

Bridging the gaps between science, regulation and practice in water environment management

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AQUARIUS is an Interreg North Sea Programme project carried out by 15 partners from 6 countries (Norway, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Scotland, and Denmark) all dealing with the implementation of the Water Frame Directive.

A primary objective of the project is to find ways for sustainable water environment management which by AQUARIUS is defined as management that in respect of the rules both leads to “good water environment”, enables continued viable agricultural production, and is cost efficient in the interest of society.

AQUARIUS works from Social-Ecological management perspective emphasizing the intricate linkages between ecological and social systems and the interdependent relationships among humans, that are mediated through interactions with biophysical and non-human biological units.

As a project AQUARIUS copies the presently ongoing struggle by all EU member countries to create a public participatory approach to water management planning and implementation such as is launched by the EU Water Water Frame Directive. It does so by engaging central water authorities, representatives from agriculture including agricultural advisors as well as research institutions in carrying out localized pilot studies in 7 pilot areas. Drawing on localized experiments with and locally founded experiences with different measures the project derives recommendations that may contribute to an EU policy approach.

The special session aims at discussing the preliminary findings of the ongoing project. It includes the presentation of a heuristic tool consisting of relevant considerations to beware of when engaging in stakeholder collaboration on specific measurements whilst acknowledging the farmer as the central water management practitioner.

The session also discusses some of the different pilot approaches to bridging the gaps between science, regulation and practice i.e. the concrete challenges faced by the approaches in trying to create outcomes that are mutually beneficial to various stakeholder interests. How can different stakeholders challenges be solved in cooperation creating a win-win situation for all? How can stakeholders (landowners) willingness to participate increase by seeing them as professional providers of eco-system services? When do stakeholders' overlapping interests allow for collaborative action and when do they hinder it? These questions are among the issues to be addressed.

One legal recommendation that may be derived from project experiences is a need to further to take the precautionary principle in public administration into account. In order to make sustainable solutions in an ever changing complexity, authorities need to make room for dynamic collaboration between science and practice.