Water4All
Water security for the planet

European Partnership

Valorisation pathways: key lessons and good practices.

Building upon the experience of the Water JPI

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List of acronyms

ACRONYM	FULL TITLE
EC	European Commission
EIT KIC	EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities
ERA	European Research Area
EU	European Union
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Replicable
FP	Framework Programme
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
JTC	Joint Transnational Call
PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean area
R&I	Research and Innovation
SRIA	Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda
SRL	Social Readiness Level
TAP	Thematic Annual Programming
TRL	Technology Readiness Level
Water4All	European Partnership on Water Security for the Planet
Water JPI	Water Joint Programming Initiative
WoLL	Water-oriented Living Lab

Executive summary

Water is a high priority within the European Research and Innovation (R&I) agenda. This is reflected in both the number of water-related calls launched and the substantial funding allocated to R&I activities. Water-related challenges are addressed across all clusters of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme and were among the first thematic areas selected for both the Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and the Horizon Europe Partnerships. Funded projects have developed innovative monitoring methods, governance approaches, technological solutions for water treatment and reuse, and strategies for the restoration of aquatic ecosystems, among many other advances. However, there is growing evidence that the results of R&I projects often fail to reach end users, including policymakers, water managers, industry and potential markets, thereby limiting their societal and economic impact.

On the occasion of the final conference of the Water JPI, participants discussed the main existing barriers and possible strategies to improve the valorisation of the results generated by Water JPI funded projects. **Valorisation here refers to the specific measures implemented to enhance the uptake and impact of project results** by market/ innovation actors and/or decision makers. This report provides a detailed description of the views expressed by conference participants.

The final conference of the Water JPI was held back-to-back to the final conference of the BiodivRestore Era-Net cofund project, on the 23rd and 24th October 2025 in Málaga (Spain). It brought together more than 60 participants amongst Water JPI members, project coordinators, and representatives of the European Commission (EC). The Water JPI was not only the first programme to achieve the full strategic coordination of EU water research; it also set the basis for the current Water4All Partnership. Its key lessons in project management, alignment and international cooperation have been fundamental for the inception and implementation of Water4All. Today, most of Water JPI funded projects have been successfully completed and the impact assessment of such projects will be undertaken as part of the activities of Water4All's Pillar A between June 2026 and the end of the programme. Amongst other indicators, the capacity of Water JPI results to achieve the market and/ or sustain policy decisions will be evaluated.

A number of recurrent messages were highlighted during the conference. Indeed, the overall valorisation of project results seems to be particularly hindered by the limited participation of stakeholders in the design and implementation of the projects, which reduces its overall usefulness. Restrained budgets after the end of projects also seem to be a key factor as well as the strong orientation of funded projects towards low Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). Another factor preventing for an enhanced use of water R&I results is the time mismatch between the R&I and decision-making communities. This problem has been widely studied and documented in science-policy interface studies. In light of these barriers, different strategies could be deployed by Water4All and future water R&I programmes including the co-creation of projects with stakeholders, the reduction of the administrative complexity of project management so that researchers can better concentrate on the generation and communication of results, and the support to demonstration activities, amongst others. **Discussions during the conference highlighted the strong support from participants to Living Labs, conceived to enable the testing, demonstration and implementation of innovative solutions in a real environment in collaboration with concerned stakeholders**.

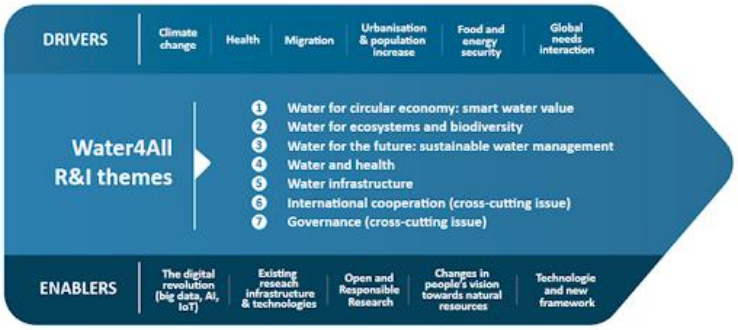
In addition to guiding the future valorisation activities of Water4All, the findings and recommendations presented in this deliverable may also contribute to the further development of the European Commission's valorisation platform. In this regard, the members of Water4All stand ready to engage with the Commission services in further discussions on effective valorisation strategies. By building on the experience gained through both the Water JPI and the Water4All Partnership, such collaboration can help maximise the impact of European investments in research and innovation, ensuring that scientific knowledge is more effectively translated into policies, innovative solutions and tangible benefits for society and the environment.

