

The Ninth world conference for graduate research in tourism, hospitality and leisure

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The Ninth World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure was held from 6 to 11 June 2017, in Cartagena, Spain. This biennial conference series which was launched in 2002, was hosted by the internationally respected tourism and hospitality research journal *ANATOLIA* and the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena in Spain. Since its birth, the main goal of this Conference has been to provide a forum for research collaboration and mentoring of emerging tourism researchers in order to share their research experience. With this goal in mind, the Conference brings together academic researchers, graduate students, industry professionals, and government officials in order to provide a platform for quality discussion on collaboration between academia and industry for effective knowledge sharing and utilization of research, tourism trends, and future hot spots for both academia and industry. Most of all, it provides a forum for networking amongst graduate students and researchers and a platform for the exchange of cutting-edge research in hospitality and tourism. Over 100 delegates from over 15 countries spanning across six continents attended the conference. The four-day event included three interactive pre-conference seminars, one inspiring keynote reflection panel with both academia and industry members, diverse paper presentations, as well as awards and engaging social activities.

Pre-conference seminars

Three sets of pre-conference seminars were held. SooCheong (Shawn) Jang (Perdue University, USA) shared his experience and lessons learnt from the past in tourism and hospitality research, emphasizing interdisciplinary perspectives, broad views, scholarly curiosity, and creativity. In the second pre-conference seminar, Metin Kozak addressed the audience on how to submit academic papers, drawing from insights, experiences, and practices from his long academic, research, and editing career. In the last pre-conference seminar, Antónia Correia (University of Algarve and European University, Portugal) discussed transformation in tourism knowledge through a neural network analysis, based on a sample of 45,007 papers published in journals between 1947 and 2017, directly related to the tourism index of Scopus. Some interesting conclusions were shared with the audience. Notably, cross-country analysis is increasing; qualitative inquiries are replacing quantitative research; very few papers mention “theory” in the title; and clusters of topics centreing around ethics, innovation, and human activities are emerging as new subjects in tourism research.

Keynote panels

The plenary sessions began with a grand opening ceremony, with welcome speeches by D^a Beatriz Miguel, Vice-Rector of Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, D^a Obdulia Gómez Bernal (Concejala de Turismo del Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Cartagena), Metin Kozak (Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey), who was co-chair of the Conference with Nazmi Kozak (Anadolu University, Turkey) and Andres Artal-Tur (Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain). The Vice-Rector expressed her appreciation for the opening of the conference and praised all those who contributed to it. Metin Kozak highlighted the long history of the *ANATOLIA* journal and the two conference series: *World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure* and *Interdisciplinary Tourism Research Conference*, incepted since 2002 and 2010, respectively. It is worth mentioning that these conferences have vigorously contributed to the recognition of tourism as a field of study. Obdulia Gómez Bernal, as Council Delegate for Tourism, talked about the Council's past and future actions for developing the industry of tourism in “Cartagena-Puerto de Culturas”, highlighting “Archaeotourism” as a strategic product for Cartagena. Andres Artal-Tur welcomed all participants to the Conferences, the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, and the city of Cartagena.

On the first day, the first panel featured five distinguished academics: John Crompton (Texas A&M University, USA), Adele Ladkin (Bournemouth University, UK), SooCheong (Shawn) Jang (Perdue University, USA), Antónia Correia (European University and Algarve University, Portugal), and Karl Woeber (Modul University, Austria). These world-renowned scholars shared with the participants lessons they have learned in their careers and, simultaneously, reflected upon the current status as well as challenges and opportunities in hospitality and tourism scholarship. This was a truly insightful panel, mainly for the richness of the panellists' life experience. A few advices were given, as follows: the importance of having a focus; don't be afraid to try new research areas; never stop learning; we can make a better world with our research; we can create the best environment for ourselves and choose the best research topics; conceptualization always precedes empiricism; university tends to separate research from teaching which is not correct; and enjoy life and have fun! One concluding and truly insightful remark which came from this inspiring conversation is that the study of tourism should be seen as a “lens” to studying other things, topics, and perspectives about the world.

