



## Report European symposium 20 april 2023 by Corien Ligtenberg

# Dare to dream big

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On Tuesday night April 20th, Electron|MotMot Gallery in Breda was the scene of a symposium on European 17, the international design competition for young architects. Theme of European 17 is Living Cities. Urban Region Breda-Tilburg (URBT) is host for the six Dutch locations: Groenewoud and Kenniskwartier in Tilburg, 't Zoet and Schorsmolen in Breda, Taxandriaweg Waalwijk and shopping centre Etten-Leur.

The evening program, that was open to everyone, delved deeper into the importance of the Urban Region Breda-Tilburg (URBT) and of participating in European, and into the six locations and their corresponding themes.

**Sabine Lebesque** (Board Member European NL) gave a short introduction on European. She stressed that the goal of the competition is for the winners to get a second assignment, either to build or to follow up their ideas. Previously, winners won an assignment, and their design was built. These days it's more about research, which can eventually lead to a design. Lebesque has been connected to European since the early nineties and witnessed the shift in the competition through the years. Lebesque: 'These days, the different locations in one country are all in the same region. That makes for a stronger competition.'

**Bas van der Pol** (Alderman of the Municipality of Tilburg) was previously, as director of the Architecture Institute of Rotterdam (AIR), involved in European 15. He talked about the value and strength of European for the URBT. Van der Pol stressed the importance of finding young talent and connect them with clients, to create opportunities for the architecture (and also for the landscape). Van der Pol: 'We're a young region with nineteen municipalities and want to do great things, to add to the existing quality. It's good to have young people on board.' The six selected locations have been described as 'prototypical development sites'. Van der Pol: 'The locations revolve around big themes and challenges. I'm looking forward to new perspectives.'



Bas van der Pol  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**Ton Venhoeven** (Venhoeven CS) gave a key note presentation on **Living Cities**, the theme of European 17. Venhoeven: 'It's important to solve problems within the neighbourhoods. That asks for a big system change.' He shortly referred to his projects Rotterdam Alexander and the Olympic swimming pool in St. Denis, Paris, before focusing on his ideas for one square kilometre micro cities, with a circular economy and mobility hubs on their outskirts, that solve their problems on a neighbourhood level.



*Ton Venhoeven  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk*

Venhoeven: 'As a city, to make simple projects would leave the next one with high costs. That offers no solution. We have to change. The one square kilometre city is ideal for an integral approach. Don't keep it simple.'

Venhoeven On URBT: 'URBT, as a part of Brabant City, is strategically positioned. The challenges of the six selected locations are also global challenges. So they should be placed in a broader perspective.'

Video's introduced the six locations, followed by an discussion with **Peter van Schie** (Urban Planner of the Municipality of Breda) and **Marco Visser** (Urban Planner of the Municipality of Tilburg) on the significance for the URBT of participating in European. 'The theme is Living Cities, not Liveable Cities. There's a need for change, to do things differently, so that everybody prospers. That is our goal. The municipalities in the URBT together form a 'mosaic'. We should optimally deploy this Brabant mosaic.'



*Peter van Schie en Marco Visser  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk*

The site introductions were followed by a panel conversation, discussing some of the challenges. On stage were **Desirée Uitzetter** (Director Urban Area Development at BPD, Chair of the board of NEPROM), **Jonathan Woodruffe** (Board Member of European, architect and co-founding director of Studio Woodruffe Papa) and **Bas van Rijsbergen** (Director of Urban Development of the Municipality of Breda). Rijsbergen reflected on the Brabant mosaic.

Rijsbergen: 'The mosaic, that's the Brabant way. It's special that the nineteen municipalities decided to cooperate voluntarily, bottom up. Brabant is a rich region, everything is nearby, we have all this towns, and the landscape is pretty unique.' Uitzetter: 'The quality of living here is good.'

Woodruffe reflected on **Waalwijk**, a town with no train station. 'Here we have to address the substantial use of cars. People need that now. This is a prototypical site, where we can show what is possible, and what solutions look like.'

Uitzetter on **Kenniskwartier**: 'This site doesn't need just buildings. It's important to attract companies, e.g. start-ups, and create jobs.' Woodruffe compared Kenniskwartier with the likes of Oxford, Cambridge and MIT. Woodruffe: 'Presumably this site doesn't need an iconic building. It's more about creating a mix, a different urban fabric.'



't Zoet needs an icon, according to Rijsbergen, a statement, because it's the next big step in the development of Breda.

Both **Groenewoud** and **Schorsmolen** need revitalization. Woodruffe: 'In Groenewoud, there's hardly a connection between the buildings and the green heart. This location needs a rethink about its green, beyond clichés. Think contemporary garden city feeling.'

**Schorsmolen** can be seen as a prototypical model. Woodruffe: 'That models needs a rethink. Now it's also about the needs of the residents. Schorsmolen is a classic example of top down, maybe now we should work with them and try bottom up.' Rijsbergen: 'Once we thought this was okay, but that was then. Now, we have to make Schorsmolen future proof.'



Bas van Rijsbergen, Jonathan Woodruffe en Desirée Uitzetter  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk

**Etten-Leur** has a tradition as it comes to of innovation. Shopping centre Etten-Leur was the first indoor shopping centre of the Netherlands, a new concept, and the first gas-free district of the country is in Etten-Leur. The town is looking forward to plans that transform the outdated shopping centre into a new urban fabric. René Re ijngoudt (Municipality of Etten-Leur): 'We are open to innovation. Bring it on.'

Does the panel has good advice for the participants? Uitzetter: 'When it comes to the realization of a project, put yourself in the shoes of all parties involved and convince them.'

Rijsbergen: 'Dare to dream big. Shape a new identity, don't follow it.'

The symposium, that was moderated by **Sophie Stravens**, was attended by 75 interested parties. The night was concluded with drinks.

Earlier that day, interested participants could visit the six locations and receive an in-depth explanation of the assignments. The visits were followed by a Q&A.



Sophie Stravens questions the audience  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk



Good crowd  
Photo: Frank Hanswijk

