



Youth Manifesto for Water Protection 2015

Brussels, July 13th 2015

We the youth, care about the planet; and as water is the most important compound on our planet, it is significant to us. Our planets' well-being depends on our actions and because water is an essential part of all life, we have to take responsibility for its future. Our freedom from seeing boundaries and limits allows us to solve problems and make new developments with creative and innovative approaches. We present to you with these words our commitment to the task.

Water protection in 2015:

- The Water Framework Directive states that water is not a commercial product like any other but rather a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such.
- The Water Framework Directive (WFD) will not be implemented by 2015, its original goal year.
- The implementation of the Directive has therefore become an intergenerational task which requires the inclusion of younger generations who will inherit this responsibility to carry the WFD forward.
- Youth and future generations are not specifically considered in the directive.

Thus, our role as youth needs to be considered with regards to water management. This manifesto collects our experience and the local water issues we see as urgent for the sustainable management of water (section 1) and specifically proposes ways to better include youth as a party to which water as a heritage has to be passed on (section 2). Both sections reflect on how we could borrow water from future generations.

Section 1 Sustainable management of water

Ecology

1. Water is a heritage for all living beings. The preservation of remaining wild rivers and no go areas should receive special priority.

2. Laws against pollution have to be better enforced (with effective penalties). This requires putting in place the necessary staff and infrastructure.
3. A healthy river for humans and other living beings needs space, and thus where possible the removal of dikes and dams is necessary as well as allowances made for adequate floodplains and flood forests.
4. Entire ecosystems, and the embedded economy, depend on a healthy flow of water therefore it is crucial that minimum environmental flow standards should be established and enforced along with the provision and protection of routes for spawning fish.

Social

5. Water must be available for everyone. This requires a public, non-commercial provision of drinking water and sanitation as a human right.
6. Cultural and recreational spaces of living with rivers (such as swimming possibilities in rivers, including in cities) need to be preserved or created to promote a change in attitude in the general public with respect to garbage and other ways of polluting rivers.
7. Information about water must be available to the general public in a language that avoids manipulation and is easily understood by all, youth included.

Economics

8. Agricultural policy should promote the respect water needs in river ecosystems (for example via buffer zones and reduced use of fertilizers) and provide incentives not to pollute water.
9. Hydropower should be considered as an energy source with very high environmental impact that should be removed or avoided where alternatives are available.
10. Providing space for healthy rivers and environmentally sound infrastructure should be used to create jobs for the local population.

Section 2 Youth and water heritage

Drawing from our experience with local water action, we have identified ways to foster space for youth in water protection with regard to education, communication, water management and finance. This space is better fostered via voluntary options rather than obligatory measures.

Education

Learning how to borrow water from future generations starts with education from an early age up to University.

Education should essentially include learning from volunteers, including young activists who share their experiences and act as role models with practical solutions.

Education should include civic engagement around the organization of local actions (such as river clean-ups) as well as information on how to claim one's rights or advocate for those of others.

Information and communication

Information should be actively brought to us. It should be written in a language that is clear and understandable, provide relevant information early on and draw on communication technologies we use.

We recommend the use of social media, partly of our own production and in a way that communicates objectively. It should be inspiring and provides space for interaction as well as inform early on about decisions in process. For this, youth ambassadors should be present in relevant working groups at the European level with the important role of ensuring that information is communicated to youth across Europe and beyond.

A European TV and radio channel with a youth environmental section where we ask the questions and propose the topics could also play a role in communication.

Water Management

There is a need for additional bottom-up approaches that provide a space for youth' ideas to be listened to and taken seriously.

A starting point would be youth river parliaments – that so far only exist in some river basins (such as the Scheldt) – where youth can discuss water management in their river basins and develop ideas. These parliaments should be linked to the development and implementation of the water management plans.

A natural extension would be a European youth river parliament based on participants from the river basin youth parliaments, and again linked to relevant decision processes at the European Parliament and European Commission.

Financial support

The above ideas and recommendations need to receive adequate financial support. Small and non-bureaucratic grants are particularly important for making local and concrete actions possible.

We do not inherit water from our ancestors; we borrow water from future generations.

The Participants of the Big Jump Challenge – Youth Campaign for Water Protection