

Cultural values of key wetland sites in the Mediterranean

Athens, November 2004



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)



The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative



Acronyms

COP	Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
MAB	Man and the Biosphere Programme, UNESCO
MedWet	Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, Convention on Wetlands
MedWet/Com	Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, Convention on Wetlands
Med-INA	Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RIS	Ramsar Information Sheets for Sites of International Importance
SEHUMED	<i>Sede para el estudio de los humedales mediterráneos</i> , University of Valencia

Introduction: Ramsar and cultural values

In the preamble to the Convention on Wetlands^[2], signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971, cultural values were mentioned as one of the important aspects of these significant sites. More specifically, the following statements were agreed by the Contracting Parties

*'...RECOGNIZING the **interdependence of Man and his environment...***

*...BEING CONVINCED that wetlands constitute a resource of great economic, **cultural**, scientific, and recreational value, the loss of which would be irreparable...'*

However, until the late 1990s, while the scope of the Convention was broadening to include various other aspects of wetlands, little or no efforts were made to take into account cultural values in the work of the Convention. Perhaps a catalytic event for change was the Technical Session on the Cultural Values of Wetlands, held in the framework of MedWet/Com3^[3] in 2000. During that event a draft resolution on cultural values was proposed by SEHUMED and was favourably received.

Starting in 2001, at the initiative of the then Secretary General, Delmar Blasco, the Ramsar Bureau initiated serious work to introduce cultural values in the Convention, through background research, internal consultation, building of alliances with potential partners from many sectors, and preparing the necessary document^[4]. As a result, and with the approval of the Standing Committee, a draft resolution and a background information document were presented to the Ramsar COP8^[5]. After lengthy and at times acrimonious discussions among interested states, chaired by Spain^[6], a consensus was reached with some difficulty, and Resolution VIII.19 was approved unanimously with the title 'Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites'.

In the framework of this event, the Spanish Ministry of Environment with the MedWet Initiative and the Ramsar Convention presented the book *Wetland Cultural Heritage*, written by SEHUMED and *Universidad Politécnica de Valencia*, where a classification of the different elements of wetland cultural heritage was shown. The different categories were illustrated with wetland examples from many parts of the world.

During the period that followed, the new Secretary General, Peter Bridgewater, made the strategic choice of encouraging Contracting Parties to implement Resolution VIII.19 in their own territories, so that lessons could be learned from the field, and a methodology gradually developed from actual experience, in a bottom-up approach, with the results to be presented during Ramsar COP9^[7]. This was also in harmony with article 17 of the Resolution^[8].

In the case of the Mediterranean, and in view of the work previously done, the Secretary General proposed a joint presentation on a regional level. The work described in this report is one step in this direction.

Rediscovering the cultural values and potential of Mediterranean wetlands

by Moustafa M. Fouda

In 1999, in a book published by MedWet^[9], Moustafa M. Fouda, of the Nature Conservation Sector of the Egyptian Environmental Agency, wrote the following –still very pertinent– text.

As is customary at such meetings, participants attending the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee in Valencia, Spain in January 1999 were invited to take part in an excursion to a local wetland. Such activities provide valuable learning experiences, not only of the problems facing wetlands in the different parts of the Mediterranean region and of the various solutions being put forward, but also of the cultural differences that exist and which have contributed to some of the problems facing wetlands. Whilst there are similarities in culture, for instance in music which is a form of language that brings people together, as well as in the landscapes and wildlife of wetlands, the many Mediterranean languages have themselves been a major cause of misunderstandings and conflicts that have hindered wetland conservation.

The Valencia excursion triggered within me a wider awareness of the cultural values of Mediterranean wetlands. The region's communities have been in contact with each other throughout human history, exchanging views and experiences, and developing trade and other socio-economic aspects. The cultural values of the past, such as sharing, not abusing, natural resources, and cooperating rather than competing, enabled people to live in harmony with the environment and use wetland resources in a sustainable way.

Unfortunately, during the second half of this century, especially with the development of latter-day lifestyles, these cultural values have declined, and this has contributed to the destruction of the greater part of Mediterranean wetlands. The situation has been exacerbated by land-reclamation programmes, urbanization, and poorly planned tourism development on and around wetlands. This has happened largely as a result of the loss of understanding of the importance of wetlands to human life. There is thus an urgent need to reconsider and learn from the old traditions and cultures for the good of wetlands and the sustainable benefits they provide.

