

INTERNATIONAL REGENERATIVE TOURISM CONFERENCE

Report 2.12.2024

Summary

Munster Technological University (MTU) hosted the [International Regenerative Tourism Conference](#) on Tuesday, 19th, and Wednesday, 20th November 2024, in Dingle, Ireland, parallel event together with CE4RT, the [Circular Economy for Regenerative Tourism](#) project. The conference participators included tourism businesses, academics, policymakers, destination management organisations, tourism bodies, climate leaders and local authorities. Over two days, attendees discussed and learned about strategies for and examples of a more holistic, balanced approach to tourism development. Tourism that will deliver net positive benefits for businesses, communities and the environment.

The conference programme included international keynote speakers, academic papers, panel discussions, tours, and social and networking events over two inspiring days on the Wild Atlantic Way in West Kerry.

(Five) Delegates from the Reggae -project participated and learned important eye-opening lessons within research (Luke, Centria UAS) and practice (Kristianstad, GOL). New contacts were made regarding planning for future events in our Reggae projects. We gained a better understanding of regenerative tourism and were also reassured that the Reggae project is on track. One way to put the main lesson is, “If you wonder if a product is regenerative or not, ask yourself if it changes the world into *a better place?*”. The difference between sustainable and regenerative is that sustainability is passive and static, and sustainable products produce no harm. Regenerative products are active, dynamic, and sustainable but add something positive regarding culture, nature and/or society. Without regenerative agriculture, there can be no regenerative travel and tourism; soil and water are crucial. This is also the foundation for our nature-tourism Reggae -project. We want to regenerate what we have destroyed or abandoned. We need less tourism but more hospitality. Tourism is localism, “let’s go local”; we love our place and farmers. Tourism is a tool to change the place, for example, by getting more children into kindergarten. On top of that, doing good is good for business.

Regenerative tourism is a process. We need to break down the process into steps for companies and take one step at a time. For example, companies can be supported by monthly meetings. Regenerative is about a paradigm shift, a transformed mindset, driven by local regenerative movements that will become part of a significant global movement.



Introduction

The conference lasted two full days: Tuesday, November 19th, and Wednesday, November 20th, 2024. The venue was in the western part of Ireland, in Dingle, on the Kerry peninsula. During the planning stages of our journey, we were confronted with the difficulties of balancing sustainability with factors such as time constraints, available modes of transportation, and budget considerations. Travelling to Dingle is somewhat demanding and time-consuming.

Conference day one, 19th of November

The day included welcome addresses, keynote speakers, panel discussions and, in the evening, a local cultural experience, including dinner storytelling and music. Dr. Irena Ateljevic held an inspirational keynote speech as a scholar and researcher experienced in social entrepreneurship. She has a Human Geography PhD from the University of Auckland, but in 2011, she pivoted from academia to spearhead transformative social-entrepreneurship initiatives. Her key projects include Terra Meera, Regenerate Europe, SHE – Sibenik Hub for Ecology and Phoenix Arbor. Irena is a living example of applied regenerative methodologies. She talked about how regeneration is a transformative process and that we must change our mindset. The panel discussions involved sessions with SMEs and micro-entrepreneurs from the five CE4RT project countries, for example, a whisky firm offering an authentic experience and telling the local story or a farm run as a family business which aims to give their guests a sustainable, educational and hospitable experience. The other half of the panel discussions focused on the main topic of sustainability, and the first panel discussion was held on regenerative tourism and climate action with stakeholders from the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte, Ireland. Its role is to support long-term sustainable growth in tourism's economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution to Ireland. Also, a stakeholder from the new energy community (SEC), The Corca Dhuibhne Tourism and Hospitality Sustainable Energy Community, a community platform, was represented. One challenge for the Kerry peninsula will be the Climate Action Plan, which aims for only 30% of the Irish to own private cars, so there is a need for innovative solutions. The last panel discussed tourism strategy and support with stakeholders from the Dublin City Tourism Unit and Kerry County Council. The day ended with a wrap-up, networking and, in the evening, local cultural experiences.

