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## Global city-region ambition in the Netherlands: From Randstad to Deltametropolis

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with the recent turn from Randstad to Deltametropolis in Dutch strategic planning. It considers the developments in the Randstad of late a fine illustration of the global city-region thesis as recently presented by Scott *et al.* (2001). After a brief summary of the global city-region thesis, the paper sets out to discuss ‘the rise of the Deltametropolis perspective’ in Dutch planning circles and to explore the capacity of the region as a ‘regional motor of the global economy’. For this purpose, Deltametropolis is compared with the Flemish Diamond, the RheinRuhr Area, Île de France and Greater London using some key regional indicators. The conclusion reads that while the turn to Deltametropolis might be considered one of the most comprehensive attempts to pursue ‘global city-region status’ for the Randstad region since its conceptualisation in the 1950s, the region faces a difficult challenge in economic terms. Although it performs better than the rest of the Netherlands in various fields, its leading position is not quite as conclusive as that of long-recognised global city-regions such as Greater London and Paris/Île de France.

# **Global city-region ambitions in the Netherlands: from Randstad to Deltametropolis**

## **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Cities have not served their turn yet. After a period in which pessimism about the state and future of cities was rampant, they are now by many authors reassessed as increasingly important loci in today's globalising world. At the same time, both academics and policymakers increasingly acknowledge the relevance of city-regions and urban networks as spatial frameworks for analysis and planning.

Recently, the debate has been enriched with a new concept: the 'global city-region' (see Simmonds & Hack, 2000; Scott, 2001a). Especially Scott et al. (2001) convincingly establish a link between globalisation and the rise of large city-regions. They show how since WW-II a complex set of pervasive technological, economic and politico-institutional developments has been at work to create the right conditions for a resurgence of region-based forms of economic and political organisation. The clearest expression of this tendency is found in large 'global city-regions' such as Greater London, Île de France, Greater Los Angeles and others (Scott et al., 2001, p. 13-14; see also Keating 1997, 2001; Scott, 1998, 2001b).

Polycentric urban regions like the Randstad are not excluded from this perspective – neither in theory nor in practice. In comparison with the 'world cities' and 'global cities' theses (e.g. Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991), the global city-region thesis as formulated by Scott et al. (2001) clearly leaves scope for polycentric urban regions. Although it lacks clarity on the issue of demarcation (Sassen, 2001), it explicitly considers city-regions or regional networks of cities more appropriate units of 'local social organization' than the city in the narrow sense.

Following Hall (1966), both Scott et al. (2001, p. 11) and Simmonds & Hack (2000) identify the Randstad as a (polycentric) global city-region. Recent developments in the Randstad seem to justify this choice, as a varied and still growing group of local political actors since halfway through the 1990s rallies around the idea of developing the Randstad and its traditional counter part the Green Heart into a fully-fledged network metropolis named 'Deltametropolis' (see also the Economist, 2001). The group lobbied successfully for inclusion of the Deltametropolis perspective in the country's

‘Fifth National Report on Spatial Planning’, so strengthening the relative position of the region in the Dutch geopolitical arena and safeguarding a fair share of future public investment resources. Much in line with some of the more dominant views on the role of metropolitan regions in the contemporary world, Deltametropolis is conceived as the Dutch metropolitan network representing the Netherlands in the European inter-metropolitan competition for mobile resources. The central idea for the next decades is – naturally – to further develop the region’s capacities in this field.

The turn from Randstad to Deltametropolis is the central theme of this paper. The global city-region thesis as formulated by Scott et al. (2001) serves as the main frame of reference for our discussion of the rise of the Deltametropolis perspective in the Dutch planning and policy arena. The discussion of Deltametropolis is split up in two: one part deals with the genesis of the concept and its triumphal progress in Dutch planning politics (section 3); the other part explores the capacity of Deltametropolis as a ‘regional motor of the global economy’ (section 4). The debate on the rise of (global) city regions itself is briefly summarised in section 2. Conclusions are presented in section 5.

## **2. The concept of global city-regions**

In the view of Scott et al. (2001), the world’s global city-regions together constitute one of the principle structural networks lying at the geographic base of the newly emerging multi-level hierarchy of (interacting) political and economic institutions. Global city-regions are observed to gain importance as political actors that are pro-actively establishing themselves in national and international political and economic arenas and as increasingly fundamental spatial units and regional motors of the global economy. As compared to the ‘global city’ concept (Sassen, 1991), global city-regions are conceptualised as polarised regional economies each consisting of one or more central metropolitan areas and their surrounding hinterlands (Scott, 1998, p. 68). Typical examples of such global city-regions include Greater New York (perhaps even stretching from Boston to Philadelphia), the Los Angeles-San Diego-Tijuana area, Greater London/Southeast England, Tokyo-Nagoya-Osaka, Île de France (Greater Paris) and the Dutch Randstad. However, ‘emerging’ global city regions such as Shanghai, Pearl River Delta, Bangkok, São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Cairo should be reckoned with as well (Scott, 1998; Scott et al., 2001; see also Simmonds and Hack, 2000). Each

global city-region – in its capacity as a regional motor of the new global economy – must be viewed as being the site of ‘intricate networks of specialized but complementary forms of economic activity, together with large, multifaceted local labor markets, and [as] a locus of powerful agglomeration economies and increasing return effects’ (Scott, 1998, p. 68). In addition, as a combined result of a) the growing awareness – also among local and regional authorities – that cities and regions compete with each other for resources in the global economy, and b) the ongoing redistribution of tasks and responsibilities between various tiers of government, local and regional authorities are increasingly pressed or tempted to choose between ‘passive submission to external cross-border pressures’, or active institution-building and policy-making in an effort to make the best of the threats and opportunities of globalisation (Scott et al., 2001). As a consequence, in more and more cases local and regional authorities and sometimes also other key actors with an interest in economic development (e.g. chambers of commerce, employers associations, developers) have started to develop an interest in region-wide coalition building geared to specific regional development and/or political objectives (cf. Keating, 1997, 2001; Camagni, 2001).

