

Evaluation of STEP Activity 2

Table of Contents

_Toc365140520

1. Introduction.....	2	5.4 Cross border cooperation	14
2. Original description of the Activity.....	3	5.5 The opinion of stakeholders.....	15
2.1 General	3	6. Conclusions and recommendations	17
2.2 Objectives and target groups	3		
2.3 Sub actions	3		
2.4 Expected results	4		
3. Interim changes	5		
4. Realised actions and results	6		
4.1 Sub action 1: Visitors' management in wetlands	6		
4.2 Subaction2: Innovative visitors' centres.....	7		
4.3 Subaction3: development and implementation actions for hard-to-reach target groups	8		
4.4 Sub action 4: Communication and education on current issues.....	9		
4.5 Sub action 5: Monitoring	10		
4.6 Communication	10		
4.7 Cross-border cooperation	11		
5. Evaluation	13		
5.1 Results	13		
5.2 Objectives	14		
5.3 Communication	14		

By: Wim van Hooff
External coordinator STEP
Final version August 2013

1. Introduction

In this document, Activity 2 of the STEP-project is evaluated. The STEP project consists of 3 activities. In the second Activity, the focus is on actions and investments to implement visitors' management in a sustainable manner. The other activities deal with implementing sustainable tourism in public and private facilities. 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 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 Activity2 was: Actions and investments to implement visitors' management in a sustainable manner.

Explanation:

To ensure that estuarine nature conservation areas are used in a more sustainable manner, it is necessary to guide visitors better, to inform them better about the values of these areas, to attract new target groups and to properly monitor the visits and the effects. Various methods may be used to guide visitors. The most common method is placing and signposting routes for hikers, cyclists, sailors, horse riders. A disadvantage of this method is that it often leads to a multitude of signs, posts and infopanel. In this project we want to focus strongly on the use of new means of communication. Visitors' centres are often used to attract visitors, to guide them into the area and to inform them about the values of the area.

On the one hand these centres function adequately, but on the other hand they are often costly to run, not really target group-oriented and outdated in terms of means of communication. In this project, partners jointly study the design, choice of location, layout and management of these centres. This should lead to concept for the most sustainable centre and a few pilots to improve existing centres.

2.2 Objectives and target groups

The main objective of this activity is the detailing of the visitors' management, to specify this for various facilities viz. visitors' centres,

reception locations, routes, on-site information and to test them by implementing actions and pilot investments. The underlying purpose is to better guide visitors through the areas, to protect vulnerable parts and to substantially improve and modernise the provision of information.

Three important secondary objectives are:

- designing Europe's most sustainable visitors' centre;
- involving and motivating new and hard-to-reach target groups in nature and sustainable tourism and
- setting up monitoring.

Transferable concepts and methods are being developed and tested for this. All this should lead to a sustainable use of estuarine nature conservation areas and a larger social support for the preservation and development of these areas.

Target groups benefiting from these actions on a project level are: nature conservation organisations, recreational amenities boards, water managers, municipalities, tourist companies, and knowledge and research institutes, both in the project areas and beyond. They benefit because a lot of general knowledge is being developed in the field of sustainable visitors' management and the corresponding use of IT. The above organisations can easily copy this knowledge, these methods and concepts.

At the final beneficiary level, especially local managers, visitors and new target groups profit from these actions and investments; as visitors are guided through and into the areas in better and more attractive ways, they are better informed and made more aware of current issues such as the climate, biodiversity and safety.

2.3 Subactions

Surrounding this activity, we distinguish five subactions and within each subaction one or more activities or investments (pilots) are being carried out. These five subactions are:

1. Visitors' management in wetlands: joint development of management plans and use of new IT-tools (GPS and GSM routes)
2. Innovation of visitors' centres: concept development and design with regard to target groups, content, locations and sustainability
3. Participation by hard-to-reach target groups: development plans, detailing and implementation of various activities for migrants and young people
4. Communication and education on current issues in wetlands, joint detailing of action plans and implementation of various activities
5. Monitoring: setting up a monitoring programme on visitors, sustainability and impact on nature and implementation of baseline measurement

Explanation:

Subaction 1 was not worked out in detail beforehand by the three partners (LP, PP3 and PP5) involved. Through joint workshops with experts, the idea was to look for possibilities in the field of IT to reshape visitors' management. Plan development, route structures and information lie at the basis of this. Small-scale improvements of route structures such as stiles, small bridges, etc. also fall within this subaction.

