

## Better local strategies around the Baltic Sea and in inland areas

Online FARNET seminar report, 24-26 March 2021

The FARNET seminar for FLAGS around the Baltic Sea and for inland FLAGS across the EU was held online from 24-26 March and focused on **preparing high quality local development strategies** for the 2021-2027 period. It was also an opportunity to promote joint learning on themes common to many Baltic and inland FLAGS and to strengthen exchange and cooperation. **115 participants from 12 countries** took part in the event.

### Opening plenary and ‘Meet the FLAG’ video session



Opening the event, [DG MARE Head of Unit C2 Alenka Kampf](#) described the relevance of the [EU Green Deal](#) and [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#), highlighting the fact that what happens on land has an effect on the sea. Alenka stressed that the European Maritime Aquaculture and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027 (EMFAF) had fewer restrictions compared to the EMFF 2014-2020, so in her view, FLAGS will have more flexibility and can design more ambitious and innovative strategies. She also reminded FLAGS that still have money to spend from the previous period to use these funds to the maximum. A [presentation from the FSU](#) introduced an overview of the seminar theme.

In a “Meet the FLAGS” session, six films produced by FLAGS were shown, each introduced by a representative of the FLAG. These were short videos describing the FLAG area, its strategy, some successful projects and plans for the future. Representatives from [Carp Valley FLAG](#) (PL), [Steinburg FLAG](#) (DE), [Central Finland FLAG](#) (FI), [Halland FLAG](#) (SE), [Darlowo FLAG](#) (PL) and [Braila FLAG](#) (RO) also took part in a question and answer session after the screening of the films. This was an opportunity to talk more about the specific challenges they face and answer questions from participants.



### Working groups on ‘Better local strategies’

The theme of the seminar was explored further in five parallel Working Groups, in which participants were guided by facilitators through some of the key steps in developing high quality local strategies. While the objectives, indicators, criteria, and support activities developed in working groups remained at a fairly general level, due to combining a number of different FLAG areas, the discussion process helped the FLAGS to understand the **process they need to follow in practice when developing their own local development strategies**.

#### (1) From challenges to types of action

In the first step, after an [introductory presentation by the FSU](#), the participants discussed key challenges they expected their areas to be facing in 2021-2027, comparing them to the challenges of the 2014-2020 period. Challenges from the previous period that are likely to remain valid include:

- **keeping fisheries alive** in a context of ageing fishers and declining fish stocks.
- **low consumption** of local fish.
- limited **fish quotas**.
- lack of suitable legislation concerning damages caused by **protected predators**, such as seals and cormorants.



Some new challenges most frequently mentioned in the discussion include:

- **climate change** and its impact on sea level and fish species.
- water quality and **water shortages** (especially for inland/aquaculture areas).
- arrival of new, **invasive species** (e.g., round goby).
- introducing **innovation and digitalisation** in businesses, including new channels of marketing.

Some working groups also brought up specific new challenges, such as the need to better understand (with practical examples) the opportunities to develop sustainable blue economy at the local level (opened up in the EMFAF Regulation for 2021-2027), or taking advantage of 'Smart Villages'. Participants also noted that certain challenges can become an opportunity in the future (for example, seasonality of activities or invasive species such as round goby).



Discussions covered the possibilities of making the SWOT analysis more relevant for future local strategies, and learning how, based on the revisited SWOT, FLAGs can formulate their 'aspirations' and develop the key focus actions of their strategies. For example, one working group decided to focus their future strategies on **keeping small-scale fisheries alive and profitable, tapping into opportunities such as increased consumption of local fresh fish or technological innovations**. In another, participants agreed to focus on **the marketing of local fish as a healthy, climate-friendly product and alternative to meat**. A third group wanted to create a **strong business environment (including the enhanced use of digital technology) supporting resilient fisheries**.

## (2) Objectives, targets, indicators, and action plans

Following [introductory presentation by the FSU](#), a second round of working groups used the result of previous discussion to propose strategic objectives and develop targets and indicators to measure success.

For example, one working group agreed on a specific objectives of **improving the capacity of fishers to use digital tools**, and proposed to measure success with such indicators as:

- numbers of fishers educated (target: 10 programmes, 100 fishers).
- Number of digital tools used by fishers (target: five sales platforms or 50 devices).

Discussants pointed out that too many indicators can be counterproductive and that it is essential for FLAGs to have information on which indicators will be used at the national level well in advance.

The participants were also guided through the process of developing some elements of an **action plan** which would help them achieve strategic objectives. In particular, facilitators challenged the working groups to propose innovative project selection criteria and activities to support project promoters in line with the strategic objectives. Some interesting examples concerning **project selection** include:

- for the objective of encouraging young people to take up a profession in fishing, projects that bring **newcomers and youth to the area** would be given additional points.

- FLAGS that aim to strengthen linkages between fisheries and tourism can allocate extra points to tourism projects whose applicants can demonstrate that they will **purchase products from the fishing sector** or **promote local fisheries attractions**.

