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To foster the involvement of the young generation for the protection and the outlook of our Wadden Sea World Heritage Germany initiated a Youth Conference in advance of the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference, with the intention of bringing together 60 young people from the three Wadden Sea states. The conference will take place in Sankt-Peter-Ording from the 1-4 September 2022 and will address the future perspectives of the Wadden Sea with a wide range of topics and a programme developed and designed under inclusion of the participants themselves.

Based on the positive experiences made in Germany a complementary idea to support the engagement of young people is to create a “Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage”. In order to assess the practical feasibility of such an idea and to be able to form an appropriate basis for an adequate exchange, a feasibility study of a transnational Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World heritage has been commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection.

The German delegation hereby submits the study to the WSB for information and offers to present the concept and the proposals at a separate meeting and to discuss it with the authors.

Proposal: The WSB is invited to take note of the feasibility study.

Study

on the Feasibility of a

Trilateral Volunteer Service
Wadden Sea World Heritage

By
Dr. Jens Kreuter and Rainer Borcharding

Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)

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A. Introduction

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadden Sea¹ which includes parts of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, is not only an area of global conservation value, but also a unique working field and learning opportunity in environmental education². Conservation volunteers, especially young volunteers, always take on (at least) two roles: They contribute their time, passion and creativity to support the work of the many organizations active to protect the Wadden Sea, including, but not limited to the more than 60 Visitor Centers³. And at the same time they learn themselves, they receive many impulses for their knowledge and their personal development. Within the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation⁴, the Germany therefore submitted the idea of a new Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage.

This Study, which has been commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)

- will look into a possible concept for such a volunteer service,
- will elucidate the existing framework in and between the three partner countries of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation including aspects of the legal setting, (social) insurance and financing and
- will develop suggestions for the implementation of a trilateral volunteer service.

A volunteer service is always done in a concrete place of assignment like a visitor center. Here, the participants receive their tasks, they have a boss and

¹ For comprehensive information see <https://www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/one-wadden-sea-one-global-heritage>.

² A formal educational network exists under the name „International Wadden Sea School“, <http://www.iwss.org/home>.

³ For more information on the Visitor Centers see <http://www.iwss.org/visit>.

⁴ For comprehensive information on the Cooperation see <https://www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/trilateral-wadden-sea-cooperation>.

colleagues and here all formalities are being taken care of. Once again, it needs to be stressed that every person is free to volunteer - or, for that matter: to do anything - anywhere anytime within or outside of formal structures. Therefore, it is possible to agree on an “unregulated” volunteer service as long as certain labor laws and social security regulations are observed. For such an unregulated volunteer service, no further framework would be needed. However, especially with regard to social security, but also with regard to financial questions including funding, it is very rare that such an unregulated volunteer service is agreed upon between volunteer and place of assignment. This study therefore focusses not primarily on the actual activities of the participants nor on the - absolutely substantial - efforts of the places of assignments and all the people working there and supporting the volunteers, but elaborates on the legal and financial framework to make the volunteer service possible. As important as this framework is, it is only a means to an end. Each individual volunteer service is an undertaking in the prime responsibility of the volunteer and the place of assignment, in most cases the latter being part of civil society. The legal and financial regulations analyzed and discussed in this study have their sole purpose in supporting this.

B. Definitions: What is meant by “Volunteer Service”?

A volunteer service (in German: “Freiwilligendienst”) is a specific form of volunteering. There are several elements which can usually be found in a volunteer service, but not in general volunteering: a formal commitment of the volunteer, a set beginning and end of the Service and overall a formal setting. But none of these elements defines a volunteer service and none of them is obligatory in a volunteer service. The decisive characteristic is that a volunteer service gives a focus to a certain period in the life of the volunteer and characterizes this period. General volunteering can be performed besides

studying at a university, while being employed or after retirement⁵, but a volunteer service is always the focal activity during a set time. The German laws governing the different volunteer services have a common definition, which in general calls for a Service “comparable to a full-time occupation”⁶. Working hours can only be reduced timewise under very specific conditions, but must always comprise “more than 20 hours a week”⁷. This decisive factor has certain consequences:

- volunteer services should not be performed for a person's life, hence the duration of the volunteer service must be limited. Traditionally, most participants in volunteer services are young people who use a “gap year” between the end of secondary school and the beginning of University or professional training. Therefore, twelve months is the average length of a volunteer service. To offer flexibility, the duration of the service should be set to between six and eighteen months.
- Social security including health insurance must be guaranteed during the volunteer service and must be legally connected to it. The volunteer service becomes therefore a distinct legal status such as “student” or “employee”.
- To distinguish the status of the full-time volunteer from the status of “employee”, a line must be drawn between the two. As this line can not be the activity hours, it can only be payment. A person in the volunteer service is there without a salary. But at the same time it must be possible to provide the participant in the volunteer service with protective clothing or a uniform, with free food and free housing and also with some pocket money. As of course a high pocket money (plus a free ticket for public transport and other allowances) is a sign of appreciation, it can become difficult to draw a clear line between the

⁵ Cf. <https://nationalparkvadehavet.dk/udvikling-og-samarbejde/frivillig-i-nationalparken/>, <https://www.facebook.com/nationalparkfrivillig/>.

⁶ §2 (1) sentence 1 Nr. 2 a) JFDG and §2 Nr. 2 a) BFDG.

⁷ §2 (1) sentence 1 Nr. 2 b) JFDG; §2 Nr. 2 b) BFDG.

volunteer service and regular employment, especially if the latter includes regular training for employment. In the German framework, a limit is set by law for the pocket money.⁸ This limit is attached to certain parameters of the social security system and amounts to 426 Euro per month in 2021. If free clothing, free meals and free housing are added to this, the line between the volunteer service and regular work, especially vocational training, can become thin in practice, but must be clear in principle.

Many stakeholders in the German volunteer service framework argue politically for more appreciation for the volunteers and call (amongst other things) for free public transport and other benefits. Here a difficult decision has to be made between showing appreciation to persons in the volunteer service on the one hand and distinguishing clearly between employees (with a right to payment) and volunteers (having a right to appreciation and often claiming to “do something good”) on the other hand.

In the international context discussed here, it is suggested to define that someone doing a volunteer service is someone who receives a pocket money and other benefits, which amount in the sum of their monetary values to less than 50% of the full-time salary of the lowest paid employee in the same place of assignment.

- For the reasons stated above, special care should be taken to avoid - as much as possible - speaking about the “work” of someone in the volunteer service or of that person “working”. Instead, they are “volunteering” and doing “volunteer activities”.
- As a volunteer service can not be performed parallel to full time schooling the minimum age for the volunteer service must be set after the completion of mandatory schooling. Sometimes, places of assignments or their agencies prefer participants who are legally not

⁸ §2 (1) sentence 2 JFDG; §2 Nr. 4 a) BFDG.

minors any more. This should not be part of the definition of a participant of the volunteer service and such an attitude should be strongly discouraged. As many thousands of young people participate in High School exchange programs at the age of 15 or 16 all over the world with no apparent legal problems or risks, there is no reason why a volunteer service, even in an international context, should not be possible for minors as well.

- Another decision is necessary regarding a possible maximum age for the participants in the volunteer service. When the Bundesfreiwilligendienst was introduced in Germany at the end of the military draft and the alternative civil service for conscientious objectors which was attached to the draft, the new volunteer service was opened to persons of all ages. While there have been many thousand participants of all age groups in the ten years of its existence, one factor has become rather clear: It almost always needs a special occasion for someone who has started his or her professional career to interrupt this, do something completely different for a year and live on a very low pocket money - compared to the persons previous salary. One of those special occasions can be unemployment. For other occasions like retirement, society provides traditions and expectations other than full-time volunteering. At any rate, many places of assignment report that persons after a partial of accomplished professional career need on average more attention and provide more "surprises" than young people. Somewhat typical or stereotype examples of such surprises are persons in the age group of 55+ who sometimes have earned enough money for early retirement or are retiring regularly and who are highly motivated to volunteer. At the same time, many of them have obligations towards their extended family, have a house, a flat or a pet that need attention. Quite often these persons retreat from their volunteer service at short notice because a grandchild is born or because they can not afford to let their

apartment stay empty and do not feel comfortable to rent it for a year to a stranger. In cases where several volunteers work and live together in small places like nature centers on islands, which is a regular situation in the Wadden Sea, age differences of more than ten years within teams tend to cause various conflicts in daily life, especially with household habits.