On the second day, a panel with speakers and discussants from the Spanish tourism industry was staged. The panel was moderated by Andres Artal-Tur (Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena and co-chair in this edition of the Conference) and participants included representatives from Agencia Valenciana de Turismo (Generalitat Valenciana, Valencia, Spain), in person of her General Director D^a Raquel Huete, and Regional Tourism Office of Murcia, Spain, by D. Kristian Kamplade from Región de Murcia Tourist Board.

The last session gathered a panel of experts to discuss several aspects related to “Perspectives on tourism knowledge production and application”. Interesting and emergent keynotes were presented by Regina Schlüter (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Argentina), Donna Chambers (University of Sunderland, UK), Jafar Jafari (University of Wisconsin-Stout), and David Harrison (Middlesex University, UK). Each panel member brought issues into the discussion and raised concerns about tourism knowledge production and application. They reflected upon topics such as the immense pressure to publish in the academia, the huge transformation of tourism studies into business schools, the lack of trust between academia and industry, the tremendous need for knowledge communication and application from academia to industry, the need for a more inclusive scientific community that embraces a broader perspective, and the necessity for including more global topics in tourism knowledge production, amongst other issues. These are just some of the topics which were shared and discussed in this closing panel session.

Oral presentations

This year's conference received more than 90 submissions, of which 55 papers were accepted as stand-up presentations arranged into six breakout sessions: Tourism Sociology, Development and Education; Types of Tourism; Destination Management and Marketing; Tourist Behaviour; Hospitality Management; and Tourism Industry and Marketing. Topics covered diverse issues in tourism and hospitality, including rural development strategies and politics, sustainability and corporate social responsibility, consumer behaviour and decision-making, innovation and competitiveness, wine and gastronomy tourism, marketing, branding and management, digital marketing and social media, economics and forecasting, innovation, creativity and change management, experience management, emerging research methods and methodologies in tourism education, and other emergent issues of both theoretical and practical implications (e.g. digital platforms, big data, medical tourism). The programme also offered Portuguese-Spanish speaking sessions. Following the tradition of this Conference, the second and third days featured MSc and PhD student sessions, which was an opportunity for tourism and hospitality graduates to share their ideas with early career researchers and request feedback from senior researchers in the field.

Awards

Congratulations to the prize winners of the Ninth World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure:

John Crompton Recognition Award - “What percentage of travelers are writing hotel reviews?” Juan Pedro Mellinas, Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Spain

Outstanding Ph.D. Dissertation Award - “Persuading consumers to go green: Effect of perceived service greenness on environmental behavior”. Hanna Paulose, Ohio State University, USA.

Social activities

This conference offered participants plenty of opportunities to network and exchange ideas through a vibrant atmosphere, which helped inspire new thinking in this field. Participants could also interact actively during breaks and the well-organized social events planned by the conference committee. The social programme offered tours to the historical *Fuerte De Navidad* (or “Christmas Fort”) in Cartagena and *La Manga del Mar Menor*, a seaside spot of Mar Menor in the Región of Murcia, Spain. The conference ended with the award ceremony and gala dinner with entertainment of Flamenco music and dance.

In sum, the conference served as an effective and active platform for graduate students, research faculty, and industrial professionals in tourism and hospitality to exchange opinions and perspectives, to come together, and to move forward. The World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure remains an eye-opening academic event, and an ideal opportunity to build up academic connections, which are getting increasingly interdisciplinary. Built on strong interpersonal relationships, conferences are perfect occasions for developing friendly, hospitable, and inspiring academic networks. For more information, please visit <https://anatoliajournal.com/gradconference/> We look forward to another challenging and insightful World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure to be organized by *ANATOLIA!*