

## Sustainable Tourism

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

## Introduction

For the period 1997-2000, the EU Commission subsidized the development of a common tourism policy for the Wadden Sea Region according to the EU Demonstration Program "Integrated Coastal Zone Management" (ICZM). The Wadden Sea Tourism Project is one of the 35 demonstration projects in coastal zones all over Europe, which have the aim of providing the EU Commission with information about and experience of spatial planning aspects within the member states. It focuses on how co-operation and involvement with the local and national authorities, as well as the various commercial and other interest groups within the Region can be developed and promoted.



The gathering of experience from the 35 projects in the EU has shown that most of the problems related to spatial planning and to the development of ICZM, are due to a lack of political planning, and a lack of functioning procedures for communication across the different sectors and across the different interests within the coastal zone. It has also shown that a lack of sufficient information and knowledge about the dynamics of the coastal zone regarding both the natural environment and the socio-economic development is another common problem. Most of the projects put heavy emphasis upon the aspect of local involvement and commitment as a basis for solving the problems in coastal areas.

The Wadden Sea Tourism Project is thus an integrated part of the realization of the political decisions taken by the Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation and also part of EU activities concerning the development of Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

## NetForum Report

A project steering group, the so-called NetForum, was established as a cross-border and cross-sectoral unit and overall body in order to create the common policy proposals from a blank sheet of paper (a "bottom-up" process). NetForum held four thematic workshops and three meetings over the last 2 years. A first draft report was debated at the Tourism Conference in Stade in November 1999. At the last NetForum meeting in March 2000, the report was finalized with the inclusion of some of the raised questions and recommendations from the Conference (see reference).

It is the first report ever which includes an analysis of the developments in all three countries and presents a common vision, outline proposals for joint policies and follow-up projects on the issue, categorized in five items ("Sustainability", "Nature and Recreational Activities", "Culture and Cultural Tourism", "Accommodation" and "Mobility"), on which there is a broad consensus among the relevant stakeholders. It should also be mentioned that for the first time in Europe a work of its kind has been carried out, and, in spite of the potential obstacles, the work of NetForum has been regarded as a very successful process.

At the Inter-regional Chairmen's Meeting in June 2000, it was decided to establish an Action Plan to initiate, co-ordinate and facilitate the follow-up activities in a further participatory process with the stakeholders. The Action Plan should take cross-thematic activities into account and should therefore embody, amongst others, the following approaches:

- The tourism development should be more oriented towards target groups.
- Support should be given to establish a communication and co-operation strategy for the local level.
- The establishment of a network designed for the technical support and counseling of the part-

ners in the Wadden Sea Region with regard to the implementation of environmental measures in the tourism sector ("practitioners support practitioners") should be designed.

- The development of demand-oriented and competitive solutions.
- Making use of public-private-partnership (PPP).

The Action Plan is an important guideline and a powerful tool for a further enhancement of a common tourism development within the Region. Furthermore, it can function as a framework/cradle for the practical approach when formulating and implementing the already proposed projects, but also for the ripening of new ideas.

## Implementation of the Recommended Policies

An essential aspect of the bottom-up process also includes a hearing on the NetForum Report. Until autumn 2001, the subsequent political decisions will be included in the final reporting of the project to the EU Commission and will be presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Inter-regional Wadden Sea Conference in September 2001 and the 9<sup>th</sup> Trilateral Governmental Conference in Esbjerg in October 2001. In order to facilitate the NetForum conclusions and recommendations for policies, suitable for a broader audience, a leaflet will be produced in all three languages.

## Project Proposals

In the NetForum report, about 24 project-ideas were suggested. It was agreed that the further work should pay special attention to the formulation and short-term implementation in order to visualize the practical approach of the Wadden Sea Tourism Project. Priority will be given to the following five NetForum projects:

- establishment of socio-economic (tourism) monitoring (project no. 3);
- development of a thematic marketing strategy (project no. 4);
- establishment of a gastronomy-award for menus containing locally grown (eco)Wadden products (project no. 5);
- enhancement of facilities for the less mobile and disabled (project no. 9);
- establishment and promotion of alternative transport-systems on islands with excessive car traffic (project no. 11).

Furthermore, the IRWC decided to test their ability to organize and implement ideas by the estab-

lishment of a joint Internet homepage "Port to Visit the Wadden Sea".

Depending on the angle of perspective, the projects can either be financed through the programs such as LEADER+ and Inter-reg III, or through thematic funding from other EU programs (LIFE, Funds for Small and Medium Enterprises and the like).

## Monitoring of Recreational Activities

Policies to conserve the natural and cultural assets, on the one hand, and promote tourism and recreational activities on the other, demand a careful decision-making. To achieve this the best available knowledge must be used, which in many cases seems insufficient. Up until now, however, ecological data has only been compared with recreational data on a very limited scale, due to the fact that this data either does not exist or is incomplete. Socio-economic monitoring of tourism parameters are mostly done on an incidental basis and are mostly non-comparable between the different regions. At the Trilateral Governmental Conference in 1997, a 'Common Package' for the monitoring of the Wadden Sea Area was decided. Among the 28 parameter groups on nature and the environment, only 3 parameters concern recreational activities (boats at sea, number of guided tours and air traffic).

NetForum concludes that the current monitoring systems are inadequate in terms of providing appropriate information for managers and stakeholders. It was decided to develop a consistent monitoring program of relevant parameters concerning tourism development. It is urgently needed in order to implement and evaluate the common (Inter-regional as well as trilateral) policies.

## Reference

Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation, 2000. Sustainable Tourism Development and Recreational Use in the Wadden Sea Region. NetForum Final Report, April 2000, pp. 81.

The report (in English, German and Danish) can be downloaded from the IRWC Homepage via <http://cwss.www.de>

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