

The Sacca di Goro lagoon in Italy: involving a citizens' panel in a consultation on sustainable water management (the Aware project).

### Summary

In Sacca di Goro, in the Po delta in Italy, as well as in two other pilot areas in Europe, the Aware project has selected citizens' panels in order to encourage them to take part in a participative process around the question: how can sustainable management systems for aquatic ecosystems be established, taking into account local conditions? These panels have produced a citizens' declaration.

### Key words

Institutional initiative,  
citizens' panel.

### Context

The Sacca di Goro lagoon is a shallow bay situated in the southern part of the Po delta, with a surface area of around 26 km<sup>2</sup>. A 860km<sup>2</sup> watershed devoted to farming activities feeds directly into the lagoon. Sacca di Goro is one of the main European breeding sites for clams, an activity managed by fishing cooperatives. The development and stabilisation of farming as well as the development of other land-based activities are the main challenges in terms of the sustainable development of the region.



In the context of the European Aware approach (Connecting People for Sustainable Water Management), this project aims to involve citizens in a consultation on the management of human and water activities.

### Partners

Participants were divided into three groups:

- Experts and scientists whose role it was to train the other participants on current scientific knowledge of the local ecosystem and European and local regulations.
- Citizens representing the public.
- Stakeholders representing various interests to be taken into account when reflecting on the future of the region. s.

## Activities

At the end of 2009 and the start of 2010, 10 citizens from the Goro region were randomly chosen to form a local citizens' panel and to participate in the Aware project. .

In April 2010, the citizens' panel participated in a European citizens' workshop with citizens from the two other pilot regions. The experts contributed basic scientific knowledge and citizens were able to share their experiences and their interest in the coastal areas.

After this, citizens returned to their regions of origin and recreated their ten-person panels. They met with scientists, stakeholders and decision makers once more at a local two-day workshop.

Several days after the end of the Sacca di Goro workshop, the citizens produced a declaration which they submitted to European and local public authorities and the stakeholders. The response from the stakeholders was communicated to decision makers during a local seminar and was discussed with them and with citizens.

Finally, the three panels got together again on the European level to prepare a final conference and give their opinion on the EU framework policy in terms of connections to be improved between those involved in sustainable management of coastal areas.

## Results and prospects

The results took the form of a Citizens' Declaration on the European and local level. This declaration presents their analysis and recommendations on the best way to combine research, policy making and public participation for better management of Europe's coastal environments.

## Comments

This experiment formed part of the European Aware project. The three panels were organised in Italy (Sacca di Goro), France and Belgium (the banks of the Seine, the Somme and the Scheldt), Latvia and Estonia (Gulf of Riga).

The citizens' panel method is often used to involve 'ordinary citizens' in complex public decision making, on the European, national and local level. These people are involved because they provide a citizen's perspective which is different to that of other actors in civil society (organisations or professional bodies), who are more militant or have greater knowledge of the subject. Citizens' participation is very limited in time (in general 3-4 months) and this type of process is consultative: it leads to an opinion which is communicated to decision-makers and stakeholders without any guarantee that this will be taken into account. In some cases, the decision makers agree to inform the general public and the panel in particular about the follow-up they will take, but this is not always the case.