



AER Summer School

“Water, engagement for our future”

August 24-29, 2009 in Valencia (ES)

Context

On the occasion of the 14th AER Summer School and 8th AER Youth Summer School, Valencia became for one week the European Water Capital, when almost 200 adult and youth participants worked together to develop and share best practices on the topic of sustainable water management in Europe's regions.

By bringing together regional policy makers, officers, experts and young people, the Summer Schools provided an opportunity to exchange best practices and develop policy approaches further. The unique character of the AER Summer Schools is that this process is not only driven by experts and the political establishment, but also reflects the needs and opinions of young citizens from across Europe.

The objective of the Summer School was to help regional administrations understand the importance establishing a “European water saving culture” which is characterized by the responsible and sustainable management of this resource. At the same time, the Summer School also aimed to show concrete policies, methodologies, as well as technologies that can contribute to this objective.

The importance of focusing on this topic arises from a number of developments that are quickly making water management one of the most pressing challenges in Europe:

- Deserts and dry areas will expand and become ever more arid. Studies are estimating, that the Mediterranean region will have to expect a decrease of water resources of around 10-20% over the next thirty years

- Areas with an abundance of water and high levels of rainfall will most likely experience even more of the same in the future. This poses an increased risk for water related natural disasters.
- Regardless weather shortage or abundance of water: It is apparent that water affects a number of sectors that our societies depend on, including the economy, food production, health care, forestry, biodiversity and energy production.

Much has to be done to change the mindsets of many citizens, governments and businesses that water is a limited resource and that the consumption of this resource should be adapted accordingly. Developing innovative strategies to promote a European water saving culture is a pivotal objective in the light of the abovementioned challenges. Furthermore, sustainable water usage is not only about changing consumer behaviour but also about the development of new technology that allows more effective water usage as well as climate friendly energy production. This sector, therefore does have the potential to create many new technology-driven enterprises which can show the way of how to combine economic growth with sustainable development.

Content

Given the complexity of the topic, the Summer School offered a number of work-shops which were organised throughout the week and which provided a distinctive perspective on the topic of water. This allowed for more in-depth discussions and ensured that the participants could work in smaller groups with other participants who had a similar interest. The Summer School was organized along the following 3 working groups:

- Group 1: Water Management
- Group 2: Water and Climate Change
- Group 3: Water Governance and Communication

Group 1: Water Management

Regions need to provide innovative strategies to ensure safe water and sanitation for all. The workshops in this pool focused on the problems faced by policy makers when they define plans and implement infrastructures. A wide range of water management technologies was introduced, including irrigation systems, water treatment and energy generation technologies as well as other infrastructure projects that enable regions to ensure safe water supply, sanitation facilities, but also green energy generation. The variety of solutions and approaches was impressive, ranging from small installations for single households up to big projects for entire cities and regions.

Group 2: Water and Climate Change

The availability of water will change and be affected by the climate. Draughts and floods will be more severe and recurrent. This will affect not only the economy and human life, but also the ecosystems and the biodiversity. The participants of this workshop focused on the bigger picture and examined the challenges that climate change and extreme weather phenomena impose on the environment and the population. This included the discussion of a number of issues, such as climate projections, mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change, as well as preservation policies for the natural environment.

The discussion in this pool was guided by the principle to prevent the avoidable and adapt to the unavoidable. Because even with the best mitigation strategies, water-related effects of climate change will not be avoidable. The challenge for many regions, therefore, is how to adapt. And it became clear, that climate adaptation is to a large extent about water resource management.

Group 3: Water Governance and Communication

Developing technology to make water management more effective is an important piece of the puzzle. However, water related problems cannot be solved by technology alone. Therefore the participants in the third workshop discussed legislative and political strategies, public participation as well as education and training measures in order to develop a new



