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Jaap Bakema and the open society

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A man with a mission

Building social relations

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Credits
Architecture and democracy – contestations in and of the open society

Dirk van den Heuvel

In many ways the work and ideas of Jaap Bakema epitomize the best of the architecture of the post-war Dutch welfare state: it is utterly unapologetic about its modernity as well as its drive to be universal and egalitarian. Bakema firmly positioned his office and its production at the heart of the Dutch welfare state system. Not only did he, together with his office partner Jo van den Broek, succeed in developing a systemized approach towards housing and planning, integrated design, construction, and advanced typological research, he also presented the construction of the Dutch welfare state as the opportunity par excellence to reconstruct Dutch society as a forward-looking, humane, modern and rationalist welfare state society within the new global reality of the Cold War.

The monumental schemes for complete new towns and for 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 positivist rationalism and the logic of efficient production employed for the benefit of all. The gigantic city extension and regional planning projects in particular testify to an ambition that entailed nothing less than a reconceptualization of the Dutch landscape and the national identity. Architecture and planning should and would help bring about a socially just redistribution of wealth and access to power, knowledge and culture. At the same time, Bakema’s work could not escape the paradoxes of mass-produced housing and construction, which are characteristic of a late-capitalist economy. A perfect balance between universal technocracy and individual freedom was often hard to maintain. Yet, at the core this was Bakema’s conviction: that architecture and planning should be at the service of a new, democratic society, including its social structure and institutions.

In the architectural history of the twentieth century there are only a few occasions when architecture and democracy were explicitly brought together by architects. The best remembered of these is also the most recent: that moment in the 1970s when an economic and political crisis forced the countries for which the governmental planners looked to new ways of building cities through users’ participation, advocacy planning and urban renewal.1 Another well-known, yet more individual and very different position, dates back to before the Second World War and comes from Frank Lloyd Wright. He famously advocated an ‘organic’ architecture as the expression of a democratic society such as the United States, or its idealized version, which Wright dubbed ‘Usonia’. His Broadacre City proposal, which celebrated mass automobility, suburban development and the freestanding house, was in his view the supreme embodiment of a prosperous democracy, and what he regarded as true capitalism, built on a productive relationship between planning and the land.2 Jaap Bakema’s ideas concerning democracy and architecture stemmed from quite a different background, even though he concluded, in a similar vein to Wright, that architecture and planning should accommodate individual lifeways and social practices of people and cities and urban places to a person’s experience of the Second World War, among others as a prisoner in a German camp in France, and to the emotional debates among Dutch architects, both during and after the German occupation, about how to rebuild the country and its damaged cities. Notions of inclusiveness, contestation and personal engagement were part and parcel of his idea of a democracy. Government, industry and citizens all had to fulfil their particular responsibilities in terms of contributing to the democratic process. He believed that, as an expert in spatial design and material construction, the architect had a special obligation within the whole process of planning and building. It was up to him to make visible and to communicate through his architecture the social relationships of a modern society. In his view it was up to the architect to enable citizens, users and inhabitants to shape their ways of life as they themselves preferred, as well as to stimulate cultural values and what Bakema called “spiritual growth”. This paradoxical, sometimes contradictory assignment for architects – to be at the service of a client while also being their mentor – is at the heart of Bakema’s beliefs and runs like a continuous thread through his career from his early years as a young architect participating in CIAM to becoming an established architect and teacher, and thereafter when contested by new generations of students and by vocal citizens who claimed their right in the political process of decision-making.

War and liberation

It was around the moment of the liberation in May 1945 that Bakema started to argue explicitly for connecting architecture with the cause of democracy. Interestingly enough, he did so first outside the immediate architectural debate. He joined the editorial board of the Dutch Resistance periodical De Vrije Kunstenares (The Free Artist) to produce a special Groningen edition.4 Around the same time, he also joined the board of the Comité voor Actieve Democratie (Committee for Active Democracy), which campaigned for general elections in the confined period immediately after the war.5 The left-wing and progressive character of the committee was also evidenced by its uncommonly frank plea for a democratic solution to the crisis in the Dutch East Indies where a war of independence had broken out. As well as testifying to Bakema’s active involvement in political campaigning for the reinstatement of democracy, these activities also reveal Bakema’s association with the informal networks of the Dutch Resistance, so-called Engelandvaarders, connections that would also work to advance his future career.6 After Liberation many members of this network remained politically active in pursuit of their ideals; Bakema, too, stated that while war was over, the battle for ‘real freedom’ continued, a battle against a rationalist welfare state society within the new global reality, and against the bureaucracy that according to him had been implicated in the emergence of fascism in the 1920s and ’30s.7

The details of Bakema’s involvement in these networks cannot be fully retraced since much of the history of the Resistance is unknown precisely because its work was carried out in secrecy.8 Two stories from the Bakema family history serve at least to illustrate the affinity of both Jaap and Sia Bakema with these circles. The first concerns Bakema’s attempt to flee to Great Britain and his successive, temporary imprisonment when this action failed, the second is Sia’s concealment of Jewish refugees during the German occupation. At that time, the Bakemas and their first-born daughter Brita, lived in Rotterdam in the Berggoldstraat, a modernist gallery-access apartment slab designed by Willem van Tijen together with the office of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, hardly a secure kind of wartime hiding-place. Yet Sia temporarily took in two girls and a violin player, who were in transit to a safer place.9

