

LOOS.FM's PET pavilion - a temporary monument in a temporary landscape

The PET pavilion is a temporary structure, used as a public space in a shared community park. The architecture informs on topics including sustainable building, recycling and waste-cycles by rethinking the way buildings are developed, built and used.

Since completion, architect Michiel de Wit (co-founder of LOOS.fm and owner of PROJECT DWG office for architecture) has been engaged with propagating this message to whomever visits the pavilion. The temporary park where the pavilion is situated comprises of the former Robson pyjamas factory (now a creative hub for young professionals), a large dog training field, 50 allotment gardens, and a neighbourhood park maintained by the community. Here the PET pavilion plays a central role as a public living room for the local community. Visitors can enjoy bimonthly exhibitions all year round.

“It is really confronting when you encounter the huge piles of waste up close. That’s something we wanted to work with. ‘Something’ became a pavilion with monumental walls of pet bottles. Dismountable and temporary, with the plot in loan. With a temporary structure you bypass complicated regulation. Society is changing. To build for eternity, is an empty claim. Temporality means freedom.”

How an architectural icon brought plastic waste to life

The ‘[Abondantus Gigantus](#)’ by LOOS.fm, also known as the Lego church, was a temporary structure built in 2011, weighing over 600.000 kg. In this earlier experiment, a strong iconic archetype and the obvious similarity to lego bricks helped bring the massive recycled concrete blocks to life. For the PET pavilion though, stacking the bales of plastic waste (as found at a recycling plant) would have resulted in nothing more than a large structure made out of waste. Clearly, an architectural concept was needed to turn waste into architecture. The elevated framework of the Farnsworth House (by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe) turned out to be the perfect reference to make that happen.

This resulted in two monumental slabs, which have the appearance of luminous transparent curtains, embedded in the steel framework of the PET pavilion. From floor to ceiling, double-walled transparent corrugated sheets hold over 40.000 plastic bottles. Coincidentally the bottle caps on the mounted bottlenecks holding the walls together, make an amusing reference to the tie points of a thousand times more heavier concrete wall. During daytime, the translucent mass of crumpled shapes illuminates the interior. By night, the massive ‘curtains’ turn into an abstract lantern in the landscape. Mission accomplished.

But that's not all. Near the street and covered in 25.000 bottle caps, an object combining the staircase and ramp, gives entrance to the elevated pavilion. Covered in 8,000 tubes of body wash, a facility core divides the space seamless into the different areas surrounding the core. In the fall, a volume of reclaimed glass panels creates a winter garden on the sunny side of the pavilion. Here seven large pivoting doors open the entire corner of the building towards the park. Visitors to the pavilion experience the spaces as thresholds, which build up to entering the park from within. Centrally located in the park, the terrace becomes a podium in the landscape. A favourite hangout at large events.

“People often ask: are you an architect or an artist? Collaborating with people with different skills and backgrounds, allows the team to be more original in the design research. LOOS.fm embraces the phenomenon temporality as opportunity for creativity, navigating between art and architecture to explore the boundaries of what is possible.”

The power of temporary architecture and a reusable building system

Although sustainable building is an important theme in architecture, solutions are not always as green as they seem. For example, a seemingly sustainable product, could have a negative footprint through the production process. The PET pavilion holds no claims in being a sustainable solution though. It's rather an experiment that explores new possibilities and creates awareness. The immense amount of PET bottles in the facades allow us to see the extent to which we are consuming products and producing waste. Every year, billions of kilograms in the Netherlands alone. *Where does it all go?* And more so: *What else can we do with it?..* These are among the questions the PET pavilion raises, which attracts and wonders visitors.

Next to this, the structure as a building system, calls to rethink what is considered 'temporary' and what value reusing a building could have. Nothing is built forever. In reality, comparing to e.g. office buildings (which structural integrity can hold for over hundreds of years), most buildings hold an effective lifespan of about 20 years before a serious renovation is needed or buildings are demolished to make place for new plans. Consider then how the cement and concrete industry accounts for about 6 percent of global CO2 emissions and you'll realise how contradictory building can be at times.

The PET pavilion shows that a temporary building can fully serve its purpose, before being reused or recycled, without losing material value. Possibly in an entirely different context, with a different purpose. By the end of 2017, the PET pavilion will have a new destination, yet to be determined. Within a day, the steel structure can be dismantled on site, ready to be transported to the next. The future purpose will set the next challenge for a new appearance within the framework of the steel frame.

