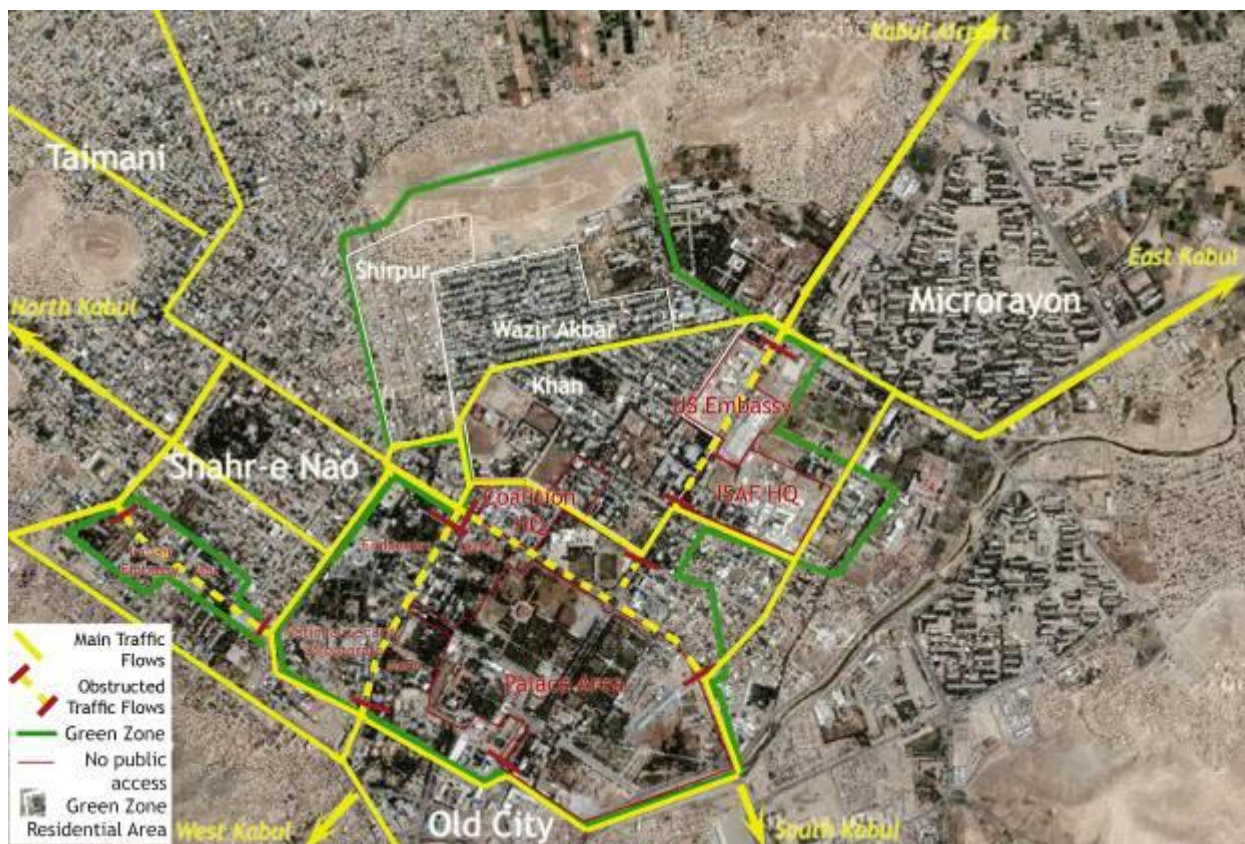


Kabul Green Zone

Formation of a Green Zone in the Capital of Afghanistan

Research Project leading to presentations, discussions and exhibitions in Kabul and Rotterdam (as part of the **Refuge Urbanism** module of the IABR, 2009)



Submitted to OSI Afghanistan

by RobertK Productions

April 2009

Project Fact Sheet

Title: Formation of a Green Zone in Kabul (Kabul Green Zone)
 Start date: 24 September 2009 (preparations: 24 June 2009)
 End date: 24 March 2010
 Locations: Rotterdam and Kabul
 Curator: Robert Kluijver / RobertK Productions
 Afghan Project Manager: Dr. Omar Sharifi
 Participating Organizations: BASA film, 3rd Eye and Kabul University (Kabul)
 IABR (Rotterdam)

Activities: Research in Kabul by Afghan professionals and students
 Preparation of materials for exhibition and publication
 Exhibition and discussion in Rotterdam
 Exhibition and discussions in Kabul

Outputs: Giant illustrated map with results of research
 Dari booklet (print run of 1000)
 A4 information flyer in English (print run 2000)
 Photographs with details of Green Zone building elements
 Video projection (3-5 min loop of tour of the Green Zone)
 Documentary Movie (30 min. in Dari, English subtitles)
 Debates and discussions in Rotterdam and Kabul.

Expected audience: Identical to that of the Rotterdam Biennial
 1,000 students and professionals in Kabul

Details of requesting organization

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Project Summary

Since the fall of the Taliban in November 2001 the city of Kabul has undergone dramatic change. The number of inhabitants of the city has grown from approximately one million to more than three million. Faced with the challenges of managing a booming city, however, the attitude of the municipal authorities has mostly been predatory. Successive master plans, training programs and grand development schemes proposed by international consultants have been neglected or subverted by the city's venal officials. Any service requested from the municipality requires a series of hefty bribes. Thus the city's infrastructure has hardly evolved from the wreckage of the civil war. Public space is completely neglected and easily annexed by private interests; partially as a result of laissez-faire policies.

Simultaneously the city has been flooded with the arrival of internationals and their Afghan allies, mostly returnees from Western countries. Although this population probably doesn't number more than 50,000, it is highly visible. Most of the central areas of Kabul have been occupied by them, much of the service industry is geared towards them – as their salaries and living arrangements are many times better than those of ordinary Afghans – and they are highly visible in Kabul's streets.

The rich and powerful, whether foreign or Afghan, don't integrate. Their obsession with security has led them to isolate themselves within their compounds and to group together in a few neighbourhoods in the centre of Kabul. Little by little a kind of 'Green Zone' has emerged. Access to the areas where the rich and powerful live has been limited; or completely blocked as around the US Embassy or the streets where top government officials live or work. Security policies first developed in Israel or Baghdad are now being adopted in Kabul, usually by the same security experts. Results for traffic circulation and pedestrian users of public space are disastrous.

Although one can see such developments occurring everywhere on the planet, in Afghanistan the effort of the 'foreigners' to seclude themselves in the best areas of the centre carries special significance. In Afghan tradition a foreigner's security is always the responsibility of his/her host. Security is achieved by integration, not by isolation. Current attempts by the new power elites to ward off any non-initiated contact with Afghans and confiscate public space remind Afghans of the time when British tried to rule the country from an enormous cantonment near old Kabul. That led to a massacre (1843) that only one Englishman survived, and the expulsion of the British from Afghanistan.

How do young Afghan urban planners, architects and socially engaged artists react to this new situation? How could the now-secluded areas be reintegrated into the urban fabric – for example, when foreign troops or the people they protect leave? An Afghan team composed of social scientists, architects and filmmakers, led by Dr. Omar Sharifi, will research the emergence of a Green Zone in Kabul. Besides the exhibition in Rotterdam, this research will lead to a detailed map of social tensions in central Kabul and an illustrated booklet in Dari. A discussion among architecture and social science students at Kabul University will ensue, which may lead to new strategies to deal with an increasingly segregated city.

About the Authors

Robert Kluijver

Curator

01-02-1968, Nicosia, Cyprus

International Relations in UvA, Amsterdam and Sciences Politiques, Paris

Robert Kluijver lived for six years in Afghanistan and is now based in The Hague. He works as the curator of the cultural centre Gemak and runs his own production company. He has a background in international relations and in contemporary art development in the Middle East. Besides programming local art events in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan and beyond, he secured the first pavilion for Afghanistan in the Venice Biennale (2005). For Gemak he curated, amongst other exhibitions, a series of exhibitions about new concepts of the border with work from Iraqi, Palestinian, Afghan, Israeli and Pakistani artists.



The curator on his motorcycle in Kabul



Dr. Omar Sharifi at a Kabul book fair he organized

Omar Sharifi

Researcher and Director of the American Institute for Afghan Studies

22-09-1978, Kunduz, Afghanistan

Master in Cultural Anthropology in Columbia University, New York

Omar Sharifi lived in Afghanistan throughout his youth, including the civil war years and the Taliban regime. Despite being passionately interested in history and social sciences, he studied medicine and became a doctor, because of the civil war. In 2003 he helped establish the Afghan Foundation for Culture and Civil Society and became head of the research and publications department there. From 2006 to 2008 he studied anthropology in Columbia University. He is currently head of the American Institute for Afghan Studies in Kabul, assisting Western social sciences researchers in their investigations in Afghanistan.

