

Fish from the Cutter

FLAG: AktivRegion Ostseeküste
 Schleswig-Holstein, Baltic Sea, Germany

Project overview

This project has successfully linked increasing demand for fresh and local fish with the use of cheap and widespread IT technologies. The project developed a direct sales system for fish coming from the “AktivRegion Ostseeküste” (Baltic Sea Coast Active Region) that makes use of a dynamic website www.fischvomkutter.de. Fishermen send details of their catch and their estimated landing time using their mobile phones via SMS to this website while at sea. Customers can then see where, when and what fish will be available for sale directly from the boat when it comes to port.



Context and key challenges



The fisheries areas of Heikendorf, Laboe, Stein, Wendtorf, Schönberg and Hohwacht are located around the Bay of Kiel on the Baltic Sea coast of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. This FLAG is a subgroup of the “Baltic Sea Coast Active Region” Leader LAG. Indeed, the implementation of Axis 4 of the EFF in this German state is carried out in close cooperation with the Leader approach.

The total population of the area is 63 493. The population has increased slightly in recent years owing to the proximity to the state capital of Kiel. Tourism plays an important role in the regional economic development and, in particular, in the area’s coastal communities.

A 100 years ago, there were still around 3 000 fishermen in the bay of Kiel. Today there are just four fisheries ports and 59 small fishing companies remaining in the “Baltic Sea Coast Active Region”. Moreover, owing to the current environmental and economic context, the commercial future of many of these is in jeopardy.



Poor cooperation and networking between fishermen and the economically dynamic touristic and gastronomic sector were identified in the FLAG's integrated development strategy as a weakness that needed addressing.

More specifically, initiatives related to the direct sale of fresh fish were hampered by a lack of information about supply and insufficient means of refrigeration. On a market level, cod and flounder catch for instance can generally only be sold at low (70 cents per kilo in some cases) and highly fluctuating prices via the wholesale with limited means of alternative marketing channels.

Project objectives

Based on this situational analysis, the FLAG has set itself the objective of:

1. improving networking between fishermen, tourism specialists and the gastronomic sector,
2. giving more focus to tourism in the fisheries area
3. increasing the turnover and the direct sales of fish.
4. The following development objectives were defined:
 - › Making coastal locations more attractive for local people and tourists
 - › Highlighting the historical and current significance of the fishing industry in the region
 - › Turning the buying of fish into an experience through direct sales from the boat and joint presentation and marketing
 - › Fostering cooperation between tourism specialists, professional fishermen and fish restaurants
 - › Better integration of ports with the tourist industry
 - › Improvement of direct sales, means of refrigeration and the refrigeration chain

Making ends meet: The primary objective of the "Fish from the Cutter" project is to give an economic boost to the region's traditional fishing businesses by increasing direct sales opportunities; turning the buying of fish into an experience; and providing information about fish and the history of fishing.

Shortening distances, for better quality and more environmentally friendly practices: the project should also make a contribution to avoiding CO² emissions from long transport routes to the auction house. The project's target groups include tourists and day-trippers from the state capital of Kiel as well as the local population, which can all benefit from local, healthy, sensible and tasty food.

Project description

The project's key component is the dynamic website www.fischvomkutter.de. It provides a platform for exchanging information instantaneously, and in a cost-effective way, in order to match supply and demand between fishermen and consumers.

The fishermen provide information to the website via SMS while still at sea on what fish they have caught and where and when they will be landing (with GPS data of the landing sites for navigation systems – this data can be downloaded free-of-charge for all standard navigation systems www.poisbase.com). Consumers can also access this information service via Smartphones, saving customers time, unnecessary journeys and offering them fresh produce at attractive prices.

In addition to specific information on fish products, the site also provides comprehensive information on the history of the fishing industry in the region, catching methods, the types of fish caught, the fishermen concerned and the work done around coastal protection. This supplementary information is also published on information boards located in landing places and in an information brochure.

The information boards are made up of solid wooden signs set up at each of the seven landing locations from Heikendorf to Hochwacht. The brochure, which presents the direct sales scheme, is distributed through all tourist information boards, fishing companies and other local partners.

The idea and plans for the project were laid out during 2009. The project was implemented between Spring 2010 and Spring 2011. The website went officially online in January 2011 and the project was presented to the press and media in March 2011.

Main actors involved

The initial idea of promoting the direct sales of fish in the region by providing information on information boards, brochures and the “Fisch vom Kutter” dynamic website was developed by Uwe Sturm in collaboration with the fisheries working group (a local working group for fisheries existing before the creation of the FLAG). Uwe runs the museum port of Probstei and is also the spokesperson for the fisheries working group of the Baltic Sea Coast Active Region, which is now integrated with the FLAG.

