The development of spatial imaginaries: Studying the changing areas around Station ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven Centraal

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Picture on the frontpage: Paleiskwartier and ‘s-Hertogenbosch station. Source: (Paleiskwartier, 2022)

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Abstract

Multiple cities in the Netherlands have started with new projects in the surrounding area of train stations. This research is about the development of spatial imaginaries of areas around train stations. In this study I look at the development of these imaginaries since the Second World war and those for the future. For this research, I look more closely at the area surrounding the train stations of ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven Centraal. To investigate this subject, I have condoned twelve interviews with experts on either the past or future of these areas. Through this research I have found that within each period different social, political and economic factors have impact on the way that urban planners look at the areas around train stations. Diverse themes such as housing, climate change and economic growth all influence the way spatial imaginaries about these places are formed. I have found that after the war these areas were mostly focused on industrialisation. Around the 1990s these locations became more closely related to solving problems of mobility and sustainability, by building high-residency housing close to a big transportation node. In the years after, this trend stayed but with an even bigger focus on sustainability and climate change.

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1. Introduction

The surrounding areas of train stations have continuously been changing. Train stations have always had a significant impact on their surroundings and have played an essential part in the mobility of both people and goods over the last century. From factories located nearby to quickly transport their products, to mixed areas where people work, live or spend their free time. The surroundings of train stations are of importance for the whole city. Not only do visitors get their first impressions here, but nowadays it is also often the start and end point of bus, tram or metro lines, creating the core of public transport in the city (Banerjee & Saha, 2022).

Where areas around train stations in the 1950s were mostly seen as practical places to establish industrial terrains, this view has changed over the last 70 years. Within the coming decades, it is expected that the number of train passengers (KiM, 2025) and households (Stoeldraijer, Te Riele, Van Duin and Van der Reijden, 2021) will grow. Looking at these areas around train stations, these types of developments influence the way this space is structured. In combination with concerns about climate change and wishes to decrease pollution, urban planners can create a space where those uses come together and take advantage of the station as a mobility hub.

This is also the case for the central train stations in 's-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven. According to the local governments, both are expecting a rise in daily passengers in the coming years (ProRail, 2019; ProRail, 2023) as a rise in population (*Gemeente Eindhoven*, 2025a; 's-Hertogenbosch in cijfers, 2023). Both cities have plans to re-structure certain parts of their surrounding areas, which means that there will be new opportunities for different stakeholders in Den Bosch and Eindhoven. At the time of writing this thesis, Den Bosch is still in the exploration phase and in Eindhoven they have already started the realisation and management phase (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2023). Projects that will change the physical environment of these locations and will try to make them as 'good' as possible for the future.

In this thesis, I discuss the change in the way urban planners look at the areas around train stations, since the Second World War. This was done through analysing the spatial imaginaries per period of what the areas around train stations should look like and why these ideas have changed over time. With spatial imaginaries I mean the way that spatial planners look at a space and envision the future of it. Through this study, I discuss how the physical area around train stations has changed and what the thoughts were behind those changes.

To assist my research, I have done an internship at 'Provincie Noord-Brabant', where both cities were part of the project 'Stedelijke gebiedsontwikkeling in 12 steden'. The Provincie is going to collaborate with other stakeholders to restructure certain urban areas in 12 different cities. Den Bosch and Eindhoven are the most relevant to this project, since the

areas where the most projects take place in these cities, are those surrounding the train stations (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2024). By being part of the team that works on this project, I was able get in touch with people who are involved in these projects and knowledgeable about the history of these places, making this internship an asset to this thesis and help me investigate how certain developments have influenced the spatial imaginaries of city planners and other stakeholders.

In this research, three different time periods are studied where changes have taken place in areas surrounding train stations. For every period, different political, economic and social reasons are discussed that have caused certain changes in the physical area surrounding the train stations of Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch. The layout of these time periods is as follows.

The first period discussed in this thesis is from 1945 to 1980. During the war, important nodes such as train stations and their surroundings were destroyed, leaving urban planners with the task of rebuilding these areas. This time was characterised by strong economic and industrial growth, and changes in new forms of mobility and infrastructure, causing lots of physical change all over the country, including the areas around train stations (Popkema, 2014).

The second period I elaborate on in this study, is that between 1980 and 2015. After a period of economic problems and urban sprawl in the 1970s and 1980s, the central stations and their surrounding areas experienced decline in places all over the Netherlands such as Den Bosch (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019), Utrecht (Buijze, 2013) and Arnhem (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018). Around the beginning of the 1990s, public transport nodes were given a more central role in Dutch spatial planning through ideas such as the 'compact city' and methods such as 'Transit Oriented Development', to combat urban sprawl (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018; Ibraeva et al., 2019). The first projects started around these areas with the goal of creating mixed functions in a high-density location that was very well reachable. This combination of the need to solve the problem of degradation and the newly discovered potential of train stations and their surroundings, meant that between 1980 and 2015, these locations became extremely relevant for urban/spatial planners.

The last era that I analysed in this research is that of 2015-2040. This is a time marked by climate change and the projects that should counter it (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). In combination with other current problems, such as housing (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024a), public transport nodes and their surroundings will become more important in urban planning. Over the last years, multiple urban redevelopment projects have started all around the country, often with plans for expansion of the station in mind (ProRail, 2025). It is especially this sustainable character of trains, train stations and their surrounding areas that makes them important for the future, which is why this is the final part of this research.

1.2 Scientific relevancy

In the existing literature, there are lots of researchers who study what effects train stations have or can have on the area around them (Bertolini et al., 2012; Hermens et al., 2015; Peters & Novy, 2012). In their research, Bertolini et al. (2012) write about the railway station area development from what once existed out of smaller commercial hubs spread over the area to projects to increasingly start to look like Transit Oriented Development. At the end of their article, they draw several implications. One of them is to do more research about different cases in areas around train stations to deepen and broaden the knowledge about these types of places. The second implication is that new research should also look at how and why certain changes took place in these areas. This thesis provides a case study about two new areas that have not been analysed in this way before and looks at the developments in these areas.

Furthermore, previous research about spatial imaginaries has shown that there are multiple forms of imaginaries (Watkins, 2015) and that these imaginaries have been used in various research, covering different areas of the world (Salazar, 2020; Olesen, 2019). Showing that this concept applies to different types of research about the spatial environment. From people claiming unused land in Brazil (Wolford, 2004) to research about the future of energy (Chateau et al., 2021), spatial imaginaries are important to understand why places are created the way they are. Most studies that are done are based on recent developments and not much on the history of those spatial imaginaries even though Watkins (2015, p. 510) wrote: *"Often, spatial imaginaries make arguments about characteristics of the past and present to advocate what the future may look like, or what people should do to shape it."* Current spatial imaginaries are built on historic imaginaries, making the historical ways of seeing certain areas relevant to how we look at them today.

An important feature of spatial imaginaries is their performative character (Olesen, 2024; Davoudi et al., 2018; Watkins, 2015). Rather than simply describing how certain actors use space, spatial imaginaries help to actively change the physical environment, legitimising specific views of the future. Watkins (2015) argues that looking at spatial imaginaries as performative concepts creates lots of new research possibilities. *"They evaluate not only how the future is represented, but how material practices are performances of 'the future' in the present."* (Watkins, 2015). By looking at the past, present and future, I analyse the influence of spatial imaginaries on areas surrounding train stations in different time periods.

By using spatial imaginaries as the central concept, this thesis gives new results that are needed since it is focussed on areas around train stations that have not been studied much yet, something that Bertolini et al. (2012) encourage to do. Although these types of areas have been studied before, this was mostly focused on larger cities located in the Randstad (Peters, 2004; Peters & Novy, 2012). Smaller cities outside this region, such as

North-Brabant, are less studied, even though they play an important role in future plans to combat problems such as the housing crisis (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022).

Secondly, this research implies a geo-historical analysis, to study the change of spatial imaginaries in the areas around train stations. By acknowledging their performative character, I create a way of analysing the reasons that have led to changes in the areas around train stations, in order to understand what factors lead to urban planners looking differently at these areas.

1.3 Societal relevance

In recent years the areas around train stations have become increasingly relevant due to the fact that multiple mid-sized Dutch cities are restructuring their central train stations and the area around them or starting the process to begin with these types of changes (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024a). With current problems such as the housing crisis (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024a) and climate change (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2025), municipalities are looking at these projects as ways to contribute to solutions for them on a local level.

This research is meant to create a better understanding of the changing view of these areas since the Second World War. Also, understanding what changes have taken place in these types of areas and which events have shaped them. Changes in the physical environment have always been a relevant way to analyse how people thought the future was going to look like. (Davoudi et al., 2018). They partly form the identity of a place and sustaining this identity with new projects in an area, makes that knowing the history and character of a place is important to understand it and what its future should look like (Massey, 2005).

The subject of this thesis is also linked to my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant, which is part of an urban development project in which the twelve biggest municipalities are planning on restructuring their urban areas, some of which include the surroundings of train stations (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2024). This thesis is relevant to the municipalities of ‘s-Hertogenbosch, Eindhoven and de Provincie Noord-Brabant, because it helps understand why the areas around train stations have changed over time and if there are any patterns that they can consider for future plans. This study gives urban planners and other stakeholders involved in the development of urban areas an idea of how and why these regions have changed and what types of factors influence these places to need certain transformations. Ultimately, projects such as ‘Urban area development in the 12 biggest cities of North-Brabant’ and similar future projects can use this study to look at the history of the area and understand what choices can or should be made.

Lastly, while this study is focused on the cities of Den Bosch and Eindhoven, I believe that certain factors and processes that have taken place in the areas around their central train stations, are applicable on other similar sized cities, both in the Netherlands and in other countries.

1.4 Research objective

The aim of this thesis is to find out what changes have taken place in the spatial imaginaries of urban planners, about what an ideal surrounding of a train station looks like. With this research, I want to investigate why different eras had different ways of planning these locations and what societal, economic or political factors have led to these changes. By looking at both the past and future, I aspire to find patterns in the projects from the past that are helpful for future projects regarding the train station surroundings. This has led to the following main question:

'*How have spatial imaginaries of the ideal train station area evolved in the Netherlands since World War II, and how do these evolvements explain spatial transformations in Den Bosch and Eindhoven?'*

For this research, I have defined spatial imaginaries as the way that urban planners see certain spaces. From the start of this study, I look at imaginaries as ideals of the physical surroundings that can change over time through general social, political or economic changes. In connection with this, I argue that space undergoes constant change through influence from outside. The influence of certain factors from outside causes the role of this area to change, for the city, the whole country and on an international level. To understand these changes and the processes that have caused them, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. How did the spatial imaginary of an ideal train station change over time?
2. How have spatial imaginaries influenced the physical changes in the surrounding areas of the train stations of 's-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven since the Second World War?
3. How did events beyond the cities of 's-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven influence the development of their station areas?

Through these questions, I have analysed spatial imaginaries through different dimensions. Firstly, I have discussed in what ways spatial planners have implemented societal developments at the time in their plans for the areas around train stations and what effect they had on their image of what an ideal area around a train station consists of. Secondly, I have looked at how these spatial imaginaries have influenced the physical environment and how they have changed it, or why sometimes these spatial imaginaries have not been made into reality. Lastly, I focused on the factors that have led to changes in the spatial imaginary of what a good area surrounding a train station is. Social, economic and political influences on national or international level and their influence on the spatial imaginaries of planners are studied through this last question.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter of this thesis, I elaborate on the concepts of spatial imaginaries and their performative character and discuss the current literature on this subject. In chapter 3, I discuss the methods I have used, and I explain certain choices I have made during this research, both content-related and ethical. In the first chapter of my empirical research, Chapter 4, I analyse the changes in spatial imaginaries in the period between 1945 and 1980. In chapters 5 and 6, I do the same for the periods 1980-2015 and 2015-2040, respectively. Finally, in my conclusion chapter, chapter 6, I answer my research questions and discuss and reflect on my own research.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the concepts used in this research. The focus of this thesis is to understand how the vision of an ideal area around train stations has looked since the Second World War and the role of spatial imaginaries in this project. This is done by discussing the types of spatial imaginaries that are used in the literature to understand in what ways researchers have written about them and the way that they are used in practice.

