Report on Sustainable Tourism in the Baltic Sea Region

2019
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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.

Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
Bodo Bahr
Secretary General
+49 171 5512557
bodo.bahr@bspcmail.net
www.bspc.net

BSPC Secretariat
Schlossgartenallee 15
19061 Schwerin
Germany
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I. Introduction

“Tourism unites us”. This is how the BSPC opening address at the 11th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Riga in November 2018 began. And it couldn’t be more true. The Region is united by blue water, green nature, white sandy beaches and historical monuments. In recent years, tourism has become an important player in the economies of the Baltic States and regions and grew larger each year. Due to the increasing popularity the industry is growing. However, this economic growth needs to be sustainable to ensure the longevity of the regions’ touristic sector.

While the environmental sustainability has gained importance in the last years, the economic and social sustainability of tourism is just as important for continuous growth. The creation of jobs, longstanding touristic products and economically as well as environmentally sustainable attractions and sites need to be a standing principle while building new measures and procedures to ensure sustainable tourism.

In order to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the industry, tourism needs to be managed in a sustainable way.
The following second 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. 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 report concentrates on certain developments of the Baltic Sea Tourism Centre and presents keystones and events since the 27th BSPC in sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the report aims to inform on developments linked to the scope of the working group, such as new concepts and guidelines, best practices, challenges and opportunities in sustainable tourism, and to point out potential benefits from sustainable tourism.

The State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as well as Sara Kemetter as a member of the Åland Parliament, are deeply saddened to announce that Sylvia Bretschneider, President of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has passed away on 28.04.2019 after a long and courageous battle against serious illness.

She held the position of President of the BSPC in 2014-15, was a longstanding member of the BSPC Standing Committee, Chair of the BSPC Working Group on Sustainable Tourism 2015-2017 and Rapporteur on Sustainable Tourism. Since 2002 she has held her position as an observer of HELCOM and was greatly engaged in the relationship between the two bodies.

Supporting international cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and the fulfilment of the mandates and responsibilities for her state parliament has been of utmost importance to her. From the beginning of her Presidency of the State Parliament in 2002, she started her ambitious work for the BSPC and gladly held the mandate as an observer of HELCOM immediately after her first election. The goal to achieve sustainable Baltic Sea Tourism with great collaboration and joint policies of the coastal countries has always been a matter close to her heart in her longstanding political career. Sylvia Bretschneider has been especially invested in the installment of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center in Rostock. With tremendous sadness and respect the BSPC has lost one of its most committed members and an outstanding personality with remarkable ambition towards its goals and values.
The State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern expressed gratitude for her tireless work and is thankful to the BSPC Standing Committee for the observer mandate in the Helsinki Commission. With honor, the parliament presents this report post mortem on behalf of Sylvia Bretschneider.

Her engagement and passion for the BSPC will be upheld and serve as an ambitious goal and inspiration for the states’ will to continue the great work on cooperation between the Baltic Sea States.
The aim of the report is to raise the political attention for sustainable tourism in continuation of the Mandate of the Working Group, which was determined by the Standing Committee meeting in Rostock, 30th August 2015. The overarching objective was to develop political positions and recommendations pertaining to sustainable tourism.

The Working Group has contributed to the exchange of knowledge and best practices within its area of responsibility. Sustainable tourism is understood in accordance to The World Tourism Organization Definition from 2004 like the following:

“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.”
Recommendations in the 27th BSPC Resolution

The 27th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference adopted the following points:

“The participants, elected representatives from the Baltic Sea Region States, assembling in Mariehamn, Åland, 26-28 August 2018,

Regarding the vision of a Healthy Baltic Sea - a call for more action, to enhance consultations and cooperation regarding a spatial master planning in the Baltic Sea region, considering all interests and aspects of economy (shipping, fishing, energy, tourism, etc.), environment and the neighbours.

Regarding Economic development and growth in the Baltic Sea Region, to acknowledge, that the Baltic Sea is a crucial line of sea transportation (a motorway of the sea) for all its neighbours, a resource for nutrition (fishing) and energy (oil, gas, wind and wave) as well as a recreation area for millions of tourists, therefore use all opportunities of Baltic Sea cooperation to enable managing and considering all interests and aspects of economy, environment and the neighbours.
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.

1. Baltic Sea Tourism Center

According to the 25th and 26th BSPC resolutions, the promotion and support for further development of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center (BSTC), located in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, is a central demand of the parliamentarians around the Baltic Sea. This was also affirmed by the Declaration of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2018 in Riga.

