

# **Lake Effects**

**Transnational History and the Making of a Valencian Landscape**

**By**

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If the Albufera is not cared for it will disappear, but its disappearance will not cause anything else to happen. There will not be any geological cataclysm; nor any sort of catastrophe, or anything like that. Moreover, the physical destiny of the Albufera is that it will disappear. The lake, abandoned to itself, with no sort of attacks upon it or any efforts to care for it, is irretrievably condemned to disappearance. But this is the fate of any historical or artistic monument. Every building, for example, is condemned to disappearance, just as the construction of extinguished civilizations disappeared, and just as little by little the castles, chapels and monasteries lost in the Spanish geography are disappearing, important victims of carelessness, theft, and hooliganism.

Restoration work is undertaken in order to alleviate this inexorable fate as much as possible. This is why any monument or work of economic or cultural interest is object of a permanent guarding and conservation that will allow such legacies of our parents to pass to our children. There is no explanation, then, for the abandonment and pillage that an area of scenic and cultural interest such as the Albufera has undergone. We have a responsibility to our descendants that this patrimony is not lost; that the cultural wealth of the Albufera, in the broadest sense of the word, passes intact to the generations to come.

from José Manuel Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia: Datos para una política de soluciones," *Revista de Obras Públicas*, February-March 1983, 179.

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## **Dedication**

To the farmers, scientists, administrators, and activists  
who helped me understand the Albufera,  
and to the eels, who made me want to.



## Acknowledgements

I am extraordinarily grateful to all of my interviewees, and especially to the many Valencians who went far beyond my expectations in their generosity and enthusiasm for this project. Victor Navarro, Guillermo de Felipe, and the rest of the gang at Acció Ecologista-Agró offered endless assistance and companionship, as well as access to their extensive documentary collection on post-Franco environmental movements. Ricardo Martínez offered early encouragement and considerable help sorting through maps at the city planning office, adding his personal files and ideas as the project took shape. Maria Consuelo Reyna also contributed both memories and a substantial personal collection of clippings, reports, photos, and memorabilia, while Vicente Ramón Quiros and Miguel Ramón Quiros gave me full access to their father's papers and offered context for what I was looking at. Pepe Segarra provided an informative tour of Sueca and introduced me to several contacts in the farming community. Sergio Carbo repeatedly welcomed me into the AVA press office and assisted not only with document retrieval but also with a big-picture perspective on contemporary farming in Valencia.

Three individuals in particular profoundly changed the way I approached this project and warrant special mention. Miguel Minguet was my first contact in the Valencian farming community and, over an outstanding *paella* made from rice grown on his family lands, made me rethink my assumptions about the relationship between farmers and the park. Francisco Pérez Puche maintained an extended correspondence with me throughout my research, and his

introductions opened doors to many sources I could not otherwise have obtained. And Joan Miquel Benavent sacrificed countless hours over the years to give me an extremely thorough guided tour of the Albufera Natural Park, from the Muntanyeta de Sans in the south to the Pinedo canals in the north, and through all the hidden corners in between. His scientific expertise, personal experience, and good humor were high points of my visits.

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## **Table of Abbreviations**

Adena: *Asociación para la Defensa de la Naturaleza*, Association for the Defense of Nature

Aeorma: *Asociación Española para la Ordenación del Territorio y el Medio Ambiente*, Spanish Association for Territorial Planning and the Environment

Apepna: *Asociación de Propietarios y Empresarios del Parque Natural de la Albufera*, Association of Landowners and Businessmen of the Albufera Natural Park

AVA: *Asociación Valenciana de Agricultores*, Valencian Farmers' Association

CAP: Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union

CHJ: *Confederación Hidrográfica del Júcar*, Júcar Hydrographic Confederation

EEC: European Economic Community

GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

ICONA: *Instituto de Conservación de la Naturaleza*, Nature Conservation Institute

OTDA: *Oficina Técnica de la Dehesa-Albufera*, Dehesa-Albufera Technical Office

SEO: *Sociedad Española de Ornitología*, Spanish Ornithological Society

USUJ: *Unidad Sindical de Usuarios del Júcar*, Júcar Users' Union

WTO: World Trade Organization

WWF: World Wildlife Fund, now World Wide Fund for Nature

## **Archives**

ACH – Archivo Nacional de Hacienda, Madrid

AHGV – Archivo Histórico de la Generalitat Valenciana, Valencia

AHMV - Archivo Histórico Municipal, Valencia

ARV – Archivo del Reino Valenciana, Valencia

AVA – Asociación Valenciana de Agricultores, Valencia

FDM – Fondo Documental de Montes, Madrid

FDMA – Fons de Documentació del Medi Ambient, Valencia

MCR – Private papers of Maria Consuelo Reyna, Valencia

MRI – Private papers of Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, Valencia

OTDA – Oficina Técnica de la Dehesa-Albufera, El Saler

OGPA – Oficina Gestora del Parque de la Albufera, El Palmar

SP – Servicio de Planeamiento del Ayuntamiento, Valencia

## **Introduction. Sedimentary Histories of a Valencian Landscape**

Hidden among the shells, plant matter, stones and soil on the floor of a lake are the stories of fishermen, farmers, philosophers, and politicians. While every physical environment bears some mark of contemporary human actions, the strata of a lakebed preserve the evidence of successive social, economic, and physical changes over time, each layer gradually buried under new deposits washed in from the surrounding countryside. Deep below the surface, the remains of marine barnacles and oysters provide records of a primeval connection between the lake and the sea. Atop them, freshwater mussel shells tumbled among river-smoothed pebbles signal a shift in the ecosystem, an influx of new streams and canals brought about by an era of river diversion and irrigation. A layer of silt suggests sudden deforestation upstream, perhaps caused by fire or the abandonment of agricultural lands. The thick carpet of muck found in urban duck ponds and bucolic watering holes alike indicates a surplus of phosphorous and nitrogen carried in by surface runoff, creating an oxygen-starved environment where not even the bacteria necessary for decomposition can survive. Wood planks, cartridge shells, fishhooks, and discarded bottles embedded in the mud all suggest the use of the lake for recreation, construction, and economic survival. And above it all, the water, opaque or transparent, sterile or teeming with life, shimmers in the sun and shields these histories from view.

Atop these physical layers lie other, metaphorical strata, laid down by visitors to the lakes who infuse the landscape with meanings built on memory, myth, and tradition. Our experiences



of nature are defined not only by materiality, but also by the cultural associations we ascribe to specific places and types of landscape. The fishermen, farmers, philosophers and politicians whose actions have contributed to the sediments on a lake floor may share certain memories of a landscape, but they are just as likely to differ in their understandings of what that landscape means. Where one visitor sees a carefully managed rice paddy, another finds underutilized real estate, and still another delights in a thriving wetland. The distance between such visions, combined with the biological and geological constraints of the landscape, creates a space for social and ideological conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The sedimentary layers, both real and imagined, in lakes around the world emanate not only from local land use, markets, technologies, hydraulic management, and cultural practices, but also from the larger processes that shape those local trends, and have their roots in global trade agreements, social movements, and political changes. Layers of connections between the biological world and the human, the local and the global, go into the creation of every new stratum. Soil and fertilizers wash down canals from freshly tilled fields, the product of agricultural practices made possible through funds from a transnational subsidy program. Fed by the nutrients in the soil, algae blooms proliferate and starve out other species when the lake's historical source of clean, fresh water dries up under the combined pressures of global climate change and nationwide hydraulic demand. Lakebed strata are some of the many physical traces left by these complex interscalar interactions.

“Sedimentary history” is both a metaphor and a literal reality. This dissertation dives beneath the ripples and excavates some of the strata, following the sediments back to their sources to reveal the relationship between the material environment and the myriad human

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<sup>1</sup> The evocative image of layers of landscapes infused with meaning by memory, myth, and tradition has been borrowed from Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Vintage: 1996).

decisions that have influenced its development. Its focus is the ongoing physical transformation of the area surrounding the Albufera, a large, shallow lagoon on the Spanish Mediterranean coast just south of the city of Valencia; the social, economic, and cultural factors that have contributed to that transformation; and the ways in which the shifting landscape has given rise to new uses and new relationships between local people and their environment. The area, whose very emergence as a cohesive region lies at the heart of this study, today plays an important role within the Valencian imagination as a site of unparalleled biodiversity and picturesque landscapes, as the origin of iconic foods and traditions, and as a significant source of pride and prestige for regional people (Figure 1). My basic argument is that the history of a specific place, including both its material characteristics and the role it occupies in the lives and ideas of its inhabitants, must be understood as a product of the confluence of multiple scales.

**Figure 1: Situating a transnational microhistory**

The Autonomous Community of Valencia is outlined in red, and the Albufera Natural Park is outlined in green. The city of Valencia and its large international port are visible immediately north of the park.



The Albufera’s recent history provides an entrée to the story of Spanish “modernization” and the attendant changes in popular attitudes towards nature, productivity, and the state.

“Modernization” can mean different things to different people, and concepts of modernity in Spain shifted significantly over the course of the twentieth century. From the anti-clericalism of

prewar intellectuals, to the industrial productivism of the Franco regime, to the post-materialism of the 1970s and beyond, however, Spanish modernity has always been measured in comparative, transnational terms. Politicians and philosophers throughout the century defined modernity and “backwardness” not by internal criteria but by the relative position of Spain vis-à-vis its international peers, specifically the industrialized nations of the West. Spain’s many divergences from the paths of development observed in England, the United States, France, and Germany – the “failure” of its nineteenth-century Liberal revolution, the persistence of a predominantly agricultural economy, the “superstitious” culture dominated by clerics and monarchists – were understood as deficiencies that kept the country from resuming its rightful place among the world powers. Spanish modernization, then, has been generally understood as a national progression away from these sins of the past and towards an imagined European economic and cultural norm. Many commentators have used the term interchangeably with “Europeanization.”

That progression has been measured by at least two different standards over the period covered in this dissertation. For most of the century, philosophers and politicians alike saw industrialization and mechanization as the hallmarks of modernity. Some went further, describing a change in the modes of production as merely a first step that would produce further improvements in quality of life, education, and political participation, but under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, economic growth often came at the expense of these other hallmarks of “modern” Western societies. Indeed, one of the great ironies of the Franco era was the regime’s emphasis on modernizing the economy even as the anti-democratic dictatorship itself stood out as an anachronistic holdover among the nation-states of Western Europe. By 1970, however, the yardstick for Spanish modernity began to shift away from Franco’s obsession with economic growth and towards ideological and political convergence with Western trends.

Reformers within the government loosened restrictions on public morality and expanded civil rights, and the final years of the dictatorship saw a blossoming of countercultural movements and intellectual trends that mirrored those of England, France, and the United States. With the return of democracy, local and regional governments scrambled to adopt progressive reforms that brought their legal regimes into line with those of their European neighbors, while the national government renewed its emphasis on diplomatic relations around the world. No single event was more successful in convincing Spaniards and foreigners alike of the country's "modernity" than the country's accession to the European Union in 1986, which marked a decisive end to the country's exclusion from political and diplomatic networks and signaled the acceptance by the new government of fundamental changes in social policy.

The process of Spanish modernization, then, entailed a wide range of physical, demographic, and ideological changes that had ramifications not only on the national scale but also in the lives and surroundings of individuals. Many of those changes can be traced through the transformations of Spanish landscapes and people's understandings of those landscapes over time. The Albufera, one of the most ecologically and sociologically diverse regions of Spain, offers a unique opportunity for an in-depth study of how the process of modernization affected a wide range of people and places. Its landscapes include one of the last undeveloped beaches on the western Mediterranean, a lake that is both the drainage point for major urban and industrial areas and an internationally protected wetland habitat, industrial zones and municipalities, major tourist resorts, and a large expanse of privately-owned fields and farms that have been known for their fertility for more than a thousand years. The people occupying these spaces have similarly diverse lifestyles and ideas, often defined by their relationship to the land itself: fishermen, scientists, novelists, rice farmers, politicians, and activists. Their divergent experiences of trends

such as urbanization, environmental engineering, conservation, and mechanization provide a complex and nuanced portrait of modernization in Spanish society.

This is not to say, however, that Valencia is somehow “typically” Spanish, and indeed a secondary focus of this dissertation is the way that the environment has helped to shape distinctive Valencian identities that diverge sharply from those of the nation as a whole. While regionalist movements in the Basque Country and Catalonia have long taken center stage in the international press, similar movements exist in regions around Spain based on claims of unified historical or cultural identities. With the institutionalization of the central government’s weakness and the political primacy of the seventeen “Autonomous Communities” during the transition to democracy, these regional identities and political entities have taken an increasingly important role in both local politics and in negotiations at the level of the European Union. These regional identities are just as fractured and problematic as national ones, with sharp internal disagreements over questions as fundamental as language and their relationship with the Spanish state. Regionalist movements in Valencia, for instance, range from a conservative, folkloric vision of the medieval Kingdom of Valencia to a progressive anti-centralism that identifies more closely with neighboring Catalonia and distant Brussels than with Castile. Valencians on all sides of the political spectrum have used various combinations of Valencian regionalism along with tools and ideas of transnationalism to advocate for political and social changes.

While the identities and experiences described in this dissertation are, therefore, uniquely Valencian, they are nonetheless closely tied to a larger national story of environmental change in the twentieth century. Where regional identities such as those found in Spain emphasize the constructed nature of the state itself, national boundaries and institutions are real in meaningful ways, both produced by and acting upon external processes. Legislation, economics, and ideas

propagated by the nation-state can produce concrete results in individual lives and specific environments. Ideas and laws emanating from Madrid fundamentally shaped the boundaries within which Valencian actors can operate. The expansion of tourism along the Mediterranean coast, the causes and consequences of Spain's accession to the European Union, and the rise of hydraulic engineering, while examined here primarily in the Valencian context, can only be understood within a framework that takes into account the national and transnational policies and events that shaped them. We must look, in other words, not only at the sediments themselves as they settled on the floor of the Albufera, but also at the streams and gullies that brought them to the lake, and at the fields and hills from whence they came.

This multiscalar view, in turn, raises larger questions about international environmental governance and the ways that local cultural, material, and historical traits can shape the implementation of policies developed in distant legislative arenas. This is not simply a case of the classic "implementation gap" between a prescribed action and the extent to which it is carried out on the ground, but rather points to the impossibility of prescribing solutions to global environmental problems from afar via universalizing policies that fail to take local and historical specificity into account.<sup>2</sup> The view from Valencia is a view from the bottom, from the rice fields and beaches where policies on conservation and the economy play out, rather than the boardrooms and parliamentary halls where the policies are designed. A local history allows us to consider how various ideologies of domination, from Francoist control to EU law, have been interpreted and resisted on the ground. In the rural environments on the outskirts of the city, we

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<sup>2</sup> A survey of the problems associated with national-level implementation of European environmental policy in the late twentieth century is *Implementing EU Environmental Policy: New Directions and Old Problems (Issues in Environmental Politics)*, ed. Christopher Knill and Andrea Lenschow (Manchester University Press, 2000). For an up-to-date analysis of existing implementation gaps and their economic implications, see European Commission Directorate-General Environment. *The costs of not implementing the environmental acquis*. Report ENV.G.1/FRA/2006/0073, September 2011, [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/economics\\_policy/pdf/report\\_sept2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/economics_policy/pdf/report_sept2011.pdf).

see how people engaged concretely with their environments, how contradictory policies were reconciled by those responsible for their implementation, and how people integrated local and personal experience with new ideas imposed from outside. Listening to a septuagenarian farmer describe his latest eco-tourism holiday, riding in a dilapidated motorboat with biologists tasked with holding back the forces of erosion, or shopping in the city market at harvest time for a kilo of the best oranges I've ever tasted for a paltry thirty cents, those policies gain an immediacy and a personal importance impossible to glean from the halls of power where they were produced.

This dissertation, therefore, maps the differences in the way policies are set forth in Madrid or Brussels and the way they are experienced in rural Valencia, as well as variations between urban and rural people's understandings of global and national events. In the process, it challenges notions of national uniformity—whether explicit or unstated—underlying some recent work, which have little place in a country as culturally diverse and politically decentralized as contemporary Spain.<sup>3</sup> More broadly, it contributes to understandings of the complicated relationships between the local and the global, contextualizing local events within broader patterns of exchange, teasing out connections between individuals and locations in disparate locations around the world, and seeking large-scale perspectives on small-scale occurrences. This approach was inspired in part by Donald Wright's classic world-systems analysis *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa*, which detailed the ways in which global economic networks linked the peripheral region of the Gambia to the rest of the world.<sup>4</sup> As in the Gambia, this study's close focus on a little-known landscape in a region of secondary cultural

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<sup>3</sup> The best-known integration of Spain into broader European narratives is Sebastian Balfour's and Paul Preston's edited volume, *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 1999). Their work is severely limited, however, by its exclusive focus on international political relations and to a lesser extent economic history, which excludes the intellectual, interpersonal, social, and environmental networks of which Spain was also a part. It also remains firmly within the nation-state construct, looking at Spain as a whole without much attention to regional differences, local specificity, or transboundary processes.

<sup>4</sup> Wright 15-16.

and economic importance, chosen in part for its very obscurity and apparent isolation from the national and global cores, enables the connections between the local and the transnational or global to stand out in sharp relief. Unlike Wright's study, however, this dissertation is less concerned with the incorporation of Spain into a unified global economic system than with the complex and overlapping currents of commercial, ideological, physical and political exchange that played a role in the Spanish experience of modernization. Changes in the Valencian environment over the twentieth century emerged in large part from the pressures of international markets, embargoes, and subsidies as Spain became an integral part of the global economy, but they also came from shifts in regional identity, countercultural ideologies, and the biophysical constraints of the landscapes themselves. Thus the collapse of the Albufera's millenarian eel fishery can be understood as part of an Atlantic-wide decline in freshwater eel stocks; local hunting regulations are shown to be an outgrowth of European environmental movements of the late-twentieth century; and the falling incomes of a handful of traditional rice farmers are seen to derive from the vagaries of international markets and policies set on distant shores.

By contextualizing a single Spanish region within larger networks and emphasizing the cultural and social aspects to environmental change, this dissertation diverges from the approach chosen by most Spanish environmental historians. In keeping with the post-Franco tendency of the intellectual left towards extreme decentralization and suspicion of the central state, most scholars today limit their inquiries to the regions in which their universities are located, especially Catalonia and the Basque Country, but also including Galicia, Andalucia, Aragon, and other Autonomous Communities. By and large, such studies fail to address issues of transnational and transregional influence, and even of nationally coordinated trends and policies.



Moreover, many of these scholars work as part of interdisciplinary teams researching physical ecology and “social metabolism,” a Marxist conception of energy flows and waste production closely related to Malthusian notions of limited resources and to political interests in environmental justice.<sup>5</sup> Members of history faculties around the country describe themselves as scientists and economists, and see their objective as providing hard data that could be of use to European policymakers in dealing with Spanish environmental and agricultural issues. As such, they tend to ignore social or cultural questions about the ways in which landscapes and ideas of nature have been constructed over the years.

Iberian environmental history remains a field in its infancy, with surprisingly little published since the Association of Contemporary History opened the discussion with a 1993 volume dedicated to “History and Ecology.”<sup>6</sup> The only monograph-length study published to date, Jesús Alonso Millán’s *Una Tierra Abierta*, is a purely descriptive history offering a general reconstruction of changes in the Iberian landscape over the course of its human habitation.<sup>7</sup> An eclectic collection of essays published under the title *Naturaleza Transformada* in 2001, while showcasing the work of many of the preeminent Spanish environmental historians, reveals some of the weaknesses of the field. Most of the essays display a relentlessly regional focus and descriptive style that limits their utility to scholars working outside of Spain.<sup>8</sup> While a few

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<sup>5</sup> For a general overview of the state of the field, see Antonio Ortega Santos, “Agroecosystems, Peasants, and Conflicts: Environmental History in Spain at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” *Global Environment* 4 (2009). For prominent examples of the “social metabolism” approach to Spanish environmental history, see Enric Tello, J. Marull, J. Pino and M.J. Cordobilla, “Social metabolism, landscape change and land-use planning in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region”, *Land Use Policy*, 27 (2010): 497-510; Joan Martínez-Alier, Giorgos Kallis, Sandra Veuthey, Mariana Walter, Leah Temper, “Social Metabolism, Ecological Distribution Conflicts, and Valuation Languages,” *Ecological Economics* (2010).

<sup>6</sup> *Historia e Ecología (Ayer)*, ed. Manuel González de Molina and Juan Martínez Alier (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Jesús Alonso Millán, *Una Tierra Abierta: Materiales para una Historia Ecológica de España* (Madrid, Compañía Literaria 1995).

<sup>8</sup> *Naturaleza Transformada: Estudios de Historia Ambiental en España*, ed. Manuel González de Molina and Joan Martínez Alier (Barcelona: Icaria 2001).

approach their subjects from a national perspective, their brevity translates into sweepingly cursory treatments of such enormous topics as “the modernization of Spanish agriculture” or “energy transition and mining expansion in Spain” in thirty-page articles or chapters.<sup>9</sup>

For historical work on environmental social movements, on the impacts of environmental change on everyday life, and on the diverse and changing conceptions of landscape across the Iberian Peninsula, we must look to scholars working outside of Spain. Most notably, the historical geographer Erik Swyngedouw, whose work helped inspire the present study, is in the midst of a significant project dealing with hydraulic policy and construction during the twentieth century and its role in political and social changes during the Franco and pre-Franco eras.<sup>10</sup> Lino Camprubi’s manuscript-in-progress, researched as a dissertation at the University of California-Los Angeles, is fundamentally concerned with the development of scientific knowledge under the Franco regime but also addresses the role of environmental engineering on political and social thought during the dictatorship.<sup>11</sup> And Pablo Corral Broto, a student at the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris, is developing some of the first scholarly work on the Spanish environmental justice movements, albeit focused principally on Aragon.<sup>12</sup> In other fields, the sociologist and political scientist Susana Aguilar Fernández has conducted the only comprehensive scholarly survey of Spanish environmentalism within the context of the European

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<sup>9</sup> José Manuel Naredo, “La modernización de la agricultura española y sus repercusiones ecológicas,” in *Naturaleza Transformada*, 55; Andrés Sánchez Picón, “Transición energética y expansión minera en España,” in *Naturaleza Transformada*, 265.

<sup>10</sup> Erik Swyngedouw, “TechnoNatural Revolutions - the Scalar Politics of Franco’s Hydro-Social Dream for Spain 1939-1975,” *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* 32 (2007); and Erik Swyngedouw, “Producing Nature, Scaling Environment: Water, Networks, and Territories in Fascist Spain,” *Leviathan Undone? Towards a Political Economy of Scale*, ed. Keil R. and Mahon R, 121-139 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> Lino Camprubi, *The Engineers’ ‘Redemption of Spain’: Science, Technology, and the Making of the Francoist Landscape (1939-1995)* (working title), 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Pablo Corral Broto, “Sobreviviendo al desarrollismo. Las desigualdades ambientales y la protesta social durante el franquismo (Aragón, 1950-1979),” *Ager: Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural* 10 (April 2011): 111-155.

Union, while the environmental journalist Joaquín Fernández has made a valuable contribution with his narratives of the principle events and people in the Spanish environmental movement.<sup>13</sup> This dissertation, then, offers an historical and ethnographic intervention in the field, and is unique in its emphasis on global methodologies.

The transnational networks that exerted the strongest influence over Valencians' experiences in the late twentieth century were those of Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States. But while the process and divergent understandings of "Europeanization" are a significant focus of this dissertation, its relevance is not limited to the European context. Tensions between local, regional, national, and transnational identities such as those observed in Valencia play important roles in the political paths of many regions around the world, as well as in the increasingly post-national European Union. Spain is one of many places, most of them outside of Western Europe, where economic development and the environmental devastation of modernity outpaced social and political reforms.

Spain has long occupied a peripheral position in European and global historical narratives. The refrain that "Africa begins at the Pyrenees" (often falsely credited to Alexander Dumas) arose in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, when French intellectuals characterized Spanish uprisings as the rejection of liberal progress by a nation of superstitious, uneducated peasants. Such stereotypes fit seamlessly with widespread acceptance of an older Black Legend built on Spain's supposed history of religious fanaticism and cultural backwardness. Spain's apparent divergence from northern European experiences of nation-

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<sup>13</sup> Susana Aguilar Fernández, *El Reto del Medio Ambiente: Conflictos e Intereses en la Política Medioambiental Europea* (Madrid: Alianza Universidad, 1997); Joaquín Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial 1999).

building during the nineteenth century, and its perceived lack of industrialization, compounded a sense both at home and abroad that following a sixteenth-century Golden Age the country had fallen into a period of decline (or “decadence,” to use the preferred term of Spanish historians), leaving it far behind the rest of the continent in terms of economic and intellectual development by the turn of the twentieth century. Spain’s more recent political and economic peculiarities, namely the early loss of its overseas empire, the advent of an extended isolationist dictatorship, and its exclusion from continental wars and alliances of the twentieth century, obviously diverged in important ways from the modern history of the northwestern European core.

While it is true that the defeat of Spain’s liberal reform movement during the nineteenth century set the country on a different path from many of its neighbors, this does not mean that contemporary Spanish history falls entirely outside of European narratives. Superficial differences, both real and imagined, have masked strong parallels between Spanish experiences of modernity and those of the rest of Europe. The top-down perspective of diplomatic and economic history, stressing treaties, gross national product, and foreign aid packages, simultaneously positions Spain as a country cousin to the more prominent central and northern nations and obscures more pervasive symmetries between everyday life in modern Spain and elsewhere in the Western world. Conversely, looking at the history of modern Spain through the lens of its environment can reveal surprising similarities between Spanish ideology and practice and those of other modern states. Such patterns include increased public and private investment in major industrial and development projects; the transformation of national and local economies from agriculture, to industry, to service; and the emergence of various discourses on conservation and ecology. In these important ways the Spanish experience as a whole differed

little from those well documented in other national contexts, even as significant local cultural, physical, and economic characteristics contributed to substantial regional variations.

This study thus walks a fine line between highlighting the ways in which Spain forms a part of European and transnational narratives and the ways in which it diverges from those narratives. It is to some extent the very uniqueness of the Spanish experience of modernity, in particular its relative economic isolation, lack of central national identity, antidemocratic political structures, and relatively late industrial development, make it much more than a case study of trends that have been documented elsewhere. Rather, the Spanish case is one of immensely complex regional relationships, distinctively Mediterranean physical conditions, and a deeply conflicted relationship with the European core.

Most scholars today correctly reject arguments about general Spanish “backwardness,” but it is undeniable that the Franco regime’s policies delayed the adoption of western cultural trends and technologies and placed Spain on a different trajectory than its northern neighbors. Specifically, when compared to most of the rest of Europe, the economic and demographic hallmarks of modernization arrived later and contrasted more sharply with the cultural and political status quo. To some extent, this is a matter of degree: European historians routinely describe postwar development on the continent as a sudden and massive acceleration of processes that had been underway for more than a century. But whereas most of Europe benefitted from transnational cooperation and vibrant intellectual exchange after 1945, Spain’s almost complete exclusion from postwar reconstruction projects, its diplomatic and economic isolation, and the internal suppression of intellectual exchange and civil society significantly impeded Spain’s ability to benefit from the technologies and ideas of the rest of the continent. Even when reformist ministers at last achieved a gradual “*apertura*” (opening) to the West in the

late 1950s, the dictatorship kept a tight rein on the social and cultural trends that had accompanied economic expansion elsewhere. While labor movements, youth activism, and other forms of civil society sought and achieved reforms in the United States, Germany, Britain, France, and elsewhere, in Spain the same problems of modernity – from a lack of urban infrastructure, to workers’ rights, to environmental devastation – went essentially unaddressed under the socially repressive Franco regime. As late as 1963, amidst massive international condemnation, the state tortured and executed the Communist leader Julián Grimau for alleged war crimes committed nearly thirty years earlier. Such actions clashed sharply with the country’s efforts to recast itself as a fully modern state.

The tensions between Spain’s modern economic system and its conservative or even regressive social and legal structures were never fully resolved, despite gradual reform in Franco’s final years and the highly controversial inauguration of a constitutional monarchy after his death in 1975. Like the postwar France described by Michael Bess, Spanish society after Franco was “caught between the lure of technology, progress, and abundance on the one hand, and, on the other, the gnawing fear of losing contact with the natural world, of drifting insensibly out of touch with its most cherished heritage and traditions.”<sup>14</sup> A long tradition of aggressively developmentalist policies intersected awkwardly with the widespread but poorly-defined desire to bring national policies and cultures into line with those of Western Europe, creating strange amalgams of postmaterialist cultural values and rampant capitalist development in laws and practices around the country. Successive governments negotiated international treaties, joined global trade and defense agreements, and advocated in diverse venues for their own visions of a unified Europe. Less than thirty years after the end of the dictatorship, the country was a full

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000* (University of Chicago Press, 2003): 4.

member of the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the World Trade Organization, and a signatory to dozens of transnational conventions; it had a modern, highly educated population working primarily in information and service industries; and it stood as a major force to be reckoned with in European and global economies, as more recent developments (such as the economic crisis underway as I write this dissertation) make clear. But it retained physical, ideological and legal holdovers from the Franco and pre-Franco eras that continued to conflict with its new modern identity. National economic and social patterns in the twenty-first century, from agricultural policy to social mobilization, are characterized by internal contradictions, both legal and social, that are the legacy of Spain's abrupt and fractured entry to transnational networks.<sup>15</sup>

It has become common practice among environmental historians to emphasize the place of the environment, and specific nonhumans within that environment, as actively contributing to historical networks. Analysis that focuses exclusively on human intent – political, cultural, economic, and social – and leaves out the relevance of materiality and the biophysical nature of the environment, is inherently incomplete. Instead, expanding historical inquiries to include nonhuman actors reveals new connections and causalities. While their behaviors may not constitute “agency” as defined with regard to *intent*, nonhuman actors are clearly significant factors that demonstrably complicate, and may even derail, the most careful technocratic policies and calculations. Far from being mere subjects of regulation and human actions, nonhumans actively contribute to shaping the political and social reality of the Albufera.

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Thomas P. Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Innovation and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (New York: Viking, 1989): 443; Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992): chapter 10.

In the case of environmental management, the behaviors of nonhumans routinely create problems and complications for human actors. Nature and the physical world “push back” against human interventions, throwing wrenches in the works of carefully planned technological projects. Frequently, politicians and engineers react to these problems with new techno-fixes or adjustments to the original policy to overcome such complications, resulting in endless revisions and re-engineering. Even at the best of times, such revisions may address one problem while creating another. More frequently, inadequate, incomplete, and unsettled science leads to unintended policy consequences. Such has been the case with the Albufera and with the Júcar River basin as a whole, where hydraulic infrastructure projects throughout the twentieth century backfired on their planners, making resources more scarce and less reliable, with disastrous consequences for humans and habitats alike.

Moreover, because nonhuman organisms have no regard for political boundaries, refocusing a historical inquiry to include nonhumans requires us to recalibrate or expand the geographical scope of that inquiry. Some, like migratory birds or eels, physically move between countries or continents; others, like blue-green algae, are individually stationary but profoundly affected by—and in some cases also shape—transnational phenomena such as technological exchange, agricultural subsidies and markets, and water flows. Following the science and stories of the nonhumans that appear in any given historical moment, then, can pull historical inquiry out of the local-only level and reveal the larger-scale forces that have helped to shape microhistorical events. Such perspectives not only add to our understandings of events but in some cases may radically change them. For instance, when we shift the focus from human stakeholders to the water itself, what appears at first a simple issue of local resource use becomes a story of global climate change and a half-century of overextraction from peninsular aquifers.



While nonhumans play central roles in the events surrounding the Albufera, however, human actors remain the focus of my inquiry. In oral histories and ethnographic work conducted in the Autonomous Community of Valencia between 2010 and 2012, the interaction of rural and urban people in the rice fields, on the beaches, and in the streets emerged as a central theme affecting regional identity, landscape creation and use, and claims to natural and financial resources vis-à-vis outsiders. In multiple visits to Valencia during this period, I attended meetings for environmental nonprofit groups, rode along with park managers on their inspections, toured rice fields and warehouses with farmers, and crept through wildlife reserves with ornithologists to watch nesting waterfowl. The men and women I met, whether after tracking them down from archival sources or via introductions from other interviewees, were eager to share both their specialized technical knowledge and their personal experiences, and more often than not my planned formal interviews evolved into multi-day visits and lengthy field trips into the lands surrounding the Albufera. Over time, through the dusty documents I unearthed in their offices and barns and through their own recollections and introductions, a central cast of characters emerged, composed of a handful of influential farmers, scientists, and activists who had been involved in the local landscape more or less continuously for more than thirty years. Those characters, and the shifting relationships between them, form the heart of this dissertation.

Since the Middle Ages, Valencia has enjoyed a reputation as the most fertile agricultural area on the Iberian peninsula, the product of centuries of hydraulic transformations by local farmers and landowners who profited from irrigation techniques first introduced by the Moors more than twelve centuries ago. The irrigated Valencian landscape played a central role in regional and, at times, national identity. However, at least since the start of the twentieth century Valencia has also seen a series of social conflicts arising from the underlying tension between

rural and urban people, each side laying claim to Valencian authenticity and the associated right to manage these iconic agricultural landscapes.

Tracey Heatherington's recent ethnography of Sardinian shepherds caught in global environmental debates provides a framework within which to understand these conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Her work on rural people struggling to define regional authenticity both within and in opposition to global currents of conservation and modernity offers strong parallels to the experiences of Valencian rice farmers. While the farmers in the lands around the Albufera routinely asserted claims to the landscape derived from tradition, economic productivity, and generational roots in the land, their opponents' appeals to modern, "European" values of ecological conservation, aesthetics, and outdoor recreation gained momentum following Franco's death. The farmers' battles over land use with middle-class urbanites, European regulators, and scientific conservationists may, in this context, be understood as a form of resistance to globalization. As such, the events surrounding the Albufera are both representative of a wider southern-European experience and a unique series of events shaped by the specific local circumstances of Valencia.

The scientists, activists, politicians, lobbyists, and farmers with whom I spoke lent not merely depth and nuance to archival and published materials, but at times proffered entirely new interpretations of the events and issues underlying this project. In the chapters that follow, I probe in detail the discrete—and contending—narratives that resulted, lodged in these different source frames. Many of the foundational events described in this dissertation occurred during the era of censorship and political infighting of the late Franco era, and I have made significant use of oral histories to provide context and explanations for the frequently contradictory reports found in official archives and press clippings. As described in Chapter Four, for instance,

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<sup>16</sup> Tracey Heatherington, *Wild Sardinia: Indigeneity and the Global Dreamtimes of Environmentalism* (University of Washington Press, 2010).

members of the press were themselves at the forefront of a campaign opposing city policy between 1970 and 1974, such that print sources from the period offered a very different picture of events than that gained from interviews with the journalists who created those sources. The process of comparing the two types of sources provided new insights into the nature of popular political activism in the early 1970s.

Conducting research on the basis of official government archives prepared under a dictatorship—or by the democratic administration that immediately succeeds that dictatorship—is a risky proposition. Again, interviews with people involved in land use policy during the 1970s and 1980s served to triangulate among these contending political perspectives, and to fill in the necessary gaps and clarify discrepancies in the written records. Oral histories have their own complications, of course, and can likewise not simply be accepted at face value. Because of the well-documented potential for inaccuracies, willful or otherwise, as well as misstatements, personal agendas, memory issues, and other lacunae that may impede oral sources, I have also always attempted to verify individual accounts of events in which my informants participated. In most cases, however, I rely heavily on such first-person narratives where I can—and where they seem credible—as a primary means of understanding the diversity of experiences in the events I depict.

This dissertation begins with a focused look at Valencia and its landscapes, laying the first layers of sediments upon which later developments settle. The story of the Albufera's transformations begins several millennia ago, with the lake's initial formation and the natural processes that led to the deposition of its first sedimentary layers. Chapter One introduces the reader to the shifting landscapes of the Albufera and to some of the many efforts to define,

protect, and control its identity throughout its history. The chapter covers the period from the lake's formation through its conversion to freshwater by medieval and early modern irrigation initiatives, to its purchase by the City of Valencia as a public park in 1911, and the concurrent social and cultural developments that gave the area special meaning to local people. This story is closely related to ongoing changes in Valencian society and in Spanish society, through profound transitions of political and cultural hegemony with immediate impacts on the physical landscape.

Chapter Two shows how the anthropogenic landscape of the Valencian hinterland not only served as the central feature of regional identity but also how this idealized vision of the Valencian countryside (along with areas of similar irrigation and land management) provided an archetype against which national progress and decline were measured. The Spanish landscape, and in particular its aridity or irrigation, formed a central component of early twentieth-century notions of economic and spiritual health. In the aftermath of the "Disaster of 1898," in which Spain lost its last overseas colonies to the United States, political reformers advocated the large-scale transformation of the Spanish landscape on the model of the Mediterranean irrigated zones as a panacea for a range of ills. Following the Spanish Civil War, these policies were implemented in slightly altered form by the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, contributing to massive social upheaval and environmental devastation across the country.

Chapter Three describes the rise of various new strains of thought regarding the natural world that emerged from the demographic and physical changes of the early Franco era. The first, derived from prewar conservationism, arose among field biologists and other natural scientists who sought to protect nature for educational and aesthetic purposes. Their carefully apolitical stance enabled them to obtain limited victories throughout the Franco regime, but eventually alienated them from an urban, explicitly Marxist "environmental" movement that understood

nature conservation as a key factor in human well being. This latter group of activists, which drew their inspiration from grassroots social justice groups, regional identity movements, and countercultural tactics and ideas sweeping Europe, would prove particularly suited to the chaotic era surrounding the end of the dictatorship.

Chapter Four returns to Valencia as a case study of the intersections between conservation, environmentalism, and progressive politics amidst the relentless drive towards modernization in the late Franco era. It describes the turn to tourism by members of the Franco administration and the impacts of this decision on Spanish landscapes and demographics, taking as its case study efforts by the City of Valencia to develop a massive tourism complex on the shores of the Albufera. Those efforts were met by a press campaign, led by a combination of scientists, journalists, and urban planners, which used the local landscapes as both metaphor of Francoist oppression and as a battleground for a diverse countercultural agenda. Currents of pro-democracy activism, global counterculturalism, scientific ecology, and Valencian regionalism overlapped and intersected in a campaign that participants described as “a symbol of the fight for the working people’s right to relax.”

The second half of the dissertation turns to issues of transnational governance in the post-Franco era, while remaining focused on the Valencian region. The Dehesa controversy devolved into an era of generalized progressive activism in the months surrounding Franco’s death in 1975, and Chapter Five picks up in the aftermath of this sea change in Spanish politics, when progressive politicians and activists took the helm of Valencian government and imposed a new, aggressively urban vision of the region’s future in its laws and practices. Over the following fifteen years, scientific conservationists with a strong regionalist political identity marshaled a peculiar mix of political connections, international influence, and socioeconomic privilege in the

service of protecting and reconstructing specific local landscapes. This chapter deals with the earliest major victory by this group of activists, the declaration of the Albufera Natural Park in 1986.

Chapters Six and Seven explore the complicated relationship between the park and the more than 8,000 rice farming families whose lands lay within the newly defined ecosystem, and who saw the park's declaration as an attack on their property rights, their livelihoods, and their integrity as the traditional caretakers of local agricultural lands. The ensuing conflict pitted competing visions of Valencian authenticity against each other, within the context of Spain's rapid ratification of European legal norms. Although adamantly opposed to globalization in the context of increased environmental regulation, competition from abroad, and collapsing price protections, farmers nevertheless relied heavily on international subsidy programs (themselves a product of transnational policies on agriculture and the environment) for economic survival. Over the course of the park's first decade, while Valencian and European environmental policy remained trapped in a centralized top-down model, ideas about the role of agriculture in contemporary European society shifted to accommodate a more active role for the Albufera's farmers in the management of the park. This change offered both economic and ideological incentives for farmers to redefine themselves as conservationists "with common sense."

Chapter Eight adds a final, crucial layer to this sedimentary history: the water itself. The national hydraulic policies and reliance on large-scale irrigation described in Chapter Two, applied across the peninsula on the model of Valencian agriculture throughout the twentieth century, led to a range of social and physical complications. After 1960, with the development of new groundwater extraction techniques and the dramatic expansion of irrigation in neighboring La Mancha, those policies gained new relevance in the lives of Valencian farmers and the

multitude of species that depended on the Albufera's health for their survival. In addition to national hydraulic politics, global factors from agricultural subsidy programs to climate change played crucial roles in the flow of water across Valencian rice fields. This chapter's attention to water expands the focus of inquiry well beyond the immediate factors commonly blamed for the area's continued agricultural troubles, and helps explain why local policies failed to alleviate the lake's profound ecological crises.

## Chapter One. Building a Spanish Landscape

*Diós creó el país y el agricultor ribereño la huerta.*

God made the country and the riverside farmers made the Huerta.<sup>1</sup>

Through sedimentation, erosion, life and death, the physical world is in a constant state of transformation.<sup>2</sup> Millennia ago, ocean currents and runoff from inland forests and hills carved out a large inland lagoon on the Iberian coast of the Mediterranean Sea, between the mouths of the Júcar and Turia rivers. Over time, a low sandbar formed and grew to more than a kilometer across, separating the lagoon from the sea and allowing the water to grow brackish as it was diluted by rain and underground springs. Sediments from streams and gullies settled on the floor atop the shells of sea creatures and sand, reducing the lagoon's depth and circumference. Aquatic plants took root, breaking the surface to form dense islands of brush called *matas* and providing protection and food for plankton, crustaceans, and fish, which in turn became prey to wading birds and other land animals, including the small groups of humans who came to hunt, fish, and forage from nearby settlements.<sup>3</sup> On the sandbar, winds formed a line of sand dunes just above

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel Gual Camarena, *Estudio Histórico-Geográfico sobre la Acequia Real del Júcar* (Valencia: Instituto de Geografía de la Institución Alfonso el Magnánimo, 1979), 9.

<sup>2</sup> This understanding of constant natural flux is, of course, a distinctly twenty-first-century way of viewing the environment, and stands in stark contrast to twentieth-century notions of “natural balance” and climax ecology.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco J. Collado Rosigue, “Water management at the Albufera in Valencia” (paper presented at the European Commission's Short and Medium Term Environmental Action Programme (SMAP III) Regional Seminar in



the waterline, lightly anchored by creeping plants and sea grasses, which formed a barrier to salt and sand and protected the lake beyond. Behind the dunes lay slightly depressed, seasonally marshy areas called *malladas*, lined with impermeable, highly saline soils that harbored a unique and extremely fragile set of specially adapted organisms including marshgrass, iris, and French Tamarisk. About fifty meters inland the winds built up a second, lower, and less continuous line of dunes, anchored in place with a mix of low vegetation and trees including juniper, dwarf fan palms, oaks, myrtle, and Aleppo pines.

By the first century BCE, Roman colonists had joined native Iberians at the site they called Valentia Edetanorum, a strategically placed coastal city located on a bend in the Turia River just north of the lagoon. With the exception of a small salt industry established on the eastern shore, fears of malaria kept large-scale settlement away despite the area's exceptional fishing and hunting. Greek and Roman geographers noted the lagoon for its size, clarity, and abundance of life.<sup>4</sup> Fourth-century traveller Rufius Festus Avienius, impressed with the wealth of shellfish and other sea life he found there, named it "the oysters' lagoon."

Landscape can be understood, in one sense, as a layered structure of material features created by historical processes. These physical, material changes in the land create a concrete set of relationships between people and the land that influence social actions and thought in myriad ways, both overt and subtle. Over the past two millennia, human actions both accelerated and qualitatively altered the ongoing physical transformation of Iberian terrain such that if Avienius arrived today on the banks of the Turia he would be hard-pressed to recognize his surroundings.

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Marseille-Barcelona, July 2-6, 2007), accessed May 13, 2013, [http://www.medcities.org/docs/135%20a%20-%20LA%20GESTI%C3%93N%20DEL%20AGUA%20EN%20LA%20ALBUFERA%20-%20VALENCIA\\_\\_EN\\_%20\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.medcities.org/docs/135%20a%20-%20LA%20GESTI%C3%93N%20DEL%20AGUA%20EN%20LA%20ALBUFERA%20-%20VALENCIA__EN_%20_2_.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, Book III Chapter 4 Section 6, describes "a lagoon of salt-water four hundred stadia [seventy-four kilometers] in circuit," and Pliny referred to the "*Estanque Ameno*" or "Pleasant Lake" to the south of the city.

Technological innovations, demographic changes, and regional trade from the medieval period to the present day brought new conditions and new means of exploitation to the lake, transforming both its utility and its role in the Valencian imagination. El Saler, a modest tourist town today, stands a few kilometers from the former site of the salt flats from which the area derives its name. The lagoon, now known as the Albufera de Valencia, has been a private hunting reserve, a source of irrigation water, a subsistence fishing ground, a source of farmlands, and a public park. Where marine life once filled a seemingly endless expanse of shallow salt water, villages, rice fields and orange groves now stretch to the horizon, surrounding a heavily polluted freshwater lake less than a quarter of its original size. Local populations have adapted, resisted, emigrated, and immigrated in response to the lagoon's repeated transformations, even as their actions have contributed to the ongoing physical changes around them.

But a second understanding of landscape is that of a cultural and political construction, derived from ways of seeing and perceiving the physical world and heavily influenced by social factors. In this sense, too, the Valencian terrain has shifted radically over the centuries, and most especially over the past hundred years. Old Valentia Edetanorum has grown into Valencia, the third-largest city in Spain, a center of international commerce and tourism, where the self-image of residents vacillates between nostalgia for their agrarian past and pride for their progressive European present. Individuals and groups in and around the city have developed widely divergent senses of the landscape and their place within it, and have made their perceptions known in political and cultural debates with far-reaching implications.

This chapter details some of the major physical changes in the landscape prior to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and foreshadows the ways that those changes are reflected in contemporary debates about Valencian identity. The events described here took place centuries

or decades before those of the rest of the dissertation and provide essential background for its wider arguments about landscape transformation, regional identity, and the role of Valencia in global politics. The earlier production of the multilayered Valencian landscape is, to follow the dominant metaphor, a base layer of sediments upon which later strata will settle. This chapter, then, traces the physical creation of agricultural lands around the city up to the early twentieth century via a combination of natural and social forces. It describes the central role played by these newly-created landscapes in the formation of Valencian identity at the turn of the century, and emphasizes the way that urban people tended to idealize and naturalize those landscapes as part of their regional heritage, even when doing so meant imposing material hardships on their rural neighbors. This latter argument reflects the ongoing tension between competing claims to Valencian identity, and between urban and rural people that also informed later conflicts over the same landscape.

Contemporary Valencia can be roughly summarized in two iconic vistas. The first is that of white-sand beaches beside tranquil aquamarine waters, teeming with tourists and lined with hotels, *paella* restaurants, and high-rise apartment buildings. The second is that of the agricultural abundance of *L'Horta* (in the Valencian language, a dialect of Catalan) or the Huerta (Castilian), which roughly translates to “The Vegetable Garden.” While the first vista is a product of the uncontrolled development boom of the late Franco era (around 1960-1975), the latter has symbolized the essence of Valencia for centuries. Popular and historic portrayals describe the Huerta as filled with trees laden with fruit and dotted with steep-roofed rural dwellings (*barracas*) rising from lush green fields, populated by hard-working farmers who sold their wares in markets overflowing with local produce. A romantic interpretation of Valencian

history attributes this bucolic idyll to the serendipitous coincidence of fertile soil, a mild and sunny climate, and an industrious peasantry.<sup>5</sup> In reality, the Huerta is just as much a product of human labor as the nearby hotels and high-rises.

The Huerta is above all a product of centuries of hydraulic engineering and land transformation carried out by individual farmers, large landowners, and various governments throughout the ages. Taken as a whole, Spain is not an especially arid country, although drought and the threat of drought feature prominently in the historical Spanish imagination. The national average rainfall is only slightly below the European mean, and the amount of rain per capita is actually above the Western European average.<sup>6</sup> But regional and seasonal climate variations across the peninsula render notions of average rainfall and aridity meaningless, and annual figures disguise major seasonal fluctuations in frequency and intensity of precipitation. In the southeast, in particular, long periods of dry heat can be interrupted by torrential deluges that batter crops and erode soil in the best of circumstances, and which not infrequently create major floods that destroy bridges, dams, and forests and leave a sea of mud in their wake. In the aftermath of one such flood in the twentieth century, Valencian singer Raimon wrote that “in my country, the rain does not know how to fall: it either rains too little or it rains too much. If it rains too little it is a drought, if it rains too much it is a catastrophe.”<sup>7</sup>

Taming the peninsula’s capricious rainfall to prevent such catastrophes and to ensure stable water supplies for agriculture has been a central concern of Iberian governments

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<sup>5</sup> Josep Vicent Boira Maiques, *La Ciudad de Valencia y su Imagen Pública* (Universitat de Valencia, 1992), 57.

<sup>6</sup> There have always been major technical and human problems with the gathering of meteorological data, magnified a thousandfold in the aggregate by differences in equipment, technique, diligence, and accuracy of measurements taken in various monitoring stations. Data collection in 20th century Spain occurred through hundreds of local monitoring stations throughout the country, but these stations were not distributed evenly throughout the country. Complete monitoring stations, recording variables including barometric pressure, rainfall, humidity, and temperature existed primarily in the provincial capitals, but in addition the Northeast was studded with hundreds of smaller stations with more limited monitoring capacities, specifically rainfall. Ministerio del Aire 1942ix and Map 1.

<sup>7</sup> Raimon, *Al meu país la pluja*, 1983.

throughout two thousand years of recorded history. Water management played a pivotal role in the lives and cultures of Celto-Iberians, Romans, Visigoths, Muslims, and Catholic peasants. Successive rulers erected towering aqueducts; dug labyrinthine canals and irrigation channels; dammed, diverted, and straightened rivers; drained wetlands; and reshaped coastlines. Nowhere were the impacts of such projects more transformative than in the Valencian Huerta, where hydraulic projects contributed to the production of extraordinary agricultural yields in the midst of one of the driest regions in all of Europe.

The first extensively irrigated area on the Iberian Peninsula, the Huerta was initially created by Valencia's Moorish rulers in the Middle Ages, who constructed eight major canals bringing water from the Turia river into the fields immediately surrounding the city, including the land northwest of the lagoon which they named the Albufera ("little sea"). News of the astonishing increases in the land's productivity spread far and wide, prompting King Jaume I of Aragon to call it "the best land, and the most beautiful in the world,"<sup>8</sup> as he set out to retake Valencia from the Moors. He succeeded in this endeavor in 1238, and by 1305 the city had become the capitol of the new Kingdom of Valencia, a subject realm of the Crown of Aragon. The Kingdom opened its borders to Christian settlers eager for new lands who came principally from Catalonia and brought with them their language.<sup>9</sup>

Valencia's Christian rulers and noble landowners expanded upon the foundations laid by their predecessors, commissioning new canals that carried the Turia's water to fields as far as twenty kilometers away. Simultaneously, Jaume I ordered construction of what would become the Royal Canal of the Júcar, leading north from the Júcar River into the fields of the Ribera

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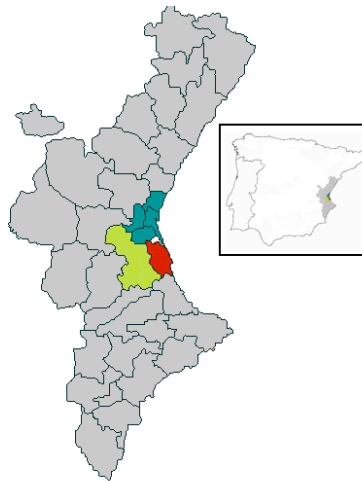
<sup>8</sup> David L. Prytherch, "Elegy to an iconographic place: reconstructing the regionalism/landscape dialectic in L'Horta de València," *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2009): 64, note 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ferran Archilés and Manuel Martí, "Ethnicity, region and nation: Valencian identity and the Spanish nation-state," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (2001): 779-797.

Baixa (lower riverside) to the southeast of the Albufera and just south of the Huerta itself (Figure 2).<sup>10</sup> By the late fifteenth century, visitors routinely described the fields of Valencia as an agricultural Arcadia, “extraordinarily fertile with olives, pomegranates, lemons, citrons, and other fruit trees,” while the fields were “cut and traversed by streams and canals that maintain the fertility of the land.”<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2: Early irrigation projects in Valencia.**

This map shows the contemporary Autonomous Community of Valencia, which is roughly contiguous with the medieval Kingdom of Valencia. The Huerta (blue) and Ribera Baixa (red) regions were the site of the earliest and most extensive irrigation projects on the peninsula. The Ribera Alta (green) was the beneficiary of some of the early Franco-era projects, notably the Júcar-Turia canal. The Albufera Lake is colored white, in the center of the irrigated areas.



Water made all this possible. Irrigation enabled farmers in the Horta and the Ribera Baixa to produce two or even three harvests a year of high-value fruits, vegetables, and nuts, many of them transplanted from the Middle East, and this agricultural wealth brought prosperity to local landowners and to the city.<sup>12</sup> Outside the range of the canals, a sparser population of farmers

<sup>10</sup> Guy Lemeunier, “Hidráulica Agrícola en la España Mediterránea, S. XVI-XVIII: La Formación de los Regadíos Clásicos,” in *El Agua en la Historia de España*, ed. Carlos Barciela López and Joaquín Melgarejo Moreno (Universidad de Alicante, 2000), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Boira Maiques, *La Ciudad de Valencia*, 74, citing Münzer, 1494 (GM 1952, 1: 341); Jouvin, 1672 (GM 1959, II: 829); and Silhouette, 1720-30 (GM 1962, III: 327).

<sup>12</sup> Twiss 1775 (Ribbans, 1955); Laborde 182680; and Gil Polo, 16th century (Guarnr, 1974: 320), all cited in Boira Maiques, *La Ciudad de Valencia*, 58-59 and 74.

continued to grow traditional Mediterranean crops of grain, grapes, and olives, always at the mercy of climatological caprice, or harnessed nearby secondary water sources such as streams, shallow wells, and springs.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout more than seven centuries of agricultural expansion, however, concerns about the health risks associated with marshy ground kept most Valencians away from the Albufera itself. At the time of the Reconquest, Jaume I granted exclusive fishing rights to a few hundred souls at the tiny hamlet of El Palmar, an island near the eastern shore, who braved the soggy isolation and malarial fevers and ferried their catches across the lake to sell in city markets.<sup>14</sup> Admiring the wealth of birds, boar, and other game species on the forested sandbar, Jaume also claimed the Albufera and its immediate surroundings as royal property, giving rise to the sandbar's moniker of La Dehesa or La Devesa (etymologically derived both from the Castilian word for "pastureland" and an old Valencian word for "protected") of El Saler (named for the ancient salt flats). The king and his successors to the title would leave behind only a few guards to protect their property, and for centuries the lake and the Dehesa were subject not only to occasional royal hunts but to steady, albeit small-scale, poaching, fishing, and wood-gathering from the settlers at El Palmar.<sup>15</sup>

To the west of the lake, too, the land lay largely unpopulated throughout the Middle Ages. Close to the shore, the ground was too swampy to grow most crops, and fears of malaria led Spain's rulers to outlaw rice cultivation, which thrived in such conditions, for several centuries.<sup>16</sup>

But events outside of the lake's immediate surroundings worked significant changes on the

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<sup>13</sup> Lemeunier, "Hidráulica Agrícola," 71.

<sup>14</sup> Carles Sanchis Ibor, *Regadiu i Canvi Ambiental a L'Albufera de València* (Universitat de València, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> See, eg, Bautista Garrea, "Denuncia contra Francisco Fontaine, su hijo, y un criado, sobre cazar pájaros sin licencia en la Albufera," 1780, Bailia AA 2000, ARV.

<sup>16</sup> It is unclear to what extent this prohibition in fact prevented the spread of malaria. Rice farming's repeated flooding and draining of fields would have reduced the overall mosquito population, but the need to work in flooded fields, where insects swarmed, would have certainly placed the individual farmers at higher risk.

ecosystem. With the construction of the Royal Canal of the Júcar and other canals in the Ribera Baixa in the fifteenth century, fresh water had begun to flow steadily through the fields south and west of the lake, down drainage ditches into the Albufera. This new input diluted the Albufera's brackish water, slowly forcing out salt-water organisms and replacing them with fresh.

The El Palmar fishermen complained these changes had dramatically diminished their returns, and the Spanish Crown, which received a portion of their catch as payment for their use of the lake, was not pleased. But the distant king proved powerless against enthusiastic support for irrigation by Valencian nobles, merchants, and laborers who benefitted from increased crop production. In 1639, King Philip IV's local representative wrote disapprovingly that "the Albufera was full of fresh water, and so many reeds that you can sail upon it only with difficulty, and such a lack of fish that one suspects that there will be no one who will wish to rent it." A few decades later the salt industry, long in decline, collapsed completely, and the royal agent despaired that "the lake is lost, as there is neither the abundance of fish that there was, nor are those that remain of such good quality, as they are fresh water fish."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the entire marine ecosystem, with the exception of anadromous species such as eels and sea bass, died off with this change, leaving a thick layer of barnacle and oyster shells on the lake floor to mark their passing.<sup>18</sup>

The last vestiges of royal opposition to the freshwater conversion of the lake, moreover, evaporated in the face of significant demographic and political changes during the eighteenth century. Between about 1750 and 1880, the integration of peninsular markets via improved

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<sup>17</sup> ACA, Consell d'Aragó, Secretaria de València, llig. 791, f. 46/1. Quartiella-Roman (1989:218), quoted in Sanchis Ibor, *Regadiu i Canvi Ambiental*, 122.

<sup>18</sup> Rafael Pellicer Esteve, "La Obra de Regadio Más Importante de España," *Agricultura Valenciana: Boletín Informativo de la Asociación Valenciana de Agricultores*, October-December 1984; J.M. Soria and E. Vicente, "Estudio de los aportes hídricos al parque natural de la Albufera de Valencia," *Limnetica* 21 (2002): 113.



transportation networks and liberal economic policies freed farmers from the need for local self-sufficiency and enabled them to specialize in the crops best suited to local land, climate, and market conditions.<sup>19</sup> The sharp rise in prices that attended these changes made it increasingly profitable for farmers to cultivate marginal and previously unproductive lands, and especially favored the high productivity of irrigated croplands.<sup>20</sup>

Valencian landowners on higher ground irrigated new fields of high-value fruits and vegetables by extending existing canals, including the Royal Canal of the Júcar, but dedicated the many local marshes to rice cultivation. Rice, a high-yield, low-effort crop, thrived in waterlogged lands not already under cultivation, and swamps and wetlands, tamed with a system of low mud dikes and drainage canals, proved ideal semi-natural rice paddies. A single hectare could yield thousands of kilos of rice with relatively little effort, and with the addition of adequate fertilizers the land could support a winter crop as well. Such practices quickly made rice a staple of the local diet, while surpluses sold on regional, national, and international markets.<sup>21</sup> Because of the relatively low cost of “reclaiming” marginal lands, rice cultivation appealed to landless peasants and small farmers as well as large entrepreneurs, and served as a supplemental source of income for laborers and fishermen.

