

# **Mountain Eco Tourism**

A case study of the High Pamir Mountain

Kyrgyzstan / Tajikistan



*Cemal trek on the Eastren Pamir Plateau (Murghab district)  
(Photo: Murghab Ecotourism Association)*

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## List of abbreviations:

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
MSDSP	Mountain Societies Development Support Program
META	Murghab Ecotourism Association
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
PATCA	Pamir Alai Transboundary Conservation Area

# 1 Introduction

The spectacular mountainous regions of Central Asia, like the Tien Shan, Hindu Kush and the Pamirs, closed for many years to visitors from abroad became one of the few spaces on earth that are still untouched. The high Pamir (*po-mir* - which can be translated as “*the roof of the world*”) includes the biggest protected area Central Asia’s, the “Tajik National Park”. It is a retreat for wild mountain faun and flora that well adapted to extreme living conditions.

*in recent years start to attract a rising number of tourists. However, so far it is a small special nature-based tourist segment .*

Since the beginning of this century eco tourism has been admitted to the portfolio of international development aid in Central Asia. Tourist infrastructure and activities have been supported and tourist associations were set up in the various mountain ranges. However, while growing tourist numbers have brought economic opportunities and employment to local populations, helping to promote these little-known regions of the world, they have also brought challenges with them: How to ensure that local communities fully benefit from the development of tourism and that growth in tourism helps to preserve and sustain the natural and cultural riches of these mountain regions, rather than putting them in danger?

In the first part of the term paper (theoretical) background information of mountain ecosystems and mountain tourism will be summarized. Opportunities and constrains of tourism development in (still undiscovered) mountain areas will be outlined and ecotourism as concept of sustainable mountain tourism will be discussed.

The second part contains the case study of the High Pamirs of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. After the geography, biodiversity, protected areas and historical context of the Pamir Mountains will be described, tourism-related issues like national framework conditions, assets, activities and demand segments will be analysed. Additionally three eco tourism development programs, implemented in the Pamirs will be presented.

In the final conclusions the different eco tourism projects will be discussed and compared regarding their economical, socio-cultural and environmental dimension.

## 2 Methodology

The first part of the term paper gives a theoretical background on Mountain / Ecotourism and its environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts. Here a summary is given of lectures on mountain ecosystems and tourism in mountainous areas (including literature sources recommended) during the Modul “Nature Tourism and Environment” (FH Eberswalde, 1<sup>st</sup> Semester). Additional secondary (and gray) literature was obtained through intensive internet research.

The second part is of more practical nature. It describes cases of ecotourism development programs in the High Pamir Mountains of Central Asia. Information for this part based on three sources:

- own travel and work experience in Central Asia in 2004/2005, including a visit to the Murghab Ecotourism Association in May 2005
- expert information (by mail and face to face) of international development workers in Central Asia ((1) Marielle Leseur; current program manager of tourism programs of MSDSP and former program coordinator of the ACTED Ecotourism Development Project in the Eastern Pamir; (2) Erik Engel, former ACTED manager of the field office in Murghab; (3) Dominik Zwicky, former ACTED Ferghana Valley area coordinator).
- several documents (reports, surveys and applications) of (eco) tourism projects in the Eastern Pamir
- additional information which was gained through internet (donor strategies and their tourism programs financed; information regarding protected areas in Central Asia)



Figure 1: Pamir Alai high mountain ranges (source of picture: [www.pamirs.org](http://www.pamirs.org))

### **3 Mountain Eco Tourism**

Mountain regions are belonging to the few natural spaces of the world that offer a unique blend of breathtaking natural beauty. They are characterized by wildness and a rich biological diversity (including lot of endemics) at the one hand side and by a high variety of human cultures, traditions, history and lifestyles at the other side. Therefore nature protection and regional economical development are the challenges of mountain region development.

With the Alpine Convention of 1991 a process of regional mountain development was initiated. A platform for regional exchange and negotiations in the Alps was set up and the significance and experiences of sustainable development in mountain regions was discussed. The Alpine experience – as an approach for other mountain regions were the basis of lessons learned for a number of conferences in the beginning of these century. In 2002 recommendations on mountain range regional cooperation were given in the Berchdesgarden declaration. Especially other European and Central Asian mountain regions were focused during this conference.<sup>1</sup> Also in 2002 the “International Year of mountains” was celebrated by the UN and a Global Mountain Summit was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. During these conferences the role of (eco) tourism for integrated mountain development was discussed.

In this connection theoretical background information will be summarized (1) about the ecological importance of mountain ecosystems, (2) about the potentials and constrains of mountain tourism and (3) about eco tourism as a concept of sustainable mountain tourism.

