Building for consumption: an institutional analysis of peripheral shopping center development in northwest Europe

Evers, D.V.H.

Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AMSTERDAM

6.0 Introduction
Many authors have noted that there is no real out-of-town shopping mall in the Netherlands comparable to those investigated in the previous two chapters (VGM Sept, 1997: 55; Borking, 1998; McKinsey Group, 1997; Guy 1998a; EIM, 1999; Kooijman, 1999a; Ministry EZ, 2000). The closest approximation is a hybrid form of edge-of-town urban entertainment center-cum-retail park built in the mid to late 1990s. The largest of these (depending on how one calculates size) is the ArenA Boulevard in Amsterdam’s southeast district Zuidoost. With a certain leap of imagination, the design of the ArenA Boulevard could be considered to reside in the same category of an out-of-town shopping mall. It was built in an outlying district of Amsterdam, completely surrounded by suburban municipalities, is large and new, well-connected to highway infrastructure, and offers ample parking. Like a mall, the ArenA Boulevard has an oblong shape, with two anchors at either end (the Amsterdamse Poort and Villa ArenA) and ancillary facilities in between such as food and entertainment. This is where the similarity ends. Whereas the Trafford Centre and CentrO were developed by the private sector according to the well-established North American model-for-success, the ArenA Boulevard is the product of a convergence of many different countervailing interests. Instead of a building application being submitted to the municipality, for example, the municipal planning department actually commissioned the master plan. Thus, more than the Trafford Centre and CentrO, the history of the ArenA Boulevard is one of direct public-sector intervention and participation, and thus intimately linked to the history of the city itself.

While the developer’s primary motive was the realization of a commercially viable scheme, the municipality saw the ArenA Boulevard as serving a collection of purposes. First, it was intended to channel private-sector investment to a problematic area of Amsterdam, and bridge the employment gap between the two halves of its Zuidoost district. Secondly, the design strived to provide a physical and mental link to the Bijlmer housing estates, a longtime goal of the municipality and district authority. Third, the retail component was intended to provide room for new large-scale retail formats and help Amsterdam compete with suburban centers, without causing undue damage to the adjacent Amsterdamse Poort district center or the historic city center. And finally, the project was obliged to adhere to the rigors of Dutch national retail planning policy. All this was to occur under the direction of the public sector, but without the aid of a formal public-private-partnership arrangement.

Obviously, the decision-making and development process that produced the ArenA Boulevard is quite different than that of CentrO and the Trafford Centre. Its history is intertwined with that of Dutch retail planning policy, administrative and political circumstances in the area, and the unique economic and physical conditions present. It is the purpose of this chapter to investigate how these institutional factors framed the actions of the most important actors in the process, and how this in turn produced what is now the ArenA Boulevard. Afterwards, as with the previous two cases, an application of the conceptual framework will be performed as an analytical reflection.
6.1 National context

Before delving into the institutional analysis of the ArenA Boulevard development, it is necessary to first gain a solid understanding of the Dutch context. The formal organization of the state, the nature and scope of its laws and certain cultural traits have all left a discernable imprint on the rules of the development game. These rules are often translated into specific policy measures aimed at controlling urbanization and the spread of shops. So it is here amongst matters of public administration that our institutional investigation begins.

6.1.1 Retail planning in the Netherlands

This section will sketch out the national context in which retail planning in the Netherlands takes place by breaking down the country into its political, administrative, (retail) spatial, and policy components. The next section will deal with the policy history of retail planning.

6.1.1.1 The political structure

The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy with a division between the government and its ministers and a parliament composed of a First and Second Chamber. With regard to the latter, the Netherlands has a system of proportional representation, meaning that the number of votes cast for each party directly determines the number of seats that the party controls in the Second Chamber. In addition, there are no electoral districts. A consequence of these two factors is that the threshold for small parties to enter the political arena is remarkably low, and that voters have little to gain by voting strategically (i.e. voting for possible winning parties rather than voting according to preference). Thus, elections have traditionally revolved around the ideological stance of the parties, rather than the opinions of specific candidates (although there does seem to be a notable trend in recent years towards party consolidation and an increasing importance of individual charisma).
After a parliamentary election, the largest party can attempt to form a government which, given the proportional representation factor, invariably requires finding a coalition partner or partners. This process involves sizing up and negotiating with other party leaders in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable government program. The compromise this necessarily entails contrasts sharply with the British spoils system in which the winning party gains complete control over the entire governmental apparatus. This politics of consensus-building has a long tradition in the Netherlands, and is often cited amongst egalitarianism and tolerance as a key characteristic of Dutch society (Lijphart, 1968; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1994). Although there seems to be a gradual movement towards adversarialism, this is rather modest when compared to Germany and especially the UK (Lijphart, 1989).

6.1.1.2 Administrative structure
The Netherlands has three distinct government tiers: national, provincial and local, each of which have their own responsibilities and authority stipulated in the constitution. As the structure of the Dutch Constitution is over a century old, the position of the governmental tiers is “strongly institutionalized” (Salet, 2003: 180). The emphasis in the Netherlands has been placed on interdependence rather than independence (such is the case in Germany). The multileveled structure of co-governance and give-and-take relations between these tiers has caused the Netherlands to be described as a “decentralized unitary state” (Toonen, 1987; 1998). Although relatively stable as compared to the UK, an unresolved issue in Dutch administrative politics regards the desirability and feasibility of a governmental tier at the metropolitan level. In the 1990s, a law was enacted enabling the creation of metropolitan authorities, including the Amsterdam Regional Platform (ROA). These authorities had few formal powers, but were expected to be given the status of provinces by mid-decade. The “city province” idea failed to capture the hearts and minds of the Dutch public, however, and were overwhelmingly voted down in a series of local referendums (Bovenberg et al, 1994; Barlow, 1998).

With regard to public finance, since 1929, taxes have been collected by the central government and then dispersed back to municipalities as grants, generally on the basis of population or housing units. In 1995, for example, about 89% of Amsterdam’s income was derived from the central government (Van der Veer, 1997: 56). This system, intended to eradicate tax-based competition has also caused a de facto top-down power structure to come into being where local governments are highly dependent on the central government for financial support (Levine and Weesep, 1988; Terhorst and Van de Ven, 1995). In this way, if it so desires, central government can “buy” consensus or compliance for its policies from local authorities (Wissink, 1993). It can also give increased latitude and discretion to local authorities by using block grants or restrict them by using special grants earmarked for a specific purpose (Toonen, 1987). Since 1990, there seems to be a gradual trend towards fiscal decentralization (WRR, 1990). Translated into retail development terms, this would suggest that the onus to attract a particular scheme such as an out-of-town shopping mall or hypermarket would be less in the Netherlands than in less fiscally centralized countries, but on the rise since the 1990s. This will be discussed further in later sections.

6.1.1.3 The planning system
The adage “the Lord created the world, but the Dutch the Netherlands” is often invoked when introducing the Dutch approach to planning. Indeed, the very geography of the country exemplifies the triumph of human will over nature. The complex system of waterways that keep most of the land dry gives the landscape a regimented and planned appearance, something which reinforces the admiration of foreigners for Dutch planning prowess. It is
tempting to attribute the highly organized physical structure of the country to an innate cultural ability and propensity to plan. However, more mundane institutional criteria may offer more insight into this issue (Needham, 1989; Kreukels, 1992; Evers et al, 2000). For example, in addition to the fiscal equalization of the country discussed above, the Netherlands has traditionally tolerated and accepted greater levels of public intervention in the land market than countries such as Belgium and the UK. This has created less resistance to the kinds of interventions that spatial planning activity often entails.

The wish for a pleasant, well-organized, predictable physical environment has led to public bodies taking a very active part in creating, maintaining and changing that environment. There is little political disagreement about this (Needham and Van de Ven, 1995: 50).

Although some form of urban planning was applied to create the famous canal rings of Amsterdam in the Dutch “golden age”, the “golden age of planning” was primarily a postwar phenomenon. Directly following the Second World War the first order of business was to rebuild physical structures in order to alleviate the acute housing shortage and ravished industry. The coordination necessary to achieve this was translated into ambitious spatial planning efforts directed by the central government (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994).

The 1962 Physical Planning Act (WRO) forms the legal basis on which Dutch spatial planning rests to this day (Klaassen, 1998). Unlike Germany, the WRO does not address substantive issues but instead establishes the framework within which policy can be formulated, thereby giving more latitude to public officials in adapting policy to changing circumstances. The WRO established a decentralized three-tier planning system comprised of a national, provincial, and municipal planning level which complemented the overall administrative structure of the state. Although the system has a clear hierarchy, with each planning level being monitored for consistency with higher level goals, only the local plan is legally binding. Therefore, in terms of legislation, it would be inappropriate to classify the system as being either top-down/centralized or bottom-up/decentralized since it embodies elements of both. This dynamic in the statutory planning system is fully within the spirit of the decentralized unitary state mentioned earlier.

National policy is indicative of this. There is, for example, no national plan as such, but instead a national planning policy document published periodically as white papers or reports. Four “National Reports on Spatial Planning” have been published to date. Current national planning policy is still based on the Fourth Report (1988) and an addendum called VINEX (a Dutch abbreviation for Fourth Report Extra) in 1991. A Fifth Report had been prepared in the course of the 1990s, but never ratified due to a political crisis in May 2002. There is a wealth of information on national level planning available in the English language (including summaries of the reports themselves), so they will not be further elaborated here.

At the provincial level, regional plans are drawn up that implement goals articulated in the national reports, and which coordinate the various local plans within the province. The

128 Until the 1990s, most municipalities actively participated in the land market by purchasing land before development, preparing it for building, and selling it to developers. Massive subsidies from the central government and the right to expropriate land zoned for development in a local plan had kept land prices artificially low and relatively equalized throughout the country. Some municipalities, Amsterdam included, even went so far as not to sell the land at all, but issue it as long-term leases. The profits made were then used to finance public facilities. Public authorities had the benefit of control over the urbanization process and low levels of speculation while developers benefited from a stable land market and an assured profit (Zundert van, 1990; Masser, 1993).
process in which local plans are evaluated is a flexible one, involving two-way communication. However, the most important planning level is that of the municipality. Local plans indicate where building should occur and what uses are permitted. If a building application conforms to the requirements of a local plan, a permit must be issued by the municipality. Although this system of zoning may appear quite rigid, flexibility has been built into the system by an exemption procedure (article 19 of the WRO) which allows local authorities to depart from the provisions of an existing local plan. Frequent use of this led Thomas et al (1983) to conclude that the Netherlands and United Kingdom were both similar in the degree of latitude municipalities had in the development process (i.e. British consideration of material considerations versus Dutch freedom to depart from zoning ordinances).

Dutch society in general and Dutch planning in particular can be typified as incorporating and nonconflictual: “consensus-building, rather than the issuing of directives, was (and indeed still is) the dominant mode of Dutch planning” (Van der Wusten and Faludi, 1992: 26). Ideally, all stakeholders are incorporated into the planning process and given a say in the content of the plan. This is intended to enhance political acceptance and support, while the legally binding status of the local plan provides a level of certainty to development interests and promote market stability (Needham and Van de Ven, 1995: 54; Booth, 1996). This “way of doing things” in planning ran parallel with another postwar innovation: the creation of the Dutch “polder model” of labor relations. Here, wage moderation was exchanged for generous welfare programs and assurances that prices of consumer items and rents would remain under control (Terhorst and Van de Ven, 1997: 293). As will be argued later, the Dutch planning system has had a significant impact on the physical structure of the country, particularly with regard to the location and spread of shops.

6.1.1.4 The Dutch retail structure

The Netherlands sets itself apart from other countries by its hierarchical retail structure and small shop size relative to other countries in Northwest Europe (IMK, 1993; Borchert, 1998; EIM, 1999). There is little peripheral development — no out-of-town shopping mall for example — and the 40 or so hypermarkets in the country at the beginning of the 1990s accounted for only 2% of total grocery sales (European Commission, 1993: 171). By mid-decade this had risen to 5%, but compared to Germany (23%) and the UK (41%) it can still be described as modest (Guy, 1998a). The Dutch retail sector has been described by outsiders as a mature and highly structured market characterized by its relative prosperity and stability (Corporate Intelligence, 1995: 3). In most parts of the country, shops for daily goods are within walking or cycling distance, and comparison shopping items are concentrated in designated shopping areas. Anyone familiar with the urban structure of the Netherlands should recognize that the density of shops depicted in the map below is virtually indistinguishable from one displaying urban densities.
Figure 40: Shop density in the Netherlands (Ministerie VROM, 2000a)

**Trends**

Despite this predominantly hierarchical composition, the Dutch retail structure has also evolved over time in ways that reflect the international trend towards consolidation (see §2.1). The table below of developments in shop size, floorspace and productivity illustrates some long-term structural changes in the Dutch retail sector, especially evident in the food branch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Food (million m²)</th>
<th>Non-food</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sales /m²</th>
<th>Shop size m²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.631</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.590</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>7.709</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>7.247</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>7.310</td>
<td>189 (1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table one can see that retail space expanded almost three-fold while at the same time sales per square meter actually decreased, after an initial rise in 1970. With less productivity per square meter, retailers were compelled to expand shop size just to maintain the same volume of sales (the growth in retail space can be explained in part by the economic conditions of the time at which it took place). As a result, the Netherlands has followed the general trend in Europe and elsewhere towards consolidation in the retail sector. The phenomenon of spatial consolidation is evident from an increase in total floorspace and a corresponding decrease in the number of outlets over the years (Davies, 1995; Centraal Planbureau, 1999). This can also be read from the last column which presents the growth in average shop size for the second half of the century.

Not only did the number of outlets diminish, so too did the total number of retailers (IMK, 1993; NRC 10 Feb 1998; EIM, 1999), pointing to corporate consolidation. During the period under investigation, Dutch retailers increasingly sought mergers within the country and internationally, the most spectacular of which was the acquisition of KBB by Vendex in 1998, placing all Dutch department stores under the control of a single owner. So strong is this influence of multiples vis-à-vis SMEs that the two largest Dutch retailers — Ahold and Vendex — reportedly meet four times a year with leading retail developers — MAB and Multivastgoed — to divide up space in planned centers (NRC 13 Sept, 2000). Ahold has taken this a step further by extending its activities into the development sphere (VGM v26 Aug 1996: 43; VGM v23 May, 1999: 55). Thus, like elsewhere, we can see that spatial consolidation has been accompanied by corporate consolidation.

A concurrent trend, identified in Chapter 2 and linked to corporate consolidation, is the gradual shift from independent retailers to multiples and the homogenization of shopping areas. The Netherlands is the most intensively “chained” country in Europe (VGM v23 May, 1996: 41; Centraal Planbureau, 1999: 182). At century’s end, one third of all points-of-sale in the Netherlands was a multiple (D&P, 1999: 69). Only about 20 of the 170 shops in Amsterdam’s famous Kalverstraat, for example, were not chains (NRC 12 Sept, 1998). The transformation from independent retailers into multiple formulas is a phenomenon so familiar that the process has acquired its own term in Dutch: filialisering (chain store-ization). This subject has been given lavish attention in the Dutch retail literature, both as to its causes as well as the question of whether filialisering is harmful to the retail structure, consumer experience or the livability of urban areas.

---

129 The table above reveals, for instance, that there was a rapid expansion of floorspace in the 1960s and 1970s in both food and non-food branches, which roughly corresponds to the rapid demographic and urban expansion patterns in these years. By the end of this period, growth in food began to slow as the market had reached its limits (Borchert, 1995a). Interestingly enough, the sales per square meter had reached a peak at the onset of the 1970s as modern logistical techniques were introduced and store formats were rationalized. However, by the 1980s, this advantage leveled off, and begun to decrease as size began to outstrip sales. The relative slump in construction during the 1980s is also visible, as is the renewed building activity in the 1990s (by 1995, already three times the amount of floorspace had been built as the decade that preceded it). Much of this development occurred at edge-of-town/out-of-town sites with the continuing construction of furniture and DIY superstores. Still, a considerable amount involved (vertical) extensions in city centers, whose total retail space rose by about 10% during the decade (Van der Wiel, 1996d: 77).

130 Many Dutch authors lament the ongoing homogenization of shopping areas, arguing that the urban environment has become increasingly bland and predictable. On the other hand, a recent study by the HBD suggested that since most consumers lack the national perspective that retail experts have, they are less aware of the extent to which shopping centers have become homogenized (Teeseling, 1998: 60). Therefore, whether blandness outweighs the reliability and trust consumers appear to appreciate — the existential relief of always knowing what they can expect to find at shops like HEMA or Blokker — has been the subject of a long and unresolved debate in the Netherlands. The consequences of this debate go beyond that of mere economics (the
In summary, one can describe the Dutch retail structure as hierarchical in terms of location in the sense that shops are concentrated in urban areas in various centers and sub-centers. The country has also followed the international trend towards spatial and corporate consolidation. A result is that Dutch city centers are thriving but generally dominated by large multiples operating small shops.

6.1.2 Retail policy and development

It goes without saying that such processes should not be treated in isolation as autonomous developments, as they are heavily dependent on various spatial, administrative and economic forces. Government policy in particular has had a great deal of influence on the Dutch retail structure, both in the way in which it has attempted to regulate the retail market, and more importantly, in the way in which planning policy has directed the location decisions of retail developers. The following section will recount the various retail planning policies that have been put into place over the years, and the various effects these policies have had.

6.1.2.1 Early Dutch retail planning 1950-1970

The enterprise of planning for retail establishments is a rather recent novelty (or some would argue, aberration) of the latter half of the twentieth century (Van der Wiel, 1996a; Borchert, 1995a). In this sense, the Second World War can be regarded as a milestone, marking a transition from a sector dominated by independent grocers (usually owning the premises), a handful of department stores in the larger cities, and piecemeal development along transport axes to the development of a rationalized latticework of planned shopping centers in an urban hierarchy. It is also at this time that new ideas began to take hold about the design, location, and control of these spaces.

The most effective control on retail development in the Netherlands originated from the statutory planning system which zoned locations for commercial use. Strictly speaking, the policy line followed by the Dutch government from the early postwar era until about 2000 has been that retail development must conform to a functional hierarchy (see §2.1 and §2.2) consistent with the precepts of Christaller’s Central Place Theory. Christaller’s depiction of a natural order of distribution was very appealing to Dutch planners. It provided a useful rule of thumb for commercial facility siting in urban extensions and new towns, and could be readily translated into concrete planning requirements. The hierarchy principle had far-reaching consequences for Dutch town planning. Retail facilities in both the postwar urban extensions around Amsterdam (e.g. Osdorp, Buitenveldert) and growth centers (e.g. Purmerend, Almere) were concentrated into planned district areas, while lower-order items were located in smaller neighborhood centers according to ex-ante calculations of retail need. The zoning of such functions in urban renewal areas followed a similar logic.
When calculating the retail need for a given area using the hierarchy principle in the Netherlands, a guiding concept was that of complementarity. This rule stated that every new shopping center had to be considered as complementing, and not excessively competing with existing centers (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 1989). The desired effect of this policy was to prevent “American conditions” of excessive price competition, bankruptcies and vacancies from arising (Buit, 1988: 77). These rules were especially welcomed by smaller shopkeepers who, more than abroad, were able to establish a prominent presence in the new shopping centers (Indemans, 1975). More importantly, it created a situation where Dutch retailers were assured that, once established in a particular center, they would be free of any additional competition — at least in terms of location. Another result of this policy is that it united commercial real estate and vested retail interests with those of city planners (Evers, 2000).

One of the consequences of the faithful application of the hierarchy doctrine and an economic policy of wage moderation and restraint is that the Netherlands’ retail structure in the early 1970s had, in relation to its neighbors, no out-of-town shopping centers, few superstores or hypermarkets (see figure below). Instead, attention and investment was focused on city center projects like the acclaimed Lijnbaan in Rotterdam, whose formula of open-air pedestrian...
walkways and clustered shops with easy-access for supply vehicles was copied in city and town centers throughout the country. As we shall see, another consequence of the hierarchy doctrine is that it led cities like Amsterdam in the 1980s to almost blindly react to economic and demographic decline by concentrating shops into designated areas.

While spatial planning provided an important control on retail development on the supply side and wage moderation affected the buying habits of consumers, some additional rules structuring retail development in the Netherlands should be mentioned as well. For example, the Trading Hours Act, which set limits on shop opening hours and prohibited trade on Sundays and holidays, has also played a part in shaping the Dutch retail structure. On the one hand, it may have dampened interest somewhat in out-of-town hypermarket formats, as these generally prefer to remain open later and strengthened the position of independents vis-à-vis multiple retailers. Conceivably, it might have also helped to inhibit the popularity of shopping as a leisure activity in the Netherlands. On the other hand, selective liberalization of this restriction (in certain city centers) in the 1990s has clearly added to the popularity of these areas.

Another basic rule of Dutch retailing was the Business Establishment Act of 1953, which required permits to open a business, ostensibly to improve the quality of retail establishments and protect the public interest (Veurtjes, 1985). Because the certificates required for these permits sometimes entailed intensive training, the effect of this law was to raise the threshold for opening new businesses. This reduced the growth in the number of shops in the country and helped maintain the status quo (Borcher, 1995a). Moreover, the specificity of the licenses protected the country’s differentiated retail structure: it was unlikely that a butcher, for example, would take the trouble to apply for a permission to sell dairy items. The effect of this law inhibited “Hotellingesque” spatial competition (see §2.2.2), and further facilitated the production of a hierarchical system of provision. With the coming of modern forms of retailing, typified by growing economies of scale and diversified product ranges, this law became increasingly regarded as anachronistic and after several amendments, is finally being repealed.131

Like resale price maintenance in the UK, Dutch retailers have also not been completely free to set their own prices. In order to protect small businesses from unfair competition, a minimum price law set levels at which certain goods like bread or milk could be sold. This law is also in the process of being phased out and applies now mainly to books. On the other hand, a similar restriction can be seen originating in the private sector, namely the practice of manufacturers demanding minimum prices for their goods. This was considered by some companies as essential for product branding.

Finally, it must be mentioned that the Netherlands, like most other developed countries has anti-monopoly laws in place. Although countries like the United States are relatively active in antitrust enforcement, the Netherlands and Great Britain are generally more forgiving to large companies wishing to expand their market share (Hallsworth and Evers, 2002). The Dutch competition authority, for example, did not find it necessary to block the merger of

---

131 Supermarkets, for example, were required under the law to obtain a corresponding array of permissions for selling meat, dairy, vegetables, etc. The Act was amended in 1972 to allow licenses for multiple product ranges, and to allow licenses to be passed on automatically to subsidiaries, thus encouraging business consolidation. After several years in force, the Act was again relaxed in 1980, and should be phased out entirely by the early 2000s (Kamerkrant Amsterdam23(7), 1999).
KBB and Vendex in 1998 to prevent all department stores being owned by the same company (however the EU antitrust authority almost felt otherwise). In addition, partly because Dutch corporate law protects the secrecy of companies, many international companies have chosen this country as their headquarters (Corporate Intelligence, 1995: 3).

6.1.2.2 Restrictive retail planning 1970-1990
The interests of consumers were assumed to be served by such planning principles and economic policy. By the late 1960s, however, a breakdown of the functional hierarchy seemed inevitable as explosive growth in radii of activity, enabled by rapid and flexible transport modes, rendered the axiomatic principle of distance seemingly obsolete. Wage moderation had become increasingly untenable, and household incomes rose suddenly. Retailers responded to this newfound affluence with expanded product ranges; the additional stock required more space, either in the form of physical extensions to existing shops or new locations. The hypermarket format, swiftly gaining popularity in Germany and France, combined this desire for large shop size (units often as large as 10,000m²) with the increased (car) mobility of consumers. It seemed just a matter of time until this would reach the Netherlands, as smaller-sized superstores around 2,500m² were already starting to dot the Dutch countryside.

