

News Articles Overseas : Building & Planning

The new Utrecht has less space for the car (Het nieuwe Utrecht heeft minder plaats voor de auto) by Charlotte Huisman. (*Utrecht is the third largest city in Nederland*)
Volkskrant 3 Jan 2019 (*≈ Dutch progressive catholic newspaper*)

Who before long buys a house in one of the largescale new developments around the centre of Utrecht cannot assume that there will be a space for their car. "We aim for inhabitants that are able to live with the alternative we offer," say Utrecht's councillor for traffic Lot van Hooijdonk (GroenLinks *≈ Green Left political party*)."

With Amsterdam takes Utrecht the lead to push back the car, a trend that is happening in many cities. "We are not bullying cars", stresses Hooijdonk. The city will only improve because of it. "With less space for the car you create space more areas for greenery and playing children.

Living with the car in front of the door: it can be done different, is the opinion of the GroenLinks councillor. "You can go with public transport, or share a car. For many people who drive a little carsharing can be cheaper," In the new suburbs, the Merwedekanaalzone where 10,000 dwellings are planned, will have 'hubs' with sharecars, sharebikes and electric sharebikes.

The number of inhabitants in Utrecht is now 350,000, but will rise to 400,000 in coming years. After years of spread out suburbs it is now the turn of density increases. But many extra cars would not fit in. Beside the environmental pollution: they are space gobblers, both when on the road (extra roads) as when standing still (parking spaces).

And so the use of cars is discouraged. Within short period tens of carbays in the historic city centre, along the Oudegracht and at the Janskerkhof, will disappear -- why would you deface those picturesque pieces of Utrecht by parking pieces of steel? In addition will the "parkingnorm" for new developments go down in the centre. In some areas three to four dwellings will have to do with one parkingbay.

Alternatives

There have to enough alternative ways of transport. That will be possible, according to the councillor. In cooperation with the surrounding councils and the province does Utrecht work on a future transport model that looks like a wheel with spokes: Utrecht Centraal (*central railway station*) stays the axel and current railway lines, the new tramline to the Uithof and the existing bus-lanes will be the spokes. The idea is that travellers easily can transfer from one ov-line (*ov = openbaar vervoer ≈ public transport payment system, which nationally has one ticketing system*) to another without having to travel to Utrecht Central. Already in the parking policy in 2013 let Utrecht go the golden rule of one parkingbay per dwelling. The city was then divided in three rings: the centre, surrounding suburbs and the outer-lying suburbs, each with different parking needs. With the new parking policy presented in 2019 the city wishes to go step further. For tens of thousands new dwellings that will be built in the next ten years the traffic-councillor wants to have a lower parking norm: in some parts to 0.3 or lower: so less than one carbay per three dwellings. That is possible according to her, "Partly due to changes in lifestyle: younger people have less often a car."

Less auto-mobility is according to Van Hooijdonk is necessary for the further building up of part of the central parts of Utrecht. "Otherwise it is not possible for the surrounding roads to cope with the pressure." It are not unrealistic plans according the councillor. From her office in the city office she points to the 90m high tower that is built at the Sijpestijnkade at stone through from Central Station. "That tower is built with a parkingnorm of 0.5 and appears already ample."

Change of direction

It is quite a change of direction that Utrecht now makes. Decades long was the car central, on old photographs one can see how till in the eighties everywhere in the centre cars were able to drive and park. Recently Utrecht re-dug out a "singel" (*≈ a type of canal*), which was filled in during the seventies for a highway straight through the city. And Utrecht has the ambition to become cycling city number one. By the development of comfortable cycle bike highways, shorter waiting time at traffic lights and more bike parkinglots.

Critics fear that the traffic will jam due too much "wishful thinking" by the green-city councillors. Because in the quick growing city some of the through roads will be narrowed to so called "city boulevards", with less lanes and more green. The idea is that more traffic going from one end to the other of the city make use of the freeway ring roads, where there are many traffic jams already.

Due to the high housing shortage in the city it looks if potential buyers will soon have little choice. People will be forced to buy a dwelling where there is no space for a car, while perhaps they need one? "If you are not prepared for less car use, or you are not able due to your job, than it is probably better not to live near the centre, but closer to a freeway turnoff." says Van Hooijdonk.

How do you lower the parkingnorm?

The parkingnorm can be lowered, but cities have to do that with a policy, say expert. "The situation in the heart of Utrecht and Amsterdam is different naturally from the outside areas in the middle of Drente (*≈ a more sparsely populated province in the northeast of Nederland*)", say parking expert Hille Talens of the traffic institute CROW. "Cities can offer their inhabitants alternative transport options. In very specific cases less than a parking bay per person is possible. The Vereniging Eigen Huis (*≈ Association of House Owners*) warns about the drastic lowering of the parkingnorms. "You cannot expect people to get rid of their car", says spokesperson Hans André de la Porte. "Young families need a car, which they have to park somewhere. If that does not is possible they will look further away and will cause hindrance."

