IABR–2016–THE NEXT ECONOMY–

CURATOR STATEMENT–

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE ROTTERDAM

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It's become quite clear: our future is up to the city. It's where the majority of the world's population lives; it's where innovation takes place and where the bulk of economic value is created. Cities have more clout than unwieldy nations and divided supranational organizations. The city stands for hope. From the city we can creatively confront the formidable challenges we face worldwide: climatic change, inequality, isolation, resource depletion, and persistent unemployment.

The twenty-first century is undoubtedly the age of the city. But the fact that we pin our hopes on the city does not automatically mean it will live up to our expectations. The economy is faltering; governments are hesitant; we are facing new, disruptive 'smart' technologies and it is not quite as self-evident as we seem to think that these will yield the best possible urban reality. Inequality is growing both in our cities and among them. The infrastructure we need to make the city work is twentieth-century, outdated and overtaxed. We are stuck in the wrong routines. We may need a new idea altogether of what the city is.

IABR–2016 aims to be a platform for creative coalitions of designers and stakeholders with fresh ideas and urban imaginaries of what the twenty first century city could be like. Designs that roll out new futures; that present perspectives of cities that generate meaningful employment; cities frugal in their use of natural and human capital, cities that provide a response to growing social inequality. We want to discuss tactical and strategic interventions because we believe that only collaboration in and among cities will lead to the fulfillment of the potential of the age of the city.

We believe that the city's public domain lies at the heart of the matter. Economists applaud the agglomerative effects of the city: proximity, diversity and density are now considered keys to economic success. But they aren't enough to re-imagine the city, for when exactly do proximity, diversity and density really add to the quality of the urban realm? What exactly does the new urbanity entail? How can we optimize the qualities of the city? What will urbanites themselves experience as economic success?

IABR–2016 aims to bring various Next Economy imaginaries to life. Though we could make the existing more efficient, that's not the answer. We need to dare to envision a new urbanity that combines enterprise with urban citizenship, and that allows interaction between education and employment and between home and public life. The city as the test site for the Next Economy. How do we make our cities strong, resilient, and agile? What urban strategies successfully combine economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and social inclusiveness?

We are trying to capture the Next Economy in times of radical uncertainty. This uncertainty is largely inspired by the awareness that the old arrangements no longer work: governments are giving up traditional tasks, partially withdrawing from public space and leaving it to companies and citizens, while trying to figure out what their new role is. Rapid technological developments are as yet based

on an 'extractive' economic model: money is being earned in the city, but the money is not made by and for the city. New services lead to profiteering by small global elites of new companies. And no one knows how society will develop: Will the democratic ideal still be leading in the twenty-first century, or will a more authoritarian or libertarian system fill the governance gap created today? We need cities that can deal with an economy of ever-changing requirements.

In these days of radical uncertainty, designers can prove their worth. By revealing how the existing system works and redesigning it. By proving that new creative alliances can come up with different results. By demonstrating how spatial planning can return to the city a strong public domain that allows it to enjoy its own dynamic, address loneliness and exclusion, make the most of diversity and proximity, and ban all fossil fuel use. This requires design that makes clever use of technology, closes cycles, connects people, sectors and disciplines; that links the small scale to the large scale and facilitates growth in public welfare. It requires adaptive design that anticipates the never-ending social dynamic that is the city.

We want to bring out the new normative: our future lies in a circular, reciprocal economy; one that does not just take, but also gives and is an organic part of a vital public domain. The IABR invites designers, architects, and urban designers to spatially imagine the future – to take from what has been accomplished so far and provide us with an alternative urban economy, to present prototypes that will help us create the Next Economy. We believe in the evolutionary potential of the world we live in.

THE DYNAMICS OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: THE CITY IN THE OLD ECONOMY–

Ever since the Second World War, a single theme has dominated urban planning worldwide: growth. Technological breakthroughs (steel framing, concrete construction, the automobile) and rapid population growth changed the face of the city. We prioritized the 'functional' city. Auto mobility, mass consumption and suburbs determined the aspirations of many generations. It's clear by now we've taken a wrong turn: one that leads to dysfunctional cities.

People's urge to try their luck in densely populated places is resulting in unbridled and unplanned growth in the global South. Cities spread across fertile farmland, causing food and energy supply chains to grow longer and less green. Density becomes congestion. To get to work, hundreds of millions of urban dwellers daily spend hours in traffic jams or hang around waiting on backed up public transport systems. Of the 3.5 billion people living in cities in 2010, 1 billion live in informal settlements. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 62 per cent of urbanites live in slums; many of these new city dwellers fail to gain access to the formal economy. Some days dense smog blocks the views of Asian cities' shiny, new towers. Western rapid growers, like London and New York, are becoming too expensive for the police officers, nurses, teachers, and cleaners crucial to a well-functioning urban economy. And meanwhile, cities increasingly have to cope with 'incidents' like flooding, water shortage, air pollution, power outages, network failures, and so on. Urban life is progressively dominated by unintended consequences.

