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GLOBAL COMMODITY CHAINS AND PRODUCTION NETWORKS

**Understanding uneven development in the
global economy**

Schwerpunktredaktion: Leonhard Plank
Cornelia Staritz

mandelbaum *edition südwind*

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RALPH LESSMEISTER

Why selling dreams brings power, but making dreams come true does not: governance, power and coordination in special tourism value chains

1. Introduction

Governance, power and access barriers are central elements of value chain concepts. These concepts can therefore answer decisive questions for economic actors who wish to shape their competitive assets in the global economy. It seems somehow curious that international tourism, as one of the most important economic branches, is not part of this discussion, although tourism is one of the biggest drivers of globalisation, and geographic dislocation and internationality are inherent features of tourism. Particularly for developing countries, the development of special interest tourism, which has emerged during the last two decades, seems to be promising, as the scenery for this tourism is often found in peripheral regions and since huge equity investments in tourism infrastructure are not required. In this paper we firstly show how special tourism value chains are configured. Secondly, building upon Gereffi's commodity chain concept, we discuss the importance of power, coordination and governance and explain why, although they are closely related, these concepts should be treated distinctly. As special interest tourism can be seen as a sophisticated life-style product conventions and product quality come to play a central role, which is discussed in the following section. Taking the Moroccan trekking tourism as an example, we then outline how power is distributed along the tourism chain and finally show the consequences of asymmetric power relations for the Moroccan players¹. In our explanations the focus is on relations between commercial players *within* the chain. Even though there are business associations and state regulations affecting the Moroccan trekking business, they have only

a very limited influence on the power configuration of the trekking value chain (for more details see Lessmeister 2008).

2. The increasing significance of special tourism

With regard to the integration of developing countries into the global economy, tourism plays an important role (see Vorlaufer 2003; Diaz Benavides 2002). But tourism today does not imply leisure only. Post-modern travel behaviour is increasingly characterised by individualisation and the differentiation of varying lifestyles, leading to a decidedly diverse number of vacation styles (Buhalis 2001). In this context, specialised forms of alternative, nature- and activity-based tourism have gained growing importance (Popp 2003). This presents an opportunity for developing countries to integrate into global tourism markets because these forms of tourism often promote 'intact nature' and 'authentic ways of life' and therefore do not need cost-intensive infrastructure. They seem therefore to fit ideally into development strategies for peripheral regions.

Many developing countries have gone through a process of thematic and regional differentiation of their tourism products (e.g. Hill-Tribe trekking in Thailand, Ecotourism in Costa Rica and Ecuador, Mountain tourism in Kenya and Tanzania). A look at the tourism structures in Northern African countries for instance, shows that, especially in Morocco, but also in Tunisia and Egypt, these new types of tourism have increased in importance in recent years (Lessmeister/Scherle 2008). In addition to the still dominant seaside vacation and to culture and study tours, 'nature based' forms of travel in particular, such as mountain and desert trekking, can increasingly be found. In contrast to traditional hiking, trekking imparts new semantic contents to foot travel; it becomes an expression of an active, experience-driven, but at the same time environmentally and socially conscious, open-minded attitude toward life (Opaschowski 2002). The conscious rejection of mass tourism and the high significance of environmentally and socially compatible travel make trekking almost the post-modern variant of classical hiking. With the change in motivation the spatial context for foot travel has changed too. The tourist scenery in which people satisfy their desire for authenticity, adventure and the experience of the 'other' is no longer found

in romantic landscapes like the German or English hill countries, but increasingly in extreme natural regions.

3. Governance in tourism value chains

3.1 International division of work and the need for governance

Looking upon the necessary activities for a packaged trekking tour, we find that chain concepts represent an applicable and useful approach to provide insights into the organisation and governance structures in the tourism sector. Although most global value chain studies deal with industrial or agricultural production and tourism has not yet been considered appropriately in the value chain debate, in tourism too, different activities, carried out by different actors in different places, are brought together to form a final 'product', which is the organised holiday tour. Transferring the value chain approach from industrial production to tourism therefore seems to be justified (see also Go/Appelman 2001: 184). In the international division of work the tour operators usually concentrate on marketing and selling, while logistics, organisation and dealing with local actors, sometimes even the tour conception itself, are in the hands of domestic travel agencies, fulfilling the function of an incoming agency for their international partners. The trekking tour itself is generally carried out by local actors working as mountain guides, porters, muleteers or cooks. Outsourcing single steps in the production process may lead to a win-win situation for both sides: for the actors in developing countries the integration into a global tourism chain opens up access to international markets. The tour operators can in turn reduce a part of the costs that arise because of the high expenditures for logistics and organisation. The important point is to find out how single activities are linked to one another and how and by whom they are coordinated and governed. It has been shown that chains in the special tourism sector have certain particularities which decisively influence the governance and the organisation of the chain.

