



TOURA D´OR 2008

Category “Informational films and documentaries”

Chile – Voices of the Desert

ARTE-Strasbourg, from the series „Die neuen Paradiese“

(43 minutes, German, 2008)

Pascal Vasselin is one of the authors of ten parts of a series broadcast by ARTE in July last year, which featured "untouched places not yet ravaged by mass tourism." He manages to draw a very graphic picture of the high mountain desert of Atacama in Chile and to make its "voices" – as mentioned in the subtitle – audible. These voices also include those of many tourist guides who describe the organisation and the context in which this inhospitable region has been opened up.

The government of Chile has left it to the local indigenous people to set up and take care of nature parks in the wilderness. They are thus able to control the increasing tourism themselves – and also the growing prosperity that comes with it. Despite the images of barren wilderness, the film keeps talking about the power of the desert, the mystic connectedness of the indigenous population with Mother Earth. The fascination of the desert has also captivated more and more visitors so that the Atacama has increasingly become a destination for both domestic tourists and foreigners. Among others, we meet a German man who is setting out on a risky trek through the desert.

This example, along with several others, shows the way in which the local guides manage tourism; it shows their objectives, and the instruments they choose in order to ensure that the exploration of the Atacama happens in a careful and sustainable manner. In several statements, indigenous people allow insights into their everyday lives which have come to be dominated by tourism. The specific problems of water supply, transport, and infrastructure in general are described in a vivid and understandable manner. It becomes clear what efforts they make to maintain a balance between the necessary conservation of nature on the one hand and the soaring tourism on the other hand. People's changing living and working conditions are described well.

From a cinematic point of view, the documentary convinces by the selection and composition of footage as well as by the music and the acoustic atmosphere as a whole. In the voice-over, some of the superlatives used were criticized. On the whole, however, the text provides a comprehensive picture of the general situation.

The film met the TOURA D'OR contest criteria in a way far above average.