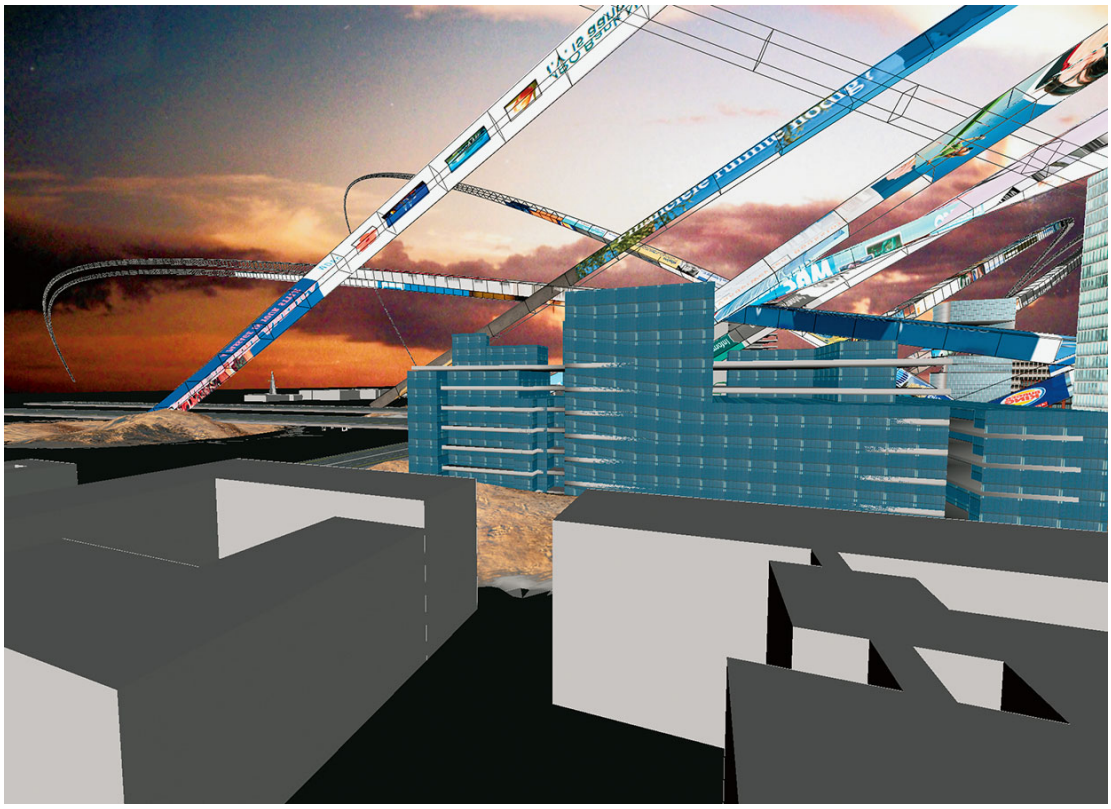
Hybridity of the Post-Public Space
Logo Parc and the Zuidas in Amsterdam

