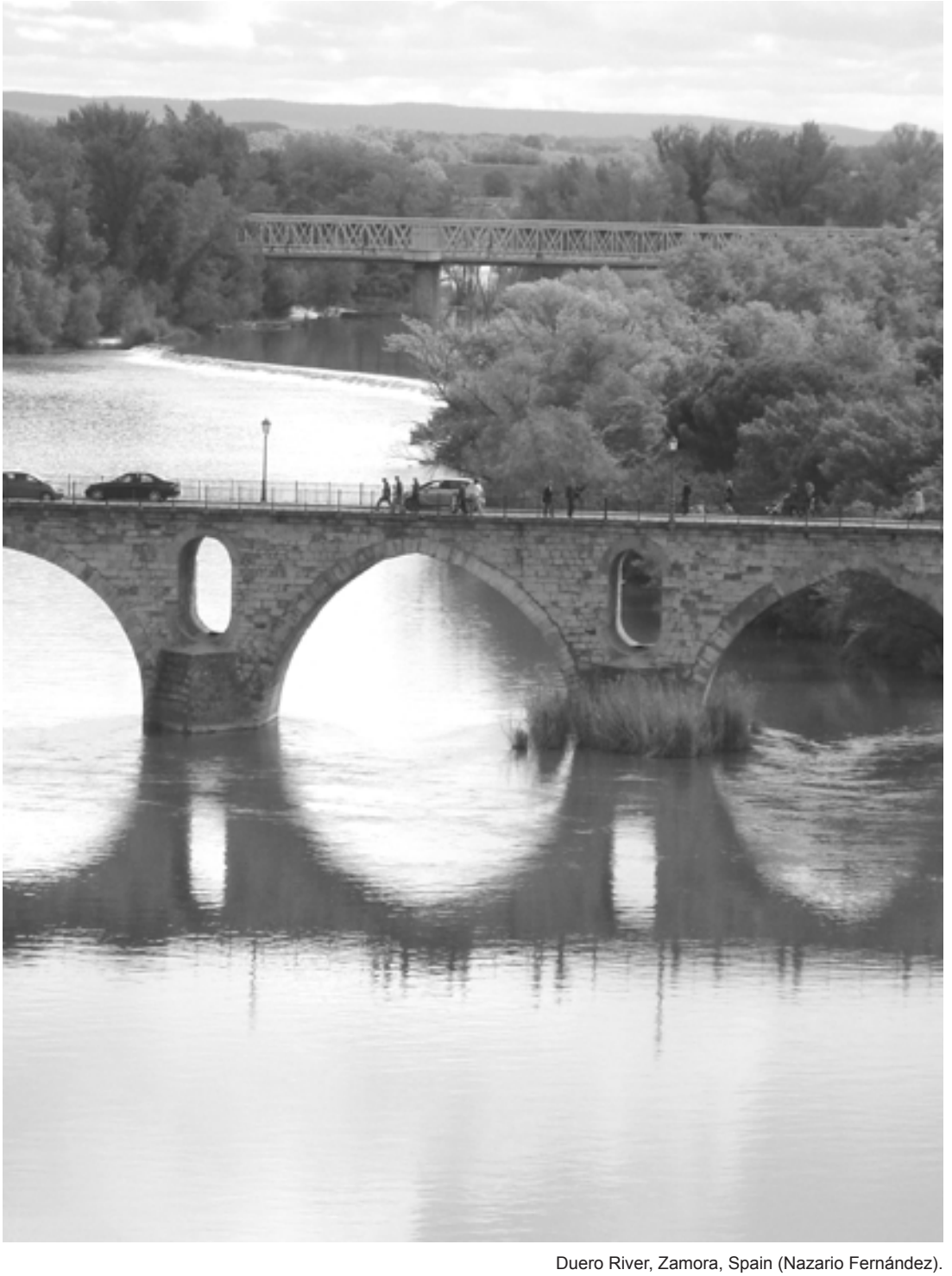

Duero River, Zamora, Spain (Nazario Fernández).

