Country report on the Netherlands

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1. The fertile Dutch ground

In this first section we will see in which fertile ground the seeds of Agenda 21 fell in the Netherlands. We will sketch the position of Dutch municipalities in the administrative structure and in environmental policy. We will describe some tendencies in environmental policy and in local policy making that are of special interest for the reception of local agenda 21 (LA21) in the Dutch situation.

1.1 The position of Dutch municipalities

The Netherlands is a decentralised unitary state. The administrative structure comprises three layers of government, namely (1) municipalities and water boards, (2) provinces and (3) national government. Local government within this state is organised in about 600 municipalities. Municipalities have two functions: the implementation of national government policies in certain policy spheres and the initiation of policy in other spheres where autonomous decision making is permitted. These functions and the relation with provincial and central government are laid down in the Municipal Law. To understand the position of Dutch municipalities one should recognise that there are constitutional constraints on the activity of local authorities. The mayor is centrally appointed, the budgets and other important financial and planning decisions must be referred for higher approval and central government also possesses the power to overrule any act of local government that is considered either against the general interest or illegal.

There are also financial constraints on the activities of municipalities because over 90% of their income is provided by national government. This can be in the form of an overall grant or in the form of specific payments for the provision of specific services or projects.

Dutch municipalities have been involved in environmental policy since the middle ages. At first municipalities were mainly considered mediators in environmental disputes between neighbours. With the growth of the scale of industry more and more the other government layers, provinces and national government got involved in environmental policy. As a result of the environmental laws introduced in the 70s, for instance the provinces were entrusted with license-issuing powers in cases involving complex, technically complicated and potentially highly-polluting companies. National government concentrates primarily on national legislation and regulations as well as on the planning of national environmental policy, including targets and norms.
An important milestone in the development of environmental policy was the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), entitled ‘To choose or to lose’ (States General, 1989). To realise the ambitious goals of the NEPP other actors have to be addressed to realise the NEPP. These other actors would firstly be the other government layers who have their own responsibilities and tasks in the field of environmental protection. Secondly the other policy sectors who have environment-related tasks, and thirdly the actors in society who are the target groups for the environmental policy. The NEPP states that ‘Everyone is assumed to be aware of his responsibility with respect to the environment and to let this influence his actions. The large scale on which some environmental problems occur, does not detract from this’ (p. 13). And ‘Without the dedication of the target groups environmental policy cannot be intensified, and the pursuit of sustainable development becomes a dead letter’ (p. 13).

As of 1990 the municipalities and the provinces received extra funds (BUGM, FUN) for constructing and extending the municipal and provincial apparatus. The targets that have to be achieved by the other government layers are based on the idea of ‘value for money’ and are laid down in the so-called ‘Central Plan for the approach to the NEPP’ for respectively the provinces and the municipalities. For the municipalities this implementation plan functions as a kind of contract between the Association of Municipalities and the Ministry of Environment. Because a minimum level of facilities (70,000 inhabitants) has to be achieved, many municipalities have to cooperate at a regional level. The Environmental Inspection annually investigates the quality of municipal environment policy and its execution. In 1995, task performance should have reached a certain required level.

The idea was that after 1995 the funding would not longer be earmarked for environmental purposes but would be added to the general municipal funding. An evaluation during the funding period (Commission Ringeling, 1993) lead to doubts if the environmental tasks were really institutionalised in the municipal organisations. The Ministry of Environment and the Association of Municipalities decided to introduce a new earmarked funding (VOGM) which in the context of the implementation of the second NEPP could strengthen the role of municipalities in environmental policy. This new earmarked funding for the 1996-1998 period gave municipalities more freedom of choice for their own priorities. One of these possible new priorities was, as we will see in section 3, LA21.

If we look upon the tasks given to the municipalities and their own initiatives, Dutch municipalities are probably among the forerunners in the world. These activities not only include tasks in the field of direct environmental protection but especially activities in related policy fields stretching out from sustainable building and sustainable physical planning to taken into account environmental effects in such different activities as for instance traffic planning, sewage building, purchasing of office goods, etc.,

1.2 Main characteristics of Dutch environmental policy

In the beginning of the nineties Dutch environmental policy had four aspects that seem of special importance for LA 21, namely the comprehensive integral approach, inter policy integration and the target group approach and ‘open’ green planning.

Comprehensive integral approach
For LA21, as is set out in Chapter one, a more comprehensive approach of environmental policy is crucial. From the late 70s and early 80s, the Dutch became increasingly aware of the disadvantages and limitations of the sector environmental policy pursued so far. As a consequence, efforts were made in various ways to integrate the policy. Environmental policy was no longer renewed according to environmental compartments - such as air, water and soil - but according to themes (e.g. acidification, the manure problem and desiccation), geographical areas (e.g. vulnerable sandy areas), flows of material (e.g. cadmium) and target groups (e.g. traffic, industrial sectors and agriculture). The new approach was later called the ‘internal’ integration of environmental policy. This ‘internal’ integration has been given concrete shape not only in plans, but also in laws and institutions like the General Environmental Act that replaces several sectoral environmental laws.

*Inter policy integration*

A LA21 should also be, as is set out in Chapter 1, a more conscious attempt to realise inter policy integration. Next to the ‘internal’ integration also the ‘external’ integration is of key importance in Dutch environmental policy. Many policies on all level of government have important side effects on the environment which stresses the importance of the bases for intra- and inter-governmental decision making. Since the first National Environmental Policy Plan, much more attention has been devoted to the ‘external integration of environmental policy’. What this entails is that such matters as transport policy, physical planning, agriculture policy, economic structure policy, water management, building regulations, energy policy and educational policy are fine-tuned with the national environmental policy (States General, 1990). This fine-tuning should not only take place at national level, but also at provincial and local level. Despite excellent initiatives in this respect, this form of integration is still making slow progress, because in traditional policy objectives remain their overriding concern. Over the past years this has been particularly clear with important government decisions on infrastructure. In these cases economic interest always, either implicitly or explicitly, took precedence over environmental considerations.