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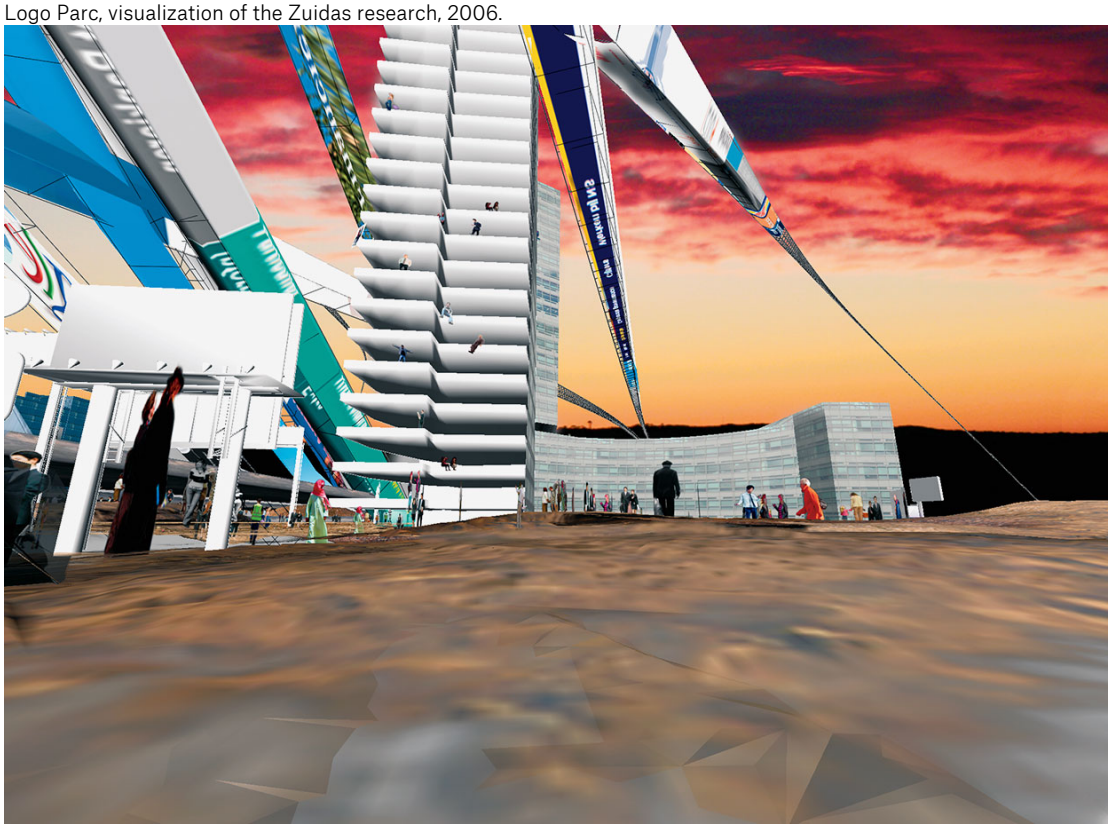
At the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, a research project is underway, on the public space of the Zuidas business district in Amsterdam. This project, entitled *Logo Parc*, looks into the value of the Zuidas as a 'symbol'. In addition, proposals are being developed for a conception of the public space as a new type of space. The present essay, along with its accompanying pictorial material, is one of the results of the project.



Logo Parc, visualization of the Zuidas research, 2006.



Logo Parc, visualization of the Zuidas research, 2006.



Logo Parc, visualization of the Zuidas research, 2006.



Logo Parc, visualization of the Zuidas research, 2006.

The Zuidas ('South Axis') in Amsterdam is the new economic heart of the Netherlands: no other district has such a high concentration of bankers, accountants, business consultants and attorneys. In the main, two sorts of information are available about what has been built there thus far: promotion and cynical commentary. As regards future developments, castles-in-the-air scenarios and prophecies of doom are making the rounds. Bank skyscrapers have been erected, like the ING House and the headquarters ofABNAmro, and business conglomerate buildings, like 'Vinoly' – more often dubbed 'the corporate crack' because of the painstakingly stylized and lighted fault line that bisects the building's façade – and the 'Ito Tower'. These two buildings, by architects Rafael Vinoly and Toyo Ito, respectively, are part of an urban development called 'Mahler4'. According to the City of Amsterdam's Physical Planning Department, the Zuidas is the ultimate implementation of Berlage's Plan Zuid ('South Plan'), which included a 'highly situated, imposing South Station' with a 'Minerva axis' leading to it. [1]

At the end of 2004, almost 1.5million square metres of office space in Amsterdam stood empty. [2] There is therefore no need for the Zuidas, as supply is amply sufficient. Comparable space with the same modular ceilings, along the same ring motorway, can also be rented elsewhere. As a financial, economic and legal business centre, the Zuidas violates one of the fundamental rules of economics. Yet the Zuidas is managing to attract businesses that used to operate in the old Amsterdam-Zuid area or in the historic city centre (for instance on the Leidseplein or along the canals). This would be impossible without symbolic compensation in the Zuidas for the absence of city-centre attractions, provided by trendy lifestyle chains such as Wagamama (restaurants) and Club Sportive (fitness), for example.

