



This manual is part of the thesis 'Steps towards Slowness: Planning and design to promote walking for wellbeing in a post-growth future in the Netherlands' by Arjanne van der Padt, at TU Delft Urbanism department, June 2025.

The full thesis is available on the repository of the TU Delft (QR code or https:// repository.tudelft.nl/record/uuid:0d824d3a-f393-433e-9b19-da705770d561)

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Planning and design for walking in the Netherlands:

An action manual

WHY?

CULT OF SPEED

Life in the twenty-first century moves at a quicker pace than it ever has. The acceleration of our society spans from everyday hurrying and multitasking, to vast amounts of space dedicated to moving quick and efficient and our societal values deeming faster to be better, to be more profit, to be *progress*.

There is an urgency to change our way of life. Fast lifestyles put enormous pressures on both our own, and the planet's wellbeing, driving it into its current state of climate emergency. Issues of wellbeing range from declining mental health, to a global and local pandemic of physical inactivity.

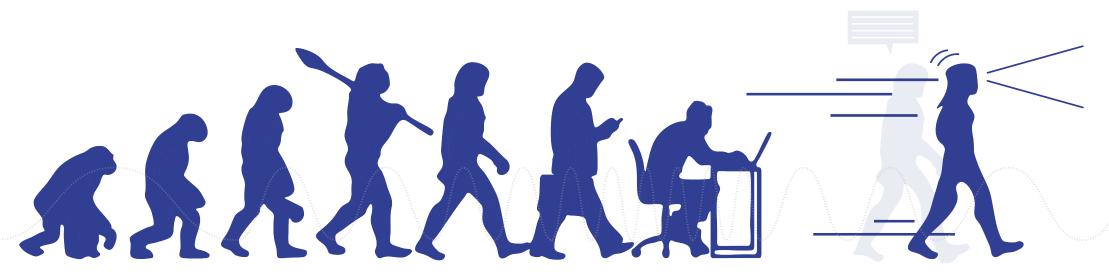
WALKING

Walking has the potential to adress these problems, making people happier and healthier, in diverse ways. Almost everyone can walk, and feel the benefits for their physical and mental health, autonomy and freedom, thinking and creativity and social and local connection. Even society-wide positive effects occur, such as savings in public healthcare or a decrease in emissions. Overall, the act of walking can raise the quality of life, without additional consumption. It presents a move towards an alternative future, where slowness becomes a source of joy.

STATUS QUO: TO WALK OR NOT TO WALK?

Historically, we walk less than ever. Where people once (around 1900) covered 15 kilometres a day on foot, the average has dropped to just 1.1 kilometres. This is easily contributed to bikes in the Netherlands, as it is seen as a country of bikers, a 'fietsland'. However, about a quarter of our trips are cycled and a close 20% is walked, while a staggering 45% is made in a car. This reframes the status-quo of the Netherlands from 'fietsland' to car-dominated. And maybe unexpectedly, the Netherlands is almost as much a country of walkers as bikers.

But we still have a long way to go. Many Dutch homes, for example, are within a 15-minute "walkable distance" of a supermarket. And yet, people mostly choose not to walk. Walking is not a valued part of our routine, but rather



WHY?

understood as either (slow, impractical) transport or an extra activity of for leftover, 'free' time.

However, a leisure walking culture does exist, fostered by traditions such as the Vierdaagse, 'dauwtrappen' and 'uitwaaien', and newer impulses of lunchwalks and ommetjes. These offer strong starting points for promoting walking more broadly.

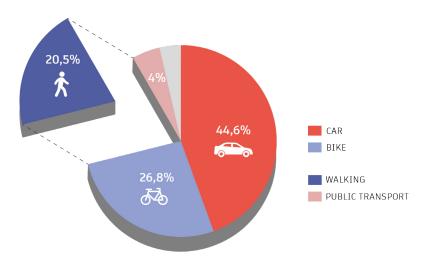
PLANNING FOR WALKING?

Walking is underrepresented and oversimplified in planning, design, research, and policy.

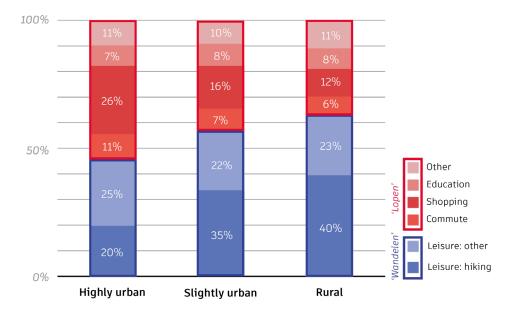
We must move away from the dichotomy of walking for either leisure or transport, and embrace its full variety. Moreover, instead of treating pedestrians as traffic objects using infrastructure, we should recognize walkers as diverse humans with varied needs, values and interests. Instead of optimizing time by defining distances or fast ways to cross great distances, the experience and quality of the time we spend should be central to the design proposals. Instead of continuing mobility-driven narratives, we should create quality places to live, to stay and enjoy. Instead of merely nudging people into the direction of walking, efforts should normalize walking and offer diverse ways to walk, while restricting alternatives.

