Sustainable nautical tourism and water sports
Panel: Integrating sustainability across the water sports industry

Paddling, stand-up paddling, sailing, and diving have become increasingly popular during the corona pandemic. Although they take place in nature and no additional propulsion is needed, they are not necessarily sustainable.

The challenges of making water sports more environmentally friendly were discussed by Florian Brunner (Starboard, Managing Director), Thomas Dederichs (Diving Industry Association (TIV), Chairman), Oto Dzenis (Marina Auda Riga, Manager), Eike Krebs (Federal Canoe Assosiation (BVKanu), Chairman of the committee for Quality), Jérôme Pero (Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry (FESI), Secretary-General) at the blue innovation dock at boot Düsseldorf. They highlighted three areas within the water sports industry where change could have appositive environmental impact: equipment, its manufacture and use.

Right from the start of the roundtable, one major problem in the water sports industry became clear: the material of paddleboards, boards, and boats. Most are made of plastic and create a large mass of waste at the end of their life. Relying on sustainable and recyclable construction methods is one way manufacturers can reduce the waste problem. Recycled PET bottles or biodegradable resins can already be used but are causing prices to rise. Many customers are not willing to pay more for a piece of sports equipment, especially if it is rarely used. Inexpensive equipment has a shorter lifespan, needs to be replaced early, and creates waste after only a short period of use.

As the speakers at the Sustainability Forum explained, technical advancements in materials and construction methods are needed, as well as customer education . On the one hand, awareness must be created about sustainability and nature conservation. On the other hand, they must be given solutions that enable them to put what they have learned into practice. In terms of boats or surf and paddle boards, this means that the purchase of a cheap paddle board of inferior quality and low environmental performance should be avoided. In order not to have to do without the use of a high-quality boat or board for financial reasons, rental offers as well as sharing models offer a good alternative that should be expanded.

In terms of other sports, such as diving, this attention to nature conservation could mean that customers are careful not to increase their ecological footprint when traveling on diving trips. Is it necessary to go on a long-distance trip? Are there diving destinations where the motorboats are powered by solar energy rather than diesel? These are questions that tourists might ask themselves before embarking on their trip to find out where their own sport is offered in a more environmentally friendly way.
To prolong the life of boats, for example, the issue of maintenance and repair was also raised. If the sport is done as a hobby, the equipment does not have to be brand-new in every case. Buying used equipment, as well as good maintenance, repairs and renovation, extends the useful life of water sports equipment and greatly improves the environmental footprint.

In addition to the demands on customers, the speakers also have some calls for policymakers. In order to achieve a change in the industry towards more sustainability, it is necessary for the European Commission to adopt uniform laws and guidelines. According to the experts, these would have to include the three previously named areas, production, materials ,and use. In addition, the introduction of more and more new labels and sustainability certificates, which are not comparable with each other, would also have to be stopped.