Room for the River and the creation of a collaborative culture

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Extremely high water levels in the Dutch river basins and near-floods in 1993 and 1995 were serious warnings. And it showed that reinforcing the levees does not bring a long term solution. In 1995, a quarter of a million people and a million head of livestock had to be evacuated. Heavier rainfall and larger volumes of meltwater mean our rivers have to discharge more water.

As a direct result of these events, the Dutch made a shift from fighting against water to living with water. By implementing the Room for the River Program, together with regional water authorities, municipalities and provinces, Rijkswaterstaat is increasing the discharge capacity of the Rhine (and its tributaries) from 15 to 16 million liters of water per second, by providing more room for the rivers.

The highest priority has been given to the safety of the four million people living in the river basin. Unique about our program is that next to measures taken to achieve required safety levels, spatial quality is enhanced. Nature and economy will benefit from the 34 projects and there will be more opportunities for recreation. Solutions that retain as much farmland as possible are preferred. Room for the River is among the first national government programs involving co-creation between the ministries of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure & Environment. Rijkswaterstaat is working on this program in co-creation and collaboration with national government, regional water authorities, municipalities, provinces, ngo's and civilians. Various (governmental) agreements in cooperation and realization ensure realization within time and on budget. Transparent and pubic permit coordination to agreed ownership and flexibility in execution, allow objectives to be met more effectively or in a more socially acceptable way. In 2015, most of our projects will be completed.

In this new integrated approach to flood defense in the riverine area, we have applied a coherent strategy that takes account of the area's functions and the interests at stake there. For a long term effect, we aimed for a collaborative culture between all stakeholders. The Dutch riverine area is of international economic, ecological and scenic importance, and an important feature of the main national and international spatial planning structure. In addition, the aim was to retain flexibility in implementing the objectives, leaving room for alternative measures other than those listed in the basic package or for the application of new knowledge, techniques or technologies. This allows the objectives to be met more effectively or in a more socially acceptable way. This approach is in accordance with the desires of the region itself.

Communication strategy
One of our critical success factor lies within the development and implementation of our strategic communication on both Program and project level. Our communication strategy is based on our ambition to deliver a high quality Room for the River Program within time and budget. For the comprehension of the utility of our Program, excellent collaboration and understanding between all stakeholders is necessary. Therefore, one of our core value lies within the fact that not the organization, but our environment is most important. To connect and understand the complex field of stakeholders we operate in, the communication strategy is embedded in the 'heart and veins' of the Room for the River Program. Through different lean methodologies (action canvas and scrum project management) we are constantly monitoring the in- and external situation of the Program. We act upon this situation through branding Room for the River by campaigns, events and facilitating different communities.

We are especially proud of our own developed and unique concept of 'river combers', our facilitated and uncensored community management of engaged civilians. Because the story of Room for the river is not complete leaving out the sacrifices that had to be made to meet our goals, for example the relocation of farms that are owned by families for

One other success factor is co-creation. Co-creation is evidenced by the innovative administrative approach and by the way the national and regional authorities work together; as well as the active way citizen participation is sought in defining the measures. This enhances planning quality while broadening support and reducing the risk of delays.

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- National government defines the borderline objectives for safety, timing and funding. The regional authorities have maximum scope to conceive and implement plans within these borderline objectives.
- Residents and the business community are involved right from the start. A good example is the participation of citizens in the Overdiepse Polder. The dairy farmers that were forced to relocate due to the depoldering are able to continue their business activities on dwelling mounds – a plan they themselves devised with support of professionals (?).

From Stakeholders to Shareholders
Instead of a top-down approach, we aimed for true co-creation and collaboration between all stakeholders. Especially important is that our program directorate facilitates in background– not our organization but our stakeholders are most important. Not only the involvement of central government, but also regional and local authorities, legal authorities, knowledge institutions, consultants, contractors, ngo's, farmers, house owners and other interested affected by our measures. It has been a growing community during the development of the Program - and the community is still growing!

Before entering each phase the Program starts the preparation work such as finding answers to questions, like: which authorities do we need to involve? What should be the role of the parties involved? Which information do we need for decision-making? And how do we make this information relevant? In other words, to accomplish our social added value on a long term, at first we analyse local situations.

