Chapter 14

Participation as Key to Destination Conscience

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Harald Pechlaner: Ms. Monshausen, what do you personally understand by the concept of 'conscience'? And what does it mean in the context of travelling?

Antje Monshausen: Your concept focuses very much on the perspective of the traveller and his behaviour in connection to the destination. So let us look at that, I think I would just leave it at an imperative: Travel in a way that you would like others to visit you. If you imagine how you want to be treated as a host, you have the chance to become a good guest, too. The origin of empathy in tourism lies in encounters between travellers and hosts.

The context of Destination Conscience goes even beyond that. It actually means that you think about the tourist activity from the point of view of the hosts, the communities and the destinations. It is a radically different approach to what we have actually done in the tourism industry since the beginning of international tourism. We used to plan tourism from the travellers' point of view and understood destinations just as a physical locality, not as a living space.

Harald Pechlaner: Thinking about the tourist activity from the host's perspective, does that then mean reflecting something like a conscience to the guest? What is it all about? Is one a role model for the guest and how can one show the conscience in the end? Is that simply acting as a role model or is that a specific way of communicating? How would you proceed if we actually think of the tourism activity from the host's perspective – which I agree with – how would you proceed?

Antje Monshausen: I think that this question is difficult because it focuses on how a host should behave in order to influence the guest's behaviour. I think that is already a wrong approach because one of the central components in such a different tourism

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model is partnership. How do you develop empathy for one other? How do you put yourself in the other person's shoes? How do you derive your own actions, your own behaviour on vacation from this? I believe that this requires a great deal of reflection, including reflection on one's own privileges as a traveller. On the other hand, it also requires a certain tolerance for mistakes, a certain curiosity on the part of the hosts towards the guests. They have to acknowledge that the guests are coming from a different reality and have a different perspective, and they should be curious about that, too. It reminds me of something that Nina Sahdeva from 'fair unterwegs' said in an interview. She asks us to be honest in how far we are open to welcome tourists and to invite them to authentic activities. Imagine you are living in a very overcrowded destination. Honestly, when a tourist asks you something, most of us hope the question will pass quickly. Hopefully, it's just a question of how to get from A to B. But as a traveller yourself, do you want to be invited to a private dinner? Who among us invites a tourist to a private dinner in our cities? That happens extremely rarely. So, to some extent, we have to accept that all social interactions in the destination have an economic context in tourism. It is not a 'normal' interaction among equals. I doubt whether it can be implemented in commercial tourism at all. The concept of Destination Conscience already exists in the non-commercial tourism sector. Community partnerships, exchanges, university exchanges, for example, all these things are tourism, and we have an honest interest in the other. We have a willingness to let ourselves be questioned on our positions. But in commercial tourism, on vacation, do we really want that? The tourist product today has become a clinically clean, antiseptic process in which you do not really want to be surprised anymore or even challenged because normal life is exhausting enough, and that's actually what you want to get away from. I have my doubts whether that can be combined with the commercial product. Nevertheless, this could be discussed.

Harald Pechlaner: I find this antiseptic process of the tourist experience very interesting and somehow accurate: developing empathy is exhausting, as you say, and nobody actually wants the stress.

Antje Monshausen: I would be more optimistic with the travellers – they are really interested and curious, but don't realise that real authentic experiences are not easy to get. When I wrote my diploma thesis in Bolivia 20 years ago, I heard a sentence that has accompanied me very much since I have been dealing with tourism criticism. A tourism entrepreneur told me that people want to know how farmers live but they do not want to live like farmers: I want to know it, but I do not want to feel and experience it myself. Now we have a new group of travellers who say that they actually want to feel it but of course only to a certain extent. I want my bed to be two metres long, even though the local population is smaller than Europeans are and the beds are 1.80m long. I still want to have a big bed. Even with this new generation of travellers, I still believe that the interest in authenticity has its limits.

