

Parallel Cases // Exhibition
4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam 2009

REPORT
by Ralf Pasel, Curator

**4th International Architecture Biennale
Rotterdam 2009**

Parallel Cases @ RDM

A Production of IABR, RAU&B and IHS

CURATOR: RALF PASEL

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IABR INTERNATIONAL
ARCHITECTURE
BIENNALE
ROTTERDAM

RAU&B Rotterdam
Architecture
Union & Bureau

IHS
Making cities work
Crafting



Foto: Marcel van der Burgh

PARALLEL CASES // 4TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE ROTTERDAM

Open City: Designing Coexistence, 2009

REPORT by Ralf Pasel, Curator Parallel Cases

QUALITY ASSESSMENT | GOALS | ACHIEVEMENTS | PARTICIPATION PARALLEL CASES

It was the goal of Parallel Cases to contribute with an additional exhibition to the Open City-Designing Co-existence Biennale. An exhibition that was dedicated to more academic, research-in-design oriented projects than best practice projects, as they were planned to be presented at the main exhibition at the NAI, by curator Kees Christiaanse.

After a quick-scan with Kees Christiaanse on the expected products in the NAI show, it was evident, that universities shall play a less important role in the main exhibition than first anticipated and that the focus of the show will be on realized projects dealing with the issue of the Open City.

If, as Kees Christiaanse stated, the Biennale should be more than just a mere exhibition, namely a wide field of research and experimentation, than the question would evolve who would be the more suitable parties to execute and fulfil this goal if not universities and other research institutions, dealing with urban issues and the global phenomenon's of today's agglomerations.

It was the aim of Parallel Cases to complement the Open City Biennale with this sort of academic research oriented projects and contribute to the actual debate by giving universities a voice.

The advantage between theory and practice is that in the academic world one is not obliged to follow the constraints of a projects realization, be it with respect to political interests, to building regulations or budget restrictions or other. A university offers a wider field of experimentation, to analyse different urban scenarios, to test their adequacy and to judge them accordingly. Academic research is a perfect laboratory situation!

As curator of Parallel Cases it was my hope that all this would allow for a higher visionary freedom in order to develop new strong ideas, which contribute to the debate on the Open City in a much more consequent if not even radical way. It is my conviction that here, in a 'parallel' test case situation, lies the fertile intellectual breeding ground of our future cities!

When we initiated the worldwide call for projects in January 2009, it was hard to predict if and what results to expect. What sort of projects we would receive (the description of the Open City as such was still pretty vague at the time), what sort of quality, what sort of relevancy etc...

The response was satisfying and comforting. Almost 300 projects and project-proposals were handed in from countless universities all around the world.

From that day on, one thing was evident: the Open City is a worldwide issue and lots of parties wanted to get involved into the discussion. A perfect pool-position!



In a diligent selection procedure of reading and discussing through all proposals, a jury of specialists finally selected 45 projects to be presented at the Parallel Cases show. The projects were originating from 28 universities of 20 countries, and gave an excellent cross-section on how the Open City is perceived and worked upon all around the world.

The fact that only about one third of the received projects were finished and the other two thirds were still developing in their design and research process shows how new and upcoming, but also how explosive the topic of the Open City is around the world.

However, it was surprising that 50% of the universities didn't tackle issues in their own surrounding, concerning problems they would rather be familiar with, but dealing with situations far from their own urban reality, far from their own social context and by consequence far from their country of origin.

It seems that the legibility of an urban condition and the ability to deal with it in an abstract way is to be destined to the fresh and unprejudiced approach of an outsider.

Universities in the US embracing projects in Brazil or North Korea, universities from Holland working in Ghana, Cuba or Istanbul and Suisse researchers exploring the Russian situation or wide parts of Africa [...].

However, as to the exhibition the challenge lay in the coordination of various projects still in process; an almost impossible task considering geographical distance, time difference, language difficulties and varying cultural backgrounds in the communication with the authors.

At the same time however, it provoked a unique situation where in many cases animated, sometimes quite emotional debates on the Open City could be stimulated, giving an enormous impact on the outcome and results of the participants' project- and research work.

As to Parallel Cases, content wise this debate was extremely fruitful and an almost ideal situation for a real research biennale.

