



# CONFERENCE REPORT

ZAGREB, APRIL 2024



## **4<sup>th</sup> International Conference “Waters in sensitive and protected areas” Report**

The 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference “Waters in Sensitive and Protected Areas”, jointly organized by the Croatian Water Pollution Control Society (CWPCS) and the European Water Association (EWA), took place in the Park Plaza Histria hotel in the City of Pula, Croatia from April 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> 2024. The conference was supported by the International Water Association (IWA) and was organized under the auspices of all Croatian public universities, Croatian Academy of Technical Sciences, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Croatian Waters, Josip Juraj Strossmayer Water Institute, Croatian Hydrological Society, Croatian Society for Drainage and Irrigation, Croatian Water and Wastewater Association, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets and Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, as well as Region of Istria, City of Pula, Public Institution Natura Histrica and Brijuni National Park.

This conference was sponsored by 3 Gold sponsors, 4 Silver sponsors, 4 Bronze sponsors, 6 other sponsors and 1 supporter.

Sensitive and protected areas are important, not only in terms of protection of nature and its biodiversity but also in preservation of their values for different human needs. We are witnesses to the fact that human activities and dramatic population growth significantly increase the impact of climate and land use change on the physical environment, causing deterioration of human health and ecosystem services, pollution of water, soil and air, imbalance of biogeochemical cycles and enormous waste production.

Over the last decades, sensitive and vulnerable areas, like fertile soils around rivers prone to flooding, karst aquifers influenced by salinization or overexploitation or coasts vulnerable to tropical cyclones, were regularly affected by extreme events, having large socio-economic and environmental impacts affecting many sectors. These multi-faceted impacts occur both in water-stressed regions, but also in countries where water availability has never been a major concern.

Many groundwater and surface water systems used for water supply, a highly sensitive areas, of which large part is under protection, are under substantial pressure from overexploitation or pollution and demand for water resources enhance remarkably. Improved knowledge on how to identify and mitigate environmental problems caused by humans and how to help land-use planners and policy makers to balance needs for water resources with their availability, is pivotal to achieve sustainable development.

Although substantial scientific progress has been made over the last decades on monitoring and forecasting, environmental impact assessment and water resources management and planning under changing climate, there are still research gaps in this area that need to be tackled. This Conference aimed to contribute to advancing the scientific knowledge to new innovative and cost-effective solutions of water protection, fulfilling the legal requirements related to sensitive and protected areas.



The results and importance of the previous international conferences on water in sensitive and protected areas, held in the Republic of Croatia in 1996, 2007 and 2013, obliged us to organize this conference, the fourth in a row, at a high level, both because of its significance and because of the great interest of world-renowned scientists and experts who attended it.

The conference, which was attended by **over 260 participants** from **20 countries** of the world, began on Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, with a day-long workshop on the topic of *“Integrated wastewater management - from the household to the watershed level”*, which was attended by 30 participants.

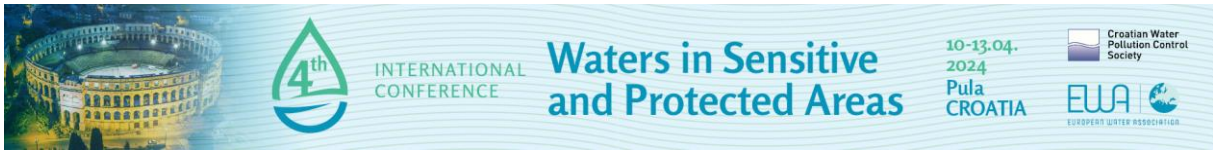
The official opening of the conference was on April 11<sup>th</sup>, and over two days a total of **4 introductory plenary lectures** were held with **four different invited lecturers**, **one round table** with the topic *“Changes in water legislation within the framework of the EU Green Deal - challenges and open questions”* with **4 invited panellists**, including representatives of the World Bank and European Commission. The **70 oral presentations** were organized as **3 parallel sections** (*Inter- and transdisciplinary research in sensitive and protected areas*, *Effective water and wastewater management in sensitive and protected areas under climate change* and *Biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems – Bringing nature back into our life*) lasting 15 min each. The Book of abstracts with **over 90 collected abstracts** has been published, and Proceedings of the Conference are yet to be published in the upcoming weeks. **Two Gold sponsors** held an exhibition of their equipment. The poster section encompassing **18 posters** was set up parallel with the exhibition *“Lives Shaped by Water”* by the organization United for Rivers.

On Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, **more than 40 participants** joined the planned excursion to the beautiful Brijuni National Park with expert guidance of colleagues from Brijuni National Park to the most important water-related locations: “Living water” - the memorial to spring water, Saline wetland habitat, Javorika bay - zone of strict protection and Brijuni Mediterranean garden.

Conference news were regularly reported via **three social media platforms** (*Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook*), the most followed being LinkedIn ([@WSPA\\_Conference](#)) with 668 followers. The official website of the conference, [www.wspa2024.org](http://www.wspa2024.org), was regularly updated with the latest information.

We are happy that the conference has contributed to the affirmation of our homeland and its natural heritage, which consists of riches that many envy, and which we must take constant care of in order to preserve them for future generations.

*Great organization, professional lecturers, interesting presentations and everlasting modern topics bind us to organizing 5<sup>th</sup> Conference in the near future somewhere in Croatia!*



Examples of social media posts:

