



Shaping Tourism Futures®  
70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of AIEST

August  
2021

A black and white photograph of an older man with a receding hairline, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He is gesturing with his right hand, pointing towards the viewer. The background shows bookshelves filled with books.

# ANNIVERSARY BOOK

70 years of AIEST

Authority through collegiality, humanity and professionalism



**Cover Image:**  
Prof. Dr. Walter Hunziker

- 1** Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner,  
President of the AIENT
- 2** Prof. Dr. Christian Laesser,  
Secretary General  
of the AIENT

# 70 years of „AIEST – International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism“

70 years are not many – yet they reflect a period of time that includes more than one generation of active work and formation. This reflects AIEST as well, as this first scientific tourism association with global outreach is exceptional in that it only had a small number of leaders over the past decades. AIEST was never of a fast-pace or short-term nature. The founders of AIEST were pioneers of tourism sciences, and the association knew how to continue the pioneering over the years – mainly due to its initial goal of uniting different tourism researchers from all over the world, influenced by realizing the enrichment of the emerging tourism science by bringing together different disciplinary approaches. Later, the focus was also laid on defining the challenges of tourism economy and science by putting topics and research areas to the test during annual meetings. These conferences were, and still are, the heart of AIEST, as the determination and discussion of topics have never been a purely academic exercise, but more one that happened in exchange with representatives from economic, political, and social practice.

From the very beginning, AIEST was, on the one hand, all about the necessity of the academic world to seek exchange with the practice world; on the other hand, AIEST has always been an organization that determines the benchmarks of tourism politics – in accordance with science, economy and politics. AIEST is still recognized as a pioneer, even after tourism science, on an international level, increasingly took a life on its own and published its research outcome in a race of the best journals and, hence, lost the contact to tourism practice and politics. Despite all this, AIEST remained true to its aspiration by both accelerating the scientific nature of tourism through urging state-of-the-art research and methodical competencies, and keeping sight of the concerns of tourism politics and the economy. That way, tourism economy and politics were provided with scientific evidence, both to not only make the right decisions but also make decisions in the right way, and to remain one of those associations that build a community with regular exchange and even friendship.

The increasing digitization, accelerated by the SARS-CoV2 pandemic, is – more than ever – a good reason for in-person conferences to take place. Relationships and trust will continue to be important pillars for a sustainable development and change of society, economy and politics. However, the value of scientific associations has greatly suffered from fundamental changes of framework conditions that occurred over the past decades. Science bears a close relation to society, economy and politics. The new role of science requires a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. Many experiences from these 70 years, including periods of growth and decline, have made AIEST more resilient. An organization's growth is often associated with power. Looking at its history, AIEST has achieved a dignity that results from the interplay of professionalism, a high degree of humanity and serious collegiality. This is not a foundation for power, but for humility and authority. These values will be important in the future to help re-determine and re-define the role of the phenomenon called tourism and leisure in a more-than-ever connected world.

**Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner, *President of the AIEST***  
**Prof. Dr. Christian Laesser, *Secretary General of the AIEST***



# 70 years of “International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (Aiest)”: Homage to a unique international scientific organisation

**Prof. em Dr. Peter Keller, *President of Aiest 1994-2014***

University of Lausanne (Switzerland)

## Introduction

It is an honour for me to congratulate Aiest on its 70th anniversary. The association can be proud to be the world's first international scientific society in the field of tourism. A jubilee is an occasion to remember why it was established, what it stands for and under what conditions it will have to master its future.

The initiators of Aiest were two Swiss tourism experts born at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, a long period of peace, free travel and international tourism boom in Western Europe. They spent two thirds of their lives in times of world wars and economic downturns. They were internationalists who wanted to overcome ideological nationalism through cooperation in order to contribute to the recovery of international tourism. The Association was established at a time when almost all the world's international travel and tourism took place in the western world. It was a period when tourism became an essential in industrialised societies. The founders convinced most of their representative peers to join the association.

