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# Islamic Tourism: Rethinking the Strategies of Tourism Development in the Arab World After September 11, 2001

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## Introduction

The global impact of the September 11 terrorist attacks on U. S. policy are obvious, in shape and rhetoric, if not in direct causality. References to the “war on terrorism” in the context of the Iraq war and occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict show that causality is indeed a matter of broad interpretation by the world’s single super power. The “War Against Terror,” according to the prominent American philosopher Richard Rorty, is a doctrine that can be manipulated by the government of the United States to legitimize any action it may take in the future.<sup>1</sup> The September 11 attacks also affected world tourism, due to the global role and position of the U. S. as well as the global character of the Al-Qaeda terror network. However, the predicted wide-ranging collapse of the tourism industry in Arab countries after the attacks did not take place. Depending upon their existing tourists markets and orientations, Arab countries were differently affected by the fallout. The spontaneous reaction of Arab and Muslim tourists, who spent their holidays in the region and avoided European and North American destinations, saved many national tourism industries from collapse. The tourism industry in the Arab World responded to the negative publicity caused by the terrorist attacks with within-region promotions and marketing tactics. In addition, the potential of developing “Islamic tourism” received more serious discussion. These positive local changes have taken place in a larger global context of externally manipulated violence and instability, as well as anti-Arab, anti-Muslim racism.

The war against the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan succeeded in destroying the most important Al-Qaeda strongholds and in enforcing a regime change in Kabul. However, some major goals of the military action have still not been achieved: eliminating the Al-Qaeda terror network or capturing Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar. Terrorist acts in Tunisia, Yemen, and Pakistan in 2002, and in Saudi Arabia in 2003, have shown that the terrorist net-

work is alive, active, and functioning.

On the one hand, the military reaction of the U. S. was understandable and acceptable to some in the Arab World. We must not forget that many Arab societies have been victims of so-called “Islamic” terrorism over the last two decades. However, four different factors weakened support for U. S. government actions in the Arab and Muslim worlds. First, the Bush administration declared the strategy of war as the only possible action against terrorism. The military actions themselves (bombing cities, using cluster bombs, alliances with non-democratic and regressive groups and countries) were brutal and disproportionate to the threat. “It was like destroying Palermo in order to eliminate the Mafia,” according to Gore Vidal.<sup>2</sup> The Bush Administration never had a comprehensive strategy that addressed the socio-economic and political roots of terrorism. Second, the Bush administration’s rhetoric (“crusade,” “axis of evil,” “you’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists,” “we are the Good,” “civilized world,” “Operation Infinite Justice”) was a disservice to rational public opinion. On some occasions, the religious rhetoric of George W. Bush reminded his opponents of the “Islamic” fundamentalists.<sup>3</sup> Third, newly implemented registration and migration laws, as well as control measures in the U. S., were widely criticized as being repressive, illiberal, and even racist. The liberal press in Europe likened it to the McCarthy era in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Fourth, influential governments, organizations and personalities called for alternative political strategies towards solving conflicts in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, and the rest of the world.

The appeal by renowned thinkers Juergen Habermas and Jacques Derrida is only one of the most impressive examples. They called for a new European foreign policy emancipated from –the U. S., based on common European values shown in the streets during the anti-Iraq war rallies, and oriented against the “hegemonic unilateral” foreign policy of the U. S.<sup>5</sup> Stories and pictures of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim incidents in the U. S.

government (circulated worldwide), closure of different Islamic welfare organizations, and images of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay strengthened negative attitudes towards the Bush administration's policy and undermined its moral credibility. The Bush administration's management of the Iraq crisis, the war on Iraq, and its pro-Israeli policy have been condemned by the majority of Arab and Muslim people.

On the other hand, images of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam in North America and Europe have suffered immensely since the September 11 attacks. The fact that the terrorists were of Muslim and Arab origin gave a major push to racist attitudes in Western societies. Political organizations with clear anti-Islamic, anti-Arab, and xenophobic ideologies achieved "respectable" results in elections in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, France, Italy, Belgium, and Portugal. In public discussions, a racist tenor was noticed in many parts of the world. Of course, other internal factors contributed to this development, such as integration problems, unemployment, and populism. Although many intellectuals and politicians encouraged a more differentiated approach towards Arabs and Muslims, damage to their general image began in September 2001 and accelerated.

Public opinion against the U. S.'s political strategy reached its peak on the eve of the war on Iraq. Millions of people demonstrated against a possible military intervention and many countries officially rejected it. It was not only traditional pacifism, the lack of legitimization of the war by the U. N., and the weak arguments by Bush and Blair that shaped the anti-war position. It was rather the fear of more future radicalization in Arab and Muslim societies and the worry that the so-called "international anti-terror coalition" could break down.

