

Collaborative governance through the Mediterranean. Framing a Community of Practice for Wetland Contracts

Romina D'Ascanio

Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University, Rome (Italy)
romina.dascanio@uniroma3.it

Elisa Avellini

Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University, Rome (Italy)
elisa.avellini@uniroma3.it

Stefano Magaudo

Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University, Rome (Italy)
stefano.magaudo@uniroma3.it

Anna Laura Palazzo

Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University, Rome (Italy)
annalaura.palazzo@uniroma3.it

Giancarlo Gusmaroli

MedWet – Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, Arles (France)
wetlandcontract@medwet.org

Abstract

Wetlands are vital ecosystems, hosting 40% of global biodiversity and providing services such as flood regulation, carbon storage, and water purification. Despite their importance, wetlands face severe threats, with over 35% lost globally in the past 50 years due to urbanization, agriculture, and pollution. The Mediterranean region is particularly affected, requiring urgent action to ensure wetland preservation and sustainable management. This paper aims to explore the potential of Wetland Contracts as participatory governance tools for wetland conservation. It focuses on the WE GO COOP project, which scales Wetland Contracts through a Mediterranean Community of Practice (CoP) and adapts them to new contexts. The paper also highlights the role of a virtual collaborative platform in fostering stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange, showcasing its effectiveness in addressing wetland challenges through innovative governance.

1. Wetlands governance in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean wetlands, as defined by the Ramsar Convention (1971), are “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters.” These ecosystems, while covering only 2-3% of the Earth's surface, host 30% of vertebrate species, highlighting their extraordinary biodiversity and ecological significance. Beyond their ecological value, wetlands provide essential ecosystem services that benefit both the environment and human society. These services include water purification, flood regulation, carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation, and the provision of habitat for a wide variety of species. Wetlands also support vital economic activities such as fisheries, agriculture, and tourism, which are especially important in the Mediterranean region.

The Ramsar Convention, formally known as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, was adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran. This international treaty focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands worldwide, recognizing their ecological, economic, and cultural value. Ramsar mandates that member states promote the protection of wetlands through direct conservation measures and encourage sustainable use of these vital areas. A key aspect of the Ramsar Convention is the establishment of the List of Wetlands of International Importance, which includes sites recognized for their global ecological significance. These sites are specially protected to safeguard biodiversity and the essential ecological functions they provide, such as water purification, climate change mitigation, and habitat for numerous species of flora and fauna.

Despite their importance, Mediterranean wetlands face severe degradation, with their surface area having declined by nearly 50% since the 1970s (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2018). This loss is driven by anthropogenic

pressures, including urbanization, agricultural land conversion, water abstraction, and disruptions to hydrological cycles. These stressors have been compounded by the absence of an integrated governance framework, resulting in fragmented conservation efforts and inadequate spatial planning.

Effective spatial planning is critical to addressing these challenges and ensuring the sustainable management of wetlands. Often, wetlands face the challenge of being governed by a patchwork of regulations and authorities, each focusing on narrow, sectoral interests, such as agriculture, urban development, or water management, without considering the holistic ecosystem dynamics. To avoid further degradation, spatial planning must be more integrated and ecosystem-based, recognizing the interconnections between wetlands and surrounding environments. A coordinated approach to land use, water management, and conservation is needed to balance human activities with ecological preservation.

In recent years, the EU Nature Restoration Law has brought wetlands into the spotlight as critical ecosystems to restore. The law, which was proposed by the European Commission in June 2022 and approved in June 2024 by the EU Parliament, sets ambitious targets for the restoration of Europe's degraded ecosystems, habitats, and species, including wetlands. The law is designed to ensure the restoration of biodiversity across the EU, addressing the severe degradation of ecosystems due to human activity, pollution, climate change, and over-exploitation. Wetlands are explicitly included as key ecosystems to restore due to their crucial role in environmental health (European Parliament and Council, 2024).

The Nature Restoration Law emphasizes that many of Europe's wetlands have been lost or degraded over previous centuries, primarily due to drainage for agriculture, infrastructure development, pollution, and climate change. However, wetlands are invaluable in achieving the EU's broader environmental, climate, and biodiversity goals. They provide vital ecosystem services, such as filtering pollutants, securing clean drinking water, reducing flood risks, and supporting biodiversity. Moreover, wetlands help mitigate and adapt to climate change, making their restoration essential for the EU's climate and social objectives.

