Léon Deben, Willem Salet & Marie-Thérèse van Thoor (eds)

Cultural Heritage and the Future of the Historic Inner City of Amsterdam

aksant

ISBN 90 5260 096 1

Photograph cover: Bird's eye view of the Munt square (MBA)
Cover design: Jos Hendrix
Typesetting: Hanneke Kossen
Printed and published in the Netherlands

Aksant Academic Publishers, www.aksant.nl

Preface

Exegi momentum aere perennius

Horatio built a monument that will outlast bronze. His poetry lives on everywhere.

The world heritage of monuments consists primarily of buildings but comprises far more as well. The UNESCO list also features pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, natural beauty and music (such as the score to Beethoven's ninth symphony).

The present book is an anthology of essays about Amsterdam, its historic inner city as a cultural legacy and the future of its history, as elaborated by international experts.

The Amsterdam, City of Monuments Foundation works with established institutions to cultivate interest in cultural history by organising publications, exhibitions and congresses, in connection with the placement of Amsterdam's city centre on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Defence Line of Amsterdam has a well-deserved place on that list. Unfortunately, however, our city centre does not appear there, despite its recent designation as a protected cityscape by the ministers of Education, Culture and Science and Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment.

It is subjected to many threats: air pollution by industry, traffic, water transportation and aviation (Schiphol Airport), destruction by crashing aeroplanes flying low over the city, tremors and subsidence as a result of drilling in the ground to build metro tunnels, damage to foundations arising from water level changes, demolition and replacement of monuments by new buildings that are incompatible with the cityscape.

The application to UNESCO is presently receiving consideration. Our book provides explanations and substantiating arguments.

I very much hope this publication will outlast bronze. I am convinced that it will delight the readers I envision in all possible ways.

Piet Witteman,
Chairman Amsterdam, City of Monuments Foundation

Table of Contents

Foreword

The monumental heritage of the historic city of Amsterdam is not static property. Not only is there a constant need for physical adjustments and renovation, but the designated users and purpose remain ongoing issues as well. This book relates experiences from different academic and professional disciplines. The areas of interest are both the historical legacy and the future of the city for which the heritage of the future is now under development. Most contributions are about Amsterdam, although selected international experts have been invited to place the significance of heritage in the perspective of the future of big cities to depict the international status of Amsterdam.

The articles in the book elaborate on the international academic conference convened for three days in the auditorium of the Universiteit van Amsterdam in the autumn of 2002. The conference was organised by the Amsterdam, City of Monuments Foundation in conjunction with the Department of Conservation and Archeology of the City of Amsterdam (BMA) and the Amsterdam study centre for the Metropolitan Environment (AME) of the Universiteit van Amsterdam. The conference and the resulting book were sponsored in part by local corporate industry, the City of Amsterdam and the central board of the Universiteit van Amsterdam. On behalf of the Amsterdam, City of Monuments Foundation, we gratefully acknowledge all participating individuals and organisations that have made this unique manifestation possible. Last but certainly not least, we wish to express our gratitude and respect to the urban planner Annemarie Maarse, who has coordinated the production of this book with enormous dedication.

The editors

Heritage Discourse and Public Space*

MAARTEN HAJER & ARNOLD REIJNDORP

The historicist inner city

Anybody who is interested in the future of historic inner cities should visit Salzburg. Respectable visitors to this city dutifully follow the little 'park & ride' signs, which lead them along streets where pedestrians, cars and lorries jostle for space to what surely is one of the most beautiful multi-storey car parks in Europe: it is located inside the Mönchberg, which divides Salzburg into two. You drive in from one side, ascend the spiral ramp in the rock until you find a parking space, then take a short ride in a hi-tech lift and step out into the open air on the other side of the Mönchberg, to find yourself in the midst of the magnificent quiet of the old Bürgerstadt of Salzburg. Here gothic, late renaissance and baroque architecture compete for aesthetic supremacy in what the tourist brochures describe as 'The Rome of the North'. The visiting urban planner begins to water at the mouth on seeing the astonishing way that one square opens into another, at the contrast between the dark, medieval streets and the flashing beams of sunlight that illuminate them, and the endless succession of astounding vistas of new façades, fountains, galleries and arcades.

