

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board (WSB 32)

4 March 2021
Online meeting



Agenda Item:	5.6 Communication and education
Subject:	Internal assessment of the 2012 TWSC communication strategy
Document No.:	WSB 32/5.6/1
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Submitted by:	CWSS

This document is an internal evaluation of the 2012 TWSC Communication Strategy against the current communication activities of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. The assessment is intended as preparatory work for a more in-depth analysis and revision of the communication strategy in 2021-22. , According to the Leeuwarden Declaration article 11, the internal assessment closes with the recommendation to update the 2012 strategy, rather than to develop a fully new strategy. For this update, a more in-depth, independent assessment of the strategy and the current situation is needed. For this, CWSS will seek out a professional PR agency. Besides receiving input from CWSS, the agency will be asked to actively request input of the TWSC member organisations through interviews and/or workshops. The results of the evaluation will be presented to the WSB and form the basis for the revision of the strategy in early 2022.

Proposal: The meeting is invited to **give feedback** on the internal assessment and **approve** the approach towards a revised updated communication strategy.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

2012 TWSC communication strategy

This document is an evaluation of the 2012 developed [TWSC Communication Strategy](#) against the current communication activities of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. The assessment is intended as preparatory work for a more in-depth analysis and revision of the communication strategy in 2021-22.

The last full TWSC communication strategy was developed in 2012 by the agency Papenfuss. The development process included a thorough analysis of the 2012 situation, based on the websites, communication activities and interviews with partners. The strategy contains a set of communicative aims, objectives, target audiences, key messages and information modules and a comprehensive set of measures.

Along with the implementation plan, the agency recommended to employ a CWSS Communication Officer long-term to ensure a consistent implementation of communication activities. Shortly after, the position was left empty from 2013 to 2016, due to which the implementation of the strategy was put on hold. In 2016 the position was filled again on a project base and kept to this date. In the period of these last four years, many of the measures recommended in the strategy were picked up and realised.

Since 2012, however, the TWSC and the topic of the Wadden Sea World Heritage as well as communication trends have developed further. Thus, it is high time to evaluate and revise the strategy to fit the new environment and set new goals for the next couple of years, as stipulated also in the Leeuwarden Declaration. This internal assessment contains a section-by-section evaluation of the 2012 strategy against the current activities and resources of CWSS communications as well as against current global trends of communication, some recommendations for the agency to conduct the in-depth analysis as well as for the TWSC communication in general, and, lastly, some next steps to follow this assessment. After the internal assessment of the strategy and status quo, a more in-depth analysis and revision of the communication strategy is planned for 2021-22. The strategy will be given to the Ministerial Council for adoption and implemented in 2022-2025, with concrete measures to accompany the next TWSC presidency term.

Section-by-section assessment

1. Aims

The first communicative aim of the strategy is directed at internal communication with partners and proposes “the communication of the CWSS to the partners of internal communication to not insist on antiquated forms of communication, in the same way that the partners need to change their communications attitude with a view to communicating forward more efficiently”. This aim is partially achieved. With new products and emphasis on new means of communication, antiquated forms have been replaced to a large extent in the course of the last four years, e.g. the online version of the Quality Status Report, a new combined website with a TWSC member area, microsites on specific issues, more emphasis on social media, newsletter, and other online publications. The process is ongoing. The second part of the communicative aim on the change of attitude towards communicating TWSC content forward more efficiently has to be assessed with interviews. This is a point difficult to assess as the status quo of 2012 is not available today. What can be said, however, is that activities of the TWSC are being implemented in newsletters of partners, but mostly when partners are directly involved.

The second communicative aim concerns changes in the external communication of all partners: “Expect to be criticised or ignored if you don't talk or if you don't tell anyone of your good deeds.” It proposes a more proactive communication overall, which has been built up in the last four years, as can be seen by the various new products, more activity on social media, more news items on the website and more press interactions.

Again, here it is only possible to evaluate the last four years, because data before 2016 has not been consistently collected. However, from experiences with various different target audiences it is clear, that the TWSC is still a concept too complex to easily grasp and understand and therefore not often known to people outside the circle of partners and well-established contacts. A survey will show whether also in the group of partners there are individuals without a clear profile of the TWSC. Due to its complexity and personal experiences, I assume that this is partially still the case, especially for new group members. The new annual report and newsletter are there to communicate the TWSC's activities to the partners and the new website communicates the essence of the Cooperation more clearly. The effects will have to be assessed in a survey.

