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Coastal Contract: A Governance Approach for Integrated Wetland Management

Applied in the Gulf of Oristano, Sardinia, Italy

A Coastal Contract is a governance approach that facilitates better cross-sectoral cooperation at the local level. The Coastal Contract is designed for the integrated management of coastal wetlands while overcoming the fragmentation of local governance.

Key Learnings

- **Collaboration** among different levels of governance (local and regional) and between public and private sectors towards the integrated management of the Gulf of Oristano.
- **Engagement** of local communities raises awareness of the importance of wetlands as natural water retention areas in case of climatic events.
- **Monitor** wetland status by a Local Wetland Observatory (LWO) to support decision-making.
- **Funding:** Better cooperation and planning enabled a more coordinated search for funding.

About the region

The coastal region of Oristano in Sardinia, Italy, comprises of a complex system of rivers, lagoons, and salt marshes with high environmental value. Most of these wetlands are protected under the Ramsar Convention and the Natura 2000 network and are leased to local fishermen's cooperatives.

Climate Hazards

Sea level rise, storms, extreme temperatures, flooding, droughts

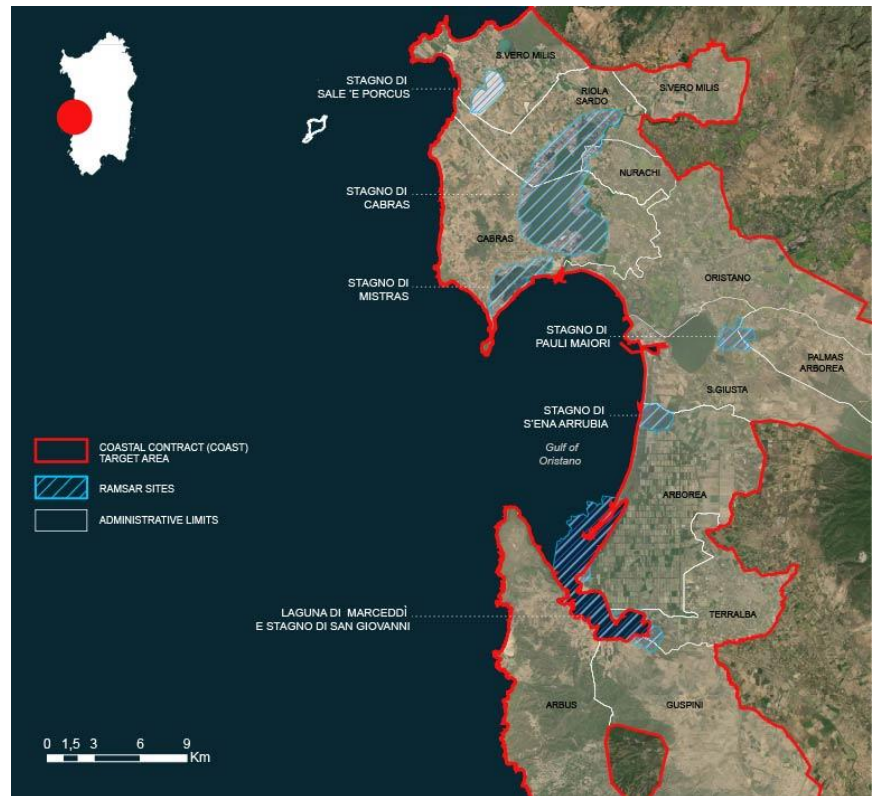
Sector

Water management

Key system

Ecosystems and Nature Based Solutions

Water Management



Climate Threats

On the western coast of Sardinia, the Gulf of Oristano is particularly susceptible to marine storms and torrential rains, posing a substantial risk of inland flooding. Another risk is the scorching summers with prolonged heatwaves and unpredictable droughts, which are exasperated by intense rainfall. This threatens the safety and well-being of the local population and jeopardises vital economic pillars like agriculture, fishing, and aquaculture. However, this scenario also presents an opportunity to rethink resilience and innovation.

Revitalizing Wetlands: A New Era of Collaborative Environmental Governance

Healthy wetlands are crucial in mitigating global warming, acting as natural carbon sinks, and providing resilience against extreme climatic events. However, the fragmentation of governmental responsibilities typically challenges the management of wetlands. Governance mechanisms encouraging multi-actor cooperation are considered a good practice in river basin management.

