

A collective approach

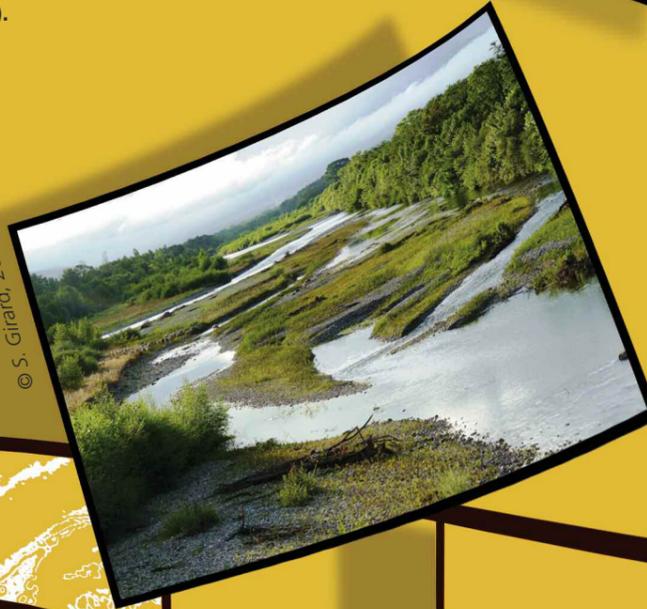
The book is the result of recent work by 23 young researchers who addressed the issue of stakeholder perceptions via a number of different and complementary approaches, including interviews, questionnaires, participant and non-participant observations, analysis of document collections, etc.

They produced scientific knowledge on an array of aquatic environments (peat bogs, ponds, small and large rivers, etc.) and in different types of landscape contexts (cities, predominantly agricultural rural regions, areas only slightly impacted by human activities, both in France and abroad), related in turn to a number of management issues (socio-economics, ecology, landscape, hydraulics and flood control, patrimonial and recreational issues, etc.).

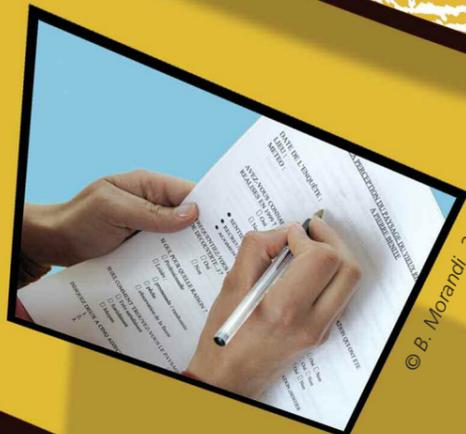
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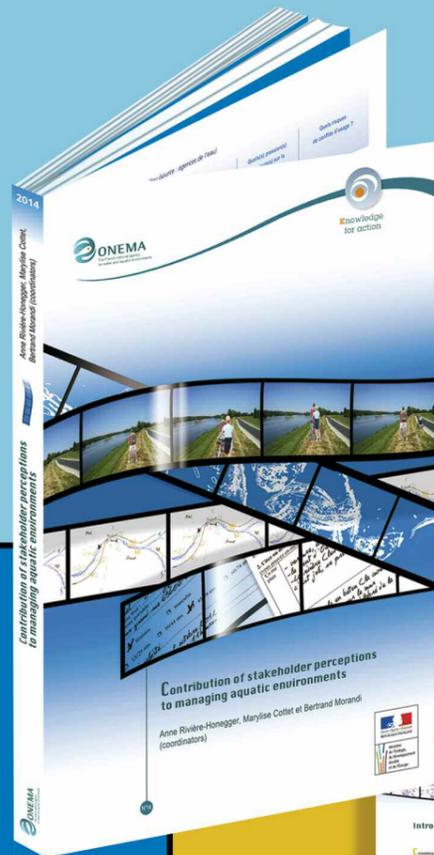


The knowledge produced was discussed during a multi-disciplinary national symposium that brought together researchers and water managers. The bulk of the book was drafted collectively during writing workshops. The process was overseen by a scientific committee and a number of important researchers contributed their ideas.



