

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board

(WSB 43)

16 May 2024
Ameland, Netherlands



Agenda Item:	5.2 Enhance Sustainability of Human Uses and foster Transformative Change (paras 17-37)
Subject:	NG-ST progress report
Document No.:	WSB 43/5.2/2
Date:	24 April 2024
Submitted by:	Network Group Sustainable Tourism (NG-ST)

This document contains a progress report of the Network Group Sustainable Tourism (NG-ST) including a summary of the key findings of the comparative status survey & consultations in the regions conducted in the context of the internal evaluation of the Strategy of Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination.

Proposal: WSB is invited to note the information.

Network Group Sustainable Tourism (NG-ST) progress report to WSB 42

Since the last Network Group Sustainable Tourism (NG-ST) report to WSB 39 on how the management respectively implementation of the Action Plan would be addressed in the framework of the updated draft Action Plan on Implementing the Wadden Sea World Heritage Tourism Strategy, the NG-ST has progressed as following:

1. Review of the Strategy of Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage

The sustainable tourism strategy (STS), as requested by the World Heritage Committee in 2009, was launched in 2014 with the ambition to provide a long-term consistent approach for the development of sustainable tourism across the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination that fully considers the integrity and ecological requirements of the property.

After nearly 10 years it deemed necessary to conduct a strategic evaluation to assess the contribution which STS has made in relation to nature conservation and sustainable tourism development. In order to initiate the process, members of the NG-ST were appointed to an evaluation core team who controlled and initiated the evaluation process in the regions:

- NL - Sjon de Haan (Monique Pruyt)
- Lower Saxony - Mira Hohmann (Heike Kulesa)
- Schleswig-Holstein - Anja Szczesinski (Martin Rimpler)
- Denmark – Peter Saabye Simonsen

The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat commissioned the Institute for Tourism Research in Northern Europe (NIT), a research institution for tourism issues and related subject areas, to carry out selected supporting services for the evaluation. In a first step, NIT prepared a questionnaire to be used by the evaluation core team in the region. The questionnaire focused on the issues addressed in the section entitled "where we are" in the Sustainable Tourism Strategy" (2014) ".

Based on this questionnaire the evaluation core team interviewed key stakeholders from states parties, regional and local authorities, local communities, the tourism sector and from environmental NGOs in the Wadden Sea Region. The NIT received 32 filled in questionnaires (7 NL, 16 LS, 8 SH, 1 DK). For the Netherlands additionally a valuable national internal assessment of key points was received.

In a second step NIT condensed the given answers into an overview report, following some accomplishments highlighted:

- The strategy provides an excellent overarching framework for the development of sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and has brought stakeholders together and led to lasting networks. But it is not very relevant in day-to-day work and not everyone is aware of the strategy and its associated goals.
- Awareness-raising, participation and cooperation have been significantly increased, both nationally and across borders as well as regionally and locally (e.g. partnership programs).
- A clear brand has been established, and internal as well as communication towards visitors is more uniform.
- Local products, especially food products, are increasingly in focus and being developed. Examples: The (national park) partnership programmes have continued to develop in terms of quantity and quality; more certified businesses and destinations, higher standards, sustainability concept are better anchored in Germany. In Denmark gastronomy is on the move.

- There has been good progress in terms of the breadth and quality of tourism offers and qualification of stakeholders. Many great successes as well as a lot of exchange between SMTEs, multipliers of visitor information and the National Parks resp. conservation authorities. Examples: In Denmark they set up a 6-year training programme and activated SMTE's, DMO's and municipalities. In the Netherlands it is facilitated by Visit Wadden and the ambassador program.
- Existence of good training programmes as well as in-house training e.g. at the Schutzstation Wattenmeer (SH) and at the NP administrations and support from the Wadden Sea World Heritage Exchange Platform + IWSS.
- The World Heritage status contributes to attracting visitors who value the area and respect nature. Example Migratory Bird Days.

Some of the following challenges were identified and named:

- The relationship between nature conservation and tourism is complex and can vary depending on the context. The cooperation between these two could sometimes benefit from improved balance, yet it serves as a solid foundation for resolving occasional conflicts more effectively (e.g. kitesurfing). Further expansion of trilateral and cross-border cooperation could lead to further achievement of additional shared goals. However, maintaining continuity poses a challenge (we need the structures, resources, capacities etc.)
- Marketing is more focused on regional cooperation in the countries, and not necessarily across the border throughout the entire Wadden Sea area. But it is also questioned whether this would be effective and reasonable.
- The communication primarily reaches those who already have an affinity for the topic and actively seek information about the World Heritage, noticing it immediately and knowing where to find it. People with different attention focuses are reached less because information is not within their field of vision or, at least, not noticed there (or they do not want to see it).
- Progress in the area of sustainable mobility is not so great in all countries, apart from single successful projects. It has to be considered for the future if this working field is still a task within the STS or not.
- Collaboration in environmental education is successfully being implemented by the International Wadden Sea School (IWSS). Collaboration in competence development as well as environmental education could be further improved by encouraging the development of offers for "advanced" users (even more in-depth information on WNE and threats). The accessibility of the existing resources could be increased for a broader tourism related stakeholder target group by better integrating the resources into an overall common World Heritage information platform.
- After 10 years, the WNE is no longer in its infancy. The World Heritage status continues to be an attraction for visitors. Taking into consideration that quality should not be standardized but instead reflect local identity, such as in food, language, and folklore, it remains crucial that quality is consistently high throughout the entire service chain.

