

# Going Dutch? The export of sustainable land-use and transport planning concepts from the Netherlands

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## Abstract

The Netherlands is often viewed as a world model of urban planning and sustainable transport practices. This article reports on a study which charts the planning policy transfer activity between the Netherlands and other countries. The study reveals that many foreign ‘policy tourists’ are impressed and inspired by Dutch planning achievements. However, policy transfer efforts based on Dutch examples of planning have rarely resulted in concrete actions or hard outcomes abroad. Contextual differences in culture, social setup, language, planning legislation and financial resources, as well as the failure to involve political elites in transfer processes, are potential obstacles to embedding Dutch planning policies elsewhere.

## Keywords

land-use development, planning, policy transfer, sustainable transport, the Netherlands

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## Introduction

Notwithstanding the strong international reputation of Dutch planning (see, for example, Roodbol-Mekkes et al., 2012) and the numerous instances of ‘policy tourism’ (policy-related fact-finding missions, excursions and exchanges) in the Netherlands, few studies of planning policy transfer from the Netherlands have been performed.<sup>1</sup> This article reports on a study which aims to measure policy transfer activity in the area

of sustainable land-use and transport. The main contribution of the paper is in systematically charting the transfer of sustainable land-use and transport planning policies, concepts and tools from the Netherlands to other countries. The Netherlands represents an interesting case to study since the Dutch

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system of land-use and transport planning is often highly regarded among academics and practitioners from around the world and is therefore likely to be a place with a higher chance of policy transfer and learning than many other countries.

The article examines the nature and type of planning policy tools sought by policy officials, consultants and academics who look to the Netherlands for inspiration, and the lessons that they have tried to draw from the Netherlands. The focus of investigation is on who transfers policy and why, what elements of policy are transferred and to what degree, from where to where are policies transferred, and which factors promote or constrain transfer. More broadly, the study aims to understand the role of policy transfer processes in the diffusion of transport and land-use planning concepts. The conclusions reflect on the importance and relevance of planning policy transfer from the Netherlands. By including both developed and developing countries and using interview material to 'follow' policies as they move from country to country, the article has a wider scope than past empirical studies, which have focused on a small set of mostly industrialised countries (McCann and Ward, 2012).

The analysis is preceded by a summary and critique of policy transfer research and application. An analytical framework based on policy transfer literature is introduced, which takes into consideration the groups and individuals involved in policy transfer, the direction and arenas of policy transfer; the motivations for policy transfer, the objects of policy transfer, the outcomes of policy transfer, and finally the barriers to policy transfer.

## Literature review

### *The upsurge in knowledge and policy transfer*

Although policy-makers have always engaged in policy learning and transfer, the

phenomenon has become much more widespread in recent decades (González, 2011). Several observers have explained the upsurge in interest in policy learning and transfer in terms of a combination of factors at the macro (global and transnational), meso (state) and micro (local, organisational and network) scales, which are briefly summarised below. Each of these three types of factors are important in explaining the process and nature of policy transfer. Consequently, the questions asked during the interviews (and the analysis of responses) reflected this range of factors (see below).

At the macro level, patterns of increased internationalisation have occurred, which preclude the pursuit of independent national strategies. Relatively new forms of communication (e.g. internet, social media) have made information about of policy initiatives throughout the world more accessible than ever before and have facilitated the work policy entrepreneurs, knowledge institutions and think-tanks in selling their expertise to governments (Wolman and Page, 2002). Planning ideas and practices are not just diffusing from the 'west to the rest' or from the 'developed' to the 'developing' world, or from the 'north' to the 'south' but rather in every direction (Healey, 2010).

At the meso level, changes in government and governance, including economic prudence or austerity, reduction of state intervention, reform of the welfare state, decentralisation, public participation and internationalisation (as opposed to isolationism) have provided more demand for policy evidence and knowledge from other nations. Policy transfer networks, comprised of state and non-state actors, have emerged with the deliberate intention of engineering policy change and disseminating international policy agendas (Evans, 2009a, 2009b).

At the micro level, especially where existing policy systems are considered to be inappropriate, outdated or unresponsive, public

organisations, in both developed and developing countries are increasingly looking elsewhere for answers to their problems (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Evans, 2009a, 2009b) since they do not always possess sufficient in-house capacity or expertise to tackle the issues with which they are confronted.

### *Policy transfer study approaches*

According to Evans (2009a), the policy transfer literature can be organised into five main (overlapping) approaches: (1) process-centred approaches; (2) ideational approaches; (3) practice-based approaches; (4) comparative approaches; and (5) multi-level approaches. These approaches are summarised briefly below. For a more detailed analysis, and further references to individual authors, readers are referred to Evans (2009a).

- (1) *Process-centred approaches.* These approaches focus on the process of policy transfer directly in order to explain the voluntary or coercively negotiated importation of ideas, policies or institutions. An emphasis is placed on analysing the structure of decision-making through which policy transfer takes place and relationships between individuals and agencies involved in transfer and their dependencies.
- (2) *Practice-based approaches.* These approaches are prescriptive avenues for policy transfer, aimed at helping public organisations solve public policy problems and guide lesson-drawing. A main proposition is that the quality of an organisation rests on its ability to demonstrate that it can learn, incorporate new ideas and innovate.
- (3) *Ideational approaches.* These approaches are united in arguing that it is systems of ideas that influence how politicians and policy-makers learn how to learn. They address the

problem of when and how politicians, other policy-makers, and societies learn how to learn. Epistemic communities, particularly think-tanks, are identified as key agents of policy transfer. Policy transfer is considered to be an intentional activity.