Project Description

Formation of a Green Zone in Kabul

In this study we will look at how the public space in the center of Kabul has been appropriated by the Afghan government and powerful individuals in order to alleviate the security concerns of internationals and the new Afghan elites. We will examine how this has affected current use by the Afghan public of these spaces, strategies to cope with it, and possible scenarios for future use of these appropriated spaces should they return to the public realms.



A building in Shirpur probably occupied by a Western intelligence agency. The author was hassled by first Afghan, then Nepalese and finally US security guards for taking this picture.

Urban development in Kabul has been characterized by the following symptoms since the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of the new, internationally supported government:

- *public space or government land is being privatized in an unruly and often corrupt fashion (half of a central public park was expropriated by powerful ministers).*
- *large swathes of public space, including roads and parks, are inaccessible to the general public*
- *security is a private matter (foreign agencies employ private security companies, warlords have private militias, rich families employ private armed guards) but its effects spill over into public space (retainer walls built on streets, many sidewalks off-limits to pedestrians, private construction of speed bumps, guard houses on the pavement, armed motorcades driving people off the street, etc.)*
- *Urban planning processes are slow and when they result in plans, these are often not (fully) implemented. Meanwhile, due to the population increase and a commercial boom, building activities have exploded. They are hardly regulated, and whatever regulations are implemented can be circumvented by the payment of bribes. There is thus a complete disconnect between formal and informal processes.*



*Left: This high-rise could not be completed due to its proximity to the US Embassy.
Right: one of the roadblocks of the Green Zone, blocking what used to be a main thoroughfare.*

- *Public utilities have been quasi-privatized.* This works from the top – where a new minister will replace the top levels of the staff by his own people, thus weakening institutional loyalty – to the bottom: to obtain city electricity one has to regularly bribe the man in charge of the local transformer.
- *The difference between rich and poor is increasing fast.* New shopping malls, luxury car dealers and small palaces are popping up everywhere. Most of the money comes from illicit sources (the opium trade, the looting of the country's resources, preferential access to foreign aid); at least such is the perception most Afghans have.
- Given the ineffectiveness of the municipal authorities, *public space has become a residual category*, used for dumping waste, for extending one's private activities (work, commerce) or for affirming one's sphere of security (guards, walls).



Sidewalks have disappeared to provide more security for the Coalition (left) and ISAF (right) HQ

Green Zone

The residential areas of Shirpur and Wazir Akbar Khan, the US Embassy, ISAF, UN and Coalition headquarters, powerful ministries and the Arg/National Palace area are all connected to each other, and together form a kind of Green Zone with shared characteristics.

The term 'Green Zone' is not commonly used for Kabul, and there exists no special regime as in Baghdad, where until a short while ago the US Army was directly in charge of the Green Zone.

However so many parallels can be found between the area in both cities where the Western-created government, international institutions in charge of providing assistance, international military forces and their many contractors work together within a security perimeter fencing off the general public, that the use of this term for Kabul seems warranted.



Kabul City Center, a giant luxury shopping mall



Garbage accumulating in the center of Kabul

As one can see on the map below, the Green Zone in Kabul lies very centrally, between Bibi Mahru hill (North of Wazir Akbar Khan), the Kabul River to the southeast, and Asma'i Mountain (known colloquially as TV Mountain) to the southwest. To get from the densely populated area of Microrayon (Soviet-built apartment blocks for the middle class) to Shahr-e Nao or Taimani, or from the latter areas to the Old City on the right (south) bank of the river, South Kabul and much of West Kabul, one needs to pass through this Green Zone.



Map showing the extent of Kabul's Green Zone (as interpreted by the author), some of the 'no-go' areas that straddle main thoroughfares of Kabul, traffic flows and obstructions. © Robert Kluijver 2009

Traffic jams have become a permanent feature of central Kabul. The only major urban development which has sought to address this problem is the building of a ring road, but as it lies far from the center it hasn't brought much relief to this area. Instead the trend has been to cut off more central thoroughfares: the roads passing in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior/Indian Embassy were cut off during 2008.

