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Fair Trade – also in Tourism!

In view of the present situation in tourism, it sounds like the proverbial voice crying in the wilderness. The players in the crisis-ridden tourism industry are currently fighting with their gloves off. For example, the Asian-Pacific partners of Kuoni UK have - despite their fierce protest - no choice but to accept the 20 percent price reductions planned by Kuoni after the SARS crisis in order to get business going again (Travel Trade Gazette Asia 2003). On the side of European tour operators, dismissals and short-time work are nothing unusual, while the price war is taking on grotesque features. A German tour operator has recently started to not only give away free flights to the Mediterranean, but also to include additional vouchers to the value of € 25, which may be used when making the next booking (**akte**-Kurznachrichten 3/2003).

“Fair” - What does that mean?

The tourism industry, spoilt by success for a long time, seems to see only one way out of the crisis: more bargains. Big tour operators are able to largely pass on the pressure for increasingly lower prices to the holiday destinations. For in the negotiations, the destinations are bound to lose out to transnational corporations, which have – in the course of wide-ranging concentration processes in the industry during the past few years – often combined airlines and hotels, operating, marketing and sales in complex alliances under one roof and may switch to cheaper destinations at any time. Forcing down prices belongs to the wide range of unfair competitive practices in tourism. This has also been put down in writing by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD (Diaz Benavides 2001). According to an UNCTAD report, it is due to these “predatory practices” of tourism companies that poor countries earn too little from tourism and to financial leakages, for example,

for tourism-related imports. UNCTAD concludes that in certain cases, poor destinations even subsidise rich tourists. In order to survive in the face of global competition, many destinations offer generous conditions to foreign investors and companies, such as tax relief, majority holdings in companies or free repatriation of profits. These investment incentives are usually granted in the context of measures against indebtedness, recommended by creditors and by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to generate foreign exchange by promoting tourism. All in all, however, this means a considerable loss of income for the public treasury, while the provision of expensive infrastructure such as airports, roads, water and energy supplies for tourism often continues to increase the debt burden. Since the mid-1990s, liberalisation to the advantage of foreign private companies has been continuously expanded. Under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO-OMC), import barriers have been reduced and employing foreign personnel has become easier. The GATS is currently being re-negotiated. This has led to strong controversies in the member countries about the future of public services such as water supply or education. But the new round of negotiations also raises serious concerns on the side of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the South as well as in the North with regard to the future development of tourism. The Indian tourism NGO Equations, for example, criticises that the service agreement on tourism undermines national regulations and local self-government, and poses a threat to the livelihoods of people in the tourism destinations. Once the agreements have been concluded, it is almost impossible to insist on the obligation of foreign suppliers to train and employ local personnel, or to maintain social and ecological standards, to ensure consumer protection or to enforce restrictions, such as limitations to the number or size of golf courses or hotels and resorts in protected areas (Equations 2002, 2003).

What is puzzling, however, is that tourism leaders often demand further liberalisation, while in international fora the same leaders announce new measures for tourism to play a role in alleviating poverty and bringing prosperity (WTO 2002). The attribute “fair” comes up more and more often in the tourism debate. Tour operators advertise “fair prices”, articles, flyers, even whole conference suddenly feature catch-words such as “fair travel”, “fair tourism”, which – like a magic formula – promise a new form of tourism. On closer inspection, however, there are not that many new aspects to be

discovered behind those trendy terms. Different, however, are initiatives, which have started to do pioneering work in the South as well as in the North in order to develop linkages between tourism and the principles of Fair Trade. For example, in South Africa "Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa" (FTTSA), initiated by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), developed the first label for tourism products, designed in line with the criteria of Fair Trade (FTTSA 2002). In other countries, such as Namibia, the Gambia and the Philippines, „community based“ tourism projects and some small private enterprises have formed networks for joint training and marketing. They try to provide opportunities for broad-based participation in decision-making processes, and benefits for tourism service providers in line with the principles of Fair Trade. The London-based tourism NGO Tourism Concern has – as one component of a several-year programme co-financed by the European Commission – facilitated global networking of tourism initiatives in order to encourage the exchange of experiences and the work on criteria for Fair Trade in Tourism (Tourism Concern 1999-2002). In Italy, environment organisations and human rights groups have joint forces with Fair Trade organisations and have developed guidelines for tourists and service providers as well as for holiday packages, which are now being sold in Third World import stores. As diverse as these initiatives may be, they are all aimed at a fairer exchange with communities and service providers in destinations in the South. In order to achieve this, they follow the principles of Fair Trade and strive to pick up the thread of its success story.