Times of Change in Water Management

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The serious damage caused to aquatic ecosystems in the last few decades make the application of the sustainability principle in water management necessary at a world level. Indeed, the current water crisis imposes management of this resource as a universal citizen right. To this end, environmental policies developed until quite recently, characterised by inefficiency and irresponsibility, must radically change. In this respect, in 2000 the EU approved the Water Framework Directive, which seeks to establish a sustainable and uniform paradigm for all Member States. However, some of them do not comply with the criteria and deadlines required by Brussels. The case of Spain, whose situation is worsened by uncoordinated autonomous policies, is especially worrying.

Introduction

For a decade, we have been witnessing an intense debate in Spain on hydrological planning, greatly clouded not only by obscure economic interests but also by political posturing with clear electoral opportunistic purposes. To review the state of the issue ten years later, we will set it in the framework of the global water crisis that we have paradoxically caused on the Water Planet, the Blue Planet.

One of the consequences of generalised degradation of aquatic ecosystems is that 1.2 billion people do not have access to drinking water. Moreover, such degradation worsens famine problems in the world, as it destroys the river and sea fisheries as well as traditional modes of farming production linked to river cycles, essential for millions of people in vulnerable communities. The current globalisation model, distanced from the most basic ethical principles, is aggravating these problems. Far from slowing down the ecological degradation, it is speeding it up; far from reducing the gradients of wealth and guaranteeing to the poorest fundamental rights such as access to drinking water, it is opening the field of environmental values and basic services of general interest to the market as a business space. In this context, multiple conflicts are emerging linked to water management as a consequence of the convergence of three main crisis fault lines:

- A crisis of sustainability, which gives rises to movements in defence of the territory and aquatic ecosystems faced with the construction of major hydraulic works, deforestation and pollution of rivers, lakes and aquifers.
- A crisis of inequality and poverty, which acutely increases the vulnerability of the

poorest communities faced with the problems of unsustainable aquatic ecosystems that climate change will undoubtedly aggravate.

- A crisis of governance, which tends to transform citizens into clients and marginalise the weakest, faced with the privatisation of basic water and sanitation services.

Moving from Resource Management to Ecosystem Management

Currently, it is estimated that 1.2 billion people do not have guaranteed access to drinking water, which involves around 10,000 daily deaths from diarrhoea, mostly children under five. The deaths probably reach 20,000 if we count the gradual poisoning by heavy metals and other toxics from industrial dumping, open-pit mining and even agriculture. Moreover, rivers, lakes and wetlands are suffering the deepest biodiversity crisis in the biosphere, as noted by the European Declaration for a New Water Culture, signed by one hundred scientists from the diverse EU countries in early 2005. Both realities are in fact two faces of the same crisis: the crisis of unsustainable aquatic ecosystems and the continental water cycle. As for these 1.2 billion people, the root of the problem does not lie so much in scarcity but rather in the quality of the water available. Throughout history, communities have settled by a river or lake or in places with access to underground water. And if the place did not have enough water for a dignified life, the community continued walking. However, because of our insatiable and irresponsible thirst for development, we have exploited and degraded these ecosystems and aquifers to produce not only problems of scarcity but also serious problems of pollution that affect the health of the populations relying on them. This is how frogs and fish died and, later, people have begun to sicken and even die; albeit, always the most vulnerable (mostly children) and in the poorest communities.

In this general context, it is urgent to move from traditional resource management approaches to new ecosystem management approaches. Just as we understand the need for moving from wood management to more complex forest approaches, we cannot continue managing the rivers as mere channels of H_2O. The Water Framework Directive (WFD), in force in the EU since late 2000, has taken on the challenge and established as a central objective the recovery and conservation of a good ecological condition of rivers, lakes and wetlands. From this new approach, beyond the traditional physical-chemical indicators, new biological indicators are emerging. The aim does not only focus on controlling water quality but also the good operation of ecosystems.

