

REPORT

of working group RA-VI - `Public Relations and Visibility of National Hydrological Services

Overview of the general tasks

Considering the need to enhance the visibility of the NHSs and the recognition of their role by national authorities, as well as their involvement in the formulation of new international policy tools concerning water the proposed program of work (conforming to annex to resolution 8/1 (XIV-RA VI) is:

- (a) To collect, analyze and disseminate information on the activities undertaken by NHSs in the area of public relations, and on tools and approaches used to enhance their visibility and recognition;
- (b) To develop a RA VI Working Group on Hydrology Web site, with a link to the WMO Web site, as an operational tool for the activities of the working group, in particular as concerns the exchange of information, the filling in of an address book, the publication of reports, the provision of links for the hydrological community; including in particular information on the current activities of the NHSs;
- (c) To formulate suggestions for the presentation to the public at large through communication media of daily hydrological bulletins and forecasts for a country or large river basins.

During the Meeting of WGH core members, held in Prague, Czech Hydrometeorological Institute, 26-27 March 2007, the hydrological tasks into the new RA VI Action Plan have been formulated and a WGH working plan has been reevaluated. Thus, specific task for working group on the Public relations and visibility of the National Hydrological Services was in the framework of the **Expected Result 7: Enhanced capabilities for Members to provide and use weather, climate, water and environmental applications and services:**

To develop a RA VI Working Group on Hydrology Web site, with a link on the WMO Web site, as an operational tool for the exchange of information, the provision of links for the hydrological community (before next RAVI meeting in 2009). To publish there an overview catalogue of hydrological outputs with recommendation of their use by different end-users (by 2011).

Group member(s ?)

According to member application only Mr. Petre Stanciu (Romania) expressed his willing to cooperate on this topic (Public Relations and the Visibility of NHSs). During the Technical Conference on Strategic plan of RAVI that has held in Riga (6-7 November

2006). I kindly asked Mr. Jan Kubat as chairman of WGH, to recommend specialists that could express their readiness to cooperate with me in the matter of Public Relations and the Visibility of NHSs. Mr. Kubat recommended me four persons. Unfortunately, I did not receive any positive reaction at the request addressed to them to be members of this group on the mentioned topic.

Review on the activities

At the request of the chairman of the WGH Jan Kubát, during June 2006 it was transmitted a proposal with the objectives, planned activities and expected results for the working group on the Public relations and visibility of the national Hydrological services (annex 1) and some possible problems which can not lead to reach the objectives. The document was also sent to the four specialists that I had hoped to collaborate on the topic of visibility of NHSs. I have not received any answer.

During June 2007 a minimal content of the RA VI WGH web site (annex 2) has been sent to the core members of WGH in view to express their opinions and suggestions and also to WMO Secretariat in order to have technical support to achieve the web site. I received the comments and suggestions only from Mr. Bogdan Ozga-Zielinski (Poland), leading expert on Potential Extreme Floods (see attachment) and by Mr. Markku Puupponen (Finland), leading expert on Networking for Contributions to Regional Initiatives Related to Water, and also from Mr. Tommaso Abrate, Scientific Officer, Hydrology and Water Resources Department WMO.

If the proposal of the RA VI WGH web site is to be agreed it is necessary to decide who will administrate the site, and especially the Forum because for this item a special person to spend some daily time is a must.

The main problem in developing the web site is the difficulty to carry out it by only a single person.

In view to touch the others items of the working plan, a questionnaire addressed to the NHSs concerning their Public Relations and Visibility (annex 3) has been developed. From the questionnaire answers it should result: what are the more visible activities already applied with success, what are the main hydrological products requested by a majority of the end-users and who they are?; what is it the best format of hydrological products dissemination?; what is the relationship with national authorities in the field of water management?; if exist a communication strategy with mass-media: how is it possible to pass from formal communication to efficient one?, how to pass from “face to face” with mass-media to a real partnership?, if there is a “communication hydrologist”?, etc.

The questionnaire will be presented during the WGH meeting in Toulouse and following the comments of the participants it will be adjusted and distributed to the National Hydrological Services from RA VI. For the contact point list I would kindly thank Mr. Ilmar Karro.