Fair Trade on the road to success

About thirty years ago, the Fair Trade movement set out to achieve a more equitable distribution of the income from global trade relations, to enable producers especially from disadvantaged communities in the South to secure their livelihoods, to live their lives in security and dignity and to be the owners of their own development. What triggered it off was the increasingly urgent call from developing countries for “Fair Trade instead of alms”. In 1969, the first Third World import store opened in the Netherlands and was soon followed by others in several European countries. The pioneers of the Fair Trade movement were first smiled at as “ideological goodies”, but

the movement stepped out of its homemade niche long ago: today, Fair Trade has a multi-billion turnover, and “being fair” is very much a current trend.

“Fair Trade” is not at all based on a recipe that has been laid down once and for all; the term has neither been patented nor is it a registered trademark. In the course of its exciting history, it has gone through various stages: the circle of Fair Trade partners has been extended, for example to wage-dependent workers; co-operation and sales strategies have been revised and expanded, in Switzerland, for example, to the sale of fairly traded products in supermarket chains; the criteria, for example with regard to environmental protection, and the instruments of implementation have constantly been refined. The profile of the minimum requirements of Fair Trade, for example, as recently laid down by the organisations united in the Swiss Forum For Fair Trade (Schweizer Forum Fairer Handel -SFFH), follows internationally agreed criteria:

- long-term, possibly direct trade relations in a spirit of partnership, which mostly include advisory services for the producers,
- fair prices that fully cover costs and earn the producers living wages, and which as a rule include a surcharge for social development,
- pre-financing and guaranteed orders,
- working conditions that are in line with existing legal regulations and with the minimum standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO),
- environmentally friendly production,
- full transparency for producers and consumers, thanks to independent control mechanisms and regular reporting,
- continuous consumer information and education in order to encourage responsible consumer behaviour.

Fair Trade is to promote sustainable development. Human rights and internationally agreed environmental and social standards are the basis of any Fair Trade (SFFH 2001).

The main orientation for the consumer is a transparent declaration of a fairly traded product, often in the form of a credible label, which is the result of a certification process. For a long time, it has been a matter of dispute among the various actors in the Fair Trade movement how the objectives of Fair Trade are to be implemented in

detail and at which level measures need to be taken. In the meantime, however, a lot of ideas and approaches have been developed, which now often prove complementary. Apart from targeted product development to make a product comply with the standards of a Fair Trade label, ethical business practices are increasingly being added, including instruments such as codes of conduct and agreements between NGOs and private service providers and companies on social and environmental standards. From the basic resource to their final sale, complex products not only require wholesalers, but a whole range of steps in the chain of production in various locations. When introducing such complex products under "Fair Trade" schemes, binding agreements with companies are indispensable. The Swiss Max Havelaar Foundation, a fair labelling organisation and member of the network of Fair Trade Labelling Organizations (FLO) founded in 1997, has played a leading role in the recent introduction of new Fair Trade products. The Max Havelaar Foundation plans to work in close co-operation with the Clean Clothes Campaign in order to develop a fair label for textiles. The Clean Clothes Campaign has already put various groups in the textile industry under the obligation to observe and improve labour standards (**akte** 2003).

Admittedly, much effort has been made in view of the fact that fair trade has only an insignificant market share of about 0.01 percent in world trade. But its share is growing, even during recession times. Today, the annual growth rate of products with a "social surplus value" (as it is called in business jargon) is 15 to 20 percent. In Switzerland in particular, fairly traded products have gained popularity with consumers. In no other country is the fair trade turnover per person as high as in Switzerland. Nowadays, one out of four bananas consumed in Switzerland is a Fair Trade product. Fairly traded honey already has a market share of about ten percent (Max Havelaar 2003). Apart from the traditional actors of the Fair Trade movement, who are increasingly becoming more professional and improving the quality of their products, supermarkets such as Coop and Migros have contributed to these successful sales. For ten years, Coop has followed a consistent strategy of introducing credible products from organic production and fair trade suppliers. Food scandals and the growing health-consciousness of consumers have contributed to the success of these products: 55 percent of the Swiss population buy such products, spending twice as much as the Germans, as Coop disclosed last year. For these

products, Coop has become the Swiss market leader. Last year, the retail chain had a turnover of 63 million Swiss francs from Fair Trade products alone. This means a market share of 56 percent in Fair Trade in Switzerland (Surprise 2003). Another success factor is the labelling organisation Max Havelaar Switzerland. Its labels have such a high degree of credibility and familiarity among the Swiss that “Max Havelaar” has become almost synonymous with Fair Trade (akte 2003). Founded by aid agencies about ten years ago, the fair labelling organisation was in the black in 2002 for the first time and recorded a 33 percent growth in turnover as compared to the previous year. About 27.5 million francs out of a total turnover of 112 million francs directly reached the producers and plantation workers in the South - 30 percent more than they would have gained from their products if they had sold them in traditional markets (Max Havelaar 2003).

