

Scheveningen A successful case of revitalization

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Aim

To develop an understanding of the problems faced by a tourist resort at a mature stage of its life-cycle and suggest and evaluate possible strategies for regeneration.

Keywords

destination life-cycle; seaside resort development; regeneration strategy; public-private partnership; comprehensive planning; product-market combinations

Summary

The resort of Scheveningen has a long tradition as the most famous seaside resort in The Netherlands. It started early in the nineteenth century as a luxurious bathing place with the well-known 'Kurhaus', attracting aristocrats from all over Europe and deserving its name of 'Pearl of the North Sea'. During the years of growth in visitor numbers Scheveningen also became popular as a destination for lower social classes. Hence other types of facilities emerged and the resort became more oriented towards the domestic Dutch market.

After a slight decrease during the Second World War Scheveningen attracted more and more tourists until 1960 when 1.7 million people visited the resort. However, during the 1960s Scheveningen became a resort in decline. Competition from the Mediterranean resorts was strongly felt in all segments of the market, but also the increase of private car ownership made other resorts along the Dutch coast accessible and attractive and, for some, a good alternative to 'old-fashioned' Scheveningen.

At the end of the 1960s a programme for revitalization was developed, primarily as a result of public sector initiative. In the strategic plan for Scheveningen a comprehensive development approach was taken, which focused not only on the creation of (all-weather) tourist facilities but also on the development of office buildings, commercial centres and housing. Apart from that, new market segments were being targeted. Implementation of the plan was very much guaranteed by creating a consortium in which the public and private sectors co-operated. The local government provided the infrastructure, whereas private banks took care of the necessary investments of DFL 800 million in new entertainment facilities, the restoration of the former 'Kurhaus', office buildings and housing.

After the realization of the plans the number of visitors to Scheveningen increased rapidly during the 1970s and particularly during the 1980s and 1990s to reach the number of 9.1 million in 1996. It is interesting, to see that nowadays seasonality is much less pronounced and that the proportion of day visitors is much higher than three decades ago.

In conclusion, one can say that Scheveningen has passed through the traditional stages of growth, stagnation and decline of the 'life-cycle model'. However, it also clearly shows the success of a redevelopment scheme, in which the right strategic choices regarding product and market development were made, and in which a close partnership between public and private sector was pursued.

Learning outcomes

After studying, analysing and discussing this case, students should be able to:

- understand the general factors that underlie the problems faced by a tourist destination at the mature stage of its life-cycle and apply the specific situation of Scheveningen in this context;
- suggest strategies for regeneration, taking into account product as well as markets;
- understand the role and interest of different actors in the planning process;
- evaluate the success of the strategies adopted by Scheveningen.

Exercises

- 1 Identify the factors that are responsible for the decline in visitor numbers to Scheveningen during the 1960s. Try to find similar patterns in other seaside resorts in Europe and discuss to what extent the problems in Scheveningen are unique as the result of the specific situation of Scheveningen.
- 2 Suppose you, as a representative of the municipality of Scheveningen, are in charge of producing a plan for regeneration of the resort.
 - (a) Which solutions would you propose to the problems in terms of product development and in terms of marketing strategies?
 - (b) Which parties should be involved in the implementation of your plan and what would be the different roles and responsibilities of the different players?
- 3 Suppose you are one of the hotel owners in Scheveningen and you faced the problem of a decline in customers. What action would you take?
- 4 If you look back to what happened to Scheveningen after the early 1970s, what would you consider being the success factor in the revitalization of the resort?

Introduction

Scheveningen is a traditional seaside resort in The Netherlands, located very close to the city of The Hague

along the North Sea Coast. It was the first and always has been the most famous seaside resort in The Netherlands, not only for the Dutch but also for foreigners.

Scheveningen has a long history, starting in the early nineteenth century as a health resort attracting the 'higher social classes'. Scheveningen flourished early this century but has changed considerably since then. Not only was the traditional 'elite' health tourist replaced by the middle and lower class mass tourist, it also faced – like many other North Sea resorts – a period of stagnation and decrease in visitor numbers and deterioration of its product after the Second World War. In the 1970s measures were taken to revitalize the resort, resulting in considerable growth of visitor numbers.

This chapter will give further details about the historical development of the resort in terms of product and markets as well as in terms of involved private and public sector parties. In conclusion the current situation of Scheveningen will be described and the revitalization strategies evaluated.

