SENSES OF PLACE: understanding urban location as an organisation of places

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Abstract

One of the dominant surmises in urban studies is that the organization of economic activities and the way it leads to a distribution in space follows a strict logic of economy. Only quite recently, after which the (neo) classic economy and location-theory begin to lose their hegemony (Thrift & Amin, 2004), that we come to realise economic logic alone fails to provide a compelling account on the problem of location. Similarly, we fail to understand the ‘cohesion’ in contemporary urban form on the basis of pure economic arguments alone; an opinion which is also shared by a number of renowned economic geographers (Peck, 2005).

The relation between movement network as generator of place-quality and urban functions taking place in this movement-generated landscape as an effect of topological differentials can be considered a ‘classic’ approach in Space-Syntax research. This study is based on Hillier’s (1996) assertion that ‘cities are movement-economies’ and the hypothesis of organization of place as a construct in human perception reflective to the process of active and ‘mobile inhabitation’ (Budiarto & Read, 2003). The paper will explore issue of location by recasting it through a Heideggerian perspective on ‘location’.

The way shifting between places occur as part of our everyday experience in the city and how it may effect on the distribution of urban functions is then explored and illustrated by way of taking an empirical study on the city of Amsterdam. Analysing the city using a series of maps, the focus is given on presenting Amsterdam’s urban form in terms of continuous formation and transformation of places, from the history to the contemporary city. By taking both ‘fixity’ and ‘changes’ in the pattern of urban functions into account, it is proposed that the historical development of form, i.e. urban formation, needs to be understood as a continuous development of form, rather than a series of breaks from medieval to modern and postmodern city. The implication of such a view is that we need to revise the way we mould a model to understand ‘city’.

Introduction

No one would deny that specific relationship exists between social and economic phenomena and physical material form of city. It is not, yet, equally clear what the nature of these relationships is. Within the domain of urban studies, the hegemony of (neo) classic location theories, ranging from Von Thunen’s Der isolierte staat (1826) to

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Alonso (1964) and most recently resurrected in Krugman’s *Self organizing economy* (1995) has become challenged. Despite spanning more than a century, they drew explanations based upon the surmise that economic logic must have underlain human actions, including ‘where to settle’. Since they had become overly obsessed by systematic rules driven by the imperatives of economic logic, they failed to reflect and unfold the richness and differences existed and generated by urban space (e.g. centralities that are already on urban surface before being appropriated by economic programmes). This is exactly where these theories miss the touch with the real world. In the work of Von Thunen (1826), for example, spatial distance was taken as the only criterion for the definition and organisation of economic activities in space. Space, as he explained there, has uniform and neutral character and under those circumstances each activity will be almost mechanically distributed according to the logic of economy. The problem of such theory, as Braudel (1979:39) has rightly said, is the absence of the very important concept of inequality, including spatial and material unevenness. Even when such inequality is acknowledged, it is taken as given or natural category and it fails to take profound comments on its origins and genesis.

Throughout this paper, I endeavour to recast the question of location of economic activities from a morphological perspective. Within this field, the location of firms has hitherto drawn scant attention; the effects of urban configuration to pattern of function are rarely observed beyond retail activities. Moreover, available studies on the impact of physical changes on spatial pattern of firms seems to have predilection for putting forward economic based argument like the relationship of urban change and development of rental values (Desyllas, 1999) or even such is bluntly sought in the realm of transportation cost (e.g. Bruinsma, 1995; Brujinsma et.al, 2000). In this regard, this paper aims to contribute towards opening a fresh perspective by drawing its arguments from the basis of spatial phenomenology (Osborne & Rose, 2004; Healy, 2006) rather than economy; it attempts to understand the city as a ‘structure of places’ within and through which human action becomes intelligible.

