

# **Stasis in the Liminal Zone**

A research on stasis in places of transition  
between train stations and their direct surroundings

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Report 3

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## **ABSTRACT**

The railways, like a river, divide the area of Amsterdam Zuid in two. Thus, the Amsterdam Zuid station becomes a crucial bridging place of connection to the tissue of the area.

Since the development of the area will bring residential buildings and new student housing in the surroundings, the station and its central position in-between the two main squares, namely Mahlerplein and Zuidplein, will be located in a even more delicate position. Position important not only on an infrastructural and transportation level but also on a social and public level.

Therefore, the report will research on how the stasis takes place in a public place of transition like the one in Amsterdam Zuid station and its surroundings. Stasis and its balance to the movement has an important role in the liveliness of a place, as investigated in the report 2.

## INTRODUCTION

The future plan of Zuidas aims to create an urban international environment taking into account the area of Amsterdam Zuid Station and its direct surroundings, because of its central and crucial position. The dimension of movement is a clear element characterising the place, due to the nature of the location itself. It is a station and a bridging point between north-south district. Furthermore, it has a densely present business class and student vacant life. The movement of people will be even a stronger element in the future, according to the studies of “Loopstromen Amsterdam Zuid 2030” and including the upcoming increasing residential class.

If the pace of movement can be seen as an obstructive element to the creation of social life, actually can play an important role in it. “Walking is first and foremost a type of transportation, a way to get around, but it also provides an informal and uncomplicated possibility for being present in the public environment”<sup>1</sup>. So movement it can be a fundamental element in fostering social life. But, alongside of it, there is a complementary dimension also “vital to the quality of public space”<sup>2</sup>; the static dimension.

The quality of a social and public space lies in this subtle relationship between stasis and movement. Jan Gehl defines this relationship in architectural terms



as “space for walking-place for staying”. The William Whyte’s documentary<sup>3</sup> shows clearly in a scene, regarding the Seagram Building plaza, this subtle

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<sup>1</sup> Gehl, 2011:133

<sup>2</sup> Gehl, 2011:155

<sup>3</sup> Social Life of Small urban Spaces, 2001

relationship. For more information please refer to Report 2 “Street, a place to stay, a place to move”.

It is almost like the relationship between the audience and public which lies in a theatrical acting scene. This metaphorical comparison is actually closer than it might be thought to stasis and movement in a public place. “Serlio, like other architects of his time, and unlike most modern ones, frequently used the theatre as a laboratory for building streets”<sup>4</sup>. In fact, the viewing, the hearing, the placement of the sitting places and so on, are crucial aspects in determining the interaction between stasis and movement and thus in the creation of a public place. “People and human activity are the greatest object of attention and interest. Even the modest form of contact of merely seeing and hearing or being near others is apparently more rewarding and more in demand than majority of other attractions offered in public spaces...”<sup>5</sup> In other words, quoting William Shakespeare: “All the world is a stage”<sup>6</sup>.

This reflection brought me to realise how influential architectural elements can be in determining the behavioral interrelation between people; between stasis and movement. “The street is a stage”<sup>7</sup> and as such it is needed a careful attention of its settings and how people is going to react and relate to them. Yet, little attention is given to the stasis in the present situation and the future development plan of the central entrance in Amsterdam Zuid station and its surroundings. The planning focuses mostly on the movement and displacement of people and the location considered is not only a station but it is at first a passage, a central bridging place for the neighbourhood; a potential place for the liveliness of the area.

Therefore, the research will focus on the stasis, aiming to establish a new balance.

How can architectural elements affect the behaviour of stasis of people and its dialogue and relationship with movement in Amsterdam Zuid? Does stasis needs its own space and borders? Where it takes place more spontaneously and why?

#### *summarising question*

How stasis take place in Amsterdam Zuid station and its direct surroundings?

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<sup>4</sup> Sennet, 1992:159

<sup>5</sup> Gehl, 2011:29

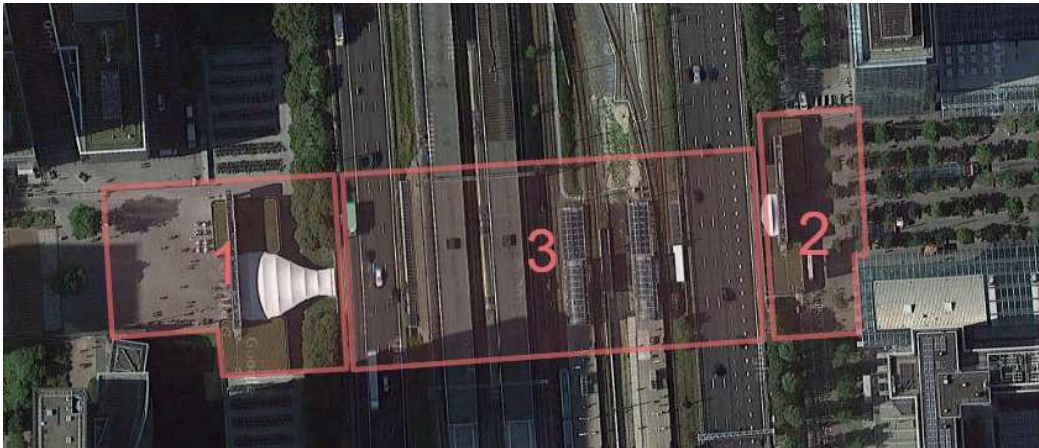
<sup>6</sup> “As You Like It”, pastoral comedy, VII century

<sup>7</sup> Gehl,2011:21

## RESEARCH SPECIFICATIONS

The research analysis considers the area regarding the Amsterdam Zuid station on the Zuidas, connecting Mahlerplein and Zuidplein and its direct surrounding. It does not consider the second entrance on Parnassusweg but it is concentrating in what is considered the core area in the future development of the station and the Minerva axis.

Since the quite relative extended area, the structuring of the paper analysis consists of three subareas, namely the Mahlerplein entrance (1), the Zuidplein entrance (2) and the tunnel (3). The main analysis will focus on the area (1), since the importance that it will acquire in the next decade due to the development of the south area with new residential buildings and student housing. The results and considerations will help then to criticize and analyse the other two areas but in a more brief form, due also to the reduced nature of this paper.



The research methods chosen are observation and case study comparisons.

The observation methodology will be used to investigate the current situation regarding stasis. Noting, photographs and mapping will be the instruments for the documentation and further study reflections.

The material it has been retrieved during three visits. The first on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, from 10:00 to 16:30, the second one on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 from 12:00 to 19:00 and the last one on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 from 12:00 to 15:00. All the dates chosen correspond to a Monday.

\_Case study comparisons will be used as an instrument of critic to understand the possibilities of improvement in Amsterdam Zuid. Again photographs and in some cases personal observations will be used as an instrument of documentation.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The findings and relative analysis are structured in three parts as already described. First, it will be thoroughly researched the Mahlerplein entrance (1) since its critical situation. Then, the Zuidplein entrance (2) and the Tunnel (3) will be subsequently compared or distinguished in some features that might be helpful to answer the research question.

The description of the area (1) will start from a general analysis about its character and first observations. This will bring the attention to a place of crucial importance for stasis between the station and its surroundings; the liminal zone. Therefore, a reflection and comparison with case studies on liminal zones will follow. Then, coming back to Amsterdam Zuid, it will proceed to a more detail analysis and critic of the Mahlerplein entrance distinguishing the stasis in sitting and standing behaviours.

