

Some reflections on tourism and tourism policy in India

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Introduction

In 1982, the Indian Government presented its first tourism policy. In retrospect one could argue that the novelty of the subject, its low priority and the belief in its potential as a social engineering tool (in keeping with Indian public ideology at that time), contributed to a rather simplistic piece of work. It took the government until 2002 to present an updated policy document. Those expecting a clear line of thinking and plan must have been quite disappointed by the new policy. It is based on a number of incompatible perspectives, of which those of the international development community and the international lobby group of tourism and travel related industries (the WTTC) are the most pronounced. As a result, it starts from the idea that tourism is both a threat and an engine of growth.

By means of this paper, we want to focus on some of the central ideas and starting points of the Indian tourism policy. We will argue that there is something fundamentally wrong with the public ideas concerning the economic (growth) potential of (international) tourism and the role of tourism as a development tool. We will also contend that, even after all these years of tourism development, very little is known on who the tourists in India actually are and what they want. Our reflections are based on our own experience as tour operators and travel guides in India as well as on our (limited) reading of public documents and research papers. As research scholars, our fields of specialisation lie elsewhere. Nonetheless we think that our observations could provoke a fruitful discussion on central policy issues.

This paper starts with a brief description of the history of tourism and tourism policy development in India, which concludes with a summary of the most important objectives of the latest (2002) policy. Section two addresses the impact of the development community on the tourism policy. It focuses on the idea of tourism as a threat. Apart from analyzing the possible meaning of this concept in the context of Indian reality it briefly describes a concrete project which can be regarded as an implementation of the idea. Section three deals with the rather confusing impact of (inter)national tourism industry lobby groups which, among other things, resulted in unrealistic definitions, statistics and ideas with respect to the potential role of tourism in India. Towards the end of the section, we will address the relative neglect of domestic tourism and its potential role in future development. The paper ends with some brief conclusions.

1. A brief history of tourism and tourism policy development

In the early days of independent India, quite rationally, the Government didn't pay much attention to tourism. Worldwide, the number of international tourists was still limited and among those tourists there were only few who considered going to faraway places like India. Moreover, the Indian Government had more urgent matters at hand. The first public milestone in the history of tourism was the creation of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), in 1966. This federal organization was meant to develop tourist infrastructure and services. On a state level, similar Corporations were established, albeit reluctantly and after considerable delay. Their budgets were small and the scales of their operations were limited. Moreover the tourist services they offered were generally considered substandard and indifferent.

Both the TDCs (the ITDC especially) and private entrepreneurs set up luxury hotels in the metropolitan, international entry and exit points. These hotels accommodated foreign visitors as well as the local elite, who patronized such hotels throughout the year. In some regional tourist centers in the vicinity of main entry points (e.g. Jaipur and Agra) such hotels were established relatively early on as well. Most of the present Indian tourist destinations, however, were developed through a slow

process which started with the arrival of rather 'adventurous' backpacker tourists and their interaction with local communities. The gradual, 'spontaneous' proliferation of various kinds of tourist services along the backpacker trail has opened up areas for tourists and paved the way for other forms of tourism developmentⁱ. The local populations involved in opening up their towns and villages showed great adaptation and flexibility in identifying and trying ways of catering to the needs and tastes of (foreign) visitors. In collaboration with these visitors, they created enclaves which were more exotic than India and yet produced exactly the right mixture of goods and services from home: peculiar places which are both island-like and thoroughly Indian. In their efforts they were neither supported nor guided by the Indian Government. Tourism development was a largely unplanned exercise.

This held true for different states to different degrees. In Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Goa and Himachal Pradesh tourism was much more consistently incorporated into state (five year) plans than in other states, even relatively early on - in the 1970s. At that time, these states already attracted a relatively large share of India's international tourists and were to become India's main tourist states and 'models for tourism development' (Singh, 2001:143). Still, even in these states, tourism was largely left to the private sector and to a comparatively unrestricted market. While there have been slight modifications in policy, this basic condition hasn't changed much until the present day.

1.1 The first Tourism Policy (1982)

The first significant policy initiatives were forged in the early 1980s. With the prospect of hosting the Asian Games of 1982, the Indian Government had to start thinking about accommodating, transporting and entertaining the large number of visitors attracted by the event. This awakened a serious public interest in tourism, which was enhanced by the fact that tourism was India's largest net earner of foreign currency. The public interest was translated into the Tourism Policy of 1982 which provided an action plan based on the development of so-called tourism circuits (Singh, 2001: 143-44).

A tourist circuit consists of a number of tourist sights which are geographically and/or thematically grouped together with the idea that the value of their sum is more than an adding up of the values of the parts. Rather than being the result of an in-depth analysis and marketing study, the circuit idea was born out of the feeling that 'the Golden Triangle' destinations of Delhi-Jaipur-Agra and the Bombay-Goa shopping-and-beach circuit were grossly oversold. In order to lure away the tourists from these overcrowded 'circuits', into the myriad of other potentially popular destinations in India, the concept of alternative *circuits* - rather than alternative *places* that could be grouped together by tourists themselves - was somehow thought imperative (Gantzer & Gantzer, 1983:119).

The jargon and the ideas behind the tourist circuits of the 1980s are remarkably similar to those put forward in the context of the rural tourism proposals of the new millennium and the present national Tourism Policy: tourism was regarded as a development tool. In concrete terms the circuit concept was centered around the establishment of so-called *contels* (condominium hotels) in undeveloped and possibly 'backward' villages and hamlets. Such *contels*, including the necessary tourist infrastructure, were to be constructed by the government...

'It then auctions plots by function: here a hairdresser, there a health club, a restaurant around that corner, a grocer, a drug store, confectionery shop, etc. Accommodation in the *contel* ranges from hospices, each with a single *table d'hôte* restaurant; to inns with no restaurants but with 24-hour snack bars/coffee shops; to lodges offering accommodation only but situated close to an independent restaurant (ibid.:120).

Contels were to be managed as a co-operative venture, an integral part of village life, making use of

local resources (skills, artisans, building materials and the like) and offering tourists a balance of rustic charm and basic comfort. As far as we know, no (rural) tourism circuit and no *contel* were ever established. Indeed, the above ideas may sound nice, but in retrospect, one can only conclude that they presume a fair amount of innocence on the part of the policy makers.

1.2 Tourism development in the 1990s

In the 1980s, the growing public interest in tourism resulted in the recognition of tourism as an export industry (including the implied tax exemptions) and the creation of a special public tourism finance corporation (1987). These initiatives were thought to openly and explicitly invite private investors and entrepreneurs to participate in tourism development. In 1997 the department of tourism published a (new) National Tourism Action Plan. Apart from identifying a few areas for 'integrated tourism development', along the lines of the aforementioned (thematic) tourism circuits, the aim of the plan was to achieve an overall growth and improvement of the tourism sector in India, by stepping up marketing, infrastructure building and human resource development. According to some, the plan didn't present anything new. It just was phrased in a more fashionable development sector jargon (Singh, 2001:144). Others maintained that the plan was over-ambitious and unrealistic. Funding by no means matched the challenging quantitative targets (Raguraman, 1998:535). In fact, from independence onwards the budget outlays for tourism have always been very small (less than 0.2%).

