

# Evaluation of STEP Activity 1

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## 1. Introduction

In this document, Activity 1 of the STEP-project is evaluated. The STEP project consists of 3 activities. The first Activity focuses on actions and investments in public facilities for sustainable tourism. The other activities deal with visitors' management and actions with entrepreneurs. All three Activities will be evaluated separately. Together with the evaluations of the communication and project management they form the overall evaluation of STEP. The purpose of the separate evaluations is to provide deeper insight into the execution of specific actions and the results and evaluation of those actions.

STEP is an Interreg 2 Seas project and stands for Sustainable Tourism in Estuary Parks. As indicated by the project title, this project is about promoting and facilitating sustainable tourism in wet nature conservation areas. Four partners work together in this project: Parkschap Nationaal Park De Biesbosch (NL), Waterwegen en Zeekanaal NV (BE), Agentschap Natuur en Bos (BE) and The Broads Authority (UK). The first partner is the Lead Partner, referred to as LP; the second partner is referred to as PP3, the third as PP4 and the last as PP5.

This shows that PP2 (Stichting Beheer Nationaal Park De Biesbosch) is missing. This is due to the fact that, during the project, PP2 merged with the original LP into the Parkschap. The new organisation, the Parkschap, has taken over and carried out all activities of the original partners LP and PP2. The activities are carried out in three areas: De Biesbosch in the Netherlands, De Polders van Kruibeke in Flanders and The Broads in England. PP3 and PP4 therefore work closely together in the Flemish area. The STEP-project was prepared in the autumn 2008 – spring 2009 period. The application was submitted in June 2009 and approved at the end of

November 2009. In effect, the STEP-project really started in January 2010. Originally the project would be completed by the end of 2012, but it was extended by six months until the end June 2013. A request for changes for this extension was submitted and approved around the 2011/2012 turn of the year. This request also contained a number of smaller and larger changes in relation to the original project plan.

This evaluation subsequently deals with the original objectives, actions and results (Chapter 2), then with the interim changes (Chapter 3) and the realised results (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 contains an evaluation on the results, objectives, communication and cross-border cooperation. A separate paragraph in Chapter 5 contains the evaluation by stakeholders. The evaluation is concluded by a number of conclusions and recommendations.

This evaluation was written by the STEP-project's external project supervisor. The basic information for this was supplied by the partners. They filled in a comprehensive questionnaire on the objectives, intended results, actual results, etc. to the best of their knowledge. These questionnaires were then discussed, supplemented and improved with all project partners individually. The results were initially evaluated by the writer. The evaluation by stakeholders was used as well. Interviews were held for this with entrepreneurs, municipal representatives and organisations involved in all three areas. In total, 18 interviews were held: 6 in The Broads, 5 in De Biesbosch and 7 in the Polders van Kruibeke; see appendix, list of names. Finally, the evaluation was discussed with all partners jointly.

## 2. Original description of the Activity

### 2.1 General

The title of Activity 1 was: Actions and investments to implement the concept of sustainable tourism.

Explanation: to ensure that nature conservation areas in estuaries are used in a more sustainable manner by local residents and tourists these areas need to be laid out in a more sustainable manner. The sustainability aspect relates to numerous areas, such as the construction of small-scale infrastructure, e.g. footpaths, the use of boats and the promotion of sustainable tourism. Although the concept of sustainability appears to have a clear meaning, it often proves hard to apply in practice. What, for instance, is a sustainable footpath? Which materials can be used for it and which ones cannot? How should it run in relation to vulnerable nature or how should it be accessible? This is just an example, but you can apply these questions to numerous types of infrastructure, facilities and means of transport. In this project, we make a distinction between public infrastructure and facilities (Activity 1) and those of companies and operations (Activity 3).

### 2.2 Objectives and target groups

The main objective of this activity is the detailing of the European Charter for sustainable tourism, to implement it for all kinds of public infrastructure and facilities and to test these in various actions and pilot investments.

An important secondary objective is involving and motivating residents, visitors and companies in the sustainable development of the project areas. A number of transferable concepts and methods are being developed and tested for this. All this should result in a sustainable tourist use of estuarine nature conservation areas.

Target groups benefiting from these actions on a project level are: nature organisations, recreational amenities boards, water managers, municipalities, tourist companies and knowledge and research institutes, both in the project areas and beyond. They benefit because much general knowledge is developed within this activity in the field of sustainable accommodation, sustainable tourist infrastructure, sustainable boating and other facilities. In addition, concepts will be developed to motivate visitors to act in a sustainable manner and to involve visitors and companies in the financial contribution towards sustainable facilities and nature conservation areas. The above organisations can easily take over this knowledge, these methods and concepts.

