

## **hess-2018-333: Response Letter by Di Baldassarre et al.**

### **Editor**

*The referees found your paper significant and well-written, and I agree with their recommendation of minor revisions. Please ensure that you address the suggestions in the short comment, which I found to be very useful (particularly the point to extend your analysis beyond the European emphasis to more worldwide examples).*

We thank the editor for handling our paper. We have addressed all the referees' suggestions, which helped us improve this opinion piece. This letter provides a point-by-point response to all comments. To go beyond the European emphasis, the revised manuscript includes references to the Sacramento Valley and the case of New Orleans in USA as well as flood protection in Bangladesh (with a new reference to the paper recently published by Ferdous et al., in HESS).

### **Anonymous Referee #1**

*The paper by Di Baldassarre et al. aims to review and provide critical analysis of the incidental impacts associated with structural flood protection measures. The authors make the case that the unintended consequences, often referred to as the 'levee effect' (among other names), are ubiquitous but poorly understood due to a i) lack of generalizable knowledge or comparative analysis, ii) dearth of holistic and long-term data and monitoring, and iii) incomplete or insufficient methods. While the levee effect phenomena has been established in the literature for decades, a coherent, interdisciplinary research agenda has not been set to understand the causes, feedback dynamics, and vulnerabilities of these systems. This paper provides such an agenda, albeit very briefly. In general, the commentary is well-written, of good quality, and adequately addresses the aims set forth. Therefore, I recommend the paper be formally accepted for publication upon the following improvements.*

We thank the Referee#1 for being positive about our paper. We have addressed all her/his specific points as specified below.

*1) Identify specific research questions that remain outstanding and how your research agenda will help address them. The language expressing the current knowledge gap is vague. One of the key purposes of these paper is to set a research agenda for the field; as such, this paper would be greatly strengthened by i) providing specific research questions that remain unanswered, ii) explaining how answering these questions will lead to transformative results, and iii) how the proposed research agenda will enable these questions to be addressed. Not only will this help the authors meet one of their chief aims, but it has the potential to make a true novel contribution to the literature, possibly serving as a catalyst for further research in this area.*

As suggested by the Referee, the revised manuscript has a new table (Table 2) with three columns that i) provides specific research questions that remain unanswered, ii) explains how answering these questions will lead to transformative results, and iii) what methods in the proposed research agenda will help these questions to be addressed. See Revised Manuscript with track change (Section 5 and Table 2).

**Table 2. Summary of the research agenda in terms of questions, methods, and outcomes**

Research question	Methods	Potential outcomes
Which socio-hydrological factors enhance or alleviate the levee effect?	Comparative analysis (Section 4.1)	These factors would enable the identifications of contexts in which increasing structural protection levels can be less beneficial than expected. Hence, it will contribute to a better development of risk reduction policies.
How does structural flood protection influence changes in risk perception and flood preparedness decisions?	Longitudinal surveys (Section 4.2)	Understanding what influences changes in risk perception and flood preparedness decisions would suggest how to improve risk awareness campaigns, thus alleviating the levee effect.
How does structural flood protection influence changes in human settlements?	Long-term monitoring (Section 4.2)	Understanding how flood protection shapes human settlements would support a more realistic assessment of long-term (decadal) changes in flood exposure.
How does flood risk changes over time in differ contexts, e.g. with/without structural flood protection?	System dynamic modelling, agent based modelling and new datasets (Section 4.3)	Modelling or observing behavioural responses would support a more realistic assessment of long-term changes in flood risk in different contexts.

2) *Make the two examples more explicit. In the abstract, the authors say their commentary explores the “intended benefits and unintended effects of flood protection with two main examples”. However, these two examples are difficult to identify given the authors briefly highlight numerous examples throughout their commentary.*

There is a misunderstanding here due to an incorrect use of the term “two”. The text of the abstract was revised. See Revised Manuscript with track change.

*Technical corrections Be consistent in use of Oxford comma. Page 1 Line 32: “phenomenon, by” -> “phenomenon by” Line 32: “effects of flood protection” -> “effects of structural flood protection” Line 33: “and then propose” -> “and then we propose”*

Amended.

*Page 2 Line 18: “2 The troubles with flood protection” -> “2 The troubles with structural flood protection” Line 25: “Sacramento valley” -> “Sacramento Valley” Line 26: “and in the United States” -> “in the United States”*

Amended.

*Page 3 Line 5-6: “transport cost, or areas in cities to benefit” -> “transport cost or areas in cities that benefit” Line 16: “not always realistic, while large” -> “not always realistic. Moreover, large” Line 19: remove “for instance” Line 24: “flooding” -> “flood”*

Amended.

*Page 4 Specify the meaning of the Likert scale values used in the survey (e.g. a response of 1 signifies strong disagreement with the statement, while a response of 5 indicates strong agreement).*

Amended.

*Page 6 Line 18: “together, within” -> “together within” Line 20: “flood risk, and provide”  
-> “flood risk and provide”*

Amended.

*Table 1: “evolution of of regulatory” -> “evolution of regulatory”*

Amended.

## **Anonymous Referee #2**

*This is an interesting work based on deep insights and years of research on the topic by the authors.*

We thank the Referee#2 for being positive about our paper. We have addressed all her/his specific points as specified below.

*1) Page 2, Lines 7-8: “This study made the (common) assumption that future flood exposure depends on socioeconomic trends only, and not on the level of flood protection.” Can you elaborate more on the difference between these socioeconomic trends and the trend of more intense urbanization of flood-prone areas behind the levee? Isn't the latter a subset of the former? That is, aren't increased economic activities on floodplains part of greater socioeconomic trends that you're referring to? This is unclear to me.*

As suggested, the revised manuscript clarifies the difference between socioeconomic trends and more intense urbanization of flood-prone areas behind the levee. This is done by better linking the text with Figure 1. See Revised Manuscript end of Section 1.

*2) Page 2, Lines 26-31: Here, you describe a case, talking about things such as how a flooding event in 1953 reduced population density of floodplain. However, it wasn't clear to me initially where this case is based on and what is the context of this 1953 flooding. I had to search other parts of the paper to find out that this is based on the Netherlands. It will be more reader-friendly if you can clearly mention that this flooding and social changes on floodplain are based on the Netherlands.*

The Referee is right. This was made clear in the revised manuscript.

