



**WaVE**  
Interreg Europe



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund

# Regional Status Quo

Provincial Council  
of Alicante (SP)

## Regional Status Quo

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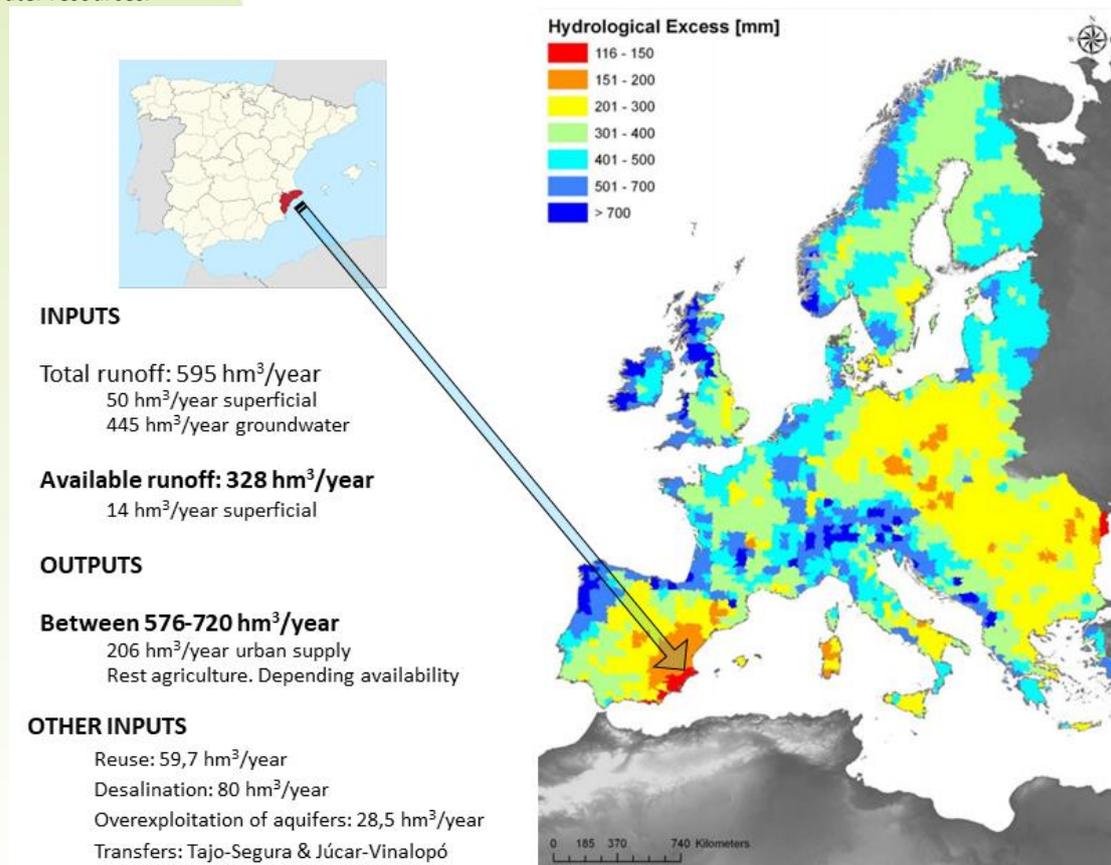
## 1. Site conditions

### 1.1 Location of the area

Alicante is a region located in the SE of Spain with a total surface of 5.816 km<sup>2</sup>, a medium height of 300 m and 244 km of coast. Its complex topography is responsible for a variety of climates that range from subhumid in the northern mountains to semiarid southern plains.

### 1.2 Main geographic features, especially in relation to water

Together with the nearby provinces of Murcia and Almería, Alicante is the driest area in Europe, taking into account the balance between rainfall and evapotranspiration. At the same time, it has a density of population of about 335 per km<sup>2</sup>, with important industrial areas and a high touristic pressure. Centuries of scarcity of water resources and at the same time an important economic activity have left a huge hydraulic patrimony direct towards the maximum exploitation of water resources.



*Location and water resources of the Province of Alicante  
 (source of illustration: own elaboration; map: Wriedt & Bouraoui, 2009)*

The objective of WaVE Project in the region is to set the basis to identify and handle this hydraulic patrimony, favoring the development of future funding instruments of the EU for the revalorization of this water linked heritage. based Two case studies will serve as pilots to demonstrate the methodology: Relleu and Tibi historical dams, and Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas (in the town of Almoradí).

