Water4All
Water security for the planet

European Partnership

REPORT ON THE DESIGN AND BEST PRACTICES OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

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ABSTRACT

The Water4All Partnership -Water Security for the Planet- is a funding programme for scientific research in freshwater. It aims to tackle water challenges to face climate change, help to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and boost the European Union's competitiveness and growth. It is co-funded by the European Union within the frame of the Horizon Europe programme.

Water4All is structured around five operational Pillars covering the whole research and innovation chain and is supporting a wide portfolio of multi-national and cross-sectoral activities. Pillar C is dedicated to Science - Policy - End-users Interface and consists of four tasks, of which Task C.3 is dedicated to "Fostering capacity development of all actors". Task C.3 aims to increase capacity building of the water research and innovation community by the implementation of PhD schemes, mobility programmes and vocational training. Task C.3 consists of four subtasks:

- C3.1. Dedicated PhD Schemes Pilot Alignment and Implementation.
- C3.2. Vocational Training and Skills Development Programmes
- C3.3. Mobility Schemes
- C3.4. Capacity Building on Systemic Thinking and System Analysis

This report summarizes the annual activities for the four sub-tasks and provides some recommendations and best practices for capacity building.

REPORT ON THE DESIGN AND BEST PRACTICES OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Introduction

The Water4All Partnership -Water Security for the Planet[1]- is a funding programme for scientific research in freshwater. It aims to tackle water challenges to face climate change, help to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and boost the EU's competitiveness and growth. It is co-funded by the European Union within the frame of the Horizon Europe programme. Launched in June 2022, Water4All brings together a wide and cohesive group of 90 partners from 33 countries in the European Union and beyond and is implementing a wide portfolio of multi-national and cross-sectoral activities, from physical and biological sciences to human and social science.

> *"We need new ways of thinking, we must dare to tread new paths, and we must insist on the ambition to strive for excellence to attract the best institutions and brightest water professionals." Bjørn Kaare Jensen, Water4All Chair*

Water4All consists of five action Pillars, from Pillar A to E[2], ranging from the funding of research and innovation projects to the strategic alignment of participating members, the support to science-policy interface, demonstration and testing of innovative solutions, networking, capacity building and international cooperation. Pillar C is dedicated to Science - Policy - End-users Interface and is structed around four Tasks. The main goal of Pillar C is to support knowledge transfer and the uptake of research outcomes and innovative approaches in the water sector. To achieve this ambitious goal, the activities aim at an acceleration of the dialogue between science and policy communities, in order to ensure that research and innovation actions are responding to policy needs, but also to reinforce the connections with the economic sectors for a more effective implementation of innovative solutions at local and regional scales. In this context, specific activities are dedicated to "Fostering capacity development of all actors" in Task C3. This task aims to increase capacity building of the water research and innovation community by the implementation of PhD schemes, mobility programmes and vocational training. Task C3 consists of four subtasks:

- C3.1. Dedicated PhD Schemes Pilot Alignment and Implementation
- C3.2. Vocational Training and Skills Development Programmes
- C3.3. Mobility Schemes
- C3.4. Capacity Building on Systemic Thinking and System Analysis

Water4All Task C3 deals with four capacity building programmes:

- Three training programmes targeting the whole water community ranging from researchers to decision makers, operators, enterprises, and end-users, and
- One mobility scheme to connect problem owners and solution providers.

[1] Water4All Partnership - Water Security for the Planet - https://www.water4all-partnership.eu/
[2] Water4All Partnership five action pillars - https://www.water4all-partnership.eu/five-operational-pillars

The training programmes include a PhD Scheme, vocational training and skill development programmes to increase know-how capacity and foster systemic transformations. The design of these programmes is presented in the next paragraph “Capacity building programmes in Water4All” and is also further discussed in details in other related deliverables: D3.4 – Research Performing Organisations are informed about the PhD scheme, D3.6 – List of PhD students recruited, D3.10 – Improvement plan for vocational education and training (VET) development programmes, D3.12 – Adapt and build on the Aqua Publica Europea Water Erasmus Platform for the use in Water4All (infrastructure development) and D3.13 – Training course material on systemic thinking.

