

Resilient coastal communities

Online FARNET seminar report, 16-18 November 2021

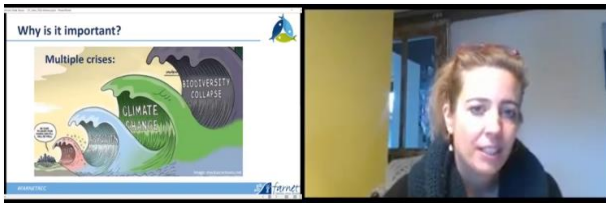
The last FARNET seminar for FLAGs was held online from 16-18 November 2021. It focused on helping FLAGs **build resilience** into their 2021-2027 strategies and find innovative solutions to help coastal communities deal with unforeseen shocks and stresses. Over **180 participants** from 20 countries (including almost **140 FLAG representatives**) registered for the event.

Opening plenary



The event was opened by [Felix Leinemann](#), DG MARE's Head of Unit for Blue Economy Sectors, Aquaculture and Maritime Spatial Planning. He said that the resilience of coastal areas, inhabited by one third of Europe's population, is an important priority for the EU. The Commission's [communication on the new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU](#) (published in May 2021) has a dedicated section on coastal resilience, and many member states are planning to allocate a significant proportion of the Recovery and

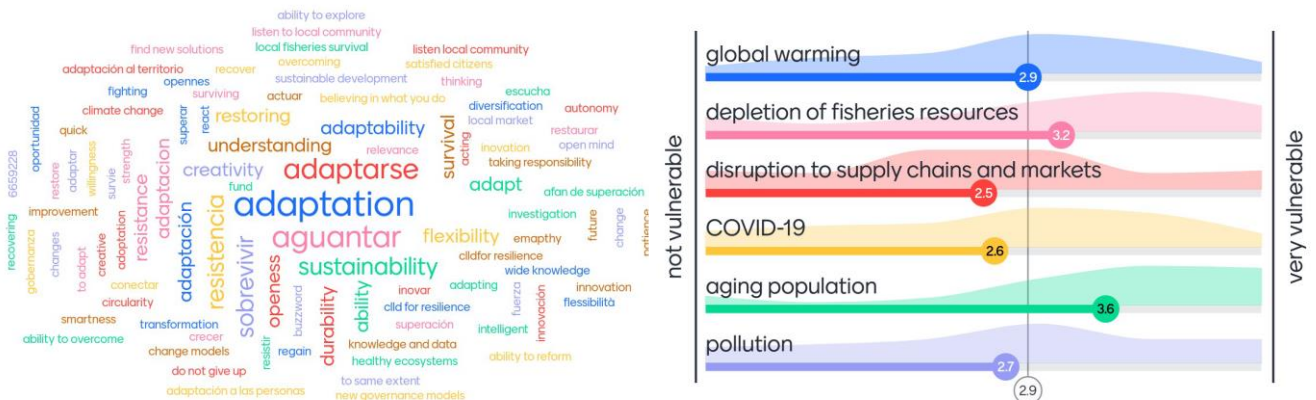
Resilience Facility to activities in coastal areas. He added that while fisheries and aquaculture will remain an important focus of CLLD under the EMFAF, FLAGs will also be able to broaden the scope of their support to allow coastal communities to benefit from a sustainable blue economy. Responding to a question from the audience, Felix stressed that in the EU context the term "coastal areas" also includes areas with inland fisheries and aquaculture. On behalf of DG MARE, Felix thanked the FLAGs and other stakeholders for their contribution to FARNET work, which is coming to an end in December 2021.



Team Leader of the FARNET Support Unit, [Monica Veronesi](#), presented the seminar agenda and provided an [introduction to the concept of resilience](#), understood here as the **ability to resist, absorb and recover** from – or successfully **adapt to – adversity or change**. She mentioned the three main – and interlinked – types of resilience: **economic, environmental**

and social, providing for each of them a few examples of how FLAGs can help their communities become more resilient.

In an interactive exercise, participants were invited say how they understood the term "resilience". The most frequent response was linked with the **capacity to adapt**; other ideas included resistance, flexibility, innovation, creativity, knowledge and open mindedness. Participants were also asked to estimate the vulnerability of their local communities to different types of shocks. According to the responses, coastal areas are most vulnerable to shocks linked with **ageing population, depletion**



of fisheries resources and global warming, and relatively less vulnerable to pollution, COVID-19 or disruption of supply chains and markets.

