



ISNGI presentation

*Creating climate-proof
infrastructures: a re-politicization
of the urban water system?*

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The issue at stake

Transformation of the urban water system is needed

(Wong & Brown, 2009)

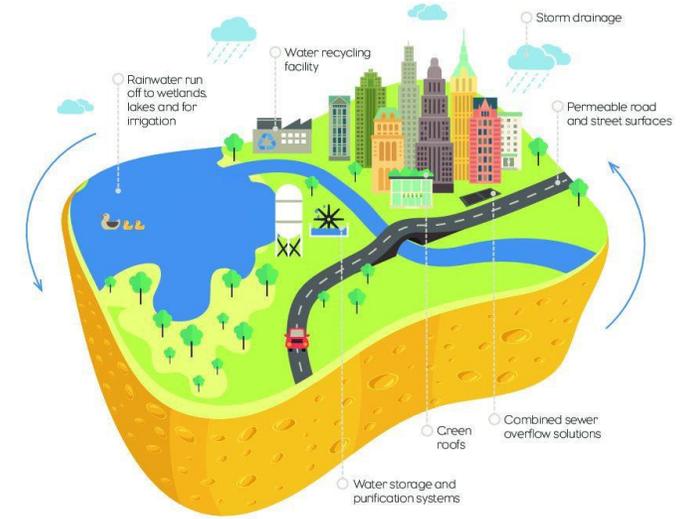
Yet: path dependencies (vested interests, sunk costs, increasing returns)

(Hommels, 2005; Furlong, 2010)

De-politicization and taken-for-grantedness of infrastructures

(Leigh-Star, 1999; Kaika, 2004)

More evolution than revolution: incremental change in infra systems





The politics of infrastructure improvements

(Incremental) infrastructure improvements are made on a daily basis

“Micro-politics” in the everyday activities for the operation of the system

(Kuzemko, 2016; Björkman & Harris, 2018)

- Knowledge asymmetries between operator and others
- Access to infrastructure and resources

Relational perspective of infrastructure (McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008; Rutherford & Coutard, 2014; Goh, 2020)



Social identity of operators

Rooted in modern state administration and technocratic government (Kaika, 2006; Björkman & Harris, 2018)

Engineering and regulatory logics dominate (Wiewiora et al., 2015; Willems, 2018)

System perspective covering long timespans, centralized bureaucracy with formalized procedures and professional institutions

Largely outside the public realm



Re-politicization?

“[W]ater flows across different ‘natural’, ‘technical’, and ‘social’ worlds, as well as their hybrid formations” (Medd and Marvin, 2008: 282)

Rise of integrated, participatory, and inclusive infrastructure governance

- Yet: uneasy for technical experts (Hillier, 2018)

New linking of knowledge and action → re-considering expertise



Boundary work

Infrastructure improvements should be understood as co-production: acknowledging and including a wider variety of meanings

Need for ‘boundary work’ or intermediaries to overcome fragmentation of knowledge and practices (Willems et al., 2022a; 2022b)

- Boundary spanners
- Boundary objects
- Boundary organizations



Boundary work

Acknowledging power relationships

Intermediaries have “a degree of bias and agency in relation to the normative position and strategic goals of espoused niches vis-à-vis the prevailing socio-technical configuration” (Kivimaa et al., 2019: 1068)

Strategic and systemic goals of intermediaries



Example: Water Sensitive Rotterdam



Insights from Rotterdam

Rotterdam successful in linking urban water management and urban development (Van der Brugge & De Graaf, 2010)

Decentralizing responsibilities mainly among professionals: e.g. with water authorities, less with communities

Intermediaries help to create awareness and inspire, yet also non-committal

Showing results asap: potentially increasing inequalities in cities?



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Thank you!

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