The situation in Afghanistan is still fragile and explosive, lacking political and socio-economic stability. Regime change cannot be effective without a long-term strategy of national solidarity, democratization, social development and economic growth. In the words of J. Bill and R. Chavez, "Islam claims to have a response to incoherence. What is the response of the United States?"<sup>6</sup>

### **Tourism, Terrorism, and the War on Terrorism**

A successful tourism industry needs political stability, peace, security, and the potential for intercultural dialogue between groups of people without mental or physical restrictions. Intercultural dialogue is the only way to prevent negative and violent developments from tourism, such as those described by the controversial French author Michel Houellebecq in his recent novel, *Plateforme*.<sup>7</sup> Houellebecq describes a terrorist attack by "Islamic" terrorists against a group of "Western" tourists in Thailand, in a place where one finds palms, blue

skies, and a blazing sun the whole year round. He writes about naked tourists, who are drinking cocktails and making love on the beach in luxurious gated resorts just a few meters from the eyes of the impoverished local conservatively-minded population. The novel was published in the year 2001, before the September 11, Jerba, and Bali attacks. In the novel, the attack is unexpected and totally surprising for the narrator and the reader. The European tourists weren't aware of existing cultural conflict. They were fully enjoying their holiday. They did not have either hostile or negative attitudes towards the locals, nor did they seek contact with them. For all practical purposes, the local population was entirely separate from the leisure activities of the tourists, who had cocktails because they were thirsty, were naked because they wanted to be closer to nature, and made love on the beach because it was "lovely." The tourists did not notice that the local Muslim minority was provoked by their activities. Lack of dialogue and personal contact prevented any possible understanding of the "other" by both sides. Since tourism is one of the most important and vital forms of an intercultural dialogue, this type of intercultural misunderstanding has affected the development of the tourism industry.

Terrorism against tourists is generally a politically motivated action. According to Phillip Karber, terrorism "as a symbolic act can be analyzed much like other mediums of communication." The success of a politically motivated terrorist action can be measured by the long-term effects caused by the action. Karber points out four basic components of the communication process within the context of terrorism: 1) the terrorist as transmitter of the message; 2) the target of the terrorist's message; 3) the message (terrorist act involving individual or institutional victims; and, 4) feedback (reaction of the recipient).<sup>8</sup> There are four different messages which terrorist attacks against tourists might want to deliver: first, destabilization of local political systems (e.g., "Islamic" terror groups in Egypt); second, drawing attention to the situation of a minority group (e.g., Basque terror in Spain, Kurdish terror in Turkey); third, expressing hostility against the policy of the tourists' countries of origin (e.g., "Islamic" terror attacks in Bali, Jerba, and Mombassa) and fourth, for financial gain (e.g., kidnapping European and Australian tourists in Yemen and the Philippines).

Culturally motivated terrorism is not a commonplace phenomenon. Many scholars see political aims of direct terror attacks on tourists in the Arab and Muslim countries as shaped by a cultural "touch." Saleh Wahab sees cultural elements as important in the terror attacks on tourists in Egypt; "Muslim activists may feel they need to take drastic action to prevent what they perceive as a threat to their national culture, tradition, and religious

beliefs.”<sup>9</sup> Abdul Aziz counters the concept of culturally motivated terrorism on tourists by pointing out that, “Tourists and locals in Egypt are separated by language barriers as well as economic and social gaps.”<sup>10</sup> What is missing in this argument is that the so-called “Muslim activists” are in opposition to the Egyptian government and state policy. The main aims of such terrorist attacks are; first, to destabilize the central government politically and economically; and, second, to address an international audience.

The British magazine *The Economist* commented on the terrorist attacks in Morocco in 2003, “Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, like other terrorist groups, albeit more murderously, are especially victimizing the tourist industry. Violence in Casablanca falls into this pattern, as did last year’s strikes on the Balinese nightclub and a Kenyan hotel. The aim is to drive out the infidels and damage local economies, and thus the regimes that preside over them.”<sup>11</sup> According to Abraham Pizam and Aliza Fleischer, “In Israel, the frequency of acts of terrorism caused a larger decline in international tourism arrivals than the severity of these acts.” They assume that “Tourist destinations can recover from even severe acts of terrorism, as long as the terrorist acts are not repeated.”<sup>12</sup> In a relatively short time, Egypt and Turkey were able to recover from the direct impacts of the terror acts in the mid-90s. But, due to the frequency of the terror acts, Israel, Algeria, Pakistan, India, and the Philippines have been facing serious problems in their tourism sectors.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 are unique in their influence on world tourism due to the global role and position of the U. S. as well as to the global character of the Al-Qaeda terror network. The geographic influence of a “normal” terror attack is generally spotted in one city, one region or one country. Global terror attacks were generally unknown until September 11. Noam Chomsky points out that “For the United States, this is the first time since the War of 1812 that the national territory has been under attack, or even threatened,” and “the first time the guns have been directed the other way.” The “global character” of the attacks is based on their geography and the importance of the U. S. in world politics and the global economy. According to Chomsky, “Such a long-term impact of one single terror attack has never before been felt, neither in political and economic nor in geographic terms.”<sup>13</sup>

