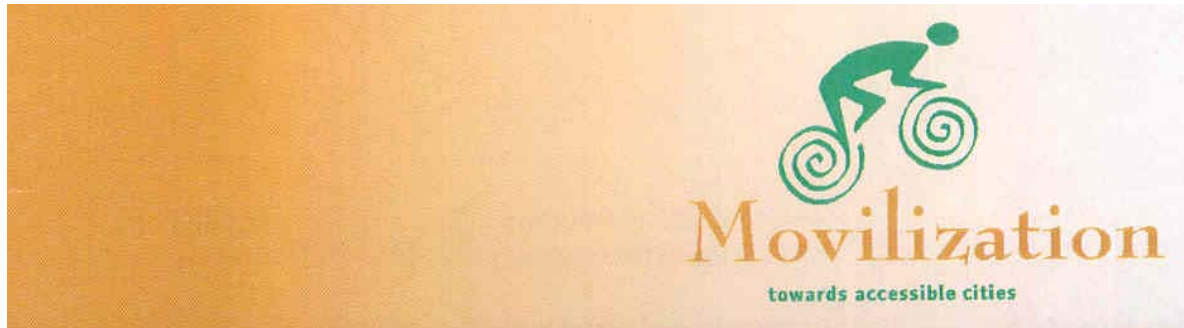


# The Dutch Bicycle Policy



## Introduction

Utrecht, and moreover the whole of the Netherlands, has a long cycling tradition. The Dutch have always cycled a lot and continue to do so. However, we cannot stand still. If we do nothing, then the use of the bicycle will decline as a result of all sorts of developments.

From abroad, the Netherlands is often viewed as a good example of a successful cycling country. Normally only the infrastructural aspects are examined, without people asking themselves why it is that the Dutch cycle so much and what factors have played a role in this.

However, this must be done if people want to learn from the Netherlands. Not everything can be copied just like that. And copying a good cycling infrastructure provides no guarantee for a successful cycling policy.

In this presentation I will address the three most important factors that play a role in the success: the Dutch spatial planning policy, the Dutch society and the Dutch traffic safety policy.

## The Netherlands as successful cycling country

### ***What are the factors that have made the Netherlands such a successful cycling country?***

This is the result of a number of factors. Some played an important role: spatial planning in the Netherlands, the far-reaching social integration in the Netherlands and the Dutch traffic-safety policy.

- **The history of spatial planning in the Netherlands.**

The Netherlands has a long tradition in the area of spatial planning. Spatial planning has been controlled by legislation for a long time.

The origin of this lies in the organisation of water management, because the Netherlands has always had to fight against the water. The water management boards have been controlled by legislation since as early as 1798. The subsequent spatial planning legislation followed on from the water board legislation. Traffic safety is still one of the core tasks of Rijkswaterstaat, the Directorate General of Public Works and Water Management.

From the start of the twentieth century, government has played a strongly regulatory role in the area of traffic, housing, industrialisation and agriculture. Since 1962, there has been an umbrella spatial

planning act. Since then, government spatial planning documents have appeared regularly. These documents strongly regulate the growth and structure of the Netherlands. The national documents are worked out in more detail at provincial, regional and local authority level.

The result of all of this is that there has been more or less no opportunity for the unstructured expansion of industry, "unstructured building", ribbon development and speculative construction outside of the development plans in the Netherlands. As a result, the impression is given of an "over organised" country in the area of spatial planning and spatial layout. This impression is to a large extent correct, but it has resulted in the function and form of the public space being harmonised and that there is a clear position for the bicycle in it.

- **The influence of Dutch spatial planning on traffic and transport, and especially on the bicycle.**

Because the Netherlands has organised spatial planning down to the fine details and moreover, because there are many opportunities for interested parties to have their say, there are many opportunities to give attention to slow traffic.

Bicycle traffic is an integral part of the traffic and transport system. The basic structure of the modalities that are always worked with is car - public transport - bicycle. This triple is also employed in spatial planning. This has the result that already at an early stage, account is taken of slow traffic in structure and zoning plans.

