

Summary note from the Netherlands – RSE workshop engagements

The purpose of this summary note is to reflect on engagements held with stakeholders in the Netherlands during the week starting May 13, 2024.

Quoted material does not necessarily reflect the views of all people we spoke to at each engagement.

Amsterdam	The Hague	Rotterdam
A workshop discussion with those working on local development issues in or concerning Amsterdam. The discussion covered a range of areas, from inter-city co-operation to targeting interventions to particular neighbourhoods. Consideration was also given to the merits of adopting long time horizons. It was remarked, first - as an overarching concern - that as a high-density place, “space and economy” are the “biggest issues” to be confronted. That is, a question of how growth is managed given territorial constraints. It was also remarked that there is a need, because of limited space and other places specialising in or undertaking other processes within an economic system, that there is a need to work collaboratively with other cities. It was noted, for example: “we need a governance structure for the circular economy where we go look at like, what region can basically organize what supply chain because there's not enough space to do it everywhere.” So “starting conversation[s] about what would your city needs to look like if you had a circular economy? So, what kind of spatial claims would you need to make? What type of logistical systems do you need to make? How does your city fit into the region?”; “...I guess there's ... a local or regional, national and global skill supply chains and the preference is to do as much as you can in a sustainable way locally, but then many things cannot be done in that way [and] require some kind of coordination”. Making policy choices and priorities was also considered. It was remarked: “things I would like to see but that's not the policy at the moment is that you really start making choices in what kind of sectors or what kind of companies you want in your city ... and you're facilitating to come here every day, say, for certain companies [who are] not really contributing to like a sustainable economy or you're not providing good jobs.” Neighbourhood level concerns are addressed by the municipality, such as through the Vital Neighbourhoods programme (https://magazines.amsterdam.nl/stadvandetoekomst/summary). There is a concern for example with “neighbourhoods where people and entrepreneurs can [be supported] socially and economically. We have a whole range of spatial features that ha[ve] to be enabled ... [for example] some very important affordable space for entrepreneurs and affordable space for people who are starting with an activity in their local [area and] have space to do something”.	A workshop discussion with a person close to local economic development concerns, located in The Hague. Th discussion ranged from consideration of the national broad prosperity approach to how concerns here are channelled through regional deals (as a mechanism of regional policy). The discussion started with the differences in socio-economic contexts between the Netherlands and the UK. Here it was remarked that while there are spatial divides in the Netherlands – and there are notable areas of deprivation in Rotterdam and The Hague – the overall divides are not nearly as stark as they are in the UK – “you've got the differences, but they're not as marked.” A focus on the environment was also apparent - “environmental constraints are a major issue”. This was discussed in terms of resource management issues and issues such as nitrogen deposits (from livestock farming), noise pollution (from e.g. the main airport), and air pollution (from an industrial plant). The idea that growth is not and should not be the sole objective of local policy was also affirmed. It was remarked: “There were always economists here in the Netherlands which were quite prominent, and ... said that GDP doesn't cover everything basically ... and we should have a broad idea of welfare ... it should always be a much broader notion than just material welfare, it's sort of quite ingrained.” The integration of Brede Welvaert with multi-lateral approaches was pointed to: “Well-being for broad prosperity in the Netherlands [is] linked to the SDG's as well” In terms of the implementation of Breede Welvaart, it was remarked that “there are attempts to see how to integrate this into the formal policy process ... and especially the budgetary process ... So that's not easy to do because you need to have a sense of these trade-offs, right? So, if you do this, then what happens to that?” It was further commented that while trade-offs across different objectives are understood, practically working through this, particularly at the local level, is not without challenges: “people are aware that there are trade-offs between the economy and social aspects. And to some extent, maybe between the economy and the environment ...	Through a series of interactions with those connected to the social enterprise and third sector spaces in Rotterdam, the following issues were noteworthy: - Experimentation, evaluation and learning by doing - The openness to experimentation has been written about for the OECD (Wolfe, 2018), and it was apparent that there was a sense of innovation from necessity (TINA) with some of the interventions (e.g. in the care economy). Evaluative thinking as much as evaluation was apparent through the discussions. That is, it is not the end of the world if you cannot measure everything at present, but there is something about the culture and building in an evaluation ethos. It was noteworthy, furthermore, that ‘narrative learning’ was used: this is the story of person x - was being turned to. It is clear to us also that there are capacity limits on doing monitoring and evaluation in some settings: “I work a 32-hour week at the community centre ... how can I do monitoring”. - Fostering a learning culture - A learning attitude was apparent throughout the discussions and the term about supporting the “civil servants of the future”. This appeared to reflect a view that there was a need to build a city-wide epistemic community supported by ‘training the values’ of the impact or social economy. - Governance fit - Where does formality and informality start in terms of governance – can a Coalition working entirely in what may be termed a ‘soft space’ (a space not subject to formal constraints), or what funding and regulations bind and shape activity? - Pointing out the direction of travel about a different kind of economy - A number of phrases were noted such as a ‘new economy’, ‘good economy’ and a ‘purpose economy’. One consideration relates to what are these terms relate to exactly, and can they be co-opted for other, not necessarily, positive purposes? How would you communicate these to a broader public? Would a citizen know them when they see them? We arrived at the following reflections regarding affinities with the alternative economic approaches we focused on in our research:

It was remarked that national frameworks – notably Brede Welvaart (or national prosperity, <https://www.pbl.nl/onderwerpen/brede-welvaart>) – have a role in structuring approaches across the Netherlands: “... national government has embraced the concept of ... inclusive prosperity. And this is mostly done through monitoring .. it does measure economic growth, but it also looks at all these other issues.” It was further noted by one participant: “politicians like to use that broad prosperity framework, or at least the term ... because it doesn't touch on growth and you don't have to talk about economic growth.”

One consideration is whether alternative approaches are new in practice or label only: “So we were totally aware of all these issues even before ... [the] concept names. So, you've always had quite a broad ... we have never only looked at GDP or anything like that. We also looked at wellbeing of people satisfaction, safety. All those issues were always monitored already.”

The practice of monitoring and evaluation were discussed in terms of the different methods that can be used at different points: “...we tried to design decision making model so we already have a lot of monitoring, but this would be kind of qualitative ... at the beginning of policymaking ... and then we have a monitor that's quantitative and looking back.”

Taking a long-term perspective was seen to be useful in asking different questions about how you would prioritise and what social and environment changes need to be taken into account. One programme is Amsterdam 2100, which tries “to envision what Amsterdam would look like in the year 2100.” It was remarked that the project is trying to “get people to see that if you again, extend the time horizon, that you get a little overlap between some financial planning and sustainability, because you avoid a lot of costs and harms from climate change ... instead of looking like two three years ahead, you look at 10-15 years and you start to see hey, actually, there's a good business case for this”.

There was a concern for discussing alternative approaches and communicating this with wider publics, beyond policymaking communities: “we should have like a website with a more general non political explanation of what this model is and how people can get involved and what it means ... But we have organized a couple of events now. We tried to organize [events in]... different neighbourhoods in [one] area to talk about like what it is, how people can get involved, how to improve the neighbourhood” Others noted that: “The information we've got for vital neighbourhoods is done with people living in that area. So we asked what is this vital neighbourhood? Why now, why not? And what should we do?”

[there is] a real gap I think in in the provision of intelligence for policy at the at the local level For some interventions you need sort of quite granular data, wouldn't you? ... [some] try to make sense of this basically ... these things are linked and what kind of trad offs there are and what kind of synergies there are. And if you propose to do something here, then what, what kind of effects could it have?”

Links to the deal making process were remarked on in terms of how Brede Welvaart shaped these: “A lot of the regions which were awarded the [regional] deals, especially in the early phase already had [a] vision for the long-[term] development and they didn't really use this idea of broad prosperity or well-being.” Furthermore, on the regional deals programme: “This program also came with a much more place-based approach which basically handed the lead to municipalities or local actors.”

See for a wider discussion, here - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09654313.2022.2140584#d1e590>; and here - <https://www.pbl.nl/publicaties/de-regio-deals-in-de-praktijk>

- Inclusive growth - narrative of migrants at a distance from the labour market and engaging them in community development practices. That is, a concern for the distributional processes and mechanisms within the economy.
- Wellbeing economy – collective spirit, cooking together etc reflect activities about community belonging over economic production narrowly. It is also apparent that key advocates in the wellbeing world were picked up on by discussants (as points of inspiration).
- Community wealth building – using anchor institutions as levers for change.
- Foundational economy - apparent in the quotidian or day-to-day activities that were referred to (even if the label wasn't referred to/used per se).