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Stakeholder discourse and water management – implementation of the participatory model CATCH in a Northern Italian alpine sub-catchment

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Abstract. The Water Framework Directive (WFD, directive 2000/60/EC) was created to ensure the sustainable use of water resources in the European Union. A central guideline included throughout the directive is a call for the participation of stakeholders in the management of these resources. Involving stakeholders is an important step to ensure that catchment management plans take into consideration local experience in the development of these plans and the impact of the plans on local interests. This paper describes and analyses the results of a series of workshops to facilitate implementation of the WFD at a catchment level based on the stakeholder participation model, CATCH.

To test the usefulness of the CATCH model, developed for water management in a catchment area, a sub-catchment in an alpine valley in the north-east of Italy, the Alta Valsugana in the Province of Trento, was chosen as the setting for a series of workshops. In this valley water is fundamental for activities associated with agriculture, domestic use, energy production, sports and recreation. In the recent past the valley has had serious problems related to water quality and quantity. Implementation of water management plans under the WFD may lead to conflicts within the catchment between different stakeholder interest groups. Including stakeholders in the development of management plans not only follows the guidelines of the WFD but also could result in a more locally adapted and acceptable plan for the catchment.

A new stakeholder analysis methodology was developed and implemented in order to identify the relevant stakeholders of the area and then two sets of workshops involving the key stakeholders identified were conducted in Spring 2006. The CATCH meetings were a new experience for the participants, who had to deal with both the principles of the WFD in general and the participation requirement in particular. During the meetings, the CATCH model played a very important role in structuring the participatory process. It provided a general framework consisting of a sequence of steps that helped the participants to reach the goal of the process: the identification and evaluation of measures to improve water management in the catchment. This test of the CATCH model showed it to be a dynamic and flexible tool, useful for structuring and guiding the participation process, without imposing undue restrictions on influencing the outcome of stakeholder participation in a small catchment.

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