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February 25, 2012

A Matter of Convergence: Cross-Promoting Sustainable Tourism and Renewable Energy

The news is just in time for this year's International Tourism Exchange (ITB) in Berlin: The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have decided to launch World Tourism Day 2012 (Sep. 27) celebrations under the Theme "Tourism and Sustainable Energy; Powering Sustainable Development", following the proclamation of the current year as the 'UN Year of Sustainable Energy for All'.

This may be interpreted as a very promising sign toward a closer collaboration of Travel & Tourism and Renewable Energy, to start with cross-promoting Renewable Energy as the 'DNA' of Sustainable Tourism. After all, both Travel & Tourism and Renewable Energy, claiming to be outstanding peace industries, show a large scale of complementary properties.

Natural disasters have become a constant challenge to modern civilization. However, is it all about CO2 and green house gas emissions? People's health is at stake, when smog is in the air. Diminishing rain forests give way to desertification, fossil energy calamities have become rampant, and nuclear energy has lost its ambiguous innocence since Chernobyl and Fukushima, at the latest. If we add to that an almost pandemic spread of garbage, we will have a threatened civilization, whose dangerous energy sources are running short and whose lifestyle should do what our climate indicates: change.

The human impact on environment and climate has ceased to be regarded as negligible, and Travel & Tourism has its responsibility – now and even more in future. With millions of more travellers predicted from emerging powerhouses like China and India, we have only a vague idea of Travel & Tourism, its energy needs and socio-ecological effects in times to come.

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Everybody expects – and will keep expecting – that hotel heating, cooling, or illumination are constantly available. But nobody likes the sound of diesel-propelled power engines in holiday lodges. And hardly anybody would frown at being offered electric mobility from airport to hotel, or electric shuttle services at trade fairs and exhibitions.

In many developing countries, access to both electrical power and electronic communication is insufficient or non-existent. Wood and charcoal are often the only energy sources in rural areas. People are out of reach of any existing power-grid. Solar Energy devices and mobile phones provide a solution.

Sometimes visions do come true, if people in charge only want it. It's a matter of vision, entrepreneurial capability and political will. The crucial point is leadership. Looking at the present state of affairs, we'd better remember the Zambian proverb: "A herd of sheep lead by a lioness can defeat a herd of lions lead by a sheep." In terms of energy, there is a real option to energy monopoly or war for energy sources: It's about turning the magic of 'tapping the sun' into reality: It is the vision that "everyone can be an unlimited clean energy producer".

It is true that the world's largest industry – Travel & Tourism – revolves around the smallest destination, that means: Tourism happens locally. The same holds true for Renewable Energy – due to its very nature of unlimited 'power' and its capacity to produce clean energy locally, exactly where it is used.

Energy means power, and Tourism is a symbol of freedom. These are higher values added to mere functional attributes like providing 'electric power' and offering 'transport, accommodation and recreation'. It is up to us to extrapolate Renewable Energy and Sustainable Tourism to a congenial 'lifestyle', keeping in a sound balance social development, economic progress and ecological sustainability.

As to the word 'extrapolate': We usually try to extrapolate past experiences to projections of the future. The results are determined by lag indicators. These are outcomes of actions previously taken. However, in order reach a healthy growth, we also need new performance drivers – new ideas, options, links, which may turn out complementary to one another: Mapping one's process and identifying key-bottlenecks will provide us with lead indicators. Focusing on key-bottlenecks, lead indicators aim at improving one's performance and maximizing customers' benefits through innovation. This is an anthropological rather than a mere numerical approach to 'growth' – sometimes with a little synergetic help from converging effects.

Great economic changes have occurred when new energy regimes converge with new communication regimes. Jeremy Rifkin, who defends this thesis, refers to the 1990s: Internet and wireless communication technologies increased industrial productivity and created new opportunities through the industrial convergence with Renewable Energy. The subsequent 'power-to-the-people' approach contributed to the growing demand for decentralized solutions.

Renewable Energy is – decentralized, ecological, and autonomous. Renewable Energy is limitless. There is no need to wage war for it: Promoting Renewable Energy means promoting peace. Travel & Tourism positions itself as a paramount peace industry. Both Tourism and Renewable Energy share the same ideal; both industries supplement and complement each other – convergence is what responsible stakeholders will have to deal with strategically.

To quote Henry Mintzberg in his book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*: "A strategy of innovation is contained not in 'plans', but in the pattern of commitments, decisions, approaches, and persistent behaviours that facilitate doing new things ..."¹)

The big question is: Who provides this pattern?

¹ Jelinek/Schoonhoven, quote in Mintzberg: "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning".

In view of his 19th century explorations in South America and Russia, world citizen Alexander von Humboldt serves as a shiny example of doing new things: Having dedicated his life to cross-disciplinary scientific research, he ignored any distinction between natural science and humanities. He branded his book "Kosmos" as a composition of reason and emotion, and evoked the natural pattern as a system of "best management practice". For Antoni Gaudí, the genius who built Barcelona's 'Familia Sagrada' cathedral, nature is "the book from which everything descends". Nature – is it good enough as Man's 'best practice'?

Some might say: "Wait a minute! Would that not mean struggling hard, competing fiercely to be among the fittest to ensure survival? Is it not the 'Darwinist pattern' that has provided Man a template to make outright greed wield over downright need?"

Less survival nature itself has no purpose, no goal, nor will. Attaining biological maturity, the 'natural system' follows natural fits which complement and supplement one another. Being 'organic' rather than organizational, the natural system points to the deficiencies of Man's 'cocooning' tendencies, which, rather than acting in a more holistic way, generally follow sharply defined functions and strongly centralized hierarchical structures.

