

Input from the Netherlands to the Habitat III preparatory process

Answers to questions

This report was compiled by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, which are jointly responsible for its content. Additional material was provided by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Hague, July 2014

I. Urban Demographic Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Questions 1 and 2: Managing rapid urbanisation and rural-urban linkages: two sides of the same coin¹

Growing pressure on cities

Pressure on cities is intensifying. This trend had already begun in the Netherlands even before the economic crisis of 2009. The urban population is growing more rapidly due to better employment prospects, changes in the nature of work and economic mobility. Decentralisation of tasks to subnational level and central government cutbacks mean that cities are having to assume a greater responsibility for policy. At the same time, implementation of voluntary agreements concluded at national and international level can lead to friction at municipal level.

Cities are facing a dual challenge: the retreat of central government combined with increasingly complex problems, i.e. the need to find local solutions in a globalising world. The economic crisis is delaying practical action while at the same time boosting urbanisation, given better employment prospects in cities.

Economic shrinkage

The definition of the term *city* is changing. Cities no longer comprise individual municipalities, but municipalities as an integral part of the region in which they are located. Municipalities with falling populations face tough political and financial challenges. They want to respond adequately to the major changes confronting them in terms of housing and public space; economic vitality and employment; accessibility and mobility; and provision of services in fields such as education, healthcare and culture.

Some cities are seeing their populations shrink due to migration and now face problems with the scale of service provision. In others, however, the population is rising, putting greater pressure on services and leading to an increase in problems such as youth unemployment, social exclusion, congestion and pollution. In other words, pressure on services is excessively high in urban areas, while the reverse is true in areas with demographic shrinkage. The Urban Agenda must take all these problems and challenges into account.

¹ NB We have combined questions 1 and 2 because any discussion of urbanisation will automatically impact on rural areas, and vice versa.

Daily urban systems

For the people who live there, a city is more than a specifically defined administrative area. In the larger conurbations, inhabitants operate within a daily urban system. To facilitate their residents, municipal authorities set up networks with neighbouring municipalities to organise transport, spatial planning, green spaces and economic activity on an adequate scale.

Cooperation between urban and rural areas is vital. Peri-urban and rural areas have a crucial role to play, because they supply nearby cities with food, energy, space, nature areas and opportunities for leisure pursuits.

By operating at the level of a conurbation (by 'borrowing size'), cities enjoy the benefits of a larger structural unit, such as greater innovative potential, better alignment between education and employment, and a smaller environmental footprint, while limiting the negative impacts of a large metropolis, such as pollution, social exclusion and crime.

Local policy considerations

Regulations, resources and policy must be tailored at local level to deal with a highly diverse array of issues within a 'human-scale' approach. This entails regulations with bandwidths enabling customisation at local level, ensuring further development.

Policy considerations are an intrinsic choice between developing and managing physical space, safeguarding health and quality of life and preventing segregation. For some municipalities, this may relate to inner-city development, where rail and road plans clash with, for example, noise pollution and environmental standards. Policy choices must also be made in the context of regional cooperation, for example between municipal authorities in relation to business parks and harmonisation of environmental legislation.

The city as leader and platform

The relationship between government and society is undergoing a fundamental change. Citizens are becoming increasingly vocal, making ever-greater demands, and are more independent as a result of the digitisation of society (new citizenship). A number of programmes have been initiated in the Netherlands to show municipalities how citizens can become more closely involved in urban renewal². This change in the role of government requires citizens to be more proactive, which means that more scope is needed for small-

² For example, *Stedelijke vernieuwing op uitnodiging* about urban renewal, and *Samen denken, anders doen* about encouraging creative solutions through collective thinking.

scale plans, temporary zoning and flexibility, and that care needs to be taken to mitigate financial risks.

Municipal authorities are working more closely together on various scales within the quadruple helix: the partnership within which government authorities, the business community, research institutions and civil society organisations work to resolve the challenges facing society. The subnational authority often takes the leading role and provides a platform for the other partners to propose solutions. In this context the city acts as a living laboratory, with local and other partners delivering local solutions through pilot projects.

The challenges ahead

Future challenges include ensuring sufficient affordable housing, maintaining levels of service, ensuring maintenance of buildings, and combating segregation.

Autonomy

A number of developments have been delayed by the economic crisis. In the long term, municipalities must have sufficient policy freedom to make unpopular choices and to deviate from norms (within bandwidths).

Level of services and quality of life

The Randstad conurbation is a densely populated area in the west of the Netherlands where the population is still growing. In contrast, populations in rural areas are already falling or are expected to do so. In both situations active, creative policies are needed to keep services at an acceptable level. To accomplish this, minimum requirements need to be set.

At the same time, the question arises as to whether central government policy is sufficiently geared up to this situation. In the field of housing, for example, rents are rising and this calls for more scope for market forces. As yet, there is little privately-owned housing available for rent. At the same time, it is also important to take account of future problems with poor maintenance of inexpensive, privately-owned properties, and increasing segregation in the lower end of the rental sector. All of this will affect quality of life in individual communities.

Regional approach and local solutions

Municipalities must realise that they can draw on each other's strengths (rather than competing with each other). Each city must seek its own unique selling points.

Local solutions ensure greater policy diversity, and it is important to share them at national and international level in order to boost problem-solving capacity.

An example of [urbanisation](#): The municipality of Haarlem is trying to speed up the procedures for urban renewal, public participation and joint decision-making and make them more flexible.

An example of regional cooperation: The housing stock in the Parkstad region of South Limburg consists primarily of owner-occupied flats that will in time no longer meet housing needs. However, there is demand for rented flats in the short term. Since the market value of these blocks of flats is low, a pilot project has now been launched to explore opportunities for them to be purchased (by housing associations), rented out on a temporary basis, and eventually demolished without significant deployment of public funds. The underlying goal is to contribute to the region's demolition target, relieve pressure on the lower end of the rented housing market, and address a number of social problems (including nuisance caused by sub-letting). A single flat will be newly built to replace each three flats demolished.

Relevant reports

[The Future of the City](#)

[Quality without Growth](#)

[Perspectief voor de steden: adviezen voor de agenda van de stad \(in Dutch\)](#)

[Committee of the Regions' draft opinion on the Urban Agenda](#)

Question 4: Addressing urban youth needs

UNICEF and UN Habitat created the Child-Friendly Cities international network in 2000. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) responded in 2004 by setting up a Dutch branch, which brings together parties such as NGOs, policymakers, experts, children and young people in an effort to make all policy areas more child-friendly. Municipal authorities can also receive assistance in developing and supporting innovative youth policy and policy integration through exchanges of information, expertise, successful policy instruments and examples of good practice at network meetings and during international working visits. The network operates on the basis of themes, and chose 'youth and public space' as its focus for the first few years. The Dutch child-friendly cities network works with other organisations to

lobby for better conditions for child-friendly policy and inclusion of this issue on local, regional and national agendas.

The network's focus has gradually shifted to other themes, such as positive youth policy, which seeks to bring about a change from risk- to development-oriented policy for children and young people. Development-oriented policy is one of the principles underpinning the decentralisation of all youth services to the municipalities, due to take effect on 1 January 2015. Responsibility for youth services will no longer be split among the various tiers of government (national and provincial for specialist services and some preventive services, municipal for some preventive services and general services). Municipal authorities will have full responsibility for all youth policy, since they are the first port of call for citizens and are therefore in the best position to assess local developments and needs and thus to provide or arrange services for local youth.