*3) Page 3, Lines 1-10: Here, you contrast two cases: “urban growth behind the dike 3) Page 3, Lines 1-10: Here, you contrast two cases: “urban growth behind the dikes is often factored into the risk analysis” and “urban growth in flood-prone areas goes beyond original plans, potentially leading to unforeseen increase in flood risk” (thus, leading to more levee development). This is interesting. But it wasn't clear to me how the two cases differ in terms of flood protection level. In the former case when risk analysis includes urban growth behind the levees, are the levees built much higher in the first place to reflect this expected growth? How will long-term flood protection level and flood risk be different between these two cases?*

As suggested, the revised manuscript clarifies how urban growth is typically factored. Also in this case, a better link to Figure 1 was provided. See Revised Manuscript.

*4) Page 3, Lines 19-21: This transference of risk to downstream due to hydraulic interactions stemming from heightening of upstream levees is interesting. Readers might benefit from little more discussion on this.*

As suggested, we expanded this part with one reference to a paper about levee wars. See revised manuscript.

*5) Pages 5: Comparative analysis is identified as a future challenge. I was surprised to see that the authors don't talk about how a framework can help with the task. In order to compare different cases in a consistent and structured way, a framework is needed. A framework defines a general set of variables and their potential relationships that an analyst should consider when examining cases.*

We agree with the Referee. We added references to the socio-hydrological framework and its application to disaster risk reduction for guiding comparative analyses.

*6) Page 6: The authors talk about how new methods, concepts, and data can help advance sociohydrology research. It will be more helpful if the authors describe how such multiple methods work together and create synergies. Also, no methods of behavioural sciences are really described here. Modeling behavioral response using differential equation is not really a behavioural science method.*

The Refereer is correct, and we have revised that section by referring to some important behavioural theories that were recently integrated in coupled 'hydrologic-agent based' models. See revised manuscript with track change Section 4.3.

The revised manuscript also clarify how multiple experts and stakeholders can work together and co-produce knowledge in the field (with reference to the last issue of *Nature* that matches perfectly our point here). See revised manuscript with track change Section 4.3.

*7) Page 6, Line 12: I think that Aerts (2018) is a review paper, not ABM paper.*

Aerts (2018) discusses the potential of ABM in integrating human behaviours into risk assessment. As suggested by the Referee, specific reference to a more specific example of ABM (human-landscape interactions and flooding in New Orleans; Werner and McNamara, 2007) was added to the revised manuscript.

# Hess Opinions: An interdisciplinary research agenda to explore the unintended consequences of structural flood protection

Giuliano Di Baldassarre<sup>1,2</sup>, Heidi Kreibich<sup>3</sup>, Sergiy Vorogushyn<sup>3</sup>, Jeroen Aerts<sup>4</sup>, Karsten Arnbjerg-Nielsen<sup>5</sup>, Marlies Barendrecht<sup>6</sup>, Paul Bates<sup>7</sup>, Marco Borga<sup>8</sup>, Wouter Botzen<sup>4,9</sup>, Philip Bubeck<sup>10</sup>, Bruna De Marchi<sup>11</sup>, Carmen Llasat<sup>12</sup>, Maurizio Mazzoleni<sup>13</sup>, Daniela Molinari<sup>14</sup>, Elena Mondino<sup>1,2</sup>, Johanna Mård<sup>1,2</sup>, Olga Petrucci<sup>15</sup>, Anna Scolobig<sup>16</sup>, Alberto Viglione<sup>17</sup>, and Philip J. Ward<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, 75236, Sweden

<sup>2</sup>Centre of Natural Hazards and Disaster Science (CNDS), Sweden

10 <sup>3</sup>GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences, Potsdam, 14473, Germany

<sup>4</sup>Institute for Environmental Studies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 1081, The Netherlands

<sup>5</sup>Department of Environmental Engineering, Technical University of Denmark, Kgs. Lyngby, 2800, Denmark

<sup>6</sup>Centre for Water Resource Systems, Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, A-1040, Austria

<sup>7</sup>School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol, BS8 1SS, UK

15 <sup>8</sup>Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, Università degli Studi di Padova, Padova, 35122, Italy

<sup>9</sup>Utrecht University School of Economics (USE.), Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

<sup>10</sup>Institute of Earth and Environmental Science, University of Potsdam, Potsdam, 14469, Germany

<sup>11</sup>SVT, Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities, University of Bergen, Bergen, 5020, Norway

<sup>12</sup>Department of Applied Physics, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, 08007, Spain

20 <sup>13</sup>Department of Integrated Water Systems and Governance, IHE Delft, Delft, 2601, The Netherlands

<sup>14</sup>Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, 20133, Italy

<sup>15</sup>CNR-IRPI National Research Council - Research Institute for Geo-Hydrological Protection, Rende (CS), 87036, Italy

<sup>16</sup>Department of Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zürich, Zürich, 8092, Switzerland

<sup>17</sup>Centre for Water Resource Systems, Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, A-1040, Austria

25 *Correspondence to:* Giuliano Di Baldassarre ([giuliano.dibaldassarre@geo.uu.se](mailto:giuliano.dibaldassarre@geo.uu.se))

**Abstract.** One common approach to cope with floods is the implementation of structural flood protection measures, such as levees or flood-control reservoirs, which substantially reduce the probability of flooding at the time of implementation. Numerous scholars have problematized this approach. They have shown that increasing the levels of flood protection can attract more settlements and high-value assets in the areas protected by the new measures. Other studies have explored how structural measures can generate a sense of complacency, which can act to reduce preparedness. These paradoxical risk changes have been described as ‘levee effect’, ‘safe development paradox’ or ‘safety dilemma’. In this commentary, we briefly review this phenomenon, by critically analysing the intended benefits and unintended effects of structural flood protection ~~with two main examples~~, and then we propose an interdisciplinary research agenda to uncover these paradoxical dynamics of risk.

## 35 1 Premise

Economic losses caused by floods are increasing in many regions of the world, and flood risk will likely further increase because of climatic and socioeconomic changes (Aerts et al., 2014; Alfieri et al., 2016). One common approach to cope with floods is the implementation of structural flood protection measures, such as levees or flood-control reservoirs. These types

of infrastructure have been implemented for many centuries in different areas around the world, as they can significantly reduce the probability of flooding. In the Netherlands, for example, the current levee system is able to withstand floods up to return periods ranging from 500 to 10,000 years (De Moel et al., 2011). In many parts of Europe, USA and Australia, flood protection measures are typically designed to protect people and assets from events with return periods between 100 and 1,000 years (Bubeck et al. 2017). Conversely, most low-income countries currently have lower protection standards (Scussolini et al., 2016), and flooding events are therefore more frequent.

