How does the internationalisation of technical expertise affect a state's soft power?
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Thesis

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The term soft power was coined in the late 1980s (Nye, 1990, p. 153). Soft power serves as a concise label for an intuitive concept: the share of a state's power that does not originate from its military or economic coercive powers. The world has changed deeply since the term was coined, but Nye's ideas, adapted to the current age, remain true: "in today's global information age, victory may sometimes depend not on whose army wins, but on whose story wins" (Nye, 2014, p. 20). The latest, inescapable example is the information front of the Ukraine war, dominated by either side in different countries (Aral, 2022; Miller, 2022). In the quest for the hearts and minds of foreigners, and thus soft power, both sides are resorting to complex mixes of propaganda, image-building and diplomatic measures. From a Western standpoint, the Ukraine appears to be winning this quest: "Today, the information war in Ukraine is more intense, more tightly contested and arguably more important than ever because […] encouraging foreign support abroad are critical to success. And this time, it seems, Russia is losing" (Aral, 2022).

International Relations, however, need not escalate to war before soft power becomes relevant. A great number of countries actively and passively foster their soft power, and their projects can be found all around us every day. They might range from the promotion of yoga (Gautam & Droogan, 2018, p. 18) to cultural and culinary exhibitions (e.g., Japan House, n.d.), or from growing the local film industry (Kolluri & Lee, 2016, p. 103) to student exchanges (Kitchen & Laifer, 2017, p. 813). Through such initiatives, countries may accumulate perceived attractiveness, which can help them influence other states and decision-makers in the international arena.

Some of these projects are founded upon local or national special technical expertise. They take this specific expertise and use it directly or indirectly to design public diplomacy projects, build their image, brand their nation, produce propaganda, or create or contribute to international regimes. Each of these approaches may "internationalise" technical expertise by applying it in the international sphere, which may foster transnational cultural and ideological attraction and thus help a country build soft power. One example is language and cultural institutes abroad, where linguistic experts teach locals and may thereby inspire an admiration of their country. Another example is Norway's strategic expertise accumulation in the area of peace negotiations, to be applied to international conflicts (Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.); or China's slow population of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with its own experts and leader (Cordell, 2020).

The label of "soft power" has become as ubiquitous as the projects designed to accumulate it, to its academic detriment. Perhaps due to its intuitiveness, soft power was quickly adopted by practitioners to broadly label any non-military foreign policy tools and outcomes: the soft power projected by the US in the post-Soviet era, or China's promulgation of its traditional culture and values, or Italian soft power built upon pizza (and other food, art, music and fashion). Consequently, it became a more practical than academic concept (Hall T. , 2010, p. 193). This fast shift in use, and general nature of the term, means that "soft power has not been fully utilized" (Rothman, 2011, p. 49), and has not been researched as thoroughly as some of its specific sub-concepts, such as public diplomacy or nation-branding.

1.2   Research aims and originality

In view of the importance of soft power, and given its under-examination in academia, this thesis sets out to investigate the research question: *How does the internationalisation of technical expertise affect a state's soft power?*

This thesis aims to measure the outcomes, in terms of support for a state's leadership, of one general strategy to accumulate soft power: the internationalisation of technical expertise.

More specifically, the outcome variable of this study is soft power measured as support for Dutch leadership in an international project. Soft power is, as will be explained in the literature review, an umbrella term that covers successful outcomes of various resources, tools and

mechanisms, including public diplomacy, propaganda, image-building and more. The latter can be considered micro-level constituents or concepts to the macro-level soft power concept. The outcome variable soft power was deliberately chosen through elimination. Concrete public diplomacy projects and other soft power strategies are often accompanied by evaluations or impact studies to justify public spending. Therefore, at a micro-level, research on outcomes already exists, but does not contribute significantly to academic literature as there currently exists no meta-analysis of such projects. The originality of the research question thus lies in its macro-level approach. With this original approach, this thesis aims to further emphasise the importance and utility of soft power as an umbrella term.

The internationalisation of technical expertise was chosen as the process focus for this thesis because concrete methods such as public diplomacy projects have already received much academic attention, mainly in the form of qualitative (e.g., Melissen, 2005; Mai'a & Melissen, 2013; Nye J. S., 2008), but also some basic quantitative analysis (e.g., Kitchen & Laifer, 2017; Wilson, 2015). Other methods such as nation branding (e.g., Dinnie, 2015) or propaganda (e.g., Edney, 2012; Van Herpen, 2015) have undergone extensive qualitative analysis. The study of the internationalisation of technical expertise therefore takes a step back from specific methods, and instead considers a process that can be – and is regularly – used in any number of methods or combination of methods. This is not only a novel question that provides insight into the social and political value of using such a process in various soft power strategies, but also may open up a new line of academic inquiry: which processes and types of knowledge are used in different soft power building methods, and what impact do they have?

The final element of originality in this thesis is the methodology. This project is the first to use a randomised survey experiment to test the effectiveness of soft power measures. This helps to address, for the first time, criticisms related to the causality of various elements of the working process of soft power theory.

1.3   Academic and societal relevance

The significance of such research is twofold. Firstly, academically, it adds a quantitative study to the principally qualitative and theoretical body of soft power research. In turn, this can be used to reinforce or reconsider some of the theoretical refinements, categorisations and tools which researchers have contributed since the original publication of soft power theory. It also

adds a further example of "the potential utility of experimental methods for international relations, […] a hotly contested topic" (Hyde, 2015, p. 403). Mass and social media have enabled wider access to information, misinformation and disinformation. This "has turned citizens into independent observers as well as active participants in international politics" meaning that "reputation management" is now aimed "a broader mass market" (Melissen, 2005, p. 4). This suggests that experiments at the individual level of analysis, such as in this thesis, are currently extremely relevant to the development of the understanding of world politics. Even so, the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 endeavours to complement literature on how to bridge the individual and state level-of-analysis with a further approach.

Secondly, in societal terms, this research can assign a numeric value and impact to a soft power activity (in political terms rather than economic – the latter may already be performed in policy evaluations). As such, this thesis can provide a concrete pointer on how (or how not) to cultivate soft power, and how soft power activities fit into wider foreign policy aims – i.e., to inform overarching smart power and international relations strategies. This is essential because soft power has been increasing in importance (Nye, 1990, p. 167) due to three primary factors: the accelerating communications revolution since WW2, fluctuations of geopolitics, and globalisation or the "expansion of international society." Together, they have turned "the contest of ideas between states much more intense and [given] it a distinctly global dimension" (Melissen, 2005, p. 3). The aforementioned introduction of "citizens [as] independent observers as well as active participants in international politics" (p. 4) means that governments may need to evaluate and recalibrate their soft power strategies to ensure that they are reaching a global mass market of individuals. Current governments may therefore benefit from policy-relevant, applicable research with concrete pointers and numeric values, such as this thesis.

Soft power has undergone a deep change in its role and importance, but research has not kept pace.

The societal implications of the change are both normative and descriptive. First, soft power projects have an onus to act globally if they wish to fulfil their goals effectively. Second, such projects – even small ones – have a global reach, and therefore global potential to generate soft power (or to backfire). The academic implication is quite simply that more research is needed, which is precisely the project this thesis embarks on.

1.4 Thesis structure

The introduction has provided background on the research topic and explained the research question, as well as the aims, originality, relevance, structure, and findings of this project.

The following chapter, *Literature review and theoretical framework*, will define and delimit soft power, and review the most pertinent criticisms of soft power. In doing so, it will bring the reader up to speed with current research on soft power. Then, it will focus on how to address the key challenges presented. This includes existing theoretical work, but also the "practice" of the survey experiment in this thesis. Section 2.4 will present the specific elements of International Relations and research theory that set up this project and its methodology. This will lead to the project's hypothesis.

Chapter 3, *Research design and methodology*, will proceed with definitions and operationalisation of variables, and then explain the case selection, samples, data types and collection. Lastly, it will describe the methodology selected, its advantages and challenges, and how these will be mitigated.

Chapter 4, *Results*, will share the demographic information and an analysis of the survey data. Here, the chapter will deduce the results, create a model, and perform robustness checks on the model. To close, it will highlight central themes from the interview-based research.

Chapter 5, *Discussion*, will analyse in depth the figures from the previous chapter, comparing them to the hypothesis. It will then proceed to combine the outcomes with the results of the thematic analysis to build depth of analysis. Lastly, it will suggest possible explanations for the results.

Finally, Chapter 6, *Conclusion*, will close by summarising the results and highlighting the limitations and scope conditions of this project. These will be used to suggest future avenues for research.

1.5 Findings

The outcome of the study was that the internationalisation of technical expertise does not have a statistically significant impact on a state's soft power. However, the presentation of either domestically or internationally applied technical expertise in the form of a short text both have

a statistically significant positive impact on a state's soft power. This suggests that communicating technical expertise can be an effective tool to foster soft power.

2   Literature review and theoretical framework

To recap, soft power describes the share of a state's power that does not originate from its military or economic coercive capabilities. On the international stage, soft power can be crucial for any state that is reluctant to deploy its hard power, or smaller states that have little economic or military weight to throw around. Despite – or perhaps because of – its conceptual breadth, soft power remains somewhat under-specified. This chapter will define soft power, and what it is not. This will help locate soft power in the field of International Relations research and reinforce the relevance of this thesis. The chapter will then consider the most relevant criticisms in the literature. Subsequently, it will examine how criticisms are addressed theoretically in academic responses, as well as how they can be further addressed by this thesis and, in more practical terms, this survey experiment. In doing so it will outline the theoretical basis of this project's analysis, including the level-of-analysis problem. It will close with the thesis hypothesis.

2.1   What is soft power?

The term brings under one umbrella the ancient ideas of image-building for nations, and diplomatic activity aimed at foreign publics (Melissen, 2005, p. 1), as well as identity creation and nation branding (p. 2).[1] Broadly and positively defined, soft power is the ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants, without "ordering" them to do so using hard power (Nye, 1990, p. 166). There are various mechanisms, such as ideological attraction, and tools such as public diplomacy which enable soft power. There is conceptual overlap with some of these sub-concepts, but not all of them exist exclusively within the realm or for the aim of generating soft power (see Section 2.2).

The following diagram attempts to locate and connect sub-concepts that are often associated with soft power according to their conceptual overlap. Internationalised technical expertise sits with public diplomacy as a tool that attempts to garner favour amongst foreign publics, but sits partly outside the bubble of soft power as it can carry separate (technical) goals too. In the case

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[1] Other authors have drawn a clear distinction between soft power and nation branding (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 43).

of the Dutch Cycling Embassy (DCE),[2] for instance, these separate goals include global climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Elements of soft power

Propaganda
(Melissen, 2005,
p. 1)
*E.g.
disinformation*

Cultural and
ideological
attraction
(Nye, 1990, p.
168)

Public
diplomacy
(Melissen,
2005, p. 1)

Int'lised
technical
expertise

Soft Power

International
regimes
(Nye, 1990, p.
168)

Image-building
(Melissen,
2005, p. 1)

Identity
creation
(Melissen,
2005, p. 2)
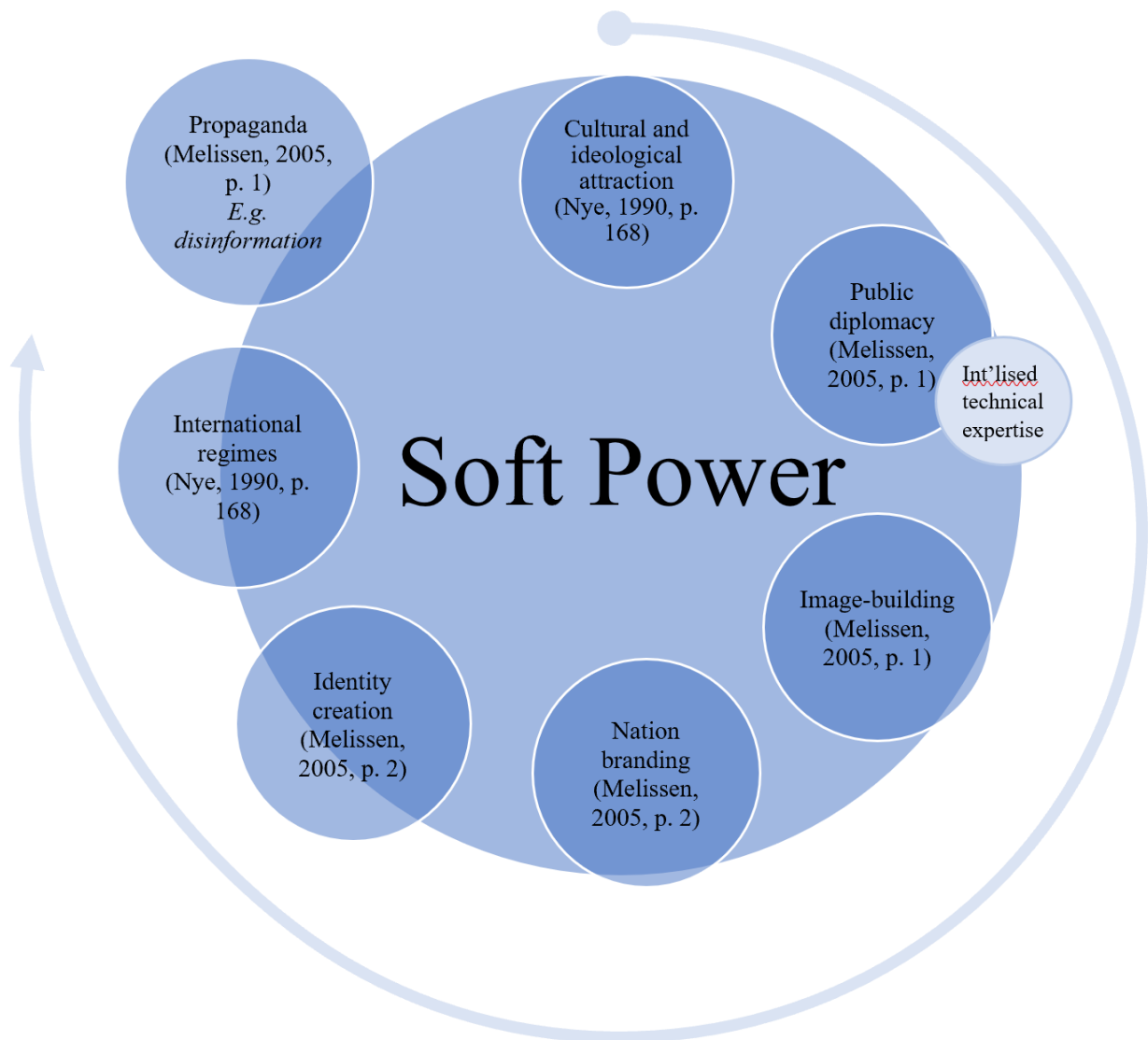
Nation
branding
(Melissen,
2005, p. 2)

Figure 1

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[2] For a more detailed description of the DCE, which will be the case study of this thesis, please refer to Section 3.1.2.

2.2   What is soft power *not*?

Soft power is not any single one of its tools or mechanisms. As touched upon in the previous subsection, there exists some conceptual overlap, but not all of the tools and mechanisms exist exclusively within the conceptual boundaries of or for the aim of generating soft power.

For example: a concept that can operate within or for soft power policies may have other primary purposes. Two concepts with different purposes may be those of identity-creation and image-building, as seen in post-war Japan. The country created a security identity built on three principles (no traditional armed forces, use of force only for self-defence, and no participation in foreign wars), which help to define its politics and culture *internally* to this day: "central tenets of the security identity […] structure policy formulation" (Oros, 2015, p. 141). Naturally, this has also projected an image of a peaceful Japan externally over time, likely providing it with some soft power, and an image Japan is very happy to reinforce externally for its diplomatic purposes. For instance, in the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, Japan has utilised its "positive identity construction" (Hagström, 2015, p. 133) to differentiate itself from China, contrasting its own peacefulness with China's "increasingly aggressive behaviour" (Hayashi, 2012a) and "bullying" (Hayashi, 2012b). Provocatively, Japan's former ambassador to the US wrote in an op-ed in The Washington Post that, "unlike China, Japan has not once fired a gun in combat since World War II" (Sasae, 2014).

In contrast, a tool may sit firmly within a soft power strategy, but be sufficiently complex that it does not only produce soft power as outcome. This further serves to differentiate such tools from soft power itself. An instance of this complex outcome may be the push-and-pull of propaganda. Russia's approach to propaganda for soft power provides an excellent example of this: "The widespread usage of blogs, bots, and trolling mixed with "fake news" underpins a propagandistic offensive that has used digital media to position Russia as a threat to Western liberal governance" (Surowiec, 2017, p. 24). Thus, Russia uses propaganda to generate both positive attitudes about itself for soft power (e.g., through blogs, social media or RT's[3] international broadcasting), as well as fear of itself (e.g., through cyberattacks) or negativity towards other nations (e.g., through damaging fake news), conceivably for hard leverage in diplomacy and international relations.

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[3] RT, formerly Russia Today, is an international television network funded and controlled by the Russian government (Fisher, 2013; Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017, p. 156).

Tools and purposes may also be combined into a single project or series of projects, but these remain *strategies* separate to the overarching term "soft power." For instance, India embarked upon its digital public diplomacy strategy in 2010, starting with its Ministry of External Affairs' first tweet, followed by a new web portal, YouTube videos, a Facebook page and photos on Flickr, and finally complementing these activities with its first conference on the theory and practice of public diplomacy (Hall I. , 2012, pp. 1089-1090). These projects targeted a range of intended audiences (p. 1090) and used a variety of tools and mechanisms to form a strategy. The soft power they aggregate as a distinct outcome is dependent upon the success of the strategy's implementation.

Finally, soft power may be used to reinforce strategies, tools and mechanisms that attempt to build further soft power – such as public diplomacy. It can be a circular, self-reinforcing element of diplomatic practice, and yet remains distinct both at the start and end of such processes. Why is this the case? To be effective in producing soft power, public diplomacy needs to be credible, and to be credible, a country already needs to have some soft power, i.e., authentic attractiveness and ability to influence. When a country lacks all soft power, its public diplomacy projects are likely to fall on deaf ears or even backfire. As Nye puts it: "Without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction" (2008, p. 101).

A country that lacked credibility, for instance, was the US in the early 2000s. The soft power resources it possessed were insufficient to generate enough soft power to use to its advantage in the "war on terror." Instead, attitudes toward the US worsened in many countries, particularly Muslim-dominated ones, and this may have also increased support for terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda in key countries (Kroenig, McAdam, & Weber, 2010, p. 421). This may have been due to a mismatch between the narrative broadcast by the US and its demonstrated values and actions. For example, Bush claimed that the US would "go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world" (Bush, 2001a), while the country's identity was formulated in terms of a "great nation, a freedom-loving nation, a compassionate nation, a nation that understands the values of life" and in terms of the "true strength of character and kindness of the American people" (Bush, 2001b). In the Middle East, these words likely stood in a very stark contrast to the cruel, unjust, unkind realities of war. The international result of this nation-branding public diplomacy attempt was likely perceived hypocrisy, inauthenticity and untrustworthiness, instead of further development and

application of soft power. Thus, countries need to carefully evaluate their levels of soft power both before and after implementing measures to build up their soft power. It is important to recognise the concept as distinct from public diplomacy or any other tools and strategies that may be supported by it.

From these examples, it becomes apparent that soft power is in fact the goal or outcome of these tools and mechanisms, or is at least a starting point for the application of further tools and mechanisms. Soft power is based on national assets and the utilisation of tools that can generate attraction, which in turn creates an *ability* to influence. Nye theorises that "a country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies" (2008, p. 94), which public diplomacy can promote vis-à-vis foreign populations. However, if a state's values, policies and culture are unattractive, then "public diplomacy that 'broadcasts' them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite" (p. 95). The same holds true for nation-branding, image-building and identity creation: foreign populations may not find resulting messages attractive, may question why they should be associated with a particular country, or may detect hypocrisies. Similarly, international regimes can help a country set the agenda, leading to soft power, or deter and frustrate non-hegemonic nations. Overall, soft power equates to successful outcomes from a range of tools and mechanisms that foster attraction, resulting in a country's ability to lead without coercion.

According to Nye's original definition, soft power impacts other countries' preferences and interests – not necessarily their behaviour (1990, p. 166) – by influencing populations and governments (pp. 167-171). This distinction is important: successful soft power-building has a *soft outcome*, such as prestige, moral authority or willingness to follow a leader, rather than hard outcomes. The latter might include trade deals, international regime restructures such as after World War 2, or voting blocks in the United Nations. These can be indirect, subsequent outcomes of soft power, i.e., of the direct outcome of attractiveness and willingness to follow generated by soft power. Soft power is therefore not demonstrated by the numbers of trade deals, or dominance within international organisations. This is best highlighted by the fact that these could equally be outcomes of hard power, coerced through threats of economic sanctions, for instance. Thus, soft power is best measured in terms of perceived attractiveness, rather than indirect hard outcomes. This is summarised in Figure 2 on the following page.

Soft Power Process

- Attractiveness
  - Requires resources such as culture, values, and policies.
- Soft power
  - Ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants.
- Soft outcomes
  - Attractedness, willingness to follow leadership and agenda, etc.
  - Ideal point of measurement: more specific than hard outcomes
- Hard outcomes
  - Could also be generated by other means
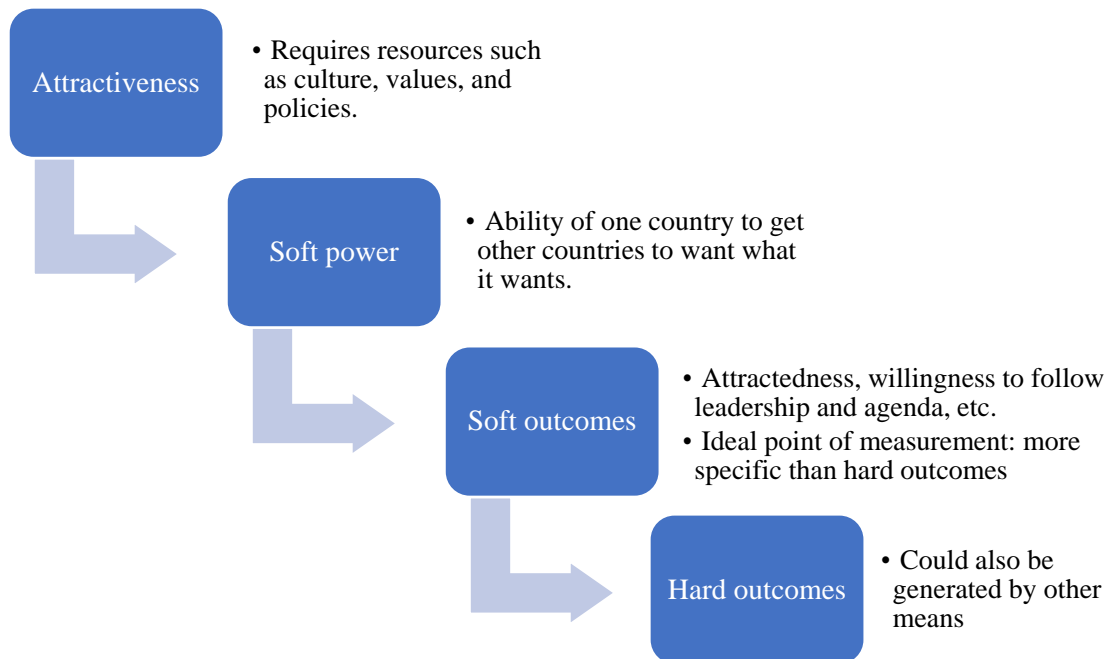
Figure 2

2.3   Challenges and criticisms

2.3.1   Gaps in the soft power process: challenges to causality

The central challenge to the theory of soft power that this project aims to address is the claim that there is no causal link between resources, attraction, soft power and outcomes – the causality criticism has been directed at each stage of the soft power process. Empirically, it is challenging to establish and measure cause-and-effect relationships in the soft power process. There are three distinct levels of this critique: firstly, the criticism that there exists a gap between resources (such as cultural goods) and attraction; secondly, that there is a gap between attraction and soft power; and thirdly, that soft power is not connected to soft or hard outcomes. These are illustrated in Figure 3 on the following page.

