

Title page



Master of Arts Thesis
Euroculture

University of Groningen (First semester)

Palacký University Olomouc (Second semester)

Month and Year when submitted

June 2024

Title of Master Thesis: Forum Groningen: A Center for All?
**Subtitle: Analyzing Stakeholder Intentions in Culture-Led Urban
Regeneration in the Northern Netherlands**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of culture-led urban regeneration (CLUR) in the context of Forum Groningen, a multifaceted cultural center in the Northern Netherlands. Opened in 2019, it offers a blend of traditional public functions with more commercial ones. It is part of the broader redevelopment effort of the Oostzijde (East Side) of Groningen's main square, the Grote Markt. This study investigates the intentions of key stakeholders involved in the development and operation of Forum and examines how these intentions align with or challenge the globally dominant paradigm among urban planners, Richard Florida's Creative Class Paradigm (CCP). By situating Forum within broader European trends of urban redevelopment, this thesis underscores the challenges and opportunities faced by medium-sized European cities. This thesis employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and an online survey, offering critical reflections on the inclusivity and exclusivity of the Oostzijde regeneration scheme. Findings indicate a complex interplay between economic objectives and social inclusivity, revealing inherent tensions in the Oostzijde project. Furthermore, they underscore the need for more socially sustainable urban planning practices across Europe, particularly in the context of CLUR projects.

Key words: creative class, culture-led urban regeneration, Richard Florida, Forum Groningen, living room, social sustainability, urban redevelopment, entrepreneurial urbanism, stakeholder intentions, inclusivity, exclusivity

Word amount of main text: 29967 (including footnotes, excluding preceding pages, Table of Content, Bibliography, and Appendices)

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definitions
B&W	College van Burgemeester en Wethouders (the municipal executive)
ESNS	Eurosonic Noorderslag
GCC	Groningen City Club
GGGM	Geen Gat in de Grote Markt (No Hole in the Grote Markt)
GMF	Grote Markt Forum
GMJ	Grote Markt Ja (Yes to the Grote Markt)
HIGG	Huis van Informatie en Geschiedenis Groningen (House for Information and History)
M40M	Meer doen met 40 miljoen (Doing more with 40 million)
PvdA	Partij voor de Arbeid (the Dutch Labor Party)
ROCK	Regeneration and Optimization of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities
RO/EZ	Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening en Economische Zaken (Department for Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs)
VCP	Verkeerscirculatieplan (Traffic Circulation Plan)

1 Introduction

1.1 An Inclusive Place?

In 2019, a multifaceted cultural center called *Forum Groningen*, situated in the heart of the city, adjacent to one of the two main squares, the *Grote Markt* (Great Market), opened in the northern part of the Netherlands. While the planning and construction process faced significant controversy, particularly regarding costs and necessity, the building received widespread praise and several awards after opening, depicting Forum in a rather positive light.¹ The cultural center offers a wide range of services, including a public library, tourist information center, museum, cinema, food and beverage options, as well as study spots and various other amenities. It combines classic public functions, such as a library, with more commercial functions, like a café and restaurant. While often popularly referred to as the “living room of the city,” Forum positions itself not only as a local community hub but also as a destination for tourists, as evidenced by features like the tourist information center and rooftop viewpoint.²

The construction of Forum forms an integral part of a larger redevelopment effort in Groningen’s city center, specifically on the *Oostzijde* (Eastside) of the *Grote Markt*. In this context, Forum was (and is) intended to act as a catalyst for the development of its surrounding environment.³ As part of this redevelopment, the city has witnessed multiple efforts, including redesigning the *Grote Markt*, a new hotel, the construction of several new apartment buildings, and a new square, the *Nieuwe Markt* (New Market). Therefore, the development of Forum is not an isolated event; it is part of a comprehensive urban redevelopment strategy that defines municipal urban planning efforts in Groningen in the twenty-first century.

Within the Dutch context, Forum positions itself as a unique type of public library, combining traditional functions like lending and reading with other offerings such as talks, exhibitions, and a cinema. These complement the more traditional functions. The stated goal is to “[i]nspire people to broaden their horizon” since “[t]he future is here.”⁴ The redevelopment of the *Grote Markt* follows a somewhat similar logic aiming to create a pleasant environment

¹ For an example of a critical account of Forum, see Johan Meijering, *Groninger Forum: Een Bodemloze Put* (Leeuwarden: Uitgeverij Elikser, 2016); For an example of a celebratory account, see Kirsten Hannema, “Hoe Forum Groningen de Harten van het Publiek Veroverde,” *de Volkskrant*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/hoe-forum-groningen-de-harten-van-het-publiek-veroverde~b648ca85/>; “Prijzen voor Forum Groningen,” Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/prijzen-voor-forum-groningen>; “Prijzen voor Forum.”

² ‘Woonkamer van de Stad’ *Forum Groningen Viert Derde Verjaardag met Babelbox*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9IRuJzmn24>.

³ Jan van Helden, “Toen het Erom Spande bij Groninger Forum: Politieke Besluitvorming en Financiële Argumentatie over een Omstreden Project,” *Maandblad voor Accountancy en Bedrijfseconomie* 91, no. 7–8 (August 2017): 211–23, <https://doi.org/10.5117/mab.91.24044>.

⁴ “What We Do,” Forum, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/en/our-story/what-we-do>.

for people to meet and spend time.⁵ Furthermore, the area's redevelopment includes the construction of relatively upscale apartment buildings and a new building for the elitist student association *Vindicat atque Polit*.

The emerging picture is mixed as Forum presents itself as an openly accessible space, while the surrounding area appears to cater to a wealthier demographic with exclusive elements as part of commercial real estate developments. Forum is meant to act as a catalyst for the area, prompting questions about the rationale behind the project. Is the primary goal to create an inclusive space for all at the heart of the city, or should it primarily be interpreted as part of a larger urban redevelopment strategy designed to attract affluent individuals and tourists to boost the local economy? Rather than primarily serving as the “living room of the city,” there is a genuine risk that Forum and the broader redevelopment efforts are leaning towards an exclusionary urban development model, which reflects the ubiquitous urban planning trends under the aegis of what David Harvey has dubbed entrepreneurial urbanism.⁶ This apparent tension between inclusivity and exclusivity forms the focus of this thesis, problematizing the generally lauded project.

1.2 Research Question

To shed light on this apparent field of tension, the overarching question that structures this thesis is: What are the intentions of stakeholders involved in the development and operation of Forum Groningen, particularly in the context of culture-led urban regeneration (CLUR), and how do these align with or challenge the principles of the Creative Class Paradigm (CCP) and the experiences of the public?

Using the notion of CLUR and the CCP, the conceptual framework enables a critical analysis of Forum within the context of urban development trends in European cities. The thesis operationalizes this main research question along the lines of four guiding sub-questions (see next page).

The first sub-question addresses the historical background of Groningen's local urban planning since the mid-twentieth century to uncover dominant ideas and understand how they might relate to the planning process of Forum. The second sub-question analyzes the intentions, goals, and objectives of the key stakeholders for the Forum project, particularly focusing on

⁵ “Grote Markt,” Binnenstad Groningen, accessed May 13, 2023, <https://ruimtevoorjou.groningen.nl/grote-markt-2023#:~:text=Op%20zaterdag%201%20juni%202024,op%20zaterdag%201%20juni%202024>.

⁶ David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (April 1989): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583>.

CLUR as Forum is an example of using culture in urban redevelopment policies. This question helps to uncover the different driving ideas behind the project to see whether more exclusionary or inclusionary aspects emerge, and it relates to the first question by allowing the identification of continuities with historical urban planning in Groningen. The third sub-question follows from the second and examines how the dominant paradigm within CLUR strategies, the CCP, relates to the project, especially to identify exclusionary elements of the project. The fourth sub-question focuses on the inclusivity aspect, examining the experiences and perceptions of the public to move beyond only key stakeholder perspectives.

These fourth sub-questions are:

1. How have historical urban planning practices in Groningen influenced the redevelopment efforts of the Grote Markt, eventually leading to the plans for Forum?
2. What are the intentions, goals, and objectives of key stakeholders involved in Forum Groningen's development and operation for the building, especially in the context of CLUR?
3. How do stakeholders' identified intentions, goals, and objectives align with or challenge the principles of the dominant creative city class paradigm for CLUR?
4. What are the experiences and perceptions of the public about Forum Groningen, and how does its programming approach contribute to inclusivity?

Together these sub-questions form a comprehensive approach to answer the main research question, enabling a nuanced understanding of Forum's role in urban regeneration.

1.3 Thesis Outline

The thesis begins by situating the case of Forum within the broader literature on urban redevelopment, and how urban redevelopment strategies and practices have been theorized. Chapter 2, the literature review, introduces CLUR and the CCP pioneered by Richard Florida, providing critical reflections and alternatives. The chapter provides the theoretical background for the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 then outlines the study's methodology, explaining the operationalization of the conceptual framework, chosen methods, and types of materials collected. Before analyzing Forum specifically, Chapter 5 offers historical background on urban planning in Groningen and discusses earlier efforts to regenerate the Grote Markt, illustrating how Forum has not been developed—and does not operate—in a vacuum. Chapter 6 then shifts the focus to the plans of the Oostzijde and Forum. The chapter addresses the second and third sub-questions, reflecting on the objectives and intentions of the main stakeholders, particularly the management of Forum and the municipality

of Groningen, and how the intentions relate to the dominant CCP. The subsequent section, Chapter 7, deals with public perceptions and Forum's programming, particularly regarding inclusivity. Thereafter, Chapter 8 synthesizes the key findings of the various parts of the thesis, discussing the theoretical implications, strengths, and limitations of the study. Lastly, in the conclusion in Chapter 9, the thesis argues that Forum is a prime example of CLUR, where key stakeholder objectives align with the dominant CCP. This alignment indicates inherent tensions, as the economic objectives often contradict efforts toward social inclusion. The chapter also briefly discusses broader implications and offers recommendations for further research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 A Europe-Wide Trend: Culture for the (Urban) Economy

To better understand the urban redevelopment efforts surrounding Groningen's Grote Markt of which Forum is a crucial element, it is worthwhile to zoom out and first focus on the broader scholarship on the use of culture in urban development policies. What stands out for the case of Forum is that as a cultural center aims to catalyze the area's regeneration, suggesting a connection between culture and urban planning policy. This connection is not unique to Forum, but it is part of broader trends in European urban planning, where cities use culture to boost their local economies.

For example, the promoting of culture and creativity to achieve economic growth and regenerate urban areas plays a significant and recognized role in the policies of European governmental bodies ranging from local to EU level. An example is the *European Capital of Culture*, a prestigious award annually given to several cities, with winners often attracting investments and international attention.⁷ Another example is the *Creative Europe* initiative, through which the EU can allocate significant funds. The growing importance of culture and creativity is evident, as the multiannual budget for 2014-2020 was only 1.47 billion euros, whereas, for 2021-2027, it increased to 2.44 billion euros.⁸ Through such initiatives, the EU, for instance, financially contributes to city branding efforts, which have become a tool to attract capital, tourists, companies, and high-skilled workers.⁹ Furthermore, the EU views cultural heritage as a developmental tool in urban contexts, designating 2018 as the *European Year of*

⁷ "European Capitals of Culture," European Commission, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>.

⁸ "About the Creative Europe Programme," European Commission, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/about-the-creative-europe-programme>.

⁹ Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko, "City Branding as a Response to Global Intercity Competition," *Growth and Change* 46, no. 2 (2015): 233–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12085>.

Cultural Heritage.¹⁰ Lastly, it also funds projects like the *Regeneration and Optimization of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities* (ROCK) program, promoting “cultural heritage-led regenerative solutions.”¹¹

The use of culture in urban redevelopment strategies is not only EU-induced, as in recent decades, many local European governments have also increasingly utilized cultural policies, ranging from constructing museums and cultural quarters to promoting arts and festivals, as tools to boost economic growth.¹² This trend has spread across Europe, from Western Europe to post-socialist countries, and from Spain to the UK to Norway, encompassing both large cities like Barcelona and smaller ones like Dundee.¹³ This continent-wide development is unsurprising, considering that a network like *Eurocities*—which counts Groningen among its members and consists of over 200 cities in 38 countries—facilitates knowledge sharing on various policy themes, including culture, economy, and urban governance.¹⁴ Similarly, Stephen Ward describes that while distinct national urban planning traditions existed in Europe for most of the twentieth century, “a common European planning tradition” is now emerging through knowledge facilitation by European-wide networks.¹⁵

¹⁰ Lucia Della Spina, “Multidimensional Assessment for ‘Culture-Led’ and ‘Community-Driven’ Urban Regeneration as Driver for Trigger Economic Vitality in Urban Historic Centers,” *Sustainability* 11, no. 24 (January 2019): 7237, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11247237>; “European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018,” European Commission, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/eu-policy-for-cultural-heritage/european-year-of-cultural-heritage-2018>.

¹¹ Roberto Falanga and Mafalda Corrêa Nunes, “Tackling Urban Disparities through Participatory Culture-Led Urban Regeneration. Insights from Lisbon,” *Land Use Policy* 108 (September 2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2021.105478>.

¹² Waldemar Cudny, Roberta Comunian, and Anita Wolaniuk, “Arts and Creativity: A Business and Branding Strategy for Lodz as a Neoliberal City,” *Cities* 100 (May 2020): 102659, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102659>.

¹³ Beatriz García, “Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future,” *Local Economy* 19, no. 4 (November 2004): 312–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0269094042000286828>; Nikola Jocić, *Creative Economy in a Postsocialist Transitional Context: Spatial Distribution of Creative Activities and Their Interrelation with Urban Milieus in City Quarters of Belgrade*, Bamberger Geographische Schriften 30 (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2019); Andrew Smith and Ingvild von Krogh Strand, “Oslo’s New Opera House: Cultural Flagship, Regeneration Tool or Destination Icon?,” *European Urban and Regional Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 2011): 93–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776410382595>; Mónica Degen and Marisol García, “The Transformation of the ‘Barcelona Model’: An Analysis of Culture, Urban Regeneration and Governance,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 5 (2012): 1022–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01152.x>; Fraser White, “Living Rooms for the City: LocHal Tilburg and V&A Dundee: Small City Regeneration in Historical Perspective, 1990-Present” (master’s thesis, Rotterdam, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2020), <https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/54493/>.

¹⁴ “Homepage,” Eurocities, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://eurocities.eu/>; Andrew Tallon, “New Forms of Urban Governance,” in *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 153, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351030304>.

¹⁵ Stephen Ward, “Is There a European Planning Tradition?,” in *European Planning History in the 20th Century: A Continent of Urban Planning*, ed. Max Welch Guerra et al. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 205, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003271666>.

In summary, in many European cities, local governments use culture to transform economically run-down areas into vibrant, lively urban zones, indicating an economic and market-driven rationale behind such initiatives.¹⁶ Forum is an example of such a strategy, serving as a multifaceted cultural center that breathes new life in the Grote Markt area. Thus, culture becomes a policy instrument for urban redevelopment.

2.2 Culture-Led Urban Regeneration

Academic literature commonly refers to the process described in the previous section as the ‘culture-led’ version of the umbrella term ‘urban regeneration.’¹⁷ Other terms often used include notions like urban renaissance, renewal, revitalization, and redevelopment.¹⁸ While academics and policymakers frequently use them interchangeably, subtle differences in purpose and content exist. However, these distinctions are typically tied to historical context, political agendas, and prevailing trends, making it somewhat unhelpful to precisely differentiate between them.¹⁹ For instance, in the European context, Teresa Tapada-Berteli notes how the EU plays “an important role as a source of financing for urban regeneration projects and therefore the use of its own conceptualiz[ations] (e.g., social cohesion).”²⁰ Overall, prioritizing the actual application of these strategies over semantic distinctions seems more valuable.

Pieter Roberts and Hugh Sykes provide a starting point for discussing urban regeneration as “a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about lasting improvements in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.”²¹ While giving

¹⁶ Tim Edensor et al., “Introduction Rethinking Creativity: Critiquing the Creative Class Thesis,” in *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, by Tim Edensor et al. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203886441>.

¹⁷ See, for example, Christopher Bailey, Steven Miles, and Peter Stark, “Culture-Led Urban Regeneration and the Revitalisation of Identities in Newcastle, Gateshead and the North East of England,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 10, no. 1 (March 2004): 47–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1028663042000212328>; Steven Miles and Ronan Paddison, “Introduction: The Rise and Rise of Culture-Led Urban Regeneration,” *Urban Studies* 42, no. 5–6 (May 2005): 833–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500107508>.

¹⁸ Andrew Tallon, “Introduction: The Decline and Rise of UK Cities,” in *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 5, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203802847>.

¹⁹ For instance, the notion ‘urban renewal’ has become somewhat outdated since the 2010s within academic literature. Maria Cerreta and Ludovica La Rocca, “Urban Regeneration Processes and Social Impact: A Literature Review to Explore the Role of Evaluation,” in *Computational Science and Its Applications – ICCSA 2021*, ed. Osvaldo Gervasi et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 176, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86979-3_13.

²⁰ Teresa Tapada-Berteli, “Urban Regeneration and Citizen’s City Making, Lessons Learned from a South-European Perspective,” in *Urban Regeneration: Methods, Implementation and Management*, ed. Ray Perrault, Urban Development, and Infrastructure (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2022), 72.

²¹ Pieter Roberts and Hugh Sykes, *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook* (London: Sage, 2000), 17.

this definition, they note that it is hard to capture it within a single conceptual definition as it represents a dynamic and not a static process.

Andrew Tallon critiques the notion of urban regeneration policies as ‘comprehensive,’ due to the persistent complexity of urban problems.²² Referencing Ivan Turok, Tallon views urban regeneration as a process with three distinct features: community involvement, multi-objective approaches, and stakeholder partnerships.²³ Turok divides urban regeneration into people, business, and place, offering a practical approach to understanding the process and implications of urban redevelopment efforts. This framework emphasizes enhancing individual skills and aspirations in the ‘people’ dimension, attracting new businesses, job creation, and support for local enterprises under ‘business,’ and upgrading physical and environmental aspects in ‘place’ to make urban spaces more attractive for people and businesses.

Returning to CLUR, cities use culture in numerous ways. Sharon Zukin documents some examples of such city boosters, which include constructing majestic buildings, beautifying waterfronts, and opening cultural museums at attractive locations.²⁴ These interventions extend beyond permanent physical changes to the landscape to include more temporary forms, such as cultural events and festivals.²⁵ Among these broad categorizations, Forum resembles the majestic buildings Zukin mentions. Scholars and other experts often refer to these structures as either flagships, landmarks, or icons,²⁶ which are typically quite tall and recognizable in city skylines, creating distinct cityscapes.²⁷

In 2005, Steven Miles and Ronan Paddisson highlighted that while CLUR is assumed to produce positive social impacts, there is a lack of evidence supporting these claims. Despite such concern, they observed how culture is increasingly viewed as “an economic panacea,” becoming “part of the new orthodoxy” for economic growth.²⁸ Similarly, Francesca Weber-Newth notes how “culture and ‘creativity’ are favored as tools for urban regeneration due to

²² Tallon, “Culture and Regeneration,” 2020, 5.

²³ Ivan Turok, “Urban Regeneration: What Can Be Done and What Should Be Avoided?,” in *Istanbul 2004 International Urban Regeneration Symposium: Workshop of Kucukcekmece District* (Istanbul: Kucukcekmece Municipality Publication, 2005), 57.

²⁴ Sharon Zukin, “Whose Culture? Whose City?,” in *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge (US): Blackwell, 1995), 1–48.

²⁵ Bernadette Quinn, “Arts Festivals and the City,” *Urban Studies* 42, no. 5/6 (2005): 927–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500107250>.

²⁶ Matt Patterson, “Revitalization, Transformation and the ‘Bilbao Effect’: Testing the Local Area Impact of Iconic Architectural Developments in North America, 2000–2009,” *European Planning Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 2022): 32–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1863341>; Kate Oakley and Justin O’Connor, “Culture and the City,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries*, ed. Kate Oakley and Justin O’Connor (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 201–11; Smith and von Krogh Strand, “Oslo’s New Opera.”

²⁷ Leslie Sklair, “Iconic Architecture and the Culture-Ideology of Consumerism,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 5 (September 2010): 143, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410374634>.

²⁸ Miles and Paddisson, “Introduction,” 833, 837.

the equation that money follows culture.”²⁹ The question that arises is: where is this conviction coming from? Tallon notes that “developing in parallel with the cultural city has been the notion of the ‘creative city’,” with Miles and Paddison attributing this thinking to Florida’s influential thesis on the creative class.³⁰

2.3 Introducing Florida’s Creative Class

In 2002, Florida coined the term the *creative class*, emphasizing the vital role of creativity in the economic prosperity of post-industrial or post-Fordist cities.³¹ He argues that to be economically successful, cities should try to attract creative people as they drive economic growth. His conceptualization of the creative class is ambiguous and broad, encompassing high-tech entrepreneurs to ‘traditional’ creatives like artists and painters.³² To attract this broad category of individuals, cities should provide the conditions of an open, diverse, and culturally vibrant character through investments in cultural amenities, education, and the overall quality of urban life—improving the “quality of place.”³³ The underlying rationale is that this approach not only attracts creative people but also entices businesses to invest, thereby fostering a more competitive and innovative city, which in turn promotes economic growth.

Within the creative class thinking, culture is necessary to make a place attractive (i.e., improving the quality of place).³⁴ However, it also reflects a shift from cultural consumption to cultural production. Initially, CLUR concentrated on consumption-based approaches, utilizing flagship cultural buildings and cultural resources for place branding, aimed at attracting investment and high-spending visitors—the Guggenheim Bilbao arguably being the most

²⁹ Francesca Weber-Newth, *The Game of Urban Regeneration: Culture & Community in London 2012 and Berlin’s Mediaspree*, Urban Studies (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), 22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839444863>.

³⁰ Andrew Tallon, “Culture and Regeneration,” in *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 262, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203802847>; Miles and Paddison, “Introduction,” 835.

³¹ Richard Florida, “Cities and the Creative Class,” *City & Community* 2, no. 1 (2003): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6040.00034>; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida’s concept is closely related to Charles Landry’s creative city. While both have (had) a huge influence on urban planning, this thesis concentrates on Florida as his work “best represents the dominant neoliberal creative city approach,” as highlighted by Robert Hollands, *Beyond the Neoliberal Creative City: Critique and Alternatives in the Urban Cultural Economy* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023), 44, <https://doi.org/10.56687/9781529233155>; Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, 2nd ed (London: Earthscan, 2008).

³² Jamie Peck, “Struggling with the Creative Class,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 4 (2005): 740–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00620.x>; Brian Tochtermann, “Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development: A Genealogy from Richard Florida to Jane Jacobs,” *Radical History Review* 2012, no. 112 (January 2012): 65–87, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1416169>.

³³ Florida, *The Creative Class*, 232.

³⁴ Tallon, “Culture and Regeneration,” 2020.

famous example.³⁵ Florida's theory expands this thinking to attracting creative people, as "notions of culture are also frequently wrapped up in the notion of the knowledge economy."³⁶ This is not to say that flagship and other cultural amenities have become less significant; rather, it signifies an expansion toward ideas like cultural clusters or quarters, "where creative people can work in close proximity and develop the kinds of 'soft' personal networks that are seen as crucial for innovation in the knowledge economy."³⁷

The concept of the creative class originates from countries of the Global North.³⁸ However, it has spread worldwide, leading to "a growing homogenization of city policies and the very idea of the modern."³⁹ This means that the 'creativity class paradigm' has become dominant, and is "accepted, almost uncritically, by city authorities around the globe."⁴⁰ Brian Tochterman contends that Florida presents his ideas in such a way that there is "no time or room for critique," and taking immediate action is deemed necessary for their successful implementation.⁴¹ By finding its way into the minds of urban planners, the CCP has, directly or indirectly, fundamentally altered the physical outlook of cities on a global scale.

2.4 Tracing the Origins of the Creative Class

For his influential ideas, Florida draws inspiration from Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.⁴² Using her work, he argues that "cities are cauldrons of diversity and difference, creativity and innovation," linking this to his argument that creative people create economic value and growth, emphasizing the crucial role of urban space in fueling creativity.⁴³ Through this, Florida shows that "place still matters."⁴⁴

³⁵ Tallon, 265; Lorenzo Vicario and P. Manuel Martinez Monje, "Another 'Guggenheim Effect'? The Generation of a Potentially Gentrifiable Neighbourhood in Bilbao," *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (November 2003): 2383–2400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098032000136129>.

³⁶ Phil Jones and James Evans, "Design and Cultural Regeneration," in *Urban Regeneration in the UK* (Los Angeles; London: Sage, 2008), 113.

³⁷ Jones and Evans, 113.

³⁸ Graeme Evans, "Creative Cities: An International Perspective," in *The Sage Handbook of New Urban Studies*, ed. John A. Hannigan and Greg Richards (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), 311–29.

³⁹ Justin O'Connor, "Creative Cities, Creative Classes and the Global Modern," in *Re-Imagining Creative Cities in Twenty-First Century Asia*, ed. Xin Gu, Michael Kho Lim, and Justin O'Connor (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 14, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-46291-8_2.

⁴⁰ Edensor et al., "Rethinking Creativity," 1; Oli Mould, *Urban Subversion and the Creative City*, Routledge Studies in Urbanism, and the City (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁴¹ Tochterman, "Neoliberal Urban Development," 79.

⁴² Gert-Jan Hospers and Roy van Dalm, "How to Create a Creative City? The Viewpoints of Richard Florida and Jane Jacobs," *Foresight* 7, no. 4 (January 2005): 8–12, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680510611796>.

⁴³ Florida, "Cities and Creative Class," 3.

⁴⁴ Tochterman, "Neoliberal Urban Development," 75.

While Jacobs's work is commendable for revealing the complexities of neighborhoods and cities, it overlooks crucial aspects such as racial and class inequality.⁴⁵ Marshall Berman shapely critiques her view: "[Jacobs's] world ranges from solid working-class whites at the bottom to professional middle-class whites at the top."⁴⁶ Florida's uncritical adoption of Jacobs fails to consider issues of inequality.

Zukin is another scholar who expands upon Jacobs's legacy further exploring the connection between culture and economic development.⁴⁷ Unlike Florida, she offers a more critical perspective on this relationship, noting how capital investors in parts of New York have used cultural consumption as a safe investment strategy, leading to the displacement of less affluent groups, including artists, and the reshaping of local economies.⁴⁸ In her 1995 work, Zukin introduces the concept of the "symbolic economy," where culture becomes the "motor of economic growth."⁴⁹ This economy centers on the use of cultural symbols, representations, and products to generate and exchange value, highlighting the influence of symbols and culture on perceptions, identities, and interactions. She raises essential questions about who controls culture and, by extension, the city and its image. This emphasizes the struggle between influential groups, such as urban planners and property owners who aim to attract cultural consumers like tourists and high-end shoppers, and the ordinary individuals who inhabit these spaces. Thus, the symbolic economy captures not only capital flows but also highlights the social and political processes influencing urban evolution and the experiences of different groups within these spaces.

The concept of the symbolic economy offers a framework for distinguishing Zukin's perspective from Florida's, highlighting how both scholars build upon but diverge significantly from Jacobs's ideas. While Florida's creative class sees culture as an instrument to boost local economies, Zukin's concept exposes potential inequalities and broader socio-political processes. By considering the conceptualization of the symbolic economy, it becomes easier to grasp how different scholars interpret the CCP, a topic further explored in the subsequent sections.

⁴⁵ Martin Fuller and Ryan Moore, *An Analysis of Jane Jacobs's The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London: Macat, 2017), 62–63, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781912282661>.

