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THE NORTH SEA SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

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THE NORTH SEA SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

White Paper

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The North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge is an initiative of **Campus Fryslân** of the University of Groningen, within the Interreg project **PROWAD Link**. The challenge called for ideas that contribute to social, economic, environmental and heritage development in the North Sea region.

Five concepts were selected as **winners** and were awarded a support programme by PROWAD Link, consisting of **workshops, coaching and networking**.

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1. Introduction

To encourage **local participation** and **engagement** in sustainable development in the North Sea region, in February 2022 PROWAD Link launched the **North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge** (NSSIC) under the direction of Campus Fryslân of the University of Groningen.

The Interreg VB project PROWAD Link aims to unlock the **potential of natural areas** as a driver for jobs and **sustainable development**. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are approached to develop **nature as a brand** to create benefits for both, **SMEs and the environment**. Fifteen project partners in **Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom** working with interested SMEs will use the “nature-business-benefit-cycle” concept to develop new, sustainable products and offers in the pilot regions of the **Wadden Sea (DK, D, NL), Geiranger Fjord (NO), Wash & North Norfolk Coast (UK)**. The 3-year project is co-funded by and carried out in the framework of the Interreg North Sea Region Programme under the Programme Priority 1 “Thinking Growth”. The programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of the European Union - www.northsearegion.eu/prowad-link.

An Innovation challenge can be defined as a competition between innovators who use their **skills, experience and creativity** to provide a solution for a particular predefined challenge.

Innovation challenges can be **key drivers for the development of new ideas and solutions** to specific problems or challenges, within a particular context or theme, or for an organization. This usually happens by **activating processes** such as involving a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, generating multiple ideas by a pool of innovators, and increasing the capacity to generate and test high quality ideas at low initial costs. These

types of challenges are often used to tackle societal and environmental issues that reflect the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For the NSSIC, **socio-environmental sustainability** was taken as the guiding principle for the designing and implementation of the project.

The overall objective of the NSSIC was to offer a chance to anyone who wanted to contribute to a **happier and healthier North Sea region** to submit his/her/their sustainable and innovative ideas. The local development of sustainable entrepreneurship and tourism were the main objectives of the NSSIC. Campus Fryslân and its network of expertise had previously led successful challenges of this type.

This document outlines all the steps undertaken and the details regarding how the NSSIC was designed, executed, coordinated and managed. This includes the timeline, an overview of the internal and external stakeholders involved, and an assessment of the final outcomes.

The five chapters describe the process of executing the Innovation Challenge, from 1) design, 2) promotion, 3) submissions, 4) support program.

2. Designing the challenge

2.1. Purpose and target audience

When organizing a challenge, it is important to reflect on the final outcome to be achieved. Why is an innovation challenge needed and what is its purpose? Who's going to benefit from it? Whether it is to find innovative ideas for a specific topic, raise awareness of a project or give participants/businesses a chance to develop, the purpose has consequences for the design and execution of the challenge and who you aim to address.

The PROWAD Link project aimed to explore and seize opportunities for linking sustainable tourism development and nature conservation by engaging local businesses, meaning an open innovation challenge was consistent with these overall objectives.

The main purpose of the NSSIC was to engage and empower local businesses, students and other North Sea enthusiasts in sustainable development. PROWAD Links main points of inquiry were, on the one hand, to explore the ideas that local communities had for their region - people who experience issues and challenges in their everyday lives - and on the other hand, to include non-residents who might instead have a new and fresh perspective to local concerns.

As such, through the NSSIC open innovation challenge we recruited participants with innovative ideas that addressed social, economic, environmental and/or heritage challenges in the North Sea region. By using the networks and capabilities of the PROWAD Link team, we supported the winning participants in taking their first steps to realize their proposals.

2.2. Submission form

In order to receive and organize the submissions from applicants in the best and most structured way, we used an online submission form, via Google Forms.

The questions that applicants needed to answer in the submission form, including:

1. Describe the outline of your idea/ innovation in no more than 250 words.
2. How does it generate social, environmental, economic or heritage impact, and for whom? (max 250 words)
3. What help or support do you think you need to take your idea a step further? (max 250 words)
4. Please provide short biographies of the team member(s). (max 250 words)
5. Please write the name and email address of the contact person.

Find the submission form [here](#).



2.3. Innovation Challenge website

Once the goal of the challenge and the target audience were defined, an appealing website and copy-text for the call were needed. To do this,, an extra section dedicated to the challenge was added to the already existing PROWAD Link website. The section was designed to include the following information:

1. Appealing lead
2. Short description and background of the challenge
3. Information on how to participate
4. Motivation for participation and awards for the winning teams
5. More detailed information regarding the challenge
6. Information regarding the application process
7. Explanation of the evaluation of the submitted proposals
 - a. Information about how the winners will be selected, so the applications can take this into account when writing their submission.
8. Schedule, program and timeline
9. Information about PROWAD Link and Campus Fryslân

Find the full text for the challenge [here](#).

Find the PROWAD Link Innovation Challenge website [here](#).

3. Promotion

Once the NSSIC website was up and running, we disseminated the call to recruit participants and raise awareness.

3.1. Prepare materials

The first step was to produce online materials that could be easily shared by PROWAD Link and external partners. Channels included social media, such as Twitter and LinkedIn, partners websites, blogs and newsletters. For each channel, a different type of copy was elaborated, depending on the length of the text and the expectations of the audiences. Some of the external partners requested a targeted text that matched their audience better.

For the launch, we prepared several images trying to get the attention of the readers with minimal information. These were mostly meant for social media posts and extra visual material for newsletters. The copy for the social media posts were short and concise, trying to not overwhelm the reader with information.

Find promotion and outreach material [here](#)



3.2. Reach out to project partners

As a first step in the launch of the NSSIC recruiting campaign, we reached out to PROWAD Link's project partners. As the challenge was active in all five project countries, the partners had the responsibility to disseminate the news and the content with relevant stakeholders, mainly local businesses and students. Project partners shared the call for applications with universities, local business organizations, tourism organizations and nature organizations.

