Are Wetland Contracts useful governance processes to work on ecosystem services such as contamination control?

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INTRODUCTION

Wetlands are in the core of global economy and local development as they provide water for drinking, irrigation, manufacturing, energy, navigation and leisure. They also provide sediments, vegetation and fishes, and suppose the base for farming, fishing and tourism local and global economies. These supplies and their landscape and cultural heritage have strengthened a local identity linked to ecosystem services that often are not recognized as so by society.

This background explain how relevant governance processes have emerged from these habitats. Recently, after River Contract agreements success in several regions of Europe, Wetland Contracts raised as voluntary and inclusive agreements that allow to adopt a set of regulations in which criteria of public utility, economic return, social value and environmental sustainability equally take part in the search for effective solutions for wetlands recovery. Wetland Contracts act as a collaborative tool and obligations trigger where all different interests are at stake.

METODOS

An exhaustive diagnosis was made in 9 wetlands of different typology in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Slovenia. For each wetland it was described the regulation framework related with the protection and conservation of their biological values, as well as the most relevant interests in conservation and stakeholder typology, experience and influence in participative processes.

The diagnosis was focused on retrieving key information to focus the participation processes through unravelling what do contexts have in common and what factors drive to diverge the process:

- Are protected Med region wetlands protecting similar values?
- How do the regulatory framework of the protected wetland allow us to figure out what are the threats and pressures facing their conservation status?
- How do the stakeholders are implicated in the wetland management?
- Do the regulatory framework for wetlands protection at regional and national level promote participative processes for their integrated management?
- Are stakeholders diverse and experienced enough to ensure a successful participation process?

DISCUSSION

Mediterranean wetlands host a wide biodiversity of conservation concern at an European level. With the 9 freshwater and brackish water wetlands of different typology here studied, 61 different habitats and 335 species of conservation are concerned.

The richness of values for the conservation of biodiversity in Europe is variable within wetlands. Melides lagoon and Verdier marshes (Camargue) host more than the half of the whole of represented habitats; birds are best represented in Verdier Marshes (Camargue), Odiel Marshes, and Albufera; and Ljubljansko Barje is richer in invertebrate protected species.

As a result of their representativeness, 8 of 9 wetlands are protected under Natura 2000 regulation. Only one (Cartaly lagoon, Spain) is at this moment protected only by regional legislation, as it is an intermittent wetland of recent recovery, and it is in the procedure to be included in Natura 2000. Some wetlands have additional protection agreements, i.e. being included in Ramsar convention or declared under UNESCO’s Biosphere Reserve figure.

The mapping of stakeholders in the wetlands resulted in a wide typology, with predominance of private non profit entities (NGO) and public bodies. The most of the stakeholders fully develop their activity in the reference area, thus reflecting both intense relationship with the reference wetland through economic, cultural, emotional or leisure links. The most of the stakeholders implicated in the Wetland Contract process have high or medium experience, and them have high or medium experience in processes similar to Wetland Contracts.

CONCLUSIONS

As the representativeness of biodiversity at the international level increase in wetlands, they boost their protection by international figures. By means of this, regulation applicable to the whole of represented habitats; birds are best represented in Verdier Marshes (Camargue), Odiel Marshes, and Albufera; and Ljubljansko Barje is richer in invertebrate protected species.

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To sum up, we have on the table all the pieces to run Wetland Contracts in Europe: we have well known wetland contexts, proper regional or local regulation framework and involved stakeholders.