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North Sea Commission Culture and Tourism Group

DRAFT OPINION to the Executive Committee

On the Follow-up of (finished) Interreg projects

In May 2005, Rogaland County Council wrote a letter to the President of the NSC on behalf of the North Sea Cycle Route project.

The letter points out that this project is now approaching its final phase, and that there needs to be a solution to maintain the very good results achieved by this project, that in fact has involved 68 regions around the North Sea.

There is a suggestion that the NSC should take over the international co-ordination of the cycle route, including its website. It is further suggested that a cycle route co-ordinator is attached to the NSC secretariat to deal with these issues. This international secretariat would be responsible for

- maintaining and improving the route
- maintaining and developing the website
- co-ordinate marketing of the North Sea Cycle Route worldwide

It is further suggested that the current partners should pay an annual fee, which would finance most of the activities envisaged.

This letter was presented to the Executive Committee of the North Sea Commission at their meeting on 27 October 2005 in Trollhättan. The Executive Committee there asked for the opinion of the Culture and Tourism Group before making a final decision at the upcoming Executive Committee meeting 1-2 March 2006.

The Culture and Tourism Group discussed the letter at their XXVI meeting in Trollhättan, 29 October 2005. The group asked the Chair to prepare a draft opinion on behalf of the group, to be presented to the Executive Committee.

This letter from Rogaland County Council raises some questions of principles.

There have been approved more than 50 Interreg IIIB projects in the North Sea region, and a similar number of Interreg IIC projects. Most of these would probably have produced results that should be sustained after the completion of these projects.

Not many, if any, projects have had so many partners as the North Sea Cycle Route, 68 regions from most of the NSC countries (all except France).

The North Sea Cycle Route has established a cycle route encompassing most the NSC area, and through the website, both the cycle route itself, supporting services for cyclists and attractions along



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the route are highlighted and made available to users worldwide. This must be an asset for the NSC and its member regions.

Other projects, like the NAVE nortrail, the North Sea Trail, have produced similar results of equal value to the NSC and its member regions.

There could be little doubt that the results of these and similar projects are of lasting value, but need to be maintained by someone.

It is also a requirement for all Interreg applicants to provide plans for how the results of their projects should be sustained/maintained after the project funding ends.

If this has not happened, the NSC is the only trans-national and trans-regional organisation in the North Sea area, and therefore, the only organisation that possibly could take responsibility for this.

The NSC economy is one restraint limiting the NSC's possibilities of supporting or taking over the responsibility of finished projects. The NSC budget is even insufficient to support the current level of NSC activity proper.

The other restraint may be the willingness to take on board a number of administrative duties. There is a clear will in the Executive Committee to focus on political issues, and limit the number of administrative issues to a minimum. This might be the main concern why the NSC should not take financial and/or administrative responsibility, neither for the North Sea Cycle Route nor for any other completed Interreg North Sea project.

There must be other ways, the most obvious being that the partners form new partnerships/networks where they commit themselves to maintain the results they have achieved during the Interreg funding period.

In fact, the North Sea Cycle Route suggests a combination of this and NSC responsibility, but probably, they could themselves run also the trans-national umbrella they suggest that NSC should run for them.

To summarize, the Culture and Tourism group recommends that the North Sea Commission do not engage itself in the future operation of the North Sea Cycle Route on the following grounds:

1. The North Sea Commission should focus on political issues of European dimension and should avoid taking on new administrative duties
2. The North Sea Commission should concentrate its administrative staff resources in preparing issues for the Executive Committee
3. The North Sea Commission should concentrate its very limited financial resources on supporting the Executive Committee's initiatives and strengthening the administrative support for this policy.