Linking fisheries to the tourism economy

9th Transnational Seminar for Fisheries Local Action Groups

Sardinia, Italy. 22-24 October 2013

REPORT

This seminar was FARNET's second lab-style event in which participants worked on a very specific theme, in this case - how to link fisheries to the tourism economy. Organised at the initiative of DG Mare and with the support of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia and the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, this transnational seminar took place in Sardinia from the 22-24 October 2013. It brought together over 80 FLAGs from 20 different EU countries, along with members of national and regional authorities responsible for implementing Axis 4 in order to work through the process of supporting fisheries-related tourism.

A mix of presentations, project examples and working group exercises guided participants, with the help of 4 experts from the tourism industry, though three key themes: matching fisheries areas' assets with potential markets; developing fisheries-related tourism products; and promoting and marketing fisheries-related tourism. A visit to see an Italian pesca-tourism boat and "itti-tourism" restaurant, and the exhibition of FLAG project examples, also gave participants an overview of different types of tourism projects that are helping fishing communities to tap into the potential that the tourism economy can offer.

FLAG Fair of tourism material & projects

The seminar was opened with a welcome by the mayor of Pula, Walter Cabasino, and an exhibition of around 70 different projects related to tourism from the fisheries areas present at the event. Participants displayed promotional material and descriptions of projects that are helping to promote their local fisheries heritage and raise awareness of the fishing activity as well as projects creating new sources of revenue within and around fishing. Some of these included: activities linked to the fishing activity such as pesca-tourism or guided visits of aquaculture sites; improving infrastructure to make fishing ports more attractive to tourists; support for local fish restaurants and accommodation provided by fishermen and their families; and projects that foster cooperation between the fisheries and tourist sectors to develop and market successful tourist products and services. The full list of project exhibited can be found at the following link.

Linking fisheries to the tourism economy: opening plenary session

The first plenary session set the scene for work to follow with short speeches from Frangiscos Nikolian, Head of Unit at DG Mare, Mr. Gatto, Italy's Director-General of Fisheries and Ms Marinelli, Director of Fisheries in Sardinia. Mr Nikolian compared FLAG work to link fisheries to tourism with successful Leader initiatives, starting 20 years ago, to develop rural tourism. But he also pointed to some key differences between such rural areas and many of today's fisheries areas which may already see strong growth and a high presence of tourism. The challenge, he said, is that fishing communities do not necessarily benefit from the developments around them and may even suffer as a result. Whether fisheries areas are remote areas with low economic activity which could benefit from more tourism or flourishing coastal economies in which the fisheries sector finds itself increasingly marginalized, Mr Nikolian insisted that FLAGs are well placed to help the fisheries sector tap into a trend towards quality local food and a search for "authenticity" and unique experiences; they can help create a new niche for fisheries related tourism.

Before moving on to a presentation of the conference theme, Ms Marinelli welcomed participants to her region and Mr Gatto underlined the state of play of Axis 4 in Italy and some key areas of work for Italian FLAGs for whom tourism is often a priority line of work. A presentation by FARNET then illustrated how fishing communities stand to benefit from taking advantage of tourism (increased added value for local fisheries products, greater awareness of Europe's fisheries heritage, additional revenue streams for fishermen and their families…) and how they FLAGs can support them to do so. Mr Selenu, President of the East Sardinian FLAG, then presented the key socio-economic characteristics his territory and its fisheries sector before going on to describe the key objectives of the FLAG's local development strategy. Parts of Sardinia's fishing sector has strong experience in linking up with tourism by taking tourists on board fishing vessels as well as involving them in land-based activities such as visits to aquaculture sites and offering opportunities to eat freshly caught local fish in restaurants run directly by fishing associations. Mr Selenu explained how the FLAG aimed to consolidate such initiatives to make sustainable fisheries integral to a quality tourist offer in his area.

Developing fisheries-related tourism: plenary session with presentations from tourism experts

This session provided the participants with key concepts and tools useful in developing fisheries-related tourism. Colin Smith from the Glamis Consultancy in Scotland explained what is meant by a tourist product and how it is developed, by introducing the key concept of customer experience and customer journey, as well as some of the key questions that need to be addressed in developing a tourism product. Marko Koscak from Slovenia focused on the principles and tools for marketing via tour operators and working with tourism actors at local, regional and national level, some typical errors in marketing a new tourist destination in the domestic and international markets, as well as useful techniques to work with tourist industry and media. Susie Burnet from the Edinburgh International Festival stressed the need for clear messages adapted to the target audience, and presented an overview of various marketing channels (both off-line and on-line) and tools that FLAGs and project promoters can use to market their product directly to the end consumer.

