

BSPC
BAL TIC SEA PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

Report on Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region

2018



**Report on
Sustainable Tourism
in the Baltic Sea Region**

2018

Report of the BSPC Working Group
on Sustainable Tourism

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The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC aims at raising awareness and opinion on issues of current political interest and relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. It promotes and drives various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region. It strives at enhancing the visibility of the Baltic Sea Region and its issues in a wider European context.

BSPC gathers parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. The BSPC thus constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

BSPC external interfaces include parliamentary, governmental, sub-regional and other organizations in the Baltic Sea Region and the Northern Dimension area, among them CBSS, HELCOM, the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being (NDPHS), the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC) and the Baltic Development Forum.

BSPC shall initiate and guide political activities in the region; support and strengthen democratic institutions in the participating states; improve dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; strengthen the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region by means of close co-operation between national and regional parliaments on the basis of equality; and initiate and guide political activities in the Baltic Sea Region, endowing them with additional democratic legitimacy and parliamentary authority.

The political recommendations of the annual Parliamentary Conferences are expressed in a Conference Resolution adopted by consensus by the Conference. The adopted Resolution shall be submitted to the governments of the Baltic Sea Region, the CBSS and the EU, and disseminated to other relevant national, regional and local stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region and its neighbourhood.

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Sylvia Bretschneider
President of the Landtag
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I. Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region is known as an area of blue water, green nature, white sandy beaches and historical monuments. These are important images and explanations why the Baltic Sea Region is so popular as a tourist destination. In recent years, the tourism industry has become an important player in the economies of the States and Regions of the Baltic Sea. Therefore, it is a challenge to foster the potentials of the Baltic Sea region and establish the whole region as a model for the growing market of sustainable tourism. Tourism creates new jobs and supports economic growth even in less developed regions. One of the biggest challenges, however, is to reinforce and improve sustainable tourism development in order to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the industry. Managing tourism in a sustainable way helps to identify the limits and capacity of the tourism resources and to encourage a tourism development that balances optimising the immediate economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits, whilst also preserving the future of the tourism industry.

The following first report on Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region continues the work of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, installed from

2015 until 2017, and is closely linked to the final report of this working group, presented at the 26th BSPC 2017 in Hamburg. The Standing Committee of the BSPC in Hamburg appointed us as Rapporteurs on Sustainable Tourism after our work as chair and vice-chair of the Working Group.

The overarching objective of this first report is to analyse the reactions and responses of the governments of the States and Regions of the Baltic Sea on the political positions and recommendations pertaining to sustainable tourism, which were integrated in the 26th BSPC-Resolution.

The second part of this report concentrates on certain developments of the important Baltic Sea Tourism Centre and presents keystones and events since the 26th BSPC according to sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the report aims to inform on certain developments linked to the scope of the working group, such as the state of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, best practices, challenges and opportunities in sustainable tourism, and to point out potential benefits from sustainable tourism.

22 August 2018

Schwerin,

Sylvia Bretschneider
*Rapporteur on
Sustainable Tourism*

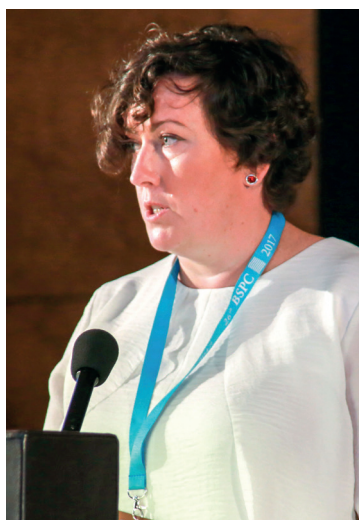
Mariehamn,

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II. Follow up of the Final Report of the Working Group

The subsequent chapter is directly pursuing the final report of the BSPC Working Group on sustainable tourism presented at the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Hamburg 2017.

