

CONCEPT

# Spiritual Capital and Sustainable Development



An Investigation into the Contributions of Religion and Philosophy of Life to the Sustainable Development Goals in the Netherlands.  
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# Introduction

## REASON FOR THE INVESTIGATION

Like other UN member states, the Netherlands has committed itself to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a list of 17 goals and 169 targets meant to address issues such as poverty, climate change and inequality in order to make the world a better place by 2030. Today, about 85% of the world's population is religious.<sup>1</sup> In a broader sense, philosophy of life, or life stance, is important to everyone in our secularised society as a fundamental vision of the good life and motivation for one's actions. After all, people do not act upon empty premises, but from a certain view on life. Nevertheless, for a long time the attention for religion and philosophy of life in sustainable development policy has been limited. This is changing. Nationally and internationally, the interest in the relationship between religion and philosophy of life, here called 'spiritual capital', and SDGs is growing.

In her policy paper *Investing in Perspective* (2018), Minister Kaag mentions three examples where spiritual capital plays a role in sustainable development: (1) protecting minority rights, (2) the role of local religious leaders in the promotion of gender equality, and (3) the involvement of religious and philosophical organisations in social issues (by using the term 'philosophical' or 'ideological organisations' we include organisations that espouse a philosophy of life that is not religious, such as humanism). Building on this, we distinguish three levels of spiritual capital in this report:

### (1) The Level of Standards and Values

This level is about the norms and values that strongly influence people's views and behaviour, individually and collectively. Standards and values can play a constructive or hampering role in relation to SDGs.

### (2) The Level of Grassroots Communities

Religious and philosophical communities are present at the roots of society and often have access to people the government cannot reach. For example, churches, including a large number of migrant churches, invest between 110 and 133 million euro's a year in Rotterdam's society as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Within Islam, Muslims annually contribute to caring for loved ones through the annual zakat donations and also provide support to the poor through donations in kind.<sup>3</sup>

### (3) The Level of Religious and Philosophical Organisations

This level concerns the social engagement of religious and philosophical organisations. For example, over the past ten years, the number of people involved in a buddy project of the humanist-inspired organisation Humanitas has increased from 10,000 to 25,000 volunteers.<sup>4</sup> With small-scale and personal help, they provide support to 70,000 people dealing with problems concerning loneliness, loss, parenting and growing up, detention and household management.

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1. According to a demographic study by the Pew Research Centre, 16% of the world's population was not affiliated with a religious movement in 2015. See: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> (visited 18 March 2019).

2. See: Castillo Guerra et al. 2009. Count your blessings: the social return of Christian churches in Rotterdam and their contribution to social cohesion: page 7.

3. For example, during Ramadan a lot of food is donated to food banks and many less fortunate families receive meat during the sacrificial feast, which is often collected and distributed through mosques.

4. Interview with Annemiek van Wesemael, National Program Manager Household Management, Poverty and Debt at Humanitas, 19 February 2019.

The research 'Spiritual Capital and Sustainable Development' of the *Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development* aims to systematically map out the relationship between spiritual capital and SDGs in the coming years. This first report focuses on religiously and philosophically inspired communities and organisations in the Netherlands, the second and third levels in Kaag's policy paper. In the coming years, the first level, the level of norms and values, will be systematically examined.

Elements of this present report will be used in the national SDG report of the Netherlands, which will go to the Lower House of Parliament in mid-May 2019. In this SDG report, various actors from the (national) government, the business community, civil society and research centres report on their contributions to the SDGs. The report 'Spiritual Capital and Sustainable Development' represents the contribution from the perspective of religion and philosophy of life.

## THE DUTCH RELIGIOUS AND IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

In 2018 the Central Bureau of Statistics published the results of a study on social cohesion and welfare in the Netherlands, which also looked at the ecclesiastical or philosophical affiliation of the Dutch population (Schmeets 2018). According to this study, 49 percent of the population aged 15 years or older in 2017 indicated to belong to a religious group. Nearly a quarter of the population (23, 6 percent) indicated to be Roman Catholic, 14.9 percent Protestant<sup>5</sup>, 5.1 percent Muslim and 5.6 percent indicated to belong to another religious or ideological group, such as Jewish or Buddhist. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) did not investigate the exact composition of this last category. However, it suspects that these are 'mostly smaller, orthodox, evangelical groups that do not belong to the wider Protestant churches, as well as other movements such as humanists and freemasons'. Earlier research indicated that in the period 2010-2015 approximately 0.1 percent was Jewish, 0.6 percent Hindu and 0.4 percent of the Dutch population was Buddhist (Schmeets 2016: 5).

Of course, the ecclesiastical and ideological organisations mentioned in this table consist of a multitude of religious and philosophical sub currents and schools. Thus, within the Hindu community in the Netherlands, which, at 0.6 percent, covers only a small part of the Dutch population, at least four different currents can be distinguished.<sup>6</sup> Islam in the Netherlands also consists of various groups. This diversity is partly related to the different Islamic movements (Sunni and Shiite Islam) and partly to the ethnic origin of Muslims. In 2007, for example, the Netherlands had a total of around 850,000 Muslims, of whom 330,000 were Turkish-Dutch and 270,000 Moroccan-Dutch (Van Herten and Otten 2007). A very good overview of the various movements and schools of all religious and ideological convictions in the Netherlands can be found in the Handbook on Religion in Netherlands (Ter Borg et al. 2008).

The sociological research report *God in Nederland (God in the Netherlands)*, which has been repeated five times since 1966 on the initiative of the KRO and is carried out by scientists from various universities, also focused on modern or new spirituality in the Netherlands in the 2016 edition (Bernts and Berghuis 2016). In the context of our research, it makes sense to look at the statistics concerning spirituality in the Netherlands, because more and more people in the Netherlands are spiritually motivated to pursue sustainable and social activities or to start social renewal projects (Hense 2015).

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5. Of these, 6.4 percent are Dutch Reformed, 2.9 percent are Reformed and 5.6 percent belong to one of the churches belonging to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN).

6. The Sanatana Dharma and the Arya Samaj are the largest currents in the Netherlands.

**Table 6.1 Consent with new spirituality**

(% is right for me / is partly right, partly not for me)

<b>Self-spirituality:</b>	
I think you should experience truth internally	74
In every human being a real, authentic and 'holy' core can be found that is unspoiled by culture, history and society.	58
<b>Search religiosity and openness:</b>	
You can combine different life wisdoms and practices into what suits you best	77
Religion in my opinion has more to do with searching than with firm beliefs	67
Religion, in my opinion, you have to seek together in the wisdom of all kinds of traditions and ideas	62
<b>Connectedness:</b>	
I think there is something that connects man, world and nature to the core	72
<b>Spiritual practices in recent years:</b>	
Practises yoga	13
Practises meditation	16

Source: *God in the Netherlands 1966-2015*, page 153

Humanism also has quite a few sympathisers in the Netherlands. According to the study *God in Nederland* more than 9% of the Dutch feel 'reasonably to strongly related to humanism' (Bernts and Berghuijs 2016: 148). Incidentally, not all of them are atheists or secularists: 'only 38% of them belong to the secular, the remaining humanists can be found equally among church members, unaffiliated believers and unaffiliated spirituals' (ibid.).

Finally, below is another table from the same research that gives an indication of the importance that the Dutch attach to religion for the norms and values in society:

**Table 2.5 The moral role of God's faith for society, per measurement year and group**

	1996	2006	2015	church members	unaffiliated believers	unaffiliated spirituals	secularists
<b>If no one believes in God anymore, morality is threatened</b>							
(totally) agree	42	40	26	54	37	12	8
disagree, disagree*	14	20	34	26	36	34	38
Don't agree(at all)	44	40	40	20	27	54	54

\* Including 'no opinion'

Source: *God in the Netherlands 1966-2015*, page 43

## DEFINITIONS

There are numerous definitions of religion and almost as many discussions about their shortcomings. One of the main issues, raised by anthropologist Talal Asad (2003), is that many definitions of religion are based on (Western) Protestantism and define religion as a series of articles of faith with concomitant norms, values and customs. This approach leaves little room for religious and spiritual traditions in which religious practices, rituals, relationships with the transcendent invisible reality and experiences of god and spirit play a much more central role.

In order to accommodate the diversity of religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions and practices, this research has chosen to make use of the so-called seven-dimensional model of religion and philosophy of life developed by religious scholar Ninian Smart (1993). This model (see inset) offers insights into the many dimensions of religion and philosophy of life and is therefore also suitable for the study of secular philosophies such as humanism, communism or nationalism.

In this report, when we speak of 'religion and philosophy of life' we use 'philosophy of life' to refer to secular philosophies such as humanism, communism and nationalism. 'Philosophy of life' as such, refers to the whole of religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions and practices.

'Spirituality' refers in a broad sense to 'being focused on the spirit'. This can be a divine or other supernatural spirit, but it can also be a 'spirit' or 'power' experienced in (dealing with) nature. Spirituality emphasises the inner, personal experience of the divine or spiritual.

## THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF RELIGIONS AND WORLDVIEWS

by Ninian Smart

Smart who was a scholar in the history of religions, introduces the following seven dimensions of religions and worldviews:

### **1. The Practical and Ritual dimension.**

This covers acts of worship, both private and corporate, prayer, preaching, sacrifice and meditation. It also includes practices such as yoga. Forms and orders of ceremonies.

### **2. The Experiential and Emotional dimension.**

Bringing together a range of religious phenomena ranging from conversion experiences to shamanistic trances. It also includes less dramatic feelings, such as a sense of oneness and stillness. dread, guilt, awe, mystery, devotion, liberation, ecstasy, inner peace, bliss (private)

### **3. The Narrative and Mythic dimension.**

The stories that form the starting points for a great deal of religious teaching. Creation myths are brought together with devotional material and accounts of the lives of significant individuals. stories (often regarded as revealed) that work on several levels. Sometimes narratives fit together into a fairly complete and systematic interpretation of the universe and human's place in it.

### **4. The Doctrinal and Philosophical dimension.**

Referring to the official teachings of the world's religions. systematic formulation of religious teachings in an intellectually coherent form.



### **5. The Ethical and Legal dimension.**

Religious rules and laws that stem from the narrative and doctrinal aspects of each tradition. Rules about human behavior (often regarded as revealed from supernatural realm).

### **6. The Social and Institutional dimension.**

This includes the living embodiment of each religion: its followers. The institutional aspects refer to the organized structures and hierarchies often to be found within religious traditions. belief system is shared and attitudes practiced by a group. Often rules for identifying community membership and participation (public).

### **7. The Material dimension.**

Religions of all sorts have created physical expressions of their faith, be it buildings, works of art or dramatic performances. ordinary objects or places that symbolize or manifest the sacred or supernatural.

*Source: The World's Religions (1993: 12-21).*

*Bron: Pew Research Centre. 2017. 'The Global Religious Landscape A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010.*

## **DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL CAPITAL**

The concept of 'spiritual capital' builds on the concept of 'social capital' developed by the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (2000). Social capital refers to social networks and the values of reciprocity and trust that result from them. Social capital is important not only for social cohesion: for community activities, social support and participation that provide 'lubrication' in society. In more technical terms, we can speak of social capital as (social) resources you can call upon to get help, support and care from others. In other words, you can 'cash in' on these relationships and networks; they also have a certain economic value - hence the reference to 'capital' (Engbersen 2003). Social capital also offers the possibilities and channels to increase your influence and power in society. It helps you to mobilise support for your ideas and to realise social projects. The condition for all this is that you continuously invest in these relationships and networks: social capital is not fixed.

## **DEFINITIE 'SOCIAL CAPITAL' ROBERT PUTNAM**

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue." The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

*(Putnam 2000: 19).*

The concept of ‘spiritual capital’ builds on the concept of ‘social capital’ and has been used by various researchers to refer to the different ways in which people connect with each other in order to work together for the common good (Ter Haar 2011: 20; Tomalin 2007: 13-16). Unlike social capital, people do not only draw from social relationships with other people, but also from their relationships with God, gods or other otherworldly realities and/or from religious and spiritual experiences that arise from personal contact with god, nature or cosmos (spirituality). Spiritual capital is, as it were, about the three-dimensional networks and contexts of humans:

- About the embeddedness of individuals in social relationships (‘social capital’),
- About the embeddedness of humans in the ecosystem and their relationships with all other living systems in nature and the cosmos, and
- About the embeddedness of humans and human action in larger frameworks of meaning and meaning-making.

This third, transcendental or vertical dimension may involve religious meaning and relationships with god, gods or spirit(s), as well as humanistic meaning and meaning in relation to humanity (‘humanity’) or human dignity.

In summary, we can say that spiritual capital is about the situatedness of individuals in social contexts, about the interrelationship of humans and the ecosystem or nature, and about the embeddedness of human actions in larger frameworks of meaning and meaning (Jansen 2018: 10).

### **The positive and negative role of spiritual capital in sustainable development**

Although spiritual capital refers to relationships of trust and reciprocity that arise in common actions for the common good, it depends on how that common good is defined whether these actions contribute to or hinder the achievement of the SDGs. Philosophies of life and sustainable development goals both provide visions of a better world and a roadmap on how to achieve that better world (Ter Haar 2011:5). In many cases these visions overlap, but sometimes they do not. We see a constructive role of religion in the pleadings of Pope Francis and “green” Patriarch Bartholomew, for example, with their emphasis on dialogue and values such as hope, trust and love (an eye for the other and yourself). Drawing from their traditions, they call for the development of ecological and social responsibility. However, a hampering role of spiritual capital is apparent where girls and women are slowed down in their development on the basis of certain religious norms and rules for example.

From their tradition, religious or spiritual leaders and communities often criticise the (singular) emphasis that SDG policies place on the material and economic aspects of development and welfare (Nordstokke 2013; Van der Wel 2011; Moyer 2015). According to them, people and the world would benefit from a more holistic or integrated vision in which more attention is paid to the ethical, social and spiritual dimensions of welfare and development.<sup>7</sup> Spiritual capital therefore fits well with a broader concept of welfare as it has featured in the Dutch political debate.<sup>8</sup> For example, qualities such as hope, love, trust, and norms and values can be of great importance in social transitions that require demanding and profound behavioural changes or changes of vision, such as the energy transition for example (Jansen 2018; ARC and UNDP 2015; Doorey 2018).

In short, the beliefs, spheres of influence and networks that make up the spiritual capital can promote, impede or criticise sustainable development goals. Also, religious and philosophical networks and communities can increase social cohesion in a society, for example when they contribute to the emancipation of marginalised groups. But they can also contribute to polarisation and segregation in society, when they exclude certain

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7. See also the interviews in this report with Matthijs Schouten (‘NatuurWijs’) and Moses Alagbe (‘The church is boring if it is not relevant’).

8. A good example of this is the Broad Welfare Monitor of Statistics Netherlands (CBS). This monitor ‘measures’ how welfare in the broad sense of the word is developing in the Netherlands, looking at both the economic and the ecological and social aspects of welfare. See also: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/publicatie/2018/20/monitor-brede-welvaart-2018> (visited 20 March 2019).

groups or set themselves off against democratic values and anti-discrimination principles that form the foundation of Dutch society.

In other words, spiritual capital orients us on the positive and negative role that philosophies of life, including religion, can play when it comes to sustainable development. A critical reflection on the positive and negative relationship between spiritual capital and sustainable development can therefore increase the scope and effectiveness of SDG policies.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

From January to March 2019 a small team connected to the *Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development* of the Vrije Universiteit carried out an initial baseline measurement to set up the research.<sup>9</sup> This explorative research consisted of two parts. The first was a quick scan or mapping of the contributions of the most important religious and philosophical groups to the Sustainable Development Goals in the Netherlands. The second was a qualitative research into the contribution of religious and ideological groups to the spiritual capital of Dutch society.

### Survey

This part of the research aimed to measure the concrete contribution of religious and ideological groups to the SDGs in the Netherlands. Charitable activities of religious and ideological communities are often invisible. With this survey we wanted to gain more insight into the workforce, financial sources and other material resources used by religious and ideological groups to contribute to the SDGs in the Netherlands. In addition, we sought clarity on which SDGs are the focus of these contributions. The survey was conducted among 50 communities and organisations from the main religious and ideological movements in the Netherlands. The 'selection of participants' section below explains the criteria for the selection of these participants.

### MAIN QUESTIONS SURVEY

1. To which of the 17 SDGs do religious and ideological groups contribute?
2. What is the contribution of these groups to the mentioned SDGs:
  - a. financial - what is the amount/budget involved?
  - b. human resources - how many paid and unpaid (volunteer) workers are involved?
  - c. material assets/resources - is the use of land and buildings involved for example with regard to the green SDGs (6, 12 to 15)?
3. What is achieved by this project or activity?
  - a. result
  - b. outreach to religious constituency/community (long term: number of direct beneficiaries, organised by gender, age, social class)\*;
  - c. connections with transnational communities and partnerships (long term: number of indirect beneficiaries, categorised);
  - d. duration and nature of relationship with supporters and/or partnerships.

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9. The research team consisted of Dr. Annette Jansen (project leader), Marieke van der Linden (intern/MA student Religion and Theology), Jan Jorrit Hasselaar MA (coordinator Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development) Prof. Ruard Ganzevoort (professor of practical theology).

### Interviews spiritual capital

With this part of the research we wanted to map out a number of religious and spiritual ‘assets’ or qualities. Indeed, literature on religion and development suggests that religious and ideologically inspired communities and organisations have a number of specific qualities, such as their long-term presence at the roots of society and their focus on values and spiritual well-being (Dugbazah 2009; Freeman 2012; Gardner 2002; Jansen 2018; Karam 2016; Marshall et al. 2017; Moyer 2015; Mtata 2013; Nordstokke 2013; Ter Haar 2011; Tomalin 2015). In this part of the research we test the assumptions of a Theory of Change about the specific role and contributions of religious and philosophical initiatives and groups. In particular, we looked at assumptions about the transformative potential, e.g. their ability to contribute to changes in norms and values, people’s perceptions and lifestyles. The preliminary Theory of Change was as follows:

#### **THEORY OF CHANGE (TOC) ‘SPIRITUAL CAPITAL**

Religious and ideologically inspired communities, individuals and organisations have certain specific characteristics and assets, which we call ‘religious or spiritual assets’, that distinguish them from secular social organisations. Because of these assets they can make a unique, complementary contribution to the SDGs, for example when it comes to the reach of certain (minority) groups and the transformation of consciousness, conviction, attitude, lifestyle and commitment needed to achieve the sustainable development goals.

### Spiritual capital indicators

Based on existing research (Jansen 2018; ARC and UNDP 2015; Doorey 2018), a list of thirteen tentative indicators was compiled based on four preliminary assumptions about the relationship between spiritual capital and sustainable development. On the next page you will find an overview of these preliminary assumptions and indicators.