C. Key Stakeholders

1. Youth

Regardless of the current situation, attitude and outlook of young people in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark it can be stated that the number of possibly interested young people is sufficient to start a pilot for a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage with one year of volunteering. In Germany, approximately 100.000 persons start a volunteer service each year and the number of applications for an ecological volunteer service exceeds the number of places by far. Detailed analysis of the target groups and their motivation can be found in the combined evaluation of the Bundesfreiwilligendienst and the Jugendfreiwilligendienste⁹ from 2015.

While similar data is not available for the Netherlands and Denmark, in both countries a considerable number of young people take a gap year between secondary school and further education or training. In Denmark it is usual to visit courses and seminars of several weeks or months in specialised “Højskoler”. Dutch young adults often travel abroad. There is a consensus among interviewed dutch and danish Wadden Sea environmental staff that at least a few young adults would be interested in a volunteer service in the Wadden Sea if that would be offered. The main challenge would be how to publish this new opportunity and make it known to the young people. In

⁹ Abschlussbericht der gemeinsamen Evaluation des Gesetzes über den Bundesfreiwilligendienst (BFDG) und des Gesetzes zur Förderung von Jugendfreiwilligendiensten (JFDG), 2015.

countries where the whole concept of a formal volunteer service is not known and where there is no such tradition, the main challenge seems to be to communicate the idea to the target group, to school teachers and other multipliers and possibly to parents.

As for the motivation of young people starting a volunteer service in Germany¹⁰, the wish to do something meaningful in the time between school and university and the wish to develop and to grow on a personal level, are the two most important factors. It is obvious that both aspects need a competent pedagogical support as well as time and space to reflect on what is “meaningful” and how one is developing.

It must also be noted that there is a certain tension between the wish to do something meaningful and the actual possibilities of a volunteer service and the competences of young people who in general have just completed secondary school. At least in the German experience, High School graduates quite often overestimate their competences when it comes to actually doing something in a place of assignment. Having completed their schooling, some tend to oversee that this has been a highly theoretical education not training them for all the other aspects of any activity. Especially in international volunteer services, young volunteers from Germany often think they can teach an English class on their own in a school somewhere in an African country. They need to be reminded how much training is required in Germany between finishing school and being allowed in front of a class as a teacher. The necessity to reflect on this tension is a main reason for a qualified pedagogical support and for regular seminars during a volunteer service.

2. Places of Assignment and their Agencies

The above mentioned tension between the motivation and self-perception of the volunteers on one side and their practical competences on the other side

¹⁰ See Abschlussbericht der gemeinsamen Evaluation des Gesetzes über den Bundesfreiwilligendienst (BFDG) und des Gesetzes zur Förderung von Jugendfreiwilligendiensten (JFDG), 2015, p. 87ff.

is mirrored by specific needs of the places of assignment. The places of assignment, always being non-profit, are interested in and often depend on very practical help. At the same time they would like to have intelligent, energetic, open-minded, creative participants of a volunteer service who obviously are not primarily interested in manual, sometimes dull tasks behind the scenes.

This tension is somewhat dissolved when the place of assignment has taken on a broader view, seeing the participants of a volunteer service beyond their time during the service. If volunteers identify with their place of assignment, they will talk about their good time there for many years, carrying the message both of the organisation and of its goals (like protecting the Wadden Sea) back to their home-towns, into universities and future work contexts. With this in mind, many places of assignment have learned that it is in their very interest to offer an attractive, interesting and activating volunteer service. The added value of a volunteer service is not limited to the actual things a participant is doing during the time of the service, but it goes far beyond: to gaining new members and volunteers, to raising awareness and making friends for a long time.

The agencies of the places of assignment - often regional or national organisations of which the place of assignment is a member - can and most often do play a vital role in helping the place of assignment to reflect on these aspects, on its own different perspectives on and interests in a volunteer service and on its multiple levels of relationship with the participants. While there is a clear need of good and comprehensive pedagogical support of the volunteers, which is almost always carried out by the agencies, one could say that in a certain way there is also the need of a good pedagogical support of the place of assignment, for which a volunteer service almost always will also be a year of challenges and learning.

3. General Public

The general Public should also be considered a stakeholder of any volunteer service, not only because it is good for society when individual members like the young participants have good experiences and when non-profit organisations carry out good work, but also because the general public must take interest both in the future of the topics the non-profit organisations are focussing on and in the development of young people.

Topics which are open for non-profit activities are considered to be of value to the society as a whole - like preserving the Wadden Sea. It must be therefore in the interest of the society that these topics stay high in public awareness and that there will be as many people as possible in the future who become active in these fields. A maximum identification with charitable tasks can be reached by an insight view of the exigent work as volunteers experience it. Especially in areas which have become quite professionalised - like many social services - one of the most important things is to keep them known to as many people as possible. One can only appreciate what is being done every day in a home for severely handicapped people when one has been there and experienced the challenges for and efforts by the staff. As very few people know what is done every day by professionals and volunteers to protect the Wadden Sea, this awareness-raising for the efforts of those already on the ground can be one of the benefits of a volunteer service. Volunteers of a volunteer service can be very important links and multipliers to the general public, connecting the professionalised world of their place of assignment to their friends and families.

On a completely different note, the general public and society as a whole must have an interest in how young people are being educated to grow into their role in society. Of course society takes a great interest in what is going on in schools and how well universities are doing. However, there is a danger of focussing too much on economic and job-related aspects. Besides the wish to raise young people who will be able to find their place in economy and who

will work well and highly skilled, it is also important to look beyond, to other aspects in a society besides labor-skills. The general public depends very much on its members being able to communicate with each other, so settle conflicts peacefully, to be open-minded and creative, to be sensitive towards the needs of others and solidaric with those who are less privileged - and many other aspects of developing a social and positive personality. These aspects need to be taught and learned. Of course there are many ways for this, but certainly a very good one for a young person is doing a volunteer service, leaving his or her comfort-zone, thinking outside the box, experiencing realities unknown so far and meeting people whom he or she would never have met otherwise. This manifold mixture of stimuli and challenges enhances social competences of young (and older) volunteers. The general public therefore does (or should at least) have a strong interest in young people doing something in the non-profit area for a time of their life, like it is being done in volunteer services. And the settings and conditions of the volunteer service should be arranged in a way that the experience becomes a good one benefiting the individual volunteer and his or her future role in society.

D. Current Situation

1. Overview

While all three Member States of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation take part in the European Solidarity Corps¹¹, the situation within the states, both regarding national and international volunteer services, is very different.

It is important to note that in all three member states there is a general freedom of action and movements. Therefore, everybody is free to volunteer their time with no limits or restrictions, both nationally and internationally. As part of the freedom of movement within the European Union, every citizen of every member state has the right to travel to any other member state and

¹¹ See below.

volunteer there. Restrictions might result from European or national laws which are aimed at protecting the rights and the social security of working persons and which could entail certain consequences - like a mandatory membership in the social security system, a minimum wage or a financial backup-deposit for the time of stay. While volunteering up to full-time is legal and unrestricted in all member states, it is still very advisable to check the national legal framework carefully beforehand. Otherwise e.g. a permanent employment-contract at minimum wage might be initiated without the volunteer or the place of assignment wanting this.