Among the different chain approaches, the Global Commodity Chain concept by Gary Gereffi (Gereffi/Korzeniewicz 1994) holds a particular importance. Gereffi focuses on the governance structure and aims to explain how single activities along a particular chain can be controlled and directed.

He assumes that governance is performed by one powerful lead firm in the chain and in this context distinguishes between producer-driven chains and buyer-driven chains. In producer-driven chains huge producers assume this position because of their capital and their knowledge of techniques and processes. On the contrary, in buyer-driven chains, huge buyers dominate the chain due to their market power and brand names. In buyer-driven chains commodity production is generally more labour-intensive; business relations are less intensive and easier to terminate as inter-firm relations are weak; the goods are mostly standardised and therefore do not require special know-how. Especially in the case of developing countries, buyer-driven chains hold the opportunity of integration into the global economy.

Gereffi's concept has often been criticised for its simplifying assumption that governance is executed by one single lead firm. The dichotomy of producer- and buyer-driven chains does not seem to be appropriate to explain the complex reality of governance structures. Kaplinsky and Morris (2000: 34) recommend a rather critical use of Gereffi's governance concept: "So, although the buyer- versus producer-driven value chain distinction is a useful one in framing a series of research questions, it should perhaps be seen as a null hypothesis to be tested rather than a proven research conclusion."

In a more recent approach, Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon (2005) have abandoned the dichotomy of buyer- and producer-driven chains for five possible forms of governance resulting from a matrix in which they consider the complexity of transactional information, the ability to codify this information and the capabilities in the supply base. *Market linkages* do not have to be completely transitory, as is typical of spot markets; they can persist over time, with repeated transactions. The essential point is that the costs of switching to new partners are low for both parties. In *modular value chains* suppliers typically make products to a customer's specifications, which may be more or less detailed. In *relational value chains* complex network interactions between buyers and sellers exist. This often creates mutual dependency and high levels of asset specificity. Trust and reputation are of great importance; relationships are built-up over time or are based on dispersed family and social groups. In *captive value chains* small suppliers are transactionally dependent on much larger buyers. Suppliers face significant switching costs and are, therefore, 'captive'. Finally, *hierarchical chains* are characterised by vertical integration. The dominant form of governance

is managerial control, flowing from managers to subordinates or from headquarters to subsidiaries and affiliates (Gereffi et al. 2005: 13).

3.2 Governance, power and coordination – distinct dimensions of co-operation in value chains

Although the categories proposed by Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon (2005) do respond better to the complex reality and include important insights into how activities are governed and coordinated in value chains, at least for the case of tourism chains they still do not tell the whole story. Nevertheless, we regard them as a suitable framework for the analysis of governance in value chains. However, in order to provide a deeper understanding of international tourism, a more differentiated perspective is needed. This is mainly for three reasons:

(1) The presented categories mix up forms of coordination with forms of governance. It is rather doubtful that an entire chain is coordinated in the same way. Instead, we found different forms of coordination at different levels of the chain. In tourism for example, the relation between tour operator and incoming agency may be coordinated in the form of modular chains, while the relation between incoming agency and transport agencies or hotels is done on a market basis. In contrast, the situation between incoming agency and tour guides can be characterised as a captive one, with the guides depending highly upon the agencies (see also Ponte/Gibbon 2005: 3).

(2) While coordination can be done in different ways, we found a coherent governance structure along the entire chain. All tourism chains are governed by one single lead firm – the international tour operators. Although Gereffi's concept of buyer- and producer-driven chains does not fully capture the complexity of coordination, his assumption of single lead firms is appropriate for the analysis of governance. However, the terms 'producer-driven' and 'buyer-driven' do not really match the situation in tourism. Instead, we suggest speaking more generally of lead firms only. This implies a broader perspective to find out what allows firms to achieve a leading position.

