

Water Europe

Policy Report

Water Innovation Europe 2023

20-22 June 2023



Water
Europe



Technology & Innovation

About This Report

The first United Nations Water conference for 46 years concluded earlier this year, reminding us of the need to act now. This challenge opens a wide range of opportunities for the whole society, while making more and more pressing the required investment in resilient infrastructure. Everybody has a role to play, and Europe is not exempt from this task.

During the last few years, the EU institutions have been deploying the Green Deal to create a paradigm shift towards a green, resilient, and digitalised Europe. Despite positive developments in the EU legislation, water-related risks have been underestimated and managed with a fragmented perspective. Europe must go further!

As we approach the end of this Commission's mandate, it's time to raise the following question: What's next? We believe that Europe must not close the Green Deal chapter but open a second one for a Water-Smart Strategy which will put water – the main natural resource of our society, economy, and environment – a top priority.

This report summarises the multi-stakeholder exchanges ran during Water Innovation Europe 2023 regarding the need for a European Water-Smart strategy to secure and sustain the water sources in Europe and beyond. The event, which took place on 21-22nd June 2023, was hosted by Water Europe and sponsored by Hansgrohe. The different sessions brought together experts from research, policy, business, and EU institutions to exchange on the challenges and opportunities that need to be embedded in such a strategy for the next EU elections in 2024.

Water Europe (WE) is the recognized voice and promoter of water-related innovation, research, and technology development in Europe. WE is a purpose-driven multi-stakeholder association with over 250 members, representing the entire range of actors in the innovative water ecosystem. WE was established by the European Commission as a European Technology Platform in 2004 and became an independent platform in 2007. WE is guided in all its activities by its Water Vision, with the ultimate objective of achieving a Water-Smart Society.

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Durk Krol,
Executive Director,
Water Europe

Water Innovation Europe: Collaborate, Advocate and Act

LET'S BUILD A WATER-SMART SOCIETY

Water Europe's ultimate objective is to build a Water-Smart Society. To achieve this, all relevant actors involved in the water ecosystem need to collaborate to stay on course, bypass the many roadblocks, and to develop the right solutions. This includes, of course, generating the necessary research, technology development and funding, but above all it means that we need the right drivers in policy, regulation and governance to make all the pieces of the puzzle fall together. It is precisely this what our annual conference Water Innovation Europe is all about.

With participants from all around Europe, Water Innovation Europe (WIE) has grown to become the landmark event of the European water sector every summer. The event brings together all the aspects of the sector: scientists and technology developers, utility representatives, large water users, policymakers and finance experts. WIE offers an open platform for information gathering and networking among the most influential stakeholders. It aims to:

- Present new technologies, innovations and projects that will allow you to get the vibe of the current and future market trends and how you can take advantage of them.
- Connect, network and be part of the discussions with EU-level decision makers and leading actors and companies from across the whole water value chain.
- Shape Europe's Water Future with leading speakers of the water sector offering new perspectives and insights.

In a nutshell, it's a unique opportunity to collaborate, debate and discuss with a targeted pan-European audience and hence contribute actively to achieving a Water-Smart Society.

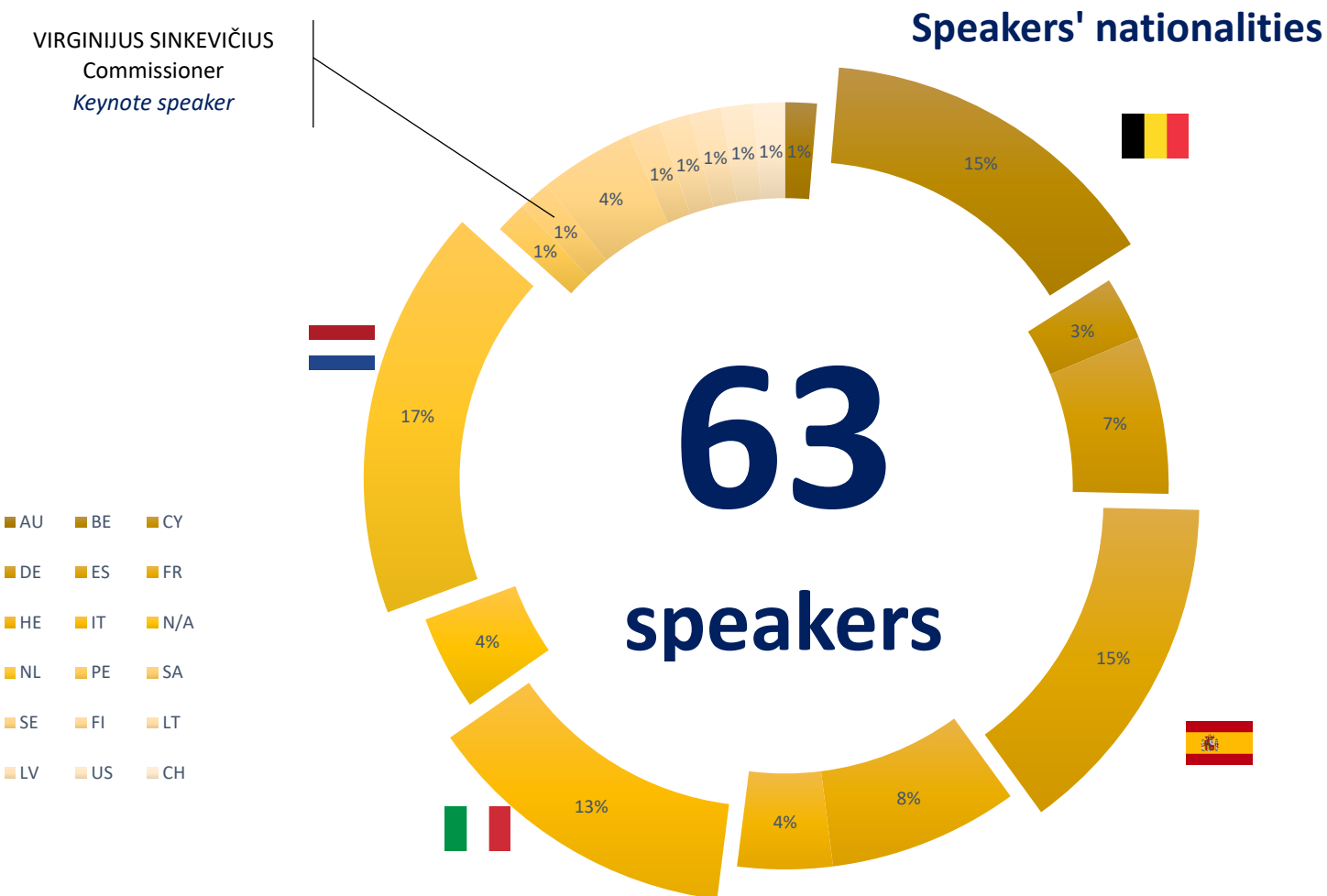
We created this event to counteract the fragmentation of the water sector and its conservative trends when it comes to discussing between challenge owners and solution providers. We do believe that the whole value-chain is part of the solutions. Otherwise, we will not be able to tackle water risks if we stick into our silos and do not discuss between us and with the other sectors.

