Building on ambition

Architectuur Lokaal in 2010 | # 80
**Architectuur Lokaal** is the national centre of expertise and information devoted to commissioning building development in the Netherlands. From a position of independence we act as bridge-builder between parties involved in the building process. For patrons such as municipalities, housing associations and property developers we organise excursions, discussions and other programmes tailored to their needs. Recurring themes are the cultural significance of commissioning building work and the importance of collaboration between client and designer. Architectuur Lokaal runs the national Steunpunt Architectuur opdrachten & Ontwerpwedstrijden (The Procurement & Design Competition Office). This offers advice in public procurement procedures and in competitions to select designers and property developers. From way back we have a special relation with the local and regional architecture centres throughout the Netherlands. Architectuur Lokaal is part of the infrastructure of institutions that implement the cultural and architectural policy of the government. To do this, it receives an annual subsidy of 480,000 euro. In addition, Architectuur Lokaal carries out commissions on behalf of third parties. Annual turnover totals an average of 1 million euros.

**Figures** In 2010 some 120,317 people made use of our services. The website www.arch-lokaal.nl was visited 17,249 times, an average of 48 times a day. The website www.ontwerpwedstrijden.nl was visited 42,232 times, an average of 116 times a day. Some 8,869 participants attended events, debates, competitions, courses, excursions and lectures by Architectuur Lokaal. The Steunpunt Architectuur-opdrachten & Ontwerpwedstrijden wrote 260 letters of advice to improve the procedures for architectural commissions.


**Board** Felix Rottenberg (chair), Henk van den Broek, Arno Brok, Robert Samkalden, Therese van Schie and Marja van der Tas.

**Bureau** Maaike van Beusekom, Dirk Bergvelt, Wendeline Dijkman, Michel Geertse, Margot de Jager, Cilly Jansen, Indira van ‘t Klooster, Marlous van Krieken, Tom Prins and Bram Talman.
The year 2010 was dominated by elections and severe cutbacks. Developments that affected the public commissioning of building development in many ways. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment vanished, and planning tasks were transferred to lower levels of government. The replacement of aldermen meant that many municipalities saw years of expertise and experience disappear. Moreover, new municipal councils were forced to take cost-cutting measures, especially on account of the stagnant real property market. Current and planned building projects were reconsidered, and on occasion a complete building freeze was evident. Owing to the stagnating area development, the trusted growth model of spatial planning turned out not to be so self-evident any longer. The focus shifted from newbuild on green sites to increasing density in urban areas. Spatial design in regions suffering from population decline was a subject of attention, as was the renovation and conversion of a growing volume of vacant property. Municipal authorities discovered private patronage as an instrument to achieve spatial ambitions. The search for a new basis and business models for spatial planning is, in brief, in full swing.

That sounds forbidding, but it has also set good developments in motion. In the current economic climate, building without a thorough knowledge of the market is no longer conceivable. Residents and occupants are increasingly involved in the building process. Not only through consultation evenings but also through thorough procedures in which the opinions of people affected are genuinely integrated into the planning process. Another development is that young architecture firms in particular — sometimes with a knife to their throat — search for niche markets and actively seek out new partners to realise their ideas. Building clients and architects alike are reinventing themselves in response to the elections, the economy, and new visions of the development of the city. We are seeing the emergence of new ambitions, new quality standards and new questions. What can we do with vacant office buildings? How can the density of inner-city areas be increased? What does the private commissioning of housing look like in practice? In that sense we can consider 2010 as the year in which the building world woke up from the shock of the economic crisis and started to look around. This publication contains an overview of all the activities that Architectuur Lokaal developed in this ‘year of awakening’.

Cilly Jansen, director Architectuur Lokaal
10 questions

to Architectuur Lokaal

1. Is there any overview of municipalities that have built either a new town hall or new council offices in recent years? (question from a magazine for public officials)

2. What is the biggest obstacle in converting offices for other purposes? (question from a living/working group for seniors)

3. Is there any list or database of architects linked to the buildings designed by them in Rotterdam? (question from a library in Rotterdam)

4. Is there any standard or guideline for the planning and statutes of architecture prizes in the Netherlands? (question from an architecture centre)

5. In the Netherlands, does the same system as the Open Call system exist and can foreigners also register, like they can in Belgium? (question from a Flemish architecture firm)

6. Where can I find an overview of the development of the housing market over the past 25 years in relation to architecture, urban design and sustainability? (question from a developer)

7. How can amateurs become involved in professional questions? (question from a student at the Design Academy in Eindhoven)

8. Are there any Dutch policy documents that define what quality is? (question from the Maltese Association of Architects)

9. Do you know any city architects or area managers who can discuss waste logistics and waste material as a raw material in relation to the design of waste containers in public spaces? (question from a journalist/researcher)

10. What is the best way to assess my policy document on building aesthetics? (question from a municipal authority)
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The perfect school for building patrons

Whether you’ve been commissioning buildings for years or have just started, you’re never too old to learn. But where to go for some coaching? The School for Patrons helps people brush up.

You don’t need to complete an education before commissioning a building. Indeed, it’s not even possible. There’s no such thing as a commissioning class or a diploma system for prospective clients. Everyone in the Netherlands who is politically active can in principle become an alderman. So one day you could be an ICT expert (or a florist, an actress or a chemist) and then the very next day you’re responsible for a plan to redevelop a town centre (or a prestigious office complex, or a new town hall). Such a rigorous transition certainly doesn’t apply to every building patron. But it does make the point that there are many types of patron. And every type has particular needs when it comes to information.

Desire

The majority of aldermen will already have gained the necessary governmental experience in practice. That is not to say that they are experts in the field of spatial planning or culture. A lack of professional knowledge does not in itself have to be a problem. Each official can surround himself with effective and expert advisors. Indeed, aldermen with a background in construction can sometimes experience their professional knowledge as more of a burden than a benefit. Alderman Aalberts from Middelburg is a case in point: ‘I try to think as little as possible about professional aspects. I represent the community now and the public interest. That means weighing the pros and cons differently sometimes.’

Obstacles

What all those aldermen do need is vision and ambition. To define a vision of the future, knowledge of the profession is necessary. What direction should development take in a town? Who or what are the parties concerned? What are the relevant themes? Which studies are of importance? Which advisory bodies? What information is already available and how can you access it? Another category of aldermen has gradually become highly well informed in one particular type of commission, such as building conversion or privately commissioned housing. Nonetheless obstacles are still encountered. This alderman also struggles with all sorts of issues. Is he the only one who faces his particular problem or do fellow aldermen also have trouble with it? Are there smarter solutions imaginable, or can some aspect of the regulations be amended? Provinces have acquired greater responsibility now that the central government has become less involved, but what does that mean for municipal authorities?

In addition to public patrons working for municipalities, there are non-public patrons such as housing associations and property developers. They have often enjoyed some schooling in their...
professional field. For example, they may have followed course in architecture, economics, public administration, real estate or financing at a university or college of higher education. After that they may have worked in the construction industry in some capacity. They are therefore highly experienced clients with a lot of knowledge of the subject. That is not to say they don’t have any questions.

Sobering

Now that financing is not so easy, for example, some developers are looking for their added value in an unstable development climate. In their search for new financing constructions they try to establish contact with new parties or attempt to assume another role within the development process? Housing associations in turn are confronted by a sobering reality: the money is all gone. They have to find other ways of performing their central task: developing social housing for the vulnerable group in the housing market. Regulations set by Brussels do not by definition help them in that effort. And then there are the one-time building clients. People who build their own collective accommodation or business premises. Or a school board that wants a new building. Or a health organisation that wants to turn sites into residential care complexes with various functions — and thus it becomes the developer of a whole area. For over 18 years all these types of building patrons have been able to approach Architectuur Lokaal with general questions or for a programme tailored to their needs.

Particular learning needs

In 2010 Architectuur Lokaal gathered this way of working under the name De Opdrachtgeversschool (The School for Patrons). Moreover, a new way of catering for learning needs has been added to the current programmes. At the moment, a range of working sessions is being developed to meet the very particular learning needs. Participants in these sessions are selected in such a way that they can share their expertise intensively with one another and with external experts. In addition, attention is given not only to the knowledge needed but also to the changes brought about for the organisations in question. From 2011 on the range on offer will be gradually expanded to encompass themes relevant to a wider group of building patrons. Subjects that could be covered include the history of architecture and urbanism from 1750 to 2010, land-use policy, financing constructions, landscape development, and specific public building commissions such as a town hall or a theatre.
Massive turnout at fifth national edition

Building on Ambition event helps new public officials on their way

The year of the municipal elections is always noteworthy for planning in the Netherlands. Public officials and municipal councillors change. The new councillors and aldermen are (it is hoped) responsible for four years of sound spatial planning and architecture. Often in partnership with other levels of local government and with professional clients. True to tradition, Architectuur Lokaal organised a national event this year to help them on their way. After all, municipal patronage is a very demanding responsibility even for experienced public officials. Certainly now that the construction industry is under pressure in so many ways.

Building with ambition was an event devoted to public patronage for municipal councillors and aldermen, members and deputies of the provincial assemblies, central government, public officials, housing associations, property developers, designers, building aesthetic committees and architectural institutes. In short: for everybody with ambitions for the planning of the Netherlands. Building with ambition is the fifth such event organised by Architectuur Lokaal since 1994 at the start of the new period in office in municipal government. In the past years numerous officials, companies, designers and sector organisations have collaborated or taken part in this event. This year 353 municipal officials and architects participated in the programme. The event consisted of 10 excursions with 30 project visits that took place at the same time all around the Netherlands on the same morning, with municipal councillors and aldermen, members and deputies of provincial assemblies. The excursions were followed by a national public debate about public patronage. Discussion centred on three themes: the transforming of areas, the mixing of functions, and the connecting of people.

This event was made possible by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science / Department of Cultural Heritage / Laboratory for Privately Commissioned Housing, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment / Chief Government Architect, Nederland Wordt Anders and Mooi Nederland. Previous editions were: Niet Grijs! (1994), ORG (1996), Oost West Thuis Best (2003), and BOOST! Impulse for Public Patronage (2006).
The **Gouden Piramide 2010**, the national prize for inspiring patronage, is an initiative from three ministries who are involved in national architecture policy. Architectuur Lokaal provides support and advice for the organisation of this prize.

**What**  St. Plechelmus primary school, Dr. Schaepman Foundation and the municipality of Hengelo.

**Why** For the ingenious accommodation of a Dalton primary school in a disused church.

**To whom** Anneke Kuipers, director of the St. Plechelmus school.

**Prize** 50,000 euro excluding VAT and an architecture plaque designed by Studio Bau Winkel, Rotterdam.

**Jury** Liesbeth van der Pol (chair), architect, chief government architect Jaap van Rij, expert on private patronage * Thijss Asselbergs, architect Gert Middelkoop, planner, econometrician * Ira Koers, architectural designer Willem Smink, former alderman in Groningen, college chairman * Dieuwke van Ooij, journalist * Martien de Vletter, architectural historian * Ton Ildinga, secretary
Converting buildings: success or fiasco?