Project

In this study Afghan researchers (oral history researchers, documentary makers and photographers) will study the formation of a green zone in Kabul from the following perspectives:

urban planning

- public space not accessible or 'privatized'.
- transportation bottlenecks, disturbance of flows
- enclave formation (self-sufficiency in utilities, possibility to live, work and consume in the same area)
- the prevalence of particular interests over public space (balance of power between residents and the municipality/government)

sociological

- population data about the new residents (private military contractors, US contractor companies, foreign diplomats and new Afghan power elites)
- issues of adaptation of returnees and foreigners to the Kabuli environment
- coping strategies by the general public



Garbage Collection in Shirpur



a typical 'neo-Kabuli' house

architectural

- influences on architecture and interiors: Pakistan, Iran, China, West
- reflections about the kind of culture that is reflected in the new architecture

The terrain research will lead to the drawing of a map which reflects some of the encountered transformations and complexities. This map will be the central element of the exhibition,

The project is steered from Kabul, by Dr. Omar Sharifi with the support of the sociology and architecture departments of Kabul University, BASA Kabul (a network of socially committed

documentary makers), the 3rd Eye agency (a grassroots photo-agency) and Afghan professional architects.

Outputs

A large-scale map will show the results of the research into the Kabul Green Zone. The map shown by Rem Koolhaas of developments in the Gulf region at the Istanbul Biennial of 2007 will serve as a graphic example.

Two videos will be made by BASA. The first is purely visual: it can be beamed without audio in a short 3 to 5' loop. It is a view of the perimeter of the Green Zone filmed from a vehicle. The other is a documentary of approx. 30 minutes which must be seen from beginning to end. It can be viewed with headphones on a TV which is part of the installation, but will also be screened on the evening of the public debate.

The photographs, made by the photographers of 3rd Eye, will be mounted on polyplate (thin plastic) and shown unframed.

The curator and the head of the research team (Dr. Omar Sharifi) will give a presentation of the project during a public debate, in an attempt to define the characteristics of the emerging Green Zone, coping strategies and future use of public space. This debate will be followed by a discussion with the public. Dr. Omar Sharifi will also be in charge of organizing a series of debates in Kabul, with for example architecture students, students of social sciences, a 'Green Zone' audience and the general public (for example by a TV debate).

An illustrated booklet will be published by the Afghan partners, with support of the donor. The book will be given away (target 25%) and sold (target 75%) at a price reflecting little more than the production costs, in order to spread the results of the research among the Afghan public. This booklet will be published in Dari and a summary will be translated into English for publication on the web or hand-out (A4, no frills) during the exhibition.

Background: Urban Segregation Developments in Kabul

Kabul was never a poor city. Although many people lived with few resources, they did not live in squalor. The abundant availability of fresh water, fertile soil and space gave most inhabitants, however poor, the chance to live in a separate house with courtyard and kitchen garden, which alleviated whatever other economic difficulties they may face. There was also an underclass (composed mostly of the Hazara ethnic minority) who had no access to land on which to build a house; they lived mostly in hovels in the old city, which were progressively abandoned in favor of the new areas of the city, where there was more space and better infrastructure. The old city still is decrepit and poor. The efforts of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Turquoise Mountain Foundation (in Muradkhaneh) to revive its more beautiful parts have not been able to reverse this trend and it seems unlikely that they will do so in the near future.

The capital traditionally housed an urban elite, composed of the extended royal family (the Mohamedzai's), other powerful family clans (often related to the Mohamedzai's through marriage) and the families of the people then in power. These mostly resided in Shahr-e Nao (i.e. the new city, built in the 1920s) and Wazir Akbar Khan (named after an Afghan general, mostly built up in the 1950s and 60s).

Besides this upper class, there was a growing middle class in Kabul, composed mostly of people who worked for the State in industry and services, and of independent businessmen. They tended to live in and around the upper class neighborhoods, populating new areas such as Kulola Poshta, Qala-ye Fataullah, Shashdarak, Karteh Chahr and the area around the University. During the communist period (late 1970s to 1992) the middle class exploded, finding residence in the

Microrayon: soviet-built apartment blocks which were at that time considered more convenient than houses, because of services such as warm water, electricity and cleaning. These popped up in the plains between the old city and the airport.



Ongoing restoration in Muradkhaneh (l) and the still decaying riverside of Kabul's old city (r)

The communist period was a relatively good one for the disadvantaged classes, as the Soviets improved the general infrastructure of the city and promoted policies of equal opportunity in education, access to health care etc. Employment opportunities also increased. However with the civil war all these improvements disappeared.

