



BUILDING A CIRCULAR SOCIETY

THE NEED FOR A
COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO
ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY



17 OCTOBER 2019

13:30 - 19:30

VIVAQUA | BRUSSELS

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS
10 YEARS OF COLLABORATION
FOR THE GENERAL INTEREST

REPORT



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Aqua Publica Europea, the European Association of Public Water Operators

BUILDING A CIRCULAR SOCIETY: The need for a collective effort to achieve sustainability

**17 October 2019
13:30 – 18:30**

**VIVAQUA Auditorium
Boulevard de l'Impératrice 17
1000 Brussels, Belgium**

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

*Organised on the occasion of Aqua Publica Europea's tenth anniversary celebration, the conference will discuss how **different institutions and stakeholders in Europe are working to build a more sustainable society.***

*The **great challenges of our time, such as climate change and demographic shifts, affect society as a whole, and put pressure on our common resources.** They also showcase the importance of **strengthening coordination** across services within public administrations as well as **amongst different industrial sectors** in order to boost the shift towards a more circular use of resources.*

*The conference will start with an **analysis of how growing challenges and technological transformation are affecting the way water resources are managed.** The conversation will review legislative and economic considerations, the role of civil society and scientific research, to define how the **essential service of water supply and sanitation is expected to evolve in the next years.** The discussion will focus on the need to combine sustainable resource management and the equitable access to water.*

*We will then broaden the discussion by **gathering different sectors around the same table to share perspectives and solutions in the move towards a society that is effectively circular in the way it uses its resources.** The final part will focus on the conditions – in terms of coordination, industrial synergies, innovation and regulatory adaptation – to foster the collective effort that such a move requires.*



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On 17 October 2019, on the occasion the **tenth anniversary of Aqua Publica Europea**, the European Association of Public Water Operators, about one hundred participants gathered for a seminar connecting the water sector with other public sectors to discuss how to jointly foster a sustainable future in a circular society. The seminar was hosted by VIVAQUA, the public water operator of Brussels.

The seminar was the opportunity to launch the association's 10-year publication '**The Public Water Services of the Future**' [\[read the publication\]](#) which presents how public operators are preparing to tackle the great challenges of our time – from climate change to growing investment needs, as well as to harness emerging opportunities. Based on the actual strategies of Aqua Publica members, the document presents the public water operator as part of several ecosystems - environment, society, economy and knowledge - and as embedded in the contextual fabric to contribute to development that benefits the general interest.

A first panel focused on **the future of water**, with experts from the institutional and regulatory, scientific, financial and environmental perspectives. The panel identified the **key challenges for water management**: quality of water, including emerging pollution concerns (diffuse pollution, micro-pollutants, mixture effects), quantity and availability of water (access to water, scarcity), and gaps in regulation (sludge). The discussion highlighted the imperative to **prioritise pollution prevention over treatment** as well as the need to adopt a **fully circular mind set when addressing issues** to be able to find new solutions. **Financing and governance are central**, especially in a changing framework: strong legislation needs to be fully implemented; all stakeholders – including the civil society - need to be involved in decision-making; and political courage is necessary to put in place effective mechanisms (cost-recovery, Polluter-Pays principle). Whilst water operators are particularly efficient at finding solutions to the range of issues, it is time to involve other sectors in the search for solutions.

Following-up on that conclusion, the discussion then took a wider approach with the view that, if we are truly committed, as a society, to building a sustainable future, it is paramount to **work across sectors and across silos**. Two panels were each introduced by a public water operator's best practice from the sustainability and inter-disciplinary angles, focusing on two aspects of water management: **management of sludge and the potential of nutrient and energy recovery** (Gruppo CAP) and **rainwater management in urban areas** (HAMBURG WASSER). It was the opportunity to gather the sectors of, in the first panel, energy, agriculture and digital, and, in the second panel, housing, banking and the civil society. Conclusions highlighted that **bringing different sectors around the same table is a critical exercise, albeit unusual, and needs to be encouraged further**, also at the EU level when developing new policy. Such cross-sectoral discussions, from the beginning of the process, allow to address differences and find **solutions satisfactory to all parties**. In addition, the discussion highlighted that **many best practices come from the local level and can contribute to debates**.