*The target group-approach*

A third characteristic of LA21 processes should be the involvement of stakeholders in policy-making and -implementation. A first aspect of the Dutch environmental policy in this respect is the target-group approach. This policy focus means that, after the national environmental objectives have been formulated in the National Environmental Policy Plans, target groups and their representatives have a strong say in all further stages of the policy process. In creating a consultative structure between the government and the industry organisations acting on behalf of the polluters (i.e. the target groups) and attempt is being made to internalise environmental responsibility in individual companies. One of the main aims of this consultations is to define the tasks for a specific sector of industry within the framework of the overall national environmental objectives. Usually these arrangements are laid down in covenants and other forms of guidelines, incorporating targets to be realised by the various sectors of industry within a certain time limit.
Convenants are a specific form of social instruments that can be placed opposite of regulatory and financial instruments. These instruments are aimed at stimulating society and other governmental bodies to accept responsibility for sustainability and environmental quality. This is done through target-group consultation and covenants, company or personal liability, emissions trading, research and information obligations, regulations requiring companies to employ staff with adequate expertise, the creation of institutional facilities (environmental impact assessment, company environment departs and internal company environmental management systems), etc. Many of these instruments also operate indirectly through intermediary organisations, and sometimes even lead to the creation of such intermediary organisations. This approach is becoming much more widespread, not only in the Netherlands but - since the fifth Environment Action Programme of the European Union - also at European level.

Not all important target groups are organised in such a way that they can be ‘reached’ through representative organisations that are not only able to speak on behalf of the groups, but also ‘can deliver’ what they agree upon in negotiations. Examples are the farmers, the car drivers and households in general. The second National Environmental Policy Plan expresses explicitly serious concern on this subject.

What is the meaning of the target group approach in the context of LA21? According to the national planning framework local authorities should also involve the target groups in their planning. At the local level there are some specific advantages and disadvantages in a target group approach.

The main guidelines of environmental policy are largely set by the state. The policy is executed mainly by the provinces and the municipalities. The advantage of the municipalities as an administrative layer in realising and intensification of environmental policy is the fact that the local authorities are closer to the citizen. Close (personal) contacts play an important part in the execution of environmental policy.

At a municipal level there will be less of a need to arrive at a common policy formulation. Usually there will be a consensus of this by the time the municipality is confronted with the problem. At the municipality level, the tension between what has already been decided at that national level between the central government and the branch of industry, always plays a part. Thus both the municipality and the local garage dealer may be confronted with agreements made between the central government and the Association of garages (BOVAG).

Of greater importance may be the fact that insight and/or influence in formulating measures is given to the policy target groups. Here we may think of various models. By means of the environmental policy plan, the municipality can address ‘third parties’. First with the intention of providing other authorities, enterprises and social organisations with a picture of the type of behaviour they may expect from the municipal authorities. Secondly, the municipality can address third parties in order to appeal to the adjustment of their actions and decisions to the intended governmental policy.

A target group policy can be an active part of this planning. In practice this has been done by, e.g. (Coenen, 1992):

- including representatives from industry, possibly as experts, in a guidance or feedback group;
organising an information meeting which has the nature of a discussion (possible brainstorming sessions, seminar, hearing), where principles or preliminary measures can be discussed;
consulting with target groups on the holding of interviews with representatives of the target groups or requesting a (written) response to planning drafts.
Some municipalities set up more permanent consultation forums especially with local environmental movement groups.

Local environmental policy planning
Local environmental policy plans can be considered the first experiences with the drawing of local sustainable strategies and the involvement of stakeholders in the planning process. Of the larger municipalities (larger than 30,000 inhabitants) 82% had in the beginning of 1993 a strategic municipal environmental policy plan or a mixed strategic and operational plan (Coenen, 1996)
In general policy planning was not a new phenomenon in the environment. Various environmental laws contained planning obligations for both the national government and the provinces. The planning systems as it was developed in the seventies has the nature of a response to urgent problems and focused mainly on the individual sectors, where these problems showed most clearly. The sector planning system consisted of various sector plan for solid waste, water quality, soil conservation, etc. In the Memorandum ‘More than the Sum of its Parts’ from 1984 by the Minister of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment, Winsenius, the foundations for a new system of environmental policy planning are sketched. The ideas from this Memorandum were converted into legislation in the chapter ‘Plans’ of the General Environmental Conservation’s Act. The new system integrates all sector plans in single strategic environmental policy plan in relation to a single operational implementation plan. Moreover, a different form of planning was proposed. The sector plans were mainly internally oriented and prepared exclusively within their own environmental sectors wanted to draw attention to their own environmental problems, and become known inside and outside the organisation.
The new planning system proposed the concept of ‘open planning’. ‘Open’ means involving others such as citizens, enterprises, environmental organisations and other authorities in planning at an early stage. This is supposed to increase the scope and recruiting power of planning. This in turn is related to the interiorization of environmental responsibility by the plan’s target groups. Such interiorization also depends on the way in which the plan is accomplished. The external function is the consequence of publicising the plan. By publicising policy intentions, actors in the environment such as citizens, firms, social organisations and other authorities gain an insight into the type of behaviour which is to be expected from the municipalities, so that they can adjust their own decision-making to this.
Local green planning, or local environmental policy plans as they are called in the Netherlands, can be considered the first experiences with the drawing of local sustainable strategies. These plans can be considered comprehensively in the sense that they involve whole range of environmental sectors (waste, air, noise) and related policy sectors (traffic, housing, physical planning). The well-known themes from the Dutch national environmental policy plan (e.g. acidification, the manure problem and desiccation) are not very common in Dutch municipalities plan (Coenen, 1996).
The participation in local green planning is representative for the way participation in municipal environmental policy making was given shape at the end of the eighties and in the beginning of the nineties. Participation in local green planning processes could be either reaction on the basis of an concept plan drawn by the administration without the involvement of target-groups or real participation in the preparation phase of the plan. A telephone survey in June 1992 (Buil, 1992) showed that only 1/3 out of 60 municipalities (above 25.000 inhabitants) actually involved the targetgroups in the preparation phase of the planning process. Methods usually would be interviewing the targetgroups or having face-to-face consultation talks. A written survey held in the beginning of 1993 (Coenen and Lulofs, 1993) showed that 29,8% only had participation in the preparation phase, 35,1% only as a reaction on the concept-plan and 21,1% in both phases. 14% of the local planning processes didn’t involve any form of participation.

