



Atlantic Arc Commission

Minutes of the meeting of the Atlantic Tourism and Culture Working Group

Thursday 24 September 2015 – Brussels
(Cantabria Regional Office)

Enhancing the attractiveness of the Atlantic as a tourist destination

These minutes are a summary of the presentations made and the discussions that took place during the meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission's "Atlantic tourism and culture" working group. This working group has been chaired by Asturias Region since March 2015.

Background and aims of the working group

Mar Martínez Salmerón, Head of Tourism at Asturias Region, opened the meeting by recalling the aims of the working group and the conclusions of the launch meeting, held in Gijón on 7 and 8 April 2014. She underlined that Asturias, together with Galicia, País Vasco and Cantabria, was part of the "Green Spain" region (España Verde). Tourism in the North of Spain is not "sea and sun" tourism. It is therefore important to focus on aspects that differentiate the Atlantic area and make it attractive. Asturias is in the process of drawing up its tourism strategy, which will be based on:

- Culture;
- Natural resources / biosphere reserves;
- Culinary heritage;
- World heritage / Unesco heritage sites.

Culture is to be understood in a broad sense, referring not only to historical monuments, but also including other aspects, such as industrial heritage, which have not been fully exploited yet.

The interest of the working group lies in the way it can help to:

- Raise the profile of the Atlantic Arc as a quality tourist destination in Europe;
- Underline the dual – tourism/culture – dimension of the Atlantic as a destination;
- Consolidate cooperation between cities, Regions and private sector stakeholders along the Atlantic seaboard;
- Develop joint projects through the platform of the working group.

One of the main aims of this meeting was to discuss this last point in more detail and identify tourism/culture projects which could be prepared by the working group.

The Interreg Atlantic Area Operational Programme 2014-2020

Vicente Rodriguez, Head of Unit, DG REGIO, was unable to attend the meeting in person due to ill health but had sent a [PowerPoint presentation](#) which was presented by Pauline Caumont, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission.

The presentation detailed the objectives of the new “Atlantic Area” programme for 2014-2020. The following points were highlighted:

- The budget for the programme has been increased (€140m of ERDF co-financing, compared to €104m).
- There are three new Regions joining the programme: Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands.
- Priority Axis 4 on “Biodiversity, natural and cultural assets” corresponds very closely to the remit of the working group, and in particular Specific Objective 4.2. “**Enhancing natural and cultural assets to stimulate economic development**”. Members of the group could submit a project under this sub-objective.
- Projects must involve partners from at least 3 of the 5 Atlantic Member States.
- The budget for each project should be between 2 and 3 million euros, and the duration two years on average.
- It is likely that the call for proposals will consist of two steps:
 - o Step 1 (simplified), in the form of a “Call for expressions of interest”: a short description of the aims and objectives of the project;
 - o Step 2: if the project is pre-selected, candidates will be asked to prepare a full project proposal for final validation.
- The timetable has not been established yet, but the call for expressions of interest is expected **early in 2016**.
- By way of comparison, [the SUDOE transnational programme](#) published its first call for expressions of interest on 21 September 2015 and envisages that projects will start in June 2016.

The participants underlined the importance of **indicators** and the need to highlight **concrete and measurable** expected results (number of jobs created, number of people trained, creation of wealth, etc.).

Legislative framework and other financing opportunities

Pauline Caumont gave a [PowerPoint presentation](#) reviewing the EU framework within which opportunities can be found for developing culture and tourism activities in the Atlantic area, in particular:

- The February 2014 strategy for coastal and maritime tourism: [COM \(2014\) 86](#)
- The Action Plan for an Atlantic Strategy, May 2013: [COM \(2013\) 279](#).

Three EU programmes could be good sources of financing for a joint project:

- The COSME programme, which has a “Tourism” priority and an annual budget;
- The Atlantic Area transnational programme, mentioned above;
- The SUDOE transnational programme, which concerns Regions from Portugal, Spain and the South of France.

During the discussion, **Inma Valencia**, Director of European Affairs, Cantabria region, underlined that under the SUDOE programme, expenditure incurred since 1 January 2014 relating to the preparation of projects is eligible. This means that a project approved by the Monitoring Committee can ask for reimbursement of expenditure on items such as studies, travel to preparatory meetings and staff expenses incurred between January 2014 (start of the programming period) and the project start date (June 2016 for SUDOE). We need to check whether this will be the case for the Atlantic Area as well.