For this report, information on the design and implementation of the four capacity programmes was collected. Subsequently a number of recommended practices was extracted from this information. This report leans mainly on the experience with PhD programmes. Nevertheless, the best practices that are included in this document are also relevant for the other three programmes. The best practices are organised in three categories:

1. Recruitment, Selection and/or Matching;
2. Safeguarding the societal relevance;
3. Communication and/or Dissemination.

In addition, it includes a chapter on “Capacity building programmes in Water4All” that shows the complementarity between the four programmes.

Capacity building programmes in Water4All

The four capacity building programmes in Water4All are complementary to each other. They are built on existing programmes included in the Water4All partners strategy. Furthermore, each programme develops a capacity that is essential for addressing the Water4All challenges.

1. Systemic thinking and system analysis

The development of capacity for systemic thinking among policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs and the wider society is critical for the current water challenges, since the challenges are complex and link to a multitude of societal actors and processes.

In the framework of the Water4All partnership we can foster systemic transformations via this capacity building program. In this programme, the development of sustainability competences is key. These are not technical, but include systems thinking, long-term engagement, and navigating complex problems. In order to provide stakeholders enough capacity to help them transform the current water systems, online training material on systemic thinking adapted to different audiences has been delivered (Milestone 44).

The delivered training material follows a double modular approach. First, it deals with the five different elements of governing sustainability transitions after Nevens, De Weerdt, Gorissen and Berloznik (2013). These include:

1. System analysis,
2. Envisioning,
3. Co-creation,
4. Experimentation, and
5. Learning.

Second, it can be consulted with different levels of details of information: (i) at a first level, the material simply informs about the five elements above, (ii) thereafter it inspires with examples of their adoption, and (iii) finally it gives guidance for those who want to implement it themselves in both a simple and in a fully-fledged way. This allows the diverse audience (in terms of interest, prior knowledge, and aim) to use the learning material according to their needs. Multiple combinations (of elements and level of detail) can therefore lead to various learning trajectories.

Each element covers thus at least the three levels of information. It offers an introduction that emphasizes why the topic has been shown to be useful for water-related challenges. For example, system analyses as a way to grasp the less obvious, yet determining relations between different roles water plays in our society (https://coda.io/@vito/nexuslearn/1-system-analysis-182). It then provides an example and testimonial of a project or of an organization that adopted the approach or skill. For example, the non-profit Drinkable Rivers that mobilizes local stakeholders for sustainable water management, by introducing the vision that it might be possible one day to drink water from rivers (https://coda.io/@vito/nexuslearn/2-future-envisioning-183). Finally, it provides a practical guide, tutorial, and template or tool to implement the element or seek support for the approach. For example, hints-and-tricks are provided of how one can learn in an active way during projects and experiments by adopting reflexive monitoring methods.

The initial steps to implement the training material based on the five outlined elements within the Water4All partnership have already been taken. These include the update of the Strategic Research & Innovation Agenda (Pillar A, Task A1.3), the Facilitation of the Knowledge Hubs & Project Calls (Pillar C, Task C1.1) and Support for

the Water-Oriented Living Lab (WOLL) local stakeholder workshops (Pillar D, Task D2). These tailored experiences are gradually added to the training material as best-practices, and so made available to the Water4All partners as exemplary starting points for using the material during future occasions.

More detail on the design of the training material can be found in the deliverable D3.13 – Training course material on systemic thinking, and the training course material is published via:
https://coda.io/@vito/nexuslearn/system-innovation-for-water-security-178

2. PhD Scheme

The PhD scheme within the Water4All Partnership aimed to 1) deliver essential knowledge for solving those challenges, and 2) shape graduates with the expertise and skills to apply that knowledge.

