

# Smart Growth Policies in the Netherlands

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This essay is the written assignment for the workshop: Smart growth, as part of the course Land Management. In this essay I will focus on policies that are and will be used to implement smart growth in the Netherlands.

## 1. Introduction

In communities across the nation, there is a growing concern that current development patterns — dominated by what some call "sprawl" — are no longer in the long-term interest of our cities, existing suburbs, small towns, rural communities, or wilderness areas. Though supportive of growth, communities are questioning the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city, only to rebuild it further out. Spurring the smart growth movement are demographic shifts, a strong environmental ethic, increased fiscal concerns, and more nuanced views of growth. The result is both a new demand and a new opportunity for smart growth.

## 2. Principles of Smart Growth

Smart growth recognizes connections between development and quality of life. It leverages new growth to improve the community. The features that distinguish smart growth in a community vary from place to place. In general, smart growth invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to centre cities and older suburbs. New smart growth is more town-centred, is transit and pedestrian oriented, and has a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses. It also preserves open space and many other environmental amenities. But there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. Successful communities do tend to have one thing in common — a vision of where they want to go and of what things they value in their community — and

their plans for development reflect these values.

- *Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices.* Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy.
- *Create Walkable Neighbourhoods.* Walkable communities are desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play, and therefore a key component of smart growth.
- *Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration.* Growth can create great places to live, work and play — if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where it wants to grow.
- *Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place.* Smart growth encourages communities to craft a vision and set standards for development and construction which respond to community values of architectural beauty and distinctiveness, as well as expanded choices in housing and transportation.
- *Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective.* For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, it must be embraced by the private sector.
- *Mix Land Uses.* Smart growth supports the integration of mixed land uses into communities as a critical component of achieving better places to live.
- *Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas.* Open space preservation supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, improving our communities' quality of life, and guiding new growth into existing communities.
- *Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices.* Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, communities,

and transportation is a key aim of smart growth.

- *Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities.* Smart growth directs development towards existing communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighbourhoods offer, and conserve open space and irreplaceable natural resources on the urban fringe.
- *Take Advantage of Compact Building Design.* Smart growth provides a means for communities to incorporate more compact building design as an alternative to conventional, land consumptive development.

### 3. Smart Growth Issue Areas

In addition to the many resource areas (bibliographies, documents, etc.) in the Smart Growth Network website, specific topics of smart growth are organized into 7 issue areas.

- *Community Quality of Life*  
Smart growth offers a framework to build community and help create and preserve a sense of place. It does this through housing and transportation choices, urban green spaces, recreational and cultural attractions, and policies and incentives that promote mixed-use neighbourhoods.
- *Design*  
Smart growth creates communities that offer health, social, economic, and environmental benefits for all. It achieves this by promoting resource-efficient building and community designs, green building practices, low-impact development, and mixed-use and walkable neighbourhoods.
- *Economics*  
Smart growth encourages community-based small business investment and development, adds to the variety of local employment opportunities, and helps attract new businesses and industries. More efficient government services are key to this, as are public and private investments that focus on quality of life improvements.
- *Environment*  
Many of our current environmental challenges — air and water pollution, global warming, habitat fragmentation and conversion — are due in part to the way we

have built our neighbourhoods, communities, and metropolitan areas during the past half-century.

- *Health*  
Smart growth reduces health threats from air and water pollution and indoor air contaminants through resource-efficient building design and offering transportation options such as mass transit, bike lanes, and pedestrian walkways. These engage residents and workers in a more active, healthy lifestyle.
- *Housing*  
Smart growth promotes housing options for diverse lifestyles and socio-economic levels. It does this through mixed-use, affordable housing and compact development that revitalizes neighbourhoods and provides an alternative to automobile-dependent communities.
- *Transportation*  
Smart growth protects public health and environmental quality, conserves energy, and improves the quality of life in communities by promoting new transportation choices and transit-oriented development.

#### Box 1: Statements about smart growth

“The goal of smart growth is not no growth or even slow growth. Rather, the overall goal is sensible growth that balances our need for jobs and economic development with our desire to save our natural environment.”

*Parris Glendening, Governor,  
State of Maryland.*

“With smart growth we will save acres, save money on roads and sewers, keep homes more affordable, and make our cities and town-centres thrive. That’s good growth.”

*Christine Todd Whitman,  
as Governor of New Jersey.*

“Smart growth is pro-growth. We know that developers, banks, and the entire community rely on growth to fuel the economy. The goal is not to limit growth, but to channel it to areas where infrastructure allows growth to be sustained over the long term.”

*Hugh L. McColl,  
Chairman and CEO, Bank of America.*

Source: EPA (2001).

**Box 2: Dutch planning in international perspective**

“Superbly efficient” (Mori 1998)

“ein gut funktionierende System der Baulandbereitstellung”,  
“ein geschickt ausgestaltetes Enteignungsrecht”,  
“handlungsfähige Kommunen”  
(Schmidt-Eichstaedt, 1999)

“goldenen Regel” Bodenbereitstellung (Voß 1997)

“world wide lead” (Hall, 1997)

“impressed by spatial planning achievements”  
(Bolan, 1999)

“one of the world’s most successful systems of planning and land management”,  
“success story”  
(Alterman 1997)

Source: Korthals Altes (2004).

#### 4. Dutch spatial planning tools

Let us look to the Netherlands. According to many international authorities (see Box 2) the Dutch planning system is successful, only Dutch critics state that it could be better (see Box 3). In this chapter I will treat some parts of the Dutch planning system, and their relation with smart growth.

