Sustainable Tourism Development in the Baltic Sea Region

Overview of existing tools and methods for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level

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Overview

Content:	Overview of existing tools and methods for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level
Basis:	Desk research through literature review and Internet research
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Preface

The agora toolbox is part of the work package 2 (WP 2) which aims to provide and implement evaluated methodologies and to give strategic recommendations on sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Consequently, the purpose of the toolbox is to deliver the corresponding methodologies. Moreover, in accordance with the overall aim of agora to develop and promote sustainable tourism in the rural areas of the BSR, the toolbox naturally needs to provide tools that allow for and lead to sustainable tourism development.

Sustainability has to consider three dimensions

Sustainable tourism must simultaneously fulfil the requirements of the environmental, social and economic dimension of sustainability. Sustainable tourism planning therefore aims much broader and deeper than just environment-friendly tourism or the mitigation of negative effects. Sustainable also means economically successful, but in a long lasting balance with the social and ecological needs of the destination.

Still, despite the many definitions of sustainable tourism, the major problem remains to make these operational for practical planning and management. For addressing the ecological dimension of tourism, tools such as certification criteria or ecotourism marking criteria may be employed, for example. The social dimension of sustainability is, among others, connected with local employment as well as impacts on or support for local cultures and lifestyles. The economic dimension refers to e.g. stability of employment over seasons, contribution to local economy and regional gross domestic product, control or leakage from the regional economy etc.

Most tools presented in the agora toolbox are methodologies designed to facilitate and optimise tourism development in general as sustainable tourism development basically employs the same methodologies. Sustainability primarily comes into the picture as a guiding principle while using the tools. Therefore, the tool box documents also give advice, as far as possible, on how sustainability can be considered in the implementation process.

Selection process for selected tools

In order to select the most appropriate and required tools and methods for developing sustainable tourism in the BSR, a determination of requirements was undertaken through the Baltic 21 Tourism Task Force (TOUTF) Network. Based on this, a pre-selection of thirteen tools was proposed to interested parties for the agora pilot projects with the request to select the most essential tools according to their perspective. This resulted in the final selection of the six following tools:

Content of the agora toolbox

- **Tools for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level:** Public participation, environmental assessments and conflict resolutions schemes are important tools to implement sustainable tourism in spatial planning processes. Selected tools will be described and their implementation will be demonstrated in a case study. A handbook will summarise the most important findings to assist developers of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region.

- **Sustainability Check for tourism projects:** In tourism, there are many so-called sustainable projects and many external funds which depend on this requirement, but no unique standard for the assessing the sustainability of these projects. Therefore, the aim of the sustainability check is to develop a testing tool for the sustainability of tourism projects which can be used for assessment during proposal, implementation and post-implementation phase.

- **Market research as capacity planning tool in tourism:** Market research is an important area in tourism as information on the requirements of consumers and competitors' activities play a major part in any tourism development and marketing. This part of the toolbox provides an overview about different issues to consider when undertaking market research and which steps need to be undertaken in order to do so. Clearly, market research in itself is not sustainable, but the information gained from it helps to use economic, natural and social resources more effectively and therefore also in a more sustainable way.

- **Developing sustainable tourism products:** In order to successfully develop sustainable tourism in the BSR, one of the most basic prerequisites is to develop products that are in line with market requirements without threatening the social and natural resources of the destination. Due to the fact that many issues need to be considered in product development, this toolbox provides detailed advice on the necessary steps in the process and illustrates where sustainability can be integrated into tourism products.

- **Labelling sustainable tourism products:** Once a sustainable tourism product is created, the next task is to communicate the product as well as its sustainability to potential customers. Applying for a sustainable tourism label can be a means of doing so as this clearly conveys the sustainability aspect of the product. Furthermore, labels also act as quality promises to the consumers because most labels require the fulfilment of certain standards. Therefore, different label types and methodologies will be illustrated in this part of the toolbox.

- **Strategic cooperation in tourism:** This issue is increasingly gaining importance as tourism suppliers are required to cooperate with others in order to overcome challenges such as an increasing competition or changing consumer demands, for example. Furthermore, tourism with its fragmented nature and interdependent product parts simply necessitates the cooperation of tourism providers.

