

# Utrecht: A Global Goals City

## *Utrecht's Approach to Localising the UN Sustainable Development Goals*



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## 1. Introduction

This publication describes Utrecht's approach to localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs or Global Goals) outlined in the [United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). The aim is to share Utrecht's experiences with others working to achieve the SDGs at local, national and international levels, as a means of knowledge-sharing and cooperation. Like many other public, private and non-profit sector actors, Utrecht has adopted the SDGs as a guiding framework to orient the city's development, as well as its cooperation with other cities, to be sustainable and inclusive. The municipality's top priorities are to increase awareness of the SDGs amongst Utrecht's residents and businesses, and to stimulate them to take supportive and (where possible) crosssectional action.



### This report highlights:

1. How Utrecht's history of sustainability partnerships laid the groundwork to become a Global Goals City;
2. How these partnerships create shared value for all parties;
3. How Utrecht's core "Healthy Urban Living" strategy has helped to narrow its SDG focus;
4. How Utrecht maximises ownership and impact by partnering with key stakeholders at local, national and international levels;
5. How Utrecht's Global Goals Dashboard tool aims to activate residents and connect policy-makers;
6. The challenging questions Utrecht is confronted with as it looks ahead.

## 2. Before the Global Goals

Before Utrecht adopted the SDGs in 2015, several other sustainable development programmes, related to international frameworks, had already been in place, including:

- Utrecht-León Sister Cities, 1983 – 2016
- Countries of Origin Programme, late 1990's
- Utrecht Millennium Municipality, 2007 – 2015
- Fair Trade Municipality, 2007 – present
- The Utrecht Human Right City initiative, 2010 – present

- **Utrecht-León Sister Cities**

Following three years of social and cultural exchange, Utrecht and León officially became sister cities in 1986 at the request of the citizen-led Utrecht-León Friendship Foundation. For more than 30 years, the cities collaborated on several initiatives to demonstrate solidarity and raise awareness about the inequality between the Global North and South. In the early years, Nicaragua and especially León lacked both the physical space and financial means to carry out an urban expansion. Meanwhile, Utrecht was also expanding via the Utrecht Leidsche Rijn development project. As both municipalities set out to build neighbourhoods for low- and middle-income families, they helped each other by sharing experiences and expertise.



Recognized by UN-HABITAT as demonstrating [best practices for local government cooperation](#), the partnership has proven to be beneficial for both parties in terms of knowledge-exchange and capacity-building, sustainable economic and urban development, mutual understanding and international



professional development. Importantly, León was also supported in realising concrete improvements related to affordable, accessible and sustainable housing (5,000 houses were built for over 15,000 inhabitants), a big win especially for low-income citizens.

Similarly, the climate forest project in León is an example of how international, multi-stakeholder initiatives can be harnessed to tackle sustainability challenges in an integrated way based on a local initiative against deforestation. Started in 2009, the project is a collaboration between Utrecht Municipality and Fundación DIA (the implementing organisation on the ground in León) with support of local and international stakeholders. These parties work together towards several interconnected goals: combatting deforestation, caused in large part by the demand for firewood; supporting local farmers and sustainable agriculture by introducing new business models based on cacao and honey production; and fighting climate change by reducing and capturing CO<sub>2</sub>. So far, over one million trees have been planted as international investors such as search engine [ECOSIA](#) that uses its profits to plant trees decided to collaborate.



- **Countries of Origin**

The Countries of Origin programme was set up in the late 1990s to support local initiatives by Turkish, Surinamese and Moroccan communities responding to natural disasters or supporting social projects in their countries of origin. Private initiatives from other communities (such as Indian and Chinese) were also supported from 2015 on as the second generation from these communities became more active creating economic opportunities for trade and investment. Through local activities such as festivals, workshops and performances, the programme aimed to attract new talent and stimulate cultural exchange, trade and investments, as well as visibility for other cultures within Utrecht's cultural scene.

- **Millennium Development Goals**

In September 2000, leaders of 189 countries met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to endorse the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Global challenges such as the eradication of poverty and hunger, universal access to primary education, gender equality, improvement of health conditions, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development, were outlined as priorities for the next 15 years to guide world leaders' work towards a safer, more prosperous and equitable world.