By including wetlands in the Nature Restoration Law, the EU aims to unlock the potential for wetland restoration, which can have far-reaching benefits for both nature and society.

In this framework, this paper aims to highlight how the Interreg Euro-MED WE GO COOP – *Improving WETland GOVERNance through a COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE* project attempts to address these governance challenges by promoting multilevel, ecosystem-based management approaches (Muccitelli *et al.*, 2023). The project is based on the capitalization of the Wetland Contract, facilitates collaboration among diverse stakeholders to harmonize wetland conservation with sustainable use. This approach seeks to mitigate conflicts between development and preservation, creating a common framework for addressing the complex dynamics of wetland management and for reaching the European and international goals (EC, 2020).

2. Wetland Contracts as a collaborative tool for e governance in Europe

In the last decades of the 20th century, under the broader framework of the European Union, relevant processes of devolution and transfer of competences were initiated.

The principle of subsidiarity, formally established by the Treaty on European Union (TEU), asserts that decisions should be made as close as possible to the citizen, with regular assessments to ensure that action at the EU level is warranted considering the capabilities at national, regional, or local levels.

Several countries in Continental Europe, operating under the so-called *civil law system* rooted in Roman law, have been encouraged to reconsider their traditional centralized legal frameworks. This has led to the incorporation of numerous contractual arrangements. Within this context, private stakeholders are explicitly involved, with recognized opportunities to influence change and participate in decision-making processes (Table 1).

Table 1. Civil Law System vs Common Law System

	Civil Law System	Common Law System
Geographical Areas	Predominantly in Continental Europe	Predominantly in Anglo-Saxon countries
Entities Responsible for Public Interest	Public authorities are entrusted with general interest matters, following a hierarchical institutional structure	A broad range of actors – including universities, non-profit organizations, foundations, and trade associations – are encouraged by social, economic, and cultural milieu to enter into binding agreements with public authorities
Written Constitutions	Always present	Not always present
Judicial Decisions	Not binding on third parties; however, administrative and constitutional court rulings on laws and regulations are binding on all	Binding on future cases (precedent applies)
Influence of Legal Scholarship	Legal scholars have significant influence in certain jurisdictions	Minimal influence from legal scholars
Freedom of Contract	Limited – many legal provisions are automatically implied into contracts	Extensive – very few legal provisions are automatically implied into contracts

Decision-making and managerial input have assumed particular significance in environmental governance. It is not merely the rigidity of regulations but rather the architecture of the decision-making framework that shapes expectations and obligations. This approach was notably implemented in France during the 1980s through the introduction of *Contrats de Rivière* (River Contracts). These contracts are defined as technical and financial agreements aimed at the comprehensive and sustainable management of a coherent hydrographic unit. They represent a shift toward participatory and multi-stakeholder governance in water resource management.

Inspired by this French model, wetland contracts have gradually gained traction across Europe. These instruments clearly express the necessity for participatory governance by facilitating coordinated action for the conservation and sustainable management of wetland ecosystems. Their increasing adoption reflects the growing awareness of the crucial role wetlands play in climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and water cycle regulation.

The evolution and dissemination of such governance tools are closely linked to the development of European environmental policy, particularly the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). This directive emphasizes participatory planning at the river basin level and introduces the objective of achieving a “good ecological status” for all water bodies. It thus encourages integrated, locally driven approaches to resource management. Throughout the years, the Contract has proven effective in France and Belgium, offering a structured yet flexible tool that enables stakeholders, including landowners, local authorities, and private organizations, to define and pursue shared goals for wetland conservation and sustainable use (Bastiani, 2011; Scaduto, 2016). These contracts exemplify a bottom-up approach to governance, aligning biodiversity preservation with sustainable practices such as eco-tourism and agriculture.

In Italy, the implementation of wetland contracts is relatively recent, since the beginning of the 2000s, but expanding rapidly, supported by a favorable regulatory environment and experience gained through river contracts.

