



# **Understanding how to approach/ engage coastal residents and tourists with sustainable coastal development in Belgium**

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Reference: Schmid, M., Vermeulen C., Cauberghe, V. Bouman, T. & Vandamme, S. (2024). Report on the influence of key motivators, inhibitors and place attachment on sustainable coastal development support among coastal residents and tourists. Research report.



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**N = 1456**



# Sustainable Coastal Development & Influencing Factors

## Demographics

### General:

- Age & Gender
- Education & Income

### Related to the coast:

- Resident vs. tourist
- Number of visits
- Working sector

*Influencing factors*

## Internal variables

Basic human values

Marine Value Orientations

Personal Norm

Place attachment

Climax Thinking

Risk perception

## External variables

Impact perception

Emotion toward projects

Trust

Acceptability of blue transition projects



# Diverse sectors



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Aquaculture**



**Ports**



**Tourism**

- High intrinsic orientation and high biospheric values
- Positive beliefs about the project
- Sea level rise and loss of marine life risk perception
- Place identity
- Low trust

People with a strong coastal and/or environmental identity

- High instrumental orientation and low egoistic values
- Positive beliefs about the project
- Sea level rise risk perception

- High instrumental orientation
- Positive beliefs about the project

- High instrumental orientation and high egoistic values
- Positive beliefs about the project
- Economic decline risk perception

More economic oriented people

- High instrumental and relational (community) orientation and high egoistic values
- Positive beliefs about the project
- Economic decline risk perception
- Place dependence
- High trust

# Diverse sectors



**Aquaculture**



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Ports**



**Tourism**

Different sectors → found this variety also in our results → **no one-size-fits all** =  
no perfect instruction manual to reach full acceptance for all of the projects

## Diverse sectors: Coastal Protection



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Aquaculture**



**Ports**



**Tourism**

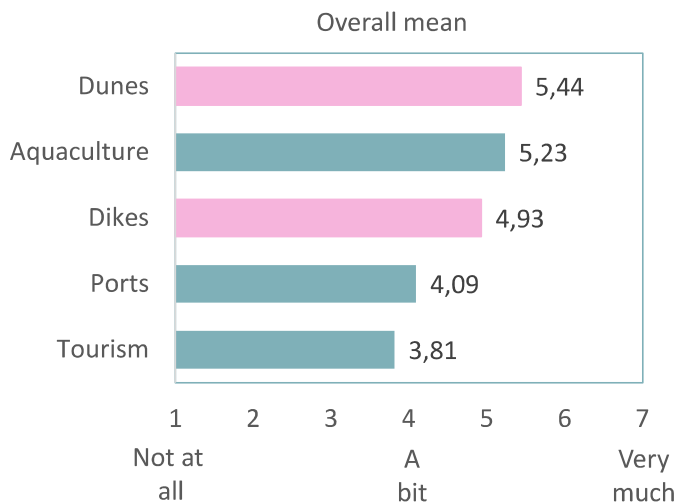




# Key take aways for coastal protection (dunes & dikes)

*I accept expanding and heightening **natural dunes** (up to 4m) in my local area/the places I like to visit at the Belgian coast.*

*I accept building new sea **dikes** and heightening existing ones in my local area/the places I like to visit at the Belgian coast.*



- Dunes are more accepted than dikes, maybe due to wider perceived (environmental) benefits.
- Generally accepted and even more so by individuals who have familiarity with the Belgian coast (i.e. residents, frequent visitors and people who have worked in the marine sector).
- An overall clear understanding of the need to protect the coastal region against sea level rise (even more for people with high risk perceptions and a high place identity to the Belgian coast).
- **But** the acceptability of any specific (coastal protection) project is likely to decrease if people perceive that it will negatively affect their lives.

# Key take aways – Communication strategy for coastal protection

- Emphasise sea level rise risks and the potential positive impact of these projects
  - **Local residents:** protecting both property and lives along the coast
  - BUT consider also the **tourists** (acceptance for dunes was a bit higher for residents): how will they also benefit from coastal protection measures?
- Dunes > Dikes: demonstrate how coastal protection can benefit nature, e.g. the more recent, creative designs



