

3: TOWARDS AN OPEN SOCIETY

Towards an Open Society: The unfinished work of Jaap Bakema

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'Building for an Open Society' was the title of a rather large exhibition of the work of the office of Van den Broek en Bakema at the Rotterdam museum Boymans-van Beuningen in 1962. It was organized for the occasion of the Prix de la Critique in 1961, which was awarded to Van den Broek en Bakema with a special mention to Bakema himself as a leader of the so-called 'Otterlo-group' or better-known as 'Team 10'. The jury praised Bakema and the office for their achievements in modern architecture, how they had found a balance between the 'emphasis on human relations' on the one hand and the 'possibility for personal freedom and intimacy' on the other. The jury report concluded their design work was a major contribution to a 'functional, human and democratic art of building'.⁽¹⁾



'Building for an Open Society'
(installation view), Museum
Boymans-van Beuningen, 1962

As evidenced by the jury report, it was Bakema who had become the leading voice of the office, the ultimate public figure who presented a comprehensive history of the office as a corner stone of the Dutch tradition of functionalism and modern architecture. The 1962 exhibition too was designed as a step-wise progression from the first establishment of the office by Michiel Brinkman in 1913, to the various partnerships with first the son Johannes Brinkman and Leendert van der Vlugt, and then to the partnerships with first Jo van den Broek and finally Jaap Bakema. A succession of classic, ground-breaking projects from the

history of Dutch modernism – the Spangen housing-block, the Van Nelle factory, and the Vroeselaan housing-block – led the visitor to the contemporary work of the office with such highlights as the Hansaviertel apartment tower block in Berlin and the town hall for the German city of Marl. A final room showed plans for the future, among which was the monumental Aula building for TU Delft.

Around 1962 the slogan 'Building for an Open Society' became key for Bakema. In the famous lectures 'Van Stoel tot Stad', which he presented in 1962–63 on Dutch national television, he asked the question: "What will be the art of building an open society?" Bakema answered the question himself straightaway: "Surely, at the very least the shapes that we build, will make clear that everybody has a right to a conviction of life that is suitable to himself."⁽²⁾

In 1962 the very phrase 'open society' was loaded with Cold War associations, even when Bakema would not explicitly refer to this larger geo-political situation. Yet, he must have been quite aware of these connotations, since from August 13th 1961 the Soviets had started constructing the Berlin Wall. Just a few years before, Bakema and his office had participated in the famous competition Hauptstadt Berlin (1957–58) organized by the then mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, as part of the public campaign to overcome the division of the occupied German capital. The Van den Broek en Bakema office had also contributed to the West-Berlin Hansaviertel building exhibition in 1957 with a tower block of a most innovative split-level typology. It was Bakema's Team 10 friends Alison and Peter Smithson who would most explicitly deploy the term 'open society', also in relation to the Hauptstadt Berlin competition and how Berlin could be re-imagined as an 'open city' for a new kind of mobility, both physically in terms of car mobility, and socially in terms of a new post-war egalitarian society, which ideally combined the Swedish social-democratic model with the new consumer culture of the United States.

Yet, for Bakema the notion of the open society was probably more philosophical or even existentialist, as it was primed in his wartime experience as a prisoner of a German camp.⁽³⁾ The term 'conviction of life' should also be understood in the context of a Dutch society, which was still largely religious and divided into so-called 'pillars', or communities of the various protestant and catholic denominations. Bakema had always explained his ambition as an architect in terms of societal responsibility, an awareness that one was operating within a larger, even cosmological context. This was not unrelated to the fascination of the early Dutch avant-garde for theosophy, including Bakema's predecessors Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, who built a theosophic meetinghouse in

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Amsterdam, and Bakema's wife's family who were also touched by this interest in theosophy.

