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Ideas, interests, and institutions: explaining Dutch transit-oriented development challenges

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Abstract. As a planning concept, transit-oriented development (TOD) has become popular in the Netherlands over the last few decades. However, the transition from planning concept to development practice has been fraught with difficulties. Where TOD projects have been implemented, they have often met with limited success in terms of livability and market viability. This paper examines TOD-related efforts in the Netherlands and the reasons for their difficulties up to now. The analysis is built around an analytical framework, which considers the role of ‘ideas’, ‘interests’, and ‘institutions’, as well as their interaction, in affecting the outcomes of these TOD efforts.

Keywords: transit-oriented development (TOD), Netherlands, ideas, interests, institutions, decision-making process, planning policy change

Introduction

The Netherlands is world renowned for its urban planning (Faludi and van der Valk, 1994; Roodbol-Mekkes et al, 2012; van der Valk and Faludi, 1992). Dutch cities are compact, with dense bicycle and public transport networks, and the country is served by an extensive rail system. Most urban areas are well served by public transport. Nevertheless, the development of new urban areas along transit-oriented development (TOD) principles, which have become popular in Western Europe and North America over the past few decades, still meets with substantial difficulties in the Netherlands.

TOD is generally considered to be mixed-use development near, and/or oriented to, mass transit facilities. Common TOD traits include urban compactness, pedestrian-friendly and cycle-friendly environs, public and civic spaces near stations, and stations as community hubs (TCRP, 2002). In parts of Europe the TOD approach reaches further than single locations towards a network approach, which aims at realigning entire urban regions around rail transport and away from the car. Recent TOD projects have been mixed in terms of delivering a genuine transit-oriented experience (Hale, 2012).

Although TOD has become fashionable in the Netherlands, certainly at a conceptual level, the transformation of the concept into practice has been fraught with difficulties. Despite the ambition to create new TOD, few projects have actually been implemented in recent years. Where TOD projects have been implemented, they have often met with limited success in terms of livability and market viability (see Geurs et al, 2012; Tan, 2009). In Amsterdam, for example, several TOD nodes outside the historic center (Amstel, Sloterdijk, and Bijlmer ArenA stations) are generally considered unattractive, indicated by high office vacancy rates, for example. They include little or no housing, shopping, or entertainment establishments. Their aesthetic quality—with high-rise, overpowering, modernist buildings—lacks attractiveness. While relatively convenient for office workers in terms of access, these spaces are empty after working hours. Their look is perhaps ‘too American’ for the taste of the Dutch public, accustomed to historic buildings, tree-lined canals, and intimate squares with cozy cafés.

Table 1. Interviewee list.

Name of agency/company	Function of agency/company	Interviewee number ^a
<i>Public sector</i>		
City of Amsterdam	Responsible for roads, public transport, housing, spatial planning, environment, social affairs, economic development, education, and healthcare within its borders.	1–8
City of Almere	Part of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area; ^b same functions as above.	9
City–Region (Stadsregio)	Consists of Amsterdam and the surrounding municipalities that form part of the same urban system, responsible especially for traffic and transport.	10–11
Province of North Holland	Coordinates planning, transport, culture, social affairs, and has legal control over the municipalities.	12–14
Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment	Deals with strategic projects (main ports, major stations, and national rail infrastructure).	15–19
Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving—PBL)	National institute for strategic policy analysis in environment, nature, and spatial planning.	20–21
OV Bureau Randstad	Cooperative arrangement between national and regional public transport authorities in the Randstad.	22
StedenbaanPlus	Voluntary regional TOD (transport-oriented development) program in the southern part of the Randstad.	23–24 ^c
Other Dutch local/regional governments	The Hague's City-Region (Stadsgewest Haaglanden), Province of Gelderland, City of Nijmegen, and City of Eindhoven.	25–29 ^c
<i>Private sector</i>		
Dutch Rail (Nederlandse Spoorwegen or NS)	Concessionary company; oversees rail operations and owns station buildings.	30–32 ^d
Vereniging Deltametropool	Deltametropolis Association—research, lobbying, and knowledge exchange platform.	33
Platform 31	Urban and regional knowledge center.	34
Traffic and Transport Knowledge Resource Center (Kennisplatform Verkeer en Vervoer or KpVV)	Research center.	35
Independent experts	Self-employed or employed in consultancy firms.	36–42

^aInterviews were grouped by organization level (local to national, then others). Within each organization, the numbering is alphabetical. In discussing the responses of interviewees, names have been withheld for reasons of anonymity.

^bThe Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is an informal association of 36 municipalities, the provinces of North Holland and Flevoland, and the Amsterdam City–Region. It includes the northern part of the Randstad and extends from IJmuiden to Lelystad and from Purmerend to Haarlemmermeer.

^cE-mail communication with interviewee 24 and interviewee 26.

^dInterview 30 was conducted by another researcher for a different project.

This paper examines TOD-related efforts in the Netherlands for the purpose of determining the reasons why TOD planning has fallen short of expectations and why TOD implementation has often been resisted. The analysis is built around an analytical framework which considers the role of ‘ideas’, ‘interests’, and ‘institutions’ (the ‘three Is’) as well as their interaction, in affecting transport and land-use policy outcomes. The framework is used to explain policy change, or the lack thereof. To date, the three Is framework (with different levels of emphasis on each of the three components) has featured in various studies of decision making related to issues ranging from employment, healthcare, welfare, pension, and migration, to environmental, agricultural, and property rights reforms (see, for example, Humpage, 2010; Kern, 2011; Reitan, 1998; Varshney, 1989; Williams, 2005). In transport research a detailed study on British transport policy changes in the second half of the 20th century also employed this framework (Dudley and Richardson, 2000), and a recent study on the coordination of transport and land use in four European metropolitan regions contains an analysis of ideas, interests, and institutions (Gallez et al, 2013).

