

EUR Research Information Portal

Crafts in the Netherlands

Published in:

A Cultural Economic Analysis of Craft

Publication status and date:

Published: 12/06/2019

DOI (link to publisher):

[10.1007/978-3-030-02164-1_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02164-1_11)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document License/Available under:

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

Citation for the published version (APA):

Hofland-Mol, M., & Poortvliet, M. (2019). Crafts in the Netherlands: From an Economic to a Value-Based Perspective. In A. Mignosa, & P. Kotipalli (Eds.), *A Cultural Economic Analysis of Craft* (1 ed., pp. 129-142) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02164-1_11

[Link to publication on the EUR Research Information Portal](#)

Terms and Conditions of Use

Except as permitted by the applicable copyright law, you may not reproduce or make this material available to any third party without the prior written permission from the copyright holder(s). Copyright law allows the following uses of this material without prior permission:

- you may download, save and print a copy of this material for your personal use only;
- you may share the EUR portal link to this material.

In case the material is published with an open access license (e.g. a Creative Commons (CC) license), other uses may be allowed. Please check the terms and conditions of the specific license.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this material infringes your copyright and/or any other intellectual property rights, you may request its removal by contacting us at the following email address: openaccess.library@eur.nl. Please provide us with all the relevant information, including the reasons why you believe any of your rights have been infringed. In case of a legitimate complaint, we will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website.



Crafts in the Netherlands: From an Economic to a Value-Based Perspective

Marleen Hofland-Mol and Marion Poortvliet

Introduction

The Dutch pride themselves on being prudent, internationally oriented and innovative. In such a mindset, the (creative) crafts did not appear to be something to be worthy of serious attention. At least that was the case during the neo-liberal phase of Dutch society from the eighties up until recently, say 2010. The market forces were considered to be compelling and they dictated that the crafts were of the old economy and lacked the innovation and productivity gain that the new economy required. At the same time, the art world downplayed craftsmanship as a quality. As a consequence, politicians were keen to dismantle the minimal infrastructure that was in place to support the crafts; educational

M. Hofland-Mol (✉)
Albeda College, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: m.hofland@albeda.nl

M. Poortvliet
Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands
e-mail: marion@craftscouncil.nl

institutions, which focused on teaching specific crafts, lost resources and attention and some were forced to close down. In the meantime, the Dutch did not seem to care about their crafts. Delfts blue, the icon of Dutch crafts, was made for foreign tourists; the Dutch had lost interest, as they did for so many of their traditional crafts.

Around 2010, the Dutch society appears to change its mind about the crafts. The secretary of education expressed new interest in the crafts, a platform on the crafts was established consisting of several prominent Dutch people, in 2013 the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen dedicated a large exhibition *Hand Made* to the crafts, and in 2012 the Dutch crafts council was founded. Companies and professionals adopt the term “craftsmanship” in their public stance, thus expressing the public appreciation of skilled work.

It is early to tell whether the Dutch are prepared to embrace the crafts as an important quality in their society. The signs are positive, at least for those who care about crafts and craftsmanship in the Netherlands. In this chapter, we assess the state of craftsmanship in the Netherlands. Our focus is on what is defined in the introduction as creative craftsmanship and pay some attention to cutting edge craftsmanship. Accordingly, we leave aside regular craftsmanship even though it makes up the lion share of the craft sector in the Netherlands. The reason we do so is that the story of the creative crafts sector is the most telling when it comes to an assessment of the crafts in the Netherlands.

The Situation of the Crafts in the Netherlands

The concept of “crafts economy” (SER 2013, p. 13) was introduced in the Netherlands in 2009 by the industrial board of crafts, *Hoofdbedrijfschap Ambachten* (HBA). In doing so the board intended to raise awareness about the importance of crafts for the Dutch economy. This strategy seems to have worked as in 2013 the Dutch Social Economic Council SER (2013) was asked to advise the Dutch ministry of Economics, as well as the ministries of Social Affairs and Employment and Education, Culture and Science on the crafts economy in the Netherlands. In order to do so, they developed a working definition on

the concept of crafts. According to their report, a profession or activity in the crafts sector should include a combination of the following elements:

- Competent, manual and skilled creation;
- Predominantly educated through practice;
- With proficiency as main value;
- Practiced as an economic activity. (SER 2013, p. 12).

