



A final "hello" from us!

This final newsletter no 3 has following themes:

- We inform about the B7 Environmental Conference held in Rügen in October 2000 where the two B7 projects BEST and SUSWAT were presented for a wider audience.
- We mark the conclusion of the project with personal comments from some of the coordinators in the project coordination group.
- We also present the last of the five BEST partner islands, Öland in this issue.

This is the BEST project

The Best Project was initiated as a result of the Common Strategy for the B7 islands, which was adopted in Visby in May 1996. The main objective is to promote Sustainable Tourism in the islands. Subaims are:

- To create an inter-island cooperation network to promote the development of sustainable tourism
- To establish common systems for codes of conduct, benchmarking and quality control
- To adopt and publish a Green Paper
- To initiate at least three development projects
- To make a B7 contribution to the VASAB and Baltic Agenda 21 processes

Facts

The BEST project – B7 Exchange on Sustainable Tourism – is a joint project between the seven largest islands in the Baltic Sea. The B7 islands are Bornholm (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden, Lead Partner), Hiiumaa (Estonia), Rügen (Germany), Saaremaa (Estonia), Åland (Finland) and Öland (Sweden).

Associated project partners are

- Bornholms Research Centre, Nexö, Denmark
- Estonian ECO-Tourism Association, Pärnu, Estonia
- Gotland University College, Visby, Sweden
- Société D'Eco-Aménagement, Montpellier, France

The project is supported by the European Union under the Interreg IIC Programme.

B7 Environmental Conference in Rügen 23-24 October 2000

- More than 100 people joined this conference in the beautiful Town of Sellin in Southeast Rügen. Most participants came from the B7 islands but also a number of guests from the mainland Germany took part. Many islands guests had to travel arduous routes since direct connections between the islands are exceptions! The aims of the conference were:
- To present and discuss the results of the two INTERREG II C projects for B7: The B7 SUSWAT-project regarding planning and management of sustainable water supply in the Baltic Sea Islands, and the B7 BEST- project.
- To present other examples of ongoing work in the Baltic Sea Region regarding environmental sound development.
- To establish closer contacts between politicians, technicians and organisations in the field of environment and tourism in the B7 islands.
- To present environmental and touristic aspects of the island Rügen.

County Rügen was a magnificent host for the conference and the facilities and arrangements were superb, including a pleasant dinner at the Pier of Sellin and excursions to different interesting and beautiful sites.



The BEST and the SUSWAT projects were presented for the plenum and afterwards discussed more in details in two workshops, each with some 40-50 participants. The conference agreed that co-operation within the field of tourism can strengthen one of the most promising development possibilities for our islands. Therefore the Principle of sustainability is extremely important in order to maintain the foundations (such as water and nature) for further development. The issue of the BEST "Green paper" was presented with pilot projects and many new ideas for how the islands can continue their common development in the field.

B7 BEST is finished as a project – what has been achieved?

The BEST project has been running for two years as a co-operation involving mainly 5 islands in four different countries. The two Estonian islands have been observers in the project. Many local tourist operators, tour companies, politicians, civil servants and other stakeholders in the field of tourism have taken active part in the project. Reports have been published and pilot projects have been started. The project has taught us that we have many similar problems and also good things in common in the tourism field, for example, a strong focus to a short summer season and vulnerable nature. We also were reminded of the poor communications between the B7 islands, which makes it hard to co-operate sometimes. Here are some comments from our partner coordinators in the islands:

Bornholm

I am sure that the BEST project will have a positive effect on Bornholm and the other B7 islands in the future. The overall goal is to achieve a common understanding of the requirements of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and the BEST project can be perceived as having laid the foundation for a greater exchange of knowledge and expertise within the field of sustainable tourism for the islands involved. Our sub-aim on Bornholm was to adopt and publish a Green Paper, and in cooperation with our associated partner, The Research Centre of Bornholm, we developed "The Green Paper".