#### **3.1 Mountain ecosystems**

Mountain ecosystems are among the world’s most vulnerable biological and geographical domains. They are embossed by habitats with specific biodiversity, including a high range of endemic flora and fauna. Plants and animals are well-adapted to the particular altitude and climate of their location. But, as a matter of high altitude, growth and recovery of flora, fauna or soil proceed very slowly. A sustainable utilization of natural resources and the minimization of disturbance or destruction of the biological diversity is therefore a key issue

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<sup>1</sup> [www.mtnforum.org/oldocs/366.doc](http://www.mtnforum.org/oldocs/366.doc)

in mountainous regions. Therefore a rising number of unique mountain areas are designated as biosphere reserves/ protected areas.

There are quite a few anthropogenic factors that endanger mountain ecosystems: climate change, over use (unsustainable grazing, deforestation, tourism, etc.), pollution, armed conflicts and population growth. Negative impacts as desertification, loss of biodiversity, water pollution, decrease of glaciers, erosion, landslides, avalanches, rock falls, etc.. are the consequences. Rural mountain population might designate from their traditional way of land use and emigrate from the countryside, if there are no alternative opportunities for livelihood.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2 Mountain tourism

Historically, all over the world mountain areas have been attracting people – pilgrims, ascetics, naturalists, explorers, and, in recent years, mountaineers, trekkers and cultural tourists from near and far-off. Features that attract tourists are the pure, original nature, natural monuments and the healthy climate. The following table gives an overview of the main tourist attractions and their related forms of tourism.

Attraction	Form of tourism
➤ Scenery	➤ Main-stream tourism, mountain railways
➤ Snow	➤ Winter sport
➤ Climate	➤ Health tourism
➤ Wildness, roughness	➤ Trekking, expeditions
➤ Original nature	➤ Classical ecotourism
➤ Rocks and peaks	➤ Alpinism, climbing
➤ Topography	➤ Mountain biking, aerial sport
➤ Traditional cultures	➤ Cultural and rural tourism

Figure 2: Tourist attractions in mountain areas<sup>3</sup>

In many western mountain destinations, like the European Alps tourism became a mass-phenomena. Tourist infrastructure like mountain railways, ski runs and big scale tourist centers were set up. Yearly up to 50 billion domestic and international visitors are counted! But also in far-away destinations, like Nepal or Peru, mountain tourism is developing fast. In these countries tourism especially means foreign visitors. In the Central Asian Pamir tourism development is in a very early stage and will, most probably, target just small specific demand segments.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture of U. Steinhardt, October 4th 2006, Modul „Natur, Tourism, Environment“, FH Eberswalde

<sup>3</sup> Strasdas, W. (25.10.05): Modul “Sustainability, Tourism and Environment”

However, regardless of its stage and expansion tourism helps to diversify mountain economies and provides alternative livelihood opportunities for mountain people. Because traditions and life-styles of rural mountain populations are of rising interest, old habits (e.g. special handicrafts, way of cooking, patterns of constructing houses or traditional folk dances/music) are revitalized.

But tourism development also creates environmental problems and poses new challenges. Several negative environmental impacts can be observed, either in areas of high tourist concentration (mainly caused through infrastructure) as well as in areas with a wide dispersion (mainly induced through tourist activities). While areas of high tourist appearance particularly suffer from enormous traffic, noise, urban development and disturbance of sceneries, in other far-flung areas major affected environmental topics are deforestation, erosions or loss of (endemic) biodiversity. In Nepal for example forest degradation and deforestation was resulting from the increased demand for fuel wood and timber to cater tourists. Other negative impacts are environmental pollution due to garbage and littering along trekking routes and on camp sites and pollution of creeks, rivers and lakes.

On top of the negative impacts traveling, respectively to far-away countries, causes emissions and contributes to global warming up. Of course, future climate changes will also affect mountain regions. For example glaciers will continue melting, natural water reserves will be endangered and mountain habitats of flora and fauna might be destroyed. Mountain destination will have to deal with new circumstances and will have to find solutions for a sustainable mountain development in future.

### **3.3 Ecotourism – as a concept of sustainable mountain tourism**

While terms like “mountain tourism”, “nature tourism” and “cultural tourism” are describing specific tourist market segments the term “ecotourism” refers to a set of desirable outcomes that chime in with the principles of environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. One of the first definitions of “Ecotourism” was formulated by the International Ecotourism Society in 1991: “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustains the well-being of local people”.<sup>4</sup>

The socio-economic and conservation-related goals of an ecotourism concept are corresponding with the following key objectives:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> TIES (The international Ecotourism Society): [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)

<sup>5</sup> Strasdas, W. (2007); Modul “Ecotourism and Outdoor Recreation”, FH Eberswalde

- (1) to mitigate environmental impacts
- (2) to contribute financially to protected area management and conservation
- (3) to create environmental awareness
- (4) to generate job opportunities and benefits to local communities
- (5) to ensure social and cultural compatibility and political empowerment

Depending of the destination's context and its stage of tourism, priority is given to one or the other objective. With its strong weighting of environmental goals ecotourism is a tool of protected area management. In this context its overall goal is "to protect and maintain the biological diversity and ensure sustainable utilization of natural resources."<sup>6</sup> Still, for the management of ecotourism it is a balancing act and big challenge to mediate between the different stakeholders and to comply with the (contradictive) outcomes within a destination.

