# The Hague: pedestrians in residential areas

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## Abstract

The city of The Hague in the Netherlands has a long-term reputation for good public space design and maintenance. This paper describes the general approach to the design, use and maintenance of public space, including three important principles applied by the municipality. The key factor for success and efficiency is the integration of all fields of policy that are relevant for the design, use and maintenance of public space, which includes standardization, car parking, bicycle parking, trees and green, slow-traffic areas and several other aspects. The papers ends with three points of attention that can be further improved in The Hague and that may also be relevant for other cities.

## Biography

Enno Ebels was trained as an architect and building engineer at Delft Technical University in the Netherlands and has worked for 20 years as urban planner/designer and manager for the city councils of Utrecht and The Hague. During his studies, he worked briefly for Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). Currently, he works as chief urban designer for the Department of Urban Planning in The Hague. He is a long-standing member of the municipal advisory committee for public space.

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## Introduction

### The Hague

The Hague is the third-largest city in the Netherlands, with almost 500.000 inhabitants. It has a unique position, being the only large Dutch city bordering the sea. It is home to the national government and a leading international city in the fields of peace and justice. The Hague has a long-term history and reputation for quality public space design, and some of the finest examples of urban public space can be found in the city, such as Lange Voorhout. In a Dutch context, The Hague stands out by its long-term policy to invest money, time and effort in creating and maintaining the quality of the public space. In addition to high-profile project such as the inner city pedestrian area and Scheveningen boulevard, much attention goes to gradual improvement of public space in residential areas. Much of this effort is aimed at creating better and safer areas for pedestrians and cyclists – as most vulnerable members in the public realm, they deserve priority in creating a pleasant and attractive city for all is inhabitants and visitors. Lessons that can be learned from The Hague are the fact that an integrated design approach for public space gives better results – but also that improving the quality for pedestrians in residential areas requires stamina, smart solutions and long-term commitment from the city council.

### A quick journey through time

When looking back for 30-40 years, a gradual change in public space policy can be noted. In the late 1960s and 1970s, quality of public space was not much of an issue. With the increasing demand for space by different users of the public areas (cars, public transport, parking), the quality (or lack of quality) of the public space was considered the inevitable consequence of these processes. This period was also a period of strong economic decline of the inner city and many densely populated 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century residential areas. In the late 1970s and 1980s, urban renewal, a re-orientation on the city center and the awareness that public space should be an asset of the city instead of a negative factor, led to new policies to improve the quality and use of public space. In The Hague, this has resulted in 20-30 years of consistently investing time, effort and money in the improvement of the public realm. Integration of different policies related to public space and introduction of mechanism to stimulate and safeguard a high level of design and maintenance quality has created a situation in which public space is no longer at the bottom line of urban renewal but a well-integrated and sometimes leading factor in urban (re)development. This situation offers possibilities to further strengthen the position of public space design as leading discipline in urban development processes and turn public space into a driving force that the city can use to achieve its goals and serve its inhabitants and visitors in the best way possible.

## 'The Hague principles'

Public space policy in The Hague is based on the following principles. With these guidelines, a communal approach with shared values by all participants is safeguarded.

### Spatial design

*Simplicity, harmony and space*

The essence of good spatial design is to keep is simple, to choose materials, green and elements that combine well and to leave space open for public use. Public space is the 'air' that a city needs to breath, and therefore *creating* space is often much more necessary that *filling* space.

### Use

*Functional, flexible and multi-usable*

Public space must allow and stimulate the uses that it is designed for. The Hague strives to make flexible use possible, by different participant and during different times of the day and week. This approach stimulates social encounters and efficient use of often limited available space.

### Maintenance

*Clean, undamaged and safe*

Public space only works for people if it is clean, not broken or damaged and, therefore, safe. Only if people feel confident that they will not hurt themselves, that children can walk and play safely and that damages will be repaired quickly, they can and will use public space as it is intended.

