

SOCIAL INNOVATION IN ROOM FOR THE RIVER: SELF-ORGANISING CITIZENS DON'T ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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■ This article discusses two projects from the Room for the River programme, namely the Overdiepse Polder and the Dike Relocation at Lent. A comparison is made between the two projects in order to learn lessons regarding the worthwhile involvement of citizens (residents, farmers) in the development and implementation of the Room for the River measures. This is done from the perspective of societal self-organisation, in other words, the capacity to take the initiative with respect to the development and the implementation of plans for complex projects.

■ This article first positions the general notion of public participation. This is followed by assessing two projects, structured by a number of recurring questions. The discussion is based on a number of core publications.¹ Finally we reflect on the cases with regard to successful societal self-organisation in water governance projects. How is it possible that the resident's initiative for the Overdiepse Polder was recently awarded the Water Innovation Prize for 2012 (category for interest group and private initiatives) and the initiative for Lent has basically fallen into obscurity?

Societal self-organisation

For over 40 years now attempts have been made in the Netherlands to encourage citizen participation in the decision-making processes specifically concerning the areas of spatial development, water and infrastructure.² Nowadays, in practice there are at least three different types of participation.³ The first one concerns the legal rights of citizens with respect to participation: citizens have the opportunity to react to a (proposed) decision. The second one is known as interactive policymaking, where at the initiative of the government, citizens are given the opportunity to become actively involved in policy preparation, creation and implementation, albeit often from a clearly defined framework (preconditions

and terms). This means that the level of participation can vary from simply informing citizens, through to ambitious levels of participation, in such cases the citizens help make decisions and assist in formulating policy.⁴ A feature of the first two types of participation is that they are initiated, conditioned and organised by the government. This is different from the third type of participation, called: societal self-organisation. Here the initiative is taken by the citizens who demonstrate self-organisation initiating planning and presenting ideas. Typical for self-organisation is that the initiatives are started voluntarily by one or more citizens for the benefit of others or for society in general.⁵ Examples of such initiatives include: citizen budgets, green space management by citizens, and the Burgernet [citizen's network] (security). All three types of participation play important roles nowadays, and in practice they alternate.

Attention for the third type of participation, societal self-organisation, has risen over the past years. The idea of societal self-organisation connects closely to the quest towards citizens to take on more responsibility, and to lay less responsibility at the feet of government. The line taken by the previous Rutte government (motto: 'Freedom and responsibility') is being continued by the current Rutte II government. The idea of citizens taking more individual responsibility,

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however, is not only finding increasing response from government, but also from the citizens themselves. This development is reinforced by the financial crisis and the reducing capacity of government to organise and pay for public services. Governments also seek other ways of making citizens take on more responsibility. Examples of this development can be observed in healthcare (e.g. informal care), sustainable energy (e.g. local energy companies) and urban developments (e.g. joint project commissioning). But self-organisation is mainly visible in the areas of spatial development and water management. Research into creating room for rivers shows that local stakeholders develop their own plans via self-organisation in order to introduce changes to government plans. Specific examples of this include Noordwaard, Overdiepse Polder and Dike Relocation at Lent.⁶

Societal self-organisation does not develop in a vacuum. It tends to develop within a generally busy institutional landscape where public issues are to a large extent appointed to in formal political authorities (in the state or state-related organisations). Little is actually known about how exchanges between societal self-organisation and administrative and political institutions develop, or what constitutes a stimulating context for the blossoming and viability of societal self-organisation.⁷

Further examination of two self-organisation projects in Room for the River

In order to obtain a better understanding of self-organisation within the context of area developments and water management, this section discusses the Dike Relocation at Lent and the Overdiepse Polder projects from this perspective. The following questions are retained as the structure:

- How did the project get started?
- When did the citizens enter the picture and how did self-organisation get started?
- What was the role of the citizens in the self-organisation?
- What was the effect of self-organisation?

How did the project get started?