Ecotourism is usually taking place in nature surroundings, often related to protected areas and conservation. Therefore mountains are predestinated destinations of ecotourism activities. In lot of mountain regions there is an urgent need for activities, which help diversifying income sources, providing alternative livelihood opportunities for mountain people and, simultaneously, which help promoting environmental care and gaining benefits for nature protection. In this connection ecotourism offers considerable potentials, because it addresses the twin problems of rural mountain areas: "poverty reduction" and "minimizing environmental degradation". It makes mountain tourism being an important sector in integrated mountain development.

In developing countries with a low stage of tourism development the negative environmental impact of tourism, as outlined in the chapter before, are often not a key issue yet. But aside from the negative impacts ecotourism can positively affect environmental awareness and conservation within a less-developed destination. Eco tourists often demand higher environmental care-taking (regarding waste management, water purification, etc.), than the local population does. Interest in wild faun and flora and in ecosystems rise awareness and respect towards the regions nature assets. Because mountain eco tourism offers alternative income for mountain communities, unsustainable use of nature resources like overuse of mountain pastures, poaching wild faun might be reduced and better controlled.

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<sup>6</sup> Strasdas, W. (2002): Annex page 28



**Figure 3: Drawings made by a Pamiri artist to illustrate environmental education materials in the frame of an ecotourism development program in 2004.<sup>7</sup>**

## **4 Case study: the High Pamir Mountains**

In this part of the term paper it will be analyzed, what kind of tourism development strategies/approaches are put in action to support ecotourism in the Pamir. Three tourism developing projects with different approaches (cultural eco tourism, community-based eco tourism and ecotourism as a component of conservation area management) will be presented. It will be discussed how and to what degree these projects contributes to nature conservation at the one hand and how and to what degree the well-being of the local population is sustained, respectively improved.

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<sup>7</sup> ACTED (2004), p.7

## **4.1 Geographical context**

The Pamir high mountains are situated in the heart of Central Asia. The high plateau of the eastern Pamirs is located at an average altitude of 4000 meters. The highest peaks however are topping 7000 meter (Peak Sumoni 7495 m). The landscape is characterized by a unique wide-scale ensemble of glaciers (Fedchenko glacier, 77 km long). In this effect the Pamir water reservoirs are of high importance for the surrounding flatlands.

The western Pamirs are characterized by different landscapes than the eastern high plateau. Here fast flowing rivers, narrow valleys, rugged mountains as well as wide green landscapes can be found.

The territory of the Pamir is belonging mainly to the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan (GBAO) in Tajikistan. But the Pamir fringes extend towards Kyrgyzstan (Pamir Allay), China and Afghanistan.

## **4.2 Biodiversity and nature conservation**

The climate of the Pamir is very dry. In winter at the level of the plateau (3500 to 4300 meters) temperatures decrease to less than minus 40 degree Celsius. The vegetation period is extreme low and just some specific plants adapted to this extreme location. One of the plants is called *tersken*. It adopted to the dry soil, the altitude and to solar radiation. But all in all the mountain vegetation and its pastures represent a poor biomass. Only selected species, as yaks, sheep and the wild fauna were able to assimilate to the region. However, despite the harsh conditions the density and diversity of animals and plants is surprisingly and characterized by a high rate of endemism. “This biodiversity is an undeniable asset for the future development of ecotourism.”<sup>8</sup> Regarding the fauna of the Pamir the “Marco Polo” *argali* and *ibex*, snow leopard, birds of prey, yaks and Bactrian camels are belonging to the main attractions. The flora includes high altitude plants with an important diversity. Some plants are used for medical purpose and for natural dyeing.

The sustainability regarding the utilization of natural resources is a core issue in the Pamir. *Tersken*, for example, plays an important role in the local economy as source of energy. The periphery zones of human settlements are sparsely harvested without any hope to renew it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Delaunay, Guy (Equaterre, France) (2003): Acted mission report of the Ecotourism development project, p. 8

<sup>9</sup> Delaunay, Guy (Equaterre, France) (2003), p. 8

The Marco Polo argali and ibex are, because of their unique trophies endangered by intense poaching. The German environmental organization “Naturschutzbund” was criticizing the rising trade with Marco Polo sheeps and their trophies in Kyrgyzstan. Since 2006 they are fighting against the export of the animals through national hunting companies.<sup>10</sup>

During Soviet time the system of PAs and conservation of biological diversity and natural resources in Central Asia was almost build. However the united soviet system of PAs had a very strong scientific background. It was based on strict nature reserves, which were excluding any kind of economical use. After the break down of the SSSR the Central Asian region suffered from sever economical crisis. Lack of financing caused the reduction of PAs staff and as a consequence the management of PAs is very ineffective. Major scientific researches connected with nature conservation were closed. At the same time the human pressure through the local population was rising due to difficult socio-economic conditions.<sup>11</sup>

During the past decade new approaches of protected area management include stronger participation of the local population and (regulated) economical opportunities like eco tourism.<sup>12</sup> The NABU therefore is supporting Central Asians governments in the reform of conservation laws and the introduction of IUCN protected area categories.