If we place the municipalities that had real participation on a participation ladder 9,8% had as the highest form of participation an citizen consultation group, 43,1% has apart from other forms of participation at least hearings and information meetings. 33,3% had as the highest step on the ladder, apart from other forms of participation, direct interviewing of targetgroups.

These numbers show that it was not unusual to involve targetgroups in the drawing of environmental strategies it happened in a minority of the municipalities and the methods were quit limited. The majority of the municipalities relied on consulting after drawing a concept-plan.

1.4 Political and administrative modernisation

A general tendency in municipalities that a process of political and administrative modernisation. The municipal elections of march 1990 showed an all-time low with 61,5 percent of the voters turning up. In general municipal politicians considered this a dramatically. What it made even worse was that research (Tops a.o., 1991) showed that those who had given their vote showed up because they considered voting as their civil duty not because they were interested or involved in municipal politics. The municipal elections were ‘nationalised’ voters were lead by national issues and voted for the same political party as in the national elections. Dutch citizens were quit satisfied with the services municipalities offered and considered the local authorities as reasonably useful, legitimate and important. But they didn’t consider municipal politics as an important political arena were citizens should get involved.

This was a starting point for a lot of municipalities to take up initiatives for administrative and political modernisation. In general this meant that the local administrators and politicians wanted to change their relation with citizens. There were a lot of symposia, conference, committees and research that lead to publications with analyses and possible solutions for the crisis in municipal politics. Although there are differences in both the analysis and the conclusions the general diagnosis was that the ‘policy style’ of municipalities was to formal and to closed, administration was directed inwards, into the own organisation. The policy style was no longer in line with the new relation that developed between municipalities and their citizens in the last decades.
In the first place because the political parties lost their role. Less and less citizens are a member of a political party, which a few decades ago was considered very natural. A lot of voters change parties very quickly, and they don’t recognise much difference between political parties at the local level. In the second place municipalities are more and more seen as an institute that offers services, the citizen considers himself as an consumer instead of an voter. And in the third place the citizens felt ‘left out’. Policy making was considered a process that goes on in a ‘inner circle’. Feeling ‘left out’ also means that one has the idea that there is no need for the expertise of the citizens but also that there are no possibilities to display there own needs and problems to local politics.

Administrative and political modernisation means searching for new ways for policy making that meet the wishes of the citizens. Inventory research (Gilising, 1994) showed that by 1994 96% of the Dutch municipalities took initiatives that can be considered experiments with political or administrative modernisation. In general two approaches can be distinguished; the instrumental and the communicative approach (Veldboer, 1996), although a lot of these experiments have elements of both categories.

The instrumental approach introduces instruments to find out what citizens think, mean and wish. For instance by introducing an referendum or some form of opinion research. In the communicative approach the way of policy making changes. Instead of involving citizens after concept-plans are already finished it means involving citizens right from the start of the policy process. Social scientist talk of ‘interactive policy-making’, co-production of policy or strategic bottom-up policy-making.

In section 6 we will discuss what this means for local environmental policy making. In environmental policy making their has been a tradition in this communicative approach as we saw in section 1.2 that already started in the eighties.

**Conclusions**

When the RIO-document came out in 1992 Dutch municipalities were putting a lot of effort in reaching an adequate level of environmental policy administration as set by the national government. This meant working on the backlogs in environmental permitting and environmental policy enforcement and the implementation of the ‘Central plan for the approach to the NEPP by municipalities’

If we look upon the work Dutch municipalities in the field of environmental policy the Dutch are among the countries with the most progressive municipal environmental policies in the world. A lot of the action points in Agenda 21 considering local authorities Dutch municipalities were already engaged in. There was also a considerable experience in communicative and participative procedures in municipalities through concept as the targetgroup approach and ‘open planning’. In general there were tendencies for an administrative and political modernisation of local government towards an more ‘open dialogue’ with the local community.

So at a first glance the Dutch soil for the seeds of Agenda 21 to fall in looked very fertile.
2. Preparations for UNCED

In this second section we will shortly discuss the preparations towards RIO. In fact this preparations go as far back as the warm welcome of the Brundtland-report in the Netherlands.

Background
Almost immediately after the publication of ‘Our common future’, the Dutch government designated ‘sustainable development’ as the general guideline for overall Dutch government policy. The points of departure and the goals of the Brundtland-report (World Commission on Environment and development WCED) were underlined by the Dutch government in an provisional standpoint on the Brundtland-report (TK, 1987-1988, 20298) and then translated into the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP).

Among municipalities there was also a great interest in the concept of sustainable development. After the publication of the first NEPP in 1989 and it’s successor the NEPP-plus in 1991 the public debate on environmental issues was at it’s highest peak. During the local council elections of 1990 environment was an important issue. NGO’s and left wing political parties (PVDA, 1990) published ideas for a more sustainable municipal policy, as an input for the election campaigns. In a lot of the political programs of the newly appointed Boards of Alderman for the 1990-1994 administration period attention was given to sustainable development.

In the beginning of the nineties municipalities also showed a growing interest in global problems and the international dimension of their policies. Municipalities were influenced by NGO’s in this respect. For instance the Inter Church Peace Platform (IKV) stimulated an Municipal platform for Peace. NGO’s in the field of development aid (NCO, NOVIB, SNV) stimulated municipalities towards intercity co-operation with the South. The anti-apartheid movement let to a platform for municipalities against apartheid (LOTA) The only part of the four leafed clover of the international dimension of municipal policy alongside peace, human rights and development aid that seemed to missing was the international dimension of environmental policy (Moerkamp, 1992).

