

WADI DELIVERABLE WP5 CEAB-CSIC

REPORT/MINUTES OF THE INFORMATIVE MEETING IN THE AIGUAMOLLS DE L'EMPORDÀ NATURAL PARK (SPAIN)



View of the Natural Park of Aiguamolls de l'Empordà (PNAE), Girona, Catalonia, Spain

INTRODUCTION:

The Natural Park of Aiguamolls de L'Empordà (PNAE; Wetlands of the Empordà, a region in north of Catalonia, Spain) presents similar ecosystemic characteristics as those in Lake Mariut of Alexandria, Egypt. The conflicts and degree of environmental degradation in this park, however, are far much moderate than those taking place in Mariut.

The team of the CEAB-CSIC was contacted by the Park asking for an informative session about the project WADI approach to the conflicts in these kind of ecosystems. On 17th December 2007 we visited the headquarters of the PNAE and informed the attendants. The two Directors of the Parks (see attendants), were provided with a complete dossier of a summary of WADI objectives and working plan, as well as with some relevant results and methods from lake Mariut experience.

The team gave a 45 minutes talk to explain the various work packages of WADI as well as the general approach of the project.

At the end of the meeting, the heads of the parks considered it interesting to repeat the informative session in the headquarters of the heads of the Department of Environment of the Catalan Government in order to plan a WADI meeting in the future. Before this happens, the PNAE needs to accomplish certain objectives related to its status and strategic plans.

Date: 17th of December 2007

Attendants:

Josep Espigolé i Dalmau (Director of the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Parc)

Victoria Riera (Director of the Cap de Creus Natural Parc)

Andrés Fernández (Environmental manager of the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Parc)

CSIC-CEAB: Miguel Ángel Mateo, Laura Serrano, and Oscar Serrano

MEETING MINUTES

13,30 h: Miguel Ángel Mateo starts the meeting with a brief explanation of the reason why was it thought that disseminating the WADI project objectives and results among the public environmental institutions would be a very enriching initiative.

Josep Espigolé: The meeting that was previously planned with the stakeholders of the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Parc was cancelled because the PNAE needs to define previously its competences and strategic plan in the administrative scale before organizing this kind of meetings. Considering this situation, they preferred to avoid to organize an open meeting that could bring to light this situation of uncertainty, which could not be easily handled by the Park.

Miguel Ángel Mateo: The project coordinator (Felicita Scapini) said that the cancellation of the meeting was interesting in itself, as it demonstrated that a conflict exists. The main goal of WADI is to listen to the people that live from a given resource and go upwards to see what we, the researchers and the public institutions, can do to promote a sustainable development and a rational use of the available natural resources. So every activity taking place during the project development must be participatory and it must involve all the people who are interested, in one way or another, on the ecosystem in study and its natural resources.

Josep Espigolé: The possible conflicts that can appear here in Spain related to this kind of approaches when dealing with environmental issues are due to the division of the competencies (Laura, activa el corrector de ingles para no pasarme estos errors ortográficos, ok?) in three different Government Departments (Forests, Fisheries, and Waters). So, for example, in the PNAE, while the livestock resources, financing and rules of exploitation are very well known and defined, the use and conservation of the rest of natural resources are not yet very clear.

Andrés Fernández: During the meeting planned with the stakeholders we wanted to elucidate, with the help of all the different points of view, the interactions between the sea and the land in the area next to Roses (the village closest to the PNAE) and how they influence each other. The stakeholders and other speakers

already confirmed their attendance to the meeting, with all the different issues fixed and ready to be discussed, but the response of the Environment Department of Generalitat de Catalunya was of a certain reluctance because they advanced undesirable confrontations with the stakeholders.

Josep Espigolé: Nevertheless, they did not object to organize a workshop at a more technical level, without including the stakeholders, in a sort of ‘training sessions’ for park heads and technicians. The main objective of this meeting would be to introduce the idea that the sea is not completely separated from the land, as there are many interactions between the two compartments. There is a great interest from the PNAE managers to start introducing the concept of unity between the river basin and the sea within the users of the natural resources of the area. With this aim, agreements have been engaged to be developed in order to create a “Community of the basin users”. For example, the water supplied to the PNAE, is treated waste water and thanks to that water the ecosystem does not suffer from drought allowing a very high biological richness.

Miguel Ángel Mateo: Now the European Union only accepts projects if it can be demonstrated that they take into account what people needs. The sustainability promoted by these projects must be realistic and fully based in a social context.

Victoria Riera: Who are the partners of the WADI project?

