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# **ARTICLES**

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# CONTRIBUTION TO THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ECOPLATA PROGRAMME FOR INTEGRATED COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT (URUGUAY)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) is: 1) an administration process and 2) aimed at human development but at the same time it 3) aims to preserve natural and cultural resources (Barragán, 2003). In this definition as well as others (Clark, 1992; Carvalho and Rizzo, 1994; UNEP, 1995; OECD, 1995; Cicin-Sain and Knecht, 1998; Kay and Alder, 1999; the European Commission, 2000; the Council of Europe, 2000, a, b; UNESCO/COI, 2006) it is assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, that ICZM is a tool which serves a certain public policy. Said policy is understood to be that which a governmental authority decides to implement or not, seeing as the latter is also a form of action. A few hypotheses can be construed from the above (Barragán, Chica, Pérez-Cayeiro, 2008):

- Coastal management is included in the framework of public policies which operate in the service of the sustainable development of these geographical environments.
- ICZM is a specific interpretation of a certain management model which is largely identified with the concept of government.

Some of the underlying ideas which support these hypotheses are: ICZM is based on the ecosystem, thus concerning ecologic, social and economic aspects in all sectors and organisations as well as in the various levels of government; ICZM is an adaptive management process which is capable of learning from experience; ICZM has a strategic aspect and a capacity for anticipation, focused on the long-term. Lastly, ICZM requires the active participation of the social and institutional agents with interests in coastal areas and the resources therein. In this respect, the point of interest of the objectives in this article is centred on two essential elements of coastal management:

- A) Evaluating the Ecoplata Programme as a long-term management plan. According to Gee *et al.* (2006), the monitoring and evaluation of a programme ensures that the ICZM is adaptive. Therefore, the strategic vision in the next ICZM cycle will be formulated based on the fulfilment of the planned objectives and results.
- B) Critically analysing an integrated coastal zone management experiment in Latin America. The purpose is to make a contribution to the knowledge of coastal zone management. Furthermore, the intention is to disseminate the results of the management process to those involved and other interested parties.

## II. FORMAL ASPECTS: METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The methodology followed in the design of this work was inspired by some of the models presented in manuals and studies carried out by authors who approached the matter in Latin America (Olsen, Lowry and Tobey, 1999; Barragán, 2003; Olsen, 2003; Olsen and Ochoa, 2004) and by others which were published by international organisations (the European Commission, 1999; UNESCO/COI, 2001, 2003 and 2006; UNDP, 2009).

In this respect, various matters have been identified which attempt to address the level of fulfilment of the objectives and actions planned and implemented by the Programme. The assessment is expressed in qualitative terms with three variables: unfavourable (U), average (A) and favourable (F). Lastly and in terms of a general conclusion, there is a summary of the evaluation, using a SWOT analysis matrix (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

## III. CONTEXT. THE COASTLINE OF URUGUAY AND THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF COASTAL ZONES

According to Barragán (2005 a and b), it can be affirmed, generally speaking, that coastal zones have a highly relevant role in Latin America. In Uruguay, there are various reasons which justify said affirmation: a) from an environmental point of view, they support rich and productive ecosystems which maintain economic development to a great extent (Viana, 2009: 9); b) they are the concentration point of 69% of the population as well as of the main economic activities, generating more than 70% of the national GDP; c) the large metropolis, Montevideo, is located on the coast; d) the majority of the ports are of national importance; e) a large proportion of the industrial production and the commerce of higher value products is concentrated in the aforementioned metropolis and ports; f) the coastal areas constitute the main tourist destination of Uruguay and the surrounding countries, namely Argentina and Brazil (UNEP, CLAES and DINAMA, 2008; Viana, 2009), receiving almost 80% of the tourists who visit the country.

In parallel to this process, the coastal zone of Uruguay has undergone changes at an accelerated rate and these produce a series of problems and conflicts.

As a consequence, since the 90s, the country has developed a series of experiments, with distinctly varying levels of scope, scale and success, aimed at the promotion of the integrated management of coastal zones. In addition to Ecoplata, the feature of this work, other programmes include *Freplata* and *Probides* (Conde, 2006: 68).

## **IV. THE ECOPLATA PROGRAMME**

At present, Ecoplata is a programme with the objective of strengthening public administrations, the scientific community, the managers and Uruguayan society in general, with regards to aspects linked to integrated coastal zone management. The Programme is based on an inter-institutional agreement between the Ministry of Housing, Land Use Planning and the Environment, the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fishing, the National Defence Ministry and the Universidad de la República. The National Directorate of Sanitation and Waters, the Directorate of Renewable Resources, the National Naval Prefecture and the coastal Municipal Administrations (Colonia, San José, Montevideo, Canelones, Maldonado and Rocha) are also participating.