⁴⁶ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 324.

⁴⁷ Fuller and Moore, *Analysis Jacob's American Cities*, 63.

⁴⁸ Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 177–79.

⁴⁹ Zukin, "Whose Culture? Whose City?," 13.

2.5 Inherent Inequalities in a Neoliberal Frame

In response to declining industries, European cities have sought new economic models, often turning to the CCP.⁵⁰ This shift aligns with a broader trend towards neoliberalism, which Hollands describes as “state-facilitated market rule.”⁵¹ Here city authorities increasingly cater to market demands. Citing Harvey’s “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism,” he illustrates how city governments actively shape conditions to attract capital, marking a shift towards an entrepreneurial role in municipal management.⁵²

This neoliberal approach, as Harvey’s neo-Marxist critique suggests, often benefits economic elites by providing them opportunities to deploy capital and accumulate more wealth.⁵³ Similarly, Waldemar Cudny, Roberta Comunian, and Anita Wolaniak observe that creativity and the arts have evolved from mere marketing tools to essential elements of strategic urban development and competitiveness.⁵⁴ With the rise of neoliberalism, they contend, creativity and arts have become key elements of strategic investment in urban development and competitiveness, as city governments take the role of entrepreneurs, city governments taking on the role of entrepreneurs, a notion Harvey explored in 1989.⁵⁵ They note that city governments have assumed an entrepreneurial role, an idea Harvey explored in 1989.⁵⁶

This aspect is also where major criticism of Florida’s CCP emerges. Myra Breitbart observes that policies aimed at attracting the creative class often “end up supporting neoliberal planning based on place branding, middle-class consumption, gentrification and competition among individual entrepreneurs and cities.”⁵⁷ This suggests that creativity under neoliberalism perpetuates the notion that everything can be monetized.⁵⁸ Jamie Peck adds that “[c]reative-city strategies are predicated on, and designed for this neoliberalized terrain” and promote the gentrification of neighborhoods.⁵⁹ Additionally, they often result in urban spaces that cater

⁵⁰ Robert Hollands, “Urban Entrepreneurialism: The Emergence of the Cultural Economy,” in *Beyond the Neoliberal Creative City: Critique and Alternatives in the Urban Cultural Economy* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023), 24–43, <https://doi.org/10.56687/9781529233155>.

⁵¹ Hollands borrows this definition from Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore, “Still Neoliberalism?,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 118, no. 2 (April 2019): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-7381122>.

⁵² Harvey, “Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism.”

⁵³ Harvey; David Harvey, “The Urban Process under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2, no. 1–3 (1978): 101–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1978.tb00738.x>.

⁵⁴ Cudny, Comunian, and Wolaniuk, “Arts and Creativity.”

⁵⁵ Harvey, “Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism.”

⁵⁶ Harvey.

⁵⁷ Myra Breitbart, “Introduction: Examining the Creative Economy in Post-Industrial Cities: Alternatives to Blueprinting Soho,” in *Creative Economies in Post-Industrial Cities: Manufacturing a (Different) Scene* (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), 6, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315574677>.

⁵⁸ Oli Mould, *Against Creativity* (London: Verso, 2020), 12.

⁵⁹ Peck, “Creative Class,” 764.

only to elite forms of consumption and interaction, exacerbating social inequalities between creatives and non-creatives.

Tochterman further critiques Florida's thesis for neglecting the inherent inequalities of neoliberal city planning.⁶⁰ In addition to inequalities, Miles argues that within the neoliberal framework, creativity is often reduced to economic value, symbolizing the commodification of culture and transforming cities into mere backdrops for consumption, sidelining authentic creative expression.⁶¹ This shift, while attracting global attention, risks marginalizing local voices and eroding cultural diversity. Samuel Stein criticizes the CCP for favoring high-end consumption habits over genuine creative output, catering to the consumer-driven desires of creative individuals.⁶² In addition, Hollands highlights the use of the creative label in city marketing efforts, for example, to attract tourists.⁶³ Mike Davidson even compares CLUR to the "capital-led colonialization of urban space."⁶⁴

In the neoliberal turn, the number of private-public partnerships has also increased urban (re)development projects, making property developers pivotal in policymaking.⁶⁵ This trend extends to once fully public spaces transform into private or semi-public ones. Such privatization and commercialization restrict public space management and "reduce the vitality and vibrancy of the spaces and reorganize it to welcome only tourists and middle-class people."⁶⁶ Instead of being a place for all, the CCP promotes a specific kind of culture as creative individuals "are drawn to locales with art galleries, chic shopping areas, heritage sites, museums, cafés, and a reputation for cosmopolitanism and liberal attitudes. (...) Yet, such an emphasis is shrouded in a particular set of middle-class values," as Tim Edensor et al. note.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Tochterman, "Neoliberal Urban Development," 77.

⁶¹ Steven Miles, "Consumption and Place," in *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries*, ed. Kate Oakley and Justin O'Connor (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 213; Steven Miles, "Consuming Culture-Led Regeneration: The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Urban Experience," *Space and Polity* 24, no. 2 (May 2020): 210–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1775573>.

⁶² Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*, Jacobin Series (London; New York: Verso, 2019); Tochterman, "Neoliberal Urban Development," 76.

⁶³ Hollands, *Neoliberal Creative City*, 46; Greg Richards, "Tourism, Creativity and Creative Industries" (Creativity and Creative Industries in Challenging Times, Breda, 2012), https://www.academia.edu/2198992/Tourism_Creativity_and_the_Creative_Industries.

⁶⁴ Mark Davidson, "Gentrification as Global Habitat: A Process of Class Formation or Corporate Creation?," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 4 (2007): 493, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2007.00269.x>.

⁶⁵ Oakley and O'Connor, "Culture and the City," 203.

⁶⁶ Setha M. Low, "The Erosion of Public Space and the Public Realm: Paranoia, Surveillance and Privatization in New York City," *City & Society* 18, no. 1 (2006): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1525/city.2006.18.1.43>.

⁶⁷ Edensor et al., "Rethinking Creativity," 6.

Part of the creative class narrative is the juxtaposition of the idealized creative entrepreneur person versus the non-ideal low-income subject.⁶⁸

Ultimately, culture is not there to serve all people; instead, its primary objective is to attract economic investment.⁶⁹ This influx of capital often displaces residents due to rising housing costs—a phenomenon also linked to gentrification by Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly.⁷⁰ Consequently, the original grassroots or community-based culture, which took years to develop, is dismantled and replaced by a culture designed to attract the creative class, perpetuating class disparities.⁷¹

2.6 Florida's (Un)awareness: Critical Reflections

The trends described, including the commodification of creativity and shifts in ownership, are reflective of Zukin's concept of a symbolic economy where the commodification of culture drives economic growth.⁷² This raises questions about who controls the city and its culture, highlighting that Florida does not adequately address the various problems and implications inherent to his CCP in neoliberal city planning. He largely overlooks shifts in social power relations resulting from his urban planning paradigm. Referring to Section 2.4, this oversight seems logical as he uncritically follows Jacobs, who also neglects racial and class inequalities. However, Florida is not completely unaware of these critiques. In 2003, he acknowledged the “downsides, tensions, and contradictions of this new Creative Age,” emphasizing the need to address rising inequality.⁷³ His 2017 book *The New Urban Crisis* further acknowledges urban inequality as a critical challenge.⁷⁴

Several critiques highlight the limitations of Florida's work. For instance, Stein criticizes Florida for misinterpreting gentrification's role, suggesting he views it as a sign of success rather than a problem.⁷⁵ Similarly, Hollands recognizes Florida's awareness of globalization's

⁶⁸ Ulrike Gerhard, Michael Hoelscher, and David Wilson, “Introduction. Inequalities in the Creative City: A New Perspective on an Old Phenomenon,” in *Inequalities in Creative Cities: Issues, Approaches, Comparisons*, ed. Ulrike Gerhard, Michael Hoelscher, and David Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 8, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95115-4_1.

⁶⁹ Justin O'Connor and Kate Shaw, “What next for the Creative City?,” *City, Culture and Society*, Making Creative Spaces, 5, no. 3 (September 2014): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2014.05.010>.

⁷⁰ Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin K. Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁷¹ John Paul Catungal, Deborah Leslie, and Yvonne Hii, “Geographies of Displacement in the Creative City: The Case of Liberty Village, Toronto,” *Urban Studies* 46, no. 5–6 (May 2009): 1095–1114, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009103856>.

⁷² Zukin, “Whose Culture? Whose City?”

⁷³ Florida, “Cities and Creative Class,” 17.

⁷⁴ Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class - and What We Can Do about It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

⁷⁵ Stein, *Capital City*, 57.

negative impacts and the call for grassroots solutions but criticizes his narrow focus on a few cities, overlooking the broader impact on urban inequality in the Global South.⁷⁶ One could make a similar argument about smaller cities that have adopted creative class-like strategies, where positive effects are often less likely to materialize compared to metropolitan cities.⁷⁷

Hollands also observes that as the dominant paradigm, CCP has led to intercity competition, with city authorities becoming obsessed with popularity rankings and lists.⁷⁸ This is an indirect result of the way Florida produces rankings of cities, using a wide variety of factors to determine their levels of creativity and attractiveness.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Hollands argues that Florida's discussions on housing and displacement tacitly ignore broader issues, such as how the creative city paradigm exacerbates socio-economic inequalities and contributes to increased "socio-spatial polarization"—"the growing gap between rich and poor in both socioeconomic position and geographic location."⁸⁰ Hollands also highlights the increased divide between the creative haves and have-nots, emphasizing the growing exclusion of these have-nots.⁸¹ This echoes the earlier point about how culture often only presents middle-class values, underscoring the persistent theme of exclusion and inequality.⁸²

Importantly, even if Florida were to acknowledge all the problems caused by the CCP, it would not change the significant impact and consequences it has already had in practice. As David Banks notes, the paradigm "has gained so much momentum over the past two decades that even its creator cannot slow it down."⁸³ Despite the fierce critique from "the academic community, the 'creative class' theory remains popular among policymakers."⁸⁴ However, not all blame can be placed on Florida, as Charles Landry also played a significant role in mainstreaming the CCP.⁸⁵ While Florida portrayed the creative class as a way to propel the city forward, using Justin O'Connor's words, the "'creative class'—socially exclusive, consumption-oriented, capital-intensive, top-down and justified entirely by hard economic

⁷⁶ Hollands, *Neoliberal Creative City*, 143–44.

⁷⁷ Hans Kjetil Lysegård, "Creativity, Culture and Urban Strategies: A Fallacy in Cultural Urban Strategies," *European Planning Studies* 20, no. 8 (August 1, 2012): 1281–1300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2012.680581>.

⁷⁸ Hollands, *Neoliberal Creative City*; A point also made by Breitbart, "The Creative Economy," 6.

⁷⁹ Florida, "Cities and Creative Class"; Florida, *The Creative Class*; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

⁸⁰ Hollands, *Neoliberal Creative City*, 135.

⁸¹ Hollands, 19–20, 148–53.

⁸² Edensor et al., "Rethinking Creativity."

⁸³ David A. Banks, "The Attention Economy of Authentic Cities: How Cities Behave like Influencers," *European Planning Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 2022): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1882947>.

⁸⁴ Jocić, *Creative Economy*, 33.

⁸⁵ For more about this, see footnote 31.

metrics—helped deliver almost the exact opposite of that promised in the Creative City imaginary.”⁸⁶

2.7 Alternatives to the Creative Class: Focusing on Social Sustainability

The critique of CCP underscores a shift towards social sustainability in urban redevelopment.⁸⁷ This concept involves improving quality of life, health, and social equity, and it addresses issues such as public participation, social capital, and environmental justice.⁸⁸ Blaž Križnik suggests that urban redevelopment projects should boost social cohesion, distribute development benefits fairly, and marry economic growth with cultural preservation, promoting activities that respect community identities and values.⁸⁹

Similarly, Guido Ferilli et al. argue that the issue is not with CLUR itself, but with “policymakers [who] treat the cultural and the creative class dimensions within urban regeneration schemes, often *overlapping* the two concepts in the direction of instrumental employment (...) to attract globally mobile, highly paid professionals, with the consequent *social sustainability* problems [emphasis added].”⁹⁰ They advocate for a hybrid approach that integrates top-down and bottom-up initiatives, balancing hardware (facilities) and software (cultural initiatives and events), with a focus on social participation, cohesion, and local identity development, rather than solely on economic metrics like real estate value and tourism flows.⁹¹

Dean Saitta discusses an alternative to creative urbanism, namely intercultural urbanism, emphasizing the co-production of public space to foster a culturally inclusive city.⁹² This approach sees public space as flexible to accommodate cultural diversity. Additionally, Cheng-Yi Lin and Woan-Chiau Hsing highlight the importance of community engagement and grassroots support in urban development processes, while Della Spina advocates for a

⁸⁶ O’Connor, “Creative Cities, Creative Classes,” 3.

⁸⁷ Cerreta and La Rocca, “Urban Regeneration Processes,” 173; Ge Xiuli and Vida Maliene, “A Review of Studies on Sustainable Urban Regeneration,” in *EPiC Series in Built Environment*, vol. 2 (ASC 2021. 57th Annual Associated Schools of Construction International Conference, EasyChair, 2021), 615–25, <https://doi.org/10.29007/zsvn>.

⁸⁸ Andrea Colantonio and Tim Dixon, *Urban Regeneration & Social Sustainability: Best Practice from European Cities* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 24, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444329445.ch2>.

⁸⁹ Blaž Križnik, “Transformation of Deprived Urban Areas and Social Sustainability: A Comparative Study of Urban Regeneration and Urban Redevelopment in Barcelona and Seoul,” *Urbani Izziv* 29, no. 1 (2018): 83–95, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2018-29-01-003>.

⁹⁰ Guido Ferilli et al., “Power to the People: When Culture Works as a Social Catalyst in Urban Regeneration Processes (and When It Does Not),” *European Planning Studies* 25, no. 2 (February 2017): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2016.1259397>.

⁹¹ Ferilli et al., 255–56.

⁹² Dean Saitta, *Intercultural Urbanism: City Planning from the Ancient World to the Modern Day* (London: Zed Books, 2020), 28–35.

community-driven approach to regeneration projects.⁹³ Shaofei Niu et al. call for a sustained long-term commitment involving artists and non-profit organizations.⁹⁴ An analysis of the EU-funded ROCK project underscores the importance of long-term commitment, noting that its short project duration limited citizen participation.⁹⁵

The social sustainability dimension of CLUR projects also relates to Eric Klinenberg's concept of social infrastructure.⁹⁶ He argues that public spaces like parks, libraries, community centers, and even regular food markets facilitate social connections and resilience, serving as "places for all—regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or income."⁹⁷ Building on this, Alan Latham and Jack Layton discuss a "prospective politics of provision," an urban planning approach that stresses the importance of developing and maintaining public spaces for societal well-being.⁹⁸ In this context, cultural centers like Forum can play a pivotal role in the social infrastructure, benefiting the community not just economically but also socially and culturally.

A related concept is the emerging idea of the urban commons, which "in a relentlessly neoliberal climate, (...) seems to offer an alternative to the battle between public and private ownership."⁹⁹ This approach promotes shared ownership and management of urban resources like parks and gardens through commoning—a participatory governance model.¹⁰⁰ This model engages communities in decision-making processes about the use, maintenance, and management of urban resources, enhancing social cohesion as individuals unite for a common purpose. Ida Susser and Stéphane Tonnelat extend this concept to categorize three types of commons: labor and public services, public space and public sphere, and arts as commons.¹⁰¹

⁹³ Cheng-Yi Lin and Woan-Chiau Hsing, "Culture-Led Urban Regeneration and Community Mobilisation: The Case of the Taipei Bao-an Temple Area, Taiwan," *Urban Studies* 46, no. 7 (June 2009): 1317–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009104568>; Della Spina, "Multidimensional Assessment for 'Culture-Led' and 'Community-Driven' Urban Regeneration as Driver for Trigger Economic Vitality in Urban Historic Centers."

⁹⁴ Shaofei Niu et al., "Sustainability Issues in the Industrial Heritage Adaptive Reuse: Rethinking Culture-Led Urban Regeneration through Chinese Case Studies," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 33, no. 3 (September 2018): 515, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-018-9614-5>.

⁹⁵ Falanga and Nunes, "Tackling Urban Disparities."
⁹⁶ Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Crown, 2018).

⁹⁷ Alan Latham and Jack Layton, "Social Infrastructure and the Public Life of Cities: Studying Urban Sociality and Public Spaces," *Geography Compass* 13, no. 7 (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12444>.

⁹⁸ Latham and Layton, "Social Infrastructure and the Public Life of Cities."
⁹⁹ Justin McGuirk, "Urban Commons Have Radical Potential – It's Not Just about Community Gardens," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2015, sec. Cities, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jun/15/urban-common-radical-community-gardens>; Sheila Foster and Christian Iaione, "Ostrom in the City: Design Principles and Practices for the Urban Commons," in *Routledge Handbook of the Study of the Commons*, ed. Blake Hudson, Jonathan Rosenbloom, and Dan Cole (New York: Routledge, 2019), 235–55.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp4q2>.

¹⁰¹ Ida Susser and Stéphane Tonnelat, "Transformative Cities: The Three Urban Commons," *Focaal* 2013, no. 66 (June 2013): 105–21, <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2013.660110>.

They contrast this vision of arts as a communal resource that fosters civic engagement and social equity with the economic-focused creative city model.¹⁰²

2.8 Icons, Flagships, and Landmarks in Culture-Led Urban Regeneration

The previous sections explored the use of culture in urban redevelopment projects. Within CLUR strategies, the CCP has become a prevalent approach among policymakers, urban planners, and developers. This paradigm, however, has faced significant criticism for intensifying inequalities, commodification, and gentrification. Despite these issues, discussions on social sustainability present viable alternatives to the dominant paradigm, raising questions about how widespread these alternatives are, or to put it differently, how dominant the CCP still is.

As Forum is part of a broader urban redevelopment effort, it may be seen as a majestic building, as discussed by Zukin.¹⁰³ Similar conceptualizations like (cultural) flagships, icons, and landmarks are often used interchangeably in regeneration projects. Andrew Smith and Ingvild von Krogh clarify these terms; cultural flagships stimulate development by attracting investments; icons primarily attract tourists through unique designs; landmarks hold historical or cultural significance, reinforcing community identity and orientation within the city.¹⁰⁴ The categories are not mutually exclusive; buildings may serve multiple roles.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, it is crucial to differentiate between a building's intended function and its actual role within the social and physical fabric of the city, because these may differ.

Forum integrates various functions, from a public library and cinema to dining facilities and a rooftop viewing area, prompting discussions on whether it is merely a modern public library or something more. Dorte Skot-Hanson, Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Henrik Jochumsen discuss public libraries in CLUR as icons, place-makers, and community revitalization catalysts.¹⁰⁶ As icons, libraries are visually appealing to attract attention and tourism. As place-makers, they act as community spaces fostering interaction and cultural exchange. Additionally, libraries serve as hubs for community revitalization, offering resources, programs, and support to address societal needs, promote education, and foster inclusivity. They question if the new roles and designs of libraries affect their core mission,

¹⁰² Susser and Tonnelat, 115–16.

¹⁰³ Zukin, “Whose Culture? Whose City?,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ Smith and von Krogh Strand, “Oslo’s New Opera,” 95–98.

¹⁰⁵ Smith and von Krogh Strand, 96.

¹⁰⁶ Dorte Skot-Hansen, Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Henrik Jochumsen, “The Role of Public Libraries in Culture-led Urban Regeneration,” *New Library World* 114, no. 1/2 (January 2013): 7–19, <https://doi.org/10.1108/03074801311291929>.

concluding that the fundamental aim “to enliven and enhance the lives of the citizens (...) has not disappeared, but is being tested through new design and new concepts,” suggesting a success story that contradicts critics about the dominant CCP.¹⁰⁷ Gary Wilkin’s case study of the City Library in Newcastle reflects this perspective by showing that libraries featuring iconic architecture can counter neoliberal trends by prioritizing social sustainability with diverse, participatory, and inclusive cultural activities, thus serving as democratic anchors that strengthen community ties.¹⁰⁸

As noted in the introduction, Forum is popularly often referred to as the living room of the city. In this context, Fraser White discusses the emergence of the phenomenon of urban ‘living rooms’ in two small-sized European cities, Tilburg and Dundee (with populations of 220,000 and 150,000 respectively), in CLUR.¹⁰⁹ For White, living rooms have three characteristics: first, their design reflects a spacious, civic feel, mixing large interiors with domestic elements. Secondly, there is “a multi-functionality related to an economic justification based on knowledge and innovation, and to a lesser extent, culture.”¹¹⁰ Lastly, they convey to citizens that these spaces are theirs, acting “as place-makers in marginalized urban spaces.”¹¹¹

2.9 Why Study Forum Groningen?

The evaluation of CLUR efforts that employ iconic architecture presents a mixed picture. While some scholars offer critiques, others like Wilkin cast a more positive light. Therefore, a detailed examination is necessary to understand the intricacies of specific projects more accurately. Several reasons make Forum a compelling case worth investigating for such a detailed study. First, the building itself presents intriguing aspects, as highlighted by the 2020 *AIT Award* jury, describing it as a new cultural typology—a “cultural department store.”¹¹² This term reflects the diverse blend of amenities it offers. Furthermore, the planning process leading up to the construction faced lots of controversy regarding its building costs, perceived megalomaniac ambition, and necessity, but after Forum’s opening, it disappeared like snow in the sun.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Jochumsen, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Gary Wilkin, “The Public Library as a Democratic Anchor within Wider Networks of Culture-Led Regeneration?” (PhD diss., Northumbria University, 2018), 210, <https://core.ac.uk/reader/196578790>.

¹⁰⁹ White, “Living Rooms.”

¹¹⁰ White, 91.

¹¹¹ White, 91.

¹¹² “Prijzen voor Forum.”

¹¹³ Erik Dorsman et al., *Grote Markt Oostzijde: 20 Jaar Stadsontwikkeling in 40 Verhalen* (Groningen: GRAS, 2022).

Forum is located in the city of Groningen, which is the most significant urban center in its namesake province, with a population of 205,000 and a municipal population of 238,147 in 2023.¹¹⁴ This makes it the sixth-largest municipality in the Netherlands and the largest in the northern region. Therefore, this thesis offers insights into under-researched smaller or medium-sized cities, where positive effects of the CCP are often less apparent compared to larger metropolitan areas.¹¹⁵ Additionally, Groningen's relative distance from the Dutch economic heart, the *Randstad*, is sometimes viewed negatively.¹¹⁶ However, others argue that it allows local initiatives to flourish without competition or overshadowing by larger metropolitan areas, i.e., splendid isolation.¹¹⁷ A recent article illustrates this by mentioning how Groningen is the second-best economically performing city in the Netherlands after Amsterdam.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the creative class concept often focuses on attracting young creative professionals.¹¹⁹ In this regard, Groningen boasts one of the youngest populations in the Netherlands, with an average age of 38.5, compared to the national average of 42.4.¹²⁰ Lastly, a 2023 European Commission survey ranked Groningen as the third happiest city in Europe out of 83 cities surveyed, in terms of quality of life.¹²¹ These statistics make Groningen particularly relevant to the CCP.

Others have examined Forum from various angles, including its architectural significance and economic impacts. Matijn Hoekstra discussed concerns about earthquakes during construction.¹²² Tom Mantel and Eva Beerling, writing in respectively 2013 and 2015,

¹¹⁴ "Economisch Profiel en Beleid," Municipality of Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://gemeente.groningen.nl/economisch-profiel-en-beleid>; "Inwoners per Gemeente," Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-bevolking/regionaal/inwoners>.

¹¹⁵ White, "Living Rooms"; Lysgård, "Creativity, Culture."

¹¹⁶ Stefan Dormans, Henk van Houtum, and Arnoud Lagendijk, *De Verbeelding van de Stad: De Constructie van de Stedelijke Identiteit van Arnhem, Groningen, Maastricht en Tilburg* (Utrecht: Nethur, 2003), 33–56, <https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/handle/2066/74477>.

¹¹⁷ Jelmer Luimstra, "Groningse Startups Genieten van 'Splendid Isolation'," *MT/Sprout*, September 20, 2021, <https://mtsprout.nl/groei/groeistrategie/groningse-startups-genieten-van-splendid-isolation>.

¹¹⁸ "Groningen Hoort na Amsterdam bij Best Presterende Steden van Nederland," *Groninger Ondernemers Courant*, February 6, 2024, <https://www.groningerondernemerscourant.nl/nieuws/het-gaat-hartstikke-goed-met-de-economie-van-de-stad-groningen>.

¹¹⁹ Tallon, "Culture and Regeneration," 2020, 263.

¹²⁰ "Demografie," De Staat van Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://destaatvangroningen.nl/kerngegevens-provincie-demografie.html>; "Leeftijdsverdeling," Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-bevolking/leeftijd/bevolking>.

¹²¹ Laura De Dominicis et al., "Report on the Quality of Life in European Cities, 2023" (European Commission, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2776/830208>.

¹²² Matijn Hoekstra, "Uncertainties in Planning When Dealing with Earthquakes: A Case Study on 'het Groninger Forum'" (master's thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2016), <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/1114/>.

examined theoretical aspects and projected outcomes before Forum had opened.¹²³ Later, Floor de Ruiter and Marijke de Groot analyzed its architecture and social functions, benefiting from the opportunity to observe Forum after opening.¹²⁴

This thesis adopts a holistic approach to Forum, as suggested by Beerling, who indicated that follow-up research could examine its effects in connection with other developments in the Oostzijde as part of urban regeneration.¹²⁵ It offers a unique perspective by conducting a historical analysis of Groningen's urban planning policy, situating Forum within a broader narrative of inner-city transformation—a perspective not extensively covered in previous studies. Since Forum has been operational since November 2019, the analysis can extend to its operations post-opening. Central to this analysis is the role key stakeholders have played in shaping the trajectory of the developments in the Oostzijde of which Forum is a major part. This approach allows for a critical examination of the socio-political forces and planning ideologies that have shaped Forum, questioning whether it truly serves as a living room for all residents or caters to commercial interests and tourists. By analyzing the intersection of urban regeneration and culture, this thesis sheds light on the complexities of CLUR strategies that shape contemporary European public urban spaces.

3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This chapter of the thesis presents a combined theoretical and conceptual framework based on the literature review. It integrates critical theories in urban development and relates them directly to the case study of Forum Groningen. The first section of the framework deals with CLUR. The second section discusses the dominant paradigm within urban planning—the CCP. The last section zooms in on social sustainability within urban regeneration.

¹²³ Eva Beerling, “De Redenen en Verwachtingen Rondom het Bouwen van Iconische Gebouwen: Een Casestudie over het Groninger Forum” (bachelor’s thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2015), <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/2676/>; Tom Mantel, “Leren van Herstructureren: Een Studie naar de Economische Effecten van het Groninger Forum” (master’s thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2013), <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/1012/>.

¹²⁴ Floor de Ruiter, “De Bibliotheek is van Alle Markten Thuis: Een Onderzoek naar de Manier Waarop de Maatschappelijke Rol van de Openbare Bibliotheek in Nederland Is Veranderd” (master’s thesis, Nijmegen, Radboud University, 2022), <https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/items/c743c57d-7eb5-460a-90ab-dabc60edccd8>; Marijke de Groot, “The Development of Public Library Design in the Netherlands: A Case Study on Forum Groningen” (bachelor’s thesis, Delft, TU Delft, 2023), <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A2134bd06-bea5-4694-8849-d573d8f230ab>.

¹²⁵ Beerling, “Groninger Forum,” 14.