Ida Kragstrup
Bornholm

Most of the islands involved have experienced unsustainable pressure for holiday development in our landscapes and small towns for many years and I believe there is a need for a policy for sustainable development in tourism. I hope the BEST project will outline an action programme towards sustainable tourism which should protect and enhance the environmental quality.

Hopefully the BEST project can be such a valuable contribution to new perspectives which can lead to new ideas and activities for the different stakeholders, organisations and authorities on the B7 islands and ensure the future of tourism. Amongst the participants in the project there has been a very good atmosphere and it has from a personal point of view been very interesting to discuss sustainable tourism with the BEST-workgroup and participating in the different seminars and conferences during the project. The role of the BEST project will not be to deal with every identified issue but to agree the key problems on which the Green Paper - in a further process - can deliver results, achieve funding and be implemented. It will be important to agree the expectations for the BEST project in resolving these issues/problems and it will ensure that stakeholders and the public all are clear on what can and cannot be possible.

Though we had some difficulties in the beginning of the BEST project by defining "sustainable tourism" I think the project has given us all an awareness, knowledge and understanding of the current problems about sustainable tourism and I hope a further cooperation between the islands will continue on this matter.

Rügen

The BEST-Project gave chances to exchange experiences between our 7 islands and to prove challenges for sustainable tourism on Rügen.

On the basis of some results in the past, regarding to the realisation of tourism concept projects on Rügen and to the Rügen talks of German Association for Environmental Education there were great expectations for concrete impacts on sustainable tourism.

And so we have got new ideas on the both conferences in Saaremaa and on Rügen and found out, there are similar problems in translating sustainable projects into action. There is a very high need of Networking between stakeholders on Rügen as well as between the partners in the Baltic Sea region.



Brigitte Thom
Rügen

Especially for increasing awareness among local stakeholders of touristic firms and organisations and local population towards sustainable development we should continue on those projects how common systems for Codes of conducts or for green quality label.

Gotland

It has been very stimulating and valuable to work as a project co-ordinator for the BEST-project. The tourism business is growing rapidly in the whole world and it is important to start the process of sustainable development in this business field. All islands have made a great contribution to the project with their reports and pilot projects. A lot of people have participated in our two major conferences. Many people have gained new contacts on other islands and the knowledge about the difficult area sustainable tourism has increased. The BEST- project has been a good platform for Gotland to start a process on the island together with some of the stakeholders working with tourism on different levels.



Bengt-Olof Grahn
Gotland

We have been able to engage a group of people from the tourism sector in Gotland and a discussion has started and some interesting spinoff effects can be presented such as: Blue flag certification of beaches, a project about environmental work in hotels and restaurants, a planned education about packetering of special tourproducts and environmental labelling of rentalcottages. The BEST project has also given us a good guidance about and possibilities to cooperate with some of the INTERREG II C projects running in the Baltic area.

Öland

Working as Ölands co-ordinator in the BEST-project has given Öland, my organisation and myself a lot of experiences both concerning Sustainable Tourism and taking part in a transnational project.

From my point of view all kinds of experiences has a value - the good ones and "the others". There is no doubt that the BEST-project has given us a lot of good experiences:

- Knowledge in a variety of fields about Sustainable Tourism.
- A lot of Networking with new contacts on the B7 Islands (and in the Baltic Sea area) which will be useful contacts in the future work with the future co-operation.
- The co-operation with our associated project partner, Högskolan i Kalmar, responsible for our development project Eco Audits of the B7 Tourism Industry has given links over to the private sector and an exchange of Networking opening new possibilities for the future.
- The Tourism sector on Öland is a very important part of the businesslife and is always in focus for discussions and debates. Among the entrepreneurs in the tourism sector there is an increasing interest for issues about environment, development and sustainability. This means that it's important for the public sector to take initiatives and show interest for this important sector.



Jörgen Samuelsson
Öland

Regarding "the others" experiences they also have a value. Perhaps you learn more from the things that you either failed with or at least could have done better - then from the successes. When things don't work out the way you planned you get frustrated. But frustration also gives you a reason to analyse your own efforts and to learn something for the future.

