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# Bank re-erosion action to promote sediment supply and channel diversification: Feedback from a restoration test on the Rhine

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## Abstract

River regulation alters hydrological and sediment regimes and consequently affects habitat complexity and dynamics, biodiversity and ecosystem services. Although channel bank erosion is a key geomorphological process supplying alluvial channels with coarse sediments and diversifying aquatic and riparian habitats, banks have often been stabilized to limit erosion risk to human activities and facilities. The objective of this paper is to assess the effects, and their sustainability, of bank protection removal on a 300 m long reach of the Old Rhine (France/Germany) to promote sediment supply, channel diversification and a rehabilitation of fluvial morpho-sedimentary processes. This action was combined with the construction of two transverse groynes to locally increase bank erosion processes. Yearly detailed monitoring was implemented over 6 years, including classical bathymetric surveys, airborne topo-bathymetric and terrestrial LiDAR, and bed grain-size and bedload tracking. Following a  $Q_{15}$  flood, the restoration induced a weak sediment supply. The restoration diversified habitats due to the implementation of the two transverse groynes, inducing bank scouring and the creation of new macroforms, as well as local bed grain-size diversification and fining. The cross-sectional diversity of the restored water channel was close to the regularization engineering phase. Channel bedform diversification persisted six years due to the persistence of the two transverse groynes. The action induced the rehabilitation of fluvial forms, in a static manner, rather than the rehabilitation of fluvial morpho-sedimentary processes, which raises questions about the sustainability of the benefits of such management actions in terms of fluvial functionality and naturality.

**Keywords:** Large river restoration, bank re-erosion, transverse groynes, geomorphological monitoring, management guidelines, Rhine river

## 1. Introduction

Most rivers have been regulated for navigation, agriculture, flood protection and electricity production purposes, altering both hydrological and sediment regimes. River regulation affects geomorphological conditions and dynamics (bed incision, bed armouring, channel narrowing, etc.), as well as the complexity of aquatic and riverine habitats and associated biodiversity and ecosystem services (Kondolf, 1997).

During the last three decades, the number of river restorations has significantly increased around the world, notably in Europe, as encouraged by the Water Framework Directive (WFD), which targets the "good status of water bodies" (Morandi et al. 2017; Buisson et al. 2018). Restoration-linked monitoring (before-after and/or control impacted schemes are generally used) is crucial to evaluate restoration success by comparing the obtained results with the restoration objectives based on indicators. This feedback allows formulation of management recommendations focusing on the surveyed reach for further improvements and/or transferring restoration guidelines to similar river reaches (Shahverdian et al. 2019).

Several restoration strategies are commonly deployed to counteract sediment starvation conditions and channel simplification in regulated rivers. These strategies include gravel

1  
2 1 augmentation (Arnaud et al. 2017; Kondolf et al. 2004; Gaeuman 2014; Chardon et al.  
3 2 2021), bank re-erosion (Klösch et al. 2013) , remobilization of old vegetated sediment  
4 3 deposits (Landon, 2008; Thorel et al. 2018), dam removal (Foley et al. 2017; Poulos et al.  
5 4 2019) and specific engineering actions aiming to reduce sediment trapping in dam  
6 5 reservoirs (Sumi, 2006). These actions may be combined to enhance geomorphological  
7 6 processes in a more sustainable way, e.g., on the Mür River (Klösch et al. 2013).  
8 7 Gravel augmentation consists of injecting a significant sediment volume downstream of  
9 8 dams according to the transport capacity of the river reach to limit sediment starvation and  
10 9 to restore fish habitats(Kondolf ,1997). Bank re-erosion actions may complexify and  
11 10 dynamize both riparian and aquatic habitats and may foster biodiversity (Hooke 1979;  
12 11 Florsheim, Mount, and Chin 2008; Habersack and Piégay 2007; Requena, Weichert, and  
13 12 Minor 2006). Whereas gravel augmentation has been well accepted by managers for  
14 13 several decades, bank erosion has until recently been regarded negatively because it may  
15 14 affect human activities and facilities (Hooke 1979; Florsheim, Mount, and Chin 2008),  
16 15 whereas the benefits of the rehabilitation of the "freedom river space" have been widely  
17 16 demonstrated (Piégay et al. 2005; Biron et al. 2014; Ciotti et al. 2021; Choné and Biron  
18 17 2016). Recently, several river restorations based on controlled bank re-erosion of formerly  
19 18 stabilized banks, based on various technical protocols, were performed in Europe  
20 19 (Habersack and Piégay 2007). For example, on the Meuse River, riprap removal to  
21 20 diversify aquatic habitats was tested (Duró et al. 2020). On the Danube River, both  
22 21 removing bank protection and reshaping groynes were tested to complexify habitats and  
23 22 create refuges for native juvenile fish species (Ramler and Keckeis 2019). Nevertheless,  
24 23 the feedback of such restoration actions remains scarce at the world scale (Staentzel et al.  
25 24 2020).

25 25 The aim of this study is to assess the capacity of a controlled bank re-erosion test carried  
26 26 out on the Old Rhine (France/Germany) to diversify both aquatic and riverine habitats  
27 27 linked to sediment supply from bank re-erosion. This test consisted of removing 300 m of  
28 28 historical bank protections on the left riverbank. The implementation of two transverse  
29 29 groynes was to maximize bank re-erosion.

30 30 We hypothesized that the action (i) would promote a high sediment supply to the channel  
31 31 from bank erosion, (ii) would diversify aquatic habitats and (iii) would allow the recovery of  
32 32 fluvial morpho-sedimentary processes such as coarse sediment erosion, transport and  
33 33 deposition (which may induce the formation of in-channel bars and side channels). To test  
34 34 these three hypotheses while evaluating the success of the action, hydrogeomorphological  
35 35 monitoring was conducted over six years. It combined (i) topo-bathymetric surveys, (ii)  
36 36 grain-size surveys and (iii) bedload tracking. Historical topo-bathymetric data were also  
37 37 used to compare post-restoration dynamics with the Old Rhine historical trajectory.

