

## Excursões a Shopping Centres: O Desafio dos Países Baixos na Luta contra o Paradigma

*Shopping Centre Excursions: The Low Countries' Quest for a Fitting Paradigm*

*Excursiones al Centro Comercial: Los Países Bajos Buscan un Paradigma que Encaje*

GOSSEYE, Janina; PhD; Delft University of Technology (TUDelft) / University of Queensland (UQ)  
j.gosseye@uq.edu.au

### Resumo

Quando os shopping centres chegaram aos Países Baixos em meados de 1950 foi um confronto a governos, reguladores, arquitetos e planejadores devido a questão de como esta nova tipologia poderia se adaptar ao contexto local. Para encontrar a resposta, várias 'missões' foram organizadas para estudar o fenômeno no exterior. Foi concluído haver dois modelos distintos; um americano e outro europeu. Este estudo investiga as características que essas missões identificaram como pertencentes a cada modelo de shopping centre e as recomendações específicas que surgiram como resultado. Finalmente, o estudo examina como essas recomendações foram traduzidas no design do primeiro shopping centre da região.

**Palavras-chave:** shopping centre. Bélgica. Holanda.

### ***Shopping Centre Excursions: The Low Countries' Quest for a Fitting Paradigm***

#### **Abstract**

*When the shopping centre reached the Low Countries in the mid-1950s it confronted governments, policy-makers, architects and planners with the question how this new typology could be adapted to the local context. To find the answer, several 'missions' were organised to study this phenomenon abroad. These concluded that two distinct models existed; an American and a European one. This paper investigates the features that these missions identified as characteristic of these two shopping centre models and the specific recommendations that they derived from them. Finally, the paper examines how these recommendations were translated into the region's first shopping centre designs.*

**Keywords:** shopping centre. Belgium. The Netherlands.

## **Excursiones al Centro Comercial: Los Países Bajos Buscan un Paradigma que Encaje**

### **Resumen**

*Cuando el centro comercial llegó a los Países Bajos a mediados de la década de los cincuenta, se enfrentó a los gobiernos, a las personas responsables de tomar decisiones, arquitectos y planificadores con la pregunta de cómo podría adaptarse esta nueva tipología al contexto local. Para encontrar la respuesta, se organizaron varias 'misiones' con la idea de estudiar este fenómeno en el exterior. Las conclusiones fueron que existían dos modelos definidos: uno norteamericano y uno europeo. Este estudio investiga las características identificadas por dichas misiones para estos dos modelos de centros comerciales y las recomendaciones específicas que derivan de ellos. Por último, el estudio analiza cómo dichas recomendaciones se traducen a los primeros diseños de centros comerciales de la región.*

**Palabras clave:** centro comercial. Bélgica. Holanda.

### **Introduction**

In 1963, Dutch economist A. Luyckx, opened the special issue on shopping centres of the weekly journal *Actuele Onderwerpen* as follows:

Between Delft and The Hague, in Rijswijk, a modern shopping centre ... is being built. Other parts of the country are also considering the construction of such a 'shopping centre'. Even more places are studying or developing plans. The situation is similar in other Benelux-countries... All of this following the example of America. Will the shopping streets of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, The Hague, Luik, Luxemburg or Rotterdam all be depopulated? (LUYCKX, 1963, p. 1, own translation)

When the American suburban shopping centre concept arrived in the Low Countries<sup>1</sup> in the mid-twentieth century, countless concerns were voiced and numerous questions raised about the impact that this commercial typology would have on the region's spatial structure. Initially conceived in the mid 1940s by Victor Gruen,<sup>2</sup> a Viennese architect who migrated to the United States in 1938, America's first 'purebred' suburban shopping centre, Southdale opened in 1956, just outside of Minneapolis (SMILEY, 2013, p. 1).<sup>3</sup> Southdale cost twenty million dollars, had seventy-two shops and two anchor department stores, all combined under one roof. Reporters from all of the country came for Southdale's opening and wore out superlatives attempting to capture the feeling of Southdale. *Life* called it "The Splashest Center in the U.S.", *Time* dubbed it a "pleasure-dome-with-parking", while *Institutions Magazine* declared this suburban shopping centre a paradigm of "America's newest institution" (HARDWICK, 2004, p. 145-147).

Around the time that Southdale opened, America's "newest institution" arrived in Europe, where it quickly forced architects and planners as well as retailers, economists and politicians to come to grips with this novel commercial phenomenon. Many European countries, including Belgium and The Netherlands, sent missions to the United States to investigate this new shopping typology first hand. In 1960 the Belgian Service for the Advancement of Productivity, sent a delegation charged with

investigating the development of shopping centres to the United States, and one year later, the Dutch Governmental Advice Commission for the Harmonious Development of Retail also journeyed across the Atlantic. The discoveries that the Dutch mission made led to the 1962 *Kopen en Knopen* (Shopping and Tangles) exhibition in Rotterdam, while the Belgian mission gave rise to the publication of a detailed report.

Not only Northern America became a source of inspiration, but also certain European countries were increasingly recognized as shopping centre destinations. In 1961, one year after their visit to the US, the Belgian Service for the Advancement of Productivity sent a mission to Europe, which travelled to Sweden, France and the UK, and published their findings in a report similar to the publication of the American mission. Under the heading “A view across the borders” The Netherlands also featured several European shopping centres in the Shopping and Tangles exhibition and in 1963, Simon Keesen, a journalist who in 1961 had joined the Dutch mission to the US, published a book on the ‘retail revolution’ in the US and Sweden (KEESEN, 1963).

