



Mr. Hendrik Willem Johan Ovink

Special Envoy for International Water Affairs,
The Netherlands

Profile

Henk Ovink was appointed in 2015 by the Dutch Cabinet as the first Special Envoy for International Water Affairs. As the Ambassador for Water, he is responsible for advocating water awareness around the world, building institutional capacity and coalitions amongst governments, multilateral organizations, private sector and NGO's, and initiating innovative approaches to address the world's pressing needs on water. "Worldwide, water is the number one global risk, the connecting challenge across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and our best opportunity for inclusive and comprehensive action!" Ovink is also Sherpa to the UN / World Bank High Level Panel on Water.

Henk Ovink served on President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force where he led the long term innovation, resilience and rebuilding efforts. He developed and led the 'Rebuild by Design' competition and initiated the National Disaster Resilience Competition. Before joining the Task Force Ovink was both Acting Director General of Spatial Planning and Water Affairs and Director National Spatial Planning for the Netherlands.

Henk teaches at Harvard GSD, the London School of Economics and the University of Groningen. His book - written together with Jelte Boeijenga - "Too Big. Rebuild by Design: A Transformative Approach to Climate Change" explores his climate and water work for the Obama Administration. In January 2018 Henk Ovink was awarded for his 'transformative global water work' an honorary membership from the Royal Institute of Engineers of the Netherlands.

Topic Title

Transformative Urban Climate Action By Design: Learning from Rebuild by Design NY and Water as Leverage Asia

Topic Abstract

As with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, we know "complex challenges call for truly comprehensive and inclusive approaches and truly transformative and innovative solutions". We need to unravel the different interdependent demands and connect these in inspiring and sustainable pathways.

For this approach and these results, we need design: architecture, urban design and landscape architecture design is about both the process and the outcome. In addressing the impacts of climate change, design is inclusive, seeks synergies, looks ahead and prepares us and our planet for an uncertain future: flexible, adaptive and resilient.

Design is comprehensive by nature, cutting across disciplines, uniting rather than dividing. Once we understand dependencies - how poverty and health relate to poor infrastructure, how urbanization touches upon the need for food, energy and water, ignoring jurisdictional boundaries - a design approach emerges that integrates this understanding, and identifies opportunities to solve problems holistically.

Appealing to the imagination but grounded in analysis, design enables us to sketch new futures and determine the steps that will get us there, linking today's conditions with tomorrow's possibilities. A comprehensive plan consists of real, innovative projects to implement and inspire others, kickstarting development and catalyzing change. A truly integrated design connects social, cultural, ecological and economic challenges. It connects regional interdependencies, local needs and community assets, not by a trade-off of interests - that is, not by compromising - but by bridging gaps between quality and safety, between economy, ecology and society. Integrated solutions add value across sectors, across scales and through time, building a sustainable business case.

This process of design is inherently inclusive. Design challenges the divisions of our daily lives by drawing all interests, all aspects, all questions and all people into a common understanding and a new deal. It invites us all to contribute: our different needs and demands, our unspoken dreams and ideas. By making the envisioned tactile and the ambitious practical, the design approach increases everyone's imaginative capacity and helps us make the future tangible and achievable. In this way, design turns complexity into compelling and inspirational ideas, and translates societal issues into shared ambitions and inspiring narratives about our future.

Design helps us tell each other stories about what could be - stories that convince, seduce and make us all believe in them. At this level, design is truly inspirational and aspirational, which makes it political. People who have participated in this process will fight for it and what it promises them. This is why we developed "Rebuild By Design" - to tackle the future and escape the past with vision, by design and in collaboration.

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