3.1 Culture-Led Urban Regeneration and Forum Groningen

CLUR is an approach that leverages cultural resources as catalysts for urban development. The concept encompasses a wide range of strategies, from the construction of iconic cultural buildings to hosting cultural events. These initiatives aim to attract investment, boost tourism, and enhance the city's image, contributing significantly to the local economy. This approach has been increasingly adopted by cities in Europe and beyond, aiming to transform run-down urban city areas into thriving cultural and economic hubs.

Numerous cities across Europe have implemented CLUR projects. For instance, many regard the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao as a classic example of how leveraging culture can successfully provide a significant economic boost to a city, enhancing tourism and creating a global cultural brand.¹²⁶ Another example, specific to the Netherlands, is the Amsterdam *Oosterdokeiland* (Eastern Docklands), where a newly constructed public library served as a cultural anchor, leading to subsequent developments that revitalized what was an economically depressed area of the city.¹²⁷

The multifunctionality of Forum, combining a public library, cinema, and various other cultural amenities within a single architecturally outstanding building, exemplifies CLUR. Forum acts as a catalyst for broader redevelopment efforts surrounding the Grote Markt in Groningen.¹²⁸ This approach is indicative of a larger trend where cities leverage cultural resources to achieve urban redevelopment and economic growth.

3.2 Creative Class Paradigm and Forum Groningen

Florida popularized the CCP, which posits that post-industrial cities should attract creative individuals to achieve economic prosperity. This creative class includes a broad spectrum of professionals, from artists and musicians to IT specialists and scientists. Florida argues that, besides economic opportunities, urban environments should be diverse and offer a high quality of life to attract creative individuals. Consequently, cities should prioritize providing a high quality of place, encompassing aesthetic, interactive, and developmental aspects of urban space. This includes not only physical infrastructure but also a vibrant cultural scene to foster creative interactions and expressions. The rationale behind this approach is that such environments attract the creative class, leading to innovation and subsequent economic growth.

¹²⁶ Vicario and Martinez Monje, "Another 'Guggenheim Effect'?"

¹²⁷ Robert Kloosterman, "Planning for Creativity: The Transformation of the Amsterdam Eastern Docklands," in *New Urbanism: Life, Work, and Space in the New Downtown*, by Ilse Helbrecht, ed. Peter Dirksmeier (London: Routledge, 2012), 61–83, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315598161>.

¹²⁸ Van Helden, "Toen Het Erom Spande."

Despite widespread influence among urban planners, the CCP has its critics, who point to its role in increasing property values and living costs, which exacerbate socio-spatial segregation and polarization. Critics argue that the focus on attracting the creative class often leads to urban regeneration strategies that favor the (upper-)middle class, consequently marginalizing non-mainstream people and cultures. For these critics, the link to neoliberalism is clear as the CCP ultimately commodifies creativity and prioritizes market-driven interests. These neoliberal strategies often reshape the urban landscape in ways that exclude those who do not fit the creative label, overlooking the broader needs of the local population.

As the CCP has spread across Europe and beyond, it is reasonable to assume that it has influenced local urban planners and politicians in Groningen. For instance, Tom Mantel refers to Florida in his thesis on Forum.¹²⁹ Given that Forum blends cultural, educational, and recreational functions, it appears to enhance the quality of life in Groningen, making it more attractive to the creative class. The question is whether the facilities genuinely cater to a broad demographic or predominantly serve a wealthier, more exclusive segment of society, potentially echoing criticisms of the Creative Class model.

3.3 Social Sustainability in Urban Regeneration in Groningen

Social sustainability in CLUR involves redevelopment efforts that go beyond mere economic interests. Such approaches prioritize inclusivity and community engagement, aiming to ensure a fair distribution of benefits among diverse social groups. Effective social sustainability practices contribute positively to the social infrastructure by enhancing social capital and community resilience. They require active local participation in planning and implementation to align projects with citizens' needs and aspirations.

While the focus on the social sustainability dimension of CLUR is increasing, there are challenges. A major challenge lies in balancing economic interests with social goals, especially as neoliberal thinking is prevalent in urban development. Market-driven approaches risk overshadowing social objectives, thereby undermining the social sustainability of a project.

The social sustainability aspect of Forum is visible in how it is often referred to as the living room of the city—a term that suggests it is a welcoming, accessible space for all. This means analysis should focus on Forum's accessibility, the opportunities for community interaction it provides, and its responsiveness to residents' needs and feedback. Evaluating the inclusivity of its programs and facilities, along with the presence of community-led events, can offer insights

¹²⁹ Mantel, "Leren van Herstructureren."

into its success in fostering social sustainability. By prioritizing these aspects, projects like Forum can serve as inclusive spaces that benefit the entire local community.

3.4 An Integrated Framework for Analyzing Forum Groningen

The framework synthesizes CLUR, the CCP, and social sustainability, setting the stage for the empirical analysis of Forum regarding stakeholder intentions and evaluating how well the project aligns with these theoretical constructs. Through this framework, it is possible to see how CLUR projects can promote cultural amenities to attract creative individuals. The framework highlights synergies such as using cultural resources to enhance social capital and community cohesion, demonstrating how urban spaces like Forum potentially serve both economic and social interests. This thesis's framework allows an examination of how Forum balances commercial objectives with social goals. This study helps determine if the project harmonizes cultural, economic, and social objectives to function effectively as the living room of the city, or whether it primarily serves a specific demographic.

4 Methodology

4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Statement

The theoretical and conceptual framework informs the methodological design of this research. Before delving into the research design, it is crucial to address the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this thesis, as each researcher operates under specific assumptions about what constitutes (social) reality and to scientifically engages with it.¹³⁰ Jonathon Moses and Torbjørn Knutsen highlight the importance of explicitly declaring one's approach, and Lara Carminati contends that this aids the generalization of a study.¹³¹ Here, generalizability does not refer to statistical generalization but to the transferability of findings to other contexts, necessitating that researchers provide detailed and rich accounts to allow others to assess the applicability of results to similar cases.

I subscribe to Moses and Knutsen in viewing constructivism and naturalism as ideal types at opposite ends of a spectrum, with scientific realism positioned centrally.¹³² They liken ontological and methodological positions to choosing a jacket, suggesting that choosing the methodology should be tailored to the specific case under study. In the context of Forum and

¹³⁰ Jonathon Moses and Torbjørn Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*, 2nd ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

¹³¹ Lara Carminati, "Generalizability in Qualitative Research: A Tale of Two Traditions," *Qualitative Health Research* 28, no. 13 (November 2018): 2094–2101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318788379>.

¹³² Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing*, 1–14.

the CCP, a hybrid stance combining scientific realism and constructivist thinking is appropriate. The literature review indicates that while the CCP is globally prevalent and often leads to outcomes such as exacerbated social inequalities, it is also subject to local interpretations and adaptations. This context requires an approach that acknowledges the constructed nature of social realities while recognizing observable, tangible outcomes.

4.2 Research Design

The ontological and epistemological position of this thesis supports a qualitative research design, influenced by White and Wilkin's studies of CLUR through cultural institutions as flagships or icons. Wilkin, grounding his approach in constructivism, defines a case study, per Colin Robson, as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence."¹³³

According to Malcolm Tight, the selection of a case study should consider factors beyond mere convenience or accessibility.¹³⁴ In this context, Forum presents several compelling reasons for selection. Situated in a smaller, peripheral city like Groningen, it stands in contrast to the typical focus on major cities in similar studies. Groningen boasts a relatively young population, a high quality of life, and a peripheral geographic position within the Netherlands. Furthermore, Forum's unique blend of cultural functions and commercial spaces within a single building, coupled with the project's transformation from controversial to widely lauded, make it an intriguing subject for exploring CLUR.

Additionally, Tight stresses the need to delineate the geographical and temporal boundaries of the study.¹³⁵ Geographically, this research will primarily center on the city of Groningen, with Forum serving as the focal point of analysis.¹³⁶ Temporally, while seeking to contextualize Forum within the broader local history of urban planning since the mid-twentieth century, the main analysis concentrates on the development of concrete plans for the Oostzijde from 2001 to the present day. 2001 serves as the starting point because citizens rejected plans for the area north of the Grote Markt in a referendum, prompting the municipality to redirect focus to the

¹³³ Colin Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 178.

¹³⁴ Malcolm Tight, "Designing Case Studies," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design, Two Volume Set*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications, 2022), 408–9, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278>.

¹³⁵ Tight, 409.

¹³⁶ It is crucial to emphasize that the Forum Groningen Foundation encompasses more than just the main location in the city center (Nieuwe Markt); it also includes eight additional neighborhood branches throughout the municipality of Groningen. This thesis primarily focuses on Forum's main location near the Grote Markt.

Oostzijde, which eventually led to the creation of Forum. The analysis extends to the present to account for ongoing developments in the Oostzijde and the continued operation of Forum.

Wilkin also addresses the concern of generalizability, pointing out that the strength of a case study lies in its ability to provide deep insights and complex understandings, which are often more valuable in social science research than broad generalizations.¹³⁷ This perspective resonates with Carminati, who discusses how rich studies providing sufficient context can offer valuable insights and opportunities for transferability.¹³⁸ This is not to say that this thesis aims to deliver a generalizable truth. Rather, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the specific case of Forum, which may apply to similar projects, situations, or contexts.

For his analysis, Wilkin adopts a qualitative mixed-method design consisting of semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and rhythmanalysis, allowing for triangulation.¹³⁹ My research design resembles this but excludes rhythmanalysis due to its time-consuming nature, as also noted in Wilkin's research. Instead, I have conducted an online survey to gain insight into the experiences or perspectives of citizens and visitors of Forum.

For his comparative case study of *LocHal* in Tilburg and *V&A* in Dundee, White conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from the cultural institution and the municipality and analyzed policy documents. He explains that these interviews help “to interrogate the intentions and goals behind the respective institutions by those implicated in shaping their development and defining the needs of the city,” which aligns with the objective of my thesis.¹⁴⁰ Due to this alignment, this thesis also includes an analysis of relevant documents and interviews with key stakeholders. Section 4.3 deals with the issue of identifying the stakeholders selected for the interviews.

White acknowledges that his analysis lacks perspectives of visitor experiences or from citizens more broadly, attributing this to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis at the time of writing.¹⁴¹ Therefore, this thesis includes an online survey to adhere more closely to Wilkin's approach, allowing for triangulation which strengthens the robustness of the research.¹⁴² White further explains that his goal was to construct micro-histories.¹⁴³ This corresponds with Wilkin's goal, which is to contextualize the specific projects as each city has its own particular story. Hence,

¹³⁷ Wilkin, “The Public Library,” 104–5.

¹³⁸ Carminati, “Generalizability in Qualitative Research.”

¹³⁹ Wilkin, “The Public Library,” 85–100.

¹⁴⁰ White, “Living Rooms,” 13.

¹⁴¹ White, 14.

¹⁴² Uwe Flick, “Revitalising Triangulation for Designing Multi-Perspective Qualitative Research,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications, 2022), 652–64, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278>.

¹⁴³ White, “Living Rooms,” 11–12.

this thesis includes an analysis of the urban planning history of Groningen since the second half of the twentieth century, identifying local characteristics to contextualize Forum.

Following the insights provided by White and Wilkin, the thesis employs a qualitative mixed-methods design. It includes two semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and an online survey. These methods gather primary data for analysis, supplemented by secondary sources for a comprehensive understanding of Forum. Integrating different methods strengthens the analysis, allowing for a nuanced view of the intentions behind Forum. Furthermore, document analysis contextualizes stakeholder interviews within a broader urban planning discourse about Forum. Through triangulation, this thesis aims to include as many perspectives as possible. The next section elaborates on the approaches used for collecting this data, enabling a critical construction of Forum's micro-history within the broader scholarship of CLUR and the CCP.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

According to Kathryn Roulston and Sean Halpin, interviews complement other methods, preventing over-reliance and allowing for cross-referencing.¹⁴⁴ Similar to Wilkin, this research utilizes semi-structured interviews due to their flexibility, which allows for deep, nuanced conversations that can adapt to the flow of dialogue. This approach is fitting to the goal of exploring the intentions and objectives behind Forum.

In the early stages, I extensively reviewed background materials to identify key stakeholders, showing the involvement of the municipality of Groningen, the Groningen province, various local cultural institutions later merged into a single entity that became Forum, the architecture firm designing the building, the construction company, and small and medium-sized enterprises located in the city center. Different property developers were involved in nearby projects but not directly in the development of Forum itself.

It was necessary to select the most important stakeholders from this public-private partnership nexus, based on their direct influence on the project. This influence refers to their substantial impact on the strategic direction, decision-making processes, and operational outcomes of Forum. Considering this, I selected the municipality, as it was the project's main executor and decision-maker. Similarly, I selected Forum itself as the organization is a key stakeholder as it operates the building and is responsible for its content.

¹⁴⁴ Kathryn Roulston and Sean Halpin, "Designing Qualitative Research Using Interview Data," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design, Two Volume Set*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications, 2022), 667–83, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278>.

Specifically, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two senior figures: Dirk Nijdam, the managing director of Forum since 2013, and Elzo Dijkhuis, the senior project manager for the Oostzijde redevelopment at the Municipality since 2009. Dijkhuis has been working for the municipality since 1996, overseeing various projects, including the recent reconstruction of the Grote Markt. Both men have played instrumental roles in the development, implementation, and operational phases of the Forum project.

To develop questions for the two interviews, I employed various approaches. Firstly, I derived them from the literature review and theoretical framework, focusing on intentions stemming from the CCP. Secondly, I analyzed policy documents to identify intentions mentioned therein, which could be discussed during the interviews. Lastly, insights from secondary literature about Forum's history informed the questions.

The second method utilized in this thesis is document analysis. The thesis operates under the premise that documents do not present some dry, ultimate truth, but are rather part of a larger social world as value-laden products of the institutions or individuals who create them.¹⁴⁵ The documents for this study encompass a wide range of texts, including policy documents, project reports, annual reports from Forum Groningen, and secondary literature on Groningen's urban planning. An example is the vision for Forum adopted by the municipal council. This method extends to analyzing web content, such as Forum's programming, news articles, and information about a real estate developer like MWPO. A more detailed list of the various sources used in the document analysis can be found in Appendix II, providing helpful context for the reader. Using document analysis allows for an in-depth understanding of the objectives and intentions surrounding urban redevelopment efforts in Groningen, particularly the role of Forum. The analysis focuses on how these documents and texts represent the intentions, processes, and outcomes of urban regeneration projects.

Finally, the online survey complements the interviews and document analysis by capturing the experiences and perceptions of the broader public regarding Forum. The theoretical framework informed the design of the survey questions, ensuring a link to key theoretical concepts. For example, the question "To what extent do you believe that the presence of Forum enhances the overall attractiveness of the city of Groningen?" derived from the framework's emphasis on how cities within the CCP instrumentalize culture to attract creative individuals. This theoretical grounding helped craft both the Likert-scale and open-ended questions to

¹⁴⁵ Katarina Jacobsson, "Designing for the Ethnographic Study of Documents," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design, Two Volume Set*, ed. Uwe Flick (London: Sage Publications, 2022), 771–72, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278>.

capture nuanced public perceptions. I developed the survey through an iterative feedback process with my thesis supervisors to ensure appropriate questions that effectively address the second part of the research question.

I distributed the online survey through multiple channels, resulting in varying response rates. For two weeks, Forum's weekly email newsletter included a link to the survey. Furthermore, I shared the link in several Facebook groups and one group on Reddit focused on Groningen. In total, 93 respondents started the online survey, with 76 completing it. The response rate through the newsletter was eight people, while 66 responded via Reddit, and nineteen through Facebook.

The interview transcriptions follow a verbatim nature to ensure an accurate representation of the responses of Nijdam and Dijkhuis. For the coding, I used both inductive and deductive approaches to thematic analysis through the ATLAS.ti 24 software program. Pre-defined codes emerged from the theoretical framework, such as 'Inclusivity' and 'Economic Objectives.' Additionally, inductive coding allowed for themes to emerge from the data.

The document analysis focuses on contextualizing the content rather than coding. This involves examining policy documents, annual reports, web content, and relevant news articles. Aligning with the research objectives, I paid special attention to how these documents discuss the intentions behind and the impacts of Forum's development. For the online survey data, the analysis is less about statistical significance and more about gathering diverse opinions and perceptions. Responses from Likert-scale questions show general trends in public sentiment, while answers to open-ended questions add depth to the understanding of public perception.

These methods together allow for a comprehensive analysis that aligns with and enriches the study's theoretical framework. The combination of structured and flexible approaches ensures that the study captures the complexity of the Forum case and provides meaningful insights into CLUR efforts in Groningen.

4.4 Limitations

This proposed research design has potential limitations that need addressing. As explained in Section 4.1, I subscribe to the idea that reality is socially constructed while recognizing the existence of observable, tangible outcomes. Consequently, I should be aware of my own positionality and biases stemming from my background as a white male pursuing higher education. Although it is impossible to fully overcome biases, recognizing them allows for

more objective analysis and interpretation, especially when discussing issues such as inequality. Additionally, stating my background makes it easier for others to interpret the analysis.

Beyond personal biases, the data collected may also contain inherent biases. These are more obvious in the interview data, but documents may also contain biases. For instance, interview participants might present themselves in a favorable light (social desirability bias) or tailor their responses to fit what they perceive as appropriate for the interview questions. To address this, the thesis employs data triangulation using interviews, document analysis, and survey data. This method does not rely on a single, potentially biased perspective but instead offers a balanced view of the data.

In addition to biases, it is necessary to address the geographical focus of this thesis, which centers exclusively on (Forum) Groningen. This is a deliberate choice as the objective is not to make broad, generalizable claims about the CCP or CLUR, but rather to offer an in-depth analysis of a specific example of urban regeneration. The focused case study allows for a detailed examination of a global phenomenon within a local context. The rich data allows for the potential transferability of insights to similar contexts, as discussed by Wilkin. Thus, focusing solely on Forum is a deliberate choice that strengthens the study by allowing for a more thorough examination, rather than a broader, less detailed analysis.

Another limitation lies in the online survey, as the sampling process was conducted through Forum's newsletter, Facebook, and Reddit, leading to a sample not perfectly representative in terms of age, though the gender distribution was relatively balanced. While this is a limitation, it is not detrimental as the purpose of the survey is not to generate statistically generalizable results but to provide exploratory insights that enrich the qualitative data.

In conclusion, the thesis has various limitations arising from the researcher's positionality, biases in data, geographical focus, and sampling. By employing strategies such as reflexivity and data triangulation, and delineating the scope of the study, it sufficiently addresses these limitations, setting a robust foundation for the analysis.

5 Post-War Urban Planning in Groningen

This chapter examines the evolution of Groningen's post-war urban planning by integrating historical insights with the theoretical framework. The analysis illustrates how past practices inform contemporary urban regeneration in Groningen, particularly in the context of the Grote Markt. Therefore, the chapter contextualizes Forum, addressing the first sub-question.

5.1 Dynamics of Groningen's Urban Development

Throughout its history, Groningen has witnessed significant changes to its urban fabric. While initially, the city developed as a marketplace for mainly agricultural products, from the 1860s onward, several industries established themselves in the city, such as the clothing industry, a gas factory, and factories related to agriculture like sugar.¹⁴⁶ Starting in the 1970s, Groningen underwent a process of deindustrialization similar to other Western European cities.¹⁴⁷ This led to various economic challenges, a changing urban core, and several redevelopments of former industrial sites. Through these changes, the city “changed from an agricultural commercial center to a city of offices with many institutions for culture, education, research, and care” and it has become associated with “modern, high-tech, and space.”¹⁴⁸ This transformation mirrors Florida’s description of how post-Fordist cities shifted their economic model from industrial to knowledge-based, focusing on aspects such as education, research, and technology. Investigating the specific urban planning governance that influenced this transformation in Groningen helps in understanding the Forum project more deeply, particularly in how local factors shape the implementation of global urban planning paradigms.¹⁴⁹

In the Netherlands, the influence of local factors is significant, as Tim Verlaan and Stefan Couperus note that Dutch urban planning “was and is much more decentrali[z]ed than its European counterparts, with the future of urban societies firmly in the hands of elected city councils and local planning departments.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, analyzing the specific local characteristics of Groningen is necessary. Within the local context of Groningen, the social

¹⁴⁶ Gregory Ashworth, “Planning by Referendum: Empowerment or Anarchy in Groningen, the Netherlands,” *Local Environment* 6, no. 3 (2001): 367, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549830120073329>; Pim Kooy, “Groningen en de Industrialisatie van Nederland,” *Historisch Tijdschrift Groniek*, Groningen en de Industrialisatie, no. 64 (January 1979), <https://ugp.rug.nl/groniek/article/view/16460>; Frederiekje de Jongh, “Bloeiende Confectie-industrie in Groningen,” *De Verhalen van Groningen*, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.deverhalenvan groningen.nl/alle-verhalen/bloeiende-confectie-industrie-in-groningen>.

¹⁴⁷ For a description of deindustrialization in Groningen, see Maarten Duijvendak, “Economische Beroering en Heroriëntatie,” in *Stad van het Noorden: Groningen in de Twintigste Eeuw*, ed. Bart de Vries and Maarten Duijvendak (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2003), 449–88; Bart Hekkema, “Een ‘Giffabriek’ nabij een Woonwijk: De Strijd tussen Burgers, Gemeentebestuur en Chemische Industrie in de Oosterpoortwijk in Groningen 1954-1983,” *Stadsgeschiedenis* 15, no. 2 (July 2020): 86; For a general discussion on deindustrialization in the Global North and its consequences, see Steven High, “Deindustrialization and Its Consequences,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*, ed. Michele Fazio, Christie Launius, and Tim Strangleman (New York: Routledge, 2020), 169–79.

¹⁴⁸ Maarten Duijvendak, “Stad, Centrum, en Imago,” in *Stad van het Noorden: Groningen in de Twintigste Eeuw*, ed. Bart de Vries and Maarten Duijvendak (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2003), 542, 545.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Ward, “Re-Examining the International Diffusion of Planning,” in *Urban Planning in a Changing World*, ed. Robert Freeston (London: Routledge, 2000), 40–61, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203819630>.

¹⁵⁰ Tim Verlaan and Stefan Couperus, “From the ‘Scientised’ to the ‘Sociocratic’ City: The Politics of Knowledge and Norm Change in Post-War Urban Planning in the Netherlands,” in *Politics of Urban Knowledge: Historical Perspectives on the Shaping and Governing of Cities*, ed. Bert de Munck and Jens Lachmund (New York: Routledge, 2023), 82.

democrats of the *Partij voor de Arbeid* (PvdA, the Dutch Labor Party) dominated local politics since the second half of the twentieth century. They were part of every municipal coalition, as they consistently emerged as the largest party in elections until 2014.¹⁵¹ The party exerted influence directly through the council but also through the networks between civil servants and influential individuals in the business and public sectors, many of whom affiliated with the party.¹⁵² However, due to the Dutch proportional system, the PvdA always needed to form coalitions to secure a majority in the municipal council.¹⁵³ Furthermore, influential PvdA members held different visions and sometimes even opposed each other, leading to intraparty tensions.¹⁵⁴ Thus, from an analytical perspective, Groningen's urban governance was pluralistic, as it was driven by various visions for urban redevelopment.

Urban planning policies are continuous and do not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, it is worth examining the broader trends and dominant belief systems. Here, it is useful to consider the local context, as Ward emphasizes the importance of how dominant ideas are negotiated locally.¹⁵⁵ However, it is also necessary to consider the Dutch national context as knowledge transfers occurred.¹⁵⁶ This approach helps to contextualize the local urban planning tradition in Groningen.

Considering these points, the PvdA's dominant position was not unique to Groningen. Verlaan notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, the aldermen responsible for urban planning in the larger Dutch cities were typically members of the PvdA.¹⁵⁷ Within this social democratic

¹⁵¹ Bart de Vries, "Politiek en Bestuur in een Stroomversnelling," in *Stad van het Noorden: Groningen in de Twintigste Eeuw*, ed. Bart de Vries and Maarten Duijvendak (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2003), 401; Ashworth, "Planning by Referendum," 367; Lucas Heling Hajema, "De Glazenwassers van het Bestuur: Lokale Overheid, Massamedia, Burgers en Communicatie, Groningen in Landelijk Perspectief 1945-2001" (master's thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2001), 359, <https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/de-glazenwassers-van-het-bestuur-lokale-overheid-massamedia-burge>.

¹⁵² Hajema, "De Glazenwassers"; Lieuwe Mulder, "Voor de Oosterpoort Was Het Allesbehalve Harmonieus: De Harmoniekwestie in Het Licht van Intergenerationele Samenwerking in de Gemeente Groningen, 1963-1973," *Groniek*, no. 228/229 (December 2021): 298-311, <https://doi.org/10.21827/groniek.228/229.40165>.

¹⁵³ Ashworth, "Planning by Referendum," 367.

¹⁵⁴ Mulder, "Voor de Oosterpoort"; Hajema, "De Glazenwassers," 272-73; Shinji Tsubohara, "Democracy through Political Parties and Public Participation: The Case of the Planning History of Groningen, the Netherlands" (Groningen, University of Groningen, 2010), 180-82, <https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/democracy-through-political-parties-and-public-participation-the->.

¹⁵⁵ Ward, "Re-Examining the International Diffusion."

¹⁵⁶ Focusing on the Dutch context does not diminish the relevance of the European perspective. However, Ward notes the difficulty in identifying a unified European urban planning tradition during the twentieth century, as practices largely remained nationally distinct. Ward, "European Planning Tradition?" For a discussion on other European planning traditions, see Max Welch Guerra et al., eds., *European Planning History in the 20th Century: A Continent of Urban Planning* (New York: Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003271666>.

¹⁵⁷ Tim Verlaan, "Dreading the Future: Ambivalence and Doubt in the Dutch Urban Renewal Order," *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 4 (November 2015): 542, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777315000326>; Tim Verlaan, "Producing Space: Post-War Redevelopment as Big Business, Utrecht and Hannover 1962-1975," *Planning Perspectives* 34, no. 3 (May 2019): 427, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2017.1408486>.

context in Groningen, two ideas were dominant. The first one is the belief among municipal planners that urban society could be deliberately shaped or constructed, meaning that it is possible to address societal ills through spatial interventions in the urban environment.¹⁵⁸ The other dominant belief was the ideal of the compact city, which favors accommodating an increasingly urban population within existing city boundaries rather than expanding outward.¹⁵⁹ This means a preference for inner-city development over suburbanization.¹⁶⁰

Besides these two dominant ideas, Gregory Ashworth notes the strong personal leadership of the urban planning aldermen in Groningen, referring to this as “a certain tradition of top-down ‘revolution by decree’.”¹⁶¹ Groningen’s most notable examples are Max van den Berg (1970-1978), Ypke Gietema (1978-1992), and Willem Smink (1992-2006), all three from the PvdA and responsible for the spatial city planning portfolio during their respective terms.¹⁶²

5.2 Changes and Continuities under Strong Leadership

The rise of Van den Berg marked a significant departure from the urban planning approaches that had dominated Groningen during the 1950s and most of the 1960s.¹⁶³ His emergence is part of a broader shift in the Netherlands, which Verlaan and Couperus identify as a change in Dutch urban governance from ‘scientized’ to ‘sociocratic.’¹⁶⁴ This transition signifies a move towards more community-driven, inclusive approaches to urban planning away from more top-down dictates. Additionally, they note that decentralization characterized Dutch urban planning at the time.

