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Understanding water governance from a citizen perspective Farmers' dilemmas in a future retention area

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Abstract

In this article we discuss the dilemmas of citizens in the Overdiep polder in Noord-Brabant Province, a 'Room for the River' project in the Netherlands. Confronted with government plans for using their polder for water retention during peak river discharges, they took the initiative to redesign their polder to make it suitable for water retention in a way that also made possible continuation of their agricultural enterprises. Their plan would achieve the principal project goal: reducing the water level in the River Meuse. A second objective was to improve 'spatial quality'. An additional objective was to strengthen the agricultural structure in the polder by expanding farm size. Contrary to what has happened in other Room for the River projects, the plan developed by the residents of the Overdiep polder was actually accepted by the government and implemented. However, planning and implementation also caused dilemmas, tensions and conflicts. While initially most farmers supported the plan, gradually the community became divided. Some farmers decided to move out, others wanted to stay, while a third group was indecisive. Based on case study research, this article provides insight in the dilemmas of farmers who are facing a transformation of their polder into a retention area. The farmers' motivations to stay or to move out and the problems they face in moving out can be understood by analyzing their interests and actions and the role of the national and provincial government in the project. Finally, the impacts of the farmers' dilemmas on water governance practices are discussed.

1. Introduction

Many studies have been published on flood risk management, focusing on a wide variety of subjects, such as dealing with uncertainties (Beven et al., 2014, Edelenbos, Roth & Winnubst, 2013; de Moel & Aerts, 2011; Roth & Warner, 2009), joint river planning (Roth & Winnubst, 2014; Warner & de Groot, 2011) and the integration of water management and spatial planning (Neuvel & van den Brink, 2009; de Vries & Wolsink, 2009). Flood risk management has been studied from various angles, such as the policy arrangement perspective (Wiering & Immink, 2006), spatial planning perspective (Neuvel & van der Knaap, 2010), climate change perspective (Pahl-Wostl, 2007; Vink et al., 2013) and governance perspective (Hartmann & Driessen, 2013; Huitema et al., 2009; Wolsink, 2006). In these studies little attention is generally paid to the citizen perspective on flood risk management measures. This article focuses on understanding water governance from a citizen's point of view, particularly the way they are dealing with the designation of their polder as a 'search area' for emergency water storage. The article is based on extensive research in the Overdiep polder in Noord-Brabant Province, the Netherlands.

¹ Both authors have contributed equally to this publication.

The Overdiep polder was one of the latest Dutch polders that was made suitable for permanent occupation and year-round agricultural use in the 1970s. Mid 1990s the polder was indicated as a possible retention area in government studies to create more space for the river. In 1996, the Dutch government published its Room for the River policy after two periods of high water levels in 1993 and 1995, when 200,000 people had to be evacuated for safety reasons. Growing concern about climate change also contributed to the idea that it was time to act. Room for the River implied a shift of focus in flood risk management. Rather than taking measures inside the main river dikes, such as lowering groynes and excavating floodplains, the emphasis shifted to measures outside the dikes, such as dike relocations, bypasses and 'green' side channels (Roth & Winnubst, 2009).

The discursive turn in flood risk management from defence to making space also resonated in neighbouring countries like Germany and United Kingdom. In Germany Space for the river has its origin in the field of flood protection. The idea to give rivers more space by providing retention capacity was not new. The change from 'keeping the water out' to the ideology of managing floods and asking citizens to make 'space for water' was officially noted in 1998 after the flood events of 1993 and 1995 (Hartmann, 2013). As a result of the river degradation discourse in the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, river restoration was propagated in the UK from 2004, parallel to more space for the river as part of new national and European policy responses (Potter, 2013). In both countries making room for the river was not receiving warm responses from politicians and the professional community of water managers, among others. In Germany politicians attempted to resist the policy. They were anxious about a lower priority to shipping, and proposed investments in dikes and flood prevention measures instead. Other politicians tried to combine space for rivers with environmental protection (Hartmann, 2013). In the UK the conflicting discourses of engineers in favour of flood defence, and spatial planners and ecologists propagating making space had to do with the difficulty of delegating power to implement these ideas and sharing responsibility with other actors across sectors at multiple administrative levels (Potter, 2013).

Despite the aim of the Dutch Room for the River policy to reconcile interests, governmental layers and sectors (Vink et al., 2013), the main stakeholders were not informed about the Room for the River white paper at the moment of its launch, February 28th, 2000. As a consequence, it caused unrest among government decision-makers and the public. They worried about the top-down planning of projects and the additional plan for emergency water storage to prevent evacuation (Roth & Warner, 2007, 2009). The areas designated for emergency water storage (so-called 'search areas' for retention) had been identified in a study conducted in the mid-1990s. One of these areas was the Overdiep Polder. Instead of resisting the government plan, some inhabitants of the Overdiep Polder drafted their own alternative plan with the help of farmers' organisation ZLTO: the so-called terps plan.² The plan, which comprises eight to ten terps on which farms were to be built, was elaborated later with the help of water experts and a financial contribution of the province. Thanks to these actors the terps plan was finally included in the Room for the River programme (Edelenbos, Roth & Winnubst, 2013).

The Overdiep Polder project deserves special attention for three reasons. First, the terps plan was the first Room for the River project that was delegated to a lower-tier government, in this case Noord-Brabant Province, and not put directly under direction of the Dutch Executive Agency of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment responsible for, among others, water management (Rijkswaterstaat).³ Second, it was the first plan in Dutch water management practices initiated by citizens, integrated in national policy, and implemented in

² A terp (mound) is a human-made elevation in the landscape, historically used in the northern Netherlands to build farms and settlements on to protect them from flooding before dikes were built for flood protection.

³ See www.rijkswaterstaat.nl (accessed on 7 November 2013).

the framework of Room for the River. This bottom-up initiative inhibited Dutch top-down planning of flood risk measures for the polder. Third, the inhabitants played a key role in the planning and implementation process, which was a new phenomenon in Dutch flood risk management (Roth & Winnubst, 2014).

Point of departure of this article is the constructed nature of water governance. (Water) governance, as Bevir (2007) puts it, depends on concepts that are themselves in part products of wider webs of belief. Focusing on the terps plan in the Overdiep Polder, this article provides a decentred analysis of the changing boundary between state and civil society (Rhodes, 2007) in flood risk management, including increased involvement of non-state actors, the decentralisation of decision-making, the emergence of new modes of steering by central authorities (Bevir, 2011), more policy arenas that impinge upon one another, and a wider variety of goals (Guy Peters, 2011). A decentred approach denotes that traditions and dilemmas are used as vehicles to explain changing conceptions of state and governance. While traditions – which may in itself be contested – explain how rule, power, order and norms arise and sustain patterns of governance within society, dilemmas explicate how people are able to bring about changes in beliefs and practices (see Rhodes, 2007). The decentred approach is point of departure of this article explaining on the one hand the traditions of the main government actors in relation to flood risk management and how they deal with stakeholders in this policy field, and on the other hand analyzing the dilemmas of citizens facing a redesign of their polder into a retention area. Based upon an in-depth study of the Overdiep Polder community the focus of the second part of the article is on what is occurring on community and household level. This will provide insight in how the Overdiep Polder community deals with the designation of their polder as retention area by drafting the terps plan, and the community members' choice whether to stay or to move out of the polder. Their experiences with and perceptions of what is happening in the polder, their considerations of what are feasible options in their negotiations with the government, and their estimations of when it is time to avoid, resist or act in other ways are relevant to study. These are continuously (re)considered on the basis of the inhabitants' experiences, social networks, and assessments of social reality, in order to reach their objectives. Generally, it will provide insight in government-citizen relationships, and how residents shape water governance practices. Questions addressed are:

- What dilemmas are citizens facing in the planning and implementation phase of the terps plan?
- How do they deal with its impact and effects?
- How does the terps plan affect their relationship with the main government actors?
- What is the impact of this on water governance?