The PhD scheme applies a strategic approach to collaboration in research and innovation and is complementary to the activities organised by Water4All Funding agencies through Joint Transnational calls. The PhD scheme has more emphasis on the triple helix, multidisciplinary and cross-sectorial collaboration enabling disruptive innovations and generating breakthrough solutions. The PhD students will participate in networking and clustering meetings and will receive additional courses designed by the Water4All partners who selected the courses, in particular related to transdisciplinary and intersectoral dimensions to be provided by a certified business school. These additional activities will deliver on the third purpose of this scheme, the training of excellent students able to tackle the water challenges in the near future.

More detail on the design of the PhD Scheme can be found in two reports: deliverable D3.4 – Research Performing Organisations are informed about the PhD scheme and deliverable D3.6 – List of PhD students recruited.

3. Mobility Scheme

The Mobility scheme ensures that a challenge in the water sector is matched with the best possible solution. It relies on a matchmaking platform where problem-owners will have the opportunity to post issues they are facing to which solutions-developers will be able to provide possible solutions, hereby facilitating direct exchanges between organisations.

The establishment of the Mobility Scheme involves two streams of work developed in parallel. The first one deals with the development of a database of users by ensuring that relevant stakeholders from the Water4All Partnership and beyond are informed about the potential benefits of the scheme and have the opportunity to participate in the mechanism, while the second one consists of fostering the matchmaking process through an online matchmaking platform to ensure that it remains relevant and usable for its audience and that information flows seamlessly to all potential users.

The matchmaking platform will be visible to everyone but in a first stage, participation in the exchanges of the matchmaking platform will be restricted to Water4All partners and their member organisations. Then, in a second stage, participation will be broadened to third parties from specific stakeholder categories and developing countries.

More detail on the design of the matchmaking platform can be found in the deliverable D3.12 – Adapt and build on the Aqua Publica Europea Water Erasmus Platform for the use in Water4All.

4. Vocational training

Vocational training, adapted to the latest developments in the water sector, is necessary to ensure that companies, governmental agencies and other societal stakeholders have the right skills to build, install or implement the developed solutions to meet the Water4All challenges. Vocational training and skills development programmes aim to enhance the expertise of water practitioners and policy makers who need a better understanding of the vocational education and training (VET) needs and the needs of the industry for informed decision-making. This subtask began with mapping the current vocational training and skill development programs in the water sector. Building on these existing programs and in particular the PoVE (Platform of Vocational Excellence) Water project[3] , Water4All partners promoted alignment, integration, and mutual learning for further development of knowledge, skills and professional attitude among VET students and professionals with support of Water4All members and through an additional workshop with EUREAU (European Federation of National Associations of Water Services). After evaluating the existing programs, an improvement plan has been developed with support of a combination of formal Water4All partners (CREA, Formas) and PoVE Water project partners (e.g., EfVET, European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training; Riga Technical University, Latvia; MCAST, Malta), outlining a step-by-step process to help students and professionals become excellent craftsmen.

The improvement plan has many facets, aiming to expand and strengthen the network of vocational education and training (VET) providers for water-related education. Key elements include:

1. **Expansion and strengthening of the VET network**. Establishing Regional Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) focused on water VET education but also the **international cooperation**: Fostering collaboration between these regional ecosystems to share best practices and resources. What is the procedure for integrating new partners into the PoVE Water network, which is not region-specific? Detail on the steps and benefits for new partners and the expectations for their participation.
2. **Improvement of the curriculum**. Developing modern l**earning tools and i**ntegrating platforms like Moodle, virtual reality (VR) technologies, and microcredentials into the curriculum. **Key activities** include the establishment procedures and quality frameworks, developing infrastructure for micro credentials, and designing draft versions. A pilot test at water expertise centers will provide crucial feedback for further development.
3. **Mobility opportunities**. On the one hand the creation of opportunities for students, teachers, and professionals to engage in international educational experiences. But also, an overview of **programs and events**, e.g. organizing summer schools, EU Water weeks, and internship opportunities to enhance learning and professional development.

