

From the Netherlands as distributor to the Netherlands as orchestrator



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The Netherlands is increasingly regarded as Europe's distributor but this role is diminishing. But if the Netherlands can start to orchestrate freight flows, then it can continue to play a leading role in the field of logistics.



Photo: Wilho Worms

DSM, Unilever and the other multinationals of this world are all starting to consider how to make their own logistics chains more sustainable. Professor Lorike Hagdorn-Van der Meijden: 'Think about the reduced amount of raw materials and number of kilometres that have to be consumed before a product gets to our plates or wardrobes. How can you bring about a reduction without incurring costs. One of the projects TNO is aiming to start is "Sustainable Supply Change of the Future". We have all kinds of models at our disposal that could play a key role in developing such a sustainable concept.'

Freight flows will change, with more and more local production taking place along with a kind of sustainable rationalisation of freight flows. That means, for instance, that all sorts of products from China intended for the east European market will no longer be transported via Rotterdam but via Constanta, for example, the Romanian Black Sea port. Hagdorn: 'Both developments will have an impact on our Dutch ports, aviation and distribution centres. Are companies adjusting to these changes yet and, if they are, how? If the Netherlands wants to retain its impact on freight flows, then it will have to shift from being a distributor to an orchestrator. In other words, moving boxes around in trucks will not be of much benefit in the long run. Which is why it would be nice to have a sort of Centre of Excellence to act as the virtual, logistics orchestrator for freight flows in Europe.'

In order to refine this vision, TNO will be talking to around fifteen companies. 'You will ultimately have to produce a real *mind shift* in this area by talking to a lot of people. We are also trying to get things moving on a small scale like the GreenRail project in which fresh cut flowers are transported by rail to Italy and ... arrive on time. Such initiatives will reveal what the economic viability is.'

4C

In the recently opened Logistics Top Institute in Breda TNO and various other knowledge institutions are collaborating with industry. TNO has proposed two of the likely six projects. 'Extended single window' is a project that focuses on developing a virtual motorway for all the freight flow data that travels along it. The idea is that all the data is given to the motorway

at source so that customs, the tax office and all the partners in the logistics network can use that data. Hagdorn says some parts of the motorway already exist but they need to be connected. 'We will be setting this up with Schiphol airport, the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam and all the contingent parties. Our knowledge partners are Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) and the University of Tilburg.'

In the 'Cross Chain Control Centre' – 4C – project logistics chains are being integrated. The Albert Heijn supermarket chain wants to have fresh products faster. Hagdorn: 'The transport company Kuehne + Nagel delivers many of the products to the AH stores but it becomes an expensive business if the trucks leave empty-handed. Now Kuehne + Nagel is taking away all the empties (returned bottles) for Albert Heijn. Two chains are connected in this way. We are working with TU Eindhoven and VU Amsterdam to find out how best to establish such a cooperation arrangement. The TNO part focuses on forming alliances, business models and the legal aspect; the latter in cooperation with Erasmus University, Rotterdam. We are also contemplating an urban 4C project.'

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