Background information on Water4All

The Water4All Partnership — Water Security for the Planet has been established under the EU's *Horizon Europe* programme as a major R&I partnership dedicated to water challenges. Launched in June 2022, the partnership spans **seven years of collaborative action**, bringing together a diverse consortium of research organisations, funding bodies, policy actors, technology developers and water authorities from **over 30 countries in Europe and beyond**. The overarching vision of Water4All is to **enable long-term water security for all**, by fostering *systemic transformations* across the entire R&I chain and *matching problem owners with solution providers*. Scientific research, innovation, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector coordination are all central to this mission.

At the core of Water4All's strategy is its **Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA)**, published in 2022. This agenda identifies key research topics that address critical water challenges and sets strategic orientations to guide future research calls and investments. The agenda was developed through extensive consultations with stakeholders, advisory boards, and international partners. The SRIA organises research priorities into thematic areas including:

- Water for circular economy
- Water for ecosystems and biodiversity
- Sustainable water management
- Water and human health
- Water infrastructure
- Water governance
- International cooperation



These themes reflect the interconnected nature of water issues — from ecological protection and infrastructure resilience to socio-economic innovation and governance frameworks.

Water4All operates by launching **Joint Transnational Calls (JTCs)** that pool funding from participating national and regional funders to support multinational research and innovation projects. These calls are directly aligned with priority themes in the SRIA and aim to: (i) Generate new scientific knowledge and tools; (ii) develop innovative technologies and approaches; and, (iii) enhance policy integration and solution uptake For example, recent calls focus on waterborne contaminants and health risks, advanced monitoring tools, and socio-economic innovations in water and health.

Beyond funding research, Water4All also emphasises:

- **Knowledge production, sharing, and communication**, ensuring that insights and data reach decision-makers, practitioners, and wider society.
- **Support for demonstration and market deployment**, helping innovations move from research to real-world application.
- **Capacity building and training**, developing skills among policy-makers, stakeholders, and R&I professionals.
- **International cooperation.**

Aim of this report

R&I generate a wide range of valuable results, including new knowledge, technologies, methods, datasets, software, cooperation networks, and policy insights. However, these results do not automatically translate into societal or economic benefits.

Many R&I projects confuse valorisation with communication tools (websites, policy briefs, newsletters, conference presentations and academic papers). These are necessary but insufficient. Valorisation requires a pathway from project outputs to actual use by utilities, river basin authorities, regulators, firms, communities, farmers, cities or policy-makers. The EC's valorisation framework explicitly widens the scope from commercialisation to policy uptake, community engagement, standardisation and societal value creation (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/new-framework-measure-knowledge-valorisation-2026-03-30_en).

Hence, identifying appropriate methods (or "valorisation pathways") to add value to R&I results and transform them into tangible impacts has become a long-standing objective for the European community. Valorisation enables the R&I community to enhance the visibility of results, justify to the general public the investments made, and ultimately to increase the competitiveness level of Europe.

Valorisation pathways can take many different forms including commercialisation, public policy documents, standardisation, open science, social innovation or even further research. A "one-fits-all" valorisation strategy is often not valid as it depends on the thematic field of R&I projects, the maturity level of the technology or final product to be delivered, potential end-users, regulatory requirements, the market and/or societal demand, and even the political and socioeconomic context in which R&I projects develop. Even though best valorisation pathways may change over the duration of the project, it is highly advisable to reflect on them from the early stages so that specific measures regarding knowledge management, intellectual asset protection, and resource allocation can be envisaged.