Oscar Serrano: A detailed list of all of them is included on the brief dossier that we gave you at the beginning of the meeting. As you can see, partners from the WADI project belong to many different Mediterranean countries (from Italy to Tunisia) and lines of research (from socioeconomist to biologist).

Josep Espigolé: The proposal seems interesting, as there are some work done on the Aiguamolls de l’Empordà, but there are still a lot of gaps to be filled, such as a more detailed study of the socioeconomic aspects linked to the environmental protection initiatives. Moreover, the problems change, such is the case of the new increasing interest on kitesurf versus windsurf, that was the most commonly practiced before 1998. This change of the main sport activity practiced near the Park, also implies a change on the related environmental impacts. Here in the Aiguamolls de l’Empordà, the main conflicts appear on the zones connecting the two parts of the Parc, more than on the Parc in itself. These areas are not protected and strong building interests centred on these zones are starting to appear. Moreover, one of the most remarkable ecological problems, although more local, that took place recently is a large-scale mortality of the adult carp populations (arriving to 1m length). This event was due to a punctual discharge from the river Muga waters, which showed ammonium concentrations of 50 ppm, because the waste water treatment plant from Figueres was not working correctly.

Victoria Riera: So in the WADI project, pollution studies were included?

Laura Serrano: On the Lake Mariut (Egypt), pollution analysis have been conducted on water, vegetation and sediment samples. Nutrients and heavy metal concentration have been measured in all these ecosystem compartments.

Moreover, human population exploits the lake natural resources (fishing activities, basically), even though it is well known and assumed that the content of pollutants in water and fishes is extremely high. But the fish that can be bought from the lake is ten times cheaper than the one coming from the sea sold in the markets of the Alexandria city. A biomonitoring and phytoremediation program will be designed using the vegetation of the lake, (mainly formed by *Phragmites australis*, *Eicchornia crassipes* and *Typha latifolia*).

Josep Espigolé: Here in the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà one can find a very similar type of vegetation to the one found in the Lake Mariut. *Typha latifolia* leaves are used here to build chairs and other hand-made products.

Laura Serrano: That would be a possible fate for the for the *T.latifolia* harvested in the Lake Mariut.

Josep Espigolé: How are the economic issues treated on the WADI project? I am interested on this subject because the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Parc, as most of the environmental protection figures of Catalonia, has many economical problems.

Miguel Ángel Mateo: The money granted by the European Union for each partner is given in advance, before starting the project, and every partner must justify the expenses at the end of the year.

Victoria Riera: It would be interesting to participate in some of the International Workshops organized on the framework of the WADI project in order to learn how the project works and the possible benefits that its deliverables can bring to the institutions that work on the environmental management.

Miguel Ángel Mateo: If you are interested and if wetlands are also included on the project that we may be applied for on 2009, I will ask the project coordinator if you can also participate in the meeting for its preparation. But joining a EU project not only implies receiving money from the European Union but also to contribute with different proposals, explain what you can offer, such as including the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà or the Cap de Creus Natural Parcs as study sites, or organizing the sampling missions taking place in them. In this case, you should also participate in the preparation of the deliverables for the new project. So it is clear that, if you finally join the new project, you must be completely involved and produce results.

Victoria Riera: The first thing that we would like to know is if a Natural Park, as a public institution, can participate as a partner in an European Union project, or we could just collaborate as a subcontractor for a partner working on the project.

Miguel Ángel Mateo: I will ask the project coordinator (Felicita Scapini) about this subject. Talking about the training workshops, what do you propose?

Josep Espigolé: It would be interesting to explain and discuss a case that is familiar to the people who knows well the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà, such as the Maremma case study.

Miguel Angel Mateo: Then, the same project coordinator (Felicita Scapini), could also explain the Maremma case, as she has worked for many years in this area. Lorenzo Chelazzi is another specialist on the Maremma region. We could also ask him to participate in the workshop.

Victoria Riera: The workshop could take place in the Diputació of Girona, including scinetists and environmental managers.



Figure 1: CEAB-CSIC team (Miguel Angel Mateo, Oscar Serrano and Laura Serrano), PNAE team (Josep Espigolé and Andrés Fernández) and the Cap de Creus Natural Park director (Victoria Riera), meeting together to talk about the WADI project main goals and results in the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park (PNAE).

The meeting concludes with the intention of organizing a 'training' meeting for environmental managers during 2008. The Heads of the Department of Environment of the Generalitat de Catalunya will decide on the format and on the most appropriate moment to organize the meeting. The organization of a typical WADI meeting, will have to wait until the PNAE is ready, form the institutional point of view, to hold and lead such kind of events.

Blanes, January 2008