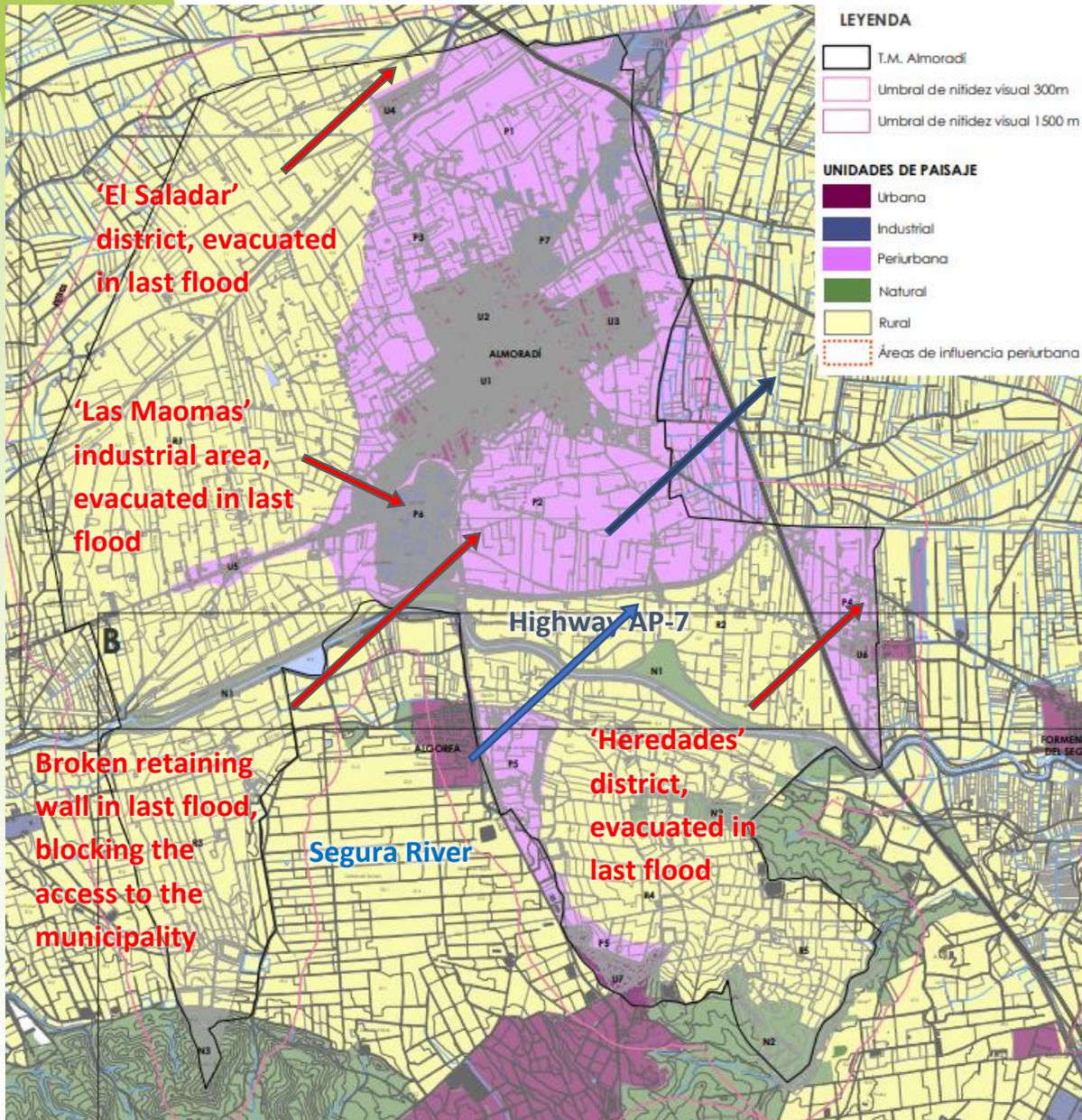


*Action sites / Study cases in the Province of Alicante (source: own elaboration).*

Relleu reservoir had originally an extension of 10 ha and a capacity of 1 hm<sup>3</sup>, though nowadays it is completely full of sediments and only a small pond exists after rainfalls. It is located in a beautiful natural canyon in the upper basin of the Amadorio River.

Tibi reservoir is located on Monnegre River and it is also nearly full of sediments, but still retains a very shallow water table which at its maximum occupies an area of 50 ha.

The region of Vega Baja, located in an arid zone with dry climate and shortage of water resources, is characterized by shortage of slope and shallow ground water table. Segura River crosses this region, where winter and autumn floods are notorious, but during the summer the streambed is almost dry. Last flood event, in September 2019, has been especially damaging in Almoradí, a mid-sized town of around 20,000 inhabitants, because of the break of the retaining wall of Segura River, blocking the access to the municipality, and a new main highway (AP-7) of Ministry that kept an important surface of water for several days.



Landscape units in Almoradí and most affected zones in last flood (source: own elaboration from the Landscape Units Map of the Structural General Plan of Almoradí)



Broken retaining wall and flooded access to the municipality of Almoradí (source: [diarioinformacion.com/multimedia/videos/alicante/2019-09-13-183723-gota-fria-cede-pared-segura-paso-entre-almoradi-algorfa.html](http://diarioinformacion.com/multimedia/videos/alicante/2019-09-13-183723-gota-fria-cede-pared-segura-paso-entre-almoradi-algorfa.html); 2019-09-13 - Álex Domínguez)



*Completely inundated streets in Almoradí and rescue actions (pictures: Alejandro Fuentes, in cadenaser.com)*

In this area, the most important feature in relation to water is the traditional irrigation system created in the Vega Baja del Segura.

### 1.3 Spatial and functional relations

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

Relleu and Tibi reservoirs are located in the municipality of Relleu (region of Marina Baja) and the municipalities of Tibi and Xixona (region of L'Alacantí), respectively, in the province of Alicante.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Traditional irrigated areas in Vega Baja are quite extensive, but the action focuses on the town of Almoradí, located in the heart of Vega Baja among irrigation canals, ditches, aqueducts, etc., which connect thousands of plots and crop fields allowing the full use of water.

### 1.4 History of the site regarding origin/use/changes/ownership

Relleu reservoir is filled with sediments, so it is dry almost all year and only in times of heavy rain it lodges a minimum volume of water, but still retains its landscape values.

Relleu dam project started in the times of King Felipe III and was built in the XVII century, when the Sindic of Villajoyosa exposed to King Felipe IV the need of its construction in 1630 (some authors consider it was finished in 1689). It was enlarged in the decade of 1770 and around 1870, increasing its height up to almost 32 m.

Nowadays, Relleu reservoir is abandoned and presents several signs of deterioration. The municipality of Relleu is interested in its valorization and rehabilitation as a cultural good, something that has to be accomplished with the authorization of the Basin Authority as it is hydric public domain.

Tibi reservoir is still operative, although its capacity has been significantly reduced by sediments and water quality is poor for any use, so its use nowadays is minimal.

Tibi reservoir is considered to be the oldest one in use in Europe. The dam was built at the end of XVI century under King Felipe II and it was the highest one in the world for almost 300 years with its 46 m height. It has 65 m length, with an arc shape to withstand the pressure, and it took 14 years to build. The Tibi reservoir belongs to the Irrigation Syndicate of the 'Huerta de Alicante', who used to manage its water for irrigation, though it is out of use nowadays.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The traditional irrigation system created in the Vega Baja del Segura is an ingenious, complex and labyrinthine construction, designed in order to irrigate with a continuous reuse of water.

Irrigation in this region, characterized by unfavorable weather conditions and water shortage, is the result of centuries of developments that have changed the natural environment and that are supported by a deep traditional know-how about water management and to allow a full exploitation of water resources.

### 1.5 What kind of heritage we are talking about

Relleu and Tibi dams are very important and pioneer hydraulic infrastructures for their time. They are paradigmatic architectural examples of that kind of infrastructures, but also retain historical and environmental values.

Moreover, Tibi reservoir was declared of Cultural Interest with the category of Monument by the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage of the Valencian Community in 1994 (Decree 84/94 of 04/26/1994).

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas include buildings and hydraulic infrastructures, with also a non-tangible heritage (as the irrigation association 'Juzgado de Aguas de Orihuela'), and environmental and economic heritage. Economically, agriculture in the region is responsible of the employment of over 100,000 people and the basis of the food industry of an area of over 2,000,000 inhabitants. It has a significant environmental value, because it has allowed the transformation of an arid zone with dry climate and shortage of water resources in a vegetated zone with a rich orchard.

#### **1.6 Situation of ownership of the land and the buildings**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The ownership of the land and the buildings linked to the reservoirs is public -in the case of Tibi, the buildings around the dam have been donated to the municipality- and there are no conflicts foreseen with private owners of the nearby areas.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The property of the land is divided into thousands of irrigation farms that are gathered in user's associations, so the ownership of the land and the buildings is private. But some of the elements included in the practice to valorize the site (cycle paths nearby ditches and plots, an old farmhouse restored by the Municipality with the purpose of creating a visitors center and museum about the traditional irrigation vegetal products...) are public domain or City Council's property and there are no conflicts foreseen with private owners.

#### **1.7 Present function and use of land and buildings**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

There is no present function and use of land and buildings. In the case of Tibi, it has no direct use because the issues of low quality of water and its small regulation capabilities.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The present function and use of land and buildings of Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas is agricultural production. All the traditional irrigation facilities are still in use.

#### **1.8 Management condition of the site / buildings / infrastructures / landscapes**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

Regarding to the management condition of the site / buildings / infrastructures / landscapes / assets, Relleu and Tibi reservoirs are managed by the River Basin Authority, as there are in hydraulic public domain soil.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The management of the irrigation infrastructure is accomplished by the Irrigation Associations.