Historical development

The period until the Second World War

Scheveningen as a fishing village has existed since the end of the sixteenth century. It became the first Dutch seaside resort in the early nineteenth century with the creation of a luxurious public bath. In 1885 a resort organization was founded and the 'Kurhaus' ('cure house') was built on the site of the former health bath. Since then all kinds of accommodation, entertainments and other facilities have been created (like a permanent circus and the first cinema in Holland). Famous (until today) became the so-called 'Scheveningse Pier', providing a wide range of entertainment.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Scheveningen, with its Grand Hotels (like the Palace Hotel and the Oranjehotel, each with façades stretching over more than 100 metres) was seen as the 'Pearl of the North Sea' and certainly was one of the leading seaside resorts on the continent. Partly this was due to the very good (tramway) connections with the city of The Hague and the further hinterland, containing a considerable number of inhabitants. The visitors mainly were aristocrats; many came from German-speaking countries, who already were familiar with health spas.

Between 1913 and 1940 a steady growth of visitor numbers can be noted (from 75,000 to almost 1 million a year). During the same period, however, the type of visitor changed. Because of the increasing number of 'free days', the shortening of the working day and the availability of cheaper transport possibilities, Scheveningen also became a popular destination for the lower social classes. This was reflected in the diminishing popularity of the Grand Hotels and the emergence of many cheaper forms of accommodation (e.g. campsites, pensions).

Also the proportion of international visitors changed. In 1913 approximately 50 per cent of the visitors were from abroad (mainly Germany); in 1939 this proportion was barely 20 per cent. The traditional 'elite' tourist was more

and more attracted by the resorts along the French and Italian riviera, guaranteeing much better climatic conditions.

The 1950s and the 1960s

After the Second World War, in which a lot of damage was done to the tourist facilities, an intensive restoration programme resulted in the 1950s in further growth in visitor numbers. In the 1960s, however, Scheveningen became more and more a resort in decline, which could no longer satisfy the needs of the market. Scheveningen not only completely lost the traditional elite tourist, it now also felt strong competition from the French, Italian and Spanish seaside resorts in the mass market segments. As well as that, the introduction of the private car in many households resulted in the emergence and popularity of many new resorts in The Netherlands and Belgium; traditional resorts like Scheveningen with their stronger orientation on facilities for overnight stays, became less popular. In the summer months the occupancy rates of the accommodations were often too low for a profitable operation. In winter the resort looked completely deserted. The logical result was the deterioration of hotels and other facilities, like the entertainment centre on the Pier, all leading to a decline in visitors numbers. In 1960 Scheveningen still received 1.7 million visitors a year, in 1970 this had dropped to 1.5 million. In particular the hotels lost many clients. Overall spending decreased considerably.

The 1970s: start of the revitalization

At the end of the 1960s it became clear that something needed to be done in order to avoid further deterioration of the resort. Public discussion started about how a new vitality could be introduced. The local authority has played an important role in the process of initiating and coordinating the redevelopment of Scheveningen by producing a strategic plan for the renovation of the resort. In this plan the following principles were applied:

- the plans for renovation should be comprehensive: not only tourist facilities should be taken into account, but also housing, office buildings and other 'urban facilities';
- the tourism product should be diversified to be able to attract new market segments;
- as much as possible, all-weather facilities should be created to make the resort less vulnerable to climatic conditions and to the competition from the Mediterranean resorts;
- existing monumental facilities, however, like the Pier and the 'Kurhaus' (as image-builders) should be maintained and restored.

The main idea behind the redevelopment was that the 'new Scheveningen should be an urban centre for recreation at the seafront, functioning all year round and for everybody'. This meant it should be:

- a seaside resort attractive for the tourist but also with a recreational function for the local population;
- a seaside resort functioning all seasons;

- a seaside resort attracting a wide range of markets;
- a centre representing high recreational value, but also providing high quality conditions for living and working.

Implementation

The local authority encouraged institutional investors and construction firms to form a financial consortium. A number of insurance companies and banks (among others National Nederlanden, Friesch-Groningse Hypotheekbank) and a real estate development company (Brederode) participated. The land which was not already owned by the municipality was acquired by the consortium. This created a development area of 12 hectares and a beachfront of 500 metres.

The financial consortium worked in the form of a public–private partnership closely together with the local government in the realization of the above mentioned projects. Basically, the local government was expected to provide the infrastructure (e.g. roads, electricity), after which the private sector would invest (approximately DFL 800 million) in the extensive (re)building programme, covering approximately 2.5 million square feet.