Within the context of Groningen, Van den Berg, associated with the PvdA’s youth organization, challenged existing norms from the ruling pre-war generation, culminating in the intra-party movement *Nieuw Links* (New Left) that wanted party reform from within.¹⁶⁵ He and

¹⁵⁸ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 308.

¹⁵⁹ Francois Pirart, “Policies against Urban Sprawl in the Changing Dutch Planning Context. Groningen Case: From a Monocentric Compact City Policy towards a New Urbanisation Path between Intensification and Expansion” (master’s thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2008), 49–52, <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/1746/>.

¹⁶⁰ Gregory Ashworth, “Grote Markt Groningen: The Re-Heritagization of the Public Realm,” in *City Spaces – Tourist Places: Urban Tourism Precincts*, ed. Bruce Hayllar, Tony Griffin, and Deborah Edwards (London: Routledge, 2008), 261–74, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080878270>.

¹⁶¹ Ashworth, 263.

¹⁶² Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 284; Martijn Duineveld, “De Nuloptie: Over Stadjes en de Maakbaarheid van het Groninger Forum” (Groningen: Platform GRAS, May 2011), 17–18, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718512002722>; Rik Reussing, “Spraaakmakende Lokale Bestuurders en Grensverleggend Lokaal Bestuur,” *Bestuurs-wetenschappen* 72, no. 2 (2018): 40–71, <https://doi.org/10.5553/Bw/016571942018072002004>.

¹⁶³ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 184–86.

¹⁶⁴ Verlaan and Couperus, “‘Scientised’ to the ‘Sociocratic.’”

¹⁶⁵ Mulder, “Voor de Oosterpoort,” 309.

others associated with the PvdA's youth organization were critical of the lack of democracy and demanded greater transparency. After internal party tensions, they successfully revitalized the PvdA from within, culminating in Van den Berg's appointment as alderman for urban planning at the age of twenty-four in 1970.¹⁶⁶

Following his appointment, there was increased attention to citizen engagement in Groningen in line with the shift toward sociocratic governance, i.e. more emphasis on citizens' interests, needs, and demands in urban planning and development affairs.¹⁶⁷ Improving information provision became an integral aspect of how Groningen's *College van Burgemeester en Wethouders* (B&W, the municipal executive) informed citizens about new policy initiatives.¹⁶⁸ Despite these efforts and ideals for increased citizen engagement, it is important not to overstate the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes.¹⁶⁹ For instance, for Van den Berg's most famous and radical plan—the *Verkeerscirculatieplan* (VCP, Traffic Circulation Plan), Shinji Tsubohara notes the “extremely limited opportunities for public participation, (...) with two public hearings before the plan was approved.”¹⁷⁰ While the local government promoted open planning processes, allowing citizens to voice concerns, ultimately, it was the experts—i.e., the municipal civil servants—working under Van den Berg's leadership who decided what was best for the city.¹⁷¹ This is not to say citizen engagement was absent, only that it might not have been as glamorous as implied by statements such as Rik Reussing's: “For ten years, from 1972 till 1982, there was a progressive government in which public participation flourished.”¹⁷²

The VCP also reflects a broader shift in Dutch urban planning, as Verlaan describes how, during the 1950s and 1960s, a new generation of urban planners in the Netherlands began to recognize the detrimental effects of car-centric policies, leading to a paradigm shift focused on reducing reliance on cars and placing greater emphasis on bicycles and pedestrians.¹⁷³ This shift aligns with the urban planning priority in Groningen of maintaining a compact city, primarily because pedestrians and cyclists require less space than cars, making them more efficient for city centers. Moreover, the VCP example is indicative of the “top-down revolution

¹⁶⁶ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 208.

¹⁶⁷ For instance, Van den Berg established a contact group to ease the strained relationship with citizens of the Oosterpoort neighborhood. Hekkema, “Een ‘Giffabriek.’”

¹⁶⁸ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 234–36.

¹⁶⁹ Duineveld, “De Nuloptie,” 71.

¹⁷⁰ Tsubohara, “Democracy through Political Parties,” 378.

¹⁷¹ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 221–65; Duineveld, “De Nuloptie,” 21.

¹⁷² Reussing, “Spraakmakende Lokale Bestuurders,” 55.

¹⁷³ Tim Verlaan, “Mobilization of the Masses: Dutch Planners, Local Politics, and the Threat of the Motor Age 1960-1980,” *Journal of Urban History* 47, no. 1 (January 2021): 136–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144219872767>.

by decree,” as described by Ashworth since the plan’s implementation happened almost overnight and was pioneering.¹⁷⁴

In 1978, fellow party member Gietema succeeded Van den Berg as alderman for urban planning. Initially, he continued along the path set by his predecessor, but he later marked a departure from these policies.¹⁷⁵ In Gietema’s view, the city was facing deterioration due to increased unemployment, in the context of the region’s de-industrialization, decreased private investments, government austerity measures, and a less attractive investment climate, which threatened the level of social infrastructure.¹⁷⁶ To address this, he shifted the focus towards large-scale projects within Groningen’s urban core.¹⁷⁷ In preparing these projects, the open planning processes became primarily a means to attract potential private investors rather than to engage citizens, as Gietema did not value citizen involvement in large projects.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, the newly-formed *Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening en Economische Zaken* (RO/EZ, Department for Spatial Planning and Economic Affairs) became the most influential municipal body, with key positions often filled by Gietema’s personal and political friends.¹⁷⁹ While Gietema’s approach to urban planning found many enthusiasts among urban planners and architects, his attempts to make Groningen more attractive for business and living led to growing resistance among citizens.¹⁸⁰

Despite resistance, Groningen saw various large-scale projects, such as the relocation of the *Groninger Museum*, which was part of a broader redevelopment of the *Verbindingskanaalzone*—the area north of the main train station named after the canal.¹⁸¹ Although the proposed location was controversial, B&W brought the planned location to a vote in the municipal council, followed by a round of consultation allowing citizens to share their thoughts on the plan. However, the most controversial aspect of the plan—the location—was already a *fait accompli*. Amidst fierce opposition, the RO/EZ played a crucial role in communicating a different kind of open planning process from Van den Berg’s, through which “investors needed to be enticed, journalists informed, opponents defeated.”¹⁸² Despite its

¹⁷⁴ Ashworth, “Grote Markt Groningen,” 263; Tsubohara, “Democracy through Political Parties.”

¹⁷⁵ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 270–72.

¹⁷⁶ Ypke Gietema, “Ypke Gietema; Hoe Zat het Allemaal Ook Alweer?,” in *De Omslag, Ypke Gietema en de Stad Groningen*, ed. Michelle Provoost (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 1992), 19–48.

¹⁷⁷ Shinji Tsubohara, “Democratic Nature of Urban Development in Groningen in the 1980s - PTT, Brink, Casino and Museum” (Groningen: Urban and Regional Studies Institute, 2006), <https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/democratic-nature-of-urban-development-in-groningen-in-the-1980s->

¹⁷⁸ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 274–75, 305.

¹⁷⁹ Hajema, 284, 290, 309; Duineveld, “De Nuloptie,” 18.

¹⁸⁰ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 275–77.

¹⁸¹ Hajema, 300–308; Tsubohara, “Democratic Nature,” 24–40; De Vries, “Politiek en Bestuur,” 422–23.

¹⁸² Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 309.

critics, specialist literature and local insiders view the Groninger Museum as a success story in terms of the boosting touristic and cultural appeal of Groningen and upgrading the area.¹⁸³

Therefore, Gietema marked a significant change in thinking, particularly in refocusing the open planning processes to attract investors, similar to what Verlaan discusses in the context of Utrecht and Hannover, with an increasing role for private partners in urban governance.¹⁸⁴ He also notes how urban planners in Utrecht envisioned transforming the city into a metropolitan hub and shedding its provincial character. In achieving this goal, he describes the influence of a scientific approach to developmental policies and a belief in a mixed economy rooted in an acceptance of “the market for efficiency reasons” among urban planners.¹⁸⁵ He argues that “the Dutch polder model of consensus decision-making in economic affairs, usually associated with the rise of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s, has long historical roots in [urban] planning.”¹⁸⁶ This analysis applies to Groningen, where a similar market orientation with projects like the Verbindingskanaalzone shows that by the end of the last century, municipal policymakers in Groningen were increasingly seeking to attract investors. This shift was influenced by global neoliberal trends and rooted in local dynamics, with the PvdA dominating Groningen’s politics, not only in elected office but also within the planning apparatus and municipal administration.

Besides the market orientation, Groningen also has a tradition of citizen engagement, beginning under Van den Berg. However, it is important to note that there was less focus on citizen engagement with the VCP and subsequently under Gietema, as the open planning process became more investor-focused. Van den Berg and Gietema significantly influenced Groningen’s urban governance, exemplifying the strong personal government aspect in Groningen, as noted by Ashworth.¹⁸⁷ Throughout this period, the dual ideals of using spatial intervention to address societal issues and promoting the compact city remained central among Groningen’s urban planners.¹⁸⁸ This focus is evident in projects like the Groninger Museum and policies like the VCP as it prioritizes non-motorized vehicles in the urban core.

¹⁸³ Martijn Duineveld, Kristof Van Assche, and Raoul Beunen, “Making Things Irreversible. Object Stabilization in Urban Planning and Design,” *Geoforum* 46 (May 2013): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.11.026>.

¹⁸⁴ Verlaan, “Producing Space.”

¹⁸⁵ Verlaan, 417.

¹⁸⁶ Verlaan, 427.

¹⁸⁷ Ashworth, “Grote Markt Groningen,” 263.

¹⁸⁸ Duineveld, Van Assche, and Beunen, “Making Things Irreversible,” 19.

5.3 Linkages to the Creative Class Paradigm and Culture-Led Urban Regeneration

The previous sections provided an overview of Groningen's recent history of urban governance, focusing on urban planning and development. This discussion highlighted key elements such as the compact city philosophy and using spatial interventions to address social issues. The prime example of the compact city philosophy is Groningen's VCP. Subsequently, Groningen adopted policies building upon the VCP, such as "*Binnenstad Beter*" (Inner City Improvement), which further prioritized pedestrians and bicycles in organizing mobility flows and the inner city's spatial layout.¹⁸⁹ While such policies are not unique to Groningen—as Francois Pirart points out that other Dutch cities have successfully implemented similar policies—Ashworth notes that compared to European standards, Groningen has a "remarkably compact and physically distinctive inner city."¹⁹⁰ This compactness aligns with Jacobs's proposition that cities should build pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.¹⁹¹ Similarly, Florida highlights the positive trend of "developing pedestrian-friendly town centers" to accommodate the development of urban-style amenities desired by "members of the Creative Class."¹⁹² The other dominant belief among Groningen's urban planners—that they can effectively address societal issues through spatial interventions—is also in line with Florida's CCP. It resonates with his argument that post-industrial cities facing economic challenges can revitalize their economies by creating environments that attract creative individuals. This belief embodies the notion that cities can deliberately shape societal outcomes through strategic urban planning.

With the relocation of the Groninger Museum in 1994, the municipality undertook a spatial intervention that strategically used culture to improve the city's image and inject new vitality into a problematic urban area. This seems to have been part of a broader reorientation towards culture in Groningen's municipal development policies near the end of the twentieth century. Quirijn van den Hoogen notes how policy documents in Groningen emphasized that "the attractiveness of the city is largely dependent on the achievements of human labor, especially

¹⁸⁹ Ashworth, "Grote Markt Groningen," 268.

¹⁹⁰ Pirart, "Policies against Urban Sprawl"; Ashworth, "Grote Markt Groningen," 265.

¹⁹¹ Jacobs's idea of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods resonates with the contemporary concepts of 'walkability' or the 'walkable city,' and it is a key principle among proponents of the New Urbanist school within urban planning. Fuller and Moore, *Analysis Jacob's American Cities*, 41–42; Monika Maria Cysek-Pawlak and Marek Pabich, "Walkability – the New Urbanism Principle for Urban Regeneration," *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 14, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 409–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2020.1834435>.

¹⁹² Richard Florida, "Building the Creative Community," in *The Gentrification Debates: A Reader*, ed. Japonica Brown-Saracino (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 350, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315881096>.

in the fields of culture and art.”¹⁹³ In addition to the Museum, Van den Hoogen highlights that “several high-quality festivals and the historic inner city are major factors in developing the city’s cultural image.”¹⁹⁴ Regarding the festivals, the annual showcase festival *Eurosonic Noorderslag* (ESNS) might be the best example. It was first organized in 1986 and has grown into a “leading platform for the European music industry.”¹⁹⁵ Van de Hoogen argues that all this has served to set the city apart from other cities, noting that the municipality “has chosen the presence of many young cultural professionals as its characterizing profile.” This is not just an aspiration but a reality, as Groningen underwent “quite [a] radical demographic and social change,” as the city has become younger and more culturally diverse over the last decades.¹⁹⁶

While a detailed discussion on ESNS is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is useful to briefly discuss the annual festival, as the municipality views it as a “focus event.”¹⁹⁷ This designation stems from its positive impact on Groningen’s image and contributions to the local economy.¹⁹⁸ Rob Ahlers suggests that the success of ESNS relies on Groningen’s specific characteristics: the compactness of the city center, its relatively remote location in the Netherlands, and a demographic structure skewed towards a high percentage of students.¹⁹⁹

This demonstrates how Groningen’s urban governance tradition of maintaining a compact city synergizes with its demographic characteristics to boost the success of cultural events like ESNS. Moreover, Ahlers mentions splendid isolation as a positive factor that contributes to Groningen’s distinct cultural profile. This relates to the Dutch perception that Groningen serves as a relatively autonomous regional hub, remote from other urban areas in the Netherlands.²⁰⁰ The interplay of various factors significantly enhances the city’s appeal to young cultural professionals, reinforcing Groningen’s identity as a culturally vibrant center. These insights highlight the interconnectedness of elements within CLUR strategies and set the stage for understanding specific urban projects in Groningen.

¹⁹³ Quirijn van den Hoogen, “Performing Arts and the City: Dutch Municipal Cultural Policy in the Brave New World of Evidence-Based Policy” (PhD diss., Groningen, University of Groningen, 2010), 123, <https://hdl.handle.net/11370/7cc1bdad-7079-4010-82c4-2cd78c7934c4>.

¹⁹⁴ Van den Hoogen, 123.

¹⁹⁵ Rob Ahlers, “Showcasing European Music Festival Networks: The Case of Eurosonic Noorderslag” (PhD diss., Groningen, University of Groningen, 2021), 11, <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.159223878>.

¹⁹⁶ Ashworth, “Grote Markt Groningen,” 263.

¹⁹⁷ Ahlers, “Showcasing European Music,” 51–52.

¹⁹⁸ Hermien Heeres, “Together They’re One: The Position of Eurosonic Noorderslag in the Cultural Sector in Groningen” (master’s thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2018), 38, <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/3031/>.

¹⁹⁹ Ahlers, “Showcasing European Music,” 60–64.

²⁰⁰ Dormans, Van Houtum, and Lagendijk, *Verbeelding van de stad*, 50.

5.4 Zooming in on the Grote Markt: The Waagstraat Complex and the Noordzijde

It is essential to zoom in on specific urban projects, particularly those regarding the Grote Markt which holds a prominent place in Groningen's post-war urban planning. Its *Noordzijde* (North Side) and *Oostzijde* (East Side) were destroyed in the final days of World War II and rebuilt in a functional modernist style. By the 1990s, a consensus had emerged that something needed to change, as "there was widespread dissatisfaction with both the form and function."²⁰¹ This sentiment mirrored similar trends in other European cities, where post-war architecture had fallen out of favor.²⁰² When discussing Forum, it is crucial to consider the broader socio-spatial context of the Grote Markt and its surroundings, focusing on plans that pre-dated those for Forum.

The first of these plans was the construction of the Waagstraat complex, which introduced a new square with shops and apartments, replacing old municipal offices.²⁰³ Amidst the controversy surrounding the Groninger Museum and a PvdA electoral loss, B&W opted for more citizen involvement, leading over 6,000 residents to select the complex's design via survey. Lucas Heling Hajema views this as a victory for citizen engagement, as the chosen design contradicted the opinion of experts and Gietema's preferences.²⁰⁴

After the Waagstraat complex, the new alderman for spatial planning, Smink, shifted focus to the Noordzijde.²⁰⁵ Private investors ABN AMRO and Vendex International, owning most of the land, offered to finance the project on the condition the plan would include an underground parking facility for 400 cars beneath the Grote Markt.²⁰⁶ Concerns emerged over its impact on the Martini Tower, skepticism regarding private investors' influence, and minimal citizen input in the bureaucratic planning process.²⁰⁷ This is exemplified by a citizen survey demonstrating general support for renovating the *Noordzijde* but little support for the parking facility.²⁰⁸

The opposition formed the committee *Geen Gat in de Grote Markt* (GGGM, No Hole in the Grote Markt) and gathered signatures for a referendum.²⁰⁹ While most political parties had initially supported the plans, Smink found himself nearly alone in defending it during the

²⁰¹ Ashworth, "Planning by Referendum," 368.

²⁰² Jones and Evans, "Design and Cultural Regeneration," 124–26.

²⁰³ Ashworth, "Grote Markt Groningen," 270.

²⁰⁴ Hajema, "De Glazenwassers," 328–29.

²⁰⁵ In 1992, Gietema resigned amidst a scandal involving substantial financial losses for the municipality. Willem Smink, then PvdA faction leader, succeeded him. De Vries, "Politiek en Bestuur," 435–38.

²⁰⁶ De Vries, 444–48; Hajema, "De Glazenwassers," 343–48.

²⁰⁷ Jan Lunsing, "Groningen, Noordzijde Grote Markt," in *De Besluitingsguillotine: Hoe Het Lokaal Bestuur Een Referendum Kan Winnen* (The Hague: LEMMA, 2008), 62.

²⁰⁸ De Vries, "Politiek en Bestuur," 445; Hajema, "De Glazenwassers," 344.

²⁰⁹ Ashworth, "Planning by Referendum," 370–71.

campaign.²¹⁰ Parties like Vendex and the Groningen City Club (GCC)—the association for local businesses—also did nothing to support the plans. In contrast, GGGM formed a broad coalition, positioning itself as a citizen initiative against politically motivated proponents of the plan.²¹¹

The campaign of GGGM was successful as the referendum attracted a 56 percent turnout and 81 percent voting against the plans.²¹² Consequently, the municipal council decided to discontinue the plans. In the aftermath, some politicians resigned while Smink remained in office despite this being “the most important project of his nearly ten-year tenure as alderman.”²¹³ The unexpected outcome indicated a failure in communication and citizen engagement despite B&W’s emphasis on citizen participation and open planning in their 1998 coalition program.²¹⁴

These initial efforts for the Waagstraat complex and Noordzijde reflect the complexity of Groningen’s urban development. While the Waagstraat project prioritized citizen engagement, B&W miscalculated public sentiment when collaborating with private investors for the Noordzijde. Additionally, the fact that Smink could stay in office illustrates the strong position aldermen for urban planning have held in Groningen, similar to Van den Berg and Gietema.

5.5 Moving on: Let’s Try the Oostzijde

After the 2001 referendum, Smink redirected efforts to the Oostzijde. Learning from past mistakes, B&W recognized the need for increased public involvement in sensitive projects like the Grote Markt redevelopment.²¹⁵ Subsequently, the municipality started a new open planning process by establishing the *Grote Markt Forum* (GMF), a discussion platform comprising approximately fifty representatives from civil society, experts, civil servants, and municipal councilors.²¹⁶ Supported by the Grote Markt project team, primarily comprising RO/EZ civil servants, the GMF actively engaged citizens, resulting in six proposed development models, some including cultural functions near the main square.

²¹⁰ Ashworth, 371; Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 346–48; Lunsing, “Groningen, Noordzijde.”

²¹¹ Ashworth, “Planning by Referendum,” 370; Lunsing, “Groningen, Noordzijde.”

²¹² Lunsing, “Groningen, Noordzijde”; De Vries, “Politiek en Bestuur,” 447.

²¹³ Hajema, “De Glazenwassers,” 355.

²¹⁴ Hajema, 348; Marcel Boogers and Pieter Tops, *Hoe het Referendum Werd ‘Gewonnen.’ Een Evaluatie van het Groninger Referendum van 29 Juni 2005* (Dongen: Pijnenburg, 2005), 14; De Vries, “Politiek en Bestuur,” 444.

²¹⁵ De Vries, “Politiek en Bestuur,” 449; Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 11; Johannes Voorberg, “Contemporary Inner-City Planning as a Quest for Support of the Diverse People” (master’s thesis, Groningen, University of Groningen, 2010), <https://frw.studenttheses.ub.rug.nl/1083/>.

²¹⁶ Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 14–16.

Based on these six models, the municipality commissioned Willem Jan Neutelings to develop four proposals, building on the findings of the GMF. However, instead of presenting multiple options, he laid down a single comprehensive vision, eliminating the possibility of a referendum with multiple choices, including a zero-option suggested by the referendum committee.²¹⁷ The opposition criticized the lack of openness in the planning process and announced their intention to request a new referendum. According to B&W, the plans needed more refinement before the opposition could request a referendum, but they were not opposed to the idea, believing it could lend more legitimacy to their plans.²¹⁸

To further develop the plans, Smink engaged local institutions, resulting in the proposal for the *Huis van Informatie en Geschiedenis Groningen* (HIGG, House for Information and History). With the groundwork laid, Smink strategically timed the announcement of the Oostzijde project initiation document, prompting the opposition party SP to request a referendum.²¹⁹ The project document outlined a comprehensive plan for the Oostzijde with three main intentions: 1) restoring the eastern building line at the Grote Markt to its pre-war position, 2) constructing HIGG (later renamed to *Groninger Forum*, and eventually *Forum Groningen*) along with an underground parking facility, and 3) creating a new square called the Nieuwe Markt.²²⁰ These plans were “intentionally kept vague,” lacking specific details such as the height of Forum, usage, or parking capacity.²²¹

For the second referendum, a less-organized opposition formed *Meer doen met 40 miljoen* (M40M, Doing more with 40 million) referring to the estimated costs for the municipality in the plan.²²² Their efforts failed to attract broad public support. Furthermore, the new plan was less controversial as parking beneath the Grote Markt was no longer included.

In contrast, proponents were better organized in *Grote Markt Ja* (GMJ, Yes to the Grote Markt). While the initiative was conceived by Smink and supported by individuals in his circle, it “was deliberately presented as a grassroots initiative.”²²³ It received support from cultural institutions like the Groninger Museum and the public library.²²⁴ There was extensive

²¹⁷ Boogers and Tops, 19–22.

²¹⁸ Boogers and Tops, 26.

²¹⁹ Boogers and Tops, 26–28.

²²⁰ “Raadsvoorstel. Planontwikkeling Grote Markt Oostzijde: Concept Programma van Eisen” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, June 2006), <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Planontwikkeling-Grote-Markt-oostzijde-1.pdf>.

²²¹ Duineveld, Van Assche, and Beunen, “Making Things Irreversible,” 22; Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 38.

²²² Lunsing, “Groningen, Oostzijde Grote Markt”; Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 29–33.

²²³ Duineveld, Van Assche, and Beunen, “Making Things Irreversible,” 20.

²²⁴ Lunsing, “Groningen, Oostzijde”; Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 31–34.

coordination among the different centers of the campaign, such as Smink and the head of the museum. GMJ positioned itself as a public organization while relying on political support.

The turnout for the referendum was 38.6 percent, with 53.4 percent in favor and 46.6 percent against.²²⁵ This meant the threshold for a valid referendum was not reached, rendering it considered ‘not held,’ meaning the plans for the Oostzijde could continue.²²⁶ However, the lower turnout suggested some disinterest among Groningen citizens, who recognized the need for action on the Oostzijde but did not perceive the plans as controversial enough to vote.

5.6 Conclusion

To address the first sub-question, this chapter examined Groningen’s post-war urban planning, highlighting the influential roles of key political figures and evolving urban governance strategies. It demonstrated how Groningen’s urban planners adhered to a compact city model and utilized spatial interventions to address societal issues. Moreover, it underscored the transformation of open planning processes, initially focusing on citizen engagement but gradually shifting towards a more market-oriented approach rooted in the Dutch polder model. Initiatives like the Groninger Museum and ESNS are connected to CLUR as expressions of municipal policies leveraging culture.

Starting in the 1990s with the Waagstraat complex, the efforts for the Grote Markt aligned with Groningen’s longstanding philosophy of a compact city. Despite setbacks, the municipality remained committed to the Grote Markt’s redevelopment. These efforts also highlight the complex nature of citizen engagement. While citizen involvement was prominent in the Waagstraat project, the Noordzijde plans failed due to a miscalculation by the municipality regarding public support, as it collaborated with private parties like Vendex International and ABN AMRO, resulting in the clear outcome of the 2001 referendum. In response, Smink and the municipality adopted a more bottom-up approach to the planning process, initiating the GMF. This eventually led to new plans for the Oostzijde, with HIGG resembling a twenty-first-century library, reflecting CLUR.²²⁷

Nevertheless, it is not yet clear what the driving motivation of the municipality and other stakeholders is, as Ashworth noted that before the redevelopments, “the Grote Markt no longer accommodated or expressed the vision of the city held by a dominant consensus of governors

²²⁵ “Oostzijde Gaat Door, Referendum Niet Geldig,” *RTV Noord*, June 30, 2005, <https://rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/49470/oostzijde-gaat-door-referendum-niet-geldig>.

²²⁶ Lunsing, “Groningen, Oostzijde,” 101–3; Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 46.

²²⁷ Boogers and Tops, *Hoe het Referendum*, 24–26.

and citizens.”²²⁸ This prompts questions such as: What was the envisioned future for the area? What kind of Grote Markt or city center should result from the redevelopment projects?

6 Regenerating the Grote Markt Oostzijde through Forum Groningen

This chapter discusses the developments that followed the 2005 referendum concerning the Oostzijde plans, including the construction of Forum. The analysis focuses on the objectives and intentions of the main stakeholders, as identified in Section 4.3. Employing both interview data and document analysis, this chapter engages with the second and third sub-questions. During the analysis, the focus is on both questions due to their analytical overlap. Toward the end of the chapter, the conclusion provides more separate answers.

6.1 Forum Groningen as a Spatial Intervention

The starting point for the Forum plans was the desire to breathe new life into the Oostzijde of the Grote Markt, which, as Dijkhuis, a senior project manager for the municipality of Groningen, remarks “had no function anymore and, well was actually nothing. Plus, [it] was completely dead (...) it did not have any appeal to the public.”²²⁹ He and Nijdam, the managing director of Forum, further note that while previous redevelopment efforts like the *Westerhaven*, Groninger Museum, and Waagstraat complex were successful, they redirected pedestrian flows away from the Grote Markt. The plans for the Oostzijde aimed to rectify this by introducing a program that would attract people, thereby creating new pedestrian flows and restoring the Grote Markt’s “central role as ‘the real heart of the city’.”²³⁰ Hence, the plans presented a spatial urban intervention to breathe new life into the Grote Markt and surrounding area, especially the Oostzijde, which was perceived as “such a prominent place” but a “neglected part” of the city.²³¹

The plans for the Oostzijde align with Groningen’s ideal of maintaining a compact city. This is exemplified in the book *Grote Markt Oostzijde* published by GRAS, a center for architecture in Groningen, in cooperation with the municipality of Groningen, which retrospectively tells the story of the Oostzijde redevelopment. The book poses some rhetorical questions about the

²²⁸ Ashworth, “Grote Markt Groningen,” 266.

²²⁹ Elzo Dijkhuis, interview by Rick Mogeozomp, March 19, 2024.