Municipalities and NGO’s preparing for UNCED
NGO’s stimulated and awoke interest within municipalities for global environmental problems and sustainable developments. In January 1991 de Vereniging Milieudefensie started with a greenhouse-campaign aimed at consumers and municipalities. Later the Climate-Alliance was incorporated into the campaign and the greenhouse-campaign itself became part of a broader campaign. The Campaign ‘Work towards a cleaner world’ was hold between Earth day (22nd April) and the World Environment Day (5 June) 1991. In this campaign participated third world organisations (NCO, NOVIB), the environmental movement (Vereniging Milieudefensie, Stichting Milieu-educatie) together with the ministry of Environmental Affairs and the Association of municipalities (VNG). The VNG called all his members to join this campaign (Circular, 8 March 1991).
In 1992 for the same period the campaign was dedicated to the UNCED-conference. The 92-campaign was especially directed to the topic ‘climate change’ and the possibilities for a local greenhouse policy. The campaign involved a conference on municipalities in a sustainable world, the founding of local groups, a model-resolution including an action program to be signed by municipalities and actions with postcards supported by international networks (World Life Fund, Friends of the earth).

Within the general campaign ‘Work towards a cleaner world’ the UNCED-campaign was very much directed towards the founding of local platforms. Local platforms got some seed money (f 5000,-), an information package and support by Regional Centres for Development Co-operation (COS) and provincial Consultancies for Nature and Environment-education (Provinciale Consultschappen Natuur- en Milieueducatie). A condition for support was the involvement of the municipality. This lead to 25 new platforms besides 13 already existing platforms. An important output was the learning process in co-operation between municipalities and municipalities and the local and regional publicity (COS, Provinciale Consultschappen Natuur- en Milieueducatie, 1992).

In the further preparation towards RIO the platform Brazil 92 was formed by a great number of organisations including Labour Unions, Employers Organisations, Church organisations, consumer organisations and the environmental movement. Goal of the platform was in the framework of UNCED to contribute to environmental consciousness in the Netherlands and aid to the position taking of the Netherlands at UNCED.

Except for the already mentioned postcard campaign ‘Work for a cleaner world’, the platform organised an conference titled ‘A start for UNCED’ were the platform presented there viewpoints to among others the Prime Minister. It also was meant as an preparation for the World Urban Forum. The platform published a booklet with the same title as the conference as their contribution to UNCED. The Alliance for sustainable development, a platform of environmental- and peace-organisations published a Dutch National NGO-report within the framework of UNCED, titled ‘It can be different’. This report was explicitly brought forward as a NGO-report alongside the formal National report that the Dutch National Government delivered for UNCED. This report was intended to be a list of concrete recommendations for society concerning sustainable development.

Before and after every Preparatory Committee (PrepCom)-meeting the ministers of Environmental Affairs and Development Corporation informed the parliament about the departure points the Dutch delegation would take and the results of the meetings. In a special paper parliament was informed about the preparation process of UNCED. The goals of UNCED, the international and national organisational structure of the preparation process and the Dutch departure points concerning the results of the conference were explained in this paper.

In the national government papers not much attention was given to the position of municipalities, although the minister of Environmental affairs stated that action on a local crucial for sustainable development (PrepCom, New York, 2 March 1992)

The Association of Dutch municipalities participated in the International Union of local Authorities (IULA) preparations for UNCED and the Oslo-declaration. Further the association was involved in several already mentioned initiatives and campaigns as the representative of the Dutch municipalities.

Conclusions

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The UNCED-conference received a lot of media attention in the Netherlands. Especially the NGO's played an important role in discussing the UNCED-theme and trying to awake interest in local groups. The larger group of municipalities kept a position at the side-line except. The minority consisted out of the ones with active local groups, the ones who got involved in the 'Working towards a cleaner world' or who signed the Climate-treaty. The Association of Municipalities was involved in a lot of the national initiatives.

3. The Dutch follow-up to RIO

The first reactions by NGO's, civil servants and politicians in the media on the results of UNCED were not very enthusiastic (f.i. Van der Klee, 1992). They ranged from very disappointing (environmental movement) to the best we could get given the circumstances (Waller Hunter, 1992). In this section we will sketch the follow-up of RIO in three phases, the first reaction by the national government (3.1) and individual municipalities till the beginning of 1995, the second phase with the start of a national campaign (3.3) and the re-enforcement of the campaign in 1996 (3.4).

3.1 First reaction by the national government

By a letter dated the 22nd of June the Minister of Environmental Affairs, also on behalf of his colleague of Development corporation, informed parliament shortly about the results of the UNCED-conference. This was a response to a request directly after the conference (dated 16 June, RIO ended 14 June). After a report from the Dutch delegation (dated 17th of August) the same ministers sent, again after a request by the parliament following the discussion in June, an paper on the 'Implementation of the UNCED-results'.

Important for LA21 was the announcement of initiatives to fully translate Agenda 21 in Dutch and some other initiatives to make the results of RIO available for the Mayor groups. Further the initiative was announced to reform the Platform Brazil 92 in the Platform for Sustainable Development, to continue the activities of the Platform directed towards spreading UNCED in the Netherlands and the achievement of sustainable development.

The ministers also elaborated on the input of the results of UNCED in Dutch policies. They promised parliament an analysis of the changes in policy and law necessary for the follow-up of RIO. At the eve of the first meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development in New York (14-25 June 1993) the ministers informed parliament about the progress of the Dutch international policy and the Dutch position in post-UNCED-implementation.

The inventory study on the changes needed in Dutch policies and law was offered to parliament in July 1993 (TK 1992-1993, 22031, 16). Existing policies were compared for several policy areas with the content of Agenda 21 by responsible departments. The main conclusion was that the Netherlands for a great part were already pursuing the goals and action points of Agenda 21 through formulated or implemented policy. But there were still a lot of recommendations left from Agenda 21 that were no policy practice. More specific it was pointed out that among others municipalities received an important role in the implementation of the first NEPP. The paper announced that attention to the further implementation of Agenda 21 in the Netherlands would be given in the second NEPP.
On the 4th of June the translation of the RIO documents was finished and presented to both responsible ministers. The translation was widely spread in (September/October) to the mayor group, with an covering letter and two papers that were sent to parliament mentioned before, namely the inventory study and the report on the progress in international policy.