The complexity of values and rights at stake, along with the impossibility of dividing up and appropriating the aquatic ecosystems as such, make the market an unsuitable tool

Adopting the sustainability principle as the basis of water management from this ecosystem approach requires enhancing public responsibility in this matter. The complexity of values and rights at stake, along with the impossibility of dividing up and appropriating the aquatic ecosystems as such, make the market an unsuitable tool. Resource management approaches, however, may derive more easily into the temptation to privatise water to the extent that, as a mere resource, it can indeed be easily divided, appropriated and commercialised.

This ecosystem approach should lead us to reform the water basin confederations, thereby enhancing our public management model based on an interdisciplinary view of integrated management. We could say that Europe, after having opted to encourage at an

international level neoliberal policies for the deregulation and privatisation of water and sanitation services, has taken on an ecosystem view to globally manage water. This, undoubtedly, involves serious contradictions and incoherencies when managing the complex system of values at stake. It is as if the EU recognised and rigorously regulated the space of environmental values, managed from an ecosystem perspective in keeping with the sustainability paradigm but leaving aside social values, which are also at stake. The Framework Directive, in fact, does not speak of human rights or citizen rights and duties.

Europe has approved directives which, despite being solid in terms of environmental principles and values, lack consistency in terms of the social values at stake

This kind of schizophrenic outbreak in environmental and social values affects not only water policy but also environmental policies in general. Europe has approved directives which, despite being solid in terms of environmental principles and values, lack consistency in terms of the social values at stake. The key, in my view, lies in the fact that in old Europe, after all kinds of environmental atrocities have been committed, we are increasingly aware of the problems that this has entailed. In this context, it is feasible to find notable areas of consensus between the main political groups, enabling the consensus required to approve a directive in the European Parliament. However, when the debate tackles social issues, the political right usually takes an entrenched neoliberal view, while the left defends more social assumptions, thereby blocking the necessary consensus. In this context, the final solution is to "socially disempower" the law. If the right wins in an EU country, it can, for example, privatise the water services and this will be legal; but if the left wins and wants to protect social rights by promoting public management of these services, this will be equally legal.

The Complexity of the Values at Stake

Today, the world is facing an unprecedented water crisis, aggravated by the high levels of inefficiency and irresponsibility that characterise the prevailing management models. In this context, it is undoubtedly necessary to rethink such models and reflect on the values at stake. If we imagine for a moment that we made peace with nature and were able to extract wood and water without undermining the health of forest and rivers, we would in fact be complying with the spirit and letter of European environmental laws and in particular the Water Framework Directive. We would be, in short, overcoming the aforementioned sustainability problems. In this hypothetical context, we would still have to tackle the challenge of water and wood management as resources strictly speaking. As for wood, I do not believe that we would have significant moral problems although we would continue to encounter ethical, social and political problems in water management. In the case of wood, once specified which trees can be felled, we will consider it reasonable for the woodcutter to sell the logs to the closest sawmill; and the latter to sell the planks to the carpenter to make pieces of furniture to sell to those requiring them. In other words, we will consider it reasonable to substantially entrust the market with the management of wood as a resource once the sustainability of the forest ecosystem has been regulated and guaranteed. Nevertheless, if we commercialise water, we will make a serious mistake.

The key difference lies, in my opinion, in that the profits that wood provides can be consistently substituted by capital goods, which

means the management of the resource can be entrusted to the market, with the pertinent regulations. However, the values at stake in the case of water are more complex and, in many cases, cannot be replaced by capital goods. In fact, in the case of water, we are faced with the challenge of managing values that are linked to different ethical categories, which requires, in short, establishing priorities and defining specific management criteria in each case.

The commercial approach, promoted by the World Bank in terms of management of water and basic services, on which people's health and life rely, is being seen as an error

This line of argument, referring to the ethical management of water as a resource, strengthens the reasoning previously set out on the inconsistence of applying market logic to water management. Given that, as previously explained, from this ecosystem view it is not reasonable to ask the market to manage and guarantee the sustainability of rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers, from an ethical vision that seeks to manage and guarantee values of equity and citizen cohesion, market logic again seems inappropriate. Indeed, it is inconsistent and erroneous to ask the market to manage a very complex system of principles, values and functions to which it is not sensitive.