Cooperation within Europe

The European Network of Child-Friendly Cities (ENCFC) is the European umbrella organisation for networks in both EU and non-EU countries. The goal of the ENCFC is to promote child-friendly cities, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child as its starting point and working framework. Exchange of good practice and experience among governments, research institutions and professionals within this network leads to a greater understanding of other disciplines and is ensuring gradual integration of the concept of the child-friendly city into them. The result is increasingly integrated policies focusing on promoting child- and youth-friendly environments.

The future

Decentralisation of youth services and the transfer of national and provincial provision will require considerable attention within municipal structures. The focus is on integrating and reshaping all these services into a comprehensive local infrastructure geared to promoting local child- and youth-friendly environments.

Young people and their parents/carers will be expected to be more proactive, since they have an important role to play in the participation society. In this model, the government and other parties will play a less prominent role, and the focus will shift to the abilities of young citizens themselves. This is a sea-change in the relationship between the government, civil

society and young citizens. In the years to come, young people and their parents/carers will be more closely and more effectively involved in the changes that are to take place.

Question 5: Responding to the needs of the aged

An active old age

The number of elderly people in the Netherlands is growing, partly due to the composition of the population and partly because the Dutch are living longer. One of the reasons for higher life expectancy in the Netherlands is that people are making better use of health services. It is important for people to stay active as they get older in order to minimise use of care services.

The key issues here are how to prepare Dutch society for an increasingly large group of elderly people who are living longer, and how to respond adequately to the need and capacity of elderly people themselves to have an active old age.

Independence

To ensure people have an active old age, it is essential to determine what they can do themselves (self-reliance *and* shared self-reliance) and where others can help (care provision).

With regard to self-reliance, it is important to look at factors such scientific research (how to stay active into old age), diet (services), housing (new housing concepts, modification, public space surrounding housing), movement (sport, leisure, mobility), ways of making contact and combating loneliness (meeting places, clubs, support), self-help and self-determination, and personal development (culture, voluntary work, learning, continuing to work).

VNG organises activities on these themes and on the role that municipalities can play.

Loneliness

Loneliness becomes an increasing problem as people get older, their networks shrink and they become less mobile. Loneliness arises because requests for help are not answered or individual needs are not met.

Given that loneliness is as deadly and costly as smoking, thinking on who should be responsible for resolving the problem is undergoing a significant change in the Netherlands.

The trend is to involve society in the issue, to put it on the agenda of public debate and ask what society itself can do about it.

The challenge

Will it be possible to work together with as little government interference as possible to improve quality of life and to reduce demand for care services relative to the above issues?

II. Land and Urban Planning: Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Question 8: Ensuring sustainable urban planning and design

At the dawn of the 21st century, the Netherlands is facing new spatial planning challenges. To maintain its attractive international business climate, it will have to meet urgent challenges relating to sustainability, water and accessibility. The Dutch government has therefore published a new national policy strategy for infrastructure and spatial planning.

This policy strategy sets out a vision for the Netherlands in 2040. The country must be competitive, accessible, liveable and safe. In the strategy, the government focuses on matters of national interest, such as accessibility, a good business climate, a robust road network and flood protection, and sets out the infrastructure projects in which it plans to invest in the coming years. It also allocates more powers to provincial and municipal authorities to pursue spatial planning policies. The government's three main goals are to:

- enhance the Netherlands' competitiveness by strengthening its spatial and economic infrastructure. This means, for example, fostering a climate that is attractive to both Dutch and foreign businesses;
- improve accessibility;
- guarantee a safe, liveable environment, with unique natural habitats and cultural and historical values.

The Netherlands also has ambitious plans to harmonise environmental legislation and make it more flexible. The current government is committed to promoting a more grassroots approach to planning decisions by decentralising tasks to the municipal and provincial authorities. These two tiers of government each have different roles: municipal authorities are closest to citizens and businesses and are best placed to take account of local factors, while provincial authorities can ensure a harmonised approach to issues such as construction of office buildings. There is a visible and growing trend for municipalities to enter into partnerships to increase their knowledge and expertise, and to work closely with the provincial authorities.

This means that local differences relating to economic growth, spatial planning, and demographic growth and shrinkage, for example, can be addressed at the right level. This

government policy is the first step towards ensuring more scope for development, with less red tape and regulation.

Dutch architects and spatial planners are very skilled at finding innovative and sustainable solutions to complex spatial challenges, and the Dutch design sector is active both nationally and internationally. In the long term, our architects, urban planners and engineers can help future-proof spatial planning in the Netherlands. We would be happy to share this expertise.

Question 9: Improving urban land management, including addressing urban sprawl

Until the economic crisis, Dutch spatial planning was based on growth. This approach gave the Netherlands a coherent system of living and working space, infrastructure, green spaces, and farmland, with flood and environmental protection systems and a high-quality living environment.

The drawback of this system is that it lacks flexibility. Although the Netherlands is still known for its structured spatial planning regulations, the current regulations will be revised over the next few years to cater for new spatial developments. Trends such as online shopping, working from home, public-sector housing construction, etc. need to be taken into account. New legislation is therefore being drafted to provide a safe, sustainable living environment that is economically competitive and that must enable plans to respond to changes in society, the economy and demographics etc.

Relatively speaking, there is more urban sprawl in the Netherlands than in other European countries, due to widespread construction activity and the high proportion of single-family homes in growth centres. However this sprawl is not random but carefully planned, and its development took account of impact on mobility and landscape. Sprawl may increase slightly as the planning system transfers more responsibilities to the subnational authorities so that they can decide for themselves whether they want to ease planning restrictions or take steps to counter building on greenfield sites and prevent sprawl. However, this should be seen in perspective. The Netherlands still has a much more organised spatial planning policy than many other countries.

Question 10: Enhancing urban and peri-urban food production

Since the 17th century, the majority of the Dutch population has lived in cities. We therefore have long-standing experience of feeding our urban centres, from areas such as the Westland region in the south-west of the country. Physical limitations have always forced the Netherlands to be innovative with space: nowhere in the world is so much produced in such a small area as in the Netherlands.

Urban agriculture concepts are attracting new groups of people to farming – from architects to bankers, from artists to hard-core agrarians, from immigrants to nature-lovers, but above all creative and aware city-dwellers, thus forming a breeding ground for further innovation. The knowledge available in the Netherlands provides enormous potential, bringing truly new forms of expertise into agriculture. This is important for strengthening the position of Dutch agriculture, both now and in the future.

In 2007, the Dutch government began encouraging multifunctional agriculture by setting up the Multifunctional Agriculture Task Force (2007-2012), in which innovation and expansion in agriculture have led to extension of the existing agribusiness system to the fields of care, childcare, education, nature management, direct product sales and tourism. The focus is on farms on the outskirts of cities.

To find out how to improve marketing of both our knowledge of and the products from urban agriculture, and to learn how to turn a good initiative into a profitable future-proof business activity, in 2012 the government concluded a green deal on urban agriculture³. This involved working with several key stakeholders, farms and research institutions to investigate the sustainability and funding of twelve projects. What revenue models are possible? And how can initiatives be funded sustainably if the government and banks are out of the picture?

