

22. Nike
European
Logistics
Center



The green
Swoosh

recentre



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Heidi Gillemot
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If you have driven on the E313, you must have seen the Nike wind turbines near Tessenderlo. The company itself does not produce anything - apart from green energy - but is a logistic transfer centre. The daily traffic of shoes, clothes and accessories between the 200 factories that manufacture the Nike products and 30.000 customers spread over 55 countries is not a small logistic tour de force. The American sports giant also wants to do this as sustainably as possible and deal with People, Profit and Planet in a considerate way. Heidi Gillemot, Sustainable business & innovation manager highlights a few important elements in the many sustainability actions.

All Nike shoes, clothes and accessories you see in the shops in the extended Europe (West, Central and East) or WE and EEC - have transited at Nike in Laakdal. The European logistics centre is an important link in the huge chain of the multinational. A link of proportionate size and responsibility, as emphasised in the company policy.

Thinking about cost saving has an ecological impact and vice versa.

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“As a logistic player we try to carry out our task as efficiently as possible with the added concern to keep our ecological footprint as low as possible. That is a concern of the Nike group, but also a responsibility of each of the company elements”, says Heidi Gillemot. New targets are set annually to further reduce CO2 emissions for example and at the same time many initiatives are taken at the level of the logistics centre and its staff.

Firstly, there is the logistic chain itself, the core business of the company in Laakdal and an important attention point. “All products arrive here by container and to reduce the CO2 impact 96% of our inbound is shipped via water”, says Heidi Gillemot referring to the strategic implanting of the company along the Albert canal. Nike also developed a special tool to closely monitor all the CO2 emissions of

the whole logistic traffic. “The figures contribute to improvements. Progress is constantly striving.” Anything that leaves the company is controlled in the same way and dispatched preferably multi modal, such as for example by combining rail and water transport.

“You can never exclude road transport, but you can cleverly optimise it. There is a lot of potential in that. We are not transporters ourselves, but we do notice that the companies we work with want to think along our lines. Our transport partner Arcese for example has developed a container trailer that immediately leaves and gets on the train as a trailer. Not only good for saving time and increasing efficiency, but removing the intermediate link also has a positive influence on the ecological footprint”, points out Heidi Gillemot referring to the indirect effects of ecological business management.

The containers which all products are transported in are also subject to innovation because if you can transport more products one small intervention at such a scale has a gigantic effect. You can see an appropriate example at the loading and unloading bay of the Nikelaan, where a minimum of pallets is loaded in the lorry. We make sure that trailers have as high a filling degree as possible by a combination of packaging and a sliding loading strip. The loading surface slides out which means loading is optimal and you can stack from the loading surface to the roof. If you can transport more in one load, you can save a transport in time. Nike wants to be a leader, both internationally and locally, with a strategic vision where economic and ecological profit ideas reinforce each other. Thinking about cost saving has an ecological impact and vice versa.

“The thousands of square metres of our company must all be lit. But some places in the factory do not need the same strong lighting. By only placing frames where necessary and adapting the strength of the light according to requirements you save quite a lot. Places where your storage is are less lit than the corridors or places where

people are working. An obvious action that saved a huge lot of energy", continues Heidi Gillemot . Nike was simultaneously very aware that green energy is more than respect for nature. "Such investments must be well thought out. If possible in the design phase of the building with the help of a green architect. We were able to do that for the new part of the enterprise, with solar panels and eco acclimatisation and the like. But a wind turbines park requires maintenance and we haven't got that expertise ourselves". The wind turbines park involved an investment of almost 15 million euro and it is fully managed by the German expert in the matter, SeeBa.

Sustainability at Nike is also complemented with social responsibility where sports are considered an important means of social integration. There are numerous initiatives intended for the direct and indirect support of under privileged groups.

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The 6 wind turbines provide a maximum of 24 gigawatt hours energy, that is as much as the use of 10.000 homes. "Nike was the first company that is fully self-sufficient for its energy use, but we also know that the communication about it is important", whereby she not only points out the information panel at the access road of the company where the precise wattage of the generated green energy is indicated. "Communication with your neighbourhood is essential too. Wind turbines in our immediate surroundings, that's not a small thing. That's why we went to Germany with all the surrounding residents to see how it works and which effects it entails and to clarify possible misconceptions."

Another important effort of Nike fits in the durable mobility plan 'Moving Forward' which stimulates employees to 'car pool' or use a bicycle. "We have lots of initiatives that are fruitful. However, the great problem is opening up to public transport, which is why we actively promote to



To Walk Again © Nike



have less employees driving to work by car. Stimulating car pooling by bringing people in contact with each other also has social advantages. The commitment is rewarded with a monthly car pool pass. That wins them a parking space nearer to the entrance and exit of the company. That might sound strange, but when changing shifts and everyone wanting to leave by car it makes a difference of easily 20 minutes", says Heidi Gillemot.

All products arrive here by container and to reduce CO2 impact 96% of our inbound is shipped via water.

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Cycling traffic is stimulated by providing company bicycles, in the meantime there already are 157 cycles of which 22 electric cycles with their own loading points in the company parking lot. "As a leading company we are convinced that our 1.500 employees must be made aware of our shared responsibility. The role of a pioneer not only applies to Nike, but to the Nike employees too. Other companies can be inspired, employees incite their family and friends to do the same... Even though these are but small links, it all contributes to social change. Ultimately the staff will come up with initiatives themselves, from printing on eco paper, no bin under your desk but central containers to sort waste, fair trade coffee, sports during the lunch break, collections for charities, it all contributes to a green community feeling that is already very strong here. Sustainability is a corporate responsibility where you should give people the freedom to take initiatives themselves too."

Sustainability at Nike is also complemented with social responsibility where sports are considered an important means of social integration. There are numerous initiatives intended for the direct and indirect support of under privileged groups. "Sustainability is also about human assets and we want to invest in that, not in cash but through reinforcing the social cohesion or by placing sports facilities at



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Windmill and solar panels
© Nike

the service of those people and the community.” Lots of initiatives can be listed such as a youth integration sports camp by To Walk Again and Nike (with support of CERA). Charities are supported by donations and facilities but also by giving staff the freedom to do voluntary work, according to the 50-50 rule whereby the employee invests part of his/her time and Nike deals with the other half.

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Christophe De Schauvre for REcentre
Interviewee / Heidi Gillemot, Sustainable business & innovation manager

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Sector • Logistics

Year of foundation • 1994

Number of employees • 1.500

Turnover (2009) • 5 billion dollar