38  
39 39 Figure 1. a. The Rhine Basin; b. locations of the Old Rhine, Grand Canal d'Alsace (GCA),  
40 40 dams, power plants and restoration site; c. removal of bank protection; d. groyne  
41 41 construction; and e. channel responses after the flood of May-June 2013 (left bank re-  
42 42 erosion and sediment deposition downstream of the upstream groyne; the view is in the  
43 43 downstream direction).  
44  
45

## 45 45 2. Materials and methods

### 46 46 2.1. Study area

47 47 The Rhine River is the third largest river in Europe, with a length and drainage area of  
48 48 1,250 km and 185,000 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively. The upper Rhine is located in a 300 km long  
49 49 tectonic graben between Basel and Bingen-am-Rhein and is characterized by a nivoglacial

1 hydrological regime. The mean annual discharge is estimated at  $1,059 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  in Basel  
2 (time period: 1891-2008) (Uehlinger et al. 2009). Since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
3 the upper Rhine was profoundly impacted by three successive engineering works: (i)  
4 channelization (19<sup>th</sup> century), (ii) regularization, which consisted of the construction of  
5 alternate groyne fields (beginning and middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and (iii) damming, and in  
6 some cases, flow diversion (middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to 1977) (Fig. 1b). These works  
7 induced severe degradation of both geomorphological and ecological functionality, notably  
8 along the Old Rhine, which is a 50 km reach between Basel and Breisach that is bypassed  
9 by the Grand Canal d'Alsace (GCA) (Arnaud et al. 2015; Arnaud et al. 2019) . The  
10 instream flow varied between 20 and  $30 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$  before December 2010. Since this date, it  
11 has varied between  $52 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  (winter) and  $150 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  (spring-summer) according to flow  
12 requirements for aquatic and riparian biocenoses in the frame of the Kembs Dam  
13 relicensing (Garnier and Barillier 2015) (Fig. 1b). Spill floods into the Old Rhine occur  
14 when the discharge in the GCA exceeds  $1400 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  at the Basel gauging station. An  
15 ambitious restoration programme was achieved between 2010 and 2017 to enhance the  
16 bedload and habitat dynamics by performing three gravel augmentations (2010, 2015, and  
17 2016) and three controlled-bank re-erosions (one in 2013 and two in 2017) (Chardon et al.  
18 2021; Aelbrecht et al. 2014)).  
19 During April and May 2013, a first test of controlled bank re-erosion was performed (Fig.  
20 1b-c). It consisted of removing historical (almost 2 centuries old) bank protection over a  
21 length of 300 m and removing three old groynes (almost 1 century old; Fig. 1). Additionally,  
22 two new transverse groynes were implemented to maximize bank re-erosion (Fig. 1d). The  
23 best locations and shapes of these groynes to favour bank re-erosion were determined  
24 prior to field work from numerical and physical modelling (Die Moran, 2012).  
25 These studies showed that the groynes should be placed perpendicular to the bank and  
26 disconnected from it, with a length equal to 30 m.  
27 Geomorphological monitoring was undertaken according to the before-after framework  
28 based on five states (Si) and four periods (Pi) (Fig. 2). The instantaneous peak flow  
29 estimated at the Rheinweiler gauging station (Fig. 1.b) was  $3,070 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  ( $Q_{ix} = 15$  years),  
30  $1,910 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  ( $Q_{ix} \approx 5$  years),  $1,880 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  ( $Q_{ix} \approx 5$  years), and  $2,010 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  ( $Q_{ix} \approx 5$  years)  
31 during P1, P2, P3, and P4, respectively.

32  
33 Figure 2. Monitoring framework and maximum daily discharges recorded at the  
34 Rheinweiler gauging station in the Old Rhine.

## 35 2.2. Estimated sediment supply from bank re-erosion

### 36 2.2.1. Channel morphodynamic adjustments and sediment budgeting

37 Classical bathymetric surveys and airborne topo-bathymetric LiDAR surveys were  
38 performed to quantify the channel morphological adjustments. During S0, a Tritech PA500  
39 single beam echo sounder was used to survey the topography of the wetted channel on a  
40 1 km length reach. Since S1, yearly airborne topo-bathymetric LiDAR surveys have been  
41 performed to characterize the above-water and underwater channel topography along the  
42 first 20 km of the Old Rhine. This method combined two wavelengths: near-infrared (1,064  
43 nm), which allows collecting datasets above the water level, and green (532 nm), which  
44 penetrates into the water column (Mandlbürger et al. 2015; Chardon et al. 2019) . This  
45 technique provides high-resolution data, with averages of 20-40 pts/m<sup>2</sup> and 10 pts/m<sup>2</sup> in  
46 above-water and underwater conditions, respectively. The Riegl VQ-820-G sensor was  
47 used at S1, and the Optech Titan sensor was used at S2. For each state, high-resolution  
48 digital elevation models (DEMs) with a cell size of 0.25 m<sup>2</sup> were produced to assess both  
49 channel morphological adjustments and diachronic sediment budgets by the DEM of  
50 difference (DoD). ArcMap v.10.3 software was used to perform DEM production by  
51 applying the IDW interpolation method and to calculate the diachronic sediment budgets.

1  
2 1 Terrestrial LiDAR surveys were also performed along the bank to estimate bank re-  
3 2 erosion. These surveys were achieved using a Leica HDS6200 sensor and a set of targets  
4 3 to georeference the point clouds. Target positions were recorded by real-time differential  
5 4 GNSS measurements made possible with the Teria network for planimetry and the NGF  
6 5 benchmarks for altimetry using a Spectra SP80 system.

7 6 We estimated the uncertainty of topo-bathymetric evolution for each  $P_i$  using the combined  
8 7 elevation change errors between two diachronic DEMs, according to the equation  
9 8 developed by (Brasington, Langham, and Rumsby, 2003) :

$$10 \quad \sigma_{diff} = \sqrt{(\sigma_t)^2 + (\sigma_{(t+1)})^2} \quad (1)$$

11 9 where  $\sigma_t$  and  $\sigma_{t+1}$  are the estimated registration errors for each DEM (m). The registration  
12 10 errors were estimated to be equal to 0.10 m and 0.05 m for topo-bathymetric surveys and  
13 11 terrestrial LiDAR surveys, respectively.

14 12 A t test statistic, according to (Bennett et al. 2012) , was calculated to identify only  
15 13 elevation changes that were statistically significant when  $|t| > 1$  and t was calculated as  
16 14 follows:

$$17 \quad t = \frac{(Z_{(t+1)} - Z_t)}{\sigma_{diff}} \quad (2)$$

18 15 where  $Z_t$  and  $Z_{t+1}$  are the elevations at t and  $t+1$ , respectively.

