

# **‘Crossing borders lessons learned’**

## a case study on public participation in a transboundary context

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### **1) Introduction**

After the riverfloodings in 1993 and 1995 the Dutch Ministry of Transport Public Works and Watermanagement was assigned to carry out an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for a strategic plan on measures how to protect the Netherlands river region from floodings in the future. This EIS is challenging in both technical and procedural terms because of potential transboundary environmental consequences. According to the ‘nondiscrimination’ principle the German public had to be invited to participate on the same level as the Dutch public. In practice this proved to be rather difficult! The ‘Space for rivers’-project-organization had to cross not only National borders but also organizational, cultural, practical and procedural borders. The ‘lessons learned’ can be relevant for everyone who is confronted with public participation in transboundary situations or more general ly everyone who has to deal with public participation in complex (multicultural, multilingual) situations.

In chapter two some theoretical notions on public participation in a transboundary context are discussed. Important elements are: the UNECE-convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a transboundary context (‘Espoo-convention’), EU-directives on EIA, the Dutch Environmental Laws and bilateral agreements on implementation with neighbouring countries. In addition to this some general notions on the role of public participation in the Dutch EIA-legislation are pointed out in chapter three.

Chapter four deals with the ‘space for rivers’-project. It contains a description of the EIS (and the parties involved) as well as a short technical description of the global (water)trends that caused the floodings (technical solutions that are to be investigated in the EIS).

Subsequently the ‘lessons learned’ from the transboundary public participation in the ‘space for rivers’-project are described in chapter five. Successful and ‘enriching’ international public participation seems to depends on such issues as:

- Procedure - a stepwise approach based on environmental legislation with clear tasks and roles is essential.
- Process - early involvement, communication and being adaptive to the cultural, historical, political and procedural context in the neighbouring countries are crucial for smooth cooperation.
- Content - agreements with authorities is needed on scope, methodological assumptions and policy priorities.

Finally some practical ‘do’s and don’ts’ for practitioners, experts and decision-makers are summarized in chapter six.

### **2) Theory and legislation on public participation in a transboundary context**

#### Legislation

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) laid the basis for public participation in a transboundary context during the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary context in Espoo (Finland, 1991). The ‘Espoo Convention’ (UNECE, 1991) stipulates the obligations of parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early stage of planning. It also lays down the general obligation of states to notify and consult each other on all major projects that might have significant environmental impact across boundaries.

The Espoo Convention entered into force on 10 September 1997. The Espoo convention was ‘translated’ into EU Directive 97/11 (EU Council, 1997) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment and the Dutch Environmental Management Act (VROM, 1999). EU Directive 97/11 points out the possibility for ‘bilateral agreements’ between neighbouring countries for detailed arrangements on a more practical level. The Netherlands have formulated such ‘bilateral agreements’ with both Belgium and Germany.

#### Basic principles ('rule of thumbs'):

This 'pile of rules' on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context (for the Dutch situation) can be summarized in a few simple principles ('rule of thumbs'):

- 1) *'Non discrimination'*. The public in the neighbouring country should always have the same possibilities for participating in the EIA-procedure as the public in the Netherlands. Inequality has to be avoided during the whole EIA-process. This means that relevant documents have to be translated etcetera.
- 2) *'Two-track approach'*. During the startup of the EIA and the subsequent EIA-procedure the competent authority has to inform both the Dutch Ministry of the Environment and the 'points of contact' in the neighbouring country. These points of contact are mentioned in the 'bilateral agreements' and assist the competent authority with the organization of the public participation in the neighbouring country.
- 3) *'Dutch EIA procedure, foreign habits'*. For projects that are carried out in the Netherlands the Dutch EIA-procedure and rules are leading. For the 'practical details' however the competent authority has to adapt to the foreign habits. The points of contact assist the competent authority with this for example by telling how the publish the notification of intent etcetera.

#### What makes public participation in a transboundary context difficult?

Although these principles look quite simple the actual organization of public participation on project level seems to be rather difficult. As stated in the 'Guidance on the practical application on the Espoo convention' the organization of public participation in a transboundary context can be problematic for several reasons such as (UNECE, 2003):

- 1) *Lack of understanding of the differences in EIA legislation*. In neighbouring countries the EIA process may be differently structured in legislation or carried out in practice in different ways depending on the historical and cultural background. Open discussions at an early stage reduce misunderstanding and help avoiding friction between the parties.
- 2) *Poor (or to complex!) organization within a party*. Clear rules of procedure with clearly identified responsibilities to organize the transboundary assessments have proved to help in carrying out the assessments.
- 3) *Many steps and stakeholders*. Environmental impact assessments are multidisciplinary in nature. The issues that arise are also effected by the knowledge and values of different stakeholders and the public. EIA's in a transboundary context generally affect more stakeholders and a broader public, which makes them more difficult.