This goes for India's share in worldwide international tourism too. During the first fifty years of independent India, the portion of international tourists visiting India has not been more than 0.4%. It is claimed to have risen to some 0.45% in 2004 (GOI 2004). Given the rise of international tourists in the world, this implies that there has been a steady increase in tourist arrivals which accelerated in 2004. Indeed, according to the Indian Tour Operators Promotion Council (ITOPC), over the period 2001-2006, the number of foreign tourists in India has nearly doubled (to some 4.4 million). While these figures are unrealistically high (see next section), they do show that in absolute terms the number of international tourists visiting India has increased considerably.

The increase in tourism arrivals was aided by the growing popularity of far-off and exotic destinations among Western tourists and recent advances in the general outlook and international image of India. The opening of its markets in the early 1990s and the recent years of high economic growth have profoundly changed its surface. In the past India was naturally associated with slums and poverty. Nowadays it is often portrayed as a rapidly emerging economic superpower.

The rising economic significance and potential of tourism has gone hand in hand with a growing public interest in the sector. With the opening up of the Indian market, a lively competition between the states emerged in attracting investors in industry and other sectors. Along similar lines, states started competing for their share of international and domestic tourists. Particularly in the traditional tourist states there was an urge to develop tourism to its full potential. A notable example is Kerala, a relatively small state with a rich variety of natural tourist settings. The Kerala government took up a largely enabling role, supporting and promoting a great number of different tourist activities.

In the new millennium, Kerala witnessed a remarkable diversification in the supply of tourist services. As never before, the government allowed tourists to move around in rather secluded areas of natural parks and sanctuaries. Private entrepreneurs pioneered 'heritage tourism', combining stays in nicely situated heritage buildings with Ayurvedic treatment. They also started organizing expeditions by foot, boat, raft, jeep or bullock cart, through the hills of the Western Ghats and along the backwaters. Varied packages including nature, local tradition and culture, heritage and relaxation were developed by a rapidly increasing number of entrepreneurs. Inevitably, with the widespread discovery of their potential, all such bits of special tourism have spread over other parts of India and

have become ordinary fare in Kerala. During this process both the government and the private sector have adopted several forms of 'eco-tourism'. Such adoption was promoted by the aforementioned 1997 Action Plan. In practice, it was largely opportunistic. Everything with a more or less natural feel to it was termed 'eco'.

The governments of other states increasingly follow Kerala's example. They do so by: (a) recognizing the income earning and job generation potential of tourism; (b) (more) actively promoting tourism through publicity campaigns and giving support and incentives to the private sector; and (c) largely putting private entrepreneurs in charge of the provision of tourist services.

The example of Kerala shows that Indian tourist destinations can outgrow the phase of basic backpacker enclaves referred to above and offer a more differentiated mix of products to a socio-economically much more varied group of tourists. Amongst these tourists, there is a large section of people from India, i.e. domestic tourists.

The importance of domestic tourism was recognized by public policy makers in the 1990s. They included it as an important issue in the Tourism Action Plan of 1997 and decided that it was a state government (policy) issue. The central government was to take care of international tourists. Traditionally, domestic tourism mainly concerned pilgrimage and work-related travel. From the 1990s onwards there has been a steep rise in modern forms of domestic tourism. This new phenomenon is related to the booming Indian economy and the new susceptibility of the Indian middle and higher classes to rather alien, Western ideas of Holiday making. At present, an ever growing group of Indian tourists travels around the country for rather prosaic, leisure and sightseeing-related reasons. This new trend is underscored by the emergence of Indian travel magazines and the growing explicit attention for domestic tourist destinations in leading newspapers.

1.3 The new Tourism Policy (2002)

In 2002, when the action plan was finally translated into a tourism policy. Tourism policy officially became a joint central-state government concern. The new policy itself, however, was designed by the central government. To a large extent, it concerns old wine in new bottles. It holds the kind of goals and expectations exemplary for the first policy. To start with, the policy document attempts to establish tourism's great contribution to national development and its role as an *engine of growth*. It suggests that tourism not only generates government revenue, foreign currency, but also provides an optimal use of India's scarce resources, sustainable development, high quality employment (especially to youngsters, women and disabled people), and finally, peace, understanding, national unity and stability (GOI, 2002: 8-9). The policy starts from the idea that tourism can be used as a development tool, e.g. that it can generate high quality, mass employment and prosperity among vulnerable groups in backward areas.

In more practical terms, the policy aims at increasing the number of domestic and international tourists. In order to do this, the government proposes to diversify the Indian tourism product and substantially improve the quality of (tourism) infrastructure, marketing, visa arrangements and air-travel. The aforementioned *tourism-as-a-development-tool* largely concerns *domestic tourism*, which in this capacity is conceptually linked to 'sustainable' *rural* development. As far as *international tourism* is concerned the Indian Government mainly wants to target the '*high-yielding variety*' of tourists (ibid.:11).

These major policy aims are derived from three main sources. The idea of tourism-as-a-development-tool leading to sustainable rural development is rooted in traditional socialist-style Indian Government thinking. An equally important source however, is the ideology of the international

development community, represented by organizations such as the UNDP. The idea to specifically target the long haul, high yielding variety of international tourists, on the other hand, is part and parcel of the worldview of lobby organizations representing international airline and hotel companies. The WTTC in particular has played an important role in shaping the Indian tourism policy. Its predictions and suggestions form an integral part of the policy. While it is understandable that organizations such as the WTTC and the UNDP have influenced the Indian Tourism Policy, it is surprising to see how apparently easily and without much adaptation their recommendations have become official policy. This implies that the policy is founded upon rather contrasting ideas.

The policy does *not* include a clear strategy, linking means and ends, assigning responsibilities and roles across government and private agencies, and setting realistic targets according to a list of prioritized goals. Rather, it seems an expression of intent to improve on everything. The policy document itself reads like a tourist brochure, piling up a great variety of tourist activities and sights that could and should be developed (it includes a 4 page list of all forms of tourism one can possibly think of - GOI, 2002:14-18). The same goes for the 'world class infrastructure' (including 'integrated' tourist circuits) through which such activities and sights are to be connected to the rest of the world. But there is nothing like the kind of systematic approach one would normally associate with government plan and policy. An obvious complication in the Indian context, particularly with respect to the division of roles and responsibilities, is the federal system of government. While the central government is not powerless and does in fact determine policy and control most of the funds, for the implementation of its policy it is largely dependent on state governments, whose plans, policies and projects are often determined by concerns other than those formulated in national plans.

In the past, this may have been one of the reasons for assigning a 'lesser' form of tourism to the states: domestic tourism. In any case, the distinction between domestic and international tourism is another source of confusion. The new national policy starts from the largely implicit assumption that domestic and international tourism concern different market segments, with distinct products (destinations and tourist services) catering to distinct sets of demand. It nowhere makes clear, however, what these differences actually are, what it is that causes such differences and what the relationship between domestic and international tourism development is or should be.