2.2 Spatial imaginaries

Spatial imaginaries are described as ways that groups understand a place (Malk, 2024; Wolford, 2004). They are seen as a representation of how people think about the future, shaped by the dominant ideas of their time. Where imaginaries and imagination are often seen as the ideas on the individual level, spatial imaginaries refer to ideas about space that are shared with the bigger collective (Driver, 2005; Watkins, 2015) or social imaginaries, as Vanhellemont (2016) calls them.

According to Watkins (2015), spatial imaginaries often make arguments about the past or present as a way to advocate what the future may look like, or what people should do to shape it. Socially shared fears and anxieties influence the spatial imaginaries (Gregory, 1995 in Watkins, 2015). These can result in the 'othering' of different places, people and ideas, seeing them as unequal or naturally different. The process of 'othering' is not only applicable to people, but also when it comes to looking at phenomena such as the environment or land-use practices (Watkins, 2015). Othering also makes that a certain hierarchy is created in places where people and ideas have been 'naturalised', meaning that they are seen as true, real or common sense, whilst other ideas or people are seen as unequal or subordinate. Within this research the concept of 'othering' is mostly applied to the different spatial imaginaries 'othering' the older ones that have to make way for the new projects and spatial imaginaries.

With his research, Watkins (2015) discovered that even though researchers often use the word spatial imaginaries, or other forms of the concept as an umbrella term. He distinguishes three sorts of spatial imaginaries: place imaginaries, idealised space imaginaries and spatial transformation imaginaries, which are explained in the next part.

2.2.1 Place imaginaries

The first spatial imaginary that Watkins (2015) writes about is that of place. According to him, place imaginaries define a space of distinction, bounding it as unique (Watkins, 2015, p. 512). The focus is mostly on certain characteristics of a place and the way they use them, on a local, national and international level (Ealham, 2005). The creation of

place imaginaries has been proven as a way to attract different actors, such as tourists or investors, through slogans, advertisements and other imaging strategies, whilst also creating a sense of civic pride among the local population (Chang and Lim, 2004). However, place imaginaries do not only have to show positives to people from outside. Watkins (2015) uses an example by Millington (2013) in his article, about the imaginary of Detroit, a city famous for its economic decline after the move of the industrial sector. This imaginary still creates positives, such as tourism interested in urban history, but it also creates an image that causes anxiety about the future of post-industrial cities, spreading the image of potential outcomes when big economic or political change influences the physical urban environment.

Other than attracting certain groups to an area, place imaginaries can also create a certain hierarchy between places. The creation of a certain place imaginary can be used to attract new projects to a region, which creates a different place imaginary and a different order in importance of a city as a transportation node. Different studies have analysed regions that are being (re)connected through train tracks and outlined as potentially important nodes (Malk, 2024; Weiss, 2023). According to Malk (2024, p. 4) urban hierarchies are increasingly defined by economic geography and less about population. Projects related to improving the infrastructure from and to a city, improve the connections between a city and other influential places. These infrastructural improvements also create a better flow of capital, people and goods (Malk, 2024, p. 4). Projects to improve stations and their surrounding areas can improve the economic importance of a city thus also improving their importance on a regional, national or even international level.

2.2.2 Idealised space imaginaries

The second type of imaginary Watkins (2015) describes is that of idealised space imaginaries. These are descriptions of types of places, which are generalised ideas on how a place should be. They are often linked to concepts that bring up a certain image, both positive, such as the concept of a ‘developed country’, but also negative, such as a ghetto (Watkins, 2015, p. 512). Positive associations can be used to romanticise a place (Chang, 2011) and to argue how a certain place must remain an idealised type of space, whilst ‘othering’ different places (Watkins, 2015). Negative associations can be used as an argument that a certain place should change into a more idealised space imaginary. For example, from a ghetto to a gentrified neighbourhood (Watkins, 2015, p. 512).

Idealised space imaginaries align with the concept of ‘spaces for hope’, a term by Harvey (2000), that Watkins (2015) used in his article. A concept where imagination plays an important role in the envisioning of alternative urban futures. Marji et al. (2025) connect this concept to utopian thinking, where leaders of places see an idealised city as a goal, and spatial planning and architecture as a way to make this utopia more tangible. They also argue that the utopian ideals address a present dissatisfaction within current social,

political or economic circumstances (Marji et al., 2025). Watkins (2015) uses an article by Oleg Golubchikov (2010) as an example to argue how idealised space imaginaries, such as a 'world city', have influenced governments. Demonstrating how these imaginaries have been incorporated into the future of the physical environment of specific places. Golubchikov (2010) argues that the idea of the world city has become a frame for these governments, through which they pursue strategies to develop world city characteristics into their city with concrete changes in the physical environment, 'othering' different ways of thinking or idealised space imaginaries, thereby showing how idealised space imaginaries can directly influence spaces through the vision of certain governments.

This form of 'othering' different ideas is also described by Davoudi et al. (2018). They analyse Golubchikov's (2010) view on spatial imaginaries eliminating other potential views. Idealised space imaginaries have a certain feeling of inevitability, which does not only create the image of how places should or could be, but how they will be. Creating the idea that all cities should conform to this certain norm that is globally accepted. According to Davoudi et al. (2018), these imaginaries *"(...) create zones of inclusion and exclusion and delineate boundaries between us and them."* (Davoudi et al., 2018, p. 104). This leads to stigmatisation of places that are being labelled as peripheral or broken, while others are glorified while labelled as smart and modern. Policy makers and planners use this form of imaginary to legitimise a certain vision for the future and to make this goal seem like a general form that is wanted by most of the population.

Although Malk (2024) agrees with Davoudi et al. (2018) about idealised space imaginaries othering different imagined future ideas of a place, he also sees the positive effects they can have. According to him, idealised imaginaries are constitutive and lead to action being undertaken, but they can still benefit from improvement. *"The constitutive capacity of imaginaries needs to be recognised and applied by a wider range of stakeholders"* (Malk, 2024, p. 8). The stakeholders he writes about are the public, the inhabitants of these areas that indirectly fund these projects through taxes and are impacted by major changes in transportation projects in the area. He argues that changes are needed where it is not only the 'spatial elitists' that decide on the idealised space imaginaries of a place, but also the local population (Malk, 2024).

Lastly, an important aspect for which idealised space imaginaries are used is that of (re)branding a city into one with a more positive and modern tone, aligning them with global trends. Olesen (2020) describes how a project of a new light rail system in the Danish city of Aalborg is not only used to make transportation easier and faster from and to the city, but it is also part of the plan to change the image from an industrial city to a cultural and knowledge city. This shows that these types of projects do not only have a practical value but are also used as tools to influence the image that residents and people from outside have of a place (Olesen, 2020). Railroads and train stations are popular ways to change the image of a city nowadays, with multiple cities upgrading their

stations and railroad systems (Olesen, 2020; Weiss, 2023; Banerjee, 2023; Malk, 2024). These changes tie in with multiple current space imaginaries such as the green city, the compact city and the connected city. Andrea Weiss (2023) gives the example of how the idealised space imaginary of a connected region is already reason enough for investors to invest their money in these projects, despite the general doubts of these projects being successful in practice. *"Despite low cargo volumes, the railway continues to figure prominently in regional planning and political discourse. Its imagined value exceeds its practical function."* (Weiss, 2023, p. 207). Which proves that idealised imaginaries alone can lead to enormous changes in cities and neighbourhoods.

2.2.3 Spatial transformation imaginaries

The last type of spatial imaginary is that of spatial transformation imaginaries. As Watkins (2015, p. 513) explains: "Place and idealised space imaginaries often include narratives of how places have, should, or deterministically will evolve through generalised processes of *spatial transformation*." It involves new ideas of change that are inevitable, or the 'othering' of older ideas that are now seen as undesirable. An example of this type of imaginary, given by Watkins (2015, p. 513), is that of globalisation as a spatial imaginary. He argues that the process of globalisation leads to a stronger interconnectedness worldwide and will continue to grow, saying that all sorts of experts see this process as 'ubiquitous and inevitable' (Watkins, 2015, p. 513). With this, Watkins does not ignore the specific processes associated with globalisation, pretending they are non-existent. Rather, globalisation tells the story of how the world is moving to more generalised outcomes and futures. This term tells the story about how the world has been, and still is, changing toward generalised outcomes and futures (Watkins, 2015).

In this thesis, spatial transformation imaginaries are used to understand the changes that have taken place over time in areas around train stations. As a step between place and idealised space imaginaries, spatial transformation imaginaries show the change and development of areas. Watkins (2015, p. 516) gives the example of British colonialism where the three discussed forms of spatial imaginaries come together. Starting with the colonial interests, which is seen as a place imaginary, of the islands. Then the (wrong) idealised imaginary that the islands are unpopulated, justifying the spatial transformation of colonialism (Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010 in Watkins, 2015).

The importance of the spatial transformation imaginary lies mostly in the fact that out of the three forms, this imaginary is the one that is directly related to physical changes in the environment (Watkins, 2015). One of the most mentioned examples is that of gentrification (Watkins, 2015; Chateau et al., 2021; Wikstrøm, 2024). Gentrification is a process where neighbourhoods with inhabitants from lower socio-economic classes are rehabilitated by mostly middle-class residents (Shaw, 2008). Over the last centuries this form of transformation imaginary has taken place in and around areas of train stations, mostly due to their part in the bigger projects through which areas were redeveloped into

more modern and pleasant residential locations that attracted a higher socio-economic class (Chava & Renne, 2021). The process of gentrification has also led to forms of othering over the last decades. The residents that lived in the area when it was a less popular place, are often pushed out of the neighbourhoods due to rising rent prices created by the rising demand for housing in these locations. Through investments and spatial concepts such as Transit Oriented Development, planners use and legitimise processes of gentrification, describing them as urban renewal or modernisation, justifying the 'othering' of the former residents and their idealised imaginary (Olesen, 2020; Davoudi et al., 2018). It is within this justification of spatial transformation that governments play an important role. The plans that regional governments decide on often depicts what the spatial transformation imaginaries of the future will look like, showing that they are performative discourses (Wikstrøm, 2024).

2.2.4 Spatial imaginaries as performative discourses

According to Watkins (2015), spatial imaginaries are not just static, meaning they do not only represent a certain view of something, but that they are performative. In his article, he describes spatial imaginaries as performative discourses: "*In other words, spatial imaginaries are stories and ways of talking about places and spaces that transcend language as embodied performances by people in the material world.*" (Watkins, 2015, p. 509). This means that spatial imaginaries have the power to make people imagine what a place looks or should look like, creating expectations. When people have certain expectations of a place, they often act according to these expectations.

To elaborate more on this subject, Watkins (2015) gives the example of the movie 'Skyfall', which partially takes place in Shanghai. During the movie, almost only impressive modern buildings are shown, emphasising the economic growth China has known over the last decades. In comparison, none of the classical Chinese architecture is shown, giving the viewer a specific impression of the city. When people act in relation to this spatial imaginary, this side of Shanghai's story gets materialised into geographies (Watkins, 2015).