At the level of final beneficiaries, especially local managers, companies, residents and visitors will benefit from these actions and investments, for the areas will become more attractive, better accessible, laid out in a more environment-friendly manner, better protected and zoned. This will result in a sustainable management and use of these estuarine nature conservation areas.

### 2.3 Subactions

The focus within Activity 1 is on public facilities: how can these be realised as sustainable as possible. Within this activity we distinguish between six

subactions; within each subaction one or more activities or investments (pilots) will be carried out. These six subactions are:

1. European Charter for sustainable tourism: study, detailing and implementation in areas
2. Sustainable tourist infrastructure, incl. ferry connections: study, manual and realisation of some pilots
3. Small-scale, sustainable accommodation: study, location study and realisation of some pilots
4. Sustainable boating in wetlands: study into stimulus opportunities, into introducing electrically powered boating, incl. landing and charging points, and realisation of some pilots
5. Visitors, sustainable tourism and nature management: study into the possibilities of fund creation for this from visitors' spending
6. Branding and promotion of sustainable tourism: study and implementing actions.

Explanation:

Subaction 1 was not worked out in detail beforehand. Partners were to study and detail the European Charter for Tourism jointly and see how the three areas could qualify for this. For The Broads (PP5) and to a lesser extent also for De Biesbosch (LP), the intention was to actually apply for the European Charter.

In subaction 2, the focus is on tourist infrastructure. All partners were to carry out preliminary studies and investments within this subaction. The nature of the investments differed substantially per partner. In the case of De Biesbosch (LP), the emphasis was on sustainable ferry connections and mooring facilities. In the case of WenZ (PP3) it was on observation posts, ferry connections, mooring facilities and other small-scale recreation facilities. In the case of ANB (PP4), it was on water bodies, paths and information facilities and in the case of The Broads (PP5) on an information and observation platform including the link routes to it.

Subaction 3 had not been detailed beforehand either. By means of a study, both the LP and PP5 were to look into the possibilities for sustainable small-scale accommodation facilities and, if possible, to realise and/or support these.

The same applies to subaction 4, in which the LP and PP5 were to study possibilities to promote electrically powered boating and realise a few charging points for that. The LP would also look into possibilities for new landing places for water sport outside De Biesbosch and into realising solar energy systems for the charging points.

In subaction 5 The Broads had planned to look into possibilities of setting up a fund to which visitors could contribute to finance the management and maintenance of nature and recreational facilities.

In subaction 6 the focus was on marketing and promotion. Within this subaction, WenZ (PP3) was to carry out a study into the required house style for and promotion of the area for sustainable tourism. The Broads (PP5) was to start developing a new branding, promotion strategy and promotion tools.

## 2.4 Expected results

The following tangible results were expected from this activity beforehand:

- report on the detailing of the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism (general and PP5 in particular)
- manuals/designs and technical details for sustainable tourist infrastructure and facilities (by PP3 and PP4)
- pilot investments made in the field of small-scale accommodation (by the LP and PP5)

- pilot investments made in the field of cycle paths and footpaths, corduroy roads, observation and bird hides, signposting, ponds, angling infrastructure (by PP3 and PP4)
- mooring places and charging points for electrically powered boating and ferry connections (by LP and PP5)
- action plans for branding and promoting sustainable tourism, incl. new example of website and green destinations guide on this subject, (by PP3 and PP5)
- concepts and methods to involve residents, visitors and companies in measures for and financial contributions to sustainable tourist facilities and nature management (by PP5)
- accounts of visitors study, new tourist policy, economic valuation of tourism in The Broads
- report on sail zoning study in De Biesbosch
- accounts of workshops and peer reviews (general)
- evaluation report (general)

### 3. Interim changes

As not everything that was to be carried within this project and this activity was documented meticulously in the preliminary phase, necessary adjustments were made during the implementation. On the one hand and for the most part this was related to the cooperation and the things that partners had learned from each other, as a result of which one was going to do things differently, or not at all or in addition to what had been planned. This is of course also the essence of a (cross-border) cooperation project. On the other hand changes were made as things sometimes proved to be unfeasible. This may be due to problems with permits, partners in the area refusing to cooperate or because the economic circumstances had changed as a result of which certain budgets were no longer available.