Find below an overview of stakeholders who helped us in sharing the news:

Stakeholder	Country	Internal/ external	Channels	Network
Visit Wadden	NL	Internal	Multiple newsletters, LinkedIn posts and regularly updated webpage	Local business organizations
Campus Fryslân	NL	Internal	Multiple newsletters for students and staff and social media posts	Students and local businesses
NTNU	NO	Internal		Students
Common Wadden Sea Secretariat	DE	Internal	Twitter	Local organizations
Waddenacademie	NL	Internal	Social media	
Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park Authority	DE	Internal		Local businesses
NHL Stenden	NL	External		Students
Toerisme Collectief Friesland	NL	External	Multiple social media posts	Local businesses
Innofest	NL	External	Social media	Businesses
Toerisme Alliantie	NL	External	Social media	Businesses
Van Hall Larenstein	NL	External		Students
Texlabs	NL	External		Businesses



Visit Wadden

1,889 followers

4mo · 🌐

Kan jij de business coaching, marketing training en het netwerk van het hele PROWAD LINK team goed gebruiken voor een echte kickstart van je idee? Pas dan je laatste kans om met de North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge mee te doen! Stuur een korte samenvatting van je innovatie tot en met 31 maart door en maak kans op een ondersteuningstraject van innovatie en branding experts. Het PROWAD LINK team staat achter je!

Stuur hier je idee door op uiterlijk 31 maart:

<https://lnkd.in/dVMS4d4C>

[See translation](#)



NORTH SEA SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

PROWAD LINK is op zoek naar leuke initiatieven die bijdragen aan een duurzamer Noordzee- en Waddengebied. Alle ideeën - groot en klein - met een positieve impact op sociale, economische en milieugerelateerde uitdagingen in de regio zijn welkom!

Ben jij een student, ondernemer of iemand met een drive voor duurzame ontwikkeling in de regio en heb je een idee dat bouwt aan een gezonde toekomst met betrekking tot natuur, cultuur of het bedrijfsleven? Doe dan tot en met **31 maart 2022** mee aan de Sustainable Innovation Challenge!

KICKSTART JE IDEE MET PROWAD LINK



De winnaar ontvangt een ondersteuningstraject inclusief **business coaching**, marketing en **branding training**, informatie over **fondsen** aanschrijven en uiteraard krijg je toegang tot het **brede netwerk** van het PROWAD LINK project om je idee een extra boost te geven.

LEVER **HIER** UITERLIJK 31 MAART EEN
KORTE SAMENVATTING VAN JE IDEE IN.

Heb je hulp of feedback nodig vóór je je inzending opstuurt? Meld je dan aan.

See [here](#) more examples of stakeholder outreach

Visit the Dutch website of the Innovation Challenge developed by [Visit Wadden](#)

Visit the Dutch website with news of the challenge by [Toerisme Alliantie Friesland](#)

Visit the Innovation Challenge website by [Centre for Sustainable Entrepreneurship](#)

3.3. Meetings

The previous table illustrates the high level of stakeholder engagement in promoting the NSSIC. This level of engagement was achieved through easy to understand and fast to implement inputs (e.g. ready to share Tweets), and a good explanation of the challenge. The table below offers an overview of the meetings organized to promote the challenge:

Stakeholder	Country	Physical/Digital	Date
Toerisme Collectief Friesland	NL	Physical	Mar 3, 2022
Visit Wadden	NL	Physical	Mar 3, 2022
Innofest	NL	Digital	Mar 8, 2022
TexLab	NL	Digital	Mar 16, 2022
Sjon de Haan	NL	Physical	Mar 21, 2022
Good Tourism Institute	NL	Digital	Mar 22, 2022
Team Waddenzee NL	NL	Digital	Apr 4, 2022
Local businesses flyer market Burgum	NL	Physical	Apr 5, 2022
Koplopers event	NL	Physical	Apr 21, 2022

3.4 Bootcamp workshops

In order to foster engagement from potential participants we organized three bootcamp workshops. In the workshops participants could learn about the NSSIC, the local challenges in the North Sea region and receive Design Thinking training including feedback on their ideas. Besides raising more awareness for the challenge, we also wanted to offer support for their potential projects before final submission.

During the bootcamps, participants had the chance to:

- Expand their network with like-minded people from diverse industries and backgrounds
- Test their idea and receive feedback from innovation experts and fellow participants
- Have the opportunity to start new (cross-sectoral) collaborations
- Gain inspiration and knowledge for developing and executing sustainable innovations through design thinking & open innovation

The table below gives an overview of the bootcamps, dates, format and the number of participants.

Bootcamp	Physical/digital	# of participants	Date
Bootcamp Germany	Digital	3	Feb 18, 2022 1-3 pm
Bootcamp Netherlands	Physical	3	Mar 15, 2022 1-5 pm
Bootcamp International	Digital	3	Mar 24, 2022 2-5 pm

Dr Thomas B. Long hosted the workshops and guided the participants through the different steps of Design Thinking, from 1) Empathize, 2) Define and 3) Ideate, including a sustainable business model workshop. These tools gave the participants a new perspective to reflect on their idea and to explore further adjustments and improvements before submitting officially. The International Bootcamp was hosted by the university's platform "Blackboard Collaborate" to allow for breakout sessions.

With each assignment, we offered the participants some time for individual reflection, after which we discussed their findings and feedback in plenary. This allowed the participants to critically think about the local challenges they wished to address and how to solve them. During the online workshop, we used the online writing tool Padlet, where users could write texts and share pictures and links, which is live updated and a shared document for all participants.

**See the Powerpoint presentation [here](#)
Read the minutes of the 'Bootcamp Netherlands' [here](#).**

NORTH SEA
SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

INNOVATION BOOTCAMP PROGRAM

Introduction:

- 14.00: Welcome & introduction round
- 14.15: Introducing the Sustainable Innovation Challenge
- 14.30: Warm-up exercise to the North Sea region.

