

Conference Report

The Cruise Industry: the Other Side of Growth, The Third International Cruise Conference, Dubrovnik, Croatia 16–18 May 2011

Alexis Papathanassis

Institute for Maritime Tourism, Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences, Bremerhaven, Germany

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The Third International Cruise Conference was held over three days in Dubrovnik in May 2011.

Compared with the tourism sector as a whole, cruise tourism has experienced significant growth over the recent years. The optimism aside, little has been done to address the externalities and overreaching social impacts accompanying this growth. Overcrowded destinations, environmental degradation, tourism income leakages, labour exploitation and criminality are just examples of growth-related issues. Held in the port of Dubrovnik, this conference followed the tradition and accent of the previous two conferences in Bremerhaven (Germany) and Plymouth (UK), encouraging open discussions between academics and professionals, while maintaining a holistic and

critical focus. Among a total of approximately 50 delegates, a variety of cruise sector stakeholders was represented, including the Croatian Ministry of Tourism, the Dubrovnik Port and Marina Authorities, international research organisations and educators. Post-graduate students also were encouraged to attend by presenting full papers and participating in the open discussions with the various experts. Each conference day ended with a social activity programme, including a guided tour to the Dubrovnik port and dinner on board the event boat 'Sea Star'. Those events supported the creation of an informal atmosphere, which in turn enabled intense and controversial discussions during the conference tracks. Based on the organizers' experience from the previous conference, sessions were held successively (i.e. no parallel sessions) as to avoid 'over-dispersal' of the audience.

The conference tracks were organized under the following headings: Marina tourism and management, cruise product development, cruise supply chain and infrastructure, sustainability and security and advances in cruise research. The enveloping discussion could be encapsulated under the headings of:

*Correspondence to: Alexis Papathanassis, Institute for Maritime Tourism, Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences, Bremerhaven, Germany.

- **Sustainable port development and socio-economic impacts of cruise tourism:** The emergence of mega-cruisers and the increasing popularity of Mediterranean ports in cruise itineraries are posing significant pressures on port infrastructures and driving destination carrying capacities over their limits. The port of Dubrovnik exemplifies those issues, often having four large cruises docking the same day. A congested old town, sea life deterioration, high prices and the over-commercialisation of the city are just examples of the challenges facing this port of call. The indirect costs of dealing with such issues render the economic benefits of investing in the development of cruise tourism questionable. The required investments inevitably call for public-private partnerships and for close co-operation between cruise operators and ports. This raises a number of questions regarding vertical dependencies in the cruise supply chain, economic and environmental risks, seasonality management and 'co-opetition' between neighbouring ports.
 - **The emergence of 'Land-Sea' holidays:** Beyond contemporary cruise tourism, there are a number of maritime-related forms of tourism emerging. Lighthouse, marina and icebreaker tourism are examples of emerging land-sea types of holiday offers co-existing with and growing alongside with cruising. Despite the marketing and distribution challenges facing such offers, they also enable diversification and additional tourism income for maritime destinations/ports. This poses a viable solution for dealing with the seasonality of cruise tourism, while reducing dependency on a single form of tourism, thus contributing to a longer-term economic sustainability for destinations.
 - **Social issues and cruises:** Although cruise tourism is primarily perceived as an economic/business phenomenon, its socio-psychological aspects cannot be ignored. Cruise guests and their experiences do not occur in a vacuum. Passengers socially interact, not only with one another but also with the vessels' personnel and the locals at the destinations. Perceiving the growth and popularity of cruising as a modern social phenomenon and understanding its dynamics are essential for interpreting and dealing with a number of challenges currently facing the sector. A number of ethical questions are raised for cruise operators when dealing with issues such as cultural diversity, living conditions and criminality (e.g. sexual assaults) on board. Moreover, there are practical questions concerning guest segmentation, social engineering on board, security regulations and facility management and their indirect impacts on the cruise experience and guests' satisfaction.
 - **Cruise research and education:** Over the last years, the increase of published cruise research has been proportional to the sector's growth. Nevertheless, it is still characterized as pre-paradigmatic and fragmented. Alternatively stated, there is still a lack of unifying paradigms and theories shedding light in the cruise phenomena. It is worth stating that a significant number of quantitative papers are based on narrow sampling frames (i.e. respondents selected from a single cruise, company and/or destination) and have a descriptive focus, suggesting that they are by-products of company-financed, market-research projects. Issues of research data availability/access and validity, as well as the absence of domain-specific methodological approaches, contribute to this state of affairs. Within this context, and with the possibilities offered by online data mining, the Internet has been identified as a promising source of research data. The challenges pertaining to cruise research are parallel to those facing cruise-management education. Dealing with a variety of undergraduate applicant expectations and the multiplicity of career paths in the cruise sector presents a challenge for the development of university curricula and course management. In conjunction with a pre-paradigmatic cruise research, this gives rise to the so-called 'circumstantial curriculum', its purpose being a matter of individual interpretation.
- The aforementioned can be translated to a number of significant and relevant questions for the academic community. The conceptual scope of the cruise sector and the corresponding research domain could be extended to include the **interface with the ports of call and the relationships with maritime tourism**

offers in general. At a theoretical level, the business, economic and environmental focus needs to be complemented by **sociological and psychological theories** to support a more holistic understanding of cruise-related phenomena. Empirical cruise research could benefit from the exploration, application and adaptation of **novel methodological approaches; especially those utilising online content**, as those could help with bypassing data availability restrictions. Finally, a close co-operation with industry practitioners and their integration into cruise education would ease the transition from a 'circumstantial' to a 'consequential' cruise curriculum, creating an ongoing and **explicit connection between theory and practice**. The gradual development of an educational standard, serving as a point of reference for individual expectations (and aspirations), is arguably beneficial for university educators, undergraduate applicants, and their future employers.

Concluding, it could be stated that the conference produced more questions and issues than those it attempted to answer. Bringing together a rather small but nonetheless diverse

and committed number of participants has proven useful for the further development of an international cruise research agenda, driven and supported by the Cruise Research Society, e.V. non-profit organisation aiming at bringing together an international, dispersed group of cruise academics and practitioners.

The organizer, Prof. Tihomir Lukovic, said: 'I believe that we had very interesting papers that have deepened our thinking about the cruise industry and have shown us the possibilities of expanding our research activities whilst developing maritime tourism'. The fourth International Cruise Conference will be held in Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. If you would like to know more about the Cruise Research Society, please visit <http://www.cruiseresearchsociety.com>. Contact Prof. Tihomir Lukovic at the University of Dubrovnik (Tel: +00385 98 343 899), Email: tlukovic@unidu.hr, to find out more about the Third International Cruise Conference, or contact Ate de Groot at the Stenden University for details about the forthcoming Fourth International Cruise Conference, Email: ate.de.groot@stenden.com.