The largest concentration of rice cultivation in Valencia centered on the Albufera. At first illicitly and later via sanctioned land purchases, capitalists and aristocrats ate away at the Crown’s property, hiring local laborers to build surrounding dikes and canals to drain parcels on the banks of the lake. The resulting enclosures, called *tancats*, could be easily flooded with lakewater and drained by gravity via a system of canals and sluiceways that took advantage of

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<sup>19</sup> James Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture: The Long Siesta, 1765-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> Lemeunier, “Hidráulica Agrícola,” 86.

the slight incline of the land towards the deepest point of the Albufera (Figure 3).<sup>22</sup> Royal representatives, realizing both that the practice could not be stopped and that sales of lakeshore lands offered a significant new source of income, conducted a thorough survey of the lake's borders in 1761 and began selling lands within that border to would-be rice farmers.

**Figure 3: Tancat construction in the early twentieth century.**<sup>23</sup>

In the foreground is the fishing hamlet of El Palmar. Earthen dikes form the square outline in the center-right of the photo, which when completed would enclose the portion of the lake to be drained and planted with rice.



Over the following 150 years, the area of rice cultivation in Valencia more than doubled, while the area of open water in the Albufera shrank by 64%, from almost 14,000 hectares (34,595 acres) at the time of the census of 1761 to just under 5,100 hectares (12,602 acres) in 1898 (Figure 4).<sup>24</sup> By way of comparison, over the nearly fourteen hundred years between Avienus's visit and the census, the lake had lost about 16,000 hectares of its surface area to sedimentation, accelerated by the proliferation of canals carrying vast amounts of soil into the

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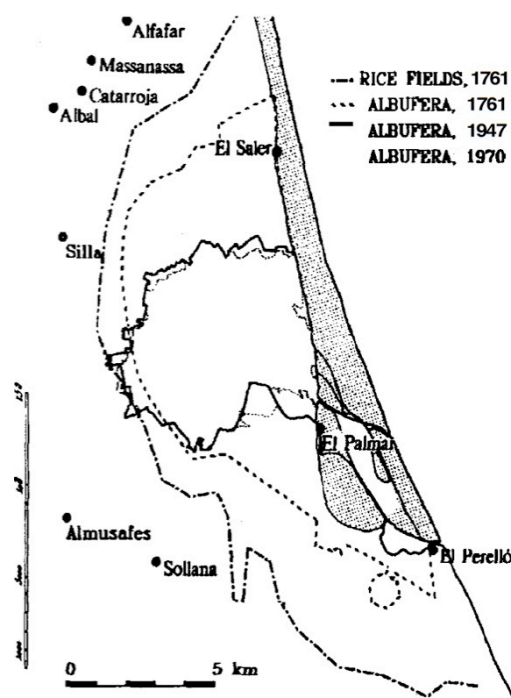
<sup>22</sup> Ricardo Sanmartín Arce, *La Albufera y sus Hombres* (Madrid: Akal/Universitaria 1982), 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Photo from OTDA.

<sup>24</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 135; Collado Rosigue, "Water management"; Sanchis Ibor, *Regadiu i Canvi Ambiental*, 305.

water. In other words, *tancat* construction reduced the lake's size five times faster than sedimentation alone. Where once a vast lagoon had stretched as far as the eye could see, by the turn of the twentieth century Valencian novelist Vicent Blasco Ibañez wrote that “the immense plain of the rice-fields merge[d] into the horizon, blending with the distant mountains... vast fields of liquid mud mottled with bronze stalks.”<sup>25</sup>

Figure 4: Changing perimeter of the Albufera lake, 1761-1970.<sup>26</sup>



In economic terms, what happened in Valencia was almost unique in Iberia. In all of Spain, the only significant increases in per-hectare and per-capita agricultural productivity during the nineteenth century occurred along the Mediterranean coast, in the irrigated regions of Catalonia, Murcia, and especially Valencia.<sup>27</sup> The particular land-use patterns of farming in the

<sup>25</sup> Vicente Blasco Ibañez, *Cañas y Barro*, 1902.

<sup>26</sup> Map by V.M. Rosselló, “Los ríos Júcar y Turia en la génesis de la Albufera de Valencia,” *Cuadernos de Geografía* 11 (1972): 7-25.

<sup>27</sup> James Simpson has shown that Spanish agriculture as a whole did not become more efficient in terms of either per-capita or per-hectare production over the course of the nineteenth century, although by cultivating new lands the agricultural sector did expand enough to keep pace with population growth. Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, ch. 4.

Horta and Ribera regions, the relatively unfertile soil reclaimed from the lake, and the scarcity of domestic livestock for manure production meant that Valencian rice farmers also adopted the use of imported guano and chemical fertilizers more than half a century before their use became prevalent elsewhere, placing them among the earliest adopters in all of Europe.<sup>28</sup> As a result of such innovations, the productivity of Valencian rice fields rose from three thousand kilos per hectare in 1770 to six thousand kilos per hectare at the turn of the twentieth century. By then, Valencian farmers produced an average of 7,200 kilos of rice per hectare, making Spain's rice productivity the highest in the world.<sup>29</sup>

As the importance of rice farming to both local and national economies grew, the El Palmar fishing community that had plied the lake's waters since the Reconquest found itself suddenly displaced (Figure 5). At the farmers' request, the state built heavy metal sluiceways across three manmade canals that connected the lake to the sea. The sluiceways permitted the farmers to regulate the lake's water level in accordance with the optimum growing conditions of their own short-grained rice crops. They frequently closed the gates at critical moments for fish migrations, keeping fish out of the lake where once they had entered at will, and fish scattered through the flooded rice fields, making fishing far more difficult. Local biologist Luís Pardo estimated that between 1900 and 1920, which already represented a significant decline from the peak of the fishing industry some centuries earlier, the annual fish catch from the lake fell from

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<sup>28</sup> Because of the high value of irrigated land, in the intensively cultivated areas of Valencia there was nowhere left for livestock to graze, making manure scarce. In 1844 farmers in Valencia began importing guano from abroad, which significantly increased yields in the rice fields. They rose still more sharply after 1880, when Valencian orange and rice farmers became the first on the peninsula to switch to chemical fertilizers. This transition was not unproblematic, and many farmers complained of stagnant or falling yields before discovering the appropriate balance of chemicals for local conditions. Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, ch. 5 and 6.

<sup>29</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 137.

175,200 kg to 78,800 kg while the number of fishermen remained basically stable.<sup>30</sup> Blasco Ibañez's evocative 1902 novel detailing the struggles of fishermen to come to terms with this new reality, *Reeds and Mud (Cañas y Barro)*, describes Tío Paloma, an elderly El Palmar fisherman, observing the steady construction of new dikes and pumps in the *tancats* with resignation and distaste. "It would be a miracle," thinks Tío Paloma, "if all the fish didn't take to the sea, disgusted by such innovations. They were going to cultivate everywhere; they were shoveling dirt and more dirt into the lake. As few years as yet remained to him, he would live to see the last eel, having no room in which to move, wriggle her tail...and disappear into the sea."<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 5: Rice farmers and fishermen working in the Albufera in the prewar years.<sup>32</sup>**



While the fishermen represented a vanishing remnant of a millenarian tradition, however, Blasco Ibañez and others saw clearly that the future of the Albufera lay in rice farming. Unlike the many travelogues throughout the centuries that had depicted the region's "natural fertility," Blasco Ibañez's novels emphasized the centrality of backbreaking labor by generations of farmers to Valencian prosperity, and the extent to which that labor instilled a profound sense of

<sup>30</sup> Luis Pardo, *La Albufera de Valencia: Estudio Limnográfico, Biológico, Económico y Antropológico, Vol. II* (Madrid: Instituto Forestal de Investigaciones y Experiencias 1942), 181.

<sup>31</sup> Blasco Ibañez, Vicente. *Cañas y Barro*, 1902.

<sup>32</sup> Photos from AVA and OTDA.

connection to the land in rural people. In 1898, he described a fictional farmer looking out at his fields and reflecting that “all the blood of his grandfathers was there. Five or six generations of Barrets had passed their lives working the same land, turning the land, medicating its inner being with strong manure, watching that its vital juices would not wane, caressing and brushing with hoe and ploughshare those clumps of earth, each of which had been irrigated with the sweat and blood of the family.”<sup>33</sup> In *Reeds and Mud*, Blasco Ibañez’s protagonist works tirelessly building a *tancat* on the banks of the lake in the hopes that it will help him “pull his family out of its miserable prostration,” only to end by burying the body of his only child in the mud, a profoundly symbolic gesture of both the generational roots and the failure of the Spanish peasantry’s dreams of social mobility.<sup>34</sup>

While the dwindling population of active fishermen in El Palmar continued to take enormous pride in their status as the historical users of the lake, it did not take long for rice farming to become naturalized as a “traditional” activity in the lands surrounding the Albufera. Rice farmers’ prestige rose in tandem with the Horta’s general fame for agricultural production, and under the State’s supportive guidance in the late nineteenth century the major rice villages around the Albufera – Sueca, Sollana, Alfafar, and others – became populous and wealthy (

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<sup>33</sup> Blasco Ibañez, *La Barraca* (1898).

<sup>34</sup> *Cañas y Barro* P. 39

Figure 6). By the turn of the century, rice farming was one of the most emblematic occupations in the Valencian region. Urbanites from Valencia and farther abroad hired local fishermen to take them out in flat-bottomed punts and sailboats to hunt or to admire the colorful sunsets, picturesque *barracas*, and waving green plants, and to enjoy rustic meals of *all i pebre* (eel with paprika) or *paella* (made with local rice, snails, and marsh rats, or chicken, duck, and rabbit, for the squeamish), all cooked with crystalline water from the lake itself.



**Figure 6: Rice-growing towns of the Horta and Ribera Baixa.**<sup>35</sup>



By the end of the nineteenth century, the rice fields had become a fundamental part of Valencia's identity as the agricultural region par excellence of the Iberian Peninsula. The city's rapid expansion, both demographic and geographic, attended a "Valencian Renaissance" featuring the cultural and literary exaltation of distinctive features of an asserted regional identity, similar to other regional movements occurring around the country. Although Valencian identity developed along several divergent paths simultaneously, the predominant strain among turn-of-the-century intellectuals was espoused by Vicent Blasco Ibañez, who lent the movement his name. In contrast to more radical and less-popular separatist movements, *Blasquismo* defined Valencia as an integral part of Castilian Spain and depicted its unique history and traditions, from the glories of the Kingdom of Valencia to the marvelous fertility of the Horta, as "local color" fully compatible with the region's participation in the Spanish state. In addition to urban

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<sup>35</sup> This map reflects the 1911 purchase of the Dehesa and the lake by the city of Valencia. El Palmar and El Saler are technically part of that purchase, and are not independent municipalities.



intellectuals, Blasquismo also attracted members of the rural right wing, who saw the maintenance of open connections with neighboring provinces as essential to the free trade of agricultural produce.<sup>36</sup>

Though the Huerta and other irrigated lands occupied far less space in Valencia than dry or urban areas, the imagery of Valencia that attended this renaissance celebrated irrigated agriculture above all other symbols of the region. The cultural historians Ferrán Archilés and Manuel Martí have noted that the graphic representation of Valencia itself “was always in the form of a woman dressed in regional costume...invariably offering fruit.”<sup>37</sup> That regional costume, consisting of silk hoop skirts embroidered with flowers and topped with lace-edged aprons and elaborate hair ornaments, was itself a fictionalized adaptation of “the attire of the well-to-do countrywomen of the end of the eighteenth century,” and featured prominently in urban festivals throughout the year.<sup>38</sup> Modernist buildings and monumental architecture, including a new train station (1906-1917), Central Market (1910-1928), and Columbus Market (1914-1917), featured endless decorative details invoking the Horta’s bounty, from mosaics of

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<sup>36</sup> The most significant nationalist alternative to Blasquismo was a pan-Catalan identity that saw Valencia, Catalonia, and the Balearic Islands as part of a single historical and linguistic entity with a united culture distinct from that of Castilian Spain, referred to by Valencian historians as “*Valencianisme Polític*.” The first pan-Catalan groups in Valencia appeared in 1907, supported largely by urban industrialists and some members of the urban lower-middle class who favored protectionist policies. Still another strain of Valencianism was a separatist movement, which produced the 1918 “Valencian Declaration” calling for a separate Valencian state. Archilés and Martí, “Ethnicity, region and nation,” 782; Joaquín Martín Cubas, “La polémica identidad de los valencianos: a proposito de las reformas de los Estatutos de Autonomía,” Working Paper 258 (Institut de Ciències Polítiques I Socials, 2007): 12; Alfons Cucó, *El valencianisme polític, 1874-1939* (Barcelona: 1974); Josep Martínez Serrano and Vicent Soler Marco, “L’anti-catalanisme al País Valencià,” *L’Avenç* 5 (1977): 24-30; Miguel-Angel Fabra i Sanch, “Cara i creu d’una burgesia: bloc català valencià o valencianisme des de Madrid,” *L’Avenç* 5 (1977): 31-36; Francesc Pérez Moragón, “El valencianisme i el fet dels Països Catalans (1900-1936),” *L’Espill* 19 (1983): 57-82; Angel Smith and Clare Mar-Molinero, “The Myths and Realities of Nation-Building in the Iberian Peninsula,” in *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula* ed. Angel Smith & Clare Mar-Molinero (Oxford: Berg, 1996): 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> Archilés and Martí, “Ethnicity, region and nation,” 787.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Xavier Costa, “Festive Identity: Personal and Collective Identity in the Fire Carnival of the ‘Fallas’ (València, Spain),” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture*, 8 (2002): 337. To this day thousands of Valencians commission custom-made gowns, which start at around €700, for use in local festivals throughout the year.

peasant farmers to bas-relief orange trees.<sup>39</sup> Such celebration of the peasantry reflects commonalities with national traditions across the western world, especially prominent in turn-of-the-century land reforms in Europe. Peasant farmers in Germany, England, and the United States, were widely described as the core of society; the heart of the country; the salt of the earth. Land reforms espoused by Blasco Ibañez and other Republicans, like those proposed around the same time in England and Germany, had as their goal the promotion of peasant production, which was understood as both morally better and more economically productive than other forms of agrarian production because of the peasants' supposedly superior knowledge of and ties to the land.<sup>40</sup>

The centrality of the peasantry to Valencian – and, indeed, Spanish – identity was further reinforced by two towering figures in art and literature, whose international popularity made them pivotal to outsiders' perceptions not only of Valencia but also of Spain as a whole.<sup>41</sup> Alongside Blasco Ibañez's unflinchingly grim portrayals of poverty and labor in the lands surrounding Valencia, the writer's close friend, painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923), offered a sunnier vision of peasant life. Primarily renowned for his treatment of light, his most popular works captured Valencians at the seaside or in the villages of the Huerta, and included subjects as disparate as middle-class women strolling with white parasols, fishermen and oxen pulling

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<sup>39</sup> David L. Prytherch and Josep Vicent Boira Maiques, "City profile: Valencia," *Cities* 26 (2009): 105.

<sup>40</sup> German ideas of peasantry and the virtues of yeoman farmers, for example, offer numerous parallels with the Valencian case. See, e.g., Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darre and Hitler's Green Party* (Kensall Press, 1985), Introduction.

<sup>41</sup> Both Blasco Ibañez and Sorolla spent significant time outside of Spain, but returned frequently to the Spanish countryside and to Valencia in particular in their works. "Valencian identity is impossible without Sorolla and Blasco Ibañez," write two of the region's most prominent art historians. "Within the artistic outpourings of Europe's fin de siècle, our painter and our writer *invented* Valencia, painted and wrote the idea in which all the rest of us submerged ourselves, defined Valencian identity in their paintings, in their novels, and created what would, without them, merely have been the eastern part of the Iberian peninsula." Facundo Tomás and Felipe Garin, *Sorolla: Vision of Spain; Hispanic Society of America collection* (Exhibition Catalog from the Centro Cultural Bancaja, Valencia, 2007), 11.

their boats from the sea, and children crippled by polio on an outing with a local priest. But when commissioned in 1911 by the Hispanic Society of America to create a set of murals depicting his country for permanent exhibit in New York (collectively known as the “Vision of Spain” or, as the artist himself later called them, the “Provinces of Spain”), Sorolla chose to represent Spain as a collection of disparate but unified regions, each symbolized by a vibrant peasantry. Over the next eight years, he created fourteen enormous canvases representing nine areas of Spain, each one depicting working people engaged in emblematic local activities surrounded by iconic landscapes and the tools of their artisanal trades. There was a “bread festival” in Castile; bullfighters in Seville; a fish market in Barcelona; and a group of happy Valencian peasants in the Horta. These paintings became popular abroad and, as their title suggests, helped influence the “Vision of Spain” held by a generation of foreigners.

To a significant extent, the entire project represented not a realistic portrayal of Spanish life but rather a nostalgic effort to preserve local “traditions” that Sorolla, like many of his contemporaries, feared would be lost in the sea of homogeneity represented by industrial capitalism. Sorolla’s complaint that “Spain is losing its local color” (*lo pintoresco*) echoed the concerns of countless intellectuals of his era.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, between 1910 and 1930, the percentage of the national population employed in agriculture had declined from 66% to 46%, and declines were even sharper in the Levante, giving Romantics like Sorolla good reason to lament the decline of rural traditions.<sup>43</sup> To create his “Vision of Spain,” the artist spent weeks in each location carefully assembling suitable outfits and props, from skirts and handkerchiefs to brooches and hair combs, and struggled even in his native land of Valencia to find locations that

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<sup>42</sup> Sorolla, quoted in Alejandro Perez Lugin, “La capa de Sorolla y la montera de Huntington,” *Heraldo de Madrid*, August 23, 1915, cited in Blanca Pons-Sorolla, *Joaquín Sorolla: Vida y Obra*, (Madrid: Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 2001), 395.

<sup>43</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 28 and 54.

adequately captured the picturesque settings he wished to portray.<sup>44</sup> As a result, Sorolla's work for the Hispanic Society offered an idealized allegory of regional identity more than a faithful rendition of reality.

His Valencian-themed panel, "Couples on Horseback," offers a particularly noteworthy example of this phenomenon (Figure 7). It depicts a group of young revelers clad in "traditional" dress, some mounted on lavishly-decorated horses, others bearing heavy orange boughs, and one costumed patriarch carrying the flag of the Kingdom of Valencia. The group is passing a shrine to the Virgin de los Desamparados, the patroness of the city, which in reality stands atop a bridge leading north from the city over the River Turia. But Sorolla's painting removes both statue and riders from this urban setting and places the shrine along a country road winding through rice fields and orange groves, with no sign of the bridge, the river, or the city.<sup>45</sup> Sorolla painted this work in the winter of 1916, long after the orange harvest had ended and several months before the rice would begin to sprout, so although he painted the panel *en plein air*, the lush backdrop must have been done from memory rather than from life. The artist created a montage of the central symbols of Valencia – its patron saint, its traditional dress, its flag, and its most emblematic products – and set them within a fictionalized landscape representing the Horta.<sup>46</sup> Other panels from the series reflect similar modifications to real Spanish tableaus of the early twentieth century: rather than steam, sails powered Sorolla's boats; no factories rose in the background; none of his laborers worked on the expanding railway system. The glories of Old Spain, from the castles and fortresses of the Middle Ages to the wonders of the Horta, were

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<sup>44</sup> Pons-Sorolla, *Joaquín Sorolla*, 450-452; Michael Gormley, "Sorolla and the Hispanic Society of America," *American Artist* (June 2012): 40-51, 47-48.

<sup>45</sup> Tomás and Garin, *Sorolla*, 411.

<sup>46</sup> Further emphasizing the ahistorical nature of the "traditions" Sorolla portrayed, oranges, undoubtedly the most iconic product of Valencia, had only come into widespread cultivation in the late nineteenth century.

uniformly depicted as residing in the countryside. Despite these glaring omissions, painter Manuel Gonzalez Martí described Sorolla's finished product as portraying the country "just as it is, in the plain light of day, picturesque and smiling, but hard-working and progressive."<sup>47</sup>

**Figure 7: Joaquín Sorolla, "Couples on Horseback (Valencia)"<sup>48</sup>**



As Sorolla found when searching for appropriate props, the romanticized "local color" of Spain was fading fast before the onslaught of "modernity," in this case meaning the homogenizing influence of urban and industrial development and the spread of a general European culture that replaced older peasant traditions. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, demographic movement across the country had been steadily in favor of urbanization. While Spain as a whole remained predominantly agricultural at the turn of the twentieth century, it is a mistake to conflate this with economic or cultural backwardness or to

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<sup>47</sup> Manuel Gonzalez Martí, "Sorolla dignificador: Conclusión," in *Anunciador* (Valencia, October 1914), cited in Facundo Tomás and Felipe Garin, *Sorolla: Vision of Spain; Hispanic Society of America collection* (Exhibition Catalog from the Centro Cultural Bancaja, Valencia, 2007), 51.

<sup>48</sup> From *Visions of Spain*, 1911-1919.

assume that other parts of Europe were radically more developed. Notions of European economic growth and urbanization during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, against which Spain has been unfavorably compared, have generally been rooted in concentrated regional development in places such as southern England and the Netherlands, but do not characterize a uniform continental economic trend.<sup>49</sup> Recent work by David Ringrose has shown that nineteenth-century Spain experienced significant economic growth and prominent bourgeois societies in the Mediterranean cities, the Cantabrian coast, Madrid, and Seville, which were surrounded by large swaths of sparsely-populated agricultural land, a description that matches much of the rest of Europe at the same time.<sup>50</sup> Combined with convincing evidence of land commodification and the erosion of feudal notions of agrarian society, such evidence significantly undermines any notions of homogenous Spanish agricultural or economic stagnation outside of the normal European range. The Valencia that Sorolla knew, then, was a land not only of irrigated farmlands, dry olive groves, and vineyards, but also of international trade ports and industrial cities.<sup>51</sup> His paintings masked the real economic development underway within Spain, ignoring the smokestacks and cities that were filling the landscape and rhetorically elevating the role of the countryside just as nationwide population trends began to shift in favor of urbanization and industrialization.

Sorolla's nostalgia for picturesque, imagined peasant traditions was just one of several new ideas and cultural movements that accompanied this development. In particular, the growing middle class shared Sorolla's nostalgia for their imagined rural past but increasingly agitated for

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 1 and 7; Charles P. Kindleberger, *Economic Growth in France and Britain, 1851-1950* (Stanford University Press, 1975).

<sup>50</sup> David Ringrose, *Spain, Europe, and the "Spanish Miracle" 1700-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Other important works challenging the myth of the failure of Spanish liberalism is Santos Julia, "Anomalia, dolor y fracas de España," *Claves* 66 (1996): 10-22; and Juan Pablo Fusi and Jordi Palafox, *España, 1808-1996: El desafío de la modernidad* (Madrid: Espasa, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Archilés and Martí, "Ethnicity, region and nation," 787.

concrete reforms to improve the quality of life in the cities. This trend paralleled the “City Beautiful” and “Garden City” movements in the United States and England, in which an increasingly affluent urban population came to prioritize aesthetic and recreational concerns, and seek spaces that were protected from the noise and grime of industrial development. The city parks and Modernist architecture of the Valencian Renaissance, along with parallel developments elsewhere in Spain and especially in Barcelona, were among the most obvious manifestations of this movement.

Closely related to these urban movements, the desire to escape the chaos of city life and preserve remnants of countryside untouched by human labor also contributed to the declaration of the first national parks around the world. This trend began in the more heavily industrialized nations but quickly spread, starting with Yellowstone in 1872 and followed, over the following decades, by parks in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Europe. In Spain, Pedro Pidal, the Marquis of Villaviciosa and a passionate hunter and mountaineer, brought a parks law to the Spanish Senate in 1915 and engineered the protection of the mountainous National Parks of Covadonga (Picos de Europa) and Ordesa (Pyrenees) in 1917 and 1918, respectively.<sup>52</sup> These two spectacular mountain regions, filled with lush forests, rugged vistas, and plentiful wildlife, embodied the Spanish version of what William Cronon has called “sublime landscapes” that were the early targets of conservation.<sup>53</sup>

Some lexicographic clarification is necessary to distinguish between the various strains of thought about the natural world described in this dissertation. Environmental historians in the United States must use care when employing terms such as “conservation” and “preservation.”

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<sup>52</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 31-32.

<sup>53</sup> William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1995): 69-90.

While the former refers to a human-centered ideology based on the need to responsibly manage natural resources for human use, the latter indicates the scientific or Romantic interest in protecting nature from the invariably degrading interference of human activity. Conservationists favored tree farms and “sustainable forestry,” while preservationists fought for national parks and species preservation. The matter is further confused when, at mid-century, both groups began to be lumped together under the general name of “conservationism,” and then “environmentalism.”

In the Spanish context, there is less ambiguity. While there is no direct Spanish corollary for the preservation/conservation dichotomy, I will refer to engineers, intellectuals, and politicians who espoused the expansion and use of natural resources without significant regard for sustainability as “developmentalists,” in keeping with the broader arc of the policies they endorsed. “Conservationists,” on the other hand, refers to the Romantic and scientific conservationists of the twentieth century, from advocates of the first national park in 1917, to their intellectual heirs in the scientific and activist communities of the rest of the century. Finally, “environmentalism” refers to the specific form of conservationism embraced by the generation of activists that came of age in the late 1960s, as described in Chapter Four, who understood the environment primarily as an important factor in human well-being. This generation was the first to self-identify their social movement as “environmentalism” (*ecologismo*) and themselves as “environmentalists” (*ecologistas*), and drew a sharp distinction between themselves and the more nature-centered “conservationists” who had previously dominated environmental debates.

In urban Valencia the obvious target for those interested in conserving relatively “wild” landscapes was the Albufera. Though the lake and Dehesa had been subject to human use and modification for centuries and thus did not intuitively fit into the standard North American



understanding of “pristine” natural parks, advocates for their protection echoed Sorolla’s concerns about homogenization and described them as a place of long-standing traditions and natural beauty at risk of being overrun by urban and industrial development. The tranquil beaches, forests, and lake garnered widespread admiration on aesthetic grounds, with Blasco Ibañez describing the clarity of the lake’s water with awe, most notably in a nocturnal scene in which “the light penetrated to the bottom of the lake. There one could see the shell bed, the aquatic plants, a whole world of mystery, invisible during the day; the water was so transparent that the boat seemed to be floating in the air with no support whatever.” The Dehesa, meanwhile, was lush with “twisted, ageless pines” and inhabited by wild bulls, boar, deer, lizards, and smaller mammals.<sup>54</sup> Hunters and birdwatchers alike, moreover, waxed rhapsodic over the immense avian population that nested around the lake and clamored for its protection.

The primary threat facing this landscape, and the target of ire from urban park advocates and hunters alike, was the ongoing construction of *tancats* along the lakeshore, which continued to reduce the Albufera’s perimeter each year. While they rhetorically glorified farmers in art and literature, urban people objected to the material reality of agriculture in this context, interpreting it as an attack on the “natural” landscape even though the lake in its present form was itself a profoundly anthropogenic product of agricultural processes. In 1911, the city purchased the Albufera and its Dehesa from the national government in order “to construct a great natural park for the city, and block the depredations that threatened to make it vanish in a short time.”<sup>55</sup> In addition to rescinding farmers’ claims on *tancats* built without explicit legal authority, the city

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<sup>54</sup> Blasco Ibañez, *Cañas y Barro*.

<sup>55</sup> Francisco de P. Momblanch, *Historia de la Albufera de Valencia* (Valencia: Archivo Municipal Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1960), 178.

council also swore “to conserve the forest of the Dehesa and the integrity of its soil, which cannot have any use or agricultural purpose other than woodland.”<sup>56</sup>

While unconcerned about the Dehesa, for which they had little practical use, local rice farmers rightly saw themselves as the targets of the new restrictions on the lake. They objected strenuously, insisting that their “traditional” land use should trump new interests in landscape preservation and urban recreation, and stressing that their “patriotic goal of working to increase the national wealth and draining swampy ground” entitled them to legal ownership of their illegally-constructed *tancats*.<sup>57</sup> Over a twenty-year period of negotiation and compromise that left no one entirely satisfied, the park advocates carried out the first stage of what would be a century-long struggle with rural people over their competing visions of Valencian identity and the future of the region. The result was legal protection for what remained of the lake, ensuring the El Palmar fishermen’s uninterrupted use of it for commercial purposes; limited hunting via permits sold by the city; and unrestricted use of the Dehesa for picnicking, strolling, and beachgoing for the urban public.

This early controversy over the Albufera and its surroundings encapsulates the conflicted relationship between rural and urban people in Valencia at the turn of the century, which in turn highlights several of the internal contradictions of Spanish attitudes towards landscape and modernity. Landscape preservation was, from the start, inextricably tied to notions of Valencian identity, to nostalgic ideas about a folkloric rural past, and to concepts of wilderness and nature common to industrializing cultures across the Western hemisphere. Even while such notions elevated the “industrious peasant” in romantic ideology, however, they disguised and in some

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<sup>56</sup> Ministerio de Hacienda, “Ley cediendo en propiedad al Ayuntamiento de Valencia el lago denominado La Albufera y el monte denominado dehesa de La Albufera,” *Gaceta de Madrid* 176 (June 25, 1911): Art. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Mayors of Alfafar, Catarroja, Masanasa, Silla, Sollana and Sueca to the Ministry of Hacienda, January 14, 1926, F.C. M<sup>o</sup> Hacienda, 5955, box 1, ANH.

cases hindered long-term processes of transformation, both physical and cultural, within that very peasantry. Agrarian landscapes created centuries or decades before, along with their idealized inhabitants, became naturalized as timeless identifiers of the region itself. Those landscapes, now valued for reasons other than their mere economic potential, necessitated protection from the people who had brought them into existence. Rural people were thus seen as somehow separate from both the ongoing modernization of the rest of the country and from the very transformations their labor had worked on the land.

This paradox will be familiar to any scholar of postcolonial environmental history in Africa and, to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia, where local people were routinely forcibly removed from their lands in the interest of middle-class European values of aesthetics or science. Those protected landscapes, emptied of people or at least with human activities sharply curtailed to conform to notions of premodern “traditional uses,” frequently appear as the iconic images of the regions or countries themselves, despite their atypicality. Just so, the Albufera, the Dehesa, and its rice fields, along with the Huerta, remained central to the image of Valencia throughout the century. While the Valencian case in no way approaches the scale or violence of many of these later parks campaigns, and of course lacks the crucial racial component, it nonetheless shares the basic principle of limiting local people’s use and modification of their traditional lands in the interest of a romantic vision of tradition and nature. As elsewhere, the conflict between urban and rural values inherent in this process would play a central role in Valencians’ experience of modernization throughout the century.

## Chapter Two. National Regeneration and Valencian Irrigation

Ironically, while nature protection efforts and economic pressures were forcing some Valencian farmers from their lands, on the national stage their efforts were celebrated by a generation of writers and politicians. In prose and, eventually, in law, reformers of the early twentieth century wrote admiringly of the way local people and rulers had transformed Valencian landscapes through rural engineering and infrastructure projects, and sought to impose similar changes on the rest of the nation. Specifically, they saw irrigation as the key to Valencia's relative prosperity, and used them as a model for hydraulic policies that were applied throughout the national territory. In so doing, they laid the groundwork for a technocratic approach to social and economic policy that would prove fundamental to contemporary Spanish nature and society. Environmental management, and specifically the anthropogenic Valencian landscapes, played the central role in both rhetoric and practice for a national "regeneration" movement that would dominate Spanish politics for the rest of the century.

The resurgence of regionalism taking place during the early twentieth century not only in Valencia but also in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, and elsewhere, was at least in part a reaction to widespread depression surrounding Spain's *national* identity. Following the loss of the last overseas colonies in 1898, a generation of Spanish journalists, politicians, and writers devoted thousands of pages to lamenting the intellectual and economic stagnation that set Spain

apart from a rapidly modernizing and expanding Europe. Despite its lack of historical veracity, the predominant narrative among intellectuals held that the country's "decadence" was rooted in the influence of foreign rulers and ideas, particularly the "failed monarchies" of the Habsburgs and Bourbons.<sup>1</sup> The failure of the Spanish liberal revolution in the nineteenth century, ostensibly confounded by immutable clerical and monarchical tendencies, had enabled feudal structures to survive in the countryside, most obviously in the latifundia system of the south and west, creating a permanently dependent, ignorant peasantry, stubbornly resistant to change or technological improvements.<sup>2</sup>

The man who gave the literary "Generation of 1898" its name was another Valencian, José Martínez Ruiz (1873-1967), better known by his pen name, Azorín.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Blasco Ibañez and Sorolla, Azorín left Valencia for Madrid as a young man and wrote primarily about his travels in the Castilian core. Echoing the sentiments of many of his peers, he described Spain as "perhaps the most backwards nation in Europe," suffering from centuries of "decadence" in the aftermath of a sixteenth-century Golden Age.<sup>4</sup> In this myth of the Spanish past, an era of religious tolerance and economic and cultural growth had been brought to a close by a series of disasters emanating from the Church and the Monarchy, including the expulsion of the Jews, the rise of the Inquisition and persecution of *conversos* and *moriscos*, and the draining effect of the

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<sup>1</sup> José Alvarez Junco, "The Formation of Spanish Identity and its Adaptation to the Age of Nations," *History and Memory* 14 (Fall 2002): 32; Henry Kamen, *Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity* (Yale, 2008), 184.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Joaquín Costa, *Oligarquía y Caciquismo* (1902). As historian Henry Kamen has pointed out, myths of past greatness provide essential background for a belief in a current period of decline necessitating major reforms. Kamen, *Imagining Spain*, 182.

<sup>3</sup> With Pío Baroja and Ramiro de Maeztu, Azorín was a member of the so-called "Group of Three" around which the Generation coalesced. Azorín gave the movement its name in his 1913 collection of essays, *La Generación de 1898*.

<sup>4</sup> Azorín, *Buscapies* (Madrid/Valencia, Arhimán, 1894). As described by Ringrose and others, Spain's regional diversity of experiences with modernization was more typical of European states than contemporary reformers may have understood, but to the Generation of 98 and the Regenerationists the only question was how to raise Castile up to the standards of the Levantine regions. Ringrose, *Spain, Europe, and the "Spanish Miracle."*

American colonies on Spanish manpower and energies. Centuries of religious persecution, ineffective land management, and political absolutism had left nothing but crumbling walls and dusty fields in the “once splendid, now depressed” Spanish cities.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, literary descriptions of Castilian farmers working with the same tools and technologies first implemented by the Romans were only slightly hyperbolic. Azorín repeatedly despaired at what he saw as peasants’ obstinacy, which prevented them from adopting laborsaving, cost-effective new methods.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, the “Levante,” an intentionally apolitical term that referred to the geographic region of the old Kingdom of Valencia and sometimes understood to also encompass coastal areas of Murcia to the south and Catalonia to the north, offered would-be reformers an example of what Spain could be if it could only “push...forward into the mainstream of modern life.”<sup>7</sup> The stagnant Castilian core contrasted sharply with what Azorín and others saw as the progressive, modern cities and democratic, productive countryside of the Mediterranean coast. “What a difference,” Azorín wrote, “between these inactive villages of the Meseta and the laughing, lively towns of the Levante!...The Levante is a region that has developed and

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<sup>5</sup> Azorín, *Los Pueblos, La Andalucía Trágica, y otros artículos (1904-1905)* (Madrid: Clasicos Castalia, 1973), 45 (from the essay “La Decadencia”).

<sup>6</sup> Such claims recur throughout Azorín’s works. Like Sorolla, while adamantly in favor of the increased “modernization” of Spain, members of the Generation of ‘98 routinely expressed concerns with the homogenizing impacts of industrialization with regard to the replacement of artisans and with the loss of cultural diversity and local traditions. In “La casa, la calle, y el camino,” he describes the wonders of modern conveniences including automobiles, elevators, telephones, housewares, and consumerism; in “Una Elegía” he describes industrially produced articles as “soulless” compared to those produced by hand; and in *La Voluntad* he laments the loss of “the old nationalities” and “their local color, clothing, customs, literature, art” as a result of industrialization and globalization. Azorín, *Obras Completas II, La Voluntad* (Madrid: Rafael Caro Raggio, 1919) and Azorín, *Los Pueblos*.

<sup>7</sup> Ramiro Maeztu, *Hacia Otra España*, 1899. The term “Levante” has definite political implications, as it refers to a geographical section of the Iberian peninsula rather than to the politically- and historically-defined regions of Catalonia, Valencia, and Murcia. Reference to the “Levante” therefore connotes a unified Spain as opposed to independent nationalities.

progressed by its own internal vitality, while the Center remains fixed, monotonous, closed to progress, the same today as four centuries ago.”<sup>8</sup>

This contrast, agreed Azorín’s peers, had emerged from the prevalent systems of land use in different regions of the country. Overwhelmingly, writers of the period conflated physical and historical processes and posited engineered environmental transformation as the key to Spain’s future. Thus, in the “dry center,” the persistence of traditional crops such as wheat and olives, which produced relatively little per hectare and thus required massive land holdings to turn a profit, contributed to the persistence of semi-feudal land use patterns. The latifundias underexploited labor and land resources and kept peasants in poverty and dependence. Conversely, the exceptional productivity of the irrigated Levante had enabled farmers to work small plots as independent landowners and still produce surplus crops for regional and international markets. Such circumstances translated directly into divergent moral and cultural standards among the masses of laborers in each region. In Azorín’s words, “Happy men who have water with which to irrigate their fields and intensively cultivate their lands, and easy communication and clean, comfortable houses, cannot think and feel the same as sad men who live on arid plains, without roads, without trees, without comfortable houses, without healthy and plentiful food.”<sup>9</sup>

Regenerationist politicians and historians embraced the Generation of 1898’s rhetoric and ideas in their quest for a way to leave behind the stagnation and decline of the past. “Double-lock the tomb of The Cid,” advised the multitalented Aragonese politician, historian, economist, and

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<sup>8</sup> José Martínez Ruiz (Azorín), *Antonio Azorin* (Madrid, Vda. de Rodríguez Serra, 1903), ch. 10. Such perceptions contributed to growing regionalist and separatist movements in Catalonia, and to a much lesser extent in Valencia, as well as in the Basque Country, which one contemporary author has described as seeing themselves as “advanced, European islands in a sea of backwardness.” Junco, “Formation of Spanish Identity,” 32.

<sup>9</sup> Martínez Ruiz, *Antonio Azorin*, ch. X.

lawyer Joaquín Costa, urging Spain to abandon its nostalgia for the Golden Age and to look instead towards material improvements for the future. To that end, the reformers promoted a new national vision that incorporated the color and local diversity of the regions, a unified nation-state built around the Castilian core, and the universal education, technological developments, and democratic political structures of modern European states.

In practical terms, these aspirations relied heavily on the lessons of the Levante. While the Romantic reformers of the City Beautiful and parks movements gravitated towards a new aesthetic appreciation of the nature they saw as increasingly imperiled by industrial progress, Costa's Regenerationists focused on the more pragmatic need to protect those aspects of the environment that most directly impacted the quality of human life. Azorín's emphasis on the landscape, and specifically on the differences between "dry" and irrigated Spain, would prove central to Regenerationist proposals for national renewal. Routinely, writers and reformers used the presence or absence of irrigation as a proxy for the cultural and social state of the land. "The countryside – the old countryside of Castile – is flat, empty, barren,"<sup>10</sup> Azorín wrote, composed of "interminable dusty plains, desperate and sad, without a tree, without a house, without a pond, without a bird."<sup>11</sup>

"How is it possible to live in these dead, gloomy cities, and in these thirsty, exhausted fields? What initiatives, what energies, what strength, what boldness, what generous and large impulses can these limitless, desperate horizons, these barren, dusty, open lands suggest to the soul?...There are two things that are fundamental, essential, in the life of nations – trees and water – and it will not be possible to achieve a town's regeneration without making those two things come into being there first."<sup>12</sup>

Costa, the undisputed leader of the Regenerationists, employed identical rhetoric to make a technocratic case for national renewal and "Europeanization," associating the country's

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<sup>10</sup> Azorín, *Obras Completas V, España (hombres y paisajes)* (Madrid: Rafael Caro Raggio, 1920), 180.

<sup>11</sup> Azorín, *Obras Completas I, El Alma Castellana* (Madrid: Rafael Caro Raggio, 1919).

<sup>12</sup> Azorín, *Los Pueblos*, 211-212.



decadence with its physical conditions.<sup>13</sup> He characterized the national struggle as an “internal war against drought, against the rugged character of the soil, the rigidity of the coasts, the intellectual backwardness of the people, the isolation from the European Centre, the absence of capital.”<sup>14</sup> Only dramatic improvements in poverty rates and public education – “the pantry and the school,” in his formulation – would draw Spain out of the decadence of its past. By “the school,” Regenerationists meant not public education per se but rather specialized technical education that would enable peasants and farmers to adopt new tools, new crops, and new methods to maximize the potential of Spanish agriculture.<sup>15</sup> The pantry, meanwhile, would be filled not only through this new knowledge but also through a vigorous national program of hydraulic and environmental engineering.<sup>16</sup>

Regenerationist politicians described irrigation as a panacea that would exponentially increase agricultural production and land values, creating wealth and food self-sufficiency on both the local and national levels, which in turn would produce a new Spanish renaissance of cultural and economic renewal.<sup>17</sup> Water was the blood of Spain, longing to feed the terrestrial body; the gold waiting to pay the people’s debts; the road leading economic emigrants back

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<sup>13</sup> Eloy Fernández Clemente, *Estudios Sobre Joaquín Costa* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias Zaragoza, 1989), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Costa Martínez 1900.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Joaquín Costa, “Caracteres de la política hidráulica,” in *Política Hidráulica* (Madrid, 1896). “The hydraulic policy concerns the nationalization of water and its...storage by the State, but it also implies the establishment of technical schools...where learning is through practical experience...the use of chemical fertilizers, the rotation of cereals with legumes without fallow, whether with irrigation or dry crops, the intensive cultivation of pastures and market-gardens, and the combination of arable with livestock breeding.”

<sup>16</sup> Joaquín Costa, quoted in Fernández Clemente, *Estudios*, 151.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Pedro M. González Quijano, “Colonización interior y política hidráulica,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 65 (1917), 317; M. Gómez González, *Colonización de las grandes zonas de regadío. Relaciones entre propietarios y cultivadores* (Valencia: III Congreso Nacional de Riego, 1921): 23-24; Lasierra, “Mejoras económicas obtenidas por la implantación del regadío; aumento de riqueza,” *First Congreso Nacional de Riegos Vol. 2, F-38*, (Zaragoza, October 2-6, 1913), cited in Antonio López-Ontiveros, “El regadío, salvación de la patria y fuente de felicidad según los Congresos Nacionales de Riego, 1913-1934,” *Demófilo* 27 (1997), 38.

home.<sup>18</sup> “The water of the canals,” wrote Costa, “is wheat, it is milk, it is wool, it is fruit.”<sup>19</sup> Based on his observations in irrigated areas of Aragon and Murcia, he asserted that “in regions punished by drought, an irrigation canal provides the people with more liberty than a Constitution, no matter how democratic,” and predicted that a state-funded hydraulic infrastructure would democratize control over resources and undermine the latifundia system in the poorer interior regions of the peninsula.<sup>20</sup> Newly fertile lands would attract internal colonization, reducing emigration, reversing urbanization, and increasing the national population, while the introduction of new crops (especially cotton, tobacco, and sugar beets) would support new national industries and improve the national balance of trade.<sup>21</sup> Hydroelectric generation, meanwhile, would bring modern conveniences and progress, with all its attendant benefits for health, culture, and morality, to the masses.<sup>22</sup>

To that end, Regenerationists called for the nationalization of peninsular water, carried out through the construction of canals, dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, and irrigation ditches “to restore great lakes, create real interior seas of fresh water, multiply vast marshes, erect many

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Ministerio de Agricultura, *Anuarios Estadístico de las Producciones Agrícolas, Año 1939-52*, (Madrid: Ministerio de Agricultura 1954), viii; Joaquín Costa Martínez, *Política Hidráulica, Misión Social de los Riegos en España* (Madrid, 1911), 334-36.

<sup>19</sup> Costa, *Política Hidráulica*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Joaquín Costa, quoted in Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, *La Conquista del Ebro* (Zaragoza, 1931), 40. See also López-Ontiveros, “El regadío,” 30-35.

<sup>21</sup> Antonio López Ontiveros, “Significado, Contenido, Temática, Ideología de los Congresos Nacionales de Riegos (1913-1934),” in *Hitos históricos de los regadíos españoles*, ed. A. Gil Olcina & A. Morales Gil (Madrid: Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, 1992), 283. Other proposed crops included tomatoes, lettuce, corn, linen, hemp, green beans, castor, and hops

<sup>22</sup> Conclusions of the First Congreso Nacional de Riegos (Zaragoza, October 2-6, 1913) Vol. 1, VII-VIII, paraphrased in Antonio López Ontiveros, “El regadío, salvación de la patria y fuente de felicidad según los Congresos Nacionales de Riego, 1913-1934,” *Demófilo* 27 (1997), 37-38; Costa, *Política Hidráulica*; López Ontiveros 1990, p 275-76.

great dams, and mine, exploit and withhold the drops of water that fall over the peninsula without returning, if possible, a single drop to the sea.”<sup>23</sup>

The first National Hydraulic Plan (1902), designed and enacted by Regenerationist politicians, embodied many of these ideas, and in particular served as a crucial first step toward nationalizing hydraulic infrastructure.<sup>24</sup> Embracing the simplistic assumption that the benefits of irrigation observed in a few small areas of the Levante could be reproduced anywhere, the Plan contained a list of 296 projects to be undertaken around the country, which would dramatically increase hydroelectric capacity and add almost 1.5 billion hectares (3.7 billion acres) of irrigated land. These projects promptly ran into problems, arising in equal parts from the plan’s fundamentally flawed initial assumption, a lack of funding to carry out its ambitious slate of projects, and the insufficiency of engineering and scientific expertise that went into its design.

Costa’s greatest admirer and self-designated intellectual heir, a civil engineer from Madrid named Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, later wrote that the lack of comprehensive scientific oversight had made the 1902 Plan nothing more than “a catalog of canals and reservoirs, nearly all isolated, with no relationship between them even within a given river basin, some fully incompatible with each other owing to the almost complete coincidence of the areas of proposed benefit.”<sup>25</sup> Dam and reservoir sites had been selected on the basis of a simple cost-benefit ratio, namely the cost of construction versus the area of land to benefit from irrigation, or as Pardo would memorably describe it, “a list of spots around the country where a dam might most easily

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<sup>23</sup> Ricardo Macías Picavea, *El Problema Nacional: Hechos, Causas, Remedios* (Madrid, 1899), 318-20. For similar sentiments, see González Quijano, “Colonización interior”; Gómez González, *Colonización*; Ministerio de Fomento, “Real decreto disponiendo la formación de la Confederación Sindical Hidrológica de la cuenca del Ebro,” *Gaceta de Madrid* 65 (March 6, 1926): 1253-54; Costa, *Política Hidráulica*, 334-336.

<sup>24</sup> Rafael Gasset, *Plan Nacional de Obras Hidráulicas* (Madrid: Ministerio de Agricultura, 1902).

<sup>25</sup> Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional de Obras Hidráulicas, Vol. 1: Exposición General* (Madrid, 1933), 19-20.

be erected across a river.”<sup>26</sup> This criterion overlooked other factors, including meteorological, hydrological, and labor conditions, which had been crucial to the successful introduction of irrigated agriculture in the Levante.<sup>27</sup> The majority of early investments under the Plan, for instance, went towards the expansion of hydraulic works in the Ebro River Basin, which yielded a significant expansion of the area of irrigated land but failed to raise the region’s productivity as much as the Regenerationists had hoped.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the Horta, the Ebro region suffered from extreme droughts in the summer, leading to shortages of water that made cultivation of high-value, irrigation-dependent crops such as fruit trees a risky business. In addition, such crops required large amounts of fertilizer, which exceeded the capacity of local livestock to provide and required significant capital outlays for the importation of guano or chemical fertilizers from abroad. In practice, despite state investment in dams and canals, local farmers played it safe by irrigating traditional dry-land crops such as wheat and olives, so that they obtained higher yields when water was available but did not risk disaster when it was not. From a purely economic standpoint, the state spent significantly more on the hydraulic infrastructure than it could ever gain by the increased production of low-value crops.<sup>29</sup> Since improving the national balance of trade had been a central component of the Regenerationists’ hopes, by this measure the Plan was an abject failure.

While it failed to transform the peninsula into a giant Horta, the 1902 Plan was a significant first step towards nationalizing and centralizing Spanish water policy, which was a

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<sup>26</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*, 20. The engineers responsible for the 1902 Plan freely admitted an almost total lack of scientific studies of the proposed projects, and an overwhelming reliance on estimation and guesswork in setting their plans for the nation’s hydraulic future. Inspección General de Trabajos Hidráulicos, “Plan general de canales de riego y pantanos propuesto por la Inspección General de Trabajos hidráulicos,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 51 (1903), 59.

<sup>27</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*, 20; Nicolás Ortega Cantero, “El Plan Nacional de Obras Hidráulicas,” in Gil Olcina and Morales Gil, *Hitos históricos*, 342-43.

<sup>28</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 143-146.

secondary interest of Regenerationist reformers eager for national renewal. Beginning in the 1920s under the nationalist dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), Lorenzo Pardo undertook a comprehensive reform of this policy informed by his extensive scientific research and surveys on hydrology and irrigation. Adhering closely to the guidelines set forth by Costa, whom he dubbed the “prophet of the true theory of his country’s riches,” Pardo implemented major changes in the structure of Spanish water management with the goal of creating a truly national, centralized system capable of scientifically informed policymaking that would increase national income and production.<sup>30</sup> The core of his policies revolved around Costa’s idea of a peninsular “hydraulic imbalance” that led to the uneven distribution of water in the different regions of the country, and in particular the relatively low water resources in sunny, mild areas with preexisting cultures of irrigated agriculture, such as Valencia and Murcia. Whereas the 1902 Plan had contemplated the indiscriminate capture of water wherever it was found, Pardo’s studies suggested that the national interest could best be served by carefully reserving the peninsula’s hydraulic resources for the areas where they could be most efficiently used to increase the national agricultural output. In many cases, this would necessitate long-range transfers of water from the “wet” north to the dry southeast. State-funded construction projects in the north or the cold Castilian steppe might provide temporary employment and local economic stimuli, Pardo argued, but a hydraulic infrastructure that would carry water to the Levante would yield far greater returns in the long term, raising national production and reducing the substantial international trade deficit.<sup>31</sup>

Pardo also understood that a necessary precondition of this national hydraulic

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<sup>30</sup> Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, *Nueva Política Hidráulica, la Confederación del Ebro* (Madrid: Compañía Ibero-Americana de Publicaciones, 1930), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Joaquín Melgarejo Moreno, “De la Política Hidráulica a la Planificación Hidrológica: Un Siglo de intervención del Estado,” in Barciela López and Melgarejo Moreno, *El Agua en la Historia de España*, 282.

infrastructure was the dismantling of existing local and regional control over water, which had long tended towards pork-barrel spending, a concentration of wealth, and inefficient resource use. Politics and science converged, not for the first time, when nationalist dictator Primo de Rivera authorized Pardo to divide the country into ten Hydrographic Confederations based on geological divisions between large watersheds in 1926 (Figure 8). Administered by the central government, these Confederations overwrote older divisions drawn by history, culture, and local politics and were tasked with determining the most efficient use of the country's water for the benefit of the nation as a whole independent of local interests.<sup>32</sup> Their boundaries, while ostensibly based on objective scientific criteria, carried overt political implications designed to undermine regional identities. In some cases, a single Confederation's jurisdiction included territories in multiple regions, as in the case of the Confederation of the Ebro, which encompassed both Aragonese and Catalan lands. In others, several rivers that had historically been regulated by distinct local authorities were combined into a single Hydrographic Confederation. The Confederation of the Júcar in Valencia, for example, encompassed not only the eponymous Júcar River basin but also those of the Turia, the Senia, the Vinalopó, and the Serpis, each of which had very different climatological, historical, and cultural conditions.

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<sup>32</sup> The Confederations were designed in part on the basis of hydraulic policy carried out elsewhere in Europe, and especially in Mussolini's Italy. They, in turn, served as a model and inspiration in many international settings, including the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States; the Regional Water Authorities in Britain (1974); the French *Agencias financieras de cuenca* (1964); and the regional water organizations of Mexico (1974). Melgarejo Moreno, "De la Política Hidráulica," 291-92.

**Figure 8: The Spanish Hydrographic Confederations**



Seven years after establishing the Hydrographic Confederations, under the auspices of the Second Republic government, Pardo unveiled his National Plan of Hydraulic Works (hereafter, 1933 Plan), the product of nearly three decades of scientific research and analysis.<sup>33</sup> He had adhered closely to Costa's original vision of a unified national system, but unlike the discredited 1902 Plan that had taken irrigation as a universal good to be applied wherever possible, the 1933 Plan concentrated state resources on projects that would produce the most significant increase in overall national production of marketable goods, and thus the largest reduction of the national trade deficit.<sup>34</sup> To that end, Pardo proposed the creation of more than 1.2 million hectares (three million acres) of newly irrigated lands over the course of twenty-five years, of which more than half lay in the warm, fertile, and arid Mediterranean basins of the Júcar, Segura, and Ebro Rivers

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<sup>33</sup> Ortega Cantero, "El Plan Nacional," 351; Antonio Gil Olcina, "Evolución de los grandes regadíos deficitarios del Sureste peninsular," in *Demanda y Economía del Agua en España*, ed. A. Gil Olcina & A. Morales Gil (Alicante: Instituto Universitario de Geografía, 1988), 315.

<sup>34</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*; Ministerio de Obras Públicas, "Decreto autorizando al Ministro de este Departamento para presentar a las Cortes un proyecto de ley referente al Plan nacional de obras hidráulicas," *Gaceta de Madrid* 182 (July 1, 1934): 12-13; Angel Arrúe Astiazarán, *Plan Nacional de Obras Hidráulicas, Vol. III: Estudios Agronomico y Forestal* (Madrid: Ministerio de Fomento, 1933), 41; Lorenzo Pardo, *Conquista del Ebro*, 35 and 42.





the form of interbasin water transfers, including a 300-kilometer “Tajo-Segura Transfer,” as well as a series of smaller internal canals.<sup>37</sup> To ensure high returns on the state’s investments and prevent the sort of problems experienced in the recently-irrigated lands of the Ebro, Pardo suggested that the Levantine farmers who would receive this national largesse be required to abandon grain and other subsistence crops in favor of vegetables and industrial crops specifically chosen for their suitability for irrigated cultivation and for their high value on the international market. Farmers on the Castilian mesa, conversely, would continue to produce cereals, beans, potatoes, and other products for domestic consumption.<sup>38</sup> River basins in the northwest, meanwhile, would not benefit from any state-funded construction but instead would continue to rely on private initiative for their hydraulic projects, which largely took the form of hydroelectric generation.<sup>39</sup>

In an era in which the profound cultural, linguistic, and historical divisions between Spanish regions occupied a prominent place in public discourse, this nationalist vision failed to seize the popular imagination. Even engineers and economists who shared Pardo’s interest in the national economy cautioned him against the kind of regional favoritism towards the Levante that the 1933 Plan embodied.<sup>40</sup> Valencia’s indigenous irrigation had already made it wealthy, they argued, whereas other regions lacked both jobs and infrastructure with which to pull them out of poverty.<sup>41</sup> “Why was it necessary,” asked one engineer, “to favor rich areas, where the sole and splendid State has carried out a multitude of works, at the cost of poor ones, where the State has

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<sup>37</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*, 209; Melgarejo Moreno, “De la Política Hidráulica,” 296.

<sup>38</sup> Lorenzo Pardo, *Plan Nacional*, 167-169 and 213.

<sup>39</sup> Lorenzo Pardo 1933 vol. II274.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Fernando García Arenal, “La política de obras públicas,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 81 (1933): 301-303, advocating cautious and closely studied public works projects applied in all regions of the country, not merely the Center and South as areas in dire financial straits.

<sup>41</sup> Luís Rodríguez Arango, “La economía española y la hiperemia hidráulica en las obras públicas,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 81 (1933): 89; José Nicolau Sabater, “El nuevo Plan nacional de Obras hidráulicas,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 82 (1934): 149.

not carried out anything?”<sup>42</sup> A Castilian newspaper, meanwhile, condemned the national administration for neglecting development in the dry interior, thereby “forever placing it in a plan of inferiority.”<sup>43</sup> Many in the neglected northern and central regions called for an equitable distribution of infrastructure projects in areas with high unemployment in order to create jobs in construction, regardless of the area’s long-term suitability for irrigation, posing a fundamental contradiction with Pardo’s and the Regenerationists’ visions of national unity. Such complaints, combined with economic depression and political instability, contributed to the 1933 Plan’s defeat in the Spanish Cortes. In the political chaos and social turmoil of the rest of the decade, including the collapse of the Second Republic into civil war, a coherent national hydraulic policy remained a distant dream.

The 1933 Plan was given new life, however, when mere weeks after the Nationalist victory in April 1939 Francisco Franco’s new Minister of Public Works, Manuel Peña Boeuf, published a General Plan of Public Works (hereafter, Peña Plan) that drew heavily on Pardo’s work. The Peña Plan, a basic plank of Franco’s aggressively nationalistic policies early in his regime, adopted many of Pardo’s most contentious proposals even while fundamentally altering his objectives of economic efficiency and Costa’s dream of yeoman farmers. Like Pardo, Peña Boeuf proposed the expansion of irrigation in the Levante using a series of costly long-range transfers and massive dams, and slated the new lands for cultivation in high-value vegetables, industrial crops, and citrus for export.<sup>44</sup> But where Costa had dreamed of enriching the country both economically and morally, and Pardo had sought to improve the national balance of trade

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<sup>42</sup> José Gallarza, “Ni plan ni Nacional,” *Revista de Obras Públicas* 84 (March 1936), 111.

<sup>43</sup> M. Bañuelos, “Intereses de Castilla, Los riegos en la Cuenca del Duero,” *El Norte de Castilla*, June 2, 1934, quoted in Ortega Cantero, “El Plan Nacional,” 361-2.

