

Editorial

In early August, more than 1000 water professionals from all over the world make a pilgrimage to Stockholm to participate in the Water Symposium. From a somewhat modest beginning in 1991, it has already become the most important annual water event in the world.

In retrospect, Stockholm has given the water profession a support and a direction that simply did not exist before. After 11 annual symposia, it is appropriate to reflect why this annual series of events has become so important and relevant to the water profession.

Before I outline my views, I must admit my close association with these symposia from their very beginning. Thus, there may be a remote possibility that I may be somewhat biased in my assessment of the contributions of the annual Stockholm Water Symposium (SWS), but I do not believe it to be the case. I have never had any problem in 'calling a spade, a spade', both in private and in public, and if I was unhappy with SWS, I would have no hesitation in being one of its more serious critics.

On reflection, it has to be admitted that SWS has established a special niche for many reasons. First and foremost, it has provided a forum where the water profession can discuss, review and analyse current and emerging water problems and issues on a regular basis. Even though the main theme of each symposium has been different, they are interconnected, and thus there has been continuity in terms of follow-up. In fact, SWS has made a conscious effort to link the summaries and findings resulting from each annual meeting. Important issues that have come up at any meeting have been followed up in later symposia.

Second, right from the very beginning, the symposium organisers have followed a fair, clear and transparent process to select the best abstracts received. Not surprisingly, as times have passed and the event has become more and more important, the number of abstracts received has increased concomitantly as well. Thus, in recent years, at least for the workshops I have been associated with, only about one of every four abstracts received could be accepted for presentation. Such selectivity is unusual, since in most conferences more than 80% of the abstracts received are accepted. It is very unusual to find meetings where half the abstracts received are rejected, let alone around 70–75%, as is the case with SWS at present.

Since the only criterion of acceptance of any abstract is its quality in terms of information contained, the availability of a large pool of abstracts from which the best could be selected has ensured a much higher level of presentations and discussions during the symposia. Stockholm has consistently picked the best abstracts received, irrespective of who its authors were or their positions or states. This independent and objective assessment has unquestionably been one of its main strengths.

Third, even though SWS has been considered a success, the organizers have

continued to experiment with new ideas and formats. This has given the event a certain dynamism, which otherwise would not have been the case. The formats of the latest symposia differ in marked ways from the format of the earlier ones. In addition, when some ideas have not been the best ones, the organizers have continued to experiment with them, until the right approach could be found. A good example is the panel discussions, which were not the 'best' or the 'most interesting' during the first decade. However, the panel discussion on 'Dams, environment and regional development' during the 2001 symposium was considered to be 'outstanding' by the participants. Let us hope that it will be the harbinger of the future.

Fourth, Stockholm has shattered the myth that authors from developing countries cannot compete with those from developed countries. By encouraging authors from developing countries and countries in transition to submit abstracts, and by financing the expenses of the selected authors, Stockholm has clearly enriched the profession in terms of new ideas and experiences, and also questioning the validities of some of the views from the North, especially in terms of their application in the South. These are welcome developments.

Fifth, Stockholm has consistently made a special effort to bring in young water professionals, who are seldom seen in significant numbers in other major, international water fora. By encouraging them and giving them opportunities, the water profession is now aware of many young rising stars, whose contributions will most certainly be significant in the future.

Sixth, right from the very beginning, the implicit SWS philosophy has been that the water problems can be successfully resolved on a long-term basis, provided approaches are multi-disciplinary, inter-sectoral and integrative. Water is an important natural resource, whose management has direct implications for the management of other sectors like land use, agriculture, energy, environment, industrial and regional development and transportation. Equally, management of other sectors has direct implications for the water sector. Thus, solutions of all water problems cannot always be found exclusively within the water sector alone. Stockholm has consistently emphasized the importance of considering these interconnections and linkages.

Last, but not least, right from the very beginning one of the tasks of the Scientific Programme Committee (SPC) has been to carry out an *ex post* analysis of each symposium, in terms of what worked, what did not, reasons thereof and how the situation could be improved in the future. These discussions have always been frank, free and objective. If there were any disagreements, these were invariably discussed without rancour. The focus has always been given to issues, and attempts to find the best alternatives for the future. In this regard, the chairmanship of Professor Malin Falkenmark from the very beginning has been an important ingredient for success. She has not only provided continuity and leadership, but also has consistently ensured that members have their eyes 'on the ball'. A collegial SPC has been an important reason for the success of SWS.

These and many other reasons have given SWS an edge, which other similar events have never managed to achieve. For the sake of the water profession, one can only hope that SWS will go from strength to strength in the future.

The papers of this Special Issue have been selected from those that were presented at two workshops on 'Water and energy' and 'Dams, environment and regional development' during SWS of 2001. The Third World Centre for Water Management sponsored both the workshops. The Carl Duisberg

Gesellschaft (CDG) co-sponsored the workshop on 'Water and energy'. We gratefully acknowledge the financial and intellectual assistance of CDG and also the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which made the participation of the authors from developing countries possible for these two workshops.

All the abstracts received for these two workshops were reviewed by certain members of the SPC of SWS, and only the best ones were selected for presentations. Following the presentation and discussion of the papers at Stockholm, the authors were requested to finalize their papers. These papers were then peer-reviewed for possible publication in the journal, and only the ones recommended for publication by the reviewers have been included in this Special Issue. Thus, all the papers published in this issue were presented at SWS, but not all of them have been included.

I would like to thank Dr Aly Shady of CIDA and Dr Ismail Al-Baz of CDG for being the Guest Editors of this issue. Their help, support and hard work made this issue possible. I would also like to express very special thanks and appreciation to Professor Malin Falkenmark, Dr Ulf Ehlin and Ms Katarina Andrzejewska of the Stockholm International Water Institute for their assistance, constructive advice and regular interactions, which not only ensured that we had two excellent workshops at Stockholm but also resulted in this publication. Finally, Dr Cecilia Tortajada, of our Centre, did the lion's share of work in terms of organizing the two workshops and editing this Special Issue. Her assistance is thus very specially acknowledged.

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