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The seminar was opened by **Bernard Van Nuffel**, President of VIVAQUA and host of the event, to welcome the participants and celebrate the tenth anniversary of Aqua Publica Europea.

Then, **Célia Blauel**, President of Aqua Publica Europea, President of Eau de Paris and Deputy-Mayor of Paris reminded the audience about **the foundation of Aqua Publica Europea**, ten years ago, **as a space for public water operators to share best practices and improve together**, convinced that a well-managed public operator under the supervision of elected officials could deliver effective solutions to tackle water challenges in the general interest. Further, Ms. Blauel introduced the discussion with experts on the future of water, an opportunity to **discuss together how the public model of water management can evolve** and ever-improve to continue address current and future challenges. In this context, she presented Aqua Publica Europea's latest publication: **'The public water services of the future'**, which outlines how water operators are preparing for the future and becoming actors of change in their communities by expanding the range of their activities guided by a sustainability compass, from environmental, social, economic and knowledge perspectives. Finally, Ms. Blauel introduced the broader conversation of the seminar by underlining the **need to work with other sectors, beyond water, to seek solutions that can work for all, which is required by the nature of the challenge ahead**.



BERNARD VAN NUFFEL
President, VIVAQUA

Bernard Van Nuffel has been President of VIVAQUA (Brussels water operator) since February 2019. Deputy-Mayor of the Jette municipality, he has been involved in the Brussels water sector since 2007, at the Board of Directors of HYDROBRU (which merged with VIVAQUA in 2018). After studying architecture, Mr. Van Nuffel joined, in 1997, the City of Brussels. First in Urban Planning, then as advisor and chief of cabinet to the Deputy-Mayor for Public Spaces, in charge of sewage network management. At a very young age, he became aware of environmental issues. When his children were born, he became fully aware of the ecological emergency, which drives him more than ever today.



CELIA BLAUDEL
*President, Aqua Publica Europea,
President, Eau de Paris
Deputy-Mayor, City of Paris*

Since the Municipal elections of March 2014, Célia Blauel is Paris Deputy Mayor in charge of the Environment, Sustainable Development, the Climate Plan for Energy, and Hydric resources and counselor of the City of Paris. In 2014, she was elected President of Eau de Paris, the public water operator serving French capital. Celia Blauel obtained a degree from the Strasbourg Institute of Political Studies in 2003. A member of the Green Party since 2006, she is particularly active in matters such as housing, health, and environment.



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The event was organised in two sessions:

- Session I: **The future of water services in the context of growing challenges and emerging opportunities**
- Session II: **Working together today for a sustainable tomorrow: towards an integrated approach to circularity**

Session I: The future of water services in the context of growing challenges and emerging opportunities

1. Emerging challenges for the water sector

A first round of questions raised the topics of upcoming challenges for the water sector.



Caroline Whalley, Expert for Water Industries and Pollution at the European Environment Agency (EEA), underlined that key questions are related to both water quantity, with a focus on resource efficiency and demographic changes, and water quality with priority to micro-pollutants and diffuse pollution. Whilst legislation has been effective on point-source pollution, diffuse pollution remains challenge.

“Once pollution is out there, it is really difficult to deal with it”

In addition, there are knowledge gaps on the effect of pollution mixtures. She expressed the need to prioritise pollution prevention. A key issue is the management of sludge, where a proper dialogue needs to be started, as part of circular economy, to be able to make use of the opportunity of bioresources [[see also: Towards a sustainable approach to sludge management: legal frameworks and technological solutions, Aqua Publica Europea](#)]. Finally, she expressed that it is necessary to address the questions of unconnected dwellings to proper waste water as well as social equity

and Sustainable Development Goals.