In the Pamirs two large protected areas have been established: the Zorkul Strict Nature reserve and the Tajik National Park, established in 2002, which covers the northern part of the GBAO. It has a size of 2.6 billion ha. However, as already expound, “management in these parks is poor and for the time being these protected areas exist mainly on paper.”<sup>13</sup>

### **4.3 Historical context**

The special status of the autonomous region is linked already to the events of the “Great Game” between Russia and Great Britain in the Pamirs. These two countries formed a so-called Pamir Boundary Commission in 1895 to define the Pamiri borders of the Russian empire and the buffer-zone of the northern Afghan Wakhan. The Pamirs, as a remote and economically not very valuable region, thus became a strategically important frontier outpost.

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<sup>10</sup> [www.nabu.de](http://www.nabu.de)

<sup>11</sup> WESCANA - IUCN Cetral Asia (2006): An assessment of strict nature reserves in Central Asia

<sup>12</sup> Nabu (2005): Naturschutz International. Nabu Rundbrief

<sup>13</sup> Kleinn, Eva; Jackson, Rodney (2004), In: The Pamirs – a tourist map of Gorno Badahshan – Tjikistan and background information on the region.

With its autonomous status during Soviet time the region was under several restrictions, for example to travel and migration. At the other hand it also conferred to a number of privileges. For example the access road (“Pamir Highway”) was build and well maintained by the army, energy and food supplies were given and health care and literacy was improved. In order to “be present” at the unions border the Soviets resettled thousands of Kyrgyz inhabitants to the districts capital Murghab at 3600 meters altitude.

However, since the independence of Tajiksitan it became very hard for the Murghab inhabitants to make life ends. While the army left, food and energy supplies stopped and the road has not been maintained due to lack of financial means. The local mountain inhabitants became for a great part dependent on international aid. Since the early 90<sup>th</sup> the French agency for technical cooperation and development (ACTED) and the Aga Khan Foundation became the most important international development organizations in the Pamir.

#### **4.4 Tourism in the Tajik Pamir**

Because of the historical context, as explained, the Pamir’s GBAO district has been totally cut off for visitors until the early 90<sup>th</sup>. Although the area is nowadays accessible also for international tourist, still a special GBAO permit has to be obtained in Dushanbe or Korogh. The interest of the Tajik government in the tourism sector is low. Responsibility was given to the state agency “Sayoh”, which was repeatedly criticized for its ambivalent role. At one hand side it is a state institution, that was contracted by the “Ministry of Economy and Trade” to support and regulate tourism in the country. At the same time, however, it is acting as commercial enterprise concurring with other private tourist companies.<sup>14</sup> Under the leadership of Sayoh a “tourism development program for Tajiksitan (2004 – 2009)” was established in accordance with the governmental “Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper”. One of its aims is to promote small business enterprises. According to Sayoh in 2003 approximately 1500 persons visited Tajikistan for trekking or mountaineering, mainly from Western countries. But only 10% of them visited the Tajik National Park in the Pamir.<sup>15</sup> However, tourism development initiatives in the Pamir, implemented by international organizations were rather seen as competitors.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> GTZ (2004): Tourismusstudie Tadschikistan; (Unfortunately no updated information about the responsibilities of Sayoh was obtained in time.)

