

WDE Spotlight: Van Eijk & van der Lubbe

In WDE Spotlight, we give the floor to various designers from the Embassies. This time we talk to Miriam van der Lubbe and Niels van Eijk, founders and designers of Van Eijk & van der Lubbe (VEVDL) and part of the Embassy of Mobility. What is their background? What inspires them? What does VEVDL hope to achieve with their work? You can read it in this Q&A!

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Can you tell us more about yourself, your background and your design practice?

We are Niels van Eijk and Miriam van der Lubbe founders and designers of; Van Eijk & van der Lubbe. Niels studied mechanical engineering and then went to the Design Academy. Miriam: I started with the Design Academy. After that, I obtained a master's degree in Design and followed Innovation and Leadership. After our studies, we worked independently of each other for the first few years. I worked as a designer in my early years, and these designs often ended up in exhibitions and museums. This has evolved into a much more strategic way of looking at things, where we see design as a strategic means of change. Design is an expression of innovation and development.

Eventually, we worked together so much that we started Van Eijk & van der Lubbe. We started with a team of about ten people, and a few years ago, we 'redesigned' our studio because we were getting different requests. These were complex requests for which we had to become more specialised. So we often work within different teams with experts. This isn't an agency that always has the same people you hope can handle these requests. For each assignment, we would look at who should be involved to get the best answer to the request. The experts we approach can be self-employed people, companies, educational institutions or other organisations.

Miriam: Since March, I have been working as Creative Head of Dutch Design week, a role I will fulfil with full enthusiasm.

Your project, Third Office, was developed from the Embassy Lab: Out-of-home workspaces from the Embassy of Mobility. What can you tell us about this project, and which stage is it in now?

Third Office is the outcome of a design research and design research for a workplace in the neighbourhood, 15 minutes walking or cycling distance from home, to reduce travel movements and kilometres. And more importantly: thereby increasing the quality of life and positively affecting our living environment and environment. Third Office is called that because of the first office (the office), the second office (working from home) and Third Office (your third workplace).

We did several interviews and masterclasses for the Embassy Lab, from which we came up with the concept of Third Office. We presented this to various external parties, both companies and governments, and the response was really good.

