



A COMPACT GEOGRAPHY

OF THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS

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North there are remarkable differences, however. The islands of Vlieland and Terschelling and Northern Drenthe (regions 1, 2 and 11) score very high on Classical Individualism (IND), while especially the city of Stadskanaal (e on the map) scores very low.

As a whole, the Northern Netherlands are much more Egalitarian Anti-Conservative (EAC) than the Dutch average. Societies that score highly on Egalitarian Anti-Conservatism are not particularly religious and have egalitarian values and non-traditional household structures (many unmarried parents, for example). Within the North, the islands of Vlieland and Terschelling and the regions of Boarnesterhim and Northern Drenthe (regions 1, 2, 9 and 11) are most strongly Egalitarian Anti-Conservative (EAC). On the other side of the spectrum we find Oostergo and Southwestern Fryslân (regions 5 and 12).

The dimension of Dissatisfaction (DST) represents both social and personal dissatisfaction, both dissatisfaction with society and with personal circumstances. The Northern Netherlands are on average less Dissatisfied than the rest of the Netherlands, but again there are strong differences between the cultural regions of the North. In the cities of Groningen en Harlingen and the region of Central Groningen (c, a and 6), Dissatisfaction (DST) is very low, while it is high in Vlieland, Fivelingo and the city of Sneek (1, 7 and d).

It is important to note that the regionalisation presented here is based on these dimensions of culture alone. There are other aspects of culture – such as language, for example – and,

hence, there are other maps of culture possible. Consequently, it should not be interpreted as the definitive map of regional culture in the Northern Netherlands. It is a map of a specific aspect of culture, basic value orientations, and, moreover, as culture is not a static phenomenon, neither is this map.

Spatial diversity

Nevertheless, the data and the map based on this data reveal some interesting spatial differences. First, the Dutch North is culturally different from the rest of the Netherlands in at least one respect: it scores much higher on Egalitarian Anti-conservatism (EAC). In other words, the North is less religious, less traditional, less hierarchical, and more egalitarian than the rest of the Netherlands. This may (at least partly) reflect what in Dutch is called *'Noordelijke nuchterheid'* (Northern sober mindedness).

Secondly, and as advanced in the first paragraph of this chapter, even the relatively small region of the Northern Netherlands, shows strong internal spatial heterogeneity. Within the North 15 cultural regions can be distinguished that differ strongly from each other. This strong internal heterogeneity poses the question whether it actually makes sense to speak of the Dutch North as a whole. It may be more accurate to view and represent it as a patchwork quilt of regional cultures, languages, dialects, economies, and so forth, each different from the others, but each contributing to the unique spirit of the Northern Netherlands. ■



THE IMAGE OF THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS

A HIGHER-MIDDLE CLASS CULTURAL VENUE THAT LINKS THE URBAN AND RURAL AREAS: A JAZZ CONCERT IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH OF GARNWERD, A SMALL VILLAGE IN NORTH GRONINGEN, VISITED MAINLY BY PEOPLE WITH A POST-MATERIALIST URBAN LIFESTYLE.



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The importance of the image of places, as reflected in the mental map held by residents and non-residents has been appreciated in geography for at least 30 years. In particular, the way regions were viewed by outsiders, who were potential new residents or investors has long been regarded as crucial to their economic development. The significance to the North Netherlands is that the region is regarded by outsiders, and especially by entrepreneurs, as distant, inaccessible, and economically and even socially backward. Research into these subjective images, the reasons for their deep-seated espousal and their basis in objective realities, is thus critical in strategies for economic development and a prerequisite for successful regional development through place marketing campaigns. This chapter describes, and attempts to account for, the image of the Northern Netherlands as viewed by entrepreneurs from inside and outside the region. It is based on research data collected over the period 1980–2005.

