



Gila ALTMANN: I am confident that women will take their chance

Gila Altmann began her career as an educator with a degree from the Pedagogical University in Hildesheim, Germany, where she specialized in Fine Arts, Mathematics and Chemistry. She worked as a teacher in Ostfriesland/ Lower Saxony from 1973 and as assistant professor at the Universities of Oldenburg and Braunschweig. She was a member of the German Parliament from 1994 to 2002, serving as spokesperson in regard of transport policy/affairs of the Parliamentary party 'Buendnis 90/ The Greens'.

In 1998, Gila Altmann assumed the office of Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety in the Cabinet

of Ministers under Gerhardt Schroeder's government, and served until 2002.

Gila Altmann worked in Azerbaijan from 2005 to 2012 as Principal Advisor on Ecotourism to the Minister of Ecology and then at the Azerbaijan Tourism Institute (ATI) Research and Development Center in the field of sustainable tourism and regional development..

Since 2013 she works as TEMPUS project manager at the Jade University of Applied Science in Wilhelmshaven. The project "Development of new modules for international bachelor and master programmes in sustainable tourism management" (www.sutoma.eu)

- Ms Gila Altmann, in one of your reports you state that the tourism sector has become one of the most important economic factors globally, bigger than automobile industry. It creates 230 million job places and in 60 countries tourism is the main economic sector, and in the 40 poorest countries tourism has become the main driver of economy and the second important source of income after oil.

In what direction will the tourism of the world develop? What threats and problems may it face?

- Actually the fight for the customer is in full swing, having been started by the tourism industry firstly in developing countries. A fierce competition occurs about unique selling points and exotic destinations, services and prices. Endemic species, unique landscapes, exotic beaches and wildlife combined with culture and traces of historical and natural events are no longer regarded as attractive enough. Extreme sports and survival trainings in extreme landscapes and temperatures are reputed as necessary competitive advantages.

Even climate change is no longer regarded as a taboo but now used as a marketing tool by tourism companies advertising Pacific islands before disappearing with rising sea levels in the next 3 to 5 decades or the last arctic glaciers, penguins and polar bears.

The tourism industry services and capitalises a strong desire in many travellers to see or to get rare and vulnerable things: the last few apes or snow leopards, a rapidly melting glacier, one of the last Bali stars or a Lady's slipper orchid.

But also the quality of service, the option of package tours, the friendliness, motivation and hospitality of staff are important indicators as well as language, cultural skills and easy access to the destinations. Those high expectations often go along with a high price sensitivity. Not only

an adequate price ratio performance and reasonable prices are expected, but special offers and discounts. Price dumping on account of middle and small enterprises is common practice.

The competition is no longer targeted on the traditional market of Europeans, Americans and Australians only, but has been extended by the entire Central-Asian region. Since the early 90s, Russians, Koreans and Chinese are in the centre of interest, having a respectable budget at their disposal.

So, no wonder that many governments and private investors respond with huge investments on infrastructure like new or upgraded airports, roads and hotels, hoping on respectable, above average profits, up to 35 % annually e.g. as currently on Bali.

The rapid development of those destinations is often accompanied by an unprecedented destruction and loss of natural and cultural resources, leading to social upheavals within the local population regarding access to water and energy resources or increasing prices for land and rents.

Also ecotourism has become part of these problems though often claims that it preserves and even improves local cultures and the livelihood of local people.

For approximately the last ten years the segment of ecotourism has increased faster than the tourism industry as a whole, with a boom in nature tourism and a growth in eco-resorts and hotels. Ecotourism, sustainable tourism meanwhile became a quality brand, the tourism industry and their advertisers already integrated these terms into their commercial concepts as a hip and promising strategy often combined with 'Green washing' which means selective information with intent to mislead. Evidence shows that, due to the breath-taking pace in many cases the local people often are driven off their land with-

out any compensation, lose their homes and traditional structures like it has been seen in South Africa by establishing protected areas for ecotourism activities.

Another example of entire communities being moved in order to create a park, happened in East Africa, where about 70 % of national parks and game reserves were established on Masai land.

Furthermore a serious comprehensive impact assessment is neither possible nor welcome if the only emphasis is on profit maximation connected with dictatorial political systems, but also over use causes serious problems to environment and indigenous people because local communities are unable to meet the infrastructure demands of ecotourism. The lack of adequate sanitary facilities in remote areas often results in the disposal of campsite garbage in rivers, contaminating wildlife, livestock, and people who draw drinking water from them.

- You are working with a EU - project concerning the sustainable tourism development in the three countries of the Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Why is it important for the EU to take care of the development of tourism in those countries and to integrate their culture and traditions into the environment of multi-national values?

- TEMPUS is a EU- programme which focuses on the reform and modernisation of higher education systems in the Partner Countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region. Particularly in these countries higher education institutions are currently facing major challenges like dramatic demographic changes, increasing global competition, changes in science and technology but notably the growing importance of organisational and societal innovation rather than purely technological innovation and last but not least challenges of societies in transition.

