

French Water Agencies : lessons learned from 40 years of practicing solidarity around basin water resources

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Last century success story

Creation of basin organisations in 1964

The pollution of rivers is an obstacle to economic development

The Financial Basin Agencies have all the characteristics of a sustainable development organisation: environmental, economical and social scopes

The basin organisations find their own place during the 70's, without duplicating with the existing public actions

The State services deal with legislation and water permits, the municipalities are in charge of water supply and sewage including tarification

The Financial Basin Agencies implement the polluter-payer principle, with concertation between three equal colleges: State, Municipalities, industries

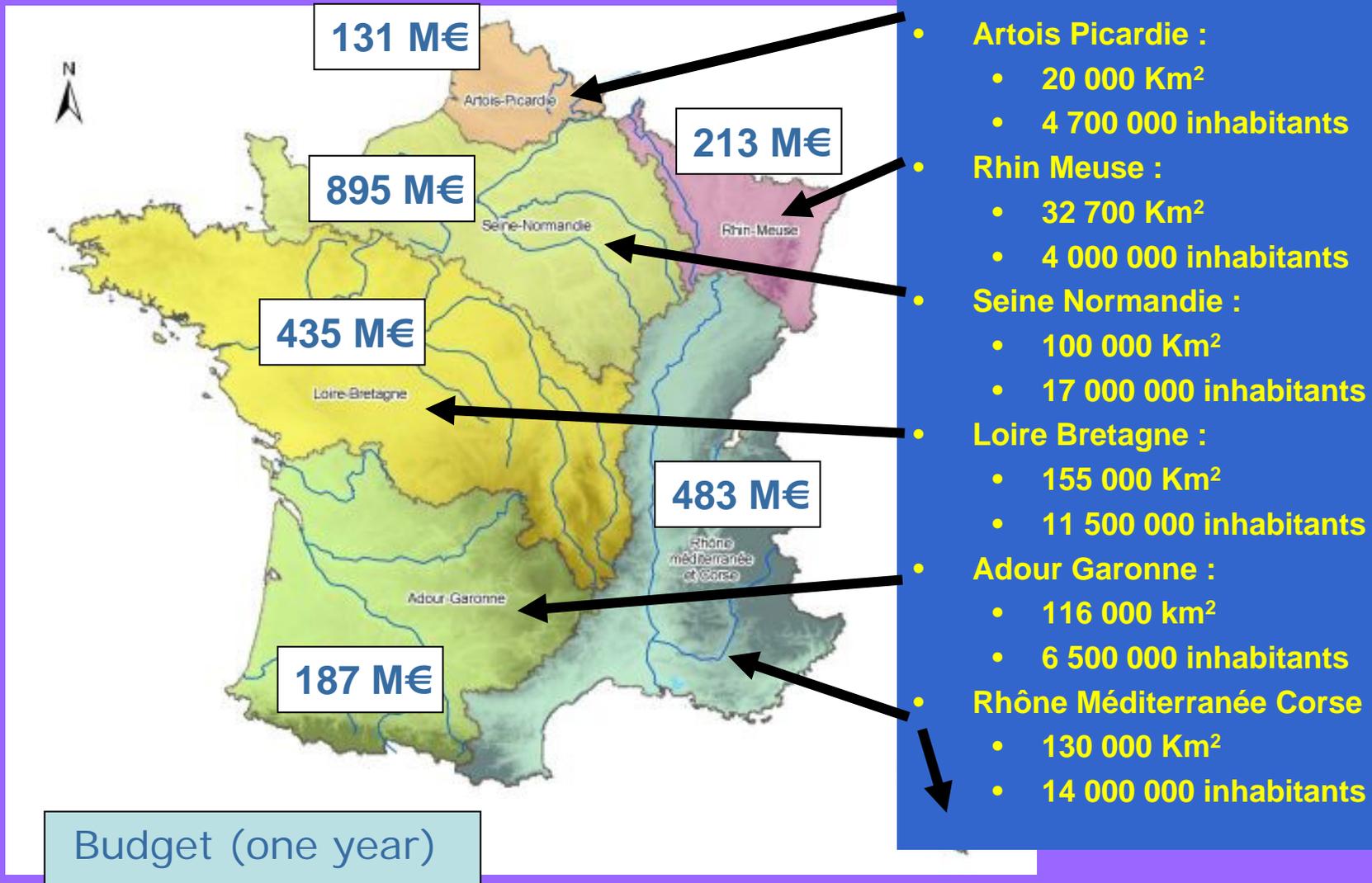
The Financial Basin Agencies develop considerably their actions during the 80's and the 90's

The annual budget grows from €500 up to €1800 million/year

The 1992 water law gives a new role to the water agencies: planning of the global water basin policy

