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Iconic Buildings, how they are planned?  
A case study of the City of Groningen



Garko Kuijzer, s2550121  
University of Groningen  
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## Summary

All across Europe iconic building projects in the last three decades like the Guggenheim in Bilbao have become very prevalent. These buildings often have more of a cultural statement than a pure functional expression in their form. This bids the question why these buildings are created, and perhaps more interesting, what the associated processes in their planning and construction entail. This leads to the main research question of this paper: *What are the possible considerations of a municipality, when evaluating an iconic building project?*

An answer will be given by studying why an icon may be preferable over more standard looking buildings. As well as, whether municipalities consider multiple of these buildings to be detrimental to each other and if municipalities look beyond their own borders when considering to build a new icon. Data will be collected through the use of a case study approach on the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. This includes the uses of place creation, city branding and the importance of tourism as well as an overview of the Dutch planning practises and the nature of icons.

By conducting interviews with professionals in the fields of city planning, municipal real estate development and project management, the pros and cons of icons have been mapped and the outward look of a municipality undergoing this process is described.

By cross-referencing these findings with existing literature on the subject, the answer to the main question is both expected as well as surprising. Whilst the existing planning structure is very organised, both rigidly and flexible where needed, the role of municipal and national politics was unexpectedly large and warrants further research

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## Introduction

People have always flocked to iconic buildings, whether it is the temples of Greece, the Coliseum in Rome, or the modern skyscrapers in cities like New York or Dubai. With the ever increasing global tourism figures these icons are becoming ever more popular (UNTWO 2015). In recent years other smaller cities have tried to promote the tourism industry. One of the most famous examples being Bilbao in Spain. A former industrial city with little appeal to the outside world, it is now a remarkable attraction for tourists who come to visit its Guggenheim museum. Using a diffusion of postmodern architecture and heritage branding the city has managed to turn itself from dilapidated industrial town into an attraction for large amounts of tourists (Economist 2013).

New development of icons is visible across Europe, for instance the new train station in Rotterdam or the Nationale Nederlanden Building in Prague. The process behind the creation of these icons is the main interest for this paper, as well as questions like: what is an icon? Are only buildings that spring to mind when someone mentions a place or city, like the Empire State building in New York or the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, icons? Are they just buildings that have become famous for being famous (Urry 1990) springing to mind when thinking of a place, or 'icons that are instantly recognizable in the landscape' (Smith&Casey 2001)? Or should other factors also be considered in defining what an icon is, such as the difficulties associated with their creation and their roots in city branding and tourism attractions (Boisen et. al. 2011)?

These questions, as well as the large amounts of public spending involved with their creation make for a very relevant subject, both societal and theoretical.

By looking specifically at Groningen through a case study approach, this bachelor project aims to develop a comprehensive analysis of what iconic buildings are, and what considerations are taken into account by a municipality in their planning and realisation.

## Research problem

The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine how a municipality decides to build an iconic project, detail the administrative processes that surround it and create an overview of the considerations that are made in the process. An overview of how these buildings affect the local economy through tourism and place branding is also created. This ties into local and tourism branding studies and how real estate projects can help affect these for the better (Riza et al 2011). Furthermore it is also relevant to a wider audience as many of the Dutch municipal challenges described can also be found elsewhere. Considering this, the main research question in this paper is: *What are the possible considerations of a municipality, when evaluating an iconic building project?*

To make answering it more manageable, the main research question has been divided into three sub-questions, which will be answered using semi structured interviews with experts in the fields of project management, real estate development and city planning.

The first question: *why can iconic building projects be preferred over more standard looking buildings?* relates to the reasoning behind the construction of an icon, what are their pro's and con's that lead to their realisation?

The second question: *do municipalities consider competition between multiple iconic buildings and plan ahead for more iconic buildings in the future?* It relates to the fact that

there can be multiple modern iconic buildings either present or under construction within a municipality. Do the municipalities plan for their construction? Is it considered that multiple iconic buildings might subtract from each other when not performed in a tasteful manner?

The third question: *do municipalities look beyond their own borders when planning a new iconic building?* It concerns whether or not it is considered that a municipality is not an isolated geographical entity and if this is accounted for in the planning process. It might be that an iconic building in one municipality causes tourism decline in surrounding municipalities, as well as attracting businesses from the outside.

The choice for these experts was made based on their experience in the fields of real estate development, city planning and project management as well as their direct involvement in the construction of a municipal icon. With their experience, it is expected that they would also have extensive first-hand knowledge of the operational processes involved in constructing these projects, and how these projects are integrated in the community. Furthermore, they were also expected to have first-hand experience in how a municipal government operates as well as provide insight into the administrative processes and how these iconic projects come to be.

The results from these interviews are compared to the existing literature and differences between theory and practise will be examined.

### **Structure of the thesis**

In the first chapter, the theoretical framework an overview of the nature of icons is created. Within the framework then follows a description of the administrative processes involved in the realisation of inner-city development, after which the third and fourth part of the framework go on to describe the main reasons to develop an icon and the importance of icons in tourism branding and city marketing, and place creation.

The second chapter is the methodology and an explanation as to why a case study approach was chosen, this will include a short background description of the case Groningen and some of its icons. The third chapter follows the three sub questions, in the order mentioned before. The paper then concludes with a chapter that answers the main question and a short review of the quality of the paper. Finally, in the attachments a short description of certain terms marked with an asterisk \* in the text can be found as well as an map of icons in the city of Groningen and the interview questions used.

# Theoretical framework

## Part 1: The nature of iconic buildings

In the introduction a description by Urry (1990) and Smith&Casey (2001) of an icon was provided, which included that buildings can be famous for being instantly recognisable, different from their surroundings and that they are buildings that spring to mind when thinking of a certain place. This describes two of the most important aspects of icons; fame and recognition, and distinction.

