

# TEST SITE ROTTERDAM PERMANENT TEMPORALITY

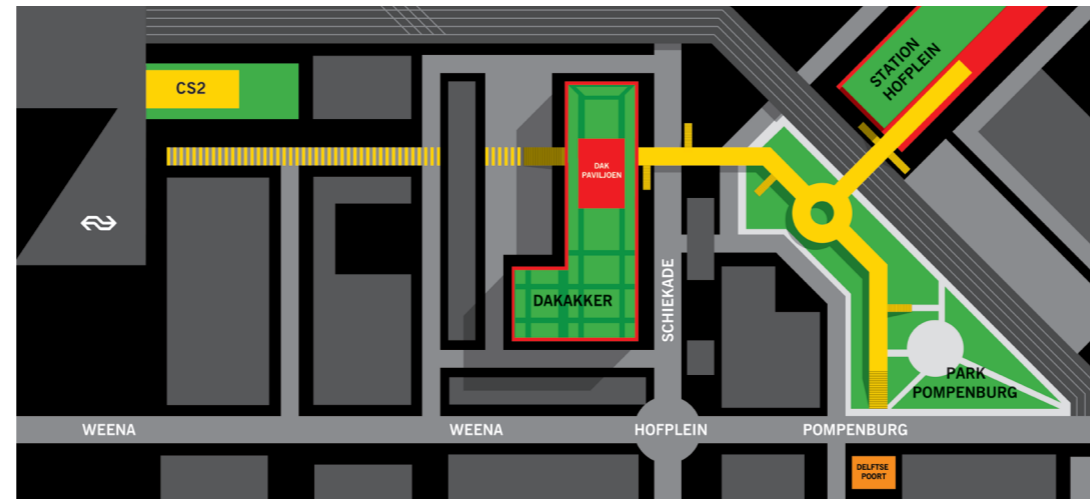
The arrival of the high-speed railway between Amsterdam and Paris in 2001 was accompanied by a boom in planning proposals. The new mobility hub had to be equipped with new offices and shops and a new Centraal Station. Speculation ensued on the property and land holdings. Meanwhile, the area's neglect continued pending the realization of planning ideas.

During this period, the Delftsehof was developed as a zero-tolerance zone, with boarded-up ground-floor units, vacant buildings, and high crime. Investment in public space and its maintenance was long gone. In the summer of 2001, ZUS [Zones Urbaines Sensibles] architecture bureau established itself in one of the empty buildings and carefully watched these developments.

In 2006, the Municipality of Rotterdam and developers presented a plan for Rotterdam Central District as a glocal city district with a 'real mix zone'. A high-end public space was proposed; elevated off the ground, crossing over the city's heavy infrastructure. Additional to this, there would be an ambitious office development of 500,000m<sup>2</sup>. The plan was presented using seductive artist impressions populated by cappuccino-drinking people. This urban plan aimed to attract the local economy and big multinationals. Property sales would fund the construction of its public spaces. However, in 2008, the waves caused by the economic crisis were also felt in urban developments in Rotterdam. The urban reality and its associated planning diverge: at that moment, the area contained 100,000m<sup>2</sup> of empty offices. To stimulate public debate on urban

Test Site Rotterdam is situated in Rotterdam's centre of post-war renovation. It is located on the railway line that separates the city centre from Rotterdam Noord. Before World War II, this location was Rotterdam's bustling heart. It was home to the Pschorr jazz club and Grand Café Loos. After World War II, a new structure of city boulevards was built, and the Weena became an office boulevard. The construction between the Weena and the railway created a no man's land comprising the Delftsehof, Pompenburg, and the former Hofplein Railway Station. The Delftsehof offered a unique urban ensemble of distinctive buildings and was home to leading Dutch architectural firms such as Oud and Maaskant. By the turn of the 21st century, the area was ignored and neglected.

In 2010, the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) invited ZUS founders Elma van Boxel and Kristian Koreman to join the Curator Team for its 5<sup>th</sup> edition in 2012. In this context, Van Boxel and Koreman, developed their ideas for Test Site Rotterdam, a research by design project that made the central district of Rotterdam manifest by in fact turning it temporarily into an exhibition in the context of the 5<sup>th</sup> IABR: Making City.



Mental map public structure Test Site Rotterdam

roof could be achieved using minimal adjustments. The roof's design is based on the building's structure. Managed by the Rotterdam Environmental Centre, local volunteers maintain the roof garden. An education program teaches local primary school pupils that the flora and fauna of the future will not only be at ground level. The Luchtsingel is one of the most important Test Site projects and threads

estranged parts of the city back together. An area formerly split by heavy infrastructure from post-war reconstruction – two four-lane carriageways, tramlines, a four-track railway – becomes accessible to pedestrians via the Luchtsingel. The financing of this bridge was initiated through the Rotterdam City Initiative and crowdfunding. In return, crowdfunders had their names or maxims engraved on the bridge's wooden planks. Consequently, the bridge has around 10,000 co-owners. Navigating the Luchtsingel, allows for new views on this part of the city.

