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The Dutch battle for highly skilled migrants: policy, implementation and the role of social networks

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Abstract

In recent years a growing competition for talent has emerged among developed nations. Policymakers across North-America, Australia and Europe have implemented targeted migration programs to attract global talent in order to gain the net positive effects associated with skilled migration. Research so far has mainly focused on analyzing such programs in traditional destinations for highly skilled migrants such as the United States, Canada and Australia. In this article we take the Netherlands as a case study of the more recent European involvement in the 'race for talent'. We first describe how 'highly skilled' migrants are categorized in the various skilled migration schemes that exist in the Netherlands. Secondly, by using primary data on highly-skilled migrants who participated in one of these schemes we look at whether the policy measures attracted the intended target group. We conclude that policy measures that favor highly skilled migrants by themselves are not enough to attract talent. Having social capital in the Netherlands as well as the recruiting efforts of Dutch employers are more important in attracting highly skilled migrants. Also, being highly skilled does not necessarily mean that access to the Dutch labor market is without obstacles.

Keywords: highly skilled migrants; highly educated migrants; social capital; migration policy; The Netherlands.

Introduction

In the beginning of the 21st century the European Union launched the Lisbon Strategy with the aim to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world (European Parliament, 2010). European countries recognized that global competition for the 'best and brightest' needed to play an important role in realizing this aim. Current restrictive immigration policies would not suffice to attract these highly skilled migrants. Several European countries therefore turned to a managed migration approach in which certain categories of migrants were looked upon favorably and other migrant categories were to be 'kept out'. This categorization of migrants into 'favorable' and 'unfavorable' groups is a policy instrument that many modern nation-states rely on for immigration control. Strict boundaries are constructed to define what kind of immigration should be encouraged - who

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is to be let in and possibly become a citizen - and which groups should be discouraged from being included in immigration flows (cf. Kolb, 2010). The resulting dichotomy of wanted vs. unwanted migrants leads to further categorizations for the sake of policy design: highly skilled vs. low skilled migrants, asylum seekers and irregular migrants vs. family migrants, western vs. non-western migrants, non-EU migrants vs. EU-migrants. Counting the numbers who belong to these categories legitimizes policy interventions (cf. Yanow, 2003) and through definition of such categories in policy design nation-states try to control the unwanted immigration flows and to attract migrants they want: those who are highly skilled and will contribute to a knowledge-based economy.

Nation-states use different approaches in defining who is a skilled migrant. In a supply-driven system, governments categorize highly skilled immigrants by using a list of desirable characteristics (education, age, language, work experience) for potential immigrants who are selected through a points system (the so-called human-capital based instruments) (Kolb, 2010; Iredale, 2001), for example. In contrast, a demand-driven system uses a more 'fuzzy' definition of highly skilled migrants relying on employers to choose workers based on firms' actual labour needs (neo-corporatist model) instead of on what governments define as 'highly-skilled' migrants (Iredale, 2001). It might be expected that the definition of highly skilled migrants depends solely on their educational level; this is mostly not the case however, and many European countries use additional multi-indicators for categorization purposes, such as salary, professional experience (e.g. Germany, Austria, United Kingdom), a minimum salary requirement (e.g. Austria, United Kingdom), a threshold for the pension scheme (Germany), or the application of a coefficient of the annual average salary (e.g. Belgium). Sweden, on the other hand, does not specifically define highly-skilled migrants as it uses an employer-driven system for recruitment which is open to all skill levels (EMN, 2013). In the Netherlands, while a so-called 'knowledge worker' is defined as someone with an income above a certain threshold, irrespective of the level of education, educational criteria are applied to categorize other highly skilled migrants (see further).

Moreover, since nation-states are nowadays caught in a 'battle for brains', and since highly skilled migrants may also have other motives besides pure economic gain (e.g. Eich-Krom, 2013; Shachar, 2006), scholars argue that a theoretical framework for analyzing highly skilled migration flows needs to incorporate different macro and micro factors of highly skilled international migration. These factors include government policies, the role of employers and international recruitment agencies, and social networks as the actual driving force behind highly skilled migration flows (e.g. Iredale, 2001; Salt & Findlay, 1989).