In this project, all partners were faced with this to a larger or lesser extent. This resulted in the following changes at the level of subactions:

- subaction 1: The LP has submitted an application for the EU Charter and drawn up a strategy for that. In addition, the LP has turned the joint study on the Charter into a workshop and into a number of local actions to better shape the communication on sustainable tourism.
- subaction 2: due to general delay in the project PP3 had only partly carried out the investments in infrastructure that had been planned originally; facilities such as corduroy roads and observation posts have been postponed till after the STEP-project . Instead of this several additional studies have been carried out.

In this subaction PP4 will carried out more than planned. The entire design plan for the Schiphhoek polder will be carried out and not just some components.

- subaction 3: LP had planned to carry out several pilots for small-scale accommodation. To this end, it depended on a study on this subject by SBB. This study became available too late resulting in only one pilot that can be carried out. Although PP5 did a study into the possibilities for this, it failed to carry out concrete pilots due to spatial policy.
- subaction 4: LP will realise a few charging points, but unfortunately not with solar energy systems. This proved to be unfeasible both technically and in terms of costs.
- subaction 5: The LP had not planned to set up a fund for visitor donations and contributions, but, inspired by PP5 and the extra excursion, it has decided to nevertheless begin this.
- subaction 6: PP3 has carried out an additional study within this context as a result of which the results from this action do not only apply to the Polders van Kruibeke but also to the whole Sigma plan area.

With regard to the results to be expected, a few changes can be noted due to these changes in the implementation of actions. These are:

- European Charter of Sustainable Tourism: additional application by LP
- Only one pilot investment in small-scale accommodation by the LP (nothing by PP5)
- pilot investments in tourist infrastructure implemented: no corduroy roads, observation and bird hides and fishing jetties by PP3; there are additional development measures by PP4
- expansion of branding and reception plan by PP3
- concepts and methods to involve residents, visitors and companies in measures for and financial contributions to sustainable tourist facilities and nature management, also by the LP

## 4. Realised actions and results

### 4.1 Subaction 1: European Charter

Subaction 1 consisted of four components including the change:

- workshop on the European Charter and check how the three areas could qualify for it;
- Resubmission of the application for the European Charter, preferably including part II, by The Broads Authority (PP5);
- First submission/application for the European Charter by Parkschap NP De Biesbosch (LP);
- A number of actions to communicate the importance of sustainable tourism.

The first part took place in November 2010. Under the guidance of Richard Denman, the partners looked at what the EU Charter means, whether they meet or could meet its requirements, what should still be done and how they could draw up the (re)submission application. Follow-up actions at PP5 resulted in attempts to involve the tourist sector in The Broads in a re-application and Part II procedure. The latter was unsuccessful; too few companies were prepared to participate. The re-submission, however, was successful. PP5 performed a study for this into the visitors and the economic significance of tourism and drew up a new Tourism Strategy. In 2011, the application for the Charter was submitted again and it was granted that year.

After the workshop, the LP started drawing up the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism. The business community was intensively involved in this. By the end of 2011, the application for the EU Charter was submitted and it was granted in June 2012. A bus full of stakeholders left for Genk (Be) in October 2012 to receive the award and to celebrate.

Communicating with consumers about (the importance of) sustainable tourism is not a simple matter. An extra workshop with all partners did not lead to unambiguous results and joint actions. It was then decided that all partners would set up and implement their own actions for this. In De Polders van Kruikeke (PP3 and PP4) a special action with and for young people was set up. Children in all age groups spend a day on game and nature activities.

In De Biesbosch the LP tried to win the EDEN award 2013 in the Netherlands (the award for destinations of sustainable tourism) but unfortunately ended in second place. The jury concluded the Biesbosch to be 'finished'.

In The Broads PP5 the Broads Authority has developed training courses for the staff of businesses to communicate sustainability issues and the special qualities of the area, so that they can pass on the message to visitors.

On balance the following results from this subaction can be identified:

- account of the workshop on the European Charter and knowledge about the implementation
- new Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for The Broads
- report on the economic significance of tourism in The Broads and the long-term manner of monitoring
- Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for NP De Biesbosch
- submission of EU Charter applications by PP5 and the LP
- granting of EU Charter for Sustainable Tourism to The Broads and De Biesbosch

- communication actions on sustainable tourism carried out in all three areas.

The results are fully in accordance with the expectations set out in the application for the STEP-project.

