

Making room for governance

Reason

The water in the rivers reached extremely high levels in 1993 and 1995. 250,000 people had to be evacuated in 1995.

Budget

€ 2.3 billion

Planning

Start: 2007

Completion: 2013-2019

Current maximum discharge capacity

15,000 m³/sec

Discharge capacity on completion

16,000 m³/sec



Room for the River works thanks to intensive cooperation between national and regional authorities in both planning and implementation stages of projects. This is essential to realise the programme on schedule and on budget.

The partners

National and regional governmentals, the general public and the business community

- In the context of this programme national or central government means the ministries of Infrastructure and the Environment, Economic Affairs and Agriculture and Innovation with the state secretary of Infrastructure and the Environment having final responsibility.
- The regional authorities. These are the local governmental bodies including provinces, water boards and municipalities.
- The local government bodies involve residents, businesses and other stakeholders including conservationists in planning and implementation of the projects.
- The Room for the River programme directorate (PDR) ensures linkage between the national and regional levels. It also monitors the budget while checking, steering and enabling the process and stimulating information and experience sharing between projects.

Methodology

Jointly devising and detailing rather than top-down

Locally within central frameworks. Timely involvement of local residents. Checking out plans and decisions by the regional authorities. Regular (informal) consultation for the pro-active solution of choke points while sharing knowledge and experience. These are the modernizing aspects around inter-administrative cooperation in Room for the River.

- The national authorities set central frameworks for safety objectives, spatial quality, the time factor and financing. The regional authorities have the scope locally to carry out the project within these frameworks.
- The local authorities elaborate these plans and designate initiating parties. They configure their own project organisation, ensure the timely involvement of local parties (residents) in the projects and develop an alternative preferred option and a detailed design.
- Implementation starts as soon as the state secretary for Infrastructure and the Environment approves the design (project decision). Depending on the nature of the project the initiator becomes the realising party, or a new realising party is appointed. The realising party commissions the project and contracts consultants and contractors to carry out the work.
- In the meantime the programme directorate checks that plan and implementation comply with requirements. This occurs at all key decision moments: the preferred alternative, design, tendering documentation, allocation and delivery.
- Procedures must be completed before ground-breaking: inquiry procedures, zoning plans and permits. Room for the River accelerates this process with a coordinating formula. For the realising parties this means 'one stop shopping' for all permits.
- Agreements between the various governmental bodies are set out in administrative contracts for the planning and realisation stages and in cooperation agreements. These agreements ensure a meaningful basis for support and ownership.
- The cooperation agreement includes undertakings by the parties granting permits (appropriate authorities) for the smooth operation of procedures. Pro-active solutions to choke points are pursued by regular meetings of administrative support groups.
- Where feasible adjustments are made to any policy that hampers project progress. A good example here is the system of flood damage compensation for residents of areas outside the ring of dykes. This was designed specifically for Room for the River.

- Partners at all levels in the joint process meet regularly outside the formal framework. This includes the annual Administrative Conference where Room for the River managers share knowledge and experience.

The benefits

On schedule

The approach to cooperation within Room for the River contributes to enhanced planning, greater support and smooth implementation. As a result Room for the River is on schedule. According to experts this is the first major infrastructure project realised on time and within budget.

- 'Room for the River could be the best example of a major infrastructural project that did go as it should. It was budgeted at € 2.3 billion and will be on budget. Completion is set between 2013-2019 and only seven projects are undergoing a minor delay of around a year.' According to Ernst ten Heuvelhof (professor of public administration at TU Delft) in Elsevier, 18 June 2011.
- Local government bodies are in touch with what is happening on the ground. They are better positioned to mesh the plan with regional developments. For example Gorinchem municipality is combining excavation of the river foreland with a facelift for the Avelingen industrial park. Meanwhile Nijmegen is taking the opportunity of repositioning the dyke at Lent to give the town a new boost.
- Local administrators get more done – as in Nijmegen/Lent where two years of resistance by local residents was initially converted to acceptance and then to enthusiastic support. Presentation of the plans by Paul Depla – alderman at the time – drew applause.
- According to Gorinchem municipality clustering permit procedures has won a whole extra year.
- The programme's combination of integral catchment area management and spatial quality reflects increasing international calls for integral solutions.



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