At the same time, as a volunteer service is by definition the main occupation during a certain time, the participant normally can not be covered by any other regulation, framework or insurance. Since there needs to be clarity about the legal framework regarding maximum hours of activity and other protections and most importantly regarding social security including health insurance it is very advisable (if not mandatory) to attach a volunteer service to a given (or new) set of rules, preferably an existing system.

More than 70 years of volunteer services in Germany have shown that sooner or later there will be participants with very special circumstances which can be very seriously influenced by the legal status of a volunteer service. For example, the widow of a German public employee receives considerable benefits for herself and her child as long as the child is in education, including university education. Once the child finalizes education and starts working, those allowances drop for the child's part. As a participant of a volunteer service can not live on the pocket money alone, but usually either continues to live at home or needs support from the family it would be impossible for such a child of a widow of a public employee to participate in a volunteer service if it was not considered "education" by law - which it is in Germany. It should not be underestimated how important these general legal aspects are and how difficult it can be to clarify all aspects and scenarios.

a) The Netherlands

In the Netherlands there is at present nothing like a formal volunteer service.¹² After finishing secondary school some young people decide to travel for a year or to volunteer abroad, but many join university or work straight away. Interestingly, when the military draft was suspended in the Netherlands in 1997, the alternative services which were open to conscientious objectors and the tradition of serving for one year in an organised framework stopped completely.

On the island of Ameland there is one volunteer place at the Natuurcentrum offered by a German agency for international volunteer services (Freunde der Erziehungskunst)¹³.

For the introduction of a formal volunteer service in the Netherlands and for young people from the Netherlands, there is no legal system which could be easily adopted or built upon. However, in the liberal tradition of the Netherlands it is presumably not necessary to have a comprehensive legal system before starting. Looking at labour law questions a bit more laid-back than Danish society¹⁴, it would probably be possible to start a full-time, year-long volunteer service without running into tremendous legal problems. Admittedly if a trade union would raise the issue of participants in a volunteer service “working” without payment and therefore being exploited, it would be hard to predict the course of events. However, it is our understanding that in the tradition of the Netherlands an escalation leading to serious problems is unlikely, but this is uncharted territory.

b) Germany

In the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), the first call to volunteer full time for one year (“Give a Year!”) was issued by a diaconical organisation

¹² Message from Frank Belt to Jens Kreuter, Nov. 1, 2021; Interview with Jan Willem Zwart Dec. 3, 2021.

¹³ https://karte.freunde-waldorf.de/?_ga=2.143424700.845551305.1644267165-1116021637.1644267165.

¹⁴ See below.

of the Lutheran Church in 1954¹⁵. Since 1964, a federal law provides the legal framework. Since then the number of different programs and the legal provisions on different levels have grown considerably and the situation has become somewhat complex and not easy to understand for people who are interested in participating in a volunteer service in general. On the other hand, for persons who know very well what they want the legal framework provides very well fitting solutions for social¹⁶ and ecological¹⁷ volunteer services, for national¹⁸ and international¹⁹, for more regulated (and better financed)²⁰ and less regulated (and less financed)²¹ services as well as for national²² and more regional programs²³. Besides the European Solidarity Corps, which is of course available in Germany as well there are many different and comparably small programs outside this legal framework, most of them international.

The most important legal provision for both national and international volunteer services in Germany is rather hidden. In the law governing the Income Tax there is a definition of “child” for the purposes of calculating the Income Tax. Under certain conditions a person who is older than 18 years is still considered a “child”, usually lowering the income-tax burden of the parents. One of those conditions is the participation in a volunteer service.

¹⁵ <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/aktuelles/alle-meldungen/50-jahre-freiwilliges-soziales-jahr-97598>.

¹⁶ E.g. §3 JFDG.

¹⁷ E.g. §4 JFDG.

¹⁸ E.g. §5 JFDG; BFDG.

¹⁹ E.g. §6 JFDG; IJFD (<https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/engagement-und-gesellschaft/freiwilligendienste/jugendfreiwilligendienste/internationaler-jugendfreiwilligendienst>), weltwärts (<https://www.weltwaerts.de/de/startseite.html>).

²⁰ E.g. weltwärts (see footnote above).

²¹ E.g. IJFD (see footnote above).

²² E.g. BFDG.

²³ E.g. JFDG.

§32 (4) Sentence 1 Nr. 2 e) EStG²⁴ lists the eligible volunteer services.²⁵ The list currently includes eight different volunteer services and is the central reference point for other legal provisions. It would be sufficient to change the list in the EStG if there was a new volunteer service and automatically all provisions linked to this list would cover the new situation.

At the same time, it is important to note that deliberate decisions have been made regarding the social security systems. While all publicly regulated national and some international²⁶ volunteer services automatically include the participant in a comprehensive system of social security²⁷, most international volunteer services do not include the participant in the full German social security system (as a German health insurance is rather expensive and of little use for someone who is volunteering in South America). Instead a comprehensive private international insurance²⁸ is required. However the situation for a Trilateral Volunteer Service within the EU would need specific consideration.

c) Denmark²⁹

In Denmark there is a tradition for most young people to take a gap year or even two or three before continuing in the education system. There are different options for young people to spend the gap year(s), but nothing is decided by law and most full-time volunteer services are done outside Denmark through programmes coordinated by various organizations. Many

²⁴ Einkommensteuergesetz - Federal Income Tax Law.

²⁵ <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/estg/>.

²⁶ Kulturweit, the international Volunteer Service of the Federal Foreign Office, is legally a FSJ as regulated in the JFDG (<https://www.kulturweit.de/programm/leistungen>).

²⁷ Listed point by point in §9 JFDG and referred to in §13 BFDG.

²⁸ E.g. II.5 of the Richtlinie zur Umsetzung des „Internationalen Jugendfreiwilligendienstes“, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/96666/5ffc360fed7c4a1185e16b8a622ecf59/richtlinie-internationaler-jugendfreiwilligendienst-data.pdf>.

²⁹ Information provided by Lisbet Østergaard of Dansk ICYE, mails to Jens Kreuter dated Nov. 1, 2021 and Nov. 2, 2021; Interviews with Anne Husum Marboe, Dec. 2, 2021 and Anne Marie Ludvigsen on Dec. 7, 2021.

young people attend voluntary Folk High School (“Højskole”) for some months during this time.

There is no governmental project like a formal volunteer service.

Persons legally residing in Denmark are always covered by the public health insurance, as long as they live in Denmark, no matter if they work, study, attend Højskole or are unemployed. This does also include incoming volunteers as soon as they hold their resident permit and cpr number (social security number). Newly a deposit of 6300 DKK (840 €) has to be proven upon arrival.

What is more important is that there is no tradition of a volunteer service in Denmark. Volunteering for a few hours a week or a few days a year is common, but the concept of volunteering full-time for several months is in danger of conflicting with the strong danish understanding of labor rights. It might be misunderstood as “working without payment” which would create severe problems. So far, the few german participants of the german FÖJ stationed in Denmark have not experienced this particular problem, but when thinking about a new, more visible program offered to young danes as well, it must be kept in mind that it will be necessary to move slowly and carefully.

The closest there is in Denmark to a volunteer services are programes specifically designed to help young people with special challenges to find their way in society and especially on the labour market. Those programs are often supported by foundations³⁰. Up to today the german volunteer services are legally part of the public social system fostering disadvantaged young people³¹. The work of these foundations is clearly focused on something different than a trilateral volunteer service which is open to everyone.

³⁰ E.g. Den Sociale Udviklingsfond (<https://suf.dk/>) or THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS (<https://veluxfoundations.dk/da/content/sociale-indsatser>).

³¹ This is the official legal reason for Federal Co-Funding of the Volunteer Services in Germany.

