Biodiversity Picnic in Portugal

20 May, 2010
Former Oyster Cleansing Station of Tagus, Municipality of Moita

The Biodiversity Picnic took place for the first time in 2010 in Portugal. Quercus, a Portuguese environmental NGO organised the event with the support of CEEweb and SIMARSUL – an integrated wastewater multimunicipal company of Setúbal Peninsula. The site of the Picnic was carefully chosen: it was realised at the Oyster Cleansing Station of Tagus, which has become a symbol of biodiversity loss because of the disappearance of a species once abundant in the Tagus and holding a high economic value - the Portuguese Oyster, *Crassostrea angulata*.

About 30 people gathered for the Picnic, including representatives of three Municipalities, a Natural Park and a Natural Reserve (Environment Ministry), two NGOs (Quercus and Greenpeace), a company of waste water treatment (the sponsor), an international company of drinking water, a consultancy on environment and biodiversity, a university, a national TV channel, two local newspapers and a regional news portal.

A guided visit started the event in the morning. The buildings of the facilities and their former functionalities were shown to the participants, as well as some features of this nicely recovered place, nowadays used as an event centre. A relaxed outdoor welcome drink of organic refreshments and sweet Moscatel wine, as well as regional cakes such as the “fogaça” were served as icebreaking for the participants.

In the seminar that followed indoor, some major issues related to biodiversity were presented by four speakers. These covered the importance of the services provided by biodiversity and ecosystems; knowledge gaps on monitoring and researching biodiversity and the contribution of the projects developed by Quercus to the conservation of biodiversity in Portugal. The need for better approaches to the ultimate drivers of biodiversity loss, such as the consumption patterns, and a simple SWOT analysis for biodiversity conservation in Portugal were some topics to launch the discussion. Questions and comments followed, mostly focusing on the role of business in biodiversity protection.

Later the participants walked out to the Picnic lunch, which included a variety of regional and local products, many from organic farming produced and certified in Portugal. The salads with colourful edible flowers, regional wines and cheese, raw Portuguese oysters with lemon, local grown strawberries and sweets were highly appreciated. The issue of promoting the Portuguese oyster and the need to develop further work on business and biodiversity in Portugal were some of the talk topics during the Picnic.

Exhibition materials included posters by Quercus and SIMARSUL and printed materials showing biodiversity related projects and activities developed by the municipality of Moita. Seeds of regional varieties of vegetables displayed by Colher para Semear, an invited NGO, showed the importance of conserving agricultural biodiversity.

In the end of this hot sunny day, new contacts were established, new ideas for action emerged and hope rose for a renewed estuary, as soon as the waste water treatment plant of SIMARSUL starts operations by the end of the year.
The wall panel made of painted tiles by local school children depicting local bird biodiversity