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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Newsletter series of the EXTRA-SMEs project that aims to achieve expansion of rural and coastal SMEs in wider markets for the promotion of their products, through simpler and improved administrative processes, and innovative technologies, in partners' territories.

In the following pages, you will find interesting material on the overall context and objectives of the project, as well as information on the latest developments and events, and on the upcoming ones. We shall keep you informed about our progress and key outcomes through the project website, thematic events, and newsletters.

The EXTRA-SMEs project team

Interview with HAPO President Apostolos Touralias

HuffPost Greece visited an aquaculture farm in the Argosaronic Gulf for an interview with Apostolos Touralias, President of the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization (HAPO). HAPO consists of 23 members-producers and is responsible for about 80% of the Greek aquaculture production.

Aquaculture is considered a great advantage of the Greek economy – Greece's shores, with warm bays and clean waters consist an appropriate field for the rise of such production activities – and if all modern procedures are followed, then these activities can also have a positive effect on the environment. In fact, aquaculture is considered the most viable solution against overfishing according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



Image: HuffPost Greece

How many direct and indirect jobs are created by the aquaculture sector in Greece?

Our industry creates 12,000 direct and indirect jobs, most of them in coastal and remote areas of the country - positively affecting many local communities, decentralizing know-how and specialization and triggering the wider development of these areas.

What about the turnover and profits of the activity?

About 97% of aquaculture sales come from the two main farmed species, sea bass and sea bream. In 2018, sea bream production reached 117,000 tons, while the final product, after any processing, amounted to 106,500 tons, worth about 502,465 million euros. The estimate for 2019 is that the production of the two species will show an increase of 1.7%, it remains to be seen the numbers now that the year is over.

And as a percentage of GDP?

Marine fisheries turnover is close to 0.40% of GDP.

In terms of exports?

Today, about 80% of Greek aquatic farming is exported - fish farming ranks second in the country's agricultural exports. Italy is the largest market for Greek fish farming after 45% of sea bream-sea bream exports are exported to the neighboring country. In 2018, 42,934 tons of sea bream and sea bass were exported to Italy. Other important markets are France, Spain, Germany and North America. Indicatively, in 2018, 72% of sales were made to EU countries, while 7% to third countries. Greek fish farming, however, does not seem to know borders since it is exported to a total of 32 countries around the world.

Greece is a "sea" country. Does it have a good brandname in your space as well? And what is the competitive advantage of Greece over other countries in aquaculture?

The sea of Greece is recognized worldwide as unique for its color, but, above all, for the transparency of its waters. An advantage for Greek fish farming is the location of the units in deep waters with underground currents, away from urban centers and therefore away from any urban or industrial pollution, resulting in the purity and clarity of the waters.

The specialized staff consisting of renowned scientists, ichthyologists, biologists and technicians with almost 35 years of experience and know-how, the highest quality of fish feed, free of genetically modified organisms and commitment to European guidelines and specifications, ensure the advantage in the European and global market.

Were the exports of aquatic farms affected by the economic crisis?

Over the past decade, there has been a slowdown in industry growth, along with a slight decline in production. However, the climate has already begun to reverse and the industry is recovering and returning to growth, as fish farming has become one of the most competitive activities for Greece, which maintains one of the leading positions in the production of Mediterranean goods, both in European as well as global level.

How does HAPO open and expand a new market?

The markets where the products of our members are exported are, above all, markets with high percentages of "fish eaters", which, either do not have their own fish, or their domestic production is not enough to meet the needs of the market. They are "trained" in fish farming, which means that they accept it as absolutely quality - so the job of HAPO is to inform them why they prefer Greek fish and not other countries.

At the same time in Greece the need is completely different, since here aquaculture does not enjoy the social acceptance it deserves. The Greek consumer must be informed transparently about the Greek aquatic farming, the best fish farming practices, the quality and the nutritional value of the

fish that are developed in the units of the Members of HAPO. We want (and are trying) for Greek consumers to recognize the importance of the industry as a growth lever for the country's economy and to believe in the viability of fish farming through practices that protect the environment and contribute to the development of local society.

Our goal is to develop a communication and marketing action plan for each country we are interested in, which, while designed to meet the different needs of each market, is always based on a common central idea: that of the transparency of the Greek sea, but mainly of transparency of the production processes of all members of HAPO.

We have added an indisputable competitive advantage to the toolbox of HAPO: with the support of TUV Austria, we have created the standard Private "Fish from Greece" Certificate Form owned by HAPO especially for our Members. This certification provides Members with the privilege of completing the "Fish from Greece" marking on their fish by completing the procedures.