(3) The categories proposed by Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon do not consider all relations along the chain, but concentrate on the transactions between lead firm and first tier-suppliers. By doing this, they do not

clearly distinguish governance from power structures. Although tourism chains are governed by one lead firm, power can be gradually distributed along the chain. For instance, incoming agencies control a huge degree of power, as they are in charge of all local actors; yet, they have to comply with the overall governance set by the tour operators. Owners of private guest-houses are highly dependent on the incoming agencies and are therefore in a captive situation. Hence, their position allows the incoming agencies to exert power on other local actors (Lessmeister 2008). While governance is passed down the chain and therefore affects the activities of all actors involved, power can be understood as a means to affect outcomes in mutual bargaining with others. In that sense, power can change over time and under altering conditions.

Considering these aspects, we argue for a more elaborate approach, which conceives of governance, coordination and power as highly interdependent, but still distinct phenomena which should be treated separately. In particular, an elaborate conceptualisation of power as the necessary precondition for governance and dependency should be given special attention. In the following section we therefore have a closer look at different concepts of power, which may contribute to a better understanding of governance and power asymmetries in value chains.

4. Conceptualising power in tourism value chains

Robert Dahl (1973) defines power generally as the ability of actor A to make actor B do what he wants him to do, minus the probability that B would have done this without any influence from A. This definition makes obvious what power is about: influencing other actors' behaviour. Yet, while it concentrates on the use of power, it does not explain where this power derives from. Russett and Starr (1996: 117f) distinguish this in more detail. *Power* is defined as the exertion of influence and *capabilities* as the basis of this influence: "Power is the ability to overcome obstacles and influence outcomes. Power means getting one's way. [...] It is the ability to affect the behaviour of others. [...] Capability is any physical object, talent or quality that can be used to affect the behaviour (or desire) of others". Even if it remains very abstract, their definition makes it clear that power does not

exist by itself. Exercising power over others implies something on which power is based upon and brings a direct advantage in the bargaining with others.

If we come back to Gereffi's idea about governance, we find that the position of the lead firms is based upon specific capabilities (in the sense of Russett and Starr). Since Gereffi focuses on governance and coordination, his concept of power is restricted to the activities of lead firms and neglects the power of other actors within the chain. In this context the simple categorisation into buyers and producers and their specific capabilities cannot be viewed uncritically (see e.g. Kaplinsky/Morris 2000). Nevertheless, his concept of power becomes more meaningful if we consider the dimension of entry barriers. As well as considering the factor of access to particular activities in the chain, Gereffi also assumes barriers, which prevent others from having access, as being decisive for the governance structure. Although Gereffi restricts his concept of governance to the lead firms, it may be also useful for the analysis of power along the entire chain. For that, a more abstract formulation is needed, one which generally focuses more on the resources of power than on those of governance.

In this context Penrose's (1980) concept of competitive advantages in the resource-based view of firms may provide us with useful ideas. "In the resource-based view of the firm, it is claimed that firms will seek to extend their competitive advantages by basing them on resources which are difficult to imitate or replicate by rivals, or difficult to substitute through alternative technological channels" (Mathews 2002: 480). Transferring Penrose's thoughts about economic success into Gereffi's concept of asymmetric access and barriers to key activities, we may say that an actor generally has power when his activities are based on resources which cannot be substituted or replicated by someone else and he is powerless when his activities are based on resources (material or technical resources as well as special skills, image and reputation or social networks) which can be easily replicated or substituted. In reality, however, it is not realistic to think of power in all or nothing terms. Most actors are in some way 'replaceable' and it is unlikely that actors either have power or not. The question is, rather, at what cost they can be replaced. The degree of power which economic players control is relative to the costs that would arise if they had to be substituted or replicated. This conceptualisation of power allows for a deeper insight

into bargaining and mutual dependency, as well as into benefits and losses along the entire value chain.