<sup>44</sup> Calculations of per-hectare costs of irrigation in river basins derived from Alfonso Peña Boeuf, *El Futuro Plan de Obras Públicas del Estado Español* (Burgos: Ministerio de Obras Públicas, 1939), 19.

and thereby its international standing, Peña Boeuf pursued Franco's autarkic goal of increasing Spain's food self-sufficiency. More than half of the land he proposed for irrigation lay in arid northern and central Castile, nearly all of it slated for crops such as corn and alfalfa, which had low value on the international market and yielded limited returns from irrigation investments. To a significant extent this signaled a reversion to the economically inefficient objectives of the 1902 Plan, with hydraulic projects intended to promote resettlement and improved standards of living in the dry interior.<sup>45</sup> Major projects in Badajoz and Jaen, two of the most desperately impoverished provinces in the country, were posited as a means of attracting internal resettlement to previously unproductive lands and slowing the trend of urbanization. Such goals were deemed more important than the fact that these and other provinces were not particularly suited for irrigation, and that the low-value crops grown there could not compensate for the immense state investments they would demand. Ironically, Peña Boeuf justified his very different policies in the same terms Pardo and Costa had used, calling on four decades of resonant rhetoric to describe his plan as an effort to improve "the utility and output for the nation" as a whole rather than each region individually.<sup>46</sup>

The Peña Plan became a central feature of the early Franco regime's national agenda, and speeches by the dictator and his ministers frequently made use of Regenerationist rhetoric of "persistent drought" and aridity to explain away the country's problems. Those problems arose in large part from the dictator's own policies and politics: Franco's Spain remained officially neutral in World War II but unofficially strongly sympathized with the Axis, which translated

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<sup>45</sup> Comité Directivo de Obras Públicas, *Plan General De Obras Públicas*, vol. II (1939), 50 and 78. See also Jefatura del Estado, "Ley de 11 abril 1939, aprobando el plan de Obras Públicas," *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 115 (April 25, 1939): 2236; Peña Boeuf, *Plan*, 4; Alfonso Peña Boeuf, *Desarrollo de las Obras Públicas en España. Conferencias pronunciadas en la Escuela de Ingenieros de Caminos* (Madrid, 1946), 22-28; Alfonso Peña Boeuf, *Memorias de un Ingeniero Politico* (Madrid: Estades, 1954), 220-226;

<sup>46</sup> Comité Directivo de Obras Públicas, *Plan* vol. II, 5.

into diplomatic and economic isolation following the Axis defeat in 1945. This, in turn, combined with the country's inability to rebuild its infrastructure following its own destructive Civil War, produced widespread poverty and hunger across Spain for the first decade of the dictatorship, which Franco and his ministers attributed to a "persistent drought." Conversely, the foreign aid and warming of diplomatic relations in the 1950s "fell on Spain like water on parched ground."<sup>47</sup> The regime diverted many of its resources, including the labor of its political prisoners, to the construction of an immense national hydraulic infrastructure of dams, reservoirs, canals, and water transfers that physically transformed the face of the country.<sup>48</sup> Between 1950 and 1965 the area of irrigated land in Spain increased by 600,000 hectares (41%), principally planted in alfalfa, maize, sugar beet, and fruit trees.<sup>49</sup> Franco himself earned the nickname of "Frankie the Frog" for his obsession with water, and perhaps the most iconic image to emerge from the early years of his regime was that of the dictator inaugurating the latest addition to Spain's growing list of large dams.

Over the course of thirty-five years, Franco's Spain erected more than eight hundred large dams and hundreds of kilometers of new canals, feeding vast fields of thirsty new crops in the driest regions of the peninsula.<sup>50</sup> Hydraulic engineers channeled about 40% of the total volume of Spanish rivers into reservoirs, rerouting massive flows from wetter river basins to drier ones along the Mediterranean coast in order to take better advantage of longer growing

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<sup>47</sup> References to the "persistent drought" and to the metaphor of water and irrigation abound in Franco's own speeches as well as those of his ministers and agents. See, e.g., Peña Boeuf, *Plan*, 18; Peña Boeuf, *Memorias*, 142; Congreso Nacional de Ingenieria Agronomica, *Publicaciones 5, Anteproyecto de Ponencia sobre "Hidraulica Agraria," Tema 4º* (Madrid, 1949).

Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, *Discursos y mensajes del Jefe del Estado, 1951-54* (Madrid, 1955), 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent synopsis of hydraulic policy and construction during the Franco era, see Swyngedouw, "TechnoNatural Revolutions."

<sup>49</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 261.

<sup>50</sup> Erik Swyngedouw, "Modernity and Hybridity: Nature, Regeneracionismo, and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (1999).

seasons and the supposed superiority of Levantine agriculture.<sup>51</sup> Along with the irrigation canals came plastic greenhouses, imported pesticides, and chemical fertilizers to make the desert bloom. The country's petroleum consumption quintupled in the last half of the twentieth century, a fossil fuel revolution especially visible in the skyrocketing number of tractors, harvesters, and other farm machinery.<sup>52</sup>

Such changes were not unique to Spain, but rather were part of the great twentieth-century transformation of global environments and attitudes that John McNeill has called "something new under the sun." The relationship of the Spanish government with the physical environment, like that of modernist states around the world, was one of increasing reliance on engineered "solutions" to control and modify natural conditions.<sup>53</sup> Franco's Spain altered river basins, drained wetlands, flooded valleys, cleared forests, reversed the flow of rivers, and exhausted groundwater supplies. The combination of mechanized, intensified agriculture and the heavy use of chemicals rapidly led to soil exhaustion across much of the country, and while various agencies within the Franco administration were assigned the task of monitoring and minimizing this critical problem, no information-gathering or remedial projects were ever fully realized.<sup>54</sup> As in other developing countries, sanitation and water treatment in newly expanded

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<sup>51</sup> Enrique Garcia, "Dams in Spain," Working Paper (World Commission on Dams) (2000), 1; Swyngedouw, "TechnoNatural Revolutions," 14.

<sup>52</sup> Naredo, "La Modernización de la Agricultura," 64.

<sup>53</sup> The foundational text on this subject is of course James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). See also David Blackbourne, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (W.W. Norton, 2006); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (UC Press, 2002); Joseph E. Taylor, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Paul Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002); and Mark Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000* (University of Washington Press, 2006), among many others.

<sup>54</sup> Naredo, "La Modernización de la Agricultura Española," 68-70.

industrial and urban areas were virtually nonexistent, and rivers running through major cities were literally open sewers.<sup>55</sup>

Even as hydraulic construction produced far-ranging effects on the physical environment, it failed to achieve the results promised by either the Francoist state or the regenerationists. Whereas agriculture was the central pillar of Spanish society in Costa's day, and even in Pardo's, by the second decade of the Franco regime circumstances had changed. Exacerbating prewar trends of rural depopulation, international isolation during the 1940s stemmed the flow of fertilizers and equipment from abroad and abruptly halted agricultural modernization efforts, contributing to widespread hunger in the villages.<sup>56</sup> Lured by the promise of work and pushed by low prices for their products and poor standards of living in the countryside, no amount of internal colonization and new irrigation – especially absent any effort to democratize land ownership – could keep rural laborers on the land. Indeed, state irrigation policies frequently contributed to rural depopulation, tending as they did to favor large and efficient producers over smaller ones owned by independent farmers. Landless peasants and dryland farmers alike were pushed out of work and joined the rural exodus.

Meanwhile, urban demand for water, though still constituting only a fraction of the total national water needs, had steadily increased, necessitating entirely new hydraulic construction including water treatment and sanitation that had not been considered in the original Peña Plan. In light of these circumstances, the continued expansion of irrigation at considerable expense to the state, while such fundamental problems as urban water supplies were ignored, made little sense from either an economic or a social perspective. As early as the mid-1950s, politicians and economic analysts had begun to openly express their doubts as to the sustainability of Franco's

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<sup>55</sup> Alonso Millán, *Una Tierra Abierta*, 234 and 260.

<sup>56</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, ch. 11.

autarkic agricultural policy. In 1959, the government passed a national Stabilization Plan that would help reintegrate Spain into the international economy via carefully controlled economic liberalization, including currency control and new entry visa procedures.<sup>57</sup> Encouraged by such measures, growing numbers of northern Europeans discovered the appeal of Spain's sunny climate and low cost of living. Suddenly, previously unproductive beaches and coastal lands became the country's most lucrative spaces. By the end of the decade, foreign visitors to Spain increased fourfold, making tourism the single largest sector of the Spanish economy.<sup>58</sup> Between 1959 and 1969 foreign tourism revenues covered two thirds of Spain's trade deficit.<sup>59</sup> In the regime's propaganda films, clips of crowded beaches and the Minister of Tourism inaugurating new hotels replaced those of "Frankie the Frog" inaugurating dams as the representation of the regime.

The single largest contributing factor to the decline of Spanish agriculture as a percentage of GDP and a source of employment, was not, then, its lack of irrigation but rather the expansion of other economic sectors. Development, especially industrial development, became entrenched as the government's main priority following the cabinet appointments of 1962, and ongoing hydraulic construction was relegated to a secondary role. The "Plan for Economic and Social Development, 1964-1967" laid out a general framework for nationally-coordinated initiatives on multiple fronts, including not only irrigation but transportation, sanitation, and housing, on the model of other Western European countries. Nonetheless, the legal framework for hydraulic construction set forth in the Peña Plan, and more fundamentally the notion that the state bore a

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<sup>57</sup> M.T. Newton, "Tourism and Public Administration in Spain," in *Tourism in Spain: Critical Issues*, ed. M. Barke, J. Towner, and M.T. Newton (Wallingford: CAB International, 1996), 142.

<sup>58</sup> V. Bote Gómez and M. Thea Sinclair, "Tourism Demand and Supply in Spain," in ed. Barke, Towner, and Newton, *Tourism in Spain*, 66; *Valencia Atracción*, September 1960, 5; Subsecretaría de Planificación, *Medio Ambiente: evolución de la Problemática Medio-Ambiental en los últimos Diez Años. Documentación básica para la preparación del IV Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (Madrid, 1976), 65.

<sup>59</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 2.

responsibility to provide water wherever agricultural users demanded it, remained ingrained in Spanish society. The basic disregard for either economic efficiency or environmental consequences that this entailed would have far-reaching consequences for Spanish landscapes throughout the twentieth century.



## Chapter Three. Environmentalism and the Environment Under Franco

Between hydraulic engineering, agricultural modernization, and rampant urbanization, the early Franco regime physically reshaped the Spanish landscape to an extent never before seen. In addition to the massive disruption caused by hydraulic construction described in the previous chapter, between 1951 and 1965, forestry engineers cleared 1,202,363 hectares (nearly 3 million acres) of native vegetation to plant pines, poplar, and eucalyptus in orderly rows around the country, in an effort to increase domestic lumber and paper production, prevent erosion and increase the amount of precipitation held by the soil.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, to accommodate the floods of foreign tourists, developers supported by the state expropriated public parks, paved over agricultural fields and picnic grounds, and dramatically increased demands on local resources, both natural and financial, all while neglecting the demands of the burgeoning urban working class. Land speculation, especially along the Mediterranean coast, flourished amidst nepotism and corruption in local administrations, to the detriment of public coffers but the benefit of private investors. Urban and touristic development proceeded with an almost complete lack of

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<sup>1</sup> These projects expanded upon similar, albeit much smaller, reforestation projects financed by the Spanish state since the eighteenth century. Direccion General de Montes, Instituto Forestal de Investigaciones y Experiencias, *Avance Inventario Repoblaciones Logradas*, 1966, FDM; Iberplan and ICONA, *La Política Forestal en el Desarrollo económico de España* (Madrid: ICONA, 1975), 17, Box 53, FDM; Agustín González Fernández, *Memoria: Industrialización de los Cotos de Huelva. Su posible producción en celulosa* (Madrid, 1949), 59, Box 77, FDM; Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 33 and 198.

regulation or planning, and often violated national and regional regulations on issues ranging from building height to the area of open space.<sup>2</sup> Urban planners today describe Franco-era coastal development as “wild urbanization” characterized by “apartment buildings of terrible quality, slum creation, lack of facilities and green spaces, and the private appropriation of public property.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite the regime’s harsh suppression of dissent, such conditions raised substantive critiques, first from technicians and professionals concerned with the ecological impacts of development, and after 1963 from urban residents demanding the state mitigate the impacts of demographic and economic changes. This chapter describes the development of a Spanish environmental movement out of these parallel but distinct strains of activism, shaped by the specific circumstances of the late Franco regime but also by various strains of international environmental thought circulating among intellectuals around the world during the mid-twentieth century. The experiences of Valencian activists, recreated from archival records and oral histories, shed new light on the ways in which different groups understood environmental concerns to be part of a deeper social and political critique of the regime.

Prior to the Civil War, the emerging interest in nature conservation among members of the Spanish intelligentsia differed little from that of their peers in other Western countries. Spain had been among the first countries in Europe to create a national park, and its wealth of relatively “wild” landscapes and mountain ranges inspired nature-lovers’ and bird-watchers’ clubs in all

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<sup>2</sup>A.S. Morris, “Environmental Management in Coastal Spain,” in Barke, Towner, and Newton, *Tourism in Spain*, 214-15; Bote Gómez and Sinclair, “Tourism Demand and Supply in Spain,” 76; Peter M. Burns, Mónica Montalvillo Sancho, “Local perceptions of tourism planning: the case of Cuéllar, Spain,” *Tourism Management* 24 (2003): 331; Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 101.

<sup>3</sup>Josep Sorribes, *La ciutat desitjada* (Valencia: Tàndem, 1998), 31; see also Pamela Beth Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain: Civil Society and the Popular Origins of the Transition, 1960-78* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 35.

the major urban centers. Such civic organizations were interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1933, followed by the suppression of associations and crackdown on many members of the intellectual community throughout the 1940s, but even at the height of Franco's White Terror a few voices echoed those early strains of conservationism. Most notably, some of Franco's own forestry engineers expressed carefully-worded, ecologically-based reservations about the ambitious public works projects and predator control programs they were tasked with carrying out.<sup>4</sup> By the early 1950s, professional field biologists and ornithologists had begun to use diplomatic channels to achieve a series of minor victories against specific projects endorsed by the regime, though their efforts would not arouse much public attention within Spain for more than a decade. Such efforts were among the few remnants of civil society in the dictatorship's early years.

The presence of dissenting conservationists under an authoritarian regime is not unique to Spain. In Soviet Russia and elsewhere, intellectual elites have repeatedly shown themselves uniquely able to frame arguments against specific regime policies in sufficiently "objective" language to avoid political repression.<sup>5</sup> Carefully-worded letters, close social connections within the halls of power, and painstaking care to present conservation as an issue of national pride that would not conflict with the regime's underlying economic and political objectives, enabled scientists to carve out a space for limited social protest. In so doing, the scientists engaged in a form of what Václav Havel has called "living within the truth," challenging the dominant

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Juan Farias Barona, "Riqueza de nuestros ríos. El Nansa, en Santander," *Hojas Divulgadoras* (March 1942): 1; Maximiliano Elegido Alonso-Geta, "La administración, punto de equilibrio entre el cazador y la caza," *Montes* (1962): 404.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3-4. A notable exception to this trend is Maoist China, where the regime's extreme anti-intellectualism resulted in the professional suppression and criminal indictment of scientists and engineers who raised objections to state hydrology and development schemes. Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2001): Chapter 1.

narrative of progress and development espoused by the state simply by asserting an alternative set of facts and theories based on scientific expertise.<sup>6</sup>

In Spain, as in other dictatorships, the perception of these scientists as eccentric dilettantes – “butterfly hunters,” as one former participant laughingly recalled in 2009 – protected them to some extent from being taken seriously as political threats.<sup>7</sup> The safest form for such protests was the advocacy of discrete protected areas on the model of national parks, often in otherwise unproductive lands that even Franco’s enthusiasm for dams and reforestation could not conquer. Scientists further protected themselves from accusations of anti-regime sentiments by depicting nature preservation as a patriotic duty, arguing that the most spectacular Spanish landscapes deserved protection as exemplars of national magnificence and subjects of international recognition.<sup>8</sup> Such tactics resulted in the declaration of three national parks in 1954, one in Catalonia and two in the Canary Islands, all of them occupying rugged, remote lands for which the State had no other use.

But just as John Muir had Yosemite, and Aldo Leopold had Sand County, José Antonio Valverde, the founder of the modern Spanish conservation movement, had the Andalusian wetland of Doñana, the pivotal space around which definitions of nature and conservation would revolve in the Franco era. His career as an activist began in 1952, when Francisco Bernís Madrazo, one of Spain’s few professors of ornithology, invited Valverde, then an exceptionally promising doctoral student of vertebrate biology, to accompany him on a field research trip to the remote wetlands habitat of Doñana on the southwestern coast of Spain. Though this would be their first trip to the region, ornithologists from northern Europe had discovered the wealth of

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<sup>6</sup> Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (1979).

<sup>7</sup> Carlos de Aguilera, interview with the author, El Escorial de San Lorenzo, July 23, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 11.

birdlife there in the mid-nineteenth century, and professionals and enthusiasts from England, Germany, France, and Switzerland, in particular, had been making the difficult journey ever since.<sup>9</sup> Valverde later described the voyage to the heart of Doñana, first by boat across the Guadalquivir River and then on a four-hour horseback ride through “an unreal world” of dunes and marshes, populated by breeding herons and an astounding diversity of wildlife. “That day,” he wrote, “I believe I leaned out into Nature with a capital N for the first time.”<sup>10</sup>

He returned from the expedition resolved to create a Spanish ornithological organization that would parallel the activities of scientists elsewhere in Europe, and convinced that the first task of that organization should be the protection of Doñana as a natural reserve. The need for such protection was urgent: at the time, state forestry engineers were developing plans to plant large portions of the area with eucalyptus for lumber and guayule shrubs for rubber production. At Valverde’s urging, Bernís argued passionately for the area’s preservation in a personal letter to Franco. “Doñana is, above all, a beautiful relic of virgin nature that houses perhaps the most formidable and famous zoological community that survives in Europe,” he wrote. Without challenging the regime’s underlying policy of forestry management, Bernís suggested that while a eucalyptus plantation on the site of the marshes would not serve any overriding national interest, “what is really in Spain’s interest is the conservation of Doñana.”<sup>11</sup> The administration’s tepid response reflected a general disinterest in the idea of habitat conservation, ambivalence about the scientists’ proposal to suspend plantation, and a practical objection to the necessary

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<sup>9</sup> José Antonio Valverde, “Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir: Su Rescate y sus Problemas Presentes y Futuros,” in *Ornitología y Conservación de la Naturaleza Hoy: Homenaje al Dr. José A. Valverde Gómez*, ed. Francisco Bernís (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1975), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Francisco Bernís, “Un cuestionario para Francisco Bernís. El pasado, presente y futuro de la Sociedad Española de Ornitología visto por su secretario general,” *Ardeola* (Special Issue June 1971): 15-51, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 48.

funding that would be required for any effort to expropriate the large areas of private property within the proposed reserve.

Undaunted, Valverde set to work organizing support for his idea among the scientific community. The Spanish Ornithological Association (*Sociedad Española de Ornitología*, hereafter SEO), formally integrated with eighty-five members in 1954, was technically a professional organization and not an advocacy group, and therefore did not run up against Franco's prohibitions on political activity. Nonetheless, from the very start SEO's mission was linked to conservation and specifically to the preservation of Doñana.<sup>12</sup> SEO quickly developed links to an international community of conservation-minded scientists, again thanks to Valverde, who believed that learning all he could about "research and conservation abroad" was the "first step" towards protecting Doñana. To that end, he traveled frequently to conferences and wildlife reserves abroad, notably a 1954 trip to the Camargue wetlands of southern France, where he met the prominent Swiss ornithologist and conservationist Luc Hoffman.<sup>13</sup> Over the next decade, Valverde would repeatedly return to France at Hoffman's invitation and add trips to Switzerland, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, England, and the United States.<sup>14</sup> Such visits taught him not only about conservation and land management but also about the kind of research that could be done with adequate infrastructure and funding, sadly lacking in postwar Spain.<sup>15</sup> He also served as a wildlife guide for a May 1957 expedition to Doñana attended by British ornithologists and conservationists including Max Nicholson, Julian Huxley, and Guy Mountfort, who would prove

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<sup>12</sup> Francisco Bernís, "Sobre la personalidad y la obra del Dr. J. A. Valverde," in Bernís, *Ornitología y Conservación*. In 1963, SEO became the official Spanish affiliate of the forty-year-old International Council for Bird Preservation, which lent funding, prestige, and support from a vast membership including several of the crowned heads of Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Bernís, "Sobre la personalidad," 9.

<sup>14</sup> Bernís, "Sobre la personalidad," 17-19.

<sup>15</sup> José Antonio Valverde, "Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir: Su Rescate y sus Problemas Presentes y Futuros," in Bernís, *Ornitología y Conservación*, 33.

pivotal in efforts to conserve the site.<sup>16</sup> Through these projects, Valverde developed a strong network of friends and colleagues among the “relatively few who had realized the serious problems of conservation that were coming upon us in Europe.”<sup>17</sup>

Armed with information on conservation methods, with a comprehensive study of Doñana compiled from his own and others’ work, and with his extensive connections at the highest levels of the international scientific community, Valverde appeared at the International Ornithology Conference in 1958 with a radical proposal. In response to the looming threat of development in Doñana, Valverde proposed that the scientists themselves raise funds to purchase the lands outright from the Spanish state, preserving them for science and the enjoyment of wilderness in perpetuity. Such a proposal had never before been made, and the ornithologists were not as enthusiastic as Valverde had hoped. Undaunted, he tried again at a meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in Athens, where he met with a more positive response.<sup>18</sup> Many of the scientists in attendance, especially those from the more industrially developed northern countries, had independently concluded that the protection of European wildlife would necessitate international collaboration.<sup>19</sup> Hoffman, in particular, became a major booster of Valverde’s project, and the organization he co-founded to help with fundraising for Doñana – formally organized in 1961 as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) – would go on to play an enormous role in global conservation efforts modeled on Valverde’s project.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bernis, “Sobre la Personalidad,” 10. Max Nicholson, *Chequered Career: An Autobiography*, 145, unpublished manuscript, courtesy Piers Nicholson and [www.maxnicholson.com](http://www.maxnicholson.com).

<sup>17</sup> Valverde, “Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir,” 45.

<sup>18</sup> Valverde, “Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir,” 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> Valverde, “Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir,” 41.

<sup>20</sup> Valverde, “Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir,” 41-42. In reality, early WWF fundraising efforts were intended to purchase the adjacent Las Nuevas wetlands, but when this project fell through the funds were diverted to Doñana.

Within Spain, too, Valverde's campaign benefitted from support among high-profile scientists, specifically José María Albareda, a prominent Opus Dei technocrat and the Secretary General of the national Scientific Research Council (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas*, hereafter CSIC). Like other members of his branch of the Franco administration, Albareda fully supported the idea of international collaboration as part of a push to end Spanish isolation, and encouraged Valverde's efforts to involve the global scientific community.<sup>21</sup> This internal pressure, combined with increasing international publicity, contributed to the weakening of the regime's resolve to convert all "nonproductive lands" into forestry projects.

In 1961, the Spanish government received a formal offer from the IUCN, acting on behalf of the just-formed WWF, for substantial financial assistance to purchase Doñana as a park. After negotiation, the WWF paid twenty-two million pesetas for the acquisition of lands in the Doñana area, which it promptly ceded to Albareda's CSIC, while the CSIC itself set aside an additional eighteen million pesetas for facilities and upkeep. The new reserve encompassed less than half of the lands the conservationists had originally hoped to acquire, but it held an important symbolic role as the first achievement of an international conservation effort and as the first significant natural reserve achieved during the Franco era.<sup>22</sup>

The Doñana campaign served as a crucial step towards raising public awareness of the Spanish environment. Its protection also suggested a significant change in policymakers' attitudes towards nature conservation. Whereas the mountain parks, with their spectacular, rugged scenery, appealed aesthetically to a substantial constituency of nature lovers interested in strolling, picnicking, and mountaineering, the wetlands offered far fewer opportunities for mass tourism. Nor were they particularly appealing locations for other economic uses, although

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<sup>21</sup> Valverde, "Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir," 36.

<sup>22</sup> Valverde, "Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir," 43-44.



Franco's engineers had imagined them as sites of at least marginally productive tree farms. In fact, Doñana's marshy ground, swarms of mosquitoes, and unassuming, flat vistas appealed almost exclusively to birdwatchers, who had long admired the vast flocks and rare specimens to be found there. It is no coincidence, then, that those birdwatchers had played a central role in the new parks' creation.

SEO member Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente, an amateur falconer, passionate hunter, and extraordinarily charismatic nature journalist, built on the success of the Doñana campaign amidst the gradually loosening restrictions on associations and the media of the mid-1960s. After 1964, "Amigo Félix" was a constant presence in living rooms and bars around the country, first through radio programs and later, as his popularity grew and more Spaniards were able to afford television sets, through several nature-themed series on the state-owned Television Español. He reached an even larger audience through summer camps, live lectures, encyclopedias, and special presentations, and became especially popular with children and young adults. While never overtly criticizing state policy, much less the Franco regime itself, his explanations of natural systems and landscapes routinely pointed out the ways in which modern Spanish society was upsetting the "balance of nature" and endangering the survival of native ecosystems. In one episode of his immensely popular program, he visited a flooded valley to explain the impacts of dams on local flora and fauna; in another, he drew careful diagrams in his ever-present field notebook showing how declining water tables interacted with well drilling and wetlands. He and his eager viewers were especially interested in a handful of telegenic predator species – the Iberian lynx, Iberian wolf, and Imperial eagle, in particular – whose ecosystem disruption and the regime's bounty system had driven to the brink of extinction over the past decades. Rodríguez de la Fuente's own half-dozen trained raptors and his personal pack of wolves, which

he had rescued as cubs and raised as family pets on the outskirts of Madrid, made frequent appearances on film, exemplifying the “softer side” of the predators so reviled by the regime.

Rodríguez de la Fuente’s impact on the general public’s understanding of the environment cannot be overestimated. While frequently compared with Jacques Cousteau for his popular appeal, Rodríguez de la Fuente’s involvement with explicitly conservationist themes in fact began much earlier and ran much deeper than that of his French contemporary. While Cousteau’s *The Silent World* was shown at Cannes in 1956, his support of French nuclear testing frequently enraged environmental activists, and his early documentaries focused on exploration and adventure but ignored the anthropogenic roots of habitat degradation.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, environmental activists today uniformly credit “Amigo Félix” with bridging the gap between Spanish popular culture and scientific conservation, fundamentally changing the way people viewed nature and their place within it. His enthusiastic narration and spectacular footage earned him instant popularity among those who could rarely afford to leave their villages, much less their country, and “Félix, friend of the animals” introduced to many the notion that nature was not something to be feared and conquered, but rather admired and protected. It was through Rodríguez de la Fuente that the majority of Spaniards became familiar with the concepts of biodiversity, food chains, and the interactions of humans with the natural world.

But despite the obvious connections between the issues he addressed and the regime’s relentless exploitation of the natural world in the interest of national economy, like his predecessors in the Doñana campaign Rodríguez de la Fuente remained careful to abstain from any political attack on the regime itself. While self-identifying as a “conservationist” and “naturalist,” he stopped short of the systemic critiques of industrial capitalism that some activists

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<sup>23</sup> Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, 72.

in the United States had begun to assert, and steered entirely clear of debates over the regime's long-term impact on Spanish welfare. Carlos Aguilera, a lifelong friend of Rodríguez de la Fuente and the cofounder of several of his environmental initiatives, was himself a staunch supporter of Franco, as were many of the scientists in SEO.<sup>24</sup> This apolitical stance enabled conservationists to continue operations in Franco's Spain, reaching a growing audience and publishing implicit critiques of specific state policies with the regime's blessing. But it also tacitly permitted the regime itself to usurp certain ideas and terminology to soften its own image, without making any substantive modifications in its policies and practices towards the environment. In 1971, for example, the national forestry administration changed its name to the "Nature Conservation Institute" (*Instituto para la Conservación de la Naturaleza*, hereafter ICONA), which became a major sponsor of Rodríguez de la Fuente's programs, but made no real changes to its environmentally destructive forest management practices.<sup>25</sup> Some conservationists were complicit in this rebranding: Antonio Valverde, the father of Spanish conservation, later wrote that when the Doñana reserve became a national park in 1969 "it was the Caudillo [Franco] who personally made the decision to order the creation of Doñana National Park," while "the Minister of Tourism, Don Manuel Fraga, and the Minister of Agriculture did a splendid job" in the process.<sup>26</sup>

In 1968, taking advantage of recently-loosened restrictions on the formation of civic associations, Rodríguez de la Fuente formed the Association for the Defense of Nature (*Asociación para la Defensa de la Naturaleza*, hereafter Adena), hoping to gain the active participation of a broader membership than the SEO intelligentsia. Crown Prince Juan Carlos de

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<sup>24</sup> Aguilera interview, El Escorial de San Lorenzo, July 23, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> ICONA, "Programa Nacional de Investigación sobre Protección Forestal" (draft), Madrid 1979, box 67, FDM.

<sup>26</sup> Valverde, "Doñana y las Marismas del Guadalquivir," 45.

Borbón accepted the organization's honorary presidency, and financial giants such as Manuel de Prado and Colón de Carvajal joined its board of directors.<sup>27</sup> The WWF's designation of Adena as its Spanish branch brought additional ideas, money, and prestige to the new group's conservationist agenda. Adena's membership, boosted by Rodríguez de la Fuente's personal popularity, soon reached 35,000, far outstripping that of SEO. For purposes of comparison, at the time the Sierra Club had 107,000 members and the society for German Bird Protection had around 50,000, both of them drawing on far larger national populations in open, democratic societies with long traditions of civic engagement.<sup>28</sup>

Like SEO, Adena's close relationship to the establishment permitted the group to survive and flourish in the repressive environment of the late Franco period, but also rendered it deeply suspect to a growing number of progressive intellectuals, especially those based outside of Madrid, who rejected everything associated with the aging regime. While apoliticism had made the scientific conservationists' efforts possible, by the late 1960s such strategies had begun to attract criticism from a new generation of activists that came of age well after the Civil War or the White Terror of the early 1940s, who saw the regime less as a personal threat than as a manifestation of a fundamentally destructive, hierarchical socioeconomic system. For many Spaniards concerned with their country's ongoing lack of basic civil rights, conservation seemed a frivolous secondary concern divorced from progressive politics; an elite hobby that threatened continued job growth and economic prosperity.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the success and growing popular

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<sup>27</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 50. Problems with such honorifics were made abundantly clear in 2012, when photographs of King Juan Carlos hunting elephants became public, resulting in widespread public outrage and his resignation in disgrace from the Adena/WWF presidency.

<sup>28</sup> Raymond H. Dominick III, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871-1971* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 124-125.

<sup>29</sup> For a more thorough description of scientists' increasing involvement in public policy worldwide during the late 1960s, see Rae Goodell, *The Visible Scientists* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 39-40.

appeal of conservation organizations offered a model for the organizational efforts that would arise in the years to come.

Scientific conservation, as practiced by Adena and SEO, focused on the protection of “wild” spaces and species relatively untouched by humanity. As William Cronon and others have made clear, the underlying philosophy of such efforts imagines humans as inherently separate from, and acting adversely upon, the natural world in ways that leave little room for a productive relationship between the two. But a second strain of environmental thought, far removed from the realm of field biology, offered a very different perspective on the human-nature relationship. In cities around the country, ideological dissatisfaction with the regime converged with widespread dissatisfaction among urban residents of all social classes with regard to the state’s failure to adequately support recent trends of urbanization and development with infrastructural investments. In a trend identified elsewhere in Europe as a crisis of “vanishing peasants,” rural unemployment and the economic unsustainability of traditional farming in the postwar era were intensified by the increasing efficiency of large producers, and contributed to urbanization and land abandonment across the peninsula.<sup>30</sup> Between 1960 and 1970, 2.7 million people (approximately 8% of the national population) moved from rural to urban areas. Of these internal migrants, fully half moved to the major urban centers of Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and Bilbao, where they settled in new neighborhoods outside of city centers, often little more than shanty towns, which lacked basic social services such as health facilities, parks, transportation, and schools.<sup>31</sup>

While Adena and SEO campaigned to alleviate the effects of rural land abandonment and

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<sup>30</sup> Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 20-21.

increasing industrialization on the countryside, the new generation of urban activists was more concerned with the impact of these demographic and physical changes on human populations. Such sentiments echoed those of other industrial societies, such as Germany and France, where they helped give rise to active green and counterculture movements. In Spain, even under the relatively relaxed standards of the late Franco regime, organization was more complicated. Political parties remained illegal, and active persecution of those with Marxist, Communist, or anarchic ties relegated the so-called “political opposition” to clandestine spaces and compromised its ability to gather popular support and participation.

Outside of this relatively narrowly defined political sphere, civil society expanded significantly over the latter part of the decade. Manuel Fraga Iribarne, appointed Minister of Information and Tourism in 1962, used his position to institute a slate of modest reforms designed to promote the country’s image as a fully modern and European nation in order to promote foreign tourism. Among others, Fraga’s 1964 Law of Associations made it easier for Spaniards to form clubs and groups around professional or personal interests, so long as they refrained from political discussions or activities. Adena was among the first major groups to take advantage of this new law. Far more popular, however, were the “neighborhood associations” (*Asociaciones de Vecinos*) formed by small groups of urban residents in order to address common problems related to their living conditions and the state’s failure to provide adequate public services.<sup>32</sup> In particular, they objected to the lack of adequate “land use planning”

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<sup>32</sup> The right to association was formally guaranteed throughout the dictatorship, but in practice it was qualified by the requirement of government approval, which was never given. As Pamela Radcliff eloquently explains, the turning point came after the administrative shakeup of 1957, when the newly disempowered Movimiento, the fascist branch of Franco’s government, sought to regain some of its clout by positioning itself as the conduit between the masses and the state. In May 1958, the Ley de Principios del Movimiento promoted the “participation of the people” via increased associations of families, students, and workers. The first “family associations” organized with the Movimiento’s blessing took shape in 1963, but by 1964 other factions within the government sought to blunt their

(ordenación) that had contributed to the haphazard construction of slums without adequate infrastructure. By defining membership on the basis of geographic residence and common concerns rather than on social class, the neighborhood associations succeeded in casting themselves as communities with legitimate social interests rather than Marxist political groups. After Fraga eliminated pre-publication censorship in print media in 1968, urban peoples' interests were further served by a number of increasingly bold journalists willing to risk fines and reprimands for critiquing what Pamela Radcliff has called the state's failure to "soften the effects of untethered capitalist development."<sup>33</sup>

To some extent, these voices revived the civic activism of the early twentieth century, but the issues they addressed were unique to the political and demographic climate of the late Franco period. The lack of adequate housing and services for new urban residents was a source of universal condemnation, even among the regime's staunchest supporters, and citizen protest against such neglect could easily be couched as a non-political issue and therefore a legitimate subject for civic activism. Neighborhood associations mobilized around issues specific to their localities and circumstances: the equitable distribution of urban resources, including green spaces and well-ordered parks; sanitation and safe drinking water; noise pollution; and the right of local people to determine the best use of the lands where they lived. Local governments received petitions signed by hundreds of residents, complaining of everything from dangerous pedestrian crossings to low water pressure to an absence of local parks.<sup>34</sup> Many such groups lasted only as long as an individual campaign, but others found themselves embroiled in long-term struggles for social justice relating to issues of development, public health, and the distribution of

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power by opening the right to association to citizens' groups unaffiliated with the Movimiento. Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 28-32.

<sup>33</sup> Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 37-39.

<sup>34</sup> Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 35.

resources in their areas.<sup>35</sup> In this, they echoed similar citizen movements in emerging democracies around the world, as well as those of the counterculture movements of the Western democracies.<sup>36</sup>

The link between these urban voices and the growing interest in the natural world is not immediately evident. Many, if not most, of the activists within the neighborhood associations would not themselves have made the connection. But a small group of Spanish intellectuals, hailing not from the earth sciences but from university faculties of architecture, law, medicine, and sociology, understood the urban grassroots activism of the late Franco era as both Marxist and environmental and used the apolitical trappings of the conservation movement to disguise its explicitly anti-regime aims.

Josep-Vicent Marqués, a young professor of sociology at the University of Valencia, saw in working peoples' concerns about land-use planning a reconceptualization of the urban environment as an essential component of human welfare. Sanitation, clean water, adequate housing, and safe neighborhoods were not only social needs, but physical ones as well, necessitating an integrated approach that sought to produce human settlements compatible with the sustainable health of the physical environment. Marqués called this philosophy, which drew heavily on Marxist materialism, "environmentalism" (*ecologismo*), describing it as the pursuit of "a life that is leisurely, creative, egalitarian, pluralist and free of exploitation, and based on communication and cooperation between people."<sup>37</sup> While environmentalism might converge

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<sup>35</sup> Soledad García, "Urban Communities and Local Participation in Spain," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 540 (July 1995); Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Environment and the People in American Cities, 1600s-1900s* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 330; Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain*, 65. Spanish participation in civil society during the final decade of the Franco regime, while significantly higher than it had been in the years immediately preceding it, remained low when compared to similar political environments such as those of Korea or Brazil.

<sup>37</sup> Josep-Vicent Marqués, *Ecología y Lucha de Clases* (Madrid: Ediciones Zero, 1980), 119.



with conservationism, as practiced by Adena and SEO, on issues such as the need for clean air and water and the preservation of healthy green spaces, their motivations and methods diverged dramatically.<sup>38</sup> Unlike “nostalgic conservationism’s” interest in “birds and trees” for their own sake, Marqués wrote dismissively, environmentalism arose from “the deterioration of the living conditions of the working population.”<sup>39</sup> The neighborhood associations, like the intellectuals who supported them, wanted well-ordered parks, safe energy sources, clean air and water, but had little use for the preservation of inaccessible habitats such as Doñana or the bourgeois values they represented. Though “it was logical that bird-lovers, naturalists and environmentalists coincided and even fought side by side,” environmentalists differed from the conservationists who were willing to tolerate an undemocratic, developmentalist society in exchange for the protection of isolated areas and species.<sup>40</sup>

The distinction Marqués drew between conservation and environmentalism has direct parallels to the evolution of thought about the environment across the western world during the 1960s and 1970s. Michael Bess, writing of the French case, calls the former “nature-centered environmentalism,” which treats nature as a valuable object in itself, requiring protection from human abuses, and the latter “social environmentalism,” which understands nature as a social space essential for the quality of human life.<sup>41</sup> Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente drew a similar distinction: always speaking in the third person with reference to “environmentalists” (*ecologistas*), he described Marqués and his colleagues as “developing a very important and very positive role” but distinguished between his own dedication to conservation and their broader interest in social justice and counterculturalism in defiance of the regime. Among those who took

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<sup>38</sup> Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

<sup>39</sup> Marqués, *Ecología y Lucha de Clases*, 21, 116 and 123.

<sup>40</sup> Marqués, *Ecología y Lucha de Clases*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, 119-120.

to the streets to protest the destruction of a local landscape, the construction of nuclear facilities, or the pollution of a river, he wrote, “there may be people who, perhaps, if environmentalism did not exist, would be an activist of hippies and flowers.”<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, among intellectuals and university students involved in the protests of the late Franco era the objective of disrupting the cultural status quo and strengthening popular support for democratic reforms generally guided their actions, though there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of their interest in individual campaigns.<sup>43</sup> Marqués himself showed little understanding of the environment as an ecosystem, at least in the early years of his activist career. In one of his first protests, he and a few colleagues snuck onto the recently completed Dehesa of El Saler golf course – a local symbol of the usurpation of public lands for the benefit of the wealthy – in the dead of night and spread herbicide all over the grass. The operation proceeded perfectly until the automatic sprinkler system came on, startling the monkey-wrenchers, who thought they had been discovered and fled, leaving their “environmental” protest burned into the soil. Though this sort of damage was not always part of their protests, Marqués and the other environmentalist intellectuals made no secret of the fact that they valued nature primarily for its practical benefits to humanity, not its intrinsic value, though unlike the productivist engineers of the regime they considered factors such as human health and recreation as among those benefits.

To some extent, then, Marqués and other elites used rhetoric about the environment as a cover for their underlying political agenda of reform. With groups like Adena and SEO so fully accepted and integrated in the regime, opponents of Franco’s antidemocratic regime could fly under the radar by masking their efforts to destabilize social policies behind language about

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Joaquín Araújo, *Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente: La Voz de la Naturaleza* (Barcelona: Editorial Salvat, 1990), 95.

<sup>43</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 52-53; Anna Mateu and Martí Domínguez, “Cuando El Saler volvió al pueblo,” *Métode* 70 (Summer 2011).

ecosystem health and landscape preservation. Moreover, by focusing on a local scale – water treatment in a suburb of Madrid, green spaces in Barcelona, air pollution in Bilbao – these campaigns escaped accusations of nation-wide agitation directed at the regime as a whole. This is not to say that the “environmentalists” of the late Franco era did not genuinely care about the environment as a whole, or that their efforts in individual campaigns were insincere. My research does suggest, however, that environmental causes and language provided a convenient cover for a more expansive social and political agenda.

In 1970, Marqués joined with like-minded thinkers from around the country to form the Spanish Association for Land-Use Planning and the Environment (*Asociación Española para la Ordenación del Territorio y el Medio Ambiente*, hereafter Aeorma). Later described by prominent activists as “the first truly environmental group in the history of the movement in Spain,” Aeorma overtly borrowed from the rhetoric of the neighborhood associations in its emphasis on “land-use planning.” and over the next six years played a role in local campaigns around the country on a variety of issues ranging from park construction to nuclear energy. Its expansive national agenda included labor policies, urban planning, public education, and the complete overhaul of the political system as well as issues dealing more directly with the environment.<sup>44</sup> Although the relatively high social status of its participants, combined with its evasive tactics and avoidance of overtly political activity, generally insulated them from official reprisals, the group occupied a dangerous liminal space between the clandestine, illegal political opposition and the apolitical, legal neighborhood associations and conservation groups. Members often used the rhetoric and tactics of the latter to espouse the views and objectives of the former. In one of their first national campaigns, for instance, members took to the countryside to disrupt a hunt of

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<sup>44</sup> Pedro Costa Morata, *Ecologíada (100 batallas)* (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2011), 190 and 193; Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 52.

endangered grouse, startling birds and distracting hunters. Whether their primary objective was truly to protect the grouse, as they claimed to the members of the Guardia Civil (the national police force responsible for repressing political dissidents) who came to arrest them, or rather to inconvenience and annoy the distinguished Francoist politicians and sympathizers who were participating in the hunt, remains an open question.<sup>45</sup>

In interviews, members of progressive Valencian society in the early 1970s affirm the sense of Aeorma as an amorphous counter-cultural affiliation, not an organized group with a clear environmental objective. With Marqués at its center, the Valencian branch attracted friends and acquaintances affiliated with the local university, eager for an outlet for their political frustrations. I asked Vicente González Móstoles, one of the group's most active participants, to describe it to me. "What was Aeorma?" he shrugged. "I don't know. It had no money, no structure, no organization, no clear agenda."<sup>46</sup> Others claimed Aeorma was nothing more than a phantom, a name used to give the illusion that Marqués and the other "most active intellectuals in the university" represented a larger group than just themselves.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, identifying Valencian activists retrospectively as "members" of Aeorma is fruitless, since no such formal designation existed at the time. This posed a sharp contrast to Adena's formal, hierarchical structure, and represented an organization even looser than that of the ephemeral neighborhood associations and NIMBY campaigns around the country.

Aeorma's informality and lack of boundaries were to some extent a response to its semi-clandestine status. The Guardia Civil could not easily shut down or arrest members of an

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<sup>45</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 53.

<sup>46</sup> Gonzalez Móstoles interview, Valencia, April 26 2012; Josep-Vicent Marqués, documents related to Aeorma dated December 1974, MRI.

<sup>47</sup> Vicente Ramón Quiros, Miguel Ramón Quiros, and Francisco Pérez Puche, interview with the author, Valencia, May 2 2012; Maria Consuelo Reyna, interview with the author, Valencia, May 1 2012.

organization that did not exist. Móstoles, for instance, laughed when I showed him the cover of a booklet he had produced some thirty-eight years earlier (Figure 10), which attributes authorship to “Aeorma team 3.” “Team three!” he giggled. “That was for the police. ‘If there’s a team three, there must be a team one and a team two! Investigate it!’”<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 10: Booklet produced by “AEORMA Team 3” opposing development on the Dehesa, 1975.**



The detached amusement and self-deprecation Móstoles expresses today towards his activism in the 1970s is characteristic of many in his generation. When I asked him about the activists’ daring in the face of ongoing political repression, Francisco Pérez Puche, one of the city’s most progressive journalists, scoffed that “we believed we had come to change the world. Ugh!”<sup>49</sup> He describes their political involvement in terms commonly used for counterculture movements around the world, calling it “juvenile, chaotic, improvised. We were trying out everything for the first time: freedom of expression, of demonstrations, politics – and we were

<sup>48</sup> Gonzalez Móstoles interview, Valencia, April 26 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, email to the author, January 21 2012.

thirty years old.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, spontaneity and a spirit of youthful rebellion may have played important roles in the protests of the early 1970s in Spain as in democratic Western societies, but the fact remains that such activism in the late Franco era was far from safe, and a relatively small number of Spaniards were willing to put themselves on the line for the sake of their political and social ideals. The Guardia Civil tended to come down hardest on labor activists, who they suspected of Marxist tendencies, but university students and other intellectuals were by no means exempt from persecution. Guillermo de Felipe, who later came to play an important role in Valencian environmental policy, was expelled from two different universities for his anti-Franco activities, while in Madrid environmentalist Francisco Sánchez Aguado remembers spending “more time running from the police than in a classroom” during his college years.<sup>51</sup> Pérez Puche, despite his denials that he or the other journalists and activists were ever in real danger, admits that “of course today we see it much more clearly than when we were in the midst of it.”<sup>52</sup> At the time, the Aeorma activists’ efforts to deceive and evade the police suggest that they felt otherwise, and their willingness to run such risks suggests that their dedication to a progressive political agenda was genuine.

Protests and minor rebellions such as those in Valencia took place all over the country, but despite the nominally national character of umbrella groups such as Aeorma the real work of environmental and other countercultural organizing took place at a local or, at most, regional scale. This capitalized on the existing structure of the neighborhood associations, but had the added benefit of complicating regime efforts to disrupt their nascent social and tactical networks. Such decentralization led naturally towards the development and internalization of strong

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<sup>50</sup> Francisco Perez Puche, email to the author, January 19 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Guillermo de Felipe, interview with the author, Valencia, April 30, 2012; Francisco Sánchez Aguado, interview with the author, Segovia, November 30 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21 2012.

regional identities within many of the environmental groups, including Aeorma's regional branches, especially outside of Castile. Even Marqués, despite having developed his ideas through contact with French sociologists and exercising significant influence among intellectuals all over Spain, had a distinctly Valencian bias in his activism and thought. He was particularly influenced by the teachings of Joan Fuster, the intellectual father of "NeoValencianism," whose writings in the early 1960s helped shape the political identity of a generation of university students.<sup>53</sup> Fuster's 1962 essay, "We the Valencians" (*Nosaltres els Valencians*) revived the turn-of-the-century concept of the "Catalan Lands" (*Paisos Catalans*) and the cultural unity of Catalan-speakers on the Spanish Mediterranean. Unlike some other regional movements, Fuster and his followers did not advocate Valencian or Catalan separatism, but they did directly challenge the authority of the Madrid-based state and sought increased autonomy and self-rule for the regions.<sup>54</sup> They also rejected Valencia's stereotypical identity, based around the image of the industrious peasantry, as relegating Valencians to a peripheral and "provincial" role, and asserted a new one based on linguistic unity, political progressiveness, and above all, modernization.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the Valencianism espoused by Blasco Ibañez and others in the prewar era, the Valencian renaissance Fuster spawned has been described as "a civic Renaissance and not a cultural or folkloric one."<sup>56</sup> Where Blasquismo celebrated the picturesque customs of the

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<sup>53</sup> D. Mollà and E. Mira, *De impura natione* (Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1986); B. Sanz and M. Nadal, *Tradició i modernitat en el valencianisme* (Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1996); J. V. Marqués, *Tots els colors del roig* (Valencia: Eliseu Climent, 1996); Pedro Ruiz Torres, "Nationalism and the Science of History in the Representation of the Valencian Past," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America*, 75 (1998): 24.

<sup>54</sup> Prytherch, "Elegy," 60.

<sup>55</sup> Joan Fuster, *Nosaltres els Valencians* (Barcelona, Edicions 62, 16th edition 1998) (1962). See also Archilés and Martí, "Ethnicity, region and nation," 790.

<sup>56</sup> Manuel Martínez Sospedra, "Notas para una crítica del Nacionalismo: El Valencianismo Político," in *Estudios de Historia de Valencia* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 1978): 567-589, 571.

Valencian countryside as “local color” making a significant contribution to the national whole, under Fuster and Marqués regional pride took the form of social protest and concerted efforts to distinguish regional identity from that of the nation. This followed a global trend, as regional nationalisms merged with Marxist theory in wars of independence across the Cold War world. Like colonial subjects in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, leftists in many of the peripheral Spanish regions in the late Franco era embraced the need for the working class to rise up in simultaneous national and socialist revolutions and overthrow the dominance of the colonial power (Castile or Spain).<sup>57</sup> Pan-Catalan Valencianism, then, was unequivocally an ideology of the political left, adopted primarily by the intellectual and professional middle classes, and especially by younger faculty members at the University of Valencia.<sup>58</sup> The more daring professors, among them Marqués and his fellow monkey-wrenchers, taught Fuster’s theories to their students, and when the faltering regime finally lifted anti-regionalism laws in the mid-1960s urban progressives who had spoken Castilian their entire lives flocked to Valencian language classrooms to “reconnect” with their roots.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Smith and Mar-Molinero, “Myths and Realities,” 22, citing John Sullivan, *ETA and Basque Nationalism: The Fight for Euskadi, 1890-1986* (London: 1998): 41, and Ramón Máiz, “The Open Ended Construction of a Nation: The Galician Case in Spain,” in *Nationalism in Europe: Past and Present vol. 2*, ed. Justo Beramendi, Ramón Máiz, and Xosé Núñez (Santiago de Compostela: 1994), 195-196.

<sup>58</sup> Where the Fusterians came from a class of intellectual elites, the right-wing, anti-Catalan nationalism that emerged simultaneously was “markedly anti-intellectual and clearly populist,” espoused primarily by the “petty bourgeoisie” of the capital city. Martínez Sospedra, “Notas para una crítica del Nacionalismo,” 571-574.

<sup>59</sup> Progressives of the late Franco era attributed the suppression of regional languages with the regime, but the idea had in fact originated far earlier and was not always associated with conservative politics. The Royal Academy of Language, for instance, had designated Castilian as the “national tongue” in 1884 and relegated all others to mere “dialects,” in an explicit part of the nineteenth-century nation-building project. Regenerationists including not only Blasco Ibañez but also Unamuno, Ruben Darío, and Ortega y Gasset all endorsed the “language of Cervantes” as the national ideal and at times even called for the elimination of the regional languages. Kamen, *Imagining Spain*, 138-39 and 164; J. A. Fishman, *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1989): 30, 270, and 272; Archilés and Martí, “Ethnicity, region and nation,” 788-89; Raquel Casesnoves Ferrer and David Sankoff, “The Valencian Revival: Why Usage Lags behind Competence,” *Language in Society* 33 (2004): 4.



While Fuster himself was at best indifferent towards the environment, Marqués successfully integrated Fusterian regionalism with his own ideas about landscape as an integral part of cultural and regional heritage and a central facet of human well-being. Moving beyond the traditional importance of farmland to Valencian identity, Marqués incorporated wilder spaces – beaches, forests, and wetlands – into the concept of the Valencian nation.<sup>60</sup> The demise of endemic species such as the Valencian toothcarp or the destruction of iconic landscapes such as the Horta or the Albufera were particularly offensive in light of their unique “Valencianness.” State efforts to rezone culturally significant agricultural and wild areas for further substandard urban development were thus reframed as attacks on Valencian identity itself.

Writing in the context of late twentieth-century efforts to protect local farmland from development projects such as the construction of a new international trade port, David Prytherch has identified landscape-centered Valencian nationalism as a form of anti-globalization, and the battle to preserve unique Valencian environments as pitting “global versus regional, urban versus rural, Castilian or Spanish versus Valencian-speaking, and modern versus traditional.”<sup>61</sup> Global forces could easily be blamed for many of the problems faced by local activists in the early 1970s, from the touristic development boom to the acceleration of production to feed global markets. But they directed their campaigns not against globalization as a phenomena or even foreigners in particular, but rather against the specific developers or polluters immediately responsible for local problems. Those culprits, in turn, stood in for the Francoist regime itself, from which they had benefitted through political or personal connections or through favorable regulations and lack of oversight. Valencian and other regional identities were employed

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<sup>60</sup> Fuster, conversely, has been described as “skeptical and indifferent towards the landscape” and once wrote that “splendid geography leaves me indifferent.” Joan Fuster, quoted in Anna Mateu, “Josep-Vicent Marqués, entre la sociologia i el columnisme,” *L’Espill* 29 (2008), 143-152.

<sup>61</sup> Prytherch, “Elegy,” 58 and 68-69.

strategically, not as a counterpoint to globalization, but as a rejection of that regime. Thus activists pointedly used Valencian, not Castilian, for their slogans and posters, and described space as “*nostra*” (ours), articulating the possession of the Valencian people, as opposed to the possession of the Spanish nation as a whole. Thus, the apparent insularity of Spanish regional environmental movements is deceptive, and in fact represents a rejection of the Francoist central state in favor of a more global community of like-minded activists. True, most Spaniards continued to focus on local causes and not global environmental problems, but this was not atypical for the era and did not necessarily represent an anti-global mentality.

Indeed, advocates of the Valencian environment routinely adopted global, and specifically European, ideas and strategies in pursuit of their goals. The notion that a healthy environment was a basic necessity for human quality of life was shared by regional environmental movements, Green parties and citizens’ groups across Europe, and by the early 1970s had become a hallmark of developed Western societies. Translations of foreign books and treatises on ecology, including Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (which reached Hispanophone audiences in 1964), made a profound impression among Spaniards worried by increasingly obvious local air and water pollution. News of ongoing degradation and high-profile disasters around the world, especially the 1967 Torrey Canyon disaster off the coast of Brittany, drew additional attention. Nuclear energy was an area of special concern in Spain as elsewhere, and by the early 1970s protest marches and letter-writing campaigns around plant construction were comparable to those of any European state. Spain’s problems, and the ideas of its citizens, would mirror those of their neighbors over the coming years.

## **Chapter Four. “El Saler for the People”: Tourism, Development, and Environmental Activism in the Late Franco Period**

The rise of urban environmentalism coincided with an intense surge of economic development across Spain, especially concentrated along the Mediterranean coast, stemming from the exponential increase of foreign tourism between 1960 and 1970. To an even greater extent than in the suburbs, touristic development produced land speculation and environmental destruction on a grand scale. In response, Valencia, while late to join the touristic development boom, became ground zero for one of the most significant protests. In what some chroniclers have called “the first environmental movement in Spain”<sup>1</sup> and even “possibly the most important citizen mobilization in the history of conservationism in favor of a natural space,”<sup>2</sup> Valencian conservationists, environmentalists, and their colleagues in the anti-Franco intelligentsia fought a bitter campaign, largely in the recently-liberated press, to save the Dehesa of El Saler from a touristic development planned by the city. Populist interest in preserving a public park, scientific interest in habitat conservation, and a critique of the undemocratic political regime overlapped and intersected, transforming the movement into a general protest against privatization, an attack on local political corruption and incompetence, and an outlet for generalized rebellion against the political and social status quo. The campaign, known retroactively as “El Saler for the People”

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Carles Dolç, interviewed in *Revista Seducción Ambiental* 2 (2011): 10.

<sup>2</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 189.

(*El Saler per al Poble*, in Valencian), offers a case study of the multiple forces at work in the rapidly changing Spanish society during the late Franco era.

The 1960s were a decade of significant reform within the regime and of rapid changes in Spanish society more generally. In visibly deteriorating health, Franco celebrated his 76th birthday the year Adena formed, and even his staunchest supporters doubted that the socio-political structure would outlive the dictator himself. One of the most prominent politicians of the era was Manuel Fraga Iribarne, appointed to the position of Minister of Information and Tourism in 1962, whose tireless efforts to promote Spanish tourism among an increasingly affluent European population did much to fundamentally transform the nature of the dictatorship in its final decade. Fraga aggressively pursued the expansion of foreign tourism as a means of both strengthening the regime and liberalizing the economy, without risking radical democratization. His highly productive propaganda machine played a pivotal role in Spanish modernization, promoting acceptance of the regime abroad as well as legitimizing it at home.<sup>3</sup> The orientalist vision of a quaint, anachronistic Spain populated by flamenco dancers, Gypsies, and bullfighters, which had featured heavily in international propaganda prior to Fraga's tenure, gave way to a new slate of posters and pamphlets that depicted the country as fully modern and European, featuring architecture, art, religious ceremonies, and diverse regional customs in addition to the traditional sunny skies and sparkling beaches.<sup>4</sup> National and regional tourism bureaus promoted Spain not only as a land of romance and folklore but also as a thoroughly modern European country with all the conveniences and luxuries a visitor could desire.<sup>5</sup> Just as

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<sup>3</sup> Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Tourism in Catalonia," in Barke, Towner, and Newton, *Tourism in Spain*, 237.

<sup>4</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 148-150.

<sup>5</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 4.

Fraga had hoped, foreign tourists returned home with stories of the country's beauty and hospitality, undermining older images of a repressive dictatorship and a backwards society. A wave of new employment opportunities in the construction and service sectors, meanwhile, along with a sharp rise in national revenue, helped legitimize the regime among Spaniards.<sup>6</sup>

Franco's initial reluctance to encourage international tourism, which he viewed as a danger to social order and public morality, had prevented the adoption of a comprehensive development policy for the increasingly popular coastal regions. By the time Fraga took office, speculators eager to maximize their investments routinely violated the national Terrains Law (*Ley de Suelo*) without repercussions.<sup>7</sup> Developers rarely attempted to provide adequate infrastructure, instead building quickly and densely with little planning and substandard materials and methods. A national survey in 1964 found that only 27% of coastal cities had a sufficient water supply and only 10% had adequate sewage facilities.<sup>8</sup> Sewage flushed directly into the sea by hotels routinely washed back up onto the beaches, and stomach sickness from local drinking water ruined many foreigners' summer holidays. In the rush to capitalize on rising land prices, the hotels themselves were often constructed quickly and shoddily, with little or no attention to their aesthetic value, harmonization with their surroundings, landscaping or green space. Members of the SGT expressed further concern that the homogeneous skyscrapers and concrete bungalows were erasing regional and local character, making them less attractive to foreigners and endangering the future of the tourist industry itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 107-109; Julio G. Sequeiros Tizón, *Algunas Notas sobre la Renta nacional de España en el siglo XX* (La Coruña: Universidad de La Coruña, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 129, citing data from Dirección General de Promoción de Turismo, "Informe sobre el problema de abastecimiento de agua y saneamiento en las zonas turísticas," November 1964.

<sup>9</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 175.

While Valencia remained largely insulated from such haphazard development by the 1911 law that required the city to maintain the Dehesa as woodland, the Mediterranean coast nearby suffered from some of the worst cases of unregulated development in the country. In Alicante, the Directorate General of the Guardia Civil informed Fraga in 1964 that “everyone has built wherever they have pleased, and anyone who had a small or medium sized plot aiming to maximize profit has built a skyscraper and then sold it off floor by floor without concern for proper sanitation, running water, or zoning. This has created truly foul odors in some places.”<sup>10</sup> Immediately south of the Dehesa, the town of Cullera sold its development rights to a private firm in 1963. Over the next seven years, the firm transformed the village’s rocky terrain into a densely-packed grid of vacation homes without ever submitting a plan for development or infrastructure, in open violation of national and regional building laws (Figure 11).<sup>11</sup> These developments were retroactively legalized in 1970, but problems with sanitation and water supply continued well into the 1990s.