#### **Box 1: Division of roles, tasks and responsibilities for transboundary public participation (Dutch situation)**

- The competent authority is responsible for the organization of the public participation (in both the home country and abroad) and the subsequent decision-making. The competent authority also informs the points of contact in the neighbouring country and the Dutch Ministry of the Environment.
- The proponent formulates the notification of intent and carries out the EIS.
- The Dutch Ministry of the Environment deals with the contact on public participation on intergovernmental level. In problematic cases the Ministry of the Environment gets involved in solving disputes between parties.
- The points of contact in the neighbouring country assist the competent authority with the organization of public participation abroad. The role of the point of contacts can be both advisory (providing information on how to deal with public in the neighbouring country) and operational (announcing meetings, publish documents, etcetera.).
- Public and stakeholders in both the Netherlands and abroad can participate in the EIA-procedure by reacting on the notification of intent and the EIS.

### **3) The Dutch context for public participation in the EIA-process for the Ministry of Transport**

In the Netherlands the competent authority is responsible for the organization of public participation in the EIA-procedure. The Dutch EIA-legislation (VROM, 1999) incorporates two official moments for public participation which are described below:

- The first moment for public participation takes place when the proponent has published a notification of intent. The public can react on this notification (within a limited time period of 4 weeks) by pointing out subjects that have to be investigated in the EIS. Based on these reactions the competent subsequently stipulates guidelines for the EIS.
- The second moment for public participation is when the EIS is published. The public is invited to react on the EIS (within a limited time period of 4 weeks). It's up to the competent authority to weigh the public reactions into the further decision-making.

Beside these two formal moments for public participation the proponent is free to involve and inform the public as much as is found to be necessary. In this paper public participation is limited to the two formal moments for public participation, which are obliged by the Dutch EIA-legislation (VROM, 1999). This public participation can be described as 'consultation of the public', which is a rather restricted form of public participation (Coenen, 2002).

Nevertheless, this kind of public participation isn't free of obligations since the competent authority is obliged to take the results of the public participation well motivated into consideration during the subsequent decision making process.

The Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water management has a professional 'Centre for Public Enquiry' ('Inspraakpunt V&W') which consists of twelve persons that takes care of the organization of the public participation in the major EIA projects of the Ministry of Transport and Watermanagement. The Centre for Public Enquiry:

- Publishes the plans on major highway and watermanagement projects
- Organizes information meetings with civilians and other stakeholders
- Registers and analyzes reactions from public and stakeholders on both the EIS and the notification of intent

The 'Inspraakpunt V&W' is daily involved in some 30 projects of different types (highway, railway and floodprotection) in different stages of the EIA-process and has some seven years of experience.

#### **Box 2: Basic conditions for effective public participation**

Based on experience on some hundred EIA-projects with legal public participation the Centre for Public Enquiry of the Ministry of Transport has formulated some conditions which are found to be necessary for effective public participation (Inspraakpunt V&W, 2004):

##### *1) Juridical context.*

Keep in mind the juridical context for public participation and always be very conscientious in juridical matters. The government has an exemplary function and therefore has to act by their own rules and laws. The formal time periods for public participation are stated in laws; stick to them! Of course the Government is allowed to do more than is legally required. The Dutch EIA legislation for example describes that the announcement for the EIS has to be published in the official Government Statejournal ('Staatscourant') and at least one other newspaper. In many cases though it's preferable to publish the notification in other (local) newspapers as well.

##### *2) In communication with the public be sensitive (empathy), be responsive and be focused.*

Treat the public with respect and be aware of the sensitivities of certain groups towards the project. Factors that influence the type of reactions from the public are:

- The type of project and the decision that has to be made. Strategic plans (such as 'Space for rivers') are quite abstract and not very detailed. As a consequence the reactions of the public are quite calm. In more operational plans (with detailed maps) reactions can become more involved.
- Phase of the EIS and decision making. In the early stages of the EIA-process plans are quite vague and lack detail. In later stages the consequences of a possible project become clearer and public reactions will be more involved.
- Communication (history) during the EIS-process. Open and clear communication about the EIS and the project are crucial for a good dialogue and public participation. People don't want to be surprised by a project or EIS.