The fame of buildings can be described as being well known. This can be through direct contact, but is most often through depiction in movies or series, often meant to create a sense of presence for the viewers. This causes people to recognise famous landmarks when they see them in person and makes them feel more at home, creating a sense of place \* (Holloway & Hubbard 2001).

However, a building does not have to be world-famous to be iconic. The article by Tomlinson (2014) denotes what makes a building iconic and argues that a building does not only have to be uniquely designed but it also has to have an impact on the city and a story to tell of its own. Sklair (2006) agrees with this, saying that to be iconic a building has to stand out from its surroundings, which is the distinction aspect mentioned earlier. Neither of them mention the need for an icon to be widely known beyond its daily influence sphere.

This means a locally famous building can also be considered iconic, as long as it has a special meaning to the people who identify with it (Chang 2010). The interaction between the building and its surroundings is the most important, as well as the symbolic meaning of the building (Sklair 2006). As such, to be a successful icon a building needs to be distinct from its surroundings, however to be a successful building it also needs to fit into those same surroundings(Riza et. al. 2011).

This means that an iconic building must not only serve touristic purposes, it also has to have an everyday use and be efficient in that regard (Llewellyn 2003). This everyday use is what Jenkins (2002) called permeability of place\*, and it is essential in having a building integrate into the life of citizens.

This can be interpreted as people needing to construct a sense of place\* associated with a newly built icon for it to be successful (Holloway& Hubbard 2001).

A very effective tool in this creating of a sense of place is the use of icons, objects, structures or landmarks that people remember when thinking back of the place or revisiting(Holloway & Hubbard 2001). This may seem like a paradox, having to construct a sense of place with an icon, then to use that icon to construct a sense of place, however by starting this sense of familiarity on a street level it is possible to attach a broader connection to a city as a whole (Holloway & Hubbard 2001).

Icons are also vital to position a city in the market (Boisen et al. 2011). By implementing the local shops and entrepreneurs you are able to create a tourist gaze\* that further enhances how tourists view the icon and city (Urry 1990). Once this has been successful, it may be stated that you have created both a successful icon and a successful building.

## **Part 2: General administrative processes involved in the realisation of inner-city development in the Netherlands**

Once an icon is successful it may become a reason for visiting a certain place or region (Karavits 2007). Famous examples from the Netherlands would be Keukenhof and Kinderdijk. However, creation of new icons can be difficult, not only because of the integration mentioned in the previous chapter, but also because of existing administrative structures. This second chapter creates an overview of the Dutch planning practices and the various stages it includes.

To start with there is the law, the WRO as it is called, which outlines how changes in the land or cityscape must be addressed and undertaken. Its primary function is to provide legal certainty and legal protection to the people and parties that are subject to the proposed changes. These are provided through objection procedures and information procedures, meaning the involved parties can make their concerns known and that there are set mediums through which the government must communicate its intentions (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). This provides the framework in within which the administrative procedures must be executed.

For the following paragraph it is presumed that the project is in the hands of a municipality. The national and regional governments generally follow very similar procedures (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). The planning procedures are very structured. Once a certain problem has been identified a municipality starts what is called a Structural (Procedure). This is initiated by the municipal council and is a document that states the policies to be implemented and the governmental powers that will be needed to act. It also has to include the societal stakeholders or parties involved, meaning those who may experience the effects of the structural (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). The structural does not have to include any reference to communication with surrounding municipalities. Basically the structural is meant to give municipalities a lot of leeway and freedom in their operations whilst still maintaining and guaranteeing the rights and safety of other involved parties and citizens (Voogd & Woltjer 2010).

Once the structural has been approved by the city council and all objections have been properly dealt with through official channels it can be transformed into a zoning plan. These are mandatory documents, and they must cover the entire surface of the municipality in question though not necessarily in a single zoning plan (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). These too must be open for objection from outside parties, and both the national and regional governments may make objections or advise changes. Both the national and regional governments can provide their own versions of a zoning plan, but only if there is a national or regional importance to it. This serves to ensure no excessive meddling restricts local municipalities too much (Voogd & Woltjer 2010).

The zoning plans have to consist of several very specific parts:

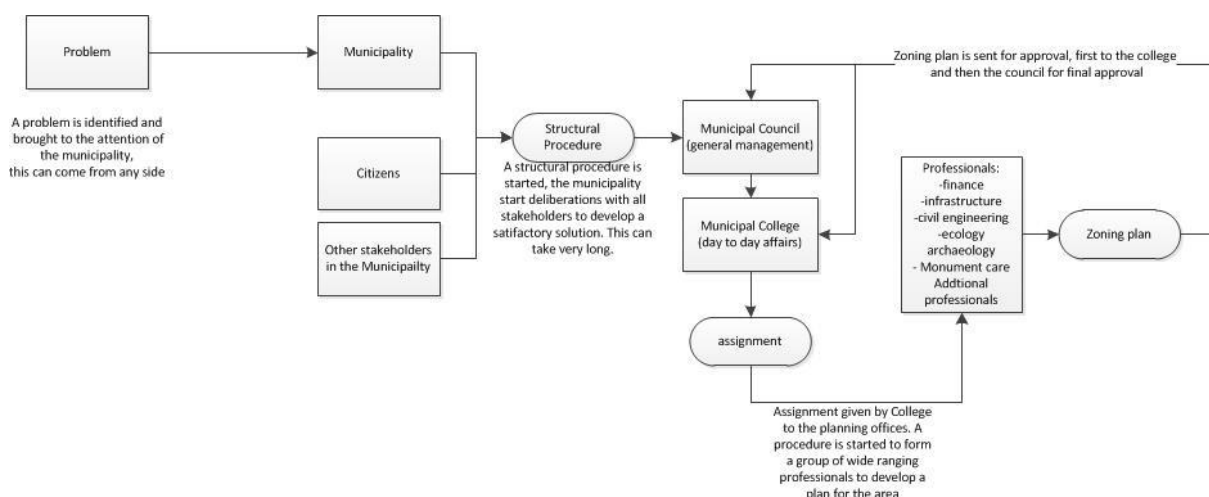
- A description of the destination and the goal of the specific zoning arrangements.
- How the set goals are to be achieved.
- Regulations and demands for the land and the structures on it (no retroactivity, though any changes to an existing building must be up to these regulations).
- Maps that clearly state the intentions of each zoning area and its borders and other functions.

