place, people, purpose
exploring the possibilities of making CBD Zuidas a lively place

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Image 1; aerial view of CBD Zuidas
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Central Business District (CBD) Zuidas (image 1,2) is a densely occupied area in Amsterdam, developed in the 1980’s. At that time the municipality together with corporate investors agreed on developing CBD Zuidas as a vibrant place with intensive city life, it was meant to become a second city centre for Amsterdam. Eventually CBD Zuidas did not become this lively place, it has become a place monotonously focussed on corporate business unable to facilitate city life. How or why this happened is mainly due to economical and political reasons, however these won’t be discussed in this essay. What might be more interesting, since it has not been completed yet, is to see what CBD Zuidas lacks or needs to improve in order to become the second city centre as primarily intended. So how can CBD Zuidas become a place of social meaning that can facilitate city life?

Analysing the current condition of CBD Zuidas and studying relevant literature have resulted in an essay that was written taking multiple perspectives. These perspectives, spatial, anthropological and programmatic, complement each other to answer the question: How can CBD Zuidas become a place of social meaning that can facilitate city life?

place

CBD Zuidas was developed according to the modernistic planning ideals of the city as a machine, every part does a different job that complements the functioning of the machine. A rational and purposeful condition for necessary activities was to be created, mostly not considering enough what this purposeful, or monotonous, condition would mean for the city as a meeting place and its city life. City life, or urban liveliness, is facilitated by pedestrian life which is based on walking, a mode of transportation that allows for interactions with other individuals, spontaneous behaviour and an opportunity to think or be inspired; ‘walking through common city space can be a goal in itself, but also a beginning’.

Increasing car traffic gradually squeezed city life out because pedestrian life became increasingly difficult, this is especially a problem in large cities. Cities like Melbourne, New York and Copenhagen have been actively trying to revive their city centres by decreasing car traffic to and from the city centre. By inviting people rather than cars into their centres these cities have successfully reimplemented city life.

Although CBD Zuidas is a product of the mentioned planning, car traffic is not necessarily a problem. Only one street supports car traffic to and from CBD Zuidas, the rest of the streets and squares is car free or at the very most one way or dead ended. (image 3) What could be an obstacle for CBD Zuidas in becoming vibrant and full of city life is the fact that not inside but around CBD Zuidas there are wide and extensively used roads that support car traffic, forming large boundaries. (image 4) The connection of CBD Zuidas with the city of Amsterdam is due to being poorly supported in terms of pedestrian traveling very faint and not inviting for people to go there. People hardly go spontaneously to or through CBD Zuidas.

The quality of city space is leading for the character and the extent of city life. Necessary and purposeful activities like going to work or to school, waiting for public transport or shopping for groceries will take place under any circumstance. On the other hand recreational and optional activities like strolling down the promenade, sitting at a square or stopping to enjoy a view will require places with good quality.

1 Geyl J., 2010, p29
2 Geyl J., 2010, p26
3 Geyl J., 2010, p13
4 Geyl J., 2010 p20
image 2; schematic plan of CBD Zuidas

image 3; car traffic in CBD Zuidas

image 4; roads surrounding CBD Zuidas

image 5; vertical contact

6m communication excellent

45m contact interface of views, clouds and airplanes

15m communication feasible

6m communication excellent

ground floor
While our senses, by means of evolution, focus mainly on everything that happens in a horizontal plain before us, city life can be created or evoked by designing for the human scale and senses that take into account the human body and all its limitations. Further, sight is the most important of the human senses. Therefore the 'social field of vision', a perimeter in which social interaction can take place, is important in urban design. The outer limit of this field is 100 meters, within which we can see people moving. Between 50 and 70 meters we can recognise persons and their body language. An important frontier is at 25 meters, from which we start recognising emotions and facial expression. Approaching even closer, from seven meters details can be experienced, conversations take place and feelings can be exchanged.\(^5\) Humans naturally are less used to experience from above, therefore city life will appear for a great deal on eye level and everything closely related to this dimension. \(\text{(image 5)}\) In both directions the trick is to make the space offer both detail and overview.