Promoting quality in fisheries tourism: plenary presentation of project examples

In this session, two project examples were presented to illustrate some transversal issues in developing fisheries-related tourism in FLAG areas: MarGalaica from Galicia (Spain), an example of developing, packaging and promoting quality tourist products related to fisheries which started with one FLAG territory (Fisterra) and then developed to include all Galician FLAGs (and possibly to be extended to other parts of Spain); and a training programme for fishermen from Northern and Western Lapland (Finland) to provide motivation and skills necessary to ensure adequate quality of tourist services. The speakers (Sebastian Valverde, Manuela Oviedo and Markku Ahonen) stressed a number of key issues such as the length of time needed for a new tourism product to take off, the importance of capacity building for people involved, especially fishermen (and the difficulty of finding the appropriate skills), as well as the need to ensure the involvement and cooperation of a wide range of local actors.

Working Groups

Based on the input from plenary presentations, as well as the project examples from the exhibitions and the study visit, the participants worked on developing and marketing their own "tourist products". Four parallel working groups were set up, two from the North and two from the South of Europe, to take account of the different types of tourism. Assisted by facilitators and tourism experts, each group went through the process of identifying key assets and target groups of their fisheries areas, developing a new product for fisheries-related tourism, and preparing a marketing plan for their area (based on the assets, target groups and products).

WG1: Matching assets and markets:

In the first Working Group session, the participants identified key fisheries-related assets of their area and the most important target groups for their tourism. The experts helped the participants to understand the concept of "assets" in the context of a fisheries area. Assets identified include: fishing businesses and fishing experience, humans – fishermen themselves and the whole community, gastronomy – including local products available in the harbour, accessible and unspoilt areas, beautiful coastlines, diversity of bio-fauna, famous cultural heritage, underwater archeological sites, museums, parks for children, saunas, and even shopping. The identified assets also included existing tourist infrastructure, hotels, good transportation etc. (although these don't necessarily help to distinguish the fisheries area from other types of tourist destinations). Areas which already have strong tourist demand did not generally have to create more accommodation or catering – the main point for them was to attract the clients of existing establishments towards fisheries-related products; in this context the concept introduced by one of the experts of a tourist "gateway" (using an already recognised tourist destination to attract tourists to visit a new area, initially for a shorter period of time) was potentially useful.

Experts encouraged the participants to be as specific as possible in defining their target groups. Potential target groups for fisheries-related tourism were identified first by type of activity: water sports, experiential tourists, gastronomic tourists (also called "seafood lovers"), corporate visitors, eco-tourists… and then by demographic and geo-demographic delineations: families, schools, independent travellers, older generations (especially the "silver tourists", relatively wealthy retirees), local urban couples, handicapped people etc. The time of stay was another distinguishing factor (e.g. day trippers). In areas with already high numbers of tourists, the specific focus on target groups was largely determined by the season: in the high season they aim to build primarily on existing tourists, while at other times of the year they focus on new target groups such as schools or elderly people in order to extend the season.

This identification of assets and target groups was later used as a basis for product development and marketing strategy.

WG2: Product development

A wide range of potential products were identified, ranging from ice-fishing and a fishing golf trail, through to fish festivals and culinary events focusing on less known or seasonal fish species, business-oriented team building, wildlife watching from fishing boats, educational packages for schools and guided bicycle tours, to smoking fish in used whisky barrels or learning how to cook fish from expert chefs. The participants in smaller sub-groups developed the product of their choice going through a set of guiding questions related to the product concept, market assessment, feasibility, operation and risk assessment. They tried to find a product that would be: market-focused, innovative, financially viable, deliverable, built on destination assets and that would comply with the principles of sustainable tourism. The experts also stressed the need to measure outputs and outcomes.

Tackling aspects such as price setting and identification of budget required proved challenging for some groups. And, identifying the scale of the potential market and likely competitors beyond the directly comparable took quite a bit of discussion to broaden the thinking and experience of the groups. Some products were regarded as relatively easy to deliver (such as the fish festival). However, in their final selection the participants did not opt only for "easy" products but preferred to develop products which targeted higher value, staying visitors. Although these products presented greater challenges, they could also bring greater value for money.

