

Extra Newsletter regarding
Accommodation, 8 May 2009

Introduction

The Gerrit Rietveld Academy urgently needs more space. Faculty and students are confronted with this every day; the difficulty they have reserving space for their (extracurricular) activities is one example. The shortage of space called for finding a temporary, limited-scale external solution, namely one storey in the former GAK building in Bos en Lommer. In addition, extra space will be created this year prior to the final exam period by setting up tents and greenhouses on the grounds around the buildings located on Fred. Roeskestraat.

The increased need for space is connected to the increase in students over the past years from approximately 750 to about 1,000. Incidentally, although the student population reached comparable numbers in the past, the education concept was different - a more whole-class teaching style - which took up less space. A significant part (150 students) of the increase is due to the resumption of the evening DOGtime or part-time programme. The Master's programmes at the Sandberginstituut are included in these figures.

In order to solve the shortage of space, a search is currently underway to find options to structurally expand the number of square numbers for the academy are being sought. We want to use this newsletter to inform everyone about the state of affairs regarding this search.

Prior to commencing the search for extra space, however, a number of considerations were made that mainly concern the academy's future perspective.

Considerations

The considerations are designed to determine whether extra space is truly necessary. For example, one consideration might be to allow the student population to decline again and thus eliminate the need for extra space. The academy's financial management plays a crucial role in this.

The academy's financing is arranged through the national government. The size of the budget is connected to the number of students. When the academy had fewer students several years ago, revenues were drastically lower and a very difficult financial situation ensued. Every single cent counted, the academy was running on a skeleton staff and there was no money for projects, excursions and investments, for example in the studios.

The increase in the number of students has improved the academy's financial situation over the years. The extra funds are used to raise the quality of the education. Additional teachers have been hired; there is room for projects, excursions and investments. Returning to the old financial situation is not desirable.

Basically, the only way for the academy to scale back is if we can be sure that it will not compromise the financing that we currently receive from the State.

There are a number of related issues in progress at the State level. Minister Plasterk wrote a letter to the Dutch House of Representatives in which he criticised the connection between art education and the professional practice. In short, allegedly too many artists are being trained. He referred to the smaller-scale programmes for Autonomous Visual Art (as well as Design and Music).

But that will not solve his "problem." (See our letter to the minister, published on our website). The chances of the minister deciding to give our academy the same amount of money for a smaller number of students seem non-existent, especially in the context of the new

cost model proposed by The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-Raad), which at this point looks like it will have an adverse effect.

Without going into too much detail regarding all sorts of plans for alternative funding for our education, we can assume that we will face a new type of financing scheme after 2011/12. Studies on the effects of the new scheme indicate that art education will be forced to make sacrifices. For the Rietveld, the most favourable model still represents an annual budget reduction of € 600,000. The only way we can survive such a cut is by maintaining at least the current number of students (1,000) paid for and knowing that we will not have any additional accommodation-related expenses. In an analysis for the Board of Trustees (Raad van Toezicht) we actually concluded that we would have to either grow or drastically increase tuition for (non-European) students in order to compensate for the negative impact of the proposed financing scheme. Both options would compromise the quality of our education and we feel that this is not acceptable.

Accommodation options

A number of options have been identified based on a need for an additional 3,000 - 5,000 m² of space: expand the currently occupied buildings on Fred. Roeskestraat; move to an existing building elsewhere in the city; move to a new building elsewhere in the city.

Based on a cost analysis, a new building at a different location and renovating an existing building elsewhere in the city would cost approximately the same. The other conclusion was that the academy is unable to cover these expenses. With that in mind, the number of options was scaled back to two more or less realistic options: expanding on the academy's existing site and moving the academy to the former GAK building in Bos en Lommer.

Option 1, expanding on the academy's existing site

Developing property on the academy's "own" site has always been an option (the land is on long lease).

To that end we requested the Hootsmans architectural firm to conduct an urban development study, with special instructions to come up with a plan for both our property and the British School's. (The British School has been searching for a new location for quite some time and eventually plans to vacate the site next to our buildings). In doing so, it was necessary to make allowances for the urgent request from our neighbours (Loyens & Loeff) to expand approximately 6,000 m² onto our property.

The study was carried out under the authority of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Loyens & Loeff and the City of Amsterdam's Zuidas project agency. The results of the study can be seen in the model and booklet on the first storey of the school.

There are four elements to which attention should be paid:

Spatial: Hootsmans' plan is not a bad proposal, but it shows 11,000m² of space on our site, of which we could lease approximately 3,500m²; the rest is for use by another party.