The Mandate of the Working Group was determined by the Standing Committee meeting in Rostock, 30th August 2015, the overarching objective of the Working Group was to elaborate political positions and recommendations pertaining to sustainable tourism. The Working Group and its members aimed to raise the political attention on sustainable tourism, for instance by pursuing those issues in the parliaments of the members of the Working Group. Moreover, the Working Group has contributed to the exchange of knowledge and best practices within its area of responsibility. Therefore sustainable tourism is understood in accordance to The World Tourism Organization Definition from 2004 like the following:



*Sara Kemetter
Presenting the final report*

“Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”

1. Recommendations in the 26th BSPC Resolution

From the final report, the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference adopted the following points:

“The participants, elected representatives from the Baltic Sea Region States, assembling in Hamburg, Germany, 3-5 September 2017,

Regarding Cooperation in the Region, to

5. elaborate a common programme based on a strategy within the framework of the CBSS to develop sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, considering the following aspects

- the reduction as far as possible of obstacles to cross-border travelling to promote the freedom of travel including promotion of the local border traffic regime on outer borders of the EU
- facilitating border and visa regime for youth and organized tourist groups
- the improvement of sustainable transport and tourism infrastructure
- support for the idea of Baltic Sea Region States creating a common Baltic Sea Brand, based on cultural and natural heritage, to strengthen tourism competitiveness
- the improvement of travel options especially for young people (e.g. interferry);

Regarding Sustainable Tourism, to

28. work towards the vision that the Baltic Sea Region will become the first eco-region in the world, conceiving the Baltic Sea Region as the first region where ecology and economy work together in a balanced and integrated manner to sustain societies and culture.
29. ensure that the consequences of tourism are sustainable by adopting models and methods to save and protect nature and orient work along the principle that sustainability is the guiding principle and standard practice in all types of tourism in the Baltic Sea region;
30. further examine the use of carbon footprints to improve the

comparability and attractiveness of tourism products and their ecological and economical impacts; further improve the transparency of tourism products as to their quality in terms of sustainability, e.g. by using common labels and standards;

31. promote wastewater facilities at harbours in the Baltic Sea Region;
32. improve interrailing, to promote the use of alternative sources of energy and foster a sustainable multimodal split (sea, road, rail), and to improve bike infrastructure including bicycle stands and Ebike charging stations at transport hubs as examples for ecological forms of tourism;
33. jointly task a Tourism Transport Impact Assessment Study to analyze continuously the output of different political action to increase the level of sustainability;
34. counteract the lack of skilled workers in the tourism sector in the Baltic Sea Region, e.g. by establishing an international winter school to increase labour skills, language and intercultural skills;
35. fully use the possibilities of the circular and fair sharing economies creating new jobs in the service sectors;
36. foster a joint promotion by private and public stakeholders of the Baltic Sea Region as a tourism destination especially in new source markets and to foster cooperation in the region as a main key for the successful development of the Baltic Sea Region;
37. better use the potential of digitalization in promoting sustainable tourism and further support the development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center into a permanent platform for information and exchange of know-how at the transnational level, especially with regard to the long-term priorities of the CBSS;
38. sustain a sound environment, safeguarding the recreational quality of natural and man-made landscapes and integrating natural, cultural and human environments within the BSR so that tourism activities do not endanger the natural and cultural heritage of the BSR and instead actively con-

tribute to their preservation;

39. promote and sustain the competitive quality and efficiency of the tourism business while also creating satisfactory social conditions for tourists, the workforce and the local population;
40. involve citizens in the development of tourism strategies.”

Furthermore, the Conference integrated the following recommendations in the introduction of the resolution according to the encouragement of the Working Group, based on the good experiences:

“continuing involving youth into the procedures of the BSPC working groups. Especially during the second half of a two-year mandate of a working group the vivid debate with young people nominated by the member parliaments can be an enriching also with regard to the annual conference;”

2. Analysis of the Statements of the Governments to the 26th BSPC

Due to the fact that the governments of the states and regions distributed their answers concerning the implementation of the 26th BSPC-Resolution, the following chapter gives a policy analysis on the implementation of the recommendations regarding sustainable tourism. This approach contains the available answers of the governments of Åland, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hamburg, Latvia, Lithuania, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Norway, Poland and Russia.