The Baltic Sea Tourism Center was constituted to promote cooperation in tourism in the Baltic Sea Region. While touristic Baltic Sea Regions generally stand in competition to each other, they also face common challenges and opportunities. After all, all regions will profit from a strong touristic economy and great exposure of the Baltic Sea Region as a tourism top destination. The Baltic Sea Tourism Center works in close cooperation with all Baltic Sea countries and the EU-Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region.

The focus was put on three main emphases: partnerships, insights, and skills, which were developed in an intensive process together with stakeholders. It was aimed to establish four working groups in correlation with the three core competences on Sustainable Tourism (Skills), Training & Capacity Building (Skills), Market Research (Insights) and Politics & Lobbying (Partnerships). Experts and stakeholders were supposed to support the BSTC work as well as build a network with new projects and institutions. The general interest in the working groups has been great so far, however the commitment towards taking responsibility inside the group has been sparse. In result, no lead for the working groups has been found yet,
which is of great importance for the coordination of the working groups. The BSTC is currently working on building bigger networks to resolve this issue.

Parallel to the establishment of working groups, an expertise has recommended the use of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as a suitable instrument for the BSTC. The EGTC a new EU-strategy to simplify transnational collaboration between countries or authorities on a coherent issue and topic.

The EGTC will enable participants to execute and coordinate joint ventures in close cooperation with experts from both sides.

Currently, the BSTC is working on a Cooperative/ Cooperation Agreement that will be the foundation of the EGTC to simplify the overview of the projects and the necessary commitment, as well as give a basis for decision-making processes and work packages.

The BSTCs “Tourism Policy” group is currently updating and reviewing the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). In close cooperation with the European Commission/ GD Regio the BSTC develops and reviews a revised action plan. In April 2019 a report was issued, discussing the challenges of the macro-region, goals of the strategy and focus points for the politic departments. In July the report on Governance structures was also presented.

In coordination with the international steering group for tourism policy the priorities for the revised action plan were defined:

1. Preservation and utilization of cultural and natural heritage
2. Competence supply
3. Transnational development in remote areas

On all three prioritized topics transnational flagship projects are planned. In late 2019, the first flagship project called “Local food networks” is being organized.

Throughout the year significant progress has been made in the fields of the three core competences of the BSTC. The field of “Insights” gives an outline of the tourism sector in the macro-region of the Baltic Sea. This year, the second market report is being compiled. It shows the development of the sector in the respective states and region through including data on overnight stays, arrivals, employment and its share of the GDP. In Addition to the market report there will be a trend report issued this year. It offers valuable clues about future developments and factors of influence. It also includes an overview of international projects, initiatives and cooperation to enable politicians and the BSPC to build synergies between already
running and planned projects. The goal is, to avoid parallel activities, promote joint projects and provide transparency about international initiatives. Such overview has never been developed in the Baltic Sea Region and will be of great use and assistance in upcoming projects.

A workshop series will take place in the Baltic Sea States this year, where regional, national and transnational projects will be presented and brought into dialogue and contact with similar ones.

In the area of “Skills” the BSTC developed a workshop to help develop new, or improve existing touristic products. The content of these products and services have their focus in the field of Internationalization, Sustainability and season extension. The workshop has been tested successfully in Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Denmark and twelve new regional touristic products have been established. It has also been determined, that international joint advertisement for tourism in the Baltic Sea Region will not be pursued since it these initiatives rarely function sustainably. Sustainability in tourism is one of the main focus points of the “Skills” group, which has been greatly encouraged by the BSPC. While gaining global importance, it has to be addressed on a macro-regional level.

To gain more transparency and encourage the work towards sustainability, the BSTC has decided to introduce the Sustainable Tourism Award in the Baltic Sea Region. The award will complement the achievements and serve as an inspiration for other projects and regions. It is planned to present the first Sustainable Tourism Award at the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2020 in Lithuania.

In the core-competence of “Partnerships” the BSTC aims to develop a network of stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region. The main tool to achieve this, is the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum. The platform is used to exchange knowledge, experience and practices. It has established itself as an important yearly event for tourism specialists in the Baltic Sea Region. The 12th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum will be held in Brussels at 13. November 2019.
2. European Commissions call for a climate-neutral Europe by 2050

On 28 November 2018 the European Commission presented its long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy by 2050.

While the hotel and leisure industry itself has considerable environmental impact, is is especially the travel industry that is responsible for immense carbon emissions that could and should be reduced. Specifically emissions from aviation constitutes a significant risk to the environment.