Soft Power Process: Gaps
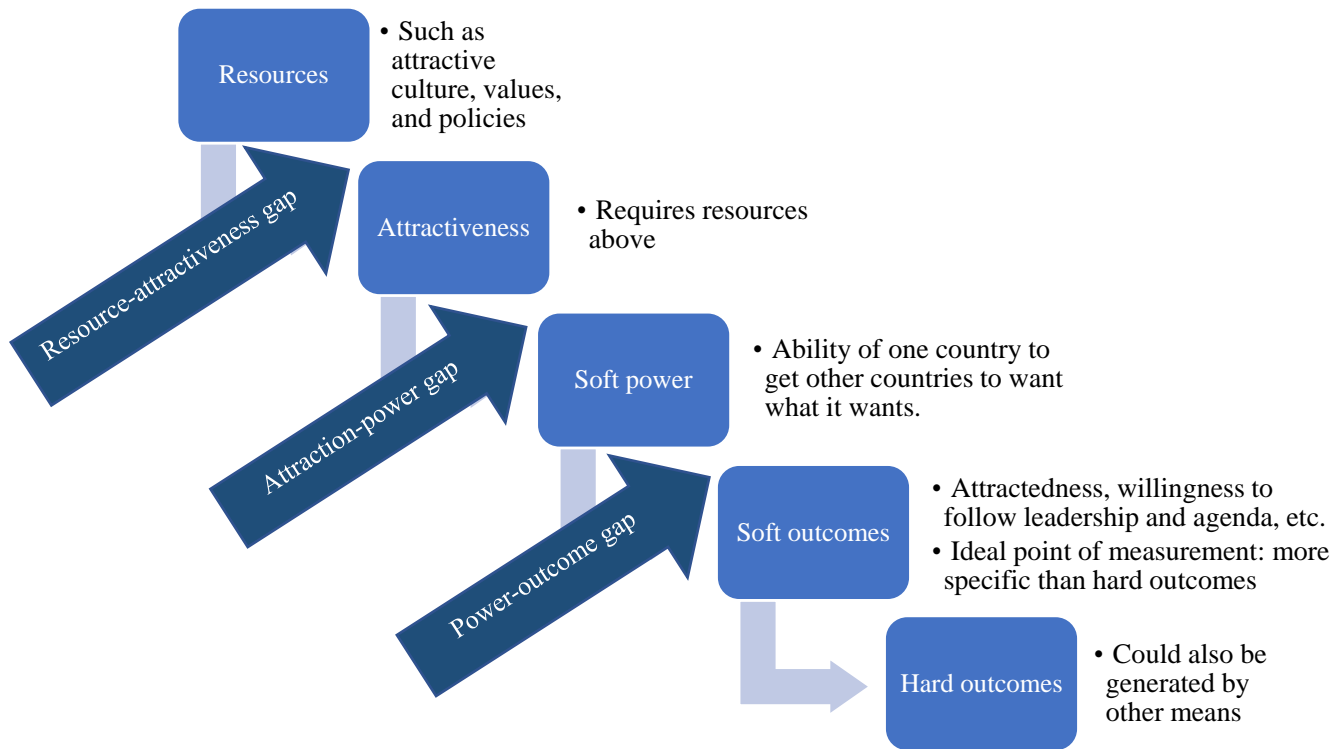
Figure 3

The resource-attractiveness gap suggests that cultural goods, narratives, values and policies may be inherently attractive, but do not cause *attractedness* to the country distributing or promoting them. For example, American products such as Coke, Big Macs or Disney films are enjoyed in Middle Eastern countries, but they do not make citizens of those countries feel more attracted to the US (Ferguson, 2003, p. 21). This means that they, in turn, cannot generate soft power. According to this criticism, then, the soft power process is interrupted or broken at the first link.[4] Ferguson's example may not be representative of the average case due to complex histories and power dynamics, which raises the question of whether the criticism always or only sometimes holds for the soft power process.

The attraction-power critique gap accepts that resources such as cultural goods, narratives, values and policies might be attractive and produce attraction, but these may still not cause soft

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[4] The potential reasons for this are discussed in Section 2.3.3: Attraction and the challenges of subjectivity.

power. In other words: why should a country be willing to follow another's lead purely out of collective admiration? Following leadership of those we admire is relatively intuitive on an individual level, but may be less so on the inter-state level, that most relevant to International Relations analysis. Citizens and politicians are perfectly capable of holding nuanced views and differentiating between resources or citizens and their state, as shown by the difference in popularity between Americans and the US in the 2008 Pew Global Survey (Hall T. , 2010, p. 201). This criticism is especially (but not only) salient to subscribers of the realist school of thought, with their particular emphasis on the competitive and conflictual side of politics (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). Morgenthau, who "developed realism into a comprehensive international relations theory" (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018), proposes that morality – and, by extension, "values" that can generate attraction, function differently in the realm of international relations: "Universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but […] they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place" (Morgenthau, 1985, p. 9) and "political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe" (p. 12). If these principles hold true, they render attraction to a particular set of values meaningless in practice for states.

The power-outcome gap is located at the next level of the soft power process. Here, Hall draws attention to the concern that:

> it remains unclear […] how such an attraction translates into positive outcomes for a state's foreign policy goals. […] This suggests that the indicators Nye associates with 'cultural attraction' are not linked in a straightforward manner to political persuasion (2010, pp. 200-201).

He further points out the difficulty in "disentangling" proof of attraction from alleged related outcomes (p. 206). In terms of the soft power process, this means that if we do accept that certain attractive resources can generate attraction, and that attraction in turn generates soft power, it is still not a given that theoretical soft power causes soft or hard outcomes for countries. This presents another possible disruption of the soft power process. While these disruptions all make sense theoretically, do they hold up to empirical examination? This thesis will aim to show a causal link from the resources to the soft outcomes (in terms of changing public willingness to follow international leadership) stages of the soft power process to provide evidence to counter each criticism in this section.

2.3.2 Process problems: the macro scale

The continuity of the soft power process has also been questioned on the international scale of operation.

The first risk to the soft power process at this scale is that of miscommunication, or under-informed communication strategies. Practical challenges with intercultural communication may mean that "soft power strategies will be unlikely to succeed except under fairly restrictive conditions" (Kroenig, McAdam, & Weber, 2010, p. 425). These restrictive conditions may not necessarily be well explored enough; soft power strategies then become dependent on their formulators' capabilities and experience, and perhaps luck or coincidence too. Such challenges can affect the soft power process at any stage, but perhaps most significantly magnify the resource-attraction gap. Target audiences, individually and collectively, may not interpret public diplomacy messaging as intended, and may fail to feel attraction. In other words, when attraction mechanisms and the causal links between resources, attraction and soft power are not well understood at the individual, micro-level, how can countries confidently formulate soft power strategies? Without a more thorough understanding of the conditions under which attraction-generating resources can be conveyed, and for which outcomes they can be successfully communicated, soft power strategies may not be the best use of taxpayers' money.

From this risk arises a practical criticism: it may be complicated to define the values that are meant to be attractive, and why they are *national* values (Hall T. , 2010, pp. 201-202). For one, defining what is attractive to others is problematic at best, and risks severely backfiring at worse if the target audience interprets the message or intention in unexpected ways. This is largely due to subjectivity (further discussed in Section 2.3.3). For another, it may be difficult to credibly defend before a global audience how any single value is best represented and authentically lived by any one nation. Once more, George W. Bush's comments (2001b) serve as an excellent example: why was the US in particular "a freedom-loving nation" when it chose to restrict freedoms following the 9/11 terrorist attacks? Why was it "a compassionate nation, a nation that understands the values of life" when it marched into Middle Eastern countries with questionable justifications and killed hundreds of thousands of civilians (*e.g.*, The Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University, 2021)? States may therefore have difficulty branding themselves, and justifying that brand, particularly for contested values.

A second major argument against soft power theory at the macro level steps outside the process entirely to argue that it does not exist, but is instead coincidence misinterpreted as "attraction".

It may be the case that what appears to be soft power in use is just attractiveness of specific policies (Lukes, 2007, p. 95). That is, countries may pick and choose to follow individually attractive policies, and there is no systematic "soft power" at play. On an even more realist interpretation, it may be possible that countries do not even "follow" "attractive" policies, but make their own choices without much regard for hegemons, voting blocks, collaboration or offers of leadership. Instead, any appearances of such adherence or support are coincidental. Additionally, linking micro- and macro-level criticisms together, one can question whether populations can perceive attractiveness *consistently* enough for it to create a potential for systematic soft power at the macro level, or if instances of attraction and willingness to collaborate are coincidental or solitary and unconnected, rather than systematic.

Alternatively, there may be some method to the madness of International Relations, but it is linked to hegemonic influence that exists due to factors other than soft power (Kearn, 2011, p. 76). This criticism seeks the explanation for what appears to be a system of soft power in the cultural and institutional structures created by hegemony, for example through the manipulation of image and opportunities within an "institutionalized and interdependent environment" that ultimately serves the interests of the hegemon (p. 76). On this reading, soft power is merely a functional tool, consisting of "the ideational and normative elements that serve as the transmission belt between the leading state and its followers" (p. 76). Soft power is not fostered because it increases influence and the potential for beneficial outcomes – these are already provided for through the hegemonic institutions – but because, as an assembly line makes a factory more efficient, soft power renders the running of such institutions less costly and difficult. Attractiveness is a by-product of such structures – it correlates with, rather than causes, soft power. According to Kearn, this leaves soft power and attractiveness as mediating variables in a causal process that leads from hegemonic institutions to beneficial outcomes.

If either of these last two macro-level arguments is right, then soft power in its original form, as defined by Nye, does not exist at all. The experimental design at the heart of this thesis, with its potential to demonstrate causality, will be able to counter the latter two criticisms that imply non-existence, or existence as a mere mediating variable without its own causal process. It will also provide an example of conditions under which soft power *can* succeed to counter the first criticism.

2.3.3 Attraction and the challenges of subjectivity

Most, if not all, of these critiques are connected to the difficulty of defining, understanding, tracing and explaining attraction. The central concept behind soft power, that of attraction and its experience, is highly subjective. With this subjectivity comes many challenges. It is not surprising that International Relations scholars run into difficulties in grappling with the concept, when a long line of philosophers and, more recently, cognitive scientists, psychologists, linguists and neuroscientists have devoted their lives to creating a strong theory or model of aesthetics, or the "inquiry into art and beauty, or 'aesthetic value'" (Pappas, 2020).

Applied to soft power theory, the challenges of subjectivity can be concretised into two key criticisms. The first is related to the resources-attractiveness gap on the micro-level, and the miscommunication criticism on the macro-level. Which images somebody associates with a country may be arbitrary, depending on such factors as time, place, media consumption or tourist experiences. Furthermore, "people need to be aware of cultural goods before they can consume them" (Hall T. , 2010, p. 199) – and then judge them. Once more, this raises the question of whether populations can perceive attractiveness *consistently* enough for it to create a potential for systematic soft power. The particular challenge of this criticism is that it can be countered with both defeat (there is no point to a soft power strategy: the arbitrariness cannot be reduced) or with initiative (the best way to reduce arbitrary associations is to craft purposeful ones with a soft power strategy).

Secondly, even when exposed to the same external information and influences – whether random or purposeful – what is perceived as attractive by one person may be perceived as less-than-attractive by another, even producing "repulsion" (Nye, 2004, p. 52). This may depend on any of a very large number of factors, including, but not limited to, culture, upbringing, values and beliefs, knowledge, experiences, open-mindedness, taste and even mood. A pertinent example is that of the stereotype: the exposure effect dictates that we tend to consider a piece of information more credible if we have heard it multiple times, as repetition leads to cumulatively more fluent processing (Begg, Anas, & Farinacci, 1992, p. 446).[5] Individuals and populations may be more or less exposed to stereotypes, drastically altering their processing and judgment of potentially attractive resources, and the amount of effort it takes to change

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[5] Processing fluency is the theory that there is a predisposition for stimuli that are easier to grasp perceptually or cognitively to be experienced positively (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004, p. 364).

their perceptions if needed. Subjectivity is thus at the heart of the resource-attractiveness gap on the micro-level, as well as the miscommunication criticism on the macro-level.

To sum up, there are two levels on which subjectivity forms a challenge to soft power theory: personal taste at the individual level, and the effective reception of information about attractive resources by individuals at the collective level. Combining this with the first macro-level criticism of "miscommunication," a third level on which subjectivity forms a hurdle is the care required in a government's choice and projection of communications. This third level at which subjectivity functions is the state-level. Thus, for soft power to be possible and effective despite subjectivity, states must cautiously choose and implement communications. They must reach (enough) individuals, and (enough of) those individuals must then judge them to be attractive.

Forming a theory general enough to explain a range of cases of attraction and their outcomes, while also being able to address the intricacies of the levels of attractiveness and subjectivity of attraction is a significant challenge; therefore, I argue that the breadth of the term "soft power" – criticised by some as too vague[6] – is in fact a strength of the concept, rather than a failure. There is value in finding a causal link to the broad concept of soft power rather than a sub-concept such as public diplomacy. This is the aim of this thesis.

2.4   Addressing criticisms: theory and practice

These criticisms present interesting opportunities for countercriticisms, and for further research. They also allow for the construction of a theoretical framework upon which this thesis will rest in response to the current literature.

2.4.1   Stopping the gaps: causality

The gaps that have been theorised to exist in – and interrupt – the soft power process, as well as the coincidence and hegemonic influence criticisms, can be countered with research into the causal link that connects resources and attraction to soft power and outcomes. It should be

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[6] Criticisms include that "conceptual stretching" has made of soft power "a catchword for any form of influence not using military command" (Rothman, 2011, p. 50), or a "catch-all term" with a "lack of core substance" (Kearn, 2011, p. 66). This dilution of meaning risks reducing the usefulness of the concept, according to some authors.

noted that various counterexamples given thus far – such as American products' popularity in the Middle East, without related positive outcomes for the US – do not refute the possibility of a causal link; they merely imply that there is more nuance to the soft power process. For example, some attraction to/via some products is not a *sufficient* cause of soft power. Despite such examples, qualitative research on the topic suggests that *on average* the theory holds, as is usually the case in the social sciences. If one were to take such approaches to criticism a step further, it would be challenging to list all possible sources of soft power to exclude the possibility that each generates attraction individually, and impossible to prove that all possible combinations of individual potential soft power sources do not generate some level of attraction, not least because of the logical fallacy of trying to conclusively prove a negative. Absence of evidence is not evidence of the absence of attraction or soft power.

Therefore, the research design of this thesis via a survey experiment attempts to demonstrate causality in one model of soft power generation instead of deducing via elimination, for example. This can provide evidence for an unbroken causal link along the stages of the soft power process up to soft power itself, and soft outcomes in terms of changes in public perception (i.e., not including intergovernmental or hard outcomes), but also one set of nuanced conditions where a soft power project *can* succeed. It can also address the claim that soft power is coincidental, and that it is related to hegemonic power structures because the case study country, the Netherlands, is not a hegemon. Thus, the research design is well matched to the most relevant critiques of soft power theory presented above.

If the link of the first three stages of the soft power process can be demonstrated, this project can then be used as a platform for further research into the conditions that produce the "right" type of attraction to further foreign policy goals, and a link between soft power and intergovernmental soft and hard outcomes.

2.4.2 Challenges of the macro-scale

The three challenges to soft power at the macro-level (miscommunication, misinterpretation, hegemony) can collectively be addressed by three responses. The first potential rebuttal to all three criticisms may be provided by this research project and its experimental design: it would, as discussed above, show a possible scenario in which communication strategies *can* succeed,

which national values can be attractive and authentic, and a causal effect between soft power measures and soft power generation of a non-hegemon.

Secondly, addressing the miscommunication and misinterpretation criticism, are extensive theoretical contributions on the affective and narrative processes underpinning soft power (these will be explored more extensively in the following subsection). Thirdly, the two-level game theory provides a theoretical bridge between the individual level of analysis at which attractiveness is perceived and the state-level at which soft power is applicable and useful (as soft or hard outcomes at the intergovernmental level). This can help address uncertainties that lead to criticisms that soft power does not exist, e.g. the misinterpretation and hegemony criticisms. While this thesis stops short of demonstrating that soft power can lead to soft outcomes at the intergovernmental level, it demonstrates a causal link in enough of the soft power process to address these criticisms. The two-level game theory also reinforces the idea that a soft power process can exist as a causal process by providing an explanation of a mechanism of progression from the individual to the theoretical inter-governmental level. This in turn supports the first rebuttal mentioned at the start of this section (that of the research project and its design). The level-of-analysis problem will be discussed in detail in Section 2.4.4.

2.4.3   Subjective attraction

Subjectivity is an important challenge to the consolidation of soft power theory. It features, with more or less subtlety, in a number of criticisms of the soft power theory, particularly those that attack the early stages of the soft power process explicitly or implicitly. Such criticism has been addressed in a range of ways by authors who have theorised the affective and narrative processes underpinning soft power. These theories will be discussed and evaluated in this subsection.

Narrative-based phenomena were first examined as mechanism that propels the soft power mechanism from resource to attraction to soft power. (Hayden, 2012; Bially Mattern, 2005). For Hayden, for instance, soft power is communication-based, and articulated by "policy leadership, public discourse, and in the design of programs that appear to reflect a soft power imperative" based upon a constructivist approach to International Relations (2012, pp. 30-31). Different mechanisms may be used as resources to build soft power, according to

communication-based approaches, each altering the subjective experience of attractiveness. These can include a choice of normative vs. analytic framing for persuasion, i.e., either "appealing to morals or to emotions" vs. "generating a causal story" involving harm and blame (Rothman, 2011, pp. 54-55). They may also include a choice of norm diffusion vs. discourse control, i.e., the copying of successful norms vs. active alteration of the dominant discourse, for example by naming and shaming (pp. 57-59). Framing is described as resource, while the latter two concepts are described as mechanisms; the differences between the two are not entirely clear. While these approaches are a helpful first, granular analysis of how soft power comes about, further analysis then developed to assess attraction mechanisms at a finer, more individual and subjective level, which is more useful to this thesis, given its level of analysis of individuals.

One such break-down identifies three substantive assets that must be attractive, moral and believable to a foreign audience to implement soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2008, p. 96). A more "procedural" line of enquiry revealed different mechanisms of attraction. One more detailed, persuasive and operationalisable approach suggests using "the three frames of 'brilliance,' 'beauty,' and 'benignity'" to break down soft power projects from the perspective of the intended audience (Kitchen & Laifer, 2017, p. 820). Another approach centralises the affective element. Attractiveness works through "the affective and aesthetic dynamics in the social construction of identity — and the investments audiences make in such identities" (Solomon, 2014, p. 721). The key to analysis here is to unpack some of the "intangibles of social and political life" (p. 721), and "aesthetic and emotional dimensions of politics" at the individual level (p. 730). While this thesis cannot provide evidence for or against any of these approaches, its outcomes may be useful to justify further research into them, and the as theoretical frameworks, they will help to conduct thematic analysis in the interviews.

2.4.4   Level-of-analysis problem: Soft power and the two-level game

While this thesis stops short of *needing* to resolve the level-of-analysis problem, because it only measures soft power and not intergovernmental soft outcomes, this section briefly discusses a potential answer to the problem for two reasons. Firstly, it supports the theory of the full soft power process, enhancing academic relevance to justify extending future research to the intergovernmental soft or hard outcomes stages. Secondly, it increases societal relevance and the theoretic potential for findings to be applied in practice, as they become more concrete

to practitioners with a suggested mechanism on how soft power can turn into concrete outcomes.

The two-level game theory originally described the impacts of national leaders' need for ratification from their constituents for an international agreement (Putnam, 1988, p. 427). The argument can be expanded to broader foreign policy, including soft power strategies. Accordingly, state leaders' behaviour must reflect the imperatives of the international game, and domestic demands for that game. For instance, if population attitudes favour disarmament and peaceful diplomatic means – as in Germany in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union – then a democratic leader who prioritises the building of soft over hard power is likelier to be re-elected.

Democratic peace theory, which states that democracies are averse to engaging in armed conflict with one another (Russett, 1993, p. 3), and domestic audience costs theory, which states that there are political costs vis-a-vis the electorate that leaders suffer if they publicly issue a threat or promise and fail to follow through (Fearon, 1997, p. 69), indirectly support the idea that domestic audiences have a considerable influence on foreign policy choices of leadership, particularly through the various mechanisms of accountability that exist in full democracies. It would be reasonable to assume that a state leader is less likely to start war with, and more likely to support or follow the lead of a country that has built significant attraction and soft power within the first state's voting population.

2.5 Hypothesis

Soft power literature theorises that appealing resources such as culture, value and policies cause some attraction, in foreign populations and their leaders, to the country that possesses these resources. This attraction in turn can cause soft power, which may take the form of willingness to follow a country's leadership internationally.

The internationalisation of technical expertise is one way to present an attractive resource to international populations, particularly with the related policies and values that come with the application of this expertise.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this research project is that the internationalisation of technical expertise, presented via vignettes, increases a country's soft power.

- H_0: $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between internationalised technical expertise and soft power)
- H_A: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (the slope is not equal to zero: there is a statistically significant relationship between internationalised technical expertise and soft power)

3   Research design and methodology

Based upon the literature review and theoretical framework, this chapter will develop the methodology that will be used to conduct the research to test the hypothesis. Section 3.1 will discuss the mixed methods research design, including the operationalisation of main concepts, the case selection, and the samples and data collection for both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the research. Section 3.2 will detail the methods of analysis.

3.1   Research design: mixed methods

This project will employ mixed methods with a sequential explanatory design (quantitative then qualitative) (Bowen, Rose, & Pilkington, 2017, p. 12). The research will proceed as follows: first, a large-n survey experiment will be run, followed by four elite interviews from a purposeful sample. The survey experiment will help to build a detailed picture of patterns in responses across a large and diverse sample group. Subsequent interviews will help clarify survey results, build depth and nuance in the discussion, and point to future areas of research.

The process of collecting qualitative data, in addition to quantitative data from the survey experiment, provides certain advantages. Primarily, it allows this research project to combine the strengths of its chosen quantitative and qualitative approaches "to develop a stronger understanding of the research problem [and] more *insight*" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 298). The strengths of the experimental design are particularly important to this project and research question: survey experiments can, in contrast to many qualitative research tools, provide "precise methodological control [and] unparalleled causal insight" (McDermott, 2011, p. 504). The randomised assignment of treatments or a control condition reduces endogeneity, so that correlation in the results can be interpreted as a causal relationship (Gaines, Kuklinski, & Quirk, 2007, pp. 3-4). This will, as discussed in the literature review, help to address the most relevant criticisms of soft power theory. The triangulation of information that subsequently occurs through the interviews helps to further enhance the study's overall validity.

In other words, the combination of research methods helps to boost internal as well as external validity. Internal validity is enhanced by the survey experiment, because it allows the elimination of spurious relationships (Mutz, 2011, p. 138) and easy assessment of internal robustness. In this case, the survey also appropriately measures population attitudes. Soft power

as attractiveness is difficult to isolate due to subjectivity, so to maximise internal and construct validity, this study defines it as the ability to influence other populations' support for a country's leadership in international initiatives. This is the outcome variable, and it measures soft power according to Nye's definition, where soft power is the ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants, without "ordering" them to do so (1990, p. 166). The Netherlands' powerful reputation in cycling infrastructure reinforces the idea of expertise, rather than the achievements in the vignettes being coincidental or lucky. Survey respondents will be in the UK, a democratic country, as laid out in Section 2.4.4. Moreover, triangulation via interviews helps further boost internal validity and trustworthiness by allowing me to dig into possible motivations behind survey response patterns and build depth of analysis.

External validity will be boosted through random population samples. Randomisation means results will somewhat generalise to the country level, though generalisability is limited by the small sample size and biases due to the use of a survey platform, which may attract people who are more open to new experiences and information. External validity is further limited by the carefully constructed experimental setting with "artificial stimuli that do not accurately reflect people's everyday world" (Devroe, 2016, p. 4). The wider generalisability to other areas of technical expertise diplomacy remains to be proven in follow-up research.

Reliability, the "replicability of the processes and the results" (Leung, 2015, p. 326), will be demonstrated by having two test questions in the survey, and running a pilot survey.

It is noted that for each sample – both quantitative and qualitative – the units of analysis and observation are both individuals.

3.1.1   Definition & operationalisation

The core concept to be investigated is soft power, the ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants (Nye, 1990, p. 166). According to this definition, soft power affects other countries' preferences and interests – not necessarily their behaviour. Therefore, this project aims to measure preferences at the population level, in democracies. To operationalise soft power, I will concretise it as: the willingness of citizens for their government to follow another country's lead or agenda. This is the dependent or outcome variable. Specifically, the outcome to be measured is:

The ability of the Netherlands, as perceived by citizens of foreign countries, to impact other countries' preferences and interests through the demonstration of technical expertise and use of knowledge-sharing. Impacts on preferences and interests will be measured in terms of willingness to follow leadership and agenda-setting actions.

A secondary concept to enable this research is the internationalisation of expertise, which I will define as knowledge-sharing in an "export" format, aimed at citizens and organisations in other countries. To operationalise this concept, it will be concretely defined as: the perception of foreign technical expertise and its outcomes in international settings (vs domestic settings). This is the independent variable.

3.1.2 Case selection

The case chosen for this project is that of cycling infrastructure expertise of the Netherlands.

On a broad level, this case is ideal for two reasons: firstly, the Netherlands' reputation in cycling infrastructure excellence precedes it. Therefore, respondents are likely to hold a long-term belief in the countries' expertise. This long-term belief would be impossible to recreate during the short experiment, and creating a shorter-term belief would require considerable manipulation by the researcher, such as making respondents read a lengthy account of Dutch cycling history and achievements. The latter approach would carry inherent risks and weaknesses. Thus, given the limited number of comparable global topics, and that the research takes place from the Netherlands, the case is not only appropriate to the research question, but also convenient and with limited downsides. The most glaring one – that respondents may have forgotten about or not yet encountered Dutch cycling expertise – is mitigated by the "baseline" text in the survey (further discussed, along with precise vignette wording, in subsection 3.1.4.1).

Moreover, in terms of formulating vignettes, the case is also optimal due to the range of examples that were initially available to showcase, allowing the choice of the ideal main factors for the construction of the survey: length, demonstrated success, expertise, values and policies, and accessibility of the text itself. Thus, the case selection easily allows for the measurement of the impacts of technical expertise at the international and domestic levels, and one may

reasonably expect that this expertise impacts respondents' perceptions of Dutch capabilities. The case selection therefore precisely fits the requirement of the independent variable.

On a more specific level, for the "internationalised expertise" vignette, I will use the case of the Dutch Cycling Embassy's work in Washington.

The DCE is a public-private network of Dutch businesses, consultancies, experts, cities and municipalities, universities, knowledge institutes or think-tanks, bloggers and more participants, including the Dutch cyclists' union (Fietsersbond), the principal passenger railway operator and network manager in the Netherlands (NS and ProRail), the Netherlands Ministry of Infrastructure and Water. It is "an intermediary between the [international] demand for Dutch cycling expertise and Dutch parties that can deliver" this expertise (Dutch Cycling Embassy, n.d.). A sizeable portion of its budget is provided by the Dutch government, and this funding is tied to aims which include increasing Dutch influence globally (Harms, 2020). To fulfil its various aims, the DCE organises activities to impart their knowledge to foreign urban planners, architects, politicians, technicians and police, and more professionals. Activity formats include, for instance, infrastructure study tours of Dutch cities, and "ThinkBike Workshops" where Dutch experts go abroad to help a city or municipality plan or improve a specific piece or project of cycling infrastructure. Thus, the DCE provides an excellent case of the internationalisation of technical expertise.

