



Deep feelings around a shallow coast.

A spatial analysis of tourism jobs and the attractiveness of nature in the Dutch Wadden area

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The Dutch Wadden area is an internationally renowned natural area with World Heritage status. Its ecological uniqueness can be attributed to its shallow coastal waters. However, the Wadden area is also a rural area in search of competitive economic activity so as to provide employment to its population. The aim of the analysis is to ascertain the level of the contribution of tourism to different parts of the rural economy, and to examine which parts and aspects of the natural area are highly appreciated by visitors and thus may serve as immobile resources for the local economy.

The results of our study indicate that the islands have a completely specialized local economy: tourism, while the share of tourism in the economy of the mainland coast is below the Dutch national average. The natural attractiveness of the Wadden area relates mainly to the islands and the sea, whereas the mainland coast is very modestly appreciated for its natural qualities. Eight spatial clusters of attractive places are identified. The tourism employment level and the share in attractive places are assessed for each cluster. Although strongly attractive parts of the Wadden area are often spatially-related to huge numbers of visitors, they nevertheless lead to only modest employment figures. We also find that the natural attractiveness of the Wadden area arouses deep feelings in visitors in that they experience priceless qualities such as the purity and immensity of the natural environment, and they feel strongly connected to nature. Our findings cast light on the need for an integrative management approach to the Wadden area as both a rural and a natural area, and meanwhile relating it to competing urban areas. An example of a suitable integrative policy would be one that accounts for the trade-off between the value of urban dwellers' deep feelings (as tourists) and the value of rural jobs.