In light of its importance, valorisation has acquired a prominent role in European Union (EU) projects and it is expected to have an even more significant role in the next Framework Programme (FP10). Indeed, valorisation constitutes one of the key pillars of the European Research Area (ERA), aimed at promoting the sharing of knowledge and the uptake of results from projects. From the R&I standpoint, consortia are required to precisely describe which valorisation strategies will be selected, justify this decision, outline communication and dissemination activities, identify potential shortcomings, and propose contingency plans. In other words, valorisation is not an add-on activity to reflect on the project; on the contrary, and as reflected in Figure I, it pervades the whole lifecycle of R&I projects, from their early development, to their implementation, communication, dissemination, and exploitation of knowledge, data, tools, and practices.

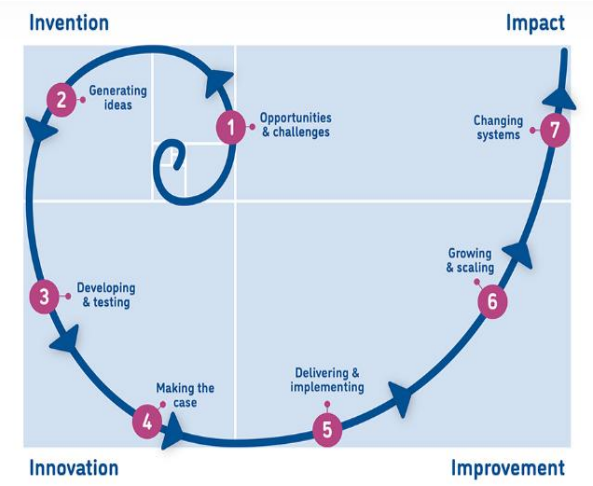


Figure I. *Valorisation pathways along the project cycle* (from NESTA, 2016).

A platform for the sharing of best valorisation practices and key lessons learnt is available at https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform_en

Ultimately, identifying valorisation pathways is not simply about maximising economic returns. It is about ensuring that publicly and privately funded research generates the greatest possible value for society. By matching each R&I result with the most appropriate pathway to use, exploitation, dissemination, or further development, organisations can enhance the impact of research investments, contribute to addressing societal challenges, and support sustainable economic growth and competitiveness. **The aim of this deliverable is to describe the valorisation pathways identified by the Water JPI community during the final conference of the initiative, held on the 23rd and 24th October 2025.**

The Water JPI journey: from early coordination to Water4All

In July 2008, the EC launched its proposal "*Towards joint programming in research: Working together to tackle common challenges more effectively*"[1], seeking to address challenges that no Member State is capable of solving on its own. To this end, both the European Commission and Member States recognised the need for the good thematic and financial coordination and alignment of research programmes and priorities. Following that Communication, ten Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), including one on water, were launched in two different waves.

The Water JPI "Water challenges for a changing world" came into being in 2011, as part of the first wave. Its overarching aim was **to achieve sustainable water systems for a sustainable economy in Europe by facilitating the coordination of national R&I efforts, reducing fragmentation, and fostering transnational collaboration**. The Water JPI succeeded to fund more than 100 projects **but its real success held in its capacity to coordinate national research agendas and national funding**. During its lifetime, the Water JPI became a key player in water R&I, helping to place water at the forefront of the European and international R&I agenda. As for 2023, the Water JPI gathered 18 Member States (underlined in dark blue), six associated partners and four observing partners. Following the set-up of the Water4All Partnership, the total number of partners decreased to 18.

The thematic priorities of the Water JPI were laid out in a strategic document (the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, SRIA) that identified four key themes in its latest version: ecosystems, health and wellbeing, water value and usage, and sustainable water management. As with Water4All, the Water JPI's SRIA was fundamental in the preparation of annual calls for proposals and the structuring of annual work plans.

