Shaping Communities

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Chapter 17
Shaping Communities

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Abstract

Importance of the region as integrating level.
Doing more in less space.
Through system integration, we can become an energy-supplying society.
Making connections between themes and sectors.
Building on communities of education, interdisciplinarity, society, and professional practice.

17.1 Introduction

Thijs Asselbergs is what you call nicely chaotic. His abundance of knowledge and insights roll over one another and fight for attention in the sharing of that knowledge. As practicing architect (Asselbergs et al., 2008), urban planner, and professor of Architecture and Engineering, his work encapsulates building, formulating policy, and teaching in how the built environment can be made reusable. The thinking does not stop at the building itself, but there is constant interaction throughout all scales. To invoke Bakema: from Chair to City (Bakema, 1964; Fig. 17.1). He brings research and design together and is always looking for innovations in process and content.

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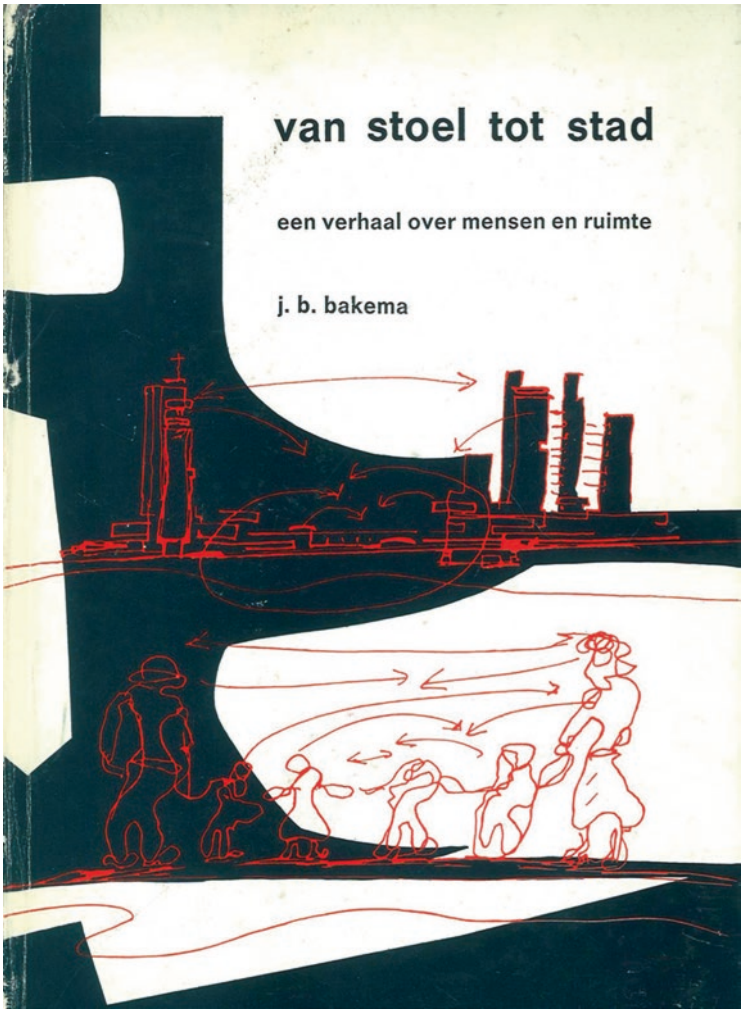

Fig. 17.1 From chair to city, book cover of the book by Bakema

17.2 Deposit

We should not strive for more, bigger, and growth alone, but ask ourselves what fits into the basis of our culture. Look at what is there and consider how we can provide more people with homes in a better-used space. We will need to reuse the available space for this, and to integrate living with working and other functions. Each space then has value, can be repurposed, and represents a deposit of a certain size! All the square and cubic meters actually already exist. We do not need any new ones, but it is important that we use the existing ones in a better way and begin to reuse them for new purposes. When you look at it that way, there already is a sizable deposit, which

Fig. 17.2 Jacques Tati. (Credit: Doisneau)

will only come under pressure due to the rising sea levels, resulting in some areas being at risk of losing their value. For the rest, we will need to make the space more flexible, and be able to take buildings apart and put them back together (Fig. 17.2). We cannot escape the need to increase the detachability of parts, which will make this easier and will greatly increase adaptability (Jonkman et al., 2020).

