

Manifesto - Voedsellokaal De Gymzaal

Sustainable Communities

August 2025

1. What is Voedsellokaal De Gymzaal?

Voedsellokaal De Gymzaal in The Hague is an accessible meeting place and home base for local residents and organisations who want to live sustainably with regard to food, materials, energy and people. It is fertile ground where ideas take root and grow, and where experimentation and learning are encouraged. In this way, we provide space for those who want to explore their sustainable and interconnective role in the world within a communal setting. Through this space, more and more people become connected and inspired.

2. What do we want to contribute?

In ten years' time, De Gymzaal will have grown into a vibrant centre for sustainable innovation and community power. We put into practice the principle that everyone should have the opportunity to participate equally in society. This local, idealistic place is an example for other communities and cities.

3. What is important to us?

The principles of De Gymzaal are:

Food

In the Western world, where food often seems abundant, waste has become the norm. However, sustainable food consumption means respect for labour, nature and the climate. We are actively engaged with food transition, focused on realising sufficient affordable, healthy and sustainable food and a fair production and distribution system. At De Gymzaal, we therefore cook consciously, locally, vegetarian and without waste – because every bite counts. Cooking and eating together is an important way to connect.

Materials

Our disposable culture depletes raw materials, fills landfills, and wastes labour and energy. Sustainable use of materials revolves around reuse, repair, and creativity. De Gymzaal opts for circular solutions – buying less, sharing more, and making things ourselves.

Energy

The West's hunger for energy is driving climate change and the depletion of resources. Using energy smartly and sparingly is no longer a choice, but a necessity. De Gymzaal uses green (partly self-generated) electricity, smart lighting and heating, and conscious consumption. We also promote this approach in the neighbourhood and city.

People

In a fast-paced, individualistic and digital society, we are losing touch with each other. We are exhausted by hierarchy and exclusion. Treating people sustainably involves acceptance, time and attention. Our well-being and health form the basis for our life on a healthy planet. We challenge ourselves to be curious about what others think. The Gymzaal is a place where everyone counts and where we listen deeply to each other – with shared engagement, we build caring relationships with each other.

4. How do we organise ourselves?

To flourish, we nurture De Gymzaal and know that this place needs maintenance and activity. The Stichting Lokaal Voedsel Den Haag is the formal entity behind De Gymzaal (hereinafter LV). This foundation owns the building and

is responsible for managing and maintaining it.

The foundation acts like a root system: it is not visible in the foreground, but it is essential for nutrition, stability and growth.

The Foundation Board serves the organisation and has formal responsibilities. The specific working method will be described in the Internal Regulations, which are yet to be determined.

Board members are expected to:

- Support the objectives/direction of De Gymzaal
- Represent De Gymzaal
- Communicate on behalf of the foundation
- Stay on course by consulting with each other and with the sounding board group (more on this later)
- engage with budgeting and monitoring
- be accountable, both in terms of content and finances (e.g. annual reports)
- archive all documents
- keep track of the cash register and manage bank accounts (e.g. signing authority)

The board may (temporarily) hire people for tasks that go beyond the volunteer role, e.g. programming, coordination and communication

The sounding board group

The Foundation Board shares responsibility for strategic decisions about Voedsellokaal De Gymzaal with a sounding board group. This sounding board group consists of representatives of permanent tenants and active members.

They are committed to contributing ideas about how to ensure the organisation remains healthy and how it can achieve its objectives. In doing so, they embrace not only their own interests but also the common good. In exchange, participating permanent tenants receive a discount on their rent.

The information shared in the sounding board group is for internal use only, as it often requires nuanced discussion and is sometimes still in flux.

If you are a member of the sounding board group, then:

- you consider the interests of the organisation as a whole
- you work together, confident in the understanding that everyone wants to make good decisions
- you identify bottlenecks
- you advise on policy decisions made by the foundation
- you inform the board about the different views and interests that may influence decisions

5. How do we go about things?

A balance between free activities and rental income is essential to the character of the sustainable meeting place we want to be. Rental income is crucial to making/keeping the place viable, while free activities are equally important for nurturing the community. Finding a healthy balance between the two is a challenge. This is elaborated below.

Initiatives by (local) residents

People who know De Gymzaal have many wonderful ideas and plans. If there is a wish, there is also a responsibility. Together, we will discuss what fits within the objective and what is feasible – and under what conditions.

LV does not take responsibility for activities. This remains with the initiators.

Tenant activities

There are various ways to become a tenant.

We distinguish between three rates: the full rate for organisations that can afford it, the reduced rate for

organisations/individuals that cannot (e.g. volunteer organisations) and a separate rate for regular users who are part of our community and who “help build” De Gymzaal. There may be exceptions. For one-off rentals (a single day, evening, etc.), the board will make separate arrangements. A separate Rental Policy is drawn up for this procedure.