2. Existing national Volunteer Services

a) The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there is nothing like a formal volunteer service.³²

b) Germany

In Germany, there are two laws governing practically all national volunteer services: the Jugendfreiwilligendienstgesetz (Federal Law on Youth Volunteer Services) and the Bundesfreiwilligendienstgesetz (Federal Law on the Federal Volunteer Service). Both regulations are very similar and in many aspects identical. The biggest practical difference is that the Bundesfreiwilligendienst (Federal Volunteer Service) (BFD) has no upper age limit while in the Youth Volunteer Services only young people up to the age of 27 years may participate. For the places of assignment and their agencies, the biggest difference is that the BFD is considerably better funded and that there is a bit more governmental control.

aa) FSJ and FÖJ

Regarding the “Voluntary Social Service Year”³³ (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr, FSJ) and the „Voluntary Ecological Service Year”³⁴ (Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr, FÖJ) there is a comprehensive information flyer in English available on the internet.³⁵ The regulations are very similar in the two programs, therefore only the FÖJ which is far more relevant for a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage shall be explored here.

The FÖJ is open for young people after finishing school until their 27th birthday. It usually lasts one year and is accessible for young people from everywhere in the world.

³² See above, D. 1. Overview.

³³ Official english name used by the german government, see <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/118156/9c4eec5e09d460fca88997226598f95b/jugendfreiwilligendienste-englisch-flyer-data.pdf>.

³⁴ See footnote above.

³⁵

<https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/118156/9c4eec5e09d460fca88997226598f95b/jugendfreiwilligendienste-englisch-flyer-data.pdf>.

As a rule without exception, every FÖJ is organised by an agency (Träger).³⁶ These agencies must be approved by the relevant authority of one of Germany's 16 states. In Schleswig-Holstein there are presently two FÖJ-agencies³⁷: The Ev.-Lutheran Church in Northern Germany³⁸ and a "Trägergemeinschaft", a cooperative agency for the FÖJ in the National Park Wadden Sea in Schleswig-Holstein³⁹ which includes WWF Germany, NABU Schleswig-Holstein, Seehundstation Friedrichskoog gGmbH, Schutzstation Wattenmeer e.V. and Naturschutzgemeinschaft Sylt e.V.

In Niedersachsen, only one agency is approved. It is the Alfred Töpfer Akademie für Naturschutz⁴⁰.

In Hamburg the FÖJ is organized by a government agency, the Behörde für Umwelt, Klima, Energie und Agrarwirtschaft (BUKEA)⁴¹.

There is no formal rule that an agency may only offer places of assignment within the territory of the Federal State which has approved it (quite to the contrary: many agencies offer places abroad), but it would certainly be considered inappropriate if an agency approved by one Federal State would start to become active on the territory of another Federal State without prior approval. An existing exception is the island of Helgoland where FÖJ-volunteers from Niedersachsen (Vogelwarte Helgoland), Hamburg (Alfred Wegener Institut) and Schleswig-Holstein (Verein Jordsand) work side by side since many years. Anyway, for a cooperation with a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage only the agencies mentioned above should be considered.

³⁶ §1 (1) sentence 2 JFDG.

³⁷ <https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Fachinhalte/F/freiwilligendienste/foej.html>.

³⁸ <https://oeko-jahr.de/>.

³⁹ <https://www.umweltjahr.de/willkommen>.

⁴⁰ <https://www.nna.niedersachsen.de/startseite/foj/>.

⁴¹ <https://www.hamburg.de/foej>.

The FÖJ gets additional funding from the federal states (Bundesländer), in each state with slightly different regulations and funding levels. Especially differences in pocket money for the volunteers and in fees for the places of assignment should be considered and balanced in a trilateral volunteer service. A political aspect to be taken into account in a new international volunteer service might be that money granted from individual states is often expected to be spent inside or for inhabitants of this particular state. Only Schleswig-Holstein has a commitment that 10 % of its funded FÖJ-places may be abroad.

There is a mandatory pedagogical support in the FÖJ. It includes not only 25 days of seminars within a twelve months service, but also support in and for the place of assignment. The agency signs the formal agreements with the participant and provides for the support. In the understanding of all parties involved, especially the agencies and their head organisations, this very specific legal construction is necessary to guarantee that there is no pressure from the places of assignment upon the participants to “work” harder and to ensure that the aspect of learning and personal development remains in the centre of the whole volunteer service.

By law there is no limit to the number of volunteers any agency may accept. However the government funding of the FÖJ which is in the three northern states relevant here always a combined federal and a state funding, is limited. As there is little chance for additional funding, this leads de-facto to a very strict limitation of places in the FÖJ.

bb) Bundesfreiwilligendienst

The historic reason for the existence of another volunteer service besides the FSJ/FÖJ is the end of the military draft in 2011. When it became apparent that the draft and with it the alternative civil service for conscientious objectors to the draft (“Zivildienst”) would end at very short notice, the federal government wanted to transfer as much of the structure and the funding of the Zivildienst into a future where there would be only volunteer services. It feared that the structures and procedures of the existing FSJ and FÖJ would

not be able to handle this transition in the given time. This decision for this parallel structure was extremely controversial at that time. Surprisingly there have been no attempts since then to merge the two systems. In the end, the transfer from the Zivildienst to the new Bundesfreiwilligendienst (BFD) was highly successful. There are around 100.000 participants in all German volunteer services every year (approximately 1/8 of each year-group) and stable budget-lines.

The BFD which can also be done in the ecological sector has two main differences to the FSJ/FÖJ: It is open to people of all ages (after finishing school) and it is organised differently. In the BFD, the places of assignment are approved by a federal agency, the BAFzA⁴². It is the decision of the places of assignment whether they want to work together with an agency or not.

Like the FSJ and FÖJ the BFD is open to participants from all over the world.

As a federal funding comes with every BFD-agreement and as the funds are of course limited, the number of places in the BFD is limited. There is an exception to this, however, if all parties involved do not want or need this federal co-funding. This is done regularly within the framework of weltwärts incoming (see below).

cc) Unregulated Volunteer Services

It is possible to volunteer even full-time in Germany without any formal arrangement and without any official program. However, as in Germany not every person is automatically part of the social security system and insurances this is in general connected to a certain status like "student" or "employee", care has to be taken that the person volunteering is covered by the necessary insurance. At the same time, as laws protecting the rights of employees are quite strong, care has to be taken that the volunteering is not being considered an employment by law. In practice, unregulated volunteering for more than 20 hours a week takes place and is only advisable when the

⁴² Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben (Federal Agency for Family and Civil Society-Affairs, <https://www.bafza.de/>).

volunteer is retired. As a retiree or pensioner the person has a status which guarantees full social security and the person is free to do whatever he or she wants for however long he or she wants without risking any involuntary start of an employment. This kind of volunteer service is not very common as many retirees value very highly that they are free from any obligations and that they can for example help their children and grandchildren at very short notice. Many of them volunteer, but only few are willing to do this in a regular, binding and full-time obligation.

c) Denmark

There is no formal volunteer service in Denmark.⁴³

3. Existing international Volunteer Services

a) The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there is nothing like a formal volunteer service⁴⁴ outside the European Solidarity Corps.

b) Germany

aa) FÖJ abroad

The FÖJ can be done both within Germany and abroad. Some specific rules apply to a FÖJ abroad like a mandatory seminar in Germany after return.⁴⁵ It would be rather uncommon but by no means prohibited to have a young person from the Netherlands participate in a (german) FÖJ which is mainly taking place in a place of assignment in Denmark.

So far, the FÖJ is not used very widely for international volunteer services, mainly because it comes with a mandatory integration into the german social system including the payment of the insurance premiums. Only Schleswig-Holstein traditionally offers a few FÖJ-places abroad, some of them in the danish Wadden Sea. The IJFD (see below) offers a very comparable framework

⁴³ See above, D. 1. Overview.

⁴⁴ See above, D. 1. Overview.