19 16 We estimated the calculation errors of the volumes for each period  $P_i$  according to the  
20 17 following equation developed by (Lane, Westaway, and Hicks, 2003) :

$$21 \quad \sigma_v = d^2 \sqrt{n} \sigma_{(diff)} \quad (3)$$

22 18 where d is the cell size of the DEM (m) and n is the sum of the number of cells of  
23 19 deposited and eroded areas.

### 24 20 **2.2.2. Bedload tracking**

25 21 We equipped 1,050 bedload particles with passive transponders (PIT tags) with a 23 mm  
26 22 length developed by Texas Instruments to assess the travel distance of sediment coming  
27 23 from the eroded bank. The tracer grain-size classes ranged from 22.6 mm to 181 mm, and  
28 24 the  $D_{50}$  was equal to 58 mm. The tracer grain-size distribution was close to the natural  
29 25 surface grain-size distribution of a natural lateral bar located upstream of the study site.

30 26 Tracers were located before the first flood of May-June 2013 (S0) along seven transects  
31 27 on the bank, each composed of three injection points of 50 tracers (bank toe, intermediate  
32 28 location and top of the bank) (Fig. 2). The initial positions of all tracers were obtained using  
33 29 a global positioning system (Trimble GeoXT 600, centimetric precision).

34 30 Bedload-tracking surveys were achieved using a CIPAM mobile loop antenna (diameter =  
35 31 0.46 m) on the restored bank and in the channel where the water depth was below 0.8 m.

36 32 Tracer positions were recorded using the GPS for punctual data recording. For water  
37 33 depths exceeding 0.8 m, a rectangular loop (width = 1.20 m) was pulled with a boat using  
38 34 cords of known length. A reader system developed by CIPAM was used to collect the  
39 35 unique identifier code of each recovered tracer. Tracer positions were determined using  
40 36 the GPS in continuous recording mode (time step recording equal to 1 s) and corrected by  
41 37 adding the cord length. The georeferenced errors of bedload tracers were estimated as 2  
42 38 m and 5 m for the tracking performed by foot and by boat, respectively.

43 39 To link sediment mobility with flood energy, we calculated the excess peak stream power  
44 40 ( $w \cdot m^{-2}$ ) for each period  $P_i$  using the following equation (Petit, Perpinien, and Deroanne,  
45 41 2000) :

$$46 \quad W_{(pi)} = \frac{\rho_w g (Q_{pi} - Q_c) * S}{W} \quad (4)$$

47 42 where  $\rho_w$  is the water density ( $kg \cdot m^{-3}$ ), g is the acceleration due to gravity ( $m \cdot s^{-2}$ ),  $Q_{pi}$  is the  
48 43 instantaneous peak discharge for each period ( $m^3 \cdot s^{-1}$ ),  $Q_c$  is the critical discharge ( $m^3 \cdot s^{-1}$ ),  
49 44 S is the average local bed slope ( $m \cdot m^{-1}$ ) (calculated over a distance of 1000 m) and W is  
50 45 the bankfull mean active channel width (m). When several flood events occurred during  
51 46 one period, we summed the excess peak stream power of all peak floods that occurred

1 during the study period. The value of the critical discharge was estimated from a one-  
 2 dimensional hydrosedimentary model and was equal to  $550 \text{ m}^3 \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$  (El Kadi Abderrezak  
 3 2009).

## 4 2.3. Indicator of channel diversity

### 5 2.3.1. Bedforms

6 For each  $S_i$ , we calculated the channel topographic diversity of the water channel using  
 7 the cross-section diversity (CSD) index developed by (Gostner et al. 2013) to quantify the  
 8 channel morphological changes over time before and after the action and calculated it as  
 9 follows:

$$10 \text{ CSD} = \frac{\sum_{i=2}^n |\Delta Z_i|}{\sum_{i=1}^{n-1} X_i} \quad (5)$$

11 with

$$12 |\Delta Z_i| = Z_{(i-1)} - Z_i$$

13 where  $|\Delta Z_i|$  is the absolute height difference between two consecutive points along the  
 14 cross-section (m) and  $X_i$  is the distance between them (m).

15 We also calculated this index based on historical topo-bathymetric data (since 1884) that  
 16 were produced along the 44 km length of the reach of the Rhine. This was performed to  
 17 compare the channel post-restoration response with the Old Rhine morphology and  
 18 processes of the corrected Rhine before regularization and canalization (Table 1). For  
 19 1884, the water levels were extracted from historical plans, while for the other periods, the  
 20 water levels were extracted from aerial photographs (Table 1).

### 22 2.3.2. Grain size

23 For  $S_0$ , the grain-size survey was focused on two emerged gravel bars located 200-500 m  
 24 upstream and downstream of the controlled bank erosion site following the 100-particle  
 25 protocol of (Wolman, 1954) ( $n=6$ ). For  $S_1$ , ten particles were sampled every 5 to 10 m in  
 26 both underwater and above-water conditions along 65 cross-sections spaced at 10 m  
 27 intervals, corresponding to the restored bank plus 350 m downstream. The length of the  
 28 transects was approximately 40 to 50 m from the restored bank. When the water level  
 29 exceeded 0.8 m, the survey was performed by diving. Since  $S_2$ , when the water level  
 30 exceeded 0.8 m, the survey was performed by both diving and telescopic bars from a boat  
 31 using a GoPro Hero 4+ or an Olympus TG-4. When the water depth was below 0.8 m,  
 32 Wolman manual sampling (10 particles) was used as during  $S_1$ . To minimize  
 33 underestimation of grain size by photoseiving compared with manual sampling related to  
 34 particle imbrication or burial (Graham et al. 2010), we aleatorically sampled ten particles  
 35 that were completely visible on each image using a grid. This step was performed using  
 36 the grid tool implemented with ImageJ v.1.51j8 software. The pixel size was determined  
 37 using a rule placed at the bottom of a telescopic bar and with knowledge of the acquisition  
 38 height during diving.