The goal of these foreign missions was twofold; on the one hand they strove to educate the population of the Low Countries about the new ‘shopping centre’ phenomenon, while on the other hand they sought to proffer guidelines and recommendations on how this new typology could be successfully adapted to and integrated in the region. This paper is accordingly composed of two parts. The first part, ‘recommendations’, explains what specific suggestions were proffered from these foreign missions, and the second part, ‘translations’ discusses how these were implemented in the first shopping centres in Belgium and The Netherlands.

## Recommendations

### *Looking to America*

In the fall of 1960, a Belgian delegation embarked on a mission to the US to study shopping centres. A few months after their visit, they published a travel report, a significant part of which was dedicated to “the metamorphosis of cities in the United States”. The report unambiguously stated: “[i]t is deplorable to have to witness the demise, not to say the death, of the [American] city centre, of which life is retracting at an accelerated pace” (Shopping Centers, 1960, p. 30, own translation). The delegation clearly held the shopping centre accountable for this sad situation, as they wrote:

Numerous shops, both large supermarkets and small specialist shops, close or slowly languish. ... At the same time, the number of commercial centres in the periphery, as well as their revenue quickly, increases. Everyone we met ... underlined the pronounced advantages of living outside the ‘downtown’ and making use of shopping centres in the periphery of large cities (Shopping Centers, 1960, p. 30-34, own translation).

Similar observations were made by Dutch journalist Simon Keesen who in his 1963 publication on shopping centres in the US and Sweden, postulated:

The horror stories about the retail revolution that has happened in American are true: during our study trip to the United States, we were confounded by the destruction of downtown businesses, the emergence of discounters, the urban exodus of American citizens and the incredible development of the car

park (KEESEN, 1963, p. 9, own translation).

The Shopping and Tangles exhibition, which was on display in Rotterdam in the summer of 1962, revealed these American “horror stories” to the Dutch public. The sixth stop along the exhibition-trajectory that was laid out through the *Bouwcentrum* carried the theme: “Will the core of the city remain the commercial centre?” To find the answer, an exhibition panel announced:

[t]he *Kopen en Knopen* exhibition takes you on a journey to the United States. [...] Here a new phenomenon arose, the so-called shopping centre. [...] Located in the urban periphery, it is very appealing to shoppers because of its coordinated design, pleasant shopping, entertainment, easy parking and modern sales methods. It is [however] instructive to examine what subsequently happened in the United States: shops left the chock-full cities, where traffic had increased to an undesirable level [and] the congested urban core in many cases became the desolate, dead inner city (Inhoud van de expositie ‘Kopen en Knopen’, 1962, own translation).

Across the Low Countries, the developments in the US were depicted as a cautionary tale, which was to be avoided at all cost. The Belgian report suggested that to pre-empt the accelerated spawning of large shopping centres in pursuit of the suburban dollar which would negatively affect downtown areas and lead to unfettered (sub)urbanization,<sup>4</sup> it would be of prime importance to forge close collaborations between governmental bodies and the free market. The report thus effectively inscribed the shopping centre in the European welfare state. Contrary to America’s liberal economy, the European welfare state was based on an agreement between the free market, state and civil society and the careful planning of the built environment was one of the key areas in which the European welfare state sought to achieve its ambitions of economic redistribution and social welfare (SWENARTON, AVERMAETE, VAN DEN HEUVEL, 2014, p. 20). Delegates of the Dutch mission to the United States thus underlined that these profound socio-political and economic differences between the two geographic regions resulted in very different shopping habits and would (inevitably) lead to a different shopping centre development:

Shopping habits over here are profoundly different ... we are not (yet) as indolent as over there. An American will not walk for more than 200 metres from a parking spot to a shop; a phenomenon which is taken into consideration when planning parking lots around shopping centres ... But what is possible in America is not possible here. In contrast to the immense freedom that retailers over there have to determine how they would like to build on their plot, which often leads to a chaotic urban planning, we have a rigid system of urban expansion plans, plot alignments and building ordinances (Problemen van de stadsuitbreiding en winkelvoorziening, 1961, p. 727, own translation).

Also the Belgian foreign delegation hypothesized that shopping centres in Europe were likely to adopt different forms than those in the United States and sent a delegation to visit commercial centres in Europe. It was, in the words of the delegation, “after all in a European frame that viable solutions for the integration of commercial centres in Belgium needed to be found” (Shopping Centers en Europe, 1961, p. 1, own translation).

### ***Turning to Europe***

In May 1961 a Belgian delegation visited France, Great Britain and Sweden. The findings of this mission were presented in a report, which confirmed that shopping centres in Europe had taken a different path from the one that their American ancestors had travelled down (Shopping Centers en Europe, 1961). The comparison with Sweden in particular threw this disparity into sharp relief. In Sweden, a country that has been pinpointed as one of the most pure 'social democratic' welfare state regimes, strong government intervention ensured that the development of new shopping went hand in hand with strategic urban planning.