### **(1) MAHLERPLEIN entrance**

The Mahlerplein entrance is an ambiguous space. In fact, It is meant to be part of the domain of the station but in reality it is perceived as another space more related to Mahlerplein. This space is covered by a roofed structure that lead the flow of people from the entrance/exit into the square. Yet, it is already an outside environment and not anymore part of the tunnel/station. The only reason to be thought as part of the station is the presence of ticket machines, the station sign and some timetable screens. It becomes so a liminal zone which determines the transition between the station environment and the Mahlerplein. Although, at first I was seeing this peculiar aspect negatively, I discovered that the nature of this space has some interesting aspects for stasis, that might be considered in the future redevelopment.

#### ***Space of transition: the liminal zone***

In fact, these transitional zones play an important role in creating a place for stasis although the presence of movement is more consistent or not. In fact "Popular zones for staying are found...in the transitional zone between one space

and next”<sup>8</sup>. An architect that dedicated a particular attention to these transitional zones is Herman Hertzberger. His attention towards anthropology brought to consider the importance of these liminal zones as a place where human interaction is encourage.

“Concretization of the thresholds as in-between means...creating a setting for welcomes and farewells. Besides, the thresholds as a built facility is just as important for social contact as thick walls are for privacy...Entrance, porches, and many other form of in-between spaces provides an opportunity for “accommodation” between adjoining worlds”<sup>9</sup>.

“[The liminal zone] constitutes essentially, the spatial condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders....”<sup>10</sup>.



Of course, it goes without saying that the liminal zone has to present qualities and it has to be treated carefully. “Details plays an important role in developing staying possibilities”<sup>11</sup>.

In concurrence with the discovering about the peculiar importance of the liminal zone, the studio research on ‘Public Interiors’ brought up interesting examples of liminal zones in public environments. The more significant and explicative ones has been the Atocha Station in Madrid and Grand central station in New York. But other places, like Galleria Vittorio Emnauele in Milano, Sergels Torg in Stockholm or the new atrium of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam revealed how stationary activities take place richly in spaces of transition between different domains.

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<sup>8</sup> Gehl, 2011:149

<sup>9</sup> Hertzberger, 2001:35

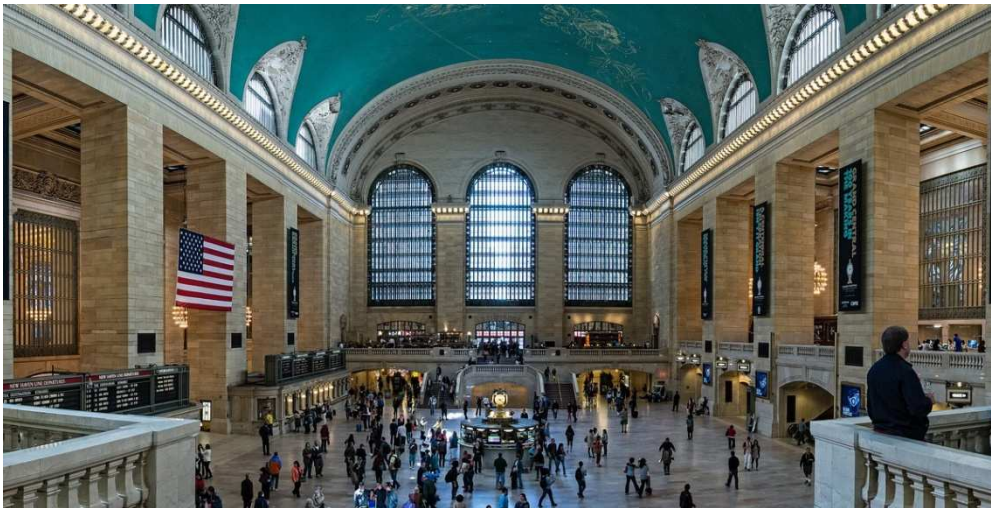
<sup>10</sup> Hertzberger, 2001:32

<sup>11</sup> Gehl, 2011:153





Atocha station – view of the interior public garden space



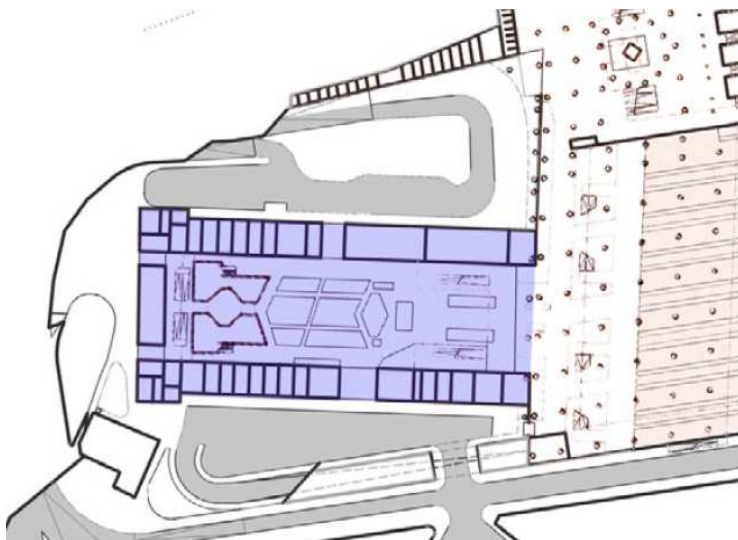
Grand Central station – view of the main liminal area between the city and the subterranean transport world



(Left)Rijksmuseum Amsterdam – view of the liminal area between museum and the public galleria  
 (Right) Galleria Vittorio Emanuele – view of the main concourse that act as liminal place between two squares



Atocha station reveals a richness of users and activities besides the standard station-domain one. Indeed, not only travellers but also pensioners, teenagers, tourists and citizens frequent the place giving act to various stationary moments. The liminal zone is a quite consistent part of the project.



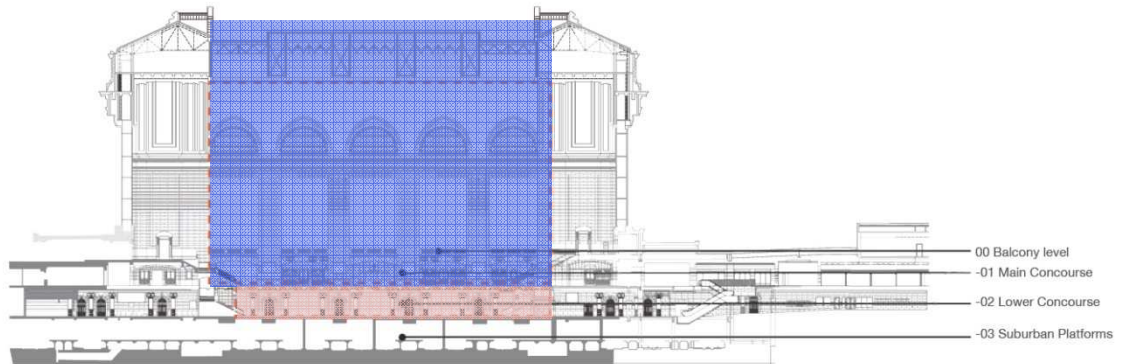
Atocha station ground floor plan - In blue is highlighted the liminal zone, in red platform zone