This paper builds on this academic literature, studying the relationship between ideas, interests, and institutions, and their alignment (or nonalignment) in connection with transport and planning policy, which is relatively uncharted terrain in the planning literature. A specific contribution of this paper is the introduction of the concept of ‘valence’ in the analytical framework. This concept can be seen as an indicator of the alignment (or nonalignment) of the three Is. Valence is used as a device to explain how and why policy changes, or to explain why policy does not change in certain cases.

A more detailed overview of the analytical framework is presented in the next section. Thereafter, the paper discusses the development of TOD policies and projects according to this framework. The analysis is structured according to the conceptual framework by discussing ideas, interests, and institutions in turn, followed by consideration of the concept of valence. The paper ends by outlining conclusions on both the analytical framework and TOD policy change (and sometimes the lack of it) in the Netherlands.

The information for this paper was obtained via semistructured interviews with policy officials from national, regional, and local government, the Dutch Railways, the Environmental Assessment Agency, members of several knowledge-exchange platforms, and selected independent experts (table 1). Most interviewees are planners and policy advisors; a few are in management positions. All have been closely involved in the development or implementation of TOD-related policy. Many work in close contact with, or serve as advisors to, politicians and are therefore very familiar with the political processes at work. While it could be argued that these individuals, especially the public sector employees, might have biases or vested interests in presenting TOD policies and processes in a positive light, the interviewees often expressed candid and critical views. This is rather different from how interviewees might respond in other countries and might be explained by the fact that Dutch planners are generally shielded from direct political interference in their profession (Faludi, 2005) or by a cultural penchant for forthrightness.

Analytical framework: ideas, interests, institutions, and their relationships

Various analytical models have been developed for the purpose of explaining how and why public policy is born, shaped, and transformed over time. This paper considers three interrelated key factors: ideas, interests, and institutions. Each of these factors affects the formulation of public policy, as well as affecting each other.

Ideas

In the past a notion existed that ideas were powerful enough by themselves to propel the course of events, and that policy making was a purely rational exercise in logic. While this notion has not survived, in the 1990s researchers began to examine how ideas affect policy making. The renewed interest in the role of ideas is due to some novel features of contemporary policy making, including a new focus on efficiency, a new awareness of the importance of policy credibility, and an increased willingness to delegate important policy-making powers to technocratic bodies with considerable political independence (Majone, 1998). The term 'ideas' encompasses 'norms' at a higher level of abstraction, and 'programs' at a lower level of abstraction.

'Norms' (also called 'cognitive paradigms', 'paradigmatic ideas', 'paradigms', 'worldviews', 'world culture', and 'normative frameworks') are taken-for-granted values, attitudes, assumptions, and identities that policy makers have themselves, or assume the public will share (eg, environmentalism, freedom, privacy, localism, collectivism, social cohesion, sustainability, private enterprise, individualism, nationalism, fairness, and equality). Norms provide an overarching understanding of how the world works. They vary significantly across countries and yield nationally specific policy responses to common problems. Norms might be so solidly entrenched in the collective psyche that they override the self-interests of policy makers. It has been observed that breaking out of old norms, even clearly ineffective ones, and embracing new ones, is generally difficult (Campbell, 2002).

'Programs' (or 'programmatically ideas') are precise guidelines that specify how to solve particular policy problems, based on well-established norms, within existing institutions, and with the available tools. Examples of programmatic ideas within the planning arena include: zoning, rent control, pedestrianization, car sharing, and 'New Urbanism'. According to some views, programs expressed in the simplest, clearest, easiest-to-understand, and strongest terms are the most likely to be implemented. Another position is that programs providing focal points around which policy makers can most easily build political coalitions are those more likely to be adopted (Campbell, 2002).

Interests

A 'pluralist' model in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s maintained that public policy is the equilibrium reached in the struggle among competing group interests at a given moment; policies change as a result of changes in the configuration of interests and power. The pluralist model was later discarded in favor of more 'rational' policy analysis (Majone, 1998). Nevertheless, policy scholars of every persuasion still agree that in advanced capitalist societies the pursuit of self-interest and group competition substantially affect policy making (Birkland, 2010).

Among the issues that are commonly perceived as deserving attention, the 'institutional agenda' is a list of items explicitly up for the active and serious consideration of authoritative decision makers. Groups must compete fiercely to gain and maintain space on this agenda. At the same time, groups fight to keep competing issues on or off the institutional agenda (Birkland, 2010). In planning, some of the typical stakeholders who strive for attention include developers, landowners, construction companies, local residents, small business owners, transport companies, advocacy coalitions (eg, environmentalists or the road lobby), and NGOs (eg, representing disadvantaged minorities). Research indicates that local politics are pivotal in determining particular planning policy trajectories (Stone, 2014).

Generally, more powerful groups are in a better position to advance their interests on the agenda. Less powerful groups tend to be underrepresented and often remain quiescent. Power depends in large part on resources, but also on the ability to form coalitions, achieve visibility, persuade the public and the media, and induce mass sympathy for a certain cause.

The status of the actors acting as ‘ambassadors’ for certain issues (eg, key politicians or experts with an authoritative claim to knowledge) affects the agenda setting (Birkland, 2010).

Institutions

The role and type of institutions can be instrumental in influencing decision making. Institutions are the formal or informal procedures, routines, and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or the economy (see, for example, Ostrom, 2005). More generally, they are socially devised constraints that filter ideas and shape the interaction of interest groups. Highly politicized environments cannot easily provide efficiency, credibility, and continuity in policy making, and institutions are employed to help deliver these features (Majone, 1998).

There are at least three distinct analytical approaches that seek to elucidate the role of institutions in the determination of public policy outcomes. These include rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism stems from the notion that particular institutions exist because they are the most efficient for the task at hand. Historical institutionalism supposes that institutions are embedded in the political landscape and that they are likely to persist over time and push development along a set of ‘paths’. Sociological institutionalism assumes a world of institutions seeking to define and express their identity in socially and culturally appropriate ways, which enhance the legitimacy of the organization and its participants (see, for example, Hall and Taylor, 1996; Scott, 2001).