Also in this case, the Italian Environment Code focuses mainly on rivers, having formalized the river contract in 2015 as “a voluntary tool of strategic and negotiated planning for the protection and better management of water resources, valorization of river landscape and mitigation of hydraulic risk, contributing to the local development.” (Italian Environment Code, 2006/2015)

Many Regions have been actively promoting these tools through their legislation and dedicated calls and programs. These processes are often initiated by local governments or regional environmental agencies, in collaboration with environmental associations, universities, and land reclamation consortia. The wetlands involved are typically under significant anthropogenic pressure, such as intensive agriculture, fishing, urbanization, or tourism, underscoring the need for a shared, multi-level vision for their protection (Ernoul *et al.*, 2021).

The governance model of wetland contracts is based on a participatory and multi-level structure, involving a broad range of public and private actors. A typical framework includes a Coordinator and a Management Board with a political role, supported by the Technical Secretariat tasked with developing studies and operational proposals and conducting the participatory process. Finally, the Assembly includes all the stakeholders involved in the process.

Community engagement is facilitated through active participation tools, including forums, territorial workshops, public consultations, and co-design sessions. The formal signing of the contract by participating entities is voluntary yet binding, with each signatory committing to responsibilities in line with their competencies and resources.

From a spatial planning perspective, the wetland contract serves as a catalyst and integrator for existing policies. It operates in synergy with urban, landscape, environmental, and agricultural plans, offering a cross-cutting and coherent vision of the challenges and opportunities related to wetlands. As such, the contract acts as a strategic coordination platform, helping to overcome institutional fragmentation and enhance the value of existing regulatory tools. Furthermore, it facilitates access to European and national funding by providing a structured and monitorable framework for concrete actions.

3. The Interreg Euro-MED WE GO COOP project: partnership and objectives

Building on the increasing relevance of wetland contracts across Europe and their evolution into strategic tools for integrated territorial governance, the WE GO COOP project represents a pivotal step toward the institutional consolidation and geographical expansion of this governance model. Funded under the Interreg Euro-MED programme, the project is designed to strengthen, transfer, and coordinate Wetland Contract experiences at both transnational and local levels across the Mediterranean.

WE GO COOP addresses the need to move beyond isolated pilot cases by structuring a shared framework for wetland governance, rooted in participatory planning and multi-level collaboration. It responds to the growing urgency to protect and restore wetland ecosystems facing anthropogenic pressures, ecological degradation, and policy fragmentation.

Central to the project is the promotion of the Wetland Contract, a voluntary agreement among public institutions, private stakeholders, and civil society organisations aimed at the sustainable management and enhancement of wetlands. This tool fosters local ownership and shared responsibility through the co-definition of objectives, action plans, and governance mechanisms. Although the model has already been implemented in several Mediterranean regions, WE GO COOP seeks to consolidate, harmonise, and scale its application, addressing both the need for institutional coherence and the diversity of territorial contexts.

The project adopts a dual strategy. On one hand, it seeks to scale up the Wetland Contract model by establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) at the Mediterranean level, a transnational platform of exchange and coordination. This community brings together public authorities, academics, NGOs, and technical experts to capitalise on existing experiences, share methodologies, and promote integrated approaches to wetland management. On the other hand, WE GO COOP aims to scale down the model by transferring it to new implementation areas, specifically Albania, Croatia, Portugal, and parts of the Southern and Middle Eastern Mediterranean, while also reinforcing its application in countries where it is already active, such as Italy, Greece, and Spain.

The initiative is organised around two main work packages: the first dedicated to the development and facilitation of the CoP, and the second to the transfer and contextualisation of Wetland Contracts in the designated pilot areas. These components are supported by transversal activities such as stakeholder engagement, knowledge dissemination, and alignment with regional and EU policy frameworks.

The partnership (Figure 1) is led by ANATOLIKI S.A. – Organisation for Local Development (Greece), and includes:

- MedWet Initiative (France), leading the CoP and overseeing the extension of project activities in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions;
- Department of Architecture of Roma Tre University (Italy), providing scientific insight into collaborative planning and stakeholder engagement processes;
- FAMP – Andalusian Federation of Towns and Provinces (Spain), contributing long-standing expertise with environmental contracts in wetland contexts;
- Nature Park Vransko Lake (Croatia), piloting actions in a vulnerable Ramsar site;
- PPNEA – Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment (Albania), adapting the methodology to the Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape;
- RCDI – Development and Innovation Network (Portugal), targeting wetlands influenced by agriculture and tourism dynamics in the Alentejo region.



Figure 1. Interreg Euro-MED WE GO COOP: partnership and main project data.