The facilitating role of social capital in international migration in general is an area that has been studied by many scholars. Social networks consisting of kinship, friendship and shared community origin provide social support (e.g. information, advice, help to find employment or better paid jobs) and build a self-perpetuating momentum in migration processes (e.g. Aguilera & Massey 2003; Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Massey et al., 1987). There is also evidence that social capital plays an important role in the labour market. Personal and social contacts facilitate the dissemination of information regarding job opportunities and in job searching processes. Many unemployed people find jobs through family and friends (e.g. Cahuc & Fontaine, 2002). Granovetter's 'strength of weak ties', on the other hand, implies that the best jobs are likely to be found via people to whom one is only weakly attached (Granovetter, 1973), as it is those people who provide job-seekers with new and valuable information. This was also found to be valid for international job seekers from emerging and declining economies (Wright Brown & Konrad, 2005). Literature shows that social capital is similarly important for employers. They use their own social networks to fill job vacancies and sometimes rely regularly on these networks to hire employees (e.g. Campbell & Marsdan, 1990; Holzer, 1987).

Yet, studies on the influence of social networks with regard to highly skilled migration are scarce in comparison to other areas of migration, e.g. family migration. Research on highly skilled migration is mostly dominated by economic arguments (Eich-Krom, 2013). In this article we aim to contribute to the research on macro and micro approaches to highly skilled international migration. We analyze the interplay between government policies that stimulate the immigration of highly skilled migrants, the role of employers, the influence of social ties on the motivations of these migrants, and the way social networks are used by migrants and employers, respectively, to gain or offer access to the Dutch labour market. The research questions are: 1) How are highly skilled migrants defined in Dutch policies, and which criteria are used to specify the categories of highly skilled migrants? 2) Do the policies attract the intended targets? and 3) How do the policies work in practice for the migrants who make use of them? Why do they choose the Netherlands under these programs, and how do their experiences relate to the goals of the policy?

We answer the first research question by describing how the Dutch government has categorized highly skilled migrants in recent policy instruments. The second and the third research questions are answered by using data from research that evaluated one of the most recent instruments designed to attract the 'best and the brightest'.

Our findings illustrate that in spite of a clearly defined category of 'best and the brightest', the defined policy-instrument fails to attract the targeted group. Rather it is social capital that determines who 'comes in'.

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Categorizations of highly skilled migrants in Dutch policy schemes

Within the context of increased competition for highly skilled migrants, the Netherlands has aimed at strengthening its knowledge economy and aspired to be one of the pioneers in this field. Consequently, the Dutch government 'renovated' its migration policy in the first decade of the 21st century. The so-called 'Modern Migration Policy' was considered to be a 'business card' for highly educated migrants and international students from non-EU countries, while being restrictive for other types of immigrants. Specific policy instruments were implemented to attract highly skilled migrants. However, the definition of who a highly skilled migrant is differs per scheme with either migrants' educational level or income as the main criterion.

The Knowledge Migrants Scheme (2004) is the most important policy instrument with regard to the number of highly skilled non-EU migrants who were issued a Dutch residence permit. Between 2008-2013 about 36,000 knowledge workers entered the Netherlands (Obradović, 2014). Under this scheme migrants are defined as 'highly skilled' if, prior to migration, they were offered jobs by employers in the Netherlands with substantially high, age-dependent salaries. The salary-threshold is defined by the government annually (cf. OECD, 2016). As opposed to what the term 'knowledge' migrants suggests, no attributes such as the level of education, or specific qualifications of 'know-how' or expertise (OECD, 2016) are used in the categorization. The underlying assumption in the scheme is that a migrant who earns at least a certain amount of salary has valuable skills (De Lange, 2007) and makes an above average contribution to the Dutch economy (Obradović, 2014). Research outcomes differ on what the actual educational level of knowledge migrants is. According to Berkhout et al. (2010), knowledge migrants completed different levels of education, while Obradović (2014) conclude that an overwhelming majority has at least a Bachelor's degree.

The EU-guideline *Scientific Researcher (EU-guideline 2005/71/EG)* (2008) promotes the EU as a knowledge economy, and sets minimum norms for member states to attract scientific researchers from non-EU countries (Obradović, 2014). According to the scheme the migrants' educational level determines their skills. Scientific researchers must have a diploma that gives them access to a PhD programme.[1] They can be involved in research projects at a research organization or enroll in a PhD programme. A scientific researcher enjoys free mobility within the EU. The residence permit is issued for at least one year. From 2008-2013 more than 8,000 scientific researchers were issued a residence permit under this scheme (Obradović, 2014).

