Regulating urban office provision: a study of the ebb and flow of regimes of urbanisation in Amsterdam and Frankfurt am Main, 1945-2000

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4 AMSTERDAM 1945-1968

The inner city as a CBD

4.1 Introduction

The Second World War had dealt severe blows to the social fabric and spatial economic structure of Amsterdam. Before the War, Amsterdam was a city in which people worked in trade, shipping, storage and finance. The post war disappearance of trade partners Germany and Indonesia affected the whole Dutch economy and hit Amsterdam hard. Nevertheless, the political institutions were quickly reinstalled, enabling urban planning to be taken up with new enthusiasm. The main challenge was of course the recovery from the war. Towards this goal, this study examines how a stable regime of urbanisation emerged from the contingent coupling of local processes of capital accumulation and socio-spatial regulation.

This chapter thus searches for the emergence of new modes and nodes of accumulation, by looking for the market led processes of accumulation that propel or thwart the re-emergence of Amsterdam as an economic node. In light of the central attention in this dissertation for the regulatory processes associated with the local or metropolitan territorialisation of capital, the interrelations between economic recovery and growth, socio-spatial urbanisation strategies and the emergence of new regulatory arrangements are central.

Given the post-war predicament of Amsterdam, one would expect regulatory processes to be characterised not only by dedicated civic movements and co-ordination and co-operation between tiers of government, but also between political and market forces. In light of the undisputed need for economic reanimation, the expectation is logical that spatial-economic interventions gain absolute priority, and the electoral correcting mechanism is of less significance. At the municipal level, the expectation is that the scarcity of public money for recovery will animate co-ordination between the municipality of Amsterdam with the national government. Also, the abundance of free available greenfield sites at the city’s edges and the pre-war national and local intentions to profit from modern extensive space demanding industrialisation also feed the hypothesis that urbanisation and accumulation strategies at the level of the state will both be driven by and infuse the dynamics of capital accumulation. This all leads to the emergence of a regime of urbanisation that combines national-infrastructure based
government intervention, a local planning culture that was supportive of the wishes of capital and national accumulation strategies, strong ties between capital and labour enacted at the platform of the state, and a laissez faire attitude towards the manifestation of capital territorialisation (see table 4.1).

This chapter examines the details of Amsterdam’s spatial economic evolution and associated office planning and development, by focusing upon the strategic political decision-making on economic development policy during these years. Emphasis is placed upon the carriers of the emerging regime of urbanisation, and the forces that worked against it. Attention is given to the definition of the regime of urbanisation during this period, and the ways in which it evolved over time.

### 4.2 Recovery plans and policies for Amsterdam

The War struck Amsterdam’s economy quite severely and the city was subject of National economic interest. Already in 1945, the Minister of Economic Affairs argued that in his view, the development of Amsterdam (historically grounded on a free economy, money exchange and colonial products) was of national importance. He was afraid that the new circumstances could not provide the room for Amsterdam to pick up its historical position in world trade, and insisted to seriously pick up harbour related industrialisation. Moreover, to offer support, the national government decided that Schiphol Airport would become the national airport for world traffic (De Vries, 1961).
Local companies, while supporting Amsterdam’s (and national) industrialisation politics, made a plea for the recovery of the city as a trade centre. They found a ready ear at the city, which supported the introduction in 1946 of an advisory committee on trade-relations. Moreover, in 1948, the Rotterdam and Amsterdam chambers of commerce wrote a petition to the cabinet, arguing that international markets were crucial for the economic recovery of the Netherlands, and that the strengthening of international trade should be high on the policy agenda. Thus, trade and industry were perceived as the two engines of Amsterdam’s recovery and there was space for this recovery through urban expansion.

Roots in the 1920’s: preparations for the General Extension Plan
During the post-war recovery period, the development of a (functional and spatial) vision on the future of the city continued to build upon pre-War discussions and decisions (for a more detailed discussion, see Hessels et al., 1985). Already by the early 1920s, the jacket of Amsterdam’s territory was constraining development. This lead to a struggle over future urban form by various groups with different stakes at urban space.

First, capital wanted to expand. Already long before the war the financial sector (the main office holding sector in the Amsterdam economy) was clustered in the historic inner city, which had been the financial CBD of the Netherlands since the establishment of the Amsterdam Exchange in 1609 (Advokaat, 1985: 135). In the 1920s the historic inner city was subject to radical functional changes in the urban fabric: economic functions, especially retail and offices, were rapidly superceding residential ones.

Second, the small but influential fraction of rich local inhabitants asked for more space for living, financial service companies also expanded and demanded more space, while the urban middle class majority demanded lower density affordable housing. Therefore, in 1921, the arguments that had long prevented the annexations of the municipalities of Buiksloot, Watergraafsmeeer, Nieuwendam, Ransdorp, and Sloten were swept off the table, giving Amsterdam room to prosper. Combined with the broad zoning powers that the municipality of Amsterdam possessed, this gave way to the development of a ‘Plan for Great Amsterdam’ during the 1920s. In this plan, the municipality had developed a policy addressing these functional changes, such as solving traffic problems with public transport (Hessels et al., 1985: 65-66).
In the preparations for the so-called ‘General Extension Plan for Amsterdam’ (GEP) more emphasis than initially intended was placed on traffic plans. The first plan that was developed, the 1926 Outline Plan (*Schemaplan voor Groot Amsterdam en de binnenstad, 1926*) was criticised for adopting a ‘laissez faire’ attitude towards especially development processes in the historic inner city (*ibid.*: 66). Only in the 1931 Report on Urban Development and Traffic (*Nota stadsontwikkeling en Verkeer, 1931*) was the case made for a more integrated and strategic consideration of urbanisation problems. In this Report the historic inner city was depicted as the centre of a strong city, but the laissez faire attitude was not dropped. A traffic plan was made, consisting of important roundway-arteries surrounding the inner city combined with radial arteries, which would guide both economic development and urban renewal: concentration of offices and large shops in the historic inner city, new residential neighbourhoods at the southern and western fringe of the existing city, and industry in especially reserved grounds. Moreover, the ideas in the 1931 Report regarding inner city development were also taken up in the General Extension Plan (GEP), which were formalised when ratified by the City Council in 1935 (see also Hessels et al., 1985: 69; Wallagh, 1994: 88). This GEP also voiced the ambition to quickly develop a detailed plan for the inner city. However, the GEP did not give an indication of the required spaces for non-industrial economic activities, and the way in which these demands should be met: contrary to the many investigations on the future development of industry, not a single investigation was done for the development of trade, banking and insurances, to name just a few sectors of employment (Nozeman, 1980: 134).

