



Baltic Nature Tourism Conference

Workshop „Dimensions of sustainability in tourism at the Green Belt: nature protection, mobility and beyond”

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<http://www.balticgreenbelt.uni-kiel.de/>

Presentations:

1. Defining Sustainable Tourism - Outline on current approaches to catch a slippery eel *Wolfgang Guenther, N.I.T., Kiel, Germany*

Wolfgang Gunther presented a number of sustainable tourism definitions and explained their meaning in practice:

- definition of sustainable tourism by UNWTO. WG referred to 12 aims for sustainable tourism quoted in the book „Making tourism more sustainable”. Among them: economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality;
- Global Sustainable Tourism criteria as set by the Tourism Sustainability council:
www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org

Documents and strategies dealing with sustainable tourism issues:

- EU Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism 2007
- EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region
- Agora strategy for sustainable tourism development in the Baltic Sea region and action plan and sustainability check for tourism projects

In practical way, sustainable tourism can be defined by examples:

- Guide for Sustainable Tourism Best practices (Rainforest Alliance)
- Promoting and rewarding best practice in sustainable tourism (World Travel and Tourism Council)

Attempts to define are not congruent, they overlap, there is variability of understandings. Sustainable tourism is mixed with eco, green, nature tourism, etc. What to do? Learn from the best approaches and use for orientation.

2. Combining nature protection and tourism - examples from the inner German Green Belt *Melanie Kreutz, BUND - Project office of the Central European Green Belt, Nuernberg, Germany*

Green Belt in Germany becomes recreational area for experience of nature and history. >600 endangered species live in GB areas in Germany. The project „Experience GB” is funded by German government and aimed to create bookable products. The project is implemented in

3 locations – pilot regions. Product aspects: history, nature, regional culture. Concept of bookable products in the model regions developed in local brainstorming. No-go areas for tourism surveyed to protect species that should not be disturbed, e.g., black stork. Efforts taken to keep the GB visible in nature physically removing shrubbery, etc.

Touristic offers:

- 1) Signposted hiking and biking trails in combination with
 - audio trails, equipment rent in tourist office
 - border experience points (showing relicts of the borderline, former villages destroyed)
 - canoe tours (river Elbe)
 - hiking and sightseeing with certified landscape guides
- 2) Printed catalogue „Travel experiences along the GB”
- 3) Booking directly from a homepage
- 4) Public survey in the beginning and in the end – increased GB awareness to 50% (population of the counties along GB).
- 5) Fahrtziel Natur – cooperation between Deutsche Bahn, BUND, Nabu and VCD. Promotion of the regions through rail.

The project developed measures, methods and strategies to make them transferable to other regions. The Eichfeld region joined the project without any financial support. Other regions will continue after the end of the project.

Questions and answers:

Question: how many people were interviewed about GB?

Answer: 1600 people.

Question: Do you have a model territory by the Baltic Sea?

Answer: Not yet. This was a model project to combine nature conservation and tourism.

Question: you mentioned cooperation with German railway. Was there any cooperation with local transport?

Answer: Not really, there were some cases. Hotel managers wanted to offer transfer from station to hotel, but not much.

Question: Tourist infrastructure expands – have there been efforts to link and connect from the main touristic areas? Like, routes leading to GB?

Answer: It is linked to other home pages.

Question: Did you create a new web page? German government funded to create bookable products? Who owns the web page?

Answer: The booking site is one homepage, consisting of two parts. BUND will run the web page after the end of the project and will continue to add offers. Ends on how the regions will handle – if they continue with the offers. The booking platform will be hosted by ViaBono and new offers will pay some little money. The web page will be financed by few hundreds of euros per region per year.