Therefore, this part of the toolbox will deal with the topic in detail. Moreover, it will also illustrate how cooperation can contribute to sustainable tourism development through its integrative approach and through the more efficient use of resources when these are pooled together.

Apart from the first tool each of the topics will be worked on in three steps: First of all, a general overview of each topic is provided. The second step will then consist of an evaluation of the tools and methods described in the overviews regarding their suitability for the agora project. As a last step, a guidebook will be prepared for each topic which will help to develop sustainable tourism in the BSR. The results of steps 2 and 3 will also be made available on the agora website.

The present document represents the first step for the ‘Tools for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level’ part of the agora toolbox.

Content

Figures

1 Introduction

The aim of this part of the agora tool box is to provide an overview about existing tools and methods for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level. This issue has been included into the toolbox as spatial planning is an integral part of any tourism planning and development. Through spatial planning, different resource uses, among which tourism can often be found, are integrated in such a way as to contribute to the sustainable use of resources. Spatial planning can be used on different scales and tourism is often included on a regional or local level. Furthermore, spatial planning is also frequently used in tourism for visitor management in National Parks and other natural areas.

In order to reach the aim of this paper, the issues covered in this text include the following: First of all, the principle of sustainable tourism will be explained in detail in order to lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion of spatial planning. Next, different tools for conservation planning, i.e. zoning and visitor management will be explained and the importance of knowledge provision is addressed. Finally, tools for environmental assessment, i.e. environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) are discussed.

2 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism must simultaneously fulfil the requirements of environmental, social and economic sustainability. Sustainable tourism planning therefore aims much broader and deeper than just environment friendly tourism or mitigation of negative effects. There are many definitions of sustainable tourism, but the major problem is to make them operational for practical planning and management. Indicators need to be found for sustainability components. Environmental sustainability indicators can be found in environmental assessments. For assessing the contributions of individual projects, environmental certification criteria or ecotourism marking criteria may be employed. Social sustainability indicators may include benefits such as local employment, impacts on or support of local cultures and lifestyles. Economic sustainability indicators include such measures as contribution to employment, stability of employment over seasons, contribution to local economy and regional gross domestic product, control or leakage from the regional economy etc.

Ultimately, sustainability criteria must be determined within the regional and local frame-work in finding a balance between environmental, social and economic sustainability.

2.1 Agora definitions and operationalisations

Figure 1 outlines a simplified view of sustainable tourism which may be easier to use in planning and environmental assessment: sustainability is always a trade-off between environmental costs on the one hand and the individual and social good produced by an activity on the other. Should the costs exceed the value of the benefits, the activity is unsustainable.

In tourism one can distinguish between two major sets of environmental costs: those associated with transport and those that arise at the actual destination. The question at the bottom of Fig. 1 underlines an important, but often forgotten question: what are the alternatives to the particular form of tourism under consideration? Would the consumer do something with greater or smaller environmental consequences for the same amount of money?

For a sustainability appraisal, a fuller view of sustainable development is necessary. Positive environmental effects as well as negative social and economic must be incorporated. Hence, the balancing in Fig. 1 becomes more complex.

Fig. 1: The concept of sustainable tourism: A trade-off!

A BALANCE BETWEEN:	
ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS	**INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL GOOD**
TRANSPORT Pollution Natural resource use Energy	RECREATION LEARNING & UNDERSTANDING
LOCAL EFFECTS Pollution Crowding Environmental degradation Local culture etc.	FOREIGN REVENUE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT LOCAL EMPLOYMENT
What are the impacts of alternative uses of money for the consumer?	

2.2 Benefits Impact Relation (BIR)

All tourism has an environmental impact, not least in the transportation sector. The reasoning above concerning sustainable tourism shows that two complementary strategies are necessary. One is the conventional environment protection approach in order to minimise environmental effects and impacts. The other is to increase the benefits from tourism, both to the region and local communities and to the tourists. Increasing the social and economic good in combination with minimising the environmental impact increases the ratio of

benefit to impact. This relationship can be termed the 'Benefits Impact Relation' (BIR).