Traditionally, the Netherlands has designed its public space on a "small scale". Dutch cities almost always have a human scale. Infrastructure is rarely amply dimensioned and therefore has never more capacity than is strictly necessary. In a city such as Utrecht, an approach road with 2 x 2 lanes is a wide road. This has resulted in the barrier effect of infrastructure being limited.

This has a positive effect on bicycle use. There are many dedicated provisions for cyclists. Where the cyclist must share the space with other traffic, there is often room to do so, especially in residential areas.

- **The Dutch society, far-reaching social integration.**

The Netherlands has a classless society. The differences between rich and poor are relatively small. There are also few differences between the uneducated, labourers and educated people. They live in the same residential areas, their children attend the same school and they encounter each other during their leisure time. Wage levelling for instance has been government policy for years.

Naturally, there are subtle differences, but these are not very large.

The basis for this was laid centuries ago. The Netherlands is from old a trading nation that has sailed all of the world's oceans. Moreover, the Netherlands has always been a Calvinistic country, where hard and serious work was one of the virtues. This, and a host of other factors, has led to the current classless society.

- **The influence of this on bicycle use.**

This far-reaching social integration has been a major influence on the development of bicycle use. Originally the bicycle, when it was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century, was a toy of the rich.

From the 1920s however, cycling has been a mass occupation in the Netherlands. The bicycle has become a means of transport for everyone. The members of the Royal Household have, for instance, always been enthusiastic cyclists. Even today it is normal occurrence for a Dutch government minister to go by bicycle to an audience with the Queen.

Because in the Netherlands administrators and policy makers cycle en masse, they are not only professionally involved with the bicycle, but they also have experience of it.

The fact that cycling forms part of our life-style is at the same time the major problem. In a country where the Queen regularly cycles and where the prime minister bicycles to work with his attaché case on the carrier, where cycling is so normal, every effort and investment in the bicycle is approached with the greatest reserve. We find it normal that hundreds of millions are invested in provisions for car and public transport. But we continue to be shocked by the investment of some million Euro's in a bicycle bridge or tunnel!

And there lurks one of the threats for the bicycle. We live in a society in which mobility and the means of transport are continually subject to major change. Cyclists have until now been able to maintain their position, despite the enormous increase in car mobility. In the Netherlands, we also need a bicycle policy to be able to retain the position of the bicycle, stagnation is unarguable decline.

- **The Dutch traffic safety policy. The role of government in and the long history of social participation.**

The Netherlands has had an active traffic-safety policy for a long time. This has had a major influence on bicycle use. After all, cyclists will only cycle if the use of the bicycle is more or less safe. Even in the 1930s, concerned Dutch citizens established a pressure group that concerned itself with the promotion of traffic safety. For decades this group has been an important discussion partner for the government. Now social interest groups such as the cyclist union and pedestrian union have also been established. These organisations are also involved in the development of the Dutch traffic-safety policy.

From the 1960s, traffic-safety measures, such as the obligation to wear a helmet, the alcohol legislation, the car testing legislation, improved driving instruction, the obligation to wear seat belts, tightened equipment requirements for cyclists and speed reduction measures have ensured much improved traffic safety. While there were more than 3000 fatalities in the Netherlands in 1970, in 2002 there were less than 1000, while mobility had more than doubled in the intervening period. This has all resulted in a climate in which the cyclist, despite the growth in car mobility, could continue to cycle.

### **Which factors can be taken over by other countries and to what degree?**

- **Spatial planning** needs powerful government control. Allow bicycle facilities to become an integral part of the development of public space. This ensures sufficient physical space and harmonisation with the other traffic provisions.
- **Social integration** cannot be copied just like that. Changes in this area are processes that take decades. Even so, this is an important precondition for a successful cycle policy.
- **The social participation** in the area of traffic safety can be organised. The government can play a leading and stimulating role and provide continuity.



Gemeente Utrecht

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