

ARTICLE

Fisheries Local Action Groups and maritime museums in Spain—An opportunity to enhance the value of fishing culture and heritage

Lluís Miret-Pastor  | Roberto Cervelló-Royo  |
Paloma Herrera-Racionero  | Andrea Márquez Escamilla

Universitat Politècnica de València,
Valencia, Spain

Correspondence

Roberto Cervelló-Royo, Faculty of
Business Administration and Management,
Building 7J, camino de vera s/n, Universitat
Politécnica de València, Valencia, Spain.
Email: rocerro@esp.upv.es

Funding information

Spanish Economy and Competitiveness
Ministry, Grant/Award Number:
PID2019-105497 GB-I00

Abstract

Although Spain has a long tradition of maritime, naval, and fishing museums, in the last 20 years there has been a boom in museums of this type along the Spanish coast. Paradoxically, this museum boom has coincided with a profound fishing crisis. In order to face the social and economic consequences, Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGS) have been established by the EU to support the territorial development of fishing areas, financing projects of various kinds, including sociocultural activities that promote fishery diversification, stimulate fishing tourism, and enhance the value of the rich tangible and intangible heritage linked to fishing. A mixed methods approach has been adopted to characterize fishing and maritime museums that have received European funds and have been supported by FLAGS, and to explore the relationship between the fishing sector and the management of museums. Results confirm the active role played by the FLAGS and the fisheries funds in the creation and consolidation of fisheries museums. However, despite the community-led local development approach, the fisheries sector still feels alienated from the management of these museums. The benefits, especially the intangible ones, that these museums can bring to fishing communities may be limited by the low level of involvement of the fishing sector.

KEYWORDS

fisheries funds, fishing heritage, maritime museums, Spain
maritime heritage

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Author(s). *Curator: The Museum Journal* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

INTRODUCTION

In Spain, fishing has long been an important sector in economic and employment terms. It has also contributed to creating an identity and a culture in many coastal areas. However, in recent years, we have witnessed a paradox, whereby fishing is losing its economic importance, while at the same time there is growing recognition and appreciation of its long-standing rich and varied cultural heritage.

This apparent paradox brings with it an important substantive debate. Fishing communities are immersed in a period of economic readjustment, and the feasibility of fishing (especially on a small scale) is in question. But such communities have their own cultural heritage, rooted in the territory, which has seeded and shaped the localities in which they are based. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2014) argues that although age-old ways of life may no longer be economically viable and even inconsistent with current forms of economic development. Their valorization as heritage (and their integration into cultural tourism) is economically viable and fully consistent with theories of economic development, as well as aligning with national ideologies of cultural identity and modernity. Furthermore, heritage education in museums plays a crucial role for identity. According to Rivero et al. (2018), museums in Spain are institutions distinguished by their comprehensive vision and an approach that tackles symbolism and identity issues, aiming to raise public awareness of its heritage and the significance of education rooted in values of respect and preservation (Temes Córdovez et al., 2023). Garradas and Semedo (2023) highlight the potential of maritime museums in heritage education. Maritime museums offer an ideal environment for integrating diverse perspectives and approaches to explore the culture and history of the sea.

According to *Heritage Studies*, drawing attention to the value of fishing heritage goes beyond the simple creation of museums that display relics and depict how these communities lived in the past. Heritage is not limited to the past, nor is it only concerned with material objects. The enhancement of fisheries heritage is an opportunity to reflect on the present and future of fisheries, as well as on the economic, cultural, and social changes that are taking place (George & Reid, 2005; Nadel-Klein, 2003; Smith, 2006).

The Spanish fishing sector is being put under pressure (Fernández-González et al., 2022; Márquez Escamilla et al., 2022). Ever reducing profitability, environmental problems, and the lack of generational renewal threaten its very survival. Despite this pressure, the sector refuses to disappear and sees the enhancement of its heritage as another step toward the valorization of its product, its culture, and its way of life (Herrera-Racionero et al., 2022). Faced with these problems, part of the European fisheries policy is committed to a multisectoral approach, in line with the concept of the *Blue Economy*. The concept of the Blue Economy has burst onto the scene in recent years and presents various conceptualizations, all of which share the common idea of promoting economic sectors related to seas and oceans. To this, the European Union adds the need to emphasize the sustainability of this important natural resource (The EU blue economy report, 2021). For many fishing villages, this means creating spaces where fishing, tourism, and culture converge as drivers of local development. Fishing museums are a paradigmatic example (Piñeiro Antelo & Lopez, 2021). In recent years, there has been a veritable boom of fishing, maritime, and naval museums along the Spanish coast, a phenomenon that can also be linked to the need for coastal destinations to create new tourism products beyond those of sun and beach to the need to diversify fishing through so-called fishing tourism and to the availability of European funds to finance these cultural infrastructures.

To address the fisheries crisis, the Union Priority four (UP4) of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), and previously axis 4 of the former European Fisheries Fund (EFF), opened up the possibility of financing projects to help territorial development and job creation in fisheries areas via Community-led Local Development Strategies (CLLD) and Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs). This same approach is continued by the

current European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), where the multi-sectoral aspect has been further reinforced by linking these funds to the broad concept of the *Blue Economy*.

FLAG projects have been numerous and varied, but one of the most common elements has been projects that recover and enhance different aspects of seafaring, fishing or maritime culture, seeking not only to protect and disseminate part of the cultural legacy of these territories but also pursuing economic diversification alternatives to fishing (Gallizioli, 2014).

In tourist areas along the Spanish coast, fisheries diversification initiatives, as well as those that enhance the value of fishing culture, are quickly identified with tourist activities. Tourism and fishing have shared a space for years, often leading to conflicts, especially with recreational fishing and nautical tourism (Miret et al., 2020). Perhaps because of this, and despite the fact that there have always been connections between the two sectors, fishing has viewed tourism with certain suspicion, as a sector that absorbed part of its resources, its space, its labor force, and even its authenticity (Voyer et al., 2017). While tourism has often viewed fishing with a certain air of superiority—a modern and booming sector versus a traditional and declining one, which provided little more than beautiful views and tasty food (Herrera-Racionero et al., 2018). The Spanish administration has not made the relationship any easier with the introduction of various regulations that only hinder the process: banning tourists from boarding fishing boats, limiting tourist access to fishing facilities or preventing the direct sale of fish to tourists, to name but a few.