As it can be noticed in the picture upon, it is not left apart but it is widely consider in the project as an important element of the station both for the orchestration of people movement and the stasis of a public space. In this zone travellers and people in a hurry can pass through without problem but often their might stop or at list glance to the unexpected garden and the atmosphere recreated in this space. Simultaneously, the space offer occasion to stop for long or short moments, sometimes more apart from the flow of people, some others more directly

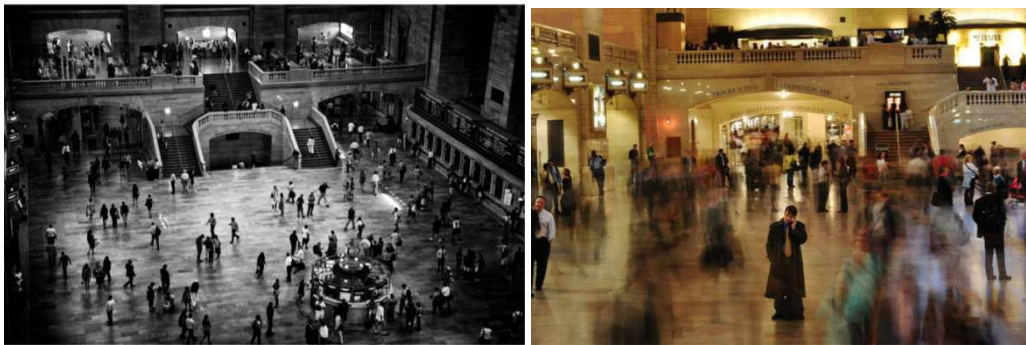


approaching to the flow.

Questions about cultural differences might arise. Yet, William Whyte in his studies find out that people behave pretty much the same in public places, although their culture background which has minor affection<sup>12</sup>.



Grand Central station, main concours section East-West – in blue the liminal zone; in red platform zone



Another station of a similar scale is Grand Central in New York. The liminal zone again constitutes a substantial part of the project. Again the space creates occasion to move and to stay. In this case the distinction is more clear; the liminal zone is on two levels. The upper level with balconies generate a more protected place from the flow but directly connected visually and physically by stairs. Here shops, market and restaurants animate the space. People easily stop, even without buying anything, just to have a look down to the movement that becomes a spectacle.

But what happens in Amsterdam Zuid? How the liminal zones are treated?

Let us come back to the Mahlerplein entrance.

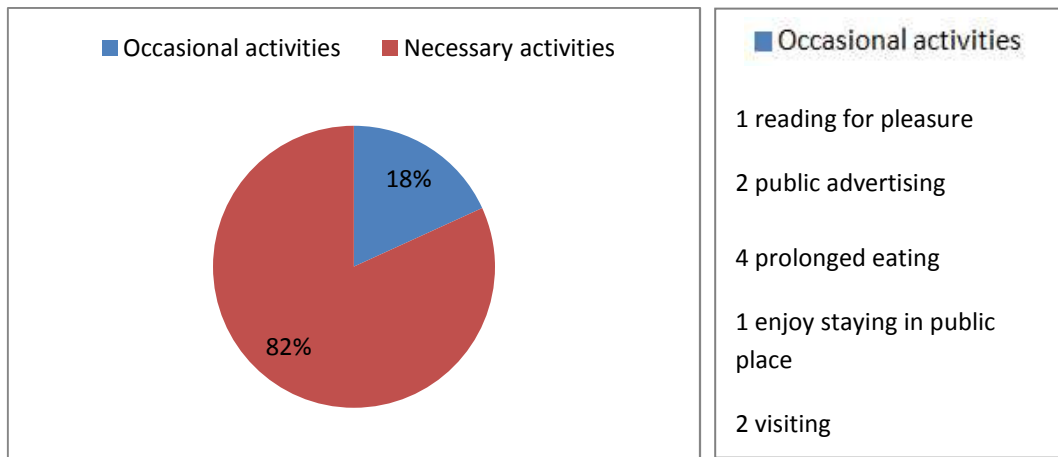
The Mahlerplein entrance and its surroundings presents a better variety of staying activities compared to the Mahlerplein adjacent square and the station itself. In fact, the Mahlerplein fails to be a square and it is better to be defined as a corridor connecting the high rise buildings and the station. People pass by and just a few

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<sup>12</sup> Whyte, 1988:23

situations for staying possibilities are taking place.

In the Mahelerplein entrance, although the transitional character of the place, the activities are diversified. With this I am not saying that is a good example of liminal public zone. In fact, the activities taking place are mainly related to the routine of necessary actions. People are smoking, eating, phoning, occasionally chatting while waiting for someone and not much more it happens usually. But, "In streets and city spaces of poor quality, only the bare minimum of activity takes place. People hurry home"<sup>13</sup>. The quality of the space around the South entrance of the station indeed are not outstanding. Nevertheless, I have retrieved some seldom optional activities that might be a starting point for a more lively environment. So, beyond the precise number and classification of routine activities, then it is far more interesting to look at optional activities. Also because if the level of "optional activities rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially"<sup>13</sup>.

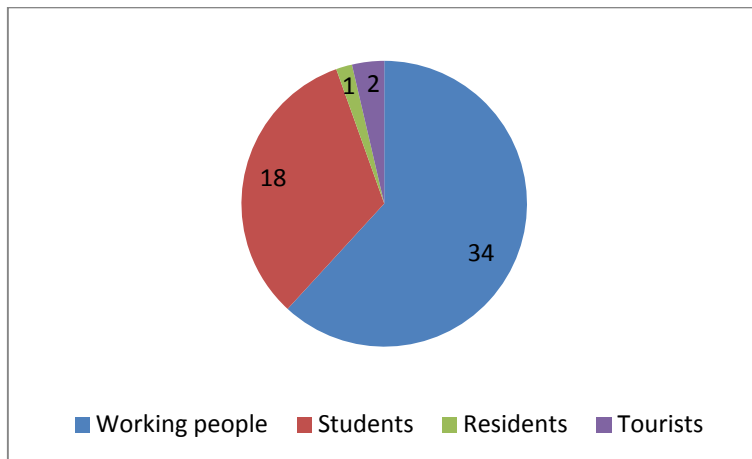


Occasional activities 45 – Necessary activities 10

Looking to the graph it is clear how the necessary activities are far more present than the occasional one. On a total number of fifty-four people mapped in this area only nine were having occasional activities. Moreover, two ninth of these occasional activities were short term actions. More precisely, there was one person reading for pleasure; two distributing brochures for a public event, creating sometimes prolonged interaction with strangers; four students eating and staying to chat for at least half an hour; two people apparently visiting the place and looking around; one mother with her baby taking a pause and eating lunch (probably one of the residents that are starting to settle down in Amsterdam Zuid).

The lack of occasional activities might be due to the users themselves and their social role in Amsterdam Zuid.

<sup>13</sup> Gehl, 2011:11



The predominant categories are the working class and the student one. Both are mainly constituted by people that do not live close by Amsterdam Zuid. So, they tend more often to live the place directly after their working day than staying for occasional activities like a dinner, a talk or a walk.

A further result is that, no pensioner has been detected during observations. Nevertheless this is not an aspect to underestimate. In fact, pensioners may play an important key element in a public space to balance stasis and movement. They are often more sedentary. They animate the place also during working time when usually the rate of activities is lower. William Whyte shows in his documentary an example in the Persian square of Los Angeles. Of course, the climate conditions are different than the Netherlands.