²³⁰ Michel Briene and Manfred Wienhoven, “Effectanalyse Ontwikkeling Grote Markt (Oostzijde) Update Ruimtelijk-Economische Impact voor de Stad Groningen” (Rotterdam: Ecorys; Commissioned by the Municipality of Groningen, April 2009), 9, <https://data.groningen.nl/dataset/groninger-forum-effectanalyse-ontwikkeling-grote-markt-oostzijde->.

²³¹ Marc Floor, “Groninger Forum, Actualisering Programma van Eisen” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, May 17, 2017), 2, <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Collegebrieven/Groninger-Forum-actualisering-Programma-van-Eisen>.

choices the city could make, such as whether “to maintain the center as the core of a vibrant and functionally compact city with the main public and cultural functions? Or [opt for] a more spread-out city, with several important public and cultural functions in the periphery?”²³² To answer these questions, the book states that “[i]n a city that has actively embraced the policy of the compact city since the eighties, these were not difficult questions.”²³³

The plans for Forum also align with Groningen’s tradition of intervening within the urban core to keep the city attractive. As Dijkhuis points out “to remain an attractive city, you need to add something new or make improvements every few years to keep it fresh. And so, in the past, uh, there have been a lot of developments. One of the developments was the *Verbindingskanaalzone*.”²³⁴ Other examples he mentions are the *Waagstraat* complex and *Westerhaven*. Regarding the latter, he notes:

That was a complete lost cause. There was prostitution, dealing, uh, junkies, uh, you name it. (...) It suffered greatly from crime, uh, burglaries, and, uh, that, yes, the prostitution, drugs, uh, crime. And then, when the *Westerhaven* came, the entire *Trox* location was bought, renovated, and new construction emerged [emphasis added].²³⁵

He discusses how the *Westerhaven* and surrounding areas were problematic, but that spatial intervention by the municipality with the new *Westerhaven* had ripple effects as some property owners saw an opportunity and developed new apartments. He also explains how patterns of pedestrian flows shifted, leading to an impact in the surrounding areas:

[A]ll the developments in the *Astraat* and *Brugstraat* [streets close to the *Westerhaven*; emphasis added], they are partly due to the construction of the *Westerhaven* because that created a new pedestrian route all at once. And when there’s a pedestrian route, uh, you saw businesses wanting to set up there. So, the better clothing stores immediately established themselves there.²³⁶

This historical example highlights a belief in Groningen that spatial intervention can help overcome social problems. As Dijkhuis situates Forum within the context of previous

²³² Dorsman et al., *Grote Markt Oostzijde*, 87.

²³³ Dorsman et al., 87.

²³⁴ Dijkhuis, interview.

²³⁵ Dijkhuis.

²³⁶ Dijkhuis.

successful urban regeneration efforts in Groningen's urban core, this philosophy directly applies to the redevelopments of the Oostzijde. It demonstrates that an important goal, framed as creating or redirecting pedestrian flows, also entails an element of social upgrading. In this process, things generally considered negative, such as crime, prostitution, and drugs, make way for things generally considered more positive, like trendy shops. The desired upgraded environment does not seem inclusive to everyone, as Dijkhuis notes that “[t]he only disgrace in that neighborhood [area next to Westerhaven] is still those, uh, those Turkish food spots on the corner, where there’s quite a bit of drug dealing going on around.”²³⁷ This example illustrates how agents like Dijkhuis render certain elements, such as Turkish food spots, undesirable, viewing them as detrimental to the area.

The Westerhaven example shows that in previous projects the municipality aimed to catalyze further developments. A 2009 Ecorys report, commissioned by the municipality, put forward a similar reasoning for Forum, suggesting that the municipality’s plans could act as a “catalyst for (other) real estate investments” in the Oostzijde or surrounding area.²³⁸ Similarly, in the interview, Dijkhuis remarked that the municipality wanted to ensure that it “makes investments that trigger further investments, providing impetus for the improvement of that part of the city and thereby encouraging others to also participate in that process.”²³⁹ Regarding Forum, he points to the success of this strategy, as these redevelopment efforts have triggered new private investments and developments in the area, such as *Merckt* and *Mercado*, referring to it as “one of the objectives” of the project.²⁴⁰ The next section provides a more detailed analysis of this aspect of the Oostzijde redevelopment efforts.

6.2 Forum Groningen as Catalyst for Further Development

This section examines how Forum’s construction is integral to the broader redevelopment initiatives in the Oostzijde. Recall that these plans emerged after the 2001 referendum, in which the residents of Groningen rejected the plans for the Noordzijde. Following this defeat, the municipality turned its attention to the Oostzijde. In contrast to the earlier Noordzijde attempts, where the initiative was more with local real estate owners such as ABN AMRO and Vendex, the municipality proactively acted in the redevelopment of the Oostzijde. Dijkhuis emphasizes that “[a]s a municipality, you sometimes also have to take control and take the lead.”²⁴¹

²³⁷ Dijkhuis.

²³⁸ Briene and Wienhoven, “Grote Markt (Oostzijde),” 14.

²³⁹ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁴⁰ Dijkhuis.

²⁴¹ Dijkhuis.

Consequently, the municipality assumed a significant role in the Oostzijde, for example, by developing several buildings itself in the area besides Forum, such as the new Vindicat building and several housing units. These municipal efforts align with what Harvey describes as entrepreneurial urbanism, where city governments assume an entrepreneurial role.²⁴²

The various developments (see Figure 1) by the municipality are scattered around the Nieuwe Markt, the new town square that is part of the Oostzijde redevelopment efforts. The book *Grote Markt Oostzijde* interestingly refers to this square as the newest chapter in Groningen’s series of characteristic historical squares—being the “*Vismarkt* (trade) - *Grote Markt* (governance) - *Martinikerhof* (religion) [emphasis added].”²⁴³ It presents the Nieuwe Markt as a place focused on culture, indicating the prominence of culture within the broader regeneration effort of the Oostzijde.

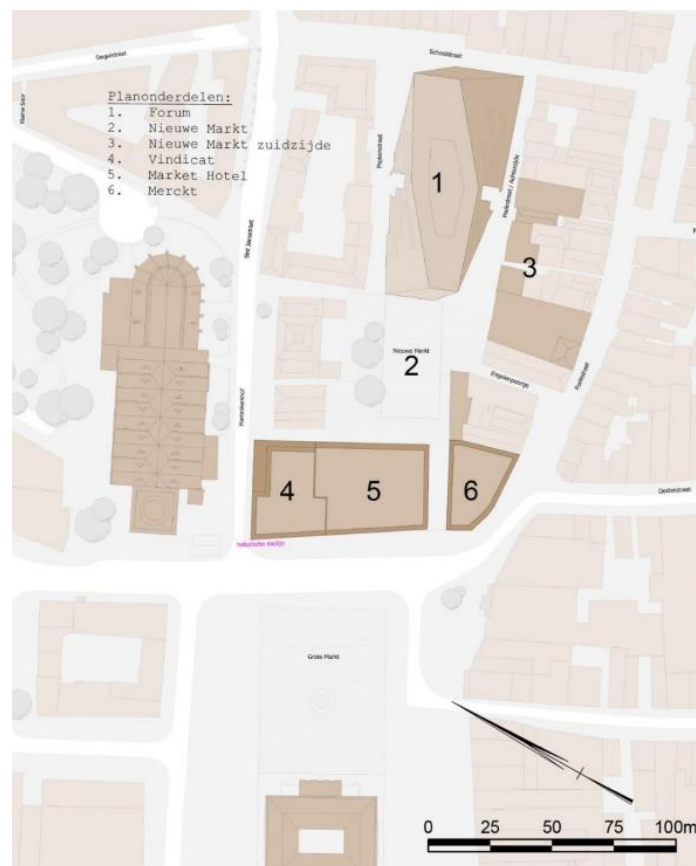


Figure 1. The various planonderdelen (sections of the plan) of the Oostzijde/Forum redevelopment. For clarification: 1) Forum 2) Nieuwe Markt 3) Nieuwe Markt Zuidzijde (South Side) 4) Vindicat 5) Market Hotel 6) Merckt.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Harvey, “Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism.”

²⁴³ Dorsman et al., *Grote Markt Oostzijde*, 27.

²⁴⁴ Elzo Dijkhuis and Bert Karsens, “Eindcalculatie Bouw- en Grondexploitatie Grote Markt Oostzijde/Forum Groningen” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, February 2023), 3,

While it is not possible to discuss all the individual buildings within the Oostzijde project, it is worth examining the building that was until recently occupied by the Italian food chain restaurant *Vapiano* (one of the developments within area 3 in Figure 1). The municipality developed the building and currently still owns it. The chain closed its doors due to rental costs that were too high compared to the generated turnover, even though the company received discounts on rent from the municipality for several years.²⁴⁵ Regarding the vacant status, Dijkhuis notes that it is a good thing the municipality still owns the building and can decide who the next occupant will be. He notes that another owner

would have contracted the first person who offered a good rent price as soon as possible. Well, we're not going to do that. We're not just going to contract the first person, uh, because then you end up with, uh, hamburger, like a fast-food chain occupying it. We do want to try to get quality in there. Something that has a bit of prestige, because it is very important for [the Nieuw Markt] that [the building] gets a, uh, good fill.²⁴⁶

This abstract shows that the municipality desires to promote a certain kind of image for the square and its surroundings. Certain types of establishments would be detrimental to this image. This desire was already the case when the building was developed by the municipality in 2015-2016. The municipality decided not to renew the rental contract with former occupants *Hasret* (a Turkish food spot) and *Café 't Vaatje* (a café primarily used by students) of the demolished buildings that existed before the *Vapiano* building was constructed. The local online news outlet *Sikkom* reported that the municipality thought “it could be better, more beautiful, more appropriate to the area development that the municipality [had] in mind,” sacrificing “two thriving businesses.”²⁴⁷ Instead, the municipality wanted something like *Vapiano*, as it “is especially popular among young people,” seeing it as “the dreamed catalyst for the Nieuwe

<https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Raadsvoorstel/Eindcalculatie-bouw-en-grondexploitatie-Grote-Markt-oostzijde-Forum-Groningen.pdf>.

²⁴⁵ Bart Breij, “Vapiano in Binnenstad Groningen Gesloten: ‘We Konden Dit Pand Niet Rendabel Krijgen,’” *RTV Noord*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/economie/1139353/vapiano-in-binnenstad-groningen-gesloten-we-konden-dit-pand-niet-rendabel-krijgen-update>; Tristan Braakman, “Stad Verwacht Snel Opvolger voor Vapiano, VVD Wil dat Gemeente Pand Verkoopt,” *RTV Noord*, March 21, 2024, sec. politiek, <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/politiek/1143049/stad-verwacht-snel-opvolger-voor-vapiano-vvd-wil-dat-gemeente-pand-verkoopt>.

²⁴⁶ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁴⁷ Willem Groeneveld, “Reconstructie: Vapiano Leefde 7 Jaar op Pof van Gemeente en Laat Stad met een Schuld Achter,” *Sikkom*, March 15, 2024, <https://www.sikkom.nl/stadsontwikkeling/Reconstructie-Vapiano-leefde-7-jaar-op-pof-van-gemeente-en-laat-stad-met-een-schuld-achter-28944489.html>.

Markt South Side.”²⁴⁸ This intention to replace older businesses with trendier establishments like Vapiano aimed to create a more appealing, modern, and dynamic urban environment that aligns with the CCP.

As of writing this thesis, the municipality has not found a new permanent occupant yet. However, the building is currently hosting the Art Library of *Kunstpunt* (Art Point) Groningen, a pop-up space for Northern Dutch artists, for three months.²⁴⁹ Since the organization is a non-profit and the contract is temporary, it is improbable that the municipality will receive significant rent or revenues from this arrangement. This setup, along with Dijkhuis’s emphasis on the need for quality in buildings at the Nieuwe Markt, demonstrates the vision for the Nieuwe Markt the municipality has. It should become a hub for creativity and culture that aligns with commercial interests as it prioritizes establishments that enhance the area’s prestige, rather than focusing on inclusivity and diversity.

Turning now to the broader impact, the redevelopment of the Oostzijde has catalyzed private initiatives and investments not only in the Oostzijde but also in the Noordzijde and two streets that feed into the Grote Markt: *Oosterstraat* and *Poelestraat*. Dijkhuis states that “more than a hundred million has already been invested by private individuals in the immediate area.”²⁵⁰ These private initiatives have helped to overcome the previous gridlock concerning the plans for the Noordzijde in 2001. By shifting focus to the Oostzijde, the municipality has also indirectly achieved its goal of regenerating the Noordzijde area, where several new developments have now occurred. The most notable developments include *Het Groot Handelshuis* (the Big Trading House), *Mercado*, *the Warehouse* in the Noordzijde, and *Merckt* and *the Market Hotel* in the Oostzijde, along with *Spot On* and the previously discussed *Vapiano* building adjacent to the Nieuwe Markt.

It is worth noting that many of these developments have been spearheaded by a single Dutch real estate developer, MWPO, responsible for projects such as *Merckt*, *Het Groot Handelshuis*, *Mercado*, *the Warehouse*, and *Spot On*.²⁵¹ MWPO describes itself as “a contemporary real estate developer, [choosing] top locations, distinctive and iconic buildings.”²⁵² While these developments are privately driven, the municipality has played a guiding role in several projects, as highlighted in the interview with Dijkhuis and a letter to the city council about

²⁴⁸ Groeneveld.

²⁴⁹ “From Pasta to Palettes: Art Takes Center Stage at Former Vapiano Restaurant in Groningen,” *The Northern Times*, May 3, 2024, sec. Arts, <https://northerntimes.nl/from-pasta-to-palettes-art-takes-center-stage-at-former-vapiano-restaurant-in-groningen/>.

²⁵⁰ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁵¹ “Projecten,” MWPO, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://mwpo.nl/projecten/fellingen/>.

²⁵² “Over MWPO,” MWPO, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://mwpo.nl/over/>.

Merckt. For instance, Dijkhuis mentions that MWPO bought the properties from the municipality. This meant that as the seller of some properties, especially in the Oostzijde, the municipality was able to make specific agreements with MWPO for developments like Merckt.²⁵³

However, not all the land for the properties developed by MWPO was purchased from the municipality. For instance, the land for its largest project, Het Groot Handelshuis, was not municipally owned.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, for this project, there is a collaboration between the municipality and MWPO, as demonstrated by the public bicycle parking facility in the basement of Het Groot Handelshuis.²⁵⁵ Although developed by MWPO, it was later purchased by the municipality, aligning with Groningen's goal to reduce bicycle parking congestion in the city center.²⁵⁶ Additionally, the municipality is actively facilitating the redevelopment of *Rodeweeshuisstraat* and *Stalstraat* (streets near Mercado, the Warehouse, and Het Groot Handelshuis) because their layout did “not align anymore with the changing usage due to various developments.”²⁵⁷ The collaboration between MWPO and the municipality aligns with the city's historical tradition of using a market-oriented approach with strategic spatial interventions to attract private investors and regenerate urban areas, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The developments by the municipality and MWPO are noteworthy in the context of the “*Bestemming Binnenstad*” (Destination Inner City) document, adopted in 2016. In the document, the municipality observes that “[l]iving in the city center has increasingly become the domain of students and other young people in recent years,” further stating that they “are convinced that it would be beneficial for the city center if other age groups also settled there.”²⁵⁸ As part of the strategy to bring more diversity to the city center, the municipality wants “to encourage developers and property owners to also explore development opportunities for other target groups.”²⁵⁹

²⁵³ Elzo Dijkhuis, “Uitslag Ontwikkelcompetitie Hoekpand Grote Markt” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, November 23, 2016), <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Collegebrief/Uitslag-ontwikkelcompetitie-hoekpand-Grote-Markt.pdf>.

²⁵⁴ Erik van der Veen, “Oude V&D Groningen Ondergaat Miljoenenoperatie en Gaat Verder als Het Groot Handelshuis,” *Dagblad van het Noorden*, November 1, 2019, <https://dvh.nl/groningen/Oude-VD-Groningen-ondergaat-miljoenenoperatie-en-gaat-verder-als-Het-Groot-Handelshuis-24980365.html>.

²⁵⁵ Gert van Akkeren, “Nieuwe Fietsenstalling Grote Markt Noordzijde Kost 5,4 Miljoen,” *OOG*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.oogtv.nl/2020/09/nieuwe-fietsenstalling-grote-markt-noordzijde-kost-54-miljoen/>.

²⁵⁶ “Bestemming Binnenstad” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, January 2016), 56–57, <https://ruimtevoortou.groningen.nl/media/1/boekje-bestemming-binnenstad.pdf>.

²⁵⁷ Roeland van der Schaaf, “Vaststelling Definitief Ontwerp en Uitvoeringskrediet Rodeweeshuisstraat” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, November 10, 2021), 1, <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Raadsvoorstel/Vaststelling-definitief-ontwerp-en-uitvoeringskrediet-Rodeweeshuisstraat.pdf>.

²⁵⁸ “Bestemming Binnenstad,” 20.

²⁵⁹ “Bestemming Binnenstad,” 41.

Asked about this desire to create more diversity in the demographic of the inner city, Dijkhuis responds:

Well, that desire is certainly there, the demand, you see, from the public itself, uh, from the city as well. [The municipality is] currently building three apartments here for the higher segment [near Forum]. (...) Mercado was then also built because Merckt was such a success. Before that, people didn't dare to realize such expensive properties for commercial rental in the city center. (...) Here [pointing to Spot On on the scale model], uh, large apartments are now being built for, uh, well, not students, so to speak. We don't realize that, but MWPO is doing it here now, they bought those properties from us with the requirement that those kinds of things be built, not just rental [targeted at students].²⁶⁰

Combining this abstract with the preceding discussion, it is clear that the municipality collaborates with real estate developers on recent developments in the city center, particularly on the Oostzijde and Noordzijde. The most notable real estate developer, MWPO, has been involved in most of these projects, which do not include space for student housing, such as rooms or studios. Instead, the focus is on more expensive housing options, including “luxury apartments and an exclusive penthouse,” aimed at creating a more diverse demographic composition of the inner city.²⁶¹ Diversity is thus understood as attracting more affluent communities with high disposable incomes—groups that have not traditionally inhabited the inner city. According to Dijkhuis, this approach is largely driven by public demand for higher-segment housing. While this might be true, it is important to note that the demographic targeted typically becomes the demographic attracted: building high-end housing tends to draw wealthier individuals. This is illustrated by the example of *Kop van Zuid* in Rotterdam, where the municipality, working together with the private sector, successfully attracted more affluent residents by increasing higher-end housing, transforming the city's demographic profile.²⁶² Dijkhuis's abstract also illustrates how the municipality plays a significant role by developing apartments in the more expensive segment itself. Additionally, it highlights that, due to the success of Merckt, MWPO has gone on to develop other buildings like Mercado. This

²⁶⁰ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁶¹ “Mercado,” MWPO, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://mwpo.nl/projecten/mercado-groningen/>.

²⁶² Brian Doucet, Ronald van Kempen, and Jan van Weesep, “‘We’re a Rich City with Poor People’: Municipal Strategies of New-Build Gentrification in Rotterdam and Glasgow,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 43, no. 6 (June 2011): 1438–54, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a43470>.

underscores the spillover effects that were one of the objectives of the Forum/Oostzijde plans, with public investments leading to private investments in the surrounding areas.

The various developments by MWPO have a certain trendy vibe, with the initial concept for Merckt and Mercado to build food market/hall-like establishments.²⁶³ These plans failed, with Mercado now hosting a Douwe Egberts café and a tapas restaurant, and Merckt remaining unoccupied except for an expensive rooftop restaurant as of May 2024. Regarding the vacant status of Merckt, in an interview, Dijkhuis suggested that while MWPO could potentially lease it to an establishment like McDonald's and earn money, the municipality does not want this as it "wants quality, [as] that's what we've agreed with [MWPO]."²⁶⁴

However, on May 24, 2024, a new concept for Merckt was announced: *Wijck*, a mix of hospitality venues including a grand café, bars, karaoke booths, and a menu with dishes from all over the world using local ingredients. It is supposed to open at the end of 2024, aiming at "a broad target group from 25 to approximately 45 years old."²⁶⁵ With its globally oriented menu, *Wijck* has a cosmopolitan outlook. The various elements indicate that, in contrast to McDonald's, *Wijck* projects a trendy image and focuses on young professionals, aligning with the CCP. This demonstrates how culture, facilitated through Forum, plays a significant role in catalyzing changes in Groningen's city center. Besides tangible changes, it also enhances Groningen's image as a culturally vibrant city.

Forum is also part of a broader vision for developing the city center, where the desire for a more diverse demographic essentially means creating more space for wealthy people with developments like Mercado and Merckt, where MWPO plays a significant role in offering opportunities for more affluent living. To attract such individuals, Forum is essential, as is an attractive urban environment, exemplified by redesigning the Rodeweeshuisstraat and Grote Markt, and ensuring that the commercial spaces within new developments convey a certain quality that appeals to the desired demographic.

From the analysis, it seems that the redevelopment efforts have CCP written all over them, which is perhaps best exemplified by MWPO director Kristian Capelle, who notes how

²⁶³ "Politieke Zorgen over Nieuwe Invulling van Markthal in Mercado-complex," January 4, 2023, <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/987382/politieke-zorgen-over-nieuwe-invulling-van-markthal-in-mercado-complex>; Marijke Brouwer and Willem Groeneveld, "Stad Merckt Verdomd Weinig van Merckt. Ondanks Beloftes Heersen Leegte en Stof op Triple A-Spot," *Sikkom*, July 20, 2023, <https://www.sikkom.nl/actueel/Stad-merckt-verdomd-weinig-van-Merckt.-Ondanks-beloftes-heersen-leepte-en-stof-op-triple-A-spot-28551381.html>.

²⁶⁴ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁶⁵ Willem Groeneveld, "Merckt Wordt Wijck en Gaat in Herfst Open: 'Beroemdste Wijken ter Wereld Komen tot Leven aan de Grote Markt,'" *Sikkom*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.sikkom.nl/grunnigids/horeca/Merckt-wordt-Wijck-en-gaat-in-herfst-open-Beroemdste-wijken-ter-wereld-komen-tot-leven-aan-de-Grote-Markt-29055045.html>.

“[e]mployers are seeking the vibrancy of the city” and “[w]ith the arrival of the Forum and the Nieuwe Markt around it, and the redesign of the Grote Markt (...) a new dynamic is created that attracts other new developments. This process reinforces itself.”²⁶⁶ Therefore, it is evident that within this broader context of urban redevelopment efforts in Groningen, the urban planning policies of the municipality reflect CCP thinking. However, as the literature review showed, several types of CLUR strategies in various contexts exist with diverse outcomes, so it is necessary to analyze what Forum itself does for the city.

6.3 Forum Groningen as an Accessible Cultural Institution

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the functional usage of Forum was vague during the 2005 referendum. Later, for the 2007 design competition, the municipality set forth requirements for the proposals.²⁶⁷ It envisioned a multifunctional building with four central functions: a museum, library, film theater, and archival presentation, offering space to foster continuous activity and social interaction, contributing to the city’s economic vitality.²⁶⁸ To enhance Groningen’s appeal, the building’s architecture should be visually stimulating, with a design that complements its usage while remaining flexible.

Regarding the primary focus of Forum’s programming, there have been two phases. Nijdam notes that initially, the focus was on history in conjunction with current events. This is evident from the following part of the vision stated in the document called “*Forumvisie*” (Vision for Forum) in 2011: “From a historical perspective, because to understand the present, you need to look back to the past, with an eye on the future.”²⁶⁹ The initial inclusion of an institution such as the *Groninger Archieven* (Groninger Archives) fits this vision with a focus on history. However, when Nijdam became managing director of Forum in 2013, he and his team adopted a different perspective, with the following reasoning in mind:

[I]f you’re placing a new building right in the heart of the city that really needs to draw attention, then you need to look forward and not backward. Because history, um, with history

²⁶⁶ Kristiaan Capelle, quoted in Van der Veen, “Oude V&D Groningen.”

²⁶⁷ The municipality organized a public competition on Forum’s design of Forum. Both the expert panel and citizens voted in majority for the current design out of seven selected. Dorsman et al., *Grote Markt Oostzijde*, 101–17.

²⁶⁸ “Planontwikkeling Grote Markt.”

²⁶⁹ “Forumvisie” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, October 14, 2011), 4, <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Forumvisie-O-W-en-raad-nov-2011.pdf>.

(...) everyone thinks it's very important that it all is preserved, but it always attracts very little audience.²⁷⁰

The focus thus shifted away from history as it was not deemed appealing enough to attract enough visitors. While the focus on history was dropped, the idea that Forum would represent something innovative remained. Instead of merely relocating existing organizations into a new building, “[t]he focus of Forum is on realizing an innovative concept that goes beyond the current roles of the intended occupants/users,” aiming to achieve synergy between the different functions.²⁷¹ Furthermore, the B&W’s cover letter to the 2011 vision states that the building “will not be an elitist art temple but a central place for all Stadgers [inhabitants of Groningen] and visitors from outside the city.”²⁷² Regarding this, Dijkhuis notes that “Forum is built for the average citizen of the city,” and Nijdam describes it as “a reflection of how the city is [demographically] structured”²⁷³ To ensure broad accessibility and inclusivity, Forum offers many free activities and options within the building, like workshops focusing on digital and literacy skills.

Workshops like these align with Nijdam’s view of Forum’s mission:

We’ve always said we’re just going to create a very accessible building where people feel welcome. (...) We simply wanted to be a place where you can easily enter, fostering cross-pollination between functions. (...) [W]e see it as our mission to inspire, to elevate people intellectually or on an inspirational level, or to spark ideas in them. (...) So, it’s really a cultural department store, just a place where you enter, where you can experience culture in various ways, culture in a very broad sense, right. You can experience culture not only with a complex film but also by learning how to draw for children or being creative, so a wide range of cultural activities.²⁷⁴

Further clarifying, “[i]t’s simply about enabling the lower group to connect with changes in the world and inspiring the upper group to get more out of all these changes.”²⁷⁵ This vision aims to create a welcoming place for Stadgers to seek education, get inspired, and grow, having

²⁷⁰ Dirk Nijdam, interview by Rick Mogezoomp, March 12, 2024.

²⁷¹ “Forumvisie,” 6.

²⁷² “Forumvisie,” 2.

²⁷³ Dijkhuis, interview; Nijdam, interview.

²⁷⁴ Nijdam, interview.

²⁷⁵ Nijdam.

“a broadly appealing program.”²⁷⁶ Forum strives to provide a diverse range of programs, from broadcasting Formula One Grand Prix events featuring popular Belgian-Dutch racer Max Verstappen, to a live podcast about the local FC Groningen football team, Eurovision viewing parties, or a *Leesclub Makkelijk Lezen* (Easy Reading Book Club).²⁷⁷ This approach highlights a social sustainability perspective towards CLUR, as the municipality and organization of Forum Groningen envision the building as a space open to everyone, from which all can benefit, for example, by increasing social capital through workshops but also having more fun activities such as viewing sports matches.

With this broad range of activities, Forum seems different from a traditional library, exemplified by labels such as the living room of the city or cultural warehouse.²⁷⁸ In its early stages, Forum was sometimes compared to the Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (OBA, public library of Amsterdam). This comparison is noteworthy, as in their discussion on the usage of public libraries in CLUR, Skot-Hanson, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Jochumsen refer to OBA as an example and state, “OBA is experience-oriented, and it underpins the experience city” and “is probably the most prominent placemaker library in Europe.”²⁷⁹ OBA serves as an early example of a top-down CLUR strategy in the regeneration of the former industrial Eastern Docklands in Amsterdam, which Robert Kloosterman refers to as “an example of a successful transition from an industrial to a post-industrial use.”²⁸⁰

Regarding the comparison to OBA, Nijdam said that Forum differs from it. He states that OBA is:

just a library and we, I’ve always said, if you come in here and think oh, this is just a nice library, then we’ve done everything wrong. [Forum] just shouldn’t become a library. We should have all the library functions, but it should not be like, oh yes, this is the new library (...) I just want a place where when you enter, you think, ah, this could be something for me. You know that you become curious about what it has to offer. And that you really feel invited to wander around the building and make a kind of journey. (...) [A] library of course has a lot of associations that many people don’t find very pleasant: dusty, musty.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ Floor, “Actualisering Programma van Eisen,” 10.

