Sustainability Check

- Implementation Manual -

What is the Sustainability Check?

- **A testing tool** for the sustainability of tourism projects
- **An application form** to avoid the granting of projects with negative impacts on society, environment and/or economy
- **A tool** to stem the arbitrary off the term 'sustainability'
- **A guideline** to stimulate sustainable tourism projects

Who should use the Sustainability Check?

- **Public and other bodies** on all levels providing financial subsidies or other support to the tourism sector
- **Applicants** to these bodies to prove that their project is sustainable
- **Anyone** who wants to ensure that a certain project is sustainable

What documentation is available?

- The '**Checklist**' itself
- The '**Instructions**' with all necessary information for filling in the Sustainability Check
- An '**Implementation Manual**' for supporting bodies who want to use the Sustainability Check for their purposes

All these documents are available on the agora website (see below, click on 'Results' and 'WP 2.2 SusCheck').

How has the Sustainability Check been developed?

The Sustainability Check has been developed as part of the agora project which aims to promote sustainable tourism development in the Baltic Sea Region. For more information about the agora project, the development of the tool (see file '**Development of the agora Sustainability Check**') and the instrument itself see:

www.agora-tourism.net

The agora project is approved as a Baltic 21 Lighthouse project and part-financed by the EU programme INTERREG IIIB.

The concept of the Sustainability Check was developed in cooperation with Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB), Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA) and Social Hansa.

Necessary background information

Scope of the Sustainability Check

An instrument such as the Sustainability Check cannot accurately picture sustainability. It can only provide a **guideline** as to what should be considered in order to achieve sustainable development. Furthermore, in order to be applicable to different regions and different types of tourism projects, the Sustainability Check has been conceived very broadly. Conversely, this **flexibility** allows supporting bodies to determine the most suitable proof of sustainability for the individual projects and thus makes the Sustainability Check fit local and project-related conditions. As the checklist has been conceived for **tourism projects**, certain issues covered in the checklist are only applicable to tourism. If the checklist is to be used **for other project types**, it should be taken as a suggestion which can be modified and complemented.

Definitions

The Sustainability Check is based on the Baltic21 definition of **sustainable development**:

'Sustainable development contains three dimensions that are co-dependent: the economic, the social and the environmental dimension. For a specific region this relates to

- a safe and healthy life for current and future generations;
- a co-operative and prosperous economy and society for all;
- that local and regional co-operation is based on democracy, openness and participation;
- diversity and productivity are restored or maintained;
- that pollution of the atmosphere, land, and water does not exceed the carrying capacity of nature;
- that renewable resources are efficiently used and managed within their regeneration capacity;
- that the material flow of non-renewable resources is made efficient and cyclic, and that renewable substitutes are created and promoted.'

For **sustainable tourism**, the Sustainability Check uses the definition of the European Commission (Lisbon, 1999):

'Sustainable tourism development is about keeping a balance between the needs of the visitor, the environment and the host community for current as well as future generations. Tourism can contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development as follows:

- in economic terms, sustainable tourism development can improve the competitiveness of the enterprises, in particular SMEs, directly and indirectly related to tourism, and bring benefits to the local economy,
- in social terms, sustainable tourism development can enable at the same time to meet the needs and to encourage a responsible behaviour of the tourists, of the people working in tourism enterprises and of the local population,
- in environmental terms, sustainable tourism development can ensure the protection and rational management of natural and cultural resources.'

The Sustainability Check defines a **tourism project** as a plan to achieve a defined goal within a defined time span. Typically, this plan is a one-off undertaking. The Sustainability Check should be used for projects that require the support or implementation of sustainable tourism. This could include projects supported by EU programmes like INTERREG, LIFE or LEADER+ or projects supported by national and regional public/private funds or organisations. Project examples can include new/further development of public and private tourism infrastructure, product development, co-operations, concepts or marketing.

Content of the Sustainability Check checklist

The checklist contains 27 questions which need to be answered. These questions are structured according the objectives shown below; hence there are one to five questions for each objective.

