

Building A Baltic Sea Tourism Region

Towards a Cooperative Approach of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Rostock-Warnemünde, 3 - 4 May 2012

Conference Report

The conference „Building A Baltic Sea Tourism Region“ was held from 3-4 May 2012 in Rostock-Warnemünde, Germany. It was jointly organized by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), represented by the Federal Foreign Office as its current chair, and the State Chancellery of the federal State Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in its role as Coordinator of Priority Area Tourism in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

The main objective of the conference was to offer a discussion forum at political and expert level on how to build a Baltic Sea Tourism Region. Almost 100 tourism stakeholders took part in the conference with representatives from almost all the Baltic Sea region countries.

The key findings and recommendations of the Conference can be summarized as follows:

1. Studies and cooperation projects indicate that there is potential for a joint marketing approach for tourism in the Baltic Sea Region.
2. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is an appropriate partner to involve non-EU stakeholders, especially from Russia, in tourism cooperation, not the least through its SEBA initiative.
3. The networking between various tourism projects and initiatives on regional and national level in the Baltic Sea Region need to be further strengthened. These efforts should be supported at transnational level by making tourism cooperation eligible for funding in the Baltic Sea Region program as of 2014.
4. The Baltic Sea Region has the potential to become a globally leading region in sustainable tourism – in terms of experts, networks, experiences and committed stakeholders. This position could foster its competitiveness.
5. Accessibility and mobility are essential for the development of transnational tourism products. Visa requirements in the region should be simplified.
6. The Baltic Sea Tourism Forum (14.-16. November 2012) will offer an opportunity to further strengthen tourism cooperation, especially among different projects.

In the following, a résumé of the conference is given. The individual speeches and presentations are available on the homepage of Priority Area Tourism in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region soon (www.baltic-sea-strategy-tourism.eu).

The organizers of the conference express their gratitude to the speakers and participants that actively shared their insights and views. The open and vivid discussions have made this conference a successful one. Special thanks go to the moderator of the conference, Knut Haenschke, Honorary President of the Baltic Sea Tourism Commission, who guided the participants in a competent and entertaining way through the conference program.



First Conference Day Opening Session

In his opening statement, **Erwin Sellering** (Minister-President of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany) emphasized the important role of the tourism sector as to economic growth and a growing common identity in the Baltic Sea region. In order to better promote the region also beyond its own borders, an attractive and recognizable profile should be developed for the Baltic Sea region. According to Mr. Sellering, this is especially true for the tourism sector, which should focus on a close cooperation of the stakeholders of this sector and the development of joint tourism products and services. The achievement of these objectives at a Baltic Sea Region level should be supported by making tourism projects eligible for funding in the EU Baltic Sea Region Program after 2013.

In her welcoming speech, **Cornelia Pieper** (Minister of State, Federal Foreign Office) underlined the importance of the fruitful cooperation between the CBSS and the European Union for a closer cooperation within the Baltic Sea Region. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region helps to focus on common objectives in the region but refers first of all to the EU member states in the region. In this context, the CBSS could build bridges to those countries who are not EU members, especially Russia. By offering a common forum for the region, the CBSS contributes to a more effective cooperation and achievement of joint objectives.

The representative of the European Commission, **Pedro Ortún** (Director for Tourism, DG Enterprise, European Commission) spoke about the priorities of the European Commission in the tourism policy. Among others, he referred to the promotion of the incoming tourism, especially from Brazil, Russia, India and China for which Visa requirements should be simplified. Mr. Ortún also announced an EU public consultation on maritime tourism to be launched on 14 May 2012. In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and in particular the Blue Growth concept, coastal and maritime tourism would have to play an important role. Further important topics in the EU tourism policy were the prolongation of tourism seasons which will be in focus of the European Tourism Forum on 27 September 2012, and the creation of an EU tourism quality label.

Due to some short termed obligations, **Elena Kropinova** (Head of Kaliningrad Tourism Agency, Russia) could not participate in the conference. Her prepared presentation was made available to the participants of the conference and can be also downloaded from the Priority Area Tourism homepage. Key points were the foci of tourism development in the Kaliningrad Region like the amber or the cultural heritage and the international cooperation projects in the tourism sector.

