



Transferring experience in Green Belt Tourism to the Baltic

Andreas Sterzel and Stefanie Maack

Kiel University, Germany

Abstract

Tourism has been called one of the major chances for sustainable development of regions at the European Green Belt. However, stakeholders along the European Green Belt have different ideas of what Green Belt tourism should or should not be. In order to assure for positive effects of tourism development on the Green Belt, it is necessary to specify the concepts underlying Green Belt tourism development. This article attempts to specify two basic aspects of Green Belt tourism: the effects (positive effects aimed for and negative effects to be avoided) and the target groups of Green Belt tourism. Two existing pilot studies (AGORA, Exp GB) were examined for information concerning these aspects. The extracted information was examined with respect to suitability for application in a coastal pilot region in Estonia, and if necessary adapted to the situation. The results consist of a generalised outline for GB tourism target groups as well as a list of desired and undesired effects of GB tourism. Both of these can be used for planning of further tourism projects at the European GB.

1 Introduction/ Background & Objectives

“The European Green Belt has the vision to create the backbone of an ecological network, running from the Barents to the Black Sea that is a global symbol for transboundary cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development.” (Terry et al. 2006)

This article ties up on this vision. The Baltic Green Belt has been developed as a part of the European Green Belt only within the last three to four years. If coastal regions decide to lay a focus on nature conservation, they face limitations with respect to growth oriented regional development, which usually results in coastal build up and land use conversion. Therefore alternative sources of income compatible to nature conservation need to be worked out for those regions. As an intact nature and rare habitats are main conditions for tourism in rural regions, it seems obvious that tourism can be an economical alternative for the regions along the Green Belt. At the same time, tourism can be a successful tool to help turn the vision into reality.

Green Belt activities in tourism have been documented for several regions, e.g. at the former inner German border (project Experience Green Belt [www.experiencegreenbelt.de]), at the Slovenian/Austrian border (Cross Border Stones [www.europeangreenbelt.org/003.local.011.html]), as well as Austria/Czech Republic border (Morava Thaya-Tours [www.greenbelteurope.eu]) and the Austrian/Hungarian border (National Park Fertő/Hanság – Neusiedler See [www.nationalpark-neusiedlersee-seewinkel.at])). However, with more people joining the initiative in other parts of Europe, the goals pursued with Green Belt Tourism and means to implement it blurred increasingly to outsiders or newcomers. No guidelines or common ideas were formulated on the level of the European Green Belt. In particular, it was difficult for the Baltic Green Belt community to grasp the Green Belt Tourism idea in order to adapt it to the own circumstances in the Baltic Sea Region.

The goal of this article is therefore, to use existing tourism initiatives to extract common ideas of Green Belt Tourism and compile these ideas into common terms to be used by Green Belt stakeholders in the Baltic Green Belt. First, a definition of Green Belt Tourism is provided. Secondly,

the principles, impacts and potential target groups of Green Belt Tourism are described. Finally, some recommendations for action for those regions that want to implement Green Belt Tourism are given including references to helpful implementation tools from the European Green Belt community.

2 Definition of Green Belt Tourism

There is no statement in the literature yet which defines Green Belt Tourism. Even the term “Green Belt Tourism” does not exist. However, within projects dealing with tourism development at the Green Belt publications about Green Belt Tourism have been produced which can serve as sources for the definition (e.g. BN & BUND 2006, Terry et al. 2006, Wrbka 2009). In these publications, Green Belt Tourism is characterised by the following aspects: the region in which it takes place, the contents it presents to visitors and the effects it has on regions.

Green Belt Tourism is **spatially bound to the European Green Belt**, that is the area associated with the former border between the eastern and western blocks during the second half of the 20th century. With respect to contents, Green Belt Tourism can be understood as a special kind of **heritage tourism**, as the heritage of the Iron Curtain, **both natural and cultural**, is one of the focus points of this tourism phenomenon in all projects. With respect to the effects, Green Belt Tourism requires its developers to keep in mind on the one hand the effects on nature, and on the other hand the (social and economical) effects on the local communities. In other words: sustainable development is essential for the development on the Green Belt through tourism. That is why Green Belt Tourism is also a form of **sustainable tourism**. The main goal of the European Green Belt, which has to be pursued in Green Belt Tourism as well, is the **conservation of the nature** that developed along the belt during the Cold War. Nature here, has two implications for tourism: Primarily, natural areas are the main locations where Green Belt Tourism takes place; secondarily, nature provides content (topics and activities) to tourism offers. All these specific forms of tourism have to be considered in Green Belt Tourism. Therefore a definition of Green Belt Tourism has to lean on these forms and their definitions.

