Geophysical Research Abstracts, Vol. 9, 10841, 2007
SRef-ID: 1607-7962/gra/EGU2007-A-10841

Living a thirty year return flood: results from a post-crisis inquiry at basin scale

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During the last decade, extreme hydrological phenomena like major floods or massive pollution impacts have received an increasing attention in north western and central Europe. Those events have pointing out the lack and the real need of integrated water management in various transboundary contexts (i.e. international, national or regional watersheds). In France, the water policy integrates the main hydrographic national limits in its water management since 1964 and the local or regional watershed limits since 1992. This legal framework aims to implement Master Plans for water resources management (i.e. SDAGE) and their application at basin level (i.e. SAGE). With the Water Mass Unit (WMU) concept the European Water Framework Directive (WFD) gives a new water resource management scale to the French policy. This territorial overlapping of hydrological units and administrative clusters is increasing both governance and decision making complexity in water resource management. If the hydrological crisis reveals water management dysfunctions, it also provide an opportunity to develop the perception of water basin community membership for population, stake holders and territorial decision makers.

After a brief presentation of water policy evolution in France and a state of basin management plan implementation, this communication focuses on the Eure basin case study (Paris basin, France). On IWM and transboundary issues, the Eure basin is a very demonstrative example of a highly clustered hydrological unit of 6000 sq. km with 435 km of main valleys and eight sub-basins. This hydrological unit is covering many administrative entities (4 levels 1 and 4 level 2 EU nuts, 600 municipalities . . .) which have various decision levels of water and urban management. This territorial complexity and its water governance (national, regional local services and their referents) is also affected by a demographical pressure of 675,000 inhabitants mostly

concentrate in the three main floodplains (50%) and a massive agricultural pressure (i.e. 63% of the basin surface is covered by permanent crops) on water resources.

During the mid-nineties, several flood events and the increasing of groundwater pollution led both water and state services to consider the implementation of water management plan for quality and quantity at sub-basin scale. In 1995, a thirty year return flood has affected the whole of the Eure basin and has been studied within a research led on flood consequences. The results from an experience return led on this hydrological event have revealed the existence of a post disaster water community covering the whole basin. Stake holders, decision makers and population went into a participative process to cope water management problems and flood consequences (i.e. mainly socio-economic impacts and drinking water pollution). This process has settled up the implementation of water management plan in the main sub-basin but failed for the whole Eure basin. To conclude this presentation, a response to the title question will be discussed within the critical analysis of this French case study.