

Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2018 (GSTC2018) Conclusions

The annual GSTC Conference, the Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2018 (GSTC2018), addressed topics related to the [Kasane Call to Action](#) to accelerate sustainable consumption and production (SCP):

- (A) Achieving Sustainable Destination Management
- (B) Certification as a Driver of Sustainable Tourism
- (C) Reaching the [SDGs through the GSTC Criteria](#)
- (D) Market Access for Responsible Tourism Businesses

Session #1: Destination Management – finding the right balance between overtourism and under-tourism (track A)

Moderator: Luigi Cabrini, Chair, GSTC

Panelists: Patricio Diaz, General Secretary, Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI); Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, Destination Stewardship Center; Prof. Urs Wagenseil, Institute of Tourism – Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts

Conclusions:

1. Overtourism is easier to prevent than to recover from. No destination is immune to the risk of overtourism (even some destinations in Switzerland that are thought to have low volume of tourists are hit by this phenomenon!)
2. Planning from early stages of tourism development needs to take it into account and include safeguards to avoid overtourism in the future.
3. The concept of overtourism is relatively recent, only few years old. At its origin are global factors such as population growth, growing affluence, and availability of cheap transport and factors inherent to tourism, such as promotion of iconic destinations. Overtourism cannot be defined just by numbers, and the perception aspect is extremely important.
4. Practical actions to address overtourism include:
 - (a) spread visitors over time (seasonality)
 - (b) Smooth visitation across sites; Align prices to demand
 - (c) Regulate the accommodation supply (both commercial and sharing economies)
 - (d) Limit access and activities (e.g. Park Guell in Barcelona)
 - (e) Disincentivize day-trip visitation in favor of longer, deeper tourism experiences

5. Strategies:

- (a) Measuring is essential - build a comprehensive database (expand measures beyond numbers and income)
- (b) Involve all stakeholders - local residents are often neglected in tourism development plans
- (c) Use new technologies - our addiction to smartphone can be used to inform and orient visitors in real time while also collecting data on visitor activities and enthusiasm (or dissatisfaction)

Session #2: Wildlife Conservation and Tourism (track A)

Moderator: Jim Sano, Vice President for Travel, Tourism and Conservation, WWF

Panelists: Sehenyi "Shex" Tlotlego, Botswana Coordinator for Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy; Dr. Michael Flyman, Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism, Botswana; Rob Taylor, Conservation Ecologist, Wilderness Safaris; Vincent Kouwenhoven, Founder & Managing Director, Green Safaris; Julian Matthews, Founder & Chairman, TOFTigers

Conclusions:

1. Public-private partnerships are key to achieving impact, funding, and scale.
2. Destination management plans that have continuous stakeholder input are also vital to achieve economic, social, and conservation outcomes, including wildlife conservation.
3. Creating the incentives and a sense of ownership with stakeholders, especially communities, creates an environment where stakeholders value wildlife and their habitats more alive than dead.

Session #3: Certification Body Collaboration through Mutual Recognition or Shared Service (track B)

Moderator: Randy Durband, CEO, GSTC

Panelists: Richard Malesu, Environment & Eco-Certification Manager, Botswana Tourism Organisation; Naut Kusters, Manager, Travelife for TOs; Carolyn Wincer, Commercial Director, Travelife for Hotels; Grace Nderitu, CEO, Ecotourism Kenya

Conclusions:

1. Collaboration between certification bodies is already happening in many places, but the collaboration can be expanded through creativity.

2. Knowledge sharing for capacity building is a key element, as the systems are not easily managed. Internal capacity is important and it is worthwhile to invest in knowledge sharing and skills building of multiple people.
3. On the marketing side, co-branding cases were given during the conference. Although it is not easily done, it can be very valuable and worthwhile.

Session #4: Recommendations for Market Access for SMEs (track D)

Moderator: Ronald Sanabria, Sustainable Tourism Specialist

Panelists: Heinrich Hafeni, Namibia Emerging Tourism Enterprises Association; Grace Nderitu, CEO, Ecotourism Kenya; Ruth Stewart, Travel for Impact

Conclusions:

1. Lack of market access for SMEs. There are no business plans: what is the distribution channel, what are the products, etc. All these should come before talking about market access.
2. The need to create partnerships. By strengthening the umbrella of partnerships between organizations, SMEs are able to collaborate for a stronger market access.
3. The Role of Destination management organizations. Local government, NGOs, and destination management organizations should have good marketing to support the local SMEs.

Session #5: “Protection of Heritage and Its Relationship to Destination Stewardship” (track A)

Moderator: Heidi van der Watt, Better Tourism Africa; GSTC Board of Directors

Panelists: Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, Destination Stewardship Center; Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA); Phillip Segadika, Head of the Archaeology and Monuments Division, Botswana National Museum; Derek Tse, General Manager, Hong Kong Ecotourism & Travels Professional Training Centre; Kathleen Pessolano, Program Director – The Americas, GSTC

Conclusions:

1. An inclusive process is more efficient in coherent destination.
2. Communities should be listened to in relation to how resources should be used (or not used). When local communities are involved, the outcome is much more robust and sustainable.