This table formed the basis for the development of the survey and for the interviews conducted in the second part of the research.<sup>10</sup> In this second part, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of eight religious and ideological movements (Catholicism, Protestantism, migrant churches, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, humanism) and one ideological public broadcaster. In this phase of the research it was mainly about mapping out the ‘what’. The main question was:

*Which religious or spiritual (a1.) networks and relationships, (a2.) visions, (a3.) practices and (a4.) roles were used in 2018 by the religious and ideological groups studied to contribute to (the awareness of) the SDGs?*

During the interviews, local activities were zoomed in on because the workings of the spiritual capital are often best visible at the grass-roots level. To further sharpen the focus, it was also decided to select projects and activities that contribute to a specific selection of SDGs, namely SDG 1, poverty alleviation, SDG 10, combating inequality, and SDG 13, climate action. However, this criterion was applied flexibly, allowing representatives of the various ideological movements to indicate for themselves which project or activity they thought was most representative of their community or organisation.

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10. See appendix for the survey questions and the interview format.

### Selection of survey participants and informants

The research focused exclusively on the contributions to the Dutch SDGs of religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations working in the Netherlands (and therefore not on the contributions to the SDGs from countries outside Europe). Although the aim of the research was explicitly to visualise the contributions of less calibrated and visible groups, for this first phase we were nevertheless dependent on the available knowledge of religious scientists and religious and ideological organisations.

Contributions from special (religious) education and confessional care institutions were not included in this research, because it is too extensive and the contributions from these institutions have often already been included in the SDG reports of the central government and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). However, projects by special, eye-catching *interreligious* institutions were included, as well as contributions from humanist organisations, which are, after all, well represented and organised in the Netherlands and have a clear religious or ideological profile.

**Table 1: Presuppositions and Indicators Spiritual Capital**

<p><b>Assumption A1:</b> Religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations have networks and relationships that increase their social reach: they reach other, often more marginalised groups than secular NGOs and develop (more) long-term relationships of trust because of their continuous presence and position as spiritual counsellor.</p>
<p><b>Indicators A1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are at the roots of society, have access to the poorest and/or minority groups,</li> <li>• They have a long-term presence, they are reachable, approachable, accessible - they can be trusted and depended upon by church members and others,</li> <li>• They have their own supporters, members and sympathisers who can be mobilised for certain social actions or easily reached with certain awareness campaigns,</li> <li>• They have their own material and financial assets that can be used for the benefit of sustainable development such as land, religious buildings and alms and donations,</li> <li>• They are part of transnational communities, have strong ties with like-minded religious communities in other cities or countries and consider these members as 'brothers and sisters'.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assumption A2:</b> Religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations have spiritual and religious visions that guide the values and norms within the community and contribute to meaning and meaning making.</p>
<p><b>Indicators A2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious canons and teachings,</li> <li>• Wisdom, parables, stories,</li> <li>• Religious education and training, also and especially to young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assumption A3:</b> Religious and ideological initiatives and groups have spiritual and religious practices that contribute to social and existential individual and collective transformation processes.</p>
<p><b>Indicators A3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spiritual development and empowerment through meditation, prayer, religious study and individual devotion that can contribute to a strong sense of purpose, empowerment and endurance,</li> <li>• Rituals and communal celebrations that mobilise groups, generate team spirit, and are important for the development of hope, historical (self) awareness and long-term orientation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assumption A4:</b> Religious and ideological groups or leaders may, because of their relative independence from politics and their focus on the general good, occupy special social roles.</p>
<p><b>Indicators A4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moral leadership in times of adversity or social change,</li> <li>• Bridge builders in times of polarisation and conflict,</li> <li>• Advocate for certain sustainable development goals or marginalised groups.</li> </ul>

Sources: The assumptions and indicators in this table are based on previous research on so-called 'religious assets': ARC and UNDP 2015; Doorey 2018 and Jansen 2018.

## RESEARCH RESTRICTIONS

Unlike, for example, faith-based organisations active in international development work, most religious and ideologically inspired communities, individuals and organisations participating in this research do not have comprehensive monitoring systems that measure the impact of a project and the number of beneficiaries it has reached. Furthermore, due to limitations in time and personnel, it will not be possible to include the significant number of religious institutions active in the field of social and sustainable development in the Netherlands in this research. The results of this first baseline measurement will therefore be incomplete and limited. However, it will be examined with the participating organisations whether and how this research can be expanded and made more systematic in the coming years.

In order to measure the influence of religious and philosophical leaders, communities and organisations on the normative level - when it comes to forming public opinions about sustainable development, for example - a large-scale discourse and opinion research is usually set up. We were not able to achieve this within this first study. However, in order to learn something about this normative level, we have included one case where individual spiritual leadership plays a major role and one case about the role of ideological broadcasting organisations in the awareness and transfer of knowledge about sustainable development.

Due to limitations in time and personnel, it was also decided to focus on qualitative research in this first report: the cases and analyses of 8-9 (local) projects and on the findings from the survey. Literature was mainly consulted to check data garnered from field research. According to the researchers, this qualitative approach is best suited to put the theme 'religion, philosophy of life and sustainable development' on the map in the Dutch context. Furthermore, by means of inspiring stories and concrete examples, the Dutch spiritual capital can best be made visible.

In a next phase, more time will be spent on literature reviews in which findings from recent national and international research in the fields of religion, philosophy of life and sustainable development will be discussed. In the coming years, the *Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development* intends to pay more attention to the relationship between norms and values and SDGs, the first level in Kaag's policy paper. At a later stage, work will also be carried out on the further definition and operationalisation of the concept of spiritual capital. We will look at possibilities to make this concept and the associated indicators suitable for the Broad Welfare Monitor of Statistics Netherlands (CBS). In addition, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations inspired by religions and philosophies of life, the Centre wants to develop a simple tool with which spiritual capital can be integrated into SDG monitoring and evaluation systems.

# General findings survey research



## METHOD, SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSE

In order to get a good picture of the contributions of religious and ideological communities and organisations to the SDGs in the Netherlands, 51 actors were approached to participate in a survey on religion and SDGs. Fifteen of these organisations responded positively. The survey consisted of three parts. In the first part, questions of a general nature were asked about the religious or ideological background and the number of members, volunteers and paid employees active in the community or organisation. In the second part, questions were asked about respondents' familiarity with the SDGs and about the activities of participating organisations that contribute to the SDGs. In the third part, respondents were asked to respond to statements about the specific role and contributions of religious and philosophical communities and organisations to the SDGs. The complete survey questions are included in the appendix to this report.

The list of communities, organisations and foundations approached for the survey was drawn up through desk research and with the help of tips and advice from religious or ideological umbrella organisations and religious scholars at VU University Amsterdam. The representativeness of religious movements in the Netherlands was taken into account in the selection. As a result, relatively more communities and organisations of Christian and Muslim persuasion were approached than organisations of other religious and ideological backgrounds. By means of web research and telephone contact it was also determined whether the community or organisation in question carries out activities or projects that clearly contribute to one or more SDGs.

The relatively small number of fifteen survey participants limited the possibility of extrapolating research results to Dutch society as a whole. Moreover, not all surveys were completely filled out by the respondents: the researchers received twelve fully completed and three partially completed surveys. The survey results were therefore mainly used to supplement the qualitative research in order to get a broader picture of the familiarity with and contribution to SDGs among religious and ideological organisations in the Netherlands.

The distribution of respondents by religious and ideological background was fairly representative of the current Dutch religious and ideological landscape. Nine of the fifteen respondents had a Christian signature. Of these, five consider themselves to be representatives of Protestantism (Stichting voor Stad en Kerk, Stichting Tijd voor Actie, Vereniging SchuldHulpMaatje Nederland, Stichting A Rocha and GroeneKerkenActie) and two consider themselves as belonging to the Roman Catholic Church (Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen en Parochiële Caritas Instelling). The other two identified themselves as 'generally Christian' or as belonging to another movement within Christianity (Stichting Micha Nederland and Jesus Christ Foundation Church). Two organisations participating in the survey have an Islamic background (Stichting Al-Yateem). Furthermore, the ZEN Peacemakers Low Countries participated in the survey as a representative of Buddhism, the Humanist Covenant as a representative of humanism, and the Dutch Israelite denomination (Nederlands Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap) as a representative of Judaism. Two organisations, of Hindu and Muslim persuasion, participated in the survey on the basis of anonymity.

## SURVEY RESULTS: INTERVENTION LEVEL, VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS

The survey sought to understand the focus of community and organisational activities related to the 17 SDGs. The results show that nine out of fifteen respondents are familiar with SDGs. Six respondents indicated that they had never heard of SDGs.

In the survey, respondents were asked to choose three SDGs that they estimate are most important to their constituency. The results show that SDG 1, which focuses on poverty reduction, was chosen the most, namely nine times. For example, the choice for poverty alleviation was motivated by an Islamic organisation with 'we have set up an Islamic food bank because many people in our constituency live below the poverty line'. Other common choices were SDG 2, 'no hunger', which was mentioned five times, SDG 3, 'good health'

was mentioned seven times and SDG 10, ‘reducing inequality’, five times. When asked which SDGs are the most important that the Dutch government should work on, the aforementioned SDGs were also the most common. Moreover, SDG 11 and 16, respectively ‘sustainable cities and communities’ and ‘peace, justice and strong institutions’, were often mentioned. Figure 1 clearly shows the results based on a classification of the 17 SDGs into the three clusters of social, economic and green goals.<sup>11</sup>

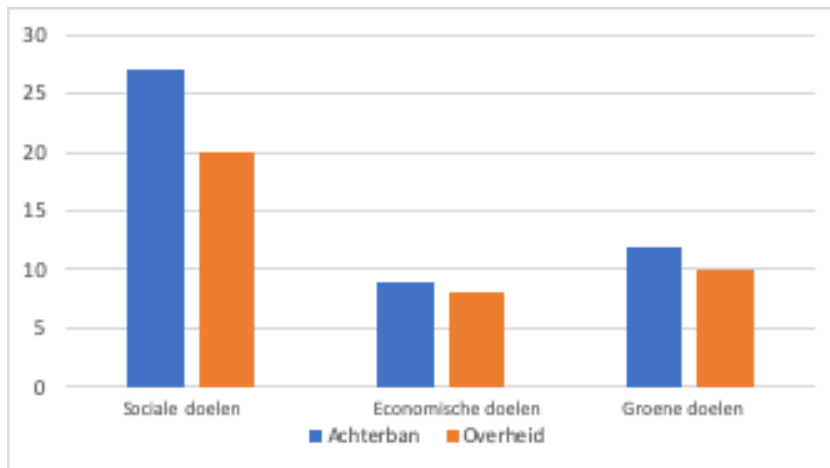


Figure 1 SDGs considered most important by respondents with left-wing supporters and right-wing supporters of the Dutch government, divided over the three clusters Social Goals (no poverty, no hunger, good health and welfare, quality education, and gender equality), Economic Goals (clean water and sanitation, affordable and sustainable energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure and reducing inequality), and Green Goals (Sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, living in water and life on land). Results are based on 14 answers

Table 2 shows which activities related to the SDGs were organised by the participating communities and organisations in 2018. Some of these activities were small-scale, such as a ‘street retreat’ in which women live five days on the streets to show solidarity with the homeless and as a form of reflection on their own lives. In other cases they were large-scale actions. Stichting Tijd voor Actie (‘time for action’ foundation), for example, set up a network that stimulates young people in 25 cities to volunteer in their own neighbourhood. In Zwolle alone, in 2018, 508 people volunteered for 946 people in need. Charity collections from their own communities and donations turned out to be the most common way of fundraising among the participating communities and organisations: of the 13 respondents who filled in the question in question, 11 indicated that they used collections and 12 donations. Five respondents indicated that their organisation receives grants from like-minded funds.

11. The Social cluster includes the following SDGs: no poverty, no hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, and gender equality. The Economic cluster includes the following SDGs: clean water and sanitation, affordable and sustainable energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure and reduce inequality. The Green cluster includes the following SDGs: sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water and life on land.

**Table 2: Overview Activities, Categorised by SDG and Religious or Ideological Current<sup>12</sup>**

SDG	Activities	Religious or Ideological current	Total number of people reached
1. No Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of course offer and annual ‘theme Sunday’</li> <li>• Clothing collection campaign</li> <li>• Street retreat</li> <li>• Buddies, aid activities</li> <li>• Weekly Islamic food bank</li> <li>• Information in newsletter</li> <li>• Online support for people in debt</li> <li>• Financial debt relief</li> <li>• Food bank</li> <li>• Neighbourhood meals</li> <li>• Network in which churches can share experiences about children in poverty)</li> </ul>	Islam Protestantism Catholicism Buddhism	79.000
2. Zero Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of course offer</li> <li>• Food bank</li> <li>• Islamic food bank</li> <li>• Neighbourhood garden</li> </ul>	Islam Protestantism Catholicism	11400
3. Good Health and Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breast cancer education</li> <li>• Spiritual care</li> <li>• Promoting right to abortion</li> <li>• Coaching by buddies</li> <li>• Sports and vacation activities for children and parents in deprived areas</li> <li>• Diaconal vacation work, vacations for vulnerable people</li> </ul>	Humanism Islam Protestantism Catholicism Judaism	15100
4. Quality education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of teaching materials</li> <li>• Providing religious education for children and courses for adults</li> <li>• Humanistic education</li> <li>• Foundation Academy of Amsterdam (education for migrants)</li> <li>• Homework support</li> </ul>	Humanism Protestantism Migrant church Judaism	25000
5. Gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme in educational activities</li> <li>• Centre for African Women</li> <li>• Psycho-physical training, monthly meetings and weekly women’s walk-in for Islamic women</li> </ul>	Protestantism Migrant church	Not known

12. This table also includes KerkinActie’s (the Protestant Church in the Netherland’s national diaconate) activities as documented in their 2017 annual report. Although this organisation did not complete the survey, it was decided to include their activities due to the size of the organisation in the Netherlands.

6. Clean Water and Sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>	Catholicism	500
7. Affordable and Clean Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of course offer</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>	Protestantism Catholicism	500
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance from food bank to work</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>	Protestantism Catholicism	1800
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure			
10. Reduced Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of course offer</li> <li>• Subject in annual theme Sunday</li> <li>• Supporting migrants through work</li> <li>• Meeting centre for African women</li> <li>• Homework support in deprived neighbourhoods</li> <li>• (legal) support for undocumented migrants</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> <li>• Neighbourhood meal with refugees</li> </ul>	Humanism Protestantism Catholicism Migrant church	22100
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste-clearing action on beaches and floodplains</li> <li>• Green Church Day Cycle Routes along Green Churches</li> </ul>	Protestantism	4300
12. Responsible Consumption and Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of course offer</li> <li>• Attention in newsletters</li> <li>• Discussion of documentary</li> <li>• Promotion of encyclical <i>Laudato Si'</i> in seminars, national networks etc.</li> <li>• Food bank</li> </ul>	Protestantism Catholicism Buddhism Judaism	450
13. Climate action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Workshops and lectures</li> <li>• Attention in newsletters</li> <li>• Documentary review</li> </ul>	Humanism Protestantism Buddhism	2006
14. Life Below Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature work days</li> </ul>	Protestantism	1500
15. Life on Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature work days</li> </ul>	Protestantism	1500
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisation 5 May meeting</li> <li>• 'Neighbourhood and church houses'</li> <li>• (Legal) Support for undocumented migrants</li> </ul>	Islam Protestantism Buddhism	144
17. Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in various civic activities</li> <li>• Participation in interreligious and -ideological platform</li> </ul>	Humanism Islam	20

### **Survey results: theses on added value of philosophical organisations**

In this section, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with certain statements about the specific qualities of religiously and philosophically inspired communities and organisations. In doing so, they could choose between the options strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. The results show that the respondents were most strongly in agreement with the statements 'Religious organisations work from philosophical and religious visions that emphasise responsibility for the environment and the future' and 'Religious organisations work from philosophical and religious visions that motivate people to actively work for social equality'. Respondents note that it is precisely the characteristics of religious organisations that make them a valuable partner for the government. On average, the statement with which the respondents disagreed most strongly with was: 'Religious organisations can be an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals'. Eight respondents disagreed with this statement. The statement on which opinions were most divided was: 'Religious organisations are ideally suited to act as advocates of the Sustainable Development Goals'. Respondents gave various motivations for their choice of this thesis, such as the fact that religious organisations are not suitable for this because of lack of experience, but also the fact that one has to be careful when attributing so much importance to religion: 'I find "ideally suited" a dangerous expression when it comes to religions'.

### **Finally: interest in participating in follow-up activities on religion and SDGs**

In general, respondents agreed that religious organisations can play a role in raising awareness about SDGs. Apart from the fact that respondents indicate that the work they do often contributes to one or more SDGs, some also indicate that more attention can be given to SDGs ('Yes. Because we work thematically, the material we develop is ultimately always linked to a number of SDGs. We could put more effort into this and communicate about it'). However, some respondents also indicated that SDGs are not the focus of the organisation ('No, it is not our focus. However, our work does connect on some fronts with the SDGs: we can tell you that').



# The Green Goals Climate Action, Life Below Water and Life on Land

Source photo: PixaBay

*I have always felt that creation is sacred, that we are all particles of God. Not only us, but the plants and the animals as well.*

*--Renée Brabers, February 7, 2019*

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we zoom in on the contribution of philosophically and religiously inspired individuals and communities in the Netherlands to the so-called 'green goals':<sup>13</sup>

- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation,
- SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production,
- SDG 13: Climate Action,
- SDG 14: Life Below water and
- SDG 15: Life on Land.

We start with a short overview of the findings from the survey. Then we present three examples of philosophically inspired 'green' projects in the Netherlands: the Green Church project of a Catholic parish in Houten, the clean drinking water project of the Islamic inspired aid organisation *Hasene* and the *NatuurWijs* project of the spiritually and Buddhist inspired *NatuurCollege*. In the conclusion of this chapter we look at which specific elements of spiritual capital were used in these three projects and to what extent these contributions are hampering the achievement of the green SDGs in the Netherlands.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

In general, green goals that are part of the 17 sustainable development goals, such as responsible consumption and production and climate action, are not the top priority of the communities surveyed. As mentioned earlier, the green goals include the five SDGs Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water and Life on Land. According to only four out of fifteen respondents, the green goals are among the three most important SDGs for their own constituencies. SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 13 Climate Action have each been chosen three times as one of the three most important SDGs for the supporters. In addition, Life Below Water was chosen once, and Life on Land twice. So in total, the green goals have been chosen twelve times. In comparison, SDG 1, No Poverty, was chosen nine times by organisations. In addition to care for creation, it is also indicated that green goals are important for people 'on the edge of society', which indicates a clear social argument for the importance of green goals. Although respondents do not further explain this, it can be argued that the adverse effects of climate change and pollution affect precisely those people who live on the edge of society. Besides the fact that their own supporters view these green goals as important, organisations also indicate that the Dutch government plays an important role in the realisation of these goals. Among other things, they indicate that an approach at the macro level is important when it comes to issues such as sustainability and biodiversity ('climate, coexistence and infrastructure combined at the macro level is government policy'). In practice, six organisations indicate to have organised projects and/or activities in 2018 that are related to one or more green goals. In total these are ten different activities or projects. Organisations give attention to projects aimed at raising awareness about climate and nature, such as blogs and documentary discussions, as well as more active projects, such as nature workdays and waste picking. An estimated 3300 people are reached with awareness raising projects and 2000 with active projects. An example of a project focusing on green goals is the project of Stichting A Rocha. This organisation has 14 local groups in the Netherlands that take care of nature management and monitoring in the area. In addition, the organisation is in close

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13. Here we follow the classification of the second Dutch SDG report that distinguishes between 'the five green SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15', 'the five social SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5', 'the five economic SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11' as well as partnerships (SDG 17) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) as independent goals. See 'Tweede Nederlandse SDG-rapportage: Nederland ontwikkelt duurzaam', May 2018: page 6.

contact with local churches and provides activities and support for these churches that want to contribute to sustainability. Noteworthy is that five of the six organisations that organise activities in the field of green goals have a Christian identity.

