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### The making of Dutch flower culture: Auctions, networks, and aesthetics

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# The Rise of Aalsmeer's Horticultural Grower's Cooperatives

Bloem

Het is een bloem  
om er met een vaantje om rond te gaan  
en zacht te zingen.  
Het is een bloem om niet meer burger te zijn,  
maar een broer van een kinderhemdje in zonneschijn.

Flower

This is a flower  
for wrapping oneself in its flag  
and softly singing.  
This is a flower to quit being a citizen,  
but a brother of a child's t-shirt in sunlight.

Pierre Kemp



### *Aalsmeer's Auction Today*

“This is the place to be,” said Fedor Broers when I asked him why he had come all the way from his farm in Ecuador to the Aalsmeer auction. He cast his eyes across the five-hundred-plus-seated hall up at the triple screens of auction clocks, and then down to the trains of linked flower carts snaking along the floor. “I use the auction as a display for my flowers. That way everybody can get a look. This place is like a global showcase.” On his balance sheet, Fedor doesn’t earn much money at FloraHolland. Most of this Dutch grower’s flowers head directly from his greenhouses near Quito to U.S. destinations in Florida and California. But because Aalsmeer enjoys a central place in the global market, Fedor sells some of his flowers here, promoting his product and getting feedback. And just as important, he maintains regular contact with the Dutch institution—keeping abreast with its innovations in breeding, growing, and marketing, as well as with its exporters, importers, and of course, its auctions.

Nearly sixty-five percent of all the cut flowers and plants sold on Earth move through the Netherlands, with shipments arriving at Schiphol airport, a few kilometers away, from points as far off as Israel, Ethiopia, and Ecuador. But most of the flowers are still grown locally, amid the flat, patchwork distances of West Holland. Aalsmeer’s auction is located right in the thick of things, close to Westland’s greenhouses, and with easy access to air freight for imports and exports. Walking along the floor of this one million cubic meter space might feel odd to the newcomer, like you are inside an airplane hangar instead of a bustling commercial center, or, given all the gadgets and movement, almost like you are inside a Borg cube, albeit a cube full of flowers. Seeing Aalsmeer’s auction, its statistics aren’t hard to believe: with a daily turnover of more than twenty million flowers and two million plants, it earns about six point six million euros per day, nearly four billion annually, and it directly employs forty-five hundred people, though between importers, exporters, and other businesses, over ten thousand people pass through the auction every Monday through Friday. It’s a multinational company with a cooperative structure, which until early 2006 was owned exclusively by Dutch members. Since then, Ecuadorian colleagues of Fedor and other international growers have entered the fold as full fledged members of FloraHolland Aalsmeer. This, the largest flower auction in the world, also takes place in the largest commercial warehouse in the world.

But the industry superlatives don’t end there, since FloraHolland and the horticultural industry are part of a larger picture involving national and regional policies and infrastructure, which coordinate transportation, spacial planning, and other aspects of agriculture. In turn, these policies and practices are informed by family networks of men, a shared national culture, commercial vision, and an ideology of cooperation. Even

given these favorable conditions, it seems astonishing that this small country is one of the world's top agricultural exporters, behind France and the United States, nations with considerably more land. Many Dutch companies in the sector excel. Avebe, in Groningen, is the world's biggest producer of potato starch; the VanDrie group in Apeldoorn leads the global market for veal; Stork tops the list in building conveyor systems to slaughter chickens; the Netherlands is the number one exporter of onions; and the Netherlands also has the world's most prodigious inland shipping fleet, with 8,600 vessels. And of course, the Dutch also export more bulbs, cut flowers, and plants than any other nation. Cut flowers are the most visible face of this agricultural sector, and are perhaps most clearly associated both at home and abroad to conceptions of 'Dutch culture.' Among all the villages that grow flowers and places that host horticultural auctions in the Netherlands, Aalsmeer is probably the best known.

In less than a century, this little town with a cottage flower industry mushroomed to become the high tech, powerful center of global horticultural commerce and innovation. Aalsmeer was quite a different place before the auction, and before residents began in earnest to cultivate roses and other flowers. Prior to its poldering, the area was best known for a shallow lake popular with eel fishermen (hence its name, Aalsmeer). Later, locals grew and sold strawberries on the land, and until the late nineteenth century, that's what the town was known for, a bit of heritage still reflected on its flag. But already in the nineteenth century there were flower growers. By 1860, a hundred growers in Aalsmeer were producing lilies, carnations, and above all, roses, but due to overproduction and competition between one another, business remained fragile and not very profitable. Growers delivered their blooms to market via canal boat, horse, and bicycle, a transportation system that continued into the first decades of the twentieth century. So what happened in Aalsmeer? How did today's fast paced, prosperous, high volume institution come from this?

It developed through grower's cooperatives, and they sell their flowers and plants at auction. If many of the important general features of Dutch horticulture emerged in the seventeenth century, the flower industry as we know it today really began to coalesce at the end of the nineteenth century. That was when flower growers first came together and organized to sell their flowers communally and via local auction. There were some structural factors that smoothed the way for this to happen, namely an agrarian crisis that caused deep rural poverty and migration to the cities. But this is only part of the picture, since it is generally agreed that the agrarian crisis didn't directly hurt the horticultural sector, and the areas where the auctions emerged were not strictly rural but a mixture of agricultural land and industry in Noord-Holland and Westland (Kemmers 1987: 14). Once the auctions began, agriculture and horticulture began to change. Horticultural cooperatives strongly influence the entire production chain, including breeding, growing techniques, transportation, and pricing. From the simple

but elegant arrangement of grower-owned cooperative auctions, the entire industry took shape. The grower's organizations and their method of sale has made this happen. With their social and commercial organizations, they define the industry. Equally important to Aalsmeer's rise, and an aspect that seems most clearly tied to the past, is the industry's cultural logic, which is expressed in organizational patterns as well as how people in the industry talk about what they do and why they do it. Networks are big part of that, both structurally and ideologically, as they process and circulate information on a local and global scale.

Many typical network characteristics make them an ideal architecture for the horticultural business, and a natural fit for Dutch horticultural cooperatives. Networks enable the industry to accomplish a lot. They distribute risk, by widely dispersing ownership and investment, and by encouraging and building in both cooperation and trust. They're adaptable to often rapid and subtle fluctuations in the market, they circulate information essential to innovation that allows the Netherlands to dominate the flower business, and they diffuse cultural information to the wider public about flowers and the Netherlands. In some ways, Dutch horticultural networks conform to ideas of how they supposedly function in the abstract, like the conception of small and large groups working together being characteristically Dutch, and in their modern form, growing out of pillarization. But in other respects, the horticultural business doesn't work the way theories describe. Some predict that in the emerging information-based society, social and economic networks would become more loosely organized, informal, and virtually based, that technology would increasingly supplant the human base of networks (Castells 1996, Van Dijk 1999). But in the flower industry, networks are shaped by physical proximity, cultural familiarity, and shared outlook. In the Netherlands, they are forged with groups of neighbors and local growers who meet regularly; among traders sitting elbow to elbow in auction halls; through casual contact in the supermarket or on the street; family connections; acquaintances from school; or through informal but professional contact at any of the frequent flower industry events. Standard theories also argue that a network has no center, but rather many different nodes (Castells 2000), but in the global horticultural industry, the Netherlands clearly represents a center, and Aalsmeer, as the flagship auction, is situated right at the bulls-eye. Furthermore, in horticultural networks, place remains important. Above all, it's important to people who work in Dutch horticulture, but also, in a variety of ways, to the political and financial life of the country, and even to local and national identity. As Fedor's comments illustrate, the Netherlands occupies center stage in the global flower business, with Aalsmeer as one of the primary sales and distribution centers.

It's the initiative and practice of growers that launched the industry, and they're still a strong reason why it is so successful and works the way it does. In some ways, Fedor epitomizes the evolution of the Aalsmeer's auctions from a business held in a

village pub to one located in a giant building with a cosmopolitan view. Fedor's father was a tomato farmer, and stayed close to his village near Rijnsburg his whole life, but Fedor has an MBA and studied agriculture for a year in the U.S. while in college. He speaks Dutch, English, Spanish and Italian, and his flower business has led him to East Africa, Japan, and south America. He's at ease discussing African droughts, Latin American politics, currency crises, hitch hiking in the U.S., Geert Wilders, flower breeding, and the place of FloraHolland in it all. Urbane, good humored, and with dynamic and practical views on business, Fedor may not represent a typical cultivar, but nor are these qualities especially unusual among Dutch flower growers.

### ***How the Need and Opportunity for Flower Auctions Emerged***

The beginnings of Dutch horticulture in the seventeenth century follow a narrative of the emerging nation moving rapidly from an isolated, rural perspective to a more integrated, cosmopolitan one. Aalsmeer's auctions in the twentieth century reflect a similar pattern of growth. They both mirror and facilitate the transition from a provincial, insular, small town business to a sophisticated, influential, worldly one. Though the foundations for Dutch horticulture were laid in the seventeenth century, and though horticultural auctions began only in the nineteenth, the Dutch flower market did not merely stagnate in deep freeze during the intervening two centuries. In addition to the ideological and organizational patterns established in the Golden Age, several developments in and outside the Netherlands made horticultural auctions an attractive option during the middle-end of the nineteenth century.

