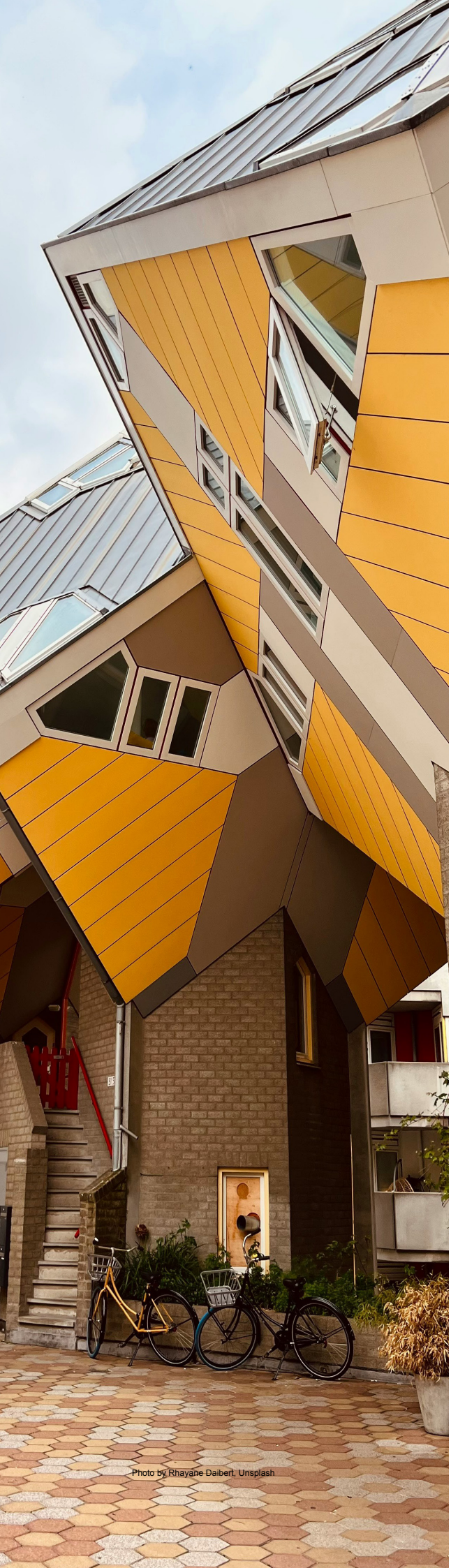

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COUNTRY FICHE

THE NETHERLANDS [NL]

In the Netherlands, only five Territorial Delivery Mechanism strategies were implemented during the 2014-20 period, focusing on the largest Dutch cities. Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies, delivered through the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument and combining European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) funding streams, were rolled out in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, and The Hague. In the latter, the SUD ITI strategy was complemented by an urban Community-led Local Development (CLLD) initiative, financed through ERDF, and piloted in the Scheveningen district with plans for citywide expansion. Although integrated approaches, community engagement, and alignment with urban strategies were already well-established in the Dutch context, the Territorial Delivery Mechanisms added value by creating new areas of intervention within neighbourhoods, engaging new stakeholders, and empowering local communities, particularly through the CLLD strategy.