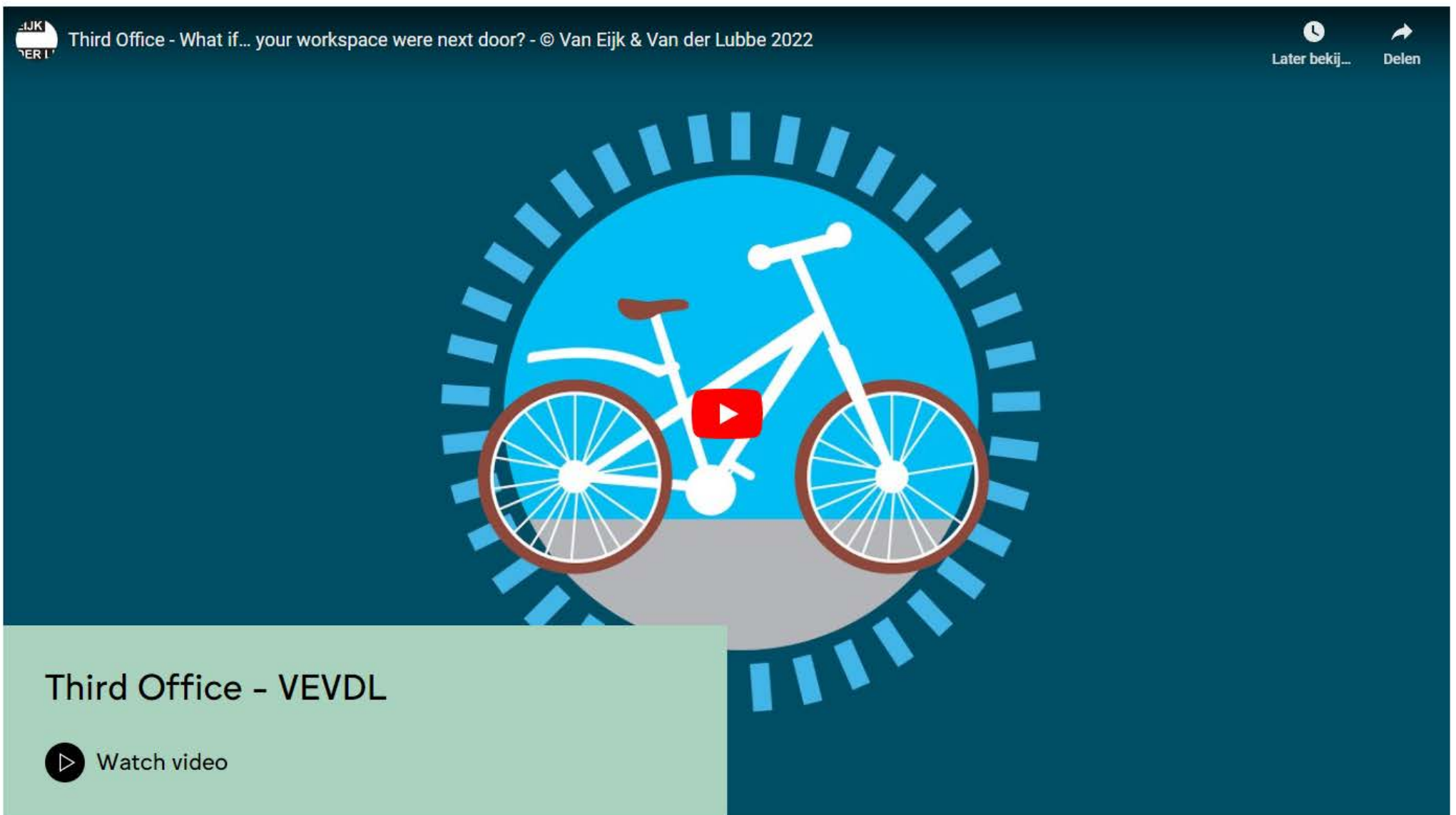
We are now in a phase to see how we can turn this into a pilot. By trying Third Office, we can substantiate it with facts. And then move to a start-up to see if we could implement Third Office. We're going to start on a small level, but you never know where things can end up. But it very much meets the need for multiple approaches for employers and employees who no longer want to spend 100% of their time in the office. This is also economically interesting; we need less real estate, fewer lease cars, and employers have to pay fewer kilometres. It is interesting for employees because they can now take more freedom in organising their lives by using secondary facilities, among other things. You can personally determine the location of your Third Office, which can be close to your children or a gym. You can easily go shopping or have packages delivered. Third Office is not only about changing our commute and the economy but also people's well-being. Third Office can also be stress-reducing because you can have a shorter commute, exercise more easily and get home faster, so you have more time for yourself. In any case, we are very curious how Third Office will develop further.

Can you explain how your project relates to the story of the Embassy of Mobility?

World Design Embassies, a Dutch Design Foundation programme, uses the power of design to develop new vistas and concrete solutions for societal challenges. With alliances of partners, we work in Embassies of the future on themes such as health,

safety, mobility, sustainability and inclusiveness. World Design Embassies is a year-round programme that peaks during Dutch Design Week. The Embassy of Mobility is one of the eight Embassies and focuses on new forms of mobility: mobility based on people and aimed at quality of life.

The outcome of the Embassy Lab is Third Office. It is deployed in the broader perspective of mobility that the Embassy of Mobility outlines in a planning design for the future. The system must change to allow for the future to change. That doesn't happen all at once. We can, however, break changes down into small chunks to sketch a perspective that people can experience.



You use design as a strategic means for change towards a better living environment. How does this manifest itself at Third Office?

We have already answered this question a bit. It is still in the concept phase, but let's say it is a 'product', a platform in the digital world, where you can book places with the desired functionalities and in the desired environment. But on the other hand, it also manifests itself in the physical world. Namely as a visitable place that you can reserve and where you can work.

The design is a means to ultimately contribute to a better living environment with less traffic and less pressure on our highways. The well-being of employees who can work more freely and organise their own lives also contributes to a better living environment. Third Office contributes in several ways to a better living environment at both individual and environmental levels.

At the moment, you are still investigating how Third Office can be turned into an experiment. What do you expect the experiment to look like?

That's a really fun question! Look, of course, we hope that the experiment will show that the idea of Third Office works, that there will be less travel and that it works for organisations. In addition to working at the office and from home, there's a third place that can be valuable in all kinds of ways. On the other hand, we naturally want to demonstrate that it is a really good addition for employees, that they would also like to opt for a kind of Third Office in the future. That one doesn't have to work exclusively in an office or from home. In any case, that's what we hope to get from our research and experimentation. And then go one or two steps further and look at how we could build it. What could it look like? Should we try it out in Eindhoven so that you can eventually scale it up? Because ultimately, the task we have is not regional but national. The experiment is important to validate that it does indeed work. We also have the burden of proof so that we can also go to future partners and say: Hey, look at that. Do you think this is something for you? So that we can then, in a second or maybe third stage, set up a start-up. That would be the best if that could actually happen. And who that is, and what that coalition looks like, we don't know yet, but developing a concept and then not being able to market it or integrate it into society... that would be a shame.

