



At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the international community adopted important resolutions about how the precious resources of our planet should be equitably shared and protected for present and future generations. Despite positive achievements over the past two decades, we are a far cry from a truly sustainable path. New momentum is urgently needed to re-orientate international actors to the promises of Rio.

#### **Tourism and sustainable development**

”The sheer size and reach of the sector makes it critically important from a global resource perspective“, says the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Tourism is often seen as a relatively eco-friendly alternative to other industries like mining and manufacturing. International tourism has been identified within the ”green economy“ debate as one of ten sectors that can drive sustainable and inclusive development. But testimonies from tourism destinations show that unsustainable tourism development is often taking place locally, undermining real progress towards the ”green economy’s“ stated objectives. More stringent monitoring, reporting and regulatory mechanisms are needed.

The ”Green Economy Report“ (2011) published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) dedicates one chapter to the tourism sector. The UNWTO co-authored this chapter and is taking Rio+20 as an opportunity to promote tourism as ”one of the most promising drivers of growth for the world economy“. The UNWTO amongst others argue that because of its cross-cutting nature, sustainable tourism can ”address meaningfully a range of priority issues [including] energy, water, oceans, green jobs, sustainable cities, sustainable agriculture and food security, disaster risk re-

duction, and investing in health, education, youth, gender equality and women’s empowerment.“ However, current mainstream tourism development often undermines progress in these areas. The growth paradigm as currently posited by the UNWTO is incompatible with real sustainability.

#### **The need for scrutiny**

The strategies discussed in Rio+20 and the underlying paradigms must be scrutinized by civil society. The ”green economy“ concept focuses on investment in energy and resource efficiency, but seriously neglects fundamental structural problems of global equity and human development. The growth-orientated paradigm advocated by UNWTO, UNEP and other ”green economy“ proponents has led to environmental destruction and human rights violations in the first place. The debate therefore has to be (re)focussed to include not only ”green“ and ”economy“, but also human rights, equity and justice. There is a need for a paradigm shift in tourism development.

While Rio+20 scrutinises the international governance architecture for sustainable development, there is a need also to look at the roles of various players who influence the ways in which the tourism sector is or-

ganised. To achieve sustainable development, the participation of a broad range of stakeholders and rights-holders in governance processes is vital. Decentralization and the strengthening of local governance allow closer involvement of citizens in the policy process, and is a fundamental ingredient for good governance.

### Key challenges

The publication "Beyond Greening. Reflections on Tourism in the Rio Process" places tourism in the context of the Rio+20 themes "green economy" and governance. It aims to raise awareness of the challenges deriving from tourism growth and encourage reflection and debate. It highlights key sustainability challenges that are being addressed or need to be addressed in the context of tourism in the Rio-process. Case studies and analyses focus on human rights and governance challenges.

Authors from different parts of the world caution against easy solutions such as the "green economy" and "pro-poor tourism". Within the "green economy" paradigm, questions of resource allocation, rights to resources and access to governance processes must be addressed. The pro-poor tourism concept assumes that any kind of tourism that makes some of the poor better off can be justified as a path to development. Both concepts fail to address the complexities of direct and indirect impacts of tourism on people's livelihoods and human rights. Livelihoods are about much more than "income"; they are rooted in the culture and identity of people and are dependent upon landscape and ecology. Sustainable livelihoods are inherently connected with community and property rights and democratic processes that determine dignity, control, empowerment and sustainability.

Communities within destinations, in particular the economically poor, must not bear the costs of meeting the requirements and demands of tourists and businesses. Tourism activities are usually based on unequal, often exploitative relationships and consequently the poorer and more vulnerable groups in destinations shoulder the negative impacts of tourism.

To achieve growth targets in tourism, local resources and economic activities are typically channelled towards the development of the industry rather than the well-being of communities, often undermining rights to land, water, natural resources, health care, education and housing. Tourism development must not privilege the needs of tourists and the tourism industry at the expense of local needs and livelihoods.

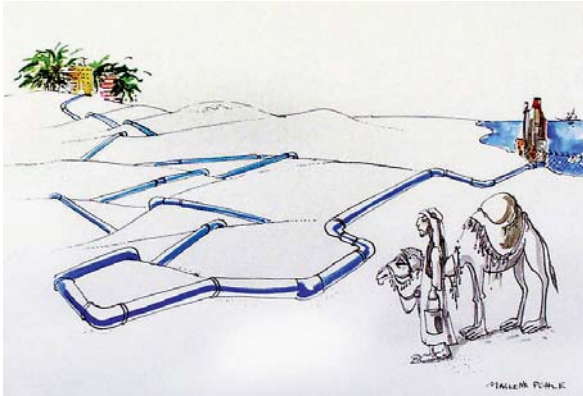
### Land grabbing

Mainstream tourism promotion strategies tend to bypass and ignore weaker parties whose rights to land, resources and livelihoods are violated. Land speculation and land grabbing have become common phenomena in areas of interest to the tourism sector, leading to the physical and economic displacement of local people. Coastal areas in developing and emerging countries, including regions in Asia affected by the 2004 Tsunami, are being destroyed by tourism resorts, such that land and other natural resources are turned into recreational space for tourists. A rights-based approach is lacking in the current discourse, which relies on market-based self-regulatory mechanisms and propagates more growth.

