

Mega-projects in New York, London and Amsterdam

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Abstract

Recently we have witnessed the mounting of very large development projects (mega-projects) in European and American cities. There is a striking physical similarity among the schemes and also a convergence embodied in private-sector involvement and market orientation. They differ, however, as to whether they provide affordable units and tie together physical and social goals. This article investigates new mega-projects in New York, London, and Amsterdam. The dissimilarities among them indicate the extent of variability in contemporary property capitalism. The comparison shows that public-private partnerships can provide public benefits, but also shows that these large projects are risky for both public and private participants, must primarily be oriented toward profitability, and produce a landscape that does not encourage urbanity. Whether the gains from increased competitiveness are spread throughout the society depends on the size of the direct governmental commitment to public benefits. This is greatest in the Netherlands, where the welfare state, albeit shrunken, lives on; it is least in the United States, where the small size of national expenditures on housing and social welfare means that low-income people must depend almost wholly on trickle-down effects to gain from new development.

During the most recent decade we have witnessed the mounting of very large development projects (mega-projects) in European and American cities. After a hiatus during the 1990s brought on by the real-estate bust early in the decade, major cities have responded to the pressures of the global economy by using very big, mixed-use developments as attractors of multinational business and sites for new housing.¹ There is a striking physical similarity among the schemes, irrespective of the city in which they are located. At the same time they differ in social outcomes and planning processes, reflecting the level of commitment that the host city has toward social equity. Examination of three mega-projects, all in their beginning stages, reveals the underlying forces producing them as well as their similarities and differences in relation to social inclusiveness. The three to be discussed in this article are Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn, New York City; Stratford City and the larger Thames Gateway of which it forms a part, in London; and Amsterdam South, consisting of the South Axis and Amsterdam Southeast developments.

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1 The definition used here of a mega-project is a loose one. Essentially it involves a costly scheme for development of a contiguous area, requiring new construction and/or substantial rehabilitation. Implementation may take a number of years and may be the responsibility of a single or multiple developers. Mega-projects always include a transformation of land uses.

The situations of the three cities differed during the period leading up to the recent efflorescence of mega-projects. London and New York both suffered serious depressions in their property markets during the early 1990s and saw the bankruptcy of firms that had engaged in speculative office construction during the boom years preceding the decline. Moreover, during much of the 1990s they had governing coalitions that focused on completing projects started earlier rather than embarking on major new endeavors. By 2000, however, the foundering projects at Canary Wharf in the London Docklands and Times Square in midtown Manhattan had been revived and were fulfilling the dreams of their original proponents, albeit under different management. New administrations wished to leave their mark on their cities and sought to do so through entrepreneurial property development. Amsterdam had not engaged in similar office-building schemes during the preceding decades but had rather placed its emphasis on enlarging its housing stock. By 2000, however, as will be discussed below, its planners became aware that office development on the periphery was occurring on its own, and they turned their attention to rationalizing and building on this base.

By the start of the new century all three cities had converted their economic base from heavy reliance on seaport and manufacturing activities to finance, business services, tourism, and creative industries. This transformation of function had forced a restructuring of spatial relations, resulting in the growth of office, entertainment, and luxury housing districts, as disused industrial and riverside structures were recycled, and glamorous new spaces, often designed by world famous architects, became the hallmarks of economic success. Government involvement took the form of public-private partnerships, with varying degrees of governmental control in the three cities. Urban regimes, anxious to maintain their image, feeling they had to compete for investment, and seeing only limited development opportunities in old central business districts, attempted to direct growth to parts of their cities that had previously been viewed as marginal. Thus, the focus of regeneration moved to areas outside the old urban core.²

Although there are continuities between the present crop of proposed developments and their predecessors, the scale of ambition has grown and the character and justification of the projects have to some degree changed. In London and New York they form part of a more comprehensive planning process than in the recent past; in Amsterdam, where comprehensive planning has always reigned, there has been a rethinking of spatial strategies away from the compact city toward a polycentric model. All three cities must deal with escalating housing prices and have incorporated housing into the new projects, claiming the residential component as an equity measure. They differ, however, in the extent to which they intend to provide affordable units and to which physical and social goals are tied together. The remainder of this article describes the context and likely outcomes of the projects and evaluates their contribution to a more just city.

Atlantic Yards

The Atlantic Yards project forms part of a grand vision for New York presented by the Mayor's Office as PlaNYC2030.³ This document represents the first effort at a master plan for the city since the John Lindsay mayoralty of the 1970s. Put forth by the

- 2 Building out of the old core did continue, and in the case of New York, replacement of the World Trade Center is being accomplished with comparably sized, wholly commercial construction (against the wishes of the mayor's office, which had called for some residential buildings). Also in New York ambitious plans for the West Side of Manhattan constituted an effort to expand the midtown central business district rather than implant a new one on the periphery, but still constituted a move into previously low-valued space. The original Atlantic Yards plan (see below) contained more office space than the final version, as the developer feared that the project would lose the support of the mayor's office if the site appeared to compete with the West Side.
- 3 NYC Office of the Mayor (2007). Formulation of the project preceded the plan.

Bloomberg administration, it reflects the world view of a billionaire mayor and his former deputy mayor for economic development, Daniel Doctoroff, himself a wealthy, former investment banker.⁴ To its credit, the plan emphasizes development in all five boroughs of the city, promotes the creation of affordable housing, and calls for environmentally sensitive measures. But, while parts of it reflect sensitivity to neighborhood concerns, its major projects⁵ utilize huge sums of public money and tax forgiveness for endeavors that radically transform their locations, stir up neighborhood opposition, and threaten to sharpen the contrast between the haves and have-nots. The concerns of the plan are restricted to land use and development; it does not link these initiatives to education, job training and placement, or social services.⁶ The overall context in which the plan was framed was one where tens of thousands of housing units were being withdrawn from the affordable housing stock (see note 11 below), the middle class was shrinking, and inequality increasing, while the city was seeing breathtaking levels of wealth acquired by hedge fund managers and investment bankers.