Another new element in this programming period is that **Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)** will be able to take part in projects and benefit from a reduced co-financing rate of 50%. The programmes will encourage the participation of SMEs.

Capitalising on what already exists

Régis López Lang, Europe Officer-UpM, gave a presentation on the [ODYSSEA European portal](#) – see: <http://www.odyssea.eu/>

Odyssea was set up in 2008 under the aegis of [Atout France](#) (French tourism development agency). The Odyssea platform is concerned with maritime tourism, short sea shipping and port cities, and has an overarching objective which is to promote integrated territorial development. Odyssea aims to raise the international profile of destinations that have been awarded the Odyssea label, and to encourage networking between different territories.

The priority areas for future development are:

1. Investing in eco-compatible solutions
2. Ecotourism (pedestrian/cycle routes)
3. Accessibility

4. Ecomobility (environmentally friendly transport from the port)
5. Structuring of the “Blue Tourism” maritime cluster
6. Training.

A number of projects have been developed and seven new projects are currently being put together. The Odyssea platform does not have a significant presence in the Atlantic area (essentially in Cantabria) and is interested in working with the Atlantic Regions to develop its activities on this seaboard.

The participants underlined the importance of the “**Training**” section of the platform, an essential element which should not be overlooked in other bids.

Ronan Le Baccon, Director of Tourism and Heritage, Brittany Region, and **Vincent Gaonac’h**, Technical Coordinator of the NEA project (Nautisme Espace Atlantique), gave a joint presentation on the ideas put forward for the follow-up to NEA and NEA2 (see the [PowerPoint presentation](#)), in particular the six backbone suggestions, grouped under three centres of excellence:

- Product and services innovation;
- Industrial innovation;
- Pleasure boating innovation.

The aims are to create jobs and wealth in the tourism sector.

Iñigo Uriarte, in charge of the “Maritime tourism” strategy at Basque Tour, the Basque tourism agency, gave a presentation on the regional strategy and ideas for a future “Atlantic Arc” project (see [PowerPoint presentation](#)). Concerning the Atlantic Arc Commission working group, he suggested identifying some common areas on which the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions were working, and bringing them together in a portfolio of existing projects geared towards maritime culture in the Atlantic. He made a number of suggestions for potential projects:

1. Culinary tourism
2. Network of historic Atlantic sea ports
3. Surfing Atlantic
4. European routes, nature reserves, UNESCO heritage sites, etc.

Giuseppe Sciacca, Senior Policy Officer at CPMR in charge of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism, gave an update on “pesca-tourism” (professional fishermen taking tourists out on their boats), which is already being developed in several Member States. New projects could be developed, adopting a wider approach in order to structure a sector that is still emerging in the Atlantic area. A typical project could be developed on the basis of three points:

1. Analyse opportunities/challenges in fisheries and aquaculture in the Member States concerned with a view to proposing ideas for harmonisation.
2. Organisation of the sector: a label for fisheries tourism, promotional activities (information point in the fishing ports), support for direct sales + training.
3. Capitalise on the experience of different FLAGs ([Fisheries Local Action Groups](#)). In the Mediterranean, a project for a “pesca-tourism” portal has received funding.

Mikel Irugo, Brussels Representative of the Navarra regional government, pointed out that since his Region did not have a seaboard, it would be important to capitalise on the territorial dimension (hinterland) of the Atlantic Regions.

Decisions taken

Following the discussions which took place during the brainstorming session, the following points were agreed:

- The working group will endeavour to boost the promotion of the Atlantic as a quality tourism destination (emphasising what differentiates it from the other sea basins).
- The group will enable the Atlantic Regions to exchange knowledge and best practices.
- The Regions are invited to send their tourism strategies/4 key regional priorities to the Secretariat of the Atlantic Arc Commission so that common points can be identified.
- The cultural dimension of the Atlantic as a destination must not be overlooked. A joint project could be developed comprising three strands: maritime culture, industrial culture and culinary culture.
- The approach must be firmly grounded in the reality of the economic situation (actual impact on the territory) but also have a recreational dimension.

⇒ The next meeting of the working group could take place mid-November/beginning of December 2015 as soon as we know more about the adoption of the Atlantic Area Operational programme and the timetable concerning the first calls for expressions of interest.