

Actor coalitions and implementation in strategic delta planning: Opening the Haringvliet sluices in the Netherlands

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The sustained development of urbanizing deltas is influenced by natural and societal processes. These processes are characterized by their long time span, in which conflicting interests of different stakeholders have to be reconciled. Reaching consent between actors is a challenge itself, but maintaining this consent throughout different stages of strategic planning – from advocacy and agenda setting to implementation – over these long periods of time is even more difficult. The implementation stage still includes many different actors involved, some of which are different than the ones who agreed before, due to both the long run of the strategic delta planning, and to a shift of tasks and responsibilities. Thus, implementation of strategic plans often features delays, deviations of agreed plans and unintended outcomes.

A key question therefore is how coalition dynamics in (pre-)planning stages influence and are influenced by the coalition dynamics during implementation. The different stages in strategic planning are often studied from either a plan formulation or an implementation perspective, but the connection between the two proves an important bottleneck for strategic planning in deltas. For instance, many building with nature solutions are still in their pilot-phase, and their upscaling can profit from lessons concerning past implementation efforts. The proposed contribution will use the case of the management of the Dutch Haringvliet sluices and the decision ('Kierbesluit') in 2000 to put these sluices ajar, to study the link between the different strategic delta planning stages and the role of the formation and change of actor coalitions herein.

With the completion of the Haringvliet dam with outlet sluices in 1970, the Haringvliet estuary of the rivers Rhine and Meuse was closed off from the sea, creating a fresh water lake. This was done to make the Dutch Southwest delta safe from flooding, and had positive effects for agricultural water supply and drinking water, but negative consequences for the ecological quality and biodiversity. In the 1980s environmental awareness increased. To restore natural processes, it was decided in 2000 to put the sluices 'ajar' as a first step towards the strategic long-term vision of tidal restoration and major rehabilitation of the Rhine-Meuse estuary. First planning was to have the Kierbesluit implemented in 2005. However, this has been put off again and again, and since the actual implementation started in 2013, planning is to have the infrastructures ready to start opening the sluices in 2018 – 13 years later. What was supposed to be the first step towards full estuarine recovery has become an end goal itself, with implementing actors strictly focusing on putting the sluices ajar and compensating for fresh water loss, dismissing building with nature possibilities behind the dam.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is used as a starting point for analysis, and will be altered and detailed with insights from implementation literature to identify lessons regarding the role and dynamics of actor coalitions from the planning to implementation stage of strategic delta planning.