

Trilateral education supports long-term protection of the Wadden Sea

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Launched on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation in October 2003, the International Wadden Sea School (IWSS; also see Wadden Sea Newsletter 2003/No .2) has in a two-year pilot phase developed and tested a concept for trilateral Wadden Sea education. The successful project's results were presented on the 10th Trilateral Governmental Conference on Schiermonnikoog in November 2005 and the governments have decided to continue the IWSS in a four-year "implementation phase". A professionalization and further development will prepare the IWSS' continuation as long-term program of the Trilateral Cooperation after 2009.

With the aim to "enhance the awareness of the Wadden Sea as a shared natural and cultural heritage and to support the understanding for a long-term protection and sustainable management of the Wadden Sea as a whole", the International Wadden Sea School has been initiated by the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation and Nature NGOs in late 2003. A two-year pilot phase has been jointly financed by the cooperating countries and the German "Umweltlotterie Bingo". The experiences made during this time were supposed to serve as a basis for an organizational and financial concept for a possible implementation of trilateral Wadden Sea education as long-term program of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation. At the end of the pilot phase, the IWSS can draw a very positive balance:

Over the last two years, a network of 3 Danish, 5 German and 2 Dutch Wadden Sea education centers has developed and run international study courses for pupils from the Wadden Sea countries. For actual international experience, classes from any of the Wadden Sea countries were encouraged to travel abroad to foreign Wadden Sea destinations. Here, the participating pupils got to know ecological, cultural, historical and political aspects of the various regions and learned about national and international approaches to protect the Wadden Sea. To facilitate communication in the international Wadden Sea area, the courses were conducted in English. International teaching resources such as multi-lingual identification guides, games and worksheets have been devel-



oped and helped teachers and partners prepare and run the courses.

In 2004 and 2005, 36 classes from Germany, Denmark and The Netherlands took part in the pilot IWSS courses. For 10 classes, the courses were not only international class trips, but also international meetings with pupils from another Wadden Sea country. Altogether, the IWSS has provided international Wadden experience for 860 pupils.

These numbers speak for themselves: The concept of international class trips with a comprehensive, interdisciplinary educational program,



Network of education
centers participating in the
International Wadden Sea
School

Wadden Sea Dictionary

The IWSS courses are conducted in English – a sometimes quite challenging task for both the guides and the audience. For children, hands and feet often provide appropriate means of communication and offer good alternatives to words. For everybody else involved in Wadden Sea matters, the IWSS has compiled an English-German-Danish-Dutch "Wadden Sea Dictionary" with general terms and species names often missing in usual dictionaries.

The dictionary is available as PDF at www.waddensea-secretariat.org.



international experience and intercultural learning proved to be successful. Both the teachers' and pupils' evaluations of the pilot courses were very positive, and besides the content and quality of the course program also the assistance with travel arrangements was highly appreciated by teachers.

Also the partner centers participating in the IWSS pilot phase were enthusiastic about the international courses and appreciated the international exchange of experience and ideas among colleagues in the IWSS network. The IWSS activities and international teaching resources like the "Wadden Sea Dictionary" that has been developed within the project supported the internationality of the centers' work and also visitors beyond the IWSS courses benefited from it.

A thorough analysis of the pilot phase showed that the IWSS has the potential to establish as high-quality and highly customized educational program for a broad target group. However, to compete on the class trip market and thus succeed as educational measure, adaptations to scholar demands and an overall professionalization of the offer are essential. Therefore, the main recommendation of the pilot phase was that the identified need for adaptations and improvements should be implemented in a follow-up project phase from 2006-2009, to allow for a thorough preparation of a long-term IWSS after 2009.

This "implementation phase" will be realized: In the Ministerial Declaration of the 10th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands stated on 3rd November 2005 that „We recognize that in particular our youth play a vital role for the continuation of our joint Wad-

den Sea protection. We appreciate therefore the work of the International Wadden Sea School (IWSS) project and will contribute to future IWSS activity."

In only two years of work, the IWSS has succeeded in introducing Wadden Sea education to the Trilateral Cooperation's political agenda. As a result of the successful pilot phase, the IWSS is supported not only by the relevant governmental authorities, but also by the Wadden Sea Forum, representing almost all stakeholder groups in the Wadden Sea region.

In the next four years, the IWSS will be strengthened, expanded and professionalized to further implement trilateral, interdisciplinary Wadden Sea education on the basis of sustainable international class trips. Depending on the overall budget that is currently being raised, a variety of targets will be headed for, such as the development of standards for sustainable class trips and the improvement of the educational program and quality of training towards a broader scope of education for sustainable development and intercultural learning. The main focus, however, will be on the establishment of a strong organizational and financial basis for a long-term IWSS providing international Wadden experience for as many pupils as possible.

And although certainly not every participant will become a nature lover because of a class trip with the IWSS, the majority will keep their "Wadden experience" in a good memory and develop positive associations with the Wadden Sea. Some will return for a holiday with their parents, some might value a living in the Wadden Sea region more than before, others might volunteer for conservation in a couple of years, and for a few of them, the IWSS course might be a spark for a serious engagement in the Wadden Sea. In any case, the trilateral approach to education will contribute to a broader Wadden awareness and thus to the long-term protection of the Wadden Sea and a sustainable development in the entire region.

For more information on the IWSS pilot phase and the future IWSS activities please contact:

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