



Contesting Territories

The significance of the Plein to the power contests
between the Dutch government and the people

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Introduction

In recent decades, the importance of public space has been brought to the eyes of intellectuals and architects. The UN-Habitat (2016) associates public spaces to the prosperity in cities, regarding their contribution to the definition of social, economic and political functions there. Therefore, the way of creating and managing these public spaces becomes a highlighted issue in different fields. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1974) considers social space as a product of thought and of action. It was also stated that the means of production of social space is a means of control, domination, and power.

In Dutch context, the relationship between public space and the power is best shown on the Plein in The Hague. The Plein is a square located in the historical center of The Hague. It is not just the center in a geographical sense, but also is it next to the Binnenhof, the political center of Dutch powers over centuries. Despite the historical and political significance of the Plein, it is a place where nowadays tourists are recommended to sit down and have a drink. As a public space with the proximities to both political power, historical landmarks as well as daily social interactions, the Plein is a strong showcase of the intertwinements of the influence from political, historical and cultural factors of the Netherlands.

Located directly next to the Binnenhof and food and beverage spots on local streets, the use and management of the Plein may visualize the relationship between the authority and the citizens in a spatial sense, as well as the contests between political powers and public sectors over the right to use and freedom on this little empty square. By unfolding the historical background of the Plein, it gives clues about the uniqueness of the space compared to the other public space in Europe and other continents. The transformation of Dutch powers can also be seen through the change in the use of Plein and surrounding buildings.

Methodology

The thesis is going to unravel, in a spatial sense, the relationship between public space and the power in the Netherlands through the case of the Plein since the 1980s till now. By the analysis on the previous discussions and disputes over the design and use of the Plein, it aims to indicate the priorities of the government and the public in their considerations on the use of public space. The power imbalance between political and public sector will also be highlighted.

In the first section, this thesis will first introduce the importance of public space in a community. It will then explain the history of plazas and squares as the representations of powers in the history, especially in Europe. Lastly, with the aid of literature and several theories, it will analyze the change in people's interpretation of public space in terms of its definition and function.

The second section will introduce the historical background of the Plein, and will address how the historical factors and development contributed to the uniqueness of this public space. The analysis will focus on the Plein's spatial nature in symbolic, architectural, and historical aspects, with the use of literature and images.

The third section analyzes the territorial disputes over the use of the Plein between the government and the public in the past decades. In which different perspectives from the two sectors will be highlighted. The cases will also be used to show how Dutch political power still exercises its dominance over the use and management of this public space. This section consists of four cases.

Case 1 – The first case will be the OMA's design proposal in the open competition for the extension of the House of Representatives of the Binnenhof in 1978. The case mainly analyzes the architects' advocative approach to rebrand the parliament by the inclusion of public realm. It also acts as the preface for the next case.

Case 2 – The second case is also the extension of the parliament, but it is Pi de Bruijn's design at the realization stage. In his proposal, the focus of the thesis will be his emphasis on transparency and openness of the government, and the proposed public passage in between Binnenhof and the extension, penetrating from the Hofweg to the Plein. However, due to security reason, the idea of open passage was banned by the Dutch government in the later stage. The dispute in fact highlights the contrast between the government and the public in their way of thinking over the management, security and the connectivity of the Plein. It also amplifies that how political power actually dominates the configuration and the feature of the public space.

Case 3 – The third case focuses on the current catering use of the Plein. The Plein is now partly occupied by the terrace seats and tables. The proximity of the Plein to Binnenhof, the central political power of the Netherlands, makes the mentioned business an interesting case in terms of the territorial tensions between the public and political sector. The case will indicate the diffuse border of the use of the space, and illustrate the positive effect of the political power's control of space to the shaping of a democratic space.

Case 4 – The final case will be the recent public demonstrations and protests on the Plein. As a public space owned by the political power, the tolerance towards civil resistance taking place on the Plein also marks the change in the governing attitude of the Dutch political powers. The change in security measures and Dutch power's stance will be analyzed to highlight the invisible dominance and its influence to the citizens' rights. A Hong Kong case will be complemented to address the importance of the public space in facilitating democracy and freedom for general public.

Public space in a city

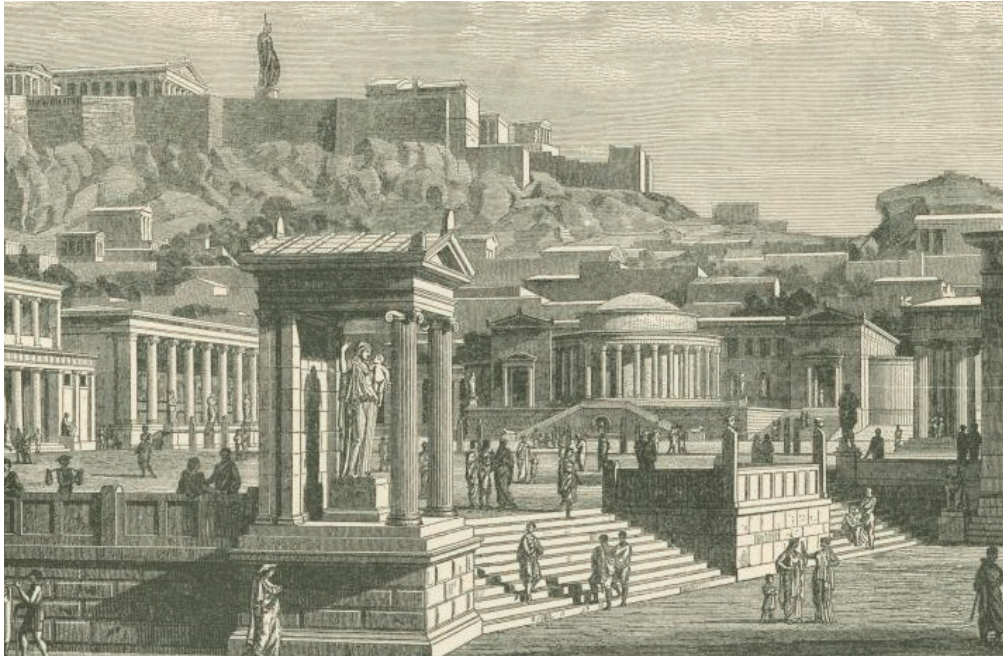


Fig 2. An illustration of the agora in ancient Athens

Agora

The earliest form of public space could be dated back to the *agora* in ancient Greek cities. From the 5th century BC, *agora* was meant to be the gathering and assembly space for the Greek citizens. In a political sense, the *agora* had served for the rulers to announce their statements and citizens' military duties. Tribunals were also called in *agora*. The *agora* was a medium that facilitated the rulers to execute their orders and proceed their administrations. Other than that, the *agora* was a marketplace for the Greeks to do business, to exchange, and to communicate. The gathering of people eventually attracted more merchants and workers to provide their knowledge and skills, as well as artists and athletes to show their professions. This ordinary form of public space already exhibited its influences in political, business and social developments in ancient Greek cities.

Plazas

In European countries, some public space or major market-space might exist in the form of *plaza*. Plazas are often located in the city center and are surrounded by shops. As a result, the high accessibility of the plazas to the citizens fosters the communications and business among the general public. In this case, the plazas are solely designed and built for economic activities. For example, the Plaza Mayor is located in the heart of Madrid, and it is now still accommodating large scale events and festivals. Furthermore, the Place des Vosges which

had been the reference for the Plein, represents the luxurious and artistic form of lives of the 17th and 18th century Paris. By comparison with the social and commercial values, the political significance of the two plazas is rather weak.