Uwe succeeded in developing a network of motivated stakeholders and organizations, generating enthusiasm for the project. Participants in the project include fishermen (such as Jan and Erik Meyer, the Rönna family, Björn Fischer and Tilo and Dirk Hohmann); maritime organizations (such as the museum port of Probstei in Wentorf, the marine biology station in Laboe, the maritime information route in Möltendorf and the IFM-geomar Aquarium) and local authorities (such as the municipality of Wentorf).



Project outcomes

Although it is not yet possible to fully assess the long-term impacts of the “Fish from the Cutter” project, it is already observed that significantly higher prices are achieved (e.g. €9 per kilo of cod fillet) through direct sales and self-marketing compared to wholesale. It is therefore believed that the economic stability and survival capacity of the 11 fishing companies involved has been enhanced. Moreover, some fishing companies have created additional activities by expanding their product range (e.g. smoking and cooking part of the catch) and now have over 30 – 50% more customers.

In addition, the direct sale of freshly caught fish does not only open up a new sales channel for local fishermen but also turns the buying of fish into an experience and therefore helps in developing a direct contact between customers and producers.

At the same time, networking between fishermen, tourism specialists and the gastronomic sector has increased as has customer information which has helped to foster stronger integration of the fishing industry into the region.

The website is currently used by around 21 000 visitors a month. On average, around 700 users visit the website every day accessing over 10 pages. Over 2 500 visitors/day use the site during special events, such as after a television report. Reports in the local media have succeeded in focusing public attention on the local fishing industry, the opportunity for direct sales and the website (see below).

The main beneficiaries of these positive results are the fishermen involved, who gain from direct sales from the boat. Additionally, direct sales also produce benefits for the environment (by cutting down CO² emissions) and customers (local people, the gastronomic sector, tourists) who, through this supply method, can obtain fresh, local products at competitive prices.

Overcoming obstacles: key lessons

The obstacles encountered concern the administrative implementation of the EFF Axis 4 funding. From the fishermen’s perspective, it took quite a long time before the funding requirements were met, e.g. approval of the FLAG and its development strategy. Secondly, not all municipalities involved in the project are recognized as part of the fisheries area and therefore as areas eligible for funding. The problems were resolved through a flexible approach and effective support from the administration. In addition, the implementation of this project was coordinated on a voluntary basis which constantly presents challenges.

The following factors are deemed key to the successful implementation of the “Fish from the Cutter” project:

- › Innovative project idea and technical implementation via the website
- › Commitment and persuasive powers of the main players and collaboration and networking of other players
- › Professional PR work and communications in addition to authentic presentation of the fishermen

Future prospects

In February 2011, all fisheries areas in Schleswig-Holstein decided to develop a joint website as the “Netzwerk Ostseefischerei und Nordseefischerei” (Network of Baltic Sea and North Sea Fisheries) which will expand the experience to new areas.

To meet growing demand for fish caught in an environmentally friendly way (no by-catch of marine mammals and sea birds) and at fair prices, plans have been made to make increasing use of alternative catching methods and to seek environmental certification of the fisheries.

The project is foreseen to continue in the longer term and the EU funding was intended as start-up financing from the outset. The www.fischvomkutter.de website will be operated by the “Fish from the Cutter” interest group on an ongoing basis, a group which counts on motivated volunteers thus keeping the costs manageable.

Transferability

The project is transferable to other coastal areas which meet the requirements for the direct sales of fish products. This involves compliance with local regulations regarding direct sales (in line with food safety and control requirements), availability of suitable landing places and presence of customers (tourists, purchasers...). The technical implementation of the project linked with the website and SMS system is on the other hand considered as pretty straightforward.

Costs and funding

Total project cost: €20 000 (approximately)

- › Total eligible costs: €15 426
- › Public contribution: €8 484
- › Funding ratio: 55% of eligible costs

The municipalities of Hohwacht, Schönberg, Wendtorf, Stein, Laboe and Heikendorf made a pro-rata contribution to co-financing based on local costs.

The implementation of the project was coordinated, and the material for the information boards produced on a voluntary basis by people involved in the museum port of Probstei.

Project information

Title: Fish from the Cutter

Duration: one year (spring 2011 – spring 2012)

Case study date: May 2011

Project Promoter

AktivRegion Ostseeküste FLAG

Mr. Uwe Sturm, FLAG manager

Project website: www.fischvomkutter.de

c/o Museumshafen Probstei, Ellernbrook, 24235 Stein

Tel: +49 4343 4211630, Mobile: +49 160 967 16899

post@museumshafen-probstei.de

FLAG details

www.aktivregion-ostseekueste.de

Editor: European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Director-General.

Disclaimer: Whilst the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries is responsible for the overall production of this document, it is not responsible for the content nor does it guarantee the accuracy of the data.