This calls for a new approach, going beyond standard models like 15-minute cities, transit-oriented development or STOMP. Instead, we focus on the diverse nature of walking and its broad societal context. This approach to planning for walking is presented in this action manual. We set off by expanding our understanding of walking.

% TOTAL TRIPS IN THE NETHERLANDS



TYPES OF WALKING IN % OF TOTAL WALKING TRIPS



^^ 2023. ^2024. (based on: https://www.kimnet.nl/binaries/kimnet/documenten/publicaties/2024/10/02/ loopfeiten-2024/KiM+brochure_+Loopfeiten+2024_defDT.pdf + https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/ verkeer-en-vervoer/personen/hoeveel-reisden-inwoners-van-nederland-en-hoe-)

WALKING SHOULD BE....

...meaningful

Walking is more than transport or leisure: it supports work, learning, socialising, and play. It boosts mood, reduces stress, and offers moments of slowing down. Expanding the meanings of walking makes it more accessible and relevant to diverse groups. Through campaigns, storytelling and branding at everyday places such as schools and work should walking should be integrated walking into routines, offering accessible and meaningful opportunities for walking in daily life.

...normal

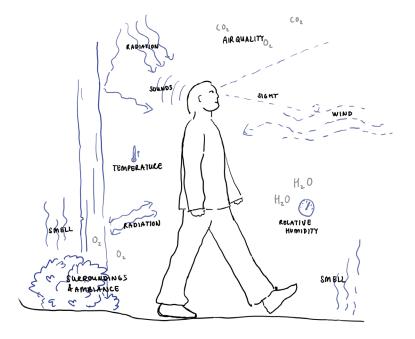
Walking reflects cultural values. It should be reframed as part of a desired and good life, linking to shared goals such as freedom, comfort, safety, wellbeing, and sustainability. Shifting norms takes (life)time(s). Engagement with younger generations who will adopt walking habits which last throughout life help make walking a natural choice. Car-free developments focused on local living and quality, frame walking as a normal, desirable part of life.

...easy

Easy walks are shaped by designs which support wayfinding through compact, walkable, and connected spaces, with clear landmarks and edges that embed themselves into people's mental maps. Places should be inclusive, accommodating all forms of walking, including those who 'walk & roll' (with wheelchairs, strollers, suitcases, roller skates, etc.).

...enjoyable

Walking enjoyment depends on many factors such as the time of day, weather, other users, materials, setting and place. An enjoyable walk might inspire another walk or a longer one. But any walk, anywhere, anytime by anyone is different. Design should allow for diversity, guided by eye-level experience of liveliness, greenery and weathering.



PLANNING FOR WALKING

Knowing this...

HOW SHOULD WE INTERVENE TO PROMOTE WALKING?

Walking is shaped not just by spatial design, but also by our subconscious values and social norms, guiding our choices, habits and interpretations of our spaces. Effective interventions must therefore integrate spatial, social, and policy actions. These should focus on introducing, reinforcing and embedding all kinds of walking in everyday life, at moment where we could choose walking, even if it currently does not even cross our minds. These 'change points' are depicted on the next pages.

HOW CAN WE CREATE LASTING CHANGE?

Lasting change relies on long-term shifts in societal norms and the persistence of daily walking habits. This means embedding walking within shared cultural values while allowing its meaning to evolve as people make it their own. Designing for diverse walking preferences in everyday life ensures walking remains enjoyable and relevant, helping habits take root and remain.

HOW CAN WE FIND THE TIME AND SPACE TO WALK?

Going beyond a short walk to the shop or around the block can seem to demand creating extra time and space to walk, when our days and spaces often feel full already. Yet the real question is not how to create time and space, but how to find it, as it is already there. This requires planners, designers, and citizens alike to critically reflect on how we choose to spend our time and shape our environments. Many of our everyday routines and spatial structures are built around speed, efficiency, and time-saving, which is seen as normal or desirable, yet it can undermine our wellbeing and the liveability of our spaces. We must shift our focus towards quality: quality of experience, of destinations, and of local environments. This means creating "places to live, not leave": environments that invite people to stay, enjoy and walk around, not leave. "Places to live" start at our front doors, continuing to where we need to be on a daily basis. This requires a focus on values of slowness in planning, such as quality and locality. For instance, rethinking housing, amenities and job distribution, which can reduce commuting, freeing up space and time for walking.

WHAT ROLES SHOULD PLANNERS AND DESIGNERS ADOPT?

All in all, planners and designers are encouraged to:

• Expand: Design around values of quality and locality; imagine alternative futures; use personas and daily routes for realistic, human-centred designs; integrate spatial, social, and policy actions.

And

• Deepen: Embrace slow, participatory research, using walking-based methods for grounded, embodied, collaborative design. Balance real-world insights with imagining different futures.