The article is structured as follows. As the inhabitants of the Overdiep Polder played a key role in these processes, we first review literature on community and community leadership with regard to motivations to cooperate or resist. Second, the role of national and provincial government actors, i.e. Rijkswaterstaat and Noord-Brabant Province, in flood risk management will be analyzed by focusing on their traditions to deal with this subject. Third, three citizens' dilemmas resulting from the planning and implementation of the terps plan are analyzed. Finally, conclusions will be drawn what the impact is of the traditions of government actors in flood risk management and dilemmas of the residents in Overdiep Polder on water governance practices.

2. Community and community leadership for cooperative ends

Nowadays there is broad agreement that complex public problems cannot be solved by one actor or organization (Crosby & Bryson, 2005). Instead, cooperation of multiple actors, usually in partnerships across boundaries of organizations is needed to address such problems (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Actors in partnerships can be governments, societal organizations, enterprises or residents who are usually acting as a group on community level. The latter is of particular interest for this article, as it may give insights in community action or the lack of this. The community is therefore the focus of this review. Questions guiding this review are Why are some community members able or not able to take action, and what is the role of community leaders in community actions?

Community

People usually organise themselves of some kind of communities (Lowndes, 1995) that, at least according to authors with a communitarian vision, have three distinct characteristics. First, a community implies bonds of affection among a group of individuals, relations that often cross and reinforce one another. Second, community requires a commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity. This definition entails that communities are collectives that have identities and purposes of their own and can act as a unit. Third, a community can be characterized by a relatively high level of responsiveness. This means that the values the community fosters and the form of its structure reflect its members' needs to support the community order. Based on these three characteristics, community is often defined in terms of the shared values of its members, who may be tied to one another by bonds of affection (Etzioni, 1996). Using a community perspective to study people at the local level has serious limitations. The problem with the term community is that it has a 'feel', it is always a good thing. As Bauman (2001, 3) puts it: 'community is nowadays another name for paradise lost'.

In various bodies of literature the term community is criticized. In the field of conservation and nature management critics concentrate on the lack of attention to differences within communities and how these differences affect the interaction inside and outside community, and local politics (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Scholars on urban research comment upon the one dimensional focus as if a community represents one public, whereas it comprises multiple publics (Wallace, 2014, see also Prior, 1995). A community is not a monolithic social system. The use of the term 'community' may pay attention to lines of differentiation like gender, age, religion and ethnicity. Rather than being homogeneous a community may comprise various groups (Guijt & Shah, 1998). Diversity may also relate to differences of experience, perception, assumption, expectation and need, but it can also relate to people who are not part of the mainstream of civic life (Prior, 1995). Furthermore, diversity relates to the different roles citizens take up in the community and in relationship to government and partnerships (Gaventa, 2004). In anthropology and sociology community research often focuses on its workings, as symbols, identity markers and imaginaries resulting in less attention to social relationships (Amit & Rapport, 2002). In public policy the idea of community is criticized because of its ambivalent, labile and contested meanings. Community defines spatial and social problems through which people are categorized in identifiable places and into cultures, such as cycles of poverty, welfare dependency, apathy and immorality (Hancock, Mooney & Neal, 2012).

Bhattacharyy (1995, p. 61) brings the term 'community' back to its essential: solidarity. Solidarity means a shared identity and a code of conduct both deep enough that a rupture in them entails affective consequences for the members. In this way, the term 'community' has a more or less universal applicability which is not the case in the classical definition of community, such as those of Durkheim (1964) and Tönnies (1957) representing an image of societal evolution. Whereas in the pre-industrial era social relations are based on personal ties,

values and beliefs, in modernity this is no longer at issue. Definitions of community used by development organisations and several social scientists (e.g. Goodenough, 1963) were based on the same image, i.e. pre-industrial social formations (Bhattachary, 1995). Another dichotomy is found in conservation and resource management literature in which community is mainly interpreted as the centerpiece. It allows a simplified dichotomy between the management of resources by the community and the state or private sector (Li, 1996). Such positive, generalized representations of community make available “points of leverage in ongoing processes of negotiation” (Li, 1996, pp. 505, 509). But such representations of community neglect the interests and processes within communities, and between communities and other actors (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999).

Despite these limitations, we stuck to use the term community. Following Agrawal & Gibson (1999) community will be examined in context by focusing on the multiple interests and actions of actors inside and outside community, on how these actors influence decision-making, and on the internal and external institutions that shape decision-making processes. Mostly, communal actions take place in pursuit of those community interests that are more or less consistent with individual community members’ interests. Literature on social cognitive theory and community development learns that communal action – viewed here as an expression of agency (Davidson, 2013) – can be applied to communities as well as individuals. Bandura (2000) views people – at least partly – as products of their environment. But by selecting, creating, and transforming their environmental circumstances they are producers of environments as well. In this way they exercise agency that enables them to influence the course of events and to take a hand in shaping their lives. In this view, agency may be present at individual level but also at community level. Based on Bhattacharyy (1995) we define agency as the capacity of people to influence processes to shape their environment. People’s shared beliefs in their collective power to achieve common goals are an important element of collective agency. However, it is conditional that individual interests are aligned with collective interests. Whether collective agency will succeed also depends on the shared knowledge and skills of the community residents and the interactive, coordinative and synergistic dynamics of their actions. To understand the interests and actions of community residents in Overdiep polder the following questions are relevant. What sorts of agents can be identified and what sorts of constraints limit their efforts in achieving collective agency? To what extent collective agency is at issue, and how may collective agency limit the efforts of agents or enable individual agency?

Community leadership

A community is always seeking for social order, which is based on social formations that are continually reshaped in response to the members’ needs. However, a community cannot meet all the demands of all members (Etzioni, 1996). A community deciding to start a community action needs a structure, someone who leads (Castells, 1985). The problem of community leaders is that they need to represent both the community and the partnership in which they are engaged. Their dilemma, also termed as ‘insider-outsider dilemma’, is that if they get more involved in partnerships, they become less active in (and perhaps less accountable to) their communities (Gaventa, 2004). Sennett (2012) describes this dilemma in terms of the gap between the apex and the base. Negotiated compromises reached by cooperation at the top often seem betrayals to those below. Community leaders feel the pressure for consensus that often accompanies community-government partnerships. In their collaborative roles community leaders are expected to be insiders within government, which may threaten their legitimacy within the community. They will be seen as ‘cosying up’ too closely to officials or government organizations which their constituents may distrust. Trust developed in the

relationship between community leaders and government needs to be expanded to include relationships with the community as well (Gaventa, 2004).

Questions arise about how a community leader can be assessed and what qualities a community leader needs to have in cooperative efforts. Literature on public leadership shows that there are three common denominators that can be applied to all forms of public leadership, being political, administrative or civic (see 't Hart & Uhr, 2008): impact, support and trustworthiness ('t Hart, 2011, p. 325). Impact is the value of the community and/or organizational outcomes that can be attributed to leaders' postures, decisions and actions. Support is the responses leaders evoke in both their authority (i.e. superiors, boards, legislatures, the general public) and their network (i.e. partners, stakeholders) environments. Trustworthiness is the degree to which leaders can be said to respect the responsibilities attached to their roles, including observing the institutional limitations placed upon their exercise of these roles. Additional to these denominators community leaders who are involved in community leadership activities have altruistic motives. They must also have the capacity to cooperate with partners and be pragmatic in order to adopt the workings of partnerships (Bono, Shen & Snyder, 2010). Sun & Anderson (2012, p. 317) refer to these as 'civic capacity', encompassing the components 'civic drive', 'civic connections' and 'civic pragmatism'. Civic drive refers to the desire and motivation to be involved with social issues and to see new opportunities. Civic connections at the individual leader level refers to the social capital present in the leader's internal and external social networks that enables and promotes the success of the cooperation. Civic pragmatism refers to the ability to translate social opportunities into practical reality by way of structures and mechanisms. It involves setting up effective structures, such as platforms where cooperation can take place, and mechanisms for governance and accountability.

