

**INTERREG IIIB SAL PROJECT “SALT OF THE ATLANTIC”:
REVALORIZATION OF IDENTITY OF THE ATLANTIC SALINES.
RECUPERATION AND PROMOTION OF BIOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC AND
CULTURAL POTENTIAL OF COASTAL WETLANDS**

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the course of the centuries salt has played an important role in the economy of Europe's Atlantic seaboard and has given way to an authentic civilization of the salt that contributed to the increase of important commercial interchanges with the countries of the North of Europe and Latin America. During the XIX century the Atlantic salt was a product appreciated by his specific qualities.

However, from the middle of the XX century the artisanal production declined dramatically. The artisanal production is subjected to territorial pressures and/or competes with the industrial production given place to loss of surfaces, development of intensive aquaculture, changes in hydrological systems as a result of infrastructure building, etc. Together with this decline in the production of artisanal salt other environmental, cultural, historic and human values are lost since the salines maintain a high biodiversity, and, as well, they are a high valued man made landscape, supporting a know-how legacy (the producers are old and their numbers are also declining). Yet there are no European regulations that contribute to the preservations of these values.

The SALT Project, with 31 associates of France, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom, was born in this context. It aims the promotion of the environment and the biodiversity, through the sustainable management of economic activities and natural resources.

The main objectives of the project are:

- Improving the biological interest of the zones maintaining and increasing biodiversity.
- The restoration of the salines and/or his exploitation in order to contribute to the maintenance of this biodiversity. This has to be done integrating producers and researchers along the process.
- Organizing and structuring the salt working profession. Bringing recognition and revalorization to the traditional salt produced along Europe's Atlantic seaboard and looking into alternative or complementary economic activities (exploitation of micro-algae and other micro-organisms).
- To promote a culture of traditional saline activity of Atlantic seaboard. Organize the transmission of know-how. Learn from the old salt workers and/or their families the technical knowledge and their organization systems and transmit this to new generation of producers.
- Promoting the tourist value of the traditional Atlantic salines to develop a tourist offer for the ensemble of the traditional salt production zones of the Atlantic Arc relating their characteristic cultural issues.

- Spatial approach for the development of integrated management: Studying and identifying levels of integration of the salines as cultural landscapes in coastal wetlands management plans.

Keywords: traditional salines, coastal wetlands, biodiversity, sustainable management, restoration, culture, economic value, tourist offer.

1. INTRODUCTION

The salt has played during centuries an important role in the economy of the Atlantic Coast. Nevertheless from half-full of twenty century, the artisanal salt activity experiences a noticeable decrease even disappearing in many zones. The problem is increased if we consider that also disappear the environmental patrimony, cultural, historical and human. However, from the years 70 some isolated initiatives have allowed to value this patrimony. This resurgence of the interest by the salines increases mainly in years 90 by the joint effect of the consumption and the leisure (artisanal product search of quality, development of the rural tourism), of the recognition of the environmental interest of wetlands (elevated biodiversity, protection of these zones like Natural Park, Area Ramsar or Red Natura 2000, and of the research (geography, ethnology, history, economy).

In this context the Project SAL is born with 31 partners of France, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom. It has predicted his conclusion in September of 2007.

Thus, zones like Guérande, Ré, Noirmoutier, Séné in France, Castro Marim, Aveiro, Figueira da Foz and Leiria in Portugal and the Canary Islands, Cadiz and, Álava in Spain, try to promote by means of a local original experience, coordinated operations between the different groups (Nongovernmental organizations, producers, collective territorial associations, university, museums...), with the objective to recover, to safeguard and to promote the patrimony related to the salt. This project develops local initiatives with the purpose of promoting, in an European network, the different aspects on which they are based the common identity of the zones: original potential of the biodiversity, know-how technician, landscape, history, economic valuation of the salt and the traditional salines like producers of a salt of great quality or like points of tourist interest. Also it identifies the common practices that they will allow a long term reinforcement of the environmental, socioeconomic aspects and cultural, that guarantee safeguard and the identity of this space.