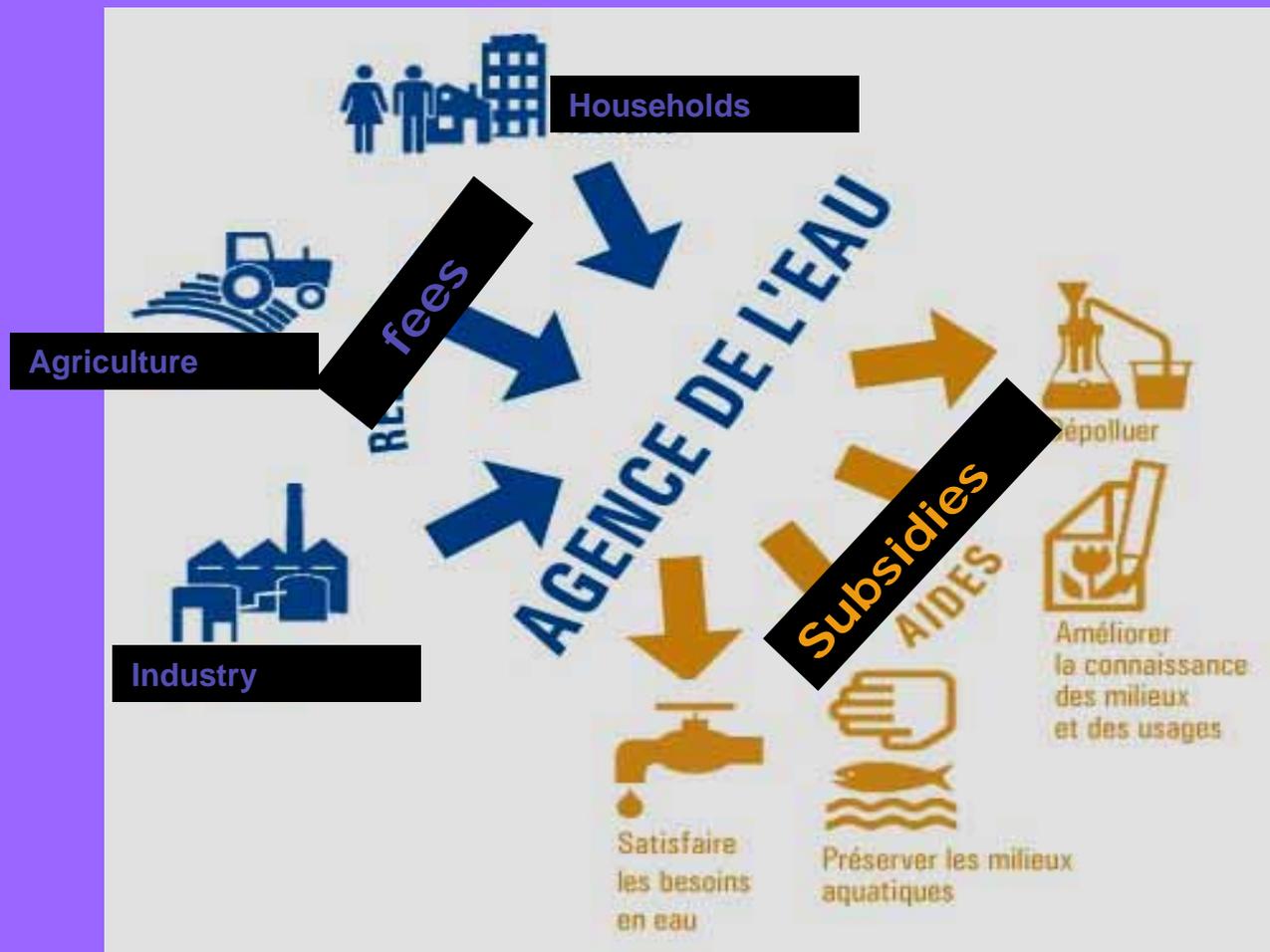
The name is changed into « Water Agencies », reflecting this new multi-sectorial scope and the responsibility of River Management Plans at the Basin or sub-basins levels

French water agencies and water financial scheme



French water agencies and water financial scheme

Fees collected by the water agency are used to subsidise water protection investment and operating costs



Present challenges

The European Union and France raise their ambitions towards ecological objectives at the beginning of the 21st century

Water quality is improving but some local degradations are not mastered: hazardous substances, agricultural diffuse pollution, fish life, accidental discharges

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the French Law about Water and Aquatic Bodies (LWAB) in 2006 enrich the Basin instances' missions:

- * the objectives are no longer quantitative or chemical only, but ecological
- * the RBMP is updated every 6 years as well as the water agency's programme of intervention
- * public consultation is developed, territorial commissions are created
- * the composition of the Basin Committees changes: instead of 33% each, the municipalities have 40% of the seats, the economic users 40% and the State only 20%; nature protection associations are involved

The main responsibilities of the Basin Committee today

Planning designed with the water actors of the basin : RBMP, programme of intervention of the Agency and programme of measures every six years with objectives of results, agreement of sub-basin MP

New water resources monitoring following the European principles in order to appraise whether the ecological objectives are met

Decision concerning the water fees (rates decided by each basin within a maximum decided nationally) and concerning the financial helps (themes, rate of grants)

Geographical modulation of fees and of financial helps depending on territorial situations and priorities

Public consultation, territorial concertations on sub-basin levels, decision concerted decision for the water policy of the basin

Transboundary concertation within Europe when the water resources cross the frontiers (Escaut, Meuse, Rhine, Rhône,...)