Economic resilience

Davie Philip, Community Resilience Manager from Cultivate – the Sustainable Ireland Cooperative – explained what economic resilience is and provided **practical ideas** on how coastal communities can become stronger by diversifying sources of income. These ideas included community orchards and gardens; community-supported agriculture and fisheries; Open Food Network (an open source digital platform owned by its users); and community initiatives for energy efficiency (including energy cooperatives) or for transport. Davie also explained the potential of community wealth building. See [PPT](#) and [video](#) of Davie’s contribution.



Two examples were presented to illustrate activities that FLAGs are already undertaking to strengthen economic resilience of their areas:



- [Anna Świątek](#) from the Polish [Carp Valley FLAG](#) described her FLAG’s comprehensive package of activities to promote local products and strengthen the area’s identity with a programme of local brand and marketing support for producers. A key feature of this is a dedicated stand in the local supermarket, that is visited by 500 people per day and has created two new jobs. There are also smaller stands in shops, restaurants, hotels and rural accommodation facilities across the FLAG area.

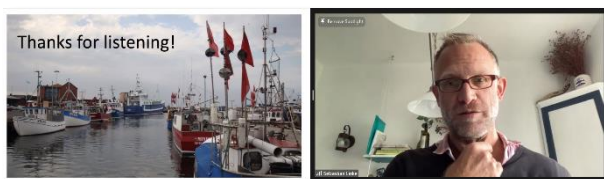


- [Tuuli Tammla](#) from the [Estonian Hiiukala FLAG](#) shared the story of a local company called Stonefish, which started as a small fish shop. With FLAG support and other EMFF funding, the shop diversified into fish processing (including innovative products, such as snacks from less-known fish or chocolate with fish chunks); selling fish fillets; a café that sells fish soup and smoked salmon; study tours on local fish processing; and a workshop making gillnets and other fishing equipment. The company created seven year-round jobs.

The interactive exercises and discussion following the presentations indicated that to be economically resilient, coastal areas need **synergies and cooperation** between different actors, **entrepreneurial thinking**, **strong leadership** and **honest and courageous decision-makers**. They also need a **long-term perspective**. Local brands can help strengthen linkages and networking between local businesses and raise awareness of local consumers, thus stimulating the circulation of wealth within the local economy (in a similar way as a local currency). The importance of good contacts with the **media** was also highlighted.

Environmental resilience

The topic was introduced by **Sebastian Linke**, Associate Professor in Environmental Social Science at the University of Gothenburg. He pointed out that economic, social and environmental resilience are strongly interconnected and, while communities need sustainable fisheries to thrive, the inverse is also true – sustainable fisheries need socially fair and empowered communities that manage their resources in a sustainable way. Thus, to ensure environmental resilience in coastal areas, FLAGs should focus not only on the “life below the water” (i.e. marine/freshwater ecosystems) but also on the “life above water”, i.e. the societal well-being of the local community. See [PPT](#) and [video](#) of Sebastian’s contribution.



This presentation was complemented by two examples of how FLAGs are contributing to the environmental resilience of their areas:



[Pekka Sahama](#) from [East Finland FLAG](#) explained how his FLAG tries to address the key environmental challenge of the area – by-catch of protected species: Saimaa ringed seal and landlocked salmon. Thanks to good cooperation with the fishing sector, researchers and conservationists, and a strong focus on obtaining practical solutions acceptable by the sector, the FLAG supported the development of more selective fishing gear and seal-safe traps.



FARNET Geographical Expert for Sweden [Thomas Hjelm](#), cooperating closely with the [Stockholmsbygd FLAG](#), showed how FLAG support to an initiative to recreate wetlands, which are spawning grounds for pike, can help restore balance to the ecosystem of the Stockholm archipelago and at the same time foster collaboration between different organisations and improve opportunities for tourism development.

In the discussion, participants identified the following **environmental threats** as having a major impact on their fisheries communities:

- Depletion of fish stocks and need for co-management
- Global warming
- Loss of biodiversity, endangered or invasive species
- Water pollution and eutrophication (particularly in the Baltic)
- Pressure of tourism and its impact on natural habitats (particularly in the Mediterranean).