We know more about Bakema’s attempted flight to Great Britain. In March 1943 he tried to travel from Rotterdam to Great Britain via Spain in order to avoid being sent to Germany as a labourer. This was the Engelandvaarders escape route. Together with Jan Rietveld, also an architect and son of De Stijl architect Gerrit, he managed to get as far as the French-Spanish border in the Pyrenees where the pair was captured and subsequently imprisoned in

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Rotterdam; it consists of 51 pages and the entries are Bakema to the Dutch State Archive of Architecture in Katholiek Bouwblad, in: De Vrije Kunstenaar, no. 13, 1947, p. 436-446. In a follow-up article in De Vrije Kunstenaar on the politics of reconstruction – ‘De Wederopbouw, de Jongere Architecten en Nieuwe Architectuur’ (The Reconstruction, the Younger Architects and New Architecture) – Bakema reiterated his plea to open the decision-making process to include modern architects like himself. He complained that “the word Democracy was not yet understood” within the building and planning disciplines. His disappointment had its roots in the early war years, when architects from different backgrounds and institutional positions had held collective meetings, the so-called Doorn seminars, in which Bakema had actively participated. These seminars were intended to overcome the pre-war dissent between architectural factions, modernists and traditionalists in particular, and to discuss the future of reconstruction once the war was over. This attempt at a new collective project was colloquially labelled ‘shake-hands architecture’, or the ‘marriage between concrete and brick’. Leading figures in these debates were Van Tijen, for whom Bakema briefly worked, on behalf of the modern architects and Marinus Graprie Molère as the leading voice of the Catholic-inspired, traditionalist architects and planners of the so-called Delft School, named after their dominant presence at the Delft University. Yet despite that early collaborative intention, now war was over it appeared to Bakema and other modern architects that the traditionalists, who also held most of the planning and government positions, were unwilling to share work with their Nieuwe Zakelijkheid (Dutch functionalist) counterparts. Significantly, Graprie Molère was also the supervisor for the reconstruction project in Bakema’s own city of Groningen.

With modernists like Cor van Eesteren as director of the town planning department in Amsterdam, and Cornelis van Traa in charge of the Rotterdam department of reconstruction, it could be argued that the actual state of affairs was more nuanced, however; the polemics quickly developed into a new polarization of the Dutch architectural scene and the post-war shift has its roots in the overall political framework or “maatschappijvorm” (social arrangement) within which diversity and difference should be accepted and accommodated. According to Bakema, in a proper democratic society both “Catholic dogmatists” and “humanitarian life artists” should be allowed to define their own way of life and give expression to this. After this statement, Bakema went on to explain his position as a humanist and as an architect and why it was necessary to move beyond the boundaries of national identities and religious beliefs and to allow a new freedom. In his view architecture and city planning, as extensions of human existence, were first and foremost relational. It was the architect’s duty to help to make people aware of this in order to enable them to make their own life choices.

Post-war CIAM 1947-1959

The idea of an inclusive and socially fair democracy was also what Bakema subsequently brought to the post-war CIAM meetings, all of which he attended. For the reunion conference held in Bridgewater in 1947 he presented a statement on behalf of a ‘group of young Dutch architects’ affiliated with Dutch CIAM, which put the ‘democratic attitude of life’ front and centre. This attitude was defined firstly by social justice, in terms of individual opportunity for a “full” life, secondly by freedom, as an awareness communicated through spatial configuration, and thirdly by collaboration, especially between different architectural factions or “Études de form”. To bring democracy as a central concern for architecture and planning in such an explicit way to CIAM was wholly new, even though CIAM’s Architektur und democratie, but this the Compiègne internment and deportation camp north of Paris. In December they managed to escape from Compiègne and travel back to Rotterdam. From there Bakema went into hiding in his place of birth, the city of Groningen in the north of the Netherlands, where he remained until the end of the war together with his young family, Sia, Brita and a new-born son, Eric. During his flight and subsequent imprisonment Bakema kept a diary. In it we find some of the 29-year-old architect’s innermost feelings, including lyrical descriptions of nature and a yearning to be back with his wife and baby daughter in Rotterdam. There are also a few reflections on society in general and visions for the future post-war political structure, ranging from outright socialism, in which everyone would be obliged to spend a few hours per day on collective labour duties, to more humanist, liberal notions of culture and politics. Descriptions of daily life in the camp and its barracks paint a picture of a micro-society, in which the prisoners had to negotiate their internal affairs. For instance, it was sometimes possible to send food packages to individual prisoners, which – when it happened – led to debates about whether or not to redistribute the food among fellow prisoners. From these personal notes an image emerges of a young Bakema who could not sit still and wait until war was over, someone who remained positive against all odds, always looking for an opportunity to improve a miserable situation no matter how gloomy the outlook. In the first issue of the Groningen edition of De Vrije Kunstenaar, published a few weeks after the liberation, Bakema continued to explore how to collectively organize and plan for immediate amelioration in the post-war situation. In his contribution, ‘Architectuur – Gemeenschap’ (Architecture – Community), Bakema argued for an open and transparent procedure for the planning and rebuilding of the central square in Groningen, the Grote Markt, which had been heavily damaged during the street battles of April 1945, which he had witnessed himself. Bakema called on architects to work together in a study circle, and on the local government to organize an information campaign, including an exhibition, to raise public awareness. In arguing the case for the much-needed new city extensions in Groningen, Bakema stated that successful planning depended on the involvement of the future inhabitants from the beginning. Two other key factors mentioned by Bakema were control of landownership and the need to accommodate a variety of household types in neighbour-hoods to achieve a city full of diversity. In a nutshell, these were elements and issues that recur throughout Bakema’s practice and way of working early on, in the way Dutch CIAM set up its collective studies for new city districts, and much later in the public debates on major urban projects, such as Pampus in Amsterdam (1964-65) and the Cityplan for Eindhoven (1966-69).

