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## The contribution of leisure and entertainment to the evolving polycentric urban network on regional scale - towards a new research agenda

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# **The contribution of leisure and entertainment to the evolving polycentric urban network on regional scale: towards a new research agenda**

Paper for the 45<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European regional Science Association  
23-27 August, 2005, Free University Amsterdam

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**Abstract:** The urban landscape in advanced economies transforms from monocentric cities to polycentric urban networks on regional scale. The growing amount of research that is being devoted to this transformation sticks to classic activity systems like residential development, economic production and employment and commuting. Synchronous to this transformation, the economic importance and spatial impacts of a 'new' activity system, outdoor leisure and entertainment, has grown rapidly in urban areas. Due to tremendous dynamics of consumption, production and urban politics with regard to this activity system, it is subject of a composite of spatial pressures for centralisation in inner-cities, de-concentration away from central cities and (re-)concentration in suburbs and exurban places. Notwithstanding this spatial dynamics, leisure and entertainment are not part of the research agenda on regional polycentric urban networks. Based on brief overviews of literature on both polycentric urban development and the dynamics of leisure and entertainment in urban areas, this paper presents a few basic research questions in order to initiate the study of the contribution of the leisure activity system to the development of polycentric urban networks on regional scale.

**Key words:** polycentric urban network, leisure and entertainment, cultural-symbolic urban economy, new urban politics.

## **1. Introduction**

Many cities have been subject of processes of spatial expansion and functional fragmentation since the 1970s. Most of the period ever since, this process has been understood as deconcentration of what essentially remained monocentric cities. Recently, however, intertwining processes of societal and geographical dynamics have given way to such expanded, complex and diffuse patterns of urban activities and mobility that the awareness is growing that we witness a more fundamental transformation of the spatial organisation of urban areas. What we see now is not simply a new round of urban extension. By and large, the monocentric city has been substituted with the polycentric urban region or network as the prevailing model of urban spatial organisation.

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Although a comprehensive theoretical framework on this transformation is still ‘in the making’ yet, this transformation can basically be associated with a decreasing importance of economies of agglomeration and proximity as the dominant logic of location. The freedom of location of urban functions vis-à-vis one another has grown. Nevertheless, the once popular idea that new technologies, in particular ICTs, have liberated us from all friction of distance and have made ‘anything possible anywhere and anytime’, has been exposed as a myth. Rather than the outcome of the single logic of de-concentration of urban population and functions, the spatial dynamics of contemporary metropolitan regions is the outcome of the composite of synchronous but partly opposite pressures. These pressures are centralisation in city centres, de-concentration away from central cities, and re-centralisation outside central cities in “magnet centres where new economies of scale arise” (Ewing, 1997). These expanding and increasingly polycentric urban configurations are ‘hold together’ by extending transport systems.

Provided the trend towards polycentric urban configurations on regional scale, the Polycentric Urban Region as a concept has gained in popularity among urban and regional geographers and planners since the late 1980s. A considerable amount of writing since then has given the research agenda on the concept a strong impetus. However, most research on these configurations is restricted to a few classic activity systems in urban research, particularly residential development, productive economic activities (industry and services), employment, labour market and commuting, if research does refer to a singular activity system at all. This paper centres upon an activity system – outdoor leisure - that has grown tremendously in importance in the economic performance and spatial dynamics of cities and metropolitan regions since the late 1980s, but has not yet entered the research agenda of the polycentric urban network. In fact, the subjects of polycentric urban configurations and leisure in urban areas are separate domains of research almost without cross-references. The paper intends to link these domains by focusing on the question how the activity system of leisure contributes to the development of polycentric urban networks. Since this is still an unexplored field, the paper ‘only’ aims at phrasing some annotated basic research questions rather than to presenting corroborated knowledge. A considerable share of the consulted literature is on the Netherlands, a bias that is explained by the intention to apply the findings of this paper first to Dutch polycentric regions.

## 2. The concept of urban polycentricity

In general, the reach of the concept of polycentric urban development is not restricted to metropolitan regions since the last two decades of the past century. The concept is much older – examples date back to the late nineteenth century (Breheny, 1996; Sieverts, 2003) - and has been applied to a variety of spatial scales. Nevertheless, the concept recently shows a growing variety of meanings, phraseology and metaphors, analogous to expanding spatial scales of physical urban growth, ever-greater spatial fragmentation of cities, and extending networks of inter-city interrelations. In the words of Davoudi (2003), the current concept of Polycentric Urban Region even means “a different thing both to different people<sup>2</sup> and on different levels of scale”. Not surprisingly, then, no unambiguous definition of the concept does exist yet (Parr, 2004). Given the lack of such a definition, I here attempt to get to grips with the question how the activity system of leisure contributes to the development of this type of urban configuration by means of identifying some key-dimensions that typify its spatial dynamics. These dimensions are distilled from a brief overview of some examples, American and European, of the concept of urban polycentricity up to the regional level of scale (Table 1). Larger scales - the concept ranges further up to the transnational level (cf. Gottman, 1961; Dieleman and Faludi, 1998) - are left out of consideration here.

