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## **CITIZEN OBSERVATORIES AS FACILITATORS OF CHANGE IN WATER GOVERNANCE? EXPERIENCES FROM THREE EUROPEAN CASES**

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### **Abstract**

In citizen observatories, the observations, insights and involvement of 'ordinary' citizens - alongside those of scientists and professionals - can be included in earth observation, environmental conservation as well as decision making. Facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs), such ICT-enabled citizen observatories have the potential to generate fundamental changes to existing governance structures. Based on an action research approach in three European cases, this paper examines the extent and nature of such changes to existing water governance structures two and a half years into the WeSenseIt project 'Citizen Observatories of Water' which focuses on flood risk management. Our study suggests that in line with a nuanced (i.e. non-normative) understanding of water governance that conceives governance goals as locally-defined rather than universally applicable, the changes resulting from the introduction of citizen observatories are equally location-specific and locally-shaped, presenting relative changes in all three cases that are limited in absolute terms regarding greater participation. The idea of 'citizens as social sensors' is embraced in all three cases; however, changes towards fundamentally more involved citizen roles with higher impact in flood risk management are not (yet) detectable.

*Key words:* citizen observatory, ICT, citizen participation, water governance, flood risk management

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