Harald Pechlaner: During a presentation at ITB Berlin (the world's leading travel trade show), I said that tourism is actually the perfect distraction industry: we distract ourselves from our problems. Everyone has enough problems, and you do not want to have any on vacation. Holidays should be as antiseptic as possible

and not complex or costly. Developing the personal dimension or empathy: these are all small acts of energy. If you develop partnership and empathy for each other, it means more than having satisfied the requirement that the bed must be 2m long. Then the question is how far can you go, how far may you go? This is perhaps also a question of conscience: how far do I want to go? 'How far do I have to go?' says the commercial provider, whereas the non-commercial provider says, 'how far can I go?'. I feel there is a gap in between. I am not sure what a travel conscience looks like in the commercial sector, but maybe we can start there again. The guest wants to relax, and the commercial provider knows where people's worries and needs are. Tour operators and commercial providers want to offer the tourists the relaxation they want, and that is what tourists are willing to pay money for. However, where do we get out of this? Is there a chance that you can also secure more of this conscience on the commercial level?

Antje Monshausen: I am not sure if you have to do that at all as a commercial provider. There are minimum requirements that companies must fulfil, when it comes to human rights, environmental safeguarding and participation. In the context of tourism, a company should fulfil these requirements actively because they are the basis of a good tourism experience. In no other product does the consumer notice so directly and immediately whether he is wanted or not. No one wants stones to be thrown at their tour bus because tourists are not wanted there. Therefore, if you want to offer a high-quality product as a tour operator, you have to rely on the local population to stand behind the product. Participation and consent, based on informed exchange, are actually necessary for a quality product. This is simply a question of quality.

Many tourists claim that they are interested in authentic experiences. I would completely question whether that is even possible in tourism because what tourists perceive as authentic is just a reflection of their own assumptions. People recognise a street market situation in South Africa as authentic, but a shiny shopping mall as artificial and not typically 'African' – even though both the local street market and the large shopping malls are a reality in South Africa. People perceive something as authentic if it confirms their clichés, not what reality looks like. Poverty seems authentic to people, wealth does not seem authentic to them. It seems authentic to them when a family has no electricity, but if a family has electricity and then watches some American soap operas, then there is this kind of cultural relativism that this is not authentic. So, I have to question this authenticity, whether it exists at all. I think it is okay to acknowledge this limitation. Moreover, once you have acknowledged your own limitation as a traveller and that there are clichés, that's the first step to actually recognise what is authentic.

Harald Pechlaner: You are right. Let us now go back to 'Tourism Watch', as part of the Christian development organisation Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World). For you, a strong civil society is important for tourism. To what extent can criticism of tourism help foster a sense of conscience among both non-commercial and commercial actors?

Antje Monshausen: We have discussed this with our partner organisations. In 2017, we got together with 35 people from 19 countries and discussed what kind of tourism we actually want. Not on the very concrete level of tourism products

but more generally and holistically. Tourism is not an end in itself; it should help to enable social progress, a self-determined social and economic development. We have defined that there are three principles if tourism wants to contribute to sustainable development. The first is respect for human rights – and thus also the right to say no to tourism. The right to determine what form of tourism, how much tourism and whether tourism takes place in destinations at all. So, participation and human rights as a first principle.

The second is a fair distribution of the benefits of tourism – not only the economic but also the social benefits that tourism has. In the negative, as well as in the positive, they must be equally distributed. Therefore, it cannot be that a certain actor gets only the benefits, and the costs are outsourced.

The third principle is that tourism should enable mutual respect. Namely, that it is an enriching and positive experience for both the travellers and the hosts. These three principles should guide any tourism development.

At Tourism Watch, we talk to the tourism industry and the public policy sector in Germany to convince them to design their tourism activities responsibly in terms of human rights and climate justice. The second pillar is the South-North and South-South exchange – we try to strengthen civil society networks around the world. So that they can learn from each other, share common experiences, cooperate in lobby and advocacy actions. The third is awareness raising and public relations work, which also means influencing the discourse so that people look at travel differently – and do not just take it as a pure consumption product.

Harald Pechlaner: The three points you mentioned: participation and human rights, the distribution of benefits and the cross-fertilisation through an enriching mutual respect between guest and host. In summary, this could be the formula for conscience – to come back to our topic. Thank you very much, that is already going in the right direction.

Shall we revisit the ongoing discussion about the Global North and Global South, which seems to be a never-ending construction site? And, returning to your earlier point about establishing partnerships, does this concept pertain only to traditional host relationships, or does it extend to the relationship between the Global North and Global South as well?