It's definitely a place turned towards solutions, offering visibility to innovative solutions through the exhibition area, the awards, as well as the possibility to cluster ongoing projects or raise awareness about new challenges. I hope to see you there in 2024.

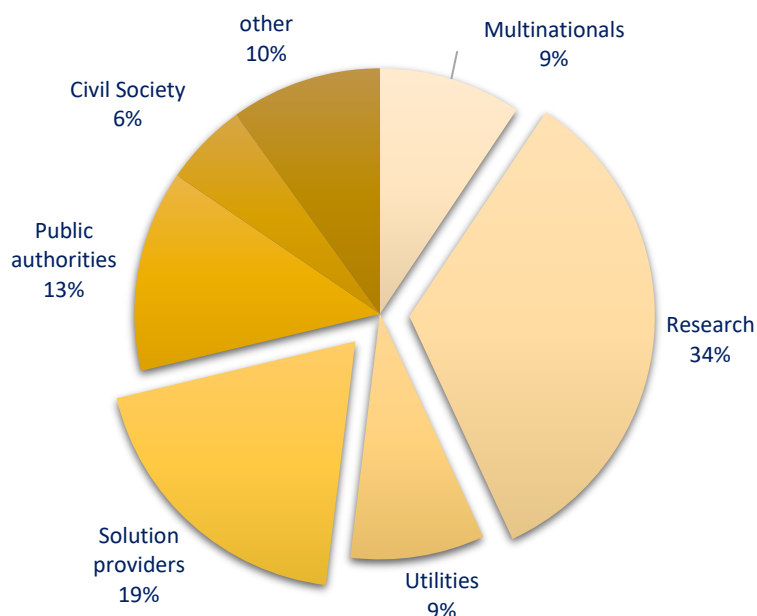


Water Innovation Europe 2023

KEY FIGURES



Participants per colleges



The 2023 edition saw an increase of **+12% participants** in comparison with the 2022 edition. Participants came from all around Europe and from the different segments of the value chain. This year, the **solution providers were strongly represented**.

The WIE2023 programme included **4 sessions, 2 dinners, 4 side events, 1 exhibition area**, and saw the organisation of 12 working groups meetings.

Water Innovation Europe is a landmark event for the innovative water sector to network and exchange knowledge and best practices, while discussing the current policy dossiers.

Keynote 2023





Keynote Speech

STRONG EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP AND EUROPEAN FUTURE ON WATER POLICIES

Virginijus Sinkevičius
Commissioner, European Commission

I have to say that when I saw the title “water innovation”, that grabbed my attention. If there is one thing that is very clear about the future of water, it is that need for more innovation.

The challenges are significant – extreme weather events that are becoming more common, pollution from chemicals and nutrients, water scarcity in places that have never previously experienced drought.

We will need ambitious measures for water management, and new technologies to tackle these problems. That makes today’s theme very timely indeed.

These technologies are advancing, all around the world.

When the OECD looked into this in 2020, they found a vibrant global industry, with water-related innovation moving quickly on many sides. The number of patents related to water has increased substantially since 1990. But that picture is mixed.

The number of patents related to water pollution abatement, water supply and water demand was a mere 1.3% of all patents filed

around the world. I think that means there is still a huge, untapped potential, here in the EU, to increase that percentage. And we do need innovation, like never before.

We also need an adequate legal framework.

When we look at the current framework, we see that a lot of progress has been made in the past twenty years since the adoption of EU water framework directive. If our waters are cleaner, that’s largely due to the ambitious objectives we put in place in EU law, and to the incentives they created for some huge investments in wastewater treatment.

But the current laws can only take us so far. There is still plenty of room for improvement.

Most of the improvements we have in mind are sketched out in the European Green Deal, our overarching plan to build up the sustainability of the EU economy. Water is a constant presence in that Deal, because it touches on almost every policy area.

The Green Deal was adopted in 2019, and since then, we have revised many areas of legislation. We have proposed changes to



laws on industrial emissions, on drinking water, on urban wastewater treatment, nature restoration, and on integrated water management. With each of these proposals, we've taken great care to ensure that the new standards can drive innovation, by increasing the quality of available data, promoting information sharing, foregrounding nature-based solutions, and supporting emerging technologies.

Water is a constant presence in that Deal, because it touches on almost every policy area.

Let's look at some of these elements in a little more detail. In our revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive, there is a whole new chapter on promoting innovation. That includes creating an innovation centre for industrial transformation and emissions – we call it INCITE for short.

It works by allowing frontrunners to enjoy temporary derogations, so that they can test emerging technologies. These provisions should enable a major push for innovation, and I hope we see those effects in areas where they are really needed, like EU patents for water pollution abatement and water efficiency solutions.

Similarly, in the context of the revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, there's also a very strong innovation component. The aim is to raise the quality of treatment, so we are looking to increase the use of more sophisticated treatment techniques. That way we address more pollutants, we facilitate water reuse, and we encourage the sector to play a full role in the EU transformation to carbon neutrality, by requiring energy neutrality in wastewater treatment at the national level.

When we revised the Drinking Water Directive, we took pains to encourage resource efficiency, and the more sustainable management of drinking water.

This foregrounding of technology is also a feature of the recent proposal on integrated water management.

This legislation is designed to help reduce or remove pollutants from groundwater and surface waters, and it comes with a strong emphasis on emerging contaminants like microplastics and antimicrobial resistant genes. These are areas where many technologies and testing methods still need to be developed.

The new regulation on water reuse will apply as of this month. I don't need to explain to you the importance of water reuse in the current context. But I do want to point out this legislation should help bring about a significant increase in the use of technologies for recycling treated wastewater. That's great news for agriculture in these difficult times. These standards should strengthen the trust of farmers and consumers alike.

Incidentally, the nature restoration law, which is currently the subject of lively discussions, will be another very important tool for Europe's waters. Directly, because restoring ecosystems works wonders for flood prevention and control, while also safeguarding supplies of drinking water, and indirectly, because by restoring biodiversity we are securing the basic foundations of our society.

We see the evidence of growing water scarcity all around us; evidence that our water use is fundamentally out of sync with water availability. Everyone concerned about water quantity and quality should give the Nature Restoration Law their wholehearted support. Nature can retain water, can purify water, can reduce evaporation. As I said the other day, if you destroy nature, you destroy the economy.

And of course, all of these changes will do much more than cleaning up Europe's waters. These technologies will also help nurse our ecosystems back to health, and they also have potential for reducing costs for water consumers.

I'm sure you'll agree that what I have set out there is a comprehensive programme of legislation. But it answers a very real need.

And we also come with a broad selection of tools to help these changes take shape on the ground,

One example is the Taxonomy Regulation, a powerful lever for enabling change. It will help scale up investment financing to emerging technologies that are environmentally sustainable, enabling both their development and their deployment.

This is particularly important for water, where the scale of investment is often considerable.