While the proposed approach may take more time, it fosters deeper community support and anticipates long-term futures. In this slow, resilient urbanism, walking is a means towards healthier and happier lives, for current and next generations. It recognizes how small changes in day-to-day life, such as walking, can contribute to broader societal shifts.

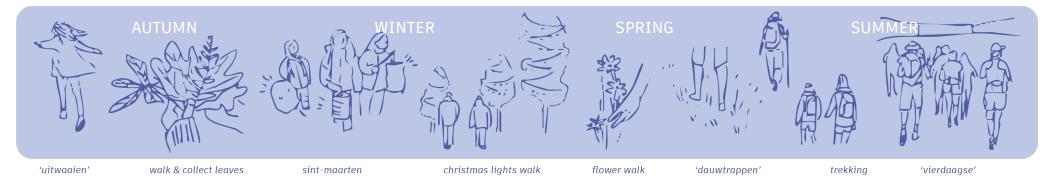
PLANNING FOR WALKING

Change points...

a day.



a year.

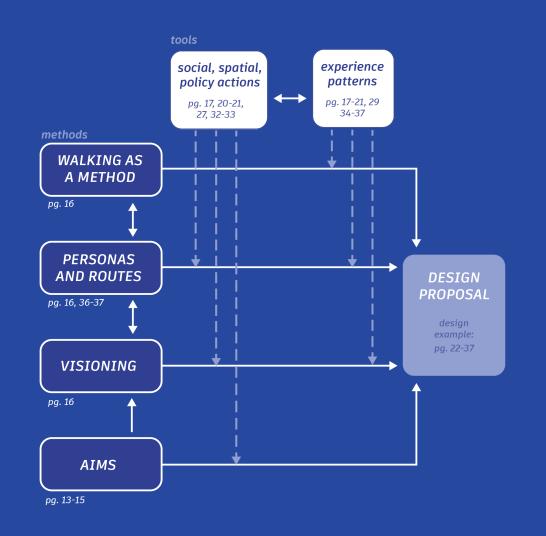


a life.



PLANNING FOR WALKING

Based on these insights, the framework below outlines the key steps, methods, and tools to plan and design for walking:



AIMS



1. CHOOSE WALKING, because...

A walking has many meanings in daily life B walking is normal, self-evident



2. KEEP WALKING, because...



3. FIND TIME AND SPACE TO WALK, because...

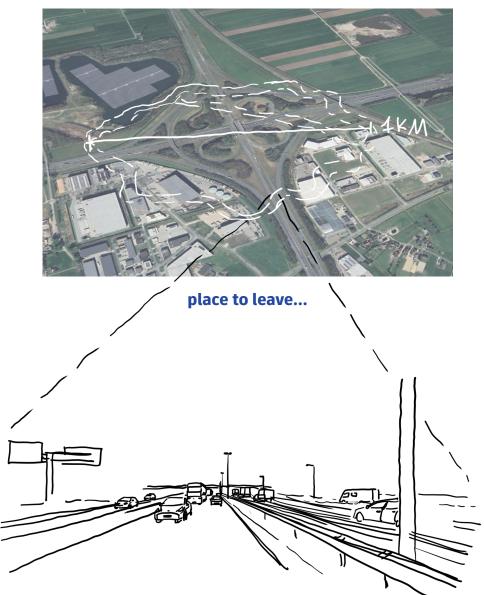
A walking has many meanings in daily life B walking is normal, self-evident C the walking experience feels easy D the walking experience feels enjoyable E places are designed for living, not leaving

..... TO WALK ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

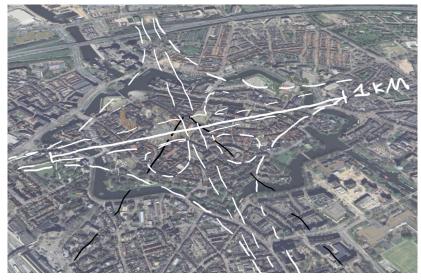
Three aims guide walking-focused projects: 1) encourage walking, 2) sustain walking habits, and 3) create time and space for walking.

These aims are interdependent, as without initial consideration, walking does not occur (1); without positive experiences, it does not continue (2); and without structural change in how we organize our space and time, walking remains constrained to an 'extra' leisure activity or sometimes-nice transport to nearby places such as the supermarket (3). Supporting all three is essential to making walking a desirable, integrated part of daily life across all contexts.





HIGHWAY (A28, 2WOLLE)





INNER CITY (ZWOLLE)

METHODS

WALKING AS A METHOD

Walking, alone or with others, offers direct, embodied insight and fosters reflection and collaboration with residents and actors. It shifts the focus from abstraction to real experiences, sparks inspiration and grounds the design in reality. Walking can be integrated into research and design by:

- Experiencing places first-hand, not just through maps or screens (especially your first impression)
- Getting lost on purpose to discover spatial logic and voids
- Walking with locals, listening and observing
- Documenting sounds, smells, visuals, and conversations
- Taking advantage of the creativity and flow-state during walking: brainstorm, design, together, on a walk

PERSONAS AND DAILY ROUTES

Walking differs per person and context. Using diverse personas and their daily routes in the design process helps account for varied preferences, values, abilities, and routines. These can be based on literature and/or local insights, such as walking and talking with inhabitants. This method supports human-centred, inclusive design.

