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"Spoiled", "Bored", "Irritated" and "Nervous": The Transformations of a Mobile Subject in Airport Design Discourse.

November 5, 2011, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. The Amsterdam – New York flight is scheduled to depart in thirty minutes. The security control takes place right in front of the gate, and people are following the familiar routine without questions. Having passed through the body scanner, I am rearranging my belongings that have just reappeared on the security conveyor belt. At the same time, the security officer asks the passenger behind me to open his hand luggage. I hear the officer exclaiming something as if in surprise and cast a glance at the contents of the open bag. A folded parachute. The officer asks why the man has a parachute and the man gives a perfectly logical answer: "To jump off a plane". "Not this one, I hope?", the officer continues. "No", the man smiles, "I am going to Florida, and I'll be jumping from a plane there". The officer laughs and nods the man signalling that the examination is over.

This small anecdote illustrates what research on airports has begun to address over the past ten years: the unavoidable diversity and unpredictability of people's behaviour and experiences at airports – spaces that have often been discussed by scholars as intensively controlled and surveilled spaces (Adey 2004; Lyon, 2008) and have been compared to prisons (Kellerman 2008; Molotch 2012). Earlier discussions of airports in human geography and anthropology emphasized the passivity of the whole experience of air travel and the infantilisation of the public that is supposedly transformed into a homogeneous crowd obeying identical orders (Augé 1995; Harley and Fuller 2004; Rosler 1998). More recent work has started to tease that image apart by signalling the varieties of people's experiences at airports and by providing more reflexive accounts of what kind of behaviours and interactions airports might encourage due to security regulations and design arrangements. The focus specifically has been on the interests of airport operators who exercise influence on passenger behaviour through agreement or conflict with other parties (Adey 2007; Lyon 2003 2008; Salter 2008a, 2008b). In this top-down perspective the compliance of passengers with the airport design and operational set-up has rarely been called into question. Some recent studies support the image of a more active (though often cautious) traveller who is aware of their surroundings, may choose what to do at an airport, makes use of airport facilities in ways that are not necessarily expected by the airport authorities and who may disrupt the monotonous routine of interrogations at the border control by a joke (Fretigny 2013; Molotch 2012). In the context of studying aeromobility, Budd (2011) has pointed to the importance of understanding air travel experiences as embodied and affective and seeing passengers not "as inert 'pax'" but as living, breathing, human subjects" (Budd 2011, 1012). Other scholars have begun to discuss the meanings and experiences of passengering (Adey, Bissell, McCormack and Merriman, 2012) and have reflected upon the socialities of travelling (Bissell 2010).

While bottom-up studies centered on the figure of the passenger promise a better understanding of people's experiences of spaces of transit, one question is left open: how are people and their behaviour accounted for in airport design? Are they indeed imagined as passive and compliant, as easy prey of the offer of walk-through stores or as cogs in the airport mobility machinery? The chapter approaches this question through an analysis of the views of the parties involved in airport design on the figure of the passenger, thus bringing together a top-down perspective and a subject that is usually dealt with through a bottom-up approach. The chapter draws upon interviews with airport architects, designers and managers who play key roles in design process at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. They would often directly discuss passengers' needs and behaviour in order to rationalise their design solutions as well as indirectly address the subject in their reflections on other topics. The analysis of interviews is supplemented by the analysis of documentary sources, such as annual reports, press releases and architectural and design reviews.[1]

The approach and methodology are informed by the work of sociologists and geographers who unpack the complexity of interactions behind the production of built environment by professionals (Cuff 1992; Franck and von Sommaruga Howard 2010; Yaneva 2009), shift the focus from the architectural form to the process of co-production of buildings by architects and non-architects alike (Imrie and Street, 2009), explore its discursive nature (Marcus and Cameron 2002) and study buildings as a spatial machinery that expresses and maintains social order (Dovey 1999). Of specific relevance is Cuff's (1989) exploration of the image that architects have of the people who will be using their buildings. This issue is particularly

intriguing in the case of public buildings when architects do not know those people in person. Cuff calls them "phantom actors" who are key imaginary figures in architects' thinking and yet are "difficult to keep in focus because of their kaleidoscopic transformations" (1989, 100).

