nextroom - the european hub for architecture

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Overview

nextroom was founded in 1996 by Juerg Meister with the idea of "creating a space for architecture on the Net". Today nextroom has become the European hub for contemporary architecture based on an extensive database and a sophisticated application specialising in digital architectural data.

The architecture database was set up according to a collection principle guaranteeing high quality standards. Qualified architectural institutions select buildings, prepare project descriptions in collaboration with the architects themselves and upload them via the decentralised online application. This form of ongoing documentation is already undertaken by numerous partners in 8 European countries curating nextroom collections. nextroom acts as editor-in-chief, links all information, researches architects' biographies, searches daily for architecture-related articles in newspapers and specialised magazines and offers a comprehensive overview of up-to-date books in its library. With 13 years of experience in this field, nextroom is the holder of unique know-how on the creation and management of digital architectural data. This development was made possible through art promotion grants by the Federal Republic of Austria.

At the moment, the site generates more then 2 million page impressions every month; the community keeps growing, and nextroom has evolved into a top-quality Web address for architecture. 10,000 buildings, 20,000 actors, 70,000 architectural images and portrait photographs, diagrams and plans, thousands of features and books were thus collected, edited and stored in a joint database.

This data stock served as the basis for the subsequent development of archtools, applications aimed at architects (archbau.at), architectural photographers (archfoto.com) and authors specialising in architecture and its communication (archtour.at). All digital data – ranging from photographers' pictorial archives or project documentations of architects to visitors' guides of tourism organisations – are combined in one data pool and can be freely linked as desired. This special application developed by nextroom organises the different editing formats and can be fine-tuned to meet a wide variety of requirements such as copyrights, access restrictions, user fees, etc. The Austrian Federal Chamber for Architects, photographer Margherita Spiluttini and the City of Vienna opt regularly for nextroom solutions.

The creation of an international network, the linking of different content types and the possibility of individually visualising this content have established nextroom as a high-frequency hub for architecture that embodies comprehensive digital architectural competence. Following the intensive development input in the field of application that characterised the past few years, the next relaunch scheduled for autumn 2009 will be dedicated to restructuring and visualising the very extensive content of one of the biggest European architecture databases.

Origins

Although the origins of nextroom date back to the earliest days of the World Wide Web, the evolution of the online database was much more strongly influenced by thematic-artistic commitment to the architectural discourse than by the possibilities offered by this (then novel) technology. Most network activists in Vienna were artists. Artists' networks such as "The Thing", which was brought from New York to Vienna by Helmut Mark, or Konrad Becker's "Public Netbase" as well as "digital cities" – above all Amsterdam – tried to further the interaction between art, city and Internet. The roots of nextroom are likewise steeped in the field of Internet art and right from the beginning were strongly determined by the new visual levels disclosed by the Web.

 "nextroom – architektur im netz" was founded in spring 1996. The first regular service was an architectural event calendar, which was followed by the online building database as early as in 1997. This core of nextroom was continuously enlarged and today is the heart of a high-frequency hub integrated into a dense European network of contemporary architecture.

Milestones

1996 start-up of nextroom on the Internet

1997 start-up of architecture database with an Austrian collection partner

1998 start-up of press review on architecture-related issues

2005 start-up of specialised review archive, enlargement into European architecture database

2005 start-up of online library

2006 GIS (geographic information system)

2009 2 million page impressions, partners from 8 European countries, 18 building collections, more than 30 newspapers and magazines, 50 publishing houses specialising in architecture, approx. 10,000 buildings, 20,000 actors, 70,000 images, 4,000 publications

Content

Right from the beginning, the nextroom application was designed for the co-operative management and presentation of architectural data from a variety of sources. Numerous collection partners, newspapers, architectural reviews and publishing houses specialising in architecture from 8 European countries provide the database with content that is continuously complemented and edited by nextroom.

Buildings

nextroom presents contemporary architecture but is mainly concerned with providing an ongoing documentation of current architectural production. The main database objects are buildings (currently approx. 10,000), which are selected by independent collection partners and the nextroom editorial board. This quality-based documentation is the key characteristic of nextroom.

The buildings are presented with text, images and meta-data. Moreover, links with other information sources, such as texts from newspapers and specialised magazines, publications, awards and prizes, actors involved in a given building and related events, are offered as well. Buildings can be accessed via index lists (persons, locations, chronology, function, companies) as well as via a search function. The nextroom front page features a list of ever-changing new entries. A newsletter informs the numerous subscribers about all new entries of the week.

Actors

Since nextroom is primarily a collection of objects, actors/persons are only presented if linked to objects (building, texts, photos, etc.) as authors of a specific item and if at least one of their works is accessible on nextroom. The currently 20,000 entries on actors (both legal and physical persons) thus result from the fact that each of them is linked to at least one object; paid entries are not admitted. In this respect, nextroom differs markedly from person-focused providers that offer marketing platforms – on which clients can buy space – based on their directories.

Images

At the moment, the database contains close to 70,000 images, which mostly include architectural photographs as well as plans and diagrams. nextroom always features photographs untrimmed with their original aspect ratios; the authors of each image are of course cited by name, and copyrights are invariably clarified before publication. In this, too, nextroom differs from many other platforms. Photographers appreciate this policy and provide all images to nextroom free of charge.