**Figure 11: Development in Cullera.**<sup>12</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Directorate General of the Civil Guard to Fraga, May 8, 1964, AGA 3: 49.09/38834, quoted in Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 173.

<sup>11</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 173-74.

<sup>12</sup> Photos by Francisco Sánchez Aguado 2008.

Fraga and others expressed alarm that such overdevelopment threatened the very characteristics – clean beaches, rural idyll, and local color – that had attracted tourists in the first place, and developments like Cullera notwithstanding, by the mid-1960s he had achieved some success in his efforts to curtail activities that threatened touristic potential by damaging scenic or historic landscapes.<sup>13</sup> In addition to pushing for improved regulation of industrial and urban activities nearby, Fraga’s basic solution was to implement a comprehensive zoning plan that both protected touristic sites, offered funding for those hoping to build local tourist accommodations, and increased state control over infrastructure and development.<sup>14</sup> Under the 1964 Law of Centers and Zones of National Tourist Interest, developments with a capacity to lodge more than 5,000 tourists were subject to Ministry oversight and regulation to ensure adequate standards of planning and maintenance.<sup>15</sup> Those standards included requirements for green space and municipal services intended to mitigate the aesthetic and practical challenges of earlier developments, and had as one of their major goals the diversification of touristic centers outside of the already overpopulated Catalan Costa Brava and the Andalusian Costa del Sol.

Valencia, lying approximately halfway between these two centers of Mediterranean tourism, benefitted from the Ministry’s efforts at geographical diversification and obtained the designation of Zone of National Touristic Interest in 1964. With its long, undeveloped white-sand beaches, shady forests, and tranquil atmosphere just a few kilometers from the city center, the Dehesa of El Saler appeared to be a perfect place for a high-class new touristic resort that would fill the city’s coffers and place Valencia on the international map. But the land that local

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<sup>13</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 103.

<sup>14</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 121-123.

<sup>15</sup> Jefatura del Estado, “Ley 197/1963, de 28 diciembre, sobre ‘Centros y Zonas de Interés Turístico Nacional,’” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 313 (December 31, 1963); Ministerio de Información y Turismo, “Decreto 4297/1964, de 23 de diciembre, por el que se aprueba el Reglamento de la Ley sobre Centros y Zonas de interés turístico nacional,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 15 (January 16, 1965).

boosters saw as vacant and waiting for economic exploitation was in fact already occupied, at least intermittently, by thousands of Valencians who had used it for decades as a public park. Middle-class longing for a “return to nature” was not, of course, unique to Spain, but three near-simultaneous trends—mass urbanization, improved transportation, and increasing disposable incomes—converged between about 1950 and 1960, and Spaniards took to the roads in droves. Though they could not, perhaps, afford to travel abroad or even far from home, working families in the cities could certainly pack up the car each weekend and drive out to a nearby park for some rest and rural idyll. Beach vacations, for those lucky enough to live near the coast, were especially popular. In Valencia, more often than not, this meant the Dehesa.

Ironically, given Valencia’s historic reputation as a “garden,” during the Franco era the Dehesa was one of the only green spaces readily available to the public. Families making the short trip from the city to the coast would drive their cars up under the trees, spread out their picnic blankets, and enjoy long days at the beach or in the shade. Children wandered through the woods searching for wild asparagus or mushrooms, gathered wood for campfires over which to cook paella, and learned to swim in the cool surf. As early as 1942, towns on the outskirts of the Dehesa had begun to fill with Spaniards’ vacation homes, and by the mid-fifties the city had installed a campground and a handful of restaurants and kiosks which catered almost exclusively to local day-trippers.<sup>16</sup> By and large, however, the city’s “improvement” efforts in the area were dedicated to providing “a place of recreation and amusement for the people of Valencia,” and consisted of sporadic and minimally effective programs to plant additional trees or reduce the local mosquito population by draining the *malladas*. These “improvements” generally failed as a

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<sup>16</sup> Pardo, *La Albufera de Valencia*; Documents relating to the Consorcio of the Dehesa de la Albufera, 1965-1972, V-158 FDM; City Council minutes from Pleno May 12, 1954, Pleno July 28, 1954, Pleno May 9, 1956, and Pleno Aug 1, 1956, AMV.



result of the area's complicated soil conditions.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to the terms of its 1911 sale to the city, which committed Valencia "to conserve the forest of the Dehesa and the integrity of its soil, which cannot have any use or agricultural purpose other than woodland," throughout the early years of the Spanish tourism boom the Dehesa remained an island of green along an increasingly concrete coast (Figure 12).<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 12: Four views of the Dehesa ca. 1963.<sup>19</sup>**



1a: The city's "improvements" on the Dehesa were largely limited to reinforcing sand dunes and planting additional trees.



1b: The Dehesa filled with Valencian families on a summer weekend.

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<sup>17</sup> Luis Oliag Miranda, Mayor of Valencia, to Minister of Hacienda, 23 February 1925, F.C. M° Hacienda, 5955, box 1, ANH; Flaviano García Monge, "La repoblación de la Dehesa de la Albufera," *Montes* 1065, 426-31.

<sup>18</sup> Ministerio de Hacienda, "Ley cediendo el lago," Art. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Photos from OTDA.



1c: Dense forests near the hamlet of El Saler. The Mediterranean is visible at the top left; rice fields are nearing harvest on the bottom right.



1d: The beach of El Saler, featuring a public restaurant but lacking parking and other facilities.

Boosters routinely described this state of affairs as a regional embarrassment; a sign of local backwardness that revealed Valencians to be outside of the larger modern European community. Members of the city council hyperbolically lamented that “from Sicily to Huelva, the Valencian coast is certainly the only one on the Mediterranean shore that remains undeveloped,”<sup>20</sup> and argued that touristic development on the Dehesa could make Valencia part of “a fantastic linear city of thousands of kilometers extending along the coasts of Spain, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and countries of North Africa.”<sup>21</sup> To that end Valencia’s unelected city council, headed by the enthusiastically developmentalist mayor Adolfo Rincón de Arellano, decided that a planned, high-quality touristic development was better than the apparent

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<sup>20</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Plan General de Ordenación del Monte de la Dehesa* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1963), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Vicente Temes Riancho, L. Felipe Vivanco Bergamín, and Julio Cano Lasso, “Proyecto de Ordenación Turística de la Albufera de Valencia y Playa del Saler,” *Arquitectura* 65 (May 1964).

alternative of unregulated, illegal development that could destroy the area's value altogether. As early as 1958, city councilor José Barberá proposed the drafting of a comprehensive urbanization plan for the Devesa to prevent the area from becoming a "a true chaos" like Cullera, an imminent threat judging by illegal and unregulated construction already in progress.<sup>22</sup>

Over the next six years, amidst enthusiastic anticipation by the official press, architect Julio Cano Lasso, a Madrid-based architect working for a Madrid-incorporated corporation called Valencian Lands, Limited (*Terrenos de Valencia, S.A.*, henceforth Tevasa), developed an ambitious plan for construction along the entire twelve-kilometer length of the Dehesa (Figure 13 and Figure 14). On the northernmost two and a half kilometers of the Dehesa, Tevasa would level the coastal dunes and replace them with an elevated concrete boardwalk, built atop a series of dressing rooms, shops, restaurants, bars, and public restrooms.<sup>23</sup> Architect Cano Lasso deemed these facilities, along with parking lots capable of accommodating five thousand cars, "adequate for the large masses of people on holidays."<sup>24</sup>

To the south, however, the Dehesa would belong to paying guests only. In all, the plan entailed the privatization of more than two-thirds of the Dehesa. South of the public area, the roads to Valencia ended, replaced with private drives and parking facilities closed to pedestrians, buses, and the general public. The dunes would again be leveled, this time to provide a better view from the three-story beachfront residences. Farther back, amidst the pine trees, the city would auction off the rights to construct 60 high-rise apartment buildings, 32 large hotels, 162 smaller hotels, 6,000 residences, four churches and chapels, and dozens of public administrative

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<sup>22</sup> José Bárbera, "Moción del Señor Concejal Delegado de Dehesa y Albufera sobre urbanización en Saler, Perellonet y y Palmar" (April 1, 1958), SP.

<sup>23</sup> TEVASA, *Proyecto de Urbanización del Monte de la Dehesa de La Albufera y de su Costa*. (1963), Viario, Planos Longitudinales.

<sup>24</sup> Temes Riancho, Vivanco Bergamín, and Cano Lasso, "Proyecto de Ordenación," 16-17; Trinidad Simó, "Un Sistema Ecológico Deshecho: La Dehesa ¿Hasta donde se nos va?" *Las Provincias*, May 1, 1974.

offices, theaters, shops, restaurants, and supermarkets.<sup>25</sup> To avoid the problems faced by unplanned developments elsewhere along the coast, the city would pay Tevasa to construct all the necessary infrastructure, including a system of paved roads, potable water, waste collection and treatment, streetlights, residential electricity, public transportation, medical facilities, public service buildings, schools, libraries, parks, and markets. This represented a massive public investment, which the city hoped to recoup by selling land on the Dehesa to private investors who would be responsible for constructing and maintaining the hotels and other facilities.

The Dehesa development was notable not only for its massive scale, but for the obvious effort to attract a “better class” of tourists than the blue-collar holiday-seekers, specifically foreigners, who tended to frequent the resorts of the Costa del Sol. Cano Lasso envisioned the Dehesa as a satellite city of Valencia, connected to the residential center by modern highways, with a permanent population of 40,000 and a seasonal capacity of 100,000. Visitors would have their choice of five-star hotels, Mediterranean-style “Casbah” residences, or luxurious apartments with lake or ocean views. During their stay, they could dine at the elevated revolving restaurant, catch a show at the Roman theater, or thrill to a stereotypical Spanish spectacle at the Dehesa’s private bullring. In addition to these luxuries, Cano Lasso’s plan called for such extravagances as a helipad and a sizeable artificial lake complete with multiple ports and a yacht club, located within half a kilometer of both the Mediterranean Sea and the Albufera Lake.<sup>26</sup> The city council invited the public to admire a scale model and explanation of the urbanization, but provided no means for public feedback and unsurprisingly did not receive a single comment, a

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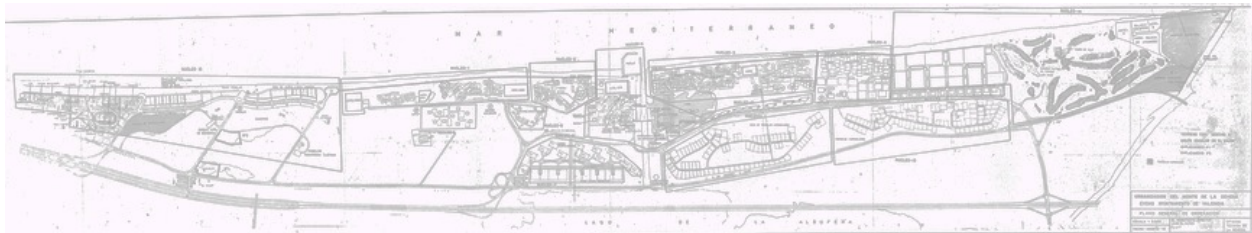
<sup>25</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, publicity pamphlet for the Plan General de Ordenación del Monte de la Dehesa (December 13, 1963), SP.

<sup>26</sup> *Valencia Atracción*, January 1964, 17; Carlos Iglesias, “Más sobre la Albufera,” *España Económica* 3691 (Oct-23-November 6, 1970): 15; Vicente Ventura, “La Dehesa del Saler,” *España Económica* 3692 (November 6-20, 1970): 13-14; Ayuntamiento de Valencia. *Urbanización del Monte de la Dehesa, Oferta de TEVASA, Annex 3: Referencias Técnicas y Financieras*. December 1966, SP.

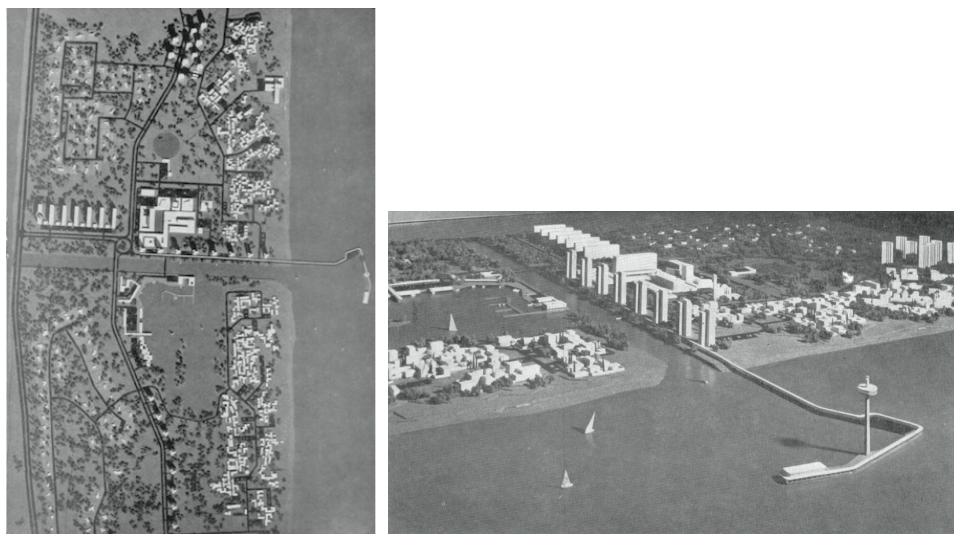
sign the regional tourism magazine optimistically interpreted as “a plebiscite in favor of the project.”<sup>27</sup> Fraga, who was in the midst of a concerted national effort to improve the quality of foreign tourism, was pleased with these efforts.<sup>28</sup> In late 1964, in exchange for a gift of land for construction of a state-run luxury hotel and accompanying golf course (which Marqués and his friends would later sabotage), the Minister arranged for the derogation of the 1911 protections and authorized the city to begin construction.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 13: Tevasa’s general plan for the urbanization of the Dehesa, 1965.**

The northern third (left) would remain relatively undeveloped and available for public use, while the heavy development in the south would be limited to paying guests. The infamous golf course lies at the extreme south (right).



**Figure 14: Partial views of Tevasa’s model of the Dehesa plan, 1964.**



<sup>27</sup> *Valencia Atracción* 348, 8; *Levante*, December 17, 1963.

<sup>28</sup> Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship*, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Jefatura del Estado, “Ley 225/1964, de 24 de diciembre, por la que se autoriza el Ayuntamiento de Valencia para disponer del monte de la Dehesa como bienes de propios y se acuerda la reversion al patrimonio del Estado de una parcela de terreno en dicho monte,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 311 (December 28, 1964): 17362-17363.

Although there is no reason to believe that members of the City Council were entirely insensitive to the concerns of local people who used the area, and indeed they frequently claimed that the development would bring economic benefits to all of Valencia's citizens, it must be pointed out that they did not choose to develop the Dehesa as a public park along the lines of London's Hyde Park, Paris' Bois de Boulogne, or New York's Central Park, as many Valencians had long sought. Rather, they chose to pursue a Fraga-style development intended specifically to attract wealthy international tourists and to exclude local working people. This can be explained only partially by the fact that many members of the city government stood to benefit financially from a major construction project in the city, either personally or through connections with well-placed members of the local bureaus of commerce and tourism.<sup>30</sup> As significantly, the Dehesa development was intended to counteract Valencia's perceived backwardness vis-à-vis its Mediterranean neighbors and to promote a more modern, European image to the world.<sup>31</sup> Boosters of the project repeatedly insisted that it would "bring prestige to Valencia, revalue the Municipal Patrimony, create a positive factor in Valencia's economy and acquire competitive capacity in the international tourism market."<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps anticipating protests that the construction would destroy a beloved local landscape, boosters of the project depicted it as the city's effort "to fight with all the means at its disposal for the protection and defense of the landscape," comparing the orderly construction and preservation of green space to the unregulated speculation that had ruined neighboring Cullera. According to city officials, the Dehesa development would "respect the natural characteristics;"

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<sup>30</sup> Banco de Vizcaya, "Antecedentes y Posibilidades del Turismo Receptivo," *Revista Financiera, Numero Extraordinario Dedicado a Valencia* (May 1966): 79 and 81; *Valencia Atracción*, "Tipos y Paisajes," August 19626.

<sup>31</sup> M. Barke and J. Towner, "Exploring the History of Leisure and Tourism in Spain," in Barke, Towner, and Newton, *Tourism in Spain*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> TEVASA, *Solicitud de Conjunto Urbano Promotor* (July 15 1968), SP; "Una aspiración Valenciana," *Las Provincias*, March 23, 1967.

“preserve the greatest possible amount of the existing pine forest as an area of common enjoyment,” and “defend and enhance the natural beauty of the whole.”<sup>33</sup> Members of the local tourism board agreed, describing the development as a guarantee “that this great natural park that belongs to our city and that serves as a marvelous contrast to the sea and the Albufera, will not disappear, but rather, much to the contrary, will grow and become more beautiful.”<sup>34</sup>

Photographs of the scale model of the development (Figure 14), featuring gleaming white buildings nestled amidst lush forests beside sparkling blue waters, were reprinted in tourism magazines and popular periodicals nationwide. Marketing materials sent to potential investors touted the area’s natural beauty, with one brochure describing the Dehesa as “eleven kilometers of uninterrupted beaches of fine sand, bounded by the calm, warm waters of the Mediterranean to the east and the marvelous freshwater lake, the Albufera, to the west,” an idyllic location for hotels or summer homes.<sup>35</sup>

While the Dehesa development undoubtedly was preferable, from a social, economic, and environmental standpoint, to the speculative devastation that had occurred elsewhere along the Mediterranean, the plans nonetheless made it clear that the landscape would be fundamentally transformed. In particular, Tevasa’s claims to preserve the landscape focused exclusively on the shady pine forest, whereas the construction would purposefully do away with less-popular features such as the mosquito-ridden *malladas* or the brush-filled dunes. Upon the plan’s approval by the city council, respected scientists from all over Spain contacted Mayor Rincón de Arellano in alarm at “the announcement of a projected series of construction complexes, some of

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<sup>33</sup> Constantino Lorente Marrades, “*La Albufera y la Ciudad de Valencia*,” 72-73, V-45, FDM. See also Ayuntamiento de Valencia, publicity pamphlet.

<sup>34</sup> R. Berenguer, “Notas al margen de un proyecto magno,” *Valencia Atracción* 348 (January 1964), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Oficina de Turismo, Ayuntamiento de Valencia, publicity pamphlet for the “El Saler” development (1970), SP. See also *Valencia Atracción*, “Una entrevista con don Vicente Giner Boira,” April 196013.

astounding extent” in “this incomparable location.” Pine forest notwithstanding, they claimed, destruction of the other features of the Dehesa’s complex landscape would prove catastrophic to the immense wealth of birdlife that wintered or nested in the nearby Albufera Lake, one of the most significant wetlands on the continent. The mayor accepted the scientists’ offer to produce a thoroughly researched report on how to make the urbanization compatible with the Dehesa’s ecological value. After several years of studies culminating in an international conference in 1968, the scientists compiled a list of modest recommendations they deemed compatible with the existing plan, including perimeter defense of the lake, creation of a biological station, regulation and enforcement of hunting and fishing seasons, dredging the Albufera’s increasingly polluted sediments, reducing water pollution, and creating a botanic garden in the Dehesa. The mayor, who by this time had already authorized construction to begin, gravely accepted the report, thanked the scientists for their time, and failed to follow through on a single one of their suggestions.<sup>36</sup>

Several years after the scientists’ failed attempt to reform the plan, in February 1970, industrial engineer Guillermo Pons Ibañez submitted a notarized “Opposition to the Dehesa Plan, in its entirety” to the city government, calling Tevasa’s plan “totally contrary to the touristic and social interests of the Valencian people, and an offense to their way of thinking.” Unlike the scientists, Pons Ibañez’s critiques arose largely from his concern for social and aesthetic concerns, calling the city’s expropriation of public property “anti-social” and roundly condemning the irrational use of “a splendid and lush Natural Park” for heavy construction that would “destroy its essence.” In making his case, however, he relied not on local discontent with

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<sup>36</sup> AEORMA, *El Saler per al Poble: Dats para una decisi3n colectiva* (Valencia: Aeorma, 1974), 8; Rafael Roca Miguel, “Avifauna cinegetica: La portentosa Albufera de Valencia,” *Valencia Atracci3n* September 19688; Ignacio Docavo Alberti, “La verdad sobre el asunto Dehesa-Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, July 26, 1970.



the plan but rather the unfavorable impression of Valencia that the plan would create internationally. Touristic activity on the scale envisioned by the city, he wrote, would invite “the shame of universal criticism, considering that the World Congress for the Protection of Wild Birds...unanimously recommended ‘the most exquisite care’ be taken of our Royal Albufera.”<sup>37</sup> Such wording suggests a sense, even in those early days of the global environmental movement, that Spain would be judged adversely for failing to care for its environment as global patrimony. The regime, however, seemed indifferent to such warnings, and met Pons Ibañez’s warnings with official silence.

By the time Pons Ibañez wrote his angry letter, in fact, the ecological value of the northern half of the Dehesa had all but vanished. To build the boardwalk along the public section of the beach, Tevasa’s bulldozers leveled the entire line of coastal dunes and filled in the *malladas* to make room for boardwalks, roads, and parking facilities, while workers removed underbrush in the interest of landscaping and preparing the terrain for future construction. Without the protective dunes and vegetation, ocean winds carrying sand and salt blew unobstructed into the forest, lashing the trees and drying out the sandy soil so completely that no new vegetation could take hold. No sooner did the city complete a new street than blowing sand would bury it; within a few months of their construction whole sections of the boardwalk began to erode from wind and waves; vast areas of cleared underbrush turned into barren deserts where no grass would grow. As amply documented by photographs taken by opponents of the development, the trees behind the boardwalk blackened, sickened and died (Figure 15). The extensive network of streets and paths, meanwhile, disrupted drainage of the Dehesa into the

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<sup>37</sup> Guillermo Pons Ibañez, “Oposición al Plan de Ordenación de la Dehesa, en su Totalidad,” submitted to the Ayuntamiento de Valencia, February 3 1970, MCR.

Albufera and fragmented ecosystems.<sup>38</sup> Populations of plants and animals native to both the lake and the Dehesa declined sharply with the rapid destruction of these habitats.

**Figure 15: The Dehesa ca. 1971.**<sup>39</sup>



As construction progressed, however, so too did social changes across the country that emboldened many Valencians to speak out against the perceived problems with the Dehesa development and against the weakening regime more generally. While Marqués and his friends poured herbicides on the golf course to protest the land’s expropriation, scientific conservationists launched a reinvigorated campaign to raise awareness about the ecological destruction of the Dehesa’s ecosystem. Miguel Gil Corell, president of the Valencian chapter of SEO, asked Rodriguez de la Fuente himself to intervene, though he cautioned that “to fight against the urbanistic project would be the equivalent of tilting at windmills” and that the best they could hope for would be a scaling-back of some of the plan’s more expansive features, such

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<sup>38</sup> This analysis of the situation was provided by active SEO member and biologist Miguel Gil Corell, interviewed in De Diego, “El Saler: ‘Este ecosistema desaparecerá como consecuencia de la urbanización que se está llevando a cabo,’” *Las Provincias*, June 29, 1973; Maria Consuelo Reyna, “La Dehesa (2): La ‘reserva’ para los valencianos,” *Las Provincias*, May 10, 1973 (describing roads so covered with sand as to make driving on them impossible).

<sup>39</sup> Photos from OTDA.

as the number of high-rises or their proximity to the fragile lakeshore.<sup>40</sup> Rodriguez de la Fuente obliged, dedicating an episode of his program “Wild Life” (*Fauna Salvaje*) on Television Española to the Albufera, describing it as a unique and immensely rich ecosystem at risk from the nearby development.<sup>41</sup> Biologist Ignacio Docavo Alberti, who had led local scientists in asking for modifications from the city four years earlier, promptly followed up with a lengthy opinion piece in the local paper criticizing the city’s refusal to listen to conservationists’ advice and arguing that “well-thought-out biological studies...are the only thing that can ensure the salvation of the Dehesa and the Albufera.”<sup>42</sup>

The publisher of Docavo Alberti’s piece was a newspaper called *Las Provincias*, the only Valencian daily that was not owned by Franco’s National Movement political party. Throughout the Franco regime, even after Fraga’s Press and Printing Law of 1966, the central administration controlled radio and television broadcasts as well as nearly half of the country’s daily newspapers.<sup>43</sup> Privately-owned periodicals, including *Las Provincias*, were also subject to strict government censorship and despite their nominal autonomy had historically functioned largely as instruments of regime propaganda.<sup>44</sup> The 1966 reform mitigated this state of affairs somewhat, most notably by eliminating pre-publication censorship, though the regime retained substantial discretion in sanctioning journalists and editors for writing that was judged too inflammatory or socially divisive. Writer Francisco Pérez Puche, for example, was memorably summoned to a private meeting with the provincial governor in the late 1960s to defend his report that

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<sup>40</sup> “Informe a ADENA de la sociedad valenciana de la Sociedad Española de Ornitología,” *Trofeo*, July 19708.

<sup>41</sup> “Fauna Salvaje,” June 30, 1970, described in Simó, “Un Sistema Ecologico Deshecho.”

<sup>42</sup> Docavo Alberti, “La verdad.”

<sup>43</sup> Rosario de Mateo, “The Evolution of the Newspaper Industry in Spain, 1939-87,” *European Journal of Communication* 4 (1989): 211-226, 214.

<sup>44</sup> Mateo, 213; Begoña Zalbidea Bengoa, “The Phasing out of the Franco and State Press in Spain,” *Journalism History* 22 (Winter 1997): 156-63, 156-57.

Valencians were unhappy about a new water tax. Nonetheless, today he describes journalists' experience of the late Franco era as one of "benevolent dictatorship" (*dictablanda*) in which such official reprimands were the worst that could befall them.<sup>45</sup> He and others used their position to promote reform, primarily by "writing between the lines" to spread information that the regime did not want publicized, or by "running lots of stories about elections in foreign democracies in the world news section."<sup>46</sup>

José Ombuena Antiñolo, in his role as *Las Provincias*' director since 1959, had managed over the course of a decade to turn it into what Pérez Puche describes as "a newspaper prudently distant from Francoism and with the sufficient critical capability to make its independence known when it was convenient."<sup>47</sup> A political moderate, at least in his own writings, Ombuena nonetheless allowed his younger writers substantial discretion and responsibility.<sup>48</sup> After the 1966 Press Law, those writers grew increasingly daring, publishing interviews and articles that closely skirted the limits of what the regime would deem acceptable. Several times, *Las Provincias* reporters were hauled into the offices of local politicians to defend themselves and the paper received financial sanctions, though such intimidation tactics rarely resulted in substantive punishments.

Beginning with Docavo Alberti's piece, *Las Provincias* became the primary platform for opponents of the development, and over the next four years would make that its signature issue.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Mercedes Montero, Jordi Rodríguez Virgili, and Carmela García Orgtega, "The Political Role of the Press in Spanish Transition to Democracy, 1975-1978," *Javnost-The Public* 15 (2008): 5-20, 8; Pérez Puche email, January 21 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, *Tal como Eramos: La Valencia de los años 70* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1998), 274.

<sup>48</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (London: Arnold, 1997); Anna Mateu and Martí Domínguez, "Inicios del columnismo ambiental en la prensa española: La campaña de *Las Provincias* sobre la urbanización de El Saler (Valencia, España)," *Zer* 16 (2011): 178.

To a generation of young, progressive intellectuals, the city's plans to privatize and develop the Dehesa of El Saler in the final decade of the Franco regime represented all that was wrong with the political and socioeconomic system. In France, the refrain "sous les pavés, la plage" (beneath the paving stones, the beach) embodied university students' desire to peel away the artifice and repression of modern industrial society to reveal, in the words of the historian Michael Bess, "the spontaneous dimension of human free play and imagination, lying trapped below the metaphoric paving stone."<sup>50</sup> In Valencia, both the paving stones and the beach took on literal dimensions, as the planned privatization of the largest green space in the city, which also happened to contain an ecosystem of internationally recognized scientific importance, would bury Valencia's last undeveloped beach under tons of concrete and steel hotels for the enjoyment of wealthy tourists.

The underlying spirit of youthful dissent that motivated French protests was also a key feature of the Valencian campaign, intensified by progressive frustration with the regime's continued existence even as that same regime limited the ways in which they could express their frustrations. To some extent, the Dehesa urbanization was merely a convenient issue through which reporters and others could express their opposition to the regime. In particular, the general apoliticism of conservation movements prior to 1970 made it more difficult for the regime to oppose critiques that remained nominally concerned with environmental issues. But in other, important ways, the fact that *Las Provincias* seized on an environmental campaign as its flagship issue of the late Franco years reflects the profound importance of local landscapes, and local control over those landscapes, in the anti-regime movement as a whole.

Using the scientists' complaints as his starting point, Pérez Puche, then a young journalist in charge of the city desk at *Las Provincias*, came to understand the Dehesa not only as an

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<sup>50</sup> Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, 80.

ecological catastrophe but also as a profoundly undemocratic undertaking by the city government, akin to its neglect of social issues elsewhere in the city. Already used to challenging the regime in subtle critiques and unfazed by the official reprimand he had received from the provincial governor a few years earlier, Pérez Puche seized on the Dehesa as a means of issuing more direct attacks against the undemocratic city government. Just a few months after Rodríguez de la Fuente's show aired, Pérez Puche published the first in a series of articles about the Dehesa in which he accused the city of irresponsible management, expropriation of public property, and misleading the public with regard to the nature of the urbanization.<sup>51</sup> Walls and fences cut off public access to the beach, he reported. The boardwalk was a disaster, the forest where Valencian families had long picnicked would be sacrificed to private development, and the few existing public areas suffered from a depressing lack of facilities. Writers at *Triunfo*, a prominent national journal at the forefront of media critiques of the regime, seized on Pérez Puche's lead, reiterating the scientists' arguments and defending "the rights of the Valencian people to enjoy the only green space available in the capital...[i]ndependently of the reasons provided by the biologists and naturalists against this urbanization."<sup>52</sup>

In such arguments, Pérez Puche laid the groundwork for a four-year campaign that used the Dehesa as a stand-in for all that was wrong with Spanish politics.<sup>53</sup> Though he frequently evoked imagery of dying pines and devastated dunes, in his own view the ecological conditions of the Dehesa were important principally insofar as they reflected the dramatic decline in the quality of the Dehesa as a public park. As he would later describe it, the environmental aspects

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<sup>51</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, "¿Hacia la urbanización definitiva de La Dehesa?," *Las Provincias*, July 17, 1970; Francisco Pérez Puche, "El bañista paga las consecuencias del 'verano negro' del Saler," *Las Provincias*, July 29, 1970.

<sup>52</sup> "El Saler: Problema Social," *Triunfo*, October 17, 1970. See also J.O.G. (Valencia), "El Saler y la Albufera," *Triunfo*, October 10, 1970; Marina Fuster Cantador (Valencia), "Alambre de Espino," *Triunfo*, October 10, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21, 2012.

served as a *tapadera*, a cover, for his political critique.<sup>54</sup> This approach allowed Pérez Puche to appeal to a much broader segment of the population than the scientists who approached the Dehesa from a purely conservationist perspective. Whereas many Spaniards remained wary of conservation's perceived adverse impacts on economic growth, Pérez Puche's interest in urban pollution and park access for the working class seemed to address a different set of problems altogether. Such concerns echoed many of those voiced by Josep-Vicent Marqués and other Aeorma "members," who used *Las Provincias* and the Dehesa issue to obtain a wider audience for their critiques.

In addition to a steady stream of articles and interviews with such figures, *Las Provincias* also published the city's responses to its critics, beginning with a histrionic press conference called in response to the accusations leveled by scientists and naturalists shortly after Rodríguez de la Fuente's show aired. City representatives declared those accusations "alarmist," "sensationalist," "groundless," "inaccurate and even cruel," and countered with a series of scientifically and logically incoherent explanations for the obvious destruction of the forest. It had been caused by a "change in the winds of the Levant," they suggested, or perhaps "all the pines that are now described as sick were in fact already dead well before the urbanization works even began." While Valencians could plainly see that the dunes on the northern section of the beach had been destroyed, the city claimed they had been merely "lowered slightly only in a short stretch of the boardwalk."<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the immense parking lots and wide avenues Tevasa had paved all along the Dehesa were, according to the city, built entirely "in areas that did not

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<sup>54</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, interview with the author, Valencia, April 12 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, "El lago de la Albufera y el monte de la Dehesa: Declaración del Ayuntamiento sobre los problemas de aquella zona," *Las Provincias*, August 2, 1970.

have trees.”<sup>56</sup> In addition to being an obvious lie, this latter claim also ignored the conservationists’ observation that trees alone could not preserve the Dehesa’s ecosystem.

The mayor of Valencia, though he had no hand in establishing or approving the development plan, became a frequent target of rhetorical attacks in *Las Provincias*. Vicente López Rosat had been one of the city’s best neuropsychiatrists in private life, but his sole political experience prior to his appointment consisted of the time he had spent as president of the local council of parents’ associations for the city’s schools. Pérez Puche, a thorn in the mayor’s side throughout his tenure, later confirmed the impression provided by archival materials and interviews that López Rosat was a fundamentally good-natured man who was profoundly unsuited for the political role to which Franco had appointed him. Another prominent journalist of the era described the mayor as “an octopus in a garage,” hopelessly unable to control the competing political and social forces converging around him.<sup>57</sup> Hoping only to avoid conflict and to reduce the debts incurred by his predecessor, including those to Tevasa for its construction of infrastructure on the Dehesa, López Rosat instead found himself under constant pressure from the public, including both members of the press and an increasingly activist population of university students.<sup>58</sup> He later described the Dehesa project itself as a bad situation over which he had little control, and often felt he had “boarded a moving train” insofar as he had inherited the project and its attendant controversy from his predecessor, Rincón de Arellano.<sup>59</sup> “Above all,” he would later tell Pérez Puche, “I didn’t like auctioning, selling land that belonged

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<sup>56</sup> “Los informadores de prensa y radio visitaron ayer la Dehesa y la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, August 27, 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Consuelo Reyna interview, Valencia, May 1 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Pérez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Pérez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 48.



to the City.”<sup>60</sup> The fact that *Las Provincias* frequently focused on precisely that aspect of the urbanization hit a particular nerve.

The mayor’s reservations about the development were magnified in February 1971 when Alfredo Sánchez Bella, Fraga’s replacement as Minister of Information and Tourism, told him in no uncertain terms that the Dehesa project was “a mistake.” Recently returned from Rome, Sánchez Bella warned that elsewhere in Europe towering concrete towers like those already under construction as part of Tevasa’s plan were passé. Modern tourists wanted tasteful, understated landscaping; distinctive architecture reflecting the local character; and natural beauty. The Dehesa project represented an older model of development that would, as Sánchez Bella assured the increasingly depressed mayor, make it difficult for the city to find high-quality buyers for the lots and building rights it had to sell. “Either you resolve it soon,” he added, “or you will have problems.”<sup>61</sup>

Many within the regional administration and the city government took Sánchez Bella’s advice to heart, but his words were not made public, and López Rosat’s lieutenants (many of whom had vested financial and personal interests in the urbanization) refused to stop or even meaningfully revise Tevasa’s plan.<sup>62</sup> City councilor Luís Puig Esteve, who was in charge of the day-to-day operations of the project, stood by his earlier statements that it would prove a benefit

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<sup>60</sup> Pérez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> These are not direct quotes from Sánchez Bella, but rather the paraphrase provided by López Rosat to Pérez Puche, who later published them in *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 47 and “Cambio de rumbo en la urbanización del Saler,” *A la Luna de Valencia*, February 12 2011. Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, López Rosat’s successor as mayor, and other politicians of the era report hearing similarly-worded warnings upon the occasion of Sánchez Bella’s visit, which were a source of general discussion and great consternation at the regional government in the months and years following. Ramón Quiros and Pérez Puche interviews.

<sup>62</sup> Pérez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 48-49; Ramón Quiros and Pérez Puche interviews; Pérez Puche, “Cambio de rumbo;” Manuel Girona, “El Saler a encuesta (1): El Saler urbanizado hubiera podido ser modelado, explotado, sin ser privatizado, hubiera podido ser utilizado por la población,” *Las Provincias*, June 18, 1974.

to the population as a whole.<sup>63</sup> Before Tevasa had stepped in, he claimed, the Dehesa had been in a state of abandon, used by “only a few rich kids” (*señoritos*). The urbanization, conversely, would put the land “at the disposal of all Valencians” so that “a great number of people will be able to enjoy it.”<sup>64</sup>

This statement caught the attention of 26-year-old María Consuelo Reyna, the recently-appointed assistant director of *Las Provincias*. As a scion of the powerful Reyna Domenech family, which owned and operated the paper, she enjoyed almost complete immunity from the regime and unprecedented editorial freedom. One collaborator, economist Vicent Soler Marco, described Consuelo Reyna’s influence at the paper as “a light coming on” in the darkness of the Franco era, offering progressive intellectuals their first public forum to express their ideas.<sup>65</sup> She extended her protections to a handful of young journalists, first among them Pérez Puche, who shared her disdain for regime policies and her interest in promoting reform through the media.<sup>66</sup> Guest columnists and interviewees over the years raised critical perspectives on a wide range of issues, often couched in terms of objective expertise to protect their overtly political slant. Favored topics included the construction of an immense Ford factory on the outskirts of the Albufera; the planned installation of a nuclear power plant upstream; the ongoing international energy crisis; rampant highway construction; and of course the continued expropriation of public lands on the Dehesa.

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<sup>63</sup> Mayor Miguel Ramón Izquierdo would later describe the urbanization as Puig Esteve’s “baby,” noting that the counsellor had been actively intervening in negotiations with the construction companies and the promotion of parcel sales...and even made a promotional trip to North America.” Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, *Memoir* (unpublished), MRI.

<sup>64</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, “La urbanización de la Dehesa, al día,” *Las Provincias*, February 25 1973.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Perez Puche, *La Valencia de los años 70*, 276.

<sup>66</sup> Maria’s brother, Santiago Consuelo Reyna, worked as a forestry engineer for the local branch of the Nature Conservation Institute (ICONA), and environmental activists today describe him as having a significant personal interest in conservation as well. Victor Navarro, interview with the author, Valencia, May 2 2012.

This latter would become a hallmark of Consuelo Reyna's early tenure at *Las Provincias*, and when interviewed in 2012 she emphasized her sense of the Dehesa and another major Valencian park as her personal legacy to the city. In her recounting, her attention was captured by the Dehesa shortly after her return from a family vacation at a low-key beach resort in Andalusia, which she contrasted with the Dehesa development's immense scale and exclusive character.<sup>67</sup> Although today she claims that her interest in the Dehesa arose from its importance in its unique ecosystems, noting that it was "the last authentic Mediterranean forest" that had not been altered "by the hand of man," her words at the time suggest that she was far more outraged by the elitist character and dismissive attitude towards Valencian families evinced by the city government.<sup>68</sup> Puig Esteve's ill-chosen comment that the Dehesa historically served only "a few rich kids" proved a catalyst for the first of many populist diatribes Consuelo Reyna penned for *Las Provincias*. "A few rich kids?" she echoed incredulously.

Half of Valencia was among those 'few rich kids,' or even all of Valencia. The members of a family who went there to spend their Sunday are "rich kids;" those who, because of their jobs, had to stay in Valencia during the summer and escaped to swim at El Saler are "rich kids;" those who were unable to pay for a summer vacation somewhere along the coast and instead went to El Saler every morning are "rich kids." Sure, 'a few rich kids.'<sup>69</sup>

Denouncing Puig Esteve and other city representatives as "demagogues," Consuelo Reyna's intensely confrontational piece and her enthusiasm for the topic set the stage for a flood of articles, editorials, and interviews at *Las Provincias*.<sup>70</sup> In the eighteen-month period between this first editorial and the end of 1974, the paper published 139 articles and columns relating to the

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<sup>67</sup> Consuelo Reyna interview, Valencia, May 1 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Consuelo Reyna interview, Valencia, May 1 2012. It is of course impossible to accurately ascribe motivations to historical actors, but it seems likely that Consuelo Reyna's assertions in 2012 about her interest in environmental themes reflect current beliefs more than past ones. Apart from the Dehesa, which as mentioned she discussed overwhelmingly in populist terms at the time, a review of the topics she covered during her journalistic career does not support her claims of interest in environmental issues.

<sup>69</sup> Consuelo Reyna, "La Dehesa (2)."

<sup>70</sup> Perez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 47 and 276.

urbanization of the Dehesa and featured dozens of images depicting the ongoing destruction of the landscape.<sup>71</sup> Staff photographer José Penalba spent countless hours walking on the Dehesa, documenting the ongoing destruction, capturing such iconic images as the one that graced the cover of the *Las Provincias* almanac for 1974 (Figure 16). The photograph, which featured a sign posted in the Dehesa that read “respect this park, report those who mistreat it,” exemplified the sharp humor characteristic of the paper’s coverage.

Figure 16: *Las Provincias* coverage of the Dehesa development, 1973-1974<sup>72</sup>



Though *Las Provincias* journalists and their collaborators repeatedly claimed to represent a public opinion staunchly opposed to the urbanization, with continued regime suppression of elections, polling, and freedom of expression there was no way to either prove or disprove this claim. In the summer of 1972, engineer Guillermo Pons Ibañez actually hired a public notary to accompany him around the city and verify the appearance of anti-development graffiti, offering

<sup>71</sup> Mateu and Dominguez, “Inicios del columnismo ambiental,” 179.

<sup>72</sup> Photos by José Penalba for *Las Provincias*, 1973-1974.

the resulting document as evidence of a popular uprising. Indeed, Pons Ibañez led the notary to five separate locations where some person or persons had painted slogans such as “Don’t speculate with El Saler – Thieves;” “El Saler belongs to the People;” and “Don’t make El Saler a private beach.”<sup>73</sup> This, of course, proved very little. It is entirely possible that Pons Ibañez or another of the prominent anti-development activists had painted the slogans himself, and even if this was not the case five isolated incidents did not constitute much evidence of a mass movement. Nonetheless, Pons Ibañez claimed such slogans reflected “the sentiments of all the Valencian People” and described them as indicative of “the universal outcry against the dangers to Humanity represented by the disappearance of green spaces and the pollution of the environment.”<sup>74</sup> Although the accuracy of his statement is impossible to ascertain, he did at least seem convinced in his own mind, and urged the city to confirm his beliefs by conducting surveys of the Valencian population about their desires for the Dehesa.<sup>75</sup>

Today, the journalists of *Las Provincias* freely admit that they took advantage of the uncertainty surrounding public opinion to assert claims that they knew to be gross exaggerations, creating an illusion of popular consensus that enabled them to exert additional pressure on the city government.<sup>76</sup> According to Pérez Puche, activists – including scientific conservationists who penned repeated protests to the City Council and to local papers, as well as social activists such as Marqués, Pons Ibañez, and Móstoles - did “just enough” to give the journalists something to write about, while *Las Provincias* “magnified everything” so as to create an

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<sup>73</sup> Rafael Azpitarte Camy, Notary of Valencia, July 6 1972.

<sup>74</sup> Guillermo Pons Ibañez, “Parcelación y Venta del Monte de la Dehesa,” to Ayuntamiento de Valencia, April 24 1972, MCR.

<sup>75</sup> Guillermo Pons Ibañez, “Parcelación y Venta del Monte de la Dehesa,” to Ayuntamiento de Valencia, April 24 1972, MCR.

<sup>76</sup> Perez Puche email, January 19 2012.

impression of citywide consensus on the issue.<sup>77</sup> “If one person went to the Dehesa” to protest the conditions there, Consuelo Reyna agrees, “it appeared in the paper as if it were one hundred.”<sup>78</sup> A few letters to the editor penned in agreement with the paper’s positions, meanwhile, were presented as evidence of a groundswell of spontaneous grassroots support.<sup>79</sup> Like the graffiti, these letters were often anonymous, and may well have come from the activists themselves.

In keeping with the portrayal of a popular moment, activists adopted the motto “El Saler for the People” as the rallying cry for those opposed to the development. “People,” in this context, meant not only the working families Marqués and his colleagues claimed to represent, but also the Valencian people, in the sense of regionalist connections to and ownership of the land, distinct from the Madrid-based nationalism of the regime.<sup>80</sup> “We need El Saler,” read one flyer handed out on the street, “because the working people have the right...to rest and have contact with nature.”<sup>81</sup> Posters and bumper stickers (affixed only to the cars of the “very brave,” according to Móstoles) featured a cartoon fist holding a tree and the motto “The Dehesa is ours and we want it green” (“*la Devesa es nostra i la volem verd,*” in Valencian), again asserting regionalist ownership of the land. The vision of the Dehesa as a Valencian commons starkly contrasted with the city’s depiction of the development primarily as a means of improving the city’s international profile, but it would be a mistake to assume that the movement against the development represented a form of opposition to globalization. As discussed in the previous

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<sup>77</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21 2012.

<sup>78</sup> Consuelo Reyna interview, Valencia, May 1 2012.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., letters from P. J. de P and A Valencian, “El futuro del Saler,” *Las Provincias*, May 19, 1973.

<sup>80</sup> In later life, Consuelo Reyna became alienated from many of her progressive colleagues as a result of her militant support for right-wing Valencian nationalism, the seeds of which were evident in her frequent appeals to the “Valencian people” throughout her writings on the Dehesa.

<sup>81</sup> Aeorma, “Al Pueblo Valenciano” (flyer), September 1974, MCR.

chapter, activists in the late Franco period borrowed tactics from and appealed directly to an international audience, seeking support from their democratic sympathizers abroad. Moreover, as land sales continued on the Dehesa it became clear that buyers hailed not from England and France, as the city had originally boasted, but from the upper echelons of Spanish and, more specifically, Valencian society itself. In this, it was little different from other developments of the time, which overwhelmingly tended to benefit local officials and members of the regime who took advantage of the subsidies and low prices of such state-funded projects. The “Valencian people” for whom activists claimed to speak, then, can be more accurately understood as working- and middle-class Valencian families, whose rights were under attack not from a foreign threat but from undemocratic elites with ties to the central regime.

By the summer of 1973 the minimal work necessary on the public area of the Dehesa had been completed, Fraga’s luxury hotel expanded, the golf clubhouse opened, and plans to build a horse racing track on one of the principal bird nesting grounds approved.<sup>82</sup> Behind this apparent progress, however, the project was in trouble, having lost the support of the central administration following Sánchez Bella’s negative report from Rome. To make matters worse, Franco was now eighty-one years old and visibly ailing, and social unrest, often violently suppressed by the police, grew with the anticipation of the approaching transition. Local authorities received orders from Madrid to seek compromise and conciliation, but above all to keep the peace. Thanks to the *Las Provincias* campaign, the urbanization topped the Valencian administration’s list of trouble spots where it would need to make concessions in order to prevent young progressives from taking to the streets.

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<sup>82</sup> “Nueva rueda de prensa: El Ayuntamiento da sus razones sobre la urbanización del Saler,” *Las Provincias*, July 30, 1973; Pérez Puche, “Las obras de la urbanización del Saler han avanzado positivamente,” *Las Provincias*, January 15, 1971; Pérez Puche, “Luis Puig habla de la urbanización del Saler, el hipódromo y el zoológico,” *Las Provincias*, June 15 1971; “Polemica sesion plenaria del Ayuntamiento,” *Las Provincias*, June 5 1971.

Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, a prominent legal academic and respected attorney, replaced the previous mayor in the fall of 1973 with an unwritten mandate to minimize social unrest via compromise and conciliation on the issues of greatest concern to young radicals, and especially to resolve the situation with the Dehesa.<sup>83</sup> He immediately set to work placing insurmountable obstacles in the path of the urbanization, using his knowledge of the Valencian legal code, a sharp and deliberate mind, and some mild prevarication to subvert developers' efforts. Citing a series of technicalities and small irregularities, within a few weeks of taking office he suspended all further land sales and construction licenses, telling the council and the press that "the entire project needs to be updated and that the Valencian people must understand the reality of the project and its future possibilities."<sup>84</sup> Simultaneously, he invited the most active opponents of the project, including Marqués himself, to submit a plan for its revision with the dual mandate of "preserving nature" and "restoring the public character of the area" to the greatest extent possible.<sup>85</sup> In short, the activists could not have asked for a more conciliatory mayor, nor one more predisposed to halt the urbanization.

But by the spring of 1974, nothing the mayor could have done would have quelled the political dissatisfaction and social unrest running through progressive Valencian society. Ramón Izquierdo had the misfortune of taking office just as political tensions in Spain reached their peak, with a massive proliferation of left-wing groups, increasingly fearless protestors, and wild

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<sup>83</sup> Ramón Izquierdo, quoted in Perez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 60; Ramón Quiros and Pérez Puche interviews.

<sup>84</sup> Ramón Izquierdo, *Memoir*; "Primera sesión municipal presidida por el nuevo alcalde," *Las Provincias*, September 22, 1973; "Rueda de prensa con el alcalde: 'Me preocupa el temor de que algo que pertenece al pueblo valenciano sea privatizado,' dijo sobre el Saler," *Las Provincias*, September 30, 1973; "Primer pleno presidido por el nuevo alcalde: Se confirma el criterio de revisar el tema de la urbanización del Saler," *Las Provincias*, October 6, 1973.

<sup>85</sup> Joëlle Bergère and Josep Vicent Marqués, "Informe Sociológico," 1974, MCR; "Respeto a la naturaleza, nuevo criterio básico para la urbanización del Saler," *Las Provincias*, December 15 1973; Perez Puche, *La Valencia de los Años 70*, 61. Puig Esteve, absent in Madrid for the relevant city council meeting, was furious to find, upon his return, that the decision had been made and he was powerless to reverse it. Ramón Izquierdo, *Memoir*.



speculation about the imminent end of the Franco regime. In early October 1973, just a month after the new mayor first set foot in City Hall, the Yom Kippur war broke out and sparked a major energy crisis across the western world, prompting Franco's technocrats to announce plans for fourteen new nuclear energy plants. The move emboldened environmental activists around the country and gave rise to more than seven hundred new citizen groups. Even more important, that December, Basque extremists assassinated Admiral Luís Carrero Blanco, President of the Spanish state and Franco's designated heir, ushering in an era of political uncertainty and redoubled social unrest.

As these national developments unfolded, the Dehesa project acted as a lightning rod for progressive Valencia's increasingly bold expressions of displeasure with the regime. *Las Provincias* published a series of new discoveries about the development, calculated to arouse indignation and outrage from a public already primed for news of corruption and wrongdoing in the regime. In the winter and spring of 1974, *Las Provincias* reported that the forest of El Saler had been reduced by 30%;<sup>86</sup> that the city had not followed proper legal channels for any revisions since 1965, making much of the completed construction technically illegal;<sup>87</sup> and that the state had subsidized many of the touristic residences and summer homes as low-income housing, thus directly using taxpayer funds to reduce the cost for wealthy purchasers.<sup>88</sup> At one particularly disastrous press conference, Puig Esteve admitted that several members of the city government had financial interests in the hotel chains involved with the development and that "the city government had never consulted with scientists, biologists, ecologists, or technicians of

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<sup>86</sup> December 28, 1973

<sup>87</sup> January 26, 1974

<sup>88</sup> February 19, 1974.

any kind” on the project.<sup>89</sup> Each new revelation brought predictable howls of protest from journalists and letter-writers. When Ramón Izquierdo released the recommendations for the Dehesa that had been submitted by Marqués and other progressive young experts in the early summer of 1974, the experts themselves promptly turned around and denounced it as elitist and insufficiently conservationist. Ramón Izquierdo privately recorded his special frustration with Marqués on this count, noting that the sociologist had received 25,000 pesetas in exchange for his input and that “in spite of seeming pleased with the acceptance of his suggestion was later a great detractor of the remodeling.”<sup>90</sup>

Admittedly, not even the mayor himself was particularly thrilled with the new plan.<sup>91</sup> Faced with the impossible task of reconciling the desire to protect the Dehesa with the desire to make back the money the city had already spent on infrastructure there, the revisions left everyone unhappy. The original plan had bound Valencia to finance the entire project using money obtained through land sales, but to date the city had spent 1,635 million pesetas and made only 376 million back. To compensate for this enormous deficit, the city’s experts – including Marqués – agreed that they would have to allow construction to move forward, albeit on a significantly more modest version of the original plan.<sup>92</sup> In accordance with progressive demands, it reduced building volume, eliminated many of the more disruptive landscape elements of the original design, and prohibited any development on the 330 hectares (815 acres) of untouched

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<sup>89</sup> “Nueva rueda de prensa.”

<sup>90</sup> Ramón Izquierdo, *Memoir*. Marqués and his colleague, sociologists Joëlle bergere, wrote in their sociological report for the remodeling that “the reduction” – but notably, not the elimination – of privately-owned land, hotels, and apartments, was “essential” to the remodeling, as was the expansion of public access to the Dehesa via new transportation networks and facilities. Joëlle Bergère and Josep Vicent Marqués, “Informe Sociologico,” 1974, MCR.

<sup>91</sup> Ramón Izquierdo, “Palabras del Señor Alcalde,” speech presented at city council Pleno December 21, 1974, MRI.

<sup>92</sup> “Informe Economico: Hay que vender parcelas por valor de 1,635 millones,” *Las Provincias*, June 1, 1974; “Importante session municipal: Se aprueba la reforma de la urbanización de la Dehesa,” *Las Provincias*, June 1, 1974; Joëlle Bergère and Josep-Vicent Marqués, interview, *Las Provincias*, June 9, 1974; Pérez Puche, “Lo del Saler,” *Las Provincias*, May 3, 1974; Marqués, Aeorma documents; Pedro Costa Morata, “Benidorm, junio de 1974: nace el ecologismo,” *La Verdad*, June 14 2008.

forest to the south of the Pujol canal. However, Marqués and others, again using the pages of *Las Provincias* to get their message out, immediately denounced this as nothing more than the unethical, illegal sale of Valencian patrimony to private interests.

In many respects, the last Francoist mayor of Valencia was the unsung hero of the Dehesa. In the five years following his cancellation of sales and licensing, Ramón Izquierdo steadfastly stalled, hedged, and manufactured a series of technical and legal obstacles that made it impossible for construction, sales, or the granting of licenses to proceed. Tevasa officials sent him a series of increasingly frustrated letters demanding that he concede the necessary permits, which he carefully filed away and ignored completely.<sup>93</sup> Landowners, construction workers, developers, and business owners on the Dehesa followed suit with a series of formal memoranda and angry visits to his office, describing themselves as the victims of a “tendentious press campaign, which, in spite of its insignificance, has had a much greater impact than expected,” and demanding he allow the urbanization to proceed.<sup>94</sup> Nearly forty years later, I unearthed many of these unanswered complaints in a pair of overstuffed filing cabinets in Ramón Izquierdo’s sons’ legal office, carefully collated with other legal notes and correspondence from the same period. Documents he received from various state agencies on the Dehesa issue, filed alongside the citizen complaints, showcased both the massive bureaucratic inefficiency of the crumbling regime and the way that Ramón Izquierdo was able to use a series of minor technical

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<sup>93</sup> Letters from the director of Terrenos de Valencia, S.A., to Mayor Miguel Ramón Izquierdo dated May 28, June 24, and July 15, 1974, MRI.

<sup>94</sup> “La Dehesa: Escrito a favor de la aprobación de la remodelación de la urbanización,” *Las Provincias*, July 6, 1974; see also “Los propietarios y promotores de la Dehesa exponen sus problemas al alcalde,” *Las Provincias*, July 6, 1974; Letters to the editor of *Las Provincias* from “a mother,” July 4, 1974; from C.F.B., July 12, 1974; from Carlos Perez Atayde, July 16, 1974; Grupo de Propietarios de Apartamentos del Saler, Memorandum to Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, 1975, MRI; Grupo de Constructores del Saler, Memorandum to Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, 1975, MRI; Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, “Memorandum Juridico sobre la Urbanización de la Dehesa del Saler,” 1975, MRI; Grupo de Promotores del Saler, Memorandum to Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, 1975, MRI.

irregularities to stall final decisions on the urbanization until the advent of democratic local elections.<sup>95</sup>

But such machinations necessarily occurred behind the scenes, reflecting Ramón Izquierdo's awkward position as both a symbol of the Francoist regime that had appointed him and his private advocacy of democratic reform. As such, he was a relatively easy target for Marqués and others seeking to direct populist outrage against the state. Much to his frustration, this revisionist version of history is the one that stuck: articles in the local press and official histories of the El Saler controversy published over the next few decades routinely described Ramón Izquierdo as "selling El Saler" and erased any mention of his role in halting the urbanization.<sup>96</sup> Figure 17, for example, shows a history of the controversy published by the new city government in 1983, entitled "El Saler becomes Ours Again" and subtitled "Democracy is: Recovering El Saler," which completely excised any mention of Ramón Izquierdo's 1973 order to cease sales and construction, as noted in his handwritten addendum. Nor did this inaccurate portrayal fade with time: A scathing critique of the former mayor appeared in local papers in 1991, entitled "Seventeen years ago Ramón Izquierdo approved the urbanization of the entire Dehesa of El Saler." This slander elicited an indignant, notarized complaint insisting that "during my mayoral term not a single square meter of El Saler was sold" and demanding a correction of the public record.<sup>97</sup> Such efforts notwithstanding, Valencians today are overwhelmingly ignorant of Ramón Izquierdo's role in stopping the development, while Aeorma and the democratic

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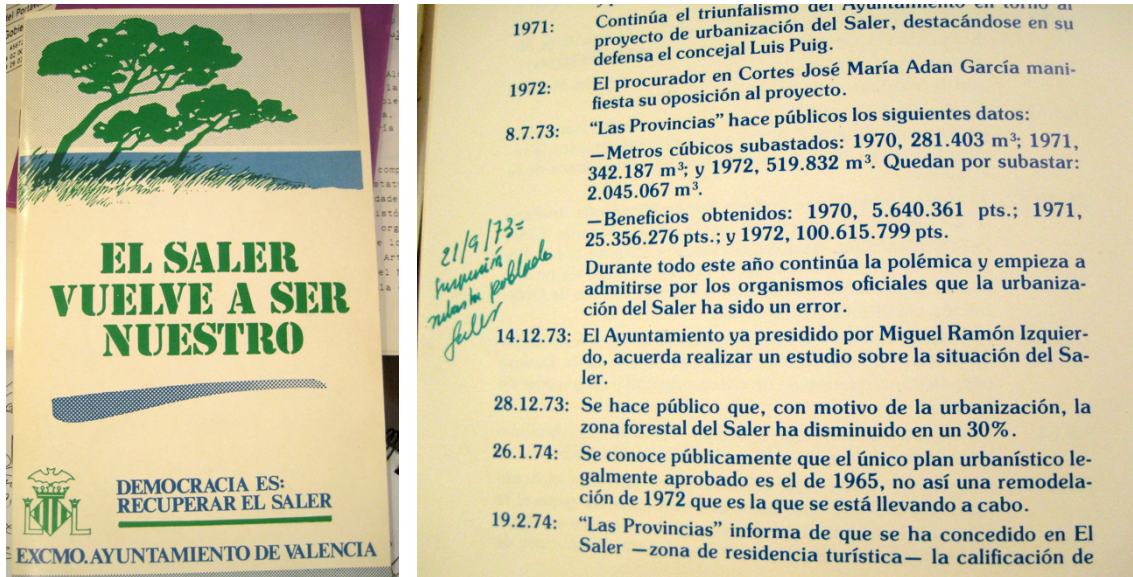
<sup>95</sup> Consejo del Estado, Memorandum regarding the remodeling plan, No. 40.158, March 18 1976, MRI; Ministerio de la Vivienda, revisions and provisional approval for remodeling plan, June 15 1976, MRI; Comisiones de Urbanismo y Hacienda (Valencia), minutes of the joint session held on July 5 1976, MRI; Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, "Plan Saler," legal memorandum for personal reference, 1976, MRI; Miguél Ramón Izquierdo, handwritten notes on "Salser," date unknown, MRI; Ministerio de la Vivienda, "Acuerdo Comisión Provincial de Urbanismo – Remodelación Plan Parcial 'Monte de la Dehesa,'" July 24, 1978, MRI.