WG3: Marketing fisheries-related tourism

In this session the participants were asked to bring together their work from previous sessions to develop a marketing plan for their destination. The experts advised them on how to address the key elements of the marketing mix at each stage of the "customer journey", i.e. how the customer interacts with the destination and product, from thinking about visiting to returning home and sharing experiences with other people. The importance of adapting the strategy to the target markets, which may well be on their doorstep rather than in the high entry international tourism industry, was stressed, as well as the distinction between promotion and marketing (the latter looking at all aspects of the product from the customer perspective). Experts helped the groups define their target audience taking into account specific traits and age ranges, reading habits and communication preferences.

Strong messages around unique aspects of the offers were identified. The selection of marketing channels focused to a large extent on online options: experts' advice on social media and other on-line tools was highly appreciated. The importance of working with intermediaries (national and international niche tour operators) was explained, together with tools such as a regularly updated data base of operators or visits for the tourist industry and media representatives (VTP and VJP events). Good promotion activities need not be expensive (although some participants expressed doubts about securing a marketing budget), but it is important that they should be cost-effective. The experts also guided the participants to move from individual action to thinking in terms of partnership and involving professionals to assist in the marketing activities, and also from looking at tourism as an isolated activity to ensuring that it links with not only fisheries but also other sectors in the area.

In general, the theme of this session was for many participants an "unknown territory", and further training and capacity building was felt to be needed.

WG4: Presenting the tourism package

In the last Working Group session, the participants decided how they would present their tourism package in the final plenary. All groups displayed a lot of creativity, preparing drawings, posters, advertising, role-playing etc. These were presented in the seminar's final plenary session to a panel of tourism experts who provided feedback on the tourist packages developed over the seminar and their proposed marketing plans.

Learning through projects: Mini tourism exhibition

Responding to demand for more work around project examples, the seminar also included a working session around the mini tourism exhibition in which a series of projects were presented at 8 stands, 4 of which followed a flexible format of project presentations with questions and answers. Four stands were organised with more structured, working discussions on specific themes: capacity building for fishermen; promotional webpages; insuring maximum impact of festivals and gastronomy projects; working with local actors to develop integrated tourist packages. The complete list of stands at the mini exhibition is below and further details can be found at the following link:

- **Pesca-tourism** (Corsica FLAG, FR ; Cornwall FLAG, UK ; Pescatur)
- **Web tools** (MarGalaica, Home Harbour and Mednetpesca)
- **Shellfish Visits** (Oyster visits in Auray, FR ; Mussel visits in the Delta del Ebro, ES)
- **Festivals & Gastronomy** (A l'Ostendaise, BE ; Hiiukala Festival, EE)
- **Integrated Tourist Packages** (Kaszuby FLAG, PL; Glavinitsa-Tutrakan FLAG, BG)
- **Sardinia FLAGs, territory and tourism (**East Coast of Sardinia and North Sardinia)
- **Accommodation & Restaurants** (La posada de Lolò, Costa da Morte FLAG, ES)
- **Capacity Building for Fishermen** (Lapland FLAG, Finland)

Pesca-tourism on *Aldo* and "itti-tourism" on the Nora Lagoon: Field trip & plenary session

A short **field trip** also offered participants project ideas by showing them, first-hand, two areas of Italy's expertise in linking fisheries and tourism. A stop off at the port of Perd' e Sali allowed participants to see and board *Aldo*, a 12.5m fishing boat used in summer months to also take tourist to watch the fishing activity while enjoying the Mediterranean sea and sun. Sergio Carone and his wife Patrizia Pitzalis, both professional fishers explained what a day of pesca-tourism consisted of, how often they took tourists out along with other questions put to them by participants. The next stop was the Nora Lagoon where a small fishing cooperative manages tourist visits and activities, including an "*ittiturismo"* restaurant. "*Ittiturismo*" in Italy, or "fishing tourism", covers a series of land-based activities undertaken by fishermen, such as running a restaurant in which they serve their catch or offering accommodation to tourists. Giuseppe Ollano, President of the fishing cooperative, explained the activities offered to visitors and the cooperative's philosophy of environmental awareness-raising combined with the promotion of fisheries products caught in season though sustainable methods. Participants had the chance to see the visitors' centre and enjoy a buffet lunch of local fisheries products from the Nora Lagoon and the Mediterranean Sea. See link for further information.

The following day, a short **pesca-tourism excursion** was organised for some of fishermen present at the event, in particular those hoping to carry out similar activities in their areas. Unfortunately, rough seas of October had prevented two other boats reaching the port the night before, scheduled to set sail with *Aldo* at 8am.

