Hydraulics, water quality, biodiversity and policy research to support nature-based water management using vegetated floodplains

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In collaboration with national and international colleagues



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Presentation topics

- Why floodplain vegetation matters?
- Interactions between floodplain vegetation and hydrodynamics
 - Lab, field and model development
- Evaluation and co-development of nature-based solutions for river and water management
 - Case two-stage channels & vegetation management
 - Sediments, water quality, biodiversity
- Natural sciences and engineering supported by economical, policy, governance, and legal considerations



(Rowiński, P.M., Västilä, K., Aberle, J., Järvelä, J. & Kalinowska, M. 2018 How vegetation can aid in coping with river management challenges: A brief review. Ecohydrology and Hydrobiology. doi: 10.1016/j.ecohyd.2018.07.003).

Why floodplain vegetation matters?

Riverine vegetation has important ecological and technical impacts



Aalto University (Rowiński, P.M., Västilä, K., Aberle, J., Järvelä, J. & Kalinowska, M. 2018 How vegetation can aid in coping with river management challenges: A brief review. Ecohydrology and Hydrobiology. doi: 10.1016/j.ecohyd.2018.07.003.)

Reality: Problems of conventional agricultural water management

Loss of

nutrient

capacity

habitats &

processing



Floodplains disconnected

Siltation, overgrowing

Incapable of handling variable flow and sediment transport conditions

Channel erosion

limited water storage capacity

Surface water quality is degraded in large parts of the world



European rivers severely affected by agricultural pollution and hydro-morphological pressures



Ecological status in Europe's river basin districts largely below good

- Little improvement since 2010
- NbS recommended for multiobjective river management
 - More vegetation
 - Natural forms and functions



Interactions between floodplain vegetation and hydrodynamics

Vegetative impacts on hydrodynamics is the starting point: flow resistance description

Formulation	Common usage
Vegetative Manning coefficient, n veg [–]	describes reach-scale flow resistance in practical applications and 1D models, or roughness in 2D depth-averaged models
Drag force, F [N]	characterizes drag forces exerted by plants under flow and is commonly applied in experimental investigations
Drag – density parameter, C ▷ a [m ² m ⁻³]	describes vegetative drag per unit water volume and is used as a sink or source term in 3D models
Drag – area parameter, <i>C ▷ aH</i> [m ³ m ⁻³]	characterizes the bulk drag of submerged vegetation in approaches that have separate vertical layers for vegetation and overflow
Vegetative friction factor, <i>f</i> ″ [−]	describes roughness in 2D depth-averaged models and represents plant-stand scale flow resistance in flume studies

Västilä, K. & Järvelä, J. 2018 Characterizing natural riparian vegetation for modeling of flow and suspended sediment transport. Journal of Soils and Sediments.

Direct drag force measurements at TU Braunschweig



(Salix viminalis) (Koripaju)

(Salix x rubens) (Kujapaju)

(Alnus glutinosa) (Tervaleppä)

(Populus nigra) (Mustapoppeli)

(Rauduskoivu)

Natural riparian vegetation ≠ rigid cylinders



F = drag force C_D = drag coefficient A_C = reference area u_c = characteristic approach velocity

stem area, A_s

leaf area, A_L



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Västilä, K. & Järvelä, J. 2014. Modeling flow resistance of woody vegetation using physically-based parameters for foliage and stem. Water Resources Research 50(1): 229-245. DOI: 10.1002/2013WR013819

Substantial seasonal impacts of vegetation on flow hydraulics









(Caroppi, G., Västilä, K., Järvelä, J., Lee, C., Ji, U., Kim, H. S., & Kim, S. (2022). Flow and wake characteristics associated with riparian vegetation patches: Results from field-scale experiments. Hydrological Processes, 36(2), e14506. https://doi.org/10.1002/hyp.14506)

Differences in turbulent flow structures



For natural-like vegetation (compared to rigid cylinders)

- Shear penetration 6-10 x greater
- Mass transport across interface 40% more efficient

Caroppi et al. 2021 Comparison of Flexible and Rigid Vegetation Induced Shear Layers in Partly Vegetated Channels, Water Resources Research

From the conventional to an enhanced parameterization of vegetative drag

Conventional:



C_D = drag coefficient a = frontal area per unit volume

New:

$$C_{D}a = \frac{A_{L}}{A_{B}z}C_{D\chi,F}\left(\frac{u_{C}}{u_{\chi,F}}\right)^{\chi_{F}} + \frac{A_{S}}{A_{B}z}C_{D\chi,S}\left(\frac{u_{C}}{u_{\chi,S}}\right)^{\chi_{S}}$$
Density Reconfiguration Density Reconfiguration of stems of stems



 A_L and A_S are the total leaf area and total stem area, respectively, in a vertical layer with the depth z, A_B =unit ground area, $C_{D\chi,F}$ and $C_{D\chi,S}$ are the drag coefficients of the foliage and stem, respectively, χ_F and χ_S are the reconfiguration parameters of the foliage and stem, respectively, and u_x is a reference velocity.