In recent years, a more multisectoral approach is being encouraged. Change is in the air and the synergies between tourism and fishing have become evident. As already pointed out, the fishing sector is in crisis and diversification (very often tourism) is seen as a possible solution. At the same time the traditional sun and beach touristic model is also suffering, leading to a rethinking of business models and tourist destinations, which some authors have defined as the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist tourism model (Ioannides & Debbage, 1997). In other words, the transition would be from tourism with an economic and homogeneous product based on the use of economies of scale, to a much more diverse tourism adapted to multiple customers with different tastes and expectations. This implies that mature destinations must try to avoid entering a stage of stagnation and decline and therefore need to transform previously standardized tourism products, seeking alternatives that enhance the value of the territory, its culture and its products, giving the destination an extra touch of authenticity and quality. On the other hand, parallel to the transformation of the sun and beach product, diversification is being sought through new tourism products such as rural tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, and gastronomic tourism and it is here where fishing and tourism have met again in recent years.

These obvious connections between fishing and tourism have even led to the emergence of concepts such as fishing tourism or pesca tourism. Spanish fishing legislation (Law 33/2014) defines *fishing tourism* as the “Activity developed by groups of sea professionals, through economic consideration, aimed at the valorisation and dissemination of the activities and products of the marine environment, as well as the customs, traditions, heritage and seafaring culture, which therefore transcends the mere extractive and commercial activity.” This concept is often confused with that of *pesca tourism*, which involves tourists being onboard professional boats and having the opportunity to fish. But the synergies between fishing and tourism go beyond these concepts focused on fishing diversification and led by “the professionals of the sea,” to include activities led by the tourism sector itself, the cultural sector or different public administrations.

Many of these initiatives that combine fishing and tourism have focused on cultural issues. Of all the cultural projects linked to fishing, our research focuses in on the museums, as they are permanent infrastructures that could be argued to best illustrate the relationship between tourism, culture, and sea.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of new municipal maritime museums, financed by European funds and located in small maritime towns. This observation was taken as the starting point of our research, which involved several stages. The first located the projects financed by the FLAGS aimed at creating or improving maritime museums; the second phase used a quantitative methodology focused on identifying and classifying the maritime museums in Spain, cross-referencing and matching data between projects financed by the fisheries funds and museums of the sea. Finally, in a third stage, qualitative interviews were used with fishers and museum managers to delve into the relationships that can occur between the fisheries sector itself and the fishing museums. The hypothesis to be contrasted is that the use of fishing funds based on the principles of *Community Led-Local Development* (CLLD) have contributed to creating fisheries museums where the fishing sector itself has a leading role.

METHODOLOGY

The first stage of the analysis consisted of identifying and analyzing the projects funded by the FLAGS that have gone to cultural projects and more specifically to maritime museums.

Data on the projects financed by the fisheries funds were obtained from the *Spanish Network of Fishing Groups* (REGP) website, managed by the *Directorate General for Fisheries Management and Aquaculture*, which reports to the *Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*. The REGP website keeps a register of projects financed in both the EFF and EMFF periods. This register is continuously updated. For this research, data present on the site in January 2022 were used. It should be noted that, in practice, European projects work with the $n+2$ rule. That is, EFF projects did not end in 2013, but continued through to 2015. Similarly, EMFF projects did not end in 2020 but spanned a further 2 years.

In the second stage, maritime, fishing, and naval museums in Spain were located and analyzed. There is no Spanish database for these types of museums; therefore, various regional databases were carefully analyzed. Subsequently, it was necessary to characterize these museums, using the web page of each museum where possible to do so. When the relevant information was not available, brief telephone interviews were conducted. Museums were classified according to the date of inauguration. Identifying which museums were related to the sea was not a simple task. First, we considered not only museums in the strict sense, but also interpretation centers, museum ships, or any other space adapted to host permanent exhibitions related to the sea. In this sense, many local museums, even in coastal towns where the sea and/or fishing play a predominant role, have not been considered, unless they were museums explicitly dedicated to fishing or the sea.

The maritime museums that had received funds were then identified, allowing us to explore the characteristics of the museums that received European funds and those which had not, for example, in terms of their location (in villages or large cities), age, or ownership.

In the third stage, a qualitative approach was used to further investigate the relationship between the local fishing sector, museums, and FLAGS. Seven locations along the Spanish coast with a deep-rooted fishing tradition were chosen for semi-structured interviews (12), both with the manager/skipper of the fishermen's guild and the manager of the museum of each of the localities: Águilas and San Pedro del Pinatar (Murcia), Santa Pola and Peñíscola (Valencian Community), San Carles de la Ràpita (Catalonia), Bermeo (Basque Country), and Porto de Son (Galicia). The main objective of the interviews was to find the degree of impact they believe museums have in their radius of influence. This would then be used to give a first approximation of the meaning and implications of museums for the fishing sector, and of the role played by FLAGS in this process. Thus, the topics covered in the interviews revolve around two basic questions: What do museums contribute to the local fishing sector? What do Flags

bring to marine museums? To this end, two questionnaires with open-ended questions were designed, one for museum managers and another for managers of fishers' guilds.

Museum manager interview protocol	Guild manager interview protocol
• When did the museum open? • Who took the initiative? Can you explain the process involved? • Do you have or have you had any relationship with the FLAG? • What is the purpose of the museum? (Objectives) • What do you think has been achieved? • What is the profile of the museum users? Are there more tourists or locals? • What is the current relationship between the maritime museum and the fishers guilds? • Has your maritime museum previously collaborated with the fishers guild on specific projects or programs? • Do you think that the existence of maritime museums has had any impact on the fishing community? • To what extent do you think the museum favors or can favor local development? And does it favor the fishing sector? • What suggestions do you have to improve collaboration between the fisheries sector and maritime museums?	• What role does your guild play in the FLAG? • Do you know about the maritime museum? What do you think of it? • Does the guild (the fishing sector) intervene in any way in the museum? (facilities, staff, contents, management...) • Do you see the sector reflected in the museum? • Has the FLAG intervened? How? • Do you think the museum has revitalized/made known/aroused interest in the sector in any way? • Do you think that the existence of maritime museums has had any impact on the fishing community? • How do you think maritime museums can contribute to the dissemination of fishing culture and knowledge of the marine environment? What should be done? • What suggestions do you have to improve collaboration between fishers associations and maritime museums?