Historical and sociological institutionalisms are very relevant to urban and regional planning research because these disciplines are strongly rooted in the contexts in which they operate. Cultural phenomena, habits, and traditions help explain why planning in some countries is more established and commands more resources, and why certain countries pursue a flexible planning approach while others do not (Hansen, 2011; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009).

Relationships between ideas, interests, and institutions: connectors and valence

Ideas, interests, and institutions reveal different and genuine dimensions of human behavior. However, their separate analysis provides only a partial account of the forces at work in any given situation. The interplay between these three variables is important as well. The way in which these variables are related has been explained in several different ways. Examples include:

(1) *Competing variables*. This is the most traditional perspective. It holds that ideas, interests, and institutions are independent, mutually exclusive variables, which ‘compete’ to influence policy. The assumption is that one of the three variables must be the ultimate underlying explanation that determines certain policy outcomes. Thus, the focus of the analysis is to measure the magnitude or weight of each variable in driving the outcomes of interest. Some analysts favor one variable over the others.

(2) *Mutually determining variables*. According to this framework, any one of the variables can, in the long run, determine the values of the other two in a feedback loop. For example, the adoption of a certain policy by an institution might benefit a particular interest group, which, later on, might be empowered to generate new ideas, which, in turn, influence the institutional agenda. To trace this type of dynamic change, longitudinal studies are required. The type of data collected for this paper—interviews conducted during a relatively short timeframe—does not, of course, allow for a longitudinal analysis.

(3) *Multicausal variables*. In this framework, adopted in the present paper, all three variables matter simultaneously. The focus is on understanding how each variable works and which shifts in which variables drive the outcomes of interest. The framework is illustrated in figure 1. It is expected that the balance might change over time. For example, while for

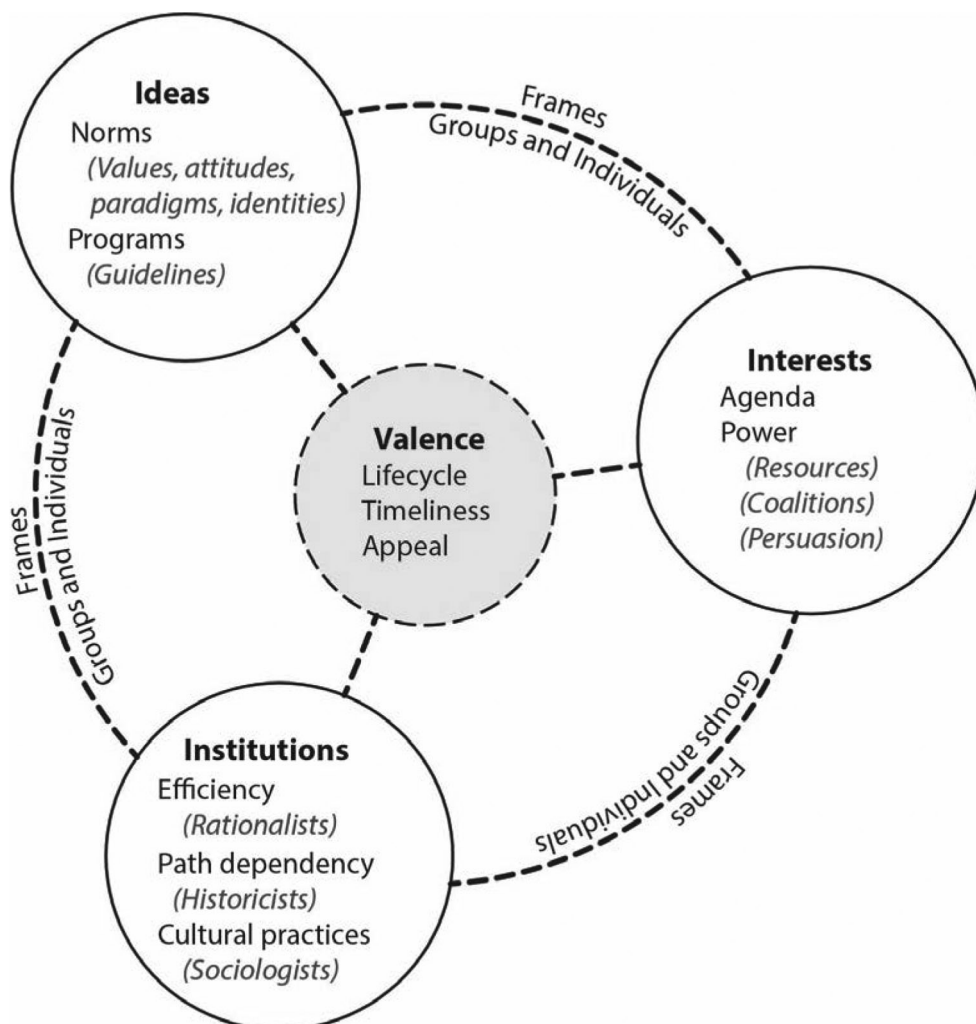


Figure 1. Analytic framework.

a period a lobby might successfully push certain problems to the forefront of the agenda, later on, policy change might be achieved through the actions of key individuals within government institutions.

Ideas, interests, and institutions connect and interact via key individuals such as elected officials, stakeholders, and policy consultants. They may be part of epistemic communities—networks of professionals with recognized expertise and skill in a particular issue or area (Haas, 1992). These actors or connectors ‘frame’ or construct problems and solutions based on their viewpoint, allegiance, skillset, and preferred course of action. Here, the term ‘framing’ refers to words, images, phrases, and presentation styles used by one person to relay information to another (Druckman, 2001).

Recently, the concept of ‘valence’ has been used to explain the interaction mechanism that produces policy change (or resists policy change if there is insufficient valence). The term is used both in chemistry and in psychology and refers to the conditions when certain public policies seem attractive or ‘sticky’ at particular junctures. It often has to do with impulse more than with reason and might explain why new policies are able to penetrate institutions, why canard policies endure over time, and why relevant policies fail to gain traction. A policy concept is attractive when its valence matches the mood of a target population. According to Cox and Béland (2013) policy valence depends on: (1) the policy lifecycle (eg, the extent

to which existing policies are valued or discredited); (2) timeliness or *zeitgeist* (ie, the sense that a ‘time for change has come’); and (3) the appeal of concepts or ideas (ie, the emotional intensity of attraction).

