Project Future Coasts

FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES

THE EUROPEAN UNION
The European Regional
Development Fund

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ÖRESUND – KATTEGAT – SKAGERRAK

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Project Future Coasts

Future Coasts was a collaboration project conducted between 2010 and 2012 with the support of the EU regional development fund. Academicians and municipal actors from the Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak region took part in the project: The SAXO Institute, Copenhagen University; Han Herred Havbåde; Vest-Agder County Council; DNT Sør; Bragdøya Coastal Heritage Centre; Oresund University; Campus Helsingborg, Lund University; Helsingborg Municipality; Centre for Tourism, School of Business, Economics and Law, Gothenburg University; Kungälv Municipality; Orust Municipality; Tjörn Municipality; West Sweden Tourist Board.

The main aim of the project was to further the conditions for the sustainable development of coastal communities. A leading concept of the project was to obtain knowledge by maximizing exchanges between different types of actors (researchers, municipalities, trade and industry) and between different coastal locations. These coastal locations differ due to being in different places (Northwest Jutland, Sörlandet, Bohuslän, and Öresund) and due to being in different phases of development. Studying the coastal communities creates knowledge which can be used to image, manage and develop physical environments, buildings, visitor attractions, cultural heritage, coastal paths, the fishing industry, seasons, how harbours receive, collaboration forms, information, and marketing etc.

Scandinavian coasts undergoing change

The sea has always been a major source of income. Primarily, the sea has always been a reserve of food. From the simplest angling and mussel-gathering to today's large fishing fleets which rifle the depths of everything that swims. For a long time, the sea has also been the very simplest and quickest way of transporting people, goods, and news over long distances. This is particularly obvious when the terrain is mountainous, wooded, and sparsely-populated, which is common in large parts of Scandinavia.

In regions like Scandinavia, the sea has been a uniting economic, cultural and political force. This was plain to see when one realm (Denmark-Norway) was formed around the North Sea and another (Sweden-Finland) around the Baltic.

The last 150 years have brought several powerful changes to the coastal regions of Öresund-Skagerrak-Kattegat. The more self-sufficient local economies have gradually been transformed into an economic landscape dominated by urbanization, industrialization, concentration, large-scalism, and globalization. The major cities, the large ports, and the big boats have become ever larger. One consequence of this has been that lots of small communities along the coasts have become "superfluous". When the basic industries disappear from this type of community, this often leads to people of a working age having to move, and the range of services suffering.

The project "Future Coasts" has aimed to capture various strategies that these coastal communities can make use of in order to retain their populations and sources of income. A general counterbalance to societal development that is dominated by urbanization, industrialization, and large-scalism is a number of factors that are linked to quality. It is on the basis of the following different quality aspects that the coastal communities must build their future strategies.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is a quality aspect that more and more people are prepared to pay extra for. Eco-friendly, energy-saving, ecological, locally-produced and fresh are all examples of common variables that may be used to develop the source of income strategies of small coastal communities. In particular, the project includes endeavours linked to sustainable fishing.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is another quality aspect. If everyone had just thought rationally, then municipalities in Scandinavia would have become depopulated as far back as the 1960s. Small communities by the sea feature many coveted quality-of-life aspects. This is clearly visible in the property prices of coastal communities within commuting distance of more comprehensive labour markets/major cities. For residents of places further away, a more creative approach to work is required. Teleworking, dual residency, and local entrepreneurship are common solutions.

THE LEISURE SECTOR

The leisure sector is a third quality aspect. Once people have met their basic needs, a range of opportunities present themselves for leisure-sector consumption. More and more people are able to spend more time and money on leisure activities of different kinds. Nicer food, more entertainment, more intellectual stimulus, more attractive environments, unique design, shopping for pleasure, more beautiful spaces, tougher challenges, real breaks from everyday life, more meaning and reflection, and increased knowledge content are all examples of leisure-related elements of consumption and production.