Ideas for **support activities** for project promoters to help achieve strategic objectives included:

- **mentoring** to assist in the implementation of more complex projects.
- support in obtaining **financial contribution** to projects.
- helping beneficiaries to **connect with media** and promote their activities.
- **training** and individual **consultancy** for project promoters (in some FLAGS, attending such training and/or consultancy is a condition of support).

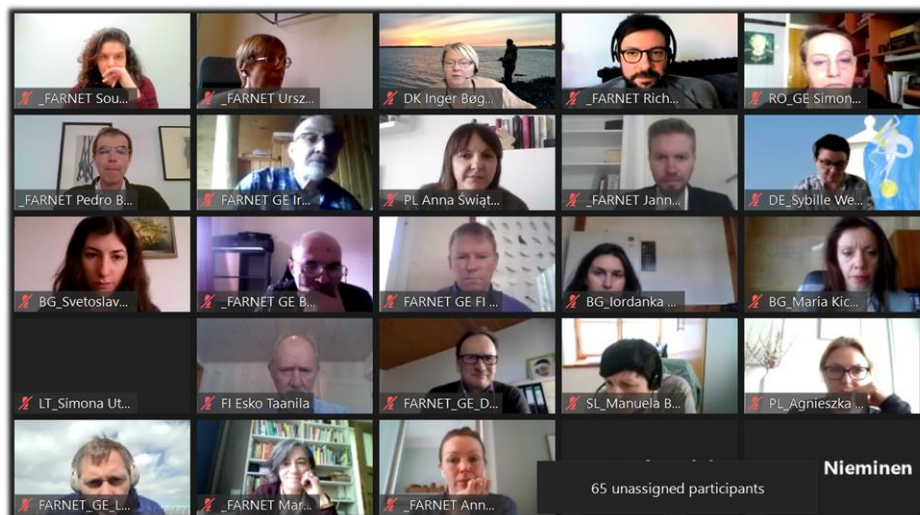
### (3) Integrating cooperation in the local strategy

The main focus of the third round of working groups was obtaining maximum benefit from **cooperation projects**. After [introductory presentation by the FSU](#), working groups discussed issues linked with developing cooperation projects that would help reach the strategic objective, in particular:

- key **barriers** to cooperation: bureaucracy – including different rules between MS; language (especially for transnational cooperation); small budgets and insufficient human resources.
- **success factors**: planning cooperation while preparing the strategy; identifying who will benefit from cooperation projects; starting with simple but effective activities (e.g., study visits); identifying a ‘flagship’ cooperation project that can be the basis of future activities; support at EU level from a FARNET-type organisation.

A number of **potential cooperation projects** were identified in the course of discussion:

- between the German FLAGS to promote fish as a local, healthy, climate-friendly food.
- between Bulgarian, Romanian (and potentially Greek) FLAGS who share a tourism market.
- between some FLAGS around the Baltic (mainly inland) on recruiting young fishers.



## Presentations of Baltic and inland initiatives and funders

Six presentations of non-CLLD initiatives focusing on fisheries around the Baltic Sea and in inland areas provided a diverse look at projects relevant to FLAG work. After the presentations, FLAGS could speak to representatives of these initiatives to find out more about them.

### RETROUT

Funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region with the support of the Swedish Agency for Water and Marine Management and the Estonian Environmental Investment Centre, the [RETROUT](#) project created solutions for efficient restoration of the sea trout stock in order to boost coastal fishing tourism. It brought together 14

partners and 28 associate organisations in six countries (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden). A pan-Baltic network for fishing tourism that use sustainable methods was created (following the Baltic Sea Fishing ethical code), which helps to boost the local economy. The project is supporting five demonstration sites of the new fishing tourism product, developing educational activities, and marketing and eco-branding, including creating marketing packages and online booking solutions. Work is still ongoing and will continue after the project's implementation time. The booking solution is not ready yet, and all Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) are not formalised yet. More info [here](#).

### **John Nurminen Foundation**

The [John Nurminen Foundation](#) is a Finnish private foundation working for the protection of the Baltic Sea by implementing projects to improve the environmental status and to reduce the nutrient load and environmental risks faced by the sea. The work is steered by measurable results and impact. The foundation's [Local Fishing Project](#), which ran from 2015 to 2019, created the first market-driven value chain for underexploited cyprinid fish harvested from the Archipelago Sea. In 2019, encouraged by the success of the Archipelago Sea example, the foundation together with other stakeholders launched the [Baltic Fish Project](#), which seeks to commercialise the underexploited cyprinids also in Åland islands and Sweden. More info [here](#).

### **LIFE**

The [LIFE](#) programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action created in 1992. The current funding period 2014-2020 has a budget of €3.4 billion. Since its creation, the LIFE program has supported more than 5 400 projects across Europe and overseas. More info [here](#).