In subaction 2, De Biesbosch (LP), The Broads (PP5) and ANB (PP3) had planned to develop new concepts for visitors' centres through studies, workshops and joint discussions. Key aspects in this regard were target groups, locations, sustainability and the type of information for which there is a need.

In subaction 3, WenZ (PP3) and The Broads (PP5) were to develop plans and test a few pilots to reach specific target groups such as youngsters, and ethnic minorities that would normally hardly come or not come at all to these areas.

In subaction 4, the focus was on communication on current issues, such as the climate, biodiversity, water management and safety. De Biesbosch was to work this out by offering digital information on site; WenZ was to work this out by developing education programmes and The Broads by developing new information in visitors' centres. ANB was to develop a communication plan for this.

In subaction 5, De Biesbosch was to carry out a baseline measurement into the impact of tourism on nature. Following on this measurement, a long-term monitoring programme is set up.

2.4 Expected results

Prior to this, the following tangible results were expected from this activity:

- plans and report on visitors' management (PP3)
- manuals on the possibilities of using modern IT-tools in visitors' centres, for routes, for information on site
- pilot investments made in the field of (GPS) cycling, walking and canoeing routes, small-scale infrastructure for these routes and for reception locations, information onsite (LP, PP5)
- concept and design for sustainable visitors' centres (LP, PP4)
- plans to improve visitors' centres in The Broads (PP5) and in De Biesbosch (LP) concerning locations, content, design and various actions
- participation plans to involve new and hard-to-reach target groups and executing of various actions (PP3 and PP5)
- information and education and communication programmes on current issues, such as the climate, biodiversity, water management and safety (by all)
- report on baseline measurement and concept for a monitoring programme (LP)
- reports of workshops, peer reviews and evaluations (general)

3. Interim changes

As not everything that was to be carried out within this project and this activity had been documented precisely 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 was 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 faced this to a larger or lesser extent. This resulted in the following changes at the level of subactions:

- subaction 1: while drawing up the visitors' management plan, PP3 came to the conclusion that the adjustment of ferries as part of the reception zones was unfeasible in terms of timing. Instead, it carried out additional studies to translate the insights from the reception plan into the overarching Sigma Plan and into a legal screening with regard to recreating safely in a flooding area.

- subaction 2: The LP did not draw up a design for the most sustainable visitors' centre. The reason for this was that no budget would become available within the foreseeable future to realise this centre due to cutbacks from the national government. Moreover, the partners gained new insights during the project on the usefulness and necessity of visitors' centres and their layout. Instead, the LP carried out a study into the functions and facilities of all entrance gates in De Biesbosch and the Design Academy has made some concepts to 'unlock' the area. This has

raised the recognisability of the entrance gates by means of uniform signs, recognition posts, benches, etc.

A similar change took place at PP4 as a result of the same new insights and circumstances. The intended design of a visitors' centre was therefore changed into a design for a nature gate with a focus on outdoor experience.

- Subaction 3: PP5 developed plans with organisations of ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged groups including young people to better reach these groups. A major international conference was organised on the subject, but unfortunately the economic crisis had started to bite, and too few bookings were received so it had to be cancelled. This means pilots for this were not carried out either. Instead, a hiking trail was also to be improved to better meet the needs of disabled persons, but this did not happen because of spatial planning issues and uncertainty over land ownership .

With regard to the planned results, the following changes can be identified because of the changes in the execution of actions:

- No adjustment to the ferries as a reception zone by PP3
- Little or no construction of small-scale infrastructure for routes by LP
- No concepts and designs for sustainable visitors' centres by LP and PP4
- No development planning and pilots in the field of hard-to-reach target groups by PP5
- Extra study reports by PP3 in the field of reception plans for other Sigma areas and legal screening
- Reports on functionalities, recognition and concepts for entrance gates including various small-scale application of this by LP
- Report/brochure about the future and sustainability of visitor centres
- Design for nature gate by PP4

4. Realised actions and results

4.1 Subaction 1: Visitors' management in wetlands

Including the implemented changes, subaction 1 consisted of 9 parts:

- Joint workshop on visitors' management and visitors' centres and find out how this could be implemented in the three areas (report)
- Joint development of a Park-app as one of the developments of visitors' management, including a specific implementation in the three areas
- Study into a reception vision for the Sigma Plan
- Workshops on and drawing up of a visitors' management plan for De Polders van Kruikeke (PP3)
- Study into translating the reception plan for De Polders van Kruikeke into the Sigma Plan area (PP3)
- Legal screening with regard to recreating safely in De Polders van Kruikeke flooding area (PP3)
- Implementation of investments for the layout of the reception zone and reconstruction of roads (PP3)
- Study into the need for and possibilities of small-scale infrastructure for routes in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Placing various GPS hiking, cycling and canoeing routes in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Development of interpretation plan for the How Hill estate, including a layer (augmented reality) programme (PP5)
- Enjoy the Broads App

In March 2011, a workshop was held on visitors' management, IT-applications and visitors' centres. Partly because of the on-going studies for all partners into visitors' centres and reception plans, doubts already arose then regarding the usefulness and the necessity of visitors' centres.