3. Methods

The case study of the terps plan in Overdiep Polder is based on longitudinal research since 2005. As the initial phase of the plan started in 2000, we covered the period until 2005 mainly with document analysis, e.g. reports, news paper articles and project documents. Empirical data were primarily gathered in the period of 2005-2013. Due to the sensitive character of the terps plan in Overdiep Polder project it was not possible to interview all farmers. Instead, interviews were held with a representative of the residents on a regular basis (2 or 3 times a year). During the planning phase (2000-2009) 12 interviews were held with a representative of the residents, the provincial project managers (2 interviews), a provincial official and a deputy of Noord-Brabant Province, relevant representatives of Rijkswaterstaat, including a former director water of the regional office East Netherlands, the head and an official of the Room for the River programme, and two MPs, one of which was a former deputy of Noord-Brabant Province (21 interviews in total). During the implementation phase (2010-now) interviews were held with a representative of the residents (9 interviews), 6 residents who intended to move out and 5 residents who intended to stay, the former and current provincial project manager, and the project manager of the water board (23 interviews in total).

The Overdiep Polder case study can be considered as a descriptive case study involving a detailed account of the dealings of the Overdiep Polder community with the terps plan (Yin, 2009). Case study is an appropriate research approach for analyzing social interactions. It acknowledges that the dynamics of interaction are the starting point for research. Thick description is used to understand the residents' experiences, meanings given to and interpretations of them, and choices. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join individuals to one another. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin, 1989).

The Overdiep Polder case study was part of the Ph.D. research of one of the authors.

4. A socio-historical analysis of the main government actors involved in the Overdiep Terps plan

Rijkswaterstaat's role in water management

From its inception in 1798 Rijkswaterstaat has been a line-management agency at the national government level, with regional offices. It was an exponent of an authoritarian and top-down government style. It enjoyed a dominant role in water management, preferably without interference or supervision by any other government body or office holders (Bosch & van der Ham, 1998; Lintsen, 2002). Over the centuries it has worked on creating a new system of water management, coastal defences and infrastructural works, all based on its own expertise and thinking. Many projects were only given a legislative basis when implementation had already started. Rijkswaterstaat was accountable to the Government and to Parliament, though it had a difficult relationship with both, and sometimes with its own minister. Many politicians found the closed nature of the organisation difficult to deal with, while Rijkswaterstaat officials, mostly engineers, had little patience with the limited responsiveness and decisiveness of politicians and preferred to fight internally rather than participate in a societal debate (Bosch & van der Ham, 1998).

Particularly after World War II, Rijkswaterstaat worked vigorously on the closure of many sea inlets, the construction of the national motorway network and the canalisation of the Rhine, and its tributaries (Bosch & van der Ham, 1998). Although from the 1960s parliamentary control increased and Rijkswaterstaat was obliged to follow legislative procedures in its daily practice, its authoritarian attitude remained, including its relatively closed character and preference for internal discussion over public debate. Its main opponents were no longer politicians, but citizens who were affected by the infrastructure it worked on and who opposed the resulting damage to the cultural landscape. Citizens were supported in their defence of nature and the landscape by a growing number of increasingly prominent environmental groups (Wolsink, 2006; van Heezik, 2007). The clash between environmental groups and Rijkswaterstaat reached a climax in the conflict about the closing of the Eastern Scheldt in the mid-1970s. While the government authority prioritized flood safety, environmental groups promoted a healthy ecosystem and protection of local (fisheries) livelihoods. Rijkswaterstaat had to accept partial defeat and had to design a storm surge barrier with open compartments that can be closed when necessary. However, it also incorporated such new 'ecosystem values' into its policies and adopted a 'green' image (Disco, 2002). As a result, 'green' engineers (ecologists) were now welcome at Rijkswaterstaat. It also adapted its policy and working style in an attempt to avoid public opposition to new infrastructure as much as possible and to co-opt environmental groups. At the same time, the idea of integrated water management, including overcoming sectoral interests, found acceptance and were adopted by Rijkswaterstaat. However, the inclusion of citizens as stakeholders in the planning process and the devolution of responsibilities have so far been fraught with difficulties (see also van Eeten, 1999).

In the beginning of the 21st century a new actor entered Rijkswaterstaat's theatre of operations: residents who came up with their own alternative plans and demanded a key role in the planning process. Such plans were often entirely compatible with national water policy, meeting the conditions for flood safety and spatial quality and proving to be cost-effective. However, dealing with residents who demand a key role in the planning process was a major challenge for Rijkswaterstaat (Wolsink, 2010). It went against the grain of the organisation's engineering culture (van Hemert, 1999), in which government officials usually prepare a plan

themselves while the role of residents is limited to giving their opinion during a public consultation round when the plan is almost ready (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2005).

The terps plan in the Overdiep polder, however, fitted in with an atmosphere conducive to changes in the policy field. A special committee of government representatives, researchers and consultants (*Bezinningsgroep Water*) was looking for projects that could practice the new water policy. The deputy of Noord-Brabant Province proposed the residents' plan for the Overdiep polder; the committee decided to choose the terps plan as one of five so-called 'mirror projects', an 'experimental garden' in which the national government delegates responsibility for a 'plan study' (project design and studies for complying with regulations like Environmental Impact Assessment – EIA) to the province. The point of departure was that residents should be the starting point of the planning process, a new element in Dutch water management planning (Roth & Winnubst, 2009).

As part of the policy drive for an efficient government Rijkswaterstaat was required to transform itself into an executive agency⁴ by the end of 2006 (Metze, 2010). With only fifteen years to complete the 39 projects in the Room for the River programme, which had been launched in 2000, delegation to lower-tier authorities appeared to be the only option for achieving this organisational objective. This devolution of responsibilities which started with the delegation of the terps plan to Noord-Brabant province, was encapsulated in the motto 'local where possible, central where necessary'. However, Rijkswaterstaat officials saw this as a threat to its 'natural' mandate to prepare flood risk management plans for the country.⁵ During the planning for the first delegated project, the terps plan in the Overdiep Polder, they reacted accordingly. Until midway through the planning process in 2004, Rijkswaterstaat deliberately obstructed progress by failing to take decisions or slowing down the process⁶ (Slootweg, 2004), exactly the attitude it had disliked so much in politicians in the past.

Although this attitude faded in the course of the planning process, its authoritarian stance and bureaucratic characteristics persisted. Bosch and van der Ham (1998) attributed this to the organisation's military origins, which were manifested in its organisational culture and traditions.⁷ Rijkswaterstaat's organisational culture and traditions followed from the nature of its work. The operational management of the organisation is complex, from the maintenance of the water system and engineering works and the management of surface waters, motorways and shipping to the execution of public works. To make the organisation manageable many rules and regulations were formulated which continuously change in the light of alterations in societal demands and technological requirements (Termeer & van den Brink, 2013; van den Brink, 2009). Apart from the question whether this proved effective, the question of transparency arose. Furthermore, it led to bureaucracy and – to a certain extent – conservatism.

In the Overdiep terps plan, these characteristics became manifest several ways. Its bureaucratic and authoritarian attitude influenced the relationship between Rijkswaterstaat and the province, as revealed by a statement by the project manager of the terps plan: 'Rijkswaterstaat has the tendency to fall back on its reflexes. The province is not part of Rijkswaterstaat.'⁸ The organization's conservatism showed up in disputes about the division of responsibilities between Rijkswaterstaat and the province, which was responsible for the planning phase of the terps plan (Winnubst, 2011).

Provincial government as intermediary organisation

⁴ The tasks of the new organisation did not include policy and research.

⁵ Interview former Rijkswaterstaat water director East Netherlands, 12 December 2005.

⁶ Interview vice chair Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 14 October 2005.

⁷ This was also affirmed by a Rijkswaterstaat official, pers. comm. 5 June 2009.

⁸ Interview provincial project manager, 28 September 2006.

