



ROTTERDAM
SCIENCE TOWER
SEPTEMBER 2016

DELTAMETROPOLIS ASSOCIATION
INDEPENDENT NETWORK FOR METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT
IN COLLABORATION WITH
MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY AND TU DELFT

OPPORTUNISTIC URBANISM CLOSING EVENT

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

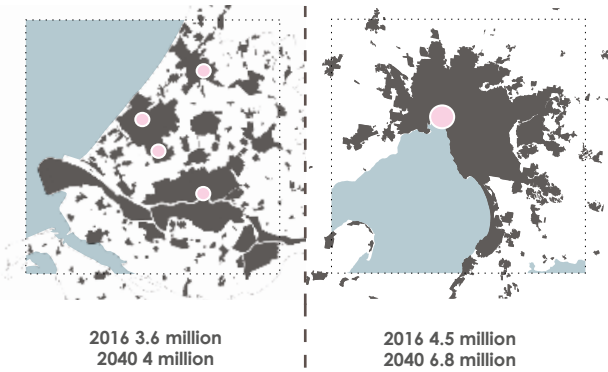
On 9 September 2016 Deltametropolis Association, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne and the Technical University of Delft, organised a closing event for the two-way international exchange on Opportunistic Urbanism. The event included presentations from Melbourne experts, contributions from the visiting students and a lively debate with experts from the national government, developers, architecture and from overseas.



“Opportunistic Urbanism” is the provocative title of a two-way exchange between two contrasting metropolises: Southern Randstad polycentric urban region and the monocentric, sprawling city of Melbourne. The exchange took place as part of the ongoing project “Atlas Slimme Verstedelijking” (Atlas Smart Urbanisation) which investigates the underused potential that lies in the existing urban areas. The outcome of this project, 6 inventory books that illustrate 3260 locations in the area of Southern Randstad with the possibility for (re-)development, formed the solid basis for the Master studio of Opportunistic Urbanism to take place at the University of Melbourne. Eleven students from both architectural and urban design backgrounds worked on a selection of 5 unconventional sites and responded critically to the challenge towards new typologies of living environments in those areas. Their Melbourne experience of a less state-led, more flexible and dynamic housing production serves as a fresh view for evaluating the existing housing stock and exploring new paradigms.

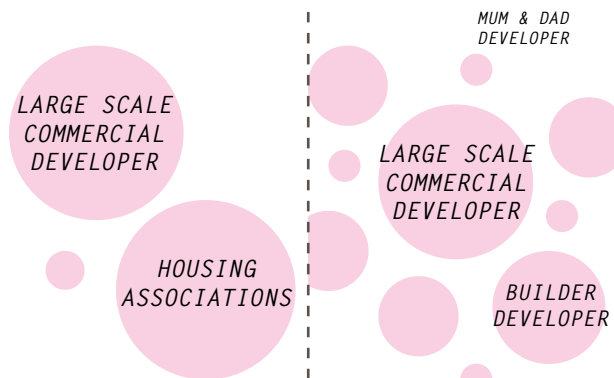
During their two-week stay in the Netherlands, the students visited diverse examples of world-known Dutch urbanism in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, they attended workshops with TU Delft professors and collaborated with students from TU Delft and Erasmus University. The closing event aimed to broaden the discussion and promote a dialogue among students, academics, professionals and public authorities regarding the challenges and opportunities that are found in developing the underused space of our cities.

With the city harbour silhouetted in the background, this closing event took place in the Rotterdam Science Tower, led and moderated by the director of Deltametropolis Association, Paul Gerretsen. The research of the Atlas books, showing a great potential for development within the existing city, introduces us to the challenge of the day. “There is so much space but we are still not making the best out of it”. The research of the Atlas books shows great potential but inner-city development remains a challenge. What can we learn from our international guests?



Southern Randstad VS Melbourne: Growth and metropolitan structure (Katherine Sundermann and Andy Fergus)

Katherine Sundermann and Andy Fergus, studio leaders from Melbourne University, took us into the world of Melbourne planning. The message was clear: we are dealing with similar tasks, but within a different scope. Illustrated by the so-called ‘mum-and-dad developer’ the access to developing houses in Melbourne is quite good. When financial resources are available, anyone can build his or her own house. This model is deeply connected with Australia’s culture, where residential property ownership is a major driver for the local economy. The Netherlands on the other hand, is characterised by a large proportion of social housing, spatially expressed in monotone but high quality housing, dominated by big developers and housing associations. In the context of a changing societal and economic framework, the Opportunistic model is proven to be more resilient and performing considerably better: it’s



Southern Randstad VS Melbourne: Housing production models (Katherine Sundermann and Andy Fergus)

hardly been affected by the crisis of 2008, and it is flexible enough to adapt to the new needs of the society.

The visiting students were asked to initiate the debate with a number of provocative statements towards the Dutch housing environment. How can we bring more diversity and reinforce identity in our neighbourhoods? Can we adapt the existing building stock in order to densify and allow for future growth? How do we best facilitate civic engagement? What is the role of technology in bringing social cohesion to our cities?



Living Environments in Southern Randstad and Melbourne Photos from Azarya Ashadi Putra Halim and Patrick Bullen

Four experts from the field of urban development also contributed an introductory statement to the debate.

Eric van Winsen, director at BPD for the region of North-East and Middle Netherlands, pointed out the new demand for houses due to the uplifting market. The new demand does not regard only the quantity but also the quality. Next to the attractive pictures from the Melbourne urban environment, it seems that the average building in Melbourne is still characterised by a lack of quality. However, we can learn from Melbourne’s way of densifying the city, using the “house to house” principle, in which the building plot is being better utilised in order to maximize the usable surface.

