

# SMART UTILITY MANAGEMENT FOR RESILIENT WATER SERVICE PROVISION

---

Yes, there are differences, and yes, they have a nasty habit of becoming glaringly visible during crises and emergencies: Well-functioning, well-equipped and well-managed utilities show, for obvious reasons, above average resilience. Far above average resilience, as a matter of fact. Reason enough for a distinguished round of specialists from various fields to sit down and discuss which difference is more important than all the others. Surprise: It's not technology, although the plenum round started with a big technological announcement bang.

Hosting the session, IAWD President Walter Kling first handed the floor to Piers Clark, Chairman of the Isle Group Ltd. Covering the field of technology and innovation, Dr. Clark held a ten-minute world premiere, for the very first time publicly revealing “The Trial Reservoir”, a highly innovative approach to financing innovative technology. During his three decades in the industry, Mr. Clark had seen too many promising innovations wasting away because utilities took too long to find the necessary finances for even a trial. The Trial Reservoir puts promising innovations on a fast track by financing real-world trials in utilities. The very promising innovation tool will enter the market at the beginning of 2022.

## Technology or finance?

Next, Teodor Popa, Financial Manager of the Compania Apa Brasov utility took the stage, looking at resilience from the monetary perspective: “Above all, utilities need to be financially solid.” Mr. Popa vividly remembers the first months of the Covid crisis, when his utility and many in the sector had to compete for personal protective equipment and other resources “amid those who had the money and grabbed the stuff first.”

Sarah Keener, Team Lead, Inclusion in Water at the World Bank, reminded the audience that while finding ways to implement technical innovation is indeed critical, water companies also need to be nimble in their relations to staff, customers and the general public.

**“Aligning with customers more broadly and having an inclusive workforce will strengthen the ability of utilities to raise political capital.”**

## Culture and the human factor!

When it comes to resilience, Christian Hasenleithner, CEO of Energie AG Bohemia, is generally fond of bottom-up solutions. For him, resilience is a state of mind:

“We have to look beyond the horizons and introduce a mindset and team spirit to be prepared personally and as a company.”

Which is a smart investment that does not even need to overcome the financing barriers that often stops technological innovation. Utilities that want to invest into smart new tools need to convince owners and also their staff, the latter being, according to Mr. Hasenleithner, “far less difficult than convincing politicians”.

In the ensuing discussion, the panel widely agreed that while a solid financial background is a must and the ability to make the necessary investments into technology is helpful, the human factor makes all the difference when it comes to strengthening resilience.

“You need a workforce that is diverse by gender, age and specializations. You need people who think outside the box, who are agile in responding to situations”,

says Teodor Popa. And Sarah Keener reminds the audience:

“If you are trying to secure financing, you need political trust. To get political trust - are you listening to customers and others? Do you have the right staff? Are your policies and systems and company culture aligned? How do you partner with the broader public?”

And Piers Clark agrees:

“If I was a manager I wouldn't focus on tech and financing but cultural issues. It's about overcoming silos, stuck historic approaches, cultural barriers. You can wrap your arms around funding and technical issues, but cultural issues require emotional intelligence to get the best from your staff.”