

## "On the MIC with Petra Hedorfer" – Episode 7 SDGs

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**Intro:** "On the MIC with Petra Hedorfer" – the podcast of the German National Tourist Board's with experts from all over the world.

**Schaubrenner:** Hello and welcome to "On the MIC with Petra Hedorfer," the German National Tourist Board podcast. In this series, you, Petra Hedorfer, as CEO of the GNTB, will again talk to international experts. And as host, I, Thorsten Schaubrenner, am again supporting you. Thank you, Petra, for joining us again today for a new podcast episode.

**Hedorfer:** Yes, my friend Thorsten, I'm also pleased to hear from you and, above all, to welcome our guest.

**Schaubrenner:** That's right, we'll get to that in a moment. Today we're talking about sustainable tourism. This is an essential topic against climate change and biodiversity loss. We want to explain: What has to happen so that the so-called Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs in short, can be implemented in a very concrete way, in other words, so that the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved? And we will discuss: What about the projects implemented so far in the context of the Global Sustainability Goals? And - as you mentioned - we again have an expert guest today. I want to welcome Dr. Dirk Glaeßer, who is joining us from Madrid. He has been with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for over 20 years and has been the Director of the Sustainable Development in Tourism Program for almost ten years. So I would say a true expert on this panel. Hello Mr. Glaeßer.

**Glaeßer:** Hello from Madrid.

**Hedorfer:** Hello Dirk, I would also like to say "welcome" to Dirk Gläeßer. Dirk and I have known each other for almost two decades, Dirk. And I am glad that we are talking about sustainability today. It's a topic that has connected us for a long time.

**Schaubrenner:** Wonderful. Petra, the term "sustainable tourism" is not new. It's also been around since the early 1990s as a tourism concept. Since then, there have been repeated global initiatives and recommendations for action to promote sustainable tourism development. And central to this is the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, as we have just heard, the so-called Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs for short. They came into force in 2016, but not everyone is familiar with them in detail. Petra, can you introduce us to the topic and explain: Where does Germany stand?

**Hedorfer:** Yeah, Thorsten, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, if my memory serves me right. And at the heart of this action plan are the 17 global SDGs you have already cited. There are many subgoals, 169 in total. You can think of them as a kind of contract for the future that provides a comprehensive framework for how a sustainable global society can be realized and developed regarding climate protection and the tasks of ensuring that we can continue to live together safely on this beautiful planet in the future. The action goals apply to a total of, Dirk, you can correct me; I think 193 countries. And what's new in the agenda is that it's not just developed countries but also developing countries participating. And the implementation of global sustainability goals always has economic, environmental, and social measures which are supposed to come into play. It's about fighting poverty for more social justice. Of course, it's about using our resources responsibly and promoting prosperity for all. For Germany, the path to achieving the SDGs is described in the German Sustainability Strategy, which I believe the German government adopted two legislative terms ago. And to also quantitatively index the achievement of the goals, there is an index. In other words, to measure based on evidence how these theoretical variables can now be measured with concrete indicators in the so-called SDG Index. And Germany ranks

sixth in this index. So we have achieved quite a bit that many entrepreneurs have already succeeded in many decades of legislative and social responsibility. Therefore, the index shows us well ranked. Various indices could be cited here, but perhaps to start with: Yes, Germany has positioned itself here.

**Schaubrenner:** Good opportunity to include our guest. Dirk Glaeßer, you have been observing at the United Nations World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, for more than 20 years: What kind of tourism policies are governments worldwide actually pursuing? Where do they stand? Where do they want to go? Where are they measuring it? Your organization sits at the table at the world climate summits. Tell us from your perspective: What are the benefits of such SDGs? And who is already at the forefront of your implementation?

