



International Court of Justice

A breath of fresh air in the UN's judicial capital: The Hague rules in favor of climate-neutral future

The Hague, circa 2050 – This city in the Netherlands, and the home of the United Nations' courts, evolved throughout the first half of the 21st century into a climate-neutral town where transportation is free of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and where energy is cleanly generated.

Industry

Government

Business Issue

Create a climate-neutral city by 2050.

Solution

SAS for Sustainability Management

Benefits

Healthier climate for residents, tourists, business and government.

“We have opted for SAS for Sustainability Management, as we can structurally and continuously monitor our CO₂ emissions with this solution. Plus we have access to frequent reports, and changes to, for example, the fleet, can be quickly and flexibly incorporated.”

Henry Terlouw
Climate Policy Advisor
at The Hague Council

No matter how ambitious and utopian that vision sounds today, The Hague's Climate Policy Advisor, Henry Terlouw, means business.

The environment and climate issues have been very high on The Hague's list of priorities for many years. “Since we are located on the seafloor, subjects like climate change and rising sea levels are literally very close to home,” says Terlouw. He explains why The Hague is so ambitious and what needs to happen for these plans to actually be realized. “Considering our location, we certainly can't ignore this development. And even though The Hague's emission levels obviously are small when measured on a worldwide scale, we have consciously opted to take responsibility. We see it as the council's task to stimulate sustainable development and to be well-prepared for all the possible effects climate change can have where our town and residents are concerned. We also want our council to set a good example. This is why we have come up with a substantial but realistic objective.”

The Hague's council organization – in other words, city government operations – became CO₂-neutral effective Jan. 1, 2010.

Lack of definitions

Terlouw also confirmed that The Hague, as a town, wants to be climate-neutral by 2050. The interim objective is for emissions across town to be reduced by 30 percent by 2020. The council organization needs to be CO₂-neutral in 2010. These ambitions have been included in a strategic plan. However, Terlouw does feel this plan has a number of snags. “The tricky thing is that there is no fixed definition for the term ‘climate-neutral organization.’ There are lots of different interpretations. In our case it means that we will be generating 70 percent of the energy requirements in a CO₂-neutral way, and the remaining 30 percent will be compensated for in The Hague Climate Fund. Also, it was challenging to establish the scope of the council organization

and the associated emissions. So what should be considered part of the council organization and what shouldn't? We have opted for a practical approach and are focusing on the civil service and the council services, including buildings and vehicles. Our biggest emission sources are therefore gas, electricity and heating in the 120 buildings, electricity for public lighting and pumping stations, and finally the fuel used by vehicles.”

The council organization's emissions have been established using SAS Energy and Emissions Management, part of the SAS for Sustainability Management solution. Initial analysis of current energy usage amounted to 41,000 metric tons of CO₂ equivalents (CO₂e). This is an amount you can't easily eliminate or compensate for. “Collecting this information was not exactly easy,” according to Terlouw. “The fuel information relating to the 550 vehicles was largely available via the lease companies, but they use various different systems. The energy usage within our buildings was harder to map out. Managers could only supply outdated, fragmented details in many cases, or the data was applicable to different years. What we were left with was a very rough estimate.”

Progress control

This estimate was sufficient as a starting point. However, Terlouw believes that unequivocal and reliable information is needed in order to effectively safeguard the project's progress. “It's very important to use data from the same year and based on the same measurement units. This is the only way to effectively and carefully calculate the CO₂ equivalents. The scale is therefore important too. We want to create an accurate image for the entire council, but also per individual building. It will be a reliable image of gas usage in cubic meters, electricity in kilowatt hours and town heat in gigajoules. We will be using this information to determine the emission levels at various different test moments. It's also just as important for us to be able to easily monitor the

progress of the CO2-neutral organization. We will then have the option of determining causes and making the necessary adjustments if there are any changes or other special circumstances.”

