

# Integrated Cooperation on Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreational Use in the Wadden Sea Region

LAYMAN'S REPORT - MARCH 2001

EU-PROJECT 96/DK/012/PAZ  
JANUARY 1997 - DECEMBER 2000





# Introduction

## The Wadden Sea – of World Wide Importance

The Wadden Sea is the largest coastal wetland in Europe (13,500 km<sup>2</sup>), and it comprises the worlds largest, unbroken stretch of mudflats in the world and will be (one of) the largest NATURA 2000 site(s).

There are few, if any, coastal zones in Europe with as many potential fields of conflict between nature and mankind as the Wadden Sea Region. One of the reasons is the fact that the International Wadden Sea Area is a natural area of world-wide importance, but also has a vital commercial significance for large parts of Europe. The Wadden Sea Region holds a great fascination for tourists, because of its scenery and distinctive ecological and cultural character and each year millions of tourists visit the Region. Tourism creates a considerable benefit for local and regional economic and social development and in many areas it exceeds farming and fishery as the most important source of income for the inhabitants.

## The IRWC and The Wadden Sea Tourism Project

In 1994/95 the Danish counties of Ribe and Sønderjylland, the Dutch provinces of Groningen, Fryslân and Noord-Holland together with the German Federal state Schleswig-Holstein launched the Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation (the IRWC).

In May 1996 the EU Commission approved the application from IRWC concerning financial support to "Integrated Co-operation on Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreational Use in the Wadden Sea Region" (referred in the following as "The Tourism Project"). The project was approved as part of the EU demonstration Programme on "Integrated Coastal Zone Management" (ICZM).

## The Objectives

1. To prepare, test and implement a model of communication and co-operation between the authorities and various interest organisations involved in the Wadden Sea Region.
2. To prepare a joint vision for a sustainable development of tourism and recreational use in the Wadden Sea Region.
3. To elaborate proposals for joint policies on sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea Region (based upon objectives 1 and 2).

## Results Anticipated

- Improvement of co-operation between the authorities and bodies concerned with the development of the Wadden Sea Region.
- Participation of the population in the decision making processes should be increased.
- Application of the principles of sustainability and integration to regional planning.
- Demonstration of how the results of this innovative co-operation concept can be incorporated into the everyday decisions of the various authorities and how the concept and method used can be applied in other transboundary coastal areas.
- Dissemination of knowledge acquired and consideration of the results at the 9th Conference on the Wadden Sea in the year 2000 (2001).





# The Wadden Sea Tourism Project

## Project Phase 1: 1997

The management was organised in the following way:

1. the "Inter-regional Tourism Working Group" (ToWG)
2. the project leader
3. the project co-ordinator (from May 1<sup>st</sup> 1997)
4. the Secretariat of the IRWC.

The ToWG consisted of three experts on planning and tourism from the involved regions (one from each country), the IRWC-secretary and the project co-ordinator (from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1997).

A communication model was prepared (objective 1). The core unit of the model was the so-called "Net-Forum" in which the participants were identified (see p. 5) selected by the criteria:

- the degree of experience in cross border co-operation at a formal or informal level;
- the degree of involvement in tourism development throughout the Region;
- the degree of influence on realisation of policies concerning tourism development.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Inter-regional Wadden Sea Conference (October, 1997) a first milestone in the fulfilment of objectives 2 and 3 was achieved with the political endorsement of the ToWG report "*Sustainable Tourism Development in the Wadden Sea Region - Developments, Perspectives and Visions*".

([www.irwc.ribeamt.dk](http://www.irwc.ribeamt.dk))

### The aims of the report are:

- to present a cross-border overview of the "tourism-situation" throughout the Wadden Sea Region;
- to illustrate the different administrative structures and regulation schemes in the three countries;
- to define future guidelines for a common tourism development.

The report includes a first analysis of the different aspects on tourism development in the three countries (recreational activities, accommodation and infrastructures) and socio-economic comparisons between the different countries. The report also presents three scenarios in order to visualise the related future impacts (reactive-, stable-, or reductive development).

At the Conference it was also decided to develop suggestions for a common tourism policy – with as much local participation as possible. The regions also agreed to base their co-operation on the principles of "subsidiarity" and "integration" (the Husum Statement: [www.irwc.ribeamt.dk](http://www.irwc.ribeamt.dk)).

