

Shaping the Concept – further thoughts on Aquawareness

Don't take water for granted

In Europe, water is too often taken for granted even though Europeans are facing increasing challenges directly related to water. Floods, droughts and water scarcity are familiar to many people all over Europe, and adequate sanitation facilities still do not exist for 62 million people in the pan-European region. These blind spots lead to insufficient political action and a lack of funding and general recognition of the challenges ahead. Therefore, awareness of water and sanitation issues needs to be raised at all levels to enable the kind of solid knowledge and behaviour change that leads to greater stakeholder involvement and the adoption of supportive policies and financing decisions — our key demands for the 2019 European Parliament elections.

We use the term “**Aquawareness**” to summarize all actions related to these objectives.

The term “**Aquawareness**” describes two things:

“**Aquawareness**” in a general sense refers to raising awareness of water as the key factor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, the goals for Sustainable Economic Growth (SDG 8), Agricultural Productivity (SDG 2), Good Health (SDG 3) and Climate Action (SDG 13) cannot be reached without targeted measures on (transboundary) protection of water sources, ecosystems and wastewater management. Therefore, water must become a crucial theme for key target groups (the general public, the media, non-governmental stakeholders and politicians), with the aim of producing behaviour change and securing funding for political action and policies.

In a more specific sense, “**Aquawareness**” is a label that can function as a common umbrella term not only in campaigning and raising political demands, but also for specific actions such as making eco-friendlier changes to production processes, re-using safely managed wastewater for irrigation, and implementing infrastructure that adapts to climate change. Under this common umbrella, actions that would otherwise happen separately can be brought together to create higher visibility and increase public pressure for action on water-related issues.

Still, some shortcomings remain: Too often, it is not possible to keep up a long-term flow since the event-driven nature is often punctual. Another shortcoming is that actions often fail to address politicians and the political agenda directly.

Objectives for 2019:

- Specify target groups, aim and instruments for a communication strategy
- Develop ideas for pilot-projects on Aquawareness
- Encourage joint-efforts within the European Pact for Water to make the concept more popular within the network and beyond