- (4) *Comparative approaches.* These approaches contain cross-national aggregate comparisons and typically employ qualitative descriptions in combination with quantitative methods. The most in-depth studies account for both the indigenous and the non-indigenous policy environment. These approaches are subject to the criticism that they provide few insights into the process of transfer.
- (5) *Multi-level approaches.* These approaches are characterised by a concern with understanding outcomes of policy transfer through combining macro, meso and micro levels of enquiry. One of the most influential and comprehensive accounts using this approach was developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000).

This article charts the policy transfer process through empirical investigation according to the latter approach, adopting an analytical framework based on the work of Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), which has been widely employed to study policy transfer in a range of policy areas and in a multiplicity of geographic contexts.<sup>2</sup> This type of approach was chosen as it was considered by the authors to be the most comprehensive and appropriate for answering the central questions of the article (i.e. who transfers policy and why, what elements of policy are transferred and to what degree, from where to where are policies transferred, and which factors promote or constrain transfer?). In this article, policy transfer encompasses both voluntary and coercive processes of transfer between nations, although the empirical evidence from the interviewees mostly concerns

voluntary processes of transfer. The concept of policy transfer is used as both a dependent and an independent variable (i.e. to seek to explain the causes and impacts of the transfer process as well as how processes of policy transfer lead to particular policy outcomes).

### *Limits to policy transfer and best practice exchange*

The search for new policies (which are currently missing or considered unsatisfactory in the home country or city) and the process of policy transfer are often closely connected to the notion of 'best practice' and the idea that 'successful' practice can be replicated in other settings (Rose, 2005). However, a number of studies have observed distortions and irrational or unpredicted outcomes both in the way best practice information is 'sent' and in the way it is 'received', leading some commentators to express reservations about some of the assumed merits of 'best practices' (e.g. Macmillan and Stead, 2014; Pojani and Stead, 2014; Vettoretto, 2009; Wolman and Page, 2002).

From the information senders' perspective, lenders from government agencies have been known to make an effort at highlighting their stronger programs, activities and policies, in order to enhance their own reputation (Bulkeley, 2006; McCann 2013; Wolman and Page, 2002). Other groups that promote best practice and policy transfer (e.g. lobbyists, advocacy groups and high-profile think-tanks) often endorse specific solutions that further their own cause (Evans, 2009b).

The reputations of certain best practices can snowball simply because observers become self-referential (Wolman et al., 2004). Particular cases can become cast as exemplars for certain policies even though their performance is no better than examples from elsewhere. A US-based study conducted in the early 1990s found that many purported

urban success stories (as perceived by highly informed observers) were unsubstantiated and that 'successfully revitalised' cities had performed no better than others on indicators such as unemployment, poverty and income (Wolman et al., 1994).

From the information recipients' perspective, Stead (2012, 2013) concluded that the scope of policy transfer in spatial planning within Europe can be limited because of substantial differences in the economic, political and social situation of member states. In the case of transport policy, Marsden and Stead (2011) found that the motivation for learning from others is strongly bounded to funding opportunities and that policy transfer is sometimes introduced for political reasons, to legitimate decisions already made by an organisation. The same conclusion, about foreign examples being used as a political legitimisation tool, has been reached by various other authors (e.g. Cook, 2008; Lee and Hwang, 2012; Temenos and McCann, 2012).

Marsden et al. (2011), in a study of transport policy innovations in large metropolitan areas in North Europe and North America, found that human interaction through trusted networks of colleagues was the most important source of learning. Similarly, Wolman and Page (2002) reported a strong bias towards neighbouring local or regional experts, who are perceived both as peers (personally known and trusted individuals) or respected competitors with similar circumstances. They also found that borrowers tend to focus their attention on physical development, rather than the institutional or procedural aspects.

## **Methods and analytical framework**

### *Methods*

The study is based on 64 interviews, including: (a) semi-structured interviews of 24

policy officials, planning consultants, and academics from 16 countries around the world; and (b) semi-structured interviews of 42 Dutch policy-makers and selected independent experts who have provided information to foreign visitors during policy-related excursions and/or exchanges in the Netherlands. The Dutch interviewees were all closely involved in the development or implementation of transit oriented development (TOD), a policy area that encompasses both land-use and transport planning. A list of the interviewees is presented in Table 1.

All interviewees from abroad were individuals who have participated in study tours to the Netherlands or international collaboration projects involving the Netherlands (focused on transport and land-use planning) over the last 10 years. They were identified by means of a preliminary internet-based survey which was sent to the members of International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) and the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) to establish who has been professionally active in the field of land-use and transport planning and who has also had an interest in learning from Dutch experiences. Interview invitations were subsequently sent to the individuals identified from the survey and also to partners involved in transport and land-use related INTERREG projects in the last 10 years as well as official visitors to the City of Amsterdam, who were on business connected to land-use and transport planning (a list of these visitors was obtained from the Office of International Relations within the City of Amsterdam). Additional interviewees were selected through the reputational method (i.e. those who were recommended by other local or foreign interviewees).

All interviews were conducted during 2013 and lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Interviews with nearly all of the individuals based abroad were conducted by

telephone. Nearly all the interviews in the Netherlands were conducted by telephone or in person. Telephone interviews were taped, transcribed and coded. Handwritten notes were made during the face-to-face interviews, which were later transcribed and coded. Information was obtained via email from six individuals.<sup>3</sup>

This methodology builds on the work of González (2011) and Cook and Ward (2011), who report on 'policy tourism' networks in Barcelona, Bilbao and Manchester, and who consider the amount and nature of policy tourism in these cities. In this paper, the research focus is on the Amsterdam region as a node in the 'space of policy flows' (to use the vocabulary of Peck and Theodore, 2010: 70). While it could be argued that the interviewees might have biased or vested interests to present policy transfer processes in a positive light, our view is that the interviewees were generally very open in describing their experiences and often expressed candid and critical views about the policy transfer processes that they observed.

