

Research Report 312 01 129
UBA-FB 000242/e

Indicators for the development of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region

By

Johanna Danielsson, Wolfgang Günther, Astrid Koch, Dr. Martin Lohmann, Martin Schumacher, Ulf Sonntag, Elisabeth Volmert, Kai Zieseimer

Institute for Tourism and Recreational Research in Northern Europe, Kiel

Summary

In conjunction with the implementation process of the Baltic 21, the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region, the Umweltbundesamt in Berlin has asked the Institute for Tourism and Recreational Research in Northern Europe (*N.I.T.*), Kiel, to develop a system of indicators for the development of sustainable tourism that could be used by local and regional levels of planning. To achieve this goal it was necessary to analyse the current situation of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region, to survey already existing systems of indicators and to use this information as a basis for the development of the desired set of indicators. During an international workshop the first draft of this system of indicators was discussed with stakeholders and optimised afterwards. This final report contains the results of all phases of this project including a proposed set of indicators and advice for the introduction of this set into practice.

This project consisted of seven phases. In the first two phases of this project it was attempted to obtain an overview of the current situation of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and of already existing systems of indicators for sustainable development in tourism. First of all data about the structure of tourism and general core data about tourism in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region were collected as background information. The situation of tourism varies considerably among the Baltic countries. Neither the supply nor the demand of tourism emphasise the same aspects throughout the entire Baltic Sea Region. Also there are no important structural similarities throughout the whole area. The state of the current development of tourism is extremely heterogeneous in different countries. Therefore the development of sustainable tourism starts from very different conditions depending on the location which makes it necessary to apply a variety of different measures.

All countries of the Baltic Sea Region have in common that they have to adapt to a more fierce global competition in the tourist industry. In general, tourism in the Baltic Sea Region is expected to remain relatively stable on the current level which is already quite

elevated. Long-term rates of increase will be moderate but the differentiation of offers and target groups will increase. It is dangerous to rely on a coming boom of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region since this could lead to the creation of excess capacities with many economic, social and last but not least environmental risks. Important factors for future success of the Baltic Sea Region will be (just as anywhere else) realistic goals, a clear focus on own strengths and a precise management of capacities.

During the second phase of this project already existing systems of indicators of sustainable development in tourism and sustainability in general were surveyed. It was assessed whether there already is a system of indicators that contains the variables for the description of sustainable tourism on a local level which could be used in practice in the Baltic Sea Region as required by the goal of this project.

Analysed proposals for indicators were either useful for describing sustainability in tourism at different levels of planning (e.g. Seiler, 1989; WTO, 1995; Albowitz, 1998; Pils and Eltschka-Schiller, 1999) or for the description of sustainability at a local level in general (e.g. Zukunftsrat Hamburg, 1999; European Commission, 2000). A total of more than 30 systems of indicators was surveyed. However, none of the analysed systems of indicators contained a combination of both characteristics mentioned above. So it was not possible to transfer one of these sets of indicators completely to the first draft of our desired system of indicators.

For this reason individual indicators were extracted from the analysed systems. These selected indicators that generally satisfied the requirements of this project were put together to form a new set of indicators (phase 3). The following criteria were used in the process of selecting the indicators:

The selected indicators should be ...

- ☒ relevant with respect to sustainable development,
- ☒ available with regard to data; data should be accessible or readily obtainable,
- ☒ suitable for local and regional levels of planning,
- ☒ clearly understandable and
- ☒ feasible; i.e. that there is a realistic chance of finding target values for the indicators for which a consensus among the stakeholders in tourism can be reached.

Comparable criteria for indicators relating to a specific sector are also formulated e.g. in the Environmental Report of the Summit of the Commission of the European Union in Helsinki (Commission of the European Union, 1999).

The fourth phase consisted of an analysis of the availability of data for the indicators included in the first draft. This survey was carried out at eight tourist destinations in different countries that all differ quite significantly with regard to the predominant structure of tourism. The destinations were St. Petersburg (Russia), the Soomaa National Park (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), Nida (Lithuania), Łeba (Poland), Grömitz (Germany), the Isle of Møn (Denmark), and Hanko (Finland). Feedback from selected experts of sustainable development and indicators yielded additional input that was combined with the experience from the analysis of data availability to revise the first draft of the system of indicators.

The second draft was discussed, evaluated and revised again by 40 stakeholders in tourism from all Baltic countries during an international workshop in early 2001 (phase 5). The discussion focused on the question of practicability and relevance of the proposed indicators. For this reason mainly those people were invited to the conference who are responsible for the development of tourism on a local or regional

level. At the end of the conference all participants identified the requirements necessary to be fulfilled in order to enable a successful introduction of the system of indicators in their respective countries.

