

First-hand...

“Digitalisation is a key tool in achieving our corporate objectives of sustainability, efficiency, service improvement, and transparency”

The digital transformation at Aqualia, which is essentially structured around the search for and implementation of innovative technological solutions to optimise processes, represents a key axis in the company's present and future.

As the director of the Systems and IT area, María Ángeles Vicente is tasked with promoting its development, allowing for the better management of the end-to-end water cycle. As a result, Aqualia can reduce and/or prevent losses in supplied water distribution networks and optimise all processes related to the internal organisation and customer service, the backbone of all operations.

In 2022, Aqualia invested 216% more in promoting the digital transformation than was the case in 2021. What was the main outcome of this increase in investment?

Everybody who forms part of this team understands that digitalisation is a key tool in achieving our corporate goals of sustainability, efficiency, service improvement, and transparency.

It is thanks to the investment made that we could harness the new capacities provided and place them at the service of our processes.

Let's take an example: in 2022, we rolled out different projects that have allowed us to develop the early detection of leaks in the supply network. As a result, we are able to avoid the unnecessary loss of water and major damage to the network. This reduction in losses involves reducing the use of electricity and reagents as we do not have to treat this lost water. In my opinion, this is a clear example of how technology is a major ally when it comes to sustainability.

Aqualia Live is the smart management platform for the end-to-end water cycle designed by Aqualia. What are this platform's contributions in terms of efficiency and optimisation?

Aqualia Live is a platform designed by our experts, professionals with extensive know-how both about the end-to-end water cycle and technology. I like to say that it is created by people with a background in water and with water in mind, with the aim of zero waste, harnessing every last drop.

Our platform, which is modular and built-in, encompasses absolutely all the processes necessary for the end-to-end management of water: from collection and purification, distribution and the customer's entire life, up to treatment and re-use. For it to work correctly, it incorporates new technologies (IoT, Big Data, Cloud Computing and AI) and, as goes without saying, mobility, to optimise processes and make them more efficient and sustainable. Using it allows us to:

Improve service management: by digitalising the assets, we know what is happening in real-time in the grid and we can harness the simplification of procedures to act more efficiently and swiftly.

Improve the service offered to citizens: via the Aqualia contact App, users can check their consumption if they have a smart meter. And define their own alerts: detecting when there is no consumption in the home of a vulnerable person or when there is consumption in an empty second home. At Aqualia, we proactively report any leak detected at a customer's home so that they can

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check their installation without having to wait for further damage to occur.

Greater transparency towards the user, city councils and other organisations, sharing the most relevant information on the cycle and its main figures with them.

Aqualia Live, as a platform, not only facilitates the management process, as the competitive advantages it offers have been and continue to be powerful. It has been a major ally for our entry into and expansion through markets as established and complex as the French market, and in spite of the challenges faced in France, a country that is home to the world leaders in the end-to-end water cycle management sector.

Looking back to 2022, which projects would you highlight for their impact on the environment?

The early leak detection projects I mentioned have had, and continue to have, a huge impact on grid performance and the environment.

During 2022, we rolled out our technology in the different regions in which we provide services in the format of control centres. Thanks to these centres, established in eight locations around Spain, we are provided with details about what is happening in real-time in each town and city and can act immediately.

I would also highlight the mobility projects undertaken by our forces in the field in Spain, Italy, France, and Colombia. Following

a comprehensive roll-out, our plumbers now receive work orders on their mobile phone, eliminating unnecessary travel. This saves on fuel, eliminates the waste of paper and improves response time and the quality of information, increasing operational efficiency, which always results in a better-quality service for our customers.

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Finally, we have also been preparing for the Digitalisation line of the strategic project for the economic recovery and transformation in relation to the urban water cycle, reinforcing our teams and defining the main projects for the subsidies we are due to receive as part of the European Next Generation funds over the coming three years. These subsidies will provide important impetus to our goals.

Following these achievements, what are the new challenges facing the department in the future?

In the short-term, our aim is to focus on energy efficiency projects to ensure that our consumption in the management of our services is as low as possible. Other challenges will be the expansion of smart metering applying sensor systems to our assets.

And as goes without saying, continue to respond to the internal requests and needs we receive. We are a department that is at the service of the other departments. Technology represents an advantage and an opportunity from the moment it generates a positive impact on the daily life of citizens, helping to improve people's lives. Mobility projects and work orders in the field, returning to a recent example, have had a huge impact, improving the workday of 1,200 workers in Spain. That is what is most rewarding.