The question of governance in value chains is hence a question of power asymmetries and asymmetrical dependency. Keohane and Nye (1989) explicitly concentrate on this aspect when they refer to costs brought about by changes as the origin of power. "When we say that asymmetrical interdependence can be a source of power we are thinking of power as control over resources or the potential to affect outcomes. A less dependent actor in a relationship often has a significant [...] resource, because changes in the relationship (which the actor may be able to initiate or threaten) will be less costly to the actor than to its partners" (Keohane/Nye 1989: 11). They further distinguish between sensitivity, which can be defined as the degrees of responsiveness to changes within a social framework, and vulnerability, which describes the dimension of interdependence on the relative availability and costliness of the alternatives that various actors face (Keohane/Nye 1989: 12f).

All concepts we have dealt with so far have focussed on power between actors inside a closed social system (in our case a particular value chain). But interactions in value chains are always embedded in broader social contexts. These contexts can change over time and will also affect the configuration of a value chain, as actors have to react to these changes. A wider conceptualisation of power should therefore not be restricted to mutual influence, but should also consider the options and potential alternatives of actors under altering external circumstances. Power can then not only be defined by asymmetric dependencies within a value chain but also by the extent to which actors (in comparison to others) are affected through altering conditions (or the resulting costs) and the options they have to react to these challenges.

Through their powerful position, lead firms have the power to control and sanction other actors. However, the exercise of power is also associated with costs and it is not certain that all subordinated actors will or can obey the given rules and standards. Nevertheless, it has to be in the interests of a powerful actor to keep his efforts at getting others to do what he wants as small as possible. This is exactly what Nye (2002; also Keohane/Nye 1989) describes as a strategy of *soft power*, whereby actor A influences actor B without using any direct force. "This aspect of power – getting others to

want what you want – I call soft power. It co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye 2002: 9). Nye’s concept seems to be very promising, as it introduces new aspects into the discussion of power. Soft power does not have to be exercised actively. Instead, it builds upon identification and accepted conventions in order to commit subordinated players. The resource for power in this context is a matter of legitimation and reputation to make others voluntarily *follow*, rather than a question of how power can be exercised in order to make others *obey*. Originally, Nye developed his concept to deal with questions of foreign policy, but his thoughts may also contribute to a deeper understanding of power and governance in value chains and for the case of specialised tourism value chains in particular. Particularly in so-called ‘responsible’ or ‘soft’ forms of tourism, reputation and accepted conventions come to play an important role, as we show in the following sections.

5. Reputation and quality conventions as central elements for governance

Trekking, as a form of alternative tourism, combines activity, adventure and responsibility for the environment as well as for the people visited. Defining quality in this niche is much more complex and sophisticated. What makes things even more complicated is the fact that services in tourism must be counted among the so-called experience and credence goods. Standards and norms to prove and verify the qualities of services before the transaction are hardly applicable. The attributes can be assessed only after the transaction has taken place. For a tourist there is, for example, no way to measure the quality of a tour guide before going on a trip with him. Moreover, the commitments to responsible and sustainable tourism (contributing to the local development, not harming the environment, etc.) cannot be proved at all. They are credence goods and tourists have to trust the chosen tour operators that their desire to travel in a responsible and sustainable way is realised.

As an ex-ante proof is not possible, it is imperative for a tourism player to give reliable information about the quality of service offered in order to facilitate consumer choices (see also Cooper/Wahab 2001: 325; Ponte/

Gibbon 2005: 2). In this context conventions about responsible tourism come to play an important role. In respect to the question of governance it is very important to know which tourism actor is able to meet the very special expectations of 'alternative tourists' and, moreover, to provide the necessary means to communicate and guarantee it to the consumer.

The description of activities and players already gives a hint of the powerful position of the tour operators and the resulting dependency structures. Given our definition of power arising from access to scarce resources, the resource that tour-operators control is that they are the only ones who have direct access to the final consumer market. For most of the domestic players, access to the final consumer market is only possible indirectly, by way of co-operation. Without a partner in the source market there will be no way to sell their services. Therefore, they need the tour operators' reputation to sell trips, and it is precisely the direct access to the final consumer which gives the tour operators such a powerful position and makes them the "gatekeepers to tourism" (Ioannides 1998). The question now is how tour operators manage to have access to the final consumer market and which barriers prevent others from simply entering their niche.

