

THE EUROPEAN S&T MED PROJECT: LINKING MARINE ECOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS IN THE CROSS-FRONTIER PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Introduction

The European Union actively promotes initiatives aimed at managing human activities having potential impact on the marine environment and biodiversity, integrating the concepts of environmental protection and sustainable use of environmental resources. In the framework of the harmonious cooperation between EU and non-EU states, the European S&T Med strategic project was launched, promoting the sharing of good social and environmental practices for a more sustainable tourism. The strategy of this project is to establish a Mediterranean network of sustainable coastal destinations in collaboration with the local scientific community operating in three (pilot) target areas (Mahdia, Tunisia; Sinis and Isola Mal di Ventre, Italy; and Aqaba, Jordan). Linking biology, ecology, technology, sociology and economics, joint public/private management schemes for the valorisation and promotion of natural and cultural assets will be defined, based on the recognition of the crucial role of the good environmental status of the natural environment in the attractiveness and economic development of the Mediterranean coastal destinations.

Objectives

A trans-national environmental monitoring system has been designed for this scope, managed by the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn in close collaboration with the other scientific partners of the project, to feed a trans-national Observatory on Sustainable Tourism connected to a worldwide database of Long Term Monitoring Stations. One high-tech monitoring system will be set up at each coastal site, equipped with sensors and modules acquiring local environmental data, as well as underwater cameras for the visualization of specific features of the biodiversity of each site. On one hand, this project will start a process enhancing the better understanding of the global trends in environmental changes at a wider Mediterranean Basin level. On the other, the non-EU state members of the project will join a cross-boundary network of sites adhering to the adoption of common best environmental practices in the management of coastal areas, with particular focus on the good environmental status of the Mediterranean marine ecosystems.



Figure 1. Project Partners

The Project relies upon the specific scientific and technical contributions of a variety of Partners that have made available their expertise and experience for the successful implementation of the Project. More specifically: National Government (Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism – MIBACT, Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn of Naples, Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan, University “Dante Alighieri” of Reggio Calabria in Italy, National Institute of Marine, Sciences and Technologies (INSTM) in Tunisia, Sardinia Region, Municipality of Mahdia, Municipality of Cabras - Managing Authority of the Marine Protected Area “Penisola del Sinis/Isola di mal di Ventre”, Italy, Aqaba Marine Park, Jordan.

The DMO model

Destination Management Organization (DMO) is the co-ordinated management of all the elements that make up a destination (attractions, access, marketing, human resources, image and pricing). It takes a strategic approach to link-up very separate entities for the better management of the destination. (World Tourism Organization).

A coordinated management within a strategic and coherent framework is intended to produce effects both at local level (in terms of increasing incoming touristic flows and yields, spreading the benefits of tourism development, reducing environmental impacts and ensuring environmental sustainability in target areas) and at the Mediterranean Sea-Basin one (in terms of visibility and attractiveness of the international network of which local stakeholders are part of).

The contextualization and customization of the model at the local level is led by the Al-Balqa Applied University that will be accompanying local Partners in implementing the model in the Med basin as well as in creating business alliance to develop public/private partnership at the regional and local level.

Figure 2. Development of competences and capacity building

University of Reggio Calabria “Dante Alighieri” is coordinating the development of competences and capacity building through several cycles of training at each project site. Intermediate and advanced training courses are conducted for young entrepreneurs, public officers, students and local operators involved in tourism and monitoring/management of coastal areas. Al-Balqa Applied University will also coordinate specialized courses and workshops on the DMO issues.

The aim of these activities is the promotion of sustainable tourism and the spreading of good social and environmental practices, to involve small and medium-sized enterprises, local communities, tourists and local touristic operators in the transfer of knowledge and valorisation of the cultural heritage, economic potential and environmental goods and services provided by the local coastal areas. Creating a suitable social and environmental environment is indeed fundamental for the implementation and success of the DMO model at the level of local policies, legislation, regulation, taxation and overall management of targeted areas.

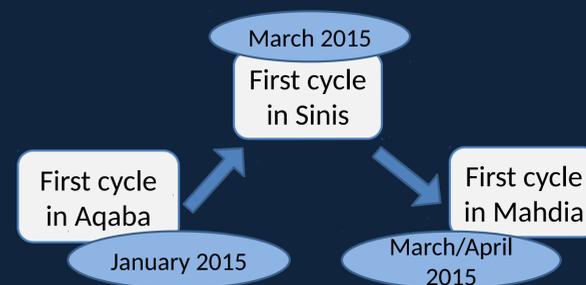


Figure 3. The environmental monitoring system

Linking tourism to scientific knowledge through monitoring and data collection and analysis at the three sites of Mahdia (Tunisia), Sinis (Italy) and Aqaba (Jordan) is one of the most relevant features of the S&T Project. Beyond its importance for scientific purposes and decision-making, this group of activities will provide tourists a deeper hint on the hidden features of the areas they are enjoying proposing an all-out experience, also involving them in observation and reporting activities, so increasing their awareness in terms of values of local ecosystem and its services.

Each target area of the Project is connected to and supported by a local scientific institution that cooperates with the Stazione “Anton Dohrn” in customising environmental monitoring systems (buoys) to sites’ specific features and monitoring needs. The environmental monitoring system will feed a trans-national Observatory on Sustainable Development as well as a worldwide database of Long Term Monitoring Stations, a key tool for understanding global trends in environmental changes. The monitoring sites will be equipped with basic sensors and cameras for visualization of specific features of the sites.

Figure 4. Including environmental monitoring in the DMO model

The Destination Management Organization model rely on the good level of attractivity of the managed area. A great proportion of the attractions in the target areas depend on the good environmental status of the coastal areas in which tourism and everyday activities take place.

As such, the monitoring of the environments, the creation of public awareness on environmental issues and the involvement of tourists in environmental related activities are key aspects to guarantee a more sustainable development of the target areas. The preservation of a suitable environment is indeed crucial for the local implementation of the DMO model.