### **COASTAL**

[COASTAL](#) is a Horizon 2020 project which aims to contribute to integrated planning of sustainable coastal-rural development through a unique multi-actor collaboration of business entrepreneurs, administrations, stakeholders, natural and social science experts for knowledge exchange on coastal-rural synergy. The project links and analyses socio-economic and environmental land-sea interactions, combining local knowledge and scientific expertise in a co-creation process. It focuses on sustainable economic growth, spatial planning, and environmental protection, including of inland and coastal-marine water quality and ecosystems. COASTAL is organised around six complementary Multi-Actor Labs (MALs), of which one covers the Northern Baltic Proper and its coastal zones and drainage basins, aiming to create an integrated approach to mitigating coastal-marine eutrophication and pollution. More info [here](#).

### **SUBMARINER**

The [SUBMARINER](#) Network is a bottom-up initiative of more than 40 actors from administration, research, and business from the whole Baltic Sea Region to actively promote innovative and sustainable uses of marine resources. Driven by its own [strategic roadmap](#), the SUBMARINER Network continuously connects partners across the Baltic Sea Region, to drive innovation and research; product, business and regional development; ecosystem restoration and zero pollution projects. It has raised more than 30 million EURO of funding for initiatives from grass-root up to the EU policy level. Topics include mussel and macro-algae production and processing; sustainable fish and shrimp aquaculture; marine litter solutions and novel combinations of maritime activities (i.e., pescatourism, nature restoration in offshore wind farms, monitoring). The Blue Platform maintained by the SUBMARINER secretariat contains all relevant resources, actors and tools currently available in the field of the blue bioeconomy within the Baltic Sea Region, for example see [Good Practices](#) on the Baltic Blue Bioeconomy. More info [here](#).

### **Round Goby**

The [Round Goby Fishing Project](#) is run by the Kalmar municipality in Sweden together with stakeholders in Latvia, Poland and Denmark. The main objective is to establish a network with key stakeholders and develop a joint application for a large-scale pilot project enhancing the potential of commercial fishing of round goby in the Baltic Sea region. Round goby is an invasive fish species that has spread rapidly in many coastal areas in the Baltic Sea region causing several negative impacts to the ecosystem. The project will focus on the

development of fisheries management for round goby and commercialisation of the species by building up local value chains and new processing techniques. More info [here](#).

## Exhibition of FLAG cooperation projects

Five representatives of LAGs and FLAGs gave talks on cooperation projects they have been involved in, providing an insight into collaborative working with neighbouring: LAGs and FLAGs, FLAGs in the same country and FLAGs in different EU Member States. After introducing those projects, participants engaged in lively discussion with the presenters.

### The fishing trip goes to Limfjorden – Tourism LAG-FLAG Cooperation

[Småøerne FLAG](#), [Jammerbugt FLAG](#), [Thy-Mors FLAG \(DK\)](#)

Despite experiencing environmental strain, the Limfjord has an abundance of sea trout. This species is very attractive to anglers. A FLAG-LAG cooperation project addresses local economic and environmental goals by creating a new tourist location based on recreational fishing. See [FARNET Good Practice](#).



### Baltic Sea seal and cormorant TNC project

Baltic region cooperation coordinated by [South Finland FLAG \(FI\)](#)

A large-scale cooperation project between Baltic FLAGs has increased knowledge on the impact the growing seal and cormorant populations are having on small-scale coastal fisheries in the region. Through this cooperation project, 14 FLAGs from FI, EE, SE and DE have developed solutions for achieving the balanced management of marine resources. See [FARNET Good Practice](#).



### Fishing Intelligently

[Zegrze Lagoon FLAG](#); [Masurian Sea FLAG \(PL\)](#), [Lapland FLAG \(FI\)](#)

Finnish and Polish fishers work together on spreading new fishing techniques which benefit both the natural environment and the fisheries sector. See [FARNET Good Practice](#).



### Sustainable entrepreneurship in the countryside

[South Finland FLAG \(FI\)](#), [Liepaja FLAG \(LV\)](#), coordinated by [East-Harju Partnership LEADER LAG \(EE\)](#)

Exchange between businesses from three countries helps increase local entrepreneurs' skills, develop new products, and encourage young people to engage in business activities. See [FARNET Good Practice](#).



### Promoting inland Slovenian products

[Soča Valley FLAG](#), [Gorenjska košarica FLAG](#), [Posavje FLAG \(SI\)](#)

Three Slovenian FLAGs are implementing a collaborative assessment of fisheries products to establish a quality system for fish products produced in Slovenia. See [FARNET Good Practice](#).



## Concluding session



In her concluding comments, [Monica Veronesi](#), FSU Team Leader, encouraged FLAGs to get started with their preparation of the 2021-2027 period. In addition to reflecting on new challenges and objectives, they should discuss with the MAs on common indicators most appropriate for their strategies and design selection criteria and support activities to obtain maximum impact. She also pointed out the importance of building partnerships within the FLAG area, as well as cooperation with other FLAGs and exploiting the potential of digital solutions.