

Editor's note

Points of interest:

- Aveiro: an identity with the taste of salt
- The Mercantel

A year from now

A year from now ECOSAL Atlantis will end. It will be a time for farewells and taking stock. We will see what has been achieved, what may be continued and by whom, and what seeds were left and where they can germinate.

A year away from the end, the Assembly of partners of ECOSAL ATLANTIS held a meeting in November in Aveiro, Figueira da Foz and in Rio Maior and set the framework for the implementation of its various activities, keeping pragmatism as its motto, that is, meeting its goals with available resources, with the partners looking to find the best synergies for the development of the project's activities, with some members sometimes acting as motivators while others accompany, demanding dynamism and commitment from everyone.

Many of the activities and actions will quickly have to move from the "conceptual" level to the level of "materialization", giving substance to the ideas and the data that has been collected. An example of this is the heritage inventory that has generated field work, with the databases now being compiled so that the results can be made available to the public.

The monograph on the salt works of the Atlantic has a well-established content and structure and the shared authorship of the respective chapters and text boxes already have some specific proposals and their authors are producing their articles. Publishers in each of the four countries must now be found to ensure publication in the respective languages.

The set of indicators for tourism potential of the salt-producing sites is already being applied and tested in sites outside ECOSAL ATLANTIS. To address biodiversity, various new collaborative bases were established between partners, which will allow for the use of the same methodologies in the different sites.

A year away from the end, ECOSAL ATLANTIS has had considerable exposure on various platforms, either through its website and newsletter, through organized workshops and training courses relating to their own activities, in newspaper articles, and through the presenting of papers at seminars and conferences. In this field the public presentation of "Traditional Salt Making - Atlantic Route", that took place concomitantly with the Assembly of Partners, on November 15 in Aveiro is an important milestone, because already there are many organizations and individuals interested in developing the route, beyond the end of the project and beyond the sites and entities participating in ECOSAL ATLANTIS.

Creating the conditions for the continuity of the route, establishing a wide network of agents and actors connected with and interested in the heritage of the saltpans, creating common tools and knowledge that are useful for the management of this heritage: these are the major objectives of ECOSAL ATLANTIS. In the Assembly of Aveiro the first results of this comprehensive and integrated approach became patent. We have a year to give them substance and meaning.

Renato Neves
National coordinator of ECOSAL ATLANTIS in Portugal

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Aveiro: an identity with the taste of salt

Cultural heritage as a vector for sustainable development

“Several thousand years ago, the famous windows of the palace of heaven fell here. The windows remained intact in their frames, for they fell upon the green grass. Today they are the salt pans”.

Almada Negreiros, Portuguese author of the first half of the twentieth century

Since time immemorial, Aveiro has been associated with salt production, making this activity a prominent sector in the universe of local production activities. The oldest written document that is known today about this site attests to this sense of identity: the will of the Countess Mumadona Dias in favour of the Monastery of Guimarães, dated 26 January 959, in which she refers to a bequest *“cum omnibus prestationibus suis terras in Aluario et Salinas que ibidem comparauimus”*.

Administrative documents as well as records of a scientific nature and travel and adventure literature have shown, over the last few centuries, the importance that salt has played in the local economy and society in the same way that the impact the activity has on the landscape and the occupation of territory expresses it. Moreover, the use of the straight lines of the salt pans is not only confined to the definition of the salt plots but extends, according to the researcher Rui Tavares, to the very logic of the present housing lots in the neighbourhood of Beira Mar, the residential area of the city where the saltmaker and fishing community lived. In addition to this urban evidence, salt is present in every corner of the city ... in tile panels, in the designs in the Portuguese stone sidewalks, in

monuments and pottery, in the place names and in ceramics, that has used salt as a theme and as a glazing technique.

Today the production is considerably lower, when compared with the records and surveys of former salt harvesting. In 2011, we can see eight salt pans that are still in full activity [these are largely accessible by land] in sharp contrast with the approximately 250 salt pans of 1956, registered during the survey *Inquérito à indústria do sal* carried by the Comissão Reguladora de Produtos Químicos e Farmacêuticos.



Figure 1 - The representation of salt production in an urban space | tile panel honouring the estuary and the salt pans.

Despite the current state of affairs, salt is still produced using traditional methods and preserves its status as a symbol of Aveiro while continuing to motivate visits to the city and its close interconnection with the discovery of the lagoon landscape. The number of visitors to the Ecomuseu Marinha da Troncalhada has increased since 2000. This increase is a reflection of the interest in cultural and nature tourism, and in this singular heritage. The increased demand for hand crafted salt as well as the declared interest of several manufacturers in the development of its many products also demonstrate this.