In terms of a curatorship of an exhibition though, it was rather tricky, since everything was blurry and, considering the running time of some projects in respect to the opening date of the Biennale, it was for a long time almost impossible to anticipate on what results to expect at the end. Certainly taking into account that some parties decided to withdraw their project in the last minute and others started a political dispute over their project - that's actually still been fought about and exceeds way beyond the exhibition as such.



CONCEPT PARALLEL CASES

Consciously we had chosen to feature the Parallel Cases exhibition of the 4th International Architecture Biennale in a neutral, introverted setting, a non-hierarchical space.

A space, that would only come into life through the ideas of the participants' projects.

The leitmotif for the exhibition was the ancient Greek agora. The birthplace of 'Demos', a place, where space and democratic life were actively interconnected - a democratic space.

The forum in the middle of the agora simultaneously gave an overview of the Open City and shows its rich diversity. The surrounding buildings of the forum that were in the antique city dedicated to specific urban functions were represented by 45 alcoves, each one showing a different project.

The forum was, as it used to be in ancient times, a platform for discussion, where different opinions - different projects go into debate with each other. It was a space of opponents, of contrasts. Contrasts in scale, contrast in cultural backgrounds, contrasts on the vision of how to proceed with urban development, contrasts of differing future ambitions and many more.

LOCATION PARALLEL CASES

The decision to feature Parallel Cases on the terrain of the Rotterdamse Droogdok Maatschappij (RDM), a former shipyard enclosed by one of the world's biggest ports, was a manifestation of openness as such.

At present, the area undergoes an extended transformation process. The formerly closed industrial site is being converted into a new Rotterdam knowledge oriented hub, where parts of the University, the Academy for Architecture and Urban Design and other educational institutions as well as numerous business-related enterprises settled down.

RDM, located on a pier in the centre of the harbour, is surrounded not only by the ports heavy, fully automatized container industry, but also lies directly adjacent to Heijplaat, a traditional small scale docker village that even though still perfectly intact, has been swallowed up by the port 's developments over the last decades.

Due to the programmatic mix, the colliding scales and the 're-opening' in terms of accessibility of the area, RDM was a perfect example showing the potentials of the Open City in a specific Rotterdam context.



A graphic design featuring a grid of small, square images. The images show various people and scenes, likely related to the Global Studio project. The text "global studio" is prominently displayed in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with the letters "g", "l", "o", "b", "a", "l" in the top row and "s", "t", "u", "d", "i", "o" in the bottom row. The images are arranged in a way that they seem to be part of a larger narrative or project.

GLOBAL STUDIO IS AN INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND PLANNING THINK + DO-TANK SPEARHEADED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM PROJECT TASK FORCE 8 ON IMPROVING THE LIVES OF SLUM DWELLERS IN 2004.

Developed by the University of Sydney, Columbia University and the University of Rome - La Sapienza, Global Studio aims to impact design and planning education and professional practice through the establishment of international, interdisciplinary, and multi-institutional partnerships. The focus of Global Studio's efforts have been international, working with disadvantaged communities. Beginning with Global Studio Istanbul (2005), Vancouver (2006) and Johannesburg (2007, 2009) Global Studio has worked with local and community academic partners in Turkey, Canada and South Africa.

Since its inception, Global Studio has involved over 450 students, academics and professionals from more than 30 countries, 50 universities and 10 disciplines in projects with disadvantaged communities, bringing together approximately equal numbers from the Global North and South. It has included participants on issues defined as important to the community, and through a participatory process assists in improving people's lives in disadvantaged communities. This includes building capacity and enabling change. Global Studio helps prepare emerging design and planning professionals who can contribute to sustainable

PROCESS PARALLEL CASES

Above all I want to stress the fact that the overall achievement of all parties and people involved in Parallel Cases was outstanding.

Looking back, to me the result of the Parallel Cases exhibition proves all efforts right, which is also echoed in a series of international publications, articles and praising comments by journalists around the world. Parallel Cases was the insider tip of the Rotterdam Biennale!

In despite of all positive aspects of the show, some organisational deficits regarding the project management cannot be disguised.

A critical and clear evaluation with all parties involved would eventually help enhancing similar situations in the future, improve the mutual co-operation and the efficiency for activities yet to come.

