



# From participation to collaboration in European water governance

Perspectives from ongoing  
research

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# Outline

- State of participation in the WFD implementation – what does the EC and research say?
- Governance innovations for a transition to sustainable and equitable water use in Europe – perspectives from the GOVAQUA project
- From participation to collaborative governance – examples from Finland
- Key takeaway messages



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# State of participation in WFD implementation

## European Commission WFD Fitness Check 2019

### Benefits of participation

- generally increased public and stakeholder participation in management planning
- incorporation of knowledge, increased awareness, local ownership and action

### Challenges

- little evidence that participation has yet benefitted the status of waters
- cross-sectoral cooperation not yet carried out to the fullest – visible in the constellation of participating sectors as well
- possibilities for stakeholders to challenge issues related to the RBMPs differ

## Recent research perspectives

### Voulvoulis et al. 2017

- “The WFD offers a platform for system-level shifts that need to take place, and unless it is recognised for this, a real opportunity for collective action will be missed”

### Rimmert et al. 2020

- Citizens and general public have been minimally involved despite the original intention
- Voluntary action by sectors not considered relevant

### Heinilä et al. 2021

- Good ecological status of waters is too narrow a focus for stakeholders with varying interests
- RBMP levels distant from stakeholders' local issues

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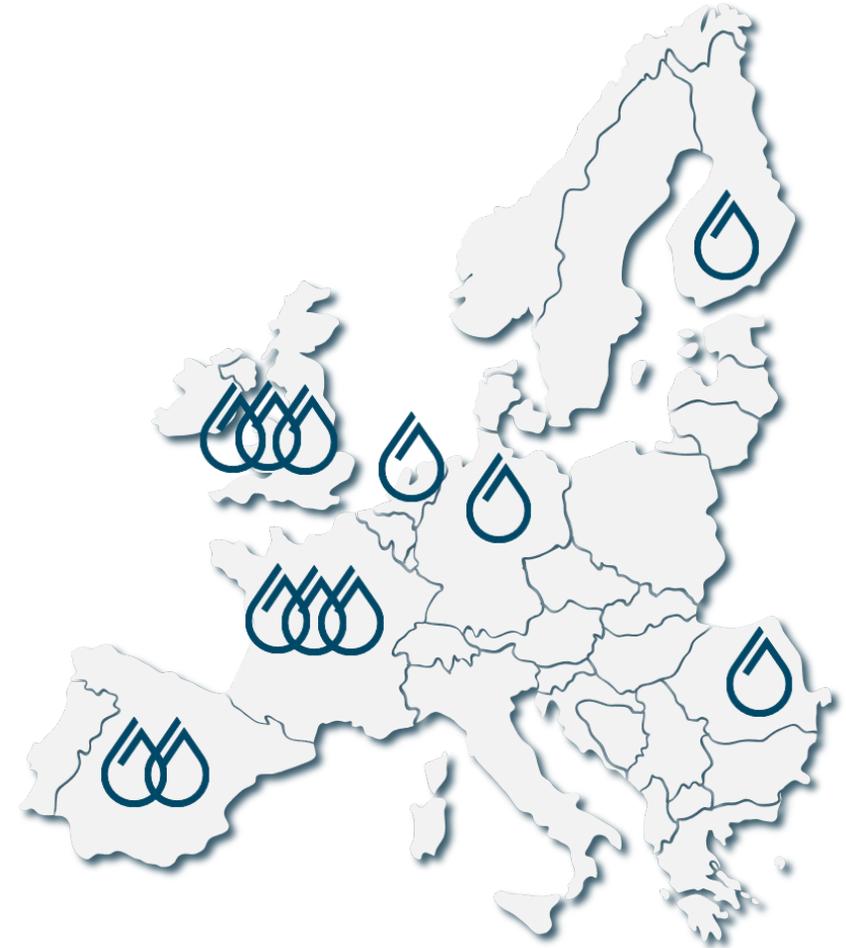
# Governance innovations for a transition to sustainable and equitable water use in Europe (GOVAQUA)

(HORIZON-CL6-2022-GOVERNANCE-01 2023-2027)

*GOVAQUA project identifies, assesses, further develops and validates innovative water governance instruments and approaches to reach the WFD, SDG and Green Deal aims*