On the contrary, some other plazas in Europe are built not only for economic but also political purpose. In the southern part of Netherlands and Belgium, the public squares are more probably located in the historical centers of towns and cities. Most of the public squares, similar to previous examples, are used as market-space. These Dutch and Belgian squares are not enclosed by just shops, they sit next to the town hall and are sometimes occupied with municipal activities. Moreover, in the 17th and 18th centuries, royal squares are designed and built to strengthen the image of the political power. They are built usually in front of palaces, city halls, and other government buildings. By creating a frontal and open image of the building façades, the royal squares amplify the greatness of the political powers. These plazas are designed for housing military parades and ceremonies instead of daily economic activities. Public space in this form was considered as a political device to promote and consolidate the governmental power to the public, its ultimate goal was to serve the power rather than the public. All the above examples have indicated that the public space in European history were mostly built by the powers to serve a specific purpose, which in a way determined the function and audience of the space.



Fig 3. Plaza Mayor as prominent marketspace



Fig 4. The Grand-Place of Brussels and the Brussels Town Hall

Changing perception of public space

Public space in the past was mainly understood as space for gathering and economic activities, sometimes for political events. Plazas and squares sometimes played a role in historical incidents, but it was not until the 1960s that they were valued as a powerful tool that contributes to changing society. Following the concept “social justice” (or distributive justice) founded by John Rawls (1971), public space was also brought into the discussion. According to the statement “*(Social) space is a (social) product.*” (Lefebvre, 1974), space does not only represent space itself, it includes the process behind as well - the production and the control of it. The concept of the right to the city then arose, it resisted to the sole control of market forces over public space and encouraged public participation in the shaping of space, in order to achieve distributive justice of public resources.

It is not just about equal access to the resources, but also the unity of public power. Following Lefebvre’s idea, the right to the city was claimed a collective right that shared and exercised by everyone to change themselves. On top of that, it can only be exercised collectively to respond to the processes of urbanization (Harvey, 2008). The claims convey a perspective that public space is not considered just a marketspace anymore, it is now also an incubator that shapes different individuals. Therefore, the focus of public space no longer stayed on its function and target of service, it shifted towards the process of the forming of space and the extent of public participation in it. It shows that public empowerment is now more prioritized in public space discussions.

Beside the collective empowerment, public space is also crucial in individual representation. In the current era, a lot of political energy is put into promoting the significance of individual human rights (Harvey, 2008). With all these diversified lifestyles and opinions, a space with open access to all is needed for heterogenic social interactions and exchanges. So that the needs and demands of individuals and groups can be visualized and recognized by society (Mitchell, 2014). It is shown that a free and open public space is necessary to ensure the voice of different groups including minorities are heard by everyone, and by the government. The recognition and involvement of different individuals’ point of views are the main components to advocate a democratic and civilized society.

The concept of public space is no longer limited to its physical variables but also to the ideas and constraints behind (Geenens, 2009). Therefore, it is more important to question that who holds the power to shape public space which is meant to be a public asset, and what approach does the power take in managing public space. The control of the public space in fact dominates the participation and recognition of individual and groups in civil society. In later sections, the territorial contests between the political power and the public would be analyzed through both visible and invisible management of space, as well as the disputes over the Plein and its surrounding buildings. In order to reflect the Dutch government’s performance in public empowerment through public space, and their unseen abuse of power there.

History of the Plein

The Hague

The Hague is officially the third largest city in the Netherlands; however, it houses the current government office of the Netherlands, the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court. The concentration of political powers of the Netherlands and even that of the united Nation has proven The Hague as the de facto capital of the Netherlands. From the 13th century, The Hague had been the hunting ground and hedge of the Counts of Holland, the rulers of the County of Holland.

A Gothic castle, the Binnenhof, was built in The Hague as the residence of the counts, and in 1584 it was converted to the political center of the Dutch Republic. After the Napoleonic Wars, Brussels and Amsterdam were the capitals of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, meanwhile The Hague remained as the administrative center. Following the separation of Belgium, Amsterdam remained the capital of the Netherlands, whereas The Hague became the political center. Together with The Hague Market, one of the largest European markets, and the international judicial bodies, it is shown that the economic and political influence of The Hague is greatly recognized by the global community.

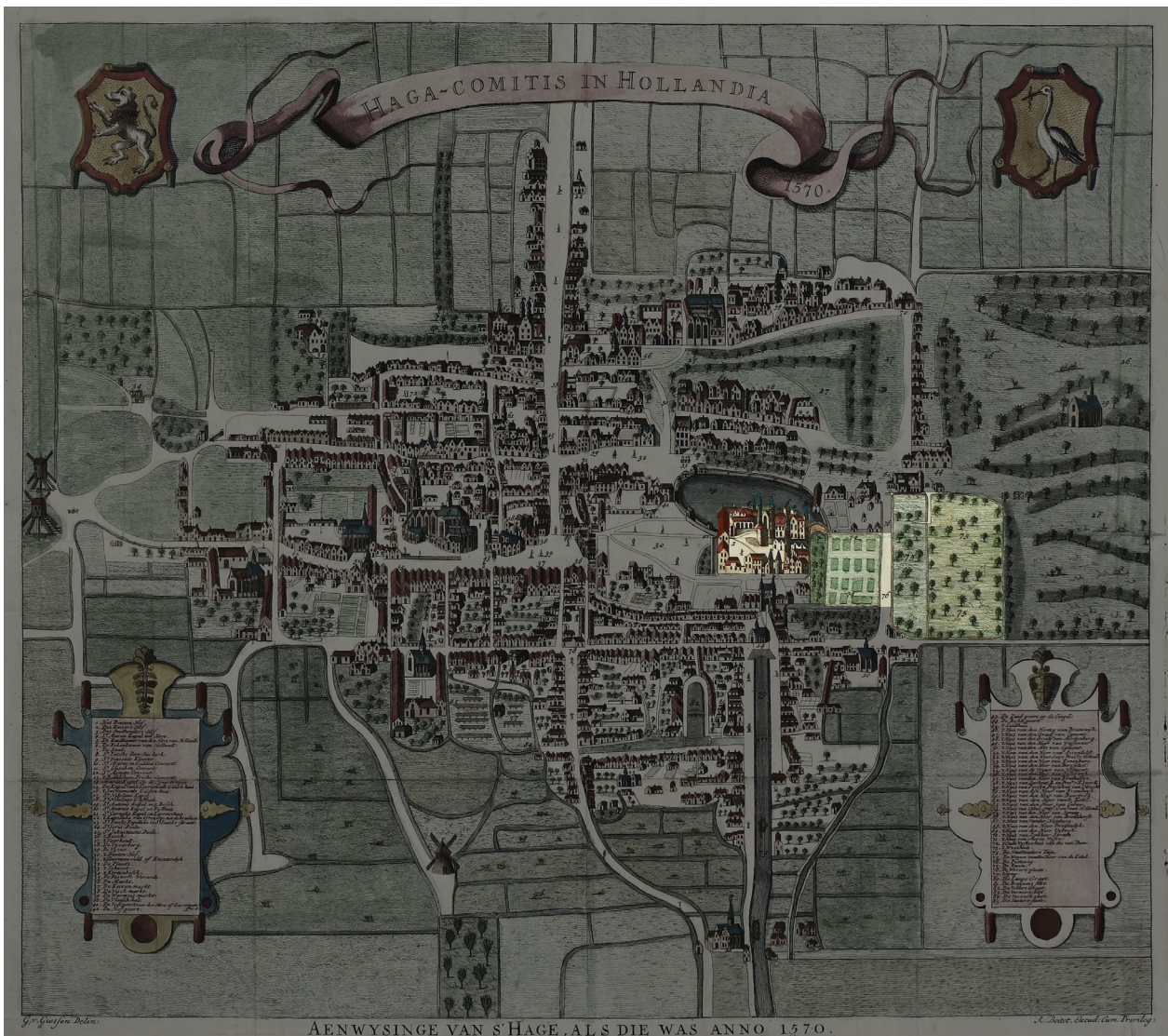


Fig 5. The map of The Hague in 1570 (illustrated in 1730),
the highlighted parts are the Binnenhof (Left), Vegetable Garden (Middle) and Hunting Field (Right)



Fig 6. Jans van Call's painting of the new Plein in 1690



Fig 7. The Place Royale in Paris in the 17th century

The Plein

The Plein was first mentioned in 1316 and it was originally a garden for the Counts of Holland. Located between the Binnenhof and the hunting forest, it was used as the vegetable garden ("Kooltuin") for the counts, and one of the two entrances connecting the Binnenhof. During the Eighty Years' War, the Binnenhof including the garden was left abandoned. In 1598, Prince Maurits renovated and converted the garden to an ornamental garden ("Stdhouserstuin").