6. International tour operators – the lead firms in tourism chains

As an extensive media analysis of international tour operators in the UK, Germany and France with any great volume of business in North African countries showed, their strategy is to stress that their tours are an extraordinary vacation. By focussing on the remoteness and exotic nature of the target regions, they transform the trekking trips into adventures, which – unlike conventional vacations – not only entail the possibility of unfulfilled expectations, but quite explicitly also real risks (accidents, illness, natural disasters, etc.). Trekkers do not opt for a 'normal' relaxing holiday. Instead, they want to experience an intense holiday under sometimes very spartan and physically exhausting conditions. Trekking tours often lead to remote and barely accessible areas. Personal contact with the local population is often difficult because of different languages, cultures and customs. In case of emergencies medical facilities are often far away from the loca-

tion visited. The tourist thus depends on the knowledge and experience of the tour operator's staff. As a prior testing of the tour-operators' capabilities is not possible, it is essential for the tourist to have reliable evidence about the quality of the chosen operator (Cooper/Wahab 2001: 325). This makes it clear that trekking tours are not normal vacation trips that you can book at your neighbourhood travel agent or via the internet. Instead, they require professional know-how.

At the same time, the desired destinations are fragile ecological and social systems that must not be endangered by tourism. Trekkers attach a lot of importance to the responsibility for nature, wildlife and the local population (see Lessmeister 2008). The tour operators respond perfectly to the demands of alternative tourism when they claim that their tours do not have any negative ecological impact, respect nature and even support the local people. Here too, they give evidence for their claim. The most common way to do this is by supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work in the aforementioned fields. Every tour operator is involved in one way or another in some NGO's activities, most of them dealing with issues of nature and wildlife conservation (e.g. WWF, Mountain Wilderness) but also with development issues (e.g. Tourism for Development) or responsible tourism (e.g. Charte éthique du voyageur). This provides the trekker with the desired feeling of not just being an ordinary tourist but a responsible traveller. Following the rules of responsible tourism and supporting NGOs in their activities makes holidays in developing countries a pleasure without inducing a bad conscience.

This being so, booking a trekking tour becomes a matter of trust, and the desire to see one's personal attitude toward travel reflected in the range of products offered by a given operator becomes the principal criterion in the choice of a trip. In their catalogues tour operators consequently describe their travel philosophy at length and stress the training and/or experience of their employees. These are generally experienced trekkers who have made a profession of their passion. The tour operator presents himself as a travelling companion and mountain comrade who shares his most intimate knowledge with the customer. In this way, the operators of trekking tours target with precision the needs of a lifestyle group that seeks 'adventures' but wants at the same time to be able to travel with a good conscience (Opaschowski 2002). In this context trekking tourism is associated with environmentally

and socially compatible tourism, which can be optimally marketed within a company's philosophy. To put it in a nutshell, the self-conception of trekking tours can be paraphrased as a 'calculated adventure' that is closely connected with the attributes of an imaginative geography (Lessmeister/Scherle 2008).

A final aspect deals with insurance and consumer protection. Even though the tour-operators may perform to a high quality level, something may go wrong and clients might be unsatisfied and complain, especially where services are concerned which are not directly in the tour operators' hands (like flight services or accommodation). For this, tour operators need regulations and institutions to make it clear that there will be no (at least financial) risk for the tourist. Again, institutions and conventions play an important role. In this context we also have to mention the role of insurance. Not only do tour operators insure their clients when offering a full package tour, they also have to insure themselves against compensation claims and ensure that in the worst case they are financially able to compensate for unsatisfactory performance. The second point is membership in an organisation that guarantees consumer protection, like the International Air Transportation Association (IATA) or the ATOL protection scheme for flights and air holidays. These organisations survey and certify the performance of their members. Finally, a written contract with an authorised company itself represents institutionalised security, as it gives the client the possibility to go to court and take legal action.