### *Analytical framework*

The interview material for this article was collected, analysed and presented according to a multi-dimensional framework adopted from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), whose framework considers all of the following six facets of policy transfer:

- (1) *Agents of policy transfer.* In the literature, at least eight main categories of agents of transfer can be identified, including politicians (elected officials), bureaucrats (civil servants), pressure (advocacy) groups, policy entrepreneurs (think-tanks, consultants), knowledge institutions, academics (experts), international organisations, and supranational institutions. A variety of policy beliefs can be found

**Table 1.** List of interviewees.

Country	Agency/company	Interviewee #
Netherlands (NL)	(a) City of Amsterdam	1–8
	(b) City of Almere	9
	(c) Amsterdam City-Region ( <i>Stadsregio</i> )	10–11
	(d) Province of North Holland (includes Amsterdam)	12–14
	(e) Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment	15–19
	(f) Environmental Assessment Agency (national institute for the environment and spatial planning)	20–21
	(g) OV Bureau Randstad (cooperative arrangement between national and regional public transport authorities in the Randstad)	22
	(h) StedenbaanPlus (voluntary regional TOD programme in the southern part of the Randstad)	23–24
	(i) Other Dutch local/regional governments (The Hague's City-Region, Province of Gelderland, City of Nijmegen, and City of Eindhoven)	25–29
	(j) Dutch Rail	30–32
	(k) Vereniging Deltametropool (research and lobbying platform)	33
	(l) Platform 31 (urban and regional knowledge centre)	34
	(m) Traffic and Transport Knowledge Resource Center (research centre)	35
	(n) Independent experts (self-employed/employed in consultancy firms)	36–42
Albania (AL)	Ministry of Public Works and Transport	43
Belgium (BE)	International Association of Public Transport (public–private association)	44
Bulgaria (BG)	Institute for Ecological Modernisation, CCSD Geopont-Intercom (private consultancy companies, planning and environment)	45
Denmark (DK)	Ministry of Environment	46
England (UK)	(a) Centro, West Midlands (Birmingham) transport planning authority	47
	(b) Birmingham City University	48
Finland (FI)	City of Helsinki, planning department	49
France (FR)	Egis International (private planning/transport company)	50
India (IN)	(a) arch i (private consultancy company)	51
	(b) City of Delhi	52
Italy (IT)	University of Naples Federico II	53
Japan (JP) / USA (US)	Lend Lease Japan (private architecture/engineering company)	54
Kosovo (KV)	Ministry of Infrastructure	55
Norway (NO)	(a) City of Bergen	56
	(b) Statsbygg (planning adviser to Norwegian government)	57
	(c) City of Oslo	58
	(d) City of Oslo	59
	(e) Norconsult (private consultancy company, transport)	60
Scotland (UK)	City of Edinburgh	61
Serbia (RS)	(a) University of Belgrade, Department of Spatial Planning	62
	(b) Ambero/Icon (private planning companies)	63
	(c) Serbian Spatial Planners Association	64
Ukraine (UA)	Ministry of Infrastructure	65
USA (US)	Bikes Belong Foundation (non-profit, cycling)	66

among these groups, each one bringing a different set of attitudes, cultural values and resources to the process.

- (2) *Direction of policy transfer.* Transfer outcomes are affected by whether they occur within a nation or between nations. Cross-national transfer is the focus of this study, which can often lead to more diverse outcomes than policy transfer within a single country.
- (3) *Motivations for policy transfer.* Motivations for transfer vary from voluntary, perfectly rational, to coercion by pressure groups, political parties, funding bodies and policy entrepreneurs or experts. Voluntary transfer tends to occur in developed countries while coercive transfer is common in developing countries. The middle ground involves mixed forms of transfer undertaken in order to secure grants, loans or other inward investments, or as a result of politico-economic crisis or image concerns.
- (4) *Objects of policy transfer.* What is transferred or sought to be transferred (i.e. policies, goals, instruments or programmes).
- (5) *Results of policy transfer.* Policy transfers can be 'soft', such as changes in ideas, concepts, and attitudes. Policy transfers can also be 'hard', such as changes in programmes and implementation. Negative or positive lessons can be drawn during and after policy changes, which may be equally valuable. The transfer and learning process can take the form of copying, emulation (benchmarking), hybridisation or inspiration. Learning can also be negative, such as when borrowers are faced with undesirable policy outcomes owing to uninformed, incomplete or inappropriate transfers.<sup>4</sup>
- (6) *Barriers to policy learning and transfer.* Three types of obstacles to policy

transfer can be identified: (1) 'cognitive' obstacles in the pre-decision phase (i.e. insufficient search for new ideas, low cultural and ideological receptivity of existing actors and organisations, excessive complexity of the policies to be transferred, physical distance and language barriers); (2) 'structural' obstacles during the process of transfer (i.e. failure to effectively mobilise the elites, lack of cohesive policy transfer networks, and technical implementation constraints, including limited financial and human resources); and (3) public opinion, elite opinions, media reports and the attitudes and resources of constituency groups.

## Analysis

### *1. Agents of transfer: The internationalisation of planning ideas*

Typical actors involved in transfers of planning policy information between the Netherlands and other countries include planners, politicians, academics, expert advisers and developers. Most often they are members of policy networks, coalitions, think-tanks and advocacy groups. Frequently they are curious and active individuals within an organisation, with a fondness for travel and experience in different parts of the world. These characteristics are discussed more in detail below. In addition, governments (Dutch and foreign; local, regional and national) often act as agents of transfer, by entering into international agreements, setting up collaboration frameworks and organising study tours for their employees.

