

With ZUS, Elma van Boxel (1975) and Kristian Koreman (1978) are working on solicited and unsolicited designs and research studies in the field of architecture, urbanism, and landscape design. They strongly believe that the architect has to claim a strong position in public debate on the future of our cities, and see a large share of their proactive work as urban politics. The projects of ZUS are never just architectural statements, but fundamentally routed within the city, civic society, and an extensive planning tradition.

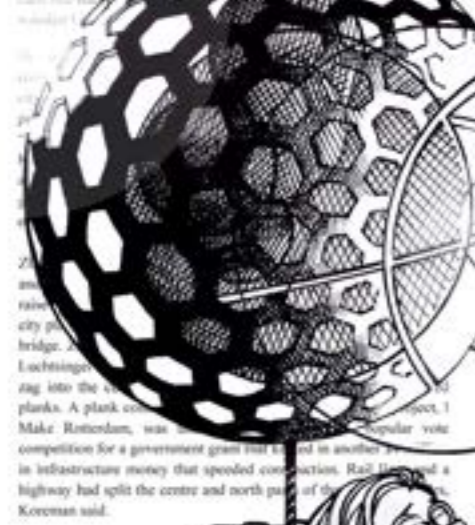
How Indie Architects Revitalize An Area From The Inside Out

The most effective way to bring positive change to an area is through personal understanding of problems as well as involvement and investment in solutions, but how does one go about accomplishing this? Architecture firm ZUS and urban strategist team Sipo have been responsible for extensive bottom-up spatial planning projects in Rotterdam. Together, they will utilize the city of Rotterdam as their classroom to explore these concepts in the fifth installment of Stadsklas May 22nd.

ZUS Architects is familiar with addressing problems in cities through resident-based, pragmatic solutions. The firm is in the final stages of completing an extensive three-year campaign to bring new life to the previously run-down areas of Rotterdam, in particular by raising finances for the construction of a pedestrian bridge connecting Rotterdam's Central and North districts through an extensive crowd-funding campaign. The realization of the Luchtsingel bridge addresses growing concerns over bringing more creative innovation as well as commercial activity to the neglected economy of the North with a solution expressed by the residents themselves. The bridge in conjunction with other initiatives in the I Make Rotterdam campaign is facilitating the social and physical reconstruction of an entire neighborhood, all completed without government aid or intervention. During their Stadsklas on May 22nd, ZUS and Sipo will work their way across the Luchtsingel, which extends through the Schieblock to the Harplein Station, to discuss the process of their project and how it has come to fruition.

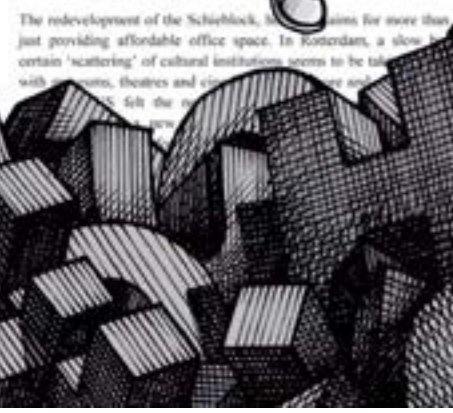
Dutch city Rotterdam crowdfunds a bridge

Modern development had cut off a once-thriving core of Rotterdam from the rest of the city. A new pedestrian bridge would take the city back to its roots.



The Schieblock redevelopment level

For years, the Schieblock in Rotterdam stood empty. Now the city is using it as an urban laboratory. The initiative for the redevelopment studio from Rotterdam, ZUS Architects, is building on such initiatives in the city centre.



Adaptive urbanism by

It was recently announced that Elma van Boxel and Kristian Koreman of ZUS [Zones Urbaines Sensibles] are curators for the next architecture biennale in Rotterdam. They spoke to them about the transformation of the Schieblock into a multi-tenant cultural building, which they call it, that they initiated and that will be part of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam in early 2012.

Schieblock is in the midst of renovation. Kristian Koreman and Elma van Boxel are curators for the next architecture biennale in Rotterdam. The building is only the start of a study into the gradual transformation of the surrounding district, within the context of the city's overall development and in relation to the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht.

Urbanes Sensibles: Urban Spatial Intervention

Urbanes Sensibles is a research and practice initiative in Rotterdam, Melbourne architect Andrew Ross met with the founders of Zones Urbaines Sensibles, ZUS.

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I recently had a conversation with Kristian Koreman of ZUS. He also gets that question often, as he has designed extremely high-end private homes. At the same time he has put together a publication and exhibition where he shows his research on where money comes from, what it goes to, and where things go wrong in this system.

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We do think we are architects. We explain what we do to you. We use our time before, we use our time now.

The redevelopment of the Schieblock in Rotterdam is more than just providing affordable office space. In Rotterdam, a slow process of 'scattering' of cultural institutions seems to be taking place with museums, theatres and cinemas.



When I first interviewed ZUS in 2006, the office had only existed for three years. At the time, principals Elma van Boxel and Kristian Koreman wondered, 'Often we ask ourselves which challenges are solvable with good design, and which can really only be solved through politics. After the tsunami in Asia or the hurricane in New Orleans, the question arises to what degree human influence has on our surroundings. What means are still tangible for a designer at larger scales?' In 2014, ZUS won a major design competition in New York that deals with this exact question. Now they are in America, having just founded ZUS NY.

