

Atlas of our Living Environment

Providing information for the public and professionals

Who is the Atlas intended for?

Citizens believe that their living environment plays an important role in health and want to make their own choices about their living environment. Professionals want reliable information about the quality of the living environment for their research and policy development. Municipal and provincial authorities, environmental agencies, municipal health services and central and local governments all have a lot of information about the living environment, often in the form of maps. Governments have a statutory duty to make this information available in a transparent way (e.g. Public Sector Information, Convention of Aarhus, Government Information (Public Access Act)). Also, governments are interested in hearing about citizens' experiences and receiving information from the public.

What is the Atlas?

The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) initiated the Atlas of our Living Environment on behalf of the Dutch government. The Atlas is a digital system that gathers, integrates and combines information about the physical living environment and tailors its accessibility according to a specific need. Where possible, information about the environment is translated into information about health. The Atlas also provides information on aspects that have a positive impact on health, such as quiet areas and green spaces.

Similar initiatives, such as SEIS and WISE, are being developed across Europe. The aim of these initiatives is to improve the digital accessibility and harmonization of information about the environment. The Atlas also needs harmonized data and metadata, which is why it ties in with European directives and information systems and is an inspiring example of how things can be done.

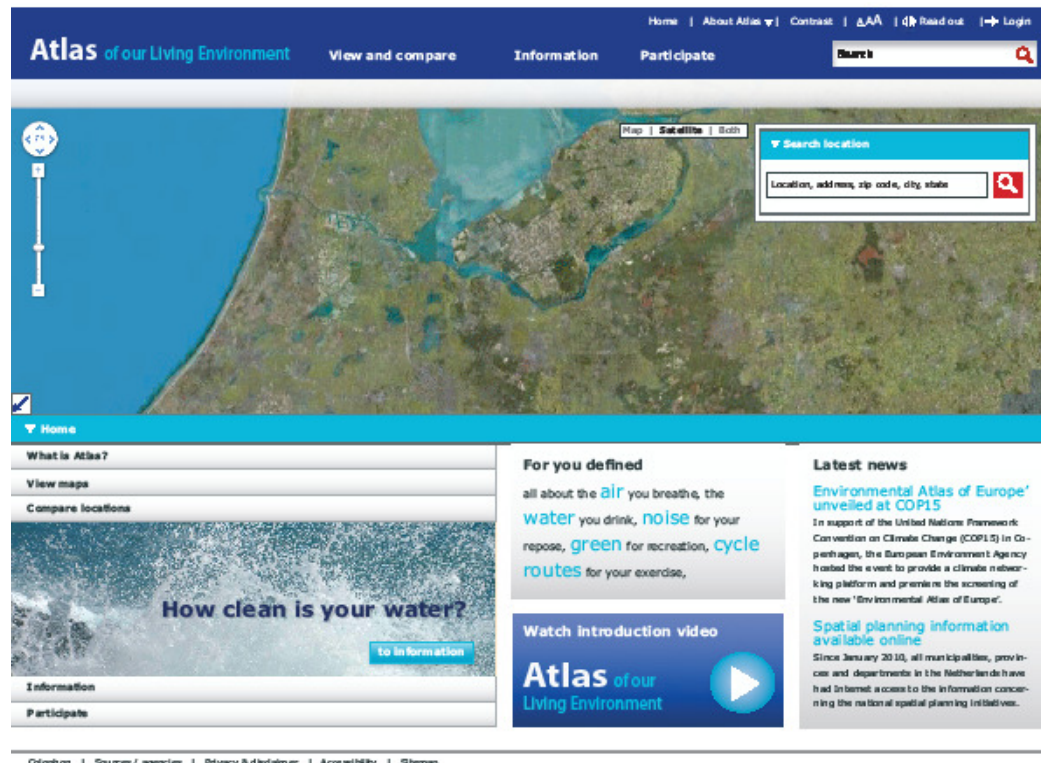


Figure 1: Homepage Atlas of our Living Environment; no more than a postcode or address is needed to display local environmental health information.

What can you do with the Atlas?

The Atlas uses the functions *View and Compare*, *Information* and *Participate* to provide insight into the local living environment at the postcode level (see Figure 1). Entering a postcode or address displays local environment and health information in *View and Compare*. An explanation in text is provided below the map (see Figure 2). This local information can be compared with that of other locations, themes or periods (see Figure 4). *Participate* enables information to be shared, discussed and edited. *Information* contains a treasure trove of background information on environmental themes.

What is the added value of an Atlas of our Living Environment?

- The Atlas automatically tackles a (large) number of information requests. This contributes to a transparent government.
- The Atlas connects the datasets supplied by different data providers. Map layers can be viewed and compared. Information is always available on the web through web services.
- The ‘one connection, multiple use’ principle is applied. The exchange of information is more effective and more efficient between and within organizations.
- Information from the Atlas of our Living Environment can be embedded in other websites such as those of municipal and provincial authorities. This enables each organization to determine how it presents information about the quality of the living environment.