## Partners

- Finnish Environment Institute SYKE - Finland - coordinator
- Ecologic - Germany
- University of Twente – the Netherlands
- University of Cordoba - Spain
- UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology – the UK
- CETAQUA - Spain
- International Network of Basin Organisation/International Office of Water - France
- French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food, and Environment (INRAE) - France
- French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) - France
- The Rivers Trust – the UK
- WWF Romania - Romania
- Alliance for Water Stewardship – the UK



# What water governance innovation?

## Governance innovation

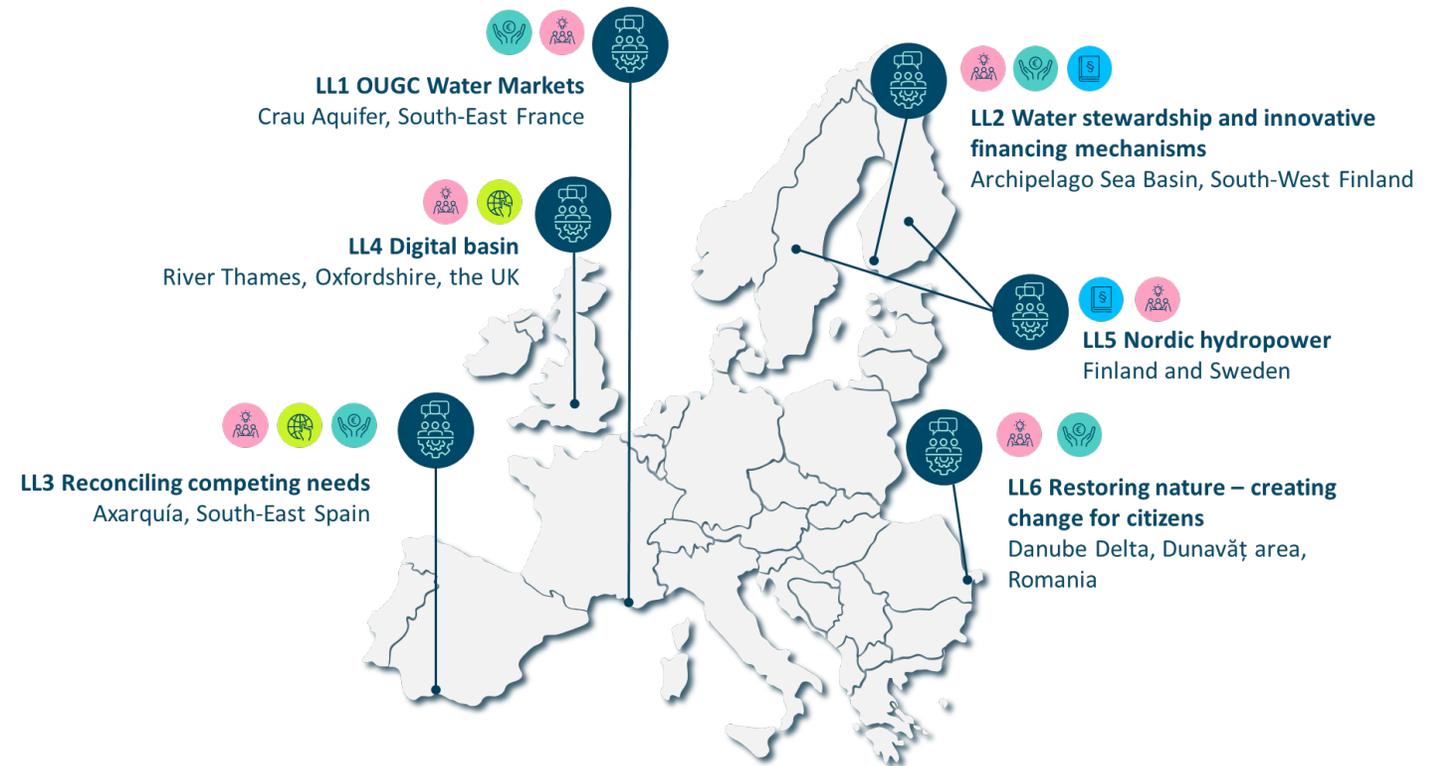
- "The capacity to radically alter existing approaches in light of new circumstances... decentralization, international organizations, privatization and stakeholder participation..." (Huitema and Meijerink, 2017, p. 84)
- "Innovations that enhance transparency, openness, and accountability as well as the use of scientific knowledge" (De Francesco, 2021)

