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Tourism — an Alternative for Rural Regions in East Germany*

1. Introduction

The transition from a planned to a free market economy in East Germany led to diverse economic and social problems in rural areas (Zierold, 1997). In the GDR agricultural enterprises had been the main employers in many rural regions and after 1989 they lost this position. The drastic reduction of jobs in agriculture and a noticeable decrease in population in many rural regions as a result of a considerable drop in the birth rate and the migration of young people in particular express the critical developments. These developments were the reason for fearing that many rural regions would become depopulated. These tendencies imply the necessity to look for measures which allow the rural population to stay in their villages. Measures to find new sources of income are of prime importance. Due to the lack of effective alternative concepts to develop rural problem regions which might be suitable for resolving the general economic and structural problems resulting from the transition from a planned to a free market economy (Steinecke/Haart, 1996), many people set their hopes on tourism as a driving force for an economic and social upturn. International experience shows that tourism may induce faster and more growth than other branches (Bakert, 1991). Tourism plays an important role in preserving the workability of rural regions (Agrarbericht, 1996) and the perspectives of rural tourism are also being positively assessed for the new *Länder* (Agrarbericht, 1995). Due to measures by the European Union, the Federal Government and the State Governments a large variety of funds to develop rural regions were available very soon after 1989, many of them putting their main emphasis on rural tourism. The development of the regional economy in the tourism sector depends on many factors, not least on the attitudes of the local residents and important protagonists in the region. Their acceptance and support is necessary for the success of any planning activities aiming at the development of tourism (Benthien, 1994).

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In this paper we will present the first results of two surveys carried out in selected regions in East Germany dealing with the attitudes of rural people to the chances of tourism as a promoter of rural development in their region.

2. Data basis

Both surveys forming the basis of this paper were carried out in the late autumn of 1996. They are both part of accompanying research projects. These projects and the surveys are outlined below.

Project 1: Social concern and acceptance in protection areas

The project was started in the autumn of 1995, taking a national park in the German Land of Brandenburg as an example. It started out from the idea that the successful outcome of nature conservation projects will always be dependent on the local people joining their efforts. Social acceptance of the targets, means and measures of nature conservation, however, will not come up as an automatic response to the hitherto destruction of nature and environmental pollution. Rather, convincing the people that measures of nature conservation are right and necessary is often quite a troublesome and lengthy process. It is true that there was general agreement on the issue that the unique cultivated landscape must be saved. But since the implementation of the national park project involves many restrictions of use, the seeds of conflict had already been sown between those affected in the region on the one hand, and the concerns of nature conservation on the other. The group of those who are, or consider themselves, affected is large. To mention but a few fields of conflict: farmers and fishermen saw their livelihood at risk, industrial and commercial circles were concerned that the national park would obstruct the settlement of more companies or make their work more difficult, and it was feared that there might be adverse effects on the regional employment market.

Investigations are made under the project as to which aspects in the decision-making patterns and environment of the people and of major decision-makers in the region have a major influence on the attitudes and decision-making behaviour towards the national park. In the Land of Brandenburg, the establishment of large protection areas is also seen as an instrument for the promotion of economic development (Flade, 1993). Possible tourist uses are often a major cause for the establishment of large protection areas, with the national park being one of those categories. That is why general acceptance is also essentially dependent on the possibilities and chances seen in the region for the development of tourism as an alternative source of income.

In 38 unstructured personal interviews, experts (mayors, district management officers, heads of economic departments) were questioned,

among other aspects, about the possibilities and chances for tourism in the region and about risks and impediments to its development.