## Diverse sectors: Aquaculture



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Aquaculture**

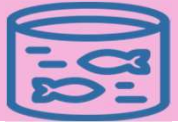


**Ports**

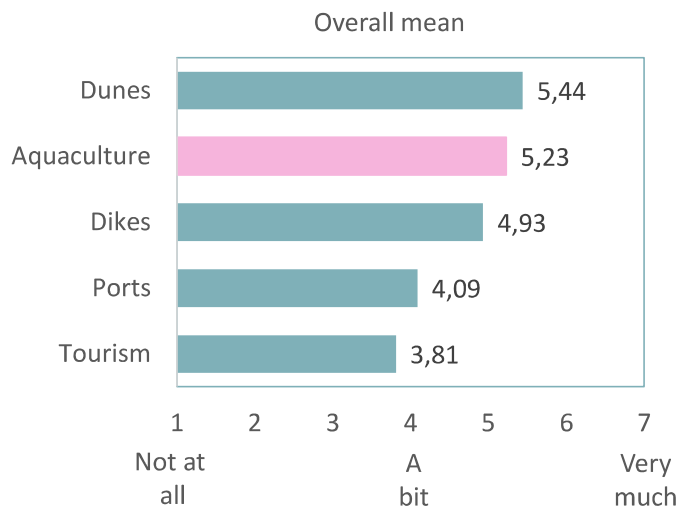


**Tourism**

# Key take aways for Aquaculture



*I accept farming of mussels, oysters, seaweed in the North Sea (i.e. **aquaculture**).*



- Generally accepted
- No significant differences between tourist and residents on the acceptance of aquaculture
- Only (negative) impact perception and emotion have a relatively strong role in predicting acceptance.
- **As aquaculture projects are new along the Belgian coast, the lack of other significantly strong predictors may suggest a lack of general awareness and knowledge about aquaculture.** Hence people may have less formalised views regarding aquaculture.

# Key take aways – Communication strategy for aquaculture



- Educate the public (both residents and tourists) on aquaculture projects along the Belgian coast
  - Make aquaculture part of the Belgian coast identity
  - Strengthen the already positive beliefs about aquaculture for the long term
  - Highlight the co-benefits of aquaculture, with a special focus on:
    - Co-existence with other activities for those people who might perceive aquaculture as a barrier to their own activities or to human activities in general (i.e. those with a higher place dependence)

## Diverse sectors: Ports



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Aquaculture**



**Ports**

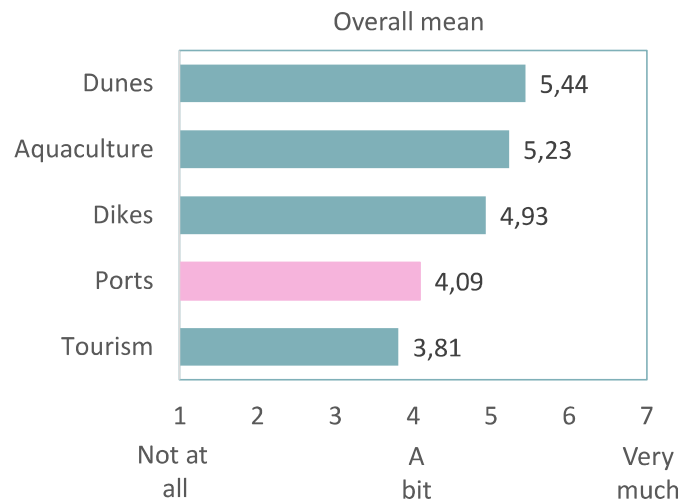


**Tourism**

# Key take aways for the expansion of ports



*I accept expanding **ports** to allow bigger ships for the development of new activities (e.g., seafood farming and wind farms at sea).*



- Not well accepted.
- Only impact perception and emotion have a relatively strong role in predicting acceptance of ports.
- Overall ports seem to be perceived as important to the coastal economy but the acceptability of any specific port expansion will depend on whether people perceive that it will negatively affect their lives. This perception will further depend on how the activities for which the port expansion is required are perceived.

# Key take aways – Communication strategy for ports

- Focus communication efforts to the communities neighbouring ports that would be directly affected by any port expansion
- Properly explain the reason for port expansion and consider how it might be perceived by different people:
  - For people with a high coastal and/or environmental identity, demonstrate wider beneficial effects on local communities and on the environment (or at least how any negative impacts have been minimised)
  - People with a high place dependence, who love the coast for its activities and the instrumental benefits, are possibly worried that expanding the ports will take up more space. Therefore it is important to highlight how other activities will be affected, or if there is a possibility for multi-use.