The Certificate is based on six pillars: Social Responsibility in Fisheries, Fish Euphoria, Fish Health, Fish Breeding & Management, Food Safety and Quality Features of Returned Fish.

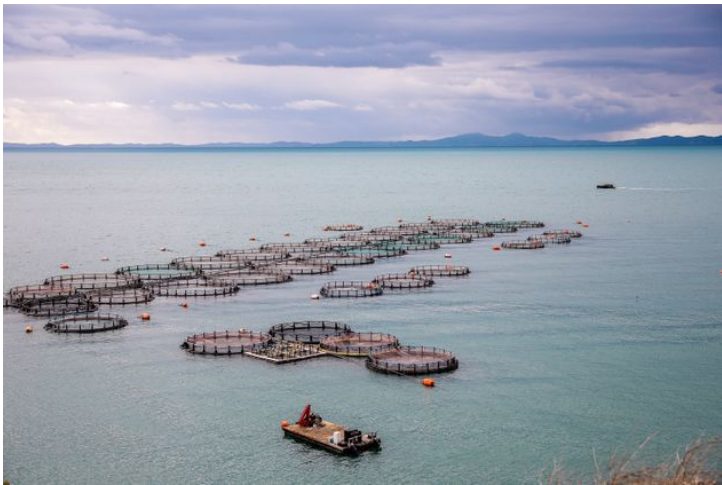


Image: HuffPost Greece

When did modern aquaculture begin globally? And when did it begin in Greece?

In the late 1960s, floating cages, first developed by the Japanese, were also adopted in Europe for the cultivation of Atlantic salmon - until then freshwater fish had been bred, mainly trout. The 1970s and 1980s saw the flourishing of salmon cultivation, starring Norway and Scotland. Its increased availability at affordable prices has been a great commercial success, and aquaculture has become one of the emerging sectors of the European economy. Seeing the success, the Mediterranean countries studied sea bream and sea bass and developed their culture - in Greece the first steps in fish farming took place in the mid-1980s.

Are there similarities between modern aquacultures and traditional methods, such as fish hatcheries?

In marine aquaculture, different methods are used to produce and breed fish, with the main difference being the distance of the cages from the land and placing them in deep waters with large currents to keep the water clean - other differences are found in food, their type cages, the use of advanced technology to monitor the well-being of fish. Fish farming in hatcheries, follows more traditional ways of raising fish and breeds other species besides ours.

How similar (or not) are the procedures followed by an aquaculture plant with those of nature?

I can assure you that fish is an organism that is not capable of many interventions in its growth process, unlike other species of the animal kingdom. As fish farmers, we reproduce the processes of nature, observing that fish grow in natural conditions - and we intervene by providing food. Our priority is the well-being of the fish from their birth to their capture.



Image: HuffPost Greece

As for the fish-breeding stage of production, do all aquatic farms have a fish-breeding station?

No, not all producers have a fish breeding station, nor is it necessary, as they can be served in collaboration with existing ones. In Greece, there are 29 fish-breeding aquatic farms in the Mediterranean and in 2018 they produced about 446.8 million fish, with a total value of 111 million euros, with the unit price ranging from 0.2 euros for sea bream to 0.4 euros for the shi drum. Of these, almost 97% represent the production of sea bream and sea bass fingerling and 3% the production of fingerling for all other Mediterranean species (mitaki, red sea bream and shi drum).

What types of fish are suitable for fish farming in Greece? And are there new items coming into production?

Many species can be grown in ideal Mediterranean conditions, but the main species grown in our Members'

units are seabass and seabream, which account for 97% of sales, while the remaining 3% are all other Mediterranean species; common pandora, mitaki, red sea bream, shi drum, common dentex.

The forecast from the Association of Greek Seafood for 2019 was for about 120,000 tons. Although the other species account for only 3% of the marine fish production volume, their production is increasing annually due to their growing demand in the markets but also due to the systematic effort to expand the available species. As part of a European program aimed at developing new species, some plants are currently being tested for meagre.

Factors that can threaten a fish farm?

Like any production unit, the fish farm is potentially threatened by external factors, economic, geopolitical, environmental, natural - however, knowing most of them, it is prepared to deal with them. Bad weather, for example, can drag a cage. An illness can affect the population of some cages. An oil slick may contaminate the sea of a unit. But even a competitor, domestic or international, dumping in prices, is also a threatening factor. In general, a unit that operates responsibly, in full compliance with the strictest quality and safety standards, complying with Greek and European regulations on the well-being of fish, the environment, food, etc minimizes the risk.