## CLIMATE ACTION (SDG 13) CATHOLICISM: THE GREEN CHURCH

*It's all about taking care of creation and starting with yourself. Starting with the church building to give an example to people of how you can make things sustainable. An equally important goal is to make people aware of environmental issues and that things have to be done differently. If such a subject is going to be heard in the church, it is going to evoke something in people: 'Oh, wait a minute... it's not just in the newspapers, it's not just in the news'.*

- Member of the Green Church workgroup Catholic Church Houten

In the autumn of 2015 the Roman Catholic Church in Houten organised a series of meetings about the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*.<sup>14</sup> In this encyclical Pope Francis speaks about the 'indissoluble ... bond ... between care for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and inner peace' and calls upon believers to commit themselves to the care for creation (see inset Encyclical *Laudato Si'*).

### ENCYCLICAL LAUDATO SI'

An encyclical is an important papal doctrinal document that is distributed as a so-called circular letter to all Roman Catholic communities in the world. An encyclical is not binding or legislative; it does not have the same status as canonical Catholic doctrine. But it is an expression of papal teaching and therefore of great weight for the Catholic Church and community.

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato si'* in which he calls "all people of good will" to treat the earth and the poor with respect and reverence. On the Dutch website of *Laudato si'* there is a summary of the encyclical from which a small excerpt is quoted below. The numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs of the encyclical.

The encyclical takes its name from the lines of Francis of Assisi in his Sun Song, "Praised be Thou, my Lord". Francis reminds us that the earth, our common home, "is like a sister with whom we share our lives and a

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14. In het onderzoek zijn twee cases van projecten in Houten opgenomen omdat beiden volgens sleutelpersonen die werden geraadpleegd (bijzonder) representatief zijn voor de religieuze stroming die zij vertegenwoordigen. Zo maakt de R.K-kerk te Houten deel uit van de Parochiële Caritas Instelling PJ23. Deze bestaat uit acht rooms-katholieke geloofsgemeenschappen in de regio, waaronder Schalwijk. Volgens Maria ter Steeg, katholiek theologe, bracht Schalwijk in het verleden veel priesters voort. Bovendien werd ingeschat dat het thema duurzaamheid vanwege de agrarische achtergrond van veel parochianen in deze regio een belangrijke rol zou spelen. De tweede casus, die van de protestantse kerk en Stichting Present Houten, werd geselecteerd omdat het hier gaat om een zeer actieve en grote protestantse gemeente. De protestantse kerk in Houten heeft 2600 geregistreerde leden en is vanwege haar locatie in de groeigemeente Houten breed van samenstelling wat betreft achtergrond en levensopbouw. Een aardige bijkomstigheid is dat één van de gemeenteleden van de protestantse kerk Houten, René de Reuver, scriba is van de generale synode van de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN).



fine mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (1). We “are the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our body is composed of elements of the planet, its air allows us to breathe, its water gives us life and nourishes us” (2). “This sister weeps because of the damage we have caused her through our irresponsible use and misuse of the goods God has given her” (2).

The appropriate answer is what Pope John Paul II called a ‘global ecological conversion’ (5). In this, Francis of Assisi is “the example par excellence of caring for the fragile and of an integral ecology that is full of joy and authenticity. [...] He shows us how indissoluble the link is between care for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and inner peace” (10).

A number of ideas run as a thread through the entire encyclical:

- the close relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
- the conviction that everything in the world is interconnected
- the critique of new models and forms of power arising from technology
- the call to approach the economy and progress in other ways
- the value inherent in each creature
- the human meaning of ecology
- the need for frank and honest debate
- the serious responsibility of international and local policies
- the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle (16)

Source: *Laudato Si’: an extensive summary*. [https://laudato-si.nl/pdf/Samenvatting\\_LS\\_\\_uitgebreid.pdf](https://laudato-si.nl/pdf/Samenvatting_LS__uitgebreid.pdf) (visited 4 March 2019). For more information about the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, see: <https://laudato-si.nl/>.

At the end of the series of meetings the participants discussed how they could give hands and feet to this call. Five members of the discussion group wanted to get to work. The facilitator showed them the format of the Green Church initiative: an initiative of Kerk in Actie and Tear Nederland that supports religious communities in the Netherlands in making their church more sustainable (see inset *Green Churches*). The five members thought it was a great plan and set up the Working Group Green Church Houten in early 2016.

On the basis of the roadmap of the Green Churches Action, the working group first examined the energy consumption and consumption pattern of the church. It looked at electricity and gas consumption and the use of cleaning agents and pesticides in and around the church building. Soon the group discovered numerous points for improvement. ‘The heating of the church is of course very expensive, it is very complicated to heat a church, it costs a lot of gas,’ says R., a member of the working group.<sup>15</sup> It also turned out that a lot of energy was being wasted because two boilers were heating fulltime water for showers that had been out of use for a long time. The gas ignition lamps turned out to use more than 500 watts each. In addition, the workgroup discovered that the wholesaler from which the church usually makes its purchases does not sell ecological cleaning products.

Based on the research, the working group drew up an ambitious sustainability plan. Although the energy savings would yield money in the long run, there was of course a cost element to the plan. The working group wanted to switch to LED lighting but both the design and the purchase and installation of the new

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15. Interview with a member of the Working Group Green Church Houten, February 7, 2019.

lighting plan required a lot of money. A member of the working group heard that the municipality of Houten had launched a competition for local sustainability initiatives. The working group decided to compete for the prize of €10,000, which led to a lot of positive awareness in the church.

In order to compete, the members of the working group had to develop a technically sound proposal for making the church more sustainable. Moreover, they had to mobilise parishioners and other inhabitants of Houten to vote on their sustainability plan. The number of public votes would significantly increase their chances of winning the prize of the municipality's sustainability fund. The working group wrote articles for the parish magazine, made sure the initiative was published in the local newspaper and told the parishioners about their plan during the announcements or during coffee after mass. 'You're going to put energy into such a plan and then you hope that people will become enthusiastic about your ideas. Which is actually just as important as having those lights installed. That people are happy to come here and that we're going to waste less energy', says R. 'Those people all went to vote, all went to that site of the sustainability fund, all typed in the word 'sustainable', so it gave awareness and it also gave solidarity'.

The Working Group Green Church won the competition and thereby received a large part of the budget. However, €35,000 was needed for the total sustainability plan. That is why the parishioners were once again called upon. A symbolic thermometer was placed in the church. For every extra €2.500 that was raised, a new LED light in the thermometer lit up. In this way the church visitors could follow the progress and were stimulated to contribute to the plan. To raise awareness and mobilise the parishioners a special 'green mass' was held and the reception of the predicate 'green church' was celebrated with the festive hanging of a sign. Five creative gatherings were organised for children in which the children made works of art based on the creation story. These were hung in a large frame in the church and unveiled by the pastor. The parishioners contributed significantly to the LED lamp project. In the end, the finance department rounded off the budget with funds from the reserves of the church community.

The working group was not only faced with positive reactions. Now and then they encountered resistance, for example when they spoke to the garden group about the use of pesticides in the park and in the nearby cemetery. Not spraying meant a lot more hoeing and that was not feasible because of the limited number of members of the gardening group and their age. After some conversations over coffee, the initial resistance broke and the garden group went along to look for a creative solution. First they experimented with a so-called weed bike, with which you can hoe on foot. When that didn't work well, the garden group developed a harrow that they could hang behind the tractor. In the end they started to think along with us', says R. 'you just have to start with awareness, then other things will follow'.

More than three years after the start of the Working Group Green Church, the main points for improvement from the sustainability plan have been addressed. With the new lighting plan, the working group realised an energy reduction of 75% and a saving of 4kwh on an annual basis. The working group is now ready for phase two: motivating parishioners to do something about making their own households more sustainable. Recently the working group organised a sustainable High Tea where 55 parishioners were invited to take on a sustainable challenge of 40 days during Lent. The participants chose for example to eat less meat during this period, to use less plastic, to drive the car less often or to turn down the heating a degree. Some even opted for two challenges. In this way, the awareness and sustainability continues to expand: from the working group to the church building, and from the church building to the houses and lives of the parishioners.

## GREEN CHURCHES INITIATIVE

De Green Church Initiative is an initiative of Kerk in Actie, the diaconate of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and of Tear Nederland, a Christian organisation that together with local churches contributes to poverty alleviation, emergency relief and sustainability. The Green Churches Action supports faith communities in making their church more sustainable by providing information, toolkits and networking opportunities. The action shows how you can set up projects that promote sustainability in your own church or religious community. The initiators believe that churches, nourished by their values and faith, can play a visible, positive role in the transition to a sustainable lifestyle and society. Several hundred religious communities of various religious denominations, including many mosques and synagogues, now take part in the Green Churches Initiative.

For more information, see: <https://www.groenekerken.nl>

## CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION (SDG 6) ISLAM: 'WATER IS LIFE'

*"We've made out of water all living things"  
- Sura al-Anbiyyaa' (21:30)*

### World Water Day

Shortly after the founding of the Dutch branch of *Hasene*, an Islamic aid organisation that supports aid and development projects all over the world (see inset *Hasene*), a small group of volunteers in the Netherlands started organising activities on World Water Day. 'Our organisation had already opened thousands of wells in Africa', says initiator and board member of *Hasene Netherlands* Huseyin Karatas.<sup>16</sup> 'In the Netherlands children are well-off, but in Africa there is a real need for water that is clean and potable'. Huseyin and the other volunteers noticed that children in the Netherlands took clean drinking water for granted. They did not know the value of water anymore. The volunteers of *Hasene* studied the information of the UN World Water Day and decided what to do to raise awareness about the value of water.

On 22 March 2014 they set up a stand in front of *Hasene's* office in Rotterdam and handed out flyers to bystanders with all kinds of facts about water: 'Did you know that 2 billion people on earth don't have clean drinking water?' and 'Did you know that in some countries people have to walk as long as 3 hours to get water?' At the same time, the group held a number of mini-workshops on water use, water wastage, water in the Netherlands and water in Africa, together with institutions for Koranic education in Amsterdam. They also organised a sponsor run. This sponsor run was used to raise money for the construction of a water fountain in Ethiopia, where visitors could tap clean water. The children who participated in the sponsor run were approached through the mosques. During the first year, two or three mosques participated in the activities around World Water Day and about 60 children per location participated in the sponsor run.

The action was a success and *Hasene Nederland* decided to turn it into an independent project aimed at raising awareness about water scarcity in the world and water use in the Netherlands. Together with

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16. Interview Mehmet Yaramis en Huseyin Karatas, 1 maart 2019.

experts, a teaching module was developed that could be integrated into Islamic education for children at Dutch mosques. The module consists of three mini lessons of 20 minutes each in which the children learn about water and faith, water in Africa and the Netherlands and about healthy and sustainable water use. Awareness is central. For example, children are asked if they know where the tap water in Rotterdam comes from and how often and when they use water themselves every day.

After the classroom lesson, children go on an excursion. In Amsterdam the children visit the Amsterdam water filtration system in the dunes. They take a walk along the basins and underground water pipes in the dunes, but are not allowed to drink during that walk - unless necessary. 'Then we give them an assignment', says Huseyin. 'Imagine you're a child in Africa right now, a child on its way to water in the early morning. Think about it and use water consciously'. That impresses the children, says Huseyin, who often accompanies them on the excursions. 'Even if this wasn't clean water I would drink this,' they say, pointing at a puddle. At the end of the walk the children get a bottle with which they can tap water in the dunes. We urge the children to stop drinking bottled water and go for tap water,' Huseyin explains. 'That's a little bit of sustainability'.

Children also get homework: for one week they have to keep track of the water consumption in their family together with their parents. Teachers at the mosque heard from their parents that their children hold them accountable for their water use. 'Mommy, you use a lot of water when doing the dishes, you can do less!' The children make pictures or movies of the water consumption in their families - from brushing their teeth to shaving and so on. This is then discussed in the Koran lessons or at the sponsor run. In this way the awareness about sustainable water use spreads from the children to the family.

This year *Hasene Nederland* also wants to involve young people and adolescents in their water project. At four colleges and universities in the country, stands will be set up on World Water Day where sustainable Dopper bottles with a logo will be sold. The proceeds will go to projects for clean drinking water in Africa. 'In this way we link a growing awareness about sustainable water use in the Netherlands to awareness about the lack of clean drinking water in Africa', says Huseyin.

*Our vision is the same as that of the UN. We fight poverty and inequality. We do not believe in giving fish, but in teaching people how to fish. And, as the Prophet, God's blessing and peace be upon him, has said, "Good people are those who do good for others".*<sup>17</sup>

- Mehmet Yaramis, chairman of Hasene Netherlands.

### **'Sprinkle the waterless hearts with water'**<sup>18</sup>

In the Qur'an there is much talk about the importance of water. The word 'water' (in Arabic: maa') occurs more than seventy times in the Qur'an. Several verses in the Qur'an also refer to water as a source of life. Sura al-Anbiyyaa' (21:30) says: 'We have made all living things out of water'. And, 'It is He who created a human being from water and then made him a relative by blood and by marriage; your Lord is almighty' (Surah al-Furqaan, 25:54).

In the Qur'an, water is not only associated with creation, but also with the survival of life. People consist for almost 70 percent of water and everything that lives and grows - man, animal and plant - needs water

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17. Interview, March 1, 2019.

18. Slogan of the water project of Hasene International.

to survive. In several Qur'an verses it is said that God created drinking water for man: 'And We send down the winds when they are heavily laden, and We send down water from heaven, and We give you to drink thereof' (Surah al-Hidjr, 15:22).<sup>19</sup>

During Hasene Nederland's lessons on water, children not only learn about the biological value of clean drinking water - about the importance of water for the human body and health - but also about the religious value of water as a source of creation, healthy living and food. At various places in Islamic canonical texts the scarcity of drinking water is pointed out and people are urged to prevent waste. 'Even if you are next to a flowing river, as long as you use more water than necessary, it is a waste,' says a quote from the Hadith.<sup>20</sup> Children and parents also learn that during the ritual wash before prayer they can use water more sparingly. 'The woodoo cleansing [short wash before prayer] can also be done with half a litre of water', says Huseyin. 'While you take off your shoes and socks to wash your feet you can just turn off the tap'. 'Spiritual capital inspires me,' says Huseyin. 'In Islamic tradition it is said, "the best people are those who mean the most to others." Then you have more commitment, you put in extra effort and that is spirituality. That stimulates you religiously'.

## HASENE

*Hasene International* is an international aid organisation operating in various countries in Africa, Asia, South America and Europe supporting projects for emergency aid, clean water, health, education and orphans. The organisation was originally founded in Germany. The Dutch branch of *Hasene* was founded in 2011 and registered as a foundation for relief and social services. The organisation works on the basis of neutrality and transparency and provides help and support to all 'oppressed, victims and people in difficult circumstances' regardless of 'religion, language, race, creed or (skin) colour'.<sup>21</sup>

Although *Hasene* is not a missionary organisation and emphasises her identity as a neutral aid organisation, she is inspired by Islamic ideas in her vision and mission. *Hasene* literally means 'the good, the beautiful and charity'. The organisation was founded from the idea of the Hadith that 'the best man is the one who is most useful to society'. *Hasene's* slogan is 'hand in hand for the needy and oppressed'.

*Hasene* has five board members and works in partnership with all mosques and institutions that want to cooperate with them. *Hasene* organises special fundraising activities during Ramadan and the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice. Every local activity in the Netherlands involves between ten and fifteen volunteers, mostly from the mosque, but the organisation also works with interns. *Hasene* also pays a lot of attention to World Disability Day in the Netherlands with numerous festivities in and around mosques.

### For more information, see:

- Hasene Netherlands: <https://nl-nl.facebook.com/HaseneNL/>
- Hasene international: <https://www.hasene.org/>

19. See: Pé Mullenders. n.d. 'Water als bron van leven'. <https://fahminstituut.nl/water-als-bron-van-leven-wij-hebben-uit-water-al-het-levende-gemaakt/> (visited 6 March 2019).

20. The Hadith, or tradition, is a large collection of passed down statements, deeds, decisions and attributes of the Prophet Mohamed, attributed to him by his companions. This voluminous body of tradition is frequently consulted by Muslims and Islamic scholars as an 'indispensable tool' for interpreting the Koran (Van Koningsveld 1988: 66-67).

21. Promotional brochure 'Hasene, hand in hand for the needy and oppressed'.

## LIFE ON LAND (SDG 15) BUDDHISM: NATUURWIJS

*'Your part in knowing nature is necessary for a sustainable future and for individual well-being.'*  
-Matthijs Schouten

### The normative dimension of images of nature

Matthijs Schouten worked for many years as a biologist and environmental philosopher at Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch forestry organisation) when he was appointed extraordinary professor of nature restoration at Wageningen University. With a background in ecology, nature conservation and comparative religious studies, he was the right person to study religious and philosophical questions about nature and society. The normative dimension of nature images became his field of study. How do people look at nature and why do they look at nature in this way? Schouten researched not only the visions of man and nature in society, but also the images of nature of the 1300 employees within the Forestry Commission. These were very diverse and sometimes resulted in conflicts. Schouten travelled all over the country to talk to foresters and employees in different districts about two central questions: what is nature and how should we deal with nature?

The image that was dominant in Western society for a long time was that of 'nature is there for man', says Matthijs Schouten.<sup>22</sup> This classic Hellenistic image of nature was adopted by Christianity and translated into 'nature is designed for man'. It was only in Romanticism that that image began to change. People began to respect the 'wilderness'. This is how nature conservation came into being at the end of the 19th century.

At Staatsbosbeheer, the Dutch public service for nature and landscape, Schouten found an image of nature strongly influenced by the idea of stewardship. Most foresters protected nature from a concern for humankind and its future and knew exactly what that nature should look like. Their image of nature was strongly anthropocentric. Within environmental philosophy, four different types of basic attitudes are distinguished in the relationship between humans and nature. Humans as owners, as stewards, as partners and as participants or part of nature. According to Schouten, the image of humans as partners and participants in nature was, until recently, hardly addressed by Staatsbosbeheer, as with most other Dutch nature organisations.