CBD Zuidas consist of a number of large office buildings that exceed the contact thresholds as shown in image 5, interacting with the majority of the buildings and the people in it is therefore not possible. The main square in CBD Zuidas is the Gustav Mahler square, 150 by 90 meters wide, which is the focal point in terms of public social interaction. This would be slightly too large, as stated above, but due to the articulation and partitioning of the square the dimensions are suitable for interaction and city life.

The facades of the buildings surrounding the square are mostly closed, separating inside from outside strictly. \(\text{(image 6)}\) To allow a lively square it would be better to evoke inside-outside relations by making permeable facades.\(^6\) Furthermore when encountering an entrance, the transition from inside to outside is very abrupt, there is mostly no intermediate space or something that could make the transition more gradual.

people

Apart from spatial conditions, perhaps there is a less visible or less directly spatial condition that prevents CBD Zuidas from having city life. French anthropologist Marc Augé published a study that addresses what he calls 'non-places'; places characterised by their uniformity and lack of social coherence, functioning similarly regardless of their geographical location, where people will only be temporarily.

'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.'\(^7\)

Alone, amongst many others, the user of a non-place is enabled to use it by the establishment of a contractual relation. He is actively aware of this nature due to the, ongoing, reminding of it by the non-place. When gaining access to an airport departure lounge a ticket stating name and other information has to be shown, reminding the individual to the contractual relation. When boarding, a boarding pass, a passport, and in some occasions a visa have to be presented; all proof that the contract has been respected. The contract always relates to the identity of the contracting party, so the individual accedes to his anonymity when respecting the contract.
image 6; entrance Ito-Toren at Gustav Mahler square
The same goes for the supermarket customer that pays by bankcard or the motorway driver that is obliged to publicly expose his identity to a certain extent by his licence plates and obligatory carrying a driver's licence. The individual is reduced to nothing else than how he acts or what he experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. He becomes more or less gently possessed by the non-place, temporarily distanced from personal worries or joys. While in this subjected state, enabled to experience the passive joys of identity loss and the perhaps more active amuse of role-playing.

In ‘corporate life’, when acting in a world where mainly corporate business is present, individuals experience a similar condition. After being interviewed and screened, having proved to possess certain qualities by showing necessary documents, they are registered and literally contracted. They enter an ungraspsably large organisation, vast like a neighbourhood or district, impossible to get acquainted with completely. A neighbourhood that obeys the standards of corporate business. These include amongst other things a certain mindset, a code of ethics or behaviour, educational level and even a dress code. By wearing the proper clothing inhabitants of this corporate world can recognise and address each other the right way, enabling both parties to instantly play the right role. Where ten years ago the CBD would probably have been filled with chalk lined suits, today it is filled with a plain dark alternative complemented by a light shirt and a plain tie. Thus the non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations, it only creates solitude and similitude.

The question is how an outsider, perhaps just passing through, can enjoy a place that demands such a subjection. Although this subjection is contained in built form, a spillover is present at the public space surrounding it. Not being able to take the threshold of the built containments because one cannot meet the contractual requirements, not even trying because there is a certain presence of the need to have clearance to access them. One is allowed only in the leftover space between these containments. A space where the requirements can still be sensed and where the rules still implicitly apply, a space that mainly facilitates the accessibility of the containments; peripheral space of contractual centres. The coincidental passenger is actually rejected due to the fact it does not meet the requirements, further it does not have the proper clothing excluding it from participation in the leftover space outside the containments. Without condemning a non-place to a negative phenomenon, an attempt has been made to build an argument merely to support the suggestion that a CBD as a non-place does not entirely qualify as a basis of a lively urban centre.

