

# Preface

'Fundamentally the importance of the King's Cross story is the struggle over whose definition of reality is to prevail', as Michael Edwards, planner and economist, concludes (Edwards, 1992, p.14). To those involved in any of the ambitious station area redevelopment plans sprouting across Europe, the word 'chaos' must have often come to mind. Euralille's master planner Rem Koolhaas defends his choices there by arguing that 'We are not deliberately introducing chaos; it is the contemporary system that is doing so, with its contradictory assemblage of architectural wills, populist sensibilities, financial policies, triumphant dreams, and so on' (*l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1992, p. 168). In the face of this 'chaotic' accumulation of demands, the planner and designer must be 'dedicated to resisting it'.

What makes the redevelopment of railway station areas such a daunting task? Is it the challenge of making order out of chaos? Or is it the challenge of sifting through the diverse perceptions of the problem and prescriptions for its solution? If the forces of chaos can be resisted, how are planners to arm themselves for the struggle? Perhaps the answer lies in recomposing divergent perceptions. With these questions in mind, we embarked on the theoretical and empirical journey that has resulted in this book. During the trip, the authors met, to compare notes and to absorb the ideas of others.

The whole project was triggered by Franco Corsico at the Politecnico di Torino. In 1992 he suggested that Bertolini should consider the theme of station area redevelopment for his PhD dissertation. At first he hesitated, but then accepted, trusting Corsico's renowned intuition. The choice could not have been more timely. Since then, waves of enthusiasm for and disillusionment with station area development have produced a groundswell of interest in the research. At an early stage, the advice given by Luigi Falco and Giuseppe Dematteis, also at the Politecnico di Torino, was essential. In particular, Dematteis' analysis of the complex relation between a *geography of networks* and a *geography of areas* helped to structure the approach to the theme. In fact, his insights are still bearing

fruit. The work of fellow researchers such as Paola Pucci of the Politecnico di Milano was also a source of inspiration during that period. At the outset, the project was intended as an international comparative study. In France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, the response of those involved in the projects under scrutiny (and of colleagues at local universities) has been outstanding. Their cooperation has been perhaps the single most important condition for the achievement that followed. Space does not permit us to mention all of them here, but at least Michael Edwards at the Bartlett School and Michael Parkes, both in London, together with Anton Kreukels at the Universiteit Utrecht in the Netherlands deserve explicit recognition. Their enthusiasm and suggestions were essential to both the initial results and the later development of the study.

For various reasons – including a fascination with the qualities of Dutch urban civilization – Bertolini looked for ways to pursue his career in the Netherlands after completing his PhD. At that point he met Tejo Spit, thanks to the mediation of Frans Dieleman (director of the research school NETHUR). Together, Bertolini and Spit wrote three research proposals to work out the findings reported in the dissertation. Two of the proposals were successful. First came a research grant from NS-Vastgoed, the newly founded property subsidiary of the Dutch railways. The firm's managers showed an unusual willingness to reflect on and learn from experiences in other countries. This project allowed the researchers to update and expand the empirical basis of the study. Again, the readiness to collaborate shown by those involved in the initiatives studied was critical to the project's success. In some cases, their cooperation went far beyond expectations. This was true of Martin Skillbäck in Stockholm and Andreas Fischer in Basel. Colleagues Stefan de Corte in Brussels and Richard Wolff in Zürich provided a fantastic blend of generous hospitality and challenging debate, a combination that helped to focus the analysis. The second research proposal that received funding was a three-year project supported jointly by NWO (the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research) and the RPD (the Dutch National Planning Agency). This project, which is still running, led to the appointment of Bertolini as a post-doctorate researcher at the Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Universiteit Utrecht, thereby creating the material conditions to develop both the empirical and the theoretical aspects. In Utrecht, he has found a stimulating academic environment at the Utrecht Centre for Urban Research (URU). Utrecht has also been the venue for particularly fruitful exchanges between the two authors and Anton Kreukels.

This book distils the findings of five years of research on the subject, and sets the goals for future endeavours. It combines the expertise on the theme built up by Bertolini with the long-standing research focus of Spit on complex planning challenges. The book remains the product of collective, interactive effort. Yet the specialities of the two authors can be traced in the division of tasks. Bertolini has done most of the writing for Chapters 2 and 3, as well as for the case studies. Spit has written most of Chapter 4 and has outlined the national planning systems. The introduction and the conclusions were a fully concerted effort of both authors, both regarding the case studies and at the general level.

While putting together the material for this book, the authors derived much benefit from the input of various individuals. The assistance of Leonie Jansen, Marinka Van Vliet and Sarah Schendeler was important. Several illustrations,

including the national maps that appear at the beginning of each case study, were prepared at the Kartografisch Laboratorium of the Universiteit Utrecht. The quality of the text was greatly improved by Nancy Smyth van Weesep, who had to untangle the first draft within very tight deadlines. At E & FN Spon, Caroline Mallinder proved to be a very professional but gentle editor, effectively combining firmness and encouragement. Last but not least, the comments of the anonymous reviewers of the first proposal and the response by the anonymous reader of the first version of the manuscript are greatly appreciated. The authors have learned much along the way, from start to finish, and hope the reader will too.

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