By the eighteenth century, Dutch tulips had gained international renown for quality and variety, and the Netherlands was exporting bulbs to neighboring Germany, France, England, and elsewhere. Tulip and daffodil bulb cultivation expanded around Haarlem and further south, as well as in Noordwijk, Uitgeest, and Lisse. Although transportation for moving cut flowers rapidly over great distances was still a ways off, there was an expanding international market for the more durable Dutch flower bulbs. Also, the practice of pleasure gardens continued, and gradually became widespread, which bolstered interest in ornamental flowers. Tulips remained prevalent, but by the 1730s, another flower of Persian origin, the hyacinth, began to captivate the popular imagination in the Netherlands. Hyacinths, roses, daffodils, tulips and other ornamentals joined with shrubs and small trees in creating beautiful gardens. The French revolution influenced social relations in the entire region with more demands for equality, and lower classes began to purchase flowers (Goody 1993: 233-253). Still, horticultural production remained largely focused on flower bulbs, trees, and shrubs for gardens, as well as fruits and vegetables.

An equally important development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the masculinization of citizenship in the Netherlands. In this era, ideas about manhood and the nation took shape, and informed one another as the country moved from a republic to a monarchy. An ideal crystallized of the new citizen as male, possessing military daring and mettle, and earning a wage (Dudink 2001). If growing flowers did not generate money, it seems unlikely many men would have taken up growing—aesthetic appeal notwithstanding. Along with these social shifts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, technological advancements started to change growing practices. In the middle of the nineteenth century, growers began to use glass houses to cultivate grape vines. Soon, with some modifications and heating introduced, people were also growing flowers in them. Glass houses allowed production of cut flowers on a comparatively massive scale, and extended the growing season.

A longer growing season, a new growing environment, and the increased volume of cut flowers led to several consequences. Aalsmeer growers began to cultivate lilacs and roses en masse, with many specializing in roses. Then, as more and new varieties flooded the market, prices fell. Flowers became both more plentiful and affordable, which was generally good for expansion of the market, making flowers available to a wider public and during more months of the year. But on the other hand, growers had no control over price, and felt pinched. In one way, glass houses made their job easier, but it was hard for them to earn money, since the buyers, the flower traders, would consistently undercut prices. Traders set growers against each other in a race to offer the lowest price. It was a buyer's market, very unstable for flower growers. Another part of the buyer's strong position came from their distribution networks, which were important because the consumer market was centered not in Aalsmeer, but in Amsterdam. Flower and plant growers were frustrated.

But it was a different story for the fruit and vegetable growers. They organized themselves into cooperatives and sold their goods at auction, and they put together their own distribution services. Their initial goal was not to set up an auction per se, but to form an organization that would protect them as a group (Kemmers 1987: 12). The idea was for buyers to come to them and compete with each other on the market for the best price. And growers preferred the method of sale over some sort of collective shipping: it was “simple” and “required little or no market orientation<sup>37</sup>” (Kemmers 1987: 14). At auction, fruit and vegetable growers got better prices, and the buyers were assured higher quality, because products had to meet certain standards to be sold. For mass produced, highly perishable goods, the system proved fast and efficient.

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<sup>37</sup> “De leiding behoeft weinig of geen marktorientatie te verwerven.”



After eyeing this arrangement with envy, in 1899 Aalsmeer flower and plant growers who supplied Amsterdam came together to found De Vereenigde Tuinbouwers, or United Horticulturalists. They opened an auction on the Marnixstraat in Amsterdam, and the main local market was along the Singel canal downtown, where there is still a daily flower market. But this auction and market served only a portion of Aalsmeer horticulturalists. Other Aalsmeer growers thought it made more sense to auction their plants and flowers closer to home, and so in 1911 and then in 1912, they began two auctions in Aalsmeer. The first, which began in Welkom pub, was called Bloemenlust, or Flower Passion, and the second, which opened business in De Drie Kolommen pub, was called Centrale Aalsmeerse Veiling, or Central Aalsmeer Auction, CAV. In addition to the local market, they especially focused on exports to Germany, sending boats with small trees and shrubs by sea to Hamburg and Bremen as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>38</sup> (Hogenwoning 1987: 82).

### ***Aalsmeer Grower's Cooperative Timeline***<sup>39</sup>

**1901:** *Coöperatieve Verenigde Tuinbouwers founded (in Amsterdam) selling fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants*

**1911:** *Bloemenlust founded in Aalsmeer.*

**1912:** *Centrale Aalsmeerse Veiling, or CAV, founded in Aalsmeer.*

**1912-1929:** *Steady growth, advances in transportation and greenhouse technology. Numerous other horticultural auctions spring up around Westland*

**1929:** *Dutch horticultural auctions earn nearly a half million guilders, in comparison with fruit and vegetable auctions, which earned 19 million.*

**1929:** *KLM offers the first 'bloemenvluchten' (flower flights) from Waalhaven (Rotterdam's airport, later destroyed in the war) to London, which was important from all of Westland's auctions.*

**1930s:** *Sales continue but growth levels out, no increases.*

**1934:** *Auction law passed which requires agriculture and horticulture to be sold via cooperative auction.*

**1940-1945:** *Horticultural business shut down during the war. No auction sales.*

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<sup>38</sup> "Zelfs in de 17e en 18e eeuw gingen reeds schuitjes met bomen en heesters vanuit Aalsmeer over zee naar Hamburg en Bremen"

<sup>39</sup> Most of the information and figures here come from *100 jaar veiling in de tuinbouw* (1987) and *An Illustrated History of the Aalsmeer Flower Auction* (2005).

**1946-1964:** Post war boom, rapid horticultural growth, and infrastructural expansion.

**1964:** Bloemenlust and CAV merge into Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer, the Aalsmeer Flower Auction, or VBA.

**1967:** Auction law repealed.

**1970-1995:** Number of cooperative auctions in the Netherlands shrinks from 88 to 6, and those 6 were all horticultural auctions

**1970s:** Major advancements in logistics, benefitting the local economy in many ways (e.g. Aalsmeer's Verhoef Aluminum Scheepsbouw Industry begins manufacturing the newly designed stacking carts and trays.)

**1972:** New auction building opens.

**1973-1977:** Oil crises, shock to imports and exports.

**1979:** Growers vote to change from six day auction sales to five, closing the auction on Saturdays.

**1980s and 1990s:** Continued steady growth. Rising number of international growers sell at Aalsmeer's auction, but only as non voting members of the cooperative. Nationally, more auctions are merging.

**1995:** Dutch growers open the world's first online flower auction, TFA (Tele Flower Auction).

**2006:** Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer opens doors to non Dutch growers as full voting members of the cooperative.

**2008:** The Netherlands' two largest flower auctions merge, and Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer grows even larger and more powerful with FloraHolland. The merger was challenged in court as violating anti-monopoly laws, but allowed to proceed. FloraHolland has six auction locations: Aalsmeer, Naaldwijk, Rijnsburg, Venlo, Bleiswijk and Eelde.

**2008:** The Netherlands only remaining independent auction Veiling Oost Nederland (VON) voted by a big majority for the merger with Veiling Vleuten to form Plantion

**2009:** For the first time since the 1930s, there was no growth in sales.

**2010:** FloraHolland and German Landgard agree to open the Rhine-Maas auction in Herongen, Germany. Germany is and always has been the biggest international buyer of Dutch horticulture.

**2011-2012:** Ongoing legal disputes with Plantion over cooperation and exchange between the two remaining Dutch horticultural auction-cooperatives.

### ***One Auction to Rule them All: a Hundred Years of an Institution***

The decision of Aalsmeer's growers to organize production through cooperatives that sell at auction has had far reaching effects: cooperative auctions have shaped the anatomy of the industry. This is true in two basic senses. Aalsmeer's horticultural auction, as the largest in the world, influences many aspects of the industry world wide, from setting prices to setting trends, standards, and innovations. Plus, due to its sheer volume of trade, Aalsmeer's auction is unignorable. But Aalsmeer is not the entire industry; many towns began to have flower and plant auctions, and today FloraHolland has six auctions sites, and Plantion, the second remaining independent horticultural auction, is located in Ede. Horticultural auctions have directly shaped growing and selling in the Netherlands, the fundamental segments of the supply chain. Other aspects of the chain, like breeding, wholesaling, and retailing, have fallen into place around the cooperative auction structure. These two related but distinct parts of the story of Aalsmeer's merit separate attention, though in reality they intertwine. One focuses on the evolution of Aalsmeer's auctions from these small time, pub centered businesses to what we see today, and is about an institution; the other describes the development of a national industry, which entails explaining the supply chain and its intricate webbing of supportive horticultural organizations, institutions, and policies. In addition, especially in their first decades, Dutch horticultural auctions formed organizations such as the Groep Bloemsterij and the Kring Bloemenveilingen, which linked cooperatives around Westland and beyond (Hogewoning 1987: 80-94). This did a lot to both stabilize prices and strengthen the position of growers.

Although Aalsmeer growers were the first, they weren't the only, to organize Dutch flower and plant auctions. Within five years of the two Aalsmeer auctions' founding, growers in Rijnsburg began their own, and other areas in Westland followed suit. But from the beginning, in many ways Aalsmeer led the industry. From early on, it had not only the largest market share, but also excelled with the best established export position, mainly to Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Britain, Scandinavia, and Switzerland. From their inception, Bloemenlust and the CAV enjoyed tremendous success in both domestic and international trade, earning in their first year 110,000 and 80,000 guilders, respectively (van Lier 2005: 28). Already in those early days they had a strong market position, partly because the preceding horticultural auction in Amsterdam had ironed out some of the kinks in the system: namely, attracting the exporters to buy at auction rather than independently (Hogewoning 1987: 83). By 1950, profits in Aalsmeer had ballooned to 10.5 million guilders each, and by 1960 they had soared to over 25 million guilders. Among other effects, the auction's success helped to stabilize flower growing as a reliable and suitable profession for a male head of household.