Recently, a global study of flood risk in a changing climate (Ward et al., 2017) has shown that the expected benefits of structural protection measures preventing frequent flooding often outweigh their building costs. This study made the (common) assumption that future flood exposure depends on socioeconomic trends only, and not on the level of flood protection. However, since the studies of Gilbert White about human adjustments to floods (White, 1945), numerous scholars (White, 1994; Tobin, 1995; Burby, 2006; Kates et al., 2006; Burton and Cutter, 2008; Montz and Tobin, 2008; Scolobig and De Marchi, 2009; Ludy and Kondolf, 2012; Di Baldassarre et al., 2013ab; 2015; Wenger, 2015) have shown that increasing levels of flood protection can also be associated with unexpected increases in flood exposure (Fig. 1). Fig. 1 depicts how the urbanisation of flood-prone areas (and therefore flood exposure) can be influenced by structural flood protection. The left and the right panel of Fig. 1 start from the same historical settlement (i.e. the orange buildings), and then show the urbanisation of flood-prone areas. If such an urbanisation was triggered by socioeconomic trends only (e.g. population growth), the spatial distribution of the new settlements would be the same. However, the presence of structural flood protection tends to create incentives to build closer to the river and therefore increases flood exposure (compare left and right panels of Fig 1). Thus, socioeconomic trends determine the amount of urbanisation increase, while the presence of structural flood protection influences the spatial location of new settlements and as such may lead to increased flood exposure. This tendency is typically described as the ‘levee effect’, although some scholars have used different terms, such as ‘safe development paradox’ or ‘safety dilemma’ (Burby, 2006; Scolobig and De Marchi, 2009). This phenomenon can offset part of the intended benefits of structural flood protection and, paradoxically, flood risk can even increase in the medium-long term after the introduction or reinforcement of a structural flood protection (Kates et al., 2006; Montz and Tobin, 2008; Di Baldassarre et al., 2013b).

## 2 The troubles with structural flood protection

### 2.1 Increasing exposure

The aforementioned studies have discussed how building levees (or other types of structural protection measures, such as flood-control reservoirs) is often associated with more intense urbanization of flood-prone areas behind the levee (Fig. 1), i.e. more people and assets will eventually be exposed to less frequent, but potentially catastrophic flooding (Merz et al., 2009). This phenomenon has been observed in many parts of the world, including: Bangladesh (Ferdous et al., 2018) in Asia, The Netherlands (De Moel et al., 2011), Central Pyrenees (Benito et al., 1998) and the Po River valley (Di Baldassarre et al.,

2013b) in Europe; Brisbane (Bohensky and Leitch, 2014) in Australia; the Sacramento ~~valley~~Valley (Ludy and Kondolf, 2012) and New Orleans (Colten, 2005; Kates et al., 2006; Colten and De Marchi, 2009) ~~and~~ in the United States.

De Moel et al. (2011), for example, analysed changes in flood exposure in The Netherlands by using land-use data with information about the maximum flood inundation. The study showed that the urban area that can be potentially flooded has increased six-fold during the 20th century. Moreover, it showed that while the proportion of urban area in flood-prone areas substantially dropped after the occurrence of a catastrophic flooding in 1953, this proportion has started to grow again over the past decades (from about 27% to about 31%), as flood protection was increased by introducing numerous structural measures, such as the Delta Works. This growth has brought economic benefits to these areas, but also offset part of the decline in flood risk that resulted from the strengthening of flood protection.

It should be mentioned that urban growth behind the dikes is often factored into the risk analysis. A recent study (Hallegatte, 2017) finds that whilst structural protection measures can increase potential losses (especially of large events) due to increased exposure, it can also generate benefits through more investment and economic activity. Indeed, this is one of the goals of flood protection investments: not only to reduce flood risk, but also to make it possible to facilitate economic growth in areas that are flood-prone but valuable, e.g. coastal areas that offer low trade and transport costs, or areas in cities ~~to that~~ benefit from the proximity of jobs and services (Hallegatte, 2017). However, in other cases, urban growth in flood-prone areas goes beyond original plans, ~~potentially leading to unforeseen increase in flood risk as depicted for example in Fig. 1, potentially leading to unforeseen increase in flood risk. If this happens does not dependent on the level of protection, but on risk communication and the specific societal and political context. In recent decades, it has been increasingly recognised in many countries that a residual risk of flooding remains behind levees (Bubeck et al. 2017; Penning-Rowsell et al., 2006). Before, structural flood protection was commonly accompanied by the belief that protected areas are save and flood problems are solved by means of engineering. The resulting increase in flood risk due to increased exposure.~~ This can imply that, based on cost-benefit analysis (Kind, 2014), it becomes economically beneficial to strengthen flood protection again (see next Section 2.2). Thus, the overall impacts of the levee effect on urban growth and flood risk depend on the specific context in which levees are planned and designed.

## 2.2 Vicious cycles, lock-in conditions and unexpected failures

The levee effect can lead to self-reinforcing feedbacks: increasing protection levels favours intense urbanisation of floodplains that will then plausibly require even higher protection standards, as seen e.g. in The Netherlands (Di Baldassarre et al., 2015). Thus, it can generate lock-in conditions towards exceptionally high levels of flood protection and extremely urbanised floodplains. This lock-in condition can be unsustainable ~~or undesirable in some contexts, as (e.g.~~ the maintenance of large infrastructure requires commitment of regular resources, ~~which is not always realistic, while) or undesirable (e.g.~~ large infrastructure can contribute to unfair distributions of risk ~~(; Masozera et al., 2007; Di Baldassarre et al., 2013b; Ferdous et al., 2018)~~. Indeed, the costs and benefits of flood protection measures, as well as potential flood losses, are often

not fairly shared across social groups (Kind et al., 2017), as seen ~~for instance~~ in the aftermath of the catastrophic 2005 flooding of New Orleans (Kates et al., 2006). ~~Changes~~

Moreover, changes in technical flood protection inevitably cause spatial risk redistribution due to hydraulic interactions, e.g. risk shifts downstream due to increased levee heights upstream, but to date these effects remain poorly understood (Vorogushyn et al., 2018). Similarly, there are reports of “levee wars”, i.e. where local districts (or land owners) build higher levees to prevent local flooding and make other areas riskier (e.g. Allan James and Singer, 2008).