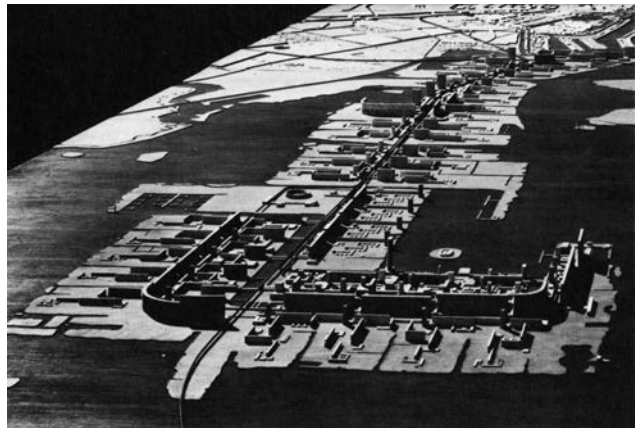
To overcome divisions and to think in terms of relations was at the heart of Bakema's project for an open society. In Otterlo in 1959 at the last CIAM conference, organized by himself, Bakema also spoke of the open society, but here the notion of 'democracy' was much more prominent in relation to personal freedom, capitalist production, and collective responsibilities.⁽⁴⁾ Thus, in the writings and thinking of Bakema the notion of the open society was a container term capable of absorbing a multitude of divergent positions moving beyond ideology or any other dogma. Ultimately, for Bakema the idea of the open society evolved around the relationship of the individual toward the larger whole, be it the neighborhood, the city, society itself, or what he called 'total space'. Architecture then was to enable the individual to become aware of his or her relationship to this larger whole, while the open society should be so generous and tolerant as to allow for the individual's self-realization. In the post-war period, in the Netherlands, it was the welfare state system that was to accommodate such lofty idealism.

Building the welfare state

In many ways the work and ideas of Jaap Bakema epitomize the best of the architecture of the post-war Dutch welfare state: its unapologetic modernity as well as its ambition to be all-inclusive and egalitarian. The monumental schemes for complete new towns and regional planning are demonstrations of an unrelenting determination to overcome the economic misery of the pre-war era and the utter chaos of the Second World War by way of a combination of optimistic rationalism and the logic of production put to good use for all. The enormous projects show an ambition that entailed nothing less than a reconceptualization of the Dutch landscape and identity: a vast expansion of the flat, horizontal, man-made polderscape interspersed by a syncopation of elementary verticals that denote the housing units, the so-called 'visual groups', which comprised a micro-cosmos of typologies to accommodate households of all walks of life.⁽⁵⁾

The 1964 Plan for Pampus summarizes Bakema's project for the Dutch welfare state in its most rhetorical grandeur. Between the old city of Amsterdam and the vast, new, and then still empty Flevopolder, a city extension was proposed for 350,000 people. Pampus was to be built into the water along a spine that integrated traffic-ways with all sorts of program for work, culture, leisure, and housing – a linear city model that was both a critique of the CIAM Functional City ideal and a continuation of Le Corbusier's call for 'soleil,

espace, verdure' for the modern city. At the end of the spine, the new city spine bends around the old existing island of Pampus and thus creates a new city core around an inner lake with harbors, boulevards, and quays. It is a majestic gesture that acts as a gate to the new Flevopolder just as it is a salutation back to the old inner city of Amsterdam and its canals. The project was presented as an alternative to current planning practices, a demonstration of the latent, underused possibilities behind the logic of mass-production and the welfare state redistribution system of land, resources, wealth, and property. An exhibition was put up in the Stedelijk Museum; and a symposium was organized at the town hall of Amsterdam with representatives from the city, the ministry, and other governmental bodies involved.⁽⁶⁾ Eventually, nothing came out of this, but it shows how the office and Bakema were operating at the forefront of innovations in planning and housing development at the time.



Plan for Pampus (scale model), 1964

At this point it should perhaps be noted that Bakema's position was much more complicated than the one of the avant-garde architect on the periphery; although driven by ideals and producing the most visionary sort of schemes, he succeeded in firmly positioning his office and its production at the heart of the Dutch welfare state system: and as an architect Bakema was to become the ultimate representative of the Dutch welfare state. Not only did he, together with the office and with Jo van den Broek, succeed in developing a systemized approach toward housing and planning, integrating design, construction, and advanced typological research, he also presented the construction of the Dutch welfare state as the opportunity *par excellence* to recast Dutch society as the epitome of a forward-looking,

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humane, modern, and rationalist welfare state society within the new global realities of the Cold War.

