Editor's Message

Beat the system!

Michel Bakalowicz, Associate Editor

Since the first issues of *Hydrogeology Journal* (*HJ*), French hydrogeologists have made only a few contributions to the journal. On the other hand, five French scientists are presently on the *HJ* editorial board as Associate Editors. Furthermore, since the very beginnings of IAH, various French hydrogeologists, including such well known scientists as L. Dubertret, G. Castany, H. Paloc, and J. Margat, have been actively involved in IAH and all its publications and working groups. Why, then, the lack of French articles in *HJ*? Is French hydrogeology on the decline?

Not at all! In numbers of members, the IAH French National Committee is one of the largest national committees, with about 240 members. All branches of hydrogeology and groundwater sciences are represented, including universities, research institutes, state and local administrations, engineering companies, and freelance hydrogeologists. Several of them participate in the National Research Program in Hydrology (PNRH), which funds several selected projects dealing with continental waters. Every year, several French PhD's are granted with a focus on groundwater. Several French research teams participate in European projects in co-operation with other European teams. The French hydrogeological community is particularly involved in investigations dealing with groundwater flow and transport mechanisms, especially in hard rocks and in karst; geochemical processes; methodology development; resource and vulnerability assessment; exploitation; and resource management and protection.

The annual meeting of the IAH French Committee brings together as many as 200 people to discuss a topic of general interest. Next November, attendees at the meeting, organized by the Committee and the Isotope Hydrology Working Group, will assess isotopes in hydrogeology. Moreover, 2–3 field trips are held each year to examine in detail a specific topic. Past topics have included land management and karst groundwater protection, groundwater in alpine regions, groundwater from chalk for Paris water supplies, and thermal and mineral spring water. The French Committee is sometimes required by ministries to assess important projects that involve groundwater. Presently, the Committee is

editing a book, partly funded by the Ministry of Environment, that describes the state-of-the-art of hydrogeological sciences and groundwater in France.

Therefore, the poor representation of the French hydrogeological community in *HJ* papers does not reflect its actual activity. The regular evaluation of scientists and institutes shows that their “scientific production,” i.e., the number of “good” papers, is at a very acceptable level, though perhaps not as high as in geochemistry, for example. Thus, it is obvious that authors of papers about hydrogeology and groundwater prefer certain other journals to *HJ*. In reality, this amounts to a kind of institutional boycott by the French scientists, a situation that is dictated by the evaluation system.

As in many countries, representative committees in France assess every year the activity of individual scientists and the collective activity of institutes. Officially, many criteria are used and should be considered as a whole to obtain an expression of individual or collective scientific production. But most of these criteria are difficult to quantify objectively with a simple mark. In fact, the only criterion that is actually applied by most referees is the number of papers published in scientific journals that are considered by the committee to be the “good journals,” i.e., those journals cited in the citation index that have the highest impact factor. Unfortunately, *HJ* is not on that list. But we should realize that *HJ* is young and is still building up its scientific citation index and its general reputation.

This system for managing science through scientific publications should be opposed by our hydrogeological community. Currently, the system discourages publication of some of our works, such as regional studies or methodological approaches, because they do not fit the “good journal” policy. Moreover, young hydrogeologists, particularly from developing countries, who are often scientifically isolated, absolutely need to know more about what is done in other countries and need to feel that they belong to a broad scientific community. In this regard, *HJ* provides a real service by publishing abstracts in Spanish and French, as well as in English, for all technical articles.

Thus, I encourage French hydrogeologists, as well as hydrogeologists from all over the world, to beat the system by submitting manuscripts to *HJ* and making it a rallying point for all groundwater scientists.

Key words editorial · *Hydrogeology Journal* · organizations

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