Part of this 'reversioning' should take into account the strong potential that the region's wetlands offer for sustainable tourism, particularly through the development of wildlife and bird sanctuaries. Birds have no understanding or need for geographical barriers and are symbols of freedom and peace. It is time that the peoples of the region bring together –as the MedWet Initiative has done so successfully– the different disciplines, of for example sociologists, anthropologists, environmentalists and economists, to preserve, restore and ensure the future wise use of Mediterranean wetlands.

Implementing Resolution VIII.19 in the Mediterranean

The MedWet Culture Working Group

A working group on the cultural values of wetlands has been established within the MedWet Initiative in March 2004 (MW/CWG). Its mission is:

'...to encourage the incorporation of cultural values in the management of wetlands in the Mediterranean Region, in accordance with the guidelines of Resolution VIII.19^[10].

Thus the main objectives of the MedWet Culture Working Group are the following:

- Catalysing and assisting the implementation of Resolution VIII.19 around the Mediterranean Basin.
- Monitoring the results of such implementation actions and deriving conclusions on:
 - further improvements of the Resolution;
 - completion and specification of the list of guidelines included in the Resolution;
 - sharing the experience gained with other regions.
- Co-ordinating and aligning its work with the parallel activities of the Ramsar Bureau on cultural values.
- Drafting of proposals for strengthening the scope and implementation of Resolution VIII.19 to be discussed with other similar regional initiatives, so that the results can be presented to the Ramsar COP9 (Uganda, November 2005).

At present the Working Group consists of representatives of:

- the MedWet Co-ordination Unit;
- SEHUMED;
- Med-INA;
- the Ramsar Bureau.

It is chaired by Professor María José Viñals, and its secretariat is ensured by SEHUMED, with Maryland Morant being the responsible person.

In March, just as the MW/CWG was formed, SEHUMED organised in Valencia a cultural expertise workshop. In this event, in addition to the MW/CWG members, took part many experts from different scientific realms. The main goals of the workshop were:

- to discuss and clarify ideas about cultural heritage concepts and types;
- to identify tools for putting in value and managing the cultural elements of wetlands.

The conclusions of the workshop (see Appendix II) have been very useful for the further development of tools, such as the 'inventory and assessment of the cultural values of wetlands'.

Work plan for 2004-2005

During the second meeting of the MW/CWG, held in Athens on 30 July 2004, its work plan was discussed and agreed. Two main events were noted, for which preparation would be

made; namely MedWet/Com6 (Tipaza, Algeria, December 2004) and Ramsar COP9 (Kampala, Uganda, November 2005).

For MedWet/Com6 these preparations include:

- A preliminary review of Mediterranean sites with particular cultural interest.
- Discussion of these (and additional) sites during a side event to be organised by the MW/CWG.
- Short report on progress made by the Working Group chair.

Respectively, for COP9:

- Analysis of the work planned or being carried out for the implementation of Resolution VIII.10 in the sites selected.
- Preparation of an exhibition and publication on the cultural values of Mediterranean wetlands with material from these sites.
- Organisation by MedWet of a side event with global scope for furthering the implementation of Resolution VIII.19, in which Contracting Parties will be invited to present their experience in this matter.

For Mediterranean sites, it was agreed that selection should be based on the following combined criteria:

- Existence of important cultural values related to water / wetlands.
- Initiation or planning of concrete measures to implement Resolution VIII.19.
- Proper conditions for collaboration (interest and willingness at both the local and the national level).

In a parallel activity, the MedWet Project "INTERREG SUDOE" (2003-04), carried out by Portugal and Spain, has included, among other actions, the preparation of the data forms for inventorying and assessing the cultural heritage of the wetlands (Appendix III), accompanied of an appropriate technique module. The first cultural database records are being elaborated at present.

A first review of sites

Thus a first, very broad questionnaire was sent to 24 sites, and 18 replies were received (see Table 1 at page 6). The MedWet/Culture Working Group is deeply grateful to all those that have contributed to this task.