### ***Global city-regions as political actors***

A series of partly parallel and interwoven developments lie at basis of the global city-region phenomenon. According to Scott et al. (2001), the resurgence of regions as territorial spheres well suited to economic and political organisation is one of the outcomes of the pressures exerted by the globalisation process on traditional institutions and hierarchies. The transformation of the traditional nation state is presented as a key background element. Nation states, while remaining key units of the contemporary economic and political order (see also Rodriguez-Pose, 1998, cited in Tomaney & Ward, 2000, pp. 475-476), do not enjoy the same degree of political and economic autonomy as half a century ago or so. Many borders between nations in quite a number of respects do not function so clearly as such anymore, as ever-increasing amounts of economic, social and monetary activity now occur in extensive cross-national networks (one of the key-features of globalisation). In addition (and in connection with it) many countries have committed themselves to the economic and/or political frameworks of larger, supranational organisations and bodies (e.g. the WTO (formerly GATT), the OECD, the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR and so on). They have handed over to or are now sharing with these organisations and bodies several tasks and

responsibilities. It is against this background, according to Scott et al. (2001), that nations states started to realise that they were becoming less able and perhaps should become less willing 'to protect all the regional and sectional interests within their jurisdictions' (ibid., p. 13). Policies aimed at balancing regional development within nation states started to lose much of their appeal and quite a number of national governments started to transfer tasks and responsibilities down to regional and local authorities<sup>2</sup>. As a result, local and regional actors were increasingly finding themselves 'on their own' in what was increasingly perceived as a continuously expanding 'competitive arena'. They had to determine whether they would submit to external cross-border pressures passively, or, on the other hand, would decide to engage actively in 'institution-building and policy-making in an effort to turn globalisation as far as possible to their benefit' (ibid., p. 14). Where this choice was made and where local and regional governments and other key-actors did really make an effort to search for region-wide coalitions and frameworks for co-operation, we are now witness to the consolidation of such regions as political actors on the world stage. According to Scott and his colleagues, the clearest expression of this tendency is found in certain large global city-regions as they – throughout the decades – persisted and further developed as the favourite habitat of economic agents in search for mutual proximity and the concomitant economic productivity, performance and innovation advantages.

### ***Global city-regions as motors of the global economy***

While the above elucidates how global city-regions could emerge as a critical political and institutional tier, it does not explain why global city-regions are the (would-be) motors of the new global economy. To clarify this part of the argument, Scott et al. (2001) bring to bear much of the body of thought that was developed by Scott in his book *Regions and the world economy* (1998). They argue that any contemporary advanced economic system is home to basically two different kinds of economic activities, each of them being organised in a significantly different way and being dependent on differently shaped network relationships. As a consequence of this, both kinds express different location preferences: one kind is better off by clustering in global city-regions whereas the other one is relatively insensitive to the specific assets of such agglomerations (Scott et al. 2001, p. 15-18).

The two basic kinds of economic activities that the authors refer to are economic activities that are highly routinised on the one hand, and economic activities that are

typically not routinised on the other. The former is associated with production activities that involve relatively well-codified forms of knowledge and relatively standardised modes of production and that cater to relatively stable markets<sup>3</sup>. In such cases, production and the required inputs can be planned in advance rather well and respectively carried out and purchased at large scales. This opens up the possibility to bring in materials or to ship out products relatively cheaply over large distances and, under normal conditions, restricts the need for complex communication between agents. As a result, the networks that such firms are part of are often rather rigid, and firms' location decisions are more likely to depend on factors such as the presence of cheap (unskilled) labour, the availability of cheap land or the nature of tax and regulatory environments than on the need to be located adjacent to functionally related firms.

For the non-routinised kinds of economic production, however, the latter is much more important. By non-routinised kinds of economic production are meant those industries and service producers that operate in markets that are characterised by high levels of uncertainty. These are, for example, markets where production technologies develop quickly and where demand for products varies greatly over time and from customer to customer. Since the early 1970s – that is when the combined effect of destabilisation of the economic environment (after 25 years of relative stability), destandardisation of production processes (enabled by computerisation) and the search for wider product variety (supply and demand driven) started off a shift towards more flexible modes of economic production and organisation – such conditions have become real for an increasing number of economic sectors, including many of today's front-rank sectors such as high-technology industries, cultural products and multi-media industries and many types of professional service industries. Firms that operate in such environments are generally forced to organise production and maintain relationships with suppliers of input (including employees) and clients in a far more flexible way. Much stronger than firms that are involved in fairly routinised kinds of production, producers in uncertain environments 'must be prepared to change and recombine equipment and labor and to monitor shifts in the market, often on a day-to-day basis' (Scott et al., 2001, p. 16). For their operations, they need to have excellent access to a wide variety of information, skills and resources. Complicating the matter is the fact that crucial parts of this information<sup>4</sup> are often hardly codified and in many cases transferred through face-to-face interaction only. In addition, the skills and resources

required by such firms (e.g. highly skilled labour / knowledge) are often relatively scarce because of their specialised nature.

In sum, such flexible production systems can be described as rather transactions-intensive and highly susceptible to externalities<sup>5</sup>. The dense patterns of non-standardised interaction maintained by such economic agents, provides them with a strong incentive to seek mutual proximity. After all, while rapid developments in transport, telecommunications and information technology have certainly resulted in the sharp decline of many kinds of transaction costs, the costs of transactions that involve face-to-face contacts have remained relatively high, and, most importantly, tend to rise significantly as distance increases. The susceptibility to externalities, on the other hand, provides an incentive to seek mutual proximity especially in large urban regions, as these are the environments that produce many of such externalities. Altogether, co-presence in large urban conurbations or global city-regions enables such firms to manage their relationships with suppliers and clients more efficiently, to tap into wide and differentiated pools of labour and experience, and to arrange relatively easy access to the many kinds of useful information that circulate in both formal and informal business-related and other kinds of circles<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, since global city-regions often also function as important and well-equipped nodes in global transport and communications networks, they give their residents excellent access to world markets and other significant places. Such factors will contribute positively to such firm's productivity, performance and innovative capacity and, consequently, to the competitiveness and economic motor function of the city regions they are embedded in.

