

NETWORKS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES IN EUROPE AND IN THE EURO-ASIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents examples of networks for higher education in the domains of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management. Being applied domains in science, Aquaculture and Fisheries respond to demands of the corresponding economic sectors in the society. In Europe, both sectors were traditionally catered by technical and professional training opportunities at vocational and professional High (Polytechnic) Schools and only a few universities offered full fletched degrees. Over the past 25years, the limited availability of natural fish resources and the continuously increasing demand for seafood have stimulated an explosive growth of aquaculture and this on its turn created a surge in the demand for highly skilled, highly trained professionals. In the open market of the European Community, it is of paramount importance that training systems, competence requirements and teaching approaches become transparent, if not harmonized between countries. For that purpose, networks were established to respond to these needs.

Aqua-TNet is a Socrates Thematic Network that encompasses >100 partners, most of which are institutes of Higher Education. Within the network, and in close interaction with stakeholders, competence requirements are assessed for graduate and postgraduate studies, programs for Master curricula are compared and/or developed and IT Tools are developed for trans-national use in the education. One step further is the development of a joint Masters curriculum in Aquaculture and Fisheries (MAqFISH), provided by a consortium of 7 European universities.

The seafood market is highly global, with 40% of the product being traded internationally and so does the primary production sector with its demands for skilled staff. Therefore, the EU has provided funds for developing a Euro-Asian parallel to the mentioned European networks. First, a Euro-Asian platform for aquaculture (ASEM Aquaculture) was established with the goal to recommend strategies for research and education in aquaculture in Asia. The activities of this platform included consultation of the most important stakeholders in the industry. At national level, knowledge institutions can be united in a network to harmonize curricula, to stimulate student and staff mobility within a country, and to develop a set of complementary competences in research and training at the different institutions. In Vietnam, such a network (ViFiNet) was successfully established in 2005. The universities of Wageningen, Gent and Trondheim provide support and share their experience of the European dimension with their Vietnamese colleagues.

It is believed that in the 21st century, networks of knowledge centers and institutes of higher education are the solution to generate science and education with impact for society.

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