### The Buddhist Doctrine of Interbeing

Matthijs Schouten, as a Buddhist, as the chairman of the Dharma Advisory Council of the Buddhist Union Netherlands and as a meditation teacher in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin closely relates to the image of humans as partners and participants of nature.<sup>23</sup> Buddhist values such as loving benevolence, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity or 'being empathetically involved in the well-being of others and yourself', are leading for Schouten. According to the American biologist Edward Wilson, we all have a certain emotional bond with nature, says Schouten.<sup>24</sup> 'That which we call compassion and charity in Christian terms can also be extended to everything that lives'.<sup>25</sup>

The teachings on *interbeing* of Thich Nath Hahn is another source of inspiration for Matthijs Schouten. This Buddhist teaching, which states that all things are interconnected and nothing stands alone, fits in very well with modern ecological visions. The idea that we are part of a greater whole has a physical dimension - we

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22. Interview Matthijs Schouten, February 25, 2019.

23. The tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin is a wide spread tradition of Theravada Buddhism with emphasis on the practical practice of the Buddha's teachings through Vipassana meditation. For more information, please visit: [https://boeddhisme.nl/organisatie/sayagyi-u-ba-khin-stichting/?org\\_id=30](https://boeddhisme.nl/organisatie/sayagyi-u-ba-khin-stichting/?org_id=30)

24. These values are called within Buddhism the four qualities of the heart of the Brahma-Vihara. See: <https://www.vihara.nl/meditatie/vier-hartkwaliteiten-brahma-viharas/>

25. Interview Matthijs Schouten, February 25, 2019.

depend on other ecosystems for our survival. But it also has a philosophical dimension. The awareness that everything is interconnected leads to a different self-image and a different stance in life. To young people who, in their fight against climate change, often feel powerless in the face of the large multinationals, Schouten often says: 'If you really start from interbeing, you are never meaningless. Every act changes something'.

*"If you are a poet, you can clearly see that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud there is no rain; without rain the trees cannot grow; and without trees we cannot make paper. The cloud is necessary for the existence of the paper. If the cloud isn't there, this sheet of paper can't be there either..."*  
- Reflection of Thich Nath Hahn

### NatuurCollege

The idea that 'nothing and no one stands alone' is also the motto of *NatuurCollege*, a network organisation of people who are explicitly committed to restoring the connection between man and nature. The organisation was founded in 2001 by Princess Irene van Lippe-Biesterveld and Matthijs Schouten is its vice-chairman. The board members and stakeholders of *NatuurCollege* have various philosophical backgrounds: one is a Buddhist, the other an anthroposophist and a number of board members - such as sustainable entrepreneur Willem Ferwerda, who led *Trouw* in 2016, and Peter Blom, CEO and chairman of Triodos Bank - have no explicit philosophical signature. Nevertheless, they all recognise themselves in the premise that man is part of nature.

Detaching yourself from nature ultimately hurts yourself, is the idea behind the *NatuurCollege*. It leads to ecological problems but also causes people to lose their connection with the greater whole. The experience of being part of a greater whole is a very essential part of human well-being. Even in today's secularised society, many people are looking for meaning and coherence, says Schouten, and this is often found in connection with the earth. You could call that a form of modern spirituality.

*NatuurCollege* organises numerous ad hoc activities, such as round tables and networking meetings with people from the business community, the media, science and NGOs. During these meetings they discuss what the organisation calls "the *inside* of sustainability". Working on sustainability has an outside that is about technological solutions and innovations. But also an inside that is about your personal motives: what does sustainability mean to you, why do you do it, what is your motivation?

### NatuurWijs

Because *NatuurCollege* also wishes to reach children with her mission, she developed the project *NatuurWijs* (NatureWise) together with Staatsbosbeheer and Wageningen University. *NatuurWijs* is an educational project in which elementary school children go into nature three times a year with their teachers and forest rangers. The project wants to give children the opportunity to reconnect with nature. Not only cognitively but also sensually: 'with heart, head and hands'. Each programme takes three days. First children learn something about ecology and how everything is related to everything. Then they go into nature and each child gets the assignment to make contact with nature themselves. 'Go and walk alone, let your feet take you somewhere. Listen, look and feel until you think, "Hey, this is my place"', Schouten illustrates. During the third day children share their experiences. 'They come back with stories about a tree that said something or an animal that suddenly moved', Schouten tells, and all these stories are true. 'The teacher is not going to say that the tree doesn't talk'.

Meanwhile, every year some 80,000 children in the Netherlands participate in *NatuurWijs* and their number is growing. *NatuurWijs* recently received a request to structurally incorporate the project in the curriculum of eight schools in Amsterdam's deprived neighbourhoods. 'These are, of course, children who never go outside and who discover a whole new world there, in nature,' says Schouten.

Recent research from Wageningen University showed that children are not only interested in nature after participating in the project. Children who have gone through the programme have been significantly and lastingly more open to the world: they listen more to other children and are more open in their classroom', says Schouten. *NatuurWijs* not only contributes to a change of awareness and attitude towards nature among children, but also among teachers and forest rangers. Forest rangers who want to guide the children first have to follow a training to become '*NatuurWijs*' in the project. During this training they have to make their own vision on and relation to nature explicit again. This is quite a process for many forest rangers.

Ultimately, the organisers hope that the *NatuurWijs* project will become superfluous. Nature education in this form should actually be a natural part of the elementary school curriculum, according to the *NatuurCollege*. The tide is in the right direction: where 'making contact with nature' was seen as 'vague' a few years ago, people now see the necessity and added value of it. More and more schools are applying to the project. More and more public figures recognise that sustainability not only has an economic and technological side, but also a social and spiritual one. 'The director of the SCP (The Netherlands Institute for Social Research) pointed out the problem with her book *Veenbrand*', Schouten argues. 'In our society everything has been flattened to purchasing power points. In the end that is not what guarantees a sustainable society. More and more people are looking for values and meaning. I give a lecture on images of nature in different religious contexts and classrooms are always full. Students are starving for questions like "who do we think we are and why do we think that". And I see that everywhere in society'.

## NATUURCOLLEGE

In 2001 the network organisation *NatuurCollege* was founded by Princess Irene van Lippe-Biesterveld. *NatuurCollege* wants to make people aware of 'the self-evident connection of all life'. Sustainability has been in the spotlight for some time now, but the focus has generally been on the 'outside': technological solutions and policy changes. *NatuurCollege*, on the other hand, wants to pay attention to the underlying consciousness: the awareness that people are inextricably linked to all life. This 'inside' forms the field of work for *NatuurCollege*. To this end, it organises various workshops, lectures and round tables for people from business, science and civil society. And it develops and implements the *NatuurWijs* project in collaboration with Staatsbosbeheer and Wageningen University.

### Web links:

NatuurCollege: <https://www.natuurcollege.nl/>

NatuurWijs: <https://www.natuurwijs.nl/>



## CONCLUSIONS: GREEN GOALS AND SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

A recent study by I&O Research (I&O Research 2019) shows that many Dutch people find it very difficult to convert their knowledge and concerns about climate change into different (consumption) behaviour. They do believe that the government should take action, but that the emissions of companies should be considered in the first instance. Citizens do feel guilty about their air travel or meat consumption and sometimes take some measures, but overall their ecological footprint often remains the same. 'It is striking that people regularly feel that they are doing their best, but do not realise that their behaviour actually changes very little, says researcher Peter Kanne to Trouw newspaper.<sup>26</sup> Can spiritual capital speed up this behavioural change in the Dutch? Or does it stand in the way?

### Spiritual capital as an asset for actions against climate change

From the three preceding case studies a number of characteristics of spiritual capital emerge that seem to facilitate the step from awareness to behavioural change. They have to do with moral leadership, with (religiously and philosophically inspired) formation, collective actions and celebrations, and with a spread of knowledge and awareness through human-to-human relationships within, but sometimes also outside the community.

Religious and ideological formation is central in the project *NatuurWijs* and in the lessons that *Hasene* provides at mosques around World Water Day. Although the method of *NatuurWijs* is not based on one specific philosophy of life, it is rooted in a philosophy of life that is shared by many religious and spiritual traditions: the idea that man and nature are inextricably linked in an ecological and philosophical sense. Or, as the Buddhist-inspired biologist Matthijs Schouten put it so succinctly: 'Knowing that you are part of nature is necessary for a sustainable future and for individual well-being'.

It is striking that both the lessons about water and nature are not limited to the classroom: children go into the woods and dunes to have sensory experiences with water and nature. They experience thirst, drink directly from the basins in the water supply dunes and look for a place in the forest where they feel comfortable. Moreover, the knowledge about and experience with nature and water is embedded in a larger context of meaning. At *NatuurWijs* children make their own stories about 'the tree that spoke to them'; at *Hasene* children learn about the Islamic meaning of water as a source of life. In this way, cognitive, sensory and spiritual knowledge are integrated in a very natural way. In both methods children not only learn about the biological value of nature and water for humans, but also that they contribute to individual and collective well-being, and to meaning-making.

Joint actions and celebrations are another way of linking philosophical ideas with climate action. *Hasene* uses the UN World Water Day as a starting point for her activities and thus kills two birds with one stone. She introduces a secular celebration and a secular mission, namely that of the UN, to an Islamic community that may not have been familiar with it yet. And she mobilises Islamic values and statements of the Prophet to motivate her community to use water sustainably. In the Green Church a reading group was set up to study the *Laudato Si'* encyclical and a 'green mass' was organised to motivate parishioners to contribute to the energy transition within the church building. *Hasene's* sponsorship run not only creates a sense of community among the young participants, but also establishes a link to the community in Africa, which, partly through their efforts, receives clean drinking water. The symbolic thermometer that occupies a central place in the church in Houten unites the churchgoers in their joint fight for the energy transition. In this way, both projects motivate actions against climate change in a philosophical way. This generates inspiration, motivation, togetherness and 'team spirit'.

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26. The biggest polluter is male, highly educated and votes VVD', Trouw Thursday, March 7, 2019.

The mobilisation of the community at both *Hasene* and the Green Church takes place through person-to-person contacts. Trust and proximity play a crucial role in this. Within the Catholic Church, the principle of subsidiarity applies: social and charitable activities are organised as locally as possible. *Hasene* can build on the trust she enjoys as an organisation inspired by the Islam: it is familiar and is therefore easily able to reach regular mosque goers in the Netherlands. Both organisations are at the roots of society and literally have an influence on the level of the household. With *Hasene's* homework assignments, the entire family around the child is put to work in order to avoid wasting water in the house. At the Green Church they first started working on making their own church building and surrounding grounds more sustainable, and now it is the turn of the individual houses and households of churchgoers. It is precisely the long-term presence and trust that makes this slow but steady spreading possible. Because the project does not end after three years and because the volunteers are part of the community, they can take the time to build commitment for action against climate change step by step.

The ability to influence at the household level and to reach multiple generations in families through children can be seen as a new quality of spiritual capital. This intergenerational impact - the fact that action connects different generations in a joint action for sustainable development - is visible in a different way in the *NatuurWijs* project. There, foresters and teachers who supervise the children were encouraged to make their own religious or philosophical vision of nature explicit.

The *NatuurWijs* project and the working method of *NatuurCollege* in a broader sense, are also interesting examples of moral leadership outside one's own community. Whereas *Hasene* and the Green Church mainly focus on their own religious supporters, *NatuurCollege* uses public figures to disseminate a specific philosophical vision of nature and sustainability among numerous secular public and private institutions (Staatsbosbeheer, Triodos bank, business community). On the other hand, *Hasene* and the church in Houten know how to increase their impact by being part of national or international networks of like-minded people. The church in Houten can gain knowledge and experience and share it with other members of the national Green Churches campaign, which also includes many mosques. *Hasene* can build on the contacts and networks of *Hasene International* and on her connection with local mosques in the Netherlands.

### Spiritual capital as a barrier to action against climate change

Behind this positive story about the potential of spiritual capital for action against climate change is another story. Being religious or belonging to a religious community does not automatically mean that you are aware of the (religious) value of the earth and that you translate this into sustainable behaviour. For example, Renée tells us that in her church there is still too little connection between the Catholic doctrine about caring for creation and the activities of parishioners in daily life. 'I would have loved it if you could fold a whole mass around that theme of sustainability'.<sup>27</sup> But the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church is very fixed and does not leave much room for innovation. Nor is the awareness of sustainable consumption and energy use automatically present in parishioners. 'Every believer should actually be very environmentally conscious', but that is less obvious than one would expect on the basis of Catholic doctrine or encyclicals.

A similar observation is made by Trees van Montfoort, theologian and author of the recently published booklet *Green Theology* (2019): 'the green church action is very practically oriented. There is a toolbox for green church management. That is very important, but it often remains something for a small group. Once the solar panels are on the roof, the next step might be fair-trade coffee but then it stops. Rarely does it work through to the entire faith community and it changes theology very little. There is no place for green theology in the service, in the liturgy'.<sup>28</sup>

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27. Interview with Renée Brabers, February 7, 2019.

28. Interview with Trees van Montfoort in Trouw, Friday 8 March 2019.

Churchgoers in the Netherlands do not automatically belong to the most sustainable group in Dutch society. Assuming that political preference at least says something about religious involvement, the aforementioned research by I&O Research shows how great the differences are among Christian parties. While CDA voters belong to the group with the largest CO2 emissions, ChristenUnie voters belong to the group with the smallest individual CO2 emissions. This at least illustrates that there are major differences in climate awareness among various Christian groups in the Netherlands, and that there is still a substantial number of 'climate-conservative' groups.

Ecclesiastical structures and traditions can also be an obstacle when one wants to work for social change. Now that the number of active churchgoers in the Netherlands has decreased, many people have increased their desire to stick to traditions. With the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis shows great moral leadership in the field of climate change, but the liturgy prevents the direct transmission of the message and call for climate action to the Catholic subjects. To this end, in the case of the parish in Houten, a working group had to be set up outside the existing church structure.

At the same time, the church offers an excellent opportunity to reach out to groups in society with a somewhat more conservative attitude: groups that are not involved in environmental issues from their own perspective and may even be a little sceptical about climate change. It is precisely in these cases that the trust and presence of the church at the roots of society are of great value. These make it possible for small groups of environmentally conscious churchgoers to get their own community moving, as shown by the example of the Green Church in Houten.

A strong relationship of trust with one's own supporters can be seen as 'constructive' spiritual capital because it facilitates mobilisation around sustainability and contributes to behavioural change in the capillaries of society: at the level of the family (household). But it can also contribute to a lack of connection with the larger society and to segregation.

In conclusion, there is great potential in the Netherlands for religious and philosophical ideas that can be deployed in the fight against climate change, but which is far from being fully exploited. To a large extent this has to do with the relative 'novelty' of the Sustainable Development Goals, which were only launched in 2015 and are not yet as well known as the Millennium Development Goals were when they were launched. Also, the fight against climate change has only just caught the attention of a broader social movement. The link between spirituality, philosophy of life and broad social actions against climate change is still relatively new. But the awareness of this and the need for it is growing, for example in the overcrowded Dominican Church where a service was held on Sunday 10 March 2019 prior to the Climate March.

A close-up photograph of an open, empty brown leather wallet. The wallet is held open by two hands, one on the left and one on the right. The interior of the wallet is lined with a dark, textured material. A zipper pocket is visible on the right side. The background is a solid, dark grey color.

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# The Social Goals Poverty Reduction and the Reduction of Inequality

Source photo: PixaBay

## INTRODUCTION

The number of people in the Netherlands that are struggling with financial and debt problems seems to be growing in recent years.<sup>29</sup> In 2017, 599,000 of the more than 7.3 million households in the Netherlands had an income below the low-income threshold, an increase of 27,000 from the year before.<sup>30</sup> In 2018, 140,000 people used the food bank, an increase of 6 percent compared to 2017.<sup>31</sup>

Religious communities have long traditions of poverty alleviation. Within Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity the collection of donations and alms for the poor is seen as a religious duty or at least a norm. In addition to continuous fundraising throughout the year, there are fundraising activities during religious holidays, such as Islamic Ramadan and the Feast of Sacrifice.

Whereas religiously inspired charity used to have a paternalistic character, within today's charitable support to people in debt and on low incomes more attention is paid to the equality between helper and helped. In this way, ancient traditions are redesigned and adapted to the needs of those in need and the possibilities of those who can help. In this section, we discuss three projects that contribute to poverty alleviation (SDG 1) in the Netherlands on the basis of their religious or philosophical inspiration, and that, through their approach and method, also contribute to combating social isolation and socio-economic inequality (SDG 10).

## SURVEY FINDINGS

Poverty alleviation (SDG 1) is important to the organisations participating in the survey. Eight of the fifteen participants named this SDG as one of the most important SDGs for its supporters. 'Poverty reduction has traditionally been a core objective of the deaconry', one respondent justified this choice and 'the crisis has ensured that people live on only a hundred euro's a month. Where people can hardly get out of debt and live a normal life', another remarked. A sizeable number, i.e. fourteen of the 51 activities organised by the fifteen surveyed participants, therefore relate to poverty alleviation. In total, these fourteen activities reached over 80,000 people in 2018 through homework support in deprived neighbourhoods, food banks, clothing collection, financial debt relief and community meals.

SDG 10, reducing inequality, was also often mentioned by respondents, albeit to a lesser extent: four respondents mentioned this SDG as one of the three most important SDGs. In their explanation, respondents pointed out, among other things, their concern about the growing gap between rich and poor: 'we see empowerment, signalling injustice, protecting the vulnerable - certainly where the government does not pay attention to this - as an important task of the church'.

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29. N.B. The poverty figures are not unequivocal. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) refers to an increase and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) to a decrease in the number of households at risk of poverty. See also the article 'Welke armoedecijfers zijn juist?' (Which poverty figures are correct?) In the NRC of 6 December 2018. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/12/06/welke-armoedecijfers-zijn-juist-a3059746> (visited 20 March 2019).

30. These poverty figures were determined by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The low-income threshold used by Statistics Netherlands is: 1,040 euro's per month for a single parent, 1,380 euro's per month for a single parent with one child and 1,960 euro's per month for a couple with two children. See: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/46/meer-huishoudens-met-risico-op-armoede-in-2017> (visited 20 March 2019).

31. These figures were announced at the beginning of March by the Association of Dutch Food Banks. See: <https://www.voedselbankennederland.nl/voedselbanken-groeien-op-alle-fronten/> (visited 20 March 2019).

## POVERTY ALLEVIATION (SDG 1) PROTESTANTISM: STICHTING PRESENT AND DIACONIE HOUTEN

*'I read in Exodus the other day. It was about God saying to his people. If you are going to harvest, don't pick up the last grain, spike or grape, which might fall to the ground, but leave some lying around. Leave a little for people who don't have any, so that they can take it. What I also like about this is that there is also something of equivalence in it. It's not like they deliver it to the door. But let them also have the dignity to come and reap it for themselves.'*

*- Frank Dijkstra, 7 February 2019*

The nature and form of volunteer work is changing, even within the churches where the number of volunteers is still high. For example, the church has more and more difficulties to fill vacancies for elders and deacons. 'People want to do something but then they clearly want to know what it is, how long it takes and so on', says Frank Dijkstra, chairman of Stichting Present Houten.

Stichting Present was founded in 2005 by Rudolf Setz, originally an evangelist. Reflecting on the changing character of volunteering he thought, 'how nice it would be if every believer would want to volunteer one day a year'. So he started in Zwolle with an offer-oriented volunteer bank; a bank that is based on the agenda and specific talents of the volunteer. This formula proved to be so successful that new departments were soon set up throughout the country, including in Houten.

