



The History of “Hydrosolidarity”

Participants involved in the annual Stockholm Water Symposium, and readers of Water Front, have in recent years become aware of the concept of “hydrosolidarity.” But as attested by participants at the recent Water Dome and World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa, the term is gaining greater usage and the concept wider acceptance within many water stakeholder groups, fora and initiatives.

As words are at the core of the art of effective communication, Stockholm Water Front looked into the history of the term “hydrosolidarity,” its development, different meanings and future.

Youth Point the Way

In 1998, young water professionals at a seminar held annually in connection with the Stockholm Water Symposium eloquently criticized what they perceived to be “hydroegoism,” or self-interest by different stakeholders in the water sector. They sought an antithesis, a type of behavior which would characterize water behavior in the 21st century – the century in which their professional careers would play out – if the lofty goals and needs so often proclaimed in international conferences and symposia were to be met.

In response to their discussions and subsequent report, “hydrosolidarity” was coined by SIWI Professor Malin Falken-

mark as the opposite of “hydroegoism.” She used the term in her Volvo Environment Prize Lecture in Brussels, Belgium, on October 27, 1998, which was then published in the Swedish environmental magazine *Ambio* (Vol. 28, No. 4, pg. 36of).

Seeing the relevance and applicability of the concept, as reflected in the term, SIWI immediately introduced a series of SIWI Seminars during the World Water Week in Stockholm. These seminars, which have focused on achieving hydrosolidarity between upstream and downstream interests in a water basin, have taken place for four consecutive years. An ongoing web-based “virtual seminar” is also taking place and SIWI will organize a session at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, in March 2003.

One Word, Several Definitions

Building on the outcome of these events, it became evident that the concept of hydrosolidarity has relevance on many different scales.

On the global and regional scales, transfer of water-related products such as grain (virtual water) as part of a global food security strategy is one type of hydrosolidarity.

On the national scale, intranational water transfers from a water abundant region to a water-short region is another type, as witnessed in Spain by strong public opposition to the proposed transfer of water from the Ebro River to the south-

eastern coastal region (see December 2001 Stockholm Water Front).

On the catchment scale, the upstream/downstream water sharing is impossible to avoid and calls for development of a catchment hydrosolidarity that is based on an ethically supported, delicately balanced orchestration of seemingly incompatible land, water and ecosystem related activities.

On the crossnational scale, the upstream/downstream water sharing in transnational river basins is a similar type of hydrosolidarity but which is being superimposed by political aspects, i.e. where the sanctioned discourse perspective is a strong barrier to be overcome.

The Future

Because the term so accurately describes the conceptual basis for much of SIWI’s activities, it will continue to be integrated into publications and programs initiated by the Institute. A search for the term on Google, Yahoo or any other web-based search engines will reveal that the concept is already being promoted in places as diverse as Australia, Sri Lanka, South Africa and the United States as a synonym for ethically based behavior and action in a water basin.

In light of this, the concept should only gain in relevance and importance in the coming years. ■