

The transition to sustainable concrete in the Netherlands through network governance

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Abstract: In response to the alarming environmental problems, frontrunners in the concrete sector have joined forces with government, the building- and recycling sector and research institutes to formulate the Dutch Concrete Agreement in 2018. The aim is to reach ambitious environmental and social goals and transform the concrete sector into a sustainable direction. This paper analyses the governance of the Concrete Agreement and the results gained until now. It is concluded that a network of partners has jointly managed to develop roadmaps with which the intended goals can be reached. This new form of network governance mediated by an independent chair does not replace conventional public governance but complements it. The challenge ahead is to mobilise the whole concrete sector in the scale up phase to act according to the Concrete Agreement.

Keywords: Dutch Concrete Agreement; frontrunners; network governance; roadmaps; innovation programme.

1 Introduction

To reach ambitious sustainability targets, the Dutch concrete sector has formulated a Concrete Agreement in 2018 together with government, the building and recycling sector and research institutes. All 82 parties involved were aware of the urgent need to reduce the environmental impact of concrete, particularly cement. The challenge was to set up an execution programme that would achieve the targets set. This paper addresses the governance of the Dutch Concrete Agreement and the results gained until now. Through network governance mediated by an independent chair, this challenge is expected to be met.

2 Preparing phase: Formulating the Concrete Agreement

The Concrete Agreement was signed on 10 July 2018 by about 82 representatives from all segments of the concrete chain, the government (also in their role as a public commissioning party) and research institutes. To reach an agreement, these representatives negotiated for one year.

After that, another half year was needed to convince parties to formally sign the agreement. Negotiations concerning the text of the Concrete Agreement focused on a time horizon lasting until 2030 and four main themes: CO₂ reduction, the circular economy, natural capital, and social capital. For each theme, specific actions and clear intermediate and final targets were formulated. The targets of the Concrete Agreement set for 2030 are:

- a CO₂ reduction of an intended 49% compared to 1990 — which aligns with the climate targets of the Dutch government (recently raised to 55%);
- 100% high value reuse and recycling of concrete in the building- and construction sector;
- a net positive value of natural capital, meaning that after extracting sand and gravel, in particular, the natural environment is left with higher biodiversity than before;
- increased social capital in the form of improving and sharing knowledge, innovation and education.