### **3. Dutch global city-region ambitions: the turn to Deltametropolis**

Recent developments in the Randstad provide a fine example of the observation that 'local authorities in many large city regions [...] over the past decades have actively engaged in institution-building, coalition formation and joint policymaking as a means of dealing with the threats and the opportunities of globalization' (Scott et al., 2001, p. 11). It may, however, also be argued that in the Netherlands, global city(-region) ambitions have been latent in strategic planning since the 1950s when the Randstad was first conceptualised. From the beginning, it was anticipated that the Randstad (then basically a collection of small and medium-sized cities situated around a predominantly rural central zone) would eventually come to function as a functionally coherent



metropolitan region capable of bearing comparison with European metropolises such as London and Paris. Most of the time since then, however, the economic functioning of the Randstad has come second to prevailing preferences as regards urban form and to central government's desire to distribute sources of prosperity equally across the country. Spatial integration at the level of the Randstad has been repeatedly dominated by the strong desire to maintain well-defined cities of modest size in a non-urbanized countryside and at least until the 1980s (government) jobs were deliberately transferred from the Randstad to – from a Randstad perspective – peripheral regions. Only more recently the attempts to promote a metropolitan development pathway for the Randstad have become more thoroughgoing. The 'Randstad International' approach developed at the end of the 1980s still failed due to local governments' unwillingness to give up local interests for the greater good of the Randstad, but the present attempt to transform the Randstad into a fully-fledged European metropolis called 'Deltametropolis' – the central theme of this section – seems to be quite a favourable one.

### ***The invention of Deltametropolis***

In the early 1990s, in spite of the fiasco of the Randstad International approach, in theory prevailing spatial policy still promoted the development of the metropolitan qualities of the Randstad. In practice, however, achievements fell short of expectations in several ways. An analysis of various plans and visions for the future spatial development of the Netherlands drawn up in 1995 and 1996 pointed out that the prevailing planning practice appeared to be a mere continuation of the timeworn 'concentrated deconcentration' policy (De Jong, 1997). Implementation of these plans would lead to a further levelling of the Dutch demographic landscape rather than to the desired reinforcement of the position of the Randstad in the Dutch and European context. At the same time, real term economic dynamics did not exactly work out in favour of the Randstad either. In particular the three largest cities of the Randstad (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague) had not yet recovered from the previous decades of suburbanization and economic restructuring. For example, in the first half of the 1990s (the economic heyday of the late 1990s was yet to dawn) unemployment figures for the four largest cities combined were on average more than 50 percent higher than the figures for the Netherlands as a whole (CBS, 2002). It was only thanks to favourable employment development on the edges of these cities that unemployment figures for the Randstad stayed in line with the figures for the Netherlands as a whole

(cf. Van der Wouden & De Bruijne, 2001, p. 69). At that time the Randstad's neighbouring provinces of Noord-Brabant and Gelderland – ten years earlier identified as parts of the Netherlands Central Urban Ring (see above) – were quite successful in nibbling away at the traditional core position of the Randstad.

The second half of the 1990s, however, saw a sea change. From the perspective of the authorities of the largest Randstad cities, the combination of alarming spatial dynamics and counterproductive spatial vision making practices were a cause for considerable concern (Hemel, 1998). Eventually, at the end of 1996, the councillors responsible for spatial planning in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht decided to join forces and take action. Encouraged by committed professionals participating in the 'Metropolitan Debate' (such as the chair of Urban Planning in Delft, Prof. Frieling) they decided to develop a joint vision on the future spatial development of the Randstad. Soon a creative process was started to formulate such a vision. Scenarios and spatial development models were developed, studies carried out and eventually, in the first months of 1997, a preliminary vision was formulated ('Towards a Green Metropolis'). After several months of consultation and further study the cities decided to publish the results of their activities. In early 1998 the four councillors jointly published a declaration (Verklaring Deltametropool) in which they revealed their vision on the future spatial development of the western part of the Netherlands. The declaration can be read as a straightforward attempt to breathe new life into the old idea of the western part of the Netherlands constituting the country's most important production and consumption environment, the function and future of which should expressly be put in a European perspective. The four cities emphasized that the Randstad and the Green Heart should not be conceived as an accidental collection of cities with a rural zone between them, but rather as a coherent polynucleated metropolitan region which should be firmly embedded in the European economic and cultural context and encouraged – once again through spatial policy – in its competitive struggle with other European metropolitan regions. The declaration opposed the conception of the Randstad as an overpopulated region and, following Frieling (1997), put forward a view in which the area is conceived as a 'thinly populated metropolis' with ample opportunity for improving the spatial quality through better coordination and more daring spatial design instead. Reinforcement of the competitive position of the Randstad was no longer put on a par with concentrating the growth of population and employment in the Randstad area, but rather to be realized by making better use of the

human and economic potential which are already available (Deltametropool, 1998). The Green Heart should be made to function as a metropolitan park and the (economic) functioning of the area should be improved by introducing innovative (public) transport concepts capable of reducing the region's congestion problem. Finally, following the Dutch planning tradition that a new discourse needs new metaphors, a new name was also introduced for the metropolis in the making. The label 'Deltametropolis' (Deltametropool) was inspired by the region's characteristics in terms of landscape (dictated by its river delta location) and function (predominantly metropolitan). 'Deltametropolis' stands for the future perspective (i.e. a polynucleated though comprehensive metropolis which is 'qualified' to take part in the European and global inter-metropolitan competition for mobile resources) and for the development strategy leading towards it. In the view of the actors involved, the notion of the Randstad had possibly become too synonymous with the inability to get things moving.