This compensation is symbolic precisely because it is not complete. It doesn't quite succeed – and any visitors to the Zuidas can see this with their own eyes – in bridging the gap between a gigantic business estate and a lively new urban district. The Zuidas has no traditional urban fabric, nor a strong interweaving of housing and employment, nor any informal quality that would make it possible for one to feel at home there. Much of the intended 'dynamism' of the Zuidas relies on conventions and codes.

Conventions

The Zuidas houses many banks and law firms. Both professions value the absence of surprises. When a bank takes financial risks on the stock market, the external system within which such risks are taken is suffused with confirmation. Professionals recognize one another not only by their knowledge and experience, but also by their company cars, suits and footwear. These conventions centre not so much on 'lifestyle' factors (fashion sense or hipness), as on quality, although the two concepts are probably increasingly intertwined. [3] The practice of law also exists by the grace of conventions on representation, which must be perpetuated by the appearance of every legal professional.

Thus there are many of the same kind of people at the Zuidas. And why would they bother one another? Whereas the traditional street is the place where they disagree, where they run into one another, the Zuidas is the place where they agree and yet don't run into one another. After all, if at all possible, the public space is avoided. The representatives of banking and legal service providers come out onto the street mainly to make phone calls and to smoke: both activities fall outside the conventions agreed upon in the office. If they're phoning in the street, it's not 'for business', but 'personal', and if they're smoking outside, it's because smoking 'on the job' is not permitted.

In the meantime the Zuidas is trying to show that it is possible to do more here than just work. On the one hand, food courts – an analogy to the airport and the shopping centre, but also a (subconscious) reference to the law ('see you in court'). On the other hand, the noodle bars, the health clubs, a bookshop with cookery and design books, and a range of ambitions including a design museum, hotels and apartments. These ambitions are translated into the presence of 'hip' spots that – in the Zuidas vision – stand for cosmopolitan dynamism. In an artist's impression, an anonymous digital artist has plastered, in a newspaper-style typeface, the word 'Traiteur' on a building on the Mahler4-plein.

Creative Zuidas

The dynamism the Zuidas is hoping for is reminiscent of the 'creative city'. The American economist Richard Florida has become the centre of a debate about the 'creative class', which seeks out and produces style-conscious, information- and culture-intensive, but also open and informal urban environments in major Western cities. The 'creative class', as it has been embraced by politicians and business, is the social embodiment of a synergy between creativity and economics. The 'creative class' designs or produces goods and services both material and immaterial, the added value of which consists of their injected creativity. In an extension of this, politicians make no secret of the fact that they see in the 'creative class' the post-industrial successor to the 'working class'.

This is not the venue for reflection on the 'creative class' and the disappearing act it implies. The working class was represented by collective bargaining agreements and trade unions, and the right to strike afforded it a political instrument to champion its own position. The 'creative class', on the contrary, is scarcely represented, [4] cannot make collective bargaining agreements about minimum compensations and rates (this would violate the right of competition), cannot strike effectively, has no protected titles, builds up little or no pension fund, and so forth. Viewed from this reality it is not difficult to understand why the centre-right of the political spectrum is welcoming the 'creative class' with open arms.

It suffices here to posit that the Zuidas, for several reasons, is not this 'creative city', and that therefore the concepts of urban dynamism and trendy nightlife and entertainment venues derived from the 'creative city' do not apply here either. The main reason is that renting workspace at the Zuidas is too expensive for the 'creative class'. The rental prices

are so high that 'creativity' is too insubstantial a financial footing. The second reason, related to this, is that in Florida's vision the 'creative class' produces the trendy urban areas on its own, by reanimating former 'no-go areas' and making them socially acceptable: all the hip districts in New York, London and Paris started out as places where artists and intellectuals would settle until they became truly popular and unaffordable. At the Zuidas the exact opposite is taking place: a hugely expensive business centre is installed first, in the hope that the 'creative class' will call it home of its own volition.

