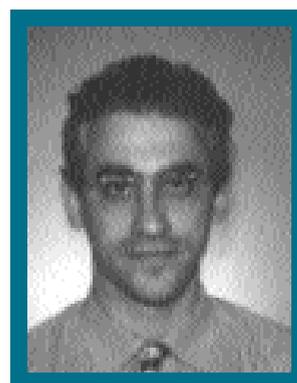


Spyros Kouvelis

El Cordinador de MedWet

(MedWet Co-ordinator)



How do you think your work experience in an international NGO and as technical advisor for the Greek Ministry of Environment will influence your contribution to the MedWet initiative?

MedWet is in fact all about bringing together partners, not only from a broad geographical region like the Mediterranean, but also from different stakeholders, including the national administrations (Ministries, Environmental Agencies etc.) inter-governmental organizations, national and international NGOs, and scientific institutions. My experience from having worked on both the national administration and an NGO has so far allowed me to initiate a fruitful dialogue and be in a position to target the collaboration of MedWet with each of those partners in direct relation to their respective capacities and needs. I hope that this will allow the optimal empowerment towards the objective of conserving and managing wetlands in the Mediterranean region.

Can you tell us what your arrival at MedWet will mean in relation to novelties concerning projects, main action lines, changes in work dynamics?

As regards the novelty in projects and action lines, our effort is to streamline the work of MedWet with the Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention. In this context, we are currently in a process, with the collaboration of all the MedWet partners, to review and structure our programme in order to achieve maximum efficiency. This is complemented by the work that we have undertaken to establish and make fully operational the networks that are set up by MedWet, including the MedWet/North African Wetlands Network, the MedWet/Regions network and the MedWet/NGOs network. These are very important parts of our overall capacity that will allow us to effectively reach out and incorporate the strengths of

each, thus enhancing MedWet's potential for planning and implementing a diverse and well-targeted set of activities.

With regard to the work dynamics, the addition of the MedWet Coordination Unit in the system presents a good opportunity to review the participation of partners, including the three Wetlands centres, in order to optimize their input to the system. We are now reviewing the comparative advantages, especially as regards their technical and scientific capacity and the methodological tools that have been developed in the past years. This will allow MedWet to reach two objectives: First to have a comprehensive picture of the capacities that exist within the system, thus developing activities that lead to the maximum use of these tools and identify the need for further development. Second, to increase the synergy between the various partners that will be in a position to complement each other's work, in an effort to use human and financial resources efficiently and have a strong impact from the activities that we implement.

What do you think about the MedWet/COM4 results and how do you see the future for MedWet?

MedWet/COM4 was an important benchmark for the future development of MedWet. Under the light of the decision to establish a MedWet Coordination Unit, MedWet/COM4 has adopted an ambitious work programme, with crucial strategic guidelines and a rich diversity of actions. These conclusions, along with the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plan will constitute the basis for the development of MedWet's programme of activity and development. For this reason, and given the interest of the MedWet members to engage in new fields of activity I expect a strong development of the initiative in the next period.

In your opinion, what should be the role of MedWet in the COP8?

Because COP8 is held in the Mediterranean region, I believe that it is imperative that MedWet has a strong presence. It is broadly recognized as a model for regional collaboration, and we must make the most of the opportunity of COP8 to clearly demonstrate the process that was followed for the establishment of MedWet, both in the sense of its structure as well as the development of tools, methodologies and collaborations. In addition, the participants and visitors at COP8 must leave with a clear picture as regards our programme and objectives. The Coordination Unit, with the help of our out posted staff member Carlos Villalba who works from the Ramsar Bureau in Gland, is in close contact with the wetland centres to prepare MedWet's presence in Valencia.

Finally, would you like to add anything about your expectations concerning MedWet?

It is my firm belief that MedWet presents a uniquely dynamic tool for regional collaboration, with a very high potential for efficiency and result-oriented interventions. My short experience from working with MedWet in the past few months has confirmed this belief, and strengthened through the personal devotion and involvement of all our partners. My expectation and personal challenge is not only to maintain this dynamic, but to set even higher standards in terms of the quality and effectiveness of our work, in an increased geographical coverage. In addition, I would be happy to see the MedWet example replicated in other regions, for which we have already expressed our willingness to assist interested parties.