Regardless of the interaction between ideas, interests, and institutions, during stable economic and political periods public policy tends to change incrementally. From time to time, however, special ‘windows of opportunity’ are opened, which allow for sweeping policy changes that are unthinkable under normal circumstances. Windows of opportunity may be the result of electoral landslides, shocks, crises, or other disturbances (Birkland, 2010).

TOD-related efforts in the Netherlands

Building on the analytical framework presented above, this section discusses how the TOD idea has risen to prominence due to its promised efficiency and how, at the same time, power barriers within and outside institutions have prevented its implementation. The analytical framework, which combines ideas, interests, institutions, and their relationship (through connectors and the frames that they construct), is used to study the Dutch ideological, political, and institutional context related to TOD.

Ideas: TOD as an efficient urban development policy

Dutch planning has historically been based on planning doctrines or norms guiding politicians and planning practitioners (Roodbol-Mekkes et al, 2012). For a long time the underlying philosophy of the Dutch planning doctrine was ‘rule and order’, which primarily concerns urban growth control through policies that affect the location, intensity, and timing of development (Faludi and van der Valk, 1994). The dominant Dutch planning doctrine has been articulated in different ways since WWII. The main stages have been:

(1) 1950s and earlier: ‘concentric growth’ policy around existing cities to preserve open spaces and minimize the costs of servicing land. With increasing urbanization and pressures on infrastructure this type of growth was later believed to be unsustainable.

(2) 1960s and 1970s: ‘concentrated deconcentration’ policy, meaning controlled dispersal, allowing for suburban development but only in designated growth centers and new towns. This policy, which reflected the middle-class desire to suburbanize, led to declines in urban population, public services, employment, and income.

(3) 1980s: ‘compact city’ policy, reconcentrating development in major urban centers. While this policy focused attention on larger cities, rural communities and small towns were left in limbo. Infill growth reduced open space and rising real estate prices in the central areas of expanding cities led to social segregation.

(4) The concept of the Randstad (a ring of cities including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague, and Utrecht, with a ‘green heart’ in the middle) complemented the compact city policy. In the 2000s the Randstad concept started to be replaced by the Deltametropolis concept which encompasses all the urban agglomerations in the Randstad. To date, however, this concept has not been fully internalized in Dutch planning policy.

(5) 1990s: ‘ABC’ policy. Locations were labeled A, B, and C, according to their level of accessibility by public transport and automobile (ie, city centers were A locations, first-ring suburbs were B locations, and exurban sites were C locations). Lack of parking and limited car access at premier A and B locations led businesses to relocate towards cheaper, car-oriented locations in the urban outskirts. For reasons of impracticality, the ABC policy was quietly shelved at the end of the 1990s.

The demise of the ABC policy in the 1990s resulted in the loss of a clear doctrine or norm on transport and land-use planning at the regional and local levels, and the creation of a policy void. Recent interest in the TOD concept can be regarded as an attempt to fill this void. Interviewees consistently noted that TOD has become popular on account of the desire

to meet the needs of the new generation that is reembracing urban living and sustainability concerns.

Dutch cities, alongside their European counterparts, are currently undergoing a veritable urban revival movement, which is reversing the effects of the 1970s suburban flight. The well-educated, highly skilled, highly paid ‘creative’ workforce prefers urban ‘trendy’ and vibrant locations with high-quality design and social and cultural activities. It cherishes urban individuality and difference rather than suburban uniformity. Moreover, for the more socially and economically mobile members of society, it is more convenient to live near multimodal nodes. The former trading centers of the Dutch Golden Age are regaining their centrality and economic vitality, with Amsterdam and Utrecht at the forefront. They have become crucial nodes of the ‘knowledge industry’ (Raspe and van Oort, 2006).

The quality of life in cities has become increasingly important for attracting the ‘knowledge industry’. In cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam proactive public programs were put in place when urban problems reached a critical stage. Both public transport and car access have been increased. Above all, the urban image has been overhauled. Refound urbanity is a windfall for transit. As large cities become more popular, space becomes scarcer and costlier, congestion increases, and access becomes more difficult. Several local and regional governments see TOD as one of the most efficient ways to reduce housing costs while preserving high access levels (interviewees 8 and 28). Stedenbaan in the southern part of the Randstad, the Province of Gelderland in the east, and the City of Eindhoven in the south have become TOD beacons in the Netherlands (Snellen, 2013). Major cities in the rest of Europe are moving in the same direction. The eagerness to project an image of progress and success, matching European competitors and obtaining EU funding, also explain the interest in TOD.

Sustainability concerns are another rational drive towards TOD (interviewees 7 and 32). Several interviewees considered that, until a few decades ago the Dutch government invested most transport monies in road construction. Instead of taking advantage of the extra capacity at existing suburban rail stations, much new housing was located in car-oriented exurban sites. Transit followed later, once a certain threshold density was reached. In the last decade, with the realization that traffic congestion is detrimental on many levels, public transport has been given higher political priority (interviewees 18 and 34).

Interests: uninterested stakeholders

While many planners are drawn to the TOD concept, the same cannot be said for developers and residents. The economic crisis has hindered developers’ interest, while weak marketing efforts have not succeeded in ‘selling’ the concept to the community.

Developers and the crisis factor

Observers agree that market players (such as developers) now feature more prominently in the planning process (Roodbol-Mekkes et al, 2012). One planner noted that, with the crisis, the public sector feels almost powerless in planning for TOD or guiding any development:

“Developers run the show now” (interviewee 9).

However, some developers are currently barely surviving (according to interviewee 42, from the private sector). They are having difficulties selling or renting their completed projects, due to dwindling consumer purchasing power and confidence and prohibitive mortgage lending conditions. As a result, they are not enthusiastic about new investments (interviewee 42).