The GEP was the spatial foothold for an important part of the post war accumulation strategies for Amsterdam. During the development of the GEP demographic prognoses were toned down. This meant that the projection of the whole new demand for urban space on the (recently expanded) territory of the city itself was possible. Both the claims of social democrats, demanding the development of decent, affordable and healthy living conditions for working class families – preferably in ‘garden cities’ – and the leading economic interests, demanding space for economic growth, could now be met in a compromise that was guided through the council meeting with ease. The GEP gave scarce attention to the future land uses of Amsterdam’s now enormous territory. Most concrete choices were left open to future deliberations (see also Terhorst & Van de Ven, 1997).
Amsterdam’s post war economic politics focused much attention on the development of Amsterdam as an industrial centre. Traditionally, the main pre-war drivers of the industry in Amsterdam had been shipbuilding and reparation, graphic/publishing industries, diamond industries and food. Especially the shipbuilding industries in Amsterdam could not retain their strength after the war, as foreign competition has eroded Amsterdam’s position. Nevertheless, the industrialisation policy focused on the driving role that port related industries played in the urban and regional economy which necessarily required ample room for growth. This approach was tied to the national policy of industrialisation. The first Report on Industrialisation in 1949, which was based on the detailed investment schemes that were developed in response to the requests of the European Recovery Programme, pleaded for heavy investments in especially metal industries and chemicals (Van Zanden & Griffiths, 1989: 242-243). This was well received amongst industrialist in Amsterdam who successfully laid a claim on central state budgets for reconstruction. So, in the period until 1960, Amsterdam and its region requested and received generous sponsorship from the national state in order to improve its basic infrastructure for especially sea harbour development. The first years after the war were mainly used to refurbish the urban and economic structure of the city by large projects such as a power plant at the Hemweg. The power plant was an enormous investment that influenced the emerging industrial

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1 Following global economic doctrine which perceived of industry as the motor of the national economy, the Dutch government set about to shape the economic structure of The Netherlands. Agriculture and commercial interests, which had been the main carriers of the Dutch economy, became of secondary importance in economic policy, and industry got the limelight. Traditionally, The Netherlands was a country with a poorly developed industrial sector possessing inadequate technical skills. Thus the new strategy required the implementation of a new regime of accumulation, based on industrial competitiveness on world markets. Quick agreements between capital, labour and the state were indispensable to reach these goals. The main regulatory instruments that were used were a guided wage policy and an industrialisation policy. The industrialisation policy in the first after war years until 1949 did not have the characteristics of the type regional policy that came about later, with the industrialisation reports of the 1950s, and the subsequent broader socio-economic policies. In the period between 1945 and 1950, the aim of industrialisation policy was mainly to give as much freedom as possible to private initiative. National recovery politics in these years mainly aimed to strengthen the historical concentration of economic power in the western part of The Netherlands, by coordinating the actions of private agents, and initiating large scale infrastructure projects in this part of the country (Bartels, 1980). Moreover, the Company for the Finance of National Recovery (Maatschappij tot Financiering van Nationaal Herstel), a co-operation between the government, the Dutch National Bank, trade and credit banks and a number of institutional investors, was founded in 1945, and invested heavily in industry (Messing, 1981: 52).

2 The official name of the Marshall help
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area once completed in 1953. Other (central state sponsored) investments in the city’s infrastructure included waterways (the Amsterdam-Rijn channel), motorways (mainly focusing on the fast traffic connections from the city to the region), the opening of the West Harbour, and the re-opening of the Coenhaven (Coen Harbour) in 1950. Moreover, plans for the Coentunnel in the new harbour area were developed in the 1950s. The development of a ring motorway, that was discussed in the Amsterdam City Council, connected well with this intention (the Coentunnel was finally built between 1961 and 1966). Finally, in 1955, when Schiphol Airport was still a municipal service,¹ large investments were made in new runways. About twenty years later this was complemented with a freeway tunnel to facilitate fast traffic from Amsterdam to The Hague.

During this period, the rivalry between Amsterdam and Rotterdam escalated. Rotterdam was not impressed by Amsterdam’s wish to expand its sea harbour and in turn, compete directly with Rotterdam’s harbour. In particular the competition for Central State funding was a point of constant rivalry. So, while Rotterdam, grasped by growth fever, positioned its harbour as the Europort, Amsterdam’s harbour officials urged the municipality of Amsterdam to write a report as a response. Their report entitled ‘The place of the harbour of Amsterdam in the future Western Europe’ (1958), was written after the National State voiced its intention to invest in the harbour entrance in IJmuiden. A first plea was made for industrialisation plans, capitalising on the spinning wheel function of the Amsterdam harbour.

In 1960, the Commission for the Economic Development of Amsterdam (Commissie Delfgaauw), established by the municipality of Amsterdam in 1958 to investigate the economic development of the city, issued the ‘Report on the economic structure of Amsterdam’ (Nota over de economische structuur van Amsterdam, 1958). This report made a number of observations which guided the municipal ideas on the economic future of the city for a considerable period. These observations concerned the importance of spatial expansion possibilities for the decentralising industrial sector, in order to capture development within the boundaries of Amsterdam. A plea was made for the planning of large-scale industrial complexes for capital-intensive companies that have a need for deep water, such as the petrochemical industry. Moreover, wholesale trade was regarded as an important expansive industry; this was in need of locations as well as good transportation possibilities. Finally, a plea was made for the accommodation of the

¹ In 1958, Schiphol became a limited company, which shares were divided amongst Amsterdam (22%), Rotterdam (2%) and the central state (76%).
commercial sector in the centre of the city to make room for so-called downtown city-development.

These recommendations found a quick response in political circles. Already in 1960, in the City Council budget meeting, the mayor and aldermen claimed that development of companies in the chemical sector had their fullest attention. Especially the social democrat PvdA was enthusiastic about the report, and tried to get the ambitious industry and harbour plans off the ground. In the business community, the recommendations found less applause; capital was concerned about the consequences of all these new industrial establishments for the already tight labour market (which was also the main complaint of the region Velsen-IJmuiden, where Hoogovens steal, the biggest industrial employer in The Netherlands, was situated). Only the parties that had a direct interest in reinforcing the position of the Amsterdam harbour were really enthusiastic. Only in 1963 did the chamber of commerce plea for the further development of chemical industries.

Tendencies in real investment behaviour of large harbour related industries, however, pointed towards Rotterdam as the main sea harbour of The Netherlands. It soon became the countries largest oil port, accommodating ever-larger oil tankers. These developments were supported by investments in the harbour-infrastructure (deep harbours, pipelines through the harbour area, and to the Rhine-Ruhr area, etc.) that increased Rotterdam’s competitive advantages over Amsterdam. Alongside oil refineries (Shell, Esso, BP, KPC, Nerefco), a petrochemical industry emerged (Esso, Shell, BP, Dow, Continental Columbian Carbon, ICI, BASF, Hoechst, AKZO, DSM), establishing their main factories in Rotterdam and Pernis, close to the Rotterdam harbour. Together, these factors triggered the success of the Rotterdam harbour. These petrochemical companies located in Rotterdam because of the presence of these oil refineries that provide the raw materials for the petrochemical industry. The petrochemical cluster thus developed in the Rotterdam area and gave an impetus for the development of the harbour related industrial complex there (for a more detailed account of the development of the Rotterdam harbour related industrial cluster, see Atzem a & Wever, 1999). This industry became the engine of Dutch national economic growth. So, even in this period of enthusiasm for harbour expansion amongst national and local policymakers⁴ and the Harbour Company itself, nothing much happened in Amsterdam (De Hen, 1985: 40), except for the settling down of Mobil