FLAGs trying to address these threats and build the environmental resilience of their communities were confronted with the following **challenges**:

- Finding compromise between stakeholders
- The fishers' perception that the environment is not their sole responsibility, but that of society as a whole
- Lack of resources
- Need for further research on topics such as fossil fuels and carbon emissions in the fisheries sector.

The discussion also showed the importance of experience-sharing and collaboration between different actors in promoting environmental resilience at the local level.

Thematic workshop – supporting local energy cooperatives

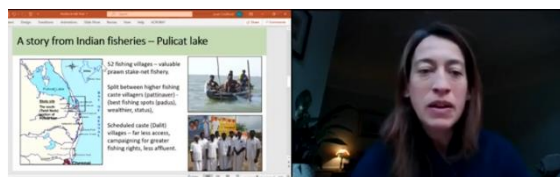


[Myriam Castanié](#) from the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives REScoop.eu introduced her organisation, which brings together 1 900 cooperatives and 1 250 000 citizens across the EU. The recent EU legislative package on Clean Energy opens the way for citizens' initiatives in renewable energies, and member states will have to develop mechanisms to support energy communities at the national level.

FLAGs can play an important role in helping local stakeholders set up an energy community and produce their own solar or wind energy. The first step usually involves raising awareness, and one of the most effective ways is the technique of **storytelling**. In the interactive part of the workshop, the participants tried to create their own story to mobilise the local community around renewable energy, guided by Myriam's advice to: focus on a pressing social issue; appeal to a local audience; appeal to emotions; and include a face or a name that people can identify with. For example, Thanos Kouletsos from the [Kozani FLAG](#) in Greece came up with the idea to promote local electricity generation by inventing a cartoon character called "EPIC"; the name recalls Greek historical tradition but also stands for "Exchange – Plan – Innovate for Climate".

For communities interested in exploring the topic further, REScoop has prepared a practical [Community Energy Guidebook](#) and an educational [video](#).

Social resilience



To help the audience better understand social resilience, **Sarah Coulthard**, Senior Lecturer in Marine Social Science at Newcastle University, shared two examples from fishing communities around the world, highlighting some of the interlinkages and trade-offs between community

wellbeing and resilience. In a fisheries community of the Pulicat Lake in India the wealthier, higher-status fishers turned out to be more affected by seasonal collapse of fishery than the poorer ones, who were more diversified, adaptive to change and better savers. In a fishing community in Northern Ireland, resilience strategies to address declining catches were linked with loss of welfare by the fishers and their families. See [PPT](#) and [video](#) of Sarah’s contribution.

Two FLAG examples were presented to illustrate what FLAGs can do to help fisheries communities build social resilience:



[Claire Lemoine](#) from the French FLAG [Estérel Côte d’Azur](#) described how the FLAG brought together fishers, fish farmers, restaurant owners, fishmongers, local associations, police and healthcare workers to react to the COVID-19 crisis. This cooperation helped fishers and restaurants to continue operating despite the restrictions, and to prepare meals for people in need and those on the frontline. Fishers were provided with cooler bags, which facilitate direct sales of their catch

and highlight their commitment to the community.

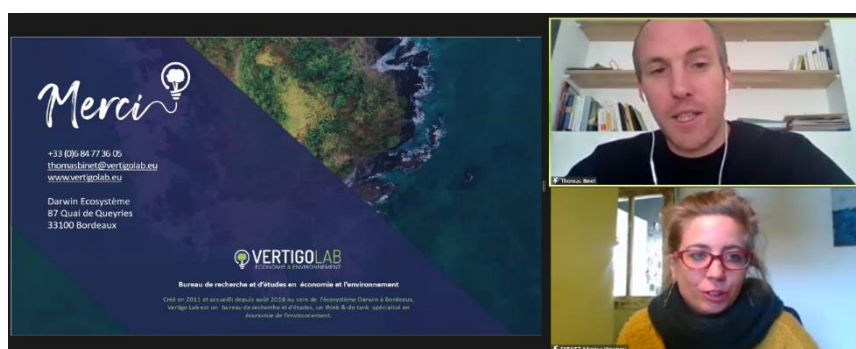


Nina Rydahl from the Danish island of Ærø told the story of the old boat engine factory in Marstal which, thanks to support of the [LLSÆ FLAG](#), has been converted into a community hub, preserving the island’s maritime heritage, while also offering shared office spaces, a fab lab, a coffee bar and conference centre. The hub builds on the community’s long tradition of volunteering and facilitates cross-generational exchanges and integration of newcomers.