##### *3) Realistic expectations.*

Be very clear about the role of public participation in the EIA-procedure and the possible influence of public participation in the subsequent decision-making. In some procedures (or stages within these procedures) the influence for the public is not that big. To avoid disappointment be clear about that from the beginning. Pay attention to the management of expectations (see also chapter 5).

#### **4) The 'Space for rivers'- project' (history, EIS, waterproblems and solutions)**

##### History

In 1995, after a long period of relative freedom from worry, the Netherlands river region was startled by a flood wave in the Rhine River which, being not only the highest it had been since 1926, was also one that was long in duration. Roughly 250.000 people were evacuated for a short week due to questionable stability of dykes that had been exposed to long-term flooding and had thus become saturated. Companies were shut down for a short period, which led to enormous economic damage to trade and industry. This flooding – together with the incident in 1993 and the comparable event along the River Meuse – made it more than apparent once again that attentiveness is crucial where safety and the prevention of flooding of the river regions is concerned. These flooding incidents have accelerated and initiated various activities. Through the enactment of the Delta Plan Major Rivers the Government decided to accelerate the execution of the dyke reinforcement that had already begun, namely before 2001. Also the 'Room for River' policy was put into effect in 1996, its goal being the preservation and where possible, the expansion of the discharge capacity of the major rivers, as well as minimizing flood damage. For centuries spatial planning in the low-lying Netherlands has been a matter of separating and maintaining the separation between land and water. In order to keep the Netherlands safe, live-able and attractive in terms of water for inhabitants and investors for the century to come, a change in water management policy and in the way the Netherlands approaches water was required. This change involves the idea that the Netherlands will have to make more frequent concessions to the water. According to

the Dutch Cabinet the Netherlands will have to relinquish space to water, and not win space from it, in order to curb the growing risk of disaster due to flooding (V&W, 2000).



Figure 1) Flood protection: 'Space for rivers'-area, the borders of the water system (left) ...and crossing them 1995 (right)

#### The 'Space for rivers'-Environmental Impact Study (facts and studies)

After the flooding in 1995 the Dutch Government has decided to carry out an EIS on a strategic plan called 'Space for rivers'. After decision making on this strategic plan individual projects with specific (assigned) measures will start which will imply EIA-studies and decision making on a more detailed (project)-level. The 'Space for rivers' project is in all its aspects a huge project since it covers the whole river-area of the Netherlands. One foreign country (Germany) Eight Ministries, five provinces, 24 local 'waterboards' and over a 100 towns are (directly) involved in the project. The first realization projects will start in 2006 and in 2015 the project will be finished.

In the EIA-procedure the division of task, roles and responsibilities for the 'Space for rivers'-EIS is as follows:

- competent authority: the State Secretary of the ministry of Transport Public Works and Watermanagement
- proponent: joint group of three Ministries namely: the Ministry of Transport and Water management, The Ministry of Housing Spatial Planning and the Environment and The Ministry of Agriculture Nature and Foodquality
- several points of contact in Germany

The main objective for the 'Space for rivers'-project is providing watersafety. The river Rhine will have to be able to cope with riverdischarges of 16.000 m<sup>3</sup>/second (in 2015). For the river Meuse the target is 3.800 m<sup>3</sup>/second in 2015. Regarding trends in climatic changes the EIS also investigates the possibilities for dealing with even bigger riverdischarges after 2015 (18.000 m<sup>3</sup>/second for the Rhine and 4.600 m<sup>3</sup>/second for the Meuse). The second objective for the 'Space for rivers'-projects is 'spatial quality' including nature development.

The notification of intent for the 'Space for rivers' EIS was published in May 2002. The public participation on the notification of intent resulted in some 200 reactions from which 12% were German (mainly government-related organizations). The 'Space for rivers' EIS is to be published in the spring of 2005.

