

Pro-poor tourism needs sustainable land use

Tourism can generate significant pro-poor benefits and at the same time create incentives to conserve landscapes and account for the preservation of ecosystem stocks. However, sustainable development for the benefit of people and the environment requires that landed property rights are clearly settled and that the demands of the local population are harmonised with those of the tourism industry.

It is assumed that the amount of tourism benefit flows reaching the poor depends less on the tourism segment (All-inclusive, organised tours, “eco-tourism”, backpacking etc.), but rather on the nature of activities and their broader business environment and tend to fluctuate significantly between destinations and their general business environments, types of accommodation, amount of restaurants etc. The same could be said about ecological and social impacts.

There is a danger of tourism supply outgrowing the carrying capacity of an insufficiently regulated destination, triggering symptomatic “tragedy scenarios” (Garrett Hardin, 1968) and turning a tourist destination into a “pasture open to all” kinds of carpet-baggers claiming excessive access to tourism revenue (rents/profits/jobs). A brief survey of causes for land related conflicts in tourism development – not only, but especially in developing countries – reveals two major but interlocking aberrations, which often already manifest themselves at an early stage in the

destination development process: First, property prices within the perimeters of designated tourism estates may inflate steeply. Second, anxiety among local stakeholders may build up and erupt into disputes over whether their access needs to local resources will overlap with immediate or future demands of the evolving tourism industry.

■ Land ownership

Land management and tenure regimes are directly linked to matters of governance. One may argue along the lines of Hernando De Soto that tourism sprawl happens because individual property rights are either non-existent or unenforceable. But the legal security of property is only one aspect to consider within the context of vertical power relations between the state, tourism developers and local communities. In most developing countries, some form of communal land rights applies, where governance affects the politics *within* local communities in equal measure and complexity.

“Security of tenure does not result so much from the legal status of the rights held as from the social consensus on these rights, their legitimacy, and the reliability of arbitration mechanisms in the case of conflict” (AFD 2008)

Nobel Economics Prize laureate Elinor Ostrom and others have demonstrated the resilience of some social monitoring mechanisms in the governance of common goods. However, rapid exogenous changes like environmental disasters, political conflict, epidemics, etc., can severely erode the resilience of social capital.

Tourism development, especially when driven by outside investors or “land grabbers”, can constitute such a shock to social capital and can lead

Site of “Hole in the Wall” on the South African Wild Coast: In order to protect the 280 km coastline of the former Apartheid Homeland “Transkei” from uncontrolled tourism sprawl, the Department of Land Affairs had enforced a moratorium on any construction within 1 mile of the coast.

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Photo: M. Junck

a functioning commons into tragedy. This is especially the case when tourism investment promises high financial returns for local decision-makers, creating incentives for corruption and rent-seeking.

Protecting resident stakeholders from being priced out of their homesteads requires institutional support for control mechanisms over price formations in the property sector. It is essential to prevent conflict by synchronising tourism development with robust agreements on tenure relations. Additionally, the natural capital that a destination benefits from is usually not contained by real estate limits. Ecosystem services exploited by tourism may present significant externalities, the costs of which might accrue to the state and/or previous local users. Ideally, tourism creates incentives for government, businesses and communities to safeguard ecosystems. Most projects for nature-bound tourism activities aspire to do this. Good examples are the Makuleke and Phinda land concessions in South Africa, where local communities have become partners of the tourism industry, hold job positions and receive fixed concession fees from their private partners.

■ Is tourism development worth the effort?

In tourism development, just as in any other socio-economic transformation process, right from the outset, it is absolutely vital to measure its opportunity cost as opposed to existing livelihoods and alternative development paths. Thus, before any tourism development is to be implemented, some

Site of the planned development area "Lalzi Bay" on the Albanian Coast: In 2010 the government granted permission for the development of a 0.5 km² plot. Although an indigenous coastal pine-tree forest covering the entire area as well as current informal users will have to give way, the hotel resort promises incomes and jobs to local residents.

Photo: M. Junck



very tough questions have to be asked, such as: What are the present demands of local communities vis-à-vis to the future demands of tourists regarding water supply and discharge, pasture, forestry, hunting grounds, fisheries, medical plants and other ecosystem services? What types of tourist activities are likely to develop over the long term? More detailed questions would be: Will tourist enterprises consume more water than is locally needed or bring in physical capital (technology) that uses and cleanses this natural capital more efficiently for tourists *but also* for the needs of local communities? Will waste overburden landfills or be collected, managed and recycled efficiently? Will tourist resorts intercept grazing areas or relieve pressure on pastures and create alternative incomes for herders? Will non-consumptive use of wildlife (e.g. game viewing) reduce the protein sources in people's meals or generate incomes that help people afford more sustainable diets?

Feasibility studies need to rigorously employ methodologies that can measure such ecosystem services and pro-

vide information on how businesses can internalise costs, which may incur to communities around designated tourism sites directly or indirectly. This means that the total environmental and economic opportunity costs of the tourism business – from construction to essential infrastructure provision to operation – all have to be assessed before deciding whether tourism investment is feasible. The classic instruments to prepare the ground for sustainable infrastructure development are strategic environmental assessments (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). Livelihood Analysis is another instrument, which unfortunately is usually used less systematically, but which can be a great indicator to measure the costs and benefits accruing to communities dependent on non-monetary resources like ecosystem services.

This article presents excerpts from a paper presented at the international conference "Africa for Sale", Groningen University 28.–29.10.2010.

A full list of references is available at www.rural21.com.

Zusammenfassung

Tourismus kann einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Armutsbekämpfung leisten, wenn bei der Entwicklung eines Touristenziels die sozialen und ökologischen Auswirkungen berücksichtigt werden. Dazu zählt, die Tragfähigkeit des Reiseziels zu berücksichtigen und zudem sicherzustellen, dass auch die lokale Bevölkerung von dem Projekt profitiert. Der Schutz von Land-Eigentumsrechten ist dabei ebenso wichtig

wie der Erhalt des „Naturkapitals“ eines neuen touristischen Ziels. Ein nachhaltiges Ökosystem ist Garant für einen langfristigen erfolgreichen Tourismus zum Nutzen aller.

Resumen

El turismo puede generar significativos beneficios pro-pobres, siempre y cuando se tomen en cuenta los impactos sociales y ambientales al desarrollar un destino turístico. Esto incluye tanto la considera-

ción de la capacidad de carga del destino turístico como la seguridad de que la comunidad local se beneficiará también con el proyecto. El respeto de los derechos de propiedad de la tierra tiene la misma importancia que la conservación del "capital natural" de un destino turístico. Un ecosistema que funciona sosteniblemente se convierte en el garante de un turismo para el beneficio de todos, que resultará exitoso a largo plazo.