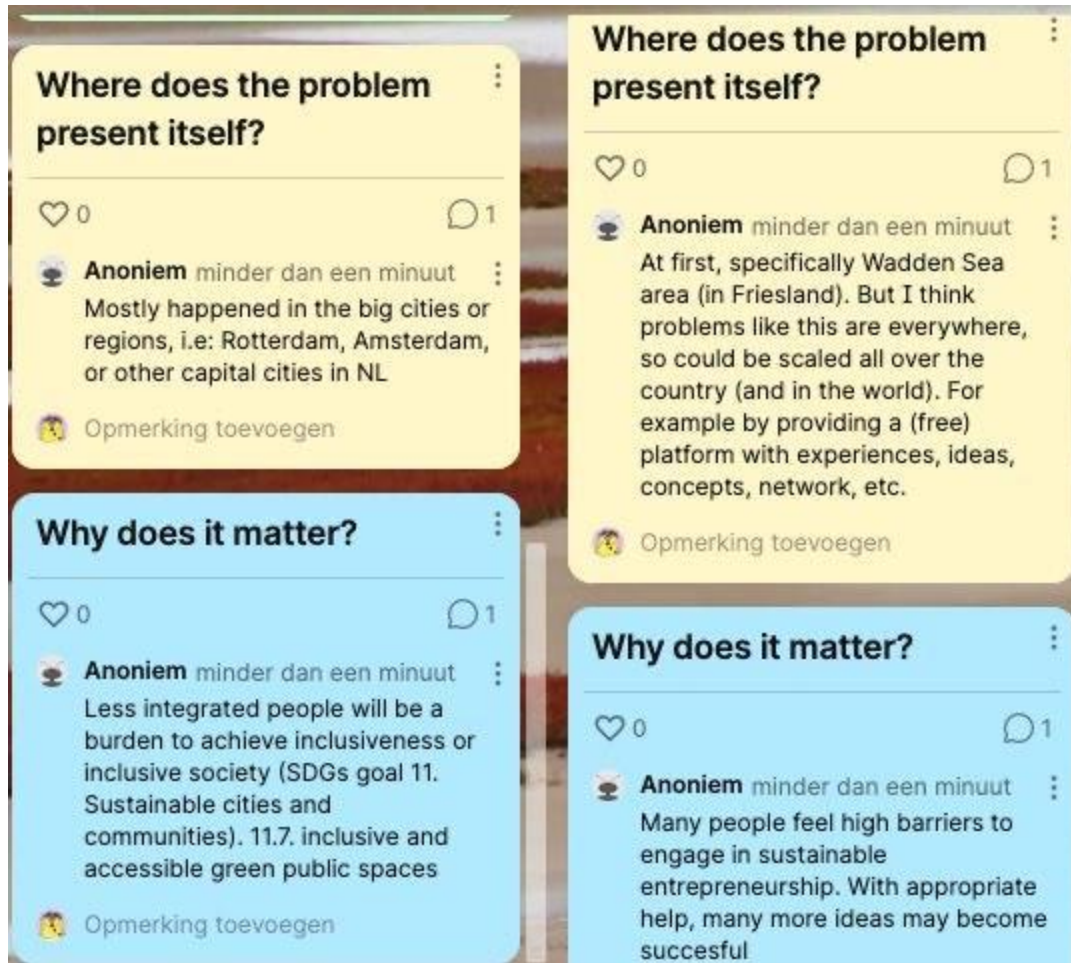
Innovation workshop:

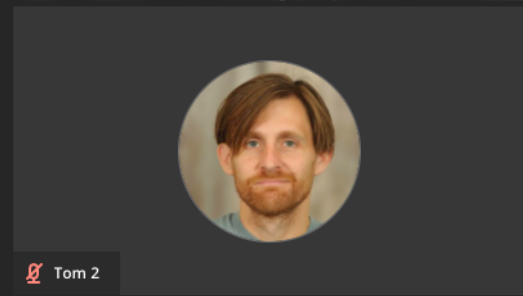
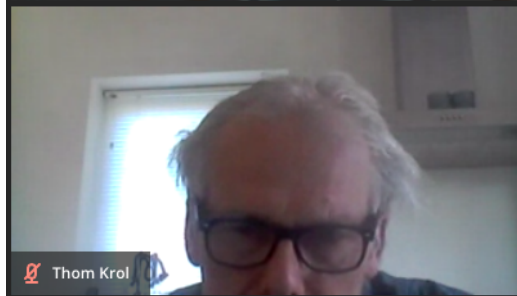
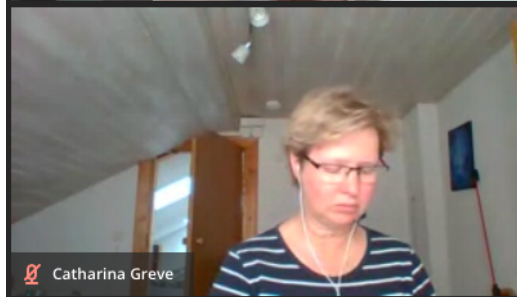
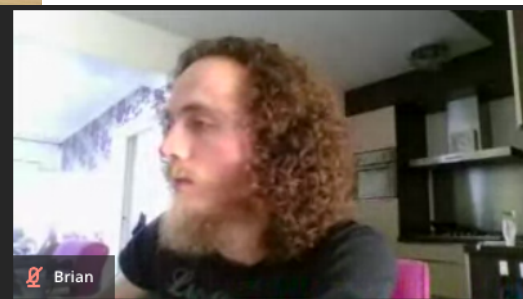
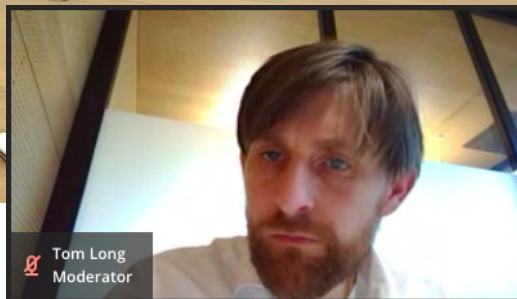
- 15.00: Empathize exercise.
Who is your user and what are their problems?
- 15.30: BREAK
- 15.40: Define exercise.
What problem are you trying to solve?
- 16.10: Ideate & business model exercise.
How can these issues be solved?

Wrap up & next steps:

- 16.40: Wrap up.
What have you learned and how to move on?
- 16.50: Next steps & submission form.
Deadline **31st of March**

Thursday March 24th, 14.00 - 17.00
Online. Register prior to the event





TIPS AND TRICKS FOR THE FUTURE

- Start promotion and recruitment early, and prime key partners and stakeholders prior to the promotion campaign.
- Keep text clear and concise. Try to attract the reader with an example, or a prize - not with, often dry, information about the challenge.
- Write a press release when the challenge is launched
- Host information meetings and innovation workshops to raise awareness and offer them something in return (such as feedback to their idea, innovation tools or concrete/inspirational content)
- Reach out to your network
- Share content with partners that are directly shareable, including images and concrete examples. Targeted to specific target groups.
- Organize targeted meetings with the project partners to prioritize dissemination and outreach

THANK YOU!

Interreg
North Sea Region
PROWAD LINK
European Regional Development Fund



PROWAD LINK

**CALL FOR
SUSTAINABLE IDEAS
IS CLOSED!**

4. Applicants Submissions

4.1. The submissions

We received submissions from four of the project countries: Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and the United Kingdom. The ideas, backgrounds and skills of the applicants were very diverse. Both cultural, environmental, social, economic and heritage challenges in the North Sea region were addressed by the candidates. Among the submissions, there were new tourism products and tools, innovative ways of managing, protecting and reusing natural resources such as water, and different approaches of supporting small and medium-sized business (SMEs) towards sustainable entrepreneurship. See here a short summary of the ten submissions:

→ **Photography course tour to show different landscapes**

- ◆ The Wadden Sea area is more than only dunes and sandy beaches. With this photography course, participants will be introduced to marshlands and salt marshes.