17.3 From Region to Home

The regional level is highly interesting. It offers the context for all the loose and independent projects and buildings. In North-Holland, we can find the unique qualities between the dunes and the polders, from the Beemster to the coast and from the

Fig. 17.3 endless reusability

IJsselmeer to the inner dune edge. Here, we will need to create the spatial connections between the subregions and from the local place to the whole area. For the permanent reuse of built elements, we can use the landscape as a frame, within which we can reuse the building blocks that are already there. For the Amsterdam canal ring, we are talking about the canals, the water, the trees, the public spaces, the roofs, the brick walls, and the wooden floors. Both the building and the public space will need to be viewed as part of each other's space, which each play a role in the transformation, adaptation, and recycling of materials. The role of the designer is providing those "deposit structures," which are endlessly reusable, and can continually be filled with new applications (Fig. 17.3). Then, we won't need to constantly remove parts for economic reasons, and the business case becomes broader than just financial. The value, including the economic value, can increase if we use, dismantle, and rebuild what we have in a better way.

17.4 Systems Thinking in Four Dimensions

Within those structures, we can then more than solve the energy issue. By connecting aspects of the built environment such as ventilation, compactness, roof-landscapes, roads, and waterways, we can become net-energy producing. By saving energy on the one hand and reducing daily usage, and by producing energy based on the elements freely available in each unique location on the other hand. Then we, as a society will be able to supply energy and stop carbon emissions. To achieve this, we need to conduct research into that systemic question. How do we create connections between the various functions, housing, and offices, for example (Fig. 17.4)? And how do we simultaneously anticipate changing circumstances (Fig. 17.5)? We might need much less heating in the future than we do now, and have a bigger need for cooling, for example. It is very urgent for us to gain that insight into how these systems work with each other and can profit from one another, and which synergies can be created (TU Delft, undated). Besides the various functionalities and

Fig. 17.4 Adjustability and flexibility. (Credit: Bob Hendrikx)

Fig. 17.5 Cepezed, The Hague

changing circumstances, we also have to connect all the themes, so not only look at energy or water or food but involving them all together. In the fourth dimension, we will finally have to acknowledge the aspects of ownership and cleverly connect options for profit, so that private concerns melt together with public interest.

17.5 Does Architecture Still Belong to the Architect?

The freedom of the architect and designer will need to change (Fig. 17.6). It is doubtful whether architecture still belongs to the architect (Muis, 2016). In current practice of project development, pressure from regulations, and financial dominance, the architect is dunked in a bucket of water, pushed under, and just when you come up for air, they push you under again. You can guess who the "they" and "you" are in this story. If the architect reduces themselves to the production of a beautiful drawing, the training is essentially doomed. There will need to be a connection between the design of a building or environment, and the possibilities of realizing this, the management of that process of execution. This begins with the design of the task, which is both the responsibility of the architect and the construction manager, driven by the collective goals and culturally determined wishes from society. The

Fig. 17.6 Where is the architect? (Los Angeles, Burtinski)

governments and education should therefore be central in this, and much less so market parties. The architect, urban planner, and landscape architect of the future will thus need to place the question in the center, investigate and formulate it, and only then start looking for solutions. Linking architecture with management of the construction process can lead to the connection of an out-of-touch designer with society.