**Glaeßer:** That's a great question. It is. It introduces the topic beautifully. And also, what Petra explained about the SDGs now gives us the first real perspective of where we are now. And looking back now, in particular at the national tourism policies, which are very often published as documents where governments clarify their objectives their goals, we can see that sustainability has become more mainstream step by step, as we could see in the last global survey that we had done: Sustainability is present as an objective in all the national tourism policies that we studied. That would typically give us enormous satisfaction. But what we then looked at next were the tools that are available to implement those policy goals. And that's where we found a big disconnect between these strategic goals of "sustainability matters" and actual implementation. So the available instruments led us to the conclusion in the analysis that there is an enormous implementation gap at the global level, always within the tourism sector, to implement these goals. And we were also able to determine was to measure them. And now, in that context, what Petra just said, the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs: The MDGs were originally the goals that were formulated for developing countries. And the SDGs are now global, on the one hand, for countries related framework, but on the other - and this is the fascinating thing about what happened there - they are embraced, implemented by everybody, by the private sector, by destinations. They are currently perceived as goals that are driving our global agenda. What do all these goals have in

common? First, as Petra just said, they frame sustainability and development holistically. They frame it across all dimensions of sustainability. But they also have a tremendous amount of goal setting and measurement, need to measure baseline and then progress, reflected in these goals. The other thing that was fascinating for us when we were negotiating those at the time, those targets, was how the tourism sector is reflected in them. And we have a direct reference in three SDGs, that is, 8, 12, and 14. And there, to talk a little bit out of the sewing box, in the beginning, it was essentially about what footprint the tourism sector would produce. And to what extent do we have to ensure that this footprint is not too harmful? That's how the discussion initially started. In SDG 12, tourism was dealt with and considered, but there in particular as a sector that makes very heavy use of resources and does not yet show sufficient responsibility to include them in its inventory.

**Schaubrenner:** Very, very exciting, Mr. Glaeßer. Thank you very much. The Agent of Change that's a great template. Please, Petra, on the topic that we always like to hear a "but" when it comes to sustainability. Against the backdrop of these diverse economic challenges and the resource-related problems we currently face - keywords: staff shortages, energy costs - the question can arise: What priority can business enterprises give to these SDG goals? Do they even have the capacity for it? How do you see it?

**Hedorfer:** I think you are addressing an important issue here. Let me put it this way: I don't know any business in tourism that doesn't do its utmost daily due to the Corona crisis, energy concerns, and the shortage of skilled workers. However, these SDGs are a framework for an economic sector that must build on the future. Tourism not sensitive to protecting the environment is depriving itself of its livelihood. And may I say: the industry is aware of this. And in Germany: all market participants are committed to this task. But without employment and securing prosperity - and Dirk mentioned SDG 8 - we have a contra-dictum here. So one conditions the other. Of course, this is about defined core issues, climate neutrality and environmental protection, digitalization, and competitive tourism.

On the other hand, tourism provides us with a peace industry and environmental protection. It also helps preserve rural areas and ensure employment, thus, the prosperity and development of civil society and the population. You can't discuss it singularly; it must always be viewed holistically. And that is why we are committed to sustainable, booming quality tourism, which of course, conserves resources, but at the same time, should also generate economic effects for Germany as a business location.

**Schaubrenner:** I have already had a preliminary discussion with Dirk Glaeßer. And he told me that the GNTB is way ahead of the game. It does many things right that other countries don't do. Dirk Glaeßer, could you update us on that? What is already on track in Germany, and what impresses you here about the industry, including the work of the GNTB, in connection with these SDGs?

**Glaeßer:** So, of course, I'm a bit biased. As you can hear, I am German. On the other hand, that's also a fair statement that you just quoted. Many German cities are innovative, have worked on sustainability for many years, and are doing exciting pilot projects. At the time, we investigated this directly as UNWTO in Germany. At the time, we were interested in these sustainability initiatives, which are very often cited at an international level: What characteristics did they have that made them so successful? Not only as a project but in which area they had a catalytic effect afterward, i.e., they radiated to others and produced changes beyond this actual project. That was very, very interesting for us. We learned quite a bit about what core properties have to come together. The interest in detail, the resilience of those involved in this project and are actually on the front line constantly having new experiences and dealing with resistance. Because not all of this is easy, and you have to be able to present it well in terms of arguments. And you also have to be convinced of it and also admit mistakes. We were able to observe this strength very strongly there. And at the same time, of course, you also have to talk about it. And the GNTB has a significant role to play here. Presenting and marketing this performance in a relevant way is one of the main tasks, as we perceive the GNTB. But this is not just about traditional marketing but also about an evolution of what you want to achieve through tourism. Nowadays, tourism is no longer globally perceived as an economic sector. However, it is a significant financial

sector, but also a sector that leads to the desired encounter in the destinations. So that the traveler welcomes the tourist there and no longer sees the purely economic activity here but also associates a particular pride with the fact that it comes to these encounters, that one is interested in his region, that one is interested in the products of this region. And that is what we have now been able to observe, which the GNTB picks up in an incredibly authentic way and reflects outwardly. And not just in terms of communication. Because here it is essential, Mr. Schaubrenner, that we not only talk about contact but also must be lived authentically. And this transformation, that you then in the daily practice with the actors in other countries, when you describe a destination, when you market a destination ... Nowadays you are examined very closely about whether you are authentic, whether you implement what you preach there.