#### **1.9 Maintenance condition of the site**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

Concerning the maintenance condition of the sites, Relleu dam, that stores no water, presents some signs of deterioration and some actions should be accomplished to repair and maintain it in the future. Tibi dam has had some maintenance and is in better general condition. However, in both cases, the infrastructure requires repairs and maintenance labors to secure their effective conservation and protection.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The irrigation infrastructures are completely functional and almost all properly maintained. The Water Dept. of the Provincial Council of Alicante plays an important role in improving the efficiency in using irrigation water and funds hydraulic works in order to improve and maintain irrigation canals.

#### **1.10 Planning designation of the site**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The route of the historical reservoirs of Relleu and Tibi

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Water routes of Vega Baja

#### **1.11 Restrictions on short term changes**

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

As they are historic buildings, and Tibi is catalogued, there would be required permissions both from the owners of the infrastructure and of various administrations previously

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

There are no mayor restrictions in the area. Some changes may have to be agreed with particular owners but no conflicts are foreseen.

## 2. Exploring the water-linked heritage values

### 2.1 Significance of the site for the identity of the city and region

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

Both infrastructures are a central part of the identity of the regions, and stand as a proud sample of their heritage. In the case of Relleu, that suffers an important depopulation and has lost its former importance in the region, this identity value is higher and so there is an important social movement to valorize the dam environment.

There is a feeling among the locals that these values are not appropriately valorized outside their regions.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

There is a social concern and an important economic activity related to this traditional irrigation system. The area depends largely on 'external' superficial water resources that reach the region as water transfers from other basins. There are continuous political and social tensions between the areas where water is transferred from and these final users of the resource. This conflict has developed a sense of social union towards the defense of water resources for the region. Though, this general demand of water for irrigation is not always together with the knowledge of the functioning and real values of the traditional irrigation techniques

### 2.2 Specific heritage value characteristics

The province of Alicante is rich in water-linked heritage. However, there is not a clear definition of what exactly is to be considered heritage: Just infrastructures? Natural values? Intangibles? Actually, all of these are heritage and could be a vector for positive transformation of the case areas. But though there may be some individual infrastructures regarded and protected as monuments of cultural value, there is not a regional strategy to valorize all this heritage. In this project, two pilot areas with different kinds of heritage have been selected. The first one, in fact two independent infrastructures but very similar in typology, represents the kind of heritage that is a single infrastructure out of use and that has important historic and architectonic value. The second one, represents a complex system still in use both with tangible and intangible value.

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The value of the infrastructures is intrinsic to their architecture, as they were both pioneer examples in Europe. Moreover, not only the landscape of the reservoirs, but also their hilly and peaceful natural environments have a high landscape and environmental value.

Relleu dam has a great singularity because of its shape, vault type, which was revolutionary for its time. It is a historical precedent of special interest.

After heavy rainfalls, Relleu dam has an added leisure and touristic value. Several local groups and guided raft tours groups take rafting trips from the Relleu dam, but the infrastructure and its recreative use after rainfalls are not well known outside the region.



*Relleu dam after rainfalls (pictures: Water Dept. of Diputación de Alicante)*

Tibi reservoir is considered to be the oldest one in use in Europe and it has been the highest one in the world for almost 300 years with its 46 m height. It has 65 m length, with arc shape to withstand the pressure, a design that set the basis of modern dam design.

Next to a zone of the Tibi reservoir, there is a signposted path which allows the access to the water surface. Furthermore, the access till the lowest part of the dam is relatively easy and it has a singular stairway in the rock till its top, from where the visitor has great views and which gives an added value to the visit.

Moreover, the proximity to major tourist nucleus on the coast and good communication of the municipality of Tibi allow for receiving a great number of potential visitors through organized excursions.



*Path till the toe of Tibi dam  
(picture: elmundo.es)*



*Informative panel in the path nearby Tibi reservoir and stairway in the rock till the top of the dam  
(pictures: es.wikiloc.com/rutas-senderismo/circular-pantano-de-tibi-panta-de-tibi-24351052)*

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Irrigation in this area is regarded as an important economic value. Traditional irrigation is performed by inundation. This technique is supposed to be highly inefficient, but not with the management strategies developed in this area: water is distributed by a complex system that allows irrigation by inundation and at the same time drains the farmland recovering the irrigation surplus that is reused downstream. This way water is reused four or even five times before it reaches the river mouth and the soil salinization process is avoided.



*Gates system in irrigation canals and a field irrigated by inundation (pictures:  
[diarioinformacion.com/vega-baja/2019/06/28/regantes-alertan-situacion-critica-cultivos/2163715.html](http://diarioinformacion.com/vega-baja/2019/06/28/regantes-alertan-situacion-critica-cultivos/2163715.html); 2019-06-27  
– Rubén Míguez; and  
[diarioinformacion.com/vega-baja/2018/09/27/exige-consell-sustituya-riego-tradicional/2067635.html](http://diarioinformacion.com/vega-baja/2018/09/27/exige-consell-sustituya-riego-tradicional/2067635.html); 2018-09-27 –  
Davis Pamies)*

The skills of the farmers who have inherited and assimilated an ancient know-how of water and soil management have a high value in this area. Some practices are from the Muslim period in Spain – over 500 years ago - and the first written laws about water management for irrigation in the area belong to the king Alfonso X ‘El Sabio’ period, during the 13th century. The heritage related to this system is then both the infrastructure and the know-how developed in the area during centuries.



In addition, traditional irrigation areas can be used to mitigate floods and including floodable areas may play a role in flood prevention for the urban settlements. Furthermore, the maintenance of the vegetal cover controls soil loss, reducing desertification, and is a sink of CO<sub>2</sub>. These are potential functions to develop through an integrated management in the frame of climate change adaptation.

Regarding the vegetable products farmed in the area, the most precious is the artichoke, which has gained recently reputation as one of the 'superfoods', according to its nutritional properties. In 2011 the 'Asociación Alcachofa Vega Baja' (Artichoke Association Vega Baja) was born for the promotion of the product developing a valorizing strategy based in the creation of a powerful commercial brand ('Alcachofa Vega Baja del Segura') and coordinated marketing strategies.

### 2.3 Specific relationship between heritage and water in the site

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

They are located on the river Amadorio (Relleu dam) and Monnegre (Tibi dam) and they were very important as a source of water resources, though they do not play this role nowadays.

As it has been exposed before, Relleu reservoir is completely full of sediments nowadays and only a small pond exists after rainfalls. But if there are heavy rainfalls, water overflows the dam and allows some canyoning leisure activities downstream. In the case of Tibi reservoir, it is also nearly full of sediments, but still retains a very shallow water table.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The traditional irrigation system has allowed the transformation of an arid zone with dry climate and shortage of water resources in a vegetated zone with a rich orchard. Water is distributed by this complex system that allows irrigation by inundation and at the same time drains the farmland recovering the irrigation surplus that is reused downstream. This way water is reused four or even five times before it reaches the river mouth and prevents soil salinization by washing down salts.

