



Sustainability Monitor for the Netherlands, July 2013

High quality of life, but some concerns for the future

According to the Sustainability Monitor for the Netherlands, the economic situation in the Netherlands in mid-2013 is still quite reasonable compared with that in other countries in Europe. Although unemployment is high in the Netherlands, it is much higher elsewhere in Europe. The economic crisis has pushed up the government debt considerably, fixed capital formation has decreased and Dutch consumers are more sombre about their own financial situation. But again, in many other countries the situation is worse. Although quality of life “here and now” is high, there is some concern about the risk of exhausting our natural and human capital, and the Netherlands is also drawing heavily on natural resources elsewhere in the world, especially in developing countries.

Sustainable development concerns the quality of life in the Netherlands and sustainability in the long term. The Sustainability Monitor looks at the extent to which improving quality of life “**here and now**” is at the expense of future generations (“**later**”), or of people living elsewhere in the world (“**elsewhere**”). Developments in the area of sustainability, however, are gradual, and although no short-term fluctuations are expected, a number of interesting developments can be seen.

This article compares the figures of the most recently updated indicators (July 2013) in the sustainable development visualisation on Statistics Netherlands’ website with the figures reported in the 2011 Sustainability Monitor for the Netherlands.

Here and now

Present quality of life in the Netherlands is high, as it also was in 2011. Only one of the 29 indicators (commuting time) showed a negative development. As expected given the present recession, people’s concerns about their own financial situation has now also deteriorated. On the other hand, there are noticeable positive developments with respect to pursuit of welfare “here and now”. In 2011, seven indicators showed a positive change. This number has risen to eleven after the update, and now also includes “satisfaction with housing”, “quality of hous-



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ing”, “generalised trust” and “exposure to particulate matter”. Although these four indicators did not show a clear trend in the 2011 Monitor, based on the most recent update, a clear improvement is now visible.

Later

Although there are no large fluctuations in the claim the Dutch society makes on its resources, the update does show some changes. In contrast to the results of 2011, two capital indicators, “air quality” (natural capital) and “generalised trust” (social capital), now show a positive development. The “emission trade balance”, however, shows a negative development. This means that the contribution by the Netherlands to the climate problem is increasingly taking place outside its own national borders.

Elsewhere

With respect to the effect of the Dutch pursuit of welfare on the rest of the world, and especially on developing countries, the picture is slightly more sombre than described in the 2011 monitor. Imports of minerals have increased, which means that stocks of these natural resources have been depleted elsewhere in the world. Moreover, imports of minerals and energy from developing countries remain high and has not decreased.

The Netherlands compared in the EU

Here and now

By European standards, present quality of life in the Netherlands is high: material welfare has increased in recent decades, and the Netherlands is one of the leaders of the EU-27 on this aspect. Compared with rest of Europe, the Dutch are satisfied with the size of their dwelling and do not think their housing costs are too high. Surprisingly, the Dutch have remained content about income inequality in the course of the years, while the income inequality between Dutch men and women is still large compared with the rest of Europe, with women earning less.



Later

With respect to the resources it uses, the Netherlands' position has hardly changed from 2011. There was noticeably no improvement in the level of education compared with 2011. In most EU countries the percentage of 25-64-year-olds with a high level of education rose by more than in the Netherlands. The Dutch, along with the Swedes and Danes have the highest level of trust in institutions in the EU-27. This level has increased in the Netherlands and Sweden in recent years, whereas in Denmark it fell.

Elsewhere

In its pursuit of welfare, the Netherlands places a relatively large burden on other countries. Within the EU-27, the Netherlands is one of the largest importers of natural resources. The country still uses up large volumes of natural resources elsewhere in the world. The effect that the Netherlands has on the rest of the world in terms of imports of energy, minerals and biomass from developing countries therefore continues to be just as unfavourable as it was compared with other EU countries.