

Piloting of CoPraNet TQMs underway in Cork Harbour

- Cathal O'Mahony (Coastal and Marine Resources Centre, UCC, Ireland)

At the CoPraNet workshop on ***Sustainable Tourism and Marine Protected Areas*** (Fuerteventura, Spain: January 31st –February 5th 2005) project participants initiated the development of a transparent international quality label for sustainable tourism destinations. These tourism quality milestones (TQMs) covered the thematic categories of *Nature, Carrying Capacity, Water and Environmental Quality* and *Socio-Economics* (see **CoPraNet Newsletter No. 3**). At the Fuerteventura workshop CoPraNet partners discussed the benefits of piloting a subset of the TQMs for relevant local destinations. In meeting this commitment, CMRC staff undertook a piloting exercise in the Cork Harbour region over the months of August and September 2005.

Pilot Area

The pilot area contains Cork Harbour and surrounding hinterland, a mix of urban centres and agricultural holdings. Cork Harbour is analogous with many other coastal locations in that it is a multi-resource and multi-use environment. Cork Harbour is one of the largest coastal water bodies in Ireland and the most industrialised estuary in Ireland with a large concentration of pharmaceutical companies based within the confines of the harbour. The harbour environs also contain the sites of former heavy industry such as shipbuilding, fertiliser production and steel manufacture that has declined in output and importance over the last decade.

The harbour and its hinterland are rich in natural and built heritage and contain a number of visitor attractions. In terms of natural environment Cork Harbour is a designated site of ecological importance under national, European and international legislation and conventions, e.g. SPA, SAC and Ramsar.



Cranes at Verolme Dockyard in Cork Harbour. Photo: Cathal O'Mahony.

Tourism in Cork Harbour is largely centred on water-based recreation, maritime heritage and historical sites. Primary water-based activities include boating, angling charters and yachting. Cobh town, located on the northern shores of the harbour was port of call for the ill-fated *Titanic* and *Lusitania* liners.



Vessels moored at Aghada Pier, on the western shores of Cork Harbour. Photo: Cathal O'Mahony.

In terms of military history, the harbour entrance is flanked by a series of forts and military installations dating back to the 19th century. A number of visitor centres and a wildlife park are also located within the confines of the harbour.

Pilot Activities

A set of 10 TQMs was selected to pilot in Cork Harbour. In an effort to optimise the feedback from the exercise, TQMs were chosen from each of the thematic categories mentioned above. Additionally, all of the chosen TQMs were selected from the '**core indicator**' set as defined at the Fuerteventura CoPraNet workshop.

Once the TQMs were decided upon, CMRC staff set about collecting information to progress the TQMs towards operational status (i.e. ready for communicating information on their destinations to visitors). Each TQM was assigned an operational definition, which outlined its scope. Methods of measurement used over the course of the pilot exercise ranged from visitor surveys, analysis of public data sets collated by the local and regional offices of statutory and regulatory agencies, and European data sets, e.g. CORINE.

Pilot Results

The piloting of the CoPraNet TQMs for Cork Harbour revealed potential for certain TQMs to be taken forward as operational tools. Key issues that emerged during the piloting exercise were data availability, data accessibility, temporal range of data sets used in the piloting exercise and the necessity to develop effective communication and dissemination tools at a local level. In a broader CoPraNet context the piloting exercise also raised attention towards the:

- Pan-European application of TQMs
- Interaction with other indicator sets being developed by coastal practitioners

Data availability is a key factor in developing an indicator set. In Cork Harbour, the absence of data at a local level is due to the data not being recorded in the first instance or as a result of the regional amalgamation of datasets whereby the local identity is lost. The difficulty in obtaining data at a local level (i.e. specifically for Cork Harbour) may hinder the operational use of certain TQMs. However, as revealed in the piloting exercise, where data gaps exist, it is possible to obtain information by undertaking standard, repeatable and cost effective surveys.

In certain instances, data sets are ostensibly available and accessible, in that public bodies collate them, but analysis of the data for specific research purposes is difficult due to resource (time and staff) constraints. Much of the data on Cork Harbour is freely available from local government offices but only through direct contact with individuals and not via a more accessible forum such as the web. One possible measure to overcome this obstacle would be greater liaison between local authorities and research institutions to optimise information that can be gleaned from existing data sets. Practitioner oriented networks such as CoPraNet are an effective means to bring about such collaboration.

Defining scale is crucial in any indicator-based assessment. When coastal practitioners use indicators as means to communicate with stakeholders it is necessary to define both the spatial and temporal scale. In terms of temporal aspects, if measurements of TQMs indicate favourable or unfavourable progress towards sustainability it must come with the caveat that such an assessment is based on a recent data set or a longer-term data set (or a combination of both).

What Next?

CMRC representatives will attend the **Sustainable Tourism and Coastal Management Week** (Gran Canaria, November 21st – 25th) 2005 and anticipate constructive dialogue between all CoPraNet partners in progressing the development

of the TQMs for sustainable tourism destinations. Different approaches taken by CoPraNet partners, technical issues and the application of the TQMs at a pan-European scale are certain to provide material for interesting and engaging discussions between all CoPraNet partners.

Cathal O' Mahony can be contacted at c.omahony@ucc.ie or 00 353 (0)21 4703111.