

Europe's challenge; A transition towards an ecosystem based water management- learning how to enjoy the river (“Freude am Fluss”).

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Europe has a long history of water management and flood protection. For centuries water management was based merely on an engineering approach. For each “conflict” with nature, technical measures were taken to bridle or even eliminate the natural dynamics of river systems.

Because of this one-sided approach the hydrological and ecological resilience of European river basins gradually disappeared whereas the potential risks for society increased. The river transformed from friend to foe. Anticipating on the effects of climate change and to escape from this dead-end street Europe has to change it's water management strategy fundamentally. Sponsored by the European Union an innovative project was launched in 2003 named “Freude am Fluss”. The project is carried out by various French, German and The Netherlands governmental and non-governmental organizations. In a joint effort project partners are facilitating the transition of Europe's traditional water management strategy towards an ecosystem based approach. In contrast to the traditional, engineering based strategy, the ecosystem based approach embraces the nature linked dynamics. Hence, technical innovations are used to adapt various forms of land use instead of transforming or bridling the fluvial ecosystem. During the “Freude am Fluss” project new opportunities for economy, ecology and safety have emerged. Instead of fearing the river, local communities are now learning to value and enjoy the river again. This presentation will be illustrated with some practical examples involving technical, institutional and scientific innovations from France, Germany and The Netherlands.