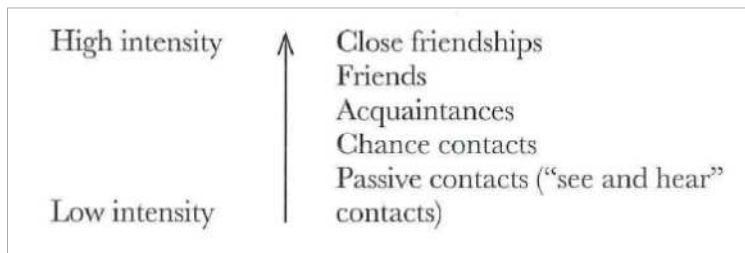
An aspect, that may justify this lack of occasional activities, is that there is not yet an established social identity of the place itself<sup>14</sup>. But, the paramount cause of the poor range of activities or ‘life between buildings’, as Jan Gehl would say<sup>15</sup>, is another. Life between buildings starts primarily with the low-intensity contacts<sup>16</sup>, although a

<sup>14</sup> Conclusion resulted from discussion with other colleagues of the course AR3AI055 and AR3AI045 on the same area and from personal observations.

<sup>15</sup> Gehl, 2011:14 - “Life between buildings comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive”

<sup>16</sup> Gehl, 2011:15

natural interest and a feeling of responsibility are equally important in a public space<sup>17</sup>.



Concept of varying degrees of contact intensity<sup>16</sup>

Low-intensity contacts start from passive contact, like seeing and hearing. So, the social role assume a second position in its contribution for social interaction. We are talking about really simple and apparently insignificant actions that actually are fundamentals for the outcoming of other, more complex interactions<sup>16</sup> and thus staying situations. Low-intensity contact is "a medium for the unpredictable, the spontaneous, the unplanned"<sup>18</sup>; it is the motor from which a different range of contacts and thus staying opportunities origin, creating, what William Whyte calls, 'triangulations'<sup>19</sup>.

So, even an unfocused human interaction<sup>20</sup> gains its importance in a public space. But, giving space to low-intensity contacts requires a subtle attention. Sound level, physical positioning, smell intensity, type of surfaces etc. become crucial elements, since they are the first one to which human being reacts and perceives space<sup>21</sup>.

Visual, auditory, olfactory space. So, again it comes out the issue and importance of details. Hertzberger knew the relevance of it. Minor elements like sills, benches, steps and thresholds are treated carefully to prompt human interaction.

Therefore, after starting on a more general and large scale, I decided to bring the attention on more detailed observations and documentations.

At first, I will observe the staying people and their positioning. Further, I will continue distinguishing the staying people between sitting and standing one for supplementary detailed observations.

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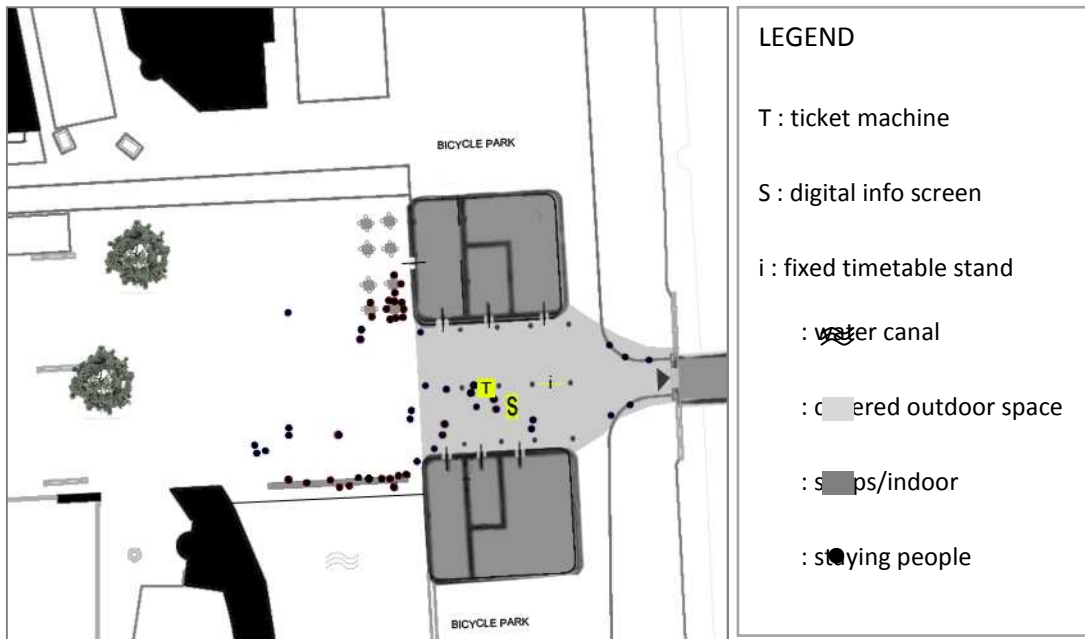
<sup>17</sup> Gehl, 2011:173

<sup>18</sup> Gehl, 2011:19

<sup>19</sup> Whyte, 1988:169

<sup>20</sup> Goffmann, 1966:33 - "...when individuals come into one another's immediate presence in circumstances where no spoken communication is called for, they none the less inevitably engage one another in communication of a sort, for in all situations, significance is ascribed to certain matters that are not necessarily connected with particular verbal communications"

<sup>21</sup> Hall, 1990:41



Mapping of stasis in the Mahlerplein entrance

Having a first look to the mapping, it can be seen how the majority of stasis takes place in an area not too close to the entrance of the station neither to the main area of the Mahlerplein. Staying people are mostly situated in-between these two spaces. The relevance that liminal zones may have in public interaction, discussed previously, is confirmed also in this not too big but important space. The transition from a place to another become a place of encounter between different domains. Yet, it can be noticed how people stasis lessens going towards open spaces. The trend is clear especially towards Mahlerplein. This is due to the fact that people “fear for empty space”<sup>22</sup>. “Places for sitting along facades and spatial boundaries are preferred to sitting areas in the middle of a space, and as in standing, people tend to seek support from the details of the physical environment”. It is part of human natural instinct to stay along the edge of the forest or close to the protection of a tree<sup>23</sup>. This permit to maintain a certain distance from others and get an overview or sight towards the more open space. This behaviour has been studied by the sociologist Derk de Jong in his work "Seating Preferences in Restaurants and Cafés"<sup>24</sup> on a smaller scale. People generally refuse to seat in the middle of restaurants or cafés if there is opportunity to seat on a more “protected” spot with a good general view. De Jonge, in another research about staying trend in Dutch

<sup>22</sup> Gehl, 2011:157

<sup>23</sup> Gehl, 2011:151

<sup>24</sup> 1968, Delft

recreational areas<sup>25</sup>, defines this behaviour 'the edge effect'.

The edges of the Malherplein entrance have not excellent qualities, yet they offer a better space compared to the Mahlerplein itself. The covered entrance and its colonnade recreates a sort of Italian portico space. The roof gives protection and columns provide opportunity to take distance from the flow of people, offering at the same time a view towards the surroundings. Furthermore, coming from the station hitting towards South, the edges still present some qualities and they do not fade away. On the left side, a stretch of water and a long bench differentiate the space. On the right one, tables and chairs fragment the space but leave an overview of the square. Nevertheless, the space cannot be defined a success. The portico become obsolete when filled with numerous trash bins and ticket machines. Columns are placed too close to the facade of the shops, letting no qualitative space. Shops entrances are dominating the front facade letting almost no valuable space outside to stay.

