Political reflection

The accompanying report presents carefully designed technical solutions optimal in a specific search space while also considering political aspects shaping the decision-making process. As policy analysts, our aim is to provide objective and transparent information to Gelderland's policymakers, considering the specific needs and constraints of the policy context. This aligns with the role of "modelers as honest policy brokers" which refers to scientists who expand or clarify the choices for decision-making in an unbiased way (Pielke, 2007). The underlying rationale is that a diversity of views, experiences, and knowledge lead to the most favorable outcomes.

By bridging the gap between political and analytical mindsets (de Bruijn & Herder, 2009), this political reflection aims to identify the challenges for the use of this report, propose strategies for the proper use of our analysis, and address potential risks that could undermine the strategy's robustness.

Identify challenges of Gelderland's proposal

Gelderland faces different challenges that may adversely impact how the proposed advice is used in decision-making. While finding the optimal solution is crucial, having the appropriate process is equally essential within the political landscape. In this regard, we will examine three distinct challenges: propagating a bottom-up proposal, broadening the agenda, and devaluation of information.

1. **The challenges of a bottom-up proposal**

A proposal that goes against tradition. Gelderland is aiming to have an active role in designing efficient flood management measures to ensure a bottom-up proposal. However, in the Netherlands, flood risk management adheres to a top-down tradition (Roth et al., 2021), where solutions are primarily conceived by national entities and sometimes enforced upon other stakeholders. The recent debate highlighted the central role of Rijkwaterstaat and Delta Commission, with Rijkswaterstaat primarily handling the analysis and both having veto power. To overcome this situation, Gelderland must create both the technical and political space that goes beyond this conventional approach. The strategy should take advantage of the network actor constellation, representing multiple interests and underlying the importance of local inputs (De Bruijn et al., 2015).

However, **Gelderland lacks "coercive power"** and faces significant constraints in the negotiation. Without veto power and with a significantly smaller budget of 20 millions for flood management compared to almost 1 billion EUR for Rijkswaterstaat and Delta (OCDE, 2014), Gelderland's influence is limited. In the decision-making process, Gelderland can be forced to accept policies if other actors form alliances. To address this, Gelderland can utilize its political leverage derived from representing three out of the five affected dike rings, bolstering its legitimacy. However, it is important to acknowledge that Dutch citizens have limited awareness regarding water management (OCDE, 2014), and their significant trust in national bodies undermines Gelderland's credibility to propose ideas.

2. The tensions of an agenda limited to flood risk management

Gelderland faces the risk of a negotiation with a limited scope. Based on the model, early warning systems and Room for River are effective and enhance resilience but overlook the province's economic and agricultural perspectives. However, as Gelderland province is situated upstream along the river, it is more susceptible to damage. It is then crucial to incorporate discussions regarding compensation (Bruijn et al., 2010) into the ongoing debate. For instance, one potential consideration could be the implementation of flood insurance measures.

Therefore, **Gelderland has an interest in broadening the agenda,** as this challenge would not favor its core interests, hindering mandate fulfillment. As the current report doesn't tackle side effects, it could be turned against our interest by opposing stakeholders. To navigate these challenges, Gelderland must maintain its political engagement and actively work towards broadening the agenda to encompass all relevant aspects.

3. Going beyond contested information

The report represents Gelderland's perspective, aiming to transcend the conventional top-down approach and foster participation from impacted actors in proposing solutions. However, **this approach introduces concerns regarding the reliability of information, the potential for bias, and the undermining of the neutral position of us as policy analysts by other actors.** Opposing stakeholders may attempt to undermine the integrity of the analysts and contest provided information, particularly in relation to the model. Their motivations may stem from conflicting interests or a desire to shape the decision-making process in their favor. In case the integrity of us as analysts cannot be maintained, this will cast doubt on the information presented in the report.

Good information is a key to good decision-making. However, the inherent complexity of the situation, coupled with diverse assumptions and conflicting interests among the involved actors complicates the issue. Additionally, the modelling process itself has limitations and relies on inherent uncertainties and assumptions, presenting additional obstacles. If Gelderland fails to navigate these challenges successfully, there is a substantial risk of information being devalued, as observed by De Bruijn in the context of megaprojects (2007). Such devaluation would significantly undermine Gelderland's ability to advocate for compensation and support for its proposed solutions. Therefore, attention should be given not only to the substance of the information, but also to the process by which information is generated (De Bruijn, 2008). This process then results in negotiated knowledge which can be of use in the decision-making process.

Affirm Gelderland's process while framing the problem

To overcome the presented challenges, different analytical steps have been performed and shared with other actors. An overview of the impacts of the solutions can be found in Appendix B.

1. Gain legitimacy

In the initial phase, the province engaged in discussions with the dike rings, establishing a consensus on the favored model. **This enhanced our legitimacy.** To further strengthen it, we collaborated with Overijssel, incorporating their perspective and creating a joint proposal. With a broad coalition of local and regional actors, it became increasingly challenging for national actors to dismiss the bottom-up approach.