#### Water-problems (origins) and solutions

The flooding-problems the Netherlands has to master are due to global trends in climatic changes (and poor soil conditions in the western part of the Netherlands). These trends are (V&W, 2000):

- 1) The sea level is rising. The sealevel has risen 20 centimeters in the past century and will rise even further by an expected average of 60 centimeters in the next century.
- 2) River discharges are increasing. Climatic changes will lead to a 40% increase in river discharges in winter and 30% lower discharges in summer.
- 3) The land is subsiding. In the low lying parts of the Netherlands, soil subsidence will average between 2 and 60 centimeters by 2050.
- 4) Precipitation increases. Until 2050, precipitation volumes in water will increase by approximately 10 % and decrease in summer by a few percent.

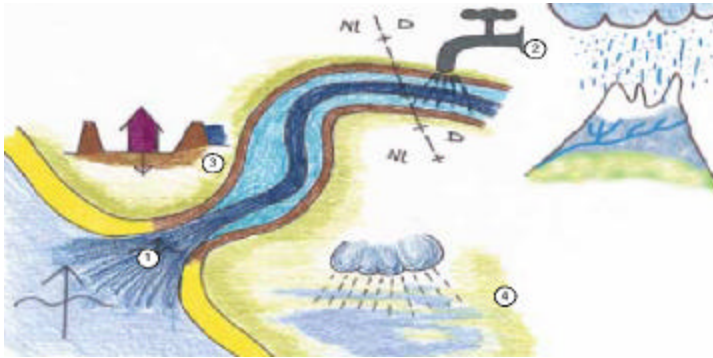


Figure 2) Trends in water the Netherlands has to deal with in the next century

A good mix of spatial and technological measures is required to address safety requirements in order to reduce water-related problems. The Dutch Government prefers constant consideration of spatial measures, including widening or lowering flood plains and construction of water retention and storage areas, in addition to technological measures such as dyke heightening and reinforcement, dewatering operations and damming. To deal with the watertrends the Dutch Government has adapted the policy 'Space for water'. Typical measures to provide for bigger river water discharges are (V&W, 2000):

- A) inland relocation of the winter dykes.
- B) lowering the floodplains
- C) removing obstacles in the flood plains
- D) creating retention areas

It's clear that the 'space for rivers' approach can have severe impact on the environment. The 'Space for water'-EIS deals with environmental aspects such as: river morphology, soil (possibly contaminated), raw materials (excavation), water quality, groundwater, hydrological aspects, nature and landscape, cultural values, etc.. Effects on non-environmental issues such as shipping, agriculture and recreation are investigated in the EIS as well.

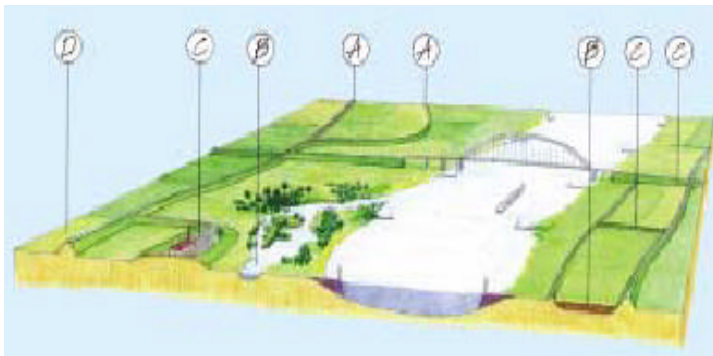


Figure 3) Possible technical measures for dealing with bigger river water discharges

## 5) Lessons learned on transboundary public participation in the 'Space for rivers'-case

In this chapter a selection of the lessons learned on (trans)boundary public participation from the 'Space for rivers'-case is discussed. The EIA-centre of the Ministry of Transport and Watermanagement has drawn up a more extensive analysis on transboundary public participation dealing with other types of projects and other countries (Belgium) as well (TMC, 2003).

### Lesson 1) Be sure to speak the same language ('crossing the language border')

Dealing with neighbouring countries can be difficult because of language and communication problems. In many cases it proves to be difficult to explain the Dutch EIA-legislation and the 'Space for water'-approach to the citizens in the Netherlands. Explaining all this - in a foreign language - to a foreign public is even more difficult. So the most obvious border to cross is the 'language-border'. You might expect that this border is so obvious that it's recognized in an early stage and that it is tackled from the beginning. In the 'Space for rivers'-project this is certainly true since a lot of attention was given to the communication with Germany. The notification of intent and public announcements for example were translated into German and the information meetings were attended by an interpreter. Nevertheless some 'accidents' happened in the communication with the German public. First of all there was some delay in the translation of the notification of intent. This was solved in a rather pragmatic way since the time period - for the public - to react



