

 AQUATIK•EU

D5.1 Pre-WP5 event discussion document and report on the implementation

30 June 2026



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1. INTRODUCTION

- Rationale behind the event

The AQUATIK-EU project addresses urgent water management challenges within a European and Mediterranean context marked by climate change impacts, resource scarcity, unequal water access, and the erosion of traditional water-related knowledge. These interconnected challenges demand integrated responses that extend far beyond isolated technical solutions.

A critical observation underpins this work: local authorities, practitioners, and communities across diverse territories often face remarkably similar water governance challenges, yet they face them in isolation and limited resources to connect with other territories. Geographic dispersion, limited cross-border dialogue, and fragmented knowledge systems leave local actors without adequate peer networks or learning partnerships. Communities of Practice (CoPs) were designed to address this gap directly.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) serve as strategic platforms that voluntarily bring together geographically dispersed professionals, practitioners, and local authorities across Europe and partner Mediterranean countries. They create an enabling environment for:

- Shared problem-solving around locally contextualised water challenges
- Peer learning grounded in applied, real-world experience
- Collective voice-building, amplifying the perspectives and expertise of local actors who often operate without institutional visibility
- Horizontal collaboration among equals, transcending the asymmetries of formal hierarchies

By connecting diverse territories through recognition of shared challenges, CoPs position local actors not as isolated implementers, but as equal partners in generating knowledge and driving innovation.

Three foundational principles enable effective CoPs:

- Voluntary participation – Members choose to engage, rather than being mandated or assigned
- Peer-to-peer connection – Horizontal dialogue replaces hierarchical structures, enabling genuine exchange among equals
- Self-organisation – Members collectively shape agendas, establish shared responsibility, and make decisions based on mutual commitment

Scope and Reach: A Euro-Mediterranean Perspective

The CoP operates through a hybrid online format, enabling broader participation across different territories. This structure explicitly includes Southern Mediterranean perspectives, drawing experiences from Tunisia, Morocco, and Palestine, where water-related pressures are particularly acute. By connecting these diverse contexts, the CoP amplifies local voices and ensures that solutions remain rooted in place-based realities while benefiting from comparative learning across regions.

The result is a structured, continuous space where Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations, experts, thematic networks (such as Water Museums), and engaged citizens can exchange experiences, compare approaches, and collectively advance participatory water governance at the scale where it matters most: the local level.

- Brief description of the event.

This online global water community of practices was designed to facilitate the exchange of successful water management and valorization practices linked to multi-stakeholder governance experiences, and aimed at public authorities and civil society actors, especially Local Authorities (LAs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The Community of Practice pursues five concrete goals:

- Identify shared interests and priority themes among local actors working on water governance.
- Exchange concrete practices and applied experiences in water governance and management.
- Strengthen the contribution of local-level experiences to the improvement of public water policies.
- Foster a sustainable and active Community of Practice that continues beyond the lifespan of the AQUATIK project.
- Incorporate experiences from at least 10 European countries (including North Macedonia and Albania), while reinforcing a Euro-Mediterranean perspective that draws in Southern Mediterranean contexts such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Palestine, where water challenges are especially acute.

Key Information

- Event name: On line Global Water Community of Practices
- Date and location: 07 May and 21 May 2026 at 13.00 CET
- Organizers: Fons Mallorquí de Cooperació I Solidaritat

Event Overview

2. PRE-EVENT DISCUSSION NOTE

a. Main activities.

The pre-event discussion note was designed as a starting point to frame clear ambition: the event must not be a one-off information exchange, but rather the starting point of a collective learning process that feeds into the project's subsequent Work Packages (WP7, WP8, and WP9).

This document also includes the methodology based on the principle that Communities of Practice are strategic instruments for knowledge capitalisation, exchange, and long-term sustainability – providing a structured, continuous space where Local Authorities (LAs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), experts, thematic networks (such as Water Museums), and active citizens can compare approaches and learn from applied practices grounded in multi-actor participatory governance.