Out of these two communicative aims, the central point of the strategy was formulated as "Creating a more pronounced profile of the TWSC through consistent conveying of certain information which illustrates the achievements and the added value of the Trilateral Cooperation!" The central point is fragmented into the communicative principles:

1. Classification of information modules and their categorisation
2. Setting editorial principles
3. Developing a central idea for communication
4. Attention to communication within a certain situation
5. Distinction between permanent and campaign-like communication
6. Implementation of the Corporate Design
7. Connection between form and content

The communicative principles are part of the next sections of the communication strategy and thus evaluated in the next sections of this assessment.

2. Objectives

For 2013 to 2015 the following strategic priorities for **external communication** of the TWSC have been set. The overview includes a preliminary internal assessment of whether CWSS sees the point as reached:

Strategic priority	Reached?
"strengthening of the perception of the Wadden Sea as a joint natural and cultural heritage"	Yes, to a large extent, although remains ongoing priority. Additionally, there is no common view on the communication of cultural heritage in the Wadden Sea Region
"obtainment of public and political support for the protection and the integrated management of the Wadden Sea as one entity"	Yes, remains ongoing priority, especially when reaching out to new target audiences
"support, furtherance and coordination of stakeholders' activities and involvement as well as education on the trilateral Wadden Sea"	Yes, remains ongoing priority
"increased depiction and promotion of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation as an international role model for successful, transboundary, integrated nature protection"	Yes, the TWSC is globally seen as a best case
"identification of locals and stakeholders with the honour Wadden Sea World Heritage"	Partially, creating ownership remains ongoing, but is in focus of Prowad Link among others

“displaying the pacemaker potential of the world heritage for the socio-economic development of the region”	Partially, creating ownership remains ongoing, but is in focus of Prowad Link among others
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The objectives of the strategy have largely been taken over in the communicative practice of CWSS, but they remain ongoing, as for their achievement a consistent and ongoing communication practice is relevant.

Concerning the strategic aims of the external communication, it is further stated that many partners were unaware of a) their responsibility to communicate and b) the added value, i.e. the advantages of transboundary collaboration as well as the added value of a joint Wadden Sea World Heritage during the development of the strategy in 2012. To this day, there seems to be a discrepancy in communication on the topics of World Heritage and the Cooperation: Whereas the Wadden Sea as World Heritage site is well communicated by partners, the TWSC is less communicated and its added value often questioned. However, this is only a CWSS perspective and a more reliant assessment has to be done via interviews and/or surveys.

For 2013 to 2015 the following strategic priorities for **internal communication** of the TWSC have been set. The overview includes a preliminary assessment of whether CWSS sees the point as reached:

Strategic priority	Reached?
“creating a more pronounced profile for the Trilateral Cooperation by means of key message & creating a Corporate Identity”	Yes, but needs constant reminding
“identification with the messages and aims of the TWSC”	Yes, but needs constant reminding
“display and better understanding of the work, attainment, successes and advantages of the TWSC”	Yes, through several publication formats (see measures)
“depiction of the added value of the TWSC and world heritage”	Yes, generally, but added value different for each target audience – needs to be addressed better
“stepping up communication on the trilateral Wadden Sea and the Cooperation, especially with regard to the world heritage area”	Yes, Communication Officer since 2016

3. Target audiences

The analysis of target audiences and forms of approach are still very accurate, as the spectrum of audiences has not changed over the years. The communication activities on the TWSC and WSWH still target politicians, administration, national parks, scientists, environmental study centres, environmental NGOs and tourism marketing in the internal communication and local population, local stakeholders, quality tourists, users of environmental study centres as well as media in the external communication. The strategy defines four different approaches to be applied to the different target audiences according to their needs: scientific, popular science, popular and child-appropriate. Concerning this section of the strategy, it has to be assessed through interviews with the partners and CWSS, however, whether the responsibilities for delivering information have been followed and whether there are some adjustments needed here.

4. Key messages and information modules

The key messages listed in the strategy remain valid. However, there are too many, which makes them impractical to use. A revision is therefore needed to establish a set of messages that should always be communicated, e.g. in press releases, publications etc., and a set of secondary messages in relation to specific topic.