## Innovative governance instruments and approaches in focus in GOVAQUA

- **Legal and regulatory:** approaches for defining and implementing e-flows, reconciling water uses, regulating sustainable water value chains
- **Participatory and collaborative:** watershed visions and river contracts; citizen science and participatory irrigation management; corporate water stewardship standards, collective action and role of intermediaries
- **Economic and financial:** hydroeconomic modelling, water markets, results based financing mechanisms
- **Digital solutions:** across governance levels and actors

# GOVAQUA Living Labs of Water Governance Innovations

- Innovative approaches and instruments will be put into test in six Living Labs representing different water governance contexts 8/2023-6/2026
- GOVAQUA definition for LL: *”An innovation ecosystem where societal stakeholders and researchers collaboratively explore, experiment with and evaluate one or more water governance innovations.”*
- Testing the Living Lab approach itself as a water governance innovation in collaboration with Water4All



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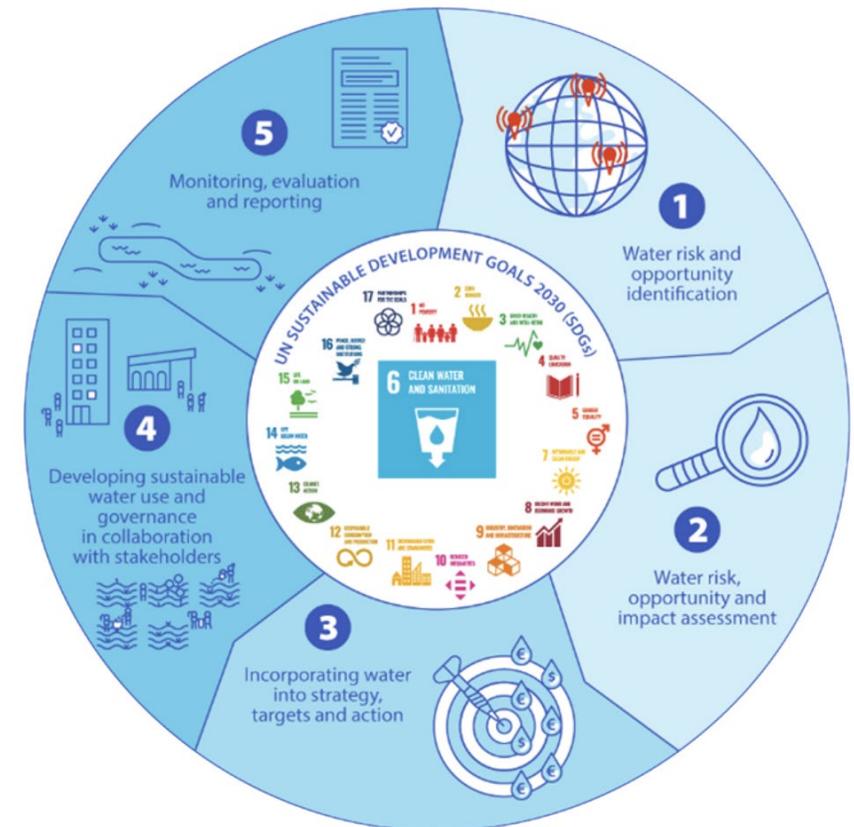
# From participation to collaborative governance – examples from Finland

- RBM delegated to regional Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment
  - Cross-sectoral by organization, integration of governmental levels, accountable and collaborative institutional arrangements (Mancheva et al. 2023)
  - Little stakeholder interest to participate in RBM planning as perceived too distant from experienced water challenges and too narrow in topic focus (Heinilä et al. 2021)
- Changing role of the government (Ahopelto & Sojamo et al. in press)
  - Diminishing resources for environmental management
  - Growing importance and interest of the private sector and civil society
  - Complex water problems cannot be solved with unilateral action
  - **Emergence of collaborative governance initiatives on the role of business, civil society and at watershed levels**



# Business: committing to water stewardship

- Water stewardship: “*use of water that is socially and culturally equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically beneficial, achieved through a stakeholder-inclusive process that includes both site- and catchment-based actions.*” (Alliance for Water Stewardship 2019)
- Business case: water risks and opportunities
- Covers water use in the own operation locations of business and throughout their value chain, process of continuous improvement
- Multi-level approach in Finland building on Finnish Water Stewardship Commitment founded by research institutes, WWF Finland and ministries
- **Water stewardship approach and commitments in Finnish RBM guidance documents 2022-2027**