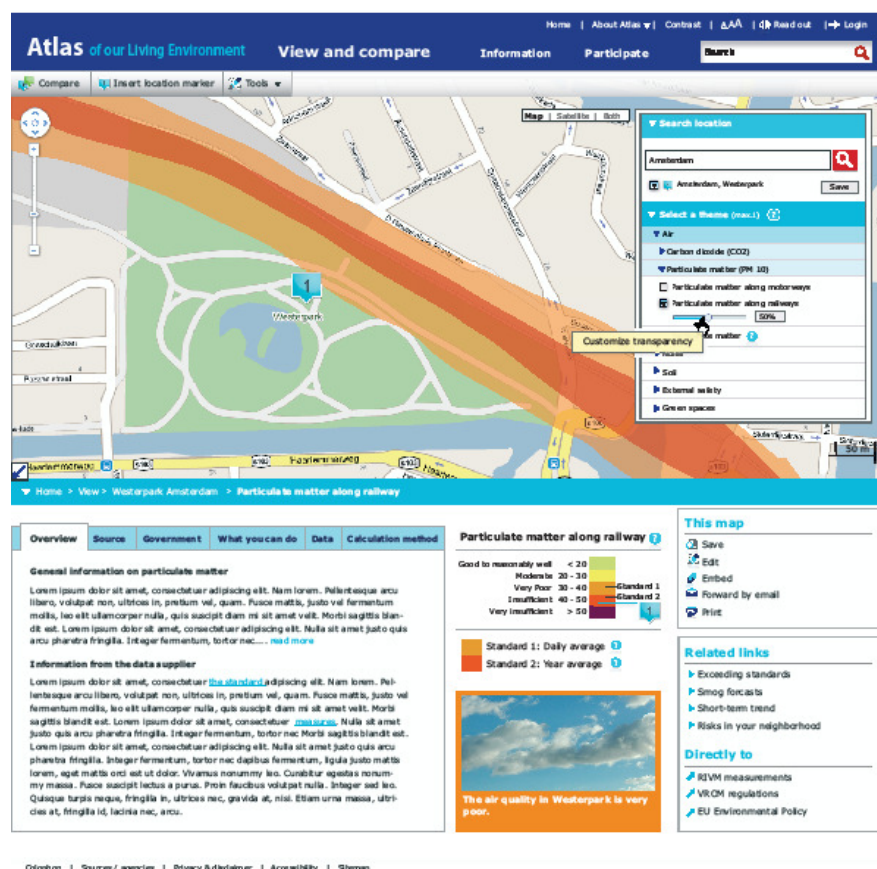


Figure 2: View location; a theme can be chosen after a postcode or address has been entered. Atlas then displays the environmental situation for the selected location. Local information about the selected theme is displayed below the map.

Added value outside the Netherlands?

A lot of the information in the Atlas is also available in English, making it accessible to non-Dutch speakers. Web services enable other organizations to embed information in their websites. Users outside the Netherlands can submit maps (through web services) and discuss them in a closed or open group.

Setting it up

The Atlas of our Living Environment will be developed in three phases, each with a decision moment on whether to proceed (see Figure 3).

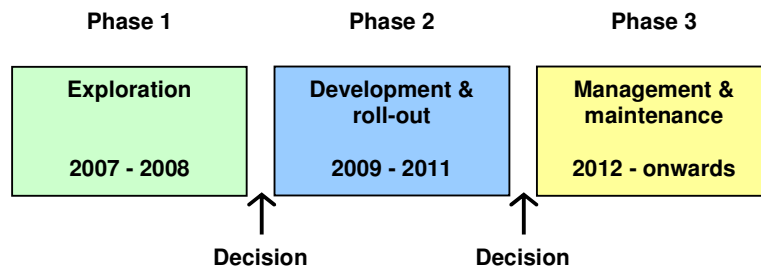


Figure 3: Overview of the development phases of the Atlas of the Living Environment.

In the *Exploratory phase* (2007-2008):

- A list of user needs and requirements was established.
- The feasibility of these wishes and requirements was determined for the themes air quality, noise and green.
- Principles were tested by building a working demonstration model, the Atlas Demonstrator.

The conclusion was that the Atlas could be built and implemented. The initiative ties in with the European, national and local developments for Geo-ICT and content, which is why the decision was made to proceed with the Development phase.

In the *Development phase* (2009-2011) the focus is on:

- Prepare and actually build, test and where necessary, modify the first release.
- Prepare and create the delivery of information with data providers.
- Work out scenarios for the final management structure and maintenance.

During the roll-out to municipalities and provinces the ICT system will continue to be developed (second and third release). The roll-out will also take shape in the form of new themes and participants.

In the *Maintenance phase* (from 2012), the management structures will be operational and the necessary (maintenance) agreements will have been made.

Collaboration is central

The creation of an umbrella system for sharing information about the living environment requires ongoing collaboration between different partners. The following parties are involved in the development of the Atlas of our Living Environment:

- Users, among other things, through panels;
- Data providers, such as municipal and provincial authorities, environmental services, municipal health services and (semi) government institutions;
- Research institutes such as RIVM and Alterra;
- Organizations active in the geo-information sector, such as the land registry, Ruimte voor Geo-Informatie (Space for Geo-Information, RGI) ICTU and Geonovum;

Interest groups including AstmaFonds (Dutch Asthma Foundation), Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands), Fietsersbond (Dutch Cyclists' Union), Vereniging Leefmilieu (Association for the Environment), etc.

