Netherlands

The Netherlands (Dutch: Nederland [ˈneːdərlɑnt]), informally Holland,[13][14][15] is a country located in northwestern Europe with overseas territories in the Caribbean. It is the largest of the four constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.[16] The Netherlands consists of twelve provinces; it borders Germany to the east and Belgium to the south, with a North Sea coastline to the north and west. It has a border with France on the split island of Saint Martin in the Caribbean. It shares maritime borders with the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium.[17] The official language is Dutch, with West Frisian as a secondary official language in the province of Friesland.[1] Dutch, English, and Papiamento are official in the Caribbean territories.[1]

Netherlands literally means "lower countries" in reference to its low elevation and flat topography, with nearly 26% falling below sea level.[18] Most of the areas below sea level, known as polders, are the result of land reclamation that began in the 14th century.[19] In the Republican period, which began in 1588, the Netherlands entered a unique era of political, economic, and cultural greatness, ranked among the most powerful and influential in Europe and the world; this period is known as the Dutch Golden Age.[20] During this time, its trading companies, the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company, established colonies and trading posts all over the world.[21][22]

With a population of 17.9 million people, all living within a total area of 41,850 km2 (16,160 sq mi)—of which the land area is 33,500 km2 (12,900 sq mi)—the Netherlands is the 16th most densely populated country, with a density of 535 people per square kilometre (1,390 people/sq mi). Nevertheless, it is the world's second-largest exporter of food and agricultural products by value, owing to its fertile soil, mild climate, intensive agriculture, and inventiveness.[23][24][25] The four largest cities in the Netherlands are Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.[26] Amsterdam is the country's most populous city and the nominal capital.[27]

The Netherlands [x] been a parliamentary constitutional monarchy with a unitary structure since 1848. The country has a tradition of pillarisation (separation of citizens into groups by religion and political beliefs) and a long record of social tolerance, having legalised prostitution and euthanasia, along with maintaining a liberal drug policy. The Netherlands allowed women's suffrage in 1919 and was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2001.[28] Its mixed-market advanced economy has the eleventh-highest per capita income globally. The Hague holds the seat of the States General, Cabinet and Supreme Court.[29] The Port of Rotterdam is the busiest in Europe.[30] Schiphol is the busiest airport in the Netherlands, and the fourth busiest in Europe. The Netherlands is a founding member of the European Union, Eurozone, G10, NATO, OECD, and WTO, as well as a part of the Schengen Area and the trilateral Benelux Union. It hosts intergovernmental organisations and international courts, many of which are in The Hague.[31]

Netherlands and the Low Countries

The countries that comprise the region called the Low Countries (Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) all have comparatively the same toponymy. Place names with Neder, Nieder, Nedre, Nether, Lage(r) or Low(er) (in Germanic languages) and Bas or Inferior (in Romance languages) are in use in low-lying places all over Europe. The Romans made a distinction between the Roman provinces of downstream Germania Inferior (nowadays part of Belgium and the Netherlands) and upstream Germania Superior. Thus, in the case of the Low Countries and the Netherlands, the geographical location of this lower region is more or less downstream and near the sea, compared to that of the upper region of Germania Superior. The designation 'Low' returned in the 10th-century Duchy of Lower Lorraine, which covered much of the Low Countries.[32][33]

The Dukes of Burgundy used the term les pays de par deçà ("the lands over here") for the Low Countries.[34] Under Habsburg rule, this became pays d'embas ("lands down-here").[35] This was translated as Neder-landen in contemporary Dutch official documents.[36] From a regional point of view, Niderlant was also the area between the Meuse and the lower Rhine in the late Middle [x] From the mid-sixteenth century, the "Low Countries" and the "Netherlands" lost their original deictic meaning.

In most Romance languages, the term "Low Countries" is officially used as the name for the Netherlands.

Holland

The term Holland has frequently been used informally to refer to the whole of the modern country of the Netherlands in various languages,[37] including Dutch[38][39] and English. In some languages, Holland is used as the formal name for the Netherlands. However, Holland is a region within the Netherlands that consists of the two provinces of North and South Holland. Formerly these were a single province, and earlier the County of Holland, which included parts of present-day Utrecht. The emphasis on Holland during the formation of the Dutch Republic, the Eighty Years' War, and the Anglo-Dutch Wars in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, made Holland a pars pro toto for the entire country.[40][41]

Many Dutch people object to the country being referred to as Holland instead of the Netherlands, on much the same grounds as many Welsh or Scots people object to the United Kingdom being referred to as England.[42] In particular, those from regions other than Holland find it undesirable or misrepresentative to use the term Holland for the whole country,[37] as the Holland region only comprises two of the 12 provinces, and 20% of Dutch citizens. In January 2020, the Dutch government officially dropped its support of the word Holland for the whole country.[43][44][45]

Often Holland or Hollanders is used by the Flemish to refer to the Dutch in the Netherlands,[46] and by the Southern Dutch (Dutch living "below the great rivers", a natural cultural, social and religious boundary formed by the rivers Rhine and Meuse) to refer to the Northern Dutch (Dutch living North of these rivers).[47] In the Southern province of Limburg, the term is used for the Dutch from the other 11 provinces.[48] The use of the term in this context by the Southern Dutch is in a derogatory fashion.[47][48]

Dutch

Dutch is used as the adjective for the Netherlands, as well as the demonym. The origins of the word go back to Proto-Germanic *þiudiskaz, Latinised into Theodiscus, meaning "popular" or "of the people", akin to Old Dutch Dietsch or Old English þeodisc, meaning "(of) the common (Germanic) people".[49] At first, the English language used Dutch to refer to any or all speakers of West Germanic languages. Gradually its meaning shifted to the [x] Germanic people they had the most contact with.[50]