

Aiest: Review of an Institution Dedicated to Tourism Knowledge

The Aiest (Association Internationale D'Experts Scientifique de Tourisme) has been in existence as the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism for 65 years! It is therefore the world's oldest association for tourism research. This age not only stands for tradition, but also for a commitment to the efforts directed towards establishing tourism as a science.

The Aiest is an interdisciplinary network of experts, whose members include specialists from all relevant disciplines (Business Administration, Economics, Geography, Sociology etc.) who have a particular interest in tourism.

Founded in 1951, the Aiest is the oldest association of scientific experts in tourism that is world wide in scope. Today the Aiest has 350 members in 44 countries on all continents.

The Aiest has contributed much to an understanding of the modern tourism phenomenon, and to the scientific acceptance of research in this field. In their work, Aiest members help to pinpoint the latest developments and trends in tourism and to devise farsighted solutions for new problems as they arise.

Many basic conditions for tourism and leisure have changed dramatically over these 65 years and in particular tourism has become one of the strongest drivers of global growth. The debate over tourism as a science has changed over 65 years, always under the influence of the economic, social and cultural challenges posed by the phenomenon of tourism.

Tourism research associations bring those dealing with the science of tourism together with those who benefit from this research in practice. Tourism is a practice, and therefore the science of tourism can only be considered as an applied science in the service of practical questions and problems.

The founders of Aiest were already practitioners and scientists and therefore made special efforts to link both in order to provide significant benefits for science and practice. It is of course necessary for the science of tourism to align itself with international standards and make use of internationally accepted and recognized methods in order to provide relevant insights.

The particular challenge in the tourism and leisure sector, then, is to appreciate that most problems in these areas can only be usefully researched with a multi-faceted approach.

'Multidisciplinarity' is the least that scientific tourism work requires, inasmuch as knowledge of the perspective of different parent disciplines allows for respect and humility towards the science of tourism. 'Interdisciplinarity' is a potential objective, but only makes sense when it is applied to merge the further development of methods with a corresponding depth of knowledge.

The Aiest has always been a platform of different parent disciplines, even though - historically speaking - the economic-scientific perspective has dominated. Today, the Aiest brings together researchers and practitioners from different disciplines and can highlight the different points of view, especially at the annual conference, in the presentations and discussions of this aspect and thus achieve a greater depth of knowledge.

Something else that makes the Aiest stand out particularly: it is not only one of the few scientific tourism organizations with global aspirations; it is, in any case, the only one with global ambitions and is conscious of its European roots.

I am therefore especially pleased that, in view of the special nature of our convening, the links between the Aiest and the science of tourism in Brazil have been reinforced, and that Brazil is demonstrating its commitment within the framework of the Aiest. This is very encouraging and could serve as an interesting example for other countries and tourism researchers.

The Aiest will continue its efforts to motivate outstanding tourism researchers to represent their respective countries in the interests of tourism science and to underline the importance of quality in tourism research. Conversely, the Aiest can learn much from addressing specific challenges of countries, in this case Brazil, and incorporate this knowledge into their own work.

Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner, President of Aiest



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