Antje Monshausen: There is, after all, this difference between travelling in the Global North and travelling from the North to the South, or the wealthy travelling to economically weaker countries. Tourism in Europe has grown in an evolutionary way. That means, the first trips were domestic or to nearby regions. Then at some point in the 1960/70s, hundreds of thousands of Germans travelled over the Alps to discover Italy and other Mediterranean countries. Then, when flying became more affordable, they started to discover Mallorca, Turkey and the North African countries. And it is a relatively new phenomenon since the millennium that Germany is also a destination that foreigners visit as travellers. This is a relatively evolutionary development. First, we were travellers and later became hosts. In the Global South, it was revolutionary because tourism came from the outside. Countries just appeared on the world map of tourism – for many of them, tourism was a neocolonial economic activity. The Gambia, for example, declared its independence and four months later, the first international

travellers arrived. If we look at the history of decolonisation and how tourism has worked there, then a new dependency has emerged from an old dependency. And with it a tourist product that is completely dependent on the perspective of the traveller. We have tourism for three months in the year during the European winter season. At that time, there are charter flights that are usually not offered. It is a tourist product, which is oriented between the rich and the poor. We have a huge phenomenon of travel with sexual motives, especially women travelling to Gambia for sexual adventures. We have a very homogeneous tourist product with beachfront, all-inclusive tourism at the core.

With this experience, the Gambia is not alone. This applies to most tourism active countries in the Global South and especially those that freed themselves from colonial rule in the 1960s and became independent. There are countries in the Caribbean and in Asia where the emergence of international tourism and decolonisation took place at the same time. In this context, I would not speak of decolonisation but of neocolonisation because new colonial dependencies (indebtedness, etc.) arose. A high level of indebtedness that makes self-determined economic development impossible. For some countries, the pandemic has led to the fact that even those responsible for tourism in politics have seen that this dependence is a dangerous path. They started to develop more domestic tourism, for example. I have a bit of hope that the window will open for tourism to develop in a somewhat more evolutionary and healthier way. Healthier in that context means more economically and culturally beneficial, with less emissions and more resilient than before.

What we can learn from the Global South, that's the other question. We see very exciting initiatives have survived in the Global South, and we have to be very careful not to destroy them. I am afraid that with many tourism development schemes, we are cannibalising healthy tourism initiatives in the Global South. They are highly participatory. Tourism is an additive income there, which is fantastic for resilience. Tourism decision-makers in the destinations are promoting tourism on the assumption that every farmer wants to become a tour guide – this is wrong, and a good tourism is integrated in other economic activities in the destinations.

Harald Pechlaner: Yes, tourism is an expression of our capitalist system. That's where dependencies are created.

Antje Monshausen: Exactly. To get back on topic of Destination Conscience, resilient tourism models that are grounded in a local diversified economy are more authentic: this is a pioneer of a Destination Conscience. Because if I do not see tourism as my main income, but as an additive income, then I have other areas of the economy, then people still have a life outside of tourism, a life outside of those costumes and facades that the tourists want to see. Then, a destination actually becomes attractive for travellers who are looking for something like that. I have actually had discussions with people about what a 'Just Transition' looks like in tourism. How a transformation from an old, destructive, fossil and exploitative tourism model into a sustainable tourism activity is possible. In countries that are extremely dependent on international aviation-based tourism, such a just transition must take place. That means people have to be empowered to go into other

areas of the economy. People must be empowered, for example, through education to offer a better, higher quality, more diversified tourism product. That actually secures the sustainability of these destinations, and it lays the foundation for what you call Destination Conscience.

Harald Pechlaner: Yes, and wherever it has become too much, it is overtourism again. It's the same in the Alps, which I know very well: in the end, it went beyond the limits. People need to be empowered to think in a diversified way to think in other economic and social categories because dependency creates a cultural framing that people cannot get out of. Tourism has always existed, will always exist and be needed. Then narratives develop, like the one that tourism brought us prosperity: if everyone just says tourism brought us prosperity, then everyone believes it. There is probably not much difference between the Gambia and an Alpine Region. Then again, tourism is a crucial factor for visibility and empowerment of local communities. The community-based approach to tourism is quite often seen as the central approach. How can Destination Conscience encourage it?