The *Orientation Year for Graduates in the Netherlands* (2004-2016) aimed at keeping students from non-EU countries in the Netherlands and classified

[1] https://ind.nl/werken/paginas/wetenschappelijk-onderzoeker.aspx; consulted in August 2017.

those who obtained a Bachelor's or Master's degree from a Dutch university as knowledge worker 'candidates'. Within one year after their graduation, graduates could apply for a one-year residence permit to look for a job as a 'knowledge' migrant, with no possibility for extension. In order to be recognized as a 'knowledge' migrant, graduates also needed to earn a minimum salary. But the salary threshold required by the *Orientation Year for Graduates in the Netherlands* scheme was lower than the one used in the Knowledge Migrants Scheme, and it was not age dependent. During 2005-2011 about 2,700 graduates made use of this scheme (Obradović, 2013).

The *Orientation Year for Highly Educated Migrants* (2009-2016) scheme was also meant as a 'search' year for non-EU migrant jobseekers. It was designed to attract a specific category of migrants to the Netherlands: young 'top-talents' and the 'best and the brightest'. The scheme operationalized these concepts as follows: those with a Master's or PhD degree from a Dutch university or from one of the top 200 universities in the world.[2] Within three years after receiving their degree qualified non-EU migrants could apply for a residence permit to look for jobs in the Netherlands as 'knowledge workers', or set up innovative businesses. The salary threshold for knowledge workers was equal to the one used by the Orientation Year for Graduates scheme, but it was not age-dependent. The *Orientation Year for Highly Educated Migrants* scheme was based on a point system.[3] Like the Graduates' scheme, it was valid for one year only. After a year, migrants either had to apply for a change in their purpose to stay in the Netherlands, or leave the country.

The government aspired to attract 500 top-talents within the first two years of the implementation of the scheme, but this number was not achieved even after four years of implementation. Between 2009 and 2012, only 462 migrants participated in the scheme, a total that is far below the ones in the aforementioned schemes.[4]

So, the Netherlands used demand driven as well as supply driven policy schemes to attract highly skilled migrants.

Although these schemes were designed to attract highly skilled migrants, the Orientation Year for Highly Educated Migrants Scheme had an important drawback. Contrary to the other schemes, its participants needed a work permit

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[2] The university ranking is determined annually according to the Times Higher Education World Rankings, the QS World University Ranking, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities of the Shanghai University.

[3] Participants had to obtain a minimum of 35 points. A PhD degree yielded 30 points, a Master's degree 25 points, and 5 points each were granted for being between the age of 21 and 40; previous stay in the Netherlands for work or study purposes; speaking Dutch or English; having obtained the degree in a country that has signed the Bologna Declaration (Voorschrift Vreemdelingen, 2000).

[4] Since 2014 participants in all schemes are registered under the category knowledge and talent migration. The number of applicants in this category rose from 10,900 in 2015 to 13,900 in 2016.

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unless they earned enough to 'become' a knowledge worker. This was also the case for their partners.

Furthermore, employers hiring highly-skilled migrants under all the aforementioned schemes needed to be registered by the Immigration and Naturalisation Office as recognized sponsors, at a cost of over 5.000 euro's.[5] In March 2016 the Dutch government revised the policy for highly educated migrants. The co-existence of two schemes with an orientation year for similar target groups but different prerequisites for determining the target group was considered undesirable, and the two schemes were combined into the *Orientation Year for Highly Educated* Scheme that is currently in effect. The requirements to participate in the scheme were reduced. Graduates of Dutch universities can now make use of the scheme until three years after their graduation (previously, one year), and graduates of foreign universities no longer need a work-permit. Scientific researchers and post-docs are also entitled to an orientation year under the new scheme. Contrary to the previous situation, participants can make use of the scheme more than once. If they complete a new study, they are entitled to a new orientation year. The *Orientation Year for Highly Educated* Scheme will be evaluated three years after coming into effect.

