

Monitoring the attractiveness of a UNESCO World Heritage region: Identifying 14 million fans of the international Wadden area

Research article (work in press)

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In the last decade the topic of governance has emerged in the protected area debate. A cornerstone was the 2003 IUCN World congress in Durban. There and in further discussions it was approved that knowledge about who to involve in is essential. This has also become very significant in the Wadden Sea area, which is a unique trilateral area, not only in terms of its high nature value, but also because of its diverse functions, structures and constitutions. Management, stewardship and sustainable use of this socio-ecological system, its resources and its biological diversity is fundamental for its future development of this area shared by Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Many actors have to be involved and interest have to be balanced or negotiated to develop and sustain a sustainable socio-ecological system. The involvement of state actors, economic actors and actors from civil society in decision-making-processes is nowadays acknowledged in the governance debate. Even that is often a challenge, but there is hardly any discussion and knowledge about which role visitors (can) play in the governance of certain areas. This paper is a first attempt to fill this gap.

Therefore it addresses the following questions: How attractive is the international Wadden area? More concrete, how many people are attached to the international Wadden area and where are they coming from? What is the character of their attachment? And what has this for consequences for the governance of the Wadden area?

To answer these research questions results from a trilateral survey using the so-called Hotspotmonitor, a google maps based Online Public Participation GIS (PPGIS) tool, will be analysed. The survey was conducted in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Through the market research bureau GfK more than 7.500 citizens of the three countries were asked to mark their favourite green places (hotspots) on different spatial scales. The results allow to draw conclusions on regional, national and international important sites, showing that the Wadden area has a high national and international significance, especially the Wadden islands are clear "hotspots". Based on the survey results we could calculate that 14 million people are attached to the international Wadden area. How to involve these 'fans' into decision making processes is the challenge of the future.