In general in all the official and parliamentary documents not much attention was given to the role of municipalities. Municipalities were just mentioned as one of the mayor groups that had to play an important role in the implementation. For instance youth was given more systematic attention1. The second NEPP (March 1994) can be seen as the post-UNCED document were national government discussed the further contribution of the Netherlands to Agenda 21. So there was no separate Dutch implementation plan for the RIO-commitments. In the second NEPP for the first time there was made a more direct reference to LA21 and the role of the municipalities in Agenda 21. This lead to take up LA21 as a separate point of action in the VOGM we already discusses in section 1 and the second ‘Central Plan for the approach to the NEPP’ (March 1995) (see section 3.3).

3.2 Reactions from individual municipalities

There was no general and enthusiastic reception of the idea of LA21 in Dutch municipalities. There seem to be three reasons for this lukewarm reception. Firstly Dutch municipalities claimed that they were already doing a lot in the field of sustainable development. International publications showing ‘good examples’ strengthened this idea. A lot of the good examples, like for instance separated garbage-collection, energy-saving, sustainable building, were already common practice in Dutch municipalities. Dutch municipalities probably are among the forerunners in the world. They didn’t see the surplus value of LA21 in this respect. Secondly the intensification of tasks in the context of the implementation of the first NEPP meant that on the one hand the municipal administrative capacity was enlarged but on the other hand the targets that had to be accomplished to receive the new funding were quit strict and much directed towards the ‘basic environmental tasks’ like permit giving, control and the implementation of national law. Fulfilling this targets, and keeping the funding, was a great burden for the municipalities. Their was not much time, capacity and energy left for new initiatives. A lot of municipalities felt that LA21 would just be a extra burden they could not carry at that moment. The Environmental Inspection who had to control the fulfilling of the environmental funding target expressed that the municipalities first priority should be these target and their basic environmental tasks (Didde, 1994).

Thirdly the environmental hype was not longer at its peak in the Netherlands. This peak was in 1989 en 1990. Media-attention, public interest and political attention were declining. In other countries in this respect UNCED probably had a greater impact.

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1 With the in 1993 established National Youth Council for Environment and development a ‘sustainable development treaty’ was signed, and a campaign started towards local Youth platform groups.
But there were still pioneers within the Dutch municipalities. In the first place is very easy to fill a book with tens of good Dutch examples with sustainable development initiatives that very well would fit in LA21 in any country. What was missing in the first two years after RIO were the municipalities who started a more or less formalised LA21 process, and not just some aspects of such a process.

In this pioneering municipalities in only a few cases the initiative for a LA21 came bottom up (Roosendaal, Etten-Leur), for instance form the already mentioned local platforms for sustainable development founded before RIO. In some cases the municipality even didn’t want to get involved in the initiative. In the other pioneering municipalities they initiative was taken by enthusiastic aldermen or civil servants (f.i. Ten Hague, Schiedam).

In November 1994 a provincial pilot project LA21 in the province of Noord-Brabant started with 20 municipalities. The project aimed to promote and gain experience in dialogue processes between local NGO’s, business, citizens and municipalities. The project is facilitated by a group of co-operating environment and development NGO’s and is financed by the province, The National Committee for Development Education and the Ministry of Environmental affairs. This pilot-project lead to a hand-out for the VOGM-task LA21 which was widely spread\(^2\).

Several international organisations took initiatives to promote Local Agenda 21. Two international initiatives are especially worthwhile to mention because a lot of the Dutch municipalities are involved or the initiatives came with publications that were influential in the Netherlands. Some of the municipalities who started a LA21 named them in their decision process to chose for LA21 (see section 4).

The first international that really made an impact in the Netherlands is the Climate alliance that started in 1990. The Alliance is an agreement between European local authorities and indigenous people in the Amazon region. The signing authorities promise to take all the necessary steps to cut CO2-emissions by 50% between now and the year 2010 and stop the use of chlorid fluor carbons (CFC’s) and tropical wood. The indigenous peoples on their part promise to do their utmost to protect the Amazon rain forest. Over hundred Dutch municipalities signed the Alliance.

Another international initiative is the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign. This campaign was launched at the end of the European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns, which took place in Aalborg, Denmark from 24-27 May 1994. The Conference was jointly convened by the City of Aalborg and the European Commission, and prepared by ICLEI. The objective of the Campaign is to promote development towards sustainability at the local level through Local Agenda 21 processes, by strengthening partnership among all actors in the local community as well as inter-authority co-operation, and relating this process to the European Union’s action in the field of Urban Environment, and the work of the Urban Environment Expert Group.

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\(^2\) Through the Working files LA21 of the Platform for Sustainable Development. The pilot-project substantially influenced the schemes for LA21 and following publications.
The Campaign is formed by municipal signatories of the Aalborg Charter as Campaign Participants. About 120 European cities, towns and counties have up to now signed the Aalborg Charter and thereby joined the Campaign.

### 3.3 The national campaign

Starting march 1995 we could speak of a second phase in the follow-up to RIO. At the beginning of 1994 the Dutch Steering Group Local Agenda 21 was formed. The Group is facilitated and co-ordinated by a national organisation that was at that moment called the Dutch Platform for Sustainable Development. This platform acts as a forum for discussion between a wide variety of Dutch independent organisations, in order to ensure and promote the implementation of sustainable development. The Platform sees Agenda 21 as an important source of inspiration. Its aim is to support citizens, groups, trade and industry at the local level in their effort to achieve a sustainable development. The Platform sees the formulation and implementation of a Local Agenda 21 as an important instrument. The Steering Group has members from a large variety of NGO’s in the Netherlands, including youth, environmental, development and health organisations. To promote LA21 the Platform published two, well-sold, books on LA21 (PDO, 193, 1994). The Platform has a newsletter that is widely spread.

The initiative to promote local agenda 21 really started with a conference in March 1995 titled ‘Working with Agenda 21’. This conference took a lot of interest from over 400 municipal politicians and administrators, with 150 on a waiting list. This was considered quite remarkable because a lot of people in the field had the idea that both environment and development corporation were no hot items at that moment and the UNCED was considered long ago and quit forgotten. All the attendants got a working map with information on LA21 that is regularly updated.