- Changes within the zoning plan are to be made in a separate zoning plan on the appropriate scale, also called a project decision.

All parties affected are allowed to cast objections during the objections period allotted. Failure to object within the allotted timeframe will render the objections void.

These two procedures can take anywhere from 22 weeks to 2 years. Because of this, from the date of enactment of the structural it is only allowed to make changes within the area by special exemption from the mayor (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). Also, when the zoning plan is put into action, the structural expires, thus ensuring no overlap is present. Whilst these processes are not specific to inner-city development, they are generally more complex within the cityscape, because of the larger number of inhabitants and parties involved in the planning processes.

After the planning stages are completed, actual building can be started, in the form of a project. This is preceded by the actual design phase, which in the case of an perceived icon may be through the use of a use of a design contest. During the building process, any nuisances caused must be accounted for and people inconvenienced by it must be informed or compensated to prevent negative sentiments (Voogd & Woltjer 2010). All this can be efficiently visualised in a flowchart, as is shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1: a quick overview of the Dutch planning process.**

### Part 3: The main reasons to develop an icon and inner-city regeneration

The overview of the administrative processes raises the question why a municipality would develop an icon in the first place. In his article De Roo (2011) pleads for a new large attraction in a city every decade or so. The reason for this, he says is to stave of dullness in a cityscape. A new icon like the Forum in Groningen he argues, is more than just a building, it is a new impulse for a city and improves its outside appearances. He also names cities like The Hague, which turned from a ‘dull city of civil servants [...] into a vibrant and internationally attractive city’ (De Roo 2011). Cities need to keep renewing themselves or fade into obscurity, becoming a so called grey mouse. Creating new icons is the only way to prevent that from happening De Roo argues.



A newly built icon can even change the fortunes of a faltering city, as was illustrated by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. This former industrial city has changed significantly from small port city with high unemployment ratios into a cultural attraction on the northern coast of Spain with the lowest unemployment and debt figures nationally. Bilbao is the textbook example of a city that has turned itself around through the effective use of tourism. By creating a single world famous icon the city has been able to enter a regenerative stage and turn its economy around for the better (Economist 2013).

This regeneration process consists of four parts according to Ball& Stobart(1998). The first of which is the enhancement of the image of the area, changing from being seen as an industrial port city to a cultural hub. The second part is the presence of tourist facilities, which means that people must be able to find a place to stay easily which increases the comfort and likelihood they will return. The creation of a tourist sector allows for diversification of the local economy which was overspecialised. The third stage then means that people can move out of the industrial sector and start small businesses in the tourist sector. Following the success of example of Bilbao other cities started implementing their own tourist attractions in the hope of diversifying their local economies and creating more jobs. This is the fourth stage, which Ball& Stobart(1998) call limited perceived areas of guaranteed growth, meaning that many municipalities believe it is the only course of action open to them to increase grow their economies.

This can often lead to short-sighted decision making municipalities who consider stimulating tourism through iconic buildings a wonder cure (Ball& Stobart 1998). These municipalities have forgotten that the key to successful tourism, architourism\* and creating an attractive place to visit are the financial and cultural means to create such a place (Ockman&Frausto 2006). These means are often concentrated in the larger centres where the producers of authentic\* tourist experience are located. These centres are often the main attraction to tourists as they only sparsely visiting the surrounding regions, thereby making these centres a perfect investment in the eyes of municipal governments (Economist 2013)

#### **Part 4: The importance of tourism and place branding, and the use of icons therein.**

Tourism is a major part in the economies of modern day cities, with an ever increasing focus on tourism to bolster and diversify the local economy (Rogerson & Van der Merwe 2016). However, with the increased access to the internet and ever growing and diversifying supply of tourist destinations these cities find themselves competing with each other on the national and even global scale. These destinations are specifically in competition with other destinations in different continents. They are very dependent on fragile environmental conditions, which then influence the price and quality and thereby competitiveness of the tourist product (Hernandez et. al 2015). This implies that tourist locations need to find a balance in how they deal with tourism that promotes it in a sustainable way to diversify a struggling economy yet also deal with socioeconomic problems that come along with increased tourism. An example of this would be the rise in tourism to Iceland. The country is promoted as a rugged wilderness where you can come to enjoy beautiful landscapes, go off-road driving or hiking (Promote Iceland 2016). But these activities may also damage the local surroundings, diminishing its attractiveness and thereby its ability to compete with similar

locations elsewhere. Finding the balance between tourism and sustainability is therefore crucial (Hernandez et al. 2015)

With this it becomes evident that there is not only a need to diversify the economy through tourism but also diversifying the tourism itself, so as not to put too much strain on a single aspect of the environment (Hernandez et al. 2015). This also applies to the areas surrounding cities as they become increasingly reliant on tourism industries. As the tourism takes on an increasingly important role in the local economy it becomes an important way marginal regions can overcome economic stagnation or decline (Rogerson et. al. 2016). However, it also brings with it the struggles associated with large scale tourism.

However, if the tourism industry is planned and managed correctly, diversified and inclusive of the local community in the decision making process, as well as focusing on the redistribution of costs and benefits across all stakeholders, tourism may lead to equality, and equity in the locale and its surroundings. (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). This means that cities are ideal locations for tourism as the local stakeholders can be brought into contact with each other much easier. As demonstrated by Romero-Padilla et. al. (2016) expanding tourism within city areas leads to a broadening of functions within the urban environment. This broadening, then becomes a catalyst for further change in the areas surrounding the city whilst still remaining reliant on the tourism sector. This can eventually lead to entire regions becoming more diverse, tolerant and open as it will become comprised of both residents and transients exchanging ideas and values (Donaldson et. al. 2012).

