

FISHING AS A FACTOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN AGUILAS, MURCIA (SPAIN)

Pedro Pérez Piernas

Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia
pedro.perez3@carm.es

Cayetano Espejo Marín

Universidad de Murcia
cespejo@um.es

The tourism development policies contribute to enhance the landscape as a tourism resource. Both seascapes, which develops fisheries and aquaculture, and urban landscapes, which are necessary for infrastructure development. In the case of Aguilas (Murcia): fishing settlements in the «Pie del Castillo» and «Cuesta Pesquera», fishing port, dock, lighthouse and fish market.

Marine tourism is a new tourism product of great interest because it allows communicate the culture of the sea, with all its uniqueness, diversity and authenticity.

Between May 2004 and 2006, Aguilas, along with other fishing ports in the Western Mediterranean, participating in the project MARIMED (INTERREG III-B): fishing as a factor for sustainable tourism development, whose purpose is the development of innovative fishery tourism. In this sense, the fishery is considered a social, economic and cultural system that offers a complementary value to the benefits of the sea. Studies in the project MARIMED collect materials for the enhancement of fishing as a tourist resource in Aguilas. On this basis starts in 2009 the «Tourism Competitiveness Plan of Aguilas, the Sea and Fisheries».

The project findings show abundant interest and good reception of this project by stakeholders: professional fishermen and tourism entrepreneurs, the complementarity between the two sectors so far apart, the potential for fisheries to generate a range of products and packages touristic of great interest, the need to join efforts and hopes to develop and a strong support of public institutions, without which it would be impossible to achieve its objectives.

These are some of the main conclusions:

1. The plurality of existing territorial elements (traditions, customs, landscapes, monuments, history...) that characterize the fisheries sector and have great potential for tourism development.

2. Ignorance of the fisher sector and their associated resources, because it is a traditional sector that has not been known for its values and tourism opportunities.
3. The exceptional and unique environmental conditions of the Region of Murcia, especially climatic conditions; benefit the development of fishing tourism during all seasons.
4. Fishing tourism can find significant synergies with other forms of sustainable tourism throughout the year in the territory of the Region of Murcia, as nautical and cultural tourism; with major projects and products as those offered by the Nautical Station of the Mar Menor and «Cartagena Port of Cultures», and the recovery and enhancement of important marine archaeological remains in different parts of the coast.
5. Many goods of great environmental value, linked to the sea, have been detected. These are, additionally, important centres of attraction for tourism. The gradual reduction in fishing effort should be accompanied by the development of sustainable forms of tourism, that contribute to the fisheries sector to allow an economic complement to reconcile the conservation of natural resources and the maintenance of fishing.
6. The fishing has not been specially related to activities different from the traditional ones. Nevertheless, the difficult situation that crosses this sector grants a special interest to the mentioned project, as guarantee of complementary income for a sector in crisis. There has been a good availability showed by the agents related with the fishing sector for the link between fishing and sustainable tourism.
7. The tourism sector was equally receptive to linking fisheries to tourism, recognizing, unanimously, its poorly developed and its great potential as a factor for sustainable tourism and not seasonally adjusted.
8. The project has been welcomed by the various public institutions, although the need for a common action plan has been detected. This plan should enable pooling of resources and reduce barriers to the optimal development of tourism associated with fishing.
9. Although the tourists prefer a sun and beach tourism predominantly, a seasonal tourism, other tourists might demand tourism products related to fishing significantly. This is the case for those tourists who demand a cultural tourism and nautical sports, characterized by a low seasonality.
10. Despite the wide availability of marine resources and fishing ports, at present, in terms of culture, traditions, history and environmental characteristics, there are no touristic packages related to fisheries properly organized.

In Aguilas, a first list of the main tourist resources available, base of products and actions to be developed in continued phases, could be the following:

- Itinerary-visit in the town of Aguilas: fishing harbor, lighthouse, traditional arts, fish market, Centre for Interpretation of Sea, pier «El Hornillo», seabed...
- Gastronomic Itinerary: fishmongers near the fishing harbour and restaurants specializing in seafood.

In 2009, the September 17, it signed the collaboration agreement for the development to the «Tourism Competitiveness Plan of Aguilas, the Sea and Fisheries». The agreement aims to coordinate cooperation between the signatory parties for implement the mentioned Plan. The cost of the planned measures is estimated at three million euros to finance into three equal parts by the Tourism Institute of Spain (TURESPAÑA), Government of the Autonomous Community of Murcia and the Council of City of Aguilas.

This plan aims to create a new tourism product based on traditional fishing and marine culture locally, offering uniqueness and differentiation to the town opposed other destinations, allowing enhance competitiveness in the new tourist scene. Another aim is to generate a non-seasonally and diversified tourism to complement the general offer of sun and beach tourism.

