



Ex-Post Evaluation – INTERREG III 2000-2006

PROGRAMME: INTERREG III B Western Mediterranean

THON.DOC (Adding value to tuna fishing as cultural heritage in the Western Mediterranean)

Project Good Practice Study

Project study: THON.DOC. Adding value to tuna fishing as cultural heritage in the Western Mediterranean

1. General information

Keywords: piscatorial tourism, alternative tourism, fishing

Region: Mediterranean

Programme: INTERREG III B MEDOCC, part of Strand B of the INTERREG Community Initiative

Duration: 1 August 2006 and 30 September 2008

Funding: Total budget, €1.703.399,98, including €1,000,000 ERDF participation, €607,999.98 initial regional and central government co-financing, and supplementary co-financing of €95.400,00 from the project partners, agreed during project implementation.

Lead Partner: Prefecture of Heraklion, Greece

Partners: 11 partners from Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Tunisia, comprising government representatives at national, regional and local level (i.e. Ministry of Environment of Tunisia; Department of Agriculture and Fishing of Andalusia in Spain, two Greek Prefectures; two municipalities from Portugal and from Spain and two communes from Italy) as well as a national research centre (i.e. National Research Council in Italy), two universities (e.g. La Sapienza of Rome and the University of Athens) and an organisation promoting aquatic tourism (Dohrn Aquarium and Zoo, in Naples). All partner regions face common development challenges and have a large fishing sector.

2. Project Aim

The overall aim was to develop sustainable and innovative tourism based on the management and protection of cultural heritage and the environment. Specifically, the project was meant to promote an alternative form of tourism to traditional beach holidays (in a similar vein to agro-tourism), i.e. piscatorial tourism, an activity that would support existing fishing-related tourist activity and, in so doing, celebrate the cultures of local communities who depend on fishing.

3. Project Description

The project sought to establish links with aquatic tourism and sustainable ecotourism, focused on traditional tuna fishing and production of fish roe in the project partners' regions. In particular, it encouraged tourist contact with local fishing communities and the sea (e.g. visiting a partner region to take part in the fishing of specific species depending on the season, such as squid in January), by offering short lessons on maritime biology, cooking lessons and insight into how to treat/handle fish and fish products (e.g. learning how roe are prepared, celebrating the sardine feast).

Partners planned to carry out studies, pilot projects, exchange of experience and networking, and the communication and dissemination of activities. The main objectives were to:

- identify additional sources of income for fishermen and identifying alternative jobs
- decrease the quantities of fish caught
- disseminate knowledge related to sea, fish species and to coastal environment
- increase knowledge and understanding of the different cultures and mentality of people living off marine resources
- encourage respect for the environment and improve the relationship of people living and

working in these coastal areas with their natural environment

The project was to be carried out in 4 phases: project coordination, studies, pilot activities, and publicity and communication:

1. Coordination: setting up the project management system; transnational project meeting of all partners; organization of teams at the central and local level; central team to put together an implementation strategy in cooperation with local teams
2. Studies: determining the working themes: history of fishing; number and type of vessels functioning in the covered regions; dynamics of fishing in the participating regions; nutritious value of fish; the socio-economic situation of the regions; traditional recipes. The necessary data were collected and the situation of the fishing sector in the regions involved was analysed.
3. Pilot activities: presentation of analyses of potential funding courses and tourism development strategies to stakeholders; establishment of a partner observatory
4. Publicity and communication: dissemination of deliverables through a webpage; establishment of a network of town halls; thematic meetings with fishermen, their associations, port authorities, researchers etc; surveys and questionnaires; communication of conclusions to ministries for fishing;

4. Political and Strategic Context

Fishing lies at the very heart of Mediterranean coastal economies. In the 1970s an EC structural policy was set up to coordinate the modernisation of fishing vessels and on-shore installations. After years of difficult negotiations, the Common Fishery Policy was born in 1983. In 2002 this policy was reviewed and further reforms are under way. Yet despite such measures, Europe's fishing sector faces considerable challenges such as oversized fleets and overfishing, with fish caught before they are allowed to grow and in many cases before they have been able to reproduce. Consequently, the sector suffers from poor economic efficiency and excessive fuel consumption. Productivity is low, as are its economic and social benefits. It produces a high environmental impact, yet makes a relatively small contribution to the EU's food supply.

Nevertheless, the fishing sector is strong in all 12 Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Tunisian regions involved in THON. The challenges are common: coping with migration, low (and decreasing) population density below the European average, high unemployment (especially among women and youngsters), poor innovation capacity, of the absence of an integrated and competitive tourism system, high environmental risks from unsustainable tourism. As such, the project was conceived as an instrument for promoting sustainable social development and economic growth in the regions involved.