Sweden was a forerunner in the domain of shopping centre development in Europe. One of the pioneering European shopping centres, Vällingby centrum, opened in Sweden in 1954. It seemingly effortlessly combined the public good with private interests. Located less than fifteen kilometres west of Stockholm, Vällingby was deemed a successful example of Europe's 'middle way'. Swedish shopping centres soon became a reference point in Europe. In 1960, the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce published a 40-page pamphlet, entitled *Swedish Shopping Centres: Experiments and Achievements* to quell the growing thirst for information. The introduction of this publication stated:

In the United States public authorities have not had any appreciable influence on the course of events. Businessmen, financial interests and contractors have built the new [shopping] centres on those sites which to them appeared to be the most suitable economically. Sweden may be said to represent the opposite extreme. Its town planning legislation gives the local authorities much wider powers in this field than is the case in most other countries (Swedish Shopping Centres, 1960, p. 5, own translation).

The shopping centres discussed in the Swedish brochure were all built in the heart of new suburban centres surrounding Stockholm and located along underground railway lines extending from Stockholm. The 1962 Shopping & Tangles exhibition dubbed these suburban centres sub-city-centres and heavily promoted them as the solution for the development of shopping centres in the Netherlands. Although the Belgian delegation was also very enthusiastic about this type of urban development, it did reserve some criticism for its architecture, stating that it missed a “soul” (Shopping Centers en Europe, 1961, p. 37). The anodyne architecture of sub-city-centres could however be understood as an expression of the ideological underpinnings of socio-political system that they were inscribed in. Contrary to the garish privately developed American shopping centres, the Swedish shopping centres were cast as integral building blocs of the welfare state and their architecture was accordingly designed to embody its egalitarian and democratic ideals.

## Translations

When it came to adapting the shopping centre concept to the Low Countries the missions clearly favoured the European paradigm of the sub-city-centre over the American model. The key difference they identified had to do with the stakeholders involved in the development process. In Europe, a close collaboration between the private and the public sector had seemingly ensured the creation of carefully planned ensembles which were generally well-connected to public transport and stood in sharp contrast with the private profit-driven shopping centre development in the US, which did not structure suburban sprawl, but exacerbated it.

### ***‘Shopping 1’ in Genk, Belgium***

In the early 1960s Genk, a municipality in the North-East of Belgium, surprisingly decided to build – in their words – an “American inspired” shopping centre.<sup>5</sup> This plan was first revealed at a town meeting in 1964, following which a municipal Commission for Commercial Urbanisation was established that was charged with reconciling commercial demands with Genk’s urban development. A few months after its establishment, the commission unambiguously projected its future on that of Sulzbach in Germany, where: “[t]he only shopping centre following American norms has been built on the European mainland” (Korte Historiek, 1964). The commercial success of Sulzbach’s shopping centre and the magnetism that it exerted on its surroundings was very appealing to Genk.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the discovery of charcoal in the region, Genk started urbanising at an impressive pace. Three mining sites opened between 1909 and 1913 and in the following fifty years the population increased from 3500 to 47,500 (DE RIJCK, KESTELOOT, JANSEN-VERBEKE, 1998, p. 8; p. 46). Genk’s fragmented settlement pattern, which had historically been built up out of a number of

dispersed hamlets, was now further articulated, with the three mining sites functioning as (new) nuclei of growth. By the early 1960s, however, when it became clear that the natural resources were not infinite, Genk set out to reinvent itself. The development of the shopping centre formed an important component in the municipality's endeavour to establish a new economical order. It was to position Genk as a modern centre of urbanity in the region and dissociate the municipality from its black mining past. Located at a short walking distance from Genk's budding city centre, it was destined to contribute to the formation of a new urban core that could weave the municipality's dispersed urban fabric together. Although the municipal Commission for Commercial Urbanisation had clearly well understood its task of espousing urban development with commercial interest, it was ostensibly unaware of the fact that this approach was much more 'European' than 'American' in nature. In Genk, just like in Sweden, the UK and France, it was a public authority (the municipality) and not private developers that took the initiative to construct a shopping centre. The municipality was therefore able to select the location for the shopping centre as well as commission an architect of their choice to come up with a design.

In 1964, the municipality of Genk asked architect J.M. Plumier to develop a proposal for its shopping centre. His initial design, which supposedly responded to the brief that the municipality had set, attests to ambitions that are of a radically different nature than those identified in the American shopping centre. The plans show a complex of detached, rectilinear buildings with different height, size and function, all located in a car-free area surrounded by parking lots. Next to commercial functions, it incorporated a large housing block, offices, an administrative centre, a hotel, a café, a restaurant and a range of communal facilities such as a day-care centre and a swimming pool. The buildings were all connected through an intricate system of 'streets in the sky', that according to M. François, Director of Technical Services of Genk, were to "... separate the vehicular traffic from the pedestrians while maintaining an optimal car-accessibility to the entire perimeter of the shopping centre" (FRANÇOIS, 1964, p. 2, own translation). Sketches that Plumier made however suggest that apart from this functional aim of grade separation these 'streets in the sky' were to fulfil a social function as well. He saw them as an extension of the urban fabric; places where people could meet and linger.