Such broadcasting of a new progressive identity was also quite characteristic of Bakema's projects for expos, and world expos in particular. After having organized and designed the Dutch pavilion for the Brussels Expo in 1958 (with many contributors such as Rietveld), Bakema was also in charge of the Osaka Expo 70 pavilion, which in Bakema's view was to broadcast the idea of an 'open society'.⁽⁷⁾ From his notes and sketches one reads: "a country is planning [its] change. an open society. open economy." Such a country integrated 'planning, education, science, art'. Bakema also forged a tradition of Dutch identity summed up by the foursome of 'Rembrandt, Mondrian, Van Gogh, Provo'.⁽⁸⁾

That the anarchism of Provo was included as a part of the hegemonic tradition by Bakema is key here. The Provo-movement caused high waves in 1960s Amsterdam and Holland, with all sorts of ludic 'happenings' against environmental pollution, against consumer culture, in support of women's liberation and lifting drug prohibition, even advocating free sex and the dismantling of the police force. Bakema would absorb Provo's experimentalism and recast it in a new story on Dutch identity of tolerance and openness, pragmatics and rationalism. At the same time it shows how a new Dutch cultural élite, to which Bakema belonged, embraced both modernity and counterculture, something that would be unimaginable today.

As one final, more anecdotal example of the way Bakema and his office were part of the new post-war establishment of the Netherlands, perhaps once again the relationship with the new TV-culture and the creation of a new, classless welfare state audience might help here. Bakema's appearance on television, talking to the nation while standing in front of a blackboard with a piece of chalk in his hand, has already been mentioned. The show was directed by Leen Timp for the Dutch broadcast organization AVRO (a liberal organization, not a left-wing, social-democratic one like the VARA). Timp was one of the foremost Dutch TV directors, married to one of the most popular TV hosts, Mies Bouwman. Bakema would design a house for the couple (1960, not built), while Mies Bouwman would host the national TV-show 'Open het Dorp' ('Open the Village') in 1962; a show to raise money for the special project 'Het Dorp' that was to house disabled people in such a way they could live on their own while supported by all sorts of welfare facilities. The design of this community village was in the hands of the office of Van den Broek en Bakema and it was a demonstration of all the familiar Team 10 concepts

like cluster, network, doorstep-philosophy, and streets-in-the-air with raised pedestrian walkways to negotiate the landscape. It was designed and built between 1963–69.



Lost in participation?

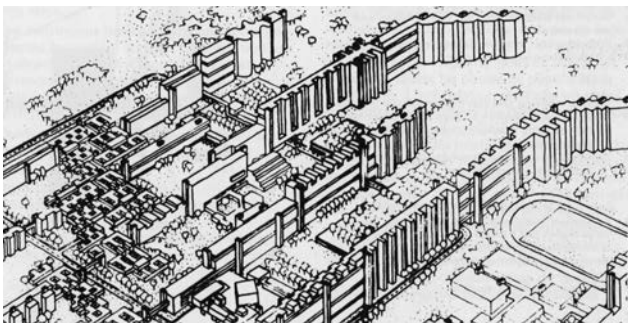
That Bakema included the anti-authoritarian Provo movement in his 1970 definition of the open society might already indicate how the notions of open, democracy, and tolerance would take a different turn. Within the Team 10 debates one can already observe an ambivalence toward the bureaucratic and paternalistic state apparatus that makes choices for the individual all in order to secure and negotiate a proper redistribution system. However, by the late 1960s, for instance in the new edition of the *Team 10 Primer* from 1968 and its new preface, we see how all Team 10 members loudly complain about the state of affairs, while also accepting having to build under the new conditions of the welfare state. In 1974, at the Rotterdam meeting, when among others the Terneuzen town hall was visited, Alison Smithson called it a monument of an already by-gone era – when the people still trusted the authorities to hire an architect to build a new town hall of a strong formal character just outside the old town, between the historic city and the new modern districts. Implying that in the 1970s – after the student revolts, and after radical 'democratization' and new concepts such as advocacy planning and participation – this sort of trust had vanished. The 1970s welfare state had now become a 'labor union society' – consumerist and populist, and anxious for more growth – and not spiritual, but materialist.