The Netherlands' considers that, in addition to national and regional governments, local governments and actors are also responsible, and in fact well-positioned, for achieving the MDGs. Accordingly, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (the VNG) launched its 'Millennium Municipality' campaign in 2007. Here, the VNG took the lead to convene as many Dutch municipalities as possible to partner and leverage their respective spheres of influence in support of the same goals. The municipality of Utrecht declared itself Millennium Goals Municipality and joined this campaign at the outset in 2007 with the creation of the local Team2015 to raise citizens awareness.



- **One Umbrella**

The MDGs provided Utrecht with a framework to link and promote diverse international cooperation initiatives throughout the city, including the sister city relation with León, school partnerships, awareness campaigns, and the fair trade movement. The results have been tangible.

- Between 2008 and 2014, Utrecht funded 55 MDG-related, awareness-raising projects from 35 different local organisations, such as fair trade fashion shows, relevant socio-political lectures for students, and street campaigns promote sustainable clothing or fundraising for War Child.
- Between 2008 and 2013, Utrecht partnered with private funders to match the funding for 45 projects in developing countries, for example, to support water projects in Africa or build schools in Nepal.
- Utrecht became a Fairtrade Municipality in 2010 to increase awareness of and demand for fair trade products among its companies, restaurants, institutions, residents and tourists. A survey in 2015 showed that more than 35% of Utrecht's citizens buy fair trade products on a regular basis as a result of the campaign.

- In 2012, the municipality adopted a sustainable procurement policy that addresses fair-trade, environmental impacts, and climate and energy.

- **Human Rights City**

In 2012, Navanethem Pillay, then the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, called Utrecht ‘the first human rights city of the Netherlands’. Motivated by this honourable recognition, Utrecht set out to create a local coalition of diverse stakeholders to cooperate on human rights in the city. Thus, the [Human Rights Coalition](#) was founded in 2013, and comprised of NGOs, local civil society organisations, businesses, politicians, policy officers and scientists. The main objective was and is to



create human rights awareness and ownership amongst individuals and organisations, and to enhance human dignity and quality of life. [Coalition members](#) take up countless human rights issues related to diversity, participatory governance, inclusion, social responsibility, job opportunities, integration, education, homelessness, women’s rights, cooperation, loneliness, accessibility and many more. Facilitated by the City of Utrecht, the coalition convenes four Human Rights Café meetings per year. As a direct result of the coalition’s work, the city council

adopted two new initiatives: [Utrecht Shelter City](#) (2015) and [Children’s Rights City](#) (2016). As a Shelter City, Utrecht offers temporary shelter, training and safety to international human rights defenders fighting human rights abuses in their home countries. As a Children’s Rights City, Utrecht employs multiple approaches to ensure that children are safe, healthy and heard, and have equal opportunities to realise their full potential.

### 3. A Global Goals City: Connecting the Local and the Global

When the MDGs expired in 2015 and the new SDGs were initiated, the Utrecht City Council reconfirmed its commitment to these Global Goals by declaring Utrecht a “Global Goals City.” The MDG campaign had been fuelled by strong civil society involvement and the municipality was keen to build on this legacy when transitioning to the SDGs. Rather than create another top-down policy, the aim now was to provide a common framework that would facilitate widespread stakeholder engagement and participation.



Within this framework, there are two main objectives:

- Create and support coalitions with local actors, including businesses, entrepreneurs, NGOs and knowledge institutions, to address international sustainable development challenges;
- Convene and support local stakeholders, including those named above, plus citizen initiatives, to raise awareness and inspire action at the local level.

In both cases, the idea is to use the SDGs as a unifying framework that stimulates exchange and cooperation, and empowers existing initiatives to extend their reach. The first steps under this framework have already been taken as part of a three-year plan (2017 – 2019).

### **Utrecht4GlobalGoals**

In May 2016, Team2015, Fairtrade Utrecht and the Utrecht – León friendship foundation joined forces to create [Utrecht4GlobalGoals](#) (U4GG) as the new, local, autonomous coalition leading cooperation on the SDGs. U4GG is a foundation, sponsored by the municipality, that strives to raise awareness of the SDGs locally and inspire residents, civil society organisations and the private sector to be actively involved. It is made up of four main initiatives, each targeting a specific group to reach as many stakeholders as possible.



- **HeelUtrechtU**

Through the [HEELUTRECHTU](#) Campaign, U4GG works to stimulate and highlight citizens, grassroots initiatives and businesses that contribute to the SDGs. The goal is to inspire others to initiate an activity or connect their existing initiative to the SDGs. Everyone can nominate an inspiring citizen or idea through the [HeelUtrechtU award](#). (Some examples of recent HeelUtrechtU award recipients are named below in the Cooperation With Businesses section.)