The Washington D.C. example chosen for the international vignette is optimal because its successful long-term outcomes demonstrate the benefits of the internationalisation of technical expertise. The DCE has existed for about ten years and started working with Washington D.C. authorities early on. While the DCE has successfully contributed to cycling infrastructure development in a variety of international cities and projects, none have been as extensive and fast as those resulting from the long-term collaboration with the North American city. The choice of a successful project is important for the vignette as to generate soft power because points of "attraction" are needed – in this case the expertise, and related culture, values and policies enabling the expertise and its distribution. A more neutral or limited-success example would not fit into the theory of soft power that is being investigated.

It is worth noting that in the U.K., where the survey experiment will be conducted, there is somewhat of a culture of disliking cyclists (e.g., Walker, 2015). On the one hand, this may produce some bias. However, "incidents [of setting traps for cyclists] remain rare" (Walker,

2015), which seems to suggest that those with extreme hatred or biases are limited and will have a limited impact on the outcomes. Perhaps their bias may even be limited or countered by the idea of a well-managed, carefully designed Dutch-style cycle lane network, where motorists and cyclists enter into conflict much more rarely. On the other hand, this means that the U.K. constitutes an effective least likely case for the purpose of testing this hypothesis. This means that if the null hypothesis is rejected based on evidence from the survey experiment run in the U.K., it is likelier the null hypothesis will also be rejected in other countries and contexts.

3.1.3   Sample and data collection: quantitative data

For the collection of quantitative data, a survey experiment was determined to be the best format. Comparing results between the treatment groups then "reveals the causal effects under investigation" (p. 4), which is "the most rigorous way of determining whether a cause-effect relation exists between treatment and outcome" (Sibbald & Roland, 1998, p. 201).   Survey experiments also have the advantages of being easy to implement and circumventing some of the problems associated with trying to draw inferences from conventional survey data or purely qualitative research. They do, nonetheless, have limitations. They measure effect at a single point in time, have a very limited ability to measure mutual and complex causation, and have a complex relationship with real world inferences (pp. 5-12). Furthermore, survey responses may be influenced by people's level of knowledge on the subject, and their "stated preferences" (survey responses) may differ from their "revealed preferences" (their choice in the real world) (Diaz, Grady, & Kuklinski, 2020, p. 7). These challenges are partly addressed by the addition of a qualitative portion to this project but further discussion and mitigation of these limitations is beyond the scope of this project. Finally, the level-of-analysis problem was addressed through careful connection of individuals with the state level in the theoretical framework section.

The data for the quantitative portion of the research was collected on the 1st and 2nd of May 2022. The dates fell on a Sunday and Monday, the latter of which was a bank holiday in the UK, purposefully chosen to allow both those in full-time Monday to Friday employment as

well as students, shift workers, unemployed and retired people to participate. This allows for respondents with a range of economic backgrounds in order to provide a balanced sample.[7]

An ex-ante power calculation[8] resulted in a minimum sample size of 150 respondents per vignette to identify a statistically significant effect in the data analysis. The total sample size was greater than 450 people (the final total was 456) to detect medium-fine effects in the size of 0.325, with a statistical power of 80% using a two-tailed t-test with a 95% level of statistical significance. The total sample was divided into three, for two experimental conditions – the domestic and international treatments – and the control group.

The sample was recruited using the online sample platform Prolific. Prolific "connects researchers with participants around the world" to "enable fast, reliable and large-scale data collection" (Prolific, n.d.), by crowdsourcing samples according to specified characteristics and presenting them with surveys. I used the characteristics "Country of birth," "Nationality" and "Location" to narrow my sample to U.K.-based respondents who are neither born in nor citizens of the Netherlands. Additionally, respondents were asked to self-screen for "significant connections to the Netherlands." This allowed the exclusion of Dutch people, or people with close ties to the Netherlands, as they are not the target group, and the treatments would most likely not work on them.[9] Moreover, it enabled limiting the number of variables to control, and to avoid overspecification, for this first quantitative investigation into the impacts of internationalised technical expertise on soft power. To incentivise respondents, they were paid £0.50 each, based on a £7.50 hourly rate and the 4-minute length of the survey.

The use of Prolific to recruit the sample has both advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, it allowed me to rapidly recruit an age-[10] and gender-balanced sample. It has a wide reach (e.g., geographically: respondents can be located anywhere in the UK, compared to a lab study sample that tends to be much more local). There is growing evidence that online testing and lab studies are comparable, despite their different conditions (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, &

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[7] This is assumed and not verified, as for the purposes of simplicity and conciseness, the questionnaire did not ask participants for their work status.

[8] Calculated using G-Power 3.1.

[9] The self-screening element of the process does introduce an element of subjectivity in the data as potential respondents may have interpreted "significant ties" differently. To limit this, examples of significant tie were provided: "in the form of nationality, current or former residency, or direct family links" – however, this may not exclude all respondents with ties that bias them toward the Netherlands. Moreover, since the survey was paid, respondents may have been incentivised to lie. However, it can be reasonably expected that if any such respondents slipped though, they will be an extreme minority.

[10] Demographically balanced, but not perfectly representative: see Table 5 for further detail.

Acquisti, 2017; Crump, McDonnell, & Gureckis, 2013). Moreover, the final sample is in all likelihood more representative than a sample based on my own social network in the UK would have been: my network was built during my time attending and working at universities there, and therefore almost exclusively consists of largely middle-class university graduates in full-time white-collar work. Such narrow samples, as often also recruited in university labs, can bias research (Sears, 1986, p. 515).

Nonetheless, Prolific also has its limitations. Firstly, according to its own analysis, a sample from Prolific may have some rapid-responder bias (those that happen to be online at launch, or click the notification fastest, are those who get into the study) (Prolific Team, 2022). Prolific has some inbuilt "mechanisms to reduce this bias, and fairly distribute study places among active participants" (Prolific Team, 2022). It was also mitigated by choosing gender balanced samples, and dividing the overall sample into different target age groups (18-24; 25-54; 55-64; 65+) that were separately recruited within Prolific, as well as the carefully chosen data collection dates.

Secondly, Prolific's overall population has a bias towards people who are female, young, and have high levels of education (Prolific Team, 2022). Gender and age were balanced via pre-screening, but education levels were not: resulting bias will be discussed in Section 4.1: Preliminary data analysis: demographics.

Thirdly, there is some selection bias resulting from the use of Prolific. Users of the platform must be aware of the platform and overcome any number of given barriers to entry: confidence in the use of technology, regular access to the internet, time, and likely other similar hurdles. Once signed up to the platform, there is further selection bias within the initial bias: users can browse a list of "available studies, reading descriptions, comparing hourly reward rates and average completion time" (Prolific Team, 2022).[11] It is theoretically possible that the people who chose to participate in this study differ systematically from the wider population of the United Kingdom. Unlikely to be attracted by the £0.50 award unless in particular financial hardship, they may nonetheless be especially interested in international relations.

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[11] See, for example: this article about a TikTok video sending thousands of new users to Prolific, considerably lowering the average number of studies each user has a chance to take part in (Letzter, 2021). This makes Prolific a seller's market (more respondents than surveys: respondents are likelier to take part in any available survey).

Fourthly, the sample may be affected by satisficing decisions. A "minority" of Prolific users may view the site as a revenue source, and care less about the quality of their responses (Prolific Team, 2022). Qualtrics flagged responses that showed bot-like behaviour, so these were rejected from the sample. Human-generated inattentive responses from "slackers […] unmotivated to provide any genuine data" (Lumsden, 2018), were rejected to the best possible extent by rejecting responses from participants who responded suspiciously quickly, and rejecting those who responded to their age category question wrong. I was able to compare their answer to this question to their Prolific screening data, and this turned out to be an excellent attention check that a substantial portion of the 25-54 and 55-64 samples failed and was rejected for. Even with these measures, there may be some noise in the data, which is to be expected in a survey experiment. The signal-to-noise ratio was increased through other measures to compensate: two test questions, a substantial sample size, and randomisation of the sample.

Finally, paying for study participation – an issue not exclusive to Prolific, or online sampling – also comes with limitations. These are particularly relevant as the full sample of this study was recruited through Prolific. Such concerns are primarily linked to data quality (Pickering & Blaszczynski, 2021, p. 517), and as discussed above, such issues were countered to the best possible extent. Moreover, Rusell et al. note in response to Pickering and Blaszczynski that no samples are unbiased (2022, p. 109).

A full breakdown of the survey sample's demographic information is presented in Table 4 in Section 4.1: Preliminary data analysis: demographics.

3.1.4   The survey experiment

For the experiment I created one baseline text and two vignettes, which were incorporated into an online survey built with Qualtrics, a survey platform which automatically collects the data from responses. Each respondent was randomly assigned to a group in which they were displayed no treatment, the domestic treatment vignette, or international treatment vignette.

3.1.4.1   Vignettes

All survey experiment participants were presented with the following baseline text:

> The Netherlands is a country in Europe with an area of 41,865 km^2 and a population of about 17.7 million.

> There are about 23 million bicycles in the country, and 36% of Dutch people list the bicycle as their most frequent way of getting around on a typical day (source: Quality of Transport report, European Commission. December 2014).

This established the same minimum level of knowledge for respondents across treatment groups, and provides context for the following steps of the survey (particularly to the control group, who receive no further information on the Netherlands). It also serves to prime the respondents on the topic of the Netherlands to be able to properly disentangle the effect of technical expertise on their responses.

One third of the total sample, randomly selected, then received the domestically-applied expertise vignette to read:

> In 2019, the Netherlands opened the world's largest bicycle parking facility at Utrecht Central Station. It has three storeys of parking for 12,500 bicycles.

> In the Netherlands, there are over 500,000 bike parking spaces available next to train stations in total, and on average 25,000 are added each year. By 2040, the country aims to have at least 650,000 spaces available.

The vignette uses a neutral framing (without partial adjectives) to describe a technical achievement within the Netherlands. The achievement is of global significance, as the size of the facility is unsurpassed worldwide. This serves to highlight the extent of Dutch expertise to respondents who receive this treatment. Bicycle parking next to train stations was purposefully selected as a topic as "intermodal" mobility, or travel using multiple modes of transport in a single journey, is something many other countries struggle to organise and build effective infrastructure for (see the interview with Lucas Harms in the Appendix).

One third of the total sample, randomly selected, received the internationally-applied expertise vignette to read after the baseline text:

> The Dutch Cycling Embassy, sponsored by the Netherlands' government, has organised over 45 workshops around the world to make Dutch cycling expertise accessible to cities and municipalities everywhere.

> In Washington D.C., USA, this programme has directly contributed to the design and building of 40 miles of cycling paths, with many more planned.

> The percentage of trips that take place by bicycle has increased from about 3.5% to 20% in the last 15 years.

> The city has made ambitious plans for the future, with carbon neutrality and zero traffic fatalities envisioned for the next decades, inspired by the Dutch approach.

This example was chosen as it precisely matches the case study and is an excellent example of internationalised technical expertise. Washington D.C. is one of the cities that has had the most notable and measurable outcomes from DCE activity. Moreover, the vignette highlights political, policy and mindset changes. Given the extent of the impact, the intent is that this vignette will be just as impressive as the domestic achievement, but with a clear *internationalisation* of technical expertise.

The control group receives no additional vignette. This is necessary to establish a group against which the outcomes of the treatment groups can be compared to, to be able to determine whether there is a statistically significant effect caused by each treatment.

After the baseline (and vignettes, if applicable), participants received two disruptor questions. These were:

> How well-developed do you consider Dutch cycling infrastructure expertise to be?

> Where do you get most of your news from?

The former presented participants with a 1-to-7-point Likert scale to respond, where 1 represented "Not well at all," 4 represented "Moderately well" and 7 represented "Extremely well." The latter question had a multiple-choice format, where respondents were able to choose any or all of "social media," "print media," "TV or radio," "websites or apps of traditional news sources," or "other" with a text box. These responses were not used for the analysis. Instead, the questions served to alleviate the priming effect of the baseline and/or treatment texts.

Next, the outcome variable, *support for Dutch leadership*, was measured by asking the respondents to choose between the Netherlands and Luxembourg as sole leader of an

international project they had jointly proposed. To be able to check internal consistency reliability, two similar but different questions to capture the outcome variable were asked:

> **Question 1:** The Netherlands and Luxembourg are presenting a plan before the United Nations. In this plan, they wish to lead an initiative that will improve communication channels in international organisations such as the United Nations.

> **Question 2:** The Netherlands and Luxembourg would like to coordinate international research on changing demographics in the 21st century.

Both of the questions contain key elements of soft power theory: an international setting, implicit or explicit resources presented (collaborative resources through coordination with other country; resources to come up with proposal or plan), and two further elements that are questioned: agenda-setting capacities, i.e. soft power or ability of one country to get other countries to want what it wants (if respondents disagree with the agenda topic, they may leave the question blank), and leadership of implicit political and social progress and associated norms and values, i.e. soft outcomes (again, if respondents wish for neither country to lead, they may leave the question blank). The topics in each context are purposefully broad and generally uncontroversial,[12] to avoid interaction effects due to partisanship.

The country of Luxembourg was chosen as alternative response to the Netherlands because of its similar characteristics. It is also a small northern/central European state without hegemony or disproportionate economic power to wield in the international sphere. It is also not associated with any strong negative stereotypes, based on the pilot survey performed before this study.

The outcome variable was measured using a standard 7-point Likert scale. While it is a categorical ordinal variable (strongly prefer Luxembourg – neutral – strongly prefer the Netherlands), it was treated as a continuous variable to allow for OLS regression.

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[12] It is acknowledged that it is impossible to find a fully uncontroversial topic, and that, for instance, a very small number of respondents might passionately despise the UN and international organisations in principle. It is expected that these will be likely to leave the questions blank, and will therefore be excluded from the dataset. Therefore, such respondents will not skew the data.

Summary: survey experiment		
Comparison	Control	Treatment group
Comparison 1: domestic treatment	Control: baseline text only	Baseline text and domestic achievement vignette
Comparison 2: international treatment	Control: baseline text only	Baseline text and international achievement vignette
Comparison 3: domestic vs. international treatment	Baseline text and domestic achievement vignette	Baseline text and international achievement vignette

Table 1

The explanatory variable, which is the randomised treatment assigned to respondents, is a categorical nominal variable.

3.1.5   Sample and data collection: qualitative data

Qualitative triangulation was effectuated via circa three elite interviews and a thematic analysis to connect to key concepts and explain survey answers in more depth: these "probe[d] into responses or observations as needed and obtain[ed] more detailed descriptions and explanations of experiences, behaviors, and beliefs" (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012, p. 21). The primary purpose was to gather alternative data to address my primary research question. It was also to help understand and interpret the findings from the survey experiment in terms of the soft power process stages, through the detailed commentary provided by people who work in the area of the case study, and have experienced the process and outcomes of the internationalisation of technical expertise. In adherence to the sequential explanatory design, the interviews were conducted after the survey results are analysed.

The sample for this part of the research was a purposeful sample, chosen for their work with the Dutch Cycling Embassy and availability to interview:[13]

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[13] All agreed to be named in this thesis.

Lilian van Ek, Policy Associate at the Department of Infrastructure and Water Management at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Washington, D.C., United States. Nationality: Dutch

Lucas Harms, Director of the Dutch Cycling Embassy, Netherlands. Nationality: Dutch.

Luca Simeone, President of Napoli Pedala and organiser of the yearly Napoli Bike Festival, Italy. Nationality: Italian

Bill Nesper, Executive Director, The League of American Bicyclists, United States. Nationality: U.S. American

This purposeful sampling strategy limits the generalisability of the qualitative data. However, the quantitative data can compensate for this in the overall research findings.

Interviews were chosen over other qualitative data gathering methods for various reasons. Thanks to the flexibility of interviews, responses are not constrained, like in the survey experiment. They were also deemed to be appropriate because the topic is complex but not sensitive, interviewing online is inexpensive, and the sample is very small, which means that interviewing was not too time consuming. Some of the disadvantages of interviews, such as bias introduced by the researcher[14] and variability of data quality (Kumar, 2011, p. 142), are partly addressed by the addition of a quantitative portion to this project. Further discussion and mitigation of these limitations is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Unstructured interviews were determined to be the most effective form of interview to gather the required qualitative data. They allow for the intensive study, via primary sources, of my case study, which constitutes both the quantitative and qualitative study design. The choice of a less structured in-depth interview decreases reliability of the qualitative data, but enhances overall face validity (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012, p. 22). It is also ideal for "gaining a deeper understanding of a given research topic" (p. 22), so given that the hypothesis was already determined, and it constrained the research topic, and that no comparative analysis was

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[14] The researcher completed an internship at the DCE, which may introduce a positive bias on the case study. To limit its impact, I tried to be aware of this bias and closely follow the interview technique in *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research* (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012, p. 113). While some research philosophies call for the use of one's subjectivity as resource during qualitative research (Gough & Madill, 2012), this was not applied to these interviews of limited scope in the framework of a mixed methods thesis.

required, this depth through limited structure was a logical choice for supplementing data collection in this deductive research approach.

3.1.6 Interviews

The interviews were held online via conference calls between the 3rd and 6th May 2022. Holding them online allowed me to interview people from different countries at no cost, making the format optimal for this project. The drawbacks were that the online format does perhaps mean that the relationship that is established throughout the interview is slightly less warm and personal, and that connectivity problems did very occasionally cause the video to freeze. The disadvantage to building the relationship with interviewees was countered by asking warmup questions, and was most likely not severely detrimental as the topic was not sensitive. Moreover, the connectivity problems were not so severe that they caused problems in understanding each other.

I followed the features listed in the *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research* as "integral to the power and utility of the technique" of in-depth interviews (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012, p. 113). That is, I conducted my interviews one-on-one, made maximum use of open-ended questioning where possible, used inductive probing to build depth, and ensured that the interview would look and feel more like a conversation than an interview by adapting my tone and question wording (pp. 113-114).

The interviews, although unstructured, followed the same loose pattern: first, interviewees were asked for their consent, told about the purpose of the research, their data privacy and right to withdraw at any time. Then, they were asked about their professional roles and how long they had been carrying them out. Interview questions were kept neutral in wording where possible to limit the introduction of bias, and were based on exploring two central questions: how does the DCE's work affect the Netherlands' international standing and relationships? And how, if at all, does it communicate the Netherlands values and policies? Where interviewees raised interesting points, I asked them to elaborate. I did not confront interviewees with the survey findings as I was primarily looking for alternative data to the survey experiment, but I did talk non-Dutch interviewees through the experiment to ask for their responses to the test questions, which were both in favour of the Netherlands. I finished the interviews by asking each interviewee if they had any further comments, ideas, anecdotes or anything else to add.

The interviews were then transcribed to be able to proceed with the coding required for the framework thematic analysis.

3.2   Methods of analysis

The data was analysed using R (version 4.0.3), "a language and environment for statistical computing and graphics" (The R Foundation, n.d.). The hypothesis was first tested using an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, which allows one to estimate the coefficients of a linear regression equation, i.e. to test the effects of the exploratory variables (treatments) on a continuous outcome variable (support for Dutch leadership), while controlling for other variables. This was done in the framework of an experimental survey, to compare differences in averages across experimental conditions. All variables are summarised in Table 2 below.

Summary of the variables			
Variable name	**Type**	**Symbol**	**Measurement**
Support for Dutch leadership	Outcome	y_1, y_2	Continuous. Measured via a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly prefer Luxembourg; 4 = indifferent; 7 = strongly prefer the Netherlands
Treatment	Explanatory	x_1	Categorical: 0 = control; 1 = domestic treatment; 2 = international treatment
Age	Control	x_2	Ordinal categorical: 1 = 18-24; 2 = 25-54; 3 = 54-65; 4 = 65+
Gender	Control	x_3	Categorical: 1 = female; 2 = male; 3 = non-binary/other
Education	Control	x_4	Categorical: measured as "Some Primary;" "Completed Primary School;" "Some Secondary;" "Completed Secondary School;" "Vocational or Similar;" "Some University but no degree;" "University Bachelors Degree;" "Graduate or

			professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS)" Recoded as binary: University degree achieved or no degree
Nationality	Control	x_5	Categorical: measured as UK only, dual national or other nationality. Recoded as binary: UK-only and others
DCE activity participation	Control	x_6	Categorical: measured as no participation, had heard about but not participated in DCE activities, and participated. Recoded as binary: participated or not
Field of study/work	Control	x_7	Categorical: measured as "Urban planning, mobility design or architecture (incl. policy and environmental planning);" "Traffic, highway or transportation engineering;" "Roadbuilding and maintenance (incl. construction, project management, environmental or safety regulation of roads and networks);" "Policing;" "International HGV operation/transportation;" or "No, I work or study in an unrelated field" Recoded as binary: control profession (one of the first five choices) or not

Table 2

The expected relationship between the variables is as follows:

Causal diagram

EXPLANATORY VARIABLES	
Treatment	
Independent variable of interest. Categorical	

OTHER INDEPENDENT VARIABLES
Gender *(categorical)*
Age *(categorical)*
Education *(categorical, binary)*
Nationality *(categorical, binary)*
DCE participation *(categorical, binary)*
Field of work/study *(categorical, binary)*

OUTCOME VARIABLE
Support for Dutch leadership
Continuous. 1-7 scale

Figure 4

With the expected relationships established, the data gathered in Prolific was loaded into R, and the control variables recoded as described in Table 2. The explanatory and control variables were converted into factors (categorical nominal variables) to ensure correct interpretation by the software. Then, I divided the data into two subsets: the "domestic" subset included data from the control group and the domestic treatment group, and the "international" subset included data from the control group and the international treatment group.

The next step was to test the hypothesis with a simple OLS regression applied to each comparison:

$$y_1 = \alpha + bx_1$$

Here, y is the outcome variable, and x is the explanatory variable. The slope of the line – which denotes the difference between the control and each treatment respectively – is represented by b while α represents the zero-intercept of the equation. Starting with a simple OLS regression permits the critical assessment of the first assumption of linear regression, that explanatory variables and the outcome variable are linearly related (Casson & Farmer, 2014, p. 592).

As the simple OLS regression showed a relationship between the two variables *(b ≠ 0)*, a multiple regression with all control variables was carried out for each comparison:

$$y_1 = \alpha + b_1 x_1 + b_3 x_3 + b_4 x_4 + \cdots b_7 x_7$$

I then used the R package stargazer (Hlavac, 2022) to export the regression tables. To build graphical representations of the analysis, I used the package *ggplot2*. Finally, I carried out Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests on the data to check robustness of the regression models.

After the quantitative analysis, I carried out qualitative analysis of the interviews. For this, I used the Framework Method for thematic analysis (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013), following its seven stages closely, but adapted to the small amount of qualitative data. First, I transcribed the interviews, then I familiarised myself with them by re-reading them, then I colour-coded passages in Word according to substantive content overlap that I noticed in the previous step. As a fourth step, I re-read the colour-coded passages to find code labels, which I wrote down on paper. As I had a small volume of data, my fifth and sixth steps were effectively the same: I applied my framework and charted my data into a "matrix" by briefly summarising the colour-coded passages in a few words under each label, giving me an overview of the data. This allowed me to proceed to step seven, the interpretation of the data.

4   Results

This chapter will present the results obtained via the methodology discussed in the previous section. In the first part, I will share a breakdown of the demographic data on the sample. Section 4.2 will analyse the outcomes of Comparison 1, using data from the control group and those respondents who received the domestic treatment. Section 4.3 will analyse the outcomes of Comparison 2, using data from the control group and those respondents who received the international treatment. Section 4.4 will then directly compare the mean outcomes of the domestic and international treatment groups to each other. In Section 4.5, a Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test will be performed on the data to check robustness of the regression models. Using all available information, Section 4.6 will discuss the implication of the quantitative results on the hypothesis. Finally, Section 4.7 will present the qualitative analysis in the form of themes and the evidence they can add to this research.

4.1   Preliminary data analysis: demographics

To be able to correctly attribute the variation in the outcome variable to the explanatory variables – the change in support for Dutch leadership to the different vignette manipulations – a "survey experiment depends on successful randomization of respondents across the […] experimental groups" (Van Der Voet, 2019, p. 11). The randomisation was performed by Qualtrics, which carried out the allocation of participants to the experimental or control groups through the "Evenly present elements" functionality of the randomiser block which contained the possible treatment or blank (hidden – for the control group) text objects. The following table shows that this random distribution was indeed even:

Even randomisation of treatments		
Treatment	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Control group (no vignette)	152	*33.3*
Domestic treatment	151	*33.1*
International treatment	153	*33.6*
Total:	456	*100*

Table 3

As can be seen, each group in the survey experiment had 152 ±1 participants. Thus, Qualtrics evenly allocated the treatments or control option amongst respondents. The slight variation in numbers may be due to the manual rejection of inattentive responses of "slackers" or satisficers.[15]

Next, the demographic characteristics of the different groups within the experiment will be examined. This is necessary to show that the baseline characteristics are evenly distributed across experimental conditions, to increase internal validity and further confirm that the randomisation process was successful (Burgess, Gebski, & Keech, 2003, p. 105). Demonstrating that the sample is similar in key demographic characteristics to the general UK population, although not fully representative, improves its external generalisability (though, again, it does not imply representativeness) (p. 105).

The following table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. It presents these characteristics both individually per treatment group as well as in summary across the full dataset.