7. Access barriers for tourism players in developing countries

7.1 The example of Moroccan firms in the international special tourism chain

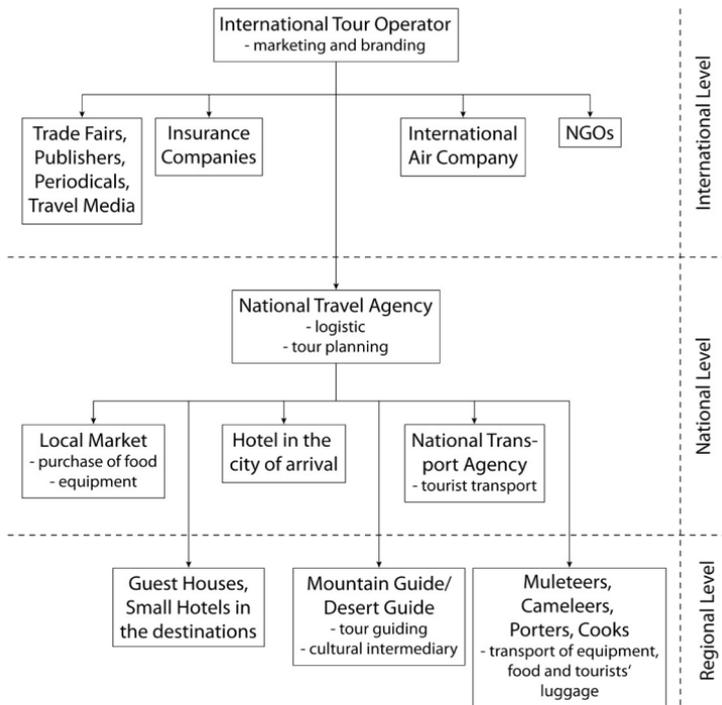
We have shown how international tour-operators manage to have access to the final market. But what prevents domestic actors from entering the sending market directly? A first barrier lies in the realm of activity, which comes from the division of work in the trekking value chain. Examining the Moroccan trekking industry, it can be seen that while the European tour-operators are present in almost every important destination around the world, Moroccan actors are limited to their own country or even only to

some particular regions in Morocco. As a consequence, the tour-operators work together with one incoming agency in each country, whereas the incoming agencies must seek to establish many relations with foreign partners. As each of these partners is contributing only a (sometimes very small) share to the total number of tours, it must be in the interest of each Moroccan agency to establish as many relations in as many markets as possible. So, even if a Moroccan agency could hypothetically manage to directly enter the consumer markets, it would have to be represented in several sending countries. This would require special knowledge about appropriate marketing techniques for every single market (Keegan 2001: 19). It would also take an immense effort to finance advertising and public relations and it would furthermore require an experienced and professional office staff for direct consumer contact. Whereas at present they have to deal with 'ready made' groups of tourists sent by their partners in Europe, they would in this case have to inform and advise potential clients. This in turn would require a physical location in close proximity to the clients (e.g. in the form of offices in the bigger cities) if they didn't want to rely on phone or internet only, which makes it even more difficult for firms to provide consumer trust. And, even when working via phone and internet only, well-trained staff is needed to handle inquiries in different languages (let alone the different consumer behaviour). Taking over the tour operators' activities would consequently entail an immense effort in financial, organizational and personal terms. And to retain a presence in the sending countries, there are also political and administrative obstacles to overcome, like residence or labour permits, visas and so on.

But even if Moroccan actors could cope with all of this and managed to enter the European market, they would still lack the institutions to gain consumer trust, as described before for the European tour-operators. Moroccan actors are only seldom involved in NGOs' activities and if they do so, this will not attract much attention by European trekkers, as long as there is no appropriate way to promote and market it. It seems to be contradictory, but precisely the good intentions of the alternative tourists and the work of NGOs, which claim to promote the visited regions, weaken the position of the local actors and consolidate the lead position of the European actors. Concerning consumer protection, no comparable organisations or agreements to those in Europe exist in Morocco. And of course the pros-

pect of defending one's right before a Moroccan court does not contribute very much to fostering consumer trust in Moroccan tours. Finally, Moroccans do not only have to establish relations to consumers, but also to all supplementary actors such as insurance companies, publishers, air companies etc. Especially in regard to air companies, they would again face structural disadvantages. Because tour-operators operate worldwide, their total number of flights exceeds those any Moroccan agency could offer. For this reason, tour operators can get better prices and as a consequence offer lower prices to their clients. Access to European markets would thus require entering the corresponding institutions and networks first.

