M A N A G E M E N T   T O O L S   F O R   E F F I C I E N T   W A T E R   U S E

LIFE supports **good water governance**

Good water governance is seen as a key management tool to address some of the problems that are emerging with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), in particular, problems highlighted by the analysis of the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and the Water Scarcity and Droughts (WSD) Gap Analysis. A number of important LIFE projects support governance strategies towards the achievement of EU water policy goals.

Since its adoption in 2000, the WFD has been the main driver for improvement of governance in European water management. However, implementation has sometimes been difficult – not least because of the very significant differences between and within countries in terms of water availability, quality, quantity, efficiency and so on; and also because of climate change and other human-induced pressures.

According to the recent reviews of the WFD, implementation has proved difficult for some Member States because of issues such as fragmented institutional structures, poor intra- and inter-institutional relationships and capacity (personnel, technical capacity, training, etc) which in turn, has undermined the ability of authorities to carry out the detailed reports and monitoring required. Governance gaps that need to be bridged range from the administrative, to policy (sectoral fragmentation), capacity (personnel and technical skills) and funding (budgetary) issues.

Other specific problems affecting water governance include difficulties in removing or changing water rights or concessions that may have been in place for a long time; and the governance of transboundary river basins - whilst there are positive examples of joint planning and coordination in shared river basins, this is not always the case.

The Water Blueprint, supported by the LIFE programme will look at ways to improve the governance system stemming from EU water policy, including the administrative set up and the potential to reduce the administrative burden, whilst providing the reactive capacity needed to face emerging challenges such as climate change adaptation.

Early examples

Across the EU there have been a number of positive examples of successful or improved water governance, co-financed under LIFE. More are expected in coming years, as the amendments to the WFD and links with other EU policies feed through to practical water-related actions on the ground.
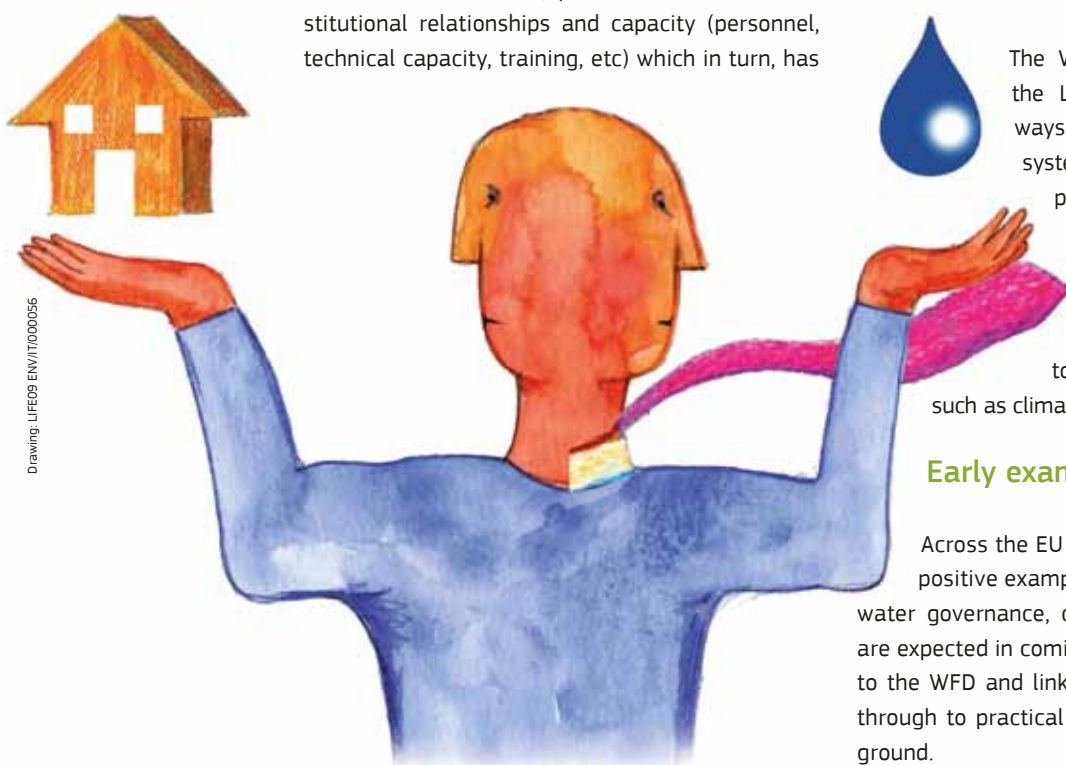
Drawing: LIFE09 ENV/IT/000056

A noteworthy earlier project is 'MOSYM' (**LIFE99 ENV/RO/006697**) carried out in Romania in 2000-02 – i.e., during the first years of implementation of the Water Framework Directive – to develop a new computerised system to better manage the environmental and economic impacts of the country's regular flood events. The project managed to bridge some capacity gaps by creating a means of allowing local authorities to gain direct, low-cost access, via the Internet, to essential flood exposure/warning data and forecasts, thus allowing them to draft and update physical planning strategies and zoning policies. By using the real-time information on water levels, the central and local authorities are also better able to respond rapidly to the danger of floods. The project team also outlined an RBMP that was one of the first examples of how to implement the WFD.