By 1970, the mass-consumer market had made its entrée into Dutch society, and large format stores were expected to follow soon. The Dutch national government commissioned a task force to look into the matter, and report back on the effects this may have on the existing retail structure (TK 1972-1973, 12321). The market proved to be faster than the task force, however, and a hypermarket proposal at a site on the outskirts of Muiden, approximately 15 km to the East of Amsterdam sparked off a controversy which would leave a visible imprint on Dutch retail planning policy until the present day. Given the significance of the Muiden case and its utility for gaining insight into the Dutch planning system, it will be discussed in more detail below.

Muiden: a test case
On June 6, 1972, the city of Muiden received a request from the eminent retail group Koninklijke Bijenkorf Beheer (KBB) to assist in the realization of a superstore within its jurisdiction (Schat and Groenedijk, 1982: 42). This letter was, in effect, a statement of intent to apply for a building permit for a 10,000m² “Maxis” hypermarket at a peripheral site zoned in the local plan as “trade and industry.” Within weeks of this disclosure, the local shopkeepers’ union and various members of the city council were already drawing battle lines. Other actors (mayor, chamber of commerce, media and neighboring communities) also began to position and brace themselves for the impending political fray.

Without descending too much into detail into the legalistic minutiae of the case, a few points should be mentioned which illustrate how very muddled and politically sensitive the decision to approve a building permit — officially a technical-bureaucratic matter — can become. It must be remembered that according to the letter of the law as established in the WRO, all applications found to be in compliance with a valid local plan must be granted (see §6.1.1.3). However, this seemingly unambiguous rule was anything but clear-cut in Muiden. First, the plan governing the site had been adopted in 1969 but still hung in a juridical limbo, being approved by both the city council and province, but suspended by an appeal to the Raad van State (administrative court of appeals) by a resident’s objection. Second, there was a lack of clarity about the zoning itself: “industry and trade” was obviously intended to allow wholesale and not retail trade, but this was not articulated as such in the plan’s notes. The
confusion called for careful study of the rather scant and short line of jurisprudence of similar cases, which was continually changing as similar cases began to emerge.

Muiden decided to try to wait until legal and policy changes would shed new light on the matter. This perceived foot-dragging by the municipality provoked, KBB to threaten Muiden with a lawsuit of NLG 10 million (€4.5 million), raising the stakes to a level far beyond what a small community like Muiden (then approx. 6,000 residents) could afford. As this presaged an unequivocal statement or policy by the central government (although this matter was being researched by an interdepartmental task force concurrent to the application procedure, and policy recommendations were considered imminent) there was a chance that planning permission issued on the grounds of local plan compliance would be overturned by a higher authority on the grounds of conflict with national spatial planning policy objectives were they to emerge in the interim. This latter point had far-reaching consequences for potential liability claims. The above construction would indemnify Muiden against claims from KBB, shifting the burden to the agency overruling the local decision. This route was seen as the safest, and permission was finally granted by Muiden on June 4, 1973 on the grounds of recent jurisprudence and the impending lawsuit by KBB. Therefore, not spatial planning or economic considerations, but the possibility of paying ruinous damage claims was in the end determinative for this retail development (Schat and Groenedijk, 1982: 81).

Once the matter had been settled within the confines of local politics, actors from outside became involved, which elevated the Maxis/Muiden controversy to a higher level of scale. The neighboring municipality of Diemen submitted a request to the national government to quash the decision on the grounds of conflict with the public interest. Amsterdam offered a more straightforward objection, namely that Maxis would undermine its efforts for establishing a retail center in the new Bijlmermeer estate. Nevertheless, neither of these arguments proved sufficiently persuasive at higher tiers of government to have Muiden’s decision overturned. The project was given a green light, and on September 11, 1974 the hypermarket opened to the public (De Hen, 1986: 284). Like most schemes of its type, Maxis Muiden has substandard public transport accessibility, the only bus stop being a ten-minute walk from the main entrance (see photo), and not integrated at all into the urban fabric (the site is surrounded by open countryside and a highway).

The Muiden case raises a few interesting factors in planning conflicts. First, there was a clear disparity in the power base of the two sides: a national retailer was able to overpower local resistance mainly because of the legal damages this could entail. KBB was unsuccessful when it made a similar attempt in a larger community (Nijmegen). Secondly, a simple building permit decision can quickly escalate into political controversy and impasse, in which
economic and spatial planning considerations become subordinate to issues of liability and political pressure. At such a point, the result is usually third party mediation or arbitration, or in this case capitulation of one of the parties. Another interesting insight regards the level of scale. Before the decision was reached to issue the permit, the game was largely played at the local level. Afterwards, the decision-making arena was raised to that of the national government (interestingly enough, passing over the provincial level). For the Dutch government, the Muiden example illustrated the difficulty of controlling retail development in the absence of strong measures at higher levels of scale.\footnote{One can argue that the major policy shifts in the 1990s may be producing a similar situation of uncertainty. This subject will be returned to later at the end of the chapter.} Because Muiden was only about 15km from Amsterdam, and the catchment area of the hypermarket was estimated to be much larger, it seemed rather illogical that the judgment of whether or not to issue the permit would fall solely on decision-makers of a small town. This case signaled the need for regional or national level actors to become involved in the planning of large-scale retail developments. Otherwise, cities would be encouraged to permit large centers to be built within their jurisdiction that would attract business (and money) from neighboring municipalities — and to do it first (see §2.3).

**A strong national response**

Soon after the Maxis permit was issued, the task force study commissioned to investigate hypermarket development in Europe published its results (TK 1972-1973, 12321). The task force found that such developments could have a considerable impact on the retail structure, and recommended discouraging out-of-town retail developments. This came concurrent with similar advice from the national advisory council for spatial planning (RARO). Furthermore, in the eyes of the national government, the Muiden controversy was also exemplary for the failure of local and provincial governments to adequately deal with the spatial impacts of new forms of retail development.

In 1973, the national government decided to impose a “very restrictive” retail policy (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 1989). The new rules introduced a new concept to the traditional retail planning hierarchy of centers: peripheral retail outlets, or PDV (*perifere detailhandelsvestiging*). The term “peripheral” here refers to areas outside of established shopping centers within the built-up area, especially industrial sites at the edges of urban areas (i.e. brownfields) — greenfield sites were ruled out entirely. Under the new regime, applications for retail activity in peripheral locations should only be granted permission if they were seen as being complementary to city center functions (TK 1984-1985, 18786: 3). In addition, only hazardous or explosive goods and bulky items like automobiles, boats, and caravans could be sold at PDV sites. Moreover, businesses were only allowed to locate at PDV sites after having passed a “three-step model” procedure — similar to the “sequential test” now in force in the UK — which would demonstrate that no suitable site was available in or at the edge of an existing center (Hoofdbedrijfschap Detailhandel, 1996). After adopting the PDV policy at the national level, municipalities were urged to amend their local plans accordingly. Because of the number of hypermarket requests was mounting, time was of the essence. Provinces were called upon to take stock of the municipalities in their jurisdiction with local plans still containing the problematic “industry and trade” zone and close this loophole. The PDV policy also mandated that any additional retail development proposals at either the local or provincial plan level be accompanied by a retail need and effects study.
No major changes were made to this policy in the 1980s. Regulation of retail spread largely continued along the lines of the hierarchy principle established and enforced in local plans, except in those cases sanctioned by the PDV policy. Despite the relative stability, this decade also saw the first signs of the liberalization and deregulation of retail planning policy that was to continue on and accelerate into the 1990s. The rationale lay in the need for economic stimulation in the face of unemployment and urban decline. In 1980, the Business Establishment Act was relaxed (Linssen, 1999), because one outcome of this law was to block or impede entry into the sector. It is also in this period that the first murmurs of liberalizing shop hours were heard. Another liberalization came about in 1985 which formally repealed the obligation to conduct a retail need study when preparing a new local plan due to the high costs involved (TK, 1984-1985: 18786: 1), although many municipalities continued to do so (Van der Wiel, 1996b: 23).

Trading Hours Act relaxed

Until the 1990s, shops in the Netherlands were among the most strictly regulated in Europe in terms of when they were allowed to be open for business. The 1976 Trading Hours Act set the maximum hours a shop could be open per week, and specified times and dates when trading was prohibited. Besides promoting fair-trading practices and establishing clarity for consumers, this law protected the position of SMEs. Over the years, however, social, demographic and labor market trends would conspire to make the maintenance of this system increasingly precarious. When the law was enacted, most households consisted of single-breadwinner families, allowing one partner (usually female) to do grocery shopping during the daytime. Even at the time of the law’s adoption, the number of households conforming to this norm was declining, decreasing further into the 1980s and 1990s. By 1995, the share of single household and dual-income households — both of which generally have more difficulty finding time to shop during regular business hours — had risen considerably (Ministry EZ, 1999: 2-3).

In 1995, after many years of pressure by consumer groups and retail giants, the Act was relaxed to allow three more hours of trade per week (52 to 55) and the maximum closing time was lengthened thirty minutes to 6:30 p.m. on weekdays and 7:00 p.m. on Saturday. This remained unsatisfying to consumers, however, and the law was changed less than a half year later to allow shops to remain open as late as 10:00 p.m. on workdays. Exceptions from opening-hours restrictions altogether were made for pharmacies, hospitals, public transit and gas stations, airports, roadside restaurant shops, and the like (TK 1994-1995, 24 266: 5, 183). Under this regime, municipalities could impose stricter limits if they so desired, or permit trade on Sundays in tourist areas (the latter was also permitted under the 1976 version, but applied with renewed vigor under the new system). The city center of Amsterdam has made ample use of this clause, liberally designating large sections of the inner city as tourist areas, making Sunday one of its busiest days. Such practices are a source of concern among advocates of the Sunday-as-rest faction, who argue that by taking advantage of the Sunday exemption municipalities do not merely serve, but actually create tourist areas (TK 1998-1999, 28900).

Although it may have caused some initial confusion among consumers (Bak, 1997), reactions to the newly extended hours by the general populace have been overwhelmingly positive (Volkskrant 10 May, 1996; Telegraaf 24 June, 1998). The Ministry of Economic Affairs boasted that the extended opening hours had functioned as “a job machine” and had already become well embedded in the minds and habits of Dutch consumers. The Ministry further praised the fact that under the new system the retail sector had “rediscovered” opening times as a form of competitive advantage (Ministry EZ, 1999: 6-7). On the other hand, this form of competition clearly favors multiple and chain store formats at the expense of the already precarious position of independents, and the 1990s reforms can be seen as a reflection of the erosion of this group’s influence on public policy.
Another policy change which affected retail development concerned the assortment allowed at PDV locations. As stated, under the PDV regime, only vendors of explosive materials or bulky items such as cars and boats were allowed outside established centers. However, out-of-town locations with good car accessibility were also seen as increasingly attractive for retailers trading in home improvement materials (DIY) and furniture. Political pressure from businesses trading in these ranges at a time when entrepreneurship was more welcomed than reviled, and various clandestine attempts by these retailers to establish themselves at PDV locations anyway on the pretense of selling “bulky” items (see Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 1989 for a survey of relevant jurisprudence), induced the national government to review this aspect of the PDV policy. In 1984, after some debates in parliament, large-scale furniture and building materials were formally brought under the umbrella of PDV-admissible items (Hoofdbedrijfschap Detailhandel, 1996; TK, 1984-1985: 1876: 7-8). This enabled the advent of the Dutch meubelboulevard, or in more dispassionate English planning jargon, furniture retail park. Within years meubelboulevard had become a household term in the Netherlands, and most reasonably sized cities had at least one on its periphery.

6.1.2.3 Gradual liberalization 1990-1999
The last decade of the century was an eventful one both in terms of Dutch retail planning policy and retail development. The upswing in the economy, granting more latitude in consumer spending, injected a new confidence into the development market. The 1990s was also a time of increasing competition in the retail sector: there was a veritable explosion of retail floorspace at peripheral sites and, at the same time, sleek urban malls were becoming increasingly commonplace. Meanwhile, the trend in the Dutch retail market towards spatial and corporate consolidation continued. The 1990s was also a time of reevaluation and revision of Dutch retail and economic policy at the national level. This decade witnessed, after many years of controversy, the amendment of the 1976 Trading Hours Act (see box) as well as the most significant modification in retail planning policy since the introduction of the PDV concept in 1973.

From PDV to GDV
A review of the PDV policy in 1990 was, like those performed in other decades, laudatory in tone (TK, 1991-1992, 18786: 3). According to the report, the restrictive policy had successfully prevented vendors of high-street merchandise or “center-relevant items” from establishing at peripheral sites (Hoofdbedrijfschap Detailhandel, 1996: 18). The 1990 policy review took the position that the 1985 relaxation had acted as a pressure valve in the retail commercial market, pointing to the fact that most other western European countries have much higher levels of peripheral developments, especially supermarkets (Centraal Planbureau, 1999: 181).

Paradoxically, the publication of this evaluation was immediately followed by another relaxation of the PDV policy. Some have questioned why, given the positive reviews of the restrictive policy, the government decided a few years later to amend it. There seemed to be little consensus on this point, but the argument made at the time centered around fears of stifling the dynamics of the retail market in the Netherlands in light of internationalization trends underway in western Europe — and these retail dynamics pointed to ever-increasing floorspace for shops. The popular furniture outlet Ikea posed a particular problem. This company is one of many internationally operating retailers whose corporate strategy involves
modifying the success formula as little as possible (Prime, 1999). For Ikea, this includes a location along a highway, a catchment area of 60km, and excellent visibility of its blue-and-yellow logo (Kooijman, 1999a: 203). Although these demands were usually difficult for Dutch planners to swallow and generally flew in the face of the PDV policy, after waging uncompromising battles with municipalities, Ikea usually succeeded in establishing itself anyway. Partly in order to solve the Ikea dilemma, the list of PDV-items was expanded at the beginning of the decade to include “home furnishings” as an outgrowth of the category “furniture” as well as materials for the garden, kitchen and bathroom (TK, 1991-1992, 18786; Cerfontaine, 1995: 1).

The deregulation was supplemented with a decentralization of authority. Municipalities and provinces were charged with overseeing the implementation and specifying exactly which items fell under the PDV policy. Finally, the three-step model for determining PDV eligibility was also officially abandoned. Soon it appeared that Ikea was not the only company that had difficulties with the PDV policy. Other businesses, already having established themselves at PDV sites began to surreptitiously sell restricted items or announce dubious extravaganzas that took great liberties with official policy. Across the nation, local authorities proved either unwilling or unable to check such activity, and again, as in 1973, a response at a higher level of government was sought.

After some debate in parliament, the national government decided in 1993 to introduce a new policy for large-scale retail called GDV (geconcentreerde grootschalige detailhandelsvestiging). This policy would allow superstores to be built for which the product range limitations did not apply, essentially giving a green light for edge-of-town shopping malls. Rather than proclaim a full liberalization, however, the government decided that such developments be subject to certain extra planning conditions. The first was that GDVs would only be allowed in the thirteen “urban nodes” identified in the Fourth Report on Spatial Planning. Second, GDVs would have to be accompanied by a study of the regional distributional structure that demonstrated that sufficient economic capacity existed to accommodate such a development. Third, GDVs must be planned in consultation with the business community and the Inspectorate of Spatial Planning. Fourth, the site itself must be well-accessible by public transport (i.e. have official “B-location” status). Finally, the national government stressed that — in order to complement and not subvert the integrity of city center shops — only large-scale enterprises should be allowed at GDV sites, and a 1,500m² as minimum space requirement was suggested for GDV outlets (Cerfontaine, 1995: 2; Ministry VROM, 1995; Van der Wiel, 1996b; Centraal Planbureau, 1999: 177-192; Ministry EZ, 2000; Evers, 2002).

Market responses to the GDV policy
There were distinct reservations about the GDV policy reforms amongst commercial real estate investors and established retailers. These issues were discussed at a 1994 NVM (Dutch real estate agent association) conference entitled “Do big retailers really want to move to the urban fringe?” At this conference, it became clear that this was a very divisive issue within the business community in which some big retailers and investors were diametrically opposed to city center SME organizations and certain property developers (Vastgoed, 1994: 1). (For its part, the NVM attempted to take the middle ground in this debate with an endorsement of the new GDV policy, under certain fair-trade conditions.) As a whole, the union of Dutch

---

133 McDonalds and Toys R Us are two other examples. Wal-Mart is yet another example, and the fact that it has passed over the Netherlands on its road to European conquest may be an indication the inhospitable climate retail planning policy has created for big-box food retailers (FD 1 July, 1999; Hallsworth and Evers, 2002).
developers was opposed to the liberalization. The opportunities afforded by the liberalized PDV and new GDV policy received only a lukewarm response from the Dutch retail sector. SMEs complained that they were effectively excluded by the 1,500m² requirement. Other retailers, including prominent national chains, which had for the last few years invested heavily in core shopping areas, were afraid that a liberalized policy would allow others (especially foreign competitors) to undermine these efforts by starting price wars from inexpensive peripheral sites. At another conference held in 1994 on this subject (Stichting Forum voor Stedelijk Vernieuwing, Zeist 23-24 September, 1994), representatives from Ahold and Vendex complained that the “pressure from the market” signaled by the government to liberalize was being exaggerated:

…only a couple of companies are pushing for this, and we shouldn’t lose our heads over them … These bullies want to head for the periphery just because it’s fast and cheap. This has nothing to do with [retail] formulas (Rutten, 1994).

Such political opposition was found by the consultancy firm Kolpron to be the main obstacle for municipalities opting for GDV, and several eligible cities (e.g. Tilburg) initially decided against building a GDV altogether (KvK Amsterdam, 1995: 3). Nevertheless, within a couple years, three of the four largest cities — Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague — were working towards developing a GDV. The next section will turn its attention to Amsterdam, where the largest GDV is being developed.

6.2 Regional context
The capital of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, is located in the northern part of the Randstad, a polycentric conurbation comprised of four major cities, and several smaller ones in a roughly horseshoe pattern on the western shore of the Netherlands. The size of the Randstad is comparable to the Ruhrgebiet, the Paris and London metropolitan areas, or North England. Whether the Randstad can be considered a single metropolitan area (albeit polycentric) has been the subject of a long and inconclusive debate (Hall, 1966; Van der Valk, 1991; Dieleman and Musterd, 1992; Masser, 1993; Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; Shachar, 1994; De Boer, 1994; Van Rossem, 1995; Berg, 1996). Recently, the term Randstad has fallen into disfavor, being superseded by Deltametropolis which refers to roughly the same area. For practical purposes, this chapter will avoid such debate and limit talk of “the region” to the Amsterdam metropolitan area, rather than the entire Randstad. The “local” context will then focus on a particular city district within Amsterdam. Since shopping in the region has traditionally been dominated by the Dutch capital, it is to this that our attention now turns.

6.2.1 Amsterdam’s retail structure
A few centuries ago, Amsterdam’s retail structure was quite different from what it is now. Instead of supermarkets and grocers, ambulatory peddlers and producers’ markets supplied the needs of most of its citizens. The city center still possesses traces of these pre-modern retail spaces in the names of its streets and squares. Four hundred years ago, for example, one could walk from the market at the Dam (almost as old as the original settlement itself), through the Kalverstraat (calf street) and Turfmarkt (peat market) area over to the Kaasplein (cheese square, now Thorbeckeplein) which lay next to the Botermarkt (butter market, now Rembrandtplein). The shop in the modern sense (as the sale of goods by middlemen to consumers from fixed premises) began to develop in Amsterdam mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the city grew in wealth, size and specialization.
Before the far-reaching planning measures following the Second World War and the widespread introduction of the car into the urban landscape, shops in Amsterdam grew not according to a rationalized plan but organically from the main axis of Kalverstraat along main transport routes leading outwards such as the Utrechtersstraat, Haarlemmerdijk, Haarlemmerstraat and Leidsestraat (see figure above). By the nineteenth century, the Kalverstraat had begun to acquire a reputation as the most exclusive shopping street in the country, and hotels, restaurants and other consumptive services flourished at this portal to Dam square. By the early twentieth century, retail as an urban function had begun to leave an imprint on the city center, which has remained largely unchanged to the present day.\footnote{The morphological features quintessential to Amsterdam were left relatively unscathed by nineteenth-century urban renewal like in Paris, Brussels or Antwerp which generally included the widening of roads, ordering of housing blocks, etc. (Wagenaar, 1993, 1999; Van de Wiel, 1996a: 8).}

**Early retail formats**

In addition to the fixed-location specialty shop, two other important retail formats made their entrée in the Netherlands before the Second World War: the arcade and the department store. The first of these, comprised of a collection of shops within a semi-enclosed area — often inspired by the famous galleria in Milan — protected potential customers from traffic and the elements, and made comparison shopping more pleasant. The Haagse Passage is one of the purest examples of this form in the Netherlands, but there is nothing comparable to this in Amsterdam. The department store was the first example of an integrated and introverted structure devoted solely to retail. At the apex of the status scale in the Netherlands was the Bijenkorf in Amsterdam, built in 1914, followed two years later by Vroom & Dreesman (V&D). In 1926, the first HEMA opened and met with such success that another 25 followed within five years (Kooijman, 1999a: 62).
Outside the city center, however, the introduction of modern retail planning based on Central Place Theory resulted in the introduction of planned centers to serve the needs of local residents. For higher order goods, residents were obliged to travel to the city center.

6.2.2 A teetering giant
In the 1960s, the area within Amsterdam’s Singel canal was the unmistakable heart of a proud and growing city, and unchallenged in the region. Almost all commercial activity was focused on the center, with department stores situated near Dam square, and specialist shops lining the Leidsestraat and Kalverstraat. All the major Dutch banks had their headquarters in Amsterdam’s center, insurance companies owned entire rows of stately canal houses, while Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal was the national media center (Parool 24 Aug, 1982: 21; Jolles, 1995; VGM v23 Nov, 1996).

In the late 1960s, signs of danger for the economic well-being of the city were beginning to surface. The most palpable of these was a drop in population. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Amsterdam’s population had grown at an unprecedented rate, peaking at almost 850,000 in 1960 (Engelsdorp-Gastelaars van and Ostendorf, 1994). Thereafter it tapered off, beginning a steady decline which would last three decades. Meanwhile, the metropolitan area was growing robustly. Every year people were abandoning the city for its suburbs and planned growth centers, the void being only partially compensated by immigration from abroad. As the concentration of public housing was within Amsterdam and the concentration of owner-occupier housing outside, this created a social sorting as well (Terhorst and Van de Ven, 2003). The residential exodus was soon followed by jobs to towns like Hoofddorp (housing Schiphol airport). In the 1970-1996 period, the economic product of the inner city declined by over 20%, and the number of jobs was cut in half (Vegt and Manshanden, 1997: 7). Unemployment, falling in the Netherlands as a whole from 18.3% in 1983 to 14.1% in 1985, rose in Amsterdam from 22% to almost 24% in these same years (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 186). More important for our purposes however, was the impact this had on retail trade: the decline in Amsterdam’s population meant a decline in the immediate customer base for its retailers. This problem was especially acute for shops in the inner city catering to the affluent and middle-class groups, because these were the most likely to have deserted the city. This, coupled with the residual effects of the oil crisis set the stage for the crisis years of the 1980s, from which Amsterdam has adapted and persevered, but never completely recovered.

6.2.3 Crisis in the 1980s
The fact that the urban retail structure manifests itself as a tirelessly churning mosaic of storefronts — constantly opening, closing, moving, renovating, expanding, specializing or diversifying in order to follow or anticipate consumer demands — can obscure the composite effects of all these changes. Even so, it became clear that the 1980s was a time of crisis for Amsterdam. A study carried out by the University of Amsterdam in 1985 frankly stated that:

135 Unemployment in 1961 was virtually nonexistent, and the 10,424 vacancies far outnumbered the 4,294 job-seekers registered at the employment agency for Amsterdam and its contiguous suburbs. The main problems signaled during this time were the housing and personnel shortages, and businesses started actively recruiting from abroad (De Hen, 1986: 9).

