

SUSTAINABILITY, TOURISM AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT – HIGHER EDUCATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Coordinator: University of Oulu, Finland

Partners: University of Namibia; University of Cape Town, South Africa; University of Pretoria, South Africa; University of Botswana; University of Maseno, Kenya and University of Moi, Kenya

Study areas: Geography, Geology; Business Studies and Management Sciences; Social Sciences



Katutura, Namibia. Photo by Prof. Jarkko Saarinen

What are the main aims of your network?

The network aims to develop higher education on sustainability, tourism and regional development in the partner universities. We also aim to increase knowledge and expertise in order to ensure environmental and social sustainability and to empower local communities. We aim to achieve these general goals through capacity building and by developing partnerships between the involved universities. Through these we aim to develop the quality of higher education and its policy relevance in the participating universities.



The focus of the project is on sustainable tourism. Sustainability and the use of tourism in development are important themes in the regional and local development as well as in innovation policies and processes in the South. In this respect many developing countries and regions see promotion of tourism as a good and relatively inexpensive strategy to attract foreign capital and investors.

However, the development of tourism can also create conflicts in the use of the land, the use of resources, in traditions and in community structures. Thus, there is an increasing need to develop sustainable tourism, land-use strategies and knowledge based on education, capacity building and academic research efforts in the region.

The higher education cooperation in the field of sustainable development, tourism and land use management brings benefits to the regional economies and local communities in the South. The main contributions of the project are to the fields of sustainable development and the use of resources, to development of international partnerships for development, to gender equality and empowerment of women, local communities and previously marginalised groups. The project also promotes trade and private sector cooperation in the field of tourism industry.

What kind of activities are there in your network?

The network is based on sharing and producing of information and knowledge among partners linked by a common interest. The main activities at practical level are student and lecturer exchanges, joint intensive courses and production of educational materials, regular network meetings and research collaboration.

Measurable targets set are: 1) to increase exchange of students and academic staff (two-way), 2) to stabilise the exchanges by establishing supporting funding and resource structures, 3) to increase knowledge about sustainable development and the role and effects of tourism in the process, and to produce related supporting material. The first goal has practically been achieved. Before the project and the funding from CIMO, achieving reciprocity in exchanges had been particularly problematic. Now the number of outgoing students is about 2 to 3 per year and that of the incoming about 3 to 5 per year.

The stabilisation of the mobility and efforts to increase knowledge are both long-term goals, emphasised and developed by the partners. There are also supporting sub-projects, such as editing an educational text book. In addition, the collaboration between the Universities has been institutionalised in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding.

What sort of successes and challenges have you encountered during your project?

In spite of minor practical and financial issues, such as timing of the exchanges, visa procedures and the numbers of outgoing and incoming co-students (2-3 would be better than hosting a single visitor at a time), the feedback has been positive. The students from the University of Oulu have reported benefits to their further studies and in respect to their world views. Development studies have started to interest students and there are MSc theses being done to explore socially and culturally sustainable tourism and pro-poor tourism issues in the South.

The student and lecturer exchanges have generally worked very well and all the participants have seen that the programme and the development of deeper and concrete partnerships on a focused theme have brought great benefits. The partnership has evolved and created new collaborative structures not only in education but also in research. For example, the partnership has already developed towards South-South direction in a form of designing joint course materials and course modules among the universities of Botswana, Namibia and Pretoria (and Oulu).

Your advice for the new North-South-South networks?

Reserve enough time for the collaboration and related processes.