In summary, we have a tourism policy document that conceives tourism both as a great boon and as a potential threat. In this latter viewpoint tourism should be publicly controlled and guided in order to prevent it from degenerating into a menace. According to the first viewpoint, however, mainstream tourism, especially of the long haul, luxury variety, is highly beneficial to start with. It concerns such an important engine of growth and source of employment, that it merits only public facilitation.

The following critical notes, focus upon the flaws of both points of view and examine their impacts upon Indian policy. We will start with a section dealing with the parts of the policy starting from the idea of tourism as a potential threat. Subsequently, we will address the elements of the policy based upon the thought of tourism as an engine of growth. This is followed by a critical analysis of the unclear relationship between domestic and international tourism development in Indian policy.

2 Tourism as a threat

The 'classic' international development community thinking that hinges on government intervention and a belief in the mouldability of reality, blends well with the old, socialist-like Indian government ideology. A combination of both formed the ideological foundation of the National Tourism Action Plan of 1997 (Singh, 2001:144) and the Tourism Policy of 2002. Below we will deal with the background and essence of the development sector ideology (in the field of tourism) as well as one of

the most prominent translations of this ideology in Indian tourism practice: The Endogenous Tourism Project.

2.1 background: development sector ideology

'The participation of different private and public agencies makes the tourism industry a complex phenomenon requiring a strong cooperation and coordination for it to be developed and expanded along lines that will contribute to the overall national development objectives. Left to itself, the industry will develop naturally, but not necessarily optimally or sustainable, and without clear links to the broad development objectives of the country. Uncontrolled tourism growth could damage India's socio-cultural structure, degrade its tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage, and lead to adverse economic impacts such as high importation costs, and weakening inter-industry linkages' (GOI 2002:12).

The above quotation, taken from the national tourism policy (2002), clearly explains that tourism should be regarded as a threat. It bears the unmistakable marks of typical development sector thinking on tourism. While it took a long time for the development sector to recognize the potential of tourism, once it did, it started questioning the ways in which tourism was organized. In the late 1990s, UNDP's and other leading development organizations' pre-occupation with *sustainable* development, naturally led to the concept of *sustainable tourism*. With the introduction of this and similar notions, the development community focused on the promotion of a kind of ideal tourism: a form of tourism that was thought to be socio-culturally, economically and environmentally unharmed and/or beneficial. Nearly all tourism labels fabricated in the late 1990s and early 2000s are normative in nature: eco, pro poor, responsible, ethical, sustainable etc. Because of the rather high pitched norms headed by these labels, their proponents almost naturally condemned the bulk of main stream tourism to be 'irresponsible, unethical, unsustainable and against poor'. They often underscored this black-and-white thinking by comparing their brand of tourism to apparent excesses in the main stream tourism sector. They thereby conveniently avoided the fact that most real world situations, whether labeled sustainable or not, are rather complex: neither black nor white, but mostly gray. It is important to understand that this kind of mindset essentially concentrates on intended rather than real impacts. It has by and large prevented the formulation of positive (instead of a normative) analyses of tourism practices on the ground.

There are obviously harmful forms of tourism that require attention: excesses leading to outright exploitation, for example in the case of sex tourism. In addition to such rare cases of blatantly 'bad or wrong' intentions and behaviour of tourist operators and tourists, there are a great number of examples concerning adverse impacts of tourism: a shortage of drinking water, overflowing drains, the clearance forests, the displacement of groups of native inhabitants etc. However, on the whole, these impacts cannot simply be attributed to tourism. Basically, they are the result of clumsy, partial (corrupt), powerless or otherwise failing (local) planning and governance. Tourism is just one of the many fields in which such shortcomings of (local) governance present themselves and it would make little sense to put the blame of a government failing to perform its caretaker role on the tourism sector. This means that, compared to the activities of any other sector, the bulk of tourism activities in India do not have excessively negative impacts.

Subdividing the numerous tour operators active in India in a good (sustainable, ethical, responsible) and a bad (unsustainable, unethical, irresponsible) section is a far from simple exercise. How should one weigh great economic benefits against negative impacts on the environment, agriculture or local land and housing prices? And how should one deal with the fact that there is no such thing as a homogenous local community - tourism affects a myriad of local interests and stakeholders, even in small communities. Then, who will stand to lose out and who will benefit? How should one

approach such a multi-interpretable issue as cultural impact? These are just some of the obvious complex issues of 'good and bad' involved.

All these questions are essentially political in nature. Social research can certainly help to clarify such issues, but if its starting point is conspicuously normative in nature, it only helps to cloud things. In such a case, it answers questions which are to be left to political pressure groups, local governments, councils and parliaments. Sustainable tourism 'schollars' get away with their *de facto* interference in (local) politics because of their seemingly straightforward, 'ethical' (normative) approach. In practice, however, such approach is rather simplistic. It generally boils down to a projection of politically correct views concerning the right behavior of tourists and tour operators on the local (host) community. More often than not such views are one-dimensional, rather condescending and therefore unrealistic. They are one-dimensional because they prescribe norms without taking the mostly complex local situations (including local politics, interests, conflicts and governance) into account. They are condescending because they generally don't bother about local ideas with respect to tourism. To the contrary, they may even act as misplaced guardians, stressing the need of protecting local culture from being spoilt by tourists. Implicitly they assume that those receiving the tourists *and* their governments have no (good) ideas concerning tourism and can't take care of themselves. Given the fact that the promotion of whatever kind of 'responsible' tourism in the South originated in the West, it might be conceived as a rather pedantic form of neo-colonialism.

This does not necessarily hold true for the work of Indian organizations active in the field of 'responsible, sustainable or holistic tourism', such as Equations, ICRT India and Kerala Tourism Watch. In as far as they act as political pressure groups, their work is essential for a more or less balanced functioning of democracy. Their publications and campaigns are necessary in order to fight for and highlight the interests of either rather powerless, local groups of people, or the environment. If they don't do it, no one does! This does not imply that their overall conceptualisations of tourism are always analytically balanced and sound reflections of reality.

While sustainable tourism proponents typically promote one particular brand of tourism, in its official policy, the Indian government mentions a great variety of desirable tourism products, most of them not particularly sustainable or responsible. In fact, the sustainability statements in the official policy document can be regarded as a lip service to the international development community and the Indian sustainable tourism lobby. Nonetheless, with the promotion and financial support of international organizations, some of the 'responsible' tourism ideas were actually put into practice. An example is the Endogenous Tourism Project.

2.2 Sustainable tourism in practice: The Endogenous Tourism Project

One of the general objectives of the Indian Tourism Policy (2002) is to ..'substantially increase the proportion of the urban resident leisure and pilgrimage tourism to rural areas..'. It proposes the development of tourist services in villages and rural regions located off the beaten tourist tracks. To this effect, in collaboration with the UNDP, it initiated a public rural tourism program geared towards all round, instantaneous village development: the Endogenous Tourism Project / Rural Tourism Scheme (2003-2007). The project was meant to be implemented in 31 villages across 20 states. Most of these villages harbored traditional artisans (weavers, potters, sculptors, block printers and the like) who were thought to attract tourists. Local or nearby NGOs were identified as the most important implementing agents in the otherwise 'community-owned' project.

