

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board (WSB 33)

27 August 2021
Wilhelmshaven, Germany



Agenda Item:	5.1 Wadden Sea World Heritage
Subject:	PROWAD LINK Progress Report
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Submitted by:	CWSS

The 3-year project started in September 2018 and submitted its fifth project report in April 2021 (see attached document). Due to delays in the initial phase of the project, a 6-month budget-neutral prolongation of the project lifetime was approved by the North Sea Region Programme in June 2020. Due to the strong impact of Covid-19 on the project since March 2020, a further up to 6-month budget-neutral prolongation was approved (until May 31 May 2022).

With the last Call in March 2021, the NSR Programme approved an application by the PROWAD Link consortium on 15 June 2021 to carry out new and additional activities which results in an extension of the project and its lifetime until 12 December 2022.

Proposal

The meeting is invited:

- 1- To note the status or the project.
- 2- To comment on the progress as appropriate.

PROWAD LINK Project progress report (July 2021)

The PROWAD Link consortium submitted an application for new and additional activities the Interreg VIB North Sea Region Programme on 19 March 2021 (final call 12 of the Programme period) to enhance the impact of the project (additional € 1.1 Mio, new total budget € 4.8 Mio, new end date 31.12.2022). With the Geiranger World Heritage Foundation, a second Norwegian partner has joined in the project. The Steering Committee of the Programme approved the extension on 15 June 2021.

The new activities complement the ones in the existing work packages and cover:

1. North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge: Involvement of public (individuals, SMEs, students, stakeholders) to propose innovative business models and products, and support of winners in promoting / implementing their ideas,
2. Beneficial effects of nature experience on mental and physical wellbeing:
 - a pilot study to assess the link of nature experience and general mental and physical wellbeing,
 - development of guiding material for SMEs to address the growing market for mental and physical wellbeing offers that interlink with the awareness/protection of nature thereby creating new business opportunities in harmony with nature,
3. Dark Sky: Background analysis on local and transnational sustainable development opportunities for SMEs related to the protection of nocturnal darkness as natural value (inventory of business cases and transnational synergies).
4. New innovative initiatives to create business opportunities by enhancing awareness for nature:
 - transnational brand activation trainings and campaigns implementing the new branding toolbox for the partnerships (transnational partnership hub and regional SME networks),
 - pilots for activation of a new nature brand connecting local DMOs (DMO: Destination Marketing Organisation) and conservation agencies in The Wash/North Norfolk region building on the brand option analysis in WP3.
 - video tutorials to educate and nudge unexperienced and/or new tourists in cooperation with local DMOs to connect and behave in nature.
5. Develop additional funding opportunities for projects and activities within the Trilateral Partnership in support of the Wadden Sea World Heritage and the Partnership Hub by supporting and promoting the establishment of a new transnational Foundation to support transnational knowledge partnership exchange, projects and activities in the Wadden Sea and internationally beyond the lifetime of this project.

1. Covid-19 impacts on the project so far.

As with many other projects, PROWAD Link has been heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the last six months, and outreach has shifted almost entirely to online co-creation workshops, webinars and video clips. On the other hand, using online tools has, in some cases, enabled businesses to attend more meetings and helped the project to better meet the demands of businesses.

Two webinars were successfully carried out to present the reports on “Ecolabels for tourism SMEs” and how SMEs cope with the pandemic. The video series on SMEs during the pandemic has been reviewed and the first video now focusing on sustainable entrepreneurship was released in January 2021. The project also faced the challenge by promoting the project and its motto “Protect & Prosper” and the 3 Nature areas: Wadden Sea, The Wash, Geiranger from 8-12 March 2021, at [ITB Berlin NOW](#), for the first time on an entirely virtual and unique platform. Under the heading ‘Towards a sustainable recovery from COVID-19 for tourism in protected areas: “PROWAD LINK – Unlocking the potential of natural areas for sustainable development” project partners and external experts offered during a panel discussion insights into best practices, forecasts, and visions for the future.

2. Extending knowledge partnerships

PROWAD Links aims to establish long-term knowledge partnerships at regional and trilateral level to be continued beyond the project lifetime and actively approached new and existing partners to link to the Wadden Sea World Heritage. The project is also closely linked to ongoing Interreg A projects such as Waddenagenda 2.0 (Lower Saxony - Netherlands) and NAKUWA (Schleswig-Holstein - Denmark) to promote synergies and transfer experiences from these projects to the partnership in PROWAD Link and the North Sea Region.

A Partnership Hub officer, Cristina Nazzari, was recruited in September 2020 to enhance engagement with potential partners as this has become more challenging in the pandemic. She has facilitated joint projects to be carried out in the framework of the hub and collected project ideas for new transnational projects and on how to facilitate knowledge exchange, like reported in more detail by the OPteamPH to WSB 32 (doc. wsb 32/6/1). In the Netherlands, the project partner continued working on the development of a Wadden Sea partner approach building on the existing networks.

3. World Heritage Brand Activation

The project has developed a brand activation guidebook as a tactical guidance and online branding toolbox to facilitate transnational communication and marketing for SMEs and local partners in four languages, implementing the transnational concept for Brand Activation in the Wadden Sea World Heritage. With the delivery of the online tools (Brandspace & Skyfish) and the strategic documents (including Transnational Concept for Brand Activation & Concept for brand auditing), there is now a strategic and solid foundation for further brand activation in the Wadden Sea World Heritage. The toolbox is now ready for application in the regions by partners, stakeholders and involved SMEs, as well as in connection with ongoing or planned trilateral Partnership Hub activities.

4. Enhanced sustainability

The work on Sustainable Entrepreneurship has continued with data collection and interviews with SMEs. Desk research was used to develop tools for enhancing sustainable entrepreneurship. In addition, data collection for another report on “Sustainable Entrepreneurship” has been completed (publication in March 2021) and an overview of best cases of sustainable entrepreneurship has been published:

- Sustainable businesses in touristic nature areas - Best case examples from 5 countries.
- Adapting to Covid-19. How local tourism businesses cope. Examples from 5 countries (living document),
- An Overview of Ecolabels for Small to Medium Sized Tourism Enterprises

The transnational visitor survey, which started in June 2020, has continued, and will now be extended to August 2021, thanks to strong support in all regions. A preliminary analysis of the 2020 survey results was carried out to investigate potential changes in visitation in the Wadden Sea as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and to help SMEs to adapt their products and services to the new situation.

Other activities, especially on co-creation and development of new and improved products and services, have continued. Three co-creation workshops were held in the German national parks, two of them virtually. In the Danish national park, new groups of stakeholders were formed working on a sustainable future for the island of Mandø, developing a hiking route, and promoting sustainable school trips in the Wadden Sea.

5. Evaluation by the Interreg Joint Secretariat

The Joint Secretariat (JS) assessed the progress of the project so far. It was concluded that, although the project was as flexible as realistically possible, the Covid-19 crisis has heavily impacted the project, and that it is at this stage unclear whether full implementation of the project will be possible. However, overall, the situation is concerning but it is clear that this is not due to a lack of motivation of the project consortium. There is a trust that the project will spend the programme funding in a way to make a positive impact and support SMEs in the North Sea Region.