

August 30, 2023

Dear State Secretary Uslu,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Coördinatie Lokale Architectuurinitiatieven (CoLA), a network consisting of around 40 local architecture initiatives and institutions throughout the Netherlands, and the Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR), which focuses on presenting (spatial) research by design to the general public. In response to the resolution 'Integrale visie op de woningmarkt', which calls for a new Nationaal Architectuurinstituut (national architecture institute, NAI), we would like to draw your attention to existing cultural networks and infrastructures and to the way in which these have managed to connect (inter)national public spatial challenges with the living environment of individual people in recent decades.

We are writing to you because, although the resolution concerns the housing market (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations), it establishes a National Architecture Institute in search of solutions in the (architectural) cultural field – the field in which the institutions we represent are active. In this context, we also consider the emphasis on the role of culture to be crucial. Although we are spatially well embedded, Dutch architecture policy does not pay attention to the cultural and human dimension of design.<sup>1</sup> The (architecture) cultural organizations we represent try to bridge the gap between the acute challenges of planetary transition and national and local policies, the (traditional) building sector, the design sector, and important public design challenges. In doing so, we involve the users of architecture: the people who live, work, recreate, learn, or recuperate in our country.

The future of socially inclusive, climate-resilient cities and equitable housing requires the power of design to address these challenges. Designers are uniquely placed to (integrally) analyze and visualize alternatives that can help bring about the systemic changes our society is facing. However, their knowledge and skills are not automatically understood and do not automatically reach the users of architecture and landscapes. To achieve spatial renewal, therefore, both the physical-economic aspects of the built environment and, more importantly, the cultural-social value of architecture need renewed attention. It is a misconception to believe that managing architecture culture will lead to more housing being built. A good housing policy starts with a coherent policy, from which good commissioning can arise, followed by good design. It is important to prioritize quality over speed and quantity in order to build sufficient sustainable housing.

The local architecture initiatives and the IABR, which we represent, are examples of organizations that present, put on the agenda, and facilitate dialogue, reflection, and education. In other words, they involve residents in the discussion about changes in their living environment and they do so in an independent, accessible way that respects the individuality of the various Dutch locations from which they operate. They pay a great deal of attention to heritage, history, and local context and work with architects, initiators, politicians, and clients who also recognize the importance of doing this. This coalition, this polyphony of voices discussing spatial challenges, is even more important now that current forms of participation are failing due to increasing polarization and the complexity of the challenges we face.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Our spatial challenges and ambitions are largely in line with the 16 points for an innovative spatial quality policy recently formulated by the Board of Government Advisors recently formulated for the authors of new election manifestos, and with the ambitions formulated in the *Actieprogramma Ruimtelijk Ontwerp* of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), namely *Actielijnen 3* and *5*, 'Inzet ontwerp bij lokale en regionale initiatieven' and 'Ontwerpdialoog', respectively. So far, we have not been able to find a starting point for our cultural ambitions on a national level.

<sup>2</sup> We are already doing this, for example by organizing the annual *Dag van de Architectuur*, which brings big issues such as climate change, housing shortage, energy transition and the quality of public space to the public through walks, bicycle tours, exhibitions and urban debates. At the local level, architecture initiatives have a year-round program that touches on heritage, the evolving city and ambitions for the future. To co-create effectively, we need new methods, and designers can play a part in developing these.

The IABR and almost all of the local architectural initiatives involved have their origins in the architectural policies of the 1990s. At that time, both national and local governments paid a great deal of attention to the cultural and spatial quality of our built environment and were active in ensuring that this was also reflected in the local context. Until 2012, local architecture centers were subsidized by the Netherlands Architecture Fund. Budget cuts by the then Secretary of State for Culture Halbe Zijlstra transformed this fund into the Creative Industries Fund NL; the former NAI suffered a similar fate. Although many of the institutions involved have had to adapt their programs, most of them still exist. The appendix contains a modest visualization of our network and the way in which our cultural programs connect professionals (policymakers, architects, administrators, etcetera) with local networks (initiators, residents, students, etcetera) and vice versa. It also shows that they often do their important work on a very narrow, and often precarious financial basis, without structural national support and without being well embedded in national cultural policies.

