

International Wadden Sea School" Inspires Future Generations for Cross-border Protection

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On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation, a new project has been launched that takes the idea of a joint protected area into the future generation of decision makers: The International Wadden Sea School - a trilateral learning experience for young people from The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

For 25 years, The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark have been working together in protecting and sustainably developing the Wadden Sea region. Politicians, conservationists and other stakeholders have increasingly understood the Wadden Sea as a shared nature area and promoted a cross-border management. Numerous facilities for public information and environmental education inform locals and visitors about the value and vulnerability of the Wadden Sea and provide first-hand experiences in nature. But still, the international dimension of the Wadden Sea and the idea of a joint protected area are generally rather little recognised. This awareness, however, is a vital basis for the successful protection of the Wadden Sea as an entity, today and in the future.

Against this background, the Trilateral Cooperation and Nature NGO's have set up an educational pilot project that addresses the coming generation: The International Wadden Sea School (IWSS). In order to enhance the awareness among young people of the Wadden Sea as a shared natural heritage and to create an understanding for the need to protect and sustainably manage the Wadden Sea region as a whole, the IWSS provides an international learning experience for the decision makers of tomorrow.

Built up as a network of environmental education centres along the coast and on the islands, the IWSS offers middle school classes from the Wadden Sea countries the chance to visit the Wadden Sea area of another country where they

take part in a special educational programme. For example, a Dutch class comes to Hallig Hooge in Germany, Danish classes visit Texel in The Netherlands and German groups travel to Rømø in Denmark. At the individual sites, the participating pupils not only learn about nature in the Wadden Sea, but also get insight into different socio-cultural backgrounds, various approaches to conservation and the sustainable development of the



(Photo: Schutzstation
Wattenmeer)

international Wadden Sea region. Activities that focus on intercultural learning and stimulate international communication complete the courses.

The three columns "network", "exchange forum" and "educational programme" principally constitute the IWSS, with the network of educational facilities in the four Wadden Sea regions Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony and The Netherlands being the framework of the project. The variety of centres offers an attractive choice of destinations for class trips and ensures a true international "Wadden experience". The different partners cooperate in establishing and running the IWSS and gain besides an international programme also an increased international exchange of experiences and ideas.

The exchange of school classes within the international Wadden Sea area is the actual purpose of the IWSS. The central tool is a platform that facilitates class trips from any of the Wad-



(Photo: WWF)

den Sea countries to any other country's Wadden Sea region by providing easy access to the individual courses. The various centres set up flat-rate offers including board and lodging, local transport and the IWSS-programme, that can be easily booked from abroad.

The educational basis of the IWSS courses is a common curriculum that the different partners jointly develop. Especially designed for international school classes, this programme focuses above all on trilateral region building and raising the "Wadden awareness". A strong emphasis is put on the experience of nature and wilderness as an essential step towards positive feelings and an increased awareness for the Wadden Sea. Besides activities that aim at awareness raising and/or convey biological and ecological aspects, the curriculum also takes account of various for the protection of the Wadden Sea relevant social, cultural and economical features of the individual sites and regions.

As the IWSS has just started as a pilot project, some aspects of the concept are still visions and many questions concerning the practice have not been answered yet. During the two-year pilot phase, made possible by the ideational contributions of many people and the financial support of the Trilateral Cooperation as well as the Schleswig-Holstein lottery "BINGO!", the present concept will be tested and continuously revised. Furthermore, questions regarding the continuation of the IWSS beyond the pilot phase will be dealt with, i.e. how cooperation and exchange between the partners can be promoted and coordinated most efficiently, whether and where to take up and involve existing programmes like Eco Schools and the BLK-Programme "21" and how to fund the long-term IWSS. At the end of these two years rich in experiments and experience shall stand a sound concept if and how the IWSS can serve as a long-term programme of the Trilateral Cooperation.

Right now, though, the IWSS is in the middle of the start-up phase, preparing and looking forward to the first international class trips next spring.

For more information about the IWSS and offers for class trips in 2004 please contact

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The IWSS-network of environmental education centers is still "under construction". Up to now, 7 facilities take part.

