



ERAC-CT-2005-0260025

IWRM-NET

Towards a European-wide exchange Network for integrating research efforts on Integrated Water Resources Management

Thematic priority: Integrated water resource management

D57 CATALYZING THE HUMAN NETWORK: REPORT OF THE EXPERIMENT DURING IWRM-NET FINAL CONFERENCE AND AFTERMATH

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RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services).	X
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1 INTRODUCTION

IWRM-NET (n°ERAC-CT-2005-026025) is a five year (2006-2010) European Research Area project (ERA-Net) funded by the European Commission. IWRM-NET aims to implement new research activities at the national and regional levels related to Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) with a focus on the Water Framework Directive.

IWRM-net held its final event on 1-3 December in Brussels. Based on the experience of using social media and web tools within the project the team decided to test a specific system of social media during the final conference. The purpose of this experiment would be to lightly assess the potential of using web discussion groups for the purpose of exchanging knowledge and aligning research.

This report provides the background, methods and results of this exercise.

2 BACKGROUND

Across Europe national ministries of research, ministries of environment, regional ministries, and several other organisations fund research for the benefit of effective water management. In an ideal world, these investments would be coordinated to avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts. It is however very difficult to bring the various programmes together. A particular problem is that a topic which has been identified as a research need by one funding agency, may have already been addressed by other research funders. Given the time delay between research and publication of results, this validation of research issues on a European level is a challenge. This challenge is magnified in case of more applied research, which is less frequently published and is typically published in the local language.

Within the IWRM-net team the idea had been growing that social media, and in particular discussion fora could be a useful tool to specify and validate research needs. The basic principle being that a perceived research issue would be posted by the individual who owns the issue, and the forum would respond, either by pointing towards existing work, or by helping to specify the issue.

In this particular case the discussions would need to involve scientists, practitioners and funders, providing an extra dimension to common discussion fora, where groups appear to be quite homogeneous, and the common interest in a topic is strong. In the case of research needs identification, the drivers are less clear: The benefits of the discussions may not be beneficial for all participants, e.g. if the conclusion can be drawn that some research may be ranked less important.

At the final conference a small experiment was carried out to get a feeling about the potential use of web-based discussions.

3 SET-UP

Leading up to and during the conference the delegates were introduced the European Water Community tool (EWC): <http://iwrn-net.europeanwatercommunity.eu/>. A list of research need 'providers' were identified to try and catalyse the discussions based around a list of themes such as climate change, groundwater etc. Questions were placed on the EWC and delegates were invited to pose responses and discuss the issues arising from the questions on the water community.

During the final session the delegates were :

1. Asked to provide an assessment of the current use of web-based discussion forums: Via an electronic voting system the participants were asked to react on a number of statements about their use of web-based discussion fora.
2. All participants were invited to use, test and comment on the system available. (They had received a login to this community site and a short manual to get acquainted to the community facilities (Annex 1).

3. invited to discuss the usability of web-based discussion for a in general.

4 RESULTS

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT USE OF WEB-BASED DISCUSSION FORUMS

To be able to assess if web-based discussions can support research needs identification and validation it is essential that different stakeholders are active in web-based discussions. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the different people attending session 3 of the conference according to their professional role in research.

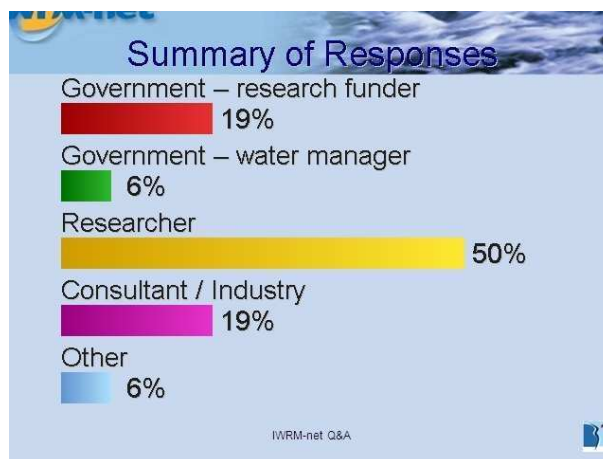


Figure 1: Participants' identification

The participants were asked per group if they were engaged in web-based discussions. The results were:

Type of respondent	active in web-based discussions	percentage of all votes ¹
Government – research funders	33%	12
Government – water managers	100%	4
Researchers	66%	69
Consultants /Industry	50%	16

Table 1 : Level of engagement in web-based discussions.