We agree with the plea made by Aric Chen and Josine Paulides of Het Nieuwe Instituut. They argue that times have changed; today's challenges are too complex and the needs are too diverse to be addressed by a single institution. Fortunately, the existence of CoLA, the IABR, and many other players, large and small, means that this is not necessary. In addition, however, we would like to analyze the existing infrastructure to see how gaps can be filled and links strengthened.

What is needed is structural support and visibility for the cultural impact of architecture and its embedding in national policy to create support, understanding, assistance, and ownership at the level of the district, the street, the home, and the individual. In the current Cultural Plan period, only a marginal percentage<sup>3</sup> of all available cultural resources have been allocated to architecture. We can seize the opportunity of the new reconstruction to take a truly integrated approach, including in policy. Only in this way will we be able to tackle complex (inter)national (transition) challenges while maintaining spatial and cultural quality.

We contend that the existing networks and infrastructure have an enormous amount of knowledge, contemplative strength, and organizational power as well as the ability to conduct the discussion about the cultural challenge of the living environment at various levels, both nationally and internationally, and that in the current context they can make a valuable contribution to the design culture and dialogue. We would like to explain this claim to you and would be happy to arrange a meeting with you at your convenience.

Kind regards,

On behalf of the Coördinatie Lokale Architectuurinitiatieven (CoLA),  
Barbara Luns, Indira van 't Klooster, Gabriël Verheggen

On behalf of the Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR),  
Saskia van Stein

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<sup>3</sup> Depending on time of calculations, and exactly which budgets are included, the percentage varies between 4% and 8%.

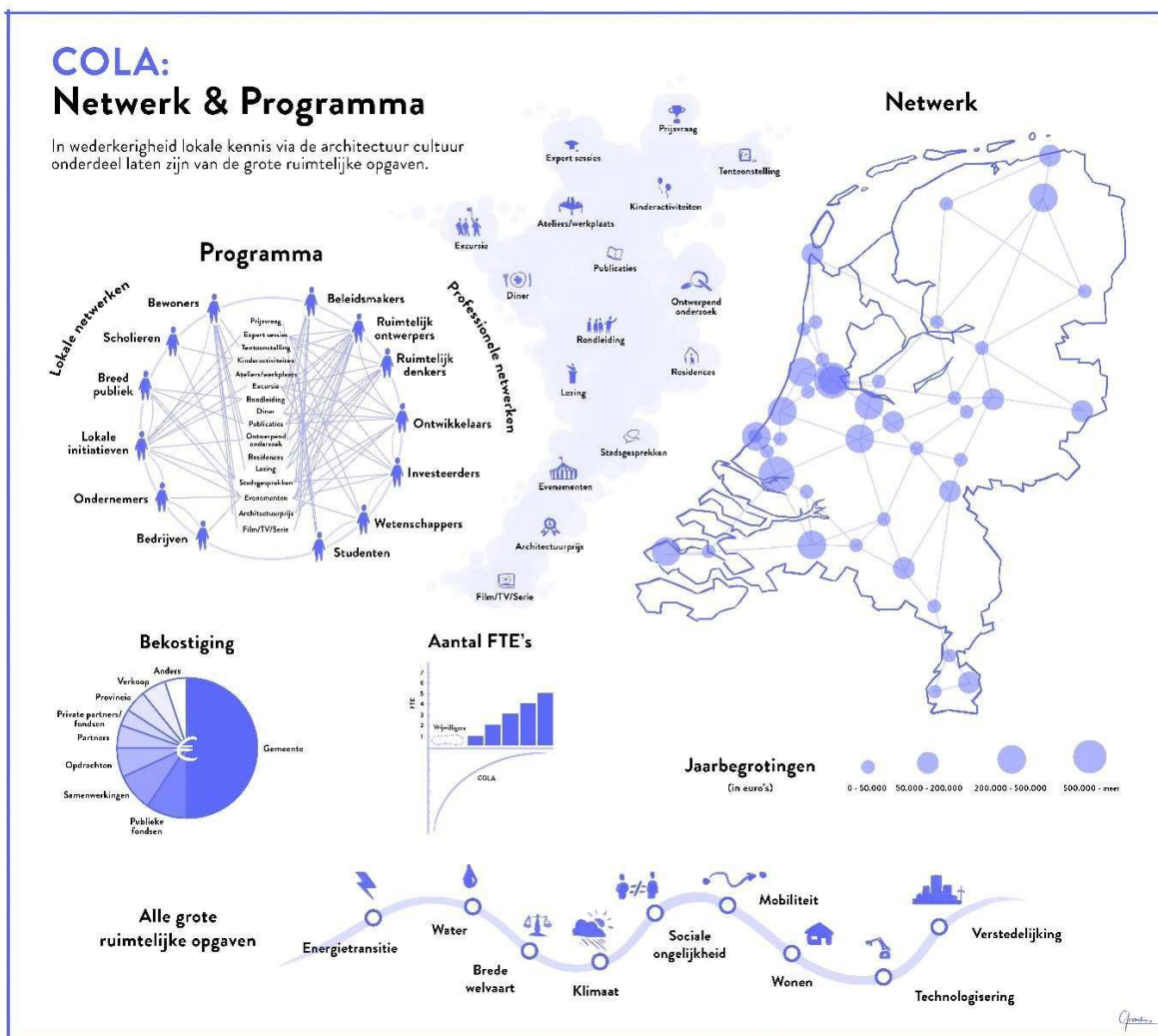
## Network CoLA (Coördinatie Landelijke Architectuurinitiatieven) Foundation