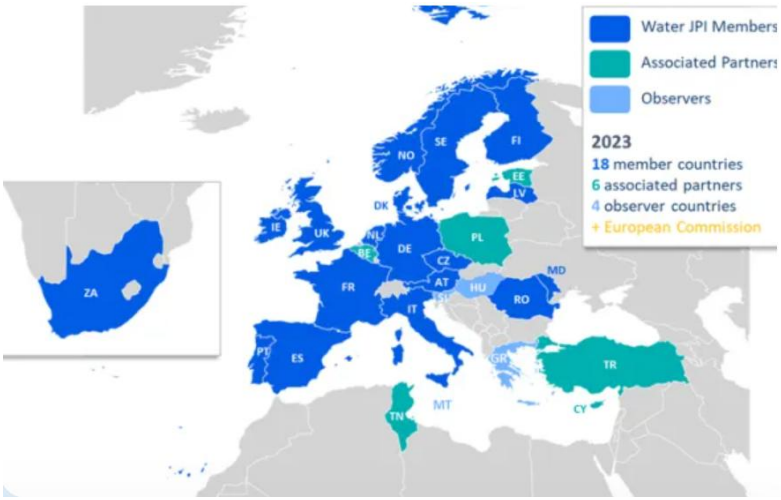


Figure II. Consortium of Water JPI as for 2023.

From the period 2013-2020, seven calls for proposals were launched in the areas of emerging contaminants, technologies for water treatment and reuse, water and agriculture, sustainable water management,

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0468&from=RO

international cooperation, and biodiversity. The topics of these calls were collectively agreed by the members of the Water JPI, and they allowed the funding of more than 100 projects. Other than calls for proposals, Water JPI members were involved in numerous strategic activities looking at influencing the preparation of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe work programmes, the launch of EU-based water-related research infrastructures, the valorisation of project results, the networking of thematic experts and national projects (through knowledge hubs and TAP actions[2], respectively) and the promotion of international cooperation (thus, as shown in Figure II, South Africa became a full partner of the Water JPI following its participation in annual calls).

The activities of the Water JPI have found continuity through the Water4All Partnership. The main difference between those two water programmes is that the latter, in addition to bringing together national research agencies, also includes research performing organisations, associations, thematic networks and local authorities in its consortium. By integrating different types of R&I stakeholders, Water4All aims to foster greater co-creation and ensure the more efficient implementation of proposed solutions. A second important difference between these two programmes is the emphasis of Water4All in demonstration activities, reflected in the inclusion of a work package dedicated to Water-oriented Living Labs (Pillar D) and the tentative launch of a demonstration call in 2028 (for which the theme has not been defined yet).

Although the Water JPI officially closed its activities at the end of 2025, an impact assessment of funded projects will be done as part of the third phase of Water4All, spanning the 2026-2029 period. Led by ISPRA, the impact assessment will look at the contribution of Water JPI projects to enhancing R&I capacity in Europe and addressing current environmental and socioeconomic challenges. Partners will replicate the impact assessment methodology used by Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean area (PRIMA). The results of the impact assessment will not only be instrumental in defining future water-related programmes, but they will also support in identifying best available strategies for the valorisation of R&I results.

To mark the end of the Water JPI, the final conference of the programme was held on the **23rd and 24th October 2025 at the premises of the University of Málaga (Spain)**. The conference gathered around 60 participants, between Water JPI members (also representing the Water4All Partnership), coordinators of funded projects, and representatives of the EC. The conference also counted with the presence of the Vice-Dean of the University of Málaga, the environmental councilor from the city hall, and a representative from the main water utility of Málaga. On the occasion, the main achievements of the Water JPI were presented with a focus on the calls for proposals, the development and update of the SRIA, alignment tools (TAP and knowledge hub), and international cooperation. The methodology for the impact assessment of funded projects to be undertaken within Water4All's third phase work plan was then presented. This was followed by a roundtable with all Water JPI coordinators, with whom key lessons from the Water JPI and main recommendations to future programmes were discussed. A final debate with participants was open at the end of the first day. The second day of the conference was fully devoted to the presentation of Water4All and a discussion with the audience on international cooperation, science-policy interface, and demonstration activities. **Annex A** presents the programme of the conference. The conference was fully recorded and it is available at the following YouTube links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIlUbCwV2uc
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toR2QUVs5TY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXZ0s5N-hnQ

[2] TAP action = Thematic Annual Programming action. It is a network of national projects focused on specific RDI needs. This cluster allows the coordination and alignment between individual projects, leading to a greater impact at the European level whilst addressing research gaps and avoiding duplication.

