

*Marianne Stang Våland*

New societal tendencies are currently affecting the professional architect in her design practice. This paper reports of *organized end user participation* as one such recent approach, and preliminarily discusses a few of the implications this phenomenon may bring to architectural practice.

# PROSPECT OR PAIN?

Today, the professional architect is under substantial pressure as several new players are encroaching on her traditional markets. Not only do massive technological advancements leave the architect lonely among the increasing number of engineers and other experts involved in the design process, but the establishment of softer, social technologies now seem to affect the area of architectural design.

This paper aims to address one of the social technologies that are now established in the building sector: the increased engagement of the client organization as end users through organized processes of end user participation. Although “the architect has always talked with the user”<sup>1</sup>, this more systematized engagement calls for a contact between client and architect that goes beyond the classical relationship we know from the traditional architectural design process. The proximity involves certain methodological implications likely to affect architectural practice. This paper provisionally provides a bit of background to explain this situation, and a few comments to what these new conditions may bring.

#### ARCHITECTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN PROCESSES

As the extended engagement of the building’s forthcoming end users now constitutes as a societal prerequisite in many types of development processes, the phenomenon seems to enable a closer link between two design processes that have traditionally been perceived as separate: the architectural and the organizational design processes.

Although organizational practice can be said to take place in a spatial setting (physical, virtual, or other), the fields of organization and architecture have not been considered integrated – as design processes. One basic reason for this is that the (organizational) end user is often unidentified during the time of the architec-



**MARIANNE STANG  
VÅLAND**

PhD Copenhagen Business School,  
Center for Management Studies of  
the Building Process  
[msv.ioa@cbs.dk](mailto:msv.ioa@cbs.dk)

<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on a longitudinal, ethnographic micro-study of organized end user participation in two contemporary building projects (Stang Våland 2010a), and the quotation refers to a message that was repeated by professional architects during the study.

tural design process. But if we know the user<sup>2</sup>, there are still reasons to think that a closer link between these two processes should be handled with great care and caution (Latour 2004).

A basic constitutional difference between the two is that an organization is a necessarily evolving unit (e.g. Weick 2001), while a house generally holds a firmer structure (although buildings are now increasingly thought of as a social object, see for example Brand 1994 for prefatorial arguments). With regards to content and structure, the two design processes are thus difficult to juxtapose and are thus traditionally organized as separate and sequential.

A prosaic way to explain the substantially complex chain of events that make up the design part of a contemporary building project could be to say that the client first identifies aspects of its activities in order to describe some of the qualities that the building is expected to signify. However, mainly involving a small group of appointed representatives, this process of identification can be characterized as a part of an *organizational design process*. Based on this and other pieces of information (financial, technical and more), a *brief of requirement* is produced that explains the conditions the new building should acknowledge. Based on the brief, the architect generates drafts for a design concept that attempts to fit the client's prerequisites, while also leaving marks of aesthetical and functional quality. This conceptual deployment represents the initial part of the *architectural design process*.

These initial assertions form the point of departure of a complex endeavor of *negotiation*, upon which a design representation emerges and eventually establishes as a construction. When the building is inhabited, the organizational design process *restarts* with reference to the staff's interaction with the new spatial framework. In the traditional architectural design process we might say that the brief represents a central connection point between client and architect; it connects and separates by the same means (cf. diagram 1).

**A CLOSER LINK: "A DOUBLE DESIGN PROCESS"**  
With this classical structure as the general point of depar-

2 The two empirical cases, upon which the study was based is municipality Hillerød's town hall north of Copenhagen and Danish architecture firm Arkitema's own Copenhagen office. Both projects included a substantial amount of organized end user participation as an integrated part of the project's general design conditions. The town hall project was based on an architectural competition between five consortia, won by a team consisting of Pihl and Partners (constructor), Birch and Krogboe Engineers, and KHR Architects. In addition, the client had hired the firm Signal Arkitekter to organize and facilitate the end user participation. In Arkitema's project, The Mikado House<sup>3</sup>, Arkitema's own staff was responsible not only for the architectural design solution, but also for the planning and facilitating of the participation activities. Finally, the staff also represented the end users (see Stang Våland 2010a for details about the complexity that both empirical projects entailed).



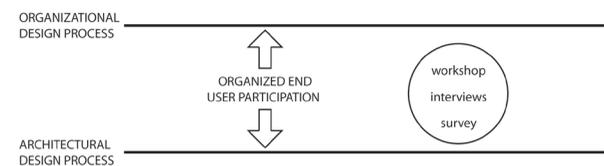
**DIAGRAM 1** illustrates the sequential organization of the two design processes, and how the brief of requirements forms the link between them. The arrows mark a causal aspect: that the two processes can be seen as influential, but that this impact takes place in a sequential structure.

ture, we might consider the notion of a closer link between these two design processes as a challenge to the traditional relationship between client and architect. But how has the idea of a closer link in fact been established?