By way of empirical study this paper presents some early findings which suggest a crude yet suggestive correlation between a structure of ‘place-world’ (Braudel, 1979) in physical environment and ‘economic’ space. The outcome is expected to contribute towards building a speculative model to understand ‘location’ as a construct emerging out from the structure of relations which partly resides in the form of urban landscape itself, rather than as a loose distribution of programmes on empty surface. The theory being outlined here imposes therefore a Heideggerian order of ‘landscape’ on the city in order to resolve the problem of ‘predication’ in the man-environment relation, and to understand the ‘projection’ of the built environment as intelligible landscape (Budiarto & Read, 2003).

While building on such view, I have heavily leaned on the shoulders of many other urban theorists. Substantial part of my arguments is derived from space syntax theory (Hillier & Hanson, 1984; Hillier, 1996a), which focuses at understanding the ‘causative’ powers of space. Since the last ten years or so we have seen a profound change in the shape of the ‘economic city’ due to the increase of mobility, found the opinions of a number of authors including ‘the city explodes’ (Wright & Stewart, 1972:2), ‘rescaling of urban functions to metropolitan or global’ (Salet, 2005:23; Brenner, 1998), and ‘edge city’ formation (Garreau, 1991). This fact goes hardly unnoticed without critically raising questions about what kind of model we should build to understand ‘the city’. Motivated by the intention to extend the functionality of traditional space syntax model to investigate cohesion
in the urban periphery and contemporary metropolitan landscape, which has become the key-issue in the understanding the ‘new’ form of urbanisation (Soja, 2000), the ‘Flat City model’ has been previously developed and introduced (Read, 2005a).

The Flat-City model suggests that the environment is structured into strata of ‘place-regions’, each with their own definitive scales and each with their own connective matrix enabling the ‘regional’ (as in ‘place-region’) movement which realizes ‘places’. Inseparable to our everyday pattern of movement is the shifting between places of different scales, which goes almost unnoticed and seems to occur ‘naturally’ (e.g. going to work in another city, shopping in city centre, buying groceries in the local market) while in fact it involves a rather sophisticated series of points of translations and orientation (Budiarto & Read, 2003; Read, 2005a).

In the case of Amsterdam, where this study has taken place, the breaking down of place-region network into three different strata – metropolitan (highways, for example), middle-scale (e.g. urban thoroughfares) and local (other street)– corresponds with the way Amsterdam is realised and experienced in the everyday life as a ‘place’. Drawing from Casey (1996), place only exists in relation to other places, which therefore entails the notion of ‘scale’. At a particular scale, Amsterdam exists in relation to Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Milan and London (Hall et al., 2006), constituted by trading and high speed train networks. At a slightly lower scale, Amsterdam is a place in relation with Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Den Haag (Lambergts et al., 2006; Hall, 2006), constituted by flows of commuters and national highway system. Again, stepping down into the neighbourhood scale, the cohesion of Amsterdam’s urban form is maintained by a movement network of particular scale, i.e. the middle scale. Examples are the intricacy road network, tram and buses lines and bicycle paths. The model is illustrated in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1:**

The breaking down of urban movement network into three different scales: the metropolitan (black), middle-scale (dark grey), local scale (light grey). Drawn after PhD work of Bruyns (Bruyns & Read, 2007)

Understanding ‘Location’ from Place-Region Network Perspective

In order to take the question of location into account, the concept of ‘centrality’ is then added to the Flat-City model (Budiarto, 2006). It is proposed that each scale of movement network produces a particular scale of ‘centrality’ which starts to give form to the process of location (a process by which ‘forms’ gain functional ‘attributes’, e.g. shopping...
streets, business centres, residential areas). Following the model, it is expected that urban (economic) functions operating at a particular scale, ranging from metropolitan to middle and local scale (e.g. company headquarters, shopping mall, corner shop), will tend to locate themselves in place-region network with the appropriate level of centrality.

It needs to be clarified, though, that the word ‘location’ I use here is not substitute for ‘site’. In Heideggerian sense, ‘location’ [Ort] refers not to a point in the surface but encompasses the relation between space and being. In other words, ‘location’ is a place that promotes actualisation of being and concerns a particular set of region-place network, while ‘site’ refers simply to a portion of empty space.

