

**Press Release International Symposium on Sustainability in Alpine Tourism**

Chur, January 23rd 2015

The warmest year on records – time to act

2014 has hit another sad climate record – with 0.68°C above the longtime average, it is the new warmest year on record worldwide, according to just published figures of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This 2014/15 winter had a very warm and dry start, and many snow sport destinations in the Alps and North America experienced an unusual late start of the season, with major economic losses around Christmas, for many the busiest time of the year. In Switzerland, the public discussion displayed in the media (ZEIT 01/2015) discussed that alpine tourism is not just facing another crisis, but a substantial failure of its economic system. New business models that are more sustainable need to be developed and implemented, and this Symposium in Chur has been one chance to address these needs.

The First International Symposium on Measuring, Labeling and Communicating Sustainability in Alpine Tourism took place from January 15 to 17 in Chur, Switzerland. About 50 regional and international experts from all tourism supply chain sectors – such as hotels, cableways, destination managers, tour operators – but also politicians, NGOs, consultants and scientists, and of course representatives of existing labels met at the University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur to engage in an in-depth discourse on how to measure, label and communicate sustainability in alpine tourism. The two days of this Symposium offered multiple speed talk sessions, open discussion rounds, workshops and networking breaks, and insights into best practices in sustainability. Presentations and discussions centered on technical details of measuring tools and labels, around communication pathways, customer acceptance and common goals to achieve.

Pre-symposium survey results – more collaboration needed

At the Symposium, a recent survey with tourism professionals invited to the Symposium topic was presented. It showed that 96% of the 78 participants were asking for better collaboration and participation, for better communication, for more concrete measurement tools and for better political support in order to enhance sustainability of Alpine tourism. About 50% have a sustainability strategy implemented in their organization. More than 30% measure the ecological impact; about 25% measure the social impact, while more than 90% communicate their ecological and social impact to the public. Audits (e.g. ISO 14001 or EMAS) are the most commonly used tools, followed by Carbon Footprinting.

Opening address by University director Jürg Kessler

In his opening address, HTW Chur Rector Jürg Kessler explained the sustainability approach of his University: „We are responsible that future generations have enough resources, that they are thankful for our decisions. We have to work not for short-term profit but for a long-term successful business, that brings pride in future generations. Let us be architects for a better world!”

French Mayor Nicolas Evrard asks for transparent communication of the imperfect

The introduction speech was held by Nicolas Evrard, Mayor of Servoz in the Valley of Chamonix, France, and Director of the European Association of Mayors in Mountain Communities. Mr Evrard spoke about sustainability and transparency: “Our CO₂ measures are not so good. But the crucial thing is to be transparent. It is not possible to live in the mountains without adaptation: to climate change, to the mountains, to all challenges, to our competition. We cannot be perfect, but we have to try to be and never stop trying. Our strategy is therefore to communicate transparently with the “Flocon Vert label for ex” and emphasize our adaptation efforts. It is important to communicate *even though* we are not perfect: to communicate that we are trying. You don't have to be perfect; you have to start with small steps!”

Chamonix valley and Chur Mayors meet to discuss on sustainability in tourism

Mr Evrard subsequently met with the president of the town of Chur, Urs Marti, who expressed his political support for sustainability in Alpine tourism.

Comparing the existing 100-150 labels is almost impossible

Dr. Tobias Luthe, Professor for Sustainability Science and Director of Tourism Research at the HTW Chur, presented an overview of the 100-150 existing labels for sustainability in tourism, and the about 15 that are directly focusing on Alpine tourism. A direct comparison of these tools is very difficult, due to the differences in the underlying number of about 150 indicators, their measurement by different parameters and unequal system boundaries. Thus, a more functional and qualitative comparison was presented.

75% of greenhouse gas emissions in Alpine tourism origin from transportation

About 75% of the greenhouse gas emissions in Alpine tourism originate from transportation to, from and within the destination; about 20% from buildings such as hotels and restaurants, and about 5% from the ski area, the lift and grooming operations, and snow making. Thus, ski lift operations, the accommodation sector and transportation need to be included in the assessment and management of sustainability, and collaboration is of utmost importance.

A common understanding of sustainability focuses on ecosystems and on participation

Luthe presented a SMTA understanding of sustainability as the balance of the triple bottom line, of ecological, economic and social aspects. However, ecosystems and their services are the fundament of any human activity, and cultural differences need to be better taken into account when attempting to use the newest technology to help finding that balance. Overall,

the most important sphere of sustainability is participation, from the public discourse to individual action to political support.