What's the planning?

Atlas is currently in the *Development phase*. The first release will be delivered at the end of 2010 and will contain information about three themes as well as a select number of data providers. We anticipate that almost all of the provincial authorities will be connected by 2012 and that the number of connected municipal authorities will have doubled compared with 2010. The aim thereafter is to increase the number of participants by at least 20% a year. Our ambition is to have all of the municipal and provincial authorities connected by 2020.

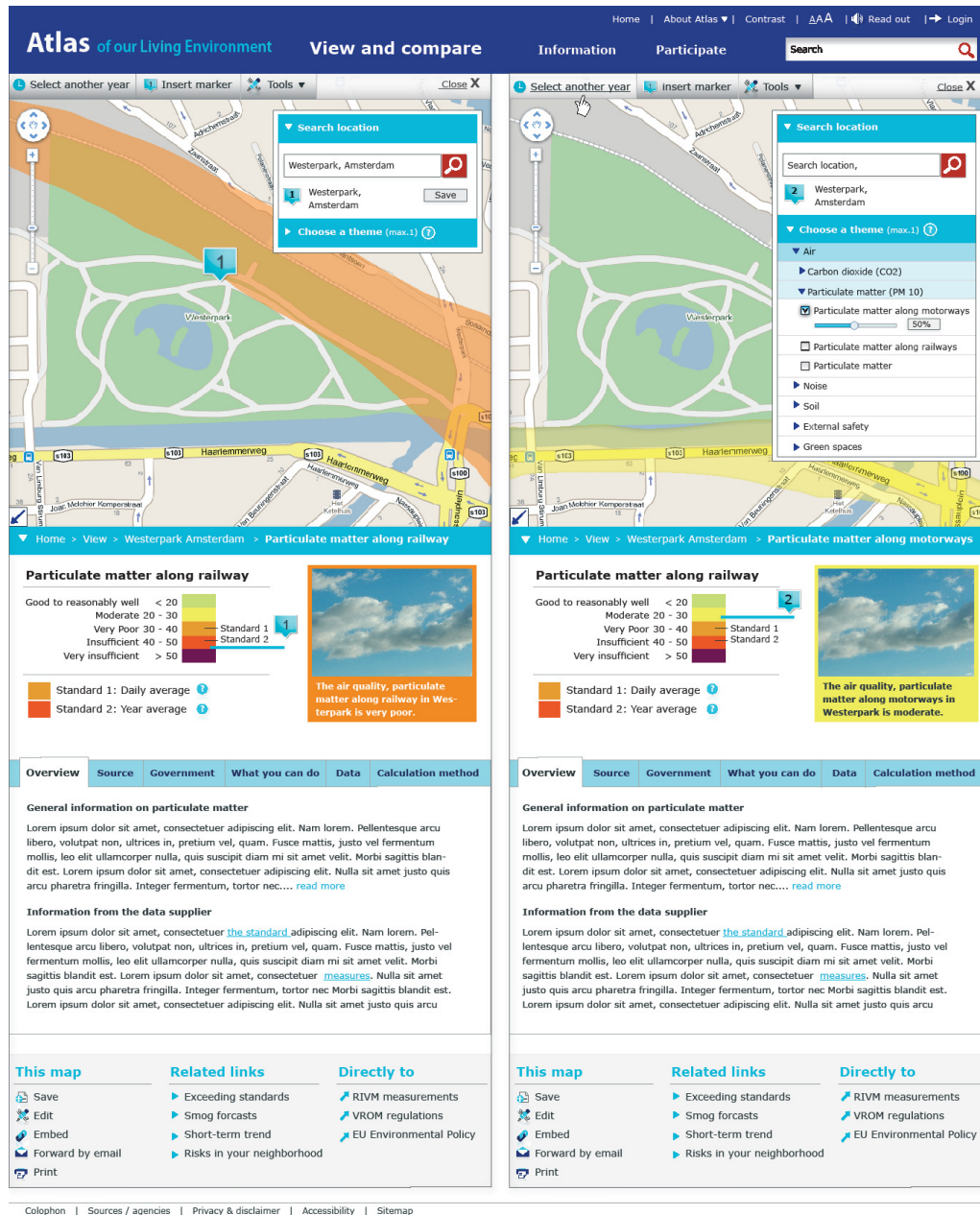


Figure 4: Compare indicators; environment-indicators for one location can be compared to those of another location, indicator or year.

More information ...

More information about the Atlas of our Living Environment can be found at www.atlasinfo.nl. Most of the website's content is still in Dutch. Alternatively, you can contact Julie Ng-A-Tham (programme manager Atlas of our Living Environment) at the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) by phone at +31 (0)70 339 2719 or by email at julie.tham@minvrom.nl.