The purpose of this general questionnaire^[11] was to provide information for a first survey of wetland sites in the Mediterranean region that have significant cultural heritage and/or activities related to the incorporation of cultural values in wetland work. Most of these sites (but not all) are inscribed in the Ramsar List of Sites of International Importance, in which case considerable information exists already (in the RIS). Some of them would be selected as case studies for the joint approach to the cultural and natural heritage of the region, in accordance with Resolution VIII.19.

Table 1: List of sites involved in the first review

[as of 10.11.2004]

	Potential site	Country	Compiler	Date sent	Reply
1.	Butrint	Albania	Auron Tare	08.09.2004	14.10.2004
2.	Kune-Vain Lagoon	Albania	Zamir Dedej	09.09.2004	27.10.2004
3.	Narta Lagoon	Albania	Zamir Dedej	09.09.2004	27.10.2004
4.	Shkodra / Skadar Lake	Albania		08.09.2004	
5.	Prespa Lakes	Albania, Greece, FYR of Macedonia	Myrsini Malacou	08.09.2004	04.10.2004
6.	Tamentit Oasis	Algeria	Ammar Boumezbeur	13.09.2004	16.10.2004
7.	Hutovo Blato	Bosnia and Her- zegovina	Jaroslav Vego	08.09.2004	30.09.2004
8.	Evros / Meriç / Maritsa Delta	Greece Turkey	Giorgos Catsadorakis	08.09.2004	01.10.2004
9.	Neretva Delta	Croatia	Eugen Draganovic	08.09.2004	21.10.2004
10.	Zaranik	Egypt	Saad El-Din Osman	09.09.2004	23.10.2004
11.	Burullus Lake	Egypt	Fayed Ibrahim El Shamly	09.09.2004	23.10.2004
12.	Camargue	France	Christian Perennou	13.09.2004	22.10.2004
13.	Orbetello Lagoon	Italy	Mario Cenni	09.09.2004	24.09.2004
14.	Moroccan sites	Morocco		14.09.2004	
15.	Castro Marim	Portugal	Emilia Silva	08.09.2004	15.10.2004
16.	Sado Estuary	Portugal		08.09.2004	
17.	Marismas de Doñana	Spain	Maryland Morant	08.09.2004	01.10.2004
18.	Albufera de Valencia	Spain	Maryland Morant	08.09.2004	01.10.2004
19.	Oasis de Tozeur	Tunisia		13.09.2004	
20.	Ichkeul	Tunisia		15.09.2004	
21.	Haouaria	Tunisia		13.09.2004	
22.	Lac de Ghar el Melh (Bohayrit Ghar Al Milih)	Tunisia	Faouzi Maamouri	13.09.2004	23.10.2004
23.	Kizoren Obrugu	Turkey	Selim Erdogan	08.09.2004	15.10.2004
24.	Kus Golu	Turkey	Selim Erdogan	08.09.2004	15.10.2004

Mediterranean wetlands of cultural interest



- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 01. Albufera de Valencia | 10. Kizoren Obrugu |
| 02. Burullus Lake | 11. Kune-Vain Lagoon |
| 03. Butrint | 12. Kus (Manyas) Lake |
| 04. Camargue | 13. Narta Lagoon |
| 05. Castro Marim and Vila Real | 14. Neretva Delta |
| 06. Doñana | 15. Orbetello Lagoon |
| 07. Evros Delta | 16. Prespa Lakes |
| 08. Ghar el Mehl | 17. Tamentit and Sid Ahmed Timmi |
| 09. Hutovo Blato | 18. Zaranik |

Further activities planned

During the side event organised in the framework of MedWet/Com6, interested members are asked to suggest additional sites and to discuss those proposed, so that a final list of case studies can be determined.

During the first two months of 2005, the selected sites will be asked to participate in a common action for further developing the guiding principles included in the Resolution VIII.19, in accordance with its article 17. Especially, they will be asked to contribute in specific aspects in which they have developed or are developing particular experience.

The results will be presented to the Ninth Conference of the Contracting Parties of the Convention on Wetlands, to be held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005. This presentation will take form in a number of ways:

- In March 2005, Med-INA and SEHUMED will work together in Valencia and will prepare –on the basis of the case studies developed and analysed– a publication on the implementation of Resolution VIII.19. This booklet of about 50 pages will be published in English, French and Spanish by SEHUMED, with the financial support of the Spanish Ministry of Environment and Planning.
- In parallel, a poster exhibition with the same theme will be prepared, also with funding from the Spanish Ministry.
- Finally, the work on cultural values done in the Mediterranean will be presented at the side event on cultural values, to be organised by MedWet.