Västilä, K. & Järvelä, J. 2014. Modeling flow resistance of woody vegetation using physically-based parameters for foliage and stem. Water Resources Research

Västilä, K. & Järvelä, J. 2018 Characterizing natural riparian vegetation for modeling of flow and suspended sediment transport. Journal of Soils and Sediments

Development needs of numerical models for quantifying flow resistance of flexible woody vegetation

Key properties properly described:	epresentation of etated conditions	Simple cylindrical representation	Conventional use of Manning's <i>n</i>
Static approach does not consider effect of vegetation height, plant density, water level or discharge on flow resistance Similar deficits for static Chezy coefficient C and friction factor f	Parameterization: Parameterization: Parameterization: Asy/AB CDX CDX CDX CDX CDX CDX CDX CDX	Neglects velocity- dependency of flow resistance Laborious or unreliable calibration when used for leafy vegetation	Static approach does not consider effect of vegetation height, plant density, water level or discharge on flow resistance Similar deficits for static Chezy coefficient <i>C</i> and friction factor <i>f</i>

(Västilä, Berends et al., to be submitted)

Developments of the 2D Delft3D FM



Västilä (VAS):
$$C_{D_{\chi,F}} \frac{A_L}{A_B} \left(\frac{u_c}{u_{\chi,F}}\right)^{\chi_F} + C_{D_{\chi,S}} \frac{A_S}{A_B} \left(\frac{u_c}{u_{\chi,S}}\right)^{\chi_F}$$

(Västilä, Berends et al., to be submitted)

Developed Delft3D FM with VAS & JAR more reliable across different flow and vegetative conditions than original model



Parameter values of VAS for common trees and shrubs

Species	C _{DX,F}	XF	C _{DX,S}	Xs	Data source
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (Common Alder)	0.18	-1.11	0.89	-0.27	Västilä & Järvelä (2014) WRR
<i>Betula pendula</i> (Silver Birch)	0.20	-1.06	1.02	-0.32	Västilä & Järvelä (2014) WRR
<i>Populus nigra</i> (Black Poplar)	0.13	-0.97	0.95	-0.27	Västilä et al. (2013) JOH
Salix viminalis (Common Osier)	0.11	-1.21	1.03	-0.20	Västilä & Järvelä (2014) WRR
Salix x rubens (hybrid Crack Willow)	0.19	-1.21	0.96	-0.25	Västilä & Järvelä (2014) WRR
White Birch (<i>Betula pubescens</i>)	0.10	-1.09	0.82	-0.25	Jalonen & Järvelä (2014)
Goat Willow (<i>Salix caprea</i>)	0.09	-1.09	0.84	-0.27	Jalonen & Järvelä (2014)
Blackberry (<i>Rubus armeniacus</i>)	0.40	-1.00	1.20	0.16	Niewerth et al. (2019)

$(u_{x,F} = u_{x,S} = 0.2 \text{ m/s})$

Västilä, K. & Järvelä, J. 2018 Characterizing natural riparian vegetation for modeling of flow and suspended sediment transport. Journal of Soils and Sediments, doi: 10.1007/s11368-017-1776-3.

Västilä, Berends et al., to be submitted



Reach-Scale Vegetative Flow Resistance due to Willow Patches. J Hydraul Eng Bae et al. 2024 Blockage effect of emergent riparian vegetation patches on river flow. J Hydrol

Cross-sectional blockage factor is key for predicting flow resistance (n_{tot}) in grassed two-stage channels



Luhar & Nepf 2013:



The seasonal C* was calibrated at the lowest B_X at one water level in spring (2011, n=0.044) and in autumn (2010, n=0.072).

n at higher blockages could be predicted using only the blockage

factor

Västilä et al. 2016 Flow-vegetation-sediment interaction in a cohesive compound channel. Journal of Hydraulic Engineering

Describing the effects of patchy vegetation on reach-scale dispersion



Longitudinal dispersion D_X is controlled by the lateral velocity differential, which depends on vegetation patch layout.