<sup>96</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *El Saler Vuelve a ser Nuestro/El Saler Torna a ser Nostre*, 1983, MRI.

<sup>97</sup> "Ramón Izquierdo aprobó la urbanización de toda la dehesa de El Saler hace 17 años," *Levante*, May 16, 1991; Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, "Puntualizaciones Sobre El Saler," four-page notarized document, May 21, 1991, MRI.

government get all the credit. As discussed further in Chapter Five, this feeds into a broader narrative contrasting the progressive democratic governments with a caricature of Francoist oppression prevalent across contemporary Valencian society.

Figure 17: City of Valencia’s official history of the anti-development movement, 1983.



By early July 1974, when an ailing Franco temporarily recused himself from office, the campaign had at last begun to spread beyond the initial core of journalists and university professors – not so much as to constitute a real popular consensus, but enough that Pérez Puche and the others at *Las Provincias* could justify its claims to represent at least a significant minority of the population. Notably, much of this popular appeal came from political radicals eager to take out their frustrations on the government more generally, who found El Saler a convenient campaign already in progress. Communist activists took to the street to hand out a dense page of text in both Valencian and Castilian, outlining their arguments against El Saler’s expropriation and closing with the rallying cry “Down with the fascist city government! Down

with the corruption of the Regime! El Saler for the People!”<sup>98</sup> A similar flyer distributed by a group calling itself “the Friends of El Saler” added to these its own calls, not only for “El Saler for the Valencian People!” and “Freedom for the Valencian People!” but the more overtly anti-establishment “Down with the Governor, the Guardia Civil and the Police who defend those who steal from the people!” “Punish the guilty!” and “Freedom for the Valencian People!”<sup>99</sup>

Neighborhood associations sent letters to the editor of *Las Provincias* rejecting the revision in its entirety on the basis of its nondemocratic nature and the lack of public facilities.<sup>100</sup> In response to a call for action from Aeorma, more than two hundred Valencians attempted to plant a Valencian flag on the beach at the Dehesa, but were stymied by a police cordon.<sup>101</sup> Activists from the school of architecture, the department of sociology, and *Las Provincias* itself gathered 15,750 signatures in support of a petition stating in part that “Valencia does not want the remodeling of El Saler, but rather that it becomes a public park.”<sup>102</sup> Aeorma-affiliated lawyers submitted formal complaints challenging the legal basis for the urbanization and its revisions.<sup>103</sup> A highly technical exhibition on the proposed revision of the plan attracted thousands of visitors, while across town, at the School of Architecture at the University of

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<sup>98</sup> Comité del Pais Valenciano del Movimiento Comunista de España, “Defendamos el Saler,” July 16, 1974, MRI.

<sup>99</sup> Comisiones de Barrio y Pueblo de Valencia, Grupos de Amigos del Saler, “Vecinos, Pueblo, Trabajadores de Valencia,” September 1974, MCR.

<sup>100</sup> “La Asociación de cabezas de familia de la Dehesa impugna el proyecto de la remodelación,” *Las Provincias*, June 29, 1974. Carles Dolç, an Aeorma-affiliated architect, later described a “direct osmosis between the intellectuals who published newspaper articles and the campaign organized by the democratic opposition through the neighborhood associations.” Carles Dolç, interview, *Revista Seducción Ambiental* 2 (2011), 10.

<sup>101</sup> A flyer handed out on the street called for a protest on the Dehesa to be held on September 15, 1974, but the city promptly responded with threats to arrest everyone who attended. Aeorma, “Al Pueblo Valenciano” (flyer), September 1974, MCR; Comisiones de Barrio y Pueblo de Valencia, Grupos de Amigos del Saler, “Vecinos, Pueblo, Trabajadores de Valencia,” September 1974, MCR. Aeorma officers later described the protest as “much ado about nothing.” Enric Amer, “Recordatori a Josep Vicent Marqués, Primers anys de l’ecologisme valencià,” Working Paper (Acció Ecologista-Agró), June 6, 2008, available at [www.accioecologista-agro.org/spip.php?article224](http://www.accioecologista-agro.org/spip.php?article224).

<sup>102</sup> Ignacio Manglano, Baron de Vallver, *Las Provincias*, July 5 1974; El Saler per al Poble, “Impugnacion colectiva al proyecto de remodelacion de la Dehesa,” *Las Provincias*, June 23, 1974.

<sup>103</sup> See e.g. *Las Provincias* “AEORMA se adhiere a la impugnacion colectiva sobre El Saler,” July 21, 1974; *Las Provincias* “Dos nuevas alegaciones contra la remodelación de la Dehesa,” June 30, 1974.

Valencia, Móstoles held a counterexhibition put together by fellow academics in Aeorma's name, depicting El Saler as "a symbol of the fight for the working people's right to relax, for those who could not buy themselves private land."<sup>104</sup> By the end of the summer, the city had received twelve kilograms of documents on the issue, including thirty-five formal challenges and more than five thousand letters (three thousand in opposition, two thousand in favor).<sup>105</sup> *Las Provincias* touted this as a resounding popular consensus.

Nearly forty years later, however, the activists say that their campaign never represented popular opinion. Despite involvement by a steadily growing number of Valencians, activism against the development retained its essentially elitist character and continued to emanate primarily from the young progressives of *Las Provincias*. Evidence for this is found not only in the letters and other documents sent to the mayor himself by unhappy Valencians, but in the fact that many of their writers also sent copies to Maria Consuelo Reyna, where I found them in 2012. Whether she commissioned or suggested their composition is entirely uncertain, but it seems clear that she remained a central figure for the opposition to the development. From those documents, moreover, which list the profession of each claimant among other personal details, it is also clear that the overwhelming majority of activists were highly educated professionals working in law, medicine, or the social sciences. Doctors, lawyers, artists, civil engineers, artists,

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<sup>104</sup> AEORMA, *El Saler per al Poble*, 3; "Sublime excursion: Visita de las autoridades al Saler," *Valencia-Fruits*, June 23, 1974; S. Barber, "Guillermo Pons Ibañez: 'El Ecosistema del Saler y la Dehesa, único en el mundo, habría que dejarlo como estaba,'" *Las Provincias*, June 27, 1974; Manuel Girona, "El Saler a encuesta (2): Se debería tender a la recuperación al máximo y a la conservación de las mejores condiciones de un parque público absolutamente necesario," *Las Provincias*, June 19, 1974; Trinidad Simó, "Mas claridad en la exposicion de la ultima remodelación del Saler," *Las Provincias*, June 18, 1974; Ricardo Bellveser, "Los que visitan la exposición sobre El Saler: Casi total unanimidad, hay que salvarlo como sea," *Las Provincias*, June 16, 1974; Ricardo Bellveser, "El Saler: Datos para una decision colectiva," *Las Provincias*, June 29, 1974; Marisa Ortega, "Cronica de Valencia: El Saler, para el Pueblo," *El Mundo*, July 27, 1974.

<sup>105</sup> "12 kilos de documentos, 35 impugnaciones, y unos 5000 escritos de todo tipo, balance provisional de la información pública sobre la Dehesa," *Las Provincias*, July 27, 1974.

and economists, among others, offered sophisticated legal and fiscal critiques of the city's plans, urging the mayor to "rescue the park for the use of all citizens."<sup>106</sup>

Broader public opinion remains elusive, though most activists agree with Móstoles' statement that "the great majority [of Valencians] wanted urbanization, tourism, hotels, development, and to be able to go to a proper beach, as was happening all over Spain."<sup>107</sup> Tevasa's plans, and even the city's 1974 revisions, were clearly "excessive" in light of these popular desires, but it is unclear whether the general public shared the activists' adamant opposition to the revisions in the summer of 1974, or if perhaps many people were more forgiving of the compromise attempt. As demonstrated by the increasingly radical slogans on flyers handed out in the street, however, by that time, the campaign had transformed from the relatively modest efforts at compromise first proposed by the neighborhood associations or the scientific conservationists, into something very different. To some extent, the El Saler campaign had ceased to be about El Saler at all, and instead was about a confrontation between two very different visions of Spain's political future. Móstoles and Pérez Puche describe themselves as "leftists dressed in green" (*vestidos de verde*), primarily interested in opposition to the regime and using the Dehesa as a *tapadera* for their desire to stir up trouble for the city government.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, by the start of 1975, *Las Provincias* had almost completely abandoned the issue of the Dehesa and moved on to campaigns against a host of other social and political abuses.

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<sup>106</sup> José Luis Massoni Muedra, José Velasquez Malboisson, and Maria Herta Esteve Werblow, letter/legal memorandum to Miguel Ramón Izquierdo (Mayor of Valencia), July 22, 1974, MCR; José Luis Lorente Tallada, Andrés Castrillo López, María García Lliberós Sánchez-Robles, and Esperanza Gómez Ferrer Soldova, letter to Miguél Ramón Izquierdo (Mayor of Valencia), July 5 1974, MCR; José Francisco Sánchez-Cutillas Martínez, letter to Miguél Ramón Izquierdo, September 25 1973, MCR; José Francisco Sánchez-Cutillas Martínez, letter to Miguél Ramón Izquierdo, February 16 1974, MCR; José Francisco Sánchez-Cutillas Martínez, letter to Miguél Ramón Izquierdo, May 13 1974, MCR.

<sup>107</sup> Pérez Puche email, January 21 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Gonzalez Móstoles interview, Valencia, April 26 2012; Pérez Puche interview, Valencia, April 26 2012.



This nonetheless begs the question of why the Dehesa, in particular, first attracted young Valencians' attention as a cause worth fighting for. The campaign to save the Dehesa offers a glimpse into the convoluted social and political world of late-Franco activism, and specifically into the close relationship between landscape and power. It represents, to some extent, a holistic vision in which social change passed through environmental imaginings. This contrasted sharply with the more compartmentalized perspective of the scientific conservationists who had driven earlier campaigns, such as that of Doñana, and to some extent of the environmental campaigns that would emerge after the transition to democracy.<sup>109</sup> The integration of social and environmental concerns in local campaigns bore a close resemblance, however, to concurrent “green” movements elsewhere in the Western world. This suggests that the regime’s efforts to keep Spain “different” by suppressing political dissent and enforcing conservative social mores were overwhelmed by countervailing forces of modernity, specifically the “opening” of Spain to foreign visitors and ideas, the rise of activism in increasingly overdeveloped and underserved urban areas, and the coming-of-age of a new generation of educated and relatively affluent young intellectuals of widespread development and ecological destruction.

While the campaign to save the Dehesa thus bore strong resemblances to other environmental movements of the time, it was also shaped by the local specificity of Valencia’s place in Franco’s Spain. The association of the central state and its development projects with an erasure of local difference magnified the importance of local control over land, especially an iconic “Valencian” landscape such as the Dehesa. The Dehesa development, designed by Madrid-based corporations and architects and carried out by a city council lodged firmly in the

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<sup>109</sup> One significant exception to this trend towards compartmentalization is the extremely popular Spanish antinuclear movement, which in Valencia coalesced around the Cofrentes nuclear energy facility, located about ninety kilometers from the city, which was completed amidst massive protests in 1984.

dictator's pocket, embodied the regime's appropriation of Valencia's natural wealth for the benefit of an elitist, corrupt, imminently capitalist sociopolitical system. The crucial importance of recapturing Valencian lands for the Valencian people thus formed a central plank in the resurgence of regional identity in the final years of the dictatorship, and lent special significance to the environmental movements of the era.

## **Chapter Five. The Albufera Natural Park: Regionalism and Europeanization in the post-Franco era, 1975-1989**

On November 20, 1975, following a lengthy battle with Parkinson's disease and even lengthier anticipation among his political opponents, Generalissimo Franco died in a Madrid hospital, thirty-nine years after rising to power as the Head of the Spanish state. His appointed heir, Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón, was crowned King and sworn in two days later, promising loyalty to Franco's Fundamental Laws. Amidst tearful mourning on the right and celebration on the left, an atmosphere of apprehension and tension settled over the country. Could Francoism continue without Franco? Would the king follow in his predecessor's authoritarian footsteps, or would Spain become a liberal democracy on a par with other Western European countries? Progressive Spaniards took to the streets in numbers unparalleled since the prewar era, calling for the immediate dismantling of the state apparatus and the creation of a democratic government, while conservatives within the administration, including the former Minister of Information and Tourism Manuel Fraga, had opposition leaders arrested and threatened to "smash demonstrators to a pulp."<sup>1</sup>

Over the next seven years, in a process rife with tensions and conflicts, a new, democratic Spain took shape, haunted by its Francoist legacy but predominantly characterized by a

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<sup>1</sup> Pedro Costa Morata, quoted in P. Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain* (London: Methuen, 1986): 87.

decentralization of legislative authority and the expansion of the country's international connections. A series of dramatic reforms culminating in the passage of a national constitution in 1978 created the "State of the Autonomies," a political structure that recognized the right of "nationalities and regions" to self-government while maintaining "the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation."<sup>2</sup> By 1983 legislative authority over an array of policy matters devolved to seventeen Autonomous Communities, including the "historic nations" (the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia) and fourteen other areas, including Valencia, that asserted unique regional identities. National elections began in 1979, followed shortly thereafter by regional and local elections that brought many former activists to positions of power within the new governments.

The enormous uncertainty and instability that followed Franco's death contributed to an atmosphere in which pressing social and political issues, from women's rights to labor organization, diverted the attention of many of those who had been active in environmental movements in the early 1970s. The idea of local control over land use remained central to many of the new issues, however, echoing not only in the campaigns for regional autonomy but also in a variety of other prominent debates with environmental connections. Antinuclear activism, for instance, garnered some of the widest participation of any single-issue protest across Spain, with passionate participation by regional activists opposed to the expansion of central control over energy and the endangerment of local environmental and human health. The concerns of the neighborhood associations, moreover, grew even more prominent as urban populations found a newly receptive government willing to listen to their demands: in Valencia, one of the most

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<sup>2</sup> Spanish Constitution of 1978, Art. 2.

prominent such campaigns was an eight-year grassroots effort to turn the old riverbed of the Turia into a public park (1975-1983).

The Turia campaign, in fact, gained far more attention from working and middle-class Valencians than the Dehesa ever had. The proposed park wound directly through the heart of the city, making it far more accessible and immediate to urban residents than the severely-damaged Dehesa, which was more than an hour's walk away and hardly qualified as an urban park, despite being owned by the municipal government. With construction and privatization already halted there, the Dehesa's fate could no longer be framed in political terms. Indeed, in the years immediately following the cessation of construction, interest in the Dehesa came principally from the same conservationists "of birds and trees" who had first raised their voices against the urbanization a full decade earlier. The Dehesa campaign had garnered attention from a number of notable international scientists, and in the summer of 1974, at the height of the protests, *Las Provincias* published an extended interview with Gerardo Budowski, director of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Budowski expressed special concern for the Albufera's degradation, which he described as "a problem of global importance" that would require the collaboration of "the greatest local and foreign talents." As one of the most outstanding and important wetlands in the world, he advised, the lake's preservation should "not be considered as an onerous burden, but rather as an interesting heritage that could be used to produce profits through conscientious touristic exploitation."<sup>3</sup> But in the years following Franco's death, that advice would go unheeded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Rueda de prensa: El doctor Budowski habla de la Albufera y la Dehesa," *Las Provincias*, June 27, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Valencia's Transition-era city councils contracted a series of engineering firms for minor jobs such as protecting the forest from the sea winds, but those efforts failed spectacularly due to Spanish forestry engineers' almost total lack of training in non-productive, non-extractive methods of land management.

In April 1977, four years after Mayor Ramon Izquierdo permanently halted all construction and sales on the Dehesa and three years after the close of the press campaign to “save” the area, journalist Francisco Pérez Puche described the Dehesa disgustedly as “a lunar landscape – or, rather, a terrestrial landscape in agony after a thermonuclear explosion.”<sup>5</sup> The boardwalk and aborted coastal installations were in shambles, with corroded metal railings emerging perilously from piles of blowing sand. The razed sand dunes had left the remaining vegetation exposed and vulnerable to sea breezes, and the once-lush vegetation had withered under the combined onslaught of salty winds and construction. Urban Valencians continued to visit this degraded landscape each weekend, driving their cars up under the pine trees, picnicking and strolling through the woods, and in the process eroding fragile soils, exposing tree roots, scattering litter across the landscape, and inadvertently setting a series of fires that burned 20% of the remaining forest. Compounding these problems, the expansion of the port of Valencia just to the north of the Dehesa blocked sand deposition from ocean currents, accelerating beach erosion. The forestry engineers of the Nature Conservation Institute (ICONA), while unable or unwilling to correct any of these issues, continued to invest in anachronisms such as a partridge farm and an Asian carp hatchery, which further disrupted the area’s ecosystem (Figure 18).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Francisco Pérez Puche, “Saler 1977: Los fantasmas del pasado,” *Las Provincias*, April 19, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> *Valencia Atracción*, “Panorama turístico valenciano,” November 1978/10; see also “La playa de El Saler retrocede un metro por año,” *Hoja de Lunes*, October 2, 1989; “El Saler, un poco más cerca,” *Valencia Atracción*, September 1975/3; C.M., “La agonía de la Albufera,” *Triunfo*, August 25 1973, pp.18-23, 23; Paloma Mateache, interview with the author, Valencia, May 9 2011. The Dehesa’s degradation was later described in detail in the city’s Preliminary Studies for the Territorial Planning of the Dehesa of El Saler (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos para la Ordenación del Monte de la Dehesa del Saler*, April 1980.

**Figure 18: Comparative views of the same section of the Dehesa in mid-1960s and in 1974<sup>7</sup>**



The lake's condition was no better than that of the Dehesa. Steadily increasing contamination from urban and industrial sources and the introduction of progressively more toxic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers to the rice fields and other agricultural lands upstream overwhelmed the ecosystem over the course of the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> The human population residing within the Albufera's catchment area doubled between 1960 and 1970, while the number of industries rose by a factor of ten.<sup>9</sup> Sanitation and infrastructure lagged far behind, with factories and towns draining their waste directly into the canals.<sup>10</sup> Local industries included slaughterhouses, tanneries, and producers of plastics, chemicals, and paper, to name only some of those located closest to the lake, while waste from another 5000 factories and more than a million inhabitants reached the lake indirectly.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Photos from OTDA.

<sup>8</sup> Jose Manuel Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia: Datos para una política de soluciones," *Revista de Obras Públicas* (February-March 1983): 172-75; Jose Manuel Benet Granell, "El Proyecto de canal perimetral al sur de la Albufera," *Jornadas sobre la problemática de la Albufera* (Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> E. Vicente and Maria Miracle, "The Coastal Lagoon Albufera de Valencia: An Ecosystem under Stress," *Limnetica* 8 (1992): 89.

<sup>10</sup> José Manuel Taléns Mollá, "Descontaminación del Parque Natural de L'Albufera," 2000, unpublished, in possession of author.

<sup>11</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, *Estudio sobre la Contaminacion el el Lago de la Albufera*, December 1980, FDMA; Javier Núñez de Murga, "La Albufera, inundada, como siempre, de inmundicia," *Las Provincias*, January 23, 1994, 55.

Blue-green algae thrived in the high concentrations of phosphates and nitrogen flooding into the Albufera, turning the water an opaque brownish-green and starving rooted vegetation of light and oxygen. Dead algae and eroded soils settled thickly on the floor of the lake, leading engineers in the early 1970s to estimate that the lake would fill completely within fifteen years. Without rooted vegetation to provide food and habitat, populations of native species declined precipitously and many of the smaller and more sensitive species of fish, crustaceans, and plankton vanished completely. Hardy species like Asian carp, mullet, and of course the ubiquitous algae thrived in this altered environment, steadily overwhelming the populations of native species.<sup>12</sup>

As the successes of SEO and Adena during the Franco regime make clear, concern for environmental health was not always a political issue in Spain. Over the course of the 1970s, however, campaigns such as that of the Dehesa and manifestos penned by intellectuals such as Josep-Vicent Marques built a strong case for the conflation of an interest in “nature protection” with a progressive agenda based on a rejection of high capitalist society, including its offshoots: industrial pollution, unplanned urbanization, and nuclear energy. The personal experiences of many of the newly-elected local officials whose entrée into the political world had come through the neighborhood associations or other groups that had long linked social justice with environmental health reinforced this understanding of left-wing politics as essentially related to environmental protection. Like newly-elected municipal governments around the country, the center-left coalition government elected to Valencia’s city hall in 1979 included several former citizen-activists including leaders of workers’ rights groups, neighborhood associations, and

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<sup>12</sup> Vicente and Miracle, “The Coastal Lagoon,” 87 and 95; Núñez de Murga, “La Albufera, inundada;” Soria, J.M., M.R.Miracle, and E. Vicente, “Aporte de Nutrientes y Eutrofización de la Albufera de Valencia,” *Limnetica* 3 (1987); J. M. Soria, “Past, Present and Future of la Albufera of Valencia Natural Park,” *Limnetica*, 25 (2006): 139-40.



participants in “Aeorma” campaigns. Though forced to compromise with moderates and conservatives, these politicians and administrators were quick to implement many of the changes for which they had worked over the past decade, rapidly improving living conditions for thousands of urban residents and working people.<sup>13</sup>

Among the many social and legal changes implemented by the new government was a renewed focus on the environment. Almost immediately after taking office, the new Valencian city council ordered Vicente Gonzáles Móstoles, the architect who had coordinated much of the earlier protest, to coordinate a series of ecological and sociological studies with the objective of analyzing the damage caused by the aborted development and assessing possible remedies. For the ecological aspects of the report, Móstoles subcontracted to biologist Guillermo de Felipe, a radical progressive activist who had done occasional odd scientific jobs for the city in the past, and Felipe in turn recruited like-minded scientists from the local universities, notably biologist Victor Navarro, to assist him.<sup>14</sup> Felipe’s team spent the next six years producing a series of exhaustive scientific analyses of the Dehesa and the Albufera, an experience that would drive several members to form a nature-centered environmental group they called Agró (Valencian for “Heron,” after one of the lake’s most prominent denizens) as a means of expressing their conservationist politics in a personal as well as in an official capacity.

Felipe’s central conclusion, consistent with other expert opinions solicited by the city, was that the Dehesa, the Albufera, and the rice fields surrounding the lake formed a single

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<sup>13</sup> Many authors and observers have described this as the “decapitation” of Spanish civil society by the Socialist party, mollifying the masses and taking protest leaders off the streets without undertaking any of the more radical propositions voiced by the former opposition. García, “Urban Communities,” 69; Pedro Costa Morata, *Hacia la destrucción ecológica de España* (Grijalbo, 1985), 179; Marqués, *Ecología y Lucha de Clases*, 155; Francisco Pérez Puche, email to the author, February 7, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Guillermo de Felipe, interview with the author, Valencia, April 30 2012.

incorporated ecosystem, each part essential to the survival of the rest.<sup>15</sup> Despite substantial degradation, the area retained significant ecological and cultural value both as a bird habitat and as the site of “important traditional uses” such as farming, fishing, and recreation, but ongoing human actions continued to threaten these values.<sup>16</sup> Hunters in the rice fields killed thousands of birds each season, disregarding the many laws that protected endangered species. Agricultural chemicals spread by farmers poured down the canals into the lake, along with urban and industrial pollution from farther upstream. Most recently, in response to new market pressures, landowners had begun to drain or abandon their rice fields, selling their land to developers and speculators or shifting to new, more profitable crops.<sup>17</sup> To save the ecological and cultural value of one piece of the “Dehesa-Albufera ecosystem,” the scientists concluded, the Dehesa, the Albufera, and the rice fields all needed legal protections that would sharply curtail these abuses.<sup>18</sup>

The city accepted these scientific recommendations and tasked Felipe, whom it hired in late 1980 as the “Biologist Conservator of the Dehesa-Albufera,” with carrying out the necessary changes. Felipe set to work in the newly-formed Technical Office of the Dehesa-Albufera (OTDA), housed in an old ranger station in the forest. In order to protect the landscape, the scientists’ first step was to bar humans from entering the area at all (Figure 19). New rules

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<sup>15</sup> A concurrent study by an independent expert, commissioned by the lame-duck Provincial government just prior to its dissolution and replacement with the Autonomous Community, echoed these conclusions. Ignacio Docavo Alberti, *La Albufera de Valencia: Sus Peces y sus Aves*, (Valencia: Diputación Provincial de Valencia, 1979), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Consell de la Generalitat Valenciana. “Decreto 89/1986 de régimen jurídico del Parque Natural de la Albufera,” *Diari Oficial* 408 (July 23, 1986): 3091.

<sup>17</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Dehesa*; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos para la Ordenación del Lago de la Albufera de Valencia* (1984), 165, MCR; SEO-Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Informe sobre la situación actual de la Albufera de Valencia* (April 1984), FDMA.

<sup>18</sup> Guillermo de Felipe, interview with author, Valencia, June 7, 2011; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Lago*; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Dehesa*; “Aprobado por el Pleno: Hubo unanimidad, a pesar del debate,” *Las Provincias*, June 5, 1980; Ferrer Alpera, “Posible consulta popular sobre el futuro de El Saler,” *Levante*, May 20, 1980; Asociaciones de Vecinos, “Consideraciones sobre el plan del Monte de la Dehesa,” *Noticias*, March 8, 1983; Pedro Muelas, “El Supremo confirma el cese de licencias en la Devesa,” *Levante*, October 16, 1985.

prohibited driving or parking off-road, lighting fires, motocross racing, pulling up plants, littering, and making excessive noise that could disturb nesting birds.<sup>19</sup> In addition to uprooting eucalyptus saplings and removing abandoned construction materials, Felipe and his coworkers placed chains across many of the internal roads left by the development, tore up parking lots and streets, and planted bramble thickets to keep people from wandering into sensitive areas.<sup>20</sup> They closed the lakeshore, parts of the northern forest and dunes, and most of the southern half of the Dehesa to the public so as to “make possible the natural regeneration of the different ecosystems.”<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 19: Land use on the Dehesa, 1980.**<sup>22</sup>

Public areas are outlined in red.



<sup>19</sup> Jesús Sanz, “El pulmón de la ciudad, a pleno rendimiento,” *Diario de Valencia*, May 25, 1981.

<sup>20</sup> OTDA, *La Gestión de L'Albufera de Valencia y su Devesa* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, November 2000), 25, OTDA; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Plan Especial de Reforma Interior y de Protección del Monte de la Dehesa del Saler*, 1983, SP.

<sup>21</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, Pleno Extra Nov 28, 1980, AHMV; Felipe interview, Valencia, June 7 2011; OTDA, *La Gestión de L'Albufera*, 7; Jesús Sanz, “De la destrucción al disfrute popular,” *Diario de Valencia*, May 23, 1981.

<sup>22</sup> Map (modified) from SP.

The progressive agenda had clearly shifted over the course of the 1970s. Just a decade earlier the *Las Provincias* campaign had focused on the city's efforts to block the public from accessing the Dehesa, but now local papers reported approvingly on the OTDA's actions as a campaign to "transform this no-man's land into everyone's land."<sup>23</sup> The sense of ecosystem preservation as a boon to the community arose in no small part from public education efforts, spearheaded by Felipe and fellow Agró member Antonio Vizcaino, both working out of the OTDA. Starting in 1982 under the motto "This is Life!" the OTDA produced videos, guided tours, hosted school field trips, installed a permanent Information Center in the hamlet of El Saler, and printed informative pamphlets and posters inviting visitors to "get to know the Dehesa."<sup>24</sup> These materials emphasized the history of human use and abuse of the Dehesa, especially its near-destruction in the 1970s, and presented responsible, scientific conservation as its only means of salvation. They also made it clear that the conservation of this unique ecosystem was a point of specifically Valencian pride. The "Rules of Use," for instance, explained that restrictions on public access would ensure that "both the Valencians of today and those of future generations" could enjoy "a space that was collective, natural, and singularly unique."<sup>25</sup>

The narrative of conservation as a means of protecting Valencian patrimony meshed seamlessly with the new government's demonization of Franco-era politics. Francoist city

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<sup>23</sup> Sanz, "El pulmón de la ciudad." In their thoughtful analysis of New York's Central Park, Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar urge us to consider the "cultural dimension of a park as a public space," that is, the way in which people use the space, as well as the political and legal dimensions of ownership. While the Dehesa legally belonged to the public (the city), the reduced access permitted by OTDA rules severely curtailed its effectiveness as a free, nonexclusive space. The fact that OTDA scientists, in their environmental education campaigns, described the creation of a human-free wilderness as a "public good" that preserved the Dehesa for future generations adds an additional layer to this apparent contradiction. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Cornell University Press, 1992): 6.

<sup>24</sup> Felipe interview, Valencia, June 7 2011; Felipe interview, Valencia, April 30 2012; OTDA, "¡¡Esto es Vida!!" 1982, SP.

<sup>25</sup> OTDA, "Normes d'Ús," February 1982, SP.

officials, they noted, had sought to destroy the Dehesa just as the regime's repressive nationalism had sought to destroy Valencian identity. Now that democracy had been restored, the Socialists promised to restore the landscape to its former glory in the name of "Valencian lands for the Valencian people." Statements and publications from the city downplayed or erased the pivotal role played by Miguel Ramón Izquierdo, the last Francoist mayor, in saving the Dehesa from development, and promulgated a revised narrative in which the notion of conservation had originated entirely with grassroots activists and the democratic government. This selective revision of recent history, in which the OTDA and Agró were complicit, carefully repurposed anti-Franco slogans such as "the Dehesa is ours and we want it green" or "El Saler for the people," transforming them from populist demands for accessible public parks to calls for environmental preservation. In the process, the official narrative reflected a sense that regional identity in the post-Franco era was intrinsically tied to the Socialist agenda of protecting unique and ecologically important local landscapes.

This notion lay at the heart of a neo-Valencian agenda espoused by a growing population of educated urban elites. Valencia in the early 1980s was no longer the land of yeoman farmers depicted by Sorolla, Blasco Ibañez, and a half-century of hydraulic engineers. By the end of the dictatorship, less than 20% of the Valencian population still worked in agriculture, and that number would drop to around 13% over the next decade.<sup>26</sup> While many urbanites still saw agrarian life through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia, the population was increasingly distanced from the sort of experiential ties to the land held by those responsible for bringing crops to the city's overflowing markets. Instead, urban Valencians sought to forge a new identity that fit their altered circumstances.

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<sup>26</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Censos de Población.

When Navarro, Felipe, and other scientists founded Agró in 1981, they explicitly embraced Valencian nationalism as a guiding principle in their defense of local habitats. This decision matched trends elsewhere in Spain, especially in the “historic nationalities” of the Basque Country, Galicia, and Catalonia.<sup>27</sup> For these self-described “eco-nationalists,” conservation was a fundamental component of regional nation building.<sup>28</sup> In practice, this meant that “the integrity of Valencian lands” was more important than larger national or global environmental issues, and Agró members only rarely participated in cooperative campaigns or conferences with popular, Madrid-based, national environmental groups such as Adena or Environmentalists in Action (*Ecologistas en Acción*), despite obvious overlaps of their missions and ideologies. Like other Valencian progressive organizations of the era, Agró used the Valencian language in its newsletters, press releases, and publicity materials, creating a sense of insularity for members and sympathizers while impeding outside participation or interference. This adamant Valencian nationalist identity bolstered members’ claims to represent the interests of the “Valencian people,” and served as a strong rhetorical point in their negotiations with the press and politicians in the years to come.

Agró’s wholehearted embrace of Joan Fuster’s pan-Catalan ideology, combined with Marqués’ emphasis on local landscapes and environments as the heart of Valencian identity, highlights the essentially urban nature of neo-Valencianism vis-à-vis older, land-based notions of regional belonging. Before Fuster, notions of Valencian identity tended to focus on historical ties to the land and connections to specific places forged through the labor of generations. Farmers whose ancestors had physically created the landscapes around the city, filling in the Albufera to

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. Santiago Vilanova and Iñaki Bárcena, both quoted in Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 72. This regionalism would later impede efforts to form a Spanish Green Party, as extreme political fragmentation and the anarchist tendencies of a significant faction within the movement translated into poor results at the polls.

<sup>28</sup> Acció Ecologista-Agró, “El Ecologismo que Queremos,” June 1993, FDMA.

build rice paddies or digging canals to irrigate new groves, possessed a unique sense of ownership of those landscapes and were, as we have seen, idealized in art, literature, and politics as the quintessential hard-working, independent Valencians.

This innate connection to the land was not, however, accessible to those who lived outside of the rural sphere, which by the 1970s constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. The neo-Valencian emphasis on language and aesthetic/scientific landscapes facilitated the assumption of Valencian authenticity by those whose lives were not connected to the land in the personal, generational ways of the agricultural population. By studying the language and asserting a progressive, modernist Valencian identity as a contrast to that of the conservative Castilian core, even those without deep roots in the land could lay claim to it. Most Agró members, for example, were not originally from Valencia: some had immigrated to the city in their youth from as far away as Ceuta or the Basque country, and others had spent significant time away from the area for studies or work. None had ever worked as farmers, nor did they come from farming families in the area. They were highly educated, predominantly with degrees in science and law; they generally spoke at least some English or French; and almost all had travelled internationally. By their own admission, most “never really learned to speak Valencian” or spoke it “very badly” despite using it exclusively in organizational communiqués and propaganda, picking it up in adult life through classes or conversations.<sup>29</sup> Navarro, one of the few members who was born in Valencia, nonetheless spoke primarily Castilian in his youth and equates his interest in Valencian with his interest in the preservation of endangered species: he wanted to revive it because it was “in danger of extinction.”<sup>30</sup> How well one spoke Valencian

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<sup>29</sup> Victor Navarro, interview with the author, Valencia, May 2 2012; Guillermo de Felipe, interview with the author, Valencia, April 30 2012; Ignacio Lacomba, interview with the author, Valencia, April 26 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Navarro interview, Valencia, May 2, 2012.

mattered less, for the purpose of claiming a Valencian identity, than the political act of speaking it at all.

While neo-Valencian identity formed in part around a celebration of local language and culture, it was also defined by its cultural and political distance from Castile. Fuster's pan-Catalan concept brought Valencians some obvious compatriots in the other "Catalan-speaking lands," notably Barcelona, but beyond that local network Valencians looked north to Europe for their political and cultural alliances. "Europeanization," in the sense of making local culture more consistent with the norms of the flourishing Western democracies, was a central objective not only for Valencia's new government but also for Spain as a whole. While the national government negotiated the country's accession to the European Community, the regions sought to forge their own ties to Europe. Whereas the national process of Europeanization would primarily be achieved through a top-down process of policy change, then, the regions focused on the horizontal transfer of ideas between member states, and especially from the politically and economically powerful states of north and central Europe outward to the peripheries.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most important of these ideas was that of environmental conservation, which in many ways echoed the "greening" of European policy both transnationally and in the form of national green movements in France, Germany, and England. UNESCO inaugurated its "Man and the Biosphere" program in 1970, and France created the world's first Ministry of the Environment in 1971, signaling an increased profile for environmental issues but accomplishing little concrete change. In the watershed year of 1972, which saw the publication of *The Limits to*

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<sup>31</sup> E. Bomberg and J. Peterson, "Policy transfer and "Europeanization: Passing the Heineken test?" *Queens Papers on Europeanization 2* (University of Belfast 2000); Andrew Jordan and Duncan Liefferink, "The Europeanization of national environmental policy," in *Environmental Policy in Europe: The Europeanization of National Environmental Policy*, ed. Andrew Jordan and Duncan Liefferink (London: Routledge, 2004): 6; A. Héritier, D. Kerwer, C. Knill, D. Lehmkuhl, M. Teutsch, and A. C. Douillet, *Differential Europe* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).



*Growth* by a concerned group of international businessmen and scientists as well as the formation of the United Nations Environment Program through the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, independent national environmental movements around Europe first became aware of each other and began to work in concert for large-scale changes.<sup>32</sup> By the time Spain joined the European Community in 1986, European cooperation and identity were closely tied to new environmental policies, if not practices.

Conservation of ecologically valuable regional spaces, then, offered Valencian politicians a way to prove their “Europeanness” to an international audience, as well as to instill cosmopolitan values in their constituency. Agró scientists seized on the opportunities this image-making provided them to achieve their own conservation goals, and along with their longstanding aversion to Spanish nationalism contributed to a sense of themselves as “more European than Spanish.” While still eschewing entanglements with Madrid-based groups, they formed loose alliances with organizations in other peripheral regions and with international groups, helping to bypass national authority and appeal directly to Brussels.<sup>33</sup> Their education and personal experiences gave them many of the tools and connections necessary to navigate legal and bureaucratic complexities, which they used adroitly to press their legislative and cultural agenda in local and regional government.

One of the first tests of these skills came in 1984, when Felipe submitted a proposal to the city council asking for the designation of 21,120 hectares (52,200 acres) of land and water composing the “Dehesa-Albufera ecosystem” as a Valencian natural park to protect its scientific,

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<sup>32</sup> B. Varillas and H. Da Cruz, *Para una historia del movimiento ecologista* (Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones, 1981), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Navarro interview, May 2, 2012.

pedagogic, and cultural value.<sup>34</sup> While providing many of the legal protections of the better-known “national parks,” under Spanish law the designation and management of a natural park fell under regional jurisdiction. By designating a natural park rather than a national park, the land would stay under the authority of the Valencian Autonomous Community’s regional government, the Generalitat, rather than that of Madrid. Felipe’s OTDA, meanwhile, would continue to collaborate with the Generalitat’s new park administration on projects in the city-owned Dehesa and lake.

In addition to this jurisdictional advantage, the law on natural parks was also designed to protect substantially modified landscapes and certain “traditional” human activities within the area considered essential to its scenic, ecological, and cultural value.<sup>35</sup> Since the first national parks were declared in the United States in the late nineteenth century, the parks concept had been applied around the world to pristine or wild regions, often to showcase unique or especially beautiful geological or biological features. Even when the land had in fact been occupied, abandoned, and modified by human activities many times throughout their histories, as is the case across Europe, park narratives presented them as timeless and museum-like, untouched and thus undegraded by the hand of man. Compounding this aesthetic preference, Franco’s regime had been reluctant to set land aside for nature protection if it might serve economically productive purposes. Consequently, the parks he declared were all located in uncultivated areas like Doñana or the Canary Islands.

As environmental historians and analysts have frequently pointed out, the dichotomy between pristine and degraded environments left little place for positive human-nature

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<sup>34</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Plan Especial de Reforma Interior*; OTDA, *La Gestión de L’Albufera*, 10; SEO-Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Informe sobre la situación actual de la Albufera de Valencia*, April 1984, FDMA.

<sup>35</sup> Jefatura del Estado. “Ley 15/1975, de 2 de mayo, de espacios naturales protegidos,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 107 (May 5 1975): 9419.

interactions. In the postwar era, this understanding began to change in tandem with new understandings of the role of the environment in human quality of life. “Nature Parks” that combined preservation, recreation, and traditional economic activities came to play a significant role in German environmental management, while French activists emphasized the need to preserve “a countryside in which rural people practice agriculture.”<sup>36</sup> The Spanish law on protected spaces, passed a few months before Franco’s death, similarly incorporated the concept of a “natural park” for the protection of coproduced rural landscapes, legally recognizing their ecological and cultural value.<sup>37</sup>

To that end, Felipe and other advocates of the Albufera’s protection argued that it was the ecosystem’s coexistence with human activities that gave the rice fields their special value and justified their protection. The park proposal described the need to maintain “the presence in the area of important traditional uses and exploitation which, in interaction with the natural ecosystem, have determined the current characteristic environmental conditions.” The park’s fundamental goal was to make “the orderly use of the space” for traditional and recreational activities, which were, according to the scientists, entirely compatible with “the maintenance of ecological values.”<sup>38</sup>

While internal Valencian politics and the passion of local scientists and advocates brought Felipe’s proposal to the table, the Generalitat’s approval and subsequent declaration of the Albufera Natural Park in 1986 was a product of the interplay between regional, national, and international politics. The same year, after a decade of negotiation, Spain finally gained entry to the European Community (EC) and the national government set to work enacting the European

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard Charbonneau, *Sauver nos régions*, 175, quoted in Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, 134; Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Ley de Espacios Naturales Protegidos.

<sup>38</sup> Decreto de régimen jurídico, 3091.

*acquis*, bringing the legal code into line with member state requirements on issues ranging from human rights to economics. Among these was an extensive slate of new environmental regulations, imposing strict standards on everything from industrial pollution, to urban development, to species protection.

European environmental policy as it was applied in the Mediterranean countries (and, later, in the new states of the Eastern expansion) in some ways mirrored the north-south divide of global environmental governance. On a global scale, transnational environmental policies have almost always been drafted by leaders in industrial countries based on their own experiences and understanding of global needs. Forced to accept such policies as part of the terms of their accession to governing bodies, less-developed states then assume the burden of implementing environmental restrictions that not only fail to address local problems and impose significant checks on economic development, but which place a disproportionate burden for global conservation squarely on those regions with lowest rates of industrial development. Though the economic and cultural divides within the EC's member states are significantly narrower than those of the world as a whole, the same dynamic is at work in European environmental politics. Having destroyed much of their own biodiversity in previous centuries and decades, the original member states responsible for drafting European environmental policy, primarily Germany, insisted on strict protections for the remaining habitats and species on the continent, a disproportionate number of which lay within the relatively rural areas of southern Europe. Unsurprisingly, the convergence in continental environmental policy came into stark conflict with national traditions, physical realities, and local identities.

Eager to at last gain access to the EC's development funds and new markets, Spanish delegates declined to negotiate the terms by which they accepted these regulations, though it was

immediately obvious that there would be serious problems with their implementation. Spaniards not only lacked the training, technology, and funding to fully enforce the European code, but the social will as well. In the words of Paloma Mateache, a biologist who has spent more than thirty years working on environmental management for the Valencian Community, “all the ideas arrived from Europe, not from internal convictions.”<sup>39</sup> Full implementation of the new laws would require a complete bureaucratic overhaul, massive infrastructural developments, and a sea change in the public’s understandings of research use and personal responsibility.<sup>40</sup> None of these were likely to happen in time to meet the EC’s deadlines.

The decentralized nature of the Spanish government further complicated implementation. While the 1978 constitution reserved authority for international agreements and “organic” laws to the national government, each of the seventeen Autonomous Communities had responsibility for designing, approving, and implementing its own independent plan for execution of these broad mandates. Faced with a dazzling array of new mandates, a lack of technical expertise, a lack of political pressure, and chronic underfunding, the ACs logically started with the low-hanging fruit. Pollution reduction and infrastructure creation would be costly, time-consuming, and socially disruptive, but the protection of isolated areas as parks and wildlife preserves offered a relatively inexpensive and uncontentious way for regions to demonstrate their ideological alliance with the European core. Even as they routinely failed to enforce major European regulations on emissions and sanitation, regional governments created hundreds of new protected habitats throughout the 1980s.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mateache interview, Valencia, May 9, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Millán 267, 272-80.

<sup>41</sup> Between 1983 and 1995 Spanish governments declared more than 450 protected spaces. Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 166; Millán, 278-81.

The Albufera Natural Park, Valencia's first protected natural space, came into being during this legislative rush to meet European standards. The area's particular physical characteristics, namely its ability to house immense populations of wild birds, made it a high-profile target for such efforts. Bird protection has a long European tradition, dating back to the late nineteenth century in northern countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Because birds migrate across political boundaries, transnational cooperation has always been essential for their protection, and in the early part of the century northern Europeans frequently lamented the indiscriminate slaughter of migratory birds by less-sensitized Italians and Spaniards. As a result, one of the European Community's first environmental laws had been the 1979 European Council Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds, which redefined migratory birds as the patrimony of all Europeans, outlined basic prohibitions against egg-gathering and indiscriminate hunting, and created a list of valuable bird habitats in member states where special protection measures would be required.<sup>42</sup> Inclusion in the list became a mark of prestige for local governments eager to prove their green credentials.

For decades, as a side effect of its relatively low rate of industrialization as well as the happy coincidence of its geographic location and its generally mild climate, Spain has had the most diverse bird population in Western Europe. Iberian lakes and marshes not only provide year-round habitat for hundreds of native species, but also serve as stopovers and wintering grounds for birds migrating between Europe and Africa. As one of the few wetlands to survive Franco-era land transformations and hydraulic construction, and despite its severe degradation, the Albufera was the third-largest bird habitat in the country in the 1980s. In cooperation with

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<sup>42</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, "Saving Migrants: A Transnational Network Supporting Supranational Bird Protection Policy," in *Transnational Networks in Regional Integration: Governing Europe 1945-83*, ed. Eolfram Kaiser, Brigitte Leucht, and Michael Gehler (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave 2010), 178.

the city, SEO members ringed birds, conducted censuses, carried out studies on the impacts of local hunting, and participated in international scientific campaigns with the objective of ensuring that “the Albufera be recognized once again in all national and international scientific circles as one of the most important wetlands in Spain, and fundamental for migratory species.” Among other findings, the scientists learned that the area was home to over two hundred and fifty species of birds, of which eighty were listed as endangered, making it one of the preeminent bird habitats in Western Europe. These birds included huge permanent populations of grey herons, little egrets, and various ducks and seasonal visitors including flamingos, black-tailed godwits, and hundreds of African migrants. Volunteers and recreational birdwatchers frequently spotted locally and internationally endangered species, including marbled teal, ferruginous or fudge duck, Eurasian coot and purple swamp hen. Moreover, while the city’s turn-of-the-century efforts to protect the area had focused on the lake and Dehesa, SEO researchers discovered that the “artificial wetlands” of the rice fields were just as, if not more, important to the overall ecosystem, providing birds with 90% of their food and serving as a “green filter” that absorbed large amounts of nitrogen and phosphates from the water.<sup>43</sup>

This knowledge was local conservationists’ most potent weapon in the effort to protect the area. One SEO scientist described how hunters “kill the birds that are born in Europe and come to die in the Albufera,” and emphasized that “this is not Valencia’s personal property. If there are 60,000 ducks in the winter, not all of them belong to us, not even the majority.”<sup>44</sup> In its official report, SEO insisted on the importance of committing Valencia to “recover [the

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<sup>43</sup> Pedro Muelas, “Empieza el Control de Aves en la Albufera,” *Levante Magazín*, November 3, 1985, 4; Ignacio Lacomba, *Informe sobre la importancia del arrozal en la conservación de la integridad ecológica del Parque Natural de la Albufera*, July 16, 1993, FDMA.

<sup>44</sup> Muelas, “Empieza el Control de Aves,” 5.

Albufera] for European natural patrimony.”<sup>45</sup> Such arguments reflected the fundamental justifications of the Wild Birds Directive, and asserted bird conservation as an obvious way to raise Valencia’s international profile. Still more appealing to local politicians, Felipe pointed out that the park could be a source of future funding from the EC, emphasizing that because of the overriding importance of bird habitat in European law, European financial and ideological support for the park would “depend on the amount of the wetland that we are able to preserve,” that is, the area of rice fields that could be included within the park boundaries.<sup>46</sup>

The icing on the cake for local politicians was the assurance that while park declaration offered significant benefits for the region it would not necessarily require significant outlays of money or resources from the government. Neither the Birds Directive nor the Ramsar Convention on wetlands of international importance, another designation pursued by conservationists for the Albufera, imposed any new duties on signatories beyond vague requirements that member states “conserve and protect” the habitats and species within their borders – a general proscription that lacked specificity or enforceability.<sup>47</sup> Instead, they simply highlighted areas of exceptional biodiversity and provided international recognition of their value to the global environment.

To a significant extent, this international context explains the Generalitat’s unexpectedly positive reception to Felipe’s park proposal. By the time the proposal came up for debate at the Generalitat, Valencian authorities themselves had begun to describe the Albufera as an integral “European” wetland in official documents; as “a basic piece of the Western European wetlands

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<sup>45</sup> SEO-Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Informe sobre la situación actual*.

<sup>46</sup> “El Director del parque de l’Albufera pide a las instituciones que compren suelo en la zona,” *El País*, March 25, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Alfonso Mulero Mendigorrí, *La protección de espacios naturales en España: Antecedentes, contrastes territoriales, conflictos y perspectivas* (Madrid: Ediciones Mundi-Prensa, 2002), 175.



system”; and as one of the most important such spaces in the country or the continent.<sup>48</sup> “We are dealing with one of the most important wetlands in Europe, the protection of which has been demanded by many international organizations,” argued Rafael Blasco, the Valencian Minister for Public Works, at one legislative hearing.<sup>49</sup> This compelling case swiftly overwhelmed the angry outcry from local landowners, who objected in the strongest terms to the inclusion of rice fields and other private property in the protected area, and Felipe’s plans passed with no major revisions. Announcing the declaration to the public, Blasco continued to emphasize the international importance of the Generalitat’s actions, describing the Dehesa-Albufera ecosystem as “the most important in the Valencian Community, and one of the most important in Spain and in Europe.”<sup>50</sup> Months after the park’s declaration, the Valencian tourism trade magazine echoed such sentiments, describing the Albufera as “not merely local heritage, but rather universal, a European ornithological wealth that comes principally from remote places in distant latitudes, and which we must harbor and preserve.”<sup>51</sup> When the park was listed under the Ramsar Convention in 1988 and then the Birds Directive in 1989, these achievements immediately appeared on promotional materials for the city and community of Valencia as evidence of the area’s “green” credentials and connections to the European community.<sup>52</sup>

While some within the government, and of course the conservationists themselves, genuinely hoped to restore and protect the ecosystem, even those with little interest in enforcing the new park regulations understood its declaration as a savvy political move. The Albufera Park

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<sup>48</sup> See e.g., Conselleria de Obras Pùblicas y Transportes, *Programa de Actuaciones para la protecci3n y regeneraci3n integral de la Albufera y su entorno, Memoria Valorada*, July 1986, OTDA.

<sup>49</sup> *El Temps*, “L’ Albufera: primer parc natural valencià,” September 8, 1986:32.

<sup>50</sup> José Miguel García, “Rafael Blasco: ‘Quien pretenda montarse una campaa personal con la Albufera se equivoca,’” *Las Provincias*, August 26, 1986, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Rafael Cebrian, “La Albufera y el Rac3 de l’Olla,” *Valencia Atracci3n*, March-April 1987:24.

<sup>52</sup> Heatherington, *Wild Sardinia*, 153.

put Valencia on the map in terms of European-style conservationism; it looked good to the growing number of urban voters interested in green politics; and it offered the potential for future funding from EC sources designed to encourage restoration and protection of valuable habitats. In a more metaphysical sense, however, the declaration of the Albufera Natural Park was part of a transnational trend towards constituting regional identity in an era of Europeanization. In peripheral regions around Spain over the late 1980s and early 1990s, regional identity took shape in an obvious backlash to Franco-era centrality but took the form of a cosmopolitan, Europe-centered outlook focused on introducing cultural and social mores commonly found in other major urban cities across the continent. This reshaping of regional identity was not uniform, but rather embodied a specifically urban idea of what it meant to be Valencian at the end of the twentieth century. As such, many rural people experienced European ideas and policies as foreign, inorganic values that imposed severe social and economic burdens and ran counter to their own notions of regional authenticity, even as they embraced certain aspects of globalized trade and information networks. The grassroots movement that arose in opposition to the Albufera Natural Park was, to a significant extent, a manifestation of this ideological conflict.

## **Chapter Six. A View from the Rice Fields: Conservation with Common Sense**

On a warm spring evening in 2012, the air in Sueca is filled with the scent of orange blossoms and the sound of many of the town's 30,000 inhabitants strolling through the main plaza and gathering on terraces outside the bars. We are running late for a meeting, but José Segarra, director of the Albufera Natural Park since 1999, insists on giving me the complete tour of his hometown, pointing out the ornate facades of mansions sandwiched between 1970s-era apartment buildings; the massive church (one of two) that rivals Valencia's cathedral in size; the 18th-century city hall filled with wooden carvings and paintings of rice farmers in the Albufera. All are remnants of the town's heyday, when the Albufera's rice fields made its most prominent citizens rich. Today, while members of the older generations are eager to share their memories of work in the rice fields, young Suecans leave each morning for jobs in the city as bankers, construction workers, and attorneys. Still, Sueca is filled with reminders of the lake and the rice. As Segarra explains, "the town, the rice, and the Albufera are inextricable."<sup>1</sup>

José Luís Mateses, the septuagenarian former president of the Sueca Irrigators' Community, meets us outside a social club on the main square. Within moments of our introduction he is telling me of his many visits to Latin America: Venezuela, Colombia, Costa

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<sup>1</sup> José Segarra, interview with the author, Sueca, April 25 2012.

Rica, Cuba. Every winter, after the rice harvest is in and the fields are flooded to create winter habitat for the park's protected birds, he takes a trip for a month or two to explore foreign national parks. His favorite voyage, he says with an excited smile, was to see the Orinoco River. When I ask him why he chooses ecotourism for his vacations, he shrugs. "I'm a rural man," he says. "Cities get me down."<sup>2</sup>

The last in a long line of Valencian rice farmers, Mateses has been farming his family's land since he was ten. He and his brother have purchased the lands of friends and neighbors as they retired without heirs over the past few decades, and together the two currently work more than 60 hectares (148 acres) of rice paddies. None of his three adult daughters are interested in carrying on the family tradition, nor are their husbands, but Mateses insists, "I don't care if my daughters don't want to cultivate the land. What I want is that it is conserved for them, so that they can go to the fields and hear the frogs and see the birds. But I want it to be conserved with common sense."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1980s, Mateses joined with more than eight thousand other rice farmers to oppose the declaration of the Albufera Natural Park, a legal designation that embodied what they understood as the antithesis of "common sense" conservation. The centrality of bird conservation to the Albufera's ecological value necessitated the inclusion of private rice fields in the park's declaration, which placed significant restrictions on local landowners' ability to adapt to changing economic circumstances. For almost a decade, Mateses and his neighbors would angrily protest these changes in a series of demonstrations, legal claims, and civil disobedience intended to undermine environmental protections and to reassert traditional Valencian identity in the face of Europeanization. But this opposition cannot easily be dismissed as a manifestation of

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<sup>2</sup> José Luís Mateses, interview with the author, Sueca, April 25 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012.

their lack of interest in the natural environment. Instead, it was in large part an expression of the farmers' frustration with being made to bear the burden of changing regional and international priorities as Spain continued the process of bringing its institutions and legislation into line with those of other western democracies. The rapid opening of national markets, decline of protectionist agricultural policies, and application of conservationist restrictions on land use converged on rural people, creating contradictory pressures to increase production while reducing their impact on the environment. The imposition of a natural park for the benefit of scientists, foreigners, and other elites challenged not only the farmers' right to manage their fields as they saw fit, but also the legitimacy of local experiential knowledge and the place of agriculture in the Valencian cultural imagination.

This chapter explores the social and political changes that underlay confrontations between farmers and conservationists in the Albufera in the late 1980s. Coinciding with massive demographic shifts, the opening of global markets, and the onset of complex and often-contradictory international regulations on agriculture and the environment, these confrontations represented a clash between rural and urban values in an era of rapid modernization. Farmers' and scientists' widely divergent understandings of the costs and benefits of European integration, in particular, played a central role in the debate. As such, the conflict was a direct consequence of the post-Franco re-scaling of Spanish politics and of the symbiosis between increasing transnational connections and evolving regional identities. This chapter suggests that rice farmers' opposition to the park failed because their vision of Valencianness relied on traditions and history to which they themselves had a weakening connection, and which urban Valencians rejected in favor of modern sensibilities embodied in conservationism.

Though the Generalitat imagined the Albufera Natural Park as a multi-use space within which the farmers could coexist with tourists, scientists, and wildlife, the derision and outrage with which farmers greeted news of the park's declaration in the summer of 1986 attested to their belief that it represented an unsustainable challenge to their way of life. The park's boundaries, which Felipe and his colleagues had drawn purely on the basis of hydrology and biology, included not only the city's property on the lake and the Dehesa, but more than 14,000 hectares (34,595 acres) of privately-owned lands lying within thirteen different municipalities (Figure 20). This overwrote the social and economic criteria upon which farmers had based their own sense of the land, including proximity to irrigation sources, private ownership, and municipal boundaries. Proposed regulations included restrictions on the types and amounts of chemicals the farmers could apply, on when and how they tilled their fields, and on the annual schedule of flooding and draining.<sup>4</sup> Property owners could not dig canals, repair dams, or build so much as a shed without express permission from the Generalitat. Farmers could not grow anything other than rice, in order to ensure an annual supply of flooded wetlands for bird habitat, and their land was permanently zoned as agricultural. Those who had planned to build on their land for personal or commercial use, or to change their crops to meet market demands, now saw these expectations dashed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, "Proyecto Decreto por el que se declara Parque Natural a la Albufera," February 1986, correspondencia, 9/1716-28, AHGV; EPYPSA, *Plan Especial de Protección del Parque Natural de la Albufera* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> AVA representative, quoted in Ernest Garcia and Maria Cabrejas. "Medio Ambiente y conflicto social: El caso de la Albufera de Valencia," *Política y sociedad* 23 (1996): 86.

**Figure 20: The Albufera Natural Park**

The Park boundaries, outlined in black, redefined three distinct geographical features - the lake, the Dehesa, and the rice fields - as a single ecological system. It also encompassed parts of thirteen municipalities (colored blocks), including several urbanized areas and inland citrus orchards.



The effect of these environmental restrictions must be understood within the context of international economic and political changes occurring simultaneously. Despite significant protective tariffs under Franco, as the rice market expanded during the twentieth century Valencia's high costs of production had become a serious problem. While farmers had responded to rising agricultural prices in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by cultivating previously unused land, they now focused instead on increasing yields from the lands already under cultivation.<sup>6</sup> On average, Valencian farmers owned less than two hectares (five acres) of land apiece, and tended to eschew farming collectives that shared machinery, storage space, and other equipment to reduce costs. Despite significant increases in the amount of herbicides, pesticides,

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<sup>6</sup> Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, ch. 5.

and chemical fertilizers used in the region, for financial reasons most of them continued to rely at least in part on low-tech, labor-intensive methods (Figure 21).<sup>7</sup> As the market grew more competitive, many farmers on the outskirts of the rice-growing region switched to fruit and vegetable cultivation, which brought higher prices, or sold their land to developers. By 1980 the area around the Albufera was the only rice-growing area left in Valencia, and many of the remaining holdouts were considering selling out or converting their fields to other uses.<sup>8</sup> The park's regulations precluded that possibility, cutting off their last avenue of economic escape, without offering subsidies or compensation in return.