In their article Davoudi et al. (2018) explain this performative character is used as a tool through policy and planning. By 'building the future in the present', spatial imaginaries essentialise a certain imaginary of what an urban future looks like, which has material consequences for the way cities will be planned and redeveloped (Davoudi et al., 2018, p. 103). In their article they give the example of the planned capital city of Brasilia. The fact that a new city was planned and built from nothing in combination with its style, was not only a representation of the 'New Age' imaginary, but it also helped generate it (Davoudi et al., 2018, p. 104).

Spatial imaginaries are often used by governments to reach broader political goals such as economic development or sustainable development (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). By creating the plans and othering different ideas, the physical changes that then

take place seem like very logical ideas. According to Allmendinger & Haughton (2010) transformation through spatial planning has a 'consensus-oriented' nature. Through spatial planning, different actors try to form a vision that everyone agrees with, they give the example of a win-win-win solution, creating a situation in which the economy, society and environment all profit, making the plans seem neutral. In practice this can still create the exclusion of lots of other ideas for example about how much the economy should profit in comparison to the climate or the other way around. With this Allmendinger & Haughton (2010) illustrate how governments use spatial transformation imaginaries to push through their own ideas.

All three types of spatial imaginaries as described by Watkins (2015), can be seen as performative, which means that they do not only reflect how space is used, but have an active role in shaping the spaces. They have the power to actively create feelings of local pride (place imaginaries), create standards for what the future will look like (idealised space imaginaries) and creating changes in demographical population (spatial transformation imaginaries).

2.3 Conclusions: Towards an operationalisation of spatial imaginaries

For this research, the three types of spatial imaginaries are central and used to analyse the changes that have taken place in the areas around train stations. I made a codebook based on the three conceptual layers of place imaginaries, idealised space imaginaries and spatial transformation (Appendix 1). By firstly looking at the interviews through these three imaginaries I created the codes and afterwards I categorised them in subthemes that I will explain shortly per imaginary.

According to Watkins (2015) place imaginaries define a place of distinction. They are the unique aspects of a place that can be used to attract people to visit or invest in the area. In combination with their hierarchical characteristic, after creating codes about the distinctions and unique aspects of the studied areas, I have created the subthemes of 'distinction at regional' and 'distinction at national level'. Per subtheme the codes include distinctive aspects of these train station areas that are special for either region or for the country. For example, HBO schools are not rare in the country, but on a local level there are not many to find which make them a distinction on a regional level, whereas universities are much less common and make them a distinctive aspect of the area on a national level. Parts of the interviews were coded as 'place imaginary', when they either referred to characteristics that make the studied areas distinct or unique compared to other places or when they referred to a unique role the locations have such as an important regional or national node. Afterwards I placed the codes in the subthemes of national and regional level, depending on the context in which the respondent talked about them.

Secondly, idealised space imaginaries. This form of imaginary is mostly focused on what a place should look like. They are about the branding and future of a place; it symbolises

aspects that are important for an area (Watkins, 2015). Through the interviews I identified characteristics and descriptions of the areas around the stations of Eindhoven and Den Bosch, from both the past and the future, that I was able to put into different subthemes. The connected city, compact city, green city, represent idealised space imaginaries of the future, whilst the industrial city and car-oriented city were idealised in the past, but nowadays are not seen as desirable. Parts of the interviews were coded as idealised space imaginaries when they were about aspects of projects that were viewed as goals and desirable, when they 'othered' different imaginations of the future that are not seen as ideal or when respondents talked about imaginaries in a way that they were inevitable and the natural direction in which the studied areas are going. I first identified such statements creating the codes and afterwards I combined the codes to create the subthemes that they fitted in.

Lastly, there are the spatial transformation imaginaries. This imaginary is about the process of change, a narrative of how places have, should or deterministically will evolve through generalised processes of spatial transformation (Watkins, 2015, p. 513). I have coded parts of the interviews in which transformations in the studied areas were discussed. By combining these codes, I created the four subthemes: gentrification, densification, de-industrialisation and sustainability transformations. These transformations have been important in different times. While de-industrialisation and suburbanisation represent past transformations, sustainability-driven change and densification are more recent developments, whereas gentrification has been recurring process over the whole period. In the transcription, parts of the interviews were coded as spatial transformation imaginary when respondents referred to processes of change in the area on either a physical or socio-economic level. These codes were afterwards grouped into the four subthemes.

By combining these three types of spatial imaginaries, the way that spatial planners and other actors have looked at the areas around train stations since the Second World War is analysed. For each period, these different parts of spatial imaginaries are looked at and how the idea of what a good area around a train station looks like has changed for every period.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss and reflect on the methodology and methods I have used for this research. My methodology is focused on finding the changes that have happened in spatial imaginaries of areas around train stations in the past. From my point of view, spatial imaginaries are formed and used as instruments to change the physical area as to build a part of the future in the present. The different types of imaginaries and their performative character are the most significant aspects to this research. Therefore, it is important to look at what changes took place, how changing spatial imaginaries have led to these changes and how them being used as tools by certain actors, led to changes in the way of thinking about these areas around train stations.

This thesis is based on Watkins's research on spatial imaginaries as discussed in the conceptual framework. Even though Watkins never developed a methodology on how to use spatial imaginaries exactly in research others have applied his concepts to their own research (Olesen, 2024; Malk, 2024; Soule, 2019). These types of research are the bases for the methodology I used. These researches all use spatial imaginaries related to certain areas, often closely related to train stations and their infrastructure and see spatial imaginaries as performative discourses.

This methodological strategy is structured as follows. First, I explain why I have chosen the research site, how I gained access to them and the respondents who let me interview them. Then I elaborate on why I chose them and which parts of the thesis I asked them questions about. Lastly, I describe the methods that I used to get my data and how I have used this data in this research.

3.2 Site selection

The studied areas are in Den Bosch and Eindhoven. These cities were chosen regarding my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant and the future plans in the areas around their train stations. In the province of North-Brabant the twelve biggest municipalities, including Eindhoven and Den Bosch, will undergo major urban changes in the coming years. In these two cities, these changes will partially take place in the areas around their central train stations. From a historical perspective, other cities in this province could have been used as a case study, but Eindhoven and Den Bosch have been chosen for this research, because of the view they can give of the future of spatial imaginaries.

Another reason why these two cities were chosen, was because of the different stages both are in their projects. Where Den Bosch is still in the exploration phase, Eindhoven is already in last phase: the realisation and management phase. Eindhoven was chosen because they are the furthest in their process and Den Bosch because of the similarity

between the two cities on the themes they are working on for the future of this area, such as living space, cultural places, heritage and mobility (Provincie Noord-brabant, 2025b).

In Den Bosch the direct area around the train station is studied as well as the three neighbourhoods Paleiskwartier, Boschveld and ‘t Zand. These neighbourhoods have been chosen because of their location and the historical influence the train station had on these places. All of them have known changing functions since the Second World War, always through the influence of the train station. Factories, workers' homes, offices, educational institutes and new modern apartments have been built in this area according to the zeitgeist of certain periods.

In Eindhoven, the areas around the train stations that area analysed are Fellenoord, Hemelrijken, Gilderbuurt, Woenselse Watermolen and the Campus of the University of Eindhoven. The neighbourhoods that are part of Oud-Woensel (Hemelrijken, Gildenbuurt and Woenselse Watermolen) are analysed as an urban block consisting mostly of older worker neighbourhoods, where similar changes have taken place. The campus on the other hand, reflects later ideas of how train stations are also practical areas for institutions that can transport commuters to their destination on a daily basis. Finally, the area of Fellenoord is a smaller place that has seen multiple changes since the war, which reflects the change in how planners look at mobility through the years.

Lastly, this thesis compares two cities to gain insight into both differences and similarities between places. While both cities have their historical background, social dynamics and physical structure, they will also undergo similar developments in the years to come. This research aims to reveal how certain changes have led to different ways of seeing the ideal surrounding space around train stations.

3.3 Gaining access

In March 2025, I started my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant. I became part of the team ‘stedelijke gebiedsontwikkeling’, which meant I was part of the weekly meeting and could participate in different excursions related to urban development. Through this internship I got in contact with different people working on urban development projects in Eindhoven and Den Bosch. It was a good way to encounter people who have specific knowledge about the exact locations I am studying. Through my internship, I was able to get in touch with numerous participants.

The interviewees who have contributed to this research process were selected by using two different methods. The first method that was used to find new interviewees was the snowball method. This qualitative method is particularly useful in accessing individuals who may be less approachable through other methods. This process starts with the first key interviewees. These initial interviewees helped me get in contact with other experts from within their professional network, knowledgeable on the theme of this study. To

these new interviewees, I asked the same question about other experts who could help me with my thesis until I had enough information (Naderifar et al., 2017; Johnson, 2014).

The second method I used is purposeful sampling. This form of sampling is based on selecting information-rich cases for the most effective use whilst having limited resources (Duan et al., 2014; Stratton, 2024). In the case of this thesis this meant looking up certain people on LinkedIn that work for either the municipality of Den Bosch or Eindhoven, that work in projects related to the area around the train stations.

The snowball method was, in the first instance, the preferred method of sampling, but it also had its negative sides. The most important thing was that it took longer than I hoped for to get from one interview to the other. When one interview was done and the email addresses or phone numbers of other potential participants were given, it was not always a guarantee that these people would reply fast or at all. This is why I also chose to approach potential respondents through LinkedIn. By combining both methods, I found 12 respondents who let me interview them.

3.4 Methods and analysis

As someone who was not familiar with most of the areas covered in this thesis, I was able to discover them with an open mind. The first step was to get a better understanding of the areas surrounding the train stations of ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven. I discovered more about the history by analysing historic pictures, maps and literature of these areas. This was done to find the patterns and changes that have happened over time. In this literature I found the stories about past industrial terrains, small towns and first projects related to sustainability.

According to Kinda (2018), maps are great scientific sources to help one understand an area at a certain time, but they also have their negative sides. Often, they are made of larger areas, giving less detail about smaller locations on a smaller scale. For my research, this is especially true for the older maps from the period after the war. That does not mean that these maps are of no use, where some maps might be less detailed and precise, they also reflect the thoughts, opinions of what is important and the spatial imaginary of that time. These maps, to be less detailed, tell a lot about what map makers found important to leave in.

After, I went to these areas myself to identify parts of my literature review and to help me understand the area more (Olesen, 2024). This was done firstly through two tours in the area around ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven Centraal, with people who work with the development of the area on behalf of the Provincie Noord-Brabant. With the help of these tours, I understood the current state of these locations and saw parts that were described in the older literature that I read.

With this, I made a start at understanding the historic developments that have taken place in the area. Since the Second World War, areas around train stations have seen

multiple physical transformations, and in the first part of the research, these are analysed and compared to the spatial imaginaries that have been discussed in the conceptual framework, to understand how and why these spatial imaginaries have changed. The final part of this thesis is about the future of these areas and how the projects that have been set up by the 'Provincie Noord-Brabant' will develop in the years to come.

Previous research that studied spatial imaginaries, used interviews with experts such as policy makers, public servants or spatial planner (Malk, 2024; Olesen, 2024), all experts on the topic that was being studied. Following their example, I have employed semi-structured interviews with experts on the history or future of these areas. In these interviews, there were open questions on subjects related to spatial imaginaries and the causes of these imaginaries through time, but it was expected that the respondents would do most of the talking. This method provides both structure through the question topics that are seen by the researchers as important, but also new information through the amount of freedom that has been given to the interviewees (Ahlin, 2019). By asking them questions that cannot be answered with a short response, it was expected that they provide more information apart from the subjects that were prepared by the interviewer.