### ***Deltametropolis gaining ground***

At first it seemed as if the idea of a Deltametropolis would lose this geopolitical battle. In spite of the publicity attracted by the advocates of the Deltametropolis perspective, and the fact that the councils of the four cities have always been quite an influential group in the Dutch political arena, 'Deltametropolis' was not mentioned once in the Starting Memorandum issued in preparation of the Fifth Policy Document on Spatial Planning (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment et al., 1999). Worse still, from the viewpoint of the Deltametropolis proponents, the Randstad was not even considered to be a coherent spatial entity, but rather to consist of three separate 'network cities'.<sup>7</sup>

Luckily for the Deltametropolis advocates, this Starting Memorandum attracted such broad criticism – most notably for its tendency to embrace the corridor concept, which was incorrectly interpreted as an argument for ribbon development along motorways – that the national planners more or less had to start over from scratch. The Deltametropolis advocates were therefore given a second chance to spotlight their ideas. In early 2000 they founded the 'Deltametropolis Association'. The four largest cities had managed to find another eight municipalities and four regional chambers of commerce in the Randstad willing to join. The Association was meant to be neither a regular administrative platform nor a formal consultative body for the central government. These roles were already taken up by the 'Randstad Region' – the

cooperative body formed by the councils of the four Randstad provinces – and the ‘Administrative Committee for the Randstad’, which had become the official platform for discussing issues concerning the ‘Region West’ in both the ICES-trajectory and the preparation process of the Fifth Policy Document. Instead, the Association was supposed to develop into an informal institution which would function both as a hothouse for ideas, as a pressure group, and as a meeting place for those who endorse the view that the west of the Netherlands is home to a would-be metropolis: a clear indication that capacity building on the regional level can express itself in multiple organizational forms, each playing its own role.

In subsequent years, the Deltametropolis Association flourished in many ways: various studies were carried out, more than a dozen meetings were organized (Vereniging Deltametropool, 2002) and several new members were welcomed.<sup>8</sup> A major victory was the fact the Association succeeded in winning over to its case the four provinces making up the Randstad/Deltametropolis territory. Although the provinces did not join the Deltametropolis Association itself, they gradually embraced the Deltametropolis perspective. This was of key importance since the Deltametropolis Association, unlike the provinces, did not have an official role in drawing up the new national spatial policy strategy (i.e. the Fifth Policy Document). The various studies produced by the Randstad provinces as input for the Fifth Policy Document show an increasing acceptance of the Deltametropolis concept. The final contribution clearly underlines the ideas advocated by the Deltametropolis Association as the title (‘Towards a blue-and-green Deltametropolis’) suggests.<sup>9</sup>

In the long-awaited first part of the Fifth Policy Document on Spatial Planning (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2001a)<sup>10</sup> the concept of ‘urban networks’ was launched as one of the key answers to the challenges posed by the ‘the rise of the network society’. It swept aside several of the concepts addressing urban development and the competitive position of the Netherlands applied in the Fourth Policy Document (Extra), so illustrating the phenomenon that visions on the desired spatial structure often change more quickly than the spatial structure itself. In the Fifth Policy Document, ‘Deltametropolis’ was presented by central government as the largest out of six urban networks in the Netherlands and as the one that is most affected by and involved in the increasingly fierce international inter-metropolitan competition for mobile resources. The local and regional authorities making up such urban networks were incited to co-operate and to develop a coherent set of agreements on a wide range

of spatial development issues (some of which had also appeared in NURI a decade ago), all aimed at making the urban network a better place to live, work, recreate and invest in.

The designation of Deltametropolis as an urban network attracted different types of criticism. Some thought that the government was not carrying the matter far enough while others considered the choice for Deltametropolis too great a move upward the ladder of spatial scales. The Deltametropolis Association belonged to the former category. It was of course pleased to find that central government had adopted the idea of conceiving the Randstad/Green Heart region as a (potentially) coherent urban network, but it was rather disappointed about the modest ambitions attached to it. In the Association's view, central government failed to conceive 'Deltametropolis' as a perspective which is yet to be realised and which requires far-reaching measures and funding. According to the Association, by presenting Deltametropolis as one of six national urban networks, central government was missing one of the main points of the entire idea: the need to single out Deltametropolis as a would-be European metropolis which deserves to be supported in its efforts to join the same league as London/Southeast England, Paris/Île de France and Frankfurt/Main-Rhein. The Association therefore called on central government to explicitly consider the European perspective and, on that basis, present concrete, operational strategies to bring the realization of 'Deltametropolis' within reach (Vereniging Deltametropool, 2001, see also VROM-raad, 2001). Contrary to the message of the Deltametropolis Association, the united Dutch national planning offices (CPB et al., 2001) objected against the idea of designating Deltametropolis as a single urban network. They considered the gap between the spatial scale of the Deltametropolis urban network and the scale at which the bulk of people's daily activities take place too large. The planning offices presented a variety of transport and migration figures indicating that various kinds of functional relationships (travel-to-work, travel-to-recreate, household migration, firm migration) extend over distances which better relate to the scale of the urban district ( $r=15$  km) than to the scale of Deltametropolis ( $r=40$  km). The planning offices considered urban districts or the 'network cities' as identified in the Starting Memorandum (see above) much better units for analysis, co-ordination and joint policy-making in the field of spatial development, even more so since the figures indicate that the development over time does not justify the expectation that the Deltametropolis will constitute peoples' daily activity space within years or even decades.

Yet, in the end, central government proved more susceptible to the argument of the Deltametropolis Association than to the criticism of the united planning offices. Like the Working Commission for the Western Netherlands had done almost 45 years ago when the Randstad was first conceived, central government singled out and conceptualised various levels of spatial integration but ultimately pleaded for the level of the Randstad/Deltametropolis as the most relevant level for policy making in the west of the country. In the adjusted and – at the time of writing – latest version of the Fifth Policy Document, the suggestion to split up Deltametropolis into a number of smaller urban networks is rejected (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2001b, p. 32). The government acknowledges that the scale of urban districts remains relevant for specific day-to-day functions and processes, but in the light of the international ambitions formulated, she considers it even more important to conceive the Randstad/Green Heart area as a single, comprehensive urban network. In addition, instead of being presented as one out of six national urban networks, Deltametropolis is now given the special status of ‘development perspective’ in its own right. Stronger emphasis is put on the international ambitions attached to the concept. Deltametropolis is explicitly presented as a ‘national urban network of international magnitude’ (ibid., p. 44), the development of which is the country’s best bet for future success.