Demographic characteristics of the sample					
Variable category	Control group	Domestic treatment	International treatment	Total	Percentage
Age					
18-24	23	19	21	63	13.8%
25-54	74	66	72	212	46.5%
55-64	26	25	25	76	16.7%
65+	29	41	35	105	23.0%
Gender					
Female	79	80	69	228	50%
Male	72	71	84	227	49.8%
Non-binary/third	1	0	0	1	0.2%
Education					

Primary & Secondary	69	69	69	207	45.4%
University degree	83	82	84	249	54.6%
Nationality					
UK only	135	134	128	397	87.3%
Dual[16] or other nationality	17	16	25	58	12.7%

A note on age: the sample was recruited roughly according to current UK demographics. A comparison is presented in the following table for clarification and comparison:

Age distribution: actual vs. sample				
Category	**Actual UK %[17]**	**Actual UK: Total percentage of 15+ population (82.37%)[18]**	**Survey %**	**Difference[19]**
15/18-24[20]	11.49%	13.95%	13.8%	- 0.1%
25-54	39.67%	48.16%	46.5%	- 1.66%
55-64	12.73%	15.46%	16.7%	+ 1.24%
65+	18.48%	22.44%	23.0%	+ 0.56%

Observing the dataset, we can see that in the age category, the oldest group of people is overrepresented in the domestic treatment group, and underrepresented in the control group. This means that the baseline or control data may skew to reflect a slightly younger population's opinion, on average. The overall age distribution of the sample compared to UK demographics skews slightly old, but more so toward the 55-64 group. The differences in age distribution between the survey sample and actual demographics of the UK are within two percentage

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[16] Including UK/non-UK combinations, e.g. UK + Ireland, or Germany + Austria dual nationals. The most frequent responses were: Ireland, followed by EU nationalities.
[17] Source: CIA World Factbook (CIA, 2022)
[18] Rounded to two decimal points.
[19] Between the third and fourth columns.
[20] N.B. Data for the actual UK demographic values was only available for the age group 15-24. Therefore, this group is very slightly overrepresented in the survey, which is partly made up by the slight negative difference between the real demographic value and percentage of the survey sample.

points. Therefore, the survey sample can be considered reflective of the UK population and thus balanced, but not truly representative.

The gender balance of the total UK population is 0.99 men per woman, according to a 2022 estimate (CIA, 2022). This is reflected in the total survey sample, but not in the subgroups. The control group and domestic treatment group are female-dominated, while the international treatment group is male-dominated. However, gender is not expected to have an impact on the outcome variable and no consistent correlations were detected in the analysis. Therefore, this bias most likely has little or no impact on the generalisability of the findings to the wider U.K. population.

In terms of education levels, the data clearly shows a bias towards university-educated individuals that is not representative of the general population of the UK. According to a 2012 Office for National Statistics report, "27.2% of the population aged 16 to 74 had a degree or equivalent or higher" at the time (Ball, 2013). The proportion is likely to be slightly higher now that access to higher education has expanded (e.g. compare 2013 data: "34.4% of the working age population of Great Britain, aged 16 to 64, achieved [...] a degree-level or equivalent qualification or above" and "the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate[21]" for 2013 "stood at 49%, up from 46% last year" (Ball, 2013)), whilst older generations that tended to hold less university degrees in total have passed. Even so, the proportion of the population that is university-educated is very unlikely to be as high as 54.6%. In terms of the evaluation of possible impacts of this bias, it may be that being university-educated makes people more open-minded to international leadership, but also that it makes them more sceptical of new – and limited, as in the vignettes – information or attempts to influence them. The results of the study will show the latter effect seems to prevail, which may skew the research results in the direction of showing a more limited impact of the vignettes than would be expected in the general population. Therefore, one of the limitations to the external validity of this study, based on the sample composition, is that it may not generalise as well to the wider, less educated population of the UK and other, less educated countries. However, the distribution of university-educated participants across the samples is balanced. Therefore, this does not affect the internal validity of the study.

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[21] This "examines participation rates for 17-30-year-old English domiciled first-time participants in higher education in the UK, including outside England" (Ball, 2013).

Finally, for the nationality demographic, the sample groups are reasonably balanced, with dual and non-UK nationals somewhat more heavily represented in the international treatment group. Such participants may have a more open-minded inclination, and may therefore introduce some bias into the study. This will be accounted for in the interpretation and discussion of results. UK demographics show that 9.11% of the population holds non-UK nationality (Office for National Statistics, 2021).[22]

In summary, the sample is not representative, but reasonably balanced in comparison to actual UK demographics. The small imbalances that this section has highlighted will be taken into account in the interpretation of results and their discussion. The following section will explore in detail the results of the comparisons: the outcomes of the control group compared to the domestic treatment and international treatment groups respectively.

4.2   Comparison 1: control vs. domestic treatment

Comparison 1 measures the difference in support for Dutch leadership between the group that read the baseline text about the Netherlands only and the group that also read the domestic treatment vignette. The latter, as a reminder, contained information about a domestic cycling infrastructure achievement: the construction of the world's largest bicycle parking facility in Utrecht. This section is divided into two subsections: one per test question.

4.2.1   Comparison 1: test question 1

Test question 1 asks respondents to choose between the Netherlands and Luxembourg as sole leader of a project that will improve communication channels in international organisations such as the United Nations.

The simple OLS regression applied to this test question and the outcome variable showed a correlation between the explanatory and outcome variables. According to these results, which can be seen in Table 6, the addition of the domestic treatment translates to a 0.25-point increase

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[22] Dual citizenship information was unavailable.

in support for Dutch leadership, on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents a strong preference against Dutch leadership and 7 represents a strong preference for Dutch leadership.

The results of the simple OLS regression are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, with a t-value of 1.941 and p-value of 0.0532. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.009081 reveals that the addition of the domestic treatment is able to explain 0.9% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership: a limited explanatory power, to be expected at this early stage.

Although the statistical significance is not high, it is enough to reject the premise that there is no relationship between the explanatory variable and outcome variable. This lower statistical significance is acceptable here because the data was shown (in section 3.1.3) to have some noise due to the inherent randomness and error in human behaviour. In other words, there is a significant relationship between *Domestic Treatment* and *Support for Dutch Leadership*, but due to the limited statistical significance, caution is advised in the interpretation of the results until further analysis is conducted.

For this purpose, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. It allows to produce a better model that controls possible confounding effects of independent variables, which can provide improved explanatory power and confirm the simple OLS findings. For this and all further multiple regression models, the variable *DCE activity participation* was excluded as it had a single level only (none of the respondents had participated).

Table 6 below displays the results of the multiple regression analysis:

```
                  Regression Table Experiment 1.1
===============================================================
                               TQ1_1
                        (1)                      (2)
---------------------------------------------------------------
Group_number1          0.250*                   0.229*
                      (0.129)                  (0.128)

Age.L                                           0.241
                                               (0.153)

Age.Q                                           0.219
                                               (0.145)

Age.C                                           0.082
                                               (0.134)

Gender2                                         0.174
                                               (0.128)

Gender3                                         1.477
                                               (1.129)

Education1                                     -0.298**
                                               (0.134)

Nationality1                                   -0.073
                                               (0.207)

Profession1                                     0.126
                                               (0.360)

Constant               4.789***                 4.891***
                      (0.091)                  (0.131)

N                        303                      302
R2                       0.012                    0.067
Adjusted R2              0.009                    0.039
Residual Std. Error  1.122 (df = 301)      1.107 (df = 292)
F Statistic         3.768* (df = 1; 301) 2.349** (df = 9; 292)
===============================================================
Notes:               ***Significant at the 1 percent level.
                      **Significant at the 5 percent level.
                      *Significant at the 10 percent level.
```

Table 6

This multiple regression model confirms the statistical significance of the relationship between the domestic treatment and the support level for Dutch leadership. The coefficient of the

explanatory variable slightly decreases to 0.229 in the multiple regression compared to the simple regression, which means that part of the effect is due to factors outside the domestic treatment. The adjusted R-squared value shows that the model can explain 3.876% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership.

The model shows that possessing a university degree is statistically significantly related to the dependent variable at the 95% confidence level. Interestingly, the negative coefficient signifies that people with a university degree are less likely to show an increased support for Dutch leadership after having read the domestic vignette. As the baseline support mean is also lower for respondents with degree (see Table 12 in the Appendix), perhaps people with university degrees have a higher level of scepticism, especially of international organisations (compare following subsection, 4.2.2). They may be likelier to question how a domestic achievement translates to international leadership capabilities.

Overall, the model shows a positive relationship between the explanatory variable, *domestic treatment*, and the outcome variable, *support for Dutch leadership*. There is a statistically significant difference between the means of the control group and treatment group, as illustrated in the following graph.

Domestic treatment

Test Question 1
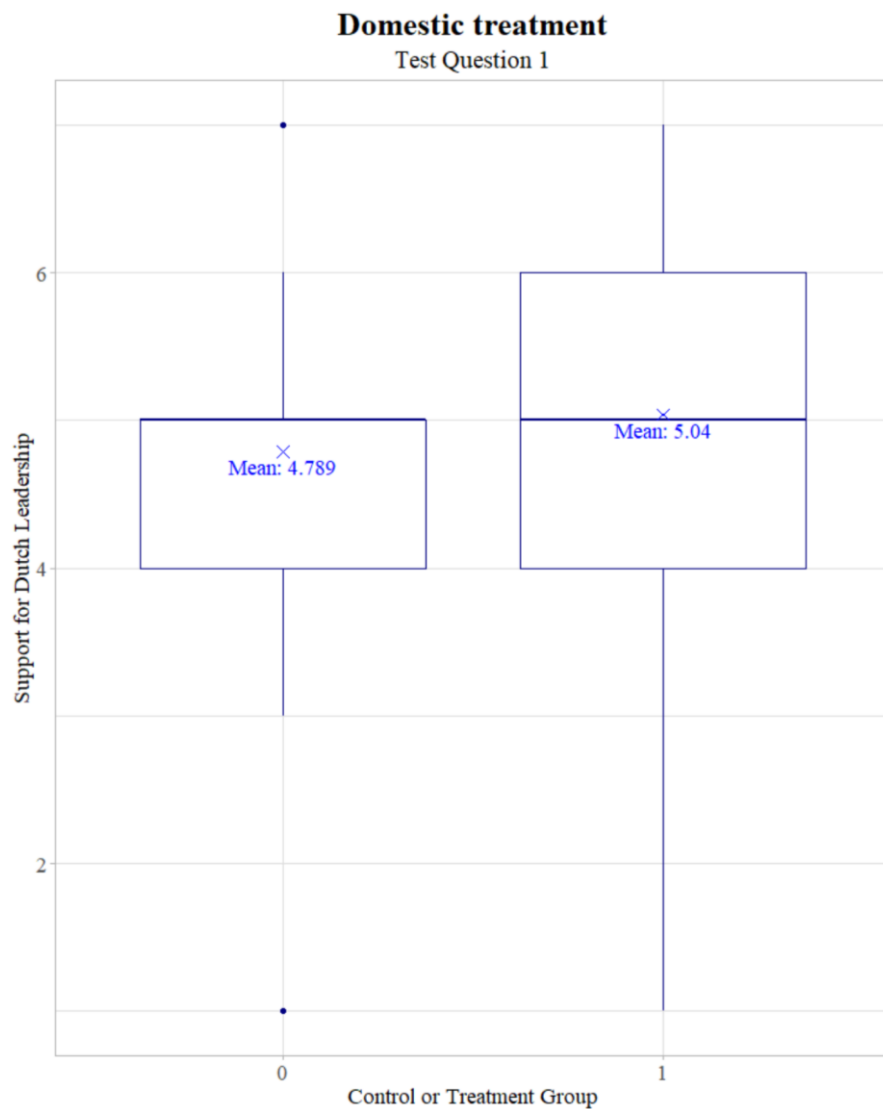
Figure 5

It is interesting to note that the control group, on average, shows some "default" support for the Netherlands as the mean is above 4, the neutral response value. This may be due to the baseline scenario about the Netherlands, which may induce some biases, or simply that the Netherlands has an existing positive reputation.

In brief, for this comparison and test question, we can reject the premise that $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between reading the domestic treatment vignette and soft power outcomes), based on a 90% confidence level. The full project hypothesis will be analysed in Section 4.6, when all experimental data has been presented.

4.2.2 Comparison 1: test question 2

Test question 2 asks respondents to choose between the Netherlands and Luxembourg as sole leader of a research project on changing demographics in the 21st century.

The simple OLS regression applied to this second test question and the outcome variable also showed a correlation. According to these results, which can be seen in Table 8, the addition of the domestic treatment translates to a 0.3-point increase in support for Dutch leadership, on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents a strong preference against Dutch leadership and 7 represents a strong preference for Dutch leadership.

The results of the simple OLS regression are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, with a t-value of 2.447 and p-value of 0.015. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.01624 reveals that the addition of the domestic treatment is able to explain 1.624% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. For this test question, there is thus an increase of the confidence level and explanatory compared to test question 1.

This leads us to reject the premise of no correlation between the *domestic treatment* and the outcome variable, the *support for Dutch leadership*, with greater confidence; nonetheless, a multiple regression analysis is useful here.

Table 7 below displays the results of the multiple regression analysis:

```
                    Regression Table Experiment 1.2
==================================================================
                                 TQ2_1
                           (1)                    (2)
------------------------------------------------------------------
Group_number1             0.303**                0.277**
                         (0.124)                (0.122)

Age.L                                            0.148
                                                (0.146)

Age.Q                                            0.367***
                                                (0.138)

Age.C                                           -0.017
                                                (0.127)

Gender2                                          0.051
                                                (0.122)

Gender3                                          1.100
                                                (1.074)

Education1                                      -0.181
                                                (0.127)

Nationality1                                    -0.434**
                                                (0.197)

Profession1                                      0.011
                                                (0.342)

Constant                  4.809***               4.993***
                         (0.088)                (0.124)

N                           303                    302
R2                         0.019                  0.094
Adjusted R2                0.016                  0.066
Residual Std. Error   1.079 (df = 301)       1.053 (df = 292)
F Statistic         5.986** (df = 1; 301) 3.373*** (df = 9; 292)
==================================================================
Notes:                    ***Significant at the 1 percent level.
                           **Significant at the 5 percent level.
                           *Significant at the 10 percent level.
```

Table 7

This multiple regression model confirms the statistical significance of the relationship between the domestic treatment and the support level for Dutch leadership.

The coefficient of the explanatory variable slightly decreases to 0.277 in the multiple regression compared to the simple regression, and the adjusted R-squared means that the model is able to explain 6.6% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. This roughly consistent coefficient level supports the models in this and the previous section and the survey design. The small increase may be explained by the bad reputation that some international organisations such as the UN, mentioned in the first test question but not the second, have. Therefore, people may be more inclined to respond with positivity rather than indifference where there is no international organisation involved. Moreover, a very small minority of respondents spontaneously, without prompt, commented at the end of the survey that they preferred the Netherlands for this test question because they perceived it as larger or more diverse, which in their opinion makes it more qualified for demographic research. While these biases are interesting to consider and speculate about, the consistency of results across the first and second questions support the models' findings.

The coefficient is only slightly higher than for test question 1, while the explanatory power has almost doubled. This is because in this multiple regression, more control variables were found to be statistically significantly correlated: in this case, belonging to the age group 25-54 and holding dual or a non-UK nationality, but not the possession of a degree. Surprisingly, holding dual or a non-UK nationality on average led respondents to be less likely to show a change in support levels of the Netherlands (see Table 13 in the Appendix). This may be due to a high level of scepticism, or the fact that this group is on average more educated than the rest of the sample: 67.2% of dual or non-UK nationals hold a university degree in this sample. This education level may in turn affect scepticism, and non-UK nationality and education levels together may have a complex effect that brings about coefficients of varying statistical significance. Reinforcing this is the fact that education level is once again negatively correlated with support for Dutch leadership, although not at a statistically significant level, which precludes us from drawing conclusions.

The results demonstrate with a 95% confidence interval a positive relationship between the explanatory variable, *domestic treatment*, and the outcome variable, support for Dutch leadership. There is again a statistically significant difference between the means of the control group and treatment group, as illustrated in the following graph.
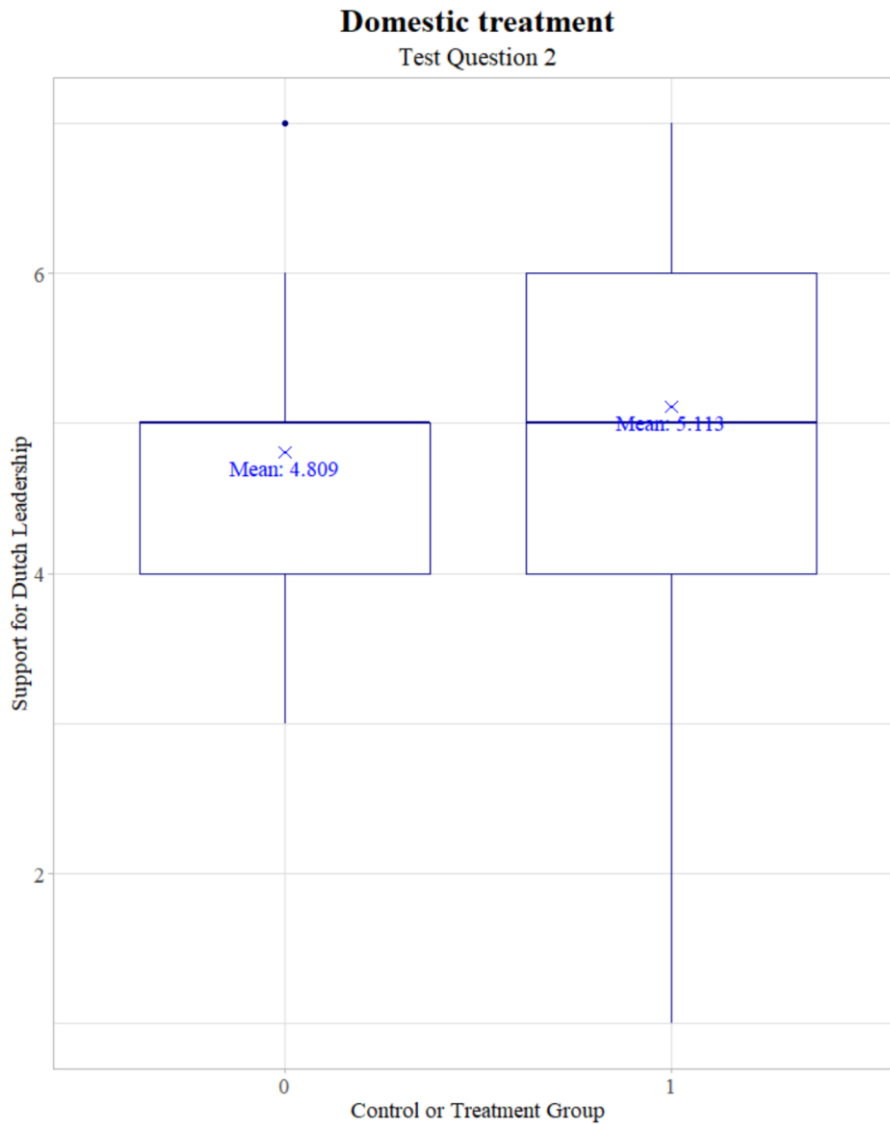
Domestic treatment

Test Question 2

Figure 6

The control group continues to demonstrate some "default" support for the Netherlands with a mean response above 4. Nonetheless, given the statistically significant difference between the means, for this comparison and test question, we can once again reject the premise that $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between reading the domestic treatment vignette and soft power outcomes), based on a 95% confidence level.

4.3 Comparison 2: control vs. international treatment

Comparison 2 measures the difference in support for Dutch leadership between the group that read the baseline text about the Netherlands only and the group that additionally read the international treatment vignette. The latter, as a reminder, contained information about an

international cycling infrastructure (diplomacy) achievement: the technical expertise aid that Dutch engineers have provided Washington D.C. with to help them build about 65 kilometres of new cycling lanes, increase the percentage of trips made by bicycle, and improve their policy goals.

4.3.1 Comparison 2: test question 1

Test question 1, as in Comparison 1, asks respondents to choose between the Netherlands and Luxembourg as sole leader of a project that will improve communication channels in international organisations such as the United Nations.

The simple OLS regression applied to this test question and the outcome variable showed a correlation. According to these results, which can be seen in Table 10, the addition of the international treatment translates to a 0.32-point increase in support for Dutch leadership, on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents a strong preference against Dutch leadership and 7 represents a strong preference for Dutch leadership. This represents a 0.07 increase on the coefficient compared respondents who received the domestic treatment.

The results of the simple OLS regression are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, with a t-value of 2.582 and p-value of 0.0103. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.01831 reveals that the addition of the domestic treatment is able to explain 1.831% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. In this comparison, for test question 1, we can thus observe a greater statistical significance and a doubled explanatory power compared to the results for the same question in Comparison 1.

Based on these results, we can most likely reject the premise that there is no correlation between the *international treatment* and the outcome variable, the *support for Dutch leadership*, and proceed to confirm this with a multiple regression analysis.

Table 8 below displays the results of the multiple regression analysis:

```
                    Regression Table: Experiment 2.1
================================================================
                                TQ1_1
                         (1)                    (2)
----------------------------------------------------------------
Group_number2            0.322**               0.305**
                        (0.125)               (0.124)

Age.L                                          0.141
                                              (0.152)

Age.Q                                          0.174
                                              (0.138)

Age.C                                         -0.068
                                              (0.129)

Gender2                                        0.144
                                              (0.124)

Gender3                                        1.379
                                              (1.091)

Education1                                    -0.336***
                                              (0.127)

Nationality1                                  -0.123
                                              (0.185)

Profession1                                    0.254
                                              (0.306)

Constant                 4.789***              4.950***
                        (0.088)               (0.128)

N                         305                   304
R2                        0.022                 0.076
Adjusted R2               0.018                 0.048
Residual Std. Error  1.088 (df = 303)       1.071 (df = 294)
F Statistic         6.669** (df = 1; 303) 2.696*** (df = 9; 294)
================================================================
Notes:              ***Significant at the 1 percent level.
                     **Significant at the 5 percent level.
                      *Significant at the 10 percent level.
```

Table 8

This multiple regression model confirms the statistical significance of the relationship between the domestic treatment and the support level for Dutch leadership.

The coefficient of the explanatory variable slightly decreases to 0.305 in the multiple regression compared to the simple regression, and the adjusted R-squared means that the model is able to explain 4.8% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. These figures are higher than in the first comparison's equivalent question: this suggests that the correlation between the explanatory and outcome variables has moved from being weak to moderate.

The model shows that possessing a university degree is again statistically significantly related to the dependent variable at the 99% confidence level. Once more, the correlation is negative; and once more, all other independent variables are not statistically significant.

Overall, the model shows a positive relationship between the explanatory variable, *international treatment*, and the outcome variable, *support for Dutch leadership*. There is a statistically significant difference between the means of the control group and treatment group, as illustrated in the following graph.
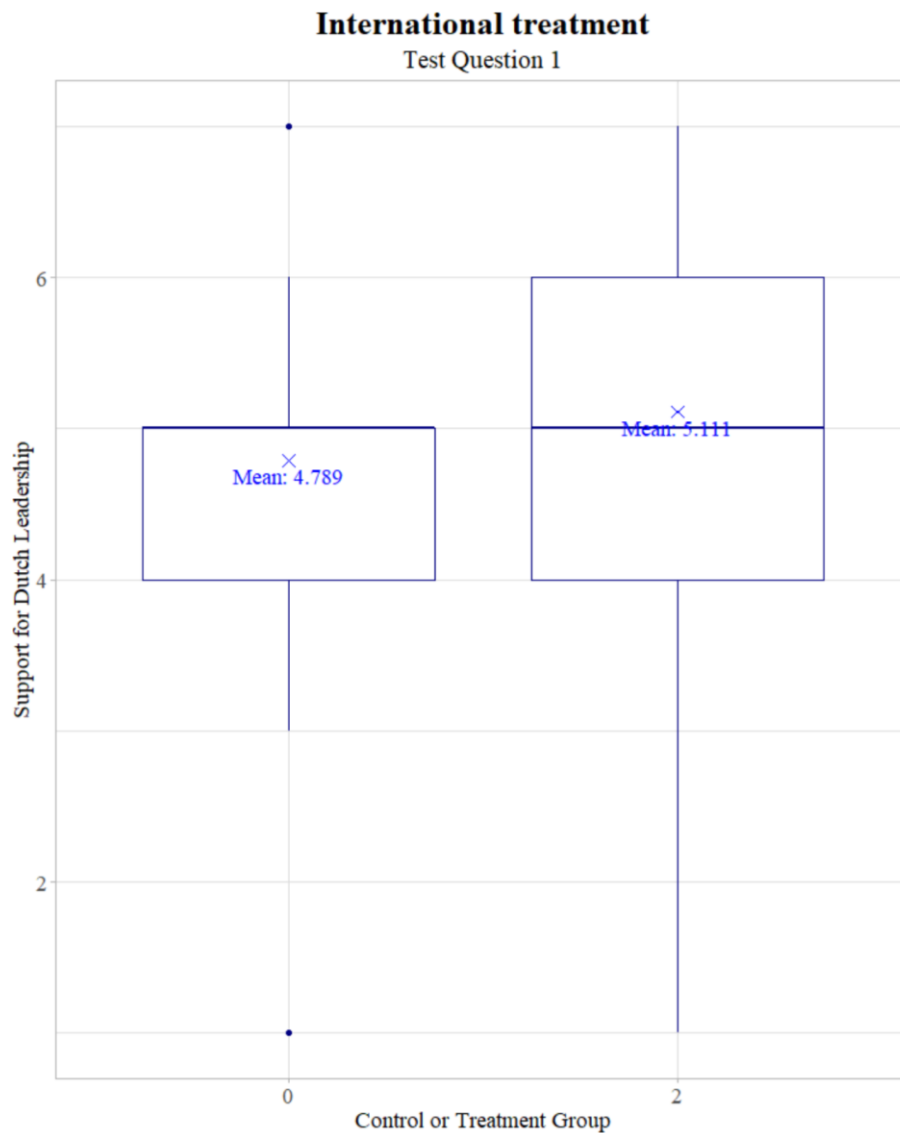
International treatment

Test Question 1

Figure 7

Given the statistically significant difference between the means, for this comparison and test question, we can once again reject the premise that $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between reading the international treatment vignette and soft power outcomes), based on a 95% confidence level.