*Deputy Mayors Jeroen Kreijkamp (left) and Lot van Hooijdonk (right) handing out HeelUtrechtU awards.*

- **Fairtrade Utrecht**

[Fairtrade Utrecht](#) organises local campaigns to promote fair trade, in particular for food and clothing. The successful [Flairtje](#) campaign challenged Utrecht cafés and restaurants to serve more fair trade products. Fairtrade Utrecht also organises the annual [Fair Fashion Festival](#).



- **Here & There**

[Here & There](#) is a subsidy scheme to support local, grassroots initiatives that contribute to the Global Goals, either in Utrecht or abroad. It is especially important that the initiative is geared towards increasing awareness amongst Utrecht residents about the SDGs, and that the target audience and the links to the SDGs are clearly defined.

- **Utrecht 4 Global Gifts**

[Utrecht 4 Global Gifts](#) is a webshop selling socially, environmentally and economically sustainable products from Utrecht-based businesses.

In addition to these four initiatives, U4GG also organises activities, maintains a calendar of SDG-related events, and maintains a local SDG network.

Besides raising awareness at the local level, Utrecht finds it important to include the importance of international cooperation to achieve the Global Goals as well. In this regard, the chapter 'International cooperation' describes the Kajjansi project, which deals with this ambition.



### **Climate Planet**

In 2018 Utrecht4GlobalGoals organises a major event in the centre of Utrecht together with the municipality, businesses and NGOs. [The Climate Planet](#) will attract an estimated 70.000 visitors. Inside this globe a 3D NASA video and images about climate change will be shown. The Climate Planet is surrounded by a circle of containers portraying the 17 Global Goals. Here, exhibitors will showcase innovative sustainable solutions. Utrecht takes this opportunity to express its concern with climate change and present local solutions for global challenges, not only to its citizens, but to other cities as well.



#### 4. Focus for Synergy: Healthy Urban Living

A healthy living environment positively affects the quality of people's lives. The City of Utrecht aims to create such a 'healthy urban living' environment for its citizens by collaborating with different stakeholders and focussing on areas like innovation, health economy and infrastructure. Healthy Urban Living is also about creating an environment in which sustainable and innovative entrepreneurship can flourish and projects can emerge. Same as with the SDGs, working towards a healthy city for all requires an integrated, interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach. That is how the SDGs are related easily to Utrecht's existing local policy on Healthy Urban Living.



Together with other international institutions, experts and cities, Utrecht seeks out international partnerships that will further promote public health as an essential dimension of urban development. For example, Utrecht takes part in the [World Health Organisation's \(WHO\) European Healthy Cities Network](#), which brings health-focused cities together to share best practices, policies, knowledge and goals.

#### On the Road Towards a Healthy City

Utrecht values healthy and sustainable mobility as an important aspect of urban living, and continues to invest in the region's vast cycling infrastructure, including the world's largest bicycle parking located in the city centre. Utrecht is currently ranked as the second most bike-friendly city in the world. By making



it easier for residents and visitors to choose cycling as their form of transportation, Utrecht is contributing to the city's health and sustainable development by reducing traffic, CO2 emissions and particulate matter as car use declines, and helping people save time and integrate physical activity into their daily lives.

To improve air quality, diesel cars and delivery vans manufactured before 2001 have been barred from entering Utrecht's city centre since January 2015, making this the Netherlands' first low-emission zone. An impact assessment carried out by the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) showed that the number of such vehicles entering the city centre has indeed declined, with noticeable improvements for particulate matter and soot levels.

More examples of Healthy Urban Living projects in Utrecht can be found [here](#).

## 5. Cooperation with Businesses on the SDGs

The city of Utrecht is looking for opportunities to partner with local businesses connecting their products and services with the SDGs and promoting the SDGs more broadly by sharing their stories and ambitions with customers and residents. Like governments, businesses can also use the SDGs as a framework for linking local activities to international development and consumer trends, such as the increasing demand for transparent, fair and sustainable supply chains. Here are a few examples of local businesses that have integrated the SDGs into their work.

**Touchée Dance Company** promotes the Global Goals through dance performances at festivals and events. Dancer, choreographer and entrepreneur Kenzo Alvares created [GLOWdance](#), a personal interpretation of the Global Goals. Through such performances, and via social media, dance classes, educational events or on the street, Touchée is raising public awareness of the Global Goals.