#### **4. Deltametropolis as a regional motor?**

The way in which ‘Deltametropolis’ is being put on the map (of the Netherlands) very much reflects the political-institutional dimension of the global city-region thesis as formulated by Scott et al. (2001). The efforts of this varied coalition of local and regional stakeholders to transform the Randstad into ‘Deltametropolis’ and to organise the necessary national political support for it, may well be judged as the Randstad region pro-actively establishing itself as an actor in wider political arenas and as an attempt to create better possibilities for dealing with the threats and opportunities of globalization. However, for the Randstad/Deltametropolis (referred to as Deltametropolis from here) to qualify as a full example of the global city-region thesis the region should preferably also emerge as a ‘regional motor of the global economy’ (see section 2). The latter would also definitely help the Deltametropolis advocates in achieving their ambitions. To tell whether the region functions as a ‘motor of the global economy’ indeed, however, is not easily done. A wide range of ‘classic’ economic

indicators can be thought of (e.g. production, productivity, innovative capacity), the region's position in global transport, communications and command networks may be taken into consideration, as well as its attractiveness to today's and tomorrow's leading economic sectors. However, a carefully thought-out definition still needs to be introduced. In this section we tentatively explore the question to what extent Deltametropolis can be considered to function as a 'regional motor of the global economy'. We take a look at the region's performance in terms of GDP per head, economic structure, European patent applications and the educational attainment of the work force. To enable meaningful evaluation, we compare Deltametropolis' performance in these fields with the performance of the rest of the Netherlands, and with the performance of four other North West European (would-be) global city-regions. These are Greater London and Île de France as long-recognised metropolises, world cities and global city-regions, and the Flemish Diamond and the RheinRuhr Area as polynuclear metropolitan regions (possibly even global city-regions) in the making. The latter pair of regions in many respects constitute peers of Deltametropolis. To make the analysis complete, these four regions are also compared with the rest of their respective countries.

### ***Data and demarcation***

Data for this exercise are provided by Eurostat at the so-called NUTS level 2. This means that we have to define the former three metropolitan regions by using provinces (Deltametropolis and the Flemish Diamond) and Regierungsbezirke (the RheinRuhr Area) as building blocks. Greater London (consisting of Inner London and Outer London) and Île de France are NUTS level 1 regions. We take Deltametropolis to be made up by the provinces of North-Holland, South-Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland. Following Lievois & Albrechts (2000) we take the Flemish Diamond to consist of the provinces of Antwerp, Oost-Vlaanderen, Vlaams Brabant, Brabant Wallone and the Brussels Capital Region<sup>11</sup>. As a proxy for the RheinRuhr Area we take the sum of the Regierungsbezirke of Düsseldorf, Köln and Arnsberg. The Flemish Diamond and Deltametropolis are in this way delineated in a slightly generous way. For the RheinRuhr Area the deviation is somewhat larger. For example, whereas a strict delineation of the RheinRuhr Area would result in population of 11 million, the generous delineation applied here covers a population of 13,3 million.

### *Five (potential) global city-regions compared*

Deltametropolis, the Flemish Diamond, the RheinRuhr Area, Île de France, and Greater London constitute cornerstones of North West Europe's metropolitan system, also in economic terms (Spatial Vision Group, 2000). Together they add up to almost 45 million inhabitants. As can be concluded from Table 4.1, the regions constitute powerful concentrations of people and economic production within their national contexts. In particular Deltametropolis and the Flemish Diamond constitute major socio-economic geographies within respectively the Netherlands and Belgium. The RheinRuhr Area has a similar role in the state of Northrhine Westphalia, but, because of the much larger size of the German Federal Republic compared to Belgium and the Netherlands, it makes up only a modest part of Germany as a whole. Greater London and Île de France are typically the most condensed city regions. They constitute large concentrations of people and production (both in absolute numbers and relative to their national economies) on very small portions of their national land surface.

**Table 4.1 Relative weight of Deltametropolis, Flemish Diamond, RheinRuhr Area, Île de France and Greater London in their national contexts**

	<b>Population (millions, 1999)</b>	<b>Gross Regional Product (millions PPS, (97-98-99)</b>	<b>Share in national surface</b>	<b>Share in national population</b>	<b>Share in national GDP (97-98-99)</b>
<b>Deltametropolis</b>	7,3	918	25%	46%	51%
<b>Flemish Diamond</b>	5,3	702	30%	52%	63%
<b>RheinRuhr Area</b>	13,3	1519	6%	16%	17%
<b>Île de France</b>	11,0	1687	2%	18%	28%
<b>Greater London</b>	7,3	1086	1%	12%	18%

Source: calculated from European Commission (2002).

The economic importance of the five metropolitan regions can be further illustrated by a look at the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head. Figure 4.1 shows that the GDP per head in each of the five regions exceeds that of their national economies and the average of the 15 countries presently making up the European Union. Especially Île de France,



Greater London and the Flemish Diamond stand out from their national contexts rather clearly. For the Flemish Diamond this is mainly thanks to the Brussels Capital Region. Deltametropolis is still doing 20 percent better than the rest of the Netherlands, but the difference is less impressive than for the other three regions. GDP per head in the RheinRuhr Area is only slightly more than in the rest of Germany. Whereas the other four entities comprise the regions with the highest GDP per head scores in their respective countries, the RheinRuhr Area in Germany must give precedence to a fair number of other (urbanised) regions in which the GDP per head is sometimes up to 30 or 40 percent higher (e.g. Hamburg, Bremen, the Frankfurt conurbation, some regions in the southern part of Germany).