4.3.2   Comparison 2: test question 2

Test question 2 once more asked respondents to choose between the Netherlands and Luxembourg as sole leader of a research project on changing demographics in the 21st century.

The simple OLS regression applied to this second test question and the outcome variable of the international treatment group also showed a correlation. According to these results, which can be seen in Table 11, the domestic treatment translates to a 0.36-point increase in support for Dutch leadership, on a scale of 1 to 7. This represents a 0.06 increase on the coefficient compared to respondents who received the domestic treatment.

The results of the simple OLS regression are statistically significant at the 99% confidence level, with a t-value of 3.004 and p-value of 0.00288. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.02572 reveals that the addition of the domestic treatment can explain 2.572% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. This is the highest value yet for the simple OLS regression.

Based on this information, it is possible to reject the premise that there is no correlation between the *international treatment* and the outcome variable, the *support for Dutch leadership*,, but once more, a multiple regression analysis will provide more evidence to do so.

Table 9 below displays the results of the multiple regression analysis:

```
                            Regression Table
===========================================================================
                                     TQ2_1
                            (1)                      (2)
---------------------------------------------------------------------------
Group_number2             0.361***                 0.350***
                          (0.120)                  (0.117)

Age.L                                               0.016
                                                   (0.144)

Age.Q                                               0.450***
                                                   (0.131)

Age.C                                               0.033
                                                   (0.122)

Gender2                                             0.216*
                                                   (0.117)

Gender3                                             1.105
                                                   (1.032)

Education1                                         -0.250**
                                                   (0.120)

Nationality1                                       -0.392**
                                                   (0.175)

Profession1                                         0.193
                                                   (0.289)

Constant                  4.809***                 4.938***
                          (0.085)                  (0.121)

N                           305                      304
R2                          0.029                    0.118
Adjusted R2                 0.026                    0.091
Residual Std. Error    1.048 (df = 303)         1.013 (df = 294)
F Statistic          9.027*** (df = 1; 303) 4.377*** (df = 9; 294)
===========================================================================
Notes:                      ***Significant at the 1 percent level.
                             **Significant at the 5 percent level.
                             *Significant at the 10 percent level.
```

Table 9

This multiple regression model confirms the statistical significance of the relationship between the domestic treatment and the support level for Dutch leadership.

The coefficient of the explanatory variable slightly decreases to 0.35 in the multiple regression compared to the simple regression, and the adjusted R-squared shows that the model is able to explain 11.8% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. These values, overall, are again the highest yet in the series of outcomes, denoting a stronger correlation and higher explanatory power of this model. Thus, for the combination *of the* international treatment with test question 2, the analysis finds the clearest indication of a relationship between explanatory variable and outcome variable.

Here , the largest assortment of variables shows statistically significant correlation: belonging to the 25-54 age group and being male are positively correlated, while education and nationality are negatively correlated. It is unclear through which process being male might affect the respondents' outcome choices; especially as this is the only combination of treatment and test question where it is the case. There are more male cyclists than female cyclists in the U.K. (e.g., MacMichael, 2021), which might bias them toward more positive responses in this cycling-themed experiment, but if this was the cause, there would most likely have been correlations in the other models too. As this variable is not central to the hypothesis, it is not analysed further.

Overall, the model shows a positive relationship between the explanatory variable, *international treatment*, and the outcome variable, *support for Dutch leadership*. There is a statistically significant difference between the means of the control group and treatment group, as illustrated in the following graph.
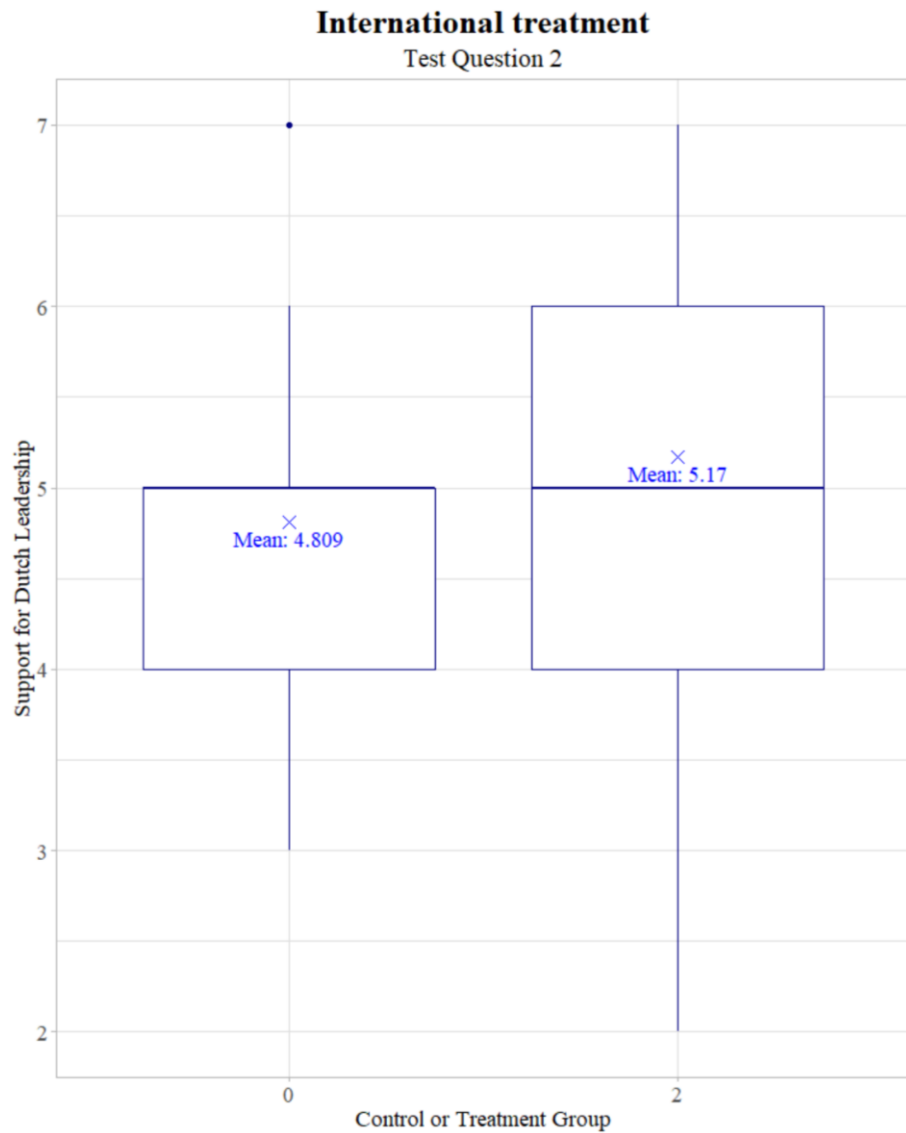
International treatment

Test Question 2

Figure 8

Given the statistically significant difference between the means, for this comparison and test question, we can once again reject the premise that $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between reading the international treatment vignette and soft power outcomes), based on a 99% confidence level.

4.4   Comparison 3: domestic vs. international treatment

As seen in sections 4.2-4.3, there is a difference between the means in each sample subgroup, and the difference between the control group and international treatment group is higher than the difference between the control group and the domestic treatment group. This section will

evaluate whether this difference is statistically significant using a simple OLS and a multiple regression to regress the groups against each other. Table 10 below summarises the means:

Differences in means: summary	
Test question 1	
Control	4.789
Domestic treatment	5.04
International treatment	5.111
Test question 2	
Control	4.809
Domestic treatment	5.113
International treatment	5.17

Table 10

The results of the regressions are presented in Table 11 below:

```
                    Regression Table: domestic vs. international treatment
=================================================================================================
                                    TQ1_1                              TQ2_1
                           (1)              (2)              (3)              (4)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Group_number2             0.071            0.085            0.057            0.073
                         (0.132)          (0.132)          (0.132)          (0.131)

Age.L                                      0.167                             0.119
                                          (0.158)                          (0.157)

Age.Q                                     -0.012                             0.133
                                          (0.149)                          (0.148)

Age.C                                      0.024                             0.003
                                          (0.137)                          (0.137)

Gender2                                    0.134                             0.160
                                          (0.132)                          (0.131)

Education1                                -0.343**                          -0.379***
                                          (0.137)                          (0.136)

Nationality1                              -0.406**                          -0.430**
                                          (0.196)                          (0.195)

Profession1                               -0.066                            -0.098
                                          (0.327)                          (0.325)

Constant                  5.040***         5.198***         5.113***         5.303***
                         (0.094)          (0.135)          (0.094)          (0.135)

N                         304              302              304              302
R2                        0.001            0.055            0.001            0.070
Adjusted R2              -0.002            0.029           -0.003            0.044
Residual Std. Error  1.149 (df = 302)  1.134 (df = 293) 1.152 (df = 302)  1.127 (df = 293)
F Statistic          0.293 (df = 1; 302) 2.124** (df = 8; 293) 0.188 (df = 1; 302) 2.749*** (df = 8; 293)
=================================================================================================
Notes:                                           ***Significant at the 1 percent level.
                                                  **Significant at the 5 percent level.
                                                   *Significant at the 10 percent level.
```

Table 11

The coefficients of the variable *Group_number*, which stands for the treatment group, show no statistical significance for the first or the second test question. The adjusted R-squared values for the simple OLS regressions are -0.002 and -0.003 for test questions 1 and 2 respectively. A negative adjusted R-squared value implies that the model is a bad fit for the data. The values do considerably improve for the multiple regressions. The adjusted R-squared values for these are 0.029 and 0.044 for test questions 1 and 2 respectively. This means that the models are able to explain 2.9% and 4.4% of the amount of variance in the level of support for Dutch leadership. However, this appears to be due to the statistical significance of the *education* and *nationality* variables, which are therefore better predictors of the outcome variable. None of the other control variables are statistically significant.

The lack of statistical significance of the variable *Group_number* in these regressions suggests that for this research design and sample size, exposing participants to technical expertise mattered more than where this technical expertise was applied, i.e., whether it was internationalised or not.

4.5 Robustness check

Performing Shapiro-Wilk's tests on the outcomes of each treatment group and test question respectively resulted in p-values less than 0.05, which means that the sample data is not normally distributed.

Therefore, I checked the robustness of my models with a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test. This test can detect differences in rank sums, which can indicate statistically significant differences in medians (Harris & Hardin, 2013, p. 337).

The test indicated that the domestic treatment outcomes were statistically significantly higher than the control group outcomes. The p-value of the test for test question 1 was 0.086, while the p-value for test question 2 was 0.008. Thus, the difference in medians of the former was statistically significant at the 90% level, while the latter was statistically significant at the 99% level. This difference in medians supports the earlier findings that there is a significant effect from the addition of the domestic vignette, enhancing the robustness of the model.

The test also indicated that the international treatment outcomes were statistically significantly higher than the control group outcomes. The p-value of the test for test question 1 was 0.009, while the p-value for test question 2 was 0.002. Thus, the differences in medians were statistically significant at the 99% level. This difference in medians supports our earlier findings that there is a significant effect from the addition of the international vignette, enhancing the robustness of the model.

Finally, the test indicated that the international treatment outcomes were not statistically significantly higher than the control group outcomes. The p-value of the test for test question 1 was 0.46, while the p-value for test question 2 was 0.696. This means that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the medians are equal. This is in line with the results of the simple and multiple regressions of Comparison 3, and provides further evidence to support the robustness of these findings.

4.6   Analysis of hypothesis

Given that the multiple regression models are robust, and given the calculations of the differences between means of the different experimental groups, under statistical significance or lack thereof, we can now examine the full hypothesis of this project.

This hypothesis was that the internationalisation of technical expertise, presented via vignettes, increases a country's soft power.

Comparison 1 showed that providing participants with a domestic treatment statistically significantly increased their mean support levels for Dutch leadership compared to the control group.

Comparison 2 showed that providing participants with an international treatment also statistically significantly increased their mean support levels for Dutch leadership compared to the control group.

The final comparison of the domestic treatment group and the international treatment group showed that although the international treatment group had a higher mean value of support for Dutch leadership, the difference between the means of the domestic treatment group and the international treatment group was not statistically significant.

From this, we may conclude that the presentation of technical expertise, whether it is domestic *or* international, has a statistically significant effect, but the *internationalisation* of technical expertise does not have a statistically significant effect in this sample.

Based on the quantitative analysis, this project has not been able to provide evidence for the alternative hypothesis. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis: $\beta_1 = 0$ (the slope is equal to zero: there is no statistically significant relationship between internationalised technical expertise and soft power).

4.7   Qualitative analysis: themes

This section will analyse the primary themes and sub-themes that emerged from the four interviews conducted (full interview transcripts are presented in the Appendix).

The first, most discussed theme was that of *influence*. All interviewees spoke in some form about the influence that cycling diplomacy had had on themselves, others, their communities or social and political structures or a combination of these. The most important of these forms of influence, based on the frequency and extent of discussion, was relationship-building and networking. The interviewees felt that it formed a significant part of what they did, and that it had produced positive outcomes for them and opened doors to wider collaborations (a second theme, discussed below). Moreover, influence can be direct or indirect, according to various examples given. Direct examples included engineers chatting to engineers, or showing an urban planning department directly that promoting cycling is not just a green, "leftist" cause, but can be valuable to everybody across the political spectrum. Indirect examples included the League of American Bicyclists using examples of successful outcomes of Dutch Cycling Embassy ThinkBike workshops in Austin and Delaware to lobby Congress.

Influence not only hinged on good Dutch reputation, which was a door-opener, but also on successful outcomes of cycling infrastructure diplomacy. Nonetheless, trying to build influence also comes with challenges, according to each interviewee. The adaptation of messaging to the local context was perceived as very important in order to prevent pushback or oversaturation, especially in the US context. Even so, existing influence, relationships or reputation was also seen as a way to overcome political differences between countries. Influence, where successful, appears to be a key mechanism of soft power, because it is able to touch or even change the hearts and minds of other populations. The examples given by the interviewees demonstrated that the internationalisation of cycling expertise was able to get others to *want* Dutch-style infrastructure, further access to Dutch expertise and partnerships, and even want to find out more about the Dutch. According to Luca, this leads to finding commonalities between activity participants' home culture and Dutch culture and values, which in turn leads to a stable positive image of the Netherlands, and a feeling of connection and trust that makes it "easy to choose [the] Netherlands" when it comes to leadership of international projects. This fits in well with Nye's definition of soft power: the ability of one country to get other countries to *want* what it wants, without "ordering" them to do so using hard power (Nye, 1990, p. 166), but also Solomon's suggestion that affective and aesthetic dynamics in identity construction are key to the attraction process in generating soft power.

A second overarching theme was that of *values* and their communication. The most common comment here was that the bike is a metaphor, symbol, or epitome of Dutch values. This was

part of the reason that interviewees felt it was such a good door-opener. One interviewee said that the bicycle was a key contributor to a positive long-term reputation of the Netherlands which could help it overcome political and diplomatic incidents, based upon its strong association with the country and recognisability, the ease of organising bike rides and tours as diplomatic connectors, and its association with quality of life, environmental friendliness and social equality in the Netherlands. These latter values were not always known by audiences, and thus may need to be communicated through tailored messaging and story-telling, as mentioned in the first theme. One interviewee mentioned that in his experience, people attending local bike festivals at which Dutch expert organisations had a presence was often the beginning of their "deep-dive" into Dutch culture and values. Another interviewee specifically mentioned the polder model of urban planning, in which the Dutch always strive for consensus. This is one of the mechanisms which demonstrates directly to workshop participants some Dutch values such as equality. Finally, several interviewees mentioned that these values and the positive reputation generated through the internationalisation of cycling expertise had spread further. For instance, Luca, who had participated in a study tour of Amsterdam and Nijmegen, mentioned that "when [he] was involved in very nice things, good experience, for [him] it's impossible to not spread it all around the world" to create "concrete moment[s] of discussion" at work, with his family and with his friends.

This theme is significant to the research because attraction to values is a key element of the soft power mechanism: "a country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies" (Nye, 2008, p. 94). The interviewees' confirmation that Dutch resources, such as values, are attractive, means that the first step of the soft power process can proceed to the second step. Attractiveness, in conjunction with the above theme, influence, can then develop into soft power. The *internationalisation* of technical expertise is valuable in this context because it what allowed the non-Dutch interviewees not only to see Dutch expertise, but to truly experience it and interact with it and its outcomes in their home countries. Luca spoke of how after organising a local bike event in Italy in collaboration with the embassy of the Netherlands, his interactions with a Dutch diplomat opened his eyes to the Dutch post-event evaluation process, which sparked appreciation in Luca. Had Dutch expertise merely been *communicated*, e.g. in a social media post similar to my experiment vignettes, this interaction most likely would not have happened. Bill spoke about his impression that local experts personally connecting to Dutch experts played a significant role in opening locals' minds to the Dutch approach to infrastructure, and made cycling diplomacy so effective. In this case,

the expertise was *internationalised* through the personal, "export-format" connections formed in on-site workshops, rather than, again, simply being communicated. Therefore, although this is limited qualitative evidence, it hints at *internationalisation* having the potential to play a unique and valuable role in the soft power process.

A third theme was that of the *expansion of collaboration*. All interviewees had experienced instances where cycling infrastructure diplomacy had opened doors to other opportunities. The most common area where this occurred was that of water management, in which the Netherlands also has a good international reputation, according to several interviewees. It may be that this frequency of topic is due to the fact that some Dutch engineering firms provide both cycling infrastructure engineering services as well as water infrastructure engineering and that this is therefore a "natural" collaboration. Several interviewees mentioned that many collaborations came about through networking opportunities that were provided through cycling-related events. Thus, the importance of networking as mentioned in the previous theme above cannot be underestimated. Cycling (expertise), in this sense, was perceived to be an easy, recognisable "entry point" or "positive […] Trojan horse". To a lesser extent there were also mentions of give and take as well as opportunities for bi-directional learning. Finally, there was a sense across all interviewees that much of this work took place at the "grassroots" level, and that this is integral to expanding these forms of collaboration and relationships. Collaboration seemed to be both a result and fostering mechanism of further influence, additionally strengthening this avenue of soft power in practice. This recalls the circularity of soft power generally, as theorised by Nye (see Section 2.2).

If *values* and *influence* can bring about the first stages of the soft power process, then *collaboration* can be interpreted as an additional way to get from the soft power stage to the soft outcomes stage (in addition to the direct effects of *influence* increasing willingness to follow international leadership directly). Unlike some of the spontaneous commenters in the survey, the non-Dutch interviewees stated or implied that they were willing to collaborate with the Netherlands in non-cycling areas of technical expertise, or that they had witnessed such collaborations develop. That being said, it is unclear how such willingness to collaborate particularly in technical projects translates specifically to outcomes at the international political level based on this limited qualitative data alone. Such mechanisms could not be uncovered through the interviews, even if the quantitative data and theory suggest that they do exist. Each of these sources will be combined into a cohesive analysis in the following section.

5 Discussion

On the basis of soft power theory literature, and the potential for technical expertise diplomacy to communicate culture, values and resources that may foster attraction in foreign publics, this research project hypothesised that the internationalisation of technical expertise would result in increased soft power for a state. However, as demonstrated by the comparison of the levels of the outcome variable of the domestic treatment group and the international treatment group in the survey experiment, there is no evidence to support this hypothesis. While qualitative data suggests that there are positive outcomes associated with public cycling diplomacy, the methodology is not rigorous enough to reject the null hypothesis. It is possible that these positive outcomes are correlated with the fact that technical expertise diplomacy is another vessel through which to communicate technical expertise, akin to providing a vignette, rather than that they are due to the *internationalisation* of the technical expertise, i.e. the "knowledge-sharing in an export format." These results are significant because at this stage they call into question the value of public diplomacy projects based upon the *internationalisation* of technical expertise.

From the results of the experiment, it appears that *communicating* either domestic or internationalised technical expertise is as effective a diplomatic measure as demonstrating and sharing it abroad. Comparing the outcome variable means of the domestic treatment group and the international treatment group against the outcome variable means of the control group respectively showed that each difference was statistically significant. Therefore, it appears to be the case that it is enough to inform foreign audiences in writing of technical expertise successes (either international or domestic) to raise their support levels for another's state leadership.

However, based on this research project, *internationalisation* of an attractive resource, such as technical expertise, need not be part of the soft power process for it to be successful. Perhaps then, some of the concerns about how sensitive soft power communication is, e.g., the suggestion that soft power strategies can only succeed under "fairly restrictive conditions" (Kroenig, McAdam, & Weber, 2010, p. 425), are overstated, based on the quantitative analysis of this project. That notwithstanding, the qualitative analysis did reveal that interviewees felt that the adaptation of messages to the local context was extremely important.

The interviews suggested that internationalisation may indeed play a specific role in the soft power process, but their limited number and methodological rigour is not sufficient to counterbalance the findings of the survey experiment. Nonetheless, they are able to provide additional qualitative evidence to reinforce the quantitative findings that communicating expertise, incorporating one of the themes, *values*, can generate some *influence*, another theme that emerged from the interviews. This in turn can sometimes lead to the *expansion of collaboration* into other technical areas. This provides a possible explanation for how technical expertise as a soft power resource could lead to the soft power stage within the soft power process as presented in this thesis, and in particular the quantitative analysis .

Overall, the research findings are able to provide counterevidence to some of the criticisms of soft power theory. This includes resource-attractiveness gap and the attraction-power gap, as the survey experiment results showed an unbroken causal link from the resources stage through to the soft power stage. The interviews hint that the soft power stage may also be connected to the soft outcomes stage. Successful outcomes of DCE workshops were discussed in Congress, and this may have positively influenced congressmen and congresswomen's perception of the Netherlands, as reading vignettes influenced the survey experiment participants. This evidence is not as methodologically strong as the survey experiment results, however, and merely constitute anecdotal evidence to counter the power-outcome gap criticism.

The survey findings may also counter the most extreme criticisms on the sensitivity of communication at the macro-level, as they showed that communication had an effect on the outcome variable in two distinct treatments. The misinterpretation and hegemony criticisms at the macro-level can be countered with caution as the experiment showed causal evidence for part of the soft power process for a non-hegemon based on resources outside international institutions, and it showed it for two separate test questions and thus two separate scenarios. The demonstrated causality and reliability can therefore counter the misinterpretation criticism that soft power may be an illusion formed by coincidence or specific policies that happen to be attractive.

Since the research showed that *internationalisation* of technical expertise is not essential to building soft power, it may be that this concept is not significantly better than *communication* at performing the functions of generating subjective attraction in the soft power process. This does not inform our understanding of narrative processes of attraction, as they were not tested via the survey experiment. However, in terms of theories of subjective attraction, it may be that

brilliance, beauty and benignity (Kitchen & Laifer, 2017, p. 820) are similarly projected via both vignettes; that certain foreign policies, as suggested by Nye (2008, p. 96), are not especially apt at generating soft power; and that the "aesthetic and emotional dimensions of politics" that lead to identity construction (Solomon, 2014, p. 721) are not substantially differently perceived in the two vignettes.

The experiments highlighted surprising negative correlations with dual and non-UK nationality and high education levels. Although these groups were more inclined to support Dutch leadership to begin with, they were less affected by the vignettes. This might be because those with university degrees assessed the presented situation more critically, and came to the conclusion that technical expertise in one area did not qualify a state for leadership in a different technical area. Indeed, some respondents left spontaneous and unprompted comments at the end of the survey to that effect. It is also worth noting that respondents with dual and non-UK nationality showed above-average education levels within the full sample. This possible scepticism ran counter to the evidence provided by non-Dutch interviewees, who spoke of collaborations developed from cycling diplomacy projects. Perhaps then there is a difference in process for those who participated in these projects in person vs. those who "only" read the international expertise vignette. This would be worth investigating in the future.

Finally, the research in this thesis has some limitations: the most significant limitation to generalisability to the U.K. and most, if not all, other countries is the sample population's high percentage of university degrees. The gender and age balance are roughly representative of the U.K., but other demographic variables such as income levels were not controlled for to keep the survey length within the realistic scope of this project. This means that the sample may also be skewed in undiscovered ways, and therefore less generalisable to the wider population of the U.K. Moreover, the project budget only allowed for a limited sample to detect medium-fine effects. This means that small effects may have gone undetected, a further limitation of the project. Additionally, Prolific, used for the recruitment of the survey experiment sample, has some limitations, such as selection bias. The qualitative sample was a purposeful sample, which limits the generalisability of the qualitative data. Lastly, a researcher-related limitation, particularly of the qualitative data, is that I completed an internship at the DCE, which may introduce some unique bias into the interview process.

6 Conclusion

This research project set out to answer the research question: *How does the internationalisation of technical expertise affect a state's soft power?* The project wanted to measure whether one general strategy to accumulate soft power, the internationalisation of technical expertise, is an effective way of building soft power. The importance of this research lay in the inherent importance of soft power, current trends in public diplomacy and mass communication, as well as a lack of quantitative or mixed methods studies of the soft power process.

To answer the research question, I conducted a survey experiment asking respondents to read some baseline information about the Netherlands, giving parts of the sample either a vignette about a domestic technical achievement or an internationalised technical diplomacy achievement, and then asking all respondents to indicate their level of support for Dutch leadership in an unrelated international project.

The outcomes confirmed the expectation that those who read the domestic vignette would have a higher average level of support for Dutch leadership than the control group, and that those who read the international vignette would have a higher average level of support for Dutch leadership than both the control group and the domestic treatment group. The data analysis showed that the difference in means between the domestic treatment group and the control group was statistically significant. It also showed that the difference in means between the international treatment group and the control group was statistically significant. However, the difference in means between the domestic treatment group and the international treatment group was not statistically significant.

This suggests that the *internationalisation* of technical expertise does not impact soft power levels in a statistically significant way. The experiment did, however, show that the communication of technical expertise has a statistically significant impact on the support for a country's leadership in different international projects. Based on soft power theory literature, this suggests that communicating technical expertise indeed has a positive, measurable and tangible impact on a country's soft power levels.