Table 1 – Some concepts of polycentric urban development

<b>Intra-urban =&gt; single city and outlying suburbs</b>	<b>Inter-urban =&gt; regional</b>
Central City and Tributaries (Thomlinson, 1969)	Edge City (Garreau, 1991)
City of Urban Realms (Vance, 1964, 1990) Multicentred Metropolis (Muller, 1981)	City Network (Camagni and Salone, 1993)
Polycentric City (Hall, 1997, 1999)	Polycentric Urban Region (Meijers <i>et al.</i> , 2003)

### *Intra-urban => single city and outlying suburbs*

The early post-war ideas on polycentricity refer to the ‘freeway stage’ of suburbanisation of the North American metropolis that started soon after World War II (Muller, 1981; Vance, 1990; Knox, 1993). Cities developed vast suburban bands of space where population growth rates sometimes exceeded those of their central parts. Thomlinson (1969) commented that a

<sup>2</sup> Davoudi refers to two main groups of different people; academics in various empirical disciplines (in particular urban and economic geographers and social and political scientists) versus planners and policy-makers.

number of “adjacent tributaries” had developed around metropolitan centres, together forming metropolitan regions. These tributaries included small bedroom suburbs virtually completely dependent upon the central city for income and services; satellite cities of sometimes considerable size; and combinations of the two called balanced or employing suburbs. Irrespective of the amount of employment and range of urban services they had, all tributaries were still largely subordinate to the metropolitan centre by “complex webs of sociological and economic relationships”.

Unlike Thomlinson, both Vance (1964, 1990) and Muller (1981) no longer conceptualised the metropolis as a single functional urban system. Vance saw the rise of a ‘city of urban realms’. The early post-war urban realms were largely self-contained centres that cared for individual’s need for most daily purposes. Although they usually formed a continuous built-up area with the central city and laid within its commuter zone, daily life could be carried on without resort to external locations in other realms. Increasingly residents of large metropolises did not make use of the entire urban area except for exceptional needs. Twenty-five years after he introduced the concept, Vance (1990) found much evidence for the existence of urban realms. Furthermore, as the formation of realms had progressed in these years, the size and complexity of their functional structure had increased and come closer to that of the traditional city centre. In addition to ‘mature outlying shopping centres’, new office structures had come in some outlying realms and “grown at such a rate that their square-footage exceeded those in CBDs” (Vance, 1990). The companies in these new offices primarily serve the national market rather than just the realm markets. Muller’s concept of the Multicentred Metropolis (Muller, 1981) draws its inspiration from the work of Vance. In Muller’s view, some suburbs had transformed into increasingly independent and self-sufficient urban entities vis-à-vis the older central city. These so-called ‘minicities’ not only housed an increasing share of metropolitan population, but, in the wake, also contained more and more major economic activities, employment, and social, cultural and leisure services. They were no longer ‘sub to the urb’ and increasingly rivalled downtown. Since Vance’s more recent urban realms and Muller’s minicities do not solely refer to households’ daily needs, they are – unlike the early post-war urban realms - no longer considered independent duplicates within a closed metropolitan system.

The concepts of Vance and Muller picture the dispersed metropolis of a central city and its surrounding suburbs. They however, paid most attention to the development of suburbia than to what had happened to the central city. Had this, for example, remained a monocentric city, or had the multi-nuclei structure that Harris and Ullman observed in

Chicago already in 1945 (Davoudi, 2003) developed further and become omnipresent in American metropolises? More recent concepts take polycentricity in the entire dispersed metropolis into consideration. Hall for example, notes that “all post-industrial cities are polycentric, with multiple nodes of employment, services and residential locations” (Hall, 1997). His concept of the Polycentric City focuses on the location of business and sees a new polycentric archetypical form to emerge in many contemporary cities. The Polycentric City consists of six main types of activity centres at increasing distance from the city centre: a traditional business core; a secondary business core; a tertiary business core or inner-city edge city; an outer edge city; outermost edge cities; and specialised concentrations of activities that require large amounts of space and attract large numbers of people (Hall, 1999). Provided that urban expansion has continued since the writing of Vance in 1964, Hall no longer comments that his composite of activity centres forms a continuous built-up area and commuting zone. Instead, these centres may be “quite widely dispersed across the metropolitan region” (Hall, 1999)

#### *Inter-urban => regional scale*

Due to the ongoing spreading out of polycentric developments over ever-larger territories and the widening typology of centres, the focus of conceptual work on polycentricity has shifted to higher levels of scale during the past two decades. Since the early observation of polycentric urban structures on the regional scale by Hall in his work on world cities (Hall, 1966), this seems to become almost universal. This ‘jump’ up to the regional scale brings a second basic form of polycentric urban development into vision. In addition to the outward extension of large cities into their regional hinterlands with new suburbs and other urban elements, polycentric development also involves the merging together of various separate cities – medium-sized rather than large - and towns that are located at relatively close proximity. By and large, a growing variety of the morphological and functional dynamics of polycentric development on the regional scale have given way to great conceptual diversity. The right column of Table 1 presents only three examples.

The first example, Garreau’s Edge City, deals with a particular type of urban development that has become the “biggest change in a hundred years of how Americans build cities” (Garreau, 1991: 3). Most of Garreau’s work is on the Edge City as a new basic component in urban development and fits with the level of scale of the left column of Table 1. That part of his work shares the common view that “suburbia has transformed from well-manicured

residential enclaves to America's principal place of economic activities - not only in back offices - and employment" (Cervero, 1995). However, Garreau also presents a big picture on the regional scale. By means of maps of nine large metropolitan regions in the United States, he shows how edge cities have been founded ever-further away from downtowns in the course of time. Edge cities, emerging edge cities, an old downtown (in some cases two old downtowns), and a network of interconnecting highways have made these regions increasingly polycentric in form.