Aiest was a forerunner in dealing with new and relevant tourism related issues, which its members discussed at annual conferences in an open, critical and non-ideological way. The association contributed to build a body of knowledge about tourism. It made its research results available through the publications of its annual conferences and its journal, the “Tourist Review”. Members of the association helped to establish tourism as a matter of research and teaching at universities in many countries and places. Members with executive functions in tourism-related enterprises, professional federations and state administrations transferred the association's knowledge into practice.

My homage to the jubilee of Aiest is an article based on rather scarce sources such as minutes of its statutory meetings. It reflects my subjective view on the association based on personal encounters. I had the chance to meet many members in the course of more than half a century. My PhD supervisor assisted in the preparatory conference of Aiest in 1949. I met the first president of Aiest as a young trade union leader involved in social tourism. My predecessor as responsible for tourism policy at the Swiss federal administration was





3 Prof. em. Dr. Peter Keller,  
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like most of the leading personalities of Switzerland's tourism at that time a member of AIEST. I had the pleasure to work together with many colleagues of the association as a delegate of my country on an intergovernmental level, particularly when I chaired the "Tourism Committee of the OECD" and some of us helped to establish UN World Tourism Organisation.

## The historic roots of tourism research

It is often not well known that independent innovators established the modern tourism structures by their entrepreneurship and their expertise without the help of the state and the support by specific research. The first professional tourism school was the Lausanne Hotel School (EHL), established in 1893, which passed on the skills of the leading tourism industry from generation to generation. The First World War, a supply side shock, abruptly stopped the booming high-end tourism developed in Western Europe in the second half of the 19th century. The "leisure class" of wealthy aristocrats and capitalists staying in palace hotels in the Swiss Alps, at the Italian Riviera and the French "Côte d'Azur" left for good and did not come back. It was an open question how these visitors could be replaced. The western world's first big economic crisis, known as the "Great Depression", did not give an answer to this question. On the contrary, the foreign exchange control dampened international tourism even more. The Second World War was another supply-side shock which made travelling impossible and led to important destructions in most of the European states.

Tourism got public attention in Western Europe in countries, which depended on international guests, when they were hit by exogenous shocks and long lasting crises. It is not a paradox that initiatives to establish tourism research and education institutions were launched during the wars and inter-war times in countries specialised in international tourism. The Swiss government rescued its leading international hotel industry with legal measures and financial aids. Its professional federations founded the first "National Tourism Organisation" in 1917 to promote the country's attractions abroad. The Austrian government followed the same year by establishing a state agency to promote the attractions which remained after the end of its empire.

In those days, the mainstream of the mostly German-speaking researchers considered tourism as a part of the passenger transport system. The rationale was that transport links territories to exploit national resources to produce and trade goods and services but also for tourism purposes (Goelden, 1939). Governments promoted tourism research hoping that it could contribute to fill the empty trains of railway companies, which had been nationalised for strategic military reasons before the First World War. Prof. Robert Glücksmann, the founder of the research institute of Berlin's Commercial College and editor of the first scientific journal in the field of tourism, was one of the scientists of that time who saw this differently. He wrote in his textbook that "tourism begins at the moment when travelling stops" (Glücksmann, 1935). It is a sad turn in the history of tourism research that the national socialist regime of his country closed his institute in the year 1934. He could only publish his textbook with the help of his Swiss friends in Berne before dying in Auschwitz in 1942.



The Swiss government was lucky not to be involved in the world wars but these shocks provoked a long lasting agony of international tourism in its structurally weak Alpine regions. It launched therefore research programmes to rejuvenate its Alpine and health resorts and to develop the promising new ski resorts. The “Swiss Tourism Federation”, tourism lobby of the country’s major professional associations, promoted the establishment of tourism research institutes at universities. It has to be highlighted that the Federation was managed by Walter Hunziker and his colleague Kurt Krapf, who was responsible for research and statistics. In 1941, these two tourism experts helped to launch the tourism research institutes, one at the University of Berne and the other one at the Business School of St. Gallen. They were asked to head these two institutes as part-time jobs beside their main activities at the Federations.