In Latvia, the 'Ziemelsuseja' project (**LIFE02 ENV/LV/000481**) extensively involved stakeholder groups in the design of an RBMP to resolve water quality problems affecting a number of small rural municipalities. Stakeholder involvement allows for coherence between the WFD and other policies, enabling better implementation. Eighteen public meetings were held in the municipalities during the project - recruiting more than 600 people (i.e. some 10% of the total population) in participation and monitoring activities. The knowledge and skills of the local decision-makers, technical specialists and managers was also improved via training courses, seminars and experience exchange. Together this participatory process resulted in water management plans for each municipality and increased awareness and understanding of river basin management. The project also led to the creation of 'Suseja', an institution with competence for coordinating the implementation of the Ziemelsuseja RBMP, whose existence enables cooperation at local, regional and national levels with regard to governance of water quality issues.

In Hungary, the 'Szigetkoz' project (**LIFE04 ENV/HU/000382**) helped to address governance concerns at a transboundary level. The project team developed an innovative decision-support tool (DST) for sustainable water and land-use management planning in the Hungarian-Slovakian Transboundary Danube Wetland Area. Historically, there had been little cross-border cooperation between decision-makers in the Szigetköz area, with negative impacts on river basin management. The LIFE project broke new ground in terms of Slovakian-Hungarian scientific cooperation and stakeholder involvement, leading to the development, testing and implementation of an integrated action plan based around the use of the DST. The GIS-based decision-support tool enabled environmental, economic and social needs to be evaluated at the same time and by the same parameters.

Thus, the DST, together with the other main result of the project, a flow-supplementation system, provided a means for Hungary and Slovakia to develop planning for sustainable development in line with the requirements of the WFD.

Lessons from Spain

A number of Spanish LIFE Environment projects are also looking at strategies aimed at improving water governance (see 'Water Change' – pp.11-13). LIFE 'CORBONES' (**LIFE03 ENV/E/000149**) developed and implemented a methodology based on the participation and involvement of local communities surrounding the Corbones river basin. The involvement of a wide range of individuals and organisations – from community groups to public authorities to farmers – has led to a broader and
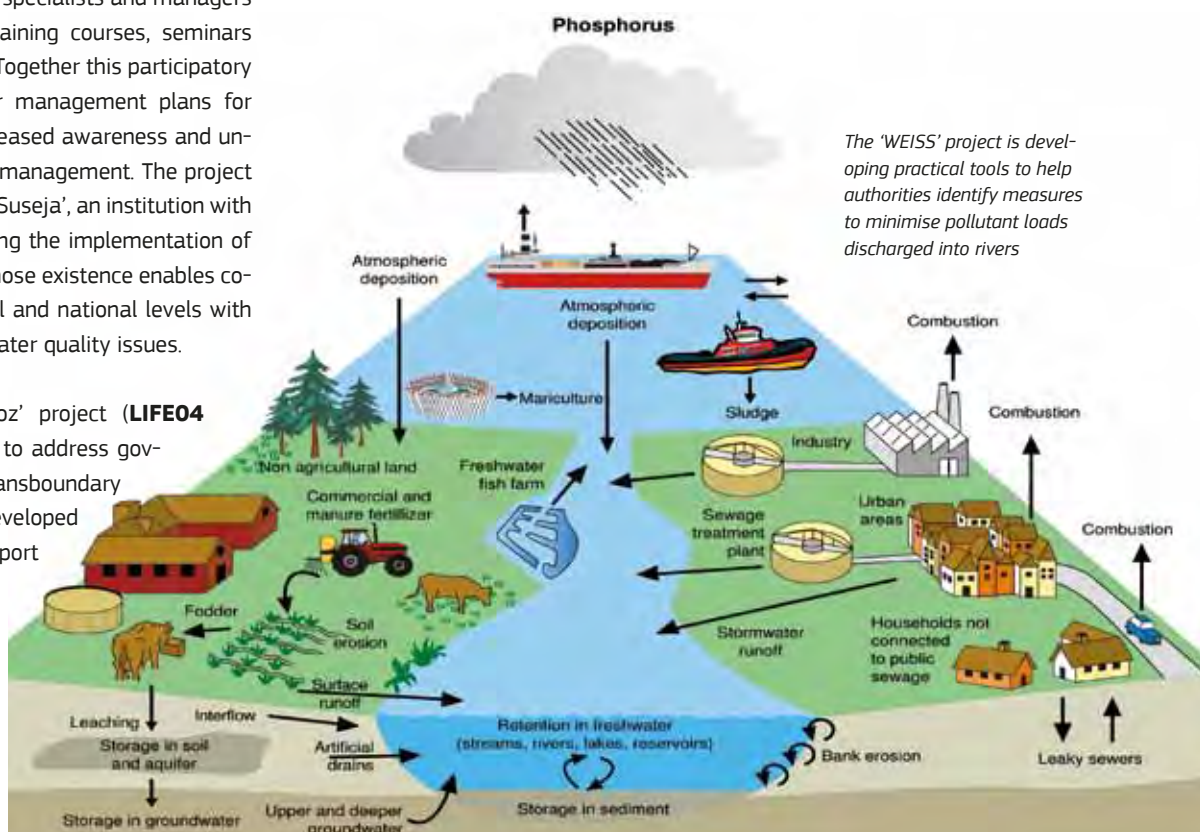
The 'WEISS' project is developing practical tools to help authorities identify measures to minimise pollutant loads discharged into rivers