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**purpose**

Cities naturally are generators of diversity, because a large number of people can support a large diversity of activities therefore making a city or a place lively. A lively place is also determined by the virtue of its collection of small elements, ergo activities. Apparently there is a balance between the number of people and activities that can make a place lively. A primary use or main programmatic activity, for instance employment or dwelling, attracts people to a place at a specific time (span) of the day, during the rest of the day the primary use won’t attract people. Combining primary uses is only effective when they attract people at different times of the day and therefore putting people on the street during different times of the day. Secondary use or convenience use, for instance retail in a residential area, exists in presence of a primary use to serve the people that are drawn by this primary use. If based on a single primary use secondary use will not flourish. Serving mixed primary uses, secondary use can be efficient and contribute to making a lively place.
Floor Space Index; a ratio between envelope and built floorspace.

FSI = floorspace (m$^2$) / envelope (m$^2$)
The other way around there is no place, how densely populated or well established, without the need for spreading or attracting people through the day.\textsuperscript{13}

In CBD Zuidas there is one primary use which is employment, this brings employees or business people for leisure related reasons on the street mainly during lunch time. There are also high end dwellings in CBD Zuidas, but due to the fact that all secondary uses are serving business people there is no reason to be on the streets of CBD Zuidas for these dwellers for leisure reasons. Furthermore most dwellers are provided with luxurious indoor or private outdoor space, reducing the need to go on the streets. On the topic of schools Hertzberger notices that when a school facilitates too many indoor activities as an alternative to schoolyard activities the schoolyard will become deserted.\textsuperscript{14}

In his essay ‘Spatial quality: compensation for density’ Rudy Uytenhaak pleads for a spatial compensation of densely built areas; density based on FSI. (image 7-10) This is because a certain density could have a menacing or claustrophobic effect.\textsuperscript{15} According to Uytenhaak this compensation should be spatial quality.\textsuperscript{16} Spatial quality is not only determined by the nature of the space itself, but also by the activities it provides; either inside or outside buildings; things that contribute to the experience of a space.

Balancing primary and secondary uses, the overall programmatic value, of CBD Zuidas can evoke more liveliness due to a large number of people on the streets during the whole day and simultaneously can offer compensation for the existing density to dwellers.

In this respect it might be interesting to notice that crime prevention strategies advocate the meeting of people from different groups of society as a routine part of every day life.\textsuperscript{17} So attracting different people not only can make a place more lively, but it also allows the strengthening of society.

\textbf{So}

In spatial terms CBD Zuidas functions reasonably well. Pedestrian life is very well possible and there is already a focal point for city life. However facades are not permeable and don’t allow inside -outside contact. Boundaries around CBD Zuidas hinder people to go there spontaneously.

Due to the large number of large corporations and business people CBD Zuidas could feel strange to people that do not work there. The subjection, people in suits or uniforms, the single identity they have and the anonymity they carry; it is all perceptible, not intimidating but also not inviting. If business people were not such a majority in CBD Zuidas, perhaps it would already be more inviting and could become more lively. Unfortunately this requires a different group of people to be there in order to solve this.

Further, developing new buildings containing different uses or program, or replacing program in existing buildings could solve the problem of the singular primary use of CBD Zuidas.

The easiest or most obvious intervention is to spatially improve CBD Zuidas. Opening facades, improving relations between public space and buildings. Also changing the boundaries around CBD Zuidas in order to make the place less isolated could help. Since it has not been finished yet this improvement could also be done by adding new buildings that meet these requirements, to function as an example.

To find the right balance between primary and secondary uses is more challenging. In order to establish this research has to be done in order to find out the demands of all sorts of target groups and implementing these is the right way.
Perhaps the most challenging thing is to balance the mixture of people. By inviting other kind of people than business people to CBD Zuidas business people will not be a majority anymore. But this should be done in such a way that these business people do not feel like ‘their’ space is, gradually, being invaded. As mentioned before there is no gradual transition from inside to outside, no intermediate space, public space is right at the doorstep of each building. In the current situation CBD Zuidas is crowded with business people so this transition is perhaps less perceptible, but once different people are drawn to CBD Zuidas in the future, this might become a less pleasant side effect.

Since pedestrian life is crucial for a lively place, the current flows of people should be investigated and the influence of future development on these flows in order to secure existing pedestrian life in the future.
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