During the same period, a near identical process was going on in nearby Rijnsburg, where the flower trade provided the key to social mobility (Strating 1994: 153-155).

From discussions with older and retired growers, it seems that even during these decades, masculine norms may have been slightly freer and more flexible than in other male dominated institutions. The industry gestalt was certainly rugged and agricultural, but also entrepreneurial and allowed space for flair and eccentricity. In other words, the environment probably had less stolid conventions than among, say, potato farmers, but on the other hand, masculine styles were likely more rustic and spirited than among business owners and independent professionals. These shades of distinction helped to define insiders and outsiders to horticultural networks, and contributed to the cultures of Aalsmeer's two auctions. On a more general level, grower's customs and behavior reflect "the specifically symbolic dimension of male domination" produced partly by ritual, habit, and language (Bourdieu 2001: 3). Equally important to this conceptual relationship are the arenas in which it takes place, where in this case, men are producing signs of distinction, ornamental flowers. The social spaces and the flowers themselves aren't the only gendered aspects of the grower's environment. As the grower cooperatives expanded and dug in to the local terrain, they joined institutions of church and state in "the economy of symbolic goods" that perpetuate gender differences in which men maintain economic power and legal authority (Bourdieu 2001: 96-108).

And expand they did. By the mid 1960s the Central Aalsmeer Auction on Cleefkade, squished in between the village and a flank of glass houses, had run out of room to enlarge, though booming business demanded it. At the same time, several other fortuitous factors nudged the CAV and Bloemenlust toward merger. Auctions in nearby Beverwijk and Vleuten began to draw business from Aalsmeer growers, and some new Aalsmeer growers did not want to honor long standing agreements about where they must auction. Though by the mid sixties pillarization was in decline, differences between the two Aalsmeer auctions were not trivial, so the merger had other dimensions. Bloemenlust growers were Dutch Reformed Protestants and Catholics, while the CAV group were Baptists and socialists, and each circulated in their own social circles, pubs, schools, and sports clubs. But fusion made sense. With the combined strength of both auctions, Aalsmeer could cement its position at the center of national and even international flower trade. Bloemenlust didn't sell plants, but only flowers, mostly roses and carnations, while the CAV did sell plants along with flowers, specializing in lilacs and tulips. Both cooperatives voted overwhelmingly in favor to merge as the Cooperative Society Verenigde Bloemenveilingen Aalsmeer, VBA, or United Flower Auctions Aalsmeer.

The Aalsmeer municipality strove to keep the auspicious business within its boundaries, and negotiated an attractive deal on land where the new, improved, much larger auction structure would be built. In this way, the auction expanded along with

local infrastructure, or vice versa. In either case, Aalsmeer's auctions have been integral to regional planning over the past century. When building highways, intersections, traffic lights and so on, planners have had to take into account the route and schedule of thousands of trucks coming from and going to the auction. Such volumes of traffic also affect quality of life issues for local residents, especially air pollution levels. This has been true as well for nearby Schiphol airport, on which the auction relies as a primary export platform. Since Aalsmeer from the beginning served both the local market and the international one, Schiphol and KLM played a vital part in horticultural distribution. With land transport, the cooperative growers voted to commission their own modes of distribution, partly because, prior to the auctions, the buyers controlled distribution, and that was one reason for the grower's weakness. But they didn't do so with air freight, and some growers feel that the auction made a big mistake. Fedor Broers thinks the cooperative lost a good opportunity by contracting with KLM ("they kind of had their heads up their asses," as he put it) instead of commissioning their own planes, which would have enabled them to have more control over costs, given the volatile prices of oil and that airlines buy fuel in bulk, ahead of time, (and also via auction). Coordinating distribution with KLM, conferring over both internal plans for auction construction and the auction's infrastructural needs with public officials, as well as negotiating financing with banks points out the complexities and intricacies of the institution's growth. Politically, the negotiations on development were sometimes tricky because as the auction grew, it overlapped into four different regions, each of which has separate governance. From this alone, one can see the value of networks and cooperation. Without them, here in this densely populated region, it would be hard to get anything done.

The auction occupies not only a sizeable plot in the regional geography and economy, it is and has been a part of the cultural landscape. One sees this in a variety of ways, from its relationships with schools and organizations to sponsoring local events such as flower parades, or *bloemencorsos*, and charity events. The old Bloemenlust building became a warehouse for the Vroom & Dreesman department store, while the CAV was converted to tv studios. Far more than a site where flowers and plants are sold, the Aalsmeer auctions are insinuated in the popular culture and imagination. Examples abound: a reality dating show in 2008 featured auction employees and was shot on site; a 1977 film, *The Amsterdam Kill* starring Robert Mitchum, climaxed with a chase scene across the Aalsmeer auction floor. But common references to the auction go beyond modish commercial media. Leaders in banking and finance as well as local and national politicians advocate for the industry, especially the industry's largest auction in Aalsmeer. It's also important for flowers to maintain their stature with the public, which is accomplished partly through marketing. But another key way that the industry maintains the flower's power of distinction is through periodic endorsement by national

and international leaders, and the Dutch royal family. After the Bloemenlust/CAV merger in 1964, over several years they constructed a new, vastly larger building to house the United Flower Auctions Aalsmeer, and when it was ready to open in 1972, Prince Claus and Princess Beatrix came forward to inaugurate the world's largest flower auction. In 1946, Winston Churchill toured the CAV, then just resuming business after the war; in 1958 Queen Juliana guided Queen Elizabeth through Bloemenlust; in 2000 Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng visited the VBA; and in 2011 at the centenary celebration of FloraHolland Queen Beatrix made an appearance.

After the 1972 opening, the Aalsmeer auction made several evolutionary leaps forward, reflecting important trends and changes in the industry. Men who were around during that time explained that this felt like a turning point, and compared it to the mergers of 2008. By the early seventies, the auction had reached a size where old ways of doing things were no longer efficient, and so the auction developed a number of internal practices and devices that made business easier, faster, and more reliable. Some of these advancements related to the greenhouse and were developed by growers, and some came from people working in the auction and related to storage, as cut flowers require refrigeration to maintain freshness. One advancement involved devising an aluminum cart with many trays. These carts made transport from greenhouse to auction safer and allowed far more volume per truck, and once at the auction site, transport became smoother from truck to storage, from storage to the auction halls where buyers sit, and then on to the buyer's lots parked across the warehouse floor. The carts were also a boon for local business, since they could be produced right in Aalsmeer by the Verhoef Aluminum Scheepsbouw Industry. The auction continued throughout the decade to expand, both in sales volume and reach, and by leasing the considerable auction building space to importers, exporters, and other businesses.

The first major energy crises also took place in the 1970s, and they affected Dutch growers in several ways. The industry depends on oil and gas for the production of fertilizers, for heating and cooling, and of course also for distribution by plane and truck. The Aalsmeer cooperative was fortunate, though, in that the majority of trade was still regional and by truck (much less costly than air freight), and because of the Netherlands' natural gas reserves, which had been discovered a decade earlier in the North Sea, and which growers used generously due to the government-sponsored discount rate. Nevertheless, the volatility of oil prices and supply signaled a warning shot both to the Aalsmeer cooperative and to the industry. Dutch growers began to feel concerned about where and how their flowers and plants would be grown and distributed in the future. Also, the oil crises occurred around the same time that the Aalsmeer cooperative voted to allow for the first time flower imports to be sold at their auction. The international growers, mostly in Israel and Spain, remained only a small

percentage of turnover (eight percent in the first decade), and they were hit hardest by the oil crises.

In spite of this, in the 1980s and 1990s the auction tended toward increased international growth and sales, though internationally produced horticulture remained under thirty percent of turnover until the new millenium, and even now it constitutes only thirty-five percent. In 2006, the cooperative voted to allow foreign based growers into the collective as full voting members. But perhaps a more dramatic trend during these decades involved the consolidation of auctions themselves though mergers. Although nationally, overall growth and sales continued to rise, the number of horticultural cooperatives shrank. In 2005, the VBA, which was the Netherlands' largest horticultural auction, voted for fusion with FloraHolland, the second largest, resulting in FloraHolland Aalsmeer, and five other auction locations (in Naaldwijk, Rijnsburg, Venlo, Bleiswijk and Eelde).

This merger was disputed in court on the grounds that it represented a monopoly, but the challenge was struck down on the logic that the merger strengthened the Dutch position internationally, and that differences and objections among unaffiliated Dutch growers were essentially irrelevant to the business. Although the initial court decision found that the merger did not violate anti-monopoly laws, the Aalsmeer merger was in 2010 challenged again by the VGB (De Vereniging van Groothandelaren in Bloemkwekerijprodukten, The Association of Wholesale Trade in Horticultural Products). But this time, the focus was on the auction's internet auction, TFA, which Dutch wholesalers argued put them at a disadvantage from FloraHolland Aalsmeer growers located in East Africa, since their products are produced more cheaply but are considered 'Dutch' and thus not subject to import tariffs and laws.<sup>40</sup> The Nederlandse Mededingsautoriteit (NMa, the Dutch Competition Authority) is a government division of the Dutch Economics Ministry that examined the case: it eventually ruled in favor of FloraHolland Aalsmeer.