136 Ironically enough, the urban crisis was fuelled by the success of the Dutch urbanization policy that encouraged middle-income households to relocate to designated growth centers. At first, the departure of these consumers had only a modest effect on the profitability of retail businesses in the center, as relatively few
Whoever would now dare to assert that Amsterdam’s city center is considered the most important shopping district of the Netherlands, can count on heavy criticism. Such an assertion would be rebuked, and not without cause, with the observation that this center has been eroding for decades” (Eiff et al, 1985: 1).

Amsterdam also suffered from negative publicity in the media, which had demonized the city center as synonymous with chaos, filth and crime (Gemeente Amsterdam, 1988: 45; Interview Van der Kolk, 1999). In the 1970s and 1980s there was an exodus of quality shops from the inner city to the PC Hoofdstraat and Van Baerlestraat (southern quarter), being replaced by mostly fast-food outlets, hash bars, discount clothing, and trinket shops geared towards budget tourists (Van der Tol and Snepvangers, 1993; Parool 24 Aug, 1982: 21). This transformation was coupled with a reduction in rents for commercial space, tumbling from five times that of the surrounding region, to a mere 1.2 times (Parool 24 Aug, 1982: 21). The local press often ran stories covering the woes of retailers in this period. The owner of Focke & Meltzer, for example, a prominent shopkeeper of exclusive crystal and porcelain, after announcing the closure of its Kalverstraat outlet, remarked that the street had once had allure, but had been deteriorating since the mid-1970s (Parool 24 Dec, 1986). Dutch real estate expert Van Hattum summarized the problem:

In the past, people would come from afar to Amsterdam to shop in the Kalverstraat, but they don’t do this anymore. First, because the Kalverstraat is filthy and secondly because they can buy everything that is offered in the Kalverstraat at home (in Kruithof, 1990).

However spectacular the Kalverstraat’s decline may have been to these particular shopkeepers and the media, it still remained relatively protected by both its reputation (Dreesman, 1986) as well as by municipal planning policy. Other shopping streets were less fortunate.

All this deeply concerned the business community. In 1982, a petition was sent to the city council, signed by prominent business groups such as the KvK and Vereniging Amsterdam City (VAC), which urged that swift business-friendly measures be taken to check the decline. Suggestions included increasing accessibility and fighting crime. These pleas fell on deaf ears. Instead, the city council responded to the downgrading of retail functions by intensifying its interventionist stance. First it attempted to slow the migration of shops from the center to the southern quarter by prohibiting residential units in the PC Hoofdstraat to be rezoned as retail. The city quickly ceased these practices once it became clear that this movement was a “second best” option to migration outside of the municipality entirely (Dijkink, 1990: 104-105). The city also used its political clout to slow or control developments outside its borders. This strategy had been employed in other major planning and administrative decisions, most notably the annexation of the Bijlmermeer (see §6.3.1) and demonstrates the municipality’s traditional preference of overruling rather than cooperating with its neighbors in planning matters (Bovenberg et al, 1994; Van der Veer, 1997; De Hen, 1986). With regard to retail, one manifestation of this defensive strategy was to ensure that the province reject the proposed expansion of neighboring Amstelveen’s main shopping area (Parool 16 Sept., 1998). Another tactic regarded the possibility of an administrative integration with its suburbs into a

attractive shopping areas were built elsewhere, and consumers were induced — by superior supply and a lingering bond with the city — to return to the Kalverstraat and the Bijenkorf. However, as the growth centers began to mature, so too did the quality and diversity of the product range in their shopping districts, making a trip to “the big city” less necessary. Sometimes these suburban centers acquired such a degree of specialization that it posed a potential threat to the Amsterdam, such as arguably the “Zwarte Markt” in Beverwijk and Amstelveen center have done.

137 These were reminiscent of the language employed by the same actors in the late 1960s. The socialist-dominated city had chosen to ignore the demands, however, and instead impose even stricter controls on, for example, parking.
CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AMSTERDAM

metropolitan body because such a reapportionment would be expected to smooth the developing inequalities within the region. This was attempted in the 1990s via the regional authority ROA which was intended to become a city province, but was voted down in a 1994 referendum.

In addition to such outward-looking measures, the city council also turned its attention inwards to examine the problems of the retail structure in the city center. Influential reports made by retail planning experts at the time concluded that the departure of residents had created an oversupply of retail space in the inner city. These studies estimated that 40-50% of the center’s retail floorspace had become superfluous, and that a fight for survival for a shrinking share of sales in the region would damage the city’s retail structure, not to mention the livelihood of shopkeepers (CIMK, 1981 in Jansen, 1990). The municipality and the KvK viewed the rather splintered pattern of small shops scattered throughout the inner city as an additional problem. Within the framework of the functional hierarchy, the solution to both problems was clear: shops must be consolidated into coherent city, district and neighborhood shopping centers according to the order of goods provided, and “anomalous” free-standing stores must be purged (Eiff et al, 1985; Jansen, 1990). Such goals were mainly to be achieved through urban renewal and by rezoning retail spaces as residential. As a result of these measures, the number of shops in the inner city decreased by about 11%, while the retail floorspace in select shopping streets increased (Gemeente Amsterdam, 1988: 15). This concentration of shops in selected major shopping streets was accompanied by a concentration of shops (usually owned by multiples) into planned shopping centers, increasingly enclosed, and increasingly under a central management. The restructuring of city center retail would continue onward into the following decade as would the competition from outside.

6.2.4 Metropolitan competition in the 1990s
As elsewhere in the Netherlands the 1990s was a time of heightened competition in urban development in the Amsterdam metropolitan region. Portentously, the decade opened with the publication of a report by the Dutch Scientific Council on Government Policy recommending fiscal decentralization (WRR, 1990). It was argued that municipalities, especially large cities, had become complacent and noncompetitive because most of their income derived from central government subsidies. Although this was not a policy document, but advisory in nature, it still sent out a clear signal to cities like Amsterdam who would stand to lose from such a measure. This served to intensify a pro-development mentality already emerging in Amsterdam. As will be discussed later, an Olympic bid had given the city its first taste of local boosterism and this was carried forward in the early 1990s with the waterfront project, the Zuidas project, and the ArenA Boulevard.

Retail growth
In terms of retail, the beginning of the 1990s began rather auspiciously for Amsterdam. After decades of reports of dilapidation and decline, there was a renewed interest of retail property investors in the city center. Part of this has to do with the burgeoning tourist trade, which called for more hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops. There was also a growth in integrated shopping centers in the city center. Multiple retailers used these high-traffic locations to function as “storefronts” for their outlets in the suburbs (Interview Van der Kolk, 1999). The real growth in retail space and sales was in the metropolitan area. This growth was not merely accommodating an increase in population as in the 1960s and 1970s; shop space per person also increased. While the national government had set explicit rules on retail developments outside of established town centers (PDV), control of expansions in the centers of suburbs is left up to the municipality in question. About mid-decade, this raised fears of saturation and oversupply in the regional retail market and whether Amsterdam, despite a renewed
confidence was adequately maintaining its position. In this view, building high-quality retail space to service the affluent local population of a particular suburb will detract from the vitality of the core city as shopping destination, and ultimately as a place to live as well. It was also felt that major cities ought to offer urban amenities which are at a higher level of that in the surrounding region (Boekema and Buursink, 1996: 3). This section will discuss the various threats posed to Amsterdam’s retail hegemony, and some of the projects undertaken inside the city to counteract it.

Suburban competition
The most obvious suburban competitor to Amsterdam is the affluent town on its southern border Amstelveen. In 1998, it rebuilt its main shopping center. The design was inspired by the North American mall format, with small shops in an enclosed area, flanked by two anchor stores (Bijenkorf and V&D). There was overwhelming interest amongst retailers, and 663 inquiries were made for the 70 available units (Parool 16 Sept, 1998; Parool 5 May, 2001). More impressively, the city succeeded in attracting the country’s most exclusive department store — the Bijenkorf — to this suburban location.\(^{138}\) While many customers from Amsterdam will continue to be drawn by the flagship at Dam square, patrons living to the south are likely to avail themselves of the new outlet, especially those coming by car. After its completion, the developer proudly exclaimed that Amstelveen city center “is among the top three shopping centers in the country, with the potential to grow into the second, maybe even number one.” Explaining this, he continued, “Many factors make a shopping center a success, but the purchasing power of the residents is the most important” (in Parool 16 Sept, 1998). This is the Bijenkorf’s first move to a suburban location, and could be a signal of things to come.

An unlikely but interesting competitor for the city center are the shops at the airport. Schiphol Plaza was built in the mid-1990s and enjoyed immediate success. It is not only patronized by personnel and travelers (as was the intention), but also draws steady customers, especially from Amstelveen, Aalsmeer and Uithoorn. These customers value the convenient rail link and parking at the terminal, and the generous opening hours. The supermarket is especially busy on Sundays, especially with bad weather. About 40,000 people work at Schiphol, but the airport’s management estimates that this is responsible for only 27% of the sales. The “fun” element seems to play a bigger part in the sales at Schiphol Plaza: about a quarter of the sales are recreational purchases. Although the retail space is only 4,000m\(^2\) at present, it has ambitious expansion plans (AS 4 Dec., 1996: 9). Behind the security gates, Schiphol’s “See-Buy-Fly” shops were the best performing outlets in the Netherlands, with sales rates of €45,000/m\(^2\) (Metz, 2002: 123).

Another center is the Zwarte Markt/Beverwijkse Bazaar, growing since the early 1980s to its current size of around 55,000m\(^2\) (Kamerkrant 24, 2000: 7). This is a large-scale unplanned retail development on the outskirts of the town of Beverwijk to the north of Amsterdam. It is comprised of a series of sprawling warehouses containing various market stalls (tropical foods, flea market, discount items, computers), many of which are operated by amateur entrepreneurs. The Zwarte Markt complex is flanked by a meubelboulevard, and the owners have bought the adjacent soccer field in order to build a mega-cinema complex. No free parking is provided at the facility and even an admission fee is charged. Some facilities are

\(^{138}\) Originally, V&D had protested the coming of the Bijenkorf, but after Vendex (parent of V&D) took over KBB (parent of the Bijenkorf) this became a moot point. The coming of the Bijenkorf also allowed the developers to raise the maximum addition of retail space from 6,500m\(^2\) to over 9,500m\(^2\) (Parool 16 Sept, 1998).
provided for children, although these are also not free (AS 17 Jan, 1996: 13). Despite this, and the fact that many of the sub-areas resemble existing markets in Amsterdam, the Zwarte Markt is very busy, attracting visitors from the entire region. It is especially busy on weekends (since 1991, it remains open on Sunday), attracting about 80,000 visitors to its 3,000 stands and shops (Parool 18 Sept, 2000: 4). It has become so popular that this “unplanned” shopping destination has received its own exit on the A9 highway.

Yet another competitor of the Amsterdam inner city is Haarlem. This town also offers a similar composition of small shops in historic buildings, but is less “urban” than the nation’s capital. In addition, Alkmaar built an 40,000m$^2$ “extension” of its inner city on the other side of a canal, and joined it with a bridge. It is unlikely that this shopping center is merely intended to serve the local population, yet its location adjoining an existing center exempts it from PDV/GDV restrictions (KvK Amsterdam, 1995: 10). In addition, although more famous for its office parks, Hoofddorp is proving that retail often follows in its wake (Bedrijfshuisvesting v118, 1997: 21). It also plans to add 30,000m$^2$ of additional retail space to its shopping center, but claims that this is merely to accommodate the 60,000-70,000 expected new residents (Bedrijfshuisvesting v124, 1998: 45).

In addition to the developments occurring outside of Amsterdam’s jurisdiction, planned shopping centers were also being built, renovated and/or expanded in some of its outlying city districts, which were given increased independence in 1990. Worth mentioning in this regard is Gelderlandplein to the southwest close to Amstelveen, Osdorp center to the West, and Boven ‘t IJ in the northern district. The largest, however, is the Amsterdamse Poort in the southeastern quarter Zuidoost (because this last center lies in the case study area, it will be discussed in more detail later).

City center initiatives

In addition to its attempts to block such projects, Amsterdam reacted to these threats to its retail sovereignty the same way many other municipalities in competitive contexts do: by enlisting developers to build more shop space within the city and modernizing the existing commercial stock (VGM v24 Dec, 1999: 5-7). Van der Wiel (1996d: 80) explained that such projects are an “important weapon” in improving the quality of the inner city vis-à-vis suburbs. The next section will examine a few major development projects taking place in the city of Amsterdam in the 1990s to counterbalance the suburban competition and their varying rates of success.

The decade opened with the conversion of the centrally located Magna Plaza at Dam square from a post office into a high-end shopping mall with approximately 5,700m$^2$ of shop space (Parool 16 March, 1991). Escalators and mezzanines were installed and gaudy Romanesque profiles were affixed to the inner facade. The scheme offers high-quality retail space with a cultural-historical allure to allow formats like Virgin Megastores and America Today to profile themselves to the Dutch market.\(^{139}\)

To most people, Amsterdam shopping is synonymous with the Kalverstraat. In 1990, shopkeepers in the Kalverstraat, determined to turn back the tide of dilapidation, and compete with the proposed 30,000m$^2$ mall at Central Station (see next section), united themselves in a town center management association (Wigman and De Soet, 1996: 117). Since 1995, the

\(^{139}\) The Virgin outlet was later bought out by the Dutch giant Free Record Shop, and promptly shut down (Parool 3 July, 2000:9).
CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AMSTERDAM

Kalverstraat has profited from its designation by the city as a tourist area, allowing shops to remain open on Sundays. The volume of pedestrian traffic and sales on this street are so significant, that in the late 1990s, rents in the Kalverstraat were among the highest in the world (Volkskrant 14 December, 1998), a development which has effectively banished all independents to side streets, other districts or towns, or propelled them into bankruptcy (NRC 12 Sept, 1998: 12). In physical terms, one of its strengths — the intimacy of the street — is also one of its drawbacks, in that this structure is rather inflexible for accommodating new (and hence usually large) retail formats. However, the demolition of the former bathhouse on the Kalverstraat offered the possibility of realizing a small integrated mall there. The project, called the Kalvertoren, was developed in a joint venture by Multi Vastgoed and Vendex Vastgoed and entailed about 10,000m$^2$ of built space (about 6,000m$^2$ of which is for retail), a parking lot for 125 cars, 29 apartments, a police station and a lookout tower. Even before its opening in September 1997, there was a keen interest among retailers, especially foreign businesses as reflected in the rents which fetched up to €636/m$^2$ to €1,136/m$^2$ (VGM v24, 1997:5).

Another and much less successful project was the Nieuwezijds Kolk, built about the same time as the Kalvertoren on the Nieuwendijk (the northern extension of the Kalverstraat). The Kolk, developed as a public-private partnership by ABN-AMRO Projectontwikkeling, city of Amsterdam and Van Berkel & Bos Architektuurbureau, opened in June 1996. Even before its opening, it had problems renting its space and even lowered its prices to entice tenants (VGM v23, 1996:7; Parool 1 Feb, 1997: 21). It has since struggled with chronic financial difficulties and vacancies. After being closed completely at the end of the decade, it was relaunched a year later, but without a significant improvement in its overall appearance.

In summary, the 1990s saw a resuscitation of the city center’s retail structure, and by mid-decade the main shopping streets were busier than ever. Rent levels soared during the decade,

---

140 It is interesting to see how the fates of both projects (Kalvertoren/Kolk) diverged, given the fact that their basic elements were so similar: approximately the same size, mixed-use nature, attention to architectural detail, a public-private partnership, and a link to the same shopping street. One of the reasons for the failure of the Kolk is that, despite its intention of orienting itself towards the youth in the Nieuwendijk, it does not fit in well with the surrounding street. It contains no street-level storefronts and had an unclear layout with dead ends.
but this does not necessarily indicate a corresponding increase in quality. Much of this activity came from the decision to allow Sunday trading and from the great influx of tourists. The social character and meaning of the area had changed from what it once had been. One should not confuse the rather bourgeoisie allure of the Magna Plaza to the elegance that the Bijenkorf used to represent — gone were the days when uniformed porters stood guard outside its main entrance. The success of the Kalverstraat of the 1990s is its ability to appeal to a wide public; it does not exude exclusivity but pop-culture. This can be read in the changes in shop names over time: Modehuis Voss is now called Foxy Fashion, and shops like Gerzon, Hirsch, and Galeries Modernes have been replaced by Cool Cat, McDonalds, and Esprit (Gemeente Amsterdam, 1988: 12). Today, it seems virtually inconceivable that the Rembrandtplein area (near the Kalverstraat) once housed some of the most exclusive jewelers, clubs and garment merchants of the city. Despite the rejuvenated economy and the crowds of shoppers drawn to this area, the atmosphere there is still gauche: pornography has not completely disappeared from view, but has been supplemented by gambling and gaming arcades, souvenir shops, various incarnations of Planet Hollywood, Teasers (the Dutch equivalent of Hooters), Internet cafes and a plethora of fast-food establishments.

**Balance sheet**

This section described the rapid growth of retail space in the metropolitan area in the 1990s. All these developments raised fears that the regional functional hierarchy was being undermined, and that the concept no longer reflected empirical reality (Jansen, 1990; Gianotten, 1999; VGM v23, 1996: 35; Kooijman, 2000). Dutch planners, on the other hand, remained unconvinced and their faith in the theory of central places unshaken (Buit, 1988; Gantvoort, 1993; VGM v24, 1997: 51; Interview Van der Zwaan, 1999, 2000; Borchert, 1998). The table below of cumulative shop space may shed some light on the debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Shop space, m²</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>% of m² in the region (1991 &amp; 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>715,148</td>
<td>773,298</td>
<td>1.081</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haarlem</td>
<td>147,437</td>
<td>217,625</td>
<td>1.476</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaanstad</td>
<td>134,397</td>
<td>176,643</td>
<td>1.314</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverwijk</td>
<td>35,651</td>
<td>130,450</td>
<td>3.659</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haarlemmermeer</td>
<td>108,224</td>
<td>126,849</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amstelveen</td>
<td>76,822</td>
<td>83,278</td>
<td>1.084</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diemen</td>
<td>23,771</td>
<td>38,332</td>
<td>1.613</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the table, it seems that the planners may be right. Notwithstanding the developments of the previous decades, Amsterdam in the 1990s still had a prominent status within the region, and its direct neighbors posed little threat in terms of crude retail space. In fact, in the KvK sub-region Amsterdam — Amsterdam, Amstelveen, Diemen, Landsmeer and Ouder-Amstel — the city more or less retained its dominant share of approximately 80% (KvK, 1999: 45). However, as indicated above, floorspace figures, like rent levels, cannot adequately

---

141 Still, when divided into sub-regions, some areas clearly showed much higher growth rates than others. Amsterdam’s floorspace, for example, grew less strongly (15%) during this decade than its surrounding region (20%). The most intense growth occurred in areas like Zaanstad, Beverwijk and Heemskerk, and to the west of Haarlem in Bloemendaal, Zandvoort and Heemstede. Much of this variation can be explained by the kind of items sold. Furniture and DIY superstores at PDV locations are partly responsible for the large rise in volume outside Amsterdam. This also explains the disproportionate share of retail space per capita in municipalities such as Beverwijk and Diemen (in the case of Diemen, this will most likely fall in the near future due to the movement of the furniture complex to the Villa Arena). While also undergoing scale increases, quality supermarkets made a return to the city in the 1990s, particularly Albert Heijn (Royal Ahold Annual Report, 1998). Fashion, on the other hand, suffered as a whole in market share, and in Amsterdam in particular. On
describe the true health of a shopping area. The city may have been holding its ground in terms of quantity, but slipping in terms of quality: Amsterdam still lacked the allure and prestige of many other European capitals. This was not necessarily for the lack of trying, as the next section will illustrate.

6.2.5 Amsterdam’s waterfront project

For many years, the pet project of the city of Amsterdam was to redevelop its waterfront (IJ-embankments). The objective was “the creation of a high-quality employment area that can be viewed as an extension and a functional reinforcement of the historic city center” (Vastgoed, 1995). This was inspired by the manifold success stories of downtown revitalization in US cities like Boston, San Diego and Baltimore. After visiting such projects in the United States, the then mayor Van Tijn seemed determined to bring this form of developmental planning to Amsterdam.

Calling the project ambitious is an understatement: it sought to transform its decaying waterfront into a vibrant commercial area, complete with a regal “IJ Boulevard.” The plan envisioned headquarters of major banks settling along the southern shore, and light rail links running east-west from Central Station. It was also reckoned to create approximately 30,000 jobs ( Witbraad and Jorna, 1993: 237). While the emphasis lay on office space, the project also included an enormous 30,000m² shopping mall at Central Station, intended to rejuvenate an ailing retail supply in the city center. Not all were convinced of the alleged synergy between inner city and the mall (Jansen, 1990: 29). In fact, shopkeepers in the Kalverstraat became so apprehensive that they founded one of the first town center management schemes in the Netherlands with the sole intent of dealing with the new competition (Wigman and De Soet, 1996: 117; VGM v26 May, 1999: 59).

Normally the procedure that would be followed by the municipality was the familiar land purchase, preparation for construction and sale to a private developer. However, for a project of this magnitude, which included massive land reclamation, the costs were significant enough to involve the private sector even at a preliminary stage. Following the general trend towards increased private-sector participation, the project was launched as a public-private partnership, one of the first of its kind in the Netherlands. This partnership involved the establishment, of a joint venture called the Amsterdam Waterfront Financieringsmaatschappij (AWF) comprised of the city (50% capital holding), the NMB Postbank (later ING) and the insurance group Nationale Nederlanden ( Witbraad and Jorna, 1993). To make the project more commercially interesting, the share of housing was reduced and “subsidized housing altogether banned” (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 190). Concerning the nature of the partnership, A.A. Soetekouw, a member of the Board of Executive Directors of the NMB Postbank explained that:

> In the first place the partnership will have a major impact on the ability to finance such a large-scale project. Joining financial forces results in lending power that would be impossible otherwise … Given that this is a large project that will last many years, it will demand much of the flexibility of the enterprise and, in turn, of the participating balance, it should be pointed out that the inner city — usually the subject of much anxiety in terms of its retail share — suffered less than other areas, and only lost a small market share as a shopping center in relation to centers in surrounding municipalities. Particularly less-attractive neighborhood centers suffered more. Some of this success of the city center can be attributed to some high-profile retail projects completed in the 1990s, and the designation of much of the city center as a “tourist zone” and thus eligible for extended opening hours and trade on Sundays, as well as its traditional advantage as a historic location.
stockholders. One must have the desire and courage to undertake such a project. This also means that one must be prepared to accept the risks (Kruithof, 1990: 11).

This quote is ironic considering that the speaker’s own company was not apparently prepared to accept the risks involved. Within a few years of the AWF’s founding, the interest of the business community in this area evaporated, and the municipality suffered the humiliation of having its star partner ING retract from the partnership.

Thus, the grandiose waterfront plans were abandoned. Many at the time believed that this would seriously compromise the prospects for developmental planning: “the demise of this project casts a shadow over the future of public private partnerships in the Netherlands” (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 190). Shadow or not, this was not the end of public-private partnerships in the Netherlands, or even in Amsterdam. However, the lessons learned by the municipality from the waterfront project could be seen in subsequent undertakings, particularly in the way in which it dealt with the development of the ArenA Boulevard in its Zuidoost district, the subject of the next section.