**Figure 21: Rice farming in the Albufera, 1983.<sup>9</sup>**



European Community accession negotiations for Spain, as for Greece and Portugal, had revolved around several key issues, including membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the terms under which their massive agricultural sectors could be incorporated into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In 1962, when the original EEC members voted the CAP into force, Europe's agricultural goals were to increase production, stabilize markets, and

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<sup>7</sup> "La industria arrocera fija precios a la baja," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 1990, 10; "El arroz se salva de la crisis del campo," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, June-July 1993, 7; Simpson, *Spanish Agriculture*, 139.

<sup>8</sup> EPYPSA, *Plan Especial de Protección*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Photo from Museo Etnográfico de Valencia, taken as part of an ethnographic study of local rice farmers.



ensure the availability of supplies, a fair standard of living for farmers, and reasonable prices to consumers. To achieve those ends, a council composed of member states' Ministers of Agriculture agreed on annual "target prices" for each regulated commodity and maintained those prices through import levies, export subsidies, and intervention buying of surpluses.

In theory, a target price should be set at a level sufficient for even the least efficient farmers in the EC to gain "an adequate income" from their crops. In practice, however, those who increased their efficiency could expect significantly higher profits. Freed from the risk that overproduction would drive prices down, large, efficient producers in wealthy states increased their yields at unprecedented levels. Even with guaranteed prices, small farmers throughout Europe struggled to compete with large ones, as their real incomes dropped. Simultaneously, the increased reliance on fertilizers, phytosanitary chemicals, and mechanized agriculture to increase production created new environmental problems and food safety concerns. Though many member states achieved complete self-sufficiency in food production within ten years, thousands of small producers were forced out of business altogether.

By the mid-1970s, Brussels's storage of surplus crops had become financially onerous, and the Council of Agricultural Ministers decided to alleviate the burden by subsidizing exports. The dumping of European crops on the international market, however, predictably angered foreign producers whose own farmers suffered plummeting prices while finding European markets virtually closed to their own more expensive goods. Many of those countries, especially the United States and Australia, found themselves forced to choose between allowing their farmers to fail or funding their own subsidies to enable competition with Europe. The cost of the CAP to the EC itself, meanwhile, continued to rise, and by the time of Spanish accession it

already absorbed half of the EC's entire budget.<sup>10</sup> All of this led London's *Economist* magazine to call the CAP the "single most idiotic system of economic mismanagement that the rich western countries have ever devised."<sup>11</sup>

Despite the many evident problems and an inherent wariness of "a profound change of adaptation to a common agricultural policy established from Brussels," Valencian farmers at first expressed cautious optimism with regard to Spanish accession in the EC. The CAP's "protection of community markets relative to outsiders and the support of internal prices and markets through intervention prices,"<sup>12</sup> they hoped, could open up new markets for their products while raising prices domestically, and AVA suggested that it might even compensate for the loss of Franco-era protectionism. However, the terms of Spanish accession were disappointing from the start. Spanish farmers initially received lower subsidies than their Italian and French competitors, and AVA accused the EC of "abandoning the traditional policy of market support" with steadily reduced prices, anti-production fees and penalties, and new budgetary restrictions.<sup>13</sup> National farm lobbyists accused Spanish negotiators of sacrificing agricultural interests for the greater social and political benefits of integration, allowing a flood of cheap produce from northern and central Europe into Spanish markets, thereby undermining domestic production.<sup>14</sup>

By the late 1980s, then, Albufera rice farmers' economic prospects were defined far more by decisions made in far-off boardrooms than by Spanish diets, environments, or culture.<sup>15</sup> Their tiny individual land holdings, high labor costs, and relative lack of machinery and chemicals

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<sup>10</sup> Rolf Moehler, "The internal and external forces driving CAP reform," in *The perfect storm: The political economy of the Fischler Reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy*, ed. Johan F.M. Swinnen (Center for European Policy Studies, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> *Economist*, "Europe's farm farce," September 29, 1990, 15.

<sup>12</sup> "El Campo en Lucha," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, Jan 1991, 4.

<sup>13</sup> SEDES16; "El Campo en Lucha," 5.

<sup>14</sup> Pedro Barato, national president of ASAJA, "Situación y perspectivas de futuro de la PAC," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, Mar-April 1996, 5.

<sup>15</sup> "La industria arrocera fija precios a la baja," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 1990, 10.

contributed to exceptionally high production costs, especially compared to the large, efficient Italian farms that produced similar short-grain rice varieties and received the full CAP subsidies.<sup>16</sup> European production of short-grain rice reached surplus levels by the late 1980s, even as domestic demand declined, both factors driving market prices steadily downwards. Increasingly, Albufera farmers found that the sale of their crops did not even cover their costs of production.<sup>17</sup> Between 1983 and 1990, agricultural incomes across the Autonomous Community of Valencia declined by 40%, and Valencian farmers lamented that “our income is farther each day from that of the other sectors.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, international economic pressures encouraged Valencian farmers to “modernize” and increase production, even as park regulations prevented them from doing so. While farmers outside the park abandoned rice in favor of onions, citrus, pigs, and other more profitable uses of the land, those within the park’s boundaries were forced to grow rice or do nothing at all with their land.<sup>19</sup> In the words of one farmer, “if the park didn’t exist, some lands would increase in value, because like it or not, they would go from solely rice cultivation that is going to leave you in poverty to having a good business and being able to sell it....It’s very important to us that we cannot change our crops.”<sup>20</sup>

Pressed to the brink of ruin by market conditions, marginalized by an increasingly urban society, and now demonized as polluters and habitat-destroyers by ecologists, rice farmers took

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<sup>16</sup>“Una gran asamblea para quien lo quiera entender,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 1989, 5.

<sup>17</sup> José Luis Mateses, interview with the author, Sueca, April 25 2012; “Propuestas para equilibrar los mercados de arroz en la CEE,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, March 1991, 15; “Arroz largo subvencionado,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, June 1992, 16; “Arroz se paga ya a 47 pesetas el kilo en el campo,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, November-December 1992, 25; “El arroz puede alcanzar una cosecha récord,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, September 1991, 8; Francisco Astorga Ramírez, “La evolución del sector arrocerero en la Comunidad Valenciana,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, September 1989, 5.

<sup>18</sup> “El Campo en Lucha,” 5.

<sup>19</sup> Junta Rectora del Parque Natural de l’Albufera, *Informe sobre las transformaciones Agrarias en el Ambito del Parque Natural de l’Albufera, Actas de la Junta Rectora*, May 10, 1988, OGPA.

<sup>20</sup> AVA, quoted in Garcia and Cabrejas, “Medio Ambiente y Conflicto Social,” 86.

to the streets and to the press to defend their rights. The newly-formed Valencian Farmers' Association (*Asociación Valenciana de Agricultores*, henceforth AVA), which represented about 80% of the farmers in Valencia and essentially all of the rice farmers, organized and coordinated many of the protests and press conferences, at times held in conjunction with the owners of illegal businesses within the park and a small but passionate group of hunters.<sup>21</sup> In protests, interviews, and petitions, the farmers espoused a vision of Valencianism derived from personal experience in the countryside, radically different from the cosmopolitan and scientific vision of the Agró eco-nationalists. Citing their own labor as well as that of their ancestors, they described the land as inseparable from those who worked it and themselves as both the traditional embodiment and the best guardians of Valencian heritage.

By the fall of 1986, just months after the park's initial declaration, the Generalitat had received a total of two hundred and fifty-six written objections calling the park "totally disproportionate and outside of any logic" and demanding that the boundaries be redrawn to exclude all private property. These included a petition with more than 1700 signatures, as well as letters from individuals. There were also formal complaints filed from town councils, irrigation collectives, and citizens' groups within the rice-growing area.<sup>22</sup> The perceived lack of democratic process inherent in the park's declaration was a particular sore point for many of the farmers.

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<sup>21</sup> Ignacio Lacomba, interview with the author, Valencia, May 6 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Camara Agraria de Sueca, report to the Conselleria de Obras Publicas, April 25, 1986; Amparo Beltrán Artés, "Recurso de Reposicion contra Decreto 89/1986 de 8 de julio," August 28, 1986; Recurso de la Camara Agraria de Sueca, April 25, 1986; Recursos de las Camaras Agrarias of Sollana, Sueca, Algemesí, Valencia, Catarroja, Beniparrel, Albalat de la Ribera, Silla and Cullera (August 1986); Asociacion Valenciana de Agricultores, "Recurso de Reposicion, Decreto 89/1986 de 8 de julio," August 28, 1986; Recurso de la "Union Cristiana" of Sueca; "Alegaciones que presenta el Grupo Popular del Ayuntamiento de Valencia al Decreto 89/1986, de 8 de Julio, del Consell de la Generalidad Valenciana de Regimen Juridico del Parque Natural de la Albufera," August 25 1986; Manuel David Pardo, Daniel David Pardo, Consuelo Bigne Fink, and others, "Recurso de Reposicion contra Decreto 89/1986 de 8 de julio," August 26, 1986; forty-two complaints filed by individuals and small groups of tancat owners. All documents from the Archivo Histórico de la Generalitat Valenciana, Expedientes, 3/564-26 (Grupo popular) and Documentos Varios, 6/4042-4 (farmers).

Consistent with the general practice of the era, Felipe and the other ecologists had designed the park without any input from those who lived and worked there, resulting in a top-down, technocratic set of regulations that ignored the concerns and potential contributions of those who would be most affected.<sup>23</sup> Ignacio Lacomba, a founding member of Agró and a scientist employed by the Generalitat who worked on many of the studies that gave rise to the park, today notes that the park “was declared from an office,” and that the park managers “arrived to give orders in someone else’s house.”<sup>24</sup> This generated a flood of objections from farmers, who insisted that “a natural park of 270,000 hanegadas [a Valencian unit of measurement] cannot be established by decree”<sup>25</sup> and that “a natural park is not viable without consensus.”<sup>26</sup>

The Generalitat’s flat rejection of all these appeals on the grounds that “the proposed reduced ambit is not functional as an ecosystem” opened the government to renewed accusations that it cared more about ducks than about rural families.<sup>27</sup> Rumors flew that the environmentalists intended to return the entire area to its “natural state,” prohibiting rice farming altogether.<sup>28</sup> Such accusations bring to mind William Cronon’s observation of the demographic trends associated with nature conservation, namely the difference between rural and urban understandings of wilderness.

The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living—urban folk for whom food comes from a supermarket or a restaurant instead of a field, and for whom the wooden

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<sup>23</sup> José Ramón Pascual Monzó, president of AVA’s rice sector, quoted in “La forma de imponer el parque es una tomadura de pelo,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, July 1989, 6. At no point in their planning did anyone from the OTDA attempt to consult with the farmers. Felipe interview, Valencia, June 7 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Lacomba interview, Valencia, April 26 2012.

<sup>25</sup> AVA president Vicente Hernández, quoted in AVA, *Anuario Asociación Valenciana Agricultores* (1989), 10.

<sup>26</sup> “Un parque natural no es viable sin consenso,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, Feb-Mar 1994, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Conselleria de Obras Públicas, Generalitat Valenciana, *Desestimación de recursos contra el Decreto 89/1986, de 8 de Julio, de Regimen Jurídico del Parque Natural de La Albufera*. September 16, 1986, Expedientes, 1/3909-24, AHGV.

<sup>28</sup> Miguel Minguet, interview with the author, Alfafar, March 2 2011. See also Camara Local Agraria de Cullera, “Recurso de Reposición contra el Decreto 89/1986,” August 26, 1986, documentos varios, 6/4042-4, AHGV.

houses in which they live and work apparently have no meaningful connection to the forests in which trees grow and die. Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.<sup>29</sup>

While the conservationists did not, in fact, seek to revert the entire area to an “unworked natural landscape,” their extremely restrictive vision of the rice fields as “green filters” for the lake nonetheless left farmers with a severely curtailed productive role in their own lands. Whereas Valencian rice farmers depended on the land for their survival, urban conservationists sought to preserve the same landscapes for aesthetic and moral purposes. Such radical disconnect between the two groups’ worldviews almost inevitably led to conflict and resentment.

Protests against the park continued for years after its initial declaration, frequently serving as an outlet for farmers to vocalize their frustration with the decline of the economic clout and social prestige of the Spanish agricultural sector. AVA joined the Sueca town hall and the rice farming associations from Sueca, Sollana, Alfafar, Sedaví, and Castellar in filing suit to annul the park’s declaration,<sup>30</sup> while hundreds of rice farmers marched through downtown Valencia to demand its repeal and the formation of a representative commission to negotiate new boundaries and terms. AVA itself proudly documented the protests in its monthly magazine, printing photographs and lengthy descriptions of farmers with signs reading, in Valencian, “The lands are ours;” “No to the dictatorial Park;” and “Our environmentalism is practical, not utopian” blocking traffic downtown (Figure 22).<sup>31</sup> While AVA organized protests and filed legal complaints, a small number of hunters used a more vigilante approach: Anti-park graffiti

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<sup>29</sup> Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness.”

<sup>30</sup> “Los agricultores arroceros contra el parque de la Albufera, oficial,” *Levante*, November 2, 1988. This lawsuit eventually succeeded on a technicality, but the victory was purely symbolic, as the Generalitat had imposed precautionary measures that ensured the park’s survival.

<sup>31</sup> Juan Lagardera, “Los arroceros colapsan el centro para que se derogue el parque de la Albufera,” *Levante*, December 3, 1988; “10,000 Agricultores reclaman a Lerma la reforma de las condiciones del Parque de la Albufera,” AVA, *Anuario 1989*, 9.

appeared around Valencia, the city's boat dock on the lake was burned, and Felipe arrived at work one morning to find that someone had thrown Molotov cocktails through the windows of the OTDA.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 22: AVA protests against the park, 1988.<sup>33</sup>**



Confrontation, not negotiation, ruled the day. While the farmers were by no means eager to communicate with the scientists, the lack of understanding between the two groups was exacerbated by the scientists' own rhetoric, which ignored economic realities in favor of environmental and aesthetic ones, and by their inability or refusal to meet the farmers on equal footing. Without ever talking to the farmers directly, Felipe and other scientists tended to attribute their protests largely to a deliberate campaign of misinformation and manipulation by wealthy businessmen with personal financial interests in the park's defeat.<sup>34</sup> According to former Agró member Ignacio Lacomba, developers and large landowners took advantage of the lack of public participation in the park declaration process to "poison the atmosphere" before the

<sup>32</sup> Juanjo García del Moral, "Un incendio provocado daña la oficina de los biólogos del parque natural de la Albufera," *El País* (Valencia), December 12, 1988; Victor Navarro, "L'Albufera conflictiva: Entrevista amb Victor Navarro, membre d'Agró-Acció Ecologista," *Diari Cultural del País Valencià* 44, January 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Photos from AVA.

<sup>34</sup> Lacomba interview, Valencia, May 6, 2011; Lacomba interview, Valencia, April 26, 2012; Felipe interview, Valencia, April 30 2012.

Generalitat itself had a chance to explain the declaration.<sup>35</sup> Victor Navarro accused AVA itself of using “this lack of information, by misinforming and manipulating the farmers.”<sup>36</sup> Agreeing with this assessment, representatives of left-wing political parties, the University of Valencia, and local environmental groups signed a “Manifiesto for the Albufera” in which they claimed that the agricultural groups working against the park “do not represent the legitimate interests of rural workers, but rather the economic thirst of certain speculative capitalists.”<sup>37</sup> Blasco, the regional minister of Public Works, simply implored opponents to “carefully read the park declaration” and avoid objections on the basis of “problems that do not exist” and “things that [the declaration] does not say.”<sup>38</sup>

Such statements added to the farmers’ frustrations as they saw their very real economic concerns written off as mere paper tigers and their political activism dismissed as puppetry orchestrated by wealthy businessmen. José Ramón Pascual Monzó, a rice farmer from Sueca who led many of the protests, says that he read the park legislation “cover to cover” and held meetings in the villages to explain it to other farmers. He adamantly denies ever being influenced by outsiders, and takes offense at the suggestion that he or anyone else was “manipulated” into opposing the park. Though he did have one meeting with local business owners who were strongly opposed to the park, he says, the meeting did not take place until well after AVA’s mobilization had begun.<sup>39</sup> Other farmers agree with his assessment, insisting that their opposition sprang not from any distortion of the facts but from the park legislation itself.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lacomba interview, Valencia, May 6, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Navarro, “L’Albufera conflictiva.”

<sup>37</sup> Environmental coalition, “Manifiesto per l’Albufera,” *Diari Cultural del País Valencià* 44, January 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Rafael Blasco, quoted in “Sobre la polémica en torno a la declaración de parque natural,” *Las Provincias*, August 26, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> José Ramón Pascual Monzó, interview with the author, El Palmar, May 4, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012; Segarra interview, El Palmar, April 24 2012; and Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011.



The scientists' tendency to see the farmers as easily-manipulated rubes was matched by farmers' perception of the scientists as interfering outsiders with no real connection to Valencia in general or the Albufera in particular. On the rare occasions when Agró scientists spoke with farmers on the outskirts of the city, their lack of fluency in Valencian contributed to this impression. One AVA representative dismissed Agró members as "mov[ing] in a different world from ours, in a postcard-vision; we touch and walk on and profit from the park, but they have a completely different sense of it. They are interested exclusively in the environment and so their basic concern is that the little ducks are pretty."<sup>41</sup> "For these civil servants," one AVA representative told the press, "the survival of miniscule creatures in the mud of the canals must be more important than the fields of rice with which millions and millions of people are fed."<sup>42</sup> Conversely, in their own words, the farmers "really need the area to be in good conditions" and thus had a vested interest in protecting the land in a more holistic, practical, and lasting way.<sup>43</sup>

AVA's repeated references to the farmers' personal interest in the health of the land and water of the Albufera to some extent challenged the dominant conservationist narrative of agriculture as a major threat to the ecological survival of the area. The way that farmers talked about water pollution and their appeals to the Generalitat for help, even as they fought against the park in court, demonstrates that their relationship with the land was more complicated than their initial opposition to the park would suggest. When contesting the inclusion of their fields in the park, they highlighted their traditions of independence and their right to manage the land in order to maximize their profits, even if that meant abandoning rice farming altogether. When decrying the presence of toxic sludge, rotting animal carcasses, and suspicious foams in their

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Garcia and Cabrejas. "Medio Ambiente y conflicto social," 81.

<sup>42</sup> "Los agricultores arroceros."

<sup>43</sup> Garcia and Cabrejas. "Medio Ambiente y conflicto social," 80.

fields, however, their arguments were almost indistinguishable from those of scientific conservationists, and reflected a dedication to rice farming and to the land itself in a far more permanent way. “Without a doubt,” argued one AVA representative, “the great promoters of the salvation of the lake are the farmers, through their energetic complaints against polluting actions and their precise monitoring thereof.”<sup>44</sup>

The image of farmers as the Albufera’s principle caretakers, and their actions as tending towards the greater health and sustainability of the ecosystem, permeated farmers’ appeals in the press and to their elected officials. They described themselves as “the first ecologists,” compared to the “theorists” with a complete “lack of knowledge of reality” who “work for the Administration, or...do senior theses for the university” but had no first-hand knowledge of “what it is like to walk through the mud of a rice field.”<sup>45</sup> “We are not ecologists of books and offices,” claimed an AVA representative, “but rather our environmentalism is that of suffering day after day, in the heat and the cold, the wind and the rain, and also of defending our way of life.”<sup>46</sup>

Though it would be easy to write off such statements as mere public relations and an attempt to appropriate conservationist vocabulary, this interpretation does not do justice to the repeated complaints farmers filed with the Generalitat with regard to specific instances of pollution and the lack of enforcement of water quality standards. Farmers who lost crops to the industrially polluted water coursing down canals in 1989, for example, demanded stricter enforcement of the law and insisted that “the managers of the natural park are the ones who

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<sup>44</sup> “AVA lucha contra la contaminación de los arrozales de la Albufera,” AVA, *Anuario 1989*, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Quotes from “Los agricultores arroceros; “La forma de imponer el parque;” Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011; Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012; Segarra interview, El Palmar, April 24 2012; Sergio Carbo, interview with the author, Valencia, April 23, 2012; Pascual Monzó interview, El Palmar, May 4, 2012; interviews conducted by Garcia and Cabrejas, “Medio Ambiente y Conflicto Social,” 80.

<sup>46</sup> “La forma de imponer el parque.”

should guard against such incidents.”<sup>47</sup> They similarly objected to the idea that their fields could be relied upon as the sole means of filtering out the nitrogen and phosphorous from the city’s wastewater. “What we rice farmers want,” wrote one, “is clean water for the Albufera, but without making our fields serve as a filter and warehouse for so much extremely dangerous filth.”<sup>48</sup> By 1992, they joined Agró and SEO in criticizing the Generalitat’s failure to enforce water quality standards in the harshest terms, bitterly noting that “the Albufera is still dying in spite of so many promises over the last decades.”<sup>49</sup>

These are not the words of people who oppose environmental preservation. Instead, the water quality debate suggests that there was less distance between AVA and Agró than either side believed. Even as they protested the park’s limitations on their land use, farmers’ were some of the loudest voices calling for enforcement of environmental laws on water pollution. “We farmers are harmed first and foremost by the enormous water pollution in the canals with which we irrigate; pollution produced by the urban and industrial dumping,” proclaimed a particularly eloquent editorial in AVA’s newsletter.<sup>50</sup> “The fields are irrigated with polluted waters that are poisoning the lands and the crops....Are we farmers the guilty ones, when it is we who are the first to suffer the negative consequences?”<sup>51</sup> The bubbling, stinking water in many of the canals carried dangerous levels of urban waste that rendered it hazardous not only to wildlife and farmers, but even to those humans who consumed the irrigated crops.<sup>52</sup> “Nobody would want to get into that water and work, not even for double pay,” noted one farmer, “but we have to do it.

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<sup>47</sup> “AVA lucha contra la contaminación;” “La forma de imponer el parque.”

<sup>48</sup> “Recurso de Reposición, Decreto 89/1986 de 8 de julio,” August 28, 1986, FDMA.

<sup>49</sup> “La contaminación creciente apesta al lago,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, June 1992, 18.

<sup>50</sup> “Los Agricultores, primeros perjudicados por la contaminación de las aguas de riego,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, July-August 1992, 14.

<sup>51</sup> “Los Agricultores, primeros perjudicados,” 14; see also AEA, cited in Garcia and Cabrejas. “Medio Ambiente y conflicto social, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Teresa Laguna, “Las acequias de la marjal de Alfafar, en estado putrefacto, vierten en el lago de la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, April 25, 1994.

If it isn't good for the toothcarp and the ducks, it's not good for us either."<sup>53</sup> Still reluctant to accept the park's limitations, the farmers argued that "no park would be needed if the Administration enforced the laws" with regard to water pollution.<sup>54</sup> Though such statements were perhaps hyperbolic, insofar as the park's regulations provided significant additional protections, this statement is not entirely inaccurate as it highlights severe deficiencies in park management during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and reflects a consensus among the progressive press and scientific conservationists alike that the park's management, not the farmers themselves, were responsible for the area's greatest problems.

AVA's rhetorical reliance on the trope of farmers as the "traditional" guardians of Valencian lands, while an effective tool in their protests against poor water quality, failed to serve their purposes with regard to the park itself. Public Works Minister Blasco's declaration that conservation of the ecosystem was "absolutely compatible with safeguarding agricultural interests, especially in their traditional exploitation," goes to the heart of the matter.<sup>55</sup> "Traditional" exploitation, as defined both by the park regulations and by popular romanticized notions of Valencian farming, meant farming rice and only rice, without chemical additives or major machinery, as they had done fifty years earlier, and indeed was entirely permissible under the park law. But this was a static, romanticized, and thoroughly impractical version of farming in the modern economic environment, which denied Albufera farmers the flexibility to adapt to the changed conditions of the world around them.

When farmers embraced new methods, technologies, and economic connections to meet demands needs of the shifting agricultural market, they risked losing their "traditional"

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<sup>53</sup> Laguna, "Las acequias de la marjal de Alfajar."

<sup>54</sup> "La forma de imponer el parque."

<sup>55</sup> Rafael Blasco, quoted in "Sobre la polémica."

credentials and thus their claims to the land. Many of the farmers protested the park not to preserve their right to farm rice as their grandfathers had done, but to assert their property rights more generally: to develop their lands for residences, industry, or tourism; to increase their use of machinery and pesticides; or to transform their rice paddies into orange groves or another more profitable agricultural use. Conservationists cited this as evidence that the farmers were *not*, in fact, upholding Valencian traditions. Instead, the conservationists themselves were the primary advocates for the low-tech, labor-intensive agriculture that had long defined the region, and successfully portrayed the farmers as straying from those traditions and therefore failing to care for the land as they had in the past. Rice farmers were faced with an insurmountable rhetorical contradiction: their claims to Valencian “authenticity” rested heavily on economically unsustainable farming methods that they themselves wished to abandon. This allowed urban ecologists to take up the mantle of protectors of the iconic Valencian landscape and the promise to preserve it for Valencian and European heritage.

The declaration of the Albufera Natural Park embodied a direct conflict between rural and urban worldviews in the Franco era, and the outcome of this conflict reflected a national cultural trend towards a distinctly European version of modernization. The conservationist vision of the Dehesa-Albufera area triumphed over that of the farmers for three principle reasons. First, the conservationists – university-trained scientists and intellectuals with close personal ties and common cultural ground with countless members of local government – possessed skills and knowledge that the farmers did not. AVA formed as an institution largely in response to the park itself, and by the late 1980s still lacked the infrastructure and institutional connections enjoyed by more sophisticated progressive activists. This situation would change radically over the

coming years, as the Valencian government grew steadily more conservative and an interest in economic productivity came to outweigh the progressive concerns of the early post-Franco period, but throughout the 1980s the farmers' inherently conservative politics and lack of facility with the bureaucratic and legal norms of the young democracy substantially hampered their efforts.

Second, supporters of the park couched their arguments in terms borrowed directly from European norms and regulations, offering a way for Valencians to directly ally themselves with a modern and cosmopolitan value system. Despite the Spanish "economic miracle" of the 1970s and 1980s, a sense of cultural and political backwardness still weighed heavily on many educated Spaniards who saw increased ties to northern Europe as a means of obtaining economic and scientific assistance to bring Spain up to modern standards. While the Agró and SEO activists were indisputably earnest in their desire to protect local landscapes and ecosystems, in general the adoption of increased environmental reforms across Spain resulted in a great proliferation of protections on paper and very little progress in practice. Instead, environmental protections served largely as a demonstration of good will, intended to convince other Europeans that Spain was ready and willing to become more "European." To some extent, then, the declaration of the Albufera Park was a calculated measure taken by the Valencian government in order to gain international prestige and support. Against such enticements, the farmers, whose arguments were firmly rooted in the local sphere, had no ready counteroffers.

The third and perhaps most compelling reason that the conservationists won the initial battle over the Albufera Natural Park has to do with the changing demographics and identity of the Valencian community. Popular anti-centralist sentiments, part of the immediate backlash of the Franco era, coincided with the increasing alienation of the Valencian population from the

countryside. By providing a way for urban Valencians to see themselves as authentic defenders of local traditions and landscapes, environmental conservation took advantage of these circumstances. Whereas the farmers' appeals to historic land stewardship and local identity emerged from personal experience and a tangible sense of the land, the scientists of Agró, SEO, and the OTDA used tactics far more recognizable to the urban majority. Environmental protection, as part of a modernist European agenda, was a form of Valencian authenticity in which anyone could share. In the end, policies emphasizing the region's modern aspirations won out over those tying it to a fading agrarian past.

## Chapter Seven. “The Park is a Complete Disaster”: Crisis and Compromise in the 1990s

By 1990, even a casual observer could tell that all was not well in the Albufera. While the scientists at the Devesa-Albufera Technical Office (OTDA) made significant gains on the Dehesa with regard to restoring natural habitats, educating the public, and improving patterns of public use, conditions in the areas of the park under the Generalitat’s exclusive jurisdiction – the rice fields – continued to deteriorate.<sup>1</sup> Agró members called the park “a complete disaster”<sup>2</sup> and one national newspaper described it as “a landscape in which garbage dumps, filled-in sections of the lake, and canals of putrid water abound.”<sup>3</sup> Despite laws prohibiting such activities, farmers on the outskirts of the park trucked soil and rubble into their fields to plant more profitable crops, or paved the fields over to allow for unlicensed warehouses, nightclubs, garages, factories, and other businesses to operate on protected lands. Towering mountains of garbage collected alongside the canals and internal paths of the fields.<sup>4</sup> Drainage ditches running through the park remained “open to the sky and unchanneled. They give off foul odors and are a potential site of

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<sup>1</sup> Guillermo de Felipe and Antonio Vizcaino, “Espacios naturales: el caso de la Devesa de l’Albufera,” in *El Medio Ambiente en la Comunidad Valenciana* (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1987), 144-49; Juanjo Garcia del Moral, “Grupos ecologistas denuncian la degradación de la Albufera,” *El País*, July 8, 1987; Demand from the Grupo Esquerra Unida of the city of Valencia to the Commission of Urbanism and Environment, May 18, 1988, SP; José Sierra, “No existe gran diferencia entre el desarrollismo de los 60 y el actual,” *Levante* February 12, 1989; “Acció Ecologista-Agró denuncia que la junta de l’Albufera no se reúne desde septiembre de 1991,” *Levante*, May 7, 1992; L. M. Notario, “Agró denuncia la degradación de la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, July 16, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> AEA representative, quoted in Garcia and Cabrejas, “Medio Ambiente y Conflicto Social,” 76.

<sup>3</sup> Ana Chapa, “Un basurero ‘protegido,’” *El País*, April 27, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., José Sierra, “Agró denuncia a fiscalía un vertido de escombros en el parquet de la Albufera,” *Levante*, December 20, 1992; Joan-Miquel Llops, “El Saler, vertedero de incívicos,” *Levante*, December 29, 1992; Juan Miguel Benavent and Alberto Solana Lopez, *Proyecto de eliminación y restauración de vertederos incontrolados dentro del Parque Natural de la Albufera (Valencia)*, Generalitat Valenciana, February 1993, OTDA.



infection and danger.”<sup>5</sup> Arsonists destroyed several of the park’s most valuable nesting areas, including most of the Mata del Fang, where hundreds of recently-hatched herons and ducks were burned alive in their nests.<sup>6</sup> Hunters “systematically violated” laws regarding permissible seasons, location, and species, prompting Agró members to stage a series of protests culminating in a dramatic march through the streets of Valencia carrying the bodies of illegally-shot birds gathered from around the lake (Figure 23).<sup>7</sup>

Worst of all was the water. The canals in the rice fields ran black and rust-brown, clogged with toxic sediments, dead animals, pesticide containers, bottles of detergent, rusted cans, and plastic of all sorts.<sup>8</sup> Joan Miquel Benavent and other park employees walked through the Dehesa and along the canals, returning with shocking photographs of fire damage and untreated waste (Figure 23). In 1991 and 1994, Victor Navarro led members of the government and the media on tours of the “black points” around the ostensibly protected area, and although disgusted reporters wrote disparagingly of the mountains of trash scattered throughout the rice fields and the “hundreds of cartridges” that belied hunting restrictions, by far their strongest responses came from the state of the water. The resulting articles described a dead pig floating at a popular boating port; canals filled with “completely black water” or covered with ten centimeters of oil,

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<sup>5</sup>Servicio del Ciclo Integral del Agua, *Proyecto: Saneamiento y cubridion de acequias de la Comisaria de Francos, Marjales y Otros*, December 1989, OTDA.

<sup>6</sup>José Sierra, “Un incendio provocado destruye 20 hectáreas de uno de los principales ecosistemas de El Saler,” *Levante*, April 18, 1992; “Quemar el Saler,” *Las Provincias*, April 18, 1992.

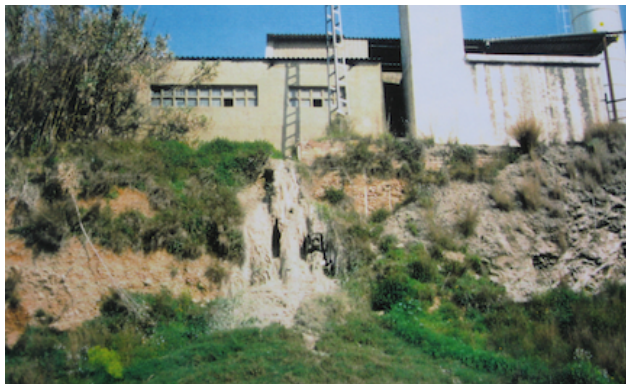
<sup>7</sup>AEA representative, quoted in Garcia and Cabrejas. “Medio Ambiente y Conflicto Social,” 76; see also P. M., “El alcalde encajó la bronca contra la caza,” *Levante*, November 8, 1986; “Agró considera insuficientes las medidas de protección de las aves,” *Levante*, November 25, 1987; B. Castro, “Agró criticó el calendario de la casa de las avefrías,” *Levante* January 25 1987; “Los ecologistas llevaron ante Lerma las Garzas abatidas,” *Levante*, October 12, 1987; “Los ecologistas denuncian la caza ilegal de especies en la Albufera,” *El País*, October 19, 1987; “Los ecologistas llevaron a la Generalidad cadáveres de garzas reales abatidas en la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, October 21, 1987; “Presidentes de 8 sociedades de cazadores condenan la matanza de garzas,” *Las Provincias*, October 22, 1987; Lagardera, “Los arroceros colapsan el centro;” Acció Ecologista-Agró, Press release, “Acció Ecologista-Agró presenta sus quejas al Presidente Lerma,” October 1987, FDMA; City of Valencia Council motion, October 20, 1987, AHMV; José Sierra, “Los ecologistas aseguran que continúa cazándose furtivamente en la Albufera,” *Levante* January 10, 1990.

<sup>8</sup>J. C. Martí, “Cien voluntarios limpian la Albufera,” *Levante*, May 8, 1994.

where motion could be discerned only when “the plastic bottles move once in a while;” and leaking containers of toxic waste – all accompanied by “pestilential” and “nauseating” odors that made at least one city counselor physically ill.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 23: Problems in the park, 1986-1995.**

From top left: OTDA scientists surveying the damage after a fire on the Dehesa, 1986;<sup>10</sup> Agró protestors carrying dead grey herons, killed by poachers in the Albufera, through the streets of Valencia, 1987;<sup>11</sup> two photos of industrial water pollution in the Barranco de Chiva, one of the Albufera’s main water supplies, 1993;<sup>12</sup> aerial view of solid waste lining canals in the Albufera, ca. 1995.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>9</sup>Javier Obregón, “Agró denuncia a la prensa los ‘puntos negros’ de la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, April 27, 1991; Javier Núñez de Murga, “La Albufera, inundada, como siempre, de inmundicia,” *Las Provincias*, January 23, 1994; Chapa, “Un basurero.”

<sup>10</sup> Photo by Enric Martinez, from AMV.

<sup>11</sup> Photo by Carles Francesc, *Carteleria Turia*.

<sup>12</sup> Photos by Joan Miquel Benavent, from OTDA.

<sup>13</sup> Photo from OTDA



Even at the height of anti-park protests in the 1980s, the farmers loudly denounced the appalling state of the waters of the Albufera and called for enforcement of water quality measures for the municipal and industrial sources surrounding the lake. United in their disgust for the Generalitat's lax enforcement, both groups turned to a higher authority – the European Union – for support. This chapter outlines the shifting alliances of scientists, farmers, and politicians during the 1990s surrounding the ongoing issues of park management, within the European climate of increasing environmental consciousness and regulation. Through the creative application of European law and funding opportunities, conservationists and farmers would form an uneasy truce that enabled rice farmers and environmentalists to work, if not together, at least in tandem on the critical water issues threatening the park. In particular, the advent of a major shift in EU agricultural policy offered the perfect opportunity for the park to make peace with the farmers, finding common ground and helping the farmers to accept a redefinition of their role as stewards of the land.

In the decades preceding park declaration, inputs of agricultural chemicals had contributed to the lake's degradation into the most hypertrophic body of water in Spain and one of the worst in the world, with pollution levels in every major canal significantly exceeding the

(unenforced) national legal standards.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1960s, farmers applied pesticides via crop-dusters and spread fertilizers in their fields that dumped enormous quantities of toxins and nitrogen into the lake, repeatedly producing massive fish die-offs in the canals nearby. One particular pesticide application has been widely blamed for the disappearance, almost overnight, of the last of the rooted vegetation in the lake in the summer of 1972. But by the 1980s, as farmers learned to moderate the amount of chemicals they added to their crops and the most dangerous toxins were banned, this problem had been dramatically curtailed. The organochlorides contained in agricultural chemicals, while potent, tended to dissipate quickly and leave little lasting effect, so by the time the park was declared in 1986, agricultural pollutants played a relatively minor role in the lake's contamination.

Despite these changes, in the post-Franco period the water quality in the Albufera continued to decline as a result of new sources and types of pollution.<sup>15</sup> In part, this pollution originated with urban and industrial sources across the 917-square kilometer drainage basin of the Albufera Lake (Figure 24). Though Spanish law required water collection and treatment facilities for all new urban and industrial construction, in practice construction was slow and halting, and developers across the Community simply used preexisting canals and rivers to dispose of their untreated waste. The year the Generalitat declared the park, more than 70% of the population of the Autonomous Community of Valencia still had no water treatment whatsoever. Seventy percent of the treatment facilities that did exist were functioning incorrectly

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<sup>14</sup> Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia," 175; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Lago*, 162; Antonio Camacho Gonzáles, *Informe sobre la situación de contaminación de las aguas del Parque Natural de la Albufera*, (2005), OGPA.

<sup>15</sup> Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Lago*, 161. New limits on the types and quantities of agricultural chemicals that could be used in the lake's immediate surroundings had successfully stabilized organochloride levels in the late 1970s. Sanmartín Arce, *La Albufera y sus Hombres*, 249; Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia," 175; Generalitat Valenciana, "Estudio sobre la Contaminación," 3-4.





Dozens of heavily polluting point sources within the park limits contributed some of the deadliest and most noxious contaminants to the lake's waters, and threatened the park's very existence. In the years surrounding the park's declaration, a handful of enterprising speculators had purchased land in the rice fields at bargain prices owing to its rural zoning, thinking to take advantage of the touristic potential offered by its proximity to the beach. Once the Generalitat rezoned the land as urban, which Franco-era development politics had shown was only a matter of time, they would make a killing either by building on the land or by re-selling it to developers. They were so convinced of the inevitability of rezoning that many of them went ahead and built on the land illegally, relying on the laxity of local law enforcement with regard to land use planning. By the mid-1990s, dozens of hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, slaughterhouses, garages, warehouses, and factories operated within the park boundaries, discharging enormous quantities of toxic waste, animal cadavers, and other refuse directly into the canals; endangering wildlife by increasing traffic on the Dehesa's roads; and creating a tremendous racket that disrupted bird nesting.

As impractical as their moneymaking strategy may sound, such practices had been common and highly successful throughout the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s, and had in fact given rise to many of the complaints of unplanned land use described in previous chapters. The Dehesa development from 1964 to 1974 had come about as a result of the 1958 proposal by city councilor José Barberá (father of the current mayor, Rita Barberá) to create a comprehensive urbanization plan in order to prevent the area from becoming a "a true chaos" as a result of illegal and unregulated construction already in progress. Even today, the issue remains a contentious one. In 2004, park director José Segarra approved a management plan that would retroactively legalize the construction that speculators carried out in the years after the park's

declaration and would rezone large portions of land within the park boundaries as urban and commercial. Agró has sued to block this action in Spanish courts and filed several complaints with the EU, which are pending at the time of writing.<sup>19</sup>

The declaration of the Albufera Natural Park, and its attendant permanent designation of all land as un-urbanizable, came as a nasty shock to these speculators, though they soon went back to building and operating their businesses with impunity when they realized they had little to fear from the park's administrators. Carlos Auernheimer, the head of the Generalitat's environmental agency between 1986 and 1991 and the de facto director of all protected spaces in the Valencian Community, embodied the Generalitat's ambivalent attitude towards environmental protection.<sup>20</sup> While the Generalitat had hired a handful of biologists to direct its environmental efforts, it had also inherited the employees, infrastructures, and duties of the famously inept Nature Conservation Institute (ICONA), which had done so much damage to the Dehesa via such projects as pine planting, road building, and carp farming. Insisting that his agency's function was "not to sanction, but rather to correct," Auernheimer gave polluters and illegal business operators within the Albufera Park virtually endless opportunities and time to voluntarily stop their illegal activities. Dozens of fines issued by his guards remained suspended for years while the infractions – most prominently waste dumping, illegal construction, and industrial activity – continued. Victor Navarro, Agró's founder and spokesman, furiously denounced this refusal to meet their legal responsibilities, accusing the Generalitat and Auernheimer in particular of a "lack of planning, ineffectiveness, indolence, and indifference."<sup>21</sup> Auernheimer, noted Navarro bitterly, "would be a magnificent Minister of Industry, because at

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<sup>19</sup> Bárbera, "Moción sobre urbanización en Saler."

<sup>20</sup> This apathy was not unique to Valencia, but rather reflected a national trend. See Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 255-258.

<sup>21</sup> "Acció Ecologista critica la gestió política en matèria medioambiental," *Levante*, April 2, 1991.

least his management is completely respectful of all the orders of that Ministry.”<sup>22</sup>

Critics in the liberal press likewise described Auernheimer as “the perfect person to direct the dungheap that they are allowing the Albufera natural park to become.”<sup>23</sup> His subordinates, overwhelmingly composed of former ICONA engineers, seemed happy enough to continue on in the same pattern. In the early 1990s, therefore, the farmers were entirely correct when they noted that the Generalitat had essentially failed to “take any repressive actions against certain local governments that violate the law, dumping sewage water within the limits of the Park.”<sup>24</sup> In the spring of 1994, *Las Provincias* reflected the general consensus that the park’s regulations had “turned out to be nothing more than wet paper,” leaving the park to deteriorate “from bad to worse” while “nobody does anything to save this rich treasure of Valencian landscape from total death.”<sup>25</sup>

Some of the blame for the park’s continued deterioration can be laid on a systematic lack of coordination between the various public administrations that shared jurisdiction over the territory.<sup>26</sup> Natural parks administration fell under the jurisdiction of the Generalitat, the bureaucratic structures of which changed frequently in that era, and within the Albufera Park in particular, multiple municipal and individual properties overlapped. The single largest property

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<sup>22</sup> Vicente Aupi, “Siempre dije que Auernheimer sería un magnífico ministro de Industria,” *Hoja de Lunes*, December 17, 1990. Administrative restructuring within the Generalitat did away with Auernheimer’s position altogether and replaced it with the cabinet-level position of regional Minister for the Environment after 1991. The first Minister, Antoni Escarré Esteve (1991-1993), achieved similarly little with regard to the Albufera. His successor, and Emerit Bono i Martínez (1993-1995), oversaw the “golden age” of Albufera management from a conservation perspective, as described in the following chapters.

<sup>23</sup> Vicente Aupi, “Zonas de la Albufera, desecadas ilegalmente,” *Hoja de Lunes*, January 5, 1988:11.

<sup>24</sup> “AVA justifica los aterramientos en el parque de la Albufera,” *Levante*, April 30, 1995. During the bureaucratic restructuring of the Generalitat in 1991 and the replacement of the Environmental Agency with the regional Ministry for the Environment, Auernheimer was replaced with the new Environmental Minister, Antoni Escarré, under whose jurisdiction the office issued an increased number of sanctions but again failed largely to enforce them.

<sup>25</sup> Teresa Laguna, “El Saler se está muriendo,” *Las Provincias*, March 7, 1994. Similar sentiments were reflected in other regional papers, notably “Las verdades del barquero,” *Levante*, November 8, 1986 and Letter from AEA to Joan Lerma and Carlos Auernheimer, June 1989, printed in part in Sierra, “Agró: ‘La junta del parque.’”

<sup>26</sup> Victor Navarro, “Sostenido, aunque insostenible,” *Levante*, June 13, 1992; Junta Rectora del Parque Natural de l’Albufera, Actas, December 19, 1989, Correspondencia, 3/931-7, AHGV.



owner within the park was the city of Valencia itself, which retained possession of the lake and Dehesa and assigned their environmental management to the scientists and technicians of the OTDA. In the rice fields, the Generalitat shared jurisdiction with not only the private property owners of each plot but also with the city councils of thirteen separate municipalities, among which support for the park and enforcement of its rules varied widely. Most of the water pollution, meanwhile, flowed into the park from outside of its boundaries, invoking the jurisdictions of still more individuals, corporations, and municipal entities, over which the Generalitat had legal jurisdiction but attempted to balance issues of economic growth and business interests with those of the environment.

The result was a morass of regulations and authorizations that industrial and development interests routinely used to their advantage. Municipal governments of some of the rice towns, in particular, disputed the Generalitat's right to impose the park in the first place and used jurisdictional issues to complicate its implementation. Some city councils issued building or business permits to residents that directly violated park regulations, but the most common tactic was simply to refuse to enforce environmental laws. Even after the completion of the Western Collector, local mayors refused to spend their own funds to connect municipal sewers to the water treatment system or to prosecute individual infractions within their city limits. The mayor of Sollana, for instance, told investigators that protecting the park "should be the responsibility of the governing board of the park. They have to be the ones to guard it, because that's not the local governments' mission." Auernheimer, meanwhile, insisted that preventing and punishing such infractions was "the responsibility of each local government, which must communicate any environmental crimes to the governing board of the park." The result of such attitudes was a

deadlock that left the Albufera Natural Park almost entirely unprotected for the first decade of its existence.<sup>27</sup>

As rice farmer José Ramón Pascual Monzó noted, if the Generalitat had really cared about protecting the ecosystem rather than simply making a show of its modern sensibilities, “they would have made the park with a real budget and resources.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, in 1989 the Environmental Agency designated just 19.5 million pesetas for the entire park (later increased to 39 million), while the OTDA and the city government spent 535 million pesetas on the Dehesa alone.<sup>29</sup> This reflected a lack of effort on the part of the Generalitat towards the environment as a whole: the Environmental Agency employed only two guards to monitor compliance with the law over the entire Valencian territory, increased to four in 1989, a laughably insufficient force.<sup>30</sup> Until 1990, the sole dedicated Albufera Park employee, biologist Ignacio Lacomba, was forced to work out of a tiny office in the middle of the city, far from the lake and the people who lived there.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Aupi, “Zonas de la Albufera,” 11.

<sup>28</sup> Pascual Monzó interview, El Palmar, May 4, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Junta Rectora, December 19, 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Conselleria de Medi Ambient, “Informe de Gestion del Parque Natural de L’Albufera, Año 1991,” FDMA.

<sup>31</sup> Ignacio Lacomba, interview with the author, Valencia, April 26 2012. For specific complaints regarding the Generalitat’s ineffective enforcement, see “Grupos pro naturaleza denuncian la política medioambiental de la Generalitat,” *Levante*, July 13, 1988; “Denuncia a la Conselleria de Agricultura al incumplir la normativa europea de caza de aves,” *Las Provincias*, March 9, 1989; José Sierra, “Agró: ‘La junta del parque natural de la Albufera es meramente decorativa,’” *Levante*, June 5, 1989; “La Generalitat autorizó ayer la caza, incumpliendo un decreto del Gobierno,” *Hoja del Lunes*, October 2, 1989; Aupi, “Siempre dije que Auernheimer sería una magnífico ministro de Industria.”” Conselleria de Medi Ambient, Generalitat Valenciana, “Informe de Gestion del Parque Natural de L’Albufera, Año 1991,” FDMA; “Acció Ecologista critica la gestión del conceller Emèrit Bono,” *Levante*, April 5 1991; José Sierra, “Acció Ecologista-Agró presentará el próximo lunes al fiscal jefe varias denuncias sobre agresiones al medio ambiente,” *Levante*, May 5 1991; “La Albufera, hoy como ayer,” *Levante*, May 18, 1991; “Acció Ecologista-Agró denuncia;” Notario, “Agró denuncia la degradación de la Albufera;” Rafael Pardo and Victor Navarro, “Año y medio de Conselleria de Medio Ambiente,” *Levante*, November 29, 1992; “Los expedientes por aterramientos en la Albufera cayeron un 84% en 1993,” *Levante*, February 3, 1994; Pablo Salazar, “Parque de la Albufera: El Ayuntamiento ha ordenado el cierre de catorce locales por no tener licencia,” *Las Provincias*, March 6, 1994; Maria Consuelo Reyna, “El Saler, en total abandono,” *Las Provincias*, March 7, 1994; “Orden de derribo de una nave ilegal en la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, April 22, 1994; “Medio Ambiente cierra por primera vez dos firmas por incumplir el plan de la Albufera,” *Levante*, May 30, 1992; “El Consell advierte a Gascó que en Pinedo hay 11 empresas ilegales,” *Levante*, February 3, 1994; Josep Pitarch, “L’Albufera ¿RIP?,” *Levante*, August 3, 1994; Teresa

Valencia joined other Mediterranean regions in blaming its failure to enforce environmental standards largely on a lack of money. Partly in response to such complaints, in 1992 the EC inaugurated the LIFE program for the environment, which provided cofinancing for projects of sustainable development, habitat protection, education and administration in member states. Nearly half of the available funds were devoted to protecting the spaces that made up the newly formed “Natura 2000” network of habitats “of European importance,” including all the sites listed in the Birds Directive, further entrenching the notion of such sites as inherently “European” properties and distancing them from traditional local, regional, or national ways of seeing the land.<sup>32</sup>

But while funding problems in the late 1980s certainly had hindered Valencian efforts to improve the Albufera’s ecological health, equally significant was a general disinterest among the responsible administrators and a pervasive wariness of environmental regulation as a potential brake on economic growth. In the words of Susana Aguilar Fernández, the preeminent scholar of contemporary Spanish environmental policy, upon accession to the EU, Spain “more or less literally, and uncritically, transposed environmental directives into Spanish national law.”<sup>33</sup> Paloma Mateache, ICONA’s first environmental biologist, echoes this claim in the local context of Valencia, noting that “all the ideas arrived from Europe, not from internal convictions,” and the national government did not look critically at or negotiate its acceptance of environmental laws even when they made no sense in a Spanish context.<sup>34</sup> Over the following decades, Spain continued this pattern, adopting increasingly onerous obligations with only minimal requests for

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Laguna, “La Generalitat no ha cobrado 60 millones en multas por aterramientos en la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, December 15 1994; J. C. Martí, “El 84.2% de los valencianos cree que la Albufera recuperará si las empresas pagan por verter,” *Levante*, January 15, 1995:39.

<sup>32</sup> This process was eloquently described in Heatherington, *Wild Sardinia*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Susana Aguilar Fernández, “Spain: Old Habits Die Hard,” in Jordan and Liefferink, *Environmental Policy in Europe*, 186.

<sup>34</sup> Mateache interview, Valencia, May 9, 2011.

additional time for implementation. Regional governments across the country varied widely in their enthusiasm for such measures, and in many cases local administrators shared Valencia's reluctance to enact and enforce a body of law for which they had no precedent, no infrastructure, and little popular support or understanding.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the landowners within the park, including some farmers, took the Generalitat's obvious lack of interest as a tacit license to continue using park lands as if the protections did not exist. Over the first six years of the park's existence, farmers in the towns of Pinedo, Sollana, Sueca and Cullera, among others, took "advantage of the lack of vigilance in the natural park of the Albufera" to fill, pave, or re-plant their rice fields to obtain more lucrative use of the land.<sup>36</sup> Local governments, such as those of Cullera in the south and Sollana in the west, officially authorized their citizens to build in defiance of park regulations, leading to protracted legal battles as the courts tried to sort out the confused territorial jurisdictions.<sup>37</sup> Between 1986 and 1990, around 500 hectares (1,235.5 acres) of rice paddies around the edges of the park were transformed into onion fields, citrus groves, and warehouses.<sup>38</sup> As local officials had worried at the turn of the century when the city had originally purchased the lake to protect it from further drainage, the gradual disappearance of the rice fields was a major threat to the long-term stability

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<sup>35</sup> The sole exception was the Spanish delegation's request for a delay in the implementation of the EU's requirement of unleaded petrol. Prior to accession, the only major Spanish environmental legislation was the Air Protection Law, which existed only on paper and lacked any enforcement. Aguilar Fernández, "Old Habits Die Hard," 173.

<sup>36</sup> P. Varea and José Sierra, "El concejal de disciplina urbanística ordena precintar 4 empresas ubicadas en suelo protegido de la Albufera," *Levante*, February 1, 1994; Aupi, "Zonas de la Albufera," *Diario 16*, "La Generalitat sanciona a 11 empresas por aterrar cultivos en el parque de la Albufera," Jan 5 1994; *ABC Valencia*, "Sancionadas diez empresas por aterramientos en la Abufera," January 5 1994.

<sup>37</sup> "La 'Conselleria' no permitirá que se construya en el parque de la Albufera," *Las Provincias*, May 25 1994; Salvador Bañuls, "PSOE-Cullera: 'Las sanciones son arbitrarias,'" *Las Provincias*, May 19, 1994; Salvador Bañuls, "Cullera: Medio Ambiente paraliza las multas en el Mareny," *Las Provincias*, May 21, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> J. G. del M., "En dos años han sido desecadas más de 500 hectáreas del parque de La Albufera," *El País*, May 11, 1988; EPYPSA, *Plan Especial de Protección*, 51.

of the aesthetic and scientific value of the lake itself, reducing the habitat and food available to birds and decreasing the “green filter” that was the lake’s only protection from toxic runoff.

While scientists evinced genuine concerns about the farmers’ failure to comply with park regulations, the farmers had legitimate objections to the disproportionate pressure and blame placed on them for the park’s situation. When Auernheimer’s guards were stirred to action, rather than enter into the maze of jurisdictions and complex infrastructural debates presented by water pollution, they went primarily for the relatively simple and easily-addressed infractions by hunters, farmers, and landowners within the park’s boundaries. Local people received citations for poaching, dumping solid waste along roadsides, filling in their rice fields, and constructing without authorization, and saw themselves depicted by the government and the press as “the bad guys of the park” while being forced to bear “all the burden.”<sup>39</sup> José Luís Mateses described how prohibitions on routine daily tasks necessary to the maintenance of the rice fields, from fixing dikes to clearing canals to improving roads, made the farmers’ lives impossible. “They paralyzed our canal construction, they forbid us from widening a road, we can’t build anything,” complained another farmer; “they don’t let us grow and modernize.”<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, this amplified existing resentment among farmers towards the park. While water of increasingly alarming colors and odors ran through their fields from municipal and industrial sources, AVA representatives complained that “if a farmer lays a single brick the entire bureaucracy falls on top of him.”<sup>41</sup> Miguel Minguet, who served at the time as the co-president of AVA’s rice-growers’ division, articulately summarized the farmers’ position with regards to the Generalitat’s

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<sup>39</sup> Pascual Monzó interview, El Palmar, May 4, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Teresa Laguna, “Los agricultores piden que la Albufera se gestione como otros parques europeos,” *Las Provincias*, April 3, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> “La contaminación creciente.”

enforcement, saying that “if we rice farmers have seen environmentalism as an enemy, it is because the attitude of those gentlemen has forced us to present it that way.”<sup>42</sup>

But while it augmented the farmers’ sense of persecution by conservationists, it also pushed them to be more vocal about the other, far more significant infractions going on within the park. Municipal authorities, they claimed, blamed farmers in an attempt to “divert public attention and responsibility towards more dispersed and defenseless sectors” while they “did nothing to clean the beaches or purify the wastewater of the town.”<sup>43</sup> As one farmer scoffed in 1989, “any reasonable person can see that the substances and objects that pollute the beach and the water do not derive from agricultural activity.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the farmers’ ongoing violations of park law paled in comparison to the devastation wrought upon the local environment by the small number of speculators and developers who continued to illegally operate their heavily polluting industries within the park. Throughout the late 1980s, these individuals had remained largely behind the scenes in the battle against the park, allowing the farmers to take the lead in legal challenges and encouraging municipal governments to act on their behalf. When Agró and OTDA scientists claimed that the farmers’ had been “manipulated” into opposing the park, it was these speculators who they blamed for spreading misinformation and unrest. But by the early 1990s, as the farmers increasingly called for enforcement of pollution laws, the landowners finally formed their own interest group, which they called the Association of Landowners and Businessmen of the Albufera Natural Park (*Asociación de Propietarios y Empresarios del Parque Natural de la Albufera*, hereafter Apepna).

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Sergio Carbó, “Amores difíciles,” *El Mercantil Valenciano*, April 3, 1994.

<sup>43</sup> “Los Agricultores, primeros perjudicado por la contaminación de las aguas de riego,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, July-August 1992, 14.

<sup>44</sup> “AVA lucha contra la contaminación;” “La forma de imponer el parque;” “Los Agricultores, Primeros Perjudicados.”

The case of Apepna highlights the difference between the farmers' cries for "conservation with common sense" and a truly anti-conservationist stance. While Apepna and the farmers both asked the Generalitat to exclude private property from the park's boundaries, any similarity between the two groups ended there. Whereas the farmers' objections derived from a combination of cultural traditions, personal identity, and concern for their economic survival, Apepna members' claims derived solely from the principles of the free market, and their plans were completely incompatible with the park's ecological and cultural goals.<sup>45</sup> When Apepna members came forward in the early 1990s to defend their interests, unlike the farmers they did so in terms that left no room for negotiation or compromise. Asserting simply that "the right to private property still exists," Apepna filed suit in 1991 to demand that the Generalitat either eliminate the park's restrictions, legalize their businesses and operations, or purchase their lands outright at exorbitant prices.<sup>46</sup>

Apepna's appearance had much to do with the speculators' inability, by the early 1990s, to rely on farmers to fight their anti-park battles for them. The farmers' fundamental objection to the park had always been that environmental regulations prevented them from responding to market pressures in a way that would make their existence financially viable. But by the early 1990s, prices for almost all Spanish crops had dropped so low that Valencian farmers lost the incentive to transform their rice fields.<sup>47</sup> While Valencians and other farmers called for higher

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<sup>45</sup> Laguna, "La Generalitat no ha cobrado."