## 39 3. Results

### 40 3.1. Sediment supply

#### 41 3.1.1. Bank re-erosion monitoring

42 Most bank re-erosion occurred during P1 following the  $Q_{15}$  flood of May-June 2013 ( $S_1$ ).  
 43 The maximal bank retreat was equal to 4.31 m and was located close to the upstream  
 44 groyne, with the creation of an erosion notch (Table 2; Fig. 1e). The total bank re-erosion  
 45 volume reached  $1,456 \text{ m}^3$ , with 62% of this total volume coming from the notch. During P2,  
 46 the erosion volume decreased significantly by one order of magnitude and was equal to

191 m<sup>3</sup>. During P3, bank re-erosion occurred only on the notch, with an eroded volume equal to 26 m<sup>3</sup> (Table 2), while no bank re-erosion occurred during P4. Important channel morphological changes occurred during P1, with the formation of two mid-bars downstream of the groynes, as well as the scouring of two pools (9,366 m<sup>3</sup>) in the centre of the channel close to the groyne eastern extremities (Fig. 3a). A volume of 5,798 m<sup>3</sup> of sediments was deposited in the channel along the restored bank, including both mid-bars. This sediment volume corresponded to approximately 4 times that provided by bank re-erosion (Table 2) but was approximately half the total erosion volume (10,822 m<sup>3</sup>), corresponding to bank re-erosion plus the scouring of the pools. During P2, the channel adjustments were weaker than those during P1, with an erosion tendency on the two mid-bars (-535 m<sup>3</sup> and -332 m<sup>3</sup> for the upstream mid-bar and downstream mid-bars, respectively) and the downstream pool (-420 m<sup>3</sup>) and sediment deposition on the upstream pool (368 m<sup>3</sup>) (Table 2; Fig. 3b). During P3, global erosion dynamics occurred in all geomorphic units (Table 2; Fig. 3c). The dynamics were globally inversed during P<sub>4</sub>, with global weak dynamics of sediment deposition in all geomorphic units (Table 2; Fig. 3d). A tendency of slumping and erosion of both groynes was observed during the whole monitoring period (Table 2), with erosion volumes of -83 m<sup>3</sup> and -102 m<sup>3</sup> for the upstream and downstream groynes, respectively.

Figure 3. Channel changes during the monitoring: a. between S0 and S1 (P1), b. between S1 and S2 (P2), c. between S2 and S3 (P3), d. between S3 and S4 (P4) and e. between S0 and S4 (whole monitoring period). Grey polygons correspond to the groynes. Black points correspond to recovered bedload tracers. The dashed line in a represents the top of the restored bank, while UG and DG correspond to the upstream and downstream groynes, respectively.

### 3.1.2. Bedload monitoring

The recovery rates for S1, S2 and S3 were 8%, 22%, and 12%, respectively. Low recovery rates were due to the collision phenomenon between tracers located on the bank (42). The percentages of the same mobile tracers between two successive states were 58%, 10%, and 13% for periods P1, P2, and P3, respectively. The mean tracer travel distances for mobile tracers were 25 m, 14 m, and 269 m for periods P1, P2, and P3, respectively (Fig. 4a). The maximal distances were 205 m, 32 m, and 2,316 m for P1, P2, and P3, respectively. The recovered bedload tracers were mostly deposited at the two mid-channel bars located downstream of the two groynes (Fig. 3a-c). A comparison of tracer mobility between surveys shows an inverse law between the mean travel distance and excess peak stream energy (Fig. 4.b). Moreover, for an equivalent excess peak stream power, the mean travel distances were lower during P1 and P2 on the restored bank than for the three gravel augmentations performed in the Old Rhine mentioned above (Fig. 4b, 39). During P3, the relative mean travel distances of the tracers of the study reach were close to the empirical law based on the survey of the three gravel augmentations.

Figure 4. The results of bedload-tracking surveys: a. travel distances of mobile tracers for each period and b. mean travel distance of mobile tracers according to the excess peak stream power for the study reach. The data for three gravel augmentations performed on the Old Rhine are also shown for comparison purposes (data from Arnaud et al. 2017; Chardon et al. 2021). The empirical linear relationship corresponds to all surveys of the gravel augmentations.

## 3.2. Channel diversity

### 3.2.1. Bedforms

From historical topo-bathymetric data collected along the entire Old Rhine, the results



1 show a significant decrease in the values of the CSD index from 1884 to 1950/56, during  
 2 which regularization engineering works were carried out (Fig. 5). A statistically significant,  
 3 but relatively low, increase in the CSD index occurred between 1985/93 and 2009 (Fig. 5)  
 4 due to high bed changes induced by the  $Q_{100}$  flood in 1999 and the  $Q_{50}$  flood in 2007  
 5 (Arnaud et al. 2019). At the restoration spatial scale, a significant increase in the CSD  
 6 values occurred between S0 and S1 (Fig. 5). After S1, the CSD values continued to  
 7 increase slightly between S2 and S4 (Fig. 5). The mean CSD value calculated for S0 at  
 8 the restored site was close to the mean value for the whole Old Rhine after regularization,  
 9 while the mean CSD values calculated from S1 to S4 corresponded to those before  
 10 regularization (O. R 1884) (Table 3).

11  
 12 Figure. 5 Diachronic evolution of the cross-sectional diversity (CSD) index. White and grey  
 13 boxplots correspond to the CSD index values calculated along the restored bank and the  
 14 whole Old Rhine, respectively. Indicated values below boxplots correspond to the P values  
 15 of the post hoc pairwise Mann–Whitney test. Paired and nonpaired Mann–Whitney U  
 16 testing was performed at the different states for the restored bank and the entire Old Rhine  
 17 reach, respectively. O.R corresponds to the entire Old Rhine. n corresponds to the number  
 18 of cross-sections.

### 19 3.2.2. Grain size

20 The bed grain-size monitoring showed that the restoration induced grain-size refinement  
 21 and diversification in comparison with the pre-restoration data (Fig. 6). The grain-size  
 22 refinement reached 29 mm ( $D_{50}$ ; -59%) for the gravel bars in above-water conditions  
 23 (EMB) during P3 and 38 mm ( $D_{50}$ ; -46%) during P1 for the gravel bars in underwater  
 24 conditions (UMB). Grain-size diversification also occurred, with an increase of +44% in the  
 25 Inman-sorting index during P2 for the EMB and +20% during P3 for the UMB. Grain-size  
 26 changes in both the EMB and UMB were sustainable during the entire monitoring period  
 27 (Fig. 6). On the other hand, grain-size fining and diversification on the remaining monitored  
 28 reach (RMR) during P1 and P2 were transitory. During S3, the grain-size conditions of this  
 29 part of the reach were comparable to the pre-restoration conditions (S0; Fig. 6)

30  
 31 Figure 6. Temporal grain-size evolution of the whole study reach (ALL; A.), the mid-  
 32 channel bars in underwater conditions (UMB; B.), the mid-channel bars in emerged  
 33 conditions (EMB; C.), the remaining monitored reach (RMR; D.) and evolution of the  
 34 Inman-sorting index for each condition (E.). Percentages at each state were calculated by  
 35 comparing the corresponding grain size with the grain size at S0. The sorting index was  
 36 calculated following the equation proposed by (Inman, 1952) .