⁴ Especially Den Uyl, who was Alderman for Economic Development from 1962 to 1965, and subsequently national Minister of Economic Affairs, was a fierce proponent of harbour related industrialisation
in 1968, after long negotiations and many promises made by Amsterdam to the company on required infrastructure adaptations. But the capture of Mobil Oil was an isolated incident, and an oil refinery industry never established in Amsterdam. The decision not to grant a permit for Progil Oil in 1969, because of the dangers associated with the transport of sulphur carbon to and from the company, was an illustrative example of the minor eligibility of Amsterdam as an industrial city. Both the City Council and the chemical industry itself were very hesitant to strive for a change in this mentality, and Mayor Samkalden, looking back on this period, speaks of a small industrial basis that did not have close ties with the local authorities, and could therefore never clench its fist (De Hen, 1985). Moreover, the targeted industries did not offer the driving function that was anticipated: the growth in the service industry for instance, was unrelated to the growth in harbour related industry. The oil crisis in 1973 smothered the remaining ambitions for expansion in this sector in Amsterdam (De Hen, 1985: 60-61).

Two things were obvious: firstly, Amsterdam (and especially the communist CPN political fraction in the City Council) was increasingly taking harbour related industrial planning seriously, and secondly, although the private sector was not interested in Amsterdam, this caused many conflicts of interest among various territorial as well as functional entities. The Amsterdam harbour was situated in an area close to other large industrial sites in neighbouring municipalities, who where busy with their own expansion plans. Many coordination efforts came off the ground. In 1966 the national government issued the Sea Harbour Act, in order to prevent oversupply of sea harbour facilities in the Netherlands. The establishment of the Commission Sea Harbour Deliberation quickly followed this Act. The Act meant that Amsterdam, alarmed by the national priority on Sea Harbours, tried to accelerate the construction of new harbours within its jurisdiction. In the meantime, the Province of North Holland intervened in industrial and harbour planning. To overcome conflicts, and to overcome competition over scarce labour, the province tried to coordinate a compromise. In 1963, after lobbying by the Zaanstad chamber of commerce, the decision was made to start the procedure for the development of a regional plan for the North Sea channel area (the area in which both the Amsterdam harbour as Hoogovens and the industries of Zaanstad were situated). It was not a traditional regional plan in the sense that the province made the plan by itself. In this plan process, the cities involved had an important say in the ultimate plan. From this process conceived in 1968, emerged a new vision for the area, which envisaged enormous amounts of land available for especially heavy metal industries and chemical industries, as well as infrastructure adjustments.
First expansion plans for the inner city financial district

Was there no office construction or planning for financial and service sector activities at all during the period of industrialisation policies? Of course there was. But during the post war reconstruction years, office activity and planning was not the spearhead of urban economic policy. However, the financial and service sectors did have their own dynamics that provoked answers from professionals in the planning community.

Some important breakthroughs were made in this period. National government issued the Reconstruction Act (Wederopbouwwet) in 1950, to guide the reconstruction of city districts that had suffered from War damage. This Act gave municipal government the authority to issue large-scale reconstruction plans for these areas in the city. In 1953 the City Council of Amsterdam determined four of these types of plans: the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood, the Jodenbreestraat and surroundings, the Weesperstraat and surroundings, and the Oostelijke eilanden, all located in the historic inner city (cf. figure 4.1). The first three of these had an important role in the development of a (functional and spatial) vision on the future of the historic inner city, a vision that still built on the mentioned discussions and decisions of the pre-war period.

The large-scale reconstruction plans for the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood, the Jodenbreestraat and surroundings and the Weesperstraat followed the decisions and guidelines of the pre-war vision on the inner city. One of the central aims of these plans was to create a central urban area where traffic, urban expansion and economic functions were in harmony and balance (Hessels et al., 1985: 73). The plans aimed to reduce traffic congestion via a new network of larger motorways surrounding and crossing the inner city. Economic and civic functions such as university buildings were to be located around the projected motorways: the City Hall at the Waterlooplein, offices along the Weesperstraat, and industry and trade in the Nieuwmarkt area.

One of the central elements of these traffic breakthroughs was the development of the IJ-tunnel, which had already been planned in the GEP. The actual development of this tunnel, which would give the historic inner city an enormous boost in the eyes of capital, was a complicated undertaking. Finance had to be provided by the national government which had already prioritised the construction of the Coentunnel. Nevertheless, the national government gave dispensation for the building of the IJ-tunnel in 1955, and building started in 1956. However, construction works were halted for four years when the national
government ran out of money. In 1961, construction resumed simultaneously with the start of the construction of the Coentunnel (Nelissen & Schmal, 1980).

In 1955, building on the reconstruction plans, the first Report on the Inner City (Nota Binnenstad, 1955) was written focusing on traffic congestion. This was a 'bottleneck-act' according to Wallagh (1994: 90). It named several main bottleneck-issues that still dominate discussions around inner city development. First, there was the obsolescence of many buildings. Second, there was the question of how to deal with the cultural heritage of the historic inner city, whilst thirdly, still developing its economic potentials and addressing problems associated with traffic and parking. These problems were considered to be interrelated in a complex manner, and even reinforcing one another. The Mayor and Aldermen wanted the Report to be a first integral plan for the development of the inner city, in which some main issues had to be resolved, especially the choice for the development of the inner city as a space for central economic and cultural activities. Despite these wishes, the Report remained focused upon traffic-issues. This was in line with the earlier Schemeplan (1931), which was used as a key source for the new plan. Other
issues were considered as derivative from traffic problems (ibid.: 94). Alongside the subway network, the most important new initiative of this plan was to plan space for economic functions in areas adjacent to the historic inner city and thereby relieve pressure for inner city redevelopment. In these areas new plans for reconstruction were made.

The Report on the Inner City was an umbrella piece, voicing the wish to preserve the inner city as a nucleus for core functions of national and international importance. The new plan served as the overall vision under which several more concrete plans could be developed, such as the reconstruction plans. These reconstruction plans were the only plans that rested on far reaching legal instruments, which meant that their realisation could be undertaken with force. In 1957 Ministerial approval was received for the plan for the Weesperstraat. After this approval the acquisition, clearance and demolition of the plots that were necessary for the widening of the street was immediately commenced, as was the building of four new bridges and the development of real estate along the eastern side of the new important tangential road. New development along the western part was postponed until the plans for the subway were developed (Van der Velde, 1968: 156).

The radical changes in the urban and traffic structure of this part of the inner city gave rise to new discussions. The new office buildings along the enlarged Weesperstraat/Wibautstraat road were not integrated with the adjacent urban structure. The symbol of this clash between expansion and preservation was the so-called Maupoleum building, that was built at the Jodenbreestraat. At this place a motorway extension had been planned but was eventually rebutted. The construction by Philips Pension Fund and Maup Caransa was finished in 1970, at a time that the proposed extension of the motorway had been stymied.

