

## Destination: Amsterdam

### *Building a Metropolis*

#### 1. Introduction

*Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you anywhere.*

**- Albert Einstein**

'The letters AMS are printed on the labels of luggage and cargo that is destined for Schiphol Airport from anywhere around the world.



AMS also equates to Amsterdam = Metropolis + Schiphol,' and that is

where the 'Destination: Amsterdam' story began in late 2005. In October 2006 this narrative was presented to the City of Amsterdam's College of Mayor and Aldermen by the Physical Planning Department (known by the Dutch acronym DRO), six months after the new municipal executive had taken office. It was the first in a series of five stories about Amsterdam's future that were presented to other parties as well as to the city's administrative body. The story heralds an innovative vision for the city: the Amsterdam Region as an environmentally friendly and flourishing metropolis with worldwide appeal. It is an invitation to envisage the Dutch capital and the surrounding region in a new way, as well as an appeal to municipal departments and agencies, the city's borough councils, residents and businesses to collaborate with one another. It also draws together a range of themes: spatial, economic, social and cultural.

In this article I will briefly explore the content of the narrative, but the focus is on the story's foundations: the process and progress of an innovative Amsterdam approach in the field of narrative-based planning.

#### *Definitions*

There are various concepts that return repeatedly in the following sections: the metropolis, the Amsterdam Metropolis, the metropolitan mentality and the metropolitan strategy. Generally speaking, a city is a 'metropolis' when it constitutes an important economic, political and cultural centre. A metropolis is recognizable as an important hub for international connections and communications. Though in spatial terms it does not have to be a contiguous urban zone, it does boast rapid links between the nuclei in the metropolitan region. Here I essentially use the term 'Amsterdam Metropolis' to refer to the city and its neighbouring municipalities within the region. The precise definition of the Amsterdam Metropolis continues to evolve, so it cannot be set in stone.

'Metropolitan thinking' involves envisaging the city and the region of the future from a catapulted viewpoint, free of preconceived notions, blinkered thinking and prevailing paradigms about city and region. The metropolitan development of Amsterdam and region is the guiding principle in this.

When I speak of the 'metropolitan strategy' it refers to the organization, strategies and palpable incentives that are necessary in order to kick-start metropolitan development.

## Structure

The vision for the Amsterdam Metropolis has evolved over the last year and a half on the basis of five stories: 'Bestemming Amsterdam' ('Destination: Amsterdam'), 'Strategie Groot Amsterdam' ('Strategy for the Greater Amsterdam Area'), 'Red de Noordpool' ('Save the North Pole'), 'Goederen maken Amsterdam' ('Goods make Amsterdam') and 'Mensen voor mensen' ('People for People'). These stories were conceived by the City of Amsterdam's Physical Planning Department (DRO) based on a range of studies and products and inspired by an abundance of literature contributed by the storyteller. This article begins with a description of the 'Destination: Amsterdam', the story that marked the full-blooded launch of metropolitan thinking in the city and the region. There is then a discussion of the shift in the way people think about the city and the region, and the abandonment of several notions that were deeply engrained. This also serves to introduce several core values that would become part of the story. In the concluding section I explore the context and the circumstances under which the metropolitan vision and metropolitan mentality has evolved, as well as the way this is being worked on now, including the forging of its organizational form. To do this I have consulted texts written by the various agencies in the spatial planning field in order to establish an intra-departmental collaborative platform.

## 2. Destination: AMS

Various attempts have been made to commit the 'Destination: Amsterdam' story to paper, but none of them has anywhere near as much impact as hearing the story being told. Its presentation is speculative and imaginary, a theoretical exercise: 'Transform the Amsterdam region into a metropolis within 20 years.' The story is unfinished and the outlines are still in flux whenever it is told. The context in which the story is heard and the audience are pertinent factors, too. The story metamorphoses, the emphasis shifts, and thus it adapts to the specific expertise or background of the listeners. The story is a call to share one's thoughts and contribute: 'Just imagine ...', 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if ...'. A select group of people is presented with a great many images of the qualities of the city and the region on a big screen in a hall. This is followed by propositions and images that translate Amsterdam's qualities into opportunities for its metropolitan development. This is how the narrator leads the audience on an imaginary journey into a metropolitan future that seems within easy reach – if you have the will to see and believe it. Regretfully I cannot take you on this journey, but in order not to leave you completely in the dark I will provide a summary here, though this description is far from comprehensive.