According to the program's website its focus 'is to develop the culture, craft and sustainable dimensions of rural life, as a means to viable livelihood opportunities for low-income rural communities ... Trough convergence with local idiom and cooperative marketing channels, it will

protect the environment, valorize host community heritage and enrich the visitor's experience ... The new tourism models promoted by the Endogenous Tourism Project will be community-owned, culturally expressive and environmentally sustainable (project website, home page).'

The above quotations sketch out a rather meaningless universe of noble intentions. One can see the direction in which the project should have traveled. Being familiar with the complex socio-economic, political, and governmental environment within which the project is implemented, however, we think these intentions were unrealistic. The problem is not that 'simple' rural people aren't able to organize tourism services. The typical gradual development of tourism along the Indian tourist trails demonstrates that they can! However, they need the tourists to come to their doorstep first. Also, they need the time to learn in a gradual trial and error process.

In 2007, the UNDP project was evaluated. There was the sobering finding that 'though the hardware was in place or under construction, the locals didn't know much about the project'. Also, these locals didn't appear to be motivated to participate. The project was largely unprofitable and could not compete with mainstream tourism ventures located in nearby tourist places. Both NGO and site selection were based on arbitrary grounds and there wasn't any meaningful coordination and continuity within and among the most important government agencies involved. State tourism departments and the state tourism development corporations were not enthusiastic about the project and didn't consider it to be their (core) business. To conclude, the evaluation report mentions that there is a lack of adequate and relevant project statistics. Indeed, the report itself lacks a solid statistical basis (Mott MacDonald, 2007:96-106).

According to Mitchell and Muckosy, community-based tourism initiatives, like the one described above, tend to simply collapse after funding dries up. They provide two main reasons for this: poor market access and poor management and/or governance. Evidence from Latin America suggests that poor people are much more likely to benefit from tourism if they are enabled to work in the mainstream tourism sector. In as far as community based tourism initiatives prevent this from happening, they are not only useless but even counterproductive (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). Alternative, collective, community-based management structures are often too complex to work effectively (ibid.). Moreover they are mostly not in keeping with local traditions of leadership and organization. Both these factors are sources of complication, inefficiency and make-belief. In any case, they results in a rather fuzzy relationship between taking risks (investing money, time and energy) and responsibilities, on the one hand, and the products and profits of these inputs, on the other. As a result, community-based tourism generally lacks the bare drive and efficiency of a simple enterprise needed for survival and successⁱⁱ.

While the above government project seems to have suffered from a number of some obviously unrealistic assumptions, it is just one of the very few examples of public alternative tourism initiatives. In Indian tourism practice, alternative, 'responsible' tourism is a peripheral matter. Both in public and private domains, it merely plays a token role. The (policy) value of the amalgam of 'responsible' concepts is that they point at the potential, negative impacts of tourism. At the same time, however, their outspoken normative approach very often precludes an open mind and an in-depth research into the possible impacts of tourism. After all, their discourse presumes certain impacts and on that basis prescribes certain forms of tourism - irrespective of their being realistic or not. We believe that at this stage a more positive approach, assessing the real and varied impacts of tourism, is in place. The so derived insights could serve to anchor a new policy. As far as 'tourism as a threat' is concerned, this policy should probably focus on tracing and banning outright harmful forms of tourism, rather than dictating 'ideal' varieties.

3 Tourism as an engine of growth

Given the apparent incentives of the Tourism department to depict tourism as something good and important, it is small wonder that in their plans the notion of tourism as an engine of growth is much more prominently present than the idea that tourism is a potential threat. The credibility and validity of the characterization of tourism as engine of growth and provider of meaningful 'high quality' employment and income to a significant part of the Indian population, hinges on statistics showing the quantitative significance of (the growth of) the tourism sector and consequently on the definition of tourism and tourists.

Among representatives of the (international) tourism and travel industry there is a lively interest in upholding such a positive picture of tourism. By means of providing rather wide definitions and dubious statistics, these representatives have been quite successful in influencing the perceived significance of tourism. In fact, one might simply say that while the proponents of the idea of tourism as a threat exaggerate the negative impacts of tourism, the advocates of tourism as an engine of growth grossly overstate the positive impacts. Ultimately, both cases concern essentially normative approaches resulting in a rather one-sided conceptualization of reality.

In this section we will question the idea of tourism as a major engine of economic growth in India. We will start with an analysis of definitions and statistics. Subsequently, we will deal with the growth potential of tourism in India. In this latter context there is an emphasis on international tourism.

3.1 Who are the tourists? - elusive definitions and statistics

There are a number of problems concerning tourism statistics. The first problem is essential and by no means is confined to India. It centers around the definition of tourism. The second problem concerns the poor quality of both the Indian data and the analysis.

Definition of tourism

In the early 1980s, Gantzer and Gantzer, wrote about an increasing awareness among government officials of the need to redefine tourism in order to make a clear distinction between... 'the functional business of travel and the essential escapism of tourism' (1983:125). Regretfully, this increasing awareness didn't lead to a change in definitions. Both on an international and national level, relatively straightforward all-travel-inclusive definitions have become the general norm.

The U.N. World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) define tourists as people who 'travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited'. The Indian Department of Tourism's definition is almost the same. It explicitly includes people traveling for the following reasons: leisure - recreation, holiday, health, study, religion, sport, business, family mission and meeting (GOI, 2008:257-260).

These all-inclusive definitions hardly serve to express meaning. They obfuscate rather than clarify things and seem to have been contrived primarily to allow for easy data collection. In addition, the great numbers of 'tourists' that are the obvious results of using these definitions help to further the interests of the organizations which created them (see below).

In our everyday discourse, tourism concerns a qualitatively distinct realm of escapist leisure traveling

with its own inherent significance and rationality (ideas, opinions and behavioural manifestations). It does not include people visiting their friends and relatives. It neither includes students, businessmen and officials traveling professionally. While the ultimate boundaries between the categories of the tourist and the non-tourist traveler are obviously blurred and reveal some overlap, on the whole, the differences are quite clear.

By and large, Indian policy documents refer to this distinct realm of leisure traveling. The statistics in the same documents, however, embrace virtually all travelers. This results in inconsistencies and hyperbolic claims with respect to the quantitative importance of tourism.

For the year 2007, the government statisticians recorded a number of five million international tourists. In fact, a large share of these 'tourists', were people of Indian origin who came to India on family visits (Gosh, for example, claims that at the end of the previous millennium, 40% of all 'foreign tourists' were people of Indian origin, 1999). In addition there were large groups of people from neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, visiting their Indian relatives. Another unknown, but probably significant share concerns students and business travelers. All these categories fall outside the realm of tourism policy. Their visit to India may have been beneficial to the country, but they are not tourists and if there would be the unlikely need for any policy to promote their visits at all, it would be the concern of government departments other than that of tourism. In 2007, the number of 'real' international tourists visiting India may not have been more than two million. Given the lack of adequate statistics, this figure is not more than a rough guesstimate.