What are the success and failure factors when it comes to converting buildings? In 2010 a ‘community of practice’ of aldermen came together to find an answer to that question. The active municipal officials shared their knowledge during a series of working sessions. Architectuur Lokaal organised these meetings in partnership with the National Programme for Conversion. The results and recommendations from the participants will be made public at the end of 2011.

Participating aldermen:
- Dennis Straat (municipality of Zaanstad)
- Wim Ruifrok (municipality of Noordoostpolder)
- Ewout Cassee (municipality of Haarlem)
- Andy Dritty (municipality of Landgraaf)

A combination of change and continuity. That’s what building patronage often amounts to in municipalities in the Netherlands. To assess the extent of that change, Architectuur Lokaal teamed up with the Chief Government Architect, the Association of Dutch Municipalities and TNS NIPO market research held a survey among aldermen for planning just before the local elections.

The report, entitled ‘Policy and implementation of local patronage 2010’, indicates that over the past four years local officials were less involved in the implementation of planning projects than prior to that. Their attention shifted to forming alliances and generating support. Even so, they still view the opportunity of realising something visible as an attractive aspect of their public position. Aldermen indicated they were particularly aiming at achieving quality when the municipality itself acted as client and commissioned work. But they also revealed that in practice this more often concerns the financial and economic aspects of an assignment than the design quality. That seems almost unavoidable in a political culture in which ‘assessment’ on the basis of objective criteria has become common. The increasing emphasis on everything that is quantifiable has up to now resulted in more satisfaction among voters. The survey also reveals that the previous crop of aldermen had not always found the dialogue with the population to be an enjoyable experience.

More info: www.archlokaal.nl
In 2010 the Office registered and assessed 267 procedures for tendering architectural commissions and for design competitions.

Of those, there were 211 public procurement procedures (188 in 2009):
- 118 invitations to tender for design services (140 in 2009)
- 93 invitations to tender for integrated contracts (48 in 2009).

The office was consulted on 629 occasions concerning commissions:
- 315 times by building clients, advisors and other parties involved,
- and 314 times by architects.

The website www.ontwerpwedstrijden.nl with the digital handbook KOMPAS Light was visited 42,232 times (22,725 in 2009).
That equals to 116 daily visits (including weekends).

The Office sent 260 letters of recommendation to improve procedures.

Some 14 lectures and courses were offered on request about KOMPAS Light and selecting an architect. Contributions were made to 5 (academic) studies.

The Office was staffed by 3 employees.

The statistical details about 2010 were made public in 4 quarterly newsletters and dispatched to 12,500 interested parties.

5 Years of European Public Procurement Procedures in Architecture is the title of the study that was presented at Building on Ambition, the national event held every four years for new municipal officials and organised by Architectuur Lokaal.

At the end of 2010, on the advice of the Chief Government Architect, the three ministries (Education, Culture and Science; Interior and Kingdom Relations; and Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation) awarded a subsidy to Architectuur Lokaal to continue the work of the Office for another three years.
Young architects learn lessons on selecting

How do architect selection procedures work in practice? Which selection procedures can architects encounter? What are the opportunities and pitfalls? In Maastricht the Competitions’ Office gave a lecture on this theme during Beroepservaring (Professional Experience) – a biennial programme for recent Masters graduates in architecture, urbanism and landscape architecture who work for private offices and municipalities. The experimental programme (started by the Chief Government Architect) runs in advance of amendments to the Architects Title Act, which has already passed through parliament. This makes two years of professional experience a requirement for registration in the architects’ register. The subject of ‘selection procedures’ forms part of the shared programme for the three professions.

RVOB Sale of Sites

Within the framework of the Noordsingel Prison pilot project, a non-public sales procedure based on the best development plan with the best bid instead of the usual best bid, the RVOB asked the Office for advice concerning the assessment of technical competence.

ADVICE AND COURSES

The OFFICE explained KOMPAS Light at various events: The perfects public procurement process BNA (21/1) * Deciding on architectural quality, Delft University of Technology / Chair in Area Development (27/01) * Tender Event in Bo Eindhoven (09/03) * Buyers from the municipality of Haarlemmermeer (19/04) * PIANOo annual congress, Rotterdam (27/05) * Professional symposium Atelier Province of Overijssel (16/06) * Client wants architect, Knowledge centre on building process innovation CPI at Delft University of Technology (30/9) * ROOTS debate, schunck Heerlen (6/10) * Building on ambition (14/10) * Market meeting for architects PIANOo/BNA, Utrecht (26/10) * Professional experience Maastricht (27/10) * Map for architects seminar, business in Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg, NL EVD, international, Europe enterprise network and Benelux architecture, Rotterdam (28/10) * Municipal Inkoopplatform, Utrecht (25/11) * NVTL (9/12).
Volume of public procurement for architectural commissions, divided as design services (D) and works with a full design component (DB-DBFMO).

What were tenders invited for in terms of design services? (cu = cultural buildings, gps = governmental office buildings, in = infrastructure & public space, mv = social purpose real estate, ut = utility buildings and wo= housing).

What were the types of projects put out to tender? (cu = cultural buildings, gps = governmental office buildings, in = infrastructure & public space, mv = social purpose real estate, ut = utility buildings and wo= housing).

Who seeks design services through public procurement? (rijk= national authorities, dec. overheden = local authorities, overig = others).

Who procures works with a full design component through tendering procedures? (rijk= national authorities, dec. overheden = local authorities, overig = others).

Diversity ratio (number of awards / number of commissions) for tendered design services and works with full design component.
Kompas Light aims to improve professionalism and build knowledge

SMEs at work

How does the average entrepreneur at an SME – SME stands for small and medium enterprises - from the Building Contractors’ Federation Netherlands (AFNL) benefit from a client who knows what he’s talking about? We asked Cilly Jansen this question and other questions about commissioning and public procurement. She heads the Procurement & Design Competition Office, which works to improve the contracting process and build bridges between parties involved in the building process; this office is part of Architectuur Lokaal.

Since its establishment, the Building Contractors’ Federation Netherlands (AFNL) has been advocating a commissioning climate in which small and mid-sized enterprises have more opportunities. Throw out those absurd requirements for references and revenues! And this is primarily referring to building projects commissioned by government authorities. According to the AFNL, this view should also be reflected in the new Procurement Act (Aanbestedingswet), which will shortly enter into force, if all goes well. This is all the more important because this law will be the guiding principle that the national, provincial and local authorities use to award contracts. According to the AFNL, uncertainty and ignorance are key factors that lead commissioning authorities to set such high standards. A client who is unfamiliar with how things work will want to prevent all sorts of risks – including unrealistic or non-existent ones. In the end, the client shoots himself in the foot; excluding SMEs is detrimental to the quality and inventiveness of the tenders received in the procurement process. That view is widely held, and quite logical. Why would a potential candidate bother making a special effort on his tender if he already knows that his company is one of the few large firms among which the national projects will be distributed? Fortunately, the tide is changing, especially in infrastructure projects. You see consortiums of SMEs operating in that sector that manage to acquire big projects (see also Sector Interests on pages 6-7). The civil and utility building sector is a different matter; SMEs are hardly included at all in public procurement of schools and other public buildings.

Kompas Light

In short, any initiative that aims to improve professionalism in procurement processes can count on unconditional and heartfelt support from the AFNL. One such initiative is Kompas Light, a digital manual for public procurement of architects’ services. This handbook was developed by Architectuur Lokaal in close consultation with the Chief Government Architect, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), the Royal Institute of Dutch Architects (BNA), the Association of Dutch Project Development Companies (NEPROM) and the Dutch Public Procurement Expertise Centre (PIANOo); the intention was to simplify procurement procedures and to provide a better understanding of procurement processes for the commissioning client. Kompas Light is available via ontwerpwedstrijden.nl, a site managed by the Procurement & Design Competition Office. The Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ), Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) and Education, Culture and Science (OC&W) have decided to continue the mandate of that office as a central national point of contact for information and advice on public procurement of architects’ services in the 2010-2012 period.

Equal opportunities

Time to talk to managing director Cilly Jansen about the background of this remarkable initiative launched by her organisation. “One of the aims of Kompas Light is in line with what the Building Contractors’ Federation wants to achieve: equal opportunities for SMEs in European public procurement processes. Our concern here is architecture firms, which by definition also includes talented designers who are just starting out. They face the same problems as the companies in the federation. It is important for these groups to have more frequent opportunities to show what they can do. And that should include the somewhat larger projects. It is good for diversity, innovation and professional development. It also improves competition and quality; the economy of the building sector ultimately benefits as well. Kompas Light is a resource that makes it easier for the procurer to conduct a good procurement process that does justice to the objective as it was formulated. The guidelines are primarily intended for public authorities and housing corporations, but may also be useful for private clients or a collective of private clients. The municipality of Almere, for instance, wants to give these latter groups more room to manoeuvre in responding to its building projects.”

Client considerations

The best way to find out how the model works is to visit the site and run through Kompas Light step by step. Jansen: “You need to imagine that you’re a client who is commissioning a project. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a very complicated undertaking. A small garden shed would be enough to try it out. It’s a nice exercise for contractors; it can be very useful to know what factors a commissioning client needs to consider before opening a project to tenders.” What are the overall considerations involved? “Almost every
project starts with defining your ambitions. Are you looking for a plan, or are you looking for a company to fit your plan? What is the ultimate objective of the designer’s work? Are the functional frameworks clearly defined and can the project count on social and political support? Sadly, we see far too often that the essential questions have not been asked, while less relevant aspects have been set out in detail. These delaying factors can lead to a great deal of frustration for the client and the contractor. Not to mention the costs of failure. Kompas Light can help you prevent them through the process, offering simplification and tangible recommendations. A consultant cannot decide what a city’s ambitions should be. Sometimes government authorities can use their own people to get the job done with major effort or unacceptable risks. Kompas Light helps them through the process, offering simplification and tangible recommendations. In addition, Kompas Light allows you to increase internal knowledge of the client side of procurement, although ensuring continuity remains a problem with municipalities due to the high turnover rate among both city officials and municipal staff members.”