### *Two trump cards and investment*

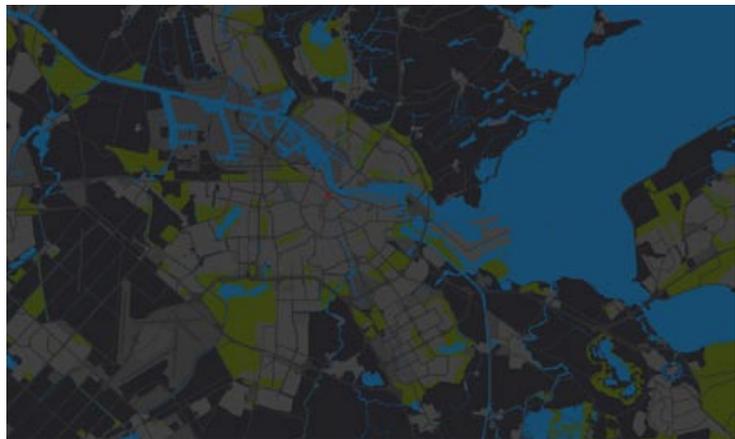
'Destination: Amsterdam' starts with the assertion that the Amsterdam region has every potential to blossom into a flourishing metropolis with worldwide allure over the coming years. The Amsterdam region already has two trump cards at its disposal: within its sphere of influ-

ence one finds Schiphol, the ninth busiest airport in the world, and the world's biggest peer-to-peer internet hub, the Amsterdam Internet Exchange (AMS-IX).

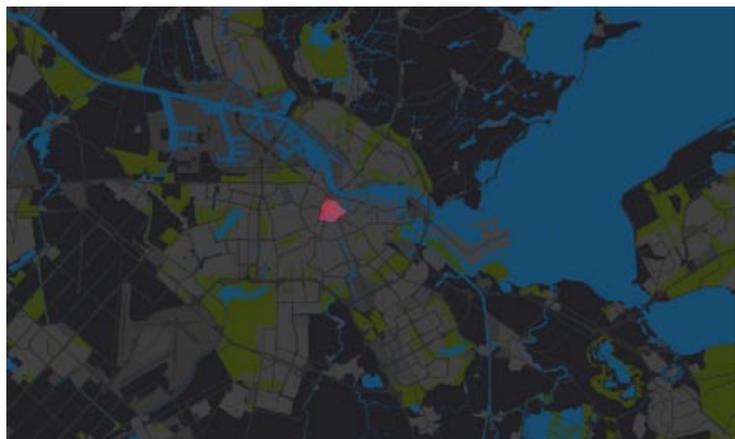
The metropolitan ambition can be fulfilled by means of substantial investments in the city and the 'Amsterdam Metropolis' brand, like Barcelona and Berlin, for example. There is, however, a yawning chasm between the budgets available to these cities and the means available to Amsterdam. The question that this prompts: How and on what foundations can the Amsterdam Metropolis be built?

The basis of the Amsterdam Metropolis is the unique cultural and historical cityscape, enjoying one of the longest waterfronts in the world as well as expanses of water and greenery that extend deep into the city core. There is also the spatial and socio-economic dynamism that is the major driving force behind the metropolitan development of the city and its environs. Choices are necessary in order to translate these characteristics and dynamism into opportunities for building a metropolis. The 'Destination: Amsterdam' story pinpoints various key qualities and proposes how these might be reinforced and developed further:

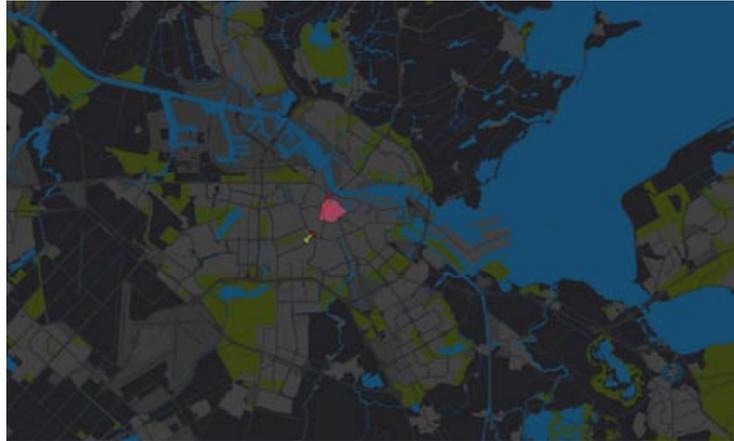
**1. A Symbolic Start.** Amsterdam's metropolitan ambition already existed in the Golden Age, when the city fathers order the construction of twelve towers in order to give the city the skyline of a metropolis, a match for Rome and Naples. Many of these towers are still standing, though a few have not survived. The reconstruction of one of these towers would be a highly symbolic launch for a metropolitan strategy.



**2. The Medieval City.** Amsterdam is distinctive for its well-preserved medieval core that attracts hordes of visitors. A large part of the historical city is occupied by the red-light district. Leisure-oriented businesses have gradually established themselves in and around these areas: Madame Tussauds and the Sex Museum, for example. The question is whether this is desirable and what the alternatives are. Perhaps there are other locations in the city more suitable for these functions, so that justice is done to the full glory of the historic city centre.