VISIONING

Visioning allows us to radically reimagine the futures. Starting from an ideal human-focused vision of a truly walkable place, or a day of walking and wellbeing in the future, and working backwards from there ('backcasting') reveals the steps which are needed for long-term, value-driven spatial transformation.

TOOLS

To operationalize the aims and design with walking experiences, two interconnected 'pattern languages' were developed:

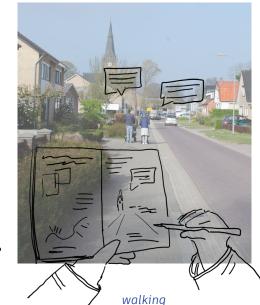
1. A set of policy, social, and spatial action patterns

2. A set of walking experience patterns that support the design of meaningful and enjoyabl e walking environments.

A 'pattern language' is a systemically linked set of individual 'patterns', which offer practical design and planning principles, grounded in theory, solo and shared walking experiences, and design analysis.

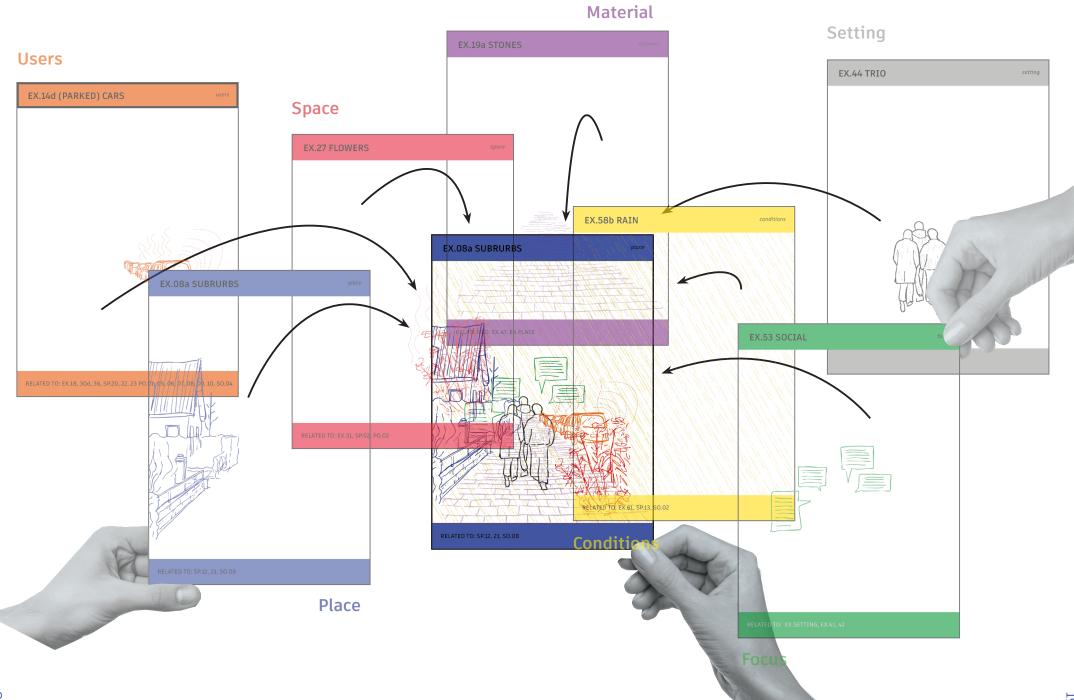
The set of policy, social and spatial actions represent a system of broader-scale actions. These are linked to the experience-based pattern cards, which can be layered to envision or assess walking environments. They align interventions with the everyday realities of walking, while ensuring that experiential quality is embedded in policy, spatial, and social strategies.