Before this conference there were some other initiatives on a national level. For instance an Association of professionals working in environmental policy organised in collaboration with the Association of Dutch Municipalities an conference in June 1994 on the development of municipal environmental policy in the context of the Second national environmental Policy Plan that was offered to the parliament in March 1994. In this conference one of the eight workshops was about (environmental) education and information, including LA21.

**The VOGM as a financial incentive**

As we already mentioned in section 1 the VOGM was a new environmental funding for a three-year period (1995-1998). A draft of the regulation was send to the municipalities in may 1994 which included an action point on LA21. This action point was titled ‘The formulation and implementation of local policies in the context of the during the UN-conference in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro. Municipalities could receive extra funding for four policy priorities out of a list of nine action points.

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3 Its Supporters are major European networks and associations of local authorities including the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, ICLEI, United Town Organisation (UTO) and Healthy Cities, who co-ordinate their efforts through a Co-ordinating Committee. The Campaign is served by a Campaign Office based in Brussels. The Campaign Sponsors including the European Commission and the Danish City of Aalborg make the activity happen through their financial contributions.
According to the leaflet explaining the regulation the goal of this specific action point is to give in a programmatic way direction to sustainable development on a local level. There is no blueprint given for how a local agenda 21 should look like. But in order to obtain a subsidy four general conditions have to be met:
- a local agenda 21 should add something extra to the municipalities present activities; it should include a debate between the administration and the local population about how to achieve sustainable development;
- environmental education should be a key-task within the implementation of the actionpoint;
- a local Agenda 21 should be directed towards concrete projects and activities. These terms are set and controlled by the environmental inspection. The municipalities had to submit for funding before march 1995. The funding period started January 1995. Eventually 143 out of more than 600 chose LA21 as one of their four action points. The second 'Central Plan for the approach to the NEPP' (March 1995) contained a section (A-10) on environmental education which explained the meaning and purpose of the LA21 action point.

3.4 Re-enforcement of the campaign

As a third phase we could distinguish is the re-enforcement of the campaign for two reasons:
- the dissatisfaction with the processes already ongoing in the VOGM-municipalities
- the wish to further spread LA21 among the municipalities without a formal LA21.
The Steering group on LA21 declared as their goal that the next five years in all Dutch Municipalities there will be a broadly based LA21, and that the majority of municipalities will be started the implementation (Zijdeveld, Duurzaam, 20 March 1996).
In a progress report (December 1995) the Steering group had been critically on the development in the municipalities who chose for the VOGM-task LA21. LA21-processes were slowly starting. The typical picture was that an civil servant from the environmental department, as a project officer, had to start the process without political back-up and support from other departments.
The Steering groups feared that a lot of LA21 would restrict to environmental subjects, leaving out the global perspective and the development side of sustainable development. In November 1995 the CSTM telephonically interviewed the bigger municipalities (above 30.000) . One of the conclusions was that some municipalities had a very slow strat because they were not sure what the subsidiser , and it’s controller the Environmental Inspection, were expecting from them.
The Steering Group pointed out that an innovation in municipalities is always very difficult. In a new campaign Advisory teams would be assembled to visit municipalities on request. Regional meetings are organised were fore running municipalities will inform other municipalities about the surplus value of a LA21.
On the national level also some new initiatives are undertaken to solve bottlenecks in the municipal practise. A committee with representatives for the ministry of Development Co-operation, Environmental affairs and municipalities developed some new initiatives. One main initiative was a training program for municipal civil servants organised by the Institute for Public and Politics (IPP) in the second half of 1996.
Parallel to the course the Association of Dutch municipalities published a new book on LA21 (July, 1996). In this book not only attention is given to a formal LA21-process but also to working in line with type ideas and concepts of LA21.
Conclusion

If we look to the follow-up to UNCED in the first two years municipalities were not really given a role in the implementation. There was a kind of silent agreement between the Association of Municipalities and the Ministry of environment that municipalities at that moment could not carry the extra burden. Besides that there was the general consensus that Dutch municipalities were doing quit well in the environmental policy respect.

In the first two years there was still a lot of confusion on the concept of LA21. Interviews with civil servants of 15 municipalities in the region Twente showed that ten out of 15 said that they had a global knowledge of the content of the UNCED-documents. But only two could answer the questions who the 'mayor' groups were in the context of Agenda 21, but answer were only partly correct. There is fundamental difference between the Dutch target group policy and Agenda 21. Municipalities as one on the mayor groups in Agenda 21 groups are no target groups in Dutch environmental policy but intermediaries or partners. The second NEPP talks about a specific Dutch interpretation of the mayor groups (p. 44, p. 102).
4. The impact of Agenda 21

The point of view of the Dutch Association of Local Authorities is that the impact of Agenda 21 in municipalities is not restricted to the municipalities who are formally engaged in LA21 under the heading of the VOGM-funding. In line with earlier viewpoints that in fact Dutch municipalities were already involved in LA21 (Dordrecht, Director VNG, 1994) points out that a lot of municipalities are working implicitly at LA21 using the same ideas and concepts VNG, 1996). Especially in the policy formulation and implementation of some of the other VOGM action points and other aspects of municipal environmental policy making we see ideas and concepts similar to LA21. Although these municipalities are not strictly engaged in LA21. Examples in VOGM are sustainable building projects and energy saving. Other examples for instance include local mobility plans and neighbourhood orientated policy making. Not every municipality engaged in LA21 has chosen for this specific action point to be funded.

In this first subsection we try to answer the question which municipalities picked up LA21 first. Were this the bigger, more progressive and left-wing dominated, more global orientated municipalities? Are there regional differences? What were their motives to choose for LA21? In the second subsection we will make some evaluative remarks on the development of LA21 in the Netherlands.

5.1 Characteristics of the VOOGM LA21-municipalities

We describe the group of the first municipalities, listed by the ministry, that choose LA21 as one of their four policy priorities out of a list of nine possible actions points that could be subsidised by the ministry. We will present some facts and figures about these municipalities concerning their:

- number of inhabitants;
- political colour;
- regional location;
- environmental policy performance;
- members of international initiatives;
- motives to choose LA21.