Local BMW dealer **EKRIS** offered this electric car with SDG-print to Utrecht4GlobalGoals for campaign and marketing activities. The car itself contributes to SDG 7 (Affordable & Clean Energy) by being 100% electric and using 95% sustainable materials.

**The Global Goals Dialogue Globe** was created by a social enterprise that aims to stimulate active dialogue about the SDGs. The Dialogue Globe is a small meeting space, sustainably built in the shape of a globe, which supports SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by inviting people with different perspectives to discuss and engage on the Global Goals in an welcoming and inclusive environment. Inspired by the Global Goals campaign, the founders chose the municipality as their launching partner.



Local radiostation El Mundo broadcasting from the Global Goals Dialogue Globe inside the City of Utrecht's offices.

[The Economic Board Utrecht](#) stimulates innovation and cooperation between companies, knowledge-based institutions and governmental organisations to create a green, healthy and smart region. They do this in part by hosting workshops and networking events. At one such event, they invited social enterprise i-did and Avance Impact (the consultancy that helped i-did define their SDG strategy and relevant KPIs) to present their process and results to over 15 other companies interested in learning how to integrate the SDGs.



Since the summer of 2017, Utrecht has been partnering with the [VIPbus](#) to bring together citizens and entrepreneurs to discuss the SDGs. Topics that were discussed are the circular economy, the future of meat consumption and sustainable building. The VIPbus is an old supermarket truck that now functions as a moving hub for Very Inspiring People, Places, Products, Projects and Philosophies. Interestingly enough, the VIPbus is not allowed to

move through the city centre due to new regulations mentioned above prohibiting older diesel vehicles. This makes it a symbol for the transformation societies have to make to support sustainable development. Because, while the engine may not be up to date, the VIPbus was ahead of its time by adding the phrase 'think global, act local' to its front, illustrating its ambition to foster behavioural and societal changes related to the SDGs.



While all the above partnerships were mainly initiated by the municipality, other projects have been developed at the initiative of businesses. In most cases, these enterprises were already working on sustainability on their own, but the SDGs provided a new, international framework for structuring, prioritising, expanding or communicating that work. Utrecht and Utrecht4GlobalGoals want to make these enterprises and their work more visible and demonstrate the power of the private sector to promote sustainability. For this reason, Utrecht developed [HeelUtrechtU](#) to nominate and reward existing sustainable initiatives and make them more visible to a wider audience.

[i-did](#), mentioned briefly above, is a slow fashion social enterprise that transforms used clothing and old textiles into upcycled products like handbags. They employ people who face various challenges in the traditional job market and try to minimise the environmental impacts of their production processes. i-did's social and sustainable business model contributes to SDGs 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth) and 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production). In cooperation with the municipality, i-did has also contributed to the SDGs internationally through its support of the Made Blue Foundation, which finances water projects worldwide. i-did was awarded a HeelUtrechtU award in the fall of 2017.



In collaboration with ANNE (All Dutch To Energy-Neutral), the Jaarbeurs, Sustainer Homes and Rabobank, Utrecht realised [Het Rabo GroenHuis](#). This sustainable building showcases and promotes sustainable living. Sustainer Homes designs and builds homes that consume almost no energy compared to regular homes. By making use of a timber frame construction instead of concrete, steel or brick, the construction is considerably more sustainable than traditional construction methods. Utrecht4GlobalGoals rewarded this collaboration with a HeelUtrechtU award in the spring of 2017.



[Restaurant Syr](#) combines multiple SDGs. A social enterprise, Syr started as a project of the Gys Foundation where Syrian newcomers could make use of their talents and further develop their skills, to help them feel more at home in Utrecht and in Dutch society. Refugees with a residence permit work together with Dutch hospitality professionals. For its innovative model to provide refugees with dignified work and at the same time, educate



Utrecht's citizens about issues related to migration, integration, diversity, mutual respect and social cohesion, Syr was awarded a HeelUtrechtU award in spring 2017 as a leading example of the Global Goals in action.

While these examples are just a few of the inspiring cases of Utrecht businesses helping to advance the SDGs, engaging the local business community remains a challenge. Recognising their social and economic importance and influence, Utrecht is investigating ways to encourage more local businesses, especially small and medium ones, to get involved with the SDGs. Recently Utrecht reached out to the [Young Innovators](#) program at Utrecht University to assist with this challenge. This entrepreneurial, interdisciplinary and innovative group of experts is currently working on a pilot project to figure out how best to motivate businesses to work on achieving the SDGs, both within their own businesses and in cooperation with the municipality. This project is carried in cooperation with Utrecht4GlobalGoals.

