Political and Social awareness on Water Environmental challenges

Result in Brief

Project information

POWER

Grant agreement ID: 687809

Project website

Status
Closed project

Start date
1 December 2015
End date
30 November 2019

Funded under:
H2020-EU.2.1.1.

Overall budget:
€ 3 747 937,50

EU contribution
€ 3 747 937,50

Coordinated by:
DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY

Water-savvy knowledge is POWER – for citizens, communities and policymakers

EU-funded researchers are working to empower citizens and policymakers on water-saving and flood preparedness actions.

Citizens are not commonly aware of important issues regarding one of our planet’s prime natural resources: water. Often, the topic of urban water sustainability comes to their attention only when related events impact their lives or livelihood. The POWER project is taking a proactive approach to increase knowledge on the subject.

Project coordinator Ljiljana Marjanovic-Halburd, professor of Building Energy and Information and Head of School of Engineering and Sustainable Development
at De Montfort University in Leicester, underlines the need to engage people in learning about such actions. However, this requires incentives and strong powers of persuasion. “POWER as a user-driven project,” she reports, “has been investigating new methods to raise awareness and transfer knowledge among citizens and to enable effective exchange between politicians, local administrations, water professionals and citizens on water-related sustainability issues.”

The project’s vision is driven by a participatory approach, exemplified in an inspiring POWER overview video. Supporting this is a novel ‘Digital Social Platform’ (DSP), or ‘Water Community Platform’. “This facilitates the exchange of citizen and expert knowledge and the dialogue between varieties of stakeholders,” the coordinator states.

**Resilient communities**

Project efforts have led to the DSP’s successful implementation in four pilot cities: Leicester and Milton Keynes (United Kingdom), Sabadell (Spain) and Jerusalem (Israel). Each DSP offers location-based and timely information on related topics such as local flood-risk assessment maps or real-time river levels. “The platforms provide the nucleus to build strong and resilient local communities around the water issues at hand in each city,” Marjanovic-Halburd relays.

Various platform mechanisms support such online engagement in an innovative and empirically validated gamification approach. Activities are supported at different levels, from simply reading up to co-creating solution approaches. This enables more informed, inclusive and effective participation.

Additionally, the POWER Best Practice Repository makes available expertise and experience on solution approaches that have been successfully implemented in over 70 cities worldwide. The POWER platform has been released in full as open-source software through GitHub. This makes it possible for any city or water utility to download and set up their own local Water Community Platform.

**Beyond the digital world**

POWER is also engaging citizens offline. This is taking form in “measures for cities to connect digital interaction with knowledge exchange and impact in the real world,” notes the professor. A prime example is the POWER Idea Contest for Sustainable Communities. The Idea Contest attracted 140 submissions, from which 10 winners were chosen and announced at the final project conference in October.

Another example is the local Councils for Citizen engagement in Sustainable Urban Strategies (ConCensus). More on ConCensus is available in a scholarly article published in the journal ‘Futures’.

**Sustaining momentum**

“The most significant achievement of the project lies not in one single tool but in providing cities with a comprehensive framework to strengthen citizen engagement in urban sustainability challenges,” Marjanovic-Halburd sums up.

Concrete indications of this success include an array of future planned initiatives beyond POWER’s original
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Keywords

POWER, water, sustainability, citizen engagement, ConCensus, water community, water sustainability, Digital Social Platform, gamification

The city council of Jerusalem has decided to widen the positive experience with its local ConCensus and establish a bigger, regional entity: the Middle East Regional Water Forum. Recognising the benefits offered by such an online community, the city of Hanau in Germany will also leverage the platform's potential in efforts to mitigate the health-related impacts of climate change.