##### 4.1 Government amendments

On the highest national level government and States General prescribe national spatial planning policy. Governmental policy is set down in several documents which are not legally binding, but they have to be used in local policy. Examples of these documents are:

- structuurschetsen (master plans)
- structuurschema’s (master scheme)
- real policy decisions by core decisions on spatial planning)

Continued effects take shape by consultation. For rural areas there are a number of facet plans:

- Vijfde Nota Ruimelijke Ordening (Fifth Policy on Spatial Planning)
- Milieubeleidsplan (Environmental Policy Plan)
- Nota Waterhuishouding (Water Balance Policy)
- Nota Ruimte (National Space Strategy)

The ‘Second National Structure Plan on Green Areas’ (Tweede Structuurschema Groene Ruimte) is an example of an important master scheme.

##### 4.2 Fifth Policy on Spatial Planning

(Source: VROM, 2001). On December 15th 2000, the Cabinet ratified the draft Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning, entitled ‘Making Space, Sharing Space’. This policy document contains the national government’s spatial planning policy resolutions for the next few decades. The most important decisions are included in the draft Key Planning Decision for National Spatial Planning Policy.

The Policy Document contains new policy resolutions for the period up until the year 2020, with a longer term perspective to 2030. It is a policy document based on a number of general tenets, a strategic policy document that provides guidance to spatial developments in the Netherlands. It does not contain any decisions on concrete locations, but rather presents policy frameworks within which those decisions can be made. Decisions on detailed spatial layout and design are primarily a matter for the provinces, urban regions and municipalities. The motto of the Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning is: ‘centralised where necessary, decentralised where possible’. The document originated as an open dialogue between the national government, on the one hand, and citizens, social organisations and lower government levels, on the other. Ideas, wishes and demands were exchanged in various consultation forums, meetings and conferences.

The Document is subdivided in five significant themes, these themes are:

- The Netherlands and Europe;
- City and Country;
- Urban Networks;
- Water;
- Delta Metropolis.

**Box 3: Critics**

“Results less than expected” (Bontje 2002)

“Planning needs to change”  
(Zonneveld, Hajer 2001)

“Counter productive concepts in planning”  
(Van Eeten 1999)

Source: Korthals Altes (2004).

The theme 'City and Country' is most important in this essay. In this theme the 'Contour Policy' is the central part.

Red contours are to be drawn around existing built up areas and expansions required on the basis of new plans. The objective is to locate new construction required for homes and workplaces within these contours by transforming and intensifying land use. The areas can only be expanded once it has been demonstrated that the demand cannot be satisfied within the bounds of the contours. The green contours are drawn around areas with special natural conservation values or units containing cultural, historical or archaeological ancient monuments. These include areas within the National Ecological Infrastructure, national parks, areas on the world heritage list and areas that have protected status internationally under the EU Bird and Habitat Directives. Within the green contour, the guideline is preservation and protection, but the dynamics of landscape and nature are given space if a demonstrable contribution is made towards the essential features and values of the area. Under the KPD (Key Planning Decision) part 3 of the Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning, other areas with green values can be added to the green contours (e.g. national buffer zones, Randstad green structure and the Belvédère locations).

The areas outside the red and green contours are designated as intermediate areas, where a development-oriented landscape strategy applies. Their landscape and cultural-historical values are protected partly on the basis of existing protection schemes. It is the responsibility of the provinces to keep these values intact and to accentuate variety in the landscape by guiding development possibilities so they do not detract from the landscape.

Besides all of this, there is attention for robust ecological networks, national and local landscapes, agriculture policy and building in the rural area.

#### **4.3 National Spatial Strategy - Creating Space for Development**

(Source: VROM, 2004) The National Spatial Strategy contains the government's views on the spatial development of the Netherlands and the most important objectives associated with that development. The strategy represents the contribution of national spatial planning into a

strong economy, a safe and liveable society and an attractive country. The Implementation Agenda for the strategy provides insights into the most important spatial investments and implementation activities with respect to the policy. The National Spatial Strategy sets out national spatial policy up until 2020; the long-term aspects cover the period from 2020-2030.

The new National Spatial Strategy replaces the current national strategies on spatial planning and/or the national spatial planning key decisions (PKBs in Dutch) that were part of the Supplement to the Fourth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning (*Vierde nota over de ruimtelijke ordening Extra*) (and its update in the VINAC) and the Second National Structure Plan for Green Areas. In addition to the National Spatial Strategy, a few other national planning key decisions will be taken.

The government has recently adopted the National Spatial Strategy. The basis for this strategy – the Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning and Second National Structure Plan for Green Areas (*Vijfde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening and Tweede Structuurschema Groene Ruimte/SGR2*) - were drawn up by the previous government, under Prime Minister Kok. During this period of government, preparatory work was also carried out on the National Traffic and Transport Plan (*Nationaal Verkeers- en Vervoersplan*). All three of these policy documents followed the procedure required for a national spatial planning key decision (PKB), but none was instituted during the term of that government. The current National Spatial Strategy integrates and completes the current (PKB) procedures of the Fifth National Spatial Planning Policy Document and the Second National Structure Plan on Green Areas, so that attention can now be focused on implementation of the policy.

The main goal of national spatial policy is to create space for the different functions that demand it, on the limited surface area that we have available to us in the Netherlands. More specifically, the government focuses on four general objectives: strengthening the international competitive position of the Netherlands, promoting strong cities and a vibrant, dynamic countryside, securing and developing important national and international spatial values, and ensuring public safety.

## 5. Conclusions

The main goal of the National Spatial Strategy matches exactly with the definition of Smart Growth, accordingly, if the Document will be cleared by the Lower and the Higher Chamber of Parliament in 2005, the Dutch Smart Growth will become again a success story and Dutch critics certainly have no cause to complain.

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