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## **Identifying Critical Issues in Designing Educational Tourism Programs for Sustainable Development - Lessons Learnt from the Case Study of ITH Salzburg**

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### **Abstract**

Education is seen as an important way to contribute to development. The World Bank finances educational projects with large amounts of money every year because it is convinced that improving education can help alleviate poverty by raising incomes, improving health and nutrition and reducing family size (World Bank, 2011). On a different yet similar level, tourism has been conceptualized as a tool for development (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). The tourism industry is said to be an export industry creating jobs and generating income. On the downside, the destinations may not benefit much from tourism with a huge proportion of profit leakage and detrimental harm to the physical environment (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). In addition, almost all of the developing countries lack a skilled labor force, which leaves the skilled and better paid jobs to foreigners. Therefore, the sustainability idea has gained more and more momentum. One aspect of this idea is to enable the local population to indeed benefit from tourism by implementing educational programs for sustainable tourism development.

One such initiative is the Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (ITH) in Salzburg, Austria. For more than 40 years the Austrian Development Cooperation (first via the Austrian Foreign Ministry, later via the Austrian Development Agency) has been financing study opportunities for students from developing countries at the college. Students are educated in all areas relevant to (sustainable) tourism (development) during the one-year diploma course. The long-term goal is to foster sustainable tourism development in the students' home countries. Students receiving a full scholarship for the program are considered future decision makers and knowledge disseminators, who work in important positions of the industry, in politics and/or the educational sector. More than 2,000 students from approximately 120 countries have successfully completed the program so far.

In order to monitor the usefulness of this development project, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) commissioned an evaluation to a team of external experts, which had to assess the relevance of the program, its cost-efficiency, the effectiveness regarding defined development goals and the different impact dimensions of the program. This paper is based on the work of these experts (one of the authors was part of the expert group) and the

resultant report. Taking into account the principle of triangulation a mixed-methods approach was chosen by the expert team. The methods of data collection included a focus group with ITH staff, qualitative interviews with experts in the development and educational sector, (partly of the developing countries), a quantitative survey among alumni (n=130) and case studies about the work life of program alumni.

In contrast to the aims of the report, the aim of this case study is to identify the critical aspects in designing educational programs to encourage sustainable (tourism) development in developing countries. In this process the authors do not want to come up with a prescription of how to do it right but rather identify the key issues that have to be reviewed among the stakeholders in order to clarify what such a project can and what it cannot accomplish.

The lessons learnt from the evaluation of the ITH program are of relevance on two levels: on the concrete project level and also on the more general policy level. The results can therefore be of help for future educational projects with similar goals.

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