⁴⁵ §6 (2) sentence 5 and 6.

but without this mandatory German social insurance. There are three reasons why the FÖJ is used in spite of this:

- **Branding:** If it is really important to the agency to offer only an FÖJ, it might be willing to accept the additional cost. However, as the whole system of different volunteer services in Germany can be somewhat confusing anyhow, there might well be agencies who would offer a “FÖJ abroad” which strictly speaking would be an IJFD. It is very unlikely that such a (wrong) branding would cause any problems as long as the specific rules, especially regarding social security are followed and are made transparent for the participant.
- **Funding:** Especially when the funding by the federal state for an FÖJ is rather high, it might make sense to take this funding in spite of the restrictions of the FÖJ. Very roughly, the costs of the social insurances for a participant in a FÖJ will be around 200 Euro per month. Therefore, if the funding for a FÖJ is more than 200 Euro higher than the funding for an IJFD - or for any other volunteer service - it will make sense financially to go with the FÖJ.
- **International, but regional:** If the FÖJ abroad is done in a neighbouring country, it might be feasible to keep the German volunteer in the German social security system. Quite likely, he or she will prefer to travel a few kilometers across the border to go to the dentist or for regular checkups. Medical costs in the host-country will only occur in cases of emergency when they are covered, at least within the EU, by the German insurance anyhow. This might be a very relevant observation for a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, as no Wadden Sea visitor center in Denmark is more than 150 km away from Niebüll in Germany. From the many possible places of assignment on the islands in the Wadden Sea in the Netherlands it is well possible and likely that any participant would be happy with a German health insurance and the possibilities this provides in the Netherlands.

bb) Bundesfreiwilligendienst abroad

There is no legal provision against a BFD abroad, but for the same reason as with the FÖJ, namely the mandatory German social insurance, the relevant government agency is informing the public, that a BFD abroad is generally not possible. Short periods (up to six weeks) of a longer BFD are allowed abroad.⁴⁶ If the BFD would appear to be the best possible legal framework for the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, it would be necessary to negotiate with the BAFzA or the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth which is responsible for the BAFzA. In the past, comparable negotiations between Federal Ministries have been successful⁴⁷, if good reasons were given.

cc) weltwärts⁴⁸

weltwärts is the volunteer service of the German Federal Ministry on Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is rather highly regulated and rather well funded. However, as it is strictly limited to volunteer services in certain partner countries, which must be developing countries according to the OECD-DAC list, it is not relevant for a volunteer service in the Wadden Sea.

dd) Internationaler Jugendfreiwilligendienst (IJFD)⁴⁹

The International Youth Volunteer Service started in 2011 after a participatory process between the Federal Ministry BMFSFJ and the agencies who were already involved in sending young people abroad on a volunteer service. It claims to have learnt from several previous programs and was designed specifically to make volunteer services abroad as easy as possible while ensuring a high quality.

⁴⁶ „Ausland“ at <https://www.bundesfreiwilligendienst.de/bundesfreiwilligendienst/a-bis-z.html>.

⁴⁷ See below on „weltwärts incoming“.

⁴⁸ For more information see <https://www.weltwaerts.de/de/startseite.html>.

⁴⁹ There is a comprehensive information on the IJFD in English at <https://www.ijfd-info.de/?id=37>. The official guideline for the IJFD is also available in an English translation at https://www.ijfd-info.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/IJFD-RL_englisch.pdf.

The IJFD can be done worldwide outside Germany and is open only to young people living in Germany. The funding is with 350 Euro per month considerably lower than with weltwärts, but the rules are significantly easier. Not surprisingly, a majority of IJFD-deployments are within Europe. There is not a maximum number of places or agreements, but a limited funding and therefore a maximum number of subsidised agreements. The agencies are free to offer more IJFD-places to interested young people if they manage to secure the funding without the government subsidy.

The IJFD would be the obvious first and easiest choice for sending German participants abroad for a volunteer service in Denmark or the Netherlands.

ee) Anderer Dienst im Ausland (ADiA)⁵⁰

The ADiA was a possibility for conscientious objectors to the draft to fulfill their obligation to serve in the Zivildienst by participating instead in a volunteer service abroad. A precondition was that the volunteer service was two months longer than the Zivildienst in Germany. This is regulated in §14b of the law governing the Zivildienst⁵¹ and although the draft and with it the Zivildienst have been suspended indefinitely, the law still exists and §14b was specifically pronounced to remain in force⁵².

The ADiA has very low requirements and no public funding. It is basically an offer for those who only need a legal status for their international volunteer service. Numbers have been very low (though not zero), because in the last ten years since the draft, there has been close to a balance between demand and funds in the above mentioned programs, making it therefore financially attractive to go through one of those programs instead of using ADiA.

⁵⁰ <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/engagement-und-gesellschaft/freiwilligendienste/jugendfreiwilligendienste/anderer-dienst-im-ausland/anderer-dienst-im-ausland-adia-96678>.

⁵¹ <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/ersdig/>.

⁵² §5 BFDG.

ff) kulturweit

Kulturweit, the international volunteer service of the Federal Foreign Office, is legally a FSJ as regulated in the JFDG⁵³ but with a separate funding outside any subsidies by the Federal States. So, strictly speaking, it is no distinct program although this is only recognizable by experts. Kulturweit is a good example how the legal framework, the branding and the funding can be coordinated, used or even occupied in creative ways to result in what is needed or wanted.

gg) Unregulated Volunteer Service

For international volunteer services, especially those outside the European Union, it has been a realistic option to do this outside any German program or regulation. Especially for young participants the German social security system does not seem very relevant and a private international health insurance is needed anyway. It is not illegal to just drop out of the German legal and social system for a year and doing so avoids paperwork and bureaucracy. This option is used especially by missionary organisations, who could have difficulties to get themselves or their projects approved by the German government. In all official programs described above there is some form of check that the volunteer service or the project does not offend the host country and does not contradict German interests. As this can be a problem with some missionary activities in some countries, those organisations sometimes choose to offer unregulated volunteer services.

c) Denmark

There is no regulated international volunteer service in Denmark outside the European Solidarity Corps.⁵⁴ There are some organisations that help young Danes to volunteer abroad like Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke⁵⁵, a member of the international network of Action Aid⁵⁶, but their focus is completely on international development and emergency aid with some short-term

⁵³ <https://www.kulturweit.de/programm/leistungen>.

⁵⁴ See above, D. 1. Overview.

⁵⁵ <https://www.ms.dk/en/home>.

⁵⁶ <https://actionaid.org/>.

volunteering opportunities. If one were to start a completely new and independent international outgoing volunteer service from Denmark, it could be worthwhile to link up with those organisations. As this is not the perspective for the envisioned Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, there is by all likelihood no immediate operative support these organisations could give to a trilateral volunteer service.

d) European Union

As the European Solidarity Corps involves outgoing as well as incoming, it will be presented below in the chapter on existing transnational volunteer services.

4. Existing incoming volunteer services

a) The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there is nothing like a formal volunteer service.⁵⁷

b) Germany

Germany welcomes foreigners to enter the country specifically for a volunteer service. There have been small numbers of “incoming” or “south-north”-participants for many years, but since approximately 15 years the discussion has gained momentum. Both the agencies who have been active in this field as well as the government agree that international volunteer services should be a true exchange. There is a certain vision that one day there should be as many incoming participants in Germany as young Germans departing for a volunteer service abroad. This vision has actually been achieved in 2021, when due to the Covid-19-pandemic most countries were still closed for German participants, but Germany was welcoming incoming participants again. At that time, the number of incoming participants has even been higher than the number of outgoing, but of course, this has been a very special situation and everyone has been working towards bringing the number of German outgoing participants up again to pre-Corona levels. In the last full

⁵⁷ See above, D. 1. Overview.

year before the begin of the Covid-19-pandemic, there were 4,586 incoming participants compared to 7,209 outgoing participants.⁵⁸ German embassies are mandated to grant Visa to international participants. Still there are reports of occasional individual visa problems with certain countries or with individual german immigration agencies.

aa) FÖJ

There are no restrictions and no special provisions for international or incoming participants in a FÖJ. Any mandated agency is free to give a (subsidized) place to an incoming volunteer. In 2019, a total of ten international participants were noted in the FÖJ⁵⁹ and were hosted by four different agencies⁶⁰. In the same year, 1,379 incoming participants were counted in the FSJ⁶¹, who were hosted by 55 agencies⁶².

bb) Bundesfreiwilligendienst

As for the FÖJ, the BFD is open for incoming participants without restrictions (except the general limits of budgets and subsidies). In 2019, 1,491 international participants were counted⁶³.

cc) weltwärts⁶⁴

The incoming-component of weltwärts is legally a BFD, although it is quite strongly advertised as part of the weltwärts program. The most important factor which allows weltwärts to be listed separately and its 709 participants in 2019⁶⁵ to be counted separately is that weltwärts south-north is operated completely outside of the general funding of the BFD. Therefore, the usual

⁵⁸ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 16.