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Geographical imagination

National questionnaire surveys held amongst firms in 1983 and 2003 asked respondents to assess the perceived value of places as sites for possible relocation on a five-point scale. It is noticeable that the highest values occur in the centre of the country around Utrecht and fall off rapidly in every direction. Also, very little change has occurred in the twenty years period between the surveys except that the western Netherlands has become marginally less attractive.

Location decisions are made on the basis of incomplete, vague and often erroneous information and the decision maker is guided by a subjective interpretation of reality. The three most significant variables in the decision choice in this case seem to be accessibility, culture and the residential environment. Accessibility is usually interpreted as access to the main metropolitan centres of the Western Netherlands and the international 'gateways' of ports and airports. It is notable that respondents in the West tended to overestimate the distance to the North while underestimating the size of its largest city, Groningen. Culture is necessarily more vague and difficult to quantify but it is clear that the North is regarded, for good or ill, as more traditional, with its own languages, dialects, folklore and as generally more old fashioned. The factor 'residential environment' includes not only elements of the physical environment, such as attractive landscapes and safety from environmental hazards but also a range of social and economic

features such as property prices, personal security and the like.

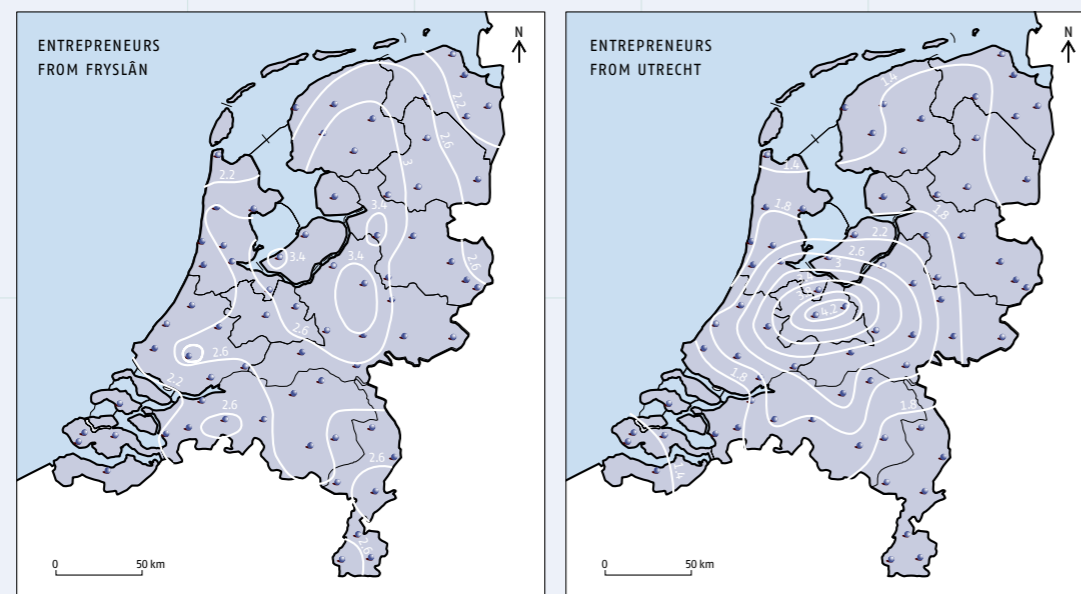
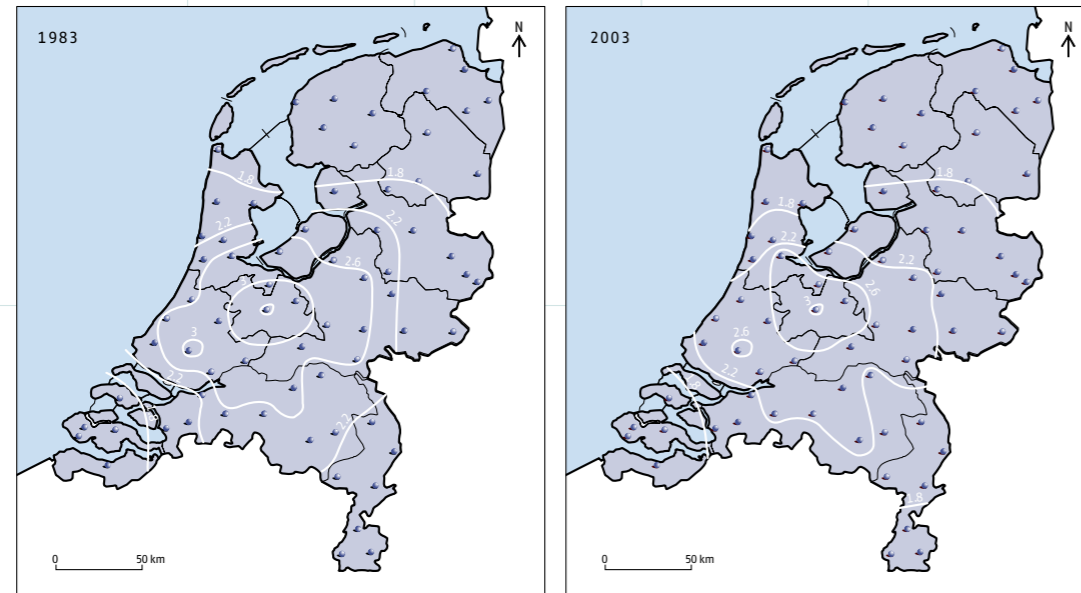
The figures in the left half of the table are the valuations of places in the North by outside entrepreneurs as possible firm locations on a five point scale while the right hand side gives the values as seen by entrepreneurs resident in the North. The striking differences are immediately apparent.