More detail on the improvement plan for vocational training can be found in deliverable D3.10 – Improvement plan for VET development programmes.

[3] https://www.povewater.eu/

5. Interconnection of the four capacity building programmes

An overview of the four Water4All capacity building programmes and how they contribute to identification, development and implementation of solutions for Water4All challenges, is summarised in Figure 1.

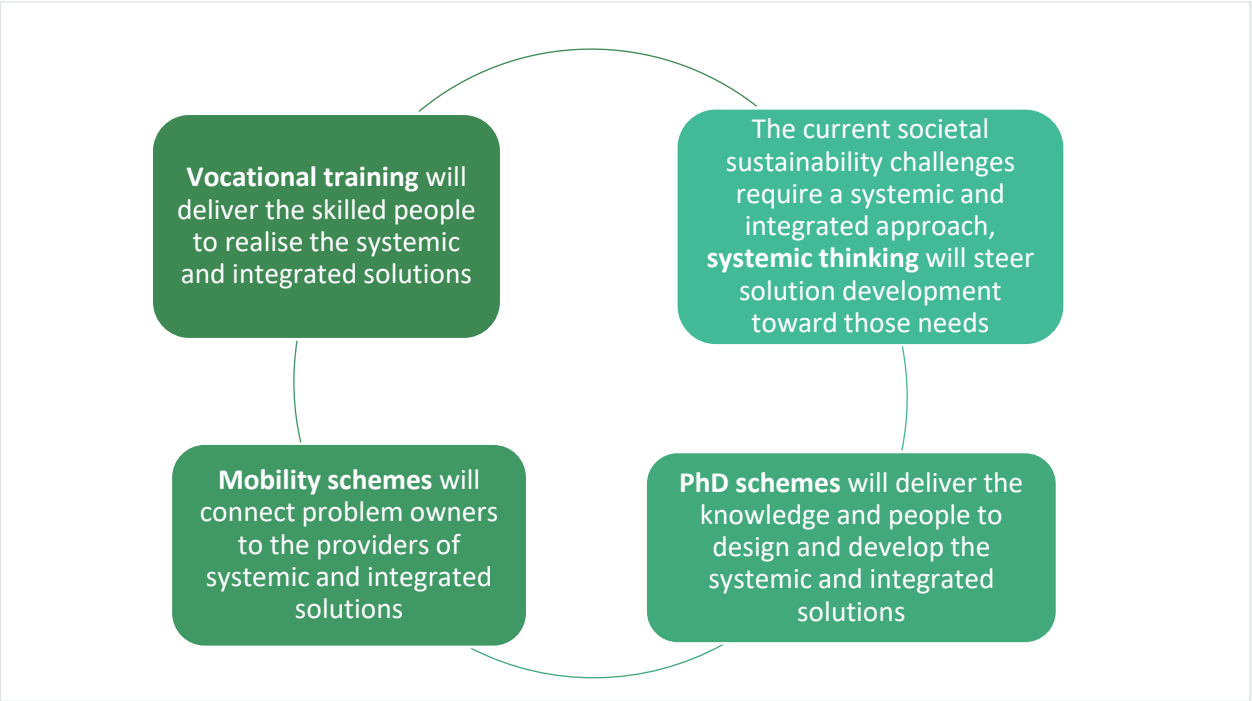

Figure 1. Simplified representation of how the four Water4All Capacity building programmes contribute to the identification, development and implementation of solutions for the Water4All challenges.

An overview of the parties involved in the capacity building programmes of Water4All is summarised hereafter in Table 1. It highlights the different activities within Task C3 of Water4All, stakeholder involvement and provides references to existing programmes.