There is another scale model in the Architectural Design department. It shows that the sun only shines on our site a few days of the year...

The new Benthem Crowel building:

Unfortunately, the new building that was finished several years ago does not meet most visitors' expectations. If the Rietveld Academy stays where it is, we anticipate that we will need to adapt this building in order to make it more suitable for use. We have already contacted the Benthem Crowel (BC) architectural firm about it. Apart from the fact that the original design by BC was heavily compromised by additional demands on the part of the users, we believe that it is possible to improve the quality of light in the building. A conservative estimate of the costs of minimal adjustments is € 2,500,000 (annual depreciation approximately € 150,000, and not including financing costs).

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Area: Hootsmans' plan also includes proposals for the existing Plato site (British School), anticipating considerable volume, with room for the Rietveld academy to expand, office space and commercial housing, as well as potential student housing. However, the problem is that the City of Amsterdam currently refuses to commit itself.

According to our study on the developments in the area that we currently occupy, we can only conclude that the original strip of educational buildings on the Fred. Roeskestraat will gradually disappear, yielding to intensive high-rise blocks intended for offices and the premium residential segment.

Did Gerrit Rietveld perhaps have the right idea all along when he envisioned a place for the Art Academy on Museumplein? We have his letter and sketches in our collection. It seems that the City of Amsterdam and the State decided to give his spot to the country's largest supermarket chain...

Financial: The costs to expand on the academy's own site, including modifying the BC building, amount to at least annual depreciation costs (approximately € 150,000), rent costs (approximately € 600,000 annually) and additional operating and maintenance costs (approximately € 250,000) for an extra 3,500m². All things considered, we shared our conclusion with the Board of Trustees that remaining on the existing site would require at least an additional € 1,000,000 of our budget each year. We do not have this kind of money "to spare" in our budget. Therefore, a considerable amount would have to come from the money earmarked for education (faculty, projects, excursions and so on).

Option 2, moving to the former GAK building



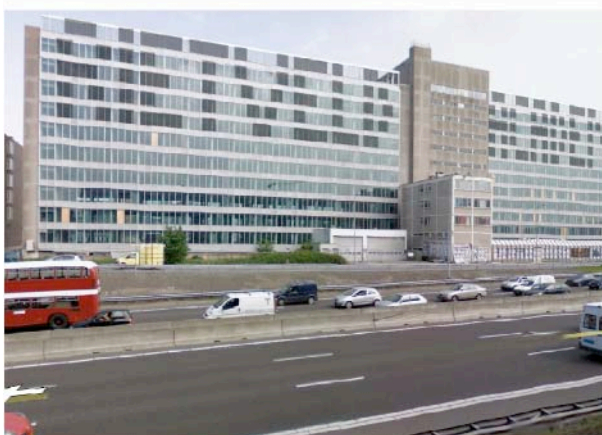
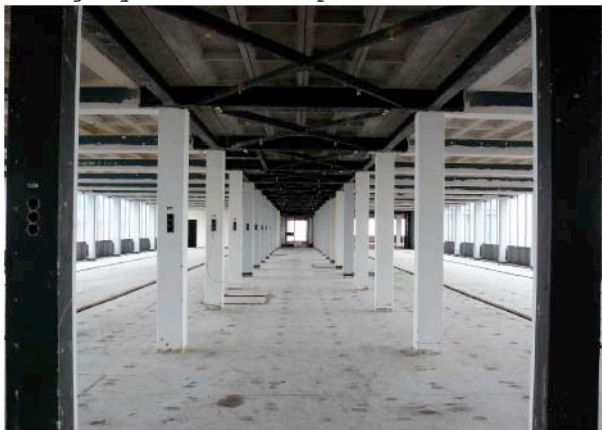
It was mentioned earlier in this newsletter that the costs of moving into either a new building at a different location or an existing building are too high for the academy. There is an exception, however: moving to the former GAK building in Bos en Lommer. There are two supporting arguments:

The current owners of the property originally bought the building with the intention of having it demolished. There was a plan to use the site for new construction (residential housing), which the city had approved basically. However, after the building was purchased the matter was raised that it was a candidate for listed status, thus effectively cancelling any demolition plans. Consequently, the current owners have been at a loss what to do with this building for a number of years, and the City of Amsterdam, too, wants to help solve the problem (for example by making a financial contribution).

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Also, both the national government and the urban district itself are interested in the project because of the building's location, which is defined as a "disadvantaged" neighbourhood. The interest will also likely be expressed by a financial contribution.