To gather more information about the past, present and future of the areas around the stations of 's-Hertogenbosch and Eindhoven, I decided to ask questions to experts on the past or present and future of these spaces. I did this by conducting interviews with key informants such as urban planners, policy makers and historians. These different perspectives helped me understand what physical changes have taken place in certain periods. Using semi-structured interviews, I was not only able to ask questions about what changes have happened over the years, but I could also go deeper into my questions about why these changes have happened. During the interviews, I paid attention to the types of imaginaries that were discussed. What the goals were for these locations, and what guidelines have been made to achieve them.

Also, in my interviews with experts about future projects in these areas, I was able to get a better understanding of why certain choices are made and why others are not. With the use of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer is still focused on the subject and is prepared with a pre-set set of questions, but it also leaves space to ask questions about the answers that are given to make the conversation more useful for the research (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Ahlin, 2019). In these interviews, questions were asked about why and how certain changes have occurred that have been found through historical research and what factors are important for the future of these places. Respondents were selected based on their expertise in the history of these locations or their involvement in projects that form the future of these places.

For this thesis, I have decided to talk to a mix of experts, knowledgeable about different aspects of this research. Firstly, I spoke to two respondents from the Provincie Noord-Brabant, both of whom were part of either the developments in the area around the train

station of Eindhoven or Den Bosch. These interviews gave me a broad image with an explanation about the future of these places. They were also the people who gave me a tour of the area. Both have brought me in contact with most of the workers of de municipality of Eindhoven and Den Bosch. I conducted interviews with experts from the municipality of Eindhoven who have different tasks. Varying from someone who is mostly involved in stakeholders and their wishes within the project of KnooppuntXL to a team manager who provides advice for the creation of the new underground bus station. Additionally, I also conducted interviews with people from the municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch with a similar variety in expertise. From an urban planner who is directly involved in creating the physical environment of this area to project managers who lead certain projects within the area of the Spoorzone. Lastly, I spoke to different people who could tell me about the history of the areas that are being studied in this research.

Respondent number	**Role**	**Organisation**
Respondent1	Stakeholder coordinator KnoopXL & Environmental manager	Gemeente Eindhoven
Respondent 2	Historian	Retired History teacher Rodenorch College
Respondent 3	Team Leader Urban Area Development and process manager (Den Bosch among other locations)	Provincie Noord-Brabant
Respondent 4a &4b	Volunteer guides Den Bosch	De kringvrienden 's-Hertogenbosch
Respondent 5	Project manager of different projects within the Spoorzone	Gemeente 's-Hertogenbosch
Respondent 6	Urban planner, partially in projects within the Spoorzone	Gemeente 's-Hertogenbosch
Respondent 7	Project manager for area development, partially in the direct area of the train station	Gemeente 's-Hertogenbosch
Respondent 8	Projectmanager Eindhoven International KnooppuntXL	Provincie Noord-Brabant
Respondent 9	Program manager for PSM (Program Station district and MIRT)	Gemeente Eindhoven
Respondent 10	Project leader for the exploration of the underground bus station and adviser future train station in Eindhoven	Gemeente Eindhoven
Respondent 11	Station developer in the southern region	ProRail

Respondent 12	Analyst on the history of the area around the train station of Eindhoven	Gemeente Eindhoven

In preparation for the interviews, I created an interview guide. In this guide, I have written about different topics and questions relevant to the thesis and the expertise of the interviewees. Because I had interviews with respondents that informed me about different periods or different aspects of my thesis, different questions were asked to each respondent, and because the interviews were semi-structured, some questions and topics that were not written down were also discussed. For example, some questions about the older historic events were asked to the respondents who were knowledgeable about these specific periods, whilst questions about the future of the municipalities or Provincie Noord-Brabant were only asked to the interviewees working there. Some of the workers of de municipality of Eindhoven and Den Bosch have worked there for a longer time so they could also answer questions that were related to the period 1980-2015.

Lastly, although projects and governmental plans such as the NOVI, NOVEX, MIRT and Notas are important to this study, they were not included in the codebook. Whilst they are important for some of the topics that were discussed in the empirical chapters, only the NOVEX and MIRT were substantively discussed with interviewee 9 at some moments. There were not enough codes to make it a relevant subject for the codebook that was based on all 12 interviews. It became clear that it was best for me to read those documents myself in combination with the discussion with respondent 9 to be able to analyse this topic that is based on the concepts of spatial imaginaries and their performative character, just like the subjects that are found in the codebook.

The last step is the analysis of the data. This is done through thematic analysis. This method is a way to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data, such as interviews or qualitative scientific research (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Through this method the researcher looks for similar patterns between these different data sources. It is a form of analysis which is widely applicable and has proven effective in multiple fields of science and is a flexible and effective method to analyse the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

3.5 Ethical considerations

For this thesis, there were different ethical considerations for me to uphold throughout the entire process. Firstly, while at my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant, I was part of the team ‘stedelijke ontwikkeling’, meaning I was invited to different tours and trips, but also to their weekly meetings. In these meetings, certain information was sometimes shared within the group that was not (yet) allowed to be spoken about outside of the group. When I thought that any this type of information could be useful for my research, I made sure I double checked with the group members if I could use it.

Secondly, the interviews themselves. To ensure that the respondents were informed enough about my thesis, I explained to them my topic and why I wanted to interview them. Then, I asked them if I was allowed to record and transcribe our conversation, explaining that only my mentor and I would have access to it unless I asked them for permission in the future. Finally, I told them I would not use their names in my study and that they could ask me to cut something out of the recordings and transcriptions and that they could stop or pause the interview at any time if they felt like it. This way, I made sure that they would feel comfortable and that their privacy would be kept.

Lastly, I want to discuss my position as a researcher in connection with the theme of my thesis. The thesis is about areas in the two cities of Den Bosch and Eindhoven. As someone who was born and raised in Den Bosch but does not have much of a connection with Eindhoven, I had to make sure to cover both cities equally. I have done this by interviewing an almost equal number of respondents related to Den Bosch and Eindhoven. Although this research is about a part of the city I was not often in, I do know the station well. During my interviews with respondents knowledgeable of Den Bosch, I tried to not make assumptions about the answers they were going to give or to fill in certain subjects with my own opinions. I maintained this by keeping it in mind during the interviews, but also by listening to my tone and way of asking questions while listening back to the interviews to transcribe them.

3.6 Conclusion

Firstly, the areas studied are analysed through different methods to understand both their history and the present structure and physical environment. After I have found respondents knowledgeable on different aspects of my thesis, through my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant or other ways, I have collected data through conducted semi-structured interviews and online literature. By combining all the data, I have collected enough information to be able to answer my research questions.

Chapter 4. The industrial and car-oriented city (1945-1980)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the physical changes in the areas surrounding train stations. This period is marked by the rebuilding of the country directly after the war and the economic growth in the years after. It was a period of housing shortages, a change in mobility and industrialisation. Within this research, it is the first period that is discussed. For the area around the train station, it was a period of important change, with industry being placed close by, but also a period of people leaving the city to live in a better living environment. I explain multiple changes that have shaped the urban environment in the Netherlands and that of the areas around train stations, such as the increasing importance of the national government in spatial planning, the strong growth of industrialisation and the importance of the car in the development of the physical surroundings of train stations.

4.2 Post-war reconstruction

During the Second World War, lots of infrastructure and nodes were destroyed (Cavallo, 2017). Train stations all over the continent were seen as locations of importance for the enemy on both sides, and thus important places to bombard, which led to destroyed railway stations across Europe (Van Acker & Triggianese, 2020). During the reconstruction era, choices had to be made about the future of these buildings. Respondent 7 spoke about the choice that was made about 's-Hertogenbosch station at that time:

"*Marker point was 1945, when the station was shot to pieces. Around 1950, the question was: What are we going to do with that station now? Are we going to repair it or are we going to replace it with something more modern? In theory, it could have been repaired, for a lot of money and a lot of fuss. There was also lobbying for that. But then the new era had already arrived. The planning came in. The infrastructure, the separation of functions, you know.*"

This shows the idealised space imaginary of this location that urban planners had in these areas after the war. There was a feeling of motivation to plan the destroyed areas in new ways that fitted the new time and needs. In a period where the number of people kept increasing and there was a housing shortage, the cheaper option was chosen, which led to the construction of a new station. The combination of the space where nothing was built before the war, with the area where there were buildings, but they were destroyed to such an extent that replacement was sometimes cheaper than reparation, made the surrounding areas of train stations seen as locations where new projects could take place.

This emptiness was partially based on the war, but it was also on the plans of new urban development. A good example of this is Fellenoord. According to respondent 10, this neighbourhood had a small population, but it was demolished in the 1960s. He said this about it: *"That was a very lively neighbourhood, with a church, and it was a completely different environment. In the early 1950s, it was still there, and I think in the early 1960s it was demolished, and the entire 'racetrack' was built behind there."* Showing the performative character of spatial transformation imaginaries. The othering of the old way that this area was used completely vanishes through the transformations the new imaginary brings. The image of an empty place means that the parts that were still standing got demolished as well, to make it fully empty and create space for another spatial imaginary.

4.3 Spatial planning as a national strategy

According to Bruinsma & Koomen (2018), the feeling in the period after the Second World War among spatial planners was that the Netherlands and its society were very 'makeable' and there was a lot of trust in how executable their plans were. In the Netherlands, problems such as a lack of housing and a need for industrialisation to rebuild the country led to an idealised imaginary of industry and housing. Spatial planning had become more and more of a national problem due to different issues being too complex to solve individually by municipalities or provinces (Zonneveld, 2018). For example, the mass migration from the peripheral areas of the country to the wealthier Randstad region with more work opportunities or the uncontrolled suburbanisation of people moving out of the city's centre (Zonneveld, 2018).

A consequence of this need for a national approach was the creation of national plans to organise spatial development, through reports that function as guidelines, such as the Notas (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018). These Notas are plans and goals that were formulated by the national government and form guidelines on how the country must physically change in the field of spatial development (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018). They functioned as plans to start the spatial transformation of suburbanisation and industrialisation. All over the country, new neighbourhoods and industrial terrains were mushrooming in quick tempo. Interviewee 1 talked about the structure of this period: *"In those years, there was of course, a lot of 'stamp structure', which you can also see in the structure of the city. That it is expanding."* This 'stamp structure' he talked about was a way of building new neighbourhoods. A repetitive pattern of housing and streets consisting of mostly of low-rise buildings. In combination with 'prefab-housings' that were used to build apartment complexes easily and quickly. These kinds of houses were made of blocks that were already made in the factories, so they could be directly transported and rebuilt in new neighbourhoods where the pieces could easily be installed on top of each other, creating similar-looking neighbourhoods all over the country (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018).

With this new national approach of the Dutch government to organise spatial planning, the Notas and other documents aimed at setting up guidelines to form the idealised space imaginaries. It was the first time this had happened, and the reason for it to happen now was due to several national problems that were seen as too complex and critical to be done on the local or provincial level (Zonneveld, 2018). Examples of these types of problems include the enormous migration of people from the more peripheral areas to the Randstad in search of work or uncontrolled urbanisation and suburbanisation (Zonneveld, 2018).

