

Strategic Advisor at 'Dunea' (Dutch drinking water and nature conservation organization)

- Which academic career did you imagine when you started to study this Sustainable Development Master's Program?

Prior to this Master's Program I studied Water Management (combination of aquatic ecotechnology, civil engineering and spatial planning). At the start of the SD Program I imagined a career in the Dutch or international water sector focused on sustainability.

- Where are you currently working and what is your scope of activity?

Since 2018 I work for the Dutch drinking water and nature conservation organization called 'Dunea' in the province of South-Holland.

As a strategic advisor focused on sustainability, innovation and aquathermal energy I helped develop our current energy strategy with the main goal of becoming a climate neutral organization by 2025.

I also work for the subsidiary company of Dunea called 'Dunea Warmte & Koude'. We formed this new company this summer specifically to utilize thermal energy from our river- and drinking water assets (called 'aquathermie' in Dutch). Aquathermie is heat and cold recovered from different water sources and can play an important role in the Dutch energy transition. Research shows that aquathermal energy could meet up to 50% of the heating needs of Dutch urban areas. Aquathermal energy is often used in combination with an Aquifer Thermal Energy Storage (ATES) system. An ATES-system uses underground aquifers to store thermal energy across the seasons.

- Did the study program help you getting the job, and does it help you doing the job?

To apply for my current job, I needed a Master's degree. This is why it definitely helped me getting my current job =).

It also helps me doing the work I do today. Even though I learn(ed) a lot on the job, the study program helped me understand and see the bigger (and international) picture. Nowadays I am mostly focused on the Dutch energy transition and it definitely helps to look across borders for inspiration.

- How did you find your job and how long did it take you to reach your current position?

During my time as a water management student, I worked as an intern at an Indonesian harbour and at a National Park on the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius. While writing my thesis for the SD program I was an intern at a consultancy firm focussed on innovation management in Amsterdam.

After I graduated from the SD program, I started a traineeship in the Netherlands called the National Water Traineeship. During this traineeship I mainly worked for Dunea, but I also got the opportunity to work for other organizations in the Dutch water sector (e.g. water boards, municipalities and lobby organizations).

While the internships were poorly paid, the traineeship paid a competitive salary.

After this traineeship I got hired by Dunea for my current position.

- Would you call your work varied and interdisciplinary?

Very. Water is at the basis of a healthy planet, society and economy. The Dutch drinking water sector is very well known for making affordable and reliable drinking water in a sustainable manner. However, we face more and more challenges to get the job done due to local and global trends. This means we have to continually come up with technological innovations to purify water while trying to improve and protect the quality of our water bodies (which can prove to be quite difficult since the Netherlands is situated at the end of some of the major European rivers).

- 3 tips you would like to pass on to future Sustainer graduates how to tackle their first job hunt?

1. Think outside of the box. Nowadays, almost all organizations are investing in CSR and decreasing their climate impact.
2. If you can, do an internship to gain some experience and find out what you are good at and like doing.
3. Do a traineeship to kickstart your career. Recently, the Dutch National Water Traineeship also started an international programme called the 'European Junior Water Programme'. Don't worry if you are new to the world of (sustainable) water management. You will catch up in no time!

- Willem van Wijk