The interviews were conducted between July and September 2022. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. This was in order to open a line of research to find ways to deepen the role played by fishing heritage and culture in the transformation of the traditional fishing sector and the role played by FLAGs in this process.

EUROPEAN FISHERIES FUNDS, FLAGs, CULTURAL PROJECTS, AND MUSEUMS

The former EFF (2007–2014) covered six Spanish regions: Galicia, the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Catalonia, Asturias, and Cantabria. In addition to the abovementioned areas, Murcia, the Valencian Community, the Basque Country, and the Balearic Islands also joined in the period of the EMFF (2014–2020). Currently there are 41 FLAGs found in Spanish coastal regions.

European countries receive fishery funds according to the size of their fishing sector. Then, each country develops its own national *Operational Program* (OP) where the funds are distributed among the different *Union Priorities* (UP). For the whole of this period (2014–2020), Spain allocated 107.6 million euros to the UP4 of the EMFF (“to increase employment and social cohesion”). These funds in the UP4 were distributed among the different FLAGs, which selected projects to finance based on their own criteria. National authorities, however, are ultimately in charge of reviewing and approving such projects.

The *Spanish Operational Program* for the EMFF points out in the description of the *Participatory Local Development strategy* that “fishing areas have great economic, ecological and tourism potential. Although tourism, traditionally, has been the main driving force of the economy of many areas of the Spanish coast, combining it with fishing activity can be a source of opportunities for the creation of both jobs and additional income.... For this reason,

we are looking for a complete, differentiated tourist offer, where the cultural value of the sea predominates... Linking tourism to local values and traditions will enhance both the cultural and environmental heritage of the territory.”

The need to promote marine tourism and the need to preserve and promote cultural heritage are included in numerous Spanish FLAG strategies. According to FARNET almost half of the Spanish FLAGS indicate *Cultural Heritage* as one of their priority themes and it appears in the strategic document of 19 out of the 41 existing FLAGS (FARNET, 2021).

Despite the intentions expressed in the national strategies or even by the FLAGS themselves, not that many cultural projects have actually been funded. During the two periods of the fisheries funds in which the FLAGS have been operational, a total of 710 projects were financed in the EFF period (2007–2013) and 1335 projects in the EMFF period (2014–2020); of the total projects, 67 projects in the EFF period and 72 in the EMFF period were cultural projects (Herrera-Racionero et al., 2022; Miret-Pastor et al., 2022).

The 139 cultural projects identified in the EFF and EMFF periods have been classified into five major groups: routes, tangible heritage, intangible heritage, museums, and festivals (see also Herrera-Racionero et al., 2022; Miret-Pastor et al., 2022).

As it can be seen in Table 1, a total of 33 projects funded by the FLAGS were related to museums (12 in the EFF period and 21 in the EMFF period). Regarding the two fisheries funds, it should be noted that a significant change in the type of museum-related projects financed during the two periods was detected. In the EFF period (2008–2014), there were 12 projects related to museums, of which 10 were for the creation of new museums, interpretation centers, museum ships, etc. (the other two were improvements to existing museums). In contrast, in the EMFF period (2015–2020), 21 museum-related projects were funded. In this case, the trend is reversed as only three of the projects were for new museums, while four projects were for future museums that have not yet been built or inaugurated, leaving 13 projects for refurbishment, improvements, and acquisition of materials for existing museums (although it should be noted that three projects were for the same museum, the *Maritime Museum of Asturias*). Logically, this is reflected in the cost of the projects and the funding received. The projects funded by the EMFF had an average cost of €125,165 and the average funding granted by the EMFF was €58,682; in contrast, the earlier EFF museum projects were considerably larger with an average cost of €182,246 and an average EFF funding of €91,327. This difference is due to the fact that in the previous period more new projects were financed (usually involving construction or rehabilitation of buildings), while in the later period almost all the projects were to equip and improve existing museums.

Finally, it should be noted that it would be very interesting to extend this study to a European level, and compare the trends that emerge. Maritime funds and FLAGS have financed numerous cultural projects in different European countries. With so-called sociocultural projects being predominant in countries such as Ireland (71%), Latvia (51%), or Poland (49%), it is, however, difficult to quantify exactly how much funding has gone to museums (Miret et al., 2020). Looking at our neighbor France, the website [musee.com](https://museums.musee.com) currently lists 115 marine and

TABLE 1 Number of cultural projects financed with fishing funds.

	EFF period (2007–2013)	EMFF period (2014–2020)	Total
Routes	12	8	20
Tangible heritage	15	15	30
Intangible heritage	17	14	31
Museums	12	21	33
Festivals	6	14	20
Total cultural projects	62	72	134

Source: Own elaboration from the Spanish Network of Fishing Groups (REGP).

river-themed museums in the country (<https://www.museemusee.com/>, 2024). In the case of Italy, the “*Museo Navigante*” carried out a national census of Italian maritime museums and identified a total of 75 museums in 2019 (Museo Navigante, 2019). Italy has a long tradition of maritime museums, very diverse and some very old, however, a brief analysis of the data provided by each museum shows that at least 28 of them were founded in the 21st century, and six more had recently undergone major transformations and reforms. A more detailed analysis would be needed to establish a relationship between these figures and the role played by the European maritime and fisheries funds, as well as by the FLAGs.