The EU strategy shows how Europe can lead the way towards climate neutrality by investing into realistic technological solutions and aligning projects, initiatives and projects in industrial policies, finance and research.

It aligns with the SGDs as well as the Paris Agreement objective to keep the global temperature increase below 2° Celsius and strive towards keeping it at 1.5°C.

This ambitious goal and strategy is an example and guideline for future BSPC work towards achieving the common goal of sustainability.
Helsinki was elected “European Capital of Smart Tourism” by the Initiative hosted by the European Commission. In 2017 a record number of more than 4.5 million people visited the modern and vibrant city.

The cities smart public transport system is highly accessible and “Helsinki Helpers” are stationed at the main attractions to offer assistance. With a total of 143 measures to help Helsinki become carbon neutral by 2035 the guests can experience an environmentally friendly vacation. On the MyHelsinki.fi platform, tourists can get recommendations from locals for a sustainable and cultural vacation. The city made a wide array of environmentally friendly saunas part of their authentic and equally sustainable tourism landscape.

In January Helsinki launched a study to analyse how sustainable tourism is carried out in the city. A new sustainable tourism programme will be developed from the assessment and put into action in late 2019.

It is a delight to see the member states do so well and implement and enforce the BSPC values efficiently. We congratulate Finland and Helsinki to this great success and their innovative and forward-thinking programmes. This achievement can lead as an example and inspiration to other countries.
3. Forums, Workshops and Conferences

*Information on the 11th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2018*

The annual Baltic Sea Tourism Forum was held in Riga, Latvia on the 14-15 November 2018. At the meeting, 400 participants from the Baltic Sea states came together to discuss many important diverse topics under the thematic umbrella ‘On the Edge of Change.’ The main subjects of the meeting included “creation vs preservation”, “digitalization vs preservation” and the “sustainable tourism cooperation post 2020”.

In the inspiring opening addresses Beate Schlupp, Vicepresident of the State Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern took to the audiences as a member of the BSPC.

She highlighted the importance of tourism to the Baltic Sea Regions and therefore the significance of the topic to the BSPC.

Beate Schlupp presented the working group on sustainable Tourism of the BSPC and gave a quick overview of the results and the answers and initiatives implemented by the BSPC states. She pointed out, that all of the members have carried out the installments of wastewater facilities in the harbors as well as management systems successfully.
She shared the goals of the Baltic Sea to become a region with a fair balance of ecology and economy. Besides the crucial issue of environmental concerns, she reminded the rising problem of strong regional concentration tourism and the resulting economic and social issues.

Beate Schlupp encouraged the participants to place this goal to the top of their policy agenda.

She welcomed the EU policy to ban single-use plastic and its importance to marine regions. She recalled the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030 and encouraged the members to include them in the seminars and discussions at the Forum and to take urgent action against the plastic pollution of the Baltic Sea.

She pointed out the successful implementation of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center in Rostock, which also greatly partook in the Forum, showing the strength and expertise of the BSPC supported Center.

She pointed out that the BSPC stakeholders continuously strive to make sustainability a guiding principle, that will become standard practice.

A highlight of this forum was the concentrated work on three major topics that have overwhelming significance and influence on the Tourism in Baltic Sea Regions. Each of these complex topics was discussed with scientists and experts on the matter. Furthermore the well-established and specialized institutions "Baltic Tourism Academy" and the "Baltic Sea Tourism Center" have been choosen to host and curate the discussions and expert groups.

The Baltic Sea Tourism Center (BSTC) curated and lead the Panel on “Sustainable tourism cooperation post 2020”. Susanne Marx from the Stralsund University of Applied Sciences, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern lead the panel between experts from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Norden Association, Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Baltic Sea Tourism Center in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This well-rounded panel held a productive discussion ranging from a globalized tourism and sustainable cooperation to exchange between touristic regions.

In the recommendations and resolutions for Sustainable Tourism at the 26th BSPC the conferenced encouraged and enlarged the work of the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Rostock. The great success and participation during the Forum in Riga showed the well known degree of expertise and effectiveness of the Center.
Another panel was held on the topic of “creation vs preservation” - creativity and innovation as a major driving force of preserving the local experience and cooperation with the Baltic Sea Region. With various experts the panel talked about the conflict and balance between globalization and international cooperation and the preservation of a local experience and authenticity for valuable visitors.

The third panel’s topic on “digitalization vs preservation” and discussed the importance of a continuous and high-quality digital presence to keep up with ever-changing technological advances and withstand the globalized growing competition.