The methodology included a participatory, interactive format as the event was designed to avoid purely lecture-based formats. Instead, it combined:

- Short presentations of selected experiences (around five minutes each).
- Moderated plenary discussions structured around guiding questions.
- Breakout rooms / rapid "governance clinics"
- Collective identification of key learnings and transferable elements.

All of it was provided by a facilitator and the support of the Aquatik-Eu partners to dynamize the breakout groups.

Selection of experiences (eligibility framework) was based on activities involving or led by local authorities, CSOs, and citizens following five thematic criteria: governance & multi-actor cooperation; basin-based planning & institutional

capacity, public participation & social innovation, sustainability, climate resilience & water stewardship; innovation, circular economy & replicable impact.

At the same time, the leader of this WP invited all the partners of the Aquatik-EU to disseminate the call. For that purpose, a communication Toolkit with templates was created in order to be flexible and adaptable to each territory.

3. REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION

- Guests and participants

The call gathered more than 20 experiences, including local authorities, CSOs and citizenship.

Dates: 07 May at 13:00 and 21 May 2026 at 13:00

Attendance

- Number of attendees: 101.
- Type of audience: local authorities, CSOs, citizens, practitioners, researchers.

a. Event structure and format

The Water Learning Community was organized as an international online series consisting of two interactive sessions. Rather than a traditional webinar format that relies on passive listening, the sessions were designed as participatory learning experiences in which practitioners, local authorities, civil society organizations, and water governance experts could actively engage with case studies, discuss governance dilemmas, and explore shared learning across diverse geographic contexts.

The two-session format allowed for in-depth exploration of water governance challenges while maintaining flexibility for participants across multiple time zones. Each session focused on distinct yet complementary themes, allowing participants to attend based on their interests and availability.

b. Session Schedule

The Water Learning Community consisted of two sessions scheduled as follows:

- SESSION 1: Water Governance Innovation and Adaptation
 - Date: May 7, 2026.
 - Time: 13:00 CET (Central European Time)
 - Duration: 2 hours

- SESSION 2: Water Heritage, Territorial Integration.
 - Date: May 21, 2026
 - Time: 13:00 CET (Central European Time)
 - Duration: 2 hours

c. Time Zone Rationale

The decision to schedule both sessions at 13:00 CET (1:00 PM Central European Time) reflects a careful consideration of geographic diversity among participants:

- Eastern European participants (Bosnia, Greece, Montenegro, Moldova): 13:00-14:00 local time (mid-afternoon, accessible).
- Western European participants (Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany): 13:00 local time (mid-afternoon, peak working hours).
- North African/Mediterranean: 12:00-13:00 local time (early afternoon, accessible).
- Central American participants (Peru, Guatemala): 6:00-7:00 AM (early morning, before typical work day).
- Canadian participants: 7:00-8:00 AM (early morning, possible before work).
- Central Asian participants (Iran, Middle East): 15:30-16:30 local time (late afternoon, accessible)

The decision prioritized European participation (as the project is EU-funded and focuses primarily on European water governance) while ensuring that Global South perspectives could be included through flexible participation options (live attendance for those able, recorded viewing and asynchronous discussion for others).

4. SESSION DYNAMICS AND FACILITATION APPROACH

The Water Learning Community was designed around the principle that effective learning about water governance comes through active engagement with real cases and shared problem-solving, not passive reception of expert presentations.

