

Salt Works! - The ECOSAL ATLANTIS Conference

The final Conference of the ECOSAL ATLANTIS Project was held in Vitoria-Gasteiz near Bilbao on 21-22 November 2012. Papers covered many aspects of the Project, including our main activity areas on the heritage inventory, biodiversity and the associated preliminary guidelines for maintaining ecologically healthy working salinas, saltmarshes and abandoned salt works, as well as the development of the Traditional Saltmaking Route for the Atlantic coast area.

Speakers from all four partner countries (UK, Spain, France and Portugal) discussed Project results as well as plans for the future to an audience of around 60 people, many of whom were from traditionally-operating salinas in Portugal, Spain and France.

Belén Escobar of the Diputación Foral de Álava and our host for the Conference introduced the overall aims of the project and also the funding programme that provided support (INTERREG). David Cranstone from the UK team presented the results of the heritage inventory from around the Atlantic coasts of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. A total of 679 sites were recorded, most of these based on archaeological and documentary evidence as there are no salt producers in the UK using the type of traditional methods practised by our Partner countries. David also covered the various types of salt-making practised in the UK over 2000 years, most of which involved boiling in pan houses, structures that have been excavated at various places around the coastline, such as at Brora in Scotland.

The heritage inventory was discussed further by Annie Josse of the Ecomusée of Daviaud and Gabriela Mota Marques of the Municipality of Aveiro. Amongst many important conclusions they drew from the database so far, an interesting one from a UK perspective is that only 1% of the continental database is comprised of archaeological information, whereas for the UK it is around 90% or more (the other 10% being largely documentary evidence for former salt working sites).

Papers by the ecologists concentrated on the results of their work surveying and sampling birds, flora and invertebrates. This important



Image 1 - Opening ceremony.



Image 2 - Speech by the Deputy General of Alava Council.



Image 3 - ECOSAL ATLANTIS Conference.

work has led to the formation of guidelines covering the management of salinas and related sites (e.g. abandoned former salt-working sites). These were brilliantly summed up by Renato Neves of Mãe d'Água, who reported on how the values for biodiversity were actually the same as values for eco-tourism. Specific points on how to improve the situation (e.g. for nesting birds, water quality, invasive species control, etc.) were also presented.

Turning to the session on the development of our Traditional Salt Making Route, a paper was presented by Abigail Pereta of the Research and Cultural Parks Department of Aragon on the creation of the Prehistoric Rock Art Trail as a case study for us to consider. The speaker went into great detail about how it had taken a great deal of time and effort to obtain support across numerous countries over a number of years to establish this very impressive Route. It was an interesting, yet cautionary tale. This was followed by a talk on the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) by Andrew Fielding, who pointed out that a small number of ECOSAL ATLANTIS salt works were part of the Salt Theme developed by this Route. A frank discussion about the term 'industrial site' ensued, highlighting the different perspectives that people have about this term and how it can be seen as being almost the opposite of many of the ECOSAL ATLANTIS sites, which are considered by many as being 'traditional' (i.e. not 'industrial') production sites. In many ways, this highlighted the need for the development of our own Route and Andrew presented some thoughts on how this could be done in the UK by working with the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Other important results of the project were also covered, such as the production of an educational tool box for use primarily with



Image 4 - Closing of the Conference by the Deputy for Heritage, Culture and Sport .

schools at eco-museums who operate salinas or have tangible heritage associated with former salt-working sites. Annie Josse was able to also announce that it is hoped to develop this as an app on a tablet in the near future – an exciting development! As well as catering for specific audiences (such as school groups), the project also endeavoured to promote good practice with regard to eco-tourism in general. To this end, Katia Hueso of the Cultural Association of the Friends of Inland Salinas pre-



Image 5 - Visit to the Valley of Salt, Añana.

sented a paper on how to communicate the value of biodiversity to the general public when they visit our sites. In a separate but related paper, Katia talked about the importance of establishing objective indicators to assess the tourism-potential of sites and encouraged all of us to use these indicators as standard practice when developing new sites or considering ways to promote existing sites.

Other areas covered included the work of Géolittomer of the University of Nantes, presented by Loïc Ménanteau, to establish a database of geographical information on salt-working sites across all Partner countries. Loïc's collection of maps, historical images including prints and drawings, satellite images, etc is phenomenal and will be a huge asset to anyone wishing to research the topic of salt.

Loïc also talked about the production of the ECOSAL ATLANTIS Salt Book which will be produced next year. It will cover a range of topics, using sites from all four Partner countries, including the history and archaeology of salt production, the uses of salt, trade and transport, and ending with a chapter on all the sites included in the Salt Route.

The Conference ended with a site visit to the fabulous Salt Valley of Añana. As this was preceded by an excellent talk by Roberto López de Eguilaz on the management plan for the site (2000-2012) and the exciting proposal to put forward the site for designation as a World Heritage Site in 2014, we were all fully up to speed with all the problems and solutions for the preservation and enhancement of this amazing site.

So the ECOSAL ATLANTIS Conference drew to an end. We were all very grateful to our hosts, the Diputación Foral de Álava and to our Leader, Belén Escobar, for treating us so well and for giving us a short, but delicious taste of the Basque Country.



Image 6 - The Valley of Salt, Añana.

Professor Mark Brisbane (Bournemouth University)

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