*Professional mobility and curiosity.* Most interviewees who looked at the Netherlands are by nature curious about developments in other countries. They often consider that planning ideas have universal application, as the quote from the following interviewee illustrates:

The origin of [planning] ideas is not important. If they do something good in Italy or Iceland or Uganda, I want to hear about it ... Besides, I have the impression that many planning ideas don't really have a nationality any more. They are global. (Interviewee 57-NO)

Not infrequently, planners in smaller and/or more peripheral European countries tend to be more open to new ideas when it comes to policy learning. This is sometimes justified in terms of the internationalisation of property development and transport operation, such as the global nature of industry, business forces and supranational regulations that influence public transport operation (Interviewees 44-BE, 60-NO).

Increasing education and career mobility of planning professions in the public and private sectors also increases the broad diffusion of planning ideas and concepts among cities worldwide. Many Dutch and non-Dutch interviewees, who served as key links between the Netherlands and elsewhere, had worked and/or studied in two or more countries. In part, their openness to foreign ideas and their liking of travel had led them to being involved in collaborative projects. For example, the work of a few individual Dutch planners in India led to a formal relationship between the Dutch Ministry of Transport and Environment and the Indian Ministry of Urban Development. Over the course of several years, Dutch advisers have provided technical assistance to the City of Delhi in the preparation of the 2050 master plan. One of the motivations for this collaboration was the prospect of new business opportunities for Dutch firms in drafting and implementing the master plan (Interviewees 15-NL, 16-NL, 17-NL, 51-IN, 52-IN).

*Networks, coalitions, advisers and advocacy groups.* A number of international planning cooperation networks and advocacies were mentioned by the interviewees as important arenas for the international exchange of

knowledge and ideas (Interviewees 44-BE, 47-UK, 49-FI, 57-NO). These include the International Association of Public Transport (UITP), the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), the European Metropolitan Transport Authority (EMTA) and the Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas (METREX).

Dutch planning organisations and practitioners are well represented in these international networks relative to the country's small size. For example, UITP includes 45 Dutch institutional members among its 1100 worldwide institutional members. ISOCARP includes 50 Dutch individual and institutional members out of about 700 worldwide members. Amsterdam and Rotterdam are two of METREX's 52 members, and Amsterdam is one of EMTA's 30 members.

Network contacts are valuable in identifying study tour hosts and in forming coalitions and consortia to respond to European project calls, such as INTERREG, which require multi-partner trans-European teams (Interviewees 44-BE, 57-NO, 60-NO, 61-UK, 62-RS). Dutch organisations are very active in this type of projects. Between 2000 and 2006, out of around 100 INTERREG IIIB projects,<sup>5</sup> the Netherlands led 10 projects on transport and land-use, and was a partner in another dozen. In addition, individual Dutch experts participated in other projects in which the Netherlands was not officially a member.

The European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON), which serves as a funding body for many European beneficiaries involved in territorial planning and development, provides another networking platform. Since the programme began in 2006, several Dutch organisations have been closely involved. As a result, planners from prospective ESPON members (e.g. Serbia) are often interested in learning about experiences from



Dutch planning academics and practitioners (Interviewee 64-RS).

Outside Europe, the Dutch government has provided technical assistance programmes in developing countries. Recent projects in Asia have taken place in Shenzhen, China (where Dutch planners have provided training on sustainable development), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (which is implementing a waterfront revitalisation project in collaboration with Rotterdam), Tokyo, Japan (where Dutch and Japanese planners are collaborating on planning in disaster areas), and Delhi, India (in the preparation of the Delhi 2050 master plan). Elsewhere, Dutch planners have recently provided guidance on multimodal transport operation in Ukraine and Kosovo, the modernisation of the cadastral system in Serbia, and reconstruction works in the aftermath of earthquakes in Kocaeli, Turkey (Interviewees 7-NL, 16-NL, 17-NL, 38-NL, 50-FR). On occasion, the presence of Dutch partners in international projects has persuaded project managers to select the Netherlands as a study tour destination, even when the Dutch experience has not been immediately relevant to tour participants (Interviewee 52-JP/US).

Some large local governments and professional organisations in the Netherlands have created special units for facilitating and intensifying international cooperation. The City of Amsterdam receives visitors from around the world on a regular basis (Interviewees 4-NL, 5-NL, 6-NL, 9-NL, 49-FI, 64-RS). In specific areas, such as cycling policy, Dutch advocacy organisations have made a considerable effort to reach out to other countries. They include the Dutch Cycling Embassy, a non-profit organisation based in Utrecht, and ThinkBike, a section of the Netherlands Embassy in the USA. For bike advocacy groups across the world the Netherlands is a favourite study tour destination (Interviewee 66-US).

*'Work & play' study tours and conferences.* Many interviewees across different countries and sectors indicate that, in addition to planning literature and tourist trips, they have become acquainted with Dutch cities through participation in conferences hosted in the Netherlands or study tours to Dutch cities organised by their employers. Study tours are frequently organised by professional bodies or are project-based, and are financed in a variety of means. More affluent governments (mainly in Northern Europe) sometimes set funds aside for this purpose, and employees take turns travelling abroad. More progressive organisations, focused on the well-being of employees, see study tours and conferences as a social bonding device and as a way to strengthen staff morale, in addition to a continuing education tool (Interviewees 60-NO, 66-US). Sometimes the cost of a study tour is built into a project budget or is covered by the most interested stakeholders. In Southern and Eastern Europe, study tours to the Netherlands are usually organised if funding is available from the EU or the Dutch government. In some cases, only a small group of close colleagues goes on a study tour, while in others, an effort is made to include politicians, business representatives and consultants.

Rather than being mere excursions, most tours have an educational component, in the form of meetings or lectures by local planners. Most foreign interviewees report that Dutch planning professionals are generally willing to contribute time for this purpose. However, interviewees from the national government indicate that they are now being more selective about these activities, mainly because of financial and time constraints, and are primarily hosting delegations from developed countries, from which the Netherlands might also benefit (Interviewee 17-NL). Tours that focus on specific policy areas, such as public transport or cycling, often include an experiential component (i.e.

using these modes during the course of the visit) (Interviewee 66-US).