Project 2: Model-project "Stabilizing income by rural tourism"

Between 1993 and 1995 a model-project "Stabilizing income by rural tourism" was carried out in five model-regions in East Germany under the overall control of the German Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry. The objective of this model-project was to develop "sustainable" tourism as an additional source of income in regions hitherto not engaged in tourism. The initiators of the model-project had seen the main needs for action in developing rural tourism in motivating the local residents and in qualifying them to act on their own authority as well as in guaranteeing the basis of their livelihood. Against the background of the economic and social situation of the rural population in East Germany after 1989 the initiators had seen the urgent necessity of showing the rural population new perspectives in order to counteract their possible migration and therefore depopulating the rural regions. A long-term process of change of behaviour requiring a lot of specialist advice was thought to be necessary. The specialist advice should enable the persons on the receiving end to act on their own authority (bottom-up approach according to the principle "support to self-help"). Within the model-project two consulting firms were engaged to give this specialist advice (one of the firms was in charge of three, the other one of two model-regions). The consulting firms' task was to initiate the process of developing rural tourism in co-operation with the local residents by giving advice. The consulting firms were in the first instance to give support, they were not to point the way. Their fields of operation were permanent moderation, counselling, care and steering. Within a given framework the internal project-organization and the internal organization of the work could freely be determined by the consulting firms. The model-project provided for each of the five model-regions funds to employ two full-time collaborators. The full-time collaborators' task was to coordinate the process of tourist development under the guidance of the consulting firms. To ensure the participation of the local residents in the development process the initiators of the model-project wanted local residents to form teams to work on different topics concerning the development of rural tourism. The model-project did not make available additional investive funds to develop tourism. Only funds for personal support (work of the consulting firms, full-time collaborators) and funds for material (office equipment, rents etc.) were provided (Fink/Plankl, 1997).

Within the accompanying research project 300 random selected local residents were questioned in structured personal interviews (60 interviews per model-region). The survey should provide the data basis to answer among others the following questions: How do local residents assess the chances

for tourism in rural development? How do they assess the approach of the model-project? To what extent were the specific goals of the model-project attained and the principles carried out? How do the local residents assess the work done in the model-project?

3. Empirical results

3.1 CHANCES FOR TOURISM AS SEEN BY EXPERTS AND LOCAL POPULATION

The expert interviews revealed a highly diversified range of opinions regarding the possibilities and chances for tourism in the region. Some of the interviewees had expected that the economic development of their structurally weak region would get substantial impetus just because it became established as a national park. "Here with us the townspeople find everything they need for a holiday: intact, unspoilt landscape, peacefulness, clean air..." — this is how one of the interviewees described the advantages of the region. "Moreover, the establishment of a national park will give new momentum to the development of the region". In some discussions in the preliminary stages of the establishment of the national park, tourism had been praised as some kind of a "miracle cure" for the region, with many of the people having pinned great hopes on it. One of the respondents said: "With the establishment of the national park we also associated the protection of our natural environment, but even more we hoped for the creation of new jobs in our shaken region... We thought that tourism could become something to carry our hopes, for if people cannot find jobs, they will continue migrating from our region. And agriculture isn't up to much any more".