Under the new Horizon Europe programme for 2023 – 2024, more than 13 billion euros are allocated to research and innovators in Europe. New in the Horizon Europe are the EU missions which bring concrete solutions to some of our greatest challenges.

Particularly important here are the missions "Restore our Ocean and Waters", and "Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities".

Speaking about the cities, the Green City Accord will support, with a dedicated group of European cities, the delivery of the European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

And this brings us to buildings as the Renovation Wave for Europe and the New European Bauhaus initiative foresee higher and innovative water standards, water efficiency and reuse, or rain harvesting, to improve and innovate in the construction sector.

We can do a lot with technology.

It will always be essential in helping us use this precious resource in the most efficient manner. Pollution abatement, zero carbon – the list of vital applications is long.

But we can't solve everything with a technological fix.

This was spelt out very clearly by the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, in the report called Turning the Tide.

Simply put, we use too much water. We need to face that fact, tackle the causes, and change the current paradigm. Our world is



changing, and we need different attitudes to water consumption.

Tackling those causes means addressing prices that are simply too low. It means removing subsidies that fuel the excessive consumption of water. It means the wider use of water footprints to promote efficiency, and identify unsustainable use.

And it means changing our attitudes to water investment. Investments must be aligned with broader objectives, like fairness and social protection, and most importantly of all, with water management that is sustainable and climate-resilient.

I think the impetus we need is already here.

The UN Water conference in New York this year created significant momentum, driving forward the global water agenda. It showed a remarkable consensus on major issues, like the urgent need to address rising water stress around the world, and the interconnections with the planetary crises involving energy, health, and food.

The key outcome – the Water Action Agenda – was endorsed by all.

Its aim is to turn that political momentum into tangible and ambitious action, addressing these global challenges to our water.

With our long tradition of shared water legislation, solid water management experience, and cutting edge research and innovation, the EU agreed a 2050 vision of water resilience, and submitted 33 commitments to the conference.

Placing water resilience at the heart of our position, we want to fundamentally rebalance water demand with water supply, while also repairing and restoring the systems that provide us with clean freshwater.

“In this vision, we cannot create a Water-Smart society by technology alone. Society must acknowledge the true value of water.”

Now it's time to follow up on those commitments, and ensure that the New York Conference was not a one-off. The EU is determined to safeguard the long-term impact of the action agenda.

We will implement those outcomes at the EU level, and also ensure that they get carried forward on the global stage.

That starts with ensuring that our union is not just climate resilient, but water resilient as well.

It also means meeting our target of zero pollution by the year 2050.

Together with improving quality, we must also solve the challenge of quantity.

We all know that our continent is facing rising water scarcity and droughts. This issue of

quantity – too little, or sometimes even, too much – is rising to the top of the political agenda.

What we see is not only the result of climate change. It's also the result of decades of bad water management.

Of straightening rivers, of illegal abstraction, of planting water-intensive crops in areas that are naturally dry. And of the linear use of water, with no consideration for reuse.

All of these problems must be addressed. They are now luxuries of a bygone age. We must change. Because we cannot face the consequences of failing to change.

It can be done – we have the plans and the vision we need.

And on that note, let me finish by welcoming the recently launched vision of Water Europe.

The objectives of your paper – water security, water sustainability and water resilience – strongly match our own. And as you so rightly say, innovation will play a key role in realising a vision centred on the value of water.

In this vision, we cannot create a Water-Smart Society by technology alone. Society must acknowledge the true value of water. Economists around the world are scratching their heads as they try to establish the economic value of water.

We know the truth. Its true value goes far beyond any economic price. So, let's cherish our waters.

Thank you for your attention.

Trakai Island Castle
Lithuania



Sponsor 2023





Hansgrohe

Blue Sponsor
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With its brands AXOR and Hansgrohe, the Hansgrohe Group, based in Schiltach - Germany, enjoys a reputation as a leader in innovation, design and quality within the bath and kitchen industry. Founded in 1901 in the Black Forest, the company gives water form and function with its faucets, showerheads and shower systems. The Hansgrohe Group stands for long-lasting quality products and for responsibility towards people and the environment. Sustainable production of resource-conserving products is central to the company's business activities around the globe. By developing innovative technologies for faucets and showers, Hansgrohe achieves the greatest possible effect on protecting water as a resource and limiting and adapting to climate change during the usage phase of its products. As part of its consistent sustainability strategy, Hansgrohe is equipping all water-bearing products exclusively with water-saving technologies by 2030 within its "ECO 2030" initiative.

Hansgrohe's Green Vision Beyond Water:

A RADICAL RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE BATHROOM

In an era where sustainability and environmental consciousness are becoming increasingly pivotal, Hansgrohe aims at pioneering a holistic approach to sustainability within its industry. Hansgrohe's "Green Vision Beyond Water" is our radical re-interpretation of the bathroom of the future that reaches beyond the sustainability triad of "reduce, reuse, and recycle." We want to rethink our daily routines with water.

In light of a widening gap between water supply and demand, we cannot continue to use water the way we use it today. Climate change will increase both shortage and demand for water, which is why we risk overconsuming this precious resource although it deserves to be valued with the highest priority. Without water, there is no life on this planet. This is why Hansgrohe set out to take its responsibility and change how we use water in the bathroom.

Our Green Vision Beyond Water challenges the merging of water and wellness, by radically re-focussing the use of water on personal hygiene and de-coupling the search for a mental retreat from the over-consumption of water in households in Europe. We enable well-being with unlimited and virtually waterless regeneration, which will require a drastic behavioural change by consumers.

Our new approach to radical water efficiency and a new level of water quality for physical hygiene not only pushes our own technological limitations but questions the future potential of the systemic and regulatory status quo: a reduction of water consumption by up to 90% in bathrooms would reduce the need for supply; a new type of water quality for showering would require a paradigm shift in policy-making and amends to the EU's regulatory acquis; decentral treatment and reuse of wastewater from showers as well as separation toilets would require a different infrastructure.

Therefore, the open innovation concept of our Green Vision Beyond Water invites policy makers, stakeholders and water experts to enter into a debate with Hansgrohe – re-thinking the present to define the future. Together, we will have to invest into a climate change resilient water sector and foster sustainable change in consciousness and responsibility for the value of water in our society.



Fiona Félix
Leader Public Affairs
Hansgrohe Group

Rethink Water Experience

CONTEXT

Water Innovation Europe 2023 gathered a large number of stakeholders to put water at the heart of EU policymaking and work towards a Water-Smart Society in the future. Within that context, Hansgrohe invited to rethink the experience with water in European bathrooms by presenting its Green Vision Beyond Water.

Hansgrohe's new concept raises societal, systemic, and regulatory questions. The panel debate and open discussion with stakeholders challenged those aspects and took them to a new level of thinking collaboratively about the value of water, behavioural change with consumers, investments in the water sector and new approaches to policymaking.

A truly Water-Smart Society entails a paradigm shift in the way we use water. Acknowledging its value requires the endorsement of using multiple waters for multiple purposes.