**Figure 4.1 GDP per head (PPS, average 1997-1998-1999, EU-15=100; source: calculated from European Commission, 2002)**

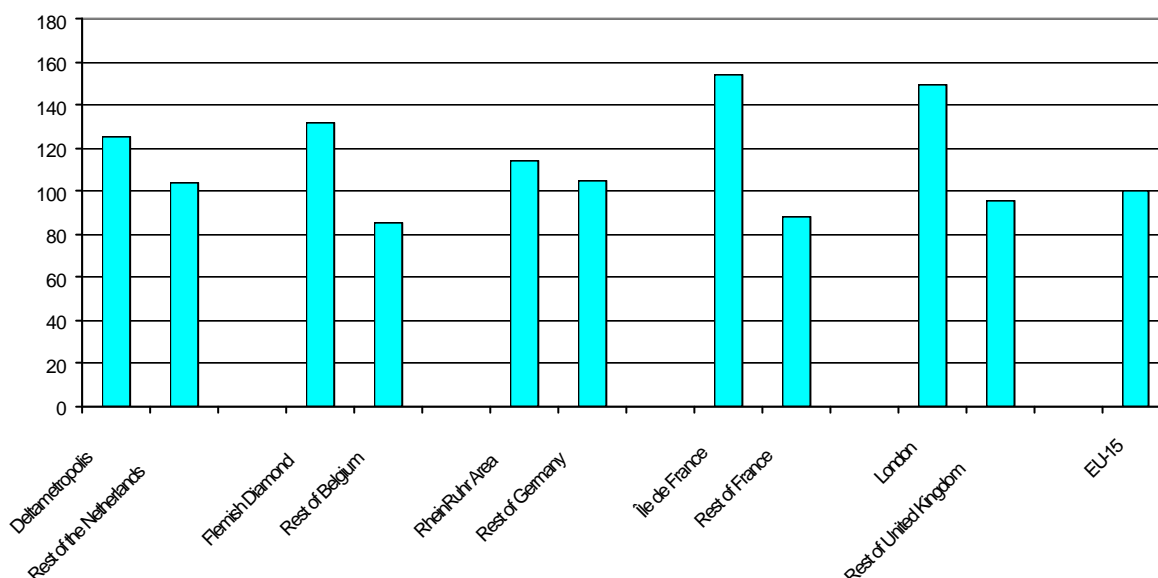


Figure 4.2 shows a simple breakdown of the five regional economies in agriculture, industries and services (measured by the number of people employed in each of these sectors). It clearly shows that especially the economies of Greater London, Île de France and Deltametropolis are strongly service-oriented, also compared with their respective national economies. Greater London beats the lot as it offers more than 85 percent of its workers a job in service industries (including non-profit services). The Randstad and Île de France follow with 80 percent. These three metropolitan regions are also clearly more service-oriented than their respective national economies. While the figures for the Flemish Diamond are slightly more moderate, the RheinRuhr Area is again the

exception to the rule. Here, the industrial sector still provides a relatively large share of the total employment that is more or less comparable with the situation in the rest of Germany and the European Union at large, and a clear reference to the region's famous industrial past.

**Figure 4.2 Employment by sector (% of total, 2000; source: calculated from European Commission, 2002)**

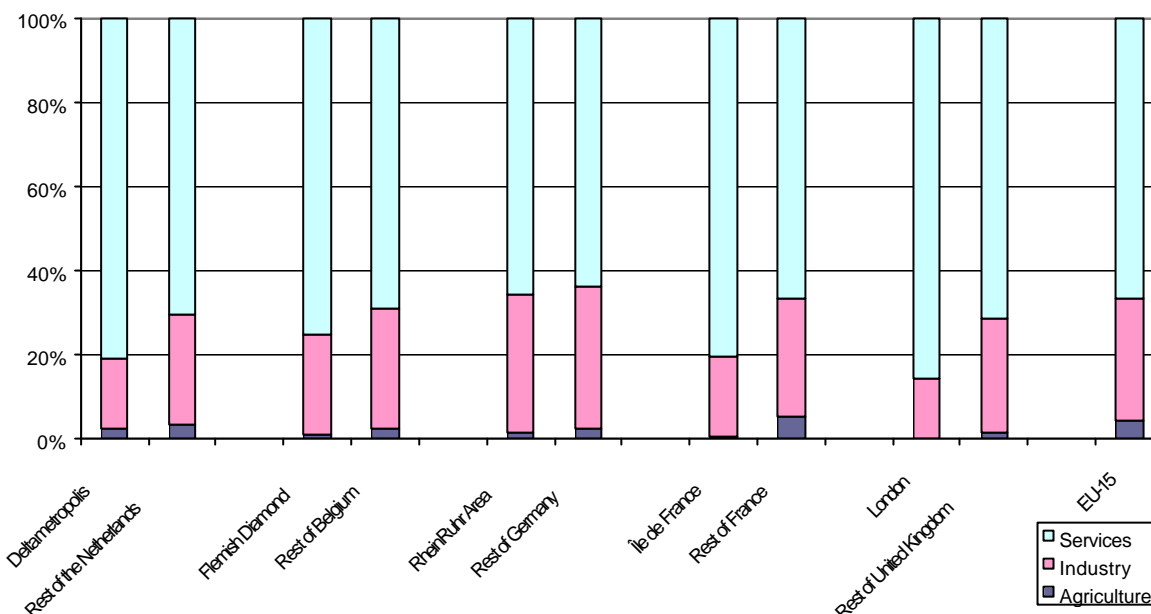
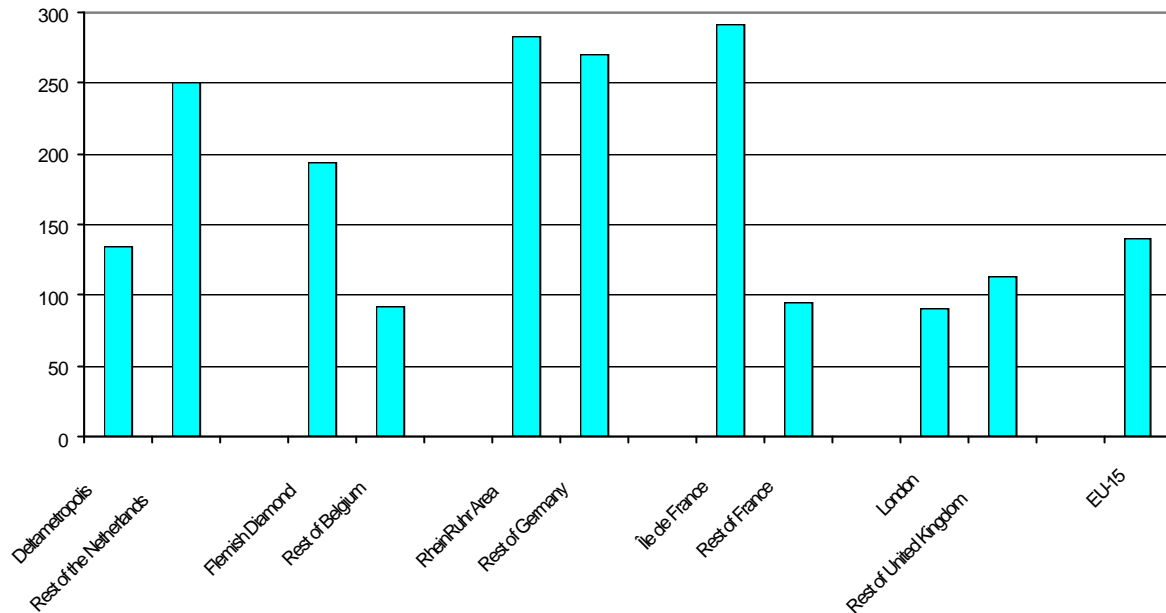