In her presentation on the state of play as to Priority Area Tourism in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, **Andrea Herrmannsen** (Head of Department for Europe and International Affairs, State Chancellery Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany) took stock of the experiences made after more than two years of implementation. She referred to some unsolved challenges, among them the mostly weak links between tourism market players and EU tourism projects in the region, still missing intergovernmental cooperation structures in the tourism sector and a lack of cooperation among tourism related projects which are mostly cross border projects. As tourism is currently not eligible for funding in the EU Baltic Sea Region Program (2007 - 2013), it has turned out to be difficult to bring actors from the different parts of the Baltic Sea Region together and to finance transnational tourism cooperation activities. Activities developed within Priority Area Tourism by the coordinator and the lead partners of the flagship projects have helped to create more visibility and attention for tourism cooperation in the region. With regard to the next EU program period, it

is necessary for the tourism sector in the region to jointly articulate its needs and interests. Mrs. Herrmannsen drew the attention also to the conference workshops B, C and D, where lead partners of the flagship projects provided additional information.

Eike Otto (Tourism Consultant Project M, Germany) presented the main findings of a study commissioned by the State Chancellery Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in its role as coordinator for Priority Area Tourism. The aim of the study was to gain insight about the online presentation of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and to get some input as to the development of a joint marketing of the region as a tourism destination in the internet. According to Mr. Otto, the web-based tourism information in the Baltic Sea Region strongly differs in terms of quality and information provided. The term “Baltic” was less used for tourism promotion than the terms “Nordic” and “Scandinavian”, with transnational tourism products being an exception. Nonetheless, he also found some commonalities that offer potential for a joint marketing approach. The umbrella themes like nature, culture and water with diversification at destination level, e.g. by Hansa, chalkstone, amber or islands could be used to develop unique selling points and corresponding transnational tourism products. A collective website could serve as an entry gate for tourists and additionally could help to develop a “joint Baltic Sea tourism destination” as a participatory and groundbreaking approach.

Workshop Session

Workshop A

Tourism development through regional cooperation: modernisation in the South-Eastern Baltic Area (CBSS SEBA project)

The project SEBA (Modernization Partnership for the South Eastern Baltic Area) was introduced by **Dr. Anna Karpenko** (Council of the Baltic Sea States, SEBA project coordinator, Information Office of the Nordic Council of Ministers in Kaliningrad, Russia). The project should bring attention to the potential of the Area, support efforts to modernize through regional cooperation and make Kaliningrad and SEBA more visible in a macro-regional context in the field of tourism, natural and cultural heritage, sustainable development, public-private-partnerships, higher education and youth exchange.

Maria Erashova (Kaliningrad Regional Tourism Information Center, Russia) presented her ideas on how the project TourInfoNet (Tourism Information Network) could be extended to the South Eastern Baltic Area. It aimed to establish an effective cross-border system for dissemination of tourism information and promotion of joint tourist products within and outside the program area. Among other aspects a regular dialogue between regional tourism authorities, small and medium enterprises and educational institutions had started.

Betina Meliř, (University of Greifswald, Institute of Geography, Germany) reflected some analyses and evaluations of natural and cultural heritage as potentials for tourism development in regional perspectives. Questions like the following were discussed: What is the impact of tourism on the regions? Who is the tourist? What kind of offers should be available? What type of holidays is wanted, any potential expectations or interests? How to improve the cooperation between heritage and tourism organizations? By the example of agrotourism she illustrated the importance of specific preconditions and steps for a successful development. The presentation ended with references to good practice projects from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern like EcoRegion, Parks & Benefits, AGORA and AGORA 2.0.

