

Anna van den Dijssel – Knaapen

Sustainability as standard: Knaapen's approach

At Knaapen, sustainability is no longer about a separate department or an isolated project. It has become an integral part of the organizational culture. Anna has now been working as a sustainability advisor at Knaapen for three years, focusing specifically on the transition to sustainable materials within renovation projects. Together with her colleague, she writes recommendations for housing corporations to encourage them to choose sustainable materials. "We do this even when it's not explicitly requested," she explains. "This way, we also encourage corporations that are not yet actively engaged in sustainable material use. Implementation will naturally follow at some point, we are convinced of that."

Although Knaapen has consciously chosen to have a separate sustainability department, the philosophy is widely spread throughout the organization. "There are two of us in the department, but 25 colleagues have been trained as sustainability ambassadors. They are spread across all departments and actively contribute to our sustainability program." This approach is bearing fruit. "It's going fast. More and more project managers are incorporating sustainability into their work." If you don't want to work sustainably, you really shouldn't work at Knaapen" says one of the project managers.

An important aspect of sustainable renovation is the use of data. In practice, however, this is not yet self-evident. "There are few obligations regarding data and sustainability, such as the MPG. As a result, many housing corporations rely on their gut feeling. They want to do what feels right, but at the same time, they also want to know what they are investing in. That's when data suddenly becomes important." Anna therefore uses BCI data, such as MKI scores and future scenarios. "It's a useful tool for comparisons, but making a full calculation is still difficult. Interpreting the figures remains a challenge."

According to Anna, the demand from housing corporations is shifting. "We see more and more corporations showing interest in circular and sustainable solutions. In Eindhoven, there are real frontrunners, including Trudo, but she also sees 'Thuis and Mooiland as drivers. They challenge us annually with circular pilots in which we apply as many sustainable materials as possible. But there are also corporations that are just starting out. Sometimes we suggest it in a recommendation and they say: 'Oh, that might be fun to try sometime.' So it's very varied."

The biggest challenge remains the price. "We are constantly looking for alternatives that do not incur extra costs, and those already exist. But if you really want to work differently, there is often an additional cost. At the moment, cost control is the highest priority in making homes more sustainable, outside of the pilots."



Still, Anna is optimistic about the future. "I see a lot of potential in materials like wood wool and flax. If the price drops or the difference becomes minimal, they will become the standard. It's often a matter of experience. For example, a maintenance contractor found it exciting to work with them. But after two times, he said: 'Whatever, let's just do it.' Now it's the standard." In short: working sustainably is not only necessary, but also feasible and logical.