Adaptive reuse by temporary landscapes

Temporary public space developed on derelict land is a phenomenon called 'pauzelandchap' in the Netherlands. Which translates as a welcome solution to postponed or abandoned developments planned for an area. By providing an urban area with additional program and amenities, complementary to the context, interventions as such can 'temporarily' (weeks to years) overcome the problem of vacancy with broad support of the community. The success of the PET pavilion and the integral role the project has taken in the district, is duly noticed by the municipality and housing association who are currently developing new plans for the site.

The project is exemplary for temporary public spaces as being applied in cities throughout the Netherlands. As a different way of spatial development, temporary development is increasingly taken more serious by municipalities and housing associations, often owners of the plots. Since the financial crisis traditional development has failed to deliver the answers society is looking for. The continuity and social cohesion of cities are interrupted by the increase in vacancy and derelict land. With the lack of development and maintenance, surrounding buildings experience a decrease in value, all the while the cohesion of a neighbourhood or district is substantially affected.

Several causes like e.g. a decrease in population, obsolete buildings or a development stop (as it happened in Enschede), make that housing association, municipalities are starting to see opportunities in temporary development. As they should. Since the privatization in the early nineties, housing corporations strayed away from their public role by becoming developers: speculating in the market, investing in buildings and buying up land. As did municipalities to balance their budgets. Now years after the crash, owning undeveloped derelict land is costing both a fortune.

A community that took action

Since the building crisis, further area development in the neighbourhood came entirely to an halt. Just before completion, the renewed part ended on a wasteland of an old factory site. The derelict plot near the factory attracted shady activities and was often used as to illegally dump bulky waste. For children, no safe place to play. The neighbourhood organised themselves and held the housing association accountable, demanding a solution. Together with [LOOS.fm](#), the community developed a widely supported project that will overcome the development stop and is significant to the social environment.

What began as an idea for a cardboard pavilion, soon developed into a study to using plastic waste as building material. The temporary nature of the project made it possible to avoid having to comply to several building regulations and requirements. This would allow a certain freedom, precedent in the architecture of the PET pavilion. Since there were talks of managing the pavilion as well, LOOS.fm ultimately became it's own client. Which, in favour of the concept, made ad hoc decisions possible in the proces and implementation. For [LOOS.fm](#), co-developing the project with the community and managing the pavilion has been a most educating experience. Changing their views on architecture and shared space for the better.

Art gallery

The foundation organising exhibitions in the PET pavilion is called 'Kunst boven het Maaiveld', which literally translates to 'Art above ground-level', but also translates to art that defies 'tall poppy syndrome'. The intension of the curators have always been to make art accessible, without people having to formally visit a museum. By this notion, visitors of the PET pavilion and the many participants in activities have been pleasantly confronted with the works of a wide variety in artists. For example, the regional institution for sheltered housing has had several weekly activities for people with mental or psychiatric problems. Not long ago, their ceramic club even held their own exhibition in the PET pavilion –which sold out– encouraging them to continue the fine work they're doing.

An art gallery as community building is not a strange combination in this neighbourhood. The city, but specifically this neighbourhood, also known as "Little Montmartre" (referencing the Parisian neighbourhood known for its artists community), has a rich art history due to its famous art school and its well known contemporary artists. Meanwhile, there have been dozens of exhibitions of artists associated to the neighbourhood and artists reflecting on some of the same issues the PET pavilion is informing on.

In only four years, the Robson Park transformed from a former wasteland to central meeting space. The program in the PET pavilion ranges from children playing and learning in allotment gardens, to meetings of the neighbourhood council. Six major exhibitions alternate through big openings and festive events, all the while the PET pavilion is sub-rented for conferences, meetings and activities.

LOOS.fm's temporary monuments

Temporary buildings like the PET pavilion (5 years), but certainly the Lego Church (6 weeks), are what LOOS.fm calls "temporary monuments". Incidents in the public realm of monumental impact, with a strong social element. These incidents can be either a building, object or landscape, which may be or may not be used commercially or socially. The goal, the process of creation and organisation behind these projects require an involvement far greater than the regular projects of project.DWG as architecture office. They require more than just architects. This is why the PET pavilion is developed by LOOS.fm, a foundation specialising in these "temporary monuments" - consisting of a multidisciplinary team of artists, architects, urban place makers and cultural producers.

"The completion of construction is not the end goal. The result, not the stone mass or clinical architectural photography but, space that works and would continue to work - even when the space would be used differently in the future." - **Michiel de Wit**

Creating and managing the PET pavilion has contributed to what the team understands as "*more than architecture*" and the understanding that "*architecture begins, where construction ends*".

projectDWG.com

LOOS.fm

petpavilion.nl