The merger signals the Dutch horticultural industry's trend toward consolidation. Not only have the auctions merged, but so have other parts of the production chain: breeding companies have been merging, and in the past decade or so, new organizations (such as Agriterra<sup>41</sup>) have sprung up. Once FloraHolland and Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer voted to merge, just two independent Dutch horticultural auctions remained—and they, too, quickly chose to merge in what is widely understood as an effort to avoid getting put out of business, to maintain a market position, or possibly to carve out a new niche

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<sup>40</sup> "VGB klaagt FloraHolland aan bij NMa" January 26, 2010, *Bloem en Blad*.

<sup>41</sup> Financed by the Dutch government and receiving advice from experts in the Dutch agricultural sector, Agriterra focuses on economic development and works closely with the Dutch agribusiness.

in a market dominated by a single institution. But it was not a coincidence that the second merger, the one that created Plantion, directly followed that of Bloemenveiling Aalsmeer/FloraHolland: in fact, it was instituted two months retroactively, so that both FloraHolland and Plantion officially began in January 1, 2008. Ever since then there have been tensions between the Netherlands' two remaining auction institutions. Plantion has sought to distinguish itself by emphasizing green technology and small world impact—and since it is a smaller company/auction, it may be more successful or credible at that. In recent years, Plantion has refused merger offers from FloraHolland, occasionally stirring a legal row.<sup>42</sup> Plantion's managing director André Kruissoon has announced that he is stepping down in 2012 in a move that some have suggested reflects controversy about the merger and internal debate about the future of the second remaining Dutch horticultural auction. Kruissoon's replacement, Peter Bakker, is slated to have more 'internal flexibility' in order to pursue greater 'external relationships'.<sup>43</sup> It's notable not only that he is stepping down, but where he is going—to become the director of Veiling Holambra, Brazil's rapidly expanding horticultural auction. Founded in the mid twentieth century by Dutch farmers, this auction is discussed in chapter five: here it's worth merely pointing out both the fluidity and international character of Dutch horticultural networks.

FloraHolland and the VBA described the merger along rather different, if also familiar, lines. Working together (*samenwerken*) in the cooperative has been “rediscovered” after the 2008 merger, according to Aad van der Knaap of FloraHolland's advisory council and Eric Persoon, FloraHolland's treasurer in FloraHolland Aalsmeer's monthly magazine. According to van der Knaap, “the government always seeks a balance between commerce and cooperation.” Nor does Persoon understand the merger as creating a monopoly, which anyway, “makes you lazy.” Instead, “the world is changing, and together we're building a giant network economy.”<sup>44</sup> This comment seems worth highlighting not because it sounds merely like an anodyne promotional message, which it is, but it is consistent with values of the institution and the horticultural sector, and of course ‘the network society’ recalls Van Dijk (1996), though Van der Knaap was clearly not making a scholarly reference. But his remarks have cachet for the horticultural audience to which they were directed, even if their familiarity would seem to have a narcotic effect on listeners. He was proposing that the merger stands as a shining example not of a single institution dominating the market, but of everyone joining the same team, working together. But was this actually

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<sup>42</sup> “Plantion sues FloraHolland for contract breach following merger refusal” May 24, 2012, and “Plantion restarts postponed lawsuit against FloraHolland” June 8, 2012, *FloraCulture International*.

<sup>43</sup> “Peter Bakker nieuwe directeur Plantion” July 16, 2012, *Hortinews*.

<sup>44</sup> *FloraHolland Aalsmeer Magazine*, March 2008: 15



a cynical calculation? Did the merger actually mark not the reemergence and triumph of *samenwerken*, but the creation of a larger institution in which growers still vote but have less of a say in the management and direction of the industry? Have the imperatives of institutional growth now superceded the interests of the small growers who built the auction? Possibly: this seems to be the trend, but it's too early to conclude, and among people I spoke with, opinions were divided.

The Aalsmeer auction has gone from Bloemenlust and the CAV to the VBA, and is now FloraHolland Aalsmeer. Aalsmeer's 3,500 grower members have joined with the grower-members of the other auctions to become a 5,200 member-strong collective. Glossy promotional materials tout this 'bigger, better' Floraholland as the institution Where Beauty Meets Business. In addition to the controversial merger, FloraHolland has expanded by opening an auction in Germany, the Rhein-Maas auction, which has strengthened the Dutch horticultural position with it's biggest trading partner and largest consumer of Dutch horticultural products. As the auction has consistently expanded, the institution's cooperative structure has shaped that expansion. But in spite of the merger's corporate mien, the cooperative's growth has not been a simple story of big fish eating little fish. Unlike franchise industries that swallow, drive out, or bankrupt small, independent businesses, the horticultural cooperative thrives with small and mid size growers. They're members of a larger structure, and so cocooned, their businesses remain profitable, and no grower gets too big. Though the growing power if the institution of FloraHolland worries some small and medium sized growers, it remains true even today that the average Dutch flower farm is between two and three hectares, and while annual profits rise and fall, most growers continue to earn a modest, middle class income. This too helps maintain the ongoing culture of the Aalsmeer auction, the industry in general, and to characterize networks, class values, and other aspects of a horticultural *weltanschauung*. Nowhere can you get a better feel for a Dutch horticultural outlook, and Aalsmeer's changes over the century, than with Jan van Akker,<sup>45</sup> a grower I met unexpectedly one October evening in 2006, who cultivated flowers from his childhood in the 1940s until his retirement in 2000.

### ***From a World War to a World Flower System: An Aalsmeer Grower's Perspective***

We met in a squatter's cafe in Amsterdam's Oost called Joe's Garage, around the corner from the squatted apartment of an acquaintance of mine, where Mr. van Akker had come to visit one of his six daughters. In contrast with the Aalsmeer auction, attendees touted this as an 'anti-capitalist space,' a place that operates under a different ethical and economic code than the outside world. Named for the 1978 Frank Zappa

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<sup>45</sup> Not his real name.

rock opera, it was an ironic venue to talk about the flower industry. A handsome sixty eight, with white hair and a Clark Kent style cowlick across his forehead, Mr. Van Akker did in fact seem both ordinary and oddly heroic. He summed up his life with a wry smile and an unabashedly romantic statement. “I was born into flowers, worked with them all my life,” he said, “and I hope one day to die into flowers.”

Born in 1937 in Vleuten, his career spanned a period from the occupation, when there was no flower market, to the European Union, the Euro, and FloraHolland. “During the war, you know, the Germans wouldn’t let us grow flowers. We had to grow vegetables for food. For them.<sup>46</sup>” Though it must have been harrowing that his family greenhouses fed the occupying army, recalling it, he remained calm and composed, the only hint of distress in the rhythm of his sentences. “Yes. For them. So officially there were no flowers. But my father and some others used to grow chrysanthemums and poppies between the rows of potatoes and other things.”

Gesturing down at our ‘people’s kitchen’ plates of potato cauliflower curry, cumin rice, and a dal with fresh tomato and cilantro, he said, “we grew everything we’re eating here, except the rice. But of course our meals were very different. And during the war we had less food.”

It seemed curious that his father and other men would defy the Germans by growing flowers, especially when there was no trade, so they couldn’t even earn money by taking such a risk. “You know, even in war—especially in times like that—people have to have something Good,” Mr. Van Akker explained. “They must have something Good, something Beautiful. Beauty is very valuable, very important.”

This was the lesson he took away from the experience as a boy, and in both conscious and unconscious ways, he reflected, it has shaped his views of flowers. Clearly, growing flowers entailed something beyond employment and an opportunity for upward mobility, and represented far more than a stable identity. Though a livelihood and a business, cultivating flowers inspired a kind of wonder, a devotion to something outside of the world’s cruelties and indignities, but also intimately connected to the earth. After the war, at fourteen he left school to work in the family business, as in a lot of flower growing families. “I never went to university, though I wanted to go, but my parents told me you have to work. Eventually I liked it, but not at first.” After fifty five or sixty hours a week in the fields and greenhouses, Mr. Van Akker went on to part

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<sup>46</sup> 1940-1943 were deep crisis years for the Dutch horticultural sector. Due to fuel restrictions and exorbitant fuel costs, up to 50 % of flowers, fruits, and vegetables had to be grown outdoors (not using greenhouses); due to high production costs, lilacs, carnations, and roses were banned from auction in 1942; partly because Germany was (and is today) the prime consumer of Dutch horticulture, the market collapsed in the war years (Hogewoning 1987: 92-94).

time jobs in factories or repairing farming machinery. There was so much work that “you didn’t even think about finishing,” he explained. He described how one day just bled into the next, time was governed by natural cycles of seasons and daylight, by the long arm of the auction clock, and by a steady though not insatiable public demand for flowers. Flowers, hard work, and family were running themes in our talk. In the post war years, it was not unusual to have illegal or semi-legal immigrants doing this hard work in the horticultural sector. It has been estimated that at it’s peak use of foreign labor (from the early 1970s to the early 1990s), as much as 20 percent of the glasshouse workforce was composed of immigrants, but since then, the introduction of fines and stricter enforcement of the law has dramatically reduced that number<sup>47</sup> (Benseddik and Bijl 2006: 65-67, 169-172).