At the 8<sup>th</sup> Governmental Wadden Sea Conference (October, 1997) the governments of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark acknowledged the work carried out by the IRWC and further they agreed:

*"to initiate inter-regional co-operation to develop and implement policies on sustainable tourism, together with relevant stakeholders, as well as local and other relevant authorities. They INVITE the Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation to carry out this task."* (§36).

The ministers also decided that ICZM should be subject for further investigations at the civil servant level with the aim to forward these at the forthcoming governmental conference in 2001.

### The impact from the two Conferences

- ✓ *The positive political reactions were crucial for the local acknowledgement of and the subsequent interest and participation by organisations in NetForum and by the public.*
- ✓ *The IRWC influenced the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation to integrate commercial issues (tourism) into their field of co-operation<sup>1</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> The Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation is based upon the protection of the Wadden Sea Area. Until then it has not focussed on the development of commercial interests within the Area.



## Project Phase 2: 1998 - 2000

Promotion of the participation of the local residents in the decision-making processes was also regarded as part of the implementation of Objective 1, and therefore corresponded with the ICZM-concept.

The realisation of this, however, raised some questions, such as:

1. *who are the local residents in a community?*
2. *which criteria should be applied to identify relevant stakeholders concerning the present process?*
3. *how can it be ensured that the local communities are integrated without being in conflict with the existing democratic structures?*

*Re.1:* In the light of some research it was decided to include the owners of second houses who regularly use their cottages in the category "local residents" (together with the local inhabitants, of course).

*Re.2:* Decisions were made after an analysis of existing networks and administrative structures in the Wadden Sea Region.

*Re.3:* It was of principal importance that the Tourism Project was integrated into existing democratic structures.

The fact that both Wadden Sea Conferences (1997) appreciated the work done until then and also made decisions on the continuation of the development of sustainable tourism was an important acknowledgement of the Tourism Project<sup>2</sup>. Moreover it provided a framework for the work within the project, which was and is essential for the realisation of proposals, initiatives and viewpoints resulting from the (NetForum) work.

The integration of the Tourism Project into existing democratic structures was an essential factor, which distinguished the project from many other EU Demonstration Projects. The Commission will probably find the process by which the final political acceptance of the project outcome will be developed of interest.

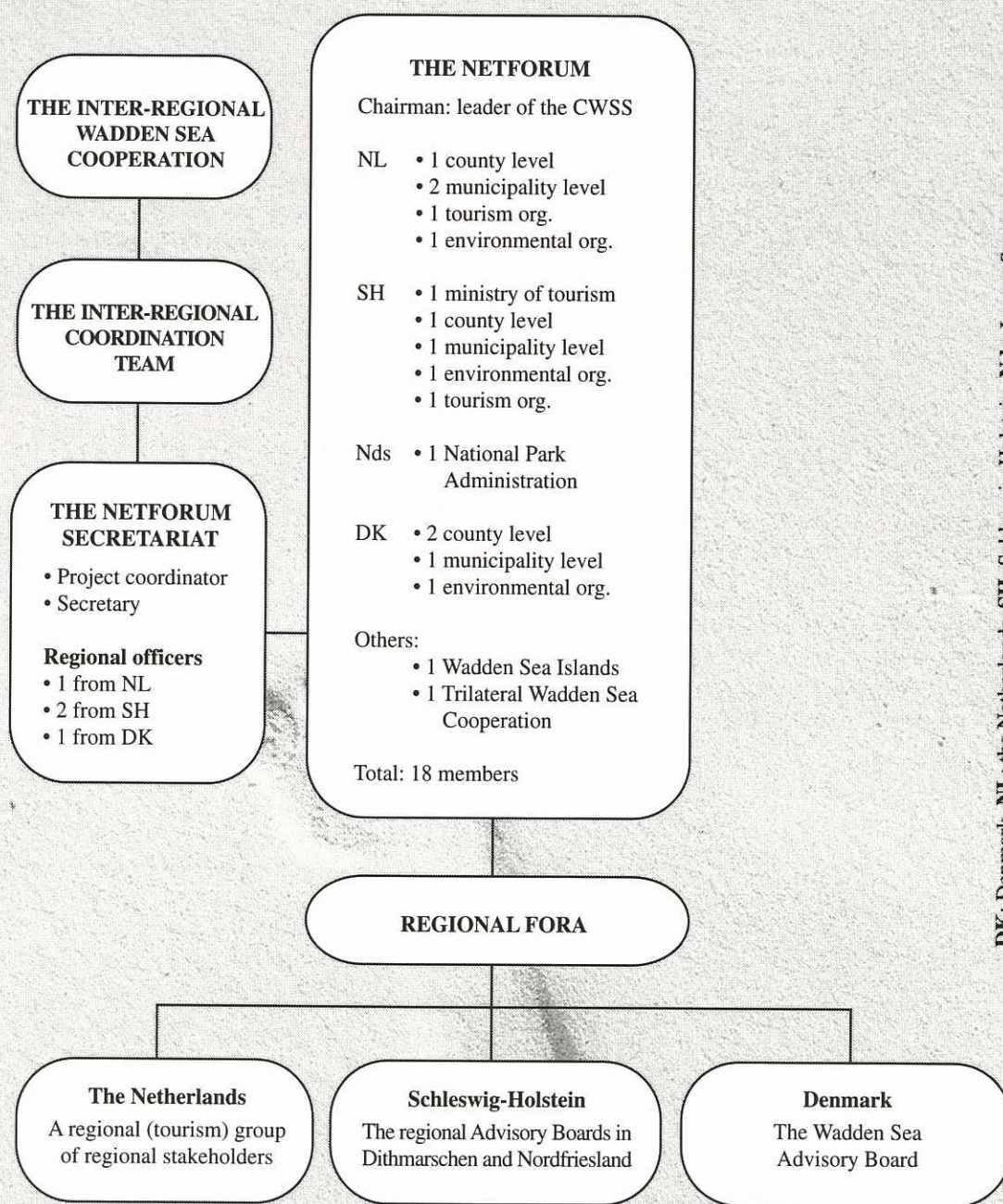
## A Model for Co-operation and Communication

