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"Water, landscape and citizenship
in the face of global change"

« Eau, paysage et citoyenneté
face aux changements mondiaux »

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WORKSHOP 3: Protection, management and planning instruments related to the presence of water in the landscape

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Heritage policies of coastal and river regions

Dear colleagues

First, I want to thank our Spanish host for this event and the Council of Europe for the idea behind these international workshops.

I had to step in for Kåre Kristiansen, Vest-Agder County Council, since his flight was cancelled. I am honoured for the opportunity to present this INTERREG-project, that maybe some of you in the audience know better than I do.

[slide 2]

The presentation has a few reflections from the HERICOAST-project about heritage policies of coastal and river regions. It will hopefully also show why it has been meaningful for a diverse partnership of coastal and river regions to be exchanging experiences during a 5 year INTERREG-project.

The presentation will be illustrated with examples of good practices from the partners, that has been identified as valuable for interregional learning by the INTERREG Europe-programme.

[Slide 3]

The HERICOAST-project is implemented under the INTERREG Europe-programme from 2016 – 2020. The main objective is to improve heritage management in coastal and river regions in line with recent EU policies on participatory heritage governance.

[Slide 3 – press to start animiation]

The partnership consists of six regions, and covers Donegal County in North Western Ireland, East and West Agder County in Southern Norway, the river region of Castile and Leon in the Spanish inland and Leartibai district in the Bay of Biscay, Molise region on the Adriatic coast and the Tulcea County in the Danube delta. Two advisory partners help facilitating the learning process. These are the European NGO Civilscape and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

[Slide 4]

Despite the differences between the regions, the shared project rationale is as follows:

Centralisation of maritime industries entails a loss of functions in peripheral coastal communities. This leads to a decline in traditional economic activities. For many, this process is coupled with an increased reuse of the coast for recreational purposes. This gives a two-sided question: How to establish a sustainable economy, and what to do with the traces of the traditional maritime activities?

[Slide 5]

A key output in the project was the HERICOAST toolbox. In this work, the partners and their stakeholders brought in examples from their own context. The toolbox covers six thematic chapters. With a set of recommendations for policy development, connecting them with the concrete experiences from the HERICOAST partners.

Lessons learned
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Looking at the toolbox, one can summarize that the HERICOAST partners, mainly are dealing with an intersection of three types of key interests, dominant in coastal development policies. These are heritage management, nature preservation and tourism development.

Heritage management
Heritage represents the first key interest. Particular for this one, is that one can, to some extent identify a historic change in the idea of the coast. From being a point of departure towards being an end destination. This change forms a key component in the heritage of the HERICOAST regions.

Earlier, water was the safest and quickest way to travel. Harbours became nodal points, in a network transferring goods and people between regions. Societies developed around these nodal points.

Because of this, coastal societies developed connections across the sea. Connections that gave rise to distinct set of customs and architecture. That to some extent distinguished them from their inland.

Eventually and alongside changes in the global economy, new transport patterns developed. The seaside lost its key function as a point of departure. The few remaining coastal nodal points were concentrated to a few very big harbours. Instead, tourism has given, the now peripheral coastal communities, a new potential as an end destination.

The HERICOAST partners share this loss of interconnectedness. The regions deals with different ways of engaging with the local populations, and visitors alike, in order to revitalise the traces from their historic interconnectedness.

One examples illustrates this:
In Agder, Norway, a number of historic outports, that emerged, as service station for the sail ship traffic in the 1600s, was more or less complete depopulated in 1900s. Today these outports are "rediscovered" as vacation resorts. Consequently, a high percentage of private owners live outside these communities, but still maintains a high interest in them. Lindesnes Lighthouse Museum has tackled this, through the development of a digital platform for dissemination of history, multiplying opportunities to access heritage and engage audiences.

Nature preservation

Policies of nature preservation represent the second key dominant interest in the HERICOAST regions. Many coastal areas had been reserved from the most intense agricultural and industrial exploitation, and a rich biodiversity and fragile ecosystems characterize these places. At the same time, they are under pressure from tourism. Therefore, nature preservation policies are widely applied to safeguard the coastal environment and secure common accessibility to the sea.

An example from the Molise region illustrates this.

The Maestrale LIFE+ project took on the fragile, coastal dunal habitats, combining preservation and valorisation, cooperating with authorities, university and inhabitants. The project demonstrates that raising awareness of the tourists, local population, etc. is crucial for achieving the long-term goals of preservation actions.

A related challenge, that might follow from the intersection of heritage management and nature preservation, is a potential juxtaposition between culture and nature. This might lead to unwanted side effects, as important heritage objects remain out of sight in the preservation of bio diversity, or vice versa.

Coastal tourism
A third key dominant interest, in the HERICOAST regions, is tourism development. For many, the biggest challenge is to retain jobs, to maintain a viable society and heritage, has proven to be a strategic asset contributing to economic growth. The recreational use of the landscape, brings in new economic agents to the region, with the tourist sector being a prime example.

The HERICOAST partners have explored the potential of collaborations, like public-private-partnerships. However, a challenge is that the high complexity of the tourism sector requires mechanisms and channels for the coordination and cooperation of both local and regional agents.

An illustrative example is from BasqueTour, the public company of the Tourism Ministry of the Basque Government.
BasqueTour has established working tables that bring together all tourism agents and allow them to contribute directly to the Basque coastal tourism strategy. In this participatory way, the strategy is being deployed collaboratively.

Managing the intersection of different interests
A particular challenge is to manage different and often conflicting evidence, between these three different key interests. A shared trend in the HERICOAST regions, is the emphasis on evidence-based policies. Hence, a final key aspect is have an integrated cross-sectoral approach.

The Seascape character assessment from Donegal County is a good example. The Seascape Assessment helps accumulating different types of knowledge. Making it easier for different sectors to share the evidence bases. This helps Donegal County Council to define the change in use, as it is dictated by: tourist visitors, sea level rises, new technologies, and social and cultural change.

Concluding remarks
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For today's peripheral coastal regions, the leisure economy and coastal tourism are an important economic sector. Together with the policies of nature preservation and heritage management these policies represents an overall of trend that aims to manage the symbolic resources of the coastal landscape.

Regions in the HERICOAST has profited from exchanging their specific experiences on these issues. In total 19 good practises, such as those that I have mentioned, have been validated as valuable by the INTERREG-programme. As a key output, the partners have developed six action plans for how they will transfer these good practises, in order to improve their own heritage policies. Together these action plans specify approximately 15 different measures, currently being implemented.