

# Marine tourism as part of a wider, regional, image strategy to provide a competitive advantage – West Cork, IE

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

## 2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The production of a sophisticated, all-embracing and detailed branding concept, based on a unique image and identity, which has been created for the region. It is centred on the development, application and management of quality criteria and is a powerful tool for enterprise development. The case embodies a core component of the area's enterprise development strategy which is also strongly linked to other priority actions in heritage, environment and community development. It embraces coastal and marine aspects of tourism and biodiversity/landscape preservation as part of a regional whole. It is transferable to other rural areas with similar geographical and economic characteristics.

## 4. Overview of the case

This case was initiated in the LEADER II programme and is an integrated development strategy primarily focused on the tourism strengths of the West Cork region embracing as part of the whole, marine tourism and protected areas.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

The West Cork region of western Ireland boasts a number of 'special areas of conservation' and 'national heritage areas' as well as marine and woodland nature reserves. Agriculture and natural resources based on manufacturing activity (agri-food and fisheries) have traditionally been the dominant components of the local economy. The service sector is well developed, particularly with respect to private professions, tourism and hospitality. Economic growth has seen the emergence of IT and internationally-traded services within the region while public sector employment has declined in recent years.

### b) Objectives

The aim was to define a development policy on the basis of West Cork's own particular situation, in terms of its strengths and weaknesses: a territorial proposition based on the unique image and identity of the region. The core components of the brand were to represent its strengths and future development opportunities which should be firmly rooted in the unique traditions and influences of the region. It should reflect the high standards of product and service excellence, passion and enthusiasm with a

strong commitment to training, networking and a code of best practice.

## **6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)**

### **a) Management**

The West Cork LEADER Co-operative Society Ltd is implementing and co-ordinating the work programme. The managing body has involved selected relevant agencies and public and private bodies as and when needed in the initiative. A large number of alliances with many project partners have been engaged in the initiative over the years. The success has been through providing development solutions to local enterprises that were not met by conventional development agencies.

### **b) ICZM tools**

The Branding Initiative incorporates a comprehensive range of development instruments categorized under the following headings:

- **CAPITAL INVESTMENT:** On and off farm guest accommodation, new visitor facilities and attractions, enhancement of visitor facilities, tourism information points, diving, sailing and associated marine tourism, enhanced productive capacity for food companies, environmental upgrades and mitigation systems, food processing, seafood processing, horticulture investments, poultry, preserves, confectionery, meat and dairy produce.
- **MARKETING:** Tourism brochure production, domestic and overseas trade fair attendance for tourism, food and craft enterprise on a sectoral or thematic collective basis, website and e-commerce development, assorted tourism brochures and print material, local food fair marketing, advertising and media promotion, DVD development, Thematic touring route signage, web marketing, development of packaged and themed tourism products.
- **TRAINING:** Food quality control systems, quality control evaluation and monitoring, web training, retail affiliate training, organic horticulture training, artisan food production mentoring, sensory analysis, farm enterprise mentoring, development of interactive school educational resource, craft sector development training programme, marketing and customer care training, tourism learning networks, heritage management training.
- **RESEARCH:** E-commerce development, labeling and traceability, overseas research trips, publication of a technical manual, environmental seminar, quality of life research and measurement index, input-output analysis, cluster model development and strategic planning,
- **GIS mapping,** new product development research, research on market access constraints, branding and design clinic, commercial appraisals and feasibility studies on commercial applications

The bottom-up approach has been highly visible in the project as it requires active support and participation from a wide range of communities and participating enterprises.

## **7. Cost and resources**

The total budget of the project was €6.25 m. The West Cork LEADER Coop currently employs eight persons.

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

The branding initiative has delivered considerable benefits to the region as a whole as well as to participating enterprises. These include coherence in regional marketing and promotion, consumer recognition and brand awareness, new enterprise and product development, increased employment, turnover and profitability, enhanced quality standards, market development and access and network development. The initiative is also regarded as an example of territorial cohesion, competitiveness and an integrated development strategy. The products marketed under the brand are firmly rooted in the unique traditions and influences of the region. The project boasts a range of results including a coherence in regional marketing and promotion, consumer recognition and brand awareness, new enterprise and product development, increased employment, turnover and profitability, enhanced

quality standards, market development/access and network development.

## 9. Success and Fail factors

The partnership approach has been fundamental to the success of the project. Considerable time and energy was invested in the research and development phase of the project. This proved critical to its subsequent success, particularly in achieving local participation. The key challenge in sustaining the initiative has been to ensure its relevance as a development infrastructure for the region and participating enterprises. This requires an explicit and clear understanding of the region, its potential, context, dynamic and history as well as an understanding of the development issues facing small scale enterprises operating from a peripheral rural location. It is also vital that the initiative operates primarily as a development initiative and not as a commercial entity. This needs to be clearly understood by all participants and components of the brand. It is also important that a step-by-step approach is adopted. In this way individual and diverse actions can be linked and developed under an integrated strategy. There also needs to be realism about the timeframe within which the desired and expected outcomes can be reasonably achieved. The success so far has been to provide development solutions to local enterprises that were not met by conventional development agencies, whether financial or otherwise. A key challenge for the future will be to mainstream the initiative amongst a variety of sectoral development agencies. The concepts of animation and capacity building inherent in the Leader Programme have also been critical to the success of the project as have the integration of enterprise and community development under a common theme. This integration of diverse but linked themes and influences is essential.

There are some concerns that the territorial proposition could be undermined by possible area revisions being considered by the national managing authority in Ireland. If this was to happen the initiative could lose coherence and validity and therefore be unsustainable. There is no sound or logical reason as to why this should happen but given the success of the project to date and the value and relevance of the development approach, this would be highly regrettable.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

The interest in the branding initiative and the specifics of the development approach has generated much interest amongst development agencies in Ireland, the EU and further afield. Project promoters have engaged in extensive networking between different bodies within Ireland and with a number of groups in Greece, Belgium, Holland, Finland, Italy, UK & Spain as well as outside Europe.

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## 13. Sources

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- Fuchsia Brands Ltd: A case study of networking among the Food Producer Members (2001) University College Cork
- <http://ec.europa.eu/leaderplus>
- <http://www.foodskool.ie>
- <http://www.fuchsiabrands.com>
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-  Developing a regional branded identity (30.84 KB) 
-  Fuchsia case study - networking (412.86 KB) 
-  Rural development & regional branding (20.81 KB) 