It was then decided to pay extra attention to this during the international excursion of June 2011 by visiting a variety of examples in this field and by organising an extra discussion evening on this subject (for more details on this see subaction 2). In addition, the possibilities for applying various new IT-tools to implement visitors' management and information transfer were explored. Several possibilities arose from this last component, which have been applied and implemented in the various areas.

In The Broads, work was started on an interpretation plan for the How Hill estate, including a Layer programme around How Hill. In De Biesbosch work was started on GPS-routes and the application of QR-codes at interesting sites in the area. And the three areas have jointly developed a so-called Park-app: a game to be used on smartphones in which visitors can effortlessly acquire information and knowledge of the area where they are walking, cycling or jogging.

In De Biesbosch, the LP has developed 3 GPS hiking routes that are also linked to the joint Park-app. In addition, 3 signposted canoeing routes have been set up with the canoe club and 1 mapped bicycle route have been realised.

In De Polders van Kruikeke, PP3 has drawn up a vision on reception and visitors' management. The other project partners made substantial contributions to this during workshops and other occasions. The report clearly shows how and where visitor flows can be expected and which facilities are required for this. The choice for three large reception zones also offers the possibility to relieve and better protect vulnerable nature zones. The layout on the basis of this plan also leads to differences in emphasis in terms of types of visitors' interests.

Based on this plan, a development plan for the Scheldelei reception zone and for the reconstruction of roads has been drawn up. This plan has been implemented and has resulted in the improvement of the northern entrance gate of the Polders, an improved accessibility and the reconstruction of almost 3 kilometres cobbled roads. The additional studies of PP3 have resulted in a juridical screening and some meetings and discussions with stakeholders.

In The Broads, experiments with the new 'Layar' IT-application have been carried out. To this end, a programme has been developed for use around How Hill. The goal is to reach a larger target group of mobile technology users and to give them better information about interesting locations. On the one hand this pilot has been successful as the programme works and is used around How Hill. On the other hand the mobile connections in The Broads have proved to be so poor or weak that there is now no point in rolling out this programme further at this time. In the case of the joint Park-app, a special off-line application had to be built for The Broads because of this problem. This shows that more traditional information tools are still necessary in specific areas or at specific locations. This is why The Broads has carried out a traditional interpretation in the shape of signs in Buttle March.

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

- Report on the workshop on visitors' management
- Park-app for the three areas
- Reception plan for De Polders van Kruibeke (PP3)
- Report on legal screening (PP3)
- Report on the application of the reception plan in the Sigma Plan area (PP3)
- Investments in the Scheldelei reception zone and reconstruction of roads (PP3)
- Three GPS-hiking routes, 3 signposted canoeing routes and 1 mapped bicycle routes in De Biesbosch (LP)

- One Layar programme and a traditional information provision in The Broads (PP5)

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

4.2 Subaction2: Innovative visitors' centres

Including the changes, subaction2 was made up of the following parts:

- Study into the development of the most sustainable visitors' centre in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Study into and realisation of functions and facilities for entrance gates (LP)
- Design for sustainable reception facilities/visitors' centre in De Polders van Kruibeke (PP4)
- Study into new ways of connecting the How Hill and Ludham bridge visitor locations, of enhancing the experience and of relieving the pressure on this area, including a few investments (PP5)

Following on the joint workshop on visitors' management in subaction 1, intensive discussions were held within the STEP-project on various occasions about the usefulness and necessity of visitors' centres in this day and age. Prompted by the many cuts in government spending, the cost aspect as well as the widespread use and the possibilities of new IT-techniques play a major role. In other words: is a visitors' centre still a thing of this day and age? In order to give further substance to the discussion, an international excursion to various types of visitors' centres in De Alblasterwaard, near Bergen Op Zoom, De Mijneweg in Limburg, both in the Netherlands and De Hoge Kempen in Belgium was organised in June 2011. During that excursion, a half-day was spent on exchanging experiences and new knowledge in this field. All this combined knowledge was processed by PP4 in a report on visitors' centres in 2013. Jointly and individually, the partners (LP, PP4 and PP5) concluded that they should not

to design any new visitors' centres and to implement this subaction completely differently. But the Broads has since developed designs for a new visitor centre at How Hill, as its existing facilities are inadequate.