Interviewees stressed the importance of personal contacts in organising a successful study tour. Frequently, the Netherlands or a particular Dutch city is selected as a destination because visitors have informal connections with local planners, who are then cooperative and predisposed to host them (Interviewees 7-NL, 49-FI, 56-NO, 60-NO, 66-US). One interviewee from Norway, a frequent visitor to the Netherlands in the last 10 years, observed:

You have to build this personal bridge to people rather than organization to organization. You need to find a person that sees value in helping someone from overseas. (Interviewee 60-NO)

Accessibility both between and within countries is another important factor when selecting study tour locations. With a major hub airport in Amsterdam and a number of cities within easy reach (nationally and internationally), the Netherlands is a desirable destination from an accessibility perspective.

## **2. Directions of transfer: Northern European lenders and worldwide borrowers**

Virtually all interviewees outside the Netherlands shared the opinion that it is one of the best countries to learn from in terms of sustainable land-use development and transport policies. The Netherlands was generally praised for its long-term, comprehensive and consistent planning vision, its high building quality, its dense multimodal transport networks and nodes, its well-managed landscape, its advanced water and flood management systems, and above all, its excellent bike planning solutions. Many foreign planners felt that the Netherlands has been able to retain its place at the forefront of planning and transport innovation.

However, the Dutch planning system was often somewhat idealised because of dissatisfaction with practices in the interviewee's country or feelings of inadequacy. Some reactions, especially from borrowers outside the immediate vicinity, verged on veneration. In addition, interviews revealed a general admiration for planning in Northern, Western and Central Europe. Countries often mentioned as exemplars included Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and, to a lesser extent, France and the UK. Southern European countries were generally seen as having less advanced planning systems, although some cities here were also named (e.g. Barcelona, which is renowned for its urban regeneration efforts).

Interviewees indicate that, within Europe, countries have a strong tendency to compare themselves with, and borrow from, their neighbours, in addition to northwest European 'ideals'. Similarity of planning systems is a preferred characteristic. City-to-city exchanges tend to occur between places with similar size and comparable population base. When choosing 'policy lenders', emotional factors such as cultural proximity and linguistic access sometimes override rational factors such as technical expertise and financial resources (Interviewees 60-NO, 62-RS).

In general, planners tend to look for examples from near neighbours if they look at practice abroad. For example, Bulgaria often looks more closely at examples from Greece, Spain and Portugal, which share certain cultural characteristics and have experienced similar problems with chaotic and/or informal construction in urban and coastal areas (Interviewee 45-BG). Albania regularly looks to Italy and employs Italian planning advisers (Interviewee 43-AL), Ukraine has close collaboration with Poland (Interviewee 65-UA), and Serbia with Balkan neighbours and Russia (Interviewee 62-RS). Norwegian planners maintain close

connections with Scandinavian/Nordic neighbours (Interviewees 57-NO, 58-NO). At the same time, however, all of these countries have looked to the Netherlands for policy ideas and/or inspiration.

### 3. Motivations for transfer: 'The grass is greener in the Netherlands'

Dutch knowledge and ideas are often sought when no satisfactory solutions can be found at home. In other cases, Dutch planning examples are borrowed to frame local sustainability discourses and provide a benchmark for local planners. Academic exchanges and the advisory and outreach activities of Dutch planners abroad reinforce the position of the Netherlands as a 'lending' country.

*Solving local problems.* Planners from other countries often intensify their exchange with the Netherlands when they are searching for ways to solve specific local problems, meet local targets or alleviate a crisis, as the following interviewees explained:

[Exchange] depends on what each country is interested in developing at the moment. For example, many Scandinavian cities are currently working on tramways; therefore they are studying in depth Dutch cities that already have them. (Interviewee 38-NL)

When I think about sustainable transport, the Netherlands and Denmark come to mind immediately because of the high concentration of cycling and the low-emission zones. (Interviewee 61-UK)

Most exchange often occurs in the ambit of formal bilateral/multilateral projects, for which funding is available. These have been numerous in the last decade, as mentioned above, and have included both developed and developing countries, although more examples from the former rather than the latter category can be found.

*Framing sustainable development discourses.* The interviews confirm that the concept of sustainable development has become an important element of the planning and transport rhetoric in their countries and that this is often a reason for looking at how to develop new approaches for land-use and transport planning policy. In Western Balkan countries, the aspiration to join the European Union is also a strong motivation for including this concept in the agenda (Interviewees 50-FR, 43-AL).

In developing countries with substantial financial constraints, sustainable development practices are in their infancy. Along with countries such as Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland, the Netherlands is often perceived as having achieved tangible results in sustainable development. As a consequence, Dutch examples are often used by borrowers as framing, persuasion and legitimisation tools vis-à-vis politicians and the public. They are used to incite cities or states elsewhere to take action to match the Netherlands, or to illustrate the limits of the possible (Interviewees 46-DK, 47-UK, 48-UK, 56-NO, 66-US).

*Traditional role models and new mentors.* In some cases, a primarily one-way exchange occurs between two countries, one of which has traditionally served as a role model for the other. For example, a Dutch planner with work experience in India noted that the current Indian planning model is still based on British and Russian models (Interviewee 40-NL). An American planner, who worked in Japan, observed that the influence of the USA on Japan has been very strong since the Second World War, even though the political and planning systems are dissimilar (Interviewee 52-JP/US). Serbian interviewees report that, from the 1960s onwards, the Netherlands has become a flagship for Serbia, somewhat supplanting the historic influence of France (Interviewees 62-RS,

63-RS, 64-RS). With the geopolitical transformations that occurred in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall, new 'mentorships' have been set up. The Netherlands established new relationships with Eastern European countries, which did not exist prior to 1990 (Interviewees 43-AL, 45-BG, 65-UA).

