

Involving stakeholders in transboundary water resource management: The Mesta/Nestos 'HELP' basin[#]

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Abstract

Alternative options for new private and public investment projects in the transboundary Mesta/Nestos River catchment between Bulgaria and Greece involve new dams and water storage reservoirs, agricultural irrigation systems, new tourist resorts and various water-related facilities for urban and industrial water supply. These developments are designed to be implemented in both parts of the basin (in Greece and Bulgaria), where different socio-economic conditions prevail, resulting in each country having different preferences and objectives. Alternative options should consider environmental consequences, to the impact on ecosystems and human health, and also financial and social risks. Any negative impacts on the environment, and whether these negative impacts can be prevented, should be weighted against the economic and social benefits foreseen.

Sustainable implementation of private or public utility projects cannot be achieved without public participation and a clear consensus between stakeholders. The UNESCO HELP (Hydrology for the Environment, Life and Policy) initiative provides a rationale for breaking the 'paradigm lock' existing between the most recent scientific findings on the one side and the public, stakeholders and decision makers on the other. In this paper stakeholder involvement in the decision making process is promoted firstly by communicating the results of integrated modelling of water resource management at the basin scale, and secondly by suggesting alternative models and software in order to facilitate negotiations and final decision making processes in transboundary water resource management. These models help to rank alternative projects according to the attributes of stakeholders in each country; the aggregated attributes of the stakeholders in both countries; and the aggregated goals of each country.

Keywords: integrated water management, modelling, public participation, decision support, conflict resolution