The effectiveness of Fair Trade, however, cannot be reduced to its growth in turnover (Misereor et al. 2002). The principles of Fair Trade have significantly contributed to making the idea of ethical business practices more tangible – practices which have become established as a precondition for sustainable development and which have been adopted by more and more companies. Furthermore, Fair Trade has proved to be one of the few areas that provide opportunities in industrialised countries to highlight the inequitable global trade relations – despite the fact that the interest in development issues has declined. We may criticise that this is not sufficient, as buying a fairly traded product only helps consumers to ease their conscience. It does not replace the political commitment necessary in order to effectively fight the existing injustice between the North and the South. Nevertheless, fair trade offers consumers a simple way to change their consumption patterns and to use their shopping basket in order to set certain points.

Approaches to fair trade in tourism

Clearly, Fair Trade offers perspectives for the urgently needed new orientation in tourism. Demands for fair trade structures and a fair distribution of profits move socio-economic and political concerns to the centre of attention – the so-called „social dimension“, which had so far been largely neglected in the strive for sustainability in tourism. This has also been admitted by tourism leaders on the occasion of the World

Summit on Sustainable Development last year in Johannesburg (WTO 2002). Furthermore, in order to achieve Fair Trade, the various actors along the supply chain – producers and consumers, wholesalers, manufacturer and retailers – all have to become simultaneously active and make their respective contribution. This framework of action goes far beyond the selective approaches of previous efforts towards sustainable tourism.

Sceptics might argue that in the current tourism crisis it is a hopeless venture to involve the various actors in measures that actually bring about Fair Trade in Tourism. The crisis, however, is - due to bomb attacks, kidnappings and wars – also an expression of the increasing insecurity of tourists. It is exactly this crisis, which encourages (or forces) actors in tourism to search for new, socially responsible approaches. The interest in Fair Trade in Tourism is growing. NGOs in the North and in the South, that have always been the driving forces in Fair Trade, have already prepared the ground well and have at various levels of action laid promising foundations. These approaches are now to be linked, and consistent campaigning and advocacy must push for the implementation of Fair Trade in Tourism.

Thanks to the Fair Trade in Tourism project of Tourism Concern, tourism initiatives and NGOs from all continents were able to develop - sometimes in heated discussions - common criteria for Fair Trade in Tourism. They have continued to refine these criteria in their daily work. One result is the certification process of FTTSA in South Africa, where a new label for individual tourism products has set new quality standards. This label has – unlike most other labels in tourism – been developed by the people actually concerned. It rings in a paradigm shift in tourism: the needs of local communities for (existential) security and quality (of life) rate at least as high as the demands of the tourists for quality and security which had so far been the only deciding factor in the design of tourism projects (even though the so-called needs of the tourists often corresponded to the needs of market research institutes and their weighty clients in the tourism industry). For such products, a clear, credible label on social responsibility can become an important marketing instrument. Many innovative tourism projects are currently making efforts to give local communities a fairer share in tourism in the South as well as in the North. All these projects will eventually need to get market access (see box "Something Out of

Nothing"). Many of these service providers bet on international tourism right from the outset.

For years, business leaders have been recommending tourism as a promising path to development. Recently, it has also been increasingly promoted as a tried and tested instrument of "poverty alleviation". These new initiatives, however, hardly find their way into the catalogues of tour operators, nor do they get access to global reservation systems where distribution channels, particularly in international tourism, converge. Every project is invariably faced with the question of how much effort is involved in getting access to the international market, and how much dependency will result from trying to survive in a highly competitive globalised environment. Proven development experts have been justified in pointing out to the Fair Trade movement time and again that market access alone does not automatically result in Fair Trade (Bello 2002). Trading partners are needed and also specific support, which goes beyond mere trade aspects. This may include targeted development co-operation.

Development agencies have recently started to increasingly turn to tourism. However, they often invest in tourism projects without adequately taking into account the global context of an economic sector, which is highly interlinked. They have also not first focussed on the empowerment of communities in the tourism destinations. This, however, would be necessary for local people to obtain the right qualifications to deal with new challenges and to above all be able to protect their rights, including their participation in decision-making processes, a share in the benefits, protection against exploitation and access to the resources which secure their livelihoods, but which are at the same time important „inputs“ for tourism.

