

# Cultural Clusters and the Post-industrial City: Towards the Remapping of Urban Cultural Policy

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**Summary.** This paper explores and discusses the fairly recent phenomenon of cultural clustering strategies in the Netherlands. Amongst other things based on ideologies of ‘enterprise culture’, the quest for urban imagery and positioning strategies, the changing spatial fabric of cities and a search for economic and cultural revitalisation, for the past 5–10 years, the formation of cultural clusters has turned into something of an urban cultural development hype. However, what at first glance appears as a common model, often accompanied by boldly expressed slogans concerning the new role of culture and creativity in the physical and economic revitalisation of cities, in more detail unfolds as an ambivalent and conflict-ridden mixture of cultural, economic, social and spatial interests and sentiments. From a short-term perspective, such an eclectic blending of interests and sentiments might be considered as a good opportunity for urban cultural developments within a ‘post-modern’ urban development regime. However, from a long-term perspective, there is the danger that the divergent sentiments and interests start to undermine and constrain each other, in the end resulting in adverse effects, mutual distrust and a standstill of developments. Following a detailed investigation of five cultural clustering projects in the Netherlands, and based on Zukin’s account of the exchange of cultural and economic values in the contemporary city, the paper argues that, in order to get out of this potentially self-defeating situation, and to enable a more sensitive but also strategic involvement of the cultural sector in the governance of cultural cluster projects, it is necessary to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the complex dynamics involved. Central to this is a locally specific appreciation of the changing interaction between culture (place) and commerce (market) in today’s mixed economy of leisure, culture and creativity. This implies both a critique and advancement of existing theories concerning the role of culture in urban development and the development of a more detailed comparative perspective on urban cultural policy projects, thus moving beyond overgeneralised perceptions of the developments concerned.

## Introduction

During the past 10–15 years, the creation or nourishment of cultural clusters has been increasingly taken up as a new, alternative source for urban cultural development. Mixtures of cultural functions and activities, from production to presentation and consumption and from theatre and the visual arts

to pop music and the new media, are grouped together in a great variety of spatial forms. Projects may restrict themselves to stand-alone buildings or larger building complexes, or they may include entire quarters or networks of locations. Mostly, the projects are housed in former industrial complexes, but

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quite often they also imply the building of new sites. While some clustering strategies are restricted to genuine artistic/cultural activities, most of them also incorporate a great variety of leisure and/or entertainment elements: from bars, restaurants and cultural retail spaces to health and fitness complexes. Sometimes, the projects have started their career as 'ploaps', places left over after planning, subsequently taken over by informal groups of cultural producers who turn them into alternative cultural sites. Sometimes, the cultural clusters began their existence in the minds of cultural managers, searching for ways to strengthen the market position of their amenities within a more competitive cultural and leisure market. In other cases, the projects came to life on the drawing-board of urban planners, looking for ways to revitalise urban quarters or to strengthen the local 'creative economy'. European examples could include such projects as the Temple Bar area in Dublin, the Museums Quarter in Vienna, the Custard Factory in Birmingham, the fashion and textile quarter of Ticinese in Milan, the late-19th-century textile factory chain of Finish Tampere, the network of industrial landmark projects in NordRhein Westfalen, the multimedia cluster of Hoxton in London or the Lowry Centre complex in Salford. But these are just a few eye-catching examples of a much wider collection of cultural cluster projects in development or operation all over Europe. In short, the conscious creation or nourishment of cultural sites, clusters or 'milieus' is rapidly becoming something of an archetypal instrument in the urban cultural planning toolbox.

Cultural clustering strategies represent an interesting turn in urban cultural policy-making and the organisation of the urban cultural field. Whereas in former days local cultural policy-making mostly restricted itself to its redistributive role within a vertically organised public arts sector, today urban cultural policy-making has to operate on a much more comprehensive level, including horizontally articulated linkages of thinking and acting. A more inclusive, process-oriented

and transverse perspective, consciously taking into account 'external' economic and spatial effects and conditions, has replaced or complemented a confined, vertical perspective, predominantly based on notions of artistic progress and the refined citizen. In line with this, other actors such as economic development agencies, urban planners and private investors have started to involve themselves with what until recently was primarily regarded as an autonomous artistic field. Basic to this more collaborative and developmental approach is the interaction between cultural activities, embedded in their 'own' urban cultural infrastructure, and a broader field of urban dynamics and linked-in value chains.

Additionally, cultural clustering strategies represent a next stage in the on-going use of culture and the arts as urban regeneration resources. In earlier periods, this predominantly involved the creation of big statements and flagship projects, from the Grand Projects in Paris to the emblematic Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Today, with all major cities having developed their own spectacular festival agendas and (re-)opened their flashy museums and theatre complexes, the regeneration-through-culture agenda has moved to a higher level. Here, we see a shift from a policy aimed at organising occasions for spectacular consumption, to a more fine-tuned policy, also aimed at creating spaces, quarters and milieus for cultural production and creativity.

For some time now, this broadening of the developmental perspective has raised a lot of uncertainties, conflicts and ambiguities. Central to this is a debate about the precise character of the developments and the motives and legitimations involved. Are we dealing here with a genuine interest in cultural advancement, with a proper cultural or arts strategy, aimed at the stimulation and development of 'autonomous' artistic values? Or is Zukin right (1982, 1991) when she concludes that, whatever the original intentions of the cultural producers and developers involved, this is merely another 'functionalisation' of culture, exploiting

culture for the sake of a recentralised 'landscape of consumption', catering for new middle-class consumers? And if the latter is indeed the case, when is this becoming a problem and for whom? Will this inevitably lead to a destruction or inflation of original artistic values, and to a (re)commodification of the related spaces, thus driving out the original cultural values? Or is it also possible that we are seeing the development of a new, more complex interaction between culture and the economy, a situation implying that the classical notion of *l'exception culturelle*, according to which the arts and the market represent mutually antagonistic dynamics, is in for a change (see Looseley, 1999)?

In addition, and especially in relation to the European realm, there is the issue of the involvement of the national/local state in these projects. To what extent is the stress on cultural entrepreneurship, underlying most of these projects, just a cover-up for a diminishing public support for the arts, in the end handing over artistic talent to the global creative industries, tourism and the culture of entertainment and the spectacle? Or are we witnessing the development of a new relation between public policy and civil society, in which hybrid public-private organisations have become as important as the state in defining what cultural policy means (Looseley, 1999)?

These are serious questions, but at the same time they are more easily formulated than answered. The new cultural policies underlying the cultural cluster strategies, and the changing political, economic and cultural relations in which these operate, do not lend themselves to easy armchair evaluations, based on oppositions stemming from former periods and contexts. Post-war changes in communication and education, the more complex and local specific blending of culture and commerce, the mixed composition of artistic and entertainment elements, the labyrinthine mingling of global, large-scale and local, small-scale cultural enterprises, the shifting composition of the cultural field and the related changing notions of artistic excellence, expressive autonomy, creative innovation or

cultural progress: these and other changes have produced a diffuse situation, complicating easy-going conclusions. There is a need to take into account the finer tactics and local specific contexts involved, together with the entire portfolio of activities developed, with possible forms of cross-subsidisation and cross-ownership, the intermingling of different taste paradigms, audiences and organisational formats, the blending of short-term, singular and long-term, collective effects, the reciprocal relations between cultural internalities and economic externalities, and the circumstantial alternation of moments of commodification and decommodification.

This paper is intended as a contribution to such a more fine-tuned analysis. The focus will be on what is currently happening in the Netherlands in the field of cultural clustering strategies. First, we begin with a brief introduction of the type of projects involved. This part of the text will concentrate on a comparative presentation and classification of five projects which stand out as examples of the new urban cultural development model concerned. The projects are respectively situated in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Tilburg. They are chosen because as a group they represent the diversity of new clustering models currently under development in the Netherlands. Also, they are used as sources of inspiration and support for cultural development projects elsewhere. Secondly, we will disentangle the arguments locally used in support of this type of urban cultural development strategy, especially paying attention to the interesting mixture of cultural, social, spatial and economic justifications involved. Five fields of argument will be differentiated. Relations will be explored between the new cultural cluster strategies and changes in national cultural policy principles, structural transformations in the global/local cultural/leisure industries, the changing economic position of cities and new patterns of cultural consumption. The text will conclude with a critical confrontation between the cases studied and Zukin's account of the changing role of the arts and culture in contemporary urban development.

As a result, it is argued that a more detailed understanding of the complex exchange of cultural and economic values opens up opportunities for better informed models of urban cultural governance, able to develop new intersections of cultural and economic policies, facilitating the attraction and (re)production of local cultural capital in the midst of an expanding global cultural economy.

### **Cultural Clustering Strategies: Five Illustrations**

As pointed out, in the Netherlands, too, cultural clustering strategies come with a great variety of backgrounds and formats. A brief introduction to five of them might illustrate this.

#### *Rotterdam: The Museum Quarter*

One of the first examples of a consciously developed cultural cluster can be found in the harbour city of Rotterdam. The project developed during the 1990s, as part of a deliberate attempt by local government to strengthen the urban profile of the city. At its heart is a museum quarter, created in the eastern fringe of the inner city, in an existing park area. The original idea goes back to the 1970s, but was taken up again as part of a new urban development plan, formulated in the second half of the 1980s on the basis of a broader debate concerning the future of the city (Mommaas and van der Poel, 1989; Hajer, 1993; van Aalst, 1997). In those days, Rotterdam was confronted with a steady rise in unemployment figures, an uneven suburbanisation process and a deteriorating investment climate. Those involved saw the creation of the museum quarter as a crucial element in a broader inner-city renewal and re-imaging strategy, aimed at the markets of tourism, shopping and cultural consumption. The renewal programme was inspired by developments in Baltimore, a city well-known in the Netherlands for the use of culture and consumption in the revitalisation of its inner-city harbour front.