Overall, Utrecht's motivation for partnering with businesses on the SDGs is twofold: to raise awareness about the SDGs by tapping into their networks, and to inspire Utrecht's residents and businesses to innovate and act. In this way, the SDGs are not only a framework for policy development and partnerships at the government level, but also for active civic engagement and city making at grassroots level.

## 6. The Utrecht SDG Dashboard

### Background

As Utrecht's commitment to the SDGs and the related activities and partnerships became more visible, more and more stakeholders wanted to know what the municipality itself was doing to contribute to the SDGs. At the same time, Utrecht was looking for ways to implement the SDGs and their targets more strategically within the local context. Combining these objectives – more transparency for stakeholders and defining a local strategy – the municipality set out to assess which of the SDGs and sub-goals were most relevant for Utrecht, how they are related to existing policies (or not), and how best to measure and communicate the city's efforts in a transparent and accessible way.

In 2016, the municipality started its investigations, consultations, and assessments to determine which of the SDGs were most relevant for Utrecht (it was decided to start with SDG 11, Sustainable Cities & Communities), and which of the relevant sub goals could be linked to existing local indicators, or not. The exercise revealed that criteria such as safe housing, sustainable (public) transport systems, safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, (natural) disaster preparedness, and creating safe and inclusive public spaces all require more specific



indicators, and that the availability of these indicators would depend on the development of national monitoring systems. Overall, it was clear that a better connection between the SDGs and local policies was needed.

### **Global Goals Dashboard**

To act on these outcomes, the municipality started working on an interactive tool – the Global Goals Dashboard – to present local SDG-related data in a user-friendly way. The tool enables the user to make connections between various data points and policy areas, and by establishing a baseline, to see where progress is being made. For municipal employees, the goal is that this tool will provide them with a clearer view of how their own work relates to the SDGs, and how the SDGs link their work to that of their colleagues. Its purpose is to challenge the siloed model of policy- and decision-making by offering an integrated framework through which to view and implement Utrecht’s strategies and activities. Connected to this is the challenge to develop new working methods to enable different municipal departments to collaborate effectively on intersectional issues such as climate change and social inclusion. It is hoped that the dashboard will facilitate these new ways of working together and support integral thinking when it comes to future policy development.

The other target group for the dashboard is Utrecht’s residents and various stakeholders. The idea here is to provide an accessible, transparent, and interactive tool that motivates people to be informed about the SDGs and Utrecht’s progress on achieving them, and also to think about how they can also contribute. Utrecht already publishes several monitors annually or bi-annually, ranging from a [Public Health Monitor](#) to a Sustainability Report, to inform stakeholders about what is happening in these areas. Compared to these monitors, which are static, often backward-looking documents, it was important that the dashboard be a living, interactive tool that stimulates stakeholder participation as much as possible.

The first version of the dashboard addresses SDG 11, Sustainable Cities & Communities, and was published in January 2018. Over the next few years, Utrecht will continue to develop the dashboard to include other SDGs and indicators, and introduce additional features to make it a fun and participatory tool for users. For instance, Utrecht plans to include a function where users can upload their own cases studies that support the SDGs. The aim is to do this in collaboration with external partners that have expertise in this area, such as the Central Agency for Statistics Netherlands or the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Utrecht is also open to cooperating and sharing knowledge with other cities and regions working on similar tools.

## 7. National Cooperation

The SDGs have been quite well-received in the Netherlands, with organisations from all sectors, including VNG International, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (some) Dutch cities, companies, investors and NGO's all using the SDGs as a guiding framework. In January 2017, Utrecht together with the City of Oss, was named the [Most Inspiring Global Goals Municipality](#) due to its efforts to implement the SDGs locally.



In granting the award, the VNG commended Utrecht for its ability to integrate the SDGs into local policy-making processes, and to involve several diverse stakeholders, including the private sector and other governments in The Netherlands and abroad. By highlighting Utrecht's successes and best practices, the VNG hopes to inspire other cities and municipalities to take further steps towards integrating the SDGs into their own processes and partnerships.