However, tourism does not come out of nowhere, and as such, branding is a very important concept in place promotion and attracting tourism. In the narrowest sense of the word place branding refers to the application of product branding to places (Karavits 2005), to increase attractiveness and flows of visitors. In a more open interpretation, Van Ham (2008) calls it a promotional activity that includes all activities that increase the attractiveness of an area as a place for working living and spending free time. This is a much more rounded view as it does not only apply to the marketing aspect to place promotion but also the spatial interventions made to a place to increase attractiveness. This is included in Messeley et. al.'s(2014) definition which states that developing a space brand is more than an identifying name given to a place. It is a geographical representation of the place and it requires a deliberate process of selecting and associating specific, regional, functional attributes and symbolic values that are assumed to add value to the place. The place brand has to represent the link between the typical functional and symbolic characteristics of the place and the potential place consumers.

No matter the definition though, according to Boisen et. al. (2011) branding has become a central concept in promoting places and increasing local competitiveness, which Van Ham (2008) agrees with, saying “to stand out from the crowd and capture the significant mind and market share, place branding has become essential. this also means that local politicians and policy makers have taken notice, and that they are becoming more confident that coherent strong and attractive place branding is nowadays a necessity, to promote a strong and economically sound city or region. (Boisen et. al. 2011, Pike 2011).

## Methodology

This paper has been conducted in the form of a case study the subject of which was the city of Groningen in the Northern Netherlands. A more detailed description of the city can also be found in the chapter Background information. The choice for a case study was made because of the nature of the research question. A municipality is a complex institution that can't easily be investigated in an atomistic manner. Furthermore, with the intention of looking into the considerations a municipality makes, a functioning municipality was required.

The choice for Groningen was primarily one of convenience, it is a mid-to large city in the Netherlands with several relatively recently constructed icons, one of which is currently under construction.

The choice for semi structured interviews alongside the literature study was made to back up the findings in the literature and to see if there would be differences that become apparent through collating the literature to the answers provided in the interviews (Longhurst 2010). The expectation was that the literature created an ideal picture of how the decision making process works, and that through interviews a more nuanced view could be created. Alongside this the aim was to gain insight into how the choice for an icon was made over a more standard looking building as well as their views on whether or not these buildings would compete with other icons in the same city. Finally, insights into the actual higher level, inter-municipal deliberation processes was also sought.

The people that have been interviewed were picked based on the expected professional view they would add to the interviews as well as their direct involvement in the construction and planning of (iconic) buildings. All of them are directly employed by the municipality and were therefore expected to be intimately familiar with the decision making processes that are central to these projects and the associated actions in their development into plans. The interviews were chosen from a number of possibilities from the municipal website and then contacted via email. Practical difficulties such as scheduling conflicts sometimes necessitated switching respondents.

All data has been collected in a period of two weeks. All interviews were conducted at the workplace of the respondents, mostly in common areas. The data is all of a primary nature and although the focus of the interviews occasionally shifted away from the main subject it is clear and precise. This means all interviews were of benefit, and the shift in focus often provided welcome background information on multiple subjects. The data has been analysed through labelling and coding of the interview transcripts to find patterns and similarities among the interviews.

The prime ethical consideration made in writing this paper was whether or not to keep the respondents named or anonymous. By naming them it would be easier to establish their expertise on the subject, however sometime political sensitive statements were made. This eventually led to the decision to keep the names redacted and not name the respondents. However, this caused some problems as it has been stated that all respondents work for the municipal government and all can be found on the municipal website. Furthermore, not many

people actually qualify to the expert criteria, thereby making it easier to identify the respondents. By keeping low on other details and not specifying who said certain things, it is expected not to cause too much issue, however it is still somewhat difficult. [I am still unsure whether or not this has been enough effort on my part to keep them anonymous.]

Other ethical considerations are dealt with more easily, permission was always asked to tape the interviews, all interviews were conducted in the professional environment of the respondents for their convenience, and all interview transcripts and soundfiles are stored only on a private computer that is not accessible to anyone else.

### **Background information Groningen**

Groningen is a city of roughly 200.000 inhabitants in the northern parts of the Netherlands, thereby making it by far the largest city in the northern half of the Netherlands (Toerisme.Groningen.nl 2016). The city and its surrounding countryside have been plagued by induced earthquakes, caused by gas extraction from the Groningen Gas field (rijksoverheid.nl 2015). Being the largest city in the north of the Netherlands also means the city is rather isolated from the other major cities. It is well over 2 hours train ride away from for instance Amsterdam.

However, what made this city of interest for a case study approach was the fact that in the last few decades a number of icons have been constructed. Foremost among these is the Groninger Museum. A very postmodern building, it is located in a former turning basin in the canal surrounding the historic inner city. It has led to increases in tourism for the city and the revival of the Folkingestraat through a strategically placed bridge (Tsubohara 2006). This bridge leads tourists to the inner-city where it is expected they will spend more money in local shops and restaurants (nom.nl 2016). Nowadays the Folkingestraat is bustling with shops and activity and is a perfect example of how an iconic building can attract new visitors to a city and instigate urban regeneration\*. With multiple very successful attractions such as the recent David Bowie exhibit and a visitor record for 2015 the museum has indeed become a major selling point for the city of Groningen (Janssen. 2016).

Also in Groningen, two other iconic public buildings have started or finished construction. The first is the Infoversum, which was meant as a 360° 3D cinema for showing informative movies and holding congress events (M. van Dillen 2014).