Sustainability directors of Vail and Aspen resorts, Colorado, USA

Matthew Hamilton, Director of Sustainability at Aspen resorts, Colorado, and Luke Cartin, Environmental Manager at Vail resorts, Colorado, presented their best practices to manage their resorts more sustainable – both companies account for 9.1 million skier days. He explained how they partner with American organizations such as POW (Protect Our Winters) in order to reach out to customers and the broader public and support transparency and good practice.

A green label leads to 20% better ratings and bookings on TripAdvisor

Tom Breckwoldt, Country Manager Germany, Austria and Switzerland of Trip Advisor, explained their Green Leader Program, with 8000 properties the largest green hotel program with over 40'000 green reviews. In the US, those hotels rated high in the Green Leader Program, achieved a 20% higher rating than hotels without this label. This proves that customers care about sustainability and that a label may be a competitive advantage for your business.

Existing sustainability labels are ready to collaborate more

Anne Dorte Carlson from Innovation Norway, Regina Preslmair from the Austrian Ecolabel, Kathrin Spiller from the leading Swiss sustainability label Ibex Fairstay, Laurent Burget from the French NGO Mountain Riders publishing the Eco Guide to ski resorts and developing the “Flocon Vert” label, Fiona Humphries from the UK based Travelife label, Alexandra Jiricka from the EMAS Environmental Auditing scheme, and Karmen Mentil from Alpine Pearls, a label focusing on mobility and transportation, presented their work and expressed their willingness to support better communication between their organizations and a mainstreaming of their work to wider applicable.

Visionary interview with Reto Gurtner from Laax on radically changing business models

Highlights of this Symposium were two field trips, one evening to the destination Flims Laax and one on skis to the destinations of Arosa and Lenzerheide. In Flims Laax, the Symposium partner Weisse Arena Group (WAG) provided insights into its Green Style concept, a sustainability program that is state of the art in Alpine destinations. Reto Gurtner, CEO and visionary leader, showcased for example their hydroelectricity heating system of the Rocks Resort, and his goal to become energy self-sufficient and zero emissions resort. Freestyle creativity has always been his main and most successful approach to achieve solutions for sustainability.

Gurtner was interviewed by Ross Harding from the Australian based company Finding Infinity: „Kids don't care about labels. We have to prove it *here*.”

“You don't need to spend a fortune on marketing; it's very easy and cheap with social media. But *first* you need a good, perfect product. This is the fundamental change. You better watch out and try to have the perfect product. And this is the challenge that we entrepreneurs have

in the future. „Globalization and interconnectedness change the traditional business models radically. I prefer going two steps ahead instead of waiting and seeing what’s happening.“

Swiss top freestyle snowboarder Nicolas Müller on sustainability

Present at this interview and dinner evening on top of the mountain was as well the Swiss Snowboard Freestyler Nicolas Müller who gave insights into his engagement in sustainability and his function as a young sports ambassador, for example by educating young kids or by cleaning his house with micro organisms to save on detergents.

Founding the SMTA – a new global alliance for sustainability in Alpine tourism

At this Symposium, the new Sustainable Mountain Tourism Alliance (SMTA) was founded, a new membership driven organization with the main objectives to connect existing people, groups and organizations that have been engaged in sustainability in alpine tourism to a broader network, and to work towards a common standard of how to measure, label and communicate sustainability. The initial board members of the SMTA are Steward Sheppard, Laurent Burget, Klaas van Hoek, Aukje van Gerven and Tobias Luthe. The 2nd SMTA Symposium will be held in January 2016, either in Switzerland or in France.

Common SMTA goals and objectives identified

The workshops and discussions of the Symposium delivered a set of common goals and objectives the majority of experts agreed on:

- Share best practices of sustainability in Alpine tourism
- Improve communication via common platforms and awareness raising
- Tackle the important transportation sector emission issue
- Engage clients, inhabitants, communities more
- Make sustainability fun
- Create & implement a more ecological alpine tourism product
- Focus on more than the environmental factors
- Better understand the customers’ expectations of labels

The detailed Symposium results will be published in a white paper of the HTW Chur within the coming weeks. More information on this Symposium - the presentations and pictures - and about the SMTA can be found online: www.sustainablemountaintourism.org

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University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur

The University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur with approximately 1600 students is a regionally positioned university with a national and international standing. The university offers Bachelor and Master degree courses as well as further education in the disciplines «Civil Engineering/Architecture», «Information Science», «Management», «Multimedia Production», «Technology», and «Tourism». The HTW Chur conducts applied research and development, provides consultancy as well as services in all disciplines. The whole university is ISO 9001:2008 certified. Since the year 2000 the HTW Chur is a member of the University of Applied Sciences of Eastern Switzerland (FHO). As the first Swiss public university, the HTW Chur joined the United Nations initiative Principles for Responsible Management Education in 2009. However, the history of the university began already in 1963 with the founding of the Technical School Chur (night classes).