WATER SENSITIVE CITY THEMATIC PARTNERSHIP – ORIENTATION PAPER

WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMATIC AREAS AND SUB-TOPICS?

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED?

1

- High water losses and inefficiency in supply systems
- Low uptake of circular water economy practices
- Urban vulnerability to climate extremes (floods, droughts)
- Social inequalities in access to water-related services and risk exposure
- Insufficient integration of water into urban planning
- Lack of robust indicators to evaluate water scarcity or water excess at regional and city levels
- Fragmented governance and lack of coordination.

SUB TOPICS

Integrated Water Management & Resilience

- Sustainable Water Management
- Urban Water Risk Management
- Strategic Water Planning

2

- Limited cross-sectoral awareness on Nature-based Solutions (NbS).
- Lack of clear and actionable implementation guidelines for NbS.
- Unlocking the benefits of NbS require long-term commitment
- Lack of knowledge and awareness about the ecosystem services they provide.
- Regulatory inconsistencies and fragmented governance.
- Insufficient awareness on long-term cost savings associated with WSC measures.
- Limited integration in planning and implementation of green and blue infrastructure.

SUB TOPICS

Water-Sensitive urban planning and investments

- Green & Blue Infrastructure
- Sponge City & Urban Water Retention
- Biodiversity & Ecosystem Restoration
- Water-Energy Nexus

3

- Unbalanced levels of digitalisation among urban entities; lack of data and sensor standardisation.
- Lack of dedicated funding mechanisms for water management digitalisation; high complexity of financing mechanisms
- Complex data governance
- Need for improvement in collaboration between universities and research and development institutions
- Lack of knowledge and capacity at local level.

SUB TOPICS

Smart Water Operations & Digital Innovation

- Smart Water Systems
- Digital Twin Technology
- Data-Driven Water Governance
- Innovation & Applied Research

4

- Fragmented governance hinders coherent and synergistic water governance across all scales
- Lack of meaningful public and stakeholder engagement
- Insufficient financing and economic incentives.
- Limited knowledge and evidence sharing on the 'Water Sensitive City' concept
- Urban environments continue to be developed in ways that increase water-related risks rather than mitigate them.
- Regulatory and legal barriers.

SUB TOPICS

Governance, Awareness, Financing & Capacity building

- Multi-Level Governance
- Public Awareness & Community Engagement
- Financing & Investment
- Knowledge Exchange & Capacity Building

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS?

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Output 1: Policy briefs with regulatory recommendations

Output 2: Analysis) of Multiannual Financial Framework and/or position paper or policy brief for better funding

Output 3: A model, template or blueprint for local water resilience plans and/or urban water management plans, including a set of indicators/KPIs.

Output 4: Distributing knowledge, exchanging best practices.

EXPECTED IMPACTS

- Adoption of policy recommendations
- More direct access to funding (more integrated and cross-sectoral)
- Easier access to funding (especially for smaller municipalities)
- More cities and regions in the EU with resilience / urban water management plans.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Output 1: Set of indicators related to water sensitive cities.

Output 2: Development of a Blueprint 'Water Sensitive City' plan.

Output 3: Handbook of best practices [Green & Blue infrastructure / Sponge city & Urban water retention/ Biodiversity & Eco-system restoration].

EXPECTED IMPACTS

- Support cities in developing a 'Water Sensitive City' plan in co-creation with local stakeholders and community
- Increase number of certified professionals with knowledge of WSC topics (architects, planners, maintenance workers, politicians, others).

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Output 1: Step-wise, scalable digitalisation strategy, based on three main milestones (digitalised infrastructure; digital twins; and data-driven water governance), including indicators.

Output 2: Mapping of private funding opportunities and public-private collaboration in research projects.

Output 3: Mapping of data-based approaches enaging civil society.

EXPECTED IMPACTS

- Better understanding of Smart Water Operations and Digital Innovation
- More efficient water management based on indicators and data analysis - including digital twins, AI.
- Increased implementation capacity (level of ambition linked with specific funding).
- Measurable benefits for ecosystem stakeholders

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Output 1: Comprehensive framework of resources for cities to implement multi-level governance models
Output 2: Joint campaign to highlight best practices and raise awareness
Output 3: Compilation of case studies on public participation in water governance across European cities
Output 4: Compilation of good practices on innovative financing models and solutions
Output 5: Stakeholder dialogue to explore innovative funding mechanisms
Output 6: A pilot project with EIB
Output 7: Advocacy for the inclusion of funding for WSC investments in EU Cohesion Policy and the next MFF.
Output 8: Development of a widespread WSC Academy
Output 9: Tailored support for local authorities to enhance their understanding of WSC principles and implementation
Output 10: Series of webinars to disseminate best practices and practical tools.

EXPECTED IMPACTS

- Enhance the capacity of cities to effectively implement multi-level governance models, promote and communicate WSC approaches
- Achieve behavioural change towards sustainable water use and citizen participation in water management
- Strengthen the financial capabilities of cities to implement WSC projects (including innovative financial mechanisms) and ensure the inclusion of WSC priorities in EU budget policies
- Develop and spread knowledge on WSC and its practical applications.
- Capacity building and tailored support
- Collaboration with relevant EU and international initiatives.

HOW WILL THE PARTNERSHIP CONTRIBUTE TO THE 3 UAEU PILLARS?

Better funding

Better Funding

- Prioritise long-term resilience and cost savings through funding that values the economic and social benefits of water-sensitive investments.
- Blend EU, national, and private funds, mobilising PPPs and revolving instruments to de-risk and scale investments, especially for smaller municipalities.
- Develop scalable digitalisation standards to guide targeted, results-based funding and improve access to finance.

Better knowledge

Better Knowledge

- Foster EU-wide knowledge exchange, peer learning, and capacity building to strengthen technical expertise and practical know-how on WSC.
- Map, monitor, and communicate the benefits of blue-green infrastructure and NbS, supporting evidence-based and data-driven decision-making.
- Promote participatory approaches and awareness campaigns that empower communities, policymakers, and practitioners to co-create sustainable water solutions.

Better regulation

Better Regulation

- Harmonise and strengthen EU, national, and local regulatory frameworks to enable multi-level governance and integrated water management.
- Mainstream water-sensitive planning by embedding binding requirements (e.g. NbS, water storage, green infrastructure) into land use, housing, and infrastructure policies.
- Use EU-wide indicators and digital tools (KPIs, digital twins) to assess compliance, identify regulatory gaps, and refine policies.