

Round Table RT2: Role building community in climate adaptation

Chair	Rory McLeod, journalist, media entrepreneur and media trainer, United Kingdom
Panel	Chris Jofeh, Director ARUP, United Kingdom Prof.dr. Chris Zevenbergen, Director Dura Vermeer Business Development, the Netherlands Mariet Schoenmakers, Director Concepts, AM, the Netherlands Erik Staal, Director Vestia Housing corporation, the Netherlands Klaas Strijbis, Director Movares engineering, the Netherlands Luck Westerbaan, Director Special Market Solutions IMTECH, the Netherlands
Rapporteur	MSc. Marjolein Pijnappels, Knowledge for Climate, Climate changes Spatial Planning, the Netherlands

Stakeholders from the building community are invited to comment on their role in climate adaptation, the opportunities and barriers they perceive and the main issues at stake. As the amiable chair Rory McLeod puts it, we are here for two things: How are we going to make money? and: How are we going to make the world a better place? McLeod presents five topics for discussion.

1. Are we still building on deltas and if so, why?

The extreme floods in Pakistan in July 2010 testify to the looming danger of living in a delta. We take these dangers for granted and are still building on deltas worldwide. Why do we do this? 'There is enormous population growth, people migrate to cities and to delta cities as well', says Prof.dr. Chris Zevenbergen, Director Dura Vermeer Business Development, the Netherlands. 'In delta cities is everything you need, they are the engines on which commerce operates.'

2. What are our defenses? How safe are people?

Delta cities have defenses in place, but not enough. The chance of a delta city flooding is once per one hundred years. There are over one hundred delta cities worldwide, so we can expect disaster every year. Another challenge is posed by the fast expansion of delta cities. Delta cities expand too fast, cross natural borders, like in Hong Kong, and flood defenses can't keep up. Implementation cannot be instantaneously. We have to plan now to implement 30 years later.

3. What's the size of the market for the building sector?

With respect to adaptation the building sector is barely scratching the surface. 'Appealing to the better nature of people', Zevenbergen calls it. Some of the other panel members disagree. Erik Staal, Director Vestia Housing corporation, the Netherlands: 'In the Netherlands numerous pilot projects have surfaced that present economical sound business cases, such as heating based on salt water.' Other examples include an innovative heating system in the Hague, where drills tap into a hot water reservoir (57 degrees Celsius) used for heating homes. However, as is mentioned in the panel, this refers to mitigation and not to adaptation. Another building sector opportunity presents itself when 80 percent of the current building stock in the Netherlands will be replaced before 2050.

4. Do we have sufficient skills and knowledge?

In the United Kingdom there are only four universities doing serious environmental studies including economics and technology. This begs the question whether or not adaptive building is a sexy sector to have a career in? Apparently, it is, as students are eager to make a contribution to society when building their careers.

As it turns out alleged lack of sexiness for university students seems to be the least of the problems of the building sector. 'We need skills in the delivery part, not in university', explains Chris Jofeh, Director ARUP, United Kingdom. 'We need a practical level of skill to upgrade and improve housing. We don't have enough builders.' Apparently as a builder you can take classes on gilding in museums, but not in adaptive building. So how do builders get into adaptive building? In the Netherlands there is an organization comprised of 10,000 small businesses that work together and learn from each other. Another obvious opportunity is provided by the 1.4 million Dutch houses that need retrofitting to energy level B within the next ten years. The biggest player in retrofitting handles 4,000 a year max. So demand is high, but the capacity to deliver isn't available.

5. What are the obstacles for the building sector? What do you think you need as adaptive building sector?

'Energy is too cheap', says Luck Westerbaan, Director Special Market Solutions IMTECH, the Netherlands. Cheap energy prices are a huge barrier to implement new green technologies, which are relatively expensive. If environmental costs were taken into account when pricing energy, green technologies would be able to compete with traditional technologies.

The importance of a broad social movement is also stressed. We should change the way we think about climate change and sea level rise. 'Characterising climate change and water as an opportunity instead of a threat', says Mariet Schoenmakers, Director Concepts, AM, the Netherlands. She pleads for advocates in the importance of adapting to climate change and the opportunities it provides for improving the quality of the environment.

It's still difficult for Joe Blow to figure out who talks sense and nonsense. Chair Rory McLeod thinks the scientists have lost the war of words to win the hearts of the public. 'People are more interested in Robby Williams and glamour models than in this.' Staal disagrees. 'In the Netherlands we have a Delta Commission and Delta Commissioner Wim Kuijken supersedes the other government layers.'

6. What does the building sector need? This question is posed to each panel member individually.

Jofeh: 'Get energy prices up.'

Westerbaan: 'Incorporate costs of transport in energy. We spill lots of megawatt transporting it.'

Schoenmaker: 'Get much more experiments working, much more pilots.'

Zevenbergen: 'More pilot projects.'

Staal: 'Deregulation.'

Strijbis: 'Make adaptation sexy to the public. Create other incentives for doing the right thing.'

Jofeh adds: 'We need as many pilots as possible to make all the mistakes we can make as soon as possible and try a hundred new things.'

On the verge of closing the round table discussion some interesting points on regulation surface. The builders find that too much regulation with respect to spatial planning hinders the adaptive building sector. However good regulation can stimulate adaptation. Therefore the old regulations that hinder adaptation need to be replaced by new, flexible regulations that stimulate adaptation.