Ethical Bases: Functions, Values and Rights at Stake

The commercial approach, promoted by the World Bank in terms of management of water and basic services, on which people's health and life rely, is being seen as an error. Water is certainly a well-defined element: H_2O. However, seeing water simply as a "useful and scarce" good which must be valued and managed based on market relations comes into flagrant contradiction with the most elementary ethical principles. In contrast to wood or other natural resources, there are numerous water functions related to ethical ranks of different levels that we must clearly identify. As the European Declaration for a New Water Culture recommends, we should distinguish three ethical categories with their respective priority levels, objectives to achieve, rights and duties at stake and, in short, different and specific management criteria:

- Water for life, as regards its basic role of providing survival for both human beings and all other living beings in nature, must be recognised as high priority so as to guarantee the sustainability of ecosystems and access of all individuals to basic quotas of quality waters, as well as the basic production of food for a dignified life, from the human rights standpoint.
- Water for general interest purposes, in activities of general interest of society, as regards its role of preserving health and social cohesion (such as urban water and sanitation services), must be ranked at a second level of priority, and related to the social rights of citizens, linked to the corresponding citizen duties.
- Water for economic growth, as regards its role in legitimate economic development, must be recognised as a third level of priority, in connection with the individual right of all to improve their standard of living. This is the function for which most of the water removed from rivers and aquifers is used and that causes the most important scarcity and pollution problems.

Water for Life

In 2002, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognised access to basic quotas of drinking water as a human

right. These basic quotas of water for life, insofar as they are framed within the field of human rights, must be efficiently guaranteed at a maximum priority level. We are faced with values that "are neither bought nor sold," but must simply be guaranteed under the responsibility of the community, the state and, finally, the international institutions, without excuse.

30-40 litres of drinking water per person per day, as a reference of what could be considered as the minimum amount of water necessary for a dignified life, represents barely 1.2% of the water used in society today

We should not forget that 30-40 litres of drinking water per person per day, as a reference of what could be considered as the minimum amount of water necessary for a dignified life, represents barely 1.2% of the water used in society today. There is no argument that justifies that 1.2 billion people have no guaranteed access to this amount of drinking water. The supposed lack of financial resources is inacceptable as a reason, even for governments of impoverished countries; even more for the governments of rich countries and international institutions such as the World Bank. In the end, the "public, drinking and free fountain in the square, close to everybody's house" was guaranteed in many countries when they were really poor and the World Bank did not even exist. The challenge was not strictly economic but rather political, in the Aristotelian and noble sense of the term. In short, the public responsibility for guaranteeing drinking and free water for everyone in the fountain was assumed, even before lighting the streets or asphalting the roads.

In the field of water for life, the productive usages in poor and vulnerable communities must also be included. These are ancestral rights, in many cases, on which basic farming production relies, that support the life of these communities and, therefore, must be considered human rights. Lastly, in the field of water for life, the necessary water, in quantity and quality, must be included to guarantee the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems and their environments, albeit only for "intelligent egoism" because, in fact, it is to say the least complicated to guarantee our existence, health and well-being if we destroy the health of the biosphere. Certainly, in this case we are not speaking of 1.2% of the water used. We are referring to much higher environmental flows, as well as of notable efforts to treat waste, preserve the quality of water, and conserve the aquatic habitats. However, as we have previously explained, the main reason why over 1 billion people do not have guaranteed access to drinking water is in fact the breakdown in the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems. Moreover, at the UN there is currently a debate on the so-called third generation of human rights, such as collective rights of people to peace, territory and a healthy environment. We should ask ourselves, in short, if we consider it ethically acceptable that the enjoyment of living rivers is for the rich, while the poor have to settle for sewage rivers, as a condition for achieving the longed for development in the future. The answer seems clear.

