

Detroit@Pakhuis de Zwijger

Can't Forget The 'Motor City:' Why Detroit Matters

Thursday 23 October 2014, 1800 – 2200

Pakhuis de Zwijger, Amsterdam

Why Detroit Matters

Detroit has been regularly in the news for several years. We all know about its bankruptcy, abandonment, arson and the small-scale creative revival of Downtown. But there is so much more to understanding what has happened to Detroit and what it means for the rest of the urban world. This evening's program will challenge what we think we know about Detroit. It will place the city in a wider regional and metropolitan context, explain the long history of the city's decline and contextualise the geography of its so-called 'renaissance.'

Speakers include both prominent Detroiters and Dutch students and artists who have spent time in city. Key topics include understanding the lessons from Detroit, exploring the new visions emerging from the city and explaining why what happens in Detroit matters for other cities around the world.

Program

18.00 An Introduction to the Motor City: Detroit in 12 Buildings

Dr Brian Doucet, Assistant Professor of Urban Geography, Utrecht University

This introductory talk on Detroit is based on both academic research and teaching a master's course which culminates in a field trip to the city. It will give a brief overview of the physical, economic and social geography of Detroit and provide some background information and comparisons with the Netherlands. It will use twelve buildings in Detroit and its suburbs to explain the rise, fall and so-called rebirth of the Motor City.

18.45 Detroit: planning in the context of an urban crisis

Robin Boyle, Professor of Urban Planning, Wayne State University

This presentation is based on more than two decades of academic research by Professor Robin Boyle and his colleagues. It will address three primary questions central to the city and the wider region:

1. What, if any, are the strategic directions for Detroit?
2. Who, if anyone, is currently in charge of the planning (and development) process in the city? And who may be missed-out?
3. Beyond urban bankruptcy, are there the resources that can fund urban reconstruction?

19.30 Break

20.00 A Skype conversation with Detroit visionaries

We will round off the evening by listening to short presentation by Detroiters active in forging new visions for the city. This session will conclude with a question and answer with the videoconference guests. Confirmed participants include:

- [Drew Philp](#), freelance writer. [Read Drew's article: 'Why I bought a house in Detroit for \\$500' featured in Buzzfeed](#)
- [Dan Kinkead](#), Detroit Future City. [Read the latest from Detroit Future City here.](#)

21.00 Dutch experiences in Detroit

In this interactive session, several urban geography students who have participated in a field trip course to Detroit will be joined by Dutch artist Friso Wiersum from Expodium to share their experiences of visiting Detroit. They will each share a key lesson or observation from the city, followed by a question and answer with the audience. Panellists will include:

[Friso Wiersum, Expodium](#)

[Dr Matthieu Permentier, Utrecht University](#)

Adriaan Nering Bögel

Robin van Lieshout,

Daphne Koenders

Edske Smit

About the participants

[Brian Doucet](#)

[Assistant Professor of Urban Geography](#)

[Utrecht University, the Netherlands](#)

Brian Doucet (1980) is an Assistant Professor of Urban Geography at Utrecht University. He is originally from Toronto, Canada, but has lived in the Netherlands since 2004. After finishing his Bachelor's degree at the University of Toronto (2003), he completed both his Master's (2006) and his PhD (2010) in the Department of Human Geography and Planning at Utrecht University.

Doucet teaches and writes about a variety of topics within urban geography. His research seeks to address two questions about cities. First, understanding the political economy of urban redevelopment, gentrification and neighbourhood change (the goals, visions and governance of contemporary urban redevelopment). Second, how these changes are experienced by those living through them.

He was the recent guest editor of a special issue in the *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* on contemporary gentrification. He teaches courses on North American urbanism, World Cities, an Introduction to Human Geography and an international summer school course called 'Contemporary Cities: challenges and opportunities.' In addition to this, he supervises Bachelor's and Master's students and regularly publishes articles in collaboration with these students. His teaching time is divided between the Department of Human Geography and Planning and University College Utrecht.

His ongoing research examines the lessons, visions and ideas coming out of Detroit. He teaches a course on North American cities which culminates in a field trip to Toronto and Detroit. Doucet's writings on Detroit have featured in *The Guardian*, the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, *The Detroit News*, the UK's *Town and Country Planning Magazine* as well as other academic and professional journals. He is regularly invited to speak on the subject of Detroit and other topics within urban geography.