In what follows, I firstly briefly introduce Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, the key parties in design process and their priorities. I discuss Schiphol's transformation over the last twenty years into "more than just an airport" (Schiphol Group 2009),a process that one could observe at many other airports. This transformation is key for understanding the motivations and arguments of different key stakeholders in the airport design and management process. Next I outline disagreements between parties over the state of mind, behaviour and needs of passengers, linking the argumentation of the parties to their agendas and their ways of measuring their success. The conclusion reflects upon the consequences of such disagreements amongst design professionals and foregrounds the questions that this paradoxical and impossible portrait of a mobile subject evokes.

"Don't Worry, Be Happy": How a Passenger Became a Consumer

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol is Europe's fifth busiest airport by passenger traffic with a total passenger volume of about 55 million in 2014 (Schiphol Group 2014). About 40 per cent of all passengers are transfer passengers for whom the Netherlands is neither a destination, nor a point of origin. Schiphol is famous for its non-aviation related facilities including, for example, a casino, a museum branch, the Airport Library and Airport Park. The airport has received a number of international awards for its distinctive facilities as well as the experience of transit. In 2013 Schiphol became the first European Airport to make it to the top three

airports of the world in a SKYTRAX survey of 12 million passengers (SKYTRAX 2013). In 2015 it was ranked the world's fifth best airport in the category "50 million pax+ per year", fourth in category "Best Airport Leisure Amenities" and seventh in the category "Best Airport Shopping" (SKYTRAX 2015). The portfolio of non-aviation related facilities of Schiphol may be impressive but at the time of writing in 2016, their offer hardly looks exceptional. Airports worldwide feature art exhibitions, cinemas, fitness centres, hotels, spas and so forth. Schiphol Group, the company that runs Schiphol, however, claims that they are pioneers in creating and branding the airport as a multi-functional city-like environment – an *AirportCity* (e.g. Schiphol Group 2010).

Key roles in design process at Schiphol are played by the Department of Passenger Services, the Department of Commercial Services and Media, security professionals, managers or units at Schiphol who perform design project management and review, architectural supervisors, architects, interior designers and way-finding designers. These parties are the carriers of distinctive sets of ideas about what kind of experience people should have at the airport and how architecture and interior design should ensure that (see also Nikolaeva 2012). Depending on the project other stakeholders may be involved, such as airlines or shop owners, for example.

While most of the parties involved in design at Schiphol recognize the value of efficient passenger operations, the *Passenger Services* department directly and consistently bears responsibility for facilitating people's movement from point A to point B at the airport both in day to day management and in planning for future. While the former means controlling the

quality of operations 24/7 (floor managers work at this level), the latter entails being involved in (re)envisioning parts of the terminal through design year by year. This "operational"[2] or "passenger processes" vision – as it is labelled by other parties – is a result of decades' long accumulation of research and expertise and ensuing values and rules within the airport design industry itself, whereas, for instance, commercial and security expertise have a broader range of sources of origin.

The principal goal of the *Commercial Services and Media* department is to earn money for the airport company, as taking care of passenger operations alone has never been a profitable business. Further, because Schiphol is considered to possess a monopoly as an international airport in the Netherlands, according to Dutch law its aviation-related income is subject to regulation which makes it impossible to increase the charges for the airlines above certain limits (ICAO 2013). The non-aeronautical income is not subject to regulation since Schiphol holds no monopoly on retail or food and beverage business. After the terminal facilities were considerably extended in the first half of the nineties space became available to develop a non-aviation portfolio and, thus, raise profits. Moving people "from A to B" still was the "core business" but a vision of the airport as a "commercial environment" began to evolve – a space that brings money to the operator and at the same time provides entertainment. The *AirportCity* concept that came into use around the same time. According to a few former commercial developers at Schiphol, this concept largely boils down to the idea "*Don't Worry, Be Happy*" in which the vision of Passenger Services provide the first part and the commercial developers had to take care of the second. The idea that "efficient processes" were not only not bringing *money* but also not delivering passengers an *experience* for which they would want to return gradually was making its way into design. From the middle of the

nineties the process of developing and conceptualizing the "added value" of the airport gained

full steam. The massive expansion of facilities, the growth of passenger traffic and the new

business goals all contributed to this shift. According to a number of interviewees, after

expansion works in the early nineties, a new kind of thinking about the airport was possible.[3]

Commercial opportunities became more apparent and the authorities were eager to seize them.

