

Launch of the Welsh Responsible Tourism Group 4th November 2011

Twenty three people attended the launch event of the WRTG, an informal partnership of staff and external associates of the Welsh Institute for Natural Resources at Bangor University. The objective of the Welsh Responsible Tourism Group is to engage all those interested in the contribution of tourism to the economy, society, culture and environment of Wales and to develop ways of managing tourism more sustainably in Wales, and looking in particular at how tourism can be used to make Wales a better place to live in.

The WRTG will engage with people working in the tourism sector in Wales, those working in other sectors and in government and academia; as well as with those with expertise and experience gained abroad which can be applied in Wales. At this inaugural meeting there were presentations from Dr Einir Young of the Welsh Institute of Natural Resources, Peter Davies, Wales Commissioner for Sustainable Development, Dr David Joyner, University Innovation Bangor and Heidi Keyser of the ICRT South Africa who talked about her experience of seeking to get the industry and government to shoulder their responsibility for sustainable development through tourism in South Africa

Harold Goodwin, Visiting Professor at Bangor University, led a discussion addressing the question: "What is purpose of tourism in Wales?" Wales is well established as a tourism destination, tourism accounting for £6.2bn of GDP and 13.3% of the economy. Tourism has been identified as a priority sector for the Welsh economy; Wales' Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science Edwina Hart, in September 2011, pointed out that tourism can be used to strengthen the distinctive national identity of Wales, also making it a more attractive place to visit; and Dan Clayton Jones has argued that tourism needs to "bear fruit in terms of job creation and income." The "National Ecosystem Assessment" for Wales has recently identified tourism as a crucial "cultural ecosystem service" for Wales. In a finite world what does tourism have to offer to the people of Wales and their environment? What can tourism contribute to wellbeing and the quality of life for people in Wales?

The WRTG accordingly seeks to address the issue of what tourism can do for Wales, rather than what Wales can do for tourism. There was a lively and wide ranging discussion and this note is not intended as a record of that discussion.

In the tourism sector there is increasing talk about local sourcing, distinctiveness and the sense of place agenda. This is driven by the need to improve the quality of the visitor experience for competitive reasons and to increase the contribution of tourism to local livelihoods through direct employment and the supply chain.

Three core themes recurred throughout the discussion: **language & culture, livelihoods and resilience**. Several argued that tourism should not just focus on the "nice bits", tourism needs to be used wherever possible to contribute to local and regional development in Wales, it needs to be used to attract interest and create value for the local community as well as the visitor. Tourism needs to contribute to the maintenance and development of culture in Wales; it can be used to engage visitors and to contribute to funding and engaging community activity, amateur and professional, in Wales. Critically tourism must create benefits for communities and their cultural and natural heritage otherwise tourism is merely exploitative.

There have been some suggestions for initial work by the WRTG if we are able to find funding:

- Contribution to the Bangor Business School's MBA in Environmental Management (confirmed).
- A symposium on "Celtic Tourism" in Bangor with participation from Cornwall and Ireland.
- Promoting a higher profile for the Welsh language as an asset to tourism, combining a sense of the exotic with the ancient – the first inhabitants of Britain were Celts, speaking Brythoneg, a precursor of Welsh and Gaelic. (There are examples of good practice from very successful businesses e.g. Portmeirion.
- A residential course at Plas Tan y Bwlch to explore the links between tourism and livelihoods.
- Responsible tourism in national parks and other protected areas.
- Working with established links in Argentina and Chile to address the question "What would Responsible Tourism in Antarctica look like?" (Proposal submitted to the Darwin Initiative)
- A high level international symposium on tourism and livelihoods in Beijing (work under way to secure funding).
- Desk research to draw together work by bodies such as the National Trust, Institute of Welsh Affairs, and research related to the Communities First Social Inclusion Programme.¹
- Adopting an 'action research' approach working directly with some of the most deprived communities (as measured on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)) in Wales which are located in areas which have high natural value- AONBs, SSIs, etc. CCW and the national parks may be keen to be partners. (ESRC funding may be available)
- Developing a greater understanding, In Wales and internationally, of the different structural models for local enterprise, incorporating equitable trading and local supply chains into the tourism equation.

All of the above would complement the local sourcing, distinctiveness and sense of place agenda and provide a platform for best practice in Wales to be promoted globally.

We welcome your ideas about how best to develop the WRTG and your assistance in engaging others.

Harold Goodwin

12/11/2011

¹ www.wiserd.ac.uk/resources/baseline-audits/ ;
www.bangor.ac.uk/so/documents/MannPlowsNorthWalesLocalitiesChaper23.5.11.pdf