Several established quantitative methodologies can be used to understand the BIR such as resource accounting, cost-benefit analysis and a combination of 'willingness to pay (WTP)' and 'life cycle analysis' (LCA). However, quantification may not be necessary. A balanced judgement may be approached by listing the positive and negative factors that contribute to BIR. Focus groups, stakeholder meetings, user surveys may contribute to elucidating factors.

Destination packaging. This is a well established concept in the tourism industry. The reason the planner needs to understand and aid in packaging is that it may be a powerful tool for sustainable tourism development. By offering a diversity of experiences and a range of economic alternatives, packaging can attract visitors to stay in a region[1]. The regional outcome as well as the quality of the tourism experience will be greater for a smaller environmental impact in the transportation sector. Getting a visitor to stay longer enhances the benefit/impact relationship.

Vertical integration. With vertical integration, capacity use can be optimised ensuring a maximisation of BIR. Vertical integration, spatial concentration and efficient capacity use[2] are combined reasons why charter or mass tourism may be relatively environment friendly, provided that suitable locations are found and stringent environmental standards are enforced. Stringent environmental standards are also necessary for quality assurance. Lack of operator responsibility and involvement has been responsible for quality deterioration in many of the world's major mass tourism destinations.

[1] For further information on developing tourism products, see the 'Developing sustainable tourism products' section of the agora toolbox.
[2] For further information on the topic of strategic cooperation in tourism, see the corresponding section of the agora toolbox.

3 Conservation vs. exploitation

Conservation planning is a powerful tool in providing resources for local and regional tourism. However, local resistance based on misunderstanding or on real conflicts of interest may thwart efforts. Careful planning with stakeholder involvement has been the basis for succeeding with major conservation efforts combined with local and regional tourism development.

Adjacent area planning and *buffer zoning* is often crucial to resolving local and regional opposition to conservation planning and to produce long term benefit to local communities.

Pan Parks is an international cooperation which has successfully tackled the joint objectives of conservation and balanced tourism development in national park settings (for further information see www.panparks.org).

Natura2000. This EU network of protected areas enjoys an especially strong protection. Since many Natura2000 reserves are of nature tourism value, it is important to plan tourism that may have impacts especially carefully. The requirements for high quality environmental impact assessment should be observed.

Because of the stringent protection and the influence and interdependencies which Natura2000 areas may have on adjacent non-protected land, local and regional opposition may be mobilised. This has delayed the development of the network. Innovative work in stakeholder involvement has been done in Lithuania.

3.1 Zoning

Various forms of zoning may be a powerful tool in producing a balanced development. Zoning may be used within recreation areas and conservation areas to balance conservation versus exploitation. It may be used to provide a spectrum of recreation and tourism opportunities. It may also be used to resolve land use conflicts both between different types of tourism and recreation uses and with other forms of land use.

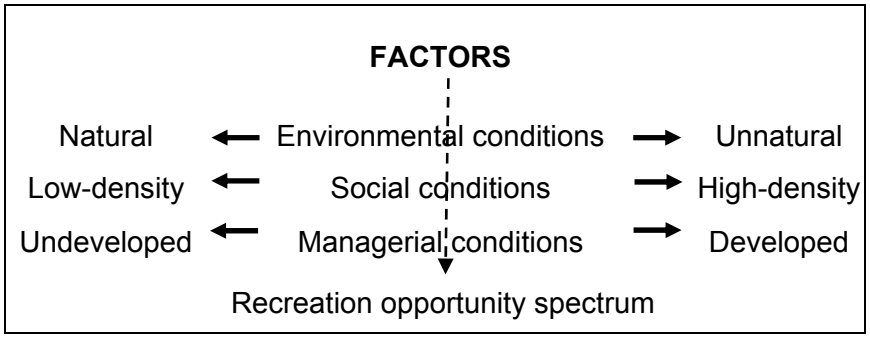
The *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* (ROS) is a planning framework where zoning is applied to the landscape. The ROS provides zoning and development of recreation experiences where areas are classified and divided according to the environmental conditions and the recreational activities. ROS encourages diversity. Since there are other management activities present in the setting where the recreation takes place, it is important that the framework makes assessment and evaluation of the shared effects between recreation and other activities possible. ROS also initiates guidance to planning in terms of a consumer-oriented paradigm where visitors' preferences are important (Stankey et al. 1999).