Even in an era of the globalisation of knowledge and of enterprise, it is noticeable how local preferences, based presumably upon local familiarity, are still dominant factors in the decision making of firms. In addition the actual levels of entrepreneur satisfaction with their existing locations in the North are much higher than the perceived and thus anticipated satisfaction of outsiders.

Diversity

Examining the map of satisfaction in detail, there are clearly a number of pockets of high valuation (Groningen, Drachten, Stadskanaal, Pekela, Emmen) and a clear axis running along the A7 motorway between Harlingen and Joure. These are surrounded by large areas of relative dissatisfaction throughout much of the rest of the North. The elements contributing to this evaluation can be compared for the provinces of Fryslân and Groningen and it is clear that landscape and recreation dominate in the first while education and culture are as important in the second.

The discovery and analysis of the existing images held of the northern Netherlands by insiders and outsiders and by



PLACES	AVERAGE VALUATION OF ALL DUTCH ENTREPRENEURS			AVERAGE VALUATION OF ENTREPRENEURS IN THE NORTH		
	1983	1993	2003	1983	1993	2003
GRONINGEN	1,71	1,71	1,70	2,39	2,97	2,78
EEMSHAVEN	1,53	1,48	1,44	1,96	1,67	1,78
DELFIJL	1,51	1,51	1,45	1,88	1,89	1,72
WINSCHOTEN	1,47	1,49	1,46	2,37	2,10	1,89
VEENDAM	1,49	1,52	1,48	2,33	2,17	1,89
LEEUWARDEN	1,62	1,64	1,57	2,25	2,57	2,33
DRACHTEN	1,60	1,66	1,60	2,54	2,72	2,67
HEERENVEEN	1,62	1,72	1,70	2,58	2,90	3,28
SNEEK	1,55	1,61	1,57	2,37	2,60	2,39
HARLINGEN	1,56	1,55	1,50	2,04	2,23	2,12
ASSEN	1,73	1,76	1,64	2,87	2,97	2,56
EMMEN	1,71	1,72	1,58	2,50	2,63	1,94
HOOGVEEN	1,82	1,85	1,73	2,83	3,17	2,89
MEPPEL	1,85	1,89	1,78	2,75	3,31	3,22

VALUATION OF PLACES AS SITES FOR POSSIBLE RELOCATION, BY DUTCH ENTREPRENEURS.