#### **4.2 Subaction 2: Sustainable tourist infrastructure**

Including the changes, subaction 2 consisted of the following components:

- Preliminary studies into the investments by all partners in their own field including contributions by other partners
- Investment in sustainable ferry connection and mooring facilities (LP)
- Investments in various recreational infrastructures in the form of stairways, bridges, guard rails and resting points (PP3)
- Investment in water bodies, paths and information facilities (PP4)
- Investment in an information and observation platform including connecting routes (PP5)
- Study into the integration of existing buildings and the design of additional experience elements (PP3)

All preliminary studies have been done. During meetings, working visits and workshops, the (preliminary) results from those studies were discussed with all partners. Sometimes this led to small adjustments, but especially other partners were able to benefit from the results through application in their own areas. The house style development by PP3 and PP4 inspired The Broads for instance to set a similar programme for future facilities in motion.

The sustainable ferry in De Biesbosch has been realised, the mooring facilities aren't realised within the STEP period, but will be soon after when all licences are received.

Investments realised by PP3 are: stairways, guard rails and resting points. By PP4 they have resulted in the realisation of the nature area Kortbroek with hiking trails, cycle routes, parking, bridge paths, fishing pool, bridges and information panels.

In The Broads (PP5) no investment were realised.

The additional study by PP3 has resulted in the design of recreational re-use of existing historic buildings and elements, as a previous tidal swimming pool and a characteristic house.

On balance, the following results from this subaction can be identified:

- Study report containing proposals for sustainable ferry connections in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Development plan for sustainable recreational infrastructure in De Polders van Kruikeke (PP3 and PP4)
- Feasibility study into new information facilities at How Hill in The Broads (PP5)
- Study report on integration of existing buildings in the Polders van Kruikeke (PP3)
- New solar energy ferry for cyclists and hikers in De Biesbosch (LP)
- All kind of recreational infrastructures in the Polders van Kruikeke (PP3 and PP4)

The results are almost in line with those expected after a change in the application at the beginning of 2012.

#### **4.3 Subaction 3: Small-scale sustainable accommodation**

Including the changes, subaction 3 consisted of the following components:

- study into the possibilities of sustainable small-scale accommodation facilities by the LP and PP5;

- implementation of one pilot for small-scale accommodation by the LP .

Staatsbosbeheer (National Forest Service in the Netherlands) has carried out a study for the LP (a report of this study is available) and in addition only one pilot was carried out: an ecolodge was realised in which 2-3 persons can spend the night on the water. Because of complicating factors and the given time frame it was impossible to carry out several pilots.

As stated before, PP5 did a study into the possibilities for this, but was unable to carry out pilots concretely due to spatial policy.

All in all, this is a meagre result within this subaction.

#### **4.4 Subaction 4: Sustainable boating**

Including the changes, subaction 4 consisted of the following components:

- study into the possibilities of promoting electrically powered boating by the LP and PP5
- realising several charging points for electrically powered boats by the LP and PP5.
- study into new water sports landing sites outside De Biesbosch by the LP.

All these components have been realised. Reports on both studies by the LP are available. In addition, the LP has realised 3 electric charging points and is considering four additional locations for the period after STEP. Eight charging points have been realised in The Broads.

Although De Biesbosch wanted to realise more charging points, which was impossible because of the high costs and the limited budget, this

subaction as a whole has been successful. A start with promoting sustainable boating in the two areas has been made.

#### **4.5 Subaction 5: Visitors contributing to sustainable tourism**

Including the changes subaction 5 consisted of the following component:  
- looking into possibilities to set up a fund to which visitors can contribute to finance the management and maintenance of nature and recreational facilities by PP5 and LP.

This action was successfully carried out by The Broads (PP5). In 2012, PP5 set up a fund for this and five entrepreneurs started asking tourists for voluntary contributions for management and maintenance. Several appropriate projects were selected. In 2013, the Visitor Giving fund will be expanded further with new entrepreneurs.

Inspired by The Broads and the additional excursion to the Lake District, the LP also started setting up such a fund. Together with three entrepreneurs, the 'Beleef en Geef De Biesbosch Fonds' (a kind of visitor giving Foundation) was set up for this in March 2013. From 1 May onwards, about twelve entrepreneurs have begun asking tourists for voluntary contributions. Some projects to be subsidised have already been selected.

So this subaction has yielded more than expected. De Polders van Kruikeke are also considering setting up such a fund.

