

Annual conference of the German Tourism Research Group 2020

International Conference on Societal Relationships with Nature in Tourism

Eichstätt (Bavaria/Germany), 26.-28.3.2020

Keynotespeaker

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Currently, the presence of societal relationships with nature in public and media debate is more prevalent than it has been for many years. The most striking example of the former is without a doubt anthropogenic climate change; however, the global extinction of species, the usage of herbicides and pesticides in agriculture or questions of environmental justice could also be mentioned. All these topics demonstrate that our current societal relationships with nature have to be critically scrutinised – especially with regard to their medium and long-term consequences. Resource consumption, carbon emissions, the transformation of ever more plant and animal habitats into different cultural and – especially – economic spaces, as well as the commodification of nature, are topics that (also) strongly concern the world’s largest economic sector: tourism. One could mention the expansion of ski resorts, the staging of “nature experiences” on safari and game farms in southern Africa or for holidays on (now mainly part-time) farms, and the environmentally damaging construction and expansion of beach resorts in the Maldives or in Egypt. Equally, one could cite the connection between speculative real estate development and tourism on the Spanish and Latin American coastline or, more generally, the increase of long-distance travel and its highly problematic carbon footprint. Despite recent debates on restrictions and sufficiency – pushed by degrowth and alternative economic approaches – the growth paradigm still seems to dominate the tourism industry. Against this backdrop, societal relationships with nature clearly provide a highly relevant topic for tourism research.

While nature and ecotourism, slow tourism, the acceptance and regional economic effects of national parks, or the sustainability of tourism products and destinations, have received considerable attention in tourism studies, broadly defined constructivist and critical perspectives on societal relationships with nature are clearly underrepresented – especially in the German speaking community. Nevertheless, in human geography and other disciplines, these perspectives are present: the commodification and production of nature in capitalist systems, political-economy approaches, political-ecology perspectives, questions of environmental justice, actor-network-theory, phenomenology, pragmatism, more-than-representational theory, animal geography, assemblage theories as well as different practice-oriented, performative and visceral approaches are gaining

ground in the field. Especially in German tourism studies, these approaches are still marginal. This is even more surprising, as many of these approaches are well established (and have been for quite some time) in international tourism geography, as clearly demonstrated by – for example – widely recognised work on the political economy and (in recent years) also the political ecology of tourism. Against this background, our aim for the next annual conference of the German Tourism Research Group is to push research perspectives towards the societal relationships with nature in – and formed through – tourism, and the consequences of these relationships. We consider broadly constructivist and critical perspectives to be complementary to positivist approaches, arguing that more profound and critical analyses of societal relationships with nature can give applied tourism studies new and thought-provoking impulses for the future development of tourism.

Your contribution

For this reason, we would particularly invite contributions this year that deal with societal relationships with nature in tourism from a broadly defined critical and constructivist perspective. Nevertheless, we would also be delighted to receive any contributions from tourism geography and/or tourism studies that are addressing the conference focus from an applied perspective. Moreover, we welcome submissions for our „Young Researchers Forum“, which is intended to present and discuss the results of excellent Master theses dedicated to the field of nature and tourism.

Registration

Registration will be possible from the 1st of November onwards. Abstracts of 300–400 words can be submitted until the 31 of December. We will communicate their acceptance into the programme by mid-January. In addition to presentations, proposals for other conference formats such as workshops, discussion rounds, panel discussions or themed sessions would be most welcome. The conference languages will be German and English.

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