A year later, Prof. Walter Hunziker and Prof. Kurt Krapf published a fundamental textbook with a new definition of tourism, which is in principle still valid today (Hunziker, W., Krapf, K., 1942). They found a solution to end the controversial supply side discussion on the nature of tourism as part of transport. As economists, they understood tourism from the demand side by considering the visitors’ consumer behaviour as an independent variable of tourism. This does not mean that passenger transport is seen as a constituting element of tourism from the supply-side view.

## The rationale of the founders to establish Aiest

It is not possible to understand the history of the association without having a look at the personalities of its founders, Prof. Walter Hunziker, first president of Aiest and Prof. Kurt Krapf, its first Secretary General. Both of them were professional tourism experts with an academic background. They represented the ideal type of founding members, the “tourism expert”, a notion, which was taken over in the name of the association. Research and education in the field of tourism was not yet recognized as a full-time occupation in the post war period. The dream of the founders was to establish an institutionalised form of cooperation or partnership among all those interested to promote tourism as a subject of research. The objective was to establish tourism research and education at academic universities by giving a special disciplinary status to this subject (Hunziker, W., Krapf, K., 1942).

Prof. Walter Hunziker was an entrepreneur and innovator, founder and co-owner of the Glion Hotel School, inventor of the Swiss Travel Check, founder president of the Swiss Social Tourism Organisation (REKA) and the “International Bureau of Social Tourism” (BITS). He invited personalities who were well-known for their scientific commitment in the field of tourism to the “First International Conference of Research Specialists in Travel” which took place at the “Grand Hotel Palace in Lugano” from 5th to 9th April 1949. None of the participants of this conference was a full-time tourism professor. The participants were high-ranking personalities who had tourism related functions in public administrations, national tourism

organisations and professional federations. In his inaugural speech, Walter Hunziker said: "...when we set up the list of possible guests to be invited, we became aware of the small number of people scientifically concerned with tourism. If we had intended to invite only those whose chief activity consists of lectures on tourism at universities, we would not have been eligible ourselves, since our teaching activity in connection with tourism is only to be considered as an extra-occupation of ours" (Hunziker, 1949).

Prof. Kurt Krapf was a scientist and an expert in the field of tourism policy. His advice was sought after by multiple national and international organisations. He built a network of researchers who joined the AIEST. He died 1963 in a plane crash on his way to the UN Conference on International Travel and Tourism Statistics in Rome from (11th August to 5th September 1963), at which the intergovernmental community took over in principle his demand side definition of tourism. Kurt Krapf understood tourism as a leisure time activity and therefore as an act of final consumption of households. He would not have agreed on what the tourism ministers and their lobbyists decided at the UN Conference on tourism statistics. The UN member states included business tourism into the definition of tourism despite the fact that it has nothing to do with leisure and must be considered as part of the production costs of goods and services.

It is very touching to read the statement of AIEST President Walter Hunziker in the obituary dedicated to General Secretary Kurt Krapf: "...He developed the best organised of the existing research institutes and was a tireless and loving care taker as secretary general of AIEST" (Hunziker, W., 1963). The founders' friendly relation and close cooperation on the shore of "Lago di Lugano" was exemplary for the future of AIEST. The participants of the conference agreed in the "Declaration of Lugano", the charter of AIEST, that their fellowship should be based on a spirit of friendly contacts and enriching collaboration. This evoked spirit has never disappeared from the association despite disputes, which inevitably occur when dominating scientists and business leaders meet.

## The liberal belief that cooperation can make the world a better place stimulated the cooperation in the field of tourism research

The expected downturn of international tourism after the Second World War did not take place. The recovery of the Western European countries from the destructions of the war led to a long economic boom, which lasted until the first oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s. International tourism profited from the fix currency system based on a strong US Dollar, which made travelling in Europe cheap. The income of the post war populations in Western Europe, where liberty of travel was recognised as a human right, increased steadily. Paid leaves, a French social innovation of the inter-war times, made tourism an essential of industrial societies. The private car and new forms of lodging such as camping or holiday villages led to a new popularised leisure tourism culture.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RESEARCH  
SPECIALISTS IN TRAVEL  
5. - 9. 4. 1949

Suggested Definitions in the Study of travel.

