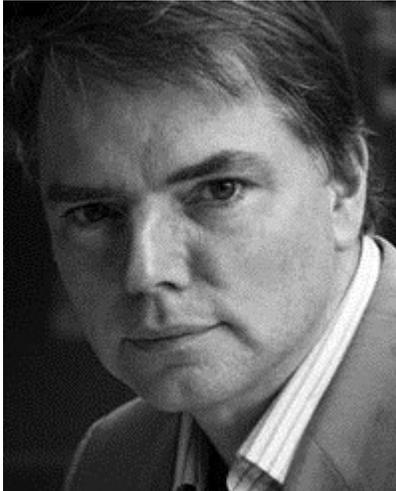


OLE BOUMAN: THE MOST IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS ARE THE ENGAGED CITIZENS

During his period as General Director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) Ole Bouman was deeply involved in the remarkable transformation of the NAI from 2007-2012. In this interview Ole Bouman gives us his perspective on the architecture institutions of the future.

Interview by Cand. Comm. Maja Tini Jensen



Having been for some time a closed bastion for specialists, the NAI changed into an open platform for the public. The results were evident. In 2012 the amount of guests increased by 40 % to about 150,000.

However, in January 2013 the NAI merged with the institutions Premisela, Netherlands Institute for Design and Fashion and Virtueel Platform, knowledge institute for e-culture to form 'The New Institute for Architecture, Design and e-Culture'. With these changes in mind, Ole Bouman gives us his perspective on the architecture institutions of the future.

The will to change

According to Ole Bouman, an architecture institution has several stakeholders to pay attention to, but the most important stakeholder, who will form future architecture institutions, is the dynamic citizen. "I do

believe, that the real stakeholders of institutions like the NAI are engaged and active citizens. Any person, who becomes interested, emigrates or escapes into his or her own world of specialism. Our job is to encourage their continued participation and their reliance on the eternal energy of architecture and design to change things." says Bouman, and explains further:

"If you ask me about the stakeholder, of course you can say that it is the visitor or the participating architect. But the real stakeholders are the people, who keep their eyes open for new things, and who are looking for inspiration to change our society for the better," he states. This relates to the transformation of the NAI.

A stronger position in society

The NAI went through a change in 2011, culminating in a new approach to the audience. But why was a change needed? "It was necessary. It was not an open institution that welcomed a general audience. So we had a strong desire for the NAI to play a more relevant role in society and to make its position clearer. Ever since I came here, I wanted an institution that showed what role architecture can play in society. The first part of the process was very hard, when we worked on new partnerships with social institutions, sports and educational institutions, real estate developers, corporations, social partners and decision-makers. That gave us a stronger grounding in society, which was very important in order to start a sudden and new agenda, where the NAI could be a source for a public consciousness of what architecture can do in terms of fundamental social questions," he explains about the first steps of the transformation.

"We decided that it was necessary to reframe NAI by changing it from being an institute to a museum, and by changing the public perception by sending a completely different message - from remoteness and specialisation to the engagement of a public consciousness," says Bouman.



The Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI)

How to form a new institution

The NAI was recently transformed into 'The New Institute for Architecture, Design and e-Culture'. The merger of architecture and design institutions has potential strengths and weaknesses and is a great challenge. For Ole Bouman and his team this process was about framing the task for the NAI, so the project became motivated intrinsically instead of extrinsically. "It was rather an external force and an external obligation on the part of the Ministry of Culture. It was harsh, because if we did not follow the new mandate, we would not get a government grant anymore. That would leave us with no choice. But we did have an option in defining exactly in which way, and for which purpose we would undertake this merger. So we had an intrinsic motivation and something to believe in," Bouman says about the NAI's influence on the merger.

Mind the gap between tradition and innovation

The merger of several institutions implies a lot of perspectives and opportunities. But what are the consequences? "The strength, of course, is that you can now rely on a slightly larger budget, new networks, a stronger reach and so on. There is a lot that you can expect from it. The weaknesses have to do with the complex dynamics involved in any merger, and there are always people who would say, 'NAI was for architecture, so we don't like the NAI anymore'. "That is a risk of course. If you ask me if the merger will affect the quality of architecture projects I certainly hope it will not. But it will affect the nature of architectural projects. They will be broader, they will be more cross-disciplinary and may also present architecture in its purest sense of the word - like making buildings. These events will be slightly rarer in terms of the overall programme, because you can't do everything," states the former General Director.



The Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI)

Architecture: From reputation to relevance

Things evolved, while Ole Bouman was in charge of the NAI. During recent years the culture of the architectural world changed and NAI played a role in that process. "The first 20 years of NAI's existence had to do with building up the reputation of architecture as a biblical, cultural discipline ending with "The starchitect-culture". But "the starchitect-culture" started with building up the reputation of architecture. But then architecture itself became reduced to what a few stars made. "I think that in recent years the NAI and a few other institutions in the world were able to change that role. Instead of building up reputation, we built up relevance again. From reputation to relevance that is the shift. NAI became important as an act of culture. It was acknowledged as something impressive, but also reduced as a civic force and that was going to change," Bouman points out.

From theory to practice, act and performance

A practical example on how institutions can create relevance for both professionals and society at large is the matchmaking programme and the NAI's workshop in China, in 2011. "That is one project that I'm particularly fond of. Chinese architects and a Dutch architect designed new housing facilities for the Chinese market. It was affordable housing and a collaboration with housing developers from China, who soon will start building it," Bouman says, unable to hide his excitement. "By doing this, you help internationalise Dutch architecture, reach new markets and re-educate clients. You improve the development of new housing typology for a new generation. By doing so, you help the Chinese city to become more compact and it is still moderated by the institution. It shows this movement from theory to practice, act and performance. I see other institutions moving

in this direction. But I think it is very much whether the institutions can overcome their own institutional self. It is a matter of character," Bouman ends.

When we interviewed Ole Bouman, he still held the position as General Director of the NAI. From February 2013 Ole Bouman will be Creative Director of the 2013 Urbanism\Architecture Bi-City Biennale Shenzhen.

Facts about Ole Bouman

Ole Bouman was General Director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) from April 2007. Bouman holds a Doctorate in Cultural History and a Doctorate "cum laude" in Art and Archaeology from The University of Amsterdam. He has curated public events for the reconstruction of the public domain in cities that have been hit by disasters, such as Ramallah, Mexico City, Beirut and Prishtina.

His articles have been published in several periodicals, his most recent publication being Architecture of Consequence (2009), which constitutes the portrait of a proactive design mentality. He has curated exhibitions for the Milan Triennale, Manifesta 3 and Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum. Furthermore he has been guest editor-in-chief for A+D (India) and editorial consultant for Urban China. Currently Ole Bouman is Creative Director of the 2013 Urbanism\Architecture Bi-City Biennale Shenzhen.

About the NAI

The NAI moved into its current premises in 1993. The striking building is situated at the edge of the Museumpark in the centre of Rotterdam and was designed by Jo Coenen. The NAI stores important architecture archives and collections, which are open to the public. The institute offers facilities for research and a platform for debates.

The NAI presents exhibitions, lectures, debates, and issues publications, which aim to inform, inspire, and stimulate both professionals and the general public. In January 2013 it was transformed into 'The New Institute for Architecture, Design and e-Culture' and Guus Beumer became Director. Visit the NAI: en.NAI.nl or [The New Institute](#)

Watch video of Ole Bouman introducing NAI