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Report from the EXTRA-SMEs kick-off meeting

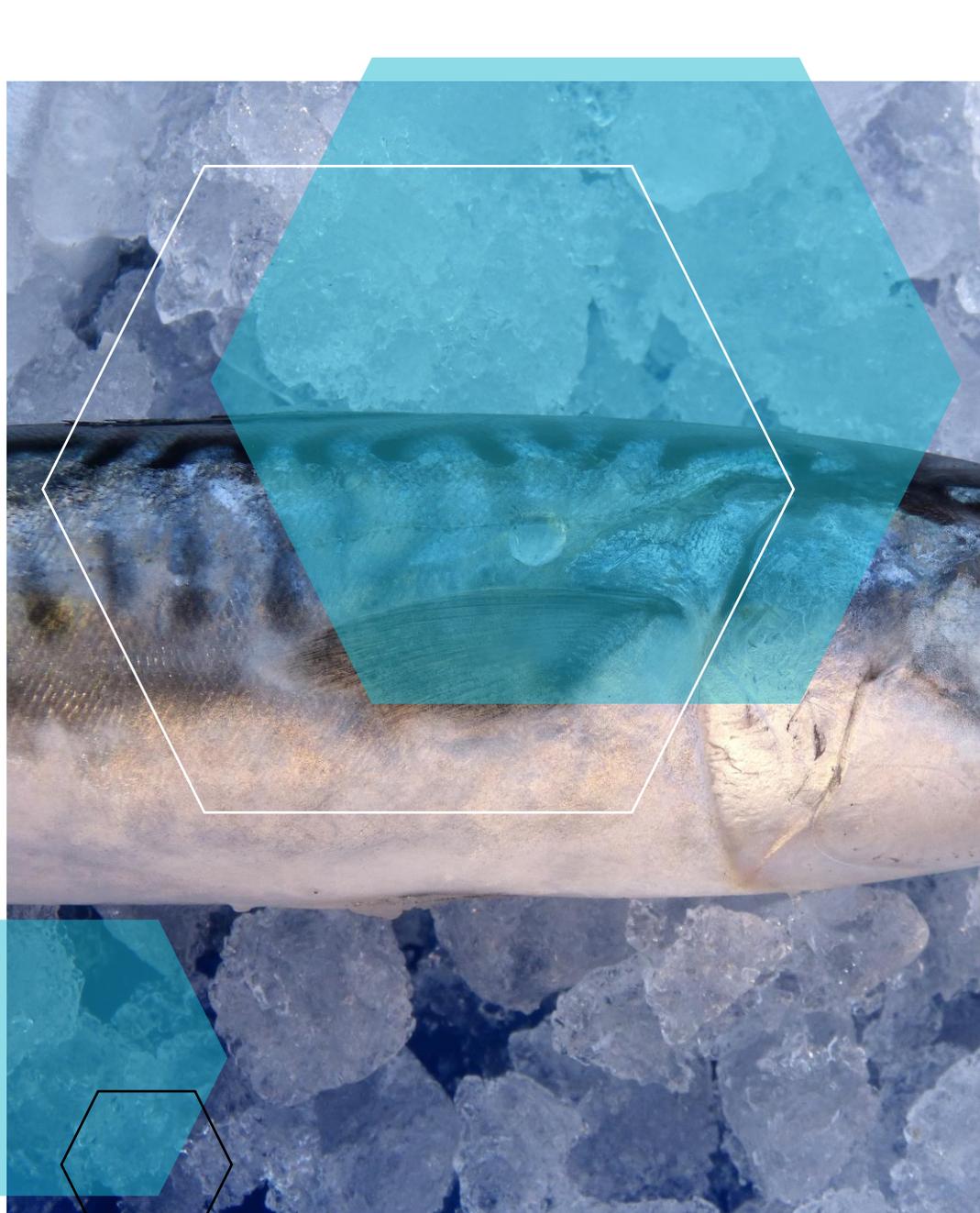
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AQUACULTURE IN EU

RESTRUCTURING THE SECTOR AND VALUE CHAIN

EXTRA-SMEs sets out to address competitiveness issues concerning the aquaculture sector in rural and coastal EU regions. Plenty of evidence shows that, despite the fact that the aquaculture sector has a turnover of EUR 4 billion and occupies approximately 85000 people, there is room for innovation, increasing production effectiveness, optimizing network logistics and harmonizing regulations. Interregional projects, such as EXTRA-SMEs, aim primarily at capitalizing on available resources, notably, existing best practices. When considering innovation, there is a danger to over-think and idealize: EXTRA-SMEs, by contrast, adopts an approach that seeks the possibility of innovation in the combination of different techniques, the exchange of knowledge and the design of the transferability of practices. What is more, EXTRA-SMEs invests time and resources in public dialogue and reaching out to targeted stakeholders. This approach is premised on the fact that involved stakeholders on the ground have a knowledge that can be put to good use and yield positive effects.



KICK-OFF MEETING

10-11 JULY 2018, TRIPOLI (GR)

The project kick-off meeting was successfully completed with partners going through thematic, financial and management issues concerning the project. The agenda included an analytic overview of upcoming research activities and details regarding the formation of stakeholder groups. Partners had the opportunity to have a fruitful exchange of views regarding the envisaged course of the project. What is more, the meeting gave partners the chance to familiarize with the realities of the aquaculture sector in diverse European countries. Indeed, the diversity of the partnership is expected to add value to the project, by drawing on multiple experiences from all corners of the EU! Finally, the kick-off meeting was an opportunity for partners to enjoy the goods of the Peloponnese! The representatives of the Region of Peloponnese are grateful for the satisfactory participation and look forward to the next project meeting in Ireland!



FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

The inaugural semester of the project comprises fascinating joint research activities, the kick-off of public dialogue and plans for the sustainability of the project. Let's revisit each in some detail:

Comparative analysis of regulatory frameworks

The focus of this research activity is on licensing and operations and on the frameworks – local, regional, national – that govern them. EXTRA-SMEs considers this work fundamental for a diagnosis of shortcomings, differences in implementation capacity and the identification of loopholes that stand in the way of innovation. Accounting for these parameters will facilitate the process of founding a robust and coherent network of coastal and rural aquaculture SMEs with clearcut objectives and a strategy to achieve them. Central among these objectives is the necessity of increasing extraversion, export capacity and more generally, the visibility and international presence of the sector! This, however, is a long and ramified process requiring concerted effort and crossing numerous milestones.

Regional stakeholder meetings

The regional 'stakeholder group' concept is rather important for an obvious reason: it provides a blueprint for the successful emergence of regional, sectoral or any other collaboration between diverse actors who have a stake in an issue or who want to solve a problem or restructure a modus operandi in a 'bottom-up' approach. 'Bottom-up' is a relatively newly adopted term which, in the policy context, signifies an intervention whose contours are defined by practitioners and its character is problem-driven. In the counter side to 'bottom-up', there are 'top-down' approaches that often overlook significant aspects of everyday realities or are based on macro-models to be applied in an identical manner irrespective of particularities. By adopting the former approach EXTRA-SMEs gives priority to collaborative deliberation and space to plural voices, by way of valorizing local knowledge.

But... who is a stakeholder?

Public authorities and associations. Municipalities, regional authorities, public development associations and regional funds' representatives. These actors play a crucial role as they often represent the link between territorial and local scales. They bring knowledge of policies, instruments, implementation routes and coordination expertise.

Chambers of commerce: These actors are indispensable in stakeholder groups concerning businesses, trade and regional economy. More than public authorities, they are enmeshed in everyday workings of commercial sectors and know the problems first-hand. Their contribution in EXTRA-SMEs is foreseen to play a pivotal and productive role.

Universities & research institutes: Thematically competent university and research disciplines bring expertise, methods and tools without which it would be adverse to reconcile the sectoral and political/regulative interests.

Stay tuned with the EXTRA SMEs Newsletter for the proceedings of the stakeholders' groups that will convene twice a year during the project's lifetime!

EXPANSION AREAS

EXPLOITING MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Upcoming research activities place a proportionate amount of emphasis on identifying new markets for aquaculture SMEs within and beyond the EU. A two-way relationship between access to new markets and innovation is foregrounded from the outset: on the one hand, access to new markets often requires innovation in product development and/or supply avenues: To reach certain markets, prepare to innovate! For instance, SMEs that would otherwise have access to local markets and would operate on more or less subsistence mode, could seize technology-intense opportunities to connect to virtual market platforms and marketplaces, or reconfigure supply line attributes to streamline international trade logistics. On the other hand, opening up to new markets is an innovation driver: new markets present characteristics whose exploitation is necessary for obtaining and sustaining a share of the market: Once access to new markets is real, the chances for innovation are increased. For instance, a local fisheries SME may access a regional market without much restructuring and/or investment. However, once there, the SME may seize previously unavailable opportunities in the local context. This understanding of capturing markets across different geographical scales also holds another lesson: Opening up to new markets not only depends on and reinforces innovation, but it is also a process that can and should take place one step at a time, through careful planning, targeted market research and risk analysis for expansion practices. Although these questions cannot be answered in the abstract, one thing is clear: strategies for market expansion require synergistic efforts between private and public actors. EXTRA-SMEs prioritizes policy and management approaches that are explicitly oriented towards extraversion, increasing competitiveness and allowing access to knowledge and resources for innovation. Equally, however, a great deal of success is dependent upon private initiative and EXTRA-SMEs is intended to act as a driver for increasing initiatives through actions of dissemination and communication.



MAPPING BARRIERS

A PROBLEM-DRIVEN APPROACH

Mapping barriers to extraversion and internationalisation. It may appear to be straightforward, however the valid and accurate mapping of problems and barriers is of outmost significance. Hence, EXTRA-SMEs invests time and resources in researching the obstacles aquaculture SMEs face. In the context of forming a whole with the other research activities, mapping barriers provides input for other questions, such as what the best practices in the field are: how enterprises on the ground deal with conventional problems and obstacles is what we are interested in, because knowing means being able to transfer! In addition, mapping drivers in a thorough and informed way makes for a good problem-driven approach. EXTRA-SMEs promotes this approach for its compatibility with 'bottom-up' approaches. The point of convergence is to be found in agenda-formation and problems' identification: who identifies the problems? What is the position within or around the supply chain from which the definition takes place? Who qualifies what counts as a solution, at which level and acting on whose interest? To answer these and many more relevant questions, project partners will engage in research practices and data collection to enable the partnership to gauge the real nature of context-specific problems and address them in the most efficient way by taking advantage of local knowledge and sectoral expertise.

PROJECT PARTNERS



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



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)



Western Development Commission (IE)



Liguria Cluster for Marine Technologies (IT)



Public institution National regions
development agency

ABOUT US

EXTRA-SMEs is co-funded by INTERREG Europe /
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