

## O43.7

### **Science and tourism development conversing ankle-deep in estuarine mud: the makings of an ecosystem-based approach to the strategic planning of a major coastal tourism project in Tróia, Portugal**

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#### **Abstract**

This contribution presents an overview and discusses the added value of the close collaboration, ongoing for more than two decades, between a multidisciplinary research team and the promoter of a major coastal tourism resort in a sandy peninsula in SW Portugal.

The collaboration started in 1997 when the project was beginning to make the headlines, when the researchers invited the CEO of the economic group (SONAE) to visit a pristine tidal coastal lagoon where there were plans to build a large marina. At low tide, ankle-deep in estuarine sandy-mud, the researchers explained and showed to the promoters the costs of building and maintaining a marina in such an intertidal environment and the added value of preserving that ecosystem in its pristine shape, home to the last remaining salt marsh in that area, and to thousands of wintering aquatic birds: other than securing key ecosystem services, that option could attract a steady flow of avid birdwatchers in the low season of the main sun-sea (summer) tourism product.

This field trip set the stage for a long-standing close dialogue and collaboration between the research team and the promoter in what became the first tourism project in Portugal developed upon environmental information since its inception (first Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the kind in Portugal, prior to SEA legislation). It constituted an approximation to an ecosystem-based approach to coastal planning and management, based on the preservation and valorisation of the natural capital of this stretch of the peninsula, which resulted in significantly fewer tourism beds than allowed, reducing construction and preserving sensitive areas such as frontal (primary) dunes.

This science-tourism collaboration is an example of a win-win-win situation: for science (environmental monitoring, scientific production); for the developer (product differentiation; eco labels); and for the environment and society at large (protection of natural capital).

#### **Keywords**

ecosystem-based management, strategic environmental assessment, stakeholder dialogue, collaborative approaches