
WaterDiss2.0 - Communicating research: Getting your message across

Monday, 14 May 2012, 09.40 – 12.50

Special Session at the IWA World Congress on Water, Climate and Energy,

The Convention Centre on May 13-18, 2012 in Dublin, Ireland

The FP7 WaterDiss2.0 project in a drop, Ulf Stein

The **implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and related regulation** is an ambitious policy goal. The FP6 project FUNDETEC, stated that “the typical length of time needed to complete the development cycle (in the water sector) is 10 years”; this means that research commissioned today will impact water management practices within about 12 years, far after the next milestones of the Water Framework Directive (2015, 2021).

WaterDiss2.0 is one of three projects in the **SPI-water cluster**, which tries to link policy makers, scientists and practitioners through research and activities. Together with [STREAM](#) and [Step-Wise](#), the WaterDiss2.0 project, funded within the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technology development (FP7), aims to improve the processes of research communication and uptake and adds an intermediate step after research, much like a marketing team in industry. The tools used in the process are innovative Web2.0 features, as well as a dissemination strategy template. When used, these tools need to be tailored to specific audiences or stakeholder groups.

Currently, **WaterDiss2.0** is working with the tools and activities developed in its Work Packages 1, 2 and 3. **WP1: Analysis** assessed a selection of FP research projects, by conducting questionnaires and interviews with project coordinators. This helped to analyze the dissemination impact and potential uptake of research results. WP1 developed a template for conducting the Individual Dissemination Strategy (IDS). The IDS framework guides project coordinators through a list of questions to develop a step-by-step dissemination strategy. First it looks at project results that are ready for dissemination, then identifies and defines the target audiences. After defining clear communication goals, dissemination activities tailored to the target groups can be planned and carried out. Finally, the progress made through the application of the IDS and related activities needs to be evaluated.

WP2: Individual Dissemination Strategy consists of a description of target groups, the preparation of dissemination events and the development of web features, i.e. the [European Water Community](#).

WP3: Marketing looks at joint dissemination activities carried out in the framework of WaterDiss2.0, such as brokerage events, summer schools, operation of social networking etc. To use the social networking tools and for a list of past and upcoming events, please visit www.waterdiss.eu

What's your message – and who is listening?, Darla Nickel

The second presentation by Darla Nickel gave an insight into the **findings on dissemination and utilization we gained during the WaterDiss2.0** project. Using the example of transfer of research results to policy (rather than practice or industry), Nickel presented recent developments in EU water policy and how policy makers can be reached (type of evidence and target group).

Successful dissemination and utilization depend strongly on how well the dissemination responds to the needs of the receivers (uptake). Different types of research outputs need to match the dissemination channel / mean in order to reach the targeted audience. The importance of designing a well thought-out dissemination strategy is often underestimated and requires thorough design and planning, as well as resources and skill. In other words, the **challenge of dissemination and utilization lies in matching the right knowledge, with the target audiences and their needs and the right media, format, language used.**

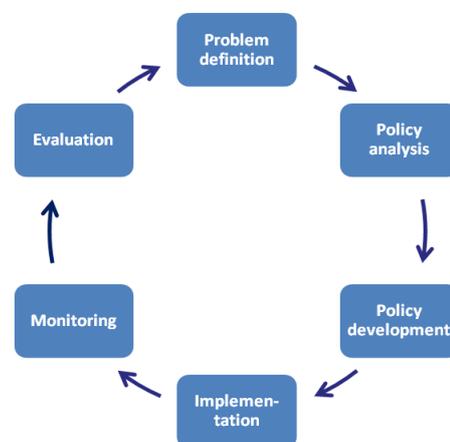
WaterDiss2.0 has identified **facilitators and barriers to dissemination and utilization.** They are grouped into the following categories (some examples are listed here):

