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F2: Public perception and participation

Project:	F: River governance: uncertainties, participation and collaboration
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Research description

Gaining knowledge on local perceptions of and public support for landscape interventions helps water managers to make better informed decisions and provides a fruitful starting point for initiating public participation. Subproject F2 focuses on stakeholder perceptions and opportunities for stakeholder participation and collaboration in river management. Our study area is a ten-kilometre stretch of the Waal between Tiel and Ophemert, where the traditional groynes have been replaced by longitudinal dams. This intervention has split the river into a main and secondary channel, which is projected to improve flood safety and discharge capacity, reduce maintenance costs, and create opportunities for inland shipping, recreation and nature development. The aim of this study is twofold:

- (1) we monitor how local residents, recreational anglers and boaters, and shipping professionals (Fig. 1) perceive the changes that come about due to the construction of the longitudinal dams;
- (2) we explore how and to what extent local stakeholders can be involved in monitoring the effects of the dams, and initiated a pilot project for participatory monitoring. The results from this project will inform the design of public engagement strategies.



Figure 1. An overview of the stakeholders included in the study (clockwise): local residents (Source: Beeldbank RWS), recreational boaters and anglers, and professional shipping (Source: L. Verbrugge).

Results

Throughout 2014, largely before the dams were constructed, a first round of surveys was carried out among the stakeholder groups: residents (N = 1102), recreational anglers and boaters (N = 75) and shipping professionals (N = 88). The survey tapped into perceptions of the river landscape, attachment to the area, views on nature, and expectations of the longitudinal dams (Verbrugge & Van den Born, 2015). The results showed that residents from the villages were more strongly attached to the river landscape than those living in the city of Tiel, and anglers were more dependent on it than any other group. Regarding the planned longitudinal dams, shipping professionals and especially anglers had negative expectations of the measures, mostly due to safety and accessibility concerns respectively, whereas boaters and residents had positive expectations, especially regarding flood safety. Based on stakeholder perceptions and their level of concern, we initiated two pilots on participatory monitoring (PM) in the spring of 2016. First, a group of volunteer anglers is participating in fish monitoring by reporting their catches in the study area (Figure 2). Second, a number of shipping professionals is involved in measuring fuel usage, travel time and safety aspects on the trajectory. These pilots have been initiated in close collaboration with the Royal Dutch Angler Association and Royal BLN-Schuttevaer (shipping), Rijkswaterstaat and research institutes.



Figure 2. Measuring catches at a fishing competition organized by the regional angling association HFMN (Source: HFMN).

Next steps

At the end of 2016 a second round of surveys will be sent out to all the stakeholder groups, in order to analyse how the groups differ in their perceptions of the landscape now that the dams have been constructed, and how their perceptions have changed in the past two years. The next steps in the participatory monitoring pilot are to report on the data collection and participants' experiences; to share these results among the participants and involved partners; and to evaluate the PM pilot using both process and outcome criteria.

References

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