Today, the museum quarter (master-planned by Rem Koolhaas) contains a museum for classical and modern art (the Boijmans van Beuningen museum, which pre-dates the museum quarter), a new architectural institute (the 'Nederlands Architectuur Instituut', designed by Jo Coenen, a clear expression of the position of Rotterdam as a pioneering city in contemporary Dutch architecture), a Hall of Arts (the 'Kunsthal', the first world-famous example of Rem Koolhaas' innovative programming of spatial forms) and the recently renovated and extended Nature Museum (the renovation/extension of which was designed by another member of the 'new wave' in Dutch architecture: Erick van Egeraat). In the summer, the park in which the museums are situated is used for a variety of open-air theatre programmes.

To connect the museum quarter to another tourist destination, the historical harbour area, situated on the opposite side of the inner city, the connecting street had to be transformed into something of a 'cultural axis' or 'cultural boulevard', accommodating a variety of cultural consumption-cum-production functions, including art galleries and art cafés. This was one of the few late 19th-century inner-city sites which survived the bombing of the city centre of Rotterdam at the beginning of the Second World War. Partly because of its marginal position, but also because of its historical atmosphere, the area developed into something of an alternative space in the 1970s and 1980s, attracting both an informal economy of drug-users and drug-traders, and a mixed cultural infrastructure of bistros, bars, galleries and arts education centres. Today, it is fair to say that the upgrading of the area has not yet succeeded completely. Some of the galleries originally attracted to the area have left again. Complaints were raised about a lack of support from Rotterdam public arts organisations and a lack of public vigour in 'sanitising' the place. At the same time, there was the feeling that investments in the physical 'hardware' of the new cultural infrastructure were not met by equivalent investments in the cultural

‘software’. In addition, the synergy effect, intended to result from the spatial clustering of museum and other facilities, did not materialise as much as expected. Besides, and this is an important point, there is an overall acknowledgement of the fact that, due to its defensive attitude, the cultural sector has not taken the initiative enough in the development process (van Aalst, 1997). We will come back to this later.

### *Amsterdam: The Westergasfabriek*

A completely different example of recent cultural clustering strategies can be found in the city of Amsterdam. Located in the north-western fringe of the inner city of Amsterdam, pressed between a former harbour area, railway tracks and exit roads, the ‘Westergasfabriek’ concerns a late 19th-century industrial complex, built in a typical eclectic neo-classical style. Originally, the site was used for the coal-based production and distribution of gas. In the early 1990s, the complex was more or less given over into the hands of the local ‘Westerpark’ borough (Amsterdam has a decentralised public policy system, with a major role for the boroughs). The complex was no longer needed for the city centre’s energy supply. However, the borough lacked the resources to redevelop the place. The soil was heavily polluted and, because of that, the site could not be used for conventional market-driven purposes such as apartment buildings or business premises, without the necessary funds needed to clean it. Subsequently, the site was more or less handed over to a project team, formed by members of the administration whose task it became to manage the site as well as possible, renting out the buildings for temporary use, thus awaiting future options.

This turned out to be fortunate. In the course of the past 7–8 years, the place has developed into a distinctive cultural site, housing a broad and vivid mixture of short- and long-term cultural activities. It includes, amongst other things, a stylish café-cum-restaurant, a movie theatre especially dedi-

cated to Dutch cinema; rehearsal, production and performing spaces for theatre companies, visual artists, a small film production company, designers and spatial planners; spaces for dance parties and festivals, conferences, fashion shows, company parties, etc. The success of the place in both the residential and the tourist markets—the site is already mentioned in the Amsterdam edition of the *Rough Guide*—is partly based on a clever, centrally controlled management scheme, aimed at producing as much cultural variety, change and openness as possible. Its success is also based on a carefully maintained ambience of historicity and marginality. The buildings are only renovated up to the point where they meet minimal standards of safety and comfort, thus carefully maintaining the ‘rough’ and bohemian atmosphere of a derelict 19th-century industrial site, also allowing for a great variety of functions. The centrepiece (and cash-cow) of the complex is formed by the giant base of a former gas-holder, with a huge cast-iron roof, an impressive enclosed space, used for dance parties, company meetings, the recording of commercials, fashion shows and other events. Tenants are stimulated to make use of the artistic resources present on the site. Thus, the project team stimulates forms of cross-subsidisation, linking profit-generating activities to activities crucial for the site’s atmosphere, but which have no independent market yet.

Currently, the place is undergoing a major renovation. This primarily involves the infrastructure, the surrounding park and the fabric of the buildings. In order to gather the funds needed for this renovation, and to maintain a certain degree of independence from an always-uncertain local policy agenda, the buildings were sold to a property development company, known in the Netherlands for grand inner-city projects. Negotiations about the contract took a long time. This was partly due to the intention to safeguard the current ambience and cultural programming scheme as much as possible, irrespective of future owners. Time will tell whether the partners have succeeded in doing so.

*Tilburg: The Veemarktkwartier*

A third, and yet again completely different, example of a cultural clustering strategy concerns the so-called Veemarktkwartier, a project in the city of Tilburg in the southern Dutch province of Noord Brabant. At stake is a deliberate attempt to create a cultural quarter, almost from scratch. The project is situated in the eastern fringe of the inner city, adjacent to a renowned bar and restaurant area. Tilburg is a typical late 19th-century textile city, now having 170 000 inhabitants. In the course of the 1960s–1970s, the textile industries collapsed, resulting in high unemployment figures and a lot of redundant industrial space. At this time, in the midst of the post-World War II modernisation period, these former industrial complexes symbolised an outdated era, to be erased from the collective local memory as quickly and radically as possible. Thus, the complexes were demolished to give way to the ‘modern’ service city. As a result, not much of the former industrial infrastructure remained, something deeply regretted today. The project of the Veemarktkwartier is situated in a former textile industry area, accommodating a mixture of 19th-century, post-World War II and contemporary architecture, with a variety of functions (mainly residential dwellings and office spaces).

The original idea to create a cultural quarter was produced by cultural managers already active in the area. The Tilburg Arts Foundation had bought a second building on the site and a purpose-built, pop-music venue (the result of a merger between three local pop musical organisations; an expression of the cultural/spatial centralisation of pop music) was soon to be opened. Subsequently, managers from both organisations came up with the idea to give the area a cultural designation. A window of opportunity presented itself in the form of a national policy scheme, created to stimulate urban regeneration projects. A proposal was made to develop a cultural quarter as a means to fight urban decay and to stimulate economic development and social cohesion. As a result,

the municipality of Tilburg received a substantial amount of money from national government to advance its plans.

Today, the quarter is still being developed. It already houses “013”, a purpose-built pop-music venue containing both performing, rehearsal and recording facilities (with, amongst other things, a central hall able to contain 2000 visitors); a centre for amateur arts, located in a former textile industry building; a collection of small-scale cultural enterprises together with an arts library, situated in a former bank building (owned by the Tilburg Arts Foundation); managed working spaces for arts and new media producers in a former garrison complex, a former school and a former hospital, and a great many small cultural enterprises scattered around the area. In addition, there are plans to create additional incubator spaces for new media enterprises, to build a youth centre aimed at innovative forms of social and cultural entrepreneurship, and to accommodate a new ‘Rock Academy’ (the second of its kind in Europe).

The Tilburg cultural cluster is particularly interesting. It is one of the first Dutch examples of a full-blown recognition of the possible role of the arts and culture in urban regeneration. Without having a clear idea about where it was going, and thus facing a situation in which one had to learn as one moved along, the intention was to create a creative environment in which the cultural, social and economic functions of the arts and culture would mingle and stimulate one another. This involved not only the creation of a new, more integrated, policy organisation, overcoming established divisions between cultural, economic and spatial sectors and departments, but also transforming the roles of and relations between the public, non-profit and private sectors in a more horizontally organised, collaborative and process-oriented direction.

*Utrecht: The Museum and the Theatre Quarter*

Towards the end of the 1990s, cultural clus-

ter strategies became increasingly popular as an urban cultural development instrument. Two later examples of this can be found in the city of Utrecht, predominantly an administrative and service city, situated in the centre of the Netherlands. The city is famous for its medieval city centre, with an emblematic collection of medieval churches, historical façades and monumental canals and wharves. The first project involved the creation of a Museum Quarter in the heart of the medieval city, a project facilitated by European Regional Development funds. The second project concerns the formation of a Theatre Quarter in the late 19th-century, eastern fringe of the city. Both projects were initiated by the local municipality, but at the same time they link in with existing initiatives in the cultural field.