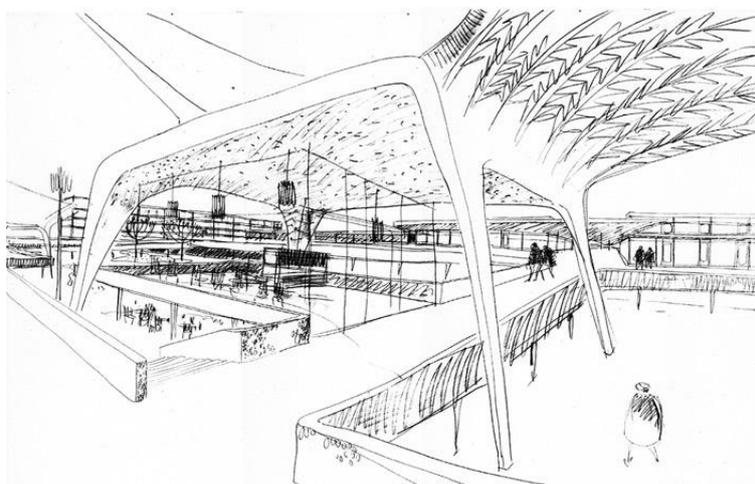


Figure 1: First design for 'Shopping 1 in Genk' by architect J.M. Plumier, 1964

Fonte: Box 874.1, City Archives Genk, Belgium.

By 1965 Plumier's design had evolved from this initial multi-level, multifunctional open-air complex to a (predominantly) single-story shopping centre structured around an open-air street, which traversed the plot from East to West and comprised a limited set of auxiliary functions. At its most Eastern point, it collected two large supermarkets and a few smaller commercial units around a spacious square, while in the West it gathered a modest health clinic, a restaurant and a hotel around a square with a generous pond. The shopping centre could easily be reached by car via a bridge over the newly planned state road, which gave out onto a three-level car park.

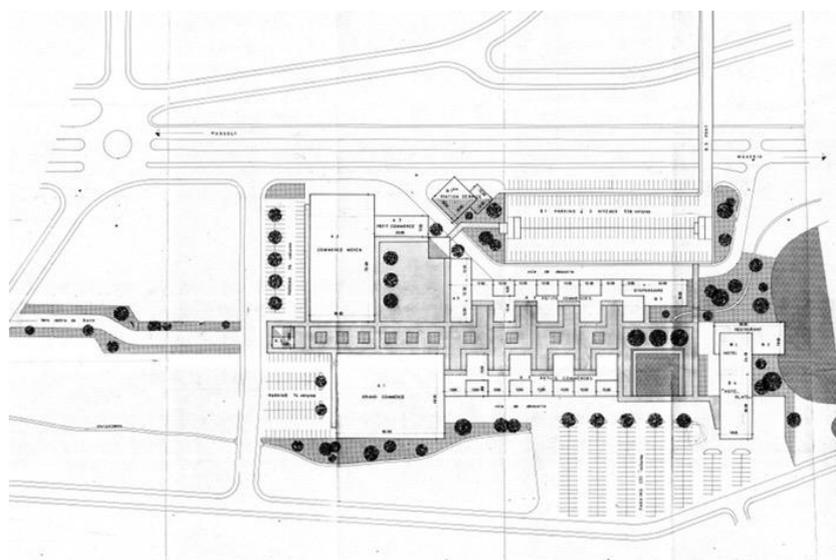


Figure 2: Second design for 'Shopping 1 in Genk' by architect J.M. Plumier, 1965

Fonte: Box 874.1, City Archives Genk, Belgium.

Based on this design, the municipality opened a tendering procedure and soon reached an agreement with the company *Constructions et Entreprises Industrielles* (C.E.I.) from Brussels. Genk would sell the land that it had expropriated to C.E.I., which in exchange was to build a shopping centre on the site following the design of architect Plumier. In the contract that C.E.I. sent to the municipality in May 1965, the company suggested that the established price was still negotiable:

Should Genk refrain from charging the undersigned to construct certain of the non profitable components, such as the multi-story carpark, the health clinic, the hotel and the bridge then the conditions of the sale could be revised, taking into account the additional available land and the surplus value that could be attributed to it (Ontwerpcontract, 1965, p. 5, own translation).

By December 1966, architect Plumier had drawn up new plans. These no longer showed the open-air shopping street, but a fully enclosed large, low-slung complex, composed of six large volumes connected by covered pedestrian streets. Although the hotel, the bridge, the multi-story carpark and the health clinic were still included, these were drawn in dotted lines and carried the inscription "to be part of a next approval application". Throughout 1967 these plans, which unmistakably made generous concessions to C.E.I., were further elaborated. As a result, when 'Shopping 1' finally opened its doors in August 1968, it no longer remotely resembled the initial

'European' proposals that Plumier had made, but was much more akin to the American shopping centre formula – the dumbbell mall – that the municipality initially aspired to build.



Figure 3: Shopping 1 in Genk shortly after its opening

Fonte: -

### **'Binnenhof' in Amstelveen, The Netherlands**

One of the first shopping centres built in the Netherlands was Amstelveen's *Binnenhof*. The *Binnenhof* was located at the heart of Amstelveen, a new sub-city centre of Amsterdam, which was to accommodate a population of 90,000. The plan for the development of Amstelveen was first adopted in 1956, after the inter-municipal corporation *Agglomeratie Amsterdam* was founded. This corporation developed a structure-plan for the whole agglomeration surrounding Amsterdam to initiate controlled decentralisation. The original design was made in 1957 by a team of architects, including the office of van den Broek and Bakema,<sup>6</sup> Arthur Staal and P. Zanstra, who worked in close collaboration with the municipal urban planning cell.