Though born into flowers, Mr. Van Akker didn’t push any of his children into horticulture: “I wanted them all to pursue their own goals... None of them chose my business, but I’m proud of them all.” In the 1960s, a cousin did start a flower auction in Vancouver. Most of the investors were not Canadian but Chinese, and the flowers came from Colombia. But his entrepreneurial cousin didn’t stay in the flower business, and no other family pursued a career in horticulture, which is somewhat unusual among Dutch flower growing families. His youngest “is the wildest, in to singing and dancing and performing, you know.” The eldest daughter, in her forties, is an anesthesiologist in England; another daughter, married and a home maker, has a passion for gardening and is his only child to maintain any involvement with flowers; another daughter “loves South America.” She is working toward her Master’s in Latin American studies, speaks fluent Spanish, and has already spent a year in Ecuador, “where they also grow many flowers.”

He added, “I also have one daughter who dedicates herself to studying the Bible. Yes, I believe that religion is very important. I believe in God. But except for one girl, all of my children are not really religious, at least they don’t go to church. I wanted them to, you know, but you can’t force it, and I’ve decided it’s okay because each of them has very strong moral beliefs, and that is very good, too.”

As one of Mr. Van Akker’s daughters chatted beside us with her boyfriend, a photographer who works in a homeless shelter, someone slid a flyer for an anti war demonstration onto our table. Of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr Van Akker commented, “I think they’re terrible, huge mistakes.” He took a deep breath and composed himself before continuing. “You know,” he said, “I also think that flowers

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<sup>47</sup> In the early 1980s some growers were complaining that the only way they could earn a profit was to hire underpaid illegal immigrant workers, which they did in spite of the 10,000 guilder fine introduced in 1979 (Benseddik and Bijl 2006: 67).

have to do with peace, and not just in a hippie way, but the spirit of flowers is peace. Imagine if the whole world were covered in flowers, blooming everywhere...Flowers are Good. There should be flowers everywhere, as there are flowers in heaven...Yes!"

### ***The Dutch Horticultural Production Chain***

If one day there were to be flowers “everywhere,” it seems likely that a good proportion of them, in fact, would be cultivated by Dutch growers and sold via Aalsmeer’s auction. What began a century ago among rural growers spawned an enormous cooperative institution and made Aalsmeer the center of world trade. But it has shaped the industry in other crucial ways as well. Almost everything that occurs in the horticultural value chain happens the way it does as a result of the grower’s cooperatives. Today, this begins with breeders and propagators. Then growers take over, and sell their flowers and plants at auction, which are bought by import and export companies, wholesalers, and retailers, who then distribute and sell to the consumer.



**Breeders:** In an industry that thrives on 'the latest thing,' breeders develop new flowers. The Netherlands has top of the line breeders and breeding organizations. They produce a remarkable volume and variety of blooms, including such rarities and difficult to achieve but highly sought after flowers as the black tulip and the blue rose. They work closely with other parts of the chain to market new varieties and ensure how well they survive. Breeders own the patent on the genetic blueprint of their flowers and plants.

**Propagators:** Once a new variety has been invented or created, it must be reproduced a million fold via seeds, cuttings, or bulbs for commercial use and sale. Typically, though not always, propagators take on this task. They possess licenses for this work, and must pay royalties to those breeders who hold the patent.

**Growers:** Flowers are cultivated world-wide but the main production areas are in south America (Colombia, Ecuador), east Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia), east Asia (Japan, Taiwan, China), and the Netherlands. Between sixty and sixty-five percent of flowers sold at Dutch auctions are grown in the Netherlands, though the figure has slowly but steadily decreased from about ninety-five percent in the mid nineteen sixties. Most Dutch flowers are cultivated in glass houses, but many growers focus exclusively on outdoor bulb production. As the industry has grown increasingly global, many Dutch growers have moved abroad for cultivation, but maintain close links with the home market and the auction. In the early twentieth century, flower (mostly rose) growers in Aalsmeer began the first modern cooperative auctions for flowers. The industry took off, and to this day the auction remains key to the value chain's success.

**Auctions:** The auction is the cornerstone of the Dutch horticultural system. Auctions free growers from time and energy they would otherwise have to spend on sales and marketing. This allows them to focus on cultivating the best flowers or plants cheaply and efficiently, and has helped them maintain advantages over international competitors. The auction plays a similar role for other segments of the chain as well, enabling breeders, wholesalers, traders and so on, to excel in their niche. Equally important, the auction provides a highly efficient method of sales and distribution. The cooperative auctions also reflect and help to sustain values of working together and distributing risk.

*Importers and Exporters: Efficiently managing the logistics of import and export is essential for an industry that each day moves about fifty million stems of cut flowers and over five million potted plants. From the earliest flower auctions a century ago, delivery of the flowers has been a central part of planning and organization of the system. Transport logistics encompasses a range of fields, from the politics of urban planning to the environmental practices of packagers, and today includes routes by sea, air, and land. Companies often specialize in particular flowers or particular markets, and maintain close relationships with the auction, growers, wholesalers, and retailers.*

***Wholesalers and Retailers:** Wholesalers and retailers seek good relationships with importers and exporters, with the auction, and especially with the consumer. Many wholesalers belong to the VGB, the Vereniging voor de Groothandel in Bloemkwekerij producten, or United Wholesalers of Floral products, which identifies as part of its mission maintaining a strong network. Retailers also have an advocacy group. They tend to benefit from and work closely with the PT, Het Productschap Tuinbouw, an organization that receives both private and public funds to promote the horticultural sector both locally and internationally.*

***Consumers/consumer market:** As with growing, of course, flowers are purchased across the globe, but there are three main consumer markets for cut flowers and plants in the world: the United States and Canada, Europe (led by Germany but including Russia), and East Asia (Japan, South Korea, and increasingly, China). Most of the flowers traded in the Netherlands (some seventy-five to eighty percent) wind up in the European consumer market, with sixty percent of exports headed for Germany alone. Consumers are the most fickle part of the chain, as trends and tastes change, and as weather dictates (summer sales lag; a winter snow storm can keep people from buying flowers). Consumer choices and practices reverberate back up the chain, affecting everyone.*

For views on how this works, and the joys and complaints of Dutch growers, no one is more articulate or insightful than Hans de Vries, who cultivates evergreens and cactuses in Aalsmeer. De Vries began working in the business when he was fifteen, and by his mid twenties, after a brief stint managing an “eclectic electric bluegrass band,” he took over his father's business in the mid nineteen sixties. In addition to managing the business, he writes a lively and unorthodox column for *FloraCulture International*, ‘Dust’. On a cloudy June afternoon in 2009, we met in his office and toured his greenhouses.

“As you know, it’s common to have cooperatives in the Netherlands,” De Vries began. “The flower auctions are just one of them. The auctions are the backbone of the cooperative, and also what makes it work—but, it’s far from perfect.” As one might expect, the system offers significant advantages for those who organized it, the growers, but the business is hardly easy, and smooth sailing, and for most flower and plant growers, profit margins are narrow. In fact, many growers feel their position is precarious. Since the price of products in an auction is a negotiation, and the market can perform erratically, growers constantly fret over finances. So why would such a fluctuating and unpredictable system help producers, and why would they collectively organize themselves and specifically choose to sell their flowers and plants via auction? One might suppose, on the contrary, that a grower would seek to develop relationships with particular buyers, in order to be able to rely on more constant and stable prices and firm contracts. As in other industries, contracts might be negotiated between individual parties.

The special advantage this system offers growers is not the unstable aspect of auctions; rather, it’s the auctions’ location in the structure of the production chain, and the protection of a cooperative institution as a mediator. The auctions neatly split vital, and very different aspects of the horticultural industry. “If you disconnect sales from production,” explained De Vries, “as a grower, then you can focus wholeheartedly on the production system. You don’t have to worry about sales, not so much, because the auction takes care of that. You don’t know the clients, who’s buying your product, so you don’t view other growers as competitors. You’re not fighting each other to win a contract with someone. This is the genius of the grower’s auction system,” or at least as the system works in combination with the cooperative, and other cultural, financial, historical, infrastructural and policy-related factors in the Netherlands. In some industries, individual businesses sell on the market and compete directly with one another. They work to develop relationships with clients, with businesses who will buy their product. But because of the grower’s cooperative auction “you don’t know your clients, not really. You don’t know, or necessarily care who’s buying your crop, [even though] you’re selling in the same place, and for about the same price. So your business becomes about being the most productive you can be, because that’s how you can perform well.”

“If I compare this with my American colleagues,” continued De Vries, “I mean, it’s pretty dramatic. They’re secretive, threatened by other growers, and competitive with one another. And in the end, while some individuals may have this or that advantage in the short term, the cut-throat approach doesn’t really help the business.” In the Netherlands, growers work together: they form clubs and share expertise on the best growing techniques so they can grow greater amounts, and do it faster, cheaper, and more efficiently. In these grower clubs, as they socialize, they discuss and share

growing techniques, tips on heating, lighting, or fertilizer, and relay other kinds of market information. In some industries, individual businesses sell on the market and compete directly with one another. They work to develop relationships with clients, with businesses who will buy their product. But not so much in the horticultural industry, or at least, not in the same way. Among other things, this cooperative, communal-enterprise aspect of the industry helps explain the Dutch dominance in the world flower business. As a cultural value, and as rhetoric in almost any circumstance, the Dutch prize working together. But, as De Vries points out, “*samenwerken* only makes sense if [it allows you to be] more productive, if it’s to your advantage.” Otherwise, it’s just a lofty goal and an empty phrase. The structure of the industry, which sharply demarcates growing from selling, functions to foment cooperation.