Various funding options were identified, such as joint ventures, crowdfunding, vegetable box schemes and private investors. Urban agriculture is not necessarily dependent on subsidies; it can in fact be profitable. The plan is to explore the issue of alternative funding for agriculture in general in 2014. Another fact to emerge was that interaction between all the projects and initiatives could be improved.

³ See report on urban farmers in the Netherlands and making urban agriculture more professional (*Stadsboeren in Nederland, professionalisering van de stadsgerichte landbouw*) 26 September 2013.

The Urban Agriculture Network⁴, a forum in which municipal civil servants can exchange knowledge and experience, has been in existence for some time. With the support of the sustainability programme *Duurzaam Door* networks are being set up in three cities where project teams can meet and learn from each other and share experience with the Urban Agriculture Network, to avoid duplication. This approach could be expanded to the national level in future.

Within the leading economic sector Horticulture and Parent Material, the public-private partnership on urban horticulture (2013) led to productive exchanges between scientists working for various research centres and companies, and between large players and small initiatives.

The European rural development programme now also offers opportunities for urban agriculture. The provinces may propose urban agriculture projects in their efforts to preserve the countryside and create new types of businesses. Central government has a limited role, acting sometimes as initiator or coordinator, more often as liaison or facilitator, but always in the background.

Question 11: Addressing urban mobility challenges

National urban mobility policy focuses mainly on the urban regions around the mainports, brainport, greenports and valleys of national significance, with central government working together with subnational authorities, each on the basis of its own responsibilities. The aim is a robust, coherent mobility system, in which users (both passengers and freight carriers) come first, and in which all available modalities are used to guarantee good accessibility. As regional and national mobility systems are closely intertwined, good connections between them are important.

The subnational authorities are responsible for a robust and coherent regional mobility system, taking full account of slow-moving and leisure traffic. Central government plans to help them achieve this by strengthening modalities (roads, public transport and waterways) in response to demand, and ensuring better connections between them (aiming for co-modality and multimodal hubs) and closer harmonisation with spatial developments. Door-to-door accessibility will be the key. Measures by businesses and subnational authorities to reduce demand at peak times can be highly effective.

⁴ www.stedennetwerkstadslanbouw.nl

Improving accessibility is a challenge for the future. Central government is committed to combining smart investment, innovation and maintenance, with the emphasis on positive action. Using smart investment, bottlenecks in the transport network can be tackled to generate maximum economic return. Innovative solutions will help users get the most out of the mobility system, for example by giving them comprehensive travel information. Good management and maintenance of the main networks form the basis of a robust and coherent system. Regional differences within the Netherlands are increasing, making universal application of generic policies less effective. The government has therefore decided to tailor policy to individual regions.

Another challenge involves strengthening the cohesion between the various modalities and making the transport system robust and more future-proof. If the Netherlands is to safeguard liveability, cope with diminishing supplies of fossil fuels and achieve its CO₂ reduction target, it needs to make progress in the transition to sustainable mobility.

Questions 12 & 13

Urban renewal policy has been a major national priority for the past 15 years, and has made a significant contribution to conditions in Dutch cities in 2014. Even before then, the urban environment was always a major consideration, especially in the context of improving the quality and variety of housing stock, enhancing the physical living environment and fostering a healthy and sustainable living environment.

The area in which stakeholders operate is developing and shifting. Government grants for urban renewal are being phased out, with primary responsibility now being delegated to municipal authorities. Prompted in part by the economic crisis, the government is now exploring scope to involve other, new stakeholders and to use alternative revenue models to facilitate urban renewal. Efforts are also being made to dovetail with grassroots initiatives and to extend the life of existing housing stock and convert empty property where this is feasible. Major Cities Policy has led to greater physical, social and economic coherence. Central government used to have a leading role in urban renewal. Since policy was decentralised in 2011, it now acts much more as a facilitator, focusing on legislation and support for the knowledge infrastructure, and, to a lesser extent, on financial and fiscal measures. Local initiatives have a much more prominent part to play than in the past. The role of cities will be explored in more detail over the next few years in a new Urban Agenda.

III. Environment and Urbanization: Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Question 15: Addressing climate change

The Netherlands addresses climate change by tackling adverse effects in urban areas. These include water nuisance (caused by storm and/or surface water), drought-related damage to buildings and infrastructure, loss of economic production due to the urban heat island effect, and damage and injury caused by surface water flooding.

In the Netherlands, the municipal authorities have primary responsibility for spatial planning, stormwater and groundwater management, and wastewater conveyance. The water authorities are responsible for surface water management and wastewater treatment. Central government and the water authorities are jointly responsible for flood protection.

Stormwater-related nuisance is a frequent problem at local level. Though less common, drought, heat and flood protection are also important local issues.

What are the future challenges and issues that could be addressed by a new Urban Agenda?

Across the EU, 'backcasting' and 'mainstreaming' are at the heart of urban regions' adaptation strategies. This involves knowing why adaptation is important, how resilience can be increased and what measures are to be taken.

The Netherlands has already taken much more action on climate change than some other countries, and we would be happy to share our knowledge. There is no need for additional regulations, partly because there is already a considerable body of European legislation. The Netherlands does not consider more regulation to be desirable.

Question 16: Disaster risk reduction

Water is the main potential cause of natural disasters in the Netherlands. This country is a vast delta, more than half of which is below sea level. Meltwater and rainwater can also cause significant fluctuations in water levels in the rivers.

The Netherlands is probably the best protected delta in the world. But how can we ensure that we remain protected from flooding – now and in the future – and that our supply of fresh water is secure?

Flood defences have to meet the safety standards laid down in the Dutch Water Act. These defences protect the lower-lying parts of the country against flooding from the sea and the major rivers. The highest standards apply in the areas where the potential consequences of a flood are most severe. Responsibility for maintaining the flood defence system lies with the water authorities and the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management, with the costs shared equally between them. The Delta Programme is a national programme in which central government, provinces, municipalities and water authorities work together with civil society organisations, the business community and research institutions under the Delta Commissioner, the government commissioner specially appointed for this task. The programme has introduced a supplementary concept of flood protection: multi-level safety. In cases where investing in primary flood defences is extremely costly or has huge impact on society, smart connections can be made between investment in flood defence measures and adaptation of spatial planning to reduce the risk of flooding.

Within the Delta Programme, agreement has been reached on the need to ensure new spatial developments are flood-resistant and climate-proof to minimise the potential impact of flooding.

The Delta Programme is the major flood defence programme for the 21st century. It aims to make the Netherlands a safe and attractive place to live, now and in the future, by protecting it from flooding and securing a sufficient supply of fresh water. This is vital to the country's survival and to the strength of its economy, for current generations and those to come.

One major challenge is to ensure that the flood defences measure up to changing circumstances and take account of new insights.

Today, we have more to protect than we did 50 years ago. Away from the coast and behind our river dykes lies a densely populated area with people, livestock and goods that would all be at risk in the event of a flood. Almost 60% of this country is vulnerable to flooding, including the economic heartland: approximately 70% of the Dutch GDP is generated below sea level. Flooding would result in unimaginable suffering and damage. Protection from floods – caused by the sea and our major rivers – is therefore of vital importance. We are currently reviewing our flooding standards using a risk-based approach that factors in impact in terms of casualties and damage. In some areas, this will lead to more stringent standards, resulting in further investment to improve safety, based on new, more realistic norms.