Antje Monshausen: I think the question should actually be phrased differently. Because when we have strong and visible communities, they are the prerequisite for authentic tourism. Authentic tourism does not enable and promote them; it's exactly the other way around. That is why the mind-set of the tourism players has to change. I just want to give an example. We always talk a lot about the fact that we need to diversify the supply chains or the value chains in tourism. No. We need local resources to have an impact on tourism value chains. This may turn things around. Therefore, if you want travel to include an authentic encounter, you have to think from the perspective of the host and not exclusively from that of the tourism product or the travellers. Of course, there are certain determinants to be taken into account, accessibility, for example. There are certain determinants that are given, but regarding everything else, we should clear our minds and think about how we can actually do justice to this desire for authenticity, for fulfilling our economic needs and social standards.

Harald Pechlaner: I completely agree with you. This is a very deep reflection. It is actually about strengthening and promoting local communities – which are also able to develop responsible tourism and not only the other way round. I would now like to approach the issue of digital media and platforms. I feel a lot in this field has already changed, both for better and for worse. The world is changing, and tourism can do an incredible number of things, thanks to digital media, but we also must consider the consequences. Perhaps you can explain how the issue of managing digital media could be part of a Destination Conscience.

Antje Monshausen: You now put two things together that I would take apart. One is social media as a form of communication. It allows people to keep in touch before the trip and after the trip. I believe the preparation and follow up of the trip is again of elementary importance for Destination Conscience. Of course, social media offer an opportunity to communicate with each other and to communicate directly without intermediaries. At the same time, we see repetition of clichés on social media. This has become stronger with Instagram and TikTok. A more differentiated perspective is actually hardly possible. This means that it is

even more difficult to fight these clichés and to unmask them to a certain extent than it used to be without social media.

The other aspects you asked about are the commercial booking platforms. They are the complete opposite of this paradigm shift that we have just described. They want to generate bookings; their goal is to keep bookers on the platform and to create as many offers as possible on the same platform. Therefore, they think radically from the booker's point of view. And that, of course, is the exact opposite of what we just described. On the booking platforms, for example, forms are provided in which accommodation providers can enter which services are available on site. We know community-based tourism providers who, for example, have left the platforms because the constraints of the platform did not let them adequately describe how diversified and differentiated their product actually is. So of course, I see the advantages that social media and the booking platforms could potentially have. But my conclusion is that they are currently more of a handicap for this Destination Conscience that you are talking about.

Harald Pechlaner: Great, thank you very much. Coming to an end, let's get back to the subject of training. What can we do? Where do you see our tasks, also as universities, of course?

Antje Monshausen: I think that universities in particular play an important role to change the mindsets of future decision-makers. They have to look beyond the current mainstream of economics and open their curricula for alternative and successful economic models. For example, they should learn to understand welfare economics and their logic in terms of business models, broader benefit sharing and in terms of corporate governance. Sociocratic decision-making, which exists in social entrepreneurship, is an already existing, successful governance model. The dominant narrative in economics so far only counts jobs and income. I observe a certain amount of mental laziness and blindness towards other means to count well-being and contributions of business activities to society – including also social and environmental effects. My goal would be for professionalisation to enter the debate because it does not help when the crackpots from civil society say that we need an economy for the common good and degrowth. In the end, it has to be backed up by tough economic models. In Germany, I am afraid that we lose ground in the scientific quality in tourism because most universities are too closely connected with tour operators and their agendas. Concepts like Destination Conscience need more than just (sustainable) management capacities, they need a new form of independent, holistic and critical thinking.

Harald Pechlaner: Yes, you are right. As a university, we also have a certain amount of responsibility. A new master's programme will start in autumn, and I think this could be an opportunity to bring responsible tourism, which you have been preaching for many years, back into the logic of the teaching system. We would like to approach teaching in a more project-oriented and cooperative manner – which should also consist of an innovative format in terms of teaching. So, 20 years of the Tourism Chair also means a caesura. We have never been purely economic: we consider geography and economics. This was already a first

step, but in the future, it will be about fundamentally questioning the entire model again. I think the pandemic may have been the right moment to question many issues – also for the overtourism discussion, which already existed before the pandemic. At the very least, as you said several times today, these signals have shown us that tourism does not work as a purely economic model. It does not work either for the Global South, which ends up getting into dependency. All this is about making something like a Destination Conscience possible by acting in ways you mentioned at the beginning of this conversation: through partnership and empathy.