On the issue of 'the most sustainable visitors centre' LP hold an expert meeting and has made an inspiration report. Afterwards, the focus shifted to improving existing entrance gates. First a study was executed on the functions and facilities of entrance gates including a booklet with pictures about those functionalities. Subsequently, a concept was worked out to improve the recognisability of entrance gates with facilities such as recognition posts, info boards, benches, etc. This concept is also applied at hosts at De Biesbosch (see subaction 3.2).

Following on the process described above, PP4 switched over from visitors' centre to nature gate. The focus in this project lies more on the outdoor aspects than the indoor aspects. Three agencies were asked to draw up a design for the three Scheldelei reception sites. The choice was made by a professional jury. After the STEP-project, this preferred design will be worked out in detail in a technical design that will also be implemented.

PP5 carried out a study into the renovation of the existing visitors' centre at How Hill. This has resulted in plans for a new building close to its existing visitor centre at Toad Hole Cottage. This will enable the Cottage to be presented better as a small museum.

On balance, the concrete results within this subaction are:

- Report on the visitors' centres, usefulness and necessity, facilities in 2013 (PP4, all)
- Report and inspiration booklet on the recognisability and functionalities of entrance gates in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Implementation of various small-scale investments at entrance gates (LP)

- Preferred design for nature gate at Scheldelei (PP4)
- Feasibility study and plans for a new building at the How Hill visitors' centre (PP5)

These results are largely in accordance with the expectations referred to in the changed application for the STEP-project. Only the planned works at Ladham Bridge (The Broads, PP5) have not been carried out because the required land was not available.

4.3 Subaction 3: development and implementation actions for hard-to-reach target groups

Including the changes, subaction 3 was made up of three parts:

- Preliminary study into participation by hard-to-reach target groups, including implementation of two cases by WenZ (PP3)
- Organisation of a congress on hard-to-reach target groups by The Broads
- Small investments to adapt a walking route for disabled persons in The Broads (PP5)

The preliminary study by WenZ showed that nature conservation societies, agricultural organisations and primary schools are hard-to-reach target groups. On the basis of this finding, WenZ set about bringing the first two together in an Estuarine Nature guides course. This has resulted in an integrated course of study evenings in which 50 guides participated. The second case was the development of an education project for primary school pupils. The result of this is an education package about the Sigma areas with a locus on water management, nature and recreation. This curriculum is realised with the support of scholars, teachers, associations and local governments and will be improved in the future.

A complete conference on hard-to-reach target groups, including a programme, was prepared by The Broads. Invitations were sent out,

advertisements were placed, etc. However, due to a lack of interest, this conference was cancelled.

In order to give this subaction substance, a hiking route to a well-known nature site near Great Yarmouth was adjusted for disabled persons, this included coordinated information provision.

On balance, the concrete results of this subaction are:

- A trained group of guides consisting of 50 nature guides
- An education package for primary schools which was used by 30 children
- A hiking route for disabled persons (proposal to be realised)

Compared to the original objectives the results of this subaction are limited, but fair in comparison with the adjusted application.

4.4 Subaction 4: Communication and education on current issues

No relevant interim changes were made in subaction 4, which consisted of the following parts:

- Digital information on current issues at various locations in De Biesbosch (LP)
- Information on current issues for visitors of De Polders van Kruikeke by means of Open shipyard days, second information point and guided walks by WenZ (PP3)
- Drawing up a communication plan on biodiversity and sustainable tourism for the Scheldt-estuary by PP4
- Development of an information and education programme about nature in The Broads which can be displayed on large touch-screens.
- Development of a cycling and canoeing guide with information about vulnerable nature conservation areas by PP5

Within the first component, De Biesbosch has developed three mobile listening chairs in which guests can obtain all kinds of spoken and visual information through touch screens on a range of subjects and stories. This information is also used for the GPS cycling and hiking routes (see subaction 1). The LP has also laid out two Tourist Transfer Points for cyclists and hikers in the area.

In the second component, WenZ held an annual Open Day together with PP4 on the developments necessary in the area. These Open Shipyard Days are mainly intended to raise social support for this highly controversial project. In addition, a second information point was laid out and guided walks were organised. About 35 people participated in each walk. The facebook page is strongly focused on different target groups and has an soaring popularity. The effect of these communication actions is an increased support by the community for the Polders of Kruikeke and all plans to be realised.

