Democratic and Industrial Development (1840–1900)



*Shepherdess With a Flock of Sheep* by [Anton Mauve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Mauve) (1838–1888), of the [Hague School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hague_School).

The Netherlands did not industrialize as rapidly as Belgium after 1830, but it was prosperous enough. Griffiths argues that certain government policies facilitated the emergence of a national economy in the 19th century. They included the abolition of internal tariffs and guilds, a unified coinage system, modern methods of tax collection, standardized weights and measures, and the building of many roads, canals, and railroads. However, compared to Belgium, which was leading in industrialization on the Continent, the Netherlands moved slowly. Possible explanations for this difference are the higher costs due to geography and high wages, and the emphasis of entrepreneurs on trade rather than industry. For example, in the Dutch coastal provinces agricultural productivity was relatively high. Hence, industrial growth arrived relatively late – after 1860 – because incentives to move to labour-intensive industry were quite weak. However, the provinces of North Brabant and Overijssel did industrialize, and they became the most economically advanced areas of the country.

As in the rest of Europe, the 19th century saw the gradual transformation of the Netherlands into a modern middle-class industrial society. The number of people employed in agriculture decreased, while the country made a strong effort to revive its stake in the highly competitive shipping and trade business. The Netherlands lagged behind Belgium until the late 19th century in industrialization, and caught up around 1920. Major industries included textiles and (later) the great Philips industrial conglomerate. Rotterdam became a major shipping and manufacturing center.[[144]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands#cite_note-144) Poverty slowly declined as begging largely disappeared along with steadily improving working conditions for the population.

**Flourishing of art, culture and science**

The late 19th century saw a cultural revival. The [Hague School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hague_School) brought a revival of realist painting, 1860–1890. The world-famous Dutch painter was [Vincent van Gogh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_van_Gogh), but he spent most of his career in France. Literature, music, architecture and science also flourished. A representative leader of science was [Johannes Diderik van der Waals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Diderik_van_der_Waals) (1837–1923), a working class youth who taught himself physics, earned a PhD at the nation's leading school Leiden University, and in 1910 won the Nobel Prize for his discoveries in thermodynamics. [Hendrik Lorentz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hendrik_Lorentz) (1853–1928) and his student [Pieter Zeeman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_Zeeman) (1865–1943) shared the 1902 Nobel Prize in physics. Other notable scientists included biologist [Hugo de Vries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_de_Vries) (1848–1935).

Taken and adapted from:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Netherlands>