Also the new size of the Jodenbreestraat, that was enlarged from two to four lanes, made inhabitants doubt the traffic policies of the departments of Urban Development and Public Works (Hessels et al., 1985: 76). On the other hand, there was the already mentioned report of the Delft Commissie that promoted the development of the inner city as a place for financial business expansion, centred on the Dutch Central Bank and the Amsterdam Exchange. In 1968, Delfgauw, on personal title, proposed the widening of the Vijzelstraat and the Ferdinand Bolstraat, so that a modern traffic axis would come to exist and facilitate orderly traffic movement, following the example of the Wibautstraat/Weesperstraat (Rooijendijk, 2001).
However, the pure politics for economic expansion, carried through with force by the Alderman of Public Works and Economic Affairs, Den Uyl, in the first half of the 1960s, met with opposition. The City Council did not automatically support this kind of policy anymore. The social democratic PvdA was split between the old left, the proponents of economic expansion, and the new left, which emphasised liveability over economic expansion. This split emerged following a period of full employment that had lasted from 1954, which made the relative importance of non-economic issues rise at the cost of economic development politics. Economic growth and prosperity was increasingly seen as something that is automatically there.

Alderman De Wit replaced the old guard represented by Den Uyl, following City Council elections in 1966. These elections brought the anarchistic Provo-movement to the City Council, with 2.6 percent of the votes. This initially extra-parliamentary local opposition had thus found its way into the City Council. Despite only limited representation, it influenced decision making by forcing those inside the social-democratic PvdA to rethink their old ideals. Thus, De Wit became the political representative in charge of the Public Works in a period in which expansion politics were being questioned. It was also a time dominated by alarming population growth prognoses, a consequent rise in housing demand, and the rise of national guidance in urban planning. For these reasons, the priority of economic expansion became less prominent (ibid.). Indeed, the Ban de Bank episode below, which occurred during this timeframe provides an illustrative example.

4.3 Economic expansion politics rebutted

*Ban the Bank*

The first office project in the historic inner city of Amsterdam that was met by harsh resistance was the 1966 plan for the ABN Bank to expand its headquarters. This large-scale expansion was a break with the past, when extra space demand could be provided for inside the historic buildings (for instance by joining two adjacent buildings together). However, now that mergers and take-overs on a national scale, as well as centralisation of management activities characterised the banking sector, scale enlargements needed were more pronounced (see also section 6.2 for more detail on these mergers). Because the tendency for the headquarters was still to cluster together in Amsterdam, banks had to look for other opportunities than on site office extensions.
The ABN bank bought a dilapidated apartment building in the Vijzelstraat from the municipality, planning to demolish it and construct a new office building on the site, which was next to its headquarters. This led to an unprecedented wave of protests. As Roegholt (1979) argues, this was the first time that the elite of old left, housing associations and inner city banking capital had to deal with action groups opposing their plans.

The Vijzelstraat is the first part of the southbound exit road from the inner city to the urban fringe (cf. figure 4.2). The new construction after the street's widening between 1907 and 1926 was already considered a controversial undertaking. People feared that the building of large bank buildings would drive out the small-scale urban functions, such as shops. Specific proposals, such as the building of the office for the Nederlandse Handel-Maatschappij fuelled that fear. Nevertheless this office, opened in 1926, was soon followed by the opening of the large Carlton Hotel in 1929 to the north of the bank building (this hotel was destroyed during the war, and rebuilt afterwards). The third building built after the
widening of the Vijzelstraat was the apartment building, completed in 1927 to the south of the office of the Nederlandse Handel-Maatschappij. It is this building over which the controversy started in the 1960s. Its poor construction led to the collapse of several floors in 1955, and the tearing down of the whole building in 1962. The owner, Amstelstein, sold the premises to Binnenlands Beleggingsfonds Vast Goed. The new owner failed to meet the expectations of the City Council, who anticipated a mixed shopping and living apartment complex. In 1966 Vast Goed argued that ‘changed circumstances’ made this impossible.

Later that year the ABN Bank, originating from a merger between the Nederlandse Handel-Maatschappij and the Twentsche Bank, made an offer for the land on which the building of the former Nederlandse Handel-Maatschappij was built, which was owned by the municipality, and issued to the ABN in orfpacht (land lease). This opened up a round of complex negotiations between the city of Amsterdam and the ABN Bank that owned some former Twentsche Bank offices in the city in which the municipality was interested. Moreover, the ABN Bank bought the Vijzelstraatflat from Vast Goed, in order to build an extension to its own headquarters.

These negotiations generated debate on the future of the Vijzelstraat (and the historic inner city). At first the mayor and alderman tried to obscure the radical nature of the ABN bank plans, simply referring to the new building as the Vijzelstraat project.

The ‘Ban the Bank’ campaign began soon after the Bank’s intentions were made public. An artist’s impression of the office was printed in ABN’s internal magazine alongside an article touting Amsterdam as the financial centre of the country, and one where the ABN Bank should be located with a landmark headquarters.

Concerned opinion makers, both individual architects, artists and residents, and organised groups as the anarchistic Provo-movement and architectural and preservation movements as Heemschut and Amstelodamum raised their concerns in pamphlets, newspapers and petitions to the City Council. They protested against
the economist's view on urban planning that emanated from this plan, their fears being fed by the building in former years of the headquarters of the Dutch Central Bank as well as the Library of the University of Amsterdam. Both these buildings, in their view, were examples of 'modern-but-already-outdated' introspective office buildings that stifled the liveliness of their surrounding urban areas. In emotional newspaper articles and petitions to the City Council they appealed to the regents' feeling for a lively and architectonically rich inner city, in which there was no place for a modern, concrete, dark office colossus.

In this way, the simple exchange of premises between the city and the bank became the symbol for a broader debate on the future of the inner city. Should narrow economic interests prevail over the centuries of urban development that made Amsterdam into such a lively, historical and architectonically rich city? The Mayor and Aldermen acknowledged the fact that this debate on the future of the city should take place, but they also sought a compromise that could overcome the conflict over the Ijzelstraatflat. They wished to maintain their decision to grant the ABN Bank permission to rebuild the apartment building into an office, because they considered a large financial headquarter in the centre of the city as an important economic asset. Indeed, Amsterdam was eager to hold on to its position as national financial headquarters. Anticipating the consent of the City Council, mayor and alderman granted the building permit, and the architectural aesthetics committee approved the design.

Nevertheless, the strategic plan for the exchange of the properties still had to be guided through the council. The recommendation of this plan to the council by means of an address by the mayor, accompanied by a press conference, heightened the animosity of opponents. While their complaints arrived at the city hall, the first part of the transaction, the transfer of the ownership of the terrain of the former Ijzelstraatflat by 'tast Gooed to the ABN Bank was carried through.