Figure 1: The value chain for packaged trekking tours: mountain and desert trekking in Northern Africa



Source: own elaboration

7.2 The consequences of indirect market access

Ongoing loss of bargaining power

When trekking started on a noteworthy scale in the mid-1980s, only a handful of incoming agencies in Morocco existed to cover the whole market. The tour operators had to invest in their partners in order to ensure they would meet the required quality standards and to comply with generally accepted conventions and the particular philosophy of the firm. Sharing these conventions and building up reputation could be understood as a competitive asset for the first-comers in the trekking business. For the tour operators, who usually prefer to work with reliable partners, experience made during the cooperation has been, for a long time now, the only possibility for rating the associate. However, this situation is about to change. Since the mid-1990s a second generation of incoming agencies has been established, and the number of domestic travel agencies has increased from only four in the late 1980s to fifteen today, who hold their own in the trekking and adventure holiday business. These firms were mostly set up by former mountain guides, who had worked before for one of the established agencies. Even though they have only been in existence a few years, their owners could look back on years of experience and so know very well what European tour operators find important and, thus, how to stay in the game.

In the beginning the Moroccan players also held a better bargaining position against the tour operators as they had the knowledge about potential tour-programmes; they knew the terrain and the places to go and they could establish personal contacts to local actors or even formed part of some social networks (often through family ties) in the respective destination areas. Nevertheless, it turned out that they were not able to retain these advantages. Very soon their knowledge changed from an innovative asset into an open secret, especially because most of the tour packages in Morocco resemble each other and follow more or less the same itineraries.

The integration into a global value chain made many Moroccan actors quickly learn and adapt to the required international standards and rules, so that at present almost all of the noteworthy agencies operate on a similar level. The acquired knowledge enabled the Moroccan actors to reach international standards and meet the tourists' expectations. However, none of

them is able to use this knowledge as a special asset to increase competitive advantage. Whereas in the production sector organisational learning is commonly accepted as a precondition for innovation and ongoing upgrading, it seems as if in tourism these learning processes have led to the reverse situation. In a limited market the domestic players cannot escape into different activities because of existing entry barriers to the international tour operators' activities; they are geographically and functionally bound to destinations and activities within their country. Here, instead, competition has increased tremendously because of the comparatively large number of experienced agencies, all operating more or less on the same quality level, which minimises the risk of high transaction costs for tour operators intending to change their associate partners in Morocco. This weakens the position of the Moroccan agencies and we can observe a growing number of tour-operators breaking off their former co-operation or using the possibility to do so for cutting their prices. Even though the Moroccan mountains have become more and more attractive and form an integral part of many of the leading European trekking companies' tour packages today, this general upgrading on the regional scale has led to the opposite effect on the level of individual companies.

The same is true for the mountain guides and other local actors. Like the incoming agencies, they have to cope with the problem that there are simply too many of them competing for work. Each year about 40 new guides finish their courses in the official training-centre in Tabant and try to work in the trekking business. At present about 450 guides compete for trekking tours; not included is the unknown number of non-official guides. And very few of them manage to find employment at a travel agency, as the number of individual tourists in the Atlas Mountains demands only a small proportion (see Lessmeister 2008). All in all we can note an oversupply of labour which leads to a situation of fierce competition and increases the pressure to come down in price and work for less than the officially fixed wage. So again, the situation of the Moroccan guides shows that improvement through skills and knowledge is only useful when there is at the same time the possibility to put up efficient barriers to prevent others adopting these skills and entering the business.

Increasing vulnerability in changing circumstances

Asymmetric dependencies also come to play an important role in changing economic circumstances. Not only is the competition among the Moroccan actors getting increasingly fiercer, but the competition among the European tour operators is getting harder as well. In recent years a change in the consumer behaviour of tourists in Morocco can be noted. Roughly speaking, the general trend goes towards shorter and cheaper holiday trips. Consequently, many tour operators have to reduce the final prices for their tour offers to stay competitive. However, their position as the most powerful actor in the chain still allows them to keep a fixed share of the final price. In consequence, if money has to be saved in the overall calculation, financial cuts are more likely to happen in the sectors of the Moroccan actors, which results in sinking shares for them. In fact, the final prices for trekking tours in Morocco have generally fallen in recent years and reduced shares were declared (to different extents) by all of the interviewed travel agencies (Lessmeister 2008).