An alternative to the building of the catalogue of hydrological outputs with recommendation of their use by different end-users is to visit the NHSS' web sites. I tried that, but I met some impediments:

- Only part of them are available in English language;
- part of them have in the menus the products in explicit manner. Many of them have only presented the main activities only;
- such kind of activity (searching the NHSS'web sites) is very time consuming.

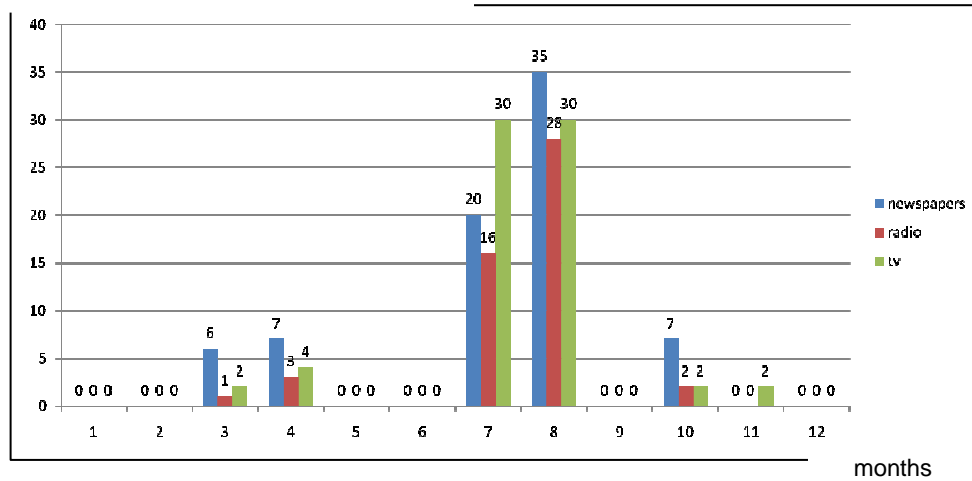
Some conclusions about the visibility and recognition of Romanian NHS (National Institute of Hydrology and Water Management) in the area of public relations

- During the interval 2002 – 2008 after the separation of hydrology from the National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology and acting NIHWM as independent institution we can say that the visibility of hydrology in mass media has recognized an important growth. In the past the flood forecast was considered to be done only by the meteorologists.
- BUT it seems that the media and the general public are more interested in events that have an immediate and significant socio-economic impact like floods and drought. For the scientific activities only the subject concerning the impact of climate change on water resources seems more visible.
- An example can be the year 2008:
 - the NIHWM organized two main important international events: the International Conference on the subject of “Water resources managements in extreme conditions”, held in Bucharest and the EURO-INBO Conference held in Sibiu
 - the Romania was confronted with floods events, especially the floods during July-August 2008 in the north-east of the country, where historical discharges were registered and caused important casualties.
- Taking into account the same dissemination techniques and channels, even though the efforts of dissemination were thorough and constant, we observed that dangerous hydrological phenomena created a larger area of visibility than the scientific events we organized. We concluded that the media and the public at large were more interested in dangerous hydrological phenomena and less in science, despite of the efforts we engage in.
- In the matter of scientific events we made everything possible to clear the barriers of communication by “translating” scientific language in common sense language. Although these actions were undertaken, there still remained one issue to discuss: is the public interested in science? Yes, but only that secondary public that activates in the same field of work we do.

Feed-back in communication media:

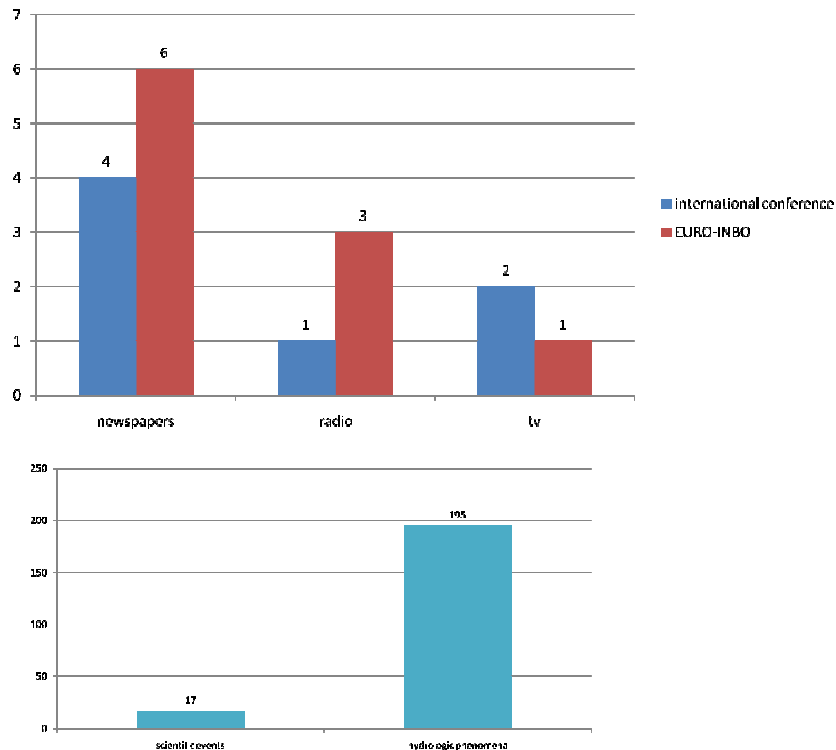
2008 visibility report on floods (the impact in mass-media is in a direct relationship with the magnitude of event)

Number of articles and tv + radio mentions



2008 visibility report on scientific events (the most mentions have been in the local newspapers and radio)

Number of articles and tv + radio mentions



The difference between the 2 events becomes now clear, once we see the media reports of floods and scientific events

In order to increase the visibility of the efforts in the water protection field, the National Administration Romanian Waters (Apele Romane) participated at the Social Responsibility Campaign we called “Let’s keep Waters Clean!”, that won the international prize “Best Green International Campaign” at the Green Awards 2008 in London ,UK.

Conclusions, recommendations

It seems that the members of RA VI are not really interested on the topic of public relations and visibility of National Hydrological Services: any applications to participate to a common activity, met no reaction at the different requests to contribute to the topic.

It is difficult, even impossible, to touch the tasks requested by the RA VI Working group on Hydrology on this topic only by a contribution of one single person (which is more specialist in hydrology and not in public relations): the results cannot be representative at the RA VI level taking into consideration only the opinion of a single country – Romania. **More participants should to be involved.**

Can the Romanian experience that **the media and the general public are more interested in the dangerous hydrological events than in the scientific subjects** be extrapolated to the RA VI members? We need an answer to this question.

The **general question that remains open** for all of us is: **how to make scientific information more visible and understandable to the public at large and even to the decision-makers?**

In my opinion it is **more important to enhance the visibility of the NHSs and the recognition of their role by national authorities, as well as their involvement in the formulation of new international policy tools concerning water.** This aspect is mostly achieved during the last period by their involvement in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and Flood Directive (but, again it is a conclusion resulted from Romanian experience).

The draft content proposed for the **RA VI Working Group on Hydrology Web site**, tries to respond to the request to be an operational tool for the exchange of information, for the hydrological community. In order to be operational **it is necessary to be agreed by the all core members of the Group on Hydrology, to have the technical support to achieve it from WMO Secretariat and each core members should provide the specific information.**

Also, a **list of experts in hydrology and water management available on this Web site** can be useful for project managers from hydrological community and not only.

The general conclusion is the **necessity to develop a common communication strategy**, based on the best practices already developed in different countries or based on the different ideas of common sense. It is a real challenge for the future activity. I hope that based on the responses at the questionnaire addressed to NHSs it will be possible to partially achieve this task. It depends on the NHS representatives' willing to fill the questionnaire concerning their experience in the field of Public Relations and Visibility.

Also, the achievement of the catalogue of hydrological outputs with recommendation of their use by different end-users depends of the NHS representatives' willing to respond at the questionnaire.