3. Sustainable Tourism in Kaliningrad Region

Anna Belova, Immanuel Kant State University, Kaliningrad, Russia

Anna Belova described the region and listed the main areas to develop ecotourism as well as ongoing projects. The key projects are:

- „Creating a cross-border bike trails on old post road in teh curonian Spit: Euro Velo-Baltika”” There are difficulties with ecological expertise – done by private companies. It is the federal land.
- CROSSROADS – lagoons as the cultural and historical crossroads in the South-East Baltic area – develop a viking village.
- AGORA 2.0 – Heritage tourism for increased BSR identity.
- Eco-Region project

Visitor surveys show that tourists spend in average 10,5 roubles a day. 50% of foreign guests arrive from Germany. Reasons to travelling to Kaliningrad – nature tourism (Curonian spit) Vistineckaya lake – formerly closed zone for foreigners and locals as well. The main problems are poor condition of services, accommodations, monuments, visas, infrastructure, not balanced tourist flows, weak legal framework in the field of tourism.

Questions and answers:

Question: is there any web site of service providers?

Answer: The site is at the web page of regional government: www.gov39.ru, „tourism agency”.

Question: Do you have investigated nature values before projects, how do you monitor the effect on nature?

Answer: Every project has good sustainability. Curonian spit projects – administration of the NP works on monitoring and investigation and keeping nature in good condition. At the University department, researchers work on development and monitoring of the Curonian spit.

Question: In the beginning you gave a long list of eco-tourism locations. What criteria were applied to label these locations as eco tourism locations? What Germany, Latvia, Russia present under eco-tourism – is it the same or diffreent understanding?

Answer: These sites were selected as ecotourism destinations because of their nature values and for being wild places.

Question: In this unerstanding, ectourism is a possibility to experience wilderness and nature, but it does not cover all 3 dimensions of sustainability?

Question about the bicycle route: how about crossing the border?

Answer: We are discussing with federal institutions about opening the border. When the road will be constructed it will be allowed.

Question: Will the border be open for Lithuanian and Russian citizens only?

Answer: No, for all. It could be a day visa or whatever, but you cannot receive a visa on the border.

4. Sometimes things go wrong - bad practice in nature tourism

Alois Lang, Nationalpark Neusiedler See/ Ferto Hansag

Alois Lang is involved in European GB for mover 10 years, coordinates GB accross Europe.

Nature tourism can be discussed in several different points of view. This presentation reduces it to 2 aspects:

- what are the impacts of tourism on nature and protected areas
- the role of protected areas in tourism in the surrounding areas

Tourism is an option to generate income for people in lesser developed border areas. If that works, tourism can contribute to raise the acceptance for conservation measures and restrictions caused by these.

Tourism is a threat to habitats in and around protected areas. Example: - ski resorts in Serbia, lots of corruption. Is it always true that tourism creates the threat? On the Austrian side, there are 5500 sailing boats in the lake. If you ask politicians – it is part of our economy, it is OK. But less than 3% of the boats are used by tourists. It has no effect on the local economy. Cycling – up to now we succeeded avoiding to be a part of Europe route. We do not want cyclists who just pass away, because it is not economic efficiency – they do not stop here. Do we include people staying in their weekend residences? You have no income if in a protected area local people have summer residences. Does the development have an effect on the local labor market?

Summarising issues of the presentation:

Are the threats to nature as described in many papers really caused by tourism? If no, the conservation sector's arguments as well as worries have to be more precisely formulated. If yes, we have to think about the strategy for marketing tourism by the respective institutions of local and regional level and how nature conservation sector can influence it. The conservation sector has to get active. There is a demand and there is a way to influence the process.

Management of protected areas requires public money permanently. Management is expensive. How this money can be earned by the state? How can the state have a return on its investment? Through nature tourism. There troubles begin.

Problem 1:

Secure the „cash cows” in the protected areas for the state:

- run accommodation facilities at the best places
- restaurants, youth hostels, camping sites (run by private companies, paying licence fees)
- souvenir shops
- merchandising
- boat/bike rentals

Worst cases: hunting, fishing, logging

Leave the rest for the locals...

Problem 2:

How can be money investment returned in addition to „cash cows”:

- entrance fees
- programme fees
- overnight taxes
- licences

Results?