The plan for Atlantic Yards did not originate within the city government but instead was brought to it by a development firm, Forest City Ratner Companies (FCRC).⁷ FCRC had already built three large projects in downtown Brooklyn and was the principal developer working in that borough (Fainstein, 2001). Also located in the borough's downtown, the new project would be built on a deck over rail yards and the immediately surrounding residential and industrial area. Spanning 22 acres (9 hectares) it would encompass 336,000 square feet (31,215 m²) of office space, 6.36 million square feet (590,863 m²) of residential space (6,860 units), an 850,000 square foot (79,000 m²) sports and entertainment arena to house a National Basketball Association (NBA) team,⁸ 247,000 square feet (23,000 m²) of retail space, a 165,000 square foot (15,329 m²) hotel (180 rooms) and over seven acres (2.8 hectares) of open space.⁹ Built on superblocks and raised above street level, the development involved the taking of some properties by eminent domain, including a newly renovated apartment building and a historic industrial structure. Frank Gehry was the architect for the entire complex and had produced a striking set of buildings wholly unrelated to their surroundings (see Figure 1). Despite current design wisdom that argues against isolating projects, it would eliminate streets currently crossing the site; if the streets had been maintained, the developer could not have squeezed so many buildings onto the site and provided so much open space.

- 4 Mayor Bloomberg's second term of office was to end on 1 January 2010. The law making him ineligible to run again was abrogated in 2008.
- 5 These include new baseball stadiums in the Bronx and Queens, high-rise housing on the Brooklyn and Queens waterfronts, a shopping mall in the Bronx that displaces an ethnic wholesale food market, a new Harlem campus for Columbia University, and a vast redevelopment of Manhattan's west side, involving high-rise apartments, extension of the subway system, and the carving out of a new boulevard (see Fainstein, 2005; Wolf-Powers, 2005).
- 6 Peter Marcuse (2008: 2) comments: 'The goal of the "plan" is simply accommodating growth. For whose benefit? A search for the words "equity," "justice," "social justice," "polarization," "inequality," "minimum wages," "land speculation," "rent regulation," "unemployment," "living wage," in the document would not turn up much'.
- 7 At the time of writing (August 2008), it was unclear whether the credit crisis afflicting property development in the United States would seriously delay the project. Some of the land involved had already been cleared, land preparation was continuing, but the developer had expressed caution regarding the speed of actual construction (Bagli, 2008).
- 8 To ensure that a top-level professional team would occupy the arena, the developer purchased the New Jersey Nets basketball team.
- 9 <http://www.atlanticyards.com/html/ay/atlanticyards.html> (web page of the project's developer, Forest City Ratner Company; accessed 2 August 2007).

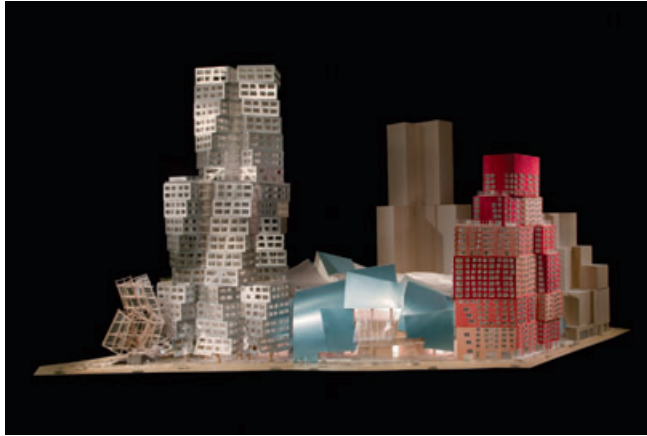


Figure 1 Model of the Gehry plan for the Atlantic Yards development (courtesy of the Forest City Ratner Company)

Supporters of the project pointed to the 1,500 construction jobs and between 1,500 and 6,400 permanent jobs that would be provided as well as the promised 2,250 units of affordable housing.¹⁰ The housing would split between low and moderate-income provision, and it would remain affordable for 30 years.¹¹ FCRC claimed the development would produce over \$5.6 billion in tax revenue for the city and state over 30 years.

Even though the concept for the scheme originated with FSRC, not the government, it enjoyed the unalloyed backing of the former and present state governors, the mayor, and the borough president, none of whom had made any effort to downsize the scheme. The Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) was the public agency spearheading the development. It had the power of eminent domain and had been used as the vehicle for developing most of New York's large projects. Since it was an agency of state government, it possessed the power to override local land use law, which required public participation in approval of major projects.¹² FSRC asserted that its contacts with community groups and its participation in a community benefits agreement (CBA) reflected a process of public consultation (Confessore, 2005).

Controversy over the impacts of the project was exacerbated by divisions along racial and class lines. This part of Brooklyn had been undergoing gentrification for a number of years, and early in-movers had seen the value of their brownstone houses multiply more than tenfold. The surrounding neighborhoods remained predominantly black, and indeed some of the gentrifiers were members of the black bourgeoisie, but the well-to-do white population had been gradually increasing. Although opposition to the development was led mostly by middle-class whites within a broad-based grouping called Develop

- 10 The number of jobs depends on the split between office and residential components of the project. Since its earliest presentation, the amount of office space has been reduced and correspondingly the potential number of jobs has shrunk. Moreover, many of these jobs would be moved from elsewhere rather than constituting new employment.
- 11 This 30-year limit (or less) characterizes much of the housing stock built in New York under various subsidy programs. Although thirty years seems a long time when housing is built, there is no reason to assume once the time passes that housing need will diminish. The causes for the decline in the affordable housing supply were the reversion to market rate of housing built under the Mitchell-Lama program, the primary provider of housing for moderate-income residents during the postwar years, the lapsing of time limits on various federally sponsored developments and the move of private owned units out of rent stabilization (see Waters, 2008).
- 12 The city's uniform land use review process (ULURP) requires participation by boards drawn from the affected community as well as city council and mayoral approval.

Don't Destroy Brooklyn (DDDB), the coalition was not uniformly white, and it counted the area's African-American councilwoman among its number.

At the same time the project's advocates within the community were almost entirely black and contended that their opponents were a white elite. In the words of one black state assemblyman:

The opposition to the arena is actually coming from people who are new to Brooklyn, who lived in Manhattan, mostly. And who have a culture of opposing projects of this nature . . . There's a class of people who are going to the opera. And there's another class of folks who will go to a basketball game and get a cup of beer (quoted in Smith, 2006).¹³

The leader of the local ACORN chapter, an activist group committed to promoting the interests of poor minorities, commented: 'The overwhelming folks who are opposed are white people and wealthier people and more secure people and people who just arrived' (*ibid.*).

