

How can local policies contribute to global sustainability goals?

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The challenges of building a sustainable society are unprecedented. But the Dutch municipalities cannot be faulted for their commitment. They are working hard, conclude Professor Eefje Cuppen and Lian Merkx,

program manager for energy at the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). To exchange local knowledge and ideas about what does and does not work in energy transition, the University and VNG are holding the symposium ["Liveable Planet: Local Policies for a Liveable Planet"](#) on 14 April.

The Liveable Planet program has been running at Leiden University for two years now. All the faculties are now participating and new interfaculty research on sustainability is being developed. It's really interesting for us researchers to bring together all this knowledge and to see how the individual pieces reinforce the whole," says Professor Eefje Cuppen, who is on the core team for Public Administration. "But besides being interesting, it is also very necessary because creating a sustainable society is complex. Everyone needs to look at what others are doing. Otherwise we won't achieve it."

Broad view

Liveable Planet is a tangible example of this in its two living labs: one at Vrouw Vennepolder in Oud Ade and the other in The Hague. Here master's students investigate what the task is, what parties are involved and what the possible solutions are. The two living labs are different, with one being in a natural environment and the other in an urban environment. "That difference will undoubtedly be reflected in the research questions, but all the disciplines are needed everywhere. This broad perspective is what makes it so interesting because new perspectives, new strategies, emerge from it."

Local level

The common denominator in all the research is the local level, says Cuppen. "That's where all the different disciplines meet and where all

the sustainability issues come together. The [energy transition](#), adapting to [climate change](#), the nitrogen problem, the [housing crisis](#), mobility problems, social inequality: it all has to be done in the same area, and municipalities often have limited resources as well. Municipalities therefore face an enormous task. Them trying to work together to solve this task together is new. They've never done that before."

Knowledge sharing

Another goal of Liveable Planet is to share knowledge about sustainability transitions and to bring together what is already happening. The University and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) are therefore holding a symposium in Museum Volkenkunde on 14 April for politicians, [civil servants](#), students and anyone involved in local sustainability policy. The symposium will give an overview of and insight into sustainability goals that can be worked on at a local level. What works and what doesn't?

Cuppen is impressed by local initiatives in the field of sustainability. "We are moving too slowly in many respects in the Netherlands, but many—not all—municipalities are taking very progressive steps."

Russian gas

Lian Merx, program manager for energy at VNG, shares this view. "Compared with five to ten years ago, a number of developments really are moving fast. There is no longer a single [municipality](#) that thinks it's not necessary, that [energy transition](#). Everyone is working hard and the shared level of ambition is impressive. The plans (such as the Transition Visions for Heating and Renewable Energy) are satisfactory and they were also drawn up within the deadlines, which is very positive."

The implementation is always trickier, says Merkx. "All the more so because everyone now wants to accelerate things to stop being dependent on Russian gas for their energy supply. That requires a great deal from municipalities, grid operators, contractors, technicians, draftspeople and all those other hands that are needed to implement this. So the pressure is increasing but the labor market can't handle it, which is a concern."

Knowledge development and the practical implementation of that knowledge, as the University is doing with its Living Labs, is something Merkx applauds. "That a university like Leiden is taking a [practical approach](#) across the board is new and interesting. I think you can generate breakthroughs with such a cross-disciplinary approach. And, equally important, that you know where to find each other if things get really difficult. Because that's what we're going to need."

Provided by Leiden University

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