Bergen op Zoom; proeve van een sociaal-geografische stadsanalyse
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SUMMARY

The town of Bergen op Zoom arose from an agrarian settlement. Especially basic trade together with a combination of craft and retail business gave this medieval settlement an urban character. Not only its being situated near the river Scheldt, but also its abandoning autarchy and the growth to a certain extent of political independence of the Lords of Bergen owing to which the right of an annual fair and other rights were obtained, attributed to the economic development of the town. Towards the close of the Middle Ages basic trade lost much of its importance. As the first cause may be mentioned the change which took place in the Scheldt delta, gradually turning the West Scheldt into an arterial thoroughfare. At the same time the political influence of the town decreased, as a result of which the right to which it owed a great part of the extensiveness of its basic trade became all the more ineffective.

Meanwhile a growing interest of the town in its surroundings had caused the region-serving trade function to increase. Because of the changes brought about in its surroundings by inundations at the end of the Middle Ages however the significance of this region-serving trade function finally decreased again. This process was hastened by its function as a fortress forced on it from outside at the end of the 16th. century as a result of which the region served by the town crumbled off more and more. Consequently its trade function was for the greater part reduced to a local service position, on which the presence of the garrison had a stimulating effect. The region-serving character of the trade function was revived again especially during the French period and since that time has been expanded and intensified by the rise of modern traffic. The trade function, owing to the income that it yields the town, is nowadays the most important function but one. On the plan of the town the trade function is shown to have a high degree of constancy, although it has disappeared from certain streets and its significance has been on the wane near the docks. It is still to be found especially in the centre of the town in the neighbourhood of the market-place and along the three principal approaches to this market-place which were already in existence during the Middle Ages.

Inherent to the rise of the medieval trade function was the rise of traffic. Only after the Middle Ages did such a disintegration between trade and traffic take place that one might speak of a traffic function. This function was partly centred in the port, which in the Middle Ages occupied an important place. In the fortress town the port did not serve international commercial intercourse any longer, but for the greater part only served to supply the town and the garrison and to export the products of industry, especially to Holland and Zeeland. With the rise of modern traffic the port grew less and less important, also because it was not adapted to the demands made by modern shipping. Through the shifting of the trade routes running North-South by land and water Bergen op Zoom's situation got an isolated character. For this reason and owing to the fact that its port was not adapted Bergen op Zoom missed the connection as far as the growth of its hinterland started in the Middle Ages was concerned.

Attended with the rise of the medieval trade function was the rise of the industrial function. In the non-local sector it appeared to
be dependent on the trade function while moreover it had a local-serving character, which remained predominating during the time Bergen op Zoom was a fortress town. Modern industry however caused this function to expand to such an extent that it became the driving force in the existence of the town, although it does not hold the position that it might have held. As one of its causes might be mentioned the isolated situation into which the town had fallen by that time.

During the Middle Ages Bergen op Zoom's increasing significance was also observable in the growth of the political-administrative function. This growth was closely connected with the now full-grown economic power. The great measure of political independence decreased towards the end of the Middle Ages, while in the fortress town it disappeared almost completely. Bergen op Zoom's interests were subordinated to those of the Dutch Republic, particularly the province of Holland. The French period entailed to some extent a political emancipation, which found its completion in municipal autonomy, which indeed meant an important improvement, but later on impeded a solution of questions on a larger scale, because the town boundaries were not quite correctly fixed.

The fortress function imposed by the Republic continued to exist up to the present time in the form of the garrison function, which, because abandoned fortress grounds were reserved for military purposes, was an added impediment to the expansion of the town.

The administrative part of the political-administrative function offered a stronger resistance to the new political situation as established in the fortress town.

In administrative respect Bergen op Zoom remained the centre of the marquisate and for a great part owes its present important central function to this fact.

The cultural-religious function born at the rise of the town showed a strong development during the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the fortress period this function underwent great changes. In spite of the fact that it receded more and more into the background, a separation of cultural and religious life took place. This separation was continued in the modern town, where both religious and cultural function regained a relatively higher significance, among other things thanks to the general rise of the level of prosperity.

The pre-urban agrarian function lived on in the medieval town and was just as in the following fortress period of a serving nature. Both in the medieval and the fortress town a considerable portion of the ground within its walls was destined for farming.

In modern Bergen op Zoom the agrarian function under the influence of the strong expansion of the town moved further and further away from its centre.

Even more constant, at least in its outward appearance, was the fishery function. During the Middle Ages it most probably had only a local-serving nature whereas in the fortress town it might be called basic, which it still is at present, although its significance for the existence of the town has lessened comparatively speaking.

In the modern town some other functions not mentioned so far are found, viz. the recreative, tourist, and residential functions. The
first-mentioned has practically arisen from the cultural function. The tourist and residential functions chiefly owe their growth to the rise of modern traffic.

At the end of this summary two disturbances in the development of Bergen op Zoom may be pointed at. The first arose owing to the fact that in modern times it has missed the connection with the development interrupted at the end of the Middle Ages, the development into a trading port of an increasingly expanding hinterland. Besides the forced fortress function may be mentioned as one of the causes the change in the course of the trade routes which gave Bergen op Zoom a more or less isolated position. The second disturbance in the development of Bergen op Zoom presented itself in the essentially urban industrial function, which especially in its first growth was impeded by the fortress function.

Finally apart from the external causes of the disturbances in the development of the town mentioned above, an internal factor, whose importance cannot be underrated, should be mentioned: the shortsighted critical aspect of the mentality, which often has a paralysing effect on the activities of the inhabitants of Bergen op Zoom.