Hansgrohe's Green Vision is intertwined with the Water-Smart Society approach and a concept of a radically water-smart bathroom of the future. It re-thinks daily routines with water, raises the question of which type of water is required for the purpose of showering, and drastically increases the efficiency of water-saving technologies in the bathroom.



Steffen Erath, Head of Sustainability, Hansgrohe

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➔ Make water a political priority at all levels.
- ➔ Develop a holistic water strategy and action plan for Europe.
- ➔ Focus on water efficiency and multiple water for multiple purposes.

Main Sessions





Loïc Charpentier,
Water Policy Manager,
Water Europe

Five Years of Green Deal: What's next for water?

WATER AS A STRATEGIC RESOURCE WILL BE A CORNERSTONE OF THE EU ELECTIONS

Water is a critical resource for most of the strategic sectors in Europe while our continent is increasingly under water stress. After 5 years of Green Deal, what is the situation for water in the path towards climate change mitigation and adaptation? With the European elections coming up, 2024 will be a momentum for the next five years policies and consequently for our ability to set secured, sustained, and resilient water. We cannot be satisfied with only one of these aspects!

Water Innovation Europe 2023 aims to assess and identify the challenges and actions to unlock opportunities for a Water-Smart Society. This event gathered participants from the whole value chain to debate, exchange knowledge and identify actions with the different perspectives for the next five years. Water Europe updated its vision in March 2023, in line with the new challenges, reaffirming the necessity to build a Water-Smart Society.

Research and innovation have been always at the core of Water Europe's activities. It could look unnecessary for the research to discuss regulatory actions or investment and research funds for companies but, in fact, they are intrinsically connected, and all of them require a new strategy.

We, hence, took the opportunity to exchange on research and investment policy, regulatory actions and lobbying activities while focusing our attention on specific topics such as international cooperation, youth and skills or digitalisation to exemplify how a Water-Smart Society looks.

Dialogue and cooperation are key to reaching this objective and therefore we cannot leave anyone behind. During electoral processes where citizens have their say, they must be aware about the value of water, its challenges and opportunities, particularly.

Let's make water a strategic priority for Europe in 2024!



Water-Smart Vision

Seven years after the release of its first Water Vision for a Water-Smart Society, Water Europe published this year a new updated version that is sharper, more policy-oriented and builds on the latest scientific and technological developments.

THE WATER EUROPE VISION FOR A WATER-SMART SOCIETY

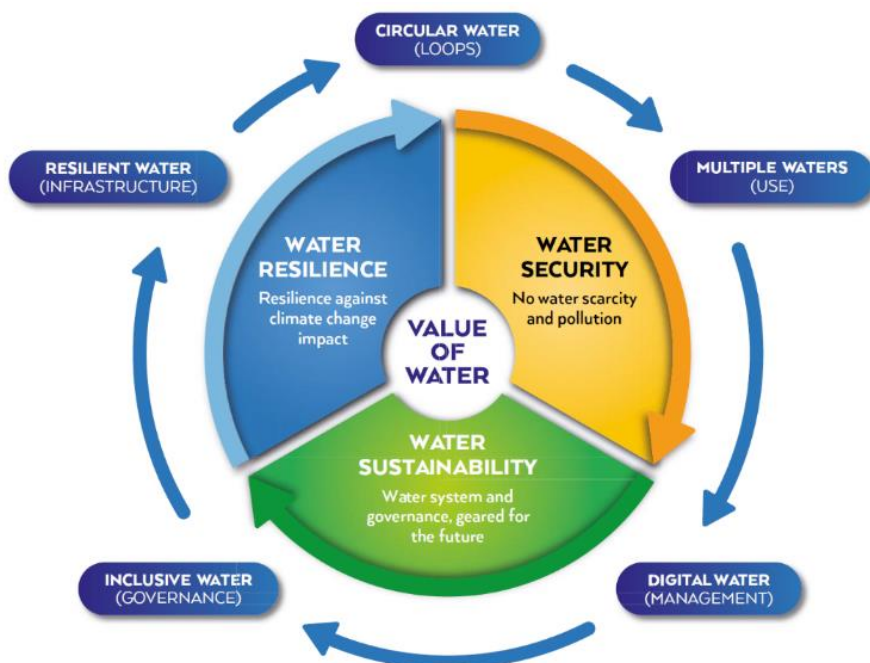
This Water Europe Vision document charts the pathways towards society's better use, valorisation and stewardship of our water resources, and the development of resilient and sustainable solutions to address our key water challenges. It describes how these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for developing and deploying new European technologies, solutions, businesses and governance models for the Water-Smart Society of the future. It projects a future of comprehensive water security, sustainability and resilience for all societal functions, and of full environmental protection. It is a vision in which all relevant stakeholders are involved in the sustainable governance of our water system. Although the vision is focused on the European situation, many of its features are relevant to realising Water-Smart Societies all over the world.

A Water-Smart Society is one in which the value of water is recognised and realised to ensure water security, sustainability, and resilience; all available water sources are managed so that water scarcity and pollution are avoided; water and resource loops are largely closed to foster a circular economy and optimal resource efficiency; the water system is resilient against the impact of climate and demographic change; and all relevant stakeholders are engaged in guaranteeing sustainable water governance.

THE WATER-SMART SOCIETY MODEL

To build a Water-Smart Society, Water Europe has developed a model, consisting of one core value, three key objectives that need to be achieved to realise the core value, and five specific innovation concepts crucial to realising the objectives.

The model indicates how the innovation concepts and key objectives are interrelated, generating a 'flying wheel' effect that drives the process towards the Water-Smart Society.



ONE CORE VALUE

The Value of Water is at the heart of Water Europe's vision for a Water-Smart Society. This core value reflects the centrality of water as a human right and its fundamental role in our society.

THREE KEY OBJECTIVES

Water Security: safeguarding sustainable access to sufficient quantities of affordable and fit-for-purpose water.

Water Sustainability: ensuring water infrastructure, management and use that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

Water Resilience: achieving long-term resilience, so that natural and anthropogenic water systems can withstand unexpected disruptive events.

FIVE INNOVATION CONCEPTS

- 1. Circular Water:** circular water system that minimises water losses, captures and exploits the value in water, and fosters water security, sustainability and resilience.
- 2. Multiple Waters:** incorporate a wide range of water sources and qualities (groundwater and surface water, rainwater, brackish water, brine, grey water, black water, recycled water) into a water-secure, resilient and sustainable water system.
- 3. Digital Water:** exploit the benefits of the extreme interconnectivity of people, devices and processes, and create capillary networks capable of monitoring the water system, starting at its multiple sources through to the individual enduser, thus generating continuous flows of valuable data for innovative decision-support systems at different governance levels.
- 4. Inclusive Water:** establish a water system whose governance balances the interests of all stakeholders in its design, management and maintenance.
- 5. Resilient Water:** create a resilient and reliable hybrid grey and green water system, designed to withstand severe external and internal shocks – such as climate-change induced floods and droughts – without compromising essential functions.