## 37 4. Discussion

### 38 4.1. Unexpected weak bank erosion

39 Our results show that major bank retreat occurred during P1 after the  $Q_{15}$  flood (1,456 m<sup>3</sup>  
 40 eroded volume). During this flood, the main sediment supply provided from the local  
 41 erosion notch was close to the upstream groyne (Table 2). This eroded volume  
 42 represented ~8% of the annual sediment deficit of the Old Rhine, which was estimated at  
 43 16,000 m<sup>3</sup>/y (Arnaud, 2012) . Through comparison with flume experiments, the modelled  
 44 bank erosion volume was equal to 7,094 m<sup>3</sup> for a modelled  $Q_{10}$  flood (Die Moran et al.  
 45 2013) . These results show that field bank re-erosion was approximately half of one order  
 46 of magnitude lower than expected. Since P2, bank erosion has been quasi-negligible due  
 47 to several factors that may have limited bank erosion: (i) the concentration on the bank  
 48 foot surface of historical riprap blocks, which were previously buried into the bank and  
 49 whose size exceeds the river competence (the whole length of 300 m is considered; Fig.

1  
2 1 1.e); (ii) local outcrops of Pleistocene coarse pudding sediment located in the bank  
3 2 foot (Fig. 1.e); (iii) excessively weak local hydraulic conditions despite the presence of  
4 3 groynes; and (iv) the progressive vegetation growth of the bank that began since P2.  
5 4 These results show that the management action provided no significant bank re-erosion,  
6 5 which invalidates our first hypothesis.

7 6 To increase the success of this kind of action, it would be best to perform a sounding  
8 7 (depth of 2-4 m) to check if riprap blocks are buried within the bank and to remove them if  
9 8 necessary to avoid bank foot pavement and stabilization. This approach seems particularly  
10 9 important for banks that have been stabilized for a long period (more than a century),  
11 10 which may have been reworked several times to ensure stabilization in the past. In  
12 11 addition, bank erosion processes may be enhanced using logjams (Krzeminska et al.  
13 12 2019; Sukhodolov, Uijttewaai, and Engelhardt, 2002) and increasing bank irregularity to  
14 13 increase hydraulic condition complexity or to implement artificial macroforms (Gaeuman,  
15 14 2014).

#### 15 16 **4.2. Groynes increased channel diversification and effect duration of the management action**

17 17 The restoration action induced clear bedform diversification along a channel length of 650  
18 18 m, with the formation of two gravel bars and two pools (located at the eastern extremity of  
19 19 the groynes), as well as surface grain-size diversification and fining (Fig. 2.; Fig. 6). The  
20 20 bed topographic changes occurred after high flows (mainly the first flood) driven by the  
21 21 implementation of the two groynes. They induced, downstream of them, a local decrease  
22 22 in flow conditions and the presence of countercurrents (Sukhodolov, Uijttewaai, and  
23 23 Engelhardt 2002; Yossef, 2002) , which induced the formation of the two gravel deposits  
24 24 (Fig. 3). The groynes also induced the scouring of two pools at the centre of the channel  
25 25 (Fig. 3). This was explained by a local increase in shear stresses due to the channel  
26 26 tightening induced by the two groynes. The sediment volume deposited on the two mid-  
27 27 bars (5,798 m<sup>3</sup>; P1) was much higher than the sediment volume provided by bank re-  
28 28 erosion (1,456 m<sup>3</sup>; P1). This shows that deposited sediment was also supplied from the  
29 29 scouring of the two pools (9,366 m<sup>3</sup>; P1) (Fig. 3; Table 2) and probably also from residual  
30 30 morphodynamics of the Old Rhine upstream of the restored bank (Arnaud et al. 2015) . The  
31 31 bed grain-size diversification and fining that occurred along the whole restored length and  
32 32 downstream along a total length of 600 m (Fig. 6) was induced by the abovementioned  
33 33 sediment supply and the reduced hydraulic conditions and countercurrents downstream of  
34 34 the groynes. Moreover, the action also significantly diversified the overall riverbed  
35 35 morphology. While the CSD index values exhibited a strong negative morphological impact  
36 36 of the regularization works (first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the restoration induced a  
37 37 significant unexpected recovery of the morphological diversity comparable to that before  
38 38 the regularization (Fig. 5; Table 3). This mainly resulted in the implementation of the two  
39 39 transverse groynes. Interestingly, the CSD index values revealed a relatively weak but  
40 40 significant morphological diversification from 1985/93 to 2009 (Fig. 5) due to two high flood  
41 41 events during this period (Q<sub>100</sub> in 1999 and Q<sub>50</sub> in 2007; (Arnaud et al. 2015). Post-  
42 42 restoration geomorphological evolution induced positive ecological effects in the short  
43 43 term, such as an increase in the diversity and richness of macroinvertebrate, fish and  
44 44 macrophyte communities (Aelbrecht et al. 2014; Staentzel et al. 2018; 2019) . An  
45 45 ecological habitat-modelling approach also highlighted a significant increase in habitat  
46 46 suitability for several lentic fish species (Chardon et al. 2020) .  
47 47 Both topo-bathymetric and RFID monitoring results show that the sustainability of the  
48 48 effects of the restoration action depended mainly on the persistence of the two groynes.  
49 49 The local erosion areas of the two mid-bars from P2 to P4 were the consequence of a  
50 50 partial slump of the two groynes, especially the upstream one, which was most impacted  
51 51 by high water velocities during floods (Table 2). The field monitoring showed that bedload

1  
2 1 velocity along the restored bank increased over time despite a temporal decrease in the  
3 2 excess peak energy due to the progressive partial slump of the groynes. For comparable  
4 3 values of excess peak energy, bedload velocities during P1 and P2 were much lower than  
5 4 the bedload transit below three gravel augmentations implemented in the Old Rhine some  
6 5 kilometres upstream of the study site, which was the consequence of the low hydraulic  
7 6 conditions on the two mid-bars induced by the two groynes (Fig. 4; Yossef, 2002).  
8 7 However, once the tracers left the two mid-bars (P3), the transfer velocities were  
9 8 comparable to those calculated for the three gravel augmentations (Fig. 4.a). These  
10 9 results highlight that to promote sustainable habitat diversification on regulated rivers,  
11 10 sediment deposition and habitat diversification depend notably on the presence of areas of  
12 11 low water velocities that could be created by channel topo-bathymetric diversity. All of  
13 12 these results show that the second hypothesis was partially validated. Indeed, the action  
14 13 promoted bed diversification, but this diversification was mainly linked to the  
15 14 implementation of transverse groynes rather than the inputs of sediment from bank re-  
16 15 erosion.