Edward van Dongen, concept developer at ERA Contour, seemed positive that the market is already adapting to a new way of working. According to him there is a lot of investment power; the question is how to get the right projects and how to direct development towards smart solutions.

Daan Zandbelt, the new advisor on spatial planning for the government, commented on the metropolitan

challenge for the Dutch cities: “It is complex but also relatively simple. Randstad Holland is actually a metropolis in denial. No one really wants to acknowledge it, but we are already using it like one.” Regarding the housing challenge, he was positive that we can learn from Melbourne’s precinct development: “You don’t need to use big scale developments anymore, we’ve already seen projects get smaller and smaller over the decades. Make use of very local and specific qualities. [...] but at the same time be part of the metropolitan system.”

Rory Hyde commented on the changing role of the architect. The architect nowadays becomes an entrepreneur, and unsolicited architecture seems to be a way to re-orient architectural practice after the global economic downturn. Is it short term? And then back to normal? This world is not coming back. New partnerships, writing briefs and seeking sites and opportunities. New ways of designing the city, then engaging with stakeholders. The final statement made by Rory was the starting point for a fruitful debate; “the city should not be a product, but a process”.

“Don’t wait for the phone to ring, the world of the waiting architect is gone”

- *Rory Hyde, Curator of Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism at the Victoria & Albert Museum*

“How do we keep our cities affordable?” This first question came from the audience, where journalist Jan Jager expressed his scepticism towards the Melbourne model with its global image as a desirable, liveable city. Which has a great impact on the city’s affordability. Andy Fergus confirmed this statement. Indeed, in the 60s and 70s the wealthy moved out of the suburban precincts when they were still able to access the city centre, where employment and services are found. Nowadays we deal with a different situation. Lower incomes are being pushed to the periphery and what emerges in Melbourne is the donut city where highly educated occupy the city centre and the outer high quality landscape at the urban fringes. According to Jan Jager what is missing nowadays in Dutch cities is an intermediate housing form, in between



Jan Jager stressing the importance of affordability in our cities.

expensive commercial rent and social rent from housing associations. In this aspect housing affordability in The Netherlands still holds a resistance to the market through housing associations. However it seems that new models need to be invented.

Vincent Taapken, creative developer, talked about the rigidity of the existing system to bringing new solutions to the front. Creative projects such as Rotterdam West development, when the old developers return, result in the same development types as everywhere else. If instead we use what was developed in the crisis, where shortage of money would allow short term solutions to come up, a much more interesting result could be achieved. Vincent sees opportunity in the collaboration between smaller companies for larger precinct developments as well as the inclusion of CPO and PO projects in larger development projects.



Vincent Taapken explaining the role of the small developer.

And what about the demand for density? Paul Gerretsen brought to the discussion one of the major aspects related to inner city development: the planners dream for compact cities which coincides with a growing desire for compact urban living. But even if people ask for density nobody wants it in their backyard. The effect of NIMBYism on subtle densification is what facilitates the move towards large scale high density investment. Such developments promote an ethic of “extraction and consumption of value rather than sharing of value”.

And what is the role of planning in this process?

“Most big developments take seven years from initiative to realization. [...] Don’t ask the people what they want now because you get the wrong product”

- *Vincent Taapken, creative developer*

Until now we’ve thought of planning as a factor that regulates and controls development rather facilitates it. Alex Wandl, researcher at the Urbanism department of TU Delft, stresses the importance of good use of the existing infrastructure. What is the minimum top-down infrastructure needed in order to allow bottom-up processes to take over?

One of the few female voices in the discussion, Marieke Hillen declared: “At the moment of the economic downturn the government didn’t change their attitude or processes or taxes to meet bottom-up projects”. Saskia Sassen talks about the physical as well as mental ownership of the city. How can we learn from such approaches in order to update our governance structures?



Marieke Hillen on redesigning government structures.

The panel concludes with a provocative assertion: “Perhaps the crisis was too short-lived!” When you are poor you need to be smart, you have to be inventive. Small developments often have much more energy than big scale investments.

Concluding, is there a potential for city development through less NIMBYism and more co-creation? Could Opportunistic Urbanism be the one that happens when the different actors work together towards a shared vision?

MORE INFORMATION

More information on the international exchange, presentations and photos from the event:

http://deltametropool.nl/nl/opportunistic_urbanism

More information on the Atlas Slimme Verstedelijking research:

http://deltametropool.nl/nl/atlas_slimme_verstedelijking

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Debate panel

- | Edward van Dongen | – ERA Contour
- | Rory Hyde | – Victoria & Albert Museum
- | Eric van Winsen | – BPD
- | Daan Zandbelt | – Board of Government Advisors

Moderator

- | Paul Gerretsen | – Deltametropolis Association

Report

- | Anastasia Chranioti | – Deltametropolis Association
- | Marrit Terpstra | – Deltametropolis Association

Photos

- | Ana Luisa Moura | – Deltametropolis Association

Studio leaders

- | Katherine Sundermann | – MGS Architects
- | Andy Fergus | – City of Melbourne

Core collaborators

- | Alan Pert | – prof. Melbourne School of Design
- | Anastasia Chranioti | – Deltametropolis Association
- | Paul Gerretsen | – Deltametropolis Association
- | Daan Zandbelt | – Board of Government Advisors
- | Birgit Hausleitner | – Technical University of Delft

PARTNERS