The droughts in 2003 and the spring of 2011 showed that maintaining a sustainable supply of fresh water is a constant reality and not a theoretical construct. We therefore have to examine the efficiency of our water system: it needs to be more flexible and better structured,

and water must also be used more efficiently. Some of the questions that need to be addressed include how much water we will be able to deliver in the short term, and at what price, and the responsibilities of users. The challenge is to set goals for a sustainable and efficient freshwater supply. In this regard, we will also look at agreements with neighbouring countries.

Dutch summers are expected to become increasingly warm and dry, which will put pressure on our supply of fresh water – not so much drinking water, but the water resources on which the agricultural sector, industry and nature depend.

Issues such as the measured increase in sea level, subsidence and rising temperatures are forcing us to look further ahead and to anticipate developments that will occur in the distant future. We will have to make our cities more climate-robust to avoid heat stress and damage from drought or flooding. Moreover, there is room for improvement in our current flood protection measures. We want to avoid disasters and ensure that we are well prepared for any eventuality – now and in the future.

Dutch municipalities have an important role to play in preventing and dealing with emergencies and natural disasters, such as flooding, power failures, earthquakes, forest and other fires, and incidents involving hazardous substances. National legislation requires them to deal with such incidents at a regional level through the safety regions and the regional implementing services. The former focus primarily on day-to-day fire services and emergency response, while the latter are more concerned with the environment and hazardous substances. The municipal authorities draw up joint plans describing how these organisations are to perform their tasks and what is expected of them.

In the event of an incident, the first to respond will be the operational emergency services (police, fire and ambulance). If the consequences are more far-reaching, the mayor and a policy team are brought in. In this context, the safety region acts as a network organisation for multiple partners, each of which can contact the others quickly in an emergency and can then take immediate action on the basis of mutual agreements. This means that all kinds of emergencies can be handled swiftly. Preparation for incidents involves paying considerable attention to prevention, for instance in policy-making on urban development, zoning plans and permits.

Question 17: Reducing traffic congestion

The Dutch government, regions and businesses are working together in a national programme designed to improve the accessibility of road, waterway and rail networks in the most densely populated areas of the country. The aim is to cut congestion by 20% in 2014 with a package of around 300 practical and quantifiable measures. The follow-up programme, which will run from 2015 to 2017, will aim to reduce journey times by 10%.

Investment in new roads should reduce congestion, but asphalt alone will not solve accessibility problems. Budgets and space are limited, and the Dutch government also wants to maintain quality of life in its cities. For this reason, it is essential to make better use of existing infrastructure through various measures, including:

- Improving existing roads;
- Offering travellers more options and services;
- Increasing goods transport by water;
- Working together with businesses

Measures are aimed primarily at the needs and behaviour of travellers and transport providers. Each region has its own problems and users, and so tailored solutions are needed. Regions and businesses are also launching their own ideas and initiatives on a co-funding basis. The idea is not to take a single measure, but various measures in combination, such as more bicycle parking facilities at railway stations, better travel information, improved public transport hubs and more dedicated bus lanes. On waterways, the aim is not just to cut waiting times at locks but also to make journey times more reliable.

Regions also operate with 'smart deals': agreements between employers and employees to reduce rush-hour travel. This might involve tax measures, e-bikes or flexible working hours, for example. It is very important for businesses to take an active part, as it is a good way for them to cut costs. A change in people's travel habits will lead to long-term improvements in accessibility.

The Dutch government concluded new agreements with the regions in early 2014. Together they will invest a total of €600 million in additional measures between 2014 and 2017.

Looking to the future, it is important that journeys are spread more evenly throughout the day

and that rush-hour traffic is reduced. People need to reach their destinations quickly and easily.

Question 18: Air pollution

The Netherlands started to take air pollution abatement measures in the latter half of the 1960s. Since 2000 the main sources of air pollution have been regulated by European legislation. The Dutch government is responsible for transposing European directives into national legislation, and for air pollution abatement policy in general. The primary sources of air pollution are industry, traffic, agricultural enterprises and consumers. Major industrial emissions are regulated by environmental permits issued by municipal or provincial authorities. In addition, general binding rules issued by central government are applicable to facilities such as combustion plants. This instrument has been greatly extended over the past few years.

Air quality standards are also regulated at European and national level. Although the Netherlands is a very densely populated country with a great deal of traffic and heavy industry and an intensive farming system, air quality standards are hardly ever exceeded, except in a few heavily congested areas. However, since most of these 'hot spots' are located in densely populated parts of our inner cities, the impact on public health is considerable. Emissions of the main air contaminants, i.e. sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter, have been reduced by between 50% and 90% over the past few decades. In order to remedy air quality problems in a number of hot spots in urban areas, a national cooperation programme on air quality was launched by the competent authorities, representing all tiers of government. This resulted in the EU granting the Netherlands more time to reach its targets without having to face the threat of European infringement procedures and fines.

The fact that European standards are rarely exceeded does not, however, mean that problems no longer exist. Particularly in the case of health issues related to particulate matter, the specified European limit values are much less stringent than the standards applied by the WHO. Highly intensive pig and poultry farming concentrated in some parts of the country is a source of both considerable nuisance and health concerns related to particulate matter and pathogenic micro-organisms. Permitting procedures for large industrial facilities like coal-fired power stations and oil refineries are often protracted due to the involvement of critical local residents and NGOs. The required reduction of nitrogen

deposition on nature conservation sites is a major problem hindering the growth of the Dutch agricultural industry.

The remaining challenges are:

- The relationship between air pollution and long-term health effects; merely attaining existing European standards will not solve the problem.
- A solution must be found to the problem of nitrogen deposition, nature conservation sites and the development of a healthy agricultural industry in the Netherlands.
- Further improvement in urban air quality by developing and implementing appropriate instruments supported by all stakeholders to reduce traffic and other emissions.
- Cities work with a local, integrated policy approach. To ensure successful implementation of legislation (in this case the European Air Quality Directive), this should be taken into account at the drafting stage.

The lessons learned are that public participation in policymaking and permitting should be properly organised to prevent unrealistic expectations and protracted procedures.

IV. Urban Governance and Legislation: Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Question 21: Improving urban legislation

Environmental legislation

The Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment has introduced a new Environment and Planning Act to regulate the sector. The Act also applies to provincial and municipal strategic and land-use plans. Where necessary, it also reviews the relationship between public authorities and their powers.

The Crisis and Recovery Act, drafted in response to the 2009 economic crisis, makes it easier to change local regulations and land-use plans in urban areas in order to facilitate growth. Sustainability and innovation are key drivers. The Crisis and Recovery Act will be repealed when the Environment and Planning Act comes into full force.

Local authorities have gone to great lengths since 2007 to reduce the regulatory burden on both individuals and businesses, and the EU Services Directive and the Services Act have also entered into force. In the Netherlands, application of the *Lex Silencio Postivio* (LSP)⁵ is considered whenever an application is made for a permit or exemption. It has applied to permits and exemptions subject to the EU Services Directive since 2009.