There are opportunities for activities in certain areas which realise people's desired experiences. The ambition is to find a balance between the use and the preservation; a variety of recreation satisfies the need for experiences and directs people to certain areas which protect nature. The idea of ROS is:

- to meet the demands of different environments for recreation reaching between wilderness and affected nature,
- to get easier valuations of effects and consequences between recreation and other interests, and
- to put management on a behavioural foundation to make the consumers' values more valid.

In the ROS, the landscape is divided into factors which are considered to provide possibilities for different experiences (see Fig. 2 on the next page). The environmental conditions are the qualities of the physical landscape, the social conditions shows how the landscape is used and managerial conditions are which measurements that are done in the area. The totality of factors creates a *spectrum*. This spectrum contains different classes which areas can be zoned after – from the primitive to the modern urbanised.

Fig. 2: The relationship between the ROS-factors



Users with different interests and activities should therefore choose areas which correspond to their preferences. He or she has to be well-informed and make a choice to achieve their experience goals. Also, management has to be part of a rational process to create concrete goals for various areas and have the means to fulfil the goals. When applying the ROS, one should be attentive that the environmental, social and managerial factors can be combined in different ways to generate recreation opportunities. The ROS is an organising or *conceptual framework* where management judgment is needed in the application. To use the framework correctly, there have to be clear and described goals for what should be offered in the area and where, how and for whom.

There are several developments of the ROS method. One is *the Water Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* (WROS) which provides guidance for water resources (e.g. coastal zones, lakes, rivers, marine protected areas etc.). Its goal is to provide planners and managers with a framework for conserving a spectrum of quality and diverse water recreation opportunities. WROS can be applied to any water resource, although it is less practical on very small areas.

WROS is a tool for understanding the type and location of six types of water related recreation opportunities. The factors from the ROS are put into six WROS classes described as zones with different distance from developed and populated cities, ranging across a spectrum of urban, suburban, rural developed, rural natural, semi primitive and primitive classes. Each WROS class is defined by a particular 'package' of activities, setting attributes, experiences, and benefits. (Aukerman and Haas 2004). Application of ROS or WROS to archipelagos may provide special problems because of the problems of producing spectra of opportunities across an archipelago. The mosaic nature of both use patterns and resources is a special challenge (Ankre and Emmelin 2005 & report to agora).

3.2 Visitor management

Visitor management can be done according to several principles: v*isitor impact management* focuses on the impacts and provides frameworks for environmental protection and quality assurance in conservation areas with multiple use. The best known and most widely applied system of impact management is the *Limits of Acceptable Change* system. Variations on this system exist such as Visitor Impact Management VIM & VAMP. A different point of departure is taken in the Benefits Based Management.

Limits of Acceptable Change. To resolve conflicts of visitors and environment, the planning framework of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) has been widely applied to determine the limits

within which a high quality recreation experience can be provided. It grew from efforts in national parks of the US. LAC not only focused on the biological and physical impacts of recreation, but also had the social consequences of increasing use pressure as a focal point. The recreational environment goes through changes, but at some point the quantity or the nature of these changes is intolerable. The LAC identifies appropriate indicators of the environmental conditions and includes some primary elements of procedure:

- Formulation of management objectives that are expressed by quantitative indicators and standards of quality.
- Monitoring of indicator variables to determine their condition relative to standards of quality.
- Application of management actions to ensure that standards of quality are maintained.

The Visitor Impact Management VIM model is a development of ROS & LAC thinking. The model is shown in the Appendix.

Benefits Based Management. This is also a development of the ROS/LAC model. It focuses on both individual and societal benefit of recreation. Five linked processes give this outcome:

- The production of opportunities for recreation by management,
- Visitor production of experiences,
- Societal good from management making a spectrum available,
- Individual and societal good from individual experiences, and
- Societal good from use of resources.