Test Site Rotterdam has become a part of the city centre. The area's vacancy rate is declining. The attention garnered from using vacancy for programming has led to concrete results: the 24Hofpoort event, where a vacant, Brutalist tower block was programmed as a vertical city for 24 hours, eventually leads to the block being

The IABR, as a cultural space and as an international platform, enabled the municipality, property owners and developers to join in a 'sabbatical detour', a cultural process in which research by design can add value to existing plans and situations. Starting from the original plans and proposals, workshops with residents and stakeholders explored which ideas could be realized. The idea being that, especially in the face of the financial crisis, initiating small projects can trigger bigger developments, thus putting the area's potential to the test.

In 2012, ZUS developed 20 pilot projects as part of the Test Site Rotterdam. Each project combined design proposals with an alliance of committed stakeholders, underpinned by a sound business case. New forms of funding

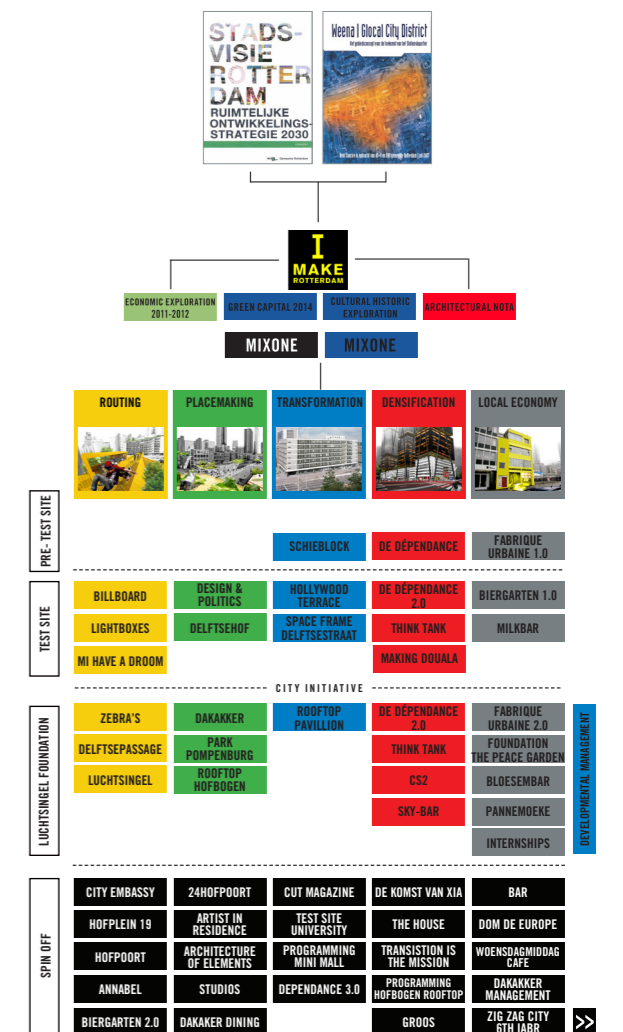
prove key to progress: crowdfunding, trading schemes, impact investment, smart partnerships with construction companies.-

In 2009, Schieblock – as a Test Site project Avant-La-Lettre – was transformed from a vacant office building into a city laboratory and business complex. Ninety companies and a number of cultural institutions settled here. Alongside the De Dépendance, the building's ground-floor units housed a bar, a cooking laboratory, an information point with bike hire, and a shop for local design products. In 2012, the Dakakker was built. Inspired by a municipal policy on climate, the Schieblock's roof was put to the test as a place to achieve a green roof without structurally modifying the building. Through developing lightweight polyester planters that doubled as roof fencing, their lightweight substrate meant a productive

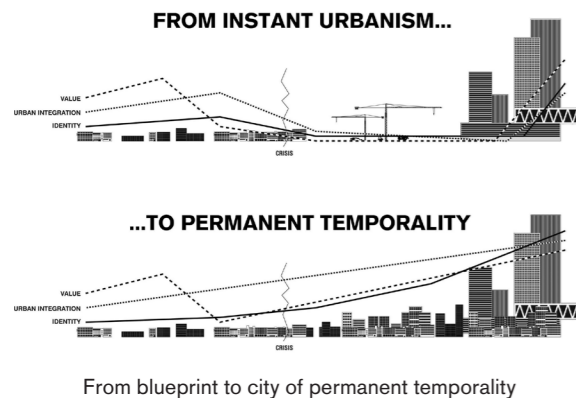
sold and developed. The Test Site's scope has increased in recent years. Many spin-offs have been achieved (see diagram below).

However, while ensembles of post-war reconstruction and public spaces were reactivated, the banks and the Delftsehof developer withdrew. The leasehold construction conceived in 2006 meant the municipality regained ownership of the property and the area. The old plans have been put on hold, and the area's future is uncertain.

ZUS and the developer Kondor Wessels, in an alliance with entrepreneurs, institutions, tenants and residents, recently sent a Declaration of Love for the Delftsehof to the Councillor for Urban Development. With this broad alliance, it is offering to invest in the region through gradual transformation, thus permanently taking the area out of its spatial and political isolation. To be continued.



Schematic overview of the numerous projects that evolved from the initial Test Site Rotterdam interventions linked to the initial vision documents of the municipality of Rotterdam



development, ZUS launched De Dépendance – a podium for city culture. The area begins attracting interest from business and cultural institutions.

Evolution scenarios