Salzburg is Europe's answer to Disneyland. Perhaps the future of the European city really does lie in the consistent design/designing of the city centre as a leisure park for the tourist, as Dyan Sudjic has suggested. Salzburg presents itself as an *Erholungsausflug* (leisure trip) from modern life, and in terms of cultural-political strategy is utterly consistent with the policy of the big amusement parks. In Salzburg's old Bürgerstadt, tourists can lose themselves in daydreams about Mozart's Salzburg or mellifluous memories of Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* – according to their taste, that is. The cultural policy in Salzburg's Bürgerstadt is an acknowledgement of certain phenomena, sometimes typically urban, as a hindrance to the stimulation of economic growth (such as mixed zoning, overlapping social environment and the ethics of urban restraint). Simultaneously, the policy recognises that there are other elements, sometimes not present initially, that are the key to success: controllability, predictability, and the functionalisation of the urban space for one specific purpose: consumption by tourists.

The application of the amusement park concepts to the city brings to life exactly what Michael Sorkin most dreaded in the ascendancy of amusement parks:

> The amusement park presents its jolly regulated vision of pleasure as a substitute for the democratic public space, and succeeds in doing this by ridding the city of its sting: the presence of the poor, of crime, dirt and work. In the 'public' space of the amusement park or the covered shopping centre, even the freedom of speech is limited: there are no demonstrations in Disneyland (Sorkin 1992, p. xv).

Admittedly, the traffic-free inner city, the strictly controlled cityscape and the policy of revitalisation, and the active dream-machine – for example in the guise of little trips in calèches, perhaps with slightly tipsy coachmen in Renaissance costumes – make Salzburg a perfect city for tourist consumption. The tourist leaves the stress of the ever-accelerating society behind in the spiral of the car park and experiences the entrance into the old Bürgerstadt as a time warp. It is a simulacrum of an early urban space, complete with cobblestones and devoid of neon advertising and asphalt, with stately coffee houses and boutiques with buffed parquet floors and window blinds of stretched toile. Exactly as the British sociologist John Urry described, here you can observe how consumption is no longer limited to the familiar touristic consumer goods, such as *Mozartkugeln* or other chocolate delights: for many years now, the coffee houses, restaurants and theatres, and even the entire city centre, have been mobilised for tourist consumption (Urry 1995). When you reflect on the development of Salzburg's old Bürgerstadt as a typification of an ideal, there is only one difference between a traditional amusement park and a tourist city such as Salzburg: you pay an admission fee to enter Disneyland, but in Salzburg you pay to leave the car park.

The example of Salzburg illustrates almost ideal-typically a particular discourse on the future of the historic inner city: that of historicism. The way forward is to turn back. All the remnants of the past are screened for their symbolic power. Those buildings that were seen an obstacle in the 1970s are now the core – or rather the front – of a new strategy of revitalisation. It is an obvious and promising strategy. Inner cities have to safeguard their economic and sociocultural future in the coming years, and by recognising historic artefacts as qualities the historic centres make a strength of what used to be seen as a weakness: limited car-accessibility, smallness and seemingly erratic layouts. But historicism is not unproblematic. As Rem Koolhaas, reflecting on his experiences all over the globe, put it in his cult book S,M,L,XL (1995):

> There is always a quarter called lipservice, where a minimum of the past is preserved ... Its phone booths are either red and transplanted from London, or equipped with small Chinese roofs. Lipservice – also called Afterthought, Waterfront, Too Late, 42nd Street, simply the village, or even Underground – is an elaborate mythic operation: it celebrates the past as only the recently conceived can. It is a machine ... History returns not as farce here, but as service. Costumed merchants (funny hats, bare midriffs, veils) voluntarily enact the conditions (slavery, tyranny, disease, poverty, colony) that their nation once went to war to abolish. (Koolhaas 1995, p. 1256-7)