In 1632, Prince of Orange and governor Frederik Hendrik in the Dutch Republic had come up with a sales contract with the municipality of The Hague. The contract stated that the garden was sold to the municipality, and as long as it belongs to the municipality nothing can be built on the garden (van Tilborg, 2019). In addition, Prince Fredrik Hendrik actively engaged in the urban planning project around the Plein and the Binnenhof. The governor and his secretary Constantijn Huygens had projected their vision of transforming the private square into a spacious and regulated public space, by referencing the Place Royale (current the Place des Vosges) in Paris.

The urban design of the Plein was briefly an empty square with rigid boundaries surrounded by houses with the combination of commercial and residential functions.

But it was more than that. The Plein was not fully employing the design of the Place Royale, it is not fully enclosed by the houses but leaves spatially logical accesses to the city. With one side of the Plein standing the Binnenhof, Fredrik Hendrik's plan emphasized the accessibility, uniformity and regularity, which clarify the relationships between the court and the government, the government and the people, and the people and the city (Tucker, 2013). The renovation plan denotes how the government back in the 17th century approached its relationship with the general public. The active engagement of Fredrik Hendrik in the city planning of The Hague as well as the layout of the Plein displays the exertion of political power and ruler's visions at the center of the city in Dutch history (Tucker, 2013).

Uniqueness of the Plein

The aforementioned complex history and characteristics of the Plein have resulted into its multifaceted culture and diversified use of space. These backgrounds also shaped the uniqueness of the Plein compared to other public space in the world. The uniqueness could be divided into three aspects as below.

Historical and cultural symbol

The Plein has huge significance in Dutch history, which symbolizes further social and cultural influence to the Dutch. Firstly, the location of the Plein is prominent, which is in the heart of The Hague, the de facto capital of the Netherlands. The above paragraphs illustrated the obsession of the Dutch rulers in staying in The Hague. The rich political history in The Hague has also translated to the Dutch peoples' projection of Dutch culture to this city. The Plein, as a public space situated right next to the Binnenhof, the headquarter of Dutch political power for more than seven centuries, is a living symbol remarking the history of the whole country. Furthermore, the Plein is not a ubiquitous square designed under the previous rulers' order; it is a place which has undergone several renovations in different times in the history. From cabbage garden to ornamental garden, then to the current public space, each renovation of the Plein has infused desires and visions of the political powers. The Plein does not house a particular moment but the dynamic flow of history of the Netherlands. It displays the cultural and historical significance of the country.



Fig 8. The International Court of Justice

Scale and proximity

A public space right in front of the central government body might not seem special, the scale of the Plein and its proximity to its surrounding, however, has created potentials for complex interactions and contests between the government and the public. Compared to Élysée Palace in Paris and Westminster District in London, the Binnenhof in The Hague has adopted an exceptionally smaller government body, the scale of the government and the square is similar to the scale of that in towns and municipalities. Furthermore, different ministry offices of the Dutch government are scattered around the Plein. After nearly 400 years, the design idea of Hendrik Fredrik still remained in current layout, which citizens could easily access to the Plein unobstructed (Tucker, 2013). The headquarter is very proximate to the city and daily lives of The Hague. The empty square did not serve as security or privacy buffer between government and local buildings, but became partly occupied by public terrace seats. The boundary, and the division between the political body and the general public are greatly diffused. As a result, both the intertwinements and conflicts could happen in a minimal scale and in a high frequency, so that they could be visualized in a variety of events.

Empty free space

To maintain a democratic and genuine public space, the public space should be able to produce democratic relations and representations, as well as invite public participation (Hoskyns, 2014). On the other hand, one of the potential threats of public space is attributed to the private purchase of public land; the private and gated community might enclose and control the space that is originally public (Low & Smith, 2006). As privatized space stands for limited variations of lives, and for forbidden political purposes (Parkinson, 2012). The privatization of once-public marketspace is not uncommon in most of the international cities like New York and London. These privatized space are not democratic space anymore, but become centers of commercial activities (Low, 2000). However, the historical background has set the Plein free from the threat of privatization. According to the contract signed between Fredrik Hendrik and the municipality of The Hague, the municipality could not build anything on the Plein during its ownership. In the foreseeable future, the privatization of the Plein by commercial sector seems not in municipality's consideration. Instead, the current Plein is more likely under the threat of the abuse of control or privatization from the Dutch political bodies in the name of security. In the following sections, this potential threat will be further discussed through four case studies that reflect the unproportional power on the use of public space between the public and political sectors.



Fig 9. A diagram illustrating the proximity between the Plein and the government offices, also the public access to the public space

Case Study 1 – OMA's proposal for the Extension the House of Representatives

The OMA's proposal in the extension of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands is a design that is never realized, and has no actual spatial impact to the Plein. However, the case is powerful and relevant as a preface for our understanding of the Dutch government and the architects' perspectives in the relationship between people and power, as well as the responses the architects took to deal with public realm in a government building design. After this case study, the case of the actualized design of the extension the House of Representatives, in which the Plein plays a crucial role, will continue the discussion.

Background

The House of Representatives in the Netherlands is set up in 1815 during the rule of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. After several amendments of the Dutch constitution, the house is adopting party-list proportional representation through elections. In this system, the eligible citizens are not only capable to vote for candidate from a chosen list but capable to also influence the candidate list. The elected candidates are taken as the representative of citizens and report to them. The house is not a fully enclosed institution but involves public participation in law making process.

Due to the increasing number of the representatives, the house demanded an extension of the government complex. Besides, it had to separate from the government to accentuate their political opposition, in which the parliament are supposed to supervise the government's actions on behalf of the populace (Koolhaas et al., 1995). The Binnenhof had called for an open competition in 1978. In this competition, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) founded by Rem Koolhaas submitted one of their earliest design proposals. The proposal was not selected and realized as the jury led by the Dutch government, Wim Quist, did not select any projects for the second round. It was claimed that all the submitted proposals did not fulfill the complexity required for this commission. But in the competition, the OMA still won a first prize, together with Leo Heijdenrijk.

Architects' visions

The OMA's proposal displays the architects' (including Rem Koolhaas, Elias Zenghelis and Zaha Hadid) refusal to a complete tribute to historical context of the Binnenhof, as it needs much more complexity and precision to be integrated into the actual context. Instead, they took another approach to transform the Binnenhof with their new, programmatic-driven, and supermodernist design (Koolhaas et al., 1995). The proposal consists of three buildings respectively designed by Koolhaas, Zenghelis and Hadid, assembled along two intersecting axes. In order to facilitate the inclusion of public realm and the respect to public space, the main entrance of the proposed extension is facing right towards the Hofweg. Right after entering the building, visitors soon arrive at the public plaza which is a glass block and provides direct sightlines to the side façade of the Ridderzaal. From the public plaza, escalators to the public gallery of the parliament assembly hall would be visible and easily accessible by visitors.

Freely accessible prominent locations, the glass block design of the entrance plaza; the building blocks and negative space that strike through the Binnenhof, and the main entrance right facing towards a public space, these various design ideas conveyed the architects' prospects of public inclusiveness and power transparency. In this sense, the space that can be freely accessed and used by public was used as a metaphor of the reachable distance between the Binnenhof and the citizens. Public space is a device that encourages public participation in the law-making process, and that empowers the populace to be involved in politics, in the shaping of their lives. With the full and frontal connection of the extension's entrance to the outdoor Hofweg, the public forum and the access to the public gallery serve as the extension of the public space. The interface between private space and public space, which represents the government and the public is no longer limited to a glass door or a meeting room, but extended to the core of political power. Apart from public accessibility of space, transparency of the government offices is also considered a metaphor of public surveillance over the governance, it stands for the sincerity and accountability of the Dutch government to the public. The full exposure of the Ridderzaal to the public is achieved through the negative space sandwiched by the two blocks. It is shown that the unobstructed empty space is also a critical device that facilitates transparency and public surveillance.



