

HUNGARY - SOMOGY

Eco – fishing tourism in Mesztegyő

The project concerns the development of an eco- and fishing tourism site in Mesztegyő, Hungary. It has been supported within Axis 3 : 'Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural activities' of the Rural Development Plan of Hungary. It aims to provide alternative income for the beneficiary who is primarily dealing with fish farming, but has also bred Grey cattle and Racka sheep.

1. Project details

Nature of the project

Purpose: The project aims to set up an eco- and fishing tourism enterprise near a fishing lake in Mesztegyő. The recreational centre also aims to enhance the knowledge of tourists about the local natural environment.

Content: The most important activities include ensuring that the lake is approachable even in unfavourable weather conditions; creating parking spaces; developing some 27,000 square meter open-air leisure space (with trees providing shades). Further facilities to be developed include some 350 meter long seats adjacent to the lake with rain covers, open-air cooking spaces, bird-watching towers, playground made of wood and other natural materials and facilities for disabled tourists.

In order to increase awareness about the local natural environment, information walls will be set up presenting local birds; boat-trips will be organised and opportunities will be provided to try and learn more about the hundred years old fishing techniques and practices (such as fishing with nets). A number of further tourist attractions will also be made available. For instance, tourists will have the opportunity to see locally bred species, such as the traditional Hungarian Grey cattle and Racka sheep.

Inspiration: The idea has long been there, as the promoter's main occupation is fish farming, and owns a land with some 16 smaller lakes (two of which will be integrated into the project). The promoter has also followed closely the initial setting up of the Leader pilot programme in Hungary (2004-2006), and therefore was aware of the Leader programme.

Policy coherence: The project is fully in line with the local development strategy of the LAG (called 'Our Countryside is Our Future'). The LAG strategy indicates the development of eco-friendly strategy as one of the main opportunities for the area, as well as the protection of the local natural environment that also has strong tourism potentials. Part of the settlement-specific strategy (included in the LAG strategy) is to develop local tourism opportunities that can be linked to already existing attractions, such as the 'strudel-festival' of Mesztegyő. Two of the LAG strategy's main priorities include the (i) development of local tourism in line with local resources

and (ii) and the protection of local natural resources; as well as the development of the quality of life through the creation of new recreational centres.

Links between agriculture and the rest of the economy

Main agricultural sub-sectors involved: Fish farming, cattle breeding and rural tourism.

Description of these links: The main link established by the project is between farming (fish and cattle) that has been previously carried out by the beneficiary; and rural tourism that is a result of the project. The recreational centre created by the project will make good use of the promoter's experience in agricultural production and his good knowledge of the local natural environment. His experience in fish farming will contribute to the setting up and operation of the eco- and fishing tourism enterprise; whereas the breeding of cattle species will also serve as tourist attraction within the recreational centre.

Scale of the project

Size: One off investment of 14,500,000 HUF (approximately 54,000 euro), plus 40% own contribution.

Time scale: The works are expected to start in May 2010 and run for a year.

Coverage: The project is local (based in Mesztegyő), however it is well integrated into the development of its direct neighbourhood. The area's cultural tourism attractions include the local baroque church with Dorfmeister frescos. The local village-house hosts a number of diverse written and material documentaries presenting the richness of local history and nature. The local 'strudel-baking' festival is well known event in Hungary.

Beneficiaries and supporters

Beneficiary: Laszlo Peter NAGY, local entrepreneur, Mesztegyő

Supporters: The promoter has had contacts with the Local Action Group. Since the project is in line with the local development strategy, the LAG can be seen as a supporter of the project.

Finance

Funding: The EAFRD funding, within Axis III, measure 311 "Diversification into non agricultural activities" is approximately 54,000 Euro, and this is co-financed by 40% own share. The project is running for a year.

Budget: see above

Results

Direct results: The planned results are as described above. The project implementation is just about to start so no direct results are yet visible.

Main target: Tourists (in particular those interested in fishing).

Wider benefits: The project has good potential in raising awareness about the natural heritage of the local area among tourists. It is important to create links between various tourism activities within a given area, in order to ensure that people come and stay in the area for a longer period. There are already a number of tourism attractions in the local area, and the eco- and fishing tourism project can potentially complement these.

2. Relevance of case study experiences for others

Problems: The main difficulty has been the delay in the approval of the project. The approval process was delayed by almost a year, and by the time the project was approved (around Oct 2009) it was not possible to start the works because of the unfavourable weather conditions. Therefore, the project will only start in the spring of 2010.

Generally, the management of rural development programmes in Hungary has been criticised as being highly centralised with no real say of the LAGs in the project selection process. It has been argued by a number of people that the value of bottom-up strategy development in the early phases of the programme has been undermined by the fact that later the decisions about projects were made by the central authorities. This is also one of the reasons for the delay in the project start. This centralised process also made local people initially involved in local development disillusioned in the programme, since many of them felt that they have no real impact on the developments.

It was argued that the project application material was not easily manageable. The guidance document provided was extremely lengthy, and the application was difficult to complete for those who are not professionals in preparing project applications. This almost forces most people who would like to submit an application to turn to external assistance (e.g. consultants) that is often costly.

Transferability and mainstreaming potential: The project could easily be transferred into areas with similar ecological conditions.

Innovation: The project content is not particularly innovative, its main added value lies elsewhere.

Institutional aspects: Although the promoter has good contacts with a number of local organisations (such as the nearby Rural Tourism Agency), as well as the LAG, there is no specific partnership involved in the project implementation.

Social aspects: The project contributes to the improvement of local entrepreneurial activities and will create and sustain a number of local jobs. The project will not only raise awareness about the rich natural and cultural heritage of the fishing-lake and its direct neighbourhood, but also its wider environment.

Environmental aspects (for projects that are not strictly environmental): The newly created fishing-tourism site is part of the Boronka landscape protected area that is rich in special tree species and other protected plants. The facility is surrounded by attractive hiking routes.

Sustainability: The project is expected to be sustainable in the longer run. Following the initial investment supported by the EU funds, the promoter expects that the eco- and fishing tourism centre will be self-sustainable.

Lessons to pass on: The project is a good example for rural tourism development and diversification of activities for those involved in farming activities. The project is well integrated into the promoter's existing activities. It is also well embedded in the local development strategy. Rural development projects can best achieve their purpose if these are linked to other tourism attractions in the area, and this condition has been fulfilled in relation to this eco- and fishing tourism project.

It would be important to reconsider the ways the Rural Development Programme has been managed in Hungary. As indicated in the county-level and this project-level case study, a number of concerns have been raised about the centralised management of the programme, leaving no real say for people living locally. This has resulted in the disillusionment of local people in the programme, especially those who were originally involved in the development of local strategies and later saw no real impact of their involvement. The fact that most LAGs had no real say in the final project selection discredited the bottom-up nature of the programme in most areas.