It is proposed that this side event, which will attempt to illustrate positive actions for the implementation of Resolution VIII.19, is sponsored by all the Contracting Parties members of MedWet/Com. The side event is intended to present a global view of the issue, with examples –besides the Mediterranean– from all other Ramsar regions.

It is hoped that these activities and examples will motivate additional Contracting Parties to take active steps in incorporating cultural values in the management of their wetland resources and will also lead to a more systematic approach to the implementation of Resolution VIII.19 during the triennium 2005-2008.

Conclusions from the analysis of questionnaires

The analysis of the questionnaires received leads to certain general and specific conclusions, which are of considerable value in planning the further work of MedWet in the sensitive sector of culture and nature interface.

General remarks

Most of the Mediterranean wetlands incorporated until recently important cultural values, due to historical reasons, and especially to the proximity of human habitation and extensive resource use. As confirmed by archaeological finds, people lived and worked in –or very close to– wetlands, using their valuable resources and services and still continue to do so in many sites. The culture that was created from this interaction is of great significance. Nowhere is it more evident than in the wetland and water landscapes, which have resulted from the interplay between the forces of nature and human actions, as evidenced in salinas, oases, and specialised agricultural landscapes.

Unfortunately, these cultural values have suffered considerable degradation during the past century (mainly during its second half), due to the abandonment of traditional activities, population movements and the impact of globalisation. The result often is a severance of the links between human beings and wetlands, which is a major factor leading to wetland loss.

As a reaction perhaps to this trend, efforts are being made in many wetlands to maintain cultural traditions that are still alive, to revive those that have disappeared and to create new values meaningful to contemporary societies. Ramsar Resolution VIII.19 is seen as an approach that will strengthen such efforts and give them new prominence on the local, national and international agendas. It is felt, however, that it must be reinforced with technical and operational tools, as well as policy guidelines, in order to render it more effective. This is a task to which the MedWet Culture Working Group intends to contribute significantly.

Specific conclusions

As was expected, not all sites present the same interests and priorities in relation to their cultural heritage. For reasons of expediency, we have tried to identify certain key aspects concerning the cultural heritage and have attempted to identify those sites that have particular pertinence for each. This will help in the deeper investigation of activities carried out and of lessons to be learned.

Cultural landscapes:

Landscapes are the result of interaction between the forces of nature and human activities. Thus, in a certain sense, all landscapes are cultural. There are some, however, in which human activities have been in particular harmony with nature, leading to a sustainable use of resources and resulting in landscapes of a unique beauty.

- A characteristic case is that of the **Neretva Delta** in Croatia, in which for centuries a special agricultural landscape has been created. Digging into parts of the wetland, creating canals and using the earth removed to build platforms above water for cultivation, the inhabitants have created a very particular cultural landscape. This mosaic of water, almost linear agricultural fields and intact pieces of the wetland, cannot be found anywhere else in the Mediterranean. It is menaced today from the intensification of agriculture.
- In the area of **Prespa Lakes**, traditional human activities (extensive agriculture, animal grazing, reed management and fishing) have transformed through the ages landscapes and increased their variety and biodiversity. In addition, the many Byzantine monuments, Ottoman monuments and examples of traditional architecture blend harmoniously with nature and create a rich and pleasing environment.
- The **Oases of Tamentit** and **Sid Ahmed Timmi**, in southern Algeria, constitute cultural landscapes created solely by human efforts since thousands of years,, in the middle of the inhospitable terrain of the Sahara. They present a particular interest and have been proposed as World Heritage Sites, also because of the intriguing architecture of the *ksars*, the fortified towns in the area. Nowhere perhaps is human works and nature so intimately related, resulting in a totally integrated environment.

Archaeological remains:

Resulting from past habitation, significant archaeological remains exist in many Mediterranean wetlands or in their proximity. These present a high interest both from the scientific and tourist point of view and enrich the attraction potential of wetland sites for both local inhabitants and visitors. However, their excavation, study and conservation may be at times incompatible with wetland management objectives, requiring mutual understanding and an integrated approach.