In its awareness of these facts, the Municipality of Aveiro restored the Marinha da Troncalhada, changing it into a reference museum of this area, which explores the marriage between the city and the Ria de Aveiro, based on the practice of salt extraction. Currently, the ecomuseum is one of the nuclei of the City Museum which is structured around the concept of multi-focussed museum in a - multifaceted city. In this context, the mission and strategies for the enhancement of salt production take on an imminently cultural character, based on an integrated and sustainable management of the various museum contexts of the city: the City Museum, the Art Nouveau Museum, the Ethnographic Museum of Requeixo and the City itself (small museums that make up the Museum of the City of Aveiro, alongside the Ecomuseum Marinha da Troncalhada).

The articulated program of the various nuclei of the City Museum, in line with the region's thematic diversity seeks to address the interests of different audiences, with a view to attracting and retaining their interest while, concurrently aiming to preserve the individual identity of the values of Aveiro. Accordingly, with regard to the Eco-museum and together with regular thematic visits organised with various local tourism operators, we arrange dynamic activities that include events such as the International Salt Fair, exhibitions, art installations, performances on the salt pans themselves, as well as various actions in informal education and research support. In addition, there are frequent collaborations with other museum institutions, especially as regards the loan of pieces from the reserves of the City Museum that are directly associated with the production of salt, to appear in exhibitions or for the development of multimedia resources.

The participation of the Municipality of Aveiro in the ECOSAL Atlantis project fits into this context by generating dynamics in the cultural / museum spaces as a means of enhancing the cultural heritage and, by extension, as a strategy for local development. Consequently, we consider the creation and implementation of the Sal Tradicional Rota do Atlântico as an asset of the project, as it provides an integrated way of disseminating information on the production of salt in general and on the site in Aveiro in particular, as well as promoting the sharing of experiences, resources and knowledge with other partners.

This reality justifies the commitment of the Aveiro Municipality to the project actions related with cultural heritage [Activity 4] and regional development [Activity 5], including the coordination of the following:

- Cultural heritage inventory [Action 4.2. shared coordination with Ecomusee Le Daviaud] | aiming to design a common database on



Figure 2 - International salt fair of Aveiro 2011.



Figure 3 - Contemporary art in the Ecomuseum | Installation art Rui Aguiar | Group visit.



Figure 4 - Mounds of salt along the line of crystallization | Ecomuseu Marinha da Troncalhada.



Figure 5 - Training in traditional salt making in Aveiro| action carried out under the Sal do Atlântico project | Interreg IIIB.



Figure 6 - View of the salt barn and drying plot with a mound of salt | Ecomuseu marinha da Troncalhada.

cultural heritage sites associated with the practice of salt production, whose main objective is to generate a source of reliable information available to the public and simultaneously a work instrument to ascertain and locate the various salt-related heritage elements that exist in the Atlantic area.

- Heritage and museum management [4.4 Action] | structuring guidelines for local action and action in the sphere of the salt route with regard to management, development and promotion of this heritage and the salt-making areas of the Atlantic, with a view to developing an endogenous strategy for internal work of the partners and an exogenous one, as a tool for information/dissemination and the mobilization of the public.
- Good production practices oriented to tourism [5.3 Action] | training sessions scheduled for the 5th 6th and 7th December 2011, in the Museum of the City of Aveiro for producers and managers of salt-production sites. The assignment of different meanings and interpretations to salt-production sites, and by extension, to other associated images and functions makes the salt-makers/producers face new challenges nowadays. Therefore, rather than address issues concerning the production of salt, of which they have ample knowledge and are the best trainers/teachers, this training focuses on issues which relate to tourism and museology: interaction with the public, new products, the provision of information, legal guidelines and, above all, a real sense of this project and the salt route.
- Technical Sessions on Heritage [5.4 Action] | this entails the execution of a document/manual of guidelines for good techniques in heritage and museology management, to be presented at the meeting of experts and museum organizations of the various sites, in 2012.

From the perspective of the Municipality of Aveiro, to research our own cultural heritage, to make it better known amongst various stakeholders and to create a close link with the local community are all ways of generating territorial sustainability and promoting integrated development, coupled with the strengthening of the place's identity: in the case of

Aveiro these are the chosen strategies that will ensure the conservation of Almada Negreiros' "windows of the palace of heaven" and in which, according to Miguel Torga, the saltmakers can continue to "architect whiteness."