Well-regulated, better and more concrete

In response to the Ministry of Economic Affairs' letter setting out its programme for 2012-2017 to reduce the regulatory burden on people and businesses, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) set up a joint programme to reduce the regulatory burden and improve the quality of services and regulations. The programme addresses both national legislation that impedes appropriate service delivery and the design of less onerous municipal regulations and permits so that entrepreneurs have to spend less time and money dealing

⁵ If a decision is not taken on an application within the set time limit, a permit or exemption is granted by operation of law.

with them. A local impact test has also been developed to measure policy impact, costs, enforcement and regulation.

Administrative network and platform for knowledge sharing

An administrative network of regional ambassadors works to reduce the regulatory burden by analysing problems. Management meetings are also organised to share knowledge and information.

Question 22: Decentralisation and strengthening of local authorities

Autonomy

The key features of subnational government in the Netherlands are 'autonomy' and 'joint governance'. Autonomy refers to the discretion local and provincial authorities enjoy to manage their own affairs, and joint governance to implementation of central government policy at local level (with the subnational authorities enjoying policy discretion in some areas). The municipalities' autonomous tasks and competences are derived from the Constitution and the Municipalities Act, and their joint governance tasks from specific legislation in specific policy fields.

The Municipalities Act stipulates that the minister must promote decentralisation. Decentralisation is also subject to the Local and Central Government Relations Code, under which the VNG must be consulted if a new provision or law affects municipalities. Before a bill is enacted, there is a formal consultation period of two months.

Current decentralisation operations

VNG itself pressed for the decentralisation of certain tasks several years ago because municipalities think they should be organised as closely to the public as possible in accordance with the 'First Government' principle.

Responsibility for youth and care services, employment and appropriate education is therefore being decentralised to municipalities (see also the answer to question 4). Tasks relating to the Environment and Planning Act and to the formation of regional implementing

services are also being decentralised. The decentralisation operations are intended to take effect on 1 January 2015 (see also the answer to question 21).

Decentralisation is part of the government's policy that tasks should be carried out as closely to the public as possible and with more coherence so that the relationship between problems can be identified. It is up to the local authorities to achieve these ambitions.

Self-reliance and spending cuts

In the current weak economic climate, central government is about to undertake a sweeping operation to cut expenditure. Decentralisation will be based on people's own strengths and problem-solving abilities. Tasks, competences and related budgets will be decentralised to the municipalities.

Decentralisation will enable central government to meet its financial targets. The municipalities will perform the tasks at lower cost in accordance with the principle of one family, one coordinator, one plan. Implementation costs will be reduced by standardisation of working procedures and even greater regional cooperation among municipalities.

Continuity of care

It has been agreed that continuity of care will be guaranteed during the first year. Central government and the municipalities will together monitor the available financial resources and resolve any problems.

Efficiency can also be increased in substantive areas of the social domain through more coherent delivery of decentralised tasks by municipalities (staff professionalisation, a quality and supervisory framework, new procurement and public contracting procedures, neighbourhood outreach teams, information policy tailored to the social domain as a whole, shared billing).

Cooperation

Given the scale of the tasks devolving to them and the efficiency savings arising from the operation, municipalities are facing a daunting challenge. The tasks will have to be carried out in a fundamentally different way than in the past and the municipalities will have to adapt to the new circumstances.

Administrative modernisation in the wake of decentralisation entails more than merely a debate about structures. It also requires active citizenship and the need for other forms of governance and citizen participation. This calls for a horizontal relationship between society and government and thus a reconsideration of the vertical relationships between government and society and among the tiers of government.

The current trend is for municipalities to work together more closely. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, municipalities are increasingly aware of the efficiency benefits to be gained from cooperation. Dutch municipalities have been working together more closely in such areas as ICT, taxes, personnel and substantive themes since 2005. Some have even merged. Secondly, municipalities themselves are increasingly coming to the conclusion that cooperation strengthens their administrative capacity. In the decentralisation operation, the latter is an important reason for the municipalities to work closely together. Decentralisation is an opportunity for municipalities to arrive at new horizontal working methods to deliver tailored services at local level for and with the public.

VNG

All the municipalities in the Netherlands are voluntary members of VNG. VNG is a platform for them to share best practices, both physically (at meetings) and virtually (by means of a databank of practical examples, see <http://www.vng.nl/producten-diensten/databanken>). As well as being a platform, VNG is a lobbyist (at central government, EU and other levels) and service provider (e.g. issuing standard regulations). VNG's mission is to strengthen local government. It also has an international branch that implements programmes to strengthen local authorities worldwide.⁶

Question 23: Improving participation and human rights in urban development

History of citizen participation in the Netherlands

There has been a shift in citizen participation in the Netherlands in recent decades from classical participation, involving the right of consultation and comment (first generation, 1970s and 1980s) via interactive policy-making (second generation, late 1980s and 1990s) to government participation, with subnational authorities facilitating public initiatives in their

⁶ www.vng-international.nl.

communities (third generation, since the turn of the century). There are several explanations for this evolution. Decision-making, for example, is cheaper and faster if citizens are involved at an early stage, while the final decision enjoys greater public support and legitimacy.

The role of municipalities in social initiatives

Citizen participation is still important to municipalities. The question being asked now is how can municipalities become more engaged in social initiatives.

The VNG Think Tank took stock of municipal practices in 2013. Social initiatives reflect contemporary ideals, modern entrepreneurship and the search for connections. Initiators have good reasons to seek a particular change (personal experience, witness to abuse). They have knowledge of a kind that is also important to subnational authorities. They know how policy works in practice. Initiators are not complainers, they seek ways of doing things better.⁷

Public services are no longer a monopoly of the public sector. They are increasingly a matter for society itself. Initiatives are taken by individual citizens responding to a problem they have experienced themselves. They do not ask for permission or account for their actions in the political arena. They are active in an area that until recently would have been regarded as part of the public sector and for which local officials would have been accountable to their municipal councils and executives. The vertical public authorities are out of step with the horizontal society.

To establish a new relationship with these public initiatives, subnational authorities (municipal councils, executives and civil servants) will have to take on another role. Municipalities are in a unique position to tap into the intelligence and energy of the public.

The way in which subnational authorities and social initiatives can strengthen each other is determined by circumstances, and can range from regulation, coordination and stimulation to facilitation and letting go. A reasoned choice for one of these options has to be made for each policy theme and in each stage of a project or initiative. Far greater flexibility is therefore required from the subnational authority. And this has consequences for inter-

⁷ Source: *Van eerste overheid naar eerst de burger, over maatschappelijke initiatieven die de lokale overheid uitdagen* (From First Government to Citizens First: social initiatives that challenge subnational authorities), 2013 annual report, Association of Netherlands Municipalities Think Tank.

administrative relations. Rigid central supervision is not appropriate, for example, if the option 'letting go' is chosen.

If the issue at hand is complex, all stakeholders must be invited to take part and decide on the solution. The municipal council decides how not what has to be done (all interests in the open, budget, term, enabling conditions and minimum standards).

