

5. NU AND THE GOVERNMENT

5.1 Introduction

The government is going to a great deal of effort to gain some form of control over the way civilians behave, which is proving very difficult to influence. That is why the authorities need new, effective instruments to drive people to act in a sustainable manner.

The NU card scheme is an example of a positive policy tool that promotes sustainable behaviour, and offers several advantages:

- The NU card scheme entices people into *new (sustainable)* behaviour through the use of incentives.
- It can be used for a *wide range* of purposes. Most civilians can benefit from it, and it covers various areas of policy.
- Subsidy euros that are used for the NU card scheme have a *double effect*: firstly, by the act of issuing points, for example by rewarding people who turn in separated waste; and secondly, when the points are redeemed, by offering the possibility of using the points earned for public transport.
- The NU card scheme can help increase the *cost effectiveness* of local authorities. Using the tool can create work-off effects, synergy benefits and lower expenditures. For example, the more civilians separate their own waste, the less it costs the authorities.
- Analysing the NU database, obviously within the stipulations of privacy legislation, generates valuable *policy and control information* for the government. The response to the specific policy stimuli built into the NU card scheme can be determined accurately, improving the effectiveness of government policy. This possibility was not tested during the demonstration project.

The government will become a NU client, because it can substantially contribute to the policy it has formulated. Although the NU card scheme does not receive any subsidy this way, it is paid to deliver specific services; thus, the government becomes a client.

This chapter discussed a number of concrete policy areas in which the NU card scheme can act as a stimulus. The areas dealt with are:

- waste;
- support of the SME sector; and
- mobility.

Do we repeat mantras or do we offer a different way of looking at our actions?

by Dick Ouwerkerk



‘A better environment starts with yourself.’ Everyone knows this government mantra. But what does it mean for the average Dutch consumer? “I agree completely”, they will nod. “Of course a better environment starts with myself”. “But,” they will add, “why should it start with me if it doesn’t start with my neighbour as well?”

This was the government campaign that was aimed at the Dutch people for years, but in fact it is shooting blanks: everyone is addressed, but it is unclear who is actually hit. What it comes down to is that no-one changes their behaviour. And this means more waste and more CO₂ emissions. Add to this the fact that civilians are increasingly being bombarded with stimuli to actually consume more and travel by car more often, and it will be clear to everyone that other measures are called for.

*Obviously, regulations and penalties may have some effect. A degree of success has indeed been achieved that way. However, restricting behaviour is only possible up to a certain level, because repressive measures often result in evasion and **free-rider actions**.*

The advantage of an incentive system, such as the NU card scheme, is that it offers civilians a new way of looking at their actions. Good behaviour is rewarded and leads to repetition; civilians will slowly start displaying sustainable behaviour.

Actually, I am not interested in why people decide to start acting in a sustainable manner. I do not really care that much if civilians know that sustainable consumption will make the world a better place. What matters to me is that they do it. Not because the government tells them to, but because they like the sustainable behaviour. And that is when a better environment actually starts with yourself!

Dick Ouwerkerk is Chair of the NU Steering Committee

5.2 Household waste

Waste management a high-priority matter in the administration of large cities. A clean city is one where people can live comfortably; pollution makes people feel unsafe. However, the costs of waste collection and processing are high. A different behaviour toward waste management, on the part of civilians, can contribute significantly to reducing these costs.

In many smaller municipalities, the inhabitants' waste management behaviour is controlled using differentiated rates (Diftar). Under the Diftar system, inhabitants pay for waste processing in accordance with their personal

behaviour. The more waste they put out in the streets, the more they pay. However, these methods do not work in some large cities. They lead to avoidance, and the city can become polluted. An incentive system that is fully integrated within the waste policy may offer a solution.

In Rotterdam, the NU card scheme was successfully used to help the populace find its way to the civic amenity sites. During each visit to a civic amenity site, civilians receive 200 points for turning in their separated rubbish and 100 points extra for turning in second-hand goods. The average Rotterdam family normally visits a civic amenity site 0.2 times per year on average. People with an NU card visit the sites three times as often. The perspective that this reveals is a cleaner city and lower operating costs for waste management, because fewer rubbish vans are needed on the streets. Materials are also separated better, allowing them to be reused and reducing the costs for processing the residual waste.

The Rotterdam sanitation company Roteb directly operates a number of recycled-goods shops, the Piekfijnwinkels. Consumers can redeem points for second-hand goods in these shops. This encourages reuse and delays the purchase of new products, sometimes making it entirely unnecessary to do so.

5.3 Support of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

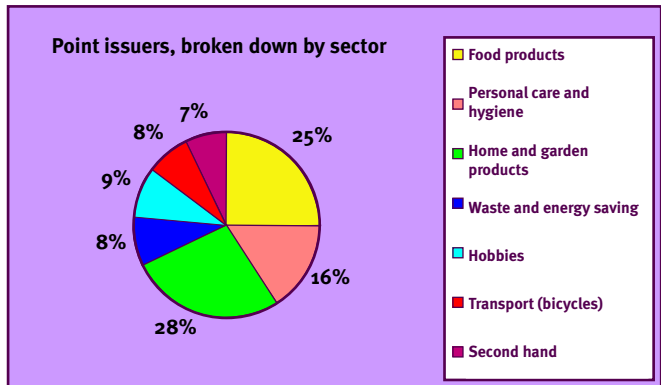
Conducting business is getting more and more difficult for small retailers. The shop owner and his family work overtime to complete all their work, and they often

see nothing of the world beyond their front door. Collaboration with fellow retailers is frequently difficult, and the competition from large chains is tremendous. Many retailers see their turnover drop and more and more of them have to give up the struggle. The spaces once occupied by the discontinued shops are then generally taken over by the chains. New small retailers often have trouble getting started, lead a difficult existence and mostly only cater to a small – generally immigrant – market sector. The changes in the sector consequently follow each other at a high rate. Shop concentrations start to look more and more alike, become less attractive and slowly but surely vanish; resulting in nothing but chain formulas in a row.



