

Report on the side event

“Climate justice and tourism – Myths surrounding tourism and climate policies”

On the occasion of the Tourism European Network (TEN) meeting from 3-6 June 2010 and the UNFCCC climate talks, 31 May – 11 June 2010, both held in Bonn, EED Tourism Watch organised a side event on “Climate justice and tourism - Myths surrounding tourism and climate policies” at the University Club in Bonn. Together with network partners, EED intended to raise awareness on:

- the impacts of emissions from tourism on global warming
- the need for binding regulations to tackle emissions caused by tourism
- the myths around the economic impacts of tourism on communities in destinations in the developing world
- the calls by civil society in the global South for a paradigm shift in tourism

Although tourism is not directly negotiated at the UN climate talks, it is mentioned. Bunker emissions (emissions from aviation, including holiday flights, and shipping) have been under negotiation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for years. However, to date they have not been subject to any binding regulations. In fact, international tourism is used as an argument by the aviation, shipping and tourism industries against binding regulations. There are concerns that such climate protection measures may harm tourism’s growth potential, particularly with respect to its role as an assumed foreign-exchange earner and driver of development for poor countries.

The invited panellists from Europe and India, representing TEN network partners from civil society and one scientist, shared perspectives and in-depth knowledge with an engaged and well informed audience.

Heinz Fuchs, director of Tourism Watch, a special desk of the German Church Development Service (EED), and Chair of the panel, opened the event with a short movie “The Bill”, produced by Germanwatch. The movie is used to sensitise Western people about Climate Justice by exposing their CO2 intensive lifestyle in contrast to the people in developing countries which are affected most.

Sabine Minninger, a consultant to Tourism Watch on disaster prevention, global warming and tourism, opened the panel with an overview on key topics in the current debate, such as the interrelations of tourism and global warming, the meaning of climate justice, false solutions (such as the use of biofuels and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in tourism projects) and the role of tourism critical groups in the UNFCCC process. According to Minninger, only a small percentage of the world’s citizens actually travel by air, but aviation emissions are one of the fastest growing.

Eke Eijgelaar from the Centre for Sustainable Tourism & Transport (CSTT) of the NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences then gave solid academic-based account of the contribution of tourism emissions and their significant, steady growth rates. According to Eijgelaar, arrivals and emissions from tourism to least developed countries are still relatively low, constituting just 0.9% of international tourist trips in 2005. He concludes that there is a need for ‘de-carbonizing’ tourism systems and adjusting financial flows in poor countries, as well as the possibility to compensate poor countries.

Andreas Zotz of the Austrian NGO “respect - Institute for Integrative Tourism & Development” addressed the current commitment of the tourism sector in international climate politics. He took a view on the roles and positions of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) within the UNFCCC process. He concluded that both organizations so far have failed to promote binding regulations or emission reduction targets on a

political level. He found further that a scientifically sound strategy for achieving “carbon neutral tourism growth” – a buzz phrase often used by these organizations – is still seriously missing.

Beyond reducing emissions from tourism, Rachel Noble from UK based NGO Tourism Concern, broadened the context of the debate by linking tourism and global warming with issues of human rights, particularly land rights and water scarcity. Not only is tourism a highly energy intensive industry, it can also violate the rights of communities in poor countries by hindering their access to water and depriving them of their land. Noble provided examples of communities in the Bahamas and Costa Rica who have had to fight for access to water against tourism interests. Tourism Concern is concerned that global warming will only intensify water scarcity and other related problems.

Sumesh Mangalassery of Kabani, an Indian organisation working on tourism, human rights and development and partner of the Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT), experienced first hand from the injustice his antecessors on the panel were talking about. He participated in a Southern Consultation on climate justice and tourism in October 2009, organised by ECOT based in Thailand. This culminated in a “Southern declaration” on tourism and climate change. Mangalassery and other Southern civil society groups argue that current forms of mass tourism do not alleviate poverty. Rather, they point out that tourism often aggravates poverty, thereby undermining attempts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Tourism should not be used as an excuse to hinder binding regulations for bunker emissions. Kabani is calling for a significant transformation of mass tourism and a serious engagement of governments in reducing tourism’s carbon footprint.

Mangalassery criticised the UNFCCC debates and negotiations for not being more people-centred. This is creating a situation where the poor are becoming the victims both of climate change and its so-called “solutions”, such as CDM and biofuels, the development of which are, in some cases, drastically violating their human rights.

TEN members urge that emissions from aviation and shipping need to be placed under binding regulations in the future climate agreement, along with all emissions from tourism. They agree that the debate around climate justice and tourism goes beyond reduction measures. There needs to be a shift in thinking on the part of tourism decision makers and the international tourism industry, which sees them take social responsibility for the impacts of tourism beyond the existing legal requirements. Climate protection measures must become a binding part of corporate social responsibility initiatives and sustainability strategies of tourism enterprises.