Early on, FCRC assisted some existing community groups and funded the creation of new ones, which unsurprisingly backed the project. These groups then participated in the negotiation of a CBA committing the developer to targets for affordable housing, job training, jobs, and community amenities. The enforceability of the agreement was open to question, as the city government was not itself a signatory to it.¹⁴ Its existence, however, was the basis for attracting low-income community representatives and leading them to label the opposition as white gentrifiers who did not want development in their backyard.

Spokespersons for DDDB contended that the resulting structures would destroy the character of predominantly low-rise Brooklyn, produce the highest residential densities in the country, cast shadows over adjacent neighborhoods, and exacerbate already inordinate levels of air pollution and traffic congestion. They argued that the developer was profiting from huge public largesse, including outright grants of up to \$205 million from the city and \$100 million from the state as well as numerous tax benefits and low-cost financing through the use of tax-free bonds.¹⁵

As well as Brooklyn residents who would suffer from direct impacts of the project, opponents included individuals who had in the past strongly backed construction of affordable housing and progressive planning. Thus, Tom Angotti (2007), a professor of planning at Hunter College and a long-time advocate for low-income groups, argued that 'Atlantic Yards . . . would actually undermine green development and be unsustainable in the long run'. He was especially critical of the failures of democratic process involved in the planning of the project (Angotti, 2005). Reliance on the Empire State Development Corporation had meant that modifications urged by community leaders never received a real hearing. Also among those arguing that the project contravened good planning principles was the Municipal Art Society, a respected citywide group, which objected to its density, to the destruction of historic buildings and existing streets, and to the alleged inaccessibility of the public spaces.

Atlantic Yards, like the other mega-projects discussed in this article, was the outcome of a public-private partnership. Unlike the others, it was going up in an area that already was densely inhabited, although the bulk of the project was being built over railroad yards. Also different from the others, the project did not originate in a publicly sponsored plan but instead was the consequence of a developer's initiative. Despite the substantial

13 Actually, New York basketball attendees tend also to be white and upper-class, although the TV audience may well be from a different class.

14 The pastor of a nearby African-American church, who had been involved in the CBA negotiation, refused to sign the agreement because of its lack of enforcement mechanisms (Freedman-Schnapp, 2006).

15 The plans for the development indicate a \$100 million city contribution for infrastructure and land improvements, but the Mayor's 2007 capital budget shows \$205 million allocated to Atlantic Yards (NYC Office of Management and Budget, 2007: 57).

public contribution to its financing, no other firms were given the opportunity to bid on the development.¹⁶ The question remained — if the process had been more open and in conformity with the city's citizen participation requirements, would the outcomes have been more beneficial to the surrounding community, to low-income people crowded out of the city's housing market, and to the metropolitan area more broadly? Recent experience with approval of a new Yankee Stadium provokes skepticism in this regard. There the opposition of the local community board simply resulted in a number of the board members being removed from their positions. At most, a more extended review process would likely have produced some compromises in the design of Atlantic Yards.

In fact, modifying the project so as to make it fit better into the community was probably an unworkable proposition under the existing financial arrangements. First, in the complicated mixing of public and private funds underlying the development, the distribution of risks and benefits between the public and private sectors was murky. The MTA was to get \$100 million for the air rights over its facility as well as needed improvements in its infrastructure, courtesy of FCRC. FCRC was also paying for the very expensive deck that would cover the yards and link neighborhoods currently separated, filling in a debilitating void at the heart of Brooklyn. At the same time the city and state were contributing heavily to infrastructure in the area through direct grants and tax forgiveness. If the public sector had simply built the deck to start, then requested proposals to build upon it, would there have been greater net public benefits? Without national government funding for the low-cost housing, as is the case in the European projects discussed below, it was unlikely that the outcome would have been much different. In the current structuring of the project, the developer was taking considerable risk. Its expenditure estimates seemed too low at a time when construction costs were escalating due to Chinese pressures on the global raw materials market and the cost of borrowing was rapidly rising as a result of failures in the secondary mortgage market. Moreover, architectural expenses for the project, inflated by the desire to gain Gehry's star power, were three times the industry average. Also, apartment prices in this part of Brooklyn currently averaged well below the projected revenues from the development, while the hope that well-to-do people would want to move to this area could constitute mere wishful thinking (Confessore and Newman, 2007). Since the financing of the affordable apartments depended on the profits realized from market-rate ones, failure to sell at the anticipated volume and price level could jeopardize this principal public benefit. But, if FCRC could not make the numbers work, could any other developer at less cost to the public sector?

Second, the environmental impacts of the project were also difficult to determine. Unquestionably the immediate area would be negatively affected by traffic and crowding of transit facilities. On the other hand, next to Times Square it was the best-served location in New York by mass transit, with nine subway lines and a major station of the Long Island Railroad at Atlantic Terminal. This consideration led to the qualified endorsement of the project by the Regional Plan Association (RPA) (2006), a non-governmental organization with a long history of supporting good planning:

The city and the region need to aggressively develop offices, housing, retail and entertainment in appropriate locations, and there are few locations more suited for dense, mixed-use development than the Atlantic Yards . . . Developing a site of this size and complexity over a working rail yard requires a very high level of density to justify the upfront investments and long-term risks. Any project meeting these requirements is likely to appear out of scale with the surrounding low-to-mid rise neighborhoods. Within reason, this 'Manhattan-ization' that is proposed for Downtown Brooklyn is part of an ongoing and necessary process that will affect communities in downtowns and transit hubs across the region. However, it can and should be

16 One other firm did make an offer to the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), owner of the railroad yards, to purchase the right to build over the yards, but the MTA chose the FCRC bid.

a process that successfully integrates large, iconic buildings with their surroundings and provides benefits that compensate for the increased congestion, noise and visual impacts that accompany these projects.

RPA conditioned its recommendation by calling for greater accessibility of the public space within the project, greater sensitivity to its surroundings in the design, subway station and sidewalk improvements, and safeguards for the promised public benefits.