An example from the exploration phase: Local and regional authorities were asked to participate in the decision of which measures to implement: they were consulted and asked for advice. Possible solutions were defined together, leading up to more than 600 measures. Preliminary designs were made and information was gathered and given to the authorities on what effects these measures would have on flood protection, environment and costs. The decision was made by the central government with approval of the parliament. But in the decision-making, there was given due attention to the consultation and advice of the local and regional authorities. The result of this approach was a general national consensus on a Program with two goals, a broad spatial outline, a set budget and a time frame. This kind of approach influenced the framework of the Program and lead to further respect and trust between parties. In the next phases different parties could take the lead of working the projects out, based on agreements of the framework.

The collaboration with stakeholders has resulted in innovative, surprising solutions and spatial enrichment. Projects which could not have been developed without mutual collaboration. The systematic involvement of stakeholders has created ownership of the Program, proudness on the results and ambassadors for water management in the Netherlands. A community bounded by working together on safety and enrichment of their surroundings.

Collaboration within Room for the River has been shaped by an intelligent interweaving of operational, institutional and constitutional cooperation at central and decentralised level of government. But, the flood protection issue is not merely a national issue; it also demands local inclusion. We took local interests and ambitions into consideration early in the decision-making phase.
Given the different situations along the Rivers IJssel, Waal and Lek, we appointed so-called 'river branch managers', responsible for all communications on a river branche from ministry to residents. These could quickly pick up on signals around the areas concerned. Our Program directorate keeps track of the local projects via the river branch managers who form a link between the regional project teams and the national Program directorate.
An approach we believe in is transforming our stakeholders into shareholders. Shareholders that can benefit from our program. Our main ambition - next to reaching our Program goals - is transforming our stakeholders into proud shareholders and ambassadors of the Room for the River Program. The approach to cooperation within Room for the River contributes to enhanced planning, greater support from our stakeholders and smooth implementation of the plans. According to experts[i], Room for the River is the first major infrastructure project completed mostly on time and within budget.

Multilayered Approach that lead the RvdR Program to Success
Three professors attribute the success of Room for the River to the 'multi-level water governance'[ii]. This entails cooperation at central and decentralized level. It also entails public, private and social spheres being

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harmonized. The scientists are of the opinion that Room for the River has been successful in organizing this plurality whilst scrupulously monitoring the objectives of the Program. Even the three-quarter review[iii] concludes that the process architecture of Room for the River has contributed to successful cooperation. The replacement decision, as an option for local interested parties to introduce alternative measures, has contributed to the sense of equality and is highly appreciated by local parties, like the participation of citizens in the Overdiepse Polder. 'Multi-level governance' is described in the review as 'a smart concept of public-public cooperation', with important values being variation in terms of leadership style (sometimes serving, sometimes compelling), taking each other seriously, cooperation on the basis of equality and giving each other credit where credit is due (win-win). Two PhD candidates wrote that 'the approach and cooperation within Room for the River are working, that the interests of stakeholders are being carefully considered and that the approach is resilient to changing circumstances'[iv]. In addition to the innovative approach to water management, our program is characterized by the way the public-public cooperation is organized: our multilevel governance mode with more than 20 public agencies. In pioneering in a new public leadership role, we varied in style (sometimes servant, sometimes mandatory). Core values underlying this style is to take each other serious, and enhance cooperation based on equality, sometimes giving each other credit (win-win). Last, but not least the 'fun factor' is very well appreciated throughout involved stakeholders which results in strong identification with our program.

We are sharing our 'Dutch approach' on an international scale. Our flood protection expertise of innovative technologies, multilevel governance and building with nature is attracting widespread international interest. As the largest Dutch civil water engineering project since the Deltaworks, we are especially proud of the true stakeholder community we accomplished through our new perspective in public leadership.

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[i] Ernst ten Heuvelhof (Professor of Public Administration at Delft University of Technology)
[ii] Jurian Edelenbos (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Ernst ten Heuvelhof (Delft University of Technology) and Michiel Kort
    (Erasmus University and Delft University of Technology)
[iii] carried out by Andersson Elffers Felix (2013)
[iv] Sebastiaan van Herk and Jeroen Rijke, both from Delft University of Technology,in their theses