⁵⁹ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 18.

⁶⁰ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 20.

⁶¹ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 18.

⁶² AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 20.

⁶³ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 18.

⁶⁴ For information on weltwärts South-North in english see <https://www.weltwaerts.de/en/volunteers.html> and <https://www.weltwaerts.de/en/volunteering-organisations.html>.

⁶⁵ AKLHÜ: 2019, p. 18.

limitations to the number of available places do not apply. Weltwärts is highly subsidised by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and all subsidies for the south-north-programme come from that ministry as well, while the general BFD is subsidised by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The BMZ-owned organisation Engagement Global, which coordinates the program and distributes the funds to the different agencies offering weltwärts, is registered with the BAFzA as a special entity within the BFD. This way, there is no limit to the number of places for weltwärts-BFD. Only when the numbers of weltwärts south-north rose considerably and this started to cause notable administrative work on the side of the BAFzA, the BMFSFJ asked the BMZ to fund a couple of persons within the BAFzA for this work.

c) Denmark

There is no formal volunteer service in Denmark. However, persons entering Denmark to volunteer full-time are given a residency permit and a CPR-number, so that they are fully covered by the danish social security system.⁶⁶

d) European Union

As the European Solidarity Corps involves outgoing as well as incoming, it will be presented below in the chapter on existing transnational volunteer services.

5. Existing transnational Volunteer Services

a) The Netherlands

In the Netherlands there is nothing like a formal volunteer service.⁶⁷

b) Germany

In Germany there is no volunteer service, which was designed as a transnational volunteer service. Weltwärts as an originally outgoing Service

⁶⁶ See above, D. 1. Overview.

⁶⁷ See above, D. 1. Overview.

now includes also a south-north-component, but this is - behind its branding as “weltwärts” and besides some special funding - a Bundesfreiwilligendienst.

c) Denmark

There is no formal volunteer service in Denmark.⁶⁸

d) European Union⁶⁹

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC), which is part of the Erasmus+-Programme of the European Union and has taken the place of the European Volunteer Service (EVS) has a number of different aspects. What is relevant here is the possibility for young Europeans between 18 and 30 years of age to spend between two and twelve months in a project in another European country. There is one national agency in each EU-member state which accredits sending and hosting organisations and the specific projects. This makes the program comparatively complicated. The environment is a priority for the ESC and there is a high interest for more environmental projects⁷⁰. The program is very well funded and results in a full funding for the volunteers that are approved.

There are specific regulations regarding the transnational character of the ESC. “In-country activities” within the country of residence of the volunteer are possible under certain circumstances - including the condition that there is no national volunteer service available in a country. Clearly, this is not the case in Germany and therefore such an in-country-activity is explicitly not

⁶⁸ See above, D. 1. Overview.

⁶⁹ For comprehensive information in English see https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en. Additional information and assessment was provided by Stephan Langenberg and Andreas Schwab of ICJA (<https://www.icja.de/>), see especially <https://www.icja.de/content/freiwilligendienste/programme/esk-dein-europaeischer-freiwilligendienst>), Sarah Mieth of NEVSO (<https://nevso.eu/>) and Heike Zimmermann, the programme-coordinator of the ESC for Germany (<https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/direktkontakt/?mitarbeiterGalerie%5Banfangsbuchstabe%5D=Z>).

⁷⁰ Assessment by Sarah Mieth of NEVSO (<https://nevso.eu/>).

possible in Germany⁷¹. No German participant could do an ESC-volunteer service within Germany.

The ESC has a rather strong specific identity and branding. For example, all seminars for the volunteers are organised and conducted by the national agencies and all participants in the ESC are mixed there. This can be a great opportunity to meet new young people and learn about very different projects, but any seminar or any activity which is focussed specifically for example on the Wadden Sea, must be carried out on top of the ESC-seminars and will not be subsidised at all.

E. Perspectives on a Trilateral Volunteer Service

1. Conceptual Thoughts

a) General Remarks

As a World Heritage⁷², the Wadden Sea has to be protected for itself and for future generations. Like all World Heritage, but especially due to its location in a highly populated region of the world and in three highly industrialised countries, the Wadden Sea can not be protected by excluding people. The peoples of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark have to stay convinced that they want to protect the Wadden Sea by using it sustainably. As the wonders of the Wadden Sea are far more fascinating when they are experienced in person, it is in the interest of the protection of the Wadden Sea World Heritage to give visitors and especially young visitors the opportunity for such a personal experience. For this end, visitor centers play a central role in the concept for the protection of the Wadden Sea in all three countries, at the same time providing unique learning opportunities for the people who staff them and those who volunteer there.

⁷¹ <https://www.solidaritaetskorps.de/service/faq/#abschnitt-activites-was-sind-in-country-aktivitaten>.

⁷² For further conceptual thoughts on the World Heritage status see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>.

Over many decades, Germany has made tremendously positive experiences with young people participating in a full-time, one-year-long volunteer service in visitor centers in the German part of the Wadden Sea, to a small extent and during the last few years also in Danish visitor centers. Applications outnumber available places by far. For the participants, this is a highly educational possibility to spend a gap year, to learn not only about the Wadden Sea, but also to grow as a person, exchange and very often live together with other participants in the volunteer service and to learn how to make a presentation, to lead a group on a hike and to take responsibility for their own projects.

International exchanges of schools, universities and many parts of civil society, international mobility of individuals and years abroad have not only been in high demand and widely used by a high number of young people. The positive effect of this exchange and especially the outstanding positive effect on European integration and friendship has also been recognized by the public and by governments, leading to a large number of scholarships and other public funding and especially to the program "Erasmus Plus" of the European Union⁷³.

In the light of the very successful trilateral cooperation between the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark and especially between the visitor centers in the Wadden Sea, it comes as a surprise that there is no coordinated exchange of volunteers and no organized trilateral volunteer service so far.

b) A Volunteer Service in the Wadden Sea

As all three partner countries in the trilateral Wadden Sea cooperation have different national parks and other ecological projects as well and as Germany has a long tradition of ecological volunteer services in many parts of the country, a specific Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage needs to be distinct from other ecological projects. We suggest to not only look for a specific connection to the Wadden Sea, but to limit the Trilateral

⁷³ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>.

volunteer service to places of assignment that are actually located in or very close to the Wadden Sea. Therefore, a place of assignment in a biological laboratory in Copenhagen or Berlin which might support scientific work connected to the Wadden Sea should not be a place of assignment for the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. A place of assignment in an office of a National Park administration or the headquarter of a NGO working in the Wadden Sea, which might be somewhat inland, could be acceptable, but only, if the actual activities of the participant would go beyond office work. Having been a participant of the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage must mean that one has spent a considerable amount of time in the actual Wadden Sea, having seen several sunrises and sunsets, tides coming and going, birds migrating south and north, controlling beaches, meeting people whose families have lived for a long time in the Wadden Sea and meeting people who are visiting for the first time, and not the least experiencing the vastness of the Wadden Sea when being alone with nature.