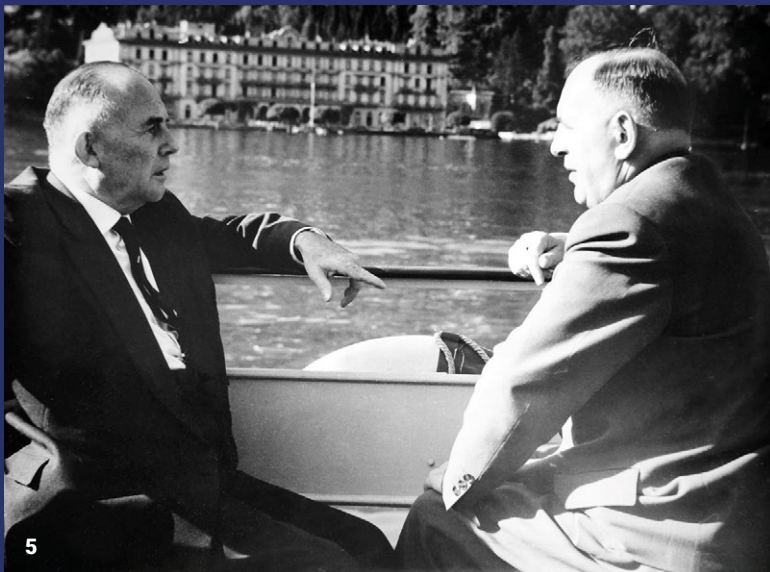
Herbert A. Wilkinson, Chief, Travel  
Branch, Department of Commerce,  
Washington D.C.

The following three definitions are submitted to this conference, as a possible basis of agreement on them as a *modus operandi* in the study of travel.

These definitions result from an effort by Dr. Krapf, Mr. Lickorish and Dr. Wilkinson to crystallize in a few words the results of the authoritative analysis of the elements of travel in the dissertations of Dr. Hunziker, Dr. Markos and the Drs. Dörfel, as well as the discussion of them by this Conference.

1. Travellers include all those persons making a temporary visit to places other than the locus of their customary residence and source of income.
2. The travel industry is that vertical structure or complex of industry for servicing travellers.
3. Travel is the incidence of the traveller upon economic, social and cultural environment.

4



4 Suggested definitions in the Study of travel, 1949

5 Prof. Dr. W. Hunziker and Prof. Dr. Kurt Krapf at the AIEST conference 1960 in Leysin

6 Prof. Dr. W. Hunziker, 1959

7 Dr. Hanspeter Schmidhauser, Prof. Dr. Claude Kaspar, Paris 1992

This economic miracle had to do with the United States of America, the winner of the Second World War. After the disaster of two wars due to nationalist and collectivist ideologies, the USA established a new world order based on the "Declaration of Human Rights" (UN 1948). President Truman launched development aid as a new intergovernmental mission in his "Four Point Speech" announcing that all countries should benefit from the scientific advances and industrial progress of advanced economies (Truman, 1949). The liberal belief has guaranteed prosperity and welfare in advanced economies until recently. People such as the founders of AIEST were convinced that international cooperation could make the world a better place, what was for them a major rationale for the foundation of AIEST.

The USA established the "European Recovery Plan (ERP)" offering loans, resources, industrial and consumer goods for more than 142 billion USD (to inflation-adjusted prices) to European countries hit by the war. At the same time the US government established the "Organisation for European Economic Cooperation OEEC" (since 1961 OECD) in order to promote economic cooperation among the European states on the basis of a liberal market order. In 1948, the Conference of Ministers of the OEEC established the "Tourism Committee" in order to abolish travel restriction and to boost tourism as a tool for economic development and redistribution.

It was at the meetings of the Tourism Committee of OEEC that our founders had the idea to establish an international organisation for tourism research. They were members of the Swiss delegation representing the private tourism industries' interests and were invited to prepare, together with representatives of national tourism administrations, a report on the impacts of international tourism on economic growth and the development of the OEEC's member countries. When doing this, they had the impression that their colleagues from the state administrations had problems understanding, defining and quantifying the paradigm of tourism. This convinced them to institutionalise international cooperation in the field of tourism research in order to advise decision makers in the field of tourism related policies.

