

Tourism – International cooperation perspectives

Interest in tourism in development policy circles has intensified in recent years. Two key questions dominate the discussion: How can tourism be used as an instrument for attaining development policy goals? How can negative effects of tourism be avoided? To answer these questions it is important to view tourism in the context of international cooperation at multilateral level and to understand the professional demands it makes on individual development cooperation measures.

When people talk of tourism it quickly becomes clear that the word is understood in very different ways. Eloquent examples from developing countries are the images of safaris, palm-fringed beaches, air travel, luxury and cheap shopping. There tourism is generally equated with holidays. Perhaps more than in any other sector attitudes to tourism – including among decision-makers – are affected by personal experience, selective perception and subjective points of view. As a result, opinions on tourism in developing countries in public affairs and politics are frequently based on unrealistic assumptions. One of the important tasks of development work is to counteract one-sided approaches of this sort and prevent associated misjudgements in international cooperation. There is in fact no fundamental structural difference between tourism in industrialised, emerging and developing countries. However, differences are to be found in the dimensions of economic dependencies, infrastructure conditions, cultural and social circumstances and ecological sensitivity.

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It must also be remembered that tourism in developing countries and emerging economies is as diverse as the countries themselves, and its economic, social and ecological significance is correspondingly varied. Differences in economic significance are vividly reflected in statistics such as the ratio of revenue from foreign tourists to the value of exported goods and services. Countries in which tourism revenue exceeds the total value of exported goods include the Maldives, the Seychelles and the Bahamas. In countries such as Albania, Turkey, Morocco, Nepal, Namibia, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia the ratio is between 25 percent and 60 percent, meaning that tourism is a key foreign currency earning sector. If the entire tourism value chain is added in, the economic and social significance of tourism and countries' dependence on it becomes even more striking.

■ Services of rural areas

Rural areas not only provide directly usable products and resources for the tourism industry (such as hotel facilities and other accommodation, food, workers for the tourism sector); they also supply ecosystem services. In the narrow sense ecosystem services are the provision of water, reception of effluent, and agriculture, forestry and fishery products. In the broader sense they also include climate functions provided by the landscape (e.g. balancing of weather extremes), acting as a sink for emissions that damage the environment and cause climate change, conservation of biological diversity and provision of resources. These services are usually (also) provided to the tourism sector, without being recorded as economic goods. The same is true to a certain extent for cultural or social features (such as buildings or cus-

A tourism camp in Mongolia.



Photo: U. Sornlag



The tourism sector has established a large number of sustainability certification schemes.

Source: Collected by ECOTRANS

toms) which are of value as “touristic products”. Measuring these functions and their value for the tourism industry may initially appear to be just a theoretical gimmick. However, for policy on rural areas the resulting figures are an important factor in decisions about (competing) uses of natural resources.

The economic and infrastructure environment in rural areas is essential to tourism. In many cases suppliers and infrastructure facilities could not exist without tourism. And without suitable infrastructure there would be no tour-

ism. In economically weak regions, in particular, investment in infrastructure is often not made until tourism development requires it, because it is only this development that makes the infrastructure economically viable. The same applies to social and cultural facilities, which become cost-effective only through tourism use.

■ Tourism in international cooperation

With the enormous growth in international tourism (see Figure on page 19) the focus of international cooperation was initially on the handling of technical, administrative, infrastructural and financial issues. Towards the end of the 1960s,

it became clear that further-reaching agreements and internationally effective measures were needed. The slogan of the UN’s first International Tourism Year (1967) – “Tourism: Passport to Peace” – shows that tourism is assigned tasks that go beyond the mere organising of travel. The Rio Process that led to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and was continued after the conference was an important milestone for the involvement of NGOs in international cooperation. But the fact that there was almost no mention of tourism at this key conference for international development is a clear indicator of the low status of tourism in development circles at that time. It was not until 1999 that a general frame of reference for the responsible and sustainable development of international tourism was created: following a lengthy consultation process the World Tourism Organisation of the UN published the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (see article on page 8). The Code is not binding on member states but it provides a guideline for further regulations and measures relating to sustainable tourism.

Quality seals, certification labels and brand guarantees are a market-appropriate instrument. The tourism sector now has a large number of such certification schemes (see Figure above), which vary in scope, coverage and quality. The star system for hotels is recognised worldwide, despite country-specific differences. An internationally standardised accreditation system for sustainable tourism, based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), has recently been launched in the form of the Tourism Sustainability Council. Internationally applicable product certification schemes for forestry and marine fishing serve as models.

