

## ***Stewardship of rivers: a right instrument for the sustainable development***

**Jordi Recordà Cos**

Master Degree on Environmental Right (CEDAT, URV)  
[jordi.recorda@estudiants.urv.cat](mailto:jordi.recorda@estudiants.urv.cat)

### **Abstract**

This project focuses the discussion of sustainability on the management of biodiversity, coinciding 2010 being recognized as that 2010 has been recognized as the International Year of Biodiversity in the Convention about Biological Diversity of United Nations.

The strategy for the challenge of sustainability is based on the land stewardship, which is a strategy intending to generate accountability among owners and users for the preservation of natural, cultural and landscape values of the territory and to encourage the responsible use of its resources.

Our hypothesis is that sustainability cannot be based exclusively on new free polluted technologies, but also in additional instruments that should focus on jointly responsibility for the different actors related to the territory.

The analysis of this project is focused on natural water areas, where mechanisms are called Stewardship of Rivers (SR). The analysis of available data (period 2003-2009) shows that SR is a right instrument for sustainability.

On the one hand, the increase in the number of voluntary agreements between owners and managers of land (12 to 176) shows that this strategy is really used by actors of the territory, which appreciate the ways of dialogue and consensus more than the imposing classical action of administration, in the process of designing policies for management and conservation of biodiversity.

On the other hand, due to SR, it has been possible to protect 176 new natural areas –representing a total of 31.892,26 ha., that the Administration itself might not be able to achieve. Mostly, these are private properties, though 28% are public properties, underlining the potential of SR,

irrespective of the ownership of the property.

It is proved, therefore, that it is possible to overcome the traditional way of action of the land stewardship, focused on private lands, in order to go more deeply into agreements with public owners. This step allows us to open new innovative actions, such as focusing on proper water resources and not only in areas.

Indeed, this project suggests the integration of the land stewardship through administrative authorizations subject to the planning of ecological flows and water reuse plants. In the first case, land stewardship entities could introduce environmental criteria in the administrative authorization when it is time to control the sustainable use of water. In the case of used water, land stewardship entities could participate to manage the percentage of reused water that corresponds to the environmental use (aquifer recharge, wetland restoration and maintenance of flow). In the case of private water treatment, also suggests that entities could reach voluntary agreements with private landowners to manage directly the reused water (taking in consideration the RD 1620/2007) for environmental uses.

The main limitation for land stewardship entities in these two cases, on the assumption that the authorities allow their performance, is that they could alter their usual role (the protection of private nature), since they might become control agents of the Administration.

It is considered that the land stewardship is a strategy that it is not developed enough in the current regional legislation, and its necessary new regulation to encourage private owners and to promote recognition of this strategy to protect natural areas. Another limitation is due to the proper characteristics of the land stewardship: agreements are “voluntary”, and it is difficult to generate accountability among owners and users.