Looking at the rich biodiversity which we ourselves are a part of, however, we may conclude that natural organism is far more apt than man-made organization, to manage complexity and even to 'economize by creating abundance'. In all its varied abundance, nature stands for self-sufficiency, complementary impact, ecological economy and – decentralization. Nothing to say that recent scientific research has even challenged a hitherto allegedly sacrosanct Darwinist pattern of nature ²).

As a matter of fact, nature has developed a systemic way of complementary properties between species, and an instinct that includes cooperative elements and may remind of human 'solidarity'. Renewable Energy and Sustainable Tourism are nothing less than natural allies: 'El sol' and 'solar' may also stand for 'sol-idarity'!

Why not adapt the natural pattern to cross-cooperation amongst humans? And why not start at the very beginning of everything, with energy? "Energy should be front and center", says Lee Iacocca³, referring to fuels, and the physicist Werner Heisenberg adds: "Energy is the basic substance of life."

We need responsible stakeholders who understand that everywhere in the world millions of power stations could stand, different in size, technology and capacity, providing with Renewable Energy everything from private houses to entire cities. Energy, renewable and decentralised, is predestined to become the first principle – the 'DNA' – of Sustainable Tourism. Indeed, Renewable Energy is not only 'natural', and sustainable, it is inherently 'ethical'.

Becoming ethical leads back to the roots. That means seeking the original, gaining authenticity, reconciling 'indigenous wisdom' and innovation urge; it means identifying vintage-trends of consistency and sustainability within the contemporary framework of hustle and bustle.

This makes Travel & Tourism a multitasking interface of communication links, rather than a mere industry for leisure and business services. Travel & Tourism is indisputably an important lifestyle trendsetter. Yet Travel & Tourism needs cross-sector pioneers to set shiny higher-purpose benchmarks. Travel & Tourism could be the very 'trailblazer' for the Authentic, the Beautiful, the Good.

Cross-promoting Sustainable Tourism and Renewable Energy would pave the way for win-win solutions so far unheard of: Let's just imagine PATA's concept of 'Total Tourism' ⁴), to be linked with

² Didier Raoult, quote in LePoint.fr (12.12.2011), www.lepoint.fr/grands-entretiens/et-si-darwin-s-etait-trompe...

³ : Lee Iacocca, "Where have all the leaders gone?" (2007).

⁴) The Total Tourism concept benefits from covering the complementary benefits of inbound, domestic and outbound tourism – introduced by the Pacific Asia Travel Association PATA years ago

Renewable Energy businesses. Could such a move not be instrumental to enhancing cross-industry investment and to mutually boosting exports related to both Renewable Energy and Tourism?

Consciousness of sustainability requires commitment to solidarity, including trust, dignity, responsibility. Sustainable Tourism is Responsible Tourism and should be partnered with likeminded allies. Renewable Energy and Sustainable Tourism are complementary to each other. Renewable Energy is the only existing sustainable energy; an optional resource provided by a 'likeminded' Creator; 'likeminded' in originating the Authentic, the Beautiful, the Good. It is time to remember that we ourselves – as professionals and co-creators – are the necessary link to creating this visionary benchmark.

Let's indulge in 'tapping the sun': The sun is a symbol of freedom, happiness, wealth, success, beauty, restart or unification. The sun is the 'face of energy', the symbol of an emerging Solar Age. We need to 'energize' our Tourism concepts with a strong, new and cohesive approach – the 'solar' approach. Let's make the sun our inexhaustible source of Renewable Energy and clean global Travel & Tourism!

Rather than a mere industry for leisure and business services, Travel & Tourism is a tool of both brain and hands – an interface of communication and cooperation, a multitasking 'cluster' to shape a country's global identity and image – far beyond the sphere of Tourism.

Tourism – an 'agent of the heart'? Nothing seems more appropriate than quoting the silent film 'Metropolis': "Between brain and hands is the heart as the mediator." Positioning Renewable Energy as the perfect energizer and key to sustainability of destinations and Tourism operations, Travel & Tourism could become the emotional and promotional bandwagon for Renewable Energy. A successful bandwagon, in course of time, is likely to become nothing less than a veritable 'brand'. Branding 'Sustainable Tourism & Renewable Energy' – what a scintillating idea!

An indispensable ingredient to wonderful holidays, the sun has become the 'face of Tourism' on catalogues and advertisements. Providing the basic impulse for any kind of movement and life, the sun is the 'face of energy', a symbol of freedom, happiness, wealth, success, beauty, restart or unification. Why not catch the spirit, making The Sun, shown in so many national flags and coats of arms, the new symbol of an emerging Solar Age, the 'brand' of Renewable Energy and clean, sustainable global Travel & Tourism'?

After all, the visionary message 'Peace Through Responsible Tourism and Renewable Energy' will need confidence and trust, but also vigilance, both tolerance and firm principles, as well as openness including flexibility and perseverance. It will take time for unavoidable detours. It's like following a spiral: We will see the goal at each whorl, and we want to reach it straight ahead, but the direction of the spiral keeps changing.

Renewable Energy will make even Travel & Tourism – renewable. It will provide stakeholders with a better perception, a clearer perspective and a stronger impetus. The outcome will be a new, converging architecture of two leading peace industries. Cross-promoting Sustainable Tourism and Renewable Energy as an awesomely exciting 'joint venture' may create the global brand of a new lifestyle; a lifestyle to keep the world's beauty and people's joy in a healthy balance. If attacked wholeheartedly, the 2012 'UN Year of Sustainable Energy for All' may be a perfect timing for take-off.