

## **Consciously Wood – timber trends in the Netherlands**

Bewusst Holz – Holzbautrends in den Niederlanden

Consciement bois – tendances au Pays Bas

Consciously wood – timber trends in the Netherlands

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# Consciously Wood

## - timber trends in the Netherlands -

### 1. Introduction

The use of timber in the Netherlands is witnessing a revival. Some thirty years ago the use of timber in Dutch architecture was 'not done'. In the nineteen-eighties, timber - especially tropical timber - was more or less condemned by environmental nongovernmental organisations (ngo) as a building material because of its presumed destructive influence on tropical forests. Times are now changing in favour of timber because Dutch society is starting to recognise the renewability of this building material, low environmental impact, the climate change reduction potential and above all because of the unprecedented beauty and creative possibilities. This contribution highlights the recent timber trends in the Netherlands. This is the result of efforts of the Netherlands Timber Trade and Wood Working Industry with respect to the use of sustainably produced timber, the influence of public procurement policies, as well as the changing perception of wood, wood properties and some wood products among the most important user groups in Dutch building practise.

### 2. Building in the Netherlands

The economic recession has influenced the present building practise to great extent. Was the building production in 2008 estimated at an all time high a number of new dwellings of 82.000, the forecast for 2010 is a production of only 52.000, while others believe that a number of 48.000 is more realistic. This had had an immense impact on the timber trade companies and wood working industry, meaning cutbacks on timber(product) selling, timber stock as well as on employment. The economic perspective for supplying timber for new buildings is not very optimistic.

On the other hand new possibilities arise, as the Dutch government is focussing on the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions, stimulates energy saving measures in the (existing) build environment and introducing green public procurement policies for timber and other building materials. Wood promotion and efforts of the timber trade to increase the sustainable use of sustainably produced timber, over the years, now seem to have positioned timber in the right place at the right time.

### 3. Sustainability and the timber trade

The Royal Netherlands Timber Trade Association (NTTA) is representing 270 timber trade companies and importers and supports as much as 65% of the total timber imports in the Netherlands. As of 2003 members of the NTTA have agreed to buy timber from legal sources only and to import as much timber from sustainable forest management as possible. In 2006 NTTA set a target percentage of sustainable sourced timber to be met by the end of 2009 of 75%. Buying patterns were altered, suppliers and producers were motivated to turn to certified deliveries, forest owners persuaded to change their management via legal to sustainable production. By the end of 2009 it was reported that 62% of all imports by members of the NTTA was of proven sustainable origin. Over the last years the demand for certified timber was not equalled by the availability. But due to the efforts of the NTTA (and due to the recession in the building sector) the supply of certified, sustainably produced timber to the Dutch market now by far outruns the demand. At the same time Dutch government introduced green public procurement policies for building materials, starting with timber and timber products. It became clear to the timber sector that in order to increase the use and supply of certified timber in the Netherlands new actions were to be taken in order to make sustainable timber mainstream. This resulted in the Action plan 'Conscious with wood'.

## 4. Conscious with wood

The Action plan 'Conscious with wood' is an initiative of the Royal Netherlands Timber Trade Association (NTTA) and the Dutch Association of Joinery Manufacturers (DAJM), and officially launched on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 (figure 1). The DAJM represents 250 companies producing window frames, doors, roof systems and timber frame elements. Goal is to stimulate the use of sustainably produced timber in such a way that it becomes mainstream. In order to be successful a number of actions have to be taken. Companies and organisations have to be motivated to become part of the chain-of-custody for certified timber. Obstacles need to be levelled and support of all key players in the building sector is essential. Therefore a series of activities are continuously been developed, implemented and evaluated. NTTA and DAJM are presently supported by nine organisations from the building sector and advised by a taskforce of stakeholders (among others representatives of organisations for architects, housing corporations, municipalities, supplier groups, government and building companies). Target of the Action plan 'Conscious with wood' is now set at 85% sustainably produced timber by the end of 2015 for both organisations. This is strengthened by the compulsory Chain-of-custody certification and reporting by member companies. In order to stimulate principals, architects and construction companies a number of activities are implemented as for example a campaign website, leaflets, newsletters, checklists how to become conscious with wood, a number of factsheets as well as a road show. FSC and PEFC are the leading certification initiatives for sustainable produced timber. This Action plan is supported by the Dutch government and will most probably be intensified the coming years to make more companies and organisations conscious with wood.