But what determines people staying behaviours is people themselves and their taking distance from other people. In fact, human beings, like animals, have their "uniform way of handling distance from the fellows"<sup>26</sup>. The anthropologist Edward Hall defines four kind of distances; the intimate, the personal, the social and the public distance. It should be noted that "distances vary somewhat with differences in personality and environmental factors. For example, a high noise level or low illumination will ordinarily bring people closer together"<sup>27</sup>. Edges, objects, light, supports, presence of people themselves and so again details gain a fundamental role another time in the developing of this research.

In the next part I will distinguish sitting from standing due to their different trend and needs. In doing so, more specific results might be achieved.

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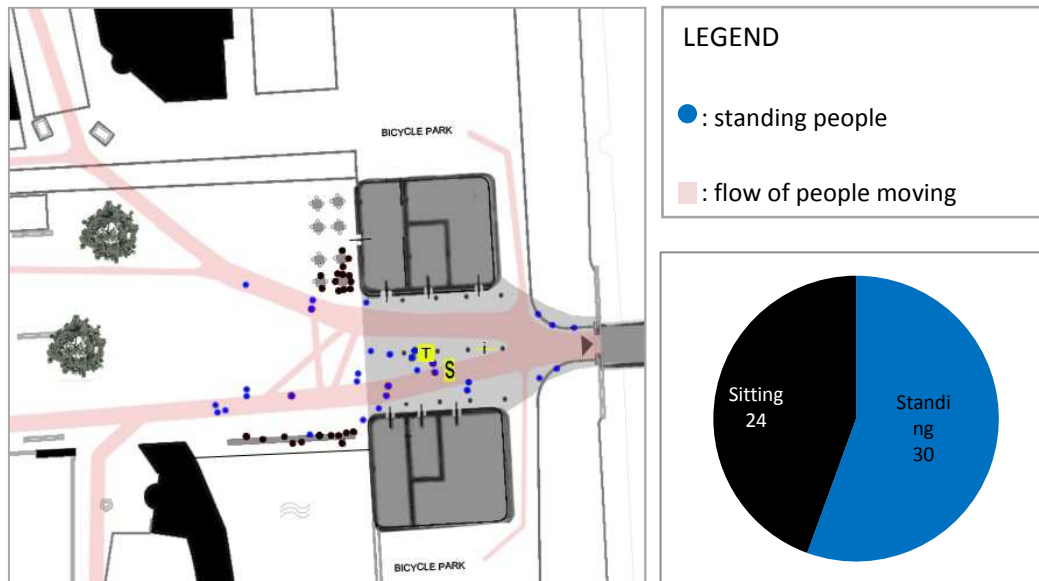
<sup>25</sup> De Jonge, 1968:10-11

<sup>26</sup> Hall, 1990:113

<sup>27</sup> Hall, 1990:116



## Standing



Mapping of standing people

The ratio between sitting (44 per cent) and standing (56 per cent) is surprisingly quite balance, especially considering the few sitting spots provided (one long public bench and eight semi-public tables, since they own to Julia's shop) . This might suggest that the quality of space does not offer qualitative standing opportunities. But before going to look at deficiencies, let us look at what is there.

What people are doing standing and why in that precise spot?

**STANDING into the PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC** - At first, I noticed how slightly more than half of the people counted (16of30) stand in the area of people's flow. This behaviour is due to the fact that "Most standing activities are of a very functional nature"<sup>28</sup>. These functional activities are mostly brief stops that therefore "are not influenced greatly by the physical environment"<sup>28</sup>. People stop where they need, whether it is out of or in-between the pedestrian traffic. In the situation of the Malehrplein entrance, it can be seen that people, standing in the flow, mainly stay around the timetable screen, to check the departing trains or close by the clock, to monitor the time. They usually stop directly without any deviation from their walking path.

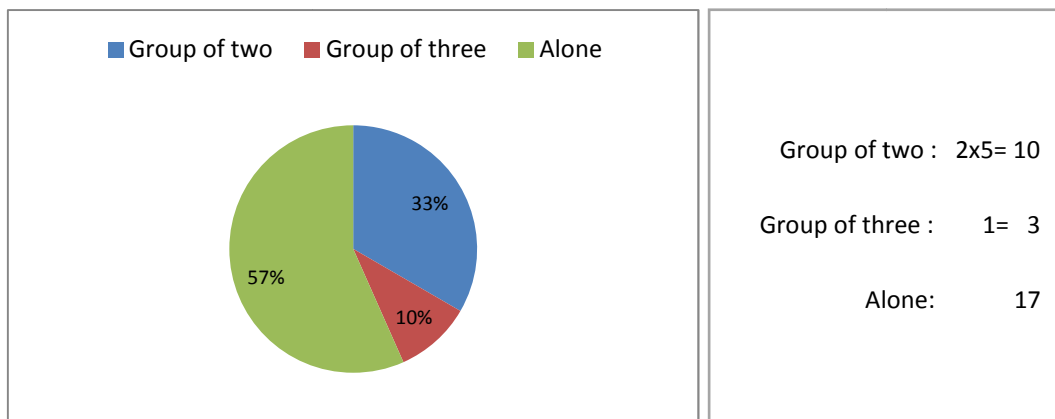
Yet, there is another category of people standing in the flow; people gathering or occasionally talking. "As no one knows in advance whether the conversation will be long or short, and as none of the participants can therefore suggest moving the meeting to a suitable standing place, groups in conversation can be seen everywhere that people meet - on stairs, near shop doors, or in the middle of a space, more or

<sup>28</sup> Gehl, 2011:147

less independent of time and place”<sup>29</sup>. In general, “Relatively few people formed their gatherings away from the space used for navigation”<sup>30</sup>. They can be seen in the picture where the dots are close together in group of two or three. Although standing to talk is more a social activity than the previously discussed one, it does not mean that the place is consequently good. In the Mahlerplein entrance, we find people waiting for the train together, people occasionally meeting or people just smoking a cigarette in company. A sign of a first social recognition in the place but not yet an establish strong social environment.



Figure showing people talking (blue)



In fact, it is true that “the best-used plazas are sociable places, with higher proportion of couples than you find in less-used places, more people in groups, more people meeting people, or exchanging goodbyes”<sup>31</sup>. The ratio in the pie-chart suggests a balanced proportion between groups and single standing in Mahlerplein entrance. Yet, it is also true that “off-peak use often gives the best clues”<sup>32</sup>. But all

<sup>29</sup> Gehl, 2011:147

<sup>30</sup> Whyte, 2001:9

<sup>31</sup> Whyte, 2001:17

<sup>32</sup> Whyte, 2001:18

these social gatherings occur to happen almost exclusively during the rush hours (lunch time between 12:00 and 13:00; end of working day and dinner, between 17:00 and 18:00). Therefore, sociality is not yet strongly established. The only exception documented is students gathering. Particularly students attending high or middle school appear in the after lunch hours. Yet, they are far more present in the Zuidplein entrance because of the vicinity of the schools.