#### **4.6 Subaction 6: Branding and promotion**

Including the changes, subaction 6 consisted of the following components:

- Developing a house style vision and applying this to various recreational infrastructures by PP3

- Translating this house style to subproducts of the overarching Sigma Plan by PP3
- Developing a new branding style and strategy in conjunction with the tourist sector in The Broads
- Applying this style in various promotion tools, such as the website, green destination guide and in an outdoor festival for The Broads

With the assistance of PP4, an intensive process was followed by PP3 with many parties and workshops to develop a suitable house style for the (recreational) infrastructure. The other STEP-partners were also involved in that process on various occasions. This led PP5 into starting a similar process (outside STEP) and the LP has been able to use the experiences from this process gratefully during the development of a house style for the entrance gates of De Biesbosch. The LP engaged the same Flemish designer for this.

The house style for PP3 is visible on investments within subaction 2 of Activity 1 and subaction 1 of Activity 2.

Translating this house style into the sigma plan has yielded the following results: some site visits in the other Sigma areas, meetings and discussions with stakeholders in those areas.

The new branding of The Broads has been successful as well. Developing this branding together with entrepreneurs has brought the entire entrepreneurial network back to life. This last aspect was unanimously identified and praised by stakeholders who were interviewed as part of this evaluation. The branding has also been successfully implemented in several means of communication. The renewed website has resulted in many more visitors and bookings. The first outdoor festival was attended by several thousands of visitors. Because of this success a second festival is organised in June 2013.

This subaction can also be considered most successful. The mutual exchange was successful as well.

## 4.7 Communication

The overall communication of the STEP-project will be dealt with as a separate component. In this paragraph we will go deeper into the specific communication actions and results of, for and about the subactions in this activity. So these actions were not listed in the application. They can, however, sometimes be found in the Communication Plan that was drawn up in the first six months of 2010. As it concerns specific communication this was mainly carried out by individual partners. An overview of actions and results is given below.

Subaction	Communication actions	Target groups
<b>By LP</b>		
1	Press releases	general
1	Information meetings	stakeholders
1	Trip to receive charter award	stakeholders
1	Competing for Eden award 2010	colleagues
1	Interview with local TV	general
2, 3 and 4	Several presentations	Internal groups
2, 3 and 4	European open day	residents
2, 3 and 4	Handover of ecolodge	press, entrepreneurs
<b>By PP3</b>		
6	Newsflash in 'Het Fusietje', November 2010 (workshop house style)	senior citizens and other residents
6	Press release, website and Facebook: presentation of house style in Milan 2012.	Higher EU authorities Residents of Kruikebeke
6	Internal communication on the reception plan and the house style 2011.	Fellow engineers Sigma plan.
6	Newsletter of June 2012; tells about the Design Fair in Milan and the	Residents of Kruikebeke, all interested parties

	recreational furniture in the house style.	
<b>By PP4</b>		
2	A presentation about the interim results of Kortbroek's technical plans	Nature/agricultural organisations, research institutes, municipality
2	5 visualisations used during various moments	local community and others
2	2 open boat yard days including representation of plans and visualisations.	local community and other visitors
2	brochure 2010/2011	local community and potential visitors
2	3 articles in 'Gazet van Antwerpen'(2011 06 06, 2011 07 27, 2012 04 17) and 2 in ' Het Laatste Nieuws' about Kortbroek (2011 07 and 2011 03)	Potentialvisitors
2	1 Press release on website Sigma and on website ANB	Interested people
2	1 message on the news bulletin of the provincial tv	Potentiële bezoekers
2	1 message on the Facebook page of the Polders van Kruibeke	Local community and other interested people
2	4 artikels in newsletters of Sigma and van GOGKBR (2012 02, 2013 03, 2013 06, 2013 06)	Lokale bewoners, geïnteresseerden
2	artikel in de brochure van het Sigmaplan versie 2013.	Lokale bewoners, geïnteresseerden
<b>By PP5</b>		
No detailed information received; only general, see below		

The effects and results of all these communication actions have been considerable. It is often difficult to measure their scope. A local TV broadcast in Dordrecht reaches many people, but how many is unclear. The same goes for press releases in local/regional papers such as De

Dordtenaar, De Gazet van Antwerpen and Het Laatste Nieuws. PP3 and PP4 expect that all residents of Kruibeke have been reached by the various news reports in the paper, on Facebook and via the open boatyard days. Many articles have appeared in the local daily newspaper of PP5. This has a circulation of 60,000, and a readership of perhaps five times that.

The European dimension, viz. that STEP is an Interreg 2 Seas project, is mentioned in all press releases, on Facebook and on websites. The newspapers sometimes copy this, sometimes they do not.