Within the broader concerns of regional planning Atlantic Yards is identifiable as the logical place for very dense development. If the New York region continues, as expected, to add population, then new residents must either further contribute to exurban expansion or to densification of the center. While unquestionably there are many parts of the suburban ring that could tolerate higher densities, very few locations could provide adequate mass transit to support a large population increase, so greater sprawl would be the outcome of further peripheral settlement.

Thus, the positives on the development include affordable housing, job creation (of debatable magnitude), and densification of the city core proximate to transit. Whether or not these benefits will actually occur is problematic, given the financial risks involved. Negatives are the massive size of the development with associated stress on the environment and city services of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, the limited duration of the affordable housing, the size of the public-sector contribution, the exclusion of public input, and the failure of government officials to interject public concerns into the planning process. The project, as it currently stands, reflects the form of developer-led planning that has characterized New York's construction projects since the 1970s and the reluctance of the city and state to start projects unless a developer is already committed.

Thames Gateway

Whereas planning for New York City must operate with very little help or interest from Washington, planning for London is of direct concern to the UK central government. Since 2000, titles of responsible ministries have changed, and a regional assembly for the South East has come into existence. At the end of the day, however, it is an office of central government (now called the Department for Communities and Local Government) that implements the planning guidance within which the plan for Greater London is developed. The Mayor of London is responsible for overall strategic planning under the guidance; the various boroughs then develop plans that fit within the Greater London Plan.

Unlike the mayors of New York and Amsterdam, the mayor of London has little authority over day-to-day management of the city. Thus, his principal focus is on strategic planning and transportation. In terms of the former, he must rely on the borough authorities and a bewildering array of development partnerships to implement his guidance. Both because of the pressures upon him to produce development and his desire to leave a mark on the city despite his limited powers, Ken Livingstone, the first mayor of London after the creation of the Greater London Authority, put considerable energy into regeneration schemes. The anti-growth sentiments within the suburban areas that surround London in all directions but the east mean that the major thrust of new programs is eastward (Edwards, forthcoming). This is justified on the grounds that East London represents the most deprived part of the city, thereby standing to benefit most, and that it contains numerous underutilized sites. It also, however, presents serious environmental issues since it is prone to flooding, an increasing threat with global warming; many areas require extensive remediation to become habitable; and transportation to much of it is inadequate. A fast east-west train route across London, the long-promised Crossrail, would make the area much more accessible; plans for this railroad were finally approved in 2008, but it was not scheduled for completion until 2017.

Based on population projections that show the Greater London area as attracting 800,000 immigrants and internal migrants in the next decade, central government had required the mayor to plan for a minimum of 23,000 new homes in London every year. Mayor Livingstone in turn pledged himself to provide for an annual rate of 30,000 homes through policies of increasing density in existing residential areas and through the use of additional sites not currently devoted to housing (Mayor of London, 2004: 54).

Under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act, local authorities bargain with developers for 'planning gain', which includes the provision of affordable housing (LTGDC, 2006). Whereas the Thatcher administration had opposed requiring developers to provide community benefits except to mitigate the direct effects of development, the succeeding Labour government strongly encouraged using it so as to force developers to include affordable housing and provide amenities and social programs. It became government policy that all new developments in London with more than 15 units of housing had to provide 50% affordable units (50% market, 35% social rented, and 15% intermediate housing) (UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006). Some of these would be achieved through cross-subsidy by market-rate units, but in addition substantial sums were available through the nationally funded Housing Corporation to support construction by housing associations.

The eastward development of London has been labeled the Thames Gateway and billed as the largest development project in Europe. It extends 40 miles from Canary Wharf in the east end of London into the counties of Essex and Kent, covering 16 local authority districts. Goals set forth by the central government included 160,000 housing units, with 35% classified as affordable; the creation of 180,000 new jobs; improvement in the skills levels of residents; access to high-quality health care, and 53,000 hectares (131,000 acres) of green space protected and enhanced (UK Department of Communities and Local Government, 2006). The scheme involved both redevelopment of existing occupied or obsolete areas and growth on greenfield sites. In its London section it covered some extremely poor districts; further out in the suburban counties it covered quite affluent settlements. The time frame involved was considerable — although the goals were ostensibly to be met by 2016, 40 years was a more realistic estimate for the entire Gateway (*ibid.*: 9). Construction, however, would be rapid within the western area where the Olympic Park and associated facilities were going up for the 2012 Games.

The overall objective was the development of 'sustainable communities' and a decentralization of business activity from the present core in Westminster and the City of London. Similar to planning in Amsterdam, thinking in London moved toward a vision of a polycentric city-region with strong connections among the various centers. Because the area is so large and the scheme really consisted of a number of separate efforts, I focus on a single large project within it — Stratford City (see Figure 2).

Located in an impoverished, heavily immigrant area northeast of Canary Wharf, Stratford will accommodate one of the two London stations for the high-speed rail link to the Continent as well as rapid commuter lines from suburban areas.¹⁷ It is the site of a new Underground station through which the recently constructed Jubilee line, as well as the Central line and the Docklands Light Rail lines, pass. As a result, it has become a much more promising site for large-scale development than previously.

In contrast to Atlantic Yards, the developer of Stratford City was selected in response to a government request for bids. The winners, the shopping mall developer Westfield in partnership with Lend Lease, committed themselves to a £5.5 billion investment. Two housing associations — East Thames Housing Group and First Base — were also participating in the project and were entitled to receive funds from the national government's Housing Corporation. The Stratford project would have about 4,000 units of housing, of which 1,000 would be social housing. An analysis performed for the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC) found that the privately

17 Questions have been raised as to when, and even whether, the Channel Tunnel trains will actually stop at Stratford.



Figure 2 Vision of Stratford's future (source: Simon Jones and Associates)

developed housing could not generate sufficient revenues for financial support for affordable housing, apart from the provision of clean serviced sites (LTGDC, 2006: 36). Unlike the developer of Atlantic Yards, Lend Lease therefore was not expected to generate a surplus sufficient to support the affordable housing component; instead housing associations would build this component. The project included the Athletes' Village for the London 2012 Olympic Games, a 1.9 million square foot (175,000 m²) regional shopping mall, 1.3 million square feet (120,000 m²) of hotel and conference space, 32 acres (13 hectares) of open space, and over 5 million square feet (485,000 m²) of office space.¹⁸ The office component was thus substantially larger than in Atlantic Yards, offering the potential for thousands of permanent jobs.