LENT Since the 1950's a dike reinforcement programme has existed for the bottleneck at Lent. However the programme never properly started because there was no sense of urgency attached to it. Although the high water levels in 1993 and 1995 did bring about change, and people realised that

something really had to be done with the bottleneck. When considering the latest measures at the end of the 1990's, an important change in the way of thinking about water security took place. Instead of improving the dike, the emphasis would be put on river widening. In 2000 the secretary of state gave the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management instructions to investigate the possibilities for relocating the dike at Lent. This signalled the start of the project, and from that date the name 'Dike Relocation Lent' was used even before the Room for the River programme officially started. A quick-scan was implemented. It appeared from the scan that in view of the current standards, measures had to be taken at the bottleneck. The proposed measure was to lay a green river. The river could be laid according to three alternatives: above the residential area, through the centre of the residential area, or in the southern part of the residential area. However, the first two alternatives were not possible owing to the high risks associated with flooding; the third alternative, therefore, running to the south of the residential area was selected. In the same period the Brokx commission got involved by carrying out a survey for the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management that looked at the third option. According to the plans at that time, part of the village of Lent would have to be demolished.

OVERDIEPSE POLDER The Overdiepse Polder is approximately 550 ha (excluding the river washland areas) located in the province of North Brabant and surrounded by the Berge Maas and the Oude Maas rivers. The polder is in an area that belongs to two municipal authorities: Waalwijk and Geertruidenberg. Until 1960 this area was regularly flooded in the winter period. But after the Haringvliet Dam was finished in 1971 the regular inundation of the area came to an end. This resulted in the area becoming suitable for agricultural purposes. Seventeen farmers settled in this new land, each one being allocated between 25 and 40 hectares. The total population of the area is around 95 people. One could say that it has become an interconnected community; there is intense social contact between the farmers who help each other in times of crisis.⁸ Because it appeared to be a suitable location with respect to the River Maas, the existing water storage function, as well as because of the limited number of people living there, the polder area was referred to as a 'search location' within the framework of the 'Room for the River' programme. In the *Integrale Verkenning Benedenrivieren* (1998) [integrated survey of tidal rivers] the Overdiepse Polder was named as a retention area. This study was carried out by a relatively closed group and also involved the ZLTO [Southern Agricultural and Horticultural Organization] and the water board. The area players from the Overdiepse Polder were not involved at this stage.



Plan Brokx	Lentse Warande
 <p>Plan Brokx</p>	 <p>Lentse Warande</p>
<p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relocating river dike 350 metres inland - Excavating a second channel <p>Consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meets the normative discharge of 18,000 m³/s - Demolition of 50 houses in Lent 	<p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excavating floodplain at ground level - Reserves for any dike relocation <p>Consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No houses demolished - Meets the standard of 16.000 m³/s, for 18,000 m³/s extra measures are needed

Illustration 1. Plan Brokx versus Lentse Warande⁹

When did the citizens enter the picture and how did self-organisation get started?

LENT Because of the dissatisfaction with progress being made regarding creating a plan for the dike relocation, the residents of Lent set up the Lent Federation that included various resident groups who were already active in the village. The Lent Federation includes the Flotust association, the Veur-Lent residents group, the GEWA foundation (victims of moving the River Waal dike) and the Lent village council. The aim of the federation was to organise an opposing force by developing a comprehensive alternative. Therefore during the second half of 2000, two plans were developed parallel to each other, one by the Brokx commission and the other by the Lent Federation. The two plans, namely 'Plan Brokx' and 'Lentse Warande', were ready by the end of that year. Figure 1 gives an overview of the proposed high water level measures. The impacts of the Brokx plan were made public in 2001 and on 22 April 2002 the administrative parties formally agreed the plans by signing the administrative agreement. All parties accepted the signing of the agreement for the Brokx plan. Central government, the water board and the province were all convinced that the Brokx plan was necessary for ensuring future safety. The municipal authority, the initial opponent of dike

relocation, was no longer in opposing because it was given assurances with regard to the Waalsprong new housing development, and generous compensation was offered, and money would also be provided by central government for a second bridge. Simultaneously a second administrative agreement was signed between Transport, Public Works and Water Management and the municipal authority of Nijmegen in which it was agreed that central government would contribute €90 million for the second bridge.

OVERDIEPSE POLDER In 1999 the area players accepted the plans for the Overdiepse Polder as a retention area and initially especially the farmers perceived the development plans as a threat and they very quickly took legal steps to hold them back. The whole area was gripped by a sense of fear of the government that was much greater than their fear of water.¹⁰

During a presentation of the plans by the province of North Brabant, two area actors who were lobbying, approached Jan Boelhouwer the provincial executive member to demand direct involvement in the preparation of the plans. From then on scope was given for participation by representatives of the Overdiepse Polder area. The residents of the area came together in the Vereniging Belangengroep [lobby group association] Overdiepse Polder, and decided early on that the defensive strategy of delaying the decision-making process would no longer work (because the

plan was coming anyway) and adopted the strategy of developing their own, alternative plan.

