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

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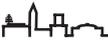
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# Introduction

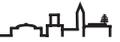
In 1999, the Frankfurt Fair purchased a large part of the inner-city railway yards in order to allow for a large-scale extension of its exhibition center. On March 31, 2005, a new trade fair, designed by Massimiliano Fuskas, opened in the periphery of Milan.

Both projects had large-scale consequences for the functioning of their host cities. The new Milan Fair alleviated congestion in the northwest of the inner city and created a new pole of development on the axis between the center of Milan and Malpensa airport. The acquisition of the former railway yards strongly anchored the Frankfurt Fair in the inner city, thereby continuing a century-long relationship between city and fair.

Both projects are also illustrative of the scale and diversity of development that is taking place in the exhibition sector. All over the world, new exhibition centers are constructed and old ones are renovated and extended. In Western Europe alone, fourteen new exhibition centers with more than 100.000 square meters of exhibition space have been constructed since 1980. Many of them were constructed in urban peripheries, thereby replacing outdated facilities that were located in the cores of their metropolitan regions. At the same time, however, many other historical facilities in inner cities were updated and extended.

This divergent geographical pattern in exhibition center construction is part of a broader trend in metropolitan development. From literature on urban and regional development emerges a broader picture of simultaneous reinforcement of urban cores and strengthening of urban peripheries. Both developments are rooted in urbanization and an increasing demographic and economic appeal of metropolitan regions in general. Since 2008, more than half of the human population lives in cities. Within this trend many scholars see evidence of the generative economic effects of cities and urban agglomerations (Soja, 2011).

Analyses of this 'triumph of the city' (Glaeser, 2012) often start with the observation that economy, governance and science have rapidly internationalized from the 1980s onwards and that cities profit from these developments through their advantageous position within international networks. Since the work by Manuel Castells (1996), cities are conceptualized as on the one hand spaces in international networks of flows and on the other hand as particular places within these networks. The work of Sassen



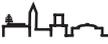
(1991) added the notion that a hierarchy of cities is emerging on the basis of how well they are embedded within these flows, leading to an increasingly competitive international economy. Both the position of a city within different networks as well as its quality of place determine the position of cities within this playing field.

This logic has largely affected city politics, aiming on the one hand at improving their position in international networks through the construction of airports, high speed stations and internet exchanges, while on the other hand attributing large funds trying to increase the quality of place through flagship developments, cultural infrastructures and public spaces (Savitch and Kantor, 2003; Altshuler and Luberoff, 2003; Orueta and Fainstein, 2008).

Profiting from these investments, central cities have made a strong comeback after being hit by suburbanization and deconcentration policies in the decades following World War Two. Depending on context and country, the revival of central cities started out modestly in the 1980s to really take off in the 1990s and 2000s. During these decades, urban amenities like museums and shopping districts were constructed and renovated, public space was redesigned and urban waterfronts were redeveloped (Mommaas, 2004; Van Aalst en Boogaarts, 2002; De Hoog and Vermeulen, 2009). This turned dilapidated central cities into attractive environments for residents, shops and companies (Frieden and Sagaly, 1989; Sagalyn, 2001).

Not all investment, however, was targeted at downtown. Although traditionally such functions concentrated in the centers of cities, they are now also to be found outside of historic urban cores, complementing or even replacing their peers in city centers. Although the historic urban core is still the location for a conglomeration of high-level urban functions, the most attractive, largest and best visited locations for a variety of other functions are now to be found in the former periphery. Over the past two or three decades, many cities have seen new sports stadiums, universities, shopping centers and hospitals being constructed in their periphery. No longer is the urban periphery reserved for the construction of suburban dwellings and NIMBY-functions (Keil and Ronneberger, 1994; 2000).