Some municipalities have decided to check enabling conditions against human rights standards. Human rights agreements also apply to subnational authorities and municipalities are therefore obliged to protect human rights. Some do so by explicitly naming human rights as specified in the agreements and applying them in policy development, for example when deciding on the minimum level of public services they will provide.⁸

Questions and challenges

Subnational authorities must redefine their position in the network society in the coming period. They will have to answer questions of an administrative, institutional and organisational nature, such as:

- How should municipalities respond to social initiatives? How can municipalities make more effective use of their knowledge of social reality in their dialogue with central government?
- Who defines the public interest? What is the role of the municipal council?
- What is the relationship between representative and participative democracy?
- How can we protect the interests of less vocal citizens?
- What is the relationship between equality and social initiatives (who wants to participate, who may participate and is that enough?).
- How can municipalities make better use of the available social capital by letting go? What does this entail for municipalities? In which domain and at what level is letting go an option and when must municipalities take the lead and set frameworks?

Central government policy is to involve the public and other stakeholders in planning at an early stage. This generates support for major urban planning decisions on transport, infrastructure, water management, etc.

⁸ http://www.vng.nl/files/vng/publicaties/2012/publicatie_goed_bezig_over_mensenrechten.pdf

Question 24: Enhancing urban safety and security

Changes in the domain of safety and security

Safety and security now occupy a more prominent place on the agenda of the subnational authorities. Policy has evolved from a series of responses to incidents – with the mayor and the police taking the lead – to a more comprehensive and coherent approach. The domain of safety and security is still evolving, as illustrated by the following developments:

- problem-oriented cooperation ‘managed’ by the municipal council is growing strongly; the emergence of community safety partnerships is a significant development. There are now around 40 regional community safety partnerships;
- distinctions between maintaining public order and the investigation of offences are blurring; municipalities and the public prosecution service are increasingly working together;
- local security issues are increasingly intertwined with cross-border crime. In this area, too, subnational authorities are working more closely with the public prosecution service.

National police force

The Dutch government decided in 2013 to transform the regional police forces into a single national police force. VNG commissioned the police training centre to carry out a study of how the police could best be embedded in local communities. The resultant publication (July 2010) provides guidelines on the organisation and working methods of the national police force. An important element is the greater responsibility given to community police officers (standard: 1 per 5,000 residents).

In recent decades, municipalities have been appointing special enforcement officers to assist the police. They deal with minor offences such as litter, antisocial behaviour and minor traffic offences. In total, municipalities have appointed around 3,600 special enforcement officers.

Safety regions

Municipal fire services have started to work together on a regional basis in recent decades. Their cooperation was formalised in the Safety Regions Act of 11 February 2010. Now municipalities are obliged to work together in 25 safety regions and municipal fire services have been transformed into regional services. As a result, each municipality has specialised fire-fighting services at its disposal and the quality of disaster relief has been raised.

Self-reliance of the public

Citizens are playing a more important role in ensuring both physical safety and safety within the community. They are working with the police to make their neighbourhoods safer. More than two million citizens have joined Amber Alert, an alert system for missing children. Citizens work with municipalities and the police in *Burgernet* to track down suspects. The police launch a *Burgernet* appeal after, for example, a burglary or robbery has been reported. Local *Burgernet* participants then receive a voice mail or text message asking them to look out for a particular person or vehicle. Nearly all municipalities in the Netherlands have joined *Burgernet*.

Citizens are also playing a more important part in the field of physical safety. Recent experience has shown that in addressing the consequences of an incident it doesn't help to have too many rules and regulations. Citizens themselves take matters into their own hands. The new disaster relief protocols therefore seek to strengthen citizens' self-reliance.

Spending cuts

Spending cuts will complicate matters in the years ahead. They will have a direct impact not only on the organisations concerned but also on cooperation between them because they will tend to focus more exclusively on their own domains. The authorities and organisations must rise to the challenge of maintaining the quality of security services in this financial setting.

V. Urban Economy: Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Question 25: Improving social inclusion and equity

Welfare state

The Dutch welfare state was gradually built up in the years following the Second World War. An elaborate system of benefits, public health care, education and other public institutions was financed from taxation. When unemployment rose sharply (to around 11%) during the crisis in the 1980s, the system proved to have become unaffordable. To overcome the crisis, wage restraints were introduced and benefit payments (e.g. old age pensions and unemployment benefits) were cut. The government's current flagship is the 'participation society'. Partly in response to the spending cuts triggered by the crisis in 2008, the government is seeking to place social responsibility elsewhere in society. Central government is decentralising care and social security tasks to subnational authorities and expecting citizens to take more direct responsibility for each other.

Self-reliance

To ensure social cohesion and equal opportunities, it is important that all relevant parties are involved: decision-makers, civil servants, providers (welfare organisations) and citizens. Civic communication is the key to public participation. Citizens must realise that they no longer 'have a right' to care but also have their own responsibilities and strengths and need to be self-reliant.

The municipalities will assume many new tasks in the fields of employment, youth care and health care. The decentralisation of social services was prompted by sweeping spending cuts (see also question 22) and it is becoming more important to ask how municipalities can provide support in the form of tailored services that enable those requiring care to do as much as possible themselves. This is a major shift in Dutch culture, from welfare state to participation society.

In the field of social inclusion and equal opportunities, the Netherlands is concerned chiefly with how public authorities can return ownership to private networks and local and

community associations. Social initiatives, such as communal gardening, neighbourhood renewal, community centre management, sport, etc., are now mushrooming.

Challenges

There are significant differences between municipalities, for example in size. How do municipalities with 500,000 residents and those with 16,000 residents communicate with their citizens? What networks are in place? Is it a question of informing or do they first meet, listen and ask questions? The welfare state is ingrained in Dutch DNA. The challenge is to create a participation society without causing serious injustices, while recognising that things can go wrong.

Question 28: Improving municipal/local finance

Subnational authorities rely on central government for more than 50% of their funding and on municipal taxes for about 17%.

The Grants to Local Government Act provides for the transfer of funds from central government to the provinces and municipalities, which together form a separate heading in the national budget. Municipalities receive funds to carry out their tasks and responsibilities from the central government Municipalities Fund. Funding reflects the development of central government expenditure and is not subject to a substantive assessment by central government. The allocation system is designed to ensure that all municipalities and provinces can provide the same services at a comparable local cost. Municipalities with high costs, for example because they have expensive infrastructure or are socially disadvantaged, receive more funding. The actual amount is determined by around 60 factors, including demographic composition (e.g. number of residents, proportion of young people, elderly people and school children), policy (e.g. number of social services), prosperity (e.g. property values, number of low-income households) and physical factors (e.g. size, water surface area).

Municipalities with relatively few opportunities to raise taxes receive more money from the fund. As a result, large cities receive more per resident on account of their higher welfare costs.

Municipalities have the autonomy to spend money from the fund as they see fit. Central government periodically evaluates whether municipalities are spending more on the various policy clusters than they receive from the fund. The findings are used to update the allocations from the fund. The budget as a whole remains the same.

The other quarter of the funding that subnational authorities receive from central authorities is provided from specific funds that are intended to cover the cost of compulsory tasks performed under joint administration.

The Council of State and the Council of Europe have repeatedly called for an increase in the local tax base as it could deepen the provincial and municipal debate and make citizens aware of how much services cost.

Question 29: Strengthening and improving access to housing finance

To the best of our knowledge, there is no direct relation between Dutch policy on housing finance and the Habitat Agenda.

Affordable rented housing is provided through a mixed system of social housing associations, rent regulation and housing allowances for tenants.