The second is the Groningen Forum, currently under construction and the subject of much debate in the city. One of the respondents is directly involved with the construction and planning of this project. It is part of a larger construction and revitalisation project aimed at the inner city around the Grote Markt. The expectations is that more tourism will be attracted and that the area around the Grote Markt will become evenly balanced with other parts of the city. (nu.nl 2016)

Because of the presence of these icons and most importantly, the fact that one is currently under construction, the city was considered as a viable example what considerations a municipality makes when constructing an icon.

## Results

### **Why can iconic building projects be preferred over more standard looking buildings?**

The prime reasoning to develop an icon was clear from the literature and corroborated in the interviews, a need to regenerate the city and attract tourism. By creating a new “postcard” for a city, tourism may increase and a local economy can start an upward trend. In combination with inner city redevelopment to rejuvenate a city and make it more attractive this can help put a city on the map, or keep it there.

The first reason is the fact that the phases before there ever is a concrete plan can take very long, sometimes even decades, something that is not clear from the literature. This was the case with Groningen as well. Back in the 1950's the choice was made to embrace modern times and architecture in a city ravaged by war. This meant that the city had to become accessible by car, and that modern architecture would be used instead of trying to recreate what had been destroyed. Some 20 years later in the 1970's it had become clear that the earlier developments had not done the city any favours. The close-knit spheres of the markets and plazas had been lost because of traffic running through the city centre and the feeling of intimacy was lost. Even back then it was apparent that changes had to be made. Yet it took until 2003 before an actual plan was developed and put into action. This is a prime example of how long the process can take, and is a far cry from the stylised theoretical process.

A second reason not to build an icon is simply the much higher cost of these buildings, because of often more extravagant architecture and use of materials. There has to be a return of investment in the projections and the realisations for a city to go through with the creation of an icon. This return of investment has to be through increased economic activity and tourism generated by the icon. This, in combination with the publicity and public sentiment may be a reason to avoid developing an icon

The third is the political process. The planning departments and developments are driven by political will. Because the creation of an icon can be such a long process, not including the phase prior to the actual structural, almost 13 years have passed since the planning for the Forum has begun. This means several colleges and councils have succeeded each other, and for such a project to succeed all these politicians involved must stay a driving force behind the project or it fail.

Finally and most importantly there is a more practical reason. There simply has to be an opportunity to develop an icon. It is not often an area large enough to accommodate an icon is available in a city centre, especially in the crowded city centres of historic European cities. This was also called the History of the site, meaning that it would have to fit in and be possible in a location. In Groningen a space only came available in the city centre through the demolition of the large parking structure that occupied it earlier, a remnant from the accessibility desires of the fifties.

### **Do municipalities consider competition between multiple iconic buildings and plan ahead for more iconic buildings in the future?**

The general assumption in the creation of these icons is that they will all be an addition to the city and together become more attractive to tourists. Icons are, by all respondents, seen as bundling their attraction and thereby increasing tourism potential to a city. The possibility that different icons in a single city might divide attention between tourists was not considered.

Because these icons are heavily dependent on strategic locations within cities to optimise their performance, their locations are not necessarily close to each other. This potentially divides attention between those icons closest to each other and the more solitary ones. An example would be the Gasunie Building (attachment B image 9) it was repeatedly named as an icon, but is situated far from the other icons on the map and does not seem to attract as much attention from tourists. Despite its isolation and lack of tourists, it still serves its purpose within the city network as it is a very prominent building when entering the city through the A7 national highway.

This relates back to the importance of place and space, because by locating an icon in a prominent place, and their nature as standing tall over their surroundings a certain feel for the icon is created, relating back to the creation of a sense of place. This sense of place can then be incorporated in the city network and contribute to how a city is experienced.

Because of the length of the process, creating icons is continually an attempt at looking into the future while it is impossible to predict long term creation of these icons, because of the evolutionary processes involved in their planning and their specific requirements for space and place. This means it is not possible to actually say an icon will be built before the actual structural starts taking shape. Even then, a suitable location has to be present as well as the political will to see the project through. However, when a location is available, and all other factors fall in to place the general aim is to create an attraction for the city and in doing so further develop the city.

So whilst municipalities are required to develop plans with a forward view it is very difficult to plan ahead for the creation of icons due to their nature and the processes involved. The general assumption that these buildings do not compete with each other seems very prevalent, yet is not supported by much evidence from the interviews.

### **Do municipalities look beyond their own borders when planning a new iconic building?**

Here the structure of government becomes important. In the Netherlands, the municipality nowadays is relatively independent in creating and developing plans. However, they still have to cede initiative sometimes when projects concern provincial or even national interests (Voogd & Woltjer 2010).

In the Netherlands, the laws governing the planning procedures for municipalities and all associated procedures are in an extensive process of rewriting and revision. The aim is to include the entirety of spatial planning powers for the governmental organs in a single comprehensive framework, which denotes which governmental organ is responsible for a specific spatial development (Rijkswaterstaat 2016a). Within this newly reformed law a chapter called inter-municipal cooperation in urban areas will also be included, yet it is currently not currently available for inspection by outsiders (Rijkswaterstaat 2016b). This means that the current inter-municipal cooperation is still bound by old laws and the initiative taken by the municipalities themselves.

The very nature of icons and their intended strengthening of a local economy may give a city an edge over its competitors in attraction tourism or business. This would indicate a certain need for surrounding municipalities to be informed of the process. Yet the interviews all

clearly outlined that whilst inter-municipal deliberations were always conducted, directed either by the municipalities themselves or by the provinces, they were always of a more infrastructural nature. These deliberations rarely seemed to focus on for instance the realisation of the Forum. This displays a certain concern with only the own municipality, and the perceived need to compete with municipalities of a similar size. For Groningen, the example of Zwolle was given, as that city is closer to the large cities in the west of the Netherlands and is often called the gateway to the north. Groningen has to compete with Zwolle for the attention of visitors and companies. Given the division in provinces and municipalities, this concern for the own municipality seems only natural.