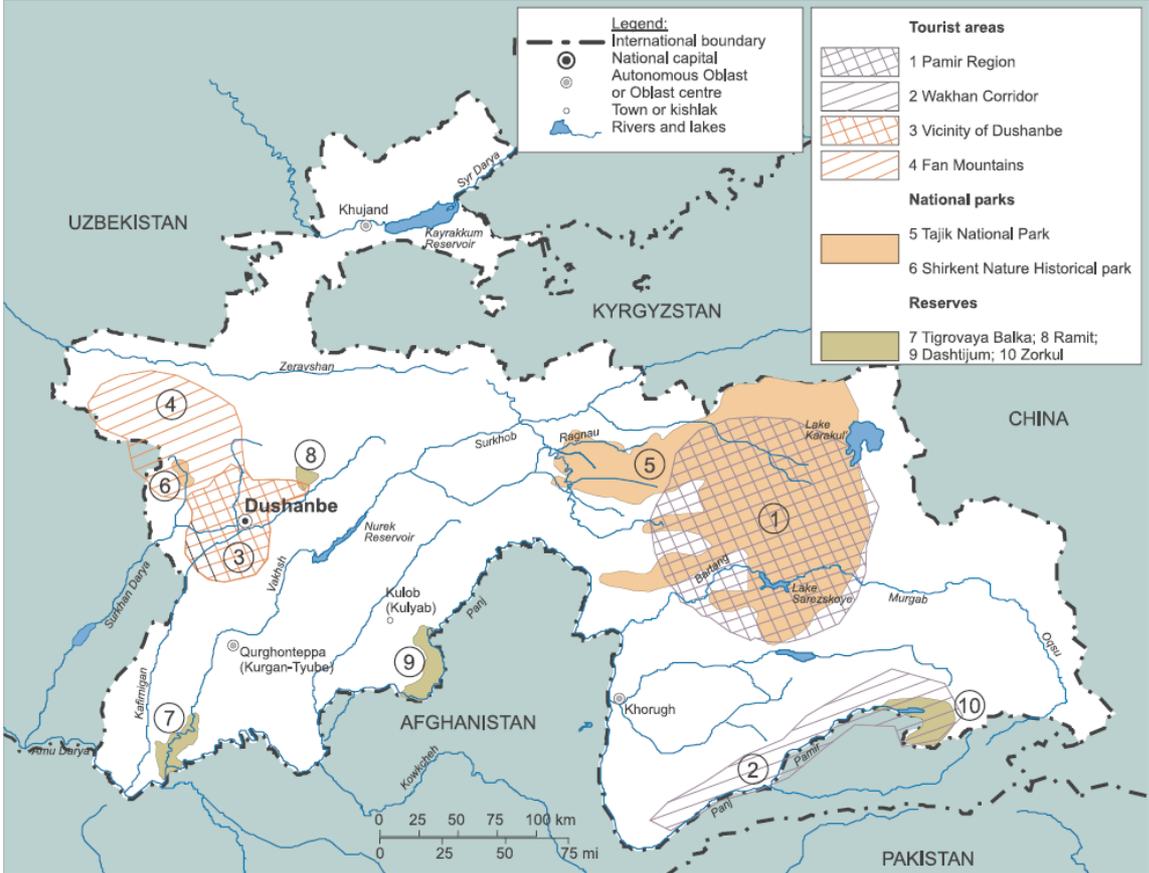
<sup>15</sup> UNECE (2004), p.150

<sup>16</sup> Kelbert, Erich (September 2005), Interview with the deputy director of Sayoh, Dushanbe

Other governmental frame conditions for tourism activities in the Pamir mountains are taxes charged for trekking license above 2000 meter (50\$) , for mountaineering above 5000 meter (100\$) and for ecology (1\$ per day). Further investigation needs to be done, to find out how this money is used.

**4.4.1 Tourist assets**

The Tajik National park is the largest protected area in Central Asia, with a wide spectrum of scenic mountains, mountain ecosystems, high altitude flora and faun, including the Marco Polo agili, ibex and snow leopard. The park also contains a number of glacier and hot mineral springs. In the south of the Pamir the Wakhan corridor is bordering to Afghanistan. It includes the nature reserve of Zorkul.



**Figure 4: Map of tourist assets in Tajikistan<sup>17</sup>**

The Pamir Highway between Osh (Kyrgyzstan) and Korogh is very spectacular. Its panoramas are an attractive asset for travelers. With the opening of the border post between Murghab and Kashgar in China, the Pamir highway will also become an optional route, along the former Silk Route to East Asia.

<sup>17</sup> Source of map: <http://www.unece.org/env/epr/studies/Tajikistan/chapter11.pdf>

#### 4.4.2 Tourist segments

Whereas nature-based tourism segments only started to be developed since five years, there are two specific tourism segments that were in practice already at an earlier stage: mountaineering and hunting.

The Soviet **mountaineers** association organized alpinist camps and competitions to the Pamirs highest peaks (former peak Lenin and Communism). Although the peaks are on the territory of the GBAO, access and camp infrastructures were basically located on Kyrgyz territory at the northern Pamir Allai Valley. Since the break down of the Soviet era, alpinist



infrastructure was badly maintained. The once well organized rescue service was not longer in place. But mountaineers activities are on the way to be revitalized and expeditions are offered mainly by Kyrgyz travel companies.

