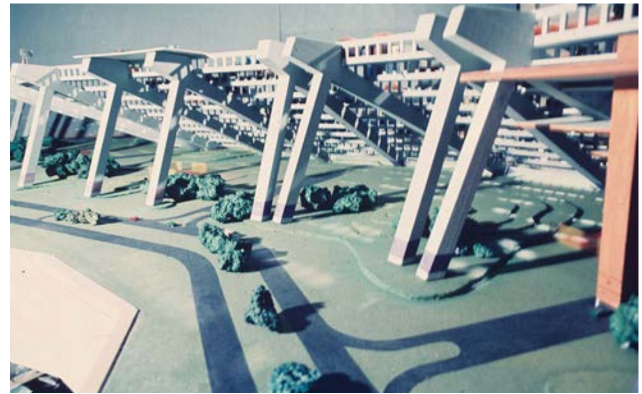
14: FROM THE CHAIR TO THE CITY

From the Chair to the City: Jaap Bakema and Politics of Scale
Łukasz Stanek

Against the background of the Cold War architects from both sides of the Iron Curtain developed apparently similar notions to negotiate the possible interrelations between the state, architecture, and the individual citizen. The notions of scale and openness are prominent among them. Łukasz Stanek discusses the work of Bakema in relation to the work of Team 10 architects from eastern Europe, in particular the Polish architects Oskar and Zofia Hansen.

"To identify yourself with total space […] asks for transitional scales in space conception from the largest scale (as big roads introduce) to the smallest scale of table and bed", argued Jaap Bakema in 1961.[1] For Bakema, it is architecture and planning, united in a new practice of 'architecturbanism', that are charged with the task of facilitating such identification of an individual with the 'largest scale'. The latter was described by Bakema abstractly as 'the scale of universal existence'[2], and his designs show that it could mean a city, a landscape, a society – or all of these. In what follows, I will read Bakema's architecture and planning particularly in regard to one of these 'largest scales': that of the state as the operative framework of post-war social order, economic management, and political subjectivity; and Bakema's project as that of re-scaling society within the welfare state system. Scales, in this context, need to be understood not as mere tools of architectural representation, but rather as historically specific frameworks for the management of life, material and discursive arenas and moments where socio-spatial power relations are exercised and contested, and compromises are negotiated and regulated.[3]

This understanding of scale is already evident in Bakema's early post-war projects, including the Pendrecht unit (1949–1951), which were informed by the discussions within the Dutch Opbouw group in the context of reconstruction, housing shortage, and the expectation of a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. Inspired by sociologists, Dutch architects and planners suggested that the city is to be re-scaled and divided into a hierarchy of discrete, self-contained, bounded settlements which would serve as frameworks of distribution of welfare and collective subjectivity. The members of the Opbouw group, including Bakema, responded to the reconstruction plans for Rotterdam which, in line with American neighborhood planning, proposed a city as a nested structure of smaller communities each with 2,000 to 4,000 inhabitants, which were functional parts of the larger neighborhood area, housing around 20,000 inhabitants.[4] The Opbouw group aimed at translating this vision of a segmented city into specific housing typologies, divided according to the size of the families and their social trajectories. Hence, the units in Pendrecht were to consist of five different building volumes (from one to four stories), each composed for, respectively, senior citizens and large, medium, and small families.[5]



Oskar and Zofia Hansen,
Linear Continous System,
the Western Belt, 1976

This basic understanding of a structured neighborhood concept as the post-war planning standard was shared both by opponents of modern architecture and by its supporters, from the French traditionalist planner Gaston Bardet to José Luis Sert, the president of CIAM.[6] In his paper on 'Human Scale in City Planning' (1944) Sert devised a hierarchy of social and spatial scales, ranging from the neighborhood unit, the township, the city proper, the metropolitan area, and the economic region. With the concept of the community complementing the functionalist triad of 'sun, air, greenery', such conceived urbanism aimed at the 'design and support of human contacts' and 'raising the cultural level' of the population.[7] This was complemented by Sert's call for new monuments, which, besides responding to specific needs such as culture or administration, were to create a bond within the community, linking the past with the present, the individual with the collective. In his 'Nine Points on Monumentality' (1943), written together with Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, Sert argued in favor of monumental buildings which would make use of modern materials and cutting-edge technologies, including mobile elements and projections, and integrate them with natural elements, trees, plants and water within man-made landscapes.[8]