The council is also considering the introduction of smart energy meters in its buildings, in order to be in a better position to measure the emission levels. However, certain measures will need to be introduced before anything can be monitored in the first place. The Hague will be focusing on three different areas: savings, sustainability, and compensating for the remaining greenhouse gas emissions. “The scale of measures differs enormously within these objectives,” according to Terlouw. “We can instantly realize major changes where new buildings are concerned. The Hague is growing, and there are currently plans in place for 30,000 to 40,000 new homes. These homes will have a 50- to 100-year life span. Thinking now about the different measures for driving back emission levels means the 2050 objective is becoming more tangible. This is somewhat different for existing buildings. This demands a clear action plan whereby we need to combine our strengths with corporations, the business community and residents. This bundling of powers will be stimulated by setting up discussion platforms and by providing focused information – but also by making an energy label compulsory for the buildings the council rents. The category of this label will certainly contribute towards the eventual choice.”

The Hague Climate Fund

Terlouw touches on the sustainable purchasing subject with this last comment. The purchasing policy is responsible for direct and indirect emissions. “For example, we only purchase green electricity. This has instantly reduced emission levels down to 16,000 metric tons. Plus we also need to consider the indirect effects of our purchasing activities. For example, flights are now also included in the mobility section of the strategic plan. Climate-neutral operations means we need to limit these trips and always compensate for them. In such cases we consciously opt for an own-compensation regulation in The Hague

Climate Fund – not for participation with initiatives elsewhere in the world.”

The council deposits the compensation fees into the Climate Fund, which is subsequently solely used for local energy-saving projects. In order to increase the scope of the fund, the council is encouraging other large organizations in the town to participate.

Savings cost money

In order to finance the cost of projects that will deliver future savings in energy consumption, the city makes use of an investment credit. The credit will be paid off using the savings. All measures with a recovery period of less than 25 years can apply to receive the credit. In order to demonstrate the potential savings, it was necessary to subject the buildings in question to energy performance research. This showed that a 20 percent savings is certainly very realistic. Various adjustments have since been carried out or planned into the maintenance or renovation plans.

Consideration for innovations

The objective of The Hague being climate-neutral by 2050 in itself isn't trendsetting in the Netherlands. Other council areas have announced comparable objectives and endorse the Climate Agreement between the government and the Dutch councils. Yet The Hague is definitely a trendsetter with its ambitions for 2010.

“We are certainly one step ahead with our concrete approach,” Terlouw says proudly. “We have clearly opted for a realistic objective, which we are realizing with the possibilities available to us now. The ambitious character of our plans does mean we will be considering the expected innovations where energy usage and savings are concerned. This is not something we want to gamble on. We need everyone in and around the town in order to reach our goals. However, in many cases we will need to win over the business community and the residents in order for them to also provide a contribution within their capacities.”

Favorable business community

An important argument for participating is the fact that the subject touches everyone, both the business community as well as the residents. Lower CO2 emission levels almost automatically mean a healthier living climate. “We will need to reach a climate agreement with the town, which is why discussions have started with all those involved. The key questions are what do we need to realize the objective and what can we do about it together? The communication is currently still quite fragmented. We will first need to create an unequivocal image. For example, The Hague's climate ambitions were recently put on paper in a public leaflet. We wanted to clearly show why we mean business and that this is in literally everyone's interest.”

The business community, large and small, also represents an essential link in this initiative. The council isn't home to a great deal of industry, but does boast many business services. Plus quite a few of the offices in The Hague are managed by the Dutch Government Building Department, which has its own objectives where climate neutrality is concerned.

“We have regular meetings with the business community, and we use the SAS sustainability platform to discuss how we can jointly design the climate policy. We want to persuade them to play an active role in our objectives.”

Terlouw feels The Hague is very much on its way – even though the objectives are ambitious and the subject of sustainability has many different aspects. “The short-term objective of a climate-neutral council organization is now within our reach. However, this doesn't mean that we will subsequently sit back and relax. One part is still based on the compensation, and energy usage needs to continue to go down. This is essential because our horizon is still much further away. Keeping a firm grasp of the final objective remains crucial, and we must make every step we realize clearly visible for all those involved. Being climate-neutral by 2050 is certainly no utopia for The Hague.”



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