10 Conversations with Brita Bakema, a second son, Niels, was born after the war Jan Rietveld also travelled with them to Groningen.
11 In 2017 Brita Bakema donated the diary of Jaap Bakema to the Dutch State Archive of Architecture and Urban Planning at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam; it consists of 51 pages and the entries are dated between 27 March 1943 and 30 October 1943.
12 Brita Bakema talks of street-by-street fighting between Germans and Canadians, and how she, her brother and Siä fled to the countryside, where they stayed briefly at a farm. Jaap Bakema remained in Groningen to prevent their temporary home in the Kromme Blokkend close to the Grote Markt from falling prey to the raging fires.
14 Ibid., pp. 1-6.
17 For an excellent overview of the transitional period before, during and after the war, see Koos Booms, Cor Wagenaar (eds.), Een ondernemend debiet, De geschiedenis van architectuur en stadsbouw tijdens de bezetting en de wederopbouw van Nederland, Rotterdam: NAI Uitgevers, 1995.
18 M.J. Granpré Molière, ‘Delft School approach. Clearly offended by such criticism, Granpré Molière responded vehemently to the criticism of the Catholic-inspired, traditionalist architects and planners of the so-called Delft School, named after their dominant presence at the Delft University. Yet despite that early collaborative intention, now war was over it appeared to Bakema and other modern architects that the traditionalists, who also held most of the planning and government positions, were unwilling to share work with their Nieuwe Zakelijkheid (Dutch functionalist) counterparts. Significantly, Graprie Molère was also the supervisor for the reconstruction project in Bakema’s own city of Groningen.

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affinities were arguably with the left or at least with a political project of the emancipation of the masses, albeit mostly through the provision of housing and slum clearance, and the planning of hygienic and healthy labour conditions as part of the doctrine of the Functional City.

Explicitly political statements were not appreciated in CIAM. Eric Mumford has pointed out how CIAM transformed itself in 1934 into an organization of specialists in response to tensions within CIAM itself, among others between André Lurçat and Le Corbusier. Lurçat favoured a communist revolutionary approach to advance the cause of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, while simultaneously Le Corbusier’s human habitat in Aix-en-Provence (1953) and the CIAM group, and the department of urban planning headed by Lotte Stam-Beez. Pendrecht served as a first case study for the realization of visual and social relationships within the actual context of city building and planning regulations.

At Hoddesdon, witness the official proceedings of the conference, The Heart of the City, the topic of democracy was raised only very occasionally.26 The then president of CIAM, Josep Lluís Sert preferred to talk about public spaces in the rather apolitical terms of community life and civic values. It was his view that the architect could only help to realize the “frame or container within which this community life could take place”, but in the end was entirely dependent on the specific “political, social and economic structure of every community”. Only once did Sert refer to democracy, stating that “a free and democratic exchange of ideas led towards the government of the majority” was preferable to “the rule of the few”, and that civic centres might help in “consolidating” such majority governments.27 Sigfried Giedion addressed the topic of democracy more explicitly, albeit in terms of the historical examples of the Greek agora and Roman forum as public spaces for the “formation of public opinion”. Apparently, he was expressing a consensus opinion when he stated that “a city is the expression of a diversity of social relationships which have become fused into a single organism.”

Yet in the final summary of the conference there is no mention of political or specific democratic concerns in relation to architecture and city planning. As has been well documented in the case of Bakema’s work and Dutch post-war architecture and planning in general, the socio-political ideals of universal inclusion and diversity were translated almost literally into specific spatial and typological configurations that were a reflection of the population, or at least a planner’s categorization of the various household and income types.28 At the lower level of social realism as the future for architecture and planning in general, and for the reconstruction of Warsaw in particular, even though back home she and her husband Szymon were treated with distrust due to their international connections and pre-war avant-gardist practice.29

After Bridgewater, Bakema too, refrained from overly political statements about an explicitly democratic programme, even though he had initially stated that he was interested to hear what “other young architects from other countries” had to say about “the extent to which in their country the democratic ideals can find expression in new architecture and town planning”.30 Instead, at the Bergamo conference and the conference in Hoddesdon in 1951, he presented the designs for the Pardrecht district in Rotterdam as illustrations of his view on the issues at stake. These plans were initially rejected but then approved and formed part of the CIAM group, and the department of urban planning headed by Lotte Stam-Beez. Pendrecht served as a first case study for the realization of visual and social relationships within the actual context of city building and planning regulations.