### Contribution to the VNG Campaign

Successfully translating the Global Goals at the local level requires the full commitment, support, actions and ownership of the local and regional governments. After the successful Millennium Municipality campaign, which was set up to raise public awareness of the Millennium Development Goals, VNG International launched the [Global Goals Municipality campaign](#) in 2016 in support of the newly adopted United Nations' Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

The campaign is devoted to stimulating, inspiring and mobilising local authorities and Dutch municipalities to put the SDGs on their local agendas. Several goals, such as SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities) and SDG 16 (Effective, Accountable & Inclusive Institutions) to name just two, are particularly relevant to municipalities. However, all the goals are – to a certain extent – local goals, which means that local governments have a role to play in each and every one of them. As with any sustainable development initiative, the local context serves as the starting point for determining which SDGs are the most relevant and what each of the stakeholders is able to contribute.

The Netherlands' decentralised governance structure also helps facilitate such collaborative processes. Their autonomy means that Dutch municipalities are well-positioned to take ownership and action at regional and local levels and to determine how best to reach their residents and other key stakeholders. Collaborations among the different departments and municipalities within The Netherlands also favour using the SDGs as a common framework.

## 8. International Cooperation

In addition to forming strategic and constructive partnerships at the local and national levels, Utrecht has also been actively seeking to partner with European and other international entities to further



promote and achieve the SDGs. The following projects showcase the extent to which Utrecht has leveraged its local knowledge, experiences and resources to support the SDGs in an international context.

### Sharing Utrecht's SDG Story on the Global Stage

In October 2016, Quito hosted United Nations' HABITAT III conference to develop a framework for sustainable urban growth for the next 20 years, known as the New Urban Agenda. The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) was present as an international alliance of cities and local governments with a common vision on climate resilience, low- emissions and just futures.

Because Utrecht signed the Covenant already in 2009, the Mayor of Utrecht, Jan van Zanen, was asked to discuss the city's current and future environmental and climate-related actions. He explained that "building a resilient city for the future means balancing people, profit and planet in one ecosystem – a healthy urban city." This ecosystem aims to prioritise citizens and put them at the heart of sustainability. Utrecht strives to create a healthy urban environment for its residents by implementing solutions like smart mobility, sustainable urban planning, green public spaces, and strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships.





### European Cities Collaborating on the SDGs

On a European level, Utrecht is cooperating with cities such as Ghent, Malmö, Stuttgart, and Bonn, who are also working on the SDGs. The main purpose of this informal network is for the members to exchange experiences and innovative approaches to translating the Global Goals into action at the local level and likewise, how to connect each city's local initiatives to international developments. The cities in this network meet throughout the year. For example,



Utrecht and the abovementioned cities co-organised a workshop held during the [Global Festival of Action](#) in Bonn in March 2018, as well as the annual [ICLEI Conference](#) in Montréal in June 2018.

### EUROCITIES

Utrecht is an active member of the European network [EUROCITIES](#). Representing cities at the European level, EUROCITIES participates in the EU multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs. Via the informal SDG cities network mentioned above, Utrecht is deliberating with EUROCITIES on how it can best support this platform. In March 2018, Utrecht hosted the EUROCITIES Social Affairs Forum. The topic was: *Together we make the city: Co-creating city strategies to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals at local level.*



## SDGs Offer a New Model for International Cooperation

As Utrecht continues to build on its long history of international sustainable development partnerships, it often draws on the lessons learned from its work with León, Nicaragua, namely the importance of reciprocity. Each partner stands to benefit and has something to contribute. Whereas the MDGs focused primarily on the most fundamental human development indicators, and thus on developing countries, the SDGs are framed in such a way that all countries share responsibility for working towards them and people everywhere will benefit if they are achieved. Within this new context, Utrecht aims to develop partnerships that continue to redefine the dynamics of investing in developing countries. By creating business and investment opportunities, and building and sharing experience, knowledge and expertise,



Utrecht sees partnering with developing countries as a mutually-beneficial means of contributing to SDGs 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities), as well as others depending on the specifics of the project.

### Kajjansi Junction, Uganda

The Kajjansi Junction programme, which started in late 2016, is one such example of the reciprocity model for international cooperation. The aim was to develop the local market area situated in a fast-growing urban area in Uganda in such a way that it would create value for the local businesses and communities, while at the same time reducing the area's environmental footprint. The Dutch and Ugandan public and private sectors co-created solutions and developed a business ecosystem that addressed the area's unique urban challenges. Local stakeholders identified waste management, food logistics, solar energy and mobility as priorities. These were then embedded into the urban design and spatial planning processes.



