

New Strategies for Implementing Locally Integrated Stream Restoration Projects

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Climate change has brought to the forefront increasingly urgent concerns regarding future uncertainties, adaptation and risk in many countries. Flooding risks in the Netherlands however have been a high priority for decades. The Netherlands has become the poster country for commitment to developing flood management, risk reduction and awareness on a national level. In the eastern part of the country the historical approach to flood mitigation and management of investing in large-scale infrastructure projects is being rethought in light of an increasingly unstable climate, with forecasted increasing severity of water events. This new approach stems from an understanding that controlling water with manmade infrastructure has limitations that the new climate will put to the test and would require serious investments of a scale that are considered all but unfeasible to acceptably mitigate the risks. The Dutch Water Board of Regge and Dinkel and other interested parties (governments, NGO's, local farmers and private citizens) are attempting to deal with this new perceived vulnerability by increasing the resilience of the natural system, giving more space to the water and integrating as many interests into the new projects as possible, thus building stability and sustainability into the resulting system. In this paper we examine the actions of this Water Board in working to increase the flood storage capacity of the Regge River through renaturalisation.

The strategies taken by the Water Board as the lead organization are comprised of taking a very broad perspective on the interests considered as compatible, deliberate adaptive project design to take advantage of different opportunities for improvements and alterations at different areas of the stream. This last strategy enables projects to commence prior to the completion of an all-encompassing project plan. Cooperation, adaptive behaviour and openness were seen as key drivers for success.

In a time where the country is finding itself making difficult decisions on both economic and environmental issues, there is a danger of these projects being undervalued compared to more traditional methods that could enable more intensive development which is perceived to have stronger short term economic benefits (and reduced state costs). Our findings suggest however that the new approach to flooding management, project development and implementation has many advantages in this densely populated country that should not be underestimated. Spinoff economic benefits and increased quality of life and environment are strong benefits of this approach.

We also provide a discussion of a few key aspects of the Netherlands governing regime that are seen to provide support for this type of project design. Based on an existing framework of important governance regime characteristics, we add focus on one newly defined important quality: flexibility. Having flexible governance regimes enables projects to meet local

requirements and work towards a sustainable situation by synergetic win-win situations, constructive and cooperative planning and implementation and the development of a high level of trust. This is described in contrast to specific policies which are experienced by the implementers to be inflexible and thus reduce the likelihood of a successful project.