The eleven submitted statements vary concerning the scope, thematic depth, and structure. Also the strength and the clear focus of priorities differ between the governments. But overall it becomes obvious that the governments are in general in favour of sustainable tourism and are working actively on this topic. Especially the following topics are relevant issues in the responses and therefore will receive more awareness.

A fact to be welcomed is, that in nearly all answers the governments respond to promote wastewater facilities at harbours in the Baltic Sea Region and give certain information on the status of the implementation of these facilities often with concrete details (Paragraph 31). Some countries already completed the installation of reception facilities and others are currently installing new systems.

To implement a more sustainable tourism, many governments adopted specific plans or agendas, like Åland – “tourism strategy for the years 2012-2022”, Latvia-“Tourism development guidelines”, Finland-“Parks & Wildlife Finland” or Norway-“Experiencing Norway – a unique adventure”. Also labels and management systems like “Green Key”, “Blue Flag” and “Certified Green Hotel” are getting more attention for the improvement of transparency in regard to sustainability (Paragraph 29, 30 & 38).

Several governments, i.e. Estonia, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, inform on their activities to improve sustainable transport infrastructure like cycle paths or bicycles stands (Paragraph 33).

Moreover, a great number of governments express their support to the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre and positively refer to the meetings, activities and network of this Centre (Paragraph 37). The topic of cooperation also plays some role in the answers of the governments (Paragraph 36). This is quite remarkable due to the fact the tourism

sector is a competitive market and the struggle for own profit of companies and regions. However, in a few answers - like from Mecklenburg-Vorpommern - the conflict between ecological requirements and economic development still plays an important role (Paragraph 28).

But there are also paragraphs and issues which are evaluated differently between governments. For example concerning the paragraph 28 to work towards the vision that the Baltic Sea Region will become the first eco-region in the world, the government of Estonia clearly expresses, that the Baltic Sea Region can hardly be considered as the first eco-region in the world and that many other eco-regions are already in place.

The importance of the paragraph 34 to counteract the lack of skilled workers is also evaluated differently. Thus, Latvia points out that there is currently no request from employers for such specialists' trainings. On the other hand, Estonia expresses the importance of exciting offers like different hospitality and tourism schools in various Baltic Sea Region countries which currently provide regular trainings to increase language and intercultural skills. However it also supports a greater cooperation between these schools and programs in tackling the shortage of skills. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern also clearly expresses the shortage of specialists and young staff as one key topic in tourism policy.

Approach for a special view and summary on country-specific answers of the governments:

The government of **Åland** informs to support sustainable tourism especially by the tourism strategy for the years 2012-2022 with a chapter on sustainability and accessibility. The government works in several networks to achieve more sustainability; especially labels and management systems like "Green Key" and "Blue Flag" are used to certificate the activities of, for example, companies or establishments. These labels are also collaborated with the "Åland Society for Nature and Environment", "Visit Åland" and the government of Åland. Furthermore the government of Åland intends to increase concentration on organic food and the reducing costs for tourism companies due to less resource waste.

The government of **Denmark** informs that Denmark has introduced new regulations for cruise ships wastewater treatment and is actively engaged in the current revision of the EU Port Reception Facilities Directive. As the Policy Area Coordinator of the Policy Area for

Clean Shipping and the Policy Area for Maritime Safety, Denmark is continuously contributing to the aim of making the Baltic Sea Region a model of region for clean shipping. The Danish government supports Baltic Sea tourism by including collaboration on sustainable tourism and coordinating activities through the Nordic and European tourism collaboration. Denmark is further supporting the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre.