17.6 Space and Matter

Combining the construction itself with the design process leads to environments that "just work really well." Because they are good for energy management, biodiversity, and have become dismantlable (Fig. 17.7). Integrating and interpreting those tasks should be central in education, and not the marketing that has formulated the number of students as the goal. Here too, the driving force is money, which eventually does lead to a greater student population, but also to overburdened teachers. Besides, it sacrifices the students' mental health, as they experience less and less joy in studying, and become less relaxed. It would of course be much more fruitful to put societal issues on the agenda, for which students can apply. This is a double-edged sword: the social issues take center stage, and the students are motivated for what they want to learn. We will need to get rid of the bureaucracy in

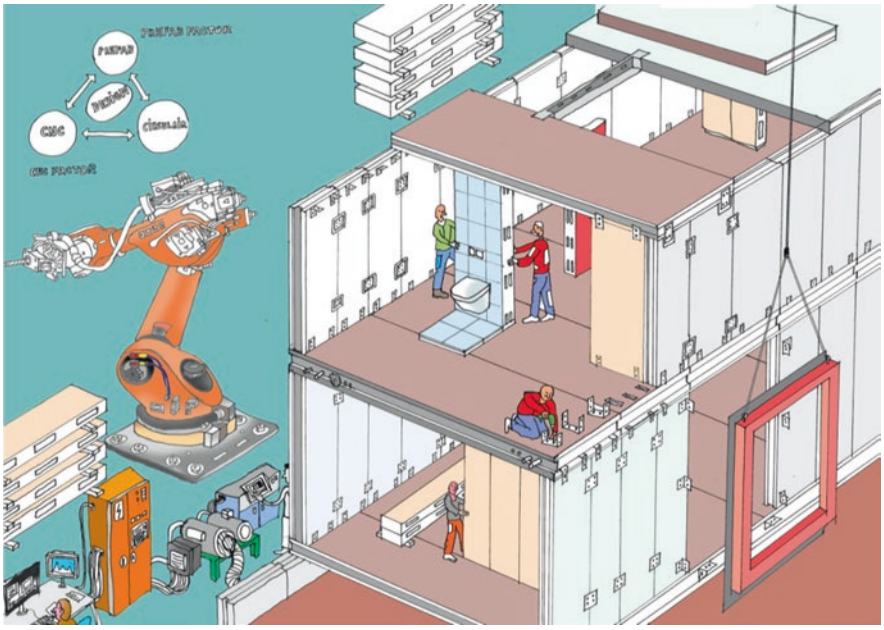

Fig. 17.7 Dismantlable building

education, which we currently all have to fight through and design the systems in such a way that that motivation, for both students and teachers, returns to the heart of education.

17.7 Studio for Designing Research

In a design studio, you can quickly anticipate changing demands and profile yourself at a regional level as well as putting yourself on the map internationally. As an organization, it makes you more agile, but it does require the right conditions: good support from directors and the board, a well-equipped space, and a small yet able team of people with knowledge of designing research and organizational capacity (Fig. 17.8). Finally, a good attitude and communication is key, so that results become outwardly and inwardly visible. In a studio for design research, the starting point should be nature and humanity. This gives you the positioning and the daring to present the polder as an export product, which can provide future problems with new solutions. You could redesign the polder with new parameters, as a set of regional tasks, and thus must teach less in separate courses, but as a part of the greater regional field of design and tasks.

Fig. 17.8 East-Serre, Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology (wooden house: Pieter Stoutjesdijk)

17.8 Building of Communities

Students should be able to work together and join forces at all levels. Communities would be built, and a design studio is a beautiful way of achieving this, which brings the various layers in our education system together and links them to professional practice. Looking for synergy between the educational institutions, universities, colleges, and trade schools, for example, and the various disciplines, from design to management, to society and the partners in the field, benefits from building on such a community. In this way, the systems in which we work can melt together and strengthen each other, rather than continuing to be their own worlds consisting mainly of odd ducks. Working in a studio can lead to both students and businesses being selected before they participate. Motivation and the contribution they can provide will then be more important than knowledge or money. In this way, we can also get away from the issues of the day. When construction companies get involved in education modules or projects, they will often still want an instant solution to a problem. By participating in a community, a longer-term perspective can be created, which will result in much more positive outcomes than is often thought on the short term. This is already present in several construction companies, and probably also available in engineering agencies, such as ARUP or RHDHV.

17.9 Master Builder

In the future, we will train students in their own specialism much less, but rather train them to become integral thinkers who connect design and execution and manage to link that to the broader societal themes of our time: how to deal with climate change, energy transition, and reusability of materials. These are the new Master Builders.

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