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Defining the universal city. The International Federation for Housing and Town Planning and transnational planning dialogue 1913-1945

Geertse, M.A.

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Preface

The journey is more important than the destination. Greek poet C.P. Cavafy has beautifully expressed this universal truth in his poem *Ithaka* (1911).ⁱ “As you set out for Ithaka hope the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery.” He urges us to enjoy our journey, to take the time to explore and to learn and not let our demons hold us back. But we must never lose sight of our goal. Colored by life experience, we will arrive as older, wiser and richer individuals. “Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you would not have set out. She has nothing left to give you now. And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.”

My PhD research certainly has been a long and challenging journey. Although, strictly speaking, my academic wanderings did not quite reach the epic proportions of the *Odyssey*, I nevertheless often felt like a modern *Odysseus*. More than eight years ago I set out to explore the history of the IFHTP, driven by the desire to learn how planning ideas and experiences circulated across the globe, how international planning history was constituted. I have made many detours and discoveries, experiencing good fortune and setbacks. Seasoned travelers will tell you that you are largely on your own if you want to reach your destination. Academic research can be a solitary occupation, requiring focus, commitment and endurance to complete the journey. Nevertheless, the wandering traveler needs help from others: directions from guides, hospitality from locals, camaraderie of fellow travelers and, last but not least, continuous support by family and friends. Now that I have reached the final stage of my journey, it is time to pay respect to all those people and institutions who provided a helping hand and made my voyage all the more enjoyable.

I was fortunate to receive directions from several guides. Throughout the journey my supervisor prof. dr. Koos Bosma has acted as a dedicated mentor. Once I secured a position at the VU University prof. dr. Karel Davids entered the picture as second supervisor. Together Koos and Karel have continuously stimulated me to push the envelope. Their support and advice, both academic and personal, was vital for the completion of this PhD thesis. In 2005 I ran into dr. Pierre-Yves Saunier at a conference in Groningen. Pierre-Yves initiated me into the Urban Internationale and provided valuable advice and support in the following years as I explored the contours of this international network society. The PhD training programme of the Posthumus Institute provided welcome directions for the structure and methodology of my research. I also must mention prof. dr. Pieter Uyttenhove who provided a new sense of direction when one of my many detours turned into a dead end. I want to credit the members of the defense committee that have guided me through the final stage of my academic travel: the rector magnificus, dr. Gerrie Andela, prof. dr. Koos Bosma, prof. dr. Jean-Louis Cohen, prof. dr. Karel Davids, prof. dr. Hartmut Frank, prof. dr. Susan Legène, prof. dr. Pieter Uyttenhove and prof. dr. Stephen Ward. Finally, I want to thank Jim Rijper and Dingmar van Eck for acting as my paranymphs.

Much of my research was spent ‘on the road.’ I have scavenged many archives and libraries in Belgium, England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland and Switzerland. Everywhere I received a warm welcome. The hospitality and valuable suggestions by the local staff made my research on location all the more enjoyable and effective. I want to

sincerely thank all my hosts in general, and the archivists and librarians Melissa Wyatt (Royal Town Planning Institute, London), Kirsteen Croll (Strathclyde University, Glasgow) and Renée Berthon (ILO, Geneva) in particular. A special thanks goes out to the former secretary general of the IFHP, Elsbeth Hylckema Vlieg, not only for hospitality at the IFHP, but also for opening doors that otherwise would have remained shut.

Throughout my research I have enjoyed the companionship, collaboration and discussions with fellow researchers, colleagues and students. These contacts not only enriched my journey, but also contributed to sharpening my methodology and conceiving alternative perspectives. I want to thank my former roommates and colleagues at the VU University, my fellow researchers in the Urban nebula project, my fellow PhD candidates participating in the training programme of the Posthumus Institute, the students I was privileged to tutor and the many researchers whose investigations touched mine. Of all these valuable contacts I want to credit some explicitly. I enjoyed tutoring a seminar on architecture and morality at the VU University alongside my colleague Petra Brouwer. My research has benefitted greatly from the many discussions with Abdel el Makhloufi , post doctoral researcher of the Urban Nebula project. And finally I want to thank fellow PhD students Iris Burgers, Mathijs Witte and Dingmar van Eck for their companionship during our shared academic pursuit.

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Last, but not least, I have to thank my friends, colleagues and family for their support over the years. Time management was always an issue during my research. Combining a PhD research with a new job, family life and social contacts is always difficult. It were the people closest to me that suffered the most from my lack of time. However, they never complained and urged me to complete my academic journey. A special thanks goes out to my wife Hinke and our lovely daughter Fenna for their undying support. Without their love and support I would never have reached my destination.

Utrecht, February 2012

Michel Geertse

ⁱ C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*. Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Edited by George Savidis. Revised Edition, Princeton University Press, 1992.