In the discussion participants stressed the importance of creating **lasting** and **multi-directional** (as opposed to one-way) **relationships** within the community and taking advantage of opportunities such as people coming back to live in remote areas due to the pandemic and teleworking.

Thematic workshop – building resilience into future FLAG strategies

The workshop was run by [Thomas Binet](#) from VertigoLab (and FARNET Geographical Expert for France). He reminded FLAGs of the key reasons why they might place resilience at the heart of their



next strategy and then provided recommendations and tips for each of the three main steps:

- assessing **resilience weak spots** of a fisheries area
- identifying the area’s major **value creation drivers**
- searching for **resilience solutions** and **project development**.

In an interactive exercise, participants identified the key economic, environmental and social challenges their areas might face, including:

(i) economic:

- low income of fishers
- short tourist season
- administrative and tax burdens for small businesses
- limited own resources
- lack of interest of young people in business activity
- lack of cooperation between different sectors
- long distribution chains, consumers' limited access to local fish



(ii) environmental:

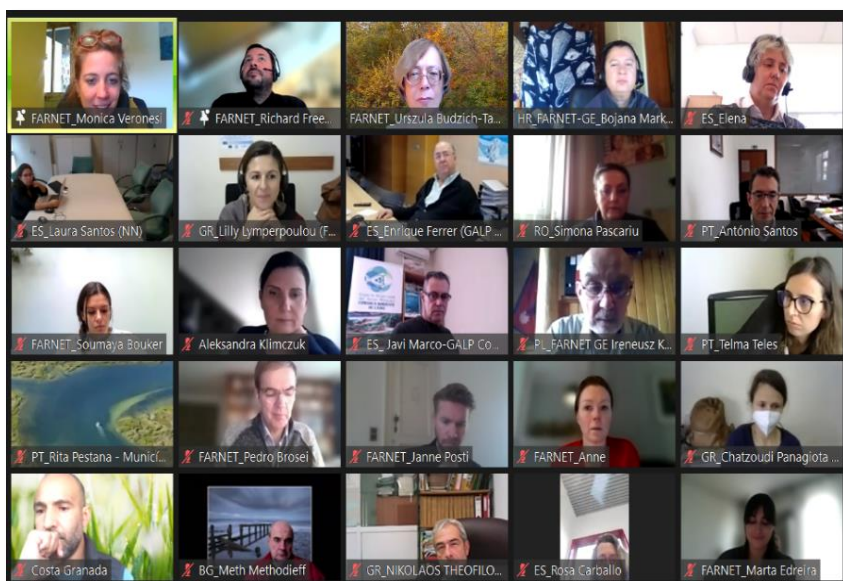
- climate change affecting many aspects of fishing: fish migration routes, increase of plankton, thinner ice making ice fishing impossible...
- water pollution and underdeveloped waste water treatment infrastructure
- low awareness of the need to address issues such as air pollution or plastics; lack of motivation to change behaviours

(iii) social:

- depopulation
- ageing and generation renewal
- sense of inferiority and isolation of fishers
- lack of employees for manual jobs
- housing problems.

To conclude, Thomas reminded participants of some of the **development keys** that will help them strengthen the resilience of their communities, such as re-localisation of activities (replacing products imported from outside the area with domestic ones) and making the most of the area's competitive advantages and various forms of capital (technical, human and natural).

Conclusions and farewell session



In the final session, Team Leader, Monica Veronesi, encouraged FLAGs to read the [FARNET guide on sustainable coastal communities](#) and reminded participants of the [project exhibition](#) in Italy on the same subject.

She concluded by highlighting some of the next steps for FLAGs as they prepare for the new period and pointing to various [FARNET resources](#) that might help them. Finally, she reminded participants that the current Support Unit would come to an end at the end of 2021 and thanked FLAGs for their active participation and contribution to the network over the past twelve and half years.