<sup>46</sup> Tribunal Superior de Justicia de la Comunidad Valenciana, *Recurso contencioso-administrativo n° 2/1031/1991*, *Sentencia num. 211/96*, March 12, 1996, FDMA; Maria Teresa Cuquerella Sales, *L'Albufera de Valencia y sus normas protectoras* (Valencia, 1993), 89; José Sierra, "Los propietarios de la Albufera se asocian y recurren el decreto del parque natural," *Levante*, December 25, 1993; Teresa Laguna, "Empresarios de la Albufera quieren vender a la Generalidad sus tierras en el parque," *Las Provincias*, May 10, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Between 1992 and 1993 alone, despite consistent enforcement by the guards, the number of new citations issued for converting rice fields to other uses dropped by 84%, from 127 to 8. J. Barajas, "Medio Ambiente interpuso cerca de 400 sanciones el pasado año en la Albufera," *Las Provincias*, February 3, 1994; "Los expedientes por aterramientos."

price supports, non-European competitors pressured the EEC to drop CAP supports altogether. Concern over market stability and agricultural prices brought parties to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the predecessor to the World Trade Organization) to place agriculture on the bargaining table for the first time. During the Uruguay Round of negotiations (1986-1994) the United States, supported by the Cairns Group of non-European agricultural exporters including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, much of southeast Asia, and most of South America, demanded that the EEC substantially reduce both price supports and export subsidies to allow for the free movement of agricultural goods on the international market. Though reluctantly willing to do so, the EEC insisted it be permitted to proceed moderately and on a product-by-product basis. Carlos Romero, the Spanish Agriculture representative for GATT, asked in particular that negotiators exclude “Mediterranean products” as a group from the new subsidy reductions. Additionally, Ministers of Agriculture from all the EEC member states with the exception of Holland and the UK agreed that the EEC could not cut the existing subsidy system without providing some form of direct payments to compensate farmers for their lost income.<sup>48</sup>

Spanish farmers saw the Uruguay Round as yet another attack by the international market on their livelihoods, compounding the competition they already faced from Italian and, increasingly, North African producers. AVA staunchly opposed the GATT negotiations, calling European willingness to consider reforms “a major concession by the agrarian sector to the multinational pressure groups” that “once again demonstrates the inability of the Ministers of Agriculture to defend the survival of a sector that is restructuring in the EEC and especially in Spain.” With regard to the notion of compensatory subsidies, Spanish farmers’ unions argued

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<sup>48</sup> “Si se reducen las subvenciones se exigen compensaciones,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 1990, 18.



that direct payments could not compensate for reduced price supports because they might “offer results in the medium-term but do not help the farmer in the moment when he confronts a fall in prices.”<sup>49</sup> Succumbing to international pressures on this issue, AVA predicted, would result in “the disappearance of four hundred thousand producers in the space of seven years; the total transformation of the basis of the CAP; and the appearance of an absolutely free market, with which we cannot cope.”<sup>50</sup>

Similar statements from farm lobbies across Europe could not counteract the CAP’s spiraling costs and growing pressure from environmental interest groups, which contributed to the general conclusion among negotiators that the policy was overdue for reforms. Several northern and central European states, especially Germany, were more interested in obtaining favorable terms of trade for intellectual and industrial exports, and pressured the Council of Agricultural Ministers to offer a compromise in exchange. Such connections lent credibility to Spanish accusations that the “ambiguous and nonstop modifications of the CAP have clearly benefitted the strategies of the North and the center of the EEC, while always trapping the Spanish interests.” Rural people nationwide expressed their resentment that they were once again being asked to sacrifice, without compensation, for the greater good of the country.<sup>51</sup>

This agricultural crisis contributed to ongoing trends of urbanization and occupational changes among many rural families. While José Luís Mateses’ generation had grown up without educational opportunities, rarely imagining careers outside of agriculture, many of their children had earned college degrees or found work in the booming construction business. Others, pressured by falling crop prices over the past decades, had been forced to work second jobs in

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<sup>49</sup> “AVA-ASAJA rechaza el recorte de ayudas de la CEE,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, December 1990, 12.

<sup>50</sup> “El Campo en Lucha,” 5.

<sup>51</sup> “La PAC nos pilla siempre a contrapelo,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, September 1991, 17.

tourism or industry. Over the course of the decade, the Valencian Community saw a sharp decline in professional farming and the rise of “part-time farmers,” defined by the Spanish government as anyone who received less than half their income from agricultural production. The numbers of part-time farmers steadily increased, especially in areas close to cities where other employment was readily available. By 1995, within the Valencian community generally, more than 80% of farmers worked only part-time.<sup>52</sup>

The new generation of farmers was a far cry from the stereotypical image of the uneducated, salt-of-the earth Valencian peasant working his fields. Frequently, part-time farmers in the mid-1990s were either retirees using their fields to supplement their pensions or highly educated professionals who worked in the cities as doctors, lawyers, journalists, or civil servants, but who maintained their inherited family lands and continued to sell produce as a hobby or supplemental income. To them, rice cultivation was a way to connect with their family histories and traditions and to make a bit of extra cash for a special vacation or luxury item, rather than a means of economic survival for their families.

This shift from farming as a livelihood to farming as a supplementary economic activity freed Albufera rice farmers from the *need*, if not the desire, to make significant profits on their land. Part-time farmers continued to grow rice, either for the supplemental income or for pleasure, so long as the price of production did not outweigh the price they could get for their crops. All they asked, by and large, was to do a bit better than break even. But crop prices had fallen so low by the early 1990s, even with CAP subsidies, that the farmers found themselves putting more money into production than they received from sales.<sup>53</sup> The result was massive land abandonment nationwide, and rapid conversion of fields to more lucrative crops for those who

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<sup>52</sup> “Necesitamos soluciones a nuestros problemas, ¡YA!” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, April 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Carbo interview, Valencia, April 23, 2012.

wanted to continue farming. In the Albufera, the second option was prohibited and the first would lead to ecological disaster for the park. Caught between the Scylla of economic pressures and the Charybdis of environmental regulations, the farmers grew increasingly frustrated with their powerlessness in the face of global pressures.

As a result of these changes, the farmers' redirected their frustrations from the park to the CAP itself and their general reliance on transnational economies. Beginning around 1990, farmers from across Valencia marched through downtown Valencia to "demonstrate our total rejection of the agricultural policy being carried out by the European Community."<sup>54</sup> In one headline-grabbing episode, more than one hundred farmers drove their tractors through the city center. Echoing their complaints about the unilateral imposition of environmental regulations, farmers demanded a voice in the decision-making processes that affected them so profoundly. "It is the farmers themselves and the other people who live in the rural environment, represented by their professional organizations, who know better than anyone what is in their interests and what is good for them," argued one AVA representative. "And therefore, their participation is essential at the hour of drafting the lines of any agricultural or rural policy at any level: local, regional, national, Community, and international."<sup>55</sup>

Against a chorus of similar demands from across Europe, in the summer of 1992, the Council of Europe approved reforms to the CAP based on a proposal by Commissioner of Agriculture Ray MacSharry, the EEC's chief negotiator in the Uruguay Round. As expected, the plan proposed dramatic cuts to intervention prices for various crops and introduced a system of direct payments for farmers who voluntarily agreed to reduce their production through such

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<sup>54</sup> L. Goicoechea, "Movilizaciones de las Organizaciones Agrarias Europeas," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, March 1990, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Araceli Esteban, "El desarrollo del mundo agrario y rural: un desafío para toda la sociedad," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, June 1991, 13.

measures as early retirement, withdrawing their land from cultivation, or adhering to “agri-environmental” practices such as reducing chemical use. These subsidies were intended to “safeguard[] the position of the vast majority of farmers, . . . improve the standard of land use and land conservation and ensure a balanced development of the countryside.”<sup>56</sup>

Valencian farmers met the news of the reforms with apprehension and distrust, a feeling shared by farmers across Europe, and a natural response given their repeated disappointments from European laws in the past. “We want to continue being farmers,” wrote one, which required “minimum conditions that permit the development of our profession with dignity and quality of life.”<sup>57</sup> The new subsidies, they feared, might not suffice. “If we tighten our belts another notch, we will suffocate,” wrote an AVA editorialist. “We have already exceeded our capacity for resistance. All that is left is to flee the countryside, entering a different economic sector, or staying with mere subsistence farming.”<sup>58</sup> As one farmer warned, apocalyptically but not inaccurately, “if agriculture collapses, the entire rural world will fall.”<sup>59</sup> Nowhere was this warning more accurate than in the Albufera, where the struggling ecosystems depended on the continued existence of the rice fields. Fortunately for the park, the CAP reforms did not directly affect price supports for rice, leaving local farmers at least no worse off than they had been

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<sup>56</sup> Ray MacSharry and Commission of the European Communities, *The Development and Future of the Common Agricultural Policy: Proposals of the Commission* (Brussels, July 22, 1991), accessed May 13, 2013, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4881/1/4881.pdf>.

Commission of the European Communities, *The Development and Future of the Common Agricultural Policy*, Revised version of Document COM(91) 258 final, Brussels, July 22, 1991 and 32. Three-quarters of the money for these payments came directly from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, while responsibility for the remaining quarter was split equally between the Generalitat and the national Ministry of Agriculture.

<sup>57</sup> “Queremos seguir siendo agricultores,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, Mar 1992, 3.

<sup>58</sup> “Maastricht, sí, pero . . .,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, July-August 1992, 3.

<sup>59</sup> J. Delors, quoted in Araceli Esteban, “El desarrollo del mundo agrario y rural: un desafío para toda la sociedad,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, June 1991, 13.

before with regard to the markets for their crops.<sup>60</sup> And despite the farmers' initial skepticism, the environmental aspects of the MacSharry reforms would prove their economic salvation.

The implementation of the MacSharry reforms roughly coincided with regional elections in Valencia, and the environmental administrators who replaced Auernheimer signaled a major shift in the Generalitat's attitude towards the park. The biologist María Angeles Ull took over as General Director for Nature Conservation in the Valencian Community and promptly put to rest any lingering hope among farmers and landowners that the park might be overturned, stating firmly that the inclusion of private property within the protected area was "non-negotiable."<sup>61</sup> Beyond this hardline stance, however, Ull's early statements made it clear that her administration would seek to improve relations with those who still opposed the park insofar as their demands were compatible with environmental protection. "While AVA shows a willingness to arrive at a legal solution," she told reporters in 1994, "the hunters and Apepna do not want the natural park at all."<sup>62</sup>

The legal solution both sides pursued would come through the MacSharry reforms, which offered economic and ideological incentives for farmers to reimagine their role as active participants in local conservation efforts. Ull appointed local biologist Joan Miquel Benavent as the first dedicated director of the Albufera Natural Park. Born in the Albufera rice town of Massanassa, Benavent made his first trip across it by boat in 1967, at the age of nine. Today, he animatedly describes leaning over the side and seeing a forest of lush vegetation growing on the bottom, fish darting below the prow of the boat, while "hundreds" of birds floated and dove

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<sup>60</sup> "Arroz se paga ya a 47 pesetas."

<sup>61</sup> Ull's title was "General Director for the Conservation of the Natural Environment," and she was responsible directly to the regional minister for the environment, Emerit Bono.

<sup>62</sup> Eva Sanchis, "El PORN de la Albufera continuará mientras estudian las 4000 alegaciones," *Diario 16*, February 15 1995; Laguna, "Empresarios de la Albufera."

around him. The Albufera of the late 1960s was, he says, “the first truly wild place” he had ever visited, and it left a permanent impression.<sup>63</sup> The memory led him to volunteer with Felipe’s scientific team in 1979 while studying biology at the university, and he continued to work off and on as a volunteer with the OTDA over the coming years, among other tasks as a translator of environmental education materials into Valencian.

Miguel Minguet, co-president of AVA’s rice-growers’ division, and other AVA members hoped Benavent’s appointment signaled a new approach, “more open to dialog and opposed to taking unilateral decisions.”<sup>64</sup> At first, the new director’s determination to enforce regulations that Auernheimer had long ignored sent farmers into a rage. Against the vehement protests of the owners, for instance, Benavent finally sent the Generalitat’s backhoes to dig out some of the converted rice fields, and AVA representatives accused him of having “broken the climate of understanding” that had existed between the park and the farmers.<sup>65</sup> Returning to their old arguments about the infringement of property rights, AVA insisted that the illegal conversion of the rice fields had been “justified given that the Administration has not compensated the losses created by the limitations of rights inherent to the declaration of the natural park, nor has it made any economic effort towards making organic farming or environmental protection possible, nor has it offered viable alternatives for the necessary modernization of cultivation.”<sup>66</sup>

But Benavent soon addressed these concerns with a slate of policies he and park biologist Ignacio Lacomba developed at lightning speed. The two drafted and submitted a formal regulatory plan for the park that would protect the boundaries and basic regulations of the area

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<sup>63</sup> Joan Miquel Benavent, interview with the author, El Saler, May 10 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Carbó, “Amores difíciles.”

<sup>65</sup> José Sierra, “Las multas de 10 millones consiguen disminuir el número de aterramientos en la Albufera,” *Levante*, March 21, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> J.B., “Amenazas a agricultores de la Albufera,” *Diario 16*, April 30, 1995; “AVA justifica los aterramientos.”

for the next several decades, even against hostile administrators and politicians. Although their budget remained limited, Benavent encouraged the Generalitat's acquisition of land within the park as a means of preserving it, freeing it from the complaints of private landowners and enabling its disposition for purely ecological, educational, and scientific purposes.<sup>67</sup> He worked closely with former colleagues at the OTDA on research projects and management strategies, incorporating their technical expertise with the Generalitat's legal jurisdiction and, for the first time, managing the entire park as the single integrated ecosystem it was meant to be. He moved the park's administrative offices into a farmhouse in the fishing village of El Palmar, where it would be closer to the park itself and more easily accessible to those who lived and worked there.<sup>68</sup>

Most importantly, Benavent's tenure as park director emphasized the integration of those who lived and worked within the park boundaries in its environmental mission.<sup>69</sup> The crashing agricultural market provided a unique opportunity to make farmers an integral part of the park's maintenance, turning enemies into reluctant allies and defusing the principal social opposition the park had endured since its founding. After a decade of hostility to environmental protection, Valencian rice farmers in the mid-1990s found that the Albufera's protected status offered them relief from their economic and political problems through the CAP's new direct subsidy program.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In 1995, 17,000 of the 21,000 hectares of the park remained privately owned. "El Director del parque."

<sup>68</sup> José Sierra, "Hacienda paga 60 millones por una alquería de El Palmar para la sede del parque de la Albufera," *Levante*, October 25 1994.

<sup>69</sup> "El Director del parque."

<sup>70</sup> Council Regulation (EEC) No 2078/92 of 30 June 1992 on agricultural production methods compatible with the requirements of the protection of the environment and the maintenance of the countryside. Official Journal L 215, 30/07/1992 p. 0085 – 0090, Article 8.

In addition to horizontal subsidies available across the national territory,<sup>71</sup> the MacSharry reforms also provided special payments available to farmers in environmentally sensitive areas including Ramsar wetlands and internationally protected bird habitats.<sup>72</sup> Benavent and Lacomba promptly went to work developing a set of specific measures for the Albufera, establishing a handful of sound environmental practices that farmers could voluntarily adopt in order to receive per-hectare payments on their lands.<sup>73</sup> Using a “carrot-and-stick” approach, they offered subsidies for activities that directly complemented existing regulations and did not require farmers to substantially modify the practices already mandated by the law. For example, the ecological objective of providing winter bird habitat was met through a combination of restrictions (park regulations forbade farmers from growing anything other than rice, from growing a winter crop, and from constructing anything not directly related to the rice fields) and rewards (subsidies for farmers who promised to maintain their rice crops, avoid winter cultivation, and flood their fields between November and March). Likewise, the objective of reducing chemical inputs to the ecosystem was achieved through complementary limitations (the park prohibition on aggressive chemicals) and incentives (payments for weeding fields mechanically rather than using herbicides).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, “Real Decreto 51/1995, de 20 de enero, por el que se establece un régimen de medidas horizontales para fomentar métodos de producción Agraria compatibles con las exigencias de la protección y la conservación del espacio natural,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 33 (February 8, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, “Real Decreto 928/1995, de 9 de junio, por el que se establece un régimen de fomento del uso en determinados humedales de métodos de producción agraria compatibles con la protección del medio ambiente y la conservación del espacio natural y de las aves silvestres,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 170 (July 18, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> Lacomba, *Informe sobre la importancia del arrozal*; Ignacio Lacomba et al., *Programa de mantenimiento del cultivo tradicional del arrozal en el Parque Natural de L’Albufera de Valencia (ZEPA, Ramsar) y su compatibilización con la conservación del potencial biogenético*, April 25 1994, OGPA.

<sup>74</sup> Maria Vallés Planells, *An analysis of the effects of Agri-environmental Policy: Case study of La Albufera de Valencia* (Masters’ thesis, Cranfield University at Silsoe, Institute of Water and Environment, 2001).



The resulting “Agri-Environmental Program for the Albufera Natural Park” was the first major step by representatives of the Valencian environmental movement towards reconciliation with the farmers. For committing to three major actions – maintaining their rice fields, flooding the fields in the fall and winter, and mechanically removing weeds rather than using herbicides – participating farmers would receive 95,000 pesetas per hectare per year, calculated as “sufficient economic aid to compensate for the decline in profitability implied by the maintenance of 40,000 hectares (98,842 acres) of rice in its traditional mode of cultivation.”<sup>75</sup> In essence, the subsidies offered an opportunity for farmers to boost their incomes enough to enable them to continue rice farming despite exceptionally low market prices, thus helping themselves and the Albufera’s birds at one go.

Following their plan’s approval by the national government, Benavent and Lacomba arranged a series of informal meetings with Miguel Minguet. Minguet was a big, friendly man, passionately devoted to the rights of the farmers, quick to anger at perceived offenses but equally quick to trust those willing to listen to his side of the story. For several weeks in 1994, the three men met in local bars after work to talk about what the farmers and the environment needed. Benavent’s deep personal roots in the Albufera area, including the fact that Valencian was his mother tongue, earned him far more respect from the farmers than Felipe’s and Navarro’s university degrees and political support. Even years after falling out with Benavent and Lacomba in a dispute over farmers’ practices, Minguet still described both scientists as “more intelligent” and “less theoretical” than the city employees with whom AVA had so often found itself in conflict.<sup>76</sup> In part, this favorable impression arose from the willingness of both men to literally

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<sup>75</sup> Lacomba et al., *Programa de mantenimiento*; Generalitat Valenciana, *Memoria sobre la Gestion del Parc Natural de L’Albufera durante el Año 1995*, OGPA.

<sup>76</sup> Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011.

meet Minguet on his own turf, to listen to his complaints, and to discuss the ways the subsidy program would enable park managers to work with, rather than against, the farmers. Benavent's obvious personal ties to the land also lent him legitimacy in the eyes of the farmers that went well beyond that of urban activists like Felipe and Navarro. But the single most important factor in Minguet's willingness to listen was the simple fact that Benavent and Lacomba offered the farmers a way to make money off the park, making their cooperation worthwhile.

The farmers understood clearly that the subsidies were primarily an effort to "quiet the voices" they had raised in protest against the park; a way to raise the farmers' profits "so that everyone would be content with the park."<sup>77</sup> At first, many did not want to accept the subsidies because they worried that doing so would signal their tacit acceptance of the park's authority. But Minguet, at least, also saw the subsidies as an effort by the Generalitat to compromise with the farmers. He felt that his talks with the biologists were a sort of "negotiation" designed to solicit his input and contributions in a collaborative process. In his words, it was clear after Ull's repeated declarations that "the park is here to stay," and the best they could hope for was to receive indemnification for their contributions and a greater voice in the way it was run.<sup>78</sup> As such, the farmers came to see the new subsidy program as a product of their own protest efforts, and a measure of their success at convincing the Generalitat to "work with the farmers, not impose regulations without consulting us."<sup>79</sup> From this time forward, farmers generally stopped

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<sup>77</sup> Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011; Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012; and Lacomba interview, Valencia, May 6 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011.

calling for the park's dissolution, asking instead for a rational regulatory structure that provided adequate compensation to the farmers and took their practical needs and expertise into account.<sup>80</sup>

During the first subsidy year, only thirty-three people requested and received the subsidies, a total of just 61 million pesetas (approximately \$427,000 at 1994 exchange rates).<sup>81</sup> To convince farmers to participate, park employees had to fill out all the paperwork themselves, at times a herculean task given the extreme disarray of local land records, where fields remained registered in the names of long-dead grandfathers and sales or transfers went unrecorded for decades.<sup>82</sup> Such confusion is in itself indicative of the fundamental disconnect between the top-down management favored by regional and European officials and the older models of customary law and family inheritance followed by Valencian farmers. Distrust of central authorities had long been a feature of rural Valencian culture, and one that the subsidy program had to overcome. Even with bureaucratic assistance, many part-time farmers who owned only a few hectares of land deemed the per-hectare subsidies too small and uncertain to be worth the effort. Larger landowners such as Minguet and Mateses, who had more to gain, were more likely to participate. But by the second round of the program, in 1995, more than a thousand farmers including small landowners requested subsidy payments, of which 898 were approved, representing a third of all the rice fields in the park and a total of 242 million pesetas (\$1.84 million at 1995 exchange rates).<sup>83</sup> Word-of-mouth from these successful applicants encouraged

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<sup>80</sup> Mario Beltrán, "El parque de La Albufera nace sin equilibrio entre el interés ecológico y el económico," *ABC Valencia*, March 29, 1994; EFE, "Los arroceros piden dialogar con el Parque de La Albufera," *Diario 16*, March 26, 1994.

<sup>81</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, *Memoria sobre la Gestion 1995*.

<sup>82</sup> Mateses interview, Sueca, April 25, 2012; Lacomba interview, Valencia, April 26, 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, *Memoria sobre la Gestion 1995*.

further participation and by 1998, nearly 3500 different farmers collected agri-environmental subsidies, representing more than 80% of the rice fields within the park.<sup>84</sup>

The subsidies quickly became essential to the farmers' economic survival. Market prices, not only for rice but also for citrus and other Valencian crops, had dropped so low that anyone who did not receive the agri-environmental payments could not recoup production costs. Outside the park, farmers who had previously converted their fields to other crops again found themselves faced with financial ruin, while the rice farmers inside the park received reliable incomes independent of market fluctuations.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the substantial economic benefits, farmers saw the agri-environmental program as the park administration's first step towards taking their concerns seriously and making an effort to help them coexist with environmental protection. Other changes soon followed. In spring 1994, for instance, regional authorities approved further subsidies for the maintenance of the *tancats*, including reinforcing and repairing walls and maintaining water levels, which Benavent's annual report noted "without a doubt...substantially contributed to spread a spirit of getting along" between the farmers and park management.<sup>86</sup> The park also gave the town of Sueca, historically one of its staunchest opponents, 4 billion pesetas (\$30.4 at 1995 exchange rates) in "compensation" for the exceptionally high burdens that it had borne on behalf of the park, most notably the infrastructural reforms (including highways and sewage networks) that were to be undertaken within the city limits.<sup>87</sup> These actions met with widespread approval from the farmers' representatives on the board, and farmers' infractions of park regulations

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<sup>84</sup> Vallés Planells, *An analysis of the Effects of Agri-environmental Policy*.

<sup>85</sup> Joan Miquel Benavent, interview with the author, El Saler, May 5 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, *Informe sobre la Gestió del Parque Natural de L'Albufera durante el Año 1994*, OGPA.

<sup>87</sup> Carles Galletero, "La junta del parque destina 4,000 millones a Sueca como compensación por la Albufera," *Levante*, May 21, 1995.

declined measurably as a result.<sup>88</sup> In 2000, in response to farmers' complaints, the Generalitat also began offering partial indemnifications for damages to crops incurred by the park's increasing bird populations. Together, these measures removed farmers' financial incentives to oppose the park regulations while providing a new way for them to continue farming within the park's boundaries, thereby contributing to the ecological, cultural, and productive value of the land.

While the park's regulations did not soften, such conciliatory measures led to a significant change in farmers' attitudes. Rather than opposing the environmental restrictions themselves, AVA focused its efforts on obtaining compensation "for the loss of competitiveness caused by producing within a protected natural space."<sup>89</sup> Thus, when the EU cut price supports for Spanish rice in 1998 (in response to the appearance of new rice-growing areas in Aragon and Extremadura that sought to take advantage of EU subsidies and state-sponsored free water), for example, AVA promptly asked the regional and national Ministers of Agriculture to make an exception for rice fields within protected ecosystems, where farmers were not permitted to change their crops.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, when further reforms to the CAP took effect in 2000 and extended the agri-environmental subsidies to rice farmers outside of protected spaces, AVA asked the Generalitat to provide additional payments to Albufera farmers for the damages caused

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<sup>88</sup> Generalitat Valenciana, *Informe sobre la Gestion 1994*.

<sup>89</sup> "Cae un 67% la rentabilidad de los arroceros valencianos en la campaña 2000-2001," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, August 2001, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Tempted by the EU subsidy program and the ready provision of water by the state, many farmers in Aragon and Extremadura converted their lands to rice fields. As a result, though the area of rice cultivation in Valencia had remained largely static, by 1998 Spain had exceeded the national limits set by the EU to discourage overproduction, resulting in the punitive decrease of price supports. Combined with simultaneous increases in Valencian production costs, one AVA study reported that Valencian rice farmers' profits decreased 67% from the previous year. Maria Angels Ramón-Llin, the Valencian Minister of Agriculture, agreed with these complaints, describing the farmers' "discomfort and rejection" as "completely justifiable." On her urging, the national minister took AVA's request to take the special circumstances of the park into account when calculating the subsidies to Brussels. "Fuerte caída de los precios del Arroz," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 1998, 4; "Las ayudas agroambiental discriminan a los arroceros," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, July 2001, 14.

by the protected waterfowl population that lived in their fields, in order to place them on even footing with competitors who did not have to deal with such “pests.”<sup>91</sup> In the spirit of compromise, the Generalitat agreed, and began to offer direct subsidies for damage caused by wildlife in 2002.

Through these and other agreements, the Albufera’s farmers increasingly came to see their interests as compatible with those of the conservationists. Beginning in 1993, AVA sponsored a series of environmental education programs, including a workshop on “Agriculture and the Environment,” essays and editorials about organic and traditional farming, and tips for farmers to supplement their incomes by renting rooms or houses for rural tourism.<sup>92</sup> In order “to make it known that agriculture is absolutely not opposed to the environment” and that farmers, too, were concerned with slowing environmental degradation, AVA also hosted a booth at Valencia’s first environmental fair, offering visitors fresh-squeezed orange juice and showing off a variety of fruits and vegetables produced in protected Valencian wetlands.<sup>93</sup> And in direct response to the opening of European markets to inexpensive North African short-grain rice, with which they could not compete for price, by 1999 AVA had begun to market *Denominación de Origen* (DO) “rice from the Albufera” as a high quality, sustainably farmed boutique item, describing environmental stewardship and the marketing of Albufera rice as a “quality product”

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<sup>91</sup> These damages could be substantial, especially in light of the slim profit margins for most rice farmers: Purple swamphens, for example, were estimated to have caused more than 36,000 euros of damage in 2002 alone. “Las ayudas agroambientales discriminan;” “La Conselleria... los gastos de los daños ocasionados por el calamón,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, September 2003, 16.

<sup>92</sup> “La agricultura debe compatibilizar el rendimiento económico con el respeto al medio ambiente,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, January 1993, 22; “Agricultura biológica, ¿Ilusión o realidad?” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, April-May 1992, 16; “La Comunidad Europea debate el futuro del cultivo del arroz,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, November-December 1993, 6; “Hay que presionar en Bruselas para obtener resultados favorables para nuestra agricultura,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, May-June 1994, 10; “Turismo rural, una alternativa con futuro,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, February-March 1995, 20.

<sup>93</sup> “AVA participó en ECOFIRA,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos* May-June 1995, 20.

as “the only instruments with which to confront the prolonged rice price crisis.”<sup>94</sup> Marketing materials emphasized not only the rice’s origins “within the Natural Park of the Albufera” but the “traditional methods” and historic roots of the farmers.<sup>95</sup> As a result of these adaptations, the news that the European Council of Agricultural Ministers had agreed to dedicate 80% of CAP subsidies to environmental protection in the first years of the new century failed to raise an outcry among Valencian rice farmers.<sup>96</sup>

The shift from production to economic stewardship was not without its complications: many farmers resented their new role to some extent, and as late as 2011 Minguet described EU subsidies as “humiliating” and longed for the old days when he could earn a living selling his products at market. Nor did their acceptance of the Albufera park signal a broader shift towards the sort of scientific conservationism espoused in the park’s educational programs. Today, the relationship between farmers and scientists in the Albufera remains fraught with tensions, misunderstandings, and disagreements with regard to the proper management of the park. Farmers resent the restrictions on building and maintaining their fields, feel they are undercompensated for the damages wildlife routinely inflicts on their crops, and openly scoff at the scientists’ formal knowledge of the landscape. The Generalitat’s construction of naturalized wetlands on the boundaries of the lake draws special ire: farmers consider these areas a “waste of money” because the rice fields can perform the same function of green filters, while the native

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<sup>94</sup> *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, April 1999, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Francesc Martínez, “Los arroceros de la Albufera pedirán una denominación de origen para sus productos,” *Levante*, October 24, 1994; Francesc Martínez, “L’arròs valencià prepara la denominació d’origen,” *El Temps*, January 30, 1995.

<sup>96</sup> José Antonio Claver, president of the DO Rice collective of Valencia, in *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, April 1999, 8.

species cultivated in the new wetlands spread into the rice fields and create more “weeding” work for the farmers.<sup>97</sup>

The scientists’ technical failures to recreate the ecosystems of the area, some of which are described in the epilogue to this dissertation, are the subject of much amusement and *schadenfreude* in the surrounding villages, where people tend to see the EU’s financial support as “wasted” on such fripperies when it could be better applied to additional agricultural support. But despite the cool interpersonal relations between farmers and scientists, the farmers understand that the ecosystem’s health, both as a biological system of which their fields are a part and as the basis for the park’s institutional protections, is central to their own interests. In an article describing AVA’s formal complaint against the new Catalog of Wetlands in the Valencian Community, for instance, the writer specifically cited the Albufera Natural Park as evidence that “the development of agrarian activity is totally compatible, and even interdependent, with environmental conservation.”<sup>98</sup> As the President of AVA cautioned in 2002, “the relation between the environment and the rice farmers that cultivate in that environment is so close that there will always be details to be worked out.”<sup>99</sup>

In the words of José Ramón Pascual, leader of the late-1980s protests, beginning with the agri-environmental subsidies “the people became more enthusiastic, and began to believe in the park,” while the financial assistance and the increased emphasis on the farmers’ collaborative role in conservation contributed to a sense of increased “sovereignty over their lands” (*sobernia*

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<sup>97</sup> For example, AVA has complained about the Generalitat’s purchase of lands immediately surrounding the lake and their maintenance as naturalized wetlands, from which “weeds” spread into the rice fields and create additional work for the farmers. “Cae un 67%.” For opposition to the declaration of additional wetlands, see “AVA presenta alegaciones a la totalidad del Catálogo de Zonas Húmedas,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, May 1998, 19; “AVA rechaza el Catálogo de Zonas Húmedas por limitar la Modernización del Sector Agrario,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, October 2000, 4.

<sup>98</sup> “AVA rechaza el Catálogo.”

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in “AVA logra ayudas que indemnizan a los arroceros de la Albufera,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos* December 2002, 16.



*sobre su parcela*).<sup>100</sup> Benavent, likewise, noted that “now we see that the idea spreading among the farmers [is] that traditional activities such as rice cultivation have a future in the park.”<sup>101</sup> By 2012, Pascual told me that he had “the sense that seventy to 80% of the prohibitions that we had in the early days are gone,” a factually inaccurate impression that reflects the extent to which farmers had learned to live within the environmental regulations.<sup>102</sup> Minguet and other farmers repeatedly insisted that “without the rice fields, there would be no park,” but as the Spanish agricultural crisis showed no signs of abating, farmers grudgingly accepted that without the park, there would be no rice fields.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Pascual Monzó interview, El Palmar, May 4, 2012.

<sup>101</sup> JM Benavent, quoted in Sierra, “Las multas de 10 millones.”

<sup>102</sup> Pascual Monzó interview, El Palmar, May 4, 2012. Farmers’ positive view of the park at the time of writing is undoubtedly also influenced by the appointment of Sueca attorney José Segarra as Park director in 1999. A popular and charismatic figure, Segarra’s lack of environmental training, relatively permissive attitude towards economic activity within the park, and dedication to “maintaining peace in the park” have led to his universal condemnation among conservationists and scientists. José Segarra, interview with the author, El Palmar, April 24, 2012.

<sup>103</sup> Minguet interview, Alfafar, March 2, 2011.

## Chapter Eight. Spanish Water Policy, the European Union, and Resource Conflicts on the Júcar River

On a hot evening in July of 1994, Pepe Caballer, a fisherman from El Palmar, noticed fish behaving strangely in the Albufera, “gasping” for air on the surface. The following morning, he and his colleagues found an estimated fifty metric tons of fish, mostly tench, along with some mullets and a few eels, floating belly-up near the protected islet of the Mata de Fang.<sup>1</sup> The mayor of El Palmar blamed industrial pollution,<sup>2</sup> and the fishermen angrily accused “someone who doesn’t like the fishermen” of having carried out “a premeditated action in the lake itself.”<sup>3</sup> A decade earlier, indeed, such an occurrence could easily have been attributed to a particularly toxic chemical application or spill in one of the canals, where such die-offs had been relatively common. But this time the fish appeared in the middle of the lake, far from areas where pesticides or other chemicals were applied and well outside of the canals that carried in urban and industrial waste. Park technicians called to the scene were mystified.

Post-mortem analysis revealed that the fish had died not from an excess of toxins, but

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<sup>1</sup>José Sierra, “Miles de peces mueren en la Albufera,” *Levante*, July 22, 1994; Paco Moreno, “Situación crítica: Técnicos de Medio Ambiente esperan una nueva mortandad masiva de fauna en la Albufera,” *Las Provincias*, July 27, 1994:20.

<sup>2</sup>José Sierra, “Una batería de pozos bombeará agua para sanear la Albufera,” *Levante*, July 28, 1994:28.

<sup>3</sup>Sierra, “Miles de peces.”

from a lack of oxygen.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the gradual implementation of the Western Collector after 1992, contaminant levels in the lake had declined notably since the previous decade, and park biologists reported occasional “clear periods” where the algae faded from view in certain areas of the lake and allowed subaquatic vegetation to briefly reemerge.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the continuous circulation of water through the lake via the seasonal opening of the canal gates to the sea had played an essential role in controlling the already high levels of eutrophication in the lake.<sup>6</sup> When the gates closed to flood the rice fields each spring, the nutrient-rich water inside stagnated, algae flourished and the overall biomass skyrocketed, exhausting the water’s oxygen supply. At the end of the growing season, even during the years of heaviest pollution, the eutrophic water flowed out into the sea and relatively clean water flowed out of the fields into the lake, allowing algal populations to decline, fresh water to replenish the lake’s oxygen supply, and patches of clear water to emerge, temporarily permitting old trophic chains to restart.<sup>7</sup>

The summer of 1994, however, had been particularly dry and followed several years of worsening hydraulic conditions in the Júcar river basin. Since the eighteenth century, water from the Júcar had flowed into the fields west and south of the Albufera through a series of canals, most notably the Júcar Royal Canal, and from there into the Albufera at a rate of around 800 cubic hectares each year, renewing the lake’s water dozens of times, diluting and washing out contaminants and algae into the Mediterranean (Figure 25). Even after upstream damming and

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<sup>4</sup> Claudia Navarro, “Bono rectifica y dice que el agua de Pinedo no es apta para l’Albufera, *El País*, July 28, 19942.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Antonio Gómez, quoted in Paco Moreno, “Este será el verano más duro para la fauna de la Albufera, por culpa de la gran sequía,” *Las Provincias*, May 17, 199534; José Sierra, “La Confederación del Júcar da 6 meses de plazo a 120 empresas y ayuntamientos de La Albufera para que connected al colector,” *Levante*, March 3, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Eutrophication is the process by which the addition of high volumes of nitrogen and phosphates to an aquatic ecosystem results in an overabundance of algae growth, which in turn exhausts the oxygen supply in the water, starving out other organisms.

<sup>7</sup> Susana Romo et al., “Tendencias del fitoplancton en el lago de la Albufera de Valencia e implicaciones para su ecología, gestión y recuperación,” *Limnetica*, 27 (2008): 22; Rafael Oltra et al., “Increase of rotifer diversity after sewage diversion in the hypertrophic lagoon, Albufera of Valencia, Spain,” *Hydrobiologia* 446/447 (2001): 214.

diversions on the river began in the mid-twentieth century, the Albufera had reliably received around 300 Hm<sup>3</sup> until at least 1980.<sup>8</sup> But in the hot dry summer of 1994, after more than a decade of declining streamflow, the Júcar had slowed to a trickle. Soaked up by thirsty fields along the canals, only 124 hm<sup>3</sup> reached the Albufera in the entire hydrologic year (Figure 26).<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the water level in the lake dropped significantly. The only recourse for farmers was to keep the gates connecting the lake to the sea sealed to keep out the salt water. This bottled up the contaminated, algae-filled water and allowed it to stagnate. Without fresh water from the Júcar to dilute and circulate it, the respiration of the thick algae blooms that choked the surface used up the dissolved oxygen in the lake, while a lack of wind and high temperatures prevented oxygenation from the air. The tench deaths were the first obvious signal that the lake was suffocating.<sup>10</sup>

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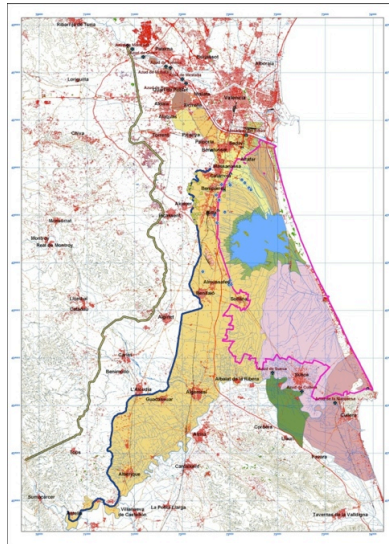
<sup>8</sup> Collado Rosigue, "Water Management"; F. González Bernáldez, "Ecological Aspects of Wetland/Groundwater Relationships in Spain," *Limnetica* 8 (1992): 12; Maria Rosa Miracle et al., "Rotifers of Spring Pools in the Coastal Marshland of Albufera of Valencia Natural Park." *Limnetica* 11 (1995), 39-47; Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia," 172; Servicio del Ciclo Integral del Agua, *Protección de Margenes y Reposición de Mojones en el Lago de la Albufera y otros Cauces Municipales* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1989), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Técnicos y Proyectos, S.A. (independent subcontractors hired by the Dirección General de Obras Hidráulicas y Calidad de las Aguas of the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, hereafter, TYPSA), "Análisis de Batimetrías Históricas," *Estudio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de l'Albufera de Valencia* (2004), 119.

<sup>10</sup> Allowing the sea to flood into the lake would have catastrophic results: an accidental spillover of seawater into the Pujol canal during the final summer of the drought, in 1995, led to a massive fish die-off when the salt water sank to the bottom of the lake and mixed with the toxins released by decomposing algae, creating an anoxic layer that killed everything in the area. Moreno, "Situación crítica;" Paco Moreno, "Medio Ambiente utilizará cuarenta pozos para bombear agua al lago de la Albufera," *Las Provincias*, July 28, 1994:18; Sierra, "Una batería de pozos;" Benavent, interview with the author, El Saler, May 5, 2011; Paco Moreno, "Gran mortandad de peces en la gola del Puchol," *Las Provincias*, June 11, 1995:34; V. Lladró, "Se teme por la Albufera cuando se corte el riego de los arrozales," *Las Provincias*, August 5, 1994:18.

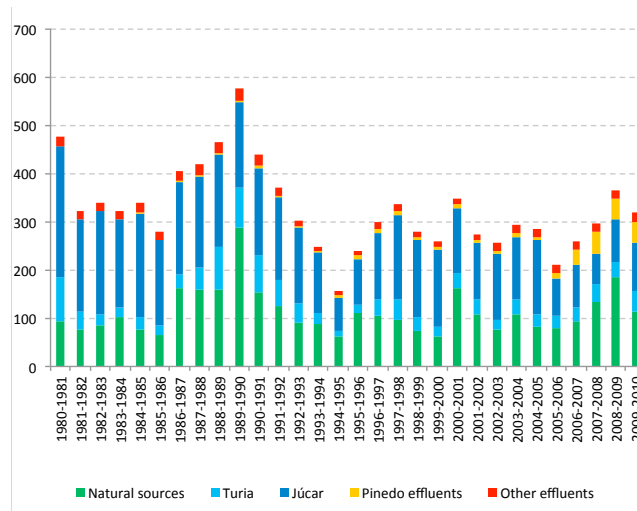
**Figure 25: Water sources for the Albufera.<sup>11</sup>**

Solid colors represent irrigation zones, with both the light pink (Sueca) and tan (Royal Canal) derived from the Júcar River.



**Figure 26: Amount of water (hm<sup>3</sup>/year) reaching the Albufera, 1980-2010.<sup>12</sup>**

Data shows an especially notable decrease in the amount of water from the Júcar and a significantly increased reliance on Pinedo and other water treatment plants.



Above the oyster shells, silt, construction detritus and algal residue that carpet the bottom of the Albufera lies the water, a final layer in our sedimentary history. This chapter traces the

<sup>11</sup> Map from CHJ.

<sup>12</sup> Graph by author; data from CHJ.

declining water quality in the Albufera to a century-long national policy of water management that encouraged overexploitation, unrestrained demand, and economically and environmentally incoherent use of one of Spain's most endangered natural resources. The belief, at the turn of the last century, that state-sponsored irrigation projects provided the key to both local and national social, economic, and cultural progress resulted in pharaonic, transformative hydraulic projects around the country. The Júcar river basin, of which the Albufera is a part, offers a particularly vivid example of the social, economic, and environmental consequences of that process. While technocrats and ideologues throughout the twentieth century emphasized the need to force the peninsula's natural resources into compliance with their political and economic goals, the story of the Júcar serves as a case-in-point of Richard White's observation that "rivers have lives of their own that escape our control."<sup>13</sup>

For more than thirty years, the Franco regime imposed a series of engineered "solutions" to Spain's climatological and environmental conditions, outlined in the hydraulic plans of 1933 and 1939, which permanently altered the character of the land. In terms of improving the quality of life for Spanish people, however, or even in terms of improving the national balance of trade as Joaquín Costa, Manuel Lorenzo Pardo, and other fin-de-siècle reformers had dreamed, the hydraulic transformation of the country accomplished remarkably little. These projects were plagued with technical problems. The actual amount of water contained in the country's vast reservoirs, for instance, never approached their total capacity, while the famed Tajo-Segura transfer, the centerpiece of Lorenzo Pardo's 1933 plan, was plagued by controversy and did not

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<sup>13</sup> White, *The Organic Machine*, 109.

carry anywhere near the projected amounts of water at any point during the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Far more importantly, the relevance of irrigated agriculture to the Spanish economy and to most Spaniards' lives declined dramatically over the late Franco period, but it continued to use a disproportionate amount of the country's increasingly scarce hydraulic resources.

In the second half of the century the state's support for hydraulic construction, and for heavy subsidies to private-sector users, contributed to increasing agricultural market distortion. Relying on the continued availability of water, large producers abandoned traditional Mediterranean crops such as olives and wheat in favor of thirsty ones such as corn and alfalfa, which remained profitable only through massive crop subsidies and almost-free water. The government allotted water rights and issued free permits to water users, charging a heavily subsidized (up to 90%) per-cubic hectare fee based solely on the price of the state's initial investment in the relevant hydraulic infrastructure. Water users where the state had not invested in any infrastructure, such as the privately owned hydroelectric power generators in the north or areas where farmers drilled their own wells into subterranean aquifers, paid nothing at all. To take advantage of these subsidies, landowners converted ever-greater areas of land to irrigation, often in the driest regions of the country, which in turn increased demand for water and the hydraulic infrastructure to bring it to the fields.<sup>15</sup> Far from ending with the dictatorship, this hydraulic program only accelerated as more funding became available after 1975.<sup>16</sup>

New technologies in the late twentieth century facilitated a new wave of hydraulic development, exploiting the previously untapped subterranean aquifers that underlay much of the

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<sup>14</sup> Melgarejo Moreno, "De la Política Hidráulica," 311, reproducing a graph from *El agua en España* (1991), Instituto de la ingeniería en España, Madrid 59.

<sup>15</sup> David Saurí and Leandro del Moral, "Recent developments in Spanish water policy. Alternatives and conflicts at the end of the hydraulic age," *Geoforum* 32 (2001): 358-60; Juan Maestre and Teresa Rojo, "División de la opinión pública española sobre las estrategias sostenibles del agua," *Observatorio Medioambiental* 5 (2002): 199.

<sup>16</sup> Arrojo Agudo, "España-California," 370-71; Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, *Libro Blanco del Agua*, 62; Melgarejo Moreno, "De la Política Hidráulica," 309.

peninsula, including large sections of the central plains. As early as the mid-40s, Franco had urged the development of groundwater for irrigation, but technology and investment capital only enabled large-scale exploitation beginning in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> New extraction techniques offered even small farmers the opportunity to irrigate previously dry fields far from any surface water, and the state was slow to implement any regulatory measures on such projects. By the 1980s, as increased demand pumped water out of the aquifers faster than precipitation and percolation could refill them, the land over and around them dried out and local water tables declined noticeably, prompting new, deeper wells. Ongoing efforts to expand irrigation, with no central coordination, rapidly ran up against the hard limits of resource availability, and traditional irrigators downstream from the aquifers began to notice that rivers and reservoirs were lower than they should have been.

The Tablas de Daimiel National Park in arid Castilla-La Mancha provides a cautionary tale of Spanish hydraulic management, frequently cited by conservationists as the possible outcome for wetlands around the country. For centuries the Tablas, a floodplain fed by the Guadiana and Cigüela Rivers and lying above a large subterranean aquifer, were home to a rich wetlands ecosystem similar to that of the Albufera.<sup>18</sup> In 1956, Franco's hydraulic engineers began efforts to drain and canalize the marshes, diverting surface waters into local fields of rice, corn, and alfalfa, and further west into one of the regime's flagship irrigation projects.<sup>19</sup> This dramatically reduced river volume, and thus indirectly reduced the amount of water reaching the subterranean aquifer underlying the Tablas, to such an extent that in the summer of 1971 they

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<sup>17</sup> Morales Antequera 1946.

<sup>18</sup> Naredo, "La Modernización de la Agricultura," 71.

<sup>19</sup> Joaquín Fernández and others have claimed that widespread irrigation in the area was first introduced in 1948 by "Valencian businessmen" who transplanted the techniques used around the Albufera to this new wetland landscape. Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 171.



dried out completely for the first time.<sup>20</sup> By 1978, in addition to ongoing divergence of surface water, 325 separate wells were registered drawing irrigation water from the aquifer under the marshes, most of them illegal, and the number continued to climb.<sup>21</sup> Alarm among the international scientific and conservation communities pushed the regime to declare the area a park in 1973 despite resistance from local farmers, and in 1980 Unesco made the Tablas the core of its World Biosphere Reserve of the Mancha Húmeda. Further international recognition quickly followed, and the Tablas were soon listed under the Ramsar convention on wetlands (1982) and the EU Birds Directive (1987). But these protections, like those of the Albufera, existed almost entirely on paper: water extraction from the rivers continued even as private wells into the aquifer proliferated, and the wetlands continued to shrink.<sup>22</sup> Conservationists turned in desperation to the EU, hoping that the threat of a fine and international condemnation would force the state into action, but the Spanish government responded with a proposal for yet another hydraulic engineering project, consisting of a lengthy water transfer from another river basin that would pump water directly into the wetland. Conservationists at home and abroad decried this wholly technological solution for its complete failure to address the underlying issues of water use, namely the state's economic and political support for over-extraction and continually increasing demand, but no substantive changes were forthcoming. By the first decade of the new millennium, while smoldering peat fires burned in the heat within the once-humid park, such complaints had prompted Unesco to threaten Spain with the withdrawal of Biosphere Reserve status if it failed to reverse the damage within the Guadiana basin.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Morales Gil 2001400.

<sup>21</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 171.

<sup>22</sup> Morales Gil 2001399.

<sup>23</sup> Gregorio López Sanz, *Irrigation agriculture at the Guadiana River High Basin (Castilla-La Mancha, SPAIN): environmental and socioeconomic impacts* (paper presented at the Workshop on The Use of Water in Sustainable

As conservationists pointed out, the situation at the Tablas de Daimiel was an extreme example of a relatively common phenomenon. Wetlands across the peninsula continued a slow regression throughout the 1990s, and seasonal desiccation grew common.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this recurring ecological catastrophe, water overextraction posed an existential threat to downstream farmers who relied on river water that was fed by the aquifers. In the Albufera, where water-hungry rice was the only permissible crop, this led Valencian farmers to firmly ally themselves with the conservationists calling for an end to water mining and for a coherent water policy on the national level.

The Albufera lies within the watershed controlled by the Júcar Hydrographic Confederation (*Confederación Hidrográfica del Júcar*, hereafter, CHJ), one of the most highly contested battlegrounds in the national “water wars.” The watershed consists of 43,000 square kilometers of land that includes almost all of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, the provinces of Albacete and Cuenca in eastern Castile-La Mancha, and small portions of southern Aragon and Catalonia.<sup>25</sup> Almost 90% of the population within this area resides in Valencia, which also hosts nearly all of the area’s tourism.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the urban centers of Valencia, Albacete, and Alicante, the CHJ’s jurisdiction also includes 243,521 hectares (602,000 acres) of

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Agriculture, 2-4 June 1997, Albacete), accessed May 13, 2013, <http://www.uclm.es/profesorado/glopez/pdf/cv/XI.1.2.2.pdf>; Elena Lopez-Gunn, Pedro Zorrilla Miras, and Ramon Llamas, “The impossible dream? The upper Guadiana system: aligning changes in ecological systems with changes in social systems” in *On the Water Front vol. 2*, ed. Jan Lundquist (Stockholm: World Water Week, 2010): 115-126; Rafael Méndez, “La Unesco da a España tres años de plazo para recuperar Daimiel,” *El País* (June 14 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Fernández, *El Ecologismo Español*, 163-165.

<sup>25</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico de Cuenca del Júcar*, August 1997, [http://www.chj.es/es-es/medioambiente/planificacionhidrologica/Paginas/PlanHidrol%C3%B3gicodeCuenca\(RD16641998\).aspx](http://www.chj.es/es-es/medioambiente/planificacionhidrologica/Paginas/PlanHidrol%C3%B3gicodeCuenca(RD16641998).aspx), Memoria 6 and 9; Javier Ferrer Polo and Javier Paredes, “Water management in Mediterranean regions prone to drought: The Júcar Basin experience,” in Andreu et al., *Drought Management and Planning*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Memoria 13-14; Teodoro Estrela, Aránzazu Fidalgo, and Miguel Ángel Pérez, “Droughts and the European water framework directive: Implications on Spanish river basin districts,” in Andreu et al., *Drought Management and Planning*, 174. The 1991 census reported that 89.84% of the basin’s population lived in Valencia, compared to 8.56% in La Mancha, and that Valencia received 94.5% of the region’s tourism. The 2001 census reported similar distributions.

irrigated land,<sup>27</sup> which absorb around 80% of the total water demands.<sup>28</sup> The entire basin, along with major hydrological features and infrastructure, is shown in

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<sup>27</sup> CHJ, *Estudio de utilización conjunta de los recursos hídricos superficiales y subterráneos de las cuencas media y baja de los ríos Júcar y Turia*, created 2002, <http://www.chj.es/es-es/medioambiente/planificacionhidrologica/Documents/Mejora%20del%20Conocimiento/SintUsoconVersPubl.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico de Cuenca del Júcar*, Memoria 19.

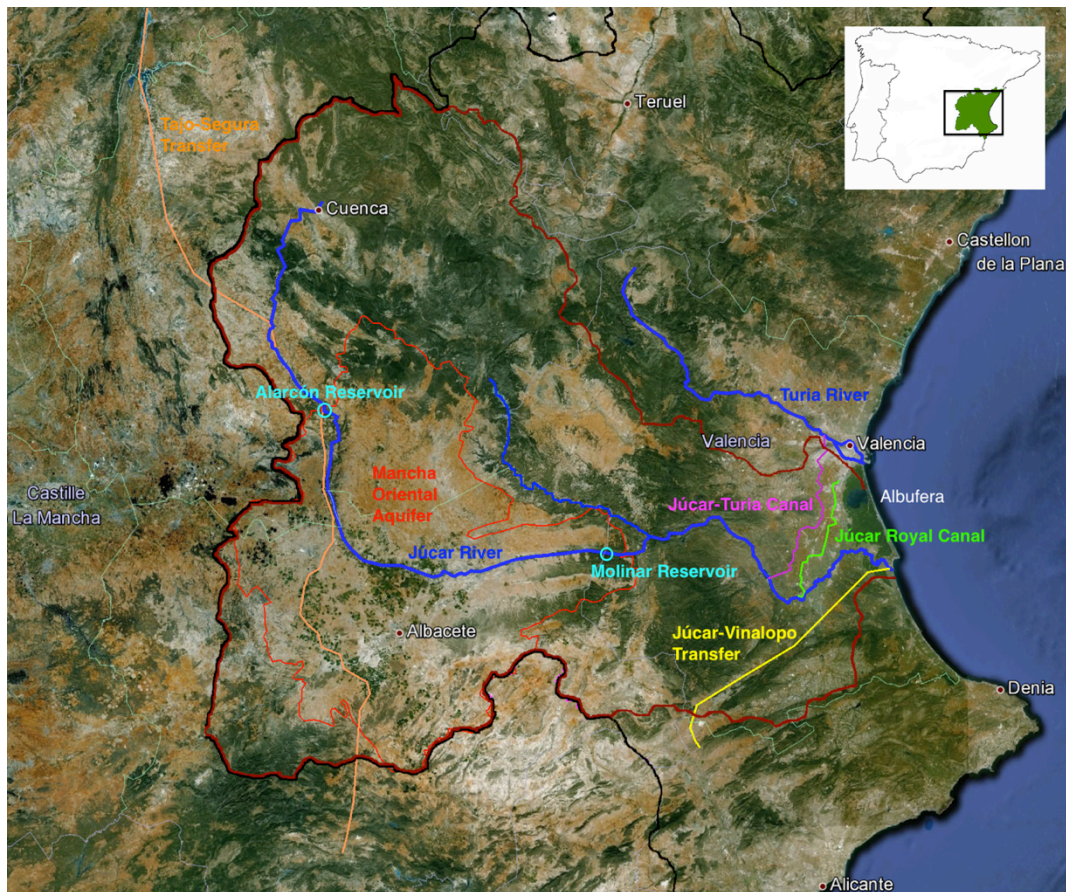
Figure 27. The black line (green on the inset map) surrounds the territory controlled by the CHJ, while the brown line surrounds the hydrological basin of the Júcar River itself, graphically illustrating the disconnect between political authority and geological features inherent to Lorenzo Pardo's 1926 delineation of the Hydrographic Confederations.

The Júcar River, for which the CHJ is named, is the largest of several rivers within the agency's territory and served since the eighteenth century as the principal source of water for the Albufera and the farmlands surrounding it to the east and south. Originating in the mountains near Cuenca, in Castile-La Mancha, the Júcar passes through the dry Manchegan province of Albacete before crossing into Valencia and heading east towards Cullera, south of the Albufera Park. Even before farmers in La Mancha began to mine the aquifer that underlay the river, the construction of more than a dozen large dams for flood control and water storage, all in the interest of irrigators and residents downstream in Valencia, had already substantially altered the river's course.<sup>29</sup> Additional canals built during the Franco regime, including one just west of the Royal Canal, expanded the area of irrigated land in the historical Ribera area, and just as Pardo had imagined, Valencian agriculture flourished under the intensification of hydraulic works, producing high-value crops in greater volume than ever before.

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<sup>29</sup> Collado Rosigue, "Water Management".

Figure 27: Hydrological features and infrastructure in the Júcar River basin.<sup>30</sup>



Upstream, meanwhile, the Manchegan provinces of Cuenca and Albacete had remained dry and increasingly depopulated throughout the Franco era, causing substantial land abandonment and impoverishment among rural people. But farmers in La Mancha knew that their lands lay above significant groundwater reserves. Since the Middle Ages, in fact, Manchegan landowners had tapped into the subterranean reserves.<sup>31</sup> Those early wells extracted water either by gravity or hand drawing, and were usually very shallow and suitable only for household use or, at most, the irrigation of small kitchen gardens or orchards.<sup>32</sup> In the 1970s,

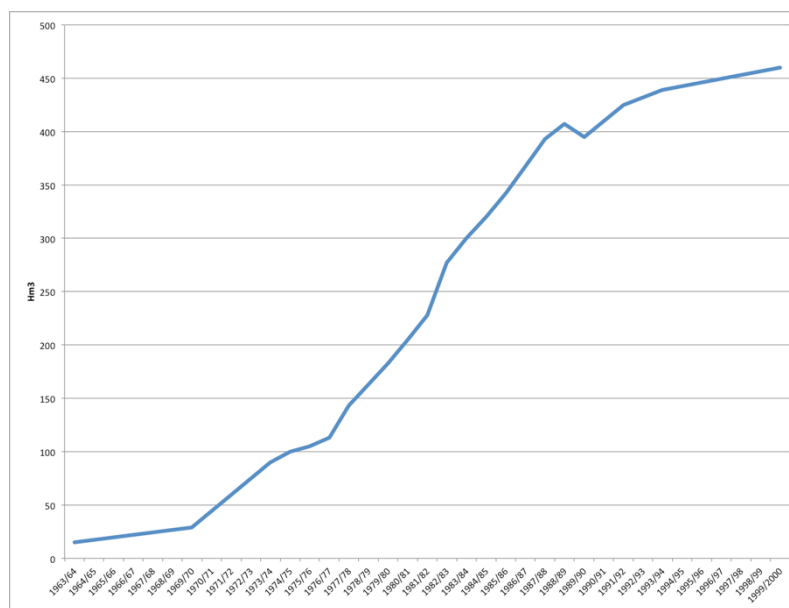
<sup>30</sup> Map by author, using Google Earth.

<sup>31</sup> Lemeunier, “Hidráulica Agrícola,” 58.

<sup>32</sup> N. Hernández-Mora, L. Martínez Cortina, and J. Fornés, “Intensive Groundwater Use in Spain,” in *Intensive Use of Groundwater: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Ramón Llamas and Emilio Custodio (Lisse, Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger B.V., 2003), 406.

however, a combination of new water-mining technologies and the discovery of the Mancha Oriental aquifer, the largest on the Iberian Peninsula, beneath the province of Albacete, transformed the prospects of Manchegan agriculture.<sup>33</sup> Farmers in Albacete promptly accelerated their exploitation of the water resources that lay beneath their soil, digging hundreds of private wells without oversight from the CHJ and demanding state investments in infrastructure to pump the water into their fields. Water extraction from the aquifer skyrocketed (Figure 28).