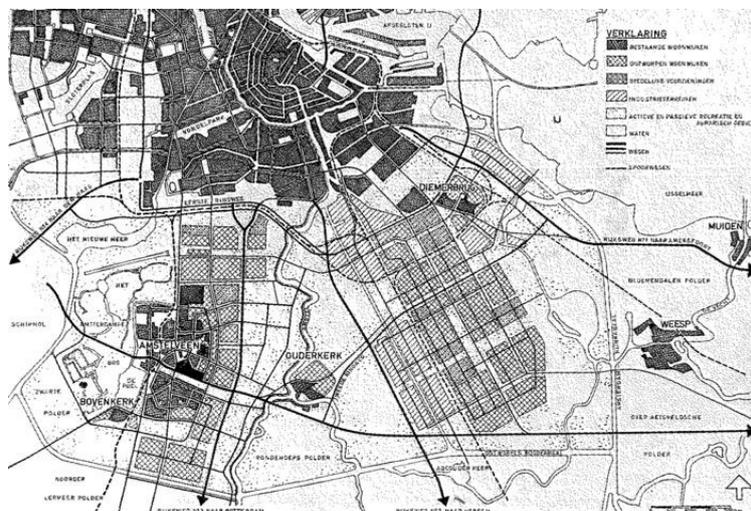


Figure 4: Plan showing the relationship between the sub-city-centre, Amstelveen, and Amsterdam

Fonte: Een centrum voor Amstelveen (1962, p. 186).

In April 1958, the first *kernplan* or centre-plan for Amstelveen was published in the journal *Bouw* (Kernplan – Amstelveen, 1958, p. 435). It revealed a neat rectilinear mixed-use development, with a large, three-storey town hall (*raadhuis*) at its heart (no. 1 in figure 5). To the south of the town hall was a voluminous four-storey office building, which also contained public services, including a post-office (no. 3 in figure 5); to the north was a low-slung supermarket with annex bank (no. 6 and 7 in figure 5); to the east the plan showed a collection of tall, five-storey apartment buildings with shops on the ground floor (no. 5 in figure 5); and to the west, an expansive triangular public square, fronting the town hall. Other components of the plan were a cultural centre (no. 2 in figure 5), a six-storey hotel (no. 4 in figure 5), a range of apartment complexes ranging from three to ten storeys high, some of which had shopping on the ground floor (no. 13 in figure 5), a police station (no. 11 in figure 5) and community services (no. 8, 9, 10 and 12 in figure 5).<sup>7</sup>

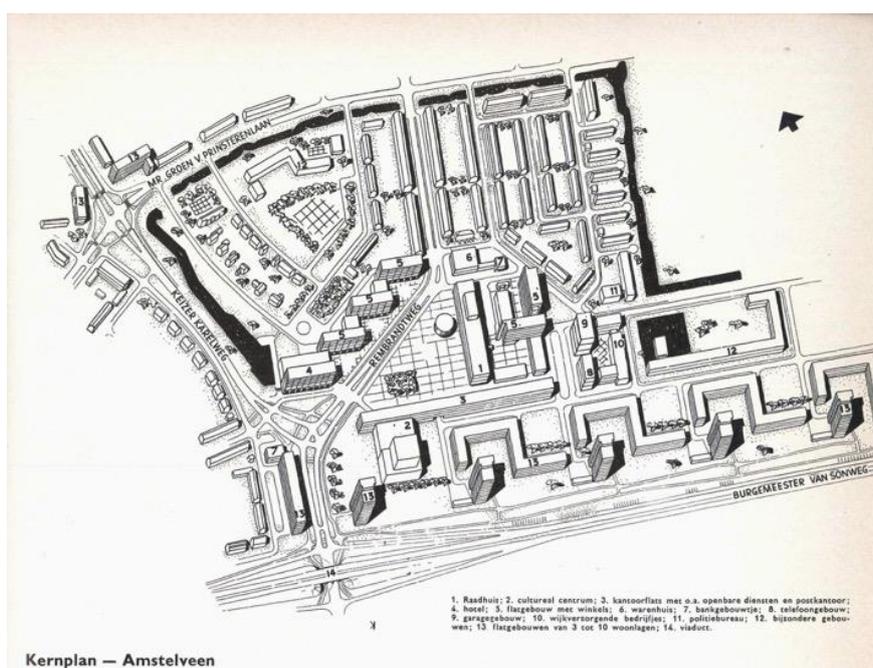


Figure 5: Plan of the new ‘urban core’ of Amstelveen

Fonte: Kernplan – Amstelveen (1958, p. 435).

By November 1961, however, when Amstelveen’s new centre was festively opened, this initial design had changed drastically. One of the most notable changes was the stark increase of shopping facilities, which had pushed the town hall out of the core, to the western periphery of the development. To accommodate this increase in shopping, the community services and the spacious public square that were drawn up in the 1957 plan, were replaced by expansive parking lots. At the heart of the development was now a sizeable shopping centre, which surrounded an open square, called the *Binnenhof*.<sup>8</sup> The *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, which in 1962 devoted a twenty-page article to Amstelveen naïvely remarked:

The original intention placed the town hall more or less in the hustle-and-bustle of the shoppers, but when a prospective buyer expressed his interest to build a department store in this location, the town hall was moved to the south-western corner (Een centrum voor Amstelveen, 1962, p. 188, own translation).

The glaring increase of shopping between the first design and the final development, prompted the *Bouwkundig Weekblad* to almost apologetically point out: “From in the beginning the commission was to design not a shopping centre, but a ‘heart’ for a municipality of 100,000 souls. Governance, culture and a shopping centre were to this end united in one design” (Een centrum voor Amstelveen, 1962, p. 187, own translation).



