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Conference Report

## **Report on the Second International Workshop on Climate, Tourism and Recreation**

This report summarizes the Second International Workshop on Climate, Tourism and Recreation, recently held on Crete, Greece. In addition to the major topics of discussion at the meeting (including potential impacts of climate change on recreation and tourism activity, as well as implications of weather conditions for tourist comfort and health), it also describes several key issues that should be considered so as to maximize the effectiveness of future research in this area.

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Sarah Nicholls is an Assistant Professor with a joint appointment between the Departments of Community, Agriculture, Recreation, & Resource Studies (formerly Park, Recreation & Tourism Resources), and Geography, at Michigan State University. She is currently working with a team of MSU researchers on modelling the potential impacts of climate change on the recreation and tourism industries in Michigan.

The *Second International Workshop on Climate, Tourism and Recreation* was held June 8-11, 2004, in Kolimbari, on the Greek island of Crete. Organized by the International Society of Biometeorology's Commission on Climate, Tourism and Recreation, the workshop brought together 30 participants from Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and a dozen European nations.

The inter-relationships between recreation and tourism (R&T), and weather and climate, remain under-investigated. Much of the work that has been completed is in a European context, and has been conducted by climatologists and other physical scientists, rather than experts in R&T or those in the social sciences. The breadth of expertise and variety of geographic origin exhibited by the workshop participants therefore offered an important opportunity to extend the discussion beyond the natural dimension of climate–R&T relationships, and into the human realm.

Presentations at the meeting fit into five main themes: historical and present-day relationships between weather/climate conditions and R&T; potential impacts of climate change on R&T into the next century; health issues associated with weather conditions in R&T settings; weather forecasting and weather risk as they relate to tourism and sport; and, the perceptions and behavior of tourists vis-à-vis climate and climate change.

While likely changes in weather and climate over the next century vary considerably by location, evidence generally suggests a warmer world prone to a higher incidence of extreme weather events such as heat waves and droughts. Estimation of the effects of climate change on R&T activity first requires detailed understanding of historical and current relationships between R&T and weather/climate conditions, however, and several papers outlined recent attempts to capture these relationships using various modeling procedures. The use of recent extreme

weather events, such as the heat wave experienced in Europe in the summer of 2003, as analogues for future “normal” conditions also generated substantial discussion, both as a predictor of future R&T patterns and with regards to impacts on human comfort and health.

It is vital to recognize that the relationship between R&T and climate, most notably in the context of climate change, is not unilateral. Thus, while changes in climate are very likely to impact R&T activities and patterns, these activities themselves contribute their fair share to global warming, most notably through the gaseous emissions generated by air travel. A series of afternoon break-out sessions recognized this issue, with groups addressing not only the impacts of, and means of adaptation to, climate change, but also the mitigation of these effects through, e.g., the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the use of carbon sinks. Small island states, less developed countries, and mass tourism destinations were all identified as key areas of future research due to their vulnerability to climate-induced changes and/or dependence on tourism as a primary economic generator.

A number of other important issues arose during the course of the meeting. A topic of continuing concern among the researchers present is the current lack of recognition of tourism by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a group established by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme to assess the potential impacts of climate change, and advance suggestions regarding adaptation and mitigation. In the IPCC’s Third Assessment, published in 2001, tourism remained conspicuous by its absence in the discussion. It is hoped that the industry will receive greater attention in the Fourth Assessment, due in 2007.

Another problem that can occur in any situation in which social and physical scientists come together around a particular topic is that of a lack of common language. The climate and

climate change literature utilizes a quite specific terminology that may be unfamiliar to others, whether researchers from other disciplines, the tourism industry, or the traveling public. A common confusion, for example, occurs between the terms “scenarios,” “predictions,” and “forecasts.” While predictions and forecasts tend to convey a degree of certainty in their occurrence, scenarios, which form the basis of climate change projections, are far less definite entities. It is vital, therefore, that all relevant stakeholders recognize projections of climate change, and the potential impacts stemming from them, as a range of possible outcomes rather than a single or definite future.

A final issue of note concerns the difference in timeframe typically considered by climate change researchers, and the tourism industry. While the former tend to think in the order of decades, out to 2100, the latter works very much in the present and thinks of the future in relatively short terms. To maximize the utility of their work, climate change researchers must make it relevant to potentially impacted constituents, which, in the case of tourism, requires a greater focus on likely changes within the planning and development timeframes of the industry.

A summary and proceedings of the inaugural workshop (held in Halkidiki, Greece, in October 2001) may be found at <<http://www.mif.uni-freiburg.de/isb/>>. Similar materials relating to this year’s meeting should be available soon at the same site; presentation abstracts can be read at <[http://www.mif.uni-freiburg.de/isb/ws2/Crete\\_Abstracts.pdf](http://www.mif.uni-freiburg.de/isb/ws2/Crete_Abstracts.pdf)>.