*Finnish water stewardship commitment*

# Business: water stewardship in food value chain to support WFD implementation

- A water stewardship model for business with contract farms, with recognised supporting roles for RBOs and expert third parties
- Aim: improving impact of water protection measures in primary production in the most critical areas – targeted measures, flexibility and assessment of impact
- **Necessary to ensure commitment at industry level – single companies reluctant to take unilateral action**

A development project by Finnish Ministry of the Environment, Pirkanmaa Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment and Finnish Environment Institute 05/2022-11/2023

## 0.1) Agreement between associated ministries and industry association

## 0.2) A company commits to water stewardship as a part of the ministry-industry agreement

- 1) Company recognises critical operation locations and contract farms in collaboration with the RBM authorities
- 2) Company gathers existing information on watershed loading in collaboration with the contract farmers and authorities
- 3) Company produces detailed information on watershed loading in collaboration with the contract farmers, authorities and expert third parties to enable targeting of measures
- 4) Company chooses water protection measures, sets targets and assessment measures in collaboration with the contract farmers, authorities and expert third parties
- 5) Company guides and supports water protection measures at contract farms in collaboration with third parties
- 6) Company monitors and reports on impact and progress

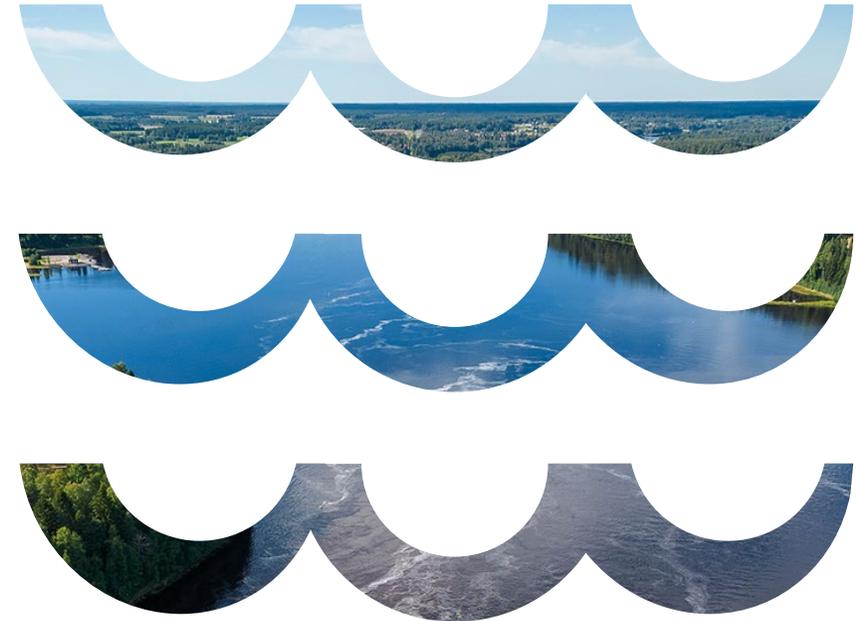
# Citizens: Finnish water management and restoration network

- A national forum for citizens, communities, businesses and authorities to work on watershed restoration with 16 regional networks
- Funded by the Finnish MoE and MoAF, restoration projects supported by RBOs and by private funding
- **Example of adaptive management coming closer to problems directly experienced by the stakeholders** (Heinilä et al. 2021, Saurilinna et al. 2018)
  - more appealing than participating in RBM planning
  - requires clear and strong coordination, either from the governmental, civil society or other organization



# Watershed: watershed visions

- Watershed visions initiated by the MoAF implemented in nine watersheds in Finland
  - integrate the management, restoration, and use of waters, flood management and other water related needs
  - bring the regional public, private and civil society actors together to agree on a desired future for the river basin and to plan steps for achieving it
- **The effectiveness of the approach in water management is still uncertain, could also give a boost for WFD when process is built on a robust theory of change** (Haapasaari et al. (in review))



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# Key take away messages

- In order to reach the broader water related aims, we need to move from public hearings and participation to partnerships and collaboration in implementation
- Public sector remains the regulator and custodian of common good, but should enable the private sector and civil society to have a proactive role to play supported by research institutes and expert third parties
- There are no blueprints, but a range of validated good practice governance models are emerging from researched practice



# Thank you!

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[GOVAQUA project](#)

[Water stewardship](#)

[Water management and restoration network](#)

[Watershed visions](#)

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