TRANSITIONING TO A WATER-SMART SOCIETY

Water Europe envisions a significant transformation of the current European water sector. The innovation concepts outlined above, along with measurable objectives and key impact parameters for water security, sustainability and resilience, will drive decision-makers to realise this transition and build new water-smart economies. This will be enabled primarily by innovative governance models, new technologies created within inclusive, open innovation environments, such as innovation-enhancing Water-Oriented Living Labs (WOLLS), and by a transformed and updated water infrastructure serving the Water-Smart Society.

Overall, the Water Europe water vision aims at the implementation of a set of innovations which will result in a 50% reduction in the demand pressure exerted on our groundwater and surface water resources, thereby eliminating water scarcity in Europe. By 2030, the transition to a Water-Smart Society will be in full swing, driven by visionary front-running industries, cities and rural areas. These will have taken the lead in laying out the migration paths towards the Water-Smart Society of the future.

A call for a Water-Smart Strategy

CONTEXT

Europe needs a Water-Smart strategy for the benefit of its environment, the competitiveness of its business and the well-being of its citizens.

Why Water-Smart? It is part of our societal responsibility to be ambitious and ensure resilience, sustainability, and security of this resource, as pointed out by Tiffany Atwell, Vice-president of Water Europe (Ecolab). Not only one of these dimensions. Beyond withstanding disruptive events such as droughts and floods, as well as safeguarding sustainable access to sufficient quantities of affordable and fit-for-purpose water, it also matters to meet current ecological, social and economic needs without compromising the ability to meet these needs in the future.

Water-smartness also refers to a practice recognised by the UN Water Report and the UN Water conference in 2023. A narrative which is also widely disseminated around the globe such as the US Reclamation Bureau and its programme on water-smartness or in the agriculture-water nexus in India and Africa.

Why a strategy? We need to connect the dots between the fragmented approach of water policies in Europe. Water is not environment; it's also economy, regional policy, international cooperation, growth, climate, energy, social cohesion, taxes, etc. Most of the time, we make decisions without considering the value of water. Moderated by Thomas Rebermark (SIWI), the panel discussion stressed, firstly, that a holistic and systematic approach will support the synergies and leverage benefits for the whole society. Secondly that research and business need to dialogue to frame and envision the path towards a Water-Smart Society.

It also points out the governance architecture in which water is also fragmented. A switch towards an accountable position for water policy would benefit Europe as a green continent, power, and economy. Without accountancy, there is no policy and consequently a lack of investment. So, the strategy should be paired with a vertical governance of water rather than a fragmented and horizontal management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➔ Develop and deploy a water-smart strategy for 2024-2029 in Europe.
- ➔ Consider water-related challenges and opportunities for each legislation in Europe as water is a vector for most of the policies.
- ➔ Support investment into water-related investment to secure water infrastructure, including industry and agriculture.
- ➔ Connect the different levels of governance to ensure the deployment of the most suitable solutions.

Agnese Danelon, Director, Ecolab



Let's Benefit from Research & Innovation

CONTEXT

Research and innovation are set in Water Europe's DNA. Exchange knowledge, collaborate and innovate together is a must-driver to achieve a Water-Smart Society. During the last years, the European Union has consequently invested in water-related research activities. But are there gaps that need to be bridged?

Moderated by Inge Genné (VITO) and with speakers from different backgrounds (utilities & associate members of the EU, representative of investment agency with a mission on sea; researcher and project managers), this session aimed to identify barriers and opportunities to collaborate across the different steps of innovative processes.

Coordination about financial tools to reduce the *Death Valley* for innovative solutions, attract private investment, collaboration with a large scope of stakeholders, including through citizens science, as well as specific status for non-EU members were discussed. Moreover, the international dimension also constitutes a parameter to provide access to the best available technologies while contributing to the SDGs.

At the time that we are discussing about strategic autonomy, trade, and environmental challenges, research & innovation is a paramount pillar for a successful strategy particularly around the five identified areas identified in the vision such as digital water, water resilience, as well as inclusive governance. Collaborative tools are paramount

not only to support both research activities and the acceptance of innovative solutions, but also to build a tailored environment to tackle challenges. Joachim D'Eugenio, policy advisor for zero pollution (European Commission) brought forward the benefits of such tools – the Living labs – to achieve the objective of the European zero pollution action plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support research & innovation, including global partnerships, and embed a specific focus on water and nexus interlinkages.
- Better align financial tools to support innovative solutions beyond the research activities to reach the market and make the solutions as much as possible accessible.

Laurent Horvath, BlueArk - Panagiotis Balabanis, European Commission – Laura Štrovalde, LIAA – Lydia Vambakeridou-Lyroudia, KWR – Inge Genné, VITO



Which EU Regulatory Leadership for Water?

CONTEXT

The burgeoning water crisis is not sparing Europe and hence comes one question: do we have the relevant regulatory toolbox to get a resilient, sustainable, and secure water management? Regulatory soft power is one of the assets of the European Union. Our continent can lead by regulatory example, thanks to the so-called Brussels Effect.

We strongly believe that Europe is missing a strategy to address all water needs with an action plan to tackle those. For example, water needs of the energy sector to ensure energy independence, water needs for strategic autonomy sectors for Europe – microchips,

hydrogen, biogas, digital and data centres-water needs for net zero industry act and upscaling manufacturing in Europe.

As it was highlighted in the session moderated by Tania Pencheva (Xylem), France already developed a water plan, dealing with quantitative and qualitative aspects for industrial, domestic, and agricultural water uses. The EU council also sowed a seed in its conclusions in March 2023. But Europe has not, yet, recognised water strategically as it did for biogas and, for instance, the EU single market still includes legal barriers to water-smart solutions access.



Guilia Laura Cancian, EU Biogas Association, Claudia Topalli, IDEXX – Tania Pencheva, Xylem – Denis Bonvillain, Veolia – Veronica Manfredi, European Commission

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop an EU water strategy and action plan to address water risks for all uses and allocate the relevant funds, knowledge, skills and human resources to achieve this ambition.
- Overcome barriers to unlock access to the best available solutions across Europe and beyond, including digital solutions.
- Better consideration of circular and efficient water processes in our societal, industrial and agricultural activities.

Let's Make Water a Top Priority

CONTEXT

How can we make water a priority during the next Commission? The speakers of this session led by Pär Larshans (Ragn-Sells, Easy-Mining) tried to answer, providing their experience from the food, waste, and energy sectors. Collaboration and narrative appeared as the key parameters while identifying the member states as the main drivers for setting water on the EU strategic agenda.

Preceded by the intervention of Mr. De Lotto, president of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change of the EU Economic and Social Committee and his call for a Blue Deal in Europe, the examples stressed during this session highlighted the opportunities in resource recovery and saving as paramount in the narrative that we must build.

Ensuring water security, resilience and sustainability will also require leveraging financial tools, beyond the innovation policy. Investment in CAPEX and OPEX is needed to deploy innovative solutions and secure water for all. In Europe, key strategic sectors have already been granted dedicated funds, whereas one of the main resources of their value chains has remained unconsidered: water.

