

EUSBSR Policy Area Steering Group meeting minutes 28.11.2024

Meeting Minutes

Event name	Policy Area Tourism Steering Group meeting
Time	Nov 28, 2024, 09:49 AM - 01:02 PM (CET)
Participants	<p><u>Steering Group Members:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Karol Biedrzycki (Poland),2. Ede Teinbas (Estonia),3. Terhi Hook (Finland),4. Blagovestka Riiser (DG REGIO/EC),5. Anna Hag (Sweden) <p><u>EUSBSR Policy Area Tourism Coordinators:</u></p> <p><i>Pomorskie Tourist Board:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło,7. Marta Chełkowska,8. Łukasz Magrian <p><i>Regional Council of Oulu Region:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Anna-Maija Toivonen,10. Hanna Honkamakila

Quick recap

The meeting covered various aspects of tourism in the Baltic Sea region, including updates on the Polish Presidency, discussions on sustainable and regenerative tourism practices, and presentations on tourism initiatives in different countries. Participants shared insights on ongoing projects, future plans, and potential collaborations, with a focus on enhancing competitiveness and sustainability in the tourism sector. The meeting also addressed the preparation of action plans, upcoming events such as the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum, and updates on EU-level developments related to tourism and transport.

Next steps

- Magda and Anna-Maija to send the draft Action Plan update document to steering group members by the end of December for comments.
- Steering group members to review and provide feedback on the draft Action Plan update.
- Magda to share Blagovesta's comments about strategic discussions at the Annual Forum with the Polish organizing team for next year's event.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to finalize the Action Plan update by the end of January 2025.
- Karol to send his presentation on Polish tourism news in writing to Ede.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to send a Doodle poll in December to suggest dates for the next in-person steering group meeting in March/April 2025.
- Steering group members to suggest country representatives and experts as potential speakers for the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2025.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to continue discussions with potential keynote speakers for the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2025.
- Steering group members to help identify potential hosts for the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2026.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to update the project library on the PA Tourism website with newly approved projects.
- PA Tourism team to prepare and send out the year-end newsletter in December.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to plan the next thematic webinar for spring 2025.
- PA Tourism team to start promoting the "save the date" for Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2025 from January.
- Magda and Anna-Maija to continue work on the platform project application due December 9th.
- PA Tourism team to avoid scheduling the next steering group meeting during the last week of March 2025 due to a big Interreg conference.

Summaries

Polish Presidency and Tourism Forum

Karol welcomed everyone and thanked Magda and Anna-Maija for their presentation on the activities of the Polish Presidency. Karol also mentioned the upcoming Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in 2025. Magda and Anna-Maija then presented a summary of the priority area tourism activities from April to December 2024, highlighting key events and activities. The presentation with details is an attachment to this meeting minutes. They also discussed the update of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Action Plan and the preparation of the new Priority Area Tourism Action Plan. The conversation ended with a discussion on the upcoming events, including the Baltic Sea Tourism Forum and the Polish Presidency.

EUSBSR Action Plan Update

Anna-Maija and Magda presented the current and proposed actions for the EUSBSR Action Plan. The presentation outlined three key actions aimed at strengthening the tourism sector in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR):

1. **Strengthening Competitiveness in the Tourism Sector** with a focus on digital tools, workforce resilience, and fostering collaboration through events, webinars, and active communication.
2. **Promoting Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism Practices** by integrating regenerative principles into tourism strategies, supporting pilot projects, and deploying sustainability toolkits.
3. **Enhancing Connectivity and Accessibility for Sustainable Tourism** through improved low-carbon transport options, digital platforms for cross-border tourism, and sharing best practices.

The Steering Group members actively engaged in the discussion, providing valuable comments and insights. Feedback focused on ensuring alignment with broader regional strategies, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and maximizing the impact of these proposed actions on the sustainability and competitiveness of the tourism sector.

The next steps include incorporating the Steering Group's feedback into the plan and further refining the proposed actions to meet regional priorities and objectives. The team received feedback and suggestions from Ede Teinbas, Blagovestka Riiser, and Karol Biedrzycki, with Ede and Blaga expressing a preference for more specific action titles and Blaga suggesting an additional focus on rural areas. Karol indicated that the proposed actions align with Poland's upcoming EU presidency priorities. The team agreed to consider these comments and continue refining the action plan.

The discussion was continued with Magda Ileszczyna-Rzucidło discussing the promotion of sustainable and regenerative tourism practices in the Baltic Sea region, emphasizing the importance of utilizing cultural heritage and natural resources. She proposed self-assessment frameworks for tourism actors to increase awareness and knowledge of these

practices. The goal is to shift regional tourism systems towards regenerative models and make the Baltic Sea region a role model for sustainable tourism in Europe. Anna-Maija Toivonen added that the region is a forerunner in sustainability and that enhancing connectivity between destinations is crucial. Ede Teinbas suggested considering the marketing aspect of sustainability and the development of sustainable connectivity. Magda and Anna-Maija also discussed the importance of promoting rural and remote tourism destinations through low-carbon transport options like cycling, train, and ferry. Ede proposed working together on the sustainability of cruising and the issue of dead ends in long-distance biking routes. Magda confirmed that cultural heritage and culinary heritage are covered under the sustainable and regenerative tourism action.

In the meeting, Anna-Maija and Magda discussed the need for further comments on a draft action plan, which they promised to send out. They also encouraged participants to reach out with any additional questions. Karol then thanked everyone for their input and suggested a coffee break before resuming the meeting.