**Win-win situation**

According to Jansen, interest increases among municipal procurers. “You still see that consultants are called in fairly frequently; organisational experts specialising in public procurement.” Jansen’s assessment is confirmed by the latest official figures on the budgets for government spending on organisational consultancy. These budgets total 57 million euros and include the costs of consultancy on public procurement processes - a fairly substantial amount. “The costs aside, those consultancy firms bring along their own systems, which are not always transparent to the procurement office. I’m not opposed to calling in consultants as such, but the point is that as the client, you are in control, so you should accept responsibility. A consultant cannot decide what a city’s ambitions should be. Sometimes government authorities can use their own people to get the job done with major effort or unacceptable risks. Kompas Light helps them through the process, offering simplification and tangible recommendations. In addition, Kompas Light allows you to increase internal knowledge of the client side of procurement, although ensuring continuity remains a problem with municipalities due to the high turnover rate among both city officials and municipal staff members.”

**Extended to building companies?**

Could Jansen envision a similar model being provided for awarding projects to building companies? “I would not exclude the possibility, although developing that type of system is currently not in our plans. If there are parties who would want to work on that, we could naturally make some contribution based on our experience. I can imagine that there would be a need for that, essentially for the same reasons as for design procurement. So: building knowledge among clients to make the procurement process go more smoothly. That automatically leads to elimination of disproportionate requirements. The SME segment of the implementing parties will profit, since that disproportionality is one of the main sources of irritation. When procurement offices have that expert knowledge, it also improves communication with market parties; it’s a lot easier to discuss a project when you know what you’re talking about.”

**Architectuur Lokaal**

Architectuur Lokaal is the national centre of expertise devoted to the culture of commissioning building development and architectural policy. From its independent position the foundation acts as bridge-builder between parties involved in the building process. It organises excursions, discussions and other programmes tailored to the needs of, among others, municipalities, housing associations, and property developers. Recurring themes are the cultural significance of commissioning building work and the importance of collaboration between client and designer. Architectuur Lokaal runs the Steunpunt Architectuur-opdrachten & Ontwerpwedstrijden (The Procurement & Design Competition Office), which advises public and private clients about selecting architects and project developers and organising competitions. It has also traditionally enjoyed a special relationship with the local and regional architecture centres throughout the Netherlands.

www.arch-lokaal.nl
www.ontwerpwedstrijden.nl
Planning and development as Bart and Klaar see it
Free thinkers in spatial planning

Bart Stuart and Klaar van der Lippe (artists) brainstorm out loud about regions and buildings. Despite their subject matter, they are neither property developers nor designers. Their task: asking the hard questions. ‘The story that goes with a plan often has very little overlap with actual reality, but saying so won’t make you very popular.’
‘What we do doesn’t have a name yet. As artists, we are focused on locations. We participate in the process of devising plans for areas and buildings. Klaar comes from an architectural background, but we do not create designs and we are not property developers. In any case, we definitely do actively seek contact with the world outside. What we do comes close to activism. We don’t want to make art and hide it away in a museum. Conversely, we don’t want to do tricks on behalf of a housing association to make their tenants become good friends. We are fascinated by the relationship between idea and implementation: what is stated in planning and preparing, and what actually happens after that? Which aesthetic and societal principles are expressed in practice?’

Simple questions

‘Words often bear no resemblance to reality. We see it over and over again. Maybe others see it too, but they don’t say it out loud. We travel to various parts of the country as guest lecturers, teaching students. We discuss the concept that designers need to have their own points of departure. Even young people have stopped asking the simple questions. If you earn your living from planning and development, you want to maintain a pleasant atmosphere. It doesn’t matter whether you’re an architect or a property developer, a banker or an alderman. Everyone needs other people for this project and for upcoming projects. No one is going to rain on your parade by asking difficult questions.’

Cumulative interests

‘It is professional practice not to criticise each other too harshly. Market forces do not cause people to be honest with each other. Independent entrepreneurs and freelancers all have to make a living; they really can’t afford to be critical. We don’t mean that as an accusation; we’re not saying that everyone working in the building sector is a bad person. And we try to keep seeing the funny side of it. But it is our role to focus on the actual practice. Producers have lost touch with reality. None of that fabled Dutch pragmatism; the goal is to preserve pleasant interaction among the people sitting around the table. The cumulative interests of everyone sitting at that table do not represent the public interest.’

We are professional Athenians who want to test whether the arguments are sound.

If something is intended to serve a public interest, we assess whether it in fact does serve that interest. Architects and city planners may once have been able to play this role, but their hands are tied now by the business interests involved in their firm or their career.’

Breeding grounds

‘It all started for us with this spot on the grounds of the former NDSM wharf in Amsterdam North. We’ve had a studio here for more than 10 years now. Back when we came here, no one was interested in this remote corner. It wasn’t until later that municipalities and housing associations started developing plans for breeding grounds that offered affordable studio space to artists. That wasn’t even on the books by that time. The wharf went bankrupt in 1984, leaving nothing but a sort of clubhouse for the workers, who were entitled to continue using it for the rest of their lives. That facility is still running, by the way.’

Dump site

‘Nothing else happened for years. It became a dump site for criminals, until artists discovered the area and breathed new life into it. They didn’t come to this location funded by municipal subsidies. The studios on this former shipyard slip never cost the government one red cent. We paid for everything ourselves, from the heater to the water mains. And it had major benefits. Because we were based here, we made sure that the buildings were kept intact — simply by using them again and keeping up with maintenance. The policy papers, planning procedures and property developers came later. Not to mention the banks. Are you familiar with the fantastic project set up by Trude Hooykaas? She took the initiative to preserve the crane rails beside the wharf by placing a transparent office block on top of it. Everything was hers: the idea, the atmosphere, the light... but not the money, and not the land. The result is that the office is too expensive for Trude to afford, and that the ING Bank holds the ropes here. That’s typical of the current system.’

‘Our long history on the NDSM grounds means that we’ve seen many things come and go here. That was a hands-on course that taught us how the Netherlands works. Fortunately, we are still able to be surprised and to put things in perspective. This is our home base, but we also contribute our experience to a housing plan in the dunes, or a vision for the city centre of Almelo. The current political climate could be viewed as a step in the wrong direction, but it’s hugely interesting to us to see how all
Building on ambition

sorts of opposing forces pull on a plan. And how basic principles are opened up to debate again because “the people” supposedly do or do not want something a certain way. In those situations, we tried to use our enlightened common sense to see what the real problem is and how the actual, fundamental need can be identified. In essence, it is a good thing for that debate to be conducted. These discussions are often lacking in the building sector.’

Fantasies
‘You’ll hear people say that we are critical of property developers, but we also believe that it is possible to collaborate with them in ways that are mutually enriching. It would be untrue to say that we think property developers are evil, on the contrary! They have fantasies and dreams, just like everyone else. We can help them to achieve a result that is better, more beautiful, more valuable. No matter who we work with, we always remain independent. In our view, it should also be possible to conclude that it would be better not to spend your money on building something.’

‘We don’t think that property developers are evil. They have fantasies and dreams, just like everyone else.’

Management is an illusion
‘We stepped into the world of spatial planning as outsiders. It is still fascinating to see how everyone knows everyone else, encounters each other over and over in different situations, and helps to maintain the current system. Aldermen talk about city planning as if it can all be managed, but that is an illusion.’

‘We’re not going to come across the man with the grand plan. What we can do is try to make the reality more bearable. The question then should be how we can make sure that reality more closely approximates what we want it to be. If that topic comes up, we introduce concepts into the dialogue that people respond to by saying, ‘Yes, that’s right.’ It gets adopted. That keeps us optimistic. It also helps to see it as a Greek drama with Elco Brinkman from Bouwend Nederland in the role of Zeus. That picture lets us sleep cheerfully at the end of the day.’

Frequently asked questions received by the Procurement & Design Competition Office

1. How do I fend off unrealistically low bids?
2. How do you assess sustainability?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a traditional contract versus an integrated contract?
4. What are the consequences of the Act on the Implementation of Judicial Protection Public Procurement Directives (WIRA - Wet Implementatie Rechts-beschermingrichtlijnen Aanbesteden)?
5. Is it true that the statutory term of a year does not apply to requested references?
6. How do I structure a qualitative (and partly subjective) assessment without violating the transparency principle?
7. How do I include expected architect’s fees in the calculations?
8. Why does a bank guarantee encounter objections in the architecture sector? How can these objections be eliminated as much as possible without making concessions on security?
9. What are acceptable key indicators for liquidity and solvency in the architecture sector?
10. How should I deal with (possible) changes in the project during the procurement process and after its completion?
STATION SQUARE WINS
HILVERSUM ARCHITECTURE PRIZE
‘THE BIG GESTURES ARE RIGHT’

THE HILVERSUM ARCHITECTURE PRIZE
2009-2010 is a biennial prize initiated by the
Hilversum Architecture Prize foundation
What  Hilversum station area
Why  Because the big gestures are right and an
enduring design has been created as a result
For what  For the creation of two squares, an
impressive tunnel and an ingenious traffic system
To whom  Beate Vlaanderen, Arcadis
Prize  Plaque designed by Ella van der Ven, Amsterdam
Jury  Hubert Jan Henket (chairman), architect*
Patrick van den Brink, Mayor of Lisselestein,
former alderman in Hilversum  * Noud de
Vreeze, city architect  * Jim Klinkhamer, architect
* Jurriaan van Stigt, architect  * Indira van
’t Klooster (secretary), Architecuur Lokaal
EYE-CATCHING ARCHITECTURE

A design competition decided what the connecting bridge between the Rotterdam Eye Hospital and the Royal Dutch Vision Centre of Expertise would look like. Rogier Groeneveld of the office Mens als Maat won with a spectacular design. The winner and competition organiser discuss the snags encountered in realising the design.

WINNER ROGIER GROENEVELD architect

Victory
‘When I heard I’d won, I jumped for joy of course. Then I went and ate oysters in Hotel New York. When did I dare to believe that I just might win? My chances gradually rose right from the start of the first feasibility study, in late 2010. Even though we’ve now been given the go ahead, I still find it exciting. Some difficulties still have to be overcome. The main question is whether the foundations of the Eye Hospital can take the extra load. An extra floor was already added in 2004. Moreover, the dimensions of the ornaments mean they’re not so easy to construct’.

Construction
‘So it now seems that the Eye Bridge is actually going to be built. But maybe you should ask me that again at the start of construction. If all goes to plan, the bridge will be finished in 2012. The planning also depends a little on when we’ve finished designing what else we need in terms of usable floor space on the roof.’

Open competition
‘The views of colleagues are divided when it comes to organising competitions and defining design assignments. Some people think they are a very inexpensive way for clients to get hold of lots of good designs. Others see it as a great chance for start-up offices. I side with the latter group. Everyone forgets that they almost always lead to spectacular architecture. So the client is also obliged to actually building something special. I think that is to the benefit of the built environment — and that’s what matters in the end.’
Competition

‘We were surprised by the large number of registrations for this competition. No doubt the vulnerable market for architects at the moment contributed to that. A point in favour of a design competition is that young architects have a chance of having their work assessed by a professional jury. That enables them to develop further and show what they can do. In general terms, the design competition for the Eye Hospital produced the most feasible design. A result we are rightly proud of.’