Regrettably the system did not provide absolute values of votes, and not all participants to the conference voted on each question (in time). However, when asked it appeared that two water managers responded, representing 4 percent of all votes. The figures suggest that all stakeholder groups are using web-based discussions. The key persons in research funding (Research funders)

¹ System round-off errors caused a sum of 101 in total.

appear to be least active: This group would be expected to moderate discussions on research need identification.

The amount of time that individuals spent on web-based discussions is represented in figure 2:



Figure 2: Time spent on web-based discussion per week.

Due to time and technology constraints it was not possible to distinguish results per user group.

More than 50% of the respondents spent more than 1 hour per week on following up on web-based discussions. Combined with an approximation of the number of people being active (Table 1), this means that about 25% of the audience may be considered educated on and active in web-based discussions.

The participants who are active in web-based discussions were asked if they believe web-based discussions could help in science-policy interfacing and in research programming. The results were:

Type of respondent	active in web-based discussions	percentage of all votes ²
Government – research funders	50%	26
Government – water managers	100%	25
Researchers	45%	30
Consultants /Industry	100%	21

Table 2 : Perception of usefulness of web-based discussions in science-policy interfacing and in research programming.

Based on the percentage of all votes it should be noted that this question was apparently not answered by many participants.

² System round-off errors caused a sum of 101 in total.

4.2 USING THE EUROPEAN WATER COMMUNITY TOOL


Within the framework of IWRM-net project developed the European Water Community tool was developed. The tool resembles well-known tools such as [LINKED-IN](#) or [FACEBOOK](#).

It has some specific features, e.g. the differentiation of ideas, news, and in particular polls. The poll-feature is considered to be unique.

During the event 30 minutes were reserved to try and use the tool. A very steep learning curve was required. In the end, some research questions were posed in the system, and meeting participants were asked to comment on these when returning home. Figure 3 shows an example.



Submit an idea


In progress (0) | Elected (2) | Rejected (0) | My bookmarks (0)

 Ouevauviller Philippe , on December 02, 2010

environmental value of groundwater resources

Any idea on how research could help in establishing environmental quality criteria for groundwater, i.e. not linked to specific usages but dealing with the environmental value of groundwater resources? Threshold values currently established by Member States are very often linked to Drinking Water standards... this was not the original philosophy of the Groundwater Directive

Commenter (1) | Bookmark 1   0

 Jellema Jan, on December 03, 2010

In general, the cleaner the water, the better the water is fit for many usages, so the more expensive it should become.

In the extreme, heavily polluted water could even have a negative value, we want to pay for anybody who pumps it up and dispose it on an acceptable way. So we could produce a range of subsequent deteriorating qualities.

- Clean, slightly alkalic (dune) water.
- Clean, slightly acidic (ground)water
- Water from glaciers and springs, with slight bacteriological contamination
- Clean lakewater, without organic pollution
- Lake and riverwater with organic pollution
- Lake and river water with organic and household pollution
- Water with industrial chemical pollution in several degrees

Every water can be defined with its own chemical characteristics.

Maybe such a definition and consequent pricing will stimulate that groundwater is used for drinking water supply and treated sewage water is preferred for spraying crops.

Reply

Figure 3 : Screenshot of a web-based discussion in the European Water Community.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the assessment of the current use of web-based discussion forums indicate a potential for the use of web-based discussion forums for science-policy interaction and research needs identification. In practise, this is not yet supported by the use of the European Water Community Tool.

In the discussion following the first two parts of the session, several participants voiced the usefulness of the EWC-tool and the interest in the concept of using this, or similar tools. This confirmed the result of the assessment.

To be useful in practice participants must see sufficient benefit to actively engage. A forum in which one can ask questions concerning water management is intuitively beneficial for the individual that poses the question. Less obvious is the motivation of others who are expected to answer. The observation was voiced that in many forums many people are inactive – possibly benefiting from the ongoing discussions, but not putting in own knowledge. The EWC forum may be used to disseminate research, increasing impact and possibly also helping the researcher who circulated the research to be invited for follow-up research. It was however also voiced that this may be a risk: an individual researcher's work is not funded anymore because the required answers are available in another Member state".

