Studienkreis
für Tourismus und
Entwicklung e.V.

**Travel for Future?!**

**Young people today are posing inconvenient questions, because they are worried about the future of our planet. What are the answers the tourism industry has for Generation Z? Impressions of a lively discussion at the 25th Ammerlander Talks.**

It doesn't come as a surprise that Alexander von Humboldt was mentioned at the beginning of the discussion: the great world traveller, cosmopolitan thinker, researcher and ecologist whose 250th birthday was commemorated this year. His name is symbolic of the positive aspects of travel such as encounters and cosmopolitanism, and the protection of nature and the environment at the same time. How we can achieve this in the 21st century was discussed by experts from the tourism industry, politics, and academia at the 25th Ammerlander Talks on 19th October 2019 at Literaturhaus München. The discussion took place upon invitation by the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung) during its 25th anniversary year. There was agreement in the round that the wheel of history cannot be put into reverse. Rather, the challenge consists in correcting undesirable developments and making tourism more climate and eco-friendly.

The tourism sector must provide answers. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is worried about the planet – 70 percent of our young people fear the destruction of the environment, 60 percent fear climate change, confirms a recent Shell study. Their fears find channels in the streets: with the Fridays for Future movement around initiator Greta Thunberg. According to the round of experts, the tourism sector must understand the protests as a signal – in order to take responsibility and avoid losing the customers of tomorrow. Sustainability and climate protection are more than just a brief hype. "The issues will affect this generation for a lifetime", explained pollster Axel Dammer, CEO of iconkids & youth international research GmBH in his presentation. However, he expressed doubt whether this would also lead to fundamental changes in behaviour. "People are emotional beings and often do not act rationally". It is difficult to abstain from fulfilling one's own needs for the sake of future generations.

An opinion which was disproved in an impressive manner by two ninth graders who were part of the discussion. Hanna and Aurelia have for the past one year been active in the Fridays for Future movement in Munich and have already

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changed their behaviour: Hanna has been a vegetarian for six years and spends her summer vacations on the Baltic Sea coast where she goes by train. Travelling is a great experience, said Aurelia. However, it depends on the mode of transport you choose. She told the group about one of her classmates who had been able to convince her father to avoid flights on future business trips. “We have to start with ourselves. We have to make sacrifices now, for the sake of our future“. The two students would like to see better cooperation across generations. Their demands: Meet the climate protection target of 1.5 degrees stipulated in the Paris Agreement, transition away from coal by 2030, 100 percent renewable energy supply by 2035.

It is an appeal to policy-makers who were represented at the Ammerlander Talks by Christian Zwanziger, spokesperson for rural development and tourism of the green party ‘Bündnis 90/Die Grünen’ in the Bavarian Parliament. He considers it the politicians’ duty to act. He did get a sense of the high expectations expressed by the young generation and regards pressure from the streets as important in the process of decision-making. Policy-makers must create offers: an improved transport infrastructure for busses and trains, concepts for sustainability. Air travel must become more expensive, rail travel cheaper. "We must not ask if we should travel, but how". Manfred Häupl, chairperson of Forum Anders Reisen e.V. called upon the tourism industry to regard climate protection as part of their core business. His association of sustainable travel and tourism enterprises has developed a strategy paper on climate protection. Mr. Häupl is also in favour of a carbon tax to be used for a stipulated purpose, equal taxation of all the different kinds of fuels, and adequate offsetting of greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Gold Standard – not planting saplings, but supporting projects around the world which are aimed at increasing energy efficiency.

The controversies around the topic of carbon offsetting in the industry became evident in the discussion that followed. It was termed a ‘selling of indulgences’, and an interim solution at best. One tour operator said that only about two percent of the customers offset their carbon emissions of air travel per year. Tour packages that include rail travel are not much in demand. It cannot only be up to the companies to implement the climate protection goals. Measures which have been voluntary to date must be replaced by state regulation – which would also lead to more fairness in the market. There was agreement in the round that policy makers must regulate by putting in place the respective restrictions, bans, and incentives. There was also a discussion on more attractive products that the tourism industry could offer to their customers, with the distance travelled and

the length of stay in a right proportion. It is not necessary to fly to Dubai for three days of shopping, or to Australia for a beach holiday.

Jan Flörcken, director of ‘Haus BergSee’ run by the Bavarian sports association, looked at the alternatives available in Germany for Generation Z that enjoys travelling and is eager for experiences: "Youth travel is no longer a niche; it has become part of the mainstream market. However, there is a need to cater specifically to young customers". Which means to move away from dormitories with foldaway beds, towards rooms with WiFi and a lounge, public transport free of charge, and local food according to the respective preferences. Young people expect a lot from their accommodation and also have a keen interest in experiences of nature and culture. ‘Haus BergSee’ has developed modern programmes for adventure-based learning which are very popular. Markus Achatz of the German Youth Hostel Association confirms the boom throughout Germany, with ten million bed nights per year. "The idea of youth hostels is 111 years old and more popular than ever". This has a lot to do with sustainable experiences in a group, which – as confirmed by evidence – make people happy.

Authenticity and real life at the destination are gaining weight in people’s travel decisions, said a tourism expert in the round. Now awareness of the ecological costs would also need to increase further. What is the value added of a trip if I cause greenhouse gas emissions? The value added in tourism would need to have more positive than negative effects – for the tourists as well as for the host countries. This cost-benefit analysis is also supported by Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner, tourism expert at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. When marketing destinations, people‘s living environment should be the focus, not tourism as such. Today’s tourists have started to rethink their approach, and the tourism industry therefore needs to create alternatives. The conclusion of the Ammerlander Talks: The sustainability of tourism is tightly linked to what Generation Z wants and needs.

Text: Stephanie Arns