

Travelling to fight poverty



sea. In addition, almost all large tourist centres face problems of rubbish disposal and consume large amounts of electricity and water. Furthermore, critics point out the high rate of land use (for golf courses, for example) and the damage of biological diversity.

The social and cultural aspects can hardly be overestimated. Tourism in developing countries is said to strengthen the influence of foreign cultures and behaviours and to destroy established social and cultural structures. Critics claim that it aggravates social imbalances and promotes sex tourism, child prostitution and child labour. In this view, the local population gains very little from tourism because the profits often do not remain in the country, and any extra foreign currency earned is required to meet the increased demand for imported products.

Tourism can boost development

Despite such criticism, tourism figures are increasing continuously. As a consequence, the discussion has taken a change of course in recent years. Development and tourism experts have strongly indicated that tourism can also promote development. A precondition for this is a sustainable development-oriented overall concept. The goal must be to limit damage and to strengthen those effects that promote development.

Tourism has the potential to contribute to the conservation of natural resources. Numerous national parks and other nature reserves in developing countries would never have been set up without the prospect of tourism. Without the revenue gained from travellers, they could not be funded on a long-term basis. Workshops and campaigns can make the local population more conscious of environmentally sustainable behaviour. The people learn that they fail to attract tourists and risk missing out on significant financial rewards if they do not protect the environment and preserve its biodiversity.

For a long time, tourism in developing countries has had a bad reputation. It has been said to damage the environment, put a strain on scarce resources such as clean water, and destroy local cultures. However, tourism can also promote development. To do so, projects have to be planned in a participative manner, they have to fulfil ecological and social standards and they have to be economically viable. Unfortunately, many tourism projects lack qualified staff.

[By Nicole Häusler]

➔ Until just a few years ago, tourism barely gained a mention in development policy. The main reason was that time long-haul tourism had a bad image. From the 1970s on, non-governmental organisations in particular have pointed out hazards. They criticise economic dependence on tourism monocultures as well as the frequent phenomenon of unmethodical mass tourism with the sole interest of maximising profit.

Growing environmental problems are one of the consequences. In many places, tourism aggravates problems of inadequate sewage disposal. It is not unusual for hotels to pipe their sewage directly into the

Photo: H. Schwarzbach / AR / Linear

An example is the eco-lodge Chalalan in the Amazon region in Bolivia. The company is run by the indigenous community San José de Uchupiamonas. It has trained workers in hygienic cooking, cleaning toilets and baths as well as the separation and disposal of rubbish. Staff increasingly apply these measures in their daily routine. Furthermore, they take part in the conservation of the biodiversity in Madidi National Park, where they had previously cut down trees illegally.

Concerning the economy, tourism frequently leads to better infrastructure and is therefore beneficial for other sectors as well. Tourism also creates new jobs – directly and indirectly – for example in construction, farming and transport. This helps to defuse problems of emigration, since tourist centres usually become established in several regions.

Rather than harming cultural values and customs, tourism can conversely bring about their revival. Culture may attract just as many tourists as nature. Indigenous and ethnic village communities are encouraged to come to better grips with their history and traditions. For several years, the isolated Karen village Baan Huay Hee in northern Thailand has hosted tourists who spend a few days there with local families. The visitors often show interest and respect for the residents' knowledge of traditional medicine, for example. This enhances self-confidence and cultural identity, particularly among the youth. Of course, the approach requires both tourists and the local population to be ready for the encounter. To this end, the Baan Huay Hee village residents attended introductory seminars and the tourists received detailed information about Karen families from the local tour operator REST (www.ecotour.in.th).

The debate on tourism and the fight against poverty gained significant new impetus through studies such as "Pro-Poor Tourism Strategies: Making Tourism Work for the Poor" by the British Overseas Development Institute. Its studies highlighted that one of the key elements of a poverty-oriented tourism strategy is participation. The poor have to be included in the creation and expansion of tourism. Planners need to take the economic, social and ecological circumstances of the poor into consideration – on a short- as well as a long-term basis. This requires an extra effort, whereas the schematic implementation of standard plans would bypass the needs of the poor. Starting points may differ widely. Moreover,

tourism planning must learn from experience. Insights from research on poverty, environmental management, good governance and the support of small and medium-sized businesses offer great help.

Flawed tourism projects

Tourism is gaining importance in German development cooperation. A German Development Ministry (BMZ) response to questions by the opposition Christian Democrats in the Bundestag in April 2004 stated that tourism plays an important role in the process of building the economic and social structure of a country. However, a precondition for this was said to be a sustainable kind of tourism "that is acceptable in social, cultural, economic and ecological respects". This year, the BMZ has authorised a German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) sector project "Tourism and Sustainable Development" with a budget of 900 000 Euro.

When implementing tourism projects, however, development organisations continue to make the same mistakes. These include:

- Lack of market orientation: Questions of viability are seldom asked and market and infrastructure are not analysed.
- Too little marketing: While large tourism companies pay millions of euros for advertising, some projects make no funding applications for marketing.
- Wrong qualifications: Tourism projects often have local or international advisors with excellent qualifications in the fields of regional development, protection of resources or small business support, however, they have little knowledge of tourism and product development. Development cooperation in tourism can only succeed with appropriately qualified employees.
- Inadequate further education: It is not enough to build a hostel in a developing country that is then managed by a local community. Many projects fail in the first years because local qualifications don't satisfy the sponsors. Experience shows that projects have to be accompanied by training and workshops for at least three years before the partners can continue to manage them independently.
- No monitoring: Many projects fail because their implementation is not monitored and mistakes are not identified in time.

Tourism projects with such flaws cannot be successful. Protection of the envi-

ronment, monitoring, social compatibility and local participation must be accompanied by professionalism, business mindedness and market orientation. Neither ecological nor social sustainability will be achieved without economic sustainability.

The GTZ sector project, "Tourism and Sustainable Development" is a step in the right direction. In cooperation with the German tourism industry, it promotes tourism in developing and transition countries – for example, by joint projects, the exchange of information and ongoing training for skilled workers from partner countries. The aim is to form model coalitions between the private sector and development cooperation.

Above and beyond this, it would be desirable to have a closer integration of cultural experts in tourism projects to improve the participation of the local population and to prevent conflicts. Moreover, it is important to raise awareness amongst travellers and tour operators to carry out checks on environmental sustainability and to work out local strategies to use tourism in the fight against poverty. ←



Nicole Häusler

is an ethnologist and tourism advisor. She is currently working as an integrated specialist at the Frankfurt based Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM) at the Boli-

vian nature reserve authorities SERINAP in La Paz, Bolivia.
nicole.hausler@t-online.de

Tribune

References:

Caroline Ashley, Dilys Roe and Harold Goodwin (2001):
Pro-poor Tourism Strategies: Making Tourism Work for the Poor. A Review of Experience. London, ODI.
<http://www.propoortourism.org.uk>

Matthias Beyer (2003):
Tourismus und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit – wie(der) besseren Wissens?! in: *Dialog*, volume 79, pp 4-9, Frankfurt am Main, IKO

Nicole Häusler (2004):
Finanzierung von "Community-based Tourism"-Projekten. Probleme, Risiken und Anforderungen. (Funding "Community-based Tourism" Projects. Problems, risks and requirements) in: Kurt Luger, Christian Baumgartner, Karlheinz Wöhler (eds): *Ferntourismus wohin? Der globale Tourismus erobert den Horizont (Long-haul tourism to where? Global tourism conquers the horizon)*. Innsbruck, StudienVerlag