Whereas Garreau's big picture of edge cities primarily deals with urban morphology, the second example in Table 1, the City Network, mainly focuses on functional interrelations between urban nodes that make up polycentric regional urban systems. Camagni and Salone (1993) take the logic of interrelations between firms as the structuring force of organisation that shape regional city networks. Based on empirical analyses in northern Italy and France, they criticise the mainstream of vertical and hierarchical thinking that originates with Christaller's central place model and has led to key roles attributed to physical contiguity, friction of distance and nested market areas. Replacement of the metaphor of the hierarchy with that of the network yields three types of networks within polycentric metropolitan regions: the hierarchical, the complementary and the synergy network. The first type still refers to Christallerian logic, but this has been put more and more in the shade of both other types.

The concept of the Polycentric Urban Region<sup>3</sup> finally, deals with both urban morphology and patterns of interrelationships between centres. The basic form of this concept consists of a number of distinct cities and towns that are historically located in more or less close proximity (roughly within commuting distance) but lack a clear primate city that dominates this regional system in size and in political, economic or cultural weight. This historic layer, and hence the Polycentric Urban Region is most widespread in north-west Europe, but is not unique to that part of the world (Lambregts and Kloosterman, 1998; Meijers *et al.*, 2003). Starting from this layer, recent urban developments have filled-in the territory between separate built-up areas with a growing number and diversity of suburbs and new towns, but also with corridor-shaped developments and large-scale stand-alone urban elements. Furthermore, specific segments of the functional markets of labour, housing and mobility of separate cities, towns and suburbs have tended to coalesce towards the regional

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3 The Polycentric Urban Region is not only an empirical-analytical but also a planning concept. As a planning concept, it is an important theme in literature on urban and regional governance. A major issue in the discussion on this planning concept is the value, feasibility and design of inter-urban co-operation with the aim to strengthen the international territorial competitiveness of the entire polycentric regions.

scale. Consequently, patterns of functional interrelations are increasingly organised according to a network logic that tends to comprise an ever-larger part of the region. The short distance mobility patterns ‘up-the-hierarchy’ for work and services that were characteristic for the first three post-war decades, have been supplemented by criss-cross patterns on regional scale that interconnect city centres with other types of centres and nodes.

#### *Key-dimensions of the regional polycentric urban network*

The above review of some concepts of urban polycentric development suggests that the transformation from the monocentric city to the polycentric urban network can be described by the following three dimensions:

1. Spatial morphology and typology of the built-up urban fabric of centres and elements,
2. Spatial re-distribution of urban functions throughout this typology and their contribution to centres’ functional mix,
3. Spatial networks of functional interrelations between these centres.

These dimensions correspond with seven ‘conditions’ that are proposed by Parr (2004) in order to come to an explicit and ambiguous definition of the Polycentric Urban Region: (1) clustering of centres, (2, 3) an upper and a lower distance limit on centre separation, (4) size and spacing of centres, (5) size distribution of centres, (6) centre specialisation, and (7) interaction among centres. The first, morphological dimension includes Parr’s conditions (1) to (5). It should be noted however, that Parr’s proposal is biased because it focuses on just ‘centres’, leaving aside that the transformation of monocentric cities to polycentric urban regions not only involves the development of a considerable diversity of types of centres, but also ‘noncentric’ urban elements. The latter are for instance stand-alone urban entertainment destinations (Schmitt, Knapp and Kunzmann, 2003), clusters of offices that are too small to be called centres (Lang, 2003), and corridor-shaped commercial strips (Ford, 1994) and highway-bound axes of urbanisation (Romein, 2003). The second dimension corresponds with Parr’s condition (6), ‘centre specialisation’, although it refers to a centre’s functional profile or mix rather than to just specialisation. The third dimension finally, corresponds with Parr’s condition (7) on ‘interaction among centres’. It involves various kinds of interrelations, notably between firms, home-to-work commuting and the use of all kinds of services (including leisure) by the region’s dwellers. It is this particular dimension that interconnects urban centres and nodes, and makes the geographical polycentric urban region into a functional polycentric urban network.



The next section presents a brief overview of literature on the activity system of outdoor leisure, in particular in urban areas. The major objective is to make plausible that leisure is a relevant activity system to be included in the research agenda on polycentric urban networks. The last section of the paper connects findings from this overview to the above three dimensions. It phrases some annotated research questions as a matter of kick-off for further exploration of the contribution of the outdoor leisure system to the development of polycentric urban networks.

### **3. The dynamics of outdoor leisure, with special reference to the urban context.**

The activity system of outdoor leisure in urban areas covers an increasingly broad range of activities that includes the consumption, production, management and maintenance of – at least - arts, culture, built historic and industrial heritage, fun-shopping, gaming casinos, nightlife districts, summer festivals and hospitality industry. The system has become an omnipresent and increasingly important feature of the urban spatial and economic landscape. This involves a rapid expansion in size, but also a large diversification in form and content of the system. The infrastructure of material production (factories and warehouses) that visually and spatially dominated the landscape of the industrial city, has been replaced not only with the glittering office complexes of the post-industrial service economy, but also, and to an increasing extent, with entertainment sites, districts and events. Concomitantly, the number of jobs and size of added-value in the urban leisure sector has steadily increased in the past two decades. Several new concepts have been introduced to grasp this development: Fantasy City (Hannigan, 1998), Entertainment City (Davis, 1999, quoted by Latham, 2003) and Event City (Bittner *et al.*, 2001) are only some examples.

Mommaas *et al.* (2000) understand the dynamics of outdoor leisure, including its spatial dynamics, as the outcome of “a complex and interconnected process of production and consumption, conditioned and spurred by processes of societal change and urban policies”. This conceptualisation fits for the greater part within “the broad shift in the organisation of the post-industrial – post-modern society” (Champion, 2001). It does not address exclusively to the urban context, but the interconnected dynamics of production and consumption that it postulates strongly influences the activity system of leisure in cities and their suburbs, and hence the urban spatial organisation and economy as a whole.

