



City profile

City profile: The Hague

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the relatively small city of The Hague has come to play an important role on the world stage by establishing itself as the seat of international organisations, particularly in the field of peace and justice. This *city profile* analyses the ambitions, challenges and policies related to this global positioning of the city, and discusses these within the framework of a more general sketch of the city's historical development, its social, economic and physical locational conditions. Particular emphasis is placed on its location in the wider Randstad metropolitan region and how The Hague can borrow size and function from its neighbouring cities to strengthen its global position.

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Introduction: 'the Residence'

In the shadow of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, The Hague, the third city of the Netherlands, is pursuing its international ambitions. Based on a distinctive economic profile of international organisations and a strong emphasis on the public sector, the city strives to strengthen its image as the International City of Peace and Justice. These are perhaps bold ambitions for a city the size of The Hague. However, despite its population of only half a million, The Hague hosts an impressive list of well-known European and international organisations such as the International Court of Justice, which is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, Europol, the European Union's law enforcement agency, and Eurojust, the European Union's judicial coordination unit, as well as the organisation that received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize: the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

In total, over 300 international organisations have settled within the region of The Hague, ranging from these intergovernmental organisations to NGOs and embassies and consulates. This further contributes to The Hague being referred to as 'the Residence', being the seat of the Dutch royal family, national government, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court. In the international media, 'The Hague' once stood primarily for the 'Dutch government', but nowadays it is increasingly synonymous with the cluster of international organisations that have settled in the city, especially in the field of international law and justice. Given the dominance of public institutions, one might forget that

The Hague also hosts the headquarters of Royal Dutch Shell, the world's largest corporation (in terms of turnover; see [Fortune Global 500, 2013](#)), as well as several other large international firms, such as Siemens and KPN Telecom.

The dominance of public institutions gives The Hague a distinct economic profile that complements the other major cities of the Randstad metropolitan region, of which it is part ([Meijers, 2007](#)). Whilst the municipality of The Hague has just over half a million inhabitants, the population of the Randstad is over 6 million. This position in a larger metropolitan urban system brings both advantages and disadvantages ([Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007](#)). For instance, the amenities of other cities can add to the attractiveness of The Hague (e.g. Schiphol Amsterdam Airport or Rotterdam's museums are within easy reach) which is an advantage, although at the same time The Hague is confronted with their 'agglomeration shadow' ([Partridge, Rickman, Ali, & Olfert, 2009](#)), as competition between the cities may hamper development opportunities in The Hague.

In this *city profile* of The Hague we provide a portrait of the city, focusing in the next section on its history, demographics as well as its economic and social conditions and issues. In the third section, we explain and describe the development of the cluster of international organisations in The Hague. This development has become a key priority in The Hague's urban policies, which we explore in the fourth section. In pursuing this ambition of truly becoming the International City of Peace and Justice, the position of The Hague in the wider Randstad region could be an important asset (fifth section), and we will discuss how this is linked to The Hague's ambitions in the concluding sixth section. This paper builds on a recent study by the authors into the prospects of, and challenges for,

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further developing the international profile of the city of The Hague (Meijers, Spaans, Louw, Hoogerbrugge, & Priemus, 2013). In this paper we make use of the results of this study that were gathered through desk research and interviews with stakeholders in The Hague's international sector.

Profile of the city of The Hague

History

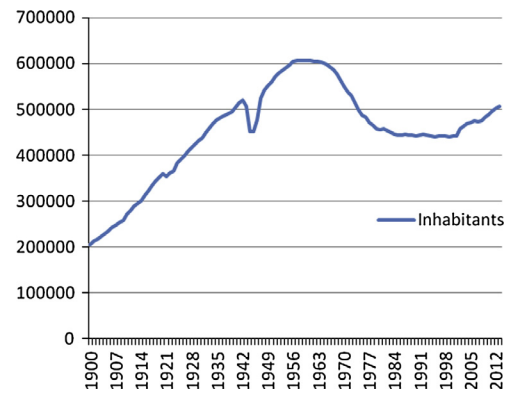
Even though The Hague is the seat of national government and the royal family, it is not the capital city of the Netherlands. This can only be explained historically. Since the 14th century The Hague has been a 'neutral' place to locate supralocal governmental functions of the politically and economically powerful region of Holland. It was neutral in the sense that this location avoided a choice among one of the six powerful cities in Holland of the late Middle Ages, namely Amsterdam, Delft, Dordrecht, Gouda, Haarlem and Leyden. An additional advantage was that the government's seat was not subordinate to local city magistrates, one of the reasons why The Hague never obtained official city rights and is teasingly referred to as the 'largest village in the Netherlands'.