The data on house construction and sales illustrate the magnitude of the slump in housing production and place these comments in perspective. House prices decreased by around 20% in the five-year period from 2008 to 2012 (CPB, 2013), and the number of sales across all segments of the housing market declined by approximately 34% during the same period, and

the number of building permits in the ownership market has almost halved between 2008 and 2011 (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013).⁽¹⁾

From a developers' standpoint, building near stations is problematic even during periods of economic prosperity. Here land prices are high, landownership is fragmented, the soil is often contaminated, the living environment is noisy, safety regulations are strict, and conflicts abound with a multitude of actors, including Dutch Rail, local municipalities, local bus companies, and local residents (interviewees 10, 11, 12, 13, 36, and 42). Moreover, developers are deterred by the requirement that a high percentage of new housing units be allocated for social housing, even in high-cost TOD areas (interviewees 12 and 13).

In view of brownfield redevelopment challenges and the anxieties produced by the crisis for both the public and the private sectors, some professionals are beginning to doubt the effectiveness of TOD as a panacea, which is apparent from the following interviews:

“TOD might not be the most appropriate planning tool to use during an economic crisis.

TOD was a tool to reach certain goals. Now, goals have changed. The most pressing question at the moment is not ‘how to create more TOD’ but ‘how to reuse empty offices’, ‘how to manage negative growth?’ But for some planners, TOD has become an end in itself ... an ideology pushed by transit lovers” (interviewee 28).

“TOD is a ‘good weather’ policy In the crisis, each city is left to its own devices, fighting for any development it can get” (interviewee 21).

Interviewees frequently mentioned that the financial crisis has altered attitudes towards all development, not only TOD. In a country already crowded with development, grand projects on large tracts of land are no longer in vogue. Cities are looking for opportunities to improve the design quality of smaller sites that already have good public transport access and interested actors. New projects too are smaller scale and more flexible and there is a move towards more community and private sector involvement (interviewees 1, 32, 34, 40, and 41). This is exemplified by the following quote from an official in the City of Amsterdam:

“Developers don’t build and people don’t buy so the government has lost its vision and self-confidence. Plans have become more modest. We realize that we can’t loan money from the future” (interviewee 2).

However, even in the current situation, TOD offers some hope for the public and the private sectors, as real estate prices around rail stations have remained stable even while they have fallen in other locations (interviewees 22 and 31). Multimodal hubs, which combine car and rail access, remain the most attractive employment locations, especially for specific sectors such as healthcare and education (Snellen, 2013). Before the financial crisis, a number of major railway station renewal projects were approved, involving substantial amounts of government infrastructure funds (table 2). The projects were meant to contribute substantially to the physical and economic structure of the country (Majoor and Schuiling, 2008; Spaans et al, 2013). These railway station renovation projects, which are currently ongoing, provide opportunities for new TOD (interviewees 33 and 36). In locations with high centrality, such as the new Amsterdam business district (*Zuidas*), there is still substantial development interest from firms that need to be visible to their clients (interviewees 10, 11, and 31). However, opportunities for TOD are certainly not only limited to these major railway station renewal projects.

⁽¹⁾The national housing statistics for 2013 suggest that house prices may be stabilizing: average prices dropped in the first half of the year but did not experience much change in the second half of 2013 (Statistics Netherlands, 2014).

Table 2. Key infrastructure projects initiated in the mid-2000s (station redevelopment accompanied by mixed-use development—offices, shops, and housing—in the surrounding areas) [sources: Majoor and Schuiling (2008), Priemus (2006); note that the discussion in this article is not limited to these projects].

Location	Scale (ha)	National government investment (€ millions)
Amsterdam Zuidas (South Station)	210	653
Rotterdam Central Station	20	215
Utrecht Central Station	90	130
The Hague Central Station	16	307
Arnhem Central Station	24	84
Breda Station	13	62

Community preferences and marketing efforts

TOD might succeed in the Netherlands if the general public was interested in transit-oriented living and working, but it is not clear if this is the case. More empirical research is needed to measure household and business location preferences in relation to TOD. In terms of modal split, compared with the rest of Europe, the Netherlands is fairly typical in terms of the amount of car travel while the distance travelled by bus, tram, and metro (especially the last two) is lower than average (European Commission, 2013). On one hand, TOD could be seen as a great opportunity for promoting higher bus, tram, and metro usage. On the other hand, however, low levels of current use can be seen as an indication that these modes are less favored or less desirable. In the Netherlands, especially in cities, cycling rates are higher than any other country in Europe: the bicycle is often used for journeys that are typically made by bus, tram, and metro in other countries. While this does not necessarily mean that there is little support for public transport in the Netherlands, it does mean that the culture of using modes like the tram and metro is certainly different from that in other parts of Europe. On a more optimistic note, rail travel in the Netherlands is higher than the EU average (in terms of kilometers travelled per person) and is also higher than its near neighbors, including Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom (European Commission, 2013). Nevertheless, the proportion of journeys made by rail in the Netherlands is not high: only 2% of all journeys were made by train in 2012 (table 3). Moreover, the traditional TOD premise of living and working in close proximity to the station (where development is located in the immediate environs of the station, usually within a few hundred meters) is profoundly affected by the use of cycles in the Netherlands. Rail commuters often live three or four kilometers from a station and use the bicycle for the first part of their commute. This means that station area locations are not always the most desirable, particularly in terms of residential development. The following quote from an interviewee (with direct experience of how TOD works in Asia) illustrates this point:

“In the Netherlands, if you live next to a train station, you are a bit of a loser. It’s different in Tokyo, where housing prices are highest next to stations and social status is determined based on which line you live next to” (interviewee 32).

In recent years mobility has been reduced due to growing unemployment, telecommuting options offered by employers, and low population growth rates. With less traffic congestion, many people do not feel the need to live near transit stations to achieve better access to work and entertainment (interviewee 20). In the central areas of larger cities, which are compact, there is less drive for TOD among consumers because a high percentage of the people live close to train stations or other good urban transit. In smaller suburban towns TOD is seen as a less pressing issue due to an excessive number of roads, which make car travel easy and

Table 3. Modal split in the Netherlands, the Randstad, and Amsterdam in 2012 (percentage of trips) (sources: Meijer, 2012; Statistics Netherlands, 2014).