In terms of definitions and statistics, domestic tourism is an even more problematic issue. India is a vast country with an enormous number of inhabitants, most whom travel regularly. According to the official government definition all these travelers are tourists, except for those visiting their native places and families (e.g. on the occasion of religious festivals) and those who go to another place for (temporary) employment (GOI, 2008:259). While this first exception is strangely out of tune with the definition of international tourists, the domestic tourist definition accords with the latter one in that it includes large numbers of non-tourist travelers, e.g. pilgrims, business travelers, students and health travelers.

The official (yearly) domestic tourism data are collected by the State Tourism Departments. They are largely based on (often scant and unreliable) information derived from hotels and other establishments offering short-stay accommodation, which is complemented by estimates to fill the unavoidable gaps. In 2002, the Ministry of Tourism embarked on a large scale domestic tourism survey to get a more reliable and refined impression of domestic tourism (GOI, 2004:109). With this, the government complied to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) promoted Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), a sophisticated methodological device to assess the (economic) importance of tourism (see also below).

According to the survey, in 2002, there were 549,4 million domestic tourists in India - more than half the total population of India at that time. This may have been in keeping with the WTTC and UNWTO definitions and guidelines, but it can be said to be barely related to material tourism. This is underscored by the fact that on average these 'tourists' spent an estimated US\$ 13 per person per trip. 60% of these 'tourists' appear to have been on a social mission, visiting relatives or friends. This implies that according to the Indian Government definition they are *not* considered domestic tourists. If one excluded this category, the single most important group would be that of pilgrims (34%), followed by a large group of 'others' (33%), business travelers (19%) and finally 'real (leisure & holiday) tourists' (14%). In terms of absolute numbers (33 million), this latter category is still quite substantial and certainly much more significant than the number of international tourists (ibid.:113).

The group of pilgrims merits some extra attention. If one avoided being too philosophical or defensive about it, one could describe pilgrimage as a form of escapist travel. At least it signifies a move away from the ordinary. Moreover, for many people, pilgrimage has always been mixed with leisure traveling. For many pilgrims, going to an important temple town was and is not a only a religious undertaking, but a holiday too. Hence, it makes sense to recognize that to some extent pilgrimage can be regarded a form of tourism. Having said this, it should be acknowledged that it takes place in its own particular, more or less traditional circuit, which has been functioning quite efficiently for ages without the support of any tourism department. It has been the domain of state endowment departments and a great number of temple, church and mosque trusts and committees. Hence, while pilgrimage is related to tourism and tourism policy, from a tourism policy perspective, it is a peripheral phenomenon which takes place in a more or less separate domain.

Using the shares of various groups found by the aforementioned 2002 survey in order to provisionally refine the yearly public tourism statistics, for 2007, we arrive at a number of 74 million hard core domestic tourists (i.e. escapist leisure travelers) and 179 million pilgrimsⁱⁱⁱ. The official government statistics mention a crude number of 526,6 million domestic tourists. Roughly reworking these statistics according to WTTC/UNWTO definitions (which take 'family visitors' to be tourists too) would lead to a number of more than 1 billion domestic tourists^{iv}. We are convinced that none of these figures give a realistic indication of the actual dimensions of domestic tourism. It seems clear though that its quantitative importance surpasses that of international tourism by far.

The above description and analysis gives rise to two important observations: (a) *there is a serious discrepancy between the real world and the world according to government statistics* - this is not just a theoretical issue and pertains both to international and domestic tourism; and (b) the fact that we have to guesstimate in order to arrive at what seem to be elementary figures, points to a *general lack of basic data and statistical analysis*.

The logic of inflated tourism statistics

In the Tourism Policy of 2002, the Indian Government abundantly quotes the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). In its 2001 status paper '*The Indian Imperative*' the WTTC predicted that if it took the right policy measures, India would emerge as one of the foremost tourist growth centers of the world by 2011. It is still a bit early to assess the value of this prediction, but given the current state of affairs, we suggest that the WTTC has been wrong. If one followed the logic of the WTTC, however, one would arrive at some astonishing conclusions. According to the WTTC, for example, in 2008, 6.4% of all people employed in India owed their jobs directly or indirectly to tourist-related activities and thereby contributed 6.1% to India's GDP. Among other things, this means that one out of every 15 workers *in India* owed his or her job to tourism.

Any informed Indian adhering to a common idea of tourism would disqualify this claim as complete nonsense. For those who wonder how the WTTC arrives at these kind of figures, we will give a brief explanation. In the first place, the figures are based upon the aforementioned, all-inclusive definition of tourists. This implies that (nearly) all travel-related employment is counted for. Secondly, it also includes (nearly) all employment in the hospitality sector - restaurants, food-outlets, bars, clubs etc. Probably it wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that one in every million restaurants in India regularly caters to a tourist clientele; and that one in every thousand travelers is a hard core tourist. But the WTTC goes even further. It wants to quantify the employment generated by tourist spending *outside* the tourism 'industry'. For this reasons it has developed a method in which fractions of employment generated by tourism are added up and assembled into theoretical jobs which are subsequently presented as real ones. This method has become one of the important elements of the aforementioned Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) device which is heavily promoted by the WTTC and

adopted by governments all over the world (including India). It leads to strange research findings. Consider the following (Australian) example.

Foreign students are regarded as tourists. They spend a lot of money on fees, living expenses etc. This spending is translated into fractions of skimmed teaching and administrative positions across all schools, colleges, universities and libraries which are aggregated into theoretical jobs. Note that apart from student liaisons officers, the study visits of foreign students lead to very few real jobs, i.e. the relationship between foreign student spending (theoretical jobs) and job creation (real jobs) is unclear, to say the least! Nonetheless in the mid 1990s, in Australia, the number of theoretical jobs in the education 'industry' was calculated to be 39,000. This resulted in a bizarre finding: 'the education industry receives a larger economic impact from international tourism than the combined hotel, restaurant and club industries' (Leiper, 1999).

Hence the contorted method of data collection and analysis of the WTTC has three twists: (a) the all-inclusive definition of tourist; (b) The blurred links between tourism and hospitality; and (c) the presentation of non-existent tourism-generated employment. In the case of India this resulted in grossly unrealistic assertions concerning the quantitative (economic) importance and potential of tourism .

In order to understand the rationale behind such magnification it is imperative to take note of the fact that the WTTC is primarily a lobby organization of multinational corporations involved with tourism. The strategy is, presumably, to convince opinion leaders and governments that if job creation is desirable, WTTC's proposals should be adopted. Typically, these include lowering taxes for hotel corporations and airlines, replacing national interest with free markets (open skies) as the first principle in airline governance, and so on (Leiper, 1999).

While the UNWTO and the Department of Tourism of the Government of India may be quite happy with inflated statistics that underscore the importance of their core-business, we wonder the widespread uncritical acceptance of an unreal tourist definition and inflated statistics, both nationally and internationally. We think this clouds a realistic insight into the position and potential of the tourism sector in India.