Based on the selection criteria and the analysis it was decided to create a test model of co-operation and communication, consisting of units and participants, shown in the diagram (p. 5). After two workshops the test-model was evaluated, and except for the changed participation of Lower Saxony, the model was implemented through-out the project.





## The Co-operation and Communication Model



DK: Denmark, NL: the Netherlands, SH: Schleswig-Holstein, Nds: Lower Saxony, CWSS: Common Wadden Sea Secretariat





## NetForum

- NetForum (NF) was the platform in the development/formulation of proposals for joint policies on sustainable tourism and for ways of implementing these policies. This also included proposals and initiatives for follow up projects.
- NF was an independent group established in consultation with stakeholder organisations and consisted of key persons from environmental and tourist organisations (to some extent) and authorities on all levels within the entire Wadden Sea Region - apart from the German federal state of Lower Saxony<sup>3</sup>.

## Regional Boards

- In the Netherlands, a specific regional tourism board was established early in the process in order to maintain the communication among the various stakeholders and provincial authorities on the topic and process. The board also supported the involvement of the Dutch NF member's in local back-up functions.
- In Schleswig-Holstein the communication to and from NF primarily took place within the two regional National Park Boards of Trustees in the districts of Dithmarschen and Nordfriesland.
- In Denmark the communication was undertaken through the Danish Advisory Council for the Wadden Sea Area.

## ICT

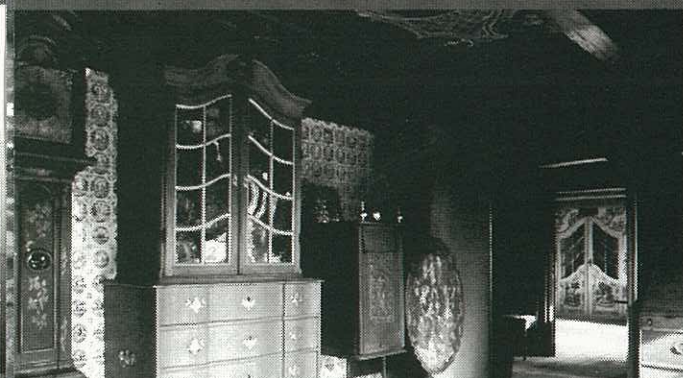
The ICT is the executive body of the IRWC and the responsible unit to the political level within the co-operation. It consists of three regional civil servants from the three countries. The IRWC executive secretary is the chairman of the ICT.

## IRWC

In this context it represents the political level of the co-operation.