Agentschap Natuur en Bos has drawn up a communication plan on biodiversity and sustainable tourism. Relevant actions from this plan which PP4 will continue after the STEP-project are:

- The organisation of a Big Jump (an European coordinated action for all people who want to jump in a clean rivers)
- The organisation of a game to become Polder hero during the international week of the Scheldt.
- Searching ways to start up partnerships in the whole Scheldt estuary to bring all touristic trumps under one brand together.

Under the name The Broads Wildlife Explorer, PP5 has developed a programme with over 200 short video clips on the flora and fauna in The Broads. This programme is displayed on several large touch screens, which have been set up in both public and private locations. For the time being, these screens are still only indoors, but work is being put into an

'outdoor' version. In addition, PP5 has developed nature information guides for cyclists and canoeists.

On balance, the following concrete results can be identified:

- Four listening chairs with information on all kinds of issues in The Biesbosch Centre and 2 mobile chairs for other locations
- two Tourist Transfer Points with information about the area
- 400 participants in the Open Shipyard Days; 30-50 participants in the guided walks and 30 scholars educated
- Communication plan on biodiversity
- The Broads Wildlife explorer programme can be watched on large touch screens in four locations and it can be displayed at shows etc on new touch-screen laptops.
- one cycling and one canoe guide with information on nature and the landscape
- the Enjoy the Broads App

On balance, most implementation products in this subaction have been realised. However, only limited attention was paid to specific current issues such as sustainability, the climate and biodiversity.

4.5 Subaction5: Monitoring

This subaction was implemented at the LP only and consisted of two parts:

- Carrying out a baseline measurement and
- Setting up a structural monitoring programme

The baseline measurement was carried out and a report was written on this. A few striking matters discussed in it are:

There are many roads and waterways into the Biesbosch. It is therefore difficult to measure the exact number of visitors. Measuring over land can best be done via automatic counting boxes on strategic places.

Measuring over water can be done by counting on different days through

the season. By doing this with annual reports for several years conclusions can be drawn on the effect of measures in visitor management e.g. new infrastructure and the role of the 3 entry gates.

The structural monitoring programme has been set up and set out in a report. De Biesbosch is going to carry out measurements every year into: the numbers of people visiting the Biesbosch as well as over water and over land. This will be done by means of count boxes at 6 strategic locations. The number of cars, cyclists, boat movements and visitors of the entry gates will be counted. This says something about the effects of visitor management from new facilities like better information on the entry gates.

On balance, the concrete results of this subaction are:

- A baseline measurement into tourism and its impact in De Biesbosch
- A structural monitoring programme for the next 10 years

4.6 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
By LP		
1 (JA)	Press release about Park app	Local residents
1	Information on progress of routes in	Tourist entrepreneurs

	meetings	
2	Inspiration booklet	Colleagues, partners
2	Interview local press about entrance beacons	Local residents
2	Exhibition and lecture on designing Design Academy	Local residents; relations
2	Exhibition listening chairs, press release and opening event	Local residents, visitors
4	Press releases and opening events on Tourist Transfer Points	Local residents; visitors
By PP3		
1	Open shipyard day; information on visitors' management, flyers, newsletters, press release	Local community
1	Workshops on visitors' management	Local associations, entrepreneurs
3	Programme folder on the training of tour guides	Tour guides from associations
3	Actively involving primary schools	Primary schools in the region and local nature conservation societies
4	Various events, newsletters, open shipyard days	Local community, tourist services
By PP4		
2	2 open shipyard days with presentation of plans and visualisations; Brochures for open shipyard days 2010 and 2011	Local community and potential visitors
2	Article in VNSC newsletter (01/06/2013)	Interested people
2	Publication Competition nature gate	Interested organisations
4	3 workshops on communication plan	Recreational, nature conservation and other organisations, municipality, entrepreneurs,

		knowledge institutes
By PP5		
	The Broads – Where Adventures Begin inspirational book	Local communities, all stakeholders and visitors
	Press Releases and articles Radio interviews	Local communities

The impact and results of all these communication actions have been considerable. It is often difficult to measure their scope. In addition a lot of actions were realised in the last period, so a lot of effects will become visible after STEP. The eight newspaper articles, including in Het Nieuwsblad, on the open shipyard days of PP3 and PP4 must have reached many readers, but it is hard to say how many. The exhibition on the designs of the Design Academy has attracted about 50 visitors. The open shipyard days themselves attracted about 350 visitors annually. The workshops of PP3 have attracted 200 participants in total. Fifty people participated in the guide training and in total 200 pupils visited the area under the supervision of their schools.

