



Dutch City Deals Evaluation – follow-up

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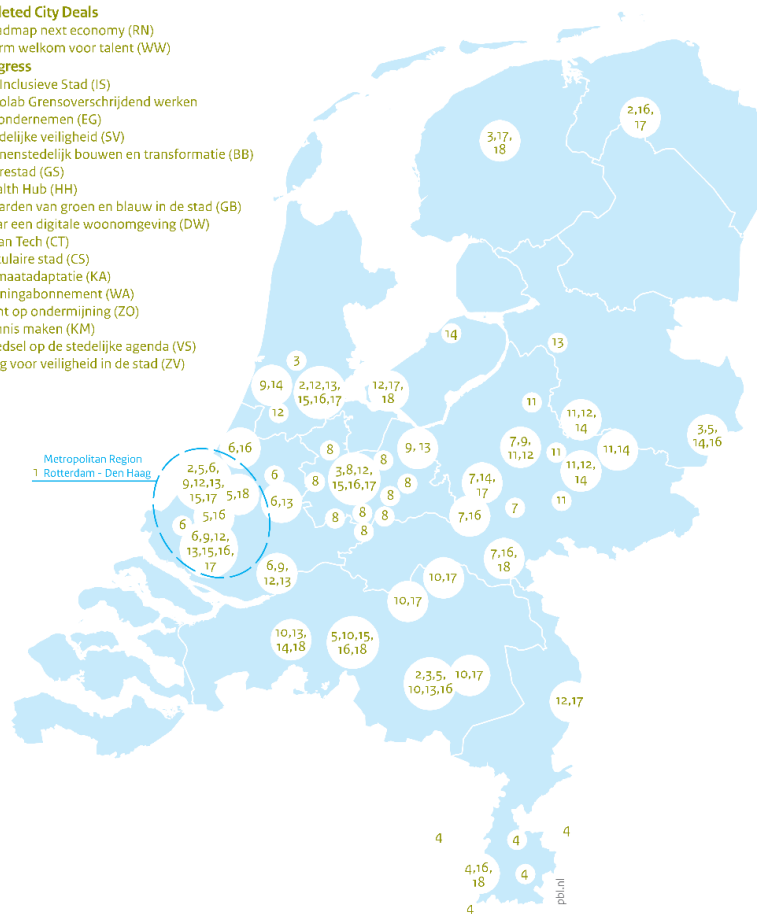
As concentrations of people, buildings, capital, infrastructure, government services, luxury goods, pollution, crime as well as hopes and dreams of a better life, cities have always acted as wellsprings of innovation. It is therefore not surprising that solutions to complex global challenges, from the imperative of achieving sustainability (transition towards renewable energy, circular economy, etc.) to promoting social justice (inclusion and equity) or continued vitality (new economic models) are commonly sought in cities. In this light, the Dutch national government seeks to harness the creative potential of cities by means of its 'City Deals' initiative.

Completed City Deals

1. Roadmap next economy (RN)
2. Warm welkom voor talent (WW)

In progress

3. De Inclusieve Stad (IS)
4. Eurolab Grensoverschrijdend werken en ondernemen (EG)
5. Stedelijke veiligheid (SV)
6. Binnenstedelijk bouwen en transformatie (BB)
7. Gelrestad (GS)
8. Health Hub (HH)
9. Waarden van groen en blauw in de stad (GB)
10. Naar een digitale woonomgeving (DW)
11. Clean Tech (CT)
12. Circulaire stad (CS)
13. Klimaatadaptatie (KA)
14. Woningabonnement (WA)
15. Zicht op ondernijning (ZO)
16. Kennis maken (KM)
17. Voedsel op de stedelijke agenda (VS)
18. Zorg voor veiligheid in de stad (ZV)



Dutch City Deals are similar to their better-known English counterpart only in name. In the Netherlands, a City Deal is an agreement between a select number of cities, national government departments, civil society and the private sector to tackle a specific and self-defined problem. It acts as a vehicle for cooperation and commitment by mobilizing stakeholders to pool their resources (e.g. financial, legal, expertise) to work together outside of standard operating procedures. Moreover, unlike the UK, it is explicitly not about the (re)distribution of central resources; most City Deals have little or no budget of their own. Approximately 20 City Deals have been signed since the launch of the programme in 2015, and about half are nearing completion.

In the Spring of 2017, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) asked the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency to carry out an 'ongoing evaluation' of the City Deals with a specific focus on the extent to which these agreements promoted innovation.

In response, the PBL made a representative selection of 11 City Deals (two of which had not yet been signed) and carried out 44 semi-structured interviews with the various parties within each deal (e.g. municipalities, national ministries, businesses). All interviews were transcribed and processed using qualitative data analysis methods. The results were published in June, and feedback obtained from the stakeholders by a questionnaire (43 responses) and a workshop. The results of this second phase were published in December.

The research was guided by theories of network governance and transition theory. More specifically, the study focussed on channels of communication between tiers (vertical) and disciplines or policy fields

(horizontal) and the role played by the City Deal in facilitating this. It also investigated how City Deals stimulate experimentation and innovation (e.g. by offering a protected environment from prevailing bureaucratic processes and regulations). Finally, the degree to which the various participants were satisfied or frustrated by the City Deal was examined in order to arrive at practical policy recommendations.

In general, the evaluation found that City Deals had made a contribution to a new form of network governance, and had allowed participants to think beyond existing frameworks, but that there was still room for improvement.

The main findings were as follows:

- The new relationships forged and lines of communication are valuable, but more work is still needed if the City Deals are to have a structural impact on existing policy processes.
- Network governance requires the national government to play an active part in the process, specifically as facilitator, participant broker and inspirer.
- Specifically, it should help to distribute and upscale knowledge and experience gained in City Deals, for example by setting up a City Deal Knowledge Centre.
- A small amount of funding is needed to facilitate the process during the City Deal. Afterwards, more substantial funding or regulatory changes may be required to accelerate the transition itself.
- Common frames and milestones can help to align the various partners' agendas and time horizons.
- Additional guidelines are needed for developing City Deals and more selectivity is required when considering new City Deals.

The results of the evaluation were published (in Dutch only) in June 2017 and the follow-up in December 2017. At present, the authors are working on publishing these results in international journals. For more information, please contact david.hamers@pbl.nl.