## Conclusions

- ✓ the effect of this model is based upon the fact that cross border (horizontal) co-perations/networks have been in force for many years at most levels. Without these previous transnational co-operations the degree of effectiveness of the model would not have been that high;
- ✓ the design of the model ensured a vertical contact between existing networks (of varied formal character). This proved to be one of the strengths, because the model fulfilled a need for bottom up communication and co-operation in the Wadden Sea Region;
- ✓ if the model is to be used in the development of cross border co-operation and communication in large geographical areas (covering a large amount of different administrative borders and barriers) it is essential that there are existing cross-border networks and/or a tradition for cross-border co-operation;
- ✓ the fact that the process was integrated in the existing democratic structures meant that the invited organisations were highly motivated to join NF and the process in order to influence the formulation and elaboration of the joint policies.





## Problems Encountered

- The attempt to keep the commercial (tourism) sector involved throughout the NF process (2½ years) did not succeed. A private (and dynamic) sector such as the tourism sector seems only marginally motivated to enter into a strategic and long-term development like this project.

Furthermore, the transnational network in the Wadden Sea Region between the tourism organisations and -industries is very limited and incomplete. The lack of an organised network within this sector meant that the few representatives of the tourism sector in NF did not have local back-up in their organisation, unlike the environmental organisations.

- In general a weakness of the model was that the NF-members themselves had to inform and involve their back-up functions.
- The composition of a discussion forum like NF demanded a thorough and time-consuming preparation for each of the workshops/meetings, because of:
  - the differentiated background and references of the members;
  - their different ability to understand, read and express themselves in English<sup>4</sup>.
- Reality also showed that a strong involvement of the local population in the German part of the Wadden Sea Region demanded the use of German in most of the documents. This created an extra workload and preparation time.
- The workload within the NF-secretariat (and other facilitating fora during the project) was not estimated well enough. This fact is illustrated by the total working hours spent on the project (18,255). Apart from the project co-ordinator and the correspondent/ secretary the other members of the NF-secretariat were also occupied with regular tasks within their "home organisations".
- In spite of the fact that most NF-members represented organisations/institutions working transna-

tionally in the Wadden Sea Region, it was clear that lack of knowledge from other parts, regions or countries often became an obstacle to constructive/innovative discussions on several issues.

## From Netforum Ideas to Policies

The fulfilment of objectives 2 and 3 was carried out through four thematic workshops, three preparatory and evaluation meetings and a Tourism Conference. From a "blank piece of paper" NF worked out a joint vision and policies on sustainable tourism development for the entire Wadden Sea Region and follow up projects, published in NF final report, April 2000: *"Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreational Use in the Wadden Sea Region"*:

[www.irwc.ribeamt.dk](http://www.irwc.ribeamt.dk)

The proposals will be finally assessed and decided upon at the 4<sup>th</sup> Inter-regional and the 9<sup>th</sup> Governmental Wadden Sea Conferences in autumn 2001 (after the finalisation of the project). Postponement of these conferences from 2000 to 2001 caused a one year prolongation of The Tourism Project.

## Proposals for Policies on Nature and Recreational Activities

- ✓ Development of a flexible zoning system in time and space should be expanded in the National Parks and Nature Reserves. (**No NF consensus**)
- ✓ Monitoring of the impact on nature caused by recreational activities should be improved.
- ✓ Whenever possible regulations should be replaced by information.
- ✓ Information should always focus on the user.
- ✓ Information material should be developed in close cooperation and coordination with the stakeholders.
- ✓ The trilateral dimension should be more visible in nature and recreational-oriented information to the public than it is today.



<sup>4</sup> In order to treat all NF-members equal, English was chosen as communication language (in line with all trilateral working groups, etc.). This fact was emphasised in the invitation to the organisations and institutions.



- ✓ Apply the principles of precaution and careful decision-making in situations where the natural assets or ecological processes can be permanently damaged.
- ✓ Restrict recreational activities with an undesirable impact on nature to suitable areas or prohibit them entirely.
- ✓ Jet-skiing is a recreational activity that should not take place in the Wadden Sea Region.
- ✓ The importance of involving the local population as early as possible in the decision-making processes was stressed.
- ✓ Establish reception facilities for oil (and for other types of waste) in all harbours.