→ **'Tourist Adventure' challenge & experience for tourists**

- ◆ By inviting tourists on a 'challenge' during their stay in the Wadden Sea, tourists will get to learn more about nature conservation and wildlife. Moreover, they will be introduced to local businesses, services and products.

→ **Research in digital storytelling for sustainable development**

- ◆ Many entrepreneurs are sustainable, but they don't show or say anything about it. More research is needed to unravel the potential of digital storytelling to increase sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

→ **Diversity Gardens for cultural and environmental inclusion**

- ◆ Diversity Gardens are spaces where everybody, no matter if you are a local citizen, a seasonal worker or a tourist, is welcome. Here, different cultures get connected while simultaneously taking care of the garden and the environment.

→ **Eco-accounting and sustainability consulting for SMEs**

- ◆ Many small businesses wish, or need to become more sustainable, but in the jungle of eco-labels and certifications, this can be a confusing and time-consuming process. Eco-accounting helps small entrepreneurs to run a more sustainable business while simultaneously handling their finances.

→ **Workation for employees' wellbeing and sustainable tourism**

- ◆ For businesses to get reconnected with their colleagues and teams, a new offer is the 'workation' solution, where groups of employees visit the Wadden Sea area in the low seasons, which contributes to the spread of tourism and income for local businesses.

→ **Tertiary wetlands to protect chalk streams & prevent pollution**

- ◆ Creating tertiary wetlands can preserve chalk streams and prevent water pollution. Moreover, the wetlands can function as recreational areas providing jobs and income for local people.

→ **Water management and storage to produce renewable energy**

- ◆ By storing the water when it's raining, it can offer energy when there is no solar energy. Through the installation of a water turbine, this solution can offer energy to local citizens.

→ **Platform for visitor feedback through gamification**

- ◆ One of the main aims of visitor centers, like natural parks, is to educate their guests about the environment. With this platform, visitors can give feedback in a playful way about the experience, which the centers can use to improve their storytelling and educational programs.

→ **SKAAI skin care made by Wadden Sea plants**

- ◆ SKAAI skin care products consist of honest and sustainable ingredients from the Wadden Sea region. By using local and ethically grown plants, the beauty products offer a sustainable alternative to mainstream skin products.

4.2. Evaluation and jury

A judging panel consisting of PROWAD Link senior project members and additional stakeholders reviewed the innovations.. The table below shows the jury members:

Partner region	Name	Institution
UK	Alex Larter	University of East Anglia
NO	Annik Magerholm Fet	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
NL	Sjon de Haan	Beheerautoriteit Waddenzee

DK	Bettina Munch	Denmark's Natural Parks Authority
DE	Anja Szczesinski	WWF Germany
DE	Mira Hohrmann	Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park Authority
DE	Annika Bostelmann	Common Wadden Sea Secretariat
DE	Catharine Greve	National Park Authority

The jury had the difficult task of selecting five winners based on the following criteria:

- Level of innovation of the idea (20%).
- Degree of social, economic, environmental and heritage impact (15%).
- Inclusion of excluded groups and communities (women, indigenous, disabled, etc.) or low income populations (5%).
- Scalability potential (15%).
- Financial sustainability for the next 3-5 years (15%).
- Capacity of the Applicant and strategic partners (15%).
- Viability of execution and risks (15%).

To ease the decision progress, the jury members were sent a Google Form where they could rate these criteria and impact per submission and indicate which idea was the most innovative according to them. This form guided the discussion and made the initial thoughts and rankings of the jury visible as a starting point.

Explore the ranking document [here](#)

Surprisingly, the jury members did not easily agree on which of the ideas should be selected. With their own backgrounds and experiences, the jury saw potential in different ideas, which also indicates the wide variety and high quality of the submissions.

4.3 The winning teams

In the end, the jury selected the following five winning ideas:

➤ **The 'Tourist Adventure Challenge' - by Ting Xu**

How can we encourage tourists to learn more about environmental protection and create a better connection between visitors and locals? The 'Tourist Adventure Challenge' might be part of the solution! Ting Xu, master student from Western Coast University of Applied Sciences in Heide, Germany, developed the idea to organize a map where tourists can take on adventure challenges during their trip. By achieving these challenges, tourists will get to explore local shops, products and areas. Much more to report about this exciting initiative when the support program will kick off!

➤ **Eco-accounting for small entrepreneurs - by Brian van Es**

How to run an economically and environmentally healthy company? Many small entrepreneurs have the wish to become more sustainable, but the problem is often the lack of time and knowledge. Brian van Es, master student at Campus Fryslân, wants to start his own business as an eco-accountant that supports local and small entrepreneurs in the jungle of ecolabels, funding, subsidies, networks and opportunities and encourages sustainable business practices. With his experience in accounting and his knowledge in sustainable entrepreneurship, he wishes to become a one-stop-shop for small and local Frysian companies!

➤ **Turning tourist feedback into data visualization - by Martina Bradáčová & Naf Ahmed**

Currently there is a lack of interaction with all types of visitors after their experiences in the Wadden Sea area. This limits the opportunity to deliver the full potential of the tourism products contributing towards sustainable development of the region. Therefore, Martina Bradáčová and Naf Ahmed have developed an online platform which transforms tourist experiences into data visualization through interactivity. The product will generate feedback data with visitors communicating their experiences through gamification methods. Martine and Naf have been part of the elite programme Erasmus Mundus 'European Master of Tourism Management', where they studied sustainable tourism development at three universities in Denmark, Slovenia and Spain during the past 1.5 years. They form the perfect team with a mix of project management skills and digital arts!

➤ **Photography course with mind and gut instinct - by Sylke Barkmann & Jörg Trittner**

When you think of the Wadden Sea, most people will think of dunes, beaches and the perfect sundown. However, the region has so much more to offer in land- and seascapes! Sylke Barkmann, Wadden Sea national park guide and passionate photographer, and Jörg Trittner, professional photo designer, want to increase awareness among local residents and visitors for the often-overlooked coastal wetlands, such as salt marshes and moorland. By participating in their photography course, they hope to get people more connected with the diverse nature in the region. A mission that PROWAD Link supports!