Finally, external shocks also affect Moroccan actors more than the international operators. As a consequence of several terrorist acts carried out by Islamic fundamentalists in North Africa (Djerba 2002, Casablanca 2003, Sharm el Scheikh 2005), as well as during the second Gulf War, Moroccan mountain tourism had to face a series of temporary but nevertheless severe slow-downs with regard to the number of tourist arrivals. However, the consequences for the international tour operators were different from those for the Moroccan players. Although they noticed a lower demand for Islamic countries (according to the tour operators interviewed after the attack in Casablanca in 2003, many of their bookings in Morocco went down, sometimes to below 50% of the previous year's value) most of them could react more flexibly than their Moroccan partners. Typically, they operate worldwide in many countries and therefore they were able to concentrate on other destinations. Many tour operators experienced a slow-down for destinations in Islamic countries while at the same time the number of bookings for other destinations (e.g. in Latin America) increased by about the same extent.

8. Conclusion

The analysis of special tourism chains reveals important asymmetries between the players involved. Tourism chains are driven by single lead firms – the international tour operators. This is not an unexpected finding. But it is also clearly obvious that focusing solely on the issue of governance in value chains does not capture the total complexity of business relations in international tourism. Although governance, coordination and power are closely interdependent terms, we suggest keeping these three aspects separate. In addition to the analyses of the overall governance, a sophisticated conceptualisation of power is needed for a better understanding of asymmetric dependencies along the entire value chains.

Conceptualising power as access to resources, we found that the most important resource in tourism is access to consumer markets and reputation in order to build up consumer trust. In this context, conventions play an important role because they facilitate consumer choices and by that, consolidate the powerful position of the tour operators, which are able to combine their offers with environmentally and socially compatible tourism. Value chain studies generally underline the fact that, for actors in developing countries, access to globally linked activities represents a *sine qua non* to enter global markets and to improve their situation by acquiring experience and knowledge about global standards and procedures which then allows them to upgrade their range of activities (Gereffi/Memodovic 2003; Humphrey 2003). However, the roles of common conventions as well as learning processes in international tourism, in particular, have to be reflected upon critically as long as there is no way to keep the acquired knowledge as a scarce resource.

- 1) The findings in this paper are based on interviews with 15 travel agencies in Morocco and 20 tour-operators in France, the UK and Germany which offer trekking tours in North African countries. In addition, an extensive media analysis of all operators in the UK, Germany and France with any significant volume of business in these countries was conducted in the period 2003 to 2008.

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Abstracts

In recent years, nature- and activity-based forms of tourism have gained increasing importance. This is of great significance for many developing countries, as the scenery for this tourism is often found in peripheral regions. Yet, despite the importance of the tourist industry, not much is known about the way firms cooperate in special tourism value chains. Building upon several value chain concepts, we argue that an elaborated conceptualisation of power and power resources as well as the role of quality conventions merit deeper recognition. Concentrating on these two aspects, we then have a closer look at the Moroccan trekking tourism that serves as an example to reveal asymmetric dependencies and the importance of reputation as the central resource for power.

In den letzten Jahren haben naturnahe und erlebnisorientierte Tourismusformen zunehmend an Bedeutung gewonnen. Dies ist für viele Entwicklungsländer von erheblicher Relevanz, da für diese Formen des Tourismus

der räumliche Bezugsrahmen zumeist in peripheren Regionen liegt. Doch trotz der Bedeutung der Tourismusindustrie ist noch wenig darüber bekannt, wie einzelne Unternehmen in spezialtouristischen Wertschöpfungsketten zusammenarbeiten. Auf der Grundlage verschiedener *Value Chain*-Konzepte plädiert der Autor dafür, sowohl differenzierte Konzepte von Macht und Machtressourcen als auch die Rolle von Qualitätskonventionen stärker zu berücksichtigen. Diese beiden Aspekte werden anhand des marokkanischen Gebirgstourismus genauer behandelt, um asymmetrische Beziehungsstrukturen und die Bedeutung von Reputation als entscheidende Macht-Ressource aufzuzeigen.

Ralph Lessmeister

Lehrstuhl für Stadtgeographie und Geographie des ländlichen Raumes

Universität Bayreuth

Universitätsstraße 30

D-95440 Bayreuth

ralph.lessmeister@uni-bayreuth.de