Marco Beros, Lead Engineer for Water Management at the European Investment Bank (EIB), then talked about the EIB’s priorities on water, as the largest lender to the water sector, based on the 2017 document: *EIB water sector lending orientation: strengthening water security*. Because the EIB provides long-term financing, it has a long-term view. A key focus is the need to factor in climate change in investment assessments as the longevity of an asset may be exposed to climate risk. There is also increasing difficulty to prove longevity, due to the uncertainties related to climate change. In addition, he express concerns about the different levels of asset management and underinvestment in Europe, especially in buried assets. It is also important to understand future financing needs. For example, removing micro-pollutants will cost billions. He wondered about the involvement of polluters, who are reluctant to contribute, and about localised examples of equipment to avoid pollutants, which imply high costs.





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Christian Minelli, Coordinator at the WAREG, the association of European water regulators, noted the variety of regulatory frameworks and, that regulators' work focuses on consumers, investors and the environment. Their key message is the importance of universal access to good quality water at affordable prices. Discussing the costs, he emphasised the importance of a real recovery of all the costs also through legislation, and the need for efficient and transparent costs. Economic regulation serves the purpose to transfer benefits to local communities as well as to find the adequate resources for investments. He explained that tariffs have the advantage to generate more confidence in the operators, also from the banks, and a good regulatory system means that there are good, transparent rules independent from the political cycle. Other key challenges, including the stress on water resources, competing usages and the quality of water released in the environment.

Sergiy Moroz, Senior Policy Officer for Water and Biodiversity at the European Environmental Bureau started by praising the quality of water in Brussels before stressing the need for access to water, which is part of the negotiations on the Drinking Water Directive and was the topic of the first European Citizens' Initiative, mobilising many citizens. He also noted the challenges affecting water quality (diffuse pollution, substances of emerging concern, micro-pollutants) and quantity (droughts), as well as threats to biodiversity. In this sense, he welcomed the role of the public water operators to play a societal role beyond water supply. Noting that regulation can help deal with all the pressures, including climate change, he stated that the Water Framework Directive is fit-for-purpose and needs to be maintained in its form, with a need to achieve it. He further focused on the benefits of river basin level cross-sector partnerships and the key role for water operators, also in policy

*“ Decisions about water
need to be taken together ”*

change, including the Common Agriculture Policy. He emphasised the role of the civil society, and its interest in water, as well as the role of the government in setting up proper cost recovery mechanisms, considering that a lot of the costs are still passed onto the customers who are paying twice through subsidies to farmers and then water treatment. He called for the proper application of the Polluter-Pays and cost recovery principles.





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2. Proposed solutions to address challenges

A second round of questions was oriented towards solutions to address challenges.

Mr. Moroz first noted that the EU has a lot of good pieces of legislation which need resources and implementation through much better enforcement. In the appointment of a new European Commission, a clear priority was given to the enforcement of environmental legislation, and the Green Deal offers an opportunity. It is also crucial to look into new substances which are not currently part of the regulation, as well as to ensure at-source pollution prevention. There is opportunity with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive: as the results of the evaluation are expected, a solution can be to look into some of the pharmaceuticals, micro-plastics and review the legislation. The WFD, however, is fit-for-purpose and the focus should be on implementation by 2027, with less exemptions and with nature based solutions, which bring many benefits, whilst also linking the climate action agenda.

Dr. Whalley emphasised the question of waste water sludge as a gap. As no one wants to think about it, the problem remains with the utilities. She noted that utilities are really good at solving problems but there needs to be a collective effort, as challenges cannot be addressed by operators alone. Focusing on sludge, she raised the question of why it cannot be used and why it is contaminated, in order to encourage thinking towards creating a circular economy. Further, as chemicals are an international topic, they require a global international treaty. The products that make it impossible to use sludge on land are not acceptable in a circular economy. It is necessary to think wider than the water sector.

Discussing the question of governance, **Mr. Minelli** noted that it depends on the institutional context. The situation is variable from country to country and the powers given to regulate water services differ. Considering the challenges to water, including climate change and water security, which are translational issues, the governance of water should go beyond the local level to a national coordination, with coordination between institutional levels to seek common solutions. Regulators can help facilitate relations between levels and a key aspect is the coordination and inclusiveness of all stakeholders in decision-making, starting from operators and customers.