The NG-ST concluded that a more thorough and nuanced documentation of the evaluation as well as a more structured approach (particularly with reference to different target groups that are addressed) is needed to capture the diverse range of perspectives reflected in the review.

Therefore, the group will meet again in the course of this year (see point 3) for a series of workshops aimed at identifying both internal and external factors impacting the defined work fields within the strategy. Evaluate how to adapt to these factors, draw insights, and recommend additional actions based on lessons learned.

Proposal: WSB is invited to note the information

2. Implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan

The implementation and progress of the Action Plan is based on voluntary commitment of the participating partners and stakeholders. Diverse regional projects and activities, all contributing to the implementation and advancement of the STS Action Plan, are demonstrating a robust overall commitment.

Since the last report various projects started in 2023/24:

[INTERREG A VaBene-project](#) (DK + SH)

Interreg North Sea Programme "[3ST: Speeding up Sustainability Skills in Tourism](#)" (NL)

EFRE project "'Gemeinsam für die Biosphäre Wattenmeer - Netzwerke für eine nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung.'" (Consolidation and further development of the partner programme and the community of municipalities in the transition zone of the UNESCO biosphere reserve). (LS)

And further project applications are in progress:

INTERREG A Wadden Vision-project (NL + LS)
Hostmanship project (NL)

The NG-ST facilitates communication particularly with regions beyond those directly involved in the projects. An overview of the ongoing /planned activities and links are shared and provided regularly to NG-ST members to facilitate easier access to projects and information.

The exchange on how the projects engage and inspire stakeholders who have not yet been involved or reached with sustainable topics is deemed particularly important. Also, the international component of the projects when e.g. communicating with local governmental bodies.

The challenges still are to name appropriate channels for exchange, frequency of communication, identifying focal points for information collection, to use the full potential of the NG-ST.

This will be addressed in the workshop named under point 3.

Proposal: WSB is invited to note the information

3. Promote and enhance the cooperation between the regions and sectors on sustainable tourism

The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) has allocated funds within the supplementary budget (K185) for the implementation of the Action Plan with a particular focus on continuously assessing the impacts and contributions of sustainable tourism to both nature conservation and the advancement of sustainable tourism practices, while also seeking ideas for a potential trilateral collaborative project.

These funds will also support workshops focused on enhancing project and activity coordination from regional to trilateral levels (as stated in point 2). These workshops will promote discussions and initiatives aimed at achieving a more holistic, synchronized, and sustainable approach to tourism development and environmental protection, while taking into account the outcomes of the STS evaluation (as mentioned in point 1).

Envisioned Outcomes:

- Enhancing the management of cross-border challenges
- Embracing a holistic approach to sustainable tourism
- Reinforcing "trilateral" identity and cooperation
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences and knowledge
- Promoting efficient utilization of resources

In May/June 2024 the NG-ST will meet online to draft a concept outline for a series of physical workshops planned for September-November 2024.

Proposal: WSB is invited to note the information

4. Exchange of tourism related activities with other trilateral groups/initiatives

On April 18th the regional focal points (appointed 2017 by the WSB to increase and stimulate the involvement of entrepreneurs with the Wadden Sea World Heritage and to facilitate the application process of using the Wadden Sea World Heritage logo) and those accountable for the respective partner programs met in Hamburg to initiate a dialogue regarding tasks, challenges, and potential synergies within the regions' various partner programs.

The agenda included an assessment of the relevance of tasks assigned by the Wadden Sea Board (WSB) in 2017, pinpointing areas requiring updates, and addressing any impractical aspects. Additionally, discussions revolved around the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) titled "Trilateral Partnership in Support of the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage" and its practical implications.

The participants received a brief update on the ongoing branding initiative and also reviewed recent procedures for logo applications, providing direct input for the envisioned brand positioning. Furthermore, opportunities for integrating the programs with the Sustainable Tourism Strategy (STS) and the Action Plan were explored.

A follow-up meeting is scheduled for August to delve deeper into structural and operational matters, indicating a commitment to ongoing collaboration and improvement.

Proposal: WSB is invited to note the information