

Nature and tourism: running events in protected areas - DE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- 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

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

An international sports event in a nature conservation area raises awareness for nature protection and attracts tourists at the same time provided it is organised in a sustainable way.

4. Overview of the case

A running event in the national park area of the peninsula Darß was planned to become a regional event with sustainable effects in terms of awareness raising for environmental protection, for the value of sustainable quality tourism and to attract extra tourists to the area. The event itself was organised in a sustainable way.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The peninsula Darß belongs to the national park "Vorpommersche Boddenlandschaft" on the German southern Baltic Sea coast. It is a famous beach holiday resort. Prerow is a town on this peninsula. The national park centre Darßer Arche provides environmental education for schoolchildren, tourists, families and locals. Inhabitants of the area greatly depend on the tourism economy to sustain a living. Some people see the nature protection rules in the national park as a hindrance to their tourism business. The Prerow fun-run through the national park had attracted many people from all over Germany in autumn 2004.

b) Objectives

The aim was to organise a sports event in a sustainable way and to combine it with environmental education in the national park.

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

a) Management

The organizer of the German pilot study in the field nature and tourism was the staff of Darßer Arche gGmbH which is the national park information and visitor centre.

b) ICZM tools

The first idea to combine a sports event with environmental education came up after the Prerow fun run through the national park in September 2004, where runners from all over Germany had participated. The first Darß-Marathon was in early May 2006. Planning had started in early 2005, and was supported by external experts. The runners and their company were seen as a new target group for environmental education. The plan was to make the Darß-Marathon a regular event to the region's and the national park's benefit that can be attractive to runners from all over Germany and even from abroad. The national park staff was eager to demonstrate that the region can profit from events that are organized in a sustainable way and that sports, environmental education, tourism, and economic benefits for the region can go hand in hand. Criteria how to organize the sports event in a sustainable way, how to combine it with environmental education, and how to market it were developed a year ahead of the event. The attractiveness of the event was raised by offering different types of running competitions: full marathon, half marathon, walking marathon, walking half marathon, children's competition. The sports event was organized in an environmentally friendly way with regional products and entertainments being offered. Re-usable material was used for catering e.g. paper cups instead of plastic cups for the runners' refreshment. Local artists had created the medals for the winners.

The success and the sustainability of the event was to be evaluated. This was done by registering the origin of the runners and questioning them on how long they stayed in the area. The participants came from all over Germany, however, most of them were from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. About half of the participants were asked, how long they had stayed in the area: about 25% stayed for 2 days, about 28% 3-4 days, and about 12% a week or even longer. Only about 25% did not stay overnight, and about 10% stayed only for one night. More than a quarter of the questioned persons wanted to participate in the marathon another time and about 14% definitely wanted to come again for the next Darß-Marathon. The Ministry of Environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern evaluated the Darß-Marathon event as sustainable. A checklist was developed that defines sustainability for the tourist sector so that it can be used to plan and check the sustainability of a tourism project or event. It addresses sustainability in its three sectors economical benefit for the region, the society, and the environment.

7. Cost and resources

The budget for planning, organizing and evaluating the running event is unknown.

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

The first running event was very successful and fulfilled the set aims to attract tourists and teach them about the reasons and values of nature protection. In the mean-time, the Darß-Marathon has become a regular event.

9. Success and Fail factors

The first running event was a big success, more runners than expected came to the area, many for the first time. Several participants in the marathon used the event to combine it with extra holidays in the area, took environmental education tours and enjoyed entertainment and local products. The marathon has been established as a regular event called "The nature experience marathon at the Baltic Sea" and developed further with additional sustainable tourism products and services.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

There were more participants in the running event than estimated. Many of them stayed longer in the area and used the environmental education offers as well as other tourism offers. Many of the participants were first-time visitors to the area.

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13. Sources

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