

Pull-out supplement

# theFocus

## New Designs for Asia

### Student Work from the Architecture Faculty, TU Delft, The Netherlands

Asia's rapid and remarkable economic and political growth, and the region's increasing importance in the world has led some to believe that future historians will be calling the twenty-first century the 'Asian Century'. We are already beginning to see a shift from the centuries-old Atlantic-centred weltanschauung to an increasingly Pacific-centred one. One of the most important factors fuelling Asia's remarkable growth is the region's rapid urbanization. As a result, urban studies, and its sister science architecture, are important disciplines for anyone interested in trying to pragmatically direct this growth, and improve people's lives in the process.

Gregory Bracken and Bart Kuijpers

## New Designs for Asia *continued*

THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE at the Technical University of Delft has seen an increase in the number of students from Asia in recent years. Design studios that deal with Asia attract a majority of Asian students, particularly from China. These students come to TU Delft to learn Western ways of doing things (and to get an internationally recognized qualification), but they are primarily doing so in order to be able to apply what they have learned back home. Studios that deal specifically with Asian topics are, as a result, very attractive.

TU Delft's openness to Asia can also be seen by its involvement in the IAS-led Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), which began in 2012. In fact, the Architecture Faculty hosted the first annual general meeting of UKNA in November of that year.

### The studio system

TU Delft's Architecture Faculty operates what is known as a studio system. This is very like an atelier or office, where

teachers and students interact almost as senior and junior employees in a practice. Students develop their designs and teachers give them one-to-one feedback; the semester is punctuated by a number of more public presentations, known as crits, where the student presents their work to a wider audience and receives a very public critique (hence the name).

Architects and urbanists communicate primarily through the medium of drawing. These drawings can be made by hand, but increasingly they are made by computer (drawings are also often augmented by models). The work presented here in this Focus section of The Newsletter is accompanied by written descriptions of the various projects' origins, programmatic requirements, chief design decisions, and why these were taken, as well as, in some cases, the theoretical research that informed these decisions.

With this in mind we invite you to first 'read' the drawings and then turn to the written articles. We have selected drawings that will be the most easily read by people with a non-technical background, concentrating on maps and perspective renderings. No architect or urbanist can communicate without being able to

effectively gather and present their material in a drawing, but many of them are also becoming good at expressing themselves verbally. Some even do it quite well, as you will see when you go through the design projects presented here.

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All images have been produced by the individual authors themselves, unless otherwise specified.

## The projects

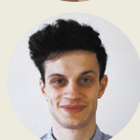
**Vertical Cities Asia** is an annual urban-planning competition, which is held between a number of prestigious universities from North-America, Europe, and Asia. TU Delft has participated in every edition of this annual competition, usually sending two teams. The projects 'The Open-Ended City' and 'Lifetime City' won joint first prize last year (and, interestingly, Jasper Nijveldt, one of the other authors represented in this Focus, was one of the second-prize winners in this competition the previous year). Organised under the auspices of the Architecture Faculty's Urbanism Department, with Prof Henco Bekkering, the design teams were led by Mitesh Dixit.



**Team A, 'The Open-Ended City'**, consisted of Stef Bogaerds, Samuel Liew, Jan Maarten Mulder, Erjen Prins, and Claudio Saccucci. Their aim was to propose a development that is able to retain the authenticity of the city while extending the dialogue between what exists and what is to come.



They wanted to uncover and intensify what already exists, while renewing the city pattern. Their master plan was based on the premise that not just 'everyone ages' (the theme of the competition) but that everything ages. Their intervention seeks to address the problem of ageing in an holistic way, paying attention to the particular needs of the elderly in Korea, while also operating within a broader framework which takes cognisance of the fact that cities, too, are constantly ageing, and growing. Located at the heart of these new communities are hybrid school centres with elderly healthcare facilities that use rare open plots of land to provide a new type of public space. This clever combination of East-Asian veneration for not only the elderly, but also for education, should serve as a catalyst for urban regeneration and growth, as well as allowing meaningful interaction between old and young.



From top to bottom:  
Stef Bogaerds, Samuel Liew, Jan Maarten Mulder,  
Erjen Prins, Claudio Saccucci.