A certain willingness to cooperate must also be cultivated from the municipalities surrounding Groningen to cooperate on a peer to peer level. Examples of inter-municipal cooperation can be found in the Netherlands among cities like Amsterdam and Eindhoven who cooperate with their neighbouring municipalities intensely to facilitate inter municipal growth (Menger 2016).

This shows that while cooperation is not yet laid down in the law a certain political willingness to cooperate must be present to make a successful intergovernmental approach possible. It also shows that a competitive edge is present in the municipalities that forestall collaboration on projects like the Forum on anything but the provincial level.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the considerations a municipality must make when deciding to build a new icon are many. When a city identifies the need for inner city regeneration, an icon may be just the way to jump-start the regeneration process through increased tourism and the attraction of businesses. However, planning for a new icon is not an easy task. The right conditions must be met, which include an available space in an important place in the city network, as well as a perceived need for a building of an iconic scale.

Iconic buildings are not seen as having a detrimental impact on each other, and are generally expected to increase tourism and economic growth in a city or a region. Even though the expected benefits generally outweigh the costs, it remains difficult to plan ahead for an icon as the conditions must be met, which can take decades. But when the correct conditions are met, an opportunity arises allows a municipality to develop its own outwards reputation and create new economic possibilities for itself. This in turn displays a certain selfishness, that must be balanced through provincial policy.

In all, within the rigid structures of the Dutch planning practise, laid down in laws, vision and guidelines, political will remains the main stimulator of all developments. This is surprising as none of the literature gave any indication of this. Projects can succeed or fail due to the preferences of the current political structure, and by losing political footing a plan can be completely scrapped. Which is risky as these projects can take decades to form and develop and can make or break a city through inner-city regeneration and increases in tourism.

In the future, it would be very interesting to look further into the strong political role in very structured planning practises. Especially with the icons presenting the outward appearances of

the city, politics are heavily involved in their planning and realisation. Moreover, it would also be of interest to further investigate the interplay between multiple icons. The general assumption from the interviews is that they complement each other, yet no real proof of this was discovered; only that municipalities do not consider it relevant. This is the largest flaw in this paper; apart from that, the unanticipatedly large role of politics should be mapped further.



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## **Attachments**

### **Attachment A: terms used and explained**

#### **architourism**

Architourism, stands for a niche market in the overall tourism industry, like ecotourism and heritage tourism. It is a growing market in the modern tourism industry, according to Ockman and Frausto (2006). More and more people go to visit specific places to experience its architectural highlights, with the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao being a prime example.

Architourism is of particular and growing importance in advanced consumer society and the modern day construction of tourist values. By developing architecture as a part of the tourism sector it is acknowledged in modern day society as an important aspect of everyday life.

#### **Authenticity**

Authenticity is a very tricky concept to accurately define. However, for this bachelor project the definition of Chang (2010) seems most appropriate. Tourism authenticity stands for the constructed reality that tourists believe to be the 'real' experience. It is created by many small businesses and people to cater to tourists and make them feel like they saw something genuine, whilst in truth it has been an deliberate construct for tourism purposes, to inspire cultural appreciation. Chang (2010) specifically calls out this duplicity between constructed and consumed authenticity.

#### **City marketing**

City marketing means the application of marketing techniques to and the adoption of a marketing philosophy to meet operational and strategic goals (Karavits 2007).

To start a city has to evaluate its position in the market, its strengths and weaknesses and the target audience (locals and tourists?). then follows choosing a vision for the city and what goals are to be achieved. This is then followed by implementing specific projects and ends with an evaluation at which point the cycle might start again (Karavits and Ashworth 2007). This is very important as it means the city has to choose its audience wisely and consider its strengths. A well-executed marketing campaign can put a city on the map for years to come, boosting the economy and creating new jobs in the city (Karavits 2007).

#### **Permeability of places/buildings**

Permeability of buildings refers to how well people and buildings can interact. It stands for the links a building has to local and global systems (Jenkins 2002). This means that a building cannot just be a closed structural entity anymore, it must have a connection to the world surrounding it. This is in line with a transition in how we experience buildings and how they are studied. There has been a transition from merely looking at the meaning attributed to a building to a more interactive approach that focuses on the everyday uses and interaction of a building and its surroundings. (Chang 2010)

#### **Sense of place**

Sense of place is a concept within humanistic geography that describes the bonds people develop with a certain place, or the lack thereof. It says that humans give values to space and in doing so create place, somewhere they identify with and that they will remember. This means that our view of the world is created by us and will never be objective. We create our own worlds by making meaningful the physical phenomena that are present there. This also

means that we can influence how we perceive spaces and places with strategic placement of laden objects and through storytelling (Holloway&Hubbard 2001).

### **Tourist Gaze**

The Tourist gaze is what Urry (1990) described as the set off expectations tourists or visitors have of locals when participating in heritage tourism. This means that the visitors have certain expectations of what they will find when visiting a certain place, often these expectations are somewhat based on the old traditions of local people. An Example would be the visiting of indigenous Mursi tribes, and the Mursi women wearing lip plates. These expectations are often based on the search for something “authentic”. The irony here is that in their effort to attract tourists these authentic experiences are completely corrupted into financial gains for the indigenous people or, more common, for the foreign tour operators. This tourist gaze is therefore the ‘set of goggles’ if you would, we wear when we believe we are about to have an authentic experience.