- As the area has been inhabited since the late Bronze Age, **Butrint** in Albania includes a great archaeological heritage^[12], intimately related with the wetland. During recent years, the work of the Butrint Foundation has been instrumental in continuing archaeological work. Thus, the Greek theatre (3rd-2nd century BC) has been restored and is today in use for cultural events and other important sites have been brought to light. The interaction between the management body of the Butrint National Park and the archaeologists working in the area may provide very useful lessons.

Historical buildings and constructions:

The conservation of buildings and other structures associated with wetlands presents major problems, because often the traditional activities for which they were erected are abandoned today. Thus, restoration efforts must be related to the re-establishment of such activities, which may not be feasible in a contemporary context. In such cases, other uses must be found, which are compatible with their initial functions.

- The area surrounding the **Kune-Vain Lagoon** in Albania is rich in historical constructions, including the medieval fort in Lezha. Their restoration and enhancement may be useful in the efforts to attract visitors and to provide alternative means of income for local inhabitants.
- The town of **Orbetello**, situated on the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, is built within the lagoon with the same name. Many historical structures remain, including a Roman villa, extensive fortifications and an ancient prison. Their maintenance and contemporary use present a significant challenge for the town, in its efforts to attract visitors and to safeguard a high quality of life for its inhabitants.

Natural resource use practices:

Traditional practices in the use of natural resources are an integral part of the cultural values of wetlands. They can be a continuous source of information, education and entertainment for visitors. In addition, they can provide invaluable lessons for the sustainable management of resources in the contemporary context.

Ecotourism:

Combining natural and cultural interest in protected areas may attract a wider variety of visitors, contributing thus to local incomes. Care must be taken, however, not to exceed the carrying capacity of sites, as this would threaten both the natural and cultural heritage.

- This activity is particularly developed in the **Albufera de Valencia** focusing on both the cultural and natural aspects of this important wetland. Very innovative work has been carried out by the Polytechnic University of Valencia and SEHUMED on the carrying capacity for visitors, which can provide a useful tool for the sustainable management of ecotourism activities.
- In the Greek side of the **Evros Delta** successful ecotourist activities have been developed in recent years, centred on the Evros Delta Information Centre in Traianoupolis. The Centre supervises the protected area, provides information to visitors, organises guided visits with buses and boats (along with a local NGO), as well as special events (such as the European Bird Day, World Wetlands Day and Green Week). It may provide a model for other similar wetlands.
- Interesting efforts are being made in the **Neretva Delta** for attracting visitors by offering an integrated programme of activities, which includes visit of the wetland by traditional boats, picnicking, visit of the archaeological site of Naronia and dining with typical dishes from wetland products (such as eels, frog legs and black water hens).

Fishing:

Traditional fishing practices still exist in many wetlands of the region and fishing continues to constitute a significant economic activity. It is menaced both by illegal activities and by the degradation of water bodies due to pollution, drainage and urbanisation. There is a need to learn more about the feasibility of sustainable management of wetland fisheries in the Mediterranean.

- In **Burullus Lake**, fishing has been practised since Antiquity. Traditional boats (*markebs* and *faloukas*) are still in use, as well as traditional methods of fishing. Water pollution, changes in salinity and illegal practises (*hosha*, explosives, trawl nets and fish-hook nets) are depleting fish stocks and menacing the future of this activity.
- **Ghar el Mehl Lagoon** on the SE Tunisia coast is in the sensitive phase of still maintaining traditional fishing methods, including tools and boats, which are being rapidly replaced by modern ones. The possibility to preserve the cultural aspects of traditional practices needs to be considered.
- **Manyas (Kus) Lake** in Turkey presents a particular interest in the fishing methods practised, as they have resulted from a fusion of cultures of various peoples that have settled on its shores during different periods and have shared age-old experience.
- In **Orbetello Lagoon**, traditional fishery practices are combined with the production of *bottarga* (salted mullet roe), which is a special delicacy.
- Unique fishing methods were used in the past in **Prespa Lakes** (with *pelaizia* being the most interesting). Many have been abandoned by now. Still, the knowledge exists and the Society for the Protection of Prespa is initiating a project for their re-establishment, including the building of traditional boats.

