

Walking in The Hague: Walking the inner-city

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Proposal:

In 1989 the city council of The Hague agreed upon the “de Kern Gezond” plan. An English translation of de Kern Gezond is “a healthy heart for the inner-city”. This plan was, and still is, the framework for the design of public space within the inner-city. The plan outlined a new approach towards public space. The municipality realized that an attractive design of public space was a basic condition for an (economically) attractive inner-city.

In the late 1980’s the inner-city of The Hague was a car dominated place, with heavy traffic arteries passing right through the city heart. The space for pedestrians and bicycles was limited. Unsafe pedestrian crossings caused many casualties. The inner-city was also rapidly losing economic power towards other centres in the periphery of the Hague, which were more easily accessible by car. During the evening and night hours little people could be found on the streets and squares of the inner city. “De kern Gezond” offered a radical new way of thinking. Pedestrians were put central in the design of public space. Pedestrians should be offered an attractive environment to shop, live and relax. To make the inner-city a lively place, public space should be able to accommodate different groups of people and activities. A new design of public space should also encourage people to spend more time in the inner-city, also strengthening the economic position.

During the last 20 years streets, squares were redesigned for pedestrians in a “street by street” approach. The municipality started with increasing pedestrian-zones by reducing motorized traffic. A new design and new materials were used, well adapted to the scale and speed of pedestrians. Relatively small steps were combined with major projects. The opening of the tram tunnel in 2004 was one of these major projects. The Grote Marktstraat, dominated by and tram-traffic, was transformed into a space for pedestrians and cyclist. In the end of 2009, the introduction of the “Traffic Circulation Plan” has made it impossible to drive through the inner city. In 2010 two new squares are realized, in which pedestrians are put central. The Hague now has the largest “car free zone” in the Netherlands. The inner-city is nowadays an attractive place to live, shop, eat and enjoy. And after 20! years, “de Kern Gezond” still is the basis for designing public space within the inner-city.

During the last 10 years the number of visitors in the inner city has increased strongly, with 32 million people visiting the inner city each year. And expectations are this number will have grown in 2020 towards 36 million. In this respect, the redesign of public space has been a vital part of the economic revitalisation of the inner city. The workshop will focus on the following questions:

- How do you transform an inner city with car-domination to an attractive centre with place for walking and cycling?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the threats?
- What about the effects on economic growth, citizen satisfaction, (road)safety and the environment.