c) A Volunteer Service with the Wadden Sea

A Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage should not only be located within the Wadden Sea, but the activities of the participants should also be closely connected to the Wadden Sea as such. Volunteering in an art museum or a social institution on one of the islands in the Wadden Sea can be a very good volunteer service and the experiences in the evenings and weekends can help the participant to experience and appreciate the Wadden Sea. However, this is something different to volunteering in a visitor center, a biological station or another place of assignment that has the Wadden Sea as its focus. Only places of assignment with a direct link to the Wadden Sea and the World Heritage should be invited to be part of the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage.

d) A Volunteer Service for the Wadden Sea

Rather obviously, a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage can not only be determined by its geographic location and by the focus of the

participant's activities. It must also be ensured that it serves the Wadden Sea and that it supports the World Heritage. Although no one has suggested this, an activity supporting bird hunting or excessive water sport in the Wadden Sea can not be a part of the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. All partners in the Wadden Sea World Heritage are connected by a common mission, an agreed purpose of their activity: To protect the nature and the World Heritage. This common ground of all activities in the Trilateral Cooperation must also be the common ground for the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage.

e) A Volunteer Service across the Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea being one World Heritage across three countries, a Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage must be a trilateral project. Even those activities that exist today and which are local, regional or national, should have - and almost always do have - the international perspective in mind. Water, air, birds and fishes but also pollution do not know borders, so it is impossible to look at the Wadden Sea without looking across borders. Starting a new project like a Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage offers the opportunity to focus on this international aspect from the very beginning of the project. Preferably and as an intercultural experience for the participants, the place of assignment should be in a different country than the home of the participants. It will have to be decided whether this should be a strict rule or not. In the light of the different traditions in the three countries of the Wadden Sea cooperation, it is quite likely that there will be many applications from people in Germany but at least initially not so many places of assignment in the Netherlands and especially in Denmark, given the relatively small part of the Wadden Sea which is located in Denmark. We would therefore like to argue that such a transnational assignment should not be a mandatory criterion. The international character could also be guaranteed by international seminars, strictly international seminar-groups and organised visits to projects in other countries.

2. Organisational Framework

As all partners in the trilateral Wadden Sea have made positive experiences both with volunteering and with transnational cooperation, it comes by no surprise that there is a consensus regarding a high interest in and favourable attitude towards a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. At the same time, especially amongst young people there is a great interest both in international volunteer activities and in ecological volunteering. Obviously the organisational framework has a very strong influence on the target groups, at least on the likelihood of certain target groups joining the volunteer service while at the same time the plans to reach certain target groups have a very strong influence on the proposed organisational framework.

As there are very different traditions regarding volunteer services and gap years in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, it is difficult to estimate the maximum number of persons who might be interested in such a volunteer service. However, there is a consensus that interest is high enough to start with a small number of places.

As a trilateral volunteer service which is experienced by the participants as one service should include a certain amount of personal interaction in the group and probably common seminars, there are practical aspects with regards to the group size. The minimum size for making a seminar work and worthwhile is around 20 persons. With regards to the maximum size, a seminar with more than 30 participants usually needs a fair amount of group work or needs to be split. Over the many decades of pedagogical work in the volunteer services in Germany, a clear understanding has developed that an ideal "seminar group size" is between 25 and 30 persons. Therefore, most organisations aim at numbers of participants in steps of 25 or 30, e.g. 30 participants, 60 participants or 90 participants. With these very positive experiences in mind, we suggest to start the trilateral volunteer service with one group of 20 to 30 participants.

For a start, participation should be open to young people between the end of mandatory school-education and 27 years of age at the time of entering the volunteer service. As pointed out above, opening up a volunteer service for older people tends to create a number of additional questions, challenges and practical problems, which can be avoided in the launching phase to be able to concentrate on the unavoidable challenges.

Looking at a volunteer service for young people it should be stressed at every occasion that such a service is an educational project. Regardless of the big and important active contribution volunteers can and will make to their places of service in many respects, it is not sought to generate cheap labour.

Volunteers do not “work”, they “learn” and “volunteer”. As a volunteer service usually fits better as a gap year between secondary school and the beginning of university or vocational training than as an interruption of study or work, it can be expected that a large part of the participants will have finished school immediately before beginning the volunteer service. This group of young people will most likely not bring any work experience or any other skills or knowledge which could be an immediate contribution to the every-day operations of their place of service - except their enthusiasm, their fresh thoughts and their willingness to learn and to contribute. As a very general rule and if one were to look merely on the business-side of things, with all the education and training necessary for the young volunteers and taking into account the ups and downs that come along with a 17, 18 or 19 year old person getting used to a daily routine, a hierarchy and probably a certain amount of dull, manual activities, everything will have gone well if by the end of one year the Volunteer will have contributed as much as he or she will have cost in training and attention.

With this aspect of training, education and learning in mind and with reference to the definition of volunteer service above, the trilateral volunteer service should be piloted as a year-long, full-time service.

3. Finances

A volunteer service has a number of expenses and no obvious income. Details to finances and possible funding depend strongly on the number of places offered and filled, the exact set-up of the volunteer service, the stakeholders taking up different roles and the distribution of roles and tasks. As a very general rule and assuming that the participants in the volunteer service should receive free housing, a food allowance and a small pocket money, the overall costs including administration and pedagogical support can be estimated very roughly at 1,000 to 1,200 Euro per participant per month. It is possible to look for some contribution to the funding from the places of assignment and from the participants themselves, the latter being a traditional element of co-funding in Germany for (only) international volunteer services with the participants being expected to raise their contribution from partners and not (at least not only) to pay it from their savings or have it being paid from their parents. However, it has to be noted that (additional) public funding will be necessary and that at least at first sight none of the present partners in the Wadden Sea is an obvious giver of sufficient additional funds. Therefore, at least one new public partner will be needed or at least one existing volunteer service including its funding will have to be used.

F. Recommendation

We see four feasible options for a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, ranked in the order of complexity, going from the simpler to the more complex options. After introducing those options, we will make a recommendation.

1. Add-on to existing Volunteer Services

With the considerable number of participants of German volunteer services in the Wadden Sea and the existing co-operations especially between the FÖJ

and Denmark, a very easy option which would not require any large funding or new organisational structures would be an add-on to those existing volunteer services, although it would be questionable whether such an add-on would justify speaking of a trilateral volunteer service. The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (or an other entity) could invite participants of the existing volunteer services to e.g. one international seminar. It could issue a certificate to those who attend that seminar stating that in combination of their volunteer service in the Wadden Sea and their attendance at the international seminar organised by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat they had participated in the Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. This could also be advertised on the internet and at other occasions, leading any inquiries of interested young people to the agencies.

Additionally, with the trilateral network of the Wadden Sea cooperation, the Secretariat could encourage all partners to look for more options for international cooperation. Already today it is possible for young people from the Netherlands and Denmark to apply for a volunteer service in the Wadden Sea organised by a German agency. In the same way as the FÖJ from Schleswig-Holstein has started to establish places of assignment in Denmark, there is no reason why the FÖJ from Niedersachsen could not do the same towards the Netherlands.

Of course, the agencies currently organising the volunteer services in the Wadden Sea would have to be motivated to participate in this project and allow their participants to attend the international seminar. Our expectation is that this should be no principal problem but might need some additional funding for the additional administrative effort.

This option has the advantage that no formal steps are needed and that therefore this could start very easily. The Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage could be allowed to grow at its own pace, especially gathering more experience in the Netherlands and Denmark. If interest should skyrocket, there would still be the chance to switch to any of the following options. If it would prove difficult to attract young people from the

Netherlands and/or Denmark for such a volunteer service close to home, very little resources would have been wasted. And if in a few years there would be a new development in one of the partner countries, it would be very easy to adapt to this.

2. Co-operation with an existing professional agency for international volunteer services

The analysis of the different existing volunteer services above showed that different programs would suit the different aspects of a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage best: The ESC for international volunteers, the FÖJ and BFD for german participants volunteering in Germany. Possibly and depending on the number of available places and funding, additional places could be contributed by IJFD for german participants volunteering abroad and BFD for dutch and danish participants volunteering in Germany. For an agency new in the field of volunteer services - like the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat would be - it would be far too complex in a pilot phase to combine these different volunteer services with quite different administrative routines into a new homogenous product. .