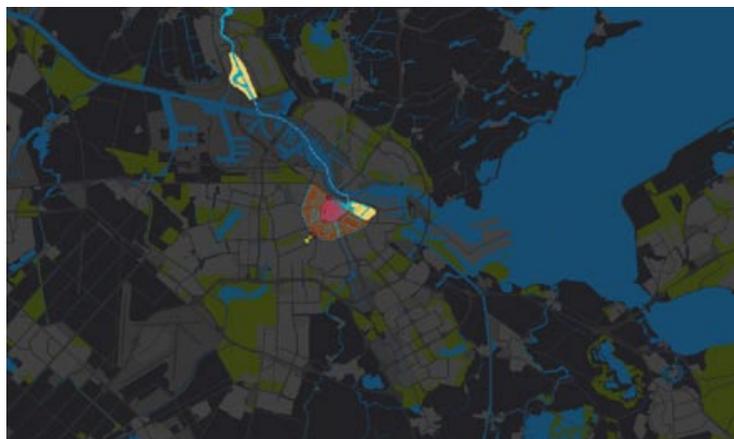
**3. The Museumplein.** Some of the country's most important museums are set around the Museumplein – the 'museum plaza' – a landscaped expanse of public space. Both the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum are undergoing alterations and renovation. Once these projects are complete, Amsterdam will once again be a cultural forum of exceptional stature. But more is possible! The south-east corner of the plaza is a lifeless spot, even though the Pijp, one of Amsterdam's liveliest and most dynamic neighbourhoods, lies just behind it. Reinvigoration of the programme on the Museumplein's eastern flank and a link with the Pijp would present opportunities for further development of the area.



**4. The Grachtengordel.** Amsterdam's grachtengordel, its 17th-century semicircle of concentric canals, is an invaluable zone that attracts many visitors. There are cafés and restaurants galore, ensuring vitality and diversity. There are, moreover, almost 100,000 people living in the very heart of the city – it is hardly a museum – and it boasts the highest concentration of creative businesses. These are the area's strengths that should be developed further. The university that is based here is currently working on the consolidation of all its humanities libraries under one roof: Amsterdam city centre will soon boast the biggest humanities library in Europe. This also presents opportunities because of the properties this consolidation will leave vacant. Amsterdam could focus efforts on attracting international knowledge-based institutions that could move into this accommodation.



**5. Making the most of the past: the VOC.** Amsterdam's roots as a flourishing city of trade are closely entwined with the history of the VOC – the Dutch East India Company. Archeologists have excavated a complete VOC dockyard on the Oostelijke Eilanden (Eastern Islands) dockland archipelago and there are even bigger historical shipyards on the banks of the Zaan. This rich history should be brought into play, as people from many corners of the world are familiar with the VOC and are prepared to travel in order to see things relating to its history.



**6. The 'Red Carpet'.** The concentrated functional mix of Amsterdam city centre is currently expanding towards the Pijp. This neighbourhood is already culturally diverse and metropolitan, comparable with the livelier neighbourhoods of London and Paris, but the majority of visitors have not yet discovered it, presenting opportunities for the 'Red Carpet' project. This project concentrates on the design of the public space and the functional programme along the route of the North/South Line, a high-speed metro link to that is currently under construction. The 'Red Carpet' peters out at the Singelgracht, the waterway boundary between the City Centre and the Pijp, but it ought to be rolled out even further and extend right into the Pijp.



**7. Zuidas.** The Zuidas (South Axis) is an ambitious, international business centre combined with high-quality residential development and a full range of amenities that is currently being realized along the southern tangent of Amsterdam's A10 ring road. The dynamism of the Zuidas development combined with the sprawling city centre are important drivers of the expansion of the city's metropolitan hub. The North/South Line is the artery that will ensure the complete integration of Zuidas and the rest of the city. The zone in between will therefore receive an enormous boost, as seen in the zone between the City of London and Canary Wharf. This process must be properly orchestrated and investment is needed in order to ensure it proceeds smoothly, establishing cultural facilities that dovetail with residential development, for instance.



**8. Connecting with Schiphol.** In 2006 more than 46 million people passed through Schiphol. The Schiphol Group forecasts that passenger numbers will reach 65 million in 2015, an increase of just over 40 per cent. To truly capitalize on the growing airport and the rise in visitor numbers, the North/South Line should be extended to Schiphol. All the important hubs in the metropolitan network would then enjoy direct access to and from the international airport.



**9. The Las Vegas Strip.** Another urban renewal area is Amsterdam Zuidoost, the city's south-eastern expansion area that was built in the 1970s. The ArenA stadium (home to Ajax football club) was built here a decade ago. In the immediate vicinity one also finds the Heineken Music Hall and a Pathé multiplex cinema, and construction of the GETZ Entertainment Centre is set to commence in the near future.



The area is traversed by the ArenA Boulevard. Introducing a slight realignment this boulevard would reorient it towards the city centre, creating an ideal link along which all kinds of large-scale leisure facilities (perhaps relocating here from the historical centre) could be established and making it as vast as the Las Vegas Strip.

**10. Metropolitan Park.** The new Amsterdam needs its own Central Park where people can find peace and quiet in the middle of the bustling metropolis. The southern and eastern quadrants of Amsterdam are separated by the finger of greenery along the River Amstel. This would be the ideal location for the park: wedged between the metropolitan entertainment zone in Zuidoost and Zuidas with its desirable residential neighbourhoods.



**11. Cruise Hub.** The city has the potential to continue developing into the North Sea's main cruise hub. Amsterdam already enjoys big advantages, and not only the proximity of Schiphol Airport but also the high-speed links with, for example, Paris (and Euro Disney!). As a complement to the cruise terminal on the Oostelijke Handelskade in the stylishly regenerated Eastern Harbour District, a second terminal would have to be built to the west of Amsterdam in order to achieve this.