To elucidate further, let us take an example from a real urban situation. Beursplein is a ‘site’ situated in the old centre of Amsterdam next to Damrak, one of the busiest shopping streets in the city, and less than five minutes away from the Central Station. The site illuminates the rich history of financial trading in Amsterdam, dating back from the seventieth century and amplified by the opening of the Beurs van Berlage in the beginning of twentieth century. Today, it prevails as one of the nation’s largest clusters of stock broker firms despite most of stock trading activities has gone computerised. Besides that, thanks to its central position in the city, the site is also a home to various functions, ranging from catering to entertainment industries.

In this example, we can regard Beursplein as a site constituted by various scales of connections, ranging from global to local scale. At a particularly global scale, it is well connected to Paris and Brussels in the space of global/metropolitan economy (i.e. EURONEXT) but also by certain scale of movement (e.g. business travels, high-speed train network). While, simultaneously, it is also well connected to the surrounding districts like Oud-West, De Pijp and Jordaan by urban network of slightly lower scale (i.e. middle-scale), constituted by a particular scale of movements (e.g. bus/ tram/ metro lines) and certain scale economies (e.g. shopping malls, local markets, and working/residential functions). Finally, at the lowest scale, Beursplein is again connected to the intermediary streets like Damrak or Rokin (constituted by walking) and to particularly local economies (e.g. café or snack bar in the corner). The diagram in Fig. 2 illustrates this concatenating structure of region-place network.

Figure 2:
Diagram of place-region network of Amsterdam’s Beursplein
For the same reason that Beursplein is not the same place to someone sitting in the dealing room and another in the snack bar, the different functions situated there are not sitting on the same location although they are sitting on the same site. Hence, the place-region network hypothesis anticipates that economic activities of different types or scales may eventually share the same site without necessarily occupying the same ‘location’. Rather, it is the way different ‘situatednesses’ of different functions have somehow become converged together in that singular site that calls for our attention.

The argument that ‘place’ definitely keeps its sense even in the contemporary economic space and ‘advanced’ economic functions, albeit for other reasons than the historical costs of transportation, is the main theme in the work of among other Salet (2005; 2003; Salet & Bertolini, 2001). In his opinion, the concept of ‘footlooseness’ –that firms may virtually locate anywhere today given the advance of telematics– which is focused on decreasing significance of place, is in general strongly exaggerated as ‘place’ definitely keeps its sense albeit for other reasons than the historical costs of transportation (Salet 2005:21-2). Furthermore, he underlines that the particular characteristic of place (which can be a city or a region) still make sense and even ‘multiplicated’ instead of becoming neglected (ibid, p.23). He asserts, then, that the quality of place lies in its grade of interconnectedness (ibid, p.24). The consequence of this view is that the quality of place should be indicated as ‘network quality’ instead of a static, locally and territorially bounded quality (ibid. p.54-5). In this line of thought, the model of place-region layering is a systematisation of the idea of layering of place-quality (ibid, p.55), which supposedly will make the concept operational in a research on urban form.

The hypothesis of centrality-driven location process has been partially tested in the doctoral research of Bruyns (Bruyns & Read, 2007). Based on Bruyns’ work, the issue being explored in this paper lies rather on understanding the relations between places of different scales and centralities: in which way (business) practices of a (dominant) function may be attuned with that of other (secondary) functions, which has thus effect in their co-location in an urban site. The result delivered in Bruyns & Read (2007) suggests, for example, that qualities and potentials delivered by one ‘place-region’ stratum are often ‘grounded’ and ‘realized’ in lower ‘place-region’ strata, e.g. metropolitan-scale functions may end up realized in a lower (‘urban’) stratum but oriented (measured by topological depth) to the metropolitan scale network.

Having defined this framework, in the remaining part of this paper I will try to deal with the following questions: (a) to what extent has the metropolitanization of the ‘economic city’ led/caused a transformation of ‘economic’ places and a reconfiguration/reshaping of ‘economic’ centralities? And (b), through which way and to what extent our ‘structure of places’ urban model is able to articulate and provide plausible demonstration regarding the logic of ‘economic’ places?