The “empowerment” of local communities is also the key to a fair exchange between hosts and guests – encounters of equals, as innovative tourism entrepreneurs in South Africa and Namibia precisely formulated it when interviewed by the Swiss Working Group on Tourism and Development (**akte**) about their expectations and ideas of Fair Trade (Frei 2002). Tourists also caught onto the ideas. They were first informed about Fair Trade in Tourism by **akte** on the occasion of Swiss holiday fairs in 2003. Consumers have expressed their interest in tourism products that offer new insights and encounters, and which at the same time assure them of a fair

involvement of local communities in tourism. This also confirms the results of surveys from several European countries that show more and more tourists are interested in environmentally and socially sustainable tourism products and would even be ready to pay an extra charge (Goodwin/Francis 2003). They "would" – but their good intentions have so far hardly been put to the test, due to the lack of corresponding, transparently labelled products. So it has become even more important to tap this potential and to show to tourists, who have frequently expressed their interest, what actually makes the difference with regard to social responsibility and environmental sustainability in tourism, and how their demands and their purchasing decisions can have the desirable influence on the holiday packages offered.

At the same time, tourists, who travel to the service providers and "consume" services in the destination itself, are an integral part of trade. Once they have made their booking, they must know clearly how they can contribute to Fair Trade during their holiday. For example, a fair exchange with the hosts includes respecting the limitations they may set to their own hospitality. Or, a fair price does not only have to cover the full costs of resource consumption, but also the service of protecting biological diversity and safeguarding local cultures and traditions. NGOs in countries where tourists are from are required to provide sound background information and to develop new instruments to raise tourist awareness. They carry out broad-based consumer campaigns, presenting tangible options that go far beyond the tips for adequate behaviour that tourists have been presented with for years.

No "fair" tourism product without fair trade relations and rules

It is certain that there will not be a credible label for „fair tourism“ or fairly traded holiday packages in the near future. Indeed, there might never be one, neither as convenient guidance for tourists nor as a welcome marketing tool for the tourism industry. There was also unanimous agreement on this among those in charge of product development at the Swiss Max Havelaar Foundation and the executive director of the import organisation "claro fair trade ag" when they discussed the feasibility of Fair Trade in Tourism and its perspectives with experts at **akte** in early June 2003 (**akte** 2003). While even complex products such as footballs and soon textiles can already be labelled, the service sector is new territory for the Fair Trade

movement. A strategy aimed at labelling whole tourism packages is not advisable. At most, individual components of such packages, such as accommodation, food and beverages, guided tours or souvenirs etc., can be labelled.

However, there is currently an unedifying mess of labels in tourism. Consumers would get the needed guidance only from a very specific, detailed and independently monitored tourism label. Only this kind of a label would help them make a responsible choice between a more and a less sustainable tourism product. So far, the many labels that exist have not really become criteria in the decision-making processes of consumers when booking their holidays. Some of these labels are rather complex and costly; most of them cover only selected environmental aspects of a tourism product or package.

The awareness campaign carried out by **akte** at holiday fairs in 2003 has shown that tourists would be interested in finding out which product offers maximum benefits for people in the destination (in terms of Fair Trade) and which measures have been taken to protect the environment. Providing this kind of information requires a new degree of transparency on the part of tour operators and travel agents. It would also give them the chance to present their environmental protection efforts, and to explain to their customers the positive effects of environmentally and socially sustainable products. This, in turn, would lead to new customer incentives. Whether they eventually bring about this transparency by using a well-introduced label or not is not yet the issue. The popular discussion on a label must not divert attention from the fact that the tourism industry will first have to ensure that local communities are actually able to participate in tourism in a fair manner. The question is not simply one of transparent communication with the public in the North. Fair Trade in Tourism must also be reflected in a fair pricing policy and in new partnerships with service providers in the destinations. These service providers must offer good working conditions, specifically empower women and disadvantaged groups, protect children against exploitation, buy local products from local producers, use resources sparingly and ensure broad-based participation of local communities.

Customers do appreciate and reward this kind of commitment. A small Swiss tour operator confirms this. He organises his South Africa packages in co-operation with

people historically disadvantaged by Apartheid. In his catalogue, he also describes historical aspects and patterns of ownership. With the specialised environmentally and socially sustainable packages they offer, tour operators organised in the German “forum anders reisen” have, despite the current crisis, been able to do relatively well so far (Kreib 2003). They now have the opportunity to open up new facets of a destination to their customers by co-operating with the new initiatives that are working towards more fairness in tourism, and by including them in their packages at least as components. “Some fairness is certainly preferable to none”, is the pragmatic approach of Jennifer Seif of FTTSA (Seif 2003). Catering to a new market segment can mean being a pioneer.