Regular tenants are expected to:

- adhere to the agreements made with the board
- keep everything tidy
- be considerate of others (both residents' initiatives and other tenants)
- participate in the sounding board group
- be ambassadors: encourage other organisations to also become tenants at De Gymzaal
- cooperate in PR

Regular tenants (weekly, monthly, etc.) share LV's commitment to the goals of De Gymzaal. We discuss in detail with these organisations what their needs are, in terms of facilities, etc.

6. How do we cooperate with other organisations?

The door is locked. And yet De Gymzaal is a meeting place.

De Gymzaal wants to be open as much as possible via trusted individuals and organisations. Achieving this means working together, as being open without supervision is not an option.

In the spirit of its sustainability mission, the Foundation works with other organisations in the following ways:

- by conducting generous discussions about what is possible and making achievable agreements
- sharing materials (chairs, crockery, cutlery)
- strengthening and referring to each other's initiatives

The foundation is not open to formal cooperation with other organisations (e.g. merger).

The principles and activities of tenants should always be compatible with the content and spirit of this Manifesto.



7. How do we pay for it?

It's not about money. But a healthy financial situation does ensure that we have a roof over our heads. We think of money as a prerequisite. Never as a goal.

There are loans and a mortgage on the building. That means there must be a financially sound plan for repayment. Otherwise, De Gymzaal simply cannot continue to exist as such.

We want to view our finances from a perspective of abundance, in which two dynamics come into play:

1. there are enormous possibilities, and as more people come in, the chance of finding tenants also increases
2. as more rent comes in, more free activities become possible

These two dynamics require sensitive coordination. It is not the case that being open seven days a week for individual initiatives leads to financial health. Conversely, it is not the case that seven days of rentals leads to an open meeting place. LV wants to achieve both and will always have to balance and choose. But it is never either/or.

In the best-case scenario, both types of activities will grow.

The board sets the target rental amount annually.

If income is too low, it does not mean that free activities should be reduced, as this has no direct impact on them. However, it is important that everyone involved in De Gymzaal makes an effort to attract tenants. It is like ensuring a healthy soil. Everyone is jointly responsible for this.

If income is sufficient and higher, the pressure on the organisation will decrease. Therefore, there will be a continuous assessment of different sources of income and the limits of each of these sources:

- rent: we determine which paying organisations we want to work with on a structural basis
- use on a donation basis: we offer flexibility to activities without their own organisational structure
- subsidies: we seek project and research subsidies that do not require co-financing
- funds: we seek funds for volunteer support that suit us
- crowdfunding: we enthuse people with our concrete objectives
- loans: we focus on the responsible continuation/refinancing of loans and the possibility of perpetual bonds.

8. A call for engagement

Manners

The Gymzaal is a meeting place. Many people make this possible and many people use it. We appreciate that and encourage it. It is rich in all its diversity. If everyone contributes from their own role and is mindful of others, this is a place with enormous possibilities. Initiators remain the guardians of their ideas, with LV as a fertile breeding ground.

We do not dwell on complaints or doubts for too long. Instead, we discuss tensions with each other as quickly as possible, trusting that we all have the same goals and can give each other space when things get tough. We want to think bigger and more generously: what is possible? We also want to experiment. We get started. We are active. If something does not work and we cannot make it work, we stop: that means that, for example in the sounding board group, we discuss it thoroughly, reflect on it and sometimes let it go.

We look honestly at bottlenecks together, clarify and resolve them.

We look appreciatively at opportunities together, make them concrete and seize them.

We dare to make choices.

9. What is the dream we are working towards?

In ten years' time, De Gymzaal will have grown into a vibrant centre of sustainable innovation and community power. This local idealistic place will serve as an example for other cities and communities.

Food: We counterbalance unfair and exhausting food production. De Gymzaal offers space to organisations that work with local and fair food chains, thereby saving food

from waste. It is a place that hundreds of people a year know as the place where they can attend workshops on topics such as cooking, climate and their own place in this world. The kitchen has become a learning place for young and old.

Materials: We counteract destructive raw material extraction and human rights violations caused by consumerism. The space is furnished with reused and modular materials. Repair cafés, upcycling workshops and sharing cupboards have become regular features of the programme. Nothing is simply thrown away – everything is given a second life. There is room for initiatives around responsible consumption.

Energy: We offer a counterbalance to energy-intensive technology, such as artificial intelligence. Thanks to sustainable materials, smart systems and behavioural change, De Gymzaal can set a good example. Visitors learn how small choices can have a big impact on their own energy consumption and how they can stand up to “big tech”.

People: We offer a counterbalance to individualism and self-enrichment. De Gymzaal is a warm, inclusive place where people of all ages and backgrounds come together. It is a caring community for equal social participation, social initiatives, neighbourhood projects and sustainable start-ups.

By 2035, De Gymzaal will provide space for a movement – living proof that sustainability works when you do it together.

This Manifesto provides direction for the activities of Voedsellokaal De Gymzaal and Stichting Lokaal Voedsel Den Haag for the next five years.

Related documents

- Internal regulations (under development)
- Rental guidelines (under development)
- Policy plan including financial section and organisational structure (under development)
- Annual plan (under development)
- Decision-making procedures (under development)