A milestone of the Forum in Riga has been the Forums Declaration of the results and recommendations to stakeholders in Baltic Sea Tourism.

In it the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum appreciated and welcomed the various cooperations and initiatives in the Baltic Sea Region to improve economy, environment and especially tourism. Due to the interlocking nature of these aspects, cooperation is the key to success. In the declaration, the Forum specifically appreciated the activities of the BSPC in sustainable tourism and welcomed the final report on sustainable tourism and their recommendations.

The Declaration specifically targeted the three topic of the panels that were worked on during the Forum.
Regarding Creation vs preservation it called the stakeholders

- to keep the focus on developing the Baltic Sea Region as an unique and distinctive tourism destination, with regions and cities telling their stories influenced by history,
- to campaign for (innovative) projects and processes setting and following actual market trends and ideas, but keeping the focus on the USP of the BSR,
- to, identify and ensure a solid financing basis for them.

Regarding digitalizations vs preservation it called the stakeholders

- to motivate tourism stakeholders to break up with established structures and make use of the possibilities digitalization offers,
- to use digital media channels in a proper way without “overloading” the target groups,
- to find an efficient way to combine them with ordinary marketing tools.

Regarding sustainable tourism cooperation post 2020 it called the stakeholders

- to accept the Baltic Sea Region as a destination in a global competition which makes it obligatory for the stakeholders to think and act in that way,
- to follow the UN SDGs to support promoting the Sustainable Tourism Award, which pays tribute to most sustainable destination, product and exceptional services and private tourism services provider (business),
- to support circular economy solutions in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR),
- to develop and establish the BSTC Tourism Market Report (TMM*) and Tourism Trend Radar (TTR*)
- to find proper solutions for funding and/or financing tourism activities in the BSR post 2020, - to actively support the PAC Tourism in the process “Revision of the EUSBSR Action plan”,
- to share and support the Position paper on “Sustainable tourism development in the Baltic Sea Region post 2020”,
- to actively support the activities of the Baltic Sea Tourism Center and its newly established Expert Groups on Sustainable Tourism, Market Research, Training Offerings and Tourism Policies,
- to promote the participation of stakeholders from non-EU countries to ensure integration of all countries from the Baltic Sea Region.
IV. Prospects and outlook for a sustainable future

In continuing the path to develop the Baltic Sea Region into the first eco-region where ecology and economy work together in balance, it is necessary to further support and strive for the implementation of the political recommendations of the BSPC Working Group on sustainable tourism. The many projects, initiatives and cooperation's in place by various countries need to be connected to enable exchange and greater success and to avoid parallel international activities. One of most important tools to connect initiatives quickly is the Baltic Sea Tourism Center in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. With this center, we gain the strong strategic connection from politics and the tourism economy with all its facilities and a great overview to all activities striving towards the joint goal of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Area.

1. 12th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Brussels

An important upcoming event will be the 12th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum on 13. November 2019 in Brussels. The 12th Forum will be held under the theme “SHARE I INSPIRE I CREATE”. For the first time, the Forum will not be held in the Baltic Sea Region, which will give great opportunities to cooperate with and further include the European Commission into the Forum and tourism in the Baltic Sea Region. The focus of the Forum in Brussels will be the results of international cooperation and collaboration. A wide range of projects and initiatives is invited to give presentations on their respective activities. Since the productive exchange on the ITB Berlin last year, the other three macro-regions will give insights into their touristic development in relation the Baltic Sea Region. The exchange in knowledge, principles and strategies will further the coherent cooperation and touristic strategies throughout Europe and will have great benefit to each of the macro-regions. The Forum in Brussels will help the dialogue with the European commission about the magnitude in which tourism and international cooperation in the Baltic Sea will be included in the financial plan for the upcoming years.
The Baltic Sea World Heritage Summit will take place in Karlskrona, Sweden from 24-26 September 2019 and is co-organized by the development of UNESCO Natural & Cultural Assets (DUNC). It aims to strengthen the cooperation and the promotion of exchange in knowledge and practices between the stakeholders.

World heritage coordinator, officials and politicians from all coastal World Heritage sites around the Baltic Sea will meet with organizations and businesses involved in the World heritage as well as representatives from the tourism sector.

Amongst the topics to be discussed at the summit are disaster risk management in case of fire or flooding, sustainable tourism development to help build inclusive communities and the debate on efforts to protect and safeguard coastal heritage sites for the future.

This Summit and its result will hopefully have fruitful impact on the BSPC work and give the participating countries great insights how to achieve a sustainable tourism on their popular UNESCO World Heritage sights.