De Kort and Van Hulle (2015) give a useful overview of the field of crafts in the Netherlands. They use nine clusters and differentiate them into thirty-six former used HBA-branches. As a result, the field of crafts is more sharply demarcated with the various professions being bundled into specific clusters (Table 1).

Up to this point, it can be argued that there is no consensus on what specifically the creative crafts sector in the Netherlands entails. UNCTAD and UNPD (2010) confirm that defining and categorizing the arts and crafts is a complicated task. Their study recognizes the need for a common understanding as the arts and crafts sector plays a crucial

Table 1 Crafts economy, clusters and model professions

Cluster crafts economy	Model professions
Outfitting/finishing	Plasterers, painters and decorators
Construction	Carpenters, pavers, glazers and roofers
Creative industry/communication	Designers (interior, clothing, products, websites), jewellers and ceramists
Building maintenance crafts	Chimney sweepers and window cleaners
Health and beauty care	Hairdressers, beauticians, dental technicians, opticians and hearing care professionals
Installation/electrical engineering	Plumbers, electrical engineers, ICT-mechanic and telecom mechanics
Metal, wood and other production crafts	Welders, toolmakers, furnishers, sewers, hat and shoemakers, tailors and saddle makers
Repayment crafts	Car, bicycle and airplane mechanics
Nutrition	Butchers, bakers and fishmongers

Source Kort, J. de and R. van Hulle (2015)

part in the economy even though the field is frequently overlooked and cut off from public policies. At the request of the HBA and the SVGB, the Foundation for Vocational Training for Healthcare and Crafts (now the SBB), a group of cultural economist tried to place creative craftsmanship in the Netherlands in the international context. Klamer et al. (2013) define the various disciplines of arts and crafts sector further. They distinguish unskilled handwork and craftsmanship. To attain craftsmanship, training and constant practice are necessary conditions. They furthermore distinguish “utilitarian crafts” and “creative crafts” where the first serve a concrete and practical purpose and the second engage in the production of “unique objects, each with a distinctive quality and expressing the creativity of the maker” (idem, p. 11).

Figure 1 visualizes the different types of crafts creating a comprehensive context of the crafts field. Both the UNCTAD and UNPD (2010) and Klamer et al. (2013) incorporate the design category in their framework. In the latter study, this results in the concept of “cutting edge crafts”. This is where contemporary crafts, arts and design come together. Craftspeople belonging to this group explore new grounds,

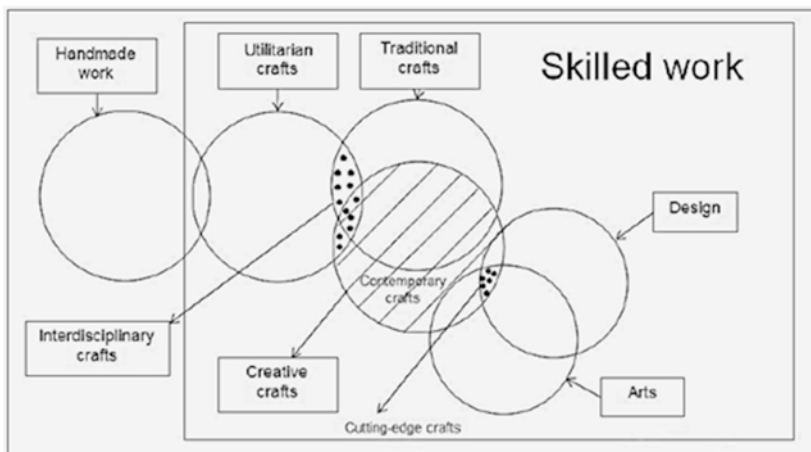


Fig. 1 The definition of utilitarian crafts versus other crafts and skills (Source Klamer et al. 2013)

develop new practices and form a new range of artefacts. This description could apply to designers or artists (Klamer 2013).