The consortium is complemented by a wide array of associated partners, including municipalities, universities, and protected area authorities, which enhance the territorial reach and thematic scope of the initiative.

Importantly, WE GO COOP builds upon the outcomes of a series of EU-funded projects that, over the past decade, have contributed to shaping and testing the Wetland Contract model in various environmental and institutional settings. These include:

- Interreg MED WETNET (2016–2019), which pioneered Wetland Contracts in six Mediterranean countries through coordinated multi-actor agreements;
- Interreg MED COASTING (2018–2019) and COASTING PLUS (2021–2022), which expanded the participatory governance model to coastal areas and sustainable tourism planning;
- Interreg IT-HR CREW (2018–2021), which focused on coordinated wetland management in the Italy-Croatia transboundary context;
- Interreg MED TUNE UP (2019–2022), which translated the Wetland Contract methodology into the marine domain, targeting Marine Protected Areas (Palazzo *et al.*, 2021).

By integrating and systematising these diverse experiences, WE GO COOP contributes to the consolidation of a common governance culture. It develops a transferable framework capable of accommodating ecological variability, socio-economic diversity, and policy asymmetries across the Mediterranean.

With a total budget of €999,784, of which €799,827.20 is provided by Interreg Euro-MED funds, and a duration of 27 months, the project actively supports European objectives in biodiversity, water protection, and climate adaptation. By enhancing collaborative capacity, facilitating cross-border cooperation, and fostering inclusive governance structures, WE GO COOP represents a key milestone in the advancement of a Mediterranean-wide, participatory approach to wetland conservation and sustainable territorial development.

4. Towards the Wetland Contracts Community of Practice

At the heart of the project's upscaling efforts is the creation of a Community of Practice (CoP) dedicated to Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean, encompassing both EU and MENA regions. This transnational network brings together policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and local communities to foster dialogue, exchange knowledge, and disseminate best practices. It supports the development and implementation of participatory governance tools such as Wetland Contracts and provides a collaborative space where stakeholders can bridge the gap between scientific research, policy frameworks, and community action, promoting multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation.

The CoP was intentionally designed as a bottom-up initiative, building on existing experiences with Wetland Contracts across the Mediterranean. Its framework responds to the needs of organizations that face challenges in wetland governance and view the Wetland Contract as a promising opportunity for change.

A kick-off event, *"Gathering the Community of Practice,"* was held in Seville in October 2024, bringing together an initial group of over 30 experts and organizations interested in launching the CoP. The participants focused on shaping a Mediterranean-specific vision of the Wetland Contract model and integrating it into the CoP. Three guiding questions structured the discussion:

- *Why establish a Mediterranean CoP on Wetland Contracts?*
- *Who should join the CoP?*
- *What should the CoP do?*

The session adopted a participatory approach, engaging both in-person and online attendees. The Mentimeter tool was used to conduct a live survey, capturing real-time responses that reflected participants' expectations and shared visions for the future of the CoP. The survey results highlighted key values such as cooperation, governance, sustainability, and community, underscoring participants' commitment to a collaborative approach to wetland management. Among the CoP's priority objectives, capacity building (15%) and networking (13%) were ranked highest, demonstrating a shared need to strengthen knowledge and foster stronger connections among actors. Other emphasized areas included monitoring, learning, and mentoring, positioning the CoP as a platform for ongoing improvement and engagement. The main perceived benefits of joining the CoP included enhanced management skills, expanded networks, and increased recognition of the Wetland Contract's value. Participants indicated that their main contributions would be intangible knowledge (27%) and introducing new stakeholders (27%), reflecting a strong emphasis on sharing experiences and broadening the community. To ensure its effectiveness, participants suggested tools such as a repository of best practices, regular meetings, online platforms, and strategic planning mechanisms to facilitate continuous information exchange and cooperation. Another key milestone was the first thematic seminar, *"Framing the Community of Practice,"* held in Rome in January 2025. This event provided a space for stakeholders to discuss common challenges, define governance goals, and explore strategies for improving wetland management. It emphasized the need for tools that enable cross-sectoral collaboration and the integration of diverse perspectives in decision-making. Using the World Café methodology, participants contributed proposals in three thematic areas to help shape the vision and objectives of a Mediterranean CoP focused on Wetland Contracts (Table 2).