### Threats to food sovereignty and access to water

Tourism can threaten food security by affecting fisheries resources, access to beaches or hunting grounds, and land used for subsistence agriculture. Indigenous communities are often displaced from nature and natural resources in the name of tourism and conservation. The "commoditization" of natural resources and biodiversity for tourism accelerates this process. The main actors in this business are big conservation groups, international financial institutions, donors and state agencies.

Local communities often lose out to tourism in terms of access to water, especially in water-scarce regions. High water consumption by hotels and resorts violates people's right to water, which is a fundamental human right.



### Climate change

Tourism contributes significantly to global climate change, which threatens the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. Based on current growth forecasts, by 2035 international tourist arrivals will grow by 179 percent and the sector's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) will increase by 188 percent, mainly as a result of increased air traffic. Although the International Panel on Climate Change is calling for a 50 percent reduction of current GHGs by 2050, tourism industry lobbies including UNWTO have been obstructing progress towards binding regulations of aviation emissions. Efficiency gains in the aviation sector have been far too small and too slow to place the industry onto a sustainable path. The impact of unsustainable consumption patterns by the rich on the lives of the poor is strikingly evident in the context of climate justice.

Without justice, the primary victims of climate change are poor and marginalised communities. New climate mitigation initiatives such as carbon trading and experiments with biofuels are accelerating this victimisation. Climate change is not just an issue of mitigation and adaptation. It demands a complete paradigm shift from the current form of neo-liberal capitalist development to a people-centric, rights-based approach.

### Participation

At all levels, the participation of local communities involved in or affected by tourism still leaves much to be desired: in international negotiating processes, in national policy formulation as well as in and around the

development and management of tourist destinations. Civil society organisations have been stressing the need for their greater participation in these processes, not least of all in the work of the UNWTO, which although a UN agency acts more as a tourism industry lobby than as a facilitator for sustainable development – in contravention to the principles of good governance.

At grassroots level, the participation of local communities is a necessary condition for sustainable development. Participation is about much more than jobs and income; it is above all about people's ownership and control of decision-making in matters that affect their lives. Where tourism is deemed an acceptable development option, participation ideally occurs in the form of community-driven tourism. Community-driven initiatives benefit greatly from the exchange of experiences with other communities, from the involvement in civil society networks and from the support of NGOs. This applies particularly to coastal communities facing similar threats across the globe, such as land grabbing by tourism enterprises, displacement, destruction of coastal ecosystems, industrial fishing, and rising sea levels. It also applies to forest communities who in many parts of the world are displaced to make way for national parks, in the name of conservation and "ecotourism." Alternative models, such as the Brazilian concept of extractive reserves (RESEX), help local communities protect their land and manage their resources sustainably.

### The way forward

We have only a few decades left to deal intelligently with climate change, water stress and the devastation of the last remaining essential ecosystems. In light of the current world situation, we are at a crossroads: accelerated capitalism including in relation to tourism may lead to greater inequality, misery and conflict; but sustainable private sector development could also be an opportunity to make peace with the planet, provide possibilities for meaningful and inclusive human development and increase levels of real democracy.

The mass tourism industry represents a serious obstacle to the task of creating a sustainable world where

communities count and democracy is real. Tourism has a huge direct and indirect influence on the global economy. In its current form, the worldwide tourism industry fuels expectations of indefinite growth on an environmentally precarious planet.

It is very important to divorce the sustainable tourism concept from the idea of unrestrained economic growth and GDP-centric development. Tourism is not a viable option for the very poor and should not be promoted as such. It is counter-productive to make poor nations dependent on an industry like tourism that is highly vulnerable to many external factors.

Agencies like UNWTO and UNEP should work out stringent regulatory mechanisms that can control unsustainable tourism practices instead of pushing for market-based solutions. They should seriously take into account the concerns of global civil society and

affected populations. People's participation at various levels of governance is a key issue in any discussion related to sustainable development.

Civil society organisations across the world engaged in challenging the harmful impacts of tourism and offering a critical perspective on this massive global industry need to link up and organise themselves more effectively. There is immense potential for a global civil society network to draw strength from its diversity while being unified under a common call for just, equitable, democratic, people-centred and environmentally sustainable tourism industry – including the right of communities to say no to tourism development where the real costs outweigh perceived or actual benefits.

The publication "Beyond Greening: Reflections on Tourism in the Rio-Process" is available as a pdf at: [www.tourism-watch.de/rio+20-beyond-greening](http://www.tourism-watch.de/rio+20-beyond-greening)

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