Nevertheless, what is more difficult to host for a public space are prolonged standing behaviours. In this situations “the problem of finding a good place to stand arises”<sup>29</sup>. In the Mahlerplein entrance prolonged standing behaviours are rare as far as observed, apart from one group of working men. The group of three men, at the far left of the mapping picture, stand for around fifteen-twenty minutes. They were talking and actually waiting for two other people. The spot they stopped at does not present great qualities but it is tactically chosen. It is enough far from the noisy environment of the station but still on a sight distance to see people arriving. It is situated close to the flow and at the edge facing the stretch of water. When the activity become prolonged, over twenty minutes, people tend to sit.

In any case, standing activities, prolonged or not, seems generally to not bother about the traffic flow. In fact, people are not bothered, but they choose to stay close by the pedestrian traffic. “Contrary to ‘common sense’ expectations... the great majority of people were found to select their sites...very close to the traffic lines”<sup>33</sup>. People tend to ‘congest’, voluntary or not, selecting their sites close to the flow. “Congestion is self-congestion”<sup>33</sup>. So, congestion is not always a bad sign. In the Mahlerplein entrance there is not a real congestion but during the peak hours an increase of density is clear.



Comparison of standing activities ratio between peak hours and not

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<sup>33</sup> Whyte, 2001:23

**STANDING OUT of the PEDESTRAIN TRAFFIC** - Even people standing out of the flow of traffic, stay relatively close (as it can be evinced also from the mapping). This behaviour might be due to the fact that “People’s movements are one of the great spectacles”<sup>34</sup>. The spectacle becomes an element of company, a way of feeling part of a more public environment. Particularly alone standing people tend to do so. In the Mahlerplein entrance, this behaviour might be due also to the fact that people want to be ready to go into the flow again and proceed to their destination, as soon as they need to. Often people stand to smoke close to the entrance, ready to go towards the platforms. One man was reading more to the outside edge of the ‘portico’, waiting for train and checking the timetable screen. Others phones in the edges of the space and sometimes move randomly around if there is space.



Ticket machines are settled just out of the traffic but in sight view, so generally we find people standing and queuing there. Standing people eating are seldom seen. It is more common to see people eating while walking in a hurry or sitting in a more relaxed mood.

Particularly when people are alone, details of the environment become important. People tend to find places in which their “personal territory is reduced”<sup>35</sup>. Alone people do not stand in the middle of an empty space. They tend to look for a sort of protection. One example is “When one’s back is protected, others can approach only frontally, making it easy to keep watch and to react, for example, by means of a forbidding facial expression in the event of undesired invasion of personal territory”<sup>36</sup>. During my observations I noticed how architectural elements can gain

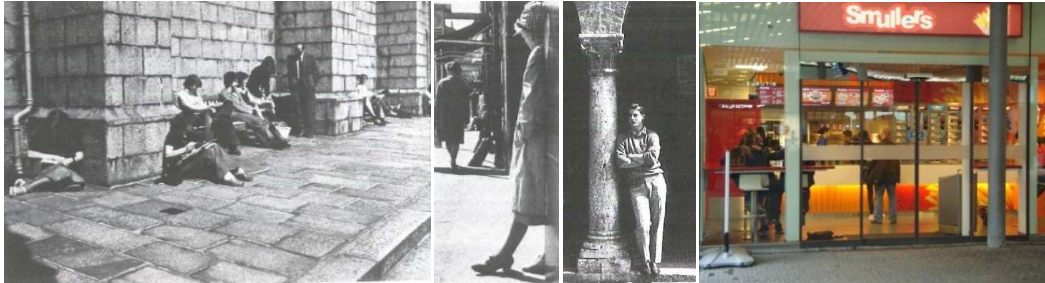
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<sup>34</sup> Whyte, 2001:22

<sup>35</sup> Gehl, 2011:147

<sup>36</sup> Gehl, 2011:149

an important value for standing activities. Pictures above give an idea of how a step or a column can play a crucial role for standing activities. People use them to handle their distance; that behavioural distances which Edward Hall defined in his studies, as already cited previously.



Edges and stasis<sup>38</sup>

In a public space like Mahlerplein entrance, social and public distance, where contact is not expected to be imminent, are usually taken. Yet, not much more qualitative elements are present in the Mahlerplein entrance. The shops edges, that define the space, do not offer good standing places. The entrances dominate the shop facade and the few left surface is completely transparent, letting not much to stand by. Furthermore, absolutely no support are present. Yet, support can be a relevant element to create qualitative places for standing and create a sort of personal territory around. Jan Gehl carefully studied the importance of supports<sup>37</sup>.



Campo Siena bollards and standing trends<sup>38</sup>

Standing support, probably involuntary designed

The left image, picturing Piazza del Campo in Siena<sup>39</sup> show a brilliant example, where bollards become the most successful place for standing activities in the square.

The middle picture shows one of the only two cases, in the Mahlerplein entrance, in which an element becomes a support for standing people; certainly non-voluntary and of bad quality. The second element was the unique long bench in the area, on

<sup>37</sup> Gehl, 2011:151

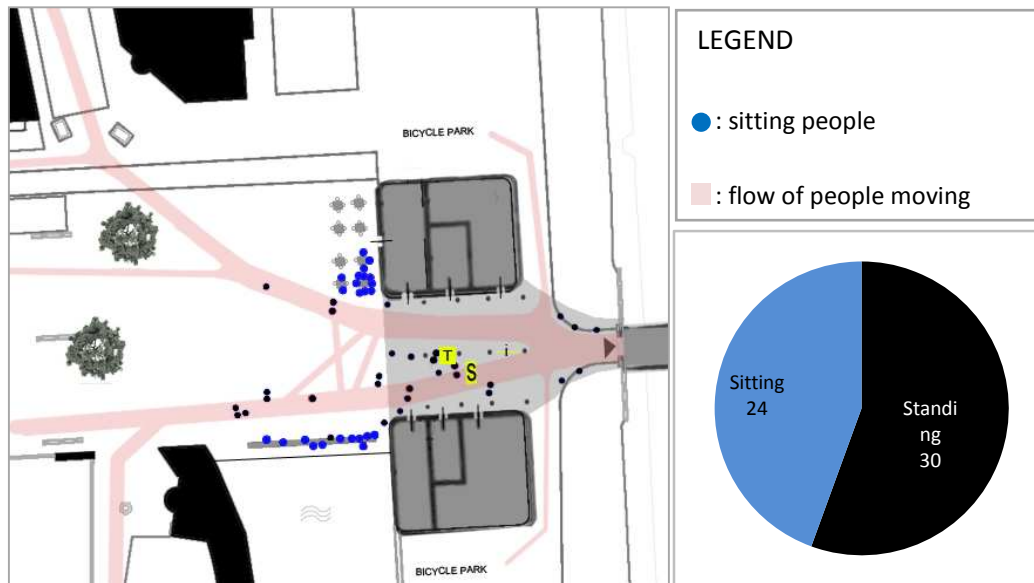
<sup>38</sup> Gehl, 2011:151

<sup>39</sup> Gehl, 2011:151



which rarely people may lay their suitcase or purse. The last picture show another interesting example but in more similar settings. The picture is taken in Amstel station. It shows how a plant container is designed also to become support for standing activities and at the same time for sitting ones, recreating a social environment similar to that one of a bar.

