



# Walk of Wisdom Charter

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*This charter explains what the Walk of Wisdom represents and what the project aims for.*

*It is written for those who are interested in growing a Walk of Wisdom in countries outside the Netherlands. Edition: September 2020.*

## The Walk of Wisdom: why?

Increasingly, people are asking themselves the classical life questions while walking ancient pilgrimage routes. The number of pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela alone grew from around 2,500 in 1984 to 350,000 in 2019. While individual motives vary, pilgrims praise the solidarity they find on the road. Differences in nationality, faith or status fade into the background of a shared horizon in unfamiliar surroundings. Walking days on end connects to the body and the environment and offers a natural space for reflection on what life is all about.

Drawing from the ritual creativity of these originally religious pilgrimage routes, we developed the Walk of Wisdom. A new pilgrimage tradition, independent of any religion. We are inspired by the search for balance between the personal desire for freedom and authenticity with a sense of connection to the bigger story of life on the planet. By articulating this search in rites and symbols of a - tentatively - worldwide network of pilgrimage routes, we want to contribute to peace and biodiversity across the borders of nationality, religion or political conviction.

This is our wisdom: those who take good care of themselves take good care of the planet- and vice versa. By finding balance between them, our species will one day live up to its noble title: "*Homo Sapiens, the wise human*". May our network of pilgrimages serve as one metaphor for the road ahead.



## Vision of the project

With the Walk of Wisdom project we envision a worldwide network of small-scale, non-commercial volunteer organizations. Each fosters one signposted pilgrimage route in their respective country. These Walks of Wisdom share core values, rites and symbols, but operate independently with 'couleur locale'.

In 2015 we opened a pioneer trail of 136 kilometers around Nijmegen (the Netherlands) as the first of its kind. This model was tested and developed and is a beginning success, winning a big regional prize in 2018 and drawing 6,500 pilgrims from the start in 2015 to mid 2020.

This pioneer trail can now serve as a model for creativity for new Walks of Wisdom to come in other countries. The different routes will gradually be connected with each other, so that a worldwide network of pilgrimage routes emerges.

This charter defines what the Walks of Wisdom share and forms the basis for cooperation with organisations interested in growing a Walk of Wisdom pilgrimage in their own country. The formal

finalization of such a cooperation is a sublicense for the symbol of the Walk of Wisdom pilgrimage. The symbol is copyright of the artists Huub and Adelheid Kortekaas, who have granted an exclusive license to the Dutch Walk of Wisdom with the right to sublicense on a non commercial basis.

## Core values

The core values of the Walk of Wisdom are individual freedom, mutual respect and biodiversity. Walk of Wisdom pilgrims define the goals of their journey for themselves, respect the journey of others and take care of the ecosystem and landscapes they are walking through.

Each Walk of Wisdom organization is independent of a religion, non commercial and strives to make the pilgrimage accessible for people on a tight budget.



## Basic rites and symbols

Each Walk of Wisdom sends out a starter kit to pilgrims who subscribe to their pilgrimage. The starter kit subscription donation is the basic source of income for the organisation and the kit revolves around the basic rites and symbols of the pilgrimage. These are:

- **Pilgrim:** the symbol of the Walk of Wisdom that conveys what we stand for. In the words of the designers Huub and Adelheid Kortekaas: "*Every person is a seedling of Mother Earth, each with its own unique power of germination.*" All the routes are marked with this symbol. In the kit pilgrims receive this symbol as a 9,9 cm bamboo pin, which can be attached to a bag or jacket. Each Walk of Wisdom has a different pin color.
- **Pilgrim lace:** along the way, pilgrims string bird rings on a cork lace with the names of the municipalities they pass through. Pilgrims receive this lace in the starter kit with a unique ring, engraved with a registration number. Design: Manja Bente.
- **Route guide:** in the kit is a routeguide with a well tested description and detailed maps of the signposted pilgrimage route. A gps track and list of guesthouses is made available.
- **Litter bag:** in the kit is a litter bag with an invitation to help clear up litter on the route, a small individual contribution to the commons of the pilgrimage.
- **Mobile detox:** the kit invites pilgrims to switch off mobile telephones and the internet as much as possible: the Walk of Wisdom is meant as an inner journey.

## Characteristics of the routes

- Every Walk of Wisdom is circular. Pilgrims return where they started at the beginning. A large image of the Pilgrim symbol marks this start and end point. This is to emphasise that a pilgrimage is not about getting somewhere. It is firstmost an inner journey.
- The route is signposted with the Pilgrim symbol.
- There is only one Walk of Wisdom pilgrimage per country of one to two weeks duration. This is to keep the organisations small-scale and non-commercial.
- The route has one-way walking direction to create a shared horizon in the midst of a diversity of people and purposes.
- We aim for pilgrimage routes with a diversity of natural scenery in regions that are accessible



by public transport but are not overly touristic.

- Pilgrimage rites are minimal and open: pilgrims should feel free to find their own purpose and walk the pilgrimage as they see fit without all kinds of things to do or to participate in.



## Profile of partners

Organizations who want to grow a Walk of Wisdom in their country according to this charter can apply for a sublicense for the Walk of Wisdom symbol. A Walk of Wisdom organization:

- Functions independently of a religion or political affiliation,
- Works primarily with volunteers so as to keep the pilgrimage non-commercial and the pilgrimage accessible for pilgrims on a tight budget,
- Intends to operate as sustainably as possible,
- Allocates part of the subscription donation to conservation projects on the route and the sustainable use of the landscape,
- Actively helps organising maintenance and clean-up actions,
- Promotes the value of meaningful moments for a rewarding pilgrimage: preparation, start, halfway, end, and reflection.



## Background

The idea for the Walk of Wisdom pilgrimage originated in 2008 as a result of a bachelor's thesis in Ritual Studies at the Radboud University of Nijmegen (the Netherlands). Professor Ronald L. Grimes challenged students to devise a ritual "that could save the planet." Although his intention was meant playfully, one of his students, Damiaan Messing, took the challenge seriously. Based on Grimes' work, Damiaan looked for ritual that could connect people across the borders of culture, religion and nationality.

The result was the bachelor's thesis "*What gesture can save the planet.*" In this thesis, Messing designed a case study on the mission of the environmental movement "de Kleine Aarde" in Boxtel to inspire people to a sustainable livelihood. This thesis eventually gave rise to the idea of the worldwide 'Walk of Wisdom' pilgrimage network. This idea was developed from 2011 onwards with the help of a foundation led by pioneer Damiaan Messing and co-developer Manja Bente. In mid 2020 Damiaan Messing left the foundation, which is now coordinated by Manja and Rob van Sprang.



*Walk of Wisdom symbol 'Pilgrim': Huub and Adelheid Kortekaas*

*Photos: Dolphijn Cantrijn, Jan Alers, Ben Teunissen, Marja Hakkoer and Thomas Hontelez*

*Illustration: Petra van Bloemendaal in our "short manual for a modern pilgrim"*