'People want clarity,' says Frank. 'We ask people if they want to do something for a day or part of a day and then it's done'. This clarity strongly lowers the threshold and results in an enormous number of man-hours. In Houten an average of 75 projects are carried out each year by some 500 volunteers. Nationwide in 2016 a total of 38,464 volunteers were deployed in groups in 7,076 projects.<sup>32</sup> And the organisation continues to grow: 'now there are already 80 departments nationwide', says Frank.

Volunteers may indicate what they are good at and what they would like to do when registering. This may involve social activities, such as making music or cooking together, or practical jobs. 'But often volunteers also say "I'll do whatever you want"', Frank says.

Stichting Present has built up close contacts with local civil society organisations, such as the housing corporation, the neighbourhood social service, social work and the centre for youth and family. 'We have social neighbourhood teams in Houten, there are people from the municipality and social work, who screen the neighbourhoods to see "where things don't go well"', Frank says. The coordinator of Stichting Present calls these organisations with an offer and says 'then and then we want to do something, do you have someone who needs something'. This coordination is essential and requires some care to prevent well-intentioned help from being counterproductive. For example, a housing corporation had imposed measures on a tenant who behaved badly, but volunteers from Present set to work to help this tenant to deal with these measures. 'Of course, that is counterproductive,' says Frank.

The projects focus on 'people who ask for help... because they do not have the right network, health or financial resources to tackle their problem', explains a leaflet of Stichting Present. All projects are complementary to professional care and social support and often fill a niche in the supply of help. Frank tells about a resident in the neighbourhood who was a heavy alcoholic and lived in a heavily soiled house. The

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32. Annual report Stichting Present 2016: page 15.

municipality of Houten wanted to give this woman household help, but that the initial extensive cleaning job was too big a job for a single person. 'Then, in five days, we cleaned that house with five different groups,' says Frank. But then you also know that this is part of a treatment that offers more perspective: that this woman will not be the same again in three months' time. Another example is that of an older woman who could get a mobility scooter from the municipality, under the condition that it could be parked indoors. But her garden shed was 'filled to the brim' and 'she herself was physically and mentally incapable of solving that,' says Frank. Then a team of Present volunteers, in consultation with the woman, tidied up the shed.

The volunteers of Present always work in groups on a project because 'with a group you can really do a lot of work in one day, which gives the person asking for help a big boost', says a text from a brochure of Stichting Present. 'In addition, it is fun to work with friends, family or colleagues for someone else. You get to know each other in a different way'.<sup>33</sup> Not only working together with a group of colleagues is an enriching experience for many. Meeting a needy neighbour also makes a big impression on volunteers. 'The person in need of help should at the very least be present and should help as much as possible. Because what is very important is meeting people. It's good for those people, but it's good for the giver as well', Frank explains. Present is a unique way of bringing people together,' says a pastor from Houten in a leaflet by Present. 'My experience is that volunteering is not a one-way street, but a real encounter from person to person. Just around the corner'. On days like this, care seekers and care givers exchange stories and sometimes suddenly there are 'two worlds meeting in one room', agrees Frank. 'You help, but you also have a conversation with these people. I would never have met these people if not through Stichting Present'.

In this way, Present's projects open the eyes of volunteers to the social problems that take place behind the front doors of neighbours. 'When people commit themselves to Present, they see, "Hey, there are people in Houten who need help", says Carin Rougoor, deacon of the Protestant church in Houten who works with Present. This is often a surprise because many people think 'but in Houten everyone gets around!' Although in principle people sign up for one day or part of a day, often a bond is formed between the giver and the receiver of help and volunteers develop a greater commitment to the neighbourhood. As a result people often indicate that they would like to come and do something on another day and that is what Present is hoping for. 'Our goal is for people to get used to looking out for each other,' explains Frank.

### **Diaconia and direct poverty alleviation**

Stichting Present works closely together with five churches in Houten which are also co-founders of the organisation. The cooperation with local churches is important because a relatively large part of the churchgoers is willing to volunteer. Nevertheless, Present does not provide any competition for the churches. The demand for help is always greater than the supply. Moreover, diaconal support often has a somewhat different way of working.

Especially when it comes to direct financial support for poor families, the diaconate attaches great importance to keeping that help a bit under the radar. 'It is often about very personal problems and situations,' says Carin. 'In light of this, you of course don't say, "Next month there will be a story in the church bulletin about how we helped you...!"', she adds with a smile. Unlike Stichting Present, the deaconry also works to combat poverty directly by providing financial support to people in difficult situations. Such situations are noticed by church members or deacons and discreetly brought to the attention of the deaconry. For example, last year the deaconate of the Protestant Church decided to help with the purchase of two laptops for students. They also supported an inhabitant of Houten who was very lonely but felt at home with a denomination in Maarn. They helped her with the travel expenses so she could attend the service there. A refugee who had just received a residence status could get a job provided he had a driving license. Because his African driver's license was not recognised in the Netherlands, he had to take some lessons to get his Dutch driver's license. The diaconate helped him with a 'flexible loan' so he could get his driver's license, get the job and

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33. Leaflet of Stichting Present Houten, 'We believe in a city where people are there for each other'.

thus start building his existence in the Netherlands, Carin relates.

Carin was deeply impressed by the generosity shown by members of the congregation when the diaconate called on them in connection with a family in the church whose residence permit had expired. This family could not return to their country of origin due to a serious illness of their daughter. Partly because of this, they were still in the procedure of getting the status of permanent resident, but suddenly received no more benefits. The diaconate therefore decided to temporarily provide for the family's livelihood.

Because it concerned a family with three children, some extra money was needed in the long run. At the same time, the diaconate didn't want to give this case too much publicity. That is why the members of the diaconate decided to ask the church council to write to people they knew well. 'Well, within ten days it was settled,' says Carin enthusiastically. 'We had commitments, all from private church-goers who said, "oh, I want to give fifty euro's a month for as long as it takes"'. Carin was pleasantly surprised by the trust people placed in them. 'There weren't any difficult questions, the money just came'. The bonds of trust that had been built up over the years in the congregation were evident. The fact that the givers knew both the people who approached them and the beneficiaries also made a big difference.

### **Fundraising**

Annually, between 30,000 and 37,000 Euros is raised by the diaconate of the Protestant church in Houten, largely due to the collections held during services. Approximately half of this is earmarked for specific charities, such as the food bank in Houten or an international development project of KerkinActie. The remainder is largely spent on local diaconal work. Almost the entire budget for diaconal work can be used for help, because all deacons are volunteers and the costs are minimal.

Stichting Present, unlike the diaconry, uses a more public approach to recruit volunteers and raise funds. Although Stichting Present has to have local connections and contacts, she also has a national office. The national office deals, among other things, with larger funding applications to national governments and charities. These national grants contribute to the budgets of local departments. Stichting Present Houten, for example, has an annual budget of approximately 50,000 euro's with which, together with a contribution from the municipality, it can employ two employees part-time. In addition, local fundraising is done in numerous ways, for example by collecting deposit bottles and waste paper, church collections and sponsor contributions from local companies and schools. With these local fundraising activities, people also commit themselves to the ideals of Stichting Present.

### **Teambuilding**

After participating in a one-off project of Stichting Present, many volunteers feel the need to do something more regularly for others through the organisation. For example, the youngsters of the institute for mentally handicapped people once started with one project. Now every six weeks they do something for other people in Houten, for example help with a renovation in the house or work in the garden.

Present does jobs you can do with a group,' says Carin. This approach also makes Present attractive for students and employees. For example, secondary school students in Houten are structurally deployed through Stichting Present to provide social services to older residents in Houten in particular. An institute for mentally handicapped young people in Schalkwijk, civil servants of the municipality and employees from the business community also enjoy participating in a day of volunteer work together on a regular basis - as an alternative, meaningful form of teambuilding.

The church also sees the added value of this teambuilding. This year, together with Stichting Present, it organises for the first time a 'Diaconal Do-Day'. All church members can sign up to do something on 15 June, whether it is organising games for the elderly, working in a garden or doing some cleaning. 'Based on the number of pre-registrations, it promises to be a good day', Carin says.



*'I don't really know what I believe, but what I do like is being there for people and trying to live in the footsteps of Jesus. What I do or don't exactly believe I find difficult. But I do know, I want to participate in this part of the church.'*

*- Carin Rougoor, February 7, 2019*

Although Stichting Present is motivated by the Christian faith, it does not always speak explicitly about Christian values. The organisation also wants to be explicitly open to non-church volunteers and helpers. Also within the church there is not always a reference to Christian values in the recruitment of volunteers. According to Carin, when during the announcements in the service there is a call to participate in an activity of Stichting Present, it is often already clear from the context that this call is also made on the basis of a Christian conviction.

'Members of the Protestant church are socially committed and real doers', Carin says. Being ready for someone else by doing volunteer work is something 'that has been part of everyone's upbringing'. It has more to do with praxis of the church than with an explicit profession of faith. Yet the power of that praxis should not be underestimated. It is precisely this practice that often makes it easier for people within the church to be encouraged to do volunteer work. 'Of course it is not only Christian organisations that are socially active,' says Carin. 'But the existence of the organisation, of the church, does make it easier to recruit people for volunteer work'. Carin has been member of a volleyball group for about twenty years and knows the team members very well. And yet, she would be less likely to ask them to participate in a volunteer project because she feels that there is less willingness and social involvement among them.

Talking openly about faith is not always taken for granted among hands-on people in the church. However, in intercessory prayer attention is often asked for the sick or people who are experiencing difficult times. And if there is a collection for Stichting Present during the service 'we stand at the back of the church after the service with a booth so that church visitors can register', says Frank.

Frank, who has an evangelical background, talks more easily about faith. 'The other day I heard someone say, "Inside the church I breathe in and outside the church I breathe out". In everything we do - in our practice of faith and in our relationship with God - we do all kinds of things that can then be used again in society, outside the church,' he explains. 'But that does not always have to be said explicitly. Sometimes it's better not to, because you don't have to give people the feeling that they actually have to be a bit religious in order to be helped. That is the very last thing we would want!'

Stichting Present now has about 80 local branches throughout the country. For more information about the foundation see: <https://stichtingpresent.nl/>

## POVERTY ALLEVIATION (SDG 1) HUMANISM: HUMANITAS' HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

*Simply being there so that the other person can have a sounding board with you of “how should I go about this, what do you think?” is, in my opinion, the essence of what you can do for someone else.*  
-Annemieke van Wesemael, 19 February 2019

‘People with stress make different decisions than people without stress,’ says Annemieke van Wesemael, National Programme Manager of Household Management, Poverty and Debt at Humanitas.<sup>34</sup> Money problems and debt cause a lot of stress. Forgetfulness is one of the symptoms of stress that Annemieke and other volunteers involved with Humanitas’ Home Administration activities often encounter. The Household Management activities engage people ‘who lose control of their finances for various reasons’ by offering temporary support by ‘well-trained volunteers to put and keep the financial administration in order’, according to the text on a Humanitas leaflet.<sup>35</sup>

Recently when Annemieke visited a participant, the first thing she said when she saw Annemieke was, ‘Oh well, I have to make a phone call now, don’t I? If I’m alone, I just can’t, but if you sit next to me...’. ‘So she did it all herself,’ Annemieke explains. The mere fact that Annemieke was there made the participant take action. Simply being there so that the other person can brainstorm with you for a moment, ‘how am I supposed to handle this, what do you think?’ is, according to Annemieke, ‘the core of what you can do for someone else’, and perhaps also the essence of Humanitas’ Household Management activities.

The approach used in the Household Management activities is largely the same as for the other buddy projects of Humanitas (see inset). Reports about potential participants in the project sometimes come in via neighbourhood social services or a general practitioner but also directly to the local coordinator. The local coordinator first holds an intake interview with the candidate to see what problems are involved and what the participant thinks he or she needs help with. On this basis, the coordinator determines whether the participant would benefit from support from a volunteer of the Household Management activity. If that is the case, the ‘match-making’ follows: the coordinator searches for a volunteer that suits the participant. ‘And that is something magical...’, says Annemieke with a smile. On the basis of ‘a certain feeling’ and, of course, knowledge about their interests, the coordinator links a participant to a volunteer, almost always successfully. Humanitas has also experimented with online methods to match participants and buddies, ‘but somehow without human-to-human contact you can’t really make that link,’ Annemieke says. The coordinator is present at the first meeting between participant and volunteer. If that goes well, then the volunteer makes follow-up appointments with the participant and they get to work.

‘Getting started’ means that the volunteer supports and guides the participant in matters such as organising the financial administration, creating insight into income and expenditure, identifying money saving and income-enhancing opportunities and familiarising the participant with laws and regulations and the working methods of (government) institutions.<sup>36</sup>

A nice example of support Annemieke recently heard about was that of a young couple. They had just moved in together. He was heavily in debt and thought: ‘I’ll probably be stuck with this till I’m 90, I don’t see it anymore!’ Fortunately, his girlfriend was very motivated to solve the debt problem. All the volunteer then had to do was watch and give very practical tips about small steps the couple could take. ‘Like, you do

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34. Interview, February 19, 2019.

35. Humanitas Factsheet, 2018.

36. Household Management Factsheet Humanitas.

groceries every day now, but what if you do that once a week. Then you make a shopping list and you will see that you save money,' Annemieke illustrates. Another tip the couple followed was to open a second bank account. 'From one they had all their fixed expenses written off and from the other they gave themselves pocket money every week'. They would then withdraw that pocket money in cash and leave the debit card at home for the rest of the week so as not to tempt themselves. The volunteer said, 'Actually, I don't do that much', but the boy and his girlfriend became very happy with her. The young couple made all the decisions and actions themselves, but the volunteer was able to motivate and assist them with good tips.

Before a volunteer can take on a role as a buddy in the project, she has to follow a basic training, 'what is your role as a volunteer, what do you do and don't you do, where are your limits', Annemieke explains. Together with Nibud (National Institute for Family Finance Information), Humanitas has also developed a basic training in which volunteers learn about allowances and how to act in case of debt.

*Humanitas works on a small scale and personally. The contacts are people to people and are organised locally. What binds us is the feeling that we want to mean something to each other and make a meaningful contribution to society'.  
- Text from Humanitas Factsheet*

During the training volunteers also learn about the values of Humanitas. The most important of these are equality, taking responsibility for yourself but also for others, self-determination and demand-oriented work. 'These are our humanistic values, we work from here', Annemieke says.

In the training they discuss with volunteers how to put this into practice. The autonomy of the participant is an important core value. The volunteer supports and guides, but the participant decides. With catchphrases like 'a listening ear', 'sitting on your hands', 'standing next to someone' and 'not playing the caregiver' volunteers develop qualities during the training that support the autonomy of the participant and the equality of the relationship. Demand-oriented work, for example, means that you start from the experience and the needs of the participant.

Short-term support is another important component of the humanist approach. Participants of the Household Management activity receive an average of one year of support. This prevents a dependency relationship between participant and volunteer, because 'you don't want that', Annemieke says. 'You are there temporarily to help someone with their issues. That has to stop at some point'. In the meantime, participants develop their own possibilities and networks that enable them to solve problems themselves. The Christian value of charity, 'being there for the other', is given a slightly different accent at Humanitas. Annemieke says, 'you stand by them for a little while'. 'There are a lot of initiatives that arrange a laptop for children or where food is distributed, but we don't do that,' she emphasises.

Annemieke does not have the impression that volunteers specifically go to Humanitas because of their humanistic background. Occasionally volunteers choose Humanitas because it is 'not a religious club'. But the vast majority sign up out of enthusiasm for the project. At the same time, most are sympathetic towards humanism. Volunteers become members of Humanitas free of charge and receive the association magazine *Van Mens Tot Mens*. But they are not always or do not always become a member of the humanistic society: the Humanistisch Verbond (Humanist Alliance).

### **The added value of volunteers**

Volunteer organisations play an important role in aid prevention. For example, Humanitas developed the *Wel Thuis* project, which provides support to families threatened with court custody over children. In this project, the added value of the volunteer compared to the care worker is clearly visible. The presence

of the volunteer, who is only there for the family and ‘doesn’t want anything from that family’, creates peace in the home and ensures a better relationship between the person seeking help and (professional) assistance. As a result, assistance processes are often faster and easier. It is precisely the disinterested nature of this voluntary support that is essential. When a care worker in such a situation comes along, the family soon gets the feeling that they are being observed and these observations are taken into account in the assessment of the court custody case. With a volunteer this is not the case. In this way a relationship of trust can arise and the tension in the house can decrease.

Also in the Household Management activities, the additional value of the volunteer compared to the professional help is clearly visible. Debt relief is a legal task of the municipality, Annemieke explains. In order to be allowed to participate in such a process, someone has to meet conditions, such as having insight into his or her debts. It is also a trajectory of a limited number of meetings with a final goal: being free of debts. In this professional trajectory obligatory tasks are often imposed in a relatively short period of time on someone who, precisely because of the stress, is not able to complete them at all. The big difference between the professional debt relief worker and the Humanitas volunteer is that the volunteer has *time*, says Annemieke. A counsellor says, “Come back next week with an overview of your debts”. While a volunteer says, “let’s go through the mail, we’ll go and see what you have”, she explains.

## HUMANITAS

The Humanitas Association was founded shortly after the Second World War to provide aid on a humanist basis. Equivalence was central to this. Over the past seventy years, Humanitas has grown into a national association with 84 local branches throughout the country: 80 of them organise Home Administration activities. In addition to the Home Administration activities, Humanitas volunteers also work for people facing loneliness, bereavement, educational problems and detention. These buddy projects are always organised locally. In 2018, all volunteers together assisted 70,000 participants. Within the Household Management activities alone that year, about 17,000 participants were supported by 4,800 volunteers.

### Links:

- Humanitas Association: <https://www.humanitas.nl/>
- Household Management: <https://www.humanitas.nl/themas/thuis-administratie/>

## REDUCE INEQUALITY (SDG 10) MIGRANT CHURCH: 'THE CHURCH IS BORING IF IT IS NOT RELEVANT'

*'Our work has to be holistic - why split it up? That only brings problems because life is experienced as a whole. That is why we are committed to the social, spiritual and economic transformation of our community. Life is a whole. Only in the Western context is it divided, but that's not true: life is a whole!'*  
-Pastor Moses Alagbe, 28 February 2019

Pastor Moses Alagbe was born in Nigeria and came to the Netherlands in the 1980s to study at the Tyndale Theological Seminary in Badhoevedorp.<sup>37</sup> After completing a Master's degree in Theological Education Moses left for North America in order to follow a doctoral degree in ministry.<sup>38</sup> 'There my view of the kingdom of God and the role of the church changed in every way,' says Moses.<sup>39</sup> Evangelical education at Tyndale was only about liberation theology, discipleship training, and personal growth in the faith. For the training in North America, which focused on global leadership, Moses was literally sent out into the world. Among other things, he went on a study trip to China and the Philippines. 'That's when I began to realise that Christianity is about much more than just faith,' says Moses. 'It's about taking care of everything God has given us: the earth and people. The church is only relevant if it is committed to social issues and a better climate'.