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Alkmaar             | AIA   |
| Almere Stichting    | Polderblik  |
| Almere              | Kunstlinie Almere Flevoland                         |
| Alphen aan den Rijn | CAS   |
| Amersfoort          | FASadE  |
| Amersfoort          | DOCKK   |
| Amsterdam           | Arcam   |
| Amsterdam           | Borneo Architectuur Centrum                         |
| Amsterdam           | Pakhuis de Zwijger                                  |
| Amsterdam           | Van Eesteren Museum Amsterdam                       |
| Apeldoorn           | Bouwhuis  |
| Arnhem              | Stichting Dag van de Architectuur Arnhem            |
| Arnhem              | CASA  |
| Born                | DvDa Maastricht                                     |
| Breda               | BLASt   |
| Delft               | Delft Design  |
| Den Bosch           | BAI   |
| Den Haag            | Dag van de Architectuur Den Haag                    |
| Den Haag            | Platform STAD                                       |
| Den Helder          | Triade  |
| Deventer            | Architectuurcentrum Rondeel                         |
| Dordrecht           | Stichting De Stad                                   |
| Eindhoven           | Stichting Architectuurcentrum Regio Eindhoven (ACE) |
| Emmen               | ArchitectuurPunt Drenthe                            |
| Enschede            | Architectuurcentrum Twente                          |
| Goes                | Architectuur atelier Zeeland                        |
| Groningen           | Platform Gras                                       |
| Haarlem             | ABC Architectuurcentrum Haarlem                     |
| Haarlemmermeer      | Podium voor Architectuur Haarlemmermeer en Schiphol |
| Heerlen             | SCHUNCK*  |
| Hilversum           | Dudok Architectuur Centrum                          |
| Leeuwarden          | Stichting Attiek                                    |
| Leiden              | RAP Rijnlands Architectuur Platform                 |
| Maastricht          | TOPOS   |
| Maastricht          | Bureau Europa                                       |
| Middelburg          | CBK Zeeland   |
| Nagele              | Museum Nagele                                       |
| Nijmegen            | Architectuurcentrum Nijmegen (ACN)                  |
| Rotterdam           | AIR Architectuur Instituut Rotterdam                |
| Rotterdam           | Keilecollectief                                     |
| Rotterdam           | OMI   |
| Rotterdam           | IABR  |
| Tilburg             | CAST  |
| Usquert             | Berlaghuis Architectuurcentrum Usquert              |
| Utrecht             | AORTA   |
| Veenendaal          | Architectuurcentrum Veenendaal                      |
| Weert               | Stichting Architectuurlijk Weert                    |
| Zaandam             | Babel, Zaans architectuurplatform                   |
| Zoetermeer          | Architectuurpunt Zoetermeer                         |
| Zwolle              | ZAP   |

The CRA is ambassador to the CoLA network.

In addition, we are in dialogue with national organizations and programs, including:

- BNA
- Bouwcultuur Nederland
- Bouwend Nederland
- CRA
- BZK
- De Architect
- NI
- IABR
- Jan de Jong Stichting
- Federatie voor Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit
- Monumentendagen
- Mooi Nederland
- OCW
- Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie
- VRO



Appendix Visualization CoLA Network