**Schaubrenner:** Quite clear. Dear Petra, you are probably hovering a few meters above the ground right now in the face of these compliments.

**Hedorfer:** Dirk, first of all, thank you very much. You are a role model for us. And also, because of the many consultations and groundbreaking recommendations, we are going down this path with many players in Germany and this continent. On the one hand, we have a mandate from the German government to ensure brand communication and awareness. And we have spoken about brand values. We have a high index factor regarding sustainability: environmental protection, water quality, et cetera. We are a country with accessibility in the legislation. Tourism can convey all of this in its brand communication. Let me put it this way: I think this is a three-pillar strategy in which we act sustainably. One is that we also want to be a role model for a company with 180 employees and all the members affiliated with our organization. We speak for customers that we have a 360-degree view that we have been Green Globe certified since 2011. And I think this knowledge transfer, business intelligence, and development of evidence-based strategies are significant.

Today, we no longer talk about being perceived only as an industrial country and a business destination. When people talk about Germany, we are now a real vacation destination where sustainability can play an important role. In our industry panel, to

give the industry a say, from which I may quote - for the quarter, very fresh figures, international industry partners. The mentions were always regarding sustainability and Germany as a travel destination; 60% said, yes, that's how we see Germany, there is credibility, and there are certified offers. Now 80% of these international industry representatives say that Germany has positioned itself as a brand with climate protection, environmental protection, and sustainability. From the last customer survey that IPK conducted for us, also here in October 2022: 40% of those surveyed who are interested in traveling abroad and want to travel in the coming year say they are looking for a broader range of offers. They still wish for more concrete information. It must remain cost-effective in the framework. We often encounter the prejudice that sustainable travel is more expensive. Many say they could also imagine staying longer, thus also reducing the CO2 footprint. They need this combination of urban and rural offers.

**Schaubrenner:** Yes. Impressive figures, I'd say, for how everything has already evolved. Dirk Gläeßer spoke of the agent of change in tourism. That's why I'd like to tie in with the figures you just mentioned, dear Petra. When sustainable offers are created, it is also essential that people find out about them. What is the GNTB doing in concrete terms to ensure that people know about this, to spread the word?

**Hedorfer:** Yes, it's global marketing campaigns on all channels, social media, out-of-home, and TV campaigns. So we use all channels and the whole spectrum. And there, the theme "Germany Simply Inspiring" is presented via various product campaigns. There it's about national natural landscapes, "Embrace German Nature," this year and next. There it's about world heritage, a sustainable theme. Routes to travel over 50 UNESCO World Heritage sites certified offer sustainability. It's about collaboration with carriers. We have powerful campaigns with SBB, Swiss Railways, ÖBB, and Austrian Railways, to name just two, where we specifically say: sustainable travel. We - predestined in the center of Europe with eleven neighboring countries - can also address customers here and refer to sustainable arrival and departure options. So there are many approaches in the digital area, in the advertising area, to present ourselves here.

We have developed a fantastic new slogan: Together, we care! It shows a small pinwheel to support this transformation in Germany. Still, with a clear message, "We care, and you're in good hands here," in modern German storytelling, via many influential people, i.e., influencers. So we're out in the target groups. And last point: strategic leverage, also the Sinus-Milieus. We are looking at changing value attitudes of groups with an affinity for travel in 20 countries. What does that mean? So in which milieus do we want to position German offers, tourist offers, in a more focused and targeted way, even if they are perhaps sustainably oriented in their lifestyle on average?

**Schaubrenner:** Dirk Glaeßer, you are looking at Germany from the outside. You are based in Madrid. You also look professionally at the tourism industry around the world. Are these measures that Petra Hedorfer has just listed getting anywhere in the world? And tell us again why it is so important to achieve this measurability. It is not enough to say we are sustainable and leave it at that, but also to establish some form of measurability and comparability.