4.4 The industrial city

After the Second World War, there was a shortage of almost everything imaginable (Aussems & Horsten, 2021; Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). To rebuild the country and restart the production of goods, the national government invested in industrialisation and the economy of certain regions that were financially left behind after the war. The eastern part of North-Brabant, of which Den Bosch is a part, was officially not seen as one of the regions that was left behind and needed more financial help. These areas were supported with money from the central government that was partially given by the United States as a loan. The mayor of Den Bosch at that time, Hendrik Loeff, saw this differently and negotiated with Dutch ministers, which accepted to financially support these new transformations on the western part of the train station (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). Interviewee 4A said:*" Mayor Loeff brought a lot of American industry to the area, he went there* (the United States) *personally. The buildings were put up, they were already ready for them."* American companies such as Remington, came to Den Bosch where their presence was of enormous financial importance. Remington's director declared he was in shock about how fast and easy the agreement between the company and the municipality was made, due to the small amount of paperwork that had been done (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). A detail that shows how eager the municipality was to bring the industry to the city.

The placement of industrial terrains close to the train tracks was not a phenomenon exclusive for Den Bosch. The most important reason being the fact that, around this time, the use of cars and trucks was far from what it is now, meaning that transporting big amounts of goods had to be done by train or boat. As respondent 4b said: *"Through water and railway was just the way of transporting goods in that time"* Positioning industrial terrains close to the tracks was a logical way to solve that problem.

Because of these factories growing, the number of workers rose as well. Lots of simple factories and neighbourhoods were created (Wijmer & Bastiaanssen, 2019). Different areas had the purpose of either living or working. At this time, the workers lived close to the factories, which meant that around this area, new neighbourhoods were built where they could live (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). In Den Bosch the neighbourhoods 'Siberië' and 'Lombok' on the North and South side of 't Zand contained mostly workers,

already before the war and were quickly repaired according to respondents 4a and 4b. In addition to this, the new neighbourhood of 'Boschveld' was built, mostly to house these workers.

According to interviewees 4a and 4b, there were already plans to bring more factories and industry to Den Bosch before the war, but due to the economic crisis in the years prior, it never started successfully. The mayor at that time, Hendrik Loeff, wanted to make an industrial city of Den Bosch. During this time Den Bosch had a clear place imaginary that was a direct result of the local government, that of an industrial city. Mayor Loeff had an image of what the city should be, and through spatial transformation imaginaries, he made it a reality.

4.5 The role of Philips

When writing about industrialisation and Eindhoven, one does not ignore the role of the company Philips. The company grew in the Netherlands from 22.000 employees just after the war to 98.000 employees in 1970 (Philips, 2024). In Eindhoven, lots of housing was added in the Gildenbuurt (AlleCijfers, 2025), and more famously, the 'Philipsdorp' in the neighbourhood Strijp-S was built for the workers of the factories. With the enormous growth of the company, more employees started working in their factories, which needed housing. Philips created social housing and in 1960, more than 8.500 houses were built in Eindhoven by the company (Breukers et al., 2016; Philips, 2024).

Another big project that took place that was linked to Philips in the decades after the war, was the campus of the Technological University of Eindhoven. Just as Wolfsdonken in Den Bosch this area was chosen because it was still an empty field and close to the station (Van Aert, 2024). Unlike Wolfsdonken', the nearby train station served another purpose for the University, instead of transporting goods, it was a practical way to transport students that had to come and did not live in Eindhoven. The university was founded in 1956 because of the need for engineers after the Second World War (Van Aert, 2024). The university and Philips had a strong connection with each other from the start, with the company investing in the university and lots of graduate students working for them (Philips, 2021).

A last physical change in this period, which Philips had a big part in, was the replacement and expansion of Eindhoven Central Station and the raising of the tracks. After the war, the neighbourhood of Fellenoord was very much bombed, and according to interviewee 10, there was almost nothing left that was seen as worth keeping. This meant that the station could be moved and raised to create a new train station. Since the railways were installed in Eindhoven, it had created a border between the north and south. The small pedestrian bridge that was made was not enough anymore for the increasing number of bikes and cars crossing the tracks. According to interviewees 1 and 12, the people who needed to cross the tracks to get to work from one place to another, started to create chaos and traffic jams. With the Philips factories located on the south side of the tracks

and workers who lived in the Gilderbuurt or other neighbourhoods on the other side of the tracks, lots of workers from Philips, among others, caused chaos and blockages. While the raising of tracks had multiple causes, the daily commuters were part of it and as respondent 1 said when asked about the reason for changes in the 1950s and 1960s: *"Very important: Philips."* With the creation of the new station, it was decided to move it about a hundred meters north and raise the train tracks by building them on a dyke like structure. Due to this project, it was now possible to make a tunnel under the tracks where cars, bikes and pedestrians could freely pass under from now on. The area around the train station that was mostly empty was used for enormous parking spaces close to the station.

These examples show the influence of the company on the city and on the transformation imaginaries that have directly changed the city due to Philips. Areas around the factories have transformed into full neighbourhoods and educational locations through the influence of Philips on Eindhoven.

In the period directly after the war, the use of the car was not as obvious as it would be in the years to come. This is why factories were often still built close to the train tracks. For urban planners, a good area around a train station consists of factories and housing for the factory workers. These should be built as efficiently as possible, to reduce the price of building because of the number of houses that had to be (re)built all over the country. A process that would start to change at the end of this period.

4.6 The growing role of the car in the city

In the first 25 years after the Second World War, the number of households with a car grew drastically. In the years after the war, the economy started to grow in most parts of the Western world, including the Netherlands. This was also felt by the middle class. In combination with the cheaper production of cars, this led to more people being able to afford one (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2018). Car usage became the most important and popular way of transportation, taking over from trains and other means of transport (Cavalllo, 2017). Between 1950 and 1970, the number of cars went from 14 per 1.000 inhabitants to 200 per 1.000 inhabitants (Wardlaw, 2014). Making space for the car became a new idealised space imaginary. Where nowadays spatial planners have mostly bad associations when hearing about making more space for cars in and outside the city, in this period the car was seen as the future of transportation.

This rapid growth led to the fact that the Dutch government had to invest in the infrastructure and growth of the national road network (Rooijers & Steg, 1992). In both the first Nota from 1960 (Nota inzake de Ruimtelijke Ordening in Nederland) and the second one from 1966 (Tweede Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening in Nederland), the usage of the car is discussed and seen as something that needs to improve over the years. The increase was so big that multiple documents, separate from the Notas, had to be made as guidelines for the future of the roads in the Netherlands (Van Acker & Triggianese,

2020). That meant that more roads had to be built and connected to make more places reachable by car, but also enough parking spaces once the drivers arrived at their destination. Spatial planners and policymakers of this time saw the car as the future of mobility, and the more space they could make for the car, the better.

In the 1960's two big main roads were built as part of the north- south connection of Eindhoven: The Veldmaarschalk Montgomery- and John F. Kennedylaan. These big roads created the border between different districts within the neighbourhood of Old-Woensel. It also created a big change in the structure of the area. Multiple buildings had to be destroyed to make room for these new roads (De Boer, 2010).

The introduction of the car to middle-income families has influenced the public sprawl of cities (Kopecky & Suen, 2004). According to Atzema (1991), suburbanisation in the Netherlands slowly started at the end of the 1950s. The development began in the western part of the country around the bigger cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Haarlem. In the second part of the 1960s the suburbanisation started to take a bigger form, with the phenomenon being seen all over the country. Big cities see a population decline, while mid-sized cities (between 5.000 and 50.000 inhabitants) are growing (Atzema, 1991). This process would continue for years until the 1990s.

Because the commuting distance was able to grow, people moved to less densely populated areas far from the city centre, while still being able to go to work in the bigger cities (Rijksdienst voor het cultureel erfgoed, 2024). The car gives normal families the choice to move away from the city into an area that is generally seen as a more pleasant living environment. The process of suburbanisation was a very typical transformation imaginary of the 1960s. Through different themes, such as the economic growth at the time, the rising usage of the car, the boost in housing outside the city and the growing up of the baby-boom generation that started looking for their place, this process was started (Atzema,1911).

4.7 Conclusion

The period between 1945 and 1980 was one where economic growth led to a lot of change. Firstly, the national government started playing a bigger role because some spatial problems were too complex for municipalities and provinces to handle on their own. One of them is the need for housing in a period with a fast-growing population. In combination with the popularity of the car, this led to more and more housing being built outside of the city. It also changed the mobility of the people, creating an idealised imaginary of a city where there was work that was very well connected to the areas around, and where it was more pleasant to live. In this same period the cities became more industrialised, the place imaginaries of the industrial city became applicable to cities as Den Bosch and Eindhoven. Although these aspects seemed positive and important in the future. In the decades after, most factories would leave the areas, and the car would lead to troubles with climate change and a growing amount of traffic. In

the periods that are discussed in the next two chapters, many of the changes that were made in the physical area around train stations in this period, were not seen as desirable.

Chapter 5. The start of the compact city (1980-2015)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the period between 1980 and 2015 is discussed. The chapter starts in a period of decay in lots of areas surrounding train stations, but it is also a new start for most of them. It is a time that is marked by new ways of thinking about cities and public transportation nodes. While problems such as climate change and an uncontrollable amount of traffic have led to a need for change in urban development. Spatial imaginaries such as Transit Oriented Development and Compact City gain popularity as they propose solutions for these problems.

5.2 The central station as an area people do not want to go to

The usage of the car kept growing in the 1970s and 1980s (Wardlaw, 2014). In combination with the moving of factories to countries with lower wages, this led to a decrease in factories and working areas around train stations. According to interviewees 5,7 and 8, companies also moved to locations along the highways, which were now easier to access for the workers. About this period, respondent 7 says: "*Then we started building trendy and modern business parks along the highways, along the A2"*. They were the direct consequence of the new and improved road network that the government had set up in the past decades through plans such as the 'structuurschema Hoofdwegennet' from 1966, in which one of the projects was to connect all highways that were not joined with the rest of the network yet, to accommodate the traffic growth (Lintsen et al., 2004).

These qualitative improvements in car mobility have led to people being able to move away from their workplace, giving them the possibility to commute to work. From this period on, people were able to move out of the city and into the suburbs while still being able to work in the city. This led to a big decrease in urban quality inside city centres and the areas around train stations. This process of suburbanisation and decay of the city centre kept going until the 1980s (Ekamper, 2010; Atzema, 1991). Respondent 5 talked about the fact that this form of decline happened in multiple areas around train stations in the Netherlands, including Den Bosch: *"In the 1980s, things started to go downhill. At least in Wolfsdonken, it didn't function very long. It did well, but many companies also outgrew their environment or were less accessible, so it really fell into disrepair."* These areas have transformed into negative idealised places (Watkins, 2015). They became

areas that brought up an image, consisting mostly of negative associations. Symbolising the downfall over the past decades of the place imaginary of the industrial city.

With the publication of the fourth Nota in 1988, spaces around train stations became more important and were seen as locations with much potential for future projects. Brownfields that were placed near stations were seen as locations that had to transform into areas with mixed use and a new part of the wider inner city (Van der Cammen et al., 2012). Problems such as climate change and the uncontrollable growing amount of traffic were generally seen as negative and had to be tackled from now on (Ibraeva et al., 2019; Bruinsma & Koomen, 2008). Trajectories such as these led to a bigger focus on areas around train stations, which meant a change in place imaginary. These old and dilapidated areas were seen as locations that had the potential to be renovated through new projects that would bring new life to the surroundings of train stations.

5.3 Creating a pleasant place to stay

To solve these problems, the government set up guidelines that created a spatial imaginary of places in the Dutch urban environment. According to Koomen & Bruinsma, it was the first time that the government saw sustainability as equally important to economic growth. A high-quality living and natural environment had to become a guarantee in future urban projects. Other points of improvement include building at higher densities, shorter travel times for commuters, good public transport and a diversity in functions (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2008).