**The Sense of Place and its Transformation**

In the context of urban research on urban form and economic space of Amsterdam, the reconfiguration of urban economic space in the last ten years or so has become a ‘hot’ issue. One of many theories is canvassed by Salet (2005:33), who argues that, the reshaping of economic space and configuration cannot be separated from the fact that from the beginning of 1990’s urbanity (including urban economy) “…has shifted to a new form in which regionalization has come to prominence,” replacing the ‘traditional’ city and along with raised the issues of accessibility and re-scaling from city to metropolitan region...
as the relevant unit of planning and governance (ibid.; Musterd & Osterdorff, 2003).

While the place-region network hypothesis will supposedly predict that reorganisation of ‘location’ will likely occur after physical transformation (e.g. due to infrastructural change), it is not equally clear, however, to what extent the effects of ‘non’ physical issues (e.g. metropolitanization, economic rescaling and change of business practice) may become measurable/traceable in the spatial terms. And most importantly, what is the role played by physical urban form in this process? Does it impede or does it precipitate such kind of shift?

Let us take a further look on the issue. Although it seems practically safe to assume that changes in urban form will positively affect the formation of centralities which then should be plainly noticeable in the redistribution of functions, such assumption needs to be taken with a careful note. Firstly, because cities are more likely being altered in part (in opposite to modified in total) which means that the scale of changes is often relatively small when put in comparison to the whole system. And secondly, although a radical change in urban form may potentially result in a violent and swift (non-linear) change of land use, such clear-cut effect is often hampered by inherent time-lag in property development and the extremely stratified nature of configuration of both the physical environment and societal development (Ceccarelli, 1978). For this reason, expecting to demonstrate a plain straightforward effect of changes in urban form to urban functions, and vice versa, between societal/economic to physical changes, is a highly illusive effort.

The hypothesis followed in this paper, originated from Ceccarelli (1978), is that there is resistance in the built environment and that “...adjustment of the environment to a socio-economic system takes place only through the adjustment of some of its elements to the [economically] dominant units; it follows that when the correspondence among these terms goes below certain levels, a critical period should start.” This means that to observe location-dynamic we need to turn our attention to the ‘dominant’ group whose behaviour would characterize or have largest effect in the structure of the environment. Or, in other words, the focus should be rather on tracing the changes of ‘orientation’ (in terms of topological ‘depth’) in the structure of multi-scales places (in opposite to changes in position) of these service firms to the head-office functions and the adaptability (fixity and changes) of urban environment.

Following this line of thought, the analysis will be pursued in two steps. First, observing the distribution of business service firms in Amsterdam and by investigating to what extent reorganisation of places affects the pattern of distribution. And second, by examining to what extent there is co-determination of locations between the primarily dominant economic functions to the secondary ones. Here, the locations of head-office functions, their ‘associated’ services (business service firms), and tertiary functions (meeting places, for example) are taken as indicator.

(Re)location of Firms in Amsterdam

Methodology

This study uses data of office locations in Amsterdam from 1955 to 2005 with intervals of ten-year. The data are gathered from public telephone directories, Yellow Pages, and official company registers. The sample covers mainly ‘core activities’: accounting, business management, tax and legal services; investment and other financial institutions (including insurance), which activities which according to data collected by LISA (2002) accounting for some 70% of the total
employment in Amsterdam. The number of sample is proportionally taken from the total population in each period, growing from some 500 firms in 1955 to around 1200 firms in 2005.

As much as possible, careful distinction is made regarding firms having multiple establishments in Amsterdam or in other cities, in particular regarding the actual function of a particular office within the firms’ internal organization as we need to separate the headquarters from back offices. All information regarding office function, firms’ core business activity, size (number of employees) and street address is then organised in a database and plotted in map with the help of software and randomly checked by hand. The result is shown in Fig. 3.