The museum quarter project is aimed at improving the quality of public space and of residential living conditions, as well as strengthening the tourist-recreational and cultural functions of the area. Central to the project are the Municipal Museum, a recently extended and renovated museum for ancient and modern art, the Catharijne Convent, a museum dedicated to the history of Catholic art, also undergoing a major renovation, and the University Museum, housing exhibitions on science-related issues. The project is linked to other museums situated elsewhere in the city centre. Included amongst those are a national museum for mechanical playing instruments (from musical boxes to carillons to street organs) and a national railway museum. In addition, the project involved the regeneration of the surrounding physical area, the revitalisation of an existing visual arts centre, the transformation of an old convent into a five-star hotel and the creation of work spaces for artists and other cultural professions involved in the preservation of historical buildings. A comprehensive tourist promotion campaign was aimed at introducing the museum quarter as a coherent product in the tourist market.

The theatre quarter developed in a more contingent way. It is situated in the eastern part of the city, in a late 19th-century com-

plex of buildings, formerly accommodating a faculty of veterinary medicine. In the course of the 1980s, after a fierce conflict between the adjacent neighbourhood and the municipality—the municipality wanted to demolish the site and replace it with apartment buildings—the complex was renovated and a major part of the original buildings turned into residential spaces. Early in the 1990s, a new theatre company established itself in the area, using two of the buildings as office, rehearsal and performing space. It named itself ‘De Paardenkathedraal’ (‘The Horses’ Cathedral’), referring both to the former function of the new theatre building (a place where they walked and trained horses) and to its majestic neo-classical character.

In the course of time, more theatre companies moved into the area, occupying other parts of the complex. Presently, the complex also accommodates a youth-theatre centre, involving itself with the production, training, staging and promotion of youth theatre. The centre resulted from a collaboration between a number of theatre companies in Utrecht, the local arts academy, the municipal theatre and the local municipality. Other cultural institutions in the area include the city’s archive, a cultural centre and a centre for contemporary dance. In recent policy plans, this spatial collection of cultural functions is consciously ‘branded’ together as a ‘creative quarter’. Partly, this strategy is legitimated by emphasising the large proportion of highly educated people living in the area, with a great number of them working in creative and/or knowledge-intensive industries. Thus, a link is established between the development of the theatre quarter, the importance of nourishing the local creative economy and the presence of a new middle-class audience.

### **Towards a Typology of Cultural Clusters**

These are just a few examples of what today is spreading rapidly as an alternative model for local cultural development; not just amongst the premier league of European cultural cities, but also amongst cities situated

lower in the urban hierarchy. Other projects, in various stages of development, could have been added. However, they would not change the overall picture. For the moment, two things are clear. First, in the cultural policy field we see the rise of a common place-based cultural development strategy, linking cultural activities and amenities to economic, spatial and social policy goals. Secondly, cultural clusters come in a great variety of cultural, spatial and organisational forms, with a lot of different backgrounds and developmental paths. In a first attempt to order some of that complexity, seven core dimensions can be differentiated. Together they represent an attempt to create something of a cultural cluster classification.

First, there is a difference in terms of the 'horizontal' portfolio of activities and their level of intracluster collaboration and integration. Although most projects contain elements of leisure and consumption (shopping, entertainment, retail, bars and restaurants), the projects differ both in terms of the share of these elements in the programme writ large and in terms of the level of intracluster collaboration between these leisure elements and the cultural core. The role of leisure elements ranges from an autonomous add-on, to an important economic, cultural and social element in a wider support structure. In a narrower cultural sense, the clusters range from an explicit focus on one specific arts and/or design sector, as in the case of the museum and theatre quarters, to an explicit and/or pragmatic emphasise on multi-sectorality, cultural hybridity and cross-overs, as in case of the Westergasfabriek and the Veemarktkwartier.

Secondly, there is the 'vertical' portfolio of the cultural functions involved—the specific mixture of design, production, presentation/exchange and consumption activities, together with the related level of intracluster integration. This can reach from monofunctional clusters predominantly organised around a loose concentration of conventional consumption and/or presentation functions, as in the case of the two museum quarters, to multifunctional clusters based on

a more inclusive mixture of consumption, presentation/exchange and production, with stronger intrachain links, as in the case of the Amsterdam Westergasfabriek, the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier and the Utrecht theatre quarter. The management team of the Westergasfabriek stimulates the involvement of small-scale cultural producers in the organisation of large-scale commercial events. In the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier, there is a search for possibilities to strengthen intracluster markets, as in the case of the pop venue making use of communications expertise present in the quarter for its market communication.

Thirdly, there is the organisational framework of the clusters in terms of the involvement of the various participants in the management of the sites. The clusters accommodate different varieties of small- and medium-sized public and private organisations, with a different relation to the management of the clusters as such. Some clusters, like the two museum quarters, have no clear central management at all, apart from irregular meetings between (groups of) participants and local government taking a responsibility for the collective maintenance and promotion of the sites. Other clusters, like the Westergasfabriek, have a strong central management team, responsible for negotiating lease contracts, attracting occupants, organising collective promotion and stimulating forms of cross-subsidisation. Somewhere in between is the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier with a strong involvement of local administration in attracting investment programmes and potential occupants, and in defining the spatial destiny of the site, but with local administration wanting to develop that task more and more in collaboration with a project team, involving the major players in the cluster. As a result, the smaller cultural entrepreneurs are complaining about their marginal role in the planning process. Paradoxically, much of the creative ambience/image of the place depends on them and, at the same time, they are the collaborators mostly depending on that creative ambience/image. As van Bon (1999) has discovered in her study of the Northern

Quarter in Manchester (UK), for smaller cultural entrepreneurs, clusters work both as an informal, lifestyle environment and as a 'brand', promoting trust amongst prospective clients. Larger organisations can do without both. For them, it is enough to be part of a spatial concentration of functions, enabling them to stand out more strongly in a more competitive leisure/cultural market.

Fourthly, and in relation to the organisational situation, the clusters differ in terms of the financial regimes surrounding them and the sort of related public-private sector involvement. Although most projects depend heavily on public support, either at the level of the cluster as such, or at the level of the individual projects, for some, such as in the case of the Veemarktkwartier and the Westergasfabriek, this is seen as a passing stage towards a more privatised or 'independent' existence, involving a variety of coalitions with private enterprises and investors. Others, such as the museum quarters, will remain public-sector projects. But even here, there is a huge variety in the way in which the projects are related to public-sector management, both at the level of the cluster and at the level of the individual participants. In various ways, the projects have moved beyond conventional subsidy-based coalitions, towards hybrid public-private models, based on a mixture of resources and management relations (public funding, entrance fees, lease contracts, sponsorship money, heritage funds). Crucial here is the level of internal cross-subsidisation or cross-financing. Spatially concentrating cultural functions is one thing; transforming them into more self-sustaining milieus is quite another. It is only by strategically strengthening the internal production and value chains, and thus the interorganisational flow of expertise and business, that the clusters develop into something of a cultural-economic microcosm. However, none of the clusters mentioned is yet at the stage where agglomeration effects really work—neither externally, in terms of the cluster working as a 'brand' or as 'atmosphere', nor internally, in terms of an interfirm exchange of knowledge and businesses.

A fifth dimension involves the level of openness/adaptability or closeness/solidity of the spatial and cultural programmes involved. None of the clusters is housed in stand-alone buildings and thus it is easier for them to overcome the danger of becoming introverted places, disconnected from the wider civic/cultural urban field. Nevertheless, the projects differ in the way they balance the necessity of being an identifiable, standing place on the one hand, based on strongly shared representations, and being an open and flexible space on the other, constantly adapting to changes in the wider cultural and urban field. Too much openness, with organisations not feeling involved or responsible for the cluster itself, might endanger the atmosphere and the identity of the clusters. Too much closeness, with strongly shared conventions and internal commitments, might make the participants become locked-in within their own cultural and physical space and thus reduce the clusters' capacity to change. The Veemarktkwartier is the most open one, with a constantly changing, but at the same time rather diffuse identity, only shared amongst those most involved. Also, the representation of the cluster is most of all based on the individual projects and not on a clearly identifiable common atmosphere and identity. Hence, the ability (or necessity) constantly to adapt itself to changing pressures and opportunities. The Rotterdam museum quarter is the most clearly defined and demarcated one but, as research shows, it is at the same time experiencing difficulties in relating itself to the wider urban field. Hence the attempts to define a cultural axis, connecting the museum quarter to other 'interesting' urban places. The Westergasfabriek can be positioned somewhere in between, with a clearly identifiable physical space, but a rather open cultural programme, partly based on temporary contracts; thus, despite its fixed spatial form, it ensures an open connection to the wider cultural field.

Sixthly, there are the specific developmental paths of the clusters, from projects which have developed as part of a conscious 'top-

down' planning strategy, to projects which have developed from a contingent coming-together of vernacular tactics. None of the projects mentioned can be situated on either extreme of this differentiation. Nevertheless the mixture of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' forces differs, with consumption-oriented clusters tending towards a higher planning input of local administration and production-oriented clusters tending towards a higher input from the historically formed urban cultural infrastructure itself. Of course, this will come as no surprise given the more critical dependency of production-oriented sites on the willingness of cultural producers to involve themselves with the projects and the critical logic involved in their location choice. As research into the cultural industries in Dutch cities indicates, this not only depends on the availability of affordable and accessible space, but also on the cultural atmosphere of the environment (van Vliet, 2000; ETIN Adviseurs, 2003). Place, community and cultural economy are often critically interconnected (Scott, 1999) and, because of that, it becomes very difficult to plan these places from scratch, without the early involvement of the cultural community itself. We will come back to this later.