The sixth phase consisted of co-ordination and feedback of information to the working group which is responsible for tourism in the Baltic 21 process (Baltic 21 Tourism Task Force). The best possible use of the project results within the framework of the Tourism Task Force work schedule was debated.

After the workshop the indicator set that was developed by the *N.I.T.* and optimised during this project contained 23 core indicators. The indicators are distributed into four categories: "economic indicators", "ecological indicators", "social indicators" and "institutional indicators". This categorisation is based on the four dimensions of sustainability as used by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (United Nations, 1996). A system of indicators should contain variables from all four dimensions in order to describe a sustainable development appropriately. Some of the indicators could very well have been placed in a different category than indicated in Fig. 5. This shows that the four dimensions are strongly interrelated. It has to be noted that any type of categorisation is a tool for the structuring of the indicator set but it is hardly possible to properly assess the complexity of the actually existing interactions. Consequently the indicators may not be used individually and isolated from each other or only with the focus on one specific category. Instead, they are all to be used together as a composite system.

A further complication of the process of selecting the indicators lies in the requirement to produce an image of the different aspects of sustainability in tourism that is as accurate as possible on one hand. On the other hand the number of indicators should be kept at a manageable level. Furthermore only those variables should be selected for which data could be obtained at a reasonable effort. At least the core indicators should satisfy these requirements for tourist destinations throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

From the first phase of this project it became evident that tourism in the Baltic Sea Region is extremely heterogeneous. Different destinations can therefore be compared only in a very limited way. This holds true for requirements for the development of tourism relating to specific locations as well as for differences in data availability.

In order to assess interesting aspects of a sustainable development of tourism where it makes sense and where data are available despite the difficulties mentioned above, the core 15 additional indicators that were categorised as generally useful. Not for all of them data are available throughout the Baltic Sea Region and their use does not make sense in all tourist destinations of the Baltic Sea Region because of structural reasons. But locations that could use some or all of these additional variables and that have the necessary data at their disposal can expand or complete their set of indicators with such supplemental indicators.

The final part of this report (phase 7) contains suggestions for the practical implementation of the indicators based on experience from this project.

Feedback from stakeholders in tourism from the entire Baltic Sea Region at the workshop and the assessment of data availability revealed a general interest in the idea to work with indicators. It is fuelled by the wish to obtain guidelines and suggestions for the own development of tourism. Important motives are related to economic (increase of the economic success and improvement of competitiveness), ecological (conservation of nature and a functioning environment) and social (preservation and improvement of the conditions of living for the local population) aspects.

Simultaneously it also became evident from the discussion with practitioners that only a few locations will be able to use indicators as a tool by themselves without any support from outside. The following requirements for the use of indicators in practice were stated:

- ☒ **advice** from scientists and experienced stakeholders,
- ☒ **resources** such as time, money and scientific competence,
- ☒ **co-ordination** on a national and international level,
- ☒ a **help desk** assisting the participating destinations,
- ☒ a **network** with other locations that work in the same or in a similar field (e.g. in the Agenda 21 process) and with politics,
- ☒ a **manual** in all languages of the Baltic Sea Region that explains how to work with indicators and what advantages such work offers.

If indicators are to play a role in the development of sustainable tourism along the coasts of the Baltic Sea in the future it will be necessary to set up a program to support locations interested in using them. A first step in this direction could be a practical test of the proposed set of indicators in selected model destinations. During such a pilot project the indicators could be tested and optimised. The experience gained by the model locations could additionally be available as instruction for subsequent destinations. Since the distribution of information and the participation of the population are fundamental aspects of projects of Integrated Coastal Zone Management the integration of the use of indicators into such projects seems reasonable.

The debate about the practicability of the indicators has shown that indicators can be a valuable contribution as tools in the process of reaching political decisions about tourism in the Baltic Sea Region if local stakeholders receive appropriate support during the initial period. However, the indicators do not replace the process of reaching political decisions itself and they are no means that creates sustainability. They are just tools that make it easier to reach a certain goal but they are not the goal itself.

Fundamental political decisions will be necessary when target values are to be selected for the indicators. That way indicators can serve as a catalyst for political decisions at the local and regional level. If all parts of society participate in the selection of the indicators and especially in the definition of the target values, the work with the indicators will increase public awareness with regard to a sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region. And finally it also can help to structure the discussion about a common sustainable future.