Although these neighborhoods of Kabul remain relatively desirable because of their central location and spacious features, momentous changes have taken place in the city in the past 30 years. A first depletion of the upper class, caused by the communist purges, was followed by a massive exodus of the middle class when Kabul fell to the mujahideen in 1992, initiating four years of excruciating civil war in which most of Kabul was destroyed. The rural warlords and their henchmen occupied the former enclaves of the rich, usually treating them as spoils of war. Many other people fleeing war or drought in the countryside came to occupy abandoned buildings of Kabul, thus giving the city a rural aspect (for example by keeping livestock)

By the time the Taliban took power in 1996, the city was in ruins, its infrastructure completely destroyed or looted and government services had ceased to function. The Taliban were not able to secure funding to reverse this tendency – and arguably lacked the required motivation and skills – so the Kabul that the new Afghan government and the international community inherited in 2001 was desperately poor.

Since 2001 many members of the former upper and middle class have returned. In many cases they have been able to get their properties back, but they still have to share space and influence over how to use it with the newcomers. Those ‘newcomers’ – the warlords and their allies – have not only maintained, but in many cases considerably increased their wealth and power¹ under the new regime.

Meanwhile the population of Kabul has exploded. There are no reliable figures, but it is likely that it increased from around 1 million to over the 3 million, and it is still growing fast. The growth can be attributed to the return of millions of refugees from Pakistan and Iran, and to the perception among Afghans in the provinces that the best income-generating and social promotion opportunities are to be found in the capital.

¹ The warlords, who were already independently wealthy during the war thanks to financial support by the West and the Gulf states and the looting of Afghanistan's resources, have maintained their grip over financial flows and invested their increasing wealth in the commercial and real-estate development of Kabul.

In these conditions it would be difficult under any circumstances to rebuild the physical infrastructure and social services. The laissez-faire approach by the international donor community – create the conditions for the Afghan government to fill the gap and wait, attempt to stimulate foreign or domestic investment with tax breaks and guarantees and wait – has not speeded up this process, quite to the contrary. In addition the municipality of Kabul and other concerned governmental institutions that should take the lead in the reconstruction process do not function well. They are under-resourced and -equipped, but also suffer incompetence through nepotism, corruption and lack of dedication by their staff to institutional goals.

Therefore in 2008, seven years after the start of the new Afghan government, the vast majority of Kabul's inhabitants still live in substandard conditions: without clean water or sewage and with less and less electricity provision; and with only limited access to quality education, health or other governmental services. This causes considerable discontent and also resentment towards the powerful, whether Afghan or foreign (with more tolerance towards the latter), who have their own provision of resources through deep wells, generators and septic tanks and receive preferential access to government services through status, personal connections or bribery.



Shirpur: grazing sheep on a vacant plot used as garbage dump (l) and construction workers (r)

What the population of Kabul may not perceive is that these same developments are taking place in other cities of the world: Baghdad is the most powerful example, but Jerusalem may also be cited. Even cities in the USA such as New Orleans, and to a lesser degree other Western cities reacting to the 'threat of terrorism' are submitted to the same patterns. Alleged security concerns of the powerful justifies cutting off public space and disrupting flows of the less powerful – often in name of the general good; public utilities are privatized and the idea of equal and universal access to these utilities is being abandoned; increasing income gaps between rich and poor are seen as signs of a healthy economy, while a global war economy (or as Naomi Klein aptly calls it 'disaster capitalism') heavily distorts the domestic economy of the 'receiving' countries, creating new forms of dependency.

The exhibition, movies and book which we hope to produce in the course of this research project are not only about the city of Kabul, but contain valid lessons about this global war economy and how it affects our lives in cities.

Text and photographs by Robert Kluijver

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Communication Strategy

Most of the project communication strategy therefore focuses on Afghanistan. The fact that the exhibition comes from Rotterdam to Kabul will increase its prestige and draw the attention of the Afghan press. In Kabul it can be shown in the locales of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation or the Afghan Foundation for Culture and Civil Society – initial contacts were established, but as yet no agreements have been made.

The American Institute for Afghan Studies can organize at least one of the presentation / discussions – most likely with the residents of the Kabul ‘Green Zone’ - and will supervise the distribution of the booklet.