was extended. A more serious problem was that the notification of intent contained some mistakes in translation. For example the word 'public participation' was translated as 'Einspruch' instead of 'Mitsprache'. This has led to misunderstandings since 'Einspruch' is in German the equivalent for 'objection'. As a consequence a lot of German people (and public authorities) thought that the public participation in the 'Space for rivers' -EIS was to be limited to just saying 'yes or no' to the project. By using the wrong word it wasn't clear to the German public that they were actually invited to do suggestions for the content (alternatives and environmental issues to be investigated) of the EIS itself (see chapter 3). These misunderstandings frustrated the public participation process. To solve the misunderstandings an additional 'information tour' was organized in Germany.



*Lesson 1) 'Differences in language can cause misunderstandings'*

Some practical recommendations – regarding the 'language borders' are:

- pay a lot of attention to accurate translations (especially the 'key -words' on the role and function of public participation may leave no room for different interpretation);
- check translations with native speakers (in case of doubt);
- start early with the translation of documents since translations take more time than you might expect;
- consider the use of use interpreters in communication with foreign authorities, public and stakeholders;
- use several (creative) communication tools (picture, video, etcetera.)

### Lesson 2) Avoid unclear division of roles, tasks and responsibilities ('crossing the internal organization borders')

As mentioned in chapter four the 'Space for rivers' project is a huge and complex project because of the number of parties involved. In theory the competent authority for the 'Space for rivers' -project is the State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport and Watermanagement. In practice however the competent authority is formed by a 'competent authority working group' of the three Ministries that are mainly involved in the project (Ministry of Transport and Watermanagement, Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Nature). The organization of the public participation - as being a task of the competent authority - was partly assigned to the 'Space for rivers' project-organization (proponent). The project-organization consists of two regional offices and a central unit. This central unit hired the Public Inquiry Office of the Ministry of Transport (see chapter three) to take



*Lesson 2 'A clear division of tasks and roles and responsibilities is recommended'*

care of the organization of the public participation in the Netherlands. For several reasons however the transboundary public participation wasn't assigned to the 'Space for rivers' -project-organization nor the Public Enquiry Office of the Ministry but was kept within the central competent authority working group of the three Ministries. Due to this form of organization fine-tuning of tasks and responsibilities was needed. This was especially time consuming since there was no handbook or blueprint on how to deal with transboundary public participation. As a first solution the EIA/centre of the Ministry of Transport has drawn up a plan for a uniform stepwise approach for transboundary public participation (based on theory and practice) which can be used in near future (TMC, 2003). Based on analysis of several projects a clear division (internally) of tasks, roles and responsibilities is strongly recommended.

### Lesson 3) Be sensitive to the intercultural differences and the context ('crossing the cultural border')



*Lesson 3 'being sensitive to intercultural differences'*

The Espoo convention, EU Directive 97/11 and the bilateral agreements between form the formal context for transboundary public participation. Dealing with public, stakeholders and authorities in neighbouring countries however also implies 'interhuman' cooperation which does a strong appeal on skills such as communication and being sensitive to the context in the neighbouring country. These aspects on how to behave however aren't prescribed in the formal laws and agreements. In practice difficulties might occur since culture and habits can differ significantly from one country to another. Civil servants in the Netherlands - for example - are used to operate in a quite informal way. German civil servants and authorities however are not used to this 'culture' and they act in a more formal/hierarchical way. This sensitivity to the context also relates to such issues as language problems and misunderstandings (lesson 1) and differences in 'EIA-traditions' (lesson 4).

Lesson 4) Good explanation of the Dutch EIA -procedure is necessary ('crossing the EIA-procedure border')

Because the 'Space for rivers' -project - as a Dutch project - is to be realized in the Netherlands the Dutch EIA - procedure is leading. For good public participation it's essential that the role of public participation in the EIA - procedure is explained in a clear way to the public (Inspraakpunt 2004, DETR 2002). Explaining the Dutch EIA-



procedure to a German public is not only difficult because of language problems (lesson 1) but also because of different 'EIA traditions'. Within the Dutch EIA-legislation the public gets involved in a rather early stage. After the publication of the notification of intent the public is invited to make suggestions for the items that should be investigated in the EIS. In Germany however the public usually gets involved in a later stage of the EIA process. Thus confronted with the notification of intent in the case of the 'Space for rivers' -EIS some German people thought that the project had already reached the phase of realization/construction. This caused misunderstandings in communication. A good explanation of the EIA procedure (and the role of public participation) is therefore very important.

