Wollongong sites impress delegates

Enjoying the region: Conference delegates Paul Dalziel, Greg Kerr, Mario Polese and Paul Collits prepare for dinner at the Harbourfront Restaurant.

GREG ELLIS

UNIVERSITY of Wollongong Commerce and Sydney Business School Alumni chair and tourism marketing lecturer Dr Greg Kerr helped showcase Wollongong to the world last week.

After being elected secretary at the Australian and New Zealand Regional Science Association Inc (ANZRSAD) conference in Canberra last year, Dr Kerr successfully lobbied for the university to host this year’s event from December 5 to 7.

As convener of the 2012 conference, Dr Kerr said the Illawarra was “a good case study in regional development and the transition from steel to innovation”.

Dr Kerr said manufacturing was still important to the city and the university was growing in importance.

“We took them up to Mount Keira lookout to give them a perspective,” he said. “We also covered ... the port and what is happening there. We took them up to Bald Hill and drove them over Seadell Bridge.

“One of the things I like about this group is it is cross-disciplinary. It covers urban planners, economists, geographers, marketers and managers. It also has very high-profile academics and researchers and it encourages those starting out. It is very strong on academic and practitioner relationships. It is a very good group and they are internationally linked.”

Association president Paul Dalziel said delegates came from the US, England, France and New Zealand for the event, which focused on connecting regions.

Professor Mario Polese delivered the keynote address on The Wealth and Poverty of Regions and Why Cities Matter.

Prof Polese holds a Senior Canada Research Chair in Urban and Regional Studies at the Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique in Montreal and spoke about the growth dynamics of cities and regions.

After two days he was sold on Wollongong.

“I wish Wollongong was closer to Montreal. You have everything. You have got the beach, you have got the scenery, you have got the climate and you are close to Sydney.”

Prof Polese said such a location in North America would have property prices up to four times higher.

“I don’t know if the people in Wollongong realise how fortunate they are,” he said.

The conference included industry tours and two plenary sessions.

David Morgan Williams spoke about initiating leadership thinking to connect regional centres. IRT chief executive Nieves Murray talked about positioning a regional community organisation to respond to a national agenda.

Refugee support organisation SCARF co-founder Sharyn Mackenzie focused on community engagement and making a difference to regional resettlement.

The second plenary session involved SMART Infrastructure Facility chief executive Garry Bowditch posing the question do regions matter?

And Professor Pascal Perez delivered a presentation on the multi-utility dashboard developed at SMART.