deskwork

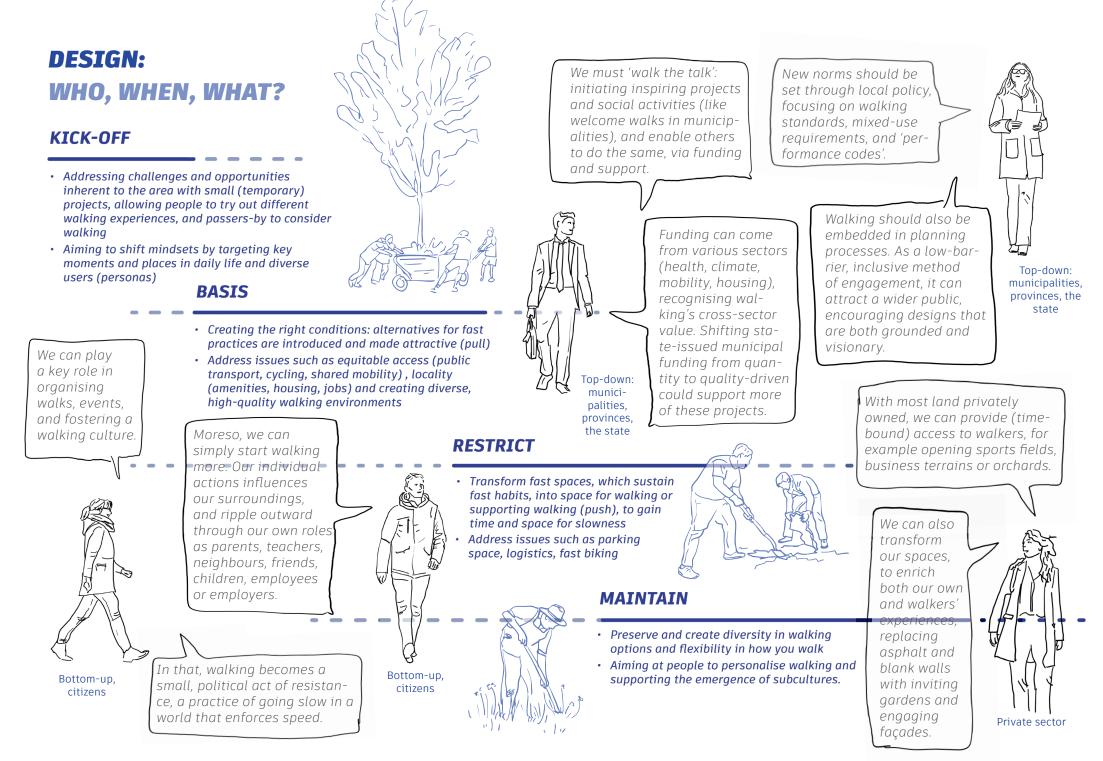
TOOLS



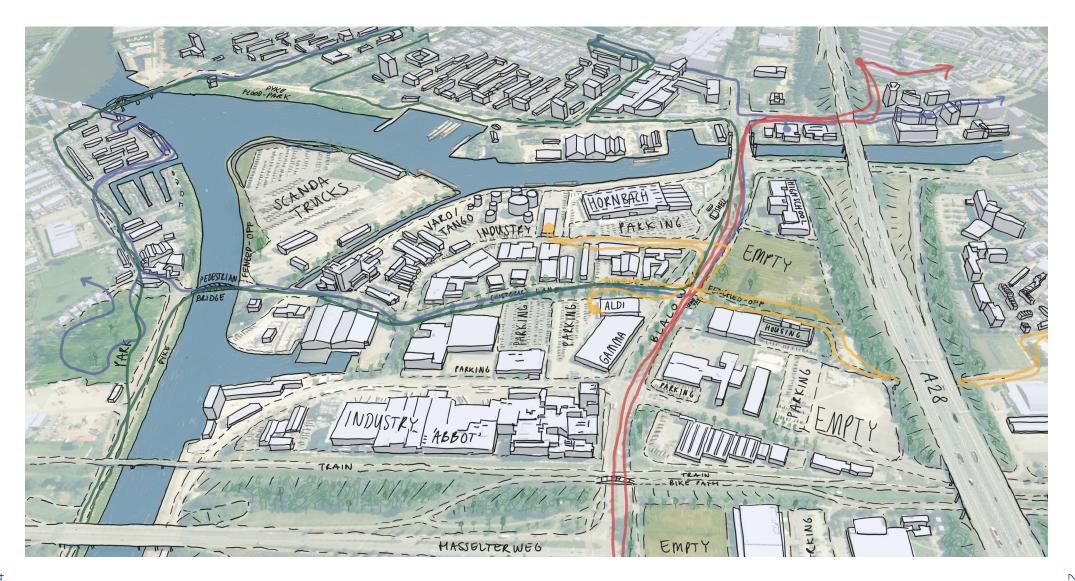


PATTERNS EX. (EXPERIENCE)





The design example focuses on a monofunctional, car-dominated industrial and business area located between the inner city and suburbs of Zwolle. This area is uninviting for pedestrians, it is primarily a place people pass through, not one to stay in. With its central location and qualities like the waterside, it holds potential to become a place which many routes choose to cross, or even stay. This subcontext was chosen based on fieldwork and exploring daily routes of value-based personas (red, green, blue and yellow).