➤ **Digital storytelling for sustainable development - by Denise Speck**

Storytelling has always been essential to humankind; But technological advancements stimulated a novel form of storytelling – digital storytelling – combining traditional oral techniques with multimedia tools which shed light on prevalent issues, foster awareness,

and stimulate action. During Denise Speck's research at Campus Fryslân, she revealed a theoretical gap in literature exploring the potential of digital storytelling within sustainable entrepreneurship and a lack of guidance on how such practices could be oriented towards creating sustainable development. Now she wants to use this possibility to further develop the concept's potential to generate social, environmental, economic or heritage impacts for particularly small and medium sized companies in the North Sea region.

A graphic for the North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge. It features a white background with a blue and dark blue curved border on the right side. The background image shows a coastal landscape with dunes and grasses under a blue sky. The text is as follows:

North Sea
Sustainable Innovation Challenge

THE WINNING CONCEPTS!

- Eco-accounting for small entrepreneurs
- The 'Tourist Adventure Challenge'
- Photography course with mind and gut instinct
- Turning tourist feedback into data visualization
- Digital storytelling for sustainable development

4.4 Announcing the winners

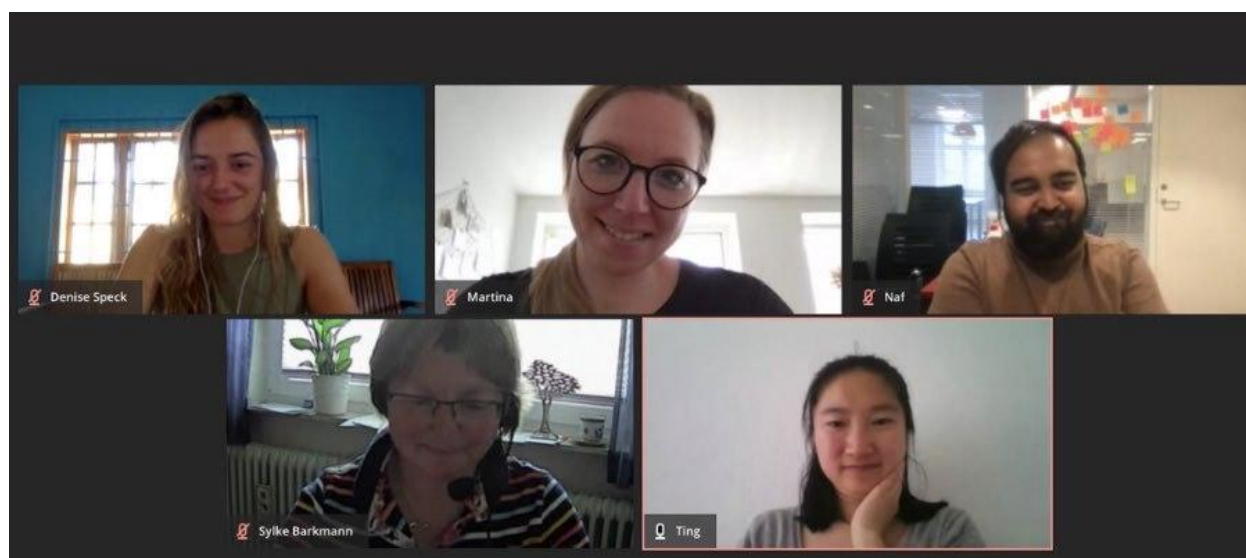
Before announcing the winners officially, we contacted them informally by email to understand if they would accept the offer by PROWAD Link. All the winning candidates responded positively. They were sent a letter of consent, stating that we were allowed to use their name, a picture and their idea on our websites and social media. It is crucial that

the candidates give their consent before publishing personal information about the winners online.

Remember to get consent from the winners before publishing personal information such as names and images!

A day before the official announcement, we reached out to the applicants who did not win, thanking them for their contribution and creativity. As a thank you, they received a certificate of participation and were invited to stay in touch with the PROWAD Link project. The winners each received a certificate of achievement.

The announcement of the winners was shared on the PROWAD Link website and the North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge page of Visit Wadden. These pages were widely shared on social media, in newsletters and with stakeholders and additional networks by our internal and external partners. Also here, we provided an image with a



short overview of what the ideas entailed including a link to the Prowad Link website to find out more.

5. Support program

5.1. Tailored support programs

The winners received a support program offered by PROWAD Link as reward for winning the NSSIC. This program was not set in stone and nor scheduled beforehand, as the objective was to meet the specific needs of the winning teams. Given their different backgrounds, the diverse ideas and the different stages and phases of the ideas, we aimed to co-create the program together with the winners.

What we promised them beforehand however, was based on what the PROWAD Link project partners could offer. This included:

- Sustainable business coaching
- Sustainable business modeling development and support
- Marketing strategy, support and budgets
- Branding training
- Networking and links to regional funding schemes
- Promotion of their team/company/idea on our partners' social media channels
- Certification of winning the NSSIC challenge and completing the support program

The support that the team could offer revolved mostly around using the extensive network of PROWAD Link project partners and trainings in business coaching (Campus Fryslân), branding (Common Wadden Sea Secretariat) and sharing knowledge of nature and entrepreneurship in the North Sea region (NTNU).

To start with, after announcing the winners officially, a kick-off meeting per winning team with Dr Thomas B. Long and Elsbeth Bembom was organized, to explore the needs and wishes of the winners and to see how PROWAD Link could help meet these aspirations. During these meetings, an initial plan for the upcoming months of the support program was realized and the first stakeholders to connect with identified.

During this process, we contacted most of the partners and stakeholders who helped with promotion of the challenge, to see if any of them would be interested in contributing to the support program. We explored which of the partners would host a workshop or support the winners through feedback and networking. Through a snowball effect and making use of everyone's network and willingness to help, we managed to connect the winners with a range of stakeholders from the start of the support program. The following table offers an overview of meetings to explore opportunities for the support program:

Stakeholder		Date	Contact	Topics
Waddenzee meeting	NL	May 2, 20...	Beheerautoriteit Waddenzee, Waddenvereniging, Visit Wadden	Exploring connections
Toerisme Friesland	Collectief	May 10, 2...	Nicole Offerein, Loura van Duren, Jannie Pitstra	Support for Brian
Van Hall Larenstein		May 30, 2...	Jan van tatenhove	Connections, workshop
Lower Wadden National Authority	Saxon Sea Park	Jun 10, 20...	Mira Hohmann	Support for Sylke and Jörg
Common Wadden Sea Secretariat		Jun 17, 20...	Anja Domnick	Branding workshop for all

Toog voor de Wadden	Jun 20, 20...	Conference	Networking
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5.2. Group activities and community-building

Besides the individual sessions to connect with and train the winners, we facilitated a process of community-building among them. The idea was to activate synergies and develop mutual support among their projects and during the entrepreneurial process. As such, informal online group meetings were held regularly so that the winners could introduce themselves and exchange ideas.