The provincial government has traditionally taken an intermediary position. As a lower-tier agency operating between the national and the local level, the province's culture is distinctive. In its position in the middle of the government hierarchy it is used to dealing with different governmental tiers, styles, cultures and traditions. According to van Kemenade and Tetteroo (2007) the province fulfils the role of 'administrative gristle'. The province gives support, aligns and coordinates policy, and integrates and mediates in conflicts between authorities. It has a key coordinating and supervisory role in governmental and public networks, including business, transport, agriculture, nature and environmental organisations. One of the province's major policy instruments is the regional plan (*streekplan*). The province determines where urban expansion can take place and where industrial estates and business parks can be built, and has various tasks in the field of water management.⁹ Apart from spatial planning and water management, the main tasks of the province included the environment, youth welfare, rural development, culture, cultural heritage, traffic and transport. Several developments led to an evaluation of the provinces' tasks, as a result of studies on the role of the provinces in Dutch government (Korsten, 2012; Allers & de Kam, 2010) and an advice of a national commission (Commissie Lodders, 2008). As a result, the provinces limited the domains in which they are acting: cultural heritage, spatial planning and regional economy.

Since decades the provinces have been struggling to overcome their negative image – often reflected in a poor turnout at the provincial elections (van Kemenade & Tetteroo, 2007). The pressure to profile itself was increased by the appearance in 1994 of a new regional authority, the city province. This administrative layer was established to ensure close cooperation between cities and the towns in the surrounding travel-to-work region and operate in the same policy areas as the province, such as spatial planning, housing, transport, employment and youth welfare (Buitelaar, Lagendijk & Jacobs, 2007).¹⁰ In response the provinces have sought to raise their profile in policy areas such as the care of the elderly and disabled, nature conservation, recreation and tourism, regional archaeology and the preservation of historical buildings and monuments, but also by taking up other responsibilities (Peters, 2007), such as playing an active role in water management, like Noord-Brabant and Gelderland. Although some of these new tasks and roles have their basis in legislation (Arpad & Biermann, 2007), provinces also feel the need to restore or enhance their authority. They are still working on transforming themselves from a modest and invisible provincial government layer with limited tasks and steering options into an important administrative layer involved in issues of public importance (Peters, 2007). Van Kemenade and Tetteroo (2007) argue in favour of specialisation and developing in-depth expertise rather than provinces broadening their range of duties, which is leading to 'administrative confusion' due to an overkill of inter-municipal cooperation networks. As a consequence, the province increasingly faces scale and coordination problems (trying to tackle major issues that properly require action at the national or local level) and conflicts of interest with national and local government in specific policy areas (van Kemenade & Tetteroo, 2007).

The public knows little about this tier of government, despite its wide range of duties (Peters, 2007). Its activities are less visible to the public than those of the national government and local authorities. Generally, the provincial government only comes into direct contact with residents when the law requires it, for example in public consultation procedures. Conversely, residents rarely seek direct contact with the province. Noord-Brabant Province

⁹ Its statutory responsibilities are making water policy plans, the management of secondary flood defences, water retention areas (in cooperation with water boards), muskrat control and the management of groundwater and surface waters. Furthermore, it is the competent authority to which the water boards are accountable.

¹⁰ As municipalities and provinces are allowed to transfer tasks to city provinces, some city provinces have an extended task; from www.stadsregios.nl, accessed on 30 May 2009.

set about bridging this distance to the public by earmarking a considerable annual budget to raise its profile and visibility (Peters, 2007). Another way of enhancing the provincial visibility was by more actively engaging with important policy domains. At the time Jan Boelhouwer took office as a deputy of Noord-Brabant Province in 1999, one of the policy areas in his portfolio was water. At that time there was hardly any political interest in this portfolio, because the general opinion was that ‘we are finished with water; the Major Rivers Delta Plan had almost been completed so the deputy’s role would be limited to cutting the tapes’, as this deputy remarked.¹¹ But it turned out otherwise. Jan Boelhouwer:

I received some signals that indicated that something was changing. In 1999 some Rijkswaterstaat officials visited me and presented several drawings, such as green rivers and retention areas, which put more blue areas [like the ‘search areas’: areas with a potential water retention/storage/flow function] on the map of the Netherlands. There was a discussion about opening the Haringvliet [a dam that closes off one of the sea inlets in the southwest of the Netherlands]. Then, in 2000 in her Loevestein speech¹² the State Secretary questioned the safety of the country as a result of climate change and problems like soil subsidence. I was informed about what the State Secretary would say that very day, but for the residents it was a shock.¹³

During a meeting in which the provincial deputy informed the region about the ‘blue spots’ on the map, residents of the Overdiep Polder asked him if they could develop their own plan. The provincial deputy agreed to this and seized the opportunity to take the lead in the citizens’ initiative to redesign their polder as a water retention area in a way that would allow them to continue farming. This implied a new provincial responsibility as well as an opportunity to increase the province’s visibility.

5. The Overdiep Polder community

When the area came into view for water retention, nearly all residents of the Overdiep Polder were farmers - and this is still the case. Apart from one pig farmer, 16 were dairy farmers. Aside from their various production systems and farming practices, an important aspect of the farms was that most were family enterprises. The latter can be associated with family virtues, such as solidarity, continuity and commitment, but can also be identified with entrepreneurial skills, choice, risk and individual achievement. This entails that family farming is a lifestyle based on living and working with livestock rather than being seen as a professional occupation (Calus & van Huylenbroeck, 2010).

Most farmers in Overdiep Polder moved there when they were young in the 1970s, and took over the family enterprise of their father later. Some of them saw new opportunities for continuing their enterprises on terps when their polder was indicated as a potential retention area. This insight, however, took time. Though a few farmers in Overdiep Polder protested the plans for a retention area, others convinced their colleagues that the best strategy would be to develop a plan that would both serve the public interest of flood protection and their private interests in a viable economic perspective of their farm enterprise. What particularly stirred the residents was their aversion to the government (‘better soon and on our conditions than uncertainty’)¹⁴. The distrust of the farmers against the government was felt deeply and

¹¹ Interview MP J. Boelhouwer, 9 November 2005.

¹² The Loevestein meeting refers to the launch of the White Paper Room for the River at Loevestein castle on 28 February 2000.

¹³ Interview MP J. Boelhouwer, 9 November 2005.

¹⁴ Interview chair of Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 13 July 2006.

throughout the polder, because of earlier experiences, such as land settlements, former buy-outs of farms and nature conservation policy. Instead of waiting for the national government to come up with retention plans and then fighting them in the courts right up to the Council of State, they drew up their own plan. As a group of residents they took the lead, a new phenomenon in Dutch river management since residents started opposing government plans for dike reinforcement in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Room for the River programme can be characterized as having a process-oriented approach and being based upon regional differentiation (Vink et al., 2012). The residents' initiative can be viewed as private participation as they took the lead in close cooperation with Noord-Brabant province. Although it was initially not part of the Room for the River programme, the residents managed to get approval from the government authorities to implement their plan (see figure 1). Despite Rijkswaterstaat's difficulty to accept the key role of the residents (see also section 6), the province was sensitive to accommodating the residents' wishes. As the terps plan fitted in perfectly with national policy, Rijkswaterstaat finally included it in the Room for the River programme. The residents negotiated a key role in the project organisation, which resulted in both their and the authorities' commitment to the realisation of the terps plan.

The new role adopted by the residents was based upon their common history of about 30 years of farming in the same polder, as well as on the administrative-organizational skills and networks of some of them. The basis for their interaction with government authorities was the long history of farming in their families, their knowledge of farming, their experience with various land consolidation schemes, and the support provided by the farmers' organisation ZLTO, which they could fall back on (see Roth & Winnubst, 2014). Although a small player, the group of farmers was willing to take a risk for the sake of continuation of their farm enterprises. An important dimension of a family farm is that it is crucial to pass on a secure and sound business to the next generation. With the growing importance of bank loans for investments in the enterprises, certainty about the long-term continuity of the farm has become even more important. This means that farming enterprises tend to have a long planning horizon, measured in generations rather than years (Calus & van Huylbroeck, 2010). The fact that the residents' interest could be aligned with the public interest was an important consideration: thanks to public means available for creating an additional ('blue') function of their land, they were able to modernize their family enterprise.