### 2.4 Current approach to the addressed heritage by local government and relevant institutions

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

In the case of Relleu, the local government (municipality) has a very proactive role towards the valorization of the dam. They have created a commission including specialist from several areas (geography, economy, architecture, social science...) and different organisms/institutions/firms to valorize the infrastructure and make it a pole of attraction to its region. The City Council of Relleu has already conditioned two paths on the area so visitors can approach the dam from the town, including informative posters about fauna and the dam.

In the case of Tibi there is some social movement so that reservoir would be dredged by the River Basin Authority to restore it to its full capacities and remove the contaminated sediment. The City Council of Tibi and the Local Development Agency are very interested in taking measures and developing activities that could make the infrastructure, its history and its environment well known and respected. They have been involved in the proposal of elaborating of a Special Plan of Protection (SPP) for the environment of the monument it, as a necessary step in order to valorize the Tibi dam and its environment. In fact, they had already started the process of elaboration the SPP previously to the beginning of WaVE, by consulting a specialized enterprise to obtain an approximated budget and a time schedule of its elaboration.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The City Council of Almoradí has a very proactive role towards the valorization of the traditional irrigation system of Vega Baja and its vegetal production, and has a great concern about floods. It has already executed several actions and develops different activities in order to valorize traditional irrigation and its products, especially artichoke.

In 2011, the Vega Bajas' Artichoke Association (Asociación Alcachofa de la Vega Baja) was born for the promotion of the product developing a valorizing strategy based in the creation of a powerful commercial brand ('Alcachofa Vega Baja') and coordinated marketing strategies. The association provides a lot of information through their site visits, web page, social media, etc., about how to cook the product, its value as 'superfood' with the highest levels of antioxidants and fiber of any vegetable or its environmental importance.

### 2.5 Awareness level of heritage values as a vector for development and transformation of the sites

The City Councils of Relleu, Tibi and Almoradí, as well as local population in general and stakeholders, show a really high awareness of heritage values as a vector for development and transformation of the sites. But the dams and the functions of Vega Baja traditional irrigation system are not well known outside these areas, and there is a lack of interest at the regional level government, so these heritage values are not being considered or taken advantage/used.

## **2.6 Awareness towards innovative heritage approaches based on art**

### Relleu/Tibi dams:

In both cases, the heritage approaches are currently rather conventional: conservation, cataloging and give touristic value. But there is scope for innovating and going beyond this traditional approach by connecting to other 'agendas', such as water management, climate change, fire prevention, etc. Attracting people to these areas could influence positively in countryside tourism increase and help to deconcentrate tourism away from the coast.

### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Whereas there is a social concern and an important economic activity related to this traditional irrigation systems, it is coupled with a holistic valorization of the area. Moreover, many of the environmental values of the system remain unknown for the population of Vega Baja and even it is perceived as a highly inefficient system outside the Alicante province.

## **2.7 Specific approach to water-linked heritage in planning and policies**

### Relleu/Tibi dams:

There is not a clear previous regional strategy to valorize this heritage. Part of the WaVE action in the area is to develop action plans for the areas that would be accomplished by the municipalities. Also, changes in policies are going to be introduced both in European regional development funds and in the policies of Diputacion de Alicante.

### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Regionally, there is not a real awareness of the new heritage approaches other than maintaining the economic activity. New plans and policies driven by WaVE will help to valorize tangible and intangible values and to include them in planning.

### 3. Exploring the policy context

#### 3.1 Existing planning laws, regulations and policies related to a potential redevelopment of the site

A major part of the water-linked patrimony in the province is located in the so called Hydraulic Public Domain. This territory is handled by the River Basin Authorities, in the case of Alicante belonging to the basins of Júcar and Segura rivers. The basic normative frame for Hydraulic Public Domain is in the Water Law (Ley de Aguas, which revised text was approved by Legislative Royal Decree 1/2001, of July 20th 2001) and in the National Hydrological Plan (NHP), approved by Law 10/2001, of July 5th 2001, and updated on July 21st 2015 last time. The NHP settles the basis to develop the Basin Hydrological Plans, that are compulsory for each basin and that are updated periodically. The main conflicts and actions related Hydraulic Public Domain have to be included in the documents of the BHP.

#### 3.2 Existing planning laws, regulations and policies related to heritage aspects

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The River Basin Authority of Júcar River elaborated several years ago a Project for the landscape and environment conditioning of the Relleu reservoir and a Project for the landscape and environment conditioning of the Tibi reservoir and Monnegre River, but finally there was no funding to execute them and there is no forecast about doing them in short/mid-term. At a local scale, the municipality of Relleu, in collaboration with the Local Development Office, has created a commission with specialists from several areas and different organisms/institutions/firms to start a project to valorize the infrastructure and its environment. In addition, there is a Local Plan for forest fire prevention in the municipality of Relleu, considered a high-risk area for forest fire.

The Tibi reservoir is included in the Hydrological Plan of the Jucar River Basin (3<sup>rd</sup> revision 2021-2027) like a water body at risk of chemical contamination. Its sediments are full of chemical contaminants due to non-controlled wastewater discharge that took place for years.

Furthermore, the Tibi reservoir was declared of Cultural Interest with the category of Monument by the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage of the Valencian Community (Decree 84/94 of 04/26/1994), a protection figure for Spanish Historical Heritage.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

This area is included in the 'PATRICOVA', Territorial Action Plan on Flood Risk Prevention in the Valencian Community, which proposes in its action catalogue an Integral Plan of River Segura (PIRS), in order to reduce the magnitude of river floods, protect urban settlements and improve agricultural drainage. In addition, a Territorial Action Plan of 'Vega Baja del Segura' is in elaboration by the Regional Government of Valencia and it is focused on flood risk management. It does not consider heritage directly, though existing infrastructure and traditional land uses play an active role in flood mitigation. Also, flood management in the area is affected by the Hydrological Plan of Segura Demarcation, developed by the River Basin Authority called 'Confederación Hidrográfica del Segura'.

#### 3.3 Specific place for water-linked heritage in policies

Four of the five main objectives that will drive EU and national policies in the horizon 2021-2027 are connected with revalorization projects linked of water-related heritage.

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

In this case, the recovery and use of the environment of the dams will:

- Lead to economic transformation and give support to small and medium-sized businesses contributing to the "Smarter Europe" objective.
- Create new environmentally valuable areas, aligned with a "Greener Europe".
- Improve the economy of these rural areas and create a good ecosystem for the development of new employments and new educational resources.
- Be an example of sustainable development.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Similarly, the redevelopment in Vega Baja, would create new opportunities for a more sustainable environment but also reinforce the economy of the area creating opportunities for small-medium businesses and for employment. In this area, also the potential of traditional land uses in the fight against climate change also is in the heart of future policies.

#### 3.4 Main restrictions and incentives for redevelopment

##### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The sites have a great tourist and leisure potential that nowadays is barely exploited. The core reasons for underdevelopment of the tourism in these areas have to do with the lack of planning. Visitors are scarce and do not create

value for the region, because they usually do not visit the town and spend a short time in the place. It is necessary then to create an offer of leisure that links the town and the site, and to develop added value to the visit.