Close to large train station the parkingnorm can go down. "Then there alternatives. But further away of the station it becomes more difficult. It are nice plans but they can also tip the scales. You could make visits difficult. The car is a known fact you cannot just rub it out."

Reduce parking without protest; it is possible (Parkeren indammen zonder protest; het kan) by Sacha Kester

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Analysis : Parking elsewhere.

Parking takes up a lot of space often on expensive land and costs the community money, Zurich worked on it with success.

The Swiss city Zurich was one of the first in the world that put the knife in carparking policy. In 1996 a “historic decision” was made: number of car parks was not allowed to increase. “If somewhere in the city a new parking spot was built, somewhere else a parking spot had to disappear”. A city spokesperson Heiko Ciceri said over the phone. “Most new parking bays are built underground ¹, due to which we have now more car free streets a space for inhabitants to do recreation”.

Also a maximum number of cars that can be on the road in Zurich. When the sensors in the road surface detect that the maximum has reached, traffic lights at the edge of the city turn red. It sometimes causes some traffic jams on the ring road, but in the city itself you do not see a traffic jam.

The city had expected protests by inhabitants,” says he, “But the opposite was true”. “They think it is marvellous”, says Ciceri, “They have received a liveable city in return. That is only possible because we have such good public transport, due to that inhabitants have alternatives to travel from A to B.”

Los Angeles

It does not surprise Donald Shoup. As professor in urban planning at University of California, twenty years ago he mapped the problematic sides of parking. In 1995 he published the book The High Cost of Free Parking. So because of Shoup we know how much space parking takes up: in a city as LA, for example, where dwellings are scarce, exists for 14% of parking bays.

“People think they have a right to park their car in front of their door and become very angry when they think it is taken away from them”, says Shoup, “But when they see their city improves, the protest stops.”

Shoup advises councils all over the world to take away as many as possible the street parking, ask a realistic price for underground parking and use the money to make the neighbourhood more liveable. “There has not been an inhabitant that became angry because there came a larger green area with terraces and playgrounds in front of their doors.”

So who thinks that their patience is tested with parking in the Dutch city centres, can expect more. In Rotterdam you pay €4/h (~ 6.30) in the centre. In Utrecht it is €5 (~ \$8) and in Amsterdam from May 2019 it will be €7.50 (~ \$12).

It can be even more expensive, like in New York. According to Global Parking Index 2017, where the prices of more than 50 million parking bays are compared, are here two parking garages where you pay €27.50/h (~ \$43). That is the most expensive in the world, but on average you pay in New York €14.50/h (~ \$23). “A bargain”, says Shoup laughing over the phone.

Parking just costs the community money. There have been built parking garages and managed, but also parking lots have to be fenced in, cleaned, secured and lit. The more money a council contributes the less money it can spend on other tasks. “The inhabitants subsidies in reality the car drivers”, according to Shoup.

Parking lots take up enormous areas: large, grey spots in public area. Take the parking lot around the West Edmonton shopping centre in Alberta, Canada, it can host 20,000 cars; that largest parking lot in the world. The area is nearly as large as the shopping centre itself and takes up roughly the same space as a suburb of 500 houses down the road.

1 HB : Noticed that in Madrid also parking spaces are built underground, often under intersections. probably easier to build them there .

Eaten away

At night the whole parking lot is empty. Because during the day the car is parked at work and at night parked at the front door and on the weekend at the supermarket, restaurant or sporting club. Certainly in the US, where the car always was given space, cities are more and more eaten up by carparks. According to a recent study by Research Institute for Housing America has the city of Seattle five parking spots per household and the town Jackson (10,000 inhabitants) even 27.

In the centre the popular cities it has a price tag. "A parking space takes up about 12m²", says Guilianno Mingardo, transport economy researcher at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. A parking permit at de canals in Amsterdam costs €535/year (≈ \$850), but look what it costs to rent an apartment at that location. That is nothing in comparison."

The same is valid for cities as New York, London or Bangkok. Still rarely do politician have the courage to increase the cost of parking. They are afraid for angry citizens and are afraid that it will damage the economy. While there is plenty of academic evidence that a high parking tariffs have no influence on the number of customers or turnover of shops. Stronger, argues Mingardo, investing in an attractive city centre will attract more shoppers and day trippers than nice parking places. "Nobody says: let's go shopping in Zoetermeer (satellite town 15km east of The Hague), because parking is free."