5. Project Implementation

The partners met 6 times (3 times per year) during the project, in different partner regions. Transnational meetings helped partners reach agreement on project objectives and activities. Partner expectations regarding project goals differed at the outset, but eventually the partners found common ground. All partners engaged in the mutual exchange of experience, developed joint policy strategies and pilot projects, and tested common approaches developed within the project.

In the first phase, after the 1st Transnational Meeting of Partners in Heraklion, project teams were set up. The central management team, hosted by the Lead Partner, was put in charge of project coordination, monitoring, quality control, audit and evaluation. It drew up a project implementation strategy and oversaw the progress of the project. In the final phase, deliverables and results were disseminated through a website in 4 languages. A network of town halls (municipalities) from the partner regions was established. Thematic meetings took place with fishermen, their associations, port authorities, researchers etc. where

questionnaires investigating the problems the modern fishery faces were circulated. Findings were then sent on to the relevant ministries of shipping, agriculture and fisheries in the respective partner countries. Articles were published in the local press and audiovisual material produced (cook books, DVDs, etc).

6. Project Results

The key deliverables included:

- 1 transnational plan for piscatorial tourism drafted. The Plan will guide the implementation of models of tourism developed in the studies through pilot projects.
- 1 website in 4 languages outlining the project deliverables
- 6 studies based on the data collected in the regions, on the following topics: history of fishing and roe in the project area, number and type of vessels functioning in the area, dynamics of fishing in the participating regions, nourishing value of fish, socio-economic situation of the regions involved, traditional recipes
- 5 tourism guides on regional traditions, history and the cultural heritage of the partner regions
- 2 books of recipes and gastronomic experiences (the latter translated in 4 languages - French, English, Italian and Spanish)
- informative meetings with fishermen, tour operators, hotel keepers and tourist guides

Overall, the THON Observatory (produced by the Rome University "La Sapienza" and incorporating data by the partner regions) played an important role in disseminating the results of the project and in providing further information on the project area (e.g. maps, compiled data on lists of fishing boats, fishing history and the dynamics of fish catches in each region, protected species, EU and national fisheries legislative frameworks, the nutritious value of fish catches and traditional recipes for cooking local fish). The THON network of town halls (municipalities) contributes to the long-term sustainability of the project.

As for results, the project has registered 7.5 million hits on its project website (<http://www.thondoc.ntua.gr/>), and there has been a marked increase in interest expressed in fishing-related (piscatorial) tourism (20,000 more tourists doing piscatorial tourism in Crete; 32,000 more tourists in Myrtini). Certain initiatives were also taken, triggered by the project, but not foreseen within the original action plan, as follows:

- In Greece, a fishermen's feast was established to show the potential of this type of tourism to the wider public. Fishermen took part with great enthusiasm.
- In Italy the local community and the local authorities embraced the project initiatives to help fishermen develop tourism activities by taking tourists out on their boats for fishing trips, then exploring the gastronomy of the catches together.
- In Italy and Spain tour operators are showing interest in advertising and organizing piscatorial tours thanks to the project. Tourist packages have now been developed that will contribute to year-round tourism. Local and national government support was more conducive and the project has made a difference to the local economies.

Looking to the future, the project partners are still in contact and have explored further projects focused on the related fields of deep-sea tourism and archaeological sea tourism.

7. Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Overall the project has enhanced awareness in the western Mediterranean of common challenges and development perspective. It fostered inter-cultural understanding and encouraged organisational learning within individual partner regions. Project partners are better equipped to be able to tackle economic developments issues related to fishing, having identified new opportunities and benefitted from significant knowledge transfer.

Key success factors encouraging cooperation beyond the INTERREG project include the

commitment of the project leader himself, the provision of clear guidelines on what more needed to be done, and the fact the partnership built mutual respect among its partners, achieved via the 6 partner meetings in the different partner regions and regular contacts maintained between lead partner and other partners.

What was deemed to be highly valuable was the involvement of public authorities from different levels (local, regional and national), practitioners (Dohrn Aquarium and Zoo, in Naples) and researchers (National Research Council in Italy and two universities, which allowed partners to draw on different types of expertise and ensured high quality deliverables. There was early involvement of public sector experts with considerable experience of legislation in the relevant sectors of fisheries and tourism. However, an even more intense involvement of the partners in the project preparation phase would have enabled them to prepare and lobby for legislative change. This particularly the case in Greece and Portugal where the existing legislative framework, preventing fishing boats from taking tourists onboard, was, unfortunately, not modified.

Despite such legal shortcomings in cooperation, the project has produced valuable lessons in a very specific field of economic activity and promoted good practice in sustainable economic development. According to the lead partner, the project could not have been undertaken without INTERREG funding since the transnational partnership would not have been sustained financially. The project has shown the potential of giving alternative sources of income to fishermen through tourism and culture.