For a long time, the government has been looking for tools to support small retailers, without hampering their freedom. The motive for this is society's need for neighbourhoods to continue to offer a wide and varied range of shops. Shopping streets with many different shops, peopled by shop owners who care about their customers and their street help create a general sense of prosperity, safety and a high quality of life, as well as bolstering the local economy.

The NU card scheme supports shops by offering them an affordable loyalty programme. Small retailers can bind customers to themselves and attract new customers, particularly if they expand their range, and so become more interested in taking advantage of the NU promotion tools. The NU account managers help retailers look for new sustainable products that match their range of goods.



The introduction of the NU card scheme to retailers encountered a delay from the initial choice only to reward purchases of green products. Once the proposition had been changed and a more commercial proposition was adopted, recruitment speeded up. Within a short period of a few months, the objective of 100 shops had been attained.

Waste, now what?

by Jean Pierre Hannequart,

The time when we could dump out household waste without worrying about it is history. At present, Europe still dumps half its waste. In London, 72% was dumped in 2000, however no new dumpsites will become available from 2007 onward. The European Commission has limited the possibilities for dumping by imposing strict conditions. In order to reduce our usage of raw materials and achieve the Kyoto CO₂ objectives, a change in behaviour is needed. Take, for example, the reduction of dumping organic waste. By 2006, no more than 75% of all organic waste may be

dumped as compared with 1995, by 2009 no more than 50% and finally in 2016 only 35%. However, in practice these objectives seem almost unobtainable.

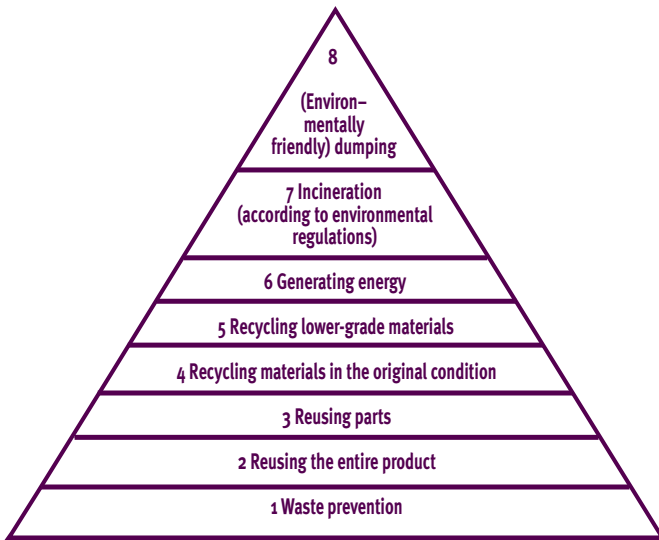


Illustration: Dumping waste as the final resort in the waste pyramid

How can we reduce the amount of waste that is dumped? What are the alternatives? The best way is to prevent waste from being produced. This goes contrary to present-day mentality: many producers tend to use increasingly excessive packing materials. Laws and covenants can stem this waste stream to some extent. But consumers can do their bit too, by buying sustainable products and remaining mindful of packing materials. Another way is by sticking a notice on their letterbox announcing that advertising material is not wanted.

Waste that is unavoidable should be separated as much as possible. Waste contains many valuable raw materials that can be used in industry. These materials should then be



reused if possible. Currently, part of plastic, paper, glass and organic waste is separated. In Rotterdam, 50 percent of glass is separated, and in Europe as a whole, half the waste paper is reused. Ideally, all our waste should be returned to the cycle.

If any waste remains after restrictions and recycling, we have to incinerate it cleanly. It is a shame that many raw materials are lost in the incineration process, but it is better than dumping it. Waste incineration provides electricity and heating. In the Netherlands, electricity generated in this way is even called green. In Rotterdam, all non-separated waste is incinerated.

Politicians and policymakers are facing a major challenge. How do you bring about this change? How do you get consumers to change their purchasing behaviour? How do you encourage your people to increasingly separate their waste? Particularly for countries and cities that are lagging behind the European average, this is an immense task.

The answer lies firstly in a good infrastructure. The delivery and removal facilities should be sufficient, and separated waste should be processed properly. Separated waste should be kept apart from the rest of the cycle, and not added to it because industry is not yet ready for it. This could seriously damage people's willingness to keep separating their waste.

Next, a solid educational campaign is needed, presenting clear information. Campaigns that are limited to providing information are generally not enough. Information does not reach every part of the population to an equal extent. That is why campaigns can be supported with enforced regulations, differentiated rates and an incentive system. Particularly in rural areas and in small towns, a system of differentiated rates for different fractions of waste can

be useful; let the polluters pay! An incentive system can supplement this; reward civilians if they behave well!

A system of rewards should also help combat street litter. And in large cities, an incentive system can mean a tremendous boost for the campaign.

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5.3 Mobility

The NU card scheme can contribute to the traffic flow by helping reduce car use by rewarding the desired behaviour: using bicycles, public transport, taxis, car pooling, travelling during off-peak hours and along less travelled routes. Public transport has a large residual capacity during off-peak hours, which could be put to better use.

In the demonstration phase, use of public transport was encouraged with off-peak travel cards that could be bought with NU points. Many bicycle shops and sheds were also involved in the NU project.

