

In Deep Water

Coastal Communities in the Era of Tourism Development

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors worldwide. It grows intensively in absolute numbers and reaches more and more places around the globe, including ecologically and culturally sensitive areas. In four out of five countries, tourism is among the five top export earners and the main source of foreign exchange for every third developing country. Thus, it is no surprise that tourism is mentioned in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. This specific reference is an acknowledgement of the global significance of the sector on one hand; but it is also an obligation to transform the current consumptive tourism model, which is incompatible with sustainable development, on the other.

The vast majority of global tourism takes place in coastal areas - and especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) focus on tourism as a strategy for diversifying their economy and fostering economic development. This is why tourism is mentioned in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 of the 2030 Agenda. SDG 14.7 aims to “increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least

developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources by 2030, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism”. While tourism is addressed in SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production) and SDG 14, the 2030 Agenda urges us not to look at the goals in isolation, but to understand the connections and interdependencies of all 17 SDGs.

As tourism is growing, pressure is increasing on resources and land. Coastal areas serve various functions: among others they are living space for 37 percent of the global population, they serve as a source of nutrition for even more people, they are ecologically important and sensitive transition zones between marine and dry lands as well as buffer zones minimizing negative effects of natural disasters. If coastal areas are supposed to additionally serve recreational needs of travellers and business interests of the tourism industry, all those functions have to be carefully brought into balance. There is an urgent need to assess the effects of tourism on coastal communities and natural resources before its further promotion.

Land and ocean grabbing in the name of tourism

Tourism is one of the driving forces behind ocean grabbing, the reallocation of rights and access to marine resources, their use and control away from small-scale fishers and local communities. This growing phenomenon results in infringements of land rights and violations of human rights. Furthermore, the construction of tourism and related infrastructure can increase the vulnerability of coastal communities to climate change effects and other natural disasters by destroying natural barriers, such as mangroves, coral reefs and sand dunes. For example, sand mining for building nearby hotels is in some parts of the world a widespread but short-sighted strategy to save money and has severe effects on the vulnerability of the communities, especially in areas that face increasingly frequent and dramatic effects of climate change.

Ocean grabbing violates fisherfolk's right to life, livelihoods and land – cases from Sri Lanka

The National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) of Sri Lanka, together with the Swiss Society for Threatened Peoples (GfbV), has been taking a strong stand against ocean grabbing in Sri Lanka. Fishing communities are under threat since the implementation of new tourism projects under the post-war development plans and the proposed National Physical Development Plan 2016-2030 for tourism promotion by the Government of Sri Lanka. Since the end of the civil war in 2009, tourism is growing in the North and East of Sri Lanka, especially in the coastal areas where hundreds of holiday resorts are constructed. Therefore, more and more fishermen have no access to beaches, which they have used for generations. They are displaced from their traditional fishing grounds, the aquatic environment and mangrove forests – the basis for their survival. By this, their basic human rights are violated. In the former war affected areas, today the military is involved in tourism activities and associated land and ocean grabbing for tourism projects, which makes it hard for local people to take action.

Another driving force for ocean grabbing closely linked to tourism is the declaration of Marine Protected Areas (MPA). While the need to protect coastal and marine areas is indisputable and supported by local communities, there are severe concerns about the lack of their participation and self-determination. Local fishing communities are excluded from MPAs too often, while tourism is introduced in the same areas as a mean for alternative income. Investment in tourism is stimulated, in many cases without proper assessment of the environmental effects, which could be very severe. Inhabitants that were able to make a

living from fishing all year long before are forced into tourism jobs. But these are highly vulnerable to external shocks and only allow for a seasonal income.

