

Water Shares

Restoration/Anticipation

Two Ice Books are launched in the Dutch Delta, each a regular size field guide. Different contents though. One contains recognizable acorns and seeds from a field of wildflowers we have behind our house. I live close to the river IJssel. The other field guide is titled with seeds from the Mediterranean area and contains some locally harvested seeds of Bergamot, one of those plants that comes from the south and seems to take hold in the Netherlands. So, one 'guide' refers to a nature that once was there along our rivers. The other 'guide' is in anticipation of climate change.

Both books I have put afloat where the Rhine, the major river of the Dutch delta, divides into the Waal, and, into its other -much smaller- 'distributary', the IJssel. Geologists discovered that the IJssel is a young river that runs in a 50.000 years old bedding of the Rhine. The river valley was closed in the Last Ice age with a rather low, but high enough, sand ridge. Five years ago our National Water Management worked on the river IJssel to create more space for the river. They dug new parallel channels and hit a layer in which they found black tree trunks. Dendrologists identified them as oaks that lived around 2.500 years ago, Most of them reached ages like 200-300 years! So, after that last ice-age an oak forest developed in the old Rhine valley. Then, according to historians, the Romans tinkered with the Rhine to build a harbour. It wasn't a big deal, but enough for the Rhine to get a 'bite' on the sand ridge and the old bedding was re-opened by the river around the year 1000.

For military strategic reasons the Dutch constructed in the 17th century a series of locks in the Rhine to be able to flood a zone along the border. This system was later adapted to be able to manage 'shares' of water from the Rhine into the Waal and the IJssel. Originally to divide risks of flooding, but, lately, dry spells cause more damage. Damage not to the dikes along the rivers, but to our economy! Those rivers drain too well, 'sucking' ground-water from the land they run through, which is problematic for the (industrial) agriculture. And, when the level is too low in the rivers, the freight boats cannot travel between the Rotterdam harbour, and the Hinterland. Plus, we should not forget, but many do, those rivers are not only the main arteries of our economy, but also of our nature!

Nature is not strongly represented in our management boards. Back to where I wrote: 'we' manage the incoming water: who is 'we'? Who can decide on that water. The farmers? The transport sector? The Netherlands? Germany, Switzerland and other European countries are depending on the transport to and from Rotterdam Main Port. Who owns the water, how to decide on the shares? Who profits? Those kind of questions are important to be included in water management projects. Without water there is no culture. But water is nature. And cultures differ immensely depending on their acces to, and availability of water. **Water = Culture! ... Is it?** When we tinker with water, we just re-inforce the course of our culture. We have to move into a different direction. Or, more radical: let's stop managing the water, and adapt our culture to what the water offers us.

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