

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS FOR THE BELGIAN COAST

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Our goal: stimulate working towards a sustainable management of the Belgian coast. To achieve this goal, common future perspectives, operating the development and sustaining the formulation of the long-term strategic objectives, are needed. The development of a set of indicators is one way to control and to support such a complex matter as sustainable coastal management.

An indicator is a measure (data/number/value/...) used to describe important phenomena as well as to reflect the actual state in a well-defined policy area. A well balanced set of indicators, in which each indicator is evaluated on a regular basis, will map out the evolution towards (or away from) sustainability. A set of indicators is a management tool which will help policy makers to take the right decisions and to communicate about the state of the art of the coast.

In a preliminary study (Centrum voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling, CDO, Ghent University, 2001) a future vision for the Belgian coast was proposed. This vision was developed in close co-operation with civil servants both from provincial and Flemish administrations. In the future vision document six equivalent priorities for sustainable development of the coastal zone were put forward: improving the quality of living and housing environment, preserving and strengthening of the socio-cultural capital, improving the environment and nature, strengthening of the economical texture, supporting tourism and recreation, carrying out governance renewal.

Starting from an extensive list of possible indicators for the Belgian coast, an interactive approach was used to deduce a smaller set of indicators which can be used as 'signboard' , but also as a directive for the management priorities, a communication tool as well as a basis on which efforts for data collection can be centred on.

The extensive list was the object of critical analysis by civil servants and representatives of coastal actors gathered in two workshops (7 June 2002 and 20 January 2003). The results of these workshops were decisive for the final set of indicators.

In order to define the indicators, the following policy domains were studied: quality of life, quality of environment, tourism and recreation, quality of work, transport and ports, nature development and management, cultural heritage and immaterial capital, industry and SME, use of live resources, institutional organisation and management, social attention.

Through this study, indicators able to translate the future perspectives into manageable numerical data were sought for each particular domain.

The participants drew up a list of 50 indicators that, in their opinion, can be used to observe in an efficient way the future perspective of the coastal zone.

For the top 20 – the 20 most representative – exhaustive filing cards have been set up

and data, where possible over several years, have been gathered. These data are now freely available on the website: www.vliz.be/projects/indicatoren.

The set of indicators proposed here is by no means final. A barometer being constantly in motion, its regular use will lead to optimise this policy instrument.