Longstanding legacies are reinforced and new ones are created because of a growing trend to conduct academic study programmes and exchanges abroad. Interviewees from both Northern and Southern Europe suggested that the Netherlands has risen as a choice country to study urban planning because of the reputation of the higher education system, the widespread use of English language and generous scholarships offered until recently by the Dutch government. Foreign academics, who trained in the Netherlands and returned to their home countries, unavoidably pass on some of the Dutch knowledge and outlook to their students (Interviewee 62-RS). In fact, a number of interviewees from abroad were alumni of Dutch universities and spoke highly of their *almae matres*. They were proud of their schooling, which they felt had helped their careers, had contributed to building a contact network outside their home country, and had shaped their professional attitude in countless ways (Interviewees 43-AL, 59-NO, 63-RS).

#### 4. Objects of transfer: The physical development bias

The interviews reveal that foreign visitors to the Netherlands, especially urban and regional planners, have a stronger interest in the built environment than in legal, administrative and financial planning tools. Foreign visitors and partners typically make an effort to use their tours to the Netherlands as efficiently as possible, inquiring on a range of issues and visiting more than one

city or organisation. Delegations from other continents often visit the Netherlands as part of a larger tour in Europe. The specific items that have generated the most interest are discussed in following sections.

*Urban transport and urban design.* Interviewees from the Netherlands reported that bike planning (lanes, networks, priority signals and parking) is the field that generates much interest among foreign visitors in the Netherlands. It was often referred to as a shining example of Dutch planning. Interviews with foreigners corroborated this opinion but also revealed a number of other appealing features of the built environment in the Netherlands. These include the following:

- Tram lines running in mixed-traffic on narrow urban streets.
- The physical layout and infrastructure at large multimodal nodes such as the Port of Rotterdam and Schiphol Airport, which combine passenger, freight, water, road and rail transport.
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects such as the Zuidtangent line in Harlemmermeer.
- Brownfield redevelopment sites, including former industrial and/or harbour areas.
- Revitalised waterfronts (especially in Amsterdam) with small-scale urban housing.
- New and renovated residential neighbourhoods, especially those on reclaimed (artificial) land, such as the IJburg island in Amsterdam.
- Residential traffic calming features (*woonerven*) and 'green building' prototypes.
- Experimental architecture, especially in Rotterdam.
- Zuidas, a new multi-functional pole in south Amsterdam, centred on a rail station.
- Built heritage preservation in historic centres (e.g. in Amsterdam and Utrecht).
- Flood protection zones.

*Legal, administrative and financial tools.* Notwithstanding the prevailing interest in physical development, interviewees also mentioned inquiry range of policy and institutional issues of interest for policy transfer. These include:

- The ABC policy, adopted in the 1990s (now defunct). Based on this policy, locations were labelled A, B and C, according to the level of accessibility by public transport and automobile, and the amount of permitted development was determined accordingly.
- Economic development and urban marketing (i.e. strategies to attract a 'creative workforce' and preserve local business viability).
- Functions of the regional (provincial) government level (i.e. regional development coordination and regional transport administration).
- Integrated public transport ticketing system (through contactless smart cards valid across modes throughout the country).
- Public transport ownership and administrative structure (i.e. mixed public-private ownership and operations).
- Transit Oriented Development elements, such as varying building height limits based on distance from public transport stations, and Amsterdam's finger plan.

The interest in urban public transport elements is surprising because Dutch interviewees generally believed that the Netherlands is not a very good example in this area and is surpassed by other European countries such as Germany and France. Interestingly, the ABC policy, which was dismantled in the Netherlands in the 1990s, remains well-known abroad (Interviewees 46-DK, 57-NO, 59-NO). One interviewee explained the reasons for its sustained international acclaim:

ABC has been one of the most famous Dutch planning policies. It turned the Netherlands

into a prime international planning model ... The policy was simple, well-defined, and had an easy-to-remember acronym. The content was widely available in English ... Also, the government made substantial dissemination efforts in international planning congresses and other media. For Dutch planners it was an interesting story to tell as well as a 'ticket' to attend conferences. (Interviewee 20-NL)

### *5. Results of transfer: More inspiration than action*

Interviews made it clear that transfer processes from the Netherlands abroad have most often resulted in inspiration and individual learning rather than implementation. Where action has been taken to translate lessons into practice, it has generally only resulted in partial policy and project transplants. 'Negative' lessons are also evident, in the sense that the actors engaged in transfer have taken notice of Dutch planning elements, which would be unwelcome in their home context. Some examples are discussed below.

*Inspiration and learning.* Almost all the foreign interviewees claimed that they had been impressed and inspired by Dutch planning and when they had visited the Netherlands on a study tour or during an international collaboration project. They felt that planners worldwide can learn from one or more Dutch planning achievements. In many cases, interviewees felt that learning, inspiration and a change of perspective were satisfactory outcomes of tours and collaborations. Phrases such as 'looking at problems with more open eyes', 'seeing a different reality', 'checking to see if we're on the right track', 'planting a seed in the ground', 'discovering the trends' and 'gaining confidence that we can do the same' were used to describe the reasons for looking to the Netherlands (Interviewees 45-BG, 47-UK, 50-FR, 64-RS, 58-NO, 65-UA). Often the

stimulus came from mental comparisons with the visitor's home country.

*Partial project and policy transplants.* Just a handful of countries had applied the knowledge and experience gained in the Netherlands or through contact with Dutch planning advisers in a specific project or policy. They tended to be isolated policy elements or small-scale built environment features. In these rare cases, a process of emulation had occurred, during which Dutch practices were adapted to the local context. A few examples are briefly summarised below.