Another important aspect of this new Nota was that of the ABC-locations (Rongen et al., 2022; Bruinsma & Koomen, 2008). This was one of the first steps that led to a decrease in car usage and an increase in public transport. The different types of locations were based on different forms of accessibility. According to Rongen et al. (2022), they are as follows: A-locations are areas easily accessible through public transport, often located near intercity stations. B-locations are served by both public transport and highway infrastructure, whilst C-locations are easily accessible by car, often located near highway exits. Where an A-location used to be just a transportation node, the transformation imaginary has changed it into an area where lots of offices and housing should be built. The train station in the area has led to a new way of thinking about the possibilities of this location. Its presence is a cause for this new way of thinking to be applied.

This new structure shows what new role the areas around train stations have as A-locations. According to respondent 1, around this time, Eindhoven also built new office buildings close to the station in Fellenoord. Firstly, on the Northern side of the station, and the plan was later to also build offices on the southern side of the station, but due to the 2008 economic crisis, these plans were not realised. When the crisis passed and there was a budget to build again, the need for these buildings passed and the plans were cancelled.

Other than offices, the areas around train stations started to get the function of an area of mixed usage. In the fifth Nota that came out in 2002, it said that the Netherlands had a shortage of space and new ways of planning were necessary (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2008). Space had to be planned more efficiently. Two examples were that areas around nodes needed to transform, and different functions had to mix in with each other. New projects in the areas around train stations often combined these two recommendations (Wijchen & Bastiaansen, 2019; Van der Cammen et al., 2012). The combination of functions in one place reduces travel distance (Dovey & Pafka, 2017), which improves walking from A to B instead of taking the car and increases sustainability in the area (Wandl & Hausleitner, 2021).

Starting from the fourth Nota (1988), the government started certain projects with a Public-Private Partnership (PPS) (Bruinsma & Koomen, 2008). A PPS can be described as follows: *'A more or less sustainable cooperation between public and private actors in which joint products and/or services are developed and in which risks, costs and returns are shared'* (Klijn & Tijsman, 2000 in Klijn & Van Twist, 2007). The application of PPS by the government is quite typical for the political zeitgeist of the 1990s. Neoliberalism generally believes the government should partially withdraw from certain projects, such as those in spatial planning. This does not mean that the government did not keep control in these PPS projects, they were always partially in control, but in comparison to before, the PPS was a very new way of organising urban planning.

5.4 Paleiskwartier in Den Bosch

This idealised imaginary of the area around train stations, consisting of high density and mixed use in combination with PPS, was a new way for the government to plan these types of areas. A great reflection of the zeitgeist and the associated idealised imaginary is the project of Paleiskwartier in Den Bosch. With this project the municipality of Den Bosch wanted to make a new and modern neighbourhood, that was future proof. Meaning it was still going to be an ideal place to live in the future. A place where people live close to the city centre and the train station, while also living in a comfortable and relatively quiet area (Wijchen & Bastiaansen, 2019)

In the 1970s and 1980s, the industry slowly disappeared from the industrial terrain the Wolfsdonken in Den Bosch. At the start of the 1990s this area was transformed into one that most people would not want to pass. Symbolic of this decline was the street prostitution that had increased in this area (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). To transform this once industrial area, the local government of Den Bosch came up with the plan of Paleiskwartier, a place that was seen as an extension of the city centre according to interviewees 3, 5 and 6. A mix of functions, such as housing, offices, education and leisure, was created in this area to attract people. The housing consisted mostly of high-rise buildings, to be able to house a larger number of people efficiently, matching the trend of a growing number of smaller households (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). About

the way that the offices were placed, interviewee 5 said: *"In Paleiskwartier, a huge wall with offices has been built as protection against noise."* They are placed between the train tracks and the rest of the Paleiskwartier, in a way that the apartment buildings are separated from the station. It became the new home of the Palace of Justice, the F. Van Landschot Bank, multiple IT businesses, law offices and numerous other companies (Van Der Cammen et al., 2012).

According to interviewee 5, multiple functions that were placed in or close to the city centre, such as the Palace of Justice and several types of educational institutions, had to be moved to a place where they had more space and could grow. They were placed in Paleiskwartier, not only because there was space, but also due to its location in respect to the central station, making it an accessible location for students and employees from outside of Den Bosch.

Almost none of the buildings that were in Wolfsdonken remained for the project of Paleiskwartier, except the old building of Interpharm. The different look made the architect, Shyam Khandekar, want to keep them, and they got the status of a monument, which meant they became part of the whole project (Wijmer & Bastiaansen, 2019). Other than this building, almost nothing remained to remind visitors and inhabitants of the industrial terrain it used to be. From now on, this area was not known as Wolfsdonken anymore, but as Paleiskwartier. A neighbourhood that had to become part of the 'wider city centre'.

Amid this new wider city centre, there was a need for a new train station. The fourth train station of Den Bosch opened in 1998 (CRIMSON, 2024; Louw, 2007) and with it came the bridge across the railroads, that was made for people to go from one side to the other. This 'passarelle' across the train tracks meant that for the first time in history, the train station of 's-Hertogenbosch had two entrances, one on both sides of the tracks. It was seen as one of the ways to connect the old city centre with the other side of the station. In addition to the station, there was more space created for commercial purposes such as offices, stores, cafés and restaurants (CRIMSON, 2024). Functions that were not often found in this area yet.

Other than the physical characteristics in the area, the project of Paleiskwartier was also a typical product of its time because of the way it came about. It was one of the first projects in the Netherlands that used PPS to redevelop the area. Respondent 7 said: *'Paleiskwartier is one of the only real forms of PPS, one of the only area developments that are really a classic PPS, where costs and revenues by market parties and municipalities have been equal in participation for thirty years. That is something unique, you know.'* This means that the municipality has had a 50/50 partnership with market parties, a collaboration that continues for only one or two more years until the final building is completed.

This example of Paleiskwartier represents the spatial transformation imaginaries of the period 1980-2015 (Watkins, 2015). Ideas of an area of mixed use combined with high-density building, and near a transportation node. Even in the way it was set up through a PPS, makes Paleiskwartier a reflection of its time, 'othering' the old, idealised imaginaries of the industrial city, by almost completely rebuilding the area.

5.5 The idealised vision of the compact city and T.O.D.

According to Watkins' (2015, p. 513) definition of an idealised space imaginary, the concept of the 'compact city' is one that was central in the period 1980-2015. The ideas of planning cities more efficiently became part of the urban planning debate in the 1980s (Dieleman et al., 1999). The compact city is defined as an urban place with high-density and mixed city use, often in or on the edge of the city (Thomas & Cousins, 1996; Van Der Waals, 2000), and as the opposite of the term urban sprawl (Neuman, 2005). This compact manner of urban planning had to lead to more accessible, sustainable and mixed areas. The concept of the compact city was clear and had new ideas about what certain parts of the city should look like, othering the older ideas of industrial terrains around central train stations and urban sprawl that was seen as an inefficient way of land use.

With the ongoing debate about new ways to plan urban areas, the concept of Transit Oriented Development started to gain popularity in the 1980s. With T.O.D., spaces around major public transport nodes are planned as you would with the compact city (high density and mixed use). The most important reason was the reduction of car traffic and stimulation of forms of public transport. These ideas started in the United States, where Peter Calthorpe developed the theory of Transit Oriented Development (T.O.D.) (Quinn, 2006). Calthorpe (1993) urged planning in favour of pedestrians and transit. For him, the goal with TOD was not to eliminate the car, but to balance it. In the 1990s it came to Europe and was mostly present in Dutch universities such as Amsterdam and Delft (Ibraeva et al., 2019). In 1999, Luca Bertolini translated the theory of T.O.D. to the Dutch context and came up with the node-place model (Bertolini, 1999). This model helps to analyse a train station by looking at their function as a transport node with its role as a place where people want to spend time.

According to Van Der Cammen et al. (2012), this new thinking about urbanism went hand in hand with shifts in the economic structure. The economy was increasingly focused on mental work rather than physical work. In the years before, companies have often moved their factories and production to other countries where salaries are lower and thus production becomes cheaper (Kumpe, 1998; Sap & Khan, 2012), leaving mostly the service industry in Western countries. Cities in the Netherlands needed to attract a certain creative class that could help manage companies and survive the 'post-industrial' age (Van Der Cammen et al., 2012). The most important company in Eindhoven that helped to survive this post-industrial age was ASML.

The concept of the compact city can be seen as an idealised space imaginary as described by Watkins (2015, p. 513). It brings up a certain image of a city with high-density buildings and lots of functions like stores and parks nearby. In this case, Transit Oriented Development can be seen as a spatial transformation imaginary. It is a process that partially helps to reach the imaginary of the idealised place. T.O.D. is a way of organising a place close to a transportation node. This location makes the travel time of inhabitants and visitors shorter, making the city more compact.

5.6 Conclusion

The period between 1980 and 2015 was one where a big turn was made in areas around train stations. The negative image of the locations caused by inhabitants and workers leaving the area in the decades prior was replaced by a new and modern idealised imaginary. Through this new imaginary, spatial planners thought of problems with traffic and sustainability for the first time. Through concepts such as Transit Oriented Development and the compact city, spatial planners created a new place imaginary. One of the areas around stations where people could live and work in a place well connected to the rest of the city and the country. Although these areas were seen as modern at the time, certain aspects of them would be planned differently in the years after. Subjects such as climate change will only become more important in the last period, which is discussed in chapter 6.

Chapter 6 The sustainable and pedestrian-friendly city (2015-2040)

6.1 Introduction

The last chapter of this research is about the period 2015-2040. It is a time where aspects from earlier projects are seen as useful, such as high-density building close to nodes, and there are also big changes happening. This period focuses more on climate change than was done before, taking more drastic measures to bring car use down and create more space for pedestrians and public transport. In combination with problems such as housing shortages. It is also an important era due to the plans that are currently being made for the future. Through the project of the urban development in the twelve biggest municipalities, the areas around the central station of Den Bosch and Eindhoven will undergo significant changes. Concepts such as the NOXI and NOVEX are explained as some of the more important imaginaries about the climate and housing.

6.2 Spatial transformations imaginaries through the government

In 2020, the national government of the Netherlands set up the Nationale Omgevingsvisie (NOVI). This document explains the governmental vision on spatial development at a national level until 2040. It is about the plans in the spatial area and how these processes must take place in a sustainable way. With the NOVI, the government explains how it looks at the future of the Dutch living environment, with a focus on 4 assignments:

- 1. Sustainable economic growth potential for the Netherlands.
- 2. Space for climate change and energy transition.
- 3. Strong, liveable and climate-resilient cities and regions with sufficient space to live, work and move.
- 4. Future-proof development of rural areas (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024).

The NOVI functions as a replacement for earlier spatial planning documents such as the ‘Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte’ (2012).

Where the NOVI functions as a vision without specific instructions on how to reach the goals, the NOVEX (National Environmental Vision Execution) is a document with stricter guidelines to execute the plans of this new spatial transformation imaginary (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024b). To be able to tackle these visions practically, 16 NOVEX areas were created. According to interviewee 9, these areas are: *“Areas that the government recognises, can be densified in terms of housing construction.”* Every region has its own goals and future vision. These different areas are all focused on different aspects to make them more ‘future-proof’, meaning that they

become part of a solution for problems, such as the housing crisis or climate change (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024b).

One of these is called ‘Stedelijk Brabant’ in which both Den Bosch and Eindhoven are located. The focus in this area is on creating 94.000 places to live and employment opportunities until 2030 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022). Especially, Eindhoven is picked out as a prime example for shorter-term plans within the metropole of Brainport Eindhoven. Through the creation of more housing and places for people to live, this project supports the growth of this Brainport (Ministerie van Binnenlandse zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022).