.ralf pasel | February, 2009



FACTS AND FIGURES ON PARALLEL CASES

GENERAL CREDITS

Curator: Ralf Pasel
Project manager: Jan Duursma
Project secretary: Marjolijn Vegter

Producers: International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam - IABR
Mr. G. Brugmans, Director IABR
Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Desig - RavB
Mr. C. van Langen, Director RavB
Institute of Housing and Urban Development Studies - HIS
Mr. J. Fransen, Director IHS

Supported by: RDM Campus
Port of Rotterdam
pasel.kuenzel architects

Exhibition design: pasel.kuenzel architects, Rotterdam

Jury project selection: Mr. G. Brugmans
Mr. C. van Langen
Mr. J. Fransen
Mr. T. Rieniets
Mr. R. Pasel
Mr. J. Duursma



FACTS AND FIGURES ON PARALLEL CASES

OPENING CEREMONY

More than 500 people were joining the opening ceremony of this Biennale event on Friday September 25th in the monumental RDM machine hall where years ago the ss Rotterdam and other mega ships were constructed.

The keynote speakers were:

Ricky Burdett (GB), Centennial Professor in Architecture and Urbanism at the London School of Economics. Ricky Burdett is leader of the Urban Age project of LSE and Chief Advisor on Architecture and Urbanism of the Olympic Delivery Authority London 2012.

Lars Lerup (US), architect and critic. Lars Lerup was dean of the Rice University Houston, Texas and is chairing the William Ward Watkin professorship at Rice.

Ralf Pasel (Ger), Visiting Professor of architecture and Curator of Parallel Cases.
Ralf Pasel is principal architect of pasel.kuenzel architects.

During the first weekend more than 4000 visitors visited the 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam.



FACTS AND FIGURES ON PARALLEL CASES

BIENNALE AWARD

As part of the opening ceremony Lars Lerup announced the three winners of this years Parallel Cases Biennale Award.

Next to him the jury consisted of Liesbeth van der Pol (NL), Chief Government Architect of the Netherlands, Dieter Läßle (Ger), Professor of Urban and Regional Economics at the HCU Hamburg, Emiliano Gandolfi (I), architectural critic and Floris Alkemade (NL), architect and urban planner.

The three winning projects were:

Leaping the Fence from the Royal College of Art, London.

WOC - Working on Cities, Ghana a collaboration of the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design (RAvB), the Institute of Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), Rotterdam and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana.

Shoafat RC by Bezalel Academy of Art and Design Jerusalem.

The three special mentions were:

Spatial Limbo, (Tamkang University, Taipei), Startankstelle (Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig) and European communities of Europeans (Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst, Sint Lucas, Brussel-Gent).



FACTS AND FIGURES ON PARALLEL CASES

ROYAL VISIT

During the official re-opening of the RDM Innovation Dock on October 29th, the Parallel Cases Exhibition had Royal visit. Prince Willem-Alexander - Prince of Oranje and Prince of the Netherlands visited the exhibition amongst others with Minister Jacqueline Cramer (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment) and Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb (Mayor of the city of Rotterdam). They attended a private guided tour by curator Ralf Pasel.



FACTS AND FIGURES ON PARALLEL CASES

PARTICIPANTS IN PARALLEL CASES

Europe:

ETH Zurich (CH)

Royal College of Art, London (UK)

The University of Sheffield School of Architecture (UK)

Delft University of Technology and International New Towns Institute (NL)

Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design (NL)

Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies - IHS (NL)

Eindhoven University of Technology (NL)

Artez, Academie van Bouwkunst Arnhem (NL)

Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst, Sint Lucas Brussel-Gent (BE)

University of Rome La Sapienza (IT)

Politecnic University of Turin (IT)

Technical University Berlin (DE)

University of Hamburg (DE)

Ludwig Maximilian University Munich (DE)

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz University of Hannover (DE)

Technical University Dresden (DE)

Bauhaus Dessau Foundation (DE)

Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig (DE)

Brandenburg Polytechnic University (DE)

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (GR)

Timisoara Polytechnic University (RO)

Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (IL)



America:

Harvard Graduate School of Design, GSD (US)

Columbia University (US)

Vassar College (US)

New Jersey Institute of Technology (US)

Maryland Institute College of Art (US)

University of Washington (US)

Clemson University (US)

University of California at Berkeley (US)

Ricardo Palma University (PE)

Veritas University (CR)

Asia:

Tamkang University, Taipei (TW)

Chinese University of Hong Kong (CN)

Tokyo Polytechnic University (JP)

Africa:

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology - KNUST - (GH)

Australia:

University of Sydney (AU)



Thank you to everyone who contributed to the succes of Parallel Cases!