Mode	Netherlands (%)	Amsterdam (%)	Randstad (%)		
			Utrecht (province)	Noord-Holland (province)	Zuid-Holland (province)
Car driver	33	28 ^a	30	28	32
Car passenger	14		14	12	14
Train	2	4	3	3	2
Bus/tram/metro	2	14	2	4	3
Motorcycle	1	–	1	1	1
Cycle	28	30	30	31	25
Walk	18	24	18	20	20
Other	1	–	1	1	2

^aCar drive plus passenger.

attractive (interviewee 3). Some planners see TOD as an appropriate office location policy but not necessarily a suitable housing location policy for the Netherlands (interviewees 23 and 28). In some cases TOD has been proposed in locations that are unlikely to succeed in attracting middle-class residents, as one interviewee observed:

“Amsterdam’s strategic plan prescribes housing construction along the metro line, the highway, and the Zaan river. These places are outside the inner core and the ring where many people like to live. The peripheries are the hotbed of socioeconomic problems—that’s where most public housing is concentrated” (interviewee 21).

Some interviewees attributed the lack of community interest in TOD to the widespread bicycle use which allows residents to reach a station located several kilometers away from home (see above). Others attribute it to the weak marketing and awareness-raising efforts undertaken by the public sector and developers (interviewees 28 and 38). One interviewee said:

“TOD is about image. It’s about making train stations ‘sexy’” (interviewee 36).

Institutions: (ir)rational goals and motivations

While TOD is seen by many Dutch planners as one of the most efficient ways to develop urban areas in the future, institutional action in favor of TOD is constrained by history, tradition, and culture. Interviews revealed that strains within Dutch planning and transport institutions are a major reason why no linear path can be followed from the identified issues (environmental protection, accessibility, and urban livability) to a ‘rational’ solution (TOD).

Centralized decentralization

Until recently, all three Dutch government tiers (national, provincial, and local) shared the responsibility for implementing planning policies through a formal hierarchy of plans. In 2005, following a common European trend towards more local autonomy, various spatial planning functions were devolved to the municipal level. However, the national government retained substantial influence in urban planning (Nadin and Stead, 2008); tax collection and redistribution remained centralized.

Interviewee opinions on the impact of the decentralization reform on TOD planning varied substantially. While some believed that a decentralized environment is more transparent, streamlined, and accessible, others lamented the diminished role of the national government and missed the efficiencies of top-down planning. They pointed out that no long-term unifying and inspiring vision has been produced recently and that TOD-related policies are driven by negotiation, compromise, and opportunism.

Dutch planning institutions are still in the process of settling in their new roles. In terms of transport planning, municipalities must compete with each other to obtain funding from the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment for transport-related projects. Also, the Ministry funds and oversees national train services and the main ports. The Ministry views TOD as one of several suitable tools available to achieve the goals of accessibility, livability, and competitiveness stated in the new national strategic plan (interviewee 17). Some institutional actors resent the fact that the national government provides infrastructure funds but not development funds (for land purchase or construction) to cities and regions, thus de facto prioritizing transport over spatial planning and housing (interviewee 9).

In redistributing tax, the ministry considers the demands of local governments but also follows a policy of equality between regions so that fringe areas are not depleted of jobs and services. Institutional actors in larger cities are dissatisfied with this policy. They believe that investments in marginal locations are wasteful, while investments in economic ‘engines’ (eg, in Amsterdam, or around Schiphol Airport or the port of Rotterdam) trigger a multiplier effect, which then trickles down to the peripheries (interviewees 3, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 18).

In terms of land-use planning, the ministry prepares a national strategic plan but this is not a legally binding document (MinIenM, 2011). It simply provides guidance to localities on how to select development locations, including TOD nodes (KiM, 2012; interviewees 15, 17, 38, and 42). Municipalities have control over the land uses within their borders, while the task of coordinating development at the regional level now belongs to the provinces.

Regional coordination is not simple because Dutch cities compete fiercely for private investment within their borders (in addition to competing for public infrastructure investment). They are keen to secure as much employment for their local residents as quickly as possible, in order to increase their overall attractiveness (interviewees 19, 23, 31, 33, and 38). One interviewee recalled:

“A few years ago, before the crisis, I took part in a meeting with top-level ministry representatives and station leaders. It turned out that a fantastic project had been prepared for every Stedenbaan station [in the southern part of the Randstad]. The same story everywhere This is not realistic” (interviewee 8).

Several interviewees expressed fears that competition for local investment might result in an oversupply of development land and in overbuilding, which can translate into high office vacancy rates. Many interviewees indicated that there is considerable pressure for the provinces to prioritize development areas and set regional hierarchies. One interviewee summarized the general sentiment thus:

“Instead of passively approving plans submitted by municipalities, the provinces must learn to actively help municipal governments in preparing those plans, they must reach out to private parties, and above all make decisions on ‘wicked’ issues for which there is no easy agreement” (interviewee 34).

However, the provinces are reluctant to act. They are still struggling to define their role in the new decentralized environment. Interviewees in the Province of North Holland explained the uncomfortable position of assuming the leading role which was played by the national government in the past:

“The province never had a leading role in the past so we find it hard to assume this role now It’s a pity that the national government is no longer involved in spatial planning We are trying to figure out what to do, what people want The province has now extended its influence to urban areas where most TOD is located. But some politicians still think that rural development is our only prerogative. Although there are no legal barriers to our work in urban areas, we still feel like we’re ‘interfering’ with the municipalities’ jurisdiction” (interviewees 12 and 13).

Other interviewees from the City of Amsterdam and Dutch Rail elaborated on the reasons why the provinces have failed to commit to TOD:

“The provinces do not do their job in prioritizing among locations because they do not want to create frictions with municipalities—although province chairs are appointed by the national government, they’re not elected officials. The Dutch ‘polder model’ is about keeping everybody satisfied” (interviewee 31).