Of course, there are already many initiatives that all have some links with Third Office, but what we think is a big difference is that it mainly concerns meetings. However, with Third Office, we imagine that it is precisely those places that are not used during the day, for example, and only used in the evenings, that can be used again for work, or vice versa, places that are empty at night. I can imagine if you feel like working in a different type of place, you choose Third Office. For example, consider an inspiring place such as a museum, near your children, or a gym.

Do you think hybrid working will become more popular in the coming years? And if so, why?

What you're hearing now and our research has shown is that many employers and organisations are implementing a 60/40 ratio. That means employees work 60% of their time in the office and 40% of the time they work from home. There are several reasons for that, as I said before. On the economic side, they can sell off real estate, and with fewer people in the office daily, you can also serve your organisation with less space. Also, think of the energy costs that you save with this. Of course, the coronavirus pandemic has really enabled a new way of working, so hybrid working is now embedded. Five years ago, if you had said that people would work from home half the time, most organisations would have said that was impossible. The coronavirus has forced us to advance working from home and hybrid working, and it has worked. It has also provided many advantages. I don't know if it will become more popular, but I do think it will remain the current policy. It offers certain flexibility, and it benefits employers and employees alike. The challenge, however, lies in actually implementing the policy. Before you know it, the habit of driving to the office every day for that one appointment will be back. Yes, that danger is there. So you have to be able to act on it as an employer and an employee.

What kind of design/project would you like to realise in the future and why?

Yes, I have to say, we can't complain about the cool questions we get. And among those questions, I find several of them incredibly interesting. One we've been working on for years is the question of how to design tourism better. So, not so much tourism itself, but the mechanics and how it works. At one location, you may have way too many tourists while, at another, a few extra tourists would be quite nice. For the additional sources of income, you initially think of the economics or site conservation. But tourism can do a lot more in our eyes, so it can make a real contribution to the issues that we face. I'd really love it if we could ultimately not only develop a concept and vision for this, but also implement it. And that we could develop a new way of looking and thinking about it. Well, we're already working on that. And further, yeah, we still have so many dreams.

How do you think your work can have an impact?

We always hope that it can be done in several ways. And that starts with holding inspiring conversations the moment we begin speaking to a client or potential partner. Whether that's one person or an entire team, if you see a twinkle in the eye, you've actually already started to have an impact. Then, you can stretch the boundaries and inspire others. I've always found that to be one of the most valuable moments in our work. You develop vision, concepts and, of course, you try to make a real difference in society through such a concept. Sometimes, that's very small, but it's a very strong example. We hope with Third Office that, at some point, we'll be able to create some volume and that it can actually have an impact. During the coronavirus pandemic, studies have shown that if 20% fewer people went to the office, there would be 70% less traffic. That's already if everyone goes to the office just one day less!

I also think that we can have an impact by giving others a podium, as we do here at the Dutch Design Foundation. I always see connections and links and make connections. Connecting people can really be meaningful. That's why I'm very happy to contribute here. So, not only are we making a difference with our own work, I think it's broader than that. I also see the power of creativity and the power of designers and what that can accomplish in ways both big and small. That has enormous potential, but it's still underutilised; I'd like to contribute to that.

If you could choose one person to work with (a scientist, artist, philosopher, biologist, designer, politician, anyone), who would you choose and why?

That's a very nice question. One person comes to mind, but the most important thing is that they must be a nice person. So that you can have an open dialogue and be receptive to other points of view. He's now a minister, but Robbert Dijkgraaf is someone I know who has an unimaginable amount of knowledge. He's hyper-smart but also able to convey that in a very good way. And in doing so, he also gives new people new insights. I'd like to do a project that combines his knowledge and expertise with our assignments and challenges. Yes, that would be great. I don't know what project, but it would be beautiful. What I also really like about Robbert is that he started at the art academy before completing a physics degree course. He also understands the value and power of imagination of creativity. Well, that with such an enormous scientific career, knowledge, and insight. Yes, that would be fantastic.