2. Propose an inclusive process relying on a negotiated view

Extending the agenda and changing the perspective from top-down to bottom-up is likely to introduce greater complexity (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2021). As the projects involve more uncertainties and engage a wider range of stakeholders, the challenges of managing contested information become more prominent. In this context, there is a pressing demand for a skilled policy broker to navigate these complexities effectively.

To jump into this opportunity, **Gelderland has developed and shared a transparent tool** that aligns with the idea of a bottom-up approach. Drawing inspiration from a previous tool utilized by the Dutch Government to promote shared understanding among stakeholders (de Bruijn et al., 2015), Gelderland has developed an Interactive Decision Support Tool[1] that provides comprehensive insights into the impacts of various policies across all dike rings (see Appendix). At the outset of the process, this tool was proposed and agreed upon by all actors, serving as a platform for sharing policy ideas and fast tracking policy development through collaboration. By leveraging this tool, Gelderland gained a central role in the debate, effectively sidelining the exclusive expertise of national actors. Notably, modeling decisions involving aggregation and timescale were collaboratively determined in discussions with the dike rings. Leading up to the final debate, 6 actors uploaded their proposed policies to the tool to be shared and discussed with the other actors. The opportunity to visualize and share policies through the tool also served as the basis to engage in a negotiation process with the province of Overijssel that resulted in a set of joint policies, one of which was finally approved in the debate.

3. Anchor preferences by defining red lines

Modeling played a crucial role in the analysis, but it had its limitations, as it couldn't simulate everything and could contain errors. To establish boundaries for model usage and policy options, **we set red lines at the beginning of the debate,** ensuring that the final decision aligned with the political constraints outlined in the main report. The red lines consisted of the following key aspects:

- By emphasizing human safety, we promoted the importance of dike increase for urban areas. This was done in collaboration with Overijssel to gain momentum.
- By leveraging the limitations of early warning systems, Gelderland province managed to exclude it from the modeling. The early warning system didn't align with Gelderland's agenda, as it primarily focused on human safety while neglecting other impacts and considerations.
- Introducing the concept of a flood insurance scheme (OCDE, 2014) or monetary compensation were introduced at the outset of the discussion. As the most impacted region, Gelderland would gain the most of such a project. This approach also addressed the intrinsic conflict of who bears the cost of resilience (de Bruijn et al., 2015) and ensured equity throughout the process (Bruijn et al., 2010).

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[1] The tool can be found online in this hyperlink. And an introductory video explaining how it can be used can be seen in this hyperlink.

4. Reframing of room for rivers as unethical

Gelderland's dike rings have consistently pushed for dike increases to ensure their communities' safety, while others, including national actors, favored Room for River. Increasing dikes is locally efficient but globally inefficient, raising overall risk and lacking resilience. Also, uncertainty analysis revealed that dike failure posed a significant risk, and thus, it showed the limits of having a strategy based uniquely on dikes. This finding was known by more actors and undermined the credibility of dikes, especially for national actors.

During the process, Gelderland's primary concern was the potential exclusion of dike increases in the solution. We strategically pushed for dike increases from the start to address this, establishing them as a fundamental reference. We aimed to negotiate and arrive at a favorable solution combining Room for River projects and dike increases. Moreover, **we shifted the discussion's framing from efficiency to ethics**. It emphasized our moral duty to proactively protect the lives and property of the dike rings' residents. It underlines the consequences of having resilience. This reframing aligned with our desire for a broader scope and provided a stronger rationale for including dike increases.

Maintain a central but cooperative role

During the negotiation rounds, Gelderland has succeeded in becoming the key actor. We have gathered a coalition around us and pushed our tool and ideas at the center of the process. Further steps are needed to continue on this trend.

Gelderland should stay a cooperative player, notably for the closest allies. The main ally of the bottom-up approach is Overijssel. As every problem seeks a solution (Bruijn et al., 2010), it's necessary that Gelderland keeps the interest of Overijssel into account and devise a strategy cooperatively with it. Overall, the policy design should emphasize **stakeholder engagement and consultation** to seek input and feedback, which will enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of the proposed ideas. This will be facilitated through the proposed tool, promoting transparency, open communication, and constructive dialogue to navigate diverse interests.

Increased transparency in the tool is crucial to maintain Gelderland's strategic advantage. Gelderland should ensure that its proposals and supporting information are communicated clearly and effectively. Extensive documentation will be provided and assumptions of the model will have to be clear to every actor. The main idea is to have a shared proposal. It could also rely on independent validation and review, to further strengthen the credibility of its proposals. This external validation can provide an additional layer of assurance and mitigate the risk of contested information.

Gelderland should imply dike rings in the project design. The viewpoints of dike rings are vital and should be taken into account, particularly regarding the Room for River project. If it wasn't a favored solution for them, it seems possible to take advantage of the situation. Open discussions with them are necessary to establish a win-win agreement that takes advantage of Room for river projects. The analyst's role includes identifying potential areas for political consensus.

