



Sustainable tourism in the Seine estuary

Project summary

Note 5055 / MA / 27/10/08

Birth of the project

The city of Le Havre joined the **UN Global Compact Cities Programme** in March 2006. Created in 2001, this programme brings together cities committed to promote **sustainable development**. Le Havre chose to focus on **tourism**. M. Antoine Rufenacht, mayor of Le Havre and Chairman of the Estuary Elected Officials Committee chose to **broaden this project to the level of the Seine estuary**.

Tourism challenges at the level of the Estuary

Estuarial specificities

The Seine estuary is the biggest estuarial network in Northwest France and one of the biggest in Europe. It represents a dynamic interaction between the river, the sea and the land. The area is made up of a complex patchwork of very diverse but complementary environments: old and new, urban and rural, industrial and natural protected areas, towns and villages... The region boasts a dynamic maritime and port activity but also agricultural areas, with industrial and SEVESO areas but also natural protected areas. It comprises an often popular coastline but also a rural inland area that is not valued enough, from top to bottom (cliffs and plains, entrance and exit (nodal points of the transport network across the region)...

The area is rich in natural elements, such as the Seine Estuary Natural Reserve and the Loops of the Seine Normandy Natural Regional Park; a coastline that traditionally attracts many tourists (Deauville, Trouville-sur-Mer, Honfleur, Etretat); impressive modern architectural sites (Le Havre city centre rebuilt by Auguste Perret) and older ones such as the abbeys and castles that are scattered all around the territory.

The estuary counts with a dynamic industrial area and the port of Le Havre, the basis of a strong economic activity but that can sometimes be detrimental to the region's image and attractiveness. Yet, with the help of a change of image and tourism marketing engineering, these industrial sites should be able to attract tourists. The wind turbines in Fecamp and the water treatment plant in Honfleur are successful examples of initially industrial projects which later became tourism assets. This industrial area is part of the Seine estuary, which is lively and humanised, and should not have to deny and/or hide its economic activity. The estuary must accept this industrial area and we will have to think about a way to promote it positively with locals and tourists.

The estuary shares common tourism objectives and it is also the target of major "sustainable development" projects, such as the "EANA, terre des possibles" park, which opened in June 2008 in Gruchet le Valasse, and the Sea and Sustainable Development Centre in Le Havre, whose construction is due to start in 2009. All these projects show that the estuary is aiming at becoming a reference and proving that a large industrial and port area can coexist with natural areas and sustainable tourism.

In the end, the very diversity and originality of the Seine estuary lie in all these differences that are scattered all around the area and that are yet complementary.

Rapidly evolving tourism practices

- the recent attractiveness of cities as tourist destinations themselves relies on the strong identity of neighbouring inland areas;
- holidays are more fragmented and shorter, and therefore depend less on seasons. They are no longer concentrated in the summer and instead there has been a dramatic rise in **mobility for leisure all year long** ;
- tourists focus on **highly connected sites** . The current trend is therefore **touring holidays**.

A political will to build an estuarial territory

« At all scales, **tourism** fosters development, until it sometimes becomes a **full stakeholder in the construction of a territory** », Rémy Knafou¹

For several years now, there has been a political will in the estuary area to gather local territories around common projects in a **Project Community**. **One of the unifying themes is tourism.**

Why tourism ?

- **a fast-growing industry**, one of the most dynamic sectors in the French economy ;
- **most tourists are locals** and they need to (re)explore their region to discover its little-known treasures ;
- **a request from socio professional stakeholders** who are willing to get involved and to adapt their offers to new market requirements ;
- the need for a **coherent and articulated supply in tourist services**, adapted to present tourists ;
- **a unifying subject between elected officials and tourism professionals**;

Rationale of the « Sustainable tourism » project :

How can we coordinate and unite socio professional and political stakeholders in the estuary area? What interests do they share? So that we can turn the Seine estuary into a tourist destination with a structuring and coherent offer that is well-known at regional, national and international level thanks to external tourists, but also by locals who make up a great part of tourist attendance.