Knowing how to frame the various concepts of craftsmanship in the Netherlands what can we say about the contribution of creative crafts to the country's economy? First, professional knowledge and knowledge about technical innovations are increasingly important for the production of innovative products. The crafts economy is, therefore, perceived to be a creative sector and part of the knowledge economy which has been growing over the last twenty years (SER 2013). Second, crafts are of great importance for innovation and growth in other parts of the economy providing specialized components and fabrics. Third, one of the most outstanding qualities of craftsmen is their ability to provide individual custom-made products, like handmade wedding rings. The expectation is that the demand for well-crafted goods will grow, as people with increasing incomes and social status will desire goods and services of distinctive and authentic quality, and will be willing to pay the price. In creative craft branches like wooden furniture and ceramics growth is expected as the interest for these products shifts from functional, mass production to expressive, experience products and services (SOS Vakmanschap 2012). Fourth, crafts business are important for social cohesion as they provide work and local products. Research shows that "crafts shops" contribute in a positive way to the quality of life because locals meet each other in those creative places (PBL 2010). And lastly, besides the social and economic values mentioned above, the cultural value of specific craftsmanship needs to be mentioned as well. The diversity of craftsmanship is of enormous cultural value. As is the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage where specialized craftsmanship is essential. This contributes to the image of the Netherlands and has its influence on tourism and the location climate.

The crafts are an important economic sector. The Dutch crafts economy, broadly defined to include utilitarian and creative crafts, offered work to 815,636 persons in 2013. This equals 728,124 FTE (fulltime equivalent) and 10% of the working labour force. The labour is performed in 42,000 enterprises. This corresponds to approximately 30% of all companies in the country. These enterprises have a total turnover of roughly 165 billion euros and contribute 60 billion to the Gross National Product.

The average age in the sector is 41 year, which is the identical level as the average age in the Dutch labour market overall. Employees in the Dutch crafts sector earn €26,100, net on average per year per FTE, a little less than the average net income per FTE in the Dutch labour market of €28,000, per year (De Kort and Van Hulle 2015).

The crafts are part of the cluster creative industry and communication. De Kort and Van Hulle (2015) studied this cluster and identified the following characteristics. The cluster is perceived as being entrepreneurial, highly educated and growing. 96% of the work force has completed an MBO education. Between 2008 and 2013 the employment grew by 9%. However, one has to take into account that the production of movies, the development of software, architects and advertising agency all are taken into account in the cluster of the creative industry and communication. Whereas creative crafts like the manufacturing of clothes, shoes, bags and furniture are counted as belonging to the cluster metal, wood and other production crafts.

And whilst the cluster creative industry and communication appears to be entrepreneurial and innovative, other studies argue that the Dutch arts and crafts sector is in need of more entrepreneurship (De Kok et al. 2009; Janssen and Gankema 2012; Klamer et al. 2013). The SER (2013) suggests in its report that entrepreneurship and craftsmanship has to go hand in hand. In practice, the craft micro-entrepreneur finds it hard and demanding to combine craftsmanship and entrepreneurship on a daily basis. Furthermore, as merely craftsmanship is not enough the SER mentions a set of factors which are relevant to become successful in the arts and crafts field, such as being creative and innovative in addition to commercial thinking. Moreover, the awareness of new technological trends and materials is perceived as lacking, even though it is seen as an essential part of the craftsman's toolkit.

Policies in Place and the Role of Institutions

The Netherlands is a corporatist country. That means that the Dutch congregate, collaborate and form societies and councils when possible. When the Dutch feel threatened, they seek others to collaborate.

Guilds have given way to semi-governmental organizations. Several such organizations were founded to provide collaborative settings for the craft sector. For instance, the HBA is a semi-public organization that organizes and represents the crafts sector. Although a far cry from the intricate infrastructure of the German crafts sector, the HBA gave the Dutch crafts a common voice.

However, the neo-liberal mindset that overtook Dutch politics and bureaucracies in the eighties led to the dismantling of corporatist institutions, including the HBA which was abolished in 2015. The idea was apparently that the crafts better be left to the market.

In recent years several private initiatives seem to attest to a revaluation of the crafts in the Netherlands. Amongst these is the foundation of the Crafts Council Netherlands (CCN), intended to be a driver, concept developer and a platform for an infrastructure that connects and sustains the craft heritage with the enhancement of the “culture and economy of making” (Over CNN n.d. CNN). A grass root organization, the Nederlandse Gilde van Goudsmiden (the Dutch guild of goldsmiths), experienced a sharp increase in members from 2010 until 2015. These developments seem to indicate an increased awareness of the importance of crafts in the Netherlands.