#### 4.8 Cross-border cooperation

The added value of cross-border cooperation has been clearly visible in this Activity and was expressed among other things in:

- The LP has been able to make much use of the knowledge and experience of The Broads in drawing up a Strategy and Action Plan and in filling in the application for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. The Broads had already gone through this process once. The joint workshop on this charter in 2010 also served as a good preparation for this.
- Partners have learned from each other how to deal with logical routes, the connections and options to spend the night. Especially the first international excursion, during which various small-scale options to spend the night on the water were looked at, have contributed to this. Making use of existing situations, e.g. old castle or outdoor accommodation in The Broads, second homes at marina site in The Broads, have contributed to this as well.
- The Broads and De Biesbosch have been able to share their knowledge and experiences on electrically powered boating, including with regard to charging points and the impossibilities for use of solar energy in the

middle of a nature conservation area, due to energy storage problems).

- The hands-on experience of De Biesbosch added enormous value for PP3 and PP4 in the entire process towards a house style vision for De Polders van Kruibeke. All partners were intensively involved in this process. The Broads has taken over this house style vision (after STEP) and the LP has called in the services of the designer of the house style in Kruibeke who is now active for De Biesbosch.
- Due to the obligation within STEP to build recreational infrastructure in Kortbroek, extra pressure was put on realising an agreement between PP3 and PP4. This might have failed if it had not been for STEP.
- The setting up of a fund by both the LP and PP5 to which tourists can contribute voluntarily to nature management and sustainable recreational facilities would not have got off the ground in either area without STEP. The shared motivation and joint excursion to the Lake District laid the foundation for this.

## 5. Evaluation

### 5.1 Results

The table below gives summary overview of the planned results following an interim change and the results realised at the end of the project (July 2013).

Sub action within Activity 1 are:	Responsible partners	Realisation: Yes PartlyNo
Sub action 1. EU Charter for Sustainable Tourism - workshop EU charter (report) - communication sustainable tourism - (re)submitting applications of The Biesbosch and The Broads - visitor survey, new tourist policy, the economic valuation of tourism	All partners All partners Biesbosch, Broads  Broads	Yes Partly Yes  Yes
Sub action 2. Sustainable infrastructure - manuals (design and technical specification) sustainable amenities - signposting, cycle paths, bridges etc. - bodies of water, fishing infrastructure - mooring and electrically powered ferry - observation and bird watching hides	WenZ  WenZ ANB  Biesbosch  Broads	Partly  Partly Yes  Partly  Partly
Sub action 3. Small scale accommodation - Studies possibilities - pilot investments	Biesbosch, Broads Biesbosch, Broads	Yes Single pilot
Sub action 4: Sustainable navigation: - moorings and charging stations for electrically powered vessels - a boating zoning study	Biesbosch, Broads  Biesbosch	Yes  Yes

Sub action 5: method involving visitors and companies in the contribution to tourist amenities & nature management	Broads Extra Biesbosch	Yes Yes
Sub action 6. Branding and promotion - plans of action for the house style, branding and promoting of sustainable tourism - an exemplary website and a green destination guide - study to translate the house style to other areas of Sigma plan	WenZ, Broads  Broads  WenZ	Yes  Yes  Yes
Others: studies and reports on: - workshops - peer reviews - evaluation	All partners All partners All partners	Yes Yes Yes

The overview shows that by far most of the planned results – following the interim change in January 2012 – are or have been realised. Compared to the results planned originally (application in June of 2009) a number of results have not been realised. This is largely related to the planned investments within subaction 2. The investments in question proved to be harder to realise than expected, mainly because of a lack of time and time-consuming preparations and licensing procedures. Please note that most of the planned facilities will be realised in the years ahead. The STEP-project played an essential role in this.

In fact, on balance only the results concerning small-scale accommodation (subaction 3) were disappointing. Both The Broads and De Biesbosch failed to realise much in this area, except for a single pilot (ecolodge) in De Biesbosch. Here too spatial policy often turned out to be a limiting factor. In the Broads a campsite near to water has now been created by a private entrepreneur at a target site. This was not funded by STEP but it was inspired by it.

## 5.2 Objectives

In the original objectives for this Activity the focus was on two issues:

1. detailing and implementing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism for all kinds of infrastructure and facilities and testing these through actions and investments.
2. involving and motivating residents, visitors and companies in the sustainable layout of the project areas.

