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The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Conservation and Management of Saltscapes in Spain - The Case of the Association of Friends of Inland Salinas

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Saltscapes need a keen eye to be appreciated, as they do not offer instant, pleasant experiences. It is an important challenge for most non-governmental organizations devoted to their protection and dissemination. There are two main types of organizations that deal with saltscapes in Spain: nature conservation and cultural heritage associations. In the first case, their interest is nature conservation in general, and they may act at different geographical levels (local, regional, national) and may organize volunteer activities related to their goals. In the second case, their interest is mainly the local cultural heritage and this may include (historic) salt making sites. Only a few cultural associations primarily deal with the local salt making heritage and their specific interests and activities usually depend on the scientific, technical or professional backgrounds of the leaders of the organization. Often they cooperate with regional authorities to organize summer work camps to restore part of the salt heritage. These types of non-governmental organizations act at a local level and often ignore each other's existence. However, in 2002 the Association of Friends of Inland Salinas (ACASI) was established with the aim to preserve, study and disseminate the cultural and natural values of saltscapes. In Spain, it is the only organization that is specialized in salt heritage in general that acts both at the national and the international level. The association works with two main groups of

stakeholders: schools and the general public and organizations; or, specialized public agencies (public authorities, managers, owners, scientists, etc.). Its main goal is to disseminate knowledge on saltscapes by means of field trips, exhibitions, and publications, and by organizing courses, conferences, and salt heritage related events. It also offers technical assistance and consults on issues such as planning, management, tourism, and sound local socioeconomic development in (former) salt making areas. The ACASI performs research on the cultural and natural values of saltscapes and functions as a network for people and organizations interested in salt heritage. In general, non-governmental organizations dealing more or less specifically with salt heritage in Spain have certain weaknesses that are hard to overcome: they generally have a very local scope of action; they work in rural and sociodemographically poor environments; they suffer from a permanent shortage of human, technical and financial resources; they usually have less than 100 paying members; and they obtain little cooperation (if not indifference or even opposition) from the local and regional authorities. Finally, the participation of the local population is highly variable, usually depending on personal relations. All of these are difficult to solve, but with patience, enthusiasm and hard work, it is possible to cope with these difficulties and successfully work towards preserving the saltscapes.



Pétrola endorreic lake. Institut De Ciencies De La Terra Jaume Almera. <http://www.ija.csic.es>. Accessed February 2009.