In contrast to Atlantic Yards, Stratford City stimulated very little controversy and did not receive much press attention. There is no nearby affluent community to object to high-rise development. The Labour-dominated council of the affected borough of Newham accepted the planning application and enthusiastically endorsed the project on its web page. The development partnership pledged to provide a substantial number of jobs to local people, training in construction skills, and low-cost housing. Although some concerns about the project were voiced, they did not attract much attention. A commentator in *The Guardian* objected to the process by which redevelopment plans were generated, contending that there was no real consultation with local people (Monbiot, 2007; see also Edwards, forthcoming). He prophesied that the outcome would be gentrification of the area. Given, however, that the project involved a considerable addition of social housing and did not directly displace anyone, the gentrification threat was not really that high.

It is, of course, always difficult to discern the extent to which rhetoric corresponds with reality. Certainly there is a striking difference in the words surrounding London's regeneration programs in contrast to New York's. London developers constantly talk about their partnerships with local communities and their housing and social service programs. They apparently expect to provide community benefits as the price of doing business and do not require excessive regulatory bonuses and tax forgiveness in order to

18 <http://westfield.com/corporate/retailer/uk/stratfordcity.html> (accessed August 6, 2007). Westfield owns the land and will develop the shopping mall. Lend Lease, which is responsible for the housing and office portions, entered the Stratford Development Partnership after the original developers, who submitted the approved application for planning permission, withdrew. In 2008 Lend Lease indicated that it was unable to get financing for the Olympic Village, putting its overall size and ownership into question.

do so. Moreover, in contrast to the CBA to which Forest City agreed at Atlantic Yards, developers in London must enter into an enforceable agreement regarding community benefits. The other party to the agreement is not community groups but local authorities, which have greater capacity to monitor implementation and firmer legal standing.

The most recent Labour-led era of regeneration in London contrasted with both the pre-Thatcherite period of Labour dominance and that which followed. When Labour was in power both locally and nationally during the 1970s, the emphasis in their planning for East London was social housing and manufacturing. Under Margaret Thatcher there was a shift to nurturing office-based businesses and market-rate housing. After 2000 the Labour government mostly abandoned hope of reviving manufacturing and was encouraging tourism and service industries. Despite earlier intense criticism from the left directed at the development of Canary Wharf as a financial services center, the construction of new office centers was accepted, including among local Labour councillors who once opposed it. Labour's housing strategy now involved mixed-income rather than purely social housing objectives, but Livingstone's 50% affordable rule represented a dramatic change from the Conservative approach. Under the Tories not only were there no requirements for affordable housing, but under Right-to-Buy a substantial amount of the best council housing was withdrawn from the affordable housing pool.

Amsterdam South

In Amsterdam, as in London, planning and housing development nest within the context of planning guidelines and financial flows emanating from the national government. Considerable power, however, rests at the city level, where, because no single party dominates, consensus is the rule. There is less reliance on private for-profit developers for housing construction than in London and New York, and, as in London, the construction of social housing relies on the activities of non-profit housing associations. Amsterdam, however, resembles both London and New York in depending on private investment for office development and in requiring office developers to contribute public benefits in return for the right to build. The city's long tradition of planning and its social democratic politics have meant that social equity, public space, and social housing have typically received priority in its regeneration efforts.

At the same time, planning for Amsterdam has not been without controversy. Modernist planning combined with social democratic ascendancy during the 1970s to promote demolition of existing buildings and their replacement with bland concrete or prefabricated-panel structures. Community opposition, culminating in sometimes violent protests by enraged young people and squatting in emptied buildings, mainly halted the efforts at bulldozer renewal and led to much more sensitive rehabilitation (Terhorst and van de Ven, 1997: 304 ff). What is particularly interesting, from the perspective of equity planning, is that the fault lines were within the left — between socialists, who called for inner-city business development and mass production of social housing under bureaucratic management, and new left elements who wanted a livelier, more diverse city with decision-making in the hands of the community.

Planners themselves changed their orientation as a consequence of a changing milieu. Earlier they had implemented policies aimed at decentralizing the population into overspill locations. They did an about-face when they realized that they were abetting the out-migration of the middle class and threatening the economic vitality of the city. Their model thus switched from that of a central city surrounded by satellites to that of the 'compact city'. They sought to achieve this by building housing on former industrial and port locations and moving business to areas on the periphery but still inside the boundaries of the city. They also began to encourage the design of houses for owner occupancy; at the same time, however, they continued to support the construction of social housing. Thus, between 1945 and 1985 about 90% of all new housing in the city comprised social rented housing (van de Ven, 2004).

The three prongs of post-1975 planning policy — social housing, then, later, peripheral business development and owner occupation — were epitomized in three developments: the Bijlmermeer, Amsterdam South Axis, and the harbor islands.¹⁹ This article is concerned with the first two, which changed from their initial conception as single-use projects to mixed-use developments. The transformation of the Bijlmermeer from an exclusively social-rented housing project to one with a more heterogeneous population adjacent to shopping and office schemes has been continuing for some time; the conversion of the South Axis to include housing, recreation and consumption uses was still in the planning stage as of this writing.