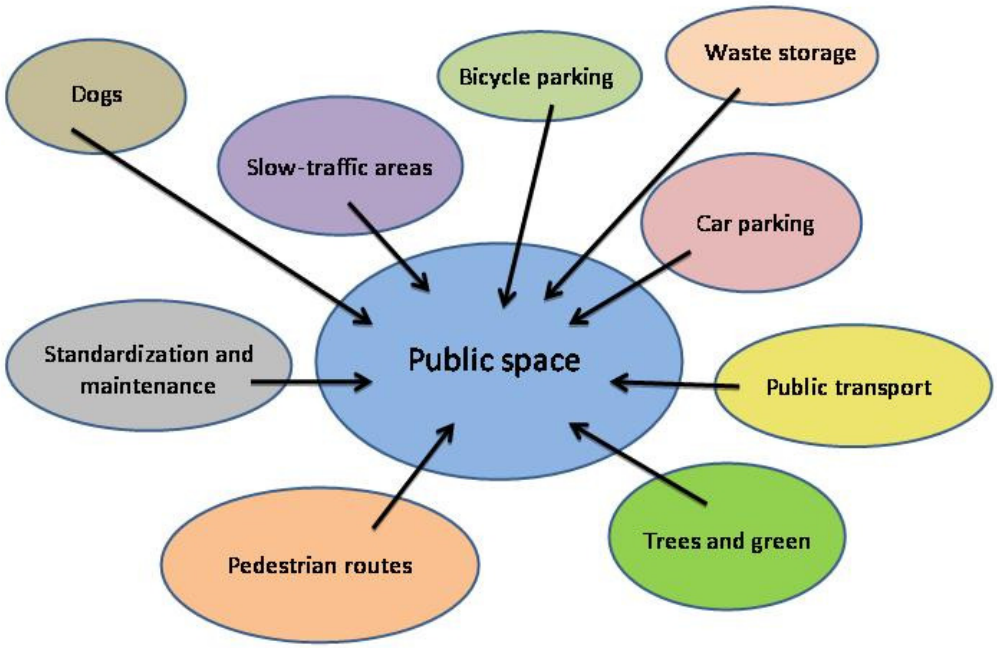
### Integrated design and control

Only by integrating all policies affecting the public space, optimized results can be achieved for pedestrians. In The Hague, the advisory committee for public space (ACOR) considers all public space proposals and acts both as stimulator and watchdog for integral quality. To facilitate the work of the ACOR and to introduce objective quality standards, an overall public space policy has been approved by the city council (*Kadernota Openbare Ruimte*). This policy defines three quality levels for urban public space: standard quality, extra high quality (for much-used and high-profile public areas), and 'tailor-made', which applies to areas where public and private areas overlap (e.g., shopping centres). A handbook for public space design (*Handboek Openbare Ruimte*) has been developed and is accessible for all designers and technicians working on public space projects in The Hague. One leading principle is to stimulate or enforce integrated design of public space within redevelopment areas, to combine spatial quality with functional use for present and new-coming inhabitants.

## Public space policies

Different policies affect the design, use and maintenance of public space. The most important are:

- Standardization and maintenance
- Slow-traffic areas (30 km/h)
- Pedestrian routes
- Car parking
- Bicycle parking
- Public transport
- Trees and green
- Dogs
- Waste storage




*Public space is determined and influenced by several fields of policy*

## Standardization and maintenance

Streets and sidewalks become safer and more attractive for walking and playing by better maintenance. A 'quick scan' of all public space shows where maintenance is most urgent and gives the city tools to decide where to intervene first. The use of standard detailing of streets aims to improve the access for pedestrians, wheel chairs, buggies etc. Standardization also facilitates quick repair. Solutions that have proven to work best are used in all similar situations (best practice). The 'Handbook public space' is regularly updated to incorporate new developments and improved solutions, thus ensuring a dynamic and not a static instrument.

## Slow-traffic areas (30 km/h)

An important policy is creating zones with speed limit for cars of 30 km/h within residential areas, which includes equal rules for all traffic participants, and therefore preferred position for cars. This results in more and safer space for playing and walking and entices 'social behaviour' from car drivers.

## Car parking

One of the main bottle-necks when striving to create more and safer space for pedestrians is the spatial dominance (both in floor space as in visual impact) of parked cars. Reduction of street car parking is helped by stimulating and, when possible, enforcing indoor/underground parking in redevelopments areas. The city council is willing – under conditions – to give financial support to create more indoor/underground parking facilities in residential areas. Meanwhile, the municipality is increasing the areas with paid parking. In residential areas where more than 90% of parking spaces is occupied, paid parking is introduced. For parking their first car, residents are offered a relatively cheap parking permit. For parking second and third cars, however, the fees of parking permits are strongly increased. People without a destination within the living areas have to pay an ever higher 'commercial' fee, which reduces the 'parking pressure' in these areas. The policy of gradual expansion of paid parking leads to less demand for parking spaces. When the number of parked cars reduces, redesign of parking on the streets is possible to create safer and clearer situations for pedestrians.

## Bicycle parking

In the Netherlands with its extreme density of bicycles, especially in densely urbanized areas, bicycle parking can be a serious problem. Most problems arise in areas where there are no storage facilities in side buildings or in gardens. Freely parked bicycles on sidewalks can seriously hamper pedestrian traffic. Policies involve stimulate en sometimes funding indoor solutions (private or collective) for parking of bicycles and reducing obstacles on sidewalks by supplying adequate bicycle parking systems on the streets.