Data and method

To answer the research questions on whether the policies attract the intended targets (2) and on how the policies work in practice for the migrants who made use of them (3), we use data from a web survey conducted in 2013 by the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), that involved participants in one of the most recent policy instruments, the Orientation Year for Highly Educated Migrants Scheme, who were still in the Netherlands. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed that included topics such as the motivation for coming to the Netherlands, experiences with the scheme, and labour-market participation.

Through the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), the last known addresses of everyone who had participated in the scheme between January 1st, 2009 and mid-April 2013 were acquired (n=462). All these *potential* respondents received an invitation to fill in the web survey. One hundred participants completed the survey (a 37% response rate). Although the web survey was conducted amongst participants who were still living in the Netherlands, the resulting response group was representative for all the participants in the scheme with respect to the top-ten nationalities, sex and age.[6]

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[5] Amount on January 1, 2017. The sponsorship requirement was introduced in the Modern Migration Policy.

[6] In addition, data from the registers of the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) show that the majority of the 'top-talents' who participated in the scheme between January 1, 2009 and mid-April 2013 stayed in the Netherlands (about 70%).

Further, 16 face-to-face interviews with web-survey respondents were conducted,[7] and an expert meeting was organized with representatives of government, employers, recruitment agencies and universities to hear their experiences with this particular scheme.

Profiles of the participants

The WODC-web survey respondents came from 36 different countries. One in three originated from one of the emerging economies (e.g. China, India, Russia, Turkey). Most (89%) were between 25 and 35 years of age, 54% were females and 46% were males. A majority had a degree in natural sciences such as engineering, mathematics, statistics or computing (Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2014). The majority of the respondents had completed their orientation year (72%), and had permanent residence in the Netherlands, or a temporary residence permit, either as a knowledge migrant or due to stay with a partner. Half of the respondents who were married or living together had met their partner in the Netherlands. The migration history of the respondents revealed three profiles of participants, which showed that a majority of these highly skilled migrants had some kind of social ties with the Netherlands before participating in the scheme:

- *Stayers:* Over three-fourths of the participants already had residence permits in the Netherlands on other grounds before participating in the scheme (81%). Stayers had been living in the Netherlands for five years, on average. The majority obtained their degrees in the Netherlands (71%). The rest of the stayers had studied abroad but came to the Netherlands for professional and socio-economic reasons, and/or because they had social ties with the Netherlands (usually by having a partner here). Men and women were almost equally represented among the stayers (42 males and 39 females).
- *Returnees*: Ten percent of the participants were highly skilled migrants who had left the Netherlands after completing their studies but then decided to return to look for work. Returnees, who were overwhelmingly women, named professional reasons and social ties with the country (especially the existence of a partner) as their reasons for returning to the Netherlands.
- *Cosmopolitans:* A small portion (9%) of the participants lived abroad before participating in the scheme. Even though they did not study in

[7] During the completion of the web-survey the participants were asked whether they were interested to talk to the researchers further about their motivations to use the orientation year scheme, their experiences with it, and their current situation in the Netherlands. Among those who were prepared to do so (about 60 respondents) a selection was made with an eye on maximum variation in the characteristics of respondents (country of birth, gender), and whether they were i) already living in the Netherlands before participating in the orientation year, ii) still in their orientation year, and iii) able to find a job during that year.

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the Netherlands, almost all the cosmopolitans had social ties with the Netherlands. They had either worked here previously, or visited as tourists.[8] Similar to the returnees, cosmopolitans were mostly women and the majority named professional reasons and, even more often than the returnees, the existence of a partner in the Netherlands as reasons why they came back to the Netherlands.

Why come to the Netherlands and why participate in the Orientation Year Scheme?

Half the respondents initially considered migrating to another country. United States, Australia, Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom are the top five choices in this respect. Different factors play a role in the eventual decision to choose the Netherlands. These factors include an expectation that finding a job will be easier, the international character of the Dutch scientific world, the open-mindedness of Dutch people, a better economic situation, the distance to the country of birth, a less strict admission policy, a better living environment and social ties with people already in the Netherlands.