**Results**

The result shows that the dominion of ‘centre’ of Amsterdam, which once regarded as the obvious nucleus of urban economic activity, has been constantly challenged by its ‘peripheries’. Its dominance as urban nexus has been significantly eroding, particularly after the end of 1980’s (Fig. 3d). Compared to fast growth of the peripheries, the inner city seems to lag behind despite the fact that the whole region experienced economic upsurge during the periods after the 1970’s.
both in terms of economic growth and the total employment (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy, 1990).

As shown in the series of maps, the seeping out of firms to various sites along the ringroad has started already since the 1970’s (Fig. 3), although it is not until the beginning of 1990’s to (Fig. 2e) that the reconfiguration of urban pattern becomes quite plain to see. The south part of Amsterdam, in particular along the highway A10, seems to gain most from this spatial and economic reconfiguration. In closer look, the shift occurred in steps. First, by the swift exodus of banks and legal service economies from the inner city locations to the urban circular (in the first wave to the south-eastern side of the circular and then to the south circular in the second wave). Shortly after this, it was followed by the relocation of accounting and other large financial institutions to the A10-south.

While the era of 1970-1980 is marked with massive relocation of headquarters, financial institutions, business administration and legal services to the A10-south (which strongly indicates that this part has been attractive to businesses, long before the development of Zuidas or the ‘southern axis’ was conceived or formalised by planning), the era of 1990-2000 is marked with a turning of inner city from a financial and legal services centre into varied ‘new’ creative economy (design and media related industries in particular) besides bolstering its eminence as tourist centre, just-in-time services and leisure economies. This is depicted in Fig 4, which shows that large to medium-sized financial, accounting, management and legal services firms (i.e. the ‘core activities), tend to locate either next to the highway or the cityring; hollowing out the old city centre. For this reason, we can argue that in Amsterdam’s city centre there has been substantial shift from the primary (or economically dominant) to the secondary and tertiary functions.

With regards to Amsterdam, such large scale transformation (in the sense of physical and economic space), is presumed to have taken place in several times, given ‘the city’ has shifted from the harbour in the 17th century, to the inner city and around the Central Station in the beginning of 20th century, and lately towards A10 (Zuidas), partly due to rapid increase in the share of ‘automobility’ in the total Amsterdam’s intra and inter urban movement and the effect of orbital motorway on urban travel behaviour (Loos, et.al, 1991).

Figure 4:
Map showing the location of offices with European headquarters function (black) and other large to medium sized firms (grey)
Building an Urban (Economic) Model of Amsterdam

Generally speaking, the results (see Fig 3a-f) show rather inconclusive correlation between physical changes in 1955-2005, which has largely taken place on metropolitan scale network, and the distribution of service firms. The problem is, then, to build a model that will allow us to produce a compelling account on the result. Does centrality ‘moves’ outward due to changes in urban infrastructure? And, if yes, how can we explain the rebound of the inner city, led partly by inward flows of smaller firms, in the period of 2005?

Time-lag and Increment Effect of Growth

As previously said, the fact that urban form and activities are transforming together in an extremely stratified way, makes it impossible for us to expect showing strong correlation between the two. However, after experimenting with the result, it can be argued that a better correlation between the model of movement network we developed previously and the distribution pattern of firms is to be found when the data of firms from a certain period is set against the model from the previous period, for instance, by matching the data from 1985 against the urban network model from 1975. This affirms the hypothesis on apparent time-lag between major physical change and shift of urban pattern.

In this continuously changing landscape of material form and activities we can observe, however, that there is certain pattern of consistent accumulation occurred at a number of sites. Sites in which change (in terms of location-centrality) occur less often, are likely to grow in more steady way (in terms of the number of firms) than sites where change of location-centrality occur rather regularly. The change of location-centrality is here indicated by change in connection to movement network of certain scale (measured by topological distance). The ‘constant’ sites are more likely to benefit from steadier increment of new establishments and by the ability to keep older ones from moving to other sites, while the development of the ‘shifting’ sites are constantly perturbed by their volatile changes in terms of centrality-location and disadvantaged in their competition to the ‘constant’ sites.