Press

Architecturally-themed articles and features in German-language dailies and weeklies are an important element of the database. nextroom continuously scans approx. 20 of the leading print media for contributions with relevant architectural content and presents these in different formats, either as full text or with a link to the respective newspaper or magazine server.

Specialised press

Leading architectural magazines and reviews have been part of the nextroom network since 2004. In the context of individual media co-operation projects, the editorial teams of as many as 20 reviews submit selected articles for publication on nextroom. Depending on the specific co-operation model, these texts are presented in various formats, with the spectrum ranging from integrated full-text articles to PDF download abstracts or brief summaries. Roughly 12.000 contributions are already listed. Compared to the text archives of major newspapers and specialised text libraries, where information is accessed via keywords or magazine editions, the main quality of the nextroom press review derives from the way it links all texts to buildings, images and actors from the database.

nextroom – database for contemporary architecture

Publications

An online library was added to the database in 2005. This enabled nextroom to build a comprehensive directory of contemporary publications on architecture directly connected to the nextroom content. Due to our co-operation with publishing houses, the library already offers close to 4,000 titles. Here, too, this information is linked to architectural, biographical and regional content in the database.

Awards & prizes

Another important source of information is provided by awards and prizes that are linked to buildings, texts and actors. As a quality criterion of contemporary architecture, they can be searched in nextroom, with a list of concrete examples.

Event calendar

The event calendar was the first nextroom application and has remained a key database element. Events can be published by organisers free of charge; to ensure thematic completeness, the event index is also edited by nextroom.

The hub for architecture

nextroom boasts 13 years of experience in the comprehensive creating and handling of digital architectural content in co-operation with numerous partners. A sophisticated online application specially designed to meet the requirements imposed by architectural content as well as a smoothly functioning international network are the fruit of these efforts.

The core of nextroom is provided by the building database derived from a quality-oriented selection of buildings that is handled by nextroom and its collection partners acting as an editorial team. This core is given greater thematic richness and completeness through architects' biographies, general and specialised press reviews, the library, a list of awards and prizes, and an event calendar. All content elements are edited and interlinked by nextroom. The specific and unique quality of nextroom is embodied in the resulting knowledge matrix.

In addition to the "traditional" platform nextroom.at, this content of the nextroom database can be visualised in other output formats (archbau.net, archfoto.com, archtour.at) as well. The difference between these various visualisation modes lies in the interest-based filters for specific content selection, which are not subject to the criteria of nextroom. The core building data always serve as focal starting-points for all further content elements (texts, images, etc.) and in this way mediate, as it were, between the different interests fuelling the use of nextroom (non-commercial, quality-based) and archtools (commercial, marketing-based), while precluding potential negative influences.

By building its international network, linking different forms of content and creating the possibility of individual content visualisation, nextroom has established itself as a high-frequency hub for architecture.

"Intelligent networking"

The concept of "intelligent networking" allows for the interlinkage of different partners, contents, output modes and user interests in the online presentation of contemporary architecture.

Numerous international partners form the nextroom network. A great variety of data is collected by means of decentralised data capturing and common data standards. As fine-grained data, they are stored and interlinked in the database, which permits structured data editing in nextroom.at. Individual guidelines then permit the presentation of the same content on other websites as well as its multi-platform linking (to archfoto.com, archbau.net, archtour.at, wienarchitektur.at, architekturwettbewerbe.at).

archtools

archtools are special output formats of the nextroom application that dip into the joint data pool but are also open to commercial purposes. The first archtool, archfoto, was developed in 2000 as an online image archive for architectural photography that is used by such notable exponents as Margherita Spiluttini, Rupert Steiner and others. archfoto enables photographers specialising in architecture to administer their pictures via personalised database access directly in the nextroom system and to link these photos to concrete buildings. nextroom collection partners may likewise access archfoto images and "borrow" photographs as required for illustration purposes and to document their buildings. A link to the commercial picture archive of the respective photographer is placed right beside the photograph published on nextroom.

In 2006, archbau was the next online tool developed to compile an online project archive for architects. Again, the emerging collection is used as a project pool for the nextroom collection partners, which can then select and access these projects for their publications. At the same time, the proposal procedure for architects is thus simplified.

As the last archtool , archtour, the Web application for online architecture guides, was implemented . Intelligent networking enables archtour operators to put architecture guides online to combine wide reach with high-quality architectural information while necessitating only limited research and editing input. The archtour administrator simply chooses buildings for the database, which are then illustrated with text and images and compiled to result in geographically structured tours. At the same time, architecture guides can be complemented without any further cost by inserting links to the extensive range of information provided by nextroom.at – constant updating, sustainable information and target group-specific reach are thus ensured.

Photo/image agencies

Another form of intelligent networking is related to the illustration service of nextroom. Agencies specialising in architectural photography like "artur" are granted privileged access to the database to place their images online and thus add to the nextroom image stock. Conversely, the linking of the images featured on nextroom to other image and photo stocks of the respective agency website creates attractive distribution channels.