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For the subsequent CIAM conferences on the topic of the housing unit,31 and the CIAM ‘56 conference in Rotterdam in 1956, Bakema expanded the idea of the repeatable housing unit into the much larger ‘visual group’ to overcome problems of too much repetition and the limitations in ‘variety in plastic-visual relationships’, in order to increase the possibilities for “greater identification” for the inhabitants.32 These studies were made in the context of the Alexanderpolder urban development east of Rotterdam. In expanding the basic unit of urbanization, he succeeded in combining the housing units with the vast scale of the polder landscape and wish that of the new infrastructure of motorways. At the final CIAM conference in Otterlo in 1959, organized by Bakema himself, he presented a full-blown regional planning scheme for the urbanization of Kennemerland, a coastal region centred on the city of Alkmaar, 30 kilometres north of Amsterdam. This time, the project was not developed within the Opbouw group, but by his own office, and in particular by Jan Stokla, who was responsible for many of the groundbreaking housing projects of the Van den Broek and Bakema firm.33 Collages of the landscape behind the dunes illustrate how he visually and plastically envisaged the recontextualization of the Dutch landscape and identity: a vast expansion of the flat, horizontal, man-made polderscape, interspersed with a synchronization of elementary verticals that denote the rhythm of the series of ‘visual groups’ which comprised a microcosm of typologies to accommodate households from all walks of life.34

In Otterlo, Bakema also felt free to once again connect his ideas of democracy with architecture and planning. Perhaps this was now possible due to the absence of the older CIAM generation, or due to the fact that the concept of national representation as a basis for its organization, and all national groups had been dismantled by the time CIAM convened for the last time in Otterlo. CIAM members now spoke as individuals, not as national representatives. This reconnection between politics and architecture was also evidenced by the presence of Jan Stokla, who spoke at the opening of the conference about the various responsibilities of the architect as a technician.
37 To what extent it was a direct appropriation of Karl Popper’s ideas remains unclear though; the Smithers did not mention Popper or his 1945 book, The Open Society and Its Enemies as a source.
39 For an extended discussion of Alan Smithers’ ideas on the open society and the welfare state, see my dissertation, chapter 6 ‘The Great Competition 1957-58’, as part of the larger ‘Unsere Nachbarn Bauen’ (‘Our Neighbours are Building’) show at the Akademie der Künste, Bakema curated the exhibition to which he brought a selection of the latest developments in Dutch modern architecture, including work by his own office, Aldo van Eyck, Jan Buitendijk and Hein Salomonson.
40 In the accompanying essay, Bakema once again stressed the need for ‘architecture by planning’ and ‘planning by architecture’ to arrive at cities in which each citizen had a ‘right to his own approach to life’, and to ‘shape his own corner’ of the larger ‘structure of society’. 41 According to the report on the Otterlo meeting, it was Ernesto Rogers’ presentation of his Torre Velasca project that elicited a discussion of the idea of the open society in relation to ‘closed’ versus ‘open’ aesthetics. Peter Smithson led the opposition, stating his view that an open aesthetic – unlike the closed one of Rogers’ project – embraced change: “The idea of capital and technology was balanced by a ‘publicly directed economy’, which was to be ‘subservient to the development of an open society’. 42 Cold War and global exchanges Otterlo 1959 also marked the introduction of the topic of the open society in Team 10’s discourse, and very likely in Bakema’s thinking as well, where it formed one of the constituent elements of his theory of the relations between society and architecture. It was Bakema’s Team 10 friends Alison and Peter Smithson who deployed the term open society most explicitly. 43 They used it specifically in relation to the city of Berlin in the context of the international architecture competition for the Hauptstadt Berlin competition of 1957-58, organized by the then mayor of Berlin Willy Brandt, against the backdrop of polarizing debates on the looming division of the occupied German capital. All too no avail as it turned out, since the Soviets started constructing the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Within this Cold War context, the Smithsons continued their argument in Berlin as the “old war excellence, characterized by a new kind of mobility that was also a new freedom. This new mobility was both a physical phenomenon in terms of car mobility, which had a fundamental impact on the principles of post-war city planning, and social in terms of a new post-war egalitarian society.” 44 Bakema, Berlin and its precarious political situation was a familiar context. Like the Smithsons, Bakema and his office participated in the Hauptstadt Berlin competition. He was also involved in the Interbau international building exhibition of 1957 that showcased projects of national and international modern architects in the Hansaviertel district and was conceived as the counterpart of the socialist realist project for the Stalinallee in East Berlin. 45 Another contribution by Bakema to the Berlin debates on planning and architecture was the exhibition ‘On Schönhauser Straße’ (From Doorstep to City) as part of the larger ‘Unsere Nachbarn Bauen’ (‘Our Neighbours are Building’) show at the Akademie der Künste. Bakema curated the exhibition to which he brought a selection of the latest developments in Dutch modern architecture, including work by his own office, Aldo van Eyck, Jan Buitendijk and Hein Salomonson. In the accompanying essay, Bakema once again stressed the need for ‘architecture by planning’ and ‘planning by architecture’ to arrive at cities in which each citizen had a ‘right to his own approach to life’, and to ‘shape his own corner’ of the larger ‘structure of society’. 46 According to the report on the Otterlo meeting, it was Ernesto Rogers’ presentation of his Torre Velasca project that elicited a discussion of the idea of the open society in relation to ‘closed’ versus ‘open’ aesthetics. Peter Smithson led the opposition, stating his view that an open aesthetic – unlike the closed one of Rogers’ project – embraced change: “The idea of capital and technology was balanced by a ‘publicly directed economy’, which was to be ‘subservient to the development of an open society’.”
Bakema archive, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam; under ‘gastcicolleges’ there is an overview of teaching posts and lectures.