Eventually, this logic may also explain why the south segment of A10 appears today as the densest cluster of firms in Amsterdam while many other sites along the Amsterdam’s highway are not. The fact that A10-south is the least modified part of metropolitan network in the last fifty years has significantly contributed to the way it continuously (and with success) re-establishes itself as a metropolitan place and benefited from a steady growth, while many other places were still in struggle for becoming metropolitan.

Linking the argument of increment development to the time-lag effect explained in the previous paragraph, expecting that sudden transformation in place-centrality is to result in non-linear change in activity-pattern seems rather unreal. In real urban formation, such effect would have been hampered by stabilising mechanisms in the landscape itself and in the society. Examples are changing value of land and premises (which also rarely occurs in non-linear way) and the time span between taking the decision to move and the actual moving itself which usually takes several years.

Formation of Urban Centres

Somewhat less obvious than the fleeting away of service firms from the inner city to the peripheries, the pattern of consolidation in firms distribution is often left unnoticed, but seems to occur in rather consistent way, which thus deserves a proper attention. Observing consolidation pattern opens, furthermore, the possibility to explain the
process of formation of new urban centres and, in particular, the emergence of business clusters.

The most striking demonstration of this effect takes place in the period of 1995 and 2005 (Fig. 5e,f), which shows that certain sites are gaining most from relocation, while some others are draining. As the map shows, the ‘gaining’ ones appear to have direct orientation to the highway, i.e. less number of topological depth (but not necessarily in the proximity to highway’s exits). In this case, spaces with ‘shallower’ depth to metropolitan scale network appear to be constituted as ‘metropolitan place’ in a much higher level of consistency than those topologically farther away from the metropolitan network.

The reason why consolidation pattern becomes rather obvious in 1995-2005 compared to other periods, is likely due to the fact that during the last ten years Amsterdam’s movement network has undergone relatively minor change as far as metropolitan scale is concerned (as the ringroad has been opened already in 1991). The only physical change that occurred in that period is the recent completion of Piet Hein tunnel on the east part of the city, which makes possible a direct connection between the western tangents of the highway to the eastern. Yet, due to time-lag and increment growth factors explained in the previous paragraph, whether such change will eventually have effect in the pattern of distribution (e.g. at what scale/ tempo and to what extent) still remains to be seen in the future; at least in some ten-years time.

**Grounding and the Relation between Variously Scaled Functions**

Having gone so far, the true (spatial) relationship between the ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ functions still remains unknown. The first attempt to do so is done relating each scale of activities to the movement network of appropriate scale. The data is taken from the survey in 2005, taking three different scales of activities: the (European) headquarters of multinational firms –supposedly operating at regional/metropolitan scale, associated service firms (i.e. the ‘core’ firms mentioned before added with all kinds of new ‘creative’ economy, IT and engineering services) –presumably operating at the city scale, and, lastly, local scale activities that presumably render the need for socialization around the life of those who carry the work of ‘economy’. Examples are face-to-face meeting facilities, like lunch rooms, business clubs, restaurants and cafés. The data is shown in Fig. 5.

![Figure 5:](image)

_Distribution of primary functions (European headquarters, black), secondary (associated service firms, dark grey) and tertiary ones (functions of socialites, light grey) in relation to the metropolitan and middle-scale network._
Looking at the structure of urban movement network and the production of places at different scales suggests that hierarchical structure of relationship between firms of various scales (from the primary to tertiary functions) seems to correspond to the structuration of places in our perception—in other words that the logic which underpins these changes is one which is founded on a Heideggerian principle of place as a ‘structure of presence’ and intelligibility.