Lastly, the shift from frequent to rare-but-catastrophic flooding generated by structural flood protection causes serious problems for decision making in flood risk management, due to high uncertainty associated with the estimation of low probability flood events, such as the 1-in-100-year ~~flooding~~flood (Merz and Thielen 2005; Merz et al. 2009). Additionally, rare-but-catastrophic events bear the potential of unexpected negative consequences, as they can take society by surprise and lead to a complex web of socio-economic interactions (Di Baldassarre et al., 2016), perhaps beyond the recovery potential (Merz et al., 2015).

### 2.3 Increasing vulnerabilities

Increasing the levels of flood protection can also generate a sense of complacency among the protected people, which can reduce preparedness, thereby increasing vulnerability (Tobin, 1995). This additional facet of the levee effect was explored by Scolobig and De Marchi (2009) and De Marchi and Scolobig (2011) with reference to four communities in North Eastern Italy. Interviews, focus group discussions and surveys in these areas showed that residents of communities exposed to flood risk tend to underestimate, minimize or even neglect risk (see also the report in De Marchi et al., 2007). These studies showed that an important component of such an attitude is the false sense of security induced by the presence of (often impressive) structural works designed to limit risk and prevent damage. Apparently, the symbolic messages encrypted in stones (“no problem”) are more powerful than the verbal messages conveyed in information campaigns (“you are protected, but not totally safe”). More specifically, De Marchi et al. (2007) report the level of agreement of the informed respondents with four statements about protection works gauged on a Likert scale from ~~1.00 to 5.00~~, to 5 (a response of 1 signifies strong disagreement with the statement, while a response of 5 indicates strong agreement). The statements are listed here from highest to lowest mean values:

- The protection works give a feeling of safety to the people living in the village (4.49).
- The protection works eliminate the possibility of serious damage (3.92).
- The protection works promote/help the economic development of the community (3.48).
- The protection works are too expensive compared to the expected benefits (1.76).

The high mean value (4.49 out of 5) relating to the first statement suggests that structural protection plays a role in inducing a feeling of safety among residents in these risky areas. Moreover, the high agreement (3.92) with the item “elimination of serious damage”, indicated that there was very little awareness of residual risk. Thus, in this area, people protected by levees

were not well motivated to undertake private precautionary measures and as such are more vulnerable towards flooding, as also found in Ludy and Kondolf (2012) in the Sacramento valley.

Yet, the reality is much more complex, as multiple factors drive risk perception and the adoption of protection measures. This leads to dissimilar outcomes in different contexts. For example, Botzen et al. (2009) found that people in The Netherlands are mostly unaware of the protection level of the levees, even though such protection level is extremely high. Moreover, recent studies in Germany (Bubeck et al., 2013) and France (Poussin et al., 2014) have found that households living in protected areas can in fact take even more risk mitigation measures, or they are more likely to have flood insurance (Bubeck et al., 2013), than the ones in unprotected areas. The latter effect is caused by the set-up of the German insurance system, which highlights the importance of contextual factors on the levee effect.

## 10 **3 Lack of knowledge**

While the levee effect has been described by many authors in different parts of the world, these studies are fragmented and have used completely different methods, hampering comparative analyses. Moreover, while some scholars have focused on the evaluation of increasing exposure, such as the intense urbanisation of flood-prone areas, very few studies have focused on increased vulnerability, such as the false sense of security caused by the presence of levees. Thus, it is still unclear what the social, technical and hydrological conditions are that can (or cannot) trigger the emergence of the levee effect and to what extent. Owing to this major lack of fundamental knowledge, these effects are typically neglected in flood risk studies. This can introduce a systematic bias in the selection or prioritization of alternative strategies for flood risk reduction, for example by favouring structural measures over non-structural options like early warning systems (Pappenberger et al., 2014, precautionary measures (Kreibich et al. 2015) and relocation (Alfieri et al., 2016).

## 20 **4 Research agenda**

Hence, we call upon hydrologists, social scientists, economists, policy makers, and flood risk experts and managers to work together, and fill this gap in knowledge on the side effects of structural flood protection measures, which hinders the development of robust and sustainable strategies to reduce the negative impacts of floods. New empirical research is needed to reveal the social, technical and hydrological factors producing the levee effect, and distinguish between intended and unintended effects of structural flood protection. Our suggestion for a research agenda comprises the following three components: 1) comparative analysis of a large datasets of different case studies; 2) long-term monitoring of exposure and vulnerability dynamics; and 3) utilisation and development of new methods to explore long-term dynamics of flood risk changes and unravel the primary mechanism generating levee effects.

### **4.1 Comparative analysis**

30 Empirical research commonly relies on specific case studies, which are unique and have their own characteristics and processes. This can make it challenging to draw general, transferable conclusions. An approach to tackle this challenge is a

comparative analysis (Blöschl et al. 2013; Kreibich et al. 2017) with the aim of finding general patterns in a large set of diverse case studies in different contexts. For instance, to support universal parameter estimation for hydrological models the Model Parameter Estimation Experiment (MOPEX) assembled and analysed a large number of data sets for a wide range of river basins throughout the world (Wagener et al., 2006; Duan et al., 2006). To better understand the unintended consequences of structural flood protection, there is also a need for comparative analysis of the evolution of urban planning and risk assessment policies, legislation and practices – including issues such as the decision making processes to define building constraints in risky areas, institutional communication strategies or the relationship between scientific and policy innovation in risk assessment. The socio-hydrological framework (Sivapalan et al., 2012), and its specific application to disaster risk reduction (Di Baldassarre et al., 2018), can provide guidance about the set of key variables to perform such a comparative analysis of the levee effect.

Hence, we suggest to identify and analyse case studies of potential or actual occurrence of the levee effect across different hydrological, technical, social, and cultural settings, and identify common patterns ~~of social, psychological, technical and hydrological~~ and factors that produce (or not) levee effects. Some examples of potential case studies across different contexts are provided in Table 1.