The quality, the freshness, the nutritional value, the taste of the fish of a water cultivation unit compared to the fish of the open sea. Is the quality difference of the open-sea sea bream from that of a farmed one a myth?

With so many years of experience in fish farming but also as President of HAPO (having visited a very large number of units in Greece and abroad), I can say with confidence that the "right" fish farming fish - what is produced based on specific, very strict, specifications (in the case of Greece, EU specifications) and certified by reputable international organizations - are equivalent to open-sea. Nutritional value and taste depend on where it grows and what the fish eats - and aquaculture fish contains more $\Omega 3$ fat than open-sea.

Food (dry food containing fishmeal and fish oils, free of genetically modified materials and products of animal origin) is of extremely high quality, close to a composition that fish would eat in nature.

As for the freshness, the farmed fish reaches the fisherman's counter, or any point of sale, the next day without ever stopping the cooling chain. In the units, the catch is based on orders, which means that a fish never "sits" after it has been caught.

There are negative stereotypes about fish farms in a portion of consumers. Where do you think they are due?

Consumers must accept that if we want our seas to survive, the only viable solution today is aquaculture, which is of course carried out responsibly and within a strict legal framework. We do not overlook the fact that in the past, when the legal framework had not yet been established, there were bad practices that led to problems. We are called to deal with these "mistakes" today as HAPO today, through a comprehensive communication program with the main goal of dispelling the myths, to educate the modern consumer and catering professionals about the benefits of fish farming, both in terms of the quality of its products, as well as its sustainable practices. In modern reality, fish farming is proving to be the only viable solution if man wants to continue eating fish for his nutritional benefits: protein and $\Omega 3$ fat acids.

Do fish farms have a positive effect on overfishing?

Our society faces the enormous challenge of providing food and livelihoods to a population of more than 9 billion people from the middle of the 21st century, while at the same time dealing with the disproportionate effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Given that precious fish stocks are overfishing and shrinking, the challenge now is to maintain high levels of fish farming production to meet the growing protein needs of a growing global population.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing food and protein production sector in the last decade and there is significant potential for its continued expansion and development. According to the World Food and Agriculture Organization, it is proven to be the most viable solution against overfishing.



Is the marine area around an aquaculture unit affected by its operation?

The sea is our "home". In it we raise our fish and our children. Any negative impact on the natural environment, any contamination, would have a direct impact on the living conditions of our fish, their survival and their quality. Why would we risk the quality of our products and the reputation of our businesses? We are the first to strictly control the

environmental parameters and the proper management of water resources - this is evidenced both by the international certifications held by our Members and by the regular inspections required by certified and authorized bodies of the countries where we export.

It is important for people to be aware that in order to be licensed to a fish farm, they must, among other things, meet the requirements set by a special, institutionalized environmental framework. By decision of the Ministers of Rural Development and Food and Environment, Energy & Climate Change, the environmental conditions of operation and breeding that must be observed by the aquaculture units are determined depending on the type of installation and the classification of the activity.

Each Member of HAPO invests in the well-being of fish from the fishery station to their catch, in the protection of the aquatic environment and in the rational management of water resources.

[Source: HuffPost Greece]

Study Visit in Szczecin, Poland

On the 26th and 27th of November 2019 the Northern Chamber of Commerce, Szczecin, hosted a meeting and study visit to discuss developments in the Aquaculture related sectors, as part of the EXTRA-SMEs project exchange of experience activities.



Speakers included Jerzy Safader, President of the Polish Association of Fish Processors, Jacek Sadowski, Professor at ZUT, Maciej Motriuk, and Grzegorz Holubek President of the Union of Polish Fishermen.

A variety of topics including innovation, opportunities and threats, and international knowledge sharing were discussed by the Panel and the EXTRA-SMEs team, before a site visit to the innovative Jurassic Salmon business.

Participation of University of Patras at Scientific Workshop “1st Open Aquaculture Day”

On the 30th of November 2019, in honor of St. Andrew, fisherman in profession and symbol of the University of Patras, the newly established Department of Animal Production, Fisheries and Aquaculture of the University organized the Scientific Workshop “1st Open Aquaculture Day” at the department's premises in Messolonghi.



The event was held for the first time in Greece, while actions took place in Spain, where St. Andrew's Day had already been established as "Aquaculture Day". Local agencies, primary and secondary education institutions, mass media and citizens interested in the aquaculture sector attended the event.