Fig 10. The OMA's drawing of their proposal of the Extension of the House of Representatives, which strikes through the Binnenhof and expose the Ridderzaal to the public through the negative gap



Fig 11. The OMA's drawing of their proposal of the Extension of the House of Representatives, illustrating the public connection from the entrance to different functional rooms

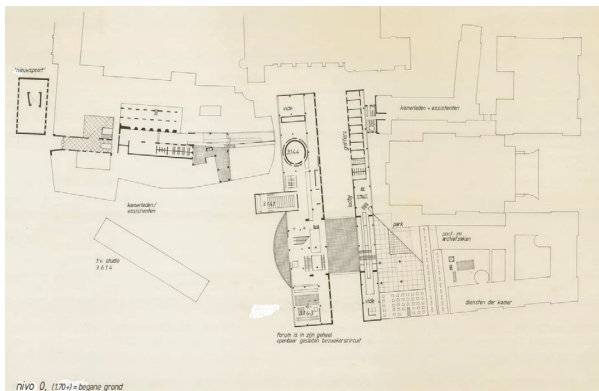


Fig 12. Ground Floor Plan, Entrance Plaza

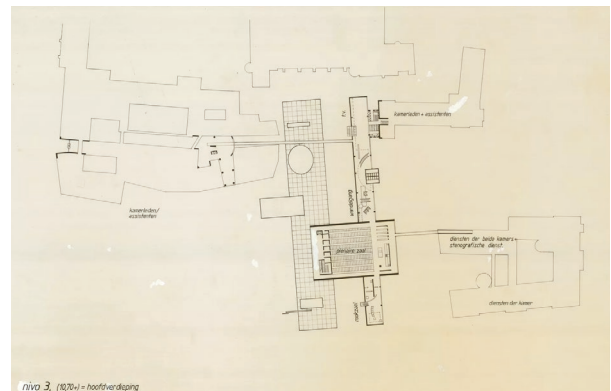


Fig 13. Third Floor Plan, Parliament Hall

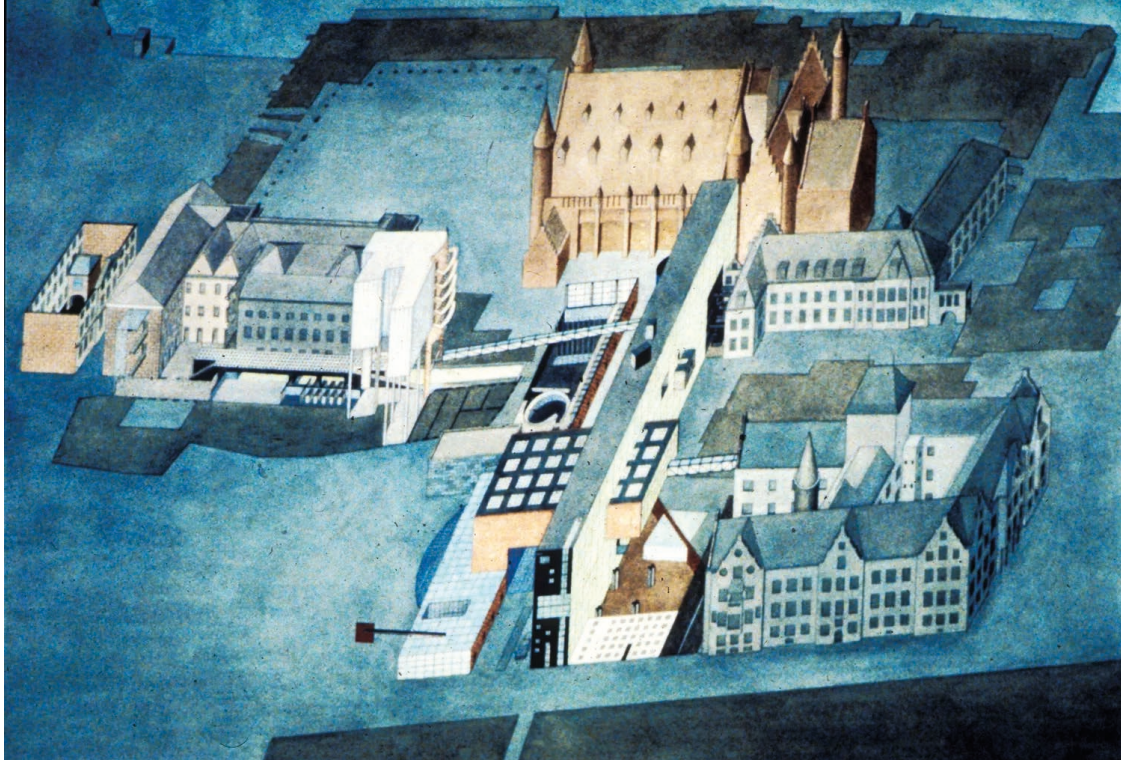


Fig 14. The OMA's drawing of their proposal of the Extension of the House of Representatives, showing its connections to existing government offices, and the visual connection to the Ridderzaal through the glass box

Disputes

As there was no winning proposal being realized from the competition, the Binnenhof then consulted three more agencies. As a result, Pi de Bruijn was chosen to lead the following design development. During this closed selection, some of the critics demanded the reconsideration of OMA's proposal. An open letter was drafted to the Parliament, in which they compared the nature of House of Representatives to the design guidelines that asked architects to "make different forms of participation and mutual verbal communication" possible (Gerrewey, 2013). The comparison reveals how the critics relate public involvement in spatial configuration to the spirits of political system. Furthermore, in an interview with *Vrij Nederland*, Koolhaas had criticized that the other proposals said to respect for the historic core, but they were completely built up and the core is no longer even visible (Pam, 1978). This statement reveals Koolhaas' emphasis on full exposure of the Ridderzaal, the historic core of Dutch political power, to the public eyes. The visual connection between historical

buildings was created by Koolhaas as the means to cultivate people's respect to the history, to the culture, and to the political system. In contrast, the government found this disclosure of government offices a security risk. The Binnenhof avoided the intertwining of public accessible area in the government complex. They refused to risk their security to the empower to public through the expansion of public realm right in the their base. Their concerns could be further proved in De Bruijn's design.

The above case study illustrates the visions of the architects to invite public engagement by enhancing public accessibility and visibility of the political cores. And how the architects and the government understand the introduction of public realm in the House of Representatives in terms of public empowerment, security and social influence. The contests of public space in the house between the two sides will be furthered analyzed in next case study, in which the Plein will also be involved in the discussion.

Case Study 2 – The Extension the House of Representatives by Pi de Bruijn

During the first competition of the extension of the House of Representatives, no proposal was selected by the government. Which caused a second round of internal competition excluding the previous participants, in which Aldo van Eyck, Arie Hagoort and Pi de Bruijn were invited, finally De Bruijn was appointed by the house in 1980 to be the leading architect for the extension project. His original design proposal was considered potential but not satisfactory in the beginning, the government demanded a revision of his scheme, in which there were multiple assignments for the architect, including the urban development and architectural integration into the cityscape, as well as the connection of this new extension with the Binnenhof.

Openness and Transparency

In De Bruijn's design development, he aimed at the clear separation of the House of Representatives from the other Binnenhof buildings inside this historical complex. Whilst he attempted to avoid a complicated and swirling circulation so as to maintain the parliament's clear and legitimate image. As the demolition of the Supreme Court was possible, it opened up the opportunity for De Bruijn to place a long building parallel to the Binnenhof, with three horizontal strips connecting to the existing departments. The whole parliament building penetrated the government complex from the Hofweg to the Plein. Inside the building, De Bruijn reserved the main passage of the building open and public, and connected it to the public space at both ends, as a metaphor of the House of Democracy's transparency and accessibility to the general public (Meurs, 2022).