The Rominta Woodland Project was presented by **Judith Kloiber** (Agency for Tourism Management and Regional Development, Berlin, Germany), **Dr. Alexey Sokolov** (Vishtynetsky Environmental and Historical Museum, Kaliningrad Region, Russia) and **Dr. Maxim Napreyenko** (Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad, Russia). The Rominta Woodland is located at the tri-border area Russia-Poland-Lithuania. In 2007 project partners from these countries and Germany started developing a concept of nature protection in combination with sustainable tourism based on good networking on local, regional and transnational level. The experts recommended the building of environmental friendly accommodation facilities, the development of guided tours through the nature park and long term protection of the Rominta Woodland as UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Workshop B

Sustainable Cruise Ship Tourism

The workshop to cruise tourism was organized by Futouris e.V., which works for the lead partner Aida Cruises. Initially **Prof. Dr. Ines Carstensen** (Futouris e.V., Germany) gave an outline of the ongoing activities of the initiative (e.g. a project to render the North Sea Island Juist climate neutral).

Subsequently **Helge Grammerstorf** (SeaConsult HAM GmbH, Germany) gave an overview of the upcoming challenges of the cruise sector. These included the observance of stricter sulfur emission limits from 1 January 2015 and the expectation of cruise passengers that shipping had to be more sustainable in general (e.g. by reducing wastewater emissions into the open sea and providing clean energy for ships while berthing). Altogether the Baltic Sea region was viewed as a safe cruise destination, whereas the Mediterranean currently was faced with relatively unstable conditions in its southern destinations in North Africa

In the third section, **Eike Otto** (Tourism Consultant Project M, Germany) presented the project „Sustainable Land Excursions“. It was planned to develop sustainable tourism products in selected destinations which would fulfill predefined sustainability criteria. The study would give an analysis of potential offers, methods of training and promotion measures. First results would be available at the end of 2012.

Panel Discussion

“Perspectives of the Baltic Sea Region as a tourism destination”

The panelists were **Jan Mücke** (Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development, Germany), **Reinhard Meyer** (Head of the State Chancellery, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany), **Maria Napiórkowska** (Director of the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland), **Bruno Bedholm** (Director of Visit Denmark) and **Armand Slokenberg** (Director of the Latvian Tourism Development Agency). Moderator **Knut Haenschke** put up three themes for discussion: infrastructure, cruise and marketing.

When talking about infrastructure, panelists outlined that large parts of the Baltic Sea Region have a good infrastructure, because of the consequent use of European structural funds. Nevertheless missing links (mainly rail connections) should be closed rapidly to ensure

overall connectivity within the Baltic Sea region. Speakers felt that point-to-point air travel connections (mainly operated by low-cost carriers) would also play an important role in making tourist destinations accessible. It was generally criticized that the tourism policy of the European commission seemed to be solely geared towards the Mediterranean. Tailor-made solutions should also be offered for North European destinations, such as the Baltic Sea Region. The easing of visa regulation with Russia should also facilitate exploiting the regions full touristic potential.

The panelists agreed that cruise-tourism was a very important issue but most importantly more efforts were needed to keep the incoming tourists in the region and offer them a great variety of things to do. The speakers welcomed very much a common brand like „Baltic Sea“, which could already be advertised at the upcoming cruise shipping fair in Miami. It was noted that growth perspectives were excellent, but at the same time many things like implementing all sorts of touristic offers, placing effective advertisements, improving shipping security and simplifying the Visa requirements still had to be done.

Concerning Tourism and Marketing it was pointed to the first steps to develop a marketing of the Baltic Sea Region and the existing cooperation of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic. But it would be difficult to get financial resources and a commercial back-up. Regional identities and brands would hardly exist with the exception of the strong branding "Scandinavia". The number of global tourists from countries with economic power like China or India would decrease. In face of the need of mutual actions in global marketing was proposed to promote concrete products and projects beyond the national marketing campaigns e.g. cruise shipping, circular trips and bicycle tours. The speakers recommended the further development and improvement of the ongoing activities. They encouraged the audience to bring activities like the construction of marinas, the European Route of Brick Gothic and bicycle tours to the market.