## The establishing process of AIEST

The first conference of AIEST took place in Rome from 28th May to 3rd June 1951. It had been well prepared by a Committee nominated at the preparatory conference in Lugano with representatives from the USA, the UK, Italy and Switzerland. The host was Prof. Giovanni Mariotti who had published a treaty on tourism economics in 1933 (Mariotti, 1933). The elite of researchers and leaders of tourism of that time were present at the conference. Its participants came from industrialised countries, which covered almost one hundred percent of the international tourism arrivals at that period. In its pioneering times, the association had a worldwide presence.

It is no surprise that the topic discussed in Rome was tourism policy. It showed the interest and the willingness of the association to give scientific support to governments in order to master the fast growing international tourism better and to optimize its positive externalities.

The association had for a long time many members from the public sector and particularly from national tourism administrations and national tourism organisations. Most of the sixty-nine conferences had topics on public matters.

The founding General Assembly adopted the by-laws of AIEST, which are basically still valid nowadays. The organisation took the legal form of a private association following the code of Swiss civil rights, which allowed to build light organic and lean administrative structures. The strategic and operational leadership was taken on by members willing to guarantee continuity. In the last 70 years of its existence, AIEST has had only four presidents and five secretaries general. Most of the members of the Committee, the leading body of the association, served or have served for long years. I think of some colleagues who accompanied me during long years, Prof. Norbert Vanhove and Prof. Egon Smeral, past and actual vice-presidents, and Dr. Claude Origet du Cluzeau, member of the Committee and still active in our "Think Tank".

The headquarters were established in times of the confrontation between West and East in neutral Switzerland, one of the countries where modern tourism was born. During the term of office of its first president, it was situated at the Swiss Tourism Federation in the Federal City of Berne. For the past 50 years, the headquarters of the AIEST have been in St. Gallen, at the Tourism Institute of the University of St. Gallen. The city is well known for its spirit of independence and as centre of the textile industry. "St Gall Abbey" is an UNESCO World Cultural Heritage. St. Gallen is part of the tri-border region shared by Austria, Germany and Switzerland, home countries of many AIEST members.

## AIEST is a typical scientific society, which promotes careers of its members

The AIEST wants to foster the careers of those interested in scientific thinking. The founder used the term "tourism experts" in the title of the association to characterise its membership criteria precisely. Experts are persons who are very knowledgeable in a particular area. This notion is not only applicable to practitioners but also to theoreticians working at universities. Tourism is an applied science living from theories of different mother disciplines. It is not possible to do research or to teach without practical experience in the field of tourism. All the presidents and secretaries general of the association have been or are strongly involved in practice.

The severe selection of members made the AIEST an exclusive association. Its charisma depended on many outstanding members who had a big influence on the way tourism developed in many countries. The high recognition and reputation of the association motivated many public organisations to commission its members to conduct studies on growth and development of tourism. The demand for such studies was so important that in 1966 the General Assembly of AIEST introduced the "Charter for Experts in Tourism"





#### PAST CONFERENCES

- 8 Rome, Italy, 1951
- 9 Ischia/Amalfi, Italy, 1963
- 10 Greece, 1961
- 11 Rome, Italy, 1951





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## RECENT CONFERENCES

- 12 Bariloche, Argentina, 1993
- 13 Potchefstroom, South Africa, 2010
- 14 Khon Kaen, Thailand, 2012
- 15 Izmir, Turkey, 2013
- 16 Treviso, Italy, 2018
- 17/18 Varna, Bulgaria, 2019



with the objective to guarantee the clients of its members the highest possible ethical and technical standards of research and therefore a bona fide performed expertise work (AIEST, 1966). Nowadays the expertise of AIEST network is less asked for by intergovernmental organisations in the field of tourism. In most of the ones operating in Western Europe consulting is strongly in the hands of British experts.

