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Water policy in the countries in transition and international cooperation

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UNESCO's Electoral Group II comprises of former socialist countries that underwent transition in the 1990s. The transition caused both positive and negative changes in water policy. The policy lost the sense of long-term directions in developing water management. Water regime processes typically take a long time and leave a permanent mark on spatial morphology. Therefore, long-term plans and guidelines are necessary for successful management. Politicians change in power relatively quickly, so they have no need for long-term directions, as they are not able to carry out long-term plans.
Due to the reduced budgetary funds, in most countries the funds for hydrological observations and research were cut. In Hungary, VITUKI, the world-renowned water research institute, stopped its operations. Slovenia is an exception in developing hydrological observations, where EU funds have been used to update the hydrological observation network and produce a state-of-the-art system of flood forecasting.
Due to Election Group II's large territory expanding on two continents, interregional cooperation, particularly with Regions I and IV, is extremely important. The cooperation of IHP National Committees in the Danube River Basin started already with the start of the International Hydrological Decade 1965–1975. XXVII conferences of the Danube countries have been held until 2017 with the last organized in 2017 in Golden Sands, Bolgaria. The monograph on the river basin, based on measurement data in the period 1930–1970, was published in 1988. Major research achievements until 2008 were published in a monograph »Hydrological Processes of the Danube River Basin« (2010). Please find more on the Danube cooperation at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/venice/natural-sciences/water/danube-cooperation/
In recent decades, the IHP UNESCO activities have focused on cooperation between UNESCO Centres and UNESCO Chairs that are not so frequently established in countries in transition.
With the growing population, industrialization and urbanization, the inundated areas and wetlands have been used for other purposes and, through river engineering, watercourses have been regulated so that the space belonging to water has been reduced. Since ancient times, and more intensively from the mid-19th century, riverbeds have been shortened and narrowed, and levees have been built for flood protection; this resulted in the serious reduction of floodplains and wetlands. The surfaces 'taken' from rivers were intended primarily for agriculture and urban development. The situation was similar in Slovenia. Twenty years ago the maintenance of embankments of regulated natural watercourses was brought to a halt, and the new practice was seen as eco-friendly maintenance of watercourses. Many river banks were overgrown with bushes and similar vegetation and the space for water was only further reduced. In some places, the vegetation in the narrow channels completely obscured the surface of the water. The serious damages due to the recent floods and, last but not least, fatalities, are the price that we pay today. This situation will be further aggravated by the expected impact of climate change. Since 2013, the Slovenian Committee of UNESCO IHP has taken part in the activities focusing on the campaign 'More Room for Water'. The activities of 'More Room for Water' satisfy the requirements of both the EU Flood Directive and the Water Framework Directive.