Västilä, K., Oh, J., Sonnenwald, F., Ji, U., Järvelä, J., Bae, I., and Guymer, I.: Longitudinal dispersion affected by willow patches of low areal coverage, Hydrological Processes, https://doi.org/10.1002/hyp.14613

Evaluation and co-development of naturebased solutions for river and water management

Typical nature-based solutions for small headwater catchments in Northern Europe

Restoration of mires/peatlands to balance extreme discharges Erosion protection: e.g. sowing grasses, fascines, erosion control blankets

Constructed wetlands for water quality and wildlife benefits, for retaining water



Natural-like bottom ramps or rocky sills for erosion protection, raising low water levels, diversifying habitats





Two-stage channels for enhancing drainage and flood mitigation + environmental benefits

In-stream habitat restoration & LWD structures Two-stage channel (TSC) design as a nature-based alternative to conventional dredging





Example TSC study sites in Finland

- Floodplains excavated ~at the level of mean discharge in 2008-2018
- Clayey-sandy soils
- Top widths ~8-15 m
- 6...40 km² catchment areas
- Q_m ~0.06-0.4 m³/s

Västilä & Järvelä 2011. DOI: 10.1080/15715124.2011.572888

Västilä, et al 2016. DOI: 10.1061/(ASCE)HY.1943-7900.0001058

Huttunen et al. 2024



Investigations of morphological development under different channel designs





-Two-stage channel had an excellent self-cleansing capacity -> flow conveyance and drainage depth well maintained

-Nature-based rocky sills/rock ramps etc. may be used for decreasing re-suspension

-Erosion in the low-flow channel? -> long-term monitoring needed (Västilä & Jilbert 2025. Evaluating multiannual sedimentary nutrie

retention in agricultural two-stage channels. Scientific Reports

New framework for quantifying sedimentary retention of nutrients to overcome limitations with water sampling / water quality sensor / lab assay -based estimates



Legend

[P]

}∆Z

Soil/sediment surface

Vertical distribution of

Net erosion/deposition

sedimentary [P]

Both physical and biochemical sedimentary retention mechanisms important



(Västilä & Jilbert 2025, Evaluating multiannual sedimentary nutrient retention in agricultural two-stage channels. Scientific Reports)

9-y retention efficiencies in different channel parts



retention in agricultural two-stage channels. Scientific Reports)



Selective vegetation cutting + natural-like rock ramp weirs to enhance floodplain inundation frequency while decreasing water levels at high flows

Selective floodplain vegetation cutting to the height of ~10 cm

- 3 mowed reaches (~50 m long)
- 2 control reaches

grade control, lowflow passability and structural diversity

Sediment

traps

Site-calibrated continuous flow, water level and water quality records

Full cut of vegetation leads to more flashy passage of pollutants

In the 4 sub-reaches, full cut caused

- 150-360% faster passage of the concentration peak
- Increase in peak concentrations (C_{max}) by 15-38%





New knowledge on water quality processes on twostage channel floodplains

Selective vegetation mowing & collection found efficient in improving floodplain sedimentary retention

(kg/m2/a)

P retention (g/m2/a)

P content of

deposits (ppm)



Combining technical and ecological expertise: biodiversity impacts of two-stage channel design





→ riparian plant and invertebrate communities benefited from the TSC design



(Huttunen et al. 2024, Two-stage channels can enhance local biodiversity in agricultural landscapes. Journal of Environmental

Connections between hydraulics, morphology and channel type



Two-stage channel design enhanced regional species diversity (gamma diversity)



At each catchment the increase in local richness due to inclusion of two-stage channels was calculated by comparing the combined taxa richness across adjacent sections of conventional and two-stage sections to species richness in a conventional ditch alone.

 TSCs enhanced regional species diversity at all sites and for all studied taxa



Further benefits could be achieved by increasing the heterogeneity of in-stream habitat structure, allowing more woody vegetation, and with additional efforts to decrease nutrient and sediment loads -> requires combining technical and ecological expertise



Three-year flower strip experiment along two-stage channel

- 50 m long sown flower ۲ strips
 - Different seed mixtures on floodplain vs drier bank
- Monitoring flowering plant ulletand pollinator abundance for three years

Experimental design (5 x 4 = 20 replicates)

10 flower- vs. 10 grass strips on both floodplain and bank







Sown flower strips increased pollinator abundance

- Sowing flower strips was successful on channel banks but not on floodplain
- Pollinators more abundant on flower strips
- Unsown, good nectar sources established naturally along the channel
- Seed mixtures should include both annual and perennial flowers



Natural sciences and engineering supported by economical, policy, governance, and legal considerations

Implementations of NbS influenced by factors beyond engineering and natural sciences