The dams themselves have some problems of maintenance, especially Relleu dam where vegetation is growing up through the wall, because there is not a long-term strategy to fund the repairs it periodically requires. Moreover, the municipalities have low budget and maintenance of the dam is not one of its responsibilities. The future of both infrastructures requires a permanent program which funding has to be properly established on the basis of a plan.

The problem is that the lack of planning tool results in the ineligibility for Funding Programs and thus prevents taking valorization actions that would increase the leisure, touristic or environmental value of the sites.

At last, the lack of medium- and long-term planning makes that the strategy of valorization of the sites may change with political cycles.

The Special Plan of Protection (SPP) for the environment of Tibi reservoir and the Action Plan for Relleu reservoir would be a first step to solve these problems.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The most important heritage in relation to water in this region is the traditional irrigation system, an ingenious, complex and labyrinthine build, designed in order to irrigate with a continuous reuse of water.

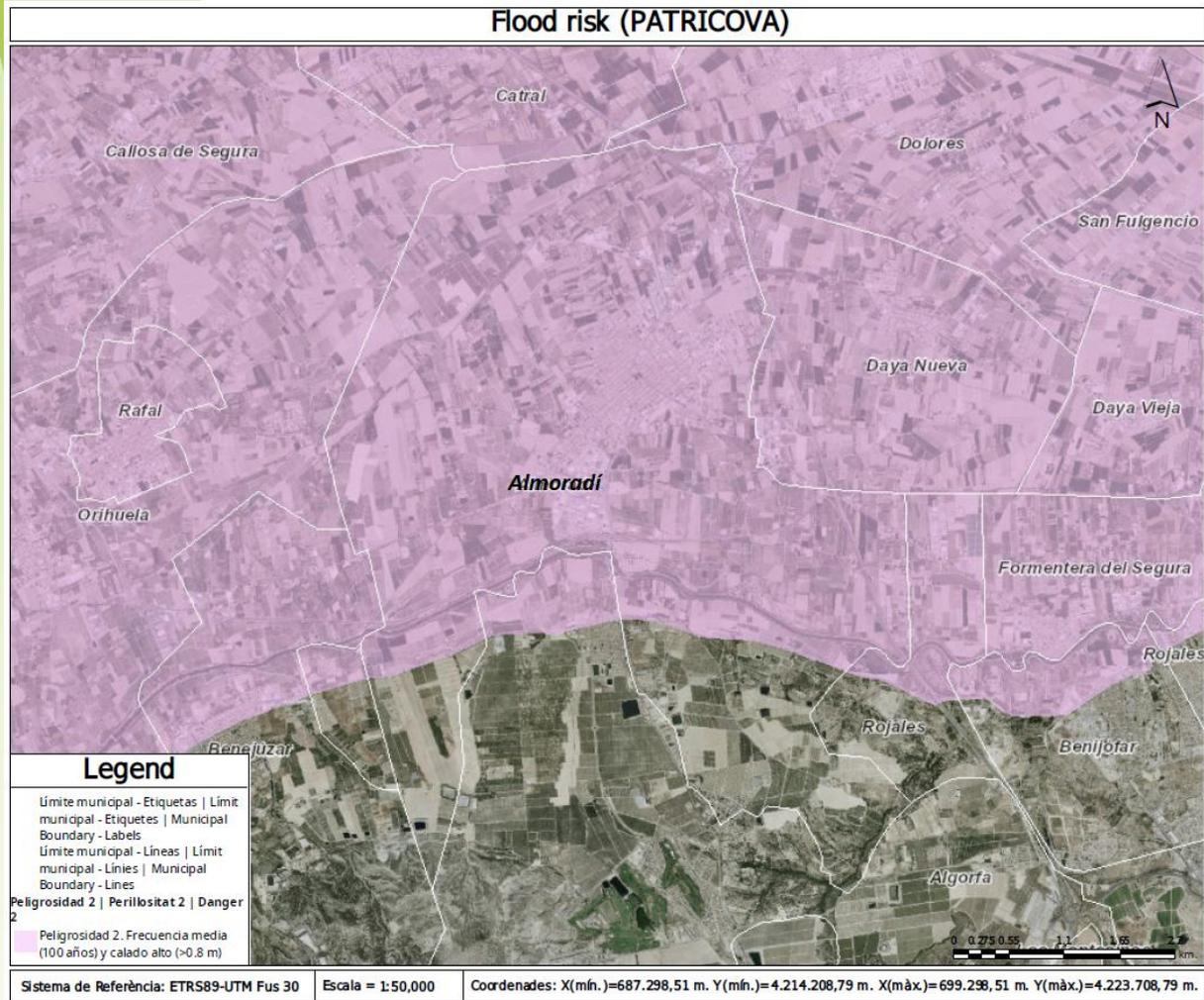
So traditional irrigation is performed by inundation. This technique had bad press nowadays because it is supposed to be highly inefficient, but it is not with the management strategies developed in this area: water is distributed by a complex system that allows irrigation by inundation and at the same time drains the farmland recovering the irrigation surplus that is reused downstream. This way water is reused four or even five times before it reaches the river mouth and prevents soil salinization by washing down salts.

As mentioned before, the heritage related to this system is then both the infrastructure –tangible heritage– and the know-how developed in the area during centuries –non-tangible heritage. But it is not well known by the civil society and it is usually thought that a lot of water is wasted.

Furthermore, traditional irrigation areas can be used to mitigate floods. Last extreme events had activated the alarm, and so the Administrations have created multidisciplinary expert teams in order to evaluate alternatives and act on soil use management, enabling floodable zones in the farmland areas.

One of the objectives of WaVE for the Vega Baja is to include the heritage as an element to improve management of extreme climatic events. It has to be stressed that traditional land management is more resilient to flood risks than some new uses of the land and that the valorization of this heritage is, at the same time, an economical opportunity. These ideas ought to be a solid foundation to promote synergies between heritage valorization and flood risk management / climate adaptation, taking into account all the planification tools and involving the managing institutions from different levels.

Most of the municipality of Almoradí is a zone with a flood danger level 2 (in a scale of 1 to 6, being 1 the major risk situation), with a frequency of 25 and 100 years and an expected water surface of over 0.8 m medium depth. This zone, within the alluvial plain of Segura River, is categorized as severe risk zone. The floodable areas in the municipality occupy 2060.39 Ha according to the Structural General Plan of Almoradí, and only traditional land uses are compatible with these risks.



Source: own elaboration from the SigPac Visor of the Cartographic Valencian Institute.

### **3.5 Availability of public funding for preparation and implementation of heritage-related redevelopment projects**

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

In the case of Relleu, the local government has obtained funding from Diputación de Alicante for a viability study about the creation of an impermeable pond in part of the antique reservoir to keep an inundated zone for fauna.

In the case of Tibi, the local government has obtained funding from Diputación de Alicante to elaborate and Action Plan for the area, that would in the future help to attract additional investments.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Regarding financial resources, funding is required to accomplish the actions. Part of this funding has been obtained from the Municipality and Diputación de Alicante for:

- The kick off the visitor center.
- Conditioning paths, including informative panels about water management.
- Actions to adapt the environment for leisure and visits.