For understanding the meaning of heritage tourism one has to understand the meaning of heritage. In research there is already a long debate existing (BOWES 1989: 36; ASHWORTH & TURNBRIDGE 1999: 105; TIMOTHY & BOYD 2003: 2). For Green Belt Tourism the understanding of heritage is leaned on the definitions by the UNESCO (UNESCO 1972: 2; UNESCO 2003: 2; Jokilehto 2005: 43), which contains the natural, the cultural and the intangible heritage. The relevant heritage for the Green Belt includes all these phenomena that are related to the time of the “Iron Curtain”. This can be for example socialist monuments, barrack complexes, military airfields, bunkers and watchtowers (cultural heritage), witnesses reports and the “living in the occupation area” (intangible heritage), but also the unique habitats developed along the Iron Curtain as the one outstanding natural heritage, containing the Biodiversity and endangered and rare species (natural heritage).

Knowing the meaning of heritage, one can define the term of heritage tourism. Combining the definitions of tourism by UNWTO and heritage by UNESCO (see above), heritage tourism can be understood as all tourism phenomena where people visit natural and/or cultural heritage sites and/or the participation in events with a reference to these heritage sites.

As mentioned before, another important premise for Green Belt Tourism is sustainability. Green Belt Tourism has to follow the principles of sustainable development and respectively sustainable tourism. Similar to heritage tourism there is a long debate in science about the meaning of sustainable development and tourism (BLANCAS et. al. 2009: 484 ;UNEP 2005: 8, 12;WCED 1987; KATES et al. 2005: 10; WILLIAMS 2009: 110). In general sustainable tourism can be understood as

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

(BARLETT 2007, p. 2;UNEP 2005, p. 12)

Combining the aspects discussed before, the authors suggest the following definition for Green Belt Tourism:

Green Belt Tourism is an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable form of heritage tourism devoted by region and content to the natural and cultural legacy of the Iron Curtain which contains all tourist phenomena where people visit, experience, or learn about the history and/or nature in the area of the Green Belt.

3 Target Group: The Green Belt Tourist

Who is the typical Green Belt Tourist? The characterisation and identification of the specific tourist and respectively the development of target groups is elementary for the development of new touristic products. The definition of specific target groups should be among the first steps of every region which plans to implement Green Belt Tourism. In order to do so, it is important to break down the potential target groups to common characteristics and to compare them to the existing tourists in the destination. As usual in tourism, there is not the one Green Belt Tourist, as it can be attractive for a lot of tourist target groups. This is due to the wide range of the themes which can be related to the Green Belt: nature, culture, history, sports, arts, and many more.

The Agora 2.0 project recently developed a Baltic Sea heritage tourism information service (BASTIS). AGORA 2.0 is an approved Baltic 21 Lighthouse Project. It is well in line with the EU strategy for the BSR and leads the region to become a front-runner in sustainable tourism implementation and aims at improving the common identity of the BSR, based on its rich natural and cultural treasures.

Part of BASTIS is a study characterizing the target groups of Baltic Sea heritage tourism. Using the data of the Flash Eurobarometer 291 (Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism), the study shows an existing demand on the tourism market (Grimm et al. 2011): In general the authors say that there are 3.25 million people and potential tourists in the EU with an interest in the BSR and have the main travel motivation of culture and religion; on the other hand, there are 6.67 million people in the EU with an interest in the BSR whose main travel motivation is nature (Grimm et al. R 2011: 34). These numbers confirm the statement that there is a general demand for the topics of Green Belt Tourism.

Within a prestudy (BN & BUND 2006) for the Experience Green Belt project several potential target groups for Green Belt Tourism at the inner German border have been worked out. We adopted them for the Baltic Green Belt, but it needs to be extended in some points primarily due to the fact that the Baltic Green Belt is coastal and thus offers different activities compared to the inner German border (Table 1).

