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Profile of the WaterTime project

Overview

Watertime is a 3-year research project, finishing in December 2005, which aims to improve the sustainability of decision-making on water services systems in Europe's cities. Watertime addresses this problem by aiming to produce a decision-making model. The model will focus on decisions concerning the organisation, management, regulation and financing of water and sanitation systems covering both the management of water supply and sewerage services. It will develop a framework for analysing decision-making processes and examining the experience of decision making on changing water systems in selected case study cities in EU member and candidate countries. The project aims to systematise the lessons drawn by developing a decision-making model for comparing different options on a multicriteria basis (fiscal, economic, social, environmental, technical, legal and political). This will provide for enhanced transparency, accountability and participatory approaches in the decisionmaking process as well as the monitoring and review of decisions made.

Case studies

The starting-point for the research project is the conducting of case studies on urban water systems in EU member states and accession countries. The research concentrates on the fundamental organisational decisions - restructuring, financing models, privatization - of the last fifteen years. The sample of case study cities is not chosen on a random basis, but has been selected to represent a broad range of geographical and structural variation and development. The central element of the case studies is the quality of decision-making processes, particularly in regard to transparency, and to the participation of stakeholders and the public. Analyses will seek to uncover which options were considered, what decision-making methods, structures and systems were used, who the principal actors were, and who might have influenced them. In addition Watertime is conducting a historical analysis of the water systems in the case study cities, to provide a historical context for recent events, and to develop an understanding of the role of past decisions in determining or limiting current options.

Case studies at a glance: 29 cities, 13 countries

Estonia:	Tallinn
Finland:	Tampere, Hämeenlinna
France:	Grenoble
Germany:	Berlin, Munich
Hungary:	Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged
Italy:	Arezzo, Bologna, Milan, Rome
Lithuania:	Kaunas, Vilnius
Netherlands:	Rotterdam
Poland:	Gdansk, Lodz, Warsaw
Romania:	Bucharest, Timisoara
Spain:	Cordoba, Madrid, Palma de Mallorca, Gran Canaria
Sweden:	Stockholm
UK:	Cardiff, Edinburgh, Leeds

Output of the project

The first of two central outputs from Watertime will be comprehensive guidelines on best practice on decisionmaking on the urban water sector. This will include criteria, mechanisms and techniques to improve the sustainability of future decisions in the sector. The guidelines will be aimed at supporting government decision-makers, and will include a substantial role for participatory principles.

The second output will be a model for participative decision-making, which will make it easier for researchers and decision-makers to the complex processes involved. The model will structure an evaluation of potential options in terms of a multi-criteria analysis, including economic, social, ecological, technical, legal, political aspects. This will provide those responsible for decision-making in the urban water sector with a grounded basis for sustainable decision-making. Finally, the 29 case studies on decisionmaking on the urban water sector in a wide range of different European context will provide a wealth of material of interest in its own right, and a basis for future research.



First WaterTime workshop: 10th to 12th April 2003, Greenwich, UK

The first WaterTime workshop took place in April 2003 at the University of Greenwich, UK. The workshop saw presentations from a range of stakeholders (including the UK's water regulator, Ofwat, and the French association of *regies*, FNCCR), as well as from members of WaterTime's Steering Committee.



University of Greenwich

A range of presentations on decision-making from external experts provided a valuable contribution to the analytical background papers supporting the future development of WaterTime's Analytical Framework. Contributions included presentations on participatory decision support systems, on the use of stakeholder analysis to analyze decision-making in the urban water sector, and on the potential role of decision models such as Systemic Grammar Networks in developing a formal decision-making system for WaterTime. For more details on the Greenwich workshop, including downloadable presentations, please see http://www.watertime.net/wt_april_2003_presentations.asp A presentation of particular relevance to the WaterTime model for participative decision-making, which will be developed from the synthesis of the 29 case studies, is presented here:

“From Technocratic to Participatory Decision Support Systems: responding to the new governance initiatives”, *Ângela Guimarães Pereira & *Serafin Corral Quintana*****

The presentation examined more than 10 years of developments in decision support systems (DSS) for environmental issues (waste management, water management, land-use planning, etc.) by a research group at the Joint Research Centre. In the earlier days the group developed some computer systems, aiming at decision makers understood as experts, whose requirements were often not obvious (many times imagining them as computer and systems literate), featuring expert knowledge databases and multi-criteria engines and requiring skilled users to take care of the analysis. Those were highly technocratic systems because they would not take into account the social context in which decisions were taking place, deploying mainly scientific information. The group has evolved the concept of the DSS through the years, the latter approach viewing it as a “context” or a “platform” for helping all those involved in decision making processes to access the necessary information for a useful debate to take place. This is in line with the new styles of governance, arising from the science and governance initiative in Europe. Newer tool developments for supporting dialogues, debates and deliberations are still computer tools, carefully designed for the audience they aim at and placed into a social process instead of embedding the social process into the system.

