

A Niche Sustainable Tourism Product: Stakeholder Perceptions on Sustainable Conference Tourism in Cyprus

Authors : Xenia I. Loizidou, Anthi Gavriel, Demetra Petsa

Abstract : The tourism industry is a significant contributor to Cyprus's Gross Domestic Product. However, as the main tourism product is 'sun and sea', the industry is significantly unsustainable, with the majority of tourists (approx. 90%) concentrated in coastal areas over a short period of time, causing negative environmental, social, and economic impacts. The newly established Cypriot Deputy Ministry of Tourism aims to diversify the Cypriot tourism industry by focusing on the development of niche tourism products that will elongate the touristic season and divert visitors to inland mountainous and rural areas. In this respect, conference and event tourism is an ideal product for development. The current paper presents the results of fieldwork carried out between January and March 2020 in Cyprus, with key stakeholders within the conference and event tourism sector. The work consisted of a survey and semi-structured interviews to determine the current level of sustainability within the conference tourism sector, the main barriers to the sector's development, as well as key stakeholder insights and suggestions for measures to improve the sector's sustainability. The results suggest that there is a general lack of understanding of the negative economic, environmental and social impacts associated with the organization of conventional conferences and events, compared to the positive impacts of sustainable conferences/events. There also seems to be a lack of awareness of actions that can be taken to make the conference and event sector more sustainable. Incentives, marketing, branding, and training are identified as some of the effective means to improve the sustainability of the Cypriot conference and event sector, as is the development of country-wide sustainability policy and a review and enforcement of national waste management legislation. The research outputs will be utilized for the development of targeted toolkits, training, and awareness-raising activities that will drive Cyprus towards becoming an international sustainable tourism destination.

Keywords : conference, event, sustainability, tourism

Conference Title : ICSTH 2020 : International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

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