■ Cooperation with the private sector

In the 1990s it was still hard to find companies that paid much attention

Development cooperation outputs in the field of tourism

As an activity area of development cooperation, tourism extends far beyond the actual sector itself. From the core activities relating to travel services and the hotel and catering trade it radiates to other sectors of the economy. The touristic supply chain itself is also long; it encompasses, with varying degrees of significance, handicrafts, services, agriculture, environmental technology, the energy industry, the construction industry and industrial production, for example in motor vehicle and aircraft manufacturing.

The following are noteworthy as overarching outputs and consultancy services provided by development cooperation:

- Personal and institutional capacity development (target areas: governmental organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector as well as in its value chain, certification bodies)
- Technical advisory services for energy and resource efficiency
- Contributions and links to international conventions and approaches (e.g. on the conservation of biodiversity, climate change, the “green economy”, ...)
- Definition of the tourism-related economics of ecosystems and biodiversity
- Destination development
- Policy advisory services (master plans, feasibility studies, ...)
- Marketing (business relationships, trade fairs, PR strategies, ...)
- Development of sustainable tourism products (target groups: production and business, tourism consumer target groups; national, international, social group specific, ...)
- Value chain development (agriculture, fishery, handicraft, travel services, other service providers and procurement and maintenance, ...).

to concepts such as sustainability or eco-efficiency. Now there are coalitions between NGOs and tourism companies that are concerned about fair travel and are taking steps to comply with sustainability principles. Their activities range from joint initiatives and events to the direct use of the logo – or customer potential – of organisations such as Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND), NABU and WWF in order to promote responsible, environmentally friendly travel. In 2001 ECPAT, an organisation that seeks to protect children against sexual exploitation, drew up a code of conduct for child protection with the German Travel Association (DRV). More recent achievements are the Guidelines on CSR Reporting in Tourism of 2008, dealing with corporate social responsibility, and the recent introduction of the TourCert certification scheme. These had been developed mainly by KATE (Centre for Ecology & Development), the Tourism Watch section of the church development service Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst and “forum anders reisen”, a coalition of some 130 small and medium-sized travel companies.

NGOs play an important part in implementing the principle of sustainable tourism. Local private foundations such as the Green Leaf Foundation and international organisations such as Conservation International, WWF, the Rainforest Alliance (see interview on p. 21), EURONATUR and the Global Nature Fund are involved in consultations of the Tour Operators’ Initiative and in the introduction of the Tourism Sustainability Council and have an important function in supporting companies in developing countries.

■ An incubator for development cooperation

More than any other sector of the economy, tourism has characteristics that make it a valuable instrument of

Tourism in German development cooperation

Development cooperation in the field of tourism initially concentrated on vocational training in catering and support for hotel investment. Later on – in the 1980s – the development-policy debate was dominated by the behaviour of foreign tourists in developing countries and the negative impacts on culture and the environment. Only slowly are the economic importance and results dimension of tourism coming to the fore in development policy. Thus it is that after several years of preparation the German development ministry (BMZ) recently published a strategy paper entitled “Der Beitrag des Tourismus zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung und zur Erreichung der Millenniumsentwicklungsziele” [The contribution of tourism to sustainable development and attainment of the Millennium Development Goals] (BMZ, 2011). The paper adopts a holistic approach and describes the overarching function of tourism in relation to development priorities.

development policy and an effective vehicle of development cooperation.

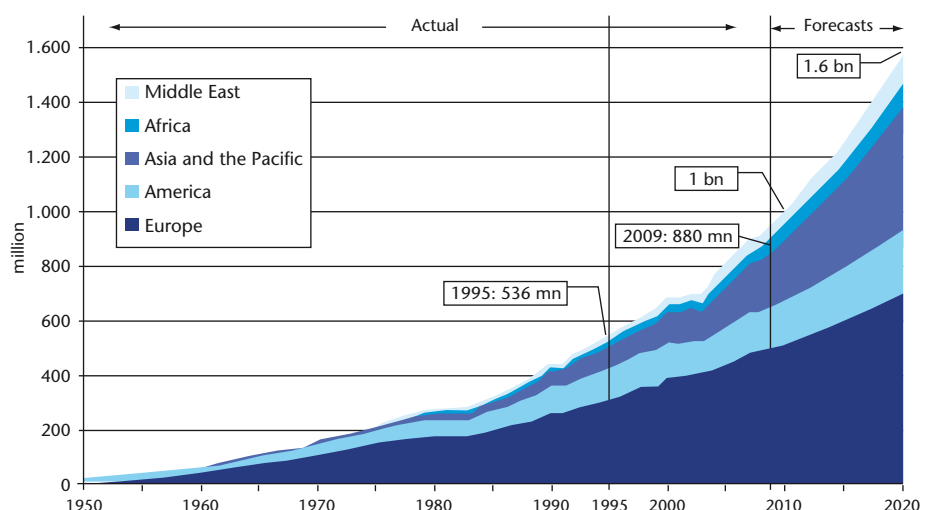
Locally grounded and effective: Tourism responds sensitively to economic changes. The negative and the positive effects on employment, human rights, working conditions, cultural goods, the environment and climate are relatively direct and are easily measurable. The loss of biological diversity and ecosystem functions as well as climate change call for rapid but well-planned intervention. Tourism is a problem and at the same time part of the solution. The cost-effectiveness of investment in tourism-related facilities and assets (accommodation, entertainment facilities, infrastructure, museums, nature conservation, etc.) can seldom be evi-

