

InnWater Article

#5 WEFE Nexus in the Middle Brenta pilot site



INN WATER

Promoting social innovation to renew multi-level and cross sector water governance



The middle Brenta river basin and the need for a Nexus approach to water management

Context to this InnWater Pilot site

The Middle basin of the Brenta River in the Italian region of Veneto is recognised at the European level for its ecological and cultural importance. It has been included in the Natura 2000 network under the name "Grave e Zone Umide del Brenta". In addition to its environmental value, the Middle Brenta area has also acquired a high strategic value for the water supply of the Veneto Region, providing drinking water to 1.5 million people - about 30% of the regional population.

Problems

Despite the recognition in the Natura 2000 network for its ecological and cultural importance, the Middle Brenta area has not been managed with biodiversity objectives in mind. Like many Natura 2000 sites in Italy, the Middle Brenta lacked a designated local management authority, an approved management plan, and allocated funding for conservation measures. Moreover, the large geographical size of the site has led to fragmented management by several authorities, each applying sector-specific practices and policies that often conflict with each other regarding land and resource management, including agriculture, drinking water, and biodiversity.

In this context, the lack of coordination between actors from different sectors, as well as between actors within the same sector, leads to missed opportunities to better manage the site and enhance ecosystem services. The lack of integrated governance combined with conflicting regulations in different sectors, such as water safety, agriculture, and Natura 2000 directives, has led to land use conflicts within the site and significant anthropogenic impacts.

These impacts have degraded water resources, river and wetland habitats of conservation interest, and associated species.



The Middle Brenta area is fundamental for the water sector of the Veneto region. The site is also a Natura 2000 protected area.

Progress towards Nexus-oriented management

Based on different funding sources, among which one of the most important has been the LIFE Brenta 2030, the Parco Fiume Brenta initiative was born in 2016 to take the first steps towards Nexus-oriented governance, linking water resource management with biodiversity conservation. One of the main achievements of the initiative has been to align the drinking water planning with the Natura 2000 objectives by integrating Environmental and Resource Costs (ERC) in the drinking water tariff, in line with Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive. The revenue generated by these costs enables the creation of an environmental fund that allows the implementation of multifunctional measures that can compensate for and mitigate the impact of water services on ecosystems and protect both water quality, quantity, and biodiversity.

Furthermore, to integrate the ERC into the drinking water tariff, a participatory process involving various institutional stakeholders was promoted in the Middle Brenta, resulting in the designation of the local drinking water authority (*Consiglio di Bacino Brenta*) as the new local management body for the Natura 2000 site.

The role of the InnWater project

The integration of the ERC into the drinking water tariff and the designation of a local management body for the Natura 2000 site were essential steps towards a nexus-oriented management approach, as it allowed both water resources and biodiversity to be managed in an integrated way. Nevertheless, future actions must be considered to integrate other sectors directly impacting water consumption and management. The InnWater project seeks to use this pilot site area to explore ways to apply the integrated approach to other sectors, such as agriculture, to continue building Nexus-oriented governance as well as to improve communication to raise awareness and inform citizens about the importance of conserving the water, the ecosystems and their services.

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