The Royal Palace at the Dam square (bMA)

What does it mean to mobilise the past? Does it make a city into a theme park? Is the city turning into a historic residential enclave for the well-to-do? Is the city essentially becoming a thematised mall? And – last but not least – what are the consequences for urban society and the public domain if the morphological heart of the city has to beat at the pace of the days that have gone by? It is particularly this last question that we want to focus on here. What role is there for the historic inner city as a public space?

Public space or public domain?

For analytical purposes it makes sense to distinguish public space from public domain. The former refers to physical spaces that are not private; that is, they are open to the public. Public domain can then be reserved for those public spaces that fulfil a particular social function. We define public domain as those places where an exchange between different social groups is both possible and actually occurs. Public domain is thereby a guiding ideal: it is a perspective from which we want to analyse the existing public space, because no matter how often lip-service is paid to the

objectives and desirability of a public domain, only rarely do places actually function in this way.

Public domain is the subject of a lively and complex debate. After all, not only is the term public domain used to refer to the physical places in a city, but it also has a broader political and philosophical meaning. Philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas have often written about the 'public sphere' in society, and others employ the term 'public domain' in a broader context.

In philosophical discussions the public sphere is the place where society is formed, or at least the arena in which the collective will is formed with regards to the future of society. The public sphere then also denotes the whole apparatus of social institutions that fulfil a function within that sphere: newspapers, television, parliament, discussion forums, etc. But the public realm, as it is sometimes called, also occupies a unique place in society: it is the sphere where we encounter the proverbial 'other' and must relate to other behaviour, other ideas and other preferences. This means it is also a domain of surprise and reflection. The public realm is:

> ... the sphere of social relations going beyond our own circle of friendships, and of family and professional relations. The idea of the public realm is bound up with the ideas of expanding one's mental horizons, of experiment, adventure, discovery, surprise (Bianchini & Schwengel 1991, p. 229).

The relation between the public sphere and the physical space is important in our search for the conditions for the development of places into public domains. This relationship has been defined by various authors. Richard Sennett and Jürgen Habermas regard public places, such as the coffee houses of ages past, as institutions of middle-class society that play an important role in processes of social change. More recent literature by Sharon Zukin (1995), Rob Shields (1991) and Kevin Hetherington (1997) also underscores the importance of locations where physical meetings occur for the public sphere. The nature of such meetings, however, and of the requirements that the physical space must satisfy, remain unclear.

In our definition of public domain we have expressly elected to use the term exchange rather than meeting. We uphold this in concordance with the view of Immanuel Kant that making judgements is always based on an exchange with others. It is in this confrontation with other opinions that we develop our own ideas. Judging is not simply the application of received norms: it is something that is based on becoming aware of one's own values and on the decision to uphold or to adapt them. We also assume that the concrete, physical experience of the presence of others, of other cultural manifestations and of the confrontation with different meanings associated with the same physical space, is important for developing social intelligence and forming a judgement. Personal perception and direct confrontation can be an antidote to stereotypification and stigmatisation. The term exchange implies that such confrontations can also be symbolic. Popular metaphors such as 'the city as theatre' refer to the urban space as symbolic space, as a space where a battle of meanings is fought out. Our research into the conditions for the development of public domain stems not from a moral calling, some kind of political correctness, but primarily from curiosity and a propensity for voyeurism, traits that we believe we share with other urbanites.

Historic inner cities as public domain?

City centres are of course no longer automatically the centre of social integration. We live in the era of the network society in which people use space à la carte. Our consumption of spaces follows erratic patterns. We move from the residential enclave to the business park, from leisure centre to the shopping mall, from natural reserve to business park, from the multiplex cinema back to the neighbourhood. City centres are no longer necessarily the central core within the field, but as condensations they are comparable to new concentrations, which increasingly exhibit a combination of living, working and leisure facilities, just like the old centres.