### *Leisure in the cultural-symbolic urban economy*

A whole body of literature stresses the orientation of the contemporary urban culture on consumption. Concepts like ‘the ethos of consumption’ (Crawford, 1992) and ‘consumerism’ (Mullins *et al.*, 1999) have been introduced to appoint that consumption has become a core component of urban culture. These concepts express that consumption in urban areas has both increased considerably in size and changed fundamentally in nature, compared with the thirty years following the Second World War. Unlike these post-war decades, when the focus of consumption was primarily on the use-value of mass-produced material necessities, it now “acts as an important marker of status, distinction and identity. It is a fundamental part of both individual and social identity construction and shifted towards notions of exclusivity, style and distinctiveness” (Hall, 1998). The strengthened focus of consumption in urban areas on immaterial symbolic meanings and content has trickled down into production in urban economies. Urban economies still manufacture material goods just for their use-value, produce a further growing variety of financial and business services, but the most rapidly growing proportions of employment and sales are connected with the production of intangible symbolic goods, i.e. “goods that satisfy the needs for entertainment, embellishment and decoration but above all endorse and give expression to personal lifestyles” (Raspe and Segeren, 2004). Since both the consumption and production of ‘performance, theatre and signification’ play a growing role in the economic performance of cities, and in particular large cities (Hall, 1996; Scott, 2000; Kloosterman, 2001), some scholars observe the emergence of a new conceptual approach in urban studies, the cultural-symbolic approach (Fainstein and Gladstone, 1997; Gotham, 2002).

The production of symbolic goods in cities is primarily the domain of cultural industries. This category of industries is hardly demarcated. It includes a broad variety of activities, products and services, such as film, photography, music, fashion, publicity, publishing, furniture, cosmetics and jewellery. A specific type of cultural industries, including for instance museums, theatres and concert halls, makes up the realm of outdoor leisure. This realm produces experiences rather than goods and people have to go out, usually in their free time, to consume these *in situ*. Furthermore, at least as important as the production of cultural-symbolic values in workshops, studios or museums, is the production of such values in urban public space. Following a long period of disinterest, from the late-1970s the need to recover run down streets, squares and buildings has been pursued as a means of improving cities’ quality of place (Monclús, 2003). In an historic overview on the roles and meanings of public

space in cities, Burgers (1995) notes that its leisure quality has become one of its most important qualities in the post-industrial city, which contrasts strongly with its roles and meanings in the industrial city. The relationship between urban economy and urban design has reversed: while the quality of urban environment was an outcome of economic growth of cities, it has now become a prerequisite for economic development, in the most direct manner because it lures consumers. Themed public spaces, the atmosphere of street-life culture, exotic neighbourhoods, spectacular architecture, and reconfigured built heritage are all increasingly important transmitters of symbolic meanings to visitors (Burgers, 1995; van Aalst and Verhoeff, 2000; Gospodini, 2001a). Sassen and Roost (1998) state that “the large city has assumed the status of exotica since most people in the highly developed countries now reside in suburbs and small towns”.

### *Consumption of leisure*

The contemporary ‘ethos of consumption’ has led to an increasing demand for more, more intense and more diverse symbolic goods. Although this is a general observation that is not restricted to leisure consumption in urban areas, it is an overarching process of societal change that has considerable impacts on the development of polycentric urban networks.

Due to rising incomes, shortened working weeks and increasing levels of car-ownership, large sections of the populations of post-war welfare states spent more and more hours, miles and money to outdoor leisure activities. Now this type of state is being reformed thoroughly in many countries, things may have changed in this respect as well. In the Netherlands, for instance, the amount of free time available for large segments of the working population has decreased significantly, in the order of 10 to 15 percent, during the past two decades (Verstappen, 2002; Galle *et al.*, 2004; Vereniging Deltametropool, 2004). This overall observation obscures a trend of polarisation of available free time among age groups, professional groups, and types of households. Nevertheless, even many people who live the “lifestyle of the full agenda” (Galle *et al.*, 2004) and cope with growing pressures of time – notably young and well educated task-combiners who work in hi-level business services and creative industries (Florida, 2002; Galle *et al.*, 2004) - still tend to invest growing rather than decreasing amounts of time, money and miles in outdoor leisure activities. This paradox of ‘doing more in less time’ is partly explained by their financial capacity to buy free time through hiring domestic personnel. Overall, numbers of visits to zoo’s, museums, cinema’s and restaurants have increased in Dutch cities since the mid 1990s (Ecorys/NEI, 2003).

A second feature of contemporary consumption of leisure attributes is its fragmentation into a “series of niches of lifestyles and cultural preferences” (Hall, 1998). In the earlier post-war decades, this consumption was principally mass-consumption since the supply was less in diversity and size, and the demand was determined by limited incomes and a set of knitted social institutions (family, church, marriage, class and gender) that a-priori determined people’s “standard biography” (Lootsma, 1999). In the contemporary post-modern urban society, disposable incomes still determine which leisure goods can be afforded by some social groups (cf. Hall, 1998; Axhausen, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). Overall, however, the range of what people do for leisure has increasingly fragmented due to a trend of individualisation, i.e. the lessening willingness to behave in conformity with rules of traditions and social institutions, together with a widening pallet of socio-cultural lifestyles, a growing ethnic-cultural diversity of urban populations, and a broadening variety of household types. “Tastes have multiplied” (Burgers, 1995) and consumers repertoires of leisure activities individualise and tend to float freely and fluidly between categories that were formerly partitioned by social boundaries.