A Basecamp and a Whatsapp Group were created, where the winners shared relevant news and opportunities in a spirit of collaboration and mutuality. Together they explored how they could help each other and potentially collaborate.

In particular, to facilitate a space where the winners could exchange freely, ask questions and keep an overview of the planned activities, we used the project management platform Basecamp. Announcements for the whole group or a part of the group were also shared in the message boards. The schedule was updated through the platform which proved to be a practical and efficient tool to collect diverse information in a single place.

Explore the North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge Basecamp group [here](#).

5.3. Webinars and Workshops

The support program initiated with a Design Thinking workshop held by Professor Thom Long attended by the five winning teams.

Design Thinking is a discipline that uses the designer's sensibility and methods to match people's needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable entrepreneurial venture can convert into products or services. During the online workshop, the winning teams were introduced to a set of Design Thinking tools and exercises that helped them understand the needs of their users, reflect on the socio-environmental issues they aimed to address and start to develop or refine a business model for their entrepreneurial idea.

- Find the presentation [here](#)**
- Explore the [empathize padlet](#)**
- Explore the [Define padlet](#)**
- Explore the [Ideate padlet](#)**

In parallel to the individual support plan received by each of the winning teams, a series of common activities and training were organized. The following table provides an overview of these common activities.

Activity	Date	Comments
Group meeting	May 20, 2022	Introduction/welcome meeting
Design Thinking workshop	May 23, 2022	Interactive workshop
North Sea Region funding webinar	Jun 21, 2022	Not specifically for Innovation Challenge winners

Prowad Link funding guide webinar	Jun 23, 2022	Not specifically for Innovation Challenge winners
Group meeting	Jun 28, 2022	Team-building, discuss activities
Anja Domnick Branding Workshop	Sep, 13, 2022	Wadden Sea branding activities and presentation of the branding toolkit
Group meeting	Sep, 15, 2022	Team-building, discuss activities
Innovation Challenge webinar by PROWAD Link	Sep 21, 2022	Webinar to present the Challenge and the winning ideas
Katrin Blomvik Workshop on GeirangerFjord Sustainability work	Oct 24, 2022	GeirangerFjord Sustainable work and collaboration with local entrepreneurs

5.3.1 ONE Wadden Sea, ONE World Heritage - Anja Domnick (CWSS) Branding Workshop

On September 13th, Anja Domnick from the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) hosted an interactive workshop for the winners on the topic of branding.

The workshop, titled “ONE Wadden Sea, ONE World Heritage”, educated the participants on the topic of place branding and on the brand activation strategy of CWSS, intended to create a common global reputation for the countries involved in the Trilateral Cooperation for Wadden Sea World Heritage.

The workshop was tailored to the specific needs of the winners and after the introductory section, Anja Domnick worked with the participants to unveil the potential synergies between the Wadden Sea World Heritage brand and their entrepreneurial activities. For this, the Brandspace online branding toolbox was presented and the entrepreneurs were invited to use its many resources.

Overall the workshop was deemed helpful and of a great value by the participants.



5.3.2. Meet the Winners of the NSSIC

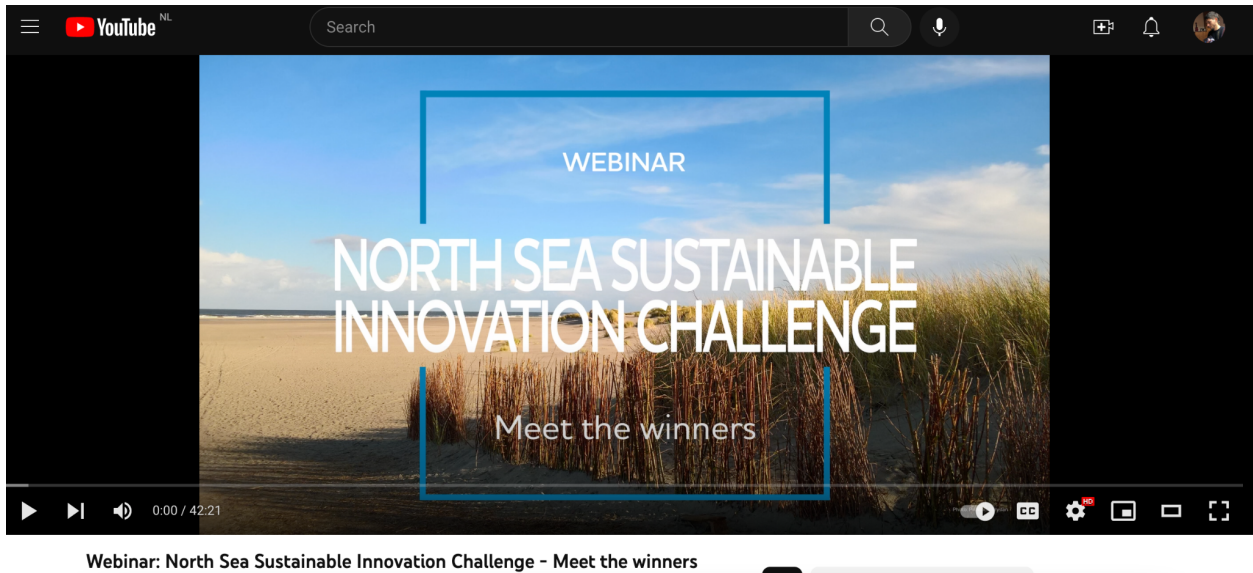


On September 21st, the winners of the North Sea Sustainable Innovation Challenge pitched their entrepreneurial projects in a public webinar organized by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat.

During the online event, Denise Speck, Brian van Es, Ting Xu, Martina Bradáčová and Naf Ahmed presented their sustainable innovations and reported on their progress in the context of Campus Fryslân and PROWAD Link's [support programme](#), which had started in May. Participants to the webinar, PROWAD Link partners and friends of the Wadden Sea, offered useful insights, feedback and networking opportunities.

A recorded version of the webinar is now available and can be rewatched:

<https://northsearegion.eu/prowad-link/news/sustainable-innovation-challenge-webinar/>



5.3.3 Geirangerfjord World Heritage and Sustainability - Katrin Blomvik' s workshop

On October 24th, Katrin Blomwik, director of the Norwegian Fjord Center in Geiranger hosted a workshop on the sustainability related works of the center and the collaborations activated with local entrepreneurs to promote sustainable development of the Geirangerfjord World Heritage Site.