6.3 Local context
Far from the hubbub of the cramped inner city and dreams of mighty office towers on the banks of the IJ lay a district in the urban periphery with hitherto unforeseen potential. Amsterdam’s Zuidoost (literally southeast) quarter has every right to claim uniqueness. In a country famous for small dwellings and relatively human-scale buildings, this quarter is dominated by imposing housing blocks in the Bijlmer housing estates and massive commercial developments. Until recently, it was the most populous of the city’s districts (at around 85,000 inhabitants), yet plagued by the dubious media reputation of being the country’s only (or worst) ghetto. It also has the misfortune of being labeled in the popular and professional literature as one of the country’s biggest planning disasters. Its reputation was damaged further when an airplane crashed squarely into a Bijlmer housing block in 1992 — an incident that exposed to international scrutiny the squalid conditions of the many immigrants (legal or otherwise) that had settled in the area. Finally, the territory of Zuidoost is physically cut off from the rest of Amsterdam, existing as a curious administrative island surrounded by other municipalities (see figure).

142 Indeed, the risks involved were quite high and, according to conservative estimates, the development would result in a deficit of €20 million, hardly a worthwhile investment by any calculation (Vastgoed, 1995). The abandonment of the partnership was also explained in terms of a slumping office market, uncertainty surrounding the north-south metro line (Van Lohuijen, 1993; Minderhoud, 1994).
Figure 43: Island-like Zuidoost

The peculiar spatial configuration of the Zuidoost district owes its existence to the rather bizarre administrative jurisdictional arrangement as an island of Amsterdam, and the large imprint that physical infrastructure has placed on the area. In particular, the bisection of the area by the north-south rail lines (metro and train) presents a formidable material and psychological barrier in Zuidoost. To the East is the Bijlmermeer built in the late 1960s and early 1970s with its towering housing blocks and multicultural flavor. To the West was an office park built in the 1980s and 1990s with a sterile businesslike quality. It also is the location of the ArenA stadium, and one of Amsterdam’s most ambitious urban development project since the waterfront. In order to understand the developments that are now trying to integrate the two regions it is necessary to first take a step back and reflect on the history and significance of this heavily divided area.

6.3.1 From marshland to Bijlmermeer

Like much of the Netherlands, the morphology of the area under investigation changed remarkably over time. In the sixteenth century, it was mostly a lake with the small village Bijlmer at its southern tip. Several attempts were made throughout the years to drain the lake for further development using the polder method, but these remained unsuccessful until the application of modern techniques in 1963.

Even at an early stage (1950s), Amsterdam was keen to acquire the rights to the area so that any land created there would fall under its jurisdiction. The crux of the argument for obtaining the land, like previous annexations (see Van der Veer, 1997), lay in the realm of housing and housing need — an issue of pressing urgency given the postwar baby boom. At
the end of the 1950s, a committee comprised of delegates from Amsterdam, its southern neighbors, and the province convened to discuss the possible urbanization of the Bijlmermeer. The resulting structure plan, adopted in 1959, foresaw a production of housing for approximately 100,000 future inhabitants. Although all parties agreed on the need for urbanization, the desire of Amsterdam for municipal reapportionment — partly justified by the lack of expertise and experience of small rural municipalities in carrying out large-scale building projects — was divisive. Diemen, for example, wished to develop the Bijlmermeer itself while Ouder-Amstel was willing to concede this to Amsterdam provided that its own (potentially threatened) borders would remain intact. The matter was later taken to the national level with the submission of a legislative proposal to the Dutch parliament in 1961 for Amsterdam to acquire and develop the Bijlmermeer. After some spectacular political maneuverings and media prowess (Mentzel, 1989: 81-91; De Hen, 1986; De Lange and Masset, 1968) the municipality of Weesperkarspel was divided in two: the eastern portion was merged into Weesp, and the western part was allotted to Amsterdam. In the process, Amsterdam annexed the contiguous municipality Driemond as well. As part of the deal, Amsterdam agreed to return the Bijlmermeer after twelve years, something which never occurred. The fact that the Bijlmermeer would soon become wholly part of Amsterdam was already evident in the early plans to connect the new district to the existing city with a metro line.

The city of Amsterdam chose to develop the new area according to the modernist notion of the functional city. The west would be zoned for industry and the east for housing. Traffic modes would be strictly separated as well. The Bijlmer housing estates were quickly laid out as gargantuan honeycombs of high-rise buildings, allowing the first residents to arrive in 1966. Within years, this area proved problematic and began to suffer from rising vacancy levels — something virtually unheard of in the postwar Netherlands, and especially in the nation’s capital which suffered from a severe housing shortage. Soon, the Bijlmer was known throughout the Netherlands as being synonymous for crime, unemployment and poverty. Although the late arrival of public transportation lines to the new development is often bemoaned in the planning literature as one of its early detractions (NS station Bijlmer opened in 1971 and the metro only in 1976), even less can be said for retail. One reason for this was that the phasing of construction necessitated the completion of the car garages before the shops could be built (Mentzel, 1989: 203). As late as 1975, the 30,000 Bijlmer residents had to make do with only one baker, one butcher and four makeshift supermarkets. Residents were forced to travel distances of up to 10 km for items as basic as thread or wall sockets (Parool 16 Oct, 1987: 4). The main shopping facility, the underground cultural center Ganzenhoef, was only completed in 1976, a decade after the first residents arrived. This was badly needed, but hardly sufficient facility. Since Ganzenhoef was disconnected from street-level traffic, shopkeepers could not profit from passers-by and over time this center acquired a (justified) reputation of being dark and unsafe (Parool 5 Nov, 1997).143

Due to these glaring deficiencies in the retail structure, it was decided that a large center with regional allure should be built in the Bijlmermeer to serve the local population and visitors from nearby villages to shop in Amsterdam. The project also aimed to attract the patronage of workers from the adjacent Amstel III business park and the abutting ING headquarters then under construction. Perhaps for this reason, the center was dubbed the Amsterdamse Poort, a gateway to the city. In addition to being necessary in terms of retail need, the center was also

143 The district authority finally decided in 1987 to demolish it, which finally took place in 1999-2000. The center reopened above ground a few years later, and is said to be trading well.
seen as injecting a badly needed economic impulse to the area. It was intended to provide employment, stimulate local entrepreneurship, and help improve the image of Zuidoost.

The Amsterdamse Poort was completed in 1987. Immediately, shopkeepers clamored to reestablish themselves at this location (and move away from Ganzenhoef). These were admitted according to a strict retail mix drawn up by the developer. Several years later, the other locations declined rapidly. By the end of the decade, the Amsterdamse Poort had absorbed most of the food and non-food provision for the Zuidoost district, and the smaller centers had vanished or been demolished. Proving that his aptitude for business operations superceded his prognosticative ability, Dreesman (1986: 165) reckoned that “This center [Amsterdamse Poort] will be the last big integrated center that will be realized (as one whole) this century in Amsterdam, and possibly the Netherlands.” In fact, in retail floorspace alone, the Amsterdamse Poort would pale in comparison to the PDV/GDV combination built on the other side of the rail line only about a decade later. This, as we shall see, was largely the result of a decision to locate a multifunctional stadium across from the Amsterdamse Poort.

The year 1987 which saw the opening of the Amsterdamse Poort seemed to be a pivotal one for the district (Bongenaar, 1987). For the first time, vacancy levels in the high-rise housing units decreased markedly, the installation of the district council “Zuidoost” became a reality, and both the NMB (ING) Bank headquarters and the Amrobank building were completed.

144 This project includes approximately 100,000m$^2$ of retail space, 80% as PDV for the Villa ArenA furniture mall, and 20% as GDV along the boulevard. It also includes a variety of non-retail activities as well such as concert hall, cinema complex and the stadium.

145 Zuidoost elected its first council in 1987. Unlike most other city districts, ethnicity plays a major role in the local politics of Zuidoost, and the figurehead of Hanna Belliot as district council chair has helped to redefine this district as an example of the future for a multicultural Netherlands (Van Tillo, 1998: 108).
Chapter 6: Case Study Amsterdam

Another significant project was the construction of the 30,000m\(^2\) Ikea outlet in 1985 to the southwest. Soon Zuidoost became the most pro-growth district of the city, being extolled as a “boomtown” by the then mayor Van Tijn (who had also pressed so strongly for the waterfront project). By the beginning of the 1990s renewal activities commenced in the Bijlmer with the establishment of the foundation Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer as a joint venture between the municipality, the Zuidoost district authority and the housing association Nieuw Amsterdam. As the decade wore on, the tide of architectural upheavals in the Bijlmer became evermore linked to those “occurring across the tracks” in what would later be called the Centrumgebied Zuidoost. It is to this area that our attention will now turn.

6.3.2 From Amstel III to Centrumgebied Zuidoost

The reputation of Zuidoost has been so overshadowed by the architectural aggression of the Bijlmermeer estates that the almost equally large area to the west is usually overlooked. In fact, both areas, although displaying vastly different characteristics, are part of the same extension plan in which the functions were intended to — albeit separately — complement one another (Brandsma and Geldof, 1991). Put bluntly, the area to the East was for living, and the area to the West was for working. The site which now houses the first GDV location in Amsterdam was originally called Amstel III, referring to its industrial function and location on the river. Although the zoning of Amstel III as commercial dates back to the 1960s (the earliest plans following the annexation), the market was not quick to respond. At one time, the planning department even considered rezoning part of the area for residential use.

By the mid-1980s, the office market had begun to recover however and building activity picked up at Amstel III. In an effort to increase the area’s attractiveness and visibility, local real estate agents, businesses, developers and investors founded the group Vereniging Promotie Amsterdam Zuidoost in 1984. The efforts of this association were so successful (aided by the real estate market upswing), that the municipality and utility companies had difficulty providing the necessary infrastructure to the growing number of office buildings. The space offered aimed at a middle segment of the market as an alternative to the increasingly expensive and car-unfriendly inner city.

As the 1980s progressed, so too did the Amstel III success story of office-space development. Development at Amstel III proceeded largely in an ad hoc fashion, with most new buildings being approved via so-called “Article 19” exception clause procedures. This did little for the internal cohesiveness of the area, only loosely defined by a vague theme of corporate finance and information technology. In order to improve the overall cohesion of the area and between the actors involved (as real-estate investors, developers and planners all thought differently about potentials and problems) the Vereniging Promotie Amsterdam Zuidoost, together with the district authority, turned its attention away from mere promotion to improving the quality of Amstel III (Interview Brandsema and Bruijne, 2001). An action plan was drawn up and later approved by the municipality.

\[146\]

The proposal was to build 5,000 social housing units (later lowered to about 1,200) as a way to relieve pressure elsewhere and to help integrate the two halves (this functional separation had therefore already been problematized in the 1970s!). This idea was vehemently opposed, and successfully blocked, by the KvK and the department of Economic Affairs (De Hen, 1986: 107). Consequently, the Venserpolder to the northeast was to become residential instead, allowing the remainder of Amstel III to remain reserved for potential commercial (i.e. office) development. The division between the Bijlmermeer and Amstel III therefore remained almost as stark as it had been before.
While much of the future of Amstel III had been dramatically altered with the coming of the stadium, some of the current developments and issues can be found in embryonic form in the objectives cited in this action plan. First, that the area should aspire to develop into a modern business center with a regional — rather than merely municipal — significance. Second, that the area must (most likely at the insistence of the district and the municipal planning department) be integrated into the physical structure of the entire district — implying increasing the connection to the Bijlmer estates by, among other things, an extension of the road Bijlmerdreef westwards into the Amstel III area. According to the plan, the monotonous office park atmosphere must be softened through the introduction of additional public space and amenities, and possibly by the construction of high-end condominiums.

One of the most remarkable differences between the content of the plan and future events was that no provisions were made for a stadium — even though reports which indicated Zuidoost as the most suitable location for such a facility had been on the table for years (Discussion Brandsema, 2000; Interview Brandsema and Bruijne, 2001). Arguably the most important trigger for the ArenA Boulevard development and the transformation of Amstel III was the building of the stadium. Had this never occurred, or if it had been built elsewhere, it is doubtful that plans for an urban entertainment center would have materialized in this area. The next section will examine this crucial issue in more detail.

6.3.3 ArenA Stadium
The original idea for a stadium in Zuidoost had little to do with the soccer team Ajax, but came about as part of the city’s bid for the 1992 Olympic summer games. The bid came in the mid-1980s, a time at which commercial development was shifting from the inner city to the outer districts and the outskirts of the metropolitan area (see §6.2.3). New investments in the city’s faltering image were seen as badly needed, and grandiose plans such as the waterfront project and the Olympic bid were viewed as important steps for attracting capital. A study conducted by EZ Research at the time estimated that the Olympic games would produce sustained job growth and international allure — both of which were badly needed in Amsterdam given the inhospitable economic climate and sordid image. To counteract this, a memorable but often-heckled public-relations campaign “Amsterdam’s got it” was launched by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Thousands of tee-shirts, yoyos, stickers and other paraphernalia bearing this slogan were produced by this organization to drum up support for the Dutch capital. The government also contributed heavily: about half of the €12.72 million required by the campaign was supplied by the municipality and the central government (Bekius et al, 1986; Grosveld, 1996: 61). Despite these good intentions, it was clear that more fundamental changes were required if Amsterdam were to qualify as an Olympic host. At the very least, it would need a stadium that could accommodate the expected crowds. There was already a track and field stadium in the southwestern district, built for the 1928 Olympics, but this was considered too small and outdated. After some debate, the city council decided to reserve space at Strandvliet in Zuidoost for a new stadium (Hanou and Van Til, 1993). In April 1987, it voted for the demolition of the old Olympic Stadium and its rezoning for housing (DRO, 1992). Thus, even at this early stage, Zuidoost (specifically the location Strandvliet slightly to the north) was singled out as the most suitable location for the stadium due to the relatively open space and presence of physical infrastructure.

On 17 October 1986 the Olympic euphoria which had surrounded the city for so long suddenly evaporated. Amsterdam, with an appallingly low number of votes, failed to make it past even the first election round. Barcelona would ultimately emerge victorious and, many
believe, would long reap the benefits conferred by international recognition. Despite the crestfallen return of the IOC delegates, the promotion machine which had been called into being continued to gyrate, including the stadium plans which were refitted to the local soccer team Ajax. In 1987, the **Stichting Amsterdam Sportstad** was founded to carry the torch forward; it sought to promote professional sports in the region and thereby “enhance the competitive position of Amsterdam” (Brandsema, 1993). Among other things, the foundation commissioned a plan for a new stadium. The new design, based on the 1986 plans — including Olympic track and field facilities — envisioned a “state-of-the-art” American-style stadium with restaurants, skyboxes and a separate event hall. International veneration was thus substituted for local bravado.

On the basis of a study carried out by the municipal planning department (DRO) in 1987, Strandvliet once again scored highest as a potential location, followed by that of the former Olympic stadium in the southwest quarter and two sites close to the Sloterdijk rail station (Van Meurs, 1994). In addition to various technical reasons (accessibility, space), the Strandvliet site had political advantages as well. The stadium in southwest had provoked NIMBY-tinted protest from the well-to-do residents, while the Zuidoost location was relatively open and the residents — being comprised of many different nationalities, language groups, and having lower levels of income and education than those in the Southwest quarter — were more difficult to mobilize. Moreover, because this district could profit — certainly in terms of image if nothing else — from such a high-profile project, opposition from the planned district authority could be expected to be minimal (Hanou and Van Til, 1993).

![Figure 44: Amsterdam/Ouder-Amstel border region](image)

The plans for the location of the stadium outside of Amsterdam, however, were far from uncontested. Like the decision to annex the Bijlmermeer, this proposal evoked conflict and ill will between Amsterdam and its surrounding communities. The main bone of contention was
that the Strandvliet site lay partly outside the city limits in the area between the traditional part of the city and the Bijlmermeer polder annexed in the 1960s. This fell under the jurisdiction of the municipality Ouder-Amstel (see figure above). The proposed stadium would straddle a municipal boundary line.

A formal request by Amsterdam to build the stadium at this site was made in 1991, causing an uproar in the media, including tales of the alleged shock and outrage of the mayor of Ouder-Amstel upon hearing the plans of Amsterdam to build a monofunctional colossus in its jurisdiction (Termaat and De Vries, 2000). However, this interpretation of events seems to be based more upon entertainment value than fact: Ouder-Amstel was consulted when Strandvliet was selected as the location for the Olympic stadium (Brandsema, 1993; Van Meurs, 1994). This does indicate a clear change of heart on the part of Ouder-Amstel however. Whereas Ouder-Amstel had seemed willing (perhaps grudgingly so) to cooperate with Amsterdam in order to help draw the 1992 Olympic games to the Netherlands, the prospect of sacrificing this space for Amsterdam’s soccer team was much less appealing (Van Meurs, 1994). Moreover, it could also have rekindled unpleasant memories of the kinds of tactics employed and promises broken in the acquisition of the Bijlmermeer. Amsterdam, for its part, was worried that not enough space would remain for the development of the other planned functions (e.g. office space, retail) and whether developers would remain interested in the project (Bruijne, 1997). In either case, the province gave the green light to the Strandvliet plans in 1991, pending an environmental impact assessment (DRO, 1992).

However, as the resistance of Ouder-Amstel could still complicate matters with an appeal to the Raad van State, Amsterdam decided to look for alternatives.

After a tour de force of planning activity, the various parties involved in the project (builders, municipality, architects) emerged with a novel solution: the stadium would be built several hundred meters to the south of Strandvliet on top of the artery road Burgemeester Stramanweg (named incidentally after a former mayor of Ouder-Amstel). This would bring it fully within Amsterdam’s jurisdiction. Despite this decision, Ouder-Amstel remained steadfast in its opposition, claiming that even at the new site (although entirely within Amsterdam’s jurisdiction), the stadium would disturb Ouder-Amstel residents during concerts and cause parking problems. Like before, the ensuing conflict received full coverage in the local press: “The media delighted in reporting the bickering between the arrogant metropolis and the spoiled little suburb” wrote Termaat and De Vries (2000: 11), reporters themselves for the Dutch daily De Telegraaf. Despite the rather sharp exchanges and sensationalistic reporting, the weapons used in the conflict itself were not especially spectacular. Ouder-Amstel attempted to suspend Amsterdam’s issuance of the building permit via the Raad van State, but this request was denied. The final ruling was in favor of Amsterdam, and construction on a new Ajax stadium in Zuidoost was allowed to commence in November 1993.

Growing pains
Several fiascos accompanied the construction and opening of the stadium which captured the attention of the local and national media. Examples include the exorbitant cost of construction, the leaky and sometimes malfunctioning roof (which gained particular notoriety during a Tina Turner concert shortly after opening), the vertiginously steep bleachers, abysmal acoustics and the introduction of a special currency for purchasing concessions (Termaat and De Vries, 2000). There was even bad press at the opening of the ArenA with allegations that the garage parking staff — disparagingly referred to as “melkertbaners uit de Bijlmer” — were pocketing fees. The woes of the stadium also penetrated into the financial
realm. Despite reasonably good patronage at Ajax games, the Amsterdam ArenA suffered heavy losses early after its opening, and in the first year booked a €4.5 million loss, mostly due to extra costs regarding delayed construction plans and technical failures (Volkskrant 15 Dec, 1997; Telegraaf 19 Dec, 1997). Another well-known uproar involved a fight over the rights to the name of the stadium itself, as the name “Arena” had been used by many other businesses for years, most notably by a popular youth hotel. This conflict, which included a lawsuit and an appeal, continued well after the official opening, and was only resolved through the payment of an as of yet still undisclosed compensation (Volkskrant 25 Jan, 1997; FD 5 Dec, 1996).

A debacle of greater planning significance was the failure of the so-called “transferium” concept, which is essentially a park-and-ride facility under the responsibility of the municipality (DRO, 1992). The incorporation of the transferium was more of an afterthought than an integral part of the stadium plans, arising from the decision to move the location above the Burgemeester Stramanweg roadway. The transferium allowed Amsterdam to qualify for a national government subsidy for park-and-ride facilities, which also helped to cover the increased costs incurred in the move from Strandvliet to above the Burgemeester Stramanweg.\(^{147}\) The high hopes cultivated by the municipality — in which transferia were touted as potential new centers of activity (Klusman, 1997) — were probably unwarranted in light of failed experiments elsewhere in the country. After its opening, the ArenA transferium was virtually bereft of cars, with motorists often availing themselves of free parking elsewhere, including the municipality of Ouder-Amstel as originally feared by their mayor (AS 19 July, 1997: 17). By 2000, the situation had become so dire that the transferium space had shrunk from 2,000 to 750 spaces, the rest being used as employee parking. After investigating the project a few years later, local civil servants concluded that the double layer housing the transferium could be put to better use (Info Regio Amsterdam v11, 2000: 4). A decision in May 2001 to only provide 500 spaces (only a quarter of what it had begun with) was the final admittal of defeat (Parool 17 May, 2001: 5).

The greatest symbolic humiliation was the chronically anemic grass on the field, which despite replacement after replacement, obstinately refused to take hold. After several failed attempts at a permanent solution and years of ridicule, the ArenA management admitted defeat and stated that due to “complex climatic circumstances” the field would always require several replacements per annum (Volkskrant 21 Nov, 1998; Telegraaf 28 Feb, 1997). In 2001 the newspaper Het Parool wryly announced the celebration of the ArenA’s 25th grass transplantation (Parool 8 May, 2001: 1). As a final insult, a poll by the construction magazine Cobouw found that a majority of its readers felt that demolition of the ArenA was the best solution to its horticultural problem (Parool 22 Dec 2000: 4). In this sense, Amsterdam received the popularity and attention it had sought by building the stadium, although not in the way it had intended.

---

\(^{147}\) Of the 2,500 parking spaces available under the stadium, 2,000 were designated for the transferium. The facility charged € 5.69 per day, and included two free rides with the metro (except during stadium events where the price almost doubled, a point much criticized in the press) and, according to the ArenA management, offered a parking environment in which sunlight and wind were allowed to filter through, which would minimize feelings of personal danger. Moreover, unlike most parking garages, the transferium would include “amenities” such as vending machines, an information desk and a telephone booth (Volkskrant 28 Aug, 1996). In this manner, the ArenA was able to secure € 3.6 million for the project — of the € 30 million total — from the national government (Ministry of Transportation and Public Works) for something that, for all practical purposes, was little more than a garage.
Despite this, it was undeniable that the stadium was a huge triumph for the city of Amsterdam. As the first major urban development project completed in over a decade, the stadium shattered the “frozen skyline” of Amsterdam. When it was officially opened by Queen Beatrix 14 August 1996, the city knew it had received a world-class facility that one normally associates with Rome, Barcelona or a large North American city (Parool 13 Aug, 1996). The stadium and transferium fundamentally changed the spatial structure of Zuidoost, and put the district on the collective mental map of public officials and the business community. The next section will look more closely at the transformation of this area. Its sheer size alone was sufficient to give it a surreal appearance. One reporter, upon finally seeing it built, was awe-struck:

The stadium looked exactly like the image on the propaganda folder dealt out to all future [Ajax] card-holders… from pop-art we know about the separation of an object from its traditional attributes. It is a simple trick: duplication at a different scale. It was like this … it could have just as easily been an enormous jar of peanut butter or a washing machine…. The ArenA has surpassed pop art. The ArenA is a model on a mega-scale (Volkskrant 13 Aug, 1996).

This strange feeling that something odd had occurred was intensified by the nothingness that surrounded the stadium — it seemed as if a gigantic spacecraft had landed in the Bijlmer. All the negative publicity only seemed to add to the mystique.

