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# **European Union : "RHINE-NET": to develop public participation 2003 - 2006**

- International Office for Water - Cooperation - International actions - Integrated water resources management (IWRM) -  
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The project which involved 13 partners, was led by Naturlandstiftung Saar (D), and co-ordinated by "Solidarité Eau Europe" (F).

The total budget of the project amounted to 3.6 Million Euro, half financed by the European INTERREG IIIb North West European (NWE) programme.

The Rhine Network or "Rhine-Net" aimed at identifying and **enhancing good practices in public involvement** over a 5-year period up to the end of 2006. The Rhine basin, located at the core of one of the most populated and industrialised regions of Europe, has a rich and varied local knowledge of water management, together with many initiatives from citizens, associations, private sector, public sector, municipalities and transboundary organisations.

These good local practices are especially significant for implementing the European Water Framework Directive that promotes a new public involvement in water management as early as possible, with a true citizens' participation.

**The aim of the "Rhine Network" is to identify and develop local practices of participatory management of water resources, to strengthen European co-operation on the scale of the river basin and to disseminate the acquired local knowledge.**

### *Project activities*

The activities carried out in this project included 6 real case studies and the same number of groups of local stakeholders along the Rhine. Participatory practices were evaluated and compared for each case and then disseminated to promote the best ones:

- revitalisation of the upper Rhine (F, D, CH),
- development of the Dreisam in Feiburg (D),
- protection of springs in Luxemburg (L),
- classification of the delta wetlands (NL),
- renaturalisation of banks in Karlsruhe (D),
- flood prevention in the Moselle / Saar basin (F, D).

**In addition to these case studies, public information and awareness activities were organised on the basin scale:**

- local information workshops on the active participation of the Civil Society in water management (Main, Upper Rhine, Moselle / Saar, Rhine delta);
- organisation of a poetry contest "Rivers of pictures, rivers of words" in the schools of the Upper Rhine and Moselle / Saar, with a mobile exhibition;
- organisation of a "Bathing Day" in the Rhine to entice the population back to the river;
- organisation of the "Neckar festival", gathering about a hundred events in the entire Neckar basin.

Knowledge gained about the different participation practices was then discussed to prepare an **"operational guide for participation"** addressing stakeholders in water management.

**IOWater mainly dealt with the evaluation of participatory management practices and with the drafting of the operational guide, which will enable the capitalisation of the best practices.**

In 2005, IOWater was in charge of producing a **methodological guide "better involvement for better managing your projects: For a participative management of water and aquatic environments"**, in close co-operation with the network partners.

This guide was gradually drawn up: it began with an overall bibliographical research and summary on the concept of public participation, the international and European regulations in this field, the existing techniques and a more in-depth thinking focused on **the requirements of the Water Framework Directive** regarding public participation, real guidelines for planning water policies on the scale of large river basins.

Interviews took place with the different project managers of the **Rhine Network**, in order to collect their views on public participation and their experience feedbacks in this field.

The results of these interviews were analysed against a reference methodology and were presented in a descriptive sheet for each case study; finally, a synthesis enabled to emphasize interesting tools and practical advice, that can help the project managers to involve the public in their projects.

Several meetings allowed the partners of the **Rhine Network** to work, in a participative and co-operative way, to formalise a first experience feedback and develop approaches that could be used by other field managers involved in water management projects.

The guide can be downloaded from the website: [www.rhinenet.net](http://www.rhinenet.net)