Maybe it’s not strictly correct to describe this as a ‘function’ of the grower’s institution, but it is certainly an effect, intentional or not. As De Vries elaborated: “Most of this works out by accident. I mean, it was meticulously planned, the auction. Sure. But when you look at how it actually ended up functioning, I mean, the growers and planners had no idea what was going to happen, really. A lot of the benefits come from hard work and foresight, but a lot of things just worked out by luck—circumstances, trial and error, and chance.” The cooperation and sharing of knowledge also has social and psychological consequences. To an extent it fosters an ‘all-for-one-and-one-for-all’ sentiment among growers, and, because many of them regularly come together via industry clubs, associations, meetings, and other social events to confer on the (global) market, this communitarian sensibility may also breed a certain urbane and cosmopolitan outlook.

I reflected on this when I noticed that many of De Vries’s neighbors also grow plants or flowers, and that the surrounding landscape can seem misleadingly rural. Westland *is* rural, but flower fields and horticultural greenhouses are integrated in this highly urbanized region, the Randstad. The day I interviewed him, I stepped off the bus as a fleet of swans was gliding through the canal between the highway and “J de Vries Potplantencultures,” and I scanned the panorama. Goats in someone’s front yard were staring at the traffic, and at the end of the road, in a wide field, cows were ruminating under a low sky, with FloraHolland Aalsmeer in the distance. The landscape may seem bucolic, but De Vries is no country bumpkin. He’s sophisticated, worldly, and very fluent in English. He boasted of being different from his neighbors, but also imagined himself equally as part of the same tradition. “A hundred years ago, guys like me were selling our stuff down the street at Welkom pub, you know.”

While the auction’s global reach may have spurred local growers to widen their horizons, and although the auction’s position in the production chain encourages cooperation, that does not mean that business is always hunky-dory from their perspective, even when FloraHolland is thriving. There is of course a down-side—



growers are not uniformly and universally pleased with FloraHolland's performance. Created to protect the interests of growers, the auction has taken on a life of its own (another unintended consequence), a new institution with its own needs and its own bureaucracy. FloraHolland seeks to protect and defend its interests, which don't always necessarily coincide with the interests of Dutch growers. De Vries put it bluntly, if hyperbolically: "the co-op works not for the growers but for the co-op." In other words, as the institution has expanded, it has acquired its own needs and priorities. The institution's board, planners, and executives steer the institution's course, though the membership elects them and votes on the agenda. But the membership isn't tied into the institution's day to day operations, nor is it active in setting the agenda for the future. Most growers focus on their own business and trust that the cooperative takes care of their interests, though increasingly, as growers have less and less to do with the auction's daily operations, this may be changing. Grower's interests and the institution's interests aren't always identical. Dutch rose growers are a case in point.

De Vries is not optimistic about the future for Dutch growers, and ironically, he sees their ultimate undoing resulting from the fantastic success of their system. Growers have supplied a steady diet of high quality inexpensive flowers, and by now consumers have come to expect low prices. For over a hundred years, due to superior growing techniques, cooperation, the auction system, and excellent marketing, Dutch flowers sold at the lowest prices and beat out all competitors throughout much of Europe. But "the current financial crisis and recession have intensified the search for lower prices. Prices this low can only be achieved with free heating and dollar-a-day labour. Dutch growers with their costs still rising cannot [sic] keep up. They are at the end of their cycle. Their hundred years are over. They are finally closing down, beaten by their own strength."<sup>48</sup> De Vries may exaggerate: the Dutch flower grower is far from dead. But increasingly, in many areas Dutch cultivars can not compete with products from lands where labor and resources are considerably cheaper. Even so, the situation is not a simple story of global competitors uprooting local business, because these internationally grown flowers are often produced by Dutch men, and they are still sold through Dutch auctions, though many Dutch growers do suffer as a result. Flowers have never been more plentiful and rarely cheaper than in today's auctions. So FloraHolland remains vibrant and continues to expand, but through the same process many local growers struggle and straggle.

Beginning in the 1970s, the co-op began to import roses from east Africa during the winter months, when local production was low. The argument was that by providing a more stable and consistent demand, prices would not fluctuate wildly, and this was in the interests of Dutch growers, who anyway, couldn't increase production during the

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<sup>48</sup> *Floraculture International* April, 2009: 22

winter and so foreign suppliers did not threaten their livelihood. But eventually east African growers began to ship roses in warmer seasons as well, and could offer abundant, high quality flowers. More land, cheaper resources and labor, and a better climate made certain varieties more plentiful, thus lowering prices people would pay at auction and driving out of business many growers in the Netherlands. But in spite of international cultivation, many roses are still grown in the Netherlands. Darker roses grow better in cooler climates and with less light, so many continue to thrive here. At a rose nursery called Kwekerij de Singel, a manager named Puk told me that flowers “are like bread. You don’t think that someone got up at two a.m. to make this, and kneaded this dough in their hands. You don’t really care where it comes from, only that it’s good quality.” Though some consumers do care where and how they’re grown (today, one can buy Fair Trade flowers), the point still stands. More and more foreign-grown roses are sold at Dutch auctions. “We take pride in these roses,” said Puk as we strolled through a greenhouse, the air rich with a nitrogen mist and a faint aroma of velvety red roses. “Each stem represents hard work, investment, and care.”

But by 2007, the average price at the Dutch auctions for the lighter colored tea hybrids grown in the Netherlands was 36 cents, compared to 18 cents for those imported, primarily from Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ecuador, Zambia and Uganda. (It’s important to recognize, however, that the average price does not describe the full picture of all imported roses, since some foreign varieties such as Passion and Avalanche sold at similar prices to Dutch roses.) The quantity of imported tea hybrids also increased, taking a 46.6% share of the total supply, a 25% increase since 2006. From the beginning of the new season in 2008, east African rose farms continued to grab headlines at the Dutch auctions with their latest intermediate and large headed roses.

Couldn’t the auction have foreseen this trend? Wouldn’t the Dutch growers, who constitute the co-op, and thus vote on major decisions, choose not to allow, or to limit entry of foreign-grown roses to their market? In this case, because it was off-season, and at the time, the auction was more regional than global, it might not have seemed apparent that the east African rose market could possibly, one day, come to dominate the Aalsmeer auctions. Even so, one might think that since the rose was one of the Aalsmeer auction’s founding flowers, and is the world’s top selling flower, Dutch growers might have been more cautious and protective. Traders, of course, don’t necessarily have a stake in the flowers being grown in the Netherlands, per se. (Though, due to networks, kinship, personal background, taste, or even a national loyalty, some traders may prefer locally grown flowers.) But if importing roses made long term sense for the strength and viability of the institution of the auction, which it did, it wasn’t in the long term interest of Dutch growers. And the auction management might find ways to play down or muffle the voices of local nay-sayers. According to De Vries and some

other growers, this is typically the case when growers express doubts or raise questions about policy. But “because most growers are simple and trusting and don’t always see the big picture,” said De Vries, “they’re not that hard to fool. And management has used every trick in the book. They even use mass psychologists to get what they want, to sucker growers who don’t know any better....But I also used to promote a pop band, so I also know about propaganda and how to stir things up!” Whether or not growers have been duped, it can’t be easy, even with the vote, to oppose the organized will of management, as any member of an institution, union, or cooperative can attest. But by the same token, the fact that the institution may sometimes work to further its own ends at the expense of local grower objectives, that doesn’t mean that in most cases the institution does not help them.

Much of that help, though, doesn’t come from some form of advocacy by the cooperative on behalf of growers. It comes from how the cooperative and the auction sever cultivation from sales, enabling growers to focus and excel at what they do, and similarly, for breeders, propagators, and others to shine in their niche. The auctions help to structure cooperation among growers, and at the same time, it creates and maintains communities of buyers. But this basic picture of the value chain is incomplete. Without the webbing of interrelated organizations, plus the support of government policy and low interest loans from banks, then the Dutch cooperatives and the Dutch horticultural chain could not work as they do. These multiple organizations, ranging from financial institutions to quasi state promotional boards to national planning and even foreign policy, together are what makes the sector particularly strong and dynamic.

### ***The Aalsmeer Grower’s Cooperative as a Piece of the Dutch Agricultural Sector***

A good deal of the contemporary horticultural business funnels through FloraHolland in one of its six locations, with most of the Netherlands’ floral exports taking off from Aalsmeer. FloraHolland is a major center in a transnational flow of horticultural commodities, capital, information, technology, and labor. It plays an important role in national planning and infrastructure in the Netherlands, and plugs into and intertwines with other businesses, urban development, agricultural policy, as well as other institutions such as banks and universities. Many in the industry consider FloraHolland in Aalsmeer the nexus of Netherlandish floriculture, since it hosts the gigantic flower auction and is situated in the abundant Westland region. And it’s more than local fame: Aalsmeer is often called the flower capital of the world. But Aalsmeer’s cooperative grower’s associations operate in a broader context of horticulture and agriculture in the Netherlands, and without an understanding of that context, the institution’s rise and ongoing success makes less sense. Horticultural networks include a vast array of interrelated groups and institutions. It is among the complex interplay of Aalsmeer’s many supportive organizations and practices that one

can see the social networks of men, the institutional exchanges, the nation's developmental policies, the dense overlap of small and large players in the production chain, and all of it, in its variety and range, informed by a sense of collective enterprise.