Second Conference Day Opening Session

At the beginning of the second conference day **Karsten Heinsohn** (dwif-Consulting GmbH) presented the results of a study made within the framework of the EU project „Enjoy South Baltic!“. On the one hand, it was found that there has not been joint image or brand like "Baltic" or "South Baltic" yet. A development of the brand "Baltic Sea" would interfere with established brands like "Scandinavia". On the other hand, it was detected, that promising travel topics for South Baltics (e.g. cruise tourism, cultural round trips, health and spa or active tourism) exist there and that there are quite potential for joint international tourism marketing. Heinsohn recommended the promotion of the entire Baltic Sea instead of limitation to the "artificial" area South Baltic. In addition, further partners from the Baltic Sea area (gateways, tourism highlights) should be integrated. He noted, that in particular a good accessibility of the Baltic Sea area is a basic requirement for tourism development. Also the creation of joint thematic tourism packages is highly recommended. These could be offered on fairs, events and online, which are the most important instruments for international tourism marketing.

Afterwards, **Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Steingrube** introduced "The Six Baltic Sea Wonders". It was a contest by means of a survey initiated and conducted by the project "AGORA 2.0 - Heritage Tourism for increased Baltic Sea Region Identity". 25 partners from 9 countries

around the Baltic Sea are involved in this project. Although the Baltic Sea Region did not only have a long common history, but also many natural and cultural treasures the inhabitants were not aware of the common characteristics of the region. The contest intended to promote the cultural and natural heritage of the region by identifying the most popular properties. The aim was to support the development of a common identity, which would help making the region more visible as a common tourist destination. He explained that the 65 nominated candidates and the voting rules could be found on the internet at www.6-bsr-wonders.net. Among the top picks in section "Culture, history and traditions" were Hanseatic League, Folklore-and-Traditions, Castles and Vikings. The first four nature-themes were: Forest and Lakes, Beaches and Dunes, Amber and Herring. Prof. Dr. Steingrube concluded that the Baltic Sea Region had a big set of common characteristics. He emphasized the need of marketing oriented on different target groups. At the end of his talk he invited the audience for voting on the internet and announced that the awarding ceremony would take place on 8th November 2012 in Gdansk.

Workshop Session

Workshop C

Making the Baltic Sea Region the leading European region for sustainability in tourism

The Workshop focused on the potential of the Baltic Sea Region to become the leading European region for sustainability in tourism. In the beginning **Prof Wilhelm Steingrube** summarized the background and current state of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Flagship Project 12.10 *Strategies for sustainable tourism*.

Basis for the following discussion was the draft Strategy Paper "Sustainable Tourism Development in the Baltic Sea Region" introduced by **Wolfgang Günther** (Institute for Tourism Research in Northern Europe / NIT Kiel, Germany). After this, experts with different background in rural and urban tourism gave statements on the current relevance and the potential meaning of sustainability and responsibility in Baltic Sea Region tourism.

The Presentation of **Markus Bollwein** (ACCOR Hospitality Germany GmbH), which was presented by **Wolfgang Günther**, pointed out that sustainability is as a most relevant topic for global players in the tourism economy. Hence, ACCOR just started a comprehensive campaign called Planet21 (www.accor.com/en/sustainable-development.html) and committed itself to 21 clear targets in seven areas of action.

Dr. Toomas Kokovkin (Island and Coast Research Centre Arhipelaag, Estonia) stated that rural and urban tourism had to be seen as one issue, they belonged together and should therefore not be treated separately. Just as important as this aspect was the authenticity of everything offered to the tourists. This is to some extent and definitely should be the distinguishing character between the Baltic Sea Region and many other touristic spots.

Niels Lund (President of Baltic Sea Tourism Commission) had a clear vision for the Baltic Sea Region: He wanted it to be established as the benchmark for sustainable tourism worldwide.

After the statements the moderator Ambassador **Eduardas Borisovas** (Council of the Baltic Sea States) continued with questions towards the panelists. There was the common belief that the Baltic Sea Region has a great potential in terms of experts, networks, experiences and committed stakeholders to become (or perhaps to stay) the leading region for sustainable tourism. This position would pay out as a common quality or brand of the Baltic Sea Region and would foster its competitiveness. As crucial for a successful use of this potential an increased transparency on the environmental and social costs and benefits of tourism products, a rising awareness among customers on the qualities of the Baltic Sea Region, an intensified smart cooperation of tourism stakeholders and a clear pan-Baltic leadership for this aim with a strong political support were underlined.