denced directly. The supply chain, on the other hand, can usually be measured easily and the project results chain is relatively short. This in turn makes it easier to define interventions and demonstrate project results.

Investment in (sustainable) tourism helps to combat economic decline in the wake of a crisis. “Send us tourists” is the commonly heard cry after natural disasters such as the tsunami in South-East Asia in 2004 or the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011.

Responsive: Tourism must make particular efforts to face up to competition. Managers and employees are used to responding quickly and flexibly to the

International tourist arrivals, 1950–2020, current situation and forecasts



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2010

A biogas-powered stove in a Thai resort.

market situation. Decisions are taken relatively quickly. Experiences of public-private partnerships with tourism companies in the context of development cooperation have proved positive.

Open to innovation: On account of the international exchange of ideas that takes place and familiarity with trans-sectoral communication, tourism is fundamentally open to innovation. The introduction of new media, new information technology and environmental management measures proceeds relatively smoothly. Innovations such as energy efficiency measures or ecological, decentral waste-water treatment systems are also adopted particularly quickly in the tourism sector. Characteristically the issue of compensation schemes in connection with greenhouse gas emissions was quickly taken up and put into practice in tourism.

Momentum and leverage for other sectors: The effects of intervention in the tourism sector are multiplied by the knock-on effects on supply chains and on other sectors of the economy. This performs an important function for the development of rural areas.

Trans-sectoral: Tourism cannot be assigned to a single priority area of development policy. This results in an inter-disciplinary, cross-sectoral approach.



Photo: B. Rauschelbach

Visible and appealing: Tourism is appealing and attracts attention, since everyone is affected as a traveller. "Freedom to travel" stands for freedom per se. In tourism problems and solutions can be communicated vividly. Tourism is emotionally charged, addresses people's longings and prompts discussion. In the media society tourists become informants, they help shape opinion and personify personal involvement. Issues of human rights, social justice, the environment and foreign policy are often more readily illustrated via tourists. The attention paid to social, political and natural events, accidents and disasters increases when tourists are affected. Examples of such situations are cultural events, traditional rituals, hostage taking, political coups, human trafficking,

environmental offences, natural disasters and accidents.

The touristic dimension of politics: Policy-making often has a touristic dimension, which can influence the public perception of certain policy realms or processes. Where tourism is an important economic factor or is publicly visible, it tends to have a politically relaxing and stabilising effect. It generally leads to greater publicity for and awareness of political circumstances and natural and cultural values. In consequence it becomes a vehicle for issues in other realms of policy, such as good governance, human rights, environmental performance, climate change mitigation, health policy, biodiversity conservation, maintenance of mankind's cultural treasures and quality standards for destinations. This is borne out by comparative studies of bathing water quality in the EU, tourism-oriented designations such as "UNESCO World Heritage Site", action to prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking, protection against HIV/AIDS and game management through hunting tourism.

A state visit is also a special form of tourism; it requires touristic professionalism and can be conceived of as a touristic product.

Zusammenfassung

Tourismus als Aufgabengebiet der internationalen Zusammenarbeit ist überaus vielschichtig. Das developmentpolitische Interesse am Tourismus wächst. Gleichzeitig nehmen die Anforderungen an die professionelle Behandlung von Fragestellungen der EZ zu. Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick zur Entwicklung und zum Gesamtgefüge des Themenfeldes Tourismus im internationalen Kontext. Er beschreibt schließlich „Schlüsselmerkmale“ des Sektors, die dessen Bedeutung in der developmentpolitik begründen.

Resumen

El turismo es un entorno multifacético de cooperación internacional. En los círculos de la cooperación para el desarrollo, el interés por el sector va en aumento. Al mismo tiempo, también crece la presión para asegurar el manejo profesional de los temas de desarrollo. El artículo ofrece una visión panorámica de la evolución y de los vínculos de los temas relacionados con el turismo en el contexto internacional. Finalmente, identifica las características clave del sector que dan origen a su importancia para la política de desarrollo.