A dedicated article to the final Water JPI conference is also available at the Water4All's newsletter: https://www.water4all-partnership.eu/news/water4all-final-water-jpi-conference-malaga-spain

This deliverable is divided into two main parts. The next section describes main barriers to the valorisation of R&I results, as fully expressed by conference participants. The following section (Recommendations for more efficient valorisation of results) builds on both the proposals made by participants and the views of the authors of this report, who have more than 20 years of research experience and have participated in numerous EU-funded projects.

Key barriers to the valorisation of R&I results

Discussions during the final conference highlighted a central challenge for European water-related R&I: **producing excellent science is no longer sufficient to generate societal impact**. There is now sufficient evidence to assert that, despite more than 150 water-related projects funded under the Framework Programmes Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, and more than 100 funded by the Water JPI, producing excellent science is no longer sufficient to generate sound and relevant results for policy and societal impact. Indeed, numerous projects have delivered high-quality scientific results but a small proportion of projects have successfully influenced public policy, regulatory frameworks or operational water management. Several barriers to valorisation were pointed out by participants, which are briefly outlined below:

Barrier I: **Communication strategies**. Scientific publications remain the principal outputs of R&I projects and are the main channel through which researchers disseminate their findings. However, ministries, public agencies, policymakers, and water managers rarely rely on academic journals to support their decision-making processes. Instead, they require concise, accessible, and actionable information, such as policy briefs, technical guidance documents, evidence-based practical recommendations, and decision-support tools tailored to their specific needs. As a result, valuable research findings often fail to reach the stakeholders who could implement them, limiting their societal impact. Bridging this communication gap requires adopting dissemination strategies that go beyond traditional scientific publishing and translating research outcomes into formats that are relevant, understandable, and directly applicable to policy and practice.

Barrier II: **Fragmentation across funding schemes and governance levels**. Even when projects produce excellent policy briefs, researchers' contributions fail to enter official government processes due to limited knowledge of the R&I governance structure and the specific role of decision-making actors. Without this comprehensive understanding and institutional connections, valuable scientific knowledge often remains within the academic community.

In addition, fragmentation across funding schemes makes it difficult to maintain innovation pathways beyond the research phase. This is due to different national administrative procedures, asynchronous release of national funding, heterogeneous reporting requirements, difficulties in combining European, national and regional funding instruments, and poor coordination between research funding programmes and innovation funding schemes.

Barrier III: Time Mismatch. One of the structural barriers repeatedly highlighted concerns the mismatch between the duration of research projects and the timescales required for policy implementation. Most European research projects are funded for a period of approximately three years, whereas policy development, regulatory revisions and standardisation processes frequently extend over five to 10 years. Consequently, many project coordinators find themselves continuing to support policy discussions, technical working groups or standardisation activities well beyond the formal lifetime of their projects, often without dedicated resources. This temporal misalignment significantly limits the long-term impact of research investments. By the time scientific results are sufficiently mature to inform regulatory processes, project funding has often ended and research consortia have dispersed. Conference participants emphasised the importance of establishing mechanisms capable of maintaining scientific expertise and institutional memory

beyond project completion. Such continuity would considerably improve the ability of research outcomes to contribute effectively to policy development and implementation.

Barrier IV: Technology and Policy Readiness. Another important challenge identified during the discussions relates to the different levels of maturity expected by researchers and policy-makers. While Water JPI research projects successfully generate innovative concepts and promising methodologies, they often conclude at relatively low Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) – between 3 and 4, with only a limited number progressing to pilot-scale demonstrations. In contrast, public authorities and water managers generally require robust methodologies, demonstrations, certified monitoring approaches and pilot-scale applications that have already been validated under operational conditions before they can be incorporated into regulations or management practices. This creates the well-known "valley of death" between research and implementation.

Barrier V: Limited use of socially responsible licensing and lack of social-impact metrics. For water-related innovations with high public-good value, licensing strategies should consider affordability, accessibility, environmental benefit and public-interest use. Yet a 2025 EC survey found that socially responsible licensing is not widely embedded in most universities' and Research Technology Organisations (RTOs) intellectual asset strategies, despite growing awareness. Reported obstacles include lack of organisational capacity, diverging expectations between universities and commercial partners, limited industry acceptance and difficulty reconciling societal impact with financial sustainability (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/thematic-focus/knowledge-valorisation-societal-impact-results-2025-survey-socially-responsible-licensing_en).

