

WaterDiss2.0 Consensus Conference: Expediting the Transfer of European Water Research

Berlin, 3 – 4 November 2011

WaterDiss2.0 Consensus Conference Conclusions

Dissemination is an essential part of any research and its planning and process throughout the whole research duration and aftermath requires more attention. The WaterDiss2.0 Consensus Conference “Expediting the Transfer of European Water Research” provided a platform to discuss how water practitioners and researchers can catalyze the transfer and use of research outputs towards meeting policy aims set out in the Water Framework Directive. The conference was divided in a suite of three sessions, each of which focused on different aspects and challenges of dissemination of EU-funded water research projects. Session I sought to introduce, discuss and validate the WaterDiss2.0 consortium’s approach to communicating research results and to promoting their uptake in the water sector. In session II the dissemination strategies used in two FP projects were presented to illustrate best practice dissemination. In session III, participants discussed possibilities to improve dissemination and uptake of research results and solutions to overcome barriers in a World Café workshop format.

Session I: Presentation of WaterDiss2.0 Dissemination and Uptake of FP Water Research Results

Session I was inaugurated by the project coordinator Gaëlle Nion and Gilles Neveu with a presentation on the WaterDiss2.0 project. The analysis grid and dissemination strategy template were introduced by Darla Nickel who emphasized how the WaterDiss2.0 process can easily be integrated in the dissemination process within every research project. Nickel highlighted the main facilitators and barriers to dissemination and uptake. Main facilitators and barriers that came up in the discussion following the presentation included:

- Facilitators: a) person-to-person contact, b) project officer involvement, c) involving target groups from the start, d) timing, e) using the right communication channels.
- Barriers: a) difficulty of reaching stakeholders at all levels, b) language, c) science-to-policy translation, d) stakeholders have no time to search for information, e) person-dependant dissemination channels, f) lack of training on dissemination.



Session II: Best Practice Dissemination Strategies of two EU-Funded Water Research Projects

To illustrate practical examples of Dissemination Strategies, two FP6 project (AMADEUS, BRIDGE) leaders presented Best Practice approaches within their respective projects.

The AMADEUS consortium owes its success to: 1) an ambitious communication strategy, 2) good prerequisites (e.g. size of cluster with high visibility, booming technology, collective and coordinated effort organized by the MBR-cluster), and 3) a strategy implemented for greatest short term and long term impacts. Other important factors also played a significant role in favour of this success. The consortium's strong and coordinated effort of dissemination (~ 5% of budget) included: creating a strong visual identity, using various printed materials (press releases, articles in national / international journals, scientific articles in peer reviewed journals), attending international conferences endorsed by IWA, and using a joint and interactive web platform. The web platform has remained active in spite of the project having ended. The project's experience also points to the general trend that dissemination of technology related projects is more likely to be successful than dissemination of policy related projects. This might be due to technological research providing more ready-to-use outputs than policy research.

The BRIDGE project was successful in disseminating its results and recommendations, which were used in the CIS (Common Implementation Strategy) guidance document drafted by the Working Group 2C (DG-ENV and Member States). Key success factors of the project's dissemination strategy are: the role played by the project team, a diverse team of scientists and policy makers, and the strong involvement of some project partners in the national implementation of the WFD. The latter is a key point for dissemination at EU level. The use of a diversity of dissemination tools, from scientific papers to websites and newsletters also plays an important role in this success story. What is more, the project follow up was made possible thanks to the strong involvement of the advisory board with, DG-ENV and DG-RTD.

Session III: World Café workshop on improving dissemination and uptake of European research and identifying solutions for overcoming existing barriers

Participants were introduced to the concept of the World Café, outlining the structure of Session III, during which active involvement of the participants was required. This workshop format enables sharing collective knowledge, exchanging experiences and providing creative input to answer the overarching topic of Session III 'Improving dissemination and identifying solutions for overcoming existing barriers'. The next paragraphs summarize the findings, following pre-formulated key questions discussed during the workshop.

How much flexibility does a successful dissemination strategy require?

Flexibility is key for a successful dissemination strategy, as it allows highlighting how people, processes and policies change. The timing of activities, an open-minded attitude when conducting stakeholder analyses, and adapting strategies to local conditions are the main issues where flexibility is needed. On the other hand, too much flexibility might lead to missing the target (out of scope and control). Flexibility should not equate a lack of planning and while fixed and measurable objectives should be set at the beginning of the project, the strategy can often benefit from regular reviews to make necessary adjustments. The following questions remain open: how much flexibility do FP projects allow for effective dissemination? How does one guarantee flexibility (e.g.

possibilities to change what is written in the contract)?

