

InnWater Article

#6 The Importance of Citizen Engagement in Water Governance



INN WATER

Promoting social innovation to renew multi-level and cross sector water governance



The Importance of Citizen Engagement in Water Governance: The Case of Figueres La Muga

Context

Citizen engagement in water governance is increasingly recognized as a critical component for sustainable development and resource management. Active participation of citizens in decision-making processes, planning, and implementation of policies and projects ensures that water management strategies are effective, inclusive, and reflective of the needs and values of the community. Engaging citizens enhances decision-making quality by incorporating diverse perspectives and local knowledge. This leads to more informed and better-quality decisions that are more likely to be accepted and supported by the community. Additionally, citizen involvement promotes transparency and accountability, fostering trust between the community and governing bodies. When citizens are engaged, there is greater transparency in the decision-making process, which promotes accountability among policymakers.

Citizen engagement also encourages sustainable practices by fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local water resources. This sense of stewardship encourages sustainable water use practices and increases public awareness about the importance of water conservation. In regions where water resources are scarce, conflicts over water use can arise. Citizen engagement provides a platform for dialogue and negotiation, helping to resolve disputes and promote cooperative water management. Furthermore, engaged communities are better prepared to face water-related challenges such as droughts, floods, and pollution. They can collectively develop and implement strategies to mitigate these risks and adapt to changing conditions.

Citizen engagement in water management

The objectives of citizen engagement in water management include inclusive planning, ensuring that all community members, including marginalized groups, have a voice in planning and decision-making processes. It also aims at collaborative management, creating partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sectors, and citizens to manage water resources together. Education and awareness are another key goal, as educating the public about water issues and the importance of sustainable water management practices is crucial. Lastly, monitoring and evaluation involve citizens in the evaluation of water management projects to ensure they meet community needs and goals.

The Figueres La Muga basin

The Figueres La Muga basin in Spain serves as a compelling example of the challenges of effective citizen engagement in water governance. Covering an area of 800 square kilometres, the La Muga basin is home to approximately 146,000 inhabitants spread across 68 municipalities. Figueres, the main city, has a population of 48,000. The primary water source is the Darnius-Boadella reservoir, supplemented by groundwater. Agriculture consumes the largest share of water (81.4%), followed by urban activities (17.2%) and industry (1.4%). The La Muga basin faces several challenges, including irregular water supply due to dependence on the Darnius-Boadella reservoir, and high seasonal water demand due to agriculture and tourism. Agriculture consumes a significant portion of water, necessitating the development of more efficient irrigation techniques and the use of alternative water sources. Climate change predicts reductions in water contributions by up to 20% in secondary river courses by 2039. To address these challenges, the community has implemented several measures, such as water reuse projects from treatment plants for drinking water and ecological balance, groundwater management by prospecting new wells and measures to prevent overexploitation and pollution, exploring the feasibility of installing desalination plants in coastal areas to supplement water supply, and permanent measures to reduce water consumption like banning the watering of parks and gardens and reducing water pressure in distribution systems.



The city of Figueres

Link with InnWater

The case of Figueres La Muga illustrates how involving citizens in the planning and decision-making process is a necessary step towards more sustainable, transparent, and resilient water management practices. By leveraging the diverse perspectives and local knowledge of the community, policymakers can develop strategies that are not only effective but also widely supported and implemented.

The InnWater project has initiated a citizen engagement process in La Muga involving multiple phases and methodologies designed to incorporate diverse citizen groups and perspectives and develop robust water management strategies. The process envisions initial engagement sessions where informed participants can identify key uncertainties and driving forces that affect water management. This includes brainstorming techniques during expert panels to elicit external factors impacting water governance. In subsequent sessions, participants will be expected to engage in scenario planning, imagining how identified factors might play out over the coming decades. The final objective is to construct multiple scenarios to anticipate potential changes and challenges, helping to develop resilient and adaptive strategies.

A citizen engagement process in a river basin can lead to several positive outcomes. Improved water management practices that are more sustainable and efficient will result from collaborative efforts. Public awareness about water issues and the importance of conservation will be heightened. The community will be better equipped to handle water-related challenges and adapt to future changes. As global water challenges continue to grow, the importance of citizen engagement in water governance cannot be overstated.

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