

# Hydria Magazine: communication for water management

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## 1. Introduction

Dublin Conference clearly set the objectives of Integrated Water Resources Management –IWRM; a breakthrough in this field. The consequences of the statements included in the short text of the Declaration are far-reaching, mainly because they extend the map of players involved in water management, especially in the drinking water and sanitation subsector.

Generally speaking, users are regarded as the *new* players in water management. Users were historically considered as passive receivers of a management which was in the hands of experts, whose main objective was to assure sufficient water supply to satisfy any type of demand. While resource availability was enough to cover all needs, there was no reason to make decisions outside the area of expertise. Such decisions were of economic and technological nature.

But Principle No. 2 of Dublin Conference means much more as “participatory approach” includes users, planners and policy-makers at all levels. However, for different reasons, the participation was conceived restrictively, that is, as an opening of traditional approaches of water management to include the opinion of users in some way. The closing sentence of Principle No. 2 may have supported such vision as it asserts that decisions shall be taken “with full public *consultation* and involvement of users in the planning and implementation of water projects.”

As previously stated, there are several reasons for that, but the main reason is water management has a particular development like any other management area. The leading part of such development is the definition of the necessary knowledge –and the relevant institutionalization to acquire and disseminate it- to carry out the task. Therefore, it is reasonable that each specific management area in each country has read Principle No. 2 in a restrictive way; otherwise, the effect would be to subject to review their own identity as a political-bureaucratic space.

In other words, each body reads a certain document from its own perspective. However, the postulates of this principle imply a deeper view. Although, in the first instance, only the *consultation* of other players was understood as participation, the increasing complexity of water management added to higher population’s demands related to access rights to services, the quality of consumed water, the requests of contamination control, and the increasing competition relating to its applications, among others, resulted in a crisis of such restrictive concept of participation.

Said crisis is related to the own definition of the concept as participation does not mean that an extra chair will be added to a meeting table to continue discussing and making decisions about the same problems, using the same language and tools than those used before the new *player has participated* in the *discussion*. In other words, the new *player* did not have the opportunity to discuss the setting in which its *participation* will be implemented.

On the contrary, the participation will involve changes in the definition of problems, languages used, institutional scopes, and participation tools. At organizational level, specially in state-owned structures, the implementation of such changes is difficult and causes high resistance related to the assignment of resources to face the new type of problems and the actual dialogue possibilities between the new disciplines and traditional ones that were in charge of the management.

## **The definitions of the problem**

The first aspect to consider is the definition of the terms established by the different players and, consequently, the nature of the problems derived from such terms. The IWRM does not mean the same for each social player; therefore, each player will have a different way to solve the problems related to it.

It should be noted that different groups in a community do not wait for a formal acknowledgement to act as interested players on a certain problem issue. On the contrary, their call capacity, visibility or resources availability turn them into factual players, although there are not formal instances to translate their points of view into institutional decisions.

That is to say, there will be institutionalized and non-institutionalized players in a community. The first group has decision responsibilities, while the second group is exempt from such responsibilities as it assigns itself demanding functions.

Therefore, a non desired effect of the little participation that the bodies in charge of water management have been able to introduce to their operation schemes is that the issue has been defined outside the institutional framework by said players and, consequently, the challenges involved in the management have not been duly internalized.

In practice, this means that the agendas of one group and the other are very different, with little possibilities of reaching minimum agreements. This is particularly evident in the subsector under discussion (drinking water and sanitation) as the users of the productive subsectors are more involved in the management problem issues.

The existing gap between the concerns of specialists, political leaders and legislators, and users will involve that –in practice- the social decisions relating to water management will move away from an ideal condition, with an inefficient application of resources and eventual non desired environmental effects.

## **New management tools**

While management was aimed at assuring the supply to the different applications, the action was focussed on appropriate technologies, analysis of costs, and the relevant legal-institutional framework to perform them. The technical education centers followed such rationale. The agreements of the sector were based on such aspects.

When such pattern was in crisis and the concept of IWRM was developed, new players were added and the purpose of management changed, at least in theory, where it is not necessary to assure the supply but to play a part in the demand. The necessary agreements are now of a different nature. In addition to technical knowledge, there are other management tools.

Not only water management shall answer to technological and economic requirements, but also it shall assume the relationship that each community establishes with resources, services, and environment on the whole.