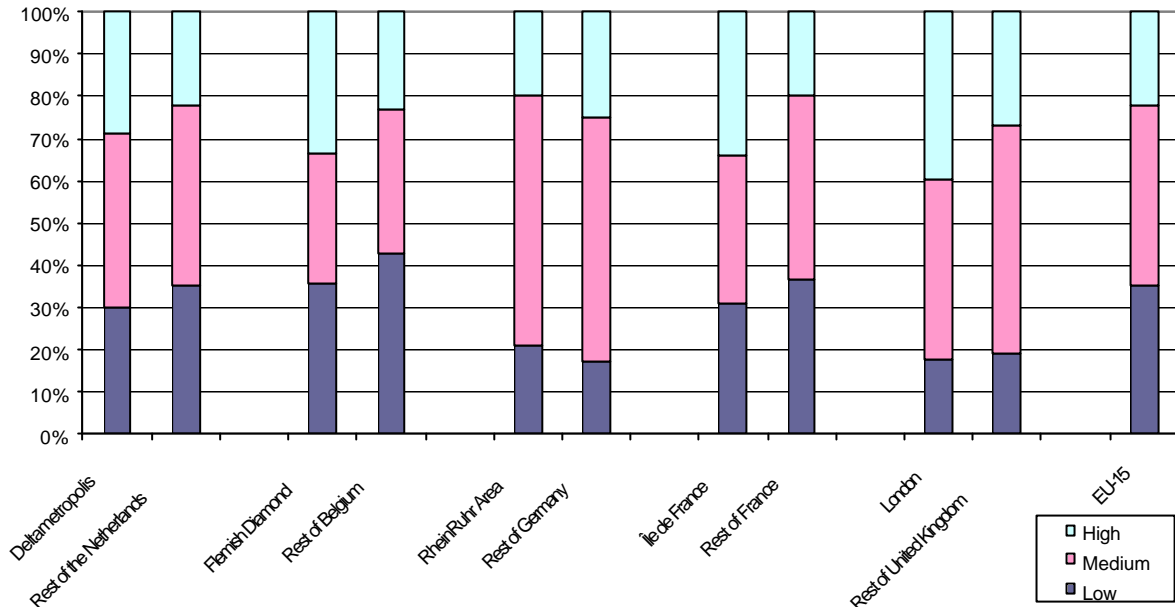
Figure 4.3 reveals some of the innovative capacity of the five regions by showing the number of European patent applications per million people. The picture is rather mixed. As regards the production of European patent applications Île de France and the RheinRuhr Area are the front-runners by far. They produce almost twice as many patent applications per million people as the EU-15 average. However, it is only Île de France and, on a more modest level, the Flemish Diamond that clearly outshine the rest of France and Belgium respectively. The RheinRuhr Area performs at about the same level as the rest of Germany. Deltametropolis, in contrast, is clearly outperformed by the rest of the Netherlands. While Deltametropolis itself produces about as many European patent applications per million inhabitants as the EU-15 on average, the score for the rest of the Netherlands is almost twice as high. A similar, but less sharply defined pattern applies to Greater London and the UK.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 4.3 European patent applications per million inh. (average 1998-1999-2000;  
source: calculated from European Commission, 2002)**



Finally, we turn to what may be considered one of today's most important labour force characteristics: the education level. Figure 4.4 shows the composition of the regions' labour force based upon the level of education attained. Especially Greater London emerges as a reservoir of highly educated people (40 percent). Île de France, the Flemish Diamond and Deltametropolis follow at some distance while the RheinRuhr Area occupies quite an exceptional position. A strikingly large share of its population has attained a medium level of education while both the shares of highly and lowly educated people are rather small. Whereas the other regions have an edge over the rest of their respective countries, the educational attainment of the population of the RheinRuhr Area appears to fall short of the attainment level of the rest of Germany. Interesting as well is the 'polarised' picture that applies to the Flemish Diamond. Here, the relatively large proportion of highly educated workers is matched by an even larger proportion of the labour force having attained only lower levels of education. The medium level accounts for only 30 percent of the total.