“ coordination and inclusiveness of all stakeholders in decision-making is key ”

Mr. Beros noted that there are different levels of regulation in Europe. Ranging from regulators with significant powers to places where they are seen as political instruments. In some countries, there may be issues because political changes affect the utilities' ability to repay their loans. Because of the social and environmental implications of water, the EIB considers that there needs to be taxation. Further, a new tariff approach is necessary to address the challenges, and take into account cost structure as well as affordability and the willingness to pay. Finally, the EIB would be in favour of regulators playing a stronger role on companies that are not investing enough or performing well. Benchmarking may also be a useful instrument.

Following questions from the audience, **Dr. Whalley** reflected on the need for other sectors to be regulated, beyond water, in particular considering that agriculture has a major effect on the environment, and energy is another area. She also expressed that the institutions should further show how exciting the water sector is for young professionals, to foster jobs and address challenges. **Mr. Beros** noted that the EIB mentions research and innovation in its lending orientation but rarely has the opportunity to finance it. He also noted that it is on river basin level that the discussion should happen and the main issue is not so much with the industry, which pays the pollution fees, but with agriculture, where the Polluter-Pays principle is not fully tried. **Mr. Minelli** also addressed the issue of cost recovery and relations with other sectors, noting that there are national experiences with multi-sector regulators (for example in Italy). Finally, **Mr. Moroz** highlighted the fundamental role of the Common Agricultural Policy to achieve objectives and support the transition to a more balanced framework but that some positive elements



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proposed by European Commission are under threat. Regarding cost recovery, whilst tools are available, there is also resistance to the Polluter-Pays principle and public pressure can help, which is why the question of transparency is important.

CAROLINE WHALLEY

*Expert: Water Industries and Pollution,
European Environment Agency*

Caroline joined the European Environment Agency in 2015, working on chemicals in and emissions to water. Having gained her PhD in environmental chemistry at the University of East Anglia (UK), she worked in marine science at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). She then moved to become a policy advisor at Defra, UK, working in the areas of water and marine policy, before moving to the EEA.

MARCO BEROS

*Lead Engineer, Water Management,
European Investment Bank*

Marco Beroš is the Lead Engineer within the Water Management Division of the European Investment Bank's project Directorate, which follows the Bank's Water projects in all countries except from the Mediterranean area and Africa. Marco studied civil engineering at Technical University Munich and at Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées in Paris. Prior to joining the EIB, Mr. Beroš worked for more than 10 years at Veolia Water Paris' suburbs operational services that provide water supply for 4 million inhabitants. He then joined SEURECA, Veolia Water's international consultancy where he worked in about 30 countries in Europe, Africa and Asia.

CHRISTIAN MINELLI

*Coordinator, WAREG (European Water
Regulators)*

Christian Minelli is an official at the Italian Regulatory Authority for Energy, Networks and Environment (ARERA), where he develops and monitors European and international institutional affairs. Since 2010, he represents ARERA in European Energy Fora, EU Institutions, OECD, international organisations. Since 2014 he is the coordinator of WAREG the first European association of national and regional agencies responsible for the economic regulation of drinking water and sanitation services. Before serving in ARERA, he was policy officer in the Cabinet of President of the Italian Senate. Graduated in Diplomacy and International Relations (Gorizia, Italy), former alumnus of the College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium) and MBA from SDA-Bocconi School of Management (Milan, Italy).

SERGIY MOROZ

*Senior Policy Officer, Water and
Biodiversity, European Environmental
Bureau*

Sergiy leads the EEB's work on the Water Framework Directive and coordinates the EEB's involvement in efforts for a better implementation of the EU Nature Directives and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. Before joining EEB, Sergiy worked as a Policy Director for the European Water Partnership promoting uptake of water stewardship approaches, as well as for WWF on a range of projects from river restoration to advocacy for ambitious EU laws. Sergiy is originally from Ukraine and speaks Ukrainian, Russian, English, French and Dutch.