For the EU higher education institutions (HEI) are therefore key players in the successful development to a knowledge-based economy and society and they provide the training for a new generation of leaders.

In this context the integration of sustainable tourism management into HEI is essential because tourism is a regional priority for all three Caucasus countries. The Caucasus region is a hot spot according to natural and cultural diversity and should be touristically jointly developed. The Caucasus is reputed as the European cradle of mankind and thus very interesting for different target groups focused on nature, culture and traditions. They like to travel the whole three countries jointly as a package tour. As the region is politically diverse yet, the obstacles like visa issues, appropriate accommodation-, service- and information standards are very differing and not yet coordinated. As the currently existing political situation does not allow a joint development, the project refers to achieve comparable standards in HEI according to the Bologna standards in each of the three partner countries. As prereq-

uisite a common understanding of sustainable tourism and regional development will be developed, profiting from worst and best case experience all over the world so far. Furthermore new methods and trainings shall be introduced and a new form of practical placements in collaboration with the business sector and NGOs. The project is designed to foster regional networking and mutual understanding, and strengthen international academic cooperation between the EU and its partner countries on a permanent base by establishing enduring partnerships.

- You have repeatedly expressed your opinion on gender issues. Tell us please, what is the proportion of gender in business? What are men and women possibilities here? What is your experience in the countries of the Caucasus on this matter?

- From the perspective of sustainability the environmental, economic and social interests have to be balanced in a bearable, viable and equitable manner.

The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality, assessing the impact of any planned action for both men and women, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. Thus gender aspects necessarily are obligatory parts of sustainable development. In (tourism) business this means to allow also women to gain access to higher positions and to employ them in management positions and pay fair comparable wages. Reality unfortunately draws another picture. All over the world women in general still earn less money for their work than their male colleagues and higher positions are out of bounds despite comparable competence. New studies state that though women globally carry out about two thirds of the working hours, they have only a small share in income and property. Therefore poverty and discrimination are closely linked to each other. It is commonplace that in families where women work more and earn less, children as a result, get less food and maternal time. Recent studies in different regions of the world have shown that households headed or maintained by women even with scarce resources, are generally run more resourceful than by their male counterparts. Income in the hands of mothers can have a manifold better effect on child health than income that is controlled by the father. Female-headed households seem to spend more on food and other family-oriented goods than male-headed household.

In order to achieve gender equality, access to education plays a key role. At the same time a change of thinking, breaking down prejudices and stereotypes is necessary, initiated and accompanied by political support.

In the Caucasus countries the situation is not homogeneous. Apart from essential differences between urban and rural areas there are significant gaps among the South Caucasus neighbours according to a study of the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (CRRC) from 2011. While Ar-

menia and Azerbaijan tend to emphasize more traditional gender roles, Georgia meanwhile seems to orientate more to gender equality how it is practised in Western Europe. However, the assessment is complicated because traditions still have an essential impact on every day life. While Armenia and Georgia are Christian countries, in Azerbaijan the rules of Islam seem to display a more traditional idea of gender roles. Though women in all three South Caucasus countries tend to disagree that university is more important for boys, the proportion in Azerbaijan is lower than in the other two countries.

Only when it comes to gender and employment, the majority in all three countries is the same, saying that a man should ideally be the breadwinner in a family. Reviewing their own life, women generally and globally tend to say that men had a better life. This is also true for the three Caucasus countries, only in Georgia men and women assess their lives similar for both genders.

Within the project these different habits are discussed in the context with the subject of intercultural communication, always taking into account that these various gender approaches are very sustainable as well.

- How do you assess, in the context of business, culture, transport and logistics development and new technologies, the fact that in the thirteenth year of XXI century the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Internal Affairs has announced that it is forbidden for the women to drive a car and if they are caught when driving a car, they will be punished?

- First of all it shows the variety of approaches of the Islam. But from Indonesia as the biggest Islamic country until Azerbaijan, nobody would dare to forbid a woman to ride a bike or drive a car. From my individual experience in SA I think that this 'unique selling point' results from the outstanding conservative Wahabism, discriminating woman and which can be only persevered due to the outstanding oil resources, which keeps the country independent from a competitive economy. As there is not anything mentioned in the Koran which could justify this prohibition, the interesting question is how long the chauvinistic society can seal the country off from the rest of the world. I am confident that women will wait for the right time and take their chance.

- Thank you for the answers.

* Wahhabism - is an Islamic political religious doctrine that occurred in the XVIII century in Arabia. Its initiator is Muhammad ibn al Wahhabi. The followers of Wahhabism fought for the purity of Islam and the rigidity of customs. In the XIX century Wahhabism became the ideology of Arab feudalists, and now it is an official ideology of Saudi Arabia.

Wahhabism requires returning purity to Islam and they proclaim the Koran as the only source of religious belief.