With information modules the strategy recommends to pre-formulate blocks of information on specific sub-topics, such as on the significance of the TWSC, risks of the Wadden Sea, IWSS and Wadden Sea research. These have not been compiled, first presumably due to the vacant position of the Communications Officer and after that due to the daily work load of the Officer. Such modules could currently only be compiled efficiently and in a timely matter with the assistance of an intern. The compilation of fact sheets on different reoccurring issues of the TWSC to use by the communication departments of partners can be very useful – not only for the external communication, but also to achieve a stronger profile with the partners. Hence, the task should be taken up in 2022 during the last stages of the development of the new strategy.

The allocation of information modules to the target audiences is still valid.

5. Measures

A large portion of the strategy is a set of measures recommended to reach the aims and objectives. Most have been achieved by now, although some in a different format than intended in 2012 – in response to changed trends and needs. Very few have not been realised. Reasons are given in the table below.

Measure	Status
Design guidelines	Update in 2018 with guidelines for CWSS-internal and for partners (available on the website). Will be updated in 2022 to include better focus on TWSC and new publication formats (annual report, leaflet, reports, website, microsites, IWSS).
Leaflet TWSC	Attempted before 2016, but not realised. In 2018, leaflet on the TWSC milestones in honour of its 40 th anniversary and publication by BMU on the German presidency depicting the TWSC published. One general leaflet should be attempted in 2022 prior to TGC.
Leaflet WSWH	Renewed in 2020/21
Leaflet WH communication	Done in form of a digital toolkit in 2015 (Prowad) and now renewed as online brand platform (Prowad Link)

Image & Information Brochure TWSC	See status of “Leaflet TWSC”.
Magazine on TWSC	Magazine-style annual report conceptualised and published in 2020
Magazine on WH	Not done. It is recommended to evaluate the necessity in light of so many magazines already published by partners and the financial and staff resources needed by CWSS to realise such a project.
Posters and adverts	Done via IWSS and Toolkit, might need update eventually
Postcard	Done for satellite image
Wikipedia	Successfully edited in German, complications in English (changes were rejected by editorial panel due to limited third-party sources, as English sources are primarily available via our own website)
Reports and TWSC publications	Update of design guidelines and templates done, second update planned for 2021/22
CWSS + WSWH website	<p>A merged website for both CWSS and WSWH content was successfully relaunched in 2019. It carries some static information on the World Heritage site, the TWSC and CWSS and their work and networks. It also contains a section for visitors, although the website is not a destination website and this section is only meant as initial inspiration with links to our destination management partners. The information on these pages is regularly reviewed. However, larger changes and adaptations are always subject to additional translation work and therefore carefully examined (as done when adding a subpage on the Partnership Hub with the signing of the MoU).</p> <p>On top of the static information, there are regular news updates, events and resources.</p> <p>There are also microsites on topics that deserve a stronger focus, which cannot be given on the main website: IWSS, QSR, in work: WSFI, Swimway, SIMP, Alien Species.</p>
Intranet	Done as log-in area for TWSC members on the merged website
Forum	Not done. It is part of the current discussions for stakeholder engagement platform planned for 2021/2022 in framework of Prowad Link. However, opinions vary on its use and whether network partners will engage in the format.
Extranet	Planned via Prowad Link as stakeholder engagement platform
Blog	Not done as separate site, but as personal stories in newsletters and annual report.
Newsletter	Relaunched in May 2020 (bi-monthly, on TWSC activities)
Online adverts, banners, Net Promotion	Done via toolkit (Prowad)
Facebook	Social media gained a stronger focus with the years. Since 2017 there are regular social media workshops for social media managers within the TWSC network

	<p>organised by CWSS and conducted with help of professional consultants. The aim is improve exchange between partners and general performance in social media. In these workshops a rough social media communication concept was developed to push for more exchange of content between partner accounts. For the accounts tended to by CWSS, the following target audiences and topics are addressed: Facebook: general public and focus on Wadden Sea World Heritage Instagram: general public and focus on nature images Twitter: network, partners and interested public and focus on TWSC activities</p>
Powerpoint Presentation	<p>General slides on different subject done, but only given to partners on request, because they usually have to be customised to fit the event in question.</p>
Jour Fixe	<p>No fixed scheduling, conducted irregularly with the main partners.</p>
Environmental education	<p>All recommendations done within IWSS</p>
Workshops and seminars	<p>Belongs to daily business; several workshops and seminars during the year; exploring the medium of webinar</p>
events for locals and Stakeholders	<p>Only one-time events, such as the anniversary bike tour. Introducing a framework concept for all partners to follow has not yet been successful. A regular event for stakeholders is the International Tourism Fair ITB.</p>
Press relations	<p>About 12 press releases a year are achieved as goal, except for 2020 due to the pandemic and many events being cancelled. An annual talk with selected local media was introduced in 2017 but not done in 2020. The suggestion to offer 3-day press trips was not followed, due to lack of resources. However, CWSS supports the planning of ad-hoc trips, e.g. by the UNESCO Welterbestätten-Verein in Germany. Partners occasionally mention the TWSC and WSWH in their press releases.</p>