Positive: permanent income, return on investment

Negative:

- disintegration of the protected area authority from the local society (there is high negative influence on image and acceptance)
- no effect on sustainable tourism
- no constructive cooperation with local stakeholders
- taxes and fees collected only from visitors who spend the money in the area, not from those who stay for a few hours

- good names, high reputation – but only outside the country...

Solutions?

- No copy/paste but a handful of proven and tested tools
- Position protected area as a player in tourism development
- Deliver content for marketing the surrounding area (unique selling point!)
- define the role of the protected area within regional tourism
- design nature tourism programmes to those target groups that are ready to spend time in the area
- create benefits for overnight guests that are not available for transit visitors.

The park introduced an electronic card for staying guests. With the card visitors can get a list of free services. As long as you stay in the area, you are allowed to use all public transport for free, some entrances, the NP excursion for free. But if you do not stay overnight, you can not buy the card. It is based on the contract. How the credit cards are financed?

The costs are shared by:

- accommodation side (a kind of additional overnight tax – it is paid to the local tourist board, 758 accommodations participate).
- all the service providers included in the list of services (interest – marketing instrument)
- tourist organisations (marketing instrument)

Questions and answers:

Question: Daily visitors also leave some money – in shops, restaurants....did you ever make a survey of revenue?

Answer: Nature tourism succeeds if nearby is a big city. Range of income is restricted to souvenir shops, restaurants, daily programs. You can run studies and investigate and find out about what kind of tourism develops, but you can get very quick answers by combining statistics – booking rates of accommodations, capacities of restaurant and overnight. Just look at simple figures. You cannot run a restaurant or accommodation if numbers are low. We analyse these figures 20 years.

The presentation rised discussions in the audience. Wolfgang Guenther observed some conclusions:

For nature conservation:

- define no-go areas
- define steps to conserve and improve (information wooden path)
- bad practice examples – too many tourists, loss of large habitats (ski resorts)

For local economy:

- lack of added value without overnight stays
- the state might take the „cash cows” to get investment return but nothing is left for locals
- increasing numbers of people coming in the area but spending no money on site

Positive impacts from tourism:

- tourism develops products with added value for the region
- success control, development meets expectations
- think about distribution of products from the very beginning
- know about your people and involve them
- conduct surveys to get better knowledge of visitor demands
- ensure to create direct financial flow to the region and state (integrate eco-catering into bookable products)

Question: it is essential to be aware of interests of key players. Tour operators know what they want – to sell elements and models. The shorter these programs are, the better. Operators are not interested to sell things that take time. They want to sell short and more – we want to keep people longer.

Answer: Tourism is multitude picture with many different players.

Dace Sāmīte rises a question regarding the Slītere NP: In Latvia we are so active in N2K, we make infrastructure, put signs, talk to municipalities, tourism providers. People come to spend a week on the beach without activities. We get leisure tourists, they do not use nature products. We do not get the target group. What is the reason?

Answer: Beach tourism can be nature tourism one day. It may be not wrong. You have a chance to address them even if their main reason is the beach.

Question: Outside the NP border there are empty beaches, but they come into NP. They stay for a week in summer cottages, but they just lay on the beach, its a pressure on dunes as a sensitive habitats. Problem is in the Baltics –we have no general plan how to use coastal areas. Very small numbers are pure nature tourists.

Answer: Most people are general – you have to offer them more than nature, but let them lay on the beach. You have to know behaviour and demands in the planning stage. Sometimes interests differ in one family – there are different tourists. Nature brings people here, without nature you do not have a unique selling point. This role in regional development is underestimated.

Question: The problem is that we do not have shops and restaurants, people go outside to buy foods, but then come back. Legislation does not allow the park to sell tickets – only fishing, hunting, logging licences. We can not get money elsewhere. Population density is low – we cannot get money from the locals. We do not deal with special programs as we cannot even run info centre. We want the visitors to use cycling routes, etc. to stay in the forest, not on the beach. Due to low population density there are no people to run shops or restaurants. Visitors arrive with big bags and leave waste. In the project they made a lot of information for tourists in the park. But nobody promotes the beaches outside the park.