An example for sustainable use of land and sea: Extractive Reserves in Brazil

By law, more than 20 Extractive Reserves (ER) in Brazil ensure the sustainable use of natural land and marine resources as well as local communities' rights to land and resources, thus contributing to protect their livelihood and culture. Traditional populations like fisherfolk, indigenous people and descendants of slaves have the right to ask the government for the demarcation of their customary land, which will give them legal protection from land grabbing and the right to manage the use of coastal resources themselves. Several Marine ER already promote community-based tourism as a complementary – not alternative – income to fishing and other activities. In the community of Prainha do Canto Verde in north-eastern Brazil the designation of an ER in 2009 brought a 30 year-standing struggle for land tenure to an end. Besides fishing, community-based tourism is now one additional source of income within the community.

Marginalized communities are also at particular risk to lose their ancestral land in the context of post-disaster rebuilding and the declaration of coastal regulation zones. While local inhabitants and fishers are forced out of those protection zones, hotels are built within or immediately adjacent to these zones restricting local peoples' access to the sea. This happened almost all over South East Asia after the 2004 Tsunami, but also takes place in other countries outside this region. Small-scale and artisanal fishing communities are most affected by these displacements.

Long-term effects of post-tsunami investments on the livelihoods of fishing communities in Tamil Nadu, India

Tourism and related infrastructure development in the post-disaster coastal areas of Tamil Nadu, South India caused major displacements of coastal communities from their land and tremendous changes in their livelihood. While the Government motivated surviving inhabitants at the coasts to relocate to interior areas citing security reasons immediately after the Tsunami, they were at the same time encouraging investors to purchase coastal lands. In combination with governmental investments in infrastructure development, supported by International Financial Institutions in context of rehabilitation and relief, private investors immediately saw chances for profitable engagement – especially near newly proposed tourist

destinations. Coastal land became dearer as there was a sudden upsurge in tourism facilitated by the tsunami rehabilitation programs for infrastructure development in the area.

13 years after the 2004 Tsunami, artisanal fishing today is an expensive investment in Tamil Nadu. Only a few fishers can afford the high living and rental costs in the new tourism destinations. For others the distances to traditional fishing spots have increased dramatically, causing high spending on transportation. Many fishermen already gave up their traditional way of life.

Tourism and community life

Tourism often uses the most attractive strips of coastline. As a consequence, land prices go up and local inhabitants are encouraged – or even forced – to sell their properties. This can reduce the space available for fishing and other traditional activities and exacerbate the daily life of local population. Urban coastal areas were always attractive not only to leisure but also to business travellers and face new challenges due to current tourism trends, as in Barcelona, New York or Venice.

Over-Tourism as a growing risk for coastal cities – the example of Venice

It is getting crowded in the old town of Venice. During one day up to ten cruise ships enter the lagoon. Today only 50,000 inhabitants (this is only one fourth of the population of 1950) live in the old town, sharing it with 30 million tourists a year. Most shops and restaurants are mainly catering tourists' demands; shops for the daily need as well as schools or neighbourhood services are closing down with serious effects on the quality of life of the inhabitants.

90 percent of the visitors in Venice are only staying in the city for a few hours – they are cruise ship holiday makers and day-trippers, who are enjoying their holidays in nearby destinations. The short duration of stay correlates with relatively small revenues for local service providers. Local entrepreneurs and hotel owners are afraid that their clients will not visit the city any more, because of the crowded situation during some hours of the day. Furthermore, the huge cruise vessels damage the environment and the fragile architecture of Venice – which is the basis for long-term prospect of the tourism activities in the city. The example of Venice illustrates that coastal areas need a proper management and planning, which integrates an early and informed participation of all stakeholders, including local inhabitants and civil society organisations.

In the context of tourism and development, tourism is seen as a catalyst for other economic activities in the communities, such as fishing. But in reality tourism is not automatically increasing the opportunities to sell fish on the local market. Research e.g. from Dominican Republic shows that international hotel chains prefer to import most of their fish instead of procuring it locally.