**Figure 4.4 Educational attainment of persons aged 25-59 (% of total, 2000, approximate; source: calculated from European Commission, 2002)**



### **Summary**

Within its national context, Deltametropolis appears indeed as a region that in many respects performs rather favourable. Compared to the rest of the Netherlands, the economy of Deltametropolis is more service oriented, produces a higher GDP per head and is home to a work force that is better educated. It loses out to the rest (most notably to the province of Brabant that is home to the high-tech cluster centred around Eindhoven) on European patent applications, suggesting that it is not a particularly innovative region. From the four other regions included in the analysis, however, Greater London and Paris/Île de France stand out from their respective national contexts much more clearly (except for London's low score in European patent applications). The figures (however limited in scope) confirm the status of these cities as leading centres in their respective national contexts and, concomitantly, in the global economy at large. The Flemish Diamond follows at a short distance: it performs clearly better than the rest of Belgium in all four categories covered, but not quite as distinctly as Greater London and Île de France. Compared to Deltametropolis, however, it stands out from its national context more markedly. Altogether, Deltametropolis seems to comprise 'regional motor' characteristics indeed, but not quite as clear as the undisputed global city-regions of Greater London and Île de France.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The latest attempt to pursue global city-region status for the urbanised West of the Netherlands is perhaps the most comprehensive until now. It is true that in the elaboration of the Deltametropolis perspective the desired urban form by tradition attracts most of the attention (see Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2002), but it would also seem as if both the functional coherence and the organising capacity of the region are more prominently on the agenda now as compared to earlier rounds. There are, for example, studies carried out into the introduction of a new, very rapid circular transport system that should bring the main centres of the Randstad within easy reach of each other (the so-called 'Rondje Randstad'), and the region's organising capacity is to be increased by the establishment of an 'Official Steering Committee Deltametropolis' and a supporting 'Deltametropolis Secretariat'. These should become responsible for the co-ordination of decision-making processes and implementation programmes aimed at the required for promoting the development of Deltametropolis into a global city-region, while the Deltametropolis Association continues to exist in its role as a think tank for new ideas. If these plans work out, Deltametropolis may well succeed in strengthening its capacity as an actor in charge of its own development destiny.

However, for Deltametropolis to qualify as a 'global city-region' of similar standing as for example Greater London or Île de France, there seems more work to be done. Yes indeed the region constitutes the country's centre of gravity in terms of population and production and also as regards factors such as the educational attainment of the work force and the service-oriented structure of the economy the region has an edge over the rest of the country while bearing comparison with the neighbouring polynuclear metropolitan regions of the Flemish Diamond and the RheinRuhr Area. But in terms of innovative capacity, which of late is increasingly seen as a key feature of regional competitive success, the region seems to have much to gain still. Along with issues such as the desired urbanisation pattern, functional integration and capacity building, the actors that will take further the development of Deltametropolis in the years to come, would do well to take on board the region's innovative capacity as a major issue as well.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based upon research that was conducted within the framework of the ESR programme 'Spatial Developments and Policies in Polynuclear Urban Configurations in North West Europe' that is financed by NWO, BNG (Dutch Municipalities Bank) and the municipalities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

<sup>2</sup> Speaking for the advanced economies, processes as described started to take off beginning in the 1970s but of course neither in all nations nor at the same time. In the Netherlands, for example, the national government changed its view on regional development in the 1980s, prior to the publication of the Fourth Policy Document on Spatial Planning (1988). After decades of promoting balanced regional development by encouraging development in regions that lagged behind and by virtually discouraging development in the country's core regions, quite suddenly the new proverb read 'regions on their own'. Regions then were encouraged to define their own destinies making use of their distinct qualities.

<sup>3</sup> This may apply both to specific economic sectors or products and to specific stages in a production chain.

<sup>4</sup> E.g.. information about upcoming changes in markets and regulations, latest developments in production technologies, the arrival of new suppliers, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> Externalities are occurrences or activities that lie outside the range of control of individual firms, but that have definite effects on firms' internal production function. Examples are information spill-overs, the benefits of having access to a large and adequately qualified pool of labour or the benefits arising to individual firms from being surrounded and working together with other firms that share a common frame of reference for judging reputations or trustworthiness.

<sup>6</sup> The argument can be extended considerably by including, for example, the effects of inter-firm proximity and transaction density on such aspects as creativity, innovative capacity and learning effects, but also by highlighting the special position of business start-ups in this context (see, for example, Porter, 1998, 2001; Gordon and McCann, 2000; Kloosterman and Lambregts, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> These were described as: greater Amsterdam, greater Utrecht and the South Wing or the greater Rotterdam-The Hague region.

<sup>8</sup> In early 2002, the Association had more than 30 members of all sorts, including municipalities (12), chambers of commerce (5), various interest groups (5), district water boards (6) and housing corporations (4) (source: [www.deltametropool.nl](http://www.deltametropool.nl)).

<sup>9</sup> Coordination between the activities and preferences of the Deltametropolis Association and the input delivered by the Randstad Region to the central government was eventually guaranteed by the dual role played by the four largest cities (they were the founders of the Deltametropolis Association and also full members of the Administrative Committee for the Randstad), and by the arrangements made at the practical level. Many of the local officials who helped to formulate the input of the Randstad Region for the Fifth Policy Document also participated in the various study groups of the Deltametropolis Association (Projectgroep Randstadinbreng Vijfde Nota, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> In the Netherlands, National Reports on Spatial Planning materialise in four steps. First the government presents its policy intentions (part 1). Next comes a document reporting on the results of the public enquiry and consultation procedure (part 2). Based upon part 1 and 2, the 'cabinet's decision' is issued (part 3). Finally, the cabinet's decision is discussed by the parliament, after which the result is published as the country's official spatial policy for the years to come (part 4).

<sup>11</sup> Brabant Wallone is included since it has strong functional relationships with the Brussels area. It is, however, not included in the definition given by the Ministry of the Flemish Society (1997).

<sup>12</sup> In fact, the disappointing performance of Greater London in this field is quite remarkable. While the Atlantic orientation of Greater London and the UK at large may have a role in explaining the low absolute score of Greater London, it is not likely to account for the weak score of Greater London as compared to the rest of the UK. It would be interesting to investigate the regions' patent applications in the USA as well.

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