Bijlmermeer

Constructed during the 1960s and 1970s on drained land at the southeastern edge of the city, the Bijlmermeer was intended to house 100,000 people in 40,000 dwelling units. Rigidly modernist principles guided the development: enormous buildings stretched out uniformly; their densities left ample space for landscaping. Auto and pedestrian functions were separated; shopping, consolidated into a small mall, was intended to serve the daily needs of residents. Residence and work were strictly separated by a railroad embankment that cut off the residential district from the nearby office center. The project provoked distaste among the Dutch middle class for whom its spacious, airy apartments were intended; consequently it became the home predominantly, though not entirely, of ethnic minorities, especially Surinamers.²⁰ The apartments proved suitable for large families, who could afford their rents thanks to the housing allowances provided by the Dutch national government.²¹

The project was never fully completed, and calls for its reconstruction arose soon after it was built. Cleaning up of the drug marketplace in the city center near the railroad station had caused this commerce to move to the open spaces and garages of the Bijlmermeer, resulting in its reputation for being dangerous and offering housing of last resort (Terhorst and van de Ven, 1997: 299–301; Bruijne *et al.*, 2002; Baart, 2003). The gargantuan structures were very far from Dutch ideals of urbanity. Moreover, even while the Bijlmermeer was still going up, planning wisdom had moved away from the principles on which it was designed. Influenced by critiques of the inflexibility and inhumaneness of modernism, planners were prescribing more vernacular designs, mixed use, street walls, and malleability. Thus, both its ostensible beneficiaries and the planning establishment eventually rejected what the original planners had regarded as a physical design embodying the egalitarian ideal of a decent home for everyone.

In order to understand the original motivations for building the Bijlmermeer, it is worth quoting from an interview with one of its remaining defenders, a white Dutchman who continues to live there:

It was the first time something was built on this magnitude and scale in the Netherlands. And yet keeping classical social-democratic ideals in mind, that it wasn't for the flashy elite but for

19 The harbor developments, including KNSM, Java, Borneo and Sporenburg, are predominantly low- and mid-rise, dense complexes of single-family and multi-family dwellings with a variety of architectural designs, of which many are owner-occupied. Containing 8,000 dwelling units on the sites of what were mainly transport facilities, they have been successful in attracting middle-class residents (Amsterdam Physical Planning Department, n.d.).

20 Surinam gained its independence in 1975, sparking the emigration of many of the former colonial subjects to the Netherlands. At that time there were large numbers of vacant units available in the Bijlmermeer. In 1996 the population was 25% native Dutch, 35% Surinamese, 10% Ghanaian, 7% from the Dutch Antilles, and 25% other, primarily African and South Asian (Kwekkeboom, 2002: 84).

21 Although the project had been constructed by a group of non-profit housing corporations, the rents reflected the cost of construction and thus would have exceeded the ability to pay of the families moving in without the assistance of the government. For families that could afford the rent without assistance, units in the surrounding new towns were more appealing.



Figure 3 Bijlmermeer – new, owner-occupied building (photo by Susan S. Fainstein)

the masses . . . I think the concept of the Bijlmermeer is very good, and I think its execution was also pretty successful. And it's a shame that the renewal didn't opt for taking out the teething problems and adding a little extra.²²

Faced with a high vacancy rate and widespread criticism, the city government resolved to remake the Bijlmermeer in conformity with newer ideas of mixed uses and mixed incomes. It proceeded to demolish many of the buildings and eliminate the separation between vehicles and pedestrians, as well to build new roads. It replaced the razed properties with low-rise housing intended for owner occupancy (see Figure 3). The remaining large buildings were brightly painted so as to mask their drab concrete facades, and they were equipped with additional elevators. The shopping mall, which did not even open until 1987, was enlarged and made more prominent, residences above stores were added, office space for small business was made available, and artists' live-work space was constructed. The mall, combined with a large office building for the ING bank, caused the area to take on new importance for the surrounding region; improved connections with the business district on the other side of the railroad meant that the Bijlmermeer could now be considered part of a larger district, Amsterdam Southeast. A new arena for Ajax, Amsterdam's premier football team, was built adjacent to a new railroad station, and other entertainment venues were added to the area, including a multiplex theater. Residents displaced from the original buildings either were relocated to suitable accommodation or purchased residences among the newly constructed homes. Interestingly many of the Surinamese residents, who by the twenty-first century had risen up the economic ladder, welcomed the opportunity to stay in the development by purchasing houses and flats in the new low-rise structures.

What is particularly striking about the redesigned project is that it has retained its ethnic mix, and in fact its multicultural character is one of its attractions to residents who have purchased homes. Where one might have been skeptical about the popularity of relatively expensive housing in an area that remains dominated by social housing, interviews with owner-occupiers, captured in the book *Territorium* (Baart, 2003), point to the reasons why the new town houses and apartments have proved popular:

Now many people from [the original buildings of] the Bijlmermeer are buying and renting in renewed areas. A bigger middle class has emerged . . . Suriname's independence changed the

²² Dirk Frieling, Professor of Urban Planning at the TU Delft University. Quoted in Baart (2003).

Bijlmermeer enormously. Now you're seeing that a middle class has emerged from the group that came after independence . . . They think it's sensible and responsible to buy (interview with Inder Mataw, sociologist and resident).

I feel at home in Bijlmermeer. The renewal plans are good, and you can really see progress. Maybe I feel at home because so many Surinamers live here (interview with Jerry Drakenstein, switchboard coordinator).

It was beautiful in the Bijlmermeer, actually, and it still is . . . I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, It's to do with the area but also with the different races that live here (interview with Jules Fränkel, house painter).

People view one another as equals. If you didn't have a decent income, you wouldn't have been able to buy this flat. Everyone who lives here makes a certain income and has a place somewhere on the societal ladder. We don't have to care whether you come from Ghana or from the Antilles (interview with Ingrid Perk, teacher).

The story of the Bijlmermeer embodies a particularly Dutch approach to urban development: if a problem exists, a rational solution must be found. Its initial construction was based on an ambitious, coherent plan. Once its realization proved not to match the hopes of its progenitors, it was restudied and rethought. In contrast to its beginnings, development now is proceeding more organically, district by district, as the planners are refraining from imposing a single model on the entire project and allowing for participation by residents. Four partners participated in the program: the City of Amsterdam, the Southeast District Council, the Nieuw Amsterdam Housing Corporation, and the Patrimonium Housing Foundation, which took over administration of the project (Kwekkeboom, 2002: 93). Total investment exceeded €1.6 billion in 2002. Population of the area exceeded 40,000, far less than originally projected but still substantial for a single residential project. Total housing stock in 2002 was 21,500 units, an increase of 2,000 over the amount when demolition began. The increase, combined with the high vacancy rate at the start of revitalization, meant that reconstruction did not require displacement of the original population, and more housing continued to be constructed.