This narrative and funding allocation should not be untied of the international dimension. The UN Water conference was a first step, but new global momentum will be paramount. The definitions of the different key concepts and approaches must be globally defined to harmonise system, mobilise water-smart sectoral investment and technology, as outlined in the UN Water conference conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➔ Build a narrative demonstrating the emergency of the situation for water availability.
- ➔ Create a dedicated fund to leverage financial tools beyond innovation to ensure water resilience, sustainability, and security.
- ➔ Build global approach and definitions of notions, such as *safe water*, to harmonise systems and tackle water risks.



Pär Larshans
Chief Sustainability Officer
Ragn-Sells, Easy-Mining

Awards



Six Awards

Innovative water-related approaches, solutions, and technologies are an integral part of the implementation of the Water Vision 2030 and the transition to a Water-Smart Society. Water Europe is committed to bringing forward innovations with high market or high-value application potential through its Water Europe Innovation Awards and its Water Market Europe programme.

Since 2016, Water Europe has been awarding the most breakthrough solutions that are here to pave the way to a Water-Smart Society. Six awards have been created to support innovative solutions into digital water, water governance, international actions, technological innovation and water-smart policy actions. A specific focus on SMEs has been set up to raise awareness about a paramount local actors.

In 2023, six new winners have been awarded during Water Innovation Europe. Have a look !



SME Award

European Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are undeniable carriers of out of the box innovations and breakthrough solutions and Water Europe could only recognise their important role by dedicating an exclusive award to their innovations. In its effort to support the economic opportunities for the SMEs but also the whole European water sector, Water Europe launched for the very first time the Water Innovation SME Awards in 2014. Since then, it has awarded SMEs, bringing them to the forefront of the water sector and welcoming them on board with a free annual membership to Water Europe.

Hydroko won this year's **SME Award** for the HydroKonekt solution, which facilitates water utilities and end-users to measure, control, manage, and predict water consumption levels. The system helps households to save up to 25% on their water consumption while maintaining the same comfort. [Discover more.](#)



Water Technology & Infrastructure Award

Societies need to create a resilient and reliable hybrid grey and green water system, designed to withstand severe external and internal shocks – such as climate-change induced floods and droughts – without compromising essential functions. In the context of climate change, Water Europe wants to shed light on the work and actors which provide water services that we generally take for granted in our daily life.

This year, **Águas do Tejo Atlântico** won the **Water Technology & Infrastructure Award** for their Action Plan for the Management of Industrial Wastewater in Greater Lisbon and Western Portugal (AgIR). It plays a key role in water-related decision-making processes by resolving complex problems like the undue inflows of industrial wastewater and improving public sanitation services while preserving water bodies. [Discover more.](#)



Digital Water Award

Digitalisation is a critical trend for our society and economy. Smart-water and water-smart digital sector are intrinsically connected. Water Europe recognises the role of solutions providing digital value to water by exploiting the benefits of the extreme interconnectivity, creating capillary networks capable of monitoring the water system, thus generating continuous flows of valuable data for innovative decision-support systems at different governance.

LACROIX is the winner of the **Digital Water Award** for their designed "Water Augmented Advisor" tool. Developed through a strong collaboration with Nevers City, this tool is the first one capable to boost utility productivity while helping to make decisions faster and saving a lot of drinking water. [Check more.](#)



Water Governance Award

Establish a water system whose governance balances the interests of all stakeholders in its design, management and maintenance is a requirement to build a Water-Smart society. It will underpin the rational use of multiple waters, based on the value of water principle and new economic models, with minimised impact on natural water bodies. Europe's wide climatic diversity makes it a unique testing ground for new governance and technologies. Water Europe launched this awards in 2014 to support such initiative.

BlueArk is the winner of the **Water Governance Award 2023**. Their Iris irrigation measurement system addresses water supply in the Alpine regions. The Iris irrigation box allows to easily collect data from different sensors, and track the water flows in the watershed from glaciers to forks. To learn more, visit the [official website](#).



MEP Award

Launched in 2019, this award highlights the work of the Members of the European Parliament that contribute to building a Water-Smart Society in Europe and beyond. Water is a shared resource which contributes to the success of the different policies if its management is secure, sustainable, and resilient. The European Parliament, as the European institution represented the citizens, has a societal responsibility to contribute to a society in which the value of water is recognised and realised to ensure water security, sustainability, and resilience; all available water sources are managed so that water scarcity and pollution are avoided; water and resource loops are largely closed to foster a circular economy and optimal resource efficiency; the water system is resilient against the impact of climate and demographic change; and all relevant stakeholders are engaged in guaranteeing sustainable water governance.

This year, Michal Wiezik is the winner of the Water-Smart MEP Award. Michal has demonstrated an outstanding work as a Member of the European Parliament who has contributed to achieving a Water-Smart Society in Europe and beyond. He is a Slovak member of the European Parliament and member of the committee ENVI. This video [link](#) is the speech he addressed during the dinner ceremony of the Water Europe Innovation Awards 2023. Learn more about his role [here](#).



Michal Wiezik, Member of the European Parliament

Envision the future: Youth & Skills

CONTEXT

The integration of the youth within the water sector is a recurrent topic. The main challenge is to balance valuable contributions and the early stage of these professionals, while ensuring substantial and thorough contributions in the different forums or meetings.

This event, moderated by Neil Dhot (Aquafed), aims to discuss the training and integration of youth within the water sector, as well as their involvement in water governance.

The contribution of professionals at the early stage is generally underestimated, reducing the attractiveness of the water sector. Moreover, the sector faces a human resources stress and several evolutions due to climate change, digitalisation and the new environmental policies.

There is an opportunity to unlock such participation, particularly in an innovative perspective to think and invent *out-of-the-box*, and consequently contributing to a Water-Smart Society.

Especially, the absence of a European strategy on Water-related human capital is a missed opportunity to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, while water is a strategic resource for most of the critical sectors.

It also goes hand in hand with citizen awareness about the value of water. Participation in decision-making shall be supported through inclusive governance, especially of the youth as an asset for the sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage visibility of the opportunities in the water sector and qualitative trainings to support high-level trust in youth.
- Prioritise crossed activities to involved youth is more fruitful rather than ad hoc events or space dedicated (e.g. youth pavilion)
- Require the evolution of the terminology to support a better integration of the youth via accessible concepts and avoid counterproductive ones such as “young professionals”.

Gabriëlle Knufman, CEO, World Water Academy
Noémie Plumier, International strategy, WaveMakers United
Naomi Timmer, Director, EU Junior water programme
Chiara Lucia, Project Manager, Xylem



ICT4Water Cluster: for a Digital Water Sector

CONTEXT

On June 21, the [ICT4Water cluster](#) organised a session to discuss the linkages of digital water to EU policies. The ICT4Water cluster is a hub for EU-funded research and innovation projects on ICT applied to water management. Currently, around 40 projects are members of the cluster. These are both ongoing projects and projects that were members of the cluster before their completion. The eight new projects members particularly demonstrate the pro-activity of this cluster.