Speed

‘In our experience the design competition sped up the process. If the Eye Hospital had opted to elaborate the Eye Bridge with just one architecture office, then the monumental status of the building might have formed an obstacle. The design competition clearly demonstrated that there were very few architects who incorporated the quality of Van der Steur in the design of the Eye Bridge. By putting the issue out in the market through a competition, and by involving the municipality of Rotterdam in the assessment, we could choose the most feasible design at an early stage.’

Collaboration

‘The involvement of the municipality of Rotterdam in the design competition was extremely valuable for us. The monumental status of the building that houses the Eye Hospital demands careful consideration in the choice of construction and design. Architectuur Lokaal also made a very valuable contribution. As project manager, and also as critic and sparring partner in drawing up the competition documents, design assessments and various communication moments. When will the bridge be finished? Let’s say that the Rotterdam Eye Hospital has indicated its intention of constructing the bridge. I hope in the first quarter of 2012.’

Kees Sol: ‘I hope that the bridge is finished in the first quarter of 2012’
SENSITIVE PLAN FOR A BIKE SHED
‘A GOOD DESIGN DOES NOT HAVE TO DISTINGUISH ITSELF BY STRIKING AND SUPERFLUOUS ARCHITECTURAL GESTURES’

In late 2009 the municipality of Nieuwegein staged a public competition for the design of the bike shed on the Ringstede. Only architects 35 years of age and younger were eligible to enter, this in order to give young architects an opportunity to realise their proposal. **R400 BIKE SHED** by Annemiek Bleumink and Donald Osborne won first prize.

**Jury verdict** A wonderfully layered analysis and a clear description of the design elements have resulted in a cleverly balanced, efficient and functional design. The combination of the entrance area, the manager’s space and the internal organisation is surprisingly clear and balanced. In the current stage of plan development, this subtly materialised design shows that a good design does not have to distinguish itself by striking or superfluous architectural gestures.’

**Wat** A bike shed in Nieuwegein

**Prize** 5.000,- euros excluding VAT

**Jury** Bert Dirrix, architect, chairman * Bert Huizing, director of project office, municipality of Nieuwegein * Hanneke Peeters, urban designer, municipality of Nieuwegein * Jeanette Visser, landscape architect * Pieter Mosterd, director Ustal * Dirk Bergvelt (secretary), Architectuur Lokaal
‘We were advised to start our own office together’

What is it like for a young architect to win a prize? Winner Annemiek Bleumink — who won with Donald Osborne — looks back.

The town of Nieuwegein is working hard on a new town centre that is a pleasant place for living, working, shopping and entertainment. It is intended to be a convivial place of gathering for young and old, with a new shopping precinct, a new town hall, a new theatre and more. In addition, stimulating the use of bikes into and out of the town centre is a spearhead. It is because of these ambitions that the municipality is investing in guarded bike sheds that are free to use.

Within budget
The first shed is planned on the Ringstede. For this shed the municipality staged a public competition among young architects to enable new talent to help the municipality in creating an attractive shed on a difficult site. But a nice idea was not sufficient: it also had to be possible to build the shed within the allocated budget.

The winning duo were Annemiek Bleumink and Donald Osborne. Alderman Bert Lubbinge presented them with the first prize in April 2010. They decided to enter the competition together because they got on well with each other during their studies. After they won they encountered a practical problem, because by then they were both working for different offices. How could they work on elaborating the winning concept? Annemiek Bleumink: ‘We were advised to start our own office together now that we had secured this commission. But we felt that a bike shed wasn’t a sufficient basis for that.’

Successful
In the end it turned out to be possible to carry out the commission within the office of Annemiek’s employer: Kraaijvanger Urbis in Rotterdam. With the facilities of that office at their disposal, both young designers could start elaborating the design. That is happening in close collaboration with Sandra Zwart, who is acting as client on behalf of the municipality. The project is running successfully, and the shed is expected to open for use on 1 September 2011. Annemiek Bleumink: ‘It’s all gone very well. The schedule of requirements was adapted later and we had to make cutbacks, but we managed to keep hold of the concept we had at the outset. A remarkable experience.’
Residents of the Overdiepse Polder developed the initiative for a series of terpen (Dutch for “dwelling mounds”): new farmhouses were required on nine mounds. In a limited competition the province of NoordBrabant requested ideas for new farmhouses that harmonise with the intended use of the landscape. Some 28 designers took part. Architect Allart Vogelzang of architecture firm Onix won first prize with his design TOEKOMSTBESTENDIGE TOP TERPEN (‘Farm Island’).

Jury verdict ‘What is appealing about the idea is the architectural relation between the farmhouse in the first shed and the development of a catalogue of materials and colours for all farms. An excellent idea to work with residents to define a band width of materials and colours to be used. In this way residents can collectively contribute to the creation of a family of farmhouses and still leave enough scope for the wishes of individual residents.’

What design of farmhouses for nine dwelling mounds in the Overdiepse Polder

Why because the architectural integration of the farmhouses into the landscape is excellent

To whom Allart Vogelzang, architecture office Onix

Prize 7,500 excluding VAT


Dirk Bergvelt: Architectuur Lokaal, jury report
PASSING THE BATON TO THE NEXT ALDERMAN

‘To enable the new accommodation of Schavenweide care centre to be built, the current residents were temporarily housed on the vacant site next to the new Prakticon school.’

Design Geesink Weusten Architecten, Arnhem
Client Markenheem, Doetinchem
Photo gemeente Doetinchem

‘It is notable that on the one hand the government is supporting the region financially in dealing with shrinkage, yet on the other is relocating services out of the region.’

Photo gemeente Terneuzen

De Wending shopping centre, Delfzijl.
‘To ensure the viability of a shrinking region like ours, services must be kept at a certain level.’

Design Liesbeth van der Pol (DOK architecten), Amsterdam
Client Leyten Vastgoed, Drachten
Photo gemeente Delfzijl

In each quarter, an alderman discusses an issue currently relevant in the municipality in the Architectuur Lokaal magazine. The issue is selected by a fellow alderman. Each alderman who has answered a question passes the baton on to an alderman from a different municipality and poses a specific question for the next alderman to answer in the next issue.

The theme of shrinkage was the main focus in 2010. Roel van der Molen (alderman in Delfzijl) started out by discussing the opportunities that an economic downturn can offer, then handing it off to Peter Drenth (alderman in Doetinchem) to discuss the standard of public facilities in Doetinchem as a means of fighting shrinkage, who passed it on to Frank van Hulle (alderman in Terneuzen) to talk about the necessity of preserving job opportunities and customised solutions in times of shrinkage.

A subscription to the magazine from Architectuur Lokaal is free and available on request.

Samen bouwen aan de stad (‘Building the city together’) is a special compilation containing the latest insights into urbanism and privately commissioned (collective) developments. This unique ‘action’ book is available now from Architectuur Lokaal for €35 excluding postage costs, via www.arch-lokaal.nl.

The book contains:
- theoretical contributions from Robert Broesi, Geert Keurs and others;
- columns by Fer Felder, Jeroen Junte and Marc van den Eerenbeemt;
- the jury report of the limited commissions for ‘balanced urbanism for private clients’;
- three detailed visions and ten more global ideas about how urban design can contribute to privately commissioned development. With contributions from Palmbout Urban Landscapes, Stereo Architects and OKRA landscape architects;
- impressions of design studios devoted to privately commissioned developments in Meppel, Deventer and Delft;
- files about urban development of neighbourhoods in ten municipalities where private clients play an important role. With plans and maps so that everybody can undertake their own study tour in the Netherlands;
- a DVD in which 8 families share their experiences. Plus extra material.
LEEUVARDEN PRIZE FOR SUSTAINABILITY
‘VICTORY FOR MUCH-DISCussed HOUSING PROJECT’

DE Gouden Oldehove 2010
Architecture and sustainability prize, municipality of Leeuwarden.

What
- category 1 (Photo below): restructuring of Vegelinbuurt (max. 200,000 euros foundation costs)
- category 2 (Photo above): house on the Moleplaat (Zuiderburen) (all other sustainable and innovative building projects)

Why
to stimulate good examples of innovative and high-profile housing projects in which the merging of sustainability and architecture are top priorities

To whom
- category 1 (Photo below): Doeke van Wieren, TWA Architecten and Kees de Haan, Jelle de Jong Architecten
- categorie 2 (Photo above): Haiko Meijer and Alex van den Beld, Onix

Prize
De Gouden Oldehove, a gold pin designed by Theo Halsema (goldsmith and silversmith in Leeuwarden)

Jury
Cilly Jansen (chair), architecture historian, Architectuur Lokaal * Marijke Martin, architectural researcher, university lecturer * Stefan Witteman, architect*
Learning from the crisis
Economic problems as the driving force behind new issues

If one thing became clear in 2010, it was that three issues dominated the agendas: private patronage, reallocation/conversion and the transformation of the existing city and the landscape. Both clients and designers are looking for ways to pick up on the practical problems associated with the economic crisis and link them to questions that have been demanding attention for some time now. The lack of funds and new projects has shifted the focus towards reallocation and transformation of the existing city, and towards areas in which building activity has not come to a standstill, in the form of private patronage.

New parties
Following from that, new policy issues play a role. This could include abolishing welfare policies. Or – as a step in the opposite direction – it could include formulating (new) architectural policies or new instruments for quality policies (such as appointing a city architect). At the same time, the crisis has made all parties somewhat uncertain. Discussions are taking place at all levels and in all sorts of regions about what the crisis means for the profession, for the building industry and for the long term. It is interesting to note that everyone is seeking connections to new parties from within their own area of expertise.

New profitability models
Municipalities like Middelburg, Sneek, Delft and Leeuwarden are looking for new forms of policy, but also acknowledge that this objective cannot be achieved without involving new parties or target groups. The province of Leeuwarden is concerned about continuity in national policy. The province is therefore working with municipalities to set balanced policy that covers the relationship between urban and rural areas. Investors are looking for new users for the square metres in office space. The private citizen building his own structure can look forward to interest from many different angles. The aim is more or less the same for all those involved: everyone wants to find an answer to the question of how a concern for the quality of the built and unbuilt environment can be linked to new profitability models. In that context, some are asking themselves: have we learned nothing from the crisis?

