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"Stiefkind" Tourismus in der EZ? von Nicole Häusler, Thailand

## **Tourism in Development Cooperation – Neglected Opportunities**

*by Nicole Haeusler, Thailand*

Today the tourism industry is one of the world's fastest growing economic sectors. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) the turnover in tourism is among the highest in the global economy – even higher than those of the car and the petrol industry. Developing countries, especially, benefit from this trend. Their popularity as a tourist destination has increased tremendously in recent years – although quite often with negative impacts for the local environment and population. In the tourism sector, therefore, sustainable concepts are urgently needed. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the international development cooperation sector.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that in 1999 the tourism industry employed 1 in 9 people world-wide, and generated, directly or indirectly, 200 million jobs. It expects that until the year 2010, 5.5 million new jobs will be created annually. Developing countries in particular will benefit from this growth. In every third developing country, tourism is the main source of foreign income.

Between 1990 and 1998 the number of international arrivals increased by 46% (from 130 million to 190 million) according to figures released by the WTO, and this increase is expected to continue. Tourism is one of the most dynamic and, with regard to its volume, important global economic sectors.

However, all these glamorous figures ignore that over-reliance on tourism carries great risks with severe negative economic, social, cultural and ecological impacts. This is especially true when, as a result of tourism mono-structure, economic dependency concentrates exclusively on profit maximisation, and when quantity replaces quality.

This kind of tourism policy also leads increasingly to environmental degradation. For instance, many hotels in developing countries do not have an adequate waste water system, or even do not have one at all. This leads to the destruction of the rich biosphere, particularly in environmentally sensitive coastal areas. Nearly all popular tourist

destinations are overwhelmed by problems of garbage disposal. In addition, hotels usually have high energy and water consumption. Critics also point to other negative impacts, such as the high use of land (e.g. golf courses) and the destruction of biological and cultural diversity. The massive impact of foreign cultures and lifestyles could exacerbate the existing social inequality and besides spreading western consumerism, promote sex-tourism and child prostitution in destination areas.

In recent years critics have also complained about the lack of local participation (bottom-up approach). Local communities have not really gained from the benefits of the tourism business. Tourism revenue flows have often been reduced severely by the growing need of imported goods.

In spite of all this criticism, the number of tourists has steadily increased. Since a ban or restriction on travelling is not a realistic political goal, the discourse has taken another direction in recent years. It has been acknowledged that, besides the many negative aspects, tourism also has positive ones. In order to prevent or minimise the negative impacts and promote and strengthen the positive sides, the whole concept of tourism has to be integrated into a sustainable development approach. Dogmatic positions and simple general judgements have been given up in favour of a more sophisticated way of looking at both sides (negative and positive) within the tourism debate.

The preservation of natural resources is often stated as a positive impact. Tourist destinations which have no other attractions besides their beautiful landscapes are forced to preserve them in order to keep their attractiveness as a holiday destination. It is likely that numerous national parks would never have been established if they did not have tourist potential. Respectively, without the profits from tourism, the maintenance of these national parks would not be possible in the long term. Additionally, it could lead to an increase of environmental awareness within the local community.

Tour operators and politicians in the North and South are also slowly realising that a steadily growing number of clients will choose their travel destination after considering its social and environmental impact. A survey conducted in 2000 by the Vienna-based institute *Respect*, shows that 75% of the Austrians interviewed are willing to spend more money for environmental and social sensitive tours. The amount which people agreed to invest more varied between five and twenty percent.

In the economic sector, tourism can lead to an improvement of the infrastructure, from which other sectors may benefit as well. Secondly, new jobs can be created, which might also reduce migration problems since tourist centres are usually more dispersed than centralised industry zones.

Concerning the social issue, tourism can, instead of weakening a culture, help to revive cultural values and customs which can improve the self-esteem and cultural identity of the people. Additionally, hardly a corner of the world can escape the media and advertising. They have a far stronger impact on the change of values and culture than tourism. It is also a fact that there is no culture and no society that is static. Societies at any time and in any place are part of a permanent process of cultural change.