At the same time, the Zuidas, its ambitions notwithstanding, isn't even urban. The Zuidas will rebut this with an appeal to a characteristic typically understood as urban: 'accessibility'. The Zuidas is hoping to become a city by the mere fact of its position straddling the A10motorway. Yet good accessibility is, in fact, the predicate of the periphery, the Vinex suburb and the industrial estate.

The Amsterdam Zuid / wtcstation is the future Amsterdam stop for the high-speed rail line. This is a place that is already a mere six minutes from Schiphol Airport. Here too, what is in fact not in evidence – urban quality – is symbolically compensated by short lines and having everything close by. But here, 'close by' means the proximity of far-away places, reached by high-speed train, by motorway with a car, and from Schiphol by plane. This proximity is primarily a business and professional asset, which has nothing to do with the needs of ordinary city residents. The Zuidas is superbly accessible from Dubai, but it is miles away from Amsterdam.

We observe that while in a formal sense two crucial urban criteria seem to have been met – functional mix and accessibility – in fact something else is unfolding before our eyes. We can speak of a *new* sort of space, which through a lack of courage and vision is not being labelled as such.

Pi de Bruyn – the architect and urban designer who developed the first master plan for the Zuidas – argues that someday homeless people will be roaming the Zuidas.[5] This, in his view, represents an urban adaptation scenario, in which the dynamics of housing, work and leisure will evolve into manifestations of the 'undesirable'. The irony is that the post-war apartment blocks of Buitenveldert start fewer than a hundred metres away – housing built as part of an ideal that everyone should have a roof over his or her head.

A lot of criticism, such as that fired at the Zuidas by the activist collective 'Loesje' through posters, is directed at the reflective high-rises. However charming it may be, this criticism is too light, and it also ignores the as yet unnamed essential characteristics of the Zuidas as a new type of space. In the context of globalization, this could be a space in which the old patterns of the city do not apply. In other words, a space with *new* features rather than bad features. We attempt to outline a few of these features below. Inevitably these are linked to the unfulfilled hope that the Zuidas will become a real public space – read: a real city.

Extra-Societal, A-Social, Post-Public

The law, financial and administrative services and banks are socially visible sectors. In parallel to a broadly shared societal interest in money matters (measured for example by the popularity of such periodicals as *Quote* and *Miljonair Magazine*) top attorneys and top bankers have become public figures. As a business centre, the Zuidas has primarily attracted banks and law firms – to a place, or space, actually situated at a distance from the society in which the law and capital exercise their influence.

The quality of a city like Amsterdam was always that the top banker would enjoy the sandwich s / he'd bought from the local baker 'on the canal', alongside the squatter, the Rastafarian and the artist. Now entire professional groups are being transplanted to a place where such confrontations no longer take place. In fact lawyers, bankers and

accountants are being shipped to a reservation, where, among their peers, they are no longer bothered by society.

One could argue that at the Zuidas it is not so much the city as the society in all its diversity that is dispensed with. Not only is there no one walking around there without a professional interest or objective, but even the future 'housing functions' of the Zuidas are being laid out in a direct extension of the spending patterns of bankers and lawyers. Work will be done under the concept of 'living as in a hotel', in which completely self-sufficient apartment complexes (comparable to Detroit and Boston on the recently redeveloped Oostelijke Handelskade in Amsterdam's Eastern Harbour District) are open for tenancy, with built-in parking, laundry facilities, swimming pools, health clubs and grocery delivery and other shopping services.

People are working and living in an enclave that has become far more than a city in itself – an extra-societal service centre. AnABN-Ville. You can lounge and drink cocktails far removed from everyone, surrounded by top design.

Meanwhile the urban quality produced by this vision is in fact a-social, in the sense that when users of the space choose the public domain, it is their second choice. People spend time on the street in order to smoke, or to make a personal phone call.