The presentation discussed this evolution and demonstrated the group's new principles for conceiving and designing these tools, namely the creation of a concept-tool named “TIDDD: Tools to inform debates, dialogues & deliberations”. The latter was illustrated with a recently implemented project in the field of groundwater planning, in a French river basin. This system (software, model, and information gathering) took 6 months to develop, a reduction from the first such system which had taken 14 months. The presentation also addressed issues arising from quality assurance of information.

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Selected Publications

Recent EU initiatives affecting public services and water

The European Commission (EC) and its various departments (DGs) have taken a number of recent initiatives in the last year which support an increased role for the private sector in public services, especially water. The combined effect is pressure from the EC for countries in the EU to restructure their sectors so as to facilitate private concessions in water services. The initiatives include:

- A report on the scope for introducing competition into water services was commissioned by the



European Commission (EC) and published at the end of 2002, by DG Competition. It finds little evidence of how competition could benefit the sector, but nevertheless encourages more PPPs : http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/publications/studies/water_sector_report.pdf

- An EC *Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships* was produced by DG Regio in March 2003 specifically in the context of the ISPA programme, to make its funds more easily available to private sector projects. It is in effect a guide on how to push through PPPs, and in the process collect ISPA grant money, not a guide on how to make best decisions on infrastructure projects. http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/ppp/ppp_en.pdf
- The EC's DG Markt published the EU "Internal Market Strategy Priorities 2003 – 2006", in May 2003 at http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/strategy/index.htm . The paper identified services of general interest, and water in particular, as sectors where the DG wants to open more of the market to private sector operators. Commissioner Bolkestein had already said in a November 2002 speech that he wants to open the water sector to competition http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/strategy/index.htm
- The Commission itself issued a Green Paper ("Public Services: a new role for Europe?") in May 2003, discussing the future of public services in the EU in view of trends towards contracting out and privatisation, not least under the Commission's own directives. Its annexe on 'policy instruments' includes a section on the GATS provisions of the WTO. europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/services_general_interest/docs/com_2003_270_fi_en.pdf
- The EC's trade section, DG Trade, handles the EU's negotiations in the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) general agreement on trade in services (GATS) . DG Trade has made two sets of proposals concerning water: first, to redefine environmental services, so that water is covered by GATS; and second, requests to many countries to open their water services. These requests were unofficially leaked: for information and a critique see <http://www.wdm.org.uk/campaign/gats109leaks.htm> .
- An 'EU Water Initiative' (EUWI), a combined initiative from DGs Research, Development, Environment and External Relations, was launched in 2002 at the WSSD in Johannesburg, as an EU contribution to the objectives of sustainable water management, water security, and the millennium goal targets for extending water supply and sanitation. EUWI partly aims to support the business activities of EU multinational companies by providing aid and subsidies to reduce or remove the risks they have experienced in developing countries. This was developed in close consultation with the companies: see <http://www.corporateeurope.org/water/infobrief6.htm> . The EC documents on EUWI are at http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/water-initiative/index_en.html .
- The EC has promised to issue a paper on PPPs in Europe before the end of 2003. This is expected to set out EC thinking on the question of tendering of activities allocated to companies owned by public authorities. It will also concern the rules on concessions: a previous "draft Commission interpretative Communication on concessions under Community law on public contracts" was issued by the EC in 2001, see http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/publproc/general/concen.htm .

Survey by PSIRU. See www.psiru.org for a number of reports providing more detail.

WaterTime at a glance

The Project

Watertime is an EC-funded research project which aims to improve the sustainability of decision-making on water systems in Europe's cities. The project is studying decision-making on water systems in 29 European cities, drawing on their long-term historical experience as well as recent decisions. Watertime will produce a report on best practices, and develop a model for participative decisionmaking. The work will be disseminated to stakeholders and public authorities, who are also involved during the course of the research.



The Team

The interdisciplinary team of researchers involved in the project is drawn from different parts of Europe - Spain, the UK, Germany, Finland, Hungary - and brings together expertise from a range of different areas, including economics, political science, environmental science, law, and water institutions.

- PSIRU, University of Greenwich, UK (project coordinator)
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), Spain
- Tampere University of Technology (TUT), Tampere, Finland
- International Water Affairs (IWA), Hamburg, Germany
- Eötvös József College (EJC), Budapest, Hungary

The Steering Committee

The Watertime project is overseen by a steering committee with representatives from consumer organizations, environmental organizations, and trade unions.

- Consumers International,
- European Environmental Bureau (EEB),
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR),
- European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP),
- European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU),
- the Consumers Protection Association of Romania, and
- the municipal water utility of Cordoba, Spain (EMACSA)

The Case Studies

Country	Case study city	Partner	Contact
Estonia:	Tallinn	TUT	Jarmo Hukka: jarmo.hukka@tut.fi
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