54 See ibid.


56 Jakob van Neck, as noted in A. van Hedel, “De partij van de openbare infrastructuur als een soort groene politieke geallieerdheid bij de Tweede Kamer,” in De 8, de kamer van de openbare infrastructuur, 2000, pp. 168–185.

57 Aldo van Eyck authored the final version and presentation for the CIAM exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 1956, see also Strauven, p. 246, 255–257.

58 Bakema, Van stoel tot stad, p. 5.


60 Bakema’s activities were closely connected with his role as independent critic. In 1951 he founded, with Albert Hofman, the Architectenjury, a jury comprising leading architects and other professionals. Bakema was one of the six members of the jury that oversaw the planning of the new town of Nagele in the twenties. Bakema, Van stoel tot stad, p. 103.


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63 Bakema archive, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, which opened on 27 October 1962. It was entitled ‘Building for an open society’. This was seemingly felt to be self-evident, since it was left unexplained in the catalogue. The exhibition was organized in honour of the Prix de la Critique, which had been awarded to Van den Broek and Bakema. The jury report singled out Jesp Bakema’s contribution as ‘characteristic of the “Otterlo group or Team Ten”’. It praised Bakema and the office for their achievements in modern architecture, for the way they had managed to strike a balance between the “emphasis on human relations” on the one hand and the “possibility for personal freedom and intimacy” on the other. Touching on the issue of the Prix de la Critique, the jury apparently felt compelled to explain why the Prix de la Critique had been awarded to the office rather than to Bakema as an individual. The report commented that Bakema’s activities could not be uncoupled from the office, while also stating that by awarding the prize to the office the jury aimed to honour the “complete development of modern architecture: the pre-war activities of Prof. Van den Broek, the participation in Opperdoes, hence in De 8, the participation in the planning of Nagele, etc. – a line from the beginnings of Dutch functionalism to the latest tendencies.” The jury report concluded by stating that the work was a major contribution to and a reflection of a “functional, human and democratic art of building.”

64 See also the essay by Jo Ritsema, “Communicatie Machine”, in pp. 234–235 in this book.


66 The idea of an open society in the Dutch context was at Expo ‘70 in Osaka, for which Bakema designed the Dutch pavilion together with Carel Visser. However, the years around 1970 were very different from the years 1959-1964. If connections between the open society, democracy and modern architecture were a matter of course in the 1950s and early ’60s, the years around 1970 represent the critical evaluation and contestation of such established notions and practices.

Contestations
When Bakema worked on the Dutch pavilion for Expo ’70 he made extensive notes to order his thoughts regarding the conceptual programme behind the project. The most concisely stated is a mere three pages of key words jotted down, initially in English, finally in Dutch, in an attempt to capture the essence of the idea of an open society. These ideas were written as part of the ‘otterlo tot stad’ lecture series, the first monographic exhibition of the Van den Broek and Bakema office held in the Boymans-van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam, which opened on 27 October 1962. It was entitled ‘Building for an open society’. This was seemingly felt to be self-evident, since it was left unexplained in the catalogue. The exhibition was organized in honour of the Prix de la Critique, which had been awarded to Van den Broek and Bakema. The jury report singled out Jesp Bakema’s contribution as ‘characteristic of the “Otterlo group or Team Ten”’. It praised Bakema and the office for their achievements in modern architecture, for the way they had managed to strike a balance between the “emphasis on human relations” on the one hand and the “possibility for personal freedom and intimacy” on the other. Touching on the issue of the Prix de la Critique, the jury apparently felt compelled to explain why the Prix de la Critique had been awarded to the office rather than to Bakema as an individual. The report commented that Bakema’s activities could not be uncoupled from the office, while also stating that by awarding the prize to the office the jury aimed to honour the “complete development of modern architecture: the pre-war activities of Prof. Van den Broek, the participation in Opperdoes, hence in De 8, the participation in the planning of Nagele, etc. – a line from the beginnings of Dutch functionalism to the latest tendencies.” The jury report concluded by stating that the work was a major contribution to and a reflection of a “functional, human and democratic art of building.”