At the EU, as is known, a priority of the Water Framework Directive is to guarantee these basic environmental functions of water. In fact, the flows necessary to preserve the good ecological condition of rivers, lakes and wetlands are considered, by law, to be a restriction on the diverse productive usages of water. Only drinking water, necessary for the basic domestic supply, is placed at a higher priority level. However, such needs, given the low flows required, on rare occasions challenge the sustainability of the aquatic ecosystems.

Water for General Interest Purposes

Offering home water and sanitation services means a qualitative leap in contrast to the public fountain that guarantees access to the 30-40 litres per person per day, as a reference of the human right to drinking water. In an average home we easily use 120 litres per person per day. However, access to such services must be for all, rich and poor. This perspective of universal access could lead to including such services in the area of human rights. Nevertheless, in my view, the appropriate thing is to locate them in the area of citizen rights. It would be convenient, in any case, to open this debate in society. In the end, human rights and citizen rights are socio-political constructs that must create at all times the necessary level of social consensus. In my opinion, there are important differences between the two: differences which are found in the field of duties. Human rights are not linked with any duty, beyond the "duty" of being alive and wishing to continue to be so. However, citizen rights must be linked to the corresponding citizen duties.

In these kinds of services, objectives emerge that are worth being considered as of general interest to society. Objectives related with values, such as equity and social cohesion, towards which the market is insensitive. Values linked to the concept of citizenship that fully enter the area of what must be considered *res publica*, that is, "public matters", a reason why they must be managed under community or public responsibility.

Designing the set of rights and duties is politically complex. Public institutions, while guaranteeing citizen rights, must establish the corresponding citizen duties. If the aim is to guarantee quality domestic water and sanitation services, it is fundamental to design appropriate tariff models that guarantee the necessary funding and encourage socio-economic efficiency and citizen responsibility.

In such a complex society as today's, guaranteeing universal access to quality domestic services, while minimising the ecological impact on the aquatic ecosystem, constitutes a major challenge. A tariff system of consumption levels with incrementing prices may guarantee the recovery of the service costs, while establishing redistributive social criteria. The first level of 30 or 40 litres per person per day should be free, at least for those under the poverty threshold. The following level, 100 litres, should be charged at an affordable price, at the real cost imposed by the service. At the third level, the price per cubic metre should clearly increase, to finally rise acutely at the fourth, characteristic of luxury usages (such as gardens and swimming pools). This leads to a cross-subsidy, so that those consuming the most subsidise the basic services of those who have difficulties to pay.

Public institutions, while guaranteeing citizen rights, must establish the corresponding citizen duties

In this case, in contrast to water for life, where the economic logic had little to contribute, we are applying economic-financial rationality criteria. However, the criteria proposed do not correspond to market rationality. In fact, when we go to the market, if a kilo of apples costs 1 euro, we will often be offered two kilos for 1 euro and 80 cents. There are strategies encouraging consumption, based on the so-called economy of scale. Indeed, the tariff model proposed takes on opposed criteria. The reason is that we seek to offer a good public service, from the perspective of the general interest rather than good business.

Certainly, this is not the coherence of the deregulating and privatising policies of the World Bank. The pressures of the international economic-financial institutions in the direction of conditioning public credits, in terms

of water services, on the prior privatisation of these services is, in my opinion, a shame, as well as a grave error. Faced with the problems of bureaucracy, opacity and even corruption that often undermine the public purpose, the solution does not lie in privatising but rather democratising. We are facing the challenge, in short, of promoting new management approaches of participatory public management under social control.

Water for Economic Growth

Most flows extracted from rivers and aquifers do not guarantee human rights or support general interest services but are rather dedicated to productive activities. The agricultural sector uses over 70% of water resources removed from rivers and aquifers, while industry and services monopolise around 20%. They are activities based on the legitimate aspiration of all individuals to improve their standard of living. However, everybody's right to be richer continues to be legitimate but cannot come before human and citizen rights; all the more so when what is at stake is the right of the richest to be richer. From an ethical standpoint, it is clear that such usages must be managed from a third priority level. In this respect, degrading a river or endangering the drinkability of flows downstream, with the justification that it encourages economic development and job creation, is seriously immoral.