**12. City of Water.** Over recent years, development along the banks of the IJ waterway have been steaming ahead. Waterfront homes and workspace are popular. And a lot more is possible. For a long time Amsterdam Noord was a no-go area on the mental map of most Amsterdam residents. It was recently discovered by the creative industries. It has long provided a venue for festivals, and now housing and leisure facilities are being realized there. MTV established its Benelux headquarters there a couple of years ago and enterprises are now queuing up in order to move here. This could serve as inspiration for further developments along the banks of the IJ waterway, extending into the neighbouring municipality of Zaanstad.



**13. New Connections: Mudholland Drive.** The laying of a new road link across an ecological dam between the provinces of Flevoland and North Holland will create a route that passes numerous polders. Designing this third ring around Amsterdam as a 'parkway' would result in the creation of a natural green route, along which a luxurious residential milieu could be established.



**14. Looking South.** To the south of Amsterdam there are vast expanses of peatland meadow that are gradually subsiding. Water storage might offer a solution here, and allowing some of the polders to flood again would make the adjoining wetlands and lakes of the Vinkeveense Plassen approximately four times bigger. There would then be potential to establish a top-notch residential environment here as well.





**15. Establishing Cities.** The Netherlands has a tradition extending from the 16th to the 20th centuries of establishing towns and cities from scratch in polders reclaimed from the sea. This is how we should build in the future, too: no off-the-peg Vinex expansion districts or American suburbs, but a continuation of that Dutch building tradition.

### 3. The Power of Stories

#### *The Word and the Narrator*

The vision for the future has not been committed to paper but is delivered using a Power-Point presentation. There are maps and graphs to illustrate and substantiate the scenario, but without actually hearing it these amount to little more than a series of attractive slides. The methodology of formulating a shared vision for the Amsterdam of the future by means of a narrative was not a predetermined strategy. It did, however, dovetail with the DRO's strategy of anticipating potential shifts in focus and direction in a timely manner should the climate and prevailing conditions be right.

The point of departure for the metropolitan strategy was provided by several broadly shared sentiments: the city was 'complete' and the urban development budget was well-nigh exhausted, there was no leeway for any new ideas, there was an economic slowdown, and private enterprise had to take the lead while government took a step back. The only success achieved was in the Noordvleugel (the 'North Wing' area of the Randstad conurbation, represented by a broad consultative platform of the same name), which had made greater headway with national government by entering into robust joint agreements. A leap of the imagination was required in order to break this deadlock. That is why the story of the Amsterdam Metropolis is first and foremost about a sea change in the way we think about the city, creating an atmosphere that entices people to enter into debate about the future of Amster-

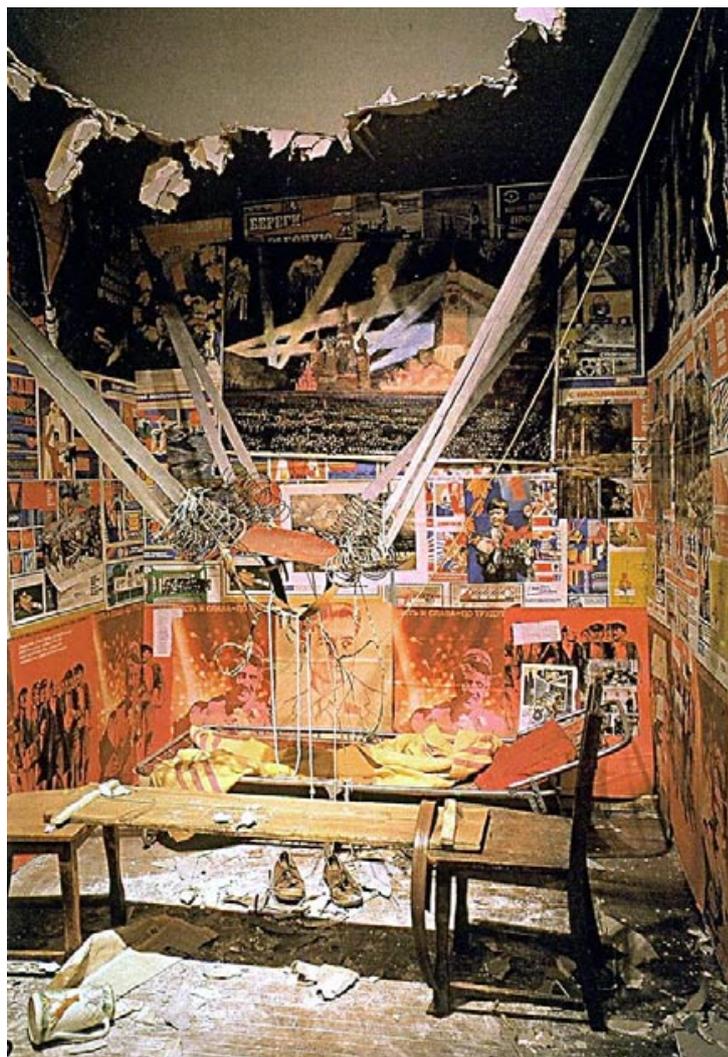
dam and the region as a metropolis. The story could alight on terra firma and disperse once the political climate permitted it and there was a call for fresh input in various discussions about the future of the city and the region. Perhaps more importantly, the story could start to take root thanks to the power and impact of the combination of the word and the narrator.