### The Amsterdam Bijlmer

When Moses became pastor of the evangelical Maranatha Church in the neighbourhood of Amsterdam Zuidoost in 2001 (the Bijlmer), he immediately put this insight into practice and founded *the Maranatha Community Transformation Centre*. Together with members of the church community a range of activities was set up focusing on almost all aspects of the neighbourhood's socio-economic problems, such as problems with upbringing and education, loneliness and isolation, youth unemployment, health and poverty.

Many of these problems have to do with the migrant background of the neighbourhood: of the approximately 800,000 people living in the Bijlmer, 56% come from a non-European country. 'Ten percent of the children in this neighbourhood do not finish high school, for example,' says Moses, 'because their parents do not speak the Dutch language and are therefore unable to help them with homework'. That is why the Centre has been providing homework support for several years now. Every Friday some 35 children come together with 8 members of the church community to work on their home work. The Centre also tries to involve the parents more actively in their children's school. Many parents complained at Moses that their children unexpectedly failed to pass their examinations. Moses told the parents how important it is to be involved in the school by regularly attending parents-teacher meetings. 'We tell the parents that this way they are better informed about the school performance of their children and better able to help when necessary', says Moses. 'Not only when it is too late'.

The difficult relationship between parents and children is another aspect that contributes to parenting problems and therefore to problems at school. 'Parents are confronted with very different social values in the Netherlands', says Moses. 'In Africa we learn that we have to obey our parents and not contradict them. Here, children say to their parents, "why?"' Many parents react angrily to this, in their eyes, rude reaction of their children. Moses is currently working on an educational series of a local TV station about parenting

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37. The Tyndale Theological Seminary is an interdenominational theology course founded in 1985 by the American evangelist William Tyndale. See: <http://www.tyndale-europe.edu/theologie-studeren-in-nederland/> (visited 13 March 2019).

38. The so-called 'Doctor of Ministry' is somewhat similar to ecclesiastical training of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

39. Interview February 28, 2019.

and fatherhood. This is also important because many fathers are not involved in parenting at all.

The relatively high dropout rate among children contributes to relatively high youth unemployment in the Bijlmer. As a result, many young people are tempted to become active in (petty) crime and become, for example, drug couriers. Recently, Moses and ministers of other migrant churches in the Bijlmer sat down with the municipality to discuss this problem. Together with other churches, the Centre will now make an inventory of the problems these young people encounter in finding a job. Based on this, a project will be set up with scouts and mentors in the neighbourhood who will guide young people towards paid work.

Many women in the neighbourhood struggle with loneliness, poverty and isolation. The Bijlmer has a relatively large number of single mothers. Therefore, the Centre has established a women's group that meets every Monday. Together they design and sew clothes and talk about their activities and problems. 'One of those women made beautiful fashion designs and has now, in Suriname, set up a small business!' Moses proudly tells. The Centre has also set up a special fitness class for women, because many women suffer from obesity.

### **The Pentecostal Council of Churches (PCC)**

When Moses Alagbe became president of the Pentecostal Council of Churches six years ago, he introduced the same holistic approach. *The Pentecostal Council of Churches* (PCC) is a platform of 40 migrant churches, all of them active in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Initially, since its foundation in 1995, the PCC focused on spiritual development. Since Moses took office, the PCC has opted for a holistic approach and is committed to the 'mental, social and economic change and development of people in our cities and neighbourhoods'.<sup>40</sup>

One of the PCC's larger projects is the 'your health is your wealth' project. Health is a big problem in Amsterdam Zuidoost. A relatively large number of people suffer from weight and heart problems due to unhealthy eating patterns. Moses and the other board members of the PCC were worried because many residents died of heart diseases. After conversations with churchgoers and local residents they found out that many people with heart problems did not go to the hospital because they were afraid. A lot of people thought, 'if you go to the hospital, you will not get out alive', Moses says. The PCC then went into conversation with doctors of the Amsterdam Medical Center (AMC). To their great surprise they said: 'that's right! Many people from the Bijlmer died here because they came here too late to be helped'.

Together with the AMC and the Municipal Health Service (GGD), the PCC then started a large health campaign. 'We put a large tent on the market where people could have their blood pressure measured', says Moses. 'We told them about the dangers of sugar, fat and high blood pressure'. Promotional campaign days are now organised two to three times a year and some 50 doctors, including many medical students, provide free health checks. A large seminar was also organised where ministers of the PCC and doctors talked to local residents about eating habits. The activities were successful and attracted an average of about 1000 people.

This health project will be expanded with a new activity in the near future. Many people with a migrant background are not used to reporting their health complaints in a formal and concise manner. The 10-minute consultations are simply too short for them and general practitioners are therefore unable to make a proper diagnosis. That is why the PCC, together with medical students, is now going to organise role-playing workshops in order to address this issue. This way, residents from the Bijlmer learn how to tell their story in a few minutes.

Another group for which PCC can fulfil an important bridging function are newcomers and undocumented migrants. Many newcomers from Islamic countries feel more confident with us than with the Dutch, because we are from abroad just like them and faith is also important to us', says Moses. They therefore turn to them

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40. See opening page PCC-Ned website:<http://www.pccned.org/index.html> (visited 13 March 2019).

with questions rather than to the official authorities.

Also for undocumented migrants, the migrant churches are places where they feel welcome and safe. They are also the first places where they report for urgent help. Many undocumented migrants are hiding because they are afraid of being deported. They therefore do not go to the hospital if they have serious health problems. 'HIV Aids is a major problem among undocumented migrants', says Moses. The PCC has agreed with the municipality to take care of these people and guide them to medical help, without interference from the immigration police. 'The church offers them a safety net,' explains Moses.

### A relevant church

The migrant churches of the PCC do not only organise activities for the neighbourhood. The weekly services on Sunday are essential moments of religious celebration and empowerment. Here too Moses has introduced an interactive form for the service. 'I preach about a certain text in the Bible for about 35 minutes, and then we talk about that text', Moses says. People ask questions about the relationship between the sermon and their daily lives. That often leads to dynamic group conversations. 'The other day, in response to a text, I talked about dealing with strong emotions', Moses tells us. 'In the bible text three options were mentioned: you can explode, suppress your emotion or just be honest'. One man said in reaction to this that he had recently punched someone who kept gossiping about him, despite the fact that he had asked him to stop doing so. 'The man said that it relieved him and that it worked: the other stopped gossiping,' Moses laughs. 'But the other churchgoers said, "How can you do that? What if you had beaten him to death?" That made the man think'.

This interactive form is part of Moses' personal mission to make the church relevant and attractive again, not in the least for young people. In his book *The church is boring! If it is not relevant* (Alagbe 2015) he explains this mission and his vision of a church as an inherent part of society. The life of Jesus is a source of inspiration for his vision. 'The church is boring because of the way it is organised,' he writes (Alagbe 2015: 15-16). 'In his lessons and sermons, our Lord Jesus Christ was very interactive. He did not hold a monologue' (ibid.).

Alagbe also speaks in this book about the role of man in the protection of creation. God gave man the most important role in taking care of creation, he argues (Alagbe 2015: 30). 'Our mission must address the whole of creation... The plant we cultivate produces the oxygen we breathe and the plant for its production uses the carbon dioxide we emit' (Alagbe 2015: 30-31). Moses translates this concern for the degradation of the earth and the environment into concrete joint actions. Together with other Nigerians and Friends of the Earth, he organised a protest against Shell. 'We protested at a Shell station against Shell's policy in Nigeria,' says Moses. Four widows from Nigeria hold Shell jointly responsible for serious human rights violations by the Nigerian regime, including the execution of their husbands.<sup>41</sup> When the case returns to the courts soon, the group of the Maranatha Church will show its solidarity with a demonstration.

### For more information:

- Pentecostal Council of Churches: <http://www.pccned.org/>
- Maranatha Community Transformation Centre: <http://mctc.nl/>

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41. See: <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/kiobel-vs-shell> (visited 14 March 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS: POVERTY REDUCTION AND SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

### Spiritual capital as an asset

Because the current Dutch policy for care and welfare is aimed at a government decreasing in size, the social commitment of volunteer organisations such as Stichting Present, Humanitas and the Maranatha Community Centre is becoming increasingly important. They are complementary to professional care and often work preventively. They also fulfil an important bridging function between those in need and official aid agencies because they have access to marginalised groups in society that are not always reached by the government. The support that the Maranatha Centre offers to undocumented people with HIV-AIDS is a telling example of this.

The three organisations are not separate but are embedded in local structures. There are short lines of communication between local coordinators of volunteer organisations and municipal authorities, which makes it possible to quickly discuss concrete individual cases. Volunteering is also carried out locally: by churchgoers and residents who are involved in their neighbourhoods.

Although these qualities also apply to many non-philosophically or religiously inspired volunteer organisations, the three organisations discussed seem to have certain additional qualities rooted in their philosophical or religious background. The approach and methods of the three organisations are clearly value-driven. Volunteers in the Humanitas Household Management project assist participants on a basis of equality and focus on the autonomy of the participant. Stichting Present puts ancient Christian values such as 'charity' and 'looking out for each other' in a new, contemporary jacket and even draws the interest of the business community. In the Maranatha Centre, the Christian faith and the life of Jesus is a direct source of inspiration and empowerment for the local community, which is struggling with numerous social problems concerning poverty and social exclusion.

Nevertheless, philosophical or religious doctrines and beliefs do not always play an explicit role in the social activities of the three organisations. At Stichting Present and in the diaconal work of the Protestant church in Houten, doing something for someone else is a religious praxis: a value that is passed on from generation to generation because it 'belongs there'. That this value of 'looking after someone else' is not self-evident to all groups of Dutch society is well illustrated by the example of Carin. Where Carin finds it quite normal to ask members of the Protestant congregation to voluntarily contribute to a project whereas she finds it a lot more difficult to ask the members of the volleyball team she has known for years. Nevertheless, churches also have to deal with a decline in the number of volunteers. Stichting Present has been set up to reverse this decline. By lowering the threshold it hopes to propagate and internalise the value of 'looking out for each other' and 'doing something for someone else': among its own churchgoers as well as among new non-religious groups in society.

The special value and role of the volunteer compared to professional aid workers is striking in all three cases. The equality between the person seeking help and the volunteer contributes greatly to the relationship of trust between the two, and strengthens the sense of dignity and self-confidence of the person seeking help. Only so little is needed, says a Humanitas volunteer. Just being there, a helping hand, a listening ear is often enough. The commitment of the volunteer is therefore relatively small; it is about giving a few pointers or to do the odd job with a group once a year. But this small effort makes a big difference for the person asking for help. The equality of the relationship and the amount of time a volunteer can spend bring the person in need of help relaxation and rest. In contrast to the debt relief provided by the government, Humanitas does not impose any requirements and conditions on the participant, other than that they go looking for a solution together. There is no fear of sanctions.

Discretion and integrity are two other qualities that come to the fore in the projects. Financial contributions



to people in difficult situations are recruited discreetly and are not made public. The ability of the deaconate to flexibly and quickly deploy funds proves to be a niche. Where subsidy applications to an Oranjefonds, for example, can easily run for half a year before it is clear whether or not they will be awarded, the deaconate can respond immediately. In this way, on a small scale and with all discretion, tailor-made help can be offered to poor families: on the basis of trust and relationships.

### Spiritual capital as a barrier

No matter how beautiful and effective the work of the volunteer organisations is, their actions sometimes obscure the view of the structural causes of poverty and exclusion and of the downside of the 'participatory society'.

For example, with the phasing out of the welfare state, the demand for support from Humanitas volunteers has increased significantly. 'In the past ten years we have grown from 10,000 to 25,000 volunteers,' says Annemieke. Especially since the advent of the WMO, the participation law and the decentralisation of youth care, the demand has increased enormously, 'because it has become both decentralised and it has suffered from budget cuts'. Volunteer organisations often operate in the vacuum created by cutbacks in the area of care and welfare 'and that sometimes doesn't sit well with us', says Annemieke. Humanitas does not want to take the care worker's place, but is increasingly confronted with complex and 'serious problems'.

Based on her experience at Humanitas, Annemieke is also somewhat critical of government policies on poverty reduction and debt relief. In her view, the government makes far too easy an appeal to people's 'self-reliance'. The humanistic value of 'self-direction' is really different from 'self-reliance': 'you have to do it all yourself and that's not what we at Humanitas aim for,' Annemieke explains. 'Our goal is to give someone help and trust so that he can have the overview and control himself'. That direction also means asking for help when you need it.

Annemieke also thinks that the government does too much to combat symptoms and does too little about the structural causes of poverty and debt. 'Why are people poor? Work doesn't pay. A lot of people work but don't get a minimum income' says Annemieke. According to Annemieke, under the guise of the 'participatory society', voluntary organisations such as Humanitas are all too easy to fall back on and therefore have to deal with ever larger and more complex requests for help. That's why Humanitas regularly sits around the table with other volunteer organisations and the government. 'If you want good volunteers, it costs money'. According to Annemieke, it is important that the government recognises and supports these different roles between volunteer and public worker. Because it is precisely in the uniqueness and qualities of the volunteer that the added value lies. Moreover, all these buddy projects create new relationships and connections between people who have never met before. 'Because you bring together volunteers and participants from very different backgrounds, you also contribute to society building, you create social capital', says Annemieke. 'By bringing different groups into contact with each other you get people out of their bubble in order to see something of society'.

# 3



## A broader vision of well-being and development

Source photo: <https://www.elsevierweekblad.nl/nederland/achtergrond/2019/05/combineren-materiele-en-brede-welvaart-grootste-uitdaging-voor-politiek-den-haag-688421/>

## INTRODUCTION

Identity has again become an important theme in Dutch society. Partly as a result of globalisation, the arrival of newcomers and the fear of religious extremism, a debate has arisen about 'Dutch identity'. The demand for Dutch citizenship causes a lot of (existential) unrest and 'unease'. At the same time many Dutch people are encouraged by this debate to look for their own roots and culture. The need for philosophical or religious reflection and meaning making is increasing. In 2018 the *Volkskrant*, a newspaper that until then had paid marginal attention to religion and philosophy of life, started a series on meaning that was unprecedentedly popular. Religion long belonged to the private domain, but is now once again the subject of a broader social debate about the values and orientation of the Netherlands in the future.

Partly as a result of this debate about Dutch identity and the revaluation of religion and philosophy of life, a new kind of self-awareness seems to be emerging among religious groups in society that previously consciously or unconsciously operated on a low profile. Within the Surinamese-Hindustani community, which for a long time opted for a strategy of adaptation, a renewed ambition has arisen to actively transfer Hindu thought and practice to new generations and to Dutch society. The Christian-inspired broadcaster KRO-NCRV, which for some time 'moderated' its religious profile in order to reach a broader group in society, now wants to express its religious beliefs and values more clearly.

The three communities and organisations presented in this section of the report show strong philosophical and religious self-awareness. They have a great awareness of the value of their own cultural and religious knowledge, history and identity and pass this on to the younger generations with care. This ideological self-awareness and the transfer of knowledge are of great value for the emancipation of one's own supporters and are a potential source of inspiration and innovation for the sustainable development of Dutch society: a society that is running up against the limitations of economic growth and is slowly beginning to gain an eye for other, ethical and spiritual, dimensions of well-being and development.

## HINDUISM: THINKING FROM THE COLLECTIVE

*Within Hinduism we think from the mind, "what do I need in this life?" That goes much further than material prosperity alone'.  
-Usha Doekhie, Chairman Hindu Council Netherlands*

'In a certain respect we live in an ego-oriented society,' says Usha Doekhie.<sup>42</sup> This society is aimed at the need for personal and individual development, whereas in the Hindu community things are aimed at the collective. The collective is the central point of departure for Hindu thought and the central guiding principle for organising society. These opposing principles often cause stress and controversy within the Hindu community in the Netherlands. In the Dutch context people often don't understand that you have to leave your work early in order to 'bring a pan of soup to your sick aunt', Usha illustrates. But within the Hindu community, you will be judged if you neglect your duty of care to your family.

Usha Doekhie has been chairman of the Hindu Council of the Netherlands (HRN) for one and a half years. The Hindu Council Netherlands was founded in 2000 as an umbrella organisation to promote the interests of the Hindu community in the Netherlands. The HRN operates as a point of contact for the government and takes care of the Hindu spiritual caregivers who work in the departments of defence and justice.

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42. Interview, February 28, 2019

An estimated 350,000 Hindus live in the Netherlands and there are about 45 Hindu temples or *mandirs*. Most of the believers have a Surinamese-Hindustani background; a smaller part comes from India and Sri Lanka. The umbrella organisation HRN consists of 9 member organisations that together represent the different streams of Hinduism in the Netherlands. The Sanatana Dharma and the Arya Samaj are the largest movements in the Netherlands.

When it was founded in 2000, the HRN also had the ambition to 'manifest itself in other areas' than merely the spiritual care within the departments of defence and justice, which received a lot of attention in the first years, Usha says. Now that spiritual care is running smoothly, Usha also wants to take up other tasks. One of these is the dissemination of Hindu philosophy and culture within one's own community and within Dutch society as a whole.

In the short time of her chairmanship Usha noticed that some people from the Hindu community are still or again looking for their identity and place in Dutch society. Many are struggling with the clash between Western and Hindu values. Especially young people 'end up in a *squeeze*', says Usha. They have to be successful in their education and career, but also meet the cherished family values. In the years of assimilation, the knowledge of Hindu philosophy and spirituality was not actively transferred to the younger generation. 'Young people no longer have benchmarks, no longer have a compass for their life orientation and that is not good,' says Usha.

The Hindu Council wants to 'bring the knowledge and spiritual consciousness within the community to a higher level', says Usha. Hindu visions of 'man as an inseparable part of the cosmos' and spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation can help young people in their search for identity. 'From a quieter mind you can look more calmly at your surroundings: there is literally no hurry anymore,' Usha explains.

This year the HRN organises a congress on youth and Hinduism. In the coming years, the HRN also wants to reach groups outside its own supporters with educational projects. Usha is convinced that Hinduism has something to offer to Dutch society, a society that has come up against the boundaries of individualism and materialism in recent years. 'I think it's a great challenge to make that spiritual body of thought, that wisdom and that wealth from Hindu philosophy and culture, more accessible. Not only for the young and old in our Hindu community, but also for the entire Dutch society'.

Two Hindu values can enrich the sustainable development (goals) in the Netherlands in particular, Usha believes: the collective thinking and the Hindu practice of giving, *dān*.

### **Collective thinking and family values**

Because the individual is so important in Dutch society, many Dutch people experience 'the collective thought as a decline and loss of acquired liberties', says Usha. Within Hinduism, the collective and the community come first. When Usha recently left for Surinam to visit her sick aunt, many Dutch people responded 'What a good thing to say that you do!' This reaction surprised Usha because for her it was the obvious thing to do.

Family relationships are very important in the Hindustani community. In the smaller communities in Suriname, people are used to live close to each other and to be there for each other. Sharing things with each other is part of that,' Usha says. Like "Oh, I've just made a little too much food, so I'll bring some to the neighbours". Many Hindus have brought these values and habits to the Netherlands. When young people from Suriname come to the Netherlands to study, you provide them with hospitality,' Usha says. Also at big events like marriages you help each other 'guided by togetherness and the collective thought'.