Discussion: How can you have more guests if you do not offer infrastructure? You need guest houses, privately offered accommodations. Guests want to buy things. You have to offer something that makes the guest leave money. Improve your NP attraction. Money has to come somewhere. Main source of income is from staying guests.

Sustainable tour operator in Germany: you probably have a wrong target group – isn't there a possibility for school groups? Younger people? Maybe it is a thing of marketing?

Dace Sāmīte: There is no such private initiative. It is a hard work. Who would do it?

Alois Lang: Educational tourism in protected areas has always side aspects – these target groups are not there for free will:)) What leads us to - how can we stimulate these people to experience nature? I would go to build up fascinating nature experiences. If you can do it with your staff and other partners? We train external staff.

Agnese Balandiņa from the Ķemeri NP suggests:

1) address those who are already there, say something appealing on the signpost. Advertise things what to do in a cloudy day;

2) talk to neighbouring municipalities to promote their empty beaches. Direct visitors there. Talk to municipalities where there are no protected areas.

Wolfgang Guenther: cooperation and common marketing – channeling guests away from beeches towards the less sensitive areas can be a solution.

Alois Lang: There is the same general objective by NP administration and sustainable development institutions. You have to give those people who are there, an opportunity to spend money. If you have organised programs, people are not dispersed. Try to steer people who are there.

Dace Sāmīte: what do you suggest to solve the trash problem? Sommerhouse people leave trash, tourists are not so bad. Waste management is hard to organise. Trash is removed once a week, is not enough in crowded summertime. Trash is waiting for a week, animals and birds eat it. It is human culture. Municipalities try to improve the situation.

Discussion: consider the necessity of offers, involve local transport, cooperation with large transport organisations. Restrictions to sea access by cars?

Dace Sāmīte: yes, we can limit the sea access by local regulations.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM DISCUSSIONS:

Table 1: **Good (green)** and **bad (red)** practice in nature tourism – outcomes of the discussion.

Nature conservation	Economical viability	Mobility
No-go area definition by nature conservation experts in touristic area prior to touristic development	Create direct financial flow to the region	Consider the accessibility of individual offers such as watchtowers
	In large protected areas: Create direct financial flow to the State	
Building of wooden paths/ barriers to protect sensitive habitats such as dunes, meadows, forests (example Dancing forest on Curonian spit)	Distinguish between: Locals (do not create much financial benefit) and visitors (create financial benefit for the region by overnight stays etc.)	Involve local transport organisations in touristic planning/ development
Providing information to tourists on the spot to make them aware of the natural values (example Dancing forest)	Conduct surveys to get to know the tourists' interests	Cooperate with large transport organisations (e.g. Green BElt tourism packages marketed through German Railway DB nature tourism product line)
	Encourage caterers to offer regional, organic food to tourists	
Maintenance of conservation areas through touristic activities (e.g. work camps for cutting bushes to keep the former borderline open)	Conduct success controls/evaluate activities	
	Be aware of the different interests of different stakeholders	
	Consider the distribution/marketing of	

	touristic products from the beginning on (involve both nature conservationists and tourism experts)	
Mix up threats of tourism and leisure activities: Not all threats attributed to tourists are really caused by them rather than by leisure activities of the regional population	Increase the number of people in protected areas without increasing overnight stays	Cut existing habitat units by roads
Permit too many tourists to an area	State takes "cash cows" (e.g. runs visitor center with café in most attractive places) to get invested money back. Disadvantage: Local people have less opportunities to earn money	In remote areas: destroy options for public transport development on the long-term by building too many permanent parking lots to favour car-based mobility
Cut existing habitat units by roads		
Loss of valuable habitats through landuse change (e.g. skiing slopes)		

5. Examples of low-energy mobility in touristic areas

Stefan Gossling, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

Sustainability is at stake when it comes to transport. In terms of taking a critical look we have to look at mobility.