“The Province of North Holland is not willing to force the municipalities’ hand. The Dutch cultural preference is for negotiation, finding a middle way. Provinces feel that, if they pull their weight on TOD issues, they will not be listened to on other things. So they need to pick their battles carefully” (interviewee 8).

In major metropolitan areas other dynamics are at play as well. The City of Amsterdam planning department has long followed the principle of steering new development towards public transport lines and stations (interviewees 1 and 18). The city’s progressive council and population support this approach. In fact, the most sought after office locations in Amsterdam are on the rail and metro lines and most employment and education centers in the city can be easily reached by public transport (interviewee 22). However, in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (not a legal entity), small local governments are wary of creating TOD corridors that bring them physically closer to Amsterdam. They fear that absorption into the capital would reduce their independence (interviewee 3).

Power fragmentation within large cities is also an impediment to TOD. In Amsterdam every main transit node has its own development organization run by the private sector. Due to this fragmentation, the city is often unable to take a leading role in TOD creation (interviewees 4, 5, and 6). Nevertheless, the city is making an effort to move towards ‘rational’ decision making in TOD investment, involving cost–benefit analysis.

Land speculation

Dutch municipalities assemble land which they purchase from private parties and later resell or rent to private developers. In the past these powers have allowed for efficient and coordinated, large-scale development (as opposed to piecemeal projects) and have generated an important source of revenue for Dutch local authorities to fund the services that they provide. As various interviewees explained, this speculative approach has disadvantaged TOD implementation. With the recent economic crisis, some authorities have substantial land assets worth less than the purchase price and no buyer in sight. Much of the municipal land stock is located in greenfield areas on the urban fringes. Cities chose this type of land for purchase because they judged it more economical to buy large parcels from farmers than to assemble fragmented and more expensive urban sites around transit stations. At the time of the purchases (more than a decade ago), suburban living was still the norm. Now, municipalities need to develop and sell the land that they are holding before moving to other areas. They are desperate for development. With less bargaining power, they are unwilling to place many restrictions on development (ie, steer it towards transit stations). In a vicious circle, urban competition for development has led to an oversupply of land.

Cultural risk aversion, conflict avoidance, and consensus building

The prevailing culture within planning organizations in the Netherlands is another factor that hampers the achievement of TOD goals. Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede (2001) describes the Dutch work style⁽²⁾ as characterized by independence, autonomy, informality, and

⁽²⁾The Hofstede model of organizational culture explores five dimensions: (1) power distance; (2) individualism versus collectivism; (3) masculinity versus femininity (ie, competition and achievement versus work–life balance); (4) uncertainty avoidance; and (5) long-term versus short-term orientation.

loose hierarchy. Communication is direct and participative and decisions are reached through involvement. People value equality, solidarity, and quality in their working lives. Conflicts are resolved by compromise and negotiation. Long discussions take place until consensus is reached. Individuals and organizations exhibit a preference for avoiding uncertainty. Rigid codes of belief and behavior are maintained and there is strong social pressure to conform. There is an emotional need for rules (even if these are ineffective). Traditions are respected and there is a strong concern with establishing the truth (ie, normative frameworks). Quick results are seen as desirable (Hofstede, 2001).

Some of these cultural traits, such as equality and solidarity in the workplace, might seem enviable to individuals accustomed to strict work hierarchies, competition, micromanagement, and large pay gaps among coworkers, which are common in many countries. However, other traits, such as resistance to change, attachment to tradition, rigidity, excessive rules, and time-consuming consensus building, play against the implementation of TOD, which involves a plethora of actors with varying interests and trajectories. The interviews with planners from both the public and the private sectors confirmed Hofstede's findings on local cultural practices. Interviewees blamed general inertia and conservatism, lack of creative thinking "outside the box", lack of "guts", overly lengthy negotiation times, ambiguous decisions formulated in such a way "as to make everybody happy", excessive focus on minutia, unwillingness to experiment with new approaches, and a desire to cling to old concepts (such as the preservation of the Randstad Greenheart) for the ineffectiveness of TOD planning and implementation (interviewees 3, 31, 34, 37, 42, and 40).

Divide between planning strands

Efficient TOD requires the parallel development of transport networks and urban systems. However, traditionally in the Netherlands transit systems were built independently, with buildings around stations added later as opportunities arose (interviewees 18 and 35). Interviewees attributed this less-than-optimal practice to the strained communication between transport and land-use planners. They explained that collaboration between these two planning disciplines is difficult because they often belong in different sections of government organizations. Transport and land-use planners have different agendas, priorities, cultures, and *raison d'être*, and dislike working together (interviewees 31, 35, and 41). The language that they use to formulate the TOD concept is vastly different, as the quote from an interviewee from the City of Amsterdam illustrates:

"Transport and land-use planning are two worlds apart; people don't understand each other" (interviewee 3).

Transport planners talk about infrastructure, nodes, corridors, technology, figures, and money. Land-use planners, on the other hand, are focused on aesthetics, visions, activity hubs, and spatial flows. Moreover, finance streams are often separate for transport and land-use development. Therefore, investments in transport infrastructure at one location (to ensure sufficient access) must often wait for investments in housing and office buildings at the same location (to ensure sufficient passengers) and vice versa, resulting in a 'chicken-and-egg' situation for TOD (interviewees 1, 15, 17, 18, and 41).

Connectors: reclusive lobby, indifferent politicians, and unfocused frame

A small but very active epistemic community—with participation from government, the private sector, nonprofits, and academia—has formed to promote the TOD concept. TOD lobby members have gained substantial expertise on issues related to TOD. Meeting frequently, they keep each other updated on policies and practices related to development near transport nodes or along transport corridors. However, a number of interviewees lamented the fact that the lobby is a reclusive, tight circle, which has not opened up to a larger audience. Its members have been ineffective in reaching out to small outlying cities in need of TOD

knowledge and in persuading the public at large of the benefits of TOD (interviewees 8, 23, and 42). One interviewee commented:

“We always see the same faces at these TOD meetings” (interviewee 14).