Eindhoven as a Brainport is not only a place imaginary, but also a way to describe its role on a local, national and international level. On a local level, this Brainport will influence the mobility from and to Eindhoven through faster transportation between the city and surrounding towns, which I explain more about later in this chapter. On both international and national level, it is expected that this Brainport will attract more people to work and live in this area. Big companies such as ASML and Philips are attracting more highly trained people from outside the country. The trajectory of information and ideas passes Eindhoven, leading to a larger number of highly educated workers (Brainport Eindhoven, 2024).

This plan of Stedelijk Brabant is translated within the Provincie Noord-Brabant to the project of Urban development in the 12 largest municipalities. Within these municipalities, special areas of focus have been chosen, often in or close to the city centre, where developments will take place to create high-density housing within the urban centre. In addition to partially solving the housing problems, these redevelopment plans must also lead to more ‘green and blue’ in the areas and create a better qualitative environment (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2025a).

The creation of this project is a good example of spatial imaginaries being performative and not passive. Through this project of Stedelijke gebiedsontwikkeling’, the province and the municipalities make these spatial imaginaries the reality for people passing by or living in the area. Not only influencing their opinion of the specific area but also that of the whole city. This is mostly important for visitors of the city that arrive by train, since this area is their first impression of the city.

An important aspect of all the NOVEX projects, is the cooperation between the different levels of governance. Different from what we saw in the 1950s and 1960s, where the national government made clear that certain problems of that time had to be solved on national level, with this project, there is a clear cooperation between the parties, with a responsibility for provinces and the municipalities. Even though the national government still decides where and what general changes must happen in the coming years, the provinces and municipalities have a big say in how these visions become a reality (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024b).

Lastly, to come to the exact ideas and plans for these NOVEX areas, the national government created the 'Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport' (Multi-year programme, Infrastructure, Space and Transport, MIRT). Part of this program is the MIRT-explorations. Within these explorations, the municipalities and provinces examine what the best solutions and projects per area look like. About the creation of these MIRT-explorations respondent 9 said: *"With large-scale projects, the government has said at one time that, hey, these projects are going in all directions, we actually want to follow a whole procedure before we say, this is what we are going to do or we have to use those resources for those projects, there is no alternative that might be much cheaper."*

This means that these MIRT-explorations are created by the national government as ways for them to maintain order and clarity on the choices that are made and the money spent. It shows that, even though there is a close cooperation between the multiple levels of governance, with a lot of creative liberty for the smaller scales. The national government, as the biggest investor, still has the last say over these projects.

These ways of transforming the physical environment, as described in the NOVI, NOVEX and MIRT, are the spatial transformation imaginaries as explained by Watkins (2015, p. 513), to form the place imaginaries into idealised imaginaries. The most essential problems and solutions that are discussed and looked at in the programs are discussed in the rest of this chapter.

6.3 Living in the new city (housing, recreation & climate)

One of the subjects that the government writes about in the NOVI is plans to build housing in areas around public transport nodes. Saying that these are the locations where there are possibilities for high-density housing, due to their optimal positioning to the train station, increasing mobility for as many people as possible.

As discussed earlier, the Netherlands are currently experiencing a severe housing crisis. According to the national government, there is a national shortage of 450.000 houses (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024a), and it will keep growing until at least 2030 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2023). The rising number of households is not only due to the growing population of the Netherlands, but also to the shrinking size of the average household. Nowadays, the average household consists of 2,1 people, whereas in 1963 this was 3,5 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid en Zorg, 2024). Outside the cities, the Netherlands will have more space for nature. Both inside and outside the city, nature must be part of the developments (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2024b). Due to new rules regarding natural reasons, municipalities do not want and cannot build new housing on the edge of the cities, as was done in the period after the war (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2024). The combination of the decreasing number of people per household with the wish to not build outside the city anymore to stay away from nature, is why plans are made for high-density building within the borders of the city centre.

In both Den Bosch and Eindhoven, the plans consist mostly of a substantial increase in inhabitants. At this moment, the neighbourhood of Fellenoord has 500 inhabitants, it is estimated that by 2040, this will increase to 15.000 inhabitants (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2025b). Most of the residences that are planned are in the form of apartments spread over multiple buildings that are going to change the image of the city centre drastically. These are mostly meant for one- or two-person households. According to interviewee 3, the goal in Den Bosch is to create 10.000 homes in this area surrounding the train station. In contrast to Eindhoven, these residences will not be created through buildings as tall as in Eindoven, but generally through lower apartment buildings spread over the whole northern part of the Spoorzone.

In all interviews with employees of the municipality of Eindhoven, ‘s-Hertogenbosch or the Provincie Noord-Brabant, it was mentioned that these areas around the train station will become greener. One of the goals of both municipalities is to upgrade the station and the direct area around it to one where people do not just pass through and want to leave fast, but one that invites both inhabitants of the area and travellers to stay. In both cities, there are plans to create ‘station parks’. In Eindhoven, there are ideas of making one in the Northern part of the station, where the bus station is located. According to

interviewee 3 and 6 there are ideas of station park in Den Bosch that would reach from the 'Education Boulevard' on the western side of the station until the Dommel on the east side. These parks should create green spaces around the stations, making this space more pleasant to wait for transport or spend your free time.

According to the respondents working for the municipality of Eindhoven, the vision of the area around the train station is that of a more pleasant place where people can stay for longer than they do now. When asked the question of how an ideal area around a train station looks like, interviewee 1 answers: *"That you create enough air, light and height to create a pleasant living function and that also includes facilities that not only get people from A to B at lightning speed but also create an environment where people can stay."*

Creating a place where people feel pleasant and at ease is strongly linked to having nature and greenery around. Interviewee 8 said:" *On the one hand, it is necessary, green and blue, because of the climate, heat stress, water retention. On the other hand, it is also important, there will soon be 15,000 people living there, who like to come to a pleasant living environment. It serves both purposes as far as I am concerned."* This also shows that it is not only important for the users of public transport that the environment of the station is pleasant, but also for the people who are going to live in this area. Which will increase a lot in Fellenoord, as discussed earlier.

Fellenoord will become a place where people stay, not only because the public areas will become more pleasant, but also in the literal sense that 7.500 new homes are going to be created. The goal for urban planners in Fellenoord is to create an environment where people can live in a nice environment, and for travellers, the new entrance to the rest of Eindhoven. As interviewee 8 said: *"The centre will remain the heart of the city, but Fellenoord, certainly from a traveller's perspective, will become the new entrance to Eindhoven."* He argues Eindhoven has grown from a small city to one with a big economy, and that the entrance of the city should fit this new place imaginary.

Other than parks, both cities planned on maintaining buildings with a historic value, through time, often getting a rougher character. In Eindhoven, this was planned in the area around the 'stroomhuis', located in the most eastern part of Fellenoord. This building was home to a group of squatters and artists. According to interviewee 10, the building unfortunately caught on fire at the end of last year, which destroyed most of the building. Den Bosch has a similar area where artists and squatters have been over the last decade. De Tramkade, in the most northern point of 't Zand, is seen as a rougher and more underground part due to the old factory buildings that are still there. In both cities, the goal is to use these areas for new projects and housing, while also keeping the underground and historical character that these places are appreciated for in the area. Respondent 4a and 4b talked about how over the last years, the municipality has

preserved more buildings than they used to before. This leads to a more physical representation of the story of this area.

6.4 Infrastructure

Another aspect in which changes are expected in this area is in the way that the local infrastructure is organised. In the future, more space will be created for pedestrians and cyclists, while car usage will be impeded as much as possible. Firstly, by decreasing the space for cars. According to interviewee 8, Fellenoord is a place where most people just pass through. It is mostly used by people who travel from the north of the city to the south or vice versa. These spacious roads close to the city centre are used more as a way of passing through than as a way to reach the city centre. Interviewee 9 also acknowledges this way that Fellenoord is used nowadays and explains that this is one of the places that will change in the future, where fewer cars will pass, and roads are going from two lanes to single lanes.

Another change in thinking about urban planning is about the role of the car. According to interviewee 7, Paleiskwartier had a lot of space for cars and parking. For every residence built, there was one parking space available. In the new projects that are happening in both Eindhoven (Fellenoord) and Den Bosch (Boschveld), the plans are to make less space for cars. Here, the parking norm for new residences will be 0,3. Meaning that for every three residences, only one parking spot will be available.

This example shows how urban planners are going to take more extreme measures to move people from using the car to using public transport and biking. When planners want people to use their cars less, it is important not only to hinder the use of cars but to also stimulate cycling. According to interviewee 7, the bike parking under the station of Den Bosch will have to increase. On the east side of the station, there have been changes where a part of the car parking was transformed into more space for the bike parking. A change that serves as an example of what the municipality wants the future to look like

Another way is by stimulating public transport, which will be upgraded in both cities by creating extra platforms at the stations, these will be able to accommodate the increasing number of travellers and trains (Gemeente Eindhoven, 2025c; Gemeente 's-Hertogenbosch, 2025b). In Eindhoven, the bus connections will also undergo big changes in the years to come. According to interviewees 1, 8, 9 and 10, the new bus station of Eindhoven will be placed underground. Not only does this create more space on the ground floor to build the housing flats, but it is also necessary for the new and faster High Quality Bus connections that will connect the station with other towns around Eindhoven.

Lastly, both municipalities are planning on creating bigger bike storage locations to make biking to the station more accessible. Interviewee 8 talked about the optimal mobility-

mix in Eindhoven, in which the goal is to make the transfer from one form of transportation to the other as easy as possible. For the bike parking this could mean a big entrance where travellers can enter by bike and do not have to hop off and walk or a good connection from the parking place to the bus- or train stations.

6.5 Conclusion

The period of 2015-2040 is symbolised by idealised imaginaries with an important role for sustainability and the creation of a pleasant place of residence. This is done through cooperation between governments on a national, provincial and local level. Where the creation of high-density housing continues, it is done differently from the period between 1980 and 2015. Nowadays, there is more attention to aspects such as greenery and water between the buildings. There is more space planned for nature, not only to increase local sustainability, but also to make the area more pleasant for inhabitants and visitors. Lastly, big changes are planned when it comes to mobility in the area. Whilst cycling, walking and public transport are stimulated, car usage will be brought down to a minimum, creating the place imaginary of a pedestrian-friendly environment.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I briefly conclude my research by summarising the results, answering the research questions and reflecting on the process in the discussion part. With this research, I aimed to analyse the change in spatial imaginaries of areas around train stations since the Second World War. These areas have been used for different reasons over the past decades due to the train station creating better mobility for the functions located around them. I looked at the imaginaries of urban planners and reasons they changed over time, by analysing three different periods in time. 1945-1980, 1980-2015 and 2015-2040. In this study, I used the cities of Den Bosch and Eindhoven as case studies for my research, due to my internship at the Provincie Noord-Brabant. Both cities have undergone major transformations in the past and are planning on doing so in the future as well. For this study, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with experts such as historians and spatial planners active in the projects around the stations of Den Bosch and Eindhoven. To guide this study, I formulated the following research question:

'*How have spatial imaginaries of the ideal train station area evolved in the Netherlands since World War II, and how do these evolvements explain spatial transformations in Den Bosch and Eindhoven?*'

To answer this question, I used the concept of spatial imaginaries as explained by Watkins (2015). Through these concepts, I analyse what types of changes took place in certain periods. The combination of the three sorts of imaginaries are seen as ways to cover change in the physical environment through different steps. Firstly, the way a place represents itself as a starting position (place imaginaries), secondly the physical transformation of an area (spatial transformation imaginaries) and lastly the end result of those changes (idealised space imaginaries)

7.2 Answer to research questions

The spatial imaginaries about areas surrounding train stations have changed a lot over the last 80 years. Starting from the period directly after the war, these areas were seen as practical locations for industry. In these years, the spatial transformation imaginary of the industrial city became a reality. This meant that Eindhoven became connected to the industry of a specific company, Philips. This led to the place imaginary of Eindhoven as an industrial city with a huge role for Philips. Over the next decades, the economy in the Netherlands started to grow. In combination with the growing population, this led to more people moving outside of the city centre. Around the same time, the car became more accessible to families with an average income, creating the possibility of a longer commuting distance. Due to these factors, suburbanisation became a big trend at the end of the 1960s, starting the pattern of a shrinking population in most of the big cities in the country, including the areas surrounding train stations. During this period, the areas around train stations became less important for spatial planners. New projects were mostly outside the cities, where idealised imaginaries of pleasant living in the suburbs were created.