Since then the *Commercial Services and Media* department became a more important player

in the design process and began to contest ideas and decisions of the *Passenger Services*

department.[4]

Compared with the Commercial Services and Media and the Passenger Services departments,

Security professionals play a different role in the design process. Seen through the eyes of

managers and architects, safety and security maintenance is not a function of the airport but a

context in which the main functions are performed. The security apparatus at Schiphol is

extraordinary complex and comprises public and private parties that operate within in a

context of national and international agreements and policies (Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

2013a, 2013b; Schouten 2014). An analysis of the design process shows that in design

projects not directly related to border and security control the role of security professionals is

limited: they are more involved at the implementation stage rather than during the early stages

of envisioning how the space will look and work. Security professionals may occasionally be

involved in negotiations with other parties of the kind with which Passenger Operations and

Commercial Services often find themselves busy (e.g. about the amount of square meters

available for a particular facility). The importance of security for design process in projects

not directly related to border control and security check is in the impact of these procedures

on the traveller: the "don't worry"-part of the slogan is to a great degree about rectifying the negative impact of security procedures.

The last party to be introduced is a very important and diverse one: architects and designers. While a variety of architects and designers have worked for Schiphol, a few stand out due to their long-term involvement and broader powers.[5] The key figures are an architectural supervisor who advise on the urban, architectural and design development of Schiphol and the chief terminal architect. The former position is temporary and has been held by a number of people during the period covered in this chapter. The latter, the position of the chief architect of the terminal, belongs to Jan Benthem of *Benthem Crouwel Architects* who has been continuously involved in designing, planning and advising at Schiphol since the end of the eighties. At the moment of writing there is no overseeing designer. Previously this position was held by Nel Verschuuren who worked at Schiphol since the sixties and left the post in 2005. Since 1967 the ideas of architects and interior designers have had a strong influence on principles which are still foundational for the vision of Passenger Services and to a certain degree are accepted by other parties. Yet, as the airport authorities came to focus more on raising non-aviation revenues, other parties, primarily Commercial Services began to challenged their role.[6]

Finally, an important player is *Market Research and Intelligence* department. Although it does not participate in the design process at all, their reports on passengers' needs, preferences and wishes are supplied to every party in the design process and thus influence the course of decision-making process. According to the head of the department they are busy

making sense of the transformation of a transportation facility into "more than just an airport" whereby a previously frightened and excited *passenger* turns into a *consumer*:

> Nowadays consumers are spoiled and bored. Two, three times a year on
>
> average we get on the plane, and as experienced consumers we wish to be
>
> treated well. But we have rushed to the airport, have been be held up in
>
> traffic, have been nervous with all the hassle around the check-in, irritated
>
> by lethargy at passport and security control and stressed by the long wait at
>
> the counter of the tax free shopping.
>
> How does Schiphol Airport still keep the appeal of its glorified "bus station"
>
> to that blasé visitor? The new Schiphol experience is "Do not worry, be
>
> happy!" And we are still investigating it. (Martens 2002, translated from
>
> Dutch by the author)

According to Martens (2002), the studies supplied by the department do not provide definitive answers: different parties would use them differently, in accordance with their goals and principles. Believing in the "Don't Worry, Be Happy" idea unites as much it divides, since stakeholders pursue different goals and have different visions of people's needs, capacities and desires. Where worrying stops and being happy begins is a deeply contested subject. As the head of the Market Intelligence department suggests, the mobile subject keeps changing and, thusdemands special attention. The next section reveals that the image of mobile subject does not only change through time but also at any given moment it incorporates contradictions and even acquires moral duties as airport design is being contested by disagreeing parties.

The Mobile Subject: Stressed and Confused or Calm and Confident?

The "Don't Worry, Be Happy"-principle was first used by Schiphol's interior designers in the 1960s after they had observed passenger behaviour. It was not formulated as a branding slogan, but the idea clearly underpinned much of the thinking in the design process. This can be deduced both from interviews with the current architects who studied the philosophy behind earlier designs and from, for example, a detailed description of the terminal opened in 1967 (that still forms part of the current terminal) written by a British journalist and entitled "Schiphol Puts Passengers First" (Hughes-Stanton 1968). The principle was based on a belief that calming down stressed passengers by ensuring easy way-finding was the priority, and, therefore, in key spaces related to passenger operations no commercial activities or signage were allowed. Shopping, eating out, advertisements and suchlike were deemed of secondary priority which only deserve a passenger's attention once the basic procedures related to flying have been followed:

> …[The terminal] is designed with the overall aim that passengers may move
>
> easily and logically to where they need to go. The main departure hall, for
>
> instance, has no kiosks for the sale of magazines or confectionery, no
>
> restaurants, and no advertisements to compete with directional signs. It has
>
> no special attractions for visitors, and is therefore not unnecessarily
>
> crowded . . . If passengers have time to spare, they can go to the top floor
>
> restaurants or to the sales kiosks in the arrival area below - here the austerity
>
> of the departure level is replaced by an exhilarating, even Pop-art explosion
>
> of advertisements. (Hughes-Stanton 1968, 48, 50)

More than forty years later an architect from *Benthem Crouwel* working on the lounge redevelopment project reinforced this belief: you need "to get passengers relaxed and calm

and then they will go shopping. Otherwise, they won't. They are just running around stressed: 'Where do I have to go?' They don't even see the shops!".

While Commercial Services and Media agree that this type of thinking is largely correct –a lost and stressed passenger would hardly pay attention to shops or entertainment – they often contest the solutions presented by architects as logically ensuing from this belief. Both parties use assumptions about people's motivation and behaviour to support argumentation.

First, there is disagreement on the degree of stress passengers experience and about their capacity to handle it. Passenger Services and architects try to protect passengers from "distractions," arguing that big bright advertisements, a lot of visual diversity and stimulation prevent people from calming down and concentrating on finding their way. Commercial managers agree that the airport should not be a "complete mess" but doubt whether someone would miss a flight if they introduced more visual diversity in the terminal by, for instance creating "more space for retailers to express their shop". A manager who worked on the "border" between the departments believes that stress and its impact on peoples' decision-making capabilities is overrated:

> I think people have changed…If you look back on old commercials, on
>
> TV…from the seventies… One single story-line and it ends with a clear
>
> conclusion that this soap is the best soap. And now we are used to having
>
> different story-lines mixed up together in a real staccato and fast way …and
>
> two or three of these stories count ten seconds. Original commercials
>
> were …[up] to 60 seconds. So we are used to get much more information

per second than 30 years ago. …The passengers…or any people are capable

of picking out those elements of information that they need.

Proceeding from these different visions, the parties pursue different strategies in the struggle

for orchestrating people's attention. Passenger Services constantly work on removing all the

information they consider "extra", while Commercial Services and Media invent new ways of

exposing the passenger to *their* information: leaflets, special promotions with staff, visual

projections on the floor, apps, Facebook page, Schiphol TV: that is, *expanding* in physical

and virtual space.

The second significant difference in thinking about the behaviour of people at airports is the

perspective on their needs. In the view of the architectural supervisor between 1996 and 2008,

Hubert-Jan Henket, "you don't want to be distracted" by shops or advertising. He believes

that people want to go to the gate, and if they long for distractions – they should find them in

Disneyland, not at an airport, so, in effect, they *should not* want to shop. Jan Benthem, the

terminal chief architect, does not take an issue with the very existence of shops but searches

for ways to give people choice, relying on the idea that if people can see options they will

choose doing what they prefer most. His ideal passengers seem to be more inclined to shop

but are not too easily "seduced" by different "tricks" of the commercial managers: they do not

buy things "accidentally" just because they are exposed to an offer:

> …I think it doesn't work because you have to be in a state of mind to go
>
> shopping. …You can't force people to go shopping. …We disagree with the
>
> airport authorities sometimes about it.

Therefore, according to Benthem, the "walk-through" stores which are now so common at airports are confusing. They deprive people of the chance to choose: immediately following security control, passengers find themselves in a store through which they should pass before reaching the gate. For instance, airports in Vienna, Manchester, Saint-Petersburg, Budapest and Copenhagen have such a set-up.

Commercial Services and Media acknowledge that the "first need" of the passenger is going through flying-related procedures. Shopping and having fun is their "second need" in which some have more interest: passengers even may be eager to search for, specific brands such as Victoria's Secret or Starbucks. Others have to be given opportunity – and then they might make use of it, according to commercial developers. The goal is to create plenty of such opportunities and make them attractive:

> [Shops] are there, because [passengers] want it. Of course, I will do my utmost to make it more interesting to go in, that's the exactly my job. I can never make someone go in, if they really don't want to. It's a need of the passenger, and they expect it to be there!

The ways of measuring success and the attitudes about people's behaviour are closely intertwined. As the goal of Passenger Services is to reach more than 90% of recognition of signage, they imagine a passenger who is easily distracted or cannot manage too much information, thus – commercial developers would argue – possibly, overprotecting others. Commercial Services and Media, on the other hand, wish to activate the supposed "second need" in the maximum number of people. Commercial Services and Media cannot boast about

"reaching" their goals, but rather continually experiment to expand the range of means that might make people consider going shopping.