3. When local communities are engaged, it should be on local terms, with pacing and methods of communications that are suitable for the local people and not necessarily for the agencies that run the processes.

Session #6: “Covering the 4 themes of the conference” (tracks A,B,C,D)

Moderator: Prof. Graham Miller, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Surrey; WTTC Tourism for Tomorrow Lead Judge

Panelists: Jillian Blackbeard, Executive Manager Marketing, Botswana Tourism Organisation; Ronald Sanabria, Sustainable Tourism Specialist (Kasane Call for Action and how it calls for measurement); Adama Bah, Chairman, Institute of Travel and Tourism of Gambia (ITTOG)

Conclusions:

1. We need to think about what kind of tourism we want – “what are we trying to achieve?”
2. We then need to think about who we need to have involved to help us answer that question.
3. We need to measure what is important, rather than manage what we can measure.
4. Whether the data is gathered from mobile phones, credit cards, facial recognitions, or geotags, we need to use data more creatively to make more informed decisions.
5. We can also use technological innovations to promote behavioral change towards more sustainable practices.

Session #7: Sustainable Procurement Based on Certification (tracks B,C,D)

Moderator: Randy Durband, CEO, GSTC

Panelists: Jim Sano, Vice President for Travel, Tourism and Conservation, WWF; Emad Hassan, Advisor to the Minister for Green and Sustainable Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Egypt; Martin Balas, TourCert

Conclusions:

1. Sustainable procurement is a way to act sustainably beyond the organization’s own practices. Enterprises can stretch their sustainability reach and impact by purchasing from certified sustainable providers.

2. Use the GSTC framework to identify sustainable tour operators. If they are certified as sustainable by GSTC Accredited Certification Bodies, it means that a legit 3rd party verified they are sustainable, and it makes it easier to identify sustainable suppliers.
3. This concept applies to any scale of operation. Not only large industry enterprises like TUI and RCL. Every business, on every level, has influence on its supply chain.

Session #9: Destination Stewardship Strategies – Action Planning from Conference Discussions (track A)

Moderator: Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, Destination Stewardship Center

Panelists: Mokgamedi Ntana, Tourism Development Manager – Kasane Office, Botswana Tourism Organisation; Jorge Alves, Azores Destination Management Organization (DMO); Dr. Kim Langmaid Founder & Vice President of Sustainability Programs, Walking Mountains Science Center; Per Gunnar Hettervik, Senior Consultant, NCE Tourism Fjord Norway

Conclusions:

1. Community involvement should be done from the beginning.
2. Communities don't necessarily know what there is to know about tourism. They should be given the toolbox to handle tourism development.
3. Need to address the difficulties of waste disposal in small destinations, rural areas, islands, etc. Large destinations often already have a robust waste disposal mechanism. Creative solutions are needed.
4. Vail is a good example of a destination that continues to improve. They do not just stop at the GSTC Criteria, but see it as a starting point to grow from.
5. A Sustainability Council (GSTC-D A2) is extremely important, well beyond of what a DMO is. It is crucial to address who will prepare the destination plan.

Session #10 Achievements towards the 17 SDGs in the Tourism Sector (track C)

Moderator: Heidi van der Watt, Better Tourism Africa; GSTC Board of Directors

Panelists: Sebastian Bovensiepen, CEO, The meeco Group; Dr. Ioannis Pappas, Found & CEO, Green Evolution; GSTC Regional Director – Mediterranean; Heidi Dahl, Head of Office – Southern Africa, Innovation Norway; Valere Tjolle, Publisher & Editor, TravelMole Vision on Sustainable Tourism

Conclusions:

1. Not everybody is yet aware of the SDGs and what can be done to achieve them. Still, we see more and more adoptions of, referral to, and use of SDGs.
2. We should improve tools to track achievements towards the SDGs.
3. Achieving the SDGs is not only the responsibility of national local governments, but the responsibility of every single player, including the private sectors.

Session #11: Working Session on GSTC Destination Criteria Revisions (tracks A,B)

Facilitators: Dr. Kelly Bricker, Vice-Chair GSTC Board of Directors, Co-Chair of GSTC International Standards Working Group; Dr. Richard Denman, GSTC Associate Technical Director, Co-Chair of GSTC International Standards Working Group

Conclusions:

1. The GSTC Criteria needs updating: changes of structure, grouping, revision of wording, etc. There is a need to update the language and terminology that is being used today.
2. It is important to be very inclusive, measuring and planning – not only environmental but also social and cultural planning aspects as well;
3. Include within the Environmental Criteria, the use of terminology of freshwater and marine resources;
4. When we make recommendation to revise the Criteria, the SDGs and ecosystem services should be front of mind.

All tourism stakeholders are invited to comment and make recommendations during the [GSTC Destination Criteria Revision public consultation](#) period.

Continuing the discussion

The above topics will continue to be discussed at the [2019 GSTC Asia-Pacific Sustainable Tourism Conference: Quality through Creativity](#) (27 February – 2 March 2019, Chiang Mai, Thailand) and at the [Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2019](#) (4-7 December 2019, Terceira Island, Azores, Portugal).