

Interregional cooperation

Gustavo Martinie discusses strategies to boost the economy, foster natural and cultural values and secure the sustainable development of the Mediterranean basin

There's no need to ask why the Mediterranean basin has always been considered a unique area in the world: a mild climate, a rich and a varied gastronomy made up of traditional dishes and high quality products, and several outstanding natural and cultural sites are some of the elements that have contributed to shape the Mediterranean identity throughout history.

Nowadays, despite the fact that Mediterranean countries still preserve a large part of their heritage, the tourism strategies carried out by most regional and local administrations still focus on the 'sun, sea and sand' model. This is mainly because they are not completely confident in the potential of their cultural and natural resources and what they could represent in terms of economic growth for their regions.

This weak awareness of the means and tools to boost the development of the Mediterranean basin is what the INNOVATE-MED, SHIFT and CHORD projects aim to overcome. Part-financed with €3.7m by the European commission's Med programme, their common goal is to foster cooperation among Mediterranean regions in order to enhance their competitiveness whilst promoting a more sustainable development.



Handcrafted purses from the Greek island of Rhodes

INNOVATE-MED: boosting modernisation and innovation in SMEs

Setting up a network of wine routes along the island of Crete, creating an olive resource centre in the province of Alicante to foster the internationalisation of SMEs from the olive oil sector, or organising a welcome programme to Naples to promote the fashion accessories industry; are just some of the initiatives carried out by the INNOVATE-MED project, all of them aimed at facing the high level of fragmentation and the know-how gap which is constraining Mediterranean SMEs.

Given the fact that the majority of SMEs based in Naples (Italy), Valencia and Alicante (Spain), Dodecanese and Crete (Greece) are characterised by their deep-rooted traditions and high quality products but also by their isolation and lack of technical skills, local authorities and development agencies from these regions have focused their efforts on developing innovative strategies to improve the technical development of their SMEs, and thus achieve a higher level of competitiveness in the global market. How?



An inside view of the Roman amphitheatre in Arles, France

By carrying out a marketing plan for the promotion of two clusters in traditional sectors: the food and wine sector on the one hand, and the fashion accessories and jewellery on the other.

SHIFT: improving the quality of the tourism industry in the Mediterranean basin

Coastal-overdevelopment, a lack of integrated planning and an intensive and seasonal tourism model are factors severely stressing the Mediterranean areas. Yet, the potential for alternative ways of tourism and to extend the season are immense, given their unique natural and environmental conditions. In that case, why isn't a totally different approach adopted in order to overcome seasonality and enhance the competitiveness of the Mediterranean tourist destinations?

The SHIFT project, which is being implemented by partners of Valencia (Spain), Andalusia (Spain), Marseille (France), Naples (Italy),

East Macedonia & Thrace and Dodecanese (Greece), suggests redistributing tourism pressure over an extended period by way of setting up an integrated quality management (IQM) model. The purpose of the IQM is to foster a more sustainable development, as well as exploit the tourist and cultural attractiveness of each territory.

CHORD: Taking advantage of Mediterranean cultural heritage

What do mastic – a resin obtained from an endemic tree on the Greek island of Chios- and the folkloric dance originary from the Italian town of Benevento have in common? Both of them are part of a vast cultural heritage –tangible and intangible- which is so familiar to the inhabitants of Mediterranean regions that it no longer attracts their attention. However, this

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cultural heritage may hold the key to diversify the tourism and services offer in those areas, which would help overcome the traditional ‘sun and sea’ scheme, and this is what the CHORD project aims to achieve.

Taking into account the fact that elements such as mastic farming or folkloric dances could be exploited as sources of cultural tourism, eight regions from Spain, Italy, France and Greece are working in partnership to design and implement innovative cultural services such as festivals, wellness programmes or thematic events that help enhance the cultural attractiveness of concrete pilot locations in the Mediterranean area.

MED: A European programme to foster Mediterranean growth

The European commission's MED programme aims to enhance interregional cooperation in the Mediterranean basin. Its main priorities are to improve competitiveness in the Mediterranean area in order to guarantee growth and employment, as well as to promote territorial cohesion and environmental protection.

With an overall budget of €250m for the 2007-2013 period, this programme covers the coastal regions from nine EU member states plus the EU candidate and potential candidate countries.

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Further information: www.innovatemed.eu;

www.shiftmed.eu; www.chordmed.eu;

www.programmemed.eu