Information Round from the BSR states by the SG Members

Karol discussed the successful summer tourism season in Poland, with a 10% increase in tourists in June and July compared to the previous year. Domestic tourism increased by 8%, while foreign tourism increased by 16%. Karol also mentioned that the average length of stay for Polish travelers abroad was 10 nights, with European countries being the most popular destinations. The most popular countries for leisure were Croatia, Turkey, and Greece. Karol also discussed the preparations for the Polish Presidency at the European Union in the second half of 2025, with a focus on increasing competitiveness and sustainability in European tourism. The Polish Presidency plans to hold an informal meeting of European Union tourism ministers in Warsaw in June 2025.

Poland's Tourism Projects and Initiatives

Karol discussed various tourism projects and initiatives in Poland. He highlighted the government's accessibility programming in 2024, a free competition for tourism institutions, and a digital transformation project for the West Pomerania region. He also mentioned a project aimed at promoting tourism without barriers and a social tourism initiative. Karol further discussed a cooperation between Poland and Ukraine in the tourism sector, including promotional activities and workshops for Ukrainian tourism representatives. He also mentioned an online promotional campaign and an application to the National Reconstruction Plan for a project using advanced AI tools. Lastly, Karol emphasized the importance of investments for the development of Polish tourism. Karol presented a comprehensive report on the current situation in Poland, which Ede found valuable and requested a written version of the presentation. The report is an attachment to these minutes.

Estonian Tourism Updates

Ede Teinbas then shared updates from Estonia, highlighting the progress on the long-term vision document for Estonian tourism - "Long-Term Vision for Estonian Tourism 2025-2035". The document is nearing completion and will be officially presented on the 16th of December. Ede also mentioned ongoing studies on assessing the social, economic impact of international events and the impact of support measures on the international events sector.

Long-term vision 2035 for Estonian Tourism:

- Process opened in October 2023
- Methods of strategic foresight
- Desk research, questionnaires, countless interviews and round tables
- Almost ready, official consultation until 09.12.2024
- Tourism Strategy 2026-2029 process is to be started (concrete actions, responsibilities, budget)

Evidence-based policymaking:

- Methodology for assessing the socio-economic impact of international Events
- Analyses of the impact of support measures for international events
- Socio-economic and legal analysis of the short-term accommodation rental market (contract to be signed)

New Visit Estonia services for tourism professionals:

- 6 groups of development programs to enhance the export capability (first group for attractions)
- 2 groups of service design master classes (for business tourism)
- Support measure for taking up and making interfaces for resource handling software
- Support measure for bidding large concerts closed due to cuts in state budget

Lastly, Ede discussed new services for tourist professionals, including a program to enhance export capability and service design master classes. Magda suggested a potential collaboration with Ede's team on the topic of regenerative and sustainable tourism, which Ede agreed to consider.

Finland Tourism and EU Developments

Karol Biedrzycki initiated a discussion about tourism in Finland, with Hanna providing an update on the government's Northern Program, which includes tourism as one of its six themes. Hanna also mentioned potential conflicts between tourism and energy development, and the possibility of a tourism tax. Blagovestka Riiser then shared news about the newly appointed Commission for Tourism and Transport in the European Union, highlighting the focus on sustainable transport and connectivity, and a proposal for a single booking and

ticketing regulation. Blagovestka Riiser also noted that the new budget will be simpler, more focused, and policy-oriented, with a shift towards performance-based funding.

Sweden Tourism updates (send via email due to technical problems)

Government initiatives (national):

Tourism statistics will become part of the public statistics from 1st of January. The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth will be responsible for tourism statistics. It is no big difference from before, but they can now proceed and develop new methods etc. within a framework of official, public statistics.

Focus on better regulation for companies. Easier permissions to start a hotel business. A simple registration process is needed without any interference from the police authority. This will relieve the burden for both companies and the police authority.

Sweden has sent a notification to the EU commission for permission to allow limited farm sales of alcohol without risking the monopoly of the state owned alcohol company Systembolaget. This is good for small tourism businesses in the country side. They will be able to sell limited number of their own production (beer, wine and spirits) to visitors in combination with study visit at the production plant.

Visit Sweden

Visit Sweden will continue their work on marketing Sweden as a tourist destination but also support small tourist companies with knowledge on marketing and also develop open data in the travel cycle to help the companies to be more competitive.

Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth.

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth report that the network "Smarter Together" (authorities, regions and destinations) will focus on sustainable transport and will also develop an agenda for innovation in the tourism ecosystem.

EUSBSR PA Tourism Project Prolongation and Baltic Sea Tourism Forum 2025

In the meeting, the team discussed their past activities and future plans. PA Coordinators mentioned that they had been approved for a project prolongation until 2025 and 2026, with a focus on regular meetings with the policy area coordination team and the Steering Group and continuous in-depth cooperation with local and regional tourism stakeholders in the BSR.

They also discussed the upcoming Baltic Sea Tourism Forum in Gdańsk, Poland, scheduled for October 1st and 2nd, 2025, with a focus on regenerative and sustainable tourism. The team also mentioned that they are looking for potential hosts for the next year's event and are considering the possibility of inviting high-level representatives from the European Commission. They also discussed the ongoing work on the Interreg Baltic Sea Region platform call and the potential for a project of strategic importance. The team also mentioned that they are preparing an update for the action plan and will send it for

comments by the end of December, since the deadline for the final contributions has been prolonged until end of Jan 2025.

The meeting ended with the meeting ended with the round of summary provided by the representative of the Polish EUSBSR presidency - Karol Biedrzycki and Christmas wishes to everyone.