We can conclude that both objectives have been realised. The European Charter acted as a source of inspiration for the detailing of actions and facilities. In The Broads and De Biesbosch this was also rewarded by being awarded the Charter. The latter is still too early for De Polders van Kruibeke, as the area has not been fully prepared. This area will definitely submit an application for the Charter in a few years' time when the layout has been fully completed. In many ways the basis for this has already been laid in this project. Not only in the form of new facilities, but especially by involving residents and entrepreneurs in all kinds of actions and investments.

In the other two areas, The Broads and De Biesbosch, a major step forward has been made in making tourism and tourist facilities sustainable and in involving entrepreneurs. The actions from STEP have made a substantial contribution in this regard.

De Biesbosch even believes that the objectives have been more than realised, because other parties/stakeholders in the area, such as Staatsbosbeheer and Projectbureau Noordwaard have adjusted their plans to the STEP-actions.

## 5.3 Communication

All partners have communicated intensively about the subactions in this Activity. One subaction is of course better suited for this than another. All this communication between the partners has resulted in properly reaching the stakeholders around the partners, viz. entrepreneurs, nature

conservation organisations, municipalities, water managers, etc. All these target groups are well aware of what STEP means, both on the local level of actions and investments and on the cross-border level in terms of cooperation with other partners.

On the level of end users, i.e. the residents in and around the areas and the tourists, especially the former will be reasonably aware of the actions that have been carried out. All communication between the partners resulted in a substantial number of articles in regional papers and in several local radio and TV-broadcasts.

## 5.4 Cross-border cooperation

The cross-border cooperation has produced more results for all partners than they had expected themselves in advance. These results can in fact be seen in all subactions. In subaction 1, De Biesbosch benefited greatly from the experience of The Broads with the EU Charter. In subaction 2, WenZ was strongly supported by all partners in the detailing of the house style. With regard to the process and the design as well as in the choice of materials, De Biesbosch set a good example. In subaction 3, The Broads and De Biesbosch studied the possibilities together and they organised trips to have a look at them here and there. The fact that the end result is limited is regrettable but does not affect the merits of their cooperation. In subaction 4, The Broads and De Biesbosch were also able to make use of each other's work, research and experiences. This has resulted in proper insights into the (im)possibilities for electrically powered boating. In subaction 5, the action of The Broads stimulated De Biesbosch to set up a similar fund. The extra excursion to the Lake District and taking along entrepreneurs has in fact contributed to the success of the initiative in both areas.

Besides the concrete cooperation in subactions, STEP has resulted in additional effects and learning points for the partners. WenZ and ANB have acquired better insight into the possibilities of laying out and financing the management of an area in different ways. In the

cooperation, they were stimulated to preserve old buildings in the area and to give them a new, suitable use. The same applies to The Broads when it comes to the house style developed for recreational facilities by WenZ.

### **5.5 The opinion of stakeholders**

The stakeholders in The Broads are unanimously very positive about the STEP-actions within the scope of Activity 1. Updating the branding and the subsequent actions, i.e. a new website, green destination guide, outdoor festival, have completely reinvigorated the cooperation between entrepreneurs and The Broads Authority and between entrepreneurs within the Broads Tourism. This in itself and the actions themselves have, in their opinion, raised sustainable tourism to a higher level and also attracted extra visitors to The Broads. The actions and studies (strategy, monitoring, economic significance) for the resubmission of the European Charter and the creation of the Visitor Giving Fund have also contributed substantially to this. Some entrepreneurs even go so far as to say that these STEP-actions have put The Broads back on the tourist map of England and this with an added positive point of sustainability. According to them, all these actions and results would have been impossible without STEP. There are also some points of criticism. Several stakeholders regret that they have not been to De Biesbosch and De Polders van Kruibeke to see for themselves what is going on there, to talk to fellow entrepreneurs and to get more feeling with the Dutch and Flemish markets. The impact of the project on sustainable boating is too small as well; more actions are needed for this. Finally, they think that the European dimension of the STEP-project has not always been properly highlighted. This could be done better and more often.

The stakeholders around De Polders van Kruibeke are positive as well. They say that, partly because of the STEP project and the actions within Activity 1, the mood about the plans for this polder has turned from negative to

positive. The focus on actions and facilities for sustainable tourism has hugely increased the social support for the controlled flooding area. According to the department head of Zeeschelde, other Sigma areas will benefit from this, too. The internal vision has definitely been changed by this project and its results. There is now more appreciation within WenZ for public-private cooperation. Political circles in Kruibeke also see the same positive results and effects of the STEP-project. New developments and cooperation with residents, volunteer organisations and entrepreneurs have been set in motion. These should also be continued after completion of the STEP-project. The visits to De Biesbosch and The Broads have provided entrepreneurs around Kruibeke with new ideas and have made them realise that active participation from the circle of entrepreneurs is necessary and may have a positive effect. Some criticism rings through as well. Some feel, for instance, that ANB outsources things like communication too much and laid down the layout plans beforehand too much, thus restricting input. In addition, the European dimension and the learning points from De Biesbosch and The Broads are not always communicated properly.

