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Remains of privileged spaces. Landscapes of power in Delfland, the Netherlands

Building on the observation that matter and power are closely linked to our past, I will develop the argument that we are confronted with the power relations of our ancestors in our built environment. Water-related power relations were literally channelled through infrastructures of different kinds (canals, roads, banks, etcetera). Buildings, bank accounts, pipe lines, material components, and infrastructure are vital to allow power relations to be sustained over time. Power would have a hard time surviving without any material components. When the historical landscapes that included the original versions of what we now encounter as material remains were created, their artefacts (or technologies) co-shaped the relationship between humans and their world, and between different social groups. Two examples from the area of Delfland, one of the oldest water boards in the Netherlands, are mobilized to sustain the argument. The Orange Sluice symbolizes how the practical need for managing water in this part of the Netherlands coincides with issues of power, control and payment. It also symbolizes how history is built into the water infrastructure and continues to be of relevance for current discussions. The Polder Berkel shows how a landscape of peat was transformed into a lake. Later, the lake was drained and turned into a polder. Apart from local drainage issues, the inherited water infrastructure has recently been transformed to fulfil new goals. The local landscape was mobilized to solve water problems elsewhere. My two examples show how Dutch water infrastructure shaped social relations through infrastructure(s).