²⁷⁷ Nijdam, interview; “Leesclub Makkelijk Lezen,” Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/agenda/leesclub-makkelijk-lezen>.

²⁷⁸ “Prijzen voor Forum”; ‘Woonkamer van de Stad.’

²⁷⁹ Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Jochumsen, “Role of Public Libraries,” 13.

²⁸⁰ Kloosterman, “Planning for Creativity,” 79.

²⁸¹ Nijdam, interview.

While these statements suggest that Nijdam does not want people to perceive Forum as a regular library, he does acknowledge that it must fulfill library functions—a requirement mentioned later in the interview as mandated by the municipality. For him, Forum should be more like a journey, which actually aligns with OBA being experience-oriented. However, Nijdam views OBA as a relatively normal library, which he aims to transcend with Forum. Perhaps more fitting is how White characterizes living rooms based on buildings similar to Forum in Tilburg and Dundee, a point further discussed in Chapter 8.

6.4 Forum Groningen as an Engine for Urban Attractiveness and Creativity

As Forum functions as an accessible cultural hub, it aims to strengthen the cultural infrastructure of the city and the wider region.²⁸² In this context, the municipality continuously recognizes how “[c]ulture contributes to a good living and business climate and has a positive influence on the economy.”²⁸³ The previously mentioned Ecorys report also refers to this, stating that the regeneration of the Oostzijde enhances the existing cultural and entertainment identity elements of the eastern part of the Groningen city center, thus boosting the city center’s competitiveness.²⁸⁴ The development of Forum thereby boosts Groningen’s image as a culturally vibrant city. Nijdam echoes this point about the importance of culture for attracting people and shaping the image of a city, making a comparison to another Dutch city, Almere:

[I]f you’re talking about the city where you’d like to live and you ask someone why, they almost always mention cultural amenities. Or that it’s a beautiful city or has a nice downtown area. (...) For example, if I were to say to you, ‘Well, Almere seems like a very beautiful city,’ people would always look at you a bit strangely. Because they just have that image. Many people don’t even know it well. They just have the image, it’s all new construction, you know, large, empty squares. And, uh, there is indeed a beautiful building. That entire city center was developed by Koolhaas, after all, the best architect the Netherlands has ever produced. Yet everyone has the idea that you wouldn’t want to be caught dead in Almere, so to speak. And that’s based on the lack of iconic buildings.²⁸⁵

²⁸² “Kadernota Cultuur 2021-2028: Kunst en Cultuur voor Iedereen” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, October 30, 2019), 16, <https://gemeente.groningen.nl/file/kadernota-cultuur-2021-2028-kunst-en-cultuur-voor-iedereen>.

²⁸³ “Kadernota Cultuur 2021-2028,” 13.

²⁸⁴ Briene and Wienhoven, “Grote Markt (Oostzijde),” 10.

²⁸⁵ Nijdam, interview.

This abstract illustrates that within the Netherlands, many people perceive Almere as dull and artificial—not a place many would want to visit or live. Nijdam points out that this perception might be inaccurate, as many, in reality, do not know what the city looks like. He partly attributes this perception to the lack of iconic buildings. Translating this insight to Groningen means that for Nijdam, iconic structures like Forum enhance Groningen’s cultural image, making it a more desirable and vibrant place to live and visit.

Dijkhuis shares Nijdam’s view that establishing Forum is crucial in upgrading the cultural appeal of Groningen. While underscoring the importance of culture in creating an attractive urban environment, he also points to a problem more specific to Groningen:

[C]ulture is a condition for establishing oneself. And if you make sure that you have something vibrant in terms of culture in your city, then that’s simply a, uh, yes, a big plus.

Mogezomp: A reason people want to live in your city?

Dijkhuis: Want to continue living in your city.

Mogezomp: Want to continue living?

Dijkhuis: Because previously, we always had to deal with a brain drain, you know. Back then everyone who studied here. They immediately went to the [Randstad] because they could earn more there.²⁸⁶

From this exchange, it is evident that Dijkhuis sees a significant role for culture in creating an attractive city to live in. Additionally, he notes that in the case of Groningen, it is not necessarily about attracting new residents but rather about having people stay in Groningen after completing their studies. To understand this dynamic, it is necessary to consider Groningen’s relatively large student population. So, when Dijkhuis refers to a brain drain, he means that many young people used to come to the city to study but would leave after completing their degrees. Therefore, he points to an inter-Dutch competition where Groningen contends with other Dutch cities, mainly in the Randstad, for talent. He argues that there was previously a significant brain drain from Groningen, but that this pattern has changed. Dijkhuis

²⁸⁶ Dijkhuis, interview.

notes that besides salary, other factors are crucial in the decisions of young people about where to settle. He hints at efforts in Groningen, such as Forum and earlier developments like the Groninger Museum, which have positively contributed to reversing this brain drain.

This brain drain point is also relevant to how Groningen portrays itself as a City of Talent.²⁸⁷ This is part of the city branding strategy employed by the municipality of Groningen and the province. For instance, the municipal “*Kadernota Cultuur 2017-2020*” (Cultural Framework Document) mentions the following: “[w]ith its many knowledge and cultural institutions, highly educated population, and constant influx of young (international) creative talent, Groningen is rightly called a ‘City of Talent’.”²⁸⁸ The strategy emphasizes aspects such as entrepreneurship, research, and innovation. Another document, the 2006-2010 municipal coalition program, sees the profiling of Groningen as a City of Talent as a key area of cultural policy and states that “[c]reativity, like knowledge and innovation, is globally recognized as the raw material for urban development. Therefore, Groningen has the potential to be a ‘creative city.’ Culture, besides its intrinsic value, is the engine for spatial, social, cultural, and economic innovations.”²⁸⁹

Around the same time, a document called “*Creative Stad: Groningen=Innovatief*” (Creative City: Groningen=Innovative) was published by B&W in 2007, in which they explained their vision for Groningen as a creative city, referring to the City of Talent as well.²⁹⁰ Referring to Florida, the text explicitly recognizes the explanatory value of the conditions for attracting creative individuals as predictive factors for economic growth. The document states that Groningen is in a favorable position regarding these conditions as it is a tolerant urban environment with an “attractive living environment” and “tolerance and space for alternative lifestyles.”²⁹¹ It further underscores the importance of actively needing to maintain this position to further strengthen it. Regarding efforts to strengthen this position, it talks about several policy

²⁸⁷ Other cities also brand themselves as “Cities of Talent.” For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, particularly in the context of internationalization in medium-sized European cities, including Groningen and others, see Willem van Winden and Marian Counihan, eds., *Cities for Talent: Good Practices for Internationalisation in Medium-Sized European Cities* (Groningen: University of Groningen Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.21827/6270dd2d5e9b0>.

²⁸⁸ “Kadernota Cultuur 2017-2020 Cultuurstad Groningen: City of Talent” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, September 18, 2015), 5, <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Kadernota-cultuur-2017-2020-2.pdf>.

²⁸⁹ “Sterk, Sociaal, Duurzaam: Collegeprogramma Gemeente Groningen 2006-2010” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, March 29, 2006), 13, <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Vergaderingen/College-onderhandelingen/2021/29-oktober/16:30/Collegeprogramma-2006-2010-Sterk-sociaal-duurzaam.pdf>.

²⁹⁰ Greet Sietsema, “Creatieve Stad: Groningen=Innovatief Beleidsbrief Versterking Creatieve Stad Groningen” (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, March 14, 2007), <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Creatieve-stad.pdf>.

²⁹¹ Sietsema, 2.

initiatives, such as the City of Talent, which started around the time of the writing of the document.

The document also talks about a “creative corridor” and

[i]n the middle of this corridor, the Groninger Forum will soon emerge. It will serve as the showcase for the innovative city, a place where information and knowledge about the past, present, and future across various fields will be presented to a diverse audience. The concept of the Forum is novel, and its substantive development and shaping are quintessentially creative processes that will draw significant attention to the city.²⁹²

This sentiment is a common thread for Forum as still 2023, the municipality stated that Forum plays an important role within the profiling of the city as it is “a defining icon [that] symbolizes the growth of Groningen into a modern European city.”²⁹³ Similarly, the 2011 municipal vision for Forum states that “[it] symbolizes the entrepreneurial spirit of Groningen.”²⁹⁴ Within this whole conception, the synergy between the different institutions, which was briefly mentioned in the previous section, is a relevant element as it allows creative people to meet with each other.²⁹⁵ This was also underscored by the 2007 *Creatieve Stad* document, which mentions the necessity to create spaces where creative people have the opportunity to meet each other. Similarly, Dijkhuis highlights that “Forum is essentially a breeding ground, in my opinion, where people come together and influence each other.”²⁹⁶

Regarding this aspect, it is noteworthy to point out that Forum has initiatives for promoting upcoming talents, such as the monthly *Op de Bühne* (On the Stage), where Forum provides space for creative initiatives from the city and surrounding areas.²⁹⁷ Another example is the *Nieuw Gronings Schrijftalent* (New Groningen Writing Talent) annual competition, where participants submit their book, which is then lent out to subscribers of the Forum library for a year and judged.²⁹⁸ At the end of the year, the book rated best by the subscribers wins and is included in Forum’s collection and available for loan at all libraries in the province of Groningen.

²⁹² Sietsema, 5.

²⁹³ Dijkhuis and Karsens, “Eindcalculatie,” 4.

²⁹⁴ “Forumvisie,” 10.

²⁹⁵ Sietsema, “Creatieve Stad,” 3.

²⁹⁶ Dijkhuis, interview.

²⁹⁷ “Op de Bühne,” Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/agenda/op-de-buhne>.

²⁹⁸ “Nieuw Gronings Schrijftalent,” Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/nieuw-gronings-schrijftalent>.

The preceding paragraphs of the analysis highlight some of the prevailing ideas that existed, and perhaps still exist, among the local political establishment and municipal officials, and most likely commercial developers. They provide pertinent evidence that during the critical phase of the Forum/Oostzijde project when the plans transitioned from the initial project document for the 2005 referendum to the first comprehensive plans for the vision of Forum, ideas from the CCP were circulating within the municipal organization. This was a pivotal period, marked by the 2007 public competition for Forum 's design, where seven designs were selected by the municipality for consideration. Additionally, in 2008, the municipality published a business plan for Forum and in 2011 it outlined a comprehensive vision for Forum.²⁹⁹

The influence of Florida's CCP is not surprising, given its status as a dominant paradigm among urban planners. This influence is perhaps best exemplified by the 2007 *Creative Stad* document, though the ideas still find resonance with the Groningen municipality, as evidenced by initiatives like "City of Talent" and related concepts such as "city of knowledge," as mentioned in Groningen's internationalization policy for 2021-2024.³⁰⁰ It demonstrates how the municipality recognizes the significant roles that creativity and knowledge play in shaping the post-industrial city and is actively striving to create the appropriate urban environment, for instance, by establishing cultural institutions like Forum. Within this context the role of Forum is twofold. Firstly, it enhances the overall attractiveness of Groningen as a place to live, impacting both tangible and intangible aspects (such as improving the city's image). Secondly, Forum serves as a hub where creative individuals can meet and exchange ideas, which resonates with its vision to inspire people as highlighted by Nijdam.

6.5 Forum Groningen as an Economic Booster

The economic dimension of Forum is visible in various aspects of its development. As an objective of Forum is to enhance Groningen's urban appeal, it also supports the goal of strengthening the city's economic base, as drivers of the post-industrial, knowledge- and creativity-driven economy seek to live in a culturally vibrant city. Similarly, the 2009 Ecorys report discusses several potential economic effects of the project, such as the potential for the creative industries to become a new economic pillar for the city, increased visitor numbers, the

²⁹⁹ "'Eenheid in Verscheidenheid' Voorlopig Bedrijfsplan Groninger Forum" (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, October 15, 2008), <https://gemeenteraad.groningen.nl/Documenten/Bedrijfsplan-Groninger-Forum.pdf>; "Forumvisie."

³⁰⁰ "Internationalization Policy 2021-2024" (Groningen: Municipality of Groningen, 2020), <https://gemeente.groningen.nl/file/international-groningen-internationalization-policy-2021-2024>.

creation of new permanent jobs, and a boost in consumer spending in the city center.³⁰¹ Furthermore, in the interview, Dijkhuis points out several economic metrics that illustrate the success of the redevelopment of the Oostzijde. He notes that the project has created 150 additional jobs in the city center, representing a 1.5% increase. This highlights the economic reasoning that motivated Forum's establishment and helped justify the project.

The Ecorys report also discusses the enhanced touristic appeal of Groningen.³⁰² This tourism aspect resonates with how the municipality envisions Forum "as a landmark, having an appeal that reaches far beyond the city and attracts new visitors to Groningen."³⁰³ From the interview with Nijdam, it becomes clear that the rationale here is that while the Groninger Museum already attracted tourists, there was a need for an additional attraction to encourage longer stays. Regarding people coming from outside the city, he mentions:

When you just see how many people come from outside [the city], just because it's nice to go to the Forum. Especially on weekends, you can see many people here taking photos, really coming here from outside, and at the same time, you also see the surrounding area developing very well. [The Market] hotel is super successful, uh, the local restaurants really benefit. (...) People also grab coffee, they walk past the supermarket, and they uh, see a pair of pants in a shop window. That's how it goes, so everyone benefits from [Forum's] appeal.³⁰⁴

This indicates that Forum attracts additional people who find the building (visually) appealing. It also speaks to the pull factor of Forum and its effects on the surrounding area. Here, one can also see that the creation of pedestrian flows has an economic rationale, as these flows bring more potential customers to the area surrounding Forum.

Returning to the tourism aspect, city branding efforts in Groningen direct attention to Forum as a top-ten place to visit in the city and province.³⁰⁵ Moreover, since 2015, there has been a significant increase in tourism in the province of Groningen, particularly from international visitors, many of whom are German.³⁰⁶ By 2030, a near doubling of short stays (two to four

³⁰¹ Briene and Wienhoven, "Grote Markt (Oostzijde)," 10–14.

³⁰² Briene and Wienhoven, 14.

³⁰³ "Forumvisie," 10.

³⁰⁴ Nijdam, interview.

³⁰⁵ "Top 10 Bezienswaardigheden Groningen," Visit Groningen, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://www.visitgroningen.nl/nl/doen/top-10-bezienswaardigheden>.

³⁰⁶ Veerle Croonen, "Twee Keer Zoveel Toeristen in Groningen in 2030. Maar Kunnen We Ze ook Kwijt?," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, February 23, 2024, <https://dvh.nl/groningen/stad/article28914099.ece>.

days) is expected. The same article also mentions that “culture is booming” in Groningen with attractions like ESNS, the Groninger Museum, and several major music concerts.³⁰⁷ Tinus Akkermans of the *Groningen Gidsenteam* (Guides Team) explains that “Groningen has made great progress with the opening of the Forum.”³⁰⁸

This shows that culture, through Forum, as well as ESNS and the Groninger Museum, is crucial in attracting more visitors to the city and province. Tourism is thus seen as a beneficial force that improves the city, similar to how the Guggenheim in Bilbao was utilized as an urban regeneration strategy. This also speaks to the role of Forum as an icon in setting Groningen apart from other Dutch cities as an attractive place to live, as suggested by the previously mentioned comparison Nijdam makes with Almere. While the objective for tourism is not directly aligned with CCP thinking, as CCP is more about attracting the creative class to settle in the city rather than tourists, both Nijdam and Dijkhuis acknowledge that a culturally vibrant city is a reason people want to live there. For instance, Nijdam suggests that creating a culturally vibrant urban environment also bolsters the city’s tourist appeal, stating, “it is all the same to me” whether Forum makes Groningen more attractive to tourists or potential residents.³⁰⁹ Thus, the tourist motive of Forum goes hand in hand with the motive of cultural amenities for residents in a city.

6.5 Conclusion

Using the preceding sections on the intentions and objectives of Forum, it is possible to answer the second and third sub-questions, reflecting CLUR and the principles of the CCP in the context of Forum. Regarding the second sub-question, the municipality envisioned plans for Forum and the Oostzijde as a spatial intervention to regenerate the area. This aligns with Groningen’s historical pattern of the compact city and employing spatial interventions to enhance the city center’s functionality and appeal, as previously seen with the Westerhaven and the Groninger Museum. As the main stakeholder, the municipality of Groningen sought to breathe new life into the Oostzijde to enhance its appeal and functionality, aiming to rectify the pedestrian flow diversions caused by previous projects and catalyze private investment in the area. To achieve this, the municipality took a proactive stance by undertaking some of the development itself and collaborating with real estate developers, especially MWPO. The municipality foresaw the creation of a fourth town square, the Nieuwe Markt, focused on

³⁰⁷ Croonen.

³⁰⁸ Tinus Akkermans, quoted in Croonen.

³⁰⁹ Nijdam, interview.

culture, featuring an architecturally appealing building that houses the newly formed cultural hub—Forum. Therefore, the redevelopment of the Oostzijde is an example of a CLUR strategy, as the use of culture is a central element.

Moving to the third sub-question, the redevelopment efforts also reflect the principles of the CCP. By enhancing the city's cultural offerings, Forum serves as a magnet, attracting not only tourists but also retaining creative individuals in the city, thereby addressing the city's brain drain. The project focuses on quality of life and cultural availability, thereby creating an attractive urban living environment. This aspect does not necessarily make the urban environment attractive only for creative individuals, as everyone can benefit from such urban qualities. However, the project has CCP elements as high-quality, trend-oriented developments like the Vapiano building suggest a focus on commercial and aesthetic values that cater more to an affluent demographic. Furthermore, the wish of the municipality to bring more diversity to the city center, i.e., reduce the proportion of students, is reflected in how the municipality itself developed some bigger apartments, but also by MWPO's projects like Mercado, Merckt, the Warehouse, and Spot On, which received the blessing of the municipality.

The analysis shows that the regeneration scheme for the Oostzijde, of which Forum is an essential part, is deeply rooted in public-private cooperation—a strategy that has had precedents in Groningen since Gietema. This insight would not have been possible by only looking at Forum, as the municipality developed the building itself. However, looking at the broader context of the Oostzijde shows that private forces drove the redevelopment of the area. While the municipality took on a leading role as developer of several buildings, indicating urban entrepreneurialism, it worked closely with private parties like MWPO. This interplay between public initiative and private investment indicates how the driving force behind these developments is often economic investment and capital return. All these factors suggest socio-economic exclusionary elements to the project. At the same time, the municipality and the organization of Forum portray the multifunctional cultural center as a place that is accessible to everyone. The next chapter examines this conundrum, reflecting upon the inclusivity aspect of Forum.

7 Public Perceptions and Experiences of Forum Groningen

The previous chapter provided an answer to the second and third sub-questions, showing how elements of CLUR and the CCP are present in the Forum/Oostzijde plans. While the discussion suggests a focus on more affluent individuals, Forum tries to be accessible and inclusive to all

in society. By focusing on this inclusivity aspect and the experiences of the public, this chapter zooms in on the fourth sub-question.

7.1 Perceptions of the Public

Referring back to Section 6.3, it is clear that Forum wants to be “a reflection of how the city is [demographically] structured.”³¹⁰ Highlighting the success of Forum, Nijdam and Dijkhuis note that the combined functions of Forum now attract more visitors than when these elements were separate—a trend supported by the annual reports Forum has published since 2015.³¹¹ Nijdam discusses the high visitor numbers in his statement:

We’ve always counted on about 1.3 million people, around 1.4. It’s just one million more people. Movies attract almost double the number of visitors compared to what we used to attract in the [old] cinema. (...) [S]o it has brought a lot, in terms of usage of facilities. The library is growing again. We have more members now, which is completely against the trend. So, I’m very proud of how this is going and how, also Groningers went from, uh, waste of money to, uh, fully embracing it.³¹²

With this abstract, Nijdam suggests that Forum is exceeding expectations about visitor numbers and indicates a shift in local sentiment away from initial skepticism about its utility and cost. While visitor statistics might serve as a starting point to assess the success of Forum, a more qualitative evaluation through the online survey provides additional insight into visitor experiences and perceptions. It is necessary to note again that the survey has limitations as it primarily reached a younger demographic (18-34, 58 percent of respondents) via Reddit (69.5 percent of respondents). Therefore, while it offers valuable directional insights, it is limited in supporting broad sweeping conclusions. This approach allows the exploration of Forum from the visitor’s perspective without overgeneralizing based on the gathered data.

Turning to the survey data, the perception of most respondents regarding Forum before its opening in 2019 compared to now indeed seems to have either improved or mostly stayed the same, indicating Nijdam is right to point to the general increased appreciation of Forum.

³¹⁰ Nijdam.

³¹¹ Compare, for example, the reports of 2015, 2019, and 2023 “Jaarverslag 2015” (Groningen: Forum Groningen, 2016), 31, <https://static.forum.nl/cache/jaarverslag-2015.681/jaarverslag-2015.pdf>; “Jaarverslag 2019” (Groningen: Forum Groningen, 2020), 23, <https://static.forum.nl/cache/jaarverslag-2019.5487/jaarverslag-2019.pdf>; “Jaarverslag 2023” (Groningen: Forum Groningen, 2024), 98, <https://static.forum.nl/cache/jaarverslag-2023.17889/jaarverslag-2023.pdf>.

³¹² Nijdam, interview.

Furthermore, when asked to rank various descriptors of the atmosphere, the survey results indicate that Forum is particularly valued for its lively and dynamic atmosphere, followed by its contemporary and stylish appearance. However, the labels ‘organized and structured’ and ‘homely and cozy’ received the lowest scores.

These points find resonance in the open-ended responses to the survey. For instance, several respondents appreciate the architectural design and mention that the building feels spacious and modern, reflecting its perceived modern atmosphere. On the other hand, other respondents note that Forum’s layout and expansive open spaces can pose challenges for navigation, suggesting a need for improved signage and a more intuitive architectural flow. Connected to this, some respondents emphasize the importance of accommodating visitors with disabilities or sensory sensitivities. Others point out that, compared to the old library building, the current building is too noisy to study and work, suggesting the need for more quiet zones. Additionally, some complain about elements such as the open escalators which make them feel unsafe.

It is also noteworthy that Forum, as ‘the living room of the city,’ does not necessarily evoke a strong sense of homeliness for many. Based on the data, it is hard to explain this observation, but possibly it might be more about providing free activities and easy access rather than evoking a cozy, home-like atmosphere, as highlighted by some respondents. Additionally, while a slight majority (51.8 percent) views the building as welcoming, this sentiment is not overwhelmingly shared, with the other respondents almost evenly split between neutral and unwelcoming perceptions. The open-ended questions also reveal that respondents appreciate Forum as a cultural hub that enhances the city’s appeal and acts as a dynamic gathering space that brings together diverse groups. Furthermore, when asked about Forum’s contribution to Groningen’s attractiveness, most respondents answered positively. Nevertheless, the overall sentiment towards Forum is varied, reflecting a range of experiences and opinions.

7.2 Programming

Most of the respondent’s express satisfaction with Forum’s general facilities and the programming offered, and they are relatively familiar with what it has to offer in terms of programming and amenities. Most people indicate they use various facilities, with the cinema and rooftop viewing point particularly standing out, followed by the library and study areas. However, some people mentioned a desire for more diversity in the cultural offerings, which could help attract and serve a broader audience. Regarding the programming, it is worth pointing out that Forum has an initiative called *VERS* (meaning fresh in Dutch), a youth panel

that “is a diverse group aged 16-24 who organize events and create content.”³¹³ This indicates a method of bottom-up programming at Forum in line with socially sustainable regeneration strategies. In the interview, Nijdam explains:

Youth is always a bit tricky because youth is hard to guide. (...) [VERS] create their own programs, for their own target group. So, for example, they have talk show evenings about sex, and we don’t interfere with that at all. It can be quite raunchy sometimes, but that’s, uh, yeah, they speak their own language with their target audience. (...) They only have a supervisor from us because they’re not experienced programmers. (...) But [VERS] does its own programming for its own target audience.³¹⁴

From this abstract, it is clear that the management of Forum established VERS because it might otherwise be challenging to reach this target group. When asked in the interview whether similar initiatives could be useful for other target groups, Nijdam mentions that within the organization, they have considered a similar initiative to engage seniors, though it has not been implemented. This seems understandable considering that the 2023 annual report indicates that attendance at VERS-organized events is still low and that Forum wants to improve this, suggesting that Forum is still working to make VERS a success before it is feasible to extend the concept to other target groups. As a bottom-up initiative, VERS allows young people to implement their own feedback into the programming at Forum. For other target groups, Nijdam mentions that Forum collects feedback for exhibitions and such.

Initiatives like VERS are promising, as currently, it is primarily the team of programmers who oversee Forum’s programming. Nijdam says this is somewhat of a leftist bubble and that he sometimes needs to keep them focused, but that is less his job as managing director, and more a task for the program director. But at least he recognizes the struggles with this. Furthermore, toward the end of the interview, he notes that reaching the least advantaged people in society is the most challenging:

“What can always be improved, but that’s generally very difficult, uh, and that lies more in the social domain. What we just said about getting behind people’s doors, when you do have a solution, but how to get those people involved? (...) [T]hat’s a very big challenge for the coming years because illiteracy is really one of the roots of everything that goes wrong in

³¹³ “VERS,” Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/over-ons/vers>.

³¹⁴ Nijdam, interview.

society. (...) [People] can't think critically anymore, or read, you know. And that starts with improving literacy and media literacy.³¹⁵

The abstract demonstrates that Forum's management is aware of the existing issues related to literacy and digital skills. Nijdam considers this a crucial task for Forum, viewing it as the root cause of many societal problems. Regarding the challenge of reaching these people, he notes that the eight branch locations of Forum in various neighborhoods and villages within the municipality of Groningen are places with low entry barriers.³¹⁶ Nijdam observes that the building of Forum in the city center is "a different building to walk into than a local branch where you know the branch manager and where you pick up the newspaper and meet your neighbor."³¹⁷ This is part of Forum's strategy to be "within slipper distance" of people's houses and possibly address more neighborhood-specific problems with its programming.³¹⁸ This illustrates that the prominent building of Forum (Nieuwe Markt), which is the main location, has a certain threshold for people, as the distance can be perceived as relatively large.

To provide a broader view of Forum's programming, this thesis utilizes offerings from May 12 to 26, 2024, as a sample to illustrate what Forum offers.³¹⁹ This is not to draw definitive conclusions about the programming but rather to show the reader the variety of activities and events available. During this period, Forum offered numerous free services and workshops in literacy and digital skills. Forum also hosted language cafes, (digital) privacy cafes, various children's activities, and tax assistance, all free of charge, catering to a diverse audience. Moreover, a temporary exhibition about Trump had a ticket price of fifteen euros, alongside organized talks on subjects like the future of Europe (coinciding with upcoming EU parliamentary elections, free entry), rural environmental challenges (4 euros), and feeling powerless in a world dominated by crises (5 euros ticket).

