

Toespraak / Speech

George Brugmans

algemeen directeur / executive director IABR

Opening IABR–2014–URBAN BY NATURE–

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Madame Minister

Mr. Mayor

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2009, German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk opened The Free State of Amsterdam, one of the exhibitions of the 4th IABR.

In his speech he made the following observation:

'Given the fact that urban agglomerations in the customary style are ever more clearly ecologically untenable we see ourselves forced to consider a new form of building whose novelty would stem from the fact that it transforms that untenable status of urban life into its opposite, a form of building and living that is compatible with nature.'

With URBAN BY NATURE–, and with its curator, Dirk Sijmons, we continue our research into the urban future.

What motivates us is the conviction that urbanism, that architecture in its broadest sense, is a public concern.

Straightforwardly put: If 7 or even 8 billion of us will live in cities, then cities better be good.

This edition claims that to make good cities, we have to explore precisely what Sloterdijk calls: 'a form of building and living that is compatible with nature'.

We all know that won't be easy.

Worldwide urbanization is rapidly increasing.

An unprecedented effort will be required to accommodate the urban population of 2050 - let alone in a consistently livable way.

It necessitates uncommon political courage and financial genius.

Up to 60 trillions of dollars, reckons McKinsey, a consultancy firm, will have to be spent on investments worldwide, *in infrastructure alone*.

And the way these trillions are spent, *by whom and for whom*, will make the difference, we think, between a sustainable perspective and urban collapse.

That sums up the challenge: for governments, for companies, for voters, possibly even for democracy itself.

It will take a completely new paradigm of what cities actually are, what their position is, and how we make and run them.

It requires new techniques and new methods, new models of development, financing, organization, and governance – completely new policies.

And whether mayors will rule the world or not, whoever will - will have to look at the world through the lens of the city.

So how can the IABR, a small cultural organization, have an impact?

We are convinced that design is key when it comes to looking through that lens and finding that new paradigm.

The role we claim is that of a free and open cultural space that brings together designers and all stakeholders for a detour that acts as an alternative route to the future; a free and open space that thus becomes an incubator for innovation.

Our project ateliers connect the research by design-methodology to real world problems. They are solution-oriented and produce results –visions and strategies, toolboxes for governance, development models and project proposals–; results that are actionable and designed to change the status quo.

This makes the IABR *first of all* an ongoing research program. A submarine that comes up for air every two years – and now is the moment again– to present the outcomes of the ateliers and build a public argument around these: with exhibitions, films, conferences, and whatever we think of.

The bulk of the research for this edition was done in the Netherlands.

In January 2013, as a new *lead partner* of the Dutch government and commissioned by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, we set up three ateliers.

One with the municipality of Texel.

Another with BrabantStad.

And number three with the city of Rotterdam.

These three Dutch ateliers, in different ways, indeed explore “ forms of building and living that are compatible with nature”.

Their outcomes are the core of the exhibition URBAN BY NATURE–.

In the meantime we have already embarked for IABR–2016–THE NEXT ECONOMY–. We have set up a third consecutive Atelier São Paulo, in Brazil, in partnership with the municipality’s Secretariat of Urban Development.

With the Albanian government and 51N4E from Brussels, we have initiated Atelier Albania, integrated in the Albanian Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism, and directly advising the prime minister.

We undertake at least three new ateliers in Holland: one in Utrecht, one in Rotterdam again, and the third is yet to be decided.

Also, we're still carrying on in Istanbul. Since 2009 Atelier Istanbul has explored how a balance could be found between relentless urbanization and the urgency of good water management in the still green north of the metropolis.

We found solutions in the coupling of building and nature, with water as the key element – an integrated, “Dutch” approach that is new to Turkey.

The outcomes were presented at the 5th IABR.

More important, they yielded scenarios for an alternative approach to urban design in the entire northern area of Istanbul. The municipality of Arnavutköy, our partner, is all set to implement the pilot projects that we proposed.

Two years ago a second Atelier Istanbul, masterminded by HNS Landscape Architects from Holland, was set up with Beykoz, another municipality bordering on the Black Sea. Local stakeholders wanted an end to regular flooding that causes economic damage and sometimes even loss of life. Looking for an alternative, integrated and environmentally responsible approach, they came to us because of what they had seen we were doing in Arnavutköy.

The first outcomes of the Beykoz Atelier are presented in URBAN BY NATURE–.

Last but not least: Atelier Istanbul was also where URBAN BY NATURE– itself was conceived.

Late 2011 Dirk Sijmons of HNS Landscape Architects, provocatively concluded, on the basis of our findings, that the world's environmental problems can and should be solved in the city.

I made a mental note.

That was when URBAN BY NATURE– in fact started – early 2012 Sijmons was appointed curator.

Ladies and gentlemen – making biennales is teamwork.

I want to thank everyone who has joined us in this adventure.

I truly appreciate the support of our many partners and all the fantastic work that design teams from all over the world have brought to Rotterdam.

I want to pay my deep respect to the small IABR team that yet again has worked miracles.

It is my pleasure to now ask Dirk Sijmons to come to the stage to deliver the IABR–
2014–Curator Statement