According to Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp, the public domain is created by confrontation: 'Different groups are attached to a particular place, and one way or another they have to come to an accommodation.' [6] By this definition, the Zuidas is not public domain, because no negotiation takes place about the use of space. One cannot consider the lawyers and bankers as different groups, because by 'difference' Hajer and Reijndorp meant social classes, ethnicities and age groups.

Because the Zuidas is not private domain either, we shall have to accept the area as a new form of space, which we will provisionally call *post-public*. As in post-punk, there are all sorts of elements that are reminiscent of the previous, obsolete stage, and it is precisely these elements that continually obscure perspectives onto new opportunities the Zuidas entails as a hybrid space. The Zuidas is first and foremost a policy city, and the policy ambition of creating public space may conflict with the most important function of the Zuidas: keeping Amsterdam on the map for the international business world.

Investors and others with interests tied into the Zuidas will violently disagree with this. In fact every discussion about the Zuidas bogs down the moment we – or others – draw any sort of conclusion from the current state of affairs at the Zuidas. According to the partners and investors of this mega-project, any such conclusion is by definition premature: even though the Zuidas has been operational for years, it is still, they say, a *work in progress.*

In their study, Hajer and Reijndorp cite Marc Augé, who coined the influential term *non-place* for the featureless, relationship-free, ahistorical spaces of mobility and consumerism. 'The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.' [7] A crucial point is that Augé presents the absence of 'relations', connections, as a criterion for a non-place. This of course begs the question of whether the Zuidas meets all the criteria for a non-place, the way industrial estates and shopping centres do. The answer is that the Zuidas may not have a history, but it *does* have connections. The Zuidas is permanently linked to the global flows of money and information, for example. It is a place that is alienating for Amsterdam, but very familiar when seen from New York, London and Singapore. This place is anchored within a network.

Characteristics of the Post-Public Space

Architect and researcher Lara Schrijver poses the question of whether public space is an 'active' or 'passive' concept: 'Ultimately the street itself is not always considered a vital part of the public space – this simply begins where the private space ends . . . whereas actual publicness, or the public domain, traditionally begins where we engage in formal contact with others.' [8]

Post-public space 'appears' when an urban inventory stands at the ready – rubbish bins, bicycle racks, public greenery, public art, street lighting and even shops – yet is hardly, if at all, used in the presumed or prescribed manner, or when the use of it produces no more than the sum of its parts. Such space is only public in a *passive* sense: all the conditions are met, except actual use – contact and therefore confrontation with others.

Now that we have defined the post-public space as a space 'in a certain state', we can ask ourselves whether the Zuidas is not in fact *pre-public*. Isn't it after all *a work in progress*?

This is certainly its ambition. But this ambition is not always propagated with equal enthusiasm by all parties involved. Even in the promotional material, differences in emphasis can be found. All the parties want the Zuidas to be fantastic. But the emphasis on the public space – including photomontages of busy plazas – is only present in advertising material signed 'Zuidas' and on the website Zuidas.nl. These make references to terraces, future festivals, the street lighting and the high-quality materials used to pave the streets: Belgian bluestone cobblestones and veined granite, tested for durability: 'Test subjects included women wearing various types of shoes and a wheelchair user.' [9]

The project developers of the buildings – including Fortis andingVastgoed – place the emphasis on entirely different things. Lifestyle and individualism strike the predominant note here. Notwithstanding such hopeful terms as 'shopping', 'strolling', 'lounging' and 'dining', no promises are made with regard to a public domain. These are the same words the in-flight magazine *Holland Herald* uses to lure a tourist to Barcelona.ingVastgoed, according to Renée Hoogendoorn, is mainly interested in the value of the real estate, and 'culture' is employed to calculate this value: 'From the start we were conscious of the fact that culture was crucial for the image of the project area. Since we know that real estate in the vicinity of cultural institutions such as museums usually represents a somewhat higher value, we declared ourselves ready to contribute this future surplus value in advance, as part of the foundation costs for the development of a museum . . . and the result is that we are now getting Platform 21.' [10]

Quality of Buildings and Public Space

The *non-use* of the public space is in itself the result of relationships and connections becoming virtual, whereas in a more traditional concept of the city they were still tangible. The hybridity and computerization of the post-public space is thus expressed in desolation.