The other Afghan partners – BASA film and the 3rd Eye photoagency – have indicated their interest in organizing discussions among their own constituencies, which overlap with the students of Kabul University. Both organizations also have websites which will post part of the materials exhibited during the exhibition.

Finally, the author of this project will approach Tolo TV, the biggest private TV station in Afghanistan, with the request to show the documentary movie and organize a televised debate on the subject.

International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam IABR 2009

(document submitted by the organization of the IABR)

The International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) engages the fields of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture in research, public dialogue, and multi-media presentation. Conceived as a research biennale, each manifestation of the IABR is based on an urgent social agenda, and is generated with the conviction that architecture can and must contribute to solving some of our society's most complex problems. The fourth edition of the IABR, 'Open City,' will be held from 24 September 2009 through 10 January 2010 in Rotterdam. The theme will be elaborated under the direction of curator Kees Christiaanse and his team from the ETH Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich.

Curator's team:

Curator: Kees Christiaanse

Co-curator: Tim Rieniets

Assistant curator: Fabienne Hoelzel

Assistant / trainee: Peter Blume

Team: ETH Zurich, Department of Architecture

Subcurators:

De Maakbare Samenleving - Crimson Architectural Historians, Rotterdam (Michelle Provoost, Wouter Vanstiphout)

Reciprocity - Stephen Cairns and Daliana Suryawinata, Edinburgh/Rotterdam

Community - Interboro, New York (Georgeen Theodore, Tobias Armbrost, Dan D'Oca)

Refuge - Philipp Misselwitz and Can Altay, Istanbul

Squat - Jörg Stollmann and Rainer Hehl, Zurich/Berlin

Collective - Bart Goldhoorn and Aleksander Sverdlov with Anna Bronovitska

IABR office:

Director: George Brugmans

Business manager: Herman van Dongen

Editor: Jennifer Sigler

Project manager: Jet Christiaanse

Office manager: Kelly Leenders

For more information and news visit our website: www.iabr.nl

Open City: Designing Coexistence

How can architects and urbanists stimulate concrete forms of social and cultural coexistence? *Open City: Designing Coexistence* is exploring, documenting, and designing strategies for coexistence in today's cities. Open City is an urban condition that balances integrating and segregating forces, encouraging distinct communities and groups to settle, interact, and establish the dynamic relationships that we call urbanity. But in order to be sustained in the face of today's urban challenges, the Open City must be researched. Differences between rich and poor, conflicts among ethnic groups, and the proliferation of gated communities and security zones are symptoms that point to the urgent need to re-address the idea of Open City and translate it into concrete intervention strategies.

The curators of the 4th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam 2009 (IABR) have

identified six situations in which geographical, spatial, typological, and sociocultural conditions reveal different qualities and potentials of Open City. Six teams of sub-curators have been commissioned to propose independently curated and produced exhibitions on the following themes:

1. *Community* has its geographical focus in the United States, the cradle of suburbia, where the notion that the city is not so much a melting pot of individuals, but rather of communities, will be addressed.

(Subcurators: Interboro, New York - Georgeen Theodore, Tobias Armbrost, Dan D'Oca)

2. *Collective* treats the transformation of the post-socialist city under the influence of emerging radical market mechanisms in Russia and elsewhere.

(Subcurators: Bart Goldhoorn and Aleksander Sverdlov with Anna Bronovitska)

3. *Refuge* concentrates on cities of Turkey and the Middle East – metropolitan places that are increasingly exposed to political and religious polarization.

(Subcurators: Philipp Misselwitz and Can Altay, Istanbul)

4. *Squat* is found in cities like Addis Ababa and São Paulo, and explores potential synergies between the informal and the official production of urban space.

(Subcurators: Jörg Stollmann and Rainer Hehl, Zurich/Berlin)

5. *Reciprocity* deals with the migratory patterns and survival strategies of the multiple populations that inhabit the Indonesian archipelago.

(Subcurators: Stephen Cairns and Daliana Suryawinata, Edinburgh/Rotterdam)

6. *De Maakbare Samenleving* (The «Makeable » Society) – *maakbaarheid* is a Dutch term referring to a period in Dutch society in the sixties and seventies. Rethinking *maakbaarheid* for the 21st century as a number of clear spatial, economic and cultural goals is the concept for this project.

(Subcurators: Crimson Architectural Historians, Rotterdam - Michelle Provoost, Wouter Vanstiphout)