

Exchange of Sustainable Tourism, Rügen - DE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Developing Europe's regional seas sustainably
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Knowledge-based
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The preservation of the natural and cultural landscape are the key values for tourism on the seven involved Baltic Sea islands. Therefore, common standards (indicators) and quality checks for a sustainable tourism development make sense to be exchanged and applied on all seven islands irrespective of country status. The same is true for other EU regions that depend of an intact cultural and natural environment for tourism.

4. Overview of the case

Sustainable tourism was the focus of the tourism evaluation on the largest German Baltic Sea island Rügen, one of the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea: Bornholm, Gotland, Hiiumaa, Saaremaa, Rügen, Åland and Öland. On Rügen, first of all sustainable economic stakeholders in tourism business were identified. Administration offices, tourism associations, national park administration and environmental protection associations were included to identify sustainable tourism projects. A website with tourist information was launched.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The seven largest Baltic Sea Islands (B7) share a similar geological and cultural background and development. Their economic development depends largely on tourism. Successful tourism depends on an intact nature and landscape, as well as on the preservation of the unique cultural maritime background. The tourism season is very short, usually confined to summer high season. Transportation to, and from, the islands is limited. In this respect, the German island Rügen is an exception because it is connected to the mainland. An international co-operation to share best practise experiences, develop common standards and quality controls and update these experiences at regular network meetings minimizes the necessary work force for each island administration. On Rügen there had been a tourism management plan in action that stated sustainability aims without explicitly mentioning sustainability: the growth of the tourism economy compatible with other economic, ecological, and social development. The national park Rügen has proposed a concept for the island Rügen as model region for sustainable regional development.

The evaluation of sustainable tourism projects was seen as a contribution to the VASAB2010 and the Baltic Agenda 21 process. A specific Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry had been issued by the World Tourism Organization in cooperation with other organizations in 1995. Several tourism quality labels already exist and contain aspects of sustainability. The evaluation of sustainable tourism projects in comparison with total tourism was initiated as a result of the Common Strategy for the B7 islands, which was adopted in Visby in May 1996. However, at the start there was no common definition of sustainable tourism and its indicators. Most stakeholders from policies, administration, and economy were not motivated to

follow a sustainability concept.

b) Objectives

A main aim was to find a common definition for sustainable tourism development, to initiate a network to exchange practical experiences in this respect, to define common quality checks, and identify limitations. Another aim was to promote the development of sustainable island tourism in an inter-island co-operation network. For Rügen the first step was to identify existing concepts of sustainable tourism and then define the current status. The next step was to create an intra-Rügen network for communication between stakeholders as bases for inter-island cooperation. The third step was to identify common existing sustainability criteria and those still needed to be defined. In the last step, a new initiative was to be stimulated to contribute to sustainable tourism development. This was started in autumn 1999 and the results were summed up in autumn 2000.

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

a) Management

Landkreis Rügen (county Rügen) / Department for Economy and Culture co-ordinated the Rügen case study. Administrative authorities, tourism enterprises and tourist tour operators, as well as environmental stakeholders participated.

b) ICZM tools

New guidelines and a list of indicators were developed to define sustainable tourism. The current situation of sustainable tourism was analysed. Demonstration projects for sustainable tourism were chosen to apply the indicators for a sustainability check. The tourism projects were monitored for their compliance with strengthening local culture, reduction of pollution and the use of resources, the creation of long-term employment and marketing for the tourism service or product. Nature and cultural heritage had been defined as the most important values for the development of the island Rügen.

A SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis revealed flaws in terms of sustainability. A key negative aspect for Rügen was that despite the large amount of sustainable tourism projects that were identified, their number was low compared to the total tourism business. Networks of several businesses had a positive effect on promotion and marketing. Most of these network initiatives increased service quality. However, in general, marketing for sustainable tourism was weak, and promotion of the term sustainability non-existent. Therefore, Rügen was not known as a sustainable tourism spot. Communication between, and within, sectors have to be developed further. Marketing courses for tourism officials were proposed to improve marketing of sustainable tourism. A quality certification system was proposed as a promotion tool and to define the aims of sustainable tourism development. More regional brands like the regional culinary heritage brand should be developed for further sectors: the "Regionale Esskultur" has been used as a label by producers and gastronomy in the region. Sustainable tourism projects improved the diversity of the tourism offer and prolonged the season. An inter-island exchange of spatial planning is seen as an important factor for the development of sustainability. Action for tourism business actors is required in intra-island co-operation, as is the development of a wider palette of tourist attractions. The public sector should support existing and emerging networks (morally and financially) to improve communication.

7. Cost and resources

The budget for the Rügen study is not known. It formed part of an initiative with a total budget of €360,000 and was co-funded by ERDF (Interreg IIC Programme).

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

Indicators for sustainable tourism were developed together with the other large Baltic Sea islands. They were applied in the pilot initiative in Rügen. Strengths and weaknesses were revealed, and common opportunities and threats defined. Differences in the focus for sustainable tourism in the different destinations were revealed and hampered the inter-island exchange of experiences. Based on this and other studies, a sustainable development concept for the island was released in 2002; the

process having been started in 2000. Stakeholders from politics, administration, economy, and NGOs as well as individuals were integrated in defining the concept for the whole range of sustainable development, grouped around the most important economical and social factor of the island, tourism. Better use and marketing of regional products and awareness-raising for regional products was seen as an important step for sustainable development. The development of a bicycle path network connecting the whole island and main touristic attraction combined with the extension of thematic bicycle tour offers is another one of the specific results.

9. Success and Fail factors

The islands were given very much freedom to conduct their case studies, therefore, the results did not have a common structure, and exchange of ideas and experiences was a bit hampered. A common marketing was not seen as favourable despite the proximity of the islands. Therefore, competition dominates co-operation. In the longer term, this may change and lead to common marketing. Several tourism quality labels already exist (national, regional, local) that contain aspects of sustainability. However, the use for common marketing is limited because several of them are not known everywhere.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

The failure of a common internet-platform was not foreseen. Business stakeholders were sceptical from the beginning because of an overlap of target groups for the different destinations and fear of migration of tourism groups between destinations. However, a B7 website exists as a common information exchange platform and the islands have developed a common strategy for sustainable development. "Rügen – Meer – Insel" has been developed as an identity label for the common Rügen identity, products and services. An association has been founded to develop the application of the label. A sustainable quality label "Natürlich Rügen" (Natural Rügen) is being developed for local products. The label "Rügen – Zeit für uns" (Rügen – time for ourselves) was defined as a general marketing label for the tourism association.

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13. Sources

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BEST finalreport (141.13 KB) 



GreenPaper_b7-05 (146.6 KB) 



b7-04Rügen (489.78 KB)