Lack of reliable data and meaningful statistical analysis

Every year the Tourism Department publishes a hefty book of *Tourism Statistics*. Information is derived from a number of different sources, each with their own limitations and built-in deviations. International tourist data are based upon immigration (passport and visa) details which don't allow for much differentiation and are biased in favor of tourists - as opposed to other categories of travelers^v. Hotel occupation information collected by state government departments is somehow digested into domestic tourism data. We suspect that this involves a host of practical problems which have a serious negative impact upon the quality of the data. This also goes for the statistics concerning the visits of international tourists to the various states. As far as the tourism 'industry' is concerned, the information base is confined to the officially approved hotels, travel agents and tour operators. In 2007, there were 1425 approved hotels and 978 approved travel agents and tour operators (GOI, 2008: 83). Obviously these establishments represent only a tiny share of the total 'industry'.

In summary, the official yearly tourism statistics are based on a patchwork of data sources which are partly unreliable and/or biased. As a result, a significant share of the figures seem unintelligible. According to these figures, for example, in 2007, Andhra Pradesh attracted more international tourists than Kerala and Goa did (GOI 2008:table 5.1.3). This cannot be true, but if it *were* true, it would merit

some serious explanation. Such explanation is lacking. There are numerous cases with remarkable but unclear and/or unexplained figures. Why did the annual growth rate of domestic tourist visit drop from more than 20% in the early 1990s to 7.5% and 2.5% in 1995 and 1996 respectively (ibid: table 5.1.1)? Why does the Indian diaspora and its inevitable reflection in (immigration) 'tourism' data nowhere figure in the analyzes - it isn't even mentioned? Another quite serious case in point concerns the fact that, in 2002, there were two sets of statistics on domestic tourism, each with their own distinct sources and definitions, resulting in entirely dissenting outcomes. Without any justification and explanation these outcomes were presented in the same volume of statistics.

Singh maintains that underlying the government statistics there is no system of data collection, tabulation and calculation whatsoever (Singh, 2001:142). Indeed, the data are derived from existing sources of (immigration and hotel occupation) information. While this is obviously economical, it explains the lack of systematic approach and the low quality of the statistics. Regretfully, there have neither been regular, systematic government surveys, nor has there been serious independent research on the issue of who the tourists actually are and what they want.

Who are the international tourists?

A recent government study in the context of formulating an action plan to increase the flow of foreign tourists, undertaken by a consultant (A.C. Nielsen), included a primary survey among 7500 foreign tourists. In principle the data collected by means of this survey could have served the aforementioned purpose. However, some of the most elementary statistical rules of data presentation and analysis were ignored. There is no explanation and account of the selection of interview sites and respondents. It seems as though the finding that 'heritage' formed an important part of the pre-tour image of India and motivation behind going there is related to the fact that the larger share of the tourists were interviewed at places known for their heritage - maybe even at heritage sites. The various score-categories which form the constituent parts of a number of (cross)tables seem arbitrary and do not make much sense. Moreover absolute column and row totals are missing everywhere. This makes any meaningful analysis and inter- and intra-table comparisons impossible.

In basic terms, the outcome of the study can be summarized as follows. Foreign tourists are primarily individual travelers (we don't know the share though) who got the idea of going to India through friends and who went there because of the available cultural heritage. Such tourists are not satisfied about the Indian roads and airport infrastructure.

Above we argued that there is an urgent need for a purposeful collection and analysis of tourism data. In this context, it is very disappointing to see that the opportunity offered by the foreign tourist survey seems to have been wasted. There has been no attempt to arrive at a meaningful typology of foreign tourists, including an indication of the quantitative importance of various categories. The figures don't shed any light on the socio-economic background of tourists and on their spending in India. Did the survey find the foreign tourists 'of the high yielding variety' who form the main target group of the Indian Government? And, if yes, would these tourists recommend India as a holiday destination to their friends and relatives? Why would(n't) they? The survey did not give answers to any of these important questions.

So far, this section has shown that, inspired by lobby organizations such as the WTTC, the government has embraced the notion of tourism as an engine of growth. In its urge to show the economic importance of tourism, it has systematically presented inflated statistics. Whereas, in policy terms, sustainable, community-based tourism more or less belongs to the domestic tourism sector, the engine-of-growth policy speak seems loosely linked to the international domain. In the following sub-section we will question the exaggerated expectations with respect to international tourism

development, not by repeating our criticism concerning faulty definitions and statistics, but by presenting a number of common-sense arguments based upon our own experience in the international tourism scene of India.

3.2 The growth potential of Indian (international) Tourism

Let's briefly forget about the definitions and statistics, and simply start from the idea that inflated numbers are a world-wide phenomenon and, hence, that India received 5 million foreign 'tourists' in 2007. Is this a significant number? It equals the *monthly* number of tourists visiting Paris, the capital of France, and the yearly number of tourists who stayed in a hotel in Amsterdam, the capital of Holland (750,000 inhabitants). These findings serve to put things in perspective. Indeed, even with the help of inflated statistics, in 2007, the second most populated country in the world attracted only 0.56% of all international tourists.

The Indian Government wants us to believe that this situation can be structurally and significantly altered. While it argues that the variety of tourism activities need to be differentiated and improved, and that the tourism infrastructure requires augmentation, it seems convinced of the idea that the things India has to offer, merit a much larger influx of international tourists. There is, however, no evidence to substantiate this view. In most cases it is based on some sort of nationalist conviction, which wants 'India to attain its proper place in the global tourism scene' (e.g. Raguramam, 1998). It is true: India can be regarded as an old civilization, with a rich history, a number of important heritage sites, mountains, beaches, deserts and the like. But then, do other countries not claim to offer similar 'tourist products'? Isn't it rather naive to assume: (a) that India offers superior sights; and (b) tourists would be drawn to such sights if they were properly informed and seduced?

We think it is naive indeed, particularly if one considers the fact that these foreign tourists are supposed to be of the high spending variety. Below we will give a number of plausible reasons to support this claim.

To begin with, there is reason to counterbalance the over-idealized and simplified image of the foreign tourist that is implied by the above suggestions. Why do tourists choose to go to India? There may be hundreds of reasons which could explain such a choice. There are seemingly trivial but nonetheless quite important reasons, such relative inexpensiveness, ideal climate, cheap liquor (e.g. for destinations like Goa). Then there is the perceived 'spiritual atmosphere' or the laid-back ambiance. And, of course, there is the genuine interest in Indian culture in its widest sense. There is always a whole range of motives based on perceived attractions that naturally depend on the 'type of tourists' involved. Such attractions are mostly related to concrete (types of) locations and settings, and more often than not they compete with the attractions of places outside India. In any case, the perceived attractiveness on which the choices are ultimately based is informed by other people, most notably people who have been in India before, or people who offer second or third hand information on being a tourist and traveling in India.