6.4 The Centrumgebied

The GDV policy (described in §6.1.5) gave Amsterdam the opportunity to inject a new commercial element into its plans for Zuidoost and at the same time allow it to compete with suburban shopping centers and bourgeoning PDVs sites in the metropolitan region. Unlike the other two GDVs (Alexandrium in Rotterdam and MegaStores in The Hague), retail would comprise only part of the attraction: the primary function in Amsterdam would be entertainment. There were several reasons for this. One, while retail is subject to rather strict planning controls at the national level, leisure functions such as concert halls and cinemas are not (Boer, 2000a, 2000b). Including entertainment functions would therefore allow Amsterdam to build more and larger facilities without the need for costly impact assessments (this turned out not to be the case for the multiplex cinema). Another and more significant reason for this decision was to play upon the function of the stadium and create a thematic center. A third reason is the possible damage that large-scale retail could have on the adjacent Amsterdamse Poort and the city center. This last point prompted the commissioning of several impact studies on the GDV at the Amstel III location, and of a “retail structure vision” of the metropolitan area.

6.4.1 Preliminary studies

Characteristically for the Netherlands, the development of spatial planning policy is based on quantitative research, and characteristically for the last decade, this has been increasingly carried out by external consultants. Retail planning policy is an especially good example of this. In order to illustrate the implications of the new 1993 GDV policy for an upcoming “round table” discussion in The Hague, the consultancy firm D&P was asked to carry out a study on how many GDVs could be accommodated in the country, and what, on the basis of national spatial planning guidelines and economic feasibility, the optimal locations for these would be. Their report culminated in the display of several maps that illustrated optimal GDV

148The fact that both activities (entertainment and shopping) are so interwoven has been interpreted as a kind of double standard by many and used as both an argument for more regulation (extending retail policy to entertainment) and more deregulation (allowing retail to establish itself as freely as entertainment facilities).
locations on the basis of proximity to potential customers, accessibility (car and mass transit) and competition with existing centers. A final map, and perhaps the most interesting one, was a superimposition of all the preceding ones. This figure, reproduced below, considerably reduced the number of suitable sites (D&P, 1994). As can be read from the map, there are several locations around Amsterdam which could potentially fulfill both market and policy requirements for a GDV. Counterclockwise, they are Diemen/Muiden (to the East), Amstel III, Amstelveen and West Amsterdam (i.e. every edge-of-town location save North). In the analysis of this information, the West Amsterdam option could be quickly eliminated as a potential site considering the difficulties in developing offices — let alone retail — at the Teleport location, while the Diemen/Muiden area was for political reasons unacceptable to Amsterdam.\footnote{It should be pointed out that this political aspect was firmly denied by a representative from the Amsterdam municipal planning department, who maintained that the selection was carried out on a purely technical basis (Interview Van der Zwaan, 1999).}

Figure 45: Optimal GDV locations (D&P, 1994)

As stated in §6.1.2.3, one of the requirements for a given metropolitan area to develop a GDV was that it must be supported by a “regional retail structure vision” that (presumably) measures the capacity of the retail supply and sets out a course of action for meeting new
retail need. As the requirement called for a *regional* assessment, the body responsible to do this was ROA, the mostly symbolic metropolitan authority whose main task was to wait until the conversion to a city-province, whereupon it would be bestowed with real power. It should be pointed out that ROA, although containing representatives from suburban municipalities, was very much dominated by Amsterdam (Salet, 2003: 181). ROA decided that the retail vision be drafted on the basis of a grounded survey of the region, which could — in fact should — be contracted out to a third party, in this case Kolpron consultants. It was argued that a comprehensive study by an independent third party could provide all stakeholders with the same information and prevent a situation of “advocacy science” from arising (Interview Van der Zwaan, 2000; De Jong, 1999). The resulting 1994 report, and an additional impact study carried out by the same firm one year later, formed the basis of the policy document “Regional retail structure vision for the ROA area,” published on 24 June 1996.\(^{150}\)

It should be noted that despite the new era that the GDV policy was supposed to signify, the ROA vision continued to approach the retail structure from the functional hierarchy principle, with the city center of Amsterdam occupying the top position. The ROA vision had clearly come out in favor of a GDV development near the ArenA, provided that the expected economic impacts lay within acceptable parameters. The latter was also felt to be the case, given the findings of the second Kolpron report that had performed an impact analysis on the basis of a hypothetical 20,000-25,000m\(^2\) retail development. Before moving on to the final recommendations of the ROA retail structure vision, the methodology employed in this second study deserves some attention, as does some of the specific findings, because these figures have comprised the basis of the collective understanding of the problem by the actors involved, and because — unlike the previous two case studies — there was no competing evidence.

In the report “Economic impact of a GDV at the Amstel III site” (Kolpron, 1995), the potential impact was measured on the basis of simply subtracting the probable turnover of the GDV (based on a hypothetical retail mix) on centers within a range of 10km, 10-20km and further. Not surprisingly, impact varied greatly according to the kinds of merchandise being offered at the new development. If, for example, automotive articles were offered, the impact on other centers would be negligible. If, on the other hand, a superstore in infant care articles was realized, this would create a 9% reduction of sales in these items in the immediate area (<10km). The study also showed that not all shopping centers around the GDV would experience the same levels of trade deflection. Gelderlandplein in southern Amsterdam, for example, would be fairly unaffected because it functions mainly as a district center. The city center, and Amstelveen center, on the other hand, act as regional centers, and would therefore find themselves in direct competition with the new GDV. In fact, the study estimated that the lion’s share of the funds flowing into the GDV would come from the city center (\(€16\) million, or 43%). However, owing to the size of the city center, this only constitutes 2% of its total non-food sales (Kolpron, 1995: 12). Thus, the report concluded, somewhat circumspectly, exactly what local officials wanted to hear, namely that “the reorientation in purchasing power in mid-2000 during the first phase of the GDV-location will not take on disastrous proportions” (Kolpron, 1995: 10).

\(^{150}\) Again, one can observe the importance of external experts in the governmental policymaking process. In fact, so confident about the completeness of the Kolpron report, the ROA document stated in its introduction that, “other existing studies contained no additional information” (ROA, 1996: 3). For all practical purposes, therefore, the ROA vision is that of Kolpron consultants.
These findings were brought forward to the various interested parties via some consultation sessions and seminars. Particularly the city center shopkeeper’s organization VAC was unconvinced of the “negligible” impacts, and wished to have more clarity about the issue of combination trips between existing centers and the GDV (FD 13 Sept, 1996; Interview Van der Kolk, 2000). It was noted that the overall figure of 2% impact for retailers in the inner city would be unevenly distributed, and even this could significantly harm shops operating at low margins, like independents. It was discussed whether visitors would use the GDV to supplement a “shopping day out” in Amsterdam or supplant it. These fears were defused in part by means of establishing a retail mix committee which included representatives from SME organizations and inner city merchants as a typical consensus-culture solution (Sinnege, 2000). This committee was to have a considerable influence on the ArenA Boulevard development, and will receive more attention later. The final recommendations of ROA, thus, were for a 20,000m² GDV (or less) to be developed at the Amstel III site with limitations placed on the retail mix, thus officially giving a green light to Amsterdam to go forward with its plans. In consideration of nearby centers, food was to be excluded from the GDV site in this first phase. Similarly, department stores and fashion articles, considered vital to the functioning of established centers, would also be prohibited. In this sense, the ROA vision remains true to its philosophy of attempting to integrate the GDV phenomenon into the functional hierarchy as much as possible. In essence, the ROA vision presents a relatively uncontested and rationalized picture of retail development, with new formats being incorporated into the existing retail structure, rather than causing a revolution. In all, it seems to have been a virtually seamless process of commissioning research and then implementing findings into policy.

6.4.2 Design of the ArenA Boulevard

During an expert meeting held by the KvK in 1995 (the same year as the Kolpron Amstel III study) another salient issue was raised: the risk of the GDV harming the relatively new Amsterdamse Poort. As a representative of local business, the KvK stressed the need to prevent overlap in the merchandise offered in the two centers. These fears formed one of the chief design challenges of the new scheme: how to encourage visitors to the GDV to traverse the rather inhospitable terrain — including a dark and somewhat foreboding railway overpass and an uninviting courtyard flanked by office towers — between the stadium and the Amsterdamse Poort.

In essence, the solution offered to the estrangement between the stadium area and the existing shopping center was a gigantic pedestrian walkway, or “boulevard” stretching from the stadium to the Amsterdamse Poort. The task of the boulevard would comprise a physical link between these two centers. The planning, design and development of this area may have been done in an era of increased private sector involvement, but the municipality of Amsterdam and the Zuidoost district still remained vital actors in the process. Unlike other mixed-use retail center developments such as CentrO or the Trafford Centre, the masterplan was commissioned by the DRO in consultation with the Architectural firm Cie and various other private parties. This can help explain the emphasis on using architecture to bring about the integration of the two halves of the Zuidoost district — long a goal of the municipal planning department — and the emphasis on public space as the cornerstone of the spatial structure. The fact that many aspects of Amsterdam’s GDV have a direct link to municipal spatial planning policy can be seen in the history of the design.
6.4.2.1 Origins
The idea behind the ArenA Boulevard and the Centrumgebied are not new. The desire to reduce the disparity between the two halves of Zuidoost was already present in the Amstel III action plan. In addition, embryonic forms of this design can be seen in an earlier study by the DRO that envisioned an extension of the Amsterdamse Poort area eastward along the Bijlmerdreef, transforming it into “the heart of Amsterdam-Zuidoost” (Hofstede, 1986). The land straddling this 2 km thoroughfare, which runs roughly east-west from Station Bijlmer to the Ganzenhoef shopping center, had been zoned for commercial use but had remained mostly empty due to building restrictions and the lack of a comprehensive plan. The department aimed to facilitate the development of the Bijlmerdreef into a commercial strip comparable with Weesperstraat/Wibautstraat axis in East Amsterdam. Because each end terminated in a shopping center, few (if any) retail functions would be included along the strip. Instead, the strip would consist mainly of luxury housing units, offices, restaurants and recreational and sports facilities with convenient parking (Hofstede, 1986). This 1980s vision had come out of an ever earlier study by Rem Koolhaas for the area (Hoogstraaten, 2002: 117). Additional cohesion within the Zuidoost district could be achieved by extending the Bijlmerdreef westward to the Amstel III office park (a point also made in the Amstel III action plan).

![Figure 46: Original location of the Bijlmer strip (Hofstede, 1986)]

The construction of the ArenA and the introduction of the GDV policy in the early 1990s allowed the DRO to dust off these plans for the district and retain the central concept of producing a central area or Centrumgebied by shifting the location from East to West...
Zuidoost. However, the content of the strip envisioned in the original plans would acquire a completely new theme: entertainment and retail would replace offices, and the pedestrian would replace the automobile. In addition, in the new plan, the strip would not consist of development along an existing thoroughfare, but be built from scratch on vacant land. Although it would still be more accurate to call it a strip, this stretch of land from the stadium to the Amsterdamse Poort was re-dubbed the ArenA Boulevard (Horlings, 1996).

6.4.2.2 Design principles
One of the initial uncertainties for planning in Zuidoost in the early 1990s was the location of the new stadium: “it was a kind of floating object, and we didn’t know exactly where it would land” (Interview Sinnige, 2000). Once the location of the ArenA above the Burgemeester Stramanweg was known, work could commence on how the area around it could be developed. Even at this stage, the DRO was aware of the potential it had: “one cannot underestimate the contribution the stadium can make to the urbanization of the cultural climate and to Amsterdam’s international orientation as the cultural capital of the Netherlands” (DRO, 1992: 5). Meanwhile, IMK reported on the market potential for public facilities, remarking that the city should attempt to create an area with “regional allure” at the site, and pointed out that the new GDV policy would enable this. Different scenarios for filling in the area around the stadium were drawn up and sketched out in an internal document “Knelpunt analyse” which ranged from rows of office blocks to the creation of public space with the additional function of carrying pedestrian traffic from the stadium to the station — a boulevard of sorts. One of the conclusions of this analysis (and accepted) was that the importance of this project was significant enough to warrant direct municipal involvement, rather than leave it up to the district authority (DRO, 1993: 43). It was also at this time that ING Vastgoed emerged as the most suitable candidate for developing the project, due in part to its considerable property investments in Zuidoost (e.g. its corporate headquarters, involvement in Amsterdamse Poort). And, as was the case for the stadium, the municipality had a large financial stake in the project, agreeing to contribute about €30 million, or about one-third of the costs (Volkskrant 21 Jan, 1998; VGM Amsterdam Stad van de Toekomst, 1999: 11). The conversion of public and private interests was amplified and intensified with the symbolic name change from Amstel III to the Centrumgebied Zuidoost and the commissioning of a masterplan.

The municipal planning department DRO took the initiative by commissioning urban designer Pi de Bruijn to draw up the masterplan. The vision Pi de Bruijn produced made the boulevard concept the central unifying element in the design. Specifically, the boulevard connects the two halves of the Zuidoost district (end-to-end link) and also acts as a backbone to the new GDV development, linking the various functions along it to one another (contiguous link). For this reason, it is commonly referred to as the “backbone” of the development (Interview Sentel, 2000; Interview Sinnige, 2000). The route which cuts directly from the one “magnet” (Villa ArenA) to the other (Amsterdamse Poort) much like a conventional out-of-town shopping mall. Various steps towards physical integration with the Amsterdamse Poort were taken in the masterplan. One example is the establishment of one of the superstores (3,000m²) under a newly restructured (and raised) railway overpass. The use of material in the Boulevard is also intended to provide visual continuity from one end to the other, or, in the words of planning commissioner Stadig “a fluid motion between what happens on both sides of the tracks” (AB1, 1998).

The figure below is a reproduction of the masterplan. Existing buildings are in black. The stadium occupies the central area, and new development can be seen to the West (Villa
ArenA and Mojo Theaters) and South (superstores, Pathé). Some aspects of the design are immediately evident: the odd intersection of Boulevard and railway line, the excellent car accessibility and grid pattern of artery roads, and the total absence of traffic on the Boulevard itself. The walkway extends diagonally to the Southeast under the railway lines to the Hoekenrode courtyard. The current shopping center Amsterdamse Poort is located in the lower right-hand corner.

Figure 47: ArenA Boulevard masterplan

The walking distance from end-to-end is approximately ten minutes, which the DRO noted is about the same time it takes to walk from Amsterdam Central Station to the Dam (Kalfsbeek, 1996). In fact, the other side of the boulevard is intended to have a “Damrak” feel: a bustling main street lined with shops, restaurants and cafes (NRC 14 Aug, 1996: 15). Indeed, the Centrumgebied project is fairly unique in that it attempts to create, and not merely recreate (as so many other retail projects tend to do), a *stukje stad* or “piece of city” in its design. In this, Pi de Bruijn emphasized that the ArenA Boulevard was not intended to become another CentrO (in Kooijman, 1997). This is evident, for example, in the conscious mixed-use aspect (although the emphasis is predominantly on commercial leisure services). The design is also noteworthy because it conveys less the image of an introverted shopping mall, and more that of a city street, albeit on a grand scale. This “bigness” is another: the size of the theaters, shops and cinemas are intended to produce an “American” larger-than-life quality (Parool 23 Aug, 2000).  

151 Indeed, one of the main anchor tenants, the theater magnate Joop van de Ende,

---

151 The rigid monotony of a single strip has been softened somewhat by the placement of kiosks and trees, and through a planned variation in the materials used in the pavement (Horlings, 1996). Finally, as another “urban” feature, the train station will be overhauled and expanded by two tracks into a major regional transfer point. The prestigious British Architectural firm Grimshaw & Partners — responsible for the new Waterloo Station in
envisioned building a themed entertainment center based on his recent experiences in Las Vegas (Bouman, 1997).

6.4.3 Development
That the plans were ambitious denied no one. In fact, in some respects the ArenA Boulevard was as grandiose and risky an enterprise as the waterfront plan which had foundered just a few years prior. In the words of a DRO publication,

The intended developments in the planning area have never occurred before in the Netherlands; [this represents] a new style of urbanism on in a hitherto unknown scale and mixture of uses (Kalfsbeek, 1996).

Considering Amsterdam’s poor track record with prestigious projects (e.g. the city hall, Rembrandt Tower, waterfront project, 1992 Olympic bid, etc.) this language should have sounded a warning bell to investors, but instead recent history was quickly forgotten in a cloud of enthusiasm enveloping the ArenA stadium and its environs (Parool 7 Aug, 1996). This also took place at the same time that the GDV studies were completed, that the furniture superstores at the Diemen meubelboulevard were seeking a new location, and that the municipality was more eager than ever to improve the image of Zuidoost. Various private parties in the area also began to see the logic of introducing urban functions that could benefit from a close proximity to the stadium. The stage for the ArenA Boulevard spectacle had been set, and it was up to the actors to provide the drama.

6.4.4 Actor constellation and interaction
At this stage, it is no longer sufficient to recount planning activities and policy, but attention must turn to the parties responsible for transforming these plans into reality. Of course, one of the most important actors was the municipality. In addition to owning the land, it was also the Amsterdam planning department that carried out many of the preliminary studies for the Centrumgebied, and had commissioned the masterplan. The other crucial party was the developer. Rather than enlisting an established shopping center developer to carry out the project, the developer of the ArenA Boulevard was an ad hoc joint venture called Ontwikkelings Maatschappij Centrumgebied Amsterdam Zuidoost, better known by the acronym OMC. OMC is comprised of the companies ING Vastgoed, BAM, and Ballast Nedam (the latter two parties are the construction companies that built the stadium, and the first is the property development wing of the ING bank). The city had invited these parties to

London — will assist in the design. This futuristic “pearl in the Bijlmer” will carry such prestigious traffic as the high-speed train from Schiphol to Frankfurt.

152 It should be pointed out that before this time, the business community was rather ambivalent about the stadium. Indeed, the ArenA was not at all seen as a boon by this group, who, much like the opposition to the Olympic stadium by residents in southwest Amsterdam, were skeptical about the noise and disturbance the stadium would bring. Only after much debate did local businesses finally agree to endorse the plan, under the condition that the stadium would not dominate the development. This is ironic considering that, once built, businesses reportedly clamored to find a space near the stadium (NRC 14 Aug, 1996: 15). The early 1990s commercial real-estate market in Amsterdam was weak — especially in Zuidoost, which struggled with the stigma of being unsafe and having low levels of purchasing power — and the commercial future of the area seemed rather grim. The director of the association for business interests in the area (Ondernemers Vereniging Zuidoost) explained, “the turnaround came only after the ArenA had been built… [in fact] when we heard that there were plans for a stadium, we almost fell from our chairs in shock” (AS 21 June, 2000: 7). The reason for the change of heart could not be fully explained by the project head Brandsema who instead offered that, “maybe there was a feeling [among business leaders] that ‘it has to work out sometime’ in Amsterdam” (Volkskrant 7 Aug, 1996).
brainstorm about the development of the area, and encouraged them to unite to ease communication (Sinnige, 2000: 8).

OMC is more of a marriage of convenience than a premeditated union. Ballast Nedam and BAM, as construction companies, did not play an essential role in the planning and design phase of the retail and entertainment functions, and will not be elaborated on here. Bam, for example, is concentrating on the housing component (VGM May, 1996: 31). The other OMC partner, ING Vastgoed Ontwikkeling, on the other hand, played a major role as an actor. ING Vastgoed has extensive experience working on complex partnership/cooperation schemes with municipalities, especially in inner cities; currently 30% of its portfolio is comprised of these kinds of projects (Sinnige, 2000: 5). ING had an active presence in the area due to its landholdings and the location of its headquarters adjacent to the Amsterdamse Poort; it was already active in developing the Amstel III area and its parent company actually owns the Amsterdamse Poort. In addition, ING was formerly the Dutch middenstandsbank (NMB) or shopkeepers’ bank, and therefore probably less inclined than other developers to undermine the interests of established retailers. It also may help to explain why ING invests so highly in city center areas. In particular, it was one of the parties participating in the failed Amsterdam waterfront PPP (see §6.2.5).\footnote{This arrangement is in line with that argued by Sinnige (2000: 21) that private cooperation rarely occurs on a voluntary basis, but is usually brought about in order to share risks, because the municipality wants it, or because different parties own the land. Once united, several issues come into play such as ensuring a favorable profit/risk ratio, improve relations with municipalities and retailers and to use this project to acquire new jobs in the future.} Moreover, the construction as a private joint venture would ensure that financial culpability would remain the foremost priority, especially since the builders of the stadium had proven themselves adept at keeping construction costs in check, and even reducing them when necessary (see §6.3.3).

Another organization which was vital to the retail aspect was the Branche Advies Commissie Amsterdam ZO (BAC). This committee was officially created by planning commissioner Stadig at the beginning of 1997 to provide advice on the retail mix for the superstores and catering facilities. It was charged with drawing up a priority list of various businesses to use when evaluating candidates wishing to establish themselves on the ArenA Boulevard (Gemeente Amsterdam Press Release 30 Jan, 1997). The fourteen-member group was drawn from representatives from many interested parties (but not directly interested as entrepreneur). The BAC was comprised of delegates from the municipality, district authority, OMC, KvK, manager of the Amsterdamse Poort, the Raad Nederlandse Detailhandel, the SME organization (MKB), large-scale retail interests (RIN), ethnic entrepreneurs (Allochtoon Ondernemerschap) and city center businesses (VAC). The BAC is a prime example of Dutch inclusionary politics where even competitors and opponents such as the VAC are incorporated into the decision-making process (see §6.1.1). Because of the input of the MKB and AO, companies run by or employing minorities would be given priority “in cases of equal suitability,” as would SMEs. This commission also made the final decision to exclude all food, fashion and department stores from the ArenA Boulevard. This is not surprising since this had already been the position taken by ROA in its 1996 retail structure vision, but quite surprising when compared to situations such as the Trafford Centre and even CentrO where the developer unilaterally draws up the retail mix. After fulfilling its main task of

\footnote{This last point may provide a clue as to why the ArenA Boulevard was not realized as a PPP: the city had experienced the problems associated with the loss of a major strategic partner due to an economic fluctuation, while ING (then NMB) had felt pressured to continue to invest in what it perceived to be an unprofitable enterprise (see §6.2.5).}
determining the product mix, the committee renamed itself the **Boulevard Overleg**, and turned to tasks such as maintenance and coordinating events (Interview Brandsema, 2001).

Another crucial actor is the **Zuidoost District Authority**, the second largest district in Amsterdam. As stated before, this district has approximately 85,000 residents, which by Dutch standards is a respectable city in itself. In addition to being plagued with a poor image, it has also struggled with financial difficulties. The “mayor” of the district during the ArenA Boulevard development, the charismatic Hannah Belliot, has since her appointment in 1992 taken a hard hand in balancing the budget and on matters of integration in order to break the cycle of subsidy dependence (Kessom, 2000). The role in which the district authority — either through the actions of its council or those of Hanna Belliot — has played in the development of the ArenA Boulevard has largely been dictated by the fact that decision-making over the project, having been declared of citywide importance, was shifted from the district authority to the city council. As a result of being “cut out of the loop” (Discussion Hofstede, 2000), the district authority redefined its role to that of an advocate for the interests of its residents. Specifically, this translated itself into appeals for more social integration between the Centrumgebied and the Bijlmer in order to ensure that the wealth generated on the one side would find its way to the other (Interview Brandsema, 2001). The district authority, for example, led the campaign to recruit unemployed Bijlmer residents for jobs created on the ArenA Boulevard. It also campaigned heavily for the new train station at the new location. (The Dutch railways were less enthusiastic about moving and raising the station, and had to be convinced to do so with an additional €4.5million subsidy from the city).