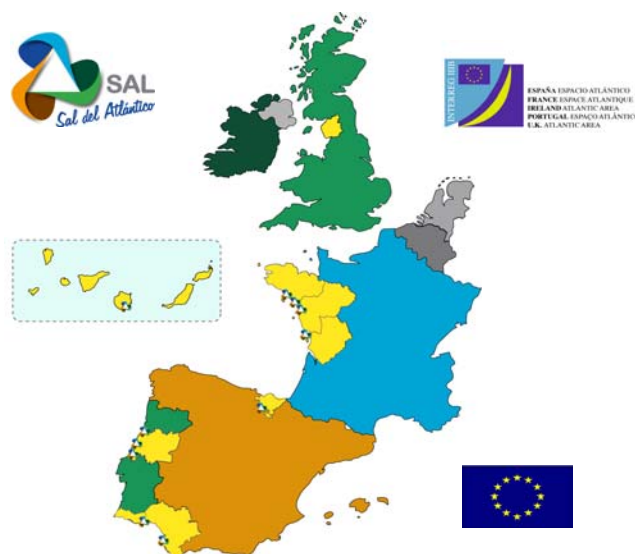


Figure 1. Zones of intervention of SAL Project.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project consider that the production of salt with traditional methods is associated to landscapes and cultural values, social, patrimonial and environmental generated throughout history.

- To improve the biological interest of the zones "to watch, to maintain and to increase the biodiversity". The salines are zones with an important biodiversity; some species of birds intimately related to this type of habitats are in endangered in Europe.
- The restoration of salines and/or its exploitation can contribute to the maintenance of this biodiversity with the condition for integrating a process arranged between producers and researchers. The zones implied in the project are protected zones, which increase the interest of a development integrated and sustainable compatible with the method of traditional manual harvesting.
- Organization and structuring of the profession/Recognition and revaluation of the produced traditional salt in the zones of the Atlantic Space. To develop a series of measures on European scale that will allow the legal recognition of the salt, the development of the different produced types of salt, the definition of the common bases to obtain a quality label, their potential and commercialization. In order to define and to guarantee beyond the project the characteristics of the artisan salt, the project will try to develop local associations and a European Federation for the artisanal producers.
- Also one is to look for economic alternatives (p. ej. exploitation of microseaweed and microorganisms) through the development of an innovating project who allows maintaining the economic potential and the biodiversity of the salines.
- Foundation of a culture of the traditional saline activity of the Atlantic coast/Organization of communications of "know-how". We will try to obtain of old producers and/or their families the "know-how" technician and of organization with the purpose of transmitting them to a new generation, with the purpose of creating the bases of a common pedagogical tool.
- Put in tourist value the Traditional Salines of the Atlantic Coast. The artisanal salt of the Atlantic must be identified not only like product of high gastronomical quality, but also like vector of a tradition, a culture and a history. The project, tends to develop a tourist offer with the set of the zones and in relation to the typical cultural content (discovery of the traditional techniques of production, formation of guides, definition of a route of the salt, etc...), as well as basic infrastructures in all the zones in which at the moment any type of information relative to the local salines does not exist (Castro Marim, Leiria and Figueira da Foz, etc.), so that the same ones are integrated in the route of the salt, along with others where these infrastructures already exist (Guerande, Ile de Ré, etc).
- Spatial approach for the development of an integrated management: To study a level of integration of the salines like cultural landscape in the plans of management of wetlands. For this purpose, it is necessary to provide to the local agents of tools of agreement and aid for the decision making. They have been chosen to experience two types of tools, one tends to improve the territorial management and the other the definition of a common model tool of the cartographic information.

- Strategy of communication and diffusion of the project. Although the salines are put under numerous researches by their high interest, for a high sector of the population are zones of low value (mud, mosquitos...). Therefore, its ecological and economic interest is not known well. The project tries to collect the data and to spread it by means of a travelling exhibition, web site, documentary, international conference, etc. Also it is tried to create a data base relative to publications and the cartography available about the salines of the Atlantic.