At the beginning of the planning process the residents were able to maintain a relatively high degree of cohesion in their community, based on kinship ties and bonds of neighbourhood and friendship. These close bonds could withstand the distrust of some farmers who initially protested the government plan. However, gradually the relatively high degree of consensus decreased as a result of rising tensions related to the redesign of the polder. As the number of planned terps was limited, some farmers would have to move out the polder. Having to choose between staying or moving individually, the farmers became potential competitors for terps. In the process, some farmers could be considered free riders who only pursued their own interests. Gradually the farmers' different perspectives on a viable future for their farm enterprises and how to reach this goal split the Overdiep Polder community. This will be illustrated in the next section in which the dilemmas of the residents are described.

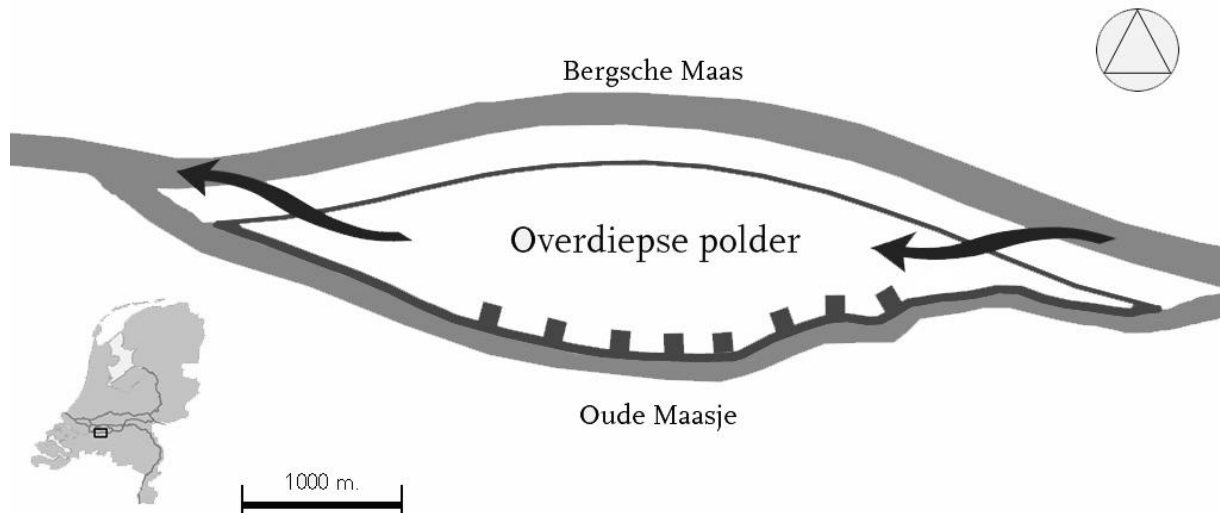


Figure 1 The location of the terps plan in Overdiep Polder, The Netherlands.

6. Residents' dilemmas

The three main residents' dilemmas related to the terps plan presented here are (1) accepting or rejecting plans for the Overdiep polder as retention area; (2) staying or moving out of the polder; (3) continuing or stopping farming. While the first dilemma had to be dealt with on community level, the second and third dilemmas required decision-making on household level. Furthermore, the dilemmas occurred in different stages of the planning process. The first dilemma was at issue in 2000, when the results of the study for Room for the River locations were communicated to Noord-Brabant Province and the local media. When the second and third dilemmas occurred mainly depended on the farming families, its age composition and the availability of a successor, and access to financial resources to start a new farm enterprise, either inside or outside the polder.

Accepting or rejecting plans for the Overdiep polder as retention area

As described above, shortly after the information meeting in which the deputy of Noord-Brabant Province informed the farmers about the water storage plans in their polder, a small group of farmers convinced their colleagues to accept a change of status of their polder to become a retention area. However, the decision of the small group of farmers to agree was not taken overnight. A few interest groups, like ZLTO and the water board, knew about the government plans. Farmer S. was member of both organisations and therefore acquainted with the ideas. Yet the message had shocked him, as it did the other residents. His neighbour N.: 'It was a bitter pill for me to swallow. We thought that we might stay here for two or three generations. When you get home you realise what it means. I thought "what about my cows?"' According to him it is a typically human characteristic to resist such threats. However, that was not what he wanted, as he recognised the opportunity inherent in the plans. He remembered it well: 'It was a warm day. For a while I was thinking about how to deal with this water storage issue. I sat under my chestnut tree when S. passed on his bike. I asked S. to join me and together we started listing the pros and cons of redesigning the polder for water retention. At that moment the terps plan was born.' Looking back at that period he said: 'Soon after we got over the initial shock, the phase of contributing ideas started. Frustrating the plans is of no help. Besides, the government could use its power of compulsory purchase.'¹⁵ However, it was unknown how the farmers would react to the idea of cooperating with the government. In a special meeting, in which all 17 farmers were present, the two

¹⁵ Interview vice chair Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 27 May 2005.

farmers presented the plan. After a moment of silence, one farmer reacted: ‘if it has to be realised, then the sooner the better’ – to which the other farmers agreed.¹⁶ Discussions showed that the farmers were more afraid of the government than of the water (van Rooy et al., 2006). They were especially apprehensive about a long period of uncertainty, which would have a negative impact on the future of their enterprise. Although cooperation with the government would bring uncertainties as well, they felt that having a key role in redesigning their polder would give them a good starting position to influence the planning process.

Choosing for cooperation, however, meant that the farmers had to come up with a clear plan and specify the conditions under which they would be willing to cooperate. Therefore, they drafted the terps plan with the help of ZLTO. They formulated four conditions for agreeing to a redesign of their polder: (1) process conditions; (2) a say in the design of the polder; (3) compensation of loss of land, property and yield when the Overdiep Polder gets the status of retention area; (4) compensation of damage after inundation. Particularly, the first condition was distinctive. Different from what was usual in planning processes the farmers asked for a key role in the project, a real say in project matters and decision making. If these four conditions would not be met, the inhabitants would not cooperate.¹⁷

When the province accepted these conditions, the farmers formed the Overdiep Polder Interest Group (OPIG) to represent their interests in the negotiation process with the government. The board of the OPIG consisted of four farmers. The two eldest farmers assumed the position of chair and vice-chair. One of the first tasks of the OPIG was a comparison of options to redesign the polder into a retention area, one of which was the terps plan. With the help of experts and a financial contribution of the province, a working group consisting of various farmers went through various options for living in a retention area that would be inundated once in 25 years on average. The first option was the terps plan. This plan aimed at constructing artificial elevations along a new dike protecting the polder’s southern perimeter to permit farmers to continue farming in a polder redesigned for a temporary water storage function. The second option was a dike in the middle of the polder, which meant that half of the polder would be inundated. In the third option, the nature option, the polder would be given back to nature and all farmers would be compensated to move out. The fourth option was lowering the floodplain and a possible dike relocation. In this option the polder would not change aside from a small dike relocation (Habiforum, 2003).

After a survey among the residents, resulting in a 100% response, two options were remaining: the terps plan and the dike in the middle of the polder. The first option consisted of two variants: one included a lowered dike through which the water will enter the polder, and another included an inlet through which the water will flow into the polder and an outlet to get rid of it. As a maximum of nine or ten terps had been agreed upon, seven or eight farmer families would have to move out the polder. The latter option meant that the farmers living in the inundation area would have to be bought out, while the others could stay in the polder. A boundary condition for the farmers was the necessity and effectivity of the measure. The farmers would agree with a possible measure if it would be established as a so-called ‘no regret measure’. Another boundary condition of the farmers was the time period of decision-making; the farmers wanted clarity about what they could expect from the government with respect to the status of their polder (Habiforum, 2003). While the province had no mandate with regard to the first boundary condition, which was a Rijkswaterstaat affair, it accepted the latter one. Therefore, the province organized informal meetings in which the farmer representatives and their water expert, the project manager and an official participated. Main points for discussion were the upcoming agenda for the next project group meeting and how to deal with specific issues. The farmer representatives and their water expert participated in

¹⁶ Interview vice chair Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 28 October 2008.