A last element involves the position of the clusters in a shifting spatial-cum-cultural urban field. The more conventional programmes, such as the museum quarters, are situated more towards the centre of their cities. It is there that they are most able to link in with the flow of cultural tourists. Other programmes, however, like the Westergasfabriek, self-consciously position themselves towards the margins of the city, thus carefully maintaining something of an alternative, bohemian atmosphere. Thus, these examples still mirror the conventional spatial hierarchy of the city, with established cultural functions positioning themselves in the centre and alternative activities finding their place towards the open and 'underused' margins. However, some of the projects mentioned also indicate interesting shifts in this conventional urban cultural landscape. Consider theatre companies using their 'mar-

ginal' location more strongly as an alternative branding device, as in the case of the Westergasfabriek and the Utrecht theatre quarter, and thus attracting a distinctive '*avant-garde*' theatre audience to these out-of-centre places. And consider the pop music scene, moving instead from the 'margins' to the 'centre', as in the case of the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier. Moreover, whereas artistic production has always been associated with more or less alternative or marginal spaces, some of the clusters, such as the Veemarktkwartier, indicate a conscious attempt to bring innovative cultural production more closely towards the centre of the city. Hence, the clusters can partly be seen as an indication of shifts in the interrelated figuration of spatial and cultural hierarchies within the post-industrial city. This is not so much an issue of the disappearance of cultural/spatial hierarchies *per se*, but of these hierarchies becoming more unstable, complex and difficult to read (Holt, 1997; O'Connor and Wynne, 1996).

The former is not intended as an exhaustive list of the different characteristics involved in place-based strategies of cultural development. Others could have been added, depending on the perspective involved. Nevertheless, the characteristics form a clear illustration of the fundamental complexity hiding behind the common umbrella of clustering strategies. On one hand, it is clear that some common and general features are involved. On the other, it is also clear that we should be cautious about generalising too much from the developmental path of single cases. Neither simple universal model building nor incremental case description will help very much in understanding what is going on. The prototypical ideal or 'norm' seems to be the one where cultural clusters cater for dense project-based intracluster transactions, both horizontally and vertically, and both traded and untraded. These transactions develop as part of close face-to-face contacts between cultural professionals within an independent cultural community, accommodated within a self-managed and emotionally charged urban environment (a

building complex, a quarter, a street). According to Scott (2000) such agglomerations produce three primary benefits: they reduce transaction costs, accelerate the circulation of capital and information, and reinforce transactional modes of social solidarity. However, in reality, projects differ a lot from this prototypical ideal, not only in the composition of their activities, but also in the way they are developed, managed and financed. Most of them are rather consumption- instead of production-oriented and, where production is central, clusters have not (yet) developed to the point where intracluster transactions or a sharing of information and markets is of great significance. Mostly, what we see is a more or less planned geographical concentration of functions, with a more or less strongly shared cultural image and/or identity, but without much collective self-governance and without much intracluster exchange.

Whether or not this deviation from the ideal is a problem depends on the actual motives behind the cluster development strategies. What is driving these strategies? Is this indeed primarily about stimulating creativity and innovation, or are there different motives and interests, and hence different models involved? How coherent is the clustering strategy anyway? What different perspectives can be identified?

### **Creating Cultural Clusters: Disentangling the Discursive Knot**

Taking a closer look at the variety of public justifications formulated in favour of the aforementioned clustering strategies, no less than five different discursive fields can be distinguished. Justifications and legitimations stemming from these different fields are sometimes used in coalition with one another; sometimes they turn up as opposing arguments in the evaluation or positioning of the projects concerned. Together, they give a good overview of the mixed 'task-environment' in which urban cultural policies today operate and in which former models of both cultural and urban development

policies have come under pressure (without a new coherent model replacing them).

### *Strengthening the Identity, Attraction Power and Market Position of Places*

A first and most common discursive field ties the cultural clusters not to motives of creativity and innovation, but to place-positioning strategies and the related revitalisation of urban space. This has been a clear driving-force behind both the museum quarter developments in Rotterdam and Utrecht, and the creation of the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier. All three projects received their public money by pointing at the critical role they were supposed to play in attracting attention, and thus economic activities, to themselves and the surrounding areas.

At stake is a next phase in the on-going rivalry between places and facilities for, amongst other things, a physically, mentally and socially more mobile audience of cultural consumers/tourists. Technological developments in the field of transport and communication, the general social and economic mobility of the post-World War II population, the destabilisation or de-institutionalisation of former taste hierarchies; together with the proliferation of consumer products and leisure activities: all these developments have significantly altered the potential field of activities of larger sections of the population, both in a cultural and in a spatial sense. However, this expanding field of possibilities has to be covered with a comparatively stagnating amount of leisure time (van den Broek *et al.*, 1999). Hence, a more hectic competition amongst possible sources of experience and fascination, such as between various inner-city destinations and their cultural facilities, and between cultural and (other) leisure facilities for the attention of a more mobile and volatile, money-rich but time-poor audiences. Furthermore, the move towards hybrid cultural spaces, involving mixtures of cultural consumption and production, is also supposed to be in line with further progress in the affinities or taste preferences of a well-

educated audience of cultural tourists, becoming more and more sceptical of the 'slick' logo-type urban spectacle development, and thus roaming European cities for more interesting, 'authentic' or 'alternative' experiences. In the field of tourism research, this is already identified as a next stage in the on-going competition for tourists, from the already-conventional model of 'cultural tourism' to that of 'creative tourism' (Richards, 2001).

Moreover, Dutch society is experiencing a flexibilisation of the spatial ties between work and home: the place where people work is no longer necessarily the place where they live (Knulst and Mommaas, 2000). Because of that, the distinctive quality of places becomes more critical in the attraction of residents. Here, the local cultural infrastructure is thought to have a critical role to play, especially in relation to the 'new middle class' (Featherstone, 1991; Martin, 1998)—a diffuse category of people, with a rather heterogeneous and unstable taste pattern, mixing classical-intellectual and popular taste patterns (van Eijck, 1999; Wynne and O'Connor, 1998).

Looked upon from the supply side, this market-oriented competition between various places/destinations is further increased by the relative liberalisation or 'de-statisation' of economic space, the unstable mobility of the service industries, constantly searching for a spatial optimisation of production, and the on-going competition between regions, resulting from that. This has increased the critical role ascribed to 'soft' agglomeration factors in the location choice of industries and companies (Lash and Urry, 1994; Amin and Graham, 1997; Castells, 1996). Due to the diminishing distinctive role of 'hard' agglomeration factors such as the availability of raw materials and cheap space and the access to the physical and electronic infrastructure, a former deterritorialisation of economic activities is replaced by a reterritorialisation based upon soft agglomeration factors such as the ambience, the quality and the symbolic value of a place.

Within this erratic field of forces and dy-

namics, cultural clusters such as the Museum Quarters and the Veemarktkwartier are presented as an alternative imagery or 'branding' strategy. They culturally 'recharge' the surrounding urban space, reintroducing that space back into a wider market of urban-dwellers, tourists and investors. Because of their increase in mass and their combination of functions, they stand out more strongly in the middle of an increasing promotional 'noise', produced by a broader, decentralised field of potential destinations and locations. Important here is the creation of synergies between culture, leisure and tourism (museums, theatres, cultural working spaces, cafés, restaurants, 'interesting' architectural spaces, the wider tourist infrastructure, retail), making use of a common physical and communicative infrastructure. This enables a more spectacular, but at the same time local specific 'packaging' or 'branding' of urban experiences, with branded spaces functioning as generalising markers, together with their implications in terms of property rights (Hannigan, 1998; Lury, 2000; Mommaas *et al.*, 2000). Thus, these places are supposed to attract attention and with that further spatial development potentials. Here, cultural clustering strategies can be linked to, and understood as part of, the on-going 'spectacularisation' (Debord, 1994) or 'staging' (MacCannell, 1999) of urban ambience or atmosphere in the context of a scaled-up competition for attention in a city that acts as decor rather than function (Willey, 1998).

#### *Stimulating a More 'Entrepreneurial' Approach to the Arts and Culture*

A second source of legitimation and argumentation is linked to transformations in Dutch national cultural policy-making, aimed at a 'revitalisation' of the arts and culture. At stake is an attempt to develop a more proactive, outreaching attitude in the cultural field, able to attract alternative financial resources, link in to new cultural forms and appeal to a younger and multiethnic audience. Again, there is a mixture of backgrounds and influences involved. Basic is the

feeling that the established public arts sector is losing grounds in the midst of a fierce competition amongst the media, entertainment and tourism industries (the heart of today's 'experience economy'; see Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Mommaas *et al.*, 2000).

This feeling was first of all triggered by Dutch research demonstrating how younger, post-1955 generations were turning away from the classical arts (classical music, museums, classical theatre, cultural heritage, etc.) as a source of cultural inspiration and aspiration (see, for example, Knulst, 1995; de Haan, 1997; de Haan and Knulst, 2000; see also O'Connor and Wynne, 1996). Longitudinal research indicated that this could no longer be attributed to the younger life-stage of those involved, with the expectation that it would resolve itself automatically when those concerned would grow older and 'learn to appreciate' the arts. Instead, this was a generational issue. Due to the specific social, cultural and media-technological circumstances within which they grew up, post-war generations have developed different, more popular and tactile, cultural affinities (de Haan and Knulst, 2000). For them, the classical arts have been desacralised to the point where they represent 'just another' leisure opportunity.