Figure 6: Aerial photograph of the urban core of Amstelveen under construction

Fonte: Item 130-0946, Fotocollectie Rijksvoorlichtingdienst Eigen, National Archives The Hague.



Figure 7: View of the *Binnenhof* in Amstelveen, showing the base of the advertising mast

Fonte: Item 130-0966, Fotocollectie Rijksvoorlichtingdienst Eigen, National Archives The Hague.

In line with the sub-city centre developments in the UK, France and Sweden, the architecture was thus subjected to a carefully defined set of restrictions, which resulted in a typical example of welfare state architecture that sought to express an equilibrium between the demands of commercial interests and the desire to convey civic solemnity. Nonetheless a tall 'advertising-mast' was placed at the heart of the *Binnenhof*, which became the focal point of the complex and a pointed signifier of the triumph of commercial interests over the public good, continuously reminding shoppers that "Coca Cola refreshes best".

In 1972, a decade after Amstelveen was inaugurated, the journal *Bouw* published a travel report of another Dutch mission that was organised to the US and Canada that same year. In the epilogue, the article projected their American experiences on the situation in the Netherlands and launched an ardent plea for the enclosure of shopping centres in the Netherlands, stating:

... in the US a pronounced preference for enclosed shopping centres exists among consumers, and as a result also among developers and investors, and the open-air centres that we visited were clearly less attractive. Although the Dutch situation is evidently not identical to that of the US, there are probably less differences in human behaviour than many assume or hope. (LEICHER & DE JONGE, 1972, p. 1638, own translation).

The tone of this article was thus very different from article that appeared in the journal *Bouw* a decade earlier, reporting on the 1961 mission, which had proudly stated that: "Shopping habits over here [in the Netherlands] are profoundly different ... And we are not (yet) as indolent as over there [the United States]" (Problemen van de stadsuitbreiding en winkelvoorziening, 1961, p. 727, own translation).

In 1988, Amstelveen's *Binnenhof* was covered in glass, thus defining it as a formal contrast to the social, cultural and governmental functions housed around the shopping centre. One year later, in 1989, the project to renovate and expand the 'heart' commenced. This included an expansion of shopping functions with an additional 4500 square metres.

## **Delusions, Disillusions and Conclusions**

As the histories of Amstelveen and Genk illustrate, the disparities between what the Belgian and Dutch foreign missions identified as the 'American' shopping centre model on the one hand and the 'European' paradigm on the other, were much smaller than what these missions had people believe. The collaborations that were – following the European shopping centre 'model' – set up between the state and the free market were tenuous at best and susceptible to venality. This 'corruption' of civic ideals by commercial interests already happened in the United States in the 1950s, when Gruen first elaborated his shopping centres design.

In Gruen's early designs a planned decentralisation, very similar to the one that was from the mid 1950s on effectuated in the UK, France and Sweden, lay at its base. Gruen envisaged the shopping centre to become a 'suburban crystallization' point or 'satellite downtown' that – once several were realised – could develop into a network of nodes, which would not only structure decentralization, but also (most importantly) safeguard the commercial viability and liveability of the (traditional) city centre.

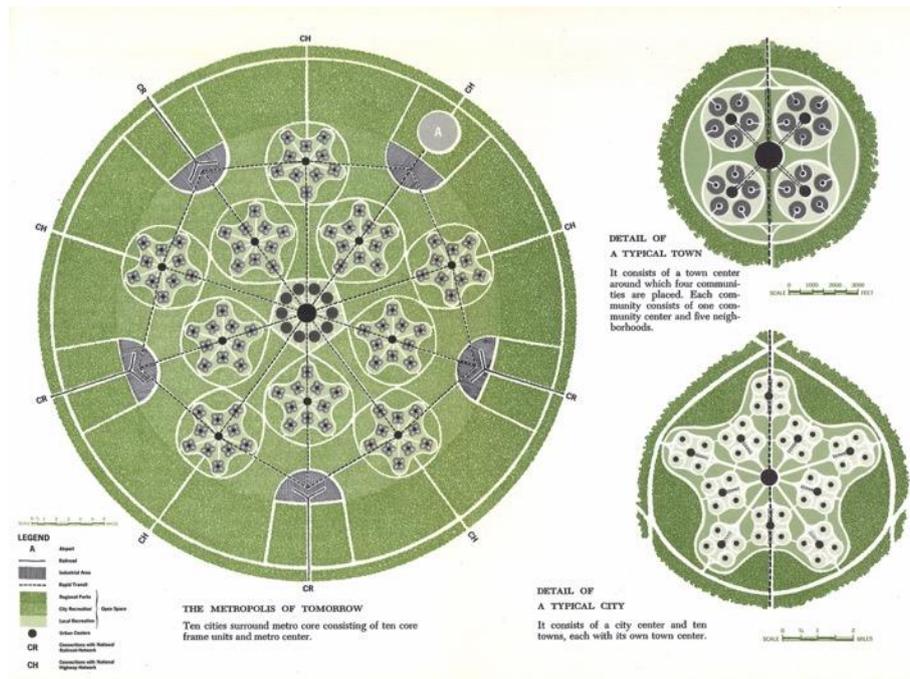


Figure 8: Victor Gruen's schematic drawings of the cellular metropolis of tomorrow

Fonte: Gruen (1964, p. 272).