A consequence arising from the discussion about harmful developments and positive approaches in international tourism is that an increasing number of political parties, parliaments and governments world-wide is now dealing with the implementation of sustainable tourism concepts. At the Rio+10 Conference, in the year 2002, this issue will again be discussed. The UN has declared it the "Year of Ecotourism".

There is still a lot of confusion about the definitions and differences of terms like "Sustainable Tourism" and "Ecotourism". Sustainable tourism includes all aspects of tourism, whereas ecotourism should be understood as responsible-minded travel into natural areas, which has to be seen as just one segment of sustainable tourism. Unfortunately, both terms are often used for one and the same idea.

An increasing number of tour operators are offering even more tours under the label "eco" or "green" in environmentally sensitive areas, without any knowledge about the consequences and responsibilities for this kind of tourism. It is just another selling slogan. Sustainability here means, first and foremost, a bigger amount of money in the pocket of tour operators. Critics of the Year of Ecotourism in 2002 therefore fear a sell-out of this term if it is not used in a proper way.

### **Tourism as a tool for poverty reduction**

The international development cooperation sector has realised that, as a result of ignoring this issue, there is no way of controlling the negative impacts and promoting the positive effects. The European Union (EU) meanwhile is supporting tourism projects ("Strategy of the European Union to Promote the Development of a Sustainable Tourism in Developing Countries", 1998). The British Department for International Development (DFID) even understands sustainable tourism policy as a means to fight poverty (Pro-Poor-Tourism), and established in the year 2000 a special Public Private Partnership (PPP)-Fund for Sustainable tourism projects (The Tourism Challenge Fund - [www.challengefunds.org](http://www.challengefunds.org)).

A growing number of publications and guidelines show that tourism is playing a more important role in the German development cooperation sector as well. In this regard the following praxis-oriented German GTZ publication should be mentioned: "Tourism in Technical Cooperation. A

guide to the conception, planning and implementation of project-accompanying measures in rural development and nature conservation."

Currently there are nine experts sponsored by CIM (Center for International Migration and Development) in the tourism sector, acting as advisers for marketing strategies, the development of infrastructure and management for eco-tourism, and to support the establishment of local tourist associations. Apart from them there are about 50 projects in technical cooperation, in which tourism is an important element of institutional development, promotion of private economy, resource management, and vocational training. However, the promotion of explicit tourism projects only exists in very few specific cases. The amount for development of sustainable tourism is about 16 Million Euro. In March 2000, the Working Group for Sustainable Tourism ("AG Nachhaltiger Tourismus") was established as a network for the various tourist activities within the GTZ (contact: Claus.Baetke@gtz.de).

Because of the increasing number of tourists in developing countries, and the growing problems which will most likely come along with it, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) should strengthen its support for sustainable tourism projects. In 1999 about 5.5 Million Germans (older than 14 years) travelled to developing countries. Tourism projects which are supported by development cooperation can become "come and see" projects for visitors. This might lead to more transparency and acceptance of development projects by the German public.

### **Ways of Promoting Sustainable Tourism Concepts in the Development Cooperation Sector**

The main concern of the development cooperation sector should be to create a deeper understanding for this issue within the population and among hosts and guests. Sustainable projects remain nice bubbles, which could burst soon, if there is no proper awareness campaign.

Furthermore, concrete incentives for sustainable tourism projects should be created (e.g. micro-credits, PPP-Projects) in order to prove the feasibility of such a sustainable tourism approach through model and pilot projects. Most likely these projects will be successful if they link resource management, economic support and local participation with professionalism, entrepreneurial spirit and market orientation. Unfortunately the expectations for the skills and competence of personnel implementing a new Ecotourism project is often rather low. This leads to wrong assessments and the failure of sustainable tourism approaches within a short time. The most common mistakes are an unrealistic market analysis and the lack of marketing and branch expertise.

The promotion of sustainable tourism should not merely be restricted to niche products like community-based tourism (CBT) or ecotourism. These are not real alternatives to mass tourism, but rather, important supplements for the tourism market. The whole industry – which includes and even explicitly addresses centres of mass-tourism - has to be involved in the planning. Otherwise a positive tourism development regionally and world-wide will hardly be successful. This means that all national and international actors like non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and tour operators need to cooperate. Otherwise, the magic formula of sustainable tourism will turn quickly into another hollow phrase.

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