**Actor relations**

The most important organizational attribute which must be noted is that, while the interests of the public sector is ever-present in the design (great emphasis on public space, strict adherence to the PDV/GDV guidelines, and relationship to the Bijlmermeer), the Centrumgebied project is not a public-private partnership, but a public-private cooperation arrangement. This agreement, signed on 18 April 1996, laid down the guiding principles and distribution of tasks. For example, it was established that the municipality would not participate in the risk or the profit of the project (i.e. will not take responsibility for the development) but that it would coordinate the planning procedures (Sinnige, 2000: 8). It was also responsible for all future public spaces, making the site construction-ready and providing the necessary access for construction vehicles, and that OMC and the city would each pay half of the planning costs (Samenwerkingsovereenkomst, 1996: §6.2, §3.6.2). It was also agreed that both parties would help to promote the scheme. Thus, while the municipality had a great deal of influence at the early planning stages, the formal party responsible for the actual development is the OMC.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the ArenA Boulevard in relation to even analogous projects in the Netherlands is the special cooperation and collaboration mechanisms which arose to facilitate development. Formally, the OMC met with representatives from the city and district council via a commissioners’ consultation committee (**opdrachtgeversoverleg**) every two months to discuss and resolve issues by consensus (Samenwerkingsovereenkomst, 1996: §6.2). The minutes of these meetings, which were signed by representatives from each party, indicated the progress of the development and the issues that needed attention (Bedrijfshuisvesting 119, 1998: 32).
1996: §3.7.1). This constant formal collaboration according to the three-level vertical model (directive, decision-making and coordinating, see figure) kept the main stakeholders abreast of the latest developments as they unfolded. Operating somewhat outside of this “inner circle” of stakeholders, the district authority has functioned as a pressure group to gain concessions for residents.

The actual cooperation among the various parties involved in development was reported to be excellent. An OMC staff member commented that this was the first time that things went so smoothly: “you just needed a single phone call to city hall to get something done” (Discussion Hoogendoorn, 2000). In fact, the links forged between the various partners, although non-replicable, have proved so advantageous that some elements were seen by the actors as potentially serving as a model for future large-scale urban commercial developments (Interview Sentel, 2000; Interview Brandsema, 2001). Several reasons have been given for the apparent lack of friction. Part of this is due to the collective interest in seeing the project through to completion, and part is due to a shared culture of land development. Furthermore, the fact that there is one person charged with overseeing the entire project — Cor Brandsema, from the municipal planning department, and someone who was closely involved in the area for years — as a sort of “ring leader” facilitated relations immensely (Interview Sentel, 2000). In fact, if one is to believe this level of success, a distinct drawback to the OMC construction is its temporary ad hoc character: the partnership

\[\text{Figure 48: Constellation of public and private actors (Sinnige, 2000: 11)}\]

\[\text{156 This last point was made by G. Oomen, project head of Pathé cinemas and Mojo Concert Hall, “The cooperation between the project manager Centrumgebied Amsterdam Zuidoost and the municipal development agency is outstanding. We have of course a big advantage in our line of work: everyone speaks the same language” (AB2, 1999).}\]
is intended to only last so long as the project does — once all the parcels are sold, OMC should cease to exist.

### 6.4.5 Boulevard subprojects

Although the Centrumgebied was conceived of as a whole in the master plan, the buildings constructed along it have been developed in a piecemeal fashion by one of the three OMC partners and usually in conjunction with the future operator of the venue. This section will provide an overview of the various projects which comprise the ArenA Boulevard initiative, and signal some of the issues involved in their development. Special attention will be paid to the one failed project (Endemol theaters and hotels), the PDV-site Villa ArenA, and the GDV superstores.

The first act of the drama opened with the laying of the boulevard itself. In 1996, a broad stretch of pavement appeared in the emptiness near the stadium with no apparent purpose. The completed pedestrian walkway, complete with tiles and trees, seemed strangely out of place in a construction area. According to the developer, this caused some confusion — “people saw a gigantic runway and asked themselves ‘what are we supposed to do with this?’” (Interview Sentel, 2000). This curious ordering of activities was explained by the DRO as an attempt to “attract quality by offering quality” (Kalfsbeek, 1996: 6). By investing heavily in the common public space, it was hoped that parties developing the areas lining the Boulevard would follow suit. This apparently misunderstood symbolic gesture also failed in terms of practicality as well since the tiles were not designed to support the weight of the construction vehicles for the other facilities. It was therefore decided to replace the tiles with concrete until all the buildings are complete, reckoned to be in 2007.

The first facility to appear was the contested multiplex cinema Pathé Arena. Even before the Centrumgebied masterplan had been drawn up, neighboring Diemen was planning to have a 16-hall multiplex cinema built by the Belgian company Kinépolis. This kind of facility is exactly the kind that Amsterdam had wished to attract to the ArenA Boulevard, and could potentially undermine the viability of the project if located elsewhere. Amsterdam retaliated by enlisting the leading cinema operator Pathé to establish itself on the ArenA Boulevard, and taking legal action against Diemen’s proposal, and Diemen followed suit. Thus, Diemen attempted to block the development of Pathé ArenA, and Amsterdam that of its neighbor. In 1995 it scored an early victory when the metropolitan body ROA (unsurprisingly) sided with Amsterdam. Perhaps in order to stake its claim in the area, Pathé Arena opened before any other facility in the Centrumgebied. Its location is on the south side of the Boulevard next to Bijlmer station.\(^\text{157}\) As a building, its stark gray monolithic box-like structure is not wholly inviting to those outside on the Boulevard. Commercially, however, Pathé ArenA is being hailed as a success.\(^\text{158}\)

---

\(^{157}\) The Pathé Arena houses fourteen theaters and 3,250 seats — more than all of Utrecht’s cinemas combined, but slightly less than the Kinépolis proposal — and offers amenities such as wall-to-wall projection, large rooms and digital sound. However, the main advantage is the fact that a new film begins every ten minutes: allowing visitors to simply drop in to see a film, rather than planning ahead. A final competitive edge is the parking facilities, or perhaps more accurately put, the relative lack of parking facilities in competing inner-city cinemas (Janette-Walen and Kapoen, 2000).

\(^{158}\) In the first week of opening, it attracted 13,000 visitors, and the cinema reached its 100,000 goal only five weeks later (AB5, 2000). At the same time, several small cinemas in the inner city closed, and plans for several new multiplexes (Pathé De Munt and Noord) materialized. This placed the question of impact on the city center on the political agenda. Although cinemas do not fall under the PDV/GDV policy (Boer, 2000b), their effects on existing facilities are also keenly felt and feared. This is all the more so with the new generation of mega-
Rather than abandon its original intent once Pathé ArenA had been built, the battle over multiplexes between Amsterdam and Diemen continued to rage. This sparked interest in the impacts of large-scale cinemas, specifically on city centers (Janette-Walen and Kapoen, 2000). Initially, the province upheld the ROA decision, but upon new insights obtained by market research — and an appeal by Diemen to the Raad van State (Echo 9 Feb, 2000: 1) — changed its mind (AS 20 Sept, 2000: 3). While the DRO has remained cautious about its statements pending the litigation, a civil servant (Jacob van der Zwaan) did indicate that he felt that the need for another mega-cinema in the region was “very small” (AS 8 Nov, 2000: 1). A study undertaken by the University of Amsterdam confirmed this: it showed that the Diemen proposal would be more damaging to the newly built complex on the ArenA Boulevard than Amsterdam city center. However, as Amsterdam had always argued that the Diemen project would compromise its city center rather than the ArenA Boulevard, the city council finally abandoned its appeal. As luck would have it, one year later (2002), Kinépolis finally abandoned its proposal as well. A recent judgment by the Raad van State in favor of Diemen may however rekindle interest of Kinépolis (Parool 27 Feb, 2003: 2).

Another major attraction is the **Mojo Concerts Hall** (now Heineken Music Hall), a midrange pop-music venue with 3,500 seats or 5,000 standing places. Aside from this primary function, the space is available to rent for corporate parties, conventions or can be used as a TV studio. Mojo was an amicable candidate as it had originally wanted to be included in the waterfront plans (Discussion Brandsemia, 2000). It also received a discount on the land (NRC 14 Aug, 1996: 15). As a venue, the Heineken Music Hall has been quite successful, drawing over 400,000 visitors in its first year and being nominated as the world’s best concert hall — only to be beaten by Manchester’s Evening News Arena (AB9, 2002: 2). Despite its obvious contribution as a magnet, one can seriously question the contribution this will make to the livability on the ArenA Boulevard. Its gray box-like outer façade is uninviting and soulless.

---

A study of Pathé Arena visitors found that most, however, were drawn from outside the city, thus supporting its claim as a regional facility (AS 6 Sept, 2000).
continuing a line begun by the equally stark and impersonal Pathé multiplex. Evidently the jubilation will take place inside, and not outside. In a slightly different context, Stiekema, the head of the Heineken Music Hall, proudly remarked “It [Mojo Concerts Hall] is just like a black box, cut off from the outside world, optimally isolated in terms of sound” (AB5, 2000). The fact that facilities such as the Postbank Lounge and Planet Internetstage (Internet café) and the purchase of snacks and drinks can only be accessed by ticket-holders (and using special tokens, like the stadium) only reemphasizes this willful estrangement from the surrounding public area.

Keeping in line with the mixed-use aspiration, the Centrumgebied plans also include offices and residential units, which are expected to also assist the overall profitability of the project. The most spectacular office development is the 95-meter Oval tower. Its 25 stories and 24,000m² of office space will provide additional capacity to the Amstel III businesses. More office space is being offered in the multicolored Rainbow Offices above the superstores along the arcade and in the ArenA Towers towards the far end of the Boulevard near the Villa ArenA. Interestingly, the tallest building in the area is being built not with a commercial but a residential function. The planned height of the Woontoren is 150-meters with the ground floor containing various public amenities (including shopping) and the top story a lookout and a restaurant. The approximately 300 units will range between 100-200m² in size, and cost between €180,000 and €360,000, depending on the height (Volkskrant 24 Oct, 1998). This is certainly not social housing. As the high-end housing market has become even tighter since 1998, the final price is expected to be even higher (about 25%). The developers have claimed that this scheme will make the area livelier, especially in the evening. However, this argument rests on shaky ground: it is probable that Woontoren residents will not spend much time on the Boulevard at night unless adequate facilities are in place. It is more probable that they proceed directly from their cars to the elevators.

Without a doubt, the darkest moment of the history of the ArenA Boulevard involved the parcel to be developed by the entertainment magnate Joop van de Ende. His (former) company, Endemol, had been in negotiations with the municipality for years regarding the construction of a Broadway-class Endemol theater in Amsterdam. At the end of the 1980s, for example, the company tried to build at the location of the Heineken Brewery, but this initiative was successfully blocked by the district authority De Pijp (FD 8 Nov, 1995). Due to the cultural importance such a theater would have for Amsterdam, the city council assumed power for all subsequent decision-making on the project, rather than leave it up to the districts.

Despite Endemol’s preference for a city-center location, the municipality was keen to direct investment to the ArenA Boulevard (Volkskrant 21 April, 1999: 9). In the negotiations, Van de Ende was enticed by tales of the expected urban allure of the area, the excellent accessibility an offer to buy the land for the symbolic price of one guilder (NRC 14 Aug, 1996: 15). While the guilder obtained much coverage in the press, the total amount that the entertainment company was prepared to invest in the area was € 136 million (Bouman, 1997). The plans included a large theater complex (8,500m²), a ballroom and two five-star hotels (FD 15 Feb, 1997; VGM Nov, 1996: 7). Although some parties were worried about the possible impact the theaters would have on establishments like Carré in the city (Discussion Brandsema, 2000), this was seen as providing an important impulse to the ArenA Boulevard, and soon became one of its main building blocks.

159 Since this time, Endemol has been sold to the Spanish telecom company Teléfonica.
For several months, things seemed to be running smoothly with the planning, and the Dutch architect Arno Meijs had been approached to design the Endemol complex. A spokesperson for Endemol at the time explained that, “we’re not yet at the contract stage yet. But we do see ourselves as definitely committed. In two years time, it will be there” (in NRC 14 Aug, 1996: 15). However this was not to be: as the plans were gelling, Joop van de Endes suddenly decided otherwise — supposedly after driving to the site “one rainy autumn morning” in 1996 and deciding that it lacked the necessary urban character to support an upscale theater (Interview Sentel, 2000; Metz, 2002: 146). The public reason given by the company, however, was that too much money was needed to upgrade the area into a true entertainment center. There were some attempts to get Endemol to reconsider, but to no avail.

The shock and disappointment of the other stakeholders was intense. Although the financial contribution was substantial (about half of the total investment), it was not nearly as important as the allure generated by a prestigious Endemol theater. The theaters were intended to act as magnets for the other facilities much like a department store does in a regional center (Dawson, 1983; Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989; Guy, 1994a), the loss of which could have significant effects on the rents that can be fetched from non-anchor tenants (Sirmans et al, 1996: 262). Shortly after the decision, the aghast OMC director Ton van der Zijden complained that, “I wonder why Joop van den Ende didn’t say this sooner. If he didn’t like the location, he should have told us a year and a half ago” (Volkskrant 15 Feb, 1997). Similarly, Pathé, who had been obliged to conform to various demands placed by Endemol in the project, felt betrayed by the sudden withdrawal. Mojo, for its part, expressed disappointment because it had been lured to Zuidoost by the promise of close proximity to an Endemol entertainment center (FD 15 Feb, 1997). Fortunately for the OMC, none of these partners decided to follow Endemol’s example.

After the withdrawal, the OMC was given a six-month deadline by the city to come up with an alternative plan for the site (VGM v24 Dec, 1997: 5-7). Soon, rumors began to circulate regarding tenants such as Disney and Cirque du Soleil, the latter being cited as a fait accompli in the real-estate magazine Bedrijfshuisteuning (119, 1998: 27). These names were also circulated by the newspaper De Telegraaf, to the annoyance of the municipality which “would neither confirm nor deny” any contact with these parties (Termaat, 2001). However, neither of these tenants came, and the functions of the 200,000m² parcel was broken down into smaller parcels. An entirely new concept was then sought in a collaborative effort between the city, OMC and architectural firm Cie (De Jong and Voskuil, 2000: 15; AB4 1999). The result is the Getz Urban Entertainment Center, a project with ambitions on the scale of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin or Times Square in New York. Getz is a Dutch acronym for the various intended functions: G=gezondheid (health and fitness), E=entertainment (disco and casino), T=theaters, and Z=zakelijk (office, hotel and conference rooms). In 2001 the city council approved the plans for Getz, and offered to pay €227,000 towards its completion (Gemeente Amsterdam Press Release 9 May, 2001). Two hundred companies

---

160 Parts of the continued negotiations included possibilities of locating on the South Axis (Zuidas) or in Utrecht city center. The most recent reports point to a new location near the neighborhood De Pijp where Endemol had originally wanted to locate before the ArenA Boulevard development (PropertyNL 28 Jan, 2004).

161 Perhaps one of the root causes of the consternation of the various actors to Endemol’s decision lay in the fact that most parties had considered it as an “assurance game” in which a high payoff to all is guaranteed provided that all parties coordinate their actions. The fact that the Endemol Company failed to do this did not only disappoint the other players, but seemed to defy logic itself.
have indicated that they are interested in obtaining space in Getz (Parool 23 Aug, 2000), although no public announcements have been made thus far. As before, there were rumors of new tenants, this time Disney, Warner Brothers and the Efteling were cited (Metz, 2002: 146). The theater, the main function, was more problematic in finding an operator. Eyes turned again to Endemol. However, the announcement of Joop van de Ende that he wished to build his theater on the Zuidas shattered all hope for a significant musical theater on the ArenA Boulevard. The “T” in Getz, therefore, will most likely be divided up into smaller entertainment venues (AB8, 2002: 4).

Because the site had to be rezoned from its original function as an Endemol theater, the scheduling of this part of the boulevard has been significantly compromised. It would not be until 2004 that work on Getz could begin, and it is not expected to open until 2007 — over a decade after the completion of the stadium. Until this time, the municipality found a temporary solution to this hole in the ArenA Boulevard: the Grace Theater. This concerned a temporary structure built in the summer of 2001 for the benefit of a single musical series about Grace Kelly (AB7, 2001: 5). It is clothed in yellowish plastic drapes that simulate the palace of Monaco, which gives it a rather surreal quality. The structure is intended to remain only two years (until the end of 2001), after which the Russian national circus and Cirque du Soleil would occupy the area. The musical Grace turned out to be a flop, and the temporary structure was bought by the municipality and promptly resold to the Heineken Music Hall. In its new incarnation as the “Pepsi Stage” it will retain some theater events, but mixed with popular music (AB9, 2002: 1).

162 This coincided with another plan to build another venue in the Centrumgebied called the Music Dome that can accommodate up to 15,000 visitors. After including this into the official plans, the project was abandoned because the city council decided in late 2003 to locate the facility in the North Amsterdam district.
The most prestigious project on the ArenA Boulevard is the Villa ArenA, a furniture mall at the far west end. At 180,000m² of space — 80,000m² of which is sales space — it is also the largest. This luxury PDV-location is divided amongst 70 shops, and claims to be the largest home-furnishings mall in the Netherlands (AB2, 1999; AB6, 2000: 2). The firm Benthem & Crouwel Architects (of Schiphol fame) was responsible for producing the design, a four-story enclosed mall format that resembles Alexandrium III (the furniture mall in Rotterdam’s GDV). The ground floor has a fountain, and sometimes a grand piano, to set the mood for a purchase. OMC was firm in its decision to exclude discount formulas from the Villa ArenA (Bedrijfshuisvesting 126, 1999: 63-65). Finding occupants was not a major concern however: most of the renters were merchants from the Diemen meubelboulevard who were dissatisfied with the location since the completion of the A10 ring road had redirected traffic away (Interview Van de Kolk, 1999; Interview Sentel, 2000; Interview Mortel, 2002). Due in part to the mass-influx from Diemen, the Villa ArenA was 40% rented by the time construction began (Info Regio, 1998: 44), and about 80% six months before opening. In its first year, it drew 1.3 million visitors and won a prize for the “most commercial” shopping center in the Netherlands (AB9, 2002: 2). It also gained an early notoriety for a bacteria-infected fountain (Parool 29 Sept, 2001) and noncompliance with fire safety regulations (Parool 9 May, 2001: 2). The Utrecht investment group Corio bought a 60% interest in Villa ArenA (the remaining 40% being owned by the retailers themselves) and some of the ArenA arcade (Parool 21 May, 2001: 9).

The final tenants, and the most significant for this study, are the superstores. In light of the Kolpron recommendations regarding optimal retail mix, some peculiar choices were made regarding the occupants of the GDV. The sports stores Decathlon (7,000m²) and Perry Sport

---

163 Although this magnitude may seem absurd, furniture is a growing sector in the Dutch economy. In the Netherlands, entire interiors change according to the whims of fashion (Parool 21 May, 2001: 3).
are understandable choices given the proximity of the stadium, but the second Media Markt (5,400m²), competes directly with the discount electronics outlet BCC at the head of the Amsterdamse Poort. More remarkably, space will be allocated to Prénatal, a superstore specializing in baby products — the worst choice in terms of impact on other shops according to Kolpron (Parool 23 Aug, 2000). One similarity between the superstores, besides providing a wide and deep range of merchandise, is their stated ambition to become a leisure destination.

Another facility, somewhat tangential to the ArenA Boulevard because it is located to the south of the Villa Arena along the Holtebergweg, is the Living Tomorrow project. This museum/leisure attraction attempts to present a “house of the future” to its visitors. There are already two successful examples of this in Belgium. One commercial advantage to this project is the support of companies featured in the future households, due to the publicity thus obtained (AB8, 2002: 4).

While not a project per se, one of the most important aspect to any mixed-use commercial development is the available space for parking. Despite the propensity of Dutch planners to favor public transportation modes in policy documents, the adage “no parking, no business” is well known to Dutch shopkeepers. Indeed, in an age where private car ownership and use is rising sharply in the Netherlands, the provision of adequate parking space is generally seen as imperative for commercial success. The location of parking facilities also reveals the impact that the public sector (city of Amsterdam) has had on the ArenA Boulevard project design. Although many of the subprojects supply their own facilities, notably the stadium, Villa ArenA and Pathé, the total number of spaces — and thus the overall parking availability — is a key statistic. If one includes the garages in the immediate area, there are approximately 7,000 spaces for the entire Centrumgebied. OMC has indicated that it feels this rather modest, but the municipality has resolutely opposed the addition of extra capacity (VGM v24 Dec, 1997: 5). Perhaps more important is the fact that the ArenA Boulevard itself is closed to all automobile traffic. This would surely never have happened if only the private sector were responsible for development (Interview Sentel, 2000).

6.4.6 Planning procedures and phasing
The master plan, of which the map displayed in §6.4.2.2 forms a part, was approved by the city council on 16 November 1997. This marked an important milestone in the cooperation between the municipality, district, and the OMC. However, this document had no legal status. In order to translate the agreements established in the master plan into a legally binding local plan, a number of procedural steps had to be followed, including a public hearing. This process was accelerated via an “article 19 procedure” which allows permissions to be issued on the basis of a provisional local plan. Interestingly enough, the most burning issue discussed regarded not the commercial impact of the Boulevard, but the possible noise

164 This decision can be explained however. Prénatal is a subsidiary of Vendex, and the fact that most other shops in the area selling this merchandise are also owned by Vendex will mean that losses incurred by this outlet will be primarily be felt by itself (Interview Sinnige, 2000; Interview Sentel, 2000).

165 This is accomplished by such means as displaying products in their environment, such as Perry Sports’ presentation of outdoor equipment in a simulated mountainous area, complete with waterfall (Parool 23 Aug, 2000). Decathlon has placed its emphasis on the possibility of trying out sports equipment before buying, supplying an inline skating rink and a climbing wall (AB6, 2000: 1). On the other hand, Media Markt has taken a more straightforward approach: it provides a wide assortment of electronic equipment for low prices and lets the products speak for themselves (the latter point somewhat lamented by the developers wishing to associate the Boulevard with exclusiveness rather than bargains).
pollution caused by the Burgemeester Stramanweg for the planned schools and housing in the area and for current residents, specifically the nearby Venserpolder. A resident, for example, was worried that the ArenA Boulevard would become something similar to La Défense in Paris: soulless, dreary and gray (Parool 21 April, 1999). These are, interestingly, the same adjectives employed to describe the ArenA Boulevard a few years later when the venues began to open their doors (Hulsman, 2001). The city council convened to discuss the Centrumgebied Amsterdam Zuidoost proposal on 2 December 1998, and approved it a fortnight later. The next step was to obtain approval from the province, necessitating the treatment of objections made by other municipalities and to take the local plans of neighboring communities into account. Ouder-Amstel, for example, objected to the plans for the 150 meter high-rise apartments (Woontoren), claiming that it will undermine the fragile cultural-historical landscape along the Amstel river (Volkskrant 24 Oct, 1998). After several years of litigation, the Raad van State finally gave the green light to Amsterdam for the highrises (AS 24 Jan, 2001: 1).

Because of the nature of this development, as a complex decision-making process between various public and private actors, agreements needed to be made about procedures and phasing, and specifically which decisions were necessary to move the project forward. This was also established in the cooperation contract which identified five distinct phases: research, definition, development, realization and completion/follow-up. These will be treated in the box below.

### Phasing

The goal of the **research** phase was to bring about the completion of a master plan in which general lines were set out. It seeks to determine the viability of the project, and measure the desire to move forward with the cooperation. This is the most creative phase because not much is set in stone, and the various parties have the freedom to consider diverse possibilities for development. Here, “one probes the frontiers of the (im)possible” (Sinnige, 2000: 29). This is also the time at which agreements are made about the deployment of resources (e.g. expertise, experience and manpower), the decision-making process, the legal or financial consequences of opting out and the drawing up of a timetable. The general master plan which rounds off this phase should contain urban architectural studies, a list of criteria, an estimate of the size (physical, functional and financial), market analysis, risk analysis, conclusions regarding viability and development of a number of scenarios to help set the land price (Sinnige, 2000: 30).