The answers from the government of **Estonia** show the importance of improving port reception facilities to reduce vessel waste and sewage reception according to the International Maritime Organization, which were completed 2017 at the port of Tallinn. Furthermore the green key label is also used in Estonia to standardize sustainability principles, and further common new labels were not foreseen. Inter-modality of various modes of transportation is seen as an important area of development and a special focus is laid upon the improvement of cycling-structure. Regarding the necessity of skilled workers, different hospitality and tourism schools provide regular trainings to increase language and intercultural skills. Estonia supports the development of cooperation between the schools in the Baltic Sea Region and programs that tackle the shortage of needed skills. Estonia also acknowledged the progress of the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre and pointed out the importance of this Centre to improve the competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region, as well as to increase the visibility of the region as an attractive tourist destination. The answers also refer to the situation of overtourism and the need to evaluate how local communities and citizens perceive tourism development in their regions.

The answers of the government of **Finland** focus on importance of renewable energy sources such as biomass, solar, geothermal, offshore wind and the modernization of the maritime industry in fields such as autonomous shipping, intelligent ships and logistics. The “Parks & Wildlife Finland” has established a set of principles to guide sustainable tourism operations in the national parks, nature sites and historical sites.

The Senate of **Hamburg** informs on activities like the “Hamburg Tourism GmbH” which advises hotels and tourist service providers offers with regard to sustainable tourism and arranges for strengthening the network of service providers. To improve transparency in regard to sustainability, the recognition of “Certified Green Hotel” or the certification of sustainability of cruise trips might be offered. Furthermore, the Senate aims to markedly improve the bike traffic infrastructure in Hamburg, and the “Hamburg Alliance for Bike Traffic” includes the completion of the bike-routes network and new construction.

The Government of **Latvia** informs on the “Tourism Development Guidelines” and “Transport Development Guidelines 2014-2020”. According to these guidelines a modernization of rail passenger transport has been implemented; the objective of this is an integrating cycling in the common transport system and to promote the use of environmentally friendly means of transport. Regarding the development of sustainable tourism, Estonia has developed a Nordic Baltic Cooperation Plan which integrates all the tourism related questions in one solid activity plan; this includes common tourism marketing activities, Baltic Tourism Committee and organizations of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum. According to the situation of workers in the tourism sector, Latvia informs there is currently no request from employers for such specialists’ trainings.

The government of **Lithuania** informs that in 2015 Lithuania was elected to represent Europe in the Committee on Tourism and Sustainability of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation. The committee’s activities mainly deal with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production. To turn the society’s attention to the topic of sustainable tourism, Lithuania organized the 5th Lithuanian Tourism Forum, the 1st National Sustainability Award, and ordered a survey on the Development of Sustainable Tourism. This survey pointed out that the implementation of sustainable tourism goals need to be strengthened in subjects such as accessibility, small business development in regions, better cooperation between tourism information centres and tourism business. Moreover, 2017 started the implementation of the project “From SDGs towards sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region” with the aim to track down the status quo of sustainable tourism and identify best practices, trigger process, gaps and differences in order to develop, provide and communicate solutions. In 2018 Lithuania organises the European Congress on Rural Tourism.

The government of **Mecklenburg-Vorpommern** supports the idea of a common Baltic Sea brand and sees the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre as a project to develop the Baltic Sea Region as a destination regarding culture and nature tourism in a professional way. The creation of a necessary balance between ecological requirements and economic development is seen feasible and will depend on the concrete design of this approach. The provision of reception facilities for ship sewage usually requires the construction of stationary plants with the possibility of discharging into the municipal sewerage network. Necessary adaptations of the port infrastructure in the context of the acquisition of treatment plants can, if appropriate, be subsidized in the framework of port infrastructure funding by the state. Furthermore, the shortage of specialist

and young staff has great consequences for the service quality in the Baltic Sea region and is therefore seen one of the key topics in tourism policy.

The government of **Norway** responds on the importance to address the issues relating to sustainable tourism. In 2017 the Norwegian Government submitted a white paper on tourism entitled “Experiencing Norway – a unique adventure” to the Norwegian Parliament. This sets out the overarching objective of Norwegian tourism policy like increasing the value within a sustainable framework. The Norwegian Parliament responded to the white paper and requested additional measures from the government. They also began planning to draw up a strategy in cooperation with the tourism industry for extending the tourism season which will help to make the Norwegian tourism industry more sustainable. But the responsibility for addressing challenges relating to tourism is seen primarily with the tourism industry itself.