Number of inhabitants

The first figure shows that relatively more big municipalities choose for LA21 as an action point. Big municipalities is a relative concept here because the majority of the municipalities can be considered small. 84 % (547 out of 653 in 1993) are smaller than 30,000 inhabitants and only 20 (3 %) are bigger than 100,000 inhabitants.

Figure 1 here (figures in a separate file)

The second figure shows LA21 was not specifically chosen by left-wing dominated local councils. Dominance was indicated on the basis of the two largest parties in the local council. Left-wing dominated are the PVDA, D66 dominated councils. Right-wing are the VVD, small Christian local parties dominated councils. We also give this picture for the political party of the Alderman responsible for environmental affairs, which also show no dominance by left-wing councils.
Regional differences
There are some regional differences in the choice for LA21. In some provinces like Noord-Brabant NGO's have been very active in stimulating. Because a minimum level of facilities (70,000 inhabitants) has to be achieved, many municipalities have to co-operate at a regional level for reasons of capacity and expertise. In the municipal funding there is a reward for municipalities who co-operated in regions. There are over 40 regions. Former agreements on co-operation sometimes mean that if the majority of the municipalities in a certain region want a certain priority the minority has which will lead to regional differences.

Figure 4 LA21 per province

Environmental policy performance
Did the front-runners in environmental policy in Dutch municipalities choose for a LA21? The Ministry of environmental affairs (10 September 1993) published a list which divided all the municipalities in three categories. Those municipalities who the Environmental Inspection rate expected to reach the BUGM-targets for a adequate environmental policy performance (fullfillers), those who were not expected to meet this deadline (stragglers), and those who kept behind at this moment (strugglers). One would expect that especially the municipalities who have their permit-giving and -control on a adequate level, would be the first one to be interested in LA21. Table 2 shows that surprisingly from the 110 municipalities bigger than 30.000 inhabitants relatively more strugglers than fullfillers chose for LA21.

Table 2. Environmental policy performance and the choice for LA21

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stragglers</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strugglers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>110 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memberships
We already mentioned in section 3 the involvement of Dutch municipalities in international initiatives. We compared the group of 138 municipalities who choose for LA21 with 68 who did not choose for LA21. The membership seems not to make very much difference.
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<th>28</th>
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<td>72.4%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>145</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>206(100%)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Motives**

In a telephone survey (CSTM, 1996) all the bigger municipalities (above the 30,000 inhabitants) were asked for their motives to choose for LA21 as a VOGM action point. We broke down their motives in nine categories:

1. **Policy continuation.** LA 21 was chosen because it was seen as an logical consequence of already established policy in the Environmental Policy Plan or the Political Program of the Alderman. This motive is largely connected with the nature- and environmental education component of the LA21 VOGM-tasks.

2. **New possibilities.** LA21 was seen as an opportunity to conduct innovative environmental policy. Innovation was especially mentioned in the context of dialogue and participation.

3. **VOGM-stimulation.** As motive the stimulant through VOGM was mentioned.

4. **Local stimulation.** The motive was pressure from local groups (political parties, environment and development groups).

5. **Civil servants.** Civil servants pushed the subject on the political agenda.

6. **Regional tuning.** Other regional co-operating municipalities wanted to make the choice for LA21, which more or less obliged the municipality to make the same choice.

7. **Easiest choice.** LA21 looked as the easiest of the VOGM-tasks to realise.

8. **Membership.** Membership of for instance the Climate Alliance made the choice for LA21 logical.

9. **Special interest.** The motive to choose for LA21 is based on a special interest of one of the VOGM-aspects of LA21 as for instance environmental education or environmental communication.

The responsible civil servants who were interviewed named one or more of this motives. In the following figure we added the times a specific motive was mentioned. Note that the VOGM (actually getting money) was seldom mentioned. Policy continuation and new possibilities were given as the mean reasons to start LA21.

*Figure 5 here.*
4.2 Evaluative remarks on the characteristics of the LA21 profile

In Chapter 1 is set out that the most essential different characteristics of the LA21 profile that makes it differ from previous processes is that is as a more conscious attempt to:

1. relate environmental effects to underlying economic and political pressures;
2. relate local issues, decisions and dispositions to global effects, both environmentally and with respect to global solidarity and justice;
3. achieve cross-sectoral integration of environment-and-development concerns, values and goals in planning, decision-making and policy implementation;
4. bring both average citizens and major stakeholder groups, particularly business and labor unions, into the planning and implementation process;
5. define and work with local problems within a broader ecological/regional framework, and a greatly expanded time frame (i.e. over three or more generations).

In section 1 we already described the base-line conditions for some of these characteristics. In this section we ask the question if we already witness in the Dutch situation some changes towards these characteristics and what obstructions are present in this respect.

Environmental effects and underlying economic and political pressures

It is to earlier to observe if LA21 changes the relation between economic and political pressure and environmental effects. Research on municipal environmental planning (Coenen, 1996) showed that the overall growth target of municipalities are of major importance for the way this municipalities handle environment and sustainable development. Municipalities with a large growth target, where several thousands of new jobs have to be created and thousands of houses have to be built with the necessary infrastructure, showed a more reserved environmental policy. There are even examples of municipalities trying to set national environmental policy aside, like the Dutch ABC-location policy, on behalf of economic growth. On the other hand there are municipalities with a low growth rate, with less employment problems who advertise themselves as green cities. They are able to make choices in attracting new businesses and refuse environmental unfriendly businesses. These are often municipalities which are very popular as central locations for offices. So it's a question of LA21 changes this pressure from day-to-day political practice to let the environment not intervene in economic growth.