Katrin Blomwik introduced the major socio-ecological threats faced by the heritage site and challenged the participants with reflections on the impact of overtourism on the community and the environment. This was the occasion, specially for Martina Bradáčová, to propose a collaboration for research work on the locals perceptions of sustainable tourism development.



5.3. Individual support programs

The following section elaborates on the specific activities and networking opportunities organized for each winning team.

5.3.1. Denise Speck

Denise Speck participated in the NSSIC as an opportunity to explore potential funding for a PhD position to investigate digital storytelling for sustainable development among local entrepreneurs in the Wadden Sea World Heritage regions.

Besides exploring funding options, she benefited from the extensive network of PROWAD Link with local businesses and organizations for potential collaborations and research participants. With her MSc in Sustainable Entrepreneurship at Campus Fryslân, she mostly focused on partnerships with actors mainly located in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea. During the support program, she was on fieldwork in Trinidad to explore how digital storytelling could be used by local cacao farmers to disseminate the message of sustainable farming.



See in the table below an overview of the meetings that Denise had thanks to PROWAD Link's support program.

Meeting	Date	Notes
Kick-off meeting with Tom and Elsbeth	Apr 20, 2...	Funding PhD, expand network for collaboration and research contacts/case studies
Waddenzee NL meeting with Beheerautoriteit Waddenzee, Waddenvereniging, Visit Wadden and Province of Groningen	Jun 13, 2...	Karina Pool, Visit Wadden: Relevant projects could be 'Waddengastronomie' and the 'Ambassadors Program'. Renate de Backere, Waddenvereniging: Ambassadors Program
PROWAD Link Exchange meeting	Jun 21, 2...	Lots of input and feedback from the partners. Denise would send a one-pager explaining her project short and concisely. Take potential collaborations further from there. Ideas: Denise hosting a workshop for PROWAD entrepreneurs, help Sylke and Jörg.
Karina Pool, Visit Wadden	Jul 5, 2022	Waddengastronomie: Denise could help as consultant, how to communicate the full food chain? Ambassador program: Denise could help to improve the trainings with regards to storytelling of the World Heritage site of the Wadden Sea
Renate de Backere, Waddenvereniging	Jul 21, 20...	Ambassador program: Renate is responsible for the training for the entrepreneurs. They need stories about the World Heritage and the natural value. Can Denise help?
Anja Szczesinski, WWF & International Wadden Sea	Aug 9, 20...	Anja works with education centers and educational materials for the Wadden Sea

School		region.
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During the PROWAD Link support program, Denise was well connected with Dutch and international partners with potential for further collaboration, especially with regards to her future PhD project. Funding for her project was identified and a starting point for contacts with entrepreneurs and partnerships were established. Overall, the objectives established for Denise support program were successfully achieved.

5.3.2. Martina Bradáčová and Naf Ahmed

Martina Bradáčová and Naf Ahmed are the only candidates who participated from a location situated in Denmark. Martina has a background in sustainable tourism development and Naf is a digital artist and digital tourism expert. Together they want to develop an interactive platform for visitor centers to track the visitor experience. Through gamification and other interactive strategies, they want to replace 'dry' surveys and make giving feedback a fun experience.

The duo's main need from the NSSIC support program was to get in contact with nature parks, visitor centers, DMOs and tourists, so they could start doing market research. They also requested support for app development, business model coaching, funding, intellectual property and marketing. App development could not be offered by the PROWAD Link team.



See in the table below an overview of the meetings that Martina and Naf had thanks to PROWAD Link’s support program.

Meeting	Date	Notes
Kick-off meeting with Tom and Elsbeth	May 17, 20...	Discussing needs and next steps: how to co-design an app with stakeholders, get in touch with local actors, upscaling opportunities, marketing and business model support.
Catch-up session with Elsbeth	Jun 29, 20...	Questions regarding intellectual property and non-disclosure agreements. Next step: Meet with Jornt from Founded in Friesland.
Business model coaching	Jul 19, 20...	Business coaching with use of the

with Tom and Elsbeth		business canvas tool and discussions and feedback
Introduction meeting with Anne Husum Marboe, Danish National Park Authority	Jul 27, 20...	Get connected, present the idea, explore further connections and opportunities. Contact 3 Danish Wadden Sea DMOs
Meeting with Jornt de Boer, Founded in Friesland	Jul 27, 20...	Martina and Naf asked questions regarding intellectual property and non-disclosure agreements.
Catch-up session with Giacomo	Sep 30, 2022	Questions regarding voice-tech technology and data visualization Next step: Meet with scientists from Campus Fryslân
Meeting with Eko Rahmadian, PhD, Campus Fryslân	Nov 1, 2022	Martina and Naf asked questions about big data for sustainable tourism and data visualization

Martina and Naf were connected with several experts and their questions regarding intellectual property rights, big data visualization and voice-technology development were addressed. Moreover, they received a business model coaching session and were connected with a local partner. Overall, Martina and Naf were successfully guided by the PROWAD Link support program.

5.3.3. Ting Xu

Ting Xu was a master student from Western Coast University of Applied Sciences in Heide when she submitted her idea to the NSSIC. Thanks to her study in tourism, she thought it was important for tourists to learn about local culture and the environment at the destination they visit. Therefore, she elaborated on the idea to design an adventure map that brings tourists in touch with local nature, experiences and businesses while simultaneously learning about nature conservation and local life.

Ting's aspirations for this support program was to receive support in realizing this adventure map. For this, she needed funding and potential partners or contacts, such as national parks and DMOs.



See in the table below an overview of the meetings that Ting had thanks to PROWAD Link's support program.

Meeting	Date	Notes
Kick-off meeting with Tom and Elsbeth	May 2, 2022	Needs: funding, contacts, potential collaboration partners. Next step: Make idea more concrete with business modeling workshop

Meeting with Anja Szczesinski, WWF and International Wadden Sea School	May 20, 20...	Anja gave lots of inspiration and other initiatives to look into. Next steps: Get connected to 2 local DMOs. Information about a lottery fund.
Ting met up with Sylke in Wilhelmshaven	Jun 12, 20...	Sylke showed the area to Ting. Connecting and getting to know the area.
Business model coaching with Tom and Elsbeth	Aug 9, 2022	Focused and interactive business model workshop using the business canvas. Ting is interested in doing a PhD Start approaching DMOs

Due to these meetings, she was empowered to start approaching DMOs and other stakeholders to do more research and explore the needs of partners and customers. In this process, she could gradually finetuned her plans for the map and its execution. Overall, Ting was successfully guided by the PROWAD Link support program.