Projects often report outputs rather than outcomes: number of publications, events, downloads, participants or policy briefs. These indicators say little about whether a basin authority changed a measure, a utility adopted a tool, a municipality changed procurement criteria, a farmer modified water use, a start-up scaled a solution, or a vulnerable group benefited.

Barrier VI: Limited stakeholder engagement and co-creation. A recurrent message from the audience was that stakeholder engagement still occurs too late in many R&I projects and often focuses on dissemination rather than genuine co-creation. Although stakeholders frequently participate as advisory board members or attend dissemination events, relatively few projects fully integrate them into the design, implementation and validation of R&I activities. Several participants also highlighted insufficient engagement or regional authorities (as key implementers of decisions), practitioners, industry, citizens and civil society organisations.

Barrier VII: Lack of continuity after project completion. Several speakers emphasised that project funding usually ends before solutions are sufficiently mature to generate tangible societal or economic impacts. In this context, participants stressed the need to create mechanisms allowing successful projects to continue their development through complementary funding instruments.

Barrier VIII: Administrative complexity. Project coordinators identified administrative procedures as a significant burden. This complexity is reflected in the existence of inconsistent reporting obligations, the delayed transfer of national funding, and the differences in contractual procedures across countries. As a result of such administrative barriers, an extensive number of resources that could otherwise be devoted to R&I activities are instead used.

Recommendations to improve valorisation of water R&I

Considering the barriers described in the previous section, the following recommendations to improve valorisation are made (such recommendations are grouped according to the phase of the R&I project they refer to):

Phase I. Project design (before the project starts).

- ***Identification of Key Exploitable Results***: datasets, models, software, protocols, demonstrators, governance frameworks, decision-support tools, policy recommendations, training modules or business models. The EC Code of Practice on intellectual assets stresses the need for clear decision-making procedures, value-sharing arrangements, awareness of funding instruments, training and early clarification of ownership (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/eu-valorisation-policy/knowledge-valorisation-platform/guiding-principles-knowledge-valorisation-and-implementing-codes-practice/code-practice-management-intellectual-assets-knowledge-valorisation_en).

  Develop stronger impact indicators (not only related to TRLs, but also to Social Readiness Level - SRLs). These should include policy uptake, regulatory contribution, adoption by utilities or authorities, training of practitioners, data reuse, standards contributions, replication cases, investment mobilised, avoided costs, environmental improvements and benefits for vulnerable groups.

- ***Make social-impact licensing part of the valorisation strategy*** when public-good outcomes are central**.** This is especially relevant for water-quality tools, low-cost monitoring, reuse technologies, decision-support systems and innovations intended for public authorities or lower-capacity users. One of the strongest messages emerging from the conference was that stakeholder engagement should begin well before research activities start. Rather than involving stakeholders primarily during dissemination activities or towards the end of projects, Water4All and future initiatives should adopt genuine co-creation approaches from the project design phase onwards. Particular attention should be devoted to stakeholder groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in EU water R&I such as regional authorities, municipalities, citizens, non-governmental organisations, consumer organisations, large industrial actors, sectoral ministries and partners from developing countries.

- ***Establishing institutional implementation pathways.*** Beyond stakeholder participation, projects should seek to develop formal cooperation agreements with public authorities, utilities and other implementing organisations whenever appropriate. A further opportunity to enhance the valorisation of R&I outcomes is to strengthen collaboration with governmental advisory boards (e.g., scientific advisory agencies in Ministries and other policy-making institutions). In the water sector, social impact is often mediated through public decision-making: research outcomes become valuable when they inform regulations and policies. However, many projects remain weakly connected to these institutional arenas. The creations of structured science-policy interfaces, involvement of public agencies as problem owners, mapping policy windows, organising joint policy labs, and tracking the uptake of research results in official strategies, plans and regulatory processes could help to fill this gap, shifting valorisation from simple dissemination towards evidence-informed governance and measurable political and societal impact.

Phase II. Project implementation.