#### 15 **4.2. Long-term monitoring of exposure and vulnerability dynamics**

Currently, the analysis of the levee effect is largely hampered by the absence of reliable long-term information on exposure and vulnerability in the focus areas. The monitoring of spatial and temporal dynamics in vulnerability is still largely missing, and strongly limited to locations that have recently experienced catastrophic flooding. Table 1 provides an overview of the types of observations needed to uncover the unfolding of levee effects, together with the actual data availability in the case studies. The table highlights that, while systematic time series of flood hazard and exposure can be more easily obtained, systematic information across decades about vulnerability is almost never available because surveys and interviews are typically performed at one point in time only, i.e. cross-sectional.

Thus, we suggest complementary empirical data collection in the case studies via longitudinal studies, where individuals, communities and decision makers are repeatedly interviewed to assess how changes in flood protection levels influence vulnerability and urban growth over time. Moreover, ideal case studies should also allow the analysis of counter-factual cases, i.e. how would risk have developed in an area had levees not been built. Such a study can be done by comparing urban growth in two adjacent areas, one protected by a levee and one which is not.

#### 30 **4.3 Exploitation of new ~~methods~~ models, concepts and data**

We can draw from new ~~methods and concepts~~ approaches that have been recently developed for the study of socio-nature interactions in various interdisciplinary fields, such as ecological economics, behavioural sciences, social ecology, and sociohydrology (Folke et al., 2005; Ostrom, 2009; Kallis and Norgaard, 2010; Sivapalan et al., 2012; Montanari et al., 2013; Di Baldassarre et al., 2013a; Aerts et al., 2018). In particular, new opportunities to simulate behavioural responses to changing flood risk and flood risk management policies are offered nowadays by system dynamics (Di Baldassarre et al.,

2013a) and agent-based modelling (Aerts et al., 2018). 2013a) and agent-based modelling (Werner and McNamara, 2007; Aerts et al., 2018). An example of a paper that integrates behavioural theories of decision making under risk in hydrological modelling is the research by Haer et al. (2017). They apply the well-known Expected Utility Theory (Neumann and Morgenstern, 1954) of individual decision making under risk, to simulate household flood preparedness behaviour under increasing flood risk. The same study compares this behaviour with boundedly rational behaviour, using Prospect Theory developed by Tversky and Kahnemann (1979). The latter captures situations in which individuals make flood adaptation decisions, while either (under-) or overweighting (high-) low-probability flood events in their decision to invest in flood damage mitigation measures. Another study is Haer et al. (2016) who apply an agent based model that includes decision rules based on Protection Motivation Theory to show the effect of risk communication on flood adaptation decisions.

These new models can guide empirical data collection to test alternative hypotheses about the primary mechanisms that can (or not) generate the levee effect in different contexts. This knowledge can be complemented by participatory approaches for co-generating knowledge between experts and stakeholders (Nature, 2018) in order to identify technical and policy options to address the unintended consequences of structural flood protection. Moreover, the protection motivation theory can also help explain the mitigation behaviour of individuals, which influences the vulnerability of those living behind the levees (Bubeck et al., 2012). It is particularly important to focus on what motivates protection and to provide a link between protection and communication theory/ies, by clearly identifying which communication tools and contents trigger attitudinal and behavioural change, e.g. for residual risk communication. Lastly, the increasing availability of remotely sensed data and advanced information extraction methods, such as night-light data extraction (Ceola et al., 2014; Mård et al., 2018), allows analyses of exposure dynamics over longer time spans.

## 5. Summary

We posit that exploiting these different methods, concepts and data ~~together~~, within the suggested research agenda would significantly improve our understanding of the unintended effects of flood protection. This advanced knowledge will improve our ability to assess and explain changes in flood risk, ~~and~~. Also, it will provide more empirical evidence supporting the selection of strategies and measures for flood risk reduction. More specifically, Table 2 shows the main research questions that remain unanswered, what elements of the proposed research agenda can help address them, and how addressing these questions can contribute to better flood risk policies.

## **Acknowledgments**

This work was developed within the activities of the working group on Changes in Flood Risk of the Panta Rhei research initiative of the International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS). GDB was supported by the European Research Council (ERC) within the project “HydroSocialExtremes: Uncovering the Mutual Shaping of Hydrological Extremes and Society”, ERC Consolidator Grant No. 761678. KA was supported by Innovation Fund Denmark through the Water Smart Cities Project, grant 5157-0009B. PB is supported by a Royal Society Wolfson Research Merit Award and a Leverhulme

Research Fellowship. PJW and WJWB received funding from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) in the form of VIDI ~~grant~~grants 016.161.324 and 45214005.