Table 2. Thematic areas, guiding questions and key outcomes discussed during the World Café session in Rome to shape the objectives of the Mediterranean CoP on Wetland Contracts.

Topic	Guiding questions	Key outcomes
Legal Acknowledgment and Advocacy	<i>How can legal frameworks for Wetland Contracts be strengthened?</i>	Analyze national regulatory frameworks for Wetland Contracts
	<i>What advocacy actions are needed to increase recognition?</i>	Highlight links between Wetland Contracts and the Nature Restoration Law
		Engage policymakers in the CoP
		Promote leadership coaching to support Wetland Contract dissemination
Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building	<i>What tools or platforms can facilitate knowledge exchange?</i>	Emphasize the benefits of Wetland Contracts
	<i>How can training enhance stakeholder capacity?</i>	Deliver know-how through the MedWet platform
Finance for Governance and Action	<i>What are the most effective funding mechanisms for governance?</i>	Develop a business plan for the CoP
	<i>How can long-term financial sustainability be ensured?</i>	Promote new EU-funded projects on Wetland Contracts
		Define a quality certification for Wetland Contracts

The second part of the Rome seminar focused on defining key elements of a forthcoming policy paper, aimed at promoting the integration of Wetland Contracts into European environmental strategies and frameworks. The seminar marked the beginning of a collective reflection on necessary recommendations, as well as challenges and opportunities that should be addressed. A brainstorming session helped identify priority policy areas where Wetland Contracts can play a meaningful role, namely:

- Climate change adaptation
- Landscape and socio-cultural heritage
- Nature restoration and biodiversity protection

In each of the aforementioned areas, Wetland Contracts can empower local communities to take action by sharing responsibilities and commitments. By providing a shared vision and a practical action plan, Wetland Contracts can also support effective investments through greater integration and synergy across all sectors. Wetland Contracts has been acknowledged as able to promote integrated governance by engaging stakeholders in shared decisions and actions. They support climate adaptation, biodiversity restoration, and cultural heritage by aligning local priorities with broader environmental goals through participatory and place-based strategies.

5. A web platform to assess the current implementation of Wetland Contract at Med level

One of the key activities supporting the creation of the Community of Practice (CoP) for wetland governance in the Mediterranean is the development of a virtual collaborative web platform. This platform serves as a transnational hub designed to monitor, document, and disseminate good practices and data related to signed Wetland Contracts across the region. It is conceived as an open and interactive tool that fosters knowledge exchange among CoP members, while also facilitating continuous interaction and capacity-building processes. The structure and tools of the platform are inspired by previous Mediterranean experiences that have contributed to building shared knowledge on wetland management. The data were primarily collected and selected from open-source datasets such as:

- *Gest'eau*, the French platform that promotes integrated and sustainable water resource management. It provides information on planning tools such as SDAGE, SAGE, PTGE, and basin contracts, facilitating cooperation among local stakeholders. It is managed by the International Office for Water with support from the the Ministry of Ecological Transition. A dedicated section focuses on the *Contrats de Milieu* (Environmental Contracts).
- The Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO) that monitors the health of Mediterranean wetlands, providing data and indicators to guide conservation efforts. It supports sustainable water and biodiversity management. Established in 2008, it is coordinated by Tour du Valat.
- The Interreg Italy-Croatia CREW Observatory that is a transnational hub focused on monitoring and sharing best practices and data related to coastal wetlands in the Italian-Croatian cross-border region. It promotes sustainable wetland management through tools like the Wetland Contract, encouraging collaboration among public and private stakeholders.
- The inventory of Environmental Contracts in Mediterranean Ramsar and marine sites, developed within the framework of the Interreg MED TuneUp project.
- The inventory of Wetland Contracts signed in Italy provided by the Italian Board of River Contracts (*Tavolo Nazionale dei Contratti di Fiume*).

The WEGOCOOP platform, currently under experimentation, is organized into different sections that enable key environmental governance actors to interact through tools such as a repository, a WIKI, and a WebGIS. The core of the platform is the WIKI, which include river, lake, wetland, coastal, marine, and aquifer agreements, are categorized by typology and georeferenced for spatial analysis (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Current state of updating of the WE GO COOP virtual platform.