Table 1: Potential target groups of Green Belt Tourism (modified after BN & BUND 2006: 125 ff).

| Target Group | Market Potential | Contents | Relation to Green Belt |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Recreation and Health | | | |
| Age: 50+ Individual travellers Couples / small groups 2-6 persons | High, slowly growing | Everything comfortable and recreational: take a walk, sightseeing, shopping, smaller guided tours, health offers, swimming, beach | Rather at the edge, has to be stimulated, f.i. Guided Tours at the GB, Excursion to exhibitions |
| Nature-Border Experience | | | |
| From Young Grown-Ups to higher age Individual Travellers Group Travellers | Low to middle, dynamically growing | Real nature experience, rational and sensitive perception of the special characteristics of nature/culture areas and the conservation areas | GB at the focus or conservation areas connected with the GB |

| Active Experience | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teenager (14+) to higher age Individual Travellers Group Travellers | Middle to high dynamically growing (health prevention) | Activities in the nature, sports like hiking, Nordic-Walking, cycling, canoeing, skiing, beach sports | GB is scenery and can be integrated in theme routes, information points, exhibitions as stopover (rest & variety) |
| Culture & History-Border Experience | | | |
| Teenager (pupil-groups) Older people with interest in the border history | Low to middle, (dependent on primary motives, at the moment often "meeting with the really personal history"), constant | Border of Iron Curtain Border and culture in the change of history Overcome of border situation | GB as a concrete experience of change & history – probably also connection with change of natural and cultural landscapes |
| Family & Children | | | |
| Families with Children (0-13 years) | High to middle | All mentioned topics, but family and children-like, swimming, beach | GB as adventure playground |

In the model regions of the Experience Green Belt project, Green Belt Tourism has already been implemented to a certain extent and products, that fit the target groups have been developed. It has to be taken into consideration that the original description focused on German visitors.

4 Impacts of Green Belt Tourism

Usually there are desired (positive) impacts of tourism on the one hand, and the real impacts which are at least partly negative on the other. The goal of Green belt Tourism should be to maximize the positive effects while reducing the negative ones to the minimum possible. This approach is also part of the concept of sustainability. Usually the possible impacts of any kind of tourism are divided into 3 spheres: Physical or environmental, socio-cultural and economic (Mathieson, Wall 1982). In table 2 these impacts are portrayed within the 3 spheres.

Table 2: Possible positive (+) and negative (-) impacts of Green Belt Tourism (own representation leaned on BOYD & TIMOTHY 2003: 125; TIMOTHY & NYAUPANE 2009: 57, N.I.T. 2007: 3).

| Physical Impacts | Socio-Cultural Impacts | Economic Impacts |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serious damage on sights caused by mass tourism - Wear and tear (visitors touch, climb on, or rub historic structures and artefacts) - Structural damage on surrounding green spaces and landscapes -> compacted soils, increased soil erosion - Garbage - Air pollution - Vandalism - Illegal trade of antiquities + environmental conservation/restoration + Environmental education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Displacement of local population - Tourism dependent communities - Cultural change - Cultural commodification - Lack of true ownership of culture - stereotypes and false perceptions through outside use and control + reviving lost or declining elements of culture + awareness of the own culture + development of a new regional consciousness + regional-psychological stabilization effects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Revenue generated (e.g. through entrance fees) + Stimulation of economies of neighbouring communities + Employment of local people |

While the physical and socio-cultural impacts seem likely negative, the destination can profit from the economic ones. On the other hand there are quite a few possible positive effects, especially on the socio-cultural level, as a rising awareness of the own culture and the development of a new regional consciousness or regional psychological stabilization effects, the mediation of a global, border crossing thinking. Cultural Tourism, and connected to that Green Belt Tourism, can also give a contribution towards international understanding and the process of coming to terms with the past (HEINZE 2009: 126; STEINECKE 2007: 23), what is an important aspect concerning the topics of the Green Belt. For the Green Belt Tourism not all of these aspects are accurate or important while some peculiarities are missing. Looking at the physical impacts the first important note is, that Green Belt Tourism as mentioned before is also a form of sustainable tourism, which excludes the phenomena of mass tourism. That means that all physical impacts listed should not appear in a strong extent (Cf. Chapter 5). The conclusion of that insight is, that the rural regions can profit from the economic impacts of Green Belt Tourism without harming the environment or losing its cultural integrity. It can rather help protecting the environment and biodiversity with the financial income of tourism. It is quite difficult or rather impossible to achieve a tourism development without negative physical or socio-cultural impacts, but the goal of Green Belt Tourism is to minimize them as much as possible.

5 Principles of Green Belt Tourism

The principles of Green Belt Tourism can be derived out of the definition itself. It mainly says that Green Belt Tourism has to be sustainable. Therefore it has to follow the principles of sustainability. As widely known, sustainable development tries to balance economic development, environmental conservation and a considerate handling of the socio-cultural aspects. This approach needs to be adopted towards Green Belt Tourism. The environment is the most important asset of the Green Belt. Its conservation and protection should be the major principle of any development in these regions. The cultural aspect is also very important. The life of the people during the time of the Iron Curtain, their witness reports and experience provides content for tourist products and thus serves to raise awareness of the difficulties of recent European history. The economic level is important as well, as Green Belt Tourism and the connected restrictions can only find acceptance at the population when they get economic benefits.