Drawing: LIFE08 ENV/B/000042

Photo: LIFE09 ENV/IT/000056

Integrating the protection and sustainable management of water in urban spatial planning by creating a platform for local authorities is the aim of the 'WIZ' project

---

DID YOU KNOW?

The main principles for effective water governance are: openness and transparency, inclusion and communication, coherence and integration, equity and ethics.

Source: Bareira, 2006

---

more participative solution to a problematic environmental situation.

Extensive stakeholder involvement helped the project overcome problems caused by administrative barriers, as well as raising awareness and creating acceptance around the implementation of the WFD (and other legislation), especially amongst farmers. This was achieved through three means, the first of which was a Register of Environmental Information (RPIM). This database stored and displayed extensive information about water quality, typically only available through very technical final reports. By making existing information and management decisions more transparent, the RPIM has been a key tool for social participation.

The second element was the Platform for Corbones River Protection, a forum that directly involved numerous organisations, including the most polluting companies. This set the basis for an open consultative process and facilitated a general improvement in practices related to the river, including a decrease in pollutant discharges, waste disposal and illegal behaviour.

Finally, the project established an interpretation centre (CIRC), which became an essential element in its success and has been the key reference point for all issues related to river protection.

A second project, 'POWER' (**LIFE08 ENV/E/000114**), is targeting water efficiencies in irrigation for the ag-

ricultural sector – the country's highest consumer of water, accounting for 68% of all available water. It aims to validate models of "good water governance" combining principles of water and energy efficiency with applications based on renewable energies for the eco-management of water in irrigation uses. One of its main objectives is to use environmental local authority networks to promote models of good water governance based on its findings to 10 irrigation communities, 10 regions and 10 southern European cities. The project team is also developing an exemplary model at regional level to reinforce the transfer potential of the project. The model will incorporate measures of a financial and regulatory nature, with social and institutional support for examples of "good water governance".

Latest developments

Water governance is an ongoing concern of LIFE Environment projects in Belgium and Italy. The Belgian project, 'WEISS - Water Emissions Inventory Planning Support System' (**LIFE08 ENV/B/000042**) aims to support authorities across Europe in their implementation of the WFD. Specifically, the beneficiary is working to develop practical tools to help authorities identify which measures could minimise pollutant loads discharged into rivers, thus helping to improve water quality and ecological status.

Finally, the Italian project 'WIZ – WaterIZe' (**LIFE09 ENV/IT/000056**) will help integrate the protection and sustainable management of water in urban planning processes and local policy areas. This will increase policy coherence, help guarantee effective governance and break down the barriers that have impeded local, national and transnational cooperation among water authorities.

The project aims to incorporate long-term analysis of drinking water management in urban spatial planning by creating a platform for local authorities to be involved in decision-making processes. 'WIZ' will contribute to the integration of the European Framework for Adapting to Climate Change into other local and EU regulations particularly in relation to future water management conditions. Another important project outcome will be the creation of a network of European projects within the water technology platform, thereby helping to increase transnational co-operation on water management. The project will also involve citizens and SMEs in water governance with the aim of increasing public participation and understanding of the issues involved.