Tourism is very sensitive to security and stability issues. Brunt and Cousins noticed just a few months after the attacks that “Tourism’s greatest fears at present are that further escalations into war outside Afghanistan, further 9/11-type events, or world recession may result.”<sup>14</sup> Eighteen months after September 11, the fears

of the world’s tourism industry had been partially fulfilled: the war in Iraq; Bali, Mombassa, Karachi, Jerba, Moscow, Riyadh and Casablanca terrorist attacks; kidnapping of Western tourists in Yemen, Algeria, and the Philippines; minimal economic growth in the E. U. and Japan; international long-haul airline collapses (Swiss Air, Sabena) or huge economic problems (United Airlines, KLM). Many international tourist destinations are struggling to survive.

The Arab and Muslim worlds are at the center of these challenges and difficulties. The *raison d’être* of the on-going war against terrorism suggests the possibility of a long-term unilateral world with the U.S. as a single global superpower. According to Habermas, “Even if hegemonic unilateralism could be achieved, it would have numerous side-effects, which are normatively undesirable according to its own logic.”<sup>15</sup> Such side effects may be terror attacks of high frequency and/or durable socio-political destabilization in Arab and Muslim countries. Both are counter-productive to the suggested “better future” and to intercultural dialogue. Especially for international tourism in “Christian-Muslim” discourse, this would be the beginning of the end.

### Winners and Losers

The predicted wide-ranging collapse of the tourism industry in the Arab countries after 9/11 did not take place. Different countries were affected differently. In the context of tourism, we should discuss Arab markets rather than one single Arab tourist market. In the last two decades, diverse concepts for development of the tourism industry have been implemented in various Arab countries. The character of tourists’ activities (leisure, cultural, pilgrim/religious, medical, shopping, etc.)<sup>16</sup> and the countries of tourists’ origin point to four main concepts of tourism development in Arab countries: 1) European/North American-oriented leisure tourism (Tunisia); 2) Arab-oriented leisure tourism (Lebanon); 3) multi-ethnic-oriented mixed-character tourism (Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, UAE); and 4) multi-ethnic-oriented cultural and pilgrim tourism (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Palestine).

The impact of September 11 on tourism in Palestine, Israel, and Jordan will not be addressed here due to the specific political and security situations in these countries and the “organic” link between the Palestinian/Israeli and Jordanian tourist markets. The collapse of the Oslo Accords and the resulting situation are the main reasons for the continuous difficulties in the tourism industry of these three countries.

Among the remaining Arab countries, the big losers were countries with limited orientation in market and tourist activities—Western leisure tourism: Tunisia and

Morocco. The terrorist attack on European tourists in Jerba/Tunisia and the Moroccan-Spanish conflict concerning the sovereignty on the Island of Layla have made this situation even more complicated. In the year 2002, some thirty-eight per cent fewer foreign tourists visited Tunisia than in 2001,<sup>17</sup> especially those from Germany and France, the most important markets for the Tunisian tourism industry. The Jerba incident demonstrated that the security of western tourists in the country is not guaranteed. The lack of success of the Tunisian investigations and the continuous attempts by the local officials to deny the terrorist character of the incident have not helped. The supposed Al-Qaeda connection of the terrorists has figured prominently in the European mass media and has damaged the rest of the country's good image. In Morocco, the decrease in the number of foreign tourists in 2002 was more moderate, only fourteen per cent. Nevertheless, forty per cent fewer American tourists, twenty-five per cent fewer Italians, nineteen per cent fewer British, and seventeen per cent fewer Germans visited the country.<sup>18</sup> This moderate decrease can be explained by the stable number of tourists from France, Switzerland, and Belgium, as well as African transit passengers travelling to Europe through Spain.

