Bridging water and space?

Exploring barriers to the integration of water managers and spatial planners in climate-proofing the Dutch water system

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Project description

Countries worldwide are facing complex water challenges: too much water in some places, too little in others. Climate change is increasing both flooding and drought, increasing the pressure on water systems and management approaches (Bartholomeus et al., 2023). Traditionally, Dutch water management has focused on controlling water through technical measures such as embankments, canals, draining water as quickly as possible (Zevenbergen & Gersonius, 2007; Morrison et al., 2018). However, with droughts now becoming more frequent and severe, there is an urgent need to retain water in the landscape (Hartmann & Driessen, 2017; Busscher et al. 2019).

This shift in approach – often referred to as the water transition – requires more than just technical solutions. Spatial and governance innovation are becoming increasingly important. Capturing and storing water requires more space, which calls for a stronger collaboration between water managers and spatial planners.

This project therefore aims to deepen the empirical understanding of how collaboration between water managers and spatial planners takes shape in the Netherlands. The focus will be on identifying barriers and opportunities that arise in working across the different policy domains and governance levels through a qualitative, exploratory approach. The assistant's tasks will include, among others: (a) collecting data – identifying and reviewing Dutch policy documents, strategies, or reports relevant to the water transition and integrated water management; (b) preparing and conducting interviews – help identify relevant stakeholders, conduct and transcribe interviews; (c) analysing data – coding the data (inductively or based on hypotheses), searching for recurring barriers to collaboration and opportunity spaces to strengthen integration; (d) summarising and reporting the results.

Job requirements

The suitable candidate has a strong interest in spatial planning, water governance, and sustainability transitions, and is motivated to contribute to research on how the Netherlands can become more climate-robust. Experience with qualitative research methods – such as document analyses, interviews, and thematic coding – is useful. Good writing skills are an asset, particularly if the student wants to contribute to written outputs (internal reports or paper drafts).

Literature

Bartholomeus, R. P., et al. (2023). "Managing water across the flood–drought spectrum: Experiences from and challenges for the Netherlands." Cambridge Prisms: Water **1**: e2.

Busscher, T., et al. (2019). "Strategies for integrating water management and spatial planning: Organising for spatial quality in the Dutch “Room for the River” program." Journal of Flood Risk Management **12**(1): e12448.

Hartmann, T. and P. Driessen (2017). "The flood risk management plan: towards spatial water governance." Journal of Flood Risk Management **10**(2): 145-154.

Morrison, A., et al. (2018). "A review of the flood risk management governance and resilience literature." Journal of Flood Risk Management **11**(3): 291-304.

Zevenbergen, C. and B. Gersonius (2007). Challenges in urban flood management. Advances in urban flood management. R. Ashley, S. Garvin, E. Pasche, A. Vassilopoulos and C. Zevenbergen. New York, Taylor and Francis.