



The fierce ox becomes tame on strange ground

Maurits Ertsen

Delft University of Technology, Department of Water Management, Delft, Netherlands (m.w.ertsen@tudelft.nl)

Obviously, the science of change in hydrology and society requires the humanities and social sciences to be an integrated part of the academic project. With the promise that serious study might actually change the hydrological framework, human-environmental interactions need to be studied. An issue is obviously how to ensure that social action by human agents is well represented. In this paper, I propose to rethink human's role within its own environment: people create environments expecting specific results (even though people have their own agendas). The group of 'people' is not a homogenous category. Bruno Latour, the French sociologist and philosopher, argues that human decision making and development of societal institutions is a local activity, constructed within networks of actors. Networks are continuously created and recreated by human actors engaging with other human actors and non-human intermediaries. The resulting networks build links between short and long term human responses – from individuals to societies – in terms of actions, policies, interventions and the like in relation to the – often stochastic – nature of water flows and systems on different scales. Through Actor Network Theory, I suggest new insights from this approach as well as the pitfalls to understand how networks of people and material conditions shape policy development for and management of water resources. I discuss how a focus on the short-term, small-scale interactions among people, their environments and technology in developing water policies and managing water systems can yield insights relevant for those involved in current water policy. How representatives of society itself can be part of this remains an issue. The paper will suggest some ideas from a project setup in the Netherlands, in which researchers, water managers and heritage agencies collaborate.