Making Space for the River—Editorial
from the guest editors

In many countries river management has changed from flood defence/control (resistance) to a more adaptive (flood risk management, resilience) paradigm (Verkerk & van Buuren, 2013; Pender & Faulkner, 2010). This change was fuelled by different drivers, ranging from the growing importance attached to ecological values and urban development to the urgency felt to adapt to climate change (ibid.). Many programs and projects aimed at making more space for the river seek to entwine ambitions to reduce flood risks with other land-use ambitions like ecological restoration, creating recreational opportunities and regional development, which is quite characteristic for the Dutch 'Room for the River' programme (Edelenbos, Roth, & Winnubst 2013; Edelenbos, van Buuren, & Warner, 2013; Rijke, van Herk, Zevenbergen, & Ashley, 2012).

Making space for the river brings many governance challenges (Warner, Edelenbos, & van Buuren, 2013) such as organizing effective and legitimate collaborative efforts with the many stakeholders involved in river management projects, and dealing with coordination and integration challenges due to horizontal and vertical fragmentation in water governance (Rijke et al. 2014; van Buuren, Edelenbos, & Warner, 2013; van Herk, Rijke, Zevenbergen, Ashley, & Besseling, 2015).

This special issue presents a collection of European case studies on making space for the river from a water governance perspective. The case studies come from very different institutional contexts: Sweden, Belgium, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom which mean varying challenges about how to combine effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy in river management.

The case study on the realization of a controlled flooding area in Flanders (Belgium), by Vera Vikolainen et al. shows us a fascinating and nearly never-ending planning process aimed at combining flood risk management with other regional ambitions. The challenge to realize more space for the river is further complicated because of controversial connections with compulsory ecological restoration projects, which are the consequence of subsequent rounds of expansion of the port of Antwerp.

Dik Roth and Madelinde Winnubst (this issue) focus especially upon the latter, analysing the initiative of citizens within the Overdiep Polder to develop their own plan for redesigning this polder into a retention area with mounds, in combination with safeguarding its agricultural function. The difficult interplay between such a citizen's initiative and the public planning and decision-making processes reveals that the Dutch flood management domain faces many difficulties in making the step from a rather technocratic,

expert-dominated policy community towards a more inclusive, stakeholder-oriented community.

The article by Arwin van Buuren et al. addresses the question to what extent Dutch and English attempts to introduce 'Making Space for the River' as a new policy paradigm really results into institutional changes. Their conclusion is rather nuanced. The Dutch experiences shows a gradual transformation (with a risk that the development is stopped and the current paradigm focussing upon hard structures survives and returns), while the English practice shows a pattern of reproduction by adaptation: the regime adapts to new circumstances in order to sustain essentially the old paradigm. The many institutional barriers to establish new governance practices are also central in the article by Nigel Watson on catchment-scale collaboration.

The Swedish case study, presented by Åse Johannessen and Jakob Granit, underlines the difficulties to establish a new paradigm, to develop new institutional routines when the context is dominated with provisions that facilitate the old paradigm of sectoral and structural measures.

The main governance challenge for making space for the river an effective and legitimate undertaking lies in the creation of institutional space to evolve towards more adaptive, more integrated and more collaborative flood risk management approaches which are deemed necessary because of new societal demands and autonomous developments like climate change. The article by Chris Zevenbergen et al. shows that experimenting with Space for the River practices can indeed become a stepping stone towards such a more adaptive policy paradigm in which new rules of the game are established. But based on experiences gained so far at best – new approaches are combined with existing ones, resulting in a kind of 'layering', 'combining' and sometimes 'blurring' of mutual existing institutional practices, in which new policy elements like rules and instruments are added on to the existing policy arrangement (van Tatenhove, Arts, & Leroy, 2000), rather than fundamentally displacing it (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

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