Completing a course of study or reaching the end of a labour-contract and wishing to remain in the Netherlands was the most commonly stated reason for participating in the Orientation Year Scheme (70% of the respondents). This is not surprising as the majority of the participants consisted of *stayers*. The scheme provided an opportunity for them to extend their stay in the Netherlands. The second most common reason (26%) was to avoid stricter admission requirements of other schemes or migration policies (e.g. the Knowledge Migrants Scheme or family reunification). Among the *stayers* who did not study in the Netherlands, as well as the *cosmopolitans,* this was the most common reason for participating in the scheme.

> With the partnership visa, you know, we would have to make sure that her [the partner's] income was high enough (…). So this just seemed an easier and cheaper path.

> It was a great option for me to have one year to explore and see if I could find a job and settle here without depending on my partner to stay here in Holland.

[8] In the literature 'cosmopolitans' are mostly defined as highly skilled young professionals (or expats) (see e.g. Bochove & Engbersen, 2015, p. 295-296). While one stream of scholars argue that they are highly mobile, and are open to different life-styles and cultures, others argue that they are not that open to different cultures and prefer to live in their own bubble (Bochove & Engbersen, 2015, p. 295-296). Bochove & Engbersen show that this division is not so clear-cut and both identities can exist among the cosmopolitans.

The wish to develop oneself professionally in the Dutch knowledge economy was the third common reason (stated by 11% of the respondents), and was given almost exclusively by stayers who had studied in the Netherlands.

Searching for a job during the orientation year

Since participants in the Orientation Year Scheme did not have jobs lined up for them prior to coming to the Netherlands they had to look for jobs after arriving. A large majority (82%) of them made use of formal methods (cf. Try, 2005), following advertisements for vacancies through the Internet or newspapers - a method often used by the highly educated in general. Such methods were used almost universally by returnees and cosmopolitans (95% altogether), but a majority of the *stayers* (79%) also relied on such formal methods. In their search to 'become' knowledge migrants, most highly-skilled participants also relied on their respective social networks. This was most often the case for returnees and cosmopolitans (84%), in comparison to stayers (57%). Relatively often it was 'strong ties' (such as family and friends) that were utilized while searching for jobs, though some respondents instead experienced 'strength of the weak ties'(cf. Granovetter, 1973). One respondent found a job through someone he had met at a conference, while another was tipped by the director of an organisation who had the same nationality as the respondent, just as he was about to complete the orientation year.

> (...) Just as I was finishing my orientation year, I spoke with the executive director of an organization who was a …. as well (…). So I told him my situation, that I was looking for a job, that my search was about to end (…) And when he told me 'why don't you do a PhD in the Netherlands' (...) I made a proposal and sent it to different universities in the Netherlands and to Germany. I was just copying and pasting. And I got some interesting proposals from two Dutch universities. But I had one problem: my residence permit had expired. So basically I was just living in the Netherlands illegally, but after two-three months I got my contract and a residence permit.

A number of respondents reported that they did volunteer work during their orientation year in order to build up social networks that they could use later when looking for 'real' jobs.

Most participants succeeded in finding jobs during the orientation year (68%), but a considerable percentage still failed to do so. The percentage of successful job-finders was considerably lower among returnees and cosmopolitans, compared to stayers (47% vs. 72%).[9] Since some of the respondents were still

[9] The success percentage would have been lower had we been able to include all 465 participants in the study, including the ones who had already left the Netherlands.

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in their orientation year at the time of the survey, the actual percentage of participants successfully finding jobs and who stayed in the Netherlands is probably higher.

Most of the respondents (77%) were satisfied with their orientation year. Still they reported that they experienced several bottlenecks during this year - returnees and cosmopolitans more often than stayers (79% vs. 56%): difficulty to find a job due to lack of knowledge of the Dutch language, an unwillingness of employers to hire participants in the scheme because of the work-permit requirement and related bureaucratic work, the high costs for small companies to be registered as sponsors, problems matching jobs to participants' skillsets, and discrimination and a general lack of knowledge about this specific scheme by employers:

> ....99% of the people I talked to in the Netherlands, including the companies where I had applied for a job, never heard about this scheme and did not understand how I could come to the Netherlands without an employer.

In addition to leading to difficulties in finding jobs, the work-permit requirement also produced some unwanted side effects. A number of respondents performed informal work during their efforts to support themselves, while a few other respondents looked for jobs in other EU-countries, with the risk of a 'flight' of the much-desired 'best and brightest' to competitor knowledge economies.

