

Urban water cycle management

In the last decennia urban water management has improved. However; is this a matter of optimization of UWC management? In the UWC theme "urban water cycle management" we explored the benefits and difficulties of the water management organisation in Germany, England and the Netherlands. Our final purpose was to show in practise how to optimise the overall performance of the urban water cycle with respect tot the built environment in which it is embedded.

Background

Within the countries in the North Sea region there are significant differences in the organisational, legal and financial aspects of the urban water cycle management. For example, in England, much of the urban water cycle is managed by private water companies, in the Netherlands the management is spread out over three governmental authorities and in Germany the urban water cycle is still mainly controlled and managed by governmental authorities, however with a great emphasis on privatisation.

Investigation method

Two workshops have been organized with all the uwc partners to exchange knowledge and experiences in order to bring back home new ideas and insights. During these workshops we also tried to find out whether there is one best way to optimize urban water management.

The yellow post its-analyses

During the second workshop, that took place in Bradford, all participants were asked to write down their profession (scientist, administrator or practitioner) and to write down an answer to some questions. Comparing the answers from the



people it can be stated that someone's profession has an influence on their way of asking a question. People with a more practical profession tended to ask more specific questions while people with a scientific or management profession tended to ask more general questions. Also, dividing the questions into social, environmental and political categories, it became clear that most people asked as well social as environmental questions. It seems that there is consensus that both aspects are equally important in water management.

Outcome

We found out that reorganizing urban water management is not a solution for optimization. The best way to optimize urban water management strongly depends on how water management is organized in a specific country. Also, optimizing urban water management does not make it less complicated. The complexity of urban water management is mainly determined by the urban environment, which is in itself complex and highly dynamic. Therefore, improving urban water management is more a matter of adaptation to these complex surroundings. Adaptation in this case means the willingness of water managers to listen to the interests of and to cooperate with all different stakeholders within the urban environment.

Complexity

When uwc management becomes more sensitive for the context in which the system is embedded adaptation seems to be the best way to improve. Urban Water management always has to deal with a certain amount of uncertainty, like climate change and financial resources. Is there a best way to act when knowledge is lacking or hard to transfer? It seems that recognizing what you do not know and learn how to cope with your uncertainty seems to be a good working strategy.