### Narratives

The impact of the word and the narrator are clearly explained by Stephen Denning in *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations* (2000). He describes how analytic, abstract thinking is ideal for reporting the everyday, the things we often take for granted and of which we are barely conscious. By contrast, narrative thinking, encapsulated in stories and storytelling, is ideally suited to discussing the exceptional. Narrative thrives on the disruptions from the ordinary due to some event or thought that changes our perspective. Stories derive their power from a subversion of the normal, which generates the fear, curiosity and excitement that we all feel when listening to a good new story. Stories therefore appeal to the mental processes and are grounded in the feelings of the listener. They appeal to heart and mind. This is exactly what is happening in the Amsterdam approach in the field of narrative-based planning.

### Catapult

The 'Red de Noordpool' ('Save the North Pole') presentation, one of the sequels to 'Destination: Amsterdam', underscores the critical importance of 'letting go' for the metropolitan



mentality to flourish. This entails a readiness to take risks, the acceptance of a sense of unease and a step outside the comfort zone of existing conceptual frameworks. Catapulting yourself into unfamiliar space makes it possible to ascertain how these frameworks function and to analyze your personal performance within them. This was illustrated using this image of a room with a catapult, a photo of *The Man who Flew into Space from His Apartment* installation (presented in Moscow in 1986) by Ilya Kabakov.

### The Power of the Imagination

The provocation to get up out of their easy chairs got many people in Amsterdam and beyond sitting on the edge of their seats, with a sense of restless expectation that something was about to happen and the desire to actively participate. The words and images presented to them were a call to become involved in concerted metropolitan

thinking about the city and region, but also provided the leeway for a personal interpretation of the metropolis. The story about the metropolis evolves with the input of its listeners' powers of imagination. The story hangs in the air and rustles through the corridors, inspiring discussion, creativity and introspection as well as clearing the way for input from a diversity of sectors. I have met colleagues from the city's borough councils and from municipal departments who were talking about the 'Metropolitan Vision' with a twinkle in their eyes, as if they were in on a big secret. I was also gripped by the story. 'At long last we have an overarching vision for the Amsterdam of the future,' I thought. It imbued me a sense of excitement, as if I were setting out on a journey to destinations unknown.

Besides inspiration there has been irritation as well, both within and outside the DRO. This is based on entrenched attitudes towards the storyteller: 'Who does that bigwig think he is?' Or towards an organization: 'So this is how the DRO thinks it will take the lead.' Voices from the region chimed in: 'There's arrogant Amsterdam imagining it's the centre of everything again!' There were also comments regarding the content: 'What the heck is a metropolis?', 'Amsterdam is the centre, but the centre of what?', 'Where exactly are we heading?', 'How does this tie in with existing policy, ongoing projects, the North Wing region and the Randstad conurbation as a whole?', 'How are we going to make this a reality?' and 'Are these really the incentives needed to establish a metropolis?' The important thing is that there is discussion and debate, and that this increasingly tackles substantive content, leaving notions of status and posturing by the wayside. Thanks to these discussions about the substance and the organization of the content, the story of the Amsterdam Metropolis has increasingly become a story that belongs to everyone over the past year.

#### 4. A Mental Leap

'We are seeing a softly-softly paradigm shift,' was the reaction of City of Amsterdam's Alderman for Physical Planning on hearing the 'Destination: Amsterdam' story. Hidden amidst the stories about the Amsterdam Metropolis one can detect a new way of thinking which bids farewell to notions that were unquestioningly accepted as givens. An important message is that the formation of the metropolis is already underway, and in that sense it is no longer just an option. It is a development that is already a fact, one which the Amsterdam region can seize in order to fulfil its aspirations. This calls for new values and ideas with regard to how and with whom the future might be shaped.

##### *The Compact City*

Amsterdam has been working on a compact city for the last 25 years. This strategy was aimed at limiting the growth in motorized mobility. People would not need to travel so far because they lived and worked in close proximity to home and to one another. The open landscape around the city could be preserved by pursuing more intensive development within the city itself. This simultaneously reinforced the social basis for amenities, so that shops in the city remained economically viable. Densification meant optimizing the use of land through more compact development and the mixing of functions. The 'Compact City' strategy was embodied in a masterplan introduced in 1981. Since then Amsterdam has evolved into an internationally oriented hub of creative business activity with an extraordinary gravitational pull. The city has been a magnet for young people, businesses, culture, foreigners and (new) media.



*Developments along the IJ waterway*

In pursuance of this masterplan, new urban environments were added to Amsterdam, including the banks of the IJmeer lake and the developments along the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere axis. Efforts were also directed at the regeneration of post-war residential districts. Two years ago there was an assumption that the city would be 'complete' once these projects were finished, but regional developments and safeguarding Amsterdam's global competitive position require a new way of thinking about the city's position. This new way of thinking ushers in the paradigm shift – from constructing as many residential units as possible in a compact city to the development of an international metropolis. That does not mean complete abandonment of the compact city concept, but quite the contrary: compact development is still necessary in order to build towards the metropolis. Space in the city remains limited, after all.