Participants made the following suggestions to maximize chances for success: a) maintain good dialogue with EC in the negotiation phase, b) include Stakeholders in the Advisory Dissemination Board, c) increase the cooperation with Clusters and follow-up projects, d) establish an Advisory Dissemination Board at National and Regional / EC / Project level which would be responsible for providing assistance and for evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the strategy, e) involve international and national organizations as users of the results, f) make dissemination self-sustainable, g) ensure continuity of dissemination activities with all actors involved.

Participants also discussed how to measure success and identify barriers and suggested the creating of indicators of effectiveness. It was pointed out that effectiveness often relies on the motivation of the EC officer. Also, money was identified as a major barrier for dissemination during and after the project.

Where do scientists most need assistance with dissemination and uptake of project results?

Participants highlighted that communication expertise is often lacking within the project. Therefore scientists could benefit from assistance with: identifying final users, deciding when to launch the strategy, using Web 2.0 tools, and understanding different countries/cultures approaches to R&D. Key suggestions include: introducing a Dissemination Officer at the Commission, creating a database of important people in each country, improving scientists' access to market studies/reports, and increasing the score criteria for funding.

Participants recommended improving / increasing the following aspects to overcome shortcomings in dissemination strategies: commercial expertise within the research project, post/mid project impact assessment, matching of push-pull factors, training (summer schools), marketing/communication, web tools. The uptake of results is particularly dependent on the identification and setting of clear targets for users and sensitivity to the different time scales for stakeholders.

How can local governments and utilities benefit from the latest results of research?

Raising awareness amongst decision-makers was identified as a key issue to allow stakeholders to benefit from scientific research in the water sector. Other factors mentioned were: demonstration/proofing, certification, developing standards for guidance, identifying windows of opportunity, finding new peer-to-peer channels, making key sources of information available, and involving governments and utilities in the research agenda. It was suggested to establish national institutions in each country to create a link between scientists / researchers and users.

The following conditions can help foster uptake of innovation: existing legal requirements for implementation, understanding the potential benefits of innovation, ensuring a trustworthy source of information, limiting risk. Additionally innovation is most likely to be taken up if it responds to decision makers' needs, helps profiling themselves as leaders and fits in their own processes.

How can Web2.0 tools best be used to improve dissemination and uptake?

Some of the comments reflected the participant's doubts as to whether a new communication platform, the EWC, is needed. Given the complementarities between EWC and other platforms such as CORDIS, it was asked why EWC was not simply made part of that portal? Participants

also mentioned that users might have a hard time identifying with the tool if they do not know who is behind it. Finally one comment raised the question of what happens to EWC after project closure.

Web tools, described as a self publishing social network or a collaborative platform, were said to be beneficial for: sharing information (internally and externally), meeting people, increasing visibility, raising awareness and providing information on the projects, sharing of skills, finding information more easily by linking topics and projects, and providing adapted tools to different target groups. These advantages should be advertised to increase the use of web tools. It was suggested to create a Wiki for research projects and a Wiki of national stakeholders.

Notwithstanding these advantages, a lot of the participant's comments suggest that they are not very familiar with the use of Web2.0 tools. It was mentioned that web tools (because they are public) can become "polluted". This raises the problem of the need for control and restriction of access. Additionally the following issues or questions concerning the use of such tools were raised: how to link to other communication tools, and how to use existing tools to attract people.

Several factors enabling a successful use of web tools were highlighted: targeted and quality information, short and simple language, blog language.

Final Findings

The WaterDiss2.0 Consensus Conference provided a great opportunity for stakeholders, scientist and decision makers to discuss the challenge of successfully disseminating their results to ensure uptake. One obstacle that was repeatedly mentioned is the difficulty in reaching target audiences. Although this is a central step in the dissemination strategy, it seems that no infallible solution can be put forward. While some projects have reached out to the use of web tools, many remain unfamiliar with it or would need further assistance to maximise the benefits. Seizing the right moment for transfer of research results as well using language are prominent factors of success in dissemination. The WaterDiss2.0 consortium stressed that communication is a skill, and expertise can be gained through trainings and assistance that the WaterDiss2.0 project can provide. By bringing together practitioners and scientists, the conference has contributed to a fruitful knowledge exchange and provided the platform for seizing opportunities to enlarge expertise.