This is demonstrated by mapping the way movement breaches from the highest scale (metropolitan scale network) to lower scales and relating it to the constitution of ‘places’ Fig. 6a, b show that despite activities seems to be highly mixed at the points where shifts between different scales of movement happen, there is certain level of consistency in the constitution of ‘place’, measured by observing the number of occurrence of functions of a particular scale in every site. Thus, it can be said that although ‘site’ may eventually contain multiple ‘places’—discussed already in the earlier part of this paper—this distorts not the dominancy of functions operating at a particular scale. Or in other words, the ‘sense of place’ prevails.

Concluding Remarks

Having arrived at this point, I will now try to reflect upon the result of this study and what would be the implication brought by this study in the near future. This paper has originally intended to sketch one of many possibilities to explain the problem of location (in this case that of service firms). In particular, this was done by drawing most of its arguments from analysis on urban form. The mission that I wanted to accomplish was to explain the working of the economy from the understanding of inhabitation logic inherent in cities, as in no other man-built landscapes. Now, I must admit that while doing so I have unavoidably picked up arguments and evidences rooted in the economic logic, which means that this paper has betrayed its own purpose and, in certain sense, failed. Here, I will try to account for such failure.

This century is marked with the realisation that the ‘economy’ is no separate to social, cultural, or political—a division which has rooted long in the history, ranging from Weber who claimed economy as a special category of social action to the expulsion of economy from sociology by Durkheim. The redirection of interest to everyday life is still adolescent and for the same reason, evidences started from non-economic basis are still scarce. Even within the field of economic geography, for instance, Yeung (2003) has said that the available literatures in the field called ‘new economic geographies’ are focused more on the issue ‘why’ the movement away from (neo)classic economic arguments is desirable, but rarely followed by serious attempts in showing clues about ‘how to do that’. For this reason, to achieve the original purpose I stated in the beginning of this paper
means that I have to start from a total scratch, which is too ambitious by far.

However, I hope that the results and analysis presented here show the correlation between physical changes and socio-economic ones, and furthermore in my attempt to demonstrate the potentiality and possibility for accounting the location of economic activities based on a study in urban morphology. The task that was not accomplished yet in this paper is to provide a complete and thorough account on the matter and to forge them together into a plausible theory. This task remains, thus, for future study.

Simultaneously, the view outlined here has opened up a new perspective. It must be realized by now that the most urgent issue in our attempt to build understanding on contemporary cities needs to be accompanied by a rigorous effort to build a profound urban/spatial model which will enable us to see the form of contemporary/postmodern cities and spaces as a development in the story of form rather than a break from the earlier forms of urbanisation (e.g. medieval city, modern city). Analysis on the shift of orientation of the ‘traditional city’ to contemporary socio-economic conditions as presented is proposed here as one of such promising direction in this new field of inquiry.

Since large economic or social shifts are not unlikely to occur again in the future, what needs to be urgently put in our agenda is the need to develop a reliable methodology that will enable us to assess and account for the transformation of 'traditional city' to 'newer' contemporary conditions. At the one hand, this should allow us to measure the re-orientation of existing/traditional cities to the new or contemporary functional orders. And at the other hand, an adequate understanding on the matter is crucial to help us formulate a conclusive strategy to deal with relevant problems facing today cities and spaces. Examples are the issues around social-economic segregation and the chasm between economic deprivation and wealth in different urban areas.

In other words, the outcome is expected to contribute towards the effort of building an accountable theory on the metropolitanization of the city; to what limit and at what expense. I believe that the key issue towards building such theory lies not in portraying contemporary urbanisation in conflict to the traditional concept of a city, but through active reassertion of the two. Only by then it will help us to produce further formulation of the concept of sustainable inhabitation.

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i. In the recently published report, the Municipality of Amsterdam registers not less than 94 neighbourhoods names which have taken root in the history and have become ‘instituted’ as early as 1529 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2006).

ii. Due to the preliminary/exploratory nature of this study, the fact that the nature and structure of relationship between the headquarters and provider of services (outsourcing as ‘normal’ business practice, for example) may have changed from time to time and thus may affect the result, will be put aside for the time being.