Although the exchange of property was guided through the City Council with ease (30 in favour and 10 against), it was clear that the tide had changed. The whole discussion had raised several important issues that opened up the urban development debate (compare Roegholt, 1979: 298). The Alderman of Economic Affairs De Wit realised that there was need for a new and sound vision on the future of the city, and the place of the historic inner city in this, on which complicated decisions like the Bank issue could be founded.
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A final convulsion of expansion politics in the historic inner city

In the context of struggle over the future of urban politics, the *Narwal* project at Bickerseiland was the last successful large-scale historic inner city office project that arose from the old regime. Bickerseiland was part of a group of ‘islands’ in the historic inner city, surrounded by waterways and railroad tracks (see figure 4.2). In 1953, a reconstruction plan for the Bickerseiland was prepared. This plan was infused with the pro-growth fever that had infected the city planners. Thus, there was little room for residential uses, whilst much space for industry (at the waterfront) and offices in the interior.

In 1960, project developer Gaus arrived on the scene, who proposed a vision of a ‘little Manhattan’ at the Western Islands, of which Bickerseiland was a part. So, in 1960, he asked the city for a building permit for a large office building on the premises that were reserved for industry in the 1953 plan, but had been lying idle ever since. The city agreed and gave Gaus the building permit for his *Walvis* office building in 1963. In order to further develop his vision, Gaus terminated the leases of many small companies at Bickerseiland in 1970, to make place for his second large office, *Narwal*.

Once residents became privy to his intentions, a wave of public opposition was triggered. Inhabitants organised a successful protest at first, backed by their own plan for the islands, which brought about the decision by the City Council to make the granting of the building permit for *Narwal* a council decision, instead of a decision by mayor and aldermen, which was usually the case. In the mean time, the new left had won the struggle over dominance inside the PvdA, while other leftist parties were also gaining dominance.6 So, all leftist parties in the City Council backed the plans of the inhabitants, which were turned against Narwal, but in December 1970 the mayor and aldermen decided in favour of Narwal. This brought about more protests, but in March 1971 the final decision was made: Gaus was issued a permit for building *Narwal*.

After losing this battle, the local residents continued to oppose new projects, and demanded more to say in the future spatial and functional development of their neighbourhood. Yet many large projects has passed the planning stage and could not be stopped by local resistance. This powerlessness fed the unease

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1 See Verloo (1979) for more details on the events around the construction of the Narwal office building.
2 This political turn will be discussed in the next chapter.
3 Cynically, the *Narwal* and *Walvis* office buildings proved to be a commercial disaster. The offices were not taken up by businesses, but after some years, the university rented these inner city spaces.
amongst broad groups in Amsterdam’s society who mobilised against local politicians and their vision of a CBD for the deconcentrated urban region.

Increasingly, the people of Amsterdam proved to be vehemently opposed to all substantial initiatives that involved the demolition and redevelopment of the historic inner city. Initiatives to make the (historic inner) city more accessible for vehicles were also fiercely opposed. It was argued that the quality of urban life should not be subordinate to narrow economic interests. In the City Council, political parties that shared these ideals gained ground. For the first time since the GEP-compromise, the interests of capital and politicians started to diverge.

4.4 The end of expansion politics – The struggle over the Second Report on the Inner City

In 1966 the new council of Mayor and Aldermen championed the drawing up of a new Report on the Inner City, in order to justify its vision on the inner city. The new vision was drafted in a period of changing ideas concerning spatial policy and spatial developments. The city of Amsterdam was expanding rapidly in all directions, and national spatial plans were drafted in order to relieve the pressure on space from the western part of the country, the so-called Randstad, of which Amsterdam is a part. The Second Memorandum on Spatial Policy was made public by national government in 1966. This greatly influenced local spatial strategies, especially since growth and scale-increases were the centre of attention in national spatial policy. For spatial economic policy with regards to the inner city, this growth was especially expected to occur in the service sector (Tweede Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening, 1966).

In the city itself, the demise of support for the inner city’s reconstruction in favour of large scale office buildings went hand in hand with Amsterdam’s first real period of unplanned and rapid officification (the conversion of residential real estate into offices) which occurred in the second half of the 1960s especially in the museum district (cf. figure 4.2) (Van de Moosdijk, 1965; Grit & Korteweg, 1971; Lambooy & Van Geuns, 1985). This was a result of remarkable changes on the user
the financial institutions that made Amsterdam the financial CBD of the Netherlands were mainly general banks (with the ABN Bank, the AMRO Bank and the NMB Bank as the main representatives), savings institutions, public fund services and mortgage banks. Institutional investors and industrial finance institutions were of less importance to Amsterdam (Advokaat, 1985: 137). Scale increases amongst banks in the early 1960s were the engines for increasing turbulence in the user market. Especially mergers and take-overs stood at the cradle of the enormous expansion of activities that had to be carried out in the headquarters of banks. In 1964 there were two major mergers: The Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij and the Twentsche Bank merged into the Algemene Bank Nederland (ABN Bank) and the Amsterdamse Bank and the Rotterdamse Bank merged into the AMRO Bank.

By and large, the merger fever in the 1960 brought down the number of Banks in the Netherlands from 117 in 1960 to 72 in 1970. Moreover, the enormous growth in welfare during this period made the number of bank affairs expand remarkably, and simultaneously the complexity of banking affairs, necessitating an increase in headquarter activities. With the concentration of activities in headquarters, the position of Amsterdam as a financial centre grew stronger during this period (Advokaat, 1985: 140). Yet as a consequence, headquarter office accommodation became inadequate. In the case of AMRO, ABN and NMB, offices were scattered over multiple sites in the city, mostly in the canal belt of Amsterdam (ibid.: 141).

Two consequences of this process raised the profile of office planning in the public arena. The development of large offices which could transform the historical part of the city into a real CBD was met with increasing resistance. Secondly, massive relocations of financial sector companies from the inner city outwards toward southern part of the city had begun, consequently crowding out residential functions in these districts. Indeed, this was the first extension of the inner city CBD functions outside its historical core. Incidentally there were also large companies that relocated to newly built offices along the ring motorway that was under construction. Examples are the Telegraaf (large newspaper), SFB (headquarter of the Social Fund for the Building Industry) and the GAK (social security and employment agency) to the western ring motorway.

Various studies (Van de Moosdijk, 1965; Grit & Korteweg, 1971; Perlstein & Schreuder, 1980) investigate the motives of office users to leave central inner city CBD locations in favour of locations in Amsterdam south, but also Amstelveen and Buitenveldert. All these studies indicate the same push factors. In the first
instance there was a lack of space for expansion in the inner city. Headquarters wanted to stay in the inner city, but simply could not be accommodated in the inner city urban structure. First they sought new and more spacious locations in the southern city districts adjacent to the historic inner city, implicating a growing spatial reach of the central city functions (Van de Moosdijk, 1965: 35).

These developments proved to become particularly unfavourable for the CBD-function of the historic inner city, because the new offices in southern districts accommodated companies that left the historic buildings in the canal belt. Accessibility was becoming more and more urgent for inner city based companies. Office planning became indispensable.

One of the first strategic arrangements was made in 1957 which aimed to plan new office developments mainly in the southern direction, where a new city district (Buitenveldert) would be established and the municipality of Amstelveen sought expansion (Brouwer, 1994: 168).

The first plans for larger scale office development outside the inner city followed in the wake of modern town expansion of the 1960s. While office (re)development in the inner city was plagued by conflicts and delay, more peripheral locations could be planned according to the ideas of the developers and/or users, because of abundant space in newly developed districts and absent opposition.