Egypt faced the same difficulties as Morocco: about nineteen per cent fewer tourists visited the country in the 2001/02. However, by Summer 2002 the pre-September 11 number of foreign tourists was once again reached. The effect of September 11 was temporary, probably due to the fact that further terrorist attacks did not take place in Egypt itself, and the country was not involved in international conflicts. Egypt's image did not suffer as much as Tunisia's image in the international mass media.<sup>19</sup> This speedy recovery can be connected to a change in the national character of the foreign tourists: while fewer tourists from North America and Europe visited the country in Winter and Spring 2002, more tourists of Arab nationalities visited the country in Spring and Summer 2002. During the Christmas and New Year holiday periods of 2002, Cairo and Sinai hotels and resorts were over-booked by a mixed group of Europeans and Arabs.<sup>20</sup> There is a clear correlation between the country of origin and the potential ability of reorientation and flexibility in difficult periods for the tourism industry. European and North American tourists were fifty-six per cent of visitors to Arab North African countries (excluding Egypt), but only thirty-seven per cent of visitors to Arab Middle Eastern countries (including Egypt). Intra-regional Arab tourists were thirty-seven per cent of those traveling to the Arab Middle East, but only six per cent went to Arab North Africa.<sup>21</sup>

The United Arab Emirates can be counted among the

winners in the tourism sector following September 11.<sup>22</sup> For Muslims and Arabs from the Middle East, Dubai is becoming a favorite destination for short holidays. Security, near-home tourist locations, and common culture are primary reasons for the choice of destinations after September 11. For Arabs and Muslims, the feeling of being misunderstood and unwelcome in non-Muslim countries has increased. Over-reactions, ignorance, and xenophobia (especially in European, North American and Australian airports and hotels) forced many people to change their traditional holiday destinations. In particular, since the early 90s, Dubai has been developing into an important and attractive international tourist destination offering various tourism activities for Arab, Asian, and European tourists. The combination of shopping, leisure, entertainment, and cultural festivals (as well as water and desert sports all year around with first-class accommodation and transportation services at moderate prices) is indeed a unique and attractive option in the Gulf region. The increase of foreign tourists in Dubai by the most moderate estimates of the Marketing Authority of Commerce and Tourism was twenty-six per cent in 2002. The success of Dubai tourism encouraged other Emirates states to develop a tourism sector. The Emirates of Sharja and Ras el-Khayma adopted a mixed concept of leisure and cultural tourism in their marketing strategy. Other states in the region, namely Qatar and Oman, have been trying to develop a tourism industry, although on much lower scale than the UAE. Bahrain, the island state connected to Saudi Arabia by a thirty-two-kilometer-long system of bridges, has been playing an important role in weekend and short-term tourism for the Saudis. Nevertheless, no major shifts were apparent in intra-Gulf tourism in 2002, with the exception of the UAE. Saudi Arabia has been initiating steps towards a modern understanding of international tourism beyond the traditional pilgrimage to the Islamic Holy sites, but it is still a project for the future. The development of internal national tourism has been successful: one hundred per cent more Saudis spent holidays in 2002 in their own country than in the previous year.<sup>23</sup>

Lebanon and Syria are two other Arab countries that have profited from the re-orientation of Arab and Muslim tourists. In addition to the shopping tourists from Jordan and pilgrimage tourism from Iran, Syria achieved a large increase in the number of tourists from the Gulf countries and Iraq than in the prior season. In 2001, the formalities at the border crossing between Syria and Iraq were eased for individual and private visits. Sixty-eight per cent more Iraqis visited Syria in 2002. Many Gulf Arabs spend their yearly holidays there, as well, preferring Syria to Lebanon and Jordan due to very moderate prices. Up to forty per cent more Qataris, twenty-two

per cent more Kuwaitis, twelve per cent more Yemenis and Jordanians as well as six per cent more Saudis visited the country. Syria achieved a twenty-five per cent increase in the number of international tourists in 2002.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Lebanon is the big winner of the change in tourism destination in the Middle East. It looks as though the venerable tradition of Lebanon as a summer vacation venue is being revived. The absolute majority of the more than one million tourists in 2002 were either citizens of Arab countries (fifty-nine per cent) or of Lebanese origin (thirty-eight per cent). While the share of tourists of non-Arab origin dropped dramatically to less than three per cent (compared to about fifteen per cent in 2001), the main increase in tourists was from the Gulf countries: One hundred per cent more Emiratis, Qataris and Bahrainis, seventy per cent more Kuwaitis and thirty per cent more Saudis. More visitors came from Jordan (fifteen per cent) and Egypt (ten per cent) as well.<sup>25</sup>

The tourism boom in Lebanon is expected to be of a long-term character. Investments in tourism infrastructure (hotels, sports, and entertainment facilities, shopping centers, etc.) and the inclusion of potential new markets (Iran, Iraq, and Libya), as well as the development of multi-concept tourism (cultural and medical tourism), will improve chances for a long-lasting boom.