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Session II: Working together today for a sustainable tomorrow: towards an integrated approach to circularity

The second session was the opportunity to engage in a discussion with representatives of other sectors to reflect together on the opportunities, but also the conditions, for a move towards a circular economy. As the shift towards a circular economy requires strong political commitment, good regulation should facilitate the coordination amongst different sectors and different actors, as a key condition for this transformation. The panels focused on two angles particularly relevant from a circular economy perspective, and are connected with other sectors: energy and nutrients recovery from sludge, and rainwater management in urban environment. Each panel started from a concrete project – from a water operator but that tries to integrate different dimensions/sectors – and then broadened to exchange with the other panellists.

Panel 1 – Wastewater as a resource: participatory approaches and coordination of local services in view of sectoral integration



Introducing the panel, Gruppo CAP's President **Alessandro Russo** and General Director **Michele Falcone** presented the operator's BioPiattaformaLab. The project is a solution to address the concern of sludge management by transforming the existing municipal incineration plant into a platform dedicated to the carbon neutral economy with a biorefinery for sludge. In the process, Gruppo CAP implemented a participatory process, with five municipalities, to involve citizens in a public debate, to collect suggestions and proposals for the industrial symbiosis project. Started in 2016 with the discussion between the proposing industrial entities and the 5 municipalities involved, it has been enlarged with the involvement of civil society and representatives of committees, associations, trade unions.

The debate then opened with a discussion on participatory processes.

Adriano Battilani, Secretary General of Irrigants d'Europe, shared perspectives on the obstacles faced by farmers as regards the use of nutrients recovered from waste water. He first highlighted that irrigated agriculture is one of the most advanced industries in the world but noted that the sector has limited capability for investment. Therefore, there are limits to the possibility to change too fast. Challenges include the fact that, according to statistics, farmers have lower salaries than cities but also the need to bring young people back to agriculture to foster the uptake of innovation (as per the new CAP), a lack of capability to increase the price also related to the price food. Therefore, if there is pollution of the sludge, it will not be used.





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Gert De Block, Secretary General of CEDEC, the European Federation of Local Energy Companies, presented his views on connections with other entities generating energy, sharing that integrated activities become increasingly important. Yet, for the moment, they are missing in the EU level framework and a lot of potential is not being exploited today. He further focused on the energy transition, going from a centralised to a decentralised model. He stated that more use could be made from local resources that could be transformed into energy. However, EU legislation, which determines most national legislation, continues with silo thinking. The lack of integrated approach at EU level which is an issue for a circular economy. It is therefore important to ensure a more integrated approach where further EU frameworks are being developed.

Dirk Pauwels, Blockchain R&D Project Manager at Fujitsu, talked about innovation and his experience with the water sector, aiming to reduce plastic pollution in the marine ecosystem. He noted that water pollution is a global issue with complex ramifications that can only be address in a collaborative manner. He particularly highlighted the need for science to lead the way with evidence, with research addressing the complexity. Further, partnerships should be created to respond with concrete goals, correct budgets and commitments. However, there is much fragmentation. Technology can be a support in overcoming issues with responding the need for data in water management: from sensors to spectrum imagery to detect plastic pollution, as well as internet of thing and computing. What is necessary is cooperation in a setting organised by the government and citizen mobilisation.



The second round of questions focused on the condition for better coordination to move towards a circular economy.

Mr. **Battilani** discussed the critical importance of coordination and proactive participation is the key, and the need for all parties to be involved from the beginning of process, including the agricultural sector, on an equal foot. In the face of global challenges, regulations are important to focus on the problem but may not always offer the solutions. He further expressed that farmers perceive polluting agents (such as nitrates, fertilisers, pesticides) as costs and they are not happy with pollution, but are bound by market conditions in which they can only sell the top third of their production. He welcomed solutions the issues in collaboration with all sectors, with an open mindset, to find a balance and mutual benefits.

Mr. **De Block** focused on the regulatory conditions and highlighted a set of hurdles including increasing complexity; sectoral expertise translating into sector-specific legislation without discussion without other sectors; a current top-down system. He underlined the opportunities in looking at local-level solutions, where cross-sector collaboration is facilitate, which can serve as examples at the EU-level in the development of new regulation. In this practice sharing, there is a role for Member States to play, as they are both involved in the legislative process and aware of national initiatives.



