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(BEFORE) STATION DESIGN

A lesson learnt from North European project processes

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Introduction

For the last 20 years the high-speed (HS) railway has been representing for European Cities a catalytic element of urban (re) developments projects, especially around the intermodal station and its surroundings. The proliferation of HS railways is associated to a large number of big station projects, characterized by ambitious master plan around the transportation nodes (EC, 2011). Therefore besides transfer functions, HS stations are considered as strategic sites able to enhance the 'image' of the city (Peters, and Novy, 2012). The predecessor of this phenomenon is the French project 'Euralille', conceived in the 1990s and based on Lille's new role as a hub in the northern European high-speed rail network. The project belongs to the family of major urban projects, such as the office district of La Défence or of the Lyon Part-Dieu, characterized by the combination of infrastructural intervention and mix-use urban development. After almost 20 years from the first sketch of the Dutch urban designer Rem Koolhaas, the original master plan of the new HS station district in Lille kept developing as an outgrowth of the first redevelopment.

On the spirit of the French *Grand Travaux* of François Mitterrand, worldwide HS station buildings are transforming the city skyline for the next decades, by the elaboration of seductive narratives and future urban scenario. Nevertheless in Europe many of these models of urban renewal have been taking a different speed (e.g. Stuttgart 21 mega-project, Spanish and Italian stations) or they have changed their original ambitions (e.g. Rotterdam Central Station), being characterized by an on-going exploration of the (market) landscape, where proposals can be continuously modified or even abandoned. In addition to the current situation, a shared knowledge on the diverging expertise for station areas (re) developments projects (i.e. infrastructural planning, urban management, safety and security, environmental analysis, typo-morphological studies, mobility behaviour, customers satisfaction analysis, architecture, urban design) is often broad and fragmented in the project definition phase. The variety of actors and disciplines makes the planning and development process taking up to 30 years. The long-term trajectory of these processes, in which the design is often reduced as a verification tool of diverging requirements, requires a particular investigation.

The Netherlands, with its large number of existing stations and new station locations represents an exemplary test site for the research investigations within the international debate (Meurs and Vanstiphout, 2009). As in France happened with the choice of Lille, using the advent of the HS to improve the status of the urban area and the image of the city, in the Netherlands six cities have been selected for new High Speed Stations together with the expansion of the nodal points in terms planning, architecture and public spaces (Amsterdam Zuidas, Rotterdam Centraal, Utrecht Central and The Hague Central, Arnhem, Breda).

In general the key actors in the development of Dutch stations are: ProRail (a task organization of the government) as owner of the railways and NS (railway company) as owner of the station hall, together with the Municipalities (de Wilde, 2006). They are responsible for the maintenance and expansion of more than 400 stations. Nevertheless in the Dutch country a case-by-case policy has always been adopted, encouraging the various stakeholders of station areas to negotiate on actual needs and discuss on future urban developments, in order to ensure the integration between station layouts and planning needs (UIC, 2013).

The main idea of the lecture is to give an enlightening retrospective to the way the design of Rotterdam Centraal evolved along ten years (2001-2014) to become less a building in and of itself, and more a transport hub that connects to different parts of the city. A particular attention will be put on the phase between two different, successive design proposals for the station project. It is the phase immediately after the failure of the first masterplan in 2001 and before the international competition in 2004, where a 'spatial functional design' for the new 'modal split' was developed together with multiple scenarios for (re)defining the program of requirements of the new station design. Main research questions are: How was the basic program defined for the design of Rotterdam Centraal? How did the decision-making process address spatial issues? Which directions have been taken for the development of Rotterdam Central District? Which are the means to implement new urban visions and how to integrate them?

This contribution is part of a research project on ‘High Speed Stations and the role of the Design’ in the initial phase of the development process, at the Department of Architecture at TU Delft. This research compares the Dutch Key Project of Rotterdam Centraal with the French *Grand projet* Euralille (1989-1995). It aims to understand the local reaction developed on the top-down strategic interventions and the catalytic effect of the stations on the development of their urban surroundings. In the 90s writing about Euralille and its process was the main focus of national and international debate and architectural criticism. ‘How does the first design of Euralille project function and how does it follow up?’ is the starting point of this research. With certain design choices, the Dutch designer of Euralille created exceptional conditions increasing the symbolic value of the arrival of the HS train, for example putting the towers on the top of the new station. The ‘station as a roof’ in Rotterdam is the result of the international competition, winning proposal of Team CS, a combination of Benthem Crouwel Architects, MVSA Meyer en Van Schooten Architecten, and landscape firm West 8 (Mandaag, B. 2014). On the basis of topic-related literature, about national experiences (van der Sluis et al. 2010; Peters, 2014) and international practices (Bajard, 2007; Terrin, 2011), and a series of conversations with the actors involved in the selected station projects, this research is an attempt to demonstrate how do design practices have been changed on the road of shifting conditions.

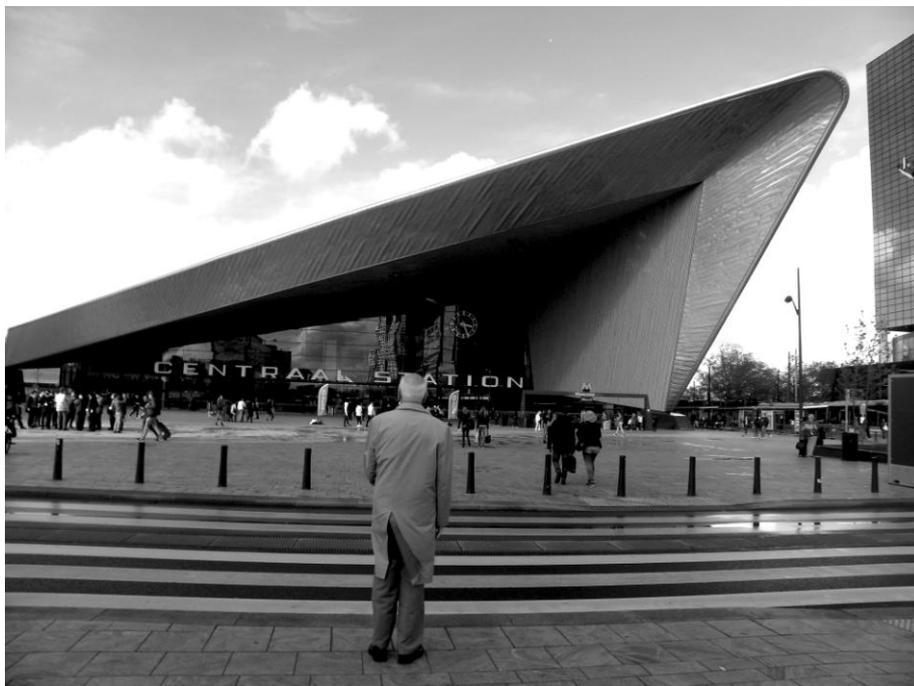


Figure. Rotterdam Central Station (copyright MTriggianese)

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