Both sessions employed a "learning community" model that emphasized:

- Practitioners' knowledge as central, not peripheral.
- Real dilemmas and challenges, not sanitized "success stories"
- Interactive discussion and peer learning, not lectures.
- Connection and solidarity among local actors, not competition.
- Adaptation and context-specificity, not universal solutions.
- Participatory problem-solving, not top-down instruction

5. SESSION STRUCTURE

Each of the two sessions followed a consistent, carefully designed structure to maximize participant engagement and learning:

- a) Welcome and Opening Frame (20 minutes)
- b) Content:
 - Welcome by organizers (Fons Mallorquí de Cooperació i Solidaritat).
 - Acknowledgment of the effort and commitment required for international online participation.
 - Introduction to the Water Learning Community's vision and objectives.
 - Explanation of language accessibility (English as working language; clarity and mutual and practical information (recording, muting, chat guidelines, etc.).
- c) Opening Reflective Question (15 minutes)
 - Breakout rooms (10 minutes): Participants were divided into small groups (5-8 people per room) to discuss:
Session 1 and 2: *"What helps you maintain hope in a time of water emergency?"*
Outcome: Brief report-back of themes from breakout discussions; creates a sense of shared commitment among participants
- d) Case Study Presentations (20-25 minutes)
 - Format: four initiatives present sequentially, 5 minutes per presentation. Presentations focus on: geographic context, specific water challenge, governance dilemma (framed as an open question, not with a predetermined answer)
Deliberate choice NOT to present the "solution" yet - inviting participants to think critically about what might work. Participant task during presentations and listen carefully to three guiding questions:
 - What might be valuable to try in this case?
 - What conditions would help or hinder success?
 - What might be transferable to my own context?

Facilitation approach: Presentations kept brief and accessible; jargon minimized; visual/storytelling elements emphasized; emphasis on dilemma rather than "solved problem"

e) Interactive Breakout Room Discussion: Deep, facilitated dialogue about governance dilemmas; peer problem-solving; exploration of transferable principles.

- Format: participants divided into 4 breakout rooms (one per case study).
- Small group size (12-20 participants per room) allows for genuine dialogue.
- Each room's case study presenter joins the discussion.
- Facilitator guides conversation using a structured approach.
- Breakout room process:

Part A (15 min): Participant responses to case study

What did you notice about this case?

What might work? What might be barriers?

What is transferable to your context?

Part B (25 min): Deeper governance analysis:

What institutional changes would enable this approach?

How do you address power imbalances?

What resources/support would be needed?

How do you sustain participation over time?

Part C (15 min): Learning extraction

What is the core principle underlying this approach?

How would you adapt this to your context?

What questions remain?

The facilitator role ensured participation (drawing out quieter participants), synthesized insights emerging from discussion, identified transferable principles and context-specific adaptations, and managed time and kept focus on core governance questions

f) Plenary Synthesis and Project Responses (30-35 minutes):

Format: Each breakout room reports key insights (5 min per room = 20 min total).

Content of presenter responses:

- Description of approach taken (not necessarily "success story")
- How they navigated the dilemma
- Challenges encountered and how addressed.

- What they would do differently.
- Invitation for continued dialogue.
Closing and Community Building (10 minutes)

Purpose: Close session; invite reflection and commitment to continued learning; preview next session

6. PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

Session 1 Participating Initiatives (May 7)

UNITED FOR RIVERS (Balkans/Southeast Europe)

Presenter: Edo Balic (Association Dinarica)

Location: Bosnia and Herzegovina, with partners in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia

Organization: Association Dinarica / Nature Conservancy partnership.

Focus: Regional river protection initiative combining advocacy, communication, public engagement, and nature-based solutions.

Theme: How regional networks can support diverse local struggles without imposing uniform solutions

Key Activities:

- Public murals and art colonies for environmental engagement
- Translation of complex environmental issues into accessible public messages.
- Cross-border coordination for river protection.
- Regional network building and knowledge exchange
- Advocacy for policy change.

ALIANÇA PER L'ÁGUA (Ibiza, Spain)

Presenter: Juan Calvo.