### **IV.1. Origin and evolution**

Since its constitution in 1991, after the signing of an agreement between the Uruguayan Government and Dalhousie University of Halifax (Nova Scotia, Canada), the Ecoplata Programme has passed through five stages which make up a cycle. These stages are summarised below:

During the period between 1991 and 1993, links were established between the scientific communities of Uruguay and Canada. This led to the Programme being oriented towards the strengthening of research capacities in marine sciences (Martínez and Fournier, 1999).

In 1997, the next stage of the Programme (1997-2001) was approved with the purpose of contributing to the integrated management of the resources of the Uruguayan coastal zone of the Río de la Plata. Using an interactive and inter-disciplinary process, the Programme aimed to contribute to the formulation of integrated management policies and strategies. These were being developed by the governmental institutions within their fields, with the participation of the social actors involved. This phase saw the incorporation of lines of research related to the social sciences and the terrestrial areas of the Río de la Plata coast were addressed.

This stage (2006-2009) is the subject of this article, its motto is “to connect knowledge with action” and its purpose is the implementation of the project (the Ecoplata Programme, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2009a and 2009b). The emphasis is on three key aspects of the prime directives of integrated coastal zone management (Barragán, 2010, 2009, 2003 and Pérez-Cayeiro, 2013): participation; public information and scientific knowledge; and coordination and cooperation.

The Ecoplata Programme is currently in the institutionalisation phase, according to the model (UNESCO/COI, 2001). The formal acceptance of the management programme is the end of legitimisation process which began in the first stage. Proof of this is that in 2011 the Programme was assigned to the Ministry of Housing, Land Use Planning and the Environment (MVOTMA), in order to contribute to the development of a national policy for integrated management of the coastal and marine zone. It should be emphasised that from this stage forwards, Ecoplata funding was assumed by the Uruguayan government. Thanks to this process, the management should be considered, by the specialists and politicians involved, to be part of a social agreement.

## IV.2. Characteristics of the Ecoplata Programme (2006-2009)

With the general objective of fortifying ICZM using a model of government for the sustainable development of the Río de la Plata coastline, the specific objectives are those detailed below (the Ecoplata Programme, 2007, 2009a and 2009b):

1. To favour the participation and coordination of the institutions and actors linked to the coastal zone, supporting the development of a model of government for ICZM which incorporates the knowledge gained.
2. To generate and systemise knowledge via the applied and participative compilation of researchers' information and advances, to support the coastal management models.
3. To coordinate the project's inherent technical/specialist activities.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, it must be highlighted that international cooperation, in this case coming from the *International Development Research Centre - Canada (IDRC)* via the sponsorship of the Ecoplata Programme, has managed to generate a remarkable amount of awareness and governmental commitment to the coast. As an expression of understanding and international collaboration between the parties, integrated coastal zone management is now interpreted as a strategic management area in Uruguay. In other words, in this exercise of cooperation, this meeting of wills has become a powerful instrument to consolidate and address ICZM in the country over the years (Pérez-Cayeiro, 2012).

Also worthy of mention are the important efforts made by the Ecoplata Programme to favour understanding between the two levels of administration - state and municipal - on the coast of Uruguay. This may have contributed in some way to the social and economic stability which the country has enjoyed in recent years, not forgetting that, in terms of dimensions, it is a country with around 700km of coastline and more than 3 million inhabitants.

Unlike other, similar initiatives, the Ecoplata Programme has managed to reach governmental levels. And this means that the initiative will still continue when the external support and financing has ended. However, political aspirations play a fundamental role in the continuation of the established procedures, which in this case have been in place for over a decade. In any case, the challenge of this new stage, without a doubt, will be to prove that ICZM can be carried out with its own resources. The initiative is currently funded by national finances. In some ways, this can be considered to be a big step towards the institutionalisation of the initiative. This is essential for the consolidation of a specific policy for coastal zones.

Ecoplata represents an unmissable opportunity to institutionalise a model of sustainable development in the coastal zones of Uruguay. Therefore the initiative should be rated positively in the sense that the MVOTMA has been able to provide a modern tool for the management of its coastal zones. This has permitted the consolidation of a good base for integrated management.

The general idea which underlies all of that written above is that the Ecoplata Programme is very favourable. This initiative, as a political decision and project directed at action, at "connecting knowledge with action", is of enormous importance for the Uruguayan coastline. It should be highlighted that it constitutes a relevant contribution to the design of the institutional instrument which will very probably manage the country's coastal zones in the future.