Thus, this thesis has produced results which may be of relevance to decisionmakers and policymakers when deliberating on public diplomacy projects and soft power strategies. Equally, this research project, like all, is not without limitations, which may be addressed by further research.

Firstly, any further research should use a bigger sample. This would allow researchers to identify finer effects from the sample, such as those present in the difference between the means of the international treatment group on the domestic treatment group. Secondly, research should also be performed on international cycling workshop participants directly, or with an "interactive" treatment (where participants experience internationalised technical expertise in person) to try to detect an effect of experiencing *internationalisation* more thoroughly than just in a vignette, as the non-Dutch interviewees had. Such interaction communicates national values, culture, and resources that may be attractive even more comprehensively than reading a vignette, and may therefore yield larger differences in means of the outcome variable. An interactive treatment could include experiencing first-hand the outcomes of successful internationalisation of technical expertise, such as the cycling lanes in Washington D.C. described in the international treatment vignette. This could be implemented as a before-and-after study design, measuring participants' support levels for Dutch leadership before and after the treatment. Alternatively, and less costly, would be to conduct the research on a sample that includes past participants of DCE workshops and study tours, where technical expertise has been internationalised in an interactive way. Knowing whether it has a statistically significant impact on soft power levels would be valuable to inform practical policy and budget decisions. It could also provide information to refine soft power literature, especially those branches addressing the processes and conditions of the perception of attractiveness.

Furthermore, the study's outcomes raised some questions. Why was there a difference in means between test questions 1 and 2? Does this mean that soft power transfers better to some areas than to others? Additional investigation of the ad-hoc finding that the *education* and *nationality* variables are closely and negatively correlated with the outcome variable would also be highly interesting. Practically, finding answers to these questions could help diplomatic decisionmakers better target their projects and improve their messaging, while also providing legislators with some guidance on where their country's soft power strengths may lie and extend to. Academically, this research would be just as relevant. If soft power does indeed transfer better to some areas than to others, it would be most informative to understand why and in what patterns it transfers: is there a spectrum within a limited field or topic area? Or is the transfer more network-like? And what are the mechanisms behind the *education* and *nationality* variables' behaviour? Are there any other demographic variables that behave similarly? Such questions would inform fascinating and useful outcomes, driven in the first instance by this research.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Additional statistics

Differences in mean support for Dutch leadership, based on **university education**, in Comparison 1, Test Question 1:

Mean support for Dutch leadership , TQ_1	
Without degree	
Control	4.957
Domestic treatment	5.232
Difference	0.275
With degree	
Control	4.651
Domestic treatment	4.878
Difference	0.227

Table 12

Differences in mean support for Dutch leadership, based on **nationality**, in Comparison 1, Test Question 2:

Mean support for Dutch leadership , TQ_2	
UK nationals	
Control	4.844
Domestic treatment	5.187
Difference	0.343
Dual or non-UK nationals	
Control	4.529
Domestic treatment	4.5
Difference	-0.029

Table 13

8.2 Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests: detailed results

```
> wilcox.test(TQ1_1 ~ Group_number, data = TD)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ1_1 by Group_number
W = 10228, p-value = 0.08634
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

> wilcox.test(TQ2_1 ~ Group_number, data = TD)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ2_1 by Group_number
W = 9529.5, p-value = 0.007595
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

>
> wilcox.test(TQ1_1 ~ Group_number, data = TI)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ1_1 by Group_number
W = 9702, p-value = 0.008838
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

> wilcox.test(TQ2_1 ~ Group_number, data = TI)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ2_1 by Group_number
W = 9328.5, p-value = 0.001781
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

>
> wilcox.test(TQ1_1 ~ Group_number, data = TDI)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ1_1 by Group_number
W = 11006, p-value = 0.4596
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0

> wilcox.test(TQ2_1 ~ Group_number, data = TDI)

        Wilcoxon rank sum test with continuity correction

data:  TQ2_1 by Group_number
W = 11262, p-value = 0.6962
alternative hypothesis: true location shift is not equal to 0
```

Thesis survey - Prolific sample

Please consent to participation in this study by reading the information below and clicking on the "I consent" button.

This survey forms part of a research project for a Master's thesis. It is being conducted by Emma Stubbe, student at Leiden University in the Netherlands. If you have any concerns or questions about this survey, please contact Emma at e.b.stubbe@umail.leidenuniv.nl.

Participation is voluntary
It is your choice whether to participate in this research. If you choose to participate, you may change your mind and leave the study at any time. Ending or refusing participation will involve no penalty.

What is the purpose of this research?
The aim of this study is to learn about the impacts of technical expertise on people's perception of a country's capabilities and political power.

How long will this research take?
Your participation will take about 4 minutes.

What can I expect if I take part in this research?
As a participant, you will be asked to make a decision between various choice options after reading a short text. You will also complete a small questionnaire.

If I take part in this research, how will my privacy be protected? What happens to the information you collect?
The data we collect will be kept confidential. Your name will never be associated with your responses. Thus, we will not know which responses you chose. We won't use your name or information in any way that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

By continuing with this study, I agree to take part in this research

○ I consent to participation (1)

○ I DO NOT consent to participation (2)

We welcome participation from anybody who: Is over the age of 18   Does **NOT** have close ties to the Netherlands (in the form of nationality, current or former residency, or direct family links). Please confirm that you are eligible to participate:

○ I am eligible to participate (1)

○ I am NOT eligible to participate (2)

⊙

What is your Prolific ID? *Please note that this response should auto-fill with the correct ID*

_____

What age group do you belong to?

Please respond carefully.

○ 18 - 24 (1)

○ 25 - 54 (2)

○ 55 - 64 (3)

○ 65+ (4)

○ Prefer not to say (9)

What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / third gender (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ Some Primary (1)

○ Completed Primary School (2)

○ Some Secondary (3)

○ Completed Secondary School (4)

○ Vocational or Similar (5)

○ Some University but no degree (6)

○ University Bachelors Degree (7)

○ Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS) (8)

○ Prefer not to say (9)

What is your nationality?

○ United Kingdom only (1)

○ Other nationality. Please specify below: (3)
_____

○ Dual Citizenship. Please specify below: (2)
_____

The Netherlands is a country in Europe with an area of 41,865 km2 and a population of about 17.7 million.

There are about 23 million bicycles in the country, and 36% of Dutch people list the bicycle as their most frequent way of getting around on a typical day (source: Quality of Transport report, European Commission. December 2014).

In 2019, the Netherlands opened the world's largest bicycle parking facility at Utrecht Central Station. It has three storeys of parking for 12,500 bicycles.

In the Netherlands, there are over 500,000 bike parking spaces available next to train stations in total, and on average 25,000 are added each year. By 2040, the country aims to have at least 650,000 spaces available.

The Dutch Cycling Embassy, sponsored by the Netherlands' government, has organised over 45 workshops around the world to make Dutch cycling expertise accessible to cities and municipalities everywhere.

In Washington D.C., USA, this programme has directly contributed to the design and building of 40 miles of cycling paths, with many more planned.

The percentage of trips that take place by bicycle has increased from about 3.5% to 20% in the last 15 years.

The city has made ambitious plans for the future, with carbon neutrality and zero traffic fatalities envisioned for the next decades, inspired by the Dutch approach.

How well-developed do you consider Dutch cycling infrastructure expertise to be?

	Not well at all	Moderately well	Extremely well
	1 2 3	4 5	6 7

Move slider to respond. Press slider to choose 4. To intentionally leave question blank: do not touch slider, and proceed. ()	

Where do you get most of your news from?

☐ Social media (1)

☐ Print media (2)

☐ TV or radio (3)

☐ Websites or apps of traditional news sources (4)

☐ Other (5) _____

The Netherlands and Luxembourg are presenting a plan before the United Nations. In this plan, they wish to lead an initiative that will improve communication channels in international organisations such as the United Nations.

Your government must vote for only one country to lead the plan.

Which country would you prefer your government chooses? Indicate this on the scale below.

	Strongly prefer Luxembourg	Indifferent	Strongly prefer the Netherlands
	1 2 3	4 5	6 7

Move slider to respond. Press slider to choose 4. To intentionally leave question blank: do not touch slider, and proceed. ()	[slider]

The Netherlands and Luxembourg would like to coordinate international research on changing demographics in the 21st century.

Your government must vote for only one country to lead the research.

Which country would you prefer your government chooses? Indicate this on the scale below.

	Strongly prefer Luxembourg	Indifferent	Strongly prefer the Netherlands
	1 2 3	4	5 6 7

Move slider to respond. Press slider to choose 4. To intentionally leave question blank: do not touch slider, and proceed. ()	[slider]

End of Block: Test_questions

Start of Block: Final_control_questions

Have you ever participated in a Dutch Cycling Embassy (DCE) activity?

◯ No (1)

◯ No, but my colleague/friend/family member did and told me about it (2)

◯ Yes - if yes, please provide more detail: which, where, when and was it online or offline? (3)
_____

Have you previously, or do you currently work OR study in one of these fields?

This can include technician, managerial, administrative or communications/journalistic roles in the field.

○ Urban planning, mobility design or architecture (incl. policy and environmental planning) (1)

○ Traffic, highway or transportation engineering (2)

○ Roadbuilding and maintenance (incl. construction, project management, environmental or safety regulation of roads and networks) (3)

○ Policing (4)

○ International HGV operation/transportation (5)

○ No, I work or study in an unrelated field (6)
_____

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

The aim of this survey is to learn about the impacts of technical expertise on your perception of a country's capabilities and political power.

If you wish to leave any comments or feedback, please do so in the box below.

If you have any urgent concerns or questions after filling out this survey, please contact Emma Stubbe at e.b.stubbe@umail.leidenuniv.nl.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8.4   Interview transcripts

Luca – 3.05.22

Emma: So how long have you been working in your current role?

Luca: Since 2012, because I'm director of Napoli bike festival and this year we will have the 11th edition of our festival that is based on the promotion of the bicycle culture. So for this reason we since, from the beginning, we tried to create a relationship between Italy and Naples, of course our city, in the southern part of Italy, and the Dutch world regarding bicycle culture, of course.

And we had… we were very lucky because since the… starting from the third edition, we had first the partnership of the Embassy of the Netherlands. We planned several initiatives to spread bicycle culture, in our city, in our region. For example, during this year we had a very important study tour in Amsterdam and Nijmegen to know directly from the actor more about this topic: how cities can grow, starting from a bicycle at the centre of the planification. We involved in this activity our municipality, people representing NGOs, people representing local public transportation, and we realised after this event a workshop in Italy a workshop to spread the results of this activity. In the following years, we realised different initiatives. Starting from the appointment of the Napoli bike festival towards key speakers regarding different topics of the bicycle culture. For example, we *involved* [?] the international cargo bike festival to promote the possibility to create a cultural shift in our city also on this topic (regarding the possibility to use the bicycle for the delivery of foods, things, stuff, or whatever). We created also a collaboration, from the artistic point of view, with some architects from Dutch country to imagine the layout of some squares in Naples and also for example bicycle racks.

Two or three years ago, we created a very interesting collaboration at university level because we involved bike Professor Mark [???]. He's the team leader/organiser of the summer school that was organised by the Amsterdam University on bicycle culture more or less. And starting from that seminary, now we have in Italy, not only Naples, the project that involved different research and professor all around our country regarding the bicycle, car, so different topics. So for us the collaboration with the Dutch country of course is important.

But… is more than important because the involvement of the Dutch country through the Embassy is like a *pattern/patent* that we are on the right way. Because of course in Italy, in particular in the south of Italy, we have to do a lot of things in this field. There are a lot of difficulties regarding the idea of the bicycle as a way of connection for peoples… for people. But the opportunity that we have to involve every… different moment of the years… because… there is a fluid collaboration not only in this period, for example, the period of the Napoli Bike Festival but all over the year.

I know that I can call Aart or different key person that are involved in this activity for the advocacy on this topic so for me, this is very important for our city. In fact, we are very happy to have this strong collaboration. For us it's very very very important.

Emma: Okay, that's really interesting to hear. Thank you. How much does the general public hear about the collaborative side. So, for instance, when people attend the festival, is there a noticeable Dutch presence or is it very much focused on the city of Naples and different kinds of bicycles, different kinds of infrastructure, etc, etc. Is there a Dutch presence and if yes, is it something that people notice would you say?

Luca: Well, the Dutch presence is important because people and the public that often participate to our events… is a little bit… not sure that bicycle could really represent the solution. Starting to hear from them [the Dutch] that it is quite a normal story. Because 30 years ago, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the other cities of Dutch country… in these cities, the situation was more or less the same of our city today.

So the possibility to hear this kind of story creates a very important follow up in the public. For this reason, they… after all our events, people also after different months, I heard from people that had been to our events: I remember when the speaker from Amsterdam said that bicycle is not an ideology but a concrete opportunity to solve the problem of traffic. So, there is also another important aspect that I want to stress in this conversation: that we had also the possibility to start from zero and create after different years a model of coming… people that want to visit Naples by bike.

One of the key actors of this process, of course are people from Dutch country, because we also in this period, but more or less the whole year, except January or some period where it's cold also in Naples… a lot of people from Dutch country. So there is a very, very strong collaboration also, on the touristic point of view. This is very important.

Emma: Okay. Thank you. I'm interested in the in the different ways that people but also decision makers in Italy, so Italians, interact with the Netherlands. So, you mentioned a study tour. For example, you mentioned speakers are there any other ways that Italians are coming into contact with Dutch bicycle expertise. I'm specifically interested in the formats.

Luca: Yes, yes. Starting from our events there were very a lot of possibilities of collaboration for other countries because our Napoli Bike Festival that more people, of course from our region, but also people from [other regions]… and I was very happy to see that starting from that occasion, people had the possibility to create a strong collaboration or with the speaker from Dutch world.

Emma: Okay. Then my next question would be how do you think that these different groups of people coming into contact with Dutch bicycle expertise… do you think that influences their opinions on the Netherlands?

Or is it something does it change in any way their opinion on the Netherlands or do you think they very much for instance, only focus on the cycling aspect and don't think any more about the Netherlands? Or do they maybe go away and think hey, the Dutch are doing really well in cycling, maybe then they're also good at other things.

Does that make sense?

Luca: Yes, these are very good questions. And I think that in my opinion… the work that the Netherlands do to promote, spread the bicycle culture is very important to attract people to other aspects, other key points of Netherland culture. In fact, lot of people have said to me that starting from bicycle, they go in-deep in the Netherland culture. And they, more or less, find a common path that specially in the field of freedom, the possibility that they do to citizen to self-empowerment, in the seat [17.07] and the effort that the Netherland culture put to promote common law, equal opportunity, and the bicycle is like a metaphor, you know, because, if you can move very easily in different parts of the city, you can also find a job, and you can decide which kind of people you want to have a relationship with, women-women, or men with men or whatever, and also regarding of the, very culture based on freedom. But, freedom not in the way of, "I can do what I want" but with the very sense of respect with the other but with the possibility to do what you really want. I hope that's clear.

Emma: Yeah, that makes sense. Thank you. Do you think… this is a slightly trickier question. Do you think that respect for the Dutch culture and let's say the Dutch people translates also to respect for the political actions of the Netherlands and… I know this is a bit tricky for Italians, especially because for instance… there's a criticism of soft power theory. So soft power being sort of… the non-military power and the ability to be a leader in the international arena…

There's a criticism that says just because people of one country find the people of a different country attractive, find the culture attractive, that doesn't mean that they will agree with the politics. And I think Italy and the Netherlands have a history of disagreeing politically within Europe, especially within the EU. In your opinion, from what you've heard: Do you think that people being attracted to Dutch culture as you've just described, also affects how they think of the Netherlands politically?

Luca: Well, I think that we live in a period where the politician level doesn't stress the discussion with the neutral [20.25] level. I think that the problem between Italy and Netherlands, or Germany and Netherlands, or both can create a news, television, or newspaper or for one, two days, a week, a month, after the relevance of the news, the idea that you have regarding the country is stronger than the short term of news that say, I don't know what. Because the power of the image of Netherland people is stronger and is based on totem as bicycle as freedom and, I don't know why, coffee shop or whatever. If you link this totem, to worth [22.04], you can create your own idea regarding the country. And, I

think that the lesson is not easy to create another image in few weeks. So, it's important, its relevant that you have a strong culture and you spread it all around the world since many images [22.55], the key factor that give an idea of a country more or less.

Emma: That makes sense. Thank you. Okay.

You might have seen in the emails that I had heard through the Dutch Cycling Embassy also – actually, have you worked directly with the Dutch cycling embassy or just with the official embassy of the country of the Netherlands?

Luca: The Dutch Cycling Embassy? Yes, in fact, the traveller work that I told you before, was organized by the Dutch Cycling Embassy.

Emma: So I heard… so I did my internship last summer with them, and Lucas told me that… I think it was in 2020… There was a series of comments from Dutch ministers and also the Prime Minister, where he and they said some things that were not very diplomatic about Italy, regarding Italy's economic situation and things like […]

Luca: Yes, I remember that was a very, very strong moment between our time. So, we were a little bit scared in that moment because it was a common discussion not only in the political sector about this. But as I told you before, after few weeks, few days, anybody remember about this.

Emma: So did you hold an event a few weeks or a few months? After those comments became or ended up over the period?

Luca: Do you remember the period? Which period of the year? Because, I […]

Emma: I don't really remember.

Luca: Because with Aart, it was a pleasure to discuss with Aart, not only about bicycle and these kinds of things but also politics, Italian and Netherlands politics. And well, Aart is a diplomatic man, so he was very able, you know, to put the discussion in few seconds on another level, and was very useful because someone said to us, "well you are organizing things with Netherlands but you know that they said that we are not very good and [bla bla bla]". Well, its just, not regarding the relationship between the countries but it's regarding relationship between politicians. So, for me, the relevant thing is the connection that I can create with people, with young entrepreneurship, […] [26.48] and of this level, I can measure the situation, not starting from things that are far from the day by day.

Emma: okay, that's very interesting. So, it sounds to me like there's a big difference between the substantial relationship between the people and the country so long-term collaboration, and being willing to start projects together. And that's sort of the more short-term political discussions. So it sounds like let's say Italy, Italians might be more willing to support a concrete collaboration with the

Netherlands on a very specific project, but if I maybe went to somebody in the street in Italy and said, Do you like the Netherlands then? Maybe they would be like they're nice people but their politicians are maybe not so nice. So, they might not say, you know, hey, it's our favourite country in the United Nations or something like that. That actually there is a good long-term connection between the people is that right? So there's that difference between the maybe the politics and the people.

Luca: Yes, there is a difference, is very strong very clear, but, if this could be a problem for the Dutch culture, I think that the one possibility is to reinforce the collaboration well but my point of view of course it's not common to other people because I know more than what can know, other people about the relationship, about the important activity that the Netherlands do for us because I want to stress this topic, first that is our municipality, region […] [29.45]. When we decide to organize the festival, in advance to promote bicycle culture from our side with the Netherlands with the support. So, for me, not only for me but all the people that loves bicycle and the idea of another kind of city knows very well that was very hard to say to Dutch Embassy, "Okay, I want to support the Napoli Bike Festival" because it was more easily to more or less, for example, to support the advance of the Northern part of Italy where these stuff are more common. So, I think that for me and for people that work with my organization, people that are involved in our events, nothing can change the idea that we have regarding the Dutch country. So, this is very very clear.

Emma: Okay. As my last question then, I don't know if you read in my very first email to Aart, that I am doing a mixed method study so I'm doing a survey and then calculating basically quantitative analysis, statistics etc, on the survey answers and my survey is for people in the UK, people of all ages, all genders etc, I just chose the UK to limit the data for now. And so, I would be curious to hear how you would respond to survey question. So I just going to show you very briefly.

So, basically the survey set up so that some people, everybody gets a very basic text about the Netherlands, it just says the population, the number of bicycles, which is of course higher than the total amount of people because people have more than one bicycle, it said something like... well I can't remember. Its just a very very basic short paragraph about the Netherlands and then, one third of those who are responding to my survey receive another bit of information about the huge bike parking facility in Utrecht, I don't know if you have heard of it, the twelve thousand five hundred bicycle racks, very impressive facility. And then another one third of the sample receives another text about the Dutch Cycling Embassy, Cycling Embassy's work in Washington DC, where they have managed to help the city build sixty-five kilometres of new cycling, like high quality cycling routs and have done in the middle of improvement to the infrastructure and to the mentality there [33.37]. So, my expectation is that, each group will read a slightly different text, will have a different answer and, of course you are not reading the text now but I'm going to read you the test questions that people need to answer, because

I am very curious how you will answer those two questions. They are very similar. So I'm going to read you the first question;

So, the Netherlands and Luxembourg are jointly presenting a plan before the United Nations. In this plan, they are proposing to lead an initiative that will improve communication in international organizations such as the Netherlands. Your country, your government can only choose one of the two countries to lead the final project to as you choose either Netherlands or Luxembourg as the leader for this international project. How strongly would you support either Luxenberg or the Netherlands? So, if Luxembourg is 1, and you really really want Luxembourg to lead the project, and the Netherlands is 7, and you really really want the Netherlands to lead the project, and then 4 is neutral, you don't care what country leads the project, on a scale of one to seven, which country would you choose as the international leader?

Luca: Well, I can choose Netherlands of course. Because we have a relationship so to me, it's better to support Netherlands because we can create us an opportunity starting from this leadership, this programme, no?

Emma: Okay… would that be your main reason or would there be any other reasons you would choose Netherlands?

Luca: No. The relevant reason is because I know Netherlands, and I know in deep from my point of view and I don't know Luxembourg. And also, regarding the discussion that we had before, the reason, the possibility to put on the same level, the Luxembourg and Netherlands, Luxembourg is more or less famous for banks, for what. I have more relationship with the Netherlands, for my first point of view in the cycling car show [37.06], but also, different topics regarding the freedom or approach to the different aspect of life, the planning of the city, and those stuff that you said before. So, for me, its very easy to choose Netherlands.

Emma: Okay. And then, out of curiosity, is that something you talk about with people outside of work, or is that something that very much stays within your work life? Because I'm curious if that kind of reputation spreads organically or not so much.

[38.17] Luca: Can you repeat? Because I had a problem with the connection.

Emma: Yeah. Let me just switch off the video for a moment because I am also having problems. Is your opinion and experience with the Netherlands, something that you talk about outside of work, or is it something that stays inside the office basically? Because I am curious to know if that reputation spreads…

Luca: No. Of course outside. Because when I was involved in very nice things, good experience, for me its impossible to not spread it all around the world. So, for me, really, one of the most important

relevant opportunity that I had in the last years was to create a ==concrete moment of discussion== level. So of course, I spread, with my work family, my work friends, and the ==injure [39.53]== municipality and so on.

Emma: Wow! Okay. That's really good for the Netherlands. I will turn the video back on.

Thank you very much for your time, that was really informative, really interesting. So, just to summarize, basically, I am trying to prove that soft power does something, basically that it exists. Because there is a lot of criticisms of it, and I'm trying to prove that there is a ==colossal [4.25]== effect between basically technical expertise, ==bit== public diplomacy, based on technical expertise, for example, bicycle workshops, that's my case study, and I'm trying to show that they do help to establish a long term soft power for the Netherlands basically, that it does influence other populations, other countries, other people, so that's really interesting. You were really helpful and that's all really good to know. Thank you very much for your time. Do you have any other questions yourself or do you have anything to add?

Luca: Yes. No, I want to add one last 2 things. One, that I understand from, I call it the Dutch lesson, it is not regarding the cycling ==car show [41.15]==, is regarding the ==way to evaluate events==. I remember that, after the first initial where we had the collaboration with the Embassy, the day after I was very tired after the events with a few of we were sleeping. In the morning, Aart said, Luca I want to have a quick feedback on the events. I said okay, and while we had coffee, he said, "okay, event is good for this, this, this and bad for this, this and this". For me it was strong and the level of events was positive. But of course, he said in this few points you can do better and for me it was a lesson because, in our culture, we are more diplomatic, we say "this is good" or "more or less is good" and you don't go in deeper and say the very mad point. And I appreciate a lot, not in the first moment of course, it was a shock for me, but, to say it the opportunity that Aart meant to be was, work on these things. Like, it's okay, you can be happy for this work, but we have to work on these 2, 3 things.

And the last thing I want to add is, the discussion that the Netherlands are doing on this topic is important and relevant to say, "oh, look at how they discussing about ==the feedback that this kind of political level can have to the citizen==". So, I appreciate a lot, the topic of this discussion, in the beginning, it was very clear in the beginning of the call but now the works that you are doing with the university, will need a concrete example as per my opinion, Netherlands opinion.

Emma: Okay… That's interesting. Realistically, I am not from the Netherlands myself, I am an international student studying here, so I am also kind of experiencing Dutch culture as an outsider and experiencing Dutch comments on their politicians' comments also as an outsider, and I think it is a quite mixed situation where of course, some people agree with their politicians but also a lot of people don't agree with the comments that their politicians make. So, a lot of people see the comments those

ministers and others made and they say like, that's so embarrassing, impossible, why would they say that. So, it is really true that politicians don't always represent the citizens.

Luca: Well, yes. It's a problem that for one or two people you can use the affinity, the collaboration from countries. This is a problem of course. But for this reason, we have to give more power to the NGOs, to all the activity that are starting at the ground level that are very relevant to give the real idea of controversy. So, this is difficult of course. I know this because I'm in the Naples, Naples is the city where there are a lot of scleroticals [47.29]. We are in the Southern part of Italy, regarding the North where the people that don't want to work, don't want to [blab la bla] so fact for us is it is very difficult to promote the bicycle culture. But if you go in the scooter, in 3 pairs or 4 pairs, without helmets, for example, "oh! You can promote the bicycle culture" and those things are said not only from the people that loves Naples, but also from people that leaves Naples. When they are using bicycles, people say "no we can't change, never! It's impossible!" so it's difficult but it's our job.