The project was designated as a so called mirror project, meaning that administrative innovation would become a special theme while the project was being developed. The administrative innovation included an experiment in which government departments worked closely with the residents of the area. The Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management decided to take a step back from the project and transferred the management to the province of North Brabant. However, it took 16 months (July 2001 until October 2002) before the process was finally called a mirror and demonstration project. Before the experiment was finally implemented, various official and administrative hurdles had to be overcome, especially with the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. Eventually the perseverance of provincial executive member Boelhouwer played an important role in getting the experiment afloat.

What was the role of the citizens in the projects?

LENT The Lents Warande alternative was developed in self-organisation by the residents federation. The federation developed the alternative Lentse Warande plan coached by (the late) professor Van Ellen (professor of hydraulic engineering at TU Delft). The river floodplain in the alternative plan was lowered so that houses could be spared. The river floodplain was excavated down to the level of the bottom of the River Waal. Between the channel and the River Waal a 'longitudinal dam' was placed along the river. The Lentse Warande plan is an sophisticated alternative and could rely on support from the majority of the town council of Nijmegen, which could not easily be ignored by the steering committee. An important comment made by the Nijmegen town council stated that the plan does not take account of the urban development programme (including Waalsprong) of the municipal authority. However, pressure was also put on the official project group and administrators by the Nijmegen town council in order to give serious consideration to the Lentse Warande. It was decided to give the residents' organisation support with their continued development of the Lentse Warande plan specifically by giving them details about the urban development aspects. An 'essential co-production' between the societal groups and the government now came into being. The municipal authority of Nijmegen also set up an advisory group in which representatives of the area players could participate. Although the residents hesitated to participate, mainly because the recommendations were not binding, they nonetheless decided to take part in

the advisory group because they wanted to actively discuss the plans and also the procedures for this had to be gone through. Thereafter it was decided to include the Lentse Warande as a fully fledged alternative within the Environmental Impact Assessment procedure. Naturally this was to the great satisfaction of the residents.

OVERDIEPSE POLDER The Overdiepse Polder residents association came up with an alternative 'terp plan' at their own initiative and in liaison with the ZLTO. The plan was received positively in the Bezienningsgroep Water [water appraisal group] and matched the status of front runner that had been given to the project in the meantime within the Room for the River programme. This status (the Noordwaard project also received it) meant that the parties involved (government departments and societal groups) got preference to create rapid clarity and did not have to wait for formal decision-making in 2006 within the framework of the national PKB procedure.

The 'terps plan' proposed a water level reduction of 30 centimetres. Moreover, the plan had to lead to the structural enhancement of agriculture. The original plan included eight to ten 'terps' (mounds) meaning that a number of farms would have to disappear out of the area. This is why the plan was submitted with a number of preconditions, including 1) full compensation for all farmers (compensation for leaving the area and compensation for the transformation from an inner to an outer dike terrain as a result of the measure), 2) the risk of flooding once in 25 years, and 3) a rapid and dynamic planning process so that the plan could be quickly developed and be properly completed and implemented. The last item was to avoid substantial levels of uncertainty over long periods for farmers in the future. The original plan was further detailed in collaboration with experts from government departments and external consultants (including the Habiforum Knowledge Network) in the areas of water and spatial planning.

The province became the process supervisor ensuring that the experimental process ran smoothly. The role of the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management remained that of supervisory agent and coordinator. The remaining role relationships between the province and the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management emerged in practice to be unclear, which led to a level of friction and extended discussions. Tension remained within the top-down control structure that is normal at the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, while bottom-up control and self-organisation was coordinated under the supervision of the province of North Brabant. The perseverance and flexibility of the province (particularly by executive members Boelhouwer and later Verheijen) as well as a number of key figures (specifically: Van Rooy van Habiforum) meant that the process was able to continue.

What was the ultimate effect of self-organisation?