TOP: AVERAGE FOR ALL ENTREPRENEURS.

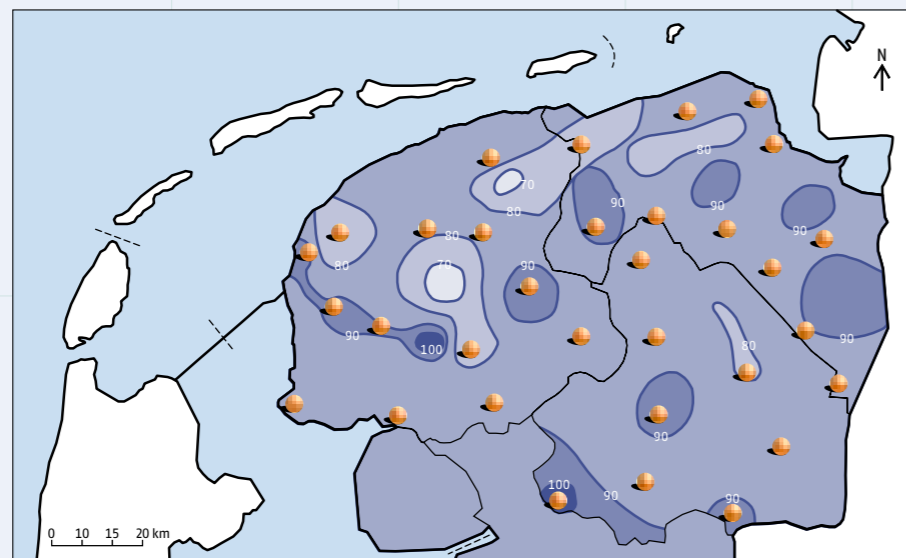
BOTTOM: FOR A GEOGRAPHICAL SELECTION OF ENTREPRENEURS, 1993.

VALUATION OF PLACES IN THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS AS SITES FOR POSSIBLE RELOCATION, BY ENTREPRENEURS, 1983-1993-2003.

different groups, whether entrepreneurs, actual or potential residents, holidaymakers, students and others is a necessary prerequisite for policies designed to utilize the favourable elements and correct or mitigate the unfavourable. Promotion strategies for the North could clearly stress the existing strong elements in the perceived image, namely the relative tranquillity, access to nature and open air recreation and even traditional cultures, all of which can confer a competitive advantage for some potential markets, especially in tourism and residential choice. Conversely a promotion campaign could address the unfavourable attributes of perceived isolation and distance from the large metropolitan centres in the Netherlands and beyond. The long term campaign *'Er gaat niets boven Groningen'* (There's nothing above Groningen) and its tourism variant ('Groningen – Top of Holland') endeavoured to combine both elements in their slogans. ■

PLACE	SCORE
MEPPEL	100,0
SKARSTERLÂN (JOURE)	99,6
SMALLINGERLAND (DRACHTEN)	96,6
LEEK	95,8
PEKELA	95,8
SCHEEMDA	94,4
HARLINGEN	93,3
MIDDEN-DRENTHE (BEILEN)	92,4
BOLSWARD	91,9
COEVORDEN	91,4
OPSTERLAND (O.A. GORREDIJK)	91,2
SLOCHTEREN	90,8
ZUIDHORN	90,5
SNEEK	90,0

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH EXISTING LOCATION AMONG ENTREPRENEURS IN THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS.



GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

PETER GROOTE

From the political perspective, the Northern Netherlands clearly seem a distinct region in The Netherlands. On the administrative level this is clear, as we have defined the region as consisting of the three Provinces of Groningen, Fryslân and Drenthe. Even on the lower administrative level of the municipalities, a difference is clear: municipalities in the North are relatively large. Maps of voting behaviour show a further contrast: in particular since the last decades of the twentieth Century, the North has become the most stable and the most social-democratic part of the Netherlands.

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