POPULATION	STATE TYPE
17.08 million	Decentralised

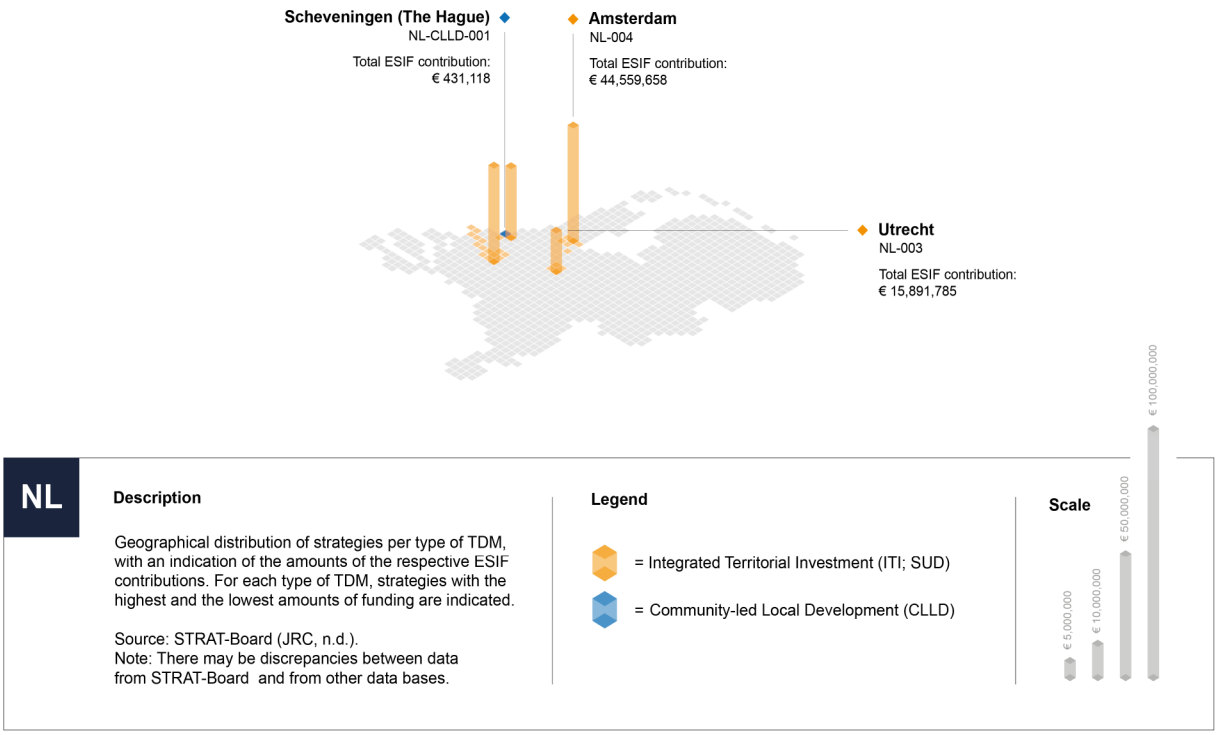
NATIONAL ESIF BUDGET	
EU Contribution (EUR)	€ 2,851,824,227
National Contribution (EUR)	€ 2,118,583,676
Total Contribution (EUR)	€ 4,970,407,903

Note: including all ESIF - ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, YEI, EMFF
Source: Cohesion Open Data Platform (European Commssion, n.d.)

Territorial Delivery Mechanism type	No.	ESIF type	Share of ERDF /CF allocation	Share of decided allocations spent (end 2022)
SUD (Art. 7) Operational Programme	0	-	-	-
SUD (Art. 7) Priority Axis	0	-	-	-
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; SUD)	4	ERDF, ESF	7.1%	82%
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; non-SUD)	0	-	-	-
Community-led Local Development (CLLD)	1	ERDF	No data	No data
TOTAL	**5**	**-**	**7.1%**	**-**

Source: allocations and spending based on Cohesion Open Data Platform (European Commission, n.d.), remaining items on STRAT-Board (JRC, n.d.).
Note: STRAT-Board data is self-reported by strategy holders. There may be inconsistencies between the data reported in STRAT-Board and other databases, such as the Cohesion Open Data Platform. No data was available on the share of the ERDF allocation or the financial implementation of the CLLD strategy in The Hague. As a result, the total share of the ERDF allocation for the implemented strategies excludes the CLLD strategy.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of Territorial Delivery Mechanism (TDM) strategies



GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

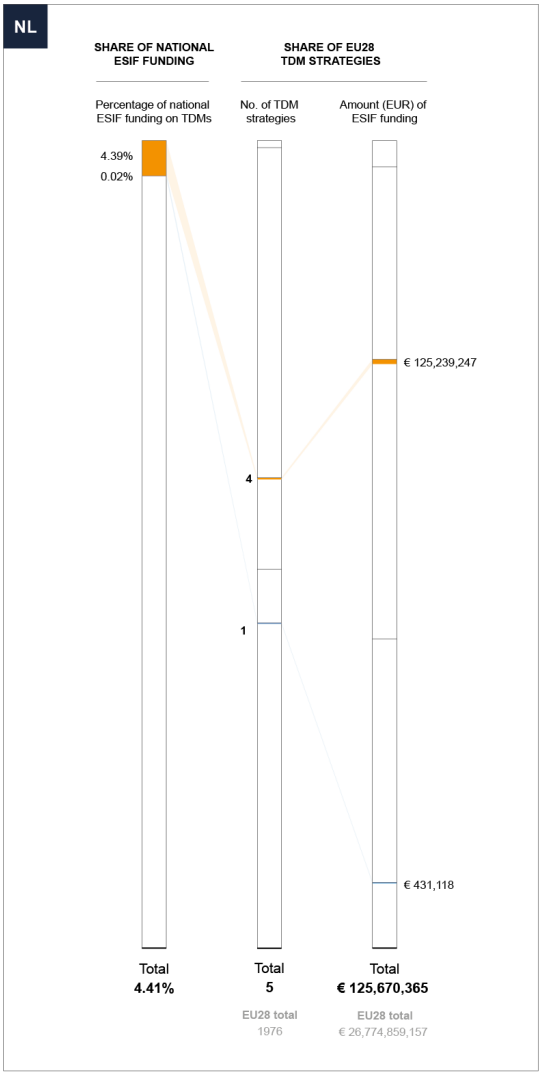
The Netherlands' territorial governance is decentralised, comprising 12 provinces (provincies), each with its own government and provincial council. The country is also divided into municipalities (gemeenten), which handle local administration. The central government, based in The Hague, oversees national affairs such as defence, foreign policy, and finance. Provinces have responsibilities in areas like spatial planning, infrastructure, and regional economic development. Municipalities manage services like education, healthcare, and public transportation. This decentralized system aims to balance national cohesion with regional autonomy, allowing tailored governance to local needs while maintaining a cohesive national framework.
The Netherlands does not have a national urban policy, but has developed the Dutch Urban Agenda (Agenda Stad). The Urban Agenda is being developed through the co-operation of the national government, municipal governments and other stakeholders. The instrument used for the Dutch Urban Agenda is the City Deal, which cities and public and/or private stakeholders would design, and which are concluded in partnership with the national government.

COHESION POLICY CONTEXT

Cohesion Policy governance consists of regionalised architecture in the case of ERDF (with four regional programmes) and a national programme in the case of ESF. The management of ERDF is in hands of regional authorities, formed by programme bureaus with representatives from each of the provinces that fall under the regional programmes. Since the 2007-2013 programme, eight territorial partners participate in the management of the West Netherlands OP, one of the four ERDF-programmes. It is composed by the four large cities, together with four provincial authorities. During the 2014-20 programme, the part of this regional programme that focused on these cities (Stedelijk Luik) was delivered through an ITI structure, through which the promotion of social inclusion and sustainable and quality employment opportunities were added as programme priorities. The MA and the four cities decided to allocate the ITI-funds to less developed parts of the cities; in the case of Rotterdam seven neighbourhoods that fall within the borders of the national NPRZ framework programme, through which long-term funding of projects in the areas of education, employment and quality of life is coordinated.