¹⁷ ZLTO (2001). Overdiep..... Retentiepolder? ZBLE.01.0105.

the project group meetings, which officials of the various government organisations involved, e.g. Rijkswaterstaat, found difficult to accept.¹⁸ While the participation of the farmer representatives in the project group was commented upon by a government official as ‘they are not one of us’,¹⁹ the farmers’ water expert was allowed to participate in the steering group meetings, first as a listener; but due to his useful advice he later became an advisor of the steering group.²⁰

Contrary to the survey outcomes, the farmer representatives of OPIG communicated towards the province that the residents had unanimously supported the terps plan. The unanimous consent issue seems to have caused a major conflict in the board of OPIG, which resulted in the exit of one out of four board members.²¹ His main reason for stepping down was that the farmer representatives acted in their own interest while not taking into account the minority position of some farmers. He questioned their go-it-alone in the negotiations with the province. Later, a second farmer left the board of OPIG.²² The conflict in the board of OPIG had far-reaching consequences as it divided the seemingly closely-knit community (Roth & Winnubst, 2014). The usual New Year’s reception based on a system of rotation, the birthday party visits, the exchanges of labour and tools, and the mutual support between neighbours during illness and holidays were no longer self-evident. Though there had always been various subgroups in the community, including those of the farmers who lived in the western and the eastern side of the main polder dike, since then the communication and reciprocal relations between the various subgroups were limited. Farmers only met at project meetings organized by OPIG or the province. For the farmer representatives it was a difficult situation. On the one hand, they needed legitimacy of their constituency, on the other hand they wanted room for manoeuvre to get the best out of the negotiations with the province.

A key issue that further divided the community was the question who could effectively claim a terp and who not. The terps plan (see figure 1) included eight to ten terps along a newly built dike. The land would be parcelled around each terp and reallocated to those staying in the polder. This meant that between seven and nine farmers would have to move out the polder. Though the formal point of departure of the province had been ‘equal rights, equal opportunities’ (see Roth & Winnubst, 2009), in the process it became clear that the location of existing farms was crucial. Some farms were located where the new dike was to be built; others were in the middle of the polder or near the flood plains along the river. Those living nearby the site of the new dike or whose land was located at other strategic places (e.g. where the terps were to be built) and wanted to stay could exert a stronger claim to a terp than those on the other side of the polder. In contrast, farmers who lived nearby the floodplain and did not own (rather than lease) much land could not easily claim a terp. A farmer representative said:

We must be honest, not all farmers are equal. If terps are going to be constructed along the dike as planned, those who live there now and intend to stay will prefer to keep their own land. It will be extremely difficult for another farmer to claim a terp there. The province said that all farmers have equal opportunities... In fact, all may have equal rights, but not equal opportunities. This awareness of existing differences becomes increasingly apparent as we move toward the final choice [of whether to stay or to move].²³ (Roth & Winnubst, 2009)

¹⁸ Interview Rijkswaterstaat official, river manager Meuse, 12 July 2006.

¹⁹ Interview Rijkswaterstaat official, river manager Meuse, 12 July 2006.

²⁰ Interview vice chair Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 14 October 2005.

²¹ Interview farmer B. Overdiepse Polder, 20 October 2011.

²² Interview farmer V. Overdiepse Polder, 21 December 2011.

²³ Interview vice chair Overdiepse Polder Interest Group, 10 November 2006.

At an information meeting organized by the province in the Overdiep Polder in 2007, the provincial deputy told the farmers that those who own land at the location of the terps, have a preferential position to claim a terp, and those who intend to move out will be facilitated. According to the project manager, this change of standpoint regarding the 'equal rights, equal opportunities' issue was meant to give clarity to the farmers and to make clear that farmers who intend to move out may not only chose an existing farm but also a new built farm. The idea behind the changed purchase rules was 'to speed up the purchase process'.²⁴ However, this had a great impact to specific farmer families whose farm or land was situated beyond the future terps location. These families would never be able to stay in the polder and were obliged to move out. Thus, the priority given to the project progress had a trade-off to the recently established 'equal rights, equal opportunities' norm by the province. Furthermore, those who intended to move out commented upon the limited facilitation by the province while the province feared to create a precedent (see also below).

Moving out or staying?

Aside from the issue of rights and opportunities, the decision whether to go for moving out or staying in the polder had to be made at the household level. Even farmer households that were in a strong position to claim a terp had to deal with a variety of important considerations that co-determined their choice. Important factors were, for instance, the age composition of the household, the availability of a suitable successor, the preference of the family, family circumstances, and the financial position of the household. Particularly for those farmers aged between 40-60 it was important to know whether a successor would be available (Keating & Munro, 1989). The return period on investments in farm enterprises has increased from 25 to 50 years, so investing in a new farm is no longer profitable when it is unknown who will succeed. Issues of property transfers from one generation to another, and of distribution of property among heirs was therefore taking up a central position in decision-making about staying or moving out (....., 2009). While some farmer families quickly decided because a son intended to take over the farm of his parents, others continued struggling with the successor issue. One farming family had three young children (all of secondary school age) none of which were interested in taking over the farm. This increased the doubts of the farmer about starting a new enterprise. Thus, for some farmers with young children the choice to stay or move out came too early. This did not only complicate decision-making at the household level, but also at the project level. It created uncertainty with the provincial project management about the number of terps needed, and among the farmers about how realistic their choices for a future in the polder would turn out to be.

Apart from the availability of a successor, the preference of the members of the household was also important in decision-making. For all farmer families this was a joint decision in which each member had a say. This meant that both spouses and their children, mostly from secondary school age, were involved. Farmer families who considered leaving the polder decided to explore options at different locations, both in the Netherlands and abroad. One family finally decided to move to another country (Canada). One farming family looked at a location in the Flevopolder because of the availability of land in leasehold. The eldest son but also the wife commented on the location. Fear of social isolation and disconnected ties with relatives (e.g. with parents and parents-in-law, brothers and sisters) were incentives to look at a location in the neighbourhood of the Overdiep Polder or nearby the place where most relatives live. Other personal circumstances in the farming households were an important factor as well. One farmer family, a married couple with two children, has

²⁴ Interview provincial project manager, 8 April 2008.

a dairy farm with 25 ha of land and some 60 cows. The husband is married to the daughter of a farm owner elsewhere in the province. After the death of the wife's father (the owner of a farm elsewhere), the widow stayed behind alone. The woman of the Overdiep family is the sole heir and, moreover, felt responsible for the well-being of her mother. These and similar circumstances put pressure on decision-making about staying or moving out (see also Roth & Winnubst, 2009).

For some farmers the terps plan came as a huge opportunity, for instance the farmer family who first negotiated with the province about selling its farm. The farmer had for some years been planning to emigrate to Canada. However, he was bound by an agreement with his brother and two sisters stating that, if he decided to sell the family property (farm and land) within ten years after their father's death, the other heirs could claim their share. He decided to sell his property to the province well before the deadline but agreed with the province that the signing of the contract would be postponed. He communicated his decision to leave the polder to his brother and sisters almost immediately after the ten years' limit had passed. Thus the Room for the River project made the farmer family's migration plan possible. In the polder community, however, the way the farmer family had organised the sale of its property did not receive positive reactions. One of his sisters, married to a farmer in the polder, was not amused about her brother's move. Moreover, the farmer representatives in OPIG were blamed for this. It was assumed that they were familiar with the family's background and had inside information about the circumstances under which this first buy-out case had taken place. The farmer representatives denied the allegations and commented that they were not involved in individual negotiations with the province. While the first buy-out had shown the province's determination to implement the project, it also contributed to further dividing the Overdiep Polder community.