Employers searching for highly skilled migrants

The findings from the expert-meeting highlighted an unexpected phenomenon: a possible mismatch between the aims and methods of job-hunting by the participants in the scheme, and those of head-hunting employers looking for the best and the brightest. In their search for skilled workers, both large and small companies relied on their own social networks – although with different strategies. A small company relied on its own networks through Linked-in, a large, innovative Dutch company recruited highly-educated migrants with specific skills through focused branding activities in countries of origin in so-called emerging economies (e.g. China, Brazil, India), as well as in former eastern-block countries and the United States. The aim of recruitment was quick information exchange through short-term contracts, while the participants in the Orientation Year Scheme were looking for jobs in the Netherlands with the aim to stay for an extended period of time:

> We search for highly educated employees for a short period; also for their knowledge, in order to get acquainted with fresh knowledge and

> expertise, just to have another influence, an international orientation, actually.

Evidence from other research confirms that companies in the Netherlands are increasingly hiring specialists with short term contracts (Thijm & Diepenhorst, 2013).

The participants' reported experience that the Orientation Year Scheme seemed to be unknown by employers was confirmed by the employers themselves. None of them had come into contact with highly skilled migrants looking for a job via the Orientation Year Scheme. Representatives of a university, as well as a large recruitment agency specialized in guiding highly skilled international migrants into the Dutch labour-market reported similar bottlenecks during the expert-meeting. The university in question had little contact with the Orientation Year Scheme, and was focused more on specific branding activities in countries like the United States and China in order to attract PhD students and graduate researchers. The recruitment agency came into contact with only two participants in their orientation year, which implies that there are insufficient opportunities through which the two parties can meet.

The promotion of the Netherlands as a knowledge economy

As stated earlier, the Dutch government introduced the Orientation Year Scheme to attract the best and the brightest highly skilled migrants to the Netherlands, in line with its ambition to be one of the leading knowledge economies in the world. There was no possibility to approach highly educated individuals in other countries for this research. However, according to the responses from returnees and cosmopolitans in our own sample, the possibility of making use of the orientation year scheme is not well known among the target group in their countries. In addition, there are indications that the international promotion of the Netherlands as a knowledge economy, in general, is insufficient. The respondents credit the importance of their own social networks for ending up in a small, non-English speaking country such as the Netherlands, rather than the country's attractiveness to highly educated talent.

> I don't know if a lot of people know about Holland, it is such a little country. And maybe a few people know about Philips and these bigger companies, because they are so international. But for the rest (…) I think most people come here only if they have a connection with the country. (...) Otherwise, I don't know why any-body would come here.

> The Netherlands is not a place that fits in the plans of someone who wants to study or live abroad. The Netherlands is a place you happen to come to. It is not a place you choose to come to (...). They usually go to

> places that are friendlier for English speakers, like the UK, the US, Australia (...). But a lot of people don't know the good part of the Netherlands [knowledge economy]. Because the PR is not good, it could be better. They need to sell themselves better, if they want to attract knowledge migrants.

> It wasn't advertised at my university. I have never heard of anyone trying to go to Europe. The only reason I came here is because I had interaction with Dutch people, but if I wouldn't have had that, I don't think I would have come here, because it is not well-advertised: the fact that the Netherlands is a knowledge intensive economy. Unless you talk about very specific cases, like technical cases, if you are doing something in architecture, things like that. But generally speaking, I think that if that is where the (Dutch) government wants to go, then there is a lot of PR they need to do, in English.

Conclusion

The categorization of migrants as 'wanted' and 'unwanted' has become an implicit policy instrument of 'border control' by modern nation-states. Many of these countries devised privileged entry and settlement conditions for the 'wanted', including international students and highly skilled workers. The Netherlands also introduced different schemes to attract highly skilled migrants. However, in a fiercely competitive race for top-talent, countries such as the Netherlands, which may not be an obvious first choice of destination for highly skilled migrants, need to realize policy objectives are not always translated into practice. The Netherlands still lags behind in the European 'battle for brains'. Its share of highly skilled migrants among employed non EU-migrants is lower than in many other EU-countries in the region, including Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, France and Germany - all non-English speaking countries - and the United Kingdom (OECD, 2016).