The project's lines of action

- **Line 1 :**
Identifying, improving and promoting the supply in tourist services, already existing actions and Sustainable Development projects;
- **Line 2 :**
Organising transportation in the Estuary so that tourists and locals can rely on less polluting public transportation, as well as « light » modes of transport and intermodal transport to go from one tourist site to another ;

➤ **Line 3 :**

Developing and promoting estuarial tourist amenities focusing on complementarity, while fostering water sports and leisure activities linked to the coast or to the estuarial inland area and the countryside ;

Methodology

- **a technical working group** was created in 2006;
- the group is made up of **socio professional partners** (tourism project leaders from each region, tourist office managers), and **representatives from tourism departments in local administrative organisations** (Département Tourism Committees, Regional Tourism Committee, Département Councils, Regional Federation for Tourist Destinations in Normandy, Département Union of Tourist Offices...);
- **the Town Planning Agency for Le Havre and the Seine estuary area** (AURH) has been moderating the group during its regular meetings in Le Havre or in the estuary area;
- a **Political Steering Group** is being created.

Line 1: prioritising the supply in tourist services and its positioning in relation with the pillars of sustainable development (the environment, local society and economy)

Two completed steps :

1. Summer 2007 - **Inventory** of tourist facilities (catering and accommodation) that have a label to analyse them with regard to "Sustainable Tourism" criteria;

Assumptions for the inventory¹ :

Sustainable tourism:

- is not a new form of tourism ;
- is not a new tourism product ;
- is a quality-based approach here to support professionals;
- the aim is not to create a new label but to value and improve already existing certifications.

Conclusions:

- labels do not match sustainable tourism criteria ;
- the environmental dimension is widely represented by labels ;
- Economic and social criteria are a minor concern, except for the « Tourism and Handicap » label, based on social criteria, but which left aside the other two dimensions;

2. **Summer 2008** - the "Sustainable Tourism in the Seine Estuary" **questionnaire** was sent out to all catering and accommodation facilities in the Estuary to get a reference point on what has been done in terms of **quality** so far.

¹ Excerpts from a paper by Marie Magnin, written during an internship in the summer 2007
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Objectives of the questionnaire :

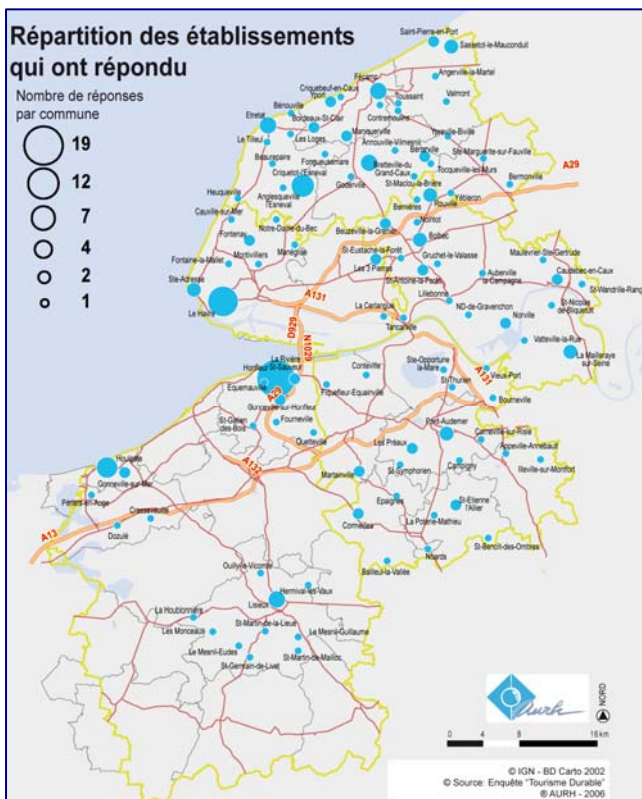
- Knowing more about local tourist amenities in terms of quality, getting a first reference point ;
- Defining concrete applications for « sustainable tourism » in order to give the concept a more pragmatic and realistic meaning for tourism professionals ;
- Offering professionals achievable action lines as incentives to promote sustainable tourism ;
- Identifying the best amenities and considering their promotion ;

The content of the questionnaire was reviewed with the technical working group.

The 30 questions were divided up into 6 « sections »:

- introduction
- water and energy
- waste management
- landscape, local dimension and eco-consumption
- transport
- social issues

Some space was left at the end of the questionnaire for additional comments.