An important part of Forum's programming is its cinema. The selected timeframe showcases a broad spectrum of films from the popular "Challengers" and "Civil War," which a 'regular' cinema would also feature, to less mainstream films like "Green Border" and documentaries such as "The Stones and Brian Jones," which are less likely to be part of the offerings in a regular cinema. During the selected period, Forum also organized a four-day film event focused on animation, with multiple film screenings, four related paid talks, and a 40-euro paid

³¹⁵ Nijdam.

³¹⁶ Recall that the Forum institution is more than only the main location in the city center. See also footnote 137.

³¹⁷ Nijdam, interview.

³¹⁸ "Jaarverslag 2023," 24.

³¹⁹ "Agenda Forum," Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/agenda>.

networking event. Additionally, Forum offered a paid Dungeons and Dragons event and a free monthly talk with a writer, alongside promotions for the *Groninger Boek Festival*. Overall, the program includes both free activities for community development, such as literacy and digital training, and paid offerings. The film tickets are competitively priced with various discounts for children, students, and those with limited means, indicating consideration for various groups with different financial means to ensure greater accessibility and inclusivity.

Also worth mentioning, though outside the selected timeframe, are weekly *Ontwikkelpleinen* (Development Plazas) in Forum's Beijum and Ten Boer branches, where Forum closely collaborates with local social organizations to provide a low-threshold stepping stone for further support in areas such as literacy and the use of computers, smartphones, and the internet.³²⁰ In the 2023 annual report, Forum expresses the wish to roll out more *Ontwikkelpleinen* to other branches.³²¹ The report also mentions the variety of partnerships, such as local bookstores and the University of Groningen.³²² It would be interesting to study these networks more extensively, but from a preliminary analysis, it seems that Forum tries to be deeply anchored in Groningen's social fabric.

7.3 Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter addressed the fourth sub-question regarding public perceptions and experiences, showing increased visitor numbers. The survey data indicates improved perceptions post-opening since 2019, with Forum described as lively, modern, and dynamic. It is noteworthy, however, that coziness and homeliness received lower scores. Additionally, navigation difficulties and inadequate quiet zones highlight areas for improvement.

Turning to the programming, the diversity of offerings—including free literacy and digital skills workshops, and various cultural events—demonstrates Forum's commitment to inclusivity, as it aims to engage a broad audience. Forum's efforts seem to align with the principles of social sustainability by emphasizing inclusivity in its programs and facilities and supporting bottom-up initiatives like VERS. Consequently, it functions as a space striving to benefit the entire local community, aiming to enhance social cohesion and cultural enrichment.

However, the extent to which Forum succeeds in this mission cannot be conclusively determined by the online survey or Forum's statements alone. More in-depth research is required, potentially involving comprehensive data on literacy and digital skills in the

³²⁰ "Het Ontwikkelplein," Forum Groningen, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://forum.nl/nl/ontwikkelplein>.

³²¹ "Jaarverslag 2023," 24–25.

³²² "Jaarverslag 2023," 16, 24, 36, 38, 48–51, 59, 66, 75.

municipality monitored over an extended period, including the effectiveness of individual workshops pre-and post-intervention. Additionally, to assess whether Forum truly serves as a place accessible and inclusive for all, a door-to-door survey and/or participant observations would be necessary. An interesting angle would be exploring differences between Forum's main location and neighborhood branches.

8 Discussion

This chapter synthesizes the three analytical chapters and the literature review to address the main research question: What are the intentions of stakeholders involved in the development and operation of Forum Groningen, particularly in the context of CLUR, and how do these align with or challenge the principles of the CCP and the experiences of the public?

8.1 Key Findings

Chapter 5 analyzed local post-war urban planning practices, addressing the first sub-question. The chapter reveals that Groningen's urban planning has consistently featured strong leadership of aldermen, with varying degrees of citizen involvement over time. Urban planners in Groningen consistently adhered to the compact city philosophy and used spatial interventions to address societal issues. Moreover, the Dutch polder model and social democratic belief in a mixed economy facilitated public-private partnerships and market logic in urban planning. These historical practices set the stage for understanding the regeneration plans for the Grote Markt and how they fit within the broader context of local urban planning.

Chapter 6 focused on the second and third sub-questions, highlighting how the municipality envisioned Forum as a cultural hub to catalyze redevelopment of the Oostzijde, breathing new life into a neglected part of the city. The project aimed to rectify pedestrian flow imbalances, stimulate the economy, and boost tourism. This leveraging of culture for urban development makes the Oostzijde project a prime example of CLUR. The comprehensive Oostzijde redevelopment scheme aligns with the CCP as Forum is a catalyst for transforming the area into a culturally vibrant environment. Various new high-quality, trend-oriented establishments enhance the city's cultural appeal, catering to tourists and creative, wealthy professionals. To achieve this, the municipality took a proactive role in developing various buildings while closely collaborating with private parties like MWPO. Moreover, with its mission to inspire people, Forum functions as a meeting space for creative people within Groningen's creative corridor.

Chapter 7 addressed the fourth sub-question by focusing on inclusivity with the survey data revealing mixed public perceptions. Some respondents appreciated Forum as an accessible

place, while others noted issues such as navigation difficulties and a lack of quiet zones. Despite these challenges, Forum's diverse programming, including free literacy and digital skills workshops and various cultural events, demonstrates the management's commitment to inclusivity. These efforts suggest alignment with socially sustainable regeneration practices, although further research is needed to comprehensively evaluate Forum's inclusivity and its impact on the community.

Therefore, the key findings from these chapters collectively address the main research question by illustrating how Forum's development and operation are rooted in local urban planning traditions and align with the dominant global paradigm, the CCP. The findings also reveal the complexities and challenges of achieving true inclusivity in urban regeneration projects.

8.2 Interpretation of Findings

The analysis showed that Groningen traditionally has specific characteristics in its urban planning practices, demonstrating continuity over several decades. These local traditions also find their way into the regeneration scheme for the Oostzijde. It is striking how easily the CCP integrates with the local practices of maintaining a compact city and responding to socio-economic problems through spatial interventions. Additionally, the social democratic belief in the mixed economy allows space for economic logic, making the paradigmatic shift toward the neoliberal CCP relatively seamless with Groningen's historical practices.

Within the Oostzijde regeneration scheme, the municipality envisioned Forum as an attractive cultural hub that draws a high volume of people. As Forum functions as a catalyst for further redevelopment and investments in the area, the urban strategy aligns with CLUR efforts in other European cities where culture is leveraged as a tool for urban planning while seeking new post-industrial economic models. The Forum case shows obvious signs of Harvey's urban entrepreneurialism, as the municipality developed apartments and a trend establishment like Vapiano. Moreover, it partnered with private entities like MWPO, highlighting the economic motivations behind the project, a strategy with historical precedence in Groningen.

The various efforts aim to transform the area surrounding the Grote Markt into a culturally vibrant environment with high-quality, trend-oriented establishments, such as Wijck. This reflects the CCP's focus on enhancing the cultural appeal of an urban environment, catering to creative, wealthy professionals. While CCP generally aims to attract new people, in Groningen, the objective is more to prevent students from leaving the city after completing their studies. The municipality also aims to diversify the city center's demographic composition by

increasing higher-segment housing units with new developments. This introduces exclusionary elements within the project, mirroring broader critiques of the CCP, which often prioritizes middle-class values and can lead to socio-spatial polarization.

It is worth considering Groningen's demographic composition, which is relatively young compared to other Dutch cities and has changed significantly in recent decades. This youthful demographic contributes to Groningen's trendy and hip atmosphere, making it culturally relevant. While according to CCP logic maintaining a culturally vibrant urban environment is necessary to attract creative people, the municipality and MWPO are constructing more expensive apartments that students and others on a small budget cannot afford. This decreases the proportion of those who made the urban core vibrant, resonating with broader critiques of CCP thinking that the aspects that made urban areas attractive are diminished as the influx of new people leads to the displacement of the original culture.

Forum also plays a role in city branding as it helps to set Groningen apart as an attractive tourist destination and a place to live, which Nijdam viewed as corresponding objectives. It enhances the cultural image of Groningen compared to other cities, or in the words of the municipality, Forum is "a defining icon [that] symbolizes Groningen's growth into a modern European city."³²³ This reflects an aspiration to gain more international appeal, rising above other cities. This is related to the competitive thinking within neoliberalism and is promoted by various city attractiveness rankings.

The various exclusionary elements contradict Forum's vision to be accessible to all, as mentioned by Nijdam and Dijkhuis. This points to a field of tension between the exclusionary aspects of the broader regeneration of the Oostzijde and the aspiration of Forum to be inclusive. This reflects the broader challenge of balancing economic development with social inclusivity in urban regeneration projects.

8.3 Theoretical Implications: Conceptualizing Forum

This study contributes to the academic literature on CLUR and the CCP by providing a detailed case study of Forum. It highlights how local urban planning traditions can integrate global paradigms like the CCP, even within the decentralized context of Dutch urban planning governance. One could argue that even localized urban planning practices cannot escape the dominant influence of the CCP, but this might be an overstatement as the analysis showed that Groningen's planning practices already aligned well with the dominant paradigm.

³²³ Dijkhuis and Karsens, "Eindcalculatie," 4.

Another theoretical standpoint to consider is the conceptualization of Forum. Referring back to Section 2.8, Smith and Von Krogh discuss three concepts regarding a building's function: cultural flagships, icons, and landmarks. As a cultural flagship, Forum aims to stimulate further investments in the area. As an icon, it focuses on tourism and has a unique design. The municipality also envisioned Forum as a landmark building, cementing community identity. While this thesis lacks the explanatory scope to determine whether Forum in practice functions as a landmark, it provides convincing evidence that the other two concepts fit the role Forum played and still plays. Arguably, the conceptualization as a cultural flagship is most fitting, considering Forum's central role in the broader regeneration of the Oostzijde.

Skot-Hansen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, and Jochumsen discuss various roles of public libraries in CLUR strategies, suggesting the public library remains inclusive even in a neoliberal context. However, this view may be simplistic when considering the broader Oostzijde plans. While Forum appears inclusive with diverse programming and low-cost offerings, a wider view reveals exclusionary aspects in the surrounding area with trendy shops and expensive apartments, which cater to the creative class. The broader contextual focus distinguishes this thesis from earlier studies on Forum, illustrating that a nuanced understanding of public libraries' roles in CLUR strategies requires considering a wider geographical and temporal context.

Another useful conceptualization is White's "living room," which has three characteristics: first, multi-functionality based on knowledge, innovation, and culture; second, conveying a sense of ownership to citizens and acting "as place-makers in marginalized urban spaces"; and third, a design mixing large interiors with domestic elements. Forum fits the first characteristic by offering educational, cultural, and social functions that stimulate knowledge and cultural enrichment. Its broadly appealing programming conveys ownership of a previously underutilized urban area. Regarding the remaining characteristic, Forum does have large interiors, but according to the conducted online survey, it feels more modern and spacious than cozy and homely. This means that Forum, as a living room, perhaps has more to do with its aspiration to be accessible to everyone. Therefore, these findings support White's concept, but more research is needed to understand the reasons behind people's perceptions of the atmosphere.

8.4 Strengths and Weaknesses: Points for Further Research

When reflecting on these theoretical implications, it is important to consider the strengths and limitations of this thesis. A particular strength of this study is the methodological triangulation through the mixed-method research design. By using semi-structured interviews, extensive document analysis, and an online survey, it brings a nuanced understanding of Forum's development and operation. It does not just focus on the building but situates Forum within the broader historical and socio-spatial context of Groningen, providing valuable insights into how local traditions and the CCP intersect in urban planning. This in-depth analysis of Groningen also helps in understanding local urban planning in the city, highlighting local practices that are also relevant beyond CLUR.

Despite these strengths, the thesis also has some limitations. The online survey had a limited and potentially non-representative sample, which may affect the generalizability of the findings regarding public perceptions and experiences. This limitation makes the analysis of Chapter 7 regarding the inclusivity of Forum and the social sustainability of the Oostzijde regeneration less certain. It also makes it more difficult to determine precisely how Forum can be more inclusive.

While this research indicates that the Oostzijde regeneration scheme has exclusionary elements, more research is needed to understand how CLUR strategies can be more socially sustainable. Further research could include comprehensive data on literacy and digital skills monitored over time, door-to-door surveys, and participant observations to evaluate Forum's inclusivity. This approach would provide a better understanding of public perceptions and experiences, helping to identify nuanced community needs and responses that may not be captured through online surveys alone. Additionally, future research could focus on differences between the main location and neighborhood branches, examining socio-spatial polarization, as neighborhood branches may have a lower threshold for inclusivity, as suggested by Nijdam.

By addressing some of these weaknesses and building on the strengths of this thesis, future research can build on the presented findings to provide a better understanding of, especially the inclusivity aspect of multifaceted cultural centers like Forum within CLUR strategies in contemporary urban planning.

8.6 Conclusion and Relevance

The discussion has synthesized key findings, demonstrating how Forum's development and operation align with both local urban planning traditions and the CCP. Groningen's historical emphasis on a compact city and strategic spatial interventions naturally integrated with CCP

principles. The study also highlights inherent tensions between economic development and social inclusivity. While Forum serves as a cultural hub catalyzing an urban regeneration scheme, it includes exclusionary elements such as high-end housing and trendy establishments that marginalize ‘non-creative’ residents. Therefore, the broader regeneration of the Oostzijde reflects a balancing act between the CCP and the aspiration for inclusivity.

These findings are highly topical, as Groningen continues to leverage culture and creativity for economic growth and urban redevelopment. For instance, the former Niemeyer factory is being transformed into a creative campus for education, culture, IT, and start-ups, developed by MWPO.³²⁴ Similarly, the municipality plans to build a music center as part of the *Spoorwegkwartier* (Railway Quarter) redevelopment, with the new area and music center “complementing each other as places of meeting and dynamism, together forming an attractive gateway to Groningen, precisely at the point where many people enter the city.”³²⁵ These projects illustrate the ongoing relevance of Florida’s CCP in Groningen, underscoring the topicality of this thesis.

9 Conclusion

This thesis examined CLUR dynamics through the lens of Forum Groningen, a multifaceted cultural center in the northern Netherlands. By integrating historical analysis with stakeholder intentions and public perceptions, the research aimed to understand how Forum aligns with the CCP. The main research question posed was: What are the intentions of stakeholders involved in the development and operation of Forum Groningen, particularly in the context of CLUR, and how do these align with or challenge the principles of the CCP and the experiences of the public?

To address this question, the literature review situated Forum within the broader scholarship on CLUR and the CCP, discussing theoretical foundations and criticisms. This review informed the conceptual framework used for the analysis, which employed a qualitative mixed-method research design combining semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and an online survey.

The analysis started by examining Groningen’s post-war urban planning to provide a historical context for analyzing Forum, highlighting a consistent emphasis on maintaining a compact city and the belief in the power of spatial planning to address societal issues. Moreover,

³²⁴ Bart Breij, “Dit Zijn de Plannen voor de Oude Niemeyer-Fabriek in Stad,” *RTV Noord*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/1085659/dit-zijn-de-plannen-voor-de-oude-niemeyer-fabriek-in-stad>.

³²⁵ “Zuidzijde Station Groningen,” Groningen Spoorzone, accessed 13 May, 2024, <https://www.groningenspoorzone.nl/deelgebieden/zuidzijde-station-groningen>.

it explored the strong leadership of aldermen in urban planning and the evolving role of the open planning process, showing how local practices relate to contemporary urban regeneration strategies such as the CCP.

After discussing Groningen's post-war urban planning, the analysis shifted focus to Forum, demonstrating how its development is a prime example of CLUR. The multifaceted cultural hub aims to catalyze the regeneration of the Oostzijde. With Forum's developments, the municipality intended to rectify pedestrian flow imbalances, stimulate the economy, and enhance Groningen's cultural appeal. In this effort, the municipality played a proactive role and collaborated with private partners like MWPO to transform the area into a culturally vibrant urban environment with high-quality, trend-oriented developments and higher-segment housing. This aligns with the CCP's focus on catering to creative young professionals.

This points to exclusionary elements within the Oostzijde/Forum project, revealing the paradoxical objective of economic development and social inclusivity. While Forum successfully boosted economic growth and catalyzed further development of the area, the goal of inclusivity proved more complex, as the emphasis on high-quality developments and upscale housing suggests a lean towards an exclusionary urban regeneration model, catering primarily to a wealthier demographic.

Public perceptions, as examined in Chapter 7, showed that Forum receives praise for its architectural design, diverse programming, and role as a community hub. However, there are various issues such as navigation difficulties and the need for more quiet zones, highlighting areas for improvement. Additionally, while Forum offers free workshops to improve literacy and digital skills, the impact of these initiatives on the municipality's overall literacy levels remains unclear, pointing to the need for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation.

The research reveals a tension between inclusivity and exclusivity since Forum positions itself as an open and accessible space, but the surrounding upscale developments suggest a lean towards an exclusionary urban model catering to a wealthier demographic. This reflects a broader trend in urban regeneration, with economic objectives often overshadowing social goals, leading to the commodification of culture and the potential marginalization of non-creative residents.

In conclusion, the primary intentions of stakeholders for Forum are paradoxical. The goal to foster economic growth, stemming from exclusionary CCP thinking, overshadows the goal of social inclusivity and accessibility. This presents a valuable insight from this thesis but also shows the need for further research into the long-term social impacts of such projects. Future studies should focus on comprehensive evaluations of Forum's impact, exploring how it can

better serve the diverse needs of the local community. Ensuring that urban regeneration projects promote not only economic vitality but also social well-being and inclusivity is vital for achieving truly equitable urban spaces.

Therefore, while the municipality states that Forum symbolizes Groningen's path to becoming a modern European city, it might be more fitting to say that Forum exemplifies the complexities of CLUR for 'modern' mid-sized European cities in balancing economic objectives with inclusivity goals. This illustrates how achieving long-term inclusivity with urban regeneration schemes that align with social sustainability principles remains an ongoing challenge for any European city.

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Appendix I: Statement about Ethics

As this research involves human subjects, it was necessary to implement measures to ensure high ethical standards.³²⁶ Early in the research process, I sought and obtained approval from the CETO (the ethics board of the University of Groningen), which reviewed both the interview and survey questions to ensure adherence to the ethical standards set by the University and the Euroculture Consortium.

A critical component of both the interview and online survey was obtaining informed consent from the participants. The two interview participants were provided with consent forms and information outlining the study's scope. Both participants agreed to the terms before participating. Additionally, both expressed interest in receiving a copy of the thesis upon completion, to which I agreed. This ensures that they also benefit from their time investment.

The full transcripts of interviews are safely electronically stored on a password-protected device. Appendix III of this thesis only includes the translations of the quotations from the interviews with Nijdam and Dijkhuis that are used in the analysis. I have decided not to include the full transcripts in the thesis submission; however, they are available upon request, bearing in mind that interviews were conducted in Dutch.

For the online survey, I directly integrated informed consent into the introduction page, requiring participants to accept the terms of participation before proceeding. Those who did not agree to the terms were automatically redirected to the end of the survey, ensuring that only fully consenting individuals participated. Furthermore, all survey questions were developed in consultation with my supervisors to ensure their ethical soundness. I also shared the survey questions with Forum's management for any potential concerns, after which they confirmed that there were no objections to the content of the survey.

These safeguards were put in place not only to comply with academic standards but also to build trust with participants and me, ensuring that the research benefits all parties involved without compromising ethical integrity.

³²⁶ Roulston and Halpin, "Designing Qualitative Research Using Interview Data," 677.

Appendix II: Clarification and Context for Key Primary Sources

As mentioned in Section 4.3 of the methodology, this thesis utilizes an extensive list of documents. Due to word limit constraints, it is not feasible to provide detailed contexts for all the pertinent documents used in the analysis. However, these documents can be found in Chapter 10.1 and the bibliography. In this appendix, additional context is provided for some key documents to offer more information. The list below follows the alphabetical order of Chapter 10.1. The focus is mainly on documents with Dutch language titles, as clarifying these can especially assist non-Dutch readers with additional context. Consequently, some entries—primarily the English-language ones—are omitted as they do not require further explanation.

List of Key Primary Sources/Documents

Akkeren, Gert van. “Nieuwe Fietsenstalling Grote Markt Noordzijde Kost 5,4 miljoen.” *OOG*, September 2, 2020.

Context: A news article on the website of a local broadcaster in Groningen detailing the costs and plans for the new bicycle parking in the basement of Het Groot Handelshuis.

“Bestemming Binnenstad.” Municipality of Groningen, January 2016.

Context: Municipal policy document outlining the spatial planning and development strategy for Groningen’s inner city

Braakman, Tristan. “Stad Verwacht Snel Opvolger voor Vapiano, VVD Wil dat Gemeente Pand Verkoopt.” *RTV Noord*, March 21, 2024.

Context: A news article on the website of a regional radio and television broadcaster discussing the status of the Vapiano building, after the company closed its doors due to ongoing financial issues.

Briene, Michel, and Manfred Wienhoven. “Effectanalyse Ontwikkeling Grote Markt (Oostzijde) Update Ruimtelijk-Economische Impact voor de Stad Groningen.” Rotterdam: Ecorys; Commissioned by the Municipality of Groningen, April 2009.

Context: Impact analysis report on the spatial and economic effects of the Grote Markt Oostzijde redevelopment by a research-based consultancy company commissioned by the Municipality of Groningen.

Breij, Bart. “Vapiano in Binnenstad Groningen Gesloten: ‘We Konden dit Pand Niet Rendabel Krijgen.’” *RTV Noord*, March 12, 2024.

Context: A news article on the website of a regional radio and television broadcaster discussing the closure of Vapiano in Groningen.

Brouwer, Marijke, and Willem Groeneveld. “Stad Merckt Verdomd Weinig van Merckt. Ondanks Beloftes Heersen Leegte en Stof op Triple A-Spot.” *Sikkom*, July 20, 2023.

Context: A news article by the local online news outlet Sikkom discusses the problematic status of the Merckt project, detailing the history of the location and how the current situation has arisen.

Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. “Inwoners per Gemeente”; Accessed May 13, 2024. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. “Leeftijdsverdeling.”

Context: Webpages providing statistical data on the populations of Dutch municipalities, offering demographic context for Groningen.

Croonen, Veerle. “Twee Keer Zoveel Toeristen in Groningen in 2030. Maar Kunnen We Ze Ook Kwijt?” *Dagblad van het Noorden*, February 23, 2024.

Context: An article on the website of a regional daily newspaper discusses the expected increase in tourism numbers, pointing out that many are foreign. The article also quotes Tinus Akkermans, who mentions the role of the Forum in the context of the increased tourism since 2015 and expected growth.

De Staat van Groningen. “Demografie.” Accessed May 13, 2024.

Context: Webpage providing demographic information on the municipality of Groningen.

Dijkhuis, Elzo. “Uitslag Ontwikkelcompetitie Hoekpand Grote Markt.” Municipality of Groningen, November 23, 2016.

Context: Official document prepared by the department of urban planning of the municipality and presented to the municipal council, discussing the results of the design competition for what would eventually become Merckt.

Dijkhuis, Elzo, and Bert Karsens. “Eindcalculatie Bouw- en Grondexploitatie Grote Markt Oostzijde/ Forum Groningen.” Municipality of Groningen, February 2023.

Context: Final financial report on the construction and land development costs for the Oostzijde/Forum redevelopment project, prepared by members of Groningen's urban planning department, including Dijkhuis. It was sent to the municipal council to keep them informed.

Dorsman, Erik et al. *Grote Markt Oostzijde: 20 Jaar Stadsontwikkeling in 40 Verhalen*. Groningen: GRAS, 2022.

Context: A book on the development process of the Grote Markt Oostzijde, looking back at twenty years of efforts to redevelop the Oostzijde since the failed 2001 referendum on the Noordzijde. It provides a historical and contextual background to the redevelopment. Published by the local network for architects in collaboration with the municipality of Groningen. Various people from the municipality actively contributed to the book, including Dijkhuis.

“‘Eenheid in Verscheidenheid’ Voorlopig Bedrijfsplan Groninger Forum.” Municipality of Groningen, October 15, 2008.

Context: The first detailed business plan for Forum, was adopted by the municipal council in 2008. Although changes were made later, it provided direction for the development of further plans.

Floor, Marc. “Groninger Forum, Actualisering Programma van Eisen.” Municipality of Groningen, May 17, 2017.

Context: Updated document outlining the requirements for Forum. It was prepared by an employee of the urban planning department of the municipality of Groningen and sent to the municipal council for a meeting and was subsequently adopted.

Groeneveld, Willem. “Merckt Wordt Wijck en Gaat in Herfst Open: ‘Beroemdste Wijken ter Wereld Komen tot Leven aan de Grote Markt.’” *Sikkom*, May 24, 2024.

Context: The news article is by the local online news outlet Sikkom about the upcoming use of the Merckt building. After a long search for how to use the building, the Wijck concept is planned to open end of 2024.

Groeneveld, Willem. “Reconstructie: Vapiano Leefde 7 Jaar op Pof van Gemeente en Laat Stad met een Schuld Achter.” *Sikkom*, March 15, 2024.

Context: This news article by the local online news outlet Sikkom about Vapiano, following the revelation that the company closed its doors due to ongoing financial issues

Groningen Spoorzone. “Zuidzijde Station Groningen.” Accessed May 13, 2024.

Context: Webpage containing information on the redevelopment of the Spoorwegkwartier (Railway Quarter), relevant for mention about the planned new music center, Nieuwe Poort.

Forum Groningen. “Agenda Forum.” Accessed May 13, 2024.

Context: Webpage containing Forum’s agenda, is used for this thesis to analyze the programming offerings between May 12 and 26, 2024.

“Forumvisie.” Municipality of Groningen, October 14, 2011.

Context: Municipal policy document laying down the vision for Forum, proposed by the municipal executive and adopted by the municipal council in 2011, outlining the strategic objectives and envisioned impact of the project.

“Internationalization Policy 2021-2024.” Municipality of Groningen, 2020.

Context: Municipal policy document outlining the city’s internationalization strategy, which makes a mention of Groningen as a ‘City of Talent.’

“Jaarverslag 2015.” Forum Groningen, 2016; “Jaarverslag 2019.” Forum Groningen, 2020; “Jaarverslag 2023.”

Context: Annual report published by the management of Forum Groningen, detailing activities and achievements of the past year and objectives for the upcoming year.

“Kadernota Cultuur 2017-2020 Cultuurstad Groningen: City of Talent.” Municipality of Groningen, September 18, 2015.

Context: Cultural policy document outlining Groningen’s strategy for the 2017-2020 period, proposed by the municipal executive, and adopted by the municipal council in 2015.

“Kadernota Cultuur 2021-2028: Kunst en Cultuur Voor Iedereen.” Municipality of Groningen, October 30, 2019.

Context: Cultural policy document detailing the municipality’s vision and goals for arts and culture from 2021 to 2028, proposed by the municipal executive and adopted by the municipal council in 2019.

Municipality of Groningen. “Economisch Profiel en Beleid.” Accessed May 13, 2024.

Context: Webpage used for providing information about the demographic statistics of the municipality of Groningen.

MWPO. “Mercado.” Accessed May 13, 2024; MWPO. “Over MWPO.” Accessed May 13, 2024; MWPO. “Projecten.” Accessed May 13, 2024.

Context: Webpages containing information about the real estate developer MWPO and various of its projects it plays a key role in various redevelopment projects in both the Oostzijde and Noordzijde.

“Raadsvoorstel. Planontwikkeling Grote Markt Oostzijde: Concept Programma van Eisen.” Municipality of Groningen, June 2006.

Context: A proposal was to the municipal council by the municipal executive after the invalid referendum results of 2005. The thesis refers to this document because it mentions the proposal that was presented to the population in the referendum regarding the initial proposal for the Grote Markt Oostzijde development.