In recent years, business managers and organizational scholars seem to have found a shared interest in the spatial structure that accommodates organizational practice (e.g. Gagliardi 1991, Becker and Steele 1995, Yanow 1998, Weick 2003, Boland and Collopy 2004, Hernes 2004, Clegg and Kornberger 2006, Taylor and Spicer 2007, Yoo et al. 2008, Dale and Burrell 2008, Van Marrewijk and Yanow 2010). The interest reflects current societal tendencies where the establishment of social technologies, such as end user participation, may be seen as one central factor. The background for this establishment is the increased societal focus on individual needs and wishes as a parameter to inform organizational practice, and also the continuous request for new ways of working and collaborating in organizational contexts. In order to support the development of new products and services, managers aim to explore approaches that can endorse these innovations. Here, the spatial design of an office environment and the staff's involvement in the establishment of such a physical framework can be considered a chance to enhance performance and collaboration in the organization. It is increasingly acknowledged that space matters to management.

To exploit this connection between architectural and organizational design, engagement activities such as workshops, interviews and surveys are being applied as an adhesive to form and uphold the potential intersection. What happens in these processes is that the forthcoming users of the new building engage in facilitated conversations about their work practice from a spatial perspective. The participation can be said to be *organized*. It goes beyond the classical, arbitrary relationship between architect and client that we know from traditional design projects.

The results from these organized activities are then translated, in order to take on the shape of an *"organizational input"* (Stang Våland 2010b), which can serve as inspiration to inform the architectural design process. Conversely, the emerging architectural configurations represent an opportunity to discuss current and future organizational practice. The two processes thus form a conceptual intersection: *"a double design process"* as it was



**DIAGRAM 2** illustrates "the double design process", where organized processes of end user participation serve as a potential adhesive in the conceptual intersection between the organizational and the architectural design process.

characterized by a central informant in my empirical study (Stang Våland 2010a). Organizational spaces and organizational practice are not one and the same (Kreiner 2010), but by looking at these in a reciprocal perspective, we may see new aspects to both.

As I have initiated in the title of this paper, we may consider the extended engagement of users in the architectural design process as having prospect, or as being a pain. Based on the notion of a parallel structure that is illustrated in diagram 2 below, the contemporary architect may be considered architect not only of buildings, but also of new ways of working in organizations. Such a proposal potentially leaves the architect with a more central role in society and thus with a significant business opportunity. But looking at the current structure, the architect also seems to have her role reduced, as the situation allows for other professionals like engineers, *"bygherre rådgivere"* (www.ebst.dk) and *"process designers"* (Stang Våland 2010a) to encroach on the architects' traditional markets. The establishment of end user participation can be seen as one factor that may leave architects with less room to maneuver.

If we accept the provisional propositions of the double design process, several questions are pressing. Below, I attempt to point out a few aspects that seem central, in order to understand more about the implications that a closer integration between user participation and architectural practice may cause.

#### REDEFINES THE CLIENT ROLE

Organized end user participation is not a new phenomenon in design processes. In areas like industrial product design or computer system design, it has been considered an integrated part of the methodological approach for decades (e.g. Greenbaum and Kyng 1993, Schuler and Namioka 1993, Ivey and Sanders 2006). In architectural design, however, the closer relationship with the client organization as actively involved end users seems to have established at a slower pace. If we look at the classical client/architect relationship, this has traditionally referred to the intimate relationship between the architect as professional advisor, on the one hand, and the client as the person(s) in charge of the project's budget, on the other (e.g. Cuff 1991, Pressman 1995). Here, the central client figure is able to

talk on behalf of the future end users of the building.

With the establishment of user engagement as a design precondition in contemporary building projects, the client role gets redefined. From the singular project-owner to a broader and more indistinct assembly of people: *"a compound body of users"* (Stang Våland 2010a). This indistinct client body is more actively involved in the actual process of designing, increasingly characterized as a potential *"co-designer"* (e.g. Boland and Collopy 2004, Binder, Brandt and Gregory 2009) alongside the architect. The input produced in this type of participation process is necessarily complex as it often involves a considerable number of people with very different perceptions and expectations. The material will thus hold a format that may be difficult for the professional architect to respond to, based on her educational training. But in a societal climate where end user participation is being established as a general methodological precondition for many types of development projects, the ability to handle such processes becomes crucial.

Based on this new client role, the relationship between architect and client must adjust. It may potentially leave the architect with the extended responsibility of organizing, facilitating and translating the participation and the outcome it produces, or leave this task to others.

#### INTRODUCES THE PROCESS DESIGNER TO THE BUILDING SECTOR

In the empirical cases that serve as a point of departure for this paper, the end user participation was planned and facilitated by so-called "