In early 2017, Utrecht, together with the NGO [TwentyOne](#), convened a multi-stakeholder coalition, comprised of the Utrecht University Centre for Entrepreneurship, waste management consultants, investors and an IT start-up, to promote investment in and development of the Kajjansi market area. The Dutch Governmental Service for Entrepreneurs (RVO) also provided funding, as the project aligns with the national policy to combine public and private investment to create sustainable business opportunities in Uganda. Thus, through this programme, Utrecht is simultaneously contributing to the SDGs in Uganda and creating opportunities for businesses located in Utrecht.

## 9. Challenges and Future Outlook

Utrecht's plans for an innovative SDG program started in 2015 and will run until 2030. The first steps have been taken, but Utrecht is still, in many ways, in the preliminary stages. Local and international partnerships will continue to be essential in the years ahead and Utrecht will continue to actively seek them out. Utrecht wants to be part of a movement, connecting cities and their populations in an international network of living laboratories, where innovation and best practices are nurtured, tested, shared and normalised. While it is impossible to predict everything that will happen between now and 2030, collaboration and exchange certainly make working towards the SDGs more efficient, effective and resilient.

Utrecht's ambition going forward is that all stakeholders know about the SDGs and are open to using them as guidelines for taking action and changing their behaviour. In the 2018 Utrecht citizens survey, 28% of the respondents expressed they were familiar with the SDGs. Utrecht wants to more than double this percentage in the coming years.

The SDGs are comprehensive and inclusive, addressing issues related to People, Planet, and Prosperity (the 3Ps) in their approach. And yet, Utrecht finds there is a vital (fourth) pillar missing: culture. Culture is reflected in the aesthetic, ethical, political, institutional, and religious or spiritual dimensions interwoven into people's personal, social and professional lives. The individual behavioural change, as well as the collective systems change needed to realise the SDGs cannot be achieved without considering this fundamental aspect.

Translating the SDGs into concrete action is a long-term challenge. Those working towards the goals have to develop and reassess their strategies, policies and methods on an ongoing basis to be able to anticipate and respond quickly to new questions and realities. As Utrecht works to do exactly that, here are some of the forward-looking questions currently under consideration:



1. How to make the SDGs meaningful and inspirational in people's daily lives?
2. How to make the Global Goals Dashboard an engaging and participatory tool? How to make working towards the goals and their targets an inclusive and social process?
3. How can we use the SDGs and the dashboard to collaborate more effectively on intersectional issues? How do the current ways of working within and across departments need to be adapted?
4. How best to share Utrecht's local examples on the international stage (together with other cities)?
5. How to create space for cities on the international stage to communicate and cooperate on the SDGs, and ultimately connect more effectively with supranational (EU) and international (UN) organisations?

Altogether, Utrecht has identified 4 main challenges for further developing its SDG approach in the coming years:

- 1) Working together with various partners to make the SDGs a powerful local movement that is known by a large majority of the population.
- 2) Further mainstreaming and integrating the SDGs into the municipality's own operations and administration.
- 3) Involving the cultural sector in rethinking their contribution to the SDGs and challenge them to formulate a 'fourth' pillar of sustainable development.
- 4) Connecting with new international networks and projects to facilitate increased knowledge-sharing about how best to integrate the SDGs locally.

## 10. Summary and Call to Action

Utrecht's approach to promoting and implementing the SDGs focuses on two areas: educating and activating local stakeholders, and connecting local initiatives and expertise with national and international developments. While the motto of "think global, act local" clearly applies to Utrecht's SDG approach, it also makes sense to "think local, act global." Utrecht sees its role, and that of other cities, as building the bridges that enable two-way traffic between



local and international action on the goals. Only by supporting other cities and regions in their efforts to achieve the goals, especially those with fewer resources, will the SDGs be achievable on a global scale.

Utrecht and other cities are uniquely positioned to be leaders, catalysts, educators, facilitators, implementers, and patrons of the SDGs because they are the common link connecting so many of the other key players in this story. They are responsible for the health and opportunities of their residents and businesses, and at the same time, they engage with national and international entities to shape policies, fund projects and programmes, and create norms, all of which can be leveraged to support the SDGs. Utrecht takes this responsibility seriously and invites any entities or individuals working to advance the SDGs [to be in touch](#) about collaborating.



### **Verantwoording foto's:**

Laura Lewis: Voorpagina

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