Location: Ibiza, Spain (Mediterranean island)

Organization: Aliança per l'Água (non-profit organization) Focus: Addressing water crisis in small island facing scarcity, tourism pressure, and aquifer salinization

Theme: How to reduce conflict and coordinate action when basic physics cannot meet demand

Key Activities:

- Dialogue spaces bringing together institutions, tourism sector, agriculture, civil society.
- Transparency through annual water indicators.
- Participation and education programs.
- Infrastructure improvements and network modernization
- Nature restoration efforts
- Demand reduction and water cycle closure

WATERVILLE PROJECT (Mediterranean Rural Areas)

Presenter: Nina Tsiklaouri (NALAS)

Location: Nine countries including Balkans; four pilot municipalities

Organization: Waterville Interreg Euro-MED Project; NALAS (Network of Associations of Local Authorities of Southeast Europe)

Focus: Modernizing rural and mountain water systems through smart technologies, nature-based strategies, and community knowledge

Theme: How municipalities can adopt advanced water technologies without becoming dependent on external expertise

Key Activities:

- Smart monitoring technologies and digital tools deployment
- Leak detection and water loss reduction
- Water quality improvement
- Integrated water management modelling
- Community of Practice development
- Training and workshop programs for water professionals

SMART WATER GOVERNANCE IN SOULI (Greece)

Presenter: Antonia Papa

Location: Municipality of Souli, Paramythia, northern Greece

Organization: Municipality of Souli (local authority)

Focus: Introducing smart water technologies in small municipality while building institutional capacity

Theme: How to adapt innovation to local capacity rather than creating external dependency

Key Activities:

- Smart monitoring technologies implementation
- Internet of Things devices and hydraulic modelling
- Flexible, phased approach to technology adoption
- Municipal capacity-building and training
- Community engagement and participation
- Adaptation to infrastructure realities and delays

Session 2 Participating Initiatives (May 21)

VALLE OF MILLS (Castelnuovo Magra, Italy)

Presenter: Giulia Sergiampietri

Location: Liguria, northern Italy

Organization: Municipality of Castelnuovo Magra

Focus: Preservation and activation of medieval water heritage landscape

Theme: How to make historic water heritage meaningful and economically sustainable through gradual activation and community engagement

Key Activities:

- Volunteer trail maintenance and heritage restoration
- School and educational program integration
- Interpretation infrastructure (information totems, digital resources)
- Eco-museum model development
- Sustainable tourism integration
- Intergenerational engagement

LOWER TER WATER USERS COMMUNITY (Catalonia, Spain)

Presenter: Francesc Camps

Location: Lower Ter basin, northeastern Catalonia (160 km²)

Organization: JCUABT (Junta Central de Usuaris d'Aigua del Baix Ter)

Focus: Multi-actor water governance in Mediterranean river basin with competing users.

Theme: How to move from competition to cooperation among water users in context of scarcity

Key Activities:

- Multi-actor coordination (irrigation communities, municipalities, industry, tourism, environment)
- Hydrological studies and shared knowledge
- Transparent information sharing about water status
- Economic cross-support between sectors
- Joint planning and conflict resolution
- Irrigation efficiency improvement programs.

LOCAL WATER GOVERNANCE IN CHIARA (Peru)

Presenter: Roger Agüero Pittman

Location: Chiara district, Huamanga province, Ayacucho region, Peru

Organization: SER - Servicios Educativos Rurales (Rural Educational Services)

Focus: Water supply and sanitation in dispersed Andean rural communities.

Theme: How to improve multi-actor coordination in rural areas with small water boards and limited municipal capacity.

Key Activities:

- Associativity programs grouping small water boards
- Municipal capacity strengthening
- Ancestral knowledge integration with modern technology
- Education and awareness-raising
- Training for water board members
- Multi-level governance coordination (local, municipal, regional, national)

BLUE PEARLS OF BERLIN (Germany)

Presenter: Pamela Rall

Location: Berlin, Germany

Organization: Foundation for Environmental Protection Berlin

Focus: Conservation of urban water bodies in highly fragmented governance context

Theme: How to coordinate action when responsibilities are dispersed among multiple authorities

Key Activities:

- Coalition-building among fragmented stakeholders
- "Sponge city" approach implementation
- Rainwater retention and infiltration
- Pilot projects demonstrating feasibility
- Political framing and advocacy
- Stakeholder negotiation and coordination

7. THEMES COVERED

Session 1: Water Governance Innovation and Adaptation

1. Transnational Networks and Regional Cooperation: How regional networks can amplify local voices, create solidarity, and influence policy without imposing uniform solutions. The role of flexibility, subsidiarity, and genuine partnership in transnational governance.
2. Water Scarcity as Governance Challenge: In contexts of genuine water scarcity, governance must combine technical innovation (desalination, recycling, leakage reduction) with honest acknowledgment of limits and demand reduction. Water as a public good requiring collective deliberation.
3. Technology Adoption and Institutional Capacity: Smart water technologies succeed only when embedded in institutions with capacity to operate and interpret them. The importance of simultaneous investment in institutional development, staff training, and democratic decision-making.
4. Dependency and Autonomy: The risk that external expertise and proprietary systems create institutional dependency. The importance of community understanding and control of their own systems, even when systems are "smart" or technologically sophisticated.
5. Transparency and Trust: Citizens accept difficult measures (water restrictions, price increases) when they understand the situation is genuine and decisions are made transparently. The relationship between information accessibility and institutional credibility.

Session 2: Water Heritage, Territorial Integration

1. Water Heritage and Community Identity: Water heritage understood as the intersection of natural systems, built infrastructure, cultural practices, and

community memory. The role of heritage preservation in creating community stewardship and generating economic value.

2. Territorial Integration and Interdependence: Making visible the deep interdependencies between water users (agriculture, tourism, municipalities, industry, environment). The importance of forums where these interdependencies are negotiable.
3. Multi-Level Governance and Scale: The challenge of coordinating governance across scales: local communities maintaining control; municipalities providing support; regional/national governments providing funding and policy framework. The role of associativity in creating economies of scale.
4. Fragmented Authority and Coalition-Building: In contexts with highly dispersed governance authority, progress requires building coalitions, creating pilot projects, and using policy priorities to create momentum. The limits of waiting for perfect institutional alignment.
5. Local Custodianship and Community Knowledge: Technical expertise is necessary but insufficient. Communities need people embedded in local networks who carry ongoing responsibility for stewardship. The importance of respecting and supporting local knowledge alongside modern expertise.

8. CONCLUSIONS:

- Transparency and shared information: a common diagnosis, accessible indicators, and shared data are necessary conditions for participation and trust among actors.
- Structured participation: community engagement requires dedicated spaces, facilitation, regular communication, technical support, and institutional pathways (it cannot rely on goodwill alone)
- No universal solutions. Every case calls for a carefully balanced response combining technical measures with governance, civic engagement, and capacity-building.
- Relationship-building is central: progress depends on connecting institutions, communities, property owners, public authorities, and local users.
- From fragmented management to shared responsibility: across all cases, governance improved when competing or siloed actors moved toward coordinated, collective ownership of water challenges.

- Participation must be resourced: community engagement is not a symbolic gesture, it requires institutional channels, funding, technical support, and political commitment.
- Political will alone is not enough: it must be accompanied by real resources to translate intention into action.
- More spaces for dialogue are needed: especially in small territories, bringing together municipalities, universities, local authorities, and civil society can serve as laboratories for governance, awareness-raising

Appendices *(if any)*

0. List of participants
1. Pre event discussion note (including methodology) approved by partners
2. International call
3. Communication toolkit
4. List of total experiences
5. Selection of final experiences
6. Conclusion and mural
7. Videos of the call
8. Attendance Clarification for Session 2 (21/05/26)

Additional Note

During the second session, held on 21 May 2026, 12 participants joined using a shared Zoom link. As a result, several names appeared multiple times in the attendance report downloaded from Zoom, creating a technical issue in identifying individual participants. To ensure accurate reporting, we manually recorded the correct names of all participants who joined through the shared account. This list is available on the consortium's Shared Drive.