Each case study is documented through a standardized set of fields that capture both institutional and ecological dimensions. Key descriptors include the location (longitude and latitude of the centroid), contract's name, year of signature, and the main source of funding, ranging from international and EU programs to national or local funds. The platform also records the typology and identity of the reference organization, contact details, and the geographical and ecological context of the water body involved, including whether it falls under nature protection regimes such as Natura 2000 or regional parks. Governance characteristics are detailed through the number and type of signatories (public/private), sectors involved (e.g., agriculture, tourism, fisheries), and thematic priorities such as flood management, pollution control, and biodiversity conservation. Financial aspects are addressed through estimates of required and activated funding, while qualitative insights are captured via self-assessment metrics on stakeholder engagement, knowledge sharing, and strategic planning. Finally, each contract entry may include links to official documents and lessons learned, offering a comprehensive and comparative view of environmental governance practices in the Mediterranean region.

By integrating these resources into an accessible digital space, the platform enhances the effectiveness, scalability, and transferability of collaborative governance practices. This work presents the initial outcomes of the WE GO COOP project and demonstrates how the virtual platform functions as a pivotal tool for advancing wetland governance. By enabling the CoP to access, share, and co-create knowledge, the platform plays a central role in addressing the ecological and socio-economic challenges faced by wetlands in the Mediterranean and beyond.

6. Perspectives and ways forward

Wetland Contracts represent a forward-looking governance instrument, specifically designed to support the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of wetlands and associated ecosystems. Developed within the framework of key European environmental policies, such as the Water Framework Directive and the Nature Restoration Law, they offer concrete means of advancing the European Green Deal's biodiversity and climate adaptation objectives. These policies emphasize the need for integrative, inclusive, and multi-level governance approaches capable of addressing the ecological degradation of aquatic and terrestrial environments while promoting socio-economic resilience.

At the heart of Wetland Contracts is a participatory model of governance that mobilizes a broad spectrum of territorial actors, including public authorities, environmental NGOs, private landowners, scientific institutions, and local communities. This collaborative framework enables the co-production of knowledge and the alignment of diverse interests around shared ecological and socio-economic goals. Through coordinated interventions, Wetland Contracts support actions such as the removal of artificial barriers to restore hydrological connectivity, wetland re-naturalization to enhance carbon sequestration and flood mitigation, and the establishment of ecological corridors to combat habitat fragmentation.

Despite their innovative potential, the implementation of Wetland Contracts still presents several critical challenges. These include the need for stable funding mechanisms, the variability in institutional capacities across regions, and the complexity of coordinating heterogeneous stakeholder interests over the long term. In some cases, the lack of clear legal frameworks or integration with existing planning instruments can also hinder their full operationalization.

In this context, the Community of Practice (CoP) promoted by the WE GO COOP project plays a crucial role. It serves as a collaborative environment in which these challenges can be openly addressed through the exchange of experiences, joint problem-solving, and the development of shared methodologies. By facilitating structured dialogue among practitioners, policy-makers, researchers, and local actors, the CoP fosters mutual learning and contributes to the progressive refinement of Wetland Contracts as effective governance tools.

Beyond their immediate ecological and social benefits, Wetland Contracts may also contribute to broader biodiversity conservation frameworks, particularly to the definition of the so-called *Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures* (OECMs). Recognized under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), OECMs refer to areas that, although not formally designated as protected, achieve sustained biodiversity outcomes through effective and enduring governance (CBD, 2018; IUCN-WCPA. (2019).

The governance architecture of Wetland Contracts, emphasizing long-term engagement, adaptive management, and inclusive participation, can help identify and support such areas, especially where conservation objectives are achieved through locally driven processes.

By embedding Wetland Contracts within a dynamic and structured Community of Practice, governance is strengthened on multiple fronts: horizontally, by fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse actors; and vertically, by aligning local actions with national and European policy frameworks. This multi-level configuration enhances institutional coherence, improves implementation capacity, and ensures that wetland restoration efforts are both scientifically grounded and socially legitimate.

In conclusion, the combined approach of Wetland Contracts and the CoP promoted by WE GO COOP represents a robust and adaptable governance innovation. By addressing existing implementation challenges, supporting participatory and evidence-based decision-making, and contributing to broader conservation strategies such as OECMs, this model advances Europe's goals for biodiversity restoration, climate resilience, and territorial cohesion. It offers a replicable and scalable pathway for sustainable ecological governance in diverse socio-ecological contexts.

Attributions

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