

FOREWORD



20 years on from the first Technical Conference on the recycling of water in urban areas, held in Castell-Platja d'Aro in 1985, we can now say that many of the ideas put forward in those first, long ago meetings are nowadays a reality on the Costa Brava. What were then remote technical possibilities are now everyday facts of life.

20 years during which we have turned the theory into a reality. A quantified, measured, analysed, contrasted and expanded reality. A reality that distinguishes and validates and improves the theory. A reality in which multiple projects are developed, and a reality that year after year, and cubic metre after cubic metre, has allowed us to reach a point whereby 25% of all treated wastewater on the Costa Brava is recycled. And we have not finished yet. This is a remarkable percentage both in the context of the Iberian Peninsula and of other European

states. By the end of 2005, a total of 7,000,000 m³ will have been reclaimed along the length of the Costa Brava, in a dozen installations which bring together the entire diverse range of tertiary treatments.

After 20 years reclaimed water is being reused for a wide range of purposes by a variety of different users and with multiple benefits. A range which includes agricultural irrigation, from vines to vegetables, maize to fodder; landscape irrigation; the irrigation of five golf courses (every course on the Costa Brava except for one, which is already making the official application to use reclaimed water), a Pitch & Putt course, and a football pitch; the recycling of water for environmental benefits in the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Nature Preserve and in the streams of Tossa de Mar and Ridaura; the proposed recharge of aquifers to prevent seawater intrusion in the Baix Tordera; and finally a whole array of different uses for water in urban areas, ranging from the cleaning of streets and waste bins to the watering of parks and gardens, through to water which is used in anti-incendiary deposits in the region's mountain areas. This entire range of uses for recycled water is an everyday reality on the Costa Brava, especially surprising and appreciated particularly during dry periods.

20 years of recycling being seen as a tool for the progressive improvement of water cycle management at local level. A tool with multiple uses. Uses such as producing recycled water in order to meet demands which could not otherwise be met, as well as for optimising the environmental management of typical Mediterranean coastal area, purifying urban wastewaters and using their nutrients in an efficient way. A tool for using these nutrients in agriculture wherever they are needed and for substituting mineral fertilizers, or rather reducing them as much as possible wherever their use is not suitable for hydrogeological reasons or due to risk of eutrophication. And, as always, all this is met using the most advanced techniques to avoid unwanted and unnecessary health risks.

20 years of planning recycling at local level. A level -and an idea of recycling- which calls for an in depth knowledge of the local area. A knowledge that is gained by combing the area inch by

inch. By walking through streets and squares, by crossing valleys and following rivers, by getting muddy in the wetlands and sunning yourself in the dry lands, by putting up with the harsh north wind and enjoying the calmer, more relaxed conditions, by watching birds, mammals, fish, reptiles and plants, and also seeing how new constructions change the landscape –and oh they do!-. By talking with local institutions, associations, irrigation communities, local people, municipal technicians, town councillors and mayors, to learn things from all of them. And by learning as well through the daily practice of recycling.

20 years of progressive improvements. Getting things wrong from time to time and putting them right again. Asking ourselves with every new recycling project if the outcome will be an improvement on the current situation and if our users will come out of it better off than before, without ever forgetting -of course- the environmental risks and benefits. In this way we are advancing the recycling process, by fully analysing every single case and putting it in its local context. In other words, by only recycling when it solves problems and not when it creates them. This includes economic problems too.

20 years of recycling has allowed us to get to know the most relevant personalities in the field on a worldwide scale, and to form great institutional and personal relations with them all. These 20 years have also allowed us to make the work of the Consorci de la Costa Brava in the area of recycling known across the world. I can't continue without mentioning a few people to whom we wish to express recognition and appreciation. People such as Takashi Asano, who was present at the first and second conferences, and who in 2001 was awarded with the Stockholm Water Prize in recognition of his continued work in favour of planned water recycling; Pedro Arrojo, present at the conference in 1998, Goldman Environmental Prize winner in 2003 and President of the Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua; Rafael Mujeriego, a man always ready to help Consorci de la Costa Brava, President of the Water Reuse Group of the IWA from 1995 to 2000, and also President, since 2002, of the Consell per l'Ús Sostenible de l'Aigua a Catalunya. Other people I'd like to mention are Ramon Folch, Miquel Salgot, Joan Gaya, Manuel Suarez, James Crook and Marcelo Juanicó, all of them renowned professionals. And many other people, to whom I feel I must ask for forgiveness for not having cited them here. And how can we not mention Lluís Sala, the very soul of recycling at the Consorci de la Costa Brava and unrelenting secretary of the Water Reuse Group of the IWA for eight years (1995-2003). This specialist group, of international scale, held the 1st International Symposium right here in Castell-Platja d'Aro in 1991, a year which brings back great memories. A first international symposium which started on the Costa Brava and has since held successive sessions in Crete (1995), Paris (2000), Mexico (2003) and South Korea (2005). It is an honour for the Consorci de la Costa Brava to have been able to take part in the initiation of a specialist recycling group within the IWA and to see how it has strengthened over the course of time.

And, last but not least, a contribution to a new way of thinking about water, where reuse, saving, demand management and public participation are the fundamental principles. Fundamental principles orientated towards the sustainability of water policy. These shared principles which are put in to practice on a daily basis, together with the definite benefits of devolution, are, each and every one of them, necessary to guarantee a new improved management of the entire water cycle, from within the region and for the region itself.

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