All in all we can say that the option of moving to the GAK building could be a budget-neutral endeavour as opposed to the annual additional costs of approximately € 1 million required to expand the academy's own lot. This is because all additional investments would likely be covered by external funding as noted above. We would need to cover the extra operating and maintenance costs for an additional estimated 6,500m² (approximately € 350,000 per year), but these would be compensated by no longer having to pay the depreciation costs on our existing buildings (especially the Benthem Crouwel building). Consequently, this option has become a highly feasible option.



This leads us to the next question, which of course is the most important: can this building be transformed into a good educational establishment for the academy?

To explore this question, two architectural firms were asked to perform a brief study of the possibilities offered by the building. The results were published in a booklet, which is available on the first storey of the Rietveld building for perusal. Remember: these are studies, not designs. The final design may prove to be very different, and could come from an entirely different architect. Of course, the basic issue remains modifications to the interior and not the exterior. Given the future listed status of the building the changes that can be made to the façade will be minimal.

Based on the studies we are convinced that the building has the potential to be a good and exciting educational establishment. The large and light open rooms in the building, the core and the supporting structure offer a variety of layout options. Doesn't being obliged to operate within outspoken guidelines often inspire more creativity?

Weighing up the options

After once again carefully reviewing the various options we have reached the following conclusion:

If we do not take any action we will be forced to completely redesign the layouts in the existing buildings. We will have to reassess every aspect of spatial use and ask ourselves (again) questions such as: which room is best suited for which department (Rietveld building / new building)? How can we create suitable space for every department (including the evening programme)? This will only be feasible if other departments relinquish space. Is it necessary to offer all students BK studio space? How can we make the best possible use of the available space? For example, by not assigning rooms to a specific department, through effective scheduling (also during the periods when it is currently quiet in the building) and so on. The GAK building offers a plethora of possibilities for the quality of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy (education, space, special functions)

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and offers the possibility for external funding thanks to its status in the community. We can use this funding to design the interior of the building as we see fit, thus creating the best possible learning environment. Expanding on the academy's own site would mean an additional annual expense of at least € 1,000,000 and leaves us in a place where we are becoming increasingly boxed in by other types of (commercial) initiatives.

Student housing

The study on the various options also took into consideration the wish to provide housing for Rietveld students in the vicinity of the academy.

In our analysis for the Board of Trustees we argued that a rise in tuition (which is unavoidable) will put a strain on our competitive position in the international higher education sector. Obviously, the quality of our education is the most important factor in terms of being competitive internationally, but students' secondary considerations such as housing options and cost of living count, too. Students (and/or their parents) regard a somewhat protective community as a plus when choosing a school. Berlin is one example of a competitor in this respect. Moreover, in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon model (UK and USA), we want to be able to offer our Master's students housing for two years. If we don't, we will lag behind Ateliers, Rijksacademie, Van Eijckacademie and EKWC.

Living close to school offers other advantages, too, such as creating a living and working community in which everyone stands to gain. Incidentally, the idea is not for Bachelor's students to occupy the housing in the immediate vicinity of the academy for their entire academic career.

There is simply not enough housing for students available to be able to do so. Instead, there should be a healthy turnover, with the academy being able to accommodate foreign students, especially during their first year of study. This gives them time to find housing in Amsterdam for the continuation of their study.



With respect to expansion options:

The option to expand on the academy's existing site: the City of Amsterdam currently refuses to make any concrete plans, let alone set a completion date, for building student housing on the Plato site (British School). Nevertheless, the option is included in Hootsmans' plan for the location.

The option to move to the GAK building: if the Rietveld Academy moves into the building, a considerable amount of student housing will likewise be created in the building.

The Rietveld building

Do we want to surrender the Rietveld building?
No and yes!

We clearly understand that this is a sensitive issue amongst those who currently work or used to work in the building. The building where (part of) our instruction is given is truly beautiful, and you would be hard-pressed to find another location with comparable quality. Rietveld designed this building for design education in the finest Bauhaus tradition, as well as the Dutch applied art tradition: specifically, for whole-class teaching in large groups, desk tops formats no larger than 50 x 65 cm and the accompanying desks in rows of five.

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There were workshops where the assistants carried out the work for the students. The students did not have their own studios; everyone neatly packed up their work and took it home at the end of the day in folders. And there were certainly no autonomous schools of art; these would not develop until the early 1970s.

My, how the times have changed! The Rietveld now trains designers and artists, most of whom can be classified under Autonomous.