The stakeholders in De Biesbosch are convinced that the STEP-project and the separate actions within it have contributed considerably to a better cooperation internally (Dordrecht, Werkendam, Drimmelen, Staatsbosbeheer, Recreatieschappen) and externally with entrepreneurs and other organisations. The actions for obtaining the European Charter and the Visitor Giving Fund have produced the most effect in this regard, besides actions in the other Activities. The actions around sustainable infrastructure, small-scale accommodation and sustainable boating have been far less visible to the outside world. Staatsbosbeheer states that it should have done more itself to be more intensively involved in the project from the start. Stakeholders are also convinced that the STEP-project has contributed to placing sustainable tourism at the top of the list of priorities of all parties involved and this can only be realised through intensive cooperation with all parties. Although the

Europeandimension of the project is noticed bymost stakeholders, one finds it difficult to say exactly what the foreign learning points were. A clear exception to this is the Visitor Giving Fundfor which everyone knows that it originated in England.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The main conclusions that can be drawn from this evaluation of Activity 1 are:

1. Most actions and investments have been carried out as originally planned (ca 85% has been carried out as planned). If one includes the interim changes in this, then the implementation is at ca 90%. These changes are mainly related to investments that proved to be feasible less quickly than anticipated and/or proved to be impossible due to rules and regulations. On some occasions the cost aspect played a role as well, as plans turned out to be more expensive than anticipated.
2. Most of the planned results have been realised as well, with the exception of course of the interim changes. The result, especially those in the subactions 1, 5 and 6 are unanimously rated very positively by partners and stakeholders.
3. Subaction 3, sustainable small-scale accommodation facilities, has been least successful. On the one hand because of regulations and technical restrictions, but on the other hand also because the approach was probably not good. Entrepreneurs have been too little involved from the start.
4. The subactions 2 and 4, viz. infrastructure and sustainable boating, are partly rated good with the rating of what has been realised and the process leading up to is as very positive and the actual results caused by only partial investments as moderate to fair.
5. Besides the planned actions the cooperation has also resulted in extra actions. Without this project, for instance, De Biesbosch would not have started participating in the EU Charter; WenZ has now translated the house style developed in this project to other areas and all partners are carrying out actions to highlight the importance of sustainable tourism.
6. The cross-border cooperation has produced more results in almost all subactions than expected. It provided new insights into procedures, led to an extra application for the EU Charter, brought about an exchange of knowledge on the use of materials and reuse of old buildings, revealed bottlenecks related to sustainable boating, showed new possibilities of raising funds and highlighted the effects of properly developed branding and house style.
7. The communication regarding the subactions went well too: all partners communicated a lot and these communications were regularly taken over by regional papers, radio and TV. Because of this, those involved directly and indirectly, i.e. entrepreneurs, organisations and internal parties were well informed of the subactions. Regional residents may also have been adequately informed, although it is hard to measure the scope of this precisely.
8. The European dimension has always been properly emphasised in the communication expressions. Those involved are well aware of this. Newspapers, radio and TV fail to pick up the European aspect of the project, as a result of which this remains unknown to residents and users of the areas.
9. Almost all stakeholders, i.e. entrepreneurs, organisations, and municipalities believe that this project has been of great significance in their own working areas, not only in terms of direct results, read: facilities, the EU Charter or new branding, but also because of the enhanced cooperation. The latter has been boosted in all areas. On top of this one realises the usefulness and necessity of sustainable tourism much more than before the project.
10. A number of stakeholders regret that partly due to their own actions they were not fully aware of STEP's European dimension: what is going on at the other partners and entrepreneurs? What can we learn from

that?What do those markets look like?More could have been done with all these questions and opportunities.

The most important recommendations are:

1. More realistic planning, especially of investments.
2. Involve entrepreneurs and others earlier in a project, although this is not always easy.
3. Take more internal and external stakeholders along to other partners at an earlier stage and give them the opportunity to meet colleagues
4. Find a better way of highlighting the European dimension of the project.
5. Communicate the added value of cross-border cooperation even better.
6. Have stakeholders tell about the results of the project.