Operating with a 3 year, renewable pesca-tourism licence since 1995, Patrizia and Sergio explained why and how they combine their primary activity with seasonal pesca-tourism. From June to September, they usually make around 50 trips with a maximum of 12 persons. These last for 8h and the price (80€ per adult) includes meals and antipasti.

Patrizia and Sergio are members of the Pescatour network; this association was created in 2007 and membership gives increased market visibility and administrative support to pesca-tourism operators. For them, pesca-tourism helps guarantee a certain level of income and allows them to generally fish less intensively, saving on fuel, gear and effort. During the tourist season their catch is reserved for direct sale to restaurants and pesca-tourists, while the rest of the year they rely largely on the fish auction.

As Sergio hauled a 400m net, laid the night before, catching some barracuda, mullet, cuttlefish and seabream, Patrizia explained that in many pesca-tourism businesses, women play a decisive role in creating a positive image of the business and ensuring a welcoming, family feel to the activity.

Other fishermen on board exchanged their views and compared their experience. Claes Lljung from Halland FLAG, Sweden, explained how North Götheborg fishermen offer *lobster safari* packages; Chris Bean, from Cornwall (UK) mentioned how the environment conditions pesca-tourism - although allowed in the UK, sea conditions would rarely allow full day family trips or eating on board.

On returning to the main seminar, the **pesca-tourism plenary session**, allowed two participants on the trip, José Basilio Ortero, a fisherman from Galicia in Spain, and Chris Bean, to share their experience on board *Aldo* with the rest of the participants. In a panel discussion that followed the screening of a short video of pesca-tourism in the Var, France, Mr Otero pointed to a series of barriers that he faced in Spain in getting operational in pesca-tourism, namely the absence of a legal framework for carrying out the activity. Mr Bean explained how a Cornish fishing boat had made adaptations in order to comply to UK rules on taking tourists on board, including making more space on the desk so that tourists could observe the activity safely. In terms of benefits that pesca-tourism could bring to fishermen, as well as the additional revenue, both fishermen pointed to its potential to educate the general public about fishing. Chris Bean also pointed out its role in attracting young people to the profession.

The plenary session finished with a presentation on pesca-tourism implementation in Italy where legislation has been in place since 1982 to regulate the activity. Gianna Saba, President of Italy's National Pesca-tourism Association, Pescatour, presented what the benefits are; who can practice pesca-tourism in Italy; and what the rules are and how they have evolved.

Conclusions

Jean-Pierre Vercruysse from DG Mare reflected on a number of lessons emerging from the seminar work and project examples, saying that linking fisheries with tourism could unlock the potential for growth and jobs which exists within the local communities. He underlined the **need for an integrated approach when developing tourist products linked to fishing**, reminding participants of the MarGalaica project which worked on the whole chain of product development, packaging, quality standards and training for stakeholders involved, as well as the comprehensive package of training courses put on by the Lapland FLAG for fishermen in its area and one-to-one support to launch their tourist products.

Mr Vercruysse went on to point out the different types of support that FLAGs may need to provide for fishing communities to benefit from tourism – and the opportunities that multi-funding for Community-Led Local Development could provide, be it from the ERDF for infrastructure, the ESF for training or the EMFF for developing linkages with and within the fisheries sector:

- **Product development** may require physical investments in the renovation of buildings, the transformation of fishing vessels, the acquisition of sports equipment, etc.

- **Linking the products with the community** is another key factor, since fishermen are at the very heart of these initiatives. This requires another set of actions such as training packages, capacity-building activities, etc.

- **Marketing the product** will again require another type actions related to pricing (market research), promotion (web development, leaflets), integration with other offers such as those supported under rural development (local products, other tourist initiatives and itineraries, etc.)

He also reminded participants that one of the key lessons had been the time that it takes to develop new tourist products in close collaboration with the local community; and touched on the issue of legal obstacles to innovative ideas such as pesca-tourism or itti-tourism. He suggested there may be a role for the European Commission in facilitating exchange of good practices, such as that seen in Italy.

Mr Vercruysse finished with a few words on the preparations for the next period, pointing out that the European Parliament had now voted on its position for the EMFF and, as such, trialogues would now get underway between the EP, Council of the EU and European Commission with a view to finalising the content of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund by the end of the year. The hope was that the EMFF would be adopted by April 2014, clearing the way for the negotiations of the Operational Programmes 2014-2020. In this context, Mr Vercruysse urged FLAGs to communicate their results to decision-makers at all levels so as to ensure that they were taken into consideration in programming decisions.