5.3.4. Sylke Barkmann and Jörg Trittner

Sylke Barkmann, Wadden Sea national park guide and passionate photographer, and Jörg Trittner, professional photo designer, want to increase awareness among local residents and visitors for the often-overlooked coastal wetlands, such as salt marshes and moorland. By participating in their photography course, they hope to get people more connected with the diverse nature in the region.

Sylke and Jörg were mostly interested in receiving support in marketing for their photography course. The tour was already fully developed and to their satisfaction, so now the mission was to gain customers and awareness for the tour.

"The UNESCO World Heritage Waddensea is not only beach, dunes and sundowns..."



Sylke Barkmann



Jörg Trittner

See in the table below an overview of the meetings that Sylke and Jörg had thanks to PROWAD Link's support program.

Meeting	Date	Notes
Kick-off meeting with Tom and Elsbeth	May 2, 2022	Needs: Publicity for their tour and receive marketing support in improving their marketing texts. Wish to create a new platform for tourists with more artistic and alternative offers.
Introduction meeting with	May 18, 20...	Mira met with the team to speak in

<p>Mira Hohmann, Lower Saxon Wadden Sea National Park Authority</p>		<p>German, which they feel more comfortable with to discuss further contacts and connections.</p> <p>They also worked on the marketing text of their offer to improve it.</p> <p>They got connected to the East Frisia DMO and they were invited to the networking event by the Wadden Sea World Heritage Forum.</p>
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The summer is the high season for Sylke and Jörg and therefore they had to prioritize which activities and meetings they participated in as part of this program. Since they are mainly looking for a German speaking audience, they canceled their participation in the Innovation Challenge webinar by PROWAD Link and in some of the group meetings due to a lack of time. They did seem content with the personal support they received from German partners in particular. With regards to the platform for more artistic and alternative experiences, they were recommended to get in touch with the DMOs.

5.3.5. Brian van Es

Brian van Es, master student at Campus Fryslân, wants to start his own business as an eco-accountant that supports local and small entrepreneurs in the jungle of ecolabels, funding, subsidies, networks and opportunities and encourages sustainable business practices. With his experience in accounting and his knowledge in sustainable entrepreneurship, he wishes to become a one-stop-shop for small and local Frysian companies.



See in the table below an overview of the meetings that Brian had thanks to PROWAD Link's support program.

Meeting	Date	Notes
Kick-off meeting with Tom and Elsbeth	May 12, 20...	<p>Brian needs help with strategy and marketing of this idea. How to start communicating?</p> <p>Finding customers and networking</p> <p>How to implement in practice</p>
Toerisme Friesland Collectief	May 24, 20...	<p>TCF shared multiple contacts of local entrepreneurs within Friesland - mainly from the hospitality sector.</p> <p>Idea: Organize networking barbeque with</p>

		local entrepreneurs Idea: Create awareness for Brian on their social media channels.
YnBusiness	May 30, 20...	Marjan Soepboer asked many constructive and critical questions about Brian's idea. It led to an opportunity for Brian to work as a freelancer for YnBusiness. This could be a great way for Brian to learn more about sustainability and entrepreneurship in the region and to get new contacts.
Circulair Inspireren meeting by Toerisme Alliantie Friesland	Jun 20, 20...	Brian joined the networking meeting about 'circulair inspiration' where several entrepreneurs from the hospitality sector were present

Brian seems to be well connected with these meetings that gave him many contacts to entrepreneurs, local organizations and potentially a job.

Read more detailed notes from the winners' meetings with stakeholders [here](#)

5.4. Trilateral Youth Conference

Together with other 44 young adults from Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands involved in or passionate about the Wadden Sea World Heritage, Brian and Ting brainstormed and exchanged for four days to create a shared vision for working to protect the Wadden Sea seascape.

Participants in the conference discussed the Wadden Sea's status as a World Heritage Site, shared future goals for the Wadden Sea and youth participation and involvement in nature conservation efforts. In addition to the workshops, they took a field trip to the

Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park, part of the Wadden Sea World Heritage site.

“It was great to meet and speak to all the different participants and to hear about their involvement in the Wadden Sea area”, says Brian, who also cared to remind that the economical sustainability of local enterprises in the area is an aspect not to underestimate for the full development of the Wadden Sea area: “A large part of the participants was in one way or another involved in volunteering. Which is great, but it is not 'sustainable' since they (eventually) still have to earn a living somehow. Therefore, it was also nice that I could share some thoughts about how sustainable entrepreneurship can be part of the solution.”

The conference was of great inspiration for Ting, too, who now feels that she has more material and ideas to develop her project further: “Everyone shared their stories about the Wadden Sea and it is nice to know all the different projects and programmes related to its protection. I learned a lot from the conference and got more ideas about sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea and hope to make it come true in the future.”

The 18 to 30-year-old conference participants concluded the works by highlighting the importance of improving communication and trilateral exchanges. A network to stay in touch and keep working on how to expand existing projects and increase the youth's influence on the conservation of the Wadden Sea is now created and Ting and Brian can't wait to contribute to it further.

Brian's words of hope and enthusiasm perfectly depict how enriching the first edition of the conference was: “I am Dutch, and previously I associated the Wadden Sea with just the Dutch part. So, the message of 'ONE Wadden Sea' really spoke to me, since it is one big interconnected ecosystem spanning over multiple countries. Nature does not stop at our imaginary drawn country lines. And I think this message also nicely reflects the bigger picture. The world is one big ecosystem, and only through joint effort and collaboration

can we make human life sustainable here on earth. Every participation is welcome and needed. The Wadden Sea (as well as the world) needs our passion and commitment. The possibilities are endless, just take your message into the world and become part of the solution!”

Read more about the conference [here](#)

Read more about the winners’ participation [here](#)

Read the review of the conference [here](#)

5.5 Next step and conclusion

Despite the formal conclusion of the NSSIC at the end of October 2022, the five winning teams can continue to count on the support of Campus Fryslân and the wider PROWAD Llnk network for mentoring and networking opportunities until the end of December 2022.

The objectives initially established by the support team of Campus Fryslân were the following:

- Business coaching
- Business modeling development and support
- Marketing strategy, support and budgets
- Branding training
- Networking and links to regional funding schemes
- Promotion of your team/company/idea on our partners’ social media channels

- Certification of winning the NSSIC challenge and completing the support program

Overall, all of the objectives were successfully achieved with the great satisfaction of the winning teams which are now able to move their first steps in their entrepreneurial journey, contributing to the development of sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea region. This was possible thanks to the extremely precious cooperation of the different PROWAD Link partners.

The NSSIC was designed, managed and executed by Elsbeth Bembom, Thomas B. Long and Giacomo Buzzao.