SPANISH MARITIME MUSEUMS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH FISHING FUNDS

Across Spain 72 maritime museums were located (Table 2). Most of the museums considered are maritime, naval, or fishing museums. According to Hicks (2001) maritime museums do not isolate seafaring from its natural and cultural surroundings; instead, they honor human industry and creativity by showcasing the crafts, traditions, and enterprise connected to the sea. Maritime museums house heritage assets that are closely related to any type of activity that makes use of the sea, rivers, and large lakes, but also to fauna, coasts, and ports (Beneki et al., 2012; Witcomb, 2003); naval museums, on the other hand, focus on military activities, and are organized into three divisions: museum, library, and archive. Its vast collection is categorized into various departments, encompassing items such as flags and pennants, paintings and portraits, documents and autographs, maps and plans, rare publications, valuable books and pamphlets, naval armaments and attire, commemorative medals, and ship models (Long, 1971). The naval museums are based on the *Spanish Navy*, which has its flagship museum in Madrid and six branches in different parts of Spain.

Finally, fishing museums focus solely on fishing activities, serving to combine natural history with industrial fishing practices, presenting fish and fisheries as national assets under progressive state management (Knight, 2014). Some specialize in certain territories (national, regional, or local), certain products (tuna, anchovy, salt, etc.) or processes (shipbuilding,

TABLE 2 Spanish maritime museums classified according to their regions and year of inauguration.

	2011–2021	2001–2010	1991–2000	1981–1990	1971–1980	Before 1971	Total
Galicia	7	11	1	1		2	22
Asturias	0	3				1	4
Cantabria	1			1			2
Basque Country	2	3	2			1	8
Canary Islands	4	2			1		7
Murcia	1			1	2		4
Andalusia	4		2	1		1	8
Balearic Islands	1	1					2
Valencian Community	2	1	2	1			6
Catalonia	2	2		1		2	7
Other inland regions						2	2
Total Spain	24	23	7	6	3	9	72

Source: Own elaboration.

navigation, canning, etc.). Some are specialized in historical aspects, others in the natural, ethnological, economic, etc. Their size also varies from large reference centers with multiple floors and spectacular designs to small rooms with modest exhibitions. There are also those that are located in old buildings such as lighthouses, canneries, towers, and even old ships converted into ship museums.

It is also significant that different museum networks are emerging, such as the *Xarxa de museus marítims de la Costa Catalana* (Catalan Coast Network of Sea Museums) which evolved from the *Maritime Museum of Barcelona* “with the aim of promoting the safeguarding and protection of maritime heritage” or the *Red de Espacios Museísticos del Atlántico REDEMA* (Network of Atlantic Museums), with the purpose of “promoting the tourist destinations that make up the Atlantic arc through cultural and heritage exchange linked to the maritime tradition.” This last network also extends to Portugal. It should be noted that these networks of museums are also common in other countries such as the Marine Heritage Network (MHN) in the United Kingdom or the aforementioned Il Museo Naviganti which brings together the museums of the sea and seafaring in Italy. At an international level, it is worth mentioning the Association of Mediterranean Maritime Museums, which has 41 museums on this subject in 12 countries. The role played by this series of museum networks deserves additional investigation.

Considering the spread of dates in which museums were inaugurated, as it can be seen in Table 3, it is clear that naval and fishing museums are not only a recent phenomenon; in fact, Spain has a long tradition in this kind of museum, with the oldest, the *Naval Museum of Madrid*, inaugurated in the first part of the nineteenth century (1843). Not until later, in the first half of the twentieth century, were more founded, such as the *Torre del Oro Naval Museum of Seville* (1944), the *Maritime Museum of Barcelona*, created in 1936, but inaugurated after the Civil War in 1941, and the *Maritime Museum of Asturias* in 1948. While fishing museums are usually much more recent, among the few exceptions is the *Museum of the Fisherman of Bermeo* (1948), but in general, the emergence of such museums began in the 80s and 90s. In recent years, there has been a real boom in the creation of museums related to fishing and the sea; 47 of the 72 museums identified have been created in the twenty-first century. However, when considering the connection between museums and European fishing funds, the year 2007 must be taken as a reference, being the year in which the EFF began. Since 2007, 33 of the 72 museums have been inaugurated. In fact, these recent museums represent the majority of projects financed by the FLAGS. 72% of museums founded

TABLE 3 Museums founded before 2007/after 2007, with funding/without funding.

	After 2007	Before 2007	Total
Funds			
Funds			
Count	18	7	25
% Funds	72.0%	28.0%	100.0%
No funds			
Count	15	32	47
% Funds	31.9%	68.1%	100.0%
Total			
Count	33	39	72
% Funds	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%

Note: Cross tabulation.

Source: Own elaboration.

since 2007 have received investment from the fishing fund, while only 28% of museums prior to 2007 received funding.

Another analysis was developed to see whether the size of the population inversely influences the possibility of obtaining funds. There is the widely held impression that a good proportion of the funds have gone to the creation of museums in small seafaring towns. Indeed, it has been observed that 27 museums are located in towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants (practically all in populations with a long seafaring tradition).

Thus, 52% of the museums that receive funds belong to municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants, despite the fact that the museums located in these cities do not reach 38% of the total. Looking at it from a different perspective, almost half of the museums located in small towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants have received funding (13 of 27). In contrast, only 12 of the 45 museums located in cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants (26%) have received funding. In short, a certain tendency to finance museums located in small towns is evident.

The final part of the analysis focuses on the museums that have received funds based on their ownership (Table 4). In this case, it is interesting to contrast the ownership of the museums by distinguishing those belonging to entities that play an important role in the management of the FLAGS (city councils and fisher's associations) from the rest. It was found that a large percentage, namely 76%, of the museums owned by the municipality or those owned by fisheries guilds receive European fishing funds. Compared to only 24% of projects going to other types of museums (despite making up 52.8% of the total).

A cross-analysis between maritime museums and fishing funds shows a certain tendency for fisheries funds destined for museums to go to museums owned by municipalities or fishers associations, founded after 2007 and located in small towns. In contrast, museums without European funds tend to be larger museums, located in larger cities and with more diverse collections.