Ana Gomes, Ana Oliveira, Gabriela Mota Marques
Câmara Municipal de Aveiro | Museu da Cidade de Aveiro

Character

The mercantel

The Ria de Aveiro is a large lagoon, wide at the center with canals feeding into it. These are simple streams or watercourses a few miles upstream but they widen and expand until they reach the center of the lagoon, where it opens out into the sea.

The lagoon landscape knows many variations; the tides cover and uncover large areas of sand, marshes and bogs. Reeds and rushes form fringes that boarder the lagoon and the canals. Islands of marshes and meadows appear in the middle of the large body of water, colonizing areas that have been silted. Beyond the fringes of the brackish water from the tides, there are flat fields where corn and potatoes are grown, divided by hedges of willows and bushes that form a geometric landscape that is annually swamped by the floods of winter. To the west,

limiting and facing the sea, one can see an extensive line of sand dunes where pine trees try to still the dunes, at times in a precarious balance, often broken by the force of waves.

This is a landscape of water and life, around which people settled densely in cities, towns and villages. People and places separated and connected by water and boats invented for all sorts of functions, the best known of which is the *moliceiro*, to gather seaweed, and many others, to load the grass and reeds collected from the islands, for the various fishing arts, for hunting, and because the estuary is also the site of salt pans, for the transportation of salt. The mercantel was made for this purpose, with its 19 meter length and capable of carrying between 14 and 15 tons of salt, it is the largest vessel of the lagoon, although less exuberantly decorated than the *moliceiro*, it is also ornamented on the inside with geometric and floral motifs and, like the *moliceiro*,



Figure 2 - Picture from the book *Sailboats of Portugal* - Francisco Correia Figueira.

proudly exhibits the symbol of its builder at the helm.

The Portuguese name mercantel is linked to commodities, and indeed the mercantel carried far more than salt, it shipped cattle and horses bound for the pastures on the islands; it transported the clay that was needed for the repairing of the walls and embankments of the salt pans as well as the sand destined to compress their floors; at a time when roads and trucking only connected the main localities and the principal passageways, avoiding the flooded lands and muddy arms of the lagoon, the mercantéis arrived and departed from the small pier in the lagoon with a plethora of goods and products in a type of coastal navigation.

Nowadays, although they still go to the rare salt pans of the islands to fetch salt, the mercantéis have a new function; they transport tourists, both in the navigable canals in the city of Aveiro, and on the lagoon. The sails now seldom drag the mercantéis on the mirror of the waters, they are propelled through the waters of the lagoon by means of outboard motors.

New uses but somehow they still perpetuate the salt boat of Aveiro, the city of salt pans.



Figure 1 - A builder's mark from a mercantel



Figure 3 - A new function for mercantel - boat trips on the estuary.

Renato Neves
National coordinator of ECOSAL ATLANTIS in Portugal

Events

Workshop Mud, Health and Wellness

University of Aveiro, November 5th 2011

On November 5th, at Aveiro University the Workshop "Mud, Health and Wellness" was held. This workshop allowed, in the morning, to share information between experts and participants about the physical and chemical properties of special sands and mud, used in diverse treatments, such as medical treatments and derma-cosmetics treatments. In the afternoon, there was a technical visit to Caldas das Saúde Thermal Baths, where the ways of applying mud in such treatments was demonstrated.

University of Aveiro



Public presentation of the route "Traditional Salt - Route of the Atlantic"

University of Aveiro, November 15th 2011

Parallel with the annual meeting of ECOSAL ATLANTIS project, on the afternoon of 15 November was held a public presentation of the route "Traditional Salt - Route of the Atlantic". This presentation aimed at exchanging experiences between the project partners and the discussion around the creation of a tourist route around the traditional salt marshes of the Atlantic arc and its contribution for the development of salt production by traditional methods.

[See the presentations of the partners and a video about the event.](#)

University of Aveiro



Partners' assembly

University of Aveiro, 15th, 16th and 17th November 2011

The second annual meeting of the partners of the project ECOSAL ATLANTIS was held in Aveiro, Figueira da Foz and Rio Maior (Portugal) between 15th and 17th of November.

During these two and a half days, each partner presented the current status of the activities under its responsibility, allowing the other partners to know the state of progress of each action and of the project.

As was planned in the meeting agenda, there was a guided tour to the Rio Mairo salt pans.

The national project coordinators assembled on November 14th in Aveiro for a global evaluation of the ECOSAL ATLANTIS Project.