The financial position of the farmers also proved an important factor. Farmers who owned land had a more comfortable starting position for a new farm enterprise, either inside or outside the polder, than farmers who mainly held land in leasehold. Although all farmers were bought out by the province, the proceeds did not cover the costs needed for increasing the company size from around 60-80 cows to 100-120 cows, which was the aim of most farmers. The farmers, therefore, had to bring their own money to finance their farm expansion. A farmer whose wife is the sole heir and whose mother-in-law sold the family farm got extra financial means to finance his new farm enterprise. Another farmer who had problems with his back and had to hire labourers to continue farming had a less favourable financial position for increasing the size of his enterprise. However, the farmer accepted the limited finances and searched for cheap stables and a less expensive renovation of the farm house in order to be able to expand his farm enterprise.

For those who decided to move out, decision-making about staying or moving out was followed by the question: where to go? As shown before, farmers used to look at various locations. While some farmers preferred to look at locations in the neighbourhood of the Overdiep Polder or nearby their relatives, others had different preferences. One farmer who had ambitious plans to increase his farm enterprise moved to the Wieringermeer, the northern part of the Netherlands, where he could buy much land and make use of land in leasehold. In addition, he got a permit to build a new stable for his cows. Another farmer, who had much land in leasehold, had less choice as land in leasehold is available in few locations. He moved to the southwestern part of the Netherlands. A pig farmer had to move because the terps were solely meant for dairy farmers. He faced many problems finding a location for his new farm enterprise, including the strict nature of legislature on pig husbandry monitored by the province, the municipal regulations concerning the type of enterprise allowed within the municipal boundaries, and the public aversion against 'mega-stables' for especially pigs. Finally, he found a location in the municipality where he had lived before his move to the

Overdiep Polder. Because he bought a location without the help of the province, he had difficulties in getting the right permits from the provincial and local governments. For most dairy farmers who intended to move out it was also difficult to find a location. Apart from the high prices of agricultural land and farms, and environmental legislature which limited the possibilities, the farmers had to compete with other interests backed up by more financial resources, e.g. housing and industry. Other difficulties the farmers faced included the tough negotiations with the province about their buy-out, the sometimes less supportive attitude of the province in the purchase process of a location, and some farmers' lack of negotiating skills and experiences with moving out, which often resulted in missing out on a first-choice location. Some farmers blamed the province for this.

The province experienced difficult negotiations as well, for example with a farmer who claimed a terp but intended to move out, or another one who always set new conditions which he hoped would turn out profitably for him in terms of money for a new firm. This set a standard in starting negotiations with the province. Due to the changed provincial purchase rules for those who intended to move whether to buy an existing farm or a 'building block', land on which it is permitted to build a farm, sometimes provincial regulations had to be adapted, e.g. the regional plan. The high prices of land and farms resulted in an increase of stayers as the farmers with land in leasehold also opted for a terp. This triggered the province to put much effort in supporting the farmers finding an alternative location. The purchase of farms by the province was based on a real estate strategy that had to be approved by Rijkswaterstaat. This led to tensions between Rijkswaterstaat and the province. On the one hand, the Room for the River project management wanted to be in control and was afraid of a precedent for other projects. On the other hand, the planning of the terps plan had been delegated to the province, which needed room for manoeuvre in its purchase strategy.

For those farmers who intended to stay the question arose whether their claim to a terp would be accepted. Farmers who owned land nearby the new dike location had a strong entitlement to a terp. However, for one farmer problems arose because he had been a partner in a joint farming enterprise. Although the partners (two brothers) had split up years ago, the two enterprises were situated at the same location. Searching for a 'free' terp the farmer finally claimed the terp on the land of the farmer who had moved to Canada. His claim was accepted because no other farmer claimed this terp. The owners of another joint enterprise (also two brothers) who intended to split up also claimed two terps. However, this claim was regarded as not eligible for financial reasons in combination with the age of the owners, for which an additional condition was applicable, i.e. the availability of a successor. In turn, these farmers claimed a terp with two farm houses, though they knew that this was against the condition that a terp will be inhabited by one farmer family. Hence, this latter claim was not accepted either.

During the planning process, the OPIG gradually transformed from an interest group for all farmers towards one that primarily represented those who were to stay in the polder. While those who moved out had to organise the permits and all basic infrastructure themselves, the OPIG supported the stayers as much as possible in terms of organizing permits, demanding infrastructure (electricity, water and a waste water system, storage facilities for cattle dung and urine, etcetera). The OPIG could easily organize these things through its close relations with the province. However, this gave those who moved out the feeling that they were no longer represented by the OPIG and did not have attention from the province either. Only when the provincial project management needed to make progress in planning, it decided to fully support the farmers who intended to move out and whose farms were situated at strategic locations in the polder, i.e. the future dike and terps (see also below).

Continuing or stopping farming?

Closely related to the question whether to move out or to stay was the question whether to continue or to stop farming. This question had to be dealt with at the household level as well. This dilemma proved to be problematic for those farmers who had no successor. They faced the end of the farm that they had inherited from their father. Some chose to continue dairy farming but in another segment, for example breeding young animals. Due to the problems the farmers encountered in deciding on continuing or stopping farming, they could not be interviewed. Hence, little is known about their choices and how they made them. Continuing farming was for most farmers a fact of life. The main motivation for them to start a new farm enterprise was 'to continue the farmer's way of life' as one farmer phrased it.²⁵ On the one hand, they like the freedom as an entrepreneur and the farmer's work. On the other hand, they felt responsible for the enterprise they have inherited themselves. By opting for continuation, they wanted to give their children the possibility to take over later if they wish to do so.

The problems farmers faced in making a well-considered decision complicated the negotiation process with the province. Some viewed stopping farming as a disaster for which the province was to be blamed, and sometimes the community leaders as well. The province had to take into account that some farmers were postponing a decision until the deadline for expropriation was approaching. As a consequence, acceleration of the planning process, which had initially been a farmers' wish, was blocked by legal procedures and strategies of a few who slowed down the process. During the implementation process it became clear that supporting farmers to find new locations and get permits was in the short-term interest of the province. As a result, the province changed its purchase and support strategy.

7. Analysis of traditions of government actors and residents' dilemmas

The socio-historical analysis of the two government actors, Rijkswaterstaat and Noord-Brabant province, showed that the delegation of Room for the River projects to lower-tier governments, in the case of the terps plan Noord-Brabant Province, turned out conducive for the governance of this bottom-up project. The province was committed to the key role the polder residents had negotiated in the planning process. This meant that residents had a say in the preparation of project decisions. Though the residents' position in the project was influential, Noord-Brabant Province also took its own decisions. By delegating a river project to a lower-tier government that takes the residents' wishes as its point of departure, the distance in the relationship between government and citizens will be narrowed. This can be seen as a prerequisite for the inclusion of citizens in the planning process. A central role for citizen also means that the public interest need to be aligned with the local interest. Thus, to get local legitimacy for flood risk policy, inclusion of the local interest is crucial for policy implementation. This study shows that due to the organisational culture and tradition of Rijkswaterstaat the residents are not seen as a natural ally in flood risk policy. Noord-Brabant Province, that can be characterized as an intermediary organisation between the national and local level and between sectors and societal organisations, has an organisational culture and tradition supportive of the inclusion of citizens. The driving forces of the province, including various provincial deputies and the provincial project managers in the Overdiep Polder project can be viewed as important in realizing the project. The provincial deputies turned out to be a relevant political force in the project, particularly in negotiations with the national government. The provincial project managers did manage the complexity that comes in when a variety of actors in various arrangements is involved, e.g. dealing with the (personal) dilemmas of the farmers, the project deliverables, and being accountable to Rijkswaterstaat. Both government actors shaped the practices of governing the Overdiep Polder terps plan, in which fierce conflict alternated with cooperation. They operated as agents that pursued the

²⁵ Interview farmer V. Overdiepse Polder (23 February 2012).

shared provincial and communal interest of realizing the terps plan. Particularly the provincial government can be characterized as boundary organisation because it operates as intermediary organisation facilitating the two-way flow of information (Guston, 2001). Whereas boundary organisations are often found in the interface between politics and science (Guston, 2000) or other fields, e.g. economics and culture (Guston, 2001), the domains at stake here are (flood risk management) policy and planning. Another difference is the type of organisation: rather than a ‘hybrid organisation’ containing both scientific and political elements (Miller, 2001), the provincial government can be viewed as a ‘traditional’ organisation.