In policy and industry literature, as in casual conversation with people in the horticultural industry, one detects a sometimes subtle but still noticeable nationalist spirit, which in part is a response to the increasingly global trade. A 2007 report published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, for instance, opens with these words. "In recent years we seem to have begun searching for our national identity again: what kind of country are we, what do we want it to be, and how do we relate to the rest of the world...Is the Netherlands, with the ongoing European integration, losing too much of its identity, and how do we maintain our economic competitive position when countries like China, India, and Brazil are coming into the global market?" These anxieties can be partly resolved, implies the Minister, through ambitious and effective promotion of Dutch horticulture and agriculture. Dutch flowers, plants, and other agricultural products are marks of distinction, and can serve as a sort of national brand, providing both economic security and cultural identity.

In the industry structure and in participants' reflection on it, there's a sense of fellowship, as though they see themselves as members of an all star team in a world tournament. In some ways, this perspective keeps the industry humming, for the coordination and cooperation at work emerge from tacit values and ideology about trade, national unity, and a kind of small town familiarity flavored with male camaraderie. FloraHolland's monthly magazine recently devoted an issue to precisely these themes. Titled *Regarding Economics and Cooperation (Over Economie en Cooperatie)*, a number of important players in the horticultural industry weighed in on these topics in several round table discussions. Two of those interviewed include Bert Heemskerk, who began his career auctioning narcissus in Aalsmeer and eventually became Director of the Netherland's Rabobank, and Art van Duyn, who also started out in the flower business and is an executive in the powerful investment corporation Dutch Flower Group. Each describes their institution as a "family business," which despite how it may sound, comes to seem, as they elaborate, like more than a corporate motto or the rhetoric of a tv commercial. Van Duyn explains: "In our business, [throughout the hierarchy] people share tasks and this increases their bonds. I find this a strong common point in the agricultural sector..." The social and cultural bonds formed by working in close proximity and cooperatively are essential to financial success. Similarly, Heemskerk talks about the important sense of teamwork that emerges from lots of small businesses, many of them family run, and how Rabobank offers numerous risk management programs to those in the horticultural industry. In fact, he says that Rabobank extends loans to small horticultural entrepreneurs because "family businesses are the motor of our economy."

Heemskerk and van Duyn are not alone in this observation. As Alex Strating discovered, one of the strengths of the Rijnsburg flower industry is its kinship or affinity system (*verwantschapssysteem*), where a kind of family loyalty and pride pervades commercial practices in local businesses run by blood relations (Strating 1994: 153-160, 199). Again and again, industry participants as well as industry literature bring home the value of kith and kin to the horticultural industry. But in slight contrast with the sense suggested by executives like Heemskerk and Van Duyn, in Strating's analysis, these business values emerged less from a spirit of cooperative unity and more from family pride, loyalty, and reputation. In Rijnsburg, the strong ties to the family also helped to define insiders and locals from 'buitenlanders', those foreigners from outside the region, as well as from outside the Netherlands. But this high appraisal of fealty in the horticultural sector is not the only characteristic worth noting.

"In addition," Heemskerk goes on to say, "are those cooperative working relationships." The cooperation between individuals and families, between institutions, and between large and small firms all have contributed to the construction of the Netherlands horticultural economy, and continue to provide muscular resilience and depth to the related industries. Timo Hughes, the Executive Director of FloraHolland, also took part in the *Regarding Economics and Cooperation* conversation. He emphasized that people in the horticultural industry cooperate because, in the global economy of "today's world, most individuals are too small to make it on their own." Hughes stressed "the financial value of standing shoulder to shoulder" in the production chain. "[In the cooperative structure] of the auction, you see the commercial solidarity between growers and traders." His comments point to one of the key advantages of the Dutch horticultural system, and FloraHolland in particular: the distribution of risk. That's what the cooperative system, with its sinews of networks, does so well.

But if cooperation helps to disperse risk, that's not its only purpose, nor its only value to Dutch horticulture. According to Gert van Dijk, a former professor at Wageningen University, agricultural cooperatives offer many advantages from environmental safety to higher food quality, but he stresses the financial benefits for growers, who can get "the highest price for their products at the lowest cost of production." Like many in the horticultural industry, Van Dijk held a variety of positions within the industry before taking his current position as the Director of Cogeca, the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the EU, which represents forty thousand farmers' cooperatives (including FloraHolland), or six hundred sixty thousand people. Many of these individuals are small and mid size producers, as with Dutch flower growers. The Aalsmeer growers, and their institution, are thus loosely connected to many other kinds of growers, to policy, and to related sectors.

Though an impressive and singular institution, FloraHolland is clearly not an island. It is ensconced in the Netherlands' horticultural industry, in planning and development projects, and in Dutch social and economic life. FloraHolland is also firmly rooted in the country's agrarian infrastructure, which supports not only the Netherlands' horticultural industry, but the nation's agricultural sector, which includes the dairy, meat, and fruit and vegetable industries. The agricultural sector has been carefully planned and organized to achieve a number of goals. Through a steering policy (*bestuurlijk beleid*) that reflects the general governmental approach of central planning that still leaves a lot of room for local autonomy, imaginative variation, and public-private partnerships, the Netherlands has for nearly a decade pursued an ambitious agricultural project called Greenports, which is a title given to a set of policies which predate the name. These infrastructure and development practices have been coordinated and organized through steering policies to create massive 'agriclusters,' densely overlapping framework and planning between related industries. FloraHolland is nestled in this panorama, which helps explain both the success of the institution and the leading place of Dutch horticulture on the world stage.

### ***Greenports and Weberian Bureaucracy***

Greenports are designated agricultural areas organized to maximize efficiency by coordinating transport and infrastructure, and grouping together associated industries and businesses, and to save energy through new technological advances in horticulture. Greenports encompass economic networks of companies, organizations, and institutions related to agriculture and horticulture, such as flower and plant breeding, the supply of equipment and products, primary production, sales, auctions, imports and exports, transportation and logistics, processing, research and development, and education and financial services. As both social and economic architecture, their objective (stated in its literature and websites) is "to serve as the drivers for the horticultural and greenhouse complex throughout the Netherlands;" these clusters are grouped in Westland-Oostland, Boskoop, Duin en Bollenstreek, Aalsmeer, and Venlo and have several specific directives. They aim to produce valuable knowledge and innovation, to use space strategically in order to increase efficient economic practices, to provide shrewd and productive infrastructure and logistics, and to advance an increasingly interlinked European agenda. This last goal should not surprise anyone, given that the EU provides the biggest market for the Netherlands' agricultural goods. In the trade literature and discussions of Greenports, again and again people highlight the need for cooperation, for *samenwerken*. Recognizing both the structural and the social, the steering policies and the propinquity of the sector, planners single out the special role of the potted plant, bulb and cut flower enterprises in the overall Dutch economy. In 2004 then Agricultural

Minister Cees Veerman stated that the Dutch “horticultural sector must remain a top global player.”<sup>49</sup>

Together the five Greenports employ a quarter of a million people and earn fourteen billion euros per year in exports, and garner high profile attention among policy makers and elites. One of the Greenports’ special programs, the ‘Innovation Platform’ called ‘Flowers and Food,’ was chaired by former Prime Minister Balkenende, which shows the level of priority and prestige given to the agenda, and offers another example of public-private integration in Dutch horticulture. As both practice and ideology, the Netherlands has a long tradition of collaboration between public and private sectors, in labor, academia, health care, and more. But considering the scale of the development project, and FloraHolland’s and other private businesses’ participation in planning, the phrase ‘public-private partnership’ seems inadequate, though frequently bandied about.

Both Greenports policies and public private partnerships have also led to valuable research. The horticultural industry supplies ornamental plants and flowers, as everyone knows, but it also advances scientific exploration in a number of fields. It provides vital research and raw materials to the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries, for instance. Recent investigations of the chrysanthemum, one of the Netherlands’ most popular flowers, has yielded some promising properties in the treatment of Alzheimer’s. The green sector also pursues integrated high tech growing environments, and has devised self sufficient or even energy-producing glasshouses, using solar and wind power as well as natural underground reservoirs to pump water for heating and cooling. Some of the latest systems cultivate tomatoes or flowers above fish tanks. Many of today’s greenhouses run on automated systems, with conveyor belts and robotics that respond to ‘plant psychology.’ In some ways, these cutting edge investigations of flowers and plants bring the industry back to the Dutch Golden Age, where distinctions were not so sharp between agriculture, medicine, business, aesthetics and nationalism. In addition to intellectual curiosity, the desire for profit drove scientific inquiry (Cook 2007). Similarly, in cultivating their products, today’s flower breeding entrepreneurs carefully eye scientific advances as well as fashionable tics in the market. Much of both the freedom and incentive to do this comes from the multiple benefits in transportation, knowledge, and finance provided by the dense overlap of industry sectors.

One important point to highlight about the Dutch Greenports is how the project demonstrates that the success of the horticultural industry comes from government support, but not, as one might imagine, in the form of agricultural subsidies. The state-

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<sup>49</sup> The statement is quoted in “The Dutch Agricluster in a Global Context” 2006: 4. Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, The Hague

of-the-art Greenports program is a recent development, but the basic policy remains the same as it has for decades: infrastructural planning is conceived of as a way to assist industry, and is fastidiously coordinated with trade leaders. This close cooperation is part of the norm of doing business for participants, and is no secret. As Plantum NL states, “one of the strongest points of Dutch agriculture is the fact that it is well organized in relation to systems and processes of production, marketing and the market and development and application of knowledge. Close cooperation with the government also benefits the sector.” In fact, to many industry participants, the point seems so obvious, natural, and rational, as to seem banal, unworthy of comment. Some anthropologists have observed that Dutch institutions and state policies correspond to that of a developmental state, “which resembles a Weberian bureaucracy and engenders ‘corporate coherence’ and autonomy. State structures are embedded in social networks that provide information and allow ‘decentralized private implementation of policy’” (Zeigler 2007: 79). An institution of FloraHolland’s size requires bureaucratic management to organize and finesse its complex of interests. The institution is large and enjoys considerable authority, but its members are mostly small and mid range growers. Weberian notions of bureaucratic formation suggest that, and these characteristics seem embedded in Dutch civic culture and economic practices (Weber 1947 [1905]).