This development has radically changed the nature of what is traditionally called the urban periphery as well as the relationship between this periphery and the traditional city center. Groundbreaking was the analysis of Garreau in his *'Edge City: Life on the New Frontier'* (1991) in which he described the radical transformation of suburban America. Traditional hierarchical relationships between center and periphery have changed into networked constellations in which the nature of the activity and position in regional networks determines the location of things (Keil, 1994; Phelps and Parsons, 2003; Phelps et al., 2010; Dear and Flusty, 1998; Soja, 2000). This had led to a variety of conceptualizations of the emergent urban form like post-metropolis (Soja, 2000; 2011), Zwischenstadt ('in-between city'; Sieverts, 2003), metapolis (Asscher, 2000) or, tweaking Garreaus earlier conceptualization, edgeless cities (Lang, 2003)



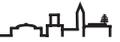
These developments had their earliest and most intense manifestations in American cities. This has been reflected in the emergence of a so-called LA School of urban theory dealing with newly emerging metropolitan configurations or ‘postmodern urbanism’ (Dear and Flusty 1998; Dear, 2004; Dear and Dahmann, 2008). Since the end of the 1980s, these developments are now also noticed in a variety of European metropolises, taking a flight in attention throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Phelps and Parsons, 2003; Keil and Ronneberger, 1994; 2000; Balducci, 2003; Foot, 2000).

Within these new metropolitan layouts, international flows of people arrive at high-speed rail stations and airports that are located at places outside of the historic cores of cities. Through increased qualities of place at peripheral university campuses, meeting venues and shopping centers, the need to leave these places of entry is evaporating. Thus, contemporary metropolises organize their international connectivity and interaction increasingly outside of their historic urban cores, thereby disentangling functional and geographical centrality.

Both the consolidation of central cores as well as the strengthening and internationalization of the urban periphery are reflected in exhibition center construction. On the one hand, as reflected in literature on urban renewal and the development of the urban tourist economy, exhibition centers are powerful tools to attract visitors to downtown. On the other hand, are exhibition centers, alongside sports stadiums, university campuses, hospitals and shopping malls, redefining the notion of the urban periphery.

In spite of the influence these new ‘peripheral’ exhibition centers have on the configuration and functioning of contemporary metropolises and the sheer quantity of investment that comes with these relocations, this phenomenon has remained largely unstudied from an urban perspective. Although the construction of exhibition centers is mentioned in relation to boosterism and urban competition, such accounts remain largely limited to a North-American perspective and hardly ever go into detail about development trajectories of specific trade fairs. In the few cases of more in-depth studies, they only present individual stories through which it is difficult to determine the significance of these developments for the broader trade fair sector. Therefore, a clear overview of the relation between city and fair is, until now, lacking

This study will try to correct this omission by an analysis of exhibition center development in Western Europe. Because, as will be demonstrated later, Western Europe has the longest tradition in fair activity and constitutes the largest market for exhibition centers, it was felt that particularly the lack of exhibition center research on this part of the world needed correction. In contrast to the few existing works on the role of exhibition center development in urban studies, not the general urban development and government visions and strategies, but rather the perspective of the facility itself is taken as the point of departure. This not only provides insight beyond their role as boosterist facilities in urban renewal and competitive city policies, but also shows how global changes within a particular economic sector are played down locally, thereby



restructuring regional geographies.

### **Structure of the book**

Three themes run through this book. First, it tries to explain for the recent spectacular boom in exhibition center development. Second, and related to the observed general transformation of metropolitan configurations, attention is paid to the geographical patterns of this new investment. And third, explanations are sought for these patterns of investment. This is done by first mapping the exhibition center development in Western Europe in a comparative study, comprising 34 of the largest exhibition centers in Western Europe. The research then delves deeper into four case studies of exhibition center development in Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Milan.

Throughout the study, an historical perspective is employed. Historic development will also be the main angle through which Chapter One will introduce the exhibition sector. From this description emerges a picture of a highly dynamic economic sector that is constantly innovating its business and adapting its venues accordingly. At the end of Chapter One, attention is paid to the current geographical patterns of this sector. Contrary to thirty years ago when almost all exhibition centers were located at central locations, half of today's exhibition centers are found in the urban periphery.