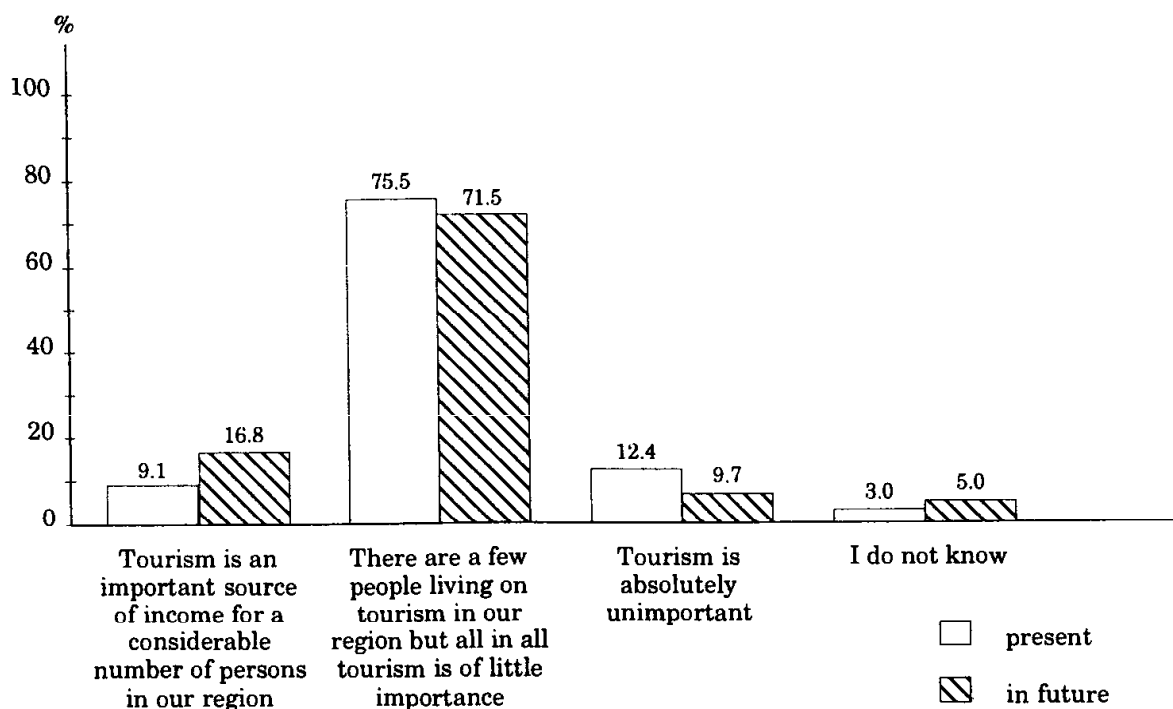
In the meantime, people have been brought down to earth. Some of the interviewees now even disapprove of tourism, the former carrier of their hopes, and also the idea of a national park, above all because the big economic impetus failed to materialize in most of the villages and households. "We have to live with the national park, but for the years to come we will not be able to make a living out of the national park", replied one of those interviewed. Communities in the close vicinity of the national park had first considered this site as an advantage but now they are disappointed because their hopes for steady economic progress from tourism were disappointed. Those who at first had been critical of the national park project now feel convinced in their view that no economic momentum to the region would ensue from the national park or from tourism either. Some of those critics say: "We said right from the beginning that... tourism will achieve nothing." "National park and tourism had been illusions from the very beginning", it "led to nowhere". Some of the interviewees continue to pin their hopes on tourism as a line of business in the region, not as a "wonder weapon" to solve all the problems but rather as an opportunity of opening new prospects for employment and for the living

conditions of the rural population. "We had expected too much. Development needs time..., and most people do not have time." They ponder critically upon the present situation. It is true that some hotels, guest houses and riding facilities were set up in the region in recent years, but, as some of the questioned experts put it, "hardly anybody can make a living on tourism."

The majority of the respondents in the survey accompanying the model-project "Stabilizing income by rural tourism" had similar views. The respondents had been provided with three statements concerning the present economic importance of tourism in the region. Over three quarters said that it was true that there were a few people living on tourism in the region but that all in all tourism was of little importance. Only 9% of the interviewees said that tourism was an important source of income for a considerable number of persons in the region. Though the respondents believed that tourism would gain importance in the future. Estimating the future importance of tourism — they were asked to think about the situation 10 years ahead — 17% of the respondents expected tourism to be an important source of income for a considerable number of persons in the region. But the vast majority expected that there would be a few people living on tourism in the region but that all in all tourism would be of little importance (see figure 1). More than half of the interviewees believed that tourism was a growing branch in their region. This shows that they pin certain hopes on tourist development.

Figure 1

Estimations on the present and future economic importance of tourism (%)



Source: own survey (1996)

To investigate the estimations about potential beneficiaries of tourist development in their region, the interviewees were given a list of potential beneficiaries. They were asked to judge against a scale to what extent the named potential beneficiaries make a profit on tourist development in their region. The scale reached from 1 (profit greatly) to 5 (profit not at all). According to the respondents local suppliers of guest rooms, local hotels and the local catering trade profit most. Few respondents answered that tourism was useful to the local retail trade, trade or agriculture. However, many said that these branches did not profit at all from tourist development: 20% (local retail trade), 26% (trade) and 41% (agriculture). Only a small share of respondents expected the local residents to profit from tourist development. This share is even smaller with the residents of the immediate vicinity (see table 1).