The Rietveld building was not made for this. We undertook renovations in 2003, and anyone walking around the academy today can see that areas of the building are really suffering under the preferred approach to education. Consequently we are faced with a tremendous amount of yearly maintenance, and will very likely be forced to commence another round of renovations within a few years, which of course will demand a significant chunk of the budget.

Finally, we are convinced that the credit for the quality of our education primarily goes to our stringent admissions procedures and the excellence of our instructors. Artez in Arnhem is also housed in a Rietveld building, but we feel that the quality of the education on offer there is not comparable to ours.

We see a tremendous opportunity in contemplating the move with our current staff and faculty to a different building designed by Merkelbach, who happened to be the architect whom Rietveld supervised at the request of the Government Buildings Agency (Rijksgebouwendienst) in creating the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. By moving we would say farewell to the Olympic quarter and Zuidas and take up residence in a neighbourhood on a par with Berlin's Kreuzberg.

Furthermore, vacating the building does not automatically mean that it will be lost. If we leave the Rietveld building it will still be a historic monument with a public function, specifically education. The new owner will be the Stadgenoot real estate cooperative (formerly Het Oosten), which will rent the building to the British School. Stadgenoot has a reputation for treating listed properties with

extreme care.

The decision-making procedure

The decision to move is not final at this stage. No contracts have been signed, and basically all options remain open.

However, given the above considerations, the Board / Management Team has indicated a preference for choosing the option of moving to the former GAK building, a preference that is supported by the mostly positive attitude of the coordinators with respect to the issue as expressed during the meeting on 7 April 2009. Of course, the condition is that the costs will be financed in full through external means. The final decision will be taken by the academy's Board of Trustees on the recommendation of the Board / Management Team.

Originally, the request was to sign a declaration of intent regarding the move to the GAK building sometime in mid-May. In the meantime we have asked whether this date could be postponed by a few weeks. We now expect to have until early June. The deadline pressure cannot be avoided, as we are dependent on various parties (current owners, the City of Amsterdam, the urban district, the national government) for the realisation of this option. In order to make the most of the interest expressed by these parties we must take advantage of the momentum.

The Board / Management Team was prompted to request a deadline extension in response to the grave concerns expressed by a group of academy employees with respect to possibly being forced to leave the Rietveld building. Of course the Board / Management Team wants to make sure that everyone is heard and to take the various views into consideration before taking the final decision. An option that does not have any support will not be chosen. There will be various opportunities for everyone to learn more and to express their opinion on the proposed option. The follow-up steps are described below.

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Follow-up steps (internal)

1. Question and Answer hours

Next week (11 - 15 May) the Board / Management Team will arrange question & answer hours to take questions and comments about the accommodation issue. The hours are listed in the attachment. Appointments are not required; everything will be organised on a first come, first serve basis.

Question and Answer hours:

Monday, 11 May:

12:00 - 13:00 Tijmen van Grootheest

15:00 - 16:00 Ben Zegers

Tuesday, 12 May:

10:30 - 11:30 Jos Houweling

12:30u - 13:30 Tijmen van Grootheest

Wednesday, 13 May:

12:00 - 13:00 Ben Zegers

Thursday, 14 May:

15:00 - 16:00 A. van Eenennaam

16:00 - 17:00 Tijmen van Grootheest

Friday, 15 May:

11:00 - 12:00 Jos Houweling

2. Participation Council

(Medezeggenschapsraad)

The Participation Council will hold a meeting to discuss the accommodation issue on 13 May from 12:00 - 14:00. The meeting is open to all interested parties.

3. Visit the former GAK building

On Friday, 15 May, there will be an opportunity to visit the former GAK building between 15:00 and 18:00. Visitors can take a guided tour (due to safety reasons no one is allowed to tour the building unescorted) and share their thoughts.

4. Round table discussions

Three round table discussions on the accommodation issue will be held on 18 May. Everyone who wishes to attend must register with Rieneke van den Broek. Each session is open to a maximum of 10 people in order to promote in-depth discussions. If the number of those interested exceeds the number of available places, additional sessions will be organised during the same week. The aim is to have a wide representation of the organisation participate in each of

the sessions.

Round table discussion schedule for Monday, 18 May:

11:00 - 12:30

13:00 - 14:30

15:00 - 16:30

Location: Tijmen van Grootheest's office.

In conclusion: for more detailed information about the former GAK building, please refer to <http://www.bma.amsterdam.nl/monumenten/beschrijvingen/gak-gebouw>.