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The 180-page document continues the *Knowledge for action* series of books that provides professionals in the water and aquatic-environment sector (scientists, engineers, managers, instructors, students, etc.) with information on recent research and science-advice work.



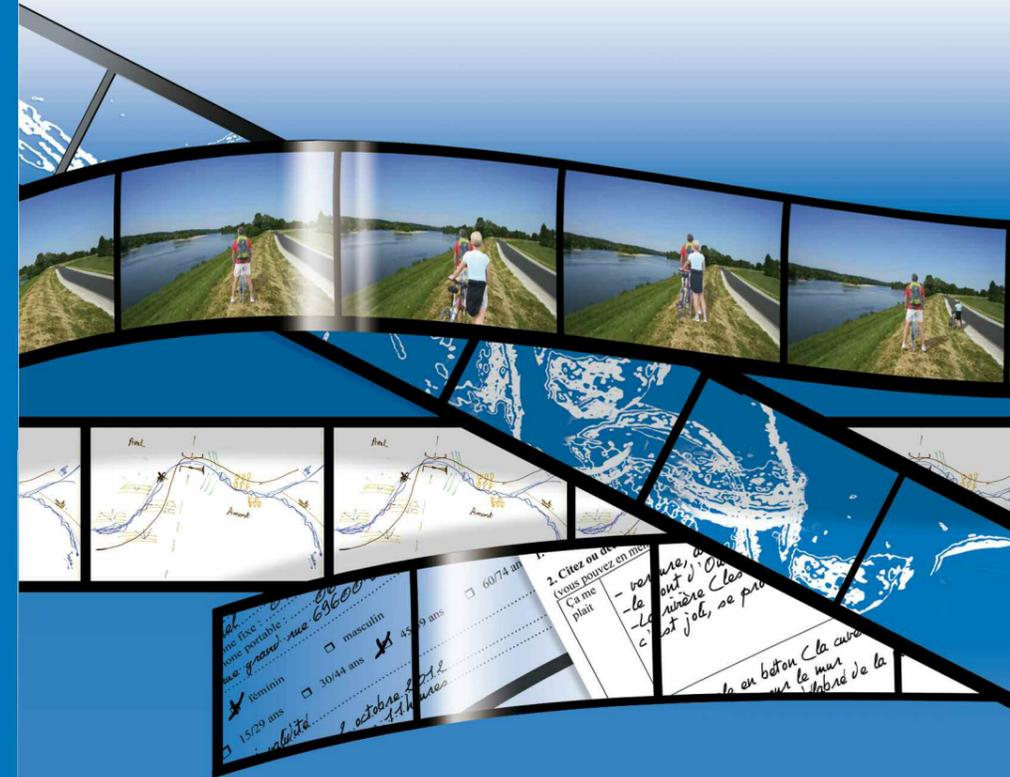
The book is available on the Onema site (www.onema.fr), in the Resources section, and at <http://www.onema.fr/IMG/EV/cat7a-thematic-issues.html#action>. A hard copy of each document may be requested as long as supplies last.

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Contribution of stakeholder perceptions to managing aquatic environments

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Integrated management of aquatic environments requires that particular attention be paid to the perceptions held by the various stakeholders (managers, elected officials, people active in those environments, the general public, etc.). The research described here underscores the usefulness of and presents methods for mobilising perceptions and expectations to improve operational management.

How can the studies on perceptions be used to identify stakeholders and their expectations? How can they be used to learn more about the history of the links between societies and aquatic environments? How can the studies serve to question and assess management practices?

This book in the *Knowledge for action* series, comprising case studies, special sections focussing on specific concepts and methods, and feedback from projects, presents the results of the collective research undertaken by researchers and water managers, divided into the various steps involved in formulating a management project. This short introduction provides a glimpse into these issues.