Alpine \pearls project - 24 villages in 6 countries joined a project for soft mobility (fewer cars). They started a network within EU project in 2003-2006.

Examples: in 2008 – cars everywhere. The family resort gives guests a soft mobility pass if they come by train or aircraft. They offer free fuel to people who come in August. Locals keep on driving.

What is sustainable destination mobility?

- lower share of aviation
- higher share of public transportation
- low-carbon transport

Destination mobility needs to be *electractive* (electric and attractive)

Electric: power sourced from renewables

Attractive: trendy, reliable, affordable

Reliable: punctuality, etc. (example: Swiss railway).

Affordable: Hasselt, Belgium: public transport free of charge (who paid – do not know)

Fun: „pleasure mobility” – electrocars. Soft mobility cars

Frequent: 10-15 minutes departures

Easy to use: smartphones, navigation, how to pay with smartphone, payment systems?

Comfortable: more space than in a car, internet access, quiet

Convenient: direct connections through borders, changes easy, enough time, payment straight forward

Fututre – radically changing destination transport systems

To 2015: Enforcement and incentives – transport free of charge

To 2020: No in-situ payment any more

Roads transformed in green areas

Low CO2 Pilot project in Kiel Region

Beach bus – pilot project

- offering public bus transportation to replace car transportation
- bus transports for beach guests and bicycles
- convenient and affordable shuttle service to nearby beaches
- enables cycling recreation at the waterfront
- avoids parking problems and fees
- reliable time schedules, provided via mobile phones
- communities cooperate instead of fighting

The audience engaged in discussion of examples of sustainable mobility: Who should be motivated to reduce CO2 emissions? Both locals and visitors. Do both have the same needs and functions? Everyday complains about too many cars but are driving cars themselves.

Examples:

- on islands they do not allow cars. Local services bring the luggage, people go by ferries and bicycles;
- near Montpellier they have something like narrow gauge train. You go by it to the beach. Where are restrictions, there is an offer on the other side. The transfer service was free;
- a project „Next bike“ of bike stations run by local partners run in Lower Austria. City bike concepts transferred to rural areas;
- in the Netherlands there are free bikes for the areas you are not allowed to walk;
- in Leningrad the only possibility of access is by car. There is only 1 bus a day, early in the morning. Railways – good in Soviet time, but not now. There is no public transportation. Lack of parking places. Tourists damage nature because there are no parking places.
- the question is if go for demand oriented systems. Check demand, investigate situation and how to respond to demand.
- in Snowdonia, Wales – cheap shuttle bus, parking places get more expensive, the deeper in the park. Buses run 3-5 times a day. A system of small buses.
- mobility planning should not be only reactive, it has to go along with the rest and be proactive.

WORKSHOP CONCLUSIONS:

Through intense discussion, the workshop helped to develop a common understanding of good and bad practice in sustainable tourism:

- In order to minimise the impacts of tourism on nature, the individual capacity of any given area for tourists (number of tourists) has to be assessed and measures have to be taken to regulate tourism (through information, visible protection, no-go areas, no-go times, attractions etc.).
- One of the main goals of nature tourism must be to create a financial backflow from tourism to the people in the region, in order for nature to become a viable part of the economical structure of the region. However, the needs of nature must be first priority as nature provides on essential basis also for the economy.

- For local mobility, the main goal is to provide tourists with alternatives to car mobility. Numerous examples exist all over Europe that can be adopted. Mobility must be developed following a concept rather than individual uncoordinated activities.

Altogether, concepts for conservation, economical viability and mobility (and other fields, if appropriate) must be brought together in a regional management plan which outlines the way forward to putting into practice an overall vision for the region's development.

For the representatives of regions in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea, mobility has not been integrated into tourism development or nature conservation concepts yet. The discussion revealed numerous good practice examples from all over Europe that could be included into future tourism planning in those regions, and some first ideas for projects were collected.