

Land of Rivers

-NCR DAYS 2019-

Dutch identity and water management: a cultural-historical perspective

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Keynote abstract

The Netherlands has a strong international reputation in the field of water technology and management. This pioneering position comes with a sense of pride and imagery, which connects the (successful) struggle against water with Dutch national identity. Publications on water management, especially those which aim at a larger audience, often refer to this expertise as being typically Dutch, as if this expertise is part of the DNA of the Dutch.

The connection between water management and Dutch identity is rooted in a long history: already in the seventeenth century the struggle against water was perceived as a typical Dutch phenomenon. It reached a high point in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in particular in times of disastrous floods (for instance in 1855, 1861 and 1916). Charity and the role of kings and queens played a pivotal role in the construction of a heroic self-image in the media.

This lecture calls for a cultural-historical turn in the study of water management. It is argued that the omnipresence of cultural discourses, spread through a wide variety of media, is key to understanding the complex relationship between flood narratives and the so called 'Dutch identity' in the past and the present. The media are not only providing people with information, they are also setting the agenda and serve as powerful tools in the political and ethical debates.

About the keynote speaker



Prof. dr. Lotte Jensen is professor of Dutch literature and cultural history at Radboud University. She is currently working on NWO Vici research on how Dutch local and national identities are shaped by disasters. She gave inaugural lecture "*Wij tegen het water: een eeuwenoude strijd*" on November 2nd 2018.



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