TOD policy diffusion has also proved difficult because the TOD lobby has been unable to recruit influential politicians to act as ‘TOD missionaries’ (interviewees 37, 41, and 42). As Bertolini and le Clercq (2003) noted a decade ago, the acceptability of policy measures either to promote transit environments or to reduce car dominance is low and thus problematic for achieving TOD. Political interest in TOD is currently generally slim. Several interviewees felt that the effective lifespan of Dutch politicians is too short for TOD implementation (interviewees 12, 13, and 31). Interviewees highlighted a few typical questions of politicians concerning TOD proposals: “can the city make money with TOD?”, “why now, what’s the urgency?”, “does TOD solve my problem today?” (interviewees 8, 12, 13, and 31).

In addition to the lack of TOD ambassadors, the unfocused frame around this concept has precluded TOD from assuming normative status. Clearly, framing planning ideas is particularly important in the Netherlands where, as mentioned, there is a cultural preference for having a planning doctrine to guide development at all levels. As outlined above, the TOD idea is closer to a ‘program’ than to a ‘norm’. As such, it requires a clear vision, as well as accompanying guidelines for implementation. However, there was certainly no clear-cut agreement on what TOD encompasses, or whether TOD is a normative or a programmatic idea, among the interviewees.⁽³⁾ Definitions vary a great deal in terms of the scale (node versus network, neighborhood versus region) assigned to TOD. While vagueness might increase the appeal of the concept, this has also resulted in confusion and further vagueness as the following interviewee noted:

“In general the Dutch planning community is overly focused on analysis. But TOD discourse is closer to a religious sermon or magical thinking than to reality-based planning policy” (interviewee 42).

Valence: a neutral concept in the right place at the wrong time

As mentioned, a high positive valence depends on the lifecycle, timeliness, and appeal of policy concepts. With regard to lifecycle, interviewees held differing views on the origins of the TOD concept. Some saw it as an exciting new idea, while others believed that TOD is based on much older concepts of rail-based property development that date back more than a century. Still others asserted that TOD originates somewhere in between (ie, in the 1980s and the 1990s), when planners realized that, with job specialization, residents could not find suitable employment within independent garden-city settlements. Therefore it was decided that new development should be adjacent to existing cities, in the form of TOD.

These inconsistencies might be due to the varied character of TOD and its somewhat raw scientific and intellectual foundations (Hale, 2012). They might also be due to the fact that the term is an American import. The local term is ‘*knooppunt*’, which means ‘node’ but also ‘knot’ or ‘problem’. Hence, some planners are interested in promoting the use of the term TOD due to a somewhat negative connotation of *knooppunt* (interviewees 12 and 13).

The timing has also been very unfavorable due to the financial crisis. This has resulted in hesitation and caution on the part of municipalities and developers. The present recessionary climate has nearly halted growth (interviewee 2, 18, 19, 22, 35, and 40).

⁽³⁾In interviews TOD was variously defined as “integration of transport and spatial planning”, “coordinated land-use and transport development”, “development along rail and road transport corridors”, “development focused around transit nodes”, “station development”, “land-use mix”, “development along transit corridors”, “hierarchical network of corridors, hubs, and nodes”, “regional network-based development strategy”, and “public-transport based urbanization”.

In terms of appeal, the vagueness of the term TOD in some cases and the image of failed TOD projects in the past also conspire to lower the overall appeal of TOD programs. One interviewee offered the following conclusion in regards to TOD valence:

“No one is against TOD. However, the concept is ‘neutral’. People feel that TOD makes sense but when it comes to implementation, no one is committed or proactive” (interviewee 42).

Conclusion

TOD implementation faces many challenges in the Netherlands. This study indicates that all the elements of the adopted analytical approach, including ideas, interests, institutions, connectors (groups, individuals, and frames), and valence simultaneously play a role in this outcome. Overall, the analytic framework was found to be suitable for a qualitative analysis of this type. As for the importance of different factors, inopportune timing due to the economic crisis and the land assembly strategy employed by Dutch municipalities emerge as significant issues affecting TOD implementation (or, rather, the lack of it). Employing the terminology of the analytical framework, neutral valence, low stakeholder interest, and a particular institutional strategy have conspired against TOD implementation. However, the balance might change over time or in another context with structural factors playing a more significant role than cyclical factors.

While not new, the TOD *idea* is seen by many Dutch planners as one of the most efficient urban development policies. On the other hand, Dutch developers and community members, who represent *interests* in our framework, are largely uninterested in TOD. The indifference of developers is due to the current economic crisis, which has placed the real estate market in hiatus. As for the community, while train station areas are seen as convenient workplaces, families and individuals do not perceive them as high-status living environments. Because bicycle use is widespread, the standard distance for nonmotorized travel to train stations is much higher than in other countries. The poor image of past TOD efforts has not helped in turning public opinion in favor of TOD and advancing this policy on the agenda.

Moreover, struggles within Dutch *institutions* have acted against TOD. Institutional path dependencies—including a historically weak role of provinces in coordinating regional development and a traditional divide between transport and land-use planners—have caused delays in implementation and low performance of TOD projects. Cultural practices within Dutch planning organizations—including risk aversion, conflict avoidance, and consensus building—have contributed further to hesitation and the postponement of TOD implementation.

TOD lobby members and local politicians (the *connectors* in our framework) have been ineffective in tying together ideas, interests, and institutions, and *framing* TOD in a positive light. The TOD lobby has operated in isolation from the larger planning community, while politicians have been focused on short-term results—which TOD cannot likely deliver. As understood by practitioners, TOD has remained a rather vague programmatic idea which sits on a slightly unstable base. As a consequence, TOD’s *valence* in the Netherlands is currently rather neutral.

These findings sound a cautionary note about TOD and its implementation in the Netherlands, despite the fact that it has a long planning tradition. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, some Dutch planners are still positive about the future of TOD policy, especially in the Randstad, as the final quote from a member of the Dutch TOD epistemic community exemplifies:

“TOD is better than other models. There is no way back” (interviewee 33).

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