Table 1
Estimations about potential beneficiaries of tourist development in the region

Potential beneficiaries	profit greatly 1	2	3	4	Do not profit at all 5
local residents	2.4	10.2	34.5	32.1	22.2
local catering trade	13.3	42.0	26.6	9.6	8.5
local suppliers of guest rooms	22.3	43.2	24.7	8.4	1.4
local hotels	22.1	39.2	19.8	9.7	9.2
residents of the immediate vicinity	1.4	10.9	21.8	35.6	30.3
local retail trade	3.3	22.8	26.8	26.8	20.3
agriculture	1.7	9.1	17.2	30.7	41.3
trade	1.7	15.5	24.7	32.1	26.0

Source: own survey (1996)

Table 2 presents estimations about possible ecological and social impacts of tourist development in their region. The interviewees had been given a list of statements concerning possible impacts of tourist development. They had been asked to judge them against a scale reaching from 1 (is absolutely true) to 5 (is not true at all). The statement "Tourism leads to increasing ecological problems" had been presented as an ecological component of tourist development. A very small share of respondents took this statement to be true. This result surely reflects the model-project's orientation towards "sustainable" tourism. Few respondents expected tourism to improve traffic

accessibility or to help preserve the public infrastructure such as the post-office, bank, doctor, pharmacy, swimming-pool or stores. However tourism was expected to help to develop bicycle paths and trails and to stimulate activities to improve village appearance by the vast majority of the respondents. The statement "Tourism encourages preservation of customs" met with general approval. The respondents did not fear tourism would disturb the local residents.

Table 2
Estimations about possible impacts of tourist development on the region (%)

Possible impact	is absolutely true				is not true at all
	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism leads to increasing ecological problems	2.4	4.7	12.5	20.9	59.5
Tourism improves traffic accessibility	2.7	14.9	27.7	25.3	29.4
Tourism helps to preserve public infrastructure in the region	2.4	12.2	17.9	32.8	34.7
Tourism helps to develop bicycle paths and trails	17.2	46.7	23.0	7.4	5.7
Tourism stimulates activities to improve village appearance	19.9	47.1	20.9	7.4	4.7
Tourism encourages preservation of customs	42.9	35.5	14.2	4.7	2.7
Local residents will be disturbed by tourists	1.0	2.0	8.5	22.7	65.8

Source: own survey (1996)

3.2 NEW APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AS SEEN BY THE POPULATION

According to the interviewed experts, the inadequate basis for tourist infrastructure is an impediment to the development of tourism, but many of them believe that the lack of a "culture of own initiative" is also an essential obstacle. People still hesitate in accepting funds for tourist projects. The

successful development of tourism, however, is essentially dependent on the self-starting qualities of the people. In many places the people have to learn this again. Many people shy away from the risk of getting involved in tourist projects, they do not want to run into debt, their own financial resources are often insufficient, or they do not want to draw on their small savings. There is also a note of resignation about the fact that so few people accept tourism as a new, alternative means of living, maybe even only as an additional source of income, when one of the interviewees says: "There is not yet enough social hardship in our villages." As the interviewed experts see it, more encouragement and support must be given to the people to develop their readiness to take matters into their own hands. As a matter of fact, the development of rural tourism "cannot be ordained, neither by us nor by law". It is based on close co-operation with the population and must be accepted by them.

