



# Dutch City Deals Evaluation

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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.

## Overview of Dutch City Deals

*Binnenstedelijk bouwen en transformatie (infill development)*

*Circulaire stad (circular economy)*

Clean tech (green technologies)

*De inclusieve stad (integrated social services)*

Eurolab Grensoverschrijdend werken en ondernemen (cross-border economic activity)

Gelrestad (smart energy solutions)

*Gezonde verstedelijking\* (urban health)*

*Health hub (smart specialisation)*

Kennis maken (knowledge centres)

*Klimaatadaptatie (climate adaptation)*

*Naar een digitale woonomgeving (wired homes)*

*Roadmap Next Economy (economic strategy)*

*Stedelijke bereikbaarheid\* (accessibility)*

Stedelijke veiligheid (public safety)

*Voedsel op de stedelijke agenda (urban food)*

Waarden van groen en blauw in de stad (ecosystem services)

*Warm welkom talent (immigration)*

Woningabonnement (energy saving)

Zicht op ondermijning (fighting crime with big data)

Zorg voor veiligheid in de stad (public safety)

\* in development, but never signed.

Italics indicate deals included in the evaluation by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

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 separate budget. 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.

The research was guided by theories of multilevel governance and transition theory. Specifically, it was interested in the 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 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. The national government could play a role in distributing knowledge and experience gained in the various City Deals.
- City Deals are intended to provide room for experimentation and innovation outside existing practices and policies. The latter however usually allow more scope for interpretation than initially thought. Nevertheless, the national government could be more active in removing barriers to experimentation and innovation, both formal and informal.
- The evaluation also found a need for additional guidelines for developing City Deals and selectivity in signing new City Deals.
- Finally, the experiences with the first round of City Deals indicate that greater attention should be paid to learning processes to improve experimentation and innovation.

The results of the evaluation were published (in Dutch only) in June 2017: [\*Evaluatie City Deals\*](#). At present, the authors are working on publishing these results in international journals. For more information, please contact [david.hamers@pbl.nl](mailto:david.hamers@pbl.nl).