Fig. 1: Main objectives of sustainability[1]

Economy	Society	Environment
(1) Strengthen local/regional economic structure	(4) Satisfaction of most stakeholders impacted by project	(7) Minimise resource use
(2) Employment of local people	(5) Participation of local people in decisions	(8) Reduce environmental load
(3) Sustainable capacity planning	(6) Respect for local/regional culture	(9) Preserve biodiversity

Sustainability Check use by supporting bodies

For supporting bodies, there are **several options** to use the Sustainability Check:

- It can be adopted as it is (translation into the respective language is highly recommended; a German translation is available at www.agora-tourism.net);
- It can be taken into account once new application proceedings are set up; or
- It can be used as background information for already existing application proceedings and integrated into existing systems. If existing application procedures already cover some of the issues contained in the Sustainability Check, then the proceedings of the tool can be shortened accordingly; where all issues are already covered, the checklist is not necessary.

Sustainability Check use at different project stages

The checklist can be used to assess projects at three different stages: **application, midterm evaluation and final execution**. Depending on the respective point in time, the assessment obviously refers to future, present or past issues. However, in order to keep it simple, the checklist is only written in the present tense. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that all questions, despite their present tense wording, can be applied to all three assessment stages.

[1] Source: INVENT (2005) Traumziel Nachhaltigkeit. Innovative Vermarktungskonzepte nachhaltiger Tourismusangebote für den Massenmarkt, p. 7 (translated and slightly adapted)

Preparations

Before issuing the Sustainability Check to applicants, **certain preparations** need to be made by supporting bodies as described below.

Possible assessment methods

The Sustainability Check has no predetermined assessment methods in order to allow for a flexible use of the tool. Hence, it is up to each supporting body to define the requirements for their assessment. Suggestions are given below:

- **All answers** in the checklist **must be positive** in order to pass the Sustainability Check, i.e. 'yes' or 'not relevant for the project' (see the file 'Instructions', p. 4 for an explanation of the answer categories). This evaluation method matches the intention of the tool best as all sustainability dimensions and objectives are equally considered.
- The **aspects** in the checklist are **divided into two groups in order to give the opportunity to customise the checklist to different project types**: those crucial for passing the check and those not. All questions in the first group must be answered positively, those in the second group may also be answered with 'no' (or at least to a certain percentage). In any case, aspects of all three dimensions (i.e. economy, society and environment) should be in the first group.
- **Two or more levels of sustainable development** can be defined. This could mean, for example, that applicants receiving a 'yes' for all aspects would be awarded the highest level, whereas applications in which not all questions are answered with 'yes' would receive a lower ranking and possibly, depending on the approach, also less support.

Ideally, the assessment should be carried out by a team of examiners in order to gain an overall picture of the project from different perspectives.

Guideline for professional statements

In order to help applicants and to increase the quality of proposed projects, the Sustainability Check includes three aspects which concern the **consultation of experts** for the economic, social and environmental outcomes of the proposed project. These experts can either be **internal or external specialists**. Internal experts are people working for the proposed project; external specialists could either be representatives of environmental, social or economic organisations and associations or experts working in private companies, i.e. consultants. In order to qualify as an expert in the respective field, these **experts must have been educated and/or have professional experience in their particular field.**

Applicants should have two different options to fulfil these three aspects:

- The application is accompanied by three different professional statements, one for each impact type. The documents should demonstrate that the specialists have been consulted and how their expertise has been integrated into the project. The supporting body should prepare a **brief guideline** regarding the required content and extent of the professional statement.
- Alternatively, the applicant can state the names, positions and addresses of the involved experts, so that the supporting body can contact these persons to check their consultation and to obtain further information on his/her expertise.

(See the file 'Instructions', p. 14 for an example of a professional statement.)

Checklist format

The file '**Checklist**' contains the cover sheet and checklist which should be filled in by the applicant, and subsequently also by the examiner. This document is a MS WORD file which has been provided with tick boxes and entry fields where users need to fill in information. As these tick boxes and entry fields only work when the document is in **protection modus**, the file 'Checklist' is already protected. Furthermore, this feature protects the checklist from any unwanted changes.

If the contents of the checklist need to be changed in any way, the protection modus simply needs to be disabled. This does not require a password as none has been set. Before the document is sent out to applicants, the **protection modus** needs to be **re-enabled**. If required, a password known only to the supporting body can be set.

Users who are not familiar with the protection modus should refer to their software's help section.

Documents for applicants

Once all the necessary preparations have been made, the relevant documents need to be sent out to applicants. These should be following files:

- **Instructions**
- **Checklist**
- **Plus** a description of the chosen assessment method (see above)
- **Plus (if required)**, a brief guideline for the **professional statements** (see above)