During the period between 1980 and 2015, the areas around train stations became more interesting to urban planners again. During the decades prior, more and more people left the cities to move to the suburbs, which led to decay in certain areas of the city. Locations where there was once a lot of industry became less populated. One of these causes was the growth of globalisation, which led to factories moving to countries with cheaper labour or places in the Netherlands close to highway nodes. New projects around central stations had to change the place imaginary of an old abandoned industrial terrain. With the growing popularity of concepts such as the compact city and Transit Oriented Development, locations around big public transport nodes were seen as ideal places to live. Projects including high-density housing mixed with working space, education institutes and room for leisure were created in these places. For the first time, climate change and sustainability were important subjects. The idea of these locations being close to public transport nodes meant that people could use them more instead of the car, creating an imaginary place of a more environmentally friendly city.

Lastly, I looked at the time between 2015 and 2040. In comparison to the big differences between the first two periods that I discussed, the last period partially continued building on the ideas of the period between 1980 and 2015. New neighbourhoods around train stations are being built in both Eindhoven and Den Bosch. A big change is that these plans are even more focused on climate change and sustainability. Projects where there is going to be less space for cars and more for pedestrians and nature. The idealised spatial imaginary of these areas has changed into neighbourhoods that are as sustainable as possible, creating more space for water, nature and climate-friendly forms of transportation, while also creating an area of mixed use with places for daily needs such as supermarkets nearby.

The chronological historical order of this research meant that the usage of the different spatial imaginaries (Watkins, 2015) could all be analysed. Physical changes in spaces around train stations take time to be planned and created, but can also be part of the zeitgeist of a certain area and be seen as outdated in the years after. Ideals such as industrial cities can be seen as desirable and future-proof at one point, but through social and economic developments end up as a negative place imaginary in the years after. In this way, the concept of spatial imaginaries aligns well with the temporal characteristics of urban development and helps to both describe changes and understand how shifts originate.

7.3 Discussion and reflection

Firstly, for this research, I used the concepts of place imaginaries, idealised space imaginaries and spatial transformation imaginaries as explained by Watkins (2015). These concepts have helped me to understand the types of changes that have taken and will take place in the future.

A positive aspect of spatial imaginaries is that it does not only focus on the technical and economic side of urban development, but also the broader societal developments. They show how ideas of what a 'good' area around a train station looks like are influenced by these changing societal developments throughout the decades.

The use of spatial imaginaries to understand the urban development around train stations also has its downsides. Firstly, they proved not to be the direct main reason for physical change in these areas, meaning that they are not directly explanatory for these developments. They are a product of the factors that are more explanatory for the direct developments in these spaces. Although imaginaries alone have been enough to make change happen in certain places (Weiss, 2023, p. 207), in this research about Den Bosch and Eindhoven, the use of spatial imaginaries alone was never enough to start big physical changes. Factors such as economic and demographic change are more strongly linked to these physical changes. For example, the process of de-industrialisation and suburbanisation had a big impact on the changes in the area around train stations.

This does not mean that spatial imaginaries were of no use in this historical research. They do help explain why certain changes happen. Through spatial imaginaries, it can become clear how local governments looked at the area around their train station and what idealised vision of it they wanted to work towards. These explain the transformations and why these transformations have taken place.

Secondly, the use of interviews to study the different types of spatial imaginaries. The different forms of imaginaries, as explained by Watkins (2015), are not generally known concepts. During the interviews, the respondents almost never explicitly talked about any form of imaginary. They talk about projects or goals, which the researcher then has

to interpret as part of a certain imaginary. This brings the risk that certain quotes or phrases are misinterpreted as part of an imaginary when in fact it was not meant in that exact way.

Lastly, although the use of interviews was a good way to study spatial imaginaries of today and the future, due to the insights I gained from the local governments about future projects, archive research may be a better option for the historical part. As has become clear through this research, the 'othering' of older ideas and imaginaries is an important aspect of spatial imaginaries. Older plans and ideas are often seen as outdated or unneeded, whilst new plans can seem the logical way to go. By using interviews as the main method of research, the ideas and imaginaries of this moment were often seen as a good way to develop the area around train stations, 'othering' older ideas. With only the interviews, it is very difficult to understand the way that planners and policy makers around the beginning of the second half of the last century thought about the way to develop areas around train stations and why those changes were seen as positive at that time. For historic research about spatial imaginaries, I would recommend a form of archive research over the use of interviews.

I used the method of semi-structured interviews with experts to gather the data for this thesis. Gathering the respondents was done through the snowballing and purposeful sampling methods. The second option was applied when I realised I did not have much time left to get a sufficient number of respondents, because the snowball method was not getting me respondents fast enough. Although it took more time, I do believe snowball sampling worked better in my situation. After having asked specific questions to people working at the municipality or province, they gladly helped me think of other colleagues with knowledge of specific topics. For similar future research, I recommend this type of sampling, but make sure to start early, asking about potential respondents to the people around, not only to respondents.

Some shortcomings of my research are about how generalisable it is. In this study, I only looked at two cities in North-Brabant. With important intercity stations that lots of people make use of, both as end stations and to switch trains to other places. This means that my thesis is not as relevant to cities with different types of stations and connections, where more or fewer people make use of them.

Through this research, I have tried to connect the concepts of place imaginaries, idealised space imaginaries and spatial transformation imaginaries to the historical evolution of the areas around the train stations of Den Bosch and Eindhoven. This way, I have tried to look at how spatial imaginaries change and what the reasons were for them to develop. This research only looked at the period between 1945 and 2040. The history of the train station in the Netherlands is much more than this period. Other research could look into different periods to create a more complete understanding of how spatial changes of train stations have changed over time.

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Appendix 1

Main theme	**Subtheme**	**Code**	**Definition**
Place imaginary	Distinction local level	Node regional public transport	The central stations form important nodes for people traveling within the region
Place imaginary	Distinction local level	Future housing plans	These areas are pointed to as the areas that have space see for lots of new housing and residents
Place imaginary	Distinction local level	Activities for the region	Activities such as cinemas or shops that are not found in the villages around are located in these regions
Place Imaginary	Distinction regional level	Location for high-schools, MBO's and HBO's	Students from the region come here to go to school
Place imaginary	Distinction regional level	Industry	Industry terrains created job opportunities for people from the region, most factories of the region were here
Place imaginary	Distinction national level	Important hop over station	Some of the most used train stations for passengers of the country
Place imaginary	Distinction national level	Location with university	The TU of Eindhoven is one of a few in the Netherlands
Place Imaginary	Distinction national level	Node close to big events	Nearby footballstadium and big podia lead to visitors from all over the country
Place imaginary	Distinction national level	Offices	The area has lots of offices easy to access by public transport all across the country
Place imaginary	Distinction (inter)national level	ASML	One of the biggest multinationals located in the Netherlands attracting lots of workers
Main theme	Subtheme	Code	Definition
Idealised space imaginary	The connected city	More public transport	Creating more busses and trains on certain trajectories
Idealised space imaginary	The connected city	Better public transport	Creating better public transport. For example more

			modern busses and special bus lines
Idealised space imaginary	The connected city	More space for bikes/pedestrians	Better bike lanes and pavements. Plus bigger parking spaces for bikes at station
Idealised space imaginary	The connected city	Smoother transfer between transport nodes	Creating smoother transfers between different forms of transportation such as bike and train
Idealised space imaginary	Compact city	Place quality residents	Enough options in the area for residents needed in daily life such as doctor, supermarket, etc.
Idealised space imaginary	Compact city	Place quality visitors	Station as a high-quality place to stay, with good public space, and functioning spaces like cafés and parks
Idealised space imaginary	Compact city	Mixed use	An area where work, living and leisure all come together
Idealised space imaginary	Compact city	Social security	Creation of social security in public spaces
Idealised space imaginary	Green city	Climate adaptation	Finding sustainable solutions for nature and climate related issues. Such as solutions for heavy rain or drought
Idealised space imaginary	Green city	Creation of green spaces	Creating more green spaces such as parks to create more space for nature
Idealised space imaginary	Green city	Conversion water	Creating and moving water currents in the city.
Idealised space imaginary	Green city	Sustainable building	New buildings will be build with more nature friendly materials. Bio-based building or circular materials
Idealised space imaginary	Car oriented city	Increase of roads	Building of lots of roads in the area to make places connected by car

Idealised space imaginary	Car oriented city	Increase of parking space	The amount of parking space in places such as train stations, increased enormously
Idealised space imaginary	Industrial city	Big industrial terrain	A typical terrain where lots of factories are built closely to the heart of the city
Idealised space imaginary	Industrial city	Economically dependent	The factories are important for the city creating work for a big group of inhabitants
Idealised space imaginary	Industrial city	Worker's housing	Typical houses/neighbourhoods close to the industry terrain to create housing for workers

Main theme	Subtheme	Code	Definition
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Gentrification	Avoiding pushing out lower classes	In new projects the housing is not focused on higher income housing, but on different forms. Also lower income
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Gentrification	Demographic changes	Lower socio-economic classes being replaced by higher socio-economic classes
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Gentrification	Gentrification resistance	The old residents of neighbourhoods taking action against renewals in their area
Spatial imaginaries	Gentrification	Changing identity location	Transforming former factory buildings into café's and bars.
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Densification	Compact housing	Building more housing in a smaller area. Mostly through creating apartments.
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Densification	Compact infrastructure	Anticipated growth in usage and built density in the zone, infrastructural leveling.
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Densification	From offices to mixed usage	Development where the focus in areas around train stations went from building offices to a mix of usage such as housing and leisure.

Spatial transformation imaginaries	De-industrialisation	Factory buildings being unused	With companies moving away and no other company taking factory buildings over, they became empty.
Spatial transformation imaginaries	De-industrialisation	Companies moving away	Companies moving away to countries with cheaper labour.
Spatial transformation imaginaries	De-industrialisation	Rise of other economic sectors	Moving from secondary sector to the Tertiary sector
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Sustainability transformations	Creation of more greenspaces and use of plants	More space for nature such as in parks or along the water
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Sustainability transformations	Remove of main roads	Big main roads that crossed parts of city centres got removed to create less traffic in the city
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Sustainability transformations	More climate friendly modes of transport	The infrastructure changed from giving as much possible place to cars, to more giving space to more sustainable forms of transport
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Sustainability transformations	Protection against weather extremes	Planting of trees and plants to combat heat stress, or catching rain to combat floods
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Suburbanisation	Creation of housing away from the city	Fully new neighbourhoods were built further away from the centres of the cities
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Suburbanisation	Living in suburbs as preferable	Life in the suburbs had many benefits that attracted people such as space and calmness
Spatial transformation imaginaries	Suburbanisation	People moving away	Inhabitants of cities started to prefer the neighbourhoods outside of the city an moved there in big amounts