#### 16 16 **4.3. Feedback for further management guidelines: focusing on processes rather** 17 17 **than forms**

18 18 Our results showed that the action promoted channel bedform diversity and bed grain-size  
19 19 diversification. However, these effects were not based on morpho-sedimentary processes,  
20 20 which invalidated our third hypothesis and raised some questions about the sustainability  
21 21 of the benefits of such management actions. A question remains whether habitat  
22 22 diversification is sufficient following groyne installation or if the targeted species also need  
23 23 bed morphodynamic changes in the mid/long term. To rehabilitate morpho-sedimentary  
24 24 processes on regulated rivers affected by sediment starvation conditions, such as the Old  
25 25 Rhine, it appears meaningful to implement bed widening some kilometres downstream of  
26 26 gravel augmentations (Arnaud et al. 2017; Klösch et al. 2013; Chardon et al. 2018).  
27 27 Indeed, this approach would foster sediment deposition, the creation of new fluvial forms  
28 28 and local bank re-erosion, thus diversifying habitats (bars, secondary channels, etc.) and  
29 29 recovering geomorphic processes, which may optimize the effects of restoration actions in  
30 30 terms of both efficiency and sustainability. Excavated sediment from artificial channel  
31 31 widening could be used for upstream gravel augmentation after a temporary storage  
32 32 period, with the duration depending on flood frequencies and intensities (Chardon et al.  
33 33 2021).

#### 34 34 **5. Conclusion**

35 35 This study provides an original evaluation of groyne implementation and bank protection  
36 36 removal on a 300 m long reach of the Old Rhine (France/Germany) to increase sediment  
37 37 supply and promote bedform diversification. Our results show that low sediment volumes  
38 38 were injected into the channel from bank re-erosion due to the (i) concentration on the  
39 39 bank foot surface of historical riprap blocks, (ii) local outcrops of Pleistocene coarse  
40 40 sediment on the bank foot, (iii) excessively weak local hydraulic conditions despite the  
41 41 presence of the groynes and (iv) progressive vegetation growth on the bank. Following the  
42 42 action, a high diversification of aquatic and riverine habitats occurred with the creation of  
43 43 new macroforms and the fining and diversification of the bed grain size, which was mainly  
44 44 attributed to the implementation of the two transverse groynes. However, these changes  
45 45 were attributed mainly to the implementation of the two transverse groynes rather than  
46 46 bank re-erosion. Moreover, the sustainability of the effects of the action depends on the  
47 47 persistence of the groynes. This action induced the rehabilitation of fluvial forms in a static  
48 48 manner rather than the rehabilitation of fluvial morpho-sedimentary processes, which  
49 49 raises questions about the sustainability of the benefits of such management actions. For  
50 50 large sediment-starved rivers, it appears meaningful to implement bed widening some

1 kilometres downstream of gravel augmentation (Arnaud et al. 2017; Chardon et al. 2018),  
 2 which would foster sediment deposition, the creation of new fluvial forms and local bank  
 3 erosion. This management could diversify both aquatic and riparian habitats and restore  
 4 geomorphic processes, thus increasing the efficiency and sustainability of such actions  
 5 (Chardon et al. 2021).

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## 48 13 **Author contributions statement**

49 14 V.C. and L.S. conceived of the experiments, V.C. and L.S. conducted the experiments,  
50 15 and V.C., L.S., and A.C. analysed the results. All authors reviewed the manuscript.

## 52 17 **Data availability statement**

53 18 Data available on request from the authors.

Topographic dataset				Planimetric dataset – Water level extraction		
Year	Dataset source	Sector (KP)	Characteristics	Year	Source	Mean daily discharge (m <sup>3</sup> .s <sup>-1</sup> )
1884	Departmental archive (Plan)	174.00–218.00	16 cross-sections spaced to 3 km (30 to 40pts/cross-section)	1884	Plan	334.00–1640.00
1950/56	RPF(GIS)	174.40–214.00	Cross-sections spaced to 200 m (70 pts/cross-section)	1956	Aerial photography	37.00–39.00
1985/93	RPF(GIS)	174.40–209.93	Cross-sections spaced to 200 m (150 pts/cross-section)	1991-92	Aerial photography	35.00–54.00
2009	RPF(GIS)	174.10–220.80	Cross-sections spaced to 200 m (150 pts/cross-section)	2008	Aerial photography	39.00
2017	GeofitConseil (GIS)	174.00–209.00	Cross-sections spaced to 200 m (150 pts/cross-section)	2017	Aerial photography	78.00

Table 1. Characteristics of historical topo-bathymetric and planimetric datasets used to calculate the CSD index along the entire Old Rhine during a period of approximately 140 years. KP corresponds to kilometric points on the Rhine river. The mean daily discharges are provided from the Rheinweiler gauging station, except for 1884, for which discharges were provided from the Rheinhalle gauging station.

Geomorphic units	SB – P1 (m <sup>3</sup> )	SB – P2 (m <sup>3</sup> )	SB – P3 (m <sup>3</sup> )	SB – P4 (m <sup>3</sup> )
Whole bank	-1,456 ± (0.43)	191 ± (0.44)	-26 ± (0.43)	ns
Erosion notch	-890 ± (0.50)	-83 ± (0.59)	-26 ± (0.43)	ns
Upstream mid-bar	3,843 ± (5.42)	-535 ± (5.13)	-2,173 ± (5.26)	216 ± (3.28)
Downstream mid-bar	1,955 ± (7.32)	-332 ± (7.29)	-523 ± (5.25)	966 ± (6.45)
Upstream pool	-3,502 ± (3.10)	368 ± (3.13)	-1,884 ± (6.49)	368 ± (3.10)
Downstream pool	-5,864 ± (4.12)	-420 ± (4.16)	-2,254 ± (8.27)	1,466 ± (7.50)
Upstream groyne	-	-77 ± (1.28)	-	-6 ± (0.94)
Downstream groyne	-	-90 ± (1.46)	-	-12 ± (1.48)

Table 2. Diachronic sediment balances (SB) for each geomorphic unit of the study area. Geomorphic units are indicated in Fig. 3a. Values in brackets indicate the estimated errors, and ns indicates no significant changes.

