

Creativity essential for climate targets -- existing -- housing

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It is a great shame that the most creative professional group in the building trade, the architects, rarely apply themselves to existing housing. A large proportion of the Netherlands' climate targets will after all have to be achieved within existing housing. This is one of the messages to be conveyed by Prof. Anke van Hal of TU Delft in her inaugural address on Wednesday 7 May. "I see it as a personal challenge to tempt architects to take up this task."

Professor Anke van Hal's area of research is sustainable building. In this area she holds chairs at both Delft University of Technology and business university Nyenrode. At TU Delft she focuses on the sustainable transformation of existing housing and urban areas. In her inaugural address, Professor Anke van Hal of Sustainable Housing Transformation concludes that her specialist field is highly relevant to the Dutch government's ambitious targets. This is due to the large number of climate targets which will have to be achieved within existing housing. These houses account for 20 percent of our total CO₂ emissions.

As the energy requirements applicable to housing before 1995 were limited, a large part of houses in the Netherlands have a low standard of quality when it comes to energy. Approximately 70 percent of houses is eligible for some form of insulation, mostly glass, roof, wall, and floor insulation.

Creative

In order to achieve the ambitious climate targets, a great deal more is needed than simply installing condensing boilers and insulation. Prof. Van Hal: “Innovation is sorely needed, both at product and process level. New products are required. Not just technology, such as new energy-saving heating systems or new insulation products, but also other products and services. Examples include savings products, mortgages and loans.”

“Yet I am more focused on process innovation than product innovation in the context of my new position. Professionals need to break away from their familiar working methods. There needs to be cooperation with new parties and, most importantly, creativity is required. In this respect it is a shame that the most creative professional group within the building trade, architects, are seldom involved in existing housing. I see it as a personal challenge to tempt architects to take up this task.”

Incidentally, existing housing is not just important from an environmental perspective. It is also essential to keep existing housing up-to-date and not to turn to demolition too hastily. After all, our housing stock only grows by 1 percent each year.

Enthusiasm

One crucial aspect for the success of sustainable housing projects is, according to Prof. van Hal, enthusiasm. “All the evaluations of successful sustainable housing projects show that at least one highly enthusiastic person was involved in the project, who often in the face of opposition continued to cling to the sustainable targets. The chance of success is also substantially improved if an influential party, such as a local councillor, is enthusiastic about the project and actively promotes

it.”

Tapping into existing enthusiasm is the key in the view of Prof. Van Hal. “Getting those involved to be enthusiastic should not be attempted by trying to inspire enthusiasm. It is much more effective to link existing enthusiasm to the sustainable objectives. In practice, this means that you should not attempt to convince people, do not ‘preach’, but you should listen very carefully and by putting the correct questions discover what really moves those involved. The next trick is to tap into this emotion using knowledge of sustainability.

“Working towards sustainability can be done in so many ways that there is always a way of helping to solve a problem or achieving an objective.

“Helping people is quite different from imposing something on people. Whether those involved are driven by idealism, or the desire to reinstate an image, to create a new market, to increase comfort or to save money; it doesn’t really matter. If you succeed in tapping into what really moves people when working from a sustainability perspective, you will create a motivated atmosphere from which everyone will benefit.”

Source: Delft University of Technology

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