When Gruen first drew up the plans for Southdale, he placed the shopping centre at the heart of a tidy urban development, complete with apartment buildings, houses, schools, a medical centre, a park, and a lake. These grand plans for Southdale were however never realized. There were no parks or schools or apartment buildings, only a big box in a sea of parking. Gruen's neig utopian socialist dream was built by American capitalists, who – cleverly using the sudden change in the economics of mall-building – turned into a paradise of the liberal economy.

In 1954, American Congress – in an attempt to stimulate investment in manufacturing – introduced a radical change to the tax rules governing depreciation. It launched a program called 'accelerated depreciation', which allowed developers to rapidly write off construction of new business buildings and even claim losses against unrelated income. The depreciation deductions were so large that in the first few years after a shopping centre was built, it was almost certainly losing money, at least on paper, as it ensured enormous tax benefits and allowed shopping centre developers to recoup the cost of the investment in a fraction of time. Shopping centres thus became lucrative tax shelters for investors, leading to a 'bonanza' for developers (GLADWELL, 2004).

In the beginning, the design and planning of the 'American' and the 'European' shopping centre was thus identical. Each could be seen as one half of a monozygotic twin, spawned from the desire to create a new and improved version of the European downtown.<sup>9</sup> However, in the immediate post-war decades, nurture stifled nature as both twins developed differently according to the different socio-political environments that they found themselves in. In the European welfare state of the 1950s the equilibrium between market, state and civil society was initially kept in check, resulting in carefully planned shopping centres, equipped with cultural facilities, well-connected to public transport and a 'sober' architecture, as could be

observed in the examples that were visited in Sweden, France and the UK. However, as the Low Countries gradually liberalised over the following years,<sup>10</sup> shopping centres in Europe gradually transformed into what their American ancestors had been since the mid-twentieth century: machines for selling.

The lessons that the foreign delegations thus should have drawn from their excursions to the United States was that it is extremely difficult to harness private interests for the public good, and the grandest of visions can (as a result) easily be derailed by the slightest imbalance in the collaboration between the state and the private market. Also Gruen came to this realization too late. He ended his living disclaiming responsibility for the shopping centre, snarling: "I refuse to pay alimony for those bastard developments" (HARDWICK, 2004, p. 216). However, as he turned away from his adopted country disillusioned in 1968 and moved back to Vienna, he found that a shopping mall had been built just south of the city, which was putting his beloved independent downtown shopkeepers out of business.

## Thanks

This paper is the result of a research project, which has been funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (project number: 275-57-001) and focuses on the development of shopping centres in post-war Western Europe. The research has been conducted at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands under the supervision of Professor Tom Avermaete.

## References

DE RIJK, T., C. KESTELOOT, M. JANSEN-VERBEKE. **Sporen van een Mijnverleden: Sociaal Geografische Studies in de Limburgse Mijnstreek**. Heverlee: Instituut voor Sociale en Economische Geografie, 1998.

Een centrum voor Amstelveen. **Bouwkundig Weekblad**, n.º 9, p. 185-188, 1962.

FRANÇOIS, E. Notes of the meeting of the council of Aldermen of Genk, 7 September 1964. In Folder 874.1: Bouwaanvragen 1966: Shopping Centre 1, City Archives Genk.

GRUEN, V. & L. SMITH. **Shopping Towns U.S.A.: The Planning of Shopping Centers**. New York/ Amsterdam/ London: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1960.

GRUEN, V. **The Heart of Our Cities. The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure**. London: Thames and Hudson, 1964.

GRUENBAUM, V. & E. KRUMMECK. Shopping Center. **Architectural Forum**, p. 100-103, May 1943.

HARDWICK, J. **Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream**. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Inhoud van de expositie 'Kopen en Knopen', 1962. In Folder: 122533/ 347: Bouwcentrum/ Dubbele exemplaren lezingen kopen en knopen, National Archives The Hague.

KEESEN, S. **Revolutionaire Distributie in U.S.A. en Zweden: Shopping-centers, Supermarkten en Discounters ook in Nederland?** Amsterdam: Uitgeverij FED, 1963.

Kernplan – Amstelveen. **Bouw**, n.º 17, p. 435, April 1958.

Korte Historiek, 9 October 1964. (Short overview of the development of the shopping centre in Genk by the Commissie Commerciële Urbanisatie). In Folder 874.1: Bouwaanvragen 1966: Shopping Centre 1, City Archives Genk.

LEICHER, J. & B. DE JONGE. Winkelcentra in de Verenigde Staten en Canada. **Bouw**, n.º 51, p. 1638-1651, December 1972.

LUYCK, A.W. Winkelcentrum: Van Markt tot Shopping Center. **Actuele Onderwerpen**, n.º 953, March 1963.

MALCOLM, G. The Terrazzo Jungle. In: **The New Yorker**. Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/03/15/the-terrazzo-jungle>. Accessed on 21 September 2015.

MATTSSON, H. Where the Motorways Meet: Architecture and Corporatism in Sweden 1968. In: **Architecture and the Welfare State**, edited by M. Swenarton, T. Avermaete & D. van den Heuvel. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 154-175.

MENNEL, T. Victor Gruen and the Construction of Cold War Utopias. **Journal of Planning History**, n.º 2, p. 116-150, May 2004.

Ontwerpcontract van immobilia aan gemeente Genk, 20 May 1965. In Folder 874.1: Bouwaanvragen 1966: Shopping Centre 1, City Archives Genk.