The acronym of AIEST was taken from the French, the “lingua franca” of its founding period. The association took over the multi language system of intergovernmental organisations. French, English, Spanish and German could be used to speak at meetings or to write articles for the journal of AIEST, the “Tourist Review” (later “Tourism Review”). The multilingual system was important to keep members who came from countries where these languages are spoken.



## The AIEST reached the peak of its development when the first oil crisis put an end to the booming economy in western states

At the beginning of the year 1974 when its co-founder in office and first president Walter Hunziker died, the association had grown from a small group to an important association with members from all over the world. A big number of about 120 members attended the 24th conference of AIEST, which took place in the French region of Languedoc-Roussillon. The participants discussed the development of functional resorts built ex nihilo such as “La Grande Motte”, which the participants visited. Nine basic reports had been written and twenty-five member presented cases on the topic. The elite of the world’s tourism researchers and experts of both sides of the Atlantic were present.

A glimpse at the list of the many participants at this conference, allows me to mention some outstanding members who are no longer among us, such as the Canadian management scientist Prof. Brent Ritchie, the French geographer Prof. Georges Cazes and its compatriot, the resort builder and social tourism leader Pierre Lainé, the Swiss early environmentalist Prof. Jost Krippendorf, the German econometrist and statistician Prof. Günter Menges and the Austrian pioneer in international tourism policy Dr. Anton Würzl. The scientific background of these personalities demonstrates the interdisciplinary character of tourism research but also the common interest in tourism, a fascinating subject of research.

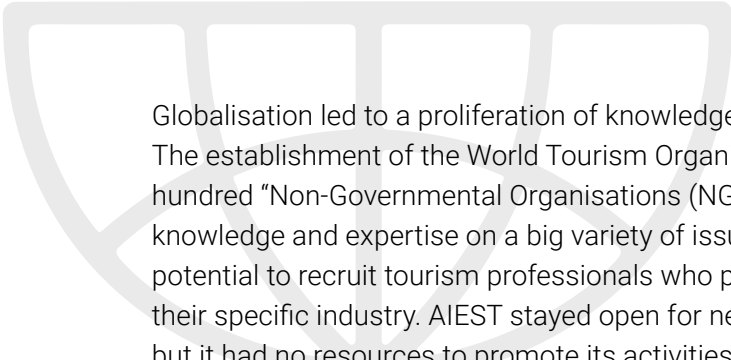
At the general assembly, held during the 1974 conference, Prof. Claude Kaspar was elected third president of the AIEST. Prof. Hans-Peter Schmidhauser followed him as secretary general. He introduced a presidential regime and spent a lot of time attracting and keeping together the most representative researchers, business leaders and politicians of his time. He was teaching in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Soviet Union in order to enlarge the association by inviting researchers from these former planned economies to join the association. At the 44th conference of AIEST, which took place in Vienna from 28th August to 3rd September 1994, he retired after 20 years in office.

## The dispute on the opportunities and threats of the development of the association

The election of the third president was linked with a discussion on the future of the association. The Committee proposed two candidates with more or less the same profile but opposite views on AIEST's future. One of the candidates, Jean-Luc Michaud, had the vision to strengthen the influence of AIEST on the international and intergovernmental level. He wanted to make the organisation bigger by increasing the number of its members and by strengthening the human and financial resources of its headquarters. The other candidate, myself, stood for an association at the service of its members offering them lifelong contacts and networks for cooperation. The majority of the members present at the Assembly shared my point of view and elected me as third president of AIEST.

The debate around the disputed election had done no harm. It made members aware that the exclusiveness of a scientific society is not compatible with a big number of members. The AIEST can only have influence on the way tourism is developed and managed through its members. Its competitive advantage is to offer a platform of open, critical but non-ideological discussions on scientific issues. It is up to its members to find and define the way they want to advise their partners at home and abroad. The association can only win size through the intellectual influence of its members. Its meetings may have fewer participants than many other intergovernmental organisations, where thousands of people meet, but it is not faced with politisation and bureaucracy either. The best frequented conference of the AIEST's history ended with a tremendous "Vienna Ball" accompanied by the music of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. It was the farewell gift of our Austrian colleagues to the unforgettable Prof. Claude Kaspar.