| | Facilitators | Barriers |
|---------------|--|---|
| Projects | Strong engagement of project coordinators | High administrative burden |
| | Alternative sources of funding after project end | Lacking ability to formulate policy recommendations |
| | Synergies with past/running FP projects | Too many outputs |
| Outputs | Readiness for use | Not ready for use |
| | Policy relevance | Topic too specific |
| | Innovation | High cost of implementation |
| Target Groups | Project partners and target group overlap | Too large and diffuse |
| | High demand for output | Public resistance |
| | Geographically diverse stakeholders | Lacking structures for 'passing-down' information |
| Dissemination | Early dissemination; involvement of stakeholders | Lack of resources |
| | Communication in native language, free access | Communication language too technical / foreign |
| | Multipliers | Lack of clear responsibilities |
| | Flexibility of dissemination strategy | Bad match between output and needs |
| | Specific communication for output/target group | Proposal description limits flexibility |

The **conceptual framework** for dissemination in the form of the IDS addresses many of the barriers and tries to promote facilitators.

Taking the policy realm as an example, one needs to be aware that the interaction between policymakers and researchers is limited by the divergence of these two worlds. Evidence is only one of many factors influencing decision-making, as the latter is a process of compromise. Researchers must know the policy cycle of a specific policy, as well as the related policy actors at each stage. The graph on the right shows a simple example of the **policy cycle**.

A policy can be at any stage of the cycle, and sometimes at several stages at the same time. Generally however, it will start with a **problem definition**. Problems are often signaled by society, and through public awareness. Government recognizes that there is a need for an intervention. The **policy analysis** phase generates alternative solutions and evaluates them against a common set of criteria, the different interest and impacts (environmental, economic, cultural, etc.). At the **policy development** stage, the decision making takes place. The government weighs the presented alternatives and



decides on an adequate policy and a corresponding set of measures and actions. The decision is then implemented. Investments are made and engineering takes place. A **monitoring** program is executed to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan and identify any unforeseen effects. Finally, the policy and its implementation can be **evaluated**. This takes into consideration new developments, new social opinions and values, and new knowledge and understanding which may require additional measures. This may lead to a new iteration in the policy cycle. The policy cycle is then applied to EU water policy (please see the PPT on the website).

Objectives of working group session, Johanna von der Weppen

This presentation gave a short overview of the IDS template and how to apply it. Participants decided to speak about the INTERREG project INNERS, which was represented by the Communication manager of the Water Board Groot Salland, Mr. Warry Meuleman and Katrin Byl.

Working Groups: Hands on: Designing communication strategies aimed at uptake

The INNERS project highlights innovative energy recovery strategies. The objective of the project is to render the urban water cycle more sustainable. To this aim, the project follows several stages, starting with the modeling, through to demonstration plants and finally evidencing the possible reduction of energy used / energy re-use.

| | |
|--|--|
| Research output | Demonstration of a new large scale technology; Reusing the energy from waste water plants; Intended to make urban water cycle more sustainable |
| Link to EU policy | Urban Waste Water Directive, Renewable Energy Directive |
| Type of output and status | New technology ready to use |
| Main barriers | Legal and organizational questions, Commercialization |
| Utilization goal(s) / output objectives | Spreading the technology, Reducing the payback time, Raising awareness, Integration of different sectors |
| Target groups and characteristics | Companies, Policymakers at national levels and EU, Decision-makers at local level. The objective of the project is to show the technical feasibility of energy recovery methods and strategies to policy-makers through demonstrations. It also aims at facilitating cooperation between different sectors. It is based on a network of INTERREG North partners. |

Lessons from the exercise

Applying the IDS template to the INNERS project evidenced several results. First of all, it is important to go into detail when identifying and defining the target groups. Also, for projects targeting local stakeholders, starting at the lowest possible level might be the most appropriate. The discussion often brings up new target group, activities and means than previously thought. Therefore, critically revising ones focus / message is an ongoing and important task in order to avoid getting off the track. Also, Understanding the incentives of the project is crucial for defining the right target groups, activities and means. Often, working in a group for stakeholders that know only the basics of the project is a useful exercise, as they tend to ask questions thinking outside the box. Finally, the question of what happens with outputs after the project end is a recurring problem.