De Halve Wereld looks ahead
Bold form of self-government celebrates 25th anniversary

Tenants who take over management of their rental homes, including rent collection, building maintenance and unit allocation. No wonder a project that involves such a radical form of self-government has called itself ‘De Halve Wereld’ (Half the World). This 118-unit housing project is located in downtown Amsterdam. It involves locations that have a tumultuous history: where the first metro line was laid in the 1970s. In those days, new buildings on top of the metro line stood as a symbol that local inhabitants were reconquering the neighbourhood. After 25 years, the project is still going strong. De Halve Wereld now has the biggest green roof in the Amsterdam city centre. Its management will shortly be handed over to a younger generation. Architectuur Lokaal was involved in a collective moment of reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future.

More info: www.dehalvewereld.nl
Friesland as Hans sees it
‘I’m afraid that the national government will just leave it at that’

Hans Konst is a proud Frisian. As a member of the Provincial Executive for Friesland, he revels in seeing cities take a stand for the fantastic Frisian landscape. He would like to see the provinces have more room to manoeuvre, however.

Text Dirk Bergvelt
The regional plan is called *Om de kwaliteit van de ruimte* [For the quality of space]. The plan was adopted in 2006. Achieving quality can include accommodating large-scale companies as soon as a good plan has been devised for incorporating them into the landscape. Plans like these emerge from working sessions based on the latest insights. Not limited to protecting quality through rules and regulations, a good plan aims to stimulate and inspire. ‘When you write strategic policy papers about quality in spatial planning, the concept may remain vague. You have to make it comprehensible, so people can work with it,’ Konst says in his capacity as a provincial representative.

Invaluable resource

*What instruments and areas of expertise is the province using to that end?* ‘We have developed all sorts of instruments. For instance, we set up a biannual provincial award for spatial quality, the Anita Andriesen Award. The award is intended for people or organisations that are doing exemplary work to keep our province beautiful. We presented the award for the first time last year. I am pleased that the jury chose the municipality of Ferwerderadiel as the winner, since municipalities play an important role in practice. There is widespread support for our approach outside government circles as well. I see it as our task to take the lead. Good intentions are not enough; you also have to be able to utilise expertise. In order to help the ideas from our regional plan take shape, we also established Atelier Fryslân, with landscape architects who provide solicited and unsolicited advice on the developments taking place in our province. A deliberate choice was made to give Atelier Fryslân an independent position. Our mandate for them is: “Designers, work according to the precepts of your profession and take us along with you.” The Atelier is primarily there to provide stimulation and inspiration. We also have a Provincial Spatial Quality Team, which advises us on provincial planning and advises external parties of municipal plans in the initial phase of planning and development projects. However, the team is not solely occupied with checking compliance with policies. This is also a team composed of people who can convey professional knowledge enthusiastically.’

‘A decline in spatial quality cannot be tolerated.

‘Many Frisians are aware that our lovely landscape is an invaluable resource and are prepared to work to keep it that way.’

Working sessions with farmers

*What themes are involved here?* ‘Consider increasing scale in agriculture. The agrarian sector is important to Friesland, and 90% are companies that have livestock. When you’re discussing the future of these businesses, factory farming is an important topic. We developed a special project to address that topic: De Nije Pleats, which is Frisian for “the new farm”. What it comes down to is, we are prepared to accommodate large-scale companies as soon as a good plan has been devised for incorporating them into the landscape. Plans like these emerge from working sessions with the farmer, the builder and the designers. This approach achieves an integrated recommendation within a very short time period. Once agreement has been reached on that plan, we here in the government are not going to touch it. In the end, it is up to the municipality to issue the building permit. However, because the theme is relevant in many places, the province takes the initiative in projects like this. Once the approach has been developed, we hand it over to the municipalities. Other than increasing scale in agriculture, the decreasing population is an important theme here. The consequences of that trend are particularly apparent in smaller villages. Shrinkage is less of a problem in Friesland than in parts of Groningen, but you still need to do something about it. When houses and other buildings stand empty, perceptions of the area that people live in immediately deteriorate. Our villages are strong as long as they are lovely places to live. That is why a decline in spatial quality cannot be tolerated.’

Accessible and inviting

*How are tasks divided between the province and the municipalities in this context? For instance, what role does the province play in quality policy in the new municipality that has been expanded to include Sneek and Bolsward?* ‘Many of our visitors see Friesland from the water, and entrepreneurs love to see them come ashore. For that to happen, the land needs to be accessible and inviting. That may seem obvious, but even a village devoted to water sports, like Heeg, was not particularly appealing when viewed from a boat. Conversely, the village did not have much contact with the water. Through Atelier Fryslân, we therefore asked designers to work with the local population to analyse the current situation and show how things could be improved. The result was an advisory report tailored to Heeg, which also provided an example that other villages could use.’

See what you feel like doing

*What policies (spatial quality policy, a new strategic memorandum on architecture) would the province be most interested in seeing from the national government? Can the national government withdraw without raising an outcry?* ‘The national government
Building on ambition

Architecture policy: municipality of Sneek

Sneek formulates vision

The municipal council in Sneek held a meeting to generate ideas in the lead-up to formulating an architectural vision. Architectuur Lokaal helped in preparing the content. Sneek is working in different ways on the spatial quality of the town. There is a need for underlying principles that will safeguard the continuity and cohesion of its architectural policy.

For this the municipality wants to define an architectural vision, based on the assumption that a well-prepared municipality will have more opportunity to control developments in the future, in terms of both process and content. Since Sneek will merge with the new municipality of Southwest Friesland in 2001, the architectural vision can play a role in a much larger area.

Stimulating national policy

‘In the past I worked with the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment; you could tell that they were really committed to their work. Even when they weren’t able to achieve all their goals, they maintained a positive attitude. I believe that programmes like Mooi Nederland [Beautiful Netherlands] did what they were intended to do. I therefore hope that the national government will continue to institute policy that has stimulating effects. Building more motorways and eliminating obstacles is not sufficient in our overcrowded country. You have to maintain a focus on quality, including the national level. The point here is to attain beauty, not just practical feasibility.’

‘I am concerned that the national government is not decentralising’

Back-up

What attitude do municipalities take? And what would the province like to see in this respect? ‘We could definitely use support from the national government as a back-up, but in practice we primarily deal with the municipalities. It’s been that way for years. As I said, most people here in Friesland are aware of how important this topic is. Municipalities have traditionally been willing to invest in spatial quality. Not just the bigger towns, either. The two smallest municipalities in the Netherlands are in our province: Ameland and Vlieland [two small islands in the Wadden Sea, ed.]. They have well-structured policies. The award-winning municipality of Ferwerderadiel is not particularly large either, with a population of less than 9000. We’ve been able to work well with all those municipalities, and that will continue to be the case, even if national policy changes.’

At the invitation of the General Board of Hûs en Hiem, advice on building aesthetics and monuments, Architectuur Lokaal discussed the results of the survey held among departing aldermen conducted every four years (see also p. 7). That gave rise to debate concerning the views of aldermen on the developments in their policy areas and their assessment of policy on building aesthetics.
AND THE BRICK GOES TO...
ZoFa architecten wins Groning architecture prize

THE GRONINGEN ARCHITECTURE PRIZE 2010

Initiative  Architecture Day foundation
Organiser  Platform GRAS in Groningen
What  Eimers location
Why  Because it is a wonderful example of CPO in architecture by a young office.
To whom  ZOFA Architecten, Groningen
Prize  A brick during the annual prize parade in the Grant Theatre in Groningen on Architecture Day
Jury  Bouke Kapteijn, developer * Wilfried van Winden, architect * Indira van ’t Klooster, architecture critic, Architectuur Lokaal

Photos  Gerben Meinders and Wap vd Meulen
Middelburg as Johan sees it

‘Amsterdam has troubles with the North-South metro line; we have our troubles with the theatre pit’

Although Middelburg expects neither shrinkage nor growth, that does not mean that the city is resting on its laurels. Alderman John Aalberts explains the ambitious building plans. Massive excitement in Middelburg!

Text: Jaap Huisman
Woke up to Ms Bakker. That’s how Alderman Johan Aalberts from Middelburg concisely summarises the about-face that the city made just before the turn of the millennium. Riek Bakker is a city planner known for her analyses of city planning processes. She wrote De Kwaliteitsatlas [The Atlas of Quality] (which outlined an integrated future vision for Middelburg through 2030, eds). In that advisory report, she suggested that the municipality of Middelburg should develop the zone around the rail tracks in order to achieve more synergy between the historic city on the west side of the canal and the residential neighbourhoods on the east side that had been built in the 1970s. In addition, Middelburg should ‘boost quality’ in the houses on offer, for instance in the Veerse Poort neighbourhood, and in its amenities.

Aalberts (from the Dutch Christian Democratic Party [CDA]; his portfolio includes Economic Affairs, Spatial Planning and Finance) notes that the capital city of Zeeland, a fairly sleepy town until that point, took a pro-active approach from that time on. The municipality adopted a motion to build a new theatre on the edge of the historic city centre, decided to move City Hall to the banks of the canal through Walcheren, and took the first steps towards building the new neighbourhood of Mortiere.

Finger city
Aalberts: ‘But now, twelve years after the presentation of the Atlas of Quality, it was time to re-evaluate the policy and contemplate where Middelburg should stand in 2030.’ Aalberts had his doubts about the architecture and the location of the new City Hall. The location of the water board would have been better, and a City Hall that made a welcoming impression would have been better yet. Still, all is not yet lost: the petrol station currently dominating the view from the council chamber is intended to be replaced by an attractive strip of green along the canal.

To Aalberts, who was originally an architect, it is beyond dispute that the ‘finger city’ that Middelburg has become over the past decades should continue to exist. As far as he is concerned, the green lobes reaching into the city should not be paved over to make room for more buildings. ‘They constitute one of the key qualities of the city. The point in the coming years is not quantity, but quality.’ Considerations include restructuring neighbourhoods and improving the facilities.

Handicap
Middelburg, like more peripherally situated cities, will not be experiencing more spectacular growth. The population will remain steady at 48,000. In Aalberts’ view, that means intensification rather than expansion: enhancing the existing neighbourhoods. In the southern district of Stromenwijk, which dates back to the 1970s, work has started on refurbishing the blocks of flats with their communal entrances. A community school has also been added to the range of education on offer, and the shopping centre is being upgraded. It was not one of the priority neighbourhoods identified by Minister Vogelaar. ‘That’s our drawback: we’re too small, so we have not been as strongly affected by impoverishment as some big cities.’

Once situated on the fringe of the city centre, Ramsburg was suddenly promoted to the welcome mat for Middelburg thanks to the construction of the ring road and a tunnel under the canal. The area was dominated by breaker’s yards, small but necessary little companies that failed to grace the entrance to the city. The municipality therefore came up with an ambitious plan to redevelop Ramsburg. Aalberts gestures at the map hanging on the wall of his office. ‘Noise barriers along the access road to the city centre, more green spaces, and a combination of houses and small businesses. We moved all the aspects that will no longer suit that area later to a different industrial estate.’