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Mr. **Russo** finally compared the circular economy system to a Rubik's Cube where each sector's individual solutions have consequences to others and therefore it is necessary to seek solutions that work for all. He further noted that, before everything, legislation is necessary to fully consider the approach.

ALESSANDRO RUSSO

President, Gruppo CAP

Since 2014, Alessandro Russo has been President and Chief Executive Officer of Gruppo CAP, the public operator that manages water and sanitation services for the metropolitan area of Milan, and one of the most important public utilities in Italy. Mr. Russo is Vice-President of Utilitalia (the Italian national association of service utilities) in charge of water issues, and is spokesperson of Water Alliance, the network of water operators of Lombardy region. He is also president of Confservizi Cispel Lombardia, the association of public local services in Lombardy. Mr Russo holds a degree in Political Science.

ADRIANO BATTILANI

Secretary General, Irrigants d'Europe

Adriano has more than 37 years of experience as researcher and project manager in the fields of irrigation, fertigation and cropping system's sustainability. Since 1990 he is involved as principal scientist in EU research projects and as scientific responsible for projects financed by the Emilia Romagna Government, public bodies and private institutions, industries, stakeholders. Adriano is also involved in pre-normative studies focused on establishing rules determining the minimal quality characteristics of treated wastewater for agricultural reuse and defining water quality for irrigation and has been involved in defining rules for fertigation management in the framework of integrated crop management (ICM).

GERT DE BLOCK

Secretary General, CEDEC - European Federation of Local Energy Companies

After university studies in economic and financial sciences, he gained his first working experiences as financial analyst in an industrial environment and as business consultant on management information systems. Since 1992 he is working in the energy sector, both on Belgian and European level. Secretary General of CEDEC since 1996, Gert De Block is the representative and speaker for the association with the European institutions, the European energy regulators and other European associations in energy and climate. He is a regular speaker at public hearings, congresses, seminars and workshops in Brussels and in Member States, on a large diversity of themes related with the energy sector, energy related climate issues and local public companies. CEDEC is the European federation of the local and regional energy companies, active in every part of the electricity & gas value chain.

DIRK PAUWELS

Blockchain R&D Project Manager, Fujitsu

After a career of more than 15 years in IT Service Management, Dirk works on the crossroads of technology, innovation and sustainability. Building on a solid professional and academic background, he manages a research and development project related to Blockchain for Smart Cities. Next to this, he runs an initiative to minimise the influx of riverine plastic pollution into the marine environment, focusing on measurement, remediation and prevention. This project involves a wide variety of disciplines such as sensor technology, marine engineering, biology, information technology and behavioral change and it requires the creation of partnerships consisting of all possible social actors, such as governmental organisations, industry, academia, ngo's and citizens.





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Panel 2 – Sustainable water management in urban areas – combining green infrastructure, new technologies, and innovative governance

The last panel aimed to address another dimension of water management which affects, and necessarily requires the involvement of other actors and sectors: management of water and rainwater in urban areas.

The panel started with a presentation by **Julia Döring**, Engineer in charge of Integrated Water Management at HAMBURG WASSER, on the operator's Rain InfraStructure Adaption (RISA) plan,



aimed to address the challenges of a growing city (surface sealing) and climate change (increase of cloudbursts). The RISA plan was led by HAMBURG WASSER and the State Ministry for Environment and Energy and was based on an interdisciplinary working method with a set of objectives: flood protection, water protection, near natural water balance. She highlighted that future-proof rainwater management operates in a field of tension between investors, costs, space requirements and other aspects of urban planning. In addition, cooperation between water utility and stakeholders in urban planning is crucial. Finally, implementation requires personnel capacity and political adaption.

Following the presentation, the panel gathered representatives from the sectors of housing and banking, as well as the civil society, to discuss collaborative approaches in urban areas.