FEATURES OF THE TERRITORIAL DELIVERY MECHANISMS

Figure 2: Types of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms (TDMs) used, amount of strategies and the corresponding shares of ESIF* contributions



Source: STRAT-Board (JRC, n.d.). Notes: On the first vertical bar from the left, the percentage of all ESIF funding for that country allocated to TDM strategies is indicated with colour. The whole bar represents all ESIF funding for that country. On the second bar (middle), the number of each type of TDM strategy implemented in this country is indicated with the corresponding colour, with the whole bar representing all TDM strategies implemented across the EU28 (1976 strategies, as indicated in grey below the bar). On the bar on the right side, the amounts of ESIF funding for the TDM strategies are indicated with the corresponding colour. The bar represents the total allocation of ESIF for TDMs in the EU28. Please note that there may be inconsistencies between the data reported in STRAT-Board and Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Sustainable Urban Development Integrated Territorial Investment

In the 2014-20 period, sustainable urban development (SUD) was delivered through Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) in the four largest cities of West Netherlands: Amsterdam (approx. 900,000 inhabitants), Rotterdam (approx. 650,000), The Hague (approx. 550,000), and Utrecht (approx. 375,000). These strategies were supported by the West Netherlands Operational Programme (OP), with Rotterdam acting as the Managing Authority. The governments of the four cities served as Intermediate Bodies for their respective SUD ITI strategies, with Rotterdam managing both the OP and its own ITI.

Each strategy targeted socio-economically vulnerable neighbourhoods, aiming to create new job opportunities and support the transition to a more innovative, low-carbon economy. A key focus was also on talent development, ensuring that school curricula were adapted to meet changing market demands and equip young people with the skills needed for emerging job opportunities.

The largest portion of ERDF funding was allocated to social inclusion (€20 million), followed by the promotion of a low-carbon economy (€17.9 million), post-COVID recovery (€15.4 million), and the support of high-quality jobs (€15.1 million). The smallest amount was allocated to research, development, and innovation (€7.6 million).

While the implementation of SUD ITIs in 2014-20 had a slow start, it was ultimately considered successful, with financial performance exceeding that of mainstream Cohesion Policy funding. By the end of 2022, 82% of the allocated ERDF funds had been spent, surpassing the 72% absorption rate of mainstream Cohesion Policy funding during the same period.

The SUD ITI strategies were closely aligned with existing domestic policies. For instance, the Rotterdam SUD ITI was integrated into the National Programme for South Rotterdam (Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid - NPRZ), which aimed to address labour market challenges in this deprived urban area. The South Rotterdam strategy was particularly notable for its clear rationale in using the SUD ITI instrument, as it helped integrate investment in social and economic development in specific parts of the city. This served as a ‘bridge’ between the education and business sectors, particularly in areas like healthcare, the port industry, and technology, and aligned priorities from both the ERDF and ESF OPs.

In Rotterdam, the introduction of new stakeholders and thematic interests required the ERDF Managing Authority to develop new methods of collaboration with local partners, including vocational education institutions, on themes such as the low-carbon economy, energy efficiency, and local entrepreneurship. A SUD ITI Steering Group was established for project selection and monitoring, composed of district authorities and officials responsible for education and business support. While the Steering Group was seen as an important governance structure, the limited involvement of community and neighbourhood actors was perceived as a weakness, given the strategy’s territorial and thematic focus.

In addition, the Dutch SUD ITI strategies built upon pre-existing platforms for inter-municipal coordination, but also a new exchange network was also established for the four cities involved, providing opportunities to share knowledge and best practices.

* In order to reflect the contribution of various funds to TDMs, this graph includes all ESIF funds (ERDF, ESF, CF, EAFRD, EMFF).

Despite this, challenges were encountered, such as the need to align SUD ITI strategic objectives with programme-level priorities. This was evident in Rotterdam, where the focus on integrating support for education and business in deprived districts aligned with the national ESF OP and the regional ERDF OP priorities.
Further challenges included the difficulty of increasing the visibility of Cohesion Policy through SUD ITIs, a concern shared by programme authorities, Intermediate Bodies, and beneficiaries. Additionally, as seen in other European cases, combining ERDF and ESF funds at the project level proved difficult due to differing management and implementation structures. Consequently, ESF operations remained complementary to ERDF rather than being fully integrated. Nonetheless, in Rotterdam, the thematic focus of the SUD strategy improved collaboration in the social and educational domains, providing employers, companies, and educational institutions in the ITI areas with the opportunity to work more closely together.