Gelderland's attention should be on the **respect of the game and Rijkswaterstaat cooperation .** It's necessary to keep a working relationship with all actors, thereby preventing the formation of coalitions against Gelderland's interests. Effective process management limits the use of power and mitigates the risk of Rijkwaterstaat exploiting its position. However, by proposing the tool, Gelderland could be seen as trying to by-pass Rijkswaterstaat. Maintaining a functional relationship with Rijkwaterstaat is essential, and providing them an exit strategy if the process deviates from the norm can help ensure a smooth collaboration.

Anticipate limits and risks

The devised strategy aims to advance Gelderland's agenda. However, this strategy carries inherent risks, both within the debate and more broadly within the province's mandate and during the implementation phase.

1. **Time pressure risk**

The actors' constellations, the debate space, and the possible policies are complex and large. However, time is running out for the discussion to happen. This strategy's main threat is to be put under time pressure and have solutions imposed by National Authorities. To prevent such scenarios, we have allied with OverIJssel, and the transport company to have a minority of blockade. Moreover, it is important to insist on the complexity of the system and avoid trying to over-simplify it (Stirling, 2010), in order to limit the political space for an oversimplified solution.

2. **Risk on public acceptance**

This process is at risk of political changes and public outcry. Notably, in the long run, people could disagree with the projects or its impacts. Local organizations or politicians could take advantage of the discontent and try to block the process. Gelderland province and all the actors need to make sure that public information and consultations are widely done. Such consultation would need explanation, showing technical aspects (Jasanoff, 1996b). The consultation should also be done at an early stage and in the process to keep the possibility to adapt the policy. These consultations will reinforce Gelderland's narrative for a bottom-up approach and will satisfy dike rings' concerns.

3. **Risk on implementation**

A final risk of this strategy is, after having agreed on a proposal, Gelderland would lose control over the process and the implementation of the projects. On the opposite, (Klijn et al., 2013) have shown that decentralized implementation could be very beneficial. It ensures an efficient implementation and respects the interest of our dike rings. In accordance with what has already been tried in the Netherlands, Gelderland could propose to have a design quality team composed of representatives of all different actors to ensure the follow-up. Gelderland would make sure not to lose the view of the situation.
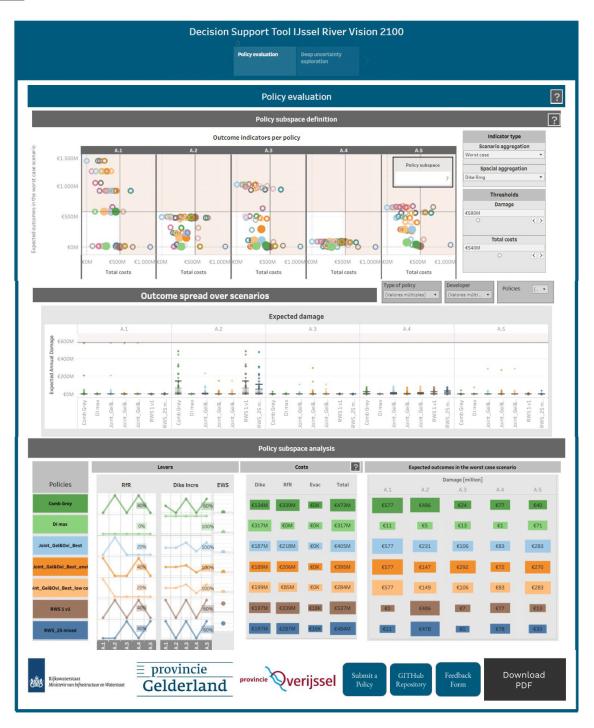
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Appendix A – Decision support tool

To help the decision and to facilitate a bottom-up process, a tool has been signed by Gelderland. It was used to evaluate policies proposed by all actors. Policies and impact were then made transparent. **It is available at this link.**

Appendix B - Summary of Impacts

Challenges / Current Action	Bottom-up approach	Limited agenda	Contested information
Gain legitimacy	Create a coalition of provinces	Gain a veto minority to avoid partial decision	Avoid conflict with Dijkrings and OverIjssel
Cooperative tool and inclusive process	Share expert knowledge Place Gelderland as necessary part of the analysis	By including financial impact, include compensation Exclude Early warning system	Propose a common view Avoid great conflicts of impact assessment
Anchor preferences		Set the agenda and extend the scope of decision	
Reframing of room for rivers as unethical		Focus on safety and not resilience	Force the debate to move beyond the model
Future Action			
Stay a cooperative player and strengthen contact with OverIJssel	Create the ground for a decision	Ensure having a veto minority	Avoid deadlock discussions on the model
Increase transparency of the tool	Gain legitimacy in the process		Improve trust in the process
Ask dike rings for specific request on Room for river project	Reinforce Bottom-up proposal	Includes other preoccupations from dike rings	
Respect the rule of the game and Rijkswaterstaat position	Emphasize Rijkswaterstaat role to guarantee their cooperation		

Table 1 – Summary of impacts on challenges of performed and future actions