In their agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism, the Commission of the European Communities developed principles for achieving a competitive and sustainable tourism. This includes amongst others a holistic and integrated approach, the planning for the long term, the involvement of all stakeholders, the minimizing and management of potential risks and a continuous monitoring (Commission of the European Communities 2007: 5f).

The Agora project compiles tools and information concerning sustainable tourism and makes them accessible for interested users. The source for this information are the Agora partners representing all three dimensions of sustainability, all levels of administration and tourism management and different thematic interests, projects, actors and stakeholders of tourism.

According to the principles of the Commission of the European Communities a testing tool for the sustainability of projects in the BSR was developed by the Agora project, the so called Sustainability Check (N.I.T. 2007: 1; GÜNTHER ET AL. 2007: 3). With the use of this check potential Green Belt Tourism regions can ensure that they follow the principles of Green Belt Tourism already in the stage of the project development. Table 3 shows the main principles for the development of sustainable projects. A new project dealing with Green Belt Tourism should always follow these principles.

Table 3: Objectives to be fulfilled by Green Belt Tourism projects (modified after N.I.T. 2007: 3).

| Economy | Society | Environment |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| Strengthen local/regional economy | Make most stakeholders satisfied with the tourism project | Minimize resource use |
| Employ local people rather than attracting people from elsewhere | let local people participate in decisions | Reduce environmental use |
| Contribution to the added financial value for the region | Show respect for local/ regional development | Preserve biodiversity |

6 Recommendations for regions for implementing Green Belt Tourism

- **Involve local stakeholders:** With a stakeholder analysis all potential project partners can be identified (Table 4). An open invitation to them at the beginning of the project can help to find partners, gather ideas for a project and to perform a first brainstorming. One organization should take responsibility for involving the stakeholder and moderating discussions. It can be either from the region or from outside, depending on the situation. While a local organization has better insight into the community and more frequent contact, an outside organization has the advantage of being neutral (e.g. with respect to existing conflicts).

Table 4: Potential partners for developing GBT (Taken and complemented from LAUKU CELTOAJS 2011: 41 ff.).

| Potential Partners for GBT |
|--|
| The Ministry of Environment |
| The Nature Protection Board |
| The State Environment Service |
| Regional Environment Boards |
| Administration of the specially protected Nature Territories |
| NGO's |
| Entrepreneurs |
| Local and/or regional administration |
| Guides |
| Private persons |
| National GB Focal Points |
| Regional GB Coordinators |

- **Involve Green Belt Network:** A Region that is thinking about Green Belt Tourism should contact their national Green Belt focal point and the regional Green Belt Coordinators from the beginning on. These Green Belt stakeholders can provide institutional support (letters, partner search, lobbying), experience from other regions and links to other ongoing international activities.
National Green Belt Focal Points: www.europeangreenbelt.org/004.initiative_focalpoints.html
Green Belt Regional Coordinators: www.balticgreenbelt.uni-kiel.de/index.php?id=140&L=0
- **Use existing Green Belt Experience:** Within other Green Belt projects several useful ideas and tools for the implementation of Green Belt Tourism have been developed, but not all of them are fully documented (articles, websites or other accessible sources such as www.europeangreenbelt.org). Therefore it is important to contact the network. The so far largest

comprehensive project dedicated to Green Belt Tourism was *Experience Green Belt project* (www.experiencegreenbelt.de). It provides a number of good ideas as well as some scientific studies accompanying the tourism development in four model regions. For the development of military heritage, Lauku Celotajs, a professional rural tourism association from Latvia, developed *heritage management guidelines*, which contain a checklist to determine the touristic potential of military heritage objects (www.celotajs.lv/cont/prof/proj/GreenBelt/GreenBelt_en.html).

- **Analyze regional situation:** The touristic situation needs to be analyzed to determine the strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities of the region. A guideline from the LEADER II (Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) initiative of the EU for the evaluation of a region's touristic potential leads through the whole analysis process.

Guideline for evaluation of a region's touristic potential:

<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leader2/rural-en/biblio/touris/metho.pdf>

- **Assure for sustainability through good project development:** From the first project idea on the different levels of sustainability should be incorporated into the project goals and plans step by step. A good practical help is the Agora Sustainability Check (cf. chapter "Principles of Green Belt Tourism"), because it breaks down sustainability into a set of manageable indicators.