In terms of water for economic growth, insofar as the objectives are economic, it is necessary to apply economic rationality criteria. Users must assume the cost required by the supply of water used. Moreover, given that there is scarcity, they must assume the so-called opportunity cost, which is the cost of the scarcity of the resource. In the field of water for growth, there is a need, in short, for applying the principle of global cost recovery, as laid down by the Framework Water Directive (including financial cost, environmental costs and opportunity cost, when there is scarcity). In this case, there are no reasons that justify direct or cross-subsidies; just as the carpenter does not have subsidised wood or the transport company subsidised diesel oil.

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The scarcity of water for life is a humanitarian catastrophe, and therefore inacceptable; the scarcity of water for general interest purposes (water cuts in a city) is a disaster and political failure, and therefore also cannot be justified. However, we cannot continue to understand the scarcity of water for economic growth as a "tragedy to be avoided", paid out of public funds, but rather it must be understood as an inexorable reality which must be managed with economic rationality criteria. From our ambition in terms of development, we make what is abundant scarce. We are making the planet small, the immensity of the oceans vulnerable, the atmosphere's capacity insufficient and, of course, we are making the fresh water of the rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers scarce. In short, this means applying economic rationality criteria to the economic use of water, managing our development ambition (often led by those who live better) based on responsible respect for the limits of sustainability imposed on us by nature.

The Debate on the National Hydrological Plan in Spain

In the mid-90s, the drafting and publication of the Preliminary Project of the National Hydrological Plan (APHN), under the responsibility of Minister José Borrell, provoked a notable debate on the water management model, inherited from

the *Regeneracionismo costista*,[1] which had been current throughout the 20th century. The APHN, of course, provided the obligatory planning demanded by the Water Law 1985, the most ambitious hydraulic works projects (dams and diversions) dreamt of by civil engineering in Spain since the early 20th century. The plan provided for more than 200 large dams, which in many cases would have flooded villages, as well as a series of large diversions from the Duero and Ebro rivers to the Mediterranean coast, which planned to divert a total of 2,800 hm^3 of water per year. The central core of the planning proposal was known as the Integral System of Hydrological National Exploitation, and included a "North-South and East-West hydraulic coverage", from the basins characterised as "surplus" to the so-called "loss-making basins". In a first phase, it was planned to divert 1,075 hm^3 from the Ebro and 400 hm^3 from the Duero and the North, while a second phase planned a diversion from the Duero of 980 hm^3, and another of 380 hm^3 from the Ebro. Such huge projects were at no time backed by environmental impact studies, nor preceded by an analysis guaranteeing their economic rationality. An opposition movement soon emerged, incipient at first although very significant, from counties, mostly in mountain areas, that would see inhabited villages flooded. Moreover, an important opposition movement was born against the diversions from the Ebro Delta, over the fear that the degradation underway in their territory would accelerate with such projects. This would lead to the creation of the Coordinating Committee of People Affected by Large Dams and Diversions (COAGRET).

The Preliminary Project of the National Hydrological Plan was blocked in the last stage of the legislature of the final government of Felipe González. With the electoral victory of the PP (conservative party) in 1996 a period of doubts and debates opened within the government itself which brought about the drafting and publication of the so-called *Libro blanco del agua en España* [Water White Paper in Spain]. It was an interesting effort to prepare studies and collect data, along with consultations with multiple experts, as diverse as they were enriching. However, before the *Libro blanco* was published, doubts were dispelled in government, and the position of Benigno Blanco, the then Secretary of State for Water and formerly Head of the Legal Department of the electricity company Iberdrola, dominated. Minister Isabel Tocino, and the government as a whole, accepted the basis of José Borrell's diagnostic of the APHN and the diversion strategy as the central basis of hydrological planning.