Handicrafts:

The production of handicrafts was very common in all Mediterranean wetlands, mainly for local use, based mostly on local natural materials, with ingenuity and an innate aesthetic sense. Industrialisation has resulted in a loss of such practices, except in rare places, with most of the handicrafts destined for purchase by visitors.

- In **Burullus Lake** a variety of artefacts and handicrafts are still made from reeds. The practice is decreasing and efforts to reinforce it are very much needed, including improved marketing of products. Similar items from reeds are also produced in the **Zaranik** protected area, part of Bardawil Lake in eastern Egypt.
- Handicraft products are also made in **Kune-Vain Lagoon**, but this activity requires some degree of management and quality control.
- In the **Oases of Tamentit** and **Sid Ahmed Timmi**, inhabitants produce a variety of handicrafts, especially black pottery items, woven baskets, silver jewellery and leather goods, which are highly appreciated by visitors.

Hunting:

This activity, considered unacceptable by many ecologists, has often strong cultural links. As it also has a strong financial side, it cannot be perhaps ostracised, but it requires sustainable management.

- Thus, waterfowl hunting in **Burullus** has been an economic and social activity since the time of the Dynasties and is strongly embedded in local traditions. A few years ago, it was opened to international sport exploitation with negative results, but efforts are now being made to control hunting and to turn it into a sustainable activity.
- In the **Camargue**, one of the major wetlands of southern France, hunting has always been both a tradition and an economic activity. It still retains these characteristics. Maintaining the traditions of hunting, while managing the economic activity sustainably is today a major challenge in the area.

- Scandalous hunting conditions have existed in the **Evros Delta** in the past, with mass slaughter of waterfowl in periods of extreme cold by both Greek and foreign hunters. In recent years, efforts for the enforcement of regulations have been made in order to curb this phenomenon, with positive results. The cultural aspects of hunting may provide a longer-term solution.
- Related to the Neretva River, **Hutovo Blato** in Bosnia and Herzegovina was traditionally a hunting reserve. Recently, it has been declared a Ramsar site and hunting is being replaced by ecotourism. It is of interest to monitor this change and to determine its costs and benefits.

Reed bed management and use:

Traditional methods of reed management, often associated with animal husbandry and grazing, constituted part of the local culture. They are maintained in some parts of the Mediterranean, while in others they are being re-established.

- Reed beds have been growing excessively in **Burullus**, due to the freshening of the lake. Efforts to control this growth by the traditional method of buffalo grazing have been unsuccessful, and have been replaced by reed cutting, with cut reeds being used widely.
- On the contrary, in Mikri **Prespa Lake**, buffaloes have been re-introduced and are being used successfully –along with other measures– to control reed beds and increase the area of wet meadows, which is important for both fish spawning and bird nesting. An interesting study is being carried out on the possible uses of biomass from cut reeds.

Salinas:

The extraction of salt from sea water has been an ancient activity in the Mediterranean, creating unique landscapes, providing refuge for a variety of fauna species and establishing solid cultural values. In contemporary times, their financial viability is heavily threatened and many are either abandoned or converted into other uses (such as aquaculture). Perhaps their only future resides in making use of their cultural potential.

- The presence of the salt pans bordering **Castro Marim** wetland alongside the Guadiana River in Portugal is centuries old. Locals have exploited the salt marshes for hundreds of years using traditional methods for the extraction of salt. The larger part of the salt flats is natural, but large areas have been transformed for the commercial production of salt in more recent times. However, the viability of such facilities remains in doubt and many of the traditional salinas have been converted into fish farms, posing threats to the integrity of the site.
- In the **Camargue**, artisan salt production has been replaced by large, industrialised salinas. Yet, they have contributed to the biodiversity of the area^[14] and have developed special links with their workers and personnel^[15], creating thus new traditions.

Water management:

Water management systems and their infrastructure have developed their own cultural context, which is being lost today due to new technological methods and the pressures of commercialisation. Yet, significant lessons can be learned from traditional wisdom related to water. Perhaps the challenge is how to make best use of contemporary science and technology while taking into account traditional practices.