The long haul, high yielding tourist idealized by the Indian Tourism policy typically lives in Europe and the US. It is good to realize that the places where these people live include the world's greatest tourist magnets by far. If India has to compete with places like France or Italy, it faces a number of insurmountable structural disadvantages. Firstly, there is the matter of sheer distance. Many Europeans spend their holidays in Europe because the nearness of the destination is thought convenient. Among other things, it allows them to travel by car, stay on camp sites etc. Secondly, the geographical proximity mostly implies a cultural similarity, offering exactly the right kind of mix of feeling at home in an exciting (not too) strange environment. Thirdly, staying relatively close to home implies low travel costs. If Europeans or Americans want to come to India for a holiday they have to

spend a relatively high amount on getting there - especially if they want to take their children. Finally, the weather conditions in Europe and the US during the main holiday season (July-August) are considered superior to the humid monsoon weather prevailing in the greater part of India at that time. In addition to these structural disadvantages, there is the great difference in the quality of the (tourist) infrastructure. Among many other things, Europe and the US offer a lot of facilities for typical family holidays. By contrast, India is generally considered unsuitable for such vacations.

Notwithstanding the relative disadvantages of going far away, more and more Europeans, Americans and Australians choose to do so. Hence, while the overall potential of attracting long haul, high yielding tourists seems limited, there is some scope for expansion. In this context, India's competitors are countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Singapore. Compared to such countries, the overall picture of India as a tourist destination is rather problematic. There are the inevitable images of India as a poor, dirty, unplanned, overpopulated and corrupt place that is associated with beggars, slums, open sewers, unhygienic restaurants, people shitting everywhere, diarrhea, unhelpful, bureaucratic hotel managers, trains so overpopulated that passengers resort to sitting on the roofs of the carriages etc. We acknowledge that this is a rather crude caricature (in fact it is just one of the many possible caricatures of India). Still, while many developing countries offer distress and discomfort to their visitors, India has always been regarded as a special league.

Interestingly, this brief discussion is largely underscored by Bandyopadhyay and Morais' discourse on the dissonance between the representation of India as a tourist destination by the Indian Government, on the one side, and its depiction by the American media (representing 'the Western tourist'), on the other (Bandyopadhyay and Morais, 2005). Based on a thorough scrutiny of brochures and other publications (1998-2003), they argue that the greatest discrepancy in the respective pictures of tourist-India concerns a theme euphemistically labeled 'cultural diversity', the essence of which is captured by the idea of bewildering chaos and uncertainty... at least by the American media. These media also appeared keen on feeding descriptions of poverty and confusion to Western tourists. The Indian Government's picture of tourist-India is completely devoid of such descriptions. In contrast with this latter American focus, it emphasizes luxury, modernity and even 'royal treatment'.

Looking through the eyes of the great majority of people in Europe and the US, India *is* a problematic, rather tough and elusive destination. I am sure, for example, that my parents (from Holland) would feel very unhappy in an average Indian environment. That is the reason that during all the years I spend in India (together with my wife and children) they never came to visit me. My parents-in-law did come. They had a good time. But the stories they told about India when they were back home certainly did not unequivocally serve to encourage people to go to India themselves.

Wilson argues that because of the picture of India given to new potential India visitors by people like my parents-in-law, by far the larger share of the tourists going to India (in his case, Goa), anticipate that services and facilities will be bad. Wilson quotes an Indian travel agent stating that many tourists consider a visit to India more as a duty than a pleasurable experience. Quite a number of visitors, think of traveling in India as a challenge to be met and overcome. To survive such self-imposed difficulties seems an important goal in itself and part of the thrill of going to India.

The above constitutes an important part of Wilson's explanation of a paradox which asks why the majority of international tourists are so enthusiastic about Goa in spite of the fact that there are aspects of the tourism experience which, if found in Europe or other developed countries, would constitute serious grounds for complaint. (Wilson, 1997:54-55). Of course, there are other valid, complementary explanations. It is the total picture that matters. Apart from the inevitable flaws and hardships, Goa, and for that matter India as a whole offers a great number of pleasant experiences and beautiful sites. People put off by the flaws and hardships, however, are not able to really enjoy

such experiences and sights.

This brings us to the important but by no means stunning observation that the 'problematic' tourist image of India serves as a filtering mechanism which by and large gives India a type of visitor willing to adjust to a strange and often harsh environment and the relative hardships of Indian tourist life. With respect to dirt, distress and bewildering chaos, the image may be both exaggerated and romanticized. Yet, in terms of mainstream Western perception it refers to real phenomena. These phenomena are omni-present in a number of classical Indian tourist destinations, such as Varanasi, Puri, Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur and Agra. Notwithstanding the warnings exerted by problematic images of India, for a considerable number of tourists these real phenomena don't turn out to be better than expected. In the end, a significant share of such tourists may exclaim that 'they have had some very special experiences, but they will never go to India again' – or something similar. Hence, time and again the problematic tourist image of India is reasserted by a great number of people who have actually been there.

There is nothing one can do about it. A great number of important tourist sites are situated 'in the middle of India' and there is no way of ignoring the fact that the (tourist) infrastructure and the whole environment in such a metaphorical place is comparatively poor and certainly not of the 'world class stature' which the Tourism Department aims to establish. In stylized terms, one could say that it is not possible to create 'world class infrastructure' without a (near-)complete transformation of the Indian world. We do acknowledge that the Indian world goes through a process of rapid transformation. At the same time, we observe that this process is unevenly spread (both socio-economically and geographically) and that, notwithstanding the great number of visible improvements, there is still a long way to go before both the wider environment of typical tourist sites and the tourist image of India has substantially changed. Until this has happened the luxury-modernity-and-royal-treatment mantra of the Indian Government is largely misplaced.

The Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation, however, seems to have found a short cut by which tourist sites are simply cut out of their Indian environment. In the beginning of March 2009, it announced the development of 'heli-tourism', i.e. sightseeing by helicopter. KDTC's idea was that helicopters would take tourists to a combination of sights which formed four conceptual circuits. According to officials this initiative was launched to attract people with lots of money 'who want to cover as many places as possible within a limited time' (The Hindu, Bangalore edition, 04.04.2009:6).

There are places in India which don't need means like helicopters in order to isolate themselves from the Indian 'mainland'. While it may be a bit of a simplification, one might claim that culturally and physically states like Goa and Kerala harbor certain attributes that make them clearly different from the rest of India and much closer to the Western image of a 'holiday paradise'. On top of this, they offer an environment that allows for enclave-style tourism. Hence, in these states especially, it is more or less possible to stay away from the comparative misery and discomfort of India. In these states too, the difference between a luxurious tourist enclave and the directly surrounding environment is such that it doesn't lead to nagging uneasy feelings and shame among tourists. Goa and Kerala form the positive extremes on an imaginary scale of 'Western tourist adaptability'.

As already hinted at above, a great number of important heritage-related tourist sites and places are situated in the middle of India, in places which stubbornly display all negative attributes of the problematic tourist image of India. If the royal-treatment slogan of the Indian Government was to effectively lure tourists to such places, they probably would be greatly disappointed. This doesn't help promoting tourism. Indeed, we think that the public focus on high spending foreign tourists is unrealistic. It even could be potentially harmful, leading to a situation such as in the Caribbean, where paradise imagery is a prime marketing strategy and where disillusionment is common as

tourists expecting paradise, are bound to discover the harsh reality of life.

