



CHERISH
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Maintaining Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Fisheries in Europe through the 2020s

A Policy Brief in the CHERISH Project

Authors:

Kaisu Mustonen Snowchange Cooperative, Chris Madine Snowchange Cooperative, Tero Mustonen Snowchange Cooperative

All report photos: courtesy of Snowchange

View to Gulf of Riga in front of the fisherman's farm "Dienīņas", Bērciems, Latvia September 2022

Summary for the Policy Makers:

This policy brief highlights the endangered role of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) across Europe. In this brief TEK is associated specifically with small-scale fisheries (SSF) maintaining cultural heritage. The brief positions the knowledge in a wider context of sustainability and heritage and offers action points to improve the status and renewal of TEK.

Role of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Fisheries Cultural Heritage¹ in Europe

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) are often also cultural fisheries, i.e. maintaining cultural heritage. They still survive across Europe but face challenges posed by the transformation of the fishing industry, climate and environmental change and pressure from tourism. At the same time these fisheries are recognized as having a valuable role in sustainable development. They also carry unique heritage in the form of detailed ecological knowledge, practices and understanding of long-term environmental change. This builds on daily observations at sea and on water, storytelling and place names.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is Varied but Accurate

Specific and place-based fisheries knowledge exists in different fishing communities across European regions. This knowledge manifests itself in different but consistent ways. TEK evolves from intimate connection with local waterscapes and traditions of cultural fisheries. The Interreg Europe Cherish Project has been able to demonstrate the viability and high policy relevance of TEK.

TEK Responds to Modern Challenges

Traditional Ecological Knowledge associated with small-scale fisheries has a great potential in understanding the biggest challenges of our time -

environmental and climate changes. TEK is a globally accepted method of knowing the waters and observing marine and freshwater habitats. Small-scale fishers are in the frontlines in detecting anomalies. Their economic well-being is dependent on sufficient catch within a limited geographical area. This makes them sensitive to all change in their fishing environment.

Policy Relevant Knowledge

TEK is a positive and policy-relevant resource in regional decision-making. It is integrative and holistic. Applications of use of TEK cover a range of sectors including fisheries, tourism and cultural heritage. It may have additional new roles to play in assessing and surveying the health of the sea, the environment and the fish stocks. In working with TEK successfully the policy actions require rigorous debates, respectful inclusion of knowledge holders and exciting piloting.



THE SVĒTUPE'S RIVER LAMPREY WEIR, Latvia. September 2022

1) Creating opportunities for regional growth through promoting Cultural HERitage of fISHing communities in Europe, **CHERISH**, is an Interreg project with an aim at improving regional development policies protecting and promoting cultural heritage in fishing communities

We need to recognize novelty and divergent substance of TEK across Europe. Solutions will emerge when critical questions are asked. This defines what constitutes the overall policy relevancy across sectors. CHERISH results summarize these potentials in the following:

Issue

Ocean plastics pollution
Climate change and the oceans
Declining and impacted fish stocks
Marine and freshwater conservation
Ageing fishers, lost fleets
Threat to local food security
Addressing the Gender Gap
Sustainable tourism

Solution

Increased monitoring and detection using TEK
Observing change at sea and offering regional context
Understanding baselines, status and trends and solutions
Key species and habitats, solutions in co-management
Attracting young fishers, Collecting cultural heritage
Enabling renewal of TEK through SSF fleets and fishers
Supporting and attracting women to the trade
Use of TEK in conveying local food culture and heritage

These actions are directly addressing several United Nations SDGs, including

- SDG 2: Zero Hunger
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 14: Life below water

ACTION POINTS TO SUPPORT TEK IN POLICY

- **Recognize Traditional Ecological Knowledge of local fishers regionally and directly:** This can happen for example through existing mechanisms such as UNESCO Cultural Heritage. This supports the self-esteem and recognition of the people and trade.
- **Engage with the local fishing community:** This can include actions of environmental education and monitoring, ecological mapping and documentation of TEK that equally co-benefits the fishers. TEK has been undervalued for a long time but offers great potential.
- **Promote TEK and Skills Transfers:** Success has been proved for example through Master-Apprentice Programs for Young Fishers and Women.
- **Develop Sustainable and Ethically Sourced High-quality Products:** This can be achieved through labelling and trademarking of sustainable fish products, engagement with recognized processes such as Slowfish, culinary travel initiatives (i.e. European Region of Gastronomy) as well as local fish and food festivals.

Remember!

Traditional knowledge can be best supported by directly involving the local small-scale fishers.

The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union, the Managing Authority or the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Europe Programme.