4 Knowledge support

All forms of visitor management presuppose knowledge of visitors which planning authorities often do not possess. Methods of user study, impact study etc. have been well developed and several standard textbooks or overviews exist (e.g. Hammit and Cole 1998; Vuorio, Emmelin and Sandell 2003; Jackson and Burton 1999; Manning 1999). An overview of how to undertake market research for tourism is provided in the market research part of the agora toolbox.

Stakeholder co-operation is also essential to offset the problems of lack of primary data and studies.

5 Environmental Assessment

Two formal types of environmental assessment may be required in tourism planning: environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA).

Major tourism projects and plans may have cross-border impacts or implications. In this case, it is important to observe the regulations of the Espoo Convention (for further information see http://www.unece.org/env/eia/welcome.html).

Sustainability Appraisal may be a useful tool for analysing the BIR, but has no formal status within the framework of the EU regulation of planning and development.

5.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Directive 85/337/EEC, amended 97/11/EC, requires environmental assessment to be made for major tourism developments (Annex II, 11a; 10 b, c & j may also apply to tourism projects). Countries should have detailed screening criteria for Annex II projects determined in accordance with the criteria in Annex III. However, the criteria developed for determining whether an individual project requires an EIA may be less well developed in individual countries.

Methodologies for EIA are well developed and most countries have a developed legal and regulatory framework for EIA as well as capacity to perform EIA. Several international handbooks are available for reference (e.g. Petts 1999). Good practice criteria for EIA are published by IAIA (www.iaia.org).

It is important that EIA is included at an early stage in tourism project planning in order to fully make use of the potential to explore environment friendly alternatives and to avoid costly delays and revisions at a later stage. This is especially so if formal permit procedures such as planning permission or project approval under environmental legislation are necessary for development

5.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or the directive 2001/42/EC requires environmental impact assessment to be made of regional development plans if they are e.g. used to determine the distribution of EU regional fund support. Project approval presupposes a determination of whether a project has a significant impact or not. This should be done with established EIA methodology. Methodology for SEA is less well established and will have to vary with the type of programme or plan that is under consideration. The official guidance to understanding the SEA directive can be found on http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/eia/sea-support.htm.

Particular attention should be given to some of the main steps in SEA:

Scoping. I.e. determining what impacts should be included in the assessment. The efficiency and effectiveness of SEA depends largely on a balanced scoping process. This is so especially in view of the very ambitious and comprehensive listing of what is to be included in the Annex 1 to this directive as well as the wide scope of the concept of impact given in the directive.

Identification of alternatives. Identifying alternative types of development may be an important tool in finding more sustainable approaches to tourism. It is important to utilise the potential of this at the SEA stage where commitments and investments in individual projects have not foreclosed options.

Base-line studies. Knowledge about tourism is often lacking or fragmented in planning and environmental administration. Co-operation with tourism authorities, organisations and stakeholders is important to offset this.

Public participation. This is required under the directive. However, participation at the higher levels of programming and planning is not well developed. Stakeholder cooperation and methods such as focus groups may be employed. The Internet has successfully been used in major projects as a method for participation. Coordination with 'adjacent zone planning' and 'buffer zoning' may be crucial to success.

Follow up. The requirements for follow up are rather ambitious. Scoping is one important method to ensure a focused and effective follow up. Coordination with ongoing environmental monitoring as well as with other planning processes, plan revision requirements etc. is also important to avoid duplication of effort.

An important role of SEA is also to provide guidance for later EIA. Identifying projects that may need EIA in accordance with the directive will aid later development, especially if screening criteria are weak or imprecise.

Sustainability Appraisal may not be an appropriate method for fulfilling the requirements of the SEA directive depending on how the national legislation implements the directive and what is included in sustainability appraisal.

6 Next steps

This document has provided an overview of existing tools and methods for integrating sustainable tourism development with spatial planning at local and regional level. In further stages of the agora project, the implementation of selected tools will be demonstrated in a case study as well as two training seminars and a handbook will summarise the most important findings to assist developers of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea region.