Other Islamic non-Arab countries have also been benefiting from the shift in tourism destinations in 2002. Turkey and Malaysia were at the top of the 2002 winners' list. Both countries are implementing an aggressive marketing strategy to attract as many Arab Muslim tourists as possible. Turkey was visited by ten per cent more Arabs in the 2001-02 season than the season prior, mainly tourists from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. More Gulf-Arabs (eleven per cent) preferred to spend their holidays in Malaysia in the same time frame.<sup>26</sup>

The latest statistics by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) for the year 2002 show a positive trend in international tourism in the Middle East North Africa. While North African Arab countries suffered an overall decrease of almost four per cent in 2002, the Arab Middle East performed extremely well in 2002 with an eleven per cent increase.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the WTO numbers do not expose the structural shift in international tourism. The economic performance of the tourism industry for the same period portrays the depth of the crisis: first, short vacations dominate; second, accommodation prices are on a level lower than ever before, threatening the survival of many hotels; third, the average tourist is generally spending less; fourth, cultural tourism is losing on all terms, while leisure and shop-

ping tourism is flourishing. There is indeed a structural crisis in the tourism industry in the Arab World, which is heightened by the effects of the dramatic events of September 11 and the current international political agenda of the U. S. and its allies.

### Recovery Tactics and Short-Term Measures

After September 2001, international organizations, governments, and private businesses acted to prevent a possible collapse of the tourist industry. Measures on different levels have been implemented. They have been designed to ignore the structural crisis and to concentrate all activities on short-term measures and recovery tactics. These include new international marketing strategies, campaigns to improve image, encouraging domestic and intra-regional tourism, reducing red tape in obtaining visas, and of course, exercising the most feasible moderate price policy.

The Tourism Recovery Committee (TRC), initiated and organized by the WTO, adopted an agenda based on such tactics and measures.<sup>28</sup> The TRC was organized multi-nationally and included a wide range of personalities from different backgrounds: WTO-experts, ministers, representatives of international and local businesses, and so on. At various seminars and meetings as well as in publications, the TRC encouraged Arab countries to implement a multitude of recovery measures, rather than adopting a new strategy regarding the tourism industry and/or developing a new tourism concept. The "different marketing strategic approaches" recommended by the TRC in Cairo (16 September 2002) suggested neither new concepts nor a structural reform. The focus of the TRC lies in strong marketing, promotion campaigns and inclusion of new markets and destinations in the short-, mid-, and long-term strategies.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the recommended measures have practical importance and may work towards improving the general performance and the organizations of the tourism industry in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. For example, a "regional market information system" that "could provide up-to-date and fully-analyzed and -interpreted information" has been suggested. Other recommendations have either a one-sided or rhetorical character. For example, the marketing strategies and programs for considering future destinations "should emphasize the economic and financial returns." Luay Saeed Kanetah suggests "ten guidelines to counteract negative news, stereotypes and inaccuracies," which include identification of the problem, steps to solve it, correction of errors in reporting, using the internet in communication.<sup>30</sup>

The main focus of the TRC-recommendation is



based on understanding the crisis as a promotion and marketing problem of a product with a bad image in Europe, North America, Australia, and the Far East. Definitely, such a problem exists as part of the crisis, but it is not the crisis itself. The roots of the crisis are in the lack of domestic tourism, very weak intra-regional and close-to-home tourism, as well as a history of ignoring these market segments for promotion and marketing, and when developing and planning tourism infrastructures. A comparison of the intra-regional tourism market in the European Union or with the domestic tourism markets in Turkey and Greece with the Egyptian and Tunisian domestic markets, for example, may demonstrate clearly where the problem is. In 2001, the absolute majority of international tourists in the European Union were intra-regional tourists (about eighty per cent) and the share of the domestic tourism in Turkey and Greece reached fifteen per cent of the entire national tourism sector. In Egypt and Tunisia they were less than five per cent.<sup>31</sup> Such weak domestic tourism is a structurally chronic disease of the sector's economical performance and profitability. Domestic tourism should always be able to cover the minimum ongoing expenditures and to keep the infrastructure either in functioning or, at worst, in "healthy" conservation.<sup>32</sup> Especially in the conditions of global crisis (when international tourism suffers from strong pressure), the importance of domestic and close-to-home tourism is obvious and on the agenda again.