Furthermore, tourism can cause direct conflicts between small-scale artisan fishers and guests that seek recreation and entertainment. Uncontrolled sports fishing can essentially reduce fish stocks. Recreational fishing and collecting shells, lobsters, conches and corals can lead to over-exploitation. Unregulated development of tourism can also bring waste and noise, which may have negative impacts on water quality and fishing activities. Increasing pollution is a serious threat to the sustainable economic viability of fishermen. Hotels and marinas with cruise ships, motor boats and yachts cause pollution through the disposal of solid waste, which contains toxic substances that harm the ecosystem. Chemical waste in marinas stems from inappropriate disposal of oils, fuel, and paint residues. Hotels with (legal and illegal) sewage disposal and fertilizer runoff contribute to nutrient enrichment, which favours algae growth at the expense of biodiversity.

Transforming Tourism

There is a clear lack of proper guidelines, systems and implementation of responsible tourism development in coastal areas, which are mostly fragile and ecologically and culturally sensitive. Ecological impact assessments as well as human rights impact assessment are still widely missing in tourism. As a consequence, benefits are highly overestimated while risks remain ignored. Only tourism that contributes to the improvement of the well-being of local people, environmental integrity as well as the elimination of exploitation, inequalities and poverty, is a meaningful option for sustainable development. Otherwise tourism is a threat to development, rather than a tool for it.

There are yet too little efforts made to involve coastal communities and local small-scale fishers in tourism planning, decision making and into the supply chains. Human rights and self-determination of communities must be at the core of every tourism development. This includes the right to meaningful participation and consultation guaranteeing free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) on whether, to what extent and in what form tourism takes place. Additionally, tourism needs to seek a widespread

and fair distribution of economic and social benefits throughout the recipient communities, including improving local prosperity, quality of life and social equity. The tourism-related indicators in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are far away from measuring the contribution of tourism to sustainable development. While in SDG 14 a tourism-related indicator is completely missing, the indicators on SDG 8 (Decent Work) are a continuation to count tourism figures instead of tourism effects. As a consequence the transformative challenges of the 2030 Agenda remain ignored.

Ways forward

The UN Ocean Conference, taking place 5 to 9 June 2017 in New York, offers an important opportunity to address the potentials and risks associated with tourism in coastal communities. Even though the 2030 Agenda is relatively new, the described challenges are well-known. The international community is not starting from zero.

In regard to the above mentioned areas of concern, the “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest” adopted by FAO in 2012, the “Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries” from 2015, and the “UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” adopted in 2011, serve as the internationally agreed references for any tourism development taking place in coastal communities. These guidelines should also be understood as a basis for the monitoring of tourism in coastal communities.

We therefore demand the full implementation of these guidelines by all public and private stakeholders:

- The state shall fully implement the “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure on Land, Fisheries and Forests” through participatory, inclusive mechanisms that prioritize the rights and needs of legitimate tenure holders, especially women and indigenous communities.
- The state shall ensure the right to free, prior and informed consent of all communities affected by land transfers, and all kind of land use, which are not initiated by local communities, including the fair and equitable participation of all groups within local communities, especially excluded and marginalized groups such as women, children, minorities, the elderly and disabled.

- The state shall review public policies and projects that incentivize land and ocean grabbing, and instead support policies that prioritize the needs of small-scale food producers – particularly women – and sustainable land use.
- The state shall guarantee protection against human rights violations committed by third parties, such as businesses. This calls for appropriate measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and compensate human rights violations.
- Hotels, investors, tour operators as well as other tourism businesses should respect human rights and avoid negative impacts that are caused directly or through their business relations. In order to assume responsibility, they should possess corresponding principles and procedures and act with due diligence strategies in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- The State as well as all private stakeholders shall take adequate measures to provide access to an effective remedy and appropriate compensation for the affected parties. In addition to judicial mechanisms, states must also provide non-judicial grievance mechanisms. Moreover, businesses should also provide effective grievance mechanisms at an operative level, or participate in such mechanisms.

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