

Aquaculture Developments in Greece

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It was also in Beijing, in October 1999, that the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting for Research and Technological Development took place. During that Meeting, Aquaculture was identified as a one of the priority areas for Euro - Asian S&T Cooperation. Professor Tsaftaris, Secretary General for Research and Technology at the time, and head of the Greek delegation, proposed that Greece could hold a coordinating role in exchanging information about the current activities in this field in the ASEM member countries.

At the same meeting, Professor Tilak Viegas, European Commission's scientific officer for International Cooperation, over the course of several unofficial discussions, encouraged the Greek delegation to exploit the opportunities offered by the INCO-Dev Programme to support this initiative. However, Professor Eleftheriou of the Institute of Marine Biology of Crete, one of the Greek delegation, took up the idea with some enthusiasm and, in collaboration with world-class scientists from Europe and Asia and with the full support of the European Commission, set up the present Workshop. Once again the Chinese government is hosting an ASEM meeting in Beijing, the capital of China, the most important aquaculture producer in the world.

Over the last fifteen years, Greece has become the most important producer of euryhaline finfish species (mainly sea - bass and sea - bream) in Europe and the larger Mediterranean area. Favourable climatic and environmental conditions, alongside with several incentives provided by national and European community investment policies and the growing demand for fresh fish products, played a critical role in this development.

But despite the progress achieved, this flourishing industry in Greece, as elsewhere in the world, is facing problems such as for example, severe fluctuations in prices: periodically prices decline dramatically and as a result many medium and small size enterprises do not manage to survive.

In Greece, aquaculture production was not based on in-house scientific and technological development, but rather on technology transfer from Northern European countries and subsequent adaptation to the local conditions and requirements of the cultured Mediterranean species. Consequently, there was a gap between the development of production and know-how. Recently, however, Greece has been catching up in many aspects concerning the scientific and technological support of the sector. Many active research teams are presently working in Greek Universities and public research centres. At the same time, the largest production companies have established their own RTD departments with competent staff and modern equipment (see Fig. 1).

Furthermore, a sectoral company aiming at facilitating liaisons between industry and academia has been created by the Greek government.

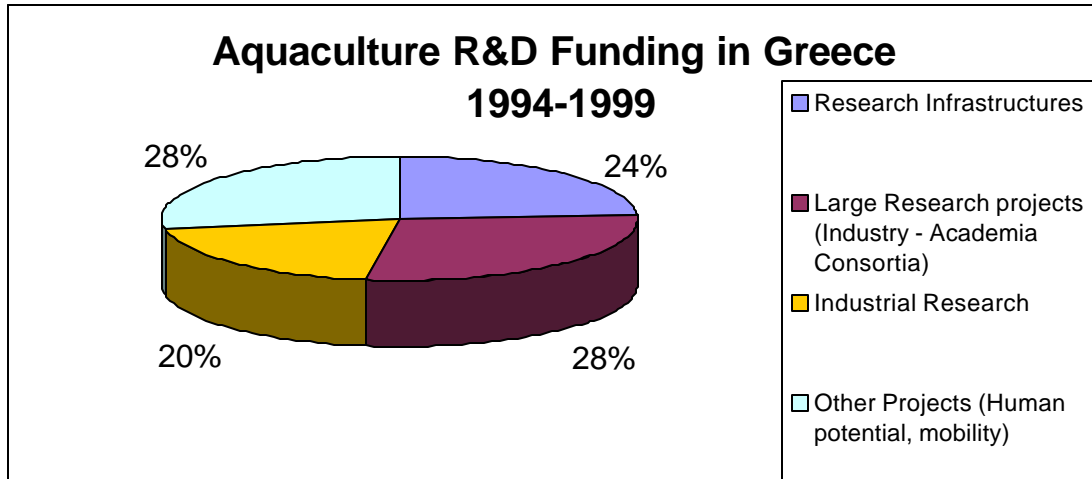


Figure 1

In the past five years, financing of RTD projects in the field of aquaculture, through the Operational Programme for Research and Technology, the main funding instrument for RTD in Greece, reached around 5,5 million Euros (see Figure 1).

Greek institutions and companies have also participated in several European projects under the various EU Framework Programmes. In the context of bilateral cooperation, offering mostly mobility grants, our more active partner countries in the field of aquaculture are Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and China.

According to the Bangkok declaration, "There is a need to increase investment in aquaculture research and development, whilst making efficient use of research resources"... A mechanism identified towards this end is trans-regional co-operation. Events such as the present AQUACHALLENGE Workshop, promoting the exchange of ideas and experiences between world-class scientists, both from Europe and Asia, could significantly contribute in providing the solid scientific knowledge for guaranteeing the sustainability of the sector. Furthermore, it could act as a catalyst for trans-regional cooperation enhancing the establishment of scientific consortia able to take advantage of the possibilities offered by several national and international funding schemes.

For Greece for example, I would like to give a brief description of the "Focused RTD Programme" for "Agriculture, Food and Aquaculture" that will soon be launched. This Programme offers opportunities for participation to foreign scientists. A special bonus in the evaluation of proposals is foreseen for projects including international cooperation activities. Even though direct funding of foreign institutions is not allowed within the framework of this Programme, it can nevertheless provide travel and consultant grants to foreign experts visiting Greece, in order to participate in a project. Furthermore, it foresees financial support for the organization of joint events in Greece.

The general objective of the Programme is to promote partnerships between industry and academia, to help industry to take advantage of scientific and technological achievements and to support integration of innovative technologies in the production process, quality control and marketing.

The specific Action Lines of the Programme in the field of Aquaculture are:

- Diversification of the production with new species for aquaculture
- Optimisation and modernization of the aquaculture techniques and methodologies in use - Introduction of innovative techniques and methodologies
- Coastal zone management - management of inland waters suitable for aquaculture
- Genetic improvement of cultured species
- Environmental impact of aquaculture
- Nutrition of cultured species
- Pathology of cultured species

The overall budget of the Programme is around 22 million Euros (of which 50% will be covered from public funds) and it will support around 40 projects of an average budget of 550.000 Euros each.

The call for proposals will be published both in Greek and in English in order to encourage international cooperation. The submitted proposals will be evaluated by committees consisting of Greek and foreign experts.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Secretary General for Research and Technology I wish you a successful Workshop and I would like to address once again our warm thanks to Professor Eleftheriou and the scientific Steering Committee, to the I.M.B.C. staff involved in the organization of the Workshop, to the Commission, the Chinese Government and to all the outstanding participants of this Workshop.