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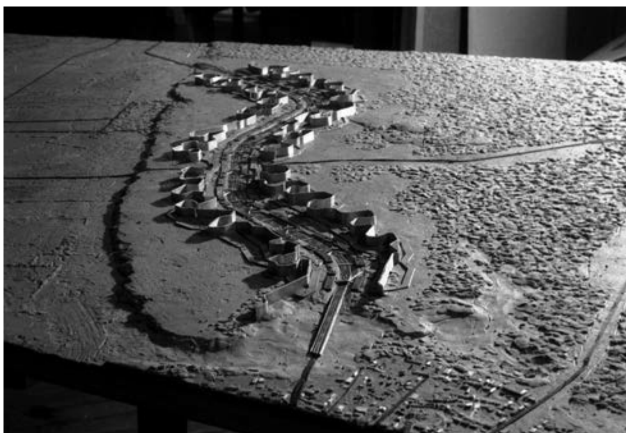
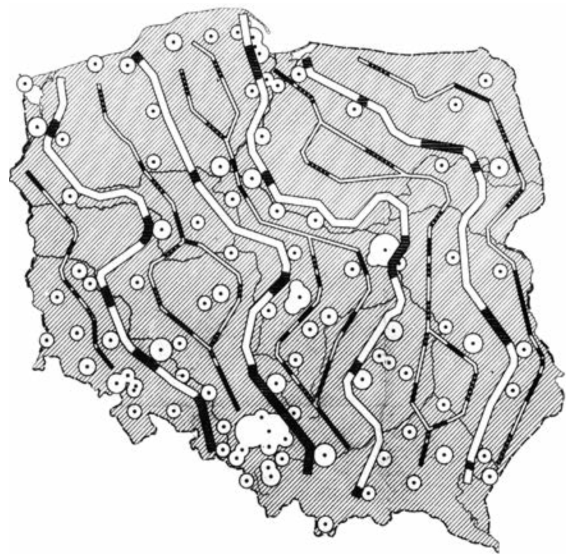
This vision of the monumental scale that sponsors an affective bond in the community was shared by Bakema. However, the monuments he envisaged were not self-standing volumes but rather parts of 'visual groups'. Distinguishing his position from the discussion on the neighborhood unit, with the walking distance as the primary criterion of the location of schools, shops, and community centers, Bakema wrote that distances are important, but visual connections are fundamental. He wrote that within a visual group houses are clustered "in such a way that by the human eye you can register interrelationship between various social ways of living."[9] In his proposal for Alkmaar and the region of Kennemerland (1957–59) he envisaged a spatial and social continuum, visually connecting low-rise dwellings with private gardens linked to medium-rise flats with communal gardens, and high-rise apartments with a view to the landscape. Similarly, the Alexanderpolder schemes (1953–56, with Opbouw) reversed the typical silhouette of the Dutch polder landscape of higher buildings at the center and lower ones on the margins. In Bakema's scheme buildings decline in height towards the center, from slabs or towers marking the edge of the unit, through to medium-rise housing descending from four to three stories, eventually to low-rise housing.Together with social facilities, the low-rise buildings form a strip with pedestrian paths and cycle routes that link the units.[10]



Oskar and Zofia Hansen,
Linear Continous System,
the Mazovia Belt, 1968

The attention to visual connections rather than to the articulation of particular units within one spatial hierarchy was shared by Team 10 architects on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This included Yugoslav fellow travelers, who invited Bakema to lecture and to propose designs for the New Zagreb city center (1964) and for Skopje (1964); as well as Team 10 members from Hungary and Poland, Charles Polónyi and Oskar Hansen.[11] It was the project of the Linear Continuous System (LCS), drawn by Oskar and Zofia Hansen and their team during the 1960s and early 1970s, that displayed most intersections with Bakema's work, including the careful attention to a scalar division of urbanization processes, and the visual and affective integration of scales in the daily routines of inhabitants. For Hansen, the LCS "should make legible to everybody his dependence on the collective and the dependence of the collective on the single person."[12] This aim of coordinating individual creativity was captured by Hansen's description of architecture as 'background' which puts to the fore individual actors but also joins them into a collective Gestalt.[13]



Oskar and Zofia Hansen, the LCS
zones projected onto the national
territory of Poland, 1972

The LCS, which Oskar and Zofia Hansen worked on in the 1960s and 1970s, was formulated in line with Hansen's theory of Open Form: an envisaged paradigm shift in the design of the built environment at every scale, which would "help us to define ourselves and find ourselves in the space and time in which we live."[14] The LCS suggested a radically new pattern for the urbanization of Poland: four large settlement strips stretching throughout the country, in this way linking together the territories within the national boundaries as they had been redrawn after the Second World War. The principal aim for Hansen was a renewed

everyday for the inhabitant, who was granted the 'right' to an integrated urban experience. For example, in one specific proposal of the LCS, the inhabitants would cross, on their way to work, all functional strips which constituted the linear pattern. In anther location of the LCS, designed for a post-industrial region in Silesia, the everyday experience of the inhabitants was to be defined by all overlapping scales of the project, starting with individual houses, constructed by self-organized cooperatives of inhabitants, and ending with a view of the broad landscape from the terraced structures conveying infrastructure provided by the state.[15]