Adding Value through new collaborations as part of the SUD ITI in Rotterdam South

In Rotterdam, stakeholders viewed the overall impact of the SUD ITI strategy on the territory as relatively limited, given its small budget and its complementary role to the much larger National Programme for Rotterdam South (NPRZ). However, the strategy added value by encouraging greater involvement of municipal experts in the programme's management structures. Local experts in social, labour market, and innovation sectors participated in advisory groups, while the strategy's use of both ESF and ERDF funding streams helped mobilise new stakeholders keen to get access to new funding opportunities. Social enterprises and educational institutions joined the urban advisory group, improving collaboration between the education and business sectors in the district. From the beneficiaries' perspective, the local relevance of the 2014-20 projects was evident: many young job seekers in low-paid jobs or on benefits were connected to labour markets through roles in low-carbon innovation and the installation of energy efficiency measures. Moreover, some stakeholder groups that were new to the 2014-20 programme have proven to be valuable partners in other collaborations and are potential beneficiaries in the 2021-2027 programme.

Community-led Local Development

The CLLD strategy in The Hague's Scheveningen district complemented the city's SUD strategy and served as a pilot for this Territorial Delivery Mechanism. The Local Action Group (LAG), Stichting Initiatief Op Scheveningen (SioS), was formed to manage the strategy, which used ERDF resources to fund projects from 2016 to 2019. The main goal was to strengthen the local economy in an innovative and sustainable way, with a focus on improving employment opportunities in the area.
The initiative's local grounding was particularly well received during both the development and implementation phases. The community's involvement in shaping the strategy ensured it addressed locally important objectives, fostering a strong sense of local ownership. This approach facilitated new collaborations between neighbourhood organisations, including sports, cultural groups, resident associations, and businesses, helping to build trust and promote projects that improved the district's liveability. Residents were effectively mobilised by the LAG, leading to the identification of shared interests and the implementation of projects chosen through a voting process. Based on these positive outcomes, The Hague is considering establishing LAGs in other neighbourhoods for the 2021-2027 period, focusing on energy transition.
However, some challenges were encountered. The financial accountability system was problematic, with excessive administrative demands overwhelming volunteers and project owners. Reports often failed to meet required standards, necessitating additional government support. Delays in fund disbursement also caused frustration, despite efforts to speed up payments. Furthermore, there was limited cooperation between the LAG and government bodies, resulting in confusion over roles and responsibilities. Connections between the CLLD, municipal authorities, and European bodies were weak, with no new administrative collaborations or alignment with other urban priorities in Scheveningen. Coordination between projects was minimal, and communication with citizens, particularly around the voting process, was insufficient.

IN SUM

In the 2014-20 period, although Territorial Delivery Mechanisms were only deployed in the four largest Dutch cities, focusing primarily on areas with socio-economic challenges, these strategies effectively addressed local needs through close alignment with pre-existing strategies and the involvement of relevant stakeholders. The CLLD in Scheveningen was particularly notable for introducing a new mechanism for direct citizen engagement in strategy formulation and decision-making. While functional integration was minimal due to the strategies' narrow territorial focus, the SUD ITIs promoted an integrated thematic approach, as seen in the case of Rotterdam. The Dutch Territorial Delivery Mechanisms strategies were implemented in a context where integrated territorial approaches to local and regional development, as well as cross-level and cross-sectoral coordination, were already well-established. However, the SUD ITIs strengthened connections between sectors, while the CLLD strategy in The Hague boosted local resident engagement.

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