Urban extensions to the south (Buitenveldert), and west (the western garden cities) were already planned in the GEP, in which economic interests and the political left had agreed on the lobe shaped urban structure. Since there was an agreement to plan for new office development extending in a southerly direction, the plans for Buitenveldert (the new, spacious neighbourhood in southern Amsterdam, just outside the new motorway of Amsterdam) were a first push into the direction of peripheral office development. Under influence of autonomous southbound expansion of the urban agglomeration of Amsterdam, the Province of North Holland had already decided in 1957 to organise some form of coordination regarding the future spatial development in the area that was primarily designated for large scale residential development. This Urban Fringe Committee (Stadsrandcommissie Zuid en Zuidoost Agglomeratie Amsterdam)\(^8\) (Wallagh, 1994: 120) prepared the Structure Plan for Amsterdam South and South East (Structuurplan Amsterdam Zuid en Zuidoost). This so-called ‘urban fringe plan’ was the basis for the more detailed structure plans that the various municipalities now had to produce.

\(^8\) This committee included the governments of Amsterdam, Ouder-Amstel, Nieuwer Amstel, Diemen and Weesperkarspel.
Policy makers were also alarmed by the deconcentration of the working population. Because the concentration of employment in the city of Amsterdam remained relatively stable, commuting caused an increase in car traffic to the city and the downtown area. Thus important choices also had to be made, and although several advisory committees thought of a structure plan as the logical vehicle for this, the city government chose to replace the existing Report on the Inner City of 1955. Alarmed by the growing unease amongst social groups on expansion politics, in 1966 De Wit issued the development of a general urban vision in which large projects (especially the metro-system) could find a place (Wallagh, 1994: 149).

Both inner city companies and the local government considered this report to provide an essential vehicle for influencing the future line of urbanisation in Amsterdam, since the Second Report on the Inner City aimed to do two things: (1) to integrate several projects in the Amsterdam urban region, such as the urban railroad (the metro, which was the logical tailpiece of the vision on deconcentration), harbour development, deconcentration of population and urban renewal; (2) to come to solutions for the complex problems in the inner city (ibid.). So, both capital, local state representatives and social movements tried to influence the ultimate plan.

Alarmed by the deteriorating internal (and increasingly also the external) accessibility of the Amsterdam downtown area caused by the increases in car traffic, companies feared for the devaluation of their investments in the inner city if nothing was done to secure the access to the central business district. So, as a follow up to the Kaasjager-plan of 1954, they proposed radical changes to the urban structure in order to ‘save’ the economic centrality of the inner city.

The chamber of commerce was in favour of the so-called Jokinen plan (Jokinen, 1967). Jokinen was an American professor who was hired by the Dutch car-lobby (Stichting Weg) to make proposals for inner city traffic reorganisation to promote economic revival. Jokinen based his ideas of urban development on the premise that the primary traffic flows should be able to travel without obstacles. Taking the idea of an inner city CBD, the ideal of both capitalists with vested interests in the inner city as well as policy-makers, as a point of departure, and the metaphor of flows (with reference to water flows) as a tool, he presented a radical solution: to optimise the accessibility of the inner city, the highways from the main national network should have connections in the form of newly created main motorways that penetrated into the heart of the city. Along these roads the city functions that inevitably would leave the congesting historic inner city could be accommodated for. Jokinen envisaged a City road through the Pijp, straight from
the historic inner city to Schiphol airport, flanked by prestigious buildings and offices. Jokinen envisaged a similar City road from the southwest through the *Kinkerbuurt* (cf. figure 4.2).

Although radical, these ideas appealed to organised capital, particularly the Chamber of Commerce. In 1968, the Chamber voiced its concerns over the fact that, while many European cities were strengthening their central areas, Amsterdam witnessed countertendencies. These countertendencies were a result of the lack of expansion and construction possibilities in the historic inner city, combined with a lack of parking space. This was all opposed to the relatively advantageous possibilities adjacent to the ring road that was under construction.

Urban politicians were also inclined to maintain the economic centrality of the inner city, but did not want to go quite as far as capital. However, state representatives were still inclined to come to agreements with capital, although pressure from social groups was building up.

The Ban the Bank example was an important landmark in the mobilisation of these social groups, but by no means the only one in this period. The ABN plans followed shortly after the smooth destination of large premises at the Frederiksplein for new construction of the Dutch Central Bank. After the struggle over the *Vijzelstraatflat*, which was decided in favour of capital, a constant stream of new projects that were similar to the ABN Bank office construction had left their less applauded landmarks in the inner city: successively there was the construction of the *Coffin* at the Weesperplein, the *Westland-Utrecht Hypothekenbank* on the Frederiksplein, the *Marriott Hotel* at the site of the former dome church close to the Leidseplein, and the largest of them all, the *Narwal* and *Walvis* office project on the Bickerseiland in 1970 (Roegholt, 1979: 350). All these large-scale inner city reconstruction plans and real developments caused a perceived corrosion of the monumental inner city, which was problematic in the eyes of residents (Wallagh, 1994: 150).

A stable factor in this debate on the future of the city was the Public Works Department of the City of Amsterdam, the urban planners of Amsterdam, responsible for all land policy, development of spatial plans and strategies, and thus also for the concrete preparation of the Second Report on the Inner City. Planners
Regulating Urban Office Provision

were used to working to a model of research – consultation – plan (Wallagh, 1994: 153), a technocratic principle that had important repercussions for their perspective on the future of the inner city, the city and the urban agglomeration. The planners in Amsterdam embraced national deconcentration policy, by introducing the so-called 'deconcentrated urban region' (Terhorst & Van de Ven, 1997: 304-305). This perspective was in line with the ideas of national planners, voiced in the Second Memorandum on Spatial Policy, whose policy of anti-sprawl did not collide with this defence of the inner city as a CBD. With regard to space for economic development, and the future of the inner city the choice was made by the Amsterdam City Council to make space for urban economic functions at junctions of public transport in the 19th century neighbourhoods (sub centres) and at accessible locations at the urban fringe (additional centres). These additional sub-centres (Sloterdijk, Station Zuid, Amstelstation, Station Bijlmer) were located close to the new ring motorway around the pre-war city. The ideal compromise, planners thought, because now the pressure on the built environment in the historic inner city was diverted while the need for a metro system that connected the additional centres with each other and with the city centre was obvious. Moreover, a number of parking garages around the historic city centre was provided in the plan, as well as spacious homes in low densities with parking facilities, both within the city of Amsterdam and in new towns and growth centres. Spacious and expensive houses within the existing city would necessitate the application of 'suburban norms' on inner city neighbourhoods, which would have consequences such as corrosion of existing street patterns and large scale demolitions. The largest political party, the Labour Party (PvdA), was internally divided over this issue (Hessels et al., 1985: 76).

In this way the Second Report on the Inner City did not meet the extreme demands put on the table by the chamber of commerce, but was considered sufficiently radical to provoke resistance. The metro, the economic developments in the inner city and the concept of concentrated deconcentration were contested both by politicians, residents of affected neighbourhoods (the Dapperbuurt) and other groupings, such as university professors and individuals through petitions and alternative plans (Hessels et al., 1985: 77; Wallagh, 1994: 156).