One of the important aspects of any group is that it needs to be facilitated. In the early stages of any product development there needs to be a constant stream of information that draws sufficient people to the site. Once a mass sufficient mass of people are engaged then it is presumed that the discussions will be self sustaining. But the question arises, what is the sufficient number of delegates on a discussion site? Then there have been questions raised regarding the quality assurance process of such a tool if it is going to be used to validate research needs that then lead to large sums if research funds being made available?

Overall, web based forums may provide an interesting additional tool in science-policy interfacing, research needs identification and validation across the European Unions Member States. It will require improved tools (e.g. forums need to differentiate different user groups) and a lot of effort to create sufficient mass to be effective.

For the developers of such tools, an important aspect to learn is that they take time to build and animate. Within IWRM-net the experiment was a relative success and taught delegates about the newly formed European Water Community. We also received interesting feedback on how social media is becoming more integrated in the 'water managers, researchers and slowly, funders lifestyle. But technical issues that often occur in managing information technology and the time required to develop functional sites requires a clear vision and resources behind them. Working on these system based on project to project funding means that the piecemeal approach often lacks the momentum to ensure it is supported and maintained into the future. These issues are they to discuss and IWRM-net partners are keen to continue the discussions on use of social media.

Annex 1: Instructions for the session

Session purpose & means:

The purpose of the session is to discuss the usefulness of social media in identifying and discussing research needs. The discussion will be fed by experimenting with one specific social media tool: The European Water Community Tool.

Aims of the EWC-tool

IWRM-Net European Water Community tool (EWC-tool) is a pilot platform to test virtual web 2.0 tools to support exchange of information specifically dedicated to researchers and research programme managers and widely open to water stakeholders in order to bridge the gap between research and programme management.

Set-up:

- We will test the EWC-tool along the following themes:

1. Water Scarcity and Droughts
2. Climate change impacts and adaptation
3. Economics and social values for integrated water management
4. Groundwater
5. Hydromorphology
6. River Basin Management Planning

Discussion groups for these themes have been created.

- If you have brought your own web-enabled laptop, connect to the European Water Community tool and join the topic of your interest. (explanations follow)
- If you have not brought your own laptop, please join a thematic group of your interest (Group laptops will be available). If your group respond, please include the name of the respondent.
- Some persons in the audience will act as “research demander”. They may already have put a question in a group.
- All other’s are asked to react to the questions, e.g. by
 - Asking for clarification / specification
 - Promoting or pointing towards own or otherwise available results / ongoing research
 - Research users will be asked to reply or provide comments

Example:

“Knowledge demanders” pose a question: “Hydromorphological change effects”: “We are considering changing the floodplain in a Natura 2000 area. Are there tools to assess effects? Are their weak points in current science that pose a significant risk?”

Individuals / groups respond: “You may want to take a look at upcoming research projects. The EC has called for proposals on hydromorphological changes. A year from now a major project may start.”

“Knowledge demanders” pose further questions: “Thank you, but I can not wait another year. What can we use today?”

- The exercise will last 30-45 minutes.
- At the end we shall pose questions and give you the chance to provide feedback (10 minutes)

Getting started:

Go to <http://iwrn-net.europeanwatercommunity.eu/>

EWC-T – getting started



news
Create public and private groups to discuss common issues.

research needs
Submit your research needs for comments and voting.

team
Find out who is involved in the Water Community and get in touch.

Join IWRM-Net's virtual community


Professional email:

Your invitation code:

I don't have an invitation code and I wish to use this service.