Figure 1: Action plan is presented to former minister Cramer of the ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment

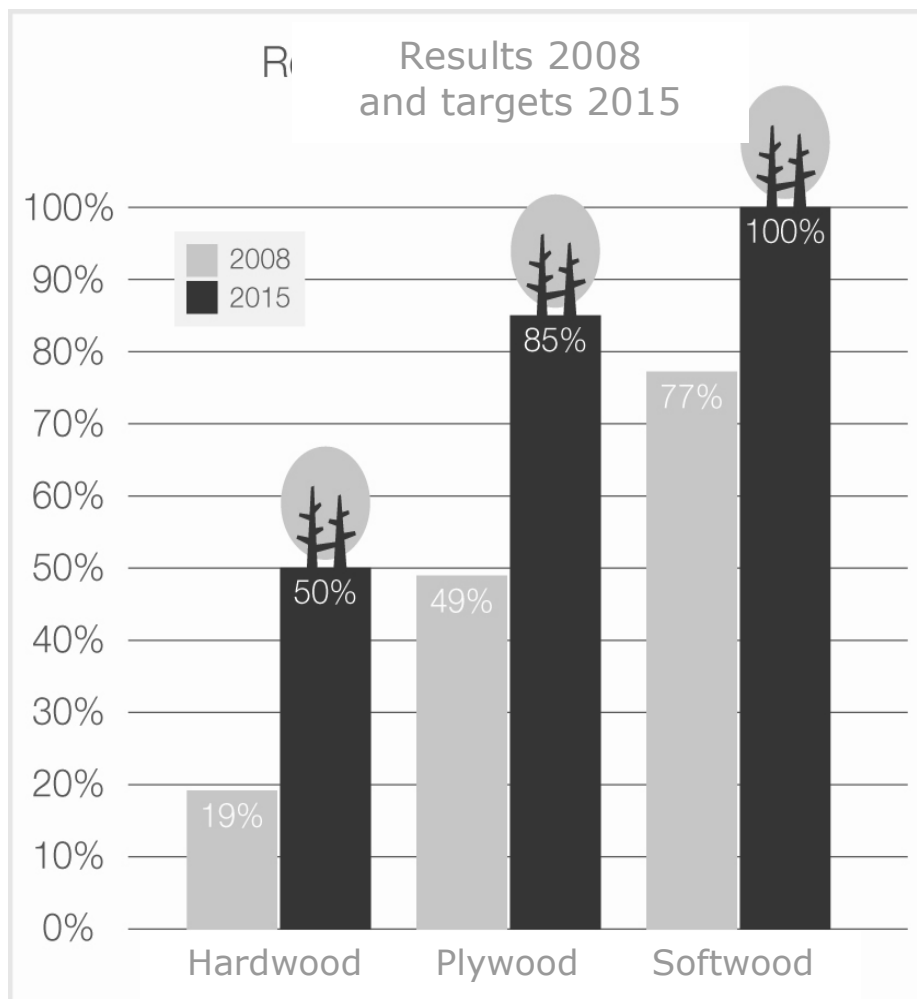


Figure 2: Campaign logo 'Conscious with wood'