LENT Both plans, the dike relocation and the Lentse Warande, were included in the Environmental Assessment procedure. The conclusion was that both plans were of equal value. They both satisfied the standards required for the Room for the River programme and the effects of the measures were comparable. Based on this conclusion, a new discussion arose about both plans. The eventual decision would be taken by the ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, but here the parties could exercise influence because the steering group had to make its preference known to the ministry. The steering group had two recommendations within the framework of the option that they had to choose. First of all the advisory group made the Lentse Warande its preference. It was of the opinion that this plan had sufficient effect on the water levels generated and simultaneously limited the consequences for the area. The second recommendation came from the project group. With this recommendation the preference was for relocating the dikes, because this plan was best able to meet the requirements for water safety over the longer term. By the end of 2004 there were two recommendations and it was up to the steering committee to make the final decision. The choice between dike relocation and the Lentse Warande was also a sensitive issue in the steering committee. Both the province and the water board preferred dike relocation, because it met the standards over the long term. The region adopted a neutral position, this applied also to the municipality of Nijmegen. The latter found itself caught in a dilemma. During the negotiations over the plans the municipality had achieved quite a lot, including retaining the planned new housing, money for a second bridge and generous compensation levels. With this background and with the agreements that had been made, the council wanted to go with the dike relocation option. However, the town council was of the opinion that the consequences for the residents must be kept as limited as possible. At the beginning of 2005 the municipal council voted unanimously against dike relocation and for the Lentse Warande. This meant in the steering group that the Nijmegen municipal authority took a neutral position and would settle for the option chosen by the secretary of state. Of the four parties in the steering group, two were neutral and two were for dike relocation, resulting in the official recommendation given by the steering group to the ministry stating a preference for the dike relocation option. With this decision the recommendation given by the steering group was pushed to one side, much to the indignation of the group members.

The discussion started at central government level in 2005. An active lobby was started in both Houses of Parliament mainly by the residents. When the

initial version of the PKB Room for the River appeared, the Lent dike relocation was adopted as a short-term measure. The secretary of state also stated indirectly that he was for the dike relocation. A final decision was not yet taken however, because the PKB public consultation had to take place first. The public consultation took place in 2005 and 532 reactions were received for the Dike Relocation Lent. Intensive consultations took place between the regional administrative parties, the residents of Lent and the Lower House. After lengthy debates, the Lower House voted nevertheless on 7 July 2006 for the short-term dike relocation as proposed in the PKB Room for the River. Now that the decision had been taken, the residents had now become battle-weary and gave up pushing for their alternative.

OVERDIEPSE POLDER Representatives of the Overdiepse Polder residents' association were frequently involved in the project group that was working on further elaboration of the 'terp' plan. There was a lot of discussion about the location, the design and the number of 'terps' in the area. There was also a lot of discussion about land values and the corresponding compensation for damage caused by flooding and for farmers who would have to leave the area because no 'terps' were available for them. Eventually things were worked out and a 'terps plan' was drawn up for implementation (see illustration 2).

The 'terps plan' was drawn up mainly because residents were united and they transformed the initiative into a plan. Supported by the province and by external experts, the plan was worked out so that it was feasible and could be implemented. The plan proposed a water level reduction of 27 centimetres. Although the construction of the 'terps' did not contribute directly to the aims of water safety, it did ensure societal acceptance of the measure.

Some of the 'terps' have already been constructed and some are even inhabited. Currently the last of the residents are leaving. They talk about 'leavers' (9) and 'stayers' (8). The community has fallen apart and there are clear winners and losers among the farmers. Some farmers were able to manifest themselves better than others in the mirror project. This led to a lot of disappointment for the farmers concerned. Some farmers took legal action against the plans. On 21 April 2010 the Council of State declared their objections to be unfounded. From that moment on it was possible to implement the 'terps plan'.

Conclusions & reflection: learning lessons for self-organisation and water governance

Both projects displayed similarities and differences that will now be discussed in this closing section. The initial similarity is that both projects started where the government had plans for the area that would not be supported in the area itself. In the case of the