In any case, the focus on up-market tourism is out of keeping with the present structure of most of the tourism industry in India, which is mainly low-budget and served by a multitude of small hotels, guest-houses, rented rooms, and a host of ancillary services. Indeed, the tradition of Indian tourism has shown that the bulk of foreign tourists are relatively young people who don't stay in luxury hotels (Gantzer & Gantzer,1983:122). Even the present share of luxury, 'world class' category of international tourism in India is highly limited. Consider, for example, the fact that according to government statistics, on an average day in 2007, only 10 to 15% of all the 5 star (+) hotels rooms were occupied by foreign tourists. This concerns no more than 3200 rooms.

Domestic versus international tourism

Establishing this, one wonders why domestic tourism doesn't get a higher priority and a more integral, central role in tourism development. Going by the guesstimates presented above, at least 90 million of all Indian domestic travelers in 2009 are conventional tourists. Another 200 million of these travelers are pilgrims. This implies that the number of international tourists projected to arrive in India in 2009 (some three million) is dwarfed by the magnitude of domestic tourism. Given the growth of the Indian economy, the expansion of the middle classes and the ongoing Westernization of their lifestyles, over the coming decades, the relative importance of domestic tourism can only be expected to increase exponentially. This explains the unprecedented attention in the Indian media for domestic tourist destinations. All the time, leading newspapers and special travel magazines come up with possible new destinations offering thus far hidden natural and cultural treasures.

For long, the importance of domestic tourism was not recognised at all. In the 1970s, 80s and early 1990s the numbers of modern domestic tourists were only small. In those days, there was a great dearth of foreign currency and international tourism was one of the major sources of this scarce asset. In combination, these factors were the most important reasons to attach considerably more value to international tourism than to domestic tourism. Over the past 15 years or so, the emergence of new (non-tourist) sources of foreign exchange have contributed to a decline in monetary importance of international tourism. In addition, with the rapid growth of domestic tourism, it was realised that, from a local or regional perspective, the money spent by Indian tourists is no different from that expended by foreigners.

While domestic tourism was finally discovered as a policy issue, it was still regarded as a kind of secondary business. Even today, seemingly random policy suggestions regarding the division of types of tourism across the domestic and international sectors, substantiate a bias favoring international tourism. The domestic sector, for example, is thought to be ideally suited for certain forms of community based tourism which could serve as vehicles for rural development. By contrast, the much desired boost of the international sector is thought to require more professional and 'world-class' inputs.

The above allocation of types of tourism across domestic and international categories seems completely random: it doesn't make sense. This is not to say that there are no differences with respect to the holiday cultures, needs and preferences between domestic and international tourists - we have explored this issue in a separate article (reference). There are, however, numerous places which could be developed as both domestic and international destinations. Moreover, current developments indicate a very gradual convergence of foreign and Indian tourist preferences. In this context, it seems good to notice that, with the stepped-up destination development activities of state tourism development corporations, the pioneers among the international tourists, can choose from a wide range of new, very interesting, predominantly domestic tourist destinations. If they would actually go

there, and put in motion a tourism development process resulting in the emergence of new tourist services and an increasing number of foreign tourists arrivals, the still rather basically developed domestic tourist destinations of today, could be tomorrow's international tourist hubs. Indeed, we think that a considerable share of the present domestic destinations harbor the potential to become international tourist centers. This is an attractive perspective in which domestic tourism does not only make economic sense in itself, but can also be regarded as a groundbreaking phase of international tourism development. We suggest that such a perspective could serve as an important starting point of a (new) tourism policy.

4 Conclusions

Highlighting some of the most important inconsistencies in Indian Government thinking on tourism, we attempted to provide tentative answers to some major policy questions. What is the relative growth potential of domestic and international tourism in India? Can one use tourism as a development tool? We tried to show that the dominant tourism-as-an-engine-of-growth position underlying the government policy (2002) has resulted in an inflation of the importance of international tourism and a gross overvaluation of its economic potential. We also attempted to substantiate the point of view that the 'responsible development' idea which supports some minor parts of the government policy, may lead to ideal forms of tourism on paper, but is in fact based on simplifications which tend collude with the stubborn, harsh realities of everyday life.

Both aforementioned perspectives have in common that they start from outspoken goals or norms. Without much research and analysis, the government seems to have embraced these norms and goals - at least on paper. Apart from the fact that these goals are not exactly compatible, one wonders whether a little more original thinking, research and analysis would not have resulted in a more realistic and useful policy. Given the lack of reliable statistics and meaningful quantitative research, even today, the overall picture of Indian tourism remains rather patchy and unclear. For example, while international tourism is thought to harbor an enormous unused potential, so far, it remains unclear who the international tourists are?; What categories of international tourists can be distinguished? and what the quantitative significance is of each of these categories?

Most of the concrete public tourism studies seem to have been driven by the urge to reaffirm and support existing policy perspectives. There has been no broad research aiming at infusing a sense of realism into the conceptualization of the role and potential of tourism, refining insights and bringing them in line with everyday reality. We think that there is a great need for this latter form of research. It would surely help if such research started from an unbiased assessment of the real impacts (both qualitative and quantitative) of different forms of tourism in different places, irrespective of it being large-scale (enclave) tourism, main stream group tours, luxury tours, community-based tourism etc. And, if such assessment dealt with essential trade-offs between different goals, norms, and interests of the various agents (including the lobby groups, the government and the development organizations) involved.

Speaking of the contentions of the present tourism policy we suspect that the stress on the long haul high yielding variety of international tourism is somewhat misplaced. Putting this issue in a broad development context, one might suggest that this type of international tourism development is a function of economic development, rather than the other way around. One can't change India for the sake of 'world class tourism development' . Rather, India will develop economically and along with this development, opportunities for various kinds of tourism will emerge. No doubt, in the near future, the greatest opportunities will arise in the domestic sector. From a research and policy perspective, the present roles of the Tourism Development Corporations in the states, identifying and developing new destinations, merits much greater attention. We firmly believe that many of the new

destinations created by these public agencies attracting mainly domestic tourists, will ultimately emerge as new hubs for both domestic and international tourists. Some serious thinking on purposeful guidance of such development seems in place!

End Notes

i Although many governments do not particularly welcome backpacker tourists because they are thought to spend relatively little amounts of money and behave in a rather 'disrespectful way', research has shown that the backpacker market segment is certainly not the universal scourge it is sometimes painted to be. Moreover, as indicated by the main text, backpackers are involved in important path breaking activities which directly (and profitably) involve the local population (Scheyvens, 2002).

ii We personally don't think that community-based tourism is impossible. We do believe, however, that it is a very difficult concept that can be made to work only: (a) on a small scale; (b) in a completely transparent set-up; (c) with the help of dedicated, local community workers

iii govt stats = 526,6 million x 14% and 34% respectively

iv $(549,4 : 269,6) \times 526,6 = 1,07$ billion

v In most cases, 'tourist' is the cheapest, least time-consuming (requiring relatively little formal input) and therefore most attractive visa category. In order to avoid formal obstacles and save time, large shares of business travelers and scholars and students enter India on tourist visas.

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