## Pedestrian routes

One of the key elements to stimulate walking in residential areas are safe and attractive routes tot daily facilities, such as shops, schools and parks. Safe means: no obstacles, good orientation possibilities, clear viewing lines and no 'dead' facades. One thing the city, building owners and architect can contribute is stimulating the urban quality by creating or preserving lively ground floors of existing and new buildings and making attractive facades (architecture, functions, position of entrances etc). Stimulating walking to and from schools, parks, shops and other facilities can be stimulated by making safer areas around schools (so-called 'school routes'), introducing pedestrian zones in shopping areas and improving pedestrian access to green areas. Sophisticated street lightning should add to (the feeling of) safety and create a pleasant atmosphere. In some situations, introducing shelter for wind and rain, eg by building canopies, can help as well, especially in areas with high-rise building where the conditions at street level may not be pleasant at certain spots.

## Trees and green

Pleasant views and a relaxed atmosphere in the streets are strong incentives to make people walk. Therefore, introducing trees and green in streets improves the attractiveness for pedestrians. Trees provide shelter from wind, rain and (sometimes…) sun. Where possible, better growing conditions for trees in pavements are realized, to make trees healthier and grow larger. When trees have to be cut to make space for new street profiles, great effort is undertaken to plant a similar number of new trees in the same area.

## Public transport

Stimulating people to walk more in the city is strongly related to the quality and density of the public transport network. Improving pedestrian routes to public transport stops and stations makes it more convenient for residents to leave their car (or bicycle) at home. Also, improving waiting facilities for pedestrians at public transport stops (shelter, lighting, information, safety) is important and, above all, a high-quality public transport network (speed, frequency, comfort, reasonably prized) is a strong stimulus for pedestrians. A major investment in The Hague concerns investments in the regional light-rail network (*RandstadRail*). This includes investments in low-floor trams with comfortable stops, which are easily accessible.

## Dogs

Dogs are a special field of attention. For many people, walking their own dog is a strong incentive to make use of pedestrian zones in the city. For these people, special dog-walking routes are established and from that point of view, stimulating dog ownership also stimulates walking! On the other hand, non-dog owners may be scared by dog walking freely and dog's feces (droppings) in the street is one of the top 5 urban nuisances. Therefore, the city has established dog walking policies, which includes assignment of special zones where dogs are allowed to run free and prohibiting free-running dogs in residential streets. Removing your dog's feces is obligatory (and fined if not done). The result of this policy are cleaner and safer streets for pedestrians, although in some parts of the city where dog ownership is high and the public space limited, problems may still need attention.

### Waste storage
Reducing obstacles on sidewalks is helped by introducing underground waste storage, especially in densely populated areas. This results in less rubbish on the streets, no broken glass on sidewalks, reduction of nasty smell and absence of rats and birds. The sidewalks become safer because of better viewing lines and are more attractive for pedestrians.

## The future
The city of The Hague is constantly working on improvements of public space design and maintenance. For the future, the following ambitions are important.

### Better coordination of planned works
Integrated design is strongly helped when scheduled works for changes of the public space can be coordinated and combined. Although a lot has changed for the better, still situations occur where, within a short period of time, different works are carried out (eg, first renewal of pavements, then renewal of waste storage and then introduction of 30 km/h measurements). Combined work reduces the inconvenience for inhabitants, is more cost efficient and increases the opportunities to achieve higher quality levels for the public space design.

### Pro-active design for public space
Because the future is unpredictable and the different investment categories may vary from year to year, it is advisable to work on long-term design proposals for the public space in the city, which allow flexible piece-by-piece realization, depending on available money and urgency. With this approach, a 'grand design' for all public space can help to make every work done contribute to the larger picture, this picture not being a blueprint where nothing can change but as a framework where much of the design and thinking has been done *before* the urgency is there, and not *when* the urgency is there. In the latter case, experience learns that it is (due to time pressure and other factors) much more difficult to stimulate integrated design than when parts of the design and coordination work has been done in anticipation.

### Further strengthening of participation
The direct environment of the place where people live in the city strongly affects their well-being. By giving people direct influence to improve the public space in their area, quality can be raised, awareness can be stimulated and even forms of 'shared maintenance' can be introduced. The process to involve inhabitants can be further improvement. Because of often differing needs by different groups, this is no easy task and it requires a lot of effort by the city and other participants to find the best way to deal with different needs and opinions.