The session included presentations on the interconnections between research activities and EU water policies, the Green Deal

Dataspace, and followed by the presentation of the different thematic action groups.

This cluster is an opportunity to work on Digital water, an innovation area identified in the Water Europe's vision: the Value of Water. The transparency of data and the activities around digital water can be a vector to connect with other sectors.

Read more about the conclusions of the session [here](#).



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Connect legislation with digital water and upgrade legislation providing common sets of terms and conditions to be used.
- Promote the inclusion of mandatory real time water quality monitoring.
- Promote legislation to enhance data transparency and exchange and data sharing across the WEFH Nexus.
- Connect with the different economic sectors through digital water as a tool to develop sustainable solutions.
- Investigate and work on the applicability and legally binding nature of specific technical standards, mainly due to the revision of old and obsolete standards.
- Develop and deploy data-intensive services for evidence-informed policymaking.

Water Projects Europe: Zoom on Quality

CONTEXT

Water Projects Europe is a series of events of Water Europe made to learn from and build on the experience of innovating projects working on converging topics. The event's objectives are:

- Foster collaboration and synergies between EU-funded projects.
- Develop strategies for the market outreach of the projects' outcomes.
- Extract and valorise components useful to policy building.

This year, Water Projects Europe focused on addressing water quality for public health with the participation of the European funded research projects PathoCERT, IntroDBP, ToDriNQ, and H2OforAll.

Developing technologies to support curative actions or toolkits to protect drinking water from crisis or specific micropollutants, pathogens or disinfection by-products, these projects explore different aspects of water management for public health.

Moreover, it was an opportunity to present the new [white paper](#) on the role of water in public health which provide an analysis of current water-related health threats; an exploration of a set of recommendations for evidence-based water management; and an examination of policy development to address the water - public-health nexus (WPH).

Generally underestimated, this nexus has been brought forward by the destruction of the Nova Khakovka dam in Ukraine and the ecological disaster and the potential impact on public health for the local population. Achieving a Water-Smart Society aims to consider such risk and ensure the most adequate emergency response, particularly with the support of smart water systems. The projects pointed out the importance of digital tools within these situation and the importance to build on inclusive governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Facilitate the digital transition of the sector, including potential threats and investment in innovative solutions.
- Better understand the multiple types of pollution due to climate change events such as floods, fire, water stress on drinking water.
- Encourage the engagement and activation of citizens and local communities to co-create solutions, raise awareness, and strengthen socio-political consensus on water policies.



International





Andrea Rubini,
Director of Operations,
Water Europe

Unlocking Global Water Governance

EMPOWERING A WATER-SMART SOCIETY THROUGH WATER-ORIENTED LIVING LABS

Within the backdrop of pressing global water challenges, Water Europe's International Water Dialogues (IWD) serves as a catalyst for international cooperation. At its core, the pivotal concept of Water-Oriented Living Labs (WOLLS), as a dynamic force for achieving a Water-Smart Society was highlighted at the IWD event back-to-back to WIE 2023.

WOLLS are the centres of innovation and collaboration, transcending borders to address worldwide water-related issues with their ability to incubate ground-breaking solutions. Through interdisciplinary research and practical testing, WOLLS drive the development of cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices, by empowering communities, governments, and industries to harness water-related solutions effectively.

In the context of IWD, WOLLS bridge geographical gaps, forging partnerships between Water Europe and global regions, and by pooling expertise and resources, WOLLS are capable of amplifying and capitalising international cooperation initiatives. In addition, the synergy between WOLLS and Water4all's international development activities is a driving force. The commitment of the Water4all EU-funded partnership aligns with the goals of IWD, by securing access to clean water, promoting ecosystem conservation, and driving economic growth towards a global Water-Smart Society.

Furthermore, the strategic teamwork between WE IWD, the WE Water Beyond Europe Working Group, and international organizations like the OECD, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum underscores the inclusive relevance of WOLLS to enhance knowledge exchange, market up-take of innovations, as well as policy and capacity development on a global scale.



International Water Dialogues

CONTEXT

The "International Water Dialogues Event" (IWDE), driven by the "Water Beyond Europe Working Group," led by David Smith (WE&B) and Gaetano Casale (IHE-Delft), stands as an annual flagship event at Water Europe. This event harmonises Water Europe's core programs of Collaboration, Advocacy, and Market with the intention to forge international partnerships between the EU and beyond, propelling European solutions and scientific cooperation and fostering collaboration and as such driving a water-smart society.

In 2023, the historic event - after 46 years – of the UN Water Conference was held at the United Nations Headquarters. Focused on the Water Action Agenda, it rallied commitments from UN Members and stakeholders, spanning diverse themes, seeking swift collective action and an international mechanism to quell the burgeoning global water crisis.

Shifting paradigms emerged, underscoring water's stature as a global common good, including the water-food-energy nexus, innovative financing, and a human rights-based approach.

Core to these aspirations are partnerships uniting communities, academia, industry, and youth voices across the globe. The UN event

showcased the urgency for novel social and business models, welcoming open innovation and collaborative problem-solving to transcend past water management norms. With this backdrop the 2023 edition of IWDE was held on the 22nd of June 2023. The event had the aim to focus on the UN Water Conference outcomes and Europe's global water cooperation role; to extract insights from global Water-Oriented Living Labs and; to cultivate an international water cooperation community.

Consequently, a new international water community for practitioners in this arena was launched during the event. If you want to connect to a diverse international community of water practitioners that are looking to respond to the Water Action Agenda on international water cooperation, you can access the group here: <https://lnkd.in/eJWpjtRG>

Prof. Jean-Marie Kileshye Onema, Vice-President of ICWRS and Executive Manager of WaterNet Africa and keynote speaker, highlighted the uniqueness of each collaboration in international water cooperation, "When it comes to international water cooperation, one size does not fit all. In this sense, the European Commission through its innovative programs has driven South-South and North-South cooperation on water."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Foster cross-sector partnerships by involving local communities, academia, and industry, embracing diverse perspectives.
- Embrace open innovation and collaborative international co-development to address the multifaceted challenges of the water crisis.
- Cultivate innovative social and business models to revolutionize water management practices.

Perspectives



Three Voices

In cooperation with the Working Group on Human capital, led by Naomi Timmer (H2OPeople), and the organisation of a Water-Smart Bootcamp during the event, we asked the opinion of three professionals who recently started their careers in European associations or Research Technology Organisations to provide their views and key take-aways from Water Innovation Europe 2023.

With different backgrounds, they provide new perspectives on this event, and consequently contribute to unlocking new prisms on the Water-Smart Society which will enrich our perspective, vision, and next actions.



What does a Water-Smart Society look like by 2050?

Catarina Baptista,
R&D Engineer Water,
VITO

As a female water engineer myself, there were three keywords that struck me from all sessions at WIE 2023: Diversity, Interconnectedness, & Leadership. Diversity in stakeholder's representativeness, including the EU Commission, local governments, utilities, regulatory agencies, research and academia, citizens, women and men of all ages, backgrounds, languages, and nationalities. Interconnectedness to break the silos and bring together people that would normally not communicate with each other. Leadership to promote a paradigm shift, take our knowledge, passion, and commitment to water from research to policy. The EU must recognize that water is not only vital for our competitiveness and economic success, but also deserves a position of ownership within the EU Commission.