Dominique Nalpas, Coordinator at Etats Généraux de l'Eau de Bruxelles, representing the voice of citizens, explained that participative action was started as populations voiced their concerns over local developments about governance (decision to build a storm water tank) and mismanagement of resources by the private sector (waste water treatment) and aimed to contribute to more efficient solutions as well as emphasise the characteristic of water as a common. The key was to start conversations to seek alternative solutions satisfactory to all parties, across silos and by sharing different types of expertise. For this purpose, "hydrological communities" were created with local citizens and researchers to work towards, in these cases in particular, resilience to flooding. An outcome was that, instead building of a new storm water tank, an alternative was to use the opportunity of a local swamp, which brought additional benefits to the population (community garden, urban agriculture, social inclusion). He concluded that cities were built in silos, with their own responses to challenges, and it is important to remember that water is in the commons, also by reducing public-private partnerships.



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Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General of Housing Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing gathering 43.000 housing providers in 24 countries, started by highlighting three sets of difficulties for the housing sector to be addressed to be able to move forward: sustainable solutions are a little more expensive and may not have a market; lack of financial incentives for housing providers; the political agenda, with the upcoming EU proposal on circular economy, represents an additional burden to existing requirements and risks transferring costs onto the sector without compensation. At the same time, she believes that the sector can play a constructive role with the European Commission on circularity, with insight as well as experience from pilot projects and on-the-ground initiatives, such as the Houseful project, focusing on developing integrated circular solutions for the efficient use of resources, including water, in buildings.



Marcel Roy, Secretary General of the European Association of Public Banks, representing directly and indirectly over 90 financial institutions acting on a public mission, first underlined that, due to their ownership (100%), and orient towards what the private sector cannot finance. He explained that public banks do not have a profit making objective. The strong focus of members lies in sustainability: green finance and social aspects, but also renewable energy and water management. The Dutch Nederlandse Waterschapsbank, for example, is entirely dedicated to finance water-related projects. The public model allows the financing of municipal projects and benefits from local expertise and understanding. Whilst bringing different stakeholders together can represent a challenge, the nature of public banks facilitates an integrative approach. Projects like HAMBURG WASSER's are natural to the members, mentioning other examples in Germany of water projects supported by public banks.

In a second time, the speakers exchanged on the governance conditions that can favour collaboration between public sectors.

Ms. Edwards talked about the next LIFE programme and upcoming consultations, which is a priority considering the programme's support for the circular economy at local level. In addition, there are structural funds where there is incentive inbuilt for going into the circular directions. She further noted that, regions are developing their own circular economy strategies, addressing the question differently, at



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local level, than the European Commission, with a focus on jobs, local economic potential and better use of local resources.

Mr. Roy welcomed the focus on sustainability in EU budgets and financial instruments, including the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) and InvestEU, and noted the importance to develop a taxonomy strong enough to avoid 'green washing'.

During the final questions & answers with the audience, **Ms. Döring** first gave more explanations about the RISA methods. **Mr. Nalpas** answered about the involvement of the elected representatives, highlighting that, when the citizens is facing the politician, there is an imbalance and to have effective 'co-creation', there needs to be an intermediary stage of empowerment for the citizens for their full involvement in processes. Finally, he expressed that there is an entire culture to create with the communities locally.

SORCHA EDWARDS

Secretary General, Housing Europe

General Secretary of Housing of Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing. Housing Europe brings together public, cooperative and social housing providers from across Europe. They share a vision of a Europe which provides access to decent and affordable housing for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where everyone is enabled to reach their full potential. Before being named Secretary General, Sorcha has dedicated herself to promoting inclusive housing policies and a fair energy transition in the EU and across Europe in several positions. She graduated from the University of the City of Dublin in applied languages, with a Master in European Studies from the Catholic University of Louvain and a Graduate Certificate on Advanced Studies of Energy and Environment from the University of East London.

MARCEL ROY

Secretary General, EAPB - European Association of Public Banks

Mr. Marcel Roy is Secretary General of EAPB, the European Association of Public Banks and Development Agencies. The Secretariat organises and coordinates the Association's activities and in particular represents its members' interest towards European and international institutions, and organises the exchange of best practices between members. Before joining EAPB in 2014, Mr. Roy held responsibilities at the European Association of Mutual Guarantee Societies, the European Association of Cooperative Banks, in the German Confederation of Crafts as well as in Nestlé and the Hypo-Bank, Munich. Mr. Roy has a Master's Degree in Banking Finance from the University of Antwerpen.



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