67 The archives of the Van den Broek and Bakema office, as listed in Jesp Bakema archive, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, contain various extensive sets of notes by Bakema on the project. One particular set consists of three pages only, archived codes BAKE_d34-15 to 16.
In his Osaka statement Bakema also listed the ‘results’ of the Dutch open society and its integrated knowledge economy. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state. They basically boiled down to the conditions of the welfare state.
in 1944. Speaking about the post-1945 avant-garde, Hardy claimed it was the opposite of an open society. It consisted of ‘almost closed communities juxtaposed to an ‘open society’ which absorbs everything that submits, adapts, socializes’. Speaking of the arts, Hardy also posited that the “open museum that admits every manifestation, attracts every event and, in doing so, neutralizes, invalidates [the avant-garde]”.82

It just goes to show that consensus-building and pragmatism as hinted at by Bakema were not a matter of course, not even among his own peers of Dutch Forum and Team 10.

How to (re)organize the planning system in the Netherlands and make it more democratic? This question was a subject of fierce debate, which led to highly radical and innovative propositions that touched on the very definition of the architectural discipline. In the Netherlands one of the first proponents of the empowerment of inhabitants as the starting point for a fundamental rethink of architecture and planning, and of the structure of the building industry was, of course, John Habraken, who published his groundbreaking book De dragers en de mensen in 1961.83 Other radical positions in the Dutch debates that sought to translate new democratic ideals into architecture as a critique of functionalist planning were represented by Frank van Klingeren and Constant Nieuwenhuys. Van Klingeren developed a spatial theory of friction to overcome functional segregation for his various experimental projects for cultural centres, while the artist Constant famously worked on his fictional and utopian project of New Babylon from 1956 to 1974.84

Bakema seemed to embrace the competition and the challenging of his propositions. To him, contestation and critique were part of the discursive game, completely in line with a Popperian understanding of what an open society stands for. A comparison of the design production of those years reveals quite a few parallels. Bakema’s diagram of future urbanization and the interweaving of public and private functions, for example, is reminiscent of Constant’s project. Both men assumed that land should be fully collectivized in order to maximize modernization and freedom, a socialist ideal that was shattered in 1977 when the centre-left coalition government led by the socialist-democrat Joop den Uyl founded on a new law that would involve the government to acquire agricultural land cheaply for the construction of new housing projects.

Bakema’s acceptance of a competition of ideas was also exemplified by his notes for the Osaka pavilion. He aimed to include what he called ‘protest schemes’. He included two of his own projects as well, the Auditorium building for Delft University and Pampus, the monumental scheme for the extension of Amsterdam.85 The inclusion of the latter as an example of ‘protest’ is quite remarkable, since proposals for megastructures had come under fierce scrutiny from local pressure groups and the media, and Bakema too, had experienced a rejection of his approach to planning, forcing him to drastically review his own assumptions.

**Denouncement**

Perhaps the so-called Cityplan, developed in the late 1960s for the restructuring of the centre of Eindhoven, is the most characteristic example of the demise of Bakema’s approach. Bakema had tailored the urban development scheme to meet all sorts of possible demands in terms of multi-functionality and mixed-use, future change and adaptability. The megastructure-like project was a response to the need to accommodate large-scale programmes for the booming hometown of the multinational Philips company. Even though the architectural language was radically modern, the specific urban configuration of the project engaged in a dialogue with the existing historical fabric to create a continuous series of new public spaces. But it was all too naïf, for the project triggered angry protests from vocal action groups, environmentalists, concerned citizens and a critical media, while politicians and governors also expressed their doubts. In Eindhoven it transpired that Bakema’s ideas of an open society and how to translate them into an urban architecture were rejected at the very moment when the open society seemed to become fully institutionalized.

Building on earlier projects for megastructures developed by his office, such as the one for the Hauptstadt Berlin, the Tel Aviv Jaffa competitions and the Pampus extension plan for Amsterdam, Bakema had proposed a so-called ‘spine-wall’ building for Eindhoven. The project was some 400 metres long and reminiscent of the earlier ‘core-wall’ concept. It was to house a variety of functions – shops, offices and flats – and can be read as a variation of the ‘facilitating folding with your own apartment’, Piet Parol, 21 May 1970.

The accompanying catalogue included sheets for comments and even one page with an outline of the area in which citizens could draw their own alternative visions, a selection of which survive in the archive. As well as an extensive presentation was organized at the Van Abbemuseum, with exhibitions and a reconstruction of post-war Groningen, with exhibitions and a wall with newspaper clippings of the debates and various opinions. There was also a model that could be used in discussions to test different alternatives. The last room was devoted to a selection of work from the Van den Broek and Bakema office as an illustration of developments in modern architecture in the 1960s.

