

Protect and Prosper – World Heritage and Tourism in the Wadden Sea

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The Dutch-German-Danish Wadden Sea was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2009 enhancing its profile worldwide. Many inhabitants are proud of this recognition, public and media intention has increased, as well as support to protect the site for future generations.

The welfare of many Wadden Sea regions depends on tourism –many islands are 100% dependent on tourism. In total 50-60 million overnight stays and further 40-50 million day visitors creating a turnover of 4-5 billion Euro per year. The Wadden Sea and North Sea coast has already been one of the strongest tourism destinations in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

The talk introduces the main results of the 3-year trilateral project “PROWAD – Protect and prosper: Sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination” to integrate the World Heritage narrative into the existing tourism destination communication and marketing. Because the World Heritage covers three states, seven regions, over 70 municipalities and 3 million inhabitants, one of the main challenges was to establish a transnational network and create commitment from stakeholders to engage with World Heritage. A joint sustainable tourism strategy and an action plan was developed, as well as concrete communication and education products which have been integrated by tourism organizations. Surveys also indicate that World Heritage has an effect on tourists’ experiences, and becomes an important (additional) reason to visit the Wadden Sea.

However, there are still challenges ahead and questions to be resolved. A new project “PROWAD LINK” with 12 partners from five countries aims to create knowledge partnerships between business, knowledge institutions, public administration and end users on developing products and services. Synergies between nature protection and economic growth will be aimed for in a knowledge driven co-creation approach using nature as driver for sustainable growth.