State	O.R 1884	O.R 1950/56	O.R 1985/93	O.R 2009	O.R 2017
S <sub>0</sub>	1.10 <sup>e-05</sup>	0.20	0.18	0.33	0.26
S <sub>1</sub>	0.12	5.00 <sup>e-09</sup>	1.00 <sup>e-08</sup>	6.80 <sup>e-06</sup>	4.30 <sup>e-07</sup>
S <sub>2</sub>	0.24	2.00 <sup>e-10</sup>	2.80 <sup>e-10</sup>	2.10 <sup>e-07</sup>	1.10 <sup>e-09</sup>
S <sub>3</sub>	0.45	3.30 <sup>e-12</sup>	1.10 <sup>e-12</sup>	1.70 <sup>e-09</sup>	2.00 <sup>e-12</sup>
S <sub>4</sub>	0.72	7.10 <sup>e-11</sup>	5.00 <sup>e-11</sup>	5.00 <sup>e-08</sup>	2.20 <sup>e-10</sup>

Table 3. P values resulting from the post hoc pairwise comparisons of the Mann–Whitney

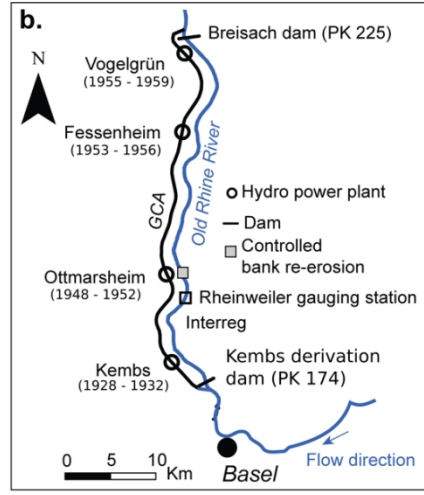
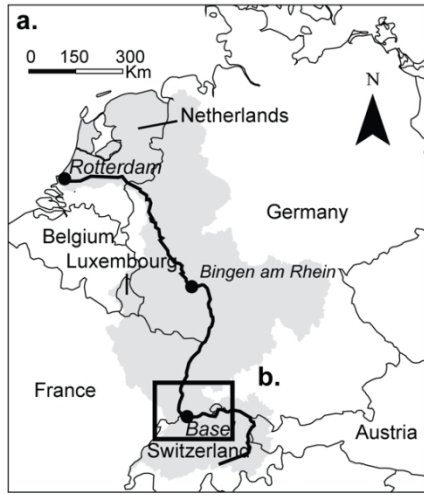


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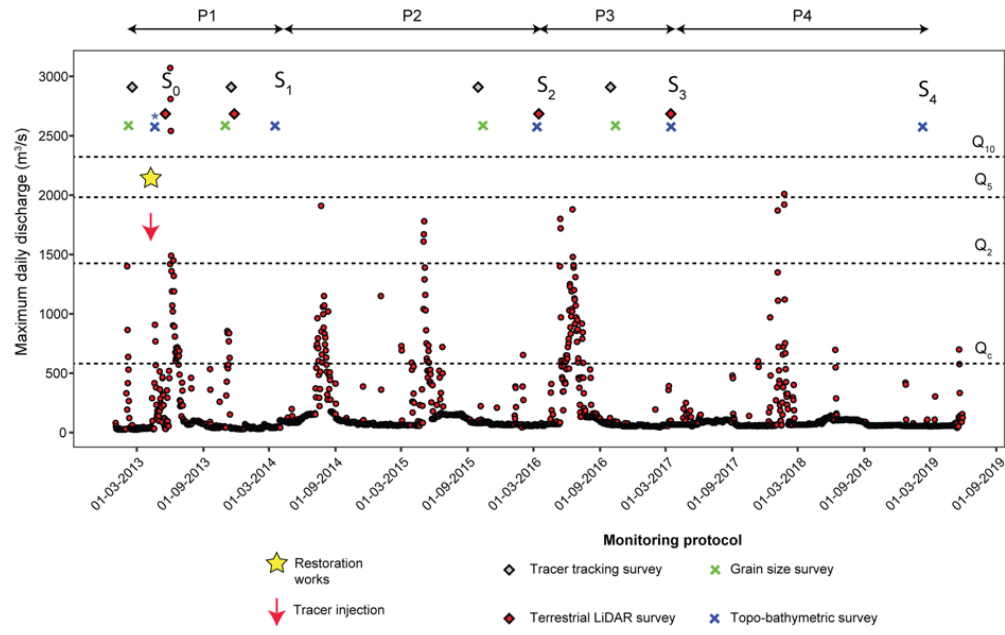
1 U test between the CSD calculated along the restored bank and on the whole Old Rhine  
2 (O.R).