Problemen van de stadsuitbreiding en winkelvoorziening: Studiereis naar de Verenigde State van Amerika inzake shoppingcenters. **Bouw**, n.º 23, p. 726-727, June 1961.

**Shopping Centers en Europe: Compte rendu d'une mission d'étude organisée en France, Grand-Bretagne et Suède.** Brussels: Comité Belge de la Distribution, 1961.

**Shopping Centers: Verslag van de Belgische Zending naar de Verenigde Staten.** Brussels: Belgische Dienst Opvoering Productiviteit, 1960.

SMILEY, D. **Pedestrian Modern: Shopping and American Architecture, 1925-1956.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

**Swedish Shopping Centres: Experiments and Achievements.** Stockholm: Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, 1960.

SWENARTON, M., T. AVERMAETE, D. VAN DEN HEUVEL. Introduction. In: **Architecture and the Welfare State**, edited by M. Swenarton, T. Avermaete & D. van den Heuvel. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 1-20.

Winkelcentrum en verzamelgebouw. **Bouwkundig Weekblad**, n.º 9, p. 194-197, 1962.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Low Countries is a coastal region in Western Europe, consisting predominantly of the Netherlands and Belgium. Although the term also encompasses parts of France, Luxembourg and Germany, this paper focuses exclusively on Belgium and the Netherlands, which make up the core of the Low Countries.

<sup>2</sup> Together with his wife Elsie Krummeck, Victor Gruen, who was then still known as Victor 'Gruenbaum' published an article on the shopping centre in the journal *Architectural Forum* in 1943 (GRUENBAUM & KRUMMECK, 1943).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Southdale was not the first shopping centre in the United States, but the first realised large-scale, fully enclosed, and air-conditioned centre, which has been broadly accepted as a milestone for regional shopping centres in the country.

<sup>4</sup> Shopping centres were however not the sole culprit of the demise of the American downtown. When Northland opened, suburbanisation of the American landscape was already well on its way. Since the 1940s, the construction of hundreds of thousands of new houses, many of which were underwritten by federally financed mortgage insurance, along with the rapid increase in car ownership and federally funded highway construction facilitated the 'white flight'. For the first time, a powerful interaction between segregation laws and race differences, which were expressed in socioeconomic terms, enabled the white middle-classes to abandon inner cities in favour of suburban living. This resulted in severe levels of urban decay that, by the 1960s, resulted in the formation of crumbling urban 'ghettos'.

<sup>5</sup> This intention was stated in a letter by the Mayor of Genk to the Director of the West-Flemish inter-municipal corporation for technical advice and support regarding spatial planning (West-vlaamse Intercommunale voor Technisch Advies en Bijstand voor Ruimtelijke Ordening), dated 5 July 1966. In this letter, the Mayor explains his plans to build a shopping centre, of which the planning is "op Amerikaanse leest geschoeid," or "based on American principles." Source: Folder 874.1: Bouwaanvragen 1966: Shopping Centre 1, City Archive Genk. This decision is quite surprising as Genk was well aware of the negative effects of shopping centre development in the US and also informed about the European alternatives; In the municipal archives of Genk, the boxes relating to the development of the shopping centre, contained the report of the Belgian mission to the United States, as well as the brochure on Swedish shopping centres.

<sup>6</sup> The office of van den Broek and Bakema was also responsible for the design of the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam (1949-1953), which is considered one of the first 'shopping centres' in Europe, which Gruen and Smith presented as an outstanding example of this new typology in *Shopping Towns U.S.A* (1960).

<sup>7</sup> While most (individual) elements of the kernplan were designed by the original design team, including the office of van den Broek and Bakema, Arthur Staal and P. Zanstra, some elements were outsourced to other designers. These included the shopping centre, which was designed by architect E.F. Groosman in collaboration with T.A. Brouwer and the telephone exchange, which was designed by engineer C. Wegeners Sleswijk and S.J.S. Wichers.

<sup>8</sup> The name *Binnenhof* betrays the civic ambitions of the complex in Amstelveen, as well as its creators' desire to give it civic gravitas. The *Binnenhof* is originally a 13<sup>th</sup> century Gothic castle (with a open – nowadays public – square in the middle) in the heart of The Hague, which in 1584 became the political centre of the Dutch Republic. Today it incorporates both houses of the States General of the Netherlands, as well as the Ministry of General Affairs and the office of the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and is the oldest House of Parliament in the world still in use.

<sup>9</sup> In *Mall Maker*, Hardwick carefully explains how Gruen sought inspiration for his shopping centre designs in his 'Old World roots'; a tendency which was also picked up by contemporary journalists, who "[...] compared a Gruen shopping centre to the best of Europe's past: St. Mark's in Venice, Copenhagen's old red brick, 'antiquated areas remindful of an Old Roman Road, and the glassed-in splendour of Victor Emmanuel Galleria of Milan, Italy". Hardwick, however, points out that "if Gruen referenced a European city in his American shopping center, it would be Vienna – the only city that truly mattered to him" (HARDWICK, 2004, p. 131).

---

<sup>10</sup> In “Where the Motorways Meet: Architecture and Corporatism in Sweden 1968”, Mattsson points out that capital and commercial groups in the 1950s and 1960s had a significant influence in European welfare states; an influence which was also expressed in so-called welfare state architecture. She launches a plea to – rather than regard the 1970s as a historical break, dually marked by economic restructuring and the advent of a new cultural condition – look for continuities. This paper could be read as such (MATTSSON, 2014, p. 155).