**Figure 28: Water removed from the Mancha Oriental subterranean aquifer, 1963-2000.<sup>34</sup>**



But the Mancha Oriental was not an isolated body of water, and extractions by the Manchegans would have serious impacts on users elsewhere within the Júcar hydrological basin. The aquifer, as it turned out, had historically been the principal source of the Júcar River’s water (Figure 29). As it flowed over the Mancha Oriental, the Júcar’s volume nearly doubled.<sup>35</sup> So long

<sup>33</sup> José Luis Pimental Equihua, “Los límites a la autogestión y cogestión del regadío: el caso de la Unidad Sindical de Usuarios del Júcar,” *Boletín del Archivo Histórico del Agua* 39 (2008): 22-31, 29; Antonio Gil-Olcina, “Régimen natural y artificial del río Júcar,” *Investigaciones Geográficas* 40 (2006), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Data from CHJ, *Estudio de utilización*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Gil-Olcina, “Régimen natural y artificial,” 9-10; F.J. Martín de Santa Olalla et al., “Integrated water resources management of the Hydrogeological Unit “Eastern Mancha” using Bayesian Belief Networks,” *Agricultural Water Management* 77 (2005), 24.

as the wells in La Mancha extracted less water than could percolate back into the aquifer through natural water cycles, the Júcar's flow remained essentially unaltered even in years of drought. But in the 1970s and especially 1980s, as Manchegan water-mining accelerated and the water table dropped by an average of one meter each year, Valencian farmers downstream noticed a significant change in the amount of water reaching their fields.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 29: Volume of water contributed to the Júcar River by the Mancha Oriental and precipitation, 1942-1990.**<sup>37</sup>

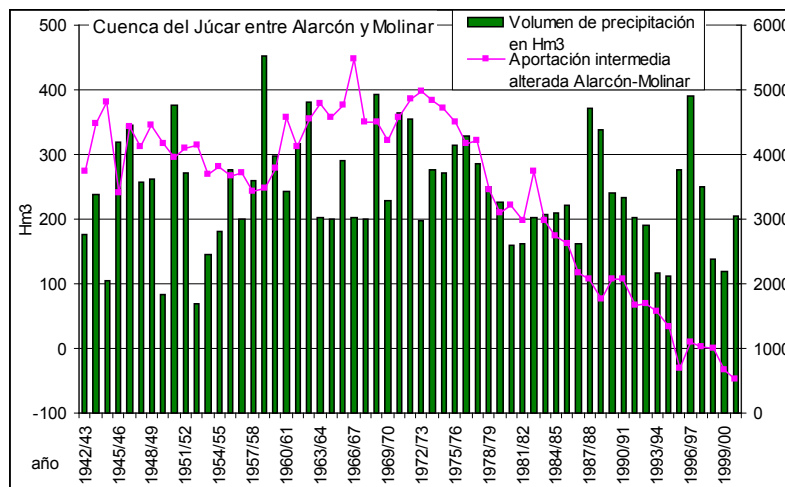


Figure 28Figure 30 offer a clear statistical demonstration of this process, revealing the parallel trends in water extraction from the Mancha Oriental and the declining amount of water reaching the Júcar, which itself translated directly into declining water entering the Júcar Royal Canal beside the Albufera. Figure 29 was produced by the CHJ as part of a lengthy report to the

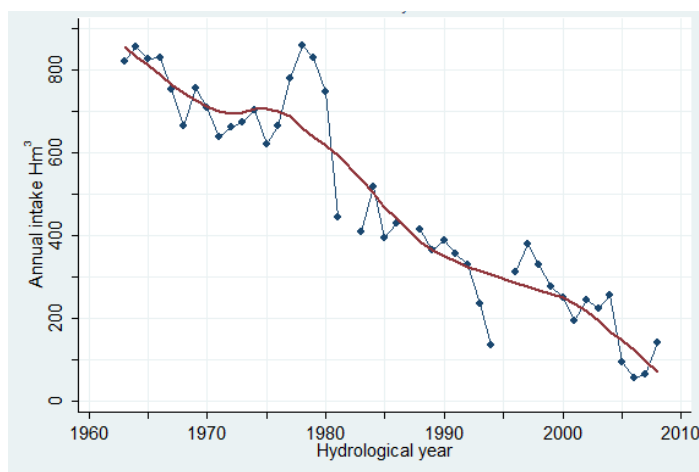
<sup>36</sup> Elena López-Gunn, “The Role of Collective Action in Water Governance: A Comparative Study of Groundwater User Associations in La Mancha Aquifers in Spain,” *Water International* 28 (September 2003), 370; Martín de Santa Olalla et al., “Integrated water resources management; CHJ, “Estudio de utilización,” 44, 51, and 283; CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Memoria 35; Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Medio Rural y Marino, *Programa de Acción Nacional Contra la Desertificación*, August 2008, 29, accessed May 13 2013, <http://www.unccd.int/ActionProgrammes/spain-spa2008.pdf>; David Sanz et al., “Modeling aquifer–river interactions under the influence of groundwater abstraction in the Mancha Oriental System (SE Spain),” *Hydrogeology Journal* 19 (2011): 480; CHJ, *Informe para la Comisión Europea sobre la Conducción Júcar-Vinalopó*, December 2004, 61-62, [http://www.chj.es/es-es/medioambiente/planificacionhidrologica/Documents/Mejora%20del%20Conocimiento/InformeJ%3%BAcar-Vin\\_CE\\_Dic2004\\_definitivo.pdf](http://www.chj.es/es-es/medioambiente/planificacionhidrologica/Documents/Mejora%20del%20Conocimiento/InformeJ%3%BAcar-Vin_CE_Dic2004_definitivo.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> CHJ, “Estudio de utilización,” 45.



national Environmental Ministry and General Direction of Hydraulic Works, for the purpose of aiding in the creation of a national plan of water use and management. The graph shows changes in the two principal water sources for irrigators along the lower Júcar River, namely precipitation (green bars) and the Mancha Oriental (pink line). A decline in either of these two sources results in significant declines in the river's total volume, and declines in precipitation eventually produce decreased contributions from the Mancha. In an extended period of drought, such as that of the mid-1990s, the river all but vanishes (Figure 30). Figure 31 offers a visual representation of the impacts of these combined stresses.

**Figure 30: Water inputs to the Júcar Royal Canal, 1963-2008<sup>38</sup>**



**Figure 31: Comparative images of the Júcar River in years of low and average rainfall.<sup>39</sup>**

Left: the Júcar at the end of the 1993-1995 drought. Right: The Júcar ca. 2007.



<sup>38</sup> Graph represents average annual values with Lowess-smoothed trend. Statistical analysis by Lawrence Hamilton.

<sup>39</sup> Photos by Javier Ferrer, CHJ.



In 1989, responding to continued demands from Manchegan landowners, the Spanish government passed a Royal Decree expressing a “national interest” in the irrigation of approximately 68,000 additional hectares (168,000 acres) in the provinces of Cuenca and Albacete using water from the Mancha Oriental.<sup>40</sup> Though sufficient water had remained in the river throughout the 1980s to meet the demands of both Manchegans and Valencians, members of the Júcar Users’ Union (*Unidad Sindical de Usuarios del Júcar*, hereafter USUJ) expressed growing alarm that the river would be unable to sustain all claimants’ needs in times of drought.<sup>41</sup> As one Valencian farmer wrote in AVA’s newsletter, “in every period of drought the consequences, the problems, are worse than in the previous one, because, logically, the necessities are higher. The population grows, domestic and urban uses grow, industrial necessities increase, and above all the demand rises for agricultural irrigation.”<sup>42</sup> The national Ministry of Agriculture echoed these concerns, warning that future dry spells would be far more devastating than ever before as a finite water supply was stretched to meet the demand.<sup>43</sup>

If the plans for La Mancha were carried out, Valencian irrigators would almost certainly be forced to reduce their water use to accommodate new upstream users. Reduced water use could be accomplished, in many cases, by transforming fields to more efficient irrigation via sprinklers and “drip” systems, but such transformations would be costly and require not only a methodological adaptation by Valencians but also a substantial investment, only partially

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<sup>40</sup> Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, “Real Decreto 950/1989, de 28 de julio, por el que se declara de interés general de la Nación la transformación económica y social de las zonas regables de Manchuela-Centro y Canal de Albacete en Castilla-La Mancha,” *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 180 (July 29, 1989); “Vamos a impedir que nos quiten el agua,” *Agricultura Valenciana*, September 1989; “Se ortoga una concesión de Aguas del Júcar para regar tierras en las provincias de Albacete y Cuenca: AVA pide la nulidad del Decreto,” *Agricultura Valenciana*, September 1989, 7; “Indignación por la concesión de agua del Júcar a Castilla-La Mancha,” *Agricultura Valenciana*, September 1989, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Collado Rosigue, “Water Management;” Saurí and Moral, “Recent developments,” 357.

<sup>42</sup> “El agua, ese bien escaso,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, February 1991, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Teresa Albendín, “Agricultura proyecta reutilizar el agua de la Albufera para garantizar el cultivo del arroz,” *Levante*, December 15 1994:1.

covered by government subsidies. Environmentally, the modernization of irrigation along the Royal Canal would also mean less runoff from the fields reaching the Albufera each year, and commensurate declines in the health of the ecosystem. Setting aside for the moment the impossibility of growing rice on a drip irrigation system, the conversion of irrigation in fruit and vegetable fields along the Royal Canal alone would have resulted in a 30 hm<sup>3</sup> annual loss to the Albufera.<sup>44</sup>

With such concerns in mind, Valencian farmers took to the streets in the thousands, demanding that the Júcar Hydrological Confederation intervene to “prevent La Mancha from taking our water.”<sup>45</sup> Echoing Pardo’s arguments of half a century before, the USUJ argued that Valencia was fundamentally better suited for irrigation than La Mancha, and should not be made to sacrifice its historical water rights for the benefit of its neighbor.<sup>46</sup> In Valencia, they argued, irrigation kept more than 50,000 small farmers on their land, working an average of one hectare apiece of high-value fruits and vegetables.<sup>47</sup> In La Mancha, conversely, latifundia-style agriculture meant that only about 9000 landowners held 117,000 hectares (289,000 acres) of irrigated land, most of which was planted with low-value onions, garlic, alfalfa, corn, and sunflowers, or increased the productivity of traditional dry crops such as wheat, barley, and grapes. Many of those crops were profitable only under the subsidy system of the Common Agricultural Policy, and were in fact “surplus crops” for which no non-subsidized market existed. Because the river could not supply enough water for everyone, Valencians argued, the state

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<sup>44</sup> CHJ, *Informe sobre la Conducción Júcar-Vinalopó*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> “Vamos a impedir que nos quiten el agua.”

<sup>46</sup> “Se ortoga una concesión; “Indignación;” “Sin garantías de que los regadíos Manchegos no perjudiquen a los Valencianos: Continúa pendiente la ‘guerra del agua,’” *Agricultura Valenciana*, March 19904; “Vamos a impedir que nos quiten el agua;” Mario Gaviria, “Inundaciones, sequía y polución (IV): Valencia es imprescindible e insustituible,” *Levante*, December 30, 1987; Pimental Equihua, “Los límites a la autogestión,” 26.

<sup>47</sup> Marta Agujetas et al., “Representing the conflict: The representation of farmers’ opinions on the water conflict by regional Water Users’ Associations in the Júcar river basin” (Sustainable Land and Water Management, Wageningen University (June 2011), 5.

should protect older, more profitable irrigation systems against the attempted incursions of “new agriculture based solely on the policy of continuous subsidies.”<sup>48</sup>

Simultaneously, farmers and developers in the province of Alicante in the south of the Autonomous Community of Valencia also clamored for additional water allocations from the Júcar, having reached the limits of the aquifers and surface water of their own river basins. As early as 1985, some had asserted that any water still left in the Júcar river when it reached the sea was obviously “surplus” that would otherwise be “wasted,” and lobbied the state to build a new canal diverting this “excess” water to the south.<sup>49</sup> The petitioners even volunteered to help Valencian farmers convert their fields from blanket irrigation to drip so as to “save” water, leaving more in the riverbed for diversion to the south. Ecologists rolled their eyes at this wordplay, noting, “If there is water saved from irrigation, it is not ‘surplus’” but rather could be used for any number of other purposes locally, first and foremost in the Albufera.<sup>50</sup> Farmers agreed, touting their role in environmental conservation as yet another argument in favor of their own irrigation and opposing the new claims from Alicante.<sup>51</sup>

Jurisdiction over the allocation of water among the users of Alicante, Albacete, and Valencia lay with the CHJ, which at last took up the problem during the drought of 1993-1995. The resulting Integral Hydrological Plan for the Júcar Basin, published in 1997, offered a compromise of sorts, giving the Valencian farmers first priority with regards to the Júcar’s water but acceding to the demands of all new claimants, including the expansion of irrigation in La Mancha and the proposed transfer of water to Alicante for irrigation and tourism development

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<sup>48</sup> Salvador Alfonso, president of the Real Acequia de Moncada and of the National Federation of Irrigation Communities, quoted in “La cosa está ya muy clara: tarde o pronto, nos van a cobrar el agua,” *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, February 1992, 19.

<sup>49</sup> C. Esteve, “El Júcar enviará a Alicante 150 millones de metros cúbicos al año,” *Información* (Benidorm), December 12, 1985.

<sup>50</sup> Joan Miquel Benavent, interview with the author, El Saler, May 10 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Agujetas et al., “Representing the Conflict,” 17.

via a new Júcar-Vinalopó Transfer. It also allotted water to meet the “ecological needs” of wetlands and riparian ecosystems in the basin, of which the Albufera was by far the largest. In so doing, it parceled out all but 23.8 hm<sup>3</sup>/year of the Júcar river basin’s entire water resources.<sup>52</sup>

The CHJ’s Plan represented a myopic embodiment of the early-twentieth-century Hydraulic Paradigm profoundly out of step with late-twentieth-century physical realities in the basin. In particular, its reliance on fifty-year averages for the prediction of future water availability in the basin ignored the increasing frequency and intensity of meteorological droughts, which had ever-more serious economic and social impacts given the heavy reliance of water users. Over the fifteen years prior to the Plan’s drafting, the Júcar basin had undergone two major periods of drought, from 1980-1985 and again from 1991-1995. When factored into the previous forty years’ worth of data in calculating the average water availability for the basin, these dry spells all but disappeared. “Statistically speaking,” they wrote, “the inclusion of the last fifteen years (in which the two periods of drought aforementioned lay) is not very significant in light of the 1940-1980 series (it produces a reduction of only 5% in the average of the series with which the Guidelines of the Plan deals).” Thus, while noting the recent droughts as “cause for reflection as to whether we are settling into a period of extended drought, due either to an uncontrolled expansion of demand or to a deficit of infrastructure with which to meet it,” they made no allowances for the possibility of such a trend in their calculations of the expected future

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<sup>52</sup> The CHJ calculated the total amount of water in the Júcar river basin as 2383.9 hm<sup>3</sup>, including non-renewable groundwater and surface water that was not controlled by dams. Out of this, only 1733.69 hm<sup>3</sup> was considered “usable,” consisting of water contained in reservoirs and the amount of annual renewal to subterranean aquifers. The Plan called for significantly increased interbasin transfers out of the Júcar to other areas within the CHJ’s territory, which over the course of the twenty-year plan would reduce the amount of water available to 1633 hm<sup>3</sup> per year. Over the same period, the expansion of irrigation in La Mancha and elsewhere would increase the total demand to 1609.5 hm<sup>3</sup>. The difference of these two figures left only 23.8 hm<sup>3</sup> of “surplus” water in the river basin. CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Memoria 46-49.

resources for the basin.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the mention of a “deficit of infrastructure” as the root cause of drought, rather than simply the lack of water in a dry region, emphasizes the CHJ’s continued embrace of the Hydraulic Paradigm and its reliance on technofixes to meet the increasing demand even in worsening meteorological circumstances. In the Ribera region, for instance, the CHJ would permit farmers around the lake to open a series of “drought wells” that had been drilled into local aquifers in the mid-1990s, to allow them access to emergency water resources that would presumably be refilled in the next wet years. Like the planned increase of water transfers, however, this measure would not be sustainable in the event of a prolonged or widespread meteorological drought.<sup>54</sup>

As the scientific community reached a growing consensus on the subject of climate change over the course of the 1990s, many experts emphasized the Mediterranean as a point of particular concern, with strong indications of increasingly hot and dry summers in the area endangering agricultural production. The Iberian Peninsula has extremely complicated weather patterns, with immense local variability that defies overarching predictions and generalizations about temperature and precipitation.<sup>55</sup> On a regional basis, however, precipitation had generally declined along the Spanish Mediterranean coast since the 1960s, while variability from month to month had increased.<sup>56</sup> The month of March grew significantly drier, for instance, while

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<sup>53</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico de Cuenca del Júcar*, Memoria 87-88.

<sup>54</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico de Cuenca del Júcar*, Memoria 87-88; Estrela, Fidalgo, and Pérez, “Droughts and the European Water Framework Directive,” 182; Ferrer Polo and Paredes, “Water management in Mediterranean regions,” 13.

<sup>55</sup> S. M. Vicente-Serrano 2006: “Differences in spatial patterns of drought on different time scales: An analysis of the Iberian Peninsula,” *Water Resource Management*, vol. 20, 37–60.

<sup>56</sup> M. de Luis, J. Raventós et al., “Spatial analysis of rainfall trends in the region of Valencia (East Spain),” *International Journal of Climatology* 20 (2000): 1452 and 1461; R. Romero, J. A. Guijarro, and S. Alonso, “A 30-year (1964–1993) daily rainfall data base for the Spanish Mediterranean regions: first exploratory study,” *International Journal of Climatology* 18 (1998): 541–560; M. de Luis, J.C. González-Hidalgo, M. Brunetti, and L.A.

November grew dramatically wetter. Simultaneously, numerous studies of temperatures recorded in the province of Valencia show a clear increase in annual averages between 1910 and 1994, with changes especially pronounced in the summer. In conjunction, this meant that there was less water available in the Júcar basin precisely during those summer months when demand for water peaked, and that torrential autumn rains were more likely to cause damage from erosion and flooding on the parched soil.

Changing weather patterns in the Júcar basin obviously did not occur in a vacuum, but rather were direct repercussions of larger trends and events. Several long-term global weather patterns, including La Niña, El Niño, and most significantly the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), influence winter precipitation on the Iberian Peninsula, as do sporadic events that interfere with these larger trends to block or enhance storms.<sup>57</sup> Valencia's declining rainfall is almost certainly related to recent changes in the NAO, the influence of which is particularly strong in southern Spain. Though precipitation and associated surface water has decreased across the Iberian Peninsula, the trend is most pronounced in the south, in direct relation to the area of the NAO's greatest influence.<sup>58</sup> In the Mediterranean area, this change was also most pronounced in the summer, which has increased the likelihood and severity of summer droughts.<sup>59</sup>

It is impossible to ascribe direct causality to global climate change for specific weather

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Longares, "Precipitation concentration changes in Spain 1946-2005," *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 11 (May 2011): 1260; José Carlos González-Hidalgo, Michele Brunetti, and Martin de Luis, "Precipitation trends in Spanish hydrological divisions, 1946-2005," *Climate Research* 43 (November 2010): 216-218; S.M. Vicente-Serrano, "Spatial and temporal analysis of droughts in the Iberian Peninsula (1910-2000)," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 51 (2006), 83-97.

<sup>57</sup> R. García-Herrera et al., "The outstanding 2004/05 drought in the Iberian Peninsula: associated atmospheric circulation," *Journal of Hydrometeorology* 8 (2007): 495.

<sup>58</sup> J. Lorenzo-Lacruz et al., "Recent trends in Iberian streamflows (1945-2005)," *Journal of Hydrology* 414-415 (2012): 473.

<sup>59</sup> J. Luterbacher et al., "European Seasonal and Annual Temperature Variability, Trends, and Extremes Since 1500," *Science* 5 (March 2004): 1499-1503.

events or even multiyear trends such as those observed in the Júcar basin. That being said, the scientific evidence clearly supports a conclusion that Mediterranean temperatures rose and precipitation declined more than the global average after at least 1980. Based on multiproxy data, by the early 2000s climate scientists established with greater than 95% certainty that the European climate as a whole was warmer than at any time during the past 500 years, and that it continued to warm at a faster rate than the global average.<sup>60</sup> This trend was consistent despite the extreme variability of Iberian precipitation patterns.<sup>61</sup>

Even if the CHJ's scientists were somehow unaware of the ongoing research on long-term climate change, the temperature and precipitation trends of the past several decades should have given them some indication that the Júcar's future was not necessarily mirrored by its long-term past. By their own admission, the spate of recent droughts had led them to wonder if the region was entering into an extended dry period that could affect its water resources, which would intensify the problems raised by altered water use practices and contribute to greater resource uncertainty. Nonetheless, they made the conscious decision to ignore this prediction when allocating the basin's resources, promising increased hydraulic infrastructure, and declined to encourage or incentivize water users to conserve their resources. In so doing, they created a situation that all but ensured ongoing deficits and conflicts between water users.

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<sup>60</sup> Luterbacher et al., "European Seasonal and Annual Temperature Variability;" A. Nicault et al., "Mediterranean drought fluctuation during the last 500 years based on tree-ring data," *Climate Dynamics* 31 (2008), 227–245; J. P. Bethoux, B. Gentili, and D. Tailliez, "Warming and freshwater budget change in the Mediterranean since the 1940s, their possible relation to the greenhouse effect," *Geophys. Res. Lett.* 25 (1998), 1023–1026; D. Camuffo et al., "500-year temperature reconstruction in the Mediterranean Basin by means of documentary data and instrumental observations," *Climatic Change* 10 (2010), 1169–1199; C.C. Repapis, C.M. Philastras, "A note on the air temperature trends of the last 100 years as evidenced in the eastern Mediterranean time series," *Theoretical and Applied Climatology* 39 (2004), 93–97.

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. José M. García-Ruiz et al., "Mediterranean water resources in a global change scenario," *Earth Science Reviews* 105 (2011): 123; M. Sanz-Elorza et al., "Changes in the high mountain vegetation of the central Iberian Peninsula as a probable sign of global warming," *Annals of Botany* 92 (2003), 273–280; M. Vargas-Yáñez et al., "Warming trends and decadal variability in the Western Mediterranean shelf," *Global and Planetary Change* 63 (2008), 177–184.

The CHJ's Plan essentially gave farmers in La Mancha and Alicante free reign to continue their demands for new, increasingly expensive hydraulic projects to permit the expansion of irrigation. Between 1980 and 2010 the area of irrigated land in eastern La Mancha tripled, watered almost entirely by extractions from the Mancha Oriental.<sup>62</sup> To the east, the Júcar-Vinalopó transfer was completed in 2010, carrying Júcar water from Cullera, just south of the Albufera, to Alicante against the protests of environmentalists.<sup>63</sup> Even with these projects, ongoing demands led to increasingly expensive technological innovations: Valencia led the nation in recycling wastewater for agricultural use, and even brackish water extracted from overexploited aquifers and desalinated at enormous expense was used in Valencian regions where "agriculture is profitable enough so as to assume the costs of desalinated or reused water and still obtain benefits."<sup>64</sup> A national plan, published in 2001, continued to emphasize the need to increase water resources and availability, both through expanded desalination facilities and the development of further water transfers.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to forcing Valencian farmers to look for new water sources at a time of special social and economic vulnerability, the declining flow of the Júcar River as a result of

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<sup>62</sup> Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, *Programa de Acción Nacional Contra la Desertificación*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> One of the most vocal opponents of the plan was María Sornosa Martínez, a native of the Valencian AC and member of the European Parliament, who submitted several complaints about the transfer to the European Commission. María Sornosa Martínez, Written Question E-2650/00, "New data on the environmental risks of the Júcar-Vinalopó water diversion project (Valencia)," *Official Journal of the European Communities* 136 E (May 8, 2001); María Sornosa Martínez, Written Question E-3668/01, "New data concerning the Júcar-Vinalopó case," *Official Journal of the European Communities* 172 E (July 18 2002); María Sornosa Martínez, Written Question E-1549/02, "Impact of the Júcar-Vinalopó water diversion on the Parque de la Albufera in Valencia," *Official Journal of the European Communities* 301 E (December 5, 2002): 175.

<sup>64</sup> Vicente Serrano-Orts, Javier Paredes, and Joaquín Andreu, "Water reuse and desalination at Comunitat-Valenciana region, Spain," in Andreu et al., *Drought Management and Planning*, 193-201, 195-200.

<sup>65</sup> Consejo Nacional del Agua, *Informe sobre la tramitación como proyecto de ley del Real-Decreto Ley 2/2004*, 29 September 2004, cited in GHK, Roland Blomeyer, and Jason Anderson, *Strategic evaluation on environment and risk prevention under structural and cohesion funds for the period 2007-2013, National Evaluation Report for Spain, Executive Summary*, Brussels: GHK Brussels, 10 November 2006, 5-6, accessed May 13, 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/evalstrat\\_env/es\\_exec.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/evalstrat_env/es_exec.pdf); Candela, L.; Pérez Zabaleta, A. y Sahuquillo, A. "Comentarios al informe de sostenibilidad ambiental de las actuaciones urgentes del programa A.G.U.A en las cuencas mediterraneas," Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua, 18 May 2005, FDMA.



Manchegan irrigation resulted directly in the catastrophic environmental consequences described in the introduction to this chapter. In setting water allocations in the river basin, the CHJ's Plan made special reservations for the "ecological needs" of protected habitats and species in the Júcar river basin, ostensibly to prevent such crises as that of the tench die-off of 1994, and gave these environmental reservations even higher priority than the irrigation rights of Valencian farmers. In the absence of a specific study, the Plan stated that ecological needs for a given body of water were to be calculated by multiplying "the area occupied by water by 12.500 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/year."<sup>66</sup> In the case of the Albufera Lake, occupying a surface area of around 24 square kilometers, this formula should have guaranteed a reservation of around 300 hm<sup>3</sup> of clean, Júcar water each year, which conforms to the amount received by the lake circa-1980. A few years after the Plan was published, further calculations by the CHJ and by independent experts concluded that the lake would in fact need to receive a minimum of 253 cubic hectares of extremely clean water each year in order to achieve "levels of chlorophyll close to those that could offer good conditions for the reversal of the dominance of phytoplankton."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Normativa Art. 18.2 – 18.4

<sup>67</sup> Environmental water needs consisted of the amount of water necessary for each body of water to maintain its biological and geological functions, and to reach the water quality standards set by national law and, after 2000, by the European Water Framework Directive. The figures cited came from a series of modeled predictions for the state of the Albufera's waters between the period of 1995 to 2015, with a variety of quantities and sources of water, based on current realities and on plans to improve the quality of water reaching the lake by eliminating untreated waste and increasing treatment at Pinedo. In the 2000-2001 hydrologic year, the Albufera received 170.94 hm<sup>3</sup> of water with an average phosphorous concentration of 0.601 mgP/l, producing a chlorophyll concentration in the lake of 180ug/l, compared to an acceptable upper limit of 20 ug/l set by national and international environmental standards. Analysts calculated that the direct transfer of 121 hm<sup>3</sup> of water directly from the Júcar, in addition to high-quality water from other sources including runoff from the Royal Canal for a total of 253 hm<sup>3</sup>, "would produce levels of chlorophyll close to those that could provide good conditions for the reversion of the dominant state of the phytoplankton." TYPESA, "Simulaciones preliminares de diferentes escenarios simplificados con los modelos de calidad de aguas," *Estudio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de l'Albufera de Valencia* (2004); CHJ, *Informe para la Comisión Europea sobre la Conducción Júcar-Vinalopó, Comunidad Valenciana* (December 2004), 75-82. See also "Se aprueba el Plan Hidrológico del Júcar," *Agricultores y Ganaderos*, September 1997, 6; José Sierra, "Agró asegura que el caudal ecológico que fija el plan del Júcar no garantiza el futuro de los ecosistemas," *Levante*, July 20, 1992, 16; European Council, "Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy," *Official Journal of the European Communities* L 327 (December 22, 2000).

However, rather than set the lake's ecological minimum and guaranteed water allocation at either of these amounts, the CHJ's Plan allocated only 100 hm<sup>3</sup> for the entire Albufera Natural Park, asserting that "with the assignment of the traditional irrigation in the Ribera del Júcar, and considering its runoff and surplus, as well as the unregulated intermediate contributions, this hydric need is considered correctly satisfied."<sup>68</sup> The shockingly low and suspiciously round estimate of the Albufera's water needs immediately raised eyebrows among the environmentally-minded Valencian scientists. Agró activist Victor Navarro bluntly called the 100 hm<sup>3</sup> reservation "a joke," in direct violation of national, regional, and international laws requiring the CHJ to protect the park's ecosystems.<sup>69</sup> Scientists working within the park suspected that the number had been chosen arbitrarily and purposely set low so as not to interfere with existing or future agricultural, urban, and industrial demands.

Indeed, while documentation within the Plan provided statistics and sources to support its calculations of all the allocations for urban, industrial, and agricultural use, it offered no such information for the ecological estimates.<sup>70</sup> The Plan did not even specify whether the 100 hm<sup>3</sup> allotment referred solely to the water reaching the lake or to that in the entire park area; nor did it make clear whether the 100 hm<sup>3</sup> constituted only the contribution from the Júcar River or rather the amount of water reaching the lake from all sources.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the CHJ appeared to have treated the environmental needs of the river basin merely as an afterthought, prioritizing not only the maintenance of existing irrigation but also the unlimited expansion of agricultural water use over the conservation of the watershed's most valuable natural site.

Without further allocations from the Júcar, the Albufera's water quality remained

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<sup>68</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Normativa Art. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Sierra, "Agró asegura," 16.

<sup>70</sup> CHJ, *Plan Hidrologico Memoria*, Memoria 40-41.

<sup>71</sup> Acció Ecologista-Agró, *Documento Fundación Recurso Albufera*.

abysmal. Attempted techno-fixes, which sought to work around the problem of declining contributions from the Júcar, failed to produce the desired results. Immediately after the 1994 tench die-off, an agreement with the Valencian Farmers' Association allowed the Ministry of Public Works to begin pumping water out of local drought wells directly into the lake, hoping to raise the lake's water enough to permit the canal gates to open briefly and allow water to circulate. The next summer, when the same wells were fully engaged pumping water into dry fields, suggestions from park administrators included diverting water directly from the already-strained Royal Canal; installing a floating water purifier in the lake; dredging the lake to allow subterranean springs to replenish the water; and dredging the northern canals to permit more water to flow in from the Turia.<sup>72</sup> The EU even financed the installation of an experimental "oxygenation system" consisting of one hundred solar-powered machines that would generate bubbles in the lake.<sup>73</sup>

In the end, none of these measures proved sufficient, and park officials reluctantly opened a canal to carry in partially-treated water from the treatment plant at Pinedo. Pinedo's effluents carried nitrates and phosphates that would intensify eutrophication and, in the words of officials at the local Ministry of Public Works, "could set back the Albufera's recovery by years."<sup>74</sup> Despite these warnings, even after the 1993-1995 crisis, heavily polluted, partially treated water from Pinedo and other treatment plants came to play an increasing role in the Albufera's water supply (Figure 26). By 1998, more than seventy hm<sup>3</sup> of the water reaching the

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<sup>72</sup>Paco Moreno, "Bono no adopta medidas de urgencia para la Albufera, pese a que los pescadores denuncian su estado crítico," *Las Provincias*, August 16, 1994, 20; "Medio Ambiente destina 15 millones a la limpieza de acequias de la Albufera," *Levante*, October 17, 1994, 30; Francesc Martínez, "La junta rectora recupera un proyecto de 1916 para trasvasar agua del Júcar a la Albufera," *Levante*, August 12, 1994, 22; José Sierra, "El Consell quiere enviar agua de la depuradora a la Albufera," *Levante*, May 19, 1995, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Paco Moreno, "Cien oxigenadores podrían inyectar nueva vida al agua del lago de la Albufera," *Las Provincias*, June 15, 1995, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Sierra, "El Consell quiere enviar agua."

park was wastewater, of which 97% failed to meet pollution standards set by the European Union for fragile wetlands habitats.<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, despite dramatically improved local water treatment, by the new millennium the best that biologists could say about the lake was that it was “less eutrophic than during the 1980s” and that its plankton diversity and general health was “a more diverse assemblage reminiscent of the 1970s,” which was of course a far cry from the halcyon pre-industrial landscape of the 1960s.<sup>76</sup> Less optimistic observers reported that “regardless of the efforts carried out by National, Regional and Municipal administration to preserve and improve the environmental state of La Albufera, after 20 years of investment and struggle, the eutrophy of the system has been scarcely reduced.”<sup>77</sup> Continued urbanization outside the park boundaries, poor waste management, and most importantly the reduction of clean waters draining in from the southern rice fields had overwhelmed the few reforms that had been attempted.

Analysts for the EU also agreed with Spanish experts that national water policies and laws failed to comply with the 2000 European Water Framework Directive on water quality, which required member states to protect, improve and regenerate natural bodies of water, and would instead continue to worsen the overexploitation of peninsular resources.<sup>78</sup> The ongoing subsidy of water prices to irrigators by the Spanish government, moreover, clearly violated the

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<sup>75</sup> TYPSA, “Jornada de debate sobre el desarrollo sostenible de l’Albufera de Valencia, Documento de Conclusiones,” *Estudio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de l’Albufera de Valencia* (2004), 17; Collado Rosigue, “Water management.”

<sup>76</sup> María José Villena and Susana Romo, “Phytoplankton changes in a shallow Mediterranean lake (Albufera of Valencia, Spain) after sewage diversion,” *Hydrobiologia* 506-509 (2003): 283.

<sup>77</sup> Soria, “Past, Present and Future,” 141.

<sup>78</sup> GHK, *Strategic Evaluation on Environment*. The Directive’s mandate for artificial or heavily modified bodies differed somewhat, stating that such areas “should” be protected and improved so as to reach a “good ecological potential and good chemical state.” In a blatant attempt to escape its obligations under the Directive, the CHJ insisted that the Albufera “constitutes a heavily modified body of water which should obtain a good ecological potential and good chemical state,” despite its internationally, nationally, and regionally protected status. Local environmentalists continue to denounce such attempts in court, but have had limited success at the time of writing.

Directive's mandate that all users pay the actual value of the water, a measure designed to promote responsible use and reduce demand.<sup>79</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, Spain had the highest per capita rate of water use in the European Union, and water use was highest in the driest areas of the country, where demand already outpaced supply, and where farmers continued to file applications for new wells and interbasin transfers to further expand irrigation. EU analysts saw a clear need to "review...agricultural practices" in Spain with the objective of reducing water use, halting the expansion of irrigation, and controlling demand.<sup>80</sup>

But the European Union's role in the continued overexploitation of the Júcar basin water resources, which in turn was directly responsible for the poor water quality in the Albufera, was a complicated one. New water transfers constructed with European Structural Funds, for instance, co-financed with the state as part of various structural and rural development projects, had direct adverse environmental impacts on wetlands and aquatic ecosystems. The EU required an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to determine the extent to which the proposed project would alter protected habitats and Natura 2000 areas prior to approving funds for such projects, and in several Spanish cases, EIAs resulted in cancellation of new dams and canals.<sup>81</sup> In other cases, however, this safeguard failed. Analysts for the European Commission cited the Júcar-Vinalopó transfer, in particular, as among the most problematic in Europe in terms of "technical, environmental and economical weaknesses," even though the EIA had originally convinced European analysts that the water to be transferred was "surplus" not needed by any Valencian ecosystems.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Sauri and Moral, "Recent developments," 359.

<sup>80</sup> Serrano-Orts, Paredes, and Andreu, "Water reuse and desalination," 195; GHK, *Strategic Evaluation on Environment*, 1-6.

<sup>81</sup> Garcia, *Dams in Spain*, 9.

<sup>82</sup> GHK, *Strategic Evaluation on Environment*, 5; CHJ, *Plan Hidrológico*, Memoria 45.

Simultaneously, the CAP subsidy system served as a further incentive for farmers in La Mancha and Alicante to expand irrigation to still more crops of corn and alfalfa despite the lack of any market for their products, overdrawing reservoirs in the process. New reforms introduced in 1999 replaced price supports with a flat per-hectare payment, calculated on the basis of the average yields of a given area between 1986 and 1991.<sup>83</sup> Though this was intended to reduce ongoing environmental damage by decoupling the subsidies from production, in practice it meant that farmers who had engaged in intensive irrigation and chemical-heavy agriculture that produced high yields during the late 1980s remained eligible for higher payments from the EU than farmers in areas that had produced less during the same period. As a result, practitioners of the most environmentally damaging agricultural practices, and especially those who continued to overdraw subterranean aquifers, received disproportionately high CAP payments relative to pasture lands and environmentally-sensitive farms located within protected natural locations such as the Albufera.<sup>84</sup> Rural development and agri-environmental payments, constituting around 35% of the total CAP budget for Spain, only partially compensate for this discrepancy, leading Birdlife International to conclude that “current CAP payments are supporting the expansion and maintenance of environmentally harmful farming systems at the expense of wetlands and other aquatic ecosystems.”<sup>85</sup>

There appeared to be no easy solution for these problems. Spain’s agricultural sector, so inextricably dependent on the continued provision of free water and subsidized crops, continued

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<sup>83</sup> European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture, *Agriculture and the Environment Fact Sheet*. 2003, accessed May 13 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/envir/2003\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/envir/2003_en.pdf); European Commission, “CAP reform – a policy for the future,” accessed May 13, 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/fact/policy/index_en.htm).

<sup>84</sup> SEO/Birdlife and WWF España, “Quien Contamina Cobra? Relación entre la política agraria común y el medio ambiente en España” (Madrid: June 2010), 26; Birdlife International, *Reality Check: Are Common Agricultural Policy subsidies paying for environmental quality?* (July 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Birdlife International, *Reality Check*, 12, 16, and 45.

to occupy an important role in local economies as well as national cultures and landscapes. As the farmers' protests of the 1980s and 1990s show, changes to the CAP subsidy system would bring significant stresses to an already struggling sector of the population. Moreover, if water costs increased to their actual value, Spanish geographers calculated that CAP surplus crops such as cereals and fodder would become unprofitable. Such crops constituted 65% of Spain's total irrigated land, which meant that their collapse would lead not only to local unemployment and the disappearance of 300,000 Spanish farms, but to massive land abandonment that could worsen the environmental situation still further through lost habitat and ground cover.<sup>86</sup>

By way of comparison, a parallel case of hydraulic management suggests that the Spanish adherence to the Hydraulic Paradigm was not the only way to maintain a healthy agricultural sector in the late twentieth century. California, which possesses similar hydrological resources, distributions, and demands to those of Spain as a whole, has addressed the environmental and economic problems they pose very differently. Whereas increased social interest in the environment and the projected decline of agricultural commerce in the US led to a policy shift in the 1970s that favored resource conservation and reuse, in Spain environmental concerns only appeared in major legislation in the 1990s. By the early 1990s, while the Spanish government planned the transformation of an additional 600,000 hectares of land to irrigation, Californian water use for irrigation had fallen sharply as a result of water-saving practices and the withdrawal of land from irrigation, and was predicted to decline still more. Conversely, 44% of Californian water use went to the maintenance and improvement of aquatic ecosystems, slightly more (in an average year) than went towards agriculture, compared to less than 7% for Spain. In

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<sup>86</sup> Saurí and Moral, "Recent developments," 359.

terms of water quality, meanwhile, Pedro Arrojo Agudo, a top Spanish expert on water policy, has described Spanish plans as “light years away” from those of California.<sup>87</sup>

The story of water in Spain over the *longue durée* is one of patently unsustainable logic: of humid gardens in the desert; of urban development unchecked by natural resources; of an endless cycle of supply and demand that forces the state to continue to manipulate the hydraulic and geological landscape in the interest of a rapidly dwindling sector of the population. Changes in human behavior brought about as a result of the national water policy over the past century have created worse “droughts” than ever before, as the chronic mismanagement of water becomes evident when existing systems are pressed to their breaking point during periods of lower rainfall.<sup>88</sup> As critical observers have noted, a drought such as the one that devastated crops in the 1990s is

not an unforeseen catastrophe, a sort of divine curse that comes to test our mortal strength....It is, simply, something normal, linked to the climate of our country. Blaming Nature for what happens is not new; but in a dry country, for drought to be considered something exceptional and therefore unpredictable and the creator of irremediable ills...is close to sarcasm.<sup>89</sup>

This, in a nutshell, is the paradox of Spanish environmental policy over the twentieth century.

The government systematically encouraged and facilitated increased exploitation of the peninsula’s water resources, increasing the volume of water consumed annually through hydroelectric centers, urban expansion, touristic development, and irrigation. Consequently, farmers and developers changed their ways of life, abandoning old, drought-resistant traditions for heavily water-dependent, more profitable ones, rendering them vulnerable to even a slight

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<sup>87</sup> Arrojo Agudo, “España-California,” 391.

<sup>88</sup> Morales Gil et al. 2005; Manuel Toharia Cortés, “Las sequías en los medios de comunicación,” in *Causas y consecuencias de las sequías en España*, ed. A. Gil Olcina and A. Morales Gil (Alicante: Instituto Universitario de Geografía de Alicante y Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo), 490.

<sup>89</sup> Toharia Cortés, “Las sequías en los medios de comunicación,” 490.



reduction in the available water. The government's continued provision of ever-greater transfers of water to the driest parts of the country provided Spaniards with a false sense of security, even in dry years, that made conservation measures difficult or impossible to impose.<sup>90</sup> At the dawning of the twenty-first century, as evidence mounts that Iberia has been and will continue to be particularly severely affected by global climate trends, the ideological legacy of the Hydraulic Paradigm will continue to create conflict and dissonance in Spanish resource management.

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<sup>90</sup> Morales Gil et al. 2000, 13.

## **Epilogue. Rebuilding the Albufera in a Changed World**

Despite its extreme degradation the Albufera's biological value – especially with regard to birds – remained exceptional at the close of the twentieth century. Since the 1990s, as the presence of occasional “clear periods” in the lake has shown (during which the pervasive algae blooms died back enough to temporarily improve the water's transparency), the lake's aquatic ecosystems continue to respond swiftly to any improvement in water quality, indicating a high capacity for regeneration. The Albufera's prospects, in fact, may best be summarized in the words of one of the park's most dedicated advocates, Joan Miquel Benavent, who commented in his capacity as Park Director at the height of the 1995 drought that “there's no need to be dramatic” about the lake's imminent demise. Noting that wetlands in the Mediterranean frequently undergo natural cycles of drying and refilling, he told reporters that although the present situation appeared dire, “we are not dealing with an irreversible situation.”<sup>1</sup>

The Albufera's ecological tenacity notwithstanding, however, natural rates of recovery were slow and in some cases could not complete the regeneration of preexisting ecosystems. Erosion from the beaches, accelerated by the blockage of sand caused by the industrial port to the north, meant that the sand dunes, for instance, could not naturally reform. Likewise, so long as the lake's water quality remained low, native species such as shrimp and toothcarp could not

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Benavent, quoted in “El director del parque de la Albufera teme que la disminución de oxígeno haga peligrar la fauna del lago,” *Levante*, June 3, 1995, 35.

return, and the water's opacity prevented new rooted vegetation. It was not enough, local conservationists believed, to simply protect what remained of the landscape: nature needed some help.

This idea of “helping nature” to restore or recreate lost or damaged landscapes permeates conservationist discourse in the twenty-first century. The very concept of restoration, however, is heavily loaded with political and historical implications. One OTDA employee involved in the effort to restore the Dehesa eloquently summarized one of the recurring questions of contemporary conservation efforts:

We knew the components of the ecosystem, we knew the dominant actions, we had scientific information at our disposal; nonetheless, what was, in the end, the reconstructed form of that nature? Should we copy the images of old photographs and topographical maps? Imitate similar formations in other places? Perhaps invent a random picturesque place and call it a day?<sup>2</sup>

Answering this question required park managers to define the park's primary function. Making the park into a wildlife reserve, a public space, or a historical recreation, to list just a few of the possibilities, would each require very different measures. The landscape of the 1960s, which most experts agreed offered the ideal model for contemporary reconstructions, was moreover itself the product of centuries of interactions between humans and their environment, from the loss of Avienius' “oysters' lagoon” in the Middle Ages to the *tancat* construction of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The designation of the 1960s as the restoration “baseline” was thus based largely on feasibility and politics, rather than a desire to erase evidence of human involvement in

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<sup>2</sup> A. Fernandez de la Reguera, “Ordenación del frente litoral de la Albufera. Sector Dehesa de El Saler, Valencia,” *Ciudades 7* (2002-2003): 145-49, 146.

<sup>3</sup> OTDA, *Proyecto de Regeneración Integral de la Devesa de l'Albufera* (Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, June 1988), OTDA; see also EPYPSA, *Proyecto de Restauración y Recuperación Ecológica de la Devesa*, Valencia: Agencia del Medi Ambient, December 1990, 13-19 10; CHJ, *Informe sobre la Conducción Júcar-Vinalopó*, 56.

the park. To the contrary, as a natural park the coexistence of economic activity with biological value remained one of the principal goals.

The Albufera, moreover, did not exist independent from the surrounding countryside, which had also undergone transformative changes over the past decades and centuries. Even if technicians could recreate the landscape of the 1960s within the park, changes to currents, water use, and other factors well outside the park boundaries meant that constant maintenance would be needed to keep that landscape intact. The loss of clean water from the Júcar forced engineers to divert recycled water from nearby waste treatment plants to clean up the lake, but the most sensitive areas of the restored ecosystem required special filtration systems to further improve their water quality. Severe beach erosion caused by construction to the north meant that the dunes could not naturally reform, and that additional sand needed to be periodically trucked in to prevent them from blowing away completely. Even with these precautions, the beach continues to recede rapidly, and OTDA engineers told me they wish they had built the dunes an additional five meters inland to give themselves more time before they wash away completely. The *matas*, the reed islands in the lake, proved especially problematic, subject to constant erosion from water currents that are no longer blocked by rooted vegetation, and city engineers build and rebuild the islands in an arduous and labor-intensive process every few years (Figure 32).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> OTDA, *La Restauración de las Dunas Litorales de la Devesa de l'Albufera de Valencia*, Valencia: Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 2007, 28; OTDA, *Proyecto de Regeneración Integral*; Ayuntamiento de Valencia, *Estudios Previos Lago*, 158; Agencia del Medi Ambient de la Generalitat Valenciana, "Conoce el Parque Natural de l'Albufera," 1987, FDMA; Junta Rectora, December 19, 1989.

**Figure 32: Rebuilding *matas* and dunes.<sup>5</sup>**



City employees at the OTDA, now run by Antonio Vizcaino, took on a disproportionate share of the park management following a political shakeup that removed Benavent from office in the late 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Scientists and technicians there achieved remarkable transformations on the Dehesa with the help of funding from the European Union via the LIFE Program, an instrument designed specifically to finance environmental protection efforts. In addition to dramatically expanding their plant nursery for native vegetation, technicians converted the old partridge farm into a hospital for injured wildlife and turned the carp farm into a breeding center for endangered aquatic species.<sup>7</sup> OTDA workers demolished and covered up roads, parking areas, and subterranean electric and plumbing lines left by the urbanization, and uprooted stands of eucalyptus planted in the first half of the century.<sup>8</sup> In 1999, an EU grant paid for city employees to tear down the promenade, pull out old roads and parking lots, dig out the dune slacks, and replace invasive and introduced vegetation with carefully grown native species.<sup>9</sup> In at least some cases, their efforts were rewarded by the recolonization of the landscape with birds, snails, amphibians, and insects, as well as the fish introduced from their farm.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Photos from OTDA.

<sup>6</sup> Benavent immediately went to work at the OTDA, where he remains heavily involved in the Park's protection.

<sup>7</sup> Paco Moreno, "Relato de un salvamento: El cuidado de la fauna es vital para la Albufera," *Las Provincias*, September 5, 1994, 64.

<sup>8</sup> EPYPSA, *Proyecto de Restauracion*, 13-19; OTDA, *La Restauración de las Dunas*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> OTDA, *La Gestión de L'Albufera*, 17-19.

<sup>10</sup> OTDA, *La Restauración de las Dunas*; Moreno, "Relato de un salvamento."

The presentation of the Albufera as a “Natural Park” to a popular audience required administrators and scientists to grapple with much of the complex history that has been discussed in this dissertation. As in the creation of any museum exhibit, curators made careful choices about what to display and what to hide from view; how to contextualize each object or point of interest; what take-home message they hoped to convey to their visitors. Through reconstruction and appropriate signage, the park could be portrayed as a primitive, undisturbed landscape; as a wildlife reserve dedicated to promoting maximum biodiversity; as a public space for the enjoyment of all Valencians; or some combination thereof. Each of these choices was heavily value-laden, with political implications on the historical memory of the landscape and with personal impacts on the farmers, fishermen, and vacationers who used the space.

The choices made by the OTDA and implemented with EU funding reflect the continued politicization of the landscape and the role it has played over the past century with regard to Valencian identity. Technicians rebuilt the dunes with sand trucked in from the north, planted them with native grasses and plants grown in the OTDA nursery, and dug out the *malladas* in their approximate former location. But they also, in some cases, “improved” on the original landscape, increasing diversity and introducing new species. Two deep pools behind the dunes, unmarked and deep in the territory that is closed to the public, house some of the largest populations of endangered native fish and vegetation in Valencia, but do not resemble anything that existed in the area prior to the urbanization.<sup>11</sup> A few kilometers away, park technicians call the 116-acre Racó de l’Olla, once an unsuccessful horse racing track, the “the jewel of the park,”

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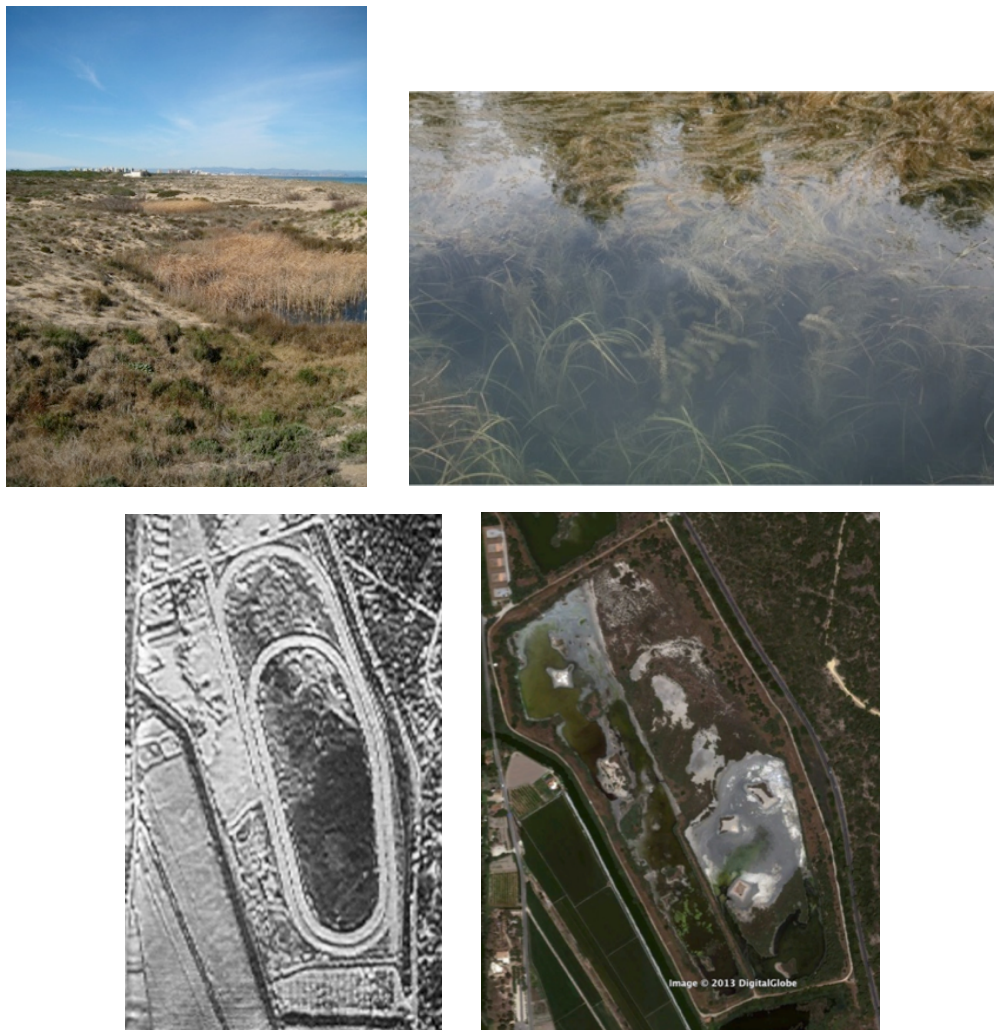
<sup>11</sup> OTDA, *La Restauración de las Dunas*, 46 and 59.

citing the immense bird populations that nest on its wholly manufactured islands and paddle through its filtered waters (Figure 33).<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 33: New landscapes.**

Top: Freshwater pools on the Dehesa, 2012.

Bottom: Racó de l'Olla before and after reconstruction (1980s and 2012).<sup>13</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Felipe interview, April 30 2012; Carmen Arjona, communist city council delegate, quoted in J. S., “El Ayuntamiento, contra el festival del Saler,” *Diario de Valencia*, March 23, 1982; OTDA, *La Gestión de L’Albufera*, 10; Generalitat Valenciana, *Informe sobre la Gestion 1994*; Generalitat Valenciana, *Memoria sobre la Gestion 1995*; Junta Rectora del Parque Natural de l’Albufera, Actas, December 20, 1990, Correspondencia, 3/931-8, AHGV; OTDA, “Anteproyecto Mallada del Racó de l’Olla” (September 1985), OTDA; OTDA and Generalitat Valenciana, “Proyecto de restauración del Racó de l’Olla, 1er Documento de trabajo” (1990), correspondencia, 9/1756-9, AHGV; P. Varea, “El Saler contará con una laguna artificial en el plazo de un mes,” *Levante*, March 25 1990; “Mil seiscientas parejas de charranes vuelven a nidificar en la Albufera,” *Levante*, April 8, 199726.

<sup>13</sup> Photos of the Dehesa pools by author. Pre-reconstruction Racó de l’Olla from OTDA. Contemporary photo of Racó de l’Olla from Google Earth.

Like other areas closed to the public, the Racó and the dune pools appear pristine, teem with life, and offer some of the greatest ecological and aesthetic value to be found in the Valencian Community. But they are also sites of some of the heaviest engineering and ongoing human intervention in the entire park. This raises an issue first raised by environmental ethicist Robert Elliot, who coined the term “faking nature” and argued that a reconstructed landscape is like a forged work of art: though it may be indistinguishable from the original, its intrinsic value is diminished.<sup>14</sup> The Racó, and indeed the whole park, are in this interpretation mere artifacts that do not convey the same aesthetic and moral attributes as an untouched wilderness.

The Albufera Natural Park, I argue, defies this negative view of restoration. Terms like “faking nature” and “forgery” suggest an effort to disguise past environmental damage, but the park’s management has opted to highlight the socio-natural coproduction of the area in all of its materials, crafting and displaying a certain narrative of environmental morality and political history for public consumption.<sup>15</sup> Signs and posters all over the park, and especially in the most aesthetically pleasing and apparently “natural” areas, draw visitors’ attention to their artificiality, and describe the ecosystem’s near-destruction in the 1970s, the continuing threats to its survival, and the enormous effort that has gone into its restoration. Javier Jiménez, the OTDA employee currently responsible for much of the park’s EU-funded signage and environmental education, told me that in many parks, managers would direct a visitor’s attention away from the horse stables that still serve as administrative buildings on the Racó, or bury the manhole covers

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Elliot, *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration* (London: Routledge, 1997), viii.

<sup>15</sup> Arguing against Elliot, Richard Sylvan suggests that we focus on the “considerable increase of natural features” that it can achieve, “albeit of lesser value than formerly,” rather than lament that restoration cannot recreate pristine nature. However, Sylvan’s interests lie largely in areas where rehabilitation consists of “helping” or accelerating natural healing processes, whereas in the Albufera such efforts have consisted largely of implanting and maintaining landscape features that would not have evolved by natural processes in the current environmental conditions.

“Mucking with Nature,” in *Applied Ethics in a Troubled World*, ed. E. Morscher et al. (Netherlands: Kluwer 1998): 74.



scattered throughout the woods. Instead, the Albufera's park managers opted to draw visitors' attention to these and other unsightly remnants of the past, emphasizing the differences between the landscapes that used to exist, the devastation of the 1970s and 1980s, and the progress that has been made since then. "Look at it," he says, with a sweeping gesture meant to encompass the blocky high-rises towering over the trees, the dark green waters of the lake, the electrical wires and abandoned water depositories dug into the ground. "Look how close it came to destruction."<sup>16</sup> The Albufera Park is a cautionary tale, to some extent, and a celebration of the redemptive power of the modern, scientific conservation movement. This shifts the purpose of restoration away from Elliot's notion of "faking nature," which implies an effort to cover up past damage and pass off a simulacrum as the original, and towards new functions of both aesthetics and education.

This narrative, moreover, has an explicitly political component closely related to the ongoing use of the Albufera as a trope of Valencian authenticity. Jimenez's colorful signs, along with the park's magazine, pamphlets, and other materials, all emphasize that the urbanization and pollution took place under Franco whereas the restoration was carried out by autonomous Valencian political authorities with the aid of the European Union. Materials are printed in both Valencian and Castilian, and in the signs, Valencian always comes first. There is also a strong emphasis in all park materials on the central role of rice farmers in maintaining the wetlands and water quality of the ecosystems, which helps to reinforce the area's historical image as the Spanish agricultural area par excellence and to strengthen ties between conservationists and local farmers, who continue to contest what they see as overly restrictive environmental laws.

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<sup>16</sup> Javier Jiménez, interview with the author, El Saler, February 15, 2011.

The redemption narrative, from industrial Francoist destruction to cooperative Valencian restoration, frames the modern park as an example of productive coexistence between humans and nature. Restoration efforts sought to approximate the substantially modified environment of the 1960s, complete with irrigation canals and intensive agriculture, while adding their own flourishes to meet contemporary ideas of scientific value and the intrinsic appeal of biodiversity. In so doing, they defined the landscape's value as derived in equal measure from ongoing human actions and its innate natural characteristics. Environmental engineers working on the Dehesa over the past thirty years have consistently defined their objective as alleviating the inexorable decline and disappearance of landscapes, just as it would be with a historic monument or a work of art, to maintain "the cultural wealth of the Albufera, in the broadest sense of the word," for "the generations to come."<sup>17</sup> To this extent, the Albufera represents the "middle ground" William Cronon describes in *The Trouble with Wilderness*, escaping the nature-culture binary and providing a productive and honorable role for humans within the natural world. The innovation of Albufera management is to redefine contemporary human actions, including the restoration efforts themselves, as an intrinsic part of this cultural heritage.

As hopeful as this narrative is, however, the Albufera remains a heavily contested site where farmers, politicians, scientists, and vacationers continue to vie for control. As none holds hegemonic control over this middle ground, none are entirely satisfied with their experience there. Farmers express frustration and, frequently, mystification at the continued restrictions on their use of the land; politicians enforce some conservationist laws while ignoring or subverting others; and scientist-activists routinely express disgust with everyone involved, up to and including their colleagues in the various environmental administrations. Meanwhile, of the

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<sup>17</sup> Benet Granell, "La Albufera de Valencia," 179.

millions of tourists who arrive in Valencia each year, only a tiny fraction ever visit the park's visitors' center or read the painstakingly-narrated signs. Those who visit the Dehesa at all do so in search of the same thing that attracted Valencians from all walks of life throughout the last century: a sunny spot to relax and enjoy a good paella.

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### **Interviews and Personal Communications**

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