Event calendar

Together with Architekturzentrum Wien (Vienna Architecture Centre) and Architekturstiftung Österreich (Austrian Architecture Foundation), nextroom maintains an event calendar as a co-operative exchange project. This form of intelligent networking aims at disseminating information items through various channels. Thus organisers publish their events in three attractive spots – their own website, the nextroom event calendar and wienarchitektur.at, the central calendar of architecture-related events in Vienna – by simply inputting the respective calendar dates.

Architectural competitions

When the Federal Chamber of Architects and Consulting Engineers was planning a portal for the comprehensive documentation of architectural competitions in Austria, nextroom's experience made it the ideal partner, not only for concept development and implementation, but above all for intelligent content networking as well. Ongoing competitions are automatically shown in the nextroom competition calendar, while actually built projects are directly linked from competition portal to corresponding nextroom building.

The concept of "intelligent networking" embodies the comprehensive competence regarding all matters architectural that nextroom has acquired in the course of its work to create an international hub for contemporary architecture.
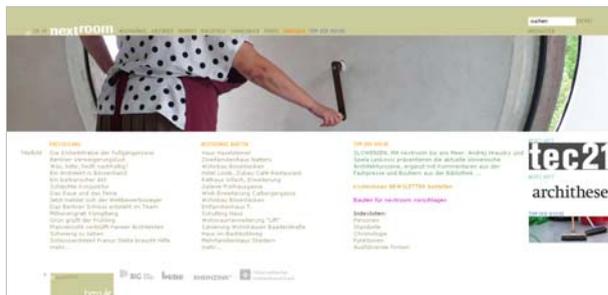
Illustrations
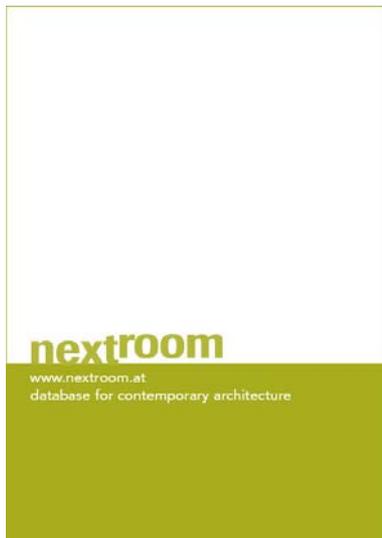
nextroom advertising subject

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nextroom frontpage on the occasion of the start of the Croatian
building collection using an image of Robert Leš, 2008

nextroom frontpage using an image of Koolhaas Houselife,
Beka Films, 2009

nextroom screenshot of the portrait-feature of David
Chipperfield using images of Nick Knight, Ute Zscharnt, 2009

nextcard edition on MUMUTH Graz, UnStudio, Ben van Berkel
and Caroline Bos using an image of Pez Hejduk, 2009

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Annex

nextroom team
Juerg Meister – idea, concept and project management
Stephan Haupt – technical development
Karl Seiringer – infrastructure and administration
Regine Koth-Afzelius – HTML, image editing and cover picture
Helga Kusolitsch – editing and public relations

Collection partners
afo Architecture Forum Upper Austria
Guide to Kassel's Architecture
ARCHITEKTUR RAUMBURGENLAND
aut Architecture and Tyrol
Az W Vienna Architecture Centre
BOKU / ILA University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences
DAZ Architects' Association Zagreb
DESSA Slovenian Architectural Association
gat Styrian Architecture on the Internet
Architecture Initiative Salzburg
Carinthian House of Architecture. Napoleonstadel
KEK Hungarian Contemporary Architecture Centre
ÖGLA Austrian Association of Landscaping and Landscape Architecture
ORTE Lower Austrian architecture Network
USTARCH SAV Institute of Construction & Architecture, Slovak Academy of Sciences
vai Vorarlberg Architecture Institute

Architectural magazines
A10
anthos
archithese
Architektur+Wettbewerbe
archplus
Atrium
BauArt
Bauwelt
dérive
detail
db deutsche bauzeitung
Hintergrund
Hochparterre
Metamorphose
Steeldoc
tec21
Umbau
Werk, Bauen + Wohnen
Zolltexte
Zuschnitt

Newspapers
Berliner Zeitung
Falter
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Frankfurter Rundschau
Kurier
Neue Zürcher Zeitung
ORF online
Die Presse
Salzburger Nachrichten
Der Standard
Süddeutsche Zeitung
Tagesanzeiger
DIE WELT
Weltwoche
Die Zeit

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Publishing houses
AAM Archives d'Architecture Moderne
Absolut Medien
archplus
avedition
Beka Films
Böhlau
Birkhäuser
Callwey
Christoph Merian Verlag
Detail
Dietrich Reimer Verlag
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Rheinzink Titanium Zinc

Links
www.nextroom.at
www.archfoto.com
www.archbau.net
www.archtour.at
www.spiluttini.com
www.wienarchitektur.at
www.architekturwettbewerbe.at

www.architekturstiftung.at
route.centrope.info
www.archtour.at/vai

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