Although the European dimension of the STEP-project is explained in all press releases, at exhibitions and during workshops and visits, it is hard to say to what extent this really rings through. Newspapers often do not copy the press release.

4.7 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 used the experiences in The Broads (PP5) with SMS information. This functioned inadequately there, as a result of which the LP has decided to use GPS for information along routes.
- All three areas grappled with the function and implementation of visitors' centres, i.e. entrances, reception sites. By organising a

workshop and by jointly going on an excursion to visit each other's visitors' centres and by jointly having discussions on these centres new insights emerged on visitors' centres, initial plans and projects were adjusted and a choice was made for new specifications.

- The study for a visitors' management plan of PP3 has benefited much from the excursions and workshops within STEP. The other example areas and the knowledge and experience of STEP-partners have been implemented in this plan.
- During the STEP-meetings, PP4 received the necessary input for its communication plan.
- PP5 was especially inspired by the Dutch Tourist Transfer Points. They are looking into the possibility of developing a similar version for The Broads.
- Within the joint action has resulted in a Park-App (game). This app takes into account the various circumstances in different areas regarding the use of smartphones. Therefore this product that can be used in the entire 2 Seas Area and beyond.

5. Evaluation

5.1 Results

The table below provides a summary overview of the planned results following an interim change and the realised results in July 2013.

The tangible results of Activity 2 are:	Responsible partners	Realisation: Yes Partly No	
Sub action 1. visitor management - Workshop - Park App - Reception vision by Sigma Plan - Visitors' management plan PP3 - Translation into Sigma Plan PP3 - Reception zone - Reconstruction roads (PP3) - Small-scale infrastructure routes LP - Various GPS cycling, walking and canoeing routes LP - Layar programme The Broads - Interpretation Plan for How Hill - Enjoy the Broads App	All partners All partners WenZ WenZ WenZ WenZ Biesbosch Biesbosch Broads Broads Broads	Yes Yes Yes Yes Partly Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	No
Sub action 2. Innovative visitor centres - Study innovative visitor centre - Facilities at entrances - Design of nature entrance - Study into connecting visitor locations and enhancing experience - Plans for new visitor centre building	Biesbosch Biesbosch ANB Broads Broads	Yes Yes Partly Partly Not yet Yes Yes	
Sub action 3. Actions towards special target groups: - Research into participation of	WenZ	Yes	

special target group - Organizing a conference about hard-to-reach groups - Small-scale investments for disabled people	Broads Broads	No No
Sub action 4: communication about current issues: - Digital information on location - Communication about contemporary themes - Communication plan on biodiversity and tourism - Nature education program - Bicycle and canoe guide with information about nature	Biesbosch WenZ ANB Broads Broads	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes
Sub action 5: Monitoring - Baseline measurement (report) - Concept for an ongoing monitoring programme	Biesbosch Biesbosch	yes Yes
Others: joint studies and reports on: - workshops - peer reviews - evaluation	All partners All partners All partners	Yes Yes Yes

This overview shows that by far most planned results – following the interim change in January 2012 – have been realised, except two. Compared to the results originally planned (application June 2009) a number of results have not been realised. These relate to a few investments within subaction 1, the designs for sustainable visitors' centres in subaction 2 and the actions around hard-to-reach target groups in subaction 3. The planned investments proved to be harder to realise than expected, mainly due to a lack of time. The designs were not made because of changed insights into visitors' centres. This has had an impact on all actions of all partners in this context. The actions regarding hard-to-reach groups simply failed; these groups proved to be even harder to

reach than expected. This has resulted in a shift in plansto groups that can be reached more easily.

Despitethes setbacks andchanged insights on balance the resultsafter the interim change were properly realised.

5.2 Objectives

In the original objectives for thisActivity,the focus was on two issues:

1. elaborating onvisitors' management andimplementing thisthrough variousfacilities, actionsandinvestments in visitors' centres, routes, information on location, etc.
2. designing variousesecondaryaspects, such asinvolving hard-to-reachtarget groups, communicationon current topics and structural monitoring.