Successful tourism destinations needed no short-term "recovery" measures. The market shifts in themselves and the long-term tourism development concepts assured positive tourist seasons in Lebanon, Syria, and the UAE. However, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco have been forced to adopt emergency measures to relieve the pressure to their tourism sectors, with moderate success. Strategies employed were: increasing marketing budgets, reduction of fiscal restrictions and debt rescheduling, the reduction of entry fees to tourist attractions, the broadening of the availability of visas at arrival facilities, reductions in air fares, increase in the number of the regional flights, and efforts to build and maintain positive working relations with the foreign media.<sup>33</sup> Egypt achieved the best performance, mainly due to the increased intra-regional tourism in the Middle East and to its short-term tactic of adjusting offers and prices to match regional market demands. Egypt's intensive international promotion and marketing strategies helped as well to decrease the loss in the markets of European origin and to improve the country's image. Egypt was declared as "recovered" by its own Minister of Tourism, Dr. Mamdouh el-Beltagui, chair of the TRC.<sup>34</sup>

### **Intra-Arab and Intra-Muslim Co-operations**

Beyond the short-term logic of winners and losers, Arab and Muslim countries recognize the danger of long-term shifts in long-distance and international tourism as well as the possible destabilizing elements of the war-against-terrorism doctrine to their international tourism sectors. Although intra-Arab and intra-Muslim cooperation in tourism issues existed before September 11, the essential importance of such coordination and cooperation on various levels has become clearer and has been intensified since.

While bilateral, multilateral, and even regional treaties and agreements on different aspects of tourism marketing and exchange, as well as easing of travel restrictions, had already existed, especially among Arab countries, an Islamic context of tourism cooperation was present only in the context of the pilgrimage to the Holy sites in Saudi Arabia. The first international meeting on tourism of Islamic countries was initiated by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Iranian city of Esfahan (3-4 October 2000). The First Session of the Islamic Conference for Ministers of Tourism (ICMT) was the official designation of the meeting. Thirty-one countries and some international organizations (World Tourism Organization, Intra-Islamic organizations) participated in the First Session. They finished their work with the so-called "Esfahan Declaration" that accents the importance of further intensive cooperation in tourism among Islamic countries, and recognizes the need for support and coordination in archaeological and antiquities' issues.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that no practical measures were adopted, enthusiastic rhetorical speeches dominated the First Session, and the first step towards institutional co-operation was taken.

The Second Session of the ICMT took place in Kuala Lumpur, on 12-13 October 2001, under the direct shock of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Pessimism and uncertainty dominated the atmosphere of discussion at this session. The "Kuala Lumpur Working Program," adopted at the end of the session, can be viewed as an appeal for support, taking every possible step to prevent a possible total collapse of tourism industries in Arab and Muslim countries.<sup>36</sup> For the first time, the development of an intra-Muslim tourism was clearly referred to in an official document of the ICMT. To a certain extent, it was a spontaneous reaction to the anti-Muslim attitudes in the global media and the growing negative images and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in non-Muslim societies. Until then, Intra-Muslim tourism had neither been present as a concept, nor as a strategy of action. It was just more "rhetoric," although of a kind

that sounded attractive, impressive, and popular.

When the Third Session of the ICMT convened in Riyadh on 6 and 9 October 2002, international tourism markets in the Arab and Muslim countries were showing radical changes. Intra-Muslim tourism was gaining ground. The role of the ICMT in the recovery of the tourism industry was recognized by the WTO. A "Co-operation Treaty" between the two organizations was signed in Riyadh during the session, after which the Arabic language was adopted as an official working language in the WTO. Fifty-seven countries participated in the session, an increase of one hundred per cent, which reflects the on-going importance of intra-Muslim tourism in the expectations and strategies of Muslim countries. Discussions on intra-Muslim tourism dominated the practical part of the session: financial support in tourism investments and activities by the Islamic Bank for Development; establishment of a joint intra-Muslim center for tourism marketing and promotion; easing of visa restrictions and thus enlarging of travel options between Muslim countries; easing of the intra-Muslim cash-flow and investment restrictions; and promotion of a common "code of behavior" for Muslim tourists.<sup>37</sup> Discussions on the marketing strategies outside the Muslim world were overshadowed by the need to accent Islamic cultural heritage, to develop image-improving tactics, and the importance of an intercultural dialogue.

The Arab countries were active from the very beginning in the IMCT movement. Nevertheless, inter-Arab cooperation was always more vital to the countries seen as traditional tourist destinations (Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia) and the newly developing markets (the Gulf States) in terms of visa, travel, and investments facilities. Shifts in the structure of international tourists towards more intra-regional (Arab and Muslim) tourism, as well as in tourism activities towards more leisure and shopping tourism, pushed for changes in tourism development concepts and in the existing infrastructures in the Arab countries. The importance of intra-Arab tourism is highlighted in the invitations and in the press releases of the Arab World Travel and Tourism Exchange Conference (AWTTE) in Beirut, 16-19 October 2003:

The World Tourism Organization estimates that the region will generate more than 60 million travelers by 2020, a significant increase from the 2002 level of 20 million travelers who spent over 29 billion US dollars. Factors contributing to these positive trends include a shift towards marketing of Arab destinations to regional tourists, targeting new markets, and more aggressive pricing policies. Independent studies show that more than 15 billion US dollars will be invested in the hotel sector in Arab countries during the coming years, with Dubai, Egypt, and Lebanon leading the way. Investments in airports and airlines are also still on schedule.<sup>38</sup>

The changes are coming from inside the market itself and forced by the behavior of international tourists. The majority of the Arab governments are still trying to manage the crisis by implementing marketing strategies that primarily aim to re-win the partially lost non-Muslim markets. Innovative ideas, new concepts and radical reorganization of international tourism are under development. The trendiest "new" strategy is based on the development of intra-Arab and intra-Muslim tourism, especially after the rediscovery of Lebanon and Syria as tourist destinations by Arab tourists, and the positive role they have played in the recovery process in Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

### "Islamic Tourism"—Concepts and Chances

In one of those curious moments in history, on the morning of September 11, 2001, just a few hours before the terror attacks in the U. S., a new bilingual Arab/English magazine on cultural tourism was presented in Damascus at an international conference organized by the UNESCO: "Islamic Tourism," a London-based "quarterly magazine of tourism in the Islamic world."<sup>40</sup> The magazine itself is neither theoretical nor scientific, but oriented to a broad public, with easy-to-read reports and lots of pictures. The principal new aspect is the "Islamic-shaped" language of the magazine, which is even more interesting than the choice of topics and locations, which are all located in Muslim countries or connected to Islam in one way or another. The publisher, Abdel-Sahib Al-Shakry, explains the meaning of "Islamic" in the context of tourism in nine points, which can be summarized in three main blocks: first, the revival of Islamic cultures and the spread of Islamic values; second, economic benefit for Islamic societies; and, third, the strengthening of Islamic self-confidence, identity, and beliefs in the face of negative stereotyping in comparison to other cultures and lifestyles.<sup>41</sup> While counterproductive phrases like "Islamic capabilities" versus "popular arts," and "attacks from other cultures" versus "spiritual beliefs of Muslims and Arabs" are openly mentioned, positive and progressive elements are revealed. For example, the intention of Islamic tourism is "not to replace existing tourist activity in our areas but opening up new and exciting opportunities for growth, as well as marketing a new type of commodity for which we are convinced there is an urgent need." Furthermore, Islamic tourism "will restrict sectarian disagreement among Islamic schools of thought and opinion, and among people generally."<sup>42</sup> The magazine reflects the discussions about "Islamic" tourism that started before September 2001, but which had new dimensions and intensity after the attacks. The ideas, models, and comprehension of what "Islamic"



tourism could be are reflected in three major concepts: economic, cultural, and religious/conservative concepts.

The economic concept for Islamic tourism focuses on the importance of intra-Muslim tourism for new markets and tourism destinations. Its precept describes intra-Muslim tourism either as new markets to be integrated in the existing tourism strategy, or as replacements for the floundering and problematic European and North American markets after 2001. The economic concept is the most widespread and widely discussed in the Arab and Muslim world at different levels. It considers Muslim countries as the emerging tourism market of the future with huge economic, demographic, and destination potential. In the strategic working papers and recovery recommendations of the WTO, RTC, IMCT, and in many other official treaties as well as in workshops and symposia discussions, the economic concept is to be found in at least one of its numerous modifications.

The cultural vision for Islamic tourism includes Islamic religious/cultural and pedagogical and self-confidence-building elements. Part of the vision includes reorienting tourist destinations towards less consumption and "western-culture loaded" sites and toward more Islamic historical, religious, and cultural sites. The change of focus by tourism authorities and operators toward second-ranking marks of Islamic cultural heritage (such as, shrines, tombs, old battle sites, ancient pilgrim routes etc.), and including them in special tourism programs is one of the examples of the new development.<sup>43</sup> A special place in this concept is held by the new "touristic" interpretations of pilgrimage and the efforts to merge religious and leisure tourism in joint programs. Saudi Arabia is developing a new strategy for tourism that is based on an updated interpretation of pilgrimage that includes leisure activities in addition to the traditional pilgrim visits to the Holy sites.<sup>44</sup> Tourism promoters in other Muslim countries are offering or working on similar programs. Islamic sites such as Karbala and Najaf in Iraq, Mu'ta in Jordan, Qum in Iran, various shrines in Morocco, old mosques in Bosnia, and the historic cities of Samarkand and Bukhara are already addressed in tourism media and in some tour programs in Arab and Muslim countries.<sup>45</sup>