Concern with high levels of unemployment and at-risk youth caused physical planning to be combined with social policy. Efforts were made to provide work space for very small businesses. A cultural and education center was established to house various outreach services. In the period 1996–2000, €36.3 million was invested in over 100 socioeconomic projects; for 2000–2004 an additional €63.5 million was budgeted. Community and ethnic organizations participated in allocating funds; a multicultural advisory group to the district council was set up; and hiring for top management of the district aimed at creating ethnic balance (Kwekkeboom, 2002: 84–5).

It is still not clear whether the revitalization was a complete success. Despite densification, mixed-use development around the shopping area, a greater variety of housing, and the introduction of enhanced social programs, parts of the area still looked rather bleak, especially as one moves farther from the train station and shopping center. Although the project as a whole is mixed use, much of it remains exclusively residential and far away from activity centers. The entertainment area around the Ajax stadium is very lively when games are being played, but otherwise is dead. Unsurprisingly, given that most housing remained in the social rented category, crime and unemployment continued to be problems. Still, the area is a substantial improvement on its former self, and the revitalization was predicated on a commitment to multiculturalism, egalitarianism and community participation.

Amsterdam South Axis (Zuidas)

This project, of the four discussed in this article, involved the largest amount of office space. A number of the office blocks were already mostly built, not according to a plan but opportunistically as a result of firms seeking convenient space outside the crowded

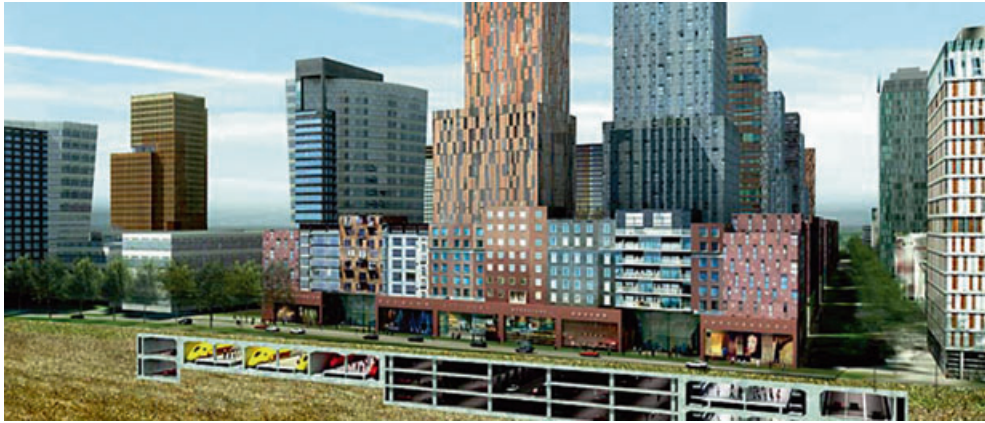


Figure 4 Vision of the future Zuidas (source: nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zuidas)

core. They went up with little relation one to another. Many were bold architectural statements, but the area as a whole was incoherent, cold, and unfriendly to pedestrians. As in the Bijlmermeer the ambitions of the planners were to retrofit an existing single-use area so as to create an urbane, multifunctional space. The challenge was particularly daunting because this district was divided by a multi-lane expressway and railroad tracks that, like the rail yards in Brooklyn, precluded pedestrian traffic and prevented design coherence. The proposed solution was extremely expensive — a 1.2 kilometer tunnel to accommodate both the road and railroad tracks (see Figure 4).

Amsterdam Zuidas was already the largest office development in the Netherlands with 248,600 m² (2.7 million square feet) built or under construction. The national government envisioned it becoming an area that would allow Amsterdam to compete with Paris, Frankfurt, and Milan for global city functions. It has excellent access to both Schiphol Airport and the city center. In the early 1990s the two large Dutch banks ABN-AMRO and ING were seeking modern office space; they wanted easy auto access and wished to evade the community controversy inevitable if they built high-rise in the central city.²³ The municipality responded with a plan for the area due south of the center that included housing, retail, educational and cultural facilities. Only the office structures were built, however. Now the municipal government, with financial participation by the central government, was seeking to realize the vision of a multifunctional scheme. The project incorporated a larger role for the private sector in providing infrastructure than had previously characterized Dutch projects.²⁴ The plan was to use the vehicle of a public–private partnership with the very expensive covering of the rail and highway right-of-ways to be financed by the private sector. Sixty percent of the costs would be borne by the private participants, who in return would receive development rights for one million m² (10 million square feet) in the newly created space. The public portion involved the city, provincial and national governments.²⁵

23 Right now the headquarters building of the bank ABN-AMRO is the largest structure in the Zuidas. As of this writing, the bank is the object of competing take-over bids by non-Dutch banks. It is possible that the winning bidder will decide to shut down the Dutch headquarters (Werdigier, 2007).

24 A failed plan for the city's waterfront that was formulated in the 1980s foundered because its demands for private sector financing of public benefits were deemed overdemanding.

25 Information in this section is drawn from Majoor (2007) and interviews with Willem Salet, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Amsterdam, Pieter Terhorst, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Amsterdam, and A.J. Jolles, a senior planner of the municipal government of Amsterdam.

The current master plan called for the creation of 1.1 million m² (11.8 million square feet) of office space, 1.1 million m² of apartments (11.8 million square feet), and half a million m² (5.3 million square feet) of facilities, to be built over 30 years (Majoor, 2007: 53). It would also include a campus for the Free University of Amsterdam. Seventy percent of the housing would be market rate, an unusually high large proportion for Amsterdam, although the target of 30% social housing would be considered high elsewhere.

The commitment to this type of office center on the urban periphery follows the trend pioneered by Paris in the development of La Défense and London with Canary Wharf. Essentially these old European cities were unable to offer modern office accommodation within their cores without extreme injury to the historic fabric and strong citizen opposition. The decision to shift the economic center out of the core, however, changed the character of the inner city of Amsterdam, causing it to shift toward entertainment, tourism and small business functions, and away from being the main center of production.

The proposal was out for bid when this was written, and whether it would actually be financed was still a question. Amsterdam suffered from an oversupply of office space, and, as indicated above (note 23), banking consolidation could jeopardize occupation by financial institutions. Requirements imposed on the private sector included contributions to public space and facilities that would not produce any financial return and might be more onerous than developers were willing to risk. As at Stratford City, the site was expected to offer the principal station outside the center for high-speed rail; but also, as at Stratford City, its actual arrival lay somewhere in the future.