The movement of the New Water Culture questions the paradigm of "dominating nature" which gives way to the new paradigm of sustainability

In short, the *Libro blanco* created a positive area of reflection and preparation characteristic of times of transition. It meant an unprecedented effort to collect and publish data and studies that offered sufficient information to prepare a relevant diagnostic in the complex Spanish hydrological scenario. However, beyond this wealth of arguments and data, the final diagnostic became a political issue, so that the chapter of conclusions was merely the anteroom of a National Hydrological Plan whose main lines, at that time, were more than decided. This Plan, finally approved in 2000, was once again structured upon a strategy of diver-

1. Intellectual movement from the 19th and 20th centuries in Spain whose main representative was Joaquín Costa.

sions centred on this occasion on the river Ebro. The Duero would be excluded, in the light of Portugal's threats to block the European funds the government was hoping for in Brussels. Moreover, the Plan envisaged more than 100 new large dams, taking on the transformation of the 1,200,000 irrigated hectares included in the basin plans previously approved.

The movement opposing this wave of new large dams and diversions would soon be strengthened in its postures by an unexpected and unprecedented alliance: a broad movement of researchers and academics that would organise in 1998, with the support of 50 vice-chancellors, the First Iberian Water Planning and Management Congress. This successful congress, the first interdisciplinary congress on water in Spain, became biannual and led to the creation of the New Culture of Water Foundation. Thus, under the motto "New Water Culture", the successive Iberian congresses, held alternatively in Spain and Portugal, forged a body of wholly consistent critical and alternative arguments which would be strengthened and ratified by the Water Framework Directive.

Indeed, the approval in Brussels of the Water Framework Directive in 2000 ratified the need for this reflection on water management that the movement for the New Water Culture had proposed from the street and the universities, based on a three-fold challenge:

- Move from the traditional to resource management approaches to new ecosystem management approaches, taking as the main objective the recovery of the good condition of rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers.
- Move from the "supply" models to prioritising "demand management" strategies based on economic rationality criteria governed by the principles of "cost recovery" and "the polluter pays".
- Move from traditional technocratic approaches to new approaches based on the principle of proactive citizen participation established by the Aarhus Agreement.

The movement of the New Water Culture questions, beyond the traditional supply models inherited from the *Costismo*, the Renaissance paradigm of "dominating nature" which inspired such models. A paradigm which, beyond the specific field of water management, upon entering into crisis at the end of the 20th century, gives way to the new paradigm of sustainability. The inefficiency, both technical and economic, induced by the traditional supply strategies, and productivist mythicizing of the large hydraulic works, outside the most elementary criteria of economic rationality under the implicit motto of "the king pays", efficiently fed the most substantial criticisms of the arsenal of arguments against the hydraulic policies of the government. Moreover, the force of the Framework Directive when placing as the central objective of the new law the recovery of the good ecological condition of the aquatic ecosystems, which even led to the emergence of the environmental principle of "No Damage", finally strengthened the environmentalist line of the new water culture.

The force of the Framework Directive when placing as the central objective law the recovery of the good ecological condition of the aquatic ecosystems, finally strengthened the environmentalist line of the new water culture

Lastly, the mass mobilisation achieved by the Coordinating Committee of People Affected by Large Dams and Diversions, thanks to its intelligent strategy of social and political alliances, particularly the diversion projects of the Ebro, finally destroyed the social acceptability present throughout the 20th century regarding the strategy of major hydraulic works.

Just before the general elections won by the PSOE (socialist party) in 2004, the European Commission, following complex and long debates with the Spanish government, issued three reports: the first, environmental; the second, on economic-financial issues, and the third, on social questions, which recommended not funding the Spanish National Hydrological Plan with European funds. In these reports, the technical teams of the European Commission brought together almost all the arguments and criticisms prepared at the New Water Culture Foundation, based on the conclusions and contributions of the successive Iberian Water Planning and Management Congresses.