It is time to admit: our urban planning has been near-sighted. We have failed to notice that its successes resulted from happy circumstances: our energy and mobility system from the abundant availability of fossil fuels, and our mass consumption from the abundant availability of low-wage countries, with labor even cheaper in one country than in the next. In 60 years' time, we've burned up the bulk of the fossil fuels that built up over the past 300 million years. And soon, it's only logical, our supply of low-wage countries is going to be depleted as well.

Urban development has given rise to an ever more speculative real estate economy, especially during the last couple of decades. Instead of on social need, it focused on the opportunity to make money on offices, shopping malls, and condominiums. If something didn't work commercially, it was left to fall apart. Vacant buildings and homeless people coexisted. The development of an effective public transport system lagged behind the potential demand. Urbanization and the organization of mobility were not consistently developed in sync, partly due to a lack of awareness of the common good it would do if they were.

In addition, speculative urban development fired a rivalry among cities. Yet all too often, the competition was erosive rather than stimulating: 'I'm going take advantage of the things you *don't* have!' International companies had no difficulty playing cities and countries off against one another and demanding favorable financial conditions *everywhere*. Instead of committing to a single city, the globalizing economy depleted cities of resources, backing out of democratic decision-making processes and legally residing in whichever city or country imposed the lowest taxes. The city as a place of social commitment and involvement lost out to the power of elusive financial flows.

Tragically, this economic development undermined the earning potential of the city itself. But the qualities that companies now recognize as crucial to their success, urban qualities like diversity, proximity, and density, aren't readily available. They need to be organized, preferably through committed collaboration between different urban parties.

It's painful to realize how strong and how long the belief in the inevitability of the neo-liberal extractive economic model survived. But it's widely recognized today: we need new perspectives. Lacking those, the city faces falling victim to a real estate-train racing along, chiefly producing *urbanization by default*. The modern city has become part of the problem.

PERSPECTIVE: THE CITY AS PUBLIC DOMAIN–
Still, the city may be the source of the solution. Its quality literally lies in its urbanity: in its many unexpected encounters and combinations. Urbanity is that which produces new ideas – via cross-fertilization, through the unexpected. This is what a successful public space can offer the city and the economy: space that everyone can freely use and where difference and diversity have positive connotations. But the city cannot produce its unique urban qualities unaided. Well-functioning public space shouldn't be taken for granted. Making public

space flourish is a challenge. The question of how that challenge is to be taken up must be addressed again and again, seizing the opportunities available at the time.

IABR–2016's approach to the Next Economy involves the creation of a new public domain. Given strong public space, any city will be able to deal with the Next Economy. We don't want the city to adopt some new 'functionality' in the Next Economy: simply because there's no way to know which technological applications will 'win' in the future. No matter how alluring, the 3D printer may merely be the flavor of the month, not unlike the driverless car or the care robot. Much more robustly, we would like to explore how we might get the city to offer its fundamentally urban qualities to private enterprise once more; how we might create new connections between urban design and new forms of employment and production; how we might give care and health care – increasingly often the city's largest employers – new, meaningful content at a time when institutions are withdrawing, leaving citizens to fend for themselves. How can we link the necessity to develop a new urban power system to civilians' and companies' desire to be less vulnerable to the unintended consequences of technological innovations?

The strength of the city lies in its public space. The whole of the city – of places, physical and virtual, in the media and in institutions – is more than the sum of its constituent parts. A successful public domain invites exchange. If its public space is in good working order, a city generates creativity and confidence and courage, innovation and social cohesion. In the absence of such a public space we withdraw, led by distrust, spending our money to shield what we've acquired. Then, the city becomes an archipelago of enclaves, its strength mimicked by gated communities.

The public domain has a great tradition. From Greek agoras to Viennese coffee houses; from Chinese tea houses to African markets. And now we are called upon to provide public space with new content. How can we use the fresh opportunities created by new, smart technologies to empower the city? How can we explore innovative environments that yield more than making what already exists more efficient? Where in the city are the heterotopias that everyone is drawn to, that give the city its extraordinary qualities and inspire individuals and enterprises?

THE CITY IN DAYS OF RADICAL UNCERTAINTY–
The Next Economy breaks with the institutional and imaginary logics of late modernism. It doesn't pin its hopes on economic recovery, but focuses on economic transformation. It radically confronts uncertainty, is aware of urgency but above all is inspired by the abundance of fresh opportunities.