In this network structure, historic inner cities have their own place. They too are a place for occasional consumption, be it for the Sunday shopping stroll or the enlightening cultural experience – especially if they are foreign inner cities. This has been well recognised by policy makers. They are reinventing city centres all over Europe, but with what idea in mind?

The problem with the historicist approach is that public domain is hardly a guiding perspective. The combination of historicist production and tourist consumption propels another type of city. The eye of the tourist forces cityscapes to adjust. As soon as a place – whether an inner city, an industrial monument, an historically interesting building, an untouched village green or a characteristic landscape – attracts the attention of the tourist industry, project developers or city promoters, it is threatened with expropriation. Cities, buildings and landscapes are adapted to satisfy the 'eye of the tourist' (Urry 1990). The original multitude of meanings is then usually reduced to one: that of the promotional brochure.

Salzburg is not the only example of a city where the organisation of tourism has led to marked dominance by touristic meaning. Interestingly, it is not so much a case of the closing off of public space, as of the complete occupation of that space with programmed meanings. All too often the optimal consumption of a specific place seems to assume a more or less complete freedom from interference: those who shape their identities by walking the long-distance footpaths in the urban field, do not want to be disturbed by artefacts of modern life in their purposeful experience of nature, new or not.

In our opinion, locations are to be considered a public domain when different groups of people have an interest in them. When this is the case, the resilience of these groups often proves to be strong. The social geographer Goheen also describes the relation of the public to public space as:

Bird's eye view of the Koning square and the Krijtberg Church (bMA)

> ... space to which it attributes symbolic significance and asserts claims... Citizens create meaningful public space by expressing their attitudes, asserting their claims and using it for their own purposes. ... The process is a dynamic one, for meanings and uses are always liable to change. Renegotiation of understandings is ongoing; contention accompanies the process (Goheen 1998).

Yet to what extent do we design the historic inner cities with that idea in mind?

Place as a consumer good

The historicist inner city fits in a broader politics of the production of places. Recent years have seen an unprecedented increase in interest for the deliberate consumption of places and events. This is a consequence of the substantial expansion of the middle class in developed countries. Influenced by this evermore dominant middle class, there are at least two related trends that have become prominent in the cultural geography of the urban field: the conscious consumption of 'cultural' experiences, and the conscious avoidance of the confrontations with the proverbial 'other' in daily life. These two trends seem to be seamlessly connected/aligned, but in reality they are at odds with each other. Isn't the pursuit of the confrontation with what is 'other' or 'foreign' the ultimate cultural experience?

A phenomenon that has mushroomed in recent years is the desire of the ordinary citizen to have 'interesting' experiences. Leisure scholars talk about an 'experience market', where all kinds of events are offered that can excite people for a short time, from factory sales to art biennials. We can find an example of the conscious consumption of places in cultural tourism. Cities and organisations compete with other places by producing experiences. The success of exhibitions is currently measured by the degree to which they are an event, viz. develop into mass-crowd-pullers of international importance. And cities now need to be approachable as an event too: Kassel during the Dokumenta, Avignon has its festival, and some twenty cities have now been 'the cultural capital of Europe'.

The mass cultural consumption indicates how the definition of places is directly related to the mobilisation of cultural heritage, that is, to the orchestrated production and marketing of cultural events. But this production of experiences and events only functions thanks to the desire for social and cultural mobility: the fact that people develop an identity by attending this kind of event or place. Being present or sharing in this deserves a highlighted entry in one's personal biography (see Hitzler 1988, Hitzler & Honer 1994). Whoever is able to secure a ticket not only has access to the exhibition, but also, it would seem, has gained admission to a cultural elite and acquired a building block of a lifestyle shared with them. People turn out to be exceptionally mobile in the spatial sense, in order to participate in this collective congestion. Typically, they then bemoan the growing popularity. As yet, they refuse

Canal boats at the Damrak (bMA)

to acknowledge that the putative cultural elite itself became a mass a long time ago (see Bell 1978).