Wallagh (1994: 156) lists four points of critique against the Second Report. First, and least important, people protested against the usage of concealing and unclear concepts such as inner city, city centre and accessibility. Second, open public discussion about the Report was said to be impossible, because of a lack of different clear-cut options. Third, the planners were criticised for using the Report as a tool to validate decisions that were already taken (concerning for instance the
4 The inner city as a CBD: Amsterdam 1945-1968

metro, harbour extension, deconcentration). Fourth, and most important, the fact that an integral vision on the whole urban region was propagated on the basis of outdated vision on CBD development inside the (historic) inner city.

With all these controversies taken together, and the perceived urgency of urbanisation issues one would expect harsh battles in the City Council over the ratification of the preliminary design, especially when the composition of this City Council is taken into consideration. But quite the contrary, the preliminary design was never discussed in the City Council. This does not mean that the issues raised were of no importance to the public debate. Harbour extension, urban railroad (metro) and deconcentration, the main building blocks of the Report, were the topics that dominated urban planning debates in the City Council during this period. Yet the Report itself, envisaged by Alderman De Wit as an integrating piece that could offer the spatial scaffolding for expansion politics, did not bring the city’s philosophy on future urban development further.

Wallagh (1994: 161-164) argues that the lack of support for and priority of the Second Report on the Inner City was caused by the fact that idea formulation about the future of the urban region of Amsterdam was already quite advanced at the time that the preparations for the Report started. This was due to the fact that in debates on the most important urban development issues (harbour extension, urban railroad (metro) and deconcentration), the philosophy on the urban region was already raised and discussed. So, because the decision-making on these issues was already in an advanced stadium, the Draft Report could not play a new and decisive role in the vision development.

Although not ratified in an official document the spatial-functional compromise of the deconcentrated urban region was supported by both capital and the political elite. However, this compromise was fragile and could not provide stable long term commitment. Popular unrest remained, fuelled by a maturing baby boom generation that demanded attention for liveability issues. Moreover, the regional housing policy (large scale demolition in the city of Amsterdam – new development in surrounding new towns and growth centres) lacked a co-ordinated approach – people who became displaced through building demolition were not automatically entitled to a house in the suburbs. The overspill policy was badly organised and not yet orchestrated by the national government. So the search for a new way forward for urban development was continued with increasingly visible and rival claims on existing and future urban spaces.
4.5 Analysis: The structure of office provision and regime of urbanisation during the industrialisation age

The changes in the urban structure of Amsterdam during the period between 1945 and 1968 were considerable, but also rather unproblematic. The GEP compromise that lay at the heart of all post war city extensions included many open spaces that were fit to provide room for urban expansion. The role of the urban planner in the processes of urban change obviously derived from its landownership in the annexed zones adjacent to the built up urban area.

As expected in the introduction, accumulation strategies built on industrialisation politics during this period, and the abundance of space available for harbour related urban development and industrial sites within the city boundaries caused rapid urban economic expansion. Straightforward local accumulation projects could be initiated with the support of central state investments. This period brought Amsterdam the harbour complex, the large infrastructure extensions and the growing airport, all representing the new spatial structures of an expanding city. However, contrary to expectations, real processes of local accumulation did not coincide with these accumulation strategies: they were concentrated in the inner city service and trade sectors, rather than in industrial development, so that the regime of urbanisation during the described period was unbalanced, and unprepared for inner city CBD development.

The revival of the financial sector that was historically concentrated in the inner city started in the early 1950s. This growth was unrelated to any efforts made by local planners, and spatial guidance of these processes was reactive, rather than
strategic. In the 1960s financial companies started to grow rapidly yet the incremental offi
cification of the inner city was insufficient for the extra space demand. Unplanned
decentralisation of offices began towards the residential museum
district as well as urban ring motorway locations. Moreover, within the inner city,
large-scale office developments were proposed which stumbled across resistance
from groupings that stressed liveability and cultural heritage issues in response to
the dominant growth oriented urban politics. This was the beginning of many
struggles over the future urban form in Amsterdam.

The local structure of office provision
Although there were processes of office provision in the inner city of Amsterdam
that had important consequences for the structure of the built environment, office
provision initially was incremental and thus of little concern for economic
development politics in this period of industrialisation. Office holding activities in
the inner city CBD were providing their need for extra space by converting
adjacent historic residential buildings into office spaces. When the demand for
larger offices became bigger than what could be provided for by conversion, the
government’s attitude towards inner city office provision remained one of laissez
faire laissez aller. This remained even when the banking district, because of lack of
space and accessibility problems, began to relocate to the south and first moving
towards the Museum district. The taxonomy of the local structure of office
provision was straightforward: office provision was essentially a bi-partite
arrangement that affected other agents, but was necessarily carried out between the
state, the inner city landowner and the financial institution seeking new premises,
or expansion. In need of new premises, users built their own office buildings, and
when they needed expansion that entailed radical reconstruction, the demolition of
neighbouring premises, or relocation to larger premises where other real estate was
situated, they engaged in a tête-à-tête with the landowner (usually the owner of the
residential building where they sought expansion or new provision) and the local
government, in order to come to an agreement.

Table 4.3 Urban change in Amsterdam - some indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>1968</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inhabitants</td>
<td>770,886</td>
<td>857,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings</td>
<td>220,168 (1946)</td>
<td>282,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>347,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- tertiary sector (1)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>234,967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sociospatial regulation, planning processes and the struggles over spatial imaginaries

In the period described in this chapter, the economy in Amsterdam grew and even boomed. This occurred on the wings of medium term processes of local social and spatial regulation. These, in turn, developed through and within a national regulatory system, largely based on state policies. The national economic policies were based on national corporatist capital-labour arrangements and pillarised social structures of social deliberation.

In Amsterdam, elite divisions were highly differentiated. Harbour capital lobbied for continued and augmented public expenditures in port related infrastructure and public land reservations for harbour extensions. Since the main public investments in harbour infrastructure came from national government, the harbour elite used its connections within the local political elite to influence national investment priorities.

Local politicians were both eager to hitch on to the growth rates of the petrochemical industries, that were functioning as the motor of the Dutch economy and predisposed to close and amicable relations with harbour barons. The electoral base of the socialist political parties consisted for a large part on blue-collar industrial workers. Consequently, the political survival of the communist party depended for an important part on the strengthening of the existing household structure of single male blue-collar breadwinners. The combination of heavily (national state) subsidised social housing (housing shortages were perceived as national enemy number 1 in these years), and the strengthening of the increasingly industry based local labour market structure could provide for a strong electoral base for the communists (10 to 20 percent of the votes throughout the years). The so-called ‘beefsteak socialism’ (biefstuksocialisme) of the social democrat PvdA believed in the adage of providing for the basic needs (housing, work, car) of blue-collar workers. Therefore, the basis for a long period of harbour based industrial policies was strong, in spite of the disappointing growth in industrial companies and employment, and the continuing weak competitive position of the harbour of Amsterdam, especially in comparison with the booming harbour of Rotterdam.