It can be concluded that both issues have only been realised in part. For thefirstpart,this is mainly due to the changed insights into visitors' centres and management in general. All partners concluded individually and jointly thatnew centres no longer function, orbetter still, existing centres have got other functions. In terms ofvisitors' management,this means thatinformation should be presented to tourists in a different manner. In the development plans for De Polders vanKruibeke (PP3 and PP4),these insights have resulted in adjusted visitors' managementplan, facilities andinvestments. In this sense,thevisitors' managementhas in fact been realised, but in a different way than previously thought. The same goesfor De Biesbosch. The plan to design a new centrehas been changed into uniform andsimple layouts of entrance gates anda larger emphasis on all kinds of digital information (on location). This last aspect was much harderfor The Broads. The desireandthe system were definitely there, but inpractice it turned out that the connections in theareaare too weakto havethe digital informationsystem function properly everywhere. An app

has been produced, however, to overcome this difficulty and provide information anywhere in the Broads.

The design of variousesecondary aspectswithinvisitors' managementhas also been realised in part only. Hard-to-reach groups have not been reached. The communicationon current issues and themes has only been realised in part, but oftenwithinthescopes of othersubjects/informationssuch as listening chairs, cycle andcanoe guide, openshipyard days. The specific themes suchas biodiversity, the climate, sustainability and watermanagement are not independently visible subjects. The basis for monitoring has been fully realised andthere is a plan to carry out monitoring structurally inDe Biesboschin the years ahead.

5.3 Communication

All partners have intensive communicated 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.

Attheend user level, the residents in andaround the areas and the tourists, especially the former will be reasonably aware of the actions that were carried out. All communication from the partners resulted in a substantial number of articles in regional papers.

5.4 Cross border cooperation

The cross-border cooperation has delivered more results for all partners than expected in advance. These results can in fact be seen especially in

the sub action 1 and 2. In sub action 1 all partners have been closely involved in the development of a joint Park-app (a kind of a game). This app will continue to be used for different purposes in all 3 areas, such as GPS routes and the accessibility of areas as The Broads and the Polders of Kruike. Moreover, this app is also useable in all other nature areas and wetlands in Europe because it can be used on all kind of smartphones. In this sub action cooperation also led to new insights and plans for visitor management and the use of ICT applications for routes. WenZ has had very extensive use of existing knowledge and experiences in the Biesbosch and the Broads concerning visitor management and the Biesbosch of the Broads regarding the use of GPS data in routes.

By far the greatest success of the collaboration was in the area of visitor centres. The joint conclusion is/was that traditional centres have no future and that their function(s) will and have to be changed. The view and thinking about entrances and gates have to be changed. Around this item consequently the greatest changes have occurred: no new visitor centres, change and upgrading in a different way of existing centres, simple entrances (TOPs), welcome focused on the outside rather than the inside, use of existing visitor points as cafes, etc. The international excursion of 3 days with visits in all kinds centres and a lot of discussions where of crucial importance to come to these new insights.

The cross-border cooperation regarding the 3 other sub actions has delivered much less, partly because these actions had less impact but also because they were relatively local actions. Of course the other partners has learned from The Broads about the difficulty to reach ethnic minorities and young people and to involve them in nature areas and conservation (sub action 3). For them a strong signal to not get started lightly with those groups.

Also within sub action 4 (education about specific themes as biodiversity) more collaboration and efficiency was possible, but it didn't happen.

For sub action r the same applies. Setting up a monitoring program which is done solitary by The Biesbosch, could also be of interest for other partners. Unfortunately others haven't got any profit from this action.

5.5 The opinion of stakeholders

As in the evaluation of Activity 1 is described stakeholders around the Polders of Kruike very positive about the STEP project and the actions in Activity 1 and 2. All believe that thanks to the STEP project the sentiment about the reconstruction and refurbishment of the polders has turned from negative to positive. The intensive process that is used to establish, jointly with all stakeholders in and around the area a visitor management plan by WenZ, has contributed significantly to the community support. Within WenZ is through this project the insight emerged that social support is needed and that sustainable tourism is a strong tool in this kind of processes. Within the overarching Sigmaplan they will certainly continue with these experiences. Due to some additional studies within STEP this process is already put in motion. But there is still much work to be done to really bring this process further. From politics one sees that the STEP project has had a big influence on visitor management, the establishment of the area for everyone and the involvement of its own residents and schools. It is hoped that entrepreneurs, especially the hospitality and tourism industry, will participate more in this project and that there is room for something visible in the field of renewable energy. Also from the entrepreneurs association they are going to see new opportunities from this project. Some ideas are already arrested but there are still a lot of opportunities to be exploit. Within one action the local nature organization launched a course to train nature guides. Therefore they have visited the Biesbosch and used their knowledge and experiences. Also, this association is very satisfied with the input they have been given in the preparation of a visitor management plan. That PP3 and PP4 has moved away from a visitor centre is unfortunate but understandable. They also recognize the

potential of the new idea for entrance gates and the connection with existing structures. Criticism is there about the slow progress of projects and the ongoing uncertainty about specific features as watchtower and plank footpaths.

