



Cultural heritage and environmental resources

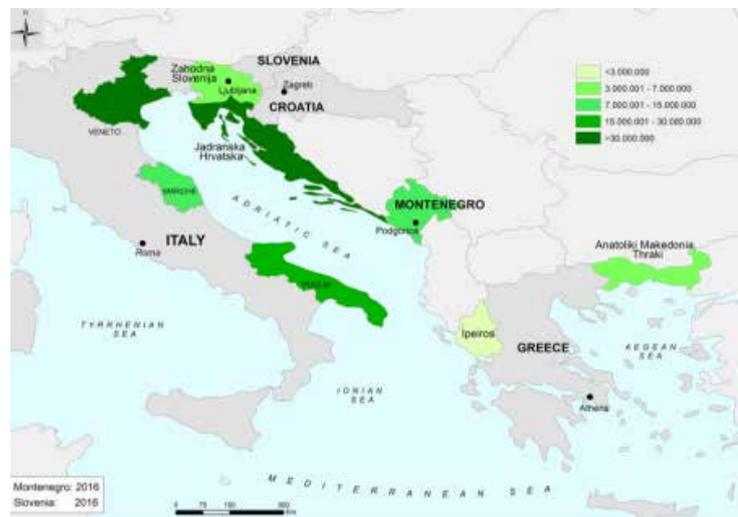
Detailed analysis of the regions of the partner countries in the QNeST project highlights their considerable cultural and natural heritage of international importance. The conspicuous presence of sites included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage indicates the balanced presence of cultural and natural assets. "Living" and "traditional" cultures are also well represented. The coastal regions of this part of the north-eastern Mediterranean are of great interest thanks to their artistic and natural heritage, traditions and local products, which distinguish them from other regions and give them a competitive advantage, representing an opportunity for sustainable development in terms of both social and economic growth.

Economic activities and regional strategies

Craft skills and industrial expertise, traditional techniques and new technologies seem to be a common characteristic of many areas in the partner countries of the QNeST project. Many of them are still suffering from the consequences of the grave economic crisis of recent years, from which they are struggling to emerge, as shown by data on income, profitability and employment, which remain poor in Puglia, Epirus, Montenegro and Xanthi, in the Greek region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. of the folklore and are present in different forms in modern art (from fashion to architecture).

Tourism in QNeST areas

In the general pattern of tourism flows in Europe, the strong and constant growth of the Balkan countries and Greece as destinations constitutes one of the most significant tendencies of the last few years. Figures 2 and 3 show the flows of arrivals and presences in the regions affected by the QNeST project and their strong increase in the last ten years, in particular in Croatia and in the This is clearly the result of demand on the part of travellers who are attentive to environmental values, but it is also due to the presence of bathing resorts with competitive prices, producing strong tourist pressure with a tendency to standardise and stereotype the experience, which then takes on the character of mass tourism, with the loss of specificity, environmental quality and the slow corrosion of autochthonous social structures.





Local products linked to the Mediterranean Diet

Gastronomic resources are an expression of a region's cultural heritage and a strategic resource for tourism because they highlight the profound link between food, landscape, culture and identity. Indeed, dishes consistent with the geographical features, traditions, culture and local products of the regions are multiplying. An important role in the rediscovery of the cultural, aesthetic and health benefits of food is played by the Mediterranean diet, inscribed by Unesco (16 November 2010) in the List of Immaterial Cultural World Heritage. The products linked to the Mediterranean Diet associated with the regions of the QNeST project that characterise quality cuisine are numerous. Fish in particular is the main reason for the longevity and health of the people of the Mediterranean and it is a common motif in local gastronomy. However, among the many products associated with the Mediterranean Diet, wine and olive oil are the most widespread and representative of the food-processing and gastronomic sector as a whole, which is still seeing strong growth. Indeed, various players are investing in the sector's supply chain, seeking to improve the range of products and services on offer and to attract tourists who not only love the local gastronomy, but are also interested in the other qualities of the region they are visiting.



Cultural routes and itineraries

In the Adriatic-Ionian area there are numerous routes and itineraries of a historic and religious nature (Via Traiana, Via Egnazia, Via Romea, Via Longobardorum) but also of naturalistic interest (parks, protected areas, wetlands) and economic value (food-and-wine itineraries, oil and wine routes, including the European itinerary The Routes of the Olive Tree). Cultural routes ensure a tourism offer of a highly experiential character, based on the heritage of a region. They highlight the region's environmental, cultural and economic assets, which have the intrinsic ability, particularly in underdeveloped and marginal regions, to bring together a number of factors of attraction, which, considered individually, might appear insignificant, of little interest and unable to induce tourists to invest time and money in visiting them, let alone ensure respect for the cultural integrity and sustainable development of the region. In addition, cultural routes favour close connections between integrated economic activities: agriculture, handicraft, hospitality. They encourage forms of partnership and cooperation between contiguous regions, promoting tourism and economic development.