The very flexibility of the overall planning principles, a slide show and a selection of work from the Van den Broek and Bakema office as an illustration of developments in modern architecture in the 1960s. The accompanying catalogue included sheets for comments and even one page with an outline of the area in which citizens could draw their own alternative visions, a selection of which survive in the archive. As well as an extensive presentation was organized at the Van Abbemuseum, with exhibitions and a reconstruction of post-war Groningen, with exhibitions and a wall with newspaper clippings of the debates and various opinions. There was also a model that could be used in discussions to test different alternatives. The last room was devoted to a selection of work from the Van den Broek and Bakema office as an illustration of developments in modern architecture in the 1960s.

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Ultimately, however, the scheme was cancelled, not due to the citizens’ protests, but because of all sorts of new uncertainties caused by, among others, the oil crisis and a newly elected city council in 1974. The minister for spatial planning decided that the proposal appeared to be unfeasible, precisely because it was too flexible, and hence its future development too unpredictable to receive his support, after which the whole scheme was abandoned.

### Between Japan and the Netherlands

Why but did Bakema feel that the megastructure concept would fit his ideal of an open society? Especially given that some very successful housing districts were realized in parallel of the debates about the various large-scale projects such as Cityplan in Eindhoven and Pampus in Amsterdam. In Eindhoven, too, Bakema and his office designed a very popular scheme for an area just north of the inner city. Crucially, it was at the initiative of a few Philips engineers that the ‘t Hool housing estate came into being. They wanted to build their own houses and established a foundation that succeeded in realizing the district together with the Van den Broek and Bakema office, housing associations and the city. The project started around 1961 and was eventually built between 1968 and 1972. It largely followed the concept of the visual group designed to accommodate a wide variety of housing types, including in terms of ownership.

The megastructure concept in Bakema’s work originated in the late CIAM debates and the exchanges between Team 10 and the Japanese metabolists, especially Kenzo Tange and Fumihiko Maki. The earliest example dates from 1953 and Bakema’s work within the Rotterdam CIAM chapter Opbouw: a sketch proposal for ‘mammoths’ for Alexanderpolder shows how the various housing blocks of the familiar visual group concept are linked together and built up into a massive ‘mammoth’-like building that rises up from the flat polder landscape and merges with the new motorway infrastructure at the point of its highest volume. Eleven such monumental structures make up the whole district and create a highly futuristic environment of an open society as envisaged by Bakema faltered at the very moment of living.”

But in Eindhoven, as almost everywhere else, Bakema’s pursuit of this ideal through the concept of megastructures and related typologies was eventually denounced. Maybe this is also one of the reasons why Bakema listed the Pampus project as a ‘protest’ scheme when he was planning the project for Osaka. Despite a publicity campaign as intense as that mounted in Eindhoven, including an exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, a special issue of Forum dedicated to the project, and a ‘symposion’ with representatives from the national, provincial and city departments, the Pampus Plan was ultimately shelved. In Delft, too, an initial megastructure plan for the new Tanthof district had to be abandoned after protests. Subsequently, a working group that included the architects, city officials and citizens was formed to develop an entirely new approach. A clear articulation in terms of spatial configuration made way for the production of a new kind of landscape approach that allowed room for change and negotiation during the realization process, and provided maximum flexibility without apparent hierarchy. In Tanthof and elsewhere, participation processes involving vocal action groups, environmentalists and concerned citizens, in combination with the demand to anticipate increasingly rapid changes in planning and politics, all under the watchful eyes of a highly critical media, resulted in an architectural design production that was very different from the heyday of the post-war welfare state.

### New beginnings?

Can we conclude that the architectural project for an open society as envisaged by Bakema faltered at the very moment of maximum participation and democracy in the 1970s? Or even more significantly, did the architectural discourse meet its nemesis when confronted with the more radical forms of democracy? Or was the submersion in process the inevitable result of the kind of integration between architecture and planning that Bakema sought and that he debated, not so poetically perhaps, ‘architecturbanism’?

A shift to the organization of processes similar to that for the megastructure projects of Cityplan and Tanthof, can be observed in many other projects of the same period, such as the planning for the Hamburg housing district of Müllemelstädt and the project for the Siemens research and computer centre in Munich. In these projects, the end result was not defined by any formal concept or language.
but rather emerged from the rules and parameters as set out at the beginning based on an analysis of the programme and needs.

The formal language of Bakema’s designs of the 1940s and ’50s, which synthesized notions from the De Stijl movement (continuous space, ascending dimensions), the objective rationalism of Dutch functionalism, and proto-brutalist, ‘concrete’ realist architecture as exemplified by projects like his modest construction office in Rotterdam, the Hansaviertel tower block in Berlin, and the church in Nagele, made way for a range of ‘impromptu responses’ to the internal logic of the assignment in question, its context and concomitant realization process.100 That the office only expanded further with branch offices and project architects, even ‘democratically’ itself into a new organization as the ‘Architects’ Community Van den Broek and Bakema’, is also part of this history.101 Within the resulting diversity of projects one can detect families of projects, associated with the various project architects, local contexts and the types of assignments.