**Glaeßer:** Great. That's exactly the question I was waiting for.

**Schaubrenner:** Beautiful.

**Glaeßer:** First story: After Petra just talked about how she does this, I just wanted to say a few sentences about this concept of Agent of Change so that it's clear why this is important, especially in tourism. And there we go back briefly to how we started, the SDGs, and the consensus prioritization now of sustainability in all social and economic areas. And that the need to accelerate SDG 12 a little exists, which we've currently identified as "it's a little bit behind." That is referred to in English as Sustainable Consumption and Production. And there's a clear commitment in SDG 12: We have to accelerate this and make these behaviors and consumption patterns more sustainable now.

How do we do that? By using more resources now. And here, tourism has an exciting answer. And all the things that Petra just said are tools we employ in tourism. And I



wanted to put them now in the context of what tourism can do for the global agenda if these are the appropriate products that lead to this change in behavior. And that has something to do with it: How does the consumer perceive this tourism product in the first place? How is it perceived? And the tourist in general - Petra, you can confirm for me - like to be surprised. What we like to do in the tourism sector is to open our eyes. We can also convince, reinforce, and show that it is possible. And here I am already coming more clearly to what can happen with sustainability than with the customer.

Products that demonstrate and convince, that make people want more, and that perpetuate the change allow us to bring about an acceleration. We need good management at the destination, national, and service provider levels. Then these products will not only impact tourism, but they can also fundamentally bring about a change in consumer behavior that goes far beyond what we do every day. And so we have made a significant contribution to these SDGs. Now to your question: measurability is important. You can't manage what you can't measure. There is widespread agreement on this among all stakeholders. That's why it's fundamental to produce a baseline in the areas that have been less measured in the past, especially the non-economic areas such as water consumption, climate, footprint, and all the other impacts that the tourism sector produces. So, where are we today with the actions we are doing now? How do we prioritize the tools properly here? And then we've made progress. And that's where we should also put a finger in the wound. But these don't just go into communicating internally about these measurement results. It is also fundamental, Mr. Schaubrenner, that they are made public and transparent. This will give this discussion much more credibility, which is necessary so that the various contributing players can continue participating.

**Hedorfer:** So here I would like to say in support: This is exactly how we must act, if I may postulate that. We have adopted the SDGs in our corporate management. Every project management must define: Which SDGs does this initiative pay towards? What have we achieved? And what do we want to improve? So in this triad, just last week, we documented our first progress report on sustainability in German tourism by the GNTB and its actions with many partners. It's a journey; there's no beginning or end. But making it visible and measurable in a management information system is essential.

Starting in January, we will be building a business intelligence dashboard in which KPIs on sustainability will be displayed, not only from the customer's perspective, from the perspective of the offer, but also in the competition, in the benchmark ... We also want to learn from others. We have much exchange with the Scandinavians and the NTOs. We are very active with the European Travel Commission at the European level. It is one way. And it must have an integrative effect and also, in a certain way, bring people along emotionally and cheerfully on this path.

**Schaubrenner:** Petra, I love it when we get as specific as possible here on this podcast.

**Hedorfer:** Yes.

**Schaubrenner:** What can German travel destinations, tourism businesses, and players in the tourism industry do in concrete terms to implement these essential SDGs, these Sustainable Development Goals, in their fields of activity and thus ultimately achieve resilient, sustainable, and inclusive tourism? Do you have any examples for us from German tourism? Because we have seen that domestic tourism is also incredibly important.

**Hedorfer:** Absolutely. Let me start by saying that I believe management needs a clear corporate strategy in which sustainability is defined and its value sharpened. Of course, it also requires a bottom-up approach. And in the dialog between the destination management organizations and the service providers, this can only be done together. I could name many now; Dirk knows some of the model regions, I will say, where Hedorfers spend much time at the weekend. That's the Palatinate Forest, which is less than 60 kilometers away. It's also easy to reach by public transport. The German Wine Route is located in the Palatinate Forest. That's a great SDG model region, which, I think, Dirk, already over 20 years, since 1998, with this biosphere reserve Palatinate Forest, with French cross-border partners, a nature park of the Northern Vosges forms a biosphere reserve here. And I know businesses that are involved there. These beekeepers, shepherds, hotels, and associations have committed themselves to an

agenda as a model region and have developed these SDGs together with experts and citizens. So this is a great project; you can also read about it, in which many goals are anchored. I am always fascinated when I am in this region. All of this can be tracked very well. And there are also model regions in Rhineland-Palatinate that deal with transportation. A large proportion of CO2 emissions are caused by mobility and traffic. Municipal administrations, transportation companies, and car-sharing providers have formed the Rhine-Neckar Mobility Pact. How can future mobility offers be developed so that there is a citizens' bus, car-sharing parking spaces, and shared cabs? This is now quite concrete in one destination, Germersheim, where they say we want to make a difference here, that the bus doesn't just run every quarter of an hour, but it runs on demand. And the awareness among the population, but also for external guests who arrive temporarily, to offer these services here in a very concrete way is, I think, an excellent example.

