



A new vision for water

Agnes Biesiekierska talks to Martha Moss about the role of regional and local governments in encouraging responsible water consumption among citizens

Agnes Biesiekierska, who showcased the “aquawareness” project at the AER summer school, thinks it is up to councillors and mayors to implement water policies and provide information about the importance of water issues. Aquawareness aims to coordinate the vision for water in Europe and create a common culture of water efficiency among individuals, industry and agriculture. “The aims are manifold,” says Biesiekierska. “We want to raise awareness of water issues in Europe in general because citizens are not aware of the situation on a local, regional and national level.” The project is designed to increase awareness among decision makers and provide information to help people change their consumption habits.

The “Vision for Europe” programme, set up by the European Water Partnership (EWP) and handed to the EU institutions last year, was incorporated into Aquawareness. The vision, which sets out how to ensure water sustainability in Europe, states, “We have achieved sustainable water resource management and universal access to modern and safe water supply and sanitation because we value water in all its dimensions – in its economic, social, environmental and cultural importance.”

“The ‘vision’ was elaborated in the process when aquawareness was set up,” says Biesiekierska. “We figured out that we have to have one joint vision for all the stakeholders – where do we want to go, what is important, what kind of commitments, goals and objectives do we all have and what do we mean by sustainable water management.” The summer school is “one of the milestones” to engage with local authorities and young people to establish what is needed to implement the vision by 2030, she adds.

Biesiekierska considers the involvement of young people – “the decision makers of the future” – particularly important. To this end, the EWP is working on the Austrian “Generation Blue” initiative with the Czech Republic to make young people aware of how they can personally contribute to effective water management and highlight little-known jobs and professions within the water sector.

With participants ranging from Danuta Hübner, chair of the European parliament’s regional development committee, to representatives from the European Investment Bank and the European Environment Agency, Biesiekierska sees

the Valencia conference as a way of ensuring a “multi-stakeholder dialogue” on the issue. “The whole of Europe is meeting there on different levels. It is a great success that people are interested and a lot of interesting figures were there so it’s a great way of tackling the problem.”

It is clear that different regions face different issues when it comes to water management. While Britain experienced its wettest summer on record in 2007, causing widespread flooding in parts of central and southern England and Wales, Spain suffered a severe drought that same year. Although it is necessary to create region specific policies, Biesiekierska insists there are “different challenges throughout Europe”.

She added, “Different sectors have different challenges to face. What we want to do is bring it on the agenda, to bring different stakeholders together at one table and discuss what we can do, the challenges and solutions, and address what is already going on, what partnerships there are and how other sectors deal with problems.” ★

Agnes Biesiekierska, of the European water partnership



AER and GE Energy: working together

GE was invited to the recent AER summer school event in Spain, one of the most arid European countries, to underline that the technologies required to address European water challenges are already available.

In his speech “Solving European water challenges”, Orlando Viera, from GE Water & Process Technologies, explained how it was possible to reduce environmental impact by providing solutions that would reduce energy and fresh water consumption as well as wastewater discharge.

The event in Valencia is in line with the goals of the ‘European regions energy day’, a joint initiative launched by the AER and GE Energy to examine the energy challenges facing European regions today and to promote their possible solutions.

To support this collaboration, GE Energy will be hosting the AER’s annual general assembly and biennial general meeting – the largest summit of European regions focused on energy and economic challenges on a local level – in November 2009 in Belfort, France.