**Team B, 'Lifetime City'**, which consisted of Laura Dinkla, Katerina Salonikidi, Maria Stamati, Johnny Tascon Valencia, and Qiu Ye, identified the inherent characteristics of Seoul's Yongsan district (the site for the competition) and used them as the point of departure for their design. They saw existing urban life as being combined with a new way of understanding the role of the street in their proposal (with its focus on traditional neighbourhoods, which they saw as places where people and the city have evolved together). They posit a high-density proposal for the area that does not necessitate the wiping out of existing urban life. Densification (a neologism you will see mentioned again in some of these projects) can, rather, be a process where the neighbourhoods' urban life can continue to evolve. In fact, by using densification instead of replacement, urban life in the neighbourhoods can even be protected and enhanced.



From top to bottom:  
Laura Dinkla, Katerina Salonikidi, Maria Stamati,  
Johnny Tascon Valencia, Qiu Ye.



**Elsa Snyder's** project seeks to redefine the Hong Kong housing typology. This small- to medium-scale development is a sensitively nuanced alternative to the rampant gentrification in this part of the city. Located on the site of the former Police Married Quarters on Aberdeen Street, one of the project's key aims was to provide affordable housing. There is a densification, but not too much, and the entire development maintains an excellent relationship with its surroundings. A vibrant mix of functions (including cultural facilities, public sitting-out space, and a covered market), combined with sensitive use of materials, create a design that works well in Hong Kong's sub-tropical climate. The project's chief innovation is the subtle reinvention of traditional shared family space. By making clever use of historical Chinese spatial dynamics, particularly the siheyuen or courtyard house, and skilfully avoiding the pitfalls of merely copying stylistic elements (which would reduce the project to a mere pastiche), the designer has presented us with a viable alternative to the ubiquitous 'pencil' tower.



**Bart Kuijpers'** contribution is another housing project, this time in Shanghai. It seeks to breathe new life into the old alleyway neighbourhoods of the city, particularly the now vanishing shikumen houses. By designing a bold reinvention of the typical high-rise apartment block, Jade Well Apartments recreates the rich diversity of the alleyway street life and should act as a welcome home for their former residents (the shikumen will simultaneously be upgraded for new up-market residents). This design will enable the shikumen's former residents to stay close to their old homes, while allowing them to keep in touch with friends and neighbours. The project's design also allows for plenty of scope for the rich social interaction that typically takes place in the older neighbourhoods of the city.



**Jasper Nijveldt's** large-scale housing project is located in Chengdu, China and seeks to nurture the everyday human experience of space in a Chinese city. This is a bold and imaginative scheme which, like Elsa Snyder's, borrows intelligently from China's venerable and fecund urban traditions. This elegant scheme shows a profound understanding of the underlying principles of Chinese urbanism and can act as a timely reminder of what is being lost, but also what can be achieved by those intelligent and sensitive enough to take the trouble to design well.



**Jonathan van der Stel's** 'Sublime and Heterotopic Landscapes' is, on one level, a design for a new university in Hong Kong, but on the other it is an ambitious essay that seeks to spatially articulate the Kantian notion of the Sublime in tandem with the Foucauldian notion of the Heterotopia. These concepts suggested themselves to the designer as he made his first site visit to the city. The sheer 'bigness' of it all had a kind of beauty, while leaving the newcomer with a terrifying sense of insignificance. The drawings here are less technical in nature than usual (especially Fig. 3 which contains a disorienting amalgam of vanishing points). The sheer vertiginousness of it all, its dislocation, are intended to intimate feelings of the Sublime, while its unifying strangeness, such a strong contrast to the Otherness of the city (which it alternatively jumps and hovers over) is what gives it its Heterotopic quality. Visitors can literally lose themselves here. The dark slab of mega-building brooding over the city is also an intriguing contrast to the rest of the 'come-and-get-it' neon more usually associated with Hong Kong.



Finally, **Ting Wen's** written contribution is less about trying to straightforwardly describe her urban intervention in the Kowloon City district of Hong Kong, but is more a thought piece that situates her project within a wider politico-intellectual context, particularly its critique of Neoliberal policies and the urban regeneration, and gentrification, that results in social exclusion for those unable to partake in this brave new world of globalized capitalism. This piece should help to clarify some of the socially driven decisions that were taken during her design process. Its point of departure is for her scheme to act as an alternative strategy for the redevelopment of the old Kai Tak Airport site, which is located nearby, and which is intended to become a new Central Business District (CBD) for the Territory. It also seeks to capitalize on some of her site's favourable factors, including its lively food culture, the result of years of inter-Asian immigration. Finally, it also illustrates how new life can be breathed into existing housing stock, particularly the shophouse. The resulting design scheme should see benefits for everyone, even the global capitalist.