The government of **Poland** informs that Poland supports ongoing projects in the Baltic Sea region concerning Sustainable Tourism. The polish ministry of sport and tourism has cooperated with Gdynia University on working out the concept of European Tourism Academy, an expert cooperation network from scientific institutions in the Baltic Sea region, which will serve as an exchange of statistic data and scientific studies in the region. Furthermore, the investments in the biggest polish passenger ports (Gdynia, Gdańsk and Świnoujście) are currently ongoing in order to upgrade capacities of the sewage infrastructure to receive waste water from the largest cruise vessels and ferries. The Maritime University of Szczecin is currently taking part in a project titled “South Coast Baltic – establishing durable cross-border boating destination management on the basis of the Marriage cooperation network” with the idea to make the cross-border boating region durably attractive through establishing a comprehensive cross-border destination management. This would combine joint marketing with the improvement of boating services and infrastructure.

The answers of the Government of **Russia** contain information on the development and reinforcement of the “Saint-Petersburg Initiative” as an international platform for the public-private Partnership, which helps to develop cross-border cooperation and projects for the better Baltic environment. In these initiatives, a number of projects have been prepared and are being implemented on a wide range of issues, such as on waste treatment, biodiversity, conservation, green shipping and raising environmental awareness.

III. Important developments in the field of sustainable tourism

The following chapter aims to inform on certain developments regarding sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region. This mainly includes the activities of the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre and appropriate meetings and conferences.

1. Baltic Sea Tourism Centre

According to the 25th and 26th BSPC resolutions, the promotion and support for further development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre is a central demand of the parliamentarians around the Baltic Sea. At the beginning of the year 2018 the profile of this Centre was enlarged and the focus was put on three main emphases: partnerships, insights, and skills, which were developed in an intensive process together with stakeholders. Currently, the development of concepts for the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre network and business plan is compiled. Initially, cross-border working groups according to the Centres emphases should be established under the topics of: Sustainable Tourism (Skills), Training & Capacity Building (Skills), Market Research (Insights) and Politics & Lobbying (Partnerships). These working groups should work continuously and bring interested partners into contact.

The Baltic Sea Tourism Centre furthermore realized the webpage *www.bstc.eu* as a “business to business” platform with key information for sustainable tourism cooperation. To achieve more publicity, the web-page *www.balticsea.travel* went online as a “business to customer” page with information for guests on relevant topics of tourism. This page will be extended to cover the whole Baltic Sea Region.

A key role concerning the topic of sustainable tourism has been the project with the title “From the Sustainable Developments Goals towards a Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region. This project will last for the duration of one year until the 31. August 2018 under the leadership of the Tourism Board Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Tourismusverband Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.V.) with governmental and non-governmental project partners from Lithuania, Germany, Estonia, Finland and Belgium. This project is

targeting the priority area “Sustainable development for a prosperous Baltic Sea Region” of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and will also be a great step forward to implement the recommendations of the BSPC Working Group on sustainable tourism. After the adoption of the Global Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, this project analyses what happened in recent years in this topic and how tourism has fared in terms of a more sustainable development. The project will describe the status quo of sustainable tourism and analyse best practices, gaps and differences in the Baltic Sea Region in order to develop, provide and communicate solutions. Furthermore, there seems to be only little knowledge about the underlying political processes of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the countries and regions. The project also aims to clarify the understanding of “sustainable tourism development” and overall to make the tourism in the Baltic Sea Region more sustainable.

During the project period, four workshops were organized on the development of sustainable tourism on a regional level in Turku, Finland and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as well as on the national level in Estonia and Lithuania. The aim was to get an overview on the status quo of certain activities and to acknowledge common challenges. A paper on the measurability of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region and an analyses on examples of sustainable tourism were written. An international workshop on sustainable tourism was arranged at the 10th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2017 in Turku (see Chapter III. 2). Furthermore, a concept for an award for sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea region was established in preparation for the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2020 in Lithuania. The main output is to use the documentation of the project results to evolve political recommendation and to establish a flagship process under the chairmanship of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the policy area of tourism.