### **3.6 Use of value capture or other funding instruments for redevelopment projects**

This initial funding should act as a catalyzer to attract new funds from:

- New calls of ERDF/FEDER
- Provincial investments accomplished by Diputación de Alicante.
- Private investors attracted by the economical (touristic, gastronomic, leisure) opportunities.

## **4. Identifying existing strategies and projects for the transformation of the site**

### **4.1 Current general proposals and status of the site**

The valorization of the heritage at a regional level, such as the Alicante province, has to combine local actions with general strategies. Diputación de Alicante promotes some of these regional strategies to include water linked heritage valorization in the agenda of water management. One of the most successful is being the 'Blue Routes', a set of proposals to visit water linked heritage of Alicante directed towards hikers and travelers with educational contents about the role of water in land modeling, water-linked ecosystems and human settlements history. The contents are shared through a web page, phone app and two guides, both in physical and in pdf formats.

### **4.2 Main reasons for redevelopment**

Alicante is a paradigm for the quantity and quality of water linked heritage, but its future conservation requires specific plans to give it new value. At the same time, many interior regions of the province eclipsed by the coastal tourism need to develop new opportunities for development and the revalorization of water linked heritage may be a key element for this task.

### **4.3 Redevelopment strategy type of approach**

#### Relleu dam:

The municipality of Relleu is leading a strategy of valorization of the site. The idea is to create a new touristic resource than may play a role in stopping the depopulation of the town.

#### Tibi dam:

The Tibi reservoir does not have a current redevelopment strategy, but due to it is listed for protection, it is compulsory the elaboration of a Special Plan of Protection (SPP) for the environment of the monument or another similar urban plan by the local government.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The municipality of Almoradí is leading a strategy with a holistic approach to valorize the Vega Baja traditional irrigation system and its products that would constitute a 'Cultural Park', where several water related heritage elements converge:

- Two of the main irrigation canals of the region plus several minor ditches of the traditional irrigation system.
- An old farmhouse restored by the Municipality with the purpose of creating a visitors center and museum about the traditional irrigation vegetal products, especially centered around the artichoke.
- Floodable areas, that may play a role in flood prevention for the urban area.
- Vegetables wholesale market where the regional products are auctioned for retailers, following a traditional scheme typically used in fish markets in ports called 'lonjas'.
- Cycle paths along ditches, that give an opportunity to divulgate the ancient soil use know-how and the associated irrigation infrastructure.

An overall target is to strength the brand for the vegetal products farmed in the area, especially the artichoke.

### **4.4 Planning horizon of the strategy**

#### Relleu dam:

In the short-term, some urgent issues have to be addressed, because there is vegetation growing in the wall of the dam that compromises its stability.

The next step is to give visibility to the Relleu dam by means of promoting its protection as cultural good, of creating some touristic offer and to divulgate it in national and international technical/scientific forums.

#### Tibi dam:

Kicking off the elaboration of the SPP is the first step in order to redevelop and valorize the site.

The City Council of Tibi has many ideas and proposals in order to attract people, complement the itineraries for visiting the reservoir with a very rich and attractive tourist offer in the municipality and activate the area, recovering vitality and interest.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Getting ready all the elements integrated in the 'Cultural Park' of Almoradí will take some months, so in the short-term several activities and visits would be organized.

Next steps in the medium-term will include civil works required to develop floodable areas, conditioning cycle paths, including informative panels about water management, and actions to adapt the environment for leisure and visits.

#### **4.5 Stage of the work on the strategy at present**

##### Relleu dam:

It is in the first stage now after about a year of work, where a multidisciplinary team of experts linked to the municipality is characterizing the asset and developing the strategy.

The City Council of Relleu has conditioned two paths on the area so visitors can approach the dam from the town, including informative posters about fauna and the dam. Moreover, it has elaborated a project to install a walkway in the canyon from the dam. Getting funding to execute this kind of works could add touristic, leisure and environmental values to the site.

At this moment, the strategy is somewhat in stand-by, but WaVE should give an important impulse to the strategy.

##### Tibi dam:

The City Council of Tibi has got an estimated budget for the SPP and is looking for funds for its elaboration.

The dam itself has some problems of maintenance because there is not a long-term strategy to fund the repairs it periodically requires. The most recent works were funded by Diputación de Alicante in 2017.

Furthermore, there is an interest from the irrigators in the recovery of the capabilities of storage of the infrastructure, but the action does not seem feasible. WaVE should propose a strategy of revalorization suitable for all the stakeholders.

##### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The City Council of Almoradí has a very proactive role towards the valorization of the traditional irrigation system of Vega Baja and its vegetal production, and has a great concern about floods. It has already executed several actions and develops different activities in order to valorize traditional irrigation and its products, especially artichoke.

The visitor center in the restored old farmhouse is ready and there are some other ongoing projects and actions to improve the visitors' experience in the site: creating a direct access by foot to the visitor center from the parking zone, habilitating a space for a big market in front of the center, organizing guided visits, etc.

#### **4.6 Performance of the strategy**

The development of the strategy is beginning to show some good indicators, as the number of visitors has increased in the case of Almoradí, and that some consulting works have been started in Relleu and Tibi, with an important participation of stakeholders.

#### **4.7 Most urgent part of the project from an environmental and economic point of view**

The most urgent part from an environmental and economic point of view is establishing a permanent program which funding has to be properly established on the basis of a plan.

In the case of Relleu dam, which presents important signs of deterioration and vegetation is growing up through the wall (high risk of breakage), repair and maintenance labors are necessary to guarantee the integrity of the infrastructure. They have to be included in the Action Plan elaborated within Project WaVE.

The most urgent step in order to valorize the Tibi reservoir, compulsory in this case, is the elaboration of the Special Plan of Protection (SPP) for the environment of the Monument, listed for protection as a Cultural Interest Good (CIG).

Regarding the practice in Almoradí, the Action Plan for the 'Cultural Park' has to integrate different aspects to valorize and promote the Vega Baja irrigation system, strength the brand for the vegetal products farmed in the area and developing an integrated management in the frame of flood mitigation and climate change adaptation.

#### **4.8 Most significant part of the project from a social and cultural perspective**

The most significant part of the project from a social and cultural perspective is the preservation of the heritage while creating new opportunities in towns that are suffering depopulation due to the decrease of traditional agricultural activities.

#### **4.9 Most feasible part of the project to initiative transformation, gain momentum and galvanise the interest of stakeholders**

The involvement of stakeholders itself and the growing perception of new business opportunities would act as an accelerator for the transformation.

## 5. Cost-benefit considerations

### 5.1 Expected benefits of proposed redevelopment strategy

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

In this case the objectives of the strategy are:

- The elaboration and approbation of a Plan through participation process to involve all the stakeholders and which enables to get funds.
- The physical maintenance of the integrity of both infrastructures.
- The effective protection and conservation of the dams and their environments.
- The creation of an area of touristic/leisure interest and environmental value, and the impulse of educative and outdoor activities.
- The connection with the towns' touristic offer.
- The improvement of the lives of inhabitants.
- The dissemination of the 'water culture'.