In a certain sense, the popular focus on the consumption of experiences is a worry for metropolitan administrators and entrepreneurs. The unquenchable demand for new and different experiences means that producers have to continually update and revise their formula. Nowadays, city centres are given a facelift every so many years in answer to new consumer preferences. Amusement parks have to continually innovate in order to keep pace, and museums are forced to curate exhibitions with catchy themes in order to achieve their visitor targets. But the consumer is unpredictable. When places become too slick, when they focus too much on the supposed desires of the consumer, they become predictable and their attraction to the critical consumer as an experience diminishes.

This is not unproblematic. First of all it is not at all easy to reinvent a city: it is costly, and the discourses according to which the reinvention takes place tend to be the basis for the reinvention of cities elsewhere – with a remarkable similarity between cities as the unintended result. Moreover, the individual importance that people attach to attending cultural events in a city is at odds with their fear of certain other negative forms of urban congestion. The patterns of this avoidance of congestion is in fact just as important in defining the cultural geography. Sociologist

Ulrich Beck (1986, 1993) thinks that the most important change in modern society right now lies in the displacement of social conflicts about the distribution of 'goods' to those about the distribution of 'bads', supposed or actual. In the final decades of the twentieth century, society was forced to deal with the inadvertent by-products of modernisation. New social conflicts often revolve round the sharing of the negative aspects of modernisation, such as rubbish dumps, crime, new infrastructure (from high-speed train routes to airport runways and motorways), asylum-seeker centres or sheltered facilities for drug addicts.

The picky consumption of space thus focused on the one hand on the massive increase in events and positive places, and on the other hand on the equally massive avoidance of all kinds of negative aspects of social progress. When people go shopping or go out on the town, they want to be entertained – not alarmed. In the sphere of the home, we see a growing tendency towards creating a distance from the urban problems and the groups associated with them. All this indicates that the growing middle class uses the urban field primarily in order to separate itself along social lines, and that exchanges between different social groups occur less often.

The historicist inner city as an island in an archipelago of enclaves

Society has become an archipelago of enclaves, and people from different backgrounds have developed ever more effective spatial strategies to meet the people they want to meet and to avoid the people they want to avoid (see also Hajer & Halsema 1997, Reijndorp et al. 1998). On the level of the urban field it is possible to distinguish between countless monocultural enclaves, from gated communities to business parks, from recreational woodlands to golf courses. Furthermore, there are countless non-places at this level: non-territorial spaces such as motorways, airports, industrial areas, stations, railway lines and distribution hubs that are designed functionally. Indeed, viewed objectively, non-places could just as easily be considered places, though they display the features of functionalism and are seemingly a-cultural. And if public domain is not seen as a key component of the design brief, historicist inner cities will become but another enclave.

Yet one may object that the meeting function of the public space is a central objective in any policy paper on the historic inner city. It is a romantic image, partly reinforced by historical-sociological studies in which it is suggested that this ideal existed in the past. The coffee houses of Vienna or Salzburg, the cafés and boulevards of Paris, and the Palais Royal are the often-cited exemplars of real public space (Walter Benjamin, *Passagenwerk*; Richard Sennett, *Fall of Public Man, Palais Royal*; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*; Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*), and always serve to support the notion that the public space is in decline. Yet merely resurrecting the coffee houses does not bring back the public domain.

In the network society, everyone puts their own city together, and each citizen selects his or her own public domain. This naturally touches on the essence of the

concept of public domain. If the modern city can best be understood as a collection of landscapes, and if the citizen is constantly occupied with keeping his or her own small network intact with as little friction with other groups as possible, then that does seem to mean the death of any form of public domain. But that is not what the individual space of the archipelago resident actually looks like.