## References

- Aerts, J. C. J. H., Botzen, W. W., Emanuel, K., Lin, N., de Moel, H., and Michel-Kerjan, E. O.: Evaluating flood resilience strategies for coastal megacities, *Science*, 344(6183), 473–475, 2014.
- 5 Aerts, J.C.J.H., Botzen, W.J.W., Clarke, K.C., Cutter, S., Hall, J., Merz, B., Michel-Kerjan, E., Mysiak, J., Surminski, S., , Kunreuther, H.: Integrating human behavior dynamics into flood disaster risk assessment. *Nature Climate Change*, 8: 193-199, 2018.
- [Allan James, L., & Singer, M.B.: Development of the lower Sacramento Valley flood-control system: Historical perspective. \*Natural Hazards Review\*, 9\(3\), 125-135, 2008.](#)
- 10 Alfieri, L., Feyen, L., and Di Baldassarre, G.: Increasing flood risk under climate change: a pan-European assessment of the benefits of four adaptation strategies. *Climatic Change*, doi: 10.1007/s10584-016-1641-1, 2016.
- Benito, G., Grodek, T., and Enzel, Y.: The geomorphic and hydrologic impacts of the catastrophic failure of flood-control-dams during the 1996-Biescas flood (Central Pyrenees, Spain). *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie*. 42(4), 417-437, 1998.
- 15 Bohensky, E., and Leitch A.: Framing the flood: a media analysis of themes of resilience in the 2011 Brisbane flood, *Reg. Environ. Change*, 14(2), 475-488, doi:10.1007/s10113-013-0438-2, 2014.
- Botzen, W.J.W., J.C.J.H. Aerts, and van den Bergh J.C.J.M.: Dependence of flood risk perceptions on socioeconomic and objective risk factors, *Water Resour. Res.*, 45, W10440, 2009.
- Bubeck, P., Botzen, W. J., and Aerts, J. C.: A review of risk perceptions and other factors that influence flood mitigation behavior. *Risk analysis*, 32(9), 1481-1495, 2012.
- 20 Bubeck, P., Botzen, W.J.W., Kreibich, H. and Aerts, J.C.J.H.: Detailed insights into the influence of flood-coping appraisals on mitigation behaviour. *Global Environmental Change*, 23(5): 1327-1338, 2013.
- Bubeck, P., Kreibich, H., Penning-Rowsell, E., Botzen, W. W., de Moel, H., Klijn, F.: Explaining differences in flood management approaches in Europe and the USA - A comparative analysis. - *Journal of Flood Risk Management*, 10, 4, 436-445, 2017.
- 25 Burby, R.J.: Hurricane Katrina and the paradoxes of government disaster policy: Bringing about wise governmental decisions for hazardous areas, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 604(1), 171–191, 2006.
- Burton, C. and Cutter, S.L.: Levee failures and social vulnerability in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta area, California, *Natural Hazards Review*, 9(3), 136–149, 2008.
- 30 Ceola, S., F. Laio, and Montanari A.: Satellite nighttime lights revealing increased human exposure to floods worldwide, *Geophys. Res. Lett.*, 41, 7184–7190, 2014.
- Colten, C.: *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*, LSU Press, Baton Rouge, La. 2015
- Colten, C.C. and De Marchi, B.: Hurricane Katrina: The Highly Anticipated Surprise, in Treu, M.C. (ed.), *Città salute e sicurezza. Strumenti di governo e casi di studio*, Politecnica, Maggioli, Sant’Arcangelo di Romagna. 638-667, 2009.
- 35 De Marchi B., Scolobig A., Delli Zotti G., and Del Zotto M.: Risk construction and social vulnerability in an Italian Alpine Region, Country Report T11-06-12 of FLOODsite Integrated Project, European Commission 6th Framework Programme, [http://www.floodsite.net/html/partner\\_area/project\\_docs/Task11\\_p33\\_06-08\\_final.pdf](http://www.floodsite.net/html/partner_area/project_docs/Task11_p33_06-08_final.pdf), 344 pp, 2007.
- De Marchi B., and Scolobig A.: The views of experts and residents on social vulnerability to flash floods in an Alpine region of Italy, *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology*, 36(2), doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.2011.01252.x, 2011.

- De Moel, H., Aerts, J. C., and Koomen, E. (2011). Development of flood exposure in the Netherlands during the 20th and 21st century. *Global Environmental Change*, 21(2), 620-627.
- Di Baldassarre, G., A. Viglione, G. Carr, L. Kuil, J. L. Salinas, and Blöschl G.: Socio-hydrology: conceptualising human-flood interactions, *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.*, 17(8), 3295-3303, 2013a.
- 5 Di Baldassarre, G., Kooy, M., Kemerink, J. S., and Brandimarte, L.: Towards understanding the dynamic behaviour of floodplains as human-water systems, *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences*, 17(8), 3235–3244, 2013b.
- Di Baldassarre, G., Viglione, A., Carr, G., Kuil, L., Yan, K., Brandimarte, L., and Blöschl, G.: Debates—Perspectives on socio-hydrology: Capturing feedbacks between physical and social processes, *Water Resources Research*, 51(6), 4770–4781, 2015.
- 10 Di Baldassarre, G., L. Brandimarte, and Beven K.: The seventh facet of uncertainty: wrong assumptions, unknowns and surprises in the dynamics of human-water systems. *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, 61, 1748-1758, 2016.
- [Di Baldassarre, G., Nohrstedt, D., Mård\\*, J., Burchardt, S., Albin, C., et al.: An Integrative Research Framework to Unravel the Interplay of Natural Hazards and Vulnerabilities, \*Earth's Future\*, 6, 305-310, 2018.](#)
- 15 [Ferdous, M. R., Wesselink, A., Brandimarte, L., Slager, K., Zwarteveen, M., and Di Baldassarre, G.: Socio-hydrological spaces in the Jamuna River floodplain in Bangladesh, \*Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.\*, 22, 5159-5173, <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-22-5159-2018>, 2018.](#)
- Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson, P., and Norberg J.: Adaptive governance of social-ecological systems. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.*, 30, 441–73, 2005.
- 20 [Haer, T., Botzen, W., de Moel, H., Aerts, J.C.J.H.: Integrating household risk mitigation behaviour in flood risk analysis: An agent-based model approach. \*Risk Analysis\*, 37\(10\): 1977-1992, 2017.](#)
- [Haer, T., Botzen, W., Aerts, J.: The effectiveness of flood risk communication strategies and the influence of social networks: insights from an agent-based model. \*Environmental Science and Policy\*, 60: 44-52, 2016.](#)
- Hallegatte, S.: A normative exploration of the link between development, economic growth, and natural risk, *Economics of Disasters and Climate Change*, 1(1), 5–31, 2017.
- 25 [Kahneman, D., Tversky A.: Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk. \*Econometrica\*, Vol. 47, No. 2., pp. 263-292, 1979.](#)
- Kates, R. W., Colten, C. E., Laska, S., and Leatherman, S. P.: Reconstruction of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina: a research perspective, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103(40), 14653–14660, 2006.
- 30 Kind J.M.: Economically efficient flood protection standards for the Netherlands. *Journal of Flood Risk Management*, 7, 103–117, 2014.
- Kind, J., Botzen, W.J., Aerts, J.C.J.H.: Accounting for risk aversion, income distribution and social welfare in cost - benefit analysis for flood risk management. *WIREs Water*. DOI: 10.1002/wcc.446, 2017.
- Kreibich, H., Bubeck, P., Van Vliet, M., De Moel, H.: A review of damage-reducing measures to manage fluvial flood risks in a changing climate. *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, 20, 6, 967-989. 2015.
- 35 [Kreibich, H., Di Baldassarre, G., Vorogushyn, S., Aerts, J. C. J. H., Apel, H., Aronica, G. T., Arnbjerg-Nielsen, K., Bouwer, L. M., Bubeck, P., Caloiero, T., Do, T. C., Cortès, M., Gain, A. K., Giampá, V., Kuhlicke, C., Kundzewicz, Z. W., Llasat, M. C., Mård, J., Matczak, P., Mazzoleni, M., Molinari, D., Nguyen, D., Petrucci, O., Schröter, K., Slager, K., Thieken, A. H., Ward, P. J., Merz, B.: Adaptation to flood risk - results of international paired flood event studies, \*Earth's Future\*, 5, 10, 953-965, 2017.](#)