### *Sitting*



Mapping of sitting people

“Sitting locations are chosen far more carefully than the standing one”<sup>40</sup>, although “people sit where there are place to sit”<sup>41</sup>. Of course, it goes without saying, “sitting activities in general take place where the external conditions are favourable”<sup>42</sup>, but actually climatic conditions are not the only and crucial factor determining or not the success of sitting areas. Sun and aesthetics play an important role but they are not the first affecting factors<sup>43</sup>. The most influential factors result to be location, orientation and flexibility<sup>44</sup>. But before going through these factors let us have a look more generally the situation in the Mahlerplein entrance. Considering the few qualitative sitting places offered in this area, as already noticed, the ratio sitting-standing reveal a good trend to sit around. In fact, there are just two main place for sitting and yet 44 per cent of the people observed are sitting. More precisely, looking as if we are coming out from the station, there is one long bench on the left and

<sup>40</sup> Gehl, 2011:155

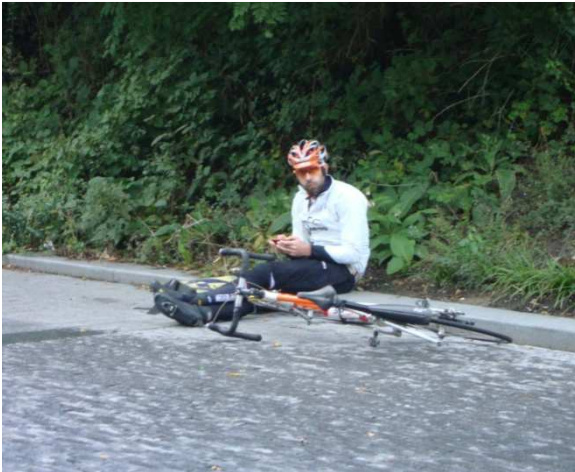
<sup>41</sup> Whyte, 2001:28

<sup>42</sup> Gehl, 2011:155

<sup>43</sup> Whyte, 2001:24

<sup>44</sup> As evinced and summarized from William Whyte and Jan Gehl studies on sitting behaviors.

thirty-eight fixed chairs with relative tables (four chairs per table). Yet, the chairs belong more to the food shop Julia's, close to which chairs and tables are placed. So, the chairs do not result of public domain, leaving no choice to sit if not on the bench. Only once it has been observed a particular behaviour of a cyclist sitting on a step just outside the station at the right side. However, the step, present also on the left side, does not present the right qualities to become a popular sitting place. In the sequent part I will try so to understand which are these qualities or which are at least limits to which people are tolerant.



Man sitting on the stepped edges aside of the station entrance

**LOCATION - ORIENTATION - FLEXIBILITY** “Seating placement requires careful planning”; “It is not unusual to see ingenious bench arrangements ‘floating’ freely in public spaces”<sup>45</sup>. This is what exactly happen for example in the middle of the Mahlerplein<sup>46</sup> or the Julia's sitting place at the farer edge towards bicycle park.



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<sup>45</sup> Gehl, 2011:157

<sup>46</sup> Although not part of the area studied, it has been observed together with fellow student during the workshop

“Each sitting area should preferably have an individual local quality”<sup>47</sup>. It is important the singular character that every seat might have. A sequential repetition can become, besides monotonous, also redundant, losing the quality that might have had. The best working example in the Mahlerplein entrance is the long bench facing the canal.



The peculiar location opening the view towards the stretch of water is a good feature that provide a ‘natural’ spectacle in the high-rise urban environment. Furthermore, besides the ‘natural’ component the bench is far enough to the movement to guarantee comfortable stationary activities and at the same time to offer a good view of the flow. The orientation is settled based on the surroundings and the flow of people that become a sort of spectacle. A further important aspect is the flexibility. In fact people behave differently depending on moments of the day or character. So the sitting place should welcome a variety of situation, “to give more choice”<sup>48</sup>. An easy but often overestimated aspect is the depth of a sitting place. A good depth should offer double side sitting for crowded moment and avoid a sense of emptiness in quieter situations.

Moreover, the materialization can play an important role. In fact the skin is a major sense organ for humans<sup>49</sup>. The importance of the memory of tactile experience is not to be underestimated. People will remember positively or negatively. Good memories will facilitate a return.



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<sup>47</sup> Gehl, 2011:157

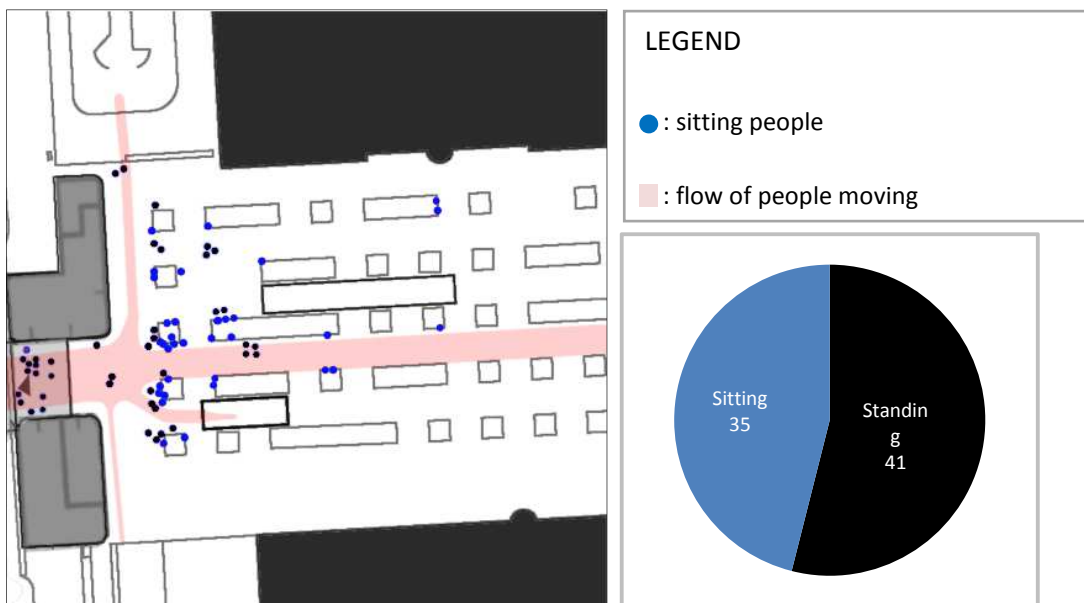
<sup>48</sup> Whyte, 1988:31

<sup>49</sup> Hall, 1990:54





**(3) ZUIDPLEIN entrance**



The transition between the station domain and the public square (Zuidplein) in this entrance is less smoother than the Mahlerplein entrance. Proceeding out from the station you almost jump directly into the square. The shops on two sides create a sort of filtering space. Yet again the flatness of the shops facade does not give occasion for a variety of staying activities. Total transparency and openness does not create a welcoming space for stasis. "A semiprivate front...[acting as] transitional zone"<sup>50</sup> could create a space where shop owners have a major sense of responsibility. In this way the space will be taken care of by shop owners, that might enrich the space and give space to advertising and all the objects that usually stand close to the movement.

<sup>50</sup> Gehl, 2011:189



In the Zuidplein entrance strong fronts might have been chosen on purpose because of the restricted space and thus the need to facilitate movement without interceptions.

People here stand, usually in the middle to check the screen timetable or often advertising or interviewing activities take place. Most of the people will pass through to reach a space offering a better place for stasis, namely Zuidplein first edges.