FLAGS AND THEIR IMPACT ON AN “AUTHENTIC” CULTURAL FISHING OFFER

Potential synergies between tourism and fishing have not gone unnoticed by fishers, the administration, or the tourism sector. On the one hand, we find a traditional fishing sector, hit

TABLE 4 Museums owned by the town hall or the fisher's guild/the rest, with funding/without funding.

	Municipality or guilds	The rest	Total
Funds			
Count	19	6	25
% Funds	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%
No funds			
Count	15	32	47
% Funds	31.9%	68.1%	100.0%
Total			
Count	34	38	72
% Funds	47.2%	52.8%	100.0%

Note: Cross tabulation.
Source: Own elaboration.

by a deep social, environmental, and economic crisis (Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2018; Herrera-Racionero et al., 2018); on the other hand, sharing territory and resources with this traditional fishing sector, we find the Spanish tourism sector, considered to be a world leader but which seeks to renew itself and escape from an overly mature and standardized model of sun and beach (Önder et al., 2009; Papatheodorou et al., 2010). A sector which has been affected by and needs to make use of the emergence of new technologies and lifestyle changes. These new tourism models (Torres, 2002) focus part of their attention on the traveler's experience, as the destination alone is no longer enough, by putting a greater emphasis on authenticity, quality and sustainability. Aware of these changes, most museums originate on the initiative of small municipalities that seek to offer new activities that help diversify the traditional tourist offer of sun and beach, and can compete in increasingly demanding tourist markets. Interviews with the managers of the maritime museums seem to confirm this claim:

I am noticing more and more that the sun and beach tourism is running dry... Because people have gotten bored of it. Yes, and in the end we all have that sea, and if we do not compete with something different, if we do not offer something different ... (M4¹)

Within these plans, one of the aspects was to try to culturally incentivize a town that went in the sixties from being purely an agricultural and marine village, to having more importance in the tourism sector. But we seek to give more importance to the cultural aspect of tourism, so that it is not all sun and beach.

(M2)

Certainly, as can be seen from the above extracts, sun and beach tourism is no longer enough ("the sun and beach tourism is running dry... Because people have gotten bored of it"), museums form part of the local development strategy based on the tourist potential of a culture linked to the sea ("we seek to give more importance to the cultural aspect of tourism"), but acquire, possibly unknowingly, a multisectoral perspective very much in line with the Blue Economy. Found in small populations with an economic and social structure closely linked to the sea and the coast, initially through fishing and now mainly through tourism, but with a unique identity and cultural heritage which increases the attractiveness of the area, these museums walk the visitor through that history and culture, revealing a trade often hidden from society:

The idea was to show the maritime cultural heritage of an evidently seafaring village.

(M2)

There you see a little piece of what fishing is ... because it talks about fishing and what everyday life is, how it was done before, it compares how it was before and how it is now.

(G3)

When we explain it, people understand it better. If we could explain to everyone what fishing in the Mediterranean is, they would understand what we do.

(G2)

Museums arise from the territory itself, with the idea of transcending their own territorial and sectoral scope. However, an important aspect is that the valorization of one's own heritage ends up affecting the territory itself as well as the sector. These museums do not speak only of objects of the past, but show the local population as an economic, social, and cultural reality threatened

but alive and undergoing change. By providing information and practical experiences, maritime museums can contribute to increasing public awareness of the importance of the oceans and fostering a greater appreciation for marine life and coastal communities. It is intended to offer a comprehensive vision of the sea, emphasizing the need for commitment on the part of citizens to protect their future, either by involving the community in the process of revaluation and protection of maritime heritage, or through the provision of tourism and educational services:

The objective is to offer a panoramic view of the sea, seeking the necessary commitment of the public to protect its future: landscapes, biodiversity, trades, traditions ... all of which require greater knowledge and respect by society, helping the process of revaluing and protecting them.

(M3)

Making the maritime heritage visible, providing tourist and educational services. We explain the biodiversity, marine habitats, all the flora and fauna that lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

(M1)

The museum can be considered an integral part of the community, creating a link between its past, present, and future. Whether it is a key tourist attraction or not, it acts as a didactic resource for the local population:

The museum, jointly with the municipal museum, can be considered the centre of cultural activities of the town. Every month we have a program of activities, as well as book presentations, some guitar concerts, painting exhibitions ...

(M5)

We have both schoolchildren, municipal associations, people from the local area who come to events, especially when we do new events or exhibitions, obviously. And also tourists and foreign visitors, of course.

(M4)

The visits to CIMAR are distributed equally between local visitors (mainly schools, but also other groups) and regional visitors, who formed the majority last year.

(M3)

We could go as far as saying that, although museums initially are intended to attract tourists (as seen in the previous statements) their most outstanding work is educational and a large proportion of their visitors are from the local area.

Economically, there is no evidence of a direct benefit to the fishing sector. As expressed by some of our interviewees: "What really affects us is that restaurants buy our fish" (G5); "For fishing it is useless, we gain nothing" (G3). But the sector does see in museums an opportunity to publicize and value their way of life and knowledge to maintain their economic activities:

People understand it. When we explain it, we understand it more. If we could explain to everyone what fishing is here in the Mediterranean they would understand what we do. Our work is very unknown, they do not value the product or the effort.

(G2)

As the sector itself acknowledges, its role in the enhancement of maritime culture is important, thus favoring the promotion and visibility of a sector. In this sense, museums are presented

as an opportunity to enhance the fishing sector, as well as to initiate a reflection on its current situation and future prospects.

If anything, the relationship between the local fishing sector and museums is ambivalent, being affected by both ownership and the degree of participation of the sector in the museum's conception. The basis of practically all museum exhibitions is provided by fishers and the fisher guilds:

Above all it is the boats, if they hand over something they have caught that can be displayed in the museum.

(G4)

Because our boats not only catch fish, we also find many things on the seabed: 17th century cannons, amphorae of the first century AD, 16th and 17th century ceramics. And they call us. A relationship exists.

(M4)

In the operation of Mediterranean aquariums it is [fishers] who supply us with the species on display.

(M3)

The museums claim to collaborate with the fishing sector in the collection of funds and materials, but they seem to be sporadic and improvised collaborations. No common strategy is detected, not even a level of formal coordination.