The residents faced three main dilemmas when they were confronted with the retention plan: accepting or rejecting plans for the Overdiep polder as retention area, moving out or staying, and stopping or continuing farming. The residents, some more than others, experienced difficulties in dealing with these dilemmas or acted strategically. Thus, during the planning and implementation process the Overdiep Polder population changed from being a close-knit community to being divided. One of the main reasons was the disappearance of collective agency – expressed by most of the residents who were initially proponent of the terps plan – due to individual agents – farmers who operated as free riders through pursuing their own interest. From our key respondent we know that some farmers turned away from the community and focused entirely on their private goal of maximizing their benefits through postponing decision-making, which did not correspond with the initial community goal to accelerate the process. This individual agency thwarted the realization of the project; particularly through its impact on the relationship with the province. Individual negotiations with the province negatively influenced their trust in the province as governance actor.

At the same time, the province had to negotiate with Rijkswaterstaat its room for manoeuvre to get the best result for the farmers. Here the province turned out to be a real network coordinator, which shows that a regional government may also take up such role (see Stoker, 2011). It did the utmost to meet the farmers’ wishes, particularly for those who intended to stay. Later, when the project implementation was approaching, it also tried to meet the wishes of those who moved out. Nevertheless, they felt less supported by the province, which decreased trust in the latter. The same group of farmers also had difficulties with the community leaders, who had to satisfy both the province and their constituency, the so-called insider-outsider dilemma (Gaventa, 2004). Their individual agency to pursue the collective interest was not satisfactory for everyone; particularly not for movers, who felt isolated. It became increasingly difficult for the community leaders to represent the whole community which turned out to be a crucial factor in the community division. Thus, the fall in trust in community leaders’ impact decreased their ‘civic connections’ and their ‘civic capacity’ as far as a large part of the community residents was concerned. However, for the province this was not an issue. As a result, the decreased ‘civic connections’ and ‘civic capacity’ of the community leaders did not negatively influence the governance of the project.

8. Conclusion and discussion

This article gives insight in three major dilemmas of farmers confronted with government plans to transform their polder into a retention area: rejecting or accepting the plans for the Overdiep polder as retention area, staying or moving out, and continuing or stopping farming. The farmers who drafted the terps plan and negotiated a central role in the planning and implementation process had a major impact on the governance of the project. The terps plan proved a (temporary) breakthrough in dealing with citizens in water management projects. Some factors turned out crucial for this development. First, the ‘window of opportunity’ that was created by a working group that stimulated bottom-up plans, which resulted in the inclusion of citizens’ ideas in dealing with flood risk in a generally state-centred flood risk policy in which top-down planning is dominant. Second, the delegation of river projects to a

lower-tier government, in this case Noord-Brabant Province. Third, the commitment of, among others, the provincial deputies and the provincial project managers who turned out to be important agents. This is distinctive: although government officials and government decision-makers are expected to work in tandem, practice shows that this is rather difficult (Vigoda, 2002). Here, the role of the provincial government as boundary organisation needs special attention. This case study has clearly shown that traditional government organisations can also take up the role of boundary organisation. Conditional for this role is the close cooperation between government officials and government decision makers. Fourth, the terps plan fitted neatly in the national flood risk policy. Thanks to the citizens' collective agency and the provincial agents the terps plan transformed from a citizens' idea towards an official plan with a national status, a project budget and a project planning. This resulted in the commitment of the government and residents because the public interest of water safety as well as the local interest of a viable economic future of the farm enterprises met in the plan.

The research results show that being 'primus inter pares', the first among equals, was important for becoming a trusted community leader. Although the community leaders tried hard to gain and maintain that initial trust, during the planning process it became clear that they were not trusted by everyone. Especially those who intended to move blamed them for not being fully transparent in their communication to their constituency. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for the community leaders to represent the whole community. In other words, their individual agency to pursue the collective interest was not satisfactory for all community residents. This turned out to be a crucial factor in the change of the Overdiep community from being close-knit to divided. The decreased trust in the community leaders resulted in less 'civic connections' and 'civic capacity'. Although the relationship between the community leaders and the province did not change much, the commitment of the movers to the project decreased (as did, in a way, the commitment of the project and the community leaders to the movers). The movers increasingly prioritized their private goals, slowing down the realization of the plan by postponing decision-making. Their individual agency also contributed considerably to the community division. Furthermore, it thwarted the governance of the project due to their decreased trust in the province as governance actor.

This case study demonstrates that decentralisation goes with a growth of monitoring, detailed agreements and accountability rules through which the interference of national government remains prominent in the planning and implementation process, also known as the decentralisation paradox (see Bevir, 2009). This was further strengthened by the organisational culture of Rijkswaterstaat characterised by a top-down approach to flood risk policy and implementation of flood risk measures. Although Rijkswaterstaat dominated the relationship with the province, it had to accept a key role of the residents in the process thanks to the provincial organisational culture and its position as an intermediate layer between national government and citizens, as well as provincial efforts to include the latter in the project organisation. The negotiated room for manoeuvre in the relationship between the province and Rijkswaterstaat further motivated the province to finalize the project. The integration of the terps plan in national policy positively influenced the planning process; particularly Rijkswaterstaat's contribution to the realization of the terps plan. The success of the project, therefore, was a shared ownership of residents, province and national government which finally had a very positive effect on the governance of the project, the cooperative behaviour of the actors in particular (see Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Vangen & Huxham, 2012). No matter what conflicts happened, all actors knew that the final result counted most.

Three main lessons can be learned from the Overdiep Polder case study as far as water governance is concerned. First, the variety of actors, including citizens, all with their histories and traditions, perceptions and interests interacting, trying to influence decision-making to meet their goals and knowing that they are dependent on one another to achieve them, are key

in water governance practices. The Overdiep Polder case study shows that the inclusion of citizens can have a positive impact on the governance of the project. At the same time it shows that such inclusion is far from unproblematic: contradicting strategies, interests, and courses of action may utterly divide citizen groups involved, with consequences for how such projects can be locally governed. Second, underlying mechanisms of human behaviour are relevant to study, to get insight in the perceptions, interests, strategies and actions of the participants. Such a focus also yields a better understanding of what were initially assumed to be shared goals and how and why these became deeply contested. This can also shed light on the impact flood risk measures have on the daily life of citizens and their sense of 'community'. Through such insight water governance practices can be better understood. Third, qualification of the Overdiep Polder project as a successful project asked for a critical analysis. What is considered successful? Who is using the term successful and for what reasons? And what is the impact of such connotation in policy terms? Does 'successful' mean that it will set a new standard for planning and implementing flood risk measures?

Discussion

Some critical reflections can be made to the Overdiep Polder case study. First, the Overdiep Polder is a relatively small polder, in which one sector is dominant (agriculture). The combination of the public interest (water safety) and the local interest (an economic viable future perspective of farm enterprises) may be considered obvious, and relatively easy to manage in terms of complexity. This study shows that addressing two different interests, which can be considered as key in getting commitment from governments and citizens, is not as easy as one might think. Second, the residents are mainly farmers, which apparently is a homogeneous group. This study shows that farmers are a diverse group of people who differ from each other with respect to interests, values and views. Third, at the beginning of the project sufficient public means were available for the design and implementation of the Overdiep Polder terps plan. A changing economic situation, e.g. an economic decline, might result in other choices. In case of the terps plan it might be more effective to buy out all farmers and decide not to build terps for eight to ten farmers. However, the question arises what counts most: agriculture, nature or water safety?

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