

## Article

# La Marina Baja Water Consortium (1950–1978): Hydro-Economic Model of Water Governance behind Tourism Development in Benidorm (Spain)

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the events that originated an integrated water resources management (IWRM) model called *Consorcio de Aguas de la Marina Baja* (CAMB), in the province of Alicante (Spain), in 1978. The impact of tourism and population growth in the second half of the 20th century motivated the need for new management formulas seeking a balance between available resources and a greater need for water resources. The emergence of mass tourism in Benidorm at the end of the 1950s generated a great imbalance between the needs and availability of water resources. Also considering the effect of periods of severe drought, the solution to the deficit was found in the principles of institutional economics and circular water management. Water infrastructure and technology are elements of great importance in this model, allowing the exchange of natural water for reclaimed water, as a result of previous agreements between traditional irrigators and supply users of coastal populations. Its success has guaranteed the coexistence of traditional agriculture and the consolidated tourism activity, making possible the conservation of the cultural landscape. The historical and economic analysis of the model that led to the creation of CAMB can be applied to other regions facing similar challenges.



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**Keywords:** water governance; institutional economy; water exchanges; irrigation; urban water supply; circular economy; *Benidorm*

## 1. Introduction

This research focuses on the events that led to the gestation of a model of integrated management of water resources, constituting the entity called *La Marina Baja Water Consortium* (*Consorcio de Aguas de La Marina Baja*, CAMB, in Spanish) in 1978, located in the district called *La Marina Baja*, whose head is the city of *Benidorm* (province of Alicante, Spain). The impact of tourism since the second half of the 20th century in this region motivated the need to find new management formulas: the increase in demography, the massive arrival of tourists, urban development with new accommodation, a greater demand for energy resources and the food associated with this growth led the actors involved to seek a balance between available resources and a greater need for water resources. After some frustrated attempts during the first decades of the second half of the 20th century, the need and the experience accumulated over the years to deal with water scarcity, recurrent periods of drought and increasing demand resulted—almost intuitively—in a management model that responded to the water supply problems of this region in southeastern Spain according to the principles of good water governance [1].

The main economic activities in *La Marina Baja* until the 1950s were fishing and agriculture and, from a demographic point of view, the district had hardly experienced any changes since 1840. Nevertheless, from the second half of the 1950s, the Spanish economy experienced a process of international reintegration and internal liberalization that resulted in a period of unprecedented economic growth. These facts propitiated the