#### *Proposals for follow up projects*

- Development of a joint concept on Visitor Information for the entire Wadden Sea Region.
- Development of an Integrated Wadden Sea and Tourist Information System.
- Introduction of beach-guides on the Wadden Sea beaches.
- Construction of a Wadden Bike.

#### **Proposals for Policies on Culture and Cultural Tourism**

##### *Raise...*

- ✓ the awareness of the fact that preserved monuments or attractions should be included as destinations for cultural tourism;
- ✓ the economic benefit of creating better conditions for the cultural tourism.

##### *Strengthen...*

- ✓ the effort to preserve the common cultural heritage and the use of it in the marketing;
- ✓ the use of the cultural heritage as tourist attractions must be improved so that it motivates the tourists to prolong their stay in the Region and thereby extends the tourism season.

#### *Proposals for follow up projects*

- Establishment of a gastronomy award on Wadden Sea menus consisting of Wadden-products.
- Development of education-packages on regional history.
- Development of joint marketing of cultural activities.
- Supplement information to the tourism sector on cultural items.
- Integration of existing visitor information systems.

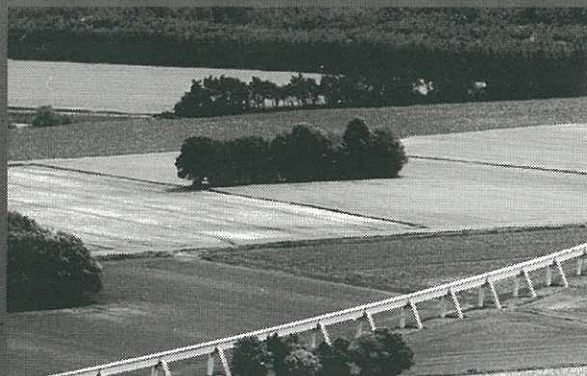
#### **Proposals for Policies on Transport**

##### *Public Transport*

- ✓ Make the public transportation competitive to the use of private cars.
- ✓ Improve the public transportation systems by taxation and parking fees etc. (**No NF consensus**)
- ✓ Improve public transport connections into and within the Wadden Sea Region.
- ✓ Promote the use of public transportation.
- ✓ Introduce customer friendly "door to door" transportation of luggage to/from and at the destinations.
- ✓ Ensure that all policies on minimisation of car traffic are sustainable.

##### *Infrastructure*

- ✓ Avoid fragmentation of the landscape (when new roads are built)
- ✓ Make the arrival and departure days more flexible in the individual areas.
- ✓ The rural and inland tourism should be encouraged, taken into account the accessibility to the location.





#### *Air Traffic/Ferries*

- ✓ Minimise environmental problems and disturbance to tourists caused by air traffic.
- ✓ No new airfields should be built in the Wadden Sea Region. (No NF consensus)
- ✓ Introduce a minimum flight altitude of 2000 feet. (No NF consensus)
- ✓ Avoid further high-speed ferries in the Wadden Sea Region. (No NF consensus)
- ✓ Avoid negative environmental impacts from high-speed ferries and other fast vessels.
- ✓ Extend the visitor information system to all ferries.

#### *Proposals for follow up projects*

- Create "Park and Ride" facilities at Hot Spots throughout the Wadden Sea Region.
- Establish and promote alternative transport-systems on islands with car traffic.
- Issue a catalogue of traffic minimisation - ideas and measures
- Establish and promote the existing "combi Wadden Sea ticket".
- Least cost planning in mobility.
- Develop a Wadden bike-hire system.
- Improve the information on public transport opportunities.
- Improve service at railway stations.

#### **Proposals for Policies on Accommodation**

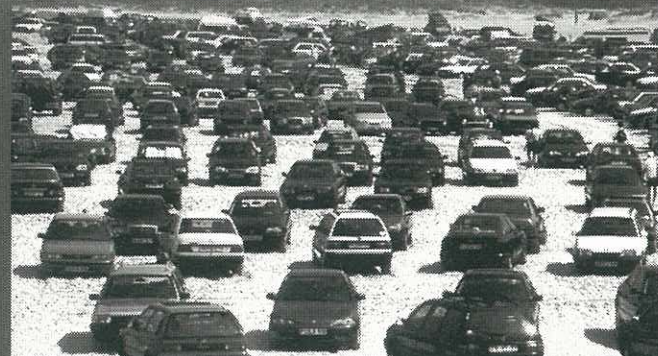
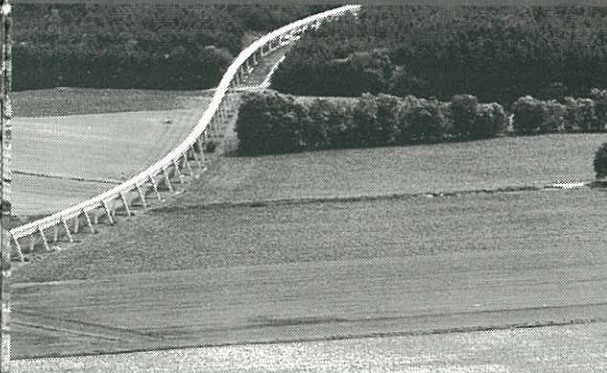
- ✓ Extend the accommodation capacity along the Wadden Sea should be avoided, but the existing capacity should be used more efficiently.
- ✓ Encourage the development of new accommodation facilities in the inland municipalities – pro-

vided that the individual, regional character is not lost.

- ✓ The renovation of old facilities and the establishment of new, if necessary, should be in accordance with the local/regional architecture – and be based on sustainable principles also with regard to location and size.
- ✓ Establishment of new and renovation of existing accommodation facilities must be made with consideration to the disabled and elderly people.
- ✓ Develop common criteria for the requirements of sustainable accommodation and other recreational facilities and restaurants.
- ✓ Promote the existing sustainable certification systems and extend it throughout the Region to include accommodation, attractions, restaurants etc.
- ✓ The tourism sector must, in co-operation with the authorities, improve the qualifications of the employees within the tourism industry, by including knowledge about sustainable behaviour and about the nature and cultural values of the Region.

#### *Proposals for follow up projects*

- Promote sustainability standards in the Wadden Sea.
- Develop a sustainable package-holiday.
- Enhance facilities for less mobile and disabled.
- Make the star classification systems comparable.
- A sustainable "backpack" for practical use.
- Establish a sustainability award in the Wadden Sea Region.
- Establish comparable classification and compatible booking systems.





# Dissemination

During both phases intensive dissemination of the interim results and proposals were carried out through public hearings and consultations in all three countries. This includes publication of nine issues of a newsletter (circulation raised from 400 to 1000 in three languages).

## Public Tourism Conference

In November 1999, almost three years of preparation and initiatives culminated with a public Tourism Conference in Stade, Germany. 160 politicians and officials from all authority levels, EU experts, representatives from different stakeholder organisations and general interested people from both the Wadden Sea Region and other parts of Europe discussed the NF draft report concerning a future sustainable development of tourism in the Wadden Sea Region.

Summaries of speeches, conclusions and recommendations are issued in Newsletter no. 9 (30 p, April 2000).

# Financing

The estimated total budget for the Wadden Sea Project was DKK 4,899,800 and the eligible costs DKK 4,862,400. The total final costs are DKK 6,693,784. The additional consumption between eligible and total final costs is covered by the project partners themselves.

## Conclusions<sup>5</sup>

The experts and participants were positive towards the NF work and report. The importance of the report as a cross-bordering document, where both existing and future plans for the tourism development in the entire Wadden Sea Region are presented, was emphasised. This was the first time such a report was elaborated.

### ✓ A common identity is necessary

### ✓ Long-term co-operation and local practical solutions are the keys to promote sustainable tourism

- Targeted development towards specific groups
- Continuous and systematic collection of tourism data
- Practicians helping practicians is the basis for the establishment of networks
- Establishment of local networks also for communication and co-operation
- Good advice is not always hard to obtain
- Reuse good examples
- Take one step at the time
- Do not forbid but provide
- Solutions must be "tailor - made"

### ✓ Promote Private - Public Partnerships

### ✓ The NetForum work must continue





# Conclusions and Experiences

✓ During the project it was recognised that a development of a tourism industry within the Wadden Sea Region based upon the principles of sustainability, integration and subsidiarity (the IRWC Husum Statement) and the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management is both essential and possible within the Region. In this management scheme the economic benefits from the high protection level of the nature values and cultural assets will be central elements in the tourism planning as well as the visibility and the integration of tourism development in the inland areas.

By doing so, and adapting to the characteristics in the different parts of the Wadden Sea Region, a regional/local starting point for an increased cross-sector and transnational Wadden Sea management can be achieved.