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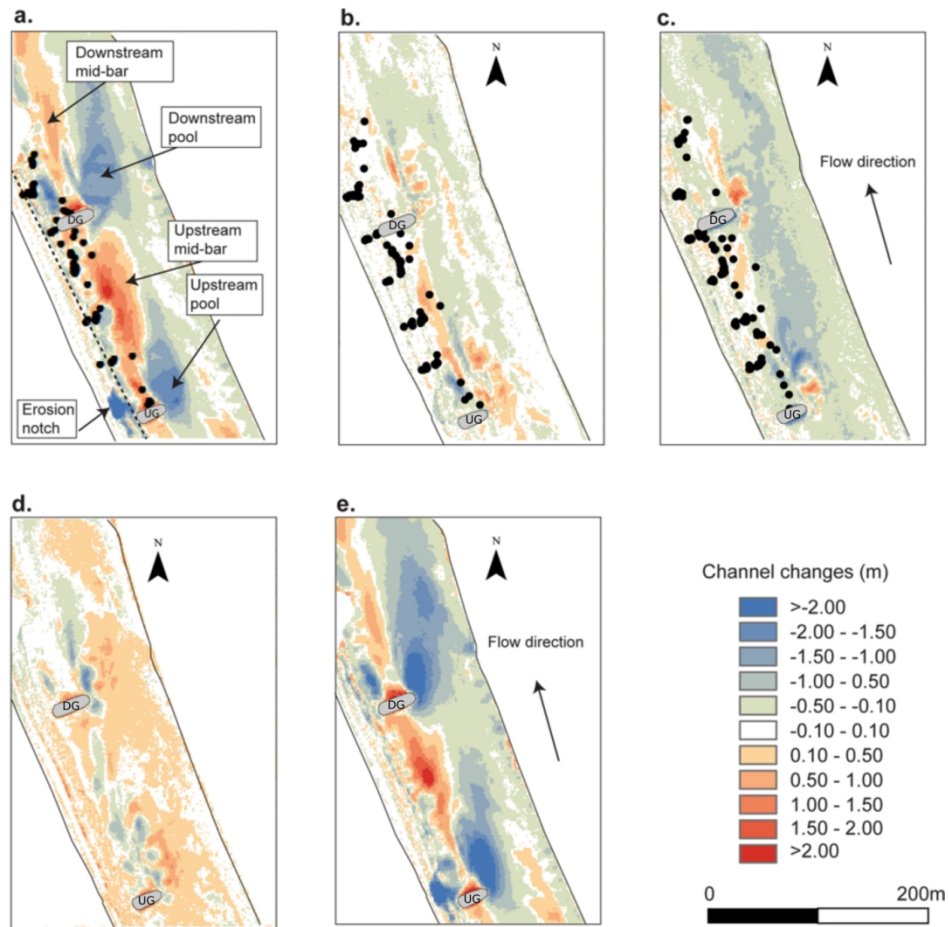
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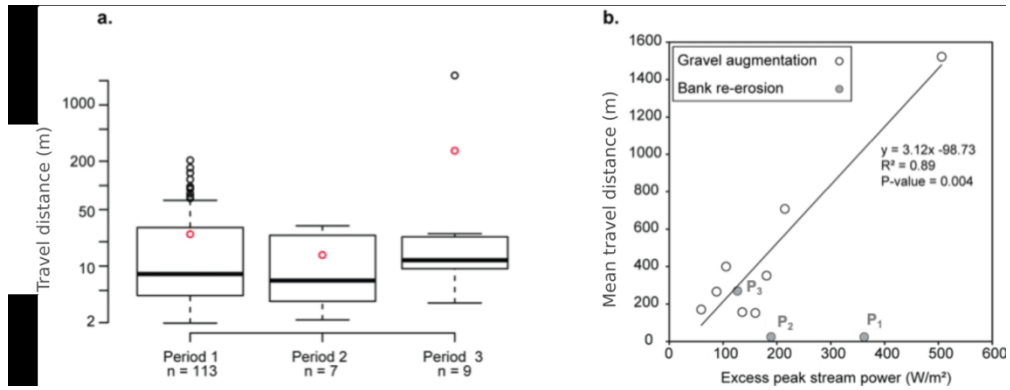


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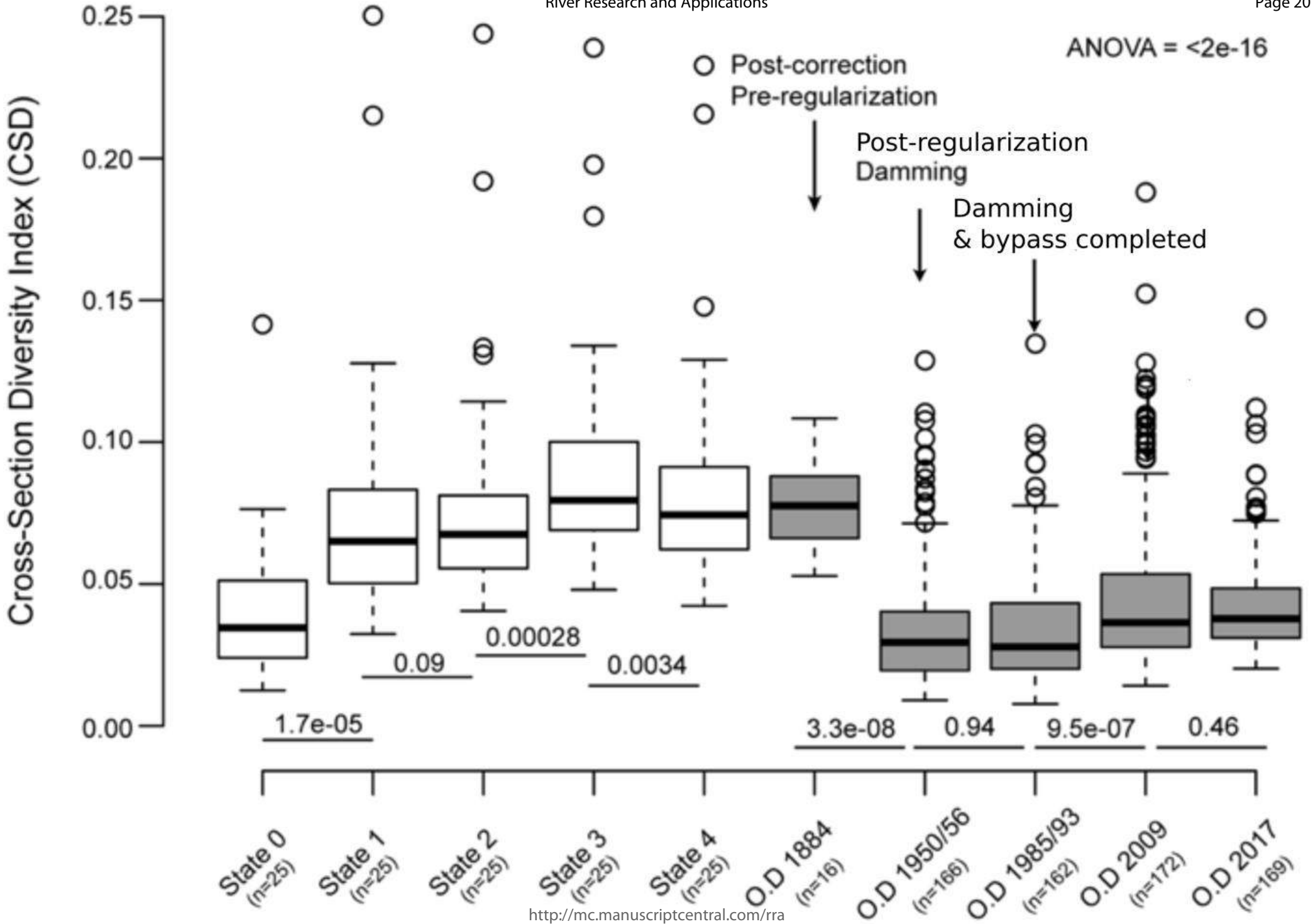
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