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Interactive Visualisation: Jaap Bakema's Correspondence Network

Dutch architect Jaap Bakema (1914-1981) was a central figure within international organisations such as the the avant-gardist CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) originally founded in 1928, and its successor Team 10. Both organisations can be analysed in terms of networks, with a multiplicity of exchanges between the involved actors. In order to create a picture of the network and explore its connections, an interactive visualisation prototype has been developed on the basis of the correspondence present in the archive of Bakema. The prototype allows visitors to navigate between people, places and archival documents.

Post Box for the Development of the Habitat

In 1959, Jaap Bakema organised the final CIAM conference at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands. At the event, it was decided to dissolve the CIAM, even when a new successor organisation for international exchange had yet to emerge. The Team 10 group around Bakema was moving towards establishing its own platform which included Aldo van Eyck, Alison and Peter Smithson, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and others.

As an alternative to CIAM and to continue its international communication, Bakema set up a correspondence network to enable further exchanges. He called this the Post Box for the Development of the Habitat (BPH) as a summary of the emerging ideas withing the network. The idea was as simple as it was effective: the members could send in letters, documentation materials, designs or ideas they wanted to share. Bakema would collect them and distribute them in a newsletter highlighting the subjects and main points. 'Postman Bakema', as he signed himself, eventually produced 18 such newsletters between 1959 and 1971. The Post Box is now an archive of exchanges between the various international avant-garde architects who contributed to it during the 1960s, among them the Team 10 members, but also Japanese Metabolists like Kenzo Tange and Fumihiko Maki, and others including Oskar Hansen, Yona Friedman, and Hans Hollein. Topics ranged from the future direction of modern architecture to the new concept of the megastructure typology and planning policies as developed by Unesco. The Post Box correspondence archive is now part of the Nieuwe Instituut collection in Rotterdam.

A Researcher's Perspective

In comparison with the two other prototypes for a Virtual CIAM Museum, the XR installation by [Paula Strunden Alison's Room](#), and the [Remote Fieldwork by Jhonno Bennett](#), this prototype for an interactive visualisation departs from a researcher's perspective to develop an alternative search portal for an institutional archive.

The basic interaction allows researchers to reconstruct the original exchanges including the gaps where the archive is not complete. The materials can be consulted systematically by name, date, location or subject, as well as intuitively. The materials behind the circulated Newsletters can thus be retraced for further investigation of one of the more influential networks in architecture mid-twentieth century and their exchanges on the 'development of the habitat'. The visualisation brings back to live the transnational network of individual and collective actors, governmental and non-governmental organisations, educational initiatives and publication strategies.

Using the possibilities offered by digitisation technologies, letters and their attachments have been reconnected, while assuring materials remain traceable in reference to their original location in the institutional archive.

Preparatory work had been undertaken by doctoral researchers who were hosted by the Jaap Bakema Study Centre: Gianluca Ferriero and Claudia Mainardi who both wrote their dissertations at the Politecnico di Milano; Ferriero as part of a research into urban questions of density, mobility and infrastructures in 2017, and Mainardi as part of the EU-sponsored project TACK: Communities of Tacit Knowledge in Architecture in 2024.

The interface displays the Bakema newsletter archive. The map shows the people and places that featured in Bakema's correspondence between 1959 and 1971.

[Open website](#)

Post Box at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014

The interactive web platform [Post Box for an Open Society](#), designed by the Experimental Jetset, was an earlier experiment with the same material. The Post Box was created for [the Dutch exhibition](#) at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014.

Fatma Tanış and Giacomo Nanni

Fatma Tanış is researcher and lecturer at TU Delft and research associate at the Nieuwe Instituut. Previously, she was the coordinator of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre (2021-24). Motivated by her interdisciplinary background in architecture and business administration, as well as her personal interest in literary writing, her research focuses on developing methods for writing alternative histories while addressing questions pertinent to the production, transfer and utilisation of knowledge. She simultaneously explores innovative ways for constructing archives by hybridising analogue and digital to display research conducted in the age of data.

Giacomo Nanni is a web and information designer based in Berlin. He works with large datasets from digitised collections, archives, photographs, texts and maps. He designs web applications, books and interactive visualisations. He is particularly intrigued by the way information is curated and the role that technologies play in this.

Jaap Bakema Study Centre

The Interactive Visualisation of Jaap Bakema's correspondence network is a project by Fatma Tanış and Giacomo Nanni, with Claudia Mainardi, Gianluca Ferriero, realised in collaboration with Dirk van den Heuvel and the [Jaap Bakema Study Centre](#).