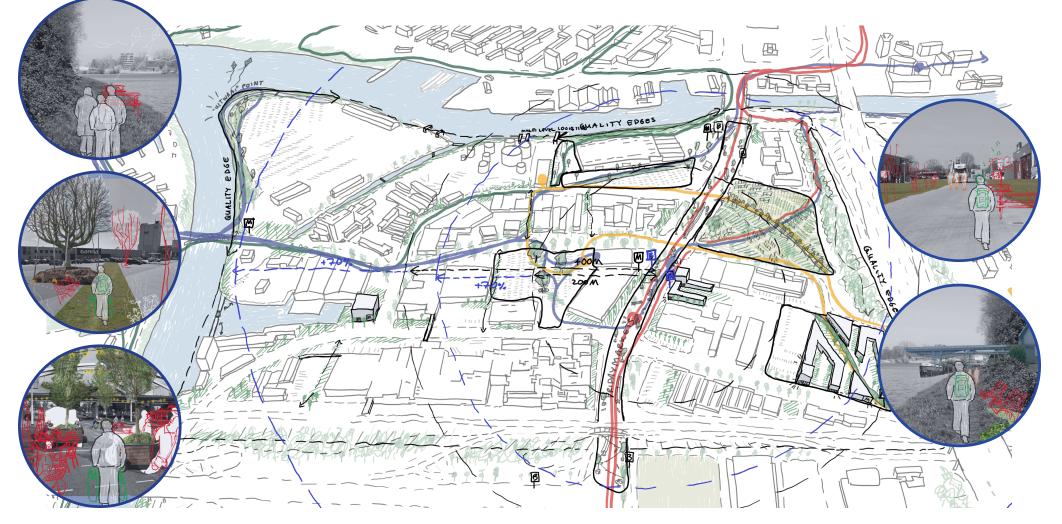


Kick-off

Immediate interventions create walking quality: fast-growing greenery, full-grown trees, improved access to existing quality spaces, and car(e) free days with markets that reclaim traffic space for people. These low-resistance actions spark habit shifts, encouraging residents to rethink their spaces and routines.

Basis

Accessibility is addressed by using the SSTOMP, an inclusive expansion of STOMP. It promotes staying and slowness (hence the added 'S') not merely going and moving, and supports those with mobility limitations, by for example shared walking aids and a focus on public transport. This is supported by creating more walking quality, as in qualitative environments people walk up to 70% further to PT stops.

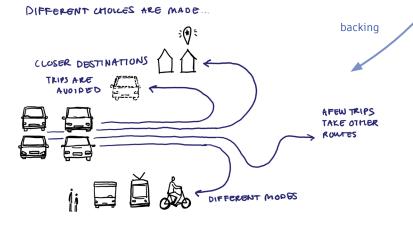


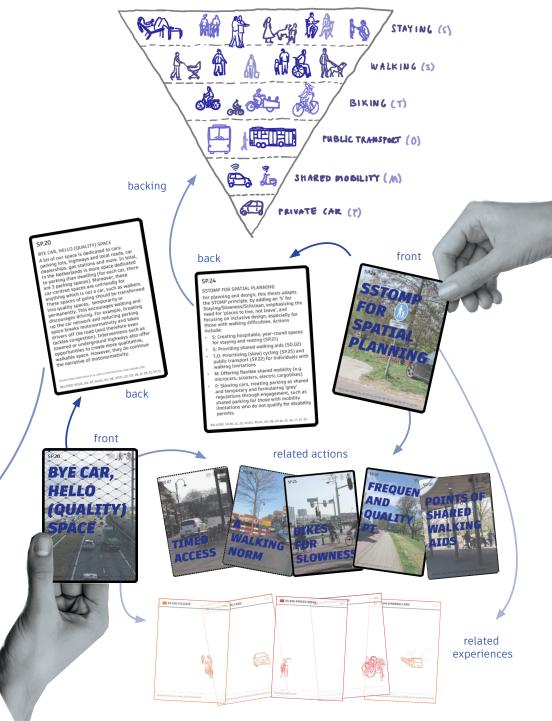
Mixed-use development introduces housing and amenities. This challenges current environmental standards deeming the area unsuitable for residential purposes. However, if an area is deemed unfit for living, why is it fit for working 8+ hours a day? Mix-use development combined with 'performance codes' addresses this issue. These codes are flexible standards that assess liveability and environmental quality, focusing on how spaces function, rather than prescribing exact uses (like traditional zoning does). Here, they support not only walkable environments, but moreover transitions to cleaner industries and more human-centred workplaces.

Restrict

Car-centric infrastructure is transformed:

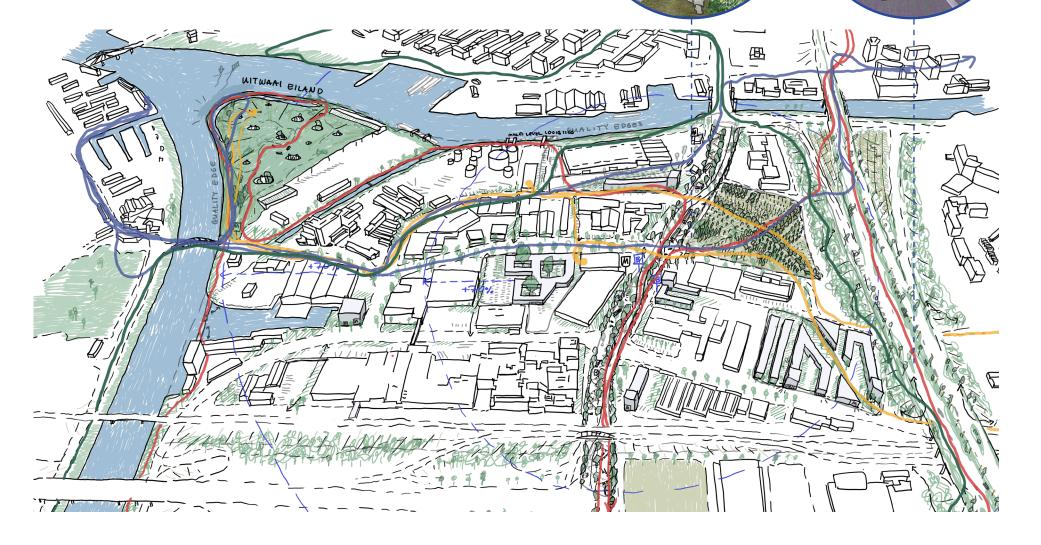
Parking lots become homes, inviting entrances and pocket parks, the Blaloweg becomes a pedestrian promenade with cafés, kiosks, markets, and the high frequency bus line, the A28 highway is reimagined as a green city boulevard and Scania's truck park is turned into an "uitwaai" roofpark. These changes follow the logic of traffic evaporation: when space for cars is reduced, congestion doesn't simply shift, it often disappears as people adjust their behaviour, choosing different modes, closer destinations or not going at all.