The UN Water Conference already set an incredible precedent for this: the world is united and willing to face the water challenges. Veronica Manfredi, DG Environment mentioned that the world is suffering from water shortage, and this pain should be used as a catalyst for positive change. *"Maybe water is the planetary boundary itself"*, she added as food-for-thought. This sentiment echoed: *"We will not have a Green Deal without a Blue Deal"*, said Tiffany Atwell, Vice-President Water Europe, and *"Water is our strategic gold, it's not like energy or gas, we cannot live without water"*, said Pietro Francesco De Lotto, member of the EU Social & Economic Committee. For instance, solar power has a big market for the moment, but why so? The energy crisis grew so much, there was no other way besides paying attention. The same strategy could be applied to the water sector. Once we can grasp people's concern, investments will follow.

Nonetheless, a sense of optimism was clear and inspired me throughout the two days. Looking towards a Water-Smart Society and envisioning a comfortable life within the planetary boundaries was not a mere dream, but a shared goal for the future. Aligning with my technical background, the concept of Nature-based Solutions fitted like a glove in this vision: *"green and blue cities, large metropolis with trees, ponds and rivers going through, where nature comes into our lives"*, envisioned Chrysi Lapidou, Prof. at University of Thessaly. *"Our water use is simply out of sync with water availability and quality"*, pointed out Virginijus Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for Environment. Technology plays a crucial role in combating water pollution, but R&D cannot solve everything. A change in consumption patterns is imperative, and this should be eased by policy strategies via pricing, efficient use, and reuse, as well as a shift in attitudes.

Inclusiveness and adoption of bottom-up approaches were also characteristics of the vision for 2050 as Cristian Carboni, Market Development Manager, De Nora, stressed. I believe that raising awareness lies, first, in increased transparency and information to empower people, so they can understand the problem and want to act upon it. On top of that, it must target all kinds of audiences – perhaps, starting with young children at schools and educational programmes on water? Naomi Timmer, Director of H2Opeople, also called for a multidisciplinary collaboration across sectors, especially by nurturing young professionals. *"Young people want to have impact and make a difference"*, and that is very attractive. To make sure we can attract as well as keep young talent, the water sector must be dynamic. Bringing future generations along, promoting parity, and considering diverse perspectives can ignite transformative change.



WOLLS: Are we challenging the Conventional currents?

Gaia Zanzi
Implementation Programme Officer
Water Europe

The 2023 edition of Water Innovation Europe prominently highlighted key themes such as systemic analysis, territorial integrated resource management, sustainability, and local implementation of solutions. While these environmental concepts are increasingly mainstream, what set the conference apart was its particular perspective, thanks to the presence of experts spanning diverse fields, addressing the topics from different points of view: the financial side, the social aspect, and the environmental feasibility.

After giving it some thought, I found a line that connects them and was a prominent topic during these days, which resemble my daily experience area in the water sector: Water-Oriented Living Labs. This concept, fostered by the European Commission, is gaining relevance and the fuzziness around it is dissolving. How did WIE then serve as a beacon of inspiration for Water-Oriented Living Labs practitioners like myself?

On the one side, a recurring practical challenge that these realities face which was a prevailing theme throughout the event was the role of financial mechanisms and business models in driving sustainable water management practices. As WOLLS serve as incubators, development and implementation tools for novel innovations, the related business models are crucial, and there was the time and space to discuss around difficulties often overlooked, such financial practices for territorial small and medium-sized realities. Even if the discussion has to continue from here, as these topics are hard and complex, some expectations were met during the event.

On the other side, a critical aspect addressed was the urgency of implementing water solutions at the local level. While acknowledging that they are not universal remedies, Water-Oriented Living Labs' goal is to prioritize a grassroots approach to problem-solving, which promotes territorial integrated resource management. By engaging local communities, stakeholders, and decision-makers, the labs ensure that solutions are tailored to specific contexts and driven by genuine needs. The imperative to develop water solutions that endure the test of time was underscored by experts from diverse sectors, including academia, industry, and policymaking. This emphasis mirrors the potential of WOLLS to serve as testbeds for innovative water management techniques, offering a tangible test for systemic analysis in practice.

In conclusion, the "Water Innovation Europe 2023" conference set a solid foundation for contemporary discussions. However, and I am throwing a challenge, for 2024 edition I am eager to witness more tools and tangible guidelines coherent with this year's edition, as we continue to navigate the complex waters of water management.



Navigating Complex Waters

Lilian Tavernier
Environmental Economist,
VITO

The Water Innovation Europe conference provided a dynamic platform for professionals, researchers, and policymakers to address the challenges and opportunities in the European water sector. As a participant of the Water-Smart Bootcamp for young professionals, which was organized as a side-event to the conference, I'm excited to share my personal reflection. Wearing multiple hats—a young professional, economist, and researcher—I offer you my perspective that intertwines these roles. Join me as we embark on a journey through my conference highlights.

First, it was inspiring to witness the enthusiasm coming from the contributions of young individuals in the water sector. The conference offered a forum where diverse voices could be heard, and it was emphasized that the water sector, still largely rooted in heritage and established practices, needs the fresh perspectives and innovative ideas of the youth to drive change. However, it is important to avoid treating young professionals as a homogenous group representing an entire generation. Our worth lies in the diversity we bring to the table, and it is important to acknowledge and value the differing viewpoints within the young professional community.

It was also interesting to see that speakers addressed the financial aspects of water management, although concrete examples of sustainable financing structures were limited. Public funding remains the predominant approach, and there is a need to explore blended financing models. Key takeaways include the need to leverage private sector funding through sustainable practices, advocating for urgency and awareness.

Developing water strategies tailored to each industry and business is essential, and these should consider the long-term nature of water as a resource. While technological innovation is important, there must be equal emphasis placed on governance, behavioral changes, and dynamic pricing mechanisms that promote inclusivity and equity.

The conference also acknowledged Europe's strength in water research compared to other continents. However, better utilization of research outcomes in water strategies and decision-making processes is necessary. For this, bridging the gap between research and practical implementation will be crucial. Demonstration sites and living labs serve as valuable tools for this, however, efforts are needed to commercialize and adapt research outcomes. Furthermore, enhanced communication between researchers and policymakers is critical to overcome regulatory barriers and foster innovation in real-world settings. Collaboration and synergy among funding sources are also necessary to maximize the impact of research projects.

In conclusion, the discussions at Water Innovation Europe underscored that water poses a global challenge that demands proactive action, collaboration, and clear targets. By prioritizing water and implementing comprehensive strategies, we can cultivate a water-conscious society where water is genuinely valued and safeguarded. Let us remember that water influences everyone and everything, and it should be on everyone's agenda, not just those working directly in the water sector. Together, let's focus on the opportunities instead of the barriers and pave the way for a Water-Smart Society.