Another part of the local capital elite, the inner city based financial sector, tried to exert influence on the local political elite through the chamber of commerce. This institutional lobby group for local capital expressed its interest in improved accessibility of the inner city and room for physical expansion of company settlements. The impact of such efforts upon local planning policy was considerably less than that of harbour capital. Although the immediate post war
recovery period was characterised by large-scale inner city infrastructure provision, the opening up of the inner city for car traffic was stopped halfway, when local inhabitants entered the platform of the local state in order to obstruct substantial demolitions of existing inner city fabric that were carried out in favour of capital expansion and associated infrastructure extension.

In spite of this, the expansion of the financial sector in the inner city continued incrementally. The steady growth of the financial sector in Amsterdam in the post war era tightened the cluster of companies in the inner city, with the Dutch National Bank and the Amsterdam Exchange as the pivotal agents. The traditional inner city location of this cluster of financial companies was consolidated despite the growing lack of expansion and the absence of large building sites and new infrastructure. Bipartite arrangements were the carriers of this incremental physical inner city growth of the financial sector: the expansion or reconstruction demands of individual companies were decided on a piece by piece basis between the company and the responsible public departments (public works and the land department). These decisions were kept outside political deliberation, and a tradition of deal making dominated office development during this era. This ended when inhabitants and interest groups started to oppose such obscure and invisible decision making on urban form, and in the mean time a slow but steady decentralisation of office holding activities alarmed local politicians.

The self-re-enforcing accumulation strategy based on large-scale social housing, industrialisation and harbour extension, and a laissez faire attitude to incremental inner city physical adjustment built on a local power bloc of the socialist political elite – elected mainly by the blue-collar working class – harbour capital, and the local financial companies. This power bloc primarily conducted their deliberations/deal making behind closed doors, outside the democratic political arena. This is both the strength and the weakness of the local regulation system: as long as the basic needs of the local blue collar electoral base (housing, work, infrastructure) were still in the process of being secured, the success of the national regulatory solution reflected positively on the local regime. In a time in which urban economic problems resulting from the war were being solved, quick local solutions for urban development were considered indispensable and the vigorousness of the power bloc, facilitated by the deliberations behind closed doors was appreciated by local inhabitants. Two structural changes made the methods of the local power bloc vulnerable. Firstly, rising problems in Amsterdam’s industrial sector after 1960 reflected on the blue-collar electoral base, which gradually diminished. Moreover, the relative decline of industry and simultaneous rise of
Regulating Urban Office Provision

Service sector employment necessitated a shift in urban accumulation strategies. Secondly, the general rise in welfare amongst inhabitants increased liveability expectations and demands. Residents were becoming more critical of political actions affecting their urban environment. They were more willing to participate in struggles over future issues of urban development. However, the static, elite and corporatist local power bloc was too inflexible to incorporate these new developments and social powers into the regulatory forms and mechanisms, and persisted with an urbanisation and accumulation strategy that was detached from the real developments inside the disintegrated regulatory powerhouse.

4.6 Conclusion: the regime of urbanisation during the industrialisation years

The persistence of the local power bloc in retaining regulatory mechanisms that were detached from real developments has something to do with the regime of urbanisation, that had proven to be rather comfortable, unproblematic and thus ‘sticky’. Figure 4.3 gives a schematic representation of this regime of urbanisation.

The history of urban planning in Amsterdam during the period between 1945 and 1968 built on one regime of urbanisation, that derived from the 1935 General Extension Plan. This plan and its underlying political-territorial fix underpinned the urban development plans of the after war reconstruction period. Underlying the GEP were three main tasks: (1) enable large scale industrialisation, (2) initiate reconstruction of housing situation in the 19th century neighbourhoods and (3) immigration. In principle, the GEP was an extension plan that had little to say about the historic inner city. It rested on the urban imaginary of the rapidly expanding central city, in which the principles of zoning were based on the functional logic of separate urban realms for living, working and traffic. Underlying this vision on the city were the developments of large industrial sites, the development of an extensive system of urban motorways combined with heavy investments in tunnels, freeways and public transport, and the large scale development of residential working class neighbourhoods on greenfields at the urban edge of Amsterdam. The character of this GEP and the abundance of undeveloped land on Amsterdam’s premises gave planners considerable latitude for guiding and re-directing real development.
In the national regulatory framework, local planners assumed the position of administrators and ‘pilots’ of large national budgets for housing construction, that were accompanied by investments in infrastructure. When war reconstruction was completed, urban planners used their central position in the national structure of social housing provision to direct investments towards enormous new districts on the outskirts of the city. Against the background of the international rise of the Fordist regime of accumulation, this functionally separated and extensive pattern of urbanisation is called Fordist urbanisation. In the 1960s, however, economic reality began to diverge more and more from expectations underlying the pre-war GEP (and post war recovery). It became especially clear that the development of the tertiary sector was grossly underestimated. Although the GEP had thought of the historic inner city as a CBD, this unexpected growth had large impact on the regime of urbanisation: the historic inner city, that had been thought of as a laissez faire area, now became the battle ground for important struggles between competing urban claims.

In the 1960s, when planners in Amsterdam were alarmed by the increasing speed of decentralisation of office-holding activities since the late 1950s. Urban planners were challenged by the complexity of inner city redevelopments for they had become accustomed to technocratic greenfield planning processes. The
decentralisation trend, combined with the disappointing development of industrialisation (it had become clear that the high expectations with regards to industry had been overstated), and continuous growth in the financial services sector, obliged local policymakers to refocus attention in their plans. This entailed a partial shift from an urbanisation strategy focused mainly on urban industrial development, with the harbour complex as the main vehicle, to one that could cope with the whirlwind of developments in the service industry that demanded a vision on office development.

This vision arose hesitantly. As discussed above, the inner city expansion demands of capital were met on a project-by-project basis, building on an urbanisation vision dating from 1931. Planners did not steer investments, they could only mediate them. CBD development was considered desirable for the inner city and thus the planner’s mediating function was undertaken in a very co-operative manner, facilitating and enticing capital to the inner city. When the service sector began to demand more and more space, new projects were initiated that implicitly built on the above cited elite compromise between capital and the local state on expansion politics and the ‘deconcentrated urban region’. In a period in which civil society began raising their voices against rigorous inner city reconstruction plans, this ‘fitting in’ model was contested, and it became clear that the implicit compromise should be made explicit.

Planners, still captured by obsolete regulatory mechanisms, prepared a plan for on the future of the city based on this formerly hegemonic vision on urbanisation that had now lost hegemony. Yet, this vision was already out-of-date before it was produced, and it was never presented to the City Council. It became clear that planners alone could not guide urbanisation, but were dependent on the outcome of a new struggle for hegemony that was being contested by various fractions of capital and labour. The development of a vision for the historic inner core in the context of a growing city emerged during turbulent and unstable social and economic order. The important question being: what is a CBD, what is its value for the city, what is its desired spatial fix, and how to plan for it? The next chapter will focus on these questions.