Table 1. Overview of the parties involved in the four capacity building programmes of Water4All

C3 Subtask	Trainees	Training providers	Stakeholder involvement	References from existing programmes
C3.1. **PhD schemes**	Recruited MSc graduates pursuing a PhD degree related to a Water4All SRIA theme.	Universities & Research Performing Organisation (RPOs) which are partners of Water4All or partners of the RPOs.	Non-academic organisations (e.g. companies & water authorities) are an integral part of the PhD projects.	https://phdpositionswetsus.eu/ www.brgm.fr/en/jobs-careers/doctorates-post-doctorates
C3.2 **Vocational training**	Students (EU Qualification Framework or EQF 3, 4 and 5) enrolling in a vocational training programme. Development of pan-European VET curricula for upskilling and reskilling of water professionals. Addressing the triple challenge of ageing workforce, adaptation to climate change and implementing novel technologies.	Vocational education and training schools offer a dedicated water sector VET programme developed by European Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and Water4All partners. Building forward on prior building blocks of CoVE, further widening and deepening a pan-European collaboration.	CoVE are public-private partnerships in which VET schools closely collaborate with companies (water utilities and water intensive industries).	https://www.povewater.eu/ https://www.wearekatapult.eu/ https://www.povewater.eu/barcove
C3.3 **Mobility schemes**	Problem-owners (e.g., water utilities) that look for possible solutions Solution developers (e.g., researchers, startups, SMEs and other water utilities) that want to offer solutions to real-world challenges The platform will be visible to everyone but only connected users will be able to participate in the exchanges.	Aqua Publica Europea (APE) and Water4All partners will organise the set-up of the matchmaking tool. European water cluster organisations can support the roll out of this tool.	The societal stakeholders participate as problem owners or solution providers.	*The online platform will go live during Water4All phase II. It is inspired by Aqua Publica Europea's existing Water Erasmus programme that facilitates peer-to-peer learning and best practice exchange among public water utilities.*
C3.4 **Systemic Thinking**	Researchers, entrepreneurs and civil servants solving system-rooted challenges	VITO and Water4All partners made open-access training material available to allow professionals and organizations in the water sector to train themselves with Systemic Thinking: https://coda.io/@vito/nexuslearn/system-innovation-for-water-security-178	The societal stakeholders professionals and organizations participate as testimonials, trainees and participants of the material's execution.	Training material is currently illustrated with experiences from the Flanders's Water Transition Arena's experience, https://h2050.be/en/mental-models-towards-systemic-view-water but will gradually be complemented with Water4All experiences, such as for the transnational project calls: https://coda.io/@vito/nexuslearn/water4all-transnational-projects-229

Best practices for capacity building programmes

The best practices for capacity building are grouped in three categories which coincide with the critical phases of the capacity development process:

1. Recruitment, selection and/or matching,
2. Safeguarding the societal relevance, and
3. Communication and/or dissemination.

1. Best practices in recruitment, selection and/or matching

The selection, recruitment of the right profiles is essential for providing the right information in capacity building programmes. The Table 2 below presents the best practices in recruitment, selection and/or matching, depending on the nature and goals of each capacity building programme developed in Water4All subtasks C3.1 to C3.4.

For each capacity building programme, the bottom-up nature of the approach is indicated.

In addition, each capacity building programme aims to be open and transparent, therefore each programme makes use of informative, user-friendly website for applicants /users. In this way the capacity building programme also provides a benefit beyond the existing partnership members and facilitates a wider engagement of the stakeholder's community.

Table 2: Application of Best Practices in recruitment, selection and/or matching for each Water4All capacity building programme