But building a „fair niche“ cannot be the objective of Fair Trade in Tourism. It is important to address the market where mass tourism is dominant, as in the case of beach holidays, emphasised Kaspar Hess, Head of the Department of Corporate Ecology, Hotelplan, and Vice President of the Tour Operators' Initiative (TOI), in a discussion with **akte** on the chances and strategies of Fair Trade in Tourism. Tour operators can hardly convince the public that they are concerned about human rights, participation, fairness and the livelihoods of local communities if most of their products include people working under deplorable conditions and valuable resources being sold off dirt-cheap.

The principles of Fair Trade correspond to the core profile of corporate social responsibility, a cause which most large companies nowadays like taking up. This alone would be sufficient to make Fair Trade a corporate principle in the tourism industry. But the consumer sensitive tourism industry of all sectors has a lot of catching up to do (Kalisch 2002). Under the Tour Operators' Initiative started by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), tourism leaders are currently making initial efforts to address social concerns in tourism (TOI 2003). It becomes evident that unlike in environmental protection, social responsibility cannot usually be achieved by setting quantifiable targets. Instead, it is an expression of respect for the rights of the people working in tourism, and for the rights of those affected by it. It often does not require major additional technology, but fair trade relations in order to protect the rights of local communities in tourism destinations.

In principle, this should be something to be taken for granted. However, considering the development of tourism today, it is not at all so. The fact that large tourism companies have now made commitments to this effect is of course to be welcomed. But who is going to monitor these corporate commitments? Binding, controllable agreements would be better. The "Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism" is a first effort in the tourism industry to put such an agreement to the test (www.thecode.org). Of course, the protection of children from exploitation needs to be given utmost priority. But given the time and energy the international network ECPAT (www.ecpat.net) has spent to have this code of conduct ratified and implemented by the industry, they now have to address how much energy and resources NGOs have to invest to commit the industry to more socially responsible practices and the implementation of existing regulations that are binding in the form of laws and international standards.

This shows that Fair Trade in Tourism is not possible without the involvement of governments in the North as well as in the South. NGOs will have to make a concerted effort to increase their advocacy work in this field. In tourism, laws and regulations such as labour standards and the rights of women and children are often trampled upon. As the eco-tax on the Balearic Islands and the ban on "all-inclusives" in the Gambia show, regulations in tourism are not at all popular or "election-friendly" (Bah/Goodwin 2003). The South African example of National Guidelines for Responsible Tourism, however, shows that governments can promote Fair Trade in Tourism by developing a favourable general set-up. Government leaders are above all required to ensure more fairness, transparency and participation in the field of international finance and trade policy. The most unsustainable tourism developments can still be traced back to the debt policy, and particularly the structural adjustment programmes prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Behind closed doors, the GATS negotiations further limit the leeway of local and regional authorities for an independent development of tourism. Any Fair Trade in Tourism effort thus runs the risk of being futile.

11.9.2003/plus

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“Something Out of Nothing”

“Something Out of Nothing” is the name of Sarah Mhlangu's workshop. In Mhluzi, not far from Middleburg in South Africa, Sarah collects waste and produces works of art from tins and garments from rags. With her recycling and arts centre, Sarah Mhlangu has not only created jobs for herself and others in the township, but also a tourist attraction: more and more guests come to visit the workshop, enjoy the food she prepares and are shown the various facets of life in the township by her daughter. Sarah is not the only one, who, like a magician, creates an inviting tourism attraction out of nothing. In Southern Africa and Brazil, in the Alps and remote regions in Europe, innovative tourism initiatives are emerging. They offer a new kind of encounter and a unique holiday experience for tourists. At the same time, they provide new sources of income for local communities, respect local traditions and protect the environment.

In South Africa and Namibia, it is clearly visible that the new tourism projects are also signs of political change. After the end of Apartheid, the South African government has made it one of its objectives to encourage the historically disadvantaged majority of the population to seek new income opportunities in tourism. It has published comprehensive guidelines to promote the development of responsible tourism. These guidelines outline the economic, social and ecological responsibility of the actors in tourism. They are to guarantee the participation of disadvantaged groups of the population. These guidelines make Fair Trade an integral part of responsible tourism. If implemented by the various actors involved, they offer a model framework for environmentally and socially sustainable tourism development.

Sarah Mhlangu has found a fair partner: a Swiss tour operator who actively supports responsible tourism initiatives, adds important background information to her project and introduces it to Swiss tourists. He is an exception. Most tour operators in the North have not yet discovered that they could actively contribute to environmentally and socially sustainable tourism by building new partnerships, that they could diversify their products and effectively cater to the growing demand for more responsible holidays. /plus

More information on Fair Trade in Tourism in:

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