Yet perhaps this is the ‘open society’ par excellence, the collection of processes of a continuous critique and revision, which ultimately cannot be fully controlled from a singular centre as exemplified by the figure of an author-architect. Bakema himself might have referred here to his favourite Henri Bergson quote: “d’abord je constate que je passe d’état en état”.105 However, this quote should not be understood as a harmonious way of being in the world. That would imply a superficial glossing-over of the real socio-political differences and disruptions that are at stake, and which can only be resolved or overcome through contestation and critique. Even though one might criticize Bakema for not explicitly elaborating such a philosophical foundation and justly complain that all too often such references to a discourse outside architecture amounted to a bypassing of the actual political differences at stake, he himself was acutely aware of the political rifts that governed the communication his office, and of the changing atmosphere in schools of architecture.102

To be sure, Bakema never abandoned the project for an open society. It was in his view by definition unfinished. The concept of the megastructure or core-wall building must likewise have remained valid and realistic in his eyes, since in 1975 in the city of Tilburg a partial realization of the idea was eventually built as part of the inner-city Koningsweij project, which included a parking garage, a public library and a housing slab. For Bakema architecture and urban planning were perfect vehicles for creating the platforms – to use a contemporary term – needed for the accommodation of the kind of contestation and criticism that were part and parcel of the open society as an evolutionary process. Some of the key projects in Bakema’s oeuvre were also clearly intended to provoke debate and contestation, Pampus famously so, while others were intended to regulate and accommodate the future development of the built environment, almost as an urban game built on the reciprocities between the users’ patterns and the spatial and material configurations.

One underlying motif in Bakema’s work that seems to have emerged from the formalism of Dutch functionalism is quite crucial to understanding his notion of architecture in relation to that of the open society, was the way he integrated the landscape into all his planning. Maybe it is overlooked because Bakema – despite being an eloquent and prolific speaker and prose stylist – also understated many aspects of his thinking and his firm’s work. Landscape was one such aspect, construction and technology two more. When Bakema’s work evolved from a clearly articulated, modernist vocabulary into a language based on process, landscape remained an important ingredient in the planning of the various projects. In the case of Tannfors, it even acquired a completely new role as the formative element of the plan, in terms for instance of the preservation of old polder structures and water management. The series of holiday resorts built for the Sporthuis Centrum company might also serve here as an example of landscape as an integral part of the development of a language of emergent forms.

The concatenated clusters of bungalows were built for the comfort of the new middle classes and as such, left-wing critics criticized them for being too commercial, as an excess of consumer culture disrupting the natural environment. At the same time, the holiday villages fitted in with Bakema’s ambition to build for the greater number and for the emancipation of the masses and individual citizens, which included the development of a leisure culture. Unlike Bakema’s megastructure proposals, the holiday villages were immensely and enduringly popular. They were planned in such a way as to try to create a balance between the landscape and the new social realities. The houses were (and still are) extremely modest, constructed of bare concrete blocks and natural wood. The concrete block walls do not exceed the ground floor so as to enable small-scale construction by bricklayers rather than large-scale system building using cranes; above the concrete is an all-timber construction. Existing trees were spared, and the new settlements were integrated as much as possible with the existing landscape. The clustering of the houses was done in such a way as to ensure individual privacy and allow a direct relation with nature. Cars are left at the entrance; the holiday parks are developed as pedestrian zones.

The no-frills architecture fits the notion of a primitive hut, of course, very appropriate for a period of holiday, repose and recuperation. But above all, it is a kind of understated architecture that generously accommodates the ordinary and the everyday, and that invites – perhaps even demands – appropriation by the user. At the same time the architectural language is a return to Bakema’s early projects of the late 1940s, before he entered into partnership with Van den Broek, projects in which Bakema demonstrated the elements for the doorstep philosophy, which was to become so popular with his Team 10 friends.103 It shows – once again – how the notions of interrelation and reciprocity are at the heart of Bakema’s approach to architecture. These notions of interrelation and reciprocity, the (proto-)environmental understanding of architecture and planning, imply an unrelenting dynamic.

The interrelational understanding of architecture as part of a larger environment was already present in Bakema’s early ideas on architecture as testified by his description of Rietveld’s design for a weekend home for the Verrijn-Stuart family. In his essay ‘The Free Form’ published in 1941 at the beginning of the Second World War, Bakema spoke of the religious feelings aroused within him, of the force of a “God-nature” captured by Rietveld’s mastery of the language of architecture as a spatial art.104 Similar lyrical descriptions are to be found in his wartime diary, and later on when he talked about the “wonder” of human existence and a cosmological experience of “total space”. The notions of horizon, water, trees and an expanding landscape are always present in Bakema’s reconceptualizations of the Dutch landscape and its infrastructure. This is still the place where the project for a modern, open society might be situated indeed, despite the demise of the big projects for ‘total urbanization’ in the 1970s, and the megastructure concept in particular. At the intersection between architecture and planning, housing and politics, this is the assignment: how to inhabit the landscapes of growth and change now total urbanization is becoming a reality?
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Jaap Bakema Study Centre

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In the photos mentions of Jaap Bakema the architecture of film director Broek and Bakema appears as the modern, urban backdrop for the director and the film’s protagonist in the Dutch feature film The Masked Tar.