- Since 2000, when the **Prespa Park** was established by Albania, Greece and the FYR of Macedonia, serious concern has been placed on hydrological matters. In its catchment, wise traditional methods have been abandoned and were replaced by thoughtless interventions that menaced both the ecological balance of the area and the welfare of its inhabitants. A major programme is now starting for the integrated

management of water resources in the entire basin of the two Prespa lakes and its results may reconnect traditional practices with contemporary scientific and technological expertise.

- The *foggara* system for managing underground water resources in the Sahara, which has existed for millennia, is a characteristic example of traditional wisdom in managing this scarce natural resource. The construction and maintenance of the system, which probably had its roots in Persia, resulted in special forms of social organisation that have survived up to our days. In the **Oases of Tamentit** and **Sid Ahmed Timmi**, this ingenious system is threatened by the introduction of intensive agriculture and its demands for large water quantities, as well as the lack of interest of younger inhabitants. Thus, the maintenance of the *foggara* system poses serious questions and merits careful attention.

Religious, spiritual and social events:

A number of major events related to wetlands play a key role in reinforcing the relationship between local inhabitants and other interested people with their wetland heritage. Such events may have a religious or broader spiritual character or are part of the folklore and the social traditions of specific areas. In addition, they may provide useful lessons for other Mediterranean sites. Thus, their conservation and enhancement is very much needed today.

- In the **Albufera de Valencia**, a procession by boat traversing the wetland is still practiced, in honour of 'Cristo de la Salud'.
- Of all the cultural aspects of the **Doñana** National Park, perhaps the most important symbolically is the celebrations in honour of the Virgin Mary (*La Madre*) of El Rocío, a village in the junction between beaches and marshes. Initially of interest to the neighbouring populations, this major religious event has acquired a national significance in Spain during recent decades. Among other events, it includes a procession on foot, by horseback and carriages through the Doñana National Park until the village of Nuestra Señora de El Rocío, which provides a very good example of the interface between nature and culture.
- Although submitted to intense pressures and threats, **Narta Lagoon** attempts to maintain its natural and cultural heritage. Thus every second week of April, the Vlorë District City Council organises a Carnival, in order to strengthen the appreciation of the natural and cultural values of the area and to contribute to its balanced development. The festivities, which are supported by local NGOs, the Chamber of Commerce and the religious communities, include concerts, an ethno-culinary fair, games, visits to the wetland and public awareness events.
- A rowing event with traditional boats, the Ladja Marathon, is held in the **Neretva Delta** each August for almost three centuries, serving both as a means to maintain local traditions and as tourist attraction.

Towards an integrated approach

Already, two years after the approval of Ramsar Resolution VIII.19, an integrated approach to the natural and cultural heritage is being developed in certain Mediterranean sites. Such efforts are still in a preliminary planning phase or even at the determination of needs. For the MedWet Culture Working Group, it is important to monitor their evolution, to assist wherever possible and to draw conclusions that might be of broader use, both in practical applications to other sites and in making the guidance of Resolution VIII.19 more specific and effective.

- As already stated, the **Albufera de Valencia** maintains strong cultural values. Assisted by SEHUMED and the Ethnological Museum of Valencia, considerable work

has been carried out (and is continuing) on the cultural heritage of this zone, which is also related to various ecotourism initiatives.

- The establishment of the **Butrint** National Park and of a management body has given new impetus to both nature conservation and cultural activities. Efforts are being made to co-ordinate both and to develop a common approach. They are enhanced by the designation of Butrint as a World Heritage Site.
- In **Prespa**, the Society for the Protection of Prespa is working on a new integrated 5-year programme concerning both biodiversity and the cultural heritage. It is establishing the Prespa Centre for Nature and Anthropos, developing the sophisticated software required for the management of the extensive data on the area and launching a series of related projects.
- Nowhere is an integrated approach to the natural and cultural heritage more needed than in the **Oases of Tamentit** and **Sid Ahmed Timmi**. Unless concerted and sustained efforts are initiated, the fragile balance in these oases may be broken and the damage will become irreparable. This is very much known by the competent Algerian authorities, but, in addition, the two oases constitute a case in which international assistance is imperative.