## 5. Green procurement policy and building regulations

As of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 the government has implemented green purchasing policies. From 2003 onwards national criteria for purchasing sustainable produced timber were developed by the Dutch government. The process, incorporating as many as 27 organisation, resulted in a non-pragmatic list of criteria. The former ministry of Housing, Special planning and Environment has formulated criteria for purchasing sustainable timber. These are represented in the Timber Assessment Procurement System (TPAS). The most impor-

tant systems for sustainable forest management and chain of custody certification were evaluated by a Board of Experts (TPAC) presently resulting in the acceptance of certificates of FSC international and PEFC international (with exception of MTCS). For legal sourced timber the evaluation of the UK Central Point of Expertise on Timber Procurement (CPET) is leading (FSC, PEFC, SFI, CSA and MTCS) as well as other approved evidence of compliance). Chain of custody certification of companies plays an important role. In the meantime green purchasing policies have been developed for all 45 product groups in the building sector. The government has set the target for timber at 100% for purchasers of the Central Government, 75% for municipalities and 50% for provinces, water ships and semi-governmental organisations like housing corporations. In 2015 purchasing of green timber will be compulsory. As timber is viewed as an environmental sound material new possibilities for usage of timber arise, provided that it is sourced sustainably. In this respect the Action plan 'Conscious with wood' is currently the only significant activity from Dutch industry to actively support green purchasing policy.



## 6. Wood promotion and sustainability

Over the last 50 years Centrum Hout (Dutch Timber Information Centre) and its predecessors have been focussing on the sustainable use of timber and timber products in building. For the last 15 years an increasing part of the message was focussed on the positive effect of timber on the climate, the importance of sustainable forest management and the significance of using timber to safeguard the existence of forest in the future. Gradually systems for the certification of sustainable forest management were developed and promoted. Overall the outstanding technical and environmental performance and technical and creative possibilities of timber in building were promoted. The international concern about global warming resulting in European timber sector activities like 'Tackle Climate Change: Use Wood' (Roadmap 2010) have supported the message to

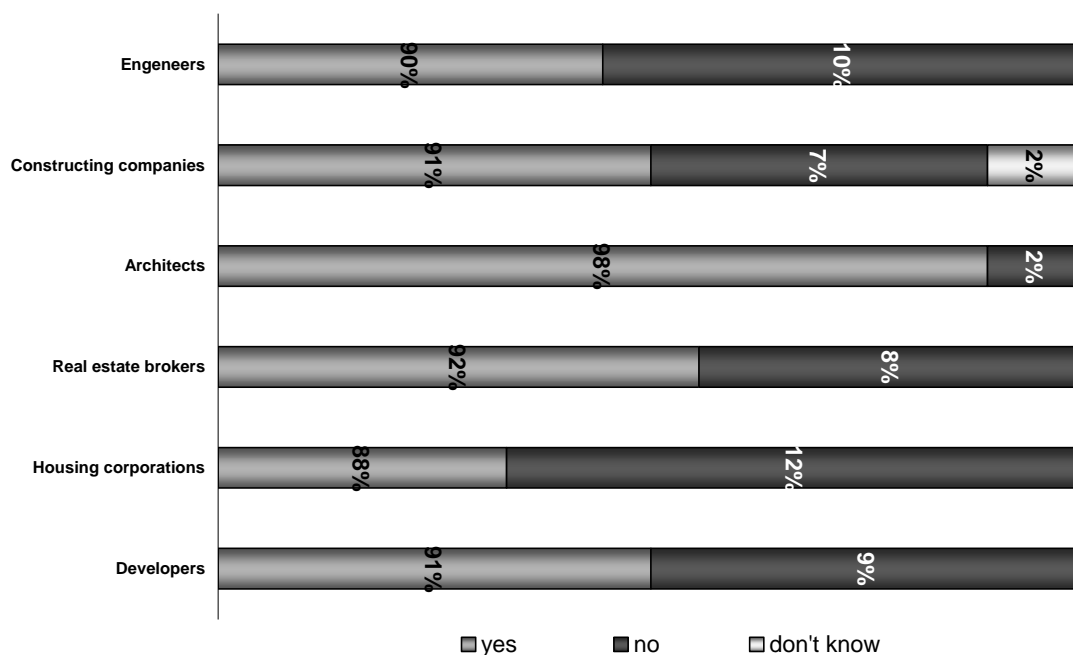
the Dutch market in a great. This for example resulted in an increasing number of beautiful entries for the National Timber Architecture Prize organised by Centrum Hout, representing an ever increasing variety of timber uses in buildings as well as an increase of the timber volume and complexness of the projects entered.