A key question is: How can we use the urban qualities economists identify – diversity, density, and proximity – to shape the Next Economy? What does a public space that invites exchange and tolerance look like? How can we connect the digital infrastructure to the physical infrastructure? How do we ensure that everyone has access to the existing wealth of knowledge and ideas, and give free rein to creativity and innovation – and in such a way that its value

is retained for the city? What choices present themselves and how should governments relate to these possible realities?

The dynamics of our cities, from San Francisco to Nairobi, is already changing under the influence of smart technology – from mobile phones to smart grids, from new mobility concepts to service platforms like Airbnb or Uber, from energy-generating façades to Internet applications that facilitate cities around the world learning from each other. But in many cases, smart meters are smarter for suppliers than for customers; Airbnb and Uber charge high service fees; Apple prunes away profits made on all those nifty apps. Entirely different is the effect of M-Pesa, the system that enables mobile payments in Kenia. By making it easier and safer to transfer money in the informal city, it facilitates enterprise. It is high time for designers to attempt to raise the level of smart urban technology: How can we use technology to develop socially inclusive and environmentally sound urban economies? What are technologically smart applications and innovations that do add value to the urban environment from which they have evolved?

Notably, we are looking for plans that will demonstrate how technology can be used to empower the public domain, and how innovation can be linked to a new and strong urbanity. Precisely urban public space can, in this time of endless virtual realities, create opportunities for concrete, physical encounters between very different people. The creative friction of such encounters often sparks new ideas. What does such a successful public place, public network, public organization, look like? How can we use the value of physical encounters? How will that value flow back to the public domain?

Even now that economists can measure the value of diversity, proximity, and density, the question remains how we can actually create added value through spatial design. How is it that the most innovative companies in the Internet enclave Silicon Valley still sport a preference for 'enclave culture'? Perhaps a public domain can only grow on the edges of certain strong environments? How do we prevent spontaneous innovation districts from losing their quality because success drives the young startups elsewhere? What should governments do, and what should they not do?

Social media and communication technology provide innovative individuals with opportunities. They can become *prosumers*: generate their own energy, grow their own food, develop skills, and market the surplus through new, cooperative alliances. Perhaps another, not necessarily individualistic future lies ahead: Can new technologies be the bases of new social relationships? Perhaps changes in power generation, in the mobility system, or the care and health care systems could lead to new urban communities? What are the spatial expressions of such imaginable futures?

There is currently a lot of emphasis on tactical urbanism. Small-scale initiatives are valuable and inspiring, but if we really want to tackle the major problems of our time, we must either (a) be able to replicate, imitate, improve, and upscale the examples, or (b) acknowledge that we cannot do without the clout, knowledge, and resources of large organizations, companies, and governments. This again raises new questions. Under what conditions is big beautiful, too?

What infrastructural requirements need to be met? Can we come up with large-scale designs that are also decentralized, adaptive, and sustainable? How will we organize the interaction between the small scale and the large scale? Which coalitions of actors will it take? And is there a way to involve an entrepreneurial state?

Cities have always had an informal economy beside a formal one. Rather than a problem, we'd better consider such informal economies invariable and be open to what the Next Economy might learn from their resilience and agility. In the global South, many people can only use their entrepreneurial spirit on the informal market: in Africa, 80 per cent of the population earns its money in the informal economy; in Jakarta, the bulk of the economy is based on bartering and reciprocal services. In the West, too, the informal economy will grow now that the withdrawing of the welfare state forces working people to take on the care of the young, the infirm, and the elderly. Critical initiatives like urban agriculture and alternative payment systems rely on informal networks, especially in their initial phase. The inevitable recognition of the informal economy will create a challenge to planners and designers. How can we purposefully use the strength of the informal economy to make the city flourish? And how can we connect it to the formal economy?

In some places, the Next Economy is already emerging. In Enkanini, an informal settlement in the South African city of Stellenbosch, the iShack project demonstrates how sustainable solar technology can illuminate life in the slums, giving locals the chance to have ideals and become more enterprising. Bristol uses smart city technology to realize social innovations that address the related problems of aging, poverty, and loneliness. Interestingly, many successful examples involve links between universities or colleges, NGOs and companies. How does this interaction work? What could it mean for the evolution of education in the Next Economy?

We do not believe that a single design philosophy will be beneficial for everyone and everything. Cities often have to contend with similar problems, but conditions in the West, East, and South vary constantly. The solutions will vary as well. IABR–2016, therefore, will not advocate a single scale or approach. The city we need most is a city that allows experiments, that has an open culture in which projects can be mutually empowering. This city actively seeks new ways to gain experience, to learn, to share local successes with the rest of the world. We welcome designs in this spirit.

–Maarten Hajer, March 2015