Gaping wound
Riek Bakker has since been succeeded by urban designer Frits Palmboom, who came up with a coherent vision for redeveloping Ramsburg and other neighbourhoods. The site of the future theatre has left a gaping wound in the city, literally and figuratively. A city council already had to step down thanks to the pit that caused the surrounding buildings to sag and crack in the early years of this century. Newspapers filled column after column with reports on the incident.

Aalberts: ‘The Hague had its tram tunnel, Amsterdam has its North-South metro line, and we have the theatre pit.’ By now, the municipality has decided to relocate this uptown facility to the grounds where Miniature Walcheren had been situated until recently. Since this Middelburg variation on Madurodam wanted to expand, room was found to accommodate the miniature park. Middelburg can finally get ready for a fully fledged theatre.

Lively
Where its neighbouring town of Vlissingen benefits from port-related industries, Middelburg relies on government agencies and the service sector. A great deal of these institutions are located on either side of the canal: Rijkswaterstaat (the Directorate of Public Works and Water Management), the water board, the court and of course the seat of the provincial government. In the past decade,
the city has also benefited from the arrival of the Roosevelt Academy, a broad university institute that attracts students from the Netherlands and abroad. The lectures are taught in English and held in the historic building of the former City Hall on the main market square. Middelburg had to arrange accommodation for the nearly 200 students attending the programmes. This was achieved by redesigning nursing homes on the edge of the city centre, as well as the former Rijkswaterstaat building. Aalberts: ‘Fortunately, the latest views encourage pensioners to stay in their own homes for as long as they can and receive care there. That made it possible for us to use the disused nursing homes.’ The students have contributed a lively note to the city, a note that Middelburg essentially needed, since regional higher education (Hogeschool Zeeland and the regional training centre) is concentrated in Vlissingen. An influx of young people offers major potential benefits for a mid-sized city. This ‘swap’ of students for seniors did not go entirely smoothly; there was some concern in Middelburg regarding the idea of offering flats to young people at the expense of the older population. Despite the teething troubles, Aalberts sees it as a win-win situation. Providing care and support to the elderly in their own neighbourhoods and in their own homes is preferable to an anonymous nursing home.

Future vision
Where will Middelburg be in 2030, as Aalberts sees it? What potentially weaker aspects need to be developed? ‘We would do better to do slightly less, but do it well, than to do more but do it poorly,’ as he phrases his pragmatic vision of the future. ‘We need to invest in our monuments, in an appealing living environment with a great deal of green space, and preferably in ground-access housing rather than flats. High-rise housing is more appropriate for Vlissingen. We aim to achieve a nice mix of green spaces and buildings, and a combination of different atmospheres. The Veerse Poort neighbourhood has a different feel than Mortiere, which was inspired by 1930s architecture.’ Mortiere primarily attracts locals from within the province of Zeeland, while Veerse Poort also draws interest from people coming in from outside the province to return to ‘their’ city. And Aalberts also believes that there should be excitement, commotion, things happening. A leg of the Giro d’Italia ending in Middelburg; a visit from the Queen in 2010, a successful late summer festival. ‘Tourists on the peninsula of Walcheren also need alternatives when the weather is poor. We can offer that here in Middelburg.’ For that reason alone, and many more, a new theatre will be more than welcome, whether a municipality is shrinking or not.

Blog post by Arie Krijgsman

ARCHITECTURE CRITICISM IN ASSEN

... A discussion on the importance and various aspects of architecture criticism took place on 8 October at the Cercle Meudon centre of architecture in Assen, where Indira van ‘t Klooster (Architectuur Lokaal) gave an inspiring introductory lecture. In her lecture, she postulated that while much has been written about architecture, architects themselves almost never write a serious critique of their own work, in the form of an interpretation, evaluation or critical reflection. Such critiques are often written by the juries that award prizes or nominate the building of the year. Architectural photography can also be a form of constructive criticism; it represents an important medium in contemporary visual culture. Architecture criticism should preferably be subjective, according to Van ‘t Klooster, since neutrality is impossible and subjectivity sets a sharper tone of debate. In addition, architecture criticism is often restricted to an in-crowd, a small group of stakeholders. It is important to broaden the scope of the discussion, since it can have some influence on future buildings or urban planning. Three forms of criticism can be identified: aesthetic (beautiful or ugly), functional (users), and social (the interests of the district or city).

Following the introductory lecture, there was a discussion amongst those present, led by Gert Wijlage (Cercle Meudon), who started off by showing a number of buildings in Assen that could certainly be open to discussion. It also became apparent that criticism could be subdivided into criticism by colleagues, who primarily discuss the technical aspects of the construction (materials, sustainability), and criticism by private individuals, who should mainly be involved beforehand to contribute to user aspects. Distinctions should be made between experts (planners, builders) and the public (users), but explicitly not excluding either from the process. Consensus will not always be achieved, nor should it; it’s never possible to please everyone. An ongoing learning process is the most important aspect. Criticism is never pointless.

The overall conclusion was that architecture criticism and a broader discussion at an early stage could influence the process. The attendees, who included a number of experts, felt that it was an interesting, lively and educational discussion. As city architect Wybe Nauta said, it was good to see that the municipality of Assen certainly acknowledges the importance of architectural discussions and effective consultation with the users – even if it will never be possible to make everyone happy, even here in Assen.

More information www.cerclemeudon.nl, www.adriekrijgsman.nl
Superman in the city

Twice-yearly gathering of city architects

What is the perfect profile for a city architect? And what are the most important conditions for his or her functioning? To such questions Superman in the city tries to formulate an answer. The aim of this initiative: to develop a platform for sharing experiences and insights, and on that basis to help improve the profile of the position. Superman in the city is an initiative by Max van Aerschot (Haarlem city architect), Noud de Vreeze (Amersfoort city architect) and Architectuur Lokaal. Now the city architects gather twice a year. In the coming years the Chief Government Architects wants to keep in regular communication with this company of local spatial experts.

Stadsarchitecten.nl forms part of the series of activities around Superman in the city.
PRIVATELY COMMISSIONED HOUSING

10 excursions > see the short films on www.archlokaal.nl.

Leiden, Nieuw Leijden

Amsterdam, IJburg

Eindhoven, Strijp

Almere, Homeruskwartier
VISITS TO PRIVATE INITIATIVES

Enschede, Roombeek
Groningen, De Linie
Rotterdam, Nesselande
Waalwijk, Alphabet
OUTDOOR COLOUR PRIZE is an initiative from the Kleur Buiten foundation.

**Organisation**  Architectuur Lokaal

**What**  Le Médi, Rotterdam

**Why**  Because the use of colour forms an integral element of the architectural concept

**To whom**  Geurst & Schulze Architecten, Rotterdam

**Prize**  5,000 euros excluding VAT

**Jury**  Adri Duivesteijn (chairman), alderman in Almere * Els Bet, urban designer * Henny van de Boogaart, colour expert * Jim Schuyt, director of housing association * Bart Mispelblom Beyer, architect * Hans Ibelings, architecture critic * Indira van ’t Klooster (secretary), Architectuur Lokaal

Photo: Stefan Müller
What is your vision of the development of the field of work? The editors of De Olifantenkooi challenged fifteen young and ambitious architects and clients to outline their views on the future.

For architects it is no longer strange to participate in or initiate projects that carry risks. Developers in turn no longer see their role as powerful clients as the obvious one. Developments will soon no longer take place on the basis of power, but as the result of the combination of initiative and knowledge. The new challenge is to find a relevant aim. Not for what, but for whom? Increasing the social relevance of architecture might very well be the new challenge and offer an answer to our misfortune.

Besides clear insights, the gathering threw up important questions:
- In our field of work, are we dealing with an economic or a social problem?
- Does our work not generate money any more, or do we not have added value any more?
- Is it about creating economic value or social value?
- Will we in retrospect have an economic boom combined with a slump in terms of content?
- Have we all earned a lot of money but contributed little socially?

New opportunities
Perhaps the economy is not the most important reason why so many in our field of work feel so miserable. Opportunities are largely seen in:
- participating in small-scale developments;
- private commissions, some organised on a collective basis;
- forming ad hoc coalitions between architects, developers, advisors, builders and financial backers.

‘Perhaps the economy is not the most important reason why so many in our field of work feel so miserable’
Offices as Laurens sees them
‘A friendly mess, that’s what makes me happy’

In Creative Valley, a multi-tenant building for ‘innovative SMEs’, Laurens van Doorn, owner of NIC Commercieel Vastgoed, demonstrates that he is ahead of the game where new office concepts are concerned. In his view, the occupant is truly at the heart of the office. The concept works: all the offices are full. How on earth did he manage that at a time when corporate buildings stand empty?

Text Anne Luijten
Creative Valley and its spectacular outcroppings have featured in all the architectural journals by now. The building in Utrecht is anything but an anonymous grey box on a nondescript industrial estate. The glass boxes ‘hang’ on the spine of the building, balancing each other out on both sides of the core. The architecture is not the only striking thing about the building, though; the occupant concept is equally remarkable and innovative. In developing the concept, Van Doorn focused fully on the needs of future occupants: small and mid-sized creative knowledge enterprises.

Nomadic
The owner of NIC Commercieel Vastgoed wants to create working environments that stimulate people, places where they feel at home. And it’s working: despite the crisis, Creative Valley has hardly had any empty spots since its completion. Van Doorn is already working on new projects by now, this time in various locations in Amsterdam. He himself is not tied down to a single spot. Van Doorn has an office in Creative Valley, but describes his style of working as ‘nomadic’. In Restaurant Dauphine in Amsterdam, for instance, he feels completely in his element. That is where he meets with his business relations – and interviewers. ‘This place has the right atmosphere, a mix of professional, cosmopolitan and bustling.’

Station or superhighway
Still, it’s striking to note that you developed Creative Valley in Utrecht, on an industrial estate along the highway. The concept seems like it would be more likely in the city centre. Laurens van Doorn: ‘The heart of downtown would also have been possible, absolutely. The ambiance of the city centre is perfect for this concept. But then you’d practically have to be on top of the station. Accessibility was an important issue during the development. You either need the station or the superhighway. As far as that goes, Papendorp (an industrial estate in the Leidsche Rijn area of Utrecht, ed.) is ideal. It’s located at a major junction; you can be in Amsterdam in 20 minutes. There is also a fantastic public transport connection to the station. The special high-speed bus line takes you to Utrecht Central Station in just 12 minutes. That bus stops diagonally across from the front door and barrels through the city on a dedicated bus lane.’