However, there are agencies which already administer all these different volunteer programs and combine them to offer the participants the most fitting framework and at the same time generate the best financial support. These agencies are experts in facilitating the different volunteer services and the different public fundings behind them in the background while in the foreground offering the volunteers one over-all experience. Quite regularly the volunteers don't even know exactly whether their volunteer service is officially an IJFD or a FSJ or FÖJ abroad or something else.

To organize a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage it would be most feasible to cooperate with an agency that is already active in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark and has experience with exchanges between these countries.

It was not within the scope of this feasibility-study to do a complete market research regarding all possible partners. However, to make this option truly feasible, it can be reported that there is at least one agency, ICJA⁷⁴, which is doing the combination of volunteer services of the kind described above, has working relations with partners in the Netherlands and Denmark and which is in general open for new cooperations, especially in the field of ecological volunteer services.⁷⁵

Depending on the agreement made with such an agency, it would advertise and offer to interested young persons in all three partner countries a uniform Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, would organize common seminars and take care of all administrative aspects. In the background, on the legal and administrative level, some of the volunteers might be participants of BFD, others of ESC and others again of another format. Organizing the combined funding for the whole trilateral volunteer service would be the task of the agency.

The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat could and should organise at least one of the seminars for the whole group together with the agency to be visible to the participants and to have a direct influence on the contents of the seminar.

With all places of assignment having to be in or close to the Wadden Sea, there will be almost automatically a very strong connection to the existing active partners in the Wadden Sea World Heritage. Details e.g. regarding the places of assignment could and should be agreed upon in the agreement with the agency and with the German states as far as the German FÖJ is concerned.

If the agency is big enough, one of the big advantages of this option is that it will not be so important how many volunteers will participate in the pilot year and how fast the service will grow. The general overhead of the agency will be

⁷⁴ <https://www.icja.de/>.

⁷⁵ Interviews with Stephan Langenberg, Nov. 10, 2021 and Andreas Schwab, Nov. 11, 2021.

there and it will be financed anyhow and to add a few volunteers to an existing program should be much easier than starting from zero.

3. European Solidarity Corps (ESC)

For a transnational European volunteer service such as a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, going through the ESC would be an obvious option. There is no question that the places of assignment such as the existing visitor centers are eligible to be accredited as places of assignment for the ESC. It should also be possible to get one of the existing organisations in each of the three member states of the Wadden Sea Cooperation recognised both as sending and as hosting organisations. There is even a possibility that the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat as a transnational organisation could be recognised as a sending and hosting organisation for all three countries which would make the organisation and running of a volunteer service of course a lot easier.

However, there are three distinct disadvantages of the ESC:

- **Bureaucracy**

The whole system is rather bureaucratic and complicated. As the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat does have some experience with European funding, the secretariat should be able to handle the bureaucracy involved. Some staff capacity should be allocated to this.

- **Limitation to transnational deployments**

In the ESC, only international volunteering is possible. Although it would certainly be hoped for that many young people from the Netherlands and Denmark would be interested in a volunteer service in one of the two other partner countries and that there would be a good number of places of assignment in the Netherlands and Denmark for participants from Germany, it would certainly be a limitation to the program if participants from Germany could never volunteer in places of assignment within Germany and experience the trilateral character

of the volunteer service there - through seminars and by volunteering together with volunteers from other countries.

- Branding

As a program of the European Commission, it is important for the ESC to be recognized as such. Although the ESC works through sending and hosting organisations in the participating countries and those organisations may offer other volunteer services as well, all ESC volunteers must participate in the centrally organised ESC seminars. If a sending or hosting organisations would like the volunteers to participate in one of their own seminars, these seminars must be on top of the ESC-seminars and without ESC-funding. It might inflict conflicts with ESC-institutions, namely the national agencies, to brand an ESC as “Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage” - or as anything else.

The big advantage of going this way would be the possibility to use a fully regulated program which is designed for transnational European volunteer activities. The new volunteer service would be closely connected and rather be a part of the European Solidarity Corps but it could be independent from any other structures, especially the existing structures of volunteer services. At the same time this could also be a disadvantage as the organisations of the existing volunteer services have a lot of know-how and tradition and public reputation. They are present in the Wadden Sea, attract many volunteer applicants and and it would be a risk to dispense of their experience.

The central disadvantage besides the ones mentioned above is the challenge of the project launch. There is no official minimum number of participants and the whole program is even structured especially for small numbers of participants in each receiving organisations. But for a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage there would have to be a unique and uniting experience for the participants to make them feel that they are part of a special trilateral ecological volunteer service. Most obviously this could be an additional Wadden Sea-specific seminar. This would require a certain

minimum number of about 20 participants and it is not clear whether this number could be reached from the very beginning. A project launch within the framework of the ESC and with new, independent sending and receiving structures set up with only a few participants would mean a tremendous effort and would create very high cost per participant.

4. Independent new Volunteer Service

Finally, it would also be possible to start an independent new volunteer service designed specifically as a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. There would be many obvious advantages to having an instrument that would fit exactly the needs and wishes of the stakeholders: specific seminars and teamers, a single administrative and financial structure and a clear branding and marketing.

The very central disadvantage of this option would be the financing: permanent monthly costs of 25,000 to 35,000 € for 25 to 30 volunteers and additional marketing expenses especially during the first years. Starting from zero would mean also that there would be no funds to automatically draw from. These financial aspects do not absolutely exclude this option of a new volunteer service as it is not be unthinkable to access public or even private funds. Additionally at least in the beginning, it might be helpful - and not unrealistic - to ask for participation fees from the participants or to motivate them to look for sponsors.

Of course many questions would need to be dealt with and it would surely be helpful to sign formal trilateral agreements.

The main argument against this option, besides the finances, is again the unknown and potentially small number of participants in the beginning with resulting possibly very high costs per person. A launch cooperation with an existing volunteer agency might help to reduce this initial risk.

Assuming that a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage would grow rather quickly and expecting substantial political support

including the signing of an official trilateral agreement with maybe even additional funding for a start, this might be considered a truly feasible option. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain why none of the other options would be taken.

5. Recommendation

It is the recommendation of this feasibility study to go ahead and further explore the idea of a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage. The authors conclude that such a volunteer service would be beneficial for the Wadden Sea and for many citizens of the three adjacent countries. The existing organisations already active in the trilateral cooperation would welcome a trilateral volunteer service. The authors are confident that there would be sufficient interest both by the possible places of assignment and by the young people in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark to participate in such a volunteer service.

We recommend to look closer at option 2, the cooperation with an existing agency. By looking for different agencies which might be interested in such a cooperation and starting informal conversations with them, more advantages and disadvantages of this option might become clear. Especially, such a dialog partner will be able to contribute additional, very concrete, operational insight from existing transnational volunteer services between the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, pointing out advantages and disadvantages, chances and risks, options for and limits to external fundings and utilizing resources. Even if at the end of those conversation this option should prove to be not the one worth implementing, it is still very likely that the conversation with agencies that have experience in this field would offer additional and very helpful insights.

Option 4 would be the optimal solution but would require a reliable continuous annual funding of roughly 400,000 €.

Option 1 could be a transitional or low level solution but will hardly develop a deep trilateral impact.

A deficit in trilateral branding and content would also be a problem with option 3.

No matter how important these organisational and financial aspects are for the feasibility of a Trilateral Volunteer Service Wadden Sea World Heritage, it should always be kept in mind that a volunteer service in the Wadden Sea, with the Wadden Sea, for the Wadden Sea and across the Wadden Sea would be a project that could reach far beyond these administrative matters - it will reach the hearts and minds of young people from different countries who come together to preserve the Wadden Sea World Heritage and at the same time to develop and grow as individual persons and as an international group, opening themselves and the people around them to change for a better future.

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