Likewise, the Dutch government does value its creative industries. However, with the transfer of craft industries to low-wages countries, the production of artefacts disappeared resulting in a dramatic decrease in assignments for designers. They could not realize their ideas no longer resulting in designers taking matters in their own hands: designs were produced on their own account, independent of any industry. This development resulted in the formation of Dutch Design around 1990. The designers thus organized production under their own management and promoted their own label: Droog Design. The production of the artefacts was done in small editions abroad, where specialized workshop could offer high-quality craftsmanship for reasonable prices.

At the end of the twentieth century, this development takes another turn as designers turn against the existing production methods as they allegedly stand in the way of innovation. They start-up their own workshops and produce in-house. Currently, Dutch designers, together with the industry, create innovative making processes and products where

not only the design or concept but also the material forms are the point of departure. Successful “maker-designers” create value due to their way of working. As a result, the market for local products is growing. And due to their pioneering role in the innovation process the Dutch government has pointed out the creative industry as one of the nine top sectors to invest in, in order to secure and improve the quality of living (Advies Topteam Creatieve Industrie 2011). With the ambition to “become the most creative economy of Europe in 2020” (p. 1) the Dutch government recognizes the need for nourishing creative entrepreneurial desire in education programmes. This is not shown when policies enhancing the creative crafts are concerned, hampering the sector as a whole but most importantly on crucial areas as innovation, entrepreneurship and education. An obvious example is the high VAT tariff of 21% which is used on crafted products when they are produced in series and not being recognized as artefacts, which gives the maker the right to use the significantly lower tariff of 6%.

In addition to the minor role of institutions and the government a deeper cause of the decline of the creative crafts in the Netherlands is the lack of appreciation for creating with the hands. This low level of appreciation seems to be deeply rooted in the Dutch society where merchant and recently cognitive skills are especially valued. This is quite different from other countries like for example Japan where masters in crafts are highly appreciated and where crafts are valued by the government. The same goes for countries that surround the Netherlands. Germany, especially, is able to sustain a culture of making and of craftsmanship, with a distinct respect for the unique human capacity to make, to create (Klamer et al. 2013).

Education System

We can argue that from 1950 onwards a large number of creative crafts like textile technics, leather works, glass blowing and ceramics have not been performed on a professional level in the Netherlands any longer. The manufacturing industry was re-allocated to low-wage countries and with this development, the transmission of creative techniques

disappeared. Moreover, without economic relevance there did not seem to be grounds to teach crafts skills. As what is the use of teaching weaving if one cannot become a weaver anymore?

To understand the development and characteristics of the Dutch education programmes on arts and crafts, a clear perspective of the education structure in the Netherlands is essential. The Dutch education system consist of 8 years of primary education followed by 4, 5, or 6 years of secondary education and 2–6 years of higher education (depending on the type and sort of education). Table 2 gives a schematic overview of the qualification system in the Netherlands.

With the exception of one Associate Degree course of two years, all arts and crafts education programmes are level 3, vocational training, but mainly level 4, specialist training, so-called senior secondary vocational education programmes. For both programmes learning in a professional practice environment, like an atelier or workshop, forms an essential part of the programme varying from 20 up to 60% of the

Table 2 The Dutch qualification in relation to the European qualification system

EQF	NLQF	Dutch qualification	
8	8	Doctorate	
7	7	Master	
6	6	Bachelor	
5	5	Associate Degree	
4	4+	VWO (University preparatory education)	
4	4	MBO 4 (senior secondary vocational education and training)	HAVO (senior general secondary education)
3	3	MBO 3 (senior secondary vocational education and training)	
2	2	MBO 2 (senior secondary vocational education and training)	VMBO 2 (preparatory secondary vocational education)
1	1	MBO 1 (senior secondary vocational education and training)	VMBO 1 (preparatory secondary vocational education)

education time (Nuffic 2014). The qualification and examination terms of vocational education programmes are identical nationwide and developed by the Cooperation Organization for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (Over-SBB n.d. SBB) in cooperation with the business field. The SBB has a legal duty to maintain the education qualification structures as well as accredit and coach work place companies. Furthermore, they are the advisor for both the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs along with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on vocational education and the labour market. Moreover, different from bachelor and university studies in the Netherlands, the SBB will only consider starting an educational programme when there is a demand from the occupational field.

