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Urban Water Resilience – A Global Challenge

On November 28th, 2024, the BLUE PLANET Berlin Water Dialogues took place with the topic “Reshaping Our Cities – Urban Water Resilience”. The event attracted almost 700 registered participants from 73 countries and, with the participation of numerous international experts, made it clear that sustainable water management is of greatest importance worldwide. The keynotes, panel discussions and project presentations focused on the integration of blue, green and grey infrastructure as well as the transformative role of the digitalization in urban spaces.

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Dr. Severin Fischer, State Secretary in the Berlin Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises, started the online conference with a welcoming speech from Berlin. “Water is not just a vital resource for life, it’s a singular element that connects us all, flowing across borders, cultures and communities. In a world increasingly impacted by climate change and urbanization, our cities face unprecedented threats to their water security. Our approach to urban water resilience must be holistic, inclusive and forward thinking. Water knows no borders, it connects us all”, emphasized Dr. Severin Fischer. “Due to the ongoing climate change and limited resources, the urban water resilience is of crucial importance”, underlined Dr. Pascale Rouault, Managing Director of the Berlin Centre of Competence for Water (KWB), who hosted the event together with Boris Greifeneder, Managing Director of German Water Partnership (GWP).

Cities, already challenged by high population density, extensive land sealing, and limited green spaces, are increasingly having to contend with longer and more intense periods of heat, drought, storms, heavy rainfall and flooding. Using Berlin as an example, Dr. Carlo W. Becker of bgmr Landschaftsarchitekten opened the conference with an introduction to the sponge city concept. He drew attention to the critical role of decentralized rainwater management and stressed the shared responsibility of various stakeholders in achieving sustainable urban development. Practical examples, such as the Cloudburst Masterplan in Copenhagen and the Hefei Airport City project in China, demonstrate the feasibility and success of the sponge city concept. The subsequent panel discussion focused on the requirements for urban water resilience in the face of rising climate change impacts and extreme rainfall events. The panelists stressed the indispensable need for urban transformation and highlighted the critical role of political instruments in successfully implementing resilient sponge cities.

Another crucial element in enhancing urban water resilience is the adoption of digital solutions. In his keynote speech, Will Sarni, Practice Lead Water and Nature at Earth Finance, accentuated the importance of cooperation, agility, and innovation-friendly strategies as key drivers for the digital transformation of the water sector. Technologies like artificial intelligence are crucial for predicting water consumption and thus optimizing the use of resources. The subsequent

panel discussion focussed on the various dimensions of resilience in the management of critical infrastructure, with a focus on water, wastewater and electricity grids. The importance of infrastructure resilience, the characteristics of resilient systems and the dependencies between critical infrastructure were examined. Resilient urban infrastructure is essential for managing these interconnections and safeguarding the long-term functionality of a city, even in the face of unforeseen disruptions. A power outage, for example, illustrates how strongly the interdependence between critical infrastructures shapes urban life.

In the concluding keynote Aklilu Fikresilassie (Phd), Director of Cities for Africa at World Resources Institute (WRI), also pointed out the need for cooperative, holistic and data-based approaches. He stressed the urgency of data-based planning, especially for the challenges of urban water management in Africa.

This year's BLUE PLANET Berlin Water Dialogues highlighted the critical importance of urban water resilience across various dimensions. The program showcased numerous examples emphasizing the necessity of adopting holistic and systemic approaches to address the complex challenges faced by urban areas worldwide. Regardless of location, the success of international and interdisciplinary collaboration hinges on fostering agility, innovation, and the development of appropriate financing models. This includes creating incentives for the private sector and establishing sustainable funding programs. Effective implementation must prioritize addressing specific challenges and needs at both the local and regional levels. This insight emerged as a key takeaway from the discussions held during the conference.

All sessions of the event are available as video-on-demand on the BLUE PLANET website.

The digital event was conducted in English and made accessible to participants free of charge. For more information about the BLUE PLANET Berlin Water Dialogues, please visit www.blueplanetberlin.de and LinkedIn.

Anhang BLUE Planet_3rd presse release <http://idw-online.de/de/attachment104276>