Advancing tourism in Africa

Dr Marina Novelli’s collaborative work with a number of local partners in Africa has facilitated the reshaping of the tourism industry and contributed to sustainable local development.

A series of research collaborations with governments and organisations across Africa have had far-reaching effects on tourism policy making, skills capacity building and industry planning, core to local sustainable socioeconomic development in a number of destinations.

Tourism is often promoted as a panacea for development by several international organisations and commentators, which often tend to adopt a Western focused approach. Dr Novelli’s view is that to be effective, tourism policy must be shaped in collaboration with local experts on the ground.

As co-ordinator of the research group on Policy, Practice and Performance in Tourism, Leisure and Sport in the Centre of Sport, Tourism and Leisure Studies – COSTALS (an Affiliate Member of the UN World Tourism Organisation), Dr Novelli focuses on raising awareness among local people about the potential impacts of tourism on their lives, collaboratively working to build local capacity to address local needs. She said: “There can only be impact if there are local ‘voices’ involved.”

Dr Novelli has developed a participatory training method – the Peer-to-Peer Capacity Building approach – and employs the Rapid Situation Analysis, developed by one of her former PhD students, in most of her research. Amongst other methods, her network encompasses participatory workshops, collaborative community mapping, public consultations and a range of creative research approaches.

In 2010, Dr Novelli was part of a consortium of five experts, including Dr Angela Benson, undertaking research into best available practices/technologies in nine African destinations as part of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization’s EUNDOI Collaborative Actions for Sustainable Tourism (COAST) project. Dr Novelli’s research specifically on Nigeria and The Gambia, and Dr Benson’s work on Ghana led to the identification of training needs and government guidelines for conservation and ecotourism development.

Dr Novelli led World Bank-commissioned research into capacity building to improve tourism and hospitality vocational training in The Gambia. This study underpinned The Gambias Tourism and Hospitality Institute (GTHI) Bill published in 2011, which established the GTHI, encouraging Gambians to study up to the level of a Higher National Diploma in tourism and hospitality. The study influenced the Spanish government’s decisions on how best to spend their funds, which led to the allocation of a €2.7m budget for the GTHI infrastructure to spend their funds, which led to the allocation of a €2.7m budget for the GTHI infrastructure development, to become a national centre of excellence for tourism and hospitality education. The GTHI trains an average of 200 of a €2.7m budget for the GTHI infrastructure development, to become a national centre of excellence for tourism and hospitality education. The GTHI trains an average of 200 students, in most of her research. Amongst other methods, her network encompasses participatory workshops, collaborative community mapping, public consultations and a range of creative research approaches.

Dr Novelli worked on a UNESCO-funded project in Nigeria to review the leisure, tourism and hospitality curriculum, and delivered a capacity building-train-the-trainers programme aimed at co-producing teaching materials, with colleagues from Kaduna State University. This resulted in the adoption of new industry and employment-oriented curricula replacing the previous ones dating back to colonial times.

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Gen Mitchell, Managing Director of Sandele Eco-Retreat and Learning Centre (Kartong, The Gambia), has witnessed growing confidence among Kartong’s village community where Dr Novelli has worked for the past seven years in a number of different projects and roles: “This new confidence has had a profound effect on the governance of the village. The value and impact that the peer-to-peer capacity building experience has brought to the village reach far beyond tourism development.”

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The impact of Dr Novelli’s work has been felt globally and across the African continent. Dr Messeli, Senior Private Sector Development Specialist at the World Bank, referred to Dr Novelli as being “on the leading edge of tourism research and its many applications”. Commending her for “her continued leadership in this dynamic discipline as she continues to grapple courageously with new research issues engaging academic, government and non-governmental communities globally.”

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