Lesson 4) 'Good explanation of the Dutch EIA legislation is necessary'

Lesson 5) Early involvement is recommended ('crossing the time-border')

In the 'Space for rivers' -case the competent authority came in contact with the German contact points rather late. As a consequence the organization of the public participation in Germany can be described as 'some what hasty'. It was concluded that in near future involving the neighbouring country in an earlier stage is wise since dealing in a transboundary context generally takes more time than expected and even more important the contact points can assist with the organization of the public participation (see chapter 2).

Lesson 6) Avoid disappointment, be clear about the role of public participation: 'management of expectations'

To avoid disappointments it's found to be very important to be clear about the role and the influence of the public in the EIA-process (Inspraakpunt 2004, DETR 2002). In order to 'manage expectations' it's important to have a good communication strategy. A lot of communication isn't always the best strategy! In the 'Space for rivers' -project the public had rather high expectations since there was a lot of communication used during the 'phase' of the publication of the notification of intent (video's, information-meetings/hearings, etc.). The evaluation of the public participation made clear that some 71 % of the public - that was involved in the public participation - was disappointed in the public participation process. The main reason for this is that, regarding the early stage of the EIA-process; the 'Space for rivers' -project -organization wasn't able to give detailed answers (yet) to the very specific questions from the public. The strategic character of the 'Space for rivers' -EIS and the early stage of involving the public are possible explanations for the large number of people that were not satisfied.

Lesson 7) It takes time to adapt to a new approach to water management ('crossing the water awareness border')

The Netherlands has a long-term tradition when it comes to protect the country against floodings. Over centuries dykes and dams are constructed to defend the Dutch Delta from the North Sea and rivers like the Rhine and the Meuse. The 'Space for rivers' approach - in many cases - will imply measures for giving water more space instead of the classical approach of keeping water out by constructing higher dykes and bigger dams. This approach is not only new for classical engineers but also for the public. In that way it's a border to be crossed. Engineers will have to come up with new technical measures like lowering floodplains and relocation of dykes (see chapter 4) whereas the public has to become aware that a different approach to water (due to climatic changes) really is inevitable in the long run. In practice it seems to be difficult to make the Dutch public aware of the need for this new approach to water management. Raising the 'water awareness' in Germany is even more difficult because German citizens were not confronted with the public debates on water management that took place in the Netherlands. A good explanation of the need for a new water management policy is needed so that the relevancy (DETR, 2002) of participation in the EIA process becomes clear to the public.

**Box 2: Raising 'water awareness' in the Netherlands**

The Dutch government recently has launched a 'water awareness' media campaign ('Holland lives with water') to inform the public on the issue of climatic changes and the need for a different approach to water ('Space for water'). The 'water awareness' campaign consist of radio and TV-commercials, adds in newspapers and public places (bus stops etc.), public discussions, brochures, comic strips and a website ([www.nederlandleefmetwater.nl](http://www.nederlandleefmetwater.nl)) which focuses attention on good practice examples. The public 'water awareness campaign' however wasn't part of the 'Space for rivers' EIS and was started after the publication of the notification of intent.

## 6) Summary

### Recommendations for transboundary public participation based on the 'Space for rivers case'

From the lessons learned from the 'Space for rivers'-project (see chapter 5) the following recommendations can be stated:

- *Be sure to speak the same language.* Differences in language can cause problems and misunderstandings. Avoid friction and misunderstanding due to poor translation and pay a lot of attention to translation. Check translations with 'native speakers'.
- *Have a clear division of task and roles (internal organization).* Within your own organization be sure to have a clear division of task and roles and responsibilities since unclear responsibilities can cause frictions and delays.
- *Be sensitive to the context in the neighbouring country.* Be sensitive (and if necessary adapt) to the context in the neighbouring country (cultural, language, EIA -tradition, etcetera.). The contact points (see chapter 2) in the neighbouring country can help you with this (Dutch – German – situation)
- *Good explanation of the Dutch EIA legislation is necessary.* Be aware that public and stakeholders in the neighbouring country face an 'information gap' since they are not familiar with the EIA legislation in the country where the EIS takes place. Spend time and effort to cross this 'gap' by clear explanation of the EIA -procedure and the role of public participation within it.
- *Early involvement.* Get in touch with the contact points (see chapter 2) in the neighbouring countries in an early stage since they can assist you with the organization of the public participation. .
- *Manage expectations.* Raise realistic expectations to the public (in both home country and neighbouring country) about the role and influence of the public participation. Unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointments later on in the process.