The beneficiaries of the strategy would be:

- The local population that will get a direct economic benefit from the increase of visitors, in business like restaurants/bar, sport/adventure or souvenirs shops.
- In addition, local population would have a leisure resource for the families.
- The touristic sector of the province of Alicante that would have new poles of attraction beyond 'sun and beach'.

Other benefits would be:

- The development of bird and biodiversity areas (IBA).
- Small contribution to mitigation of floods.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The objectives for this area are:

- Enhance the knowledge of the traditional irrigation system in the Vega Baja region.
- Promote its continuity as a source of environmental sustainability and valorizing the traditional environmental knowledge as a solution to climate change challenges.
- Mitigate extreme climate events.
- Consider the heritage of the future: places and aspects of culture and practices that may not be considered heritage now.
- Promote its vegetal products and gastronomy.
- Create touristic, leisure and educative opportunities.

### 5.2 Short- and long-term economic benefits expected from the redevelopment

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

The economic benefits expected in the short-term would be:

- Increase the economic activity.
- Obtain funding to develop the sites. Part of the redevelopment of the sites would be accomplished by local firms/workers.

And in the long-term:

- The development of new business and the increase in the local offer of leisure and environment.
- Attract foreign population to purchase vacation residences.
- Attract investors to the area.

#### Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Short-term benefits:

- Promote and strength the brand of local products.
- Increase the benefits from local agriculture, tourism and gastronomy.

The planned activities and redevelopment of the site could generate tourist attraction and have an economic impact, mobilizing private finance.

### 5.3 Expected non-material benefits

#### Relleu/Tibi dams:

- The development of new business and the increase in the local offer of leisure and environment can play an important role to fix population in these rural areas.

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

- It would be a profit for the inhabitants of the area, especially for the farmers that would get extra social support due to their role.
- It would promote the awareness of the advantages of the traditional irrigation to the society, in a moment where the farmers need support to maintain the water transfers to the region.
- It would promote the use of bicycles as sustainable mean of transport and healthy activities in the environment.

#### **5.4 Expected economic, environmental and cultural/social impact on the surroundings**

Relleu/Tibi dams:

- The keeping of the cultural heritage.
- Improve the knowledge and awareness about local water resources.
- Increase in touristic and educative offer in the region.

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Long-term benefits:

- Maintenance of the irrigation system, both infrastructure and practices.
- New business opportunities related to environmental activities.
- Strengthen of the rural communities.
- Conservation of the water-linked intangible heritage.
- Maintenance of the vegetal cover, that controls soil loss, is a sink of CO<sub>2</sub> and helps to control floods.

The planned activities and redevelopment of the site could have an important social effect. It is important that the population, and especially its youngest part, understands the economic and environmental value of these irrigation practices. In this area, the traditional irrigation is a very efficient way to use water: it keeps soil from salinization, promotes an environment appropriated for bird life, helps to reduce the impact of floods and keeps green a land that otherwise would be a desert.

#### **5.5 Possible positive effects on water management**

Relleu/Tibi dams:

The maintenance of the walls of the dam will result in an improvement in the security of the infrastructures in case of flood.

In the case of Relleu the redevelopment will create a source of water for wild life, very important in years of scarcity of rainfall.

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

The reinforcement of traditional practices has a clear positive impact for the hydrological system in the area. It promotes the sustainable use of the resource, that is intensely reused while prevents soils from salinization and keeps creates a rich ecosystem. In addition, ditches are key in this area to evacuate water during floods, and so its good maintenance creates resilience against extreme climatic events.

#### **5.6 Positions and interests of the stakeholders on the strategy**

Stakeholders in both pilot areas are very interested in the redevelopment of the areas, and there are no conflicts between users and land uses in the area. In the case of Tibi, some stakeholders would like a more ambitious action plan including the drainage of the sediments of the dam.

#### **5.7 Proportion among commercial and non-commercial functions of the strategy**

Relleu/Tibi dams:

80% non-commercial / 20% commercial.

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

50% non-commercial / 50% commercial.

#### **5.8 Public funding needed for the public space redevelopment of the site**

Important funding would be required to accomplish the full redevelopment of the areas (between 5 to 10 m€ for each area), but this inversion can be differed in time, and with moderate annual investments (in the range of 100,000 €/year) part of the objectives would be achieved producing a gradual return of investment.

**5.9 Political position on needed public investment**

There is agreement on the need of the public investment, but no Administration compromises to do de investment, and so it depends on ERDF funds of the UE.

## 6. Assessing the policy instrument

### 6.1 Addressed policy instrument description

The policy instrument (PI) is the ERDF Operational program 2014-2020 and the additional funding opportunities to disperse the remaining OP funds. The Managing Authority (MA) is now strongly focused in calls that support SMEs and mobility, leaving out opportunities for cities and cultural and heritage operators. As usually, ERDF Operational Program 2014-2020 will be finalized on 2022 because it is stipulated that the budget is spent every seven years. In this way, the Managing Authority may issue new calls until 2022.

The OP ERDF for the Valencian Community 2014-2020 has the main aim to boost economic growth in the Valencia region, as well as to contribute to the achievement of the EU 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth that includes the creation of jobs and the boost of regional productivity. The OP is divided into 5 thematic priorities (+ 1 TA).

The priority concerned by the WaVE Project is Priority 6: Environment and resource efficiency, and more specifically the Investment Priorities that concretely impact the valorization potentials of water-linked cultural heritage in the region. Firstly, IP 6.3 that deals with the protection, promotion and development of cultural heritage, secondly IP 6.4 that deals with the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and thirdly PI 6.2 that deals with investment into the water sector.

### 6.2 Identified redevelopment strategies vs the addressed policy instrument

The Provincial Council of Alicante is in need to increase its capabilities to support towns within the region that want to engage in projects that are capable of valorizing their water-linked cultural heritage sites, that requires a process of close collaboration with regional stakeholders to identify project needs, and also with the PI owner in order to unleash new possibilities for the funding of such projects.

Taking into account the most important strategic plans at regional level, we must highlight the last regional strategy for regional development called '**Estrategia Territorial de la Comunidad Valenciana, Decreto 1/2011, de 13 de enero**' (**Territorial Strategy for Comunidad Valenciana**). It was approved on 2011 and included the guidelines for regional development until 2030. This strategy included 25 thematic objectives, 100 of goals and more than 1500 projects that were approved by a strong consensus. 2 of those thematic objectives are water management and environmental heritage. This integrated document is an important tool to take into consideration for the current Regional ERDF OP 2014-2020 and also for the future Regional ERDF OP 2021-2027.

### 6.3 Contradictions or synergies between the proposed strategies and existing policies or regulations

The main envisaged betterment of the OP ERDF is focusing on the opening up of the PI to fund projects in the field of the integrated valorization of water-linked cultural heritage in the Alicante region. More specifically, the creation of calls is envisaged that give towns the opportunity to recover water-linked cultural heritage sites, e.g. via physical interventions, redevelopment plans, analyses and studies. Also, the aim is to increase consistency between calls focusing on water preservation and the ones on cultural heritage, promoting transversal priorities and synergies between specific themes.