Chapter Two will take this observation into the central research question that guides the remainder of the book: how can this binary pattern between central and peripherally located facilities be explained? To answer this question this chapter proposes a qualitative method based on a comparative case study between four exhibition centers: Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Milan.

After Chapter Two, this book leaves the traditional structure of a thesis monograph. Throughout the PhD trajectory, different articles have been written to allow for focus and quicker dissemination of empirical results. Therefore, Chapters Three till Six are reprints of earlier published and submitted articles to international peer-reviewed journals. As such, they can be read independently.

Chapter Three builds on the historical perspective employed in the first chapter of the book and develops this into a theoretical framework. In this chapter, that has been published in TESG (*Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*), path dependency theory is introduced for the valuable concepts it renders for the analysis of exhibition center development. Moreover, this chapter links these concepts to the multidimensional analytical framework that is used to understand the specific development trajectories of the four cases in subsequent chapters.

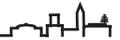
Chapter Four is submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal and introduces the case of the development of the RAI exhibition center in Amsterdam. Within the analysis of this facility's strategic choices, particular attention is paid to the alleged role of



exhibition center development in urban boosterism that comes out of urban planning literature.

Chapter Five, also submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal, takes the cases of the Frankfurt and Munich trade fairs, and asks the question why Frankfurt extended its central facility whereas Munich moved to a new peripheral location. As such, this chapter explores the central question of this thesis on the basis of two German cases.

Chapter Six adds an international perspective to this analysis of Munich and Frankfurt and adds two cases to the comparison. First, insights from the earlier introduced Amsterdam trade fair are used to understand why exhibition centers remain at central locations. Second, the recently relocated trade fair of Milan adds to the understanding of new exhibition projects in the urban periphery. This chapter is scheduled to appear in a special issue of an international peer-reviewed journal on the relocation of high-level urban functions to the metropolitan periphery and should be read as the conclusive chapter of this thesis.



### **Fairs and Exhibition centers**

*Throughout this introduction the terms exhibition center and fair have been used without distinction to essentially indicate the same thing: venues where exhibitions and associated events take place. The long history of the phenomenon and the multiple cultural and linguistic contexts in which exhibitions are held have over the centuries rendered a broad variety of terms for the matter. The term fair was first used for the large markets in the Middle Ages. They were often combined with religious festivals. The German word 'Messe' comes from mass and the, Italian 'fiere' and Spanish 'ferias' find their etymological origin in the Latin feriae which means religious festivals.*

*The word fair has stuck to indicate large exhibitions (like the World's Fairs organized from the 1851 London World Fair onwards). To indicate gatherings of professionals, often the adjective of 'trade' has been added. The word fair, over time, has also come to mean the place where these events are held. Also the German word 'Messe' and the Dutch 'beurs' are both used for the event as well as the location where it is taking place. When fairs lost part of their exchange character and became places for promotion and display, the word 'exhibition' came in use. Also the location in which these exhibitions were held changed names. At first they were called exhibition halls. When modernization and enlargement of scale hit the sector after World War Two and most venues consisted of multiple halls, often linked through systems of internal corridors, the term exhibition center was introduced.*

*When the functional use of exhibition centers shifted, this time from display to personal interaction, the name of the facilities changed again. A new family of exhibition centers was now dubbed 'convention center': places where people convene. Such venues mainly host events that combine exhibitions and conferences and are generally smaller than the large-scale exhibition centers that are central in this research. Because convention centers are mainly found in Anglo-Saxon countries, this term will only be used in this study to indicate this specific branch of exhibition venues.*

*Because their difference is subtle and mainly dependent on linguistic contexts, the terms 'exhibition center' and 'fair' will be used interchangeably throughout this study to indicate essentially the same thing. The term fairground, will be used to indicate the broader ensemble of exhibition facilities and accompanying infrastructure like outdoor exhibition space, parking facilities, loading docks and entrance buildings.*