The centre for Public Enquiry Office (Inspraakpunt V&W, 2004) and other sources (V&W 2003, Umweltbundesamt 2002, UNECE 2003, DETR 2002) also state some more general recommendations on public participation, which can be useful for transboundary projects as well:

- *Use inviting information tools and documentation.* Avoid however too 'glossy materials' since the public might interpret this as a 'marketing trick'.
- *Use detailed maps.* The public wants to know what the project is about. On basis of vague maps (with less detail) the public can't give good reactions which can lead to indifference and disappointment.
- *Use clear language.* Explain the project, the EIA decision making process and surrounding policies in clear language (avoid 'expert language').
- *Information should be tailor made.* Information should be easy accessible, complete, easy to understand and focused on the groups you want to reach. Information and relevant (policy) documents should be easy accessible also digital (see also box 3).

#### **Box 3: Example of tailor made information project 'De Maaswerken'**

The Dutch 'Maaswerken'-projects deals with flood relief within the area of the River Meuse in the southern part of the Netherlands. It's a similar project as 'space for rivers' but it was started earlier in the nineties. Some parts of the project are already in realization. The projects website ([www.demaaswerken.nl](http://www.demaaswerken.nl)) contains all information on the project (including EIS reports, detailed maps, etc.). The website was voted as second best Dutch Governmental website in 2003 by the Dutch public ([www.burger.overheid.nl](http://www.burger.overheid.nl)).



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V&W, Ministry of Transport Public Works and Watermanagement (2000), *A different approach to water, watermanagement policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (cabinets position)*, The Hague. (Available via [www.minvenw.nl](http://www.minvenw.nl) English section click 'water')

V&W, Ministry of Transport Public Works and Watermanagement (2001), *Room for the Rhine branches in the Netherlands, what the research has taught us*, drafted by W. Silva, F. Klijn, J. Dijkman, The Hague

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V&W, Ministry of Transport Public Works and Watermanagement (2002), *Startnotitie MER in het kader van de PKB procedure Ruimte voor de rivier (Notification of intent EIS 'space for rivers')*, The Hague

VROM, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning & Environment (1994), *M.e.r. zonder grenzen (EIA without frontiers)*, The Hague

VROM, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning & Environment (1999), *Environmental Management Act*, dated 29 april 1999, The Hague.

\* These documents and reports are available via the UNECE- website ([www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org))

**Internet-links on the Espoo convention**

[www.unece.org/env/eia/eia.htm](http://www.unece.org/env/eia/eia.htm)

[www.mos.gov.pl/enimpas/](http://www.mos.gov.pl/enimpas/)

[www.unece.org/env/eia/guidance/espoo\\_convention.pdf](http://www.unece.org/env/eia/guidance/espoo_convention.pdf)

[www.unece.org/env/pp](http://www.unece.org/env/pp)

**Dutch water policy and EIA links**

[www.nederlandleeftmetwater.nl](http://www.nederlandleeftmetwater.nl)

[www.ruimtevoorderivier.nl](http://www.ruimtevoorderivier.nl)

[www.minvenw.nl](http://www.minvenw.nl)

[www.minvrom.nl](http://www.minvrom.nl)

[www.demaaswerken.nl](http://www.demaaswerken.nl)

[www.inspraakvenw.nl](http://www.inspraakvenw.nl)

[www.eia.nl](http://www.eia.nl)

[www.wldelft.nl](http://www.wldelft.nl)

UNECE website on the Espoo convention (including complete text of the convention)

UNECE database on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context

Guidance on the practical application of the Espoo-convention

UNECE documents on public participation

Public water awareness campaign of the Government  
Space for rivers project

Ministry of Transport Public Works and  
Watermanagement

Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the  
Environment

Project 'De Maaswerken' (Flood relief for the river  
Meuse)

Public Enquiry Office of the Ministry of Transport,  
Public Works and Water management

Dutch EIA commission

Delft Hydraulics Research Institute