During the project the IRWC has endorsed the principles of ICZM in their co-operation charter. Furthermore, the two Danish Counties have followed up by publishing a joint planning document for the Danish Wadden Sea Region with the aim to achieve a higher degree of integration between the inland, the mainland coastal zone, the islands and the Wadden Sea.

✓ The project was formed as a joint venture between the stakeholders and politicians (regional and governmental), where the two levels were integrated into a "feed-back process". In this way the democratic procedures were not overruled, and the motivation of the NF-participants was maintained throughout the project. This "dialogue" made the Wadden Sea Project quite exceptional among the Demonstration Projects, because it provides the EU Commission with endorsed policies at the highest national and regional levels in the three member states.

✓ The transnational communication and co-operation model proved to be a simple and constructive tool in order to involve most of the relevant stakeholder organisations directly.

✓ The construction of NF however, clearly demonstrated that the tourism industry and organisations were not perceptible; due to time consuming aspects and the level of abstraction. This was to some extent compensated by the fact that the sector responded actively during the several hearing procedures.

✓ The model, as a platform for broad policy discussions and influences, has also demonstrated how the principles of integration (and subsidiarity) can be included in transnational coastal policy-making and management. In this process an increased awareness and the mutual responsibility among the stakeholders to find common sustainable solutions was highlighted, which in the long run is expected to lead to a more effective policy-making.

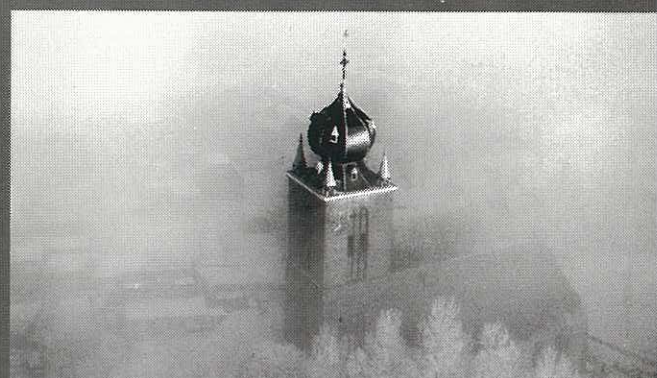
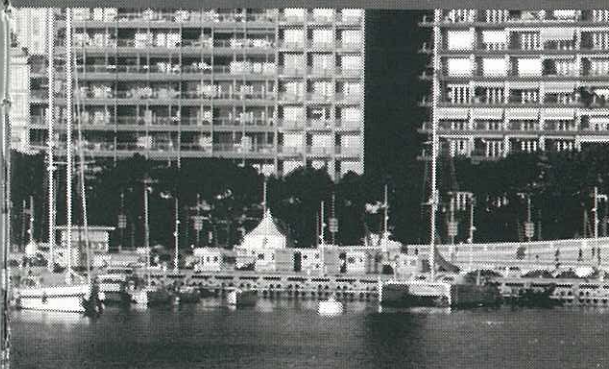
✓ The work within NetForum has over the last 3 years become legendary in "the Wadden Sea publicity". New trilateral proposals to increase the public participation in the decision-making processes for the future take the starting point in the experiences of NetForum.

✓ An analysis of the problems influencing tourism development and recreational use in the different regions has been presented in the NF-report.

✓ The overall vision and guiding principles of NF for a tourism development in the Region take all aspects of sustainability into account and balances the preservation of the Wadden Sea nature and the cultural assets and the survival of viable local communities.

✓ The formulation of strategic goals and tools meet the EU concept of the "Tourism Value Chain".

✓ The project has presented a set of joint policy proposals of central aspects on tourism development in a coastal region with a very high degree of consensus among the very different stakeholders.







**RIBE AMT**



**Sønderjyllands Amt**

**Landesamt  
für den Nationalpark  
Schleswig-Holsteinisches  
Wattenmeer**



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*Publisher: The Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation*

*Lay out: Grafisk Service, Ribe Amt*

*Photos: Jan Abrahamse, Aerophoto Eelde, Gert Fobma,  
Wietze Landman, Svend Tougaard, John Frikke,  
John Frederiksen, Augst, Jessel.*

*Print: Colourprint, Ribe*

*Copies: 300*

*ISBN: 87-7941-109-6*



**Inter-Regional  
Wadden Sea  
Cooperation**



**Integrated  
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