Best practice	PhD scheme	Vocational training	Mobility scheme	Systematic thinking
Bottom up approach	Transparent, impartial, merit-based selection process open to everyone with a relevant MSc degree. This ensures that the best candidate for the PhD position and/or for the additional training is selected.	CoVE are developed bottom up within a regional and national context. PoVE (ERASMUS+) supports the matchmaking and selection of an EU wide network of CoVEs.	The Mobility Scheme will follow a bottom-up and demand-driven approach to couple the needs of requesting organisations and capacities of providing entities for an effective knowledge-sharing and skills-exchange experience.	The strategy is to develop Systematic thinking among all stakeholders in the water sector. The policies, research, technologies and other solutions that will arise from this 'educated' group will be better adjusted to the complex and integrated nature of the challenges.
Informative, user-friendly website for applicants /users	Applicants for a PhD position can submit their application through a user-friendly website. The offer and the selection criteria & procedures are fully disclosed on this website. Users can easily find the website via Google and well-established sites such as EURAXESS and Academic Transfer.	VET schools attract students through open days and national events, for instance hosted by WeAreCatapult (www.wearekatapult.eu)	An online matchmaking platform will be created. This platform will include a database of best practices based on successful exchanges and will facilitate solution-centric discussions. The platform will not allow for marketing or promotion. The platform will be visible to everyone but only connected users will be able to participate in the exchanges. In a first	The online platform with the open access training material allows users to easily navigate through the different sections. The material is an attractive balance between theory, examples, diagrams and exercises.

Best practice	PhD scheme	Vocational training	Mobility scheme	Systematic thinking
			stage, participation will be restricted to Water4All partners and their member organisations. In a second stage, participation will be broadened to third parties from specific stakeholder categories and developing countries.	

2. Best practices in safeguarding the societal relevance

Table 3 indicated how the societal relevance of Water4All capacity building programmes is safeguarded through the involvement of additional societal stakeholders, as well as their key importance for the success of the capacity building programme. The Table 3 indicates the degree of involvement of companies or other societal stakeholders in the wider execution or implementation of the capacity building programme.

The Table 3 also indicates how the holistic approach is being guaranteed within each capacity building programme. The European Commission, the European Parliament and European Council conclusions often refer to the importance of the holistic approach, which has been taken into account in the design of the capacity building programmes.

Table 3. Application of Best Practices in safeguarding the societal relevance for each Water4All capacity building programme

Best practice	PhD scheme	Vocational training	Mobility scheme	Systematic thinking
Involvement of companies or other societal stakeholders	Companies take part in the research projects to provide input on real-world considerations and to valorise the research results.	Water utilities and water intensive industries collaborate with VET providers to develop curricula, upskilling and reskilling for professionals and deliver testimonials of professionals at VET colleges, to reduce the gap between education and professional work environment.	The Mobility Scheme will help water utilities, and other end-users in the water sector, to find solutions. Those utilities provide critical services in the form of drinking water provision and sewage treatment, this has a direct societal benefit, relevance and impact coinciding with several of the Water4All challenges.	The training material is not too academic, it is accessible and applicable to a wide range of professionals and organisations in the water sector. These 'users' of systems thinking are also testimonials on the platform.

Best practice	PhD scheme	Vocational training	Mobility scheme	Systematic thinking
Holistic approach	The PhD projects are embedded in a multidisciplinary supervision team and multi-sectoral stakeholder group to provide the best chance an open and broad research approach. The compatibility of PhD topics with the Water4All SRIA has been assessed and confirmed to ensure a holistic understanding of societal challenges.	A new improvement plan will support the growth and advancement of students and professionals in their quest to become highly skilled craftsmen. As well as the growth of the European network of VET providers through transferring knowledge and mobility of students and teachers. Water4All partners act as regional hubs, to widen and deepen the collaboration. It will emphasize progressive learning and development opportunities, enabling individuals to enhance their practical skills and theoretical knowledge in a systematic manner. By equipping water practitioners and policymakers with the necessary expertise, these programs aim to elevate the overall quality of decision-making processes and pave the way for sustainable and efficient water management practices.	In the development of the matchmaking platform, Aqua Publica Europea (APE) will explore synergies with other Water4All (sub)tasks such as (Sub)tasks C2.2 - Co-developing the strategy of a European Water Incubator, C3.2 - Vocational training and skills development programmes, C4.1 - Reinforcing link with policy observatories and research infrastructures, D1.1 - Water Oriented Living Labs and Demos atlas development and E3 - Developing innovative tools for international cooperation. The matchmaking platform will not restrict problem owners and solution providers in silos, and provide integrative solutions that respond to complex challenges.	Systematic thinking is all about using a holistic integrative approach to problem analysis and solution development.