Access to housing finance in the owner-occupied market is arranged through a mix of tax incentives that effectively lower the cost of financing (tax relief for mortgage interest) and tax deductibility of costs associated with the purchase of a home. In addition, national and municipal authorities offer special loans to first-time home buyers.

The financial crisis has restricted the supply of new mortgages. This is probably one of the major challenges for the future.

The government is both taking steps to increase competition on the mortgage market and creating opportunities for new entrants. It is also setting up an institution that will provide government guarantees on certain mortgages in order to improve mortgage funding on the capital markets. Furthermore, the government has created tax incentives to promote the use of savings to buy a home.

It is not immediately clear how these efforts could be linked to a New Urban Agenda. However, we would be pleased to share our knowledge and expertise with other countries.

Question 30: Supporting local economic development

Supporting local economic development

An important factor in local and regional economic development in many urban regions in the Netherlands is the closer cooperation between public authorities, the business community and the education sector. In Eindhoven, for example, the Brainport concept has been launched by the triple helix, an alliance between the municipality of Eindhoven and neighbouring municipalities, education institutions and major employers in the region such as Philips and ASML.

Other urban regions, such as Amsterdam, Utrecht and Groningen/Assen, are also establishing regional alliances to boost local economic growth. For example, the *Zuidvleugel* alliance in the south of the Randstad conurbation, which includes the cities of Rotterdam and The Hague, has prioritised the growth of high-tech SMEs and matching training to labour market needs.

Question 31: Creating decent jobs and livelihood

The financial and economic crisis of 2009-2014 increased unemployment in the Netherlands from 4% to 8% and made the creation of more jobs and greater flexibility in the labour market even more urgent. Central government has taken a series of measures, such as relaxing the regulations governing redundancies and introducing unemployment benefit for temporary lay-offs. It is also investing €600 million in 'sector plans'. The government funds 50% of the costs of plans drafted by employers and employees to increase jobs and work placements for the young, retain professional skills and help employees in danger of losing their jobs find new work.

The underlying problem is the widening mismatch between training and work, especially in the technology and care fields. The Technology Pact signed by the education sector and the business community is intended to increase the business community's involvement in education so that trained professionals are better equipped for the labour market of the future.

Future challenges and issues in these areas (questions 27-31) that could be addressed by a New Urban Agenda

The first challenge is to maintain the competitiveness of the network of small and medium-sized urban regions in the Netherlands at a time when the benefits of agglomeration are becoming more pronounced. The concept of borrowed size must be worked out and applied. How does cooperation between urban regions lead to higher productivity growth?

The second challenge is to create a learning economy that can adapt more quickly to changing economic circumstances. Knowledge circulation is critical to a learning economy. Regional cooperation between education institutions, research centres and business is necessary for all layers of urban society to benefit in full from innovation and knowledge circulation. A related challenge is to increase and exploit the innovative strength of small and medium-sized enterprises. Another serious challenge is to connect the various sectors to each other because in many cases interconnectivity generates the most innovation. The starting point for interconnectivity differs, however, from one urban region to another.

Another challenge is to prevent too great a division on the labour market and the stagnation of urban 'piggybacking'. Urban piggybacking can be illustrated as follows: increasing automation has reduced demand for people with an education up to secondary level, and a growing number are having difficulty finding work. As a result, urban regions are less of a springboard to success than in the past.

Question 32: Integration of the urban economy into national development policy

Since 2008, national economic policy has concentrated on promoting knowledge, innovation and investment in nine economic sectors in which the Netherlands excels: Agri-Food, Chemicals, the Creative Industry, Energy, High Tech, Logistics, Life Sciences & Health, Horticulture and Parent Materials, and Water. This sectoral policy now takes precedence over the spatial economic policy of supporting specific regional or urban qualities.

Various advisory bodies argue that a focus on urban economies drives prosperity because it concentrates productivity growth at places where professionals from different sectors come together to generate innovation. Central government is currently studying how best to focus on urban economies.

The Netherlands has a widely-dispersed urban network (polycentric structure) that is not dominated by one or two major metropolises (in the way that London and Paris dominate their respective countries). This means that the urban economies are closely intertwined and that further cooperation and specialisation will stimulate economic growth. This concept, also known as borrowed size, has been built on in a spatial economic development strategy. The ambition is further integration of the north and south of the Randstad conurbation with the Eindhoven region in order to strengthen the benefits of agglomeration, which are key to the Netherlands' competitiveness.

Question 33: Challenges experienced and lessons learnt in these areas

Regional cooperation underpins economic growth. Challenges such as the shortage of engineers and the problems on the housing market can be addressed more effectively if employers, education institutions and public authorities coordinate their investments and strategies.

Question 34: Future Challenges

Supporting local economic development

A key feature of local and regional economic development in many urban regions in the Netherlands is the increased cooperation between public authorities, the business community and the education sector. The Brainport concept has been launched in Eindhoven by the triple helix, an alliance between the municipality of Eindhoven and neighbouring municipalities, education institutions and major employers in the region such as Philips and ASML.

Other urban regions, such as Amsterdam, Utrecht and Groningen/Assen, are also establishing regional alliances to boost local economic growth. For example, the *Zuidvleugel* alliance in the south of the Randstad conurbation, which includes the cities of Rotterdam and The Hague, has prioritised the growth of high-tech SMEs and matching training to labour market needs.

Creating decent jobs and livelihood

The financial and economic crisis of 2009-2014 increased unemployment in the Netherlands from 4% to 8% and made the creation of more jobs and greater flexibility in the labour market even more urgent. Central government has taken a series of measures, such as relaxing the regulations on redundancies and introducing unemployment benefit for temporary lay-offs. It is also investing €600 million in 'sector plans'. The government funds 50% of the costs of plans drafted by employers and employees to increase jobs and work placements for the young, retain professional skills and help employees in danger of losing their jobs find new work.

The underlying problem is the widening mismatch between training and work, especially in the technology and care fields. The Technology Pact signed by the education sector and the business community is intended to increase the business community's involvement in education so that trained professionals are better equipped for the labour market of the future.

Challenges experienced and lessons learnt in these areas

Regional cooperation underpins economic growth. The challenges such as the shortage of engineers and the problems on the housing market can be addressed more effectively if employers, education institutions and public authorities coordinate their investments and strategies.

VI. Housing and Basic Services: Issues and Challenges for a New Urban Agenda

Question: 35

This question has not been answered because there are no slums in the Netherlands.

Question 36: Improving access to adequate housing

Access to adequate housing for people who cannot afford to buy their own home can be viewed from two perspectives: access and legal certainty, and the quality of housing.

Quality of housing

The Building Decree contains statutory regulations on the quality of housing. It is a compilation of minimum requirements that all buildings in the Netherlands – houses, offices, shops, etc. – must satisfy. Renovations are also subject to the Building Decree, which applies to all housing: rented, owner-occupied, social and privately-owned.

The Building Decree sets out requirements relating to safety, health, utility, energy efficiency and the environment. The latest version, dating from 2012, is depicted in the figure below. In most cases, the rules apply to both newbuilds and existing buildings. Municipalities are responsible for supervising compliance.

The Building Decree was introduced in 1992 and is periodically updated but no significant reforms are planned. The general contents of the Building Decree are summarised below to show the requirements housing must meet.