To begin with, these findings resulted in new programmes for cultural education, aimed at bringing school-children, as part of their curriculum, in touch with the arts (at the same time producing much confusion about what these programmes should be about). On the other hand, these findings also raised questions about the lack of attention within the public sector given to new cultural forms with a stronger appeal to younger generations. What about the pop music scene (the artistic new dance and techno scene), the field of new media and digital culture (video art, digital art) or the cross-overs between the arts and fashion, architecture and design? In addition, there were questions about the involvement of ethnic minorities in the subsidised arts, both in terms of consumption and production. This again raised issues about the organisation of the subsidised arts:

the possible biased nature of criteria of excellence used in the evaluation of arts programmes, the composition of art selection and evaluation committees, possible social and cultural biases in cultural policy programmes and in notions of public culture and public participation, still dominated by a classical-humanist cultural doctrine. At the same time, new generations of art-makers and cultural producers were asking for support from a subsidy system which had become increasingly pressurised, due to a lack of circulation.

Together, these considerations produced an atmosphere throughout the entire field of the arts and culture in favour of a more 'entrepreneurial' approach. The subsidy regime had to be reorganised in order to stimulate, instead of stifle, the circulation of artistic qualities. In addition, more attention, money and space were needed for new media formats, for the cultural activities of younger generations of ethnic minorities, and for bringing cultural activities outside the conventional walls of vested art institutions. To free that money, and to increase its public reach, vested subsidised companies and institutions like museums and theatres were forced to increase their income from entrance fees. Last, a change in the national curriculum had to bring schoolchildren in touch with the broader field of the arts and culture. Overall, the arts would have to become less supply- and more demand-oriented and, in doing so, make more use of alternative sources of support and income (technological and economic support structures, real estate developments, market opportunities). According to a national cultural policy report, written for the 2001–04 policy period, the choice should not be for a defensive arts strategy for the privileged, creating something of an arts reserve in response to the threat of the global leisure and cultural industries, but for an offensive, entrepreneurial strategy, able to explore new domains of activity and innovation, and for the creation of sustainable local/regional alternatives. To illustrate this new line of policy, the policy report points, amongst other things, to the

Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam and the Veemarktkwartier in Tilburg. Both projects are mentioned as examples of a more proactive approach to culture, in which different art forms are gathered under one roof (Ministerie OCenW, 1999).

Although this transformation in national cultural policy from a classical-humanistic to what might be called a more sociological approach was confronted with fierce opposition from the vested arts establishment—it was breaking with the age-old principle of non-interference in the arts and, at the same time, reducing the arts to the status of a commodity with a quality to be lowered to the greatest common denominator—in general, both the national Arts Council, acting as a national advisory board, and regional and local authorities went along with the perspectives formulated. At the local and regional levels, these new perspectives coincided rather well with aspirations aimed at strengthening the position of regions and cities as independent policy agents in a wider, transnational environment. After the Second World War, local public spending on the arts and culture in the Netherlands has steadily increased. At the moment, the sum of local public spending on the arts and culture is twice the amount spent by national government (Pots, 2000). This does not mean that national spending has decreased, on the contrary. However, in an era of a cultural ‘post-scarcity’ (see Giddens, 1991), the increase of the budget at both the local and the national levels does not seem to be able to prevent an increasing pressure on the national/local subsidy system. The system finds it difficult to cope with the current change in the status of the arts, and the related diffusion of cultural taste, and with the global/local restructuring of the field of cultural production/distribution (see also Looseley, 1999). Thus, it remains to be seen which side of the new Janus-faced entrepreneurial model will become dominant: the side asking for a turn to self-sufficiency and the market, or the side asking for more cultural democracy, diversity and openness.

Meanwhile, the national policy guidelines

encouraged a more proactive and inclusive cultural policy approach, amongst other things implying a more entrepreneurial and developmental attitude, together with a willingness to use culture for extra-cultural reasons, thus also tapping new financial and public sources for cultural activities. Here, cultural clustering strategies appear as part of an arts-oriented revitalisation strategy, aimed at positioning the public arts and culture more strongly within a more hectic cultural environment, characterised by the rise of global cultural industries, the commodification of culture, changing taste paradigms and the rise of new media formats. The clustering together of various cultural forms and functions (both public and private, and both classical and popular) is supposed to stimulate a more open, entrepreneurial and innovative attitude towards the arts and culture, both amongst producers and consumers, and both economically and culturally.

#### *Stimulating Innovation and Creativity*

A third field of argumentation circles around the aforementioned strategic importance of the ‘creative economy’ and the role of cultural clusters therein. These sentiments are clearly present in both the Veemarktkwartier project in Tilburg and the Theatre Quarter project in Utrecht. There are links here with the aforementioned transformations in national cultural policy and the strategy to use culture as an alternative source for urban revitalisation. However, at the same time, this field of argumentation adds something specific to that. Involved is, on the one hand, a deeper understanding of the dynamics of cultural or creative production in the wider context of the global/local cultural industries. Central here is the on-going ‘culturalisation’ of the economy, the establishment of a ‘weightless’ economy of communication and information, and the critical importance therein of the so-called creative economy (the economy of ideas, experiences, design, organisational concepts; see, for example, Waters, 1995). On the other hand, this can be linked to the notion of the ‘creative city’; a

city able to adjust itself permanently to changing conditions in the global economy, involved in recurrent cycles of innovation and regeneration (see, for example, Verwijnen and Lehtovuori, 1999; Landry 2000).

As pointed out by O'Connor (1999) both developments—the growing importance of the cultural or creative economy and the on-going necessity for urban innovation and renewal—are bringing economic and cultural policy at a more strategic level. Crucial for both the local creative economy and local urban renewal is the conscious creation/stimulation/nourishment of sources of creativity and innovation, and it is here that the abovementioned cultural clusters are thought to have a role to play. Cultural clusters are seen as stimulating in various ways the development of a 'critical infrastructure', able to function as an on-going source/environment for artistic/cultural/economic imagination and innovation. First, in various senses, the clusters are expected to create a local climate favourable for creative workers to work in; thus, for one thing, keeping arts and design graduates in the city for a longer period. Secondly, if functioning well, they have a wider symbolic and infrastructural spin-off, which will attract other creative workers, from theatre directors and designers/architects to musicians, and information and communication specialists. In a more direct sense, the clusters are expected to function as contexts of trust, socialisation, knowledge, inspiration, exchange and incremental innovation in a product and service environment characterised by high levels of risk and uncertainty (Banks *et al.*, 2000). Subsequently, if successful, the clusters might work as a brand, a spatial identity. A cluster's symbolic value as an interesting place delivers a market advantage for those working in it or in relation to it (van Bon, 1999). Thus, the model carries a resemblance to famous icons of bundled creative innovation such as 1960s Rive Gauche, 1970s SoHo or 1980s Silicon Valley.

Here, the model can be linked to more general economic policies, aimed at creating place-specific advantages for innovative

SMEs (Simmie, 2002). However, what makes the field of cultural production special is the symbolic and thus volatile or ephemeral character of the products and services produced, and the way these depend on the on-going creativity of individuals, embedded in loosely organised networks of people with a similar lifestyle and background (Bilton, 1999; Banks *et al.*, 2000). Thus, much will depend on whether or not the places concerned will be able to deliver the critical mixture of spatial, professional and cultural qualities with which artists and other cultural producers and entrepreneurs want to associate themselves, both on a personal level, in terms of their lifestyle politics, and on a professional and business level.

In this context, it is important to note how famous creative quarters such as 1900s Montmartre, 1960s Rive Gauche and 1970s SoHo were never planned as such. Instead, they developed more or less spontaneously, out of favourable conditions only identified retrospectively, conditions which were, in many ways, related to their status as marginal spaces. Also, many of them had a rather transient character. Their cultural success triggered social, economic and institutional processes which struck at the roots of their very success as alternative spaces of creativity and innovation (Zukin, 1982; Frank, 2002). However, while this may lead some to conclude that, given their anti-establishment, marginal or transient character, the planning of creative environments is impossible, others point to the changing composition of the field of cultural innovation, with a variety of developmental paths and models, borrowing from a mixture of backgrounds: from the archetypal counter-cultural model of Bohemia, to the more business-oriented model of new media and designer start-ups. Besides, while public policy may not be able to organise creative milieus directly, there still is the feeling that it can at least create conditions favourable for the coming into being of an open and decentralised infrastructure of working places. These could be situated in culturally 'rich' environments and surrounded by a loosely

organised economic, technological and professional support structure—for instance, linking the arts and design schools with places of cultural consumption/presentation (theatres, music halls, galleries) and production (alternative working and/or ‘breeding’ places) (see, for example, Verwijnen and Lehtovuori, 1999).

Here, cultural clustering appears as a strategy to create favourable conditions for artistic/cultural growth and renewal in the context of a wider (global) culturalisation of the economy and a related economisation of culture. This is because cultural clusters and the related agglomeration effects, are supposed to stimulate the kind of spatial, social and economic logic on which the field of cultural and creative production depends, a field mainly consisting of micro businesses, involved in the production of highly symbolic and ephemeral products and services in a rather risky, open and dynamic environment (Amin and Graham, 1997; van Bon, 1999; Bilton, 1999; O’Connor 1999; Verwijnen and Lehtovuori, 1999; Scott, 2000).

