

Long term governance in the Noordwaard: matching physical features, social needs and economic revenues

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Introduction

The Noordwaard is a recently realised high water floodplain near Dordrecht. The design plan of the Noordwaard is an answer to the increasing river discharge extremes, combining water safety, agriculture, recreation and nature management (Stobbelaar & Schoenmakers, 2018). However, in terms of governance a gap has emerged. The Department of Water management and Public Works (RWS) had been the main driver in this redevelopment project, being both landowner and project developer. However, there was no plan for the governance of the area after completion (Van Buren, 2017), while institutional settings are required to maintain the floodplain in an integrated way (Fliervoet and Van den Born, 2016). The area has a high potential for the development of different ecosystem services, thus it has the potential to stimulate economic growth in the area. Which leads us to the following question: to what extent does the layout comply with the recreational wishes of the inhabitants and other stakeholders in the area?

Method

Through the platform of the Kenniscentrum Natuur en Leefomgeving (KCNL) a triple helix research project was developed to assess the integral development of the Noordwaard. Our research question was addressed as part of this project. A power/interest matrix was made on the basis of 17 stakeholder interviews about governance, qualities and bottlenecks of the area (Van Buren, 2017). Recreationists were interviewed on their perception of natural areas and how they view the developments within the Noordwaard (Hendriks, 2017). The same was done for the inhabitants (Bromberg, in prep).

Qualities and bottlenecks

Local residents mention the following qualities of the area: natural (fish eagle) and landscape qualities (open area), showing the historic struggle against flooding, and management by large grazers. Recreational possibilities like biking, walking, bird spotting, canoeing (Figure 1) are also highly appreciated. This was in line with the preferences of the recreationists (Hendriks, 2017).

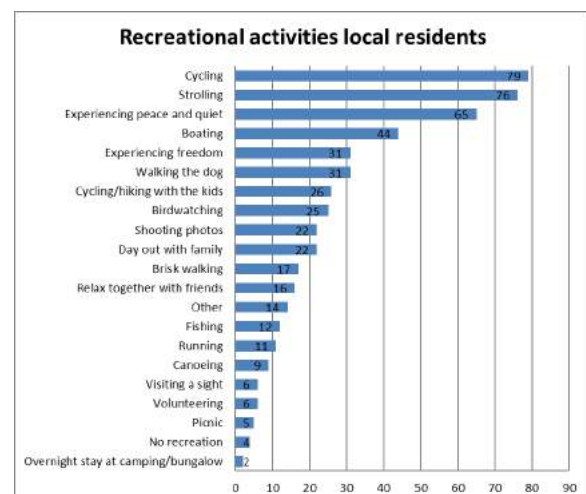


Figure 1. Recreation motives of inhabitants (Bromberg in prep).

The area is easy to access for cyclists. Although, they also point out some bottlenecks like the use of the Bandijk (the main dyke). Here conflicts occur between different user groups, for instance between inhabitants driving to their homes and bird watchers blocking the route. There are only a few accessible footpaths and there is no regular bus line. Some of the stakeholders would like to expand recreational possibilities, while others would keep it small, protecting nature qualities

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and/or Sunday rest (Hendriks, 2017; Bromberg, in prep).

Among the interviewed recreationist the desire to visit the Noordwaard repeatedly when more recreational activities would be developed, correlated with their reason for visiting. Those who visited the area for recreation have the intention to return ($r_2 = 0.335$; $p < 0.05$) than those who visited for the natural value ($r_2 = -0.335$; $p < 0.05$) and relaxation ($r_2 = -0.285$; $p < 0.05$) (Hendriks, 2017).

Governance

As written in the former section, the stakeholders are satisfied with the changes made in the area, but they also see possibilities for improvement. However, a clear governance structure is lacking and more cooperation is wanted to neutralize bottlenecks and to seize opportunities. Several stakeholders, like the municipality of Werkendam and recreational organizations want to cooperate with Free Nature (owner of the large grazers) because their management is very important for the image of the area and recreational possibilities.

According to the power/interest matrix, the five most important stakeholders need to be encouraged and influenced to actively take a role in the development of the area (Figure 2). They should take care that especially stakeholders with little power but high stakes (farmers and recreational entrepreneurs) could/should be more

Conclusions and discussion

The Noordwaard is a typical example of a project with emphasis on placemaking, somehow disregarding place keeping aspects (Dempsey & Burton, 2011). Especially a recreational vision is necessary to keep developing the area, because most of the stakeholders have opinions about and / or interest in recreation. This recreational vision should determine what sort of recreationists will be attracted to the area, which will influence both the natural value and the economic progress of the area. Strongly related to this and very important for place keeping is to secure funding over the long term for managing the area for recreation, livelihood and nature quality, which therefore should be an important element of the new vision. Therefore it is vital for the landowner (RWS) to involve the main stakeholders in writing this vision, in order to balance their wishes with the physical features of the area and the economic revenues from the area. Fortunately RWS has become aware of the lack in governance structure and has appointed a new internal coordinator for the Noordwaard. More in general the Noordwaard learns us that organizing a governance structure in large scale spatial projects from the start on is essential to keep stakeholders attached and the area in continues development.

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involved in the governance process.

Figure 2. Power/interest matrix of the stakeholders in the Noordwaard and their preferred method of participation (Van Buren, 2017).