#### *From Polycentric Network City to Metropolis*

Conceptualizing the Amsterdam Metropolis means a jump in scale, from city and environs to metropolitan region. The region is emphatically involved in 'Destination: Amsterdam', but in a new way. In recent years the notion of the polycentric network city has dominated the way we in the Netherlands have thought about urban development. The basis of this concept is a vector of various nuclei without a hierarchy, with Amsterdam as one of many nuclei. However, in the Amsterdam region, the so-called North Wing, there is in fact a hierarchy in the polycentric network, with Amsterdam as a self-evident midpoint. Amsterdam's metropolitan core encompasses everything within the A10 ring road, while the metropolitan region is what surrounds it. This is the magnet for people, tourists, businesses and so on. A network situation like that found in the Ruhrgebiet in Germany is neither relevant nor desirable here; without this centralized concentration a truly metropolitan area would be inconceivable. Amsterdam's central role is unique within the North Wing of the Randstad conurbation and the Netherlands as a whole. The Ruimtelijk Planbureau (the Netherlands Institute for Spatial Research) concludes that all kinds of studies point in a similar direction: 'Whether it concerns national

prosperity, employment growth, the importance of investment in infrastructure or the demand for new homes, the Amsterdam metropolitan region is the undisputed economic heart of the Netherlands in every respect. This is where investment is most needed and it also generates the highest returns. In brief, the advantages of an agglomeration are greatest there.' However, this does not mean that Amsterdam can think exclusively about itself, because regional coordination is a prerequisite for thinking and functioning as a metropolis.



### *The People-based Economy*

From centuries the commodity-based economy was an important pillar of Amsterdam's urban development, a source of economic growth and prosperity for the city. However, today's economy is shifting from the production of goods to the generation of added value, from a production economy to a consumer economy. The tertiary sector accounts for 90 percent of Amsterdam's economy, with highest growth in business services and the creative industries. Taking full advantage of this requires a change of course, shifting the emphasis from commodities to people.

A growing number of people will live, work or spend leisure time in the Amsterdam Metropolis, making it essential to carefully manage urban space and the people who reside there or visit it. This calls for an expansion of the metropolitan core area and a dispersal of public amenities, residential and business milieus across the city and the region.

A people-based strategy means it is possible to focus efforts on establishing a more environmentally friendly metropolis. The goods-based economy with the need for transportation and logistics usually causes congestion and pollution. To make a flourishing and sustainable metropolis a realistic proposition, one needs a metropolitan strategy that is focused on a people-based economy, an increase in high-value tourists and business visitors, knowledge-intensive and creative business activities (ICT and business/financial services), knowledge institutions (R&D and higher education), a diversity of residential environments, Amsterdam's existing and potential inhabitants (education, sport and jobs), thoughtfully designed public

space (greenery and water), culture (museums, leisure and events) and services (cafés and restaurants, hotels, conference centres).

## 5. Shaping the Metropolitan Vision

The development of the Amsterdam Metropolis involves a complexity of interlocking processes with a diversity of actors and vested interests. Public governance of these complex processes is no simple task. Urban development and the shaping of a metropolitan vision involve a process of consultation about joint signification and the joint negotiation of values regarding content (what), processes (how) and interrelationships (who), for which an assortment of conclusions and outcomes are possible.

The preceding sections were about the how and the what: the story as a method and ideas about stimuli and the assets that might lend substance to the metropolitan vision. In the following section I will explore the context and the conditions under which the metropolitan mentality as understood by the DRO could be deployed, also describing the way in which the metropolitan mentality is currently translated organizationally.

### *Space for Change*

A new vision implies making choices and saying farewell to old convictions and behavioural patterns. Generally speaking it is typical of signification processes that the reticence towards the outside world increases as the internal consensus grows. Values that have become broadly embedded and accepted, such as the 'compact city' or the 'network city', eventually 'coagulate', becoming institutions in their own right that are difficult to even call into question. The notion that the city would be 'complete' is exemplary.

Innovation becomes a necessity if new values rise to the surface, prompted by changing circumstances that are uncomfortable or must still find a place within existing institutions. For this there must be space for change, a momentum that encompasses the readiness to accommodate new perspectives, make choices and re-examine old convictions.

### *The Context*

The notion that the city would be 'complete' stemmed from the city's previous municipal executive. A whole raft of projects was initiated during this period, facilitating Amsterdam's development into the attractive city it is today. This process came under pressure because of the recession that limited the City Council's financial wherewithal. The coffers for building projects were empty. The response to this was launched under the motto of 'The Great Simplification'. Closely interwoven with the political Zeitgeist, this essentially meant a period of austerity and an appropriately tailored strategy in the spatial development domain. The DRO did not have much of a hand to play: now that most of the metropolitan projects were in the process of construction or implementation, the baton had to be passed to the private sector and market forces. The task for the spatial development sector was to simplify the abundance of rules and regulations as well as decision-making procedures in order to accommodate the market as efficiently as possible. This process of reducing government involvement and limiting the DRO's role to the simplification and enforcement of planning laws and building codes was the main feature of spatial planning policy in the two years prior to the municipal elections of March 2006.