In the *Amsterdam Creative Index* Maarten Hajer is quoted as calling the Zuidas a 'blank zone', 'with no identity, and therefore a place no one wants to visit'. [11] The author, Jaap Huisman, notes that everyone agrees that the 'quality' of the public space and the architecture of the Zuidas will be a decisive factor in its success. The Amsterdam professor Robert Kloosterman says: 'Have Koolhaas design a museum, ormvrdv. The masses will flock to it.' [12] 'Quality' in architecture thus seems to be measured by the name recognition of an architect. This has already been exploited by naming the eye-catching buildings of the Zuidas after their architects. 'Quality' coincides with the most dominant convention of this district: the status of the builder.

But how do we measure the 'quality' of public space? Ruwan Aluvihare, of the Physical Planning Department of the City of Amsterdam, is the landscape architect who designed the public space of the Zuidas, and in his case neither his first name (as in 'Rem') nor his last name (as in 'Koolhaas') suffices as proof of 'quality'. 'The streets running north to south will be tree-lined; those going east to west will be narrower, with trees on the north side only. All will be green lanes that serve to relieve the glass and steel mass of the office blocks.' [13] The greenery is intended to 'undo' the buildings!

Ruwan Aluvihare has 109 Google hits. He is, among other things, the designer of the Zuidplein – the first public work to be completed in the context of the Zuidas. A brochure published by the City of Amsterdam on the occasion of the Zuidplein's completion contains several noteworthy remarks. Such as: 'In the plans for the Zuidas, the Zuidplein will become a lively abode . . . where people spend time, meet one another, and where strangers get acquainted.' [14] The planners know that only then will the Zuidas become public domain. And: 'There is room for market stalls and other ambulatory trade.' [15] Yet whatever 'ambulatory trade' might be, you find no market stalls on the Zuidplein. 'Cafés, a supermarket, a hairdresser's, a dry-cleaner's, a bookshop and a wide array of smaller shops make for a lively atmosphere.' [16] The liveliness of the dry-cleaners has yet to be proven. 'The newly constructed buildings on the west side of the plaza, with a height of104metres, provide a metropolitan atmosphere, one of the characteristics of the new Zuidas city district.' [17] The metropolitan atmosphere as an *a priori* characteristic of the Zuidas is pure suggestion. But: 'The role of the greenery in the densely built-up Zuidas is crucial, as the district will include many high-rises. Therefore it has been decided to give the greenery a vital role as a counterpoint to the built environment.' [18] And: 'The Zuidas will . . . become a landscape.' [19] But: 'The trees will be replaced once they get too tall, and a warranty period of10years has been agreed. The growing conditions selected stipulate that the larger species of trees never reach full size.' [20]

Logo Parc: A Design Challenge for the Post-Public Space of the Zuidas

The 'quality' of the architecture of buildings proves entirely incomparable to the 'quality' of the public space. That of architecture begins with the contribution of an architect to the image of the Zuidas – whereby a less tangible quality like a 'brand' is meant as well (see Koolhaas,mvrdv) – which in and of itself generates streams of visitors. The quality of the design of the public space is based on concrete objects with intrinsic qualities, such as market stalls, greenery and durable street paving. Aside from the irony in the designers wanting to create a market square across from the World Trade Center, we have already noted that the post-public space emerges when an inventory of the classic public space is made ready as a matter of policy, and this is then not used, or not used with the expected consequences. The question is: doesn't the post-public space entail a *new* design challenge?