Appendix I:

Initial questionnaire for Mediterranean sites of cultural interest

The purpose of this general questionnaire is to provide information for a first survey of wetland sites in the Mediterranean region that have significant cultural heritage and/or activities related to the incorporation of cultural values in wetland work. They may be inscribed in the Ramsar List of Sites of International Importance, in which case some information exists already, or not. Of these sites, some will be selected as case studies for the joint approach to the cultural and natural heritage of the region, in accordance with Resolution VIII.19 of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971), which concerns 'Guiding principles for taking into account the cultural values of wetlands for the effective management of sites'.

The selected sites will be asked to participate in a common action for further developing those guiding principles in accordance with article 17 of Resolution VIII.19. The results will be presented to the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties of the Convention on Wetlands, to be held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005.

1. Name of site

Provide the official name of the site, as well as any other local designations.

Co-ordinates:

Elevation:

Area: ha

2. Type of site (general description)

Describe the site in qualitative terms (without using strict scientific classification terms), including its location and its relation to human settlements past or present.

3. Human activities directly or indirectly related to the site

Mention the key human activities that are directly related or may have an indirect impact on the particular site. Under traditional ones, list those that have existed until the first half of the 20th century. Modern ones could be considered those that have appeared since. For each one, indicate its importance (from the social and economic point of view) and its degree of relatedness to the wetland.

3.1 Traditional

Activity	Importance		Relatedness to the wetland	
	high	low	high	low

3.2 Modern

Activity	Importance		Relatedness to the wetland	
	high	low	high	low

4. Cultural heritage

Mention briefly any elements of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, which are considered significant for the site. Under 4.1, list those cultural elements that have a direct relation to water and to the wetland. Under 4.2, list those that are in the proximity of the wetland, but without direct links to it.

4.1 Directly related to water and the wetland

4.2 In the proximity of the wetland

5. Management structure

If the site is managed by a specific service, management body, local authority or other organisation (such as an NGO), please mention it, and provide information on a contact person, address and other co-ordinates. If not, please indicate it.

6. Activities related to cultural values

List below any activities in the specific site or its vicinity that concern the cultural heritage and its values. These may include festivals and other events, as well as efforts for the conservation of the cultural heritage and for its enhancement. Those that are practiced today should be mentioned under 6.1. Those that have been abandoned by the local community should be listed under 6.2. Indicate in particular any activities that concern both nature and culture.

6.1 Still practiced

6.2 Abandoned activities

A map and a few photographs would be highly appreciated. Please send electronically or by post to: Med-INA, 23 Voucourestiou Street, 10671 Athens, Greece.

Please write below your name, function, and co-ordinates

Name	
Function	
Organisation	
Address	
Telephone	
Fax	
E-mail	

Thank you immensely.

Please return to: e-mail thymiop@med-ina.org or to fax +30 210 3629338.

1. Consisting of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit (Athens), SEHUMED (Valencia) and Med-INA (Athens), with the participation of the Ramsar Bureau (Gland, Switzerland).
2. Known then as 'Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat'.
3. Third Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, Djerba, Tunisia, 1-5 April 2000.
4. Work led by Thymio Papayannis, at that time Special Advisor to the Secretary General.
5. Eighth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands, held in Valencia, Spain in November 2002. COP8 had as its theme 'Wetlands: water, life and culture'.
6. Represented by Professor María José Viñals.
7. To be held in Kampala, Uganda in November 2005.
8. Which states: [The Conference of the Contracting parties] 'Requests that the Ramsar Bureau seek inputs from Contracting Parties, experts and practitioners, and local communities and indigenous peoples from around the world to enhance the information paper on cultural aspects of wetlands (COP8 DOC. 15) and the detailed guidance prepared for consideration by this meeting of the Conference of the Parties, with a view to publishing it as a background document, and to inform COP9 of the progress made'.
9. Papayannis, Th. and T. Salathé (1999), *Mediterranean wetlands at the dawn of the 21st century*, MedWet – Tour du Valat, Arles, France, p. 55.
10. From the Terms of Reference of the Working Group, dated April 2004.
11. The questionnaire is included in Appendix I, p. 15.
12. Revealed after the excavations by Luigi Maria Ugolini during the Mussolini Italian occupation of Albania.
13. Visitors are also interested in the *erredim*, a traditional medical treatment for arthralgia, in which the patient is buried in the sand.
14. Such as the large flamingo colony within the Salins du Midi.
15. Many of them immigrants from Greece, at the beginning of the 20th century.