### *New Ways of Working*

This inspired the DRO to endeavour to find new ways of working and new methodologies in the context of the 'Planological Debate' in order to ensure that planning policy could still play a significant role in the City of Amsterdam. The process generated many new products. With a limited budget and a limited time frame ('quick and dirty' was a term heard often), demands from the political, commercial and social arenas were responded to swiftly, by drawing up an inventory of contemporary developments and formulating concrete proposals in order to proactively accommodate them. This process involved experimentation with new ways of working, including the optimized integration of existing information resources, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the functional map (a map providing data about every function within the city). External coaches were appointed for each project and the urban planners collaborated with all kinds of parties from a whole range of disciplines and backgrounds, including businesspeople. Examples of the new products that were devised include the 'on-site planning survey', which involved taking walking tours of specific city locations in the company of urban planners, strategists and other experts, and 'entrepreneurial round tables', at which businesspeople and civil servants cooperated in the development of strategies for the realization of leisure initiatives within the city that capitalize on gaps in the market. The outcomes generated by these new products were to become building blocks of the metropolitan story and a firm foundation for the development of the metropolitan mentality.

Alongside the context outlined above there were three developments that put the city's future back on the agenda:

1. In the run-up to municipal elections in March 2006, the DRO spoke with various political factions. These discussions revealed that the party-political agendas were primarily determined by short-term thinking and encapsulated issues.
2. In discussions about the future of Schiphol Airport, the limitations imposed by the noise pollution contours and the stagnating number of transfer passengers inspired consideration for a change of course.
3. Discussions about the Randstad (including the North Wing) are conducted at regional and national levels. They are dogged by a lack of executive power, caused by the proverbial bureaucratic spaghetti of endless deliberation as well as by the multiplicity of interests – often conflicting – that they strive to accommodate. Pivotal here is the lack of a shared perspective on the Randstad and how it functions.

### *A Sea of Stories*

The 'Destination: Amsterdam' story and the sequels it generated are a reaction to the context described, which is characterized by one common denominator: the lack of a shared and coherent vision for the future of Amsterdam. Every alderman and every municipal department in Amsterdam was working on a personal or organizational citadel, devising scenarios that proceeded from some particular background (often sector-specific) and were ratified by administrators: the residential vision, the sustainable city, art and culture, and so on. These are all separate trajectories that are sometimes connected (but are as likely not to be) and pivotal here is that they are different stories. And these stories were often not even passed on after the enactment of the vision, thus gaining no foothold within the municipal apparatus. Nor was there any external communication of a shared storyline and agreements with neighbouring and regional municipalities were reached just on the basis of sector-specific classifications.

### *Time for a Joined-up Story*

The momentum necessary for the Amsterdam Metropolis story's construction of a shared long-term vision to succeed was attained when the newly elected city council took office in early 2006. The elections meant a big swing to the left. The city's voters wanted municipal government to become actively involved again. The economy was picking up again around this time, so there was the opportunity to adopt a more proactive strategy, to launch new initiatives, to further invigorate the private sector, and to continue investing in the city. Six months after its appointment, the new executive, a coalition of PvdA (labour) and GroenLinks (left-wing greens), presented the 'Amsterdam Top City' programme with the subtitle 'The birth of a metropolis'. The executive set itself the goal of re-establishing the city among the five leading European cities, but the 'Top City' initiative was primarily an economic narrative. Moreover, it did not qualify what exactly the Amsterdam Metropolis ought to be. It did, however, provide the inroad for the 'Destination: Amsterdam' story, for the development of a shared narrative that can only flourish through dialogue. 'Destination: Amsterdam' has actively promoted this dialogue, giving the Amsterdam Metropolis the chance to evolve democratically, from the bottom up.

### *A Cultural Shift*

In the process of developing the Amsterdam Metropolis narrative, everyone involved has to come to believe that a metropolitan ambition is appropriate and they must be ready to actively contribute. This new way of thinking about and building on the metropolis requires a cultural shift within Amsterdam's administrative apparatus. In my experience, great alertness, an ability to draw people together and versatility are a prerequisite. It also requires the art of prophecy to envision and investigate the various possible avenues for the future. The planning policy discussion spawned a creative and vigorous process within the DRO. However, it is not the DRO alone that needs to be actively engaged with the story. It is necessary to exercise the greatest possible openness and to seek intensive collaboration with residents, the business community and neighbouring municipalities, and this also applies within the municipal apparatus itself, between city boroughs and municipal departments. This is a means of ensuring cohesion across the various sectors, shifting from the spatial disciplines pur sang to a broader outlook in which economic, social and cultural components are tackled in conjunction with the spatial.

