

INVENT

TOURISMUS

INNOVATIVE MARKETING CONCEPTS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROPOSALS (INVENT)

BMBF JOINT PROJECT
'SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS ACTIVITY IN THE
TOURISM INDUSTRY'

 **Öko-Institut e.V.**

Die Bahn 

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LÜNEBURG

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Background

Tourism is an important growth industry worldwide, and it will play an increasingly important role in the future economy. Apart from its economic and socio-cultural significance, the adverse environmental and social effects of tourism have in recent years become the focus of public attention. Since hospitality and an intact environment are essential prerequisites for the long-term, economically-successful development of tourism, it is in the best interest of the economic players to run their business on a sustainable basis. Tour operators and service providers such as transport companies, hotels, restaurants, and those offering holiday-related services play a key role here. They can decisively influence the sustainable development of the travel market with new and innovative proposals for package holidays and mass tourism.

Although travel proposals geared towards sustainability already exist today, they predominantly involve niche offers for consumers who have a particular commitment to ecological and social issues.

Tourism companies ultimately tailor their offer to the demand from travellers. One of the crucial questions in this research project is therefore whether, in what form, and at what price sustainable holiday proposals can be sold to the broad mass of travellers. Only a sophisticated knowledge of people's wishes and reasons for travel allows tourism companies to integrate the model of sustainability when designing their travel proposals.

The research team

In the joint project ***Innovative Marketing Concepts for Sustainable Tourism Proposals (INVENT)***, *Öko-Institut e.V.*, the Department of Tourism Management at the University of Lüneburg, and the *Institute for Social/Ecological Research (ISOE) GmbH* are working in conjunction with their practice-based partners *AMEROPA-Reisen GmbH* and *Deutsche Bahn AG (DB AG)* and with the cooperation of the *German Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (DRV)* to develop models of innovative and sustainable tourism proposals for the package and mass market, these proposals being specific to certain target groups.

The objective

The core question is how more sustainable tourism proposals can be designed specifically for the mass market, and what criteria these proposals have to meet in order to win over a bigger share of holidaymakers. The entire holiday trip – from the outward journey via the stay, including accommodation and on-the-spot holiday activities, right through to the return journey – is observed in an approach that encompasses all the players concerned. The idea is to exemplify the development of proposals that on the one hand are more sustainable, and on the other hand can be integrated into the tourism companies' marketing strategies.

Project design

Analysis of the travel market

The project began by producing a differentiated account of today's German outbound travel market, based on the market survey 'Mobility'. Economic, ecological, and social criteria were used to assess whether travel segments should be seen in terms of greater or lesser sustainability. On this basis, four destinations were selected for the in-depth research: *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* as an example of tourism within Germany, *Northern Italy* as an example of travel to a nearby foreign country that can be reached by earthbound means of transport as well as by plane, *Turkey* as an example of a holiday region in the Mediterranean area, and the *Dominican Republic* as an example of a long-haul destination that offers sunshine, beaches, and palm trees even in winter.

Target groups

As a starting point for the development of target-group-specific sustainable proposals for the mass market and the corresponding marketing concepts, the various wishes, needs, and demands of holidaymakers were investigated. The thought behind this was that there are a number of different holiday and travel orientations that are linked to one's life phase and family situation, but also to fundamentally different lifestyles. To begin with, group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to develop hypotheses for a holidaymaker typology. 2000 people throughout Germany were questioned in the subsequent representative survey, and a target group typology of 'holiday and travel styles' was elaborated.

As a result, seven different types of holidaymaker were determined: classic holidaymakers looking for *sunshine and beaches* constitute the largest group. They usually book their travel as a package, and together with young, *'fun and action'* holidaymakers they constitute almost one third of all travellers. Aspects of sustainability can be conveyed to these groups if they are cost-neutral and, for example, linked with qualities as cleanliness and entertainment, or to younger people if they promise adventure and action.

It's quite a different story when it comes to people *interested in culture* or active *'countryside and outdoors'* holidaymakers. For the latter in particular, unspoilt countryside that's used for sporting and recreational activities is an essential criterion when it comes to choosing a holiday trip. Then there are holidaymakers who are creatures of habit, going to the same place every year, and families that travel with children. Both groups often stay in their own country, and they use the train more than other people to get where they're going. Individual discoverers constitute the seventh group; the frequency with which they book flights is above average.

Strategies

In order to provide an additional focus, those target groups in the individual sample destinations were selected that on the one hand show great interest in travelling to the destination, and on the other hand offer starting points for a demand for more sustainable travel.

In principal, there are *two* strategies as a path to greater sustainability: in the short term, it is possible to achieve greater sustainability optimising existing offer structures. Examples of this are water-saving fittings in hotels, excursions respecting aspects of nature conservation, or the use of modern, fuel-saving aircraft.

Over the medium and long term, it is possible to achieve a shift towards greater sustainability by winning over new or different market segments. One example of this would be tropical island destinations with sensitive eco-systems that could benefit if a more qualitatively oriented tourism were reinforced by travellers who bring with them a sophisticated, high regard for the local countryside and culture. In concrete terms, this might result in fewer tourists for the destination, who are overall spending more money on their trip. Target groups that are primarily looking for a varied nightlife and a cheap and sunny stretch of beach for their holiday could also be happy in destinations with less sensitive natural areas and an infrastructure that has already been established. This strategy thus aims at achieving future growth for the tourism enterprises that is profitable as well as socially and ecologically viable.

Design of sustainable holiday proposals

In both cases it is crucial for success that the proposals are designed in a way to match the target groups' expectations and to set up appropriate communication and marketing. The many faces of sustainability should be addressed in conformity to the target groups' needs. Clean water, saving money, hygiene, a lovely beach, unspoilt countryside, adventure, socialising are exemplifying key words how to address target groups.

The proposals that are developed must fit into the companies' marketing strategies and promise economic success. This is why a focussed exchange with selected tourism companies is underway, to take into account practice-based requirements and the companies' objectives.

Communication and publicity

The results will be presented to a wide audience: a practice-oriented brochure and a book for the specialist audience will be published, partial results will be presented at the ITB, and a 2-day conference will be held in Brussels with international stakeholders from the spheres of politics, science, and business. All these activities will be complemented by targeted press initiatives carried out by the participating partners. In addition, a project committee has been established with leading representatives from the tourism business and opinion-forming players from the worlds of politics and science.

The joint INVENT project is sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), and will run for three years.

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