

Q & A WITH CURATOR OF REGROUND ANTWERP DESIGN COMPETITION

“Inspired by Rebuild, we were able to embrace complexity and create the space to design solutions.”

– Alexander D’Hooghe



Alexander D’Hooghe led one of the winning Hurricane Sandy Design Competition teams, which designed the New Meadowlands project. As Principal of *Organization for Permanent Modernity (ORG)*, he is using his experience with Rebuild by Design to curate a design competition that will reimagine a ringed highway system and the surrounding urban space in Antwerp, Belgium. ORG implemented a process that fostered an agreement between government and community on how to approach the complex site that had been disputed for 21 years.



Signing ceremony between Flemish government and civic groups.

Q: How has Rebuild by Design influenced the Antwerp design competition that you are curating?

A: We have borrowed a lot from the structure of Rebuild by Design. First, we wanted to have two phases of the project similar to that of Rebuild by Design; research and design. Over the past year we brought together local universities, academics, government officials, planners, civic organizations and others to form a common understanding of the different issues that the ring poses for the the city and the opportunities to design solutions. In the second phase, we will put out a brief to solicit design teams to devise ideas for the project area. Like in the Rebuild process, this design phase will be iterative in nature. Civic organizations and local community members will be key parts of the process since local support and integrating the lived experience are critical parts of the competition.

Zooming out, what I took most out of the Rebuild by Design competition was the ability to reimagine large scale, complex infrastructure design and fuse it from the get go with health, quality of life, and neighborhood scale design. In this sense, Rebuild really set a new standard. This is a massive project, with hundreds of stakeholders, that has been stalled for over two decades, and we’ve now created an opening.

Q: Can you tell me more about [Reground Antwerp](#)?

A: Reground Antwerp has been a bitter issue in the region for some 21 years where resistance from many stakeholders led to paralyzing disputes. This is where we stepped in with the idea of collaborating to project aspects of liveability, health and public space, rooted in each neighborhood’s local context. My firm was hired by the government to organize a \$1.35B design competition to reimagine and redesign a massive ringed highway system that goes throughout the city and the urban space it encompasses. We are dividing the ring into six slices, and the competition will identify a design team for each slice.

Q: What is the goal of the competition?

A: We aim to transform the ring of highways from a barrier to a basis for which we can reimagine urban life in Antwerp. This region is both the densest area in Europe and one of the most important logistical hubs. Through those challenges and a historical lack of urban and regional planning, we aim to partner some of Belgium’s best designers with international expertise to create solutions that lead to a more healthy, integrated, creative, and liveable city. The teams that have the strongest projects, biggest community support, benefits for health, public space and the environment, will be chosen.

Q: What is will be your role as curator?

A: Our task is two parts. First, we led the collaborative research phase of the project and recently released a report, [Over the Ring](#), that will form the basis of the research for the design teams to work with. The report was presented to the Flemish Parliament and received unanimous support. Now we will work to maintain the coherence of the interventions and build the common framework for different designs to flourish. As there will be six different teams putting forward ideas for six different areas, we need to be the common thread.