The Netherlands is a very highly dense country for its size. Holland has an area of is made up of 41,526 square km and of that only 33,889 square km is land. Minnesota has an area of is 206,190 square km and of our land we designate 16,187 square km to be specifically for state forests. Even though Minnesota contains much more land, it holds only has only one third the population of the Netherlands. We have space, they do not. Every country seeks to give their citizens benefits for living within their borders to living in that area. The United States gives individual families more land, personal yards, and their own space that they can call their own. In the Netherlands, however, this is not possible. The country’s limited amount of surface area does not allow people to have big backyards. This leads a Dutch architect to say, “America will never run out of space” (Meike). We allow land for open use, to spread us out and away from others, causing our entire society to engage and travel around our area in an entire different way than the citizens of the Netherlands in their limited spaces. The limited space and the high necessity for housing in the Netherlands, it has lowered amounts of individual, personal space, which promotes a more social community the United State lacks due to its vastness, its expanse of personal yards and other personal spaces.

People need space. But how much or what type is difficult to say for sure, because different cultures perceive the idea of “space” in many varied ways. In the Netherlands, space is so limited that citizens have minimized personal space and created bigger, communal space for everyone to use. They have taken the human necessity of personal activity, and transformed it into public space, such
as those spaces required for public recreation and relaxation.

Almere is one city recently planned with this private-to-public space utilization in mind. It was started in 1976 and contains over 175,000 people already. By the year 2030 it is planned that they will have 350,000 residents. It was begun because Amsterdam was reaching the peak of its growth and all the incoming residents had to be placed someplace. With the rapid population growth and the necessity for jobs and homes, the city is a constant construction area. Jobs are a high priority for a city growing this fast. Not only do they need a place to live but a place to work. This is causing the city to become dense and limit the amount of inner city green space, whether it is public or private. The planners of Almere have found a different solution to this problem though; they have placed the green spaces on some roofs. Not only that, but single family homes are even placed on top of commercial businesses. The green space on top of this complex, pictured above, can be viewed by a nearby restaurant’s customers, but only residents of the single-family housing it was built for have access to it. This idea of spreading up instead of out is an ingenious, grand plan. The city does not have space to spread out buildings and yards, but the sky is literally the limit, and it is practically endless.

On the opposite side of the spectrum sits America, with more space than it can handle. The United States has given its residents luxuries such as big yards, big houses, and monstrous two and three car garages. America is not the Netherlands, and therefore it will never plan or build like the Netherlands does, simply because it doesn’t
have to. In the United States people have the ability to spread out. The United States can give each citizen the home with the yard and the white picket fence. But this way, the American way, is not the best way to utilize the land, nor the best way to treat our environment. With our homes being spread out, United States citizens travel from place to place by plane, train or automobile. This is not beneficial for the environment because we pump incredible amounts of ozone-harming emissions into our atmosphere. And, along with the idealistic individuality or the American people, this independent spirit also promotes a more individualized type of environment for our citizens. Taking a car is private. United States citizens are less outgoing, and meet fewer people because of our automobiles. They stay in their little five-passenger worlds and are happy with that, thank you very much.

The Netherlands is altogether different. The Netherlands is dense; cities, such as Amsterdam, are not allowed to spread out more, not allowed to grow outside of their current perimeters. Even so, Amsterdam is growing. It is becoming more densely populated with taller buildings and more people living in them. This kind of density ensures that everyone in the city is living extremely close to their neighbors. Citizens of Amsterdam do not find it necessary to drive to work, or their friend’s house. They can walk or bike for those short treks.

With the cities’ densities rising, public transportation is also stepping up to be a key player in travel from city to city. Not only is mass transit less harmful for the environment, it is also
sometimes faster and much more cost effective. Another bonus to public transit is that riders are opening themselves up to the world of human interaction. Saying “Hi” to people as they pass by on their bikes, or talking to the person sitting directly across from them on the train, is encouraging the entire society to be more outgoing and friendly.

Why is this in here? Holland is a country that is limited in space but overflowing with interaction. It is hard to avoid others with the small, private yards so you must go to a park to get recreation or public transportation. The entire city must be planned, must be thought out in all aspects.

Urban planners in the Netherlands have had to deal with another major factor before beginning to think where they would place buildings or fields: altitude. The country is mainly below sea level, and this creates many issues with water damage and flooding. All water must be pumped out of the areas that planners would like to develop and must be transported through a canal to the other side of dikes or dams. So building in the Netherlands starts, in essence, by addressing the many issues related to water to prevent drastic effects on the entire community, and the country at large.

After addressing aquatics, planners move on to transportation, leaving housing for the end. Having begun planning do to the fact they must manage how the water will react with the area, they continue with transportation rather than with house construction. Planning how the public moves from area to area, either by car, bus, bike, train or walking, allows for better traffic flow through the city. This flow will aid the developers by framing what buildings should be placed and exactly how the public will travel to and from it, be it by walking, biking, or driving. Transportation is the fuel for a city, bringing travelers in, moving residents throughout the city, and also exporting residents out to other locations. Therefore, it is crucial to plan transportation.
In the above aspects, the United States is different from the Netherlands. With its massive amount of space, the United States has plenty of room to pick and choose which land to build on, therefore eliminating the need to drain water. With the United States not required to plan for water management as the most crucial part of the planning process, that entire step is saved for last. The United States does not plan ahead, but rather for what the people need in their personal lives; a roof over their head, a place to work, entertainment, etc. But we forget one key aspect. The United States does not plan for how people will get from one location to the next except by personal automobile transportation. This is our pitfall. Personal automobiles have priority and pedestrian and public transportation have to step aside and wait in line.

Each individual country is allowed to provide its own answers to the questions of their publics' individual wants and needs. America is allowed to be selfish, allowed to give our citizens what each person hopes for. But is that really right? Should we allow ourselves to be greedy and have everything we desire? The Netherlands thinks differently. They cannot be greedy, because there is no room to be greedy. Everything is planned, predicted and designed. There is no “uncharted land,” no “I’m about to go where no one has gone before.” And so it must be compacted, must be planned, must be designed with a particular mode of human existence in mind. Technically, Holland should not exist. It was under sea level and planners lifted it up from under the ocean to live on. These planners of old proved their brilliance not just by building cities, but also building a better life through a better lifestyle. Americans should look to them for guidance, for inspiration, and for a goal.
Bibliography

Population and Size


Meike talking to us on a bike tour