#### *Finding a New Use for Old Buildings and Derelict Sites*

A next field of motivation and argumentation links the cultural cluster strategies to the increasing popularity of heritage culture. At stake is a search for a cultural and economic re-evaluation of the local vernacular, including its historical landmarks and derelict sites. Both the post-Second World War turn from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and rationalising developments in remaining industrial sectors have made an entire 19th-century industrial infrastructure of harbour areas, shipyards, warehouses and industrial production plants redundant. In addition, due to technological developments in the military field and the end of the Cold War, there is the redundancy of an already older military infrastructure of harbours, hospitals and garrisons. Additionally, Dutch society has also experienced a profound secularisation process, creating a surplus of churches, convents and monasteries. Last, new ideas about and

technological developments within the caring system have made empty an entire infrastructure of 19th-century hospitals and sanatoriums. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of a further modernist turn in spatial planning, economic development and architectural design, large parts of this 19th-century infrastructure were destroyed in order to create the rationalised service city. Today, in the context of increasing interurban and interregional competition, a post-modern celebration of diversity and a related demand for place-bound identities, the 19th-century heritage infrastructure is back on the agenda. Now, the search is not for a ‘creative destruction’, but for a new economic use, able to sustain a historical infrastructure valued, amongst other things, for its symbolic and economic potential.

Increasingly, the areas concerned are turned into centres of a new ‘post-modern’ infrastructure. Former warehouses, monasteries, factories, steel works and coal mines, prisons and hospitals, sometimes occupied by a counter-cultural movement of squatters, students and artists, are brought back on the real-estate market and turned into apartment buildings (‘loft living’), office spaces, halls of events and entertainment and/or places of cultural production and presentation (‘cultural incubators’). Combined with a relative long period of economic growth, this ‘recommodification’ of a formerly decommodified space adds to an increasing pressure on real estate, especially in urban core areas, but also in other popular places such as harbourside, riverside or park areas. In some cases, this is already leading to a shortage of working space for cultural producers.

Interesting here is Amsterdam. Due to the on-going expansion of the city in the direction of the harbour area, redundant spaces were successively converted into office, apartment and/or exhibition complexes. Rumour had it that, as a consequence, more and more cultural producers were moving to Rotterdam, a city known for its active promotion of new media culture. In order to protect its image as an open, creative city, the municipality of Amsterdam set aside around 40

million euros, to be used for the creation of cultural working spaces in and around the city. At the same time, however, the city continues its expansionist development policy, thus creating a lot of uncertainty with regard to its cultural policy motives. This is a clear indication of not only the market-driven and policy-mediated spatial pressure in cities such as Amsterdam, but also of the importance attached to the presence of a 'critical cultural infrastructure' maintaining the city's ambience or image of creativity, openness and/or cosmopolitanism.

However, while in some cities there is a shortage of 19th-century building heritage, to be used for cultural production purposes, something which is stimulating the conscious re-creation/protection of such places, in other areas local/regional municipalities are still searching for new cultural functions for heritage complexes, sometimes left in ruins for decades. Also, as in the case of the Amsterdam Westergasfabriek, other factors such as the level of soil pollution might prohibit a simple recommodification of property, thus freeing space for alternative uses. Subsequently, two paths of development are possible. Most productive is the one where, at an early stage, the cultural infrastructure finds its way to the building complexes concerned. This leaves the local municipality with the task of formalising an original grass-roots development. Here, much may be destroyed but, at the same time, there are numerous possibilities for safeguarding an existing cultural centre by creating subtle support structures. An alternative, but much more delicate, development path is where local municipalities are more or less forcing developments by moving subsidised cultural functions to newly renovated areas. Here, cultural functions can get isolated from their local support network, thus gradually becoming side-tracked. Meanwhile, in both cases, cultural clustering strategies appear as a means to create a new economic base for the renovation and maintenance of 19th-century heritage sites, thus linking in with the increasing symbolic and economic value of heritage culture.

### *Stimulating Cultural Diversity and Cultural Democracy*

Whereas the former four fields of motivation and argumentation are more or less in line with and supportive of dominant institutional developments, there is enough evidence for a fifth, and more critical, one. Some of the related argumentation can be found in policy reports surrounding the Westergasfabriek project in Amsterdam, the Veemarktkwartier in Tilburg and the Theatre Quarter in Utrecht. Also, some of it has played a role in the aforementioned turn in Dutch cultural policy towards new cultural audiences and a new digital cultural field. However, questions can be raised about the role of these arguments in the final decision-making process. In general, the arguments appear to remain quite obligatory. They never really make it to the forefront of the cultural clustering strategies analysed.

For this field of argumentation, we have to go back to the 1970s and 1980s and to what originally triggered the idea for a new approach in urban cultural policy-making in Europe, in the context of what was then labelled the 'New Left'. At stake was a repolitisation of cultural policy-making, moving away from the cultural politics of the 'old left' which, according to some, restricted itself too much to pre-electronic, pre-20th-century, pre-technological and non-commercial forms of culture (see Bianchini, 1989). The cultural policies of the 'New Left', analysed by Franco Bianchini in relation to the Movimento in Rome (1976–85) and the Greater London Council in London (1981–86), had a few elements in common. First, they regarded the arts and culture not as neutral areas, but as important sites of politics. Secondly, popular 20th-century cultural forms, far from being considered as marginal or low, had become the focus of policy-making. Thirdly, commercial culture, instead of being left to the private sector, became a model on which the state could base a new intervention in the cultural sphere (Bianchini, 1989). At stake were policies directed at the creation of new economic

and cultural channels, enabling marginalised youth and ethnic minorities to present themselves more strongly and independently in the urban cultural arena. In order to be successful, these channels had to be based on the cultural and urban affinities of the groups concerned. This directed the attention almost automatically towards the field of popular/electronic/urban/commercial culture (the culture of urban festivals, dance, design, pop music, fashion). An additional argument was that “for the public sector to have an influence ... on ‘culture’ in its broadest sense, intervention must be directed through not against the market” (GLC, 1984; in Bianchini, 1989, p. 38). Also, in order to break with existing cycles of dependency, these channels had to be organised outside the established subsidy system. Hence, a search for various unorthodox channels of cultural expression (festivals, parks, activity centres), for forms of financial investment through loans and equity rather than subsidies and grants, and for new support systems, organising training programmes and stronger marketing and distribution channels. Last, there was the intention to develop a new aesthetics “which is not ‘traditional’, ‘ethnic’, ‘folk’, ‘exotica’, but which is appropriate for what needs to be expressed here and now” (GLC, 1984; in Bianchini, 1989, p. 37).

As said before, in some cultural clustering strategies there are some references to this sort of critical argumentation, but only sporadically and in a fragmented way. So, for instance, in the Tilburg case, *Attak*, a youth work organisation, will get a place in the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier. Here, *Attak* plans to develop a more ‘entrepreneurial’ approach to youth work, aimed at stimulating youth to create small cultural businesses based on existing cultural affinities (*graffiti*, Web design, music, fashion). This could become a part of the existing cultural production and consumption network in the area, connected to the activities of other players in the quarter (the pop cluster, the Tilburg arts foundation, new ICT companies). Part of the Theatre Quarter in Utrecht is the *Berekuil*, a new centre for youth theatre, organised on the

basis of existing contacts between the Utrecht arts academies, small-scale youth theatre groups, youth theatre producers, youth centres in Utrecht, etc. In addition, the *Westergasfabriek* clearly functions as an urban platform for different forms of culture (commercial and non-commercial, electronic and pre-electronic, ‘ethnic’ and ‘non-ethnic’) (re)presented in an inclusive, open cultural space. Thus, it functions as an urban meeting and presentation place for parts of the Amsterdam youth culture.

As these examples indicate, cultural clustering strategies can sometimes also be presented as possible sources for cultural diversity and democracy, organising an alternative infrastructure of places and resources, breaking away from the established arts-policy regime and opening up an urban cultural platform for otherwise marginal tastes and groups. Spatially grouping together a diversity of cultural functions, with a diversity of social, cultural and economic backgrounds, might stimulate the accessibility of the cultural field for a greater variety of groups and make available a greater diversity of subsequent channels of cultural expression and development.

In various ways, the clusters analysed link in with the discursive fields differentiated. Of course there is an important instrumental element in this. Arguments may fulfil an important strategic role in gaining public support. At the same time, however, phase differences in and the selective use of arguments tell us something about the positioning of the projects in a field of possible intentional and developmental options. Here, the Veemarktkwartier in Tilburg can be said to be the most open and inclusive one, combining arguments from all fields of argumentation. Initially, the cultural managers involved were striving for the creation of a creative quarter around existing amenities, based on both consumption and production functions. In the course of developments, urban revitalisation and cultural democracy arguments were added, especially because of the related strategic options. Also, the project developers tried to incorporate as much of the built

heritage in the area as possible, not only because of the usefulness of the space, but also because heritage culture imparted the various cultural activities and the cluster with a distinctive atmosphere and association. The Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam started from the need to find a new function for a derelict industrial site. Next, the management team aimed at the creation of a vibrant cultural site, mixing classical and popular cultural functions, and production and consumption elements, thus building upon arguments of cultural marketing, the creative economy and a democratisation of culture. The theatre quarter in Utrecht is based on both the availability and attractiveness of a heritage site and notions which stress the importance of agglomeration factors in the stimulation of culture and creativity. The development of the museum quarters in Rotterdam and Utrecht was primarily based on a combination of urban revitalisation and cultural marketing arguments. From there on, both municipalities tried to link the quarters to possible cultural production functions in the area, thus strengthening the cultural ambience and urban embeddedness of both clusters.