Interviewed by *Vrij Nederland*, De Bruijn had made the following statement about the relationship between the new and old Binnenhof: *"The Binnenhof excludes the city through its walls. The new building actually lets the city in. The public can walk from the Plein to the Hofvingel via the central passage"* (Koelewijn, 1992). His claim has reflected the defensive architectural and spatial configuration of the historical political building; the core of the power is surrounded by walls or watch towers and public access is forbidden. On the other hand, the claim also denotes the change in the political power's approach to the use of space, from a repulsive enclosure of political space to the inclusion of public space inside the political body.

The idea of a public passage responded the House of Representatives' hope for a more accessible and inviting gesture to the public (Meurs, 2022). The atrium passage named Statenspassage on the ground floor made the meeting rooms and the lives of the government representatives visible to the public. The wide passage linking the Plein and the Hofweg did not only serve as circulation space, but also the extension of the public gathering and protest space, a meeting point for the politicians and the public (Engels & Monier, 2020). The glass façades at the two ends also proved the House of Representatives' approach to permeate their ways of working to the public. Besides, the wide interface between the passage and the outdoor public space showed the openness to the people's voice on the Plein and the Hofplaats. This original design approach reflected the government and the architect's emphases on public inclusiveness and empowerment. However, one cannot deny that the political power still reserve the full rights to control and configure the public realm, which could completely hinder the architect's design intentions.

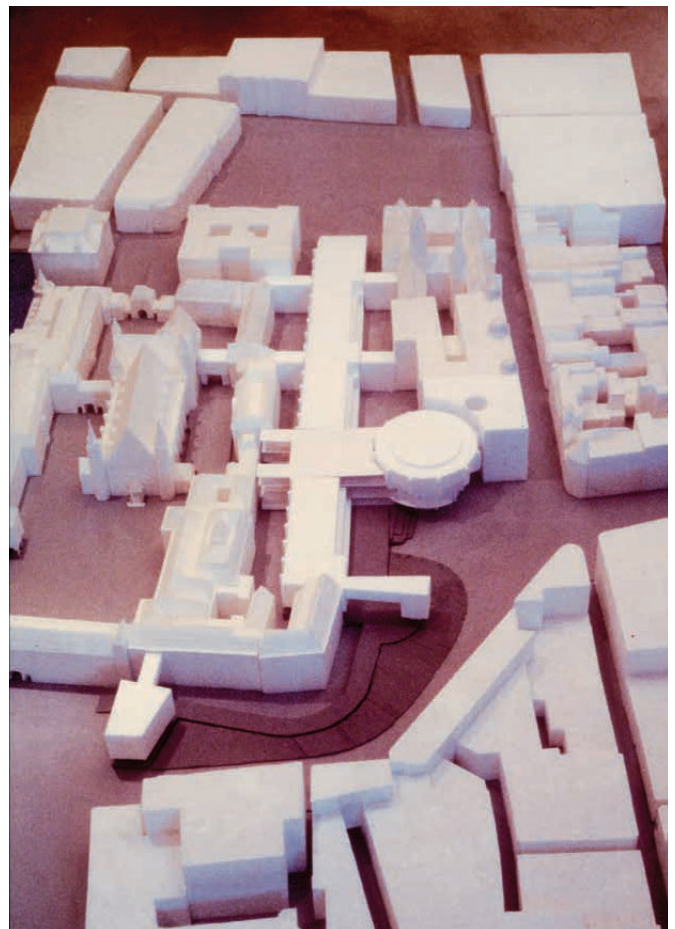


Fig 15. Pi de Bruijn's idea of public passage and bridging to existing government offices in early stage of design development



Fig 16. Pi de Bruijn's idea of the extension of public realm into the House of Representatives

Politicians' concerns

Right before the inauguration of the extension, the design was questioned by the representatives and parliamentary journalists that the open inclusion of the public would risk the daily functioning of the politicians. They argued that the over-transparency of the Statenpassage had made "back-room politics" impossible. Without a private space facilitating confidential discussions, the committees could not discuss the public matters in advance (Hoetink, 2018). Apart from the need for secretive discussions, some journalists were afraid that the overwhelming transparency of politicians might lead to a foreseeable increase of heating debates between them and the public, which damages the citizens' trust in the government. To politicians, the complete disclosure of them to the public, or even the complete participation of the populace, were not what they were looking for. They wished to be prepared to face the public in a designated space. As a result, the Statenpassage was limited to authorized persons, air conditioning systems were even introduced a few years later (Kouffeld, 1998). The inclusion of public space inside the House of Representatives was no longer possible, and the current design barely conveys the original intention from Pi de Bruijn's design.

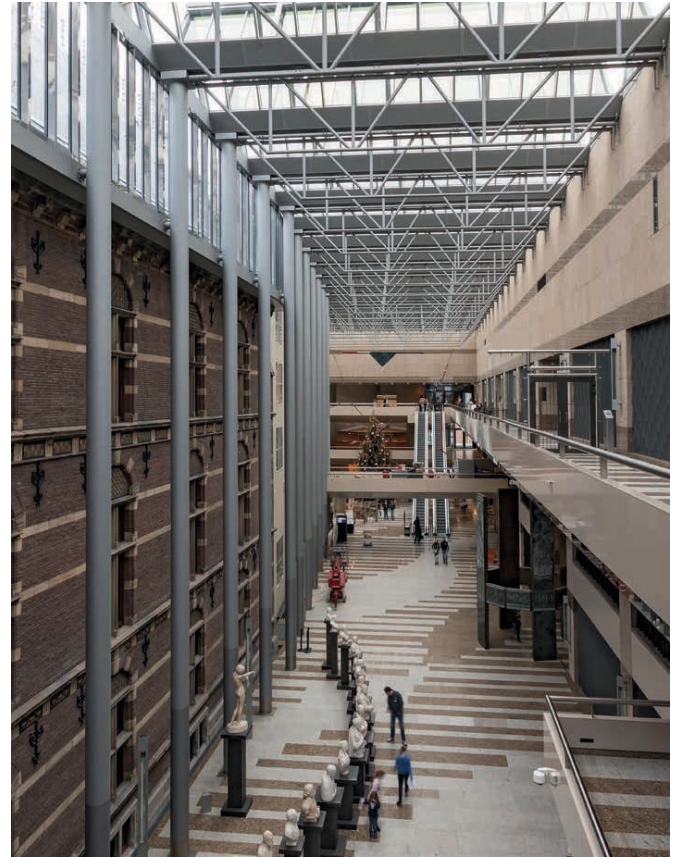


Fig 17. The intended design for the visual connection between public passage and office corridor, as a metaphor of public scrutiny

Security versus scrutiny

Pi de Bruijn, and the Dutch government, were ambitious to make the House of Representatives a strong contrast to the traditional Binnenhof. Their visions of the openness of the building and the inclusion of public, as well as the response to the streets and surrounding public space, had however failed. *"Over the years, the architect came under increasing pressure to build in more barriers against unwanted public, especially since CDA and VVD acquired more influence in the committee that supervises the new construction."* (ten Hooven, 1992). The newspaper article revealed the conflicts between the architect and the political power in the balance between transparency and security. When De Bruijn intended to invite the public to the House of Representatives, the politicians preferred to keep the public out of field. From the whole Statenpassage, the intended interface between the public and the politicians had shrunk down to the two tiny glass entrances reaching the Plein and the Hofplaats.

As a result, the connections and exchanges between the safehouse and the reality, have been retained on the two public space nearby. Although most of the demonstrations still take place peacefully on the Plein, sarcastically politicians rarely came out from the passage through the glass entrance (Meurs, 2022).