Finally, ‘repertoires’ of leisure activities change rapidly. This is a feature of contemporary youth cultures, where “increasing mobility and multiformity of lifestyles generate temporary ‘communities’ of shared preferences regarding consumption and leisure” (Bittner *et al.*, 2001), but, for instance, high pressures of time also make the leisure behaviour of task-combiners capricious. What we see, by and large, is a tremendous dynamics of leisure consumption that can be typified by the general terms of increasing size, fragmentation, multiformity and capriciousness.

### *Production of leisure in urban areas*

A fundamental process in the contemporary activity system of leisure is the composite of its arrival in an ever-stronger market regime and the increasing demand-driven nature of this regime (Mommaas *et al.*, 2000, van der Knaap, 2002). In the post-war Keynesian welfare states, leisure and entertainment was a supply-driven market that was largely controlled by the public sector. The re-distributive nation-state and its local sub-units (municipalities) took the initiative to expand a basic infrastructure of cultural programmes (e.g. museums and libraries) and recreational facilities (e.g. swimming-pools, sports grounds and parks) as part of its welfare policies. Recently, the welfare state has slimmed and has left most control of the supply of culture and entertainment over to the market .

According to Mommaas and van der Poel (1989), urban leisure policy in the Netherlands since 1985 has been linked “not only to the shift from Keynesian welfare policy to a monetarist state policy but also to a new phase in capital accumulation”. This new phase is a general tendency in contemporary capitalism to reconfigure, manufacture and commodify cultural symbols to become a lever for expanding consumerism. Leisure is one of the major fields where this tendency is manifest. Although private industry was, off course, not new in urban leisure and entertainment, it has not just filled in the gap recently left behind by the public sector, but has also pushed forward an “implosion” (Ritzer, in Galle *et al.*, 2004) of supply in both quantitative and qualitative sense, with large investments in symbolic values. This implosion is largely driven by the dynamics of demand as typified above. Competition for the attention of consumers who spend more on leisure but repeatedly demand new thrills, presses industry to acceleration, renewal and diversification of the production of leisure services and entertainment sites. The supply of ‘traditional’ services such as municipal libraries, swimming pools or sports grounds has not disappeared - some even remain subsidised by the local public state - but has been increasingly put in the shade by a rapidly growing variety of environments, attractions and activities that offer new and penetrating symbolic meanings. Museums, for example, have been transformed from the dusty, dull and ‘introvert’ places they were in the days that culture was a supply-driven system, into hybrid palaces of interactive learning, lunching and fun.

The concerted dynamics of demand and supply has given way to a growing variety of so-called ‘transsectoral cross-overs’. Former boundaries between forms of leisure, culture and entertainment have vanished, and entertainment has ‘infiltrated’ into urban functions, activities and spaces that originally are not part of this activity system. At a small scale, this is manifest in the addition of elements of entertainment to shops, restaurants, cafés or museums. This has lead to such hybrids as ‘shopertainment’, ‘eatertainment’ and ‘edutainment’. More visible is the growing variety of large-scale cross-over clusters that extend up to several square miles, including parking space. Examples are multifunctional malls (Crawford, 1992), festival market places (Ford, 1994), waterfront redevelopment projects (Jauhainen, 1995; Gordon, 1997) and even airport cities (Burghouwt, 2002). Furthermore, these clusters sometimes combine the mixture of leisure and entertainment with hi-value housing, retail and office space. Sassen and Roost (1998) point at a peculiar form of cross-over that is based on the actual fabrication of hi-tech multi-media products. Video, television, printed media, music and Internet are interwoven mutually, but also with show, retail, and themed cafés into clusters where virtual realms of entertainment are created. An example is Sony Plaza on the

‘post wall’ Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. Technological breakthroughs have made it possible to create virtual worlds and special effects in the compressed spatial frame of such inner-city leisure clusters.

A final characteristic of the leisure and entertainment sector is a dual trend towards growing capital-intensity and concentration in the hands of large transnational leisure, entertainment *cum* multi-media corporations (Mommaas *et al.*, 2000; Sassen and Roost, 1999; Scott, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). This does not imply that there is no more room for national or local firms, or for ‘free zones’ of alternative sub-culture entertainment, but these are either kept in marginal neighbourhoods and places or increasingly remodeled in order to be competitive in the hectic market (Urry, 2002; Latham, 2003; Urban Unlimited, 2004).

### *Leisure in urban politics*

The withdrawal of the public sector as supplier of cultural programmes and entertainment facilities is not to say that urban government is not involved anymore in the activity system of leisure. On the contrary; but its objectives, methods and partnerships have radically changed throughout the past three decades. Two interconnected trends have been decisive in this respect. First, “old urban politics” have been replaced with “new urban politics” (Cochrane *et al.*, 1996; Gospodini, 2006). Old urban politics involved a bureaucratic welfarist approach, dominated by the local public state that acted primarily as a site of distributive policies aimed at social and collective consumption. New urban politics is on the other hand spurred on by an entrepreneurial approach of the local state. Entrepreneurial urban government and planning turned from regulating and redistributing urban growth to encouraging it “by any and every possible means” (Monclús, 2003), in particular by luring prospective people and firms. It pays less attention to city-wide distributive policies and instead enters into partnerships with private actors to develop single projects under the mask of revitalization the city, i.e. making it more attractive, to generate economic growth. The boom of new real-estate projects on formerly redundant places that combine high-value housing and office space with elements of leisure like themed cafés, casinos and saunas fit within new urban politics.