The Greenports program sits within the Dutch government’s Nota Ruimte, or National Spatial Strategy, guided by the vision of a changed governance model, or steering philosophy, the way national policy is elaborated at the regional and local levels through the participation of a range of actors, including “the public sector, private firms and the community of voluntary and non-governmental organizations.” The steering approach of the spacial planning reflects Weberian characteristics, along with the current Dutch government’s slogan, ‘*samenwerken, samen leven*’ (working together, living together), as well as the broader ideas about development put forth on the EU agenda out of Brussels. The National Spatial Strategy, directed largely by VROM, the Ministry of Housing, Spacial Planning and the Environment, uses this decentralized governance model to allow for the participation of business and civil society organizations in development, and commits itself “to nature, landscape, cultural heritage and water management.” In addition to pursuing these preservation goals, VROM works to link infrastructure between main ports, such as Schiphol Airport and the Port of Rotterdam, with the metropolitan areas in the Netherlands and abroad, including the Eindhoven/Zuidoost-Brabant ‘brainport,’ which produces research and knowledge, and the five agribusiness clusters which encompass the Netherlands horticultural industry. Though Greenports show how carefully and deliberately the Netherlands’ agricultural policy is planned and coordinated, long before the policy took effect, the principals of governance, the net of related organizations and institutions and the Dutch culture of flowers were well in place. And many of the horticultural organizations and institutions



now grouped in the Greenports have long standing relationships with each other, and with the Aalsmeer flower auction.

### *Exporting a Dutch Model to China*

While these policies and organizational styles pervade the Netherlands, including its horticultural industry, their impact exceeds national boundaries. As in the seventeenth century, Dutch horticulture takes place in a global context. Both Aalsmeer's grower's cooperative and Dutch Greenports have attracted attention on the world stage. The reason is easy to understand. With more than half of Earth's population living in cities, and with many of those cities located in coastal, delta regions, countries face daunting infrastructural challenges, and barriers to agricultural production, since these crowded alluvial regions are the most fertile. Countries may increasingly choose, as China has, to seek the Netherlands' expertise in fields like water management, green planning, and metropolitan agriculture, exemplified by the Greenports.

Partnered with Greenport Venlo and the World Horticultural Exhibition Floriade 2012, Shanghai has embarked on an ambitious urban agricultural project to design and construct Greenport Shanghai, also known as Dongtan Ecocity. Those committed to the project include the governor of Limburg, the Mayor of Venlo, the Shanghai Agricultural Commission, the Shanghai Industrial Investment Corporation, the Dutch engineering company Grontmij and the Environmental Science Group of Wageningen University. The plan envisions a twenty-seven square kilometer agricultural park, a 'circular system' involving transportation, water infrastructure (canals), and waste management, alongside ample production facilities, all taking place in a sustainable environment in which refuse and by-products of one unit are used as the input of another. The park is designed to include safe and environmentally friendly provisions for three million chickens and eight thousand cows, as well as multiple fishponds, and copious fruits, vegetables, and flowers cultivated in solar-powered greenhouses, which would also help to generate extra energy. All products would be sold via on-site auctions, so most of the value chain would be centered right there. Thousands of people would also live and work in the park, and move around on elevated rails that connect locations like a 'floating pagoda' for research and education with plenty of green space for recreation. The master plan for Greenport Shanghai was presented to Chinese Minister Sun Zhengcai and the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, Gerda Verburg, at the seminar 'Innovating Metropolitan Agriculture' in Beijing in October of 2008. There, Ministers Sun and Verburg also opened the Sino-Dutch Agricultural Center, an initiative of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science and Wageningen University, to support cooperation between China and the Netherlands on innovative agricultural research and projects.

But it remains to be seen how much of the futuristic Dongtan Ecocity/ Greenport Shanghai plan will be achieved. It has not emerged gradually, nor from the grass roots; rather, it is a top down, corporate proposal. Originally scheduled to open for the 2010 World Expo, the project has run into snags and is currently on hold, and there is no official date for completion. But if and when it is ever finished, it is unlikely to work like the Dutch Greenports, which are founded on cooperatives comprised of small and mid sized growers and similar players, and whose infrastructure blends with male networks and cultural identity.

The Greenport project is not the only elaborate plan in China to reproduce or modify some aspect of Dutch horticulture. In the 1990s, a Dutch citizen of Chinese origin named Yang Bin combined a devotion to Dutch aesthetics with ideas about how to do horticulture, and carried it out to an absurd extreme. Known in China as the Orchid King, he built an empire founded on real estate and horticulture. Yang constructed his own 'Dutch' town on two hundred twenty hectares of land just outside the city of Shenyang, an industrial center in China's rust belt. Holland Village featured tall, narrow, Dutch style homes, a theme park, several enormous indoor gardens, windmills, and drawbridges, as well as replicas of Amsterdam's Central Station and the International Court of Justice, where he housed his office—a place that would seem to have more in common with Michael Jackson's Neverland estate than with the Netherlands. Along with Holland Village, Yang built a network of greenhouses around the country, where he cultivated tulips and orchids along with fruits and vegetables, and sold them through a multi million dollar business he founded called the Euro-Asia Agricultural Holding Company, listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Though orphaned at a young age, Yang excelled in school and managed to attend China's premier naval academy. From there, he gained admittance to Leiden University in the Netherlands, and while there won political asylum, on the grounds that he faced persecution at home resulting from Tiananmen Square protests. After graduating in the early 1990s, Yang built a lucrative business marketing textiles and toys in Eastern Europe, and used that wealth to return to China as a Dutch citizen with a plan to start a commercial flower business. By the late 1990s, Yang had become one of China's new class of ingénues, or what people call the Yuan Billionaires. In 2001, *Forbes* magazine ranked him as the second wealthiest person in China, with an estimated worth of almost a billion U.S. dollars. At 39, the brash, flamboyant Yang epitomized the kind of character journalists often celebrate in bullish markets. But like a fluorescent, polka dot tie on a salmon, button down shirt, this flashy tycoon contrasts rather obviously with the modest, independent characters of Dutch growers. He concocted a scheme to enrich himself through flowers, and for a time it worked, but it's hard to tell how much of the business was a ruse and how much was legitimate horticulture.

By evading taxes and freely admitting it to newspapers, Yang eventually faced charges before Chinese authorities. Police escorted him from his office in the copied International Court of Justice, and despite supposed diplomatic immunity as a citizen of the European Union, in 2002 he was convicted of fraud, tax evasion, and illegal property ownership, and sentenced to eighteen years in prison. Dutch officials attended his trial, but the Netherlands kept out of the Chinese government's case. Holland Village mostly vanished or was knocked down as new, much larger construction surrounded it, but a few landmarks remain. I asked many officials in the Dutch horticultural industry about Yang, and though no one could add much to his story, his name never failed to generate a smile. Like Fedor Broers, Jan van Akker, and Hans de Vries, Yang Bin is a horticultural producer, entrepreneur, and a Dutch citizen, but there the similarity ends. Yang was not part of the Dutch male horticultural networks, and it's hard to imagine him as a member of an agricultural cooperative.

Among Aalsmeer growers, one rarely hears tell of Yang Bin or Greenport Shanghai, but in conversations with people in FloraHolland Aalsmeer, the theme of 'China' cropped up again and again. For instance, many people enmeshed in local Dutch horticulture expressed astonishment that entrepreneurs, politicians, and flower producers in China (and India) would show interest in the Netherlands's flower auctions. With this in mind, one can better appreciate some comments of Stef Griffioen. He has been involved in the industry for over twenty years, working in greenhouses, and holding down various jobs in the auction, including his current position in the complaints department. One morning as he was showing me around, explaining what he did there, and telling me some lore about the auction, he mentioned something curious I had heard before from both traders and guys who work on the floor. "Some Chinese came here one time to study this place. Just imagine! They went around in these white lab coats and wore thick glasses and inspected everything." While few knew these conspicuous Chinese visitors' exact relationship with the Aalsmeer flower auction, their presence left a strong impression, and people's stories showed provocative consistencies not only in how they imagine Chinese people, but in how they think about globalization, and how the Netherlands fits in the contemporary world.

Griffioen continued, "they wanted to see how everything worked, you know, probably so they could build something similar back in China. That's what the Chinese do—everyone knows that—they copy things." (We had not discussed Yang Bin or Greenport Shanghai.) "And you know what? They probably could copy this place, and maybe make something even bigger, but it would never be the same, never."

"Why's that," I asked.

"They can copy this place, and even this building, right down to the trolleys on the floor. But they can't copy us, or the Netherlands. They can't copy the Dutch culture,

and so whatever they make, it would never be the same.” It wasn’t just pride speaking. If by “Dutch culture” he meant a certain density of social relations that find expression in networks, a particular historical legacy in flowers, and cooperative practices between growers, the auction system, and government policies favorable to the industry, Mr. Griffioen couldn’t have summed it up better.