Evidence shows that economic motives are not that important for highly educated migrants. Acquiring professional experience and personal motives also play a role (Erich-Krom, 2013; Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2014). Familiarity with a country or culture, or having ties with individuals in a specific country seem especially important in the decision to migrate to countries that are not, historically, among the top destinations for highly skilled migrants (Shachar, 2006). For example, whereas the United States is a common destination for professionals, less well-known countries in Europe or Asia might benefit from social ties potential highly skilled migrants have with these countries (Iredale, 2001).

The implementation of the Orientation Year Scheme, specifically designed to attract 'the best and the brightest' from all over the world, showed a discrepancy

between the policy target group and whom it really 'attracted' in practice. It was not the 'imported' talent who made use of the scheme, but overwhelmingly those who were already living in or had some social ties with the Netherlands.The majority of the participants who made use of this scheme were stayers and returnees (altogether 91%), and even the cosmopolitans often had some social ties in the country already. These participants may have been familiar with the Dutch government websites where they could find information about their possibilities in the Netherlands, and/or were informed by their social or professional networks about the possibility of making use of the orientation year. In our research we did not include highly skilled migrants who had already left the country and what their reasons for emigration were, but there are indications that the ones who left had no social ties with the Netherlands.[10] These research findings suggest that the discrepancy between official definitions of "wanted" migrants in policy documents and the actual characteristics of the individuals that these policies affect in practice deserve more attention in research on highly skilled migrants.

Our findings show that for a country like the Netherlands, the specific role of social capital in highly skilled migration is quite important in attracting top talent. While the literature on highly skilled migration flows most often focuses on human capital and economic incentives, taking into account how social and cultural ties affect highly skilled migration flows seems an important way forward. The importance of social ties in attracting highly skilled migrants has not yet been acknowledged by Dutch policy. For a small country as the Netherlands, in competition with better known and more attractive (especially in terms of language) destinations for knowledge workers, it could be interesting to try to make more use of existing networks of talents already in the Netherlands in attracting others. For example, Bilecen (2012, p. 151) mentions that, in Germany, the relations of foreign doctoral students with co-nationals are sometimes formed prior to their doctoral studies, either in previous studies or from their childhood circles.

In addition to the motivations of highly skilled migrants, employers are considered to be the actual driving force behind the immigration of highly skilled migrants, as they make the decisions on whom to hire (Iredale, 2001). In line with previous findings (e.g. Campbell & Marsdan, 1990; Holzer, 1987) our findings show that social capital is similarly important for employers. They regularly use their social networks, including those in specific 'supply' countries, to fill job vacancies. However, the social networks of highly skilled migrants looking for jobs in the Netherlands and those of employers do not seem to 'find' each other. Furthermore, the motivations of employers who want to

[10] We did interview a participant from Northern America who already left the country, via Skype. Although she had found a job during the orientation year, she left the Netherlands as she had no social ties, did not feel connected with the country and experienced discrimination.

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benefit from international expertise by offering short-term contracts, and those of highly skilled employees who wish to stay in the Netherlands for a longer period seem to be contradictory. Most of all our results show that employers are unfamiliar with the available policy measures.

Finally, according to our respondents, the Netherlands is not promoted as a knowledge economy in their countries of origin. We can assume that the Dutch government's lack of sufficient and focused international promotion of the scheme contributed to the failure of the goal of *attracting* a certain number of international top-talents within the targeted period. In order to realize the ambition of being a leading knowledge intensive, innovative economy in the world, the Netherlands has to compete with countries that have introduced policies to attract highly skilled migrants much earlier. In addition, some of these countries have an advantage to the Netherlands regarding the language, such as Canada, Australia, and the US, and are better known by foreign talents. If the Dutch government wants to *attract* and *keep* the best and the brightest, it will need not only to promote the Netherlands as a knowledge economy with the specific policies that exist for these groups, but also emphasize the aspects of living in the Netherlands that highly skilled migrants may value, such as attractive living conditions, a tolerant and safe society, and a good knowledge infrastructure that offers possibilities for personal development and the presence of talented professionals (e.g. Kulu-Glasgow et al., 2014; Papademetriou, 2012).

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