The social agenda related to water shall evaluate the perceptions of the different social players, inquire about the ways in which they relate with water and the perception about risks of each group according to their different social conditions.

In this way, management shall adopt procedures that allow, on the one hand, a sustainable application of the resource based on an ideal assignment of responsibilities (by the Government and operators, but also by users and institutions of the civil society), the prevention of conflicts, an appropriate risk assessment, and the development of a proper institutional framework to attain such objectives.

To sum up, a cultural change shall be achieved between the traditional protagonists of water management and the new ones in order to have a common agenda of problem issues to solve.

The communication may act on three main aspects to work on said cultural change: the analysis of the perception, the strategic planning for the different communication objectives of a management, and the development of specific communication products.

The major problem to achieve the implementation of the communication discipline in a traditionally technical management is the little level of formalization in the market offer of this type of professionals (especially, compared to professionals of *hard* sciences). Moreover, some type of communication action -based on methodology and/or implemented by professionals from other fields- is made. These two factors together make communication lose even more its methodological condition, become inefficient, or be not properly evaluated.

Therefore, the challenges posed by the IWRM oblige all players to review their methodological base and assess their interlocutory capabilities with other players from a different field, with different interests, and with different perceptions of the problem.

### **Communication for the water sector**

In this general context –and bearing in mind the specific case for water management in Argentina— a specialized publication was developed —Hydria Magazine—, whose main challenge is to reach the different recipients with specific and relevant information in an suitable format to allow an actual understanding of problem issues, a relationship of such information with daily problems related to water, and in this way, to set the basis for a social agreement for a change of the cultural guidelines in the relationship between the population and the natural resources on the whole and, in particular, with water and all its related services.

The editorial design of a publication may be defined as the planned generation of expectations and their compliance throughout the course of time. The following are the main editorial design tools:

- Selection of topics
- Presentation (writing style, handling of technical aspects, titles, etc.)
- Aesthetics
- Format and graphical design
- Contact management
- Financing sources

**Hydria** magazine, as an editorial project, assumed two basic challenges:

1) To build a bridge between the public sector, the professional sector, the companies and the different users by:

- Dealing with the different problem issues with technical accuracy, but in dissemination format so that its contents can attract the attention of professionals, legislators, entrepreneurs and users with the same level of interest.
- Evaluating all aspects of water problem issues, focussing on the function and importance of this resource for health, agricultural and industrial production, welfare, tourism, and environmental balance, among others, and the relationship of each process with others.
- Focussing on problems issues related to resource management and services.
- A publication really directed to all sectors (technical and non technical); an aspect that continues to be a difficult work in relation to the building of a base of contacts and the operative and logistics costs.

2) To achieve an acknowledgement of the publication as an appropriate space for the communication of the sector:

To that end, we have aimed at attaining a significant presence of the magazine in the most important events of the sector, have developed a focused distribution of the publication and have established confidence and reciprocity relationships with its main referents (authorities, institutions and professionals.)

In short time –even with a bimonthly frequency-, *Hydria* became a point of reference for the sector:

- We have achieved the attention and support from the highest level of water management in Argentina, both at national and provincial level.
- The articles of *Hydria* are signed by the most well-known referents of the sector.
- We have been awarded the First Prize to Journalism, 2006, granted by the *Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas/ADEPA* (Argentine Association of Journalism Entities).
- We are invited to the main events related to water and sanitation.
- We receive daily contacts for discussions, events or spreading campaigns on water.
- We have an increasing demand in the distribution in the entire country, both from the technical sector and the education and institutional sectors.

To date, *Hydria* has published 18 editions and electronic tools are in progress to supplement the publication and deepen the objectives and achieve new financing sources.

*Hydria* has two financing sources: the marketing of advertising spaces, which covers most part of the services hired (printing, distribution, illustrations), and capital contributed by the edition team, which covers the remaining percentage of outsourced services and the entire cost of human resources.

The first one is the main and genuine source of financing, where it has been essential the support of the different governmental bodies, both in direct advertising and contacts with third parties.

The direct business management has also been highly beneficial. However, bearing in mind that it is a publication which works in the promotion of a sustainable development –which does not directly participate in the business dynamics of private companies- it has had less development compared to the growth of the magazine.

This perspective is conditioned by the relative size of the sector in Argentina, the lack of financial and decisional capacity of small and medium size operators (city authorities, cooperatives), the long terms uncertainty especially in relation to the sanitation sector, and the present de-financing structure of operators.