Thus, all parties strive to guide the passenger either way: to the gate or to the shop, interpreting human behaviour in accordance with their own vision and wishing to encourage particular behaviours for profit or being disappointed that people do not always behave as they "should". Airport design is a contested field rather than an implementation of a single vision, and, hence, the image of the passenger also remains highly contradictory—despite attempts to 'fix' passenger identity through market research.

Conclusions

Mobile subjects in airport design process become chess figures in multiple games for space, for profit and for efficiency, undergoing transformations and eluding definitions. It is this unpredictability and mysteriousness of these "phantom actors" that both puzzles airport designers and managers and grants them the room for manoeuvre. Most interviewed professionals believe in the "Don't Worry, Be Happy" principle: first the potential reasons for the passengers to be worried have to be eliminated, and only then the leisure amenities can spark their interest. Yet this slogan is as much a "formula" as an equation with two unknowns: ideas about the passengers' resilience to stress and ability to plan the route from A to B as well as their interest in shopping or entertainment are a subject of ongoing contestation.

According to Markus and Cameron, "there are no 'innocent', power-free spaces' (2002, 69). Architectural briefs and any communication pertaining to the process of designing a building

"contain some prescriptive element, and… all have an ideological dimension" (2002, 41).

Each image of the passenger mobilised in the process of contestation of airport design has its

implicit or explicit ideological foundations and wide-reaching practical implications. Should

an airport remain as much as possible a travel-related space without extras because passengers

are too stressed or even incompetent to handle extra choices or possible temptations? Should

passengers be protected from extra information that could be distracting or they can be trusted

in their choices of the route through the airport, speed of movement and activities on the way

from A to B? Whilst appearing practical in nature, such questions have clear moral undertones.

Airports are spaces of temporary dwelling, but they are tricky to leave once inside, and if one

wants to reach their destination the "house rules" should be followed. But does one become a

non-smoker just because it is cheerfully announced throughout the terminal that it is a non-

smoking airport? The choice to get rid of smoking rooms may be driven by an operational

objective (to free more flow space for example) or a commercial project (adding extra shops),

but it is also unavoidably a moral decision whereby airport authorities impose a rule related to

healthcare rather than to travel on millions of foreign citizens. Obviously, cigarettes and

alcohol would still be sold in impressive quantities in duty free stores.

This chapter offers a new perspective into existing research on the governance of mobile

subjects and the ambiguity of the figure of the passenger (Adey 2008; Adey, Bissell,

McCormack and Merriman 2012). The investigation of ideas held by architects and designers

about passengers reveals that for airport-makers, passengers can be *simultaneously* "pax"

(Budd 2011) whose routes are prescribed, stressed individuals who are always at risk of

becoming too confused to be in control as well as subjects choosing their activities as they please and navigating the airport with confidence. Each of these dimensions of a mobile subject is mobilised to justify designs serving particular goals and achieve versions of success that different groups of "airport-makers" strive towards.

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1 In total, forty interviews were conducted during the years 2010-2011. The brief historical narrative in this chapter is based on the extensive analysis of annual reports and other documentation, conducted within the framework of a bigger research project on designing airports as multifunctional public spaces and on Schiphol as an "AirportCity" in particular. For more details on designing the airport as a space for mobility and temporary dwelling see Nikolaeva (2012), for a detailed discussion of Schiphol as an AirportCity see Bosma and Nikolaeva (2013a, 2013b).

2 Hereinafter the source of direct quotations is the interview material. Interviewees are anonymised except easily identifiable architects and architectural supervisors who have given their permission for their name to appear in publications.

3 For a detailed discussion of the expansion see Berkers and Burgers (2013a) and Kloof and de Maar (1996).

4 For an analysis of the processes of "struggles" and "negotiations" between different parties at Schiphol see Nikolaeva (2012).

5 Architecture and design at Schiphol are a subject of a number of publications written both by researchers and professionals who have worked for Schiphol. For historical accounts of architecture and design and Schiphol see Bosma (2013), Kloos and de Maar (1996) and van Beusekom & Huygen (2005).

6 For a discussion of disagreements on commercial developments see Henket (2013), Nikolaeva (2012), Verschuuren (2005).