Fig 18. A diagram illustrating the proposed Statenpassage as the extension of public space inside the political core

This case introduced how the architect interpret transparency and accountability of the government by the introduction of public space government buildings. It also remarked how these confrontational territories could be manipulated by the political power and defeated the architect's purpose. With regard to the terrorist attacks in European countries in recent years, the parliament even solidified its borders, an airport standard of safety check was implemented at the building entrances. *"The transition from the closed Binnenhof to the current building is so big. I think it will turn out fine, that the ball will open to the public at some point."* De Bruijn showed his eagerness to retrieve his design idea of public passage in the interview (ten Hooven, 1992). Sadly, today this might seem a dream that never comes true.

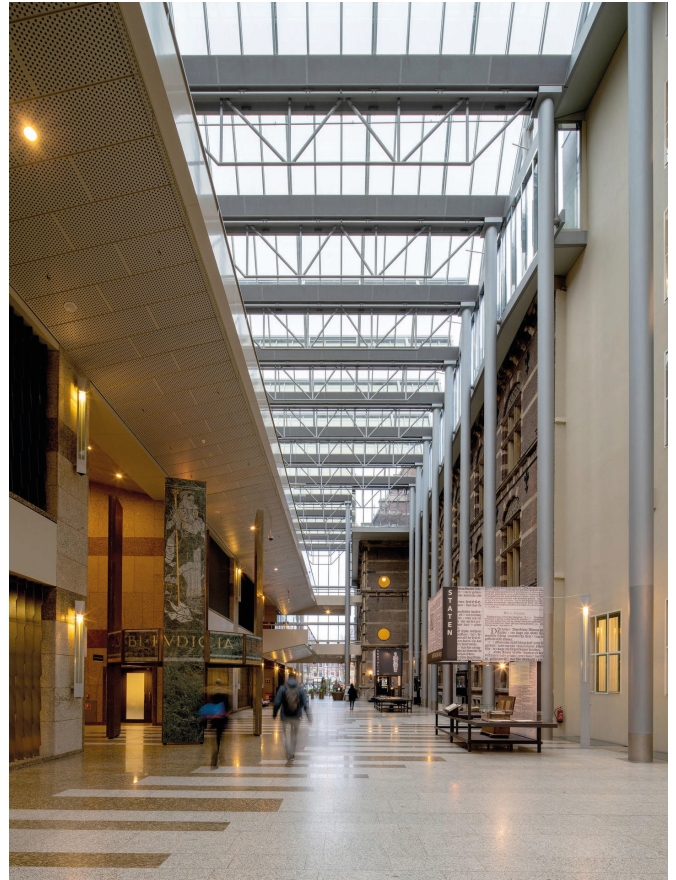


Fig 19. The Statenpassage with security gates at the entrances

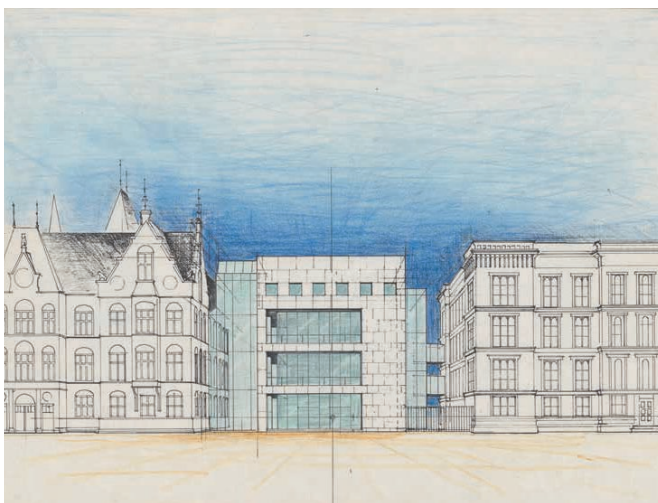


Fig 20. Preliminary design of the façade in 1982, facing the Plein



Fig 21. Recent protestors removed from the House of Representatives

Case Study 3 – Catering business around the Plein

Regarding the Plein, one of its features that recognized internationally would be its catering culture. The harmonic and joyful atmosphere of the people sitting on the terraces' seats is one of the reasons for the tourists to visit The Hague. The terrace culture in the Plein could be traced back to 1863 in front of Sociëteit De Witte, it was the first terrace in the Netherlands, influenced by the Parisian aristocracy (Dollen, 2021). However, the catering industry was not affordable that not until the 1960s it was approachable and welcoming to people from different socio-economic status. Since then, the restaurants, bars and cafes became the space for all walks of lives to meet up and discuss on all matters. Now, the Plein is one of the favorite spots to enjoy meals and drinks for the locals, tourists, as well as politicians. After five o'clock in week-day evenings, it is common for the politicians and government officials to take a seat in those bars and cafes where the public are also enjoying their time.

Social and cultural influence

In the beginning, the terrace seats were just placed in front of the buildings, the Plein was still clearly separated from its surrounding shops, it remained a public and empty square, unlike how the current Plein is occupied by the seats. Through the change of the terraces' setup, it can be observed that the division of the Plein is diffused, in both physical and social sense. The use of the Plein is not limited for political purpose like parades and assemblies anymore, the widened variation of

the activities there enables the citizens to connect their daily lives with the space. Not only the terraces diluted the boundary between the government and the public, but also they reduced the disparity between the two sectors.

The scattered seats of catering services are also a sign of public and democratic engagement of space. Locals, tourists and politicians are all welcomed in the restaurants and bars in the Plein, these people from varied backgrounds are provided a platform to see, to be seen, and to interact with each other. These daily communications could be conceived as a way of accommodating differences of social classes and ethnic groups that is prone to sustaining cultural and social diversity (Low et al., 2005). The importance of cultural diversity to public's rights to space is justified in "seven arguments for diversity" by Ulf Hannerz (1996), one of the arguments values the "cultural resistance to political and economic domination by elites and power asymmetries and a way to counteract relations of dependency." To further elaborate, this resistance could also be translated to public empowerment and participation in the use of space, and so on to their involvement in the governance and maintenance of their local communities (Low et al., 2005). Before the introduction and popularization of terrace space, the Plein was a space mainly for the Dutch powers and privileged class. It now has transformed to a space that fosters social inclusion and public engagement in The Hague.



Fig 22. Terrace seats of Sociëteit De Witte, mostly for privileged



Fig 23. Terrace seats of Sociëteit De Witte on the Plein in 1915

Management of the Plein

To facilitate cultural diversity, a safe and sufficient territory has to be secured for the people from all social classes and ethnic groups, in order to enhance and maintain the social interactions among those group (Low et al., 2005). In this case, the control of the Plein by the political power did not oppose, but assisted the formation of cultural resistance of the people. In addition to daily patrol of the police, the municipality of The Hague has introduced the “doorman project” (*portiersproject*) where two police officers are assigned exclusively to monitor the activities on the Plein at nights on Thursdays to Saturdays. The surveillance helps to maintain a safe and welcoming space of the Plein to attract peoples from all backgrounds and fosters a diversified interaction on the space. Therefore, the execution of political power is not always conflicting the public interest on public space, to a certain extent it is in fact favoring the public access and participation there. The relationship between political power and the public could not be justified to be only contradictory, the influence from both sides are needed to generate a space that favors the building up of a strong and democratic community.

However, it is also the political power’s responsibility to utilize their resources and rights to balance the needs of different stakeholders. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the terraces were agreed by the municipality to expand in size by 25% as a means to maintain social distancing for the customers. Such measures were intended to remain to compensate the shop merchants for their loss with their business. However, it led

to the discontent from local residents’ association around the plein. They stated that the permanent expansion of terrace space, together with the renovation of the Binnenhof, results in a smaller public space, as well as higher level of nuisance to the neighborhood (Den Haag FM, 2023).

Public space is a limited resource to everybody. On one hand, the catering shop owners struggled to maintain their business with lower number of visitors in post-pandemic era and needed the government’s assistance. On the other hand, the power also has to promise the neighborhood with a good living condition. The contests of space are not exclusively found between the political power and the public, but also within the general public. As the owner and the managing authority of the Plein, the municipality of The Hague is responsible to listen and mediate the needs from different parties. Hugo de Jonge, the Minister of Housing and Spatial Planning, met and discussed about the renovation of the Binnenhof with the Plein’s local residents and merchants. This works as an example of how the government should exercise its power to protect everyone’s rights to expression. Democracy is about the changing contexts and contests where the citizens communicate with the authority at different distance, and the re-invention of those communications (Geenens, 2009). Conveying the catering service as a device to strengthen cultural representation and to encourage public participation on the Plein, this case study also illustrated the importance of synergy between the government and the public to create a free and just space.