## 7. Perception and future possibilities for wood

A recent study by Centrum Hout revealed that timber and timber products are highly appreciated for its beauty and its creative possibilities. Timber scores 'gold', 'silver' and 'bronze' with almost all user groups. The study was conducted among appr. 1300 representatives of 6 of the most important stakeholders in the build environment, like developers/real-estate, architects, construction companies, housing companies as well as engineers. In respect to themes as fire behaviour, maintenance and pricing, timber scores – in comparison to other building materials - have not changed over the last ten years and need continuous attention. As to environmental aspects like indoor health, energy saving possibilities, prefabrication, insulation etcetera timber and timber products scores are way above the average building materials, although brick is a strong competitor in Dutch market. This opens the way for intensifying the use of timber frame housing in the Netherlands. In the Centrum Hout study the respondents were also asked about sustainable produced timber. It was found that the target groups have an increased awareness of the main certification schemes like FSC and PEFC, compared to the study of 2006. The majority of the housing corporations and architects demand the use of sustainably produced timber, however this survey also indicates that during the building process it is very hard to stick to this, as many building contractors are not yet chain-of-custody certified, contractors stick to old patterns of entrepreneurship, availability and price are used as arguments not to implement sustainably produced timber. This underlines the necessity of a program like 'Conscious with wood'.

Most rewarding is the perception of respondents on the opportunities for timber in the future. More than 90% of the respondents is confident in future possibilities either be it in new buildings, timber constructions but also in renovation of existing buildings. As the main challenge of the Dutch building sector, and therefore for the timber sector, is situated in the latter segment, building in timber has the possibility to become prominent in the near future.

Do you see opportunities for timber in the future?



Tabel 1: Opportunities timber in the future  
Source: Survey "Perception and Changes Wood", USP Marketing/Centrum Hout, May 2010, Almere Netherlands

## **8. CO<sup>2</sup>-reduction, energy saving and other developments in the build environment**

The Dutch government has stated that the coming 10 years as much as 300.000 family houses dating from the 1950 to the 1970's need to be upgraded to meet present energy performance regulations. Every few years the government increases this standard for new and existing buildings. In 2015 new build family dwellings should be zero-energy buildings. In order to improve the energy performance of the existing buildings a great deal of money is available. Timber framed building is historically perfectly suited to meet the demand for industrialised production and can cope with increasing insulation thickness easily. It is no wonder that some of the biggest pilot projects in the Netherland are currently performed in timber frame. Family houses are, in one day, transformed from gusty energy insufficient dwellings into comfortable, energy efficient houses without much disturbance to the household or neighbourhood. These positive references motivate many other principles to specifically opt for the timber.

The Netherlands have stringent building regulations. The new building regulations, presently under revision, will be containing for the first time in its existence an environmental performance module. Presently a national environmental database is developed for this purpose, from which timber could benefit a great deal.

## **9. Conclusions**

Timber has great possibilities in the Dutch market, despite the fact that timber is not part of the traditional way of building. The concern on Climate Change, government policy on green purchasing, CO<sup>2</sup>-reduction and energy savings in the build environment may greatly benefit the use of timber. Also the incorporation of environmental performance of buildings in the new building regulations opens the way for more use of timber. The present public on timber and timber products is very positive. With respect to beauty and creative designs timber is unprecedented and for environmental performance wood is also rated very high compared to other building materials. Prerequisite for future use is that timber and timber products are sourced from sustainable sources. The Dutch Action plan 'Conscious with wood', an initiative of the Royal Netherlands Timber Trade Association (NTTA) and Dutch Association of Joinery Manufacturers (DAJM) is working very hard to convince the Dutch building chain to convert to sustainable timber only and in that way securing this important prerequisite for future sustainable development in timber.