## Diverse sectors: Tourism



**Natural dunes**



**Dikes**



**Aquaculture**



**Ports**



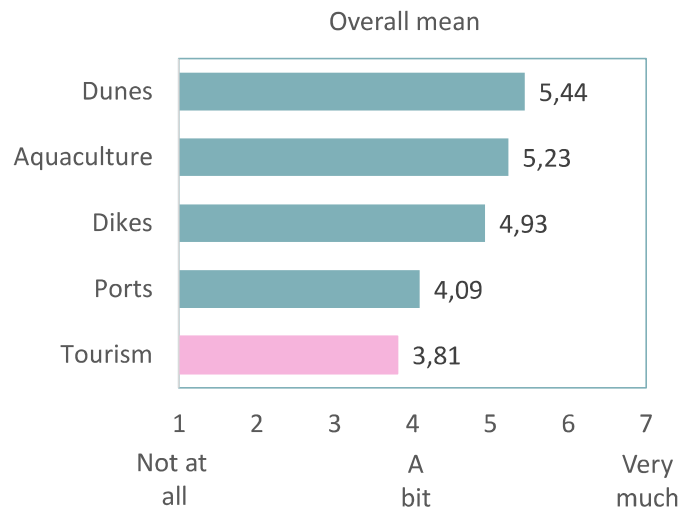
**Tourism**



# Key take aways for promoting tourism



*I accept promoting and developing **tourism** in less touristic areas of the Belgian coast.*

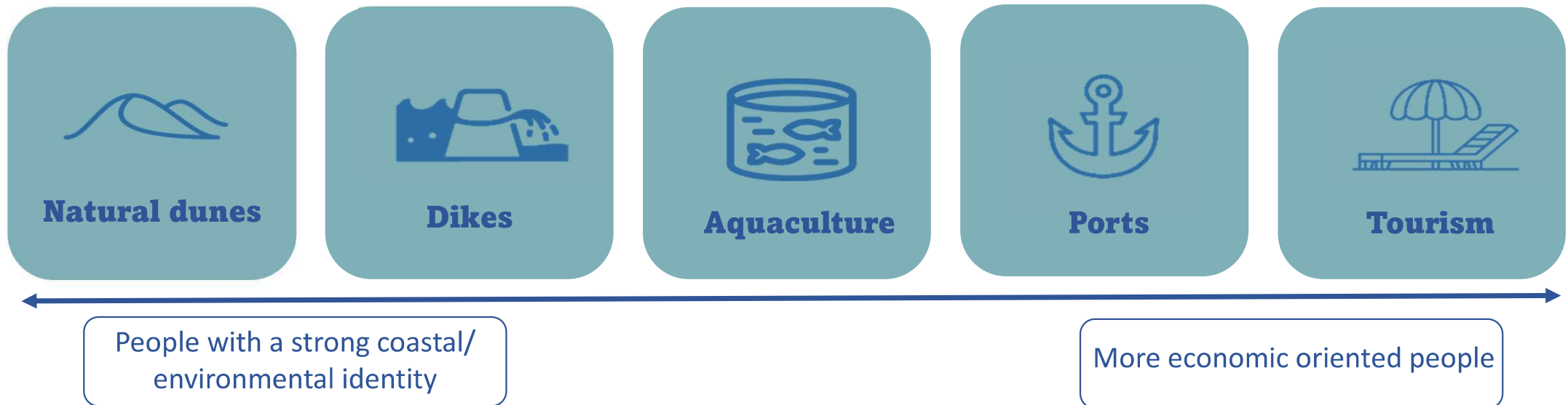


- Limited acceptance, especially by individuals who have familiarity with the Belgian coast (and high place identity) (i.e. residents, frequent visitors and people who have worked in the marine sector).
- Tourism is perceived as important for a thriving coastal economy (as evidenced by the strong role of place dependence and economic decline risk perception in predicting acceptance).
- **But development of tourism is also associated with negative (local and environmental) impacts.**

# Key take aways – Communication strategy for tourism

- Focus communication efforts on residents and environmentally-minded people and consider matters important to them e.g.:
  - Minimal to beneficial environmental impact
  - Minimal to beneficial impacts on the local communities
- Need to change the image/perception of tourism?

# Diverse sectors: Conclusion



- There are differences between those who feel familiar with the coast (residents/frequent visitors/people in the marine working sector...) vs. others
- Overall, risk perceptions and positive beliefs about the project are the most important factors for acceptability
- Necessary to differentiate the communication strategies depending on the type of coastal development project  
→ different motivations for acceptance: strong coastal and/or environmental identity vs. more economic oriented