In adopting newly required safety regulations for its new light rail system, the Norwegian city of Bergen drew on experience from the Dutch approach (Interviewee 60-NO). In Finland, the city of Helsinki is preparing to introduce Dutch-style public-private ownership arrangements for regional transport (Interviewee 49-FI). In Scotland, new urban design features are being introduced in Edinburgh, including high quality development along several tram corridors, traffic roundabouts and *woonerven*<sup>6</sup> which have been partially influenced by Dutch urban design (Interviewee 61-UK). In Kosovo, the Dutch 'fishbone' concept for public transport<sup>7</sup> is being introduced in the national multimodal transport strategy (Interviewee 55-KV). In Bulgaria, Dutch advisers helped to design a bike network for the city of Varna, which is in the first steps of implementation (Interviewee 45-BG). In the USA, the cities of Madison, Wisconsin, and San Francisco, California, have taken steps to increase the budget for biking projects and set higher policy goals on bicycle mode share following local politicians' study tours to the Netherlands (Interviewee 66-US).

*Negative lessons.* In principle, negative lessons can help countries avoid 'newcomer' costs (i.e. by not repeating the mistakes of

others). To some transfer agents, especially those coming from more developed countries, negative lessons are equally important as positive ones. While interviewees were generally very positive about planning in the Netherlands, they were also critical of certain aspects. These include overly bureaucratic planning procedures, the user unfriendliness of the public transport system (e.g. insufficient English translations), the dreariness of some new neighbourhoods and the poorly designed open space around some new residential areas (Interviewees 43-AL, 45-BG, 49-FI, 50-FR, 58-NO, 60-NO). It is not yet clear whether these negative lessons helped the interviewees to avoid the same shortcomings in their home contexts. After all, the transfer of negative lessons may face the same barriers as the transfer of positive lessons.

## 6. Barriers to transfer: Location, location, location

The interviews have helped to uncover various barriers to policy transfer from the Netherlands to other countries. Contextual variations among countries engaged in policy transport include culture, social setup, language, planning legislation and financial resources. Interviews reveal that, at different times and in different places, any of these issues might stand in the way of policy transfer from the Netherlands to another context. In addition to contextual constraints, the failure to involve political elites in transfer processes and the institutional discontinuity that less stable countries experience have prevented the transfer of Dutch planning policies. In some cases, policy transfer has been condemned to failure from the start because the process has been too shallow and/or because the objectives were unrealistic. The following sections explore these issues in more detail.

*The 'apples and oranges' analogy.* Interviewees from various developing countries indicated that disparities in financial resources and economic development are prime factors that hamper the transfer of Dutch planning policies. In fact, some of them questioned whether it is reasonable to use a wealthy, industrialised country such as the Netherlands as a planning benchmark. Some felt that, in their contexts, where more basic problems prevail, environmental and sustainability concerns are a luxury. One interviewee described the outcomes of a study tour from Kosovo to the Netherlands as follows:

People got to discover how sustainable development concepts can be implemented in reality. But you often heard them say, OK, this is marvelous, but it's not for us, or it's not for us right now. It's a dream, it's another world, but we have nothing in common. (Interviewee 50-FR)

Nevertheless, interviews suggested that financial resources are limited everywhere, especially in the current economic crisis, and debates and negotiations about funding allocation abound in developed countries as well.

Cultural phenomena and habits, as well as planning traditions, are other major factors that explain why other countries find it difficult to adopt Dutch planning policies. For example, an interviewee from Serbia talked about the high status attached to automobiles in the Balkans since the end of communism (Interviewee 64-RS). An interviewee from Norway cited the Scandinavian preference for a lifestyle in solitude and in close connection with nature, which results in large distances between destinations and therefore car-dependence (Interviewee 59-NO). Countries in Eastern Europe and South Asia still follow the Soviet mechanistic approach to planning, which contrast with the Dutch tradition of integrated planning.

In these contexts, the planning profession does not enjoy a high standing in society as it does in the Netherlands (Interviewees 40-NL, 51-IN).

Among the Netherlands' neighbours in Northern Europe there is a general willingness to draw lessons from Dutch experience. In southern Europe however this willingness is much more limited. A few interviewees observed that the lack of financial resources or cultural differences are a convenient excuse for inertia-ridden, risk-adverse or conformist countries that lack the motivation to consider innovative planning ideas (Interviewees 50-FR, 60-NO, 62-RS).

Differences in local legislation and in the distribution of planning powers are another barrier to the successful transfer of Dutch policies. For example, an interviewee from England indicated that the fragmentation of governance structures in the UK precludes the implementation of an integrated public transport ticketing system similar to the Dutch one (Interviewee 47-UK). Interviewees from Norway and Japan indicated that a tradition of strong private property rights in these countries does not allow the public sector to assemble fragmented land parcels the way Dutch municipalities do (Interviewees 58-NO, 52-JP/US).

Clearly, differences in physical development patterns also make planning policy transfer more complex. Interviewees remarked that, because of the country's high population density, Dutch planners have been able to or forced to adopt certain solutions, which are often impossible or undesirable in other countries. For example, in the Netherlands, the compact shape of urban areas has rendered mass transit viable. In countries with sprawling, low-density development, public transport is more inefficient and costly (Interviewee 56-NO). On the other hand, because of high population densities, some Dutch regional rail systems, such as the high-profile

RandstadRail, are required to have lower speeds and more stops than regional rail systems elsewhere (Interviewee 44-BE).