On the other hand, fishing museums do recognize the role of FLAGS to provide them with funds that allow for the acquisition of material and audio-visual media. Although the EFF period was used in many areas to create these museums, it seems that the trend in the latest period has been to take advantage of these funds for renovations and improvements. The fundamental attraction that marine museums can offer are representative products of the local culture that give the museum its uniqueness and authenticity. And, at least in theory, this would enable community members, who possess traditional knowledge, to disseminate their craft from their own resources.

However, at the same time, and as one museum manager emphatically puts it: "Is there a co-ordination of objectives? No, there isn't." And in the same sense this is expressed by the fishing sector, which does not feel it is an active participant:

We intervene very little, I tell you.

(G1)

We have absolutely no relationship with them. We are not involved.

(G3)

There are very few fishers who come here (to the museum), because they start from a prejudice that here they will not learn anything.

(M6)

These excerpts show us that, in practice, the proposals of New Museology,² regarding community participation and the inclusion of local voices, have not yet materialized. The fact that fishers feel that they "have very little involvement" or that they "have absolutely no relationship with them" calls into question the museum as a means of reflecting the authentic experience of the fishing community. Museums continue to be perceived as institutions designed from the top down. Their role is recognized, as seen in previous excerpts, but they are still an alien medium for the fishing sector.

In any case, this statement must be qualified if we analyze these relations from the FLAGS. Although most of the museums on the Spanish coast have come into being on the initiative of the municipalities, with their own funds and as a strategy of tourism diversification, FLAGS play a very important role in providing additional funding for the set up and sustainability of such museums. Many small fishing villages have been able to create their own museums, or adapt their facilities thanks to projects subsidized fully or partially by the FLAGS. Musealization³ of ships, expansion of collections, installation of digital media are just a few of the projects that allow museums to move with the times:

At the time of the project, for example, we made the adaptation and improvements, using FLAG grants. Installing a TV screen to show the video that I mentioned before, the computer, the audio guides. All this has been possible thanks to the grant from the FLAG program. Last year they gave us 140,000 Euros.

(M2)

We ask for and propose projects to the FLAGS. We have obtained funding from the FLAG to carry out projects in the museum: enhancement of boats, virtualization of archaeological sites linked to the manufacture of salted fish.

(M4)

We are going to present a project through the local action group so that a program of activities is carried out three days a week, and perhaps, disseminate it through the tourist offices and the tourist information points.

(M5)

With FLAG funds, the fishers' guilds digitised documents and photographs that were later transferred to the museum.

(M6)

The FLAGS with their *Community-led local development* approach allow fishing institutions, as a significant part of the local community, to participate in the financing of the museum, including in the elaboration of a territorial strategy of which museums are part. However, in its daily operation the fishing sector is still absent. At most they contribute material, but do not participate in the management. According to this interviewee: "95% of museums are unipersonal, you have to be realistic, so you can not work. Right now, the word heritage is being used as a hook to raise funds" (M6). Perhaps that is one of the great problems faced by fishing museums; they have been conceptualized as finished projects, used by municipalities and fishing communities to obtain funds for their territory, but without a clear heritage action plan. This makes it difficult for the fisheries sector to be integrated into its management.

Finally, this leads us to an interesting debate about the role of fishing museums and that of the large oceanographic museums and their associated aquariums. The growing relevance of these ocean literacy centers, that have a strong focus on marine science, biology and conservation, provide innovative and technologically advanced educational experiences that capture the attention of broad audiences but can, at the same time, overshadow local narratives and community memory.⁴

In summary, and as we have seen throughout this section, maritime museums can play an important role in the conservation and promotion of maritime heritage, contributing to the education and awareness of visitors and offering a deeper connection with seafaring history and culture. They can establish a bridge between tourists and local communities that promotes integration and cultural exchange and even mitigates many of the conflicts by acting as mediators and facilitators of dialogue and mutual understanding. By highlighting the shared values

and interdependencies between tourism and fisheries, maritime museums can help foster a more collaborative and sustainable approach to the management of marine and coastal resources. However, the lack of real involvement by the fishing community, as revealed in the excerpts above, calls into question the authenticity and relevance of the museum's content in achieving these objectives. Without the contribution of those who have direct knowledge of fishing and fishing culture, narratives can become superficial or detached from reality, and even turn fishing traditions into mere tourist attractions, stripping them of their cultural significance.

CONCLUSION

This work has looked into the relationship between European fishing funds and Spanish museums of the sea. The use of funds implemented through FLAGS and with a *Community-Led Local Development* philosophy, could be an opportunity for the emergence of more authentic fisheries museums, in which the fishing sector plays an active role and which have a positive impact on fishing communities.

The conclusion is that European fishing funds, based on a leader bottom-up philosophy, have contributed to a boom of maritime museums in Spain, inaugurated since 2007, located in small towns and owned by the municipality or the fisher's own institutions. However, what is not clear is whether funds with a CLLD philosophy are helping to create maritime museums with an active participation of the fishing sector in their management.

From this work some important issues have arisen, which could be of interest for in depth analysis. First of all, the sustainability of small museums has been called into doubt. The fact that the funded museums are located in small towns leads to the conclusion that they are small in size and scarce in resources. In fact, some of the museums financed in the first period are no longer open.

In any case research, work on fisheries diversification should delve deeper into the real long term impact that projects financed with fisheries funds have on fishing communities. Many of the effects of cultural projects are intangible and take the form of the enhancement and dissemination of seafaring culture, the protection of the marine environment or adding value to the fishery product.

The fishing funds are contributing not only to the emergence of fishing tourism, especially in small towns with a strong fishing tradition, but also to the enhancement of fishing culture and heritage. In both cases, the fishing museums, while significant, are part of a larger picture. Beyond short term questions such as the sustainability of these museums, or the direct impact on the local community, the long-term question is whether these museums will come to represent traces of these villages' fishing past, or if they will be able to contribute to attracting a new generation to work in a sector that urgently needs to enhance the value of a traditional, local and sustainable activity.