Frayed edges
So what factors did you consider in choosing a location? ‘As far as I’m concerned, accessibility is my guiding principle. Take the woman who leaves work at 6 o’clock in the winter. How pleasant is the environment for her? That consideration eliminates a place like Amstel North for now. Just for the time being; I absolutely believe that North has potential – but it will have more in ten, twenty years. The North-South Line will do so much for North. Amsterdam North has a different ambiance than the city centre.’ Despite your disclaimers, I can see the gleam in your eyes. ‘Yes! I love unfinished fringes, the rough-edged, raw spots. I have an absolute faith in developing the brownfields, like locations in Amsterdam that we’re working at now: Schinkel and Houthavens. Amazing areas! Schinkel has all sorts of odd things in a row; the major advertising agencies are there, but there’s also a garage where you can have your car inspected. It’s a cheerfully random hodgepodge, and it makes me happy. I bought a piece of land on the waterfront and am already working there with occupants.’

Lively
‘Accessibility is good too: it’s right next to the motorway around the city and just five minutes from the Zuid station. As far as ambiance goes, the area could be linked to Amsterdam South. Not necessarily my favourite part of the city, but it is a very lively area. I love the Houthavens as well; they still retain a certain roughness, but new buildings can still be added. MVRDV architects designed the Alphabet building for us here, a concept with units that SMEs could buy, complete with financing package. There’s nothing else like it in Amsterdam, even though many smaller businesses are sick and tired of paying rent for years. They’d rather be investing in their own pensions.’

Rough idea
How does a development project work? You buy a piece of land, and then what? ‘No, it doesn’t start with the land in my view; it starts with the occupant. The first step is a rough idea. Once I’ve found the right place for that idea, I take my time to think through the whole concept. I talk to occupants as soon as possible to get input. Property development is a long-term profession. You have to take that time; that’s when something emerges, when things happen. An occupant suddenly crosses my path, and then another, and another. That occupant heard something from someone; that’s the way it works. That is why I spend all day talking: I tell people about my ideas.’

Brainstorming based on consumer insights
Property developers these days seem to be constantly talking about ‘the occupant’, but many of them don’t seem to progress
Building on ambition

beyond standard market research. How are you able to achieve a hold on that occupant?

‘I look around a lot, spend a lot of time on the road, talk to people; that’s what triggers me. I’m infinitely fascinated by catering establishments, restaurants and so on. I derive a lot of inspiration from them. I look at how people move through that space. Why are they at their ease there? What atmosphere does it have and how is it created? People look for the setting that suits them. I try to translate that into working environments: they should be comfortable and have a pleasant atmosphere. My background in advertising may help; I’m accustomed to brainstorming based on consumer insights. That’s the key, but it’s not just a trick that you can casually throw in there.’ ‘Offices haven’t been standard products for a while now. Primarily sticking to a thought process based on your land positions really isn’t going to cut it. Just look at the huge number of empty office buildings. As long as we view office buildings exclusively as a financial product, the vicious cycle of unoccupied premises is going to be fed. We have to start building based on the tenant’s preferences, not based on raking in some of the profits.’

‘I am fascinated by catering establishments, restaurants and so on. I derive a lot of inspiration from them.’

Uncompromising

How does that vicious cycle in office production work? And who needs to take responsibility to break out of it? ‘Everyone who earns a profit from developing a new office building. The tenant who agrees with the property developer to take a share of the profits when it is sold. The investor who is triggered more strongly by the quality of the rental contract than the intrinsic value of the building. And the city government that keeps issuing land-use permits because they need the revenues to patch the holes in their budget. All of them are equally culpable and have a death grip on each other. And then investors refuse to write off unoccupied buildings, making redevelopment impossible and pushing us towards 10 million square metres of unoccupied office space. Incomprehensible.’

Do you retain ownership of your buildings? ‘That depends on the project. In the brownfields, you eventually expect value to increase once the area flourishes. We kept Creative Valley, too; that’s our poster child. We built it without any compromises, during the deepest point of the crisis. We were able to stick to our original choices. As a result, it has become a beacon of individuality; it’s distinctive. That is the essence of its strength. We have enough dime-a-dozen buildings.’
SKYLIGHTS WIN PRIZE

VELUX Trophy 2010
Biennial prize awarded by Velux

What School “De Zuidlanden”, Leeuwarden

Why an innovative application of skylights as contemporary and eye-catching architecture

To whom Zerodegree Architecture from Amsterdam, Bouwgroep Dijkstra Draisma from Dokkum, and NVB Ubbens Bouwstoffen from Groningen

Prize 7,500 euros excluding VAT, and a painting by Kamagurka

Jury Michel Sombroek, director Velux * Hans Ruijssenaars, architect * Gert Smi, HIBIN * Rob de Groot, Bouwgarant * Indira van ‘t Klooster (secretary), Architectuur Lokaal
CONVERSION

Excursions to offices in Eindhoven (Boschdijk student housing, Granida, Blauwe Engel) and Rotterdam
Building on ambition

Granida, Eindhoven

De Blauwe Engel, Eindhoven

Strijp, Eindhoven

Central Post, Rotterdam

De Machinist, Rotterdam

Excursie kantoren Eindhoven | De Blauwe Engel
Learning from abroad

In recent years Architectuur Lokaal has built up intensive contacts and exchanges with governmental bodies, organisations and people working at national policy level in many European countries. We establish contacts with relevant foreign agencies active at local level and in the field of practice through lectures, exchange meetings and study tours. Developments abroad are important for Architectuur Lokaal and for Dutch architecture policy, as much can be learned from the way in which architecture policy is created in the countries around us. And, conversely, there is often great interest abroad in the way architecture policy is shaped in the Netherlands. In the quarterly magazine Architectuur Lokaal, a foreign correspondent illuminates building patronage in another country each year. In 2010 that was Alex van den Beld (of architecture firm Onix), who wrote about the building industry and about building patronage in Sweden.

Dusseldorf
An annual congress was organised by Architektenkammer NordrheinWestfalen (NRW), the architectural association of this German federal state. Architectuur Lokaal was asked to make a contribution. This year the theme was: Architecture Politics for Nordrhein-Westfalen. With this the association was putting a new subject on the political agenda of the federal state, which equals the Netherlands in terms of size and population. The meeting in 2010 was attended by the newly elected members of parliament in the NRW federal state, and the speakers included Architectuur Lokaal and other representatives of foreign organisations. Architectuur Lokaal gave an introduction to experiences with architectural policy and commissioning buildings and development in the Netherlands, and with European public procurement procedures.

Copenhagen
Efforts to put national architectural policy in place in Denmark got underway some years ago. Indeed, the government has even made architecture an export policy. Following on from this, many Danish municipalities launched initiatives. This prompted the Danish National Architecture Centre (DAC) to invite representatives from municipalities in Copenhagen for a congress aimed at sharing experiences. DAC invited Architectuur Lokaal to give an introduction about the Dutch architecture centres.

Brussels
One of the results of the meeting in Hamburg was an initiative from Architectuur Lokaal and the Flemish Government Architect to start an international pool of expertise concerning the selection of architects and to consider to what extent European public procurement and competition procedures — such as the Open Call in Flanders — could be brought more in line with one another. At the end of the year the first preparations for that were made by the Flemish Government Architect’s Team in Brussels. In addition, Architectuur Lokaal took part in a two-day study tour organised by the Netherlands Institute for Heritage to acquire insight into European politics and the related organisations.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcPLOZJuMB8
Hamburg

The Bundesstiftung Baukultur (Federal Foundation for Building Culture), in partnership with the IBA and the Goethe Institut, organised its first international network meeting entitled Connect Baukultur, in the IBA Dock in Hamburg. ‘We organised this day,’ said chairman Michael Braum, ‘because through the European Forum for Architectural Policies (EFAP) we learn much from policy makers and about organisational structures, but less about how we can connect shared aims of architecture and urbanism, about how we should not only work top-down on the strength of professionals and politicians, but also how we can design public space that is of a high standard. Nonetheless, this education in building culture is on everyone’s agenda, and communication with the public is the key in that.’ The Bundesstiftung is subsidised by the Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development. Representatives from national architecture organisations from Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Romania, Russia, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands and Slovenia took part in the discussion, as did Architectuur Lokaal.

Meer weten? www.bundesstiftungbaukultur.de
A national architecture policy never got off the ground in Germany. But many initiatives at the level of the federal states take on local conditions to give substance to the notion of Baukultur (Building Culture), according to Carl Zillig, academic staff member of the Bundesstiftung Baukultur (Federal Foundation for Building Culture) in Berlin.

No national policy
In 2000 the German central government came up with a plan to set up a German Centre for Architecture in Berlin with funds from institutional, industrial and private benefactors. The centre would then lobby for a Federal Foundation for Building Culture. That failed, but the idea turned out to be popular enough to maintain momentum. In 2006 the parliament approved a federal law that made it possible to finance a new federal institution, which became operational in 2008.

Bottom-up strategies
Various organisations and foundations had already set up initiatives much earlier. The most well-known of them is Stads-Baukultur Nordrhein-Westfalen, headed by Ulrike Rose. Architecture initiatives has also been developed in other federal states, albeit with a less extensive and ambitious agenda. An example outside the bigger

For more than ten years there has been a discourse in Germany one could gather under the name Baukultur (Building Culture). This discourse mainly deals with the perspectives and the policy with regard to our built environment. Even so, a description such as ‘the culture of building’ proves inadequate, since its meaning extends beyond architecture alone. The term should be interpreted as an integrated approach to processes and projects that affect our built surroundings. It is based on transdisciplinary challenges and focused on solutions.

Germany is an area of experimentation for bottom-up strategies for a building culture.
cities is Bauwerk in Oldenburg, which has done well for the past seven years in a city with 150,000 inhabitants, close to Bremen and Groningen. Similar agencies exist in many much smaller cities. Some of them focus just on architecture, some are run by volunteers only, but all contribute to local discussions and provide points of view for their building culture. Sponsored by public bodies, Germany in 2011 is demonstrating how it is still an area of experiment for bottom-up strategies for a building culture that affects a wide audience in everyday ways.

**Mix of expertise and the commonplace**

The history of various ‘Baukultur’ initiatives and organisations in Germany is still brief, though successful. Although the public discussions and the developed policy do not together constitute a full-fledged national architecture policy, they do illustrate how the term Baukultur could acquire substance. A balanced mix of professional expertise, the interdisciplinary potential of people from the profession and, especially, the everyday is of importance in that endeavour.