An official Dutch capital was first announced in 1806 during the French period, when Napoleon Bonaparte enthroned his brother Louis Napoleon in what had for centuries been the Dutch republic. He preferred to settle in Amsterdam and made this city the capital. When the French rule ended in the Netherlands (1813), the Dutch returned the seat of government to The Hague, but the capital city status, which was not considered to be very important at that time, was left untouched.

Although The Hague never obtained city rights, in 1794 it was already the third largest municipality in the Netherlands, after Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Just like these cities The Hague grew rapidly in the 19th century and continued to do so until 1960. Much of this growth can be explained by the growth of the machinery of government, but also by an increase of employment in manufacturing. Nearby villages and land were incorporated by the municipality of The Hague. The Hague grew uninterrupted until the Second World War, when about 45,000 inhabitants of the neighbourhoods along the coast had to leave their homes to make room for German coastal defences. After the war the number of inhabitants grew again until an all-time high of 606,000 in 1960.

Between 1960 and 1985 the population shrank to 443,000 (see Fig. 1). This shrinkage can be explained by the 'new town policy', introduced by the national government in the 1970s. This policy aimed to concentrate new housing development in a number of greenfield locations in the proximity of existing cities, mostly in the Randstad (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1990). Construction activity on the outskirts of cities induced young native Dutch families and prospective families to leave the city in droves. The Hague lost many middle class households to the new satellite town of Zoetermeer, but also to municipalities in the immediate vicinity such as Rijswijk and Voorburg. This led to a considerable change in the city's household composition. Kruijthoff and Priemus (2001) showed that, by Dutch standards, socio-spatial segregation at a district level in The Hague increased and led to spatial concentrations of low income households, unemployment and ethnic minorities.

In the 1970s and 1980s The Hague also lost employment, mainly due to the relocation of some ministries and governmental agencies to the adjacent municipalities of Rijswijk and Voorburg, but also to some peripheral regions of the country. In the 1970s, national policy shifted to the renewal of dilapidated 19th century urban housing areas. Large neighbourhoods within The Hague were completely demolished and rebuilt or renovated. This



Source: Buurtmonitor Den Haag (2013).

Fig. 1. Number of inhabitants in The Hague between 1900 and 2013. (See above-mentioned reference for further information.)

resulted in a stabilization of the number of inhabitants from 1985 onwards.

The mid-1980s saw another policy shift. Rather than redistributing development to achieve equality, it was deemed necessary to increase the international competitive position of the Netherlands by strengthening its cities, in particular those in the Randstad. Compact city policies were introduced to enhance the support base for urban functions, and to prevent urban sprawl and additional growth of mobility. Large new housing areas were developed at the borders of the major cities, including The Hague. Although initially built on the territory of neighbouring municipalities these areas were later annexed by the municipality of The Hague. This resulted in a rise of the number of inhabitants from 1999 onwards (see Fig. 1). Also the ministries that moved out of The Hague in the 1970s returned, as did some of the agencies. While the city nowadays has 507,000 inhabitants, this is projected to grow to about 575,000 by 2040.

Location and accessibility

The Netherlands is densely dotted with cities, most of them small or medium-sized. Their overlapping spheres of influence complicate the identification of a metropolitan area surrounding The Hague (Fig. 2), and in practice, several delimitations circulate with varying degrees of functional coherence (see Burger, Meijers, & Van Oort, 2013) and governmental co-operation (see Fig. 3). First of all, The Hague is the centre of a larger city-region called 'Haaglanden'. This region is composed of nine municipalities; including Delft, Voorburg, Rijswijk and Zoetermeer, and has 1,040,000 inhabitants. The municipalities within the city-region have been co-operating for quite some years in multiple policy domains, including housing and transportation. Secondly, The Hague has recently been conceptualised as one of the cores of the bipolar 'Rotterdam The Hague Metropolitan Area' (see Meijers, Hoogerbrugge, & Hollander, 2014) totalling about 2.2 million inhabitants (see Fig. 3). It was recently decided that the national government funding for transportation will be allocated to this metropolitan area. Thirdly, The Hague is the seat of the government of the Province of South-Holland and the string of close-by cities ranging from Leyden in the North of this province to Dordrecht in the Southeast, with The Hague and Rotterdam in between, is referred to as the 'South Wing' (3 million inhabitants). Fourthly, the South Wing, the 'North Wing' (with Amsterdam and Utrecht as leading cities) and the 'Green Heart' that separates the two, jointly form the Randstad metropolitan region, which with over 6 million inhabitants is the economic and demographic core of the Netherlands (Fig. 2).

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