Overall assessment

The 2012 strategy is **in large parts still applicable** to today's communication needs of the TWSC. However, **some areas need updating** against current trends – especially the area of social media, which only played a minor role in 2021. Next to social media, the entire area of **online communication** needs to be better addressed in the new strategy, which is taking up more and more relevance, as the pandemic has shown.

In the assessment, the **measures** of the strategy should be reviewed against the current communication activities of CWSS and communication trends and needs. It should also be reviewed against the resources available to CWSS. The measures should not exceed the capacities of these resources without a plan in place to enhance them. Otherwise the aims in the strategy cannot be achieved to the fullest.

Further, in the measures chapter there is a full section on the International Wadden Sea School, but not on other larger **projects**, e.g. the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative. Those additional topics should be “add-ons” to the strategy (see point on lengths below), meaning they should be addressed in the overall strategy, by reviewed and worked on individually. Both the IWSS and the WSFI are part of the TWSC, but stand on their own. Thus, they should have their own strategies that should then be linked to the overall strategy. Putting them in the overall strategy, however, will overload the main paper, making it impractical. Also, especially in

regards to the WSFI, the communication of individual projects with external partners involved should stand by its own.

An aspect not covered by the strategy, but needs discussion is the integration of **content from TWSC groups** in the overall communication. It is not completely necessary to include this procedure in the strategy. However, experience has shown that it is not clear to the groups how their can push topics of their activities and results onto CWSS's communication agenda. Thus, we should use the opportunity of the evaluation survey among partners to include questions of what topics the groups have in mind and how they would like to be better represented. On that basis a procedure can be formed for a regular exchange of communication content between groups and CWSS.

The **collaboration** within the network on communication should also be part of the assessment with a recommendation of concrete and realistic measures on how to improve it, e.g. by establishing a network group with the communication experts of the member organisations and CWSS.

Another critical point of the strategy is its **length**. Both the [full strategy](#) (49 A3-pages) as well as the shorter [manual](#) (17 A4-pages) are too long and elaborate to be practical. It has to be part of the survey, but most probably many of the communication colleagues within the TWSC are unaware of the strategy and/or are not using it due to its length and complexity. Thus, the renewed strategy should be readapted to the actual needs of the people, who are asked to use it: for CWSS it should include the messages and measures specifically applicable to its work, for the TWSC member organisations an even shorter version of just up to 10 pages with the most relevant, ready-to-use information for them and useful links should be developed.

Recommendation

With the abovementioned considerations, a revision of the strategy based on an in-depth analysis is recommended, rather than replacing it by a fully new strategy. The process of analysis and revision should be accompanied by a professional PR agency and should include modules on interactive input from CWSS and the TWSC member organisations (in form of interviews and/or workshops). For this, CWSS, in coordination with the WH Focal Points, will instruct the agency with the relevant contacts in the TWSC network.

The following step-wise approach is recommended

Step 1 was the internal assessment of the 2012 strategy (this document). Step 2 is now to involve a professional PR agency for a more profound analysis of the status quo with its constructive elements, shortcomings, risks and opportunities. Step 2 will be done in 2021 with some modules of active engagement with the TWSC network by the agency to receive a complete picture of criticisms and recommendations. The results will be presented and discussed at the November meeting of the Wadden Sea Board. Step 3 will be the revision of the strategy to an update, which will be in force for the next presidency. The analysis of the PR agency and input of the TWSC from step 2 will form the basis for the revision. The updated strategy will be presented to the WSB in 2022 and submitted to the TGC for final adoption.

Next steps

March 2021	With approval of approach by WSB 32, call for tender for communication agencies
April 2021	Selection of agency
May-October 2021	In-depth analysis of TWSC communication activities including survey of partners and workshops at operational level
November 2021	Presentation of analysis results to the WSB 34
November 2021-	Development of strategy on basis of analysis with basic elements of a

March 2022	communication plan, recommended measures and a media plan for upcoming years
March/April 2022	Presentation of final strategy with request for feedback/approval at WSB
March-October 2022	Possible revision of strategy, preparation for adoption process at TGC