Åland

The BEST project was my first experience of the B7- co-operation. It has been stimulating to work with something as big and complex as sustainable tourism. Tourism, as well as the nature, is important for all the participating seven islands.

At times this project has felt to large. It is not easy to know about the different circumstances on the islands and the geographical distance between us makes it almost impossible to arrange regular meetings. Therefore it seemed as a good idea to divide the planned activities between the participating islands. Afterwards it is possible to see that the dividing of responsibility shattered the BEST project into several small projects, almost apart from each other.



Terese Flöjt
Åland

Today, when it is time for conclusion all I can hope for is that the work we have done will show result in terms of sustainable tourism and not just end up in a drawer.

Öland - The isle of sun and wind

Öland is approximately 140 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide at its widest point. At its narrowest it is only 4 kilometres from coast to coast. The highest point is 42 metres above sea level. The island is divided into two municipalities, Borgholm in the north and Mörbylånga in the south. The number of inhabitants is about 25,000, spread evenly in both municipalities. It has the lowest levels of precipitation in the country, 400 millimetres per year. The average temperature in July is 17 degrees! Due to the cooling effect of the sea, spring is somewhat later than the mainland but roses bloom here well into December instead.

About 3,000 people commute daily to their jobs in Kalmar. The main towns are Borgholm, Färjestaden, Mörbylånga and Löttorp on northern Öland.

Öland is widely known for its unique scenery. Activities at the Ottenby Bird Station on the south tip of Öland, at the foot of the Långe Jan lighthouse, are renown throughout the world. The Stora Alvaret and the arable landscape of southern Öland became the thirteenth World Heritage site in Sweden in 2000. There are thousands of different flowers and insects on the island. In Europe's largest continuous deciduous forest, Mittlandsskogen, new species are still waiting to be discovered!

The tourist industry is the largest industry on Öland today. Without the two million tourists that visit Öland every year the level of service for all the year-round inhabitants would be much more limited.



Agriculture and fishing are the island's other large industries. Nearly all the onions and brown beans for domestic consumption in Sweden are produced on Öland. Strawberries from Öland are sought-after throughout all of Sweden. Milk production is substantial and necessary not least because grazing is the best way to keep the unique Öland landscape open. Fishing intensity varies according to long-term fluctuations in the numbers of fish in the Baltic Sea. Ölanders are optimistic, however. In spite of receding catches the fishing industry is investing in the future. A large fish processing plant was recently opened in Öland's biggest fishing port, Kårehamn.

Every year more people discover that Öland has something to offer everyone. Anyone who has ever been to the island is sure to return. No other place in the country can guarantee sunshine the way Öland can.

All B7 BEST reports will mainly be available on the B7 homepage: www.B7.org under projects. Some of the major reports will also be available in paperform, please contact Mr. Bengt-Olof Grahn, phone +46 498-26 93 79, fax: +46 498 26 92 52 or e-mail bengtlof.grahn@gotland.se.

Following reports have been written in the BEST project:

1. Sustainable Tourism - An international overview, SECA, France, 1999.
2. Sustainable Tourism - A Baltic Seven Islands Update, Municipality of Gotland, 1999.
3. Opportunities and challenges - Conference documentation no.1, Saaremaa, Estonia, 1999.
4. Current status of sustainable tourism on the island of Rügen, Prof. Markus Landvogt, 1999.
5. Community initiative concerning transnational co-operation on spatial development planning, Mr. Jan Wigsten, Gotland, 2000.
6. Codes of conduct - Frameworks for the Codes of Conduct Scheme and examples from the Åland Islands, Landskapsstyrelsen on Åland, 2000.
7. B7 environmental Conference - Conference documentation no.2, Sellin, Rügen, 2000.
8. Green Paper on Sustainable Tourism in the B7 Islands - Bornholms Amt and the Bornholm Research center, 2001.
9. Eco- audits for the B7 Tourism Industry - Tourism on Öland, Viewpoints on sustainable development, Ölands kommunalförbund, 2001.

DO YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION?

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