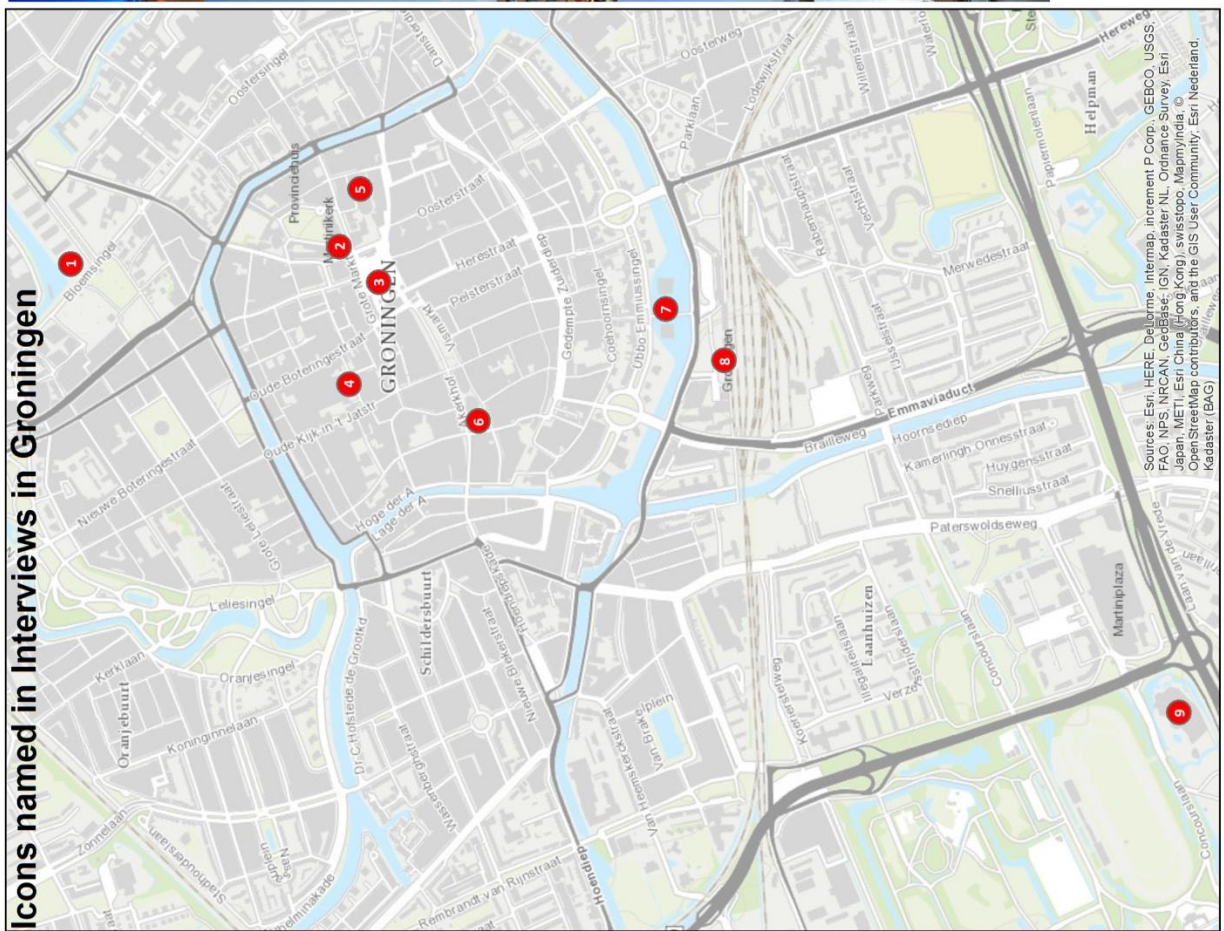
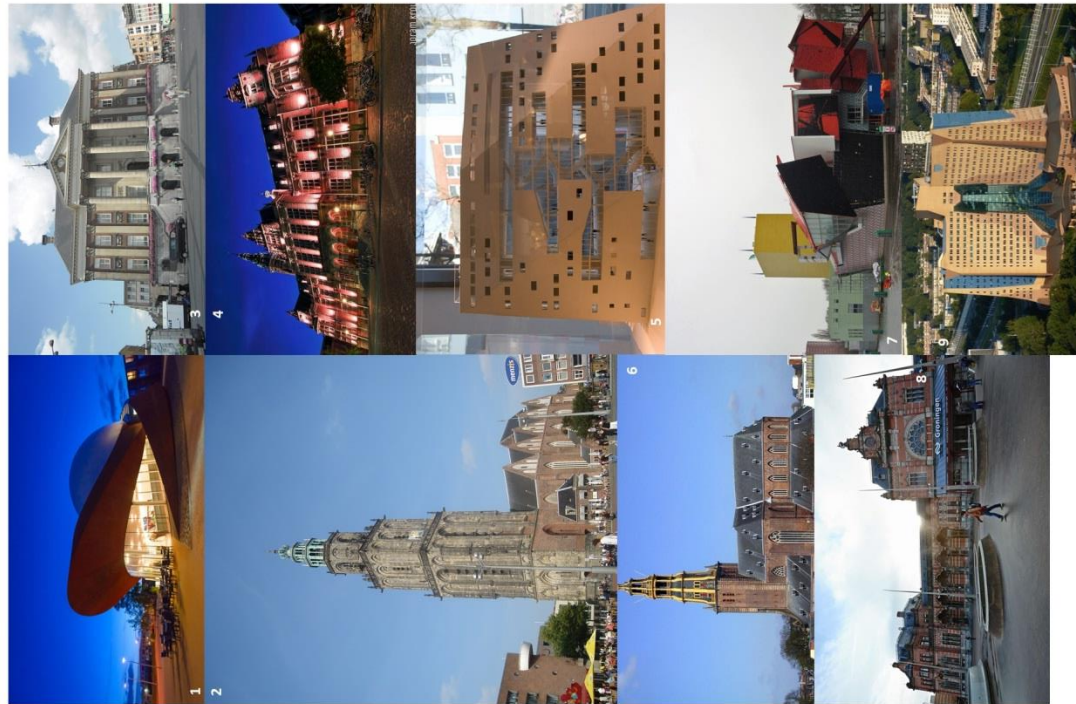
### **Urban regeneration**

Urban regeneration or Urban renewal logically means the regeneration of the inner city. This entails providing local or regional impulses to change the composition of a neighbourhood to a more desirable or diverse character. Examples of impulses might include gentrification, the construction of new facilities to attract new social entities like young families or new businesses, or infrastructural changes to promote growth or change. The purpose of renewal is to make neighbourhoods more attractive and change their reputation and social composition. It might for example be attempted in areas near the city centre with high poverty or crime (Tsubohara 2006).