The fact that many of these museums arise from the fishers themselves or from the small local councils, shows that these museums of the sea and fishing museums are rooted in the territory where they are found. Their intention, however, is to go beyond the local area itself and become a fishing tourism product, allowing the activity of fishing to be linked to culture and tourism. This marine tourism is a paradigmatic activity of what is now referred to as the Blue Economy, setting out to help the sustainability of the sea while creating wealth and jobs in the coastal territories. Beyond the tangible advantages, the fishers themselves point out the intangible values that they bring to the sector; of creating pride in one's own cultural identity and in a profession which is proving increasingly difficult to attract young people. The local administrations that manage museums should look for ways to involve the fishing sector in the management of museums. In this line, the fact that in some towns, the fishing institutions themselves are the ones that promote and manage the museums is an example to follow. However, in most cases, museums

arise at the initiative of the municipalities and the fishing sector seems to remain on the side lines. This can lead to misconstruing fishery heritage management as the management of a past heritage which serves to entertain tourists. However, in these small towns, fishing is not, at least not yet, an activity of the past and fishers still have much to say about their culture and way of life. Museums should be dynamic spaces for reflection and debate on the future of the sea and fisheries. This is a debate in which the voice of fishers must be present.

The rise of oceanographic museums, which focus primarily on marine research and conservation, may overshadow the preservation of the memory and identity of fishing communities. It is essential to find a balance that allows both types of museums to thrive and collaborate, ensuring that local voices and traditions are not lost while promoting scientific knowledge and environmental conservation. In the end, integrating these perspectives can offer a richer and more multidimensional view of the sea and its communities.

However, fishermen do not seem to be involved in the current management of museums, not even those that receive fishing funds. Quantitative data and analysis from interviews indicate that FLAGS are contributing to the creation and maintenance of maritime museums. The sector itself recognizes the role of the FLAGS in promoting tourism or, in valuing the seafaring culture and in bringing funds to the municipality; however, once the funds are obtained and the museum created, the fishers recognize that they do not participate in the management of the museums, moreover, they identify the museums as something not related to them. Furthermore, some museum managers indicate that the small size of museums makes it difficult to have a clear museum strategy.

European funding and FLAGS seem to be playing an important role in the emergence and consolidation of these museum spaces. We have presented the Spanish data, but it would be very interesting to extend the study to other countries. In another country with similar characteristics, like Italy, there also appears to be an increase in maritime museums, although more data are needed to establish this relationship. In any case, it may be time to take this further; as FLAGS can play an intermediary role between administrations, museums, and fishers, they could prove to be fundamental in turning the management of fishing heritage in general, and museums in particular, into key elements for the necessary valorization and renovation of the traditional fishing sector.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by Spanish Economy and Competitiveness Ministry, under Grant number PID2019-105497 GB-I00, European Fisheries Funds, opportunities for the fisheries sector through diversification, and the FLAGS management (DivPesc).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available from Márquez Escamilla et al. (2022).

ORCID

Lluís Miret-Pastor  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9644-0021>

Roberto Cervelló-Royo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8304-4177>

Paloma Herrera-Racionero  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6174-9822>

ENDNOTES

¹ To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, we named each with the capital letter G (guild) or M (museum).

² New museology is a museological approach that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, which promotes a more participatory, inclusive, and socially committed vision of museums. Unlike the traditional approach, new muse-

ology fosters the active participation of local communities, promoting collaboration with the community and commitment to education, sustainability, or social justice (Varine-Bohan, 1991; Rivière, 1995; Simon, 2010).

³ Musealization is the process by which an object, space, or set of elements becomes part of a museum's heritage. Through musealization, objects, or spaces are endowed with meaning and inserted into museum narratives that allow them to be interpreted and appreciated by the public. It is, in short, the act of transforming elements of everyday life or history into museum objects, giving them heritage value and ensuring their preservation.

⁴ In Spain, there are several oceanographic museums that stand out both for their size and for their role in marine and environmental research and education. Among the most important is the Oceanogràfic de Valencia, the largest aquarium in Europe and one of the main tourist attractions in the city. This museum receives approximately 1.3 million visits per year and its goal is to actively promote the conservation of marine diversity (<https://www.oceanografic.org/>). Other relevant museums are the Aquarium Finisterrae in A Coruña, the Aquarium of San Sebastian, the Aquarium in Palma de Mallorca, the Aquarium of Gijón, or the Aquarium of Almuñécar. All of them play a crucial role in environmental education and in the promotion of marine conservation.