**Schaubrenner:** Yes. I think it's vital that we make it concrete. Otherwise, a discussion like this very quickly ends on a theoretical level. But we also want to give concrete hints here as far as implementation is concerned. We're already coming to the end of our podcast, but of course, I'd like to give Dirk with Gläeßer the opportunity to make your main appeal to our listeners. What do you take away from this podcast? What would you like to tell our listeners, the decision-makers in the tourism industry, today from Madrid?

**Gläeßer:** First of all, I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to discuss this with Petra today, to exchange views and to comment on these questions and the relationship between Germany and other countries. I think Germany is on the right track. Germany is being represented well. As Petra said earlier, it is a process in which changes are constantly needed. That one works openly with the partners. And I would like to say at the end: This sustainability discussion also has a larger purpose.

We could observe that in the times of the pandemic. We could see that countries that had dealt with sustainability more strongly and far more intensively in the past reacted very differently during the pandemic than those that recognize sustainability in principle but have a bit of a problem implementing the actions there. We found that during the

pandemic, they were much more flexible in their evidence-based approach and prioritized responsible action. That was very interesting for us to establish this link between public health and sustainability. And it goes much more profound when looking at the pandemic's root causes. That is land loss, loss of biodiversity, and climate change and the factors contributing to that. In other words, with the pandemic, we see a sector, tourism, extremely affected by the fact that, fundamentally, sustainable action is not yet high enough on the agendas and is not being implemented strongly enough. And the fact that tourism is now focusing very strongly on sustainability is precisely the right way forward, not only to be more sustainable but also more resilient. And that's what we've recently re-embedded at the international level in a relevant UN resolution; this Resilience Concept is also extremely important to tourism and is now a fundamental strategic goal alongside sustainability. In the future, tourism will play a far more significant role in our societies. And that is why it is essential that we set the right course today for sustainability and resilience for tourism and for the institutions in which this tourism takes place.

**Hedorfer:** I believe that in addition to all the economic and ecological considerations - as we both mentioned earlier - the social aspect of tourism is of inestimable value: The social element that tourism can provide is an invaluable asset. And we are currently experiencing geostrategic conflicts, burgeoning nationalism, and closing borders. I believe that dialogue and exchange - and tourism is a platform for this - can also be a vehicle for us to think about and resolve this openness to the world and the future together in a discussion about values and how we can secure the future to ensure change. That is a fundamental impulse.

Dear Dirk Gläeßer, first of all, thank you very much for today's exchange. We have many tasks that continue to unite us. We look forward to working with UNWTO under your leadership on sustainability themes. The goal certainly has to be, let me summarize that again, to reconcile economic, environmental, and social aspects. It's not just a green momentum; it's a compendium, a broad bouquet. There are many goals, SDGs, by which we measure and shape the future.

**Schaubrenner:** Yes, an exciting, informative, and essential conversation. We now know how important the SDGs are for tourism, how we measure their implementation, and how the world learns about them. And that it's not just a matter of talking but also of action - and above all, of doing. In other words, tourism is a genuinely active change agent regarding sustainability.

I want to thank our guest in Madrid, Dirk Glaeßer, and the head of the GNTB, Petra Hedorfer. That's it today with our German National Tourist Board podcast. Thank you, dear listeners, for listening, and of course, I recommend our other episodes in this series. For example, the importance of the German national parks, for travelers from the Netherlands. After all, we have already discussed this and much more in this podcast series. Of course, we would be incredibly pleased if you subscribed to "On the MIC with Petra Hedorfer." You can listen to the GNT podcast on Spotify, Apple, Google, and wherever there are good podcasts. And of course on our website [www.germany.travel](http://www.germany.travel). Happy listening, and safe travels. Thank you and goodbye.