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Spatial opportunities of exhibition centers: Explaining path-dependencies in Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Milan

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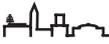
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Preface

“Je gaat het pas zien als je het door heb”

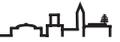
“You only see things when you understand them” is one of the numerous oracle-like quotes from Johan Cruijff, the most famous of all Dutch soccer players. When I was a little boy, my primary school was around the corner of the RAI exhibition center. The petting zoo where my parents took me was at the location where the first RAI pavilions stood for over forty years. My first home in the Rivierenbuurt was exactly in-between those two locations. When going to soccer practice, I passed through the Beatrixpark that was, at the time, a highly contested place because of the extension plans of the exhibition center.

When I grew older we moved but stayed in the neighborhood. My high school was only a hundred meters away from the RAI, just at the other side of the park. During those years, I did not see the RAI daily but every time soccer practice was cancelled because of frost or heavy rain we had to “run around the RAI”, something that was highly disgusted by me and most of my teammates. What I wasn’t aware of is that the RAI was at the time studying on extending to the site of my precious soccer club.

Actually, I wasn’t aware of any of the RAI activities. They took place inside the RAI premises where, as a school-boy that did not have a particular fashion for cars or household goods, you had no business of going. The only noticeable signs of activity were the people that moved between the RAI entrance and the dedicated train station just hundred meters south. At first these visitors were foremost Dutch people with large goodie bags, later they became foreign businessmen with suitcases.

So, although the first years of my life I circled around the RAI (see map on page vii), it was only during the past five years that I learned about the role it played in the national and international exhibition sector. It was through understanding the processes taking place within and around the RAI that I saw the neighborhood that I knew so well through different eyes. Moreover, I got the chance to study other European exhibition centers in neighborhoods just like mine.

I’m very thankful for this opportunity that was offered to me by my supervisor, Willem Salet. When I was only focusing on completing my master’s thesis he was already thinking about the start of my professional career. He did not only create a spot for me in his dedicated and lively group of researchers but also supported my desire to work as a practitioner. He introduced me to the Physical Planning Department of the



Municipality of Amsterdam that gave me a second part time job at the newly created Metroteam, working on metropolitan issues for the Amsterdam region.

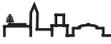
This team, headed by Eric van der Kooij, was probably the best place for a recent urban planning graduate to start working. It combined new and novel approaches with hard work and, just like the rest of the department, a deep love for the city of Amsterdam. Undisputed highlight was the opportunity to work with Maurits de Hoog on 'New Rhythms of the City'. He taught me so much more than is in the book. Recently Elvira Vreeswijk has taken over this mentoring role by introducing me into the more serious elements of being a civil servant. I have to thank all of my colleagues at the Metroteam, Beleidsteam Stad and the rest of the Department for sharing their profound knowledge and enthusiasm with me. They really kept me from losing track of practical relevance.

An equally stimulating environment was provided by my colleagues at the University of Amsterdam. In particular by the members of the "Dreamteam", the modest name that somehow got stuck on the discussion group of PhDs in urban planning at our university. Although it is common-sense to thank your roommates, room plans at our department change so frequently that I'm afraid that I will miss some of them in an attempt to be comprehensive. They will have to do with a general, but very warm, thanks to you all for discussions, comments, lunches and drinks! I am also very grateful to my co-promotor Stan Majoor who provided very valuable comments to my work, especially in the final stages of the project. My deepest thanks, however, should go to Willem Salet. I've very much appreciated our sessions and the time he has made available for them. It is amazing how he has always managed to get the academic essence of my stories and has guided them by very subtle comments into the work that is this thesis.

In every thesis there are a few key moments that accelerate the research and add new depths to it. For me, the most important of these has been the international research colloquium on transforming metropolitan regions in the summer of 2011, organized by Prof. dr. Bernd Scholl in Zurich. The international experience brought to the table here, really kick-started the international empirical part of my work. Stimulating experiences also strikingly often took place during interviews and visits to archives, for which I have to thank the people involved.

On a different level, my parents have created the circumstances that allowed me to do the things I'm doing. They have always been supportive in the things my sister Leonore and I wanted to pursue. We are very lucky to have such parents. I also have to thank Karen for providing me with a very balanced mix of unconditional support for, and indispensable distraction from, my work. This can only come with love.

Amsterdam, April 2013



- 1 Home 1
- 2 First location of RAI
- 3 Beatrix Park
- 4 AFC Soccer club
- 5 Sint Nycolaas Lyceum High School
- 6 Home 2
- 7 RAI Exhibition Center
- 8 Anne Frank Elementary School



Places of personal identity around the RAI exhibition centre