### **Vernacular**

Vernacularism in Tourism is a very important concept that is somehow easy yet difficult to understand. Karen de Bres (1996) gives multiple examples in the form of the state of Kansas, where vernacular stands to mean promoting the odd and the local. Things such as the world’s largest ball of twine, the world’s oldest clay hut etc. So it might be taken to mean the promotion of the local fondness of certain things. Yet De Bres (1996) also notes that it must always be about something that is locally considered important enough to want to promote it to the outside world. And it must always be about something from the local past, which represents the local spirit as it were. It has to be experienced as something ‘real’, or authentic. So, for the purposes of this bachelor project I will stick with this last part. Vernacular means the local flavour, be that in its objects or its building style and that feels genuine to the local and the outsider.

## Attachment B: map with icons within the city of Groningen named in interviews



Sources Pictures:

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## Attachment C: Interview Questions with translations

*what is an iconic building and why are the sometimes preferred over more standard looking buildings?*

*do municipalities consider competition between multiple iconic buildings and plan ahead for more iconic buildings in the future?*

*do municipalities look beyond their own borders when planning an new iconic building?*

- Kan je iets over jezelf vertellen? (can you tell me something about yourself?)
- Wat voor werk doe je hier precies (what kind of work do you do here exactly?)
- Wat denkt u dat een iconisch gebouw is? (what is in your own opinion an iconic building?)
  - Heeft de gemeente ideeën over wat zij graag zouden willen zien? Wordt er gestreefd naar het bouwen van iets iconisch? (does the municipality have ideas about what it wants to see build? Does it want specifically iconic buildings?)
- Wat is jouw mening over de bouw van iconische gebouwen in het algemeen? ( what is your personal opinion on iconic buildings?)
  - Zijn ze voor iedere regio of gemeente geschikt? (do you think iconic buildings are suited for every region or municipality?)
  - Kan het impulsief zijn, omdat iedereen het doet moeten wij ook? (do you think the building of iconic buildings might be done impulsively? Everybody does it so we have to as well?)
  - Zijn er vaak voorstellen in de vorm van iconische gebouwen? (do proposals for iconic buildings come in often?)
  - Wat is zijn redenen om een voorstel te accepteren dan wel verwerpen? (what would be the reasons for accepting or refusing a proposal?)
- Wat zijn, denkt u de belangrijkste voordelen van meerdere iconische gebouwen in een stad? (What, do you believe are the main benefits of having multiple iconic building in a single city?)
  - Denkt u dat meerdere iconische gebouwen met elkaar kunnen concureren om de aandacht van het publiek? Of valt alles samen tot een aandachtstrekker? ( Do you consider that one iconic building might compete with another iconic building within a city or is it all considered to just add up and stack on top of each other?)
- *(What are pros of an iconic building that make the municipality choose it over a more standard looking building?*
  - *What are the cons that would make a municipality decline an iconic building?*
  - *Considering the criticisms made to iconic buildings, for instance regarding the infoversum, do you believe the city of Groningen should keep investing in iconic buildings? (laden question))*
- Welke partijen zijn er (nog meer) betrokken bij de besluitvorming rondom iconische gebouwen? (what other stakes are involved with the decision making procedure surrounding iconic buildings?)
- Weet je iets over de daadwerkelijke besluitvorming? (do you know something about the actual decision making process? Were you involved?)

- Welke fasen zijn er in het besluitvormingsproces doorlopen? (what stages are there to the decision making process?)
- Is dit anders voor iconische gebouwen dan voor normale bouwprojecten, bijvoorbeeld omdat het meer in het oog springt? (is this different for iconic buildings as opposed to more standard building projects, for instance because these are often very public affairs?)
  - What are the stages in the design process that lead to the choosing of one iconic building over another?
- Zijn er voorafgaand studies geweest die deze projecten in een negatief daglicht stellen? ( groningen forum) (have there been studies that put these projects in a negative light? For instance the forum, or the bankruptcy of the Infoversum?)
- Welke factoren hebben uiteindelijk geleid tot de beslissing? Waren deze vooral op cijfers of op politiek gericht? (what factors eventually lead to the decision to build an icon? Do you think this was more political or more by the numbers?)
- Wordt er in plannen rekening gehouden met het feit dat er al meerdere van deze gebouwen zijn in de stad? (does the city account for the fact that multiple of these buildings already exist?)
- Are you aware of any newly planned icons?
- Wordt bij deze beslissing ook rekening gehouden met andere gemeenten? (when deciding to build an icon, do other municipalities come into play with the decision making? Are their interests considered?)
  - Wordt er ook buiten de stadsgrenzen van Groningen gekeken? (do you look beyond the borders of Groningen?)
  - Speelt de Groningse identiteit een rol bij het bouwen van deze gebouwen? (does the identity of Groningen play a role in the building of these buildings?)
  - Do you consider other, surrounding municipalities when choosing to build an iconic building?
- Do you believe it may disadvantage other cities in comparison?
  - Waarom wel of niet? (why? Why not?)
  - Denkt u dat zij hierin een rol zouden moeten kunnen spelen? (do you think they should be included?)
  - Denkt u dat als er in Assen ook een aantal iconische gebouwen geplaatst zouden worden dat dit van invloed zou kunnen zijn op bijvoorbeeld toerisme naar Groningen? (do you think that if in a neighbouring city multiple icons were build this could negatively impact Groningen?)