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De wording van het stadspark in Nederland 1600-1940

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Summary

Longing for green walks

The creation of the Dutch city park 1600-1940

With the growing population in cities and climate problems, city parks are very popular today. A city park is designed by human beings and laid out as a public green space in an urban environment with a cultural, recreational, educational, social, spatial, esthetical, ecological and economical meaning. Classified as green heritage, some city parks are protected as listed monument by the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency. Most of the existing historical city parks in The Netherlands have been designed and landscaped in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This is one of the reasons why people often think that a city park is a nineteenth century construction. This thesis shows us that Dutch city parks are part of a *longue durée* development from the sixteenth century up to the present day. Archival material shows us that in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century green walking spaces were described as *bequame* (pleasant), *publieke* (public) or *groene* (green) *wandelweg*, *(stads)wandelweg*, *wandelplaats*, *wandelallee*, *wandelgang*, *wandelpad*, *wandelbaan*, *(stads)plantsoen*, *(stads)plantagie*, *(stads)hout*, *(stads)wandelbos*; from circa 1875 *(stads)wandelpark*, *villapark*, *volkspark*, *stadspark* came into fashion, while in the beginning of the twentieth century a combination of the words *park* or *garden*: *wandelpark*, *wandel- en villapark*, *wandel- en sportpark*, *volkspark*, *stadspark*, *gemeente* (municipal) *park*, *heem* (native plants) *park* or just *park* but also *gemeente* (municipal) *tuin* or *plantsoen* came into being. All denote one common function, as attractive public city walks and parks especially designed and laid out as green walking places in, on or outside the city boundary. These so-called *green walks* were laid out according to different designs and often in combination with other functions. The essence of the city park is the green walk, which since 1600 forms the common denominator of any green space we would call *city park* today. The central question in this research is how these urban green walks were defined or described in the archives in order to get more insight into the history of the Dutch city park between 1600 and 1940. Several functions and meanings were attributed to the green walks and public parks during the time they were laid out. But what exactly is a city park? A standard definition of the term city park in The Netherlands doesn't exist. We lack an (inter) national list of city park publications, an up-to-date list of Dutch listed and unlisted city parks as well as an (inter)national research program on the history of city parks. Most of the city park studies focus on individual and large parks of the nineteenth century in the capital cities. These studies refer again and again to the same sources and tell the same story: that city

parks originated in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is often thought that Lodewijk Napoleon, first King of The Netherlands, initiated the layout of Dutch city parks at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But in several case studies in different cities the archival materials shows us the opposite as Lodewijk Napoleon used existing plans when he created a more Parisian greatness in his private and public Dutch gardens and parks. Few primary sources have been used in the studies on the development of the history of the Dutch city parks. Therefore, this research focuses on the history of city parks in the smaller provincial towns of The Netherlands. Not the famous city parks, like the Vondelpark in Amsterdam, were an example for the rest of the country; it was the mutual competition between towns and cities where city pride was one of the strong motives of laying out public parks and gardens. How city parks were described in the archival sources, where they were laid out – in, on or outside the former city fortifications– what the motives were of laying out public parks, who were their designers, planners, initiators and which existing public parks are listed monuments; these are the central questions in this study. Private gardens and parks opened for the public played an important role in the democratization of public city parks, but as they were not designed for public purpose they fall outside the scope of this study. The public urban green of Amersfoort is the thread of this research and serves as a walk through both time and public green space. On the one hand because of its central position in The Netherlands, on the other hand because archival research shows that Amersfoort was familiar with the urban greening of public walks and parks since the sixteenth century. Despite the fact that all city parks have there own character, they all originated in the same tradition of city councils laying out urban public green walks and parks for the benefit of the inhabitants. This research covers the period 1600-1940, starting when urbanization increased around 1600 and ending in 1940. After World War II the city park movement is documented and well kept at the municipal archives. This archival research is based on several case studies in every province of the Netherlands. The case studies are divided in two parts. Part I includes the time period 1600-1812, the period of the rising of public city green, which have now disappeared or exist in a transformed way. Part II includes the time period 1812-1940, the construction period of the many city parks that still exist. The year 1812 was chosen as a cut-off-date as Dutch green walks and walking places were described for the first time as walking parks (*wandelpark*). Politically it was also the birth of the Kingdom of The Netherlands. The case studies shows us different types of public green: walkways and woods (*plantagien*), green walks and walking places, public green (*plantsoenen*) and walking woods, villa- and walking parks, people- and city parks. The various terms for city parks used in the archival sources show us that the city park is not a nineteenth century construction, but was based, in fact, on a long tradition of greening the public environment mainly

instigated by the Dutch city councils but sometimes as a gift from private investors. They regularly changed in physical space and design but always kept the original function of walking. Different assumptions, interpretations, definitions, meanings or publications surrounding the Dutch city park have most of the time presented a one-sided view of its development history. A city park is a social construction that combines high and low culture. The loss of a historical city park is not only the loss of public green, it is the loss of part of the human existence, of city pride and local identity. It is important to adapt today's requirements into historical city parks. At the moment where differences between poor and rich increase, historical city parks can become an important inspiration for the development of our future and more inclusive living environment.