There are ten education institutes offering programmes under the umbrella of “creative craftsman” in arts and crafts in the Netherlands of which two are Regional Education Centres (ROC’s) and three vocational schools (vakschool). With their regional function the ROC’s offer a wide variety of mainly general education programmes at various locations depending on the regional needs and population. Vocational schools, like the Wood and Furniture College (HMC) or Sint Lucas, are small education institutes offering programmes in a specific field. In her research for the SBB, Voncken (2014) concludes that one of the main features of sustainable craftsmanship is the quality of the educational institutes. However, quality often seems to be compromised in the struggle for survival. This makes finding sustainable, long-term solutions difficult. Table 3 provides an overview of all level 4 Dutch education institutes providing arts and crafts education programmes.

The study of De Kort and Van Hulle (2015) shows that about 70% of the people working in the craft industry have an intermediate professional diploma (in Dutch “MBO”, level four). Almost 13% have a bachelor. As Van der Wel and Schuring (2009) show, in line with the descriptors defined in the European Qualifications Framework (European Commission n.d. EGF), level four students acquire a range of skills to create solutions for specific problems in a certain field. Still, “demonstrating mastery and innovation in order to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialise field of work or study” (European Commission n.d. EGF) are skills developed in a bachelor,

Table 3 Overview of the institutes offering level 4 arts and crafts education programmes in the Netherlands

Educational institute	Arts and crafts programmes	Categorization
Zadkine (Vakschool Schoonhoven)	Creative craftsman (gold- and silversmithing)	ROC
Sint Lucas	Creative craftsman (ceramics, glass, leather and textile)	Vakschool
Hout en Meubilerij College (HMC)	Wood and furniture Creative craftsman (wood, leather and textile)	Vakschool
Cibap	Creative craftsman (wood and textile)	Vakschool
Friesland College	Creative craftsman (wood, ceramics and textile)	ROC
Koning Willem I College	Wood and furniture	ROC
ROC Deltion College	Wood and furniture	ROC
ROC Midden Nederland	Wood and furniture	ROC
ROC Twente	Wood and furniture	ROC
Summa College	Wood and furniture	ROC

Source www.beroepinbeeld.nl

level 6, course. This is important as the vast majority of Dutch arts and crafts students merely follow a level four programme, occasionally followed by a level 5 Arts and Crafts programme (Nuffic 2014). If creative crafts students would like to widen their horizon they should consider enrolling in a bachelor course arts or design at several Dutch academies. A study by Janssen and Gankema (2012) suggested that the lack of a bachelor arts and crafts programme in the Netherlands results in some programmes offering a level 4+ course. In their education manifesto, the Crafts Council England (2014) calls for the promotion of world-class higher education and research in crafts. Klamer et al. (2013) propose an extension for multiple creative crafts education disciplines to include a master title in order to promote these fields and to develop the sharing of skills and knowledge.

We distinguish two directions in the Dutch creative crafts education field. First, there is the training for “creative craftsman” at the middle professional level (MBO in Dutch) that prepares students to become independent specialists and entrepreneurs who design, make and sell artefacts.

In these programmes, students learn new digital technics next to traditional skills to develop traditional and innovative products. They become identifiable craftspeople like goldsmith or furniture maker. The other direction is design. Art and design academies, that succeeded craftwork schools, are part of the higher education, level six programmes. The last fifty years these schools have changed from product and discipline minded to educating creative makers and thinkers according to societal themes like sustainability, healthcare and social amenities. Some institutions, like Sint Lucas and the Design Academy Eindhoven, have succeeded in fruitful collaborations. Their focus is on design and less on making. Students who graduate are designers and lack a clear professional identity.