Second, it is cities and urban regions rather than nation-states that are the principal actors in territorial competition in the increasingly globalising economy. In the emerging cultural-symbolic urban economy, a high-quality supply of unique cultural services and other leisure goods is supposed to strengthen a city’s competitiveness. The actual debate on economic competitiveness of cities show that it is a complex concept that involves many more

dimensions than culture, leisure and entertainment (cf. Kresl, 1995; Parkinson, 2001, Gospodini, 2001b; Grosveld, 2002) and that aims at attracting, or holding, either visitors and tourists, professional and creative workers, or investments. Not surprisingly, the competitiveness of cities is almost impossible to plan and difficult to monitor and to evaluate. Nevertheless, many cities – including cities that have to contend with severe urban decay – make large efforts to position themselves as ‘a place where unique cultural and entertainment experiences can be consumed’ (Bramham *et al.*, 1989; van der Berg *et al.*, 1995; Fainstein and Judd, 1995; Cairncross, 2001; Graham, 2002; Florida, 2002; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002). Governments of cities in all size classes heavily invest in the shaping of cultural districts and the building of ‘flagships’ of entertainment. Such urban entertainment destinations are often developed in close partnership with a cast of corporate players, not seldom transnationals, since these consider the development of leisure projects increasingly more lucrative<sup>4</sup>. Irrespective of the successes of such policies – they are in fact heavily criticised in literature (cf. Harvey, 1988, quoted in Urry, 2002; Zukin, 1991; Burgers, 1995; Ashworth and Dietvorst, 1995; Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Florida, 2002) - it is abundantly clear that a multitude of recently built flagships and themed districts exert considerable spatial, economic and social impacts on urban areas all over the world.

### *Polycentric leisure fields*

It is in particular city centres that have been reshaped into arenas of pastime for pleasure and fun and have been moulded with a rapidly expanding accompanying leisure infrastructure. Cairncross (2001) states this very explicitly for North American cities, which are in a process of “change from concentrations of office employment to centres of entertainment and culture. They become places where people congregate to visit museums and galleries, attend live performances of all kinds, participate in civic events and dine in good restaurants. Of course, not every downtown office complex, if deprived of office tenants, will be quickly transformed into a glittering entertainment center, but cities do already thrive as centres of entertainment and culture”. Similarly, city cores in the Netherlands have turned into “outgoing cities” (Burgers, 1992) or “bubbling cities” (Mommaas, 2000). Notably, inner cities became the focus of renewed policy attention and private sector investments in leisure functions in a time, the

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4 Hannigan (1998) discusses the role of respectively corporate lenders and investors, entertainment companies, real estate developers, and retail and entertainment operators in the design and construction of urban entertainment destinations in North-American cities.

early 1980s, that suburbanisation of most urban functions continued unabated (Mommaas and van der Poel, 1989; Burgers, 1995; Hannigan, 1998, Hall, 1998).

Regardless of the remarkable dynamics of outdoor leisure and entertainment in inner-cities, the contribution of this activity system to the development of polycentric urban networks would be limited if its dynamics should be restricted to central parts of singular cities. In fact, research into this contribution should be of less interest then. Yet, the recent history of spatial trends of this activity system gives much cause for research. It is found that the transformation of inner-cities into “spaces of consumption for fun and enjoyment” (Mullins *et al.*, 1999) since the early 1980s is part of a composite of spatial trends that also includes an unprecedented establishment of shopping malls, mega dance halls, sports stadiums, multiplex cinemas, integrated entertainment complexes and new-style amusement parks at city edges, in suburban places, in well-accessible former rural villages, and along highways. For the Netherlands, several authors (Mommaas *et al.*, 2000; Knulst and Mommaas, 2000; van Dam, 2000; Verhoeff and Mommaas, 2000; van der Knaap, 2002) suggest such varieties of places within the country’s urban regions function as single undivided but polycentric ‘leisure fields’ that offer a large diversity of supplementary amenities and experiences. Individuals and families stretch out the spatial scope of leisure consumption from their homes across these fields.

## **5. Research questions and hypotheses.**

There is no question that the interconnected dynamics of production and consumption of outdoor leisure interferes with the transformation from the monocentric city to the polycentric urban network. This is however, a largely unexplored field in urban research. Referring to the above distinguished key-dimensions of the polycentric urban network, this section presents some annotated research questions to initiate this exploration.

### *Typology of leisure sites and spaces*

The first question refers to the variety of outdoor leisure spaces and entertainment sites. Since this activity system has arrived in an ever-stronger demand-driven market regime, the supply of leisure and entertainment services has rapidly grown and diversified: many new types have supplemented to traditional ones. In order to explore the contribution of this system to the development of polycentric urban networks, it is crucial to know which sites and



environments are part and not part of it. The matrix presented below proposes a framework for a typology of contemporary forms.

Some of the examples in the most right column include forms where leisure is only a minor, added function. In waterfront redevelopment projects for example, investments in the development of hi-value housing and office-space may be much larger than in leisure (Wang, 2003). It should be judged in each individual case whether a waterfront is part or not part of a city's leisure system. The category of temporary events receives relatively little attention in literature - probably because they are 'only' temporary - but festival and championships may nevertheless generate enormous impacts on the spatial structure and organisation of urban areas. Some are local in scope and only have some impacts on the day itself, but others attract large numbers of visitors and broadcasting companies from all over the world. For large-scale events such as the once-only Olympic Games and annual city-wide festivals (Mardi Grass in New Orleans, carnival in Rio de Janeiro), real-estate developments, new sports accommodations and mass transit lines, and even large-scale redevelopments of existing nuclei in the city are much more long-lasting than the events themselves (Gratton and Taylor, 1995; Cochrane *et al.*, 1996; Waitt, 1999; Hemel, 2000; Gotham, 2002; Monclús, 2003).