Learnings from Day 1

The learnings from the first day were eye-openers, but they also provided reassurance that the Reggae -project is on the right track compared to the CE4RT project. Dr. Irena Ateljevic's keynote speech had several lessons and thoughts. As she spoke with the voice of the Earth, we have to question our mindsets because our consumption has been our way of life based on an uncaring economics and market economy. Tourism should not be an "industry", as "industries" have been understood as manufacturing models. As the Earth is one single

organism, we need a regenerative renaissance, a new planetary vision. Regenerative tourism comes in when sustainability is no longer enough. Tourism is localism; tourism is much about food; we are guardians of the soil since the soil and water are the basis for regenerative agriculture. According to Booking.com (2022, 2023), 59% of travellers say they want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived, while 66% want experiences representative of the local culture. We are part of something bigger, and local regenerative movements will be part of a global movement.

One of the panellists stated that, as project partners, they gained stronger skills and a deeper understanding of regenerative tourism. They also have a lasting legacy in the form of curriculum and courses that are and will be taught. Lessons live on in monthly meetings with the SMEs. Tourism as localism was also highlighted in the discussion. Tourism is a tool for community development and economic sustainability. Tourism is good when it benefits local communities and nature.

Day 2

The programme for day 2 was different since the participants had the option to participate in the afternoon in either a workshop on wheels, visiting some local tourism companies, or staying at the conference for an academic part. A keynote speech was given by Duncan Stewart, who is an environmentalist, architect and a known TV presenter and film producer in Ireland. He has been a leading Irish advocate for environmental, health and conservation issues for over 40 years. He has produced and presented Ireland's longest-running environmental series, EcoEye, which ran for over 20 years. He has examined environmental



issues at home and abroad on one of Ireland's most popular television shows, with over 150 episodes. He is a leading speaker on climate change, biodiversity, circular economy, renewable energy, and various topics around human interaction with nature. He had the same view as Irena Atelejvic that transformation is the answer. However, he focused quite much on Co2 and saw perhaps also the audience as part of the problem. The second keynote speaker was Dr Karen Weeks, who specialises in effective, transferrable coping tools for managing business, sports and life challenges. She has focused on effective coping strategies and motivations of elite endurance athletes. She has solid knowledge and experience from numerous ultra-endurance expeditions, including rowing alone and unsupported across the Atlantic Ocean. She forwarded that we can “mind” ourselves and our mental skills. Reflection is crucial; we should have proactive thinking and a visual timeline. Our “whys” are essential to reflect on since they will form our motivation. Part of the Reggae-team took part in a workshop on wheels, visiting and learning from local companies, while the other part was academic. The latter part mainly consisted of first-year doctoral student’s papers on various topics, e.g. Bali rural tourism, designing tourism futures for small island communities, transformative tourism experiences, dark tourism (focuses on tourism related to topics of tragedy, suffering and death) and topics on promoting sustainable wellbeing practices in Irish tourism SMEs.

Those participating in the “workshop on wheels” were split into two groups in two buses and would visit different companies. Both groups had lunch at a local pub where the CE4RT companies got to share their experience and learnings from the project, as well as traditional music and songs for one of the groups. Then, the groups visited local companies such as Louis Mulcahy Pottery. During the bus ride, the participants got to hear more stories and facts about the places and the Irish language. A few stops were made at important cultural and natural places, such as Gallarus Oratory.

The workshop was also a good opportunity to network more.

Learnings from day 2

One important lesson from Karen Weeks was that we need to break down our main target into smaller pieces. This echoes well with regenerative thinking; it is a process, all about learning, a shorter or longer ongoing process. Her slogan was, “if she can do – we can do”! One learning from the academic world is that residents have a learning effect and impact on the environmental behaviour of companies. Companies want to do “the right thing” not only because of PR but also for ecological reasons. Community-based tourism was mentioned as a new term. Different terms may be used, but the common goal is to renew and reinvent places, people and nature.

The companies we visited wanted to involve local people and enhance society by activating and hiring local people. The companies' storytelling plays a crucial role. We could also observe that, as in our project, even if all the companies aim for regenerative tourism, very few have reached this goal at this time. It is a long process that needs reflection and long-term changes.