3. Best practices in communication and/or dissemination

One of the most relevant best practices is the use of testimonials/examples or stories as indicated in Table 4. For each capacity building programme, the relevance of testimonials/ examples or stories in relation to communication or dissemination is explained.

In addition, related to communication and dissemination, the importance of Open Science in the capacity building programme is outlined. Open science is an approach to research based on open cooperative work that emphasizes the sharing of knowledge, results and tools as early and widely as possible. It is mandatory under Horizon Europe, and it operates on the principle of being ‘as open as possible, as closed as necessary’. Water4All is co-funded by the European Union within the frame of the Horizon Europe programme. This table indicates to what extend European regulation for Open Science and Open Data are being applied.

Table 4. Application of Best Practices in communication and/or dissemination for each Water4All capacity building programme

Best Practice	PhD Scheme	Vocational training	Mobility scheme	Systematic thinking
Use testimonials/ examples/ stories	Besides dissemination through scientific journals and conferences, the results of the PhD projects are translated into stories meant for general public, e.g. for each PhD graduate at Wetsus a "Behind the PhD" story is written by a science communication expert, and it is made availble on Wetsus website and disseminate through the social media. This is also done for each high impact paper, patent, and upscaled innovation that resulted from the PhD research.	Vocational training builds forward on prior activities performed through 3 other projects (PoVE Water ScaleUp, WeAreCatapult, BarCOVE). These efforts included Testimonials of VET students, such as "Meet the Champions of Challenge", which took place at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) with VET student contributions from Leeuwarden and Brno. These events highlight the value of vocational education and training (VET) and encourage young people to choose VET as an effective learning and career path. Water4All will build forward on this in Phase 2 and 3.	Matching and discussions on the platform will be solution-centric. The platform will include a database of best practices based on successful exchanges.	The training material comprises ample of examples and exercises, relevant for Water4All. Which is an effective way to disseminate Systemic thinking among a diverse user group.
Open Science & Open Data	The PhD researchers publish under Open access, and upload their data on data repositories, according to the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable data) principles	The website of the PoVE water project already includes the project outcomes of three separate EU projects and acts as an open depository project outcomes, news and testimonials. The website will continue to act as central depository, also integrated the outcomes of Water4All supported VET actions in a centralised location. (www.povewater.eu). *In Phase 3 the Improvement Plan will be executed, with Water4All partners and the results of PoVE Water ScaleUp will be available to Water4All partners. Collaboration in European wide VET improvement will be widening and deepened through Water4All.*	A clear code of conduct for users will be adopted to ensure the platform remains an open space for discussion, and sharing knowledge and best practices.	The training material is freely online available, it is possible to also publish new Systemic thinking cases on this website.

Conclusions

This report identifies recommended principles that can be applied to a multitude of capacity building programmes, including the three training programmes and the mobility scheme in Water4All. These recommended principles are summarized below. Due to the difference in nature of the four capacity building programmes, some of these principles are more relevant than others but can still be applied to all the capacity building programme developed as part of Water4All Task C3.

Recommended principles:

- to make use of a bottom-up approach, to find the best ideas or candidates supported by the programme or initiative,
- to involve societal stakeholders into the programmes or initiatives to ensure its societal relevance,
- to have an integrative approach that does justice to the complexity of the Water4All challenges, and
- to have a dedicated website or online platform for the users/applicants of the Capacity building programme.

However, the implementation of these principles at organisations level will always require a case-to-case approach. There are too many underlying variables (e.g., demographic and socio-economic discrepancies across regions, level of experience and cooperation between key actors, application of EU funding programmes and relevant strategies, etc.) to allow for exact replication of the practices in a capacity building programmes and initiatives.

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