	<b>One leisure function dominant</b>	<b>Mix of leisure functions, non-leisure functions present but subsidiary</b>	<b>Mix of leisure with non-leisure functions</b>
<b>Single business and/or built object</b>	themed café or restaurant, cinema and theater, casino, concert hall	museum, multi-media plaza	soccer stadium
<b>Large multi-building compound</b>	retail outlet centre, zoo	mall, amusement park, sports complex (swimming, skying etc.)	airport city
<b>Networked cluster</b>	museum quarter	cultural district, festival market place,	waterfront
<b>Temporary Events</b>	music and cultural festival	city-wide festival	Olympic Games, International sports championships

*Spatial distribution of leisure sites and spaces and their contribution to centres' functional mix*

The second research question follows naturally from the design of a typology of leisure sites and spaces: “How are the types of leisure sites and spaces distributed across the various centres and ‘noncentres’ that make up polycentric regions?”. Empirical findings regarding this research question are scarce and restricted to general impressions, sometimes fairly anecdotal, rather than based on detailed field research. These findings distinguish between inner-cities, city edges and suburbs, and highway-bound location outside the urban built-up area.

First and foremost, there is no question that the most rapidly changing parts of cities are their inner-cities. Many inner-cities have been transformed into leisure destinations for a mix of out-goers and fun-shoppers from their own metropolitan region and day-trippers and cultural tourists from elsewhere. Since urban governments increasingly deploy inner-cities in the frenetic territorial competition of cities for visitors, residents and investments, many spaces in inner-city areas - including previously redundant ones - are physically revalourised in order “to kick-start the regeneration of local urban environment and economy” (Hall, 1998). These spaces have been redeveloped into themed districts and clusters for fun-shopping, night-life and culture. Furthermore, some specific landscapes of industrial heritage that are renovated to lure visitors are located in inner-city areas for historic reasons. Some are single large objects (e.g. empty factory buildings and warehouses) but others have the scale of a whole district (e.g. waterfronts). Complexes of fabrication of multi-media products are also located in the central parts of cities, in particular large cities, since both advanced producer services, creative professionals and visitors in search of rapid sensations concentrate there (Sassen and Roost, 1999). A final trend in inner-city areas is the development of spectacular eye-catching ‘flagships’ of leisure and culture, frequently sited with packaged landscapes. A famous, successful example is the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao: the history of the city is often divided into ‘before and after Guggenheim’.

At city edges, a rapidly growing quantity and diversity of large-scale leisure facilities springs up next to new businesses and public institutions. These include entertainment halls, shopping boulevards, and many different sports accommodations both to play and to watch games (Hall, 1999; Mommaas *et al.*, 2000). Suburban centres are best known for large-scale malls with a considerable diversity of atmospheres and functions, including entertainment, in addition to just shopping. The history of the suburban mall is an appendage of the overall trend of suburbanisation of people and employment that dates back to the 1960s. Since then,

suburban malls have grown bigger, multifunctional (including office space) and more spectacular. Recently however, Hannigan (1998) made mention of a “return of the mall to downtown” in US cities. As the decade of the 1990s unfolded, it “became increasingly clear that the problems of the inner city that suburbanites thought they had left behind – traffic congestion, high costs, crime - had begun to migrate to the suburbs and their malls. Shoppers began to look for other options. Of the two possible options, ‘big box stores’ in the exurban landscape or downtown locations, the clientele from the suburbs has been particularly attracted to downtown, where a new entertainment economy had gathered momentum”.

Some of the largest specimen of multifunctional indoor malls are almost urban worlds in itself. Given their large size, these are frequently situated outside suburban centres at rural highway-bound locations. In addition to these malls, entertainment parks of the size of Euro Disney Paris and Disney World Florida are also found at such peripheral locations (Fogelson, 1999). In general, these large-scale leisure complexes primarily gear to middle-class, car-owning households residing in suburbia; a type of household that has considerable increased in proportion in many advanced societies over the past few decades. The grounds to establish such complexes outside urban centres are in particular the availability of room for parking spaces, relatively low land prices, and good accessibility by car for a regional and supra-regional catchment area.

An additional question to that on the distribution of the types of leisure sites across the various types of centres and noncentres in a polycentric urban region, is how leisure contributes to their functional mix? This contribution can be measured in terms of the number of businesses or jobs. Research into this question would supplement a mainstream in urban research that pays attention to the development of city centres, suburbs and exurbs as residential areas and concentrations of industrial and office employment. Such additional research has, however, not been carried out thus far.

### *Spatial patterns of consumption of leisure sites and spaces*

To obtain insight in how polycentric urban regions function as networks, the final research question is how spatial patterns of consumption of leisure sites and spaces are organised? This question deals with the spatial scope and hierarchy of this type of consumption. Until the 1980s, these dimensions were pretty well structured – at least in large parts of western Europe – not in the last place due to a persistent type of planning. Burtenshaw *et al.* (1991) characterised urban recreation planning in European cities until the late 1980s by three

preponderant features: supply-driven, based on a hierarchical central-place like model, and a spatial scale of the single city and its immediate open hinterland.