[small talk, end of conversation]

Lilian – 4.05.22

[small talk, introduction to project, data privacy and consent…]

Emma: How long have you been working in your role?

Lilian: I started in July of 2016. So it's been six years.

Emma: Wow. Okay. And what exactly do you do?

Lilian: Good question. I work for the Department of Infrastructure and Water management at the Netherlands embassy in Washington. And my specific portfolio concentrates on tracking policy on aviation and maritime issues and promoting and helping us organisations, cities, departments of transportation, etc. into finding the expertise to help them develop better cycling cities. That's I think the best way to put it [coughing]

Emma: Okay, so you're spot on in the area I'm looking for. So I'm looking to find out a little bit more about your experience of the impact that your role and your work has on both the general public in the US or at least in the cities that you work with, as well as the higher governmental level. Perhaps the state level is a little bit high to aim but certainly the political level of cities, municipalities communities. So how do you think your work or for instance, also the Dutch Cycling Embassy's work affects the people that you work with?

Lilian: I think so… when I when I started the position. I really dove into dealing with you know, going to conferences on cycling matters and things like that. And what you notice is when you visit locations that are specifically directed to cycling or physical conferences that have to do with urban mobility or cycling in broader aspect, people always come and visit you and say, Oh, we love cycling in the Netherlands. So it's, it's gone so far now in the past six years that when I go to conferences, I receive emails afterwards from people thinking I work for the Dutch Cycling Embassy, because I present myself as working for the Netherlands embassy in Washington, but they see cycling and we always have Dutch Cycling Embassy materials available when you go to a conference. So their impact and their name is pretty widely known in the US at the moments. And I think that's only growing so talking about impact of public diplomacy. It seems to be doing its work when it comes to cycling. We are we are well known as a cycling nation. So much so that we sometimes get pushback where they say, Oh, there's the Dutch again, you know, that's 11 We can't reach so we need to scale it down. And that's a message we've taken to hearts to be careful not to be constantly, you know, mentioning where the cycling nation but to kind of try to figure out when we go to a conference, what the messages we should bring and what we should focus on and that can be different depending on the city or in like DC has done a lot on cycling. So when we talk to DoT here in DC, it's easy to say we can help you do better because they know the effects of doing a ThinkBike workshop, they've been there they've done that they're familiar with it so they know what they can do with it. Then when you

go to a completely new area where they're not familiar and think that what we have in the Netherlands is something that we've always had are not aware of the fact that it's something that's grown over the years and that we are there to help them you know, skip a few years in between to not have to do the 30 years before they get to the point,

Emma: Yes. Okay. That's really interesting about the pushback actually hadn't considered that at all where do you think? Where do you think that's coming from?

Lilian: Well, it's, I had a conversation this morning. So it's back in my mind. I spoke to the director of the League of American cyclists this morning, and he mentioned it again. So he even gets pushed back when he mentioned that he's been in touch with us or that he's done something with the Cycling Embassy. Or… and he's been in touch with the Dutch. So there, there are cities that are really worried that what we have in the Netherlands can't work for them. And I think it's because they are unaware of the fact that we had to work really hard to get there. I think that part of the message. We haven't presented sufficiently. We have great engineers when I am not an engineer by trade, which is unfortunate because it would be great if I had that knowledge but what I've heard from people that are heavily into the cycling organisations here, they say that their engineering programme isn't quite as well as we have that in the Netherlands. So their engineers are taught differently, to look at street developments and they say that's something that would have to change if they want to reach what the Netherlands has. So I think we are we are sometimes a victim of our own success where we are so welcomed into the biking community because we are so good that we kind of forget to ask, you know, but what is it that you need? What is the question you need answered? So I think that we sometimes push a little too hard with saying, Oh, we're so good at it. Let us help you. Which we do because we really, I still believe we really want to help. It's not it's not just for getting our companies jobs in the US. We really are helping we really are open to helping cities. But I think it's sometimes looked upon as you push too much and we were not having it. It's just too much. And I have not had anyone say to me to my face. But I have heard it from several different sources now. So it is something that I am trying to figure out. Going into our next conference how to deal with that and how to not be you know, too much in people's faces with you know, word of cycling nation number one look at us look how good we are. At the same time I find it interesting that coming from Americans, they have an issue with that because what they do normally themselves is say, Look how good we are. So it's a very, you know, it's a thin line of what's acceptable and what they feel is too much

Emma: Yeah, it sounds like a delicate balance. Wow. Yeah. Okay, that sounds very different from the interview I had yesterday with somebody from Italy who was very enthusiastic. Do you… have you observed that that approach of promoting technical expertise has an impact on the relationships at a higher level? So between the Netherlands and the US or Netherlands and other countries have you been able to make any observations on that level?

Lilian: Okay, I'm not sure if I understand your question. So when it comes to having a good relationship with higher level we have that we have a good relationship with DoT, Department of Transportation, on a federal level. We have a good relationship with the Federal Highway Administration, which is more like our Dutch Rijkswaterstraat at the start. So the operational part of it. We work closely in many of the cities where we have an office with local Department of Transportation is that due to the fact that we could promote our engineering expertise? I'm not sure it's just based on you know, we, we seek out that network and those relationships, because we know they are the decision makers and when you can convince them that we have the expertise to help them make their city safer. That helps you have to have someone of that level on board to get changes and happen. And we have seen examples of that where like in City of Austin when you had someone at the Department of Transportation with city level who was really into cycling, and you are able to bring up a programme like a thing bike workshop, they are very open to the help and they make changes with that. When you do things on a level where for instance, a local bike organisation invites you over for think bike workshop, you'll see that the effect is much less because if the higher level is not on board, and we've learned this over the years, you have to have people in the city council state level DoT level onboard enthusiastically and show them what you can help them with in order to make that change happen. So if from that perspective, the question is that we see that yes, we have seen that and we do have those relationships, and we still actively seek them. I mean, we are still working on building our network in different cities. Over the past I would say probably year or two. We've noticed an enormous shift as well, from the Netherlands from our own ministry as well as EVO to make cycling more of an international focus points. And that really has helped us in our works because now we can instead of doing only public diplomacy events, we could actually move more to bigger events where also economic diplomacy can become a part of it. So for us it's also a strategic shift as well.

Emma: Okay. Fair enough. That makes sense. That makes me very curious, have you it might not be within your remit. But is there have you seen that your relationships have enabled collaboration in the opposite direction? So if the Netherlands needs something in particular from the US, I can't imagine they need much in terms of transport. So but for instance, in other areas has it enabled?

Lilian: So we try to we try to seek that out which, when it comes to cycling is a little bit more difficult. But we do seek that out and want one like with Federal Highways, we have that relationship and we have an agreement where we do collaboration on projects where we can learn from the US and they can learn from us so those relationships do exist on different levels. I am not sure if we have that specifically when it comes to urban mobility yet. I know that we are far ahead with most of the things that are happening but I can imagine that when it comes to instance to um, you know, data collection, I know we're good at it. We have quite a few companies that do that well specifically for cycling, but I can't imagine that there would be something that the US does better in that aspect. So I

could see a collaboration in that specific area. But I don't know yet if there is one in existence. I do know our office in Miami has been working with a I think it's an Arkansas a school in Arkansas now for cycling. Not engineers, motors. I'm trying to think of the word… technicians basically. So technicians studies so they've been working with a school in the Netherlands that does similar things to exchange expertise on, you know, what's your curriculum like? How do you attract students? What do you teach them? So there's a collaboration between schools so those things happen as well? Do we specifically learn from the US perhaps, I don't know yet. It's a new relationship, but it could be. I think, what could be a strong a strong topic would be on equity. I think the US is really pushing hard on that these days. And I think that might be a topic where we can learn from them as well, when it comes to urban mobility, but that's something that I had a conversation on this morning that we will need to look into. I'm not that familiar with that yet. I don't know if anything exists yet in the US. So we'll have to look at that.

Emma: Equity in what sense?

Lilian: Equity is in making sure that areas in certain cities don't get left behind, right? That there's connectivity between, you know, your inner city and your outer city that we tend to see here in the US that areas where there's a predominantly what they call minority population. So it could be black, it could be Hispanic, it could be basically anything that they regards minority that they are left behind when it comes to development so they you know, highways are pushed through their city instead of pushed through their living areas. Instead of looking at the design they are left behind usually when it comes to the projects, the money that's been set out so they are doing a big push on that here to make sure that they are part of what's happening so that they're no longer an afterthought. So I think that's an interesting developments that perhaps in the Netherlands, we haven't really looked at as much so I think that might be something that we at least if not learn from at least learn together on how to approach that better.

Emma: Okay, that makes sense. And springboarding off of some of what you said is that have you seen that your work and these kinds of collaborations. within urban mobility within infrastructure have led to collaborations in other areas.

Lilian: They sometimes do. I'm thinking if I have an example myself, I don't think so. But what you notice is that by through the context we have, like oh, this morning, actually that might be something that will lead to something this morning, my conversation with the bike league. We ended up talking about Austin and they know the Director of Transportation and drainage now water is an important area for my ministry as well. Water Management. So in that aspect, yes. Knowing that person and that director and having that contact and being able to pursue that could lead to something in a completely different field of expertise we have so yes, we do see that on occasion where you know one person in your network, know someone else who knows someone else and it goes from there. So yeah, we do

have those. Actually, we do have another one because we know we do. So sometimes I network my previous colleague who did want to manage went to a conference in Detroit and that led now to a relationship with a company on sustainable urban planning, which is completely something else than the water management wastewater that he went for the conference to so on occasion that happens yes.

Emma: Okay. That's interesting. That's good to know. Just reading through my question, sorry. So, I'd be interested in hearing a little bit this is not the easiest question, but I'd be interested in hearing your perspectives on we did discuss pushback, but if you have seen instances where there is a clear sense of attraction to the Netherlands. How do you think that comes about? Through? So given that it's quite a narrow context, of course, the cycling infrastructure? I suppose I should ask first. Do you think that makes people more attracted in the broad sense of the word to the Netherlands as a country to its people to its culture to its values? And if so, how do you think that comes about?

Lilian: Oh, that's a difficult question. I don't know how it comes about. I do notice that wherever we go. There are always numerous amounts of people that are extremely enthusiastic about the Netherlands and about the people there. They feel we are very friendly that we have we have a good name. They feel we're open sometimes a little bit too direct, but most people that tend to like the Netherlands seem to be okay with that. They were very friendly. They feel we are connectors. So I think we have a really good reputation in in what we do. Whether it's you know, helping people find connections, doing the work we do so, but how that came about. I really don't know. I think that each of us, including the Dutch [?], as I said the Dutch Cycling Embassy has an extremely good name through the work they do. They have a lot of people enthusiastic about their work about the people that work there. And I'm happy to say that they think that I'm part of it, which is really funny because you know, I'm not but I see you know, Dutch cycling embassy, Embassy of the Netherlands. I see the confusion but I take it as it is because it doesn't really matter. We all have the same message in the end. So yeah, how does it happen? I don't know. I think it grew over the years to be quite honest. I think it's not something that happened from one day to the other. I think we started early on with being a great mission. A great country with a lot of you know, we did a lot of what's the word? Economic. We do a lot of trades. A lot of economic trades. We have a good name. We seem to be regarded as dependable and trustworthy. And I do my best with my network and you notice that a lot of people are very receptive to it. They're happy to meet you. They're friendly. They always say they look forward to visiting it's on the list or if they have been there and then what I noticed at conferences when people have been to the Netherlands, they seek us out to tell us that they've been to your country. I loved it. There. You know, it's great to cycle there, though. That's always fun to hear. Yeah, we went we did the… we did a great cycling tour in New York last weekend with a group of Dutch like 60, 70 people in our team. And there were 32,000 cyclists. We had about 80 there that were Dutch. We got a shout out from the organisation. The Dutch are here. So that tells you how

welcoming us is to Dutch cyclists and knowledge they're so happy that we want to be part of what they're doing. So you know, that's always that's always fun.

Emma: Okay. Okay. Well, thank you. That's actually really helpful, because I'm trying to trace…

Lilian: Does that answer your question?

 Emma: Yeah, it does. Yeah, I'm trying to trace some of the different factors that go into these kinds of reputations and trying to establish some level of causality in the end I'm also doing so it's mixed methods. I'm also doing some quantitative work, trying to show that there is a process between certain resources that turns into attraction that turns into soft power, and all these different elements, I think.

Lilian: Interesting. Yeah. Go into that, I think. Yeah, I think the power of the Dutch cycling embassy because I you know, I, I read up on when they started, which had partly to do with my colleague before me, my predecessor, she did a lot of work getting the Dutch cycling embassy to become the Dutch cycling embassy, and she helped [with?] ThinkBike workshops at the time. I think they're very good reputation has to do with the fact that the ThinkBike workshops that they've done throughout the US and it's been quite a few as you know, because you know, you researched quite a few of them yourself. They have had such a positive impact on the people that were there that I think that kind of spread out into, they're having a good name and becoming such a force that they are at the moment. So yeah, […]

Emma: That's interesting. Yeah, I got a similar comment about the importance of word of mouth from the colleague yesterday. He's the organiser of the Napli Bike Festival and does a lot of work. He's also worked with a Dc etc. So yeah, he's also saying how happy he is to tell him about the Netherlands. So I think that will definitely feature in some of my research findings.

Lilian: Yeah. And perhaps will help as well. Like for instance, we have a trade mission going on in California that has to do with smart and green mobility. So urban mobility is not part of it. We do that later in the year, but smart and green mobility group started off with a cycling tour in San Francisco yesterday. So wherever we go, it seems that we try to build in cycling in these types of things we do, because the as we call it, The bicycle is such a high bar. It's such an eye-catcher. Yeah, it's so eye catching, but it's also it's such an easy thing to like. organising a cycling tour like this is fairly easy to do it. People are so happy when they're on their bicycle going through a city to look at things and we work with local partners. So we worked with the bike share company in San Francisco and they're happy to help us with the bikes. So you get that mutual factor of this is so much fun to do. And that helps because now you know we're happy with Bay wheels giving us the bikes to use Bay Wheels is happy because we reached out to them and we can build a contact with them in a relationship, looking more at other things they do that have to do with payment systems and data sharing and data collection. So from that you grow relationships as well. And I think that we do that even in missions

where the urban mobility or bicycling is not the main topic so use the bicycle as is. This this thing we have here we call it an… [Dutch word] or trying to come up with the English term. It's an [Dutch word] so you can you can pet it, it's a [?] product because if people's people are so happy, most people are happy with a bicycle. You know, it's they know what it is they used it or it's just an easy it's an easy recognisable thing to bring into what we do. And we use it everywhere because we are good at it and we like to present it even when it's not really related to the actual you know, visit we're doing we still the Planning Division of the royal couple in September, they will be on the bike somewhere in that trip because it's just it's part of, you know, this is our royal a couple and they cycle because, you know, in the Netherlands everybody cycles so it's a really strong message as well at that point to show that even our Royals cycle, been our prime minister cycles to work that those are the moments that we grabbed, because that also gets the attention of the Americans. We're still not you know, part of our message here. Part of our challenge here is to make Americans understand that the bicycle is a mode of transport. It's not just for recreational use. And so by doing these types of things, even unrelated to having cycling as your main topic, it helps to bring that message. That's also words of miles, that's visually a very strong thing to do. You know, that social media with your queen or your king on a bicycle that that goes around. People are like, Oh, wow, yeah. So great to see that. That is

Emma: Yeah, yeah, I think I've seen similar images on social media as well of I'm not sure if it was the royal or any other Royals but Mark Rutte cycling to work that one went viral.

Lilian: In his in his jeans, it's even worse. Because we don't we don't dress up the cycle. You know, you go in your usual clothing you go in your suit or your jeans. You cycle. Yeah, so those messages when it comes to public diplomacy kind of thinks that those are very strong messages that has nothing to do with how great our engineers are in planning cities. That message alone is something that that kind of sets our culture apart is when it comes to cycling. That's why they think we have cycling in our DNA why we are a cycling nation. It has nothing to do with that. But it helps that you have those images to bring that message along. Of course, yeah, yeah. And presumably also sparks curiosity, which helps set people on a certain path of looking more into the Netherlands and Exactly, yeah.

Emma: Do you have any further comments? Anything to add?

Lilian: Oh, I just want to say I heard you say that the colleague in Italy was much more enthusiastic. I am very happy with the DCE. Don't get me wrong. Oh, yeah, no, no. Yeah. I mean, they're a great group. They do a lot of work. It's just weird in the US, we've noticed sometimes, and that's not just them. It's the experts we use. I think we sometimes need to be more aware of things when we come in and I think that's something that we as local embassies, Consul generals need to work on better to make sure that our experts that we do have come to the US are aware of and those are those are interesting things because you know, you want to present them as they are but at the same time you need to be aware of where what you're doing and what you're trying to reach. So what you know, I'm

enthusiastic, I when I go to conferences, I spread the news of the Dutch cycling embassy, because we don't we don't really do. We don't really stimulate Dutch tourism on cycling. We only have you know, things like workshop brochures and things like that with us to present because we do think that that's a very powerful, powerful thing to do. Things like workshops really helps cities to think about planning cross section or bike path differently. So we've noticed that that's a strength that we gladly promote and help spread the word on so yeah,

Emma: no, absolutely makes sense that different groups of course will receive and process and then react or implement different results from different messages. So it's, it is something that's covered very much in the theory, and that's actually interesting. That's also coming out of the interviews then because yeah, it is. It is such a tricky thing to pinpoint that attraction element. That's very much actually where the literature gets very divided. What is attraction? How can you define it? How can you test it? Does it even exist? Does it really lead to anything? So that's so where I'm sitting

[small talk, end of interview]

Lucas – 5.05.22

[introduction, small talk, data privacy and consent]

Lucas: Yeah, Director of the Dutch Cycling Embassy and been in that role for three years. Yeah. I think that was the question, wasn't it? Yeah, just. Yeah.

Emma: And you've seen first-hand some of the effects that your work has. So I'm interested in finding out a little bit more about the impact you've seen of the Dutch cycling Embassy has various workshops on international relationships between the Netherlands and other countries, but at various levels. So if we start with the very local level, how do you think coming in with a workshop affects people's views on the Netherlands?

Lucas: If at all, yeah, I personally believe but maybe I'm very [biased] to working at the Dutch Cycling Embassy and being part of it for the last couple of years, but also previously we got before working with the Dutch Cycling Embassy itself, I was already part of the expert of the group of experts. So I got to know the work beforehand and also joined as an expert in various workshops and are not proper, I think real proper thing, my workshops for more to smaller ones and visits. And what we saw in all those years is actually that it's on all the various levels, but also on the local specific level, which we're asking for is that it really has an impact in the sense that they see the Netherlands as of course, on the on the level of how we deal with urban mobility and urban planning, as a sort of a paradise, this utopian way of dealing with our problems. And cities. So in most of the cases, they are very much energised, and there's a lot of enthusiasm coming along. When letting these people experience study visit, for instance, if they are here in Netherlands, our cities, but also vice versa, we go abroad and organise these workshops and we so show the pictures and show we bring our knowledge, always in a tailor made way, copy pasting, but really making it tailor made according to the local, geographical societal and spatial planning […] it's always very much positively affecting how they see the Netherlands. To give you a maybe a concrete example that's maybe a more high level example but in the past we already… but maybe good to mention… but we already discussed it many times but the Austin ThinkBike workshop, the one we organised 10 years ago and also that really had a huge impact. On how they perceived their mobility strategy and urban cycling policies. And they really made a sort of the long-term transformation. This year they are going to celebrate 10 years of things like workshops, or the 10-year anniversary of their ThinkBike workshop in 2012, this autumn, and they are so proud of what they have been accomplishing… what they have accomplished that there is also scheduled royal visit, so that the king and queen of the Netherlands are coming to Texas for work visits and then they'll also go to visit Austin. And I don't know how secret it is but I think you can just mention it and take it away but they are going to also do a bike ride through Austin and together with probably deputy mayors or local policymakers or maybe the mayor of that city to celebrate what they accomplished so far and to bring back again this touch on it. […] that's a specific

example. Yeah, it's quite exciting. There also we are going to organise a trade mission to the West Coast of the US in September. And they are also going to be part of the parts of this trade mission. So they probably will be in Austin and then come to California will be part of our trade mission. So that's super cool.

Emma: Yeah, that sounds really cool, actually. Yeah, and can we dig into the so the change that happens, let's say so people are coming in with a lot of enthusiasm, but what do you think happens during the workshops, that changes people's perspectives? It's not the easiest question, but do you have any thoughts on that?

Lucas: Yeah, there's a couple because normally people think, Oh, this is never going to work. In here. There's a lot of obstacles to be taken. It's too huge of a gap and then suddenly, there are these *aha* moments. I like nice. Are these eye opening moments that they think wow, it is potentially possible. And sometimes it's really due to specific ingredients or specific discussion points. For instance, the use of the move metre to which shows exactly how many trips are extremely local, how many car trips are very local and what is the potential for mode shifts. If you pure racial racially look at the number of very local car trips, it's really astonishing, even in cities like in many cities, I think or as rules. car trips are very often very, very short trips, and are easily transferable to cycling and just shining the light on that specific empirical evidence can be an eye-opening experience. And if and then if you give the tools for us to give a sort of safe, comfortable network opening up for the entire public for all ages, and abilities, then it couldn't be a viable alternative for others to… for people that normally perceive themselves as car-dependent even for the most local trips. So that I know for sure that this specific in this specific case of Austin again that that was an eye opening moment for, for them realising that all these local trips were very important. That's the first… there's other rational evidence based on the specific tools that can be brought in from the Dutch another element is of course by economics, societal cost benefits analysis, and that's often also a fantastic eye opener, that to say of course, it's all about money and what we invest in what is the return on investment, and if you show that from a societal perspective, and the cost benefit analysis, proofs in many, many instances, that cycling, improving cycling conditions, opening up that as an alternative for the entire segments of the population, that it's a really societal beneficial way of improving your mobility and urban policy. Then that can be an eye-opening tool as well, especially if you can use it as arguments both to the to the local to the local citizens, but also to to shop owners and other stakeholders that that are important. Another maybe a final two sometimes standard, it's really easy to just start very small with experiments and with so to say like this, this trials or sometimes it's called urban acupuncture, […] pilot projects or living labs, maybe or tactical urbanism or whatever you want to phrase it. Showing sometimes the public that really works that's sometimes also an eye opening experience and one example maybe. I shared it also last year a couple of times, and maybe you're very aware of this, but Stephen Bendiks from our network is working with our engineering and urban planning firm

focused on Urban Development and Engineering and Architecture and city planning. He discussed the example of Villach city in Austria, where they were opening up as a test pilot as a living lab, one corridor focusing on interlinking between the urban centre and the campus the university capital fell off and there was a lot of resistance from shop owners from people with terraces, etc, etc, the normal arguments and then they showed how it could look like and they just did it small pilots and then they convince the general public but also other stakeholders, how beneficial it wasn't then then became sort of a catalyser… people were totally were opened up and became a catalyser for the transformation of the rest of the city.

So yeah, it's a lot of those examples, and they can be, of course, all trigger back to two inputs coming from the {?}. And sometimes it's difficult to trace it back to our advice where our tools, but in many instances, there are various connections possible, so we get, sometimes, really very energetic and enthusiastic replies back with the specific moments and light moments. […]

Emma: fair enough. How, if at all, once again, do you think these kinds of activities communicate the Netherlands values and policies and resources and capabilities? I think that's something that probably happens a bit more study tours than with workshops. That yes, what are your thoughts on that communication aspect?

Lucas: Yeah. I think yeah, it's somebody else yesterday saying it actually that that sometimes study visits are potentially just depending also on the sort of people which countries people are coming from, but sometimes study visits are even more effective than the ThinkBike workshops in the sense that as first eye-opening experience, people aren't totally… it's the sort of moment where they're visiting with their colleagues and are freed from all the regular normal life so they are also more open eyes and with more open minds. So they are and they can see a lot more from the Netherlands our values and how maybe how we behave for or how tolerant we *used* to be. I have to say… but sometimes, or Yeah, some of the traditional values I think that might come across in this presentation. Sometimes it's also explicitly asked how we come to decision making like polder model consensus way we try to always have sort of consensus in the make going forward. Do you know what polder is?

Yeah. And it's actually how we together we had to conquer the water coming in from the sea. And so we had to work together and make a lot of compromises working together to stop our feet from getting wet. Their […] always, we always strive for consensus to, for the entire group to keep our feet dry, so to say. So that's our cultural, we're striving for consensus. And that's always also that's also very true in how we have our politics and our decision making in terms of urban planning and mobility planning. They're also the striving for consensus working together of the various fields spatial planning and urban planning, spatial planning and mobility planning. There are two totally interlinked, that's rather unique, and that that sometimes can be referred back to this this whole consensus elements or ingredients in how we interact. Even it's a bit vague, but I guess that comes

back to sort of a principle or value that is important for us. And another maybe once to the article to each, each [?] and or the equal and the informal illness in Netherlands that we don't have that much of a hierarchy and differences between various groups, and that we normally interact in a very informal way, as opposed to for instance, maybe you know, that that are as opposed to Germany or France or other cultures where there's much more of a hierarchy. And cycling is of course, one of the epitomes of also living in a very, in a not very elitist society or very equal society. There's a Dutch saying […] I don't remember exactly, but maybe you know it, but there's, there's, we say Dutch people don't want to be too high up the trees. So I'd say there's also that saying that refers to high trees, catching a lot of wind. Like people will, and people don't want to stand out in the Netherlands. They really want to be equal and on the same foot and that's very typical, and I think that can sometimes also be referred back to our culture of cycling and how normal days and sometimes it's referred to us as of course a very cheap and something for people that cannot afford its fancy cars, but in the Netherlnads that that is not so much the case.

Emma: Yes. And it is actually interestingly similar to what Luca said, and his experience of Dutch values through his collaboration with the Dutch embassy, but also the Dutch cycling embassy. So there's definitely interesting patterns there. Yeah, and yeah, I haven't heard I haven't experienced it, but I have heard that the Dutch tell each other doe normaal.

