

Climate Change, CSR and Tourism

Decision Makers Need to Act

„By climate justice, we mean that the burden of adjustment to the climate crisis must be borne by those who have created it, and not by those who have been least responsible.“
(Asian Civil Society Groups, Bangkok, July 2008)

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Klimawandel, CSR und Tourismus

Tourism is one of the sectors causing global climate change. This is an undisputed fact and policy makers and business leaders are well aware of it. However, there is less consensus about the degree to which tourism and the emissions caused by tourism actually contribute to climate change and to what extent activities should be climate friendly. There are no legal requirements. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) expects contributions for climate protection to result from the innovative strength of the tourism sector: "Much will come eventually from the private sector with its appetite for innovation"¹. But in the tourism industry, innovative concepts for climate protection are yet to emerge.

So far, voluntary initiatives in the tourism industry have hardly reduced emissions. Efforts made have been confined to isolated initiatives for greenhouse gas offsetting, and to general statements of intent. Meanwhile, the growth of global tourism is substantial and tourism-related emissions continue to increase. The UNWTO forecasts for 1995 to 2020 show a global average growth rate of 4.1% annually. Especially long haul travel is growing world wide, with growth rates of more than 5.4% annually, while intra-regional travel is growing at 3.8%, which is rather below average².

Legislative frameworks for the reduction of emissions in tourism are currently not in sight. Bunker fuel emissions, i.e. emissions from international aviation and maritime transport, are not yet subject to internationally binding reduction targets. In the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on a post-2012 agreement, they are on the agenda. However, there are no tangible suggestions on the negotiating table yet. The EU has now taken a unilateral step to introduce reduction targets for aviation emissions at least. It has been decided that from 2012 onwards, the aviation sector is to be integrated into the European Emissions Trading Scheme. All inbound and outbound flights touching EU airports are to be covered, irrespective of where the airline is registered. For the year 2012, emissions have been capped at 97% of the average of aviation emissions between 2004 and 2006. The allowances shall be further reduced at a later stage. 15% of the allowances are to be auctioned, 85% are to be allocated free of charge. After having been reviewed, this percentage may be increased or decreased at a later stage.

To date, there is no detailed research on the share of all tourism-related emissions in man-made climate change. A study³ presented at the International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism in October 2007 in Davos, Switzerland, covers the main tourism emissions. The expert team estimates that in 2005, international tourism – including transport, accommodation and tourism activities – contributes about five percent of global emissions.

Need for Action

If the tourism industry wants to be credible in its social responsibility and if „Corporate Social Responsibility“ (CSR) is to be filled with life, the tourism sector needs to set its own binding emission reduction targets and develop instruments, methods and new products that help to achieve these targets.

¹UNWTO's position to Poznan Climate Change Conference. By UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General & Spokesperson, Geoffrey Lipman. Poznan, Poland / Madrid, Spain, 12 December 2008.

²UNWTO: Tourism 2020 Vision. Available at: www.unwto.org

³Commissioned by UNWTO, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

UNWTO is called upon to be a creative and innovative pioneer and to develop concepts. There is a need for scenarios in tourism that de-link economic growth from increasing emissions. The Davos Declaration, an outcome of the 2nd International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, calls upon the tourism industry to reduce emissions, but the declaration only includes general non-binding recommendations without authoritative targets. There is a need for clear and groundbreaking commitments by tourism businesses to reduce their CO₂ emissions in the core tourism business by x % by the target year, as compared to a base year.

Climate protection is an integral part of corporate social responsibility and thus an important element of customer information. Transparency is a pre-condition for well-informed customers to be able to consciously decide on a climate-sensitive tour operator or a climate-friendly tourism product. There is a need for a paradigm shift in tourism which can only be achieved by making tangible commitments!