Fig 24. The Plein in 1915



Fig 25. The Plein in 2024, filled with terrace seats

Case Study 4 – Protests and demonstrations on the Plein

Regarding the demonstration practice in the Netherlands, the right to assembly is first stated in the Dutch constitution in 1798, but such right was protected only provided that it was to “arouse patriotism”. In 1983, the right to demonstration was clearly stated and recognized in the constitution. As a prominent venue for Dutch and international politics, The Hague has been a place with high demand for demonstrations. For example, in 1983, the anti-nuclear demonstration took place at Malieveld and drew about 550,000 participants, it is still the largest demonstration ever in the Netherlands.

The people were once allowed to protest inside the Binnenhof, on the square in front of the Ridderzaal. In 1884, there was the first “Great National Demonstration”, where three thousand people presented a petition at the Binnenhof after marching through the city center (Smit, 2015). In 1990, farmers even drove their tractor into the Binnenhof during a protest (Hemmes, 2023). Since then, throughout the decades, the Binnenhof has been a space with frequent protests and even riots. In light of the emergence of terrorist attacks and the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, the municipality of The Hague announced the Binnenhof to be a permanent safety risk area in 2007, and prohibited demonstrations in the government complex (Buijinck et al., 2023). The Plein and the Hofplaats have then become one of the popular locations for demonstrations and protests because of their proximity to the political power. But the authorized demonstrations in both public spaces are in a much smaller scale.

The approval of public assembly and demonstrations in the constitution shows a relatively liberal political environment in the Netherlands. However, the Dutch government still holds the absolute power in the management and use of public space, which greatly affects the expression of public voices. In the name of security and public interest, the state’s dominance might not be explicitly displayed to everyone, but left unseen instead.

The authorization of demonstration

The authorization of demonstrations on the Plein is done by the municipality of The Hague, the application for demonstration has to be assessed by the mayor, police as well as the public prosecution service. As the application is submitted to the municipality and assessed internally. The people’s voices might fall to the threat of intransparency and censorship by the political power. Before the demonstration and the government’s response to be seen by public, the people’s rights to use the protest space is already controlled by the political power.



Fig 26. Tram strike on the Plein in 1914



Fig 27. Farmers occupying the Binnenhof with tractors in 1990



Fig 28. Police surrounded the protestors closely



Fig 29. Police force confronting the protestors

Zoning of protest space

The municipality has the right to decide the protest space, just like the ban of protest in the Binnenhof. When the political power has divided the city into protest or no protest zones, and limit the protest activities on one particular zone, it leads to a static and segregated civic participation in the city. For example, if someone is going to organize a demonstration in the Plein, they cannot move to somewhere else without permission but can just stay in the same spot during the designated time. Moreover, the pocket protest zones inevitably justify the government to limit the number of protest participants. Therefore, the protesters are always put on a defensive position that subordinate to the general order. They have to adjust their tactics and rights to follow all the guidelines given by the municipality, in order to let their rational voices to be heard (Nicholls et al., 2013). The public's rights to voice in the city with so many conditions could hardly be considered a genuine form of liberty.

Gentrification and constrained use of space

The Plein is not just a public space that serves for political and protest purpose, at the same time, it is also a tourist and drinking spot that attracts people who are looking for leisure time. Given that two kinds of activities contradict with another in nature, to maintain the commercial business and cultural value of the Plein, there is the need for the municipality to regulate the displeasing demonstrations. The Dutch political power's preference of commercial use of the Plein, however, is also slowly dictating the future there. The commercial and tourism activities somehow encourage a gentrified and monotonous transformation of the use of the public space (Stacheli & Mitchell, 2008). Following the development in business and cultural value, the protests and demonstrations will face more and more constraints from the municipality. The demonstrators would have a harder access to the space than the customers and tourists, in the long run it damages the democratic inclusion of the Plein.

Unproportionate exercise of power

Due to the current threat of terrorism and tightened tension in politics, strict security measures are carried out by the Dutch government. During demonstrations on the Plein, the whole Binnenhof will be closed and gated by barriers. Riot police will be standing with their vehicles and cordons surrounding the government complex (Smit, 2015). If the demonstration is not registered, even though it is peaceful and silent, the political force would also demand to clear the crowd. Sometimes the peaceful protestors got arrested, if they resisted it would be escalated and the use of batons or sprays then emerged. General public have to go through difficult procedures to get their voices heard. The unproportionate of power between the government and the public, together with the constraints to the protestors, demonstrations and protests are seemed discouraged by the political power. The radical or threatening response from the police force are temporary and not usually seen on the public space, but they spread the fear and risk to the participants and reduce their willingness to express their opinions.

Importance of physical protest space

Some might argue that in the era of information technologies, public space is not essential anymore in expressing opinions or anger towards the government. Geenens (2009) has listed three reasons of the importance of physical public space, in public demonstrations. Firstly, the demonstrations on public space can display the sheer scale of public discontent through physical presence that hardly be omitted by the government. Secondly, the physical stage is more likely to attract media coverage, which provides a relatively objective means to narrate and capture people's voices. Lastly, the physical stage helps to keep the spotlight on the politicians, that they have to be accountable for their actions. The presence of public space helps to scrutinize the political power. Therefore, public space remains crucial in achieving democracy in the cities.



Fig 30. A diagram illustrating the scale and location of authorized protest space according to the demonstration guideline in The Hague



Fig 31. Reclaiming Civic Square (Upper Left)



Fig 32. Umbrella Movement, crowds occupying the major roads

Furthermore, the Plein is a unique physical stage that contains specific symbolic and cultural meaning in the political system and history of the Netherlands. The proximity, and cultural significance of the Plein help to amplify the public narrative and resonance to the general public in the Netherlands. The Plein can never be replaced by the other public squares in The Hague to be the venue for protests and demonstrations. In some cases, the excessive restrictions and control of these symbolic public spaces might cause widespread public discontented emotions and escalate to a large-scale civil disobedience.

Hong Kong's Reclaiming Civic Square and Umbrella Movement

Comparable to The Hague, Hong Kong is an international city with great economic and political influence globally. It was once a British colony and its sovereignty was handed over to China in 1997. Threatened by the political ideologies of the Chinese government, the Hongkongers called for a democracy and self-determination throughout the years. The citizens are entitled the freedom of speech and assembly by the Basic Law, demonstrations and protests in front of government quarters and on the streets were very common back in the time.

In 2011, the new Government Headquarters of Hong Kong has come to service. The gate-like block of the complex creates a visual metaphor of "Door always open", in which the architect emphasized the communication between the government and the citizens. Since then, the forecourt of the government office was frequently used for protests, and named "Civic Square". In July 2014, the government announced to set up a two meters high fence along the boundary of the Civic Square, public are only allowed to protest on Sundays with application in advance. In September, student groups organized a week-long boycott of classes at Tamar and demanded a genuine direct election of the chief executive of Hong Kong.

On September 26, the student organization announced an immediate action to reclaim the Civic Square. The protestors rushed to the public space, confronted the police and forced open the gate. The reclaiming action led to riot police's response with pepper spray and was widely broadcasted. It came to a stalemate that the students were trapped in the Civic Square by the police force, whilst confrontations were found between the police and the additional protestors who came to help. Demanding the release of the students and the reopening of the public space, more and more protestors came over and the confrontations escalated. The police tried to cut off the chain of protestors between Admiralty MTR station and the government complex. However, the grown discontent of the public reacted to the political violence by spreading across Harcourt Road, which is in between the complex and the metro station. The demand for public protest space had turned out to be an extensive civic disobedience, where the protestors simultaneously occupied the main roads in critical location. This marked the beginning of the globally known Umbrella Movement.