- ***Living labs as catalysts for innovation*****.** Amongst the approaches discussed during the conference, Living Labs emerged as one of the most promising mechanisms for strengthening the societal relevance of EU water research. Unlike conventional research environments, Living Labs provide spaces where researchers, practitioners, public authorities, businesses and citizens jointly develop, test and refine innovative solutions under real operational conditions. Participants stressed that Living Labs offer multiple advantages. They improve the usability and applicability of decision support tools, increase stakeholder ownership of project results, facilitate citizen participation, and generate continuous feedback that can be incorporated into project activities as they evolve. Moreover, they contribute to raising SRLs, ensuring that innovations are not only technically sound but also socially accepted and institutionally feasible. Given these benefits, participants recommended that Living Labs become a standard feature of future Water4All projects whenever appropriate.

- ***Reducing administrative burden and improving programme coordination.*** Participants consistently highlighted the need to simplify administrative procedures and improve coordination among funding organisations involved in transnational research programmes. To maximise the efficiency and impact of future projects, participants recommended greater harmonisation of administrative procedures across funding agencies. Simplifying reporting requirements, aligning project management procedures, synchronising funding timelines and promoting greater consistency in contractual arrangements would reduce the administrative burden placed on project coordinators and beneficiaries. Improved coordination among national and European funding organisations would also facilitate project implementation, strengthen collaboration within international consortia and accelerate the translation of research results into practical applications.

Phase III. Scaling-up and valorisation.

- ***Strengthening communication and the science-policy interface***. Conference participants agreed that effective valorisation requires moving beyond traditional scientific dissemination. Research outputs should increasingly be translated into formats that respond to the needs of policymakers, practitioners, and water managers including policy briefs, technical documents, and decision-support tools. However, communication alone is insufficient to ensure policy uptake. Successful valorisation depends on the establishment of long-term institutional relationships between research organisations and public authorities. In this regard, participants recommended strengthening collaboration with ministries, regional implementation authorities and EU institutions throughout the project lifecycle.

- ***Enabling demonstration, operational deployment and/or policy implementation***. Participants recommended water R&I programmes to devote greater attention to increasing TRLs and SRLs. This will require stronger support for pilot demonstrations, validation under real operational conditions, and implementation activities that enable innovative solutions to progress from experimental research towards practical application.
  Water-oriented Living Labs (WoLLs) can play a strategic role in increasing both the TRLs and the SRLs of water R&I projects. By operating as real-life, territorially anchored open-innovation ecosystems, they allow solutions to be co-created, tested, validated and implemented with the direct involvement of public authorities, utilities, companies, researchers, civil society and end-users. Living Labs strengthen SRL by testing whether innovations are socially acceptable, institutionally feasible, affordable, equitable and aligned with the needs of problem owners and affected communities.

- ***Ensuring knowledge continuity beyond project completion*****.** Beyond extending financial support, participants emphasised the importance of preserving and transferring the knowledge generated during research projects. Valuable datasets, methodological know-how, operational experience and lessons learnt frequently remain dispersed among project partners after project completion, making them difficult for future initiatives to reuse. Future programmes should therefore strengthen data stewardship, promote FAIR data principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Replicable), facilitate access to project outputs and establish mechanisms that enable subsequent projects to build upon previous results rather than starting from scratch. Such continuity would considerably enhance the cumulative impact of European research investments.

- ***Funding continuity pathways****.* A further barrier to valorisation is the weak connection between project-based R&I funding and follow-on instruments dedicated to networking, dissemination, training and capacity building. Water research projects often generate valuable outcomes, but these outcomes require time, trust, user training, cross-country adaptation and community consolidation before they can generate policy, market or societal impact. Programmes such as COST Actions can help close this gap. Since COST funds networking rather than research, it can provide a complementary

pathway for maintaining post-project communities, organising training schools, supporting short-term scientific missions, engaging stakeholders, preparing future proposals and transforming project-level outputs into wider communities of practice. Alternatively, other programmes, such as EIT KICs (e.g. Water KIC), also offer funding instruments to facilitate up-scaling of technological solutions and the continuity of R&I projects and consortiums. The identification of these funding continuity pathways in early stages of the R&I project design would help to maximise valorisation of outcomes.

- ***Supporting valorisation beyond project completion***. This recommendation was one of the most recurring messages from participants, who proposed the European Innovation Council and the regional and structural funds as possible instruments to support valorisation after the project ends.