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The contributions of studies on stakeholder perceptions are presented for each essential development step in a restoration or natural-resource management project for aquatic environments. Prior to the project itself, these studies provide insights by identifying stakeholders and their expectations, and by delving into the history of the relations between societies and aquatic environments. Following project construction, they are an important factor in post-project appraisals of management practices.

1 Identifying stakeholders and their expectations

Study of the perceptions of the various stakeholders concerning aquatic environments produces useful information during the preliminary assessment phase of the project. By characterising the diversity of stakeholders and their expectations, information is generated that helps to address all the issues involved when developing a project. That is why the study must be launched in advance in order to effectively define the project. Awareness of the perceptions of the various stakeholders makes it possible to enhance the preparation of the efforts to take into account the interaction between stakeholders and to make decisions during the discussions that are a necessary part of defining a management plan. Conversely, lack of knowledge on stakeholder perceptions raises the risk of neglecting issues and of setting management objectives that do not correspond to the expectations of certain stakeholders.

2 Learning more about the history of the links between societies and aquatic environments

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate the value of studying the relations between history and aquatic environments when implementing management projects. Discussing and explaining past events enhances knowledge of more recent landscape management. This in turn raises questions on environmental dynamics over relatively long time spans and thus puts into perspective and/or pinpoints contemporary problems. Information on the history of aquatic environments can also be used for mediation work during project implementation. It is of value in creating a story, a narrative on aquatic environments.

3 Questioning and assessing management practices

An assessment of a project acquires greater depth by integrating an analysis of the perceptions of the various stakeholders involved. The analysis can be used to evaluate the environmental measures taking into account the complexity of the relations between stakeholders and the environment, and thus enhance management of future projects. Different stakeholders can have very different opinions on management projects. The perceptions concerning each aquatic environment differ for each person, with different expectations as a result. The fulfilment or the frustration of those expectations can profoundly influence the final appraisal of a management project. Post-project appraisal results depend on how the project is set up and conducted.

4 Feedback

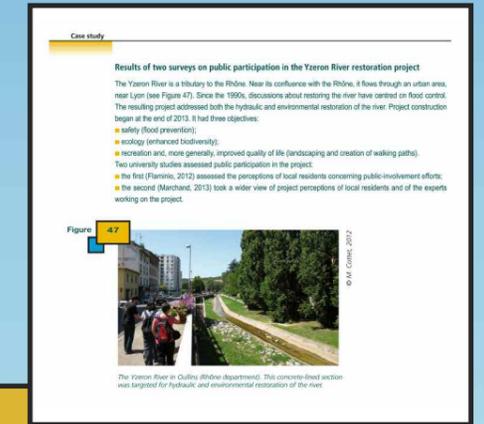
The book also presents the opinions of water managers and scientists who discuss their practical experience and provide their thoughts on the subject of stakeholder perceptions of aquatic environments. This information takes the form of feedback from eleven projects addressing the diversity of the aquatic environments studied (river basin, small and large rivers, etc.) and a number of research and management situations, both in France and abroad (Austria, Canada and Switzerland). The objective was to pull together a number of "stakeholder viewpoints" providing examples and feedback useful in expressing various needs and gaining perspective in terms of current practices.

Also in the book

■ Case studies

A total of 18 case studies, from different regions in France, illustrate the links that studies on perceptions have with:

- various legislative and regulatory texts in the water sector and more generally in the environmental and landscape-planning field, e.g. SBMPs (sub-basin management plans), river contracts, flood-prevention programs, local zoning documents, regional nature parks, etc.;
- the specific aspects of the areas and the projects, ranging from urban areas to nature parks and from the restoration of river banks for landscaping and recreational purposes to flood control;
- the diversity of the areas studied on different spatial scales, including peat bogs, ponds, small and large rivers.



■ Viewpoints, concepts and methods

The book also contains 13 Focus sections on viewpoints, concepts and methods providing readers with background information on the theories and methods used to produce the data on perceptions of aquatic environments. The sections also discuss the strengths and the limitations of the methods employed, notably surveys based on interviews and questionnaires, participant and non-participant observations and analysis of document collections (oral, written, imagery).