Attempts to revive the Islamic and Arabic cultures in the discourse of tourism are a counterpart to the process of cultural globalization previously dominated by the U. S. pop culture. According to Al-Aidi, "marketing national Arab tourism as Arab in character and dominated by Arab features, with its own tradition and costumes, is also convenient for the requirements of Arab tourists."<sup>46</sup>

The cultural "Arabization" and/or "Islamization" of

tourism is to be understood as a reaction of the (much) weaker part in the aggressive process of cultural globalization, to define and to protect one's own culture and cultural heritage. The challenge is whether the tourism industry is capable and skilled enough to implement such a task or even to contribute to a solution, as Kevin Meethan suggests, otherwise tourism will globally "commodificate" the national cultures into exotic and "consumptional" goods. The "commodification" of native and national cultures is one of the most controversial topics of globalization.<sup>47</sup>

The religious/conservative concept for Islamic tourism has not yet been theoretically articulated, but various opinions and remarks in discussions on the future of tourism in the Arab and Islam worlds indicate that this articulation is just a matter of time. The whole idea is based on the conservative interpretation and understanding of Islam. Merging elements of the conservative Islamic lifestyle with the modern tourism industry could present new tourism options and spheres. Excluding the fundamental isolationistic views that reject practically any tourism activities beyond pilgrimage, the religious-conservative concepts may be described as "community tourism." Islamic resorts and hotels, as well as Islamic destinations and programs, will shape the tourism activities; alcohol-free accommodations in which gender-segregation and the dress code will be strictly respected and controlled; available prayer-rooms on site; "Islamic" transportation facilities; gender-segregated sport and wellness facilities; and "Islamic" entertainment programs. Elements of this concept are already implemented in domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia and Iran. In contrast, luxurious hotels and resorts where the share of international tourism is significant are less controlled and have a more liberal atmosphere.

For a growing conservative intra-Arab and intra-Muslim tourism market, the implementation of a religious/conservative concept in tourism-planning as an insertion into the existing mainstream tourism could have a positive economic and social effect. The exclusion of a noteworthy and growing population from the tourism market has led to the alienation of the tourism industry from the religious conservatives. Under "lifestyle" pressure in liberal and "western-style" tourist locations, if religious/conservative families and individuals ever decide to vacation in such locations, it could lead to the negative affects of "never again" or simply frustration. Discussions in Saudi Arabia about opening the country for international tourism and about tourism with Islamic values are steps in the right direction.

However, one must not lose sight of the fact that other types of tourism, for liberal-Muslims and non-Muslims, must be options as well. The example of Du-

bai/Sharja is interesting in this context. Dubai is an international, liberal, shopping-, events-, and leisure-oriented destination, while Sharja, a city located just a few kilometers to the north, has alcohol-free accommodation rules and a more conservative cultural and leisure tourism concept.

### Conclusions

The effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the strategies of tourism development in the Arab world must be seen in the context of international and regional politics, security and stability issues, as well as in the context of social development and economic growth in the Middle East North Africa region. International tourism will continue to face numerous crises and problems as long as militarism and violence dominate in the region. Various marketing and promotional campaigns can serve to relieve the pressure on tourism sectors. International and regional cooperation and coordination at different levels provide an institutional background for crisis management. Nevertheless, the core problem of the tourism industry in the region has a structural character: very weak domestic tourism and poorly developed intra-regional tourism.

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington exposed the structural weakness of the tourism industry in the Middle East North Africa region, in terms of planning concepts and one-sided out-of-region dependency. Alternative scenarios for crisis situations did not exist. Only the spontaneous reaction of Arab and Muslim tourists in avoiding European and North American destinations and spending their holidays in the MENA region saved many national tourism industries from collapse. In-region promotions and marketing tactics later introduced were literally "riding the wave."

The concept of "Islamic tourism" has a real chance only if the intra-regional political situation and intra-regional cooperation in travel and visa issuance improve considerably. Security and stability are the "magic" ingredients for new investments, innovative tour programs, and structural correction. "Islamic tourism" has a chance to succeed only as a part of multiple concepts for tourism developments. Intra-Arab and intra-Muslim tourism may indeed contribute to stabilizing the national tourism industries. The cultural concept and the religious/conservative concept have the ability to play a positive role as insertions and supplemental options in the tourism landscape.

International tourism is not only an economic sector that yields jobs, dividends, and foreign currencies. It is one of the most important "living and breathing" forms of inter-cultural dialogue. The September 11 terrorists aimed to push forward the "clash of cultures" and en-

force cultural isolation. We fear that the rightwing political and military doctrines on the "war on terrorism" and "good versus evil" rhetoric will not diminish cultural clashes nor result in a more secure and better world. We hope our doubts are unfounded.

### NOTES

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