RTV Noord. “Politieke Zorgen over Nieuwe Invulling van Markthal in Mercado-Complex.” January 4, 2023.

Context: A news article on the website of a regional radio and television broadcaster discussing political concerns about the use of Mercado.

Schaaf, Roeland van der. "Vaststelling Definitief Ontwerp en Uitvoeringskrediet Rodeweeshuisstraat." Municipality of Groningen, November 10, 2021.

Context: The document, sent to the municipal council in the name of the municipal alderman for urban planning, was subsequently adopted by the council.

Sietsema, Greet. "Creatieve Stad: Groningen=Innovatief Beleidsbrief Versterking Creatieve Stad Groningen." Municipality of Groningen, March 14, 2007.

Context: Municipal document outlining the ambitions and framework for strengthening Groningen as a creative city.

"Sterk, Sociaal, Duurzaam: Collegeprogramma Gemeente Groningen 2006-2010." Municipality of Groningen, March 29, 2006.

Context: Municipal coalition program document outlining the goals for Groningen from 2006 to 2010.

Appendix III: Translations of Dutch Quotations

I did all translations and I believe the provided English translations in the thesis capture the Dutch meaning and essence to a high extent. The Dutch quotations are a combination of various policy documents, web content, and interviews with Dijkhuis and Nijdam. For reference on where each quotation comes from, I refer to the footnotes in the text.

Translations Chapter 5		
<i>Footnote</i>	<i>Original (Dutch)</i>	<i>Translation (English)</i>
149	“van en agrarisch cultureel centrum geworden tot een kantorenstad met veel instellingen voor cultuur, onderwijs, onderzoek en zorg” “modern, high-tech en ruimte.”	“changed from an agricultural commercial center to a city of offices with many institutions for culture, education, research, and care” “Modern, high-tech, and space.”
173	“Tien jaar lang, van 1972 tot 1982, was er een progressief bestuur waarbij de inspraak hoogtij vierde.”	“For ten years, from 1972 till 1982, there was a progressive government in which public participation flourished.”
183	“[i]nvesteerdere moesten worden verleid, journalisten geïnformeerd, tegenstanders worden afgetroefd.”	“[i]nvestors needed to be enticed, journalists informed, opponents defeated.”
214	“het belangrijkste project van zijn bijna tienjarige wethoudersloopbaan”	“the most important project of his nearly ten-year tenure as alderman”

Translations Chapter 6		
<i>Footnote</i>	<i>Original (Dutch)</i>	<i>Translation (English)</i>
230	“had geen functie meer en het was eigenlijk ook niks. Plus [it] was helemaal dood (...) het had geen publieksaantrekkende werking.”	“had no function anymore and, well was actually nothing. Plus, [it] was completely dead (...) it did not have any appeal to the public”
231	centrale rol als ‘het echte stadshart’	“central role as ‘the real heart of the city’.”
232	“zo’n prominente plek” “veronachtzaamd deel”	“such a prominent place” “neglected part”
233	“behouden als kern van een levendige en functioneel compacte stad met de belangrijkste openbare en culturele functies? Of [kiezen voor] een meer uitgespreide stad, met een aantal belangrijke openbare en culturele functies in de periferie?”	“maintain the center as the core of a vibrant and functionally compact city with the main public and cultural functions? Or [op for] a more spread-out city, with several important public and cultural functions in the periphery?”
234	“[i]n een stad die sinds de jaren tachtig actief het beleid van de compacte stad had omarmd, waren dat geen moeilijke vragen.”	“[i]n a city that has actively embraced the policy of the compact city since the eighties, these were not difficult questions.

235	“om als stad aantrekkelijk te blijven, moet je dus om de zoveel jaar moet je iets toevoegen of iets verbeteren aan je stad om het ook een beetje fris te houden. En zo zijn er in het verleden, uh, een heleboel ontwikkelingen geweest. Een van de ontwikkelingen was de Verbindingskanaalzone.”	“to remain an attractive city, you need to add something new or make improvements every few years to keep it fresh. And so, in the past, uh, there have been a lot of developments. One of the developments was the Verbindingskanaalzone.”
236	“Dat was een hele verloren zaak. Daar was allemaal prostitutie, dealen, uh, junken, uh, noem maar op. (...) Dat had enorm veel last van criminaliteit en, uh, insluipen en, uh, en die, ja die prostitutie, drugs, uh, criminaliteit En toen die Westerhaven daar kwam, werd die hele Trox-locatie werd opgekocht werd verbouwd, werd, daar ontstond nieuwbouw.	“That was a complete lost cause. There was prostitution, dealing, uh, junkies, uh, you name it. (...) It suffered greatly from crime, uh, burglaries, and, uh, that, yes, the prostitution, drugs, uh, crime. And then, when the Westerhaven came, the entire Trox location was bought, renovated, and new construction emerged.”
237	“[A]lle ontwikkelingen in de Astraat en Brugstraat daar, die zijn mede te danken doordat de Westerhaven gebouwd is, want dat is in één keer een nieuwe looproute ontstaan. En als er een looproute is, dan, uh, zie je ondernemingen die willen daar gaan zitten. Dus de betere kledingzaken die zijn daar in een keer gaan vestigen, in de Astraat en in de Brugstraat”	“[A]ll the developments in the <i>Astraat</i> and <i>Brugstraat</i> [streets close to the Westerhaven; emphasis added], they are partly due to the construction of the Westerhaven because that created a new pedestrian route all at once. And when there’s a pedestrian route, uh, you saw businesses wanting to set up there. So, the better clothing stores immediately established themselves there.
238	“[d]e enige schandvlek daar in die buurt [naast de Westerhaven] is nog die, uh, die Turkse tentjes daar op de hoek, waar, waar nogal veel dealerrij omheen hangt.”	“[t]he only disgrace in that neighborhood [next to the Westerhaven] is still those, uh, those Turkish food spots on the corner, where there’s quite a bit of drug dealing going on around.”
239	“[k]atalysator voor (andere) investeringen in onroerend goed”	“[c]atalyst for (other) real estate investments”
240	“investeren maakt die investeringen uitlokken, die impuls geven voor een verbetering van dat deel van de stad waardoor anderen dus ook meegaan in dat, in dat traject.”	“make investments that trigger further investments, providing impetus for the improvement of that part of the city and thereby encouraging others to also participate in that process.”
241	“een van de doelstellingen”	“one of the objectives”
242	“[j]e moet als gemeente soms ook de regie nemen en het voortouw nemen.”	“[a]s municipality, you sometimes also have to take control and take the lead.”
244	“Vismarkt (handel) - Grote Markt (bestuur) - Martinikerkhof (religie).”	“Vismarkt (trade) - Grote Markt (governance) - Martinikerkhof (religion).”

246	<p>“hadden ze zo snel mogelijk de eerste de beste, die daar een goede huurprijs voor betaalde, die hadden ze gecontracteerd. Nou, dat gaan wij niet doen. Wij gaan niet de eerste de beste daar, uh, bij in contracteren, want dan krijg je juist een, uh, een hamburger, zo’n fastfoodketen die daarin zit. We willen wel proberen daar kwaliteit in te gaan krijgen. Die een beetje uitstraling hebben, want is heel belangrijk voor [de Nieuwe Markt] dat [the building], uh, goeie invulling krijgt.”</p>	<p>“would have contracted the first person who offered a good rent price as soon as possible. Well, we’re not going to do that. We’re not just going to contract the first person, uh, because then you end up with, uh, a hamburger, like a fast-food chain occupying it. We do want to try to get quality in there. Something that has a bit of prestige, because it is very important for [the Nieuwe Markt] that [the building] gets a, uh, good fill.”</p>
247	<p>“[d]at kan beter, mooier, passender bij de gebiedsontwikkeling die de gemeente voor ogen [had]”</p> <p>“twee goedlopende zaken”</p>	<p>“it could be better, more beautiful, more appropriate to the area development that the municipality [had] in mind”</p> <p>“two thriving businesses.”</p>
248	<p>“is vooral onder het jonge publiek populair”</p> <p>“de gedroomde aanjager van de Nieuwe Markt Zuidzijde”</p>	<p>“is especially popular among young people”</p> <p>“the dreamed catalyst for the Nieuwe Markt South Side”</p>
251	<p>“is er meer dan honderd miljoen geïnvesteerd door particulieren al in de directe omgeving”</p>	<p>“more than a hundred million has already been invested by private individuals in the immediate area”</p>
253	<p>“een eigentijdse vastgoedontwikkelaar [kiezend] voor toplocaties, markante en beeldbepalende panden.”</p>	<p>“a contemporary real estate developer, [choosing] for top locations, distinctive and iconic buildings.”</p>
258	<p>“sluit als gevolg van diverse ontwikkelingen niet langer aan bij het veranderende gebruik.”</p>	<p>“not align anymore with the changing usage due to various developments”</p>
259	<p>“[h]et wonen in de binnenstad is de laatste jaren wel steeds meer het domein geworden van studenten en andere jongeren.”</p> <p>“ervan overtuigd dat het goed voor de binnenstad is als ook andere leeftijdsgroepen zich er vestigen”</p>	<p>“[l]iving in the city center has increasingly become the domain of students and other young people in recent years.”</p> <p>“are convinced that it would be beneficial for the city center if other age groups also settled there”</p>
260	<p>“stimuleren dat ontwikkelaars en vastgoedeigenaren ook naar ontwikkelmogelijkheden voor andere doelgroepen gaan kijken”</p>	<p>“to encourage developers and property owners to also explore development opportunities for other target groups.”</p>
261	<p>“Nou ja, die wens, die is er zeker, de vraag hè, vanuit het publiek zelf, uh,</p>	<p>Well, that desire is certainly there, the demand, you see, from the public</p>

	<p>vanuit de stad ook. [De gemeente bouwt] hier nu drie appartementjes voor het hogere segment [dichtbij Forum]. (...) Mercado is daarna ook gebouwd omdat [Merckt] dus zo'n succes was. Want daarvoor durfde men niet in de binnenstad zulke dure panden te realiseren voor de commerciële verhuur. (...) Hier [wijst naar Spot On op schaalmodel], uh, komen nu ook grote appartementen voor de, uh, uh, nou ja niet studenten, zeg maar. Dus, dat realiseren we wij niet, maar MWPO doet dat nu hier, die heeft van ons die panden gekocht met de, uh, eis dat dat soort dingen gebouwd worden, niet alleen maar kamergewijs verhuur [gericht op studenten]."</p>	<p>itself, uh, from the city as well. [The municipality is] currently building three apartments here for the higher segment [near Forum]. (...) Mercado was then also built because Merckt was such a success. Before that, people didn't dare to realize such expensive properties for commercial rental in the city center. (...) Here [pointing to Spot On on the scale model], uh, large apartments are now being built for, uh, well, not students, so to speak. We don't realize that, but MWPO is doing it here now, they bought those properties from us with the requirement that those kinds of things be built, not just rental [targeted at students]."</p>
262	"luxe appartementen en een exclusief penthouse"	"luxury apartments and an exclusive penthouse,"
265	"wil kwaliteit, dat hebben we ook met [MWPO] afgesproken."	"wants quality, that's what we've agreed with [MWPO]."
266	"een brede doelgroep van 25 tot ongeveer 45 jaar"	"a broad target group from 25 to approximately 45 years old."
267	<p>"[w]erkgevers zoeken de levendigheid van de stad"</p> <p>"[m]et de komst van het Forum en de Nieuwe Markt daar omheen, de herinrichting van de Grote Markt (...) ontstaat een nieuwe dynamiek die ook weer andere nieuwe ontwikkelingen aantrekt. Dat proces versterkt zichzelf."</p>	<p>"[e]mployers are seeking the vibrancy of the city"</p> <p>"[w]ith the arrival of the Forum and the Nieuwe Markt around it, and the redesign of the Grote Markt (...) a new dynamic is created that attracts other new developments. This process reinforces itself."</p>
269	"Vanuit historisch perspectief, want om de actualiteit te begrijpen moet je terug naar het verleden, en met een blik op de toekomst."	"From a historical perspective, because to understand the present, you need to look back to the past, with an eye on the future."
270	"[A]ls je in het hartje van de stad een nieuw gebouw neerzet dat echt moet trekken, dan moet je naar voren kijken en niet naar achteren kijken. Want geschiedenis, uhm, met geschiedenis, dat geldt ook als je met een groot museum oude spullen neerzet. Iedereen vindt het heel belangrijk dat het allemaal bewaard blijft, maar dat trekt altijd heel weinig publiek."	"[I]f you're placing a new building right in the heart of the city that really needs to draw attention, then you need to look forward and not backward. Because history, um, with history, that also applies when you set up a large museum with old items. Everyone thinks it's very important that it all is preserved, but it always attracts very little audience."

272	“Het gaat bij Forum om het realiseren van een innovatief concept dat verder reikt dan de huidige taken van de beoogde bespelers/bewoners”	“[t]he focus of Forum is on realizing an innovative concept that goes beyond the current roles of the intended occupants/users”
273	“zal geen elitaire kunsttempel zijn, maar een centrale plek voor alle Stadgers [inwoners van Groningen] en bezoekers van buiten de stad.”	“will not be an elitist art temple but a central place for all Stadgers [inhabitants of Groningen] and visitors from outside the city.”
274	“Forum is gebouwd voor de doorsnee van de stad” “een weerspiegeling is van hoe die stad [demografisch] is opgebouwd.”	“Forum is built for the average citizen of the city” “a reflection of how the city is [demographically] structured.”
274	“We altijd hebben gezegd we gaan gewoon een heel laagdrempelig gebouw maken waar mensen voelen dat ze er welkom zijn. (...) We wilden gewoon een plek zijn waar je makkelijk binnenkomt, waardoor de kruisbestuiving ontstaat tussen de functies. (...) [W]ij zien het als onze opdracht om het inspireren. Om het trapje te stijgen in, uh, op intellectueel of op inspiratie niveau, of op om mensen op ideeën brengen. (...) Dus het is wel echt een cultureel warehouse, gewoon een plek waar je binnenkomt, waar je verschillende manieren cultuur, cultuur wel in een hele brede zin, hè. Je kunt, dus cultuur niet alleen als in een moeilijk ingewikkelde film, maar ook uh, in het leren tekenen of voor kinderen, of creatief bezig zijn, dus een breed palet aan cultuur.”	We’ve always said we’re just going to create a very accessible building where people feel welcome. (...) We simply wanted to be a place where you can easily enter, fostering cross-pollination between functions. (...) [W]e see it as our mission to inspire, to elevate people intellectually or on an inspirational level, or to spark ideas in them. (...) So, it’s really a cultural department store, just a place where you enter, where you can experience culture in various ways, culture in a very broad sense, right. You can experience culture not only with a complex film but also by learning how to draw for children or being creative, so a wide range of cultural activities.
275	“het is gewoon de onderste groep laten aansluiten bij de ontwikkelingen in de wereld en de bovenste groep inspireren meer uit alle ontwikkelingen te halen.”	“[i]t’s simply about enabling the lower group to connect with changes in the world and inspiring the upper group to get more out of all these changes.”
278	“een breed aansprekend programma”	“a broadly appealing program”
281	“gewoon bibliotheek en wij, ik heb altijd gezegd, als je hier binnenkomt en denkt goh dat is gewoon een mooie bibliotheek, dan hebben we alles verkeerd gedaan. [Forum] moet gewoon geen bibliotheek worden. We moeten alle bibliotheek functies hebben, maar je moet niet binnenkomen en denken, oh ja, dit is	“just a library and we, I’ve always said, if you come in here and think oh, this is just a nice library, then we’ve done everything wrong. [Forum] just shouldn’t become a library. We should have all the library functions, but it should not be like, oh yes, this is the new library (...) I just want a place where when you enter, you think, ah,

	<p>dus de nieuwe bibliotheek. (...) Ik wil gewoon een plek waarbij je binnenkomt en denkt, ah zou hier wat voor mij zijn. Hè, dat je nieuwsgierig wordt voor wat er allemaal is. En dat je echt uitgenodigd wordt door het gebouw te gaan slenteren en een soort reis maakt. (...) [Een] bibliotheek heeft natuurlijk wel heel veel associaties die heel veel mensen niet heel fijn vinden: stoffig, muf.</p>	<p>this could be something for me. You know that you become curious about what it has to offer. And that you really feel invited to wander around the building and make a kind of journey. (...) [A] library of course has a lot of associations that many people don't find very pleasant: dusty, musty."</p>
283	<p>"[c]ltuur draagt bij aan een goed leven en vestigingsklimaat en heeft een positieve invloed op de economie."</p>	<p>"[c]ulture contributes to a good living and business climate and has a positive influence on the economy."</p>
285	<p>"[A]ls jij het hebt over de stad waar je graag wil wonen en je vraagt iemand waarom. Noemen ze eigenlijk bijna altijd culturele voorzieningen. Of dat het een mooie stad is of een mooi centrum heeft. (...) Als ik tegen jou bijvoorbeeld zeg van, 'Nou ja Almere lijkt me een hele mooie stad,' gaan mensen je altijd een beetje raar aankijken. Omdat ze er gewoon dat beeld hebben. Veel mensen kennen het niet eens goed. Ze hebben gewoon het beeld, is allemaal nieuwbouw, weet je wel, grote lokale lege pleinen. En, uh, er staat wel echt een mooi gebouw. Dat hele centrum is door Koolhaas notabene ontwikkeld, hè. De beste architect die Nederland ooit voortgebracht heeft. Toch heeft iedereen het idee bij Almere daar wil je dood niet liggen, zeg maar. En dat is wel gebaseerd op het feit dat het gebrek aan iconische gebouwen."</p>	<p>"[I]f you're talking about the city where you'd like to live and you ask someone why, they almost always mention cultural amenities. Or that it's a beautiful city or has a nice downtown area. (...) For example, if I were to say to you, 'Well, Almere seems like a very beautiful city,' people would always look at you a bit strangely. Because they just have that image. Many people don't even know it well. They just have the image, it's all new construction, you know, large, empty squares. And, uh, there is indeed a beautiful building. That entire city center was developed by Koolhaas, after all, the best architect the Netherlands has ever produced. Yet everyone has the idea that you wouldn't want to be caught dead in Almere, so to speak. And that's based on the lack of iconic buildings."</p>
286	<p>"[C]ultuur is een vestigingsvoorwaarde. En als jij zorgt dat je in je stad iets bruisend hebt qua van cultuur, qua cultuur, dan is dat gewoon een, uh, ja een grote plus.</p> <p>Mogezomp: Een reden dat mensen in je stad willen wonen?</p> <p>Dijkhuis: In je stad willen blijven wonen.</p> <p>Mogezomp: Willen blijven wonen?</p>	<p>"[C]ulture is a condition for establishing oneself. And if you make sure that you have something vibrant in terms of culture in your city, then that's simply a, uh, yes, a big plus.</p> <p>Mogezomp: A reason people want to live in your city?</p> <p>Dijkhuis: Want to continue living in your city.</p> <p>Mogezomp: Want to continue living?</p>

	Dijkhuis: Want eerder hadden, hadden we altijd last van een braindrain, hè. Dan ging alles wat hier studeerde. Dat ging meteen weer de, naar het Westen toe, want daar konden ze meer verdienen.”	Dijkhuis: Because previously, we always had to deal with a brain drain, you know. Back then everyone who studied here. They immediately went to the [Randstad] because they could earn more there.”
288	“[m]et zijn vele kennis- en cultuurinstellingen, hoogopgeleide bevolking en constante instroom van jong (internationaal) creatief talent is Groningen met recht een ‘City of Talent’.”	“[w]ith its many knowledge and cultural institutions, highly educated population, and constant influx of young (international) creative talent, Groningen is rightly called a ‘City of Talent’.”
289	“[c]reativiteit wordt, evenals kennis en innovatie, wereldwijd gezien als de grondstof voor stedelijke ontwikkeling. Daarmee heeft Groningen de potentie een ‘creatieve stad’ te zijn. Cultuur is, naast de intrinsieke waarde die het heeft, de motor voor ruimtelijke, sociale, culturele en economische vernieuwingen.”	“[c]reativity, like knowledge and innovation, is globally recognized as the raw material for urban development. Therefore, Groningen has the potential to be a ‘creative city.’ Culture, besides its intrinsic value, is the engine for spatial, social, cultural, and economic innovations.”
291	“aantrekkelijk bewonersklimaat” “tolerantie en ruimte voor alternatieve leefstijlen”	“attractive living environment” “tolerance and space for alternative lifestyles.”
292	“creatieve corridor” “[m]idden op deze corridor komt straks het Groninger Forum. Dat wordt de etalage voor de innovatieve stad, een plek waar informatie en kennis over verleden, heden, en toekomst op verschillende terreinen wordt gepresenteerd aan een divers publiek. Het concept van Forum is nieuw en inhoudelijke ontwikkeling en de vorming daarvan is een creatief proces bij uitstek, dat veel aandacht op de stad zal vestigen.”	“creative corridor” and “[i]n the middle of this corridor, the Groninger Forum will soon emerge. It will serve as the showcase for the innovative city, a place where information and knowledge about the past, present, and future across various fields will be presented to a diverse audience. The concept of the Forum is novel, and its substantive development and shaping are quintessentially creative processes that will draw significant attention to the city.”
293	“[dat] symboliseert als beeldbepalend icoon de doorgroei van Groningen naar een moderne Europese stad.	“a defining icon [that] symbolizes the growth of Groningen into a modern European city.”
294	“[it] staat symbool voor de ondernemersgeest van Groningen.”	“[it] symbolizes the entrepreneurial spirit of Groningen.”
296	“Forum is eigenlijk een broedplaats vind ik, waar mensen bij elkaar komen, waar ze elkaar beïnvloeden.”	“Forum is essentially a breeding ground, in my opinion, where people come together and influence each other.”

303	“als een landmark, uitstraling hebben tot ver buiten de stad en nieuwe bezoekers naar Groningen trekken.”	“as a landmark, having an appeal that reaches far beyond the city and attracts new visitors to Groningen.”
304	“Als je gewoon ziet hoeveel mensen je van buiten [de stad] komen, gewoon omdat het leuk is om even naar het Forum te gaan. Hoeveel mensen hier vooral in de weekenden lopen te fotograferen, zie je gewoon dat er heel veel mensen van buiten komen echt hiervoor komen en tegelijkertijd zie je ook in het gebied er omheen zich heel goed ontwikkelen. [The Market] hotel is super succesvol, uh, horeca hier omheen profiteert echt. (...) mensen halen ook koffie, die lopen langs de supermarkt, die uh, ja die ziet een broek in de etalage. Zo gaat het toch, dus iedereen profiteert mee van [Forum’s] aanzuigende werking.”	“When you just see how many people come from outside [the city], just because it’s nice to go to the Forum. Especially on weekends, you can see many people here taking photos, really coming here from outside, and at the same time, you also see the surrounding area developing very well. [The Market] hotel is super successful, uh, the local restaurants really benefit. (...) People also grab coffee, they walk past the supermarket, and they uh, see a pair of pants in a shop window. That’s how it goes, so everyone benefits from [Forum’s] appeal.”
308	“Groningen heeft een mooie slag gemaakt met de opening van het Forum.”	“Groningen has made great progress with the opening of the Forum.”
309	“dat is voor mij een pot nat”	“it is all the same to me”

Translations Chapter 7		
<i>Footnote</i>	<i>Original (Dutch)</i>	<i>Translation (English)</i>
310	“een weerspiegeling is van hoe die stad [demografisch] is opgebouwd.”	“a reflection of how the city is [demographically] structured.”
312	We hebben altijd gerekend met 1,3 miljoen mensen ongeveer, 1,4. Het is gewoon 1 miljoen mensen meer. De film draait bijna het dubbele aantal bezoekers van wat we vroeger draaide in de [oude] filmhuizen. (...) [D]us het heeft heel veel gebracht, aan gebruik van functies. Bibliotheek groeit weer. We hebben weer meer leden, uh, wat al helemaal tegen de stroom is. Uh, dus ik ben heel trots op hoe dit gaat en hoe de, ook door Groningers van, uh, zonde van het geld tot, uh, het helemaal omarmd hebben.”	“We’ve always counted on about 1.3 million people, around 1.4. It’s just one million more people. Movies attract almost double the number of visitors compared to what we used to attract in the [old] cinema. (...) [S]o it has brought a lot, in terms of usage of facilities. The library is growing again. We have more members now, which is completely against the trend. So, I’m very proud of how this is going and how, also Groningers went from, uh, waste of money to, uh, fully embracing it.”
313	“is een uiteenlopende groep tussen de 16-24 jaar oud die evenementen organiseert en content creëert”	“is a diverse group aged 16-24 who organize events and create content.”
314	“Jeugd is altijd wel lastig, want jeugd laat zich niet goed sturen. (...) [VERS] maken eigen programma’s, voor hun eigen doelgroep. Dus die	“Youth is always a bit tricky because youth is hard to guide. (...) [VERS] create their own programs, for their own target group. So, for example,

	hebben talkshow avonden over seks, zeg maar, bijvoorbeeld, daar bemoeien we ons helemaal niet mee. Dat is ook echt heel ranzig soms, maar dat is ja, uh, ja zij spreken hun eigen taal met hun doelgroep. (...) Ze hebben alleen een begeleider van ons die een beetje, omdat ze natuurlijk niet ervaren programmeurs. (...) Maar [VERS] doet zijn eigen programmering voor hun eigen doelgroep.”	they have talk show evenings about sex, and we don't interfere with that at all. It can be quite raunchy sometimes, but that's, uh, yeah, they speak their own language with their target audience. (...) They only have a supervisor from us because they're not experienced programmers. (...) But [VERS] does its own programming for their own target audience.”
315	“Wat altijd beter kan, maar dat is gewoon heel moeilijk is, uh, en dat dat zit meer in het sociaal domein. Dat wat we net zeiden om achter de deur van mensen te komen, waar je wel een oplossing voor hebt, maar krijg die mensen erbij? (...) [D]at is gewoon een hele grote uitdaging voor de komende jaren, want dat laaggeletterdheid dat is wel echt een van de wortels van alles wat misgaat in de maatschappij. (...) [Mensen] kunnen helemaal niet meer kritisch denken, lezen, weet je wel. En dat begint wel met laaggeletterdheid verbeteren en mediawijsheid.	“What can always be improved, but that's generally very difficult, uh, and that lies more in the social domain. What we just said about getting behind people's doors, when you do have a solution, but how to get those people involved? (...) [T]hat's a very big challenge for the coming years because illiteracy is really one of the roots of everything that goes wrong in society. (...) [People] can't think critically anymore, or read, you know. And that starts with improving literacy and media literacy.
317	“een ander gebouw om binnen te lopen dan een wijkfiliaal waar je de, de, de filiaalhouder kent en, uh, waar je krantje pakt en, uh, je buurvrouw tegenkomt.”	“a different building to walk into than a local branch where you know the branch manager and where you pick up the newspaper and meet your neighbor.”
318	“op pantoffelafstand”	within slipper distance”

Translations Chapter 8		
<i>Footnote</i>	<i>Original (Dutch)</i>	<i>Translation (English)</i>
323	“[dat] symboliseert als beeldbepalend icoon de doorgroei van Groningen naar een moderne Europese stad.	“a defining icon [that] symbolizes the growth of Groningen into a modern European city.”
326	“versterken elkaar als plekken van ontmoeting en dynamiek en vormen samen een aantrekkelijk visitekaartje voor Groningen, juist op de plek waar veel mensen de stad binnenkomen.”	“complementing each other as places of meeting and dynamism, together forming an attractive gateway to Groningen, precisely at the point where many people enter the city.”