Although it is possible to identify some relations between the rationales adopted by the clusters and the specific cultural, spatial, financial and managerial programmes related, it would be wrong to turn these relations into a generalised set of correlational rules. Although a primary stress on place promotion tends to imply a high level of public-sector involvement with a strong top-down and consumption-oriented approach, as in the case of the Rotterdam and Utrecht museum quarters, this is not necessarily always the case. Depending on local circumstances, such as the specific cultural infrastructure at hand, it may be the case that place-promotion strategies become associated with a strong bottom-up support for small cultural enterprises.

The issue here is not so much that the number of cases researched is too small to come to generalised conclusions. Instead, the issue is that local circumstances give room

and may ask for different combinations and trajectories. The rationales behind the cluster projects differentiated above and the related cluster characteristics make it clear that clusters come in very different shapes and forms and thus that on-going choices have to be made and arguments developed, in cultural-political and in strategic terms. Cultural cluster strategies seem to be in a situation where it is very much a case of learning and improving when moving along. There are no fixed models (yet) and there do not seem to be clear planning-based strategies of development. At the same time, the rationales and characteristics differentiated suggest some of the lines along which, in the future, cluster developments might be assessed and choices made, thus deepening the level of developmental reflexivity. At what are cultural cluster developments supposed to be targeted? Are they primarily aimed at stimulating the local creative economy, revitalising the local cultural infrastructure, cultural marketing and the revitalisation of place, increasing the cultural democracy and diversity, or finding a new use for heritage buildings? And, given specific local circumstances, what does this imply for the possible vertical and horizontal cultural programme of the cluster, the type of management structure, its financial regime, its future developmental path and its spatial programme and position? These questions become more pressing as the reproduction of cultural values and of economic and spatial values become more interdependent.

### **When Culture Meets the Economic: The Art of Tightrope Walking**

The work of Sharon Zukin (1982, 1991, 1992) undoubtedly represents one of the most comprehensive accounts of the changing role of the arts and culture in contemporary urban development. Originally based on an analysis of the regeneration of SoHo New York, from a former textile industry site to a place for ethnic and cultural use, and from there to a site for aesthetic consumption, her work developed into a generalised critique of the role of cultural producers and consumers

in the renewal of urban space. Here, innovative cultural producers and consumers are represented as symbolic trail-blazers, reintroducing marginalised urban places back into the urban cultural landscape. At the intersection between structural economic changes and sectoral group interests, the cultural infrastructure is thus responsible for a crucial phase in the recentralisation or recommodification of urban space, turning old and often forgotten vernacular places into vibrant, fashionable spaces. In the words of Zukin (1992, p. 242), these spaces are slipping and mediating between nature and artifice, public use and private value, global market and local place, desire and control. Old warehouses, harbour areas, factory complexes, schools, monasteries, gasworks, military garrisons and working-class quarters are transformed into a kind of “‘no-man’s land’ open to everyone’s experience yet not easily understood without a guide”. They are turned into liminal spaces, “crossing and combining the influence of major institutions: public and private, culture and economy, market and place” (Zukin, 1991, p. 269). Mediated through the increasing popularity of the artistic bohemian lifestyle, the increasing interest in culture in general and the contemporary synergy between cultural and economic values, this leads to a rise in the economic value of the spaces concerned, in the end ironically forcing out the very artistic-cultural values on which the trail-blazers’ symbolic work depended. Thus

liminal space becomes a metaphor for the extensive reordering by which markets, in our time, encroach upon place. ... by which a landscape of power gradually displaces the vernacular (Zukin, 1991, p. 269).

Zukin’s critical assessment of the culture-based regeneration of urban space mirrors the scepticism often aired against the kind of projects illustrated above. These projects are not primarily developed for the sake of the arts, it is said, but for purposes of spatial and urban development. They force the arts into a relativist discourse and strategy which alien-

ates them from their autonomous function as producers/mediators of alternative or disruptive perspectives, questioning, reinterpreting and repackaging established viewpoints. In short, and despite the original intentions of those concerned, this is a strategy which will make the arts fall prostrate before commerce, the market and vested political interests, turning the arts and culture into a commodity, only to be appreciated in terms of its ‘experience value’.

Significantly, in various projects described above, the closer interaction between cultural and economic values can easily be traced, together with the problems this is producing in terms of the conditions within which artists and cultural producers have to operate. In some projects, like that of the Tilburg Veemarktkwartier, the designation of the area as a cultural quarter resulted in a rise in real estate values, hindering developments. The Amsterdam Westergasfabriek has certainly played a role in the rising popularity of the surrounding residential area, with the project running the danger of becoming trapped in the middle-class urban landscape. The conscious aim behind the creation of both the Rotterdam and Utrecht museum quarters has been to increase the flow of tourists to the areas concerned, thus stimulating economic development. And of course, whatever the actual situation, this raises questions about how this is influencing the programming of the cultural spaces involved, including the museum exhibitions.

However, as previously highlighted, this represents only one part of the story which can be told about the clusters involved. The precise conditions under which cultural and economic values meet differ considerably in the different clusters. Cultural clustering projects can be developed for many different reasons, some cultural, but others also economic, social and spatial. As a result, the value transition itself also follows a variety of specific trajectories, with a different role and result for the local cultural infrastructure involved. There are different parties involved here, with different agendas, connecting the projects to different strategies and within

different time-scales. As O'Connor and Wynne (1996, p. 75) have already made clear, this diversity does not represent a situation which can be reduced to a linear movement from the local to the global, from production to consumption and from micro to macro, in the end inevitably leading to the SoHo result. There is a danger here, that the analysis does away too easily with the complex conditions under which the production and consumption of culture and, in line with that, the production and consumption of place, occur in today's post-Fordist city. This not only involves a closer interaction between cultural and economic values in the midst of otherwise unchanged conditions, it also involves a change in the structural and cultural conditions upon which the validation and creation of both cultural and economic value depends. One of these changing conditions involves a growing uncertainty about, and plurality of, notions of artistic excellence, with these notions no longer falling together with linear perspectives on the evolution of Western art, or with clear-cut definitions of what it means to belong to a cultural *avant garde*, going together with the related notions of refinement, abstraction, disruption, craftsmanship, originality. These and other distinctive cultural notions no longer simply mirror and sustain a wider field of oppositions, such as those between control and desire, the aesthetic and the emotional, reason and the sensory, the private and the public, the margins and the centre, the local and the global, culture and commerce, the refined and the banal (Schulze, 1992). Other, transverse, figurations have become possible, with parts of the cultural infrastructure seeking its independence and identity through rather than against the market, with a new aesthetic blending of local history and global form, with aesthetic and conceptual imagination, experimentation, innovation and authenticity becoming important values in both consumer, organisational and product markets, with groups of new media artists celebrating a more pragmatic attitude towards public and/or private resources, with highly edu-

cated consumers developing a more reflexive cultural attitude, celebrating cultural dispute and the playful mixing of identities and perspectives (see Featherstone, 1991). This is not only a case of otherwise equal structural conditions allowing for more freedom at the level of local agency (the archetypal structure-agency dichotomy), it is also—and perhaps even more so—a case of changing structural conditions, in both the economic and the cultural realm. Economic and technological developments have enabled an increase in communicative and physical mobility, allowing people to develop their own taste independent of an established national élite. Besides, there is an expanding media-cum-leisure industry catering for a larger diversity of tastes. Together, these developments have opened up national cultural monopolies and desacralised the arts.

The collection of cases presented above is a clear indication of these structural transformations and the more complex conditions within which cultural and economic values are created and exchanged. The Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam cannot be identified simply as either place or market, public or a private, cultural or commercial. It is both and fits easily into Zukin's definition of a 'liminal' space. However, at the same time, this cannot be read as forming part of an unavoidable development from a state of 'pure' culture, towards commerce and consumption, with that development destroying the cultural values which originally were responsible for the place itself. This would not do justice to the interests and struggles involved. For the team managing the place, public and/or private resources have no intrinsic value. They are evaluated on the basis of the level of autonomy they allow, thus enabling a mixed cultural programme, based on a mixed audience and creating a productive place for cultural production/consumption. In fact, the management team cannot allow itself to become locked into either a purely commercial, or a purely public economic/symbolic position. This would discredit the open and autonomous character of the place, based on a mixture of small and large, local and

global, handicraft and electronic, long term and short term, and would thus destroy the cultural 'story' on which it depends. Neither public support nor commerce is an end in itself here. Both are a means to maintain a specific cultural autonomy and standard. Also interesting here is the Tilburg case, combining on various levels (from the level of the individual projects to that of the quarter writ large) a hybridity of financial structures (structural and project subsidies, loans and equity, sponsor contracts) and artistic paradigms (from the traditional arts to pop music, the new media and design). Yes, the project is experiencing the economic consequences of the increase in cultural value, but this is reflexively taken up by public and private coalition partners as a matter of concern and there is an awareness of the fact that, in the long run, the economic value of the place is founded on the very cultural values which created the economic value to begin with. Economic value is no neutral, empty entity, allowing for a simple and non-consequential exchange of content. In the context of a more reflexive consumer economy, in particular, economic value is increasingly based upon a specific cultural value, which does not always allow itself to be changed easily. As a consequence, the partners involved in the Tilburg case also have an interest in maintaining the cultural value which originally founded the economic value of the place. Hence, the urge to maintain an artistic image. As soon as rumour has it that the Veemarktkwartier has been handed over to other sources of economic value—for instance, by allowing large-scale cultural retailers to establish themselves in the quarter—the place will lose its attractiveness to small-scale cultural producers, primarily responsible for the creative ambience to begin with. The place would lose its image of an open, innovative space and the small producers staying would risk their reputation as creative innovators. This would in turn seriously damage the image on which a major part of the pop music infrastructure still depends. Thus, the decline in cultural value would produce a serious risk, not only for the private partners involved, but

also for the local administration which has invested heavily in the place, both politically and economically. As a result, and following an extended reflexive awareness of this two-way dependency of cultural and economic value, the partners involved are searching for subtle ways to safeguard the open character of the place, allowing for a constant movement of creative cultural capital. Much will depend on whether the existing coalition of public and private partners will be able to succeed in doing this.