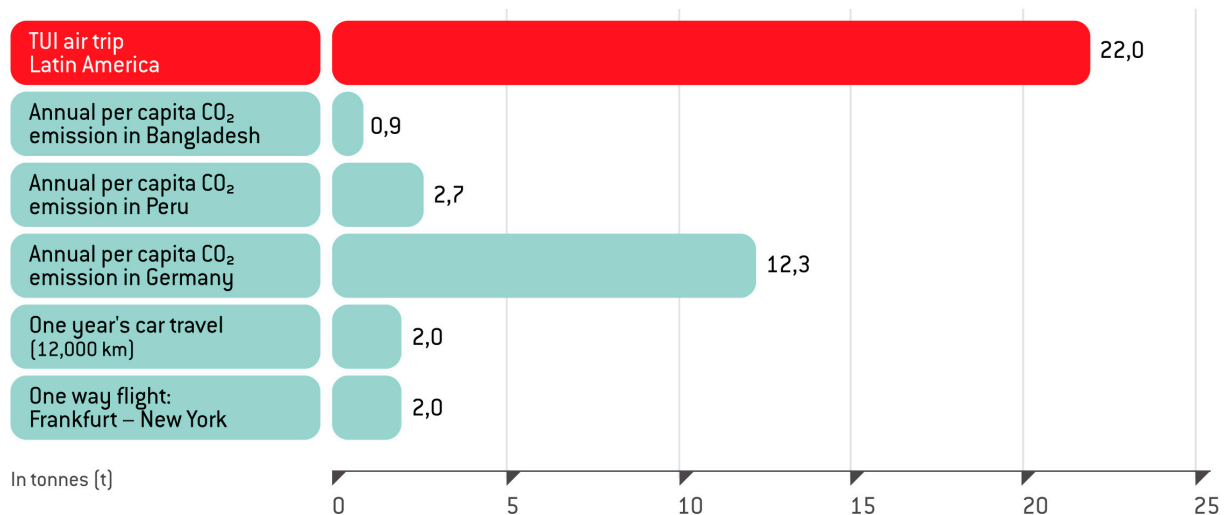
Tourism businesses, national and international associations, UNWTO and the tourism sector as a whole are asked to work towards sustainable tourism in a creative and innovative manner, by:

- » developing fair and responsible tourism products
- » advocating human rights and social standards to be respected, and the local population to benefit
- » practicing corporate social responsibility and by developing – on the basis of measurability and transparency – an action plan for the Davos Declaration that includes clear climate protection targets
- » introducing social and ecological product labelling, e.g. by providing information on carbon footprints or on the ecological balance sheet of tourism products
- » developing and improving methods and standards to calculate and measure emissions in tourism
- » including a **Radiative Forcing Index (RFI)** of at least three when calculating flight emissions in order to take into account the higher impact on the climate as aircraft emissions occur at high altitudes
- » recognizing and ensuring that growth in tourism is possible while emissions are being reduced at the same time
- » establishing clear reduction targets and deadlines for tourism emissions and by developing innovative instruments and methods to achieve these reduction targets
- » defining climate protection targets as a corporate voluntary commitment and by integrating them into strategies of corporate social responsibility (CSR)
- » ensuring that reduction targets are achieved mainly by increasing efficiency and by reducing emissions in the core business. The offsetting of emissions by supporting climate protection projects in developing countries should happen only on a very limited scale and under strict conditions **(at least CDM-Gold Standard)**.

The Radiative Forcing Index (RFI) recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Especially at high altitudes, emissions can cause additional greenhouse effects that go beyond mere CO₂ emissions. The so-called radiative forcing index (RFI) is a multiplier used to multiply CO₂ emissions emitted at high altitudes. In the IPCC report of 2007, it is estimated to be between 1.9 and 4.7. As a committee assisting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the IPCC is in charge of evaluating the risks of global warming and of gathering information on the options for mitigation.

Clean Development Mechanism – Gold Standard. The „Clean Development Mechanism“ (CDM) is an important pillar of the Kyoto Protocol. It allows for the offsetting of greenhouse gas emissions through compensation projects in developing countries and emerging economies. The „Gold Standard“ was launched by environmental organisations under the lead of WWF in order to ensure that CDM projects really contribute to sustainable development.

Emissions from TUI air trip in comparison



Source: 1. Emissions calculated by Atmosfair
2. Emissions calculated by World Resources Institute - Per capita greenhouse gas emissions in 2000

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Of course, the debate about socially and environmentally responsible tourism goes far beyond a mere reduction of emissions.

Human rights, land rights or poverty alleviation through tourism are not realised by calculating or reducing emissions. Policymakers, the tourism industry and travellers themselves – all the stakeholders in tourism have to take responsibility for the climate, have to minimise negative impacts and contribute to fair and sustainable tourism. Of course, as part of their corporate social responsibility tourism businesses are also responsible for their impacts on the climate. Nevertheless, concepts based on voluntary initiatives alone will hardly be sufficient. When voluntary commitments on climate protection made by the tourism industry fail, if not sooner, there is a need for legal regulation. Mandatory social and ecological labelling of tourism products would be a first step.