Agora Sustainability Check for touristic projects:

<http://www.yepat.uni-greifswald.de/agora/87.0.html>

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Hermann Martens and Dieter Leupold for the provided information and their support within the interviews.

This study was partly financed by the International Bureau of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (IB/ BMBF) within the project MobEE (NOE 10/026).

This study is part of a diploma thesis, which will be available soon on the reports section on www.balticgreenbelt.net.

References

- Ashworth, G.J.; Tunbridge, J.E. (1999): Old Cities, new pasts: heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe. In: *GeoJournal* 49: 105 – 116..
- Barlett, T. (2007): Keynote presentation on "Sustainable Practices in Developing the Tourism Industry". Kuala Lumpur. (<http://worldtourismconsultancy.com/WorldTourismConference/timbarlett.pdf> December 2011)
- Blancas, F.J.; González, M.; Lozano-Oyola, M.; Pérez, F. (2009): The assessment of sustainable tourism: Application to Spanish coastal destinations. In: *Ecological Indicators* (2010). 10:2: 484-492..
- BN – Bund Naturschutz in Bayern e.V.; BUND – Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (2006): E+E – Vorhaben Vorstudie „Erlebnis Grünes Band“ (Abschlußbericht. Im Auftrag des Bundesamtes für Naturschutz). Nürnberg.
- Commission of the European Communities (2007): Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism. Brussels.
- EU Initiative Leader II (2001): Evaluating a territory's touristic potential. (<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leader2/rural-en/biblio/touris/metho.pdf> March, 21st 2011).
- Grimm, B.; Meinken, I.; Sonntag, U. (2011): Target Groups of Baltic Sea Heritage Tourism. (http://www.bastis-tourism.info/images/3/3b/Agora2_heritage_tragetgroups_BSR.pdf March, 21st 2012).
- Günther, W.; Grimm, B.; Winkler, K. (2007): Sustainable Tourism Development in the Baltic Sea Region – Testing sustainability in tourism projects: Development of the agora Sustainability Check. Kiel.

- Heinze, Th. (2009): Kultursponsoring, Museumsmarketing, Kulturtourismus: Ein Leitfaden für Kulturmanager. Wiesbaden.
- Jokilehto, J. (2005): Definition of Cultural Heritage – References to documents in history. (http://cif.icomos.org/pdf_docs/Documentsonline/Heritagedefinitions.pdf February, 15th 2012).
- Kates, R. W.; Parris T. M. ; Leiserowitz, A. A. (2005) : What is sustainable development ? Goals, Indicators, Values, and Practice. In: Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development 47, (3): 8-21.
- Lauku Celotajs (2011): Military Heritage – Management Guidelines. (http://www.balticgreenbelt.uni-kiel.de/fileadmin/fileexchange/OutcomesDocumentation/Reports/20111101_GuidelinesMilitaryHeritage_LaukuCelotajs.pdf February, 17th 2012).
- Mathieson, A.; Wall, G. (1982): Tourism: Economic, physical and social impacts. London and New York.
- N.I.T. (2007): Sustainability Check – Implementation Manual. (http://www.yepat.uni-greifswald.de/agora/fileadmin/agoradaten/WP22/Agora_Sustainability_Check_-_Implementation_Manual-1.pdf. January, 15th 2012).
- Steinecke, A. (2007): Kulturtourismus – Marktstrukturen, Fallstudien, Perspektiven. München.
- Terry, A.; Ullrich, K.; Riecken, U. (2006): The Green Belt of Europe: From Vision to Reality. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- Timothy, D.J.; Boyd, St. W. (2003): Heritage Tourism. London.
- Bowes, R.G. (1989): Tourism and heritage: a new approach to the product. In: Recreation and Research Review. 14:4: 35-40.
- Timothy, D.J.; Nyaupane, G.P. (2009): Cultural Heritage and tourism in the developing world: A regional perspective. New York.
- Tilbury, D. (1995): Environmental Education for Sustainability: defining the new focus of environmental education in the 1990s, Environmental Education Research, 1:2: 195-212
- UNEP (2005): Making Tourism more Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers. Paris.
- UNESCO (1972): Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Paris.
- UNESCO (2003): Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris.
- WCED (1987): Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. Annex to document A/42/427: Development and International Co-operation: Environment. 8<http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>: January, 16th 2012).
- Williams, St. (2009): Tourism Geography: A new Synthesis. New York.
- Wrbka (2009): The European Green Belt. Borders.Wilderness. Future. Linz

Address

Andreas Sterzel
 University of Kiel
 Feldstraße 67
 24105 Kiel, Germany

andreassterzel@gmail.com