Inclusive archipolitics

NETHERLANDS — TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER, ILLUSTRATION: KLAUSTOON

Since Hurricanes Katrina (2005) and Sandy (2012), an awareness of the need for a more inclusive way to solve its climate problems has gained ground in the United States. After Sandy hit New York, it was with amazing speed that 'Rebuild by Design' was initiated.* The competition's formula, to bring stakeholders to the heart of effective resilience planning, has been quite successful ever since. Designs were issued (and won) by renowned firms like OMA and BIG. But among the six finalists was also a team consisting of MIT, ZUS, and De Urbanisten, together with Deltares, 75B, and Volker InfraDesign. The team received roughly €135 million (of a total of €830 million) to realize their proposal for New Meadowlands in New Jersey. The aim is to work with local governments and communities to ensure that the design is incorporated into the lives of everyone involved.

'When we heard the news, we were busy making Pompenburg Park at the Luchtsingel (see A10 #60), a park underneath our crowdfunded wooden bridge in Rotterdam, literally building it with our own hands,' says Van Boxel. Now ZUS spends a good deal of their time in New York, gearing up for the next big thing. This interview took place via Skype, email, and face-to-face contact, which appropriately reflects their hectic way of life at the moment.

Last year, you won 'Rebuild by Design', and at this very moment you are in New York dealing with all sorts of involved parties to get it realized. In what phase are you now, exactly?

We are currently engaged in talks with large engineering firms, to see how we can best work with them. For such a big project, we can only proceed in cooperation with a major partner. At the same time, we are in discussion with the state of New Jersey, which is preparing the competition brief for the project and thereby utilizing our input to formulate the task as precisely as possible. It seems we must still be patient for a few months before the project actually begins, but then we also have ten years to work on it.

Like in the Netherlands, you deal with communities and stakeholders, with a focus on ecology, community,

culture, and landscape design – an inclusive way of working that influences spatial planning and peoples' lives. Thus, your projects are usually also political. Is working in the US different from here?

If interdisciplinary and proactive work is an ambition in Europe and the Netherlands, it is a necessity in America. To get a project done, you have to work proactively through all the political layers, and you automatically come up against economic and environmental factors. These must somehow be integrated in the plans. You will have to create support from top to bottom. In that sense, working in America is fundamentally integrated and always political. It sometimes takes a little longer, but it's very valuable.

Among your assignments to date, which were good learning projects for New Meadowlands?

Test Site Rotterdam, of which the Luchtsingel was a part, has convinced us that if you want your ambitious projects realized, you need to get your design, politics, and finance in line. That means having not only a strong narrative that mobilizes many actors, but also that you should pay attention to the smaller elements. Almere Duin, for instance, has taught us that you can combine water safety with urban development.

When the city of Rotterdam was facing massive vacancy problems in its central business district, it was ZUS that came up with a strategy to revive both the office towers and the urban surroundings of Schieblock. It took courage to take the risks they did, but it also encouraged a large number of people to inhabit both the indoor and the outdoor space. At Almere Duin, they introduced dunes to the flat landscape of Almere (NL) as an addition to the existing public space, while simultaneously creating a new waterfront typology.

What new skills are you bringing to America?

We wouldn't say anything new, but rather an openness to be able to deal with the complexity of the system. And experience with integrated water projects, of course. We grew up with water, and living with water, not in opposition to it, is in our blood.

Tell me about the most interesting parties with whom you are working in the US.

We've just been invited as visiting professors at the Syracuse University School of Architecture New York. We proposed a multi-year studio boldly baptized 'Gentrification Lab NYC - Contesting the evolution of metropolitan space and politics', a project that takes gentrification, affordable housing, and public infrastructure as its main topics. To make it really public, we collaborate with the Van Alen Institute. Both Van Alen and Syracuse conduct their own agendas in the city, and thereby generate public debate. They recognize in us an archipolitical way of working, and we can work well together in a city like New York.

Since 'Rebuild by Design', has there been a spin-off for countries outside the Netherlands?

Yes, we've just been selected for the Metropolitan Vision for Aix-Marseille-Provence, in a team with LIN and ORG. It's a national-level project, similar to Grand Paris, but then dealing with a region that is under intense pressure from climate change and migration. We're thinking about ways to create an overflow from the wealthy Provence region to the poorer city of Marseille. Apart from a number of strong natural elements, you see there a kind of 'agri-sprawl' – disorderly agricultural activity. We want to create radical landscapes so that wholesome olive groves and vineyard landscapes can flourish once more. Our collaboration with MIT continues with this project.

The first time we spoke, back in 2006, you were still making bags and doing small projects. Do you miss those days?

We're still doing small projects! Culture complex Annabel, for instance. For that, we're totally involved in the design, from the building down to the napkins. It's extremely important to keep working on all scales. In that sense, nothing has changed – only the bandwidth has become larger.

* This inclusive design competition is headed by the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force and the Department of Housing and Urban Development in New York (HUD), in collaboration with the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University, Municipal Art Society of New York, Regional Plan Association, and Van Alen Institute.