### *Points of the Compass*

With regard to content and organization, the metropolitan strategy currently extends from the city centre into the metropolitan area in subsections determined by the four points of the compass, each one receiving tailor-made attention. There is already a Westward, a Northward and a Southward, and the policy for the fourth point of the compass is currently being implemented. Within these '—wards' the DRO collaborates with projects on the metropolitan scale, with city boroughs, other municipal departments, neighbouring municipalities and private initiatives, driving a diversity of projects that are aimed at taking best advantage of opportunities in the area concerned, all within guidelines defined by the metropolitan strategy. As a project manager for 'Southwards', I and my fellow project managers employ an integral approach, addressing developments and opportunities in the area from the perspectives of various disciplines and thus forging links, forming new coalitions and collaborative teams within and between existing networks. Inspirational individuals from other municipal organizations and beyond are being brought in to generate new perspectives and working methods. The activities set in motion in the context of the '—wards' are being implemented at various levels. They might take advantage of autonomous developments, eliminate barriers

and encourage the concentration of urban amenities at specific locations or they might entail the safeguarding and/or reinforcement of existing qualities. The attendant measures might involve the physical space, such as small- or large-scale interventions in the public domain, but might also entail the structuring of processes, the rallying together of various parties, the appointment of a manager for a retail district or the adaptation of existing policy.

### *The Region*

Within the North Wing of the Randstad the metropolitan strategy has become the basis for the long-term spatial and economic development of the region. The metropolitan mentality helps boost cohesion across the region by mustering the array of interests into a single shared context. There is already intensive cooperation with Almere, the neighbouring city on the far side of the IJmeer. With Haarlemmermeer, the most important municipality to the southwest of the city and the site of Schiphol Airport, there are ongoing discussions about intensifying cooperation that are motivated by the metropolitan mentality. In the context of the Randstad as a whole it is not yet entirely clear how Amsterdam Metropolis will be implemented.

### *The Development Alliance*

In June 2007 I attended a memorable gathering of directors from the spatial planning sector. A significant organizational step was taken towards implementing a successful and concerted metropolitan strategy. Amsterdam City Council established a Development Alliance to provide an interdepartmental platform for the spatial development sector. The consensus, the ambition and enthusiasm for working on the city in a new way, seemingly free of sector-specific mentalities, was impressive. The Alliance's texts refer to Barcelona and London, cities that have made successful bids to host the Olympic Games, thanks to a diversity of parties establishing cooperative alliances during the initial stages of the bid, and all rallying behind a broadly shared ambition. The shared driving force behind the Alliance is the will to fulfil the Amsterdam Metropolis vision.

## **6. Conclusion: the Tipping Point**

In *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000), Malcolm Gladwell explains how the behaviour of so-called 'social epidemics', or sudden and often chaotic changes from one state to another. He draws a parallel with how an epidemic 'tips'. By 'tipping point' he means the moment when something unusual crosses a threshold and becomes broadly accepted or, by analogy with epidemics, the point at which a virus proliferates and spreads like wildfire. Stories can be seen as epidemics, so if it is sufficiently robust then it will spread via the various networks in which it can gain a significant foothold. This is also described as the phenomenon of 'story lines': if a group of people tells a story often enough then in the long term this results in a commonly shared image.

The metropolitan mentality has recently gained an irrevocable hold within the City of Amsterdam's governmental apparatus. There are also signs of a change of tack in the region. Thinking about the Amsterdam Metropolis has served as the initial impetus to foster cohesion in political strategies and to enter into intensive collaboration among the municipal components and in wider circles – residents, businesses, social agencies and neighbouring municipalities. The Amsterdam Metropolis story – the metropolitan mentality – has proliferated and dispersed in a softly-softly manner, reaching its tipping point almost unnoticed. I sense a renewed

vitality to work together on shaping Amsterdam's future – and not only on the work floor but also at the managerial level. And the story is still far from finished. Anchoring the requisite cultural shift depends on choices that are made in the future. In organizational terms the metropolitan modus operandi must be sculpted further and the ties with other sectors, especially the social, must be reinforced. Strategically speaking the city council will have to make further choices regarding the financial commitment. It also has to be determined how the private sector, which must take responsibility for the lion's share of the spatial investments, will be involved. In terms of content, there must be further deliberation about the importance of the metropolitan mentality to the programme, about space, accessibility, and the people who live and work in the Amsterdam Metropolis as well as its visitors. When will the focus shift to specific projects? Embedding the Amsterdam Metropolis in the Randstad debate is another important challenge.

The way in which the vision for Amsterdam Metropolis succeeded in reaching its tipping point as part of the city's developmental process relied on a great many factors that are explored in this article. I do not think it is the tangible content of a metropolitan vision for Amsterdam that was decisive in achieving this. It was the presentational form, the narrative, told repeatedly in small, select groups. 'Did you already hear...?' No reams of paper or memoranda that end up in a bottom drawer without a second glance, but a story that sticks in your mind, like a tune that won't go away, rising to the surface and providing inspiration at unexpected and long-awaited moments. The storyline, speaking in terms of possibilities and incentives while leaving the precise content open to people's imaginations and to open-hearted discussion, is what has given the metropolitan mentality a chance to flourish. The metropolitan strategy has worked because time and opportunity, the political and administrative climate, the individuals and the economy were favourable. The DRO was able to seize the moment, with a convincing storyteller as its figurehead.