

# CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN COASTAL TOURISM – NETWORKING TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN.

## SUSTAINABILITY

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In many European regions, coastal areas provide attractive tourism destinations. Together with natural and cultural resources, climate is one of the most important factors for their attractiveness. As a consequence, coastal tourism is highly sensitive to prospective climate changes. Baltic coasts are no exception to this. Possible direct climate impacts for the region include changes in air temperature and precipitation patterns as well as erosion processes and flooding due to sea level rise, and an increased frequency or amplitude of extreme events. Secondary impacts caused by changes in salinity or water temperature could affect the stability of coastal ecosystems and the quality of coastal bathing waters in a negative way. Induced impacts such as shifts in tourism travel patterns or overall economic and financial developments will also have its influence on the coastal tourism sector. However, a concrete level or dimension of the impacts as well as a specific regional scaling cannot be projected and might never be. For the tourism sector, this poses a substantial problem as planning horizons are with 5-10 years rather short given the fact that climate projections often refer to 2050 or 2100. Uncertainty is a common feeling with regional coastal tourism stakeholders and up to now hinders pro-active and strategic climate adaptation actions of the sector. If action is not yet regarded necessary as impacts still seem to be far away, what can be done to adequately prepare the sector for future climate changes and for the at any rate resulting necessity of adaptation? Does the communication of climate adaptation possibly need 'covering fire' from another future-oriented idea – the idea of sustainability?

In recent years, the idea of sustainable development has gained ground amongst tourism destinations along the German Baltic coast. With accepting nature and coastal environment as the region's major touristic resources, sustainability is ascribed an increasing role in long-term planning processes. Including the challenge of climate change adaptation into evolving sustainability strategies will add an important dimension to them. Initiating a local exchange on experiences and best-practice can be a successful method to start the exploration of the topic and to further regional cooperation on it. Sensitising coastal tourism stakeholders for possible future challenges might therefore not just be the very first but rather one of the most important steps towards successful sectoral adaptation. Approaches at the German Baltic coast showed that co-operative relationships with regional tourism networks are a promising way to gain access to regional decision makers. Established networks form important fora to internally discuss the vulnerability of the destination as well as potential risks and chances for tourism due to a changing climate, and they provide adequate communication channels. To support sustainability and adaptation strategies, they should be provided with the necessary level of information for strategic planning. Up-to-date scientific facts can be provided by scientific institutions but should be downscaled and translated into comprehensible sector relevant information by intermediaries, such as NGOs.

With respect to possible future climate impacts, keeping one watchful eye open will be the minimum action that regional coastal tourism stakeholders should commit themselves to at present. However, the visibility of a sustainable development strategy and a pro-active approach towards the challenges of altered climatic conditions may even be of advantage for future marketing campaigns. Due to the rising awareness of sustainability as a lifestyle and consequently the growing demand for sustainable products in Western societies there might be a potential for the topic to become a unique selling proposition. As tourism works highly competitive, those who participate actively in topical networks might be ahead by a nose when preparing their destinations with an adaptive strategy for an unknown future. Our presentation focuses on experiences with applied methods for communicating relevant climate impacts to one the study region's main economic branches: coastal tourism. The experiences cover national and pan-European projects, in particular RADOST (<http://www.klimzug-radost.de/>) and baltadapt (<http://www.baltadapt.eu/>).