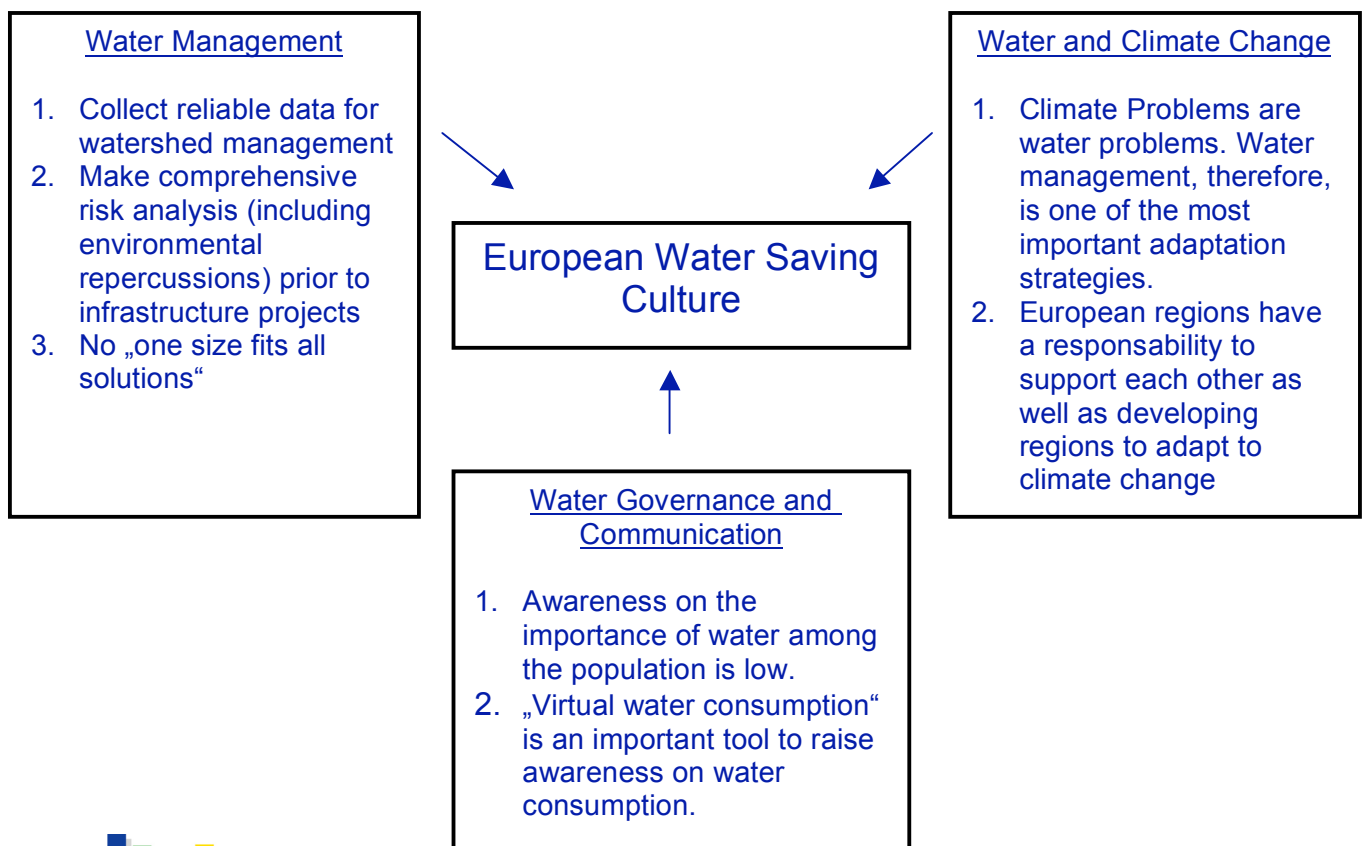
water culture in Europe. So the focus here was on awareness raising strategies and on ways to influence the political decision making process.

Horizontal Workshops:

These workshops were complemented by plenary discussions, which focused on underlying issues of interest to all participants, such as the overall water situation in Europe and EU funding opportunities for water related projects. The horizontal workshop also gave participants the opportunity to propose their ideas for joint projects dealing with water, and instruments to be developed by the AER Water Working Group in order to promote better water management all over Europe.

Results

Following one week of intensive debate and exchange – both in the plenary and in the working groups – the participants identified a number of crucial factors that have to be addressed to develop a European Water Saving Culture. These factors are as follows:



Next steps

Beyond these findings, the participants convened at the end of the week in a Project Forum Corner to discuss and exchange concrete project proposals. A number of proposals have been identified, which will now be further elaborated and handed in to obtain EU funding.

AER's Water Working Group will receive the ideas and suggestions developed by the participants of the Summer School and will evaluate, how they can be integrated into its working program. This ensures, that the results of the Summer School will not be lost and that the topic water will remain high on the agenda of AER.

Should you have any question regarding follow-up measures from the Summer School and how your region can participate in the Water Working Group, please contact:

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