

Making Rivers, Producing Futures

The Border Meuse project and the rise of an ecomodern river imaginary

10th International Meuse Symposium

10 September 2024 Liège

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De Jong, L., Veldwisch, G. J., Melsen, L. A., & Boelens, R. (2024). Making Rivers, Producing Futures: The Rise of an Eco-Modern River Imaginary in Dutch Climate Change Adaptation. *Water*, 16(4), 598. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w16040598>

The Border Meuse: what is deemed important

What should we do?

“Doing nothing [on climate change adaptation] means that until 2050, between €77.5 and €173.6 billion of climate damage can occur. This is why climate change adaptation is needed.”

“A forceful interplay of giving space to rivers and dike reinforcement”

Who knows the area?

“The Meuse-explorers, inhabitants and volunteers have most knowledge of the area.”

“Deltares en RIVM [water knowledge institute and meteorological institute] are trustworthy, although you should not blindly follow them because this drought was not modelled, that hurts.”

What is worth knowing in the area?

Risk and vulnerability, economic losses/benefits of flood(protection), biodiversity monitoring, participatory successes/involvement

Theories and methods

- River Imaginaries

“collectively performed and publicly envisioned reproductions of riverine socionatures mobilised through truth claims of social life and order”

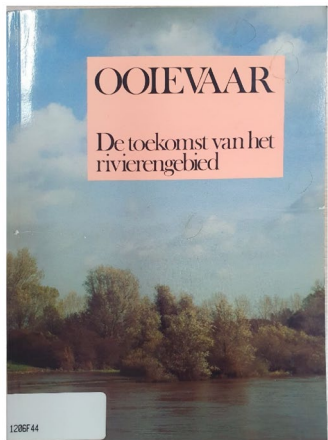
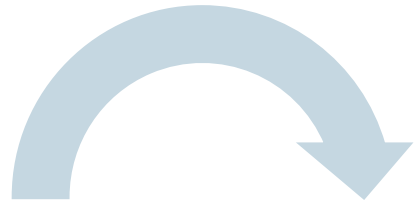
- Imagination ≠ Imaginary
- Imaginary = collective
- Truth claims = connectors
- Future oriented

Methods

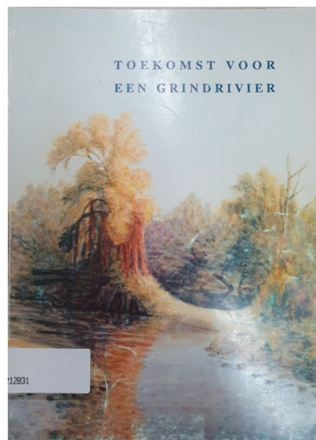
Exploring river visions, river studies
and its conclusions

In practice: organising events,
attending events, interviews,
riverwalks

Vision changes in the Border Meuse



(a)



(b)



(a)



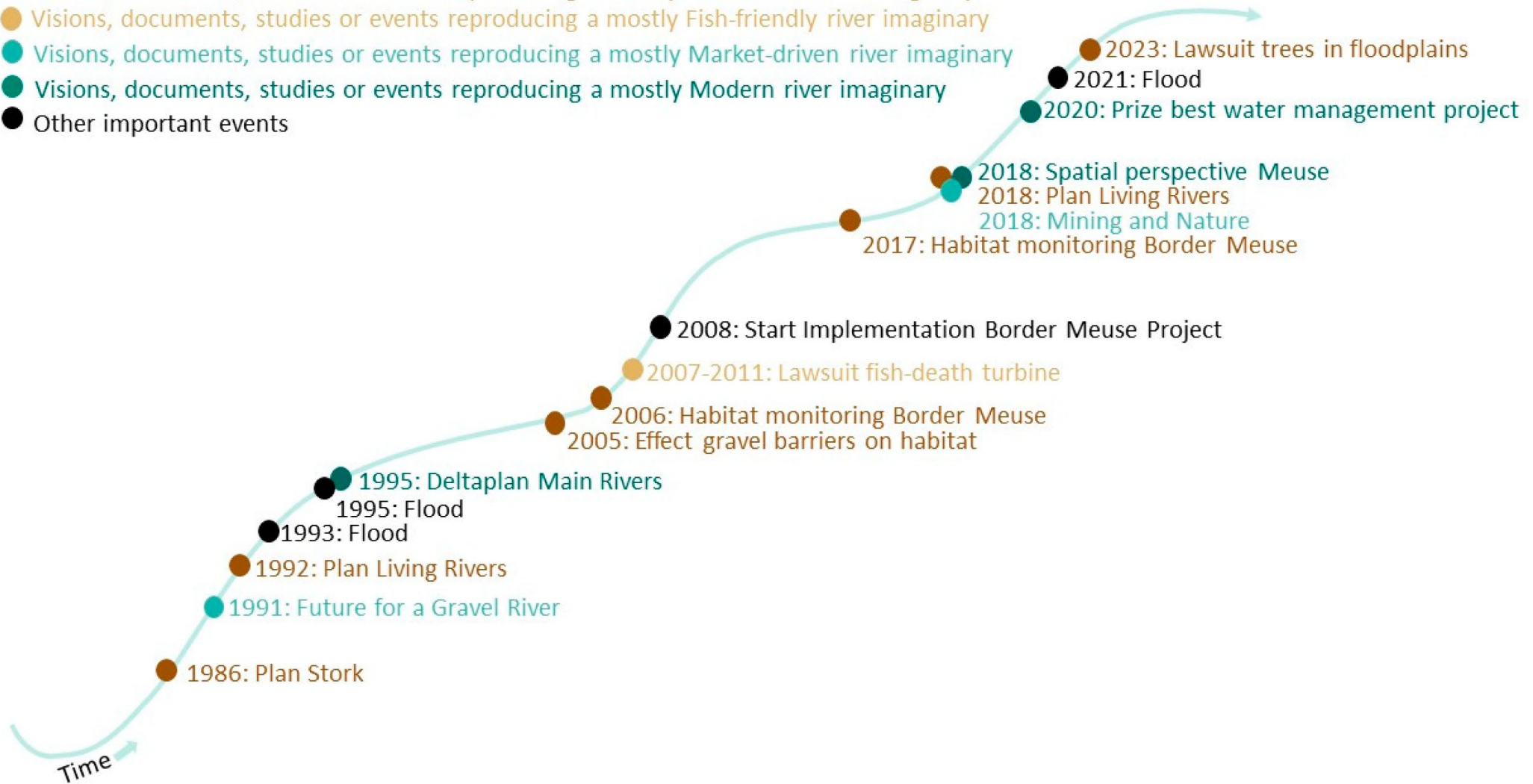
(b)