*Politics permeating planning.* A number of interviewees pointed out that policy transfer efforts are likely to fail if political elites are not involved in the process and persuaded to be ‘sustainability ambassadors’ (Interviewees 59-NO, 63-RS, and 66-US). In developed car-oriented countries such as the UK and Norway, politicians’ pro-sustainability statements often do not match or manifestly contradict practice (Interviewees 61-UK, 60-NO). This issue is even sharper in developing/transition countries, which are also experiencing high staff turnover (thus losing valuable information gained during transfer) and a more politicised planning environment, with decision-making power concentrated in a few hands (Interviewee 50-FR).

Moreover, in developing countries, where policy transfer is initiated by donors rather than the civil servants, there is less motivation to apply knowledge gained in the Netherlands. One French planning advisor with broad international experience noted that the European Union, which provides policy transfer funds to candidate countries for twinning or technical assistance projects, is often lenient if results are minimal or non-existent in order to avoid political frictions (Interviewee 50-FR).

*Policy ‘skimming’.* If a policy transfer process consists of a single study tour to the Netherlands, little more than inspiration is achieved, especially when tour participants have little prior familiarity with Northern Europe. An American planner, who accompanied a Japanese delegation in a recent visit to Amsterdam and other European cities, captures a general sentiment about these types of tours:

The visit was relatively short, and we were spending a lot of time moving around. We heard some presentations but they didn’t really talk about process – they more said, here is what we did, this is the result, and isn’t it nice ... There wasn’t time to get into a really good discussion. Everybody came back in a good mood, saying, gee, wasn’t it really pretty over there. But my gut feeling is that it was perceived a little as a junket, as in, we’re going on a fancy trip to Europe. (Interviewee 54-JP/US)

A number of longer-term exchanges between the Netherlands and other developed Northwestern European countries (i.e. in the framework of EU projects) have often only resulted in practice guides or reports, which have soon faded from memory (Interviewee 61-UK). However well-meaning and ambitious, longer-term advisory projects in Southern and Eastern Europe, have rarely resulted in implementation or policy change. Even when the policy ideas introduced by Dutch advisers are incorporated into planning documents, they often remain on paper (Interviewee 50-FR).

## Conclusions

Employing an analytical framework containing transfer rationales, mechanisms, actors, outcomes and obstacles, this article has charted the transfer (or ‘export’) of sustainable land-use and transport policy concepts from the Netherlands. The study reveals that the Dutch land-use and transport planning approaches are very reputable abroad. The Netherlands can therefore be considered as a prime ‘policy lending’ country: a place with a higher chance of policy transfer and learning than many other countries. The study adds to the existing evidence that a growth in ‘policy tourism’ and an increase in interest in policy learning have been taking place over recent years, including the policy area of sustainable land-use



and transport. In terms of 'coveted' policy elements, physical planning and built environment aspects are highly praised by foreign observers. These include cycle planning, long-term comprehensive master-planning, urban design, historic preservation, public transport, landscape architecture and water management.

As for transfer agents, a stream of planners, politicians, academics, expert advisers, students and developers from all over the world continues to visit the Netherlands on study tours or join forces with Dutch planners in international projects. Foreign visitors are usually impressed and inspired by Dutch planning achievements. They are interested in borrowing Dutch solutions to alleviate problems or frame sustainability discourses in their home countries. At the same time, transfer is promoted by Dutch planners and the Dutch government that make substantial efforts to reach out to peers in other parts of the world. The most intense collaboration and exchange occurs with neighbouring countries in Northwestern Europe, a region which is generally seen as having one of the best planning models and as having advanced the most in reaching sustainability targets.

Notwithstanding the intensity of interactions and the internationalisation of planning ideas, policy transfer efforts from the Netherlands abroad have rarely resulted in specific actions or hard outcomes. This finding confirms the results of prior studies on policy and best practice transfer and learning. Contextual differences in culture, social setup, language, physical patterns, planning legislation and financial resources, as well as the failure to involve political elites in transfer processes, form barriers to embedding Dutch planning policies elsewhere. Some transfer processes have been too short and superficial for lasting results (i.e. involving a single tour to a few Dutch cities). Where transfer has occurred, the imported policies

or programmes have been adopted to the local context. Adoption is of course a necessary strategy in almost all cases – replication is rarely considered to be a useful option, as the more critical literature on policy transfer and best practices is keen to emphasise.

Irrespective of the outcomes of the policy transfer process, most individuals involved in these exchanges take the view that simple inspiration and openness to knowledge are useful even if they do not translate directly into tangible results on the ground that mirror Dutch practice. The broader implication of these findings is that studying practice elsewhere, while not leading to direct implementation, helps practitioners, politicians, or academics to understand their 'home' situation better and to consider their own practices and knowledge in a different light or with a more critical eye. Viewing planning policies and outcomes often extends well beyond the creation of new documentary evidence (e.g. reports and presentations): the impacts can be much wider and can permeate policy processes and practices elsewhere. This does not however result in the replication of physical development seen in the Netherlands.

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### Notes

1. One notable exception is a study on the transfer of sustainable transport policies from the Netherlands by Sagaris (2010).

2. According to a recent stocktaking by Benson and Jordan (2011), Dolowitz and Marsh's framework is still considered a most useful and relevant basis for the analysis of policy transfer.
3. Interviewees 24-NL, 26-NL, 43-AL, 51-IN, 52-IN and 55-KV.
4. Uninformed transfers occur if policies are transferred with insufficient information on how they work in the lending place, incomplete transfers if crucial aspects of policy are not transferred, and inappropriate transfers if the borrowers and lenders are divided by large differences in their economic, social, political and ideological contexts.
5. The INTERREG initiative aims to stimulate cooperation between regions in the European Union. The INTERREG III programme covered the period 2000–2006. Strand B projects focused on transnational cooperation.
6. Called 'home zones' in English-speaking countries.
7. A network based on a limited number of high-capacity trunk lines and numerous lower capacity feeder lines.

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