### 6.4 Synergies with other policies

It would be desirable to establish a more transversal approach in the new 2021-2027 ERDF OP, opening and crossing thematic objectives and sectors. It will bring the opportunity to generate synergies and between sectors and themes like economic development or environmental issues to Water-Linked Cultural Heritage.

The most relevant political framework for the new 2021 – 2027 ERDF OP will be the Global Agenda 2030. Under this Agenda, it will be fundamental to work thematic objective 6 and its line related to conserve water ecosystems. In Spain, Global Agenda 2030 will be coordinated by the National Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030.

At the same time, changes and consequences motivated by Covid19 crisis will influence new development policies, as for example, the new EU plan for 're-generation' that will have an important impact for the Spanish short and mid-term development. This new situation will joint with other regional current plans motivated by recent climatic phenomena as the 'Vega Baja Renace', that will affect one of the WAVE target territories.

Another important element are the advisory boards funded by the regional government as 'ProspectCV 2030' that will advertise the Comunidad Valenciana regional government in terms of strategic planning. It will be interesting to establish synergies with these academic boards in order to get information as well as in order to share with them our project conclusions and influence their academic advice to the regional government in terms of strategic planning, etc.

### 6.5 Measures for redevelopment of water-based heritage taken into consideration by the policy

The Provincial Council of Alicante proposes to increase the knowledge on the impact of water-linked cultural heritage on regional growth at MA level, improving its capabilities to select projects from the new calls proposed focusing on integrated usages, as well as to create a sustainable awareness for the projects' topicality that will increase chances for the continuation of support for water-linked cultural heritage within the new funding cycle of the OP after 2020.

In this regard, the Provincial Council of Alicante will participate in the evaluation of the implementation of the operational program 2014-2020, like other regional stakeholders, and will be able to contribute their point of view about how the ERDF has been managed in relation to the management of the linked cultural heritage the water. The said participation will be made through participative meetings proper to the management work of the operational program itself, as well as through direct meetings with the management organizations.

**6.6 Adaptation of existing practices and / or adoption of new practices required by the policy instrument**

It is expected that from said participation in the evaluation and that thanks to the participation in the creation of the new regional operational program 2021-2027, it will be possible to influence the strengthening of the line of support for cultural heritage, and specifically the water-linked heritage. In this sense, and specifically, we detected a lack of specific of water-linked heritage in the current OP and this could be solved in the new 2021-2027 ERDF OP.

## 7. Key challenges and opportunities related to water and heritage

### Relleu dam:

Key challenges: minimize weaknesses and avoid threats.

- We should work next to stakeholders, especially with administrations and authorities, in order to guarantee the integrity and maintenance of the Relleu dam.
- The vulnerabilities of the site have to be managed to mitigate extreme events effects, which could be stronger and more frequent due to climate change.
- We should strongly keep focus on participation with developers and stakeholders to include this kind of heritage and sites in the objectives of policies in a regional / national / European level.
- We should secure getting National / European budgets to be able to maintain a long-term development and valorization.
- The engagement of all the stakeholders and developers is necessary to secure the protection of the infrastructure and its environment.

Key opportunities: use strengths to maximize opportunities

- The River Basin Authority elaborated and approved a Project for the landscape and environment conditioning of the Relleu reservoir.
- This kind of areas and heritage could fit in the Thematic Objective 6 of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme of the Comunidad Valenciana to get funding: Protection, promotion and development of cultural and natural heritage (PI.6.3.)
- WaVE Project could be a first step in order to valorize and improve Relleu dam and its environment conditions.
- Next Calls for funding in the Cultural Programme 1,5% of Ministry of Development to fund conservation and enrichment works of Historical Spanish Heritage
- Horizon Europe: The next EU Research & Innovation Programme (2021 – 2027)
- Nowadays, there is an important social concern about environment and its conservation, so this works can be welcomed.
- Attracting people and new visitants to this area would influence positively in hinterland and countryside tourism.
- Through Interregional collaborations this kind of heritage can be promoted.
- Due to other actions in other Spanish regions (for instance, 'Caminito del Rey' in Málaga), there is an important demand of circuits or paths in natural canyons through walkways.
- A growth in tourism in the municipality could increase job opportunities and influence in its repopulation.

### Tibi dam:

Key challenges: minimize weaknesses and avoid threats.

- We should strongly keep focus on participation with developers and stakeholders to get solutions and funding for the elaboration of the SSP as a first step for valorizing the dam and its environment.
- We should secure getting National / European budgets to be able to maintain a long-term development and valorization.
- The needs of the site must be prioritized from an open approach regarding all aspects and stakeholders.
- The most expensive and conflicting actions require a broad and open approach from all stakeholders.

Key opportunities: use strengths to maximize opportunities

- The River Basin Authority elaborated a Project for the landscape and environment conditioning of the Tibi reservoir and river Monnegre.
- This kind of areas and heritage could fit in the Thematic Objective 6 of the ERDF Regional Operational Programme of the Comunidad Valenciana to get funding: Protection, promotion and development of cultural and natural heritage (PI.6.3.)
- WaVE Project could be a first step in order to valorize Tibi dam and improve its environment.
- Next Calls for funding in the Cultural Programme 1,5% of Ministry of Development to fund conservation and enrichment works of Historical Spanish Heritage
- Horizon Europe: The next EU Research & Innovation Programme (2021 – 2027)
- There is a Subsidy Programme of Generalitat Valenciana for elaborating Special Plans of Protection
- The nearness and good communication of Tibi from major tourist nucleus on the coast allow receiving a great number of potential visitors through organized excursions.
- Through Interregional collaborations this kind of heritage can be promoted.

- Nowadays, there is an important social concern about environment and its conservation, so this works can be welcomed.
- Attracting people to this area could influence positively in countryside tourism increase.

Vega Baja traditional irrigated areas:

Key challenges: minimize weaknesses and avoid threats.

- We should strongly keep focus on participation with developers and stakeholders to promote the real values and potential of the traditional irrigation system
- It is important an open approach regarding all aspects in order to manage the territory and extreme events.  
We have to be aware that some of these (and other) threats are a result of the lack of plans and policies. It is necessary keep emphasizing the importance off the water related cultural and natural heritage to all stakeholders.
- Lack of funding could lead to the impossibility of executing all the planned actions.
- The very different values and characteristics of the site a broad and open approach from all stakeholders in order to valorize the site.
- Conflicting goals require an open approach regarding all aspects and stakeholders.

Key opportunities: use strengths to maximize opportunities

- The great labor and approach of the City Council of Almoradí in order to valorize traditional irrigation system fits perfectly in the WaVE Project context and offers tourism, recreation, education and commerce opportunities.
- The rich heritage of the site could expand the possibilities of getting funding.
- Traditional irrigation areas can laminate and mitigate floods, attending social concerns.
- The branding strategies enlarge economic opportunities.
- The traditional irrigation transformed zone, with a rich orchard, invites to ride along the cycle paths, which confers touristic, recreational and educational values to the region.
- The collaboration between Diputación de Alicante and Suez will help in flood risk management, improving the success of specific planning in the region and collaborating with the River Basin Authority.
- Improved participation with local stakeholders and inhabitants is important in order to implement agreed solutions.

Local products gastronomy and the particular wholesale market give the site an important touristic value.