Global dimension of local policies

Just before UNCED there was already growing interest in global aspects of municipal policy. In 1994 research was conducted (van der Bie, 1994) into the success- and fail factors of global environmental policy in municipalities. Global activities of municipalities were undertaken in different frameworks like the already mentioned campaign ‘Working together on a cleaner world’, the climate-Alliance and the UNCED-campaign. Other initiatives are rain forest protection (tropical wood) campaign and North-South city-relations. More recently local sustainability treaties and joint implementation were added.
Global municipal environmental policy is always viewed with scepticism in the Netherlands. Like an Alderman expressed it is no our task to do something about the melting polar caps. In the 1994 research the expectation was expressed that a LA21 could be an important framework for the municipal global environmental policy. Research in the province of Limburg showed that signing up to the Climate Alliance did not mean that these Climate Alliance municipalities really took substantially more extra actions in policy areas as energy, traffic, tropical wood and waste treatment.

Cross-sectoral integration
In section 1 we already mentioned some problems with inter policy integration. Inter policy integration should especially be given form at a local level, because a a local level policy areas really touch each other on this level. In a sense inter policy integration is quit successful on a local level, if we take in to account the good examples in sustainable building, sustainable physical planning, traffic planning, sewage building, purchasing of office goods, etc., But in a lot of areas the inter policy integration is given shape on a national level and then implemented on the local level. For instance on a national level in the national physical plans and national traffic and mobility plan sustainability principles are taken into account and than implemented on a local level. There is still resistance from other policy sectors to the infringement of environmental policy into these sectors. LA21 in this respect is pushed back to the environment sector. Although it is a much broader concept it is handled as if it was just another initiative form the environmental department. The problem lies in the situation that LA21 often means that one civil servant from the environmental department gets time off as a project officer, because LA21 is financed by the ministry of environment. Therefore it's very much viewed as an 'environmental initiative'.

A second problem is that LA21 is placed in line with nature and environmental education and the so called environmental communication. Municipalities than see LA21 as their external environmental communication mechanism. What means that for internal communication, what external integration in fact is, the municipality is looking for other instruments.

Participation
Does a LA21 lead to more participation of average citizens and major stakeholder groups, particularly business and labour unions, into the planning and implementation process? In section one we already discussed the experiences with participation in environmental policy. Problem in participation processes was often to get business involved. Especially during hearings all kinds of groups would show up, except business.

The municipalities as well as the environmental policy target groups have problems getting used to the new role municipalities have to play in local Agenda 21 processes. Instead of the local government that regulates and forbids the municipality has to play a role as facilitator of a process and as a partner in an open dialogue.

On the other hand a bottom-up LA21 process depends very much upon the quality and power of the others actors involved. NGO's and other actors need to be well organised to play an role in Local Agenda 21. Municipalities sometimes find it difficult to find equal and relevant partners for the dialogue. 4

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4 Interesting in this respect was that in the preparation of a municipal environmental policy plan the association of trade and business in a town hired their own consultant to help them comment on the environment policy plan prepared by the municipality with the help of another consultant firm.
**Broader framework and expanded time frame**

In section 3 we already mentioned that in a lot of LA21 is restricted to environmental subjects, leaving out the global perspective and the development side of sustainable development. The evaluation of the 1996 training course (IPP, 1996) showed that the North-South dimension was still underexposed.

A LA21 is orientated towards the future, towards a sustainable municipal community. The development of a sustainable vision or future projection is in this sense crucial for LA21. In practise there are three pressure against the development of such a sustainable vision. In the first place the VOGM-regulation states that a LA21 should be directed towards concrete projects and activities. This is than translated by some municipalities and consultants that a sustainable vision should be secondary to direct and short term results to keep the process going. There's a general tension between short term gain with action points and a sustainable vision, because politics want to score, at least within the next four years, and consultants want to deliver quick and concrete results.

5. **Concluding remarks**

At the eve of UNCED the base-line conditions for Dutch municipalities for a rapid and broad diffusion of LA21 looked very promising in the Netherlands. Dutch municipalities were well ahead with environmental policy. Sustainable development was a political issue. There was already experience with participation in environmental policy and there was a tendency towards political and administrative modernisation. This modernisation calls for another relation between administration, politic and citizens which is very much in line with the ideas in Agenda 21.

In the first two years after RIO not much happened, except in some pioneering municipalities. The main reasons for this lukewarm reception of the concept of LA21 was the external pressure to concentrate on basic environmental tasks like permit giving and the misconception that LA21 wasn’t new, but something that Dutch municipalities were already doing.

The basic conditions were not as good as they seem to be at first glance. Targetgroup policy was no stimulus in practice for LA21. Municipalities have a difficult position in targetgroup policy. They do not formulate a local targetgroup policy, although some municipalities try to do, but are the executors of a national targetgroup policy which leads to a tension between opposed policy styles. A regulatory approach at one side and a communicative approach at the other side (Bressers and Huitema, 1996).

The problem with political and administrative modernisation is that is much more easier to profess one’s faith in political modernisation then really practice it. Both politicians and civil servants have difficulties with the new role that this modernisation processes ask from them. But also their partners in this process have difficulties with this new role The way the incentive for LA21 is given form, subsidising through the municipality, maybe even complicates this role.
We already discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of VOGM as a financial incentive. An advantage is that it can solve capacity problems in manpower and money. A disadvantage is that like every form of funding it creates certain expectations from the side of the subsidy giver and some obligations for the subsidy receiver. A first problem is that the municipality is still the actor who receives the funding and has to account for this. This is even complicated because for municipalities is not clear what the ultimate result is that the subsidy giver is expecting.

What will be the perspective for the next five years? We should not expect that within a period of five years the Netherlands will go to a situation with a 100% coverage with a formal LA21. The Steering group on LA21 has as a goal that the next five years in all Dutch Municipalities there will be a broadly based LA21, and that the majority of municipalities will be started the implementation (Zijdeveld, Duurzaam, 20 March 1996). We may expect that coverage will considerably go up. For a lot of municipalities it will be only a small step form the existing practice in other VOGM-tasks. For the VNG and VROM the first accent will be the international dimension of LA21.

A crucial moment in time will be the disappearing of the special environmental funding at 1 January 1998. The funding will not disappear but will no longer be earmarked. This means that environmental goals have to compete with sports, welfare or whatever for the same money. What will municipalities do then. Will environmental policy be enough institutionalised that the organisation and the funds keep intact?
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