The project *Logo Parc* is an attempt to give shape to this challenge. The project began with a critique of the Zuidas as a symbol, in a historical comparison with the architectural representation of political ideas, as seen in the parks of Versailles and La Villette. At Versailles, the territorial power of France and Louisxiv; [21] at La Villette, the intended 'confrontation' in deliberately uncomfortable pavilions of revolutionary aspect. [22] At the Zuidas – which embodies the power of the economy – a designed representation of an idea is missing. The analysis of the Zuidas along these lines continues, but the project is now concentrating on an overall, critical look at the public spaces of the Zuidas.

As we have seen, this space is complex because public life is uncommon there. The present public space of the Zuidas has been developed based on conceptions of as well as calculated in the direction of forms of 'desirable', and therefore traditional, city life. It seems this choice was made in order to forestall a potential doom scenario: that the Zuidas

should become a costly but moribund office park, deserted after five o'clock in the afternoon. In contrast with a more traditional critical outlook toward the Zuidas,*Logo Parc* is not concerned with softening or turning back the Zuidas into a traditional city.

Our research shows that 'quality' for architecture and public space is interpreted in highly divergent ways. The architecture at the Zuidas is overloaded with authorship – important buildings are named after their architects – while the identity of the public space emerges anonymously. Various architects proposed public works for the Zuidas in its planning stages, but none of these were implemented. In at least one case, that of the Zuidplein, a simpler plan was inserted into the process by municipal architects and implemented.

Challenging new ideas are therefore badly needed at the Zuidas. Certainly if the intended use of public space and the urban expectations for the district do not go according to plan. This has led to the introduction of the term 'post-public space', where a clear lack of urban street life is not interpreted as regressive or 'under construction', but as a departure point for new urban strategies.

Logo Parc views its own proposals as derived from four programmatic layers that have been given little chance in the current design yet are essential 'public domain': landscape, communication, social life and virtuality. These elements, which range from the concrete to the intangible, are essential ingredients for a twenty-first-century post-public space, in which an overabundance of digital technologies and networks develops in parallel with an increasing physical distance from the historical city centres. This creates different forms of public behaviour. The public space represents, in potency, the symbolic dimension of this behaviour.

This text is a collaboration by Logo Parc reseachers Katja Gretzinger, Matthijs van Leeuwen, Matteo Poli, Gon Zifroni and Daniel van der Velden.

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Footnotes

1. See City of Amsterdam Physical Planning Department, *Plan Amsterdam* brochure no. 4, 2004.
2. *Het Financieele Dagblad*, 19 October 2004.
3. See also Camiel van Winkel, 'Koning Midas in Wonderland', *de Witte Raaf*, January 2001.
4. This problem is also being seen in a broader context. Recently, the organization 'Alternatief voor Vakbond' ('Alternative to Trade Union') began in Amsterdam, at the initiative of Mei Li Vos, specializing in representing freelancers and the self-employed. In the profile of this new-style trade union, no specific emphasis is being placed on the creative industry. See www.avv.nl.
5. Pi de Bruyn, 'Creating City Culture' in *Creativity and the City: How the Creative Economy is Changing the City, Reflect* #5 (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2005).
6. M. Hajer and A. Reijndorp, *In Search of New Public Domain* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2001).
7. Ibid.
8. Lara Schrijver, 'From Public City to Publicity . . . and Back Again? Collectivity in the Twentieth Century', *Oase 59* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2002).
9. See City of Amsterdam Physical Planning Department, *Plan Amsterdam*, op. cit. (note 1).
10. In B. van Ratingen, 'Ik zie ik zie wat jij niet ziet', *Real Estate Magazine,* May 2006.
11. J. Huisman, 'Harmony and dissonance', in: *Amsterdam Creative Index 2006* (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2005).
12. Ibid.
13. J. Huisman, 'The art of compromise', in: *Amsterdam Creative Index 2006* (Amsterdam: BIS, 2005).
14. See City of Amsterdam Physical Planning Department, *Plan Amsterdam*, op. cit. (note 1).
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. C. Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
22. See Y. Futagawa, *GA Document Extra 10: Bernard Tschumi* (Tokyo: a.d.a. editaTokyo Co., Ltd., year).

Tags

Architecture, Capitalism, Public Domain, Public Space, Urban Space

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