The River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive are examples of cooperative action at the (larger) river basin scale. Fewer collaborative, integrated management examples exist locally, e.g., a smaller river, bay or wetland. In Belgium, France and Italy, the concept of river contracts is used to facilitate multi-actor cooperation at smaller rivers. In the Gulf of Oristano, a Coastal Contract has been

endorsed to facilitate cooperation and joint management of Oristano's coastal wetlands and bay. Local municipalities and regional and provincial authorities have endorsed the Coastal Contract.



Figure 1 - Meeting of the Coastal Contract Coordination Group.
Photo credit: MEDSEA Foundation

The Coastal Contract represents a voluntary and inclusive agreement among various partners who recognise the territory of the Gulf of Oristano as part of a unique ecosystem and want to collaborate actively towards its protection and promotion. Driven by this shared commitment and supported by a constructive dialogue, participants had the opportunity to share their experiences and proposals, highlighting both individual territorial characteristics and common needs. This process has been crucial in shaping an ambitious and effective Action Plan.

"We have extremely important wetlands which represent key habitat in the Mediterranean region. If we continue to act individually, we won't get the result that we are all hoping for."

Sandro Pili, Mayor of Terralba, Italy

This initiative has led to significant advancements:

Innovative Collaborative Governance: The Coastal Contract is a blueprint for how multi-level collaboration can drive economic growth and environmental sustainability, bridging the gap between local needs and regional strategies.

Enhanced Engagement and Awareness: The community recognised that wetlands are part of their cultural identity and a nature-based solution for climate resilience.

Evidence-based making: The Local Wetland Observatory, a hub for data and research, ensures that every action taken is grounded in science and aligned with the needs of the ecosystems and communities.



Figure 2: Photos of the participatory meetings aimed at public and private stakeholders from the municipalities involved in the Coastal Contract, organised between June and July 2023. Photo credit: Poliste srl – Società Benefit

"The contract helps promote good practices. All fishermen must work harder to guarantee a sustainable fishery and create a model that is applicable to all Mediterranean lagoons."

Alessandro Porcu, Director of Sant'Andrea Fishermen Cooperative. S'Ena Arrubia Pond, Arborea.

The Transformative Journey of the TrasformAr Project

Within the framework of the TransformAr Project, partners are working to enhance the use of the Coastal Contract to protect water bodies in the Gulf of Oristano and encourage its replicability across Sardinia. Thanks to a consolidated participatory process and the development of the Local Wetland Observatory, the project is reaching a broader involvement of public authorities, local communities, fishermen, farmers, and tourism operators and guaranteeing a scientific approach to develop wetland conservation and adaptation measures. The Observatory facilitates informed, evidence-based decisions and raises public awareness about the crucial role of wetlands in climate protection.

The acquisition of new funding for the Action Plan's implementation, combined with the growing engagement of local stakeholders in public meetings on wetlands and the surge in proposals for various actions and initiatives, collectively highlight the effectiveness of this governance tool.



Figure 3: Aerial view of the coastal wetland system in the Gulf of Oristano, Sardinia (Italy). Photo credit: Egidio Trainito

THE NUMBERS OF THE COASTAL CONTRACT

14 Signatories (including municipalities, local and regional authorities).

Four governance bodies:

1) Coordination Group 2) Technical Secretariat 3) Committee for Directions 4) Technical Committee

50 Actions affecting the integrated system or a specific site.

Seven Strategic Axes in which the actions are grouped:

- Governance and capacity building
- Improvement of the ecological status of water systems
- Protection of biodiversity and natural capital
- Landscape development and promotion of cultural heritage
- Green Economy
- Enhancement of the resilience to climate change
- Communication and environmental education

50% of the Actions funded and started the implementation phase.

50% requesting new funds for the implementation in the medium term.

40 participatory meetings with local public and private stakeholders were organised along the territory.

Summary

The efforts to develop and implement the Coastal Contract in the Gulf of Oristano demonstrate a commitment to integrated, multi-level and participatory governance of wetlands by all stakeholders involved. This approach is reshaping the management of wetlands, focusing on their role in mitigating climate change impacts and promoting a green economy. The progress of this initiative sets a model for sustainable conservation and effective governance, inspiring other regions to adopt similar practices for a resilient Europe.

Further information

The work presented in this adaptation story is part of the [TransformAr](#) project.

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<https://www.medseafoundation.org/index.php/en/portfolio-ita-2/transformar/49>

<https://www.medseafoundation.org/index.php/en/portfolio-ita-2/coastal-contract/69>

<https://transformar.eu/demonstrator-4-oristano-italy/>



TransformAr

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