



Second session of e-waterexpo.net

Water and cities

Water Tribune in Zaragoza focused this week on the theme of 'Water and Cities'. Because of their growing importance in development: cities are not only economic engines, but more and more places for social interaction and participation. Urbanization is on the increase and the pressure to feed and provide water for poor city dwellers is stretching thin government resources, which are also needed to provide safety for its citizens, protect property from erosion, floods and draughts. Providing leadership for sustainable growth and peace in cities under such challenging dynamics is becoming an art form required at all levels, including stakeholders.



Strategic planning, effective city management, and dialogues with relevant stakeholders can help with the short and long term dilemmas facing politicians and mayors. During the session participants from Accra, Delft, Lilongwe, Washington and Zaragoza discussed these dilemmas.

'Listening to the City, is of crucial importance', says Mila E. Freire, Senior Advisor Finance Economics and Urban Department to the Vice President of the World Bank, 'This is essential for successful governance -- to accelerate decision-making that enables immediate implementation, while aligning with long term and strategic goals and aspirations'.

Some cities have proven successful in managing scarce resources for their citizens and interests groups, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Another component discussed was the extent to which decision-makers and planners are acquainted with the availability and operation of new technologies, innovative financing and decentralized governance mechanisms that can be used for sustainable water management in cities.



Managing Water for the City of the Future



During the past years, global change pressures, escalating costs and other risks inherent in conventional urban water management are making it increasingly difficult to efficiently manage scarce water resources. Also, satisfying water demand and waste water disposal without creating environmental, social or economic damage is a growing challenge.

The SWITCH project aims to bring about a change in urban water management away from existing ad hoc solutions and towards a more coherent and integrated approach. SWITCH is the name of a five year action research program, co-funded by the European Commission and implemented by a cross-disciplinary team of 33 partners and 13 cities in 15 countries around the world.

'The key question is how do cities themselves define sustainability? This is

the basis from which we work on this project, towards an integrated fashion and approach", says Professor Kala Vairavamoorthy of UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education during the 2nd e-waterexpo.net session at the Water Tribune earlier this week.

The network of researchers and practitioners work directly with civil society and governments using a 'learning alliances' approach to share, learn about and implement innovative approaches. Other methods used to accelerate the adoption of more sustainable urban water solutions across different geographical, climatic and socio-cultural settings are demonstrations, research, training and knowledge sharing.

Royalty visits the Water Tribune

This week, Water Tribune Director Eduardo Mestre literally had his hands full. He not only had to welcome HRH the Prince of Orange and his wife Princess Maxima from the Netherlands, but also Prince Albert II from Monaco.

The Royal couple visited the Water Expo to attend the symposium 'Building with Nature', organised by the Netherlands Water Partnership, which took place at the Water Tribune.

Prince Albert visited Water Tribune a day later and was joined by Luc Laliberte, the founder of the renowned Cirque du Soleil, to launch the new One Drop Foundation in Zaragoza. "Water issues transcend the boundaries of countries and affect the whole of humanity," Prince Albert stated. "This is a major challenge of this century and it is essential that organizations throughout the world come together in a global movement of solidarity to ensure the preservation and better management of a resource that is both irreplaceable and fundamental to life."



Lodz returns its rivers back to the people



The climate in Poland has over the years changed significantly, resulting in more rainfall in spring and less in summer. The Polish city of Lodz is located in a watershed where 18 streams originate and the Sokokwicz river dominates the area.

As society is increasingly changing from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, the local government and environmental professionals in Lodz created a community based delivery process as a way of using global knowledge to address local issues. This was one of the reasons why city environmentalists, planners and scientists decided to join forces with the local administration. Opening rivers to the public creates recreational areas for citizens while securing space to absorb summer floods.

Today, the wetlands, restored in the watershed, are providing a refuge for birds and the 'sliver-sided' fish, which were once faced with extinction. This new approach was done in tandem with a thorough clean up of the region. The City of Lodz now is now leading the charge to bring together scientific and environmental stakeholders into a learning alliance. This movement was in part responsible for persuading Lodz city manager, Slawomir Turkowski, to join the e-waterexpo in Zaragoza this week.