

# Public Outdoor Space and Covid-19

**Symposium: 24 – 25 June 2021 - Wageningen University**

**Proposal from HvA Research team – ‘From prevention to resilience’ research project**

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**Format:** Presentation

**Focus themes:** Theme 3 session: ‘WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CURRENT PANDEMIC?’

**Session:** Friday 25th of June from 10:00 to 11:30 (CEST)

## Title

**Covid-19's impact on public space: trends in Dutch cities as perceived by a Community of Practice**

## Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public spaces are being redesigned and revalued. In the ZonMW project 'From Prevention to Resilience', we aim to understand these changes both in the short term, mapping the more ad hoc responses to the pandemic in public space, and in the long-term, exploring how public space can promote urban resilience with an eye on future shocks and stressors. Here we report on a series of interviews several partners from the community of practice involved in the project. The aim was to get an initial understanding of trends concerning public space during COVID-19 in cities in the Netherlands. Based on the interviews, we have identified two main trends. The first trend concerns the rapid shift towards soft mobility, reflected in the increased pedestrian activity in residential urban areas; people started to walk and cycle more to commute and relax. The second trend refers to the increasingly versatile use of green outdoor places, attracting a more diverse group of users than before the pandemic. We suggest the identified trends help in looking ahead and considering the roles that public space can play in post-COVID cities. More specifically, they feed into two of the research goals that drive the 'From Prevention to Resilience' project. First, the trends help in anticipating needs and responses during future pandemics, and, as such, they offer initial handles for urban designers and planners to pro-actively create public spaces accordingly. Second, the trends enable us to look beyond COVID-19 and consider the resilience of cities and their neighbourhoods in a more integral manner. In particular, the trend towards greener public spaces invites us to look at resilience from both a social and ecological perspective, acknowledging their potential to enable versatile use, foster social cohesion, and contribute to the goals of climate adaptation and biodiversity.

## Interviewees:

- Diana Krabbendam and Emiel Wolf, The Beach
- Charley Fiedeldij Dop, Pakhuis de Zwijger
- Boen Groothoff, Amsterdam municipality
- Judith Lekkerkerker, Almere municipality
- Annelies Bloemendaal, Almere municipality
- Henk Snel, Zwolle municipality
- Like Bijlsma, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
- Sarah Chekh Ibrahim, Breda municipality
- Filippo Lodi, UNStudio | UNSx
- Beata Giermasinska,

## Keywords:

Research-through-design; public space trends; pandemic; community of practice; neighborhood resilience.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public spaces are being redesigned temporarily and sometimes more permanently. Furthermore, people's use and perceived value of public spaces are changing. In the ZonMW project 'From Prevention to Resilience', we aim to understand these changes both in the short term, mapping the more ad hoc responses to the pandemic in public space, and in the long-term, exploring how public space can promote urban resilience with an eye on future shocks and stressors. Besides our research goals, we are also developing actionable tools for professionals in urban design and planning for promoting resilience in urban neighbourhoods. A cornerstone of our project is the community of practice involved, which brings together researchers, design agencies, municipalities and housing organizations. Here we report on a first series of interviews that we conducted with several of these partners, in which we aimed to get an initial understanding of trends concerning public space during COVID-19 in cities in the Netherlands. Based on the interviews, we have identified two main trends. The first trend concerns the rapid shift towards soft mobility, reflected in the increased pedestrian activity in residential urban areas; people started to walk and cycle more as a way to commute and relax. The second trend refers to the increasingly versatile use of green outdoor places, attracting a more diverse group of users than before the pandemic.

*Increased soft mobility* — Interviewees indicated a shift from more vehicle-based mobility to local soft mobility during the pandemic. Nearby outdoor environments offered people the possibility to move and escape their home confinement temporarily. In this way, a more prominent 'radius of action' emerged around people's homes. Citizens performed more of their daily routines within their neighbourhood, including recreational walks, shopping and other leisure activities. Also in the context of working life, daily walks among colleagues become a new form of meeting, whether online or in person. By walking through their neighbourhood, people are (re)discovering their environment, seeing its potential, and growing a sense of connection with particular places. In light of this trend, municipalities reacted by trying to limit or control the walking and biking flows in particular areas that became too crowded, with solutions such as demarcations and informative banners, as well as more technical solutions, using crowd data to share traffic predictions on an openly accessible online platform.

*More versatile use of green spaces* — Interviewees also described how public green spaces nearby people's homes had become better recognized for their role in mental health during times of pandemic. Issues in households related to crowdedness and poor liveability indoors became more prominent, making public green spaces more attractive to them. Activities that would otherwise happen indoors were increasingly relocated to public environments, particularly in green spaces. This adaptive response also affected the public green spaces and their use, creating green hotspots that brought together a more diversified group in terms of socio-economic status. One example is how open-air dining became popular also in colder months and offered a safer way to socialize for a broader population. Another example is how sports activities moved from indoor clubs to parks. Green public spaces have thus shown to be versatile in their possible uses, in ways that we did not consider possible before. As green spaces became more crowded, some municipalities have started articulating ambitious objectives to develop higher-quality green infrastructures. From their perspective, green spaces are more than a pleasant décor; they also contribute to social cohesion in neighbourhoods, as illustrated by citizen's engagement in community gardens and local food production. Various municipalities also actively engaged their citizens in participatory activities to create greener environments.

