



EURO
CITIES



Neighbourhood action in The Hague

Sustainability street by street

The Hague is harnessing the commitment, time and skills of citizens to help achieve its goal of becoming climate neutral by 2040. Practical support and grants for cooperative action at grassroots level are turning good ideas into reality across the city.

Citizens are crucial in helping cities achieve their CO₂ emission reduction targets, in terms of understanding the need for environmental policies and changes in behaviour. The Hague, however, decided to take citizen participation to the next level. The city was convinced that letting community groups take the lead in sustainability action and innovation would achieve greater momentum and engagement, new ideas and better results.

The city allocated a budget of €1.4 million to its sustainability scheme, from which grants of up to €8,000 are offered to citizens with ideas for improving the environment or reducing energy use and emissions in their neighbourhood. These grants are for basic costs like setting up bank accounts and paying for research, legal and professional advice so that a group of neighbours can become a sustainable association or foundation with a feasible idea.

Removing barriers to success

The Hague recognised that a traditional subsidy alone would not be enough. It needed to add value by actively removing barriers to the transformation of ideas into plans. As a result, the initiative's team works closely with project originators to help them become more organised, develop their ideas, find the right support from within city hall, connect with businesses and get their ideas off the ground. The fact that team members can be reached in the evenings and weekends is indicative of the flexible and truly supportive role they play.



What we offer is much more valuable than just money: we really help neighbourhood groups get organised, raise funds and local awareness and find the support and skills they need for success, so they become part of a strong local network.



Wendelijn Oolders, project manager, The Hague

cities in action

July 2015

where: The Hague, Netherlands
what: cooperation
when: 2012+

To mobilise all citizens - not just active environmentalists - the scheme was carefully designed to encourage inclusivity and creativity. Ideas are evaluated on the basis of neighbourhood support rather than fixed criteria. And word about the scheme has spread through case studies published in the press and on the city's website. As a result, while the first year's 27 plans came primarily from sustainability frontrunners, 80% of groups are now made up of new activists.

Having a wide impact

Results have exceeded expectations. Project numbers have risen each year and the city is now benefitting from 75 unique ideas involving thousands of citizens and providing work for hundreds of businesses. Many of these projects have already been implemented, without direct financial support for this phase from the municipality.

New neighbourhood playgrounds and gardens have been created, including one that's transformed a supermarket roof from a grey eyesore into a green haven. A system to supply homes in one street with residual heat from local shops has been set up. And whole streets have got together to buy and install insulation and solar panels, with residents benefiting from negotiation of better prices as well as cheaper energy.

Other projects prove the scheme's impact goes beyond energy sustainability to making a social and economic contribution too. One of these is a 'value-adding network' set up in the Laak quarter, which stimulates greater use of products, services and knowledge available very locally, reducing transport use and CO₂ emissions while boosting the community spirit and economy.

Creating a new dynamic

The success of the scheme shows it can fulfil the need for the city to catalyse sustainability action and for citizens to be empowered to make a difference. Its transparent and interactive approach has also proved that a new dynamic is possible between local government and the local community. This learning is currently being used to develop a new participation policy which will be applied to other areas of city policy.

Cities are critical arenas for addressing sustainability issues, home to more than 70% of Europe's population.

The Hague hopes this initiative will inspire others to mobilise citizen participation in a similarly simple, cost-effective and powerful way to support their transition to a sustainable city.



The Hague is supporting the creation of spaces for people with a shared vision and shared core values... to me this is the only way to go to encourage people to stand back from the daily hassle of busy lives and find the time and energy to address the bigger things in life, the global problems.

**Sebastiaan van Zaanen, project originator,
Moerwijk neighbourhood**