Submit

EWC-T – Find your group



Groundwater

Stephen Midgley
Created on November 17, 2010

Participants

Jean-Paul Fourd
Social Network Facilitator

Candela Lucila
PROFESORA

Last name	Created on	Administrator
✓ A changing climate	June 16, 2010	Natacha Amorosi
✓ Economics and social values	November 25, 2010	Stephen Midgley
✓ Final Conference - LIVE	November 19, 2010	Gilles Neveu
✓ Final Conference, 1-3 Dec 2010	October 04, 2010	Jean-Paul Fourd
✓ Groundwater	November 17, 2010	Stephen Midgley
✓ Hydromorphology	November 25, 2010	Stephen Midgley
✓ River Basin Management Plan	November 25, 2010	Stephen Midgley
✓ Water Scarcity and Droughts	November 25, 2010	Stephen Midgley
✓ Wetlands	November 27, 2009	Mihail Costache

IWRM-NET

Groundwater news ideas team

[Browse ideas](#)



B **I** **I** **A****B****C** **[List]** **[Link]** **[Image]** **Font size** **A** **Ω**


Explain your idea here. Use the menu bar above to format your text.

Closing date for this idea :
The voting period for your idea must be between 2 and 30 days.

3 (your idea)



1

2 (react)

 Michiel Blind, 1 minute ago

First idea
test 1

|

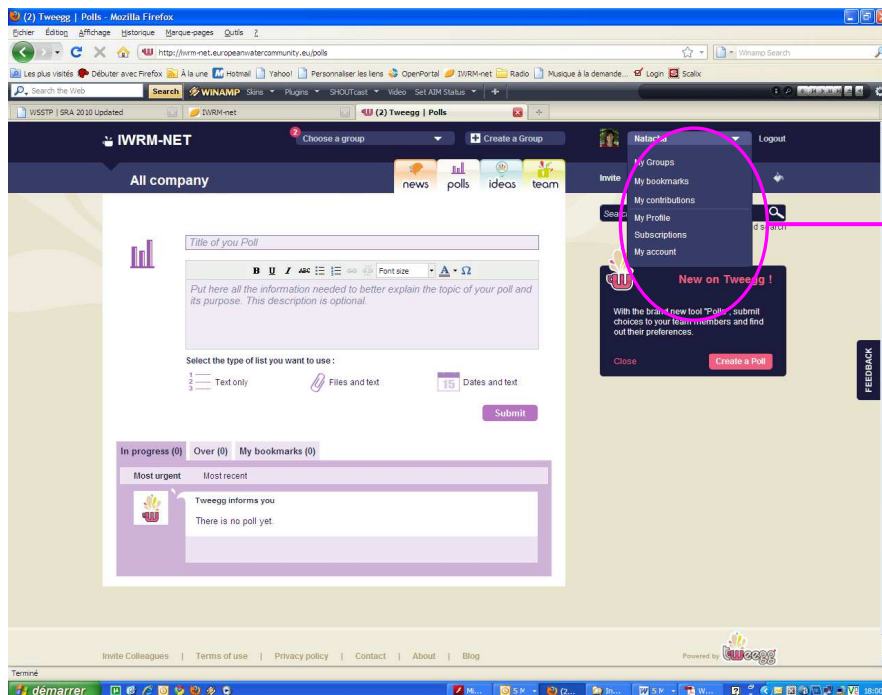
1   0

Voting ends in : 11 d 23 h

1

Misscelaneous

- The shared area is automatically opened when you enter EWC and you see the page 'News'. News includes everything that happened in your community (a new member entered, an idea or a poll published...). You can hide news that you already read.
- You have the possibility to publish your own news, and comment on news of others.
- In the area's 'Polls' or 'Ideas', you can create, read and vote on contributions. 'Ideas' is especially dedicated to discuss a subject, research needs, ...
- 'Team' precise the different members of the community or a specific group;
- Both shared area and groups are structured identically with a short Menu bar (right-hand side of the title of the group) containing 'News', 'Polls', 'Ideas', 'Team' ;
- You need to select the group in which you want to participate in;
- You will be informed on new public groups by email.
- When you create a group (private or public), you then have to invite people to join it. If the group is public, every member of the community will be informed of its creation (by a news on the front page or by email) and will have the possibility to take part in the exchanges;
- You can change your settings in the Menu under your name right next to your picture. Your settings specify the different groups you take part in, your bookmarks (you have the option to bookmark News, Polls or Ideas submitted to the community, your different contributions to the community, and your profile (name and other details). 'Subscriptions' precise the notification of activities you want to receive by email.



Your profile :
My groups ;
My bookmarks,
My contributions,
My profile,
Subscriptions,
My account