The aim of the **definition** phase is to give the green light to the project, based on what has been set out in the global master plan. This signals the beginning of a capital intensive process and the involvement of other parties such as architects. During the **development phase** the project(s) are designed, agreements are made about the exchange of land titles, organization of communication activities and search for occupants and a buyer for the project. At the end of this phase, the building can commence. Then, upon completion of the buildings, the transfer is made to the new tenants, ushering in the **realization phase**. Finally, there is a **completion/follow-up phase** which concerns issues of evaluation and management.

As rational as the phasing may look on paper, the gritty reality of the Centrumgebied area was that all different phases seemed to intersect one another as the timeframe for one project intersected (or interfered) with that of another. The timeline below gives an indication of the intense level of construction activity in the area spanning over a decade. This continual upheaval can leave a scar by tainting visitor’s first impressions of the Boulevard. Unlike planned out-of-town shopping malls that open all at once with a well-orchestrated grand opening, the ArenA Boulevard is often reported as a desolate area.
Although many attractions were present on the ArenA Boulevard by the end of 2000, official completion will not occur until the renovated Bijlmer station and the Getz center open in 2007 — over ten years after the first football match was played in the ArenA stadium. At this stage, it is not clear whether there will be a single management for the ArenA Boulevard such as is common in out-of-town shopping centers, nor whether this management will encompass the Amsterdamse Poort (Interview Brandsema, 2001).
There are already some points on which the design of the Boulevard can be criticized. First, the potential for integration with the Amsterdamse Poort is somewhat doubtful given that many facilities in the Centrumgebied (stadium, cinema, concert hall) have a more evening-oriented clientele — a time at which the shops in the Amsterdamse Poort are closed. Another point regards the Eastern terminus of the Boulevard at Hoekenrode, the soulless courtyard wedged between the Nieuw Amsterdam office blocks (AB1, 1998). Therefore, the claims of the DRO that “the area around the station in the evening and in the weekend has [sic.] a busy, urban character” (DRO homepage consulted in Sept. 2000) can, if true at all, only be said for the western side. It must be added that at the time of this writing, the area still has an uninviting atmosphere even in full daylight, as some of the facilities still linger in a half-built state. As the station is not slated to be completed until 2006, this is not a problem of an ephemeral nature. Unless this can be successfully upgraded, it is doubtful that pedestrians will want to “flow freely” into the Amsterdamse Poort area.

Others have expressed their reservations about the logic behind constructing such a wide and long public space in a relatively unpopulated area. The comparison, cited above, of the Boulevard to a “runway” is telling. However, this description is much more flattering than that given by a NRC Handelsblad columnist a few years later, namely, that it looked like the “kind of megalomaniac squares that unpopular dictators have constructed in tribute of themselves” (Hulsman, 2001). The choice for placing large kiosks in the middle of the Boulevard has broken the monotony somewhat, but has also blocked the view of the stadium from many angles, which may undermine the sense of place. Moreover, the patrons (FEBO and Bakker Bart) are not the first names that spring to mind with the concept of allure.

If deserted, the grand scale amplifies the emptiness, and the style of the buildings only heightens this feeling of despondency and isolation. The facades of Pathé and Mojo, which
make up most of the south side of the boulevard, are soulless and gray. Only their corporate logos set them apart. Villa ArenA, too far away to participate in the public space on the Boulevard, is also introverted: “as dark and closed as the Villa ArenA may seem on the outside, so light and open it is from within” (Parool 12 April, 2001: 2). In addition, by allowing cars to arrive from the street to the west and park on the roof, motorists can make a daytrip to the Villa ArenA without ever having to set foot on the Arena Boulevard. This may be the — unintended — trump card of the inner city against peripheral developments: “in the inner city, there are things to experience on the street; on the periphery, all experiences are on the inside” (Metz, 2002: 148). On the outside, the Arena Boulevard is still rather inhospitable, characterized by construction sites and by rising crime levels: in 2002 there was a 37% rise in the number of incidents while the rest of the city saw a reduction (AS 3 April, 2002). One proposed solution was the placement of CCTV cameras on the Boulevard, a sad commentary on the ideals of public space inherent in the urban design. At present, when walking on the Arena Boulevard it is hard to imagine that this area — together with the Amsterdamse Poort — is intended to attract 27 million visitors annually (Bruijne, 2002: 51).

6.5 Issues and impacts
One problem endemic to most projects in which the public sector works closely with the private sector in urban development, and in which the Arena Boulevard is no exception, is the question of democratic representation and procedure. Most accounts of the Arena Boulevard development process have praised the municipality for calling in the private sector at an early stage in the planning process, rather than employing the old “command and control” method of first zoning land in a local plan and then hoping that private parties will respond. A spokesperson from the OMC, for example, explained that, “before the 1990s, the private sector was called in much later, as the government believed in the malleability of society” (Discussion Hoogendoorn, 2000). On the other hand, the earlier private parties become involved in urban revitalization projects, the greater the risk to democratic decision-making (Frieden and Sagayn, 1989). This section will take pause to reflect on this question by asking how the interests of local residents were addressed, and the potential impact that the developments along the Arena Boulevard can have for businesses in the inner city or Amsterdamse Poort.

6.5.1 Relationship with the Bijlmermeer
The flurry of planning activity at Amstel III during the 1980s and early 1990s was primarily targeted at attracting white-collar employment and did little to help the largely unskilled labor pool in the Bijlmer housing estates. The jobs mismatch became more acute in the course of the 1990s as Amstel III gained in popularity as a highly accessible and relatively affordable business park (Nimako, 1997). Over 55,000 people worked in this area in 2001, and this number is expected to grow to 70,000 by 2010 (Bruijne, 2002: 29). Meanwhile, the nearby Bijlmer faced an unemployment rate of over 25% (Discussion Hofstede, 2000). Jobs became a poignant political issue once plans for building the stadium and the Arena Boulevard became known. It is at this time that the district authority began playing a larger role as a spokesperson for the residents. The increased involvement with the Bijlmer manifested itself in two distinct ways. Socio-economically, there was a drive to ensure that the growth in jobs in the Centrumgebied would go to the Bijlmer unemployed. Physically, there was a desire to alter the urban landscape from the detested high-rise estates to suburban-style family houses.
6.5.1.1 Physical renewal of the Bijlmer

As the decade wore on, the fate of the Bijlmermeer became evermore linked to the area across the tracks. Over the years, various initiatives had sought to reverse the downward spiral and poor image of the area, and one of the most important steps in this direction was the establishment of the agency Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer in 1992, a joint venture between the city of Amsterdam, the district of Zuidoost, and the housing association Nieuw Amsterdam. One of the first priorities of this group was to improve the physical structure of the area (housing, shops and infrastructure). The arrival of the stadium and the concurrent promise of investment in Zuidoost a year later signaled that change was finally in the air.

As quickly as buildings rose from the ground on the west side, so did buildings fall on the east. The infamous honeycombs were breaking apart: some buildings were refurbished, some lost wings, and others were cleared altogether. What came in their place were mostly single-family suburban-style homes for the midrange market. According to plans, almost 60% of all Bijlmer housing stock (12,500 total) will consist of this kind of dwelling by 2006 (Parool 26 Aug, 2000: 1); it is also estimated that of the thirty high-rise estates, only ten will remain standing by 2007 (NRC 27 Nov, 1999: 39). Even more upscale dwellings are now under construction (240 urban villas on Burgemeester Stramanweg). At the beginning of the new decade, the shopping center Ganzenhoef was also demolished and rebuilt above ground. Demand among retailers in the new center was so high that all the space was allocated before opening (AS 21 June, 2000). On balance, most residents view these new developments positively, and take pride in the investment pouring into the district. Much of this may be due to pure quiescence, however, considering that over 60% of Bijlmer residents are foreign-

---

166 This effort was supported by a €409 million investment by the city and Centrale Fonds Volkshuisvesting (CFV).
born, and thus difficult to mobilize. Some have expressed fears that these renewal activities will exacerbate social disparities. Furthermore, despite the physical renewal of buildings, social problems and a lack of social cohesion and control remain. New facilities are clashing with old habits, and tales of blaring music, vandalism, trash and urination are common in the renovated areas as well. The new private gardens, for example, often remain unattended, and the new terraced balconies are made unsafe by falling cassette recorders, bottles and boiling water jettisoned by residents above (Echo 30 Aug, 2000: 1).

6.5.1.2 Socio-economic renewal of the Bijlmer

As noted above, one of the most glaring differences between the respective halves of Zuidoost was the white (collar) employment in Amstel III, and the (black) unemployment in the Bijlmer. Promises had been made during the construction of the ArenA that this would change, especially with the arrival of low-skilled jobs on the ArenA Boulevard. However, this transition proved far from easy.

In 1996, the unexpectedly high turnout for the listed vacancies (e.g. 1,500 candidates for less than 100 jobs) made it clear that the stadium alone could not solve the Bijlmer’s unemployment problem (Telegraaf 20 March, 1996). Moreover, the ArenA’s hiring policies immediately came under fire because the stadium was recruiting university students instead of Bijlmer residents for its jobs in catering, security and sanitation.

However, as most of these jobs were low paid and offered on an unattractive zero-hour contract (i.e. no medical

167 This was corroborated by an ArenA spokesperson. Zuidoost Commissioner H. Burleson-Isajas said, “I really do hope these jobs are not just going to students. However, if I find that employment doesn’t increase among residents after the stadium opens, I will have to ask [the city of] Amsterdam for help, because I think that is simply unacceptable.” (Telegraaf 10 Aug, 1996).
insurance) and on-call basis, this provided little incentive to those enjoying unemployment benefits.

In the promotional newsletter *Arena Boulevard*, the council chair of the Zuidoost district Belliot pointed to the continued existence of a mental divide in her district — Bijlmer residents commonly refer to the Centrumgebied as “the other side” (AB1, 1998). With the opening of the Rainbow Offices in April 1999, the district chair repeated, “I hope that those living in the Bijlmer can also pluck the fruits of the wealth that is doubtlessly being created here” (AB3, 1999). For example, while certainly signaling an integration of functions, the planned luxury apartments towering over the stadium is unlikely to bring about an integration of people as few apartments will be bought by former Bijlmer inhabitants. Similarly, when one looks at the target group for some of the facilities on the Arena Boulevard, it looks nothing like the multiculturalism of the Bijlmer: the Villa ArenA brochure for example, portrays almost exclusively white families.

The need for socioeconomic integration of the two halves has sparked some “unorthodox” responses among the local business community and district authorities. The most interesting of these is the establishment of the “Arena Initiative” launched in 1997. This program seeks to train unemployed Bijlmer residents for jobs on the Arena Boulevard. One of the concrete initiatives of the program — to integrate the public employment agency with several private temporary agencies — resulted in a great increase in the number of job queries. The director of the Bedrijvenvereniging Amsterdam Zuidoost La Rose explained that the first meeting was “a crisis” because the great discrepancy between both worlds had resulted in an “explosive situation” along ethnic lines (FD 31 July, 1999). Partly due to the political sensitivity of the issue, the business community agreed to invest in training potential employees, rather than simply recruiting students. Facilities to support this include a radio program that encourages Bijlmer youth to apply for jobs around the new Arena complex, and a training center called the Arena Academie. This training school guaranteed a job upon graduation by negotiating placement with the business community beforehand (Interview Baljon, 2001). In 2000, Vereniging Zuidoost director La Rose announced that all new Arena Boulevard jobs would go to local residents (Echo 9 Feb, 2000). Others are less sanguine about the success of this “polder-model in the Bijlmer” (Discussion Hofstede, 2000; Discussion Mooren, 2003). Indeed, the latest reports are rather sobering: the unemployment rate in Zuidoost, after several years of decline is once again rising. The enthusiasm was further dampened upon the discovery that the head of the Arena Academie had, in the process of placing disadvantaged youth in low-paying jobs, embezzled about € 363,000 for himself (AS 11 June, 2001: 1).

### 6.5.1.3 Shrugging the poor image

In spite of all the building activity in the Bijlmer and the Centrumgebied, falling crime rates and the creation of jobs, Zuidoost continues to be portrayed in a negative light in the media. In 2000, there was a controversy surrounding the relocation of the IT company Getronics to the suburb Hoofddorp because of the alleged high crime rate. Other companies that threatened to vacate the area for similar reasons were Albert Heijn and Kwik Fit, while the telecommunications companies UPC and KPN publicly stated that they refuse to send their personnel into Zuidoost at night (Parool 13 April 2000; AS 13 April, 2000: 1). In fact, Kwik Fit demanded compensation from the city for failing to provide adequate safety (Makenbach, 2000). Another painful symbol of the continued low status of especially the Bijlmer was a brochure for European Cup visitors that displayed a map in which the train station was situated at the far end “to prevent people from going astray in the Bijlmer” (Discussion Hofstede, 2000). Finally, there were reports in the press that most taxi drivers refuse to travel...
to Zuidoost (AS 23 Aug, 2000: 1), and a shooting on the still uncompleted ArenA Boulevard did not help matters either (Interview Sentel, 2000). All this placed the question of safety and crime in Zuidoost on the agenda (Parool 29 April, 2000: 4). Although the district authority has produced figures of rapidly falling crime rates (38% in muggings since the year before), the stereotypical image of the Bijlmer has proven stronger (Parool 14 April, 2000: 1).

6.5.2 Effects and impacts

Unlike the previous two cases, it is still much too early to measure the effects of the GDV and surrounding facilities on other areas. At the proposal stage, there were many fears that the superstores would harm shops in the city center and the Amsterdamse Poort (FD 3 Sept, 1996; Interview Van der Kolk, 1999). The Kolpron ex ante study had predicted only moderate levels of trade deflection from the city center, but this research is almost ten years old. Since that time, some research has been done on the effect of individual facilities, notably the multiplex Pathé Arena as part of the legal battle with Diemen, and a trade deflection study of the major superstores is being planned by the University of Amsterdam. However, these are isolated studies, rather than a study of the impact of the ArenA Boulevard as a whole, and the positive spin-off effects of the non-retail functions (e.g. new residents in the Woontoren, Getz center) once they are realized and operating. By this time, the second phase of the GDV may be in place as well (an additional 30,000m² of superstores). One of the greatest uncertainties for the future of the Arena Boulevard will be Getz, and its potential to draw patrons to the area. It is also unclear whether the link between the Arena Boulevard and Amsterdamse Poort as a result of the new Bijlmer station (to be completed in 2007) will indeed produce the much hoped-for synergy between these two centers as well. Finally, the ramifications of the far-reaching liberalization and decentralization of national retail planning policy are still unclear. If it results in a flood of new initiatives for peripheral development, such as what occurred in Manchester or the Ruhrgebiet, this could potentially compromise the viability of the Arena Boulevard, especially if this expansion is followed by an economic recession. Therefore, most current estimates of impact can at this point only reside in the realm of speculation and conjecture.

Regarding this speculation, OMC and the municipality have had to walk a fine line between promoting the new center as something exciting and attractive for potential investors and patrons, and at the same time playing down the effects that the developments would have on existing centers. Because of this, a rather mixed message is often produced. One way that the developer worked around this dilemma was to claim that the GDV will not undermine the vitality of the inner city because they serve different clienteles: one prefers the urbane surroundings of the historic center while comparison shopping, and the group is drawn by big events and goal-oriented purchases (Parool 23 Aug, 2000). Another attempt to reconcile the promotion/impact dilemma has been to refer to an almost mystical “region” from which the various retail and entertainment will draw their sales. Both the city center and Zuidoost can serve this growing region without undermining each other’s profitability. Defending the Arena Boulevard project, the municipal planning agency argued, “the Amsterdam region is gradually evolving into a network of urban centers that reinforce each other … there is room for urban center developments outside the city center” (Kalfsbeek, 1996: 4). Since the facilities situated on the Arena Boulevard have a “super-regional function” the Centrumgebied can rightly call itself another center of Amsterdam (AB1, 1998). However, this once again undermines the previous claim that the Arena Boulevard and the city center — the most important regional center — will not significantly overlap.
6.5.3 Comparison to other GDVs

Two other GDVs were completed before the first shop opened on the ArenA Boulevard: Alexandrium in Rotterdam, and MegaStores in The Hague. This section will briefly examine the other two projects and compare their strengths and weaknesses to ascertain what kinds of effects may be expected in Amsterdam.

The first GDV to appear was Alexandrium, built in a postwar urban extension of Rotterdam. This project, like the ArenA Boulevard, consists of a combination of the already-existing district shopping center Oosterhof, superstores (GDV) and a furniture mall (PDV). The integration of these three areas is achieved not only physically via a bridge (and later a new wing) connecting the old district center Oosterhof, but linguistically by renaming it Alexandrium I (Rotterdams Dagblad 4 Jan, 1999; VGM Sept, 1999: 73). The GDV then became Alexandrium II (26,000m$^2$), and the furniture mall Alexandrium III (62,000m$^2$). The site is readily accessible by rail and by car, and unlike the ArenA Boulevard, there is ground-level parking directly outside the superstores (Jannette-Walen and Kapoen, 1998). The total number of parking spaces is 4,000. The retail mix for the superstores was established in a private contract and tied to the sale of the land and, in addition to adhering to the 1,500m$^2$ minimum size requirement, excluded food and fashion so as not to compete with Oosterhof/Alexandrium I. Thus, here too, the GDV was not completely free of product restrictions.

Before Alexandrium, this was a problematic area, and most development had occurred in an ad hoc manner (Ten Cate, 1997). In 1990 the district authority drew up an ambitious masterplan for the area, and worked with the developer to realize it. Unlike the ArenA Boulevard, it was easier to attract operators to the GDV part than the PDV part of the scheme. Nevertheless, at opening there was more than enough interest in Alexandrium III to rent 95% of the space (FD, 15 May 1996). There were conflicting reports about the level of Alexandrium’s commercial success after its opening in 1995 (II) and 1996 (III) — Alexandrium I had been operating as Oosterhof since 1984. An initial survey by TU Delft found disappointing results in terms of footfall and average sales, but the tenants of the project seemed satisfied (Rotterdams Dagblad 15 May 1996). An impact analysis showed that the sales feeding Alexandrium I and II were drawn mostly from other centers in this part of the Rotterdam conurbation. Alexandrium III had a slightly more regional/recreational function.

The second GDV to open in the Netherlands was MegaStores in The Hague at a site called Laakhaven. As with the ArenA Boulevard, this commercial development was torn between the aspiration of regenerating a derelict site in a low-income region and the possible impacts this would have on the inner city. According to the D&P advice that provided the context of the development, if the city wished to not have the GDV compete with existing centers, it should be located at least 80% outside of their catchment area (D&P, 1994: 17). Because of this, The Hague’s decision for the Laakhaven site not far from the city center required design compromises. The Hague decided, for example, against allowing a multiplex cinema in the project because it would compete too much with the inner city (Boer, 2000b). Unlike the ArenA Boulevard, The Hague’s GDV is very retail-oriented, with rents ranging from € 90/m$^2$ for large-scale retailers to € 180/m$^2$ for smaller shops (VGM Jan, 2000: 13). Unlike Alexandrium and the ArenA Boulevard, MegaStores is a single structure built at one time. It still lacks internal coherence as different kinds of retail types are situated alongside one another with no clear theme. Like the ArenA Boulevard and Alexandrium, tenants were selected partly on the basis of not posing significant competition for the inner city.
Within a year of opening, MegaStores was already experiencing financial problems. There are several reasons for this. First, the placement of enlarged Konmar supermarket and furniture shops in the same location is not the most self-evident choice in terms of complementarity. Similarly, MegaStores sited three large drugstores next to one another. Because this kind of shop is not of the comparison-shopping kind, but of goal-oriented purchase variety, it does not profit from the proximity of competitors. In addition, MegaStores was criticized as being cheaply executed, and has terrible freeway access (Interview Sinnige, 2000). The MegaStores developer also complained that neither the German Hypo-Vereinsbank who had bought the project for € 118 million, nor the tenants seemed much interested in promotion or marketing (Haagsche Courant 4 Sept, 2000: 1).

This brief overview of the other two GDV projects reveals some interesting parallels with the ArenA Boulevard. First, all three GDVs did not depart significantly from the rigorous Dutch national retail policy (MegaStores comes perhaps closest, as its B-location status is questionable). Second, all three schemes incorporated PDV ranges into the development. Third, all were in less affluent and/or problematic areas of the city. Last, all three GDV developments decided to impose product restrictions in order to protect an existing center. In this sense, the ArenA Boulevard is not so unique for GDV developments, except for the fact that it also includes entertainment functions into its mix.

6.6 Cogitations and conclusions
As should be evident from this chapter, the peculiarly hierarchical makeup of the Dutch retail structure can be traced back, to a large extent, to the constraints placed on it by the government. In a critical report, the McKinsey Group argued that:
CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AMSTERDAM

Dutch zoning laws and municipal permit policies have made it virtually impossible to establish out-of-town shopping malls. Since shopping malls in places like the UK and US have tended to boost output and employment, we believe that the scarcity of shopping malls in the Netherlands has contributed to lower levels of retail output and employment (McKinsey Group, 1997: 7).

Whether one adheres to the view of McKinsey (1997) or others (e.g. Borking, 1997 in VGM v24: 55; Ministry EZ, 2000) regarding the desirability of shopping malls, there does tend to be a consensus that restrictive planning policy is largely to blame for this. The case under investigation in this chapter, the ArenA Boulevard, is largely a product of this restrictive policy, and of the ways in which the various actors reacted to it.

6.6.1 Application of conceptual framework
From the account given in this chapter, it should be clear that the history of retail policy and development in the Amsterdam metropolitan area was powerfully influenced by institutional factors, both in terms of the overall context in which the actors operate and the disposition they have with respect to each other. When one looks to the specific developments which led to the ArenA Boulevard, one can clearly discern the important role that all three contexts — administrative, economic and spatial — played in guiding the activities and strategies of the actors that initiated, investigated, coordinated and carried out the development. This section will take each of these structures in turn in its explanation of why the municipality became so pro-business in the 1990s and why business was so amenable to working with heavy public-sector influence in the planning process without a concomitant commitment to participate in the risk of the project. It will also show how the artificial or “unnatural” character of the ArenA Boulevard arose from the special constraints placed on it by institutional factors and a propensity among the actors to solve conflict via incorporation and compromise.
Explaining the ArenA Boulevard development

Relatively Stable Parameters

**Economic**: Hierarchic retail structure, ongoing retail sector consolidation

**Administrative**: Three-tier fiscally centralized planning system of upward checks

**Spatial**: monocentric conurbation, but decreasingly so, Zuidoost functionally divided, island of Amsterdam

Contingencies and Events

**Economic**: improved retail market, especially superstore format, high unemployment in Amsterdam, especially Zuidoost

**Administrative**: city province, possible fiscal decentralization

**Spatial**: GDV policy, ArenA stadium, failed waterfront project

Retail Development Arena

- City Council
- Planning department
- OMC
- District authority
- Retail mix committee
- Occupants
- Residents (jobs)
- Amsterdam Poort retailers
- VAC
- MKB, RND, AO
- Kolpron consultants
- BOA

Strategic action

Minimization of conflict via retail mix committee, agreed upon impact study, public-private cooperation

Boulevard idea encompasses ideals of multiple parties

Masterplan drawn up, incorporated into local plan

Outcomes

(ArenA Boulevard)
Economic context
In the 1990s, the retail market was becoming increasingly consolidated and increasingly international (Alexander, 1997). At the beginning of the decade, Dutch national government had bowed to the pressure of Ikea to widen the product range allowed at PDV sites, and in 1993 once again to allow superstore development under the GDV policy. Another salient factor was the upswing in the Dutch economy in the mid-1990s (this, conversely, can also help explain why the waterfront project collapsed a few years earlier). Markets may also help to explain the content of the project: in the early to mid-1990s — the time at which plans were being drawn up for the Amstel III/Arena stadium area — there was continued uncertainty in the office market, but a renewed vigor in the retail and entertainment market (Interview Sendel, 2000). Because retail was declining as a share of total consumer expenditure, schemes that could create synergy between shops and the flourishing leisure sector were in high demand. This market situation was coterminous with the relaxation in retail planning (GDV) policy.

