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A new water culture. Opportunities for territorial planning

Edited by Federica Legnani
and Michele Zazzi

For a few years the International Scientific Community has been witnessing a harsh debate over water resource planning and management. Such discussion has involved institutions and society, especially after evermore frequent extreme weather and climatic events that upset territory and population. In Europe the *Water Framework Directive* has certainly fueled this debate and has led to new prospects outline.

The latest news report a draft legislative decree concerning "soil protection, desertification and water pollution prevention, water resource management" that sorts out measures regarding such matters. The role of central and local administrations has been redefined, basin authorities have been replaced by basin district authorities. It has not been explained though what is the relation between new territorial division of national territory in hydrographic districts and old territorial division in basins.

In this cultural context about a hundred European experts belonging to different universities, institutions and organizations, have accepted as from 2003 the invitation of *Fondación Nueva Cultura de Acqua* and its President Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Professor at the University of Saragoza and winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize 2003, to help drawing up a *European Declaration for a New Water Culture*. The think tank's experts have been supported by institutions and organizations that actively participated in drawing up the Declaration, organized and supervised such activity

at a local level. Preliminary meetings have been held in Spain, France, Rumania, Italy, in order to discuss specific needs and issues and to grant specific requests from different European countries.

The *European Declaration for a New Water Culture* was officially signed on 18th February 2005 in Madrid during a ceremony, sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment, gathering signatory experts, institutions and organizations, other important people in the water sector coming from several countries.

This multidisciplinary document refers mainly to European water resource situation, but it also invites the European Union to take full responsibility for the rest of the world (in particular for the other countries overlooking the Mediterranean and Latin American countries) in order to promote a sustainable development model as to water resource and catchment basin management. Emphasis has been laid as well on government bodies' ability to ensure an effective use of such resources and a participatory approach of those countries, as warrant of a new universal order encouraging evergrowing democracies.

In addition to the Declaration's drawing up, the EUWATER, an interdisciplinary network of European experts on water resource and catchment basin management, was created on that occasion. The Declaration gave an opportunity for those dealing with territorial and urban planning to reflect upon such issues. Among environmental policy's main goals contained in the Declaration are: attention to territorial scales' specificity, description of social organizations that have to take care of their own environment, testing new forms of coordination

between public sectorial and territorial policies. Government instruments have been given many development directions that are often antithetic and difficult to deal with. An important case that the Declaration tries to examine without taking sides is the comparison between territorial integrated planning, which is completely permeated by water issues, and requests of setting aside 'wishes' and principles that would end up being purely theoretic. In fact there is an urgent need of solving concrete problems deriving from fragmentation of the decision-making process and its tools. In order to grant successful requests contained in the Declaration we should not forget the potential contribution of the territorial planning processes that every country already has. Even if the effectiveness of those planning processes applied to water resources and catchment basins seems to be a bit overestimated, such processes are anyway great opportunities to set relationships between general policies, common goals, priority strategies, territorial actions, future scenarios. This opportunity looks even more important if we consider water, according to the Declaration, as a resource whose public use and interests at stake can be used in an innovative way. This requires, at least in Italy, a careful consultation, sharing process, concertation or negotiation between all public and private actors involved. The final result can also be included in a plan or programme, yet its processing and realization are very different to the basin's plan current prospects.

Attention to participatory processes means choosing actions, which can be tailored to individual local conditions, through

implemented capacity building by governments. It seems to be an adequate solution for water resource management and decision-making related processes that involve both the participation of a high number of institutional and non-institutional individuals and a good knowledge of territorial matters, in order to increase awareness of shared information, contents and policies.

The above-mentioned contribution aims at defining the Declaration's results in relation to general applications filed by cities' and territories' governments. Pedro Arrojo Agudo explains the principles that inspired the Declaration by highlighting water ecosystems' crisis and current models' ineffectiveness of water resource management. Selected themes to face new water culture's challenges are: social and cultural building of the concept of sustainability, ethic and economic aspects of water management processes, importance of multidisciplinary scientific contribution and of participation in decision-making processes. José Esteban Castro, coordinator of the EUWATER executive Committee, investigates the necessary requirements for effective governance processes, in which local communities exercise their representation rights in order to choose the best development options. Federica Legnani and Michele Zazzi have the task to present a few investigation notes that might be useful to remark, at least in Italy, the need of a specific contribution by the planner to water resource, seen as both a resource and a territorial ecosystem. Federica Legnani analyses hydrogeological stability plans layout and water protection regional plans and their relations to

territorial and urban planning considering that, as stated in the Declaration, there is the need of overcoming sectorial approaches.

Michele Zazzi introduces the hypothesis that governance policy applied to catchment basin management, can justify the importance given to planners' point of view among the multidisciplinary knowledge used in drawing up the Declaration. Some important innovations, though much-discussed, can be seen in the application of concertation and negotiation to decision-making processes regarding local basin territorial policies and actions.