

Zurich – Water City

Between 21st June and 20th July, Zurich turned into a “Water City”, thus honouring the International Year of Freshwater 2003. The project has raised the sensibility of the local population for a sustainable use of our precious resource water. The main emphasis was put on an open air exhibition along the Limmat. Consisting of seven sites, the water path revealed e.g. where rain water disappears in the city, where drinking water in Zurich is derived from and which species have their habitats in the



lake and rivers. A website with further information, offers for schools, special events and guided tours added to the programme. The historical stroll around the Water City, the lecture of water texts in the

water church, an exhibition on ground water and a panel discussion on water management met a lot of interest in the public. A competition of water stories organized by the local newspaper “Tages-Anzeiger” counted 250 participants – a great success.

Following the invitation of the Year of Freshwater, the local protagonists AWEL, EAWAG, ERZ, ewz, WVZ and WWF had jointly launched the project “Water City”. The successful team work created a strong presence of the wet

element in Zurich. As main sponsors acted APG, the “Tages-Anzeiger” and the Vontobel Foundation.

For further information see: www.wasserstadt.ch

Fishnet: International and National Expert Hearing

The project Fishnet, dealing with the decline in fish catch from Swiss water systems, is entering its final stage. Results have been achieved in about 70 sub-projects and profound literature studies produced during the past 5 years. Many issues were raised during the final synthesis: Have results been assessed and authoritative international knowledge been taken in consideration adequately? Are the conclusions drawn by Fishnet convincing and appropriate? Do suggested measures promise success? On 21st/22nd August, the project management and an international group of experts discussed these and other questions at EAWAG in Kastanienbaum.

The discussion was based on the provisional report on 12 working hypotheses considering various factors (e.g. chemicals, change in temperature, quality of physical habitat) as possible causes for the decrease in fish catch. The experts confirmed and completed our conclusions and/or added critical comments. Even though the decline in fish catch is important on a national scale, it was made clear that significant local and regional variability of manifestation and causes do exist. The experts stressed the significance of ongoing research. Additionally, a national expert hearing took place on 9th September where conclusions gained and measures suggested were

examined and put into a concrete form. The final report will be presented to the broad public at the end of January 2004 in Berne.

For further information see: www.fischnetz.ch



The Future of Aquatic Ecosystems: Endangered but not Lost

Experts from all continents gathered at the “International Conference on the Future of Aquatic Ecosystems” held between 23rd and 27th of March 2003. About 160 scientists met at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich, where they pointed out trends and future prospects of aquatic ecosystems. The conference was organized by the Swiss Foundation for Environmental Conservation (FEC) and the EAWAG.



Dr Polunin presents the key outcomes of the meeting.

Experts clearly showed their consensus that today almost all aquatic ecosystems suffer from increasing pressure, such as increasing nutrient loading, abstraction of fresh water from wetlands and coastal systems caused by irrigation, physical habitat destruction and

salinization. Furthermore, the climate change was identified as a possible cause for the decline of coral reefs.

A closer look at past decades confirmed that effective concepts are available in order to stop those negative trends. The Stockholm convention of 1972 e.g. banned the imission of persistent organic pollutants into rivers. The eutrophication of lakes was stopped by upgrading water treatment plants and banning phosphorus in detergents. Large parts of the population support an ecologically sound flood protection allowing the revitalization of river systems.

Additionally, the wide range of scientific insights available today may help a positive influence on the development of the aquatic systems. The hindrance is not a lack of knowledge but a lack of political courage. Scientists, politicians and public must necessarily work together, dealing with uncertainty, proceeding step by step and learning from mistakes – on a local and on an international level.