

A new dike provokes conflict

Starting point

The city Lang plans to create a **flood control reservoir**, a so-called **retention space**. The river Lang is a large, navigable river which regularly crosses the banks. This happens, for instance, in Spring when the snow in the mountains melts and it rains heavily. To protect the city, including houses and factories as well as the farmer's fields, dikes have been built in the past.

These dikes are sufficient for normal high water. For severe floods, which are to be expected approximately every 50 years, the city wants to create a flood control reservoir and a new dike behind the old one (see map). The flood control reservoir would be flooded in case of high water and contain the flood.

In addition to that, however, there's supposed to be a regular "**ecological flooding**". Once a year, at normal high water, the floodgate will be opened. As a result, a third of the reservoir will be flooded, so that local plants and animals are able to adapt to high water. Otherwise the plants and animals would drown in case of a real flood.

The land for the flood control reservoir is currently used as agricultural land. Among the inhabitants of Lang it's called "the controversial knee" (formerly solely known as "the knee"). 21 farmers own fields in this area. The fields are used to grow vegetables, especially potatoes and asparagus as well as grain.

If the flood control reservoir is to be realized, 30 ha (hectare) of land will be lost for the farmers completely. Another 30 ha will have to be converted to grassland, for the land becomes too moist for agriculture (due to the regular floodings).

Not only the farmers, residents close to the new dike and nature conservationists have raised concerns about the plan of the city Lang, too.

In order to finally be able to begin the construction works, the mayoress of Lang is trying to turn the conflict into a conversation. In fact, she has invited representatives of the different groups (farmers, conservationists, residents) and members of the city council to a **round table**.

Role descriptions

The city of Lang

The city of Lang is striving to establish a flood control system which is able to deal with above average floods. As a part of this program all dikes are heightened from 10.70 m (meter) to 11.90 m. The old dike is preserved so that the fields inside the flood control reservoir are protected during normal high water. Only once a year during high water a part of the area is deliberately flooded.

The city of Lang is also of the opinion that there's an obligation towards the cities further downstream, that is, to contribute to flood control outside of Lang. One should abandon the old line of selfish thinking: "Well, we have a dike. How the cities downstream deal with high water is their own business."

The city has offered to buy the land from the farmers at the normal price for farmland.

The city of Lang is represented by the mayoress Ms Meisenkamp. She's supported by Mr Baurat, a representative of the city council of Südblau, a city where many of the affected farmers run their operations.

Note for the players: As the inviting party you are also the host of the round table. This means that you have to set the rules for the negotiations, are responsible for taking the time.
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The farmers of Südblau and Graunord

The farmers fear for their existence in case the flood control reservoir is realized. They are concerned about a variety of issues:

- The farmers feel left out by the city Lang. Why haven't they been involved from the start?
- Every farmer loses about 1.3 ha per farm - the one-off compensation by the city does not compensate for this.
- The farmers fear that customers will stop buying their goods in wake of the floodings. As an effect of the floodings the water of the river Lang is going to be dirty, which negatively affects the growing of asparagus and vegetables.
- The responsibility for the removal of floating debris isn't clarified. "It's the city's job", the farmers say.

In principle, the farmers do not want to convert farmland to grassland. It's no use to them – unless they adjust their daily operations heavily to the keeping of animals. Then again, they don't want to give up land because it would reduce their income in the long term.

The farmers are represented by a farmer of Graunord (Mr Weizacker) and Südblau (Mr Müller).

The residents

The residents live in close proximity of the site where the new dike is supposed to be built (about 50 meters away). They are worried that the groundwater level will rise and lead to water damage at their houses; cellar walls could get moist, the building fabric could crumble. Even if none of this happens, the market value of their houses and properties will decrease just by the potential dangers tied to the dike.

The residents also feel that the new dike will spoil the landscape. In addition to that, they fear the three-year construction period of the project will cause considerable noise pollution due to construction work.

The residents will be represented by two citizens, Ms Priel and Mr Billing.

The conservationists

The nature conservationists from Lang consider the project to be ecologically important, for it could create a valuable forest biotope. But to them, one ecological flooding per year is not enough. The conservationists believe that the city of Lang is opting for a technical solution which is not appropriate to protect the environment. The annual flooding does not allow the emergence of a real **riparian forest**. Organisms from the river Lang can not inhabit the area. In fact, such an area can neither be used for residents for recreation, nor is it attractive for animals and plants – it will always be “artificial”.

One should allow the river to return to its natural course, combined with several floodings per year. To achieve this one could simply tear down the old dike.

“The city of Lang only thinks about the farmers and has therefore chosen a technical solution“, say the conservationists. By contrast, the **water resources act** states that former **inundation areas** should be preferred to protect against high water, which is why the conservationists argue that the whole area should be left for “natural floodings”.

The conservationists are represented by the chairmen of the bird conservation group Ortsgruppe (Ms Pfeifer) and a member of the citizen's initiative “Nature Knee” (Mr Schratter), which favour a riparian forest over a the new dike.