**Activists and lobbyists**

Although national top-down initiatives and organisations paved the way and demonstrated why Building Culture constitutes an added value, they achieved little. That is because the built environment cannot be just a product of policy. Rather, it must be embedded in a hybrid context of local factors. Activists, lobbyists, designers and policy-makers have found one another in local platforms in many German cities. If this experimentation continues from the bottom up, then the term ‘Baukultur’ might one day be just as successful as the terms Kindergarten and Autobahn.
Jealousy

In Flanders over the past decade the impression has often been created that architecture can celebrate a party every day. Developments in Flanders are increasingly viewed from the Netherlands with jealously, something that had been unthinkable for a century — except perhaps a romantic longing for uncontrolled development. From a Flemish perspective, that shift can largely been explained by the exceptional position that architecture has always occupied. In Flanders, one had to search for ‘good’ architecture, in the margins if need be, and despite opposition from the government and other organisations. If architecture did manage to materialise in such a climate, that it was a cause for celebration. The desire for architecture therefore formed the underlying project of critics and architects.

Underdog

Marcel Smets (1947), Flemish Government Architect from 2005 to 2010, describes that — also in an issue of OASE (issue 83, from 2010) — as ‘the feeling of living in chaos’. ‘In Belgium,’ he says, ‘we’ve had to set up the entire structure from scratch. Compared with the Netherlands, we’re starting from an incredible underdog position.’ And indeed it is according to Dutch models that both the Flemish Architecture Institute (VAI) and the position of Flemish Government Architect were established, at the behest of the government. The former must stimulate architectural culture, the latter the quality of space. In 1998 Bob van Reeth (1943) shook everybody up and laid the foundations, most effectively expressed in the Open Call procedure by which a public body, under the direction of the Government Architect, acts as client in an architecture competition.

‘Developments in Flanders are increasingly viewed from the Netherlands with jealously’
‘A party that drags on too long become dull and decadent’

Automatism
Van Reeth’s successor Smets has continued to deploy this instrument and has tried to put emphasis on the intersection between infrastructure and urbanism. In partnership with the VAI he launched the rather ominous term ‘architecture reflex’, as though architecture was to be an automatism. It illustrated what was gradually at stake, and what the horizon had become. At the end of 2010 Smets was succeeded by the young architect Peter Swinnen (1972), a founding member of the Brussels office 51N4E. In early 2011 Swinnen presented his Seven memos for an enlightened culture of building.

Reflex
For Swinnen it is clearly no longer simply about ensuring the acceptable quality of each individual architectural commission. What’s more, he has dropped the term ‘reflex’, together with the emphasis on policy that is to be automated. The new Flemish Government Architect takes a broader view: he wants to play a role in drawing up a new Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders, defining the position of Flanders as a European region, and implementing innovations in the healthcare and housing sectors. For that, the Open Call system will be simplified, and a ‘PPS Grant’ will be developed to enable social values to play a role when private agencies construct infrastructure and community amenities.

Post-war generation
In addition, a prize will be established for exemplary public patronage, comparable with the Gouden Piramide. The Government Architect also wants to get involved in the debate by highlighting themes or issues, or by supporting regional and international organisations with a ‘BWMSTR Quality Label’. The desire of the post-war generation for architecture has, to paraphrase the closing words of the memos, been replaced by the hope for ‘an intelligent, generous and future-oriented building culture.’

In other words, that is to say that architecture may not simply suffer from its own success. The danger exists that the social support for architecture becomes so great, and the interested parties so numerous that only the average, the regulations, the academicism and the consensus will dominate — and thus Belgium can indeed learn a thing or two from the Netherlands. A party that drags on too long becomes dull and decadent. Policy should not concentrate on what gradually happens of its own accord, even if it was unthinkable twenty years ago.

More info? www.vlaamsbouwmeester.be
Landscape according to Steven
Looking 400 years into the future

Text by Mark Hendriks
Steven Delva (32) is working on an extraordinary assignment. This young landscape architect is designing a visual quality plan for surface storage of radioactive waste in the Belgian town of Dessel. The intended duration is more than usual: Delva is looking ahead to the coming 400 years. The first hundred years focus on the storage process; the fissionable materials will be stored in long, narrow buildings that will then be covered in heaps of sand. “In the visual quality plan, we not only set parameters for the architecture, but also formulate guidelines for structuring the outdoor areas, the plants and road construction, naturally also taking into account the strict safety requirements in effect at this type of site,” Delva says. Covering the following centuries after the nuclear waste has been stored, the visual quality plan offers suggestions for new forms of use. Delva: “All you’ll be able to see by then is two hills. As a landscape architect, I then think: what can you do with it?”

Open call

Steven Delva is from the Belgian province of West Flanders. After graduating from the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, he stayed in the Dutch capital to start his own firm: Delva Landscape Architects. In his office on Nieuwpoortkade, he explains why it’s important for the Belgian federal government (his client is NIRAS: the Belgian Agency for Radioactive Waste and Enriched Fissile Materials) to focus on spatial quality aspects in storing nuclear waste. “Those hills are going to be there for a long time. It’s important to consider how they are situated, what opportunities they offer for ecology, the economy and recreation, about the significance of a newly created energy landscape.”

A visual quality plan for nuclear waste storage is fully in line with the impression that many Dutch people probably have of Flemish commissioning practices: a strong sense of responsibility, an intense focus on spatial quality and promotion of an integrated approach. Dutch designers have been coveting the ‘open call’ system for years. The system allows government agencies to submit spatial and architectural issues and problems to the Flemish regional government, which then ‘markets’ them. The concept has countless advantages, in Delva’s opinion. “Everyone – young and old, local and international – can take part, which ensures that diverse solutions are proposed. The organisation requesting the solution can choose from a rich palette of design visions and ideas.”

Unexplored territory

In contrast to many public procurement procedures, the ‘Open Call bureaus’ are selected on the basis of their story rather than the price tag. The Flemish regional government plays a key role in that. “They have a good feel for spatial quality on projects and encourage an integrated approach – which means they also link projects.” There is no easy explanation for this difference between Belgium and the Netherlands. It may be because the Flemish are more willing to take risks, Delva suggests. “They are open to the ideas of young architects and are more likely to dare to venture into unexplored territory. They are less interested in references and annual budgets.” The role of the commissioning client in Belgian Flanders may seem very clear-cut, especially from a Dutch perspective. Where architects, urban planners and landscape architects in the Netherlands have been forced to look for new clients as a result of the economic crisis, municipalities are facing cutbacks and project developers are merely maintaining the status quo, Belgium has seen far fewer changes. Steven Delva: “Project development as it happens in the Netherlands has hardly taken hold in Belgian Flanders. The Belgians don’t want to live in planned neighbourhoods. They see the ability to build their own home as a much higher priority.”

World war

In spatial terms, it means that the layers of government – the federal government, the regional governments, provinces and municipalities – are still the parties that commission the projects and identify problems. Delva has noticed that he receives a great deal of room to manoeuvre from those government authorities. In Lommel, he worked with the Brussels-based bureau Plus Office to design a visual quality plan for the city centre and expand that plan into a strategy for the entire city and the surrounding landscape. “We are working on a framework that introduces coherence between existing and new initiatives. It seemed at first that not much could be done in Lommel, but this vision for main lines and structures gave the municipality a city planning direction that made it possible for them to break through impasses.” Another current and relevant topic that also demands an integrated approach is population decline. Delva: “Many municipalities want to reverse that trend on their own, without a large-scale vision. But dealing with population decline on a regional scale has a much better chance of succeeding.” Delva also experienced a lack of regional vision when he spent time in West Flanders working on the plan known as ‘Landscape as the last witness’, about the memories of the First World War and the legacy that remained. Despite their open attitude, the province and the municipality of Ypres initially wanted to keep the project limited to within the city limits. Surrounding municipalities had coalition governments with different political compositions, which would only cause difficulties – was the argument they provided. Landscape architect Delva convinced them to take a regional approach. “The war did not stop at the city limits, and neither did the morphology of the landscape. Landscape planning and design are completely unrelated to administrative boundaries.”

More info?

In September 2011 Steven Delva in partnership with the Province of West-Flanders is organising a series of debates about the differences in landscape planning between the Netherlands and Flanders.
At the request of Step to European partnerships, Architectuur Lokaal presented an introduction to school building for a group of English school heads. It took place during a study trip to the Netherlands from 28 February to 3 March 2010. The study trip was organised by STeP for the Specialist Schools and Academies in London. The theme of the study trip was school building. This theme is currently topical in England on account of the Building Schools for the Future programme that started in 2003 and that affects or will affect many school heads.

The main points of consideration of the study tour

- What examples are there of a transformational approach to learning and teaching within schools?
- How have stakeholders been engaged in developing visions for transformational learning and teaching?
- How are new technologies supporting transformational learning and teaching?
- What impact has the vision for transformational learning and teaching had on the design of learning spaces.

Schools visited

Secondary schools
- Nieke, Roermond, www.niekee.nl
- Broekhin College, Roermond, www.broekhin.nl
- Bouwens van der Boije College, Helden Panningen

Primary schools
- OBS De Stapsteen Herten, Herten, www.destapsteen.nl
- Bs De Zonnewijzer, Roermond, www.basischooldezonnewijzer.nl
- Latasteschool, Horn, www.alloysiusstichting.nl/scholen/latasteschool
- De Achtbaan, Melick, www.achtbaan-melick.nl
- Hubertusschool, Herten, www.hubertusschoolherten.nl
- Octopusschool, Swalmen
In the Air
Architectuur Lokaal takes a study trip to the USA

The Dutch government is increasingly stepping back and leaving more room for market forces. But is it actually possible to achieve quality without active government involvement, for example with regard to architectural policy, the construction of exceptional buildings, or the design of public spaces? If the answer to that question can be found anywhere, it will be in the USA, the country that could be said to have invented the private initiative. Architectuur Lokaal took a study trip to Washington and Chicago, in part to learn more about patronage and project commissioning in that country.

Zoning laws
We spent ten days talking to prominent developers, housing corporations, lawyers, investors, architects, municipal officials, users, occupants, journalists and cultural organisations. The result was an impression of the diverse aspects of the building sector in America. Everything, absolutely everything turned out to be for sale – even the air rights and the expected sources of funding (e.g. tax credits, tax increment financing). In areas where sufficient economic pressure can be brought to bear, quality is created by giving privileges and incentives to the organisations doing the building. Mayors and aldermen play important roles at a personal level; government policy as such is much less relevant. Developers take risks, while architects primarily serve others. There are zoning laws that cover certain areas, but there are no master plans that encompass an overall vision. That means that areas with limited economic pressure can deteriorate quickly. It is taken for granted in the US, and is not considered a trend that requires a response, but there are those who do care about the problem and manage to achieve (minor) successes.

In the Air, a book describing the trip, will be published in autumn 2011, offering Dutch policymakers and designers useful information about patronage and clienthood in the USA.