40

- Ludy, J., and Kondolf, G. M.: Flood risk perception in lands “protected” by 100-year levees, *Natural Hazards*, 61(2), 829–842, 2012.
- Masojera, M., Bailey, M., and Kerchner, C.: Distribution of impacts of natural disasters across income groups: A case study of New Orleans, *Ecol. Econ.*, 63, 299–306, 2007.
- 5 Merz, B., Thielen, A. H.: Separating natural and epistemic uncertainty in flood frequency analysis. *Journal of Hydrology*, 309, 1, 114–132. 2005.
- Merz, B., Vorogushyn, S., Lall, U., Viglione, A., Blöschl, G.: Charting unknown waters — On the role of surprise in flood risk assessment and management. - *Water Resources Research*, 51, 8, 6399–6416, 2015.
- 10 Montanari, A., G. Young, H.H.G. Savenije, et al.: "Panta Rhei - Everything Flows": Change in hydrology and society - The IAHS Scientific Decade 2013–2022, *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, doi:10.1080/02626667.2013.809088, 2013.
- Montz, B. E., and Tobin, G. A.: Livin’large with levees: Lessons learned and lost, *Natural Hazards Review*, 9(3), 150–157, 2008.
- [Mård, J., Di Baldassarre, G., Mazzoleni, M.: Nighttime light data reveal how flood protection shapes human proximity to rivers. \*Science Advances\*, 4, no. 8, eaar5779, doi: 10.1126/sciadv.aar5779.](#)
- 15 [Nature \(editorial\): The best research is produced when researchers and communities work together, \*Nature\*, 562, 7, doi: 10.1038/d41586-018-06855-7, 2018](#)
- [von Neumann, J.; Morgenstern, O.: \*Theory of Games and Economic Behavior\* \(Third ed.\). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.](#)
- 20 Pappenberger, F., Cloke, H. L., Parker, D. J., Wetterhall, F., Richardson, D. S., and Thielen, J.-(2015)-.: The monetary benefit of early flood warnings in Europe. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 51, 278–291, [2015](#).
- [Penning-Rowsell E., Johnson C. & Tunstall S. ‘Signals’ from pre-crisis discourse: lessons from UK flooding for global environmental policy change? \*Glob Environ Change\* 2006, 16, 323–339.](#)
- Poussin, J., Botzen, W.J.W. and Aerts, J.C.J.H.: Factors of influence on flood damage mitigation behaviour by households - Literature review and results from a French survey. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 40: 69–77, 2014.
- 25 Sivapalan, M. and H.G. Savenije and Blöschl G.: Socio-hydrology: A new science of people and water, *Hydrological Processes*, 26(8), 1270–1276, 2012.
- Scolobig, A. and De Marchi, B.: Dilemmas in land use planning in flood prone areas, in *Flood Risk Management: Research and Practice* – Samuels et al. (eds), Taylor and Francis Group, London, ISBN 978-0-415-48507-4, 2009.
- 30 Scussolini, P., Aerts, J. C. J. H., Jongman, B., Bouwer, L. M., Winsemius, H. C., de Moel, H., and Ward, P. J.: FLOPROS: an evolving global database of flood protection standards, *Nat. Hazards Earth Syst. Sci.*, 16, 1049–1061, 2016.
- Tobin, G. A.: The Levee Love Affair: A Stormy Relationship, *Water Resour. Bull.* 31, 359–367, 1995.
- Vorogushyn, S., Bates, P. D., de Bruijn, K., Castellarin, A., Kreibich, H., Priest, S., Schröter, K., Bagli, S., Blöschl, G., Domeneghetti, A., Gouldby, B., Klijn, F., Lammersen, R., Neal, J. C., Ridder, N., Terink, W., Viavattene, C., Viglione, A., Zanardo, S., Merz, B.: Evolutionary leap in large-scale flood risk assessment needed. - *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water*, 5, 2, e1266, 2018.
- 35 [Werner, B. and McNamara, D.: Dynamics of coupled human-landscape systems, \*Geomorphology\*, 91, 393–407, doi:10.1016/j.geomorph.2007.04.020, 2007.](#)
- Wenger, C: Better use and management of levees: Reducing flood risk in a changing climate. *Environmental Reviews*, 23 (2), 240–255, 2015.

Ward, P. J., Jongman, B., Aerts, J. C. J. H., Bates, P. D., Botzen, W. J., Loaiza, A. D., Hallegatte, S., Kind, J. M., Kwadijk, J. C. J., Scussolini, P. and Winsemius, H. C.: A global framework for future costs and benefits of river-flood protection in urban areas, *Nature climate change*, 7(9), 642–646, 2017.

White, G.F.: *Human adjustment to floods*, Chicago, 1945.

- 5 White, G.F.: A Perspective on Reducing Losses from Natural Hazards, *Bull. Amer. Meteorol. Soc.* 75, 1237–1240, 1994.

5

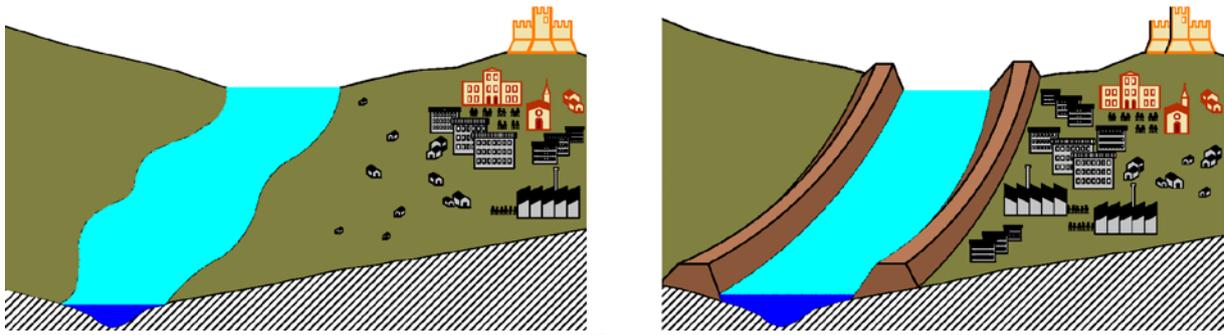


Figure 1: Hypothetical urbanisation patterns without (left) and with (right) levees. The presence of levees often triggers more intense urbanization (in grey) in flood-prone area, which can offset (at least part of) the initial benefits of flood protection.