Methodology

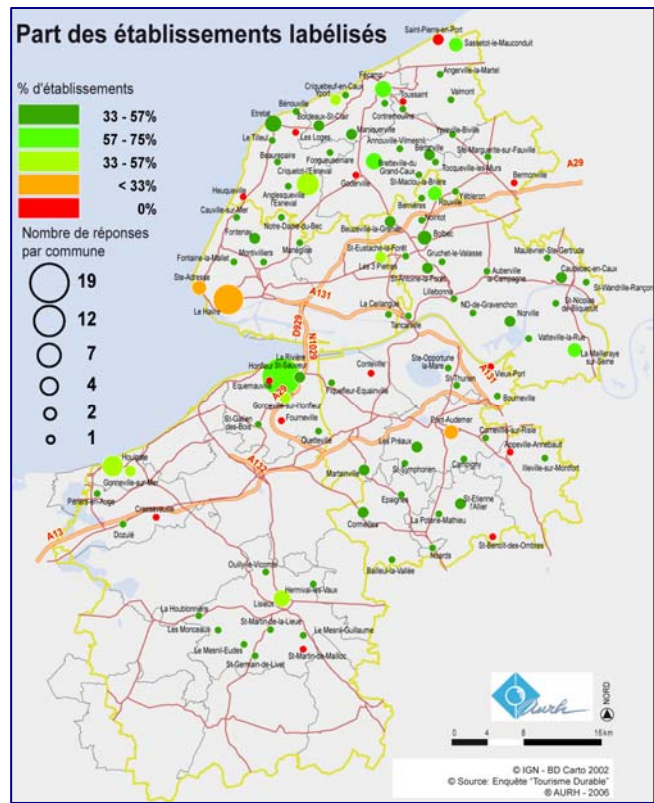
- natural regions were the primary scale of administration
- the results were then centralised by the AURH

187 questionnaires received from 106 towns and villages

The label

A motivating factor for the promotion of sustainable tourism

73% of replies came labelled amenities



Key words for the questionnaire’s conclusions

Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of professionals feel “involved” or “very involved” in “sustainable tourism” actions
Information Communication	<p>But...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information on big local projects Lack of communication and awareness for professionals regarding « sustainable tourism » challenges
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43% of respondents would be interested in training A low training rate : 18% Ageing professionals
Action	<p>Professionals ask for more</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on the concept of sustainable tourism; Personalised support for improvement;
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A real need to improve the public transportation network and “light” transport in the Seine estuary

Next steps:

- Working with Tourist Offices to inform and raise awareness among professionals through concrete actions (e.g. « Eductour » in the Pays de Caux-Vallée de Seine area) ;
- Launching a « sustainable tourism » section on the Estuary websites, with three dimensions (information, training, support) ;
- Organising training sessions on « sustainable tourism » with the relevant organisations (Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Basse Normandie’s Local Information and Coordination Centre, etc.);
- Promoting professionals who are deeply involved in « sustainable tourism » actions through different means;
- Finding solutions to improve the transportation network in the Estuary
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Line 2: Organising transportation in the Estuary so that tourists and locals can rely on less polluting public transportation, as well as “light” modes of transport and intermodal transport to go from one touris site to another ;

« Sustainable tourism » is more than ever related to « sustainable mobility » :

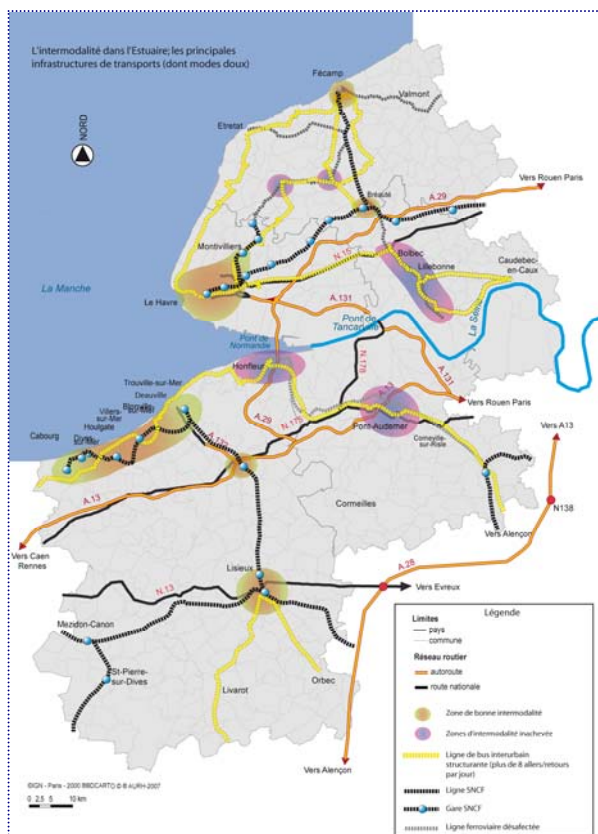
- the smallest environmental impact (environmental pillar),
- widely accessible (social pillar),
- generating wealth and employment (economic pillar).

