

WATER SOLUTIONS MADE IN PORTUGAL

A ROADMAP TO IMPLEMENT ROBUST AND SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

Building-blocks, lessons learned and best practices



“The Portuguese Miracle!” is a statement frequently made by the former Executive Director of IWA – The International Water Association, Paul Reiter, when referring to the **institutional reform that took place in the Urban Water Sector**, in Portugal, over the last 25 years.

In the 1990’s, the sector was lagging behind, faced with poor performance, fragmentation in service provision and lack of financial sustainability. In many regions of the country, potable water did not reach minimum quality standards, the service was interrupted during summer due to vulnerable water sources and information for the consumer was not available. In the wastewater sector the situation was even worse. Only 15% of the population was connected to wastewater treatment facilities, many rivers were heavily polluted and a large extension of coastal area bathing waters were contaminated. At that time, decision makers realized that it was impossible to maintain “business as usual”.

Economic development and environmental sustainability could not cope with this situation. Therefore, in 1993, the government decided to start a transformative institutional reform. Since then, there has been remarkable progress in the water sector in Portugal, resulting in the **development of significant expertise and valuable capabilities** in all components of the industry’s value chain.

An ambitious infrastructure investment plan has been implemented across the country as evidenced by excellent performance indicators in drinking water quality, wastewater treatment and environmental improvements.

These results were made possible due to an enabling institutional environment fostered by **a sound governance system**, diverse and robust management models involving public (central and local) and private companies, clear regulatory standards and state-of-the-art engineering.

Today, the **Portuguese water sector is a reference in key areas**, such as regulation, infrastructure resilience, operators’ consolidation in order to achieve economies of scale, water efficiency, wastewater management, digital transformation, adaptation to climate change and resource valorization among others.

These achievements are internationally recognized by reputed organizations, such as the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, OECD and others.

At the upcoming PT Water Seminar in Washington, this 25 year story and the lessons learned from the institutional process of change that supported all these achievements will be shared. Also, some of the following questions will be answered and discussed:

- What were the main drivers of this institutional transformation?
- How was it possible to mobilize and commit key stakeholders?
- What were other key success factors along this 25 year process?

Some of the most important outcomes of the Portuguese sector reform are centered in an **effective institutional capacity building process** and in the consolidation of competences, experience and leading edge expertise. In order to show-case these outcomes, the PT Water Seminar will include a panel of state-of-the-art cases developed by Portuguese organizations in the following areas:

- Wastewater management;
- Water efficiency;
- Adaptation to climate change;
- Digital transformation;
- Capacity building.

We believe that this expertise and competencies may turn into contributions to foster World Bank goals and to accelerate the process of change needed to enable the fulfillment of the SDG 2030 agenda. The examples presented in the **PT Water Seminar** aim to be **inspiring and potentially scalable to other regions of the world.**

Notably, the water sector represents approximately 1% of Portuguese GDP with a large percentage of international projects financed. Several Portuguese players (institutions, research centers and enterprises) have been working in emerging economies and developing countries for quite a long time, thus allowing the Portuguese Water Cluster a **good understanding of the key issues and effective approaches towards SDG #6 and others.**

The key theme in the **PT Water Seminar** will be **sharing** these Portuguese experiences and lessons learned with the World Bank as a contribution to consolidate new approaches and solutions in the Urban Water Sector and taking advantage of this successful 25 year process that **can be inspiring for other countries.**

PT WATER SEMINAR PROGRAM

9.00 – 9.15	Opening Session
9.15 – 10.45	<p>Panel 1 Governance, management models and stakeholders involvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 years in a glance: from poor performance to sustainable and efficient services. Critical success factors of the Portuguese Multimunicipal Model. (PT delegate) • Regional challenges related to good governance of the urban water sector. Highlights of the Portuguese experience. (WB) • Water service regulation as a driver for sustainability. (PT delegate) • Discussion
10.45 – 11.00	<i>Coffee-break</i>
11.00 – 12.30	<p>Panel 2 Portuguese water case studies</p> <p><i>This panel presents and discusses relevant successful projects and on-going initiatives implemented by the Portuguese Water Cluster that can be inspiring in different regional contexts.</i></p> <p>Moderator: (WB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wastewater management. A new paradigm in resource recovery. • Water efficiency. Non-revenue water control and management. • Cities and climate change adaptation. Lisbon, the 2020 elected European Green City–in Action. • Digital transformation of a water utility. From corporate to operational decision making through smart data management. • Capacity building. LIS-Water: The Lisbon International Centre for Water
12.30 – 13.00	Panel discussion and session wrap-up
13.00 – 14.00	Networking lunch