**Table 1. Monitoring levee effects over time – data needs for an empirical analysis of the levee effect and their availability in different hotspots across decades**

Data needs (ideal case study)				
(ideally all data should be available for the same time period over several decades)	<b>Time series of floods</b> Flood information: e.g. annual maximum flows or peaks over a threshold.	<b>Change in flood protection standards</b> Data/indicators/proxies: e.g. building times and heights of levees (with some reasonable resolution e.g. 10-30 years).	<b>Change in flood exposure</b> Data/indicators/proxies: e.g. spatio-temporal changes in population density, asset values, land use in protected flood plain (with some reasonable resolution e.g. 10-30 years).	<b>Change in flood vulnerability</b> Data, indicators, or proxies: e.g. risk awareness and preparedness studies (with focus on levee effect), emergency management (e.g. early warning times), insurance cover, evolution of regulatory frameworks, legislation, policies, decision making processes and communication strategies for hazard/risk assessment.
Actual data availability				
Dresden, Germany	Annual maximum river flows.	Available.	Land use reconstruction from 1790-2009 Estimate of asset value of residential buildings since 2000.	Survey data in Dresden: 2002: 300 households 2005/2006: 21 households 2013: 117 households
Cologne, Germany	Annual maximum river flows.	Available.	Development of the population since 1993 until 2020 for 80+ districts of Cologne.	Survey data from 2012 on risk perception, perceptions towards flood risk management. Can be compared to other areas that have a much higher flood risk compared with Cologne.
North East Italy	Annual maximum river flows.	Qualitative information available in the technical municipal and provincial offices.	Data available on: i) land use change (municipal urban plans) and construction of protection works; ii) changes in social vulnerability and population density at municipal level years (Official National Census data, conducted every 10 years since 1900).	Risk awareness and preparedness surveys conducted in 2005 (N=400, Trento area; N=176 Bolzano/Bozen area; N=100 Malborghetto Valbruna). Emergency plans and flood risk maps available.
The Netherlands	Annual maximum river flows.	Available.	Census data <a href="#">and land-use maps</a> .	Risk awareness surveys in 2008.
Sacramento, USA	Annual maximum river flows.	Available.	Census data <a href="#">and land-use maps</a> .	Risk awareness surveys in 2010.
<a href="#">Jamuna River floodplain in Bangladesh</a>	<a href="#">Annual maximum river flows</a> , <a href="#">Flood extent maps</a> .	<a href="#">Available</a> .	<a href="#">Census data and land-use maps</a> .	<a href="#">Risk awareness surveys in 2017</a>
Denmark	Levees are for sea surges. Detailed time series, 10 series longer than 100 years.	Large flood in 1872 led to construction of large dike to protect valuable farmland. No larger change in standards since then.	National compensation scheme in place since 1980s.	Land use change and change of human preference imply that levees are protecting the wrong locations.
Vienna, Austria	Time series of floods.	Reports about the various projects that were undertaken throughout the years to update the flood protection system of Vienna.	Available.	No data available.
Calabria region, Italy	Time series of flood levels. Discharge data are not available: we deal with typically Mediterranean ungauged torrential streams. The series of maximum rainfall events can be used as a proxy of river discharge Historical series of elements damaged by floods throughout the time series	Qualitative information that can be obtained from the comparative analysis of the different types of structural works realized during the period 1820-present.	Temporal series of realisation of protection works (levees, check dams and other types) and major land transformation since 1850. Number of inhabitants obtained from Official National census: since 1900 every 10 years. Map of urbanized sectors in two or three times, depending on the availability of air photos ( <del>in Calabria the flights are dated 1951, 1972 and for the present we can use Google map</del> ).	Flood risk maps of PAI (Piano di Assetto Idrogeologico): these maps realized on 2000, classify territory according to four different flood risk levels. <del>They are official and legal instruments defining the restrictions and allowed land use types according to expected flood risk level.</del> Official flood risk maps of PAI: updated version 2016.
Lodi, Italy	Annual maximum river flows. Annual maximum precipitation.	Executive projects of the levee system built after the 2002 flood with information about height, material, design safety level, costs and	Urbanization patterns (i.e. buildings construction time) since 1920 Number of inhabitants from official national	Risk awareness and preparedness survey of people affected in 2002 and still living in the area (10 households ongoing).

path.

census since: since 1900 every year  
Orthoimages: since 1950.

Emergency plans and flood risk maps  
available.

---

**Table 2. Summary of the research agenda in terms of questions, methods, and outcomes**

<b><u>Research question</u></b>	<b><u>Methods</u></b>	<b><u>Potential outcomes</u></b>
<u>Which socio-hydrological factors enhance or alleviate the levee effect?</u>	<u>Comparative analysis (Section 4.1)</u>	<u>These factors would enable the identifications of contexts in which increasing structural protection levels can be less beneficial than expected. Hence, it will contribute to a better development of risk reduction policies.</u>
<u>How does structural flood protection influence changes in risk perception and flood preparedness decisions?</u>	<u>Longitudinal surveys (Section 4.2)</u>	<u>Understanding what influences changes in risk perception and flood preparedness decisions would suggest how to improve risk awareness campaigns, thus alleviating the levee effect.</u>
<u>How does structural flood protection influence changes in human settlements?</u>	<u>Long-term monitoring (Section 4.2)</u>	<u>Understanding how flood protection shapes human settlements would support a more realistic assessment of long-term (decadal) changes in flood exposure.</u>
<u>How does flood risk changes over time in differ contexts, e.g. with/without structural flood protection?</u>	<u>System dynamic modelling, agent based modelling and new datasets (Section 4.3)</u>	<u>Modelling or observing behavioural responses would support a more realistic assessment of long-term changes in flood risk in different contexts.</u>