The case reveals how the public correlate the public protest space to their freedom of expression, and the criticalness of public space in a social movement. The selected public spaces of power were reclaimed, occupied by the protestors to sustain their struggle against the authoritarian regime and expose the unjust consolidation of the political and economic power (Chen & Szeto, 2017). Similarly for the freedom of protests on the Plein, a public space with all its historical, cultural and political symbols, are also critical for us to evaluate the level of liberty and democracy of the Netherlands. The Plein matters in public participation in politics not just because it is a public space, it matters because of its uniquely substantial symbolic meanings to the Dutch citizens. The contests of the use of the Plein are identical to the contests of values between the political power and the public.

Summary

In the first part of the thesis, a historical background of public space in previous eras and the relationship between power, people and space are discussed. Through referencing literature and theories, a scope of the thesis is set up, which mainly focuses on the public involvement in the use of public space to achieve self-empowerment and social justice. The emphasis of the thesis is also put on the territorial contest between the government and the general public on the Plein and its surrounding buildings, in order to reveal the impact of the political power on democratic development through the control of public space. Following is the introduction of the history of The Hague and the Plein, this section is mainly to describe the deep social, political and cultural value of the Plein to the Dutch citizens. Three aspects of uniqueness of the Plein are also summarized to give justification of the choice of site for study: The rich context of the Plein provides a medium for the multitude of territorial contests.

Regarding the case studies of the contestation on the Plein. The first two case studies stress on the extension of the House of Representatives. The OMA proposal reveals the evocation of the ideas of transparency and openness governmental space by both government and architects, and how they conceive the inclusion of public space in political typologies. Whilst in De Bruijn's design, the focus of the case study is put on the politicians' concerns about security and confidentiality of their working space due to the introduction of public passage. It highlights the contradictory relationship between politically powered space and public space. Then the case of catering culture on the Plein explains how catering business on the Plein contributes to the people's interaction and facilitates cultural diversity of the public space. Furthermore, it introduces the role of the political power in relation to cultural diversity on the Plein. The adequate practice of political power in terms of maintaining security and cleanliness of the space is in fact beneficial to the development of cultural diversified society. Lastly, the final case illustrates the dominance of the political power in public protest use of space, and how these invisible control and restrictions adversely affect the democratic development of a society. By the case of reclaiming Civic Square and Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, the necessity of physical stage in public protests is introduced. It also further denotes how people correlate the cultural and social value of the public space to the venue for neoliberal movements.

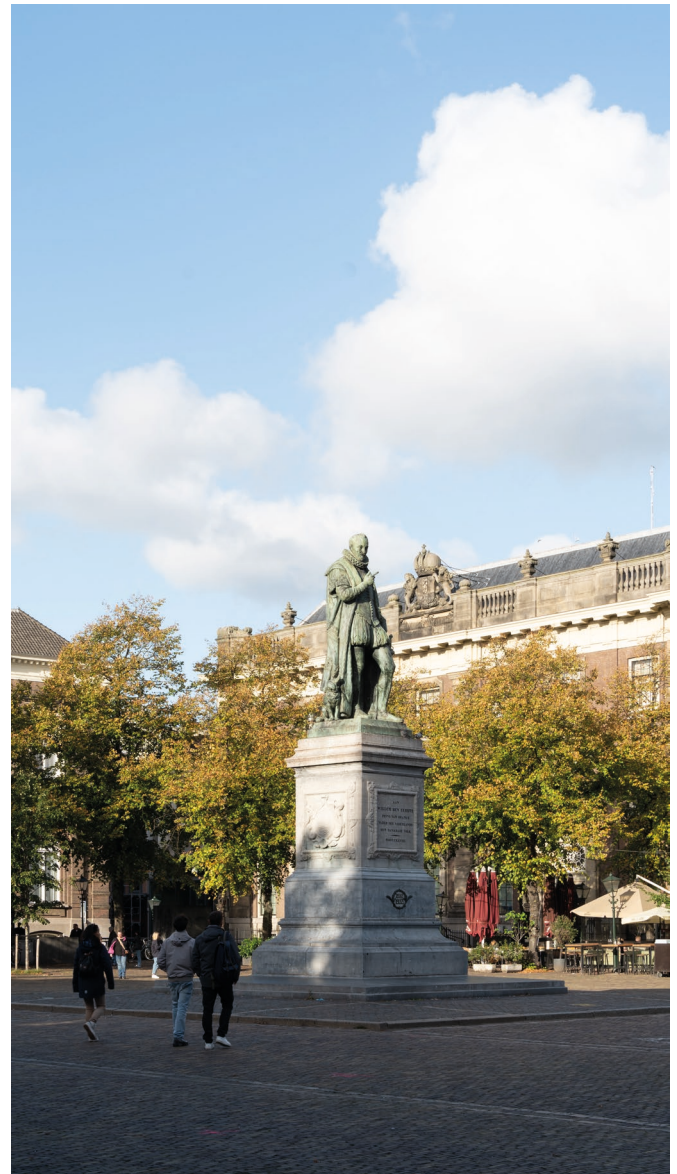


Fig 33. Statue of William of Orange

Conclusion

The thesis has provided multiple lenses to investigate the contesting use of the Plein by the government and the public in various dimensions, and unfolds its potential influence social justice and the democratic movements of Dutch society. It reveals the significance of the Plein as a tool for the people to promote cultural diversity, public empowerment and participation in politics. On the other hand, misuse and power's dominance of the public space that hinder public empowerment are also the highlighted issues of this topic. In the discussion, the value of the Plein is further explored, its significance is not just found on a superficial level, but also found in the Dutch political systems and social progressions.

From the defensive and walled Binnenhof, to the intended transparent and public inclusive House of Representatives; from terraces that only serve the privileged, to the catering business that attracts people from all over the world; from pro-government parades to protests and demonstrations. These change in space also marked the transition in the political ideologies and the government's relationship with its people.

Under the circumstances of globally heated urbanization and economic expansion, the provision of public space might be more and more difficult. Public space is not just coming to a scarcity, but is also under the threat of privatization in neoliberalist societies. The privatized ownership of public space likely leads to the introduction of gated communities and results in social and economic segregation (Low & Smith, 2006). In neoliberalist society that relates the sense of liberty and democracy to the market economy, the culturally and socially symbolic Plein, although very rarely, is still potential to be privatized by the market. Nevertheless, the territorial contests of public space are then not limited in between the government and the public, but the property groups and merchants, or the middle class and the underprivileged.

Meanwhile, the technological developments in 21st century also aroused our concern about the power's control of the activities on public space. For example, the CCTV and the human identification technology could be widely used by the authority to establish a more comprehensive surveillance of individuals, and applied even more restrictions on the freedom of people on public space. In some totalitarian states, such technologies are already introduced to maintain its "national security". Hannah Arendt (1973) once mentioned that totalitarian governments do not just limit people's essential freedom, they attempt to destroy the people's capacity of motion which can only exist with space. Just like how Civic Square in Hong Kong was gated for three years after the Umbrella Movement, also like the scattered pocket protest zones in The Hague, public space for expression could be very easily manipulated by the political power in different means. Our freedom of expression or belief in democracy might be slowly diminished in a way that we cannot notice.

Public space is powerful yet fragile given the fact that it is never genuinely owned by the people but by the government or property groups. The general public seem helpless to oppose such corruption of public space. However, in this era of shrinking democracy, the active contestation of space is still much needed by the public. The occupation or control over public space gives strong symbolic significance, as it stands for the rights for anyone to be visible and recognized as a person. On the other hand, one's identity and value will be invisible if they are excluded from public space (Murphy & O'Driscoll, 2021). Space is a fundamental asset that we all have to treasure and protect by any means, as this is the very powerful device for us to express ourselves; to fight for better conditions; to pursuit justice; and to preserve our own dignity and identity.



Fig 34. The Plein used for royal family celebrations and parades in the past



Fig 35. The Plein used for public demonstrations nowadays

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