The European dimension is not really clear for various stakeholders. The relevant communication is limited. By stakeholders who are well aware, they praised the results of the cross-border cooperation with the Biesbosch and The Broads.

In the Biesbosch stakeholders recognize the European dimension especially within the actions and discussions about the visitor centre and the entrances. But the exact impact of cross-border cooperation at this point is not very well known by most stakeholders. Only a few stakeholders in the Biesbosch know that the Park app, monitoring and GPS and canoe routes are also actions within the STEP project. A single stakeholder indicates that the STEP actions have led to the disappearance of the negative image of The Biesbosch (due to wild west affairs, fires, waste). He hopes that supervision, especially because the new Biesbosch-hosts will get better. Also in the Biesbosch stakeholders find that the implementation is too slow and that there are still too less results visible.

Unlike the actions in Activities 1 and 3, the actions of The Broads Authority in Activity 2 are hardly known to the stakeholders. In general, the stakeholders are very positive about the STEP project and the actions and they say that this project has led to a renewed cooperation between BA and entrepreneurs and between entrepreneurs themselves. But spontaneously not any stakeholder is able to identify an action within Activity 2. This is not entirely illogical because the sub actions 1, 2 and 4 have not yet led to tangible results and are mainly focused on small investments in their own visitor centers, entrance gates and information on location. In addition, sub Action 3 (focusing on hard to reach groups) failed, the use of new ICT tools (SMS, GPS and layar) have had very limited success because of poor telecom connections and improvements around

visitor centers were difficult to achieve due to authorizations. The really visible results within this activity are thus limited to the large touchscreens at centers with lots of information about nature in The Broads. This result is known only to a few stakeholders.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The main conclusions that can be drawn from this evaluation of Activity 2 are:

1. Most actions and investments are implemented as originally planned (around 65% is carried out as planned). If one includes the interim changes in this, then the performance is at about 85%. The changes are mainly related to investments that are less easy to implement and proved to the changing insights in the field of visitor centers.
2. The same applies to the scheduled results. The results, especially those about visitor management, entrances and use of new ICT tools (within the sub actions 1 and 2) are positively assessed by the partners and stakeholders.
3. Sub action 3, hard to reach groups, is clearly less to their promise. These groups were more difficult to reach than expected and the interest in them was low. Partners have their actions therefore adjusted accordingly.
4. In sub action 4, although most of the actions are carried out, the details still lack on offering general information and education and less on specific, topical themes such as biodiversity and climate.
5. The partnership has two special results:
 - a. Renewed insights into the functions, design and organization of visitor centres;
 - b. The development of a common, widely usable Park app. The consequences of the former were / are significant: substantive adaptation of actions and renewal of concepts.
6. Besides these two exceptional results, the collaboration had several smaller effects, such as the choice GPS routes through the Biesbosch (in response to experience in The Broads), support in the preparation of visitor management and communication plans and help from the Biesbosch for WenZ in the creation and training of a guide club.
7. However, there are several possibilities to cooperate remain, such as in the area of monitoring, communication about current issues and the development of a shared vision of the locations, functions and organization of entrance / reception points / ports.
8. The communication around the sub actions is fair to good expired: all parties have adequate communication and messages are regularly taken over by local media. Those directly involved (entrepreneurs, organizations and interns) were therefore usually aware of relevant actions. For indirect stakeholders this will have been much less the case (which is also evident from the reactions of stakeholders). Local and regional residents will have taken limited knowledge of the results of this activity. The range will therefore have been limited.
9. The impact of this activity is much less clear than that of activity 1 regarding the responses of stakeholders, except for the changed views around (new) visitor centers and entrances. Most stakeholders may appoint spontaneously only few concrete actions within this activity. This is also because many actions have not yet led to visible results. In addition, the actions have been more internally focused than those in Activity 1, where branding, EU Charter and development of corporate identity were much more eye jumps.
10. Most stakeholders also have not really been aware that action taken in this activity were part of the STEP project. Sometimes they find that opportunities weren't fully used where they realize that they themselves are also to blame.

The main recommendations are:

1. The jointly produced new insights into the functions and structure for visitor centres should lead to a bright vision future jointly formulated.
2. Investment planning should be better, more realistic.
3. More investigations in advance in identifying opportunities for cooperation and making clear action plan

4. Permanent discussing and exploiting opportunities to get the European dimension of the project better into the high lights.
5. Bring the specific results of the project more outward.