

Implementing coastal Natura 2000 to give a socio-economic impulse and Nature conservation - PL

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Regeneration or development of new, local, traditional occupations giving an economic stimulus in Natura 2000 areas.

4. Overview of the case

A heavily, economically depressed area has begun the process of rejuvenation and regeneration following the designation of the community land area as a Natura 2000 site. A development strategy for the community was drawn up to embrace the opportunities which the Nature values of the area afforded. This has led to the area developing a niche market for eco-tourism with new occupations alongside more traditional ones.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Stepnica Local Community is located on the eastern part of Szczecin Lagoon. It covers 294 km², of which 40% are the waters of the Lagoon and local catchments, 32% are forests and the rest (28%) are fields, meadows, swamps and peat areas. The community has about 4900 inhabitants from which about 2100 live in Stepnica village. The most important businesses are: the wood industry, forestry, tourism, fisheries and agriculture. About 93% of the land and water area are designated as "Natura 2000" because of its very high nature values. From the beginning of the 20th century, Stepnica gained recognition as an important tourism destination due largely to the valuable coastline. The years of 1920 –1930 were the most successful for local development: the community then had more than 6000 places for overnight accommodation, a number of restaurants and well-prepared beaches. It was even linked to Szczecin by a narrow-gauge, steam railway as well as ships. Post-1945, the economics of agriculture took over with the area famous for its cows and milk and hay production. However, in 1989, the state agriculture system collapsed resulting in high unemployment. Tourism had been effectively reduced to a few separate places for children (campsites), small separated bed & breakfast establishments.

b) Objectives

To couple the designation of the land area as a Natura 2000 site with renewed opportunities to give the local community an

economic impulse.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The Ministry of the Environment is responsible for Natura 2000 site designation. The Head of the Region (voivod or province) coordinates the implementation whilst a supervisor assigns a protection plan in conjunction with the local municipalities.

b) ICZM tools

In the planning drawn up under the local community development policy, tourism is one of the most important directions for local sustainable development. The location of Stepnica gives a great opportunity for the regeneration of tourism and the development of local, traditional sources of income. On the one side, there are the waters of Szczecin Lagoon and, on the other a great complex of forests. These can be offered to specialist tourists interested in e.g. angling, sailing, windsurfing and other water sports, walking, horse-riding and for eco-tourism e.g. bird-watching with the area rich in white-tailed eagle and crane.

A developmental strategy which involved a zoning system was agreed with emphasis laid upon extensive agriculture, extensive fisheries, extensive forest production, education and eco-tourism. Increasing the number of available visitor beds was deemed a high priority. The local community already offers about 100 places in an acceptable, local, rural style. A group of local, traditional small-fisher boats are combining fisheries with bird watching and photo-tours. Horses have become important in the area with Europe's only wild horse, the Konik, breeding here; tourists can use local horses for riding with local inhabitants offering horse-drawn carts, one family has specialised in horse riding instruction. A permanent consultation process was set up by the stake-holders to allow a better understanding in the implementing of Natura 2000 in the coastal zone. The local community also participated in international nature and management programmes in order to exchange experiences and learn from others

7. Cost and resources

No costs are available.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

A combination of active nature conservation, agriculture and tourism after only one year of implementation is already giving very promising, economically attractive results.

9. Success and Fail factors

The local initiatives of the stakeholders and NGOs which supported the local administration was very important as was the permanent consultation process. Getting the message across that the Natura 2000 network must be understood not as a system of restrictions, but as a system of sustainable management, which can bring new opportunities, especially in the attractive areas for tourism, also played a major role in getting the local community to support the process. This reinforces the recognition that a bottom-up approach is needed at all levels of Natura 2000 establishment. Finally, there were benefits from participating in international nature and management programmes e.g. for the National Park, the Veluwe in the Netherlands donated 100 bicycles to the community for rental to tourists. The other input has been given by a local initiative supported by a Dutch foundation (Koninklijke Nederlandsche Heidemaatschappij) which was focussed on the creation of small investments to improve village facilities for inhabitants and guests.

At the beginning, there were many sceptics who did not believe it was possible to combine nature conservation and tourism. Initially, also, the local administration were not fully supportive of the Natura 2000 designation since traditionally "Nature" was synonymous with "restrictions".

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Implementation of sustainable tourism as a specific Natura 2000 “product” can enable the acceptance of an NGO working for nature as an important partner in both local spatial planning and the creation of new forms of local, economic development. This can be very helpful in building democracy in a post-collective, social situation.

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13. Sources

- Implementation of Natura 2000 in the case of ICZM in Stepnica Local Community (2006) Rabski K, available by download from www.databases.eucc-d.de/files.
- Who is responsible for Natura 2000 in Poland? A potential role of NGOs in establishing the programme (2007) Cent J., Kobierska H., Grodzinska-Jurczak M & Bell S. International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development pp 422-435 (copyright protected but can be purchased from <http://www.inderscience.com>)