The actual redevelopment started in 1974 with rebuilding the seafront area:

- the former Grand Hotel area became a quiet living area with some shops and offices;
- the 'Kurhaus' has been completely rebuilt in the same architectural style (costs DFL 86 million). It became a 5-star hotel with over 250 rooms, a casino, first class conference rooms, bars, restaurants and the 'Kurhall', open to the public and at the same time functioning as hotel lounge;
- a new entertainment centre was created in front of the 'Kurhaus' (*Gevers Deynoot-plein*). On the top of this centre 130 terrace apartments were built. Close to it specific facilities for tourists and the regional population have been realized, like an indoor surfpool ('Golfslagbad') with saunas and indoor sports facilities;
- at the location of the former Palace Hotel a shopping and entertainment centre 'The Palace promenade' was created.

It was planned to use the inland Scheveningen area to create office buildings, more housing, parking places and – last but not least – cinemas and a huge theatre on the site of the permanent circus ('Circustheater').

In the early 1980s there was stagnation in the redevelopment activities, due to some problems within the consortium and the city council. In 1987 the insurance company Nationale Nederlanden became the sole owner of the consortium, who agreed with the municipality in 1990 upon the realization of the final phase of the project, particularly aiming at the development of the inland area.

Operation

The city council and the financial consortium together have set up an organization to promote and manage the new facilities: the Scheveningen Resort Board (Stichting

Scheveningen Bad.). In this board not only the local government and the private investors are represented, but also employers in Scheveningen, like shop and hotel owners, the local population, Chamber of Commerce and the local tourist board.

Current situation

After starting the redevelopment programme the numbers of visitors rapidly increased. In 1970 approximately 1.5 million visitors came; after realization of the first phase of the redevelopment scheme the total number of visitors already was over 3 million (1978). In the year of the opening of the renovated 'Kurhaus', the 'Golfslagbad' and the entertainment square in 1981 the total number of visitors was 6.5 million. However, the stagnation in the development – particularly of the inland area – in the early 1980s slowed down the growth rate: in 1996 Scheveningen received 9.1 million visitors. The total tourist expenditure in Scheveningen by then was approximately 250 million DFL.

The entire regeneration is almost finished now. The latest developments have been the removal of the casino from the 'Kurhaus' into a new building some 100 yards further inland (1996), the creation of a modern cinema complex (Movie-world) and the opening of a new health centre (*kuurcentrum Vitalizee*). Also the ownership and exploitation structure have slightly been changed. For instance the Scheveningen Pier has been taken over by van der Valk, the biggest motel chain in The Netherlands.

If we compare the characteristics of the visitors of today with those almost three decades ago we also see some interesting developments. For example:

- In the early 1970s, before the redevelopment activities had started roughly 40 per cent of the visitors came to Scheveningen during the high season (July–August). Nowadays the seasonality pattern is less pronounced; there is a much more even spread over the year. The season now runs from April until the end of October (receiving some 80 per cent of all visitors). But also in the winter months a considerable number of people visit the facilities of Scheveningen, like the *Circustheater* which turned out to be one of the most successful and modern theatres in The Netherlands.
- There has been a considerable growth in the proportion of day visitors, mainly coming from the city of The Hague or the surrounding Randstad (including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, in total having approximately 5 million inhabitants). However, the absolute number of holidaymakers (originating mainly from the other parts of Holland and from abroad) and the number of overnight stays, is also increasing, but at a lower rate.

Evaluation

Although there were some difficulties in the early 1980s, Scheveningen can be considered a successful case of revitalizing a traditional seaside resort. The renovated and newly created facilities made Scheveningen again one of the most

popular seaside resorts along the North Sea coast, receiving over 9 million visitors in 1996, which is six times as many as in 1970, the year before the renovation started.

Eventually three main factors appeared to be responsible for the success:

1 The strategy of aiming more at day visitors, realizing that in the overnight segment the competition of Mediterranean resorts was getting stronger and stronger. In terms of product development this underlined the significance of the creation of all-weather facilities to extend the season. Obviously the location of Scheveningen, close to a major conurbation, contributed to the success of this strategy.

2 The principle of guaranteeing a close partnership between the local authority and the private sector in the planning, construction and operational phase of the revitalization project.

3 The comprehensive approach in which the development of tourist facilities went hand in hand with the development of other types of (lucrative!) development like housing and office building.

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