He is currently working on two books. The first is an edited volume on Detroit, which brings together some of city's leading scholars, planners, writers, artists and visionaries. The second is a photo analysis of the changing urban, economic and social geography of Toronto. This book will use historic and contemporary photos of the city to explain and illustrate the nature of urban and neighbourhood change in Canada's largest city.

[Robert \(Robin\) Boyle](#)

[Professor of Urban Planning Department of Urban Studies and Planning](#)

[Wayne State University, Detroit](#)

Born and educated in the UK, the first half of his academic career was at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. He moved to Detroit and Wayne State University in January 1992, first as Chair then Associate Dean.

Most recently, Boyle was co-director of and is now academic advisor on the WSU Detroit Revitalization Fellows Program. This is a critical component of a region-wide talent attraction and retention strategy that seeks to build leadership capacity in revitalization agencies across the city of Detroit. The Fellows program is generously funded by the Kresge, Ford, Knight and Hudson-Webber foundations, Twenty-nine Fellows completed the program in the summer of 2013 and a second cohort of 23 Fellows started in August.

His research interests have focused on public policies and planning for large cities and their metropolitan areas, with an emphasis on local economic development. He recently completed a study of surface transportation options between Detroit Metro airport and downtown. Scholarly research has included cross-national policy responses to urban decline, with a detailed study of how mid-west cities are responding to “shrinkage”. He also has a long-term interest with the impact of an aging society and how to adapt the built environment to assist “aging in place”.

Connecting to professional organizations, he was until recently co-chair of the Detroit chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI). He is a board member for the Greening of Detroit and the Michigan Suburbs Alliance. In 2012 he completed two terms as an elected member of the US Urban Affairs Association and served as the Midwest representative for the US Association of Collegiate School of Planning [ACSP].

Boyle has recently served on two WSU presidential initiatives: a Midtown (Detroit) Task Force and a review of the Urban Research and Outreach mission for WSU. He also served on the WSU Standing Committee on the Environment.

Active in local planning, Boyle has served on the Planning Board for the City of Birmingham, MI. for the 10 years, and as Chair since 2006.

[Friso Wiersum](#)

[Expodium](#)

[Utrecht](#)

Friso Wiersum is a member of Expodium, a collective of three [Nikos Doulos, Friso Wiersum, Bart Witte]. He lived in Detroit from October – December 2011 as part of Expodium’s residency project in Detroit, which was done in collaboration with the DetroitYes! Farm. Expodium invited Dutch-based artists to dive and deepen into local Detroit networks, to come up with fictional scenarios for developments in both Detroit and elsewhere and to blog about their experiences on newstrategiesdmc.blogspot.com. Through a variety of methods of artistic research, Expodium generates vital information about urban areas and at the same time activate those areas and their users. Wiersum and Expodium work with an international network of artists, architects, academics and others. They have collaborated with and worked for housing corporations, local governments, museums, universities, festivals and art institutions.

[Drew Philp](#)

[Freelance writer](#)

[Detroit](#)

Drew Philp is a freelance writer who built his own house on the east side of Detroit out of the shell of an abandoned one purchased for \$500. His work has been published both nationally and internationally and has appeared in publications including BuzzFeed, Spirit Magazine, The Detroit Free Press, Metrotimes, and the Bakersfield Californian. His essays and profiles have appeared in books and collections in the United States and Europe and he has a forthcoming memoir published by Scribner.

[Dan Kinkead](#)

Director of Projects

[Detroit Future City](#)

Dan Kinkead is the founding principal of Allied Design and Urbanism and the Director of Projects for the Detroit Future City Implementation Office. Dan is an architect and urban designer whose focus is at the intersection of design, research, policy and practical applications.

Adriaan Nering Bogel, Daphne Koenders, Edske Smit and Robin van Lieshout are graduates of the Master's program in the Department of Human Geography and Planning Utrecht University. They have visited Detroit as part of the course 'Urban Reflections in Practice: North American Cities' led by Brian Doucet and Matthieu Permentier.