The results of all further undertakings (as well as on all other parts of the agora toolbox) will be made publicly available on the agora project website http://www.agora-tourism.net/.

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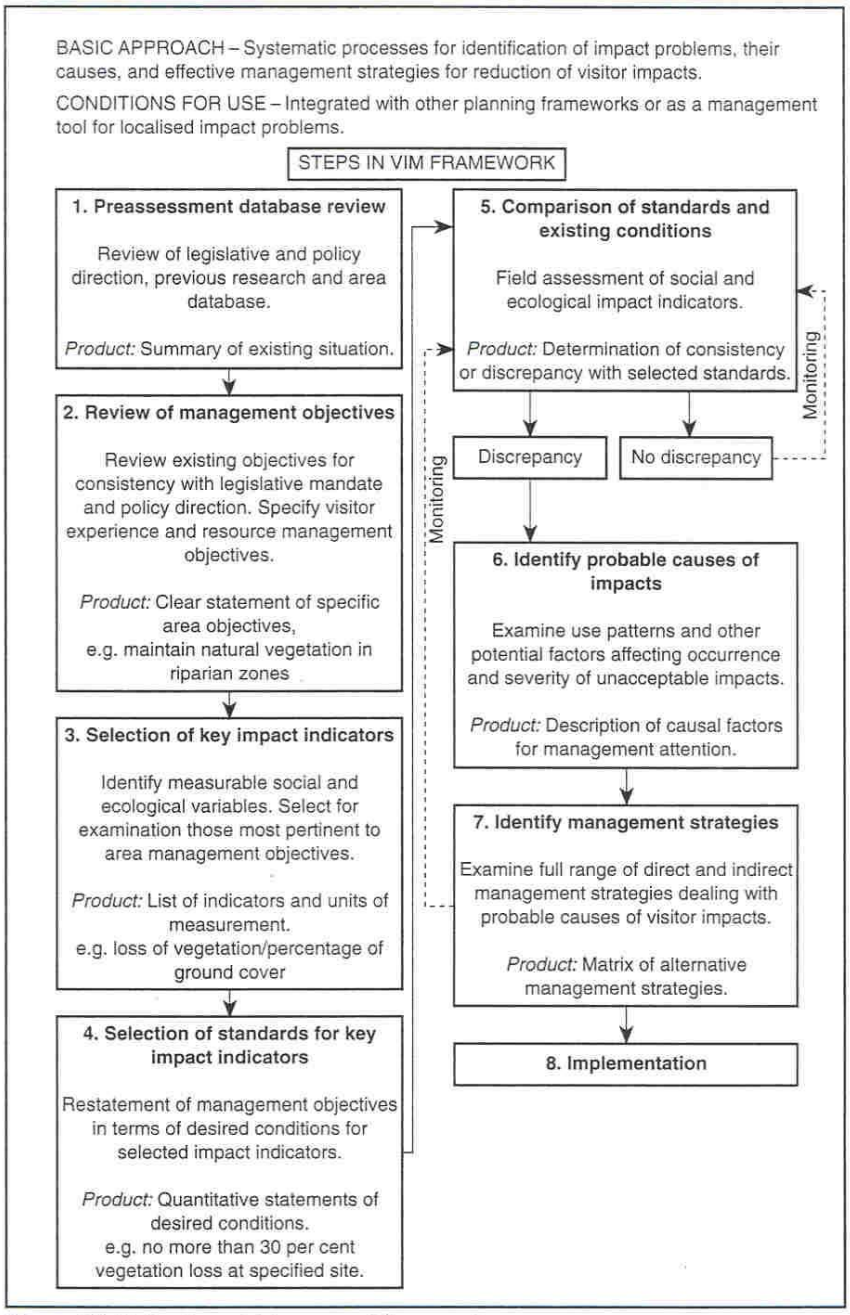
8 Appendix

Fig. 3: Visitor impact management model



Source: adapted by Graefe (1990, p. 218) from Pigram and Jeninks 1999