

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board (WSB 32)

4 March 2021
Online Meeting



Agenda Item:	5.1 Wadden Sea World Heritage
Subject:	PROWAD LINK Progress and Extension
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Submitted by:	CWSS

The 3-year project started in September 2018 and submitted its fourth project report in December 2020 (see attached document). Due to delays in the initial phase of the project, a 6-month budget-neutral extension of the project lifetime was approved by the North Sea Region Programme in June 2020. However, due to the strong impact of Covid-19 on the project since November 2020, a further up to 6-month budget-neutral extension is foreseen (new end date 31 May 2022).

On 11 January 2021, the NSR Programme published a call for additional funding for new activities in existing projects (maximum co-funding €500,000, maximum duration 30 June 2023, submission deadline 19 March 2021). This offers the possibility to support envisaged new activities and projects within the Partnership Hub and the increased involvement of stakeholders. With a project extension, new activities could be implemented without delay and the ERDF co-funding of existing project staff can continue for the period until June 2023, while a completely new project application in the Interreg programme 2021-2027 requires more time and effort and may lead to a gap in co-funding in 2022/23.

Therefore, the PROWAD Link consortium is currently assessing which additional activities could be carried out which convincingly fit into the structure and objectives of the ongoing project. Consultation will then take place with the national Interreg contact persons and the Joint Secretariat of Interreg to discuss specific content issues.

By 12 March, the consortium intends to prepare a project proposal (as part of the ongoing project) with new activities and deliverables, including an additional budget, by 12 March.

Proposal

The meeting is invited:

- 1- To note the status of the project.
- 2- To support, in principle, the preparation of an application for new activities in PROWAD Link with a view to extend the project (budget and timeline),
- 3- To task the TWSC focal points to oversee a potential application.

PROWAD LINK Project progress report (January 2021)

1. Covid-19 impacts

Since March 2020, PROWAD Link, like many other projects, has been severely affected by the Covid 19 crisis, as many activities such as training workshops, co-creation activities, study visits and workshops had to be cancelled. In an overall risk assessment, the project concluded that 35 out of 42 deliverables were (severely) affected. As a consequence, the project adjusted its activities both in terms of timing (planning for project extension) and type of activities (manageable alternatives). In addition, major platform and networking events such as ITB, Berlin, and the annual PROWAD Link Forum were also cancelled.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic led to good developments in addition to the potential for green recovery: The project group developed a stronger and broader level of digital communication to keep the transnational collaboration alive. This led to a very constructive "digitalisation" of the whole project team in terms of using video software and facilitating and conducting virtual project meetings, webinars and interactive co-creation workshops with local stakeholders.

2. Extending knowledge partnerships

PROWAD Links aims to establish long-term knowledge partnerships at regional and trilateral level to be continued beyond the project lifetime and actively approached new and existing partners to link to the Wadden Sea World Heritage. The project was also closely linked to ongoing Interreg A projects such as Waddenagenda 2.0 (Lower Saxony - Netherlands) and NAKUWA (Schleswig-Holstein - Denmark) to promote synergies and transfer experiences from these projects to the partnership in PROWAD Link and the North Sea Region.

Due to the pandemic, interaction with the main target groups was very limited and new ways had to be found. This concerns among others:

- Webinars and online events with stakeholders to communicate project reports (such as studies market analysis, sustainability case studies)
- Video series to enable SMEs to share ideas and adaptation opportunities and methods during Covid-19 times.
- Interactive online co creation workshop by the national park partner programmes and other partner networks.

With the employment of additional staff at CWSS in September 2020, the project further supported the process towards establishment of a trilateral partnership hub. The project will also investigate potential funding opportunities (national, transboundary, transnational level) for projects to be carried out within the partnership hub. An exchange platform for knowledge, case studies, branding (see below) and interaction is also part of the project deliverables.

3. World Heritage Brand Activation

PROWAD Link has developed several tools to improve access to the Wadden Sea World Heritage brand (according to the WH strategy). Stakeholders can now more easily engage with the brand and connect themselves to the Wadden Sea World Heritage objectives. The brand activation toolkit (online, four languages) also includes a platform (Skyfish) with brand activation material (also in four languages) and material for partners (National Park partners) and supporters.

The toolkit will be successively populated with further material from all partners involved in order to pool resources and strengthen synergies.

4. Enhanced sustainability

PROWAD Link has identified best practice examples of sustainable entrepreneurial ventures using a sustainable business model framework that aims to support the development of tools for future sustainable business models in all project regions. This was supported by a (second) round of data collection, which enabled a higher number of entrepreneurs to be included in the sample.

A real highlight was the launch of the first transnational visitor survey in the entire Wadden Sea World Heritage area, which started in July 2020 with the summer holidays. The survey missed the 2020 spring season as closures in all three Wadden Sea countries kept visitors away. After careful consideration, it was therefore decided to extend the visitor survey until the end of June 2021 in order to collect sufficient data and include the spring season 2021 responses in the analysis.

5. Evaluation by the Interreg Joint Secretariat

The Joint Secretariat (JS) assessed the progress of the project in the first two years. It was concluded that, although the project was as flexible as realistically possible, the Covid-19 crisis had caused significant delays overall. The JS supported the proposal to apply for another 6-months extension (budget neutral) to at least partially mitigate these delays. They acknowledged that the project has also seen some positive aspects of the crisis in terms of improved digital communication and considered the launch of the first transnational visitor in the Wadden Sea as a major achievement of the project.