Like Stratford City, Amsterdam Zuidas did not provoke much opposition (Majoor 2007). There were a number of open public meetings to discuss the plan, and its mixed-use conception reflected popular sentiment. On the whole, however, the project did not attract much attention for the same reason as was the case in Stratford — nobody lived there. Here the land was a greenfield site occupied mainly by sports clubs, which were awarded alternative locations. Both Stratford and Amsterdam Zuidas pointed to the difficulty of gaining citizen involvement in planning when the project did not impinge directly on people's lives and when the future occupants of the site were as yet unknown.

Conclusion

The four mega-projects described here reflect the evolution of urban redevelopment programs since their post-second world war beginnings. They also represent a convergence between American and European approaches to government intervention in the built environment as embodied in private-sector involvement and market orientation. At the same time the European schemes, while incorporating a neoliberal concern with competitiveness, manifest greater governmental direction and commitment to egalitarian goals. To understand the current shape of these interventions, it is useful to briefly trace the history of large-scale redevelopment in Europe and the United States (Fainstein, 1998).

After the war cities on both continents embarked on large urban rebuilding programs that relied on funds from their national governments. In Europe the emphasis was on providing housing, which was located either on sites destroyed in the war or on greenfields at the urban periphery. Responsibility for housing construction lay with local governments and with non-profit housing associations, both financed by national governments (Harloe, 1995). In contrast, in the United States the effort involved demolition of inhabited areas with the goal of slum clearance. Federal funds were used only for taking and clearing property. Except for the relatively small public housing program, the US differed from Europe in its heavy reliance on the private and non-profit sectors for investing in the structures that would occupy cleared land.

After the demise of the US federal urban renewal program in 1974 major development efforts faltered as cities were thrown entirely on their own resources for putting together a project. After a while, however, they invented a variety of methods involving regulatory relief, low-interest loans, and tax incentives to entice private developers to make large front-end investments in property acquisition as well as construction. They also learned to avoid the turmoil that had surrounded displacement under the urban renewal program by largely avoiding construction on already occupied sites (Altshuler and Luberoff, 2003). The new forms of cooperation between government and business were labeled public-private partnerships. Surrounding them was a misleading rhetoric implying that previously government and business had not worked together when, in fact, only the form of deal-making had changed (Squires, 1989; Judd and Swanstrom, 1998).

The term 'public-private partnership' made its way across the Atlantic, as European governments also began to involve private firms in large-scale development projects (Heinz, 1993). In an era of fiscal stringency, the availability of private funds offered governments a means of continuing regeneration efforts but at the price of sharing project control and of choosing schemes that would be profitable. This usually meant the construction of modern office towers and luxury housing. The most prominent example of European adoption of the US model was in London's Docklands, where the development firm Olympia and York (O&Y) took advantage of tax forgiveness and freedom from planning regulations to construct Canary Wharf (Fainstein, 2001). The hazards of the model were also demonstrated there, as O&Y's enormous financial commitment to the project caused the firm's bankruptcy in 1992. Eventually the UK government provided the initial capital for the construction of the Jubilee tube line connecting Canary Wharf to the rest of the city, the property market recovered, and Canary Wharf flourished. However, the refusal of the UK government initially to supply transportation infrastructure contributed to O&Y's failure and was an object lesson to firms being asked to participate in these kinds of projects.

The contemporary mega-projects discussed in this article indicate that public-private partnerships can be a vehicle for the provision of public benefits, including job commitments, cultural facilities and affordable housing. They also show, however, that such projects are risky for both public and private participants, must primarily be oriented toward profitability, and typically produce a landscape dominated by bulky buildings that do not encourage urbanity, despite the claims of the project's developers.

In London and Amsterdam, where a social-democratic ethos still to some extent prevails, more is being asked from developers than is the case in New York. Also the direct governmental contribution to housing is larger, because the national governments play a much larger role in financing affordable housing development. Even in these cities, however, everything depends on profitability of the market-driven parts of the project. There are only three forms of construction that can generate big profits: luxury residences and hotels, large-footprint office towers and shopping malls. Thus, what we can expect to see in both European and American cities are projects with similar design characteristics and product mixes, usually outside the old urban core and lacking the layering of old and new, small and big, that gives central cities their ambiance and opportunities. The requirements in all four projects for affordable housing and jobs represent a minimal commitment to socially just policies, but the primary orientation is to profitability and competitiveness. The extent to which the gains from increased competitiveness are spread throughout the society depends on the size of the direct governmental commitment to public benefits. This is greatest in the Netherlands, where the welfare state, albeit shrunken, lives on; it is least in the United States, where the small size of national expenditures on housing and social welfare means that low-income people must depend almost wholly on trickle-down effects to gain from new development.

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Résumé

Les très grands projets d'aménagement (mégaprojets) se multiplient dernièrement dans les villes d'Europe et d'Amérique. On est frappé par une similarité physique entre les programmes, mais aussi par une convergence observable dans l'implication du secteur privé et dans une orientation-marché. Ils diffèrent pourtant par leur capacité ou non à procurer des unités accessibles financièrement et à associer des objectifs physiques et sociaux. L'article étudie de nouveaux mégaprojets à New-York, Londres et Amsterdam. Les divergences entre eux indiquent l'étendue de la variabilité du capitalisme immobilier contemporain. La comparaison établit que les partenariats public-privé peuvent produire des bénéfices publics, et montre aussi que ces grands projets sont risqués pour les participants publics et privés, qu'ils doivent surtout rechercher la rentabilité et qu'ils génèrent un paysage peu favorable à l'urbanité. La répartition, sur toute la société, des gains tirés d'une compétitivité accrue dépend de l'ampleur de l'engagement direct des gouvernements à l'égard des bénéfices publics. Le cas le plus flagrant est celui des Pays-Bas, où l'État-providence subsiste, bien que diminué; le plus limité est celui des États-Unis, où la faible ampleur des dépenses nationales de logement et de protection sociale signifie que les populations à bas revenu dépendent presque totalement des effets de propagation pour bénéficier d'un nouvel aménagement.