According to the group of Dutch authors mentioned before (Mommaas *et al.*, 2000; Knulst and Mommaas, 2000; van Dam, 2000; van der Knaap, 2002), both supply and demand of leisure have ‘dis-embedded from the geometry of town and surrounding country’ since the late 1980s. Supply has spread over inner cities, suburbs and highway-bound places in a manner in which their ‘range’ and ‘threshold’ – to stick to Christallerian terminology - are less and less related to the size of the centre where they are located: large-scale entertainment complexes are more and more found in small villages. Furthermore, urban leisure services and sites are increasingly extending their catchment areas beyond the singular city and its immediate hinterland. On the demand side, local leisure amenities still matter but are increasingly supplemented with visits to amenities in a growing variety of centres, large and small, on a growing variety of distances from home. Which amenities people actually assemble is increasingly determined by critical combinations of place-bound characteristics (quality) and network-bound characteristics (accessibility). Both large-scale integrated amusement parks at exurban locations and themed inner-cities welcome many visitors from far-away places thanks to accessibility by highway or airport. All by all, it is hypothesised that spatial patterns of leisure consumption starting from home, are less hierarchical, increasingly polycentric, and range much further than twenty years ago. How this contributes to the function of polycentric urban regions as networks is still unexplored, however.

It can be hypothesised next that groups of consumers with different characteristics assemble different sets of leisure services and sites in different places. Income, car-ownership and age-group definitely play a role. Most non car-owning elderly people for example, might spend by far most of their leisure time within a small radius of their place of residence. Reasonable as this sounds, “literature devotes little attention to the mobility behaviour for leisure activities among senior citizens” (Schwanen *et al.*, 2001). More in general, it can be assumed that the growing diversity of household types and cultural lifestyles has led to a growing variety of spatial patterns of leisure. Although lifestyle has recently become a major field of research in social sciences, this has not yet resulted in research output that links this concept to spatial patterns of leisure behaviour in urban settings. Mommaas (2000) is one of the very few who makes an explicit comment on the differentiated consumption of urban spaces in leisure time. He notes that the cultural and outgoing ‘milieus’ of the inner-city are increasingly the leisure domain of single-person and dual-earning households, while the suburban zone of outdoor sports and recreation grounds is increasingly the domain of middle-

class families with children. Other state that this latter group also dominates the streams of visitors to highway-bound super malls and amusement parks.

A last remark on the spatial patterns of leisure consumption concerns the trend that leisure spaces are increasingly ‘forbidden territory’ for specific people. Leisure sites and spaces are more and more developed with a view to the social groups they intend to attract or/and to keep away. With regard to inner-cities, a critical approach that is most prominent in literature on North American cities denounces policies of selective accessibility that actively exclude unwelcome people from privatised themed sites and aesthesised shopping centres (Cristine Boyer, 1992; Zukin, 1997; Hannigan, 1998; Schwartz, 1999; Fainstein and Judd, 1999; Fainstein and Gladstone, 1999; Dear, 2000; Broudehoux, 2001; AlSayyad, 2001). Cristine Boyer (1992) observed a process of segregation that leads to fragmentation of inner-city space into “chaotic arrangements and disconnected juxtapositions of (public and private) city-segments” Notably, specific enclaves in inner-cities are sold to external visitors from a much wider market area than the city itself – not seldom the global tourist market – while local visitors are expelled.

## **6. Conclusion**

A recent study, in Dutch, by Asbeek Brusse *et al.* (2002) that is entitled ‘Town and Country in a New Geography’ analyses the interconnections of societal processes of change and spatial dynamics from three disciplinary angles: economy, sociology and geography. Their conclusion is that a ‘new geography’ arises. Contemporary changes in the fields of economy, technology, culture and politics thoroughly restructure spatial reality. The authors distinguish three types of space: physical, symbolic and social space. Physical space is the tangible spatial morphology, both form and fabric, of places and areas; the symbolic space is the perception of places by people; and the social space is being shaped by patterns of economic and social interrelations. Several scholars (Giddens, 1990; Zukin, 1991; Ashworth and Dietvorst, 1995) have raised the idea that these three types of space largely coincided within the boundaries of the individual monocentric city and its immediate hinterland in the past, but that these – in the terminology of Giddens (1990) - have ‘dis-embedded’ from this local territorial bond and have ‘re-embedded’ in different ways and on different scales in the course of the modern era. Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the dual processes of dis-embedding and re-

embedding have considerably accelerated. For most activity systems, this is manifest in rapid re-structuring of their spatial organisation.

With regard to the activity system of leisure, recent literature also points at considerable dynamics of the three types of space and the overarching processes of change behind it. In the physical space, growing amounts and varieties of leisure amenities and sites are produced – not seldom through public private partnerships - in increasing varieties of locations both within and outside cities. Regarding symbolic space, the contemporary post-modern consumer attaches a growing importance to an ever-increasing variety of symbolic meanings. In response, developers invest heavily in new symbolic values of leisure environments and entertainment sites, hence making the symbolic space of this activity system as a whole more penetrating and intrusive. Consumers' tendency to assemble more and more different symbolic values causes the supply of leisure services in their own local residential environment to be increasingly inadequate. Facilitated by growing (auto)mobility, their radii of action over the spatially dispersing leisure system have expanded. In general, the contemporary social space of leisure and entertainment implies a multiplication rather than just a single unilinear expansion of the scale of action from home to leisure destinations.

Unquestionably, the composite spatial dynamics of the activity system of leisure contributes to the development of Polycentric Urban Networks. The brief review of literature presented in this paper shows that we still have little and only unsystematic knowledge on this theme. Therefore, it is high time that the activity system of leisure is included in the research agenda on polycentric urban development. This paper presents some initial research questions to start research on this theme.

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