2. Forums, Workshops and Conferences

2017: The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development



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2017 was a very significant and active year for the field of sustainable tourism across the globe with projects and programs expanding on every continent. As globalization and technology take the reins of the international community into the future, the world begins to look smaller and people's eyes grow wider with the curiosity to explore. Countries have been intensely researching and implementing strategies to adapt to patterns of tourism in ways which also preserve the environment as well as safeguard the economy. This is no easy feat, considering the rising issues of climate change, pollution, market fluctuations, and the diversity of the tourism industry itself. For the great efforts and accomplishments made toward creating systems of sustainable tourism, the United Nations 70th General Assembly was excited to announce 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. This recognition will not only raise awareness of sustainable tourism's contribution to the development among both private and public sectors, but also strengthen the cooperation of stakeholders in making sustainable tourism the catalyst for positive, long lasting change.

Sustainable tourism developments in the Baltic Sea region have been particularly interesting and innovative the past year. One event which took place was the Sustainable Tourism Media Contest held in Gdansk, Poland on from January to March 2017. The objective of the contest was to spread environmentally-engaged ideas of local

tourism through different social mediums, such as press articles, radio podcasts, and television programs. This movement helped increase the awareness among stakeholders, especially citizens and travellers visiting the Baltic region, of the impacts of tourism on the local ecosystems as well as on natural resources and climate on a global scale. Participants primarily took away strategies on how to promote sustainable transport through responsible travelling behavior and appreciate the local environment without harming it.

More news on sustainable tourism came in the very beginning of 2017, when the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) decided the theme of the international Day for Biological Diversity will be “Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism.” To show their support of this initiative, the Swedish Ecotourism Society partnered with the Staffans family, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency to establish a special award for sustainable nature tourism and nature conservation. The award will be given in the memory of Staffan Svanberg, who offered an appreciated mix of boat trips to Haparanda Sandskär, seal safaris, guided hikes and overnight stays at the top of the Bothnia bay. The memorial prize was made possible by a generous anonymous donation received by the Swedish Ecotourism Society in 2017. With cooperation from the Svanberg family and local representatives of residents around the national park, the criteria for future prizewinners has been designed and agreed upon.

Information on the Participation of Sylvia Bretschneider at the 27. Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdrój, Poland

The 27th Economic Forum took place from the 5. – 7. September 2017 in Krynica-Zdrój, Poland. This forum is the biggest



Sylvia Bretschneider at the 27th Economic Forum

international meeting in Eastern Europe of economic and political leaders as well as scientists and representatives from NGO's and media. Several thousand people participated at this conference with the title: "Project Europe – what recipe for the next decade?". Sylvia Bretschneider was invited to participate at the panel discussion on the topic: "Fighting Stereotypes - the Influence of the National and Regional Image on Tourism and Economic Development." Tourism experts from Moldova, Ukraine, Switzerland, Portugal and Poland also participated. Sylvia Bretschneider used that opportunity to inform the other participants, stakeholders and guests on the developments on sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and delivered the printed final report of the BSPP Working Group on Sustainable Tourism to the interested audience. She pointed out in her speech that: "the tourism sector is a competitive market in which every region and every tourism provider competes traditionally for his or her own profits. However, to promote tourism regions in a globalizing world it is important to work together. [...] cooperation and the exchange of experiences are the keys to achieve this goal. To promote a region abroad, we must be visible and therefore we need a common approach and we need to cooperate. Against this background of an apparent contradiction between competition and cooperation, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference for example launched in 2015 the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism. [...] After two years of intensive work, the Working Group was completed in Hamburg with the presentation of the final report. This report contains concrete political positions and recommendations pertaining to sustainable tourism and leads to stronger cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region."

