

Cultural approaches to wise use of wetlands – past, present and future

Tuesday 23rd October, 19.40 to 21.00, Room 8



19.40 – Arabic dancers performed from 6pm to 6.15pm to promote the event, then from 7.30pm to 7.45pm immediately before the event and finally from 9pm until 9.15pm. We also created a display of posters and materials that had been laid out around the issue of culture.

20.00 – Short four minutes talks, films and other interventions on culture and wetlands

- Chris Rostron introduced the session and welcomed guests.

Gordana Beltram, Slovenia National Focal Point then explained the background to the session and how it related to the Draft Resolution 18.16 on Local Communities, indigenous populations and climate change.

- Presentation 1 – *Achievements of the MAVA culture network programme with a focus on the report on indigenous peoples and local communities, Mariam Ali (video)*. Mariam outlined the background to the Mava funding, and explained the thematic groups that had been set up by the Ramsar Culture Network. (add some stuff from the video). She said that only 15% of national reports mentioned cultural values, and that this is an area that does not receive sufficient attention.
- Presentation 2 – *“Restoration and conservation of a traditional water use system - UAE” a project from Emirates Nature -WWF in collaboration with The Water Project, presented by Adam Torrey – The Water Project*. This short presentation showed how traditional irrigation systems that have been used for centuries have been restored, and create benefit for biodiversity. Emirates Nature are working at Habhab and wadi Shis with local communities to raise awareness of this sustainable form of irrigation and its benefits. They also aim to designate wadi Shis as a site of international cultural importance.
- *Presentation 3 UNESCO – cultural values of wetlands and how they deliver good conservation outcomes; what UNESCO is doing and can offer the Ramsar community. Clemens Kupper, UNESCO*. 96 world heritage sites overlap with 135 Ramsar sites, showing the clear opportunity to combine these benefits for better site protection. A report on Ramsar and World Heritage Conventions: Converging Towards Success show the potential for the two convention and their activities to work better together. Scientific knowledge and local and indigenous knowledge could work much better together to deliver site protection.
- *Presentation 4 – Visual Storytelling, Jose Gabriel Mejia (previous winner of the Ramsar photo contest) on his work*. Gab used his prize money to travel to Patagonia to photograph the landscape, people and wildlife. This opportunity convinced him of the power of images and





visual storytelling to inspire and engage people in conservation. As a young person, he also promoted the role of youth in delivering conservation and changing attitudes towards wetlands.

- *Presentations 5 - WI Pantanal, Aurea de Silva Garcia, integrated community development.* This short video showed the importance of engaging local communities and involving them in the management of their own protected areas. Myth, legend and tradition all play a great role in strengthening the local support for wetlands. Traditional livelihoods and activities also help to

ensure the sustainability of the projects in the Pantanal wetlands.

- *Presentation 6 – Burkina Faso govt delegation, Director at Ministry for Coordination of International Agreements, Joel Awouhidia Korahire. Sacred crocodiles of Sabu.* The villagers of Sabu have lived alongside the crocodiles, which are regularly fed and treated as part of everyday life. The crocodiles represent the souls of the ancestors of the Kabore people and as such as treated with great respect. A folk story says that in the past a thirsty man was lost and dying of thirst when he came across a crocodile that gave him some water from its long tail.



They also provide a source of income through national and international tourism. These local beliefs and reliance on the wetland should be recognised and used to help long term management of the site.

- *Dr Yu give introduction to ICOMOS and invitation to cooperation for a meeting in 2019 in Taiwan.*

20.30 - The panel discussion, panel to be made up of:

- Chair: Gordana Beltram
- Co-chair: Chris Rostron
- Tunisian representative: Heli Guidara, government focal point
- Paule Gros, MAVA
- Youth representative – Elise Allely
- UNESCO – Clemens Kupper

The panel questions were focussed on the following points, and were followed by a discussion with the wider audience. The two questions included:

Q1: How should culture be continued as part of the Ramsar Convention?

Q2: What are your opinions on the future priorities for Ramsar around culture?

The case studies illustrated that culture is an essential part of delivering wetland conservation and protection, and should be included in Ramsar's approach. The networks set up by the MAVA funded Ramsar Culture Network form a great structure to allow this to happen, but they need some kind of platform and support to continue to function. Some sort of relationship needs to be formed with the Ramsar Convention, and it was suggested that culture is something that falls outside of the CEPA programme, and should be recognised separately. In the Arab region in particular, this is a strong focus, with people still living intimately with their wetlands. Although this has been lost somewhat

in some more developed Western countries, all countries can find some culture relevance in wetlands, which increases their relevance to local communities, and leads to better protection.

During the panel discussion the panel members all expressed some of their views on the above questions, starting with Gordana Beltram, former Chair of the MedWet Steering Group and Ramsar Focal Point for Slovenia, who asked the audience and panel members how in their opinion culture can be continued in the Ramsar Convention. Hela Guidara, Ramsar Focal Point for Tunisia and new Chair of the MedWet Steering Group, mentioned that one way of promoting culture in the Ramsar framework is through the new Resolution on “Cultural values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities and their contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands”. The Resolution, which promotes cultural diversity in wetlands, works towards resilience against climate change before 2040, encourages the Secretariat to review the Guidance on Culture and Wetlands reflecting that was proposed in the DR and to enrich the guidelines with specific case studies or good practices around culture. The Resolution also proposes to integrate the organisations that are partners and the networks that are created around cultural values.



Paule Gros, of the MAVA Foundation, expressed her satisfaction of the progress made so far on cultural values and wetlands, stressed the need to continue this work and invited participants to join ongoing projects on culture and wetlands that take place in the Mediterranean region, as well as the coastal West Africa. Clemens Kupper from the World Heritage Center of UNESCO highlighted the fact that culture is an integral part of sustainable development and that there are a number of wetland World Heritage sites from which case-studies can easily be derived, as there’s abundant information in the relevant State of Conservation reports. Elise Allély-Fermé, leader of the RCN Youth Engagement Thematic Group stressed the need to integrate cultural values and ecological values, combining the different sciences, ensuring the long-term management of sites and added that when promoting stories on culture and wetlands, the perspective of the youth is worth sharing. Comments and questions from the audience followed the issues that panel members had discussed. These included:

- The importance of sharing traditional local knowledge with policy makers and experts, to effectively protect it the same way that scientific knowledge is protected.
- The question of whether we need to rephrase the title of the session to ‘how the culture approach to the wise use of wetlands can help support community development in the world’?
- The announcement of the ICOMOS Conference on Water as Heritage, to be hosted in Chiay, Taiwan, next year 2019.
- The fact that the new Resolution on “Cultural values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities and their contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation in wetlands” is twofold: to maintain and promote communities and their way of adaptation to Climate Change and to maintain the network and make it sustainable. Also the question “how can the network be maintained and what’s its role?” was asked.
- The Ramsar Culture Network (RCN), according to Gordana Beltram, aims to bring together experience, knowledge and people from different organisations to act as a platform and establish linkages both inside and outside of the Ramsar Convention.
- Chris Rostron stressed the fact that although today the Ramsar Culture Network works under CEPA, it has a separate identity, which needs to be supported.

- Certain jobs are related to wetlands and are threatened by climate change, urbanization and agricultural pressures. Cultural values of wetlands should be taken into account and protected, including to ensure that traditional knowledge is transmitted between generations.

This document was prepared by the Ramsar Culture group, contact [Irin Lyrtsaki](#) or [Dave Pritchard](#) for further information.