Lessons learned (1)

A water law is not sufficient, precise sets of legislation and juristic decisions are necessary to enforce the basin instances' role, to make the polluter-payer principle credible. This legislation has to be updated every 10 or 20 years.

The composition of the Basin Committee must be well-balanced between the different categories of water actors so that nobody, even the State, can impose its will to the others: the role of the State is to impulse national orientations

The definition of a water policy at the level of an hydro graphic basin is pertinent on a technical plan (solidarity between upstream and downstream) and on an institutional plan (questions transverses to the usual responsibilities of Ministries : agriculture, energy, etc...) Multi-year planning is indispensable in a field where the investments and the number of actors are very high.

At the beginning, the basin Committee has to find its own place among the existing institutional environment, bringing its own value added without taking charge of bad-handled responsibilities

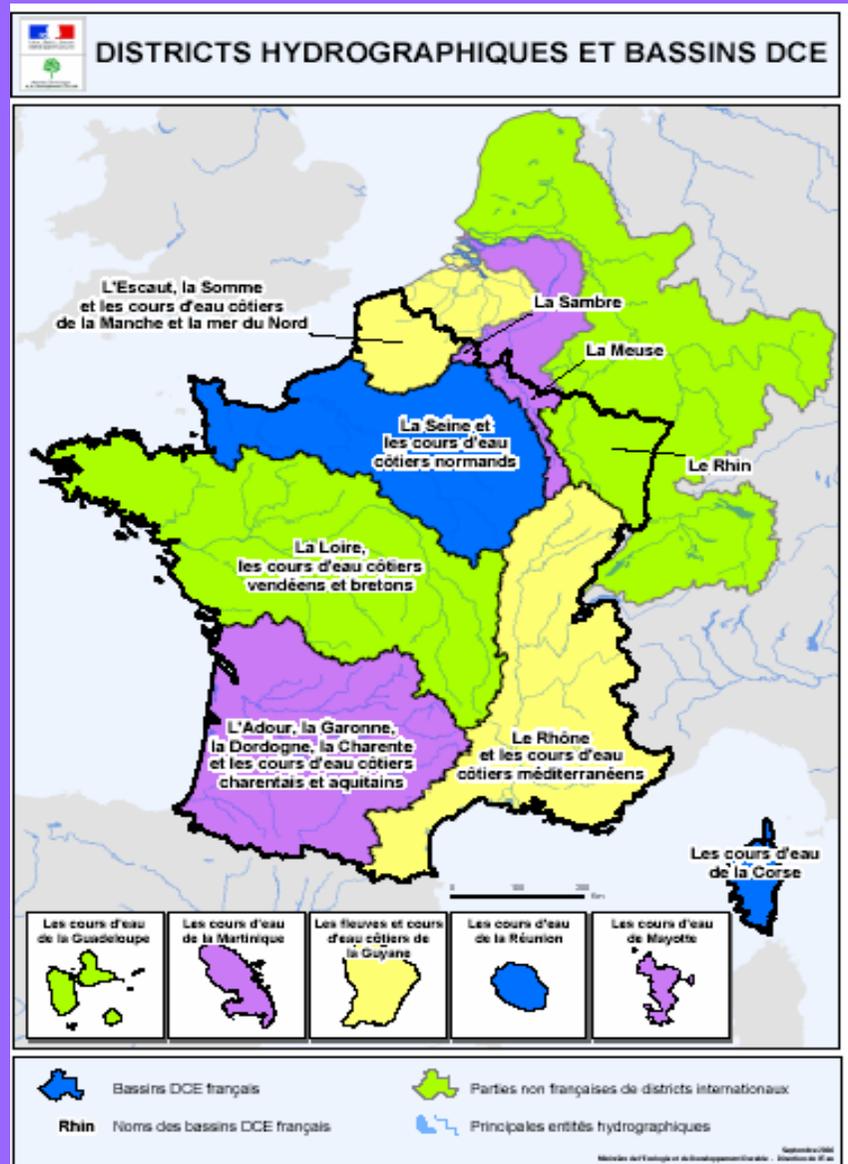
Financial instruments give to planning a greater credibility, putting means to the service of a policy

Lessons learned (2)

The institutional system will be accepted if the water actors are totally responsible : they decide the ambition of their policy and vote as a consequence the needed financial means (within national orientations); the level of the fees must be compatible with the ability of each actor's category to pay, and the collected funds must be entirely devoted to finance the basin actions. (The State doesn't withdraw any money but evaluates and controls)

The management of transboundary basins needs a supra-national organisation, as well as the basin organisation is supra-regional. For France, the European Union facilitates the constitution of transboundary basin Commissions since the WFD gives a common methodology to every riparian States.

The transboundary aspects



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