The Challenge of Developing a Water Framework Directive

With the change of government following the 2004 general elections, the Ministry of the Environment was led by Cristina Narbona. Overcoming the indecision within her own party, she took the government not only to promote the repeal of the Ebro river diversion legislation in Parliament but also to put forward throughout the mandate a shift in the water policy to adopt the new coherence of the Water Framework Directive. Nevertheless, the so-called Annex II was not questioned, which, along with other minor diversions such as the Júcar-Vinalopó, provided for the construction of around 120 major dams, some of them, such as the enlargement of the Yesa dam, clearly linked to the diversion itself. The fact that many of these works were linked at a regional level to the prospect of new irrigated lands and other productive developments undoubtedly hindered progress. However, Cristina Narbona imposed two clear guidelines in terms of the most controversial projects of the so-called Annex II:

- Technical debates and processes of social dialogue with the opposing movements should be opened before making definitive decisions.
- Villages and urban centres should never be flooded.

Moreover, the technical skills of the hydrographical confederations were diligently applied to meet the deadlines set in the Framework Directive itself to produce the new basin plans following new management principles and criteria. The Action Plan for the Management and Use of Water (AGUA), approved as an alternative to the main diversions, fostered new integrated policies of surface and ground water, the modernisation of urban grids and irrigation systems and the desalination of sea water in the most sensitive and vulnerable spots of the Mediterranean coast. The blocking of the European funds was deactivated in Brussels and it was shown that, indeed, there were more reasonable alternatives than the main diversions planned.

The Framework Directive will not be interpreted lightly in the mid-term by governments of one persuasion or another. It is a basic logic of the EU that Brussels will be responsible for ensuring compliance

The acid test came with the drought crisis around 2005. Despite being the most severe drought in the century, and in contrast to what happened in the previous drought of 1992, there were no water cuts in any city. It is worth noting that the inherited National Hydrological Plan had given less priority to drought prevention and management plans which had not even been outlined. At the Committee of Drought Experts promoted by Cristina Narbona, the emphatic recommendation was to make the drought plans the hard core of the new plan-

ning, taking on the perspective of the climate change underway.

Although the first government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, with Cristina Narbona at the head of the Ministry of the Environment, distinguished itself, as we explained before, by a historical change in the environmental policies and particularly those related to water, with the exit of Narbona in the second socialist government mandate things changed drastically. The shadow of the economic crisis and the pressures of the groups that, inside and outside her own party, confronted Cristina Narbona, brought about a lamentable shift in environmental matters and water policy. It could be said that the Ministry of the Environment was finally abducted by the Ministry of Agriculture. Thus, the diligence with which the development and application of the Framework Directive was loyally being promoted was gradually diluted and blocked. From being an exemplary country within the European framework in terms of compliance with the deadlines foreseen in the development of the aforementioned directive, Spain systematically failed to meet the deadlines, principles and criteria set out and required by it. With the exception of the Catalan Water Agency, which rigorously met the deadlines for the preparation of water planning under its competence in inland basins of Catalonia, the remaining autonomous agencies and hydrographical confederations have blatantly failed to meet the deadlines fixed and continue to do so. The key planning issues seem to be kept in the drawers for political-electoral convenience. Such seems the case of the environmental flow regimes or the transparency in terms of costs, in particular in the enormous demands linked to new irrigation lands. In fact, the prospects for growth of irrigation lands, inherited from the previous hydrological planning, continue to prevail. This shelters foolish autonomous policies of unsustainable growth of the irrigation guided by clientelist strategies of a populist nature, in flagrant contradiction of the Framework Directive and the caution that the climate change underway should inspire.

In any case, the Framework Directive will not be interpreted lightly in the mid-term by governments of one persuasion or another. It is a basic logic of the EU that Brussels will be responsible for ensuring compliance and, in fact, in 2011 the Spanish government received a serious warning in this respect. Moreover, climate change, which unfortunately is not a fantasy, will open a debate on the need for the changes required by law.