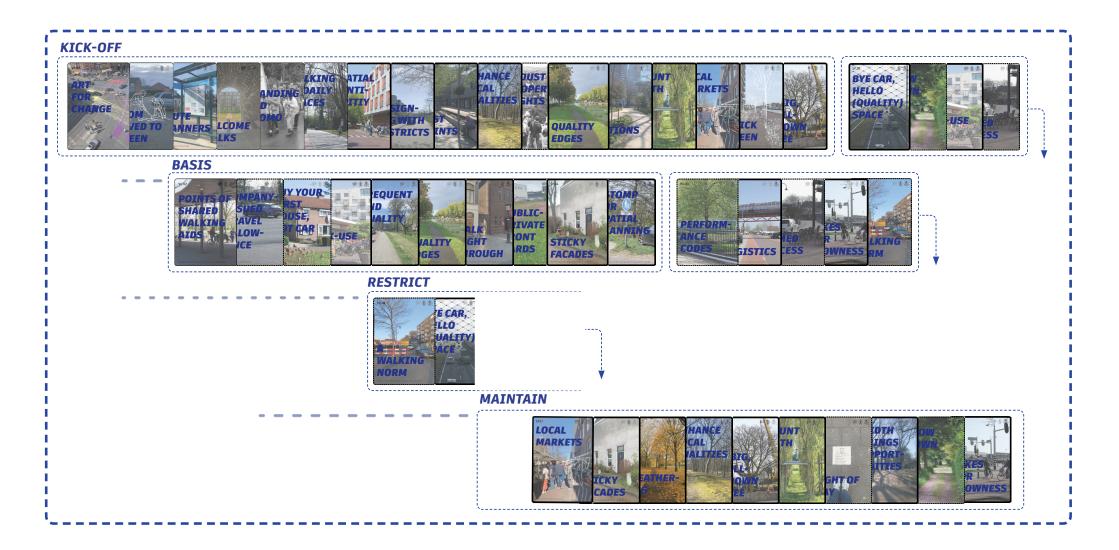
Maintain

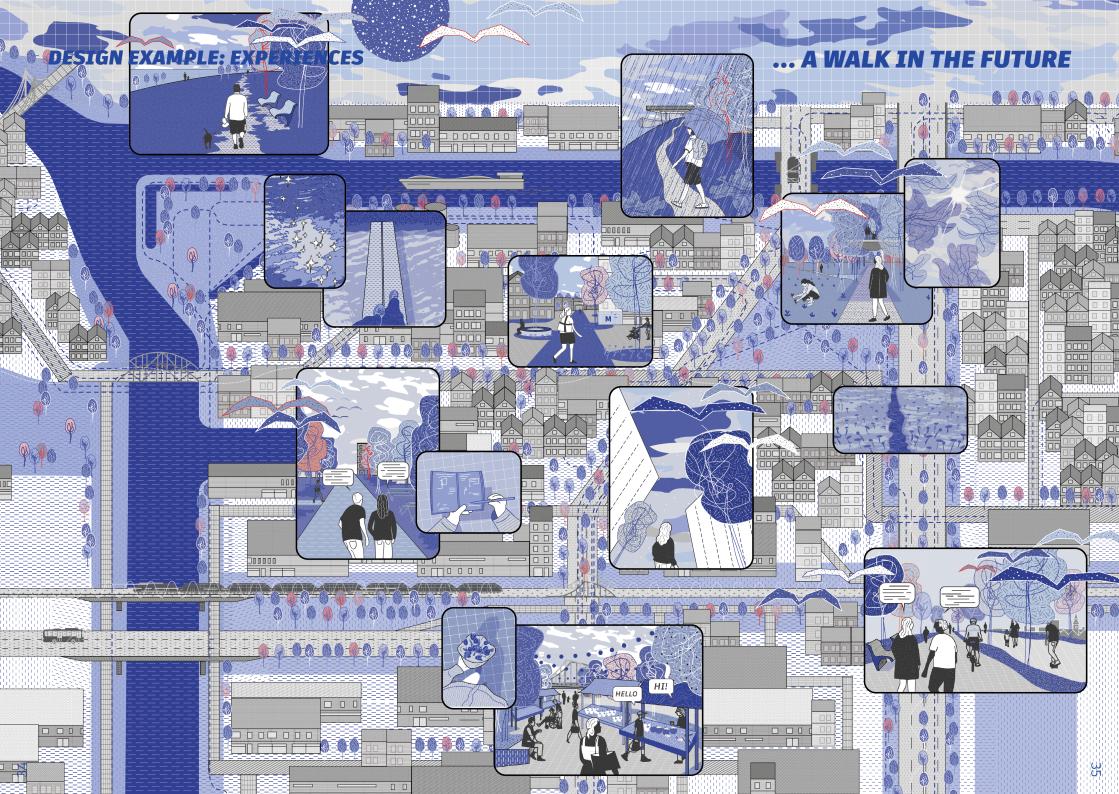
Walking is supported not just by space, but by social habits and culture. The spaces support diverse walking options, which lets people personalise how and why they walk. This fosters the emergence of walking subcultures over time. With local, high-quality routes throughout, walking becomes possible anywhere, anytime.

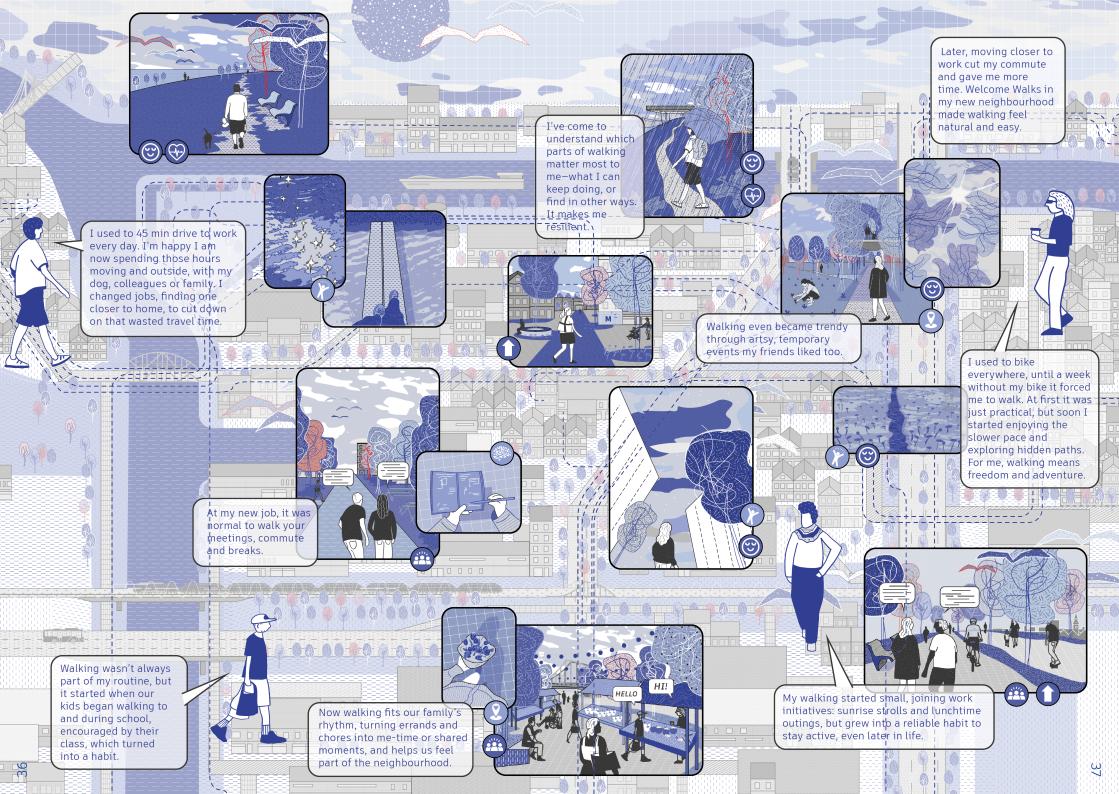


DESIGN EXAMPLE: PATTERNS

The scheme shows the patterns used for the design proposal in Zwolle. The patterns are documented in detail in the thesis 'Steps towards slowness', which holds their development, backing and relationships.







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