- Costs: immediate vs long-term, relevant categories
- Benefits: also societal & ecosystem services, compared to costs and other measures (additional)
- Regulations and policies: e.g. CAP, WFD, Baltic Sea Action Plan, Water Law
- Financing: agri-environmental subsidies, national funds for restoration, ecological compensation, stakeholders' willingness to pay (~20...60 e/y)
- Governance: levels, information exchange, guidance to practitioners, bureaucracy
- Capacity: design tools, guidelines, science-practice knowledge exchange, cocreation
- Bottlenecks in any of these

Cost-benefit assessments considering technical, water quality and ecological benefits: NbS vs grey alternative

two-stage channels are costeffective in streams/rivers having high biodiversity values, or where conventional dredging has resulted in instability or the need for frequent re-dredging

Variable	Units/Unit cost	Conventional Two-stag dredging channel desig		Two-stage channels compared to the grey alternative (conventional dredging):
Project life	years		60	
Channel length	km		14.8	
Maintenance interval	years	20	50	Large initial contruction cost, but lower
Maintenance costs	€5/€2.5 per meter	-222 000	-44 000	maintenance costs
Construction costs	€0/€21.6 per meter	0	-314 000	Costs related to lost field area because
Adjacent land price	€ 0/ €3.6 per m	0	-53 000	of non-integration to CAP-AES
Lost crop value	€ 0/ € 268 per km<	0	-223 000	
Environmental benefits for biodiversity	€50 per <i>Unio crassus</i> mussel	0	594 000	Additional monetary environmental
Environmental benefits for water quality	€ 249 per phosphorus kg retained on the floodplain	0	951 000	biodiversity
Net costs in 60 years	€	-222 000	910 000	Environmental benefits larger than costs
Equivalent annual cost (EAC)	€ per year	-1 200	7 400	considering the whole lifecycle and targeting to optimal locations

(Västilä et al. 2021, Agricultural Water Management Using Two-Stage Channels: Performance and Policy Recommendations Based on Northern European Experiences. <u>https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169349</u>)

Developing financing models (example for EU's Common Agricultural Policy)

Associated Cost Factor	Costs (€) ofCosts (€) of Two-StageConventional DredgingChannel (TSC) Design		Notes		
Maintenance costs	-15,000	-3000			
Construction costs	-	-21,200	CAP-AES reform	m (3 m of TSC width replaces the	
Adjacent land value	-	-3600	required	red edge-of-field buffer strips;	
Lost crop value	-	-2800		Figures 5 and 6)	
Total costs	-15,000	-30,600			
Difference in total costs	-15	5,600			
Benefits	Rationale	for paying	Payment (€)	Notes	
Well-functioning drainage and flood mitigation	Farmers pay the costs for flow conveyance, equali convention	or ensuring drainage and ng the estimated costs of al dredging	-15,000	The total cost partitioning can be realized through public	
Improved water quality and biodiversity	Public funding covers th as the additional be	e difference in total costs nefits are collective ¹	-15,600	 funding covering 74% of TSC construction costs 	
¹ Additional private funding can be arranged through developing mechanisms for ecological compensation (biodiversity offsetting) or for stakeholder participation according to their willingness to pay.					
For mitigating the costs buffer/subsidizable fi For mitigating the higher	s caused by lost field area eld area in the new CAP 20 construction costs: an €/ch	1: count TSC floodplains as 023-2027 1annel meter public comp	vegetated		

(Västilä et al. 2021, <u>https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169349)</u>

Providing decision/policy support: case vegetated buffers



Limited funds Spatial targeting for optimizing performance Priority sites

(Västilä et al. 2021, https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169349)

Support for designers, authorities, land owners & policy makers



Peltosalaojitus (Salaoinuha)

Recent & ongoing developments to mainstream "wet NbS" & Natural Flood Management

- TSCs much more widely applied in Finland since ~2020, but still marginal compared to conventional methods
- TSCs included in CAP in Finland since 2023: but only ditches, not streams & rivers... + financing level insufficient
- EU's BD strategy & Nature Restoration Law
 - Increase landscape features on agricultural land (to 10%): wet NbS, woody vege
 - 3 billion new trees by 2030 (also on riparian areas?)
 - Laferia project to identify the key factors that can promote the reintroduction of LFs & develop strategies to overcome barriers
- EU Missions to Restore our Ocean and Waters and Adapt to Climate Change
 - Integrating catchment-scale NbS, CES & BfS with lake restoration (FutureLakes)
 - Blueprint for lake protection and restoration



Grant Agreement 101157743

Conclusions

- Vegetative parameterizations available e.g. through Delft3D FM
- Vegetated two-stage channels as NbS appear to have potential for multiple benefits, but R&D gaps remain
- Impact through bridging natural sciences to policy & economical analyses to changes in policy & financing & capacity