Lucas: Yeah, that's it. [Dutch saying] doe normaal, then you're then already you're a acting crazy enough? Yeah. Don't be too crazy or don't stand out too much. Don't stand out and our being behaving arrogance or something that's kind of I know, a little Dutch people can be very arrogant, but that can be sometimes. A trigger. People don't want to people to stand out too. Much.

Emma: Okay. Have you experienced - this is a very leading question - but have you experienced that collaboration in the world of cycling has led to collaboration in or even opportunities in other areas?

Lucas: Yeah, absolutely. Did I speak specifically, there's specific examples where we came in with cycling, cycling diplomacy for instance. That's literally it also yesterday was mentioned in a in a chat about organising for instance, all these fun things, day tours at embassies, overseas or consulates. They are organising orange bike rides, and that sort of stuff just to celebrate, to have network events, celebrating a lot of stakeholders, for instance, at the embassy, and that always, or in many instances that leads to new connections, and to also all kinds of collaborations international collaborations, or between companies or in other ways on totally different fields. So cycling in that sense is a very powerful symbol. Also water and other elements… cycling specifically has a nice [?] feature, which is a kick-starter for, for collaboration, in totally different fields. And we also have seen it as specifically that for instance, companies in the past, which became part of the Dutch cycling embassy and then due to being part of the Dutch cycling embassy had nice events, organising specifically […] in Singapore. And then due to that, that was just a steppingstone for them to get a very, very large

assignments on, on harbour developments and water… they are totally different fields. And I know I remember still specific people on our board, in our network, are a bit pissed off about that, that they were say using the Dutch Cycling Embassy in a way to get a large assignment on totally different fields. But I think it's, it's, yeah, that's the power of cycling. Also, that can be a steppingstone to something entirely different. And we phrase it also as the positive parts from Trojan horse to bring in cycling almost as a [?] or to bring cycling and then cycling itself to Troyan horse and out of it comes water management or totally different science or urban planning more broadly speaking. So that's definitely symbolic power of cycling as a diplomatic tool.

Emma: Okay, have you ever had any instances where that translated more directly to political results… to political results in a sense of not on a national level, but maybe on the local level?

Lucas: In the sense that that it helps change the perception of it sometimes, in some cases, it is very much attached or cycling can be attached to the green leftist kind of spectrum. In the Netherlands. It's become mainstream either left wing or right wing… it's not so much as in the past, associated with some leftist kind of elements of politics. And sometimes, if we bring that to the foreground that we also see that it helps in other cities that it's becoming, or hopefully, a spark is brought to the foreground that it's not purely leftist again anymore, but it's becoming hopefully a bit more mainstream if we tell our story. So it's embraced all by both the spectrums and in the middle spectrum as well.

Emma: Okay, thank you very much. That was… those are my main questions actually. I have one more very, very, very leading question for you. That is, a lot of the work on the DCE right now, according to my understanding, is on intermodality right now?

Lucas: Yeah.

Emma: And so I chose my domestic vignette with the bike parking at Utrecht, I chose that because I'm aware it's something that other countries tend to struggle with. I'm struggling to find a source that says, other countries struggle with modality. So can I just ask you to confirm so I can quote you: other countries tend to be weaker at intermodality than the Netherlands.

Lucas: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. There is. We are. That sounds an arrogant I don't want to be to be perceived as that but the Netherlands is really a front runner country that intermodality especially of course by transit accumulation is an extreme stronghold. And often if we refer to the power of combination of the bike train combination and Netherlands, or the bike tram combination, then that might be a trigger a starting point for discussion. For instance, in LA you heard it last year. They are building a huge network of light rail and metro system or they have a very weak interconnectivity with for instance cycling. But they have a very low density build up city and [intermodality] really helps for the capacity and for the economic returns. Even on investing in this public transportation

network that you have a much larger reach when investing in cycling as an exercise and egress modes of transportation. Same was true for Paris. We get a lot of questions now from Paris. In the run up of the 2024 Olympic Games, they are also extending and investing in public transportation, but they also see that the bike parking facilities around station areas are very meagre and they are looking to us in that term. So for intermodality and more broadly speaking, we are now also developing more [?] internationally also phrased as hubs, network building hubs in various instances or various forums, you can perceive that but yeah, the it's a central station and it's definitely also a help especially also the bike transit combination there. But it's absolutely one of the ingredients that we are also bringing along with our work.

[small talk, end of interview]

Bill – 6.05.22

[introduction, consent, data privacy]

Bill: I've been the executive director at the league for five years. I previously worked at the organisation for 15 years, before that running our bicycle friendly America programme which gives ==out== awards to cities and businesses and to universities at the local level. So I've been I've been at the league for almost 20 years.

[…]

Emma: So you've worked a little bit with Lilian and of course you've come into contact with the DCE. And you've presumably seen some of the impact for instance, in Washington. How do you think that kind of bicycle diplomacy affects relationships between the countries on any, whatever you experience here is on any level so between local populations between municipalities or ministries or governments or anything that comes to mind here?

Bill: Yeah, sure. So I mean, I think at a local level, my you know, we're a grassroots advocacy organisation and so having, you know, we work a lot with the state and local advocacy organisations, who in some places are just a few people, right, who are pushing for better bicycling infrastructure. Education, all those things that make bicycle friendly communities and having outside expertise. I mean, having you know, the Dutch are known and had become much more ==well known==, I think, in the US bicycling community over the last 20 years, maybe 10 years, it's become even more so. I think having an outside expert come in and say, actually, you know, you could do it this way. It's not going to blow up and have horrible results you know, in and that you're actually going to get better return on investment for your local money. I think there's, you know, there's, there's study tours that happen, I think, have happened over the last 20 years, like sending like mayor's go to, you know, go to the Netherlands, you know, go to other countries in in Europe. And Colombia, you know, in the Americas, you know, I think see, you know, going somewhere and seeing Oh, wow, this can be done. It is a really powerful thing, but I think bringing it to the US makes it a lot easier and a lot more accessible for people to be able to make the case for the kinds of investments. So let's say at the local level, that advocate, you know, it's nice to have like, a really good example to point to. Same thing is true though with the agency staff, so you have a lot of times, a planner or an engineer, or planner, a lot of times internally who was trying to you know, with the guidance of the ==site sidebar==, the guidance in the US has become much better over the last 10 years for building bicycle infrastructure. We have a number of guides that have come out. The Federal Highway Administration has put out some good guidance and has really led in over the last 10 years and given like the permission to do things, but oftentimes, you know, it's a local engineer, who, who signs off on things. And it's really the good it's really the gatekeeper for this stuff. So I think having engineers you know, when you might have a planner or an engineer that's like an internal advocate for this sort of thing to be able to, you know, to

support them in making the case and to find, you know, context appropriate solutions to the bike network. But also like changing the minds of engineers, it's good to have an engineer, tell another engineer that it's okay to do this thing. Yeah, I think that's super that's super powerful. Because it's like, oh, okay, you actually make data, you make decisions based on data, you know, and, and in sort of why and we, you know, we have this sort of professional exchange. So, I think, you know, at that local agency level and the local advocacy or what's been really good. It's hard to see at the federal level like you know, I don't have as I think was first at the state level, I guess, you know, actually, I do have some examples. So at the state level, like in Delaware, a few years ago, they did their statewide bikes of it, trying to get the State Department of Transportation which by the way, in the US, is responsible for the most dangerous roads in the United States. So that's state DoTs, state roads are the roads like the 45 mile per hour plus roads that run through a city, and then like, oh, wow, there's bike lanes all over here. But like, what, what's this huge barrier that isn't just more dangerous in the place where the majority of fatalities are happening, but also that you know, in serious crashes, but it's also the place that sort of tells people in their minds like I don't really want to, I can't really get there because of this, because of this big road. So there has been some state level advocacy actually, I think DCE came in participated in the Delaware Bike Summit a few years ago, three years ago, and I remember that again, that aha moment that happens with with engineers and planners that like weren't thinking about this yet. And so that kind of exchange I think is powerful. When you're when you have like engineers speaking to engineers and in making it clear that this isn't some sort of fanciful dream that you can do these things… like you know there's a big barrier for people here is like: Oh, well that's Europe. Yeah. And in there are real thing. I mean, you have more density, you have better transit, there's, you know, there's all sorts of reasons why you know, they can make valid arguments, but there's also a lot of things to learn. And I think, at the state level, federal level, we haven't we haven't a relationship with the embassy. It's nice to do. The National Bike Summit goes every year like having the embassy and the Dutch cycling embassy, so like both of EVA, the Dutch cycling embassy, but also, you know, the Netherlands embassy participating in that National gathering of advocates from around the country. So when we go up on Capitol Hill, we can say, you know, we're using examples, of course, it's, it's usually better to use an example from Austin, or from Atlanta or from, you know, Kansas City. But in some cases, you know, you're able to say, you know, DCE, you know, helped out with this workshop in these in these places, and have helped, you know, like, here in Washington with visioning and in coming up with solutions in the city where, you know, our federal government is so pointing that kind of thing out it's been it's been fruitful to be able to, to not only to let people meet the Dutch leaders at the, like the grassroots advocates that come together for the National Bike Summit, but also to be able to, to be able to when we're when we're speaking to Congress, you know, we have examples that that, again, that same sort of overcoming barriers by saying, Well, this has been done in places without, you know, having like catastrophic economic, you know, awful outcomes. It's actually been really good for the economy and for health and for

sustainability and all those things. So, yeah, I think at all levels, it's been good. It's been a good relationship, and I'm very ==thankful== that DCE and, and, and just the government itself, takes us seriously enough to like come to these events in share knowledge. Not just on this, but I mean, I'm all sorts of things, water issues. I mean, there's all kinds of things that that we should be sharing on and I'm glad I'm glad to see that.

Emma: That is going to be my next question. Do you find that this kind of knowledge sharing stays within one technical field or does it open up other opportunities, even… both in other technical fields, but also completely different? Non-technical projects or collaborations?

Bill: Yeah, well, I think it's hard to know. I mean, for me, it's hard to know, concrete examples of like, where that has happened, but I mean, just first point, just like any sort of relationship, it's, it's it's good to have that ==entry point== in the place, you know, meet places and people where they are and it basically is the thing that gets a city talking to a to a Dutch firm or DCE. About while you know about that. I would imagine that that relationship building in this scene. Oh, wow. There's a good give and take. And there's things to learn that it would it would naturally lead to. Oh, well, let's talk about your stormwater management. Like I can see that being very, I mean, that seems like obviously the Dutch have a very luminous history about water management. So it seems Oh, yeah, of course. Now, I don't know. Personally, I don't know where the Netherlands is on, you know, solar and on other sort of renewables. I don't know. But I would think that while you know that the relationship would help. Also, I think that I was I was thinking of something that was like an actual example of this. Yeah, I lost it. Yeah, no, I don't I don't I don't have Oh, non infrastructure stuff. Maybe so like things that you would. One thing that happens like with our cycling work with the Netherlands, it's the I'm kind of excited about. It's like, okay, we want if we're going to build what we call, you know, a safe system approach to transportation systems. The Dutch model, we have a lot to learn from there, to how you know, slowing down the cars, making neighbourhoods more comfortable for people to walk around and play hockey… kids to play into, you know, kids to ride to school, all that stuff. You know, there's a whole lot to learn there. But it's going to it's going to take a while for us to like, you know, we need people that we need, state, non-state DoT people in the local officials to say, yes, we're gonna build those kinds of networks. We're gonna build a safe system. But that's, you know, that's a longer term thing. Sadly, I mean, it's not, not every place can be like severe. You know, where it's like, you know, you have a bike network, you know, like that. I wish it could be but it isn't usually, but on the other thing is the, like riding bikes together. So, you know, there's other ways of getting but you know, growing a bike culture, right, so, last week, we did the Fibro bike tour in New York. There were tonnes of people riding from the embassy, from the consulate in New York. You know, we got invited, we got connected with them. There were a bunch of bike advocates who was actually we were riding with the city, some city engineers from DoT. And you know, so I feel like that kind of again, is good for the relationship. It's also good just go out and have fun together. Yeah. But then lastly,

education, you know, in the Netherlands, we know that we know that it's integrated into schools, but I feel like we have a lot to learn there too on like how to build that side of the bike culture so that you know that kids when they're growing up, they're like, just it's part of being a person that's going to move around, you know, your community like you need to know how to use you know, a bike and walk and be safe and use transit and you know, of course, many are going to drive and most are going to drive and know how to do that too. And it all goes together. I think you all have done a good job of or the Netherlands has done a really good job of are you feeling Yeah, or somewhere. But the Netherlands has done a good job of, of integrating that sort of mobility education. And I think that that's something

Emma: Okay, yeah. Fair enough. And have you seen any instances where specific events so coming in with technical expertise, and actually yeah, collaborating with people in the US has changed people's opinions both positively negatively or more strongly in any one direction? Oh, the Netherlands.

Bill: You know, it's, it's hard to know like, I mean, I haven't been a part of doing like pre surveys and post surveys. It's, you know, a lot of this is just from working with advocates and working with local agencies, and generally having like a positive experience about this, you know, that's, I have heard Okay, sure. Maybe it's not a negative experience. There's, there's definitely eye rolls or, you know, like, okay, that's, you know, is that that's not gonna work here. You know, I think I think that there's still some of that and that we have to work to overcome that. And it takes, you know, a lot of examples and a lot of pushing but you know, mostly it's been, you know, positive experiences that I've heard, you know, of, of that approach to building strong bicycling cultures in their work in the US trying to think there's any Yeah, no critique of this. I mean, I think it's just so much less expensive than sending people in study tours. And if you're gonna bring consultants in anyway, you know why wouldn't the Netherlands be like part of that sort of marketplace? Right. It's kind of it's, I guess, my feeling. I think that the folks that have done these things feel pretty, like it's pretty ==special== to have, you know, and Delaware was a very interesting experience because, you know, it's like suburban, very suburban, you know, where we are and, you know, they went out into teams and like, we're looking at this roadway and this intersection and all that and it was I mean, I think overall, it's a pretty cool to have to be able to show that off and go hey, help.

Emma: Yeah. Okay, cool. That's interesting. And in your experience, do you find that these kinds of events are able to communicate Dutch values and values mainly, but potentially […] also policies, I assume that comes with your studying of cycling policy. So that's a bit more of the self evident side.

Bill: Yeah. I mean, the policies but I think that you know, the in my experience with DCE, and just working within that group from the Netherlands, it's like the I feel like there's like a leading with values is the thing that actually gets it that breaks through to decision makers here, right, it's like, oh,

well, those all sound like really good value to me. So like leading with the values and leading with the stories is often the way that you get things done versus like showing a bunch of numbers, right? Like you're making big data arguments. I mean, it's, you want to have both, you know, because but because we're humans and you know about decision, sort of, I'm sure science around this, you know, people go with their gut a lot of times and they go: Oh, this feels right and I think leading with those principles like that, like for example, like the CROW manual, right, I mean, that's like DC has done a good job of like, explaining, you know, just distilling it, like one of these things, and then and then why would we want these things well, because like we think people should be able to get around by bike and by foot in that this is a very human thing and, and, you know, there's some great stories about reaching out to refugees in the Netherlands and like it teaching them how to bike and like, Hey, this is this is how you become, you know, doing their best to like help people refugees become part of Dutch society, like, it's just part of being a Dutch person in the community. Like, you need to know how to bike and, hey, let's do it together. That that kind of thing comes through. At least I see it, you know, were like, wow, okay, yeah, that in that kind of thing is disarming people who have barriers who are like going like, oh, well, they're just trying to sell us some fancy dancy bike lanes and bike signals and everything else to use those terms and you're just like, you know, expensive things we don't need you know. I don't know if this is this is a true thing, but I have also almost always had this feeling like the Dutch are pretty, you know, stereotypically frugal, you know, and they don't like waste money on things. So I really like that kind of like has potential also the breakthrough with like, city departments, you know, where like, they, you know, we can't spend on this even though they'll spend billions on on an interchange on a highway interchange is like sort of leading with that kind of like you know, we we're not just doing this to waste money or you know, we're doing this to move people. I feel like that stuff does come through in the in the way that they talk about the work. You know, it's not like if these are like, no, if you want to be a modern city, you know, you need to have these things. It's more like this is how we, I mean, it's like, that's the kind to say that but it's, it's, you know, we have solutions to problems that all cities face, you know, and that's those values that leading with the kind of like we want to help with health and well being and climate and, you know, helping families get around and kids to move under their own power and all that stuff. I think that kind of resonates.

Emma: Okay, that's really interesting. That's really good to hear, actually, because I yeah, I talk to Lillian, for instance, a little bit about the pushback that comes from specifically the US it seems so far. I mean, I haven't interviewed too many people from too many different countries over the course of both my internship last year and this but most countries, it's probably up to down to just a general enthusiasm for of a lot of cycling advocates in a lot of different countries, but most countries are quite receptive. And the pushback topic I've come across so far, just to the of course it exists in all countries, but it seems to be a major theme specifically in the US. And I was reading an article about

it as well that Lilian sent me. And the answer does seem to be Yeah, well, so the in the article the suggested solution was to show specific policies and very like to be really specific and not to say, Hey, do it like the Dutch that that doesn't, you know, people are tired of hearing that. So the author's suggestion was yet to be a lot more specific about policies or really specific problems and really specific solutions and making them comparable. to the US. But actually,

Bill: sorry, ==setting== that last part about like, specific, I didn't understand that that last part about like, the specific policies and like the kind of the pushback I mean, I'm not aware of this. So this is interesting. […]

Emma: Yeah. So the is point of the article was that he thinks people are tired of hearing Oh, we should just do the Dutch ==manage==, you know, the Dutch are great, etc, etc. We should just do it like them. But rather than that news coverage, and I don't think this is ever going to happen, because that's not how news coverage works, but that articles and opinion pieces and advocacy pieces should very much not lead with that general statement of debt like the Dutch but should have very specific case studies and lead with policies and I suppose, extending your response into that also values and adapt those things to local situations and local problems. And essentially, just to be a lot more specific, instead of just naming the Dutch at every opportunity. […]

Bill: No, I totally agree with that, actually, and I don't know if that seems incongruent from what I was saying previously. I think that leading with like, this European sort of, like, you know, oh, just do what the Dutch do thing is, has become, I think less and less the way to lead the conversation I think that the author is right in general that it's better to talk about the case studies. I would say stories like the narrative base, I mean, the data, but also the narrative about like how x y&z thing works in a place. I do. Yeah, sure. There are people out there who just like oh, well, what are the Dutch doing because like they have such a great biking brand. I think that's still true for some people. But I think it has become two things. First, I think that there's a lot of resistance to any city like every city every mayor thinks not every mayor but lots of people. Many people think that their city is special. And that like there's no other city like my city, you know, in of course in many ways, right? Like I love my neighbourhood there's lots of things about like that are special in the can be replaced. But, you know, there's like types of, of streets and there's, you know, there's in there's just certain things that are just very similar. But I think that kind of feeling, you know, goes all the way down to like Don't, don't even talk like Okay, so let's say we're in a city in Florida. Don't talk about California, when you're talking, you know, when you're trying to like, explain the value of a bike lane or you know, or have this or that policy, because it's just you know, don't talk about Cambridge, right. Cambridge has one of the best ordinances in the country, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I mean, it's pretty hard to like, because basically every protected bike infrastructure that's you know, bit of bike infrastructure that's in the plan has to actually get built from the know about, like, it's pretty it's like complete streets like

or whatever… I think like like using an example like that if sometimes are going to close because like, yeah, of course they have that Massachusetts or, you know, they have that in you know, California or whatever. That's a that's a very, I think. So. Yeah. Just saying like, Oh, we got these people coming in from the Netherlands, like, isn't going to be isn't going to be immediate. The I don't know that's not I think it's gonna be exciting to some and like in many people do want to go on like a study tour to, you know, to Europe and see it but I think it's better to lead with the values and the lead of expertise and, and not just to say what to do with the Dutch do. I think it was also equity concerns here too. So like in the bike advocacy space. There's a tip, you know, I think there's a tendency amongst advocacy groups, you know, or, you know, people who are like just Pointing to examples to point to Europe, only to Europe. And I think we have, you know, there's been some pushback on that, too, over the last few years, which is like, hey, let's like look at examples in Asia. And look at good examples in Africa. Like Uganda, there's some really cool you know, white infrastructure development and, and by culture development happening in Uganda and in obviously, in Colombia in Bogota is like a good example. And I think there's been a desire to for representation, right, even though many things can be learned from the Netherlands can be learned from Denmark can be learned from, you know, lots of places. I mean, I think even Germany has a lot of like, similar sort of, like, land use in some places where you're like, well, that's a good example. That may all be true, but it's important to have more representation. I think when you're when you're, you know, when you're when you're doing this, so yeah. I think it's right maybe don't leave with like what the Dutch do this way. That's not probably the winning strategy. Okay, that's really interesting. Yeah. I mean, I think I tend to be on the on the on the front of like, I know a lot more about what they're doing. In the Netherlands and I'm like, excited about it. And I'm also you know,

I mean, I'm a white guy who was you know, who's an executive director at like this organization's it was you know, I mean, I have to… there could be a perception that I'm, you know, just always looking to Europe, I think that there's critiques out there that they know, you don't want to I mean, don't want to assume that about me or people you know, but like you definitely, you know, I have to be careful about I think we as advocates have to be careful about only, you know, showing European examples.

Emma: So, this is not so much from my research, but then… would it be more interesting: Do you think to places that are starting to really consider a presentation because to be fair, that's not the place or that's not the case everywhere yet. Would it be more interesting to in terms of let's say, if the Dutch came to represent themselves, of course, would it be more interesting to have examples from more different continents have where they've done workshops and where they've had outcomes?

Bill: Absolutely, yes. Yeah, I was gonna get to that because I was gonna say, you know, I imagine that some of these places that you know, we're like, oh, this is happening in this place. This, you

know, many of those places are looking to the Netherlands because I mean, you know, there's been it's not like it's like, The Netherlands has been like this forever, but it's still like a big leader over the last 30 years, especially in many of those places, are looking at this so I think, yeah, if I were, if I were trying to lead with the concepts and the in the sort of applications and the policies that like make things but I would probably use a mixture of, you know, Representative pictures of people, you know, people of colour women older people, younger people like having a really good mix of, and then geographic diversity, you know, in representation. When you're, you know, showing how these kinds of applications these interventions that you're doing, really work. Yeah. I think that that makes do that. You know, and I think I just seen on the whole, like, European example thing and like, I don't feel like there's a huge resistance to it. It's just like I think we need to we as like, advocates need to be sensitive to this you know that that you don't want to close people's ears, right you can just think that that's the what is the what the Dutch do or whatever, you know. Yeah, I think there's a there's a better way to do it, you know? And I definitely have to be I have to think about that too. Because I'm, you know, a fan, you know, of a lot of the things you know, you talked about the trek, you know, I mean, been there, you know, haven't been in the Netherlands in a long time, but like, I mean, it's just like the, the media, like, like YouTube channels just devoted to showing me like you like, like, how many videos have I seen of that parking facility?

Emma: Right, so, so I assume you've never actually been into it yourself?

Bill: No, I have not been into it. I've not been… I've not been to Utrecht in 20 years. I need to go Yeah.

Emma: It's yeah, cycling into that facility is something special, like wow, it's almost like riding into a cathedral to bicycles, you know? And the high ceilings are like the feeling isn't saying when you just because you're just it's a downward around so you're just gliding down and the ceilings are insanely high and you can see all the Yeah, parked bikes. It's yeah. Wow.

Bill: That's cool. Yeah, no, that's, that is really cool. I definitely watch those videos. And I look forward to being able to go myself but you know, when you're when you're showing these things, you know, it's just like the sort of delight in the excitement around like, oh my gosh, look at that. Yeah. You know, when you're when you're showing, I think, I think it would be valuable to show examples of places that aren't super built up, right. So for the US, you know, most people live in suburban land. Use. So if you're, if you're trying to help a metro area, you've got to have examples of more suburban, kind of, you know, interventions that have worked in other places and it can't, and maybe it's not just the Netherlands, right. I mean, it's like, look at this example from, you know, Uganda or what, you know, or or from Bogota, or from Austin, Texas, you know, like, I think that it's, it's smart to, you know, to have that sort of approach.

Emma: Yeah. Absolutely. And I can imagine for the people actually producing these messages. It's a tricky balance to strike because you need to be specific enough. For instance, about presenting things that are applicable to the specific audience, but also, general enough that you're going to catch a lot of different people's attention. So as you said, different groups, you know, different minorities and such. And to show that changes are possible in different countries. So you have to be general and specific and that's always a really tricky thing. To bridge. So yeah. Very interesting. Okay. Those are my questions. So this is really interesting. Thank you very much.

Bill: My pleasure.

Emma: Thanks for Yeah, have anything to add or any further thoughts, anything that might be useful for my research?

[…]

Bill: I mean, I don't know about you. I don't have anything else to add. I mean, I think this is really interesting. The outcomes have been generally <mark>positive</mark> of like, oh wow, we get them in our place but also Yeah, I think that with the article I wouldn't call it criticism of, of this but in or the Dutch specifically but like as an advocate, just saying simply do what Northern Europe does, you know, is is not a winning strategy that you know, right now, I think it's, you know, for all sorts of reasons not just the sort of ethnic or racial representation but just sort of like my town is special and like looking at Portland Oregon is crazy thinking about Amsterdam or Utrecht is like in like, what like that. We can't We can't be anything alike. You know, and obviously, once you get into conversation, like Oh, actually, we could do this and that thing that would that would work here.

Yeah, in selling this, you know, I think it's got to be it's got to be about more than just sort of the Dutch name. But the kind of like examples of, of how it's worked in in different places. So hopefully that all made sense. And it does. It comes through so yes. Thanks for doing the research. It's pretty cool.

[small talk, end of interview]