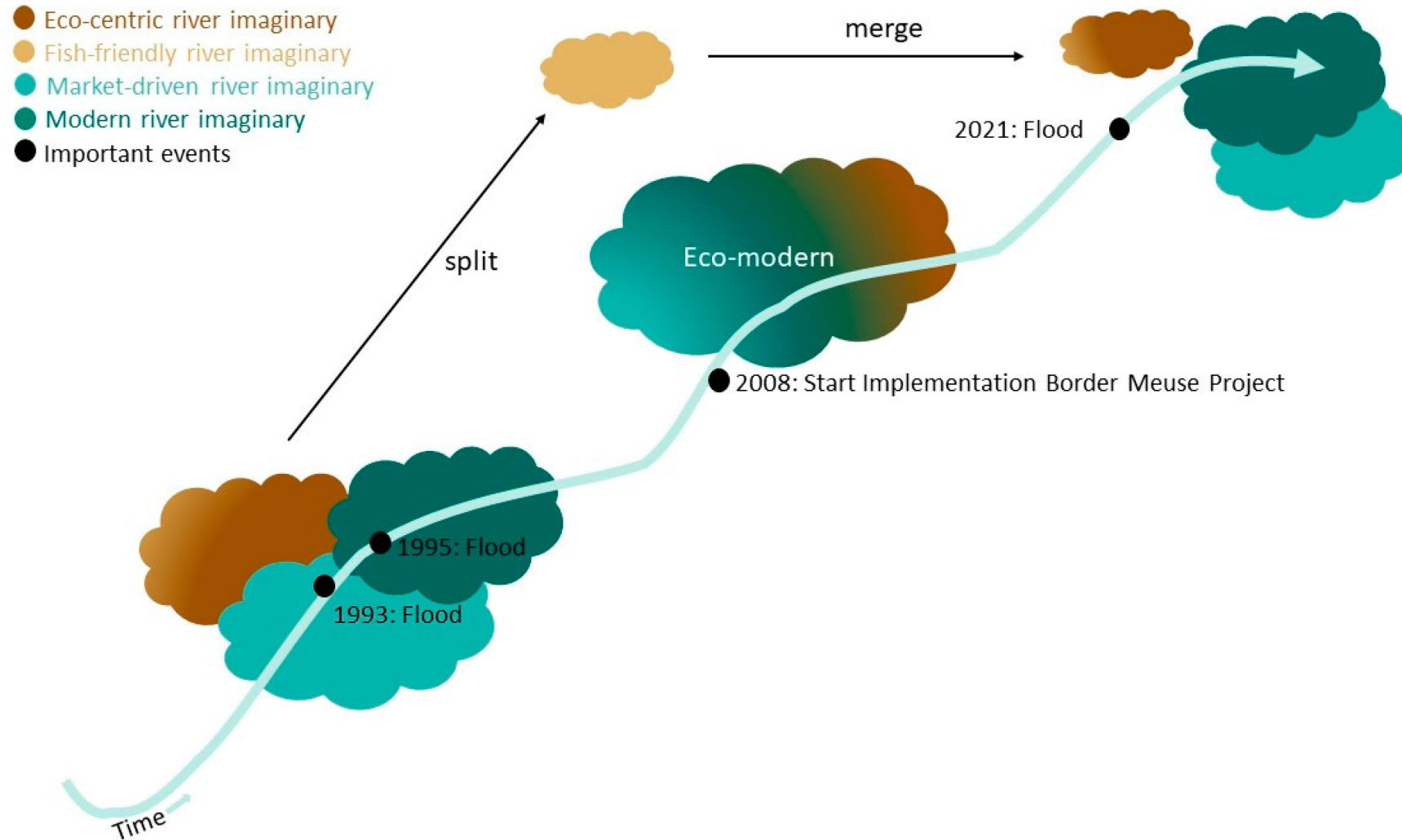
The illustrations on the left were made by (a) Natuur en Milieu Gelderland [39] and (b) Bureau Strooming and reused with the owner's permission [41,45]. The fish photo on the left middle (a) was taken by Henk Houben and reused with the permission of the owner David Vertegaal, Sportvisserij Nederland. The photo on the middle right (b) was taken by Thijs Belgers and reused with the owner's permission [49]. Illustration on the vision on the left made by Jeroen Helmer, ARK Rewilding Nederland and reused with the owner's permission