On the other hand, while it is clear from this small collection of case studies that the interaction between cultural and economic values allows for other models than the one represented by Zukin's SoHo analysis, with the possibility of a stronger role for the cultural infrastructure and the artistic values involved, it is also clear how Zukin's evaluation reflects dominant sentiments, tendencies and interests, and how alternative models will have to be based on both a subtle and reflexive, but at the same time strong and determined, policy.

Crucial here is the flexible, *ad hoc* character of the policies surrounding most, if not all, of the aforementioned clusters. Most of the time, this is seen as a strong point. Due to their 'adhocracy' (Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985; in Bilton, 1999), the projects seem to be able to respond to very different and constantly changing local conditions and circumstances. Because of a lack of a coherent and consistent developmental model, the projects are able to circumvent conventional ways of doing things, move into different directions, build multiple alliances with former oppositional networks and organisations, and create portfolios of erstwhile differentiated activities. This makes them more flexible and adaptable *vis-à-vis* a more erratic field of urban and/or cultural developments. Hence, they embody a less universal and less standardised approach in not only the field of cultural policy-making, but also in policy-making in general, moving from a conventional welfare-state model towards 'post-modern' models of cultural/urban governance.

However, as Bilton (1999) has made clear,

there are also limits to this adhocism. Without a coherent perspective and support system, there is the danger that the various clustering projects and the related cultural values will remain marginal in relation to the dominant dynamics of both the vested subsidy systems and the global cultural economy. In Tilburg, the Warner Music group has already found its way to the new Tilburg pop music infrastructure, contracting successful bands, thus possibly drawing away the revenues of the original investments. Moreover, the greater part of one of the stakeholders in the area, Mojo Concerts, a national company specialising in the organisation and staging of pop music events, is now owned by Clear Channel, a Texas-based global advertisement company. The question is how these wider distribution interests will influence the future of the local project. Also, a major insurance company, Interpolis, is claiming a bigger part of the urban space of the Veemarktkwartier for an enlargement of its Tilburg-based head office. In Utrecht, the 'Utrechtse model', consisting of an agreed network between theatre producers, the arts academy, local theatre stages and the local municipality, is not recognised as such by the national subsidy institutions. Hence, one of the key projects of the Theatre Quarter, the youth theatre workplace, is constantly in danger of not receiving enough support.

These are just minor examples of how vested institutional interests can very easily frustrate subtle local tactics, searching for alternative ways to exchange cultural and social, economic and spatial values. It is important here not to romanticise the small-scale and local production regimes. In order for these projects, and the models underlying them, to really be able to play a role in the line of developments, and to secure the cultural values implied, there is a need for a more robust institutional permanence and a more reflexive and strategic approach, not only at the local, but also at the national level, together with a more clearly targeted and better informed cultural policy development discourse.

Here, it becomes all the more important to

go beyond a generalised, self-evident approach to cultural clustering strategies and to start and differentiate more critically and strategically between different possible perspectives, both in terms of the wider goals these clusters are supposed to meet, and in terms of the kind of structures necessary to stimulate or support their development. Cultural cluster programmes come with a great variety of possible forms and objectives. In general, they are both an expression and a further stimulation of a broader 'horizontalisation' of the arts and culture. A vertically organised production and consumption column, supported by national public policy and a rather tightly organised arts profession, is making way for a more horizontal, process-oriented development, based on a broader definition of culture, using a broader mixture of possible resources and linking in with a broader network of interests. Cluster programmes are a spatial expression of this. They mirror attempts to find a new fit between a more open and dynamic cultural infrastructure and a more competitive, scaled-up, post-industrial urban environment. This can be conceived of in both negative and positive ways. In practice, much will depend on how those involved 'read' developments and how they are able to fit in and secure cultural values in relation to them. Stimulating the local cultural democracy and diversity, a stronger positioning of culture amenities and urban quarters, the revitalisation and renewal of art and culture, finding a new use for cultural heritage, stimulating the cultural economy: these and other possible rationales ask for different clustering strategies and different support structures, with different spatial, financial and managerial arrangements and different links to different parts of a wider urban environment. A more reflexive approach to cultural clustering developments, from a comparative perspective differentiating between possible developmental goals and trajectories, could help in more clearly identifying preferred opportunities, together with related cultural, spatial and economic support structures. As a result, this could take away something of the 'hype'

of cultural clustering strategies, also preventing those strategies from becoming the object of overgeneralised forms of either boosterism or scepticism.

### Conclusion

Over the past 10–15 years, cultural cluster strategies have developed into something of an urban/cultural development ‘hype’. In every major city, cultural and/or leisure functions are grouped together in a great variety of spatial forms and programmes. In general, the aim is for these cultural functions to profit from each other’s presence in one way or another. Hence, the cultural clustering model represents an interesting turn in urban cultural policy-making, from a more exclusive, vertical and regulatory perspective, to a much more inclusive, horizontal and stimulating perspective. The clusters mirror a situation in which the cultural field has become much more diverse and open, with the arts and culture not only being reproduced through the public, but also through the private sector.

However, as will have become clear from the foregoing, behind this common spatial strategy, we see the emergence of a great variety of forms and rationales. The analysis has shown clusters to differ in terms of their portfolio of activities, both horizontally and vertically, the way they are financed and managed, their programmatic and spatial position within a wider urban infrastructure and their specific developmental trajectory. They can range from being mostly consumption to production-oriented, from predominantly art- to entertainment-based, from being the result of top-down planning to bottom-up organic growth, from relying on closed and hierarchical to open and network-based forms of finance and management.

Partly, this variety of forms can be related to a variety of rationales underlying their development. Not all the projects have to do with the archetypal promotion of local creativity and the creative economy. Cultural cluster programmes serve a greater variety of objectives. Moreover, we see intentions rang-

ing from amenity and place-promotion, the revitalisation of the arts and culture and the preservation of architectural heritage, to the stimulation of the local cultural democracy and diversity.

Interestingly, most of the projects analysed are not the result of a clear choice between alternative developmental models, based on specific cultural objectives and a related evaluation of local and historical circumstances. Instead, most of them are the result of a rather eclectic coming together of locally specific opportunities, in combination with a rather generalised notion of the possible role of the arts and culture in the post-industrial city. Because of that, no clear correlations can be identified (yet) between the rationales used and the models developed.

Partly, this *ad hoc* blending of arguments and opportunities can be related to the short history of cultural clustering policies. There is no clear tradition with an established classification of possible strategic trajectories. Partly this must also be related to the fact that cultural clustering models involve new coalitions, clearly falling in between established cultural, economic, social and spatial policies. As a result, things depend very much on local forms of enthusiasm and on fragile personal alliances across vested interests. In addition, there is the highly volatile and unstable character of the cultural sector itself, very much depending on subjective knowledge and personal commitments. Because of that, the sector is less inclined to be regarded as a possible stable object for planning and investment.

On the one hand this highly subjective, personalised, open and pragmatic situation might be celebrated as something suiting a ‘post-modern’ complexity. Due to a decreasing influence of the binding structures of the corporatist society, former planning-based approaches to urban reality have to give way to much more open, flexible, dynamic and developmental approaches. The current ‘ad-hocracy’ surrounding cultural clustering strategies could be celebrated as a productive part of such a reflexive and ‘enabling’ turn in local policy-making. However, on the other

hand, there is the danger that such an open and pragmatic attitude will in the end underscore the sceptics' point of view. Due to a weak or hesitant involvement of the arts and cultural sector, a situation all too often attributable to a combination of a classical, inhibitory attitude towards the broader field of culture on one hand, and a boosting approach to urban economic development on the other, other interests take over. This leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which cultural values become more and more side-tracked or forced out by other, external values.

Of course, this does in itself not invalidate the critical assessment of events, together with all the possible artistic and/or cultural standards involved. However, what it does demonstrate is how, in a situation in which the exchange between cultural and other (social, economic) values has become more complex and unstable, the search for new forms of urban cultural governance can easily be frustrated by a combination of unclear goals, a lack of mutual understanding and involvement, overgeneralised models and inhibitory attitudes. In order to prevent this from happening, there is a need to develop a more reflexive involvement with cultural clustering developments, more clearly differentiating between possible objectives and programmes. The rationales and characteristics differentiated above might help in developing such a more fine-tuned but at the same time more determined perspective on multi-functional urban spaces, involving sustainable links between cultural values and a wider urban infrastructure.

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