When I took over the presidency, I was convinced that the association still had a strong reason for existence. I knew that the framework conditions of our association had changed. It must be taken into account that our association was founded three decades before the innovation of jet aviation, which made tourism almost global. This technological revolution enlarged the world market and increased competition among countries specialised in international tourism. We discussed the impact of this important structural change at the 46th conference in New Zealand.



Globalisation led to a proliferation of knowledge based on international organisations. The establishment of the World Tourism Organisation led to the spread of more than one hundred “Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)” providing professional tourism related knowledge and expertise on a big variety of issues (Keller, 1999), a fact which reduced our potential to recruit tourism professionals who preferred to join the international body of their specific industry. AIEST stayed open for new members of all countries in the world but it had no resources to promote its activities in the new tourism countries although this would have increased the number of its members. We remained an association of members coming mostly from advanced economies of the western world.

## The AIEST lost its first mover advantages and had to face structural changes in the academic world

AIEST has existed for 70 years, which is less than the average life expectancy of people living in advanced economies. Nobody of the founder generation would have expected that the association would not only lose its first mover advantages but also a part of its members in a relatively short time. The reason was the loss of our first mover advantages. The implementation of promotion of the place and regional policies by western governments led to the discovery of tourism as a tool for developing structurally weak, remote, nature near, rural or classical industrial regions and eventually to the spread of local tourism institutes at different academic and polytechnic schools. The organisational model of AIEST was copied by its own members, who founded national sister organisations in Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The double membership in the national and the international research organisation temporarily brought AIEST more members, later, however, many of these new members left the association since they benefited more from national rather than international networking and the acquisition of expertise. It is an open question if the proliferation of tourism institutes and schools really improved the quality of researching and teaching.

The most important challenge that AIEST faces, has to do with the new division of work between the production and the use of knowledge. Methodological rigour and empiric evidence replaced holistic thinking. A counter trend took place in teaching. The knowledge society needed an increasing number of students, which led to an efficiency-oriented schooling and to the mass production of diplomas. In fine, the gap between basic and applied research has increased. The ideal type of a professional “tourism expert” with academic background but strongly involved in professional activities has almost disappeared. It continues to exist in the form of “associate professors” who bring desirable professional knowledge into the university system.



- 19 Neue Zürcher Zeitung,  
22 October 1997
- 20 L'Echo touristique,  
18 May 1956
- 21 Jordan,  
26 September 2004



The stronger focus on evidence-based research was necessary since tourism as a subject has been undergoing fundamental changes. The understanding of tourism by our founders who saw tourism as a socio-economic phenomenon of industrial societies, with its positive and negative externalities, may still explain the behaviour of potential visitors in emerging countries. This is no longer the case in advanced economies, where tourism is a mature phenomenon undergoing a strong diversification and specialisation process. It is no longer based on the stereotype of “mass tourism”. On the contrary, nowadays tourism is an individual experience of potential visitors for whom travelling has become part of their larger work-life balance.

## The maturity of the association and its transition to a modern scientific organisation

When I took over the presidency in 1994, it was evident for me that the Aiest of the founders had reached its maturity. I was aware too that I had to go through a longer process of transition step by step to keep the association fit for its future. The objective of the first years of presidency was to look for continuity, to replace the members of the first and second generation, who had retired or passed away, and to reform the Committee. I took over the presidential regime of my predecessor, which besides strategic tasks, such as programming and networking, also includes operational activities such as the edition of the “Tourism Review”. This was possible thanks to loyal support of my secretary general, Prof. Hanspeter Schmidhauser, and the help of my own staff at the University of Lausanne. We were also successful in stopping the loss of members.

The retirement of Committee members representing the interests of national tourism research organisations and their replacement by independent researchers made it possible to initiate major changes. It was at the turn of the new millennium that the Committee of Aiest initiated the necessary changes to adapt to the new academic framework conditions. It proposed to the General Assembly in Hangzhou (China) to establish English as the only translated and written language of Aiest. Two years later, we introduced the double-blind review system to evaluate articles submitted to be published in our “Tourism Review”. Both steps were necessary to increase the recognition and the quality of our research. These steps, however, privileged the members who pursued a scientific career in the universe of higher schools whereas they disadvantaged many members with a professional career because they were excluded de facto from publishing in our review.