Usha sees that these values and customs are beginning to be recognised in the Netherlands, partly due to the growing need for informal care. But she also notes that informal care is still often seen as a burden or as something with a cost attached to it. 'Success in life is not just, "look what I've achieved, I have a beautiful

house and a fat car”, Usha says. Being able to rely on others when you are sick and needy should be an essential value in Dutch society, according to Usha. That’s why the HRN wants to propagate this collective idea and tradition, Usha says: ‘if possible together with Muslims and Jews who have similar collective values and traditions’. Just like the Christian tradition in which attention is also paid to the general good.

### **Dān, Giving**

‘Every form of sustainability starts with giving,’ says Usha. Within Hinduism it is considered important not always to give in to (material) desire. Through ascetic and spiritual practice your need to consume decreases and as a result you are left to give to others. After a visit to a temple in India, people often give the priest some money and give to the poor people they meet along the way. These gifts also have a spiritual dimension: it has an influence on your karma: on your well-being and development, and on your spiritual growth.

Also within the Hindu formation importance is attached to the notion of giving. The Hindu concept of *gyān*, which in Sanskrit means “knowledge,” ‘is also about giving and passing on knowledge,’ Usha explains. Education is not only important because it increases your chances on the job market: it contributes to your spiritual growth and development. Because passing on (spiritual) knowledge is so important within Hinduism, the HRN will set up a chair in cooperation with the Free University of Amsterdam. Within this chair research will be done on spirituality in leadership.

For more information about the Hindu Council Netherlands, see:  
[http://www.hindoeraad.nl/oude\\_site/](http://www.hindoeraad.nl/oude_site/).

## **JUDAISM: THE SABBATH AS A RESTING POINT IN A HECTIC EXISTENCE**

*Sabbath is... a social rest moment, social cohesion, away from the tech... When it comes to sustainability, I think that’s one of the best things the Torah can give the world.  
- Ruben Vis, alg. secretary Dutch-Israeli Church, February 5, 2019*

The Dutch-Israeli Church Society (NIK) was founded as early as 1814 under King Willem I. Following Napoleon’s example, the king wanted to introduce the model of the national state to the Netherlands. One of the ways to promote this national unity was to set up bodies that would strengthen the ties between religions and the Dutch state. Thus, under royal decree, the Dutch Israelite denomination was founded on 26 February 1814, says Ruben Vis, the current general secretary of the NIK.<sup>43</sup>

When the NIK was founded, Willem I had several goals in mind. There were disputes between Jewish communities that he hoped to settle. He also wanted to strengthen the national control over Judaism and promote the development and emancipation of Jews in the Netherlands. Jews at that time were not persecuted, but were still a kind of second-class citizen, says Vis. ‘Many of the Jews at the time came from

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43. Interview February 5, 2019.

Eastern Europe and Germany, were poor and spoke Dutch poorly'. This gave the NIK, when it was founded, mainly 'an emancipatory objective', says Vis.

This objective changed after the Second World War. After 1945 the NIK had to deal with 'the gigantic damage of the Shoah' as a result of which 'three quarters of the Jewish population was decimated', says Vis. Moreover, the community was confronted with the depillarisation and secularisation of post-war Dutch society. That is why the NIK continues to focus on 'the strengthening of Jewish identity in a non-Jewish, secularising society'.

This Jewish identity is not only religious but also cultural. That is why the NIK pays attention to the preservation and transfer of religious knowledge and practices, as well as to 'Jewish music, the Yiddish language and art with a Jewish element or character'. In recent years the NIK, for example, organised study days for Jewish teachers, worked on the restoration of eight Jewish cemeteries in the province of Groningen, developed an app with guidelines for kosher food, and published a new prayer book. This is very special because the previous book is so old, the first edition probably came from around 1840', says Vis. The new book of course contains the same prayers, but 'the presentation, approach and explanation have been completely renewed'. A second prayer book has even been developed for people who aren't at home in the synagogue at all and who can't follow the prayers, in Hebrew, very well.

Knowledge transfer and education are not only important instruments for strengthening Jewish identity in the Netherlands. Tradition and study are also central religious values within Judaism. Learning gives prestige within the Jewish community. Vis therefore strongly identifies with SDG 4, the objective concerning quality education. Especially the phrase 'quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning' appeals to him. 'We are brought up to learn all the time', explains Vis. Jewish children learn to 'always ask, always investigate, always question'. He sometimes hears from teachers that Jewish children ask are the ones who ask questions the most frequently in classrooms.

This inquisitive attitude is also nourished by the Sabbath. 'The Sabbath includes three meals', explains Vis. 'One on Friday evening, one on Saturday after the synagogue service and one at the end of Saturday. The fixed menu of these meals also includes learning something'. It's not just about reading the Bible<sup>44</sup>, but really something has to be learned. At the table, for example, insights are exchanged about the meaning of certain biblical texts or a certain subject is explored. 'Everyone does this on his or her own level', says Vis. During the Sabbath meal children are often asked, 'what have you learned this week?'

Within Judaism the Sabbath is also seen as 'the most important gift of the *Torah*', says Vis.<sup>45</sup> This day of rest, which is such a central part of Jewish religious practice, contains, according to Vis, qualities that can contribute to the welfare and sustainable development of Dutch society.

### The Sabbath

According to Vis, Judaism really is a religion of practices, regulations and laws. The Sabbath plays a central role in this. 'I think that the Sabbath is an important part of sustainability, because it makes you stand still in the rush of existence', says Vis. During this weekly Jewish rest day Jews are not allowed to work or 'make fire', or use electricity in any form whatsoever. 'If it were the Sabbath now, none of these four devices would be on the table,' says Vis, pointing to our laptops and cell phones. We'd really be 25 hours *tech off*. That extra hour on top of the 24 hours has been added, according to Vis 'because we cherish the Sabbath so much'. 'During the Sabbath we are separated from the rush of everyday life. Then you dedicate yourself to your relationship with your immediate environment and with God'.

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44. When Vis speaks about the 'Bible' or 'bible texts' he refers to the Tanakh, the holy book of the Jews that consists of 'the bible books of the Torah, the prophets and the writings', according to Ruben Vis in the interview.

45. The Torah contains the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh. The Tanakh corresponds to the Old Testament of Christianity.

According to Vis, this recurring moment of peace and quiet during the week contributes to connection and social cohesion. 'Real social cohesion is therefore no tablets, no computers, no smart phones... and that is what we do on Sabbath. 'Because you are not allowed to make use of transport, TV or cell phones, on Sabbath you are really thrown back on your own social group. It's really very small-scale because you have to sit together,' says Vis. Sabbath is spent with family and friends. Family members or friends are often invited to the Sabbath meal on Friday evenings.

It's great to get out of that 'rat race' together every week, but it's also a 'huge challenge', says Vis. Because, according to the rules, you are not allowed to make a fire during the Sabbath (but you are allowed to use it), you are also not allowed to turn a light switch on or off during that day. Nowadays this can easily be solved with time switches. 'This does not mean that we leave the light on all day during the Sabbath, but we set it on a time switch'. According to Vis, this also saves energy. It also increases your awareness of all those moments when you use electricity in your daily life.

Although no research has been done yet, Vis thinks that the Sabbath regulations, which must be followed on a weekly basis, also reduce the ecological footprint. He is a member of a Facebook group on Sabbath and ecology. A member of that group took the initiative to measure his electricity consumption during the Sabbath. He noticed that he used less electricity during Sabbath. Also, no transport is used during the Sabbath and 'of course' no pork is eaten - because that is contrary to Jewish food laws. Of course, the food laws and the Sabbath are primarily divine precepts that you should follow regardless of any other consideration, emphasises Vis. They are not 'invented' because they would be better for health or the environment, but they do contribute to it. 'Now it turns out that it is quite a good idea to once a week take a step back ecologically and socially'. The fact that this is prescribed by God perhaps makes it easier to do so, suggests Vis.

The element of rest is very important within Judaism. Rabbi Rashi - one of the most important commentators of the Torah who lived in the Rhine region around the year 1000 - says: 'God created the world in six days, but he also created the Sabbath as a day and the factor or concept of rest', explains Vis. 'Bringing things to rest at a certain moment is the essential characteristic of the Sabbath'. The same thought speaks through in biblical precepts about ecology and agriculture. 'The Torah also includes the prescription to leave the land fallow once every seven years,' says Vis. 'Now we know that it's good not to exhaust the soil... But it already occurs in the Torah!'

Vis sees the Sabbath as a 'real jewel in our faith...'. He propagates this to his own Jewish supporters, for example through articles on the importance of the Sabbath on the website. But he also regularly brings it forward in social discussions, for example by critically looking at the consequences of the 24-hour economy. 'Sabbath is... a social rest moment, social cohesion, away from all that tech... When it comes to sustainability, I think that's one of the best things the Torah can give the world'.

**For more information:**

- About NIK: <http://www.nik.nl>
- About the Sabbath: <http://www.nik.nl/sabbat-wekelijkse-rustdag-op-zaterdag/>

## KRO-NCRV: BROADCASTING OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

*Faith, hope and love remain. It is not only about faith in God, but also about faith in yourself, the other and in a bright future.*  
-Kirsten Andres, 5 March 2019

### The Dutch broadcasting system

Although, according to Dutch law, the broadcasting system has not been based on the so-called pillars since the 1960s, the Dutch media landscape was coloured for a long time by the various religious and political ideological movements in the Netherlands.<sup>46</sup> 'The media landscape in the Netherlands as it looks today is very much determined by the religious movements in the Netherlands', says Petra Moonen, market researcher at KRO-NCRV.<sup>47</sup> 'Religion has actually made the media landscape as it is now, and there is a lot of value in that, precisely because everyone is allowed to make their voice heard. For example, the fact that there is a Buddhist broadcaster that has broadcasting time, you won't find that in many other countries'.

In 2014 many broadcasters had to merge as a result of the new Media Act.<sup>48</sup> The Catholic Radio Broadcasting Association (KRO) and the Dutch Christian Radio Association (NCRV) merged in the new system to form KRO-NCRV. The merger involved a larger budget and the assignment to broaden their offer of programmes<sup>49</sup>, says Kirsten Andres, director of Marketing and Association of KRO-NCRV.<sup>50</sup> 'A few years after the merger, the management found that the identity and profile of the broadcaster were 'somewhat diluted', says Kirsten. The broadcasting company began to take on the character of a production house more and more 'and we came back from that', says Kirsten. Over the last two years, the management wanted to make KRO-NCRV's religious profile more explicit and recognisable again, 'because we sincerely believe that our roots are our *raison d'être*', explains Kirsten.

### Philosophical and religious profiling

After an internal reflection process of more than a year, it was decided that the KRO-NCRV should become the broadcaster of hope, faith and love. 'As KRO-NCRV we believe in a loving society in which there is room for everyone. A society in which we pay attention to each other and in which it's a little less about me and a little more about us', says Kirsten in an interview in the society magazine *Vertel*.<sup>51</sup> On the basis of a newly formulated vision and mission statement in which our values are described, our management has been working on a new strategy for content. The strategy addresses three domains that are clearly linked to hope, faith and love.

The first domain is about meaning. With this domain the broadcaster wants to respond to society's need for new forms of meaning, 'so not just the church,' Kirsten explains, 'but you have to think more about questions of life or the art of living'. The second domain is that of the inclusive society, 'which is about solidarity and standing up for the weak'. The third and last domain is stewardship: 'we have this earth to borrow, how do we deal with it and leave it behind for the next generation'. These three domains are now

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46. Historian Peter van Dam argues that 'the Dutch pillarisation' is primarily the product of a 'myth' created by the polemics of social debate in the 1950s and 1960s (Van Dam 2011). That myth has been buzzing around for a long time, even in the broadcasting world. In 1965, however, the 'pillarisation' within broadcasting was already abolished with a new media law. It stipulated that broadcasting associations AVRO, KRO, NCRV and VARA were no longer simply allocated 20 percent of broadcasting time each, as had been the case since 1930, but broadcasting time based on member numbers. This abolition of pillarisation in 1965 made it possible to establish new successful broadcasting associations such as EO and Tros. See: Van Dam, Peter. 2011. *Staat van verzuiling: over een Nederlandse mythe*. Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek.

47. Interview with Kirsten Andres, director KRO-NCRV and Petra Moonen, market researcher KRO-NCRV, 5 March 2019.

48. Smaller religious broadcasters such as the RKK (Omroep Rooms-Katholiek Kerkgenootschap) were no longer given a separate budget and broadcasting time under the new Media Act from 2016 and had to stop. The new broadcasting system consists of three merged broadcasters: KRO-NCRV, TROS-AVRO and VARA-BNN. The EO, MAX and VPRO remained independent, just like the NOS and the NTR. Broadcasters that voluntarily merge receive double the basic budget and a merger bonus.

49. Broadcasters received a merger bonus under the new Media Act.

50. Interview 5 March 2019.

51. See: KRO-NCRV *Vertel*, number 3, 2018: page 18.



being worked out into a content strategy that gives direction to the programming and ensures that the broadcasting company 'really starts to excel in these three domains', says Kirsten.

An example of a program in which the value of inclusiveness is propagated is the TV program *Hij is een zij* about transgenders. 'A program like that really makes you think differently,' says Kirsten. The value domain of stewardship, for example, leads to programs like *Keuringsdienst van Waarden* in which viewers are made aware of the origin and production of food, or the program *BinnensteBuiten*, a daily 'magazine' early in the evening with many items about consuming and building sustainably. The broadcaster opted for an open approach 'we don't want to point the finger, but offer food for thought with suggestions for concrete action', Kirsten explains. This constructive approach was deliberately chosen with the target group of the broadcaster in mind.

KRO-NCRV makes programs for everyone, but above all wants to reach 'that large, quiet group in the middle': people who do not take one extreme standpoint or another and who you hear much less about because of the polarisation, Kirsten explains. The broadcaster has made a description of that target group that Kirsten likes very much and therefore reads out loud: 'We are there for all those people from young to old who are of good will. Who, despite doubt, despite confusion, uncertainty, threats and polarisation, believe in the good in people. Who continue to hope for a better world and who want to live in harmony with each other and want to pass on love to other people. People who find meaning important and who want to put charity into practice'. Some people find that soft or boring, says Kirsten, but the KRO-NCRV is there for people who want to continue to see the positive, who believe in the good in people. Faith, hope and love therefore remain the most important source of inspiration for broadcasting. 'This is not only about faith in God, but about faith in everything,' explains Kirsten, 'in yourself and the other and in a bright future'.

In this way, the broadcaster also wants to actively involve its members in its mission. Not only through programs, but also by offering them concrete social activities. In this way the broadcaster also gives shape to its role as a religiously inspired association.

### **The association**

The broadcasting association KRO-NCRV currently has about 500,000 members. This support group roughly consists of three groups, says Kirsten. The first is that of the 'traditional believing members' and forms the largest group in the membership. People from this group are among the most loyal and relatively older members who have been members all their lives and 'never give up', says Kirsten. But they do react critically to programs in which, for example, curses are heard or negative remarks are made about the church.

The second group consists of people who, although they were raised Catholic or Protestant, now mostly find general values such as 'charity' very important. The third group is a group that initially became a member because of the member discounts for events such as *de Boer zoekt Vrouw* (farmer wants a wife) after party or the Night of the Proms organised by the association. Nevertheless, 'at least 50%' remains a member after the one-year membership with the corresponding benefits has expired. So this group does have sympathy for the broadcaster.

The association organises various festivities and activities for its members throughout the year. Some of them, such as the mentioned *Boer zoekt Vrouw* afterparty and the Night of the Proms are mainly meant to entertain. But in addition, quite a few activities have to do with meaning and 'looking out for each other' - as the broadcaster's slogan says. For example, in the association magazine of autumn 2018 the program *Voor wie steek jij een kaarsje op?* (For whom do you light a candle?) is announced that takes place on All Souls' Day. During this meeting, members can take part in a candle light tour and a musical program in which known and unknown Dutch people who died that year are commemorated. In December, members could

also ‘literally put their loved ones in the light’ by hanging their wishes on one of the Christmas trees that had been erected at four locations in the country for the *Joris’ Christmas tree* programme. Following this, the Joris’ Christmas Tree dinner was organised where especially singles were invited to participate in a joint Christmas dinner for a small fee. The dinner was provided by *RestovanHarte* - a chain of neighbourhood restaurants with an idealistic goal.

The broadcaster is also experimenting with online platforms for crowd funding and volunteer projects.<sup>52</sup> Every year, elections are organised for the *‘Actie Warm Hart’* (the warm hearts action), where association members can vote for three charities that ‘contribute in a special way to a warm, caring society’.<sup>53</sup> The winners receive a cash prize.

It is estimated that about 40,000 members of the association are involved in these activities and meetings every year. That this social commitment is cherished by the broadcaster is shown by the pride with which market researcher Petra Moonen talks about the relatively high number of volunteers among the KRO-NCRV members. Research has shown that about 80% of our members volunteer’, says Petra. Whether there is a direct link between this social involvement and the religious or philosophical conviction of members has not been researched. However, other research did show that many members attach importance to their faith. ‘Eighty percent of our members say that faith plays a role in their lives,’ says Petra. ‘Whether that is a minor role or a major role is unknown, but it does indicate something’.

### Vrijwilligerswerk

Het percentage steunleden dat vrijwilligerswerk doet, is gelijk onder NCRV- en KRO-leden. KRO-leden verrichten vooral vrijwilligerswerk in de sectoren bureu-, bejaarden- of gehandicaptenhulp (23%) en godsdienst/levensbeschouwing (21%). Onder NCRV-leden is vrijwilligerswerk met betrekking tot godsdienst/levensbeschouwing (33%) veruit het populairst, gevolgd door vrijwilligerswerk voor overige maatschappelijke doelen (20%).

Tabel 2.1.2 Wat voor vrijwilligerswerk doet u?

Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk. Basis: alle respondenten

	KRO						NCRV					
	0-meting	1-meting	2-meting	3-meting	4-meting	verschil 3- en 4-meting	0-meting	1-meting	2-meting	3-meting	4-meting	verschil 3- en 4-meting
Godsdienst, levensbeschouwing	23%	19%	23%	21%	21%	1%	27%	23%	32%	30%	27%	-4%
Bureu-, bejaarden- of gehandicaptenhulp	23%	24%	25%	22%	23%	1%	24%	24%	23%	23%	19%	-4%
Overig maatschappelijk doel	17%	15%	19%	18%	18%	0%	21%	18%	21%	19%	20%	1%
Sport	16%	14%	17%	17%	16%	-1%	15%	15%	16%	15%	15%	0%
Zang, muziek, toneel	10%	12%	14%	12%	14%	1%	16%	12%	16%	14%	14%	0%
Hobby	10%	10%	11%	10%	10%	0%	10%	10%	11%	11%	10%	-1%
Politiek	6%	5%	4%	4%	4%	0%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	0%
Hulp op school	8%	9%	9%	7%	7%	0%	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	-1%
Beroeps- vak- stamorganisatie	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	0%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	0%
Overige hulpverlening: advies, voorlichting etc.	5%	5%	7%	7%	5%	-1%	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	-1%
Vrouwenvereniging of vrouwengroep	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	0%	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%	-1%
Oudercommissie, schoolbestuur	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	0%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%
Jeugd- en clubhuiswerk	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	0%
Kinderopvang, crèche, peuterspeelzaal	2%	2%	4%	2%	2%	0%	2%	2%	2%	4%	2%	-2%
Ik doe geen vrijwilligerswerk	20%	27%	27%	28%	20%	-8%	29%	25%	25%	24%	20%	-4%

### Spiritual capital for sustainable development

The management of the KRO-NCRV considers it ‘more relevant than ever’ to contribute as a broadcaster to the awareness and activation of members and viewers on themes such as sustainability, solidarity and inclusiveness. ‘Society is hardening, individualisation is advancing, technology is creating distance, the government is stepping back’, Kirsten sums up. ‘That means that we have to create a beautiful society together and we do that from our conviction of faith, hope and love’. This message is not only for the stage, but also motivates Petra and Kirsten personally in their work for the broadcasting company. ‘When I think of “spiritual capital” I immediately think of selflessness,’ says Petra. I think that someone who works from a spiritual perspective does so out of selflessness, doesn’t expect anything in return,’ she explains. ‘I very much believe in organisations that act from the “why, how, what” golden circle,’ Kirsten says. ‘You’ll work harder if you believe in what you do’. Kirsten speaks from experience because she used to work in the commercial sector. Now she notices the difference. ‘I really do work here with a different passion, because I think: what we do matters’.

52. See for example the platform ‘Make a difference’ at: <https://maakhetverschil.kro-ncrv.nl/> (visited 19 March 2019).

53. KRO-NCRV Vertel magazine no. 3, 2018: page 19.



# Conclusion

Source photo: PixaBay

*I look from the train at a slow passing ship on the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal when the phone rings. It is Reverend Moses Alagbe of the Maranatha church in Amsterdam Zuidoost. 'Annette', he begins, 'I am satisfied with the report of our interview. You've reproduced it well, everything is in it. But I have one remark'. 'please', I answer while looking for pen and paper in my bag. 'In the first two paragraphs you talk about "volunteers"... but we do not have any volunteers', Moses continues. 'If people join our church and choose to follow the life of Jesus, they become workers in the Kingdom of God'.*

In one sentence, Reverend Alagbe points to the persistent tendency towards classification ('*compartmentalisation*') in Western thought. Like many other participants in this research, Reverend Alagbe speaks from an integrated view of mankind. One in which man is not 'cut up' according to the rules of functional rationality in different roles and is only weighed on the basis of his or her economic value (as paid or unpaid power). But one in which man is seen as a being driven by convictions and values and who wants to contribute to a better world: in an economic, ethical, social and philosophical sense.

'Politics is too much about purchasing power statistics',<sup>54</sup> says Kim Putters, director of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) in the recently published book *Veenbrand* (2019). When discussing important issues in relation to sustainable development such as climate policy, the answers to questions are 'not only financial and technological in nature, but also social, spatial and ecological' (Putters 2019) - and moral-ethical and philosophical in nature, we would like to add on the basis of this research.

If we could draw any cautious conclusions from this research, which is, after all, limited in approach and scope, it is that the contribution of spiritual capital to sustainable development is primarily qualitative in nature. Of course, religious and philosophical communities have human resources and financial resources that can be 'harnessed' for the benefit of the SDGs, but this instrumental approach does not bring us any closer to the added value that we were looking for in this research. Rather, the added value of religion and philosophy of life lies in the ability to work in an integrated way - with head, heart and hands - on social and sustainable development.

With this research we tried, on the basis of a so-called baseline measurement, to sketch a first picture of this added value: one that we tentatively refer to as 'spiritual capital'. In addition, with this pilot we wanted to find out exactly how you can recognise, measure and monitor that spiritual capital. We developed a preliminary definition of spiritual capital, four assumptions and a series of indicators and tested them with this research. In this conclusion, we examine the extent to which these proved useful and valid. Did the definition and indicators help to make spiritual capital visible in the activities and projects of religiously and philosophically inspired individuals, communities and organisations? Were the assumptions we made about the potential added value of 'spiritual capital' correct?

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54. See: NRC, February 21, 2019 'Er hangen veel gele hesjes aan de kapstok'. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/02/21/er-hangen-veel-gele-hesjes-aan-de-kapstok-a3654935> (visited April 12, 2019).

## ASSUMPTIONS

### **Assumption A1:**

Religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations have networks and relationships that increase their social reach: they reach other, often more marginalised groups than secular NGOs and develop (more) long-term relationships of trust because of their continuous presence and position as spiritual counsellor.

This first of the four assumptions is most clearly confirmed by the research. Moreover, we find that the spiritual capital of religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations is above all visible and tangible at the local or grass-roots level: in the informal networks and human-to-human relationships that they build and perpetuate on the basis of proximity, presence and trust. Even the activities of national religious or philosophical (umbrella) organisations that participated in this research are largely - and intentionally - locally directed, embedded and organised.

Whether religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations reach more marginalised groups than non-philosophical or religious social organisations cannot be determined on the basis of this research. However, a number of cases showed that religious and philosophical communities were able to involve groups in society that are usually more difficult to reach. A clear example of this is *the Maranatha Community Transformation Centre* in Amsterdam Southeast, which offers help to people with serious health problems (HIV-Aids) without residence status - people who often do not dare to report to other agencies for fear of deportation. Refugees and newcomers with an Islamic background also sometimes prefer to approach this migrant church rather than secular government agencies: they feel more at ease with people for whom religion is also important and who, like them, come from non-Western societies. The working group Green Church of the Roman Catholic Church in Houten managed with its climate actions to reach groups in society that are usually less open to social change: their fellow parishioners.

The findings of this research also endorse the ability of religious and philosophical communities and organisations to penetrate the roots of society. The projects of *NatuurWijs* and *Hasene* mobilised both children and their adult supervisors and contributed to a change of consciousness and behaviour at the household and family level. This intergenerational impact, the ability to involve older generations (parents, teachers, foresters) in sustainable development through activities for children, can be added as a new indicator of spiritual capital.

### **Assumption A2:**

Religious and philosophical communities, individuals and organisations have spiritual and religious visions that guide the values and norms within the community and contribute to meaning and meaning

This assumption was partially confirmed. The norms and values that motivated participants in this research to commit themselves to sustainable development are conveyed through religious and philosophical narratives and canons, but not always so explicitly. Religious praxis proved to be an equally important vehicle for the transfer of norms and values. Being ready for someone else by doing volunteer work is something 'that has been imbued in me during my youth', Carin Rougoor said. Within the Protestant church in which she grew up to do something for someone else' has more to do with the praxis of the church than with an explicit profession of faith. Also within Judaism 'really a religion of

practices, precepts and laws' according to Ruben Vis, praxis is at least as important as the religious canon. The weekly Sabbath is pre-eminently a religious custom that is transmitted by doing it. During the weekly Sabbath meal and the shutting down of time and electricity many values are transferred that contribute to connection, social cohesion and sustainability. Assumption A2 should therefore be corrected as follows: religious and ideological communities, individuals and organisations have (a) religious or ideological vision(s) and praxis that guide the values and norms within the community and contribute to meaning making.

### **Assumption A3:**

Religious and philosophical initiatives and groups have spiritual and religious practices that contribute to social and existential individual and social transformation processes.

The term 'practices' is unfortunate in view of the addition of the word 'praxis' in the preceding assumption. Moreover, this is more about religious and philosophical formation: the indicators of assumption A3 mention activities such as spiritual development and religious study.

The efficacy of religious and philosophical formation became especially visible in this research in the projects of *Hasene* and *NatuurWijs*. In these educational projects children and young people are brought into contact with important questions about sustainable nature management and water use. Cognitive, sensory and spiritual knowledge is integrated into the teaching modules in a very natural way. This holistic approach contributes significantly to the integrated image of humankind and the self that was discussed in the opening of this conclusion. Children show a more integrated (emotional, rational and spiritual) sense of well-being; according to research by Wageningen University, children who took part in *NatuurWijs* turned out to be calmer in the classroom, better able to listen to others and more self-confident up to several months after the forest trip. They experience a stronger bond with their vicinity (the classroom) and with the wider environment (nature) in which they live.

People are the building blocks of the sustainable society of the future that we are working on with the SDGs. The formation of young people is therefore essential. Some cases from this research indicate that philosophical and religious formation can contribute significantly to the development of a more holistic or comprehensive picture of people and society. A society in which people are not only judged on the basis of individual performance and economic merit, but also on the basis of their contributions to sustainability and the common good.<sup>55</sup> This dimension of spiritual capital deserves more attention in a follow-up study. That is why the revised assumption A3 focuses on philosophical and religious formation. Because the indicator 'religious and communal celebrations' refers to religious praxis, it moves to assumption A2.

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55. Of course, religious and philosophical formation can also form an obstacle to the attainment of the SDGs, for example when climate change is denied or resistance to basic rights and democratic principles is encouraged. Zie: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/publicatie/2018/20/monitor-brede-welvaart-2018> (visited 13 april 2019).

#### **Assumption A4:**

Religious and philosophical groups or leaders may, because of their relative independence from politics and their focus on the general good, occupy special social roles.

Members of religious and philosophical communities and organisations do not necessarily see themselves as advocates of the SDGs. Of course, many of the social activities they organise touch upon themes of sustainable development, 'but it's not our focus,' a survey respondent remarked.

The findings of this research do, however, endorse the role of religion and philosophy of life as suppliers of moral leaders and bridge builders. Particularly the individual moral leaders who also fulfil a role as bridge builders stand out. For example, Reverend Moses Alagbe knows how to fulfil an important bridging function between the municipal authorities in Amsterdam and newcomers and undocumented migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Because of his hybrid identity and expertise as a biologist and Buddhist, Matthijs Schouten was also able to stimulate the development of a different vision of nature management. Precisely because the formal membership of religious and ideological institutions is decreasing, the role of these individual ideological bridge builders and moral leaders deserves more attention in a follow-up study. This does not only involve figures in leadership positions: the volunteers of Humanitas and Stichting Present are also breaking through their so-called social 'bubbles' because they come across to people outside their own social circle due to their participation in the project.

#### **Systematise and broaden**

With this pilot study we also wanted to see how research into the contribution of religion and philosophy of life to the SDGs in the Netherlands could be systematised in the coming years. A total of 26 participants from 22 organisations representing nine different religious and ideological currents in the Netherlands (Catholicism, Protestantism, migrant church, evangelical movement, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism) participated in this first study. With this, we had only a fraction of all religious and philosophically inspired communities, individuals and organisations that contribute to sustainable development in the Netherlands. It seems most obvious to increase the number of participants in this research in the coming years, for example by assigning an important coordinating role to philosophical umbrella organisations. But this is not the best solution.

It is important to safeguard the uniqueness and independence of religious and philosophical communities and organisations: only in this way can their added value, the spiritual capital they have to offer, be preserved. Activities for the social and sustainable development of religious and philosophical communities should therefore not be deployed and framed according to the (economic and technocratic) yardsticks of the SDGs, but vice versa. The existing monitoring frameworks of the SDGs must be supplemented with indicators that can provide a better picture of spiritual capital. In this way, the instrumentalisation of religious and philosophical organisations can be avoided and the concept of 'development' that guides sustainable development goals can be enriched and broadened.

The Netherlands has already taken an important step in that direction with the development of the Broad Welfare Monitor of Statistics Netherlands (CBS).<sup>56</sup> This monitor maps out the economic as well as the ecological and social aspects of welfare, including the sustainable development goals. Moreover, sustainability is integrated into this monitor by investigating the 'pressure' that current prosperity in the Netherlands places on future generations ('later') and in other places in the world ('elsewhere'). Indicators for social cohesion, subjective well-being and trust are also included in this national monitor.

On the basis of this pilot study on spiritual capital, it would be interesting to see whether the Broad

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56. See: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/publicatie/2018/20/monitor-brede-welvaart-2018> (visited 13 April 2019).

Welfare Monitor can be enriched with indicators that also map out the religious, philosophical and spiritual contributions to well-being and development. These indicators should be developed in a further study and in close cooperation with Statistics Netherlands (CBS). However, it can already be established that the 'measuring' of the spiritual capital of Dutch society involves three dimensions of welfare and development that must be measured in *an integrated manner*, i.e. at the level of:

- the embeddedness of individuals in social relationships ('social capital'),
- the embeddedness of humans in the ecosystem; in relation to other living systems in nature and the cosmos, and
- the embeddedness of human beings and human actions in larger frameworks of meaning and meaning making.

Indicators such as 'social inclusion' and 'exclusion' and an 'open, communicative' or 'closed, directive attitude' can then be used to measure the 'positive' or 'negative' contributions of spiritual capital to sustainable development.

It would be extremely useful and valuable to involve the participants of this study on spiritual capital as a sounding board in this possible next step: the joint development of indicators for spiritual capital that could be integrated into the Broad Welfare Monitor. A large number of them have already indicated that they are open to participating in such a sounding board.

The survey that was initially set up in the hope of measuring quantitative contributions (human resources, resources, results in combating poverty, etc.) from religion and philosophy of life was insufficient due to the low response rate. The design and execution of the survey took a lot of time and yielded only minimal usable data. In a next step, it seems better to write a thorough literature study in which the findings of recent, large-scale studies into quantitative contributions of religion and philosophy of life to sustainable development in the Netherlands are summarised and discussed.



**Attachments**

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## LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- Annemieke van Wesemael, national program leader Household Management, Poverty and Debt at Humanitas
- Carin Rougoor, deacon protestant church in Houten
- Frank Dijkstra, chairman Stichting Present Houten
- Huseyin Karatas, Treasurer *Hasene-Netherlands*
- Kirsten Andres, Director Marketing and Association KRO-NCRV
- Matthijs Schouten, Vice Chairman Natuur College and Chairman Dharma Advisory Council Buddhist Union Netherlands
- Mehmet Yaramis, chairman Hasene-Netherlands
- Moses Alagbe, pastor of the Maranatha Community Transformation Centre in Amsterdam and chairman of the Pentecostal Council of Churches.
- Petra Moonen, market researcher KRO-NCRV
- Renée Brabers, volunteer working group Green Church, Roman Catholic Church Houten
- Ruben Vis, general secretary Nederlands-Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap
- Usha Doekhie, Chairman Hindu Council Netherlands

### Participants survey-research\*)

- Stichting Stad en Kerk
- Stichting Tijd voor Actie
- Vereniging SchuldHulpMaatje Nederland
- Stichting A Rocha
- GroeneKerkenActie
- Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen
- Parochiele Caritas Instelling Paus Johannes XXIII
- Stichting Micha Nederland
- Jesus Christ Foundation Church
- Stichting Al-Yateem
- Nederlands-Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap
- ZEN Peacemakers Low Countries
- Humanistisch Verbond

\*) N.B. A total of thirteen organisations participated in the survey. Thirteen gave explicit permission to mention their names in this report; two participated on the basis of anonymity. In that case, the philosophical or religious movement of which they are part was registered.

## CONVERSATION QUESTIONS SURVEY

### General

- What is the name of your organisation?
- Which religious or philosophical movement does your group or organisation belong to?
- How large is the constituency of your community or group (estimated) on a local and national level?  
By supporters is meant the number of members or active stakeholders of your group, parish or organisation.
- How many employees and volunteers work (estimated) for your organisation within (pastoral) care for your own supporters and within social activities for the wider society?
- Does your group, community or organisation come together for meetings? What do these meetings consist of and how often do they take place?
- Is your organisation part of a national and/or international religious or philosophical network? If so, which one?

### Sustainable Development Goals

- Is your organisation familiar with the sustainable development goals (SDGs)? If so, in what context have you heard about SDGs?
- Which three of the following 17 development goals are most important to your own supporters? Why?
- Select three of the 17 goals and motivate why they are particularly important to your supporters.
- According to your organisation, what are the three most important development goals that the Dutch government should work on? Why is this the case?
- Select three of the 17 targets and motivate your choice.
- On which of the 17 development goals has your organisation organised activities or projects in 2018? Please indicate with short keywords what kind of activity or project it was and how many people it was estimated to reach.
- Can you give an estimate of the total budget your organisation had available in 2018 for all these activities together?
- Can you say something about the method and frequency of fundraising you used for this activity budget?
- Can you name one activity or project that you find most important or leading for your organisation? Can you briefly describe what this project was about and why you think it is so important or leading?
- To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the specific qualities of religious or philosophical organisations?
- Do you have any comments or explanations about one of the statements based on your own experience and insight?
- Do you think your organisation can play a role in raising awareness about SDGs? Motivate your answer

### Concluding

- May we include your organisation in the research report with the list of participating organisations?
- Would your organisation be interested to participate in a sounding board group on religion and sustainable development goals in the Netherlands in the future? If so, who can we contact?
- Do you have any questions or comments about this survey?

## TOPICS UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

### History

- Can you tell us something about the history and development of diaconal/socially engaged work within [religious or philosophical movement] in the Netherlands?
- How is this work organised in the Netherlands within [religious or philosophical movement]?
- What role did faith or philosophy of life play in this work? How did it develop over the past few years (trends/themes)?
- Is there a typical [religious or philosophical movement] view on poverty, inequality and development?

### Sustainable Development Goals

- Are you familiar with the sustainable development goals?
- Which of the 17 development goals below are most important to your organisation? Why?
- Does [religious or philosophical movement] feel a natural affinity with some of these developmental goals? Can you explain where that comes from? Interweaving human and worldviews?
- What are the most important social issues you are confronted with within your community and the surrounding environment

### Activities 2018

- On which of the themes of the development goals did you organise activities in 2018?
- Can you give a short description of these activities?
- Which activity or project did you find most eye-catching, important or successful?
- What did you find the most meaningful change or result of this project? Or: Which moment or change are you most interested in?

### Spiritual capital

#### Organisational assets

- What sources and resources did you commit to this activity?
  - Human resources
  - Budget, obtained from...
  - Knowledge
  - Networks/contacts
- Who was involved and mobilised in this activity?
  - Support
  - Non-believers in the neighbourhood
  - Certain (target) groups of society
- Was it relatively easy or difficult to motivate people? What's the reason?

### Religious and philosophical visions

- Was this activity based on certain religious or philosophical canons or doctrines?
  - Wisdom, parables, stories
- In this activity was religious formation or reflection worked on the theme?

### Spiritual and religious practices

- Has this activity worked with forms of spiritual development such as prayer or meditation?
- In this activity were rituals worked with, for example, celebrations, blessings or otherwise?

**Social roles**

Did you or your organisation take on a certain social role in this activity, for example as:

- Moral or religious leader
- Bridge builder
- Advocate?

**Concluding**

- Can you tell how your faith or belief motivates you personally in your work?
- Do you think that religious or philosophical organisations or communities have added value in the fight against poverty, inequality and climate change in the Netherlands?
- In the future, would you be interested in being involved in a sounding board group on religion/philosophy of life and sustainable development goals?