The paradox is that what many people experience as pleasant public space is in reality often dominated by a relatively homogeneous group. However, these are not the spaces dominated by one's own group. Anyone reflecting on one's own public domain experiences will notice that the key experiences with the shared use of space, upon closer inspection often involved entering the parochial domains of others. Public domain is thus not so much a place as an experience. One experiences this space as public domain because one does not belong to that specific dominant group.

The core of successful public space thus lies not so much in the shared use of space with others (let alone in meeting them) as in the opportunities that urban proximity offers for a shift of perspective: through the experience of otherness, one's casual view of reality is subjected to some competition from other views and life-styles. That shift of perspective, however, is not always a pleasant experience. Take the famous example of Baudelaire's *The Family of Eyes* (see Jukes 1990), which concerns the experiences of a young couple who are confronted with the staring eyes of street urchins while sitting outside one of the gas-lit restaurants on the corner of one of the new Parisian boulevards. Their apparition in the bright light shatters the self-determined *mise en scène* of romance and happiness and makes the presence of the man and his children a problem. The other Paris shows itself and the perspective shifts. It is a public domain experience *par excellence*, but not a happy one.

Those who have a soft spot for the public domain must account for the fact that many places that bring together a great diversity of public are currently designed, very deliberately, as 'zero friction' environments, as friction-free space. The design is dictated by the avoidance of friction and the successful play on the imagination. The functionalisation of city centres for the benefit of tourist consumption has not penetrated everywhere quite as far as it has in Salzburg. However, here too plans are being devised to turn city centres into friction-free spaces. One of the means to this end is the system of the 'speaking façade'. Tourists in the smaller cities in the western provinces of Holland (Haarlem, Leiden, Gouda, Delft) will have a chance to roam the streets wearing headphones with a radio link from one historic façade to another, pumping their ears with all kinds of information about the historic city. In essence, this not only shuts out the outside world but also implements a system that orchestrates the most ideal touristic corridors. The least we can do is make sure that the functional relationships of a multitude of publics with the historic inner cities remains intact.

Note

* This article draws on material presented in our book *In Search of New Public Domain*, published by Nai Publishers, Rotterdam (2001).

References

Beck, U.
1986 *Risikogesellschaft – Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
1993 *Die Erfindung des Politischen*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Bell, D.
1978 *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books.

Benjamin, W.
1983 *Das Passagen-Werk*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Berman, M.
1982 *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Bianchini, F. & H. Schwengel
1991 'Re-imagining the City', in: J. Corner and S. Harvey (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage*, London: Routledge, p. 212-263.

Goheen, P.
1998 'Public Space and the Geography of the Modern City', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 22, nr. 4, p. 479-496.

Hajer, M. & F. Halsema
1997 *Land in Zicht! Een cultuurpolitieke visie op de ruimtelijke inrichting*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.

Hetherington, K.
1997 *The Ballads of Modernity – Heterotopia & Social Ordering*, London: Routledge.

Hitzler, R.
1988 *Sinnwelten*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Hitzler, R. & A. Honer
1994 'Bastelexistenz. Über subjektive Konsequenzen der Individualisierung', in: U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim (eds), *Riskante freiheiten*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, p. 307-315.

Jukes, P.
1990 *A Shout in the Street. An Excursion into the Modern City*, London: Faber & Faber.

Koolhaas, R. et al.
1995 *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.

Reijendorp, A. et al.
1998 *Buitenwijk. Stedelijkheid op afstand*, Rotterdam: Nai Uitgevers.

Sennett, R.
1978 *The Fall of Public Man. On the Social Psychology of Capitalism*, New York: Vintage.

Shields, R.
1991 *Places on the Margin*, London: Routledge.

Sorkin, M. (ed.)
1992 *Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space*, New York: Hill & Wang.

Urry, J.
1990 *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London: Sage.
1995 *Consuming Places*, London: Routledge.

Zukin, S.
1995 *The Cultures of Cities*, Cambridge (Mass.): Blackwell.