Collective truth-building

- Visions, documents, studies or events reproducing a mostly Eco-centric river imaginary
- Visions, documents, studies or events reproducing a mostly Fish-friendly river imaginary
- Visions, documents, studies or events reproducing a mostly Market-driven river imaginary
- Visions, documents, studies or events reproducing a mostly Modern river imaginary
- Other important events



Imaginaries are dynamic



Discussion: who know's best?

	Dominant Truth Regime	Contesting Truth Regime	Merged Truth Regime
	Modern and Market-Driven River Imaginary	Eco-Centric River Imaginary	Eco-Modern River Imaginary
Visible power	<p><u>River future:</u> a safe river, calculated through safety standards that are determined in the water law. The leading vision is described in the formal Delta programme.</p> <p><u>River experts:</u> hydrologists and hydraulic engineers</p> <p><u>River rules and laws:</u> draw on flood safety laws</p> <p><u>River institutes:</u> Ministry of Infrastructure and Water, national water authorities, and knowledge institutes partially financed by the state</p>	<p><u>River future:</u> a wild river, determined by the amount of human interventions in the area (desired as minimum) and the amount of ecological processes that can exist (desired as maximum). The vision is part of a broader re-wilding movement.</p> <p><u>River experts:</u> ecologists</p> <p><u>River rules and laws:</u> draw on environmental laws</p> <p><u>River institutes:</u> NGOs and environmental consultants</p>	<p><u>River future:</u> a wild but safe and economically feasible river where ecology can develop if it does not hamper flood safety.</p> <p><u>River experts:</u> A strong alliance between technocratic river management and eco-centric river management. Both draw on empiricism and historical data to gain knowledge about the future, which strengthens their imaginary.</p> <p><u>River rules and laws:</u> draw on flood safety and environmental laws and aim to find compromises or synergies between the two</p> <p><u>River institutes:</u> Partnerships between public and private parties, such as the Border Meuse consortium</p>
Hidden power	<p><u>River agenda:</u> To understand water safety, research should be dedicated to quantifiable knowledge of risks and vulnerability.</p> <p><u>Included views:</u> market partners (gravel industry)</p> <p><u>Exclusion strategy:</u> diminish trust in ecological knowledge by ignoring counter-facts on the implications of the project on ecology</p>	<p><u>River agenda:</u> To understand river ecology, research should be dedicated to quantifiable knowledge of biodiversity, with a focus on the whole ecosystem and species-specific interactions.</p> <p><u>Included views:</u> market partners (gravel industry)</p> <p><u>Counter strategy:</u> producing counter-facts and demonstrating the impact of the dominant truth regime on certain ecologies</p>	<p><u>River agenda:</u> To understand how river ecology and water safety can be combined and optimised and benefit from each other, research should be focused on opportunities to couple the research domains and quantify their complementarity in reaching optimised and cost-effective water safety</p> <p><u>Exclusion strategy:</u> framing species-specific ecology such as fish/aquatic ecology as biased and single-minded</p>
Normalising power	<p><u>River moralisation:</u> Controlling the river for flood safety is/should be a common goal of subjects and rulers. Thus, subjects need to be educated by the ruling parties. Protecting people from floods is a common task and is best realised by top-down collaboration between the public and private sectors.</p>	<p><u>River moralisation:</u> A healthy river is/should be a common goal of subjects and rulers. Thus, subjects need to be educated by the ruling parties. Protecting the river ecology is a common task and is best realised by tow-down river management.</p>	<p><u>River moralisation:</u> A healthy river can contribute to a safe river and is/should be a common goal of subjects and rulers. Thus, subjects need to be educated. A safe and healthy river is a common desire best realised by top-down collaboration between the public and private sectors where participation is aimed at creating allies.</p>

Conclusion and take away messages

1. In the Border-Meuse, an eco-modern river imaginary was realised
2. Through collective – and contestation of – truth-building, some imaginaries became more powerful than others
3. Futures do exist in the present, and above all, hold a significant power over how we act in our present and rediscover our past
4. Water management is a deeply political endeavour

Thank you!

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Funded by the
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