More effective, although their limited capacity are the kiosks. Since most of them are take-away, people often stop to consume in the sitting place under the trees, animating the area but mainly on good climatic condition.



The only people detected to stay just outside the entrance where an ambulant journal vendor and smokers, coming from the commercial activities around. The rest, especially sitting people decide to stay close to or directly under the trees. The journal vendor actually reveal an interesting social trend. Local activities like selling paper can establish a social relation, although likely and often quick, between local and sellers. William Whyte detected the importance of street workers or as he defines them “people who work the street”. Even “store owners [in fact] can be street people”<sup>51</sup>. In the situation of Amsterdam Zuid this aspect can be important to infill a sense of social belonging especially in the liminal zones towards public

<sup>51</sup> Whyte, 1988:25

squares.



Coming back to stasis, it has to be underlined that a rich presence of sitting possibilities are present in the immediate surroundings. The trees container are design to serve also as benches, creating numerous opportunity to sit. Nevertheless, as discussed previously, sitting places needs local qualities and characters. In the case of Zuidplein the numerous repetition of trees and sitting places results almost redundant and sometimes labyrinthic. "Sight lines are important. If people do not see a space, they will not use it."<sup>52</sup> The most used sitting places are in the edges, where the movement pass by. The more insight one are barely used. So I would say quality comes first to quantity.



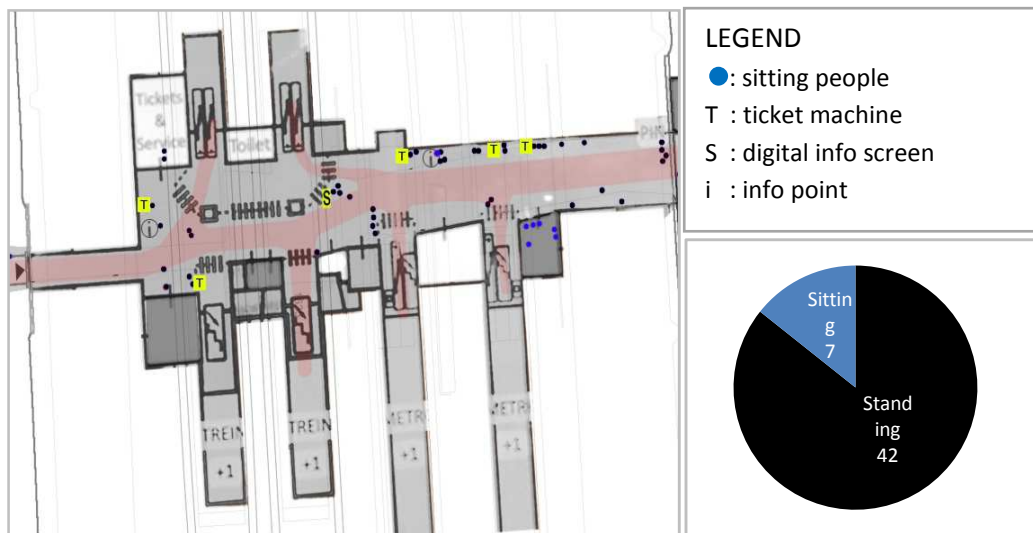
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<sup>52</sup> Whyte, 1988:129





## (2) TUNNEL train station



The domain of this space belong completely to the station and its movement. The statistic derived from observations, shows how the stasis is substantially low. The total of people stasis, forty-nine, is almost 40 per cent less than the two entrances surroundings datas. Movement rules the space. The moments of stasis observed are mainly actions related to the station users. Most of the people stop to check the timetable, to ask information, occasionally to wait or to control the time arrival on the digital screen and so on. This moments, although might be thought irrelevant, actually have to be treated carefully. Screens and ticket machine can create traffic and congestion if placed in wrong and crucial places.



More interesting for the stasis are the shops and their relation to the space of movement. Since the dominance of the people flow, train stations or similar places of movement like passages, gallerias or simply streets, house commercial spaces. The commercial activities automatically try to claim their own space with objects, advertising and openness. This trend might be seen negatively and often it is. It easily results in hindering the lane of movement. But if the right space is given and the right approach is used effective situation for stasis might be achieved, effecting positively also the commercial value of the shop. I personally detected some aspects in the Amsterdam Zuid tunnel that inspired me positively.



Since the tunnel is an interior and the climate is mild, shops can have literally open fronts. The Burger King, eliminating the shop windows, recreates a space that reminded me of a street-like environment, with the street view seats towards the flow of people. The feeling of street-like atmosphere is perceived by people to the point of bringing the bikes inside and parking them close by as in a street. Another interesting situation is offered by Kiosk that with a small table offer a support inviting standing activities just out of the flow and then why not to buy something. A further inspirational example is given by Ako. The fronts are pushed backwards

living space for objects to be exposed and creating a pro stasis space.



A more carefully designed example that I find out during my travelling is in Leiden Centraal. Here the domains are clearer and balanced. Shops have openable fronts, that are closed only in working off time. This feature is commercially advantageous but it also recreate a pleasant atmosphere. Sitting fixed place are positioned in the middle of the lane defining a more static area. This recreate occasion for sitting but also for standing without interfering obtrusively with the flow.



Leiden Centraal – (right) shop front example; (left) main concourse introducing to the platform

The last aspects that I want to point out is the info point. The metro service in Amsterdam Zuid has a movable open desk. This makes possible a more direct interaction. Daily seeing the service personal might create social bonds, recreating a recognition of the place. Situations of stasis are more invited and likely to happen enriching the social character of the place, although just a station. I can imagine the future residents, that travelling every day, will likely establish a social relationship with shop owners, service or security personal.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the transitional nature and movement of a railway station, even in a precarious situation like Amsterdam Zuid in 2014, is alternated by moments of stasis. Amsterdam Zuid station in its surroundings reveals already sparkles of static moments due to the centrality that the station has to the area. The range of activities, although limited, let us think the station not only as a distributor but also as a potential connector to the social tissue of the area.

Yet, a railway station is characterized by intense moment of movement and thus stasis take place mainly in specific spaces, which do not interfere the flow of people. The case studies and literatures reveal how spaces of transition between different domains, in other words liminal zones, play a crucial role in train stations of international level or in important public spaces of movements. The liminal zones often become the major public space of the project in which stasis and movement are balanced and crucial to the place. This aspect comes up also in the Amsterdam Zuid station, although the limited scale of it.

On the other hand, it goes without saying that the area of major domain of the station, introducing to the platforms, has to give priority to movement. Nevertheless minor and mostly short staying activities take place also in this spaces; from standing in front the time table screen to phoning or waiting. Offering and studying a space for these situations will avoid obstruction with the movement and enrich the liveliness of the space. Last but not least, the research also suggest briefly the importance of details in moment of stasis. The location, materialisation or dimensioning can affect decisively the behaviour of people.

The reflection on the results brought me elements of inspiration to define some of my project decisions. The main aspect derived from the research has been the creation of two liminal zones, each one for the two sides of the station tunnel. The two liminal zone work as spaces of transition between the domain of the squares and the station. These two spaces constitute a fundamental and quite large part of the project. They distribute the flow connecting to the net of transportation and public spaces in the area and at the same time, they offer occasions for stasis, contributing to the liveliness of the area. Details play an important role in the building both for the stasis and movement domain. The building edges, views, materials, ground are designed trying to establish a balance between movement and stasis as far as possible in a railway station environment.

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