The three quality aspects in many cases result in projects linked to tourism. Coasts as important tourism sites are a phenomenon, which, interestingly enough, is roughly as old as industrialization. Even at the beginning of the 1900s, a good number of picturesque coastal communities were starting to take on the character of summer destinations. Then, it was only the financial elite that went on holiday. As early as the mid-1900s, however, some form of seaside holiday, albeit with bicycles and tents, had become a possibility for the great majority of people.

Tourism entails great opportunities for the coastal communities to revive. The major problem with Scandinavian coastal tourism, however, is that many people want to be in the same place at the same time during a rather limited period. For two months, a large capacity is required as regards marinas, water and sanitation services, rubbish collection, accommodation, parking spaces, restaurants, and shops. For the rest of the year, the most extreme summer resorts become peculiar combinations of overcapacity and lifelessness. Most of the measures being discussed under the theme of "tourism in the coastal communities" are based on creating a better balance throughout the year.

Strategies for developing the coastal

The following is a précis of the results emerging from the project Future Coasts:

TOURISM
Tourism does not have to be the goal, but a means of more temporarily bringing industry to a place or making it visible so that more people become year-round residents in the long-term. Lots of people moving out to this type of location often have a long relationship with that location in the form of having visited it frequently as a tourist.

DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY
Stimulating the development of trade and industry is very important. This should not occur purely within tourism. One problem at many of the studied locations is that the inhabitants are used to thinking in terms of their old basic industries, but that training and competence in other areas are rarer. The reason for this is that, over the space of a couple of generations, those unable to provide for themselves locally have moved away. The project shows that the need for training and incoming/re-incoming strategic competence is important. Competence development can beneficially also consist of various coastal communities learning from each other.

CREDIBLE THEMES
Studies conducted within the project have established that a key part of the development of tourism today is about building up credible themes which are largely based on locations' unique conditions and history. Experts such as historians, archaeologists, ethnogeographers, building conservators, ethnologists, zoologists, and botanists can beneficially be used to highlight a location's qualities and, in doing so, provide more leisure dimensions. Not only sights, but also accommodation, food, and shopping have a lot to gain from upgraded thematic thinking.

POSITIVE DIALOUGE
The development of tourism must be done in positive dialogue with the local population to achieve the best results. This may sound banal, but studies conducted within the project show that a lot of energy is lost when people talk at cross purposes and do not agree on goal scenarios for the development of a location. Conflicting interests and planning horizons frequently contribute to greater inertia and the complete inability to act. People who can make actors and populations see the big picture are of great value to regional development processes.

STRATEGIES OF SUCCESS
Several of the sub-projects of Future Coasts show that new organisational forms, cooperative solutions, more effective collaborations, industry-spanning combinations, and even national border-spanning projects are strategies of success for the coastal communities. It is a matter of being able to think past standard solutions for market economics and business organisation.

PLANNING
One important conclusion from the project is that tourism and leisure-related issues have to be included early on in community planning and town planning issues. How the physical environment looks has a direct bearing on whether or not people want to spend extra time there, return often, or even move there. One study conducted within the project shows that architects prefer a considerably stricter, modernistic house design in harbour conversion projects than tourism executives.

SERVICE QUALITY
Several studies conducted within the project show that service quality endeavours make a great difference with regard to how visitors experience a facility or destination. The link between a nicer experience and the increased will to pay for it is clear.

IT SOLUTIONS
IT, computers, webcams, smartphones, and audio guides etc. have shown themselves to be interesting aids in tourism development. Maps, guides, trails, multi-language services, historical reconstructions, weather services, and reservation services are all examples of this. Since several of the sights in the studied region attract relatively few visitors, they cannot be staffed all the time. Then, IT solutions are a good complement.

SEVERAL SEASONS
Having more seasons is a key issue noted by almost all the sub-projects of Future Coasts. One way is by focusing less on sun and high summer in marketing and instead coming to terms with the local climate in the same way as Scotland and Iceland have done. Another way is to talk about several seasons, e.g. the "lobster season" etc.

“Our visitors want to experience living communities.”

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