A diagnosis at the level of the estuary was carried out by the AURH. It looked at:

- tourist hubs,
- public transportation (+8 return trips a day),
- tourist sites (museums, castles..),
- hiking trail,
- cycle routes,
- bile hire stations,
- available theme tours (the fruit tour, the thatched houses tour, the cider tour, the spices tour....)

The main junctions were also analysed bearing in mind the issue of intermodal transport.

Summary maps :





Three priorities :

- **Sea-river shuttle service project** between Honfleur/Deauville/Trouville-sur-Mer/le Havre (in progress²);
- **Study on bike hire stations networking** (specifications identification in progress);
- **A summary** on the transport system and its challenges at the level of the estuary to be sent out to elected officials (end of December 2008) for validation, ownership and to translate it into concrete actions ;

We are also looking at the development of sea-river transport in the estuary, to connect Le Havre to Caudebec en Caux.

Line 3: Developing and promoting estuarial tourist amenities focusing on complementarity, while fostering water sports and leisure activities linked to the coast or to the estuarial inland area and the countryside;

- A task that was partly included in the previous to lines;
- An idea that was strongly advocated in the campaigns promoting tourism in the Estuary
Example: Operation “Destination Estuary”.

Communication and promotion strategy for estuarial tourist services Operation « Destination Estuary »

1st edition – May 2005, Salt Storehouses, Honfleur

- **A first promotion campaign was launched in 2005 in the Salt Storehouses, Honfleur.** On this occasion, the whole Seine estuary got organised to offer very diverse tourist products.
- **All five natural regions of the Seine estuary took part in this first edition** : Pays le Havre Point de Caux Estuaire, Pays des Hautes Falaises, Pays Caux Vallée de Seine, Pays Risle Estuaire and Pays d’Auge. For the exhibition, each natural region had its own stand and there was also a common stand with round tables, book signings, an exhibition...
- **The operation was a success.** For the first time, estuarial tourist services were presented under a single denomination: « Destination Estuary ». **The target that was reached:** locals, and tourists.

² Elected officials from the four local authorities met in Honfleur on 1st October 2008 to be informed of the results of the first survey carried out in the summer 2008 on the demand for such a sea-river shuttle service from locals, occasional residents and tourists. The survey showed that the demand is real and that the market sector is not yet exploited enough. Elected officials therefore agreed to carry on with the project with a financial feasibility study.

- The operation was **organised rather quickly**, with an almost exclusive support from natural regions. **The total budget was 40,000 euros: 5000 euros from each natural region and 15,000 euros from the city of Honfleur.**

Intermediate action – the « **Local sustainable tourism : the Seine estuary** » forum - **30 October 2007, Le Havre**, in which took part around 20 professionals and elected officials who discussed sustainable tourism issues in 5 round tables.

2nd edition – May 2009, Hanging Gardens, Le Havre

Challenges and objectives for the 2nd edition of « Destination Estuary »:

- Making sure that it is consistent with the « sustainable tourism » approach ;
- Presenting tourism products and assets in the Estuary in a both united and diverse way ;
- Presenting the past and future major local projects ;

**Main targets: locals.
Families are a priority.**

Organisation principles for the 2nd edition

Main exhibition - a new tourist site

- Generating flows
- Inviting people to (re)discover the estuary
- Regional scope
- **A « star product »**
- **Presentation of common themes**
 - WATER SPORTS,
 - GREEN TOURISM,
 - ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE (OLD AND NEW).
- **And :**
 - 1 « LANDSCAPE » stand presenting the estuary's diverse landscapes ;
 - « CULTURE AND MAJOR EVENTS»
 - 1 LOCAL PRODUCTS MARKET
 - 1 END-AISLE DISPLAY, presenting the main estuary projects
- Activities to be defined.

Key words: (re)discovery, surprise, emotion, adventure

Long-term communication policy towards locals and tourists

Outside the peak season
(e.g. during the Le Havre Exhibition)

- **Objective :** communicating on the image and the identity of the estuary
- **Key words :** seduction, sense of ownership and belonging, pride
- **Content :** art exhibitions in the estuary, entertaining atmosphere

Travelling exhibition in the Seine estuary

- In several local authorities, willing to host the exhibition for 2 or 3 days
- Targeting locals
- Narrower scope
- Local activities.