Workshop D

Tourism marketing in the Baltic Sea Region

Introducing into the workshop **Marta Chełkowska** (Office of The Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, Pomorskie Tourist Board, Poland) pointed out the need for more multilevel cross border cooperation and creative and efficient solutions for joint tourism marketing actions.

Cezary Molski (Polish National Tourist Organization, Poland) spoke about meeting the potential of the destination Baltic to the expectations of tourists. Similar to the Danube cooperation authorities on local, regional and national level together with marketing stakeholders and tourism industry should find a common market approach focused on a few core values, a Baltic Sea Region branding and selected products adapted to the expectations of tourists like e.g. sailing, bicycle tours to dangerous experience, urban tourism and shopping.

Hubert Gonera (Landbrand, Poland), presented the “candy shop approach”. It is based on the idea that promoting a good mix of diversity and common ground in the 9 countries around the Baltic Sea would attract tourists. He had evaluated some of the potential „candies with unique flavour“ for example unspoiled nature for active holidays like the Slowinski Park Narodowy, a former military area at the Polish coast, historical and cultural heritage like post USSR and Hanse trade guide, culinary tradition: Baltic - the best taste of the world, and some more.

Artur Żyrkowski (APMiR Marketing Agency, Poland), demonstrated how to get attention of people on advertisement and separate them from the crowd by extraordinary actions on places where they do not expect it. For example Santa Claus could promote winter holiday destinations in summer at the beach or escalators in shopping centers could be designed as gangways on airport scenery etc. Surprise effect, visionary presentation of the product and amusing action started direct communication, drew the audience into unwanted participation and brought enormous media publicity.

Krystyna Hartenberger-Pater (Pomorskie Tourist Board) presented the Enjoy South Baltic project, flagship project 12.9 of the European Strategy of Baltic Sea Region. The main results of the analysis of ongoing tourism projects are: Activities mostly related on infrastructure, research and new product creation. No project is addressed to small and middle sized enterprises or launched to the implementation of products. The new website www.balticsea.travel was set up to improve the networking of actors in tourism on all levels

(in particular tour operators). Joint products and offers should be developed in the Baltic Sea Region and promoted on the commercial market.

Closing Session

Kirill Logvinov (Embassy of the Russian Federation in Germany) spoke about the priorities of the incoming Russian presidency of the CBSS. One of the main topics he referred to was the strengthening of economic growth by building of innovation clusters, promoting public private partnerships, direct investments and other instruments of innovative project financing. The liberalization of the visa regime would be another core issue during the Russian presidency. The current visa requirements are considered to be one of the main obstacles for tourism development in the region that should be removed. As further priorities Mr. Logvinov mentioned the improvement of environmental protection, the approximation of living conditions in the region and the fight against human trafficking.

Finally, **Sylvia Bretschneider** (President of the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) stressed two reasons that speak in favor of a closer cooperation in the tourism sector in the Baltic Sea Region. Firstly, the future challenges for the sector like the quality of infrastructure and the environment are transnational by nature. Secondly, an increasing global competition makes a worldwide visibility for the whole Baltic Sea Region more advisable as individual countries have less marketing potential. Accordingly, cooperation should be one of the priorities of the individual tourism stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region. Against this background, she also underlined the necessity to make tourism eligible for funding at the Baltic Sea Region level in the coming program period.

She closed the conference with the invitation to the fifth Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2012 (14.-16. November 2012). This event is planned to take place in Rostock (Germany), Sjaelland (Denmark) and on one of the new Scandlines ferries connecting Rostock and Gedser. The Forum titled "Nine countries - one destination" would offer the possibility for tourism-stakeholders to exchange ideas and thoughts on a sustainable tourism development in the Baltic Sea Region.