Oskar and Zofia Hansen,
Linear Continous System,
the Western Belt, 1976

The LCS shared a number of ideas with Bakema's work, most clearly with the Pampusplan project – the linear extension of Amsterdam (1964). Both schemes were conceived as ways of managing complete urbanization by combining what was best about rural life (contact with nature) with urban opportunities (work, facilities, culture); and they also shared the basic layout, with traffic in the center, facilities, and then dwelling in large structures creating a sharp edge towards the landscape. Because of these similarities, when the journal *Le Carré Bleu* published the LCS (1969)[16], Bakema sent to the editors a presentation of the Pampusplan as a contribution to the discussion on linear urbanization. In his letter to the editors accompanying the submission, Bakema repeated Hansen's argument that an "open city (an architectural and urbanistic expression of an open society) will be most often based on the idea of a linear city (just as the concentric city was very often the expression of a closed and defensive society)."[17]

This abstract discourse on openness created a common denominator that allowed maintaining a carefully staged consensus within the Team 10 group across the Iron Curtain, as exemplified by the *Team 10 Primer* (1962).[18] However, this discourse was double coded, and when read within specific cultural and political boundaries, it conveyed distinctions alluding to the Cold War system of differences. Hence, Bakema's statement could be read in the West as a reference to Karl Popper's anti-Marxist discourse on the 'open society'. At the same time, Hansen's discourse of Open Form was welcomed by the new technocratic elites of the Polish Communist Party as hinting at the 'opening' of Marxism in Eastern Europe after and against the Stalinist 'closure'. These references would also point to the differences in the political economies of the LCS and the Pampusplan. For example Hansen expected his project to be based on a large-scale expropriation of land and the centralization of a state-led building industry; while Bakema was careful to stress the feasibility of the Pampusplan within the Dutch socio-economic consensus, arguing that half of this scheme could be built already on land belonging to the city of Amsterdam, and the rest would be created by shifting sand from the IJ-lake.[19]

In spite of these differences, the projects of Hansen and Bakema shared the promise of individual expression across multiple socio-spatial scales facilitated by a self-limiting state – the very promise that could not be kept. Hansen's LCS, which was launched as a contribution to the reform of Polish socialism, was increasingly used by him since the mid-1970s as a polemical device to debunk the ossified housing corporations, inflexible building industry, and centralized decision making processes in the face of the political and economic crisis of the regime which led to its collapse in 1989.[20] Bakema's ambition to reform the welfare state and to confine the administration to

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‘co-ordination and information’ was at odds with what he called, following the Smithsons, the ‘labour union controlled society’ and the ‘bureaucratic dictatorship’ which he saw manifested in the monotony of the built environment in the Western European welfare state.(21)

In retrospect, Bakema’s opposition to the rigid definition of the community by means of geographic isolation, which he shared with other Team 10 members, appears less as an attempt at a reform of the welfare state, and more as a hunch of a new type of urbanization and societal management that was to appear in Western Europe since the 1970s. In the *Team 10 Primer* this hunch was conveyed by the concept of the ‘doorstep’ as a different type of understanding of scale, developed by Aldo van Eyck among others. For Van Eyck, the doorstep is an in-between sphere, in which polarities are reconciled: the individual and the collective, the outside and the inside, unity and diversity, the part and the whole, the large and the small, the many and the few as well as the opposition between architecture and urbanism. The failure of modern city planning, according to Van Eyck, stems from its inability to deal with these ‘twin phenomena’ as he called them: “Failure to govern multiplicity creatively, to humanize number by means of articulation and configuration [...] has led to the curse of most new towns”.(22) The role of both architecture and urbanism is to lay out a configuration of clearly delineated intermediary places; in other words, scales are not defined any more as bounded entities but rather as a set of in-between realms.

This call for transition spaces announced a different type of discourse about the city, marked by a proliferation of debates about ‘intermediary spaces’, ‘semi-public’, ‘semi-private’, ‘spaces of transition’, ‘spaces of negotiation’, and ‘urban voids’ – a vocabulary which has governed the discourse about urban spaces ever since.(23) If for Bakema the home was “directed toward family towards the interior, and towards society from exterior”(24), his stress on the spaces of transition comes with a premonition of a new biopolitical regime where this clear cut division between the interior and the exterior becomes challenged and where architecture and urbanism are charged with the task, in the words of Aldo van Eyck, to create an “interior both outside and inside.”(25) From that point onwards, the domestic interior and the city were to become increasingly intertwined into one urban field of production and reproduction: a set of in-between spaces whose articulation is dominated by concerns of flexibility, resilience, and security.

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