**Figure 5: Navrus alpinist base Camp (Kg), Pictured on an envelop from the former SSSR**

Another special case is **hunting tourism**, mainly demanding the trophy of Marco Polo Sheeps. Several agencies<sup>18</sup> specialized in trophy hunting are offering hunting tours in the Pamir. Hunting tours (including shooting one Marco Polo argili) of the mentioned operators are offered for prices ranging between 22.000 and 30.000 Euros (see Anex 1,2). But structures regarding hunting licenses and regarding the cash flow seem to be not transparent and badly controlled.<sup>19</sup> It is to doubt that local communities and protected areas are getting respectable parts of the benefit of the hunting business. Licenses to hunt selected species, like Marco Polo mountain sheep or bear, are “given by the State for free to tour operators, who sell them to



their clients. Net profit is shared between the tour operator and the local institution responsible for the protection of that specie. Even tough information on the price of licenses was not available, total revenues may well exceed that generated by the fees mentioned

**Figure 6: Hunter with a Marco Polo trophy. “Weltjagd Austria” brochure 2006**

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of German lingual agencies: Adler Adventure Tours & CW Jagdkontor (Schernebeck) , Shikar Safaris (Mannheim), Weltjagd (Austria)

<sup>19</sup> Information of Erik Engel, former ACTED coordinator of the Murghab field office (Mai 2005)

above, given an average number of 30-60 licenses per year between 1989 and 2003.”<sup>20</sup>

After relief agencies were getting active in the Pamirs potentials of the development of **ecotourism** were discussed and assessed. It suggests itself that the overall discussion of sustainable mountain development in 2002 (Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan’s capital Bishkek) had a strong influence on new development strategies and approaches in Central Asia. Regional integrated projects, including mountain ecotourism were developed and implemented by particularly two international NGOs (ACTED, Aga Khan Foundation). All eco tourism initiatives are running on a small scale. Approximately 500 international visitors were counted in the Eastern Pamirs in 2005.<sup>21</sup> According to Sayoh in 2003 approximately 1500 persons visited Tajikistan for trekking or mountaineering, mainly from western countries. But only 10% of them visited the Tajik National Park in the Pamirs.<sup>22</sup> In 2006 a number of 1050 visitors to the Pamirs were counted by the tourist reception office of MSDSP (see chapter 4.5.2) in Korogh.<sup>23</sup>

Target groups of the new developed tourism services are nature-based tourists. Looking at specific demand segments **“committed” nature tourists, adventure tourists** as well as **nature tourists with cultural interest** are included. Important markets are western countries, but also Eastern Europe, CIS-Countries and East Asia are conceivable future markets. Preponderantly tourists are traveling individually (backpackers) or in small groups. Especially expatriates and their guest visiting them are also belonging to the pioneer tourists. Backpackers are attracted, since Lonely Planet reports about the eco tourism programs and services in their Central Asian guide.



**Figure 7: Yeshikul looking, north east Pamir (source of picture: [www.pamir.org](http://www.pamir.org), July 2007)**

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<sup>20</sup> UNECE (2004), p.154

<sup>21</sup> Information was given by Dominik Zwicky, former ACTED area coordinator.

<sup>22</sup> UNECE (2004), p. 150

<sup>23</sup> Information given by Marielle Leusier, MSDSP program coordinator in Korogh (e-mail from July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

## 4.5 Example cases of eco tourism development projects

In the following chapters three tourism development projects and their respective eco tourism approach will be presented. Different project approaches and donor strategies of eco tourism development will be analyzed and compared. Because eco tourism is defined by its impacts / desired outcomes, it is likely to be a favorite term used in tourism development concepts, applications and reports. To which grade the investigated programs fulfill the objectives of ecotourism will be a core issue to discuss in the following chapter.

Region	Project approach	Donor	Implementing Agency
Easern Pamir	Community based Ecotourism Cultural and Ecotourism	Swiss Government UNESCO	ACTED (F)
Western Pamirs	Community based Ecotourism / Institutional building of private partnerships (Central Asian University, Korogh)	European Union (TACIS IBPP)	Aga Khan Foundation (MSDSP)
Pamir-Alai	Pamir Allai Transboundary Conservation Area (PATCA) between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; Eco tourism as a project komponent	European Commision	Agreco (B) Nabu (D) GRM (NI)

Figure 8: Ecotourism development programs in the Tajik and Kyrgyz Pamirs

### 4.5.1 Ecotourism development in the Eastern Pamir (ACTED / META)

In the Eastern Pamir an eco tourism development project was started in 2002 initiated by the French agency for technical cooperation and development (ACTED). As a subcomponent of the “High Pamir Mountain Integrated Project” (PHIP), funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation since 1999, **community-based eco tourism** was started with the aim to create income opportunities to the Pamiri population.

As a result the Murghab Ecotourism Association (META) was founded and legally registered. Its members are tourism service providers from the Eastern Pamir. Their services include home- and yurt stays, transportation and guiding. Training programs for service providers focused on language and guiding. A variety of tour offers (for example up to eight days mountain treks, glacier treks, jeep safari, camel trek and a Marco Polo Photo Safari) were developed, and marketing efforts were done on the regional and international market. Another activity in the frame of economic diversity was to initiate a local handicraft group.