We suggest the identified trends help in looking ahead and considering the roles that public space can play in post-Covid cities. More specifically, they feed into two of the research goals that drive the 'From Prevention to Resilience' project. First, the trends help in anticipating needs and responses during future pandemics, and, as such, they offer initial handles for urban designers and planners to proactively create public spaces accordingly. Second, the trends enable us to look beyond COVID-19 and consider the resilience of cities and their neighbourhoods in a more integral manner. In particular, the trend towards greener public spaces invites us to look at resilience from both a social and ecological perspective, acknowledging their potential to enable versatile use, foster social cohesion, and contribute to the goals of climate adaptation and biodiversity.

# PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES AND COVID 19

**SYMPOSIUM: 24 -25 JUNE 2021**

WAGENINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS

ONLINE

Since the start of 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we think and use public outdoor spaces. Repeated lockdowns and social distancing are now part of our daily lives. But what does it mean for the design of these places going forward?

This symposium intends to highlight current research pathways, perspectives and practices and to bring together experts to discuss potential opportunities for the post-pandemic environment, around a central question: **How will the COVID 19 pandemic impact the design and use of outdoor public spaces, and how was it impacted by them in the first place?**

## FULL PROGRAM

THURSDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE

### THEME 1

PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES, HEALTH AND WELLBEING DURING THE PANDEMIC

10:00 -11:30

**Ralitsa Shentova** Nature in times of corona: associations of nearby greenery with mental well-being during COVID-19

**Francisco Macedo, Kevin Raaphorst,  
Erwin van der Krabben** Investigating Built Environment Correlates of Physical Inactivity During COVID-19 Restrictive Policies in the Netherlands  
(Geography, Planning and Environment, Radboud University)

**Karolina Doughty** A qualitative analysis of experiences of nearby green and blue spaces  
(Cultural Geography, WUR)

**Alexandra Jiricka-Pürerer, Karolina Taczanowska, Andrzej Tucki, Gianpaolo Cirone, Giulio Senes** Significance of green areas for emotional and physical health and wellbeing in challenging times – a transnational study on the influence of the SARS-CoV-2-pandemic on the use and perception of green areas  
(University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna; Department of Regional Geography and Tourism, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University; Department of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, University of Milan)

## THEME 2

### WIDER PERSPECTIVE: HOW IS THE PANDEMIC CHANGING OUR USE AND PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES

13:30 -15:00

**Ana Aceska** Planning for uncertain futures: shifting ideas of city and countryside after global crises  
(Cultural Geography, WUR)

**Taícia H. N. Marques** The quietness, the tension, the release: a process between people and public spaces during the pandemics in Lima, Perú.  
(Department of Land Use and Construction, Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina)

**Marieke de Haas** COVID-19 and the function of a marketplace as public space

**Gideon Spanjar** Rewilding at street-level for incremental gains and a sustained promotion of human well-being  
(Aeres University of Applied Sciences, Chair of Innovation & Urban Green Spaces)

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

### PROCESSES OF IN- AND EXCLUSION IN PUBLIC SPACE

15:30 - 16:30

Led by **Karin Peters** and **Alexandra Rijke** (Cultural Geography, WUR)

With the participation of Prof. dr. **Sanda Lenzholzer** (Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning, WUR)

And **Mathias Lehner** (Nextcity)

FRIDAY 25TH JUNE

### THEME 3

WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CURRENT PANDEMIC?

10:00 -11:30

**Meghann Ormond** (Cultural Geography, WUR) Managing internationally mobile bodies in a world on hold: Migration, tourism and biological citizenship in the context of COVID-19

Prof. dr. **Edward Huijbens** (Cultural Geography, WUR) Social distancing and the promise of tourism

**Giulia Gualtieri, Boudewijn Boon** (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences) Covid-19 impact on public space: urban trends from Dutch cities, positive changes and potentials applicable worldwide

**Mathias Lehner** (Nextcity) Nature-inclusive design of public space in cities: health & well-being while & post covid-19

### PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP

COVID-19 AND OUTDOOR NATURAL SPACES: UNDERSTANDING AND UTILIZING OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

13:00 – 15:00 (in person)

Led by **Roald Pijker** and **Marthe Derkzen** (Health and Society, WUR)

### LOCATION AND REGISTRATION

The Symposium will take place both online and in person

At the **WICC, Wageningen International Congress Centre**  
Lawickse Allee 9, 6701 AN Wageningen

You can register online at: <https://event.wur.nl/126069/subscribe>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me:

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