Overdiepse Polder river widening

Project plan

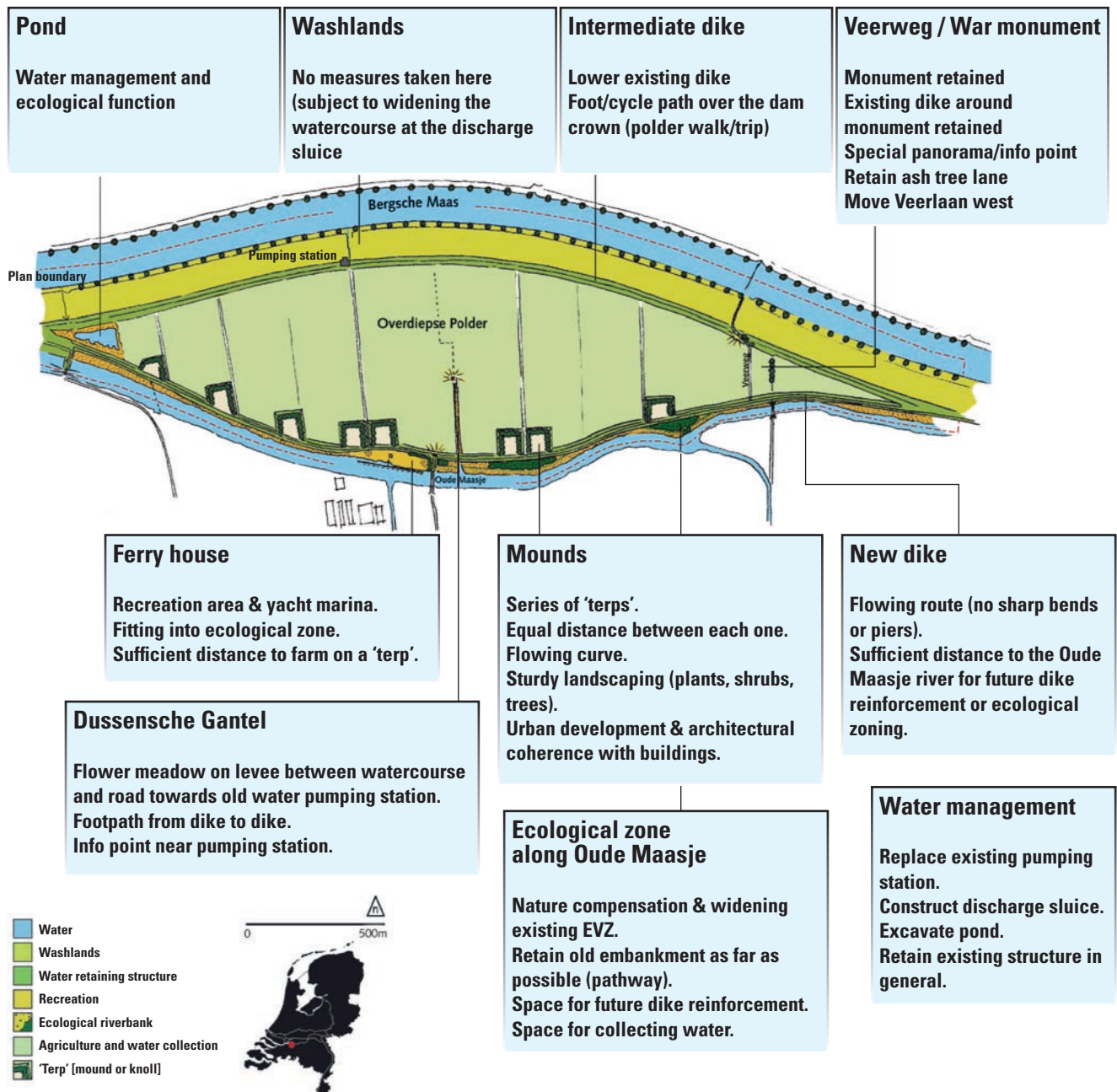


Illustration 2. Terps plan¹¹

Dike Relocation Lent project, the Brokx plan was the first version of the dike relocation option and required approximately 50 houses to be demolished. The local residents strongly resisted this and organised opposition. The residents in the Overdiepse Polder case were also not happy with government's plans, because they didn't trust the government to take their interests properly into consideration when drawing them up. The second similarity concerns the reaction to the governments' plans and initially a defensive strategy was drawn up aimed at causing delays in the decision-

making process through taking legal steps. In the second situation the citizens decided to develop their own plans, because they realised that opposition only delayed the process, but didn't lead to its cancellation. With the Lent case it was the Lentse Warande, and with the Overdiepse Polder case it was the 'terps plan' that was drawn up on the initiative of the residents. The third similarity concerns the initial reaction of government, which was identical in each case: initially they didn't know how to deal with the initiative shown by the residents. It took quite a while before they took



Illustration 3. International interest in the Overdiepse Polder project

it seriously. With the Overdiepse Polder project, the resident's initiative was taken seriously at an earlier stage than it was with the Dike Relocation Lent project.