A similar idea was the initial point for the implementation of the model-project outlined in section 2. How local residents assess the principles of this model-project and how they assess the work done in the model-project is dealt with below. The vast majority of the respondents in the accompanying survey (80%) said that they fully agreed with the idea that the local residents should have a determining influence on the process of tourist development in contrast to traditional approaches using planning firms. However, almost half of the interviewees said that this principle had been carried out in the model-project. According to the respondents, this is a result of the fact, that too few people had joined the project actively and that there had been communication problems between the local residents and the consulting firms. Nevertheless the principle that consulting firms had been brought in to give specialist advice and to support the process of tourist development was considered to be useful by nearly 70% of the respondents. Nearly 60% agreed with the principle that two full-time collaborators had been employed. Most of the respondents confirmed that these collaborators had advanced the process of tourist development by their ideas and action. Setting up teams consisting of local residents to work on different topics concerning rural tourism in order to advance the process of tourist development was generally approved by more than 80% of the respondents. The majority of the interviewees confirmed that the teams had completely committed themselves to their tasks and that they had worked efficiently. The principle that no additional investment funds had been provided did not meet with general approval. Only 40% of the respondents considered it to be useful to provide merely funds for personal support. Over a third disagreed with this principle. This shows the evident call for additional funds and is underlined by the following results: More than half of the respondents said that the model-project had built a basis which could not be extended without outside help. 15% said that the term of the model-project (2 years) had been too brief to initiate sustainable development and that the achieved effects would fail.

Almost 10% said that the model-project with its principles had not been able to initiate sustainable development and that developing tourism required different measures. Almost 18% of the respondents proved to be optimistic by answering that the model-project had built a basis and that the region would be able to continue the process of tourist development.

4. Critical reflection on the contribution of tourism to sustainable rural development

Developing rural tourism should generally use the endogenous potential of the region (Steinecke/Haart, 1996). A sustainable regional development requires that the regional character of the landscape, the regional culture, history and above all the local residents are included in the process of development. It is important that the local residents have from the beginning realistic ideas about the chances for tourist development in their region. The results of the experts' survey showed that it might be counterproductive when tourism is extolled to people in rural areas as a panacea. If in the medium-term no perceptible success becomes apparent in the region, people will be disappointed and the prevalent lack of prospects will increase. In the survey accompanying the model-project "Stabilizing income by rural tourism" most of the respondents showed less hope in tourism as a source of income, both for the present and the future. This result reflects the difficult situation especially of newcomers on the German tourism market. Competition is characterized by the globalization of supply: Two thirds of on holiday the Germans go abroad and this trend is expected to last. Against this background hopes of a growing economic importance of tourism in rural areas often seem to be exaggerated — especially concerning job creation. Tourist strengths in rural areas (e.g. high aesthetic quality of landscape, high environmental quality) face tourist weaknesses (e.g. mostly lack of uniqueness of landscape, climatic disadvantages, deficits in infrastructure, marketing problems) (Steinecke/Haart, 1996). Therefore, tourism cannot under any circumstances be a panacea either for agriculture or for rural areas, at best one important factor among others of the local economy. Koch (1986) and Maly (1991) say that tourism cannot be an alternative for all rural regions, because not all of them are suitable for tourism. It is important that tourism is implemented only in suitable regions considering the natural and cultural peculiarities. In the process of tourist development these peculiarities should be central issues.

Habermann (1994) assumes that developments starting out from the mobilization of the endogenous potential are more effective and longer lasting than top-down approaches. Therefore, it is important that the acceptance of the local residents is obtained before projects promoting tourist development are implemented (Potthoff, 1988). The residents themselves have to be the real architects of rural tourism when they want to be the main beneficiaries

(Thibal, 1988). In the survey accompanying the model-project "Stabilizing income by rural tourism" the vast majority of the respondents fully agreed with the idea that the local residents should have a determining influence on the process of tourist development. Encouragement and support must be given to the people to develop their readiness to take matters into their own hands. This is necessary especially in East Germany where the planned economy destroyed any form of initiative. To initiate a developing process according to the principle "support to self-help" it is necessary to bring in experienced staff and to provide permanent staff that works full-time on tourist matters. The vast majority of interviewees in the model-regions agreed with that principle. On the other hand, the results of the survey show that only the implementation of self-help projects will not be sufficient to initiate lasting and sustainable processes. Additional outside help seems to be necessary especially in the form of investive funds.

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