

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN EUROPEAN LIFE PROJECT TO THE
REVITALIZATION OF THE URBAN WATERFRONT IN A COASTAL
LAGOON – A CASE STUDY FROM PORTUGAL**

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Introduction

The Ria de Aveiro, situated in the Central Region of Portugal, is a coastal lagoon that is subject to the influence of the tides. This has resulted in a set of characteristic biotopes, which enable anthropic and natural process. Each of these biotopes will, if managed and controlled correctly, allow simultaneously the biodiversity and integration of making in the landscape of the wetland.

The characteristics of the lagoon and the socio-economics activities developed inside and around the area during the last decades are strictly dependent of the navigability conditions of the several branches showing the strong link between the differences activities and the lagoon

From the 109 quays that existed in the past, only 37 are presently in use. The remaining quays either have disappeared altogether, or are now in an advanced state of degradation. The cultural and historic importance of these particular quays and the strategies defined in order to revitalise the Ria de Aveiro as a whole, have develop a recovery and valorization Quay's Plan, representative of these several potentialities and interests of the population of Aveiro's District, serving the integrated management goals.

This presentation shows the results obtained during the first year of this (1999) pilot project, especially the strategies of intervention defined inside the Partnership inside the MARIA Program (LIFE'96).

Recuperation And Valorisation Of The Quays

Due to the lagoon characteristics of the Ria de Aveiro, the socio-economic activities developed in its surroundings along times occurred in a close dependency of the navigability of its channels. The use of the channels to transport people, cattle and merchandise, when other highways along the Ria where almost non-existent, implicate the existence of numerous quays in the riverain villages. Only 37 of the 107 quays are still in use. Most of the quays have suffer degradation during the times due to the lack of use, some have disappeared and others are too degraded and the recuperation will be very difficult. Attending to the historical and cultural meaning of this quays and to their importance in the revitalisation of the Ria it is important to develop one

quay recuperation and revitalisation plan. That presents the potentialities and interests that can contribute to the welfare of the population that can use it, on an integrated management perspective.

Objectives

With this pilot-project we will try to find solutions that stimulate an increasing involvement of the waterfront communities making possible one future revitalisation of the Ria itself, encouraging its leisure and recreational components. In this sense we consider as necessary:

- Typify the adaptation of the quays to the potential uses of the annex waterfront margins.
- Define strategies to the physic recuperation and qualification of the quays.
- Implement revitalisation strategies.

Methodology

The methodological approach in this pilot-project comprehends seven different phases:

- 1st PHASE: the Ria dynamics knowledge will help the definition of guidelines for the intervention actions;
- 2nd PHASE: study and diagnosis of the Ria (potentialities/problems/vocations), its navigability, the interest of the navigation activities and the municipalities interventions;
- 3rd PHASE: elaboration of theoretical models to the revitalisation of the quays;
- 4th PHASE: evaluation of the various quays and selection by multi-criteria analysis of those who will be object of intervention;
- 5th PHASE: the model of revitalisation will be applied to the target quays;
- 6th PHASE: elaboration of the conclusions and recommendations about the developed theory and practice
- 7th PHASE: the most appropriate models of revitalisation to each quay will be applied.

In what concerns to the necessary means to develop this pilot project we can refer its diversity in terms of type and use during the different phases of the work. In terms of documented information we will use the disposable bibliography, works already effectuated in Ria area, reference work models, Municipality Master Plans and Urban Plans, some interviews with the municipalities, questionnaires to population and cultural and sportive associations, and Harbour Administration advisory field work.

As a consequence of the developed work we aim to reach the following results:

- identify the number of quays that are rather degraded and in deep need to be revitalised;
- identify the existence of areas with a great tourist potentiality;
- identify the diversity of uses and decay of traditional activities;
- reanimate the traditional activities and the uses of the Ria by the local communities and municipalities;
- implement revitalisation models to some of the quays of the Ria de Aveiro.

Discussion Of The Expected Results

Taking into account the objectives of this project, we have the expectation of identifying the virtues and insufficiencies of integrated management for the “Ria de Aveiro”. This way we can identify integrated coastal zone management methodologies, in particular for wetlands. In anticipation of obtaining a negative reaction, it is our expectation to identify mechanisms that permit the reformulation of one such structure capable to dispute with the diversity and multiplicity of aspects related to physical planning and conservation of this area.

The innovating character of this integrated approach of physical planning and management (considered necessary in promoting the sustainable development of the coastal zones) has for itself one group of difficulties and risks due to the non-existence of a consistent theoretical reference that supports the implementation of projects with this characteristics. If we associate to this point the social, institutional and political contexts in which the project develops, namely in regard to the weak tradition of planning, participation and cooperation of agents in Portugal and the low level of involvement in partnership (legally conditioned by the political calendar), the difficulties and risks inherent to the project increase.

Meanwhile the acquired experience by the actual partnership during the MARIA project (LIFE’96) constitutes a benefit from the actual project. That circumstance is much more evident if we consider the quantity and diversity of entities which form the actual partnership. The entities represent different legal levels and capabilities intervening in the Ria area with different perspectives of use and with specific dynamics and co-operating to achieve the sustainable development to this region.

Integrated management of coastal zones is a subject of the European Union agenda and this project can contribute to develop strategies at this level. The contribution of ESGIRA-MARIA project presents an operative feature because it pretends to test the capacity of the management structure through the development of pilot-projects in the resolution of the problems that affect the coastal lagoons.

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