Information on the 10th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2017

The annual Baltic Sea Tourism Forum was held in Turku, Finland on the 2-3 November, 2017. At the meeting, 140 delegates from the Baltic Sea states came together to discuss many important, diverse topics under the thematic umbrella of 'The Future of Baltic Sea Tourism.' The main subjects of the meeting included sustainability, digitalization, education, tourism funding, and cooperation among regional actors and governments.

A highlight of this forum was the participation of experts who gave presentations detailing their professional insights and experiences regarding sustainable tourism practices. One of these speeches came from Ms. Anke Domscheit-Berg, a member of the Federal Parliament in Germany, who gave input into 'Digitalization and the



*10th BSTF from 2 – 3 November 2017 in Turku, Finland,
© Mika Okko*

Future of Travel.’ She noted as the rate of change in technological advances accelerates, it becomes more difficult to make predictions on problems that will arise and how to address them. The revolution of technology is affecting all industries, and Domscheit-Berg particularly mentioned how 3D printed autonomous cars are becoming the future of local transport. It was important to her to invest in the human experience and make travel more accessible through technology, such as Virtual Reality and Travel Apps.

Another key contribution to the forum came from Mr. Frank Cuypers, Senior Strategic Consultant of the consulting agency “DestinationThink.” This concept is meant to stimulate the discussion on ‘The future of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)’ and sustainable funding models for DMOs. Cuypers went over how to build and manage brands, create reputation for a place, and promote tourism with a long-term, sustainable strategies.

Furthermore, the Forum became a platform for transnational cooperation. This was best demonstrated through the participants laying out plans and showing support for the Baltic Sea Tourism Center (BSTC). The BSTC is intended to: bridge the gap between politics and business operations, collect data through research and collaboration, and voice the interests of the tourism sector on a macro-regional level.

The Forum also released the results of the “Questionnaire on futures of BSR tourism 2030.” The purpose of this exercise was to get participants to recognize future challenges, drivers and barriers of

sustainable tourism in the Baltic. It also helped gather insights and generate discussion about futures. 120 responses on the desirability versus the probability of six statements related to the Sustainable Blue Growth Agenda for Baltic Sea Region were collected and analyzed. All statements were seen as rather desirable (mean 5,8 on a scale 1 -7) but a little less probable (mean 4,6 on a scale 1 -7). The most probable (and least desirable) statement was that in 2030 the customer experience will be increasingly digital, using virtual and augmented reality. The least probable statement was that destinations and actors will cooperate in a cross-cutting and horizontal manner across the Baltic Sea region.

In addition, the Forum included a pitching session, which gave the opportunity for projects to present their innovative ideas of transnational and cross-border initiatives and for programs to improve the visibility of existing sustainable approaches of international cooperation. Looking toward the future, a tighter cooperation with the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States was envisioned.

IV. Prospects for a sustainable future

In continuing the path to develop the Baltic Sea Region into an eco-region where ecology and economy work together in a balanced and integrated manner to sustain societies and culture, it is necessary to further support and strive for the implementation of the political recommendations of the BSPC Working Group on sustainable tourism. Fruitful contacts with relevant institutions, organizations and other actors in the Baltic Sea Region have been established and should be maintained. One of these close contacts is with the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre. With this centre we have the strong strategic connection from politics and the tourism economy with all its facilities. Hopefully the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre will become a permanent establishment beyond the end of the funding period in 2019; however this requires further political support from the whole Baltic Sea Region.

An important upcoming event will be the 11th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum from 14. - 15. November 2018 in Riga. The 11th Forum will “focus on the exciting yet challenging times of change in tourism and politics, the forum will address how to be prepared for and these changes in order to make travelling better, smarter and more valuable – for visitors, locals, heritage, and nature.” A position paper concerning the cooperation on sustainable tourism after 2020 will be evolved for that forum. Furthermore the results and the final documentation of the project “From the Sustainable Developments Goals towards a Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region” (see chapter III. 1) will be integrated in the forums resolution.

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