- ***Enabling the clustering of projects***. With the objective of enhancing the cumulative impact of projects, participants advocated clustering thematically related projects.

- ***Promoting standardisation activities*****.** Participants noted that successful market uptake frequently depends on the availability of recognised technical standards. Future projects should therefore engage with European and national standardisation bodies whenever appropriate and consider standardisation activities as part of their valorisation strategies. Although these processes often extend well beyond project completion, they provide an effective pathway for translating research results into operational practice.

Conclusion

The discussions held during the final Water JPI conference demonstrated that Europe already possesses a strong scientific base to address current and future water challenges. Over the past decade, the Water JPI has supported the development of innovative technologies, governance approaches, monitoring methods and management tools that have significantly advanced knowledge in the water sector. However, the conference also confirmed that generating excellent science is only one step in the innovation process**. Achieving societal, environmental and economic impact requires dedicated efforts to ensure that research results are translated into policies, operational practices and innovative products and services.**

The barriers identified by participants show that effective valorisation depends on much more than dissemination activities carried out at the end of a project. It requires stakeholder engagement from the earliest stages of project design, continuous interaction between researchers and end users, stronger science-policy interfaces, increased support for demonstration and implementation activities, and mechanisms that preserve knowledge and sustain innovation beyond project completion. Equally important are simplified administrative procedures and better coordination among funding organisations, allowing researchers to devote more time and resources to innovation rather than project management.

Many of these recommendations are already reflected in the evolution from the Water JPI to the Water4All Partnership, which places greater emphasis on co-creation, stakeholder participation and long-term collaboration. Their systematic implementation would further strengthen the capacity of European research programmes to generate tangible benefits for citizens, water managers, policymakers and the environment. **Valorisation should therefore not be regarded as the final stage of a research project, but as a continuous process that accompanies the entire research and innovation cycle, from project conception to the long-term uptake of results.**

Ultimately, the experience accumulated by the Water JPI demonstrates that the value of European research cannot be measured solely by the scientific knowledge it generates, but also by its capacity to improve decision-making, support innovation and contribute to addressing major societal challenges. Building on these

lessons, Water4All is well positioned to consolidate a European innovation ecosystem in which research excellence and societal impact advance hand in hand.

Annex A. Programme of the conference

OCTOBER 23

9.30 – 10.00
Opening and welcome
Dean of the University and City Hall of Malaga

10.00 – 10.15
Video presentation:
A short story of the long history of the Water JPI

10.15 – 11.30
Key success stories of the Water JPI
Esther Diez /SRIA, Mary Kelly Quinn /TAP, Kristina Laurell /KH, Véronique Briquet-Laugier /IC strategy and Dominique Darmendrail /Joint Calls

11.30 – 11.45
Coffee Break

11.45 – 13.15
Key success stories of the Water JPI
Follow-up

13.15– 14.30
Lunch Break

14.30 – 15.15
Water JPI's impactassessment
Francesco Fatone or Maria Chiara Sole

15.15 – 16.15
Roundtable with previouscoordinators: Key lessons from the Water JPI and recommendations for Water4All
Water JPI coordinator and previous Water JPI coordinators (Dominique Darmendrail, Enrique Playán, Véronique Briquet-Laugier)

16.15 – 16.45
Mentimeter: Discussion with the audience
Miguel Angel Gilarranz

16.45 – 17.00
Next steps: Short meeting reserved to Water JPI members
Esther Díez

17.00 – 19.30
Field trip

20.30 – 22.30
Social Dinner

OCTOBER 24

9.30 – 10.00
Looking ahead: The Water4All Programme
Benjamin Lopez, Water4All's CEO

10.00 – 11:00
Working sessions on demonstration activities, international cooperation and bridging the science- policy interface
Several groups

11:00 - 11:15
Coffee Break

11.15 – 12.30
Working sessions on demonstration activities, international cooperation and bridging the science- policy interface (follow-up)
Several groups

12.30 – 13.00
Feedback from the working sessions

13.00 – 13.15
Final words & official closingof the Water JPI
Giuseppina Monacelli, Miguel Angel Gilarranz

13.15 – 14.00
Lunch

14.00 - 15.30
Student Prize

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