

Status Report from the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism - a macro-regional perspective

President of the Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Chair of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Sylvia Bretschneider

Event

9th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum

20 October 2016, 09:15

Estonian Resort Hotel & SPA

A. H. Tammsaare puistee 4A, Pärnu, 80010 Pärnu

“Cooperation of all actors at all levels, including internationalisation of cooperation, exchange of experiences and political gatherings”, this is one of the most important priorities of our Working Group on Sustainable Tourism. With this objective, I would like to start my status report about the working group on Sustainable Tourism of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference – a macro-regional perspective.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear speakers and participants of the 9th Baltic Sea Tourism Forum,

A warm welcome to the second day of the conference which has the thematic focus on the aspect of “sustainability”. First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation and the opportunity to present the work of our Working Group on Sustainable Tourism. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate all tourism actors who work together in the “International House of Tourism” in Rostock. It is great news that the European Union approved funds money for the project of a Baltic Tourism Center for the next three years.

We are all here today, because the issue of tourism, especially sustainable tourism, is very important for us. Promoting the Baltic Sea region as tourist destination is the overall aim for each of us. I think cooperation and the exchange of experiences are the keys to achieve this goal. But the tourism sector is also a competitive market in which every region and every tourism provider competes for their own profits. Therefore, I am very proud that we in the Baltic Sea region achieved to install this forum as a joint platform where participants from all rim states convene. It is a great opportunity to share information, ideas, best practices and to learn more about the positioning of the Baltic Sea region in the global environment.

Against the background of the contradiction between a competitive market on the one hand and the objective of promoting the entire region as tourist destination on the other hand, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference launched the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism in 2015. For those who do not exactly know what the Baltic Sea

Parliamentary Conference or – as we call it in short – the BSPC is, I will briefly explain the organization. The BSPC was established in 1991 after the fall of the iron curtain as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. Its aim is to raise awareness and opinion on current political issues with relevance for the Baltic Sea Region. The BSPC promotes various initiatives and efforts to support a sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea Region.

11 national parliaments and 11 regional parliaments as well as 5 parliamentary organizations around the Baltic Sea are members of the BSPC. Thus the BSPC constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU- and of course also non-EU-countries of the Baltic Sea Region.

As chair of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism I would like to present to you a status report from the working group and on this occasion emphasize the cooperation and its importance for our work.

This report should be a strategic overview of the past sessions of the Working Group. Since its establishment we met four times, in Rostock, Helsinki and Petrozavodsk, and the last meeting was the day before yesterday here in Pärnu. The overarching objective of the Working Group is to elaborate political positions and recommendations concerning sustainable tourism in several aspects for example economically and culturally. With this in mind, the Working Group should maintain as well as establish contacts with relevant institutions, organizations and other important actors in the Baltic Sea Region. So, being here today, is another step for a better network within the Baltic Sea tourism destination.

The scope of our work is diverse. It can be found in the Working Program we elaborated within intensive discussions. With the elaboration of the Program we managed to determine strategic priorities of the Working Group. I would like to present to you some examples of our scope of work, quoting from the Working Program:

“The scope of work of the Working Group should as strategic priorities cover, but not be limited to, issues such as

- The state of sustainable tourism in the Baltic Sea Region from economic, ecological, social and cultural perspectives;
- Knowledge- and competence building in sustainable tourism, including sustainable development in the curricula on all levels in the educational systems in the Baltic Sea States to prevent skills shortages and to strengthen workforce;
- Awareness-raising and promoting the image of the Baltic Sea Region as travel destination, including marketing and communication strategies as well as campaigns and brandings;

- Awareness-raising about the potential benefits and business opportunities for the Baltic Sea Region through Sustainable Tourism, especially the role of SMEs in developing high-quality products and services in sustainable tourism – tax incentives being one of these benefits;
- Collection of best practices in sustainable tourism as a methodical approach to support the transfer of advantages and opportunities of sustainability into other states.”

End of quotation.

That is only an extract and if you want to read the whole Work Program or our scope of work I kindly refer to the Mid-Way Report and to our homepage BSPP dot net, where both can be found. At our third meeting in Petrozavodsk we decided on a new version of the strategic focus of the Working Group and as a consequence the former 13 priorities were limited to 9 priorities so that the scope of work is more streamlined and focussed. The priorities I just presented to you are 5 of the 9 priorities we agreed on in June 2016.

Relating to the scope of work at all our meetings we heard several presentations. Therefore, we invited experts who held presentations for example on different national and regional tourism strategies, the challenge of the conservation of UNESCO heritages or the priority area “Tourism” in the context of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. We also approached several practical examples, like best practices of waste water treatment or cross-border cycling routes through Europe. Thanks to very active and engaged working group members we had lively and intensive discussion evaluating these themes.

As a first result of the Working Group, we elaborated political recommendations for the annual Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in August. I would like to present three of our recommendations that were included into the final resolution of the conference. They can be seen as good examples for our comprehensive work. Within the resolution, the governments of the Baltic Sea region are called inter alia to – I quote:

“Regarding sustainable tourism to

- support transnational strategies which promote the development of tourism in the Baltic Sea Region and to include the creation of synergies between projects and a communication strategy for the Policy Area Tourism;
- ensure the better inclusion of all Baltic Sea countries in joint projects and strategies as well as of the private sector to improve direct economic impact;
- support the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum and its newly-established project for a permanent platform for information and know-how exchange – the Baltic Sea

Tourism Center – as coordinator for the implementation of activities on Sustainable Tourism in the region;”.

As you can see, the opportunities to work together, to cooperate on a cross-border level and to promote the entire region are the main focuses. Currently, the Baltic Sea Tourism is one of the best possibilities to achieve a closer cooperation of all actors.

I have an offer and a request for you. Cooperation is a two-way street. So, use the opportunity to get in touch with us, with the political level from around the Baltic Sea! Give us your ideas and inspirations for we can help you by improving the legal and political framework of your activities, of your business! We will pick-up your input for the next meetings. As I said before, our Working Group is working to the best of its knowledge and judgement. We are trying to take up relevant issues and find solutions that can be presented to other forums and to our respective governments. At the end, we will develop further political recommendations that will be forwarded to the 26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference in Hamburg in September 2017 and its resolution.

Today we all have the opportunity to strengthen the cooperation between all actors of the tourism sector. A lively cooperation is a strong connection and therefore an important aspect of sustainability. So, let's use today's conference for a better understanding of sustainable tourism around the Baltic Sea.

Our Working Group will continue with the same commitment and I am looking forward to our next meetings with new inputs from today.

Thank you for your attention.