Additionally, the tourism activities were co-financed since 2003 by a UNESCO Program which supports **cultural eco tourism** in the previously isolated mountainous regions of Central and South Asia. The aim of the program is to ...”capitalise upon the spectacular natural environment, using it to the benefit of all while promoting environmental protection



and awareness.”<sup>24</sup> In the frame of the UNESCO program a few environmental components (like environmental education and a nature protection group) as well as socio-cultural assets of the region were supported. Archeological sites were restored, the Murghab museum was valorized and the living eco museum was extended. An environmentally built Yak House was designed. It is used as a cultural center in Murghab, hosting the reception office of META and the handcraft shop.

**Figure 9: Handcraft exhibition in the Murghab Yak house (source of picture: [www.pamirs.org](http://www.pamirs.org), July 2007)**

#### **4.5.2 Ecotourism development in the western Pamirs (MSDSP)**

In the western Pamirs the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP) is implementing, in partnership with the French NGO “Equaterre”, a **community-based eco-cultural tourism** project.<sup>25</sup> Its overall goal is to generate income and create jobs for vulnerable households of the Western Pamirs. The current program is financed by the TACIS Institutional Building Partnership Program (IBPP), which is funded by the European Commission. It is designed to support the development of non-profit organisations in the New Independent States. In this context the project will facilitate the creation and support the operations of an association gathering tourism actors (tour operators, home stay providers, etc) of the western Pamirs. Its role will be to facilitate the elaboration of a tourism development strategy for the Pamirs including social, environmental and cultural responsibility (green charter). Activities of the association will be

- to increase tourist information through a tourism information centre,
- to train its members to increase the quality of their services,
- to lobby decision makers to ensure that laws favourable to tourism development are passed,
- to advertise the Pamirs internationally

<sup>24</sup> [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

<sup>25</sup> Information about the MSDSP program sent by Marielle Leusier, project coordinator (mail from July 30 2007)

The MSDSP activities will directly help 75 rural households (450 people) to generate income through provision of services to tourists. Indirectly, the project will benefit most communities in the two areas of concentration (Wakhan and Bartang valley - current population 26,000) through the multiplier effect (additional income for drivers, guides, handicrafts, sale of food etc.) resulting from the increase in tourist numbers. Communities are also benefiting through service providers' contribution to village organizations. Last but not least, the project is contributing to preserving the natural, cultural and historical resources of the Western Pamirs.

### **4.5.3 Eco tourism in the Pamir-Alai Transboundary Conservation Area (PATCA)**

The “Support to the establishment of the Pamir-Alai Transboundary Conservancy Area (PATCA) between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan” Project, funded by the European Union, was started in November 2006. The project is implemented by the company- Agreco (Belgium) in the consortium with GRM (Netherlands) and NABU (Germany).

The overall objective of the project is to improve transboundary biodiversity protection in the Tajik (Pamir) National Park and the Kyrgyz Alai National Park. This project approach includes the facilitation of meetings of environmental and scientific working groups to discuss, present and agree upon methodologies for transboundary biodiversity conservation in the Pamir-Alai area. One tool of the PA management is the development of alternative and sustainable income generating activities for the local population within and around the PATCA national park. These subcomponent includes small businesses, nurseries, traditional handicrafts and **small scale eco-tourism**.