Legal security and access

People on low incomes in the Netherlands have access to rented social housing. The rent is regulated and held below the market level. Furthermore, those on the very lowest incomes receive housing benefit. Allocation policy has been tightened up in recent years, so that only households with an income of less than €34,000 are eligible for social housing.

The tenants' general legal position is laid down in the Civil Code. An important element is rent control to protect the tenant. There are a limited number of legal grounds on which a landlord can terminate a rental agreement. Conflicts between the tenant and the landlord can be resolved by the courts. Disputes about the rent can be put to the rent tribunal. This is an accessible dispute resolution body whose members are appointed by the government.

Question 37: Ensuring sustainable access to basic sanitation and drainage

Virtually everyone in the Netherlands has access to sanitation and drainage in accordance with the European Urban Water and Waste Treatment (UWWTD) Directive and the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Virtually all Dutch homes are connected to wastewater treatment plants. Sanitation is therefore not a problem in the Netherlands.

Sewerage systems in the Netherlands are built, maintained and owned by the municipalities. There are two main types of sewerage system in the Netherlands. Combined sewers carry waste water and rainwater in a single pipe to a water treatment plant. Improved separated systems carry waste water and rain water in separate pipes so that waste treatment plants can work more efficiently and there is less pollution if the sewer floods.

The Netherlands intends to maintain this efficient system in the future too, innovating where necessary. The Netherlands would be pleased to share its knowledge and experience in this area with other countries.

Question 38: Ensuring sustainable access to safe drinking water

The Drinking Water Act was introduced in 1957 with the aim of providing everyone in the Netherlands with a secure, sufficient supply of high quality (healthy and clean) drinking water. Now, everyone living in the Netherlands has access to high quality, microbiologically reliable drinking water at all times. The drinking water network is of such a high standard that treated water typically does not need to be chlorinated to prevent recontamination. Water reaches the consumer without the taste or smell of chlorine.

Dutch drinking water policy is set by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment on the basis of national and European regulations. The owners of communal water systems in buildings are responsible for the equipment; drinking water is provided by the drinking water

companies, which also monitor the safety of communal systems. The drinking water companies are private companies owned by municipalities and provinces. The only exception is the Waternet organisation, which not only produces and distributes drinking water, but also treats wastewater and manages groundwater and surface water. The quality of drinking water at the tap is regulated and laws are in place to prevent Legionella in communal systems.

Since 1997 the Dutch water companies have been voluntarily benchmarking their performance against each other in order to improve their efficiency and increase transparency in four areas: water quality, service, the environment, and finance and efficiency.

The Netherlands intends to maintain this efficient drinking water system in the future, too. The Netherlands would be pleased to share its knowledge and experience in this area with other countries.

Question 39: Improving access to clean domestic energy

The Energy Agreement for sustainable growth, concluded in 2013, forms a milestone in the Netherlands' energy transition and has improved domestic access to sustainable energy. More than 40 organisations have signed the agreement, laying the foundations for a robust, future-proof energy and climate policy. National and subnational authorities, employer organisations, trade unions, and nature conservation, environmental and other civil society organisations and financial institutions have thus assumed joint responsibility for major investments in energy savings, more sustainable energy and additional jobs. The agreement's main goal is to increase the proportion of renewable energy in accordance with EU regulations from 4.4% now to 14% by 2020 and 16% by 2023.

Energy savings and the smart use of renewable sources will help maintain energy prices at a manageable level for households and businesses. The average domestic energy bill is 5% to 6% of household income (or higher for households with lower incomes).

Another important element of the Energy Agreement is the local generation of sustainable energy by individuals and cooperative initiatives. Individuals will have more opportunities to generate renewable energy. Where necessary and possible, municipalities, provinces and central government will support local and regional initiatives. Tax incentives will encourage

the generation of renewable energy by cooperatives or associations of home owners on condition that the energy is used by small consumers and the members of the cooperative or association, and the equipment is located within a defined area.

Energy transition will have far-reaching consequences for the networks that match supply to demand. The Energy Agreement will therefore ensure that the energy transmission network is ready for a sustainable future. The parties have agreed that they will prepare themselves thoroughly for this changing future so that switches can be made quickly whenever necessary or desirable. An important measure, for example, is the development and introduction of 'smart grids'.

The goals set in the Energy Agreement cannot be achieved unless the parties to it work together. Employers, employees, environmental organisations, public authorities and other parties have their own responsibilities for implementing those parts of the agreement that are relevant to them. Central government, for example, provides municipalities with financial support to launch local and regional energy saving and generation initiatives with a view to enforcing the Environmental Management Act and managing social property.

Where possible, municipalities work with civil society organisations and businesses to achieve the energy goals. They set a good example by making their social property sustainable. VNG assists the municipalities by sharing and collecting knowledge and experience and by raising problems relating to legislation with central government.

Question 40: Sustainable means of transport

The question of how to enhance mobility and reduce congestion, accidents and pollution is a common challenge to all urban areas. These issues can only be addressed through cooperation among municipal authorities, market players and other stakeholders.

A densely built-up country like the Netherlands must strike a balance between accessibility and a healthy environment. Central government's mobility policy therefore recognises transport as a means of economic development and gives priority to specific, sustainable forms of transport.

Policy sometimes has to be refined. Increasing the maximum speed on motorways proved detrimental to air quality in some places and the municipalities concerned successfully campaigned for a lower speed limit.

The Energy Agreement, concluded in October 2013, sets out a public-private agenda with activities for all stakeholders to achieve the overall ambitions of reducing CO₂ emissions, improving energy efficiency, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. One of the key actions in relation to mobility and transport is the formulation of an integrated long-term vision for a sustainable fuel mix for transport (2050).

Furthermore, several partnerships have been forged between central government, regions, cities and other stakeholders to increase sustainable transport. With its progressive tax policies, the Netherlands is one of the leaders in the market for clean and zero-emission vehicles. The government is eager to reach a critical mass of 200,000 electric vehicles on Dutch roads by 2020. The challenge is to consolidate our position and grow as an internationally attractive location for testing and marketing electric vehicles. To do so, we must play to our strengths, focus on tailored solutions and align regional, national and commercial activities. With regard to the charging infrastructure, the Netherlands is by far the leading country in Europe in facilitating charging points.

Several Dutch cities restrict access to heavy goods vehicles that do not meet certain emission standards. These low-emission zones successfully reduce the emission of pollutants in the inner city. Agreements on low-emission zones between local authorities and the business community also provide for a revision of urban land-use plans to improve the cities' efficiency. Several cities are currently making plans for zero-emission urban land use by 2025.

Another good example of sustainable mobility is the introduction of a zero-emission benchmark in concessions for all public bus services by 2025. Regional and local authorities are responsible for awarding the concessions. In cooperation with the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, they have agreed an ambitious target for cleaner buses. The government is removing legal barriers and carrying out total cost of ownership studies.

The modal split in favour of the bicycle is already very favourable. Nevertheless, the Energy Agreement recently set a new national target. At the moment, the percentage of kilometres cycled is about 26% of all kilometres travelled. This must increase to 35% by 2030. Local

authorities are working with stakeholders, for example providers of bicycle parking facilities, in order to bring about the change in scale.