However, both projects had interesting points and differences that explain why societal self-organisation in the Overdiepse Polder case did have a positive effect in contrast to the Dike Relocation Lent project. The first major difference between the projects was that the province (North Brabant) quickly embraced the 'terps plan' and insisted on supporting it from the position of having a vision of the area and a strategy. Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management gave the province the scope to carry out the project management, but still felt that it was ultimately responsible and crept into the role of supervisor. The new role relationship caused a period of groping around and tension between the bottom-up process initiated by the province, and the traditional top-down control implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. When combined with the 'not-invented-here' attitude of the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, it was responsible for the problems experienced at start-up. Nonetheless, the province was able to get the upper hand and designed an interactive process in which the initial 'terps plan' would be taken further in a project group where

water experts from the province, the water board and external consultants (specifically Habiforum) together with the area players, and would continue to develop the 'terps plan' thereby making it feasible and workable.

Regarding the Dike Relocation Lent project, it was only because of strong pressure from the Nijmegen town council that the Lents Warande resident's initiative was taken seriously. Heavy lobbying by the resident's federation ensured that the council in turn put the pressure on alderman Depla who was soon forced to consider the Lentse Warande and include it in the environmental impact assessment. The officials from the municipality modified a few necessary items and aspects of the alternative plan in order that it could play a comprehensive role in the assessment.

This indicated a second major difference between both projects. With Overdiepse Polder the resident's initiative was acted upon and developed even further in the project group that consisted of a wide collection of government professionals and local experts from the area – the initiative received a place in a co-creative process. The Lent resident's initiative also made an impact, but this didn't happen within co-production, but by way of official professionals who worked in relative isolation from the societal players. No co-creative process was started. Although an advisory

group was set up in which representatives of the resident's group had places, this was principally intended to make recommendations for further development and dealings with the plans. There isn't voting of any substance in the group. The recommendations given by this group for continuing with the Lentse Warande didn't receive sufficient support in the steering committee and so it was decided to proceed with the dike relocation option, because this guaranteed the highest water level reduction in the future (2030). In the short-term, 2015, both alternatives were considered to be equal.

The third major difference between the processes of self-organisation came from the specific preconditions and administrative context in which both projects were developed. With the Dike Relocation Lent project, the timing of the citizen's initiative was poor. The alternative only came to the fore after various administrative agreements concerning dike relocation had been agreed between the governmental departments involved (province, central government and municipal authority). Their preparatory survey took place in a relatively closed circle and was consolidated into a number of administrative agreements. It was specifically the agreement in which the dike relocation (preferred by the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management) and the second bridge over the River Waal (preferred by the Nijmegen municipality) was banded about and eventually finalised that proved to be a limiting factor for making further developments with the Lentse Warande alternative. Every time the alternative plan was brought up, central government threatened to cancel the financing of the second bridge if the municipal authority did not agree with the dike relocation option. These unfavourable starting conditions ensured specifically that the resident's alternative plan would not see the light of day.

The starting conditions for the Overdiepse Polder project were better and the timing was better, because no strict administrative preconditions had been created or agreements made. This 'lapse' worked positively and ensured that there was more room for the citizen's initiative to grow and be included in a process of co-creation, ultimately leading to plan implementation. The role of the province was important for keeping the resident's alternative alive. This is in contrast to the Lent case where the officials didn't bother at all about the initiative from the residents.

Timing, support from the administrative key figures and inclusion of the alternative plan in a concerted process of co-creation are important conditions for self-organisation before water governance and resident's initiatives have any chance of success. Social innovation and societal self-organisation must be timed properly and linked into existing administrative forces in order to obtain practical development. ■

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This article deals with civic engagement in two Room for the River projects (Overdiepse Polder and Lent) from a societal self-organisation perspective. Today, citizens show more self-organising capabilities by drafting their own plans alongside those of (local, regional and national) governments. Citizens use all kind of resources (e.g. knowledge, connections, time) to mobilise self-organising capacity. However, this article argues that societal self-organisation in the Overdiepse Polder case has paid off, while in Lent it has been left stranded. With cross-case analysis it becomes clear that good timing, the organisation of co-creation between citizens and representatives from governments, and the smart linking of self-organisation into existing governmental institutions can be considered the three most important factors in making societal self-organisation meaningful in the practice of water governance.