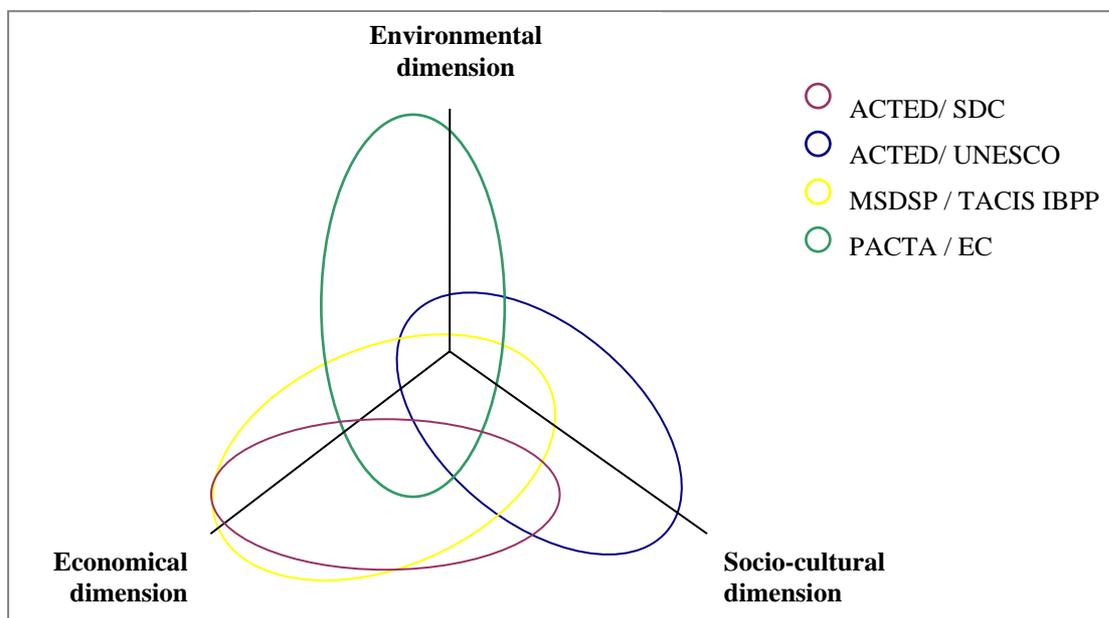


**Figure 10: Fedjenko glacier in the Tajik National Park (source of picture: [www.pamirs.org](http://www.pamirs.org))**

## 5 Conclusions

The description of the different ecotourism development projects showed, that, depending of the donor strategy different dimensions of a sustainable tourism concept were stressed. The initial approaches (ACTED/MSDSP) aimed particularly the economical development. Job creation and alternative income revenues here are the main goals. The follow up programs, all starting after the 2002 Year of Ecotourism and Year of Mountains, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions have been admitted to the portfolio of project objectives.

But ACTED and MSDSP are not only using the term ecotourism. They additionally included two (all overlapping) approaches: “community-based tourism” and “cultural tourism”.



**Figure 11: Dimensions of sustainability particularly objected by the analyzed development programs**

The concept of community-based eco tourism is emphasizing the participation and the (political) empowerment of communities. The involvement of local communities in the planning and decision making processes right from the beginning creates the basis for a sustainable development. To ensure economical benefits for the community and to ensure that reinvestment is done, there is a need of strong interest in the region and an active leadership by a group of local people. However, these arrangements do rarely materialize spontaneously. ACTED and MSDSP, as external driving forces, therefore particularly stress the creation and capacity building of locally registered tourism associations (META and a Western Pamirs tourism association). In the frame of the IBPP Program this aspect is the even the main objective. On the other hand through the UNESCO program the development of cultural assets are revitalized (handicraft, archaeological sites, etc.).

Regarding the ecological dimension main efforts are put to create environmental awareness. The activities include several trainings and the creation of a nature protection group. The development of animal observation tours or photo safaris aims, beside its economic benefits to raise awareness for endemic species in the hope to mitigate negative environmental impacts like poaching (through locals) as well as uncontrolled hunting tourism.

During the past three years the number of tourists in the Pamir doubled (from 500 in 2003 to 1050 in 2006). However, there are a lot of obstacles, like the special GBAO permit, expensive and enduring arrival and departure journeys, short seasons, etc., so that tourism in the Pamirs stay on a very small scale. It is now in a stage as were neighboring countries 5 or 10 years ago. In the long term, however, it will have to compete with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, all of which have a more developed tourist industry. The Pamirs will most probably remain as a niche product. Therefore the economical benefits will be first and for most income for the people providing services. When the international aid will run out, they will also have to cover the overall costs of the tourism associations. A financial contribution to protected area management and conservation therefore is limited to the trekking permits and eco taxes charged by the government, provided that they are used for this purpose.

Ecotourism, in general, is very often connected with protected area management. It is surprisingly that tour descriptions of META do not refer to the existents of the Tajik National Park, although it is their area of intervention. Also the ACTED eco tourism proposal from 2005 did not integrate any activity like establishing cooperation with the national park's directory. In place they supported a local nature protection group. This facts indicate and confirm the statement of Eva Kleinn (GTZ Tajiksitan, 2005) that "for the time being these protected areas exist mainly on paper".<sup>26</sup>

The most recent program (PATCA), which started in 2006 has a quite different approach. Its main objectives refer to nature conservation and (cross-border) protected area management. Reaction is given to the poor management and financial means of the Tajik National Park. In this case eco tourism is seen as an instrument of the new established PATCA management plan, in order to generate income in and around the Kyrgyz Trans Alai and Tajik National Parks.

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<sup>26</sup> Background information on the region added to „THE PAMIRS – a tourist map of Gorno Badakhshan, Tajikstan. Published, supplied by the UNESCO/ACTED project

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### Web-links

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- Biodiversity Conservation Centre: <http://www.bcc.org>
- European commission’s delegation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- HELVETAS (Swiss Development Agency): [www.helvetas.kg](http://www.helvetas.kg)
- Hospitality Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyz CbT Association): <http://www.cbtkyrgyzstan.kg>
- Lonely planet: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>
- Naturschutzbund Deutschland: <http://www.nabu.de>
- Novinomad (Tourism Development Company. Kyrgyzstan): <http://www.novinomad.kg>
- Tajik Gateway: <http://www.tajik-gateway.org>
- The Pamirs (private site): [www.pamirs.org](http://www.pamirs.org)
- UNESCO: <http://www.unesco.org>
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