The event is implemented with the support and participation of the Hellenic Aquaculture Production Organization (HAPO). HAPO was founded in 2016 and currently consists of 23 Members, which have units in the Greek territory.

Representing about 80% of Greek aquaculture, HAPO provides its Members with multiple benefits in terms of collaboration, support, development, education, progress, problem solving, communication with authorities and more. Mission of HAPO is consolidating Greek identity and highlighting the remarkable features and competitive advantage of fresh Greek fish grown in transparent procedures at Member Fisheries in the crystal clear, transparent Greek sea, in accordance with European standards.



Several presentations concerning the Aquaculture section took place, including one by Ismini Bogdanou, Marketing and Communication Director, Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization, who made a presentation about “Planning the Future of Greek Fish Farming: From Vision, Innovation and Practice”.



The University of Patras participated with the presentation of Mr. Georgios Katselis, Professor at the Animal Production, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the University of Patras and Mr. Ioannis Theodorou, Assistant Professor, Department of Animal Production, Fisheries and Aquaculture,

University of Patras, who presented the good practices to improve the competitiveness and extroversion of aquaculture SMEs based on the EXTRA-SMEs deliverable “A1.3 Good Practice Guide for raising EXTRA-SMEs sector’s economic potential” of the project’s “exchange of experience” phase.

After the end of the presentations, a guided tour at the Department’s Facilities took place.

Third Stakeholders Meeting of the University of Patras

The 3rd Stakeholders Meeting, organized by the University of Patras, took place on the 20th of November 2019 at the Conference and Cultural Center of the University of Patras.

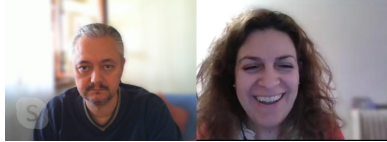
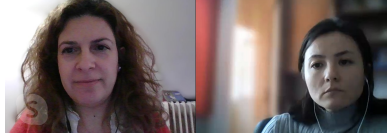
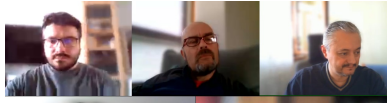


The participating speakers included, among others, Professor Georgios Katselis of the Department of Animal Production, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Victoria Litsi-Mijan, PhD Candidate of the Institute of Oceanography, Hellenic Center for Marine Research, Dr. Alkistis Parpoura and Ms. Paraskevi Ntzoufra of the Fishery Department of the Region of Aitolokarnania, Ioannis Theodorou, Assistant Professor of the Department of Animal Production, Fisheries and Aquaculture of the University of Patras, Ismini Bogdanou, Marketing and Communication Director, Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization, and Christos Bouras, Professor of the Department of Computer Engineering and Informatics of the University of Patras and Scientific Officer of the EXTRA-SMEs project.

The presentations were followed by a discussion of the participants' good practices on improving the competitiveness and extroversion of the aquaculture media. The attendees agreed that the most important element is the training of the entire chain involved in aquaculture, starting from the operation of aquaculture to the final consumer.

EXTRA-SMEs Virtual Project Meeting

The 4th Project Meeting of the EXTRA-SMEs consortium was organised by the National Regions Development Agency on the 24th of April 2020.



The meeting took place virtually, in compliance with the COVID-19 protective measures.

The partners had the opportunity to discuss the implications of COVID-19 on Interreg Europe project's implementation, to present the identified good practices on raising the perceived economic potential of the EXTRA-SMEs sector, as well as to discuss the progress and outcomes of the regional stakeholders meetings.

EXTRA-SMEs and COVID-19 challenges

As expected, most interregional cooperation projects – including EXTRA-SMEs – are dealing with the challenges the COVID-19 preventive measures have put in place, affecting work plans and delaying the implementation of the scheduled activities.

The EXTRA-SMEs consortium, in close collaboration with the Joint Secretariat officers, is examining and implementing risk mitigation measures, to ensure the smooth and successful implementation of the project amid the pandemic.

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Contact us

Email: extraSMEs2018@gmail.com

Web: www.interregeurope.eu/extra-smes/

The EXTRA-SMEs Partnership



Region of Peloponnese (EL)



Liguria Region (IT)



Northern Chamber of Commerce in Szczecin (PL)



Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (RO)



Lapland University of Applied Sciences (FI)



University of Patras (EL)



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Public institution National Regions Development Agency (LT)

About us

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