3. INNOVATING ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

- Approaches from "an integral" point of view and puts in practical solutions of sustainable development applied to all salines. It allows the future for a common definition of strategies (maintenance of the biodiversity, market, collaboration, professional and continuous formation, culture and patrimony, tourism...).
- It along with discloses the local societies the importance of the salines and its patrimony, in zones where its existence has forgotten (Leiria) or others in which the society no longer considers them important (Cadiz, Figueira da Foz, Aveiro).
- It proposes to approach a series of measures of legal recognition of the salt that do not exist at the moment or exist of isolated and different way: label quality, formation of producers, European recognition, creation of an European Federation of producers of artisanal salt.
- The work groups are multidiscipline and transnational that associate producers, territorial, researchers groups, partners privates and publics.
- The tourist project pilot of the salines of Añana (Álava), emphasizes by its innovating character since it tries to make the ecoturism with his fundamental productive function compatible with the salt extraction. It uses a method based on the definition of a Plan Director created with multidiscipline contributions (economy, archaeology, architecture, law...) and with the support of a GIS. The used methodology could be adapted and be used by other Traditional Salines of the Atlantic area.
- Creation of a base common in graphical and conceptual terms, for a route of the Atlantic Salt.
- With respect to the biodiversity, the birds like bioindicators of the environmental changes will be used, by means of the application of population, reproductive parameters and feeding ecology that will allow knowing like increasing the biodiversity in the salines.
- The research on alternative products (as the culture of *Dunaliella salina* microseaweed to obtain natural b-carotene) is an innovating activity (at the present time a high commercial demand of this carotenoid one exists) that offers new possibilities of development and a new possibility to maintain the viability economic of the old salines.
- The products derived from the different activities (type sheet of technical specifications and/or quality, code of good practises) revalue these practices considering criteria Natura 2000.

4. TRANSNATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The solutions must be a resulting answer of the cooperation and the common point of view of the undertaken experiences. From this transference of knowledge of the different local practices the concrete actions, like for example, the definition of an European protocol of conditions of the artisanal salt characteristic of the Atlantic compatible with the criteria Natura 2000, the beginning of a tourist network type "route of the salt of the Atlantic", the definition of a common base of formation will be created, etc...

The approach "biodiversity" by means of the capacity of the partners to put in common its works at level of all salines of the Atlantic Space like for example the election of bioindicators and the definition of a common methodology applied to key species (mainly of the birds) since the migration zones correspond with the Atlantic salines. The cooperation of the producers of artisanal salt of the Atlantic Space is a condition for the obtaining of the European legal recognition of the extracted salt manually (for feeding purpose). The creation of a common tourist product set and a network of museums, eco museums and interpretation centers on the Traditional Salines, will produce a relation between all of them and the formation of a common identity that it reinforces his future viability and the identification of a resource differentiated bound to the salt from the Atlantic.

In fact, it is considered that the transnational work is the necessary support for the development of the traditional methods of production and revaluation of the salt, of the survival of the cultural patrimony and the environmental to which is bound. On the other hand the accomplishment of projects pilots, allows an experimental base, to make a will technology that can revalue the salines economically (culture of microseaweed) or find solutions to the erosion problems which they have caused the loss of many salt mines.

5. INTEREST INFORMATION

The project anticipates the incorporation of new partners who are interested in participating. Therefore all those organizations, associations, etc. who are link to the artisanal salt of the Atlantic space can ask for their incorporation, whenever they have a series of requirements already established by the own partners.

The results and advances of the project will be seen in the website that soon will start up. However, an advance can be found in: <http://sal-atlantic.net>

In September of 2007 and like end of the Project has anticipated an international conference on biodiversity of salines to celebrate in Jerez (Cádiz, southwest of Spain) to all those people or organizations interested in the research and conservation of salines.