Identification of Issues and Shortcomings and Possible Future Policy Directions

One might say the creative crafts evolve around the pillars: economy, culture, society and education. Until the start of the twentieth century, the Dutch seemed to emphasize economic value and therefore were downplaying the importance of the creative craft sector. However, along with the rise of grass root initiatives like the Dutch Crafts Council, the Dutch Guild of Goldsmiths and renowned crafts museums like the Textile Museum in Tilburg, a new awareness of a more value-based approach appears to emerge. In such an approach it is not only economic values but also social and cultural values that get the attention. It is the recognition of both the artefact as well as the skills of the master and their importance for Dutch culture and quality of life as a whole.

To achieve this all four mentioned pillars need to be connected and valued equally. There seems to be a need for cooperation, which is a complicated task as the arts and crafts sector is fragmented with numerous niches. Moreover, the creative crafts worker finds balancing craftsmanship and entrepreneurship especially demanding. However, with a grounded definition on creative crafts, and “cutting edge crafts” (Klamer et al. 2013) in particular, the various crafts could be specified and

placed in an international perspective as suggested by the UNTAD and UNPD (2010). This way policies to reinforce the Dutch arts and crafts could be set into place. For example, a more crafts friendly VAT-policy or the reintroduction of a compulsory contribution for all creative crafts workers would reassure investments in overarching issues and research.

Furthermore, the pillar of education needs overall enforcement. There is a need for specialized craft skills and knowledge. Even though the need for crafts education has been put on the agenda there is no balanced and integrated education programme. Opportunities to learn about craft and making need to be offered throughout all stages of education. Furthermore, a workshop is needed not only for the crafts worker, but also a laboratory where scientists and designers can do research. Next to this a master title will contribute to the creative crafts economy making craft workers highly skilled, innovative, good promoters and teachers. Finally, introducing a master title at bachelor level might help improve the quality of creative crafts in Netherlands and making it cutting edge.

References

- Advies Topteam Creatieve Industrie. 2011. Creatieve industrie in topvorm. Retrieved from Rijksoverheid <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2011/06/17/creatieve-industrie-in-topvorm>.
- Crafts Council England. 2014. *Our Future Is in the Making: An Education Manifesto for Craft and Making*. London: Crafts Council England.
- de Kok, J.M.P., M. Mooibroek, F. Pleijster, and A.R.M. Wennekers. 2009. *Innovatief ondernemerschap in detailhandel, horeca en ambacht*. Zoetermeer: Economisch Instituut voor Midden-en kleinbedrijf (EIM).
- de Kort, J., and R. van Hulle. 2015. *Structuuronderzoek ambachtseconomie 2015*. Delft: ABF Research.
- European Commission. n.d. EQF. Retrieved May 21, 2017, from <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/nl/node/1440>.
- Janssen, H., and H. Gankema. 2012. *De toekomst van het creatief vakmanschap. De Opleiding als motor voor duurzame innovaties in eeuwenoude ambachten*. 's-Hertogenbosch: KPC groep.

- Klamer, A., T. Fjeldsted, K. Goto, L. Jiang, P. Kotipalli, and A. Mignosa. 2013. *Crafting Culture; Final Report*. Rotterdam: Stichting Economie en Cultuur.
- Nuffic. 2014. *Het onderwijssysteem van Nederland beschreven*. The Hague: Nuffic.
- Over CCN. n.d. In CNN. Retrieved March 18, 2018, from <https://crafts-council.nl/en/over-ons/>.
- Over SBB. n.d. In SBB. Retrieved May 21, 2017, from <https://www.s-bb.nl/over-sbb>.
- Planbureau voor leefomgeving. 2010. *Bedrijvigheid en leefbaarheid in stedelijke woonwijken*. Den Haag/Bilthoven: Planbureau voor leefomgeving (PBL).
- Sociaal-Economische Raad. 2013. *Handmade in Holland*. Den Haag: Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER).
- UNCTAD, and UNPD. 2010. Creative Economy Report: Creative Economy a Feasible Development Option. New York. Retrieved from http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditctab20103_en.pdf.
- Vakmanschap, S.O.S. 2012. *Monitor SOS Vakmanschap – editie 2012*. Utrecht: SOS Vakmanschap.
- Van der Wel, M., and F. Schuring. 2009. *Welk spoor kiest u? Waarderingskader voor het bevorderen van ondernemerschap*. The Hague: LEI Wageningen UR.
- Voncken, E. 2014. *Schakels naar duurzaamheid*. Utrecht: Bureau Turf.