

# Defining Innovation for the Water Sector

What makes a solution innovative? What tools and conditions are needed to bring innovation to implementation?

It is a “complex” phenomenon that requires different skills than those needed for research, according to Carmen Vela, Spain’s Secretary of State for Innovation. In order for innovation to have an impact, it needs a legal framework and regulations that will make it possible to bring solutions to the market, as well as funding and flexible administration.

“We can’t separate innovation from other areas,” Vela explained. “All of us, including individuals, need to be innovative. There is no way to move ahead if we are not working together.”

“A very small group gets things done – they never complain about barriers. We have to focus on success.”

Florian Witsenburg, Tygron

“No single country will solve the problem on its own.” For that reason, new EIP Water Action Groups are needed – and we need to move quickly to put them into practice, she warned.

Florian Witsenburg, CEO of [Tygron](#), an online 3D multiplayer game engine for urban communities, tackled these questions from the perspective of an entrepreneur. His advice: “It’s about people – find those who have time to listen, who are willing to innovate.” Florian had three suggestions for promoting and implementing innovative solutions:

1. Make data on water and other aspects of urban planning openly available;
2. Provide financial support for finding innovative solutions (e.g. governments could allocate 3 percent of their budget for innovation);
3. Establish demonstration sites to showcase and promote new technologies; after all, “tech does not sell itself.”

Tygron’s innovation is that it creates a platform that brings different stakeholders together and allows them to experiment with different solutions in a safe way. It is modeled in part on the game SimCity, a game in which “stakeholders could negotiate together.” So, in this platform, “not cooperating means no one gets their plan. Make them cooperate, and everyone wins.”

There is an element of risk associated with adopting new technologies or approaches since, as Witsenburg puts it, “Innovation is something that has not been accepted yet.” But the potential for failure is also a powerful tool for learning and gaining experience.



“The challenge with the water market is – is there a market? We don’t want risk in the water market, so there is little incentive for innovation.”

Florian Witsenburg, Tygron