The election of Prof. Thomas Bieger as secretary general of the Aiest was another turn in the history of the association. He took over the chair and the institute from Prof. Claude Kaspar, who retired. He also succeeded to Prof. Hans-Peter Schmidhauser as secretary general of the association. His nomination allowed me to give up the presidential regime established by the first president. We could stabilise the association by choosing actual and



relevant topics, which were discussed at attractive places. He left his function after eight years in office since he was elected rector of the University of St. Gallen, an honour for him and for the Aiest.

Prof. Christian Laesser, who was elected new secretary general, put forward "Aiest Life", a cornerstone for the organisational development of the association. The new concept made of the association a platform of empiric research based on the most appropriate methods and instruments. The general assembly created a new member category for young promising researchers offering them regularly programmes and activities to boost their scientific careers. The Committee established a Think Tank to analyse crucial front stage questions of tourism in order to keep and to attract professional members with academic background loyal.

## The promising future of today's Aiest

My successor, Prof. Harald Pechlaner, took over the presidency of the association seven years ago. I met him the first time in 1993 when he was a young and dynamic director for tourism policy and promotion in the Government of the autonomous Italian province of Southern Tyrol and guest at the high level meeting of officials from Austria, Germany and Switzerland to discuss tourism issues. This meeting took place at the same time as one of the most symbolic events of the Swiss Alpine culture, the "Unspunnenfest", at which only distinguished guests are invited. Harald Pechlaner has been full professor at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt for a long time. For many years he was president of the "German Society for Tourism Science (DGT)", the most important national sister organisation and loyal member of the Committee of Aiest, who never missed an annual conference since I met him for the first time.

Under his presidency, the Aiest proved that it functions in a dynamic way. Not only advances in tourism research are discussed at its annual conferences but also the latest developments of international tourism. It promotes conceptual thinking, a resource that is particularly scarce in the real world of tourism. It gives its members, especially promising young researchers, insights into new methods and instruments of research. It stimulates excellence in research by awarding a prize to established members for the best presentation at its annual conferences and by organising the year of its jubilee a contest for younger members for new ideas.

The association still has leading researchers and experts in its ranks. It remains a trendsetter, studying relevant topics in the field of tourism. We wrote about and fought for keeping tourism related resources such as landscapes and healthy environments intact twenty years before the "Earth Summit of Rio de Janeiro". The association's Think Tank recently gave the persons in charge of the operational tourism sector valuable advice very early during the SARS Covid-2 crisis and showed them ways to minimise its impacts on tourism flows and receipts (Aiest, 2021).

AIEST cannot leave the analysis of international tourism to rent-seeking lobbyists who over-emphasise its benefits but neglect its risks. International tourism research needs an institution which is able to analyse the still growing but fragile world tourism in an independent and critical way. Its smaller number of members must not be an obstacle for the recognition and the reputation of the association on an international level. The ubiquity and the low reproduction costs of the internet can also make a small institution big.

AIEST should continue to stay an independent organisation without recurring to private or public aid. Our headquarters are situated at one of the leading European business schools with a worldwide reputation, where institutes have to finance their activities from own funds. Our secretary general, Prof. Christian Laesser, has the management qualities to guarantee a lean administration. He is like all his predecessors involved in the management of important tourism related companies. We should nevertheless guarantee them sufficient human and financial resources.

*Long live our AIEST*



- 22 Prof. Keller, Prof. Pechlaner, Prof. Laesser, Prof. Bieger, 2014, Plzen (Czech Rep.)
- 23 Researcher at work: Michael Volgger, Australia
- 24 Early Career Workshop, 2019
- 25 Admission of the new AIEST Junior member Annika Aebli

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## **Imprint**

**Editor:**  
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Scientific Experts  
in Tourism**

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**Design:**  
Beate Reichel,  
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