On the surface, the concept of shops and entertainment surrounding a major stadium seems rather commercially sound. The stadium would doubtlessly generate streams of pedestrian traffic during events, a factor that makes the location between it and the various modes of transport feeding into it (parking garage, metro station) very interesting to food vendors and retailers. However, the hierarchical Dutch retail structure is another important factor. The fact that the country is so highly populated with shops makes it difficult for new entrants — especially large-scale formats — to capture a large market share (Parool 24 Oct., 2000). One of the consequences of this for the Arena Boulevard development is that it was difficult to find retailers willing to establish themselves at this location. On the other hand, an advantage the Arena Boulevard offered to potential investors and operators was that, under the PDV/GDV policy no competing GDV could be realized nearby, thus providing a spatial monopoly.

As the other Dutch GDVs, the Arena Boulevard was developed in an outlying urban district with a problematic economic profile. The image of Zuidoost had until the 1990s been dominated by the Bijlmer housing estates whose unemployment rate was far above the city’s average, which was in turn much higher than the national average. Given this, little opposition to new forms of development such as the Arena stadium could be expected, especially if it promised the creation of new (low-skilled) jobs. Moreover, even in its infancy, the district authority Zuidoost struggled with glaring public-finance difficulties, and felt itself badly in need of investment (Kessom, 2000). These factors would help explain the pro-growth disposition of the district since its inception in 1987.

Administrative context
As indicated in §6.1.1, the Netherlands can be described as a three-tier decentralized unitary state. However, unlike the two other cases, the decision making process regarding planning and development of the Arena Boulevard almost exclusively took place within the municipality. Except for the occasional appeal to the Raad van State (e.g. Woontoren and multiplex), the highest active authority was the city council (because the Centrumgebied was designated a project of city-wide significance, the district authority had little decision-making power of its own). The province in particular failed to play a role in spatial planning since Amsterdam had acquired the right to automatically incorporate its structure plan into the provincial regional plan (a good example of bottom-up authority!). Similarly, the metropolitan body ROA was dominated by the capital, and had few real teeth anyway. Thus,
more salient than central-local government relations are those between the city of Amsterdam and its neighbors and the central city and the district authorities.

Historically, Amsterdam has had an antagonistic relationship with its suburbs, especially those to the south, which has sometimes resulted in annexation (Van der Valk and Wallagh, 1994). Before the centralization of the tax system in 1929 Amsterdam had complained bitterly about the tax havens just outside its municipal boundary, and afterwards complained about the lack of space within its jurisdiction for housing. The migration of affluent citizens to suburbs and growth centers in the 1970s and 1980s and subsequent decline of the city center as a retail destination was made more worrisome in the 1990s with the rumors of fiscal decentralization. Nevertheless, Amsterdam still occupied a strong position in the region economically, and still possesses much political clout in the province. Another administrative factor structuring the ArenA Boulevard development regards the curious spatial situation of Zuidoost vis-à-vis the main city, intensified after the division into district governments. The city-province plans (via ROA) in the early 1990s corresponded with a shift in mentality of the municipality from one of blocking proposed projects of its neighbors to attracting commercial development to the region as a whole. The reasoning behind this was, of course, that if all the municipalities in the metropolitan area would be brought under the jurisdiction of a Greater Amsterdam, this would shift the level of scale for competition to the regional level. Thus, Amsterdam could permit growth on its southern edge (instead of on its waterfront) with the knowledge that these projects would become part of the city-province within a few years. This change of heart manifested itself in bold plans for the Zuidas and the ArenA Boulevard. The failure of the referendum for a city-province may point to a reemergence of the adversarial disposition of the city. On the other hand, there are reports that, despite this, relations between the city and its neighbors continued to improve in recent years (Interview Van der Zwaan, 2000; Interview Van de Mortel, 2002) partly as a result of timely consultation and willingness to listen to the desires of communities such as Amstelveen (Parool 27 Jan, 2000: 6; Interview Boerma, 2000).

Spatial context
Space played a crucial part in determining the nature and content of the ArenA Boulevard, both in terms of physical locational characteristics and spatial policy conducted at the national and local levels. With regard to the former, the most important was the introduction of the GDV policy. The planning restrictions that accompanied this policy, particularly the limitation to the thirteen urban nodes, gave Amsterdam a competitive advantage over its suburbs. The spatial monopoly this entailed also placed the municipality in a better bargaining position to use the ArenA Boulevard development to effectuate other urban development goals.

With regard to the local level, one can consider the spatial configuration of Zuidoost as an island in terms of both the administrative separation (lone district) and socio-economic profile. The physical separation from the rest of Amsterdam also complicated developments such as the metro line and the stadium with neighboring communities in between, and more recently with the Woontoren. Another physical characteristic of the district is the prominent east-west divide imposed by the railway line and separation of functions. This grew into a second kind of separation, namely a jobs-skills mismatch between the Blijmermeer and Amstel III (Nimako, 2002). This division was to become one of the main motivations for the municipality for advocating a design that would integrate both halves of the district, and thus leave a considerable imprint on the final outcome.
Zuidoost is also characterized by its large-scale quality. The large-scale Bijlmer estates of the 1970s complemented the ArenA development twenty-five years later, and the ArenA Boulevard. It is spacious by Amsterdam standards and very well connected by physical infrastructure. In comparison to the inner city, it is highly accessible and therefore has a great competitive advantage in certain retail branches. Because of this, the Zuidoost district was ideally situated to accommodate the growth in scale in the retail sector. In fact, the results of one study on the economic potentials of Zuidoost concluded that: “the driving force of the Bijlmer/Zuidoost is not the spatial renewal, nor that of the renewal of administration, nor the multiethnic population, but the strategic location” (Nimako, 1997: 156).

The most important “spatial event” towards the building of the ArenA Boulevard was the decision to and building of the stadium. This structure had been a “floating object” hanging above the area since the 1992 Olympic bid (Interview Sinnige, 2000), and when it finally landed in Zuidoost it became the first major landmark to adorn the Amsterdam skyline in decades. The decision for Zuidoost as a location for the stadium was also largely due to its spatial attribute of still being relatively open: before 1960 it was mostly water, and thus offered “virgin soil” for urbanization. The western part also had a chaotic nature, unlike much of the ordered majority of the city, and thus would not be thrown into disarray by another large-scale facility. The stimulus provided by the successful completion of the ArenA itself constituted the most important spatial event preceding the ArenA Boulevard. Before, the eyes of the city had been directed almost exclusively inwards towards the waterfront, but this major urban development introduced the possibility of creating a new urban center on Amsterdam’s fringe. The notoriety in the media surrounding the stadium only added to the curiosity of investors, and soon it was seen as something positive rather than detrimental to local business interests. Within years, the ArenA had become a positive icon for Zuidoost and as definitive for the skyline as a church tower for a traditional Dutch village (Interview Sentel, 2000). There was a collective herd mentality of businesses following one another into the area, which was perhaps more powerful than the carrots offered by the municipalities. The acquired reputation of being “booming” has enticed evermore businesses to attempt to locate in Zuidoost, recently stated to be “the best location in Amsterdam” by the British flexible office-space trader MWB Business Exchange (Info Regio Amsterdam June, 2000: 22).

Actor interaction
Since virtually all opposing interests seem to have been given a say in the project, one can call the ArenA Boulevard a “mega-compromise” — something quite different from the previous two case studies. While the other two case studies enabled a proponent/opponent distinction to be made, more subtlety is required to describe the relationship between the various parties in the GDV development in Zuidoost. Perhaps a more appropriate distinction is between (inner-circle) stakeholders and (outer-circle) participants in the planning process.

As can be read from the figure above, the most important stakeholders were the municipality and the developer OMC. Because the planning department had commissioned the masterplan, and because Cor Brandsema was appointed as project manager, the municipal planning department had gained exclusive access to the inner circle without having to participate in the risk of the project. Regarding OMC, the main partner of significance was ING Vastgoed, which had a direct interest in the area in terms of landholdings and the location of its

---

168 The completion of the A10 and the subsequent desire of merchants along Diemen’s meubelboulevard to vacate the area is testament to this element in retail competition.
headquarters. Like other developers, it can be assumed that ING was interested in realizing a prestigious project that could be sold for a profit, and that would enhance the company’s reputation. However, in this context, it is also significant that this same organization had cooperated with the municipality a few years earlier to develop the waterfront. This waterfront project cannot be underestimated as a forerunner to the ArenA Boulevard because this constituted the first great attempt by the city to involve the private sector in urban development. Arguably, the fact that it failed offered a more poignant lesson for the municipality than had it succeeded, namely the importance of being more sensitive to and involving the private sector at an earlier stage, and of the difficulty of realizing a financially sound PPP under unfavorable economic conditions (Interview Sentel, 2000). On the other hand, it also taught ING to be more circumspect when entering into a PPP. This may explain the construction of the cooperation between the municipality and OMC: not as a formal PPP but as a contractual cooperation agreement. By all reports, the interface between the municipality and OMC have been virtually seamless, indicating that most problems were dealt with internally, or via constructions such as the BAC. Another factor which cannot be overlooked was that there was a project manager with seven years of experience in the area who could speak both the language of the municipality as well as that of the local business community.

As regards the “outer circle” actors, these included city-center interests, united in the organization VAC, neighboring municipalities, shopkeepers in the Amsterdamse Poort and other small businesses (MKB), the district authority, and finally Bijlmer residents. Perhaps the most striking thing about the ArenA Boulevard development process is the way in which these “outer-circle” interests were dealt with. From the beginning, the objective was to defuse opposition via incorporation, tactical compromises and consensus-forming rather than direct conflict. The commissioning of reports and drawing up of plans is a prime example of this. The 1994 D&P study had already pointed out Zuidoost as one of the best locations in the Netherlands for a GDV, thus giving Amsterdam — in addition to the “urban nodes” clause in the Fourth Report — justification for selecting this area for its GDV. In addition, by closely following the formal GDV procedure — drawing up a regional structure vision that included an impact assessment — the city gained legitimacy for its actions. The fact that this was carried out by an independent consultancy agency under the banner of ROA made it appear even more objective, and therefore more difficult to contest. The results of the study, that a preliminary GDV of 20,000m² would have no grave effects on the hierarchical structure of the region, could then be followed by OMC without seeming unreasonable. OMC even provided information in a timely and honest way to opposing groups such as the VAC.

---

169 In the 1996 development agreement between the city and the OMC, the city gained the authority to do most of the planning for the area, but the private-sector parties could, by a clause in the contract, exit its provisions if contingencies (e.g. economic downturn) were to arise (Samenwerkingsovereenkomst, 1996: §11.1).

170 The excellent relationship of ING with the municipal land agency in negotiating prices was also seen as a risk-reducing factor. Working closely with a “professional municipality” like Amsterdam is, despite some of the additional demands, also much more beneficial than a much less experienced suburban community like Diemen or Ouder-Amstel (Interview Sentel, 2000).

171 By designating the Centrumgebied a “project of citywide significance”, the central city seized authority for the project, placing the district authority in this outer circle.

172 One interesting factor is that the voice of residents was largely absent from the ArenA, the Centrumgebied and much of the Bijlmer renewal activities, and has only been raised in mid-2000 regarding the latter. Part of this can be explained by the distance between most of the commercial development and residences and the generally positive reception of facilities, and some by the quiescence induced by the representative role played by the district authority, and the social fragmentation.
(Interview Sinnige, 2000). The establishment of an information center and a public-relations newsletter helped to garner support as well. This preemptive maneuvering using planning procedures and information was supplemented by the instigation of the BAC, giving even rivals of the project a say in the GDV product range.\textsuperscript{173} This incorporation \textit{par excellence} was sufficient to pacify even the most virulent of opponents (AS 19 June, 1996: 17).

Another major “outer circle” player to appease was the district authority. This body had to explain to its constituents that the investments pouring into the west side would find their way eastwards. A local “polder model” brought about the establishment of the ArenA initiative and other programs to employ Bijlmer residents in the new commercial area, and thus ease the spatial/jobs mismatch in the district. This desire to integrate the two halves of Zuidoost — also a desire of the municipal planning department — can also be read in the final design of the Boulevard: the elevation and movement of Bijlmer station atop the Boulevard being the most defining feature.

\textsuperscript{173} Both the Zuidoost district authority and the planning commissioner were firm about the establishment of this body (Interview Brandsema, 2001).
because all the information was public, the strategy of the proponents became one of incorporation rather than exclusion. As one might imagine, inviting so many cooks into the kitchen had a profound impact on the final product.

**Outcome**

In 1996, a year after the controversial but spectacular ArenA stadium had opened to the public, the stretch of land that was to become the ArenA Boulevard was paved with cement and metal tiles and outfitted with trees in steel railings. Unlike a regional shopping mall, there was little fanfare to commemorate this genesis, and nothing of interest for visitors to see. Except for the stadium and the walkway, the area was completely barren, inhabited only by the rumbling of an occasional bulldozer, or the presence of a construction worker. The municipality of Amsterdam had hoped that by constructing the common public area first, they would send a message to the developers to create something with flair and allure. Instead, what developers saw, in the words of one ING Vastgoed employee, was a gargantuan “landing strip,” with nothing around it but a soccer stadium adjoining a business park (Interview Sentel, 2000). The envisioned functions of exciting large-scale retail formulas, multiplex cinemas, and a glamorous Broadway-style musical hall were little more than colored lines on the drawing table, and in stark contrast with reality. It is partly for this reason that one of the main anchors of the project (Endemol) decided to pull out unexpectedly a few months later. Its director seriously doubted that this peripheral district of Amsterdam would ever have the stature or allure needed for the planned theatres and hotels. This was a major setback, but not fatal to the project. The developers forged ahead with the plans, and in 2000 the first building block opened its doors to the public: Pathé ArenA adjoining Bijlmer station. This was followed by the gradual opening of Media Markt, Decathlon, Prénétal, and Perry Sports on the north side of the Boulevard. At the same time, construction on other parts of the scheme continued unabated.

The ArenA Boulevard has the character of a perennial building site. The opening of the long-awaited furniture mall Villa Arena in April 2001, for example, was accompanied by the start of construction on the new Bijlmer train station, whose expected date of completion is no earlier than 2007. Only then, will the ArenA Boulevard be once again repaved and officially considered complete. In the meantime, the area continues to evolve. For example, in 2002, the Grace Theater (a temporary structure built to fill the Endemol gap) had already failed commercially, and had to be relaunched under a new concept. At the same time, the PDV/GDV policy which had played such a pivotal role in determining the content and form of the scheme was abandoned by the central government. This raises the question of what the ArenA Boulevard, as a gradually evolving urban commercial center, will look like when it is finally complete, and whether it can compete with what is to come.

**6.6.2 Some final thoughts on the ArenA Boulevard**

Scarcely had construction on the ArenA Boulevard facilities begun, and the red carpet rolled out at Pathé ArenA, than the policy which had made it all possible was in danger of being abolished. The PDV/GDV policy, increasingly viewed as anachronism by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, would be replaced by a completely new system of local discretion in the upcoming Fifth Report on Spatial Planning (Ministry EZ, 2000; Ministry VROM, 2001), effectively dismantling the regime established in the wake of the 1973 Maxxis-Muiden controversy. Although the effects of this rule change will not make themselves fully apparent within the timeframe of this research, their potential impact on the ArenA Boulevard should receive some attention nonetheless.
Ministerial misgivings
In 1997, the Ministry of Economic Affairs commissioned the McKinsey group to assess the economic competitiveness of the Netherlands. These consultants produced two influential reports: *Benchmarking the Netherlands* and *Boosting Dutch Economic Performance*. With regard to retail, the McKinsey group found that “Dutch retail sector performance closely resembles that of the other European countries [France, Germany and the UK], but seriously lags behind that of the US … the Netherlands has the potential to boost retail output by 25% and employment by 30%” (McKinsey Group, 1997: 2,1). One of the “barriers” to this was the planning system. In *Benchmarking*, for example, planning is blamed for helping to create a scarcity on the land market, thus driving up prices of commercial sites. This accusation certainly holds true as regards retail planning: the system has — consciously — directed investments inwards towards higher-priced sites in town and district centers. In *Boosting*, the McKinsey Group argued that:

Municipalities are apparently reluctant to allow more out-of-town retailing, preferring instead to protect the existing retail structure. In view of this reluctance, the government should consider measures to curb municipalities’ power to control the number of out-of-town shopping centers (McKinsey Group, 1997: 18).

These criticisms were carried forward in a working paper by the Ministry of Economic Affairs the following year which lamented that the “strict regulation in the area of spatial planning and local plans in which retail locations are established” had prevented the construction of “very big stores” as was common in Britain, France and Germany (Ministry EZ, 1998). Here it is possible to see that the “success” of retail planning as seen through the eyes of the Ministry of Spatial Planning had been reinterpreted as a problem by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In 1999, the latter published its *Dynamics in Networks*, which carried this standpoint forward as an official statement of policy intent. In the same year, the Ministry commissioned a workgroup to investigate the PDV/GDV policy. The point of departure was to be deregulation, streamlining and the subsidiarity principle. The product of these efforts was a report with the portentous title *More with Less*. Unsurprisingly, given the points of departure of the workgroup, the report argued for a full-scale deregulation at the national level. Specifically, this entailed abandoning the GDV requirements of confining large-scale retail projects to “urban nodes” and all product range restrictions (Ministry EZ, 2000; Evers, 2002; Hallsworth and Evers, 2002). Within a week of its publication, the Dutch cabinet stated its support of these measures. For the first time in the postwar era, the prospect of building out-of-town shopping malls and hypermarkets in the Netherlands seemed realistic.

Reactions
Predictably, planners were diametrically opposed to the suggestions of the workgroup. More noteworthy was the reaction of market parties. Rather than embracing the new free-market approach, the established business community rallied against it, as it once had against the GDV policy. Like before, they contended that such far-reaching liberalization would give newcomers an unfair advantage and undermine years of investment in established centers. Various retailing interests united in the lobby group “platformdetailhandel.nl” to urge the government to reassess its position, and the Dutch Association of Real Estate Interests (IVBN) also expressed its disapproval (Ministry EZ, 2000; NRC 23 March, 2002). Most large cities were also opposed to the change, Amsterdam in particular.174 At the time of the

---

174 During a hearing on 15 December 1999 before the workgroup, the representative from the city of Amsterdam complained that the GDV policy had only been implemented a few years before, and had not had a chance to make its effects felt. He urged the workgroup to reconsider its demands, and delay its plans for another five years “in order to assess its impact.” Veiled behind this apparently technical argument lies a sensitive political-
proposed liberalization, construction activities on the ArenA Boulevard were in full swing, and only Pathé ArenA was operating. The prospect that the spatial monopoly afforded by the GVD policy would be removed cast a dark cloud over the commercial viability of the development. It also placed the city and OMC in an awkward position vis-à-vis retailers who had been lured to the location with the promise that no rival center would be built in the surrounding region (Interview Van der Zwaan, 1999). In spite of these outrages, the liberalization is being carried forward.

There are several different ways actors can respond to such a situation. The first is to take a “business as usual” stance, by continuing to concentrate on areas sanctioned under the PDV/GDV policy. This is the strategy taken by Amsterdam in its new structure plan — it essentially carries forth the previous government policy in its municipal strategy. By implication, this will be the position taken by the Province of Noord Holland as well. Utrecht has adopted a similar stance in its provincial vision (Provincie Utrecht Press Release, 8 April, 2003). This also seems to be the initial response expressed by the main OMC partner ING Vastgoed:

If you build malls that suck inner cities dry, you are on the wrong track. You might get away with it once, but you will damage your relationship with retailers, especially SMEs, and municipalities. Furthermore, this is against ING’s corporate culture (Interview Sinnege, 2000).

However, a dilemma will arise if other parties decide to take full advantage of the new freedom and build on the periphery. As the retail sector has shown itself to be remarkably swift in responding to policy relaxations, “business as usual” may be a risky strategy. Already there are signs that some parties are defecting, which would throw the equilibrium out of balance.

Although the new rules are not yet in force (the Fifth Report had run aground due to a government collapse and elections in Spring 2001), within a week of their endorsement Royal Ahold announced its intention to build 150 to 200 “mega-supermarkets” in the Netherlands, presumably at peripheral sites along highways (Telegraaf 16 March, 2000; Jansen, 2000). By September 2002, there was a record number of plans for shops on the edges of cities, totaling 2.48 million m² (FD 23 Sept, 2002). A more worrying concurrent trend is that supermarkets are now vacating urban neighborhoods deemed “unsafe” (Volkskrant 20 Jan, 2003). This urban disinvestment may indeed be linked to an increasing sensitivity to crime, but it may also be a zero-sum response to the new opportunities being offered on the urban fringe. At worst, the Netherlands may be heading in the direction of other countries in which “supermarket redlining” and “urban food deserts” are being discussed as planning problems (Lowe and Wrigley, 2000; Eisenhauer, 2001).

The current policy limbo has also spawned a number of even bolder initiatives. An American-style shopping center has recently been proposed, for example, in Sassenheim, located in the affluent “dune and tulip region” of the Netherlands (VGM, 10 Jan 3003), a multi-functional commercial complex was proposed along the A12 motorway near Woerden (Utrechts Nieuwsblad 24 March, 2003), and a proposed retail/entertainment scheme inserted in the sound-barrier of the A2 highway is appropriately being called “The Wall” (Telegraaf 13 March, 2003). At present, the most ambitious idea is a proposal for a 150,000-200,000m² shopping center in the municipality of Geldermalsen (a village near the A15/A2 nexus)

-281-
patterned on (but dwarfing) CentrO (De Gelderlander 31 Jan, 2003). Finally, as a bitter irony, the Maxis hypermarket on the A1 — which had been so controversial a quarter of a century ago — announced its metamorphosis into a 64,000m$^2$ megawinkelcentrum, with the addition of well-known chains as XenoS, Lidl, Kruidvat, Megapool, Burger King, Dierenland, the fashion retailers Piet Kerkhof, Van Haren, Villa Happ and Zeeman and two themed crèches (VGM 24 April, 2003; Parool 25 April, 2003). Already 12,000 additional parking spaces are being realized, and the shopping center is scheduled to open in September 2003.

Of course, most of these proposals — excepting Maxis — are still at an early planning stage, but it is certain that most, if not all, would be summarily rejected under the PDV/GDV policy. It is also clear that if similar proposals find their way to the Amsterdam metropolitan area, the ArenA Boulevard “mega-compromise” might not be able to compete, and well-intended actors such as ING Vastgoed may find themselves forced to participate in the rush to the periphery. There already seem to be signs that ING’s “corporate culture” is changing in this regard. This is indeed an uncertain time for the future of the ArenA Boulevard, and the Dutch retail structure as a whole.

175 However, even if this were not the case, once liberated from the PDV/GDV constraints, the ArenA Boulevard could adapt itself to the new competition by subdividing the megastores, or introducing “forbidden” product mixes and formats into Villa ArenA such as department stores. Naturally, this would entail a reexamination of the agreements made in the BAC, and whether these are legally binding. More importantly, it would also need to overcome political opposition from local residents and shopkeepers (Interview Brandsema, 2001). Such speculation may seem premature considering that the ArenA Boulevard is not yet complete, and one of its main anchors (Getz) is still uncertain.