REFERENCES

- Beneki, E., Delgado, J. P., & Filippopoliti, A. (2012). Memory in the maritime museum: objects, narratives, identities. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 18(4), 347–51.
- Chuenpagdee, R., Jentoft, S., 2018 Transforming the governance of small-scale fisheries. *Maritime Studies* 17, 101–15
- FARNET (2021): Country Factsheet. Spain. https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/cms/farnet2/on-the-ground/country-factsheets/spanish-clld-programme_en.html
- Fernández-González, R., Pérez-Pérez, M. I., & Garza-Gil, M. D. (2022). COVID-19 and the Spanish Celtic Sea fishery: An economic analysis. *Marine Policy*, 143, 105204.
- Gallizioli, G. (2014). The social dimensions of the Common Fisheries Policy: a review of current Measures. Pp. 65–78 Pp. In J. Urquhart, TG Acott, D. Symes et al. eds, *Social issues in sustainable fisheries management*. MARE Publication Series (9) (New York, London: Springer, Dordrecht Heidelberg).
- Garradas, C., & Semedo, A. (2023). The Potential of Maritime Museums for Heritage Education. *Didactica de Las Ciencias Experimentales y Sociales*, (44).
- George, E. W., & Reid, D. G. (2005). The power of tourism: A metamorphosis of community culture. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 3(2), 88–107
- Herrera-Racionero, P., Miret-Pastor, L., & Lizcano, E. (2018). Traveling with tradition: artisanal fishermen before fishing-tourism in the Valencian Community (Spain). *Notebooks of Tourism*, (41).
- Herrera-Racionero, P., Miret-Pastor, L., Cervelló-Royo, R., & Rodilla-Alama, M. (2022). The role of the Spanish Mediterranean Fisher's Guilds in Maritime Sustainability. *Marine Policy*, 140, 105058.
- Hicks, R. D. (2001). What is a maritime museum? *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19(2), 159–74.
- Ioannides, D., & Debbage, K. (1997). Post-Fordism and flexibility: the travel industry polyglot. *Tourism Management*, 18(4), 229–41.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2014). Intangible heritage as metacultural production. *Museum International*, 66(1–4), 163–74.
- Knight, W. C. (2014). *Modeling Authority at the Canadian Fisheries Museum, 1884–1918* (Doctoral dissertation, Carleton University).
- Long, J. W. (1971). The Russian Naval Museum, Lakewood, New Jersey. *Slavic Review*, 30(2), 350–4.
- Márquez Escamilla, A., Cervelló Royo, R. E., Herrera Racionero, P., Miret Pastor, L. G. (2022). Datos museos marítimos España. Universitat Politècnica de València. <https://doi.org/10.4995/Dataset/10251/190519>
- Márquez Escamilla, A., Herrera-Racionero, P., Pastor Gimeno, J., Miret-Pastor, L. (2022). The Artisanal Fishing Sector in the Spanish Mediterranean: A Sector with a Long History and an Uncertain Future. *Journal of Marine Science and Engineering*, 10(11), 1662. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jmse10111662>
- Miret-Pastor, L., Herrera-Racionero, P., & Escamilla, A. M. (2022). Analysis of the Socio-cultural Projects Carried Out in Spain by the FLAGs. In *Transcending Borders in Tourism Through Innovation and Cultural Heritage* (pp. 587–96). Springer, Cham.
- Miret-Pastor, L., Svets, K., & Freeman, R. (2020). Towards territorial development in fisheries areas: A typology of projects funded by Fisheries Local Action Groups. *Marine Policy*, 119, 104111.
- Museo Navigante (2019): I musei. <https://www.museonavigante.it/i-musei-del-mare-e-della-marineria-ditalia/i-musei>
- Nadel-Klein, J. (2003). Fisherfolk under glass? Memory and the heritage wars. In *Fishing for heritage: Modernity and loss along the Scottish coast* (pp. 171–212). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Önder, Ö.; Aykan, O. & Kumral, N. (2009): “An Empirical Analysis of the Determinants of International Tourism Demand: The Case of Izmir”, *European Planning Studies*, 17 (10), pp. 1525–33.
- Papatheodorou, A.; Rosselló, J. & Xiao, H. (2010): “Global Economic Crisis and Tourism: Consequences and Perspectives”, *Journal of Travel Research*, 49 (1), 39–45.

- Piñeiro Antelo, M. Á., & Lopez, L. (2021). The Museums of the Sea: Functions, Discourses and Future Perspectives. The Case of Galicia (Spain). *Placetelling. Collana di Studi Geografici Sui Luoghi e Sulle Loro Rappresentazioni*, 2021(3), 135–8.
- Rivière, C. (1995). *Ethnologie*. Anthropologie.
- Rivero, P., Fontal Merillas, O., García-Ceballos, S., & Martínez Rodríguez, M. (2018). Heritage education in the archaeological sites. an identity approach in the museum of Calatayud. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 61(2), 315–26.
- Simon, N. (2010). *The participatory museum*. AK Peters.
- Smith, L. (2006). *Uses of heritage*. Routledge.
- Temes Córdovez, R., Pérez Igualada, J., Portalés Mañanós, A., Palomares Figueres, M. T., & Llop Torne, C. (2023). hipo_TESIS_Vlc. Valencia, ciudad imaginada. *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, 28(49), 276–285.
- The EU blue economy report. (2021). European Commission: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Joint Research Centre. In A. Addamo, A. Calvo Santos, N. Carvalho et al. eds, *The EU blue economy report 2021*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Torres, R. (2002). “Cancun's tourism development from a Fordist spectrum of analysis”, *Tourist Studies*, 2, pp. 87–116.
- Varine-Bohan, Hugues de (1991), L'initiative communautaire. Recherche et expérimentation, Savigny-le-Temple: Presses universitaires de Lyon/Éditions W/M.N.E.S.
- Voyer, M., Barclay, K., McIlgorm, A., & Mazur, N. (2017). Connections or conflict? A social and economic analysis of the interconnections between the professional fishing industry, recreational fishing and marine tourism in coastal communities in NSW, Australia. *Marine Policy*, 76, 114–21.
- Witcomb, A. (2003). *Re-imagining the museum: Beyond the mausoleum*. Routledge.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Lluís Miret-Pastor is PhD in economics, professor at the Universitat Politècnica de València and Research at the Research Institute for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (IGIC). Its main research areas are related to the blue economy, European maritime policy, and the use of European fishing funds.

Roberto Cervelló-Royo is PhD in economics, professor at the Universitat Politècnica de València and researcher at economics and social sciences department. He has published several papers in important reviews such, Journal of Cultural heritage Management and Sustainable Development or Marine Policy. Her primary research interests lie in sustainable development of heritage areas with a special focus on entrepreneurship and the blue economy.

Paloma Herrera-Racionero is PhD in sociology, professor at the Universitat Politècnica de València and researcher at the Research Institute for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (IGIC), a multidisciplinary research team linked to the marine and coastal areas. Her primary research interests lie in environmental sociology with a special focus on fisheries communities.

Andrea Márquez Escamilla has a degree in environmental sciences from the Universitat de València and specializes in environmental assessment and monitoring of marine and coastal ecosystems from the Universitat Politècnica de València. Her incipient research work has focused on the study of the problems of fishing communities under the triple prism of sustainability, giving the importance it deserves to the more social aspects.

How to cite this article: Miret-Pastor, Lluís, Roberto Cervelló-Royo, Paloma Herrera-Racionero and Andrea Márquez Escamilla. 2025. “Fisheries Local Action Groups and Maritime Museums in Spain—An Opportunity to Enhance the Value of Fishing Culture and Heritage.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 68(2): 319–335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12651>.