Bakema shared the same ambivalence. As a professor at TU Delft he supported the student revolt of 1969 there, to achieve more openness and involvement of the students and staff members in the decision-making process. Still, he resisted the idea to decide by way of one-man-one-vote during massive meetings where the whole community of the Faculty of Architecture would gather. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the neo-Marxist factions that would set the tone in the 1970s in Delft's development of research and education

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were highly critical of Bakema's work, just as they were critical of the positions of other so-called Forum-professors like Aldo van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger, or the lesser known but very influential, cultural theorist Joop Hardy.

The large office of Van den Broek en Bakema 'democratized' as well, and transformed itself into a so-called 'architects community'. Although loyalty between the two principals and staff seemed consistent throughout, the new less hierarchical organization also brought new tensions, in relation to authorship issues, for instance, but particularly so in the case of future office partners. In the production of the office we see a shift away from the clearly defined schemes of the 1950s and 60s with configurations of a continuous spatial development articulated according to scalar hierarchies and interdependencies between the large and the small, the house and the city. The formal language based on notions from the De Stijl movement (continuous space, ascending dimensions) and the 'concrete' realist architecture of Dutch functionalism made way for designs that resulted from the planning of processes. This becomes most notable in the design for the computer center for Siemens in Munich – an incredibly large assignment that needed to accommodate a fantastic degree of flexibility. Yet, we see it also in large-scale housing and planning schemes of the period, such as the ones for the Delft Tanthof and Hamburg Mümmelmansberg.

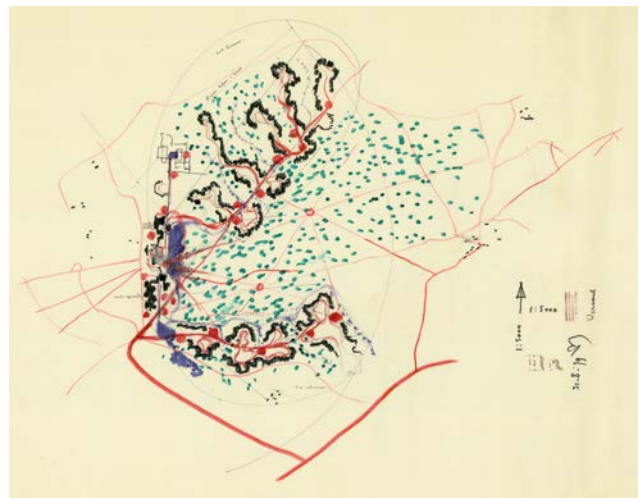


Hamburg Mümmelmansberg (zoning principle, detail drawing), 1969

In these cases, participation processes with vocal action groups, environmentalists, concerned citizens, in combination with the demand to anticipate ever-faster changes in terms of planning and politics under the impact of a highly critical media resulted in a very different sort of design output, which is still hard to assess today. A clear articulation in terms of spatial configurations made way for the production of a new kind of landscape approach to

accommodate maximum mobility between clusters of relatively undefined, yet shifting activities and program without apparent hierarchy. While these projects were accompanied by experiments in video and model-building, there are hardly any proper presentation drawings in the archive.

In 1975 Jaap Bakema suffered from a heart attack while traveling, which he miraculously survived. He lost much of his renowned energy and the last years of his life until his death in 1981 must have been quite tough according to the accounts of contemporaries. Still, he kept designing, giving lectures and interviews, teaching, and traveling. Sketches became even more energetic in the sense of 'wild gestures' – for instance, in the design of the vacation village of Verneuil, one of the many resorts the office built for the Sporthuis Centrum company. The bright patterns and clusters made with felt-tip pens suggest a registering of emotions, planning for unplanned exchanges – almost in the vein of Cobra-artist Karel Appel, whose work Bakema admired so much.



Verneuil, landscape of clusters (felt-tip pen sketch), 1979

A landscape of relational reciprocities

So can we state that the architectural project for an open society falters at the moment of maximum participation and democracy in the 1970s? Or is the submersion in process the inevitable result of the kind of integration Bakema sought – what he termed 'architecturbanism'? Why do we find it so hard to try and grasp the exact qualities of these relational schemes of endless landscapes without apparent

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hierarchies, to accept these as the outcome of the new democratic processes?

We might take the vacation villages of Sporthuis Centrum again as a key to read the ambitions of Bakema to build for the greater number and the emancipation of the masses and the individual citizen. The concatenated clusters of bungalows were built for the comfort of the new middle classes and as such, progressive left-wing critics would criticize them for being too commercial, an excess of the consumer culture disrupting the natural environment. At the same time, these resorts were planned in such a way as to try and create a new balance between the landscape and the new social realities. The houses are terribly modest, built in bare concrete blocks and natural wood. The concrete blocks reach to the height of man as to enable small-scale construction by bricklayers rather than by a large-scale system building with cranes; above it is all timber construction. Existing trees could be spared and a maximum integration of the landscape and the new settlements was realized. The bare architecture fits with the idea of a primitive hut, of course. This is allowable or even appropriate for a period of holidays, repose, and recuperation. But above all, it is a kind of laconic architecture that generously accommodates the ordinary and the everyday, and that invites – perhaps even demands – the appropriation by the user.



Sporthuis Centrum, vacation houses Lommerbergen (exterior view), 1966

At the same time the architectural language is a return to Bakema's early projects of the late 1940s before he entered the Van den Broek en Bakema office.

These were various temporary facility buildings, in which Bakema demonstrated the elements for the doorstep philosophy, which was to become so popular with his Team 10 friends. Here, we also see how the doorstep idea,

is a continuation of the interpenetration of the inside and the outside as proclaimed by Rietveld in his canonical De Stijl pieces.

It shows how the notions of interrelation and reciprocity are at the heart of Bakema's concern for architecture, a project open to use and future use, quite like his favourite 'growing houses' project for 't Hool in Eindhoven. The inevitable conclusion must be that the project for the open society can therefore never be finished. Bakema would quote Bergson here: "d'abord je constate que je passe d'un état – d'un état"⁹ To Bakema, architecture and urban planning were perfect vehicles to create a new landscape that could accommodate the involved processes of an ever becoming, from the small to the large and extra large, and then back again.



1. Brinkman, Brinkman, Van der Vlugt, Van den Broek, Bakema, *Bouwen voor een open samenleving*, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1962.

2. J.B. Bakema, *Van stoel tot stad*. Een verhaal over mensen en ruimte, Uitgeversmaatschappij W. de Haan, Zeist / Standaard Boekhandel, Antwerpen, 1964, p. 54; Dutch original: 'Hoe zal de bouwkunst zijn van een open samenleving? Toch minstens zo dat de vormen die we bouwen verduidelijken dat ieder recht heeft op een hem passende levensverklaring?'

3. Although Bakema is not quite transparent in his theoretical underpinnings, with regard to the notion of open society it is interesting to note that he never refers to Karl Popper, but on occasion he does refer to Henri Bergson, from whom Popper borrowed the term.

4. Oscar Newman (ed.), *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, Karl Krämer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1961, p. 141.

5. Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Jaap Bakema et l'exemple de Leeuwarden: Un paysage artificiel dans l'infinité de l'espace', in: Bruno Fayolle Lussac, Rémi Papillault, *Le Team X et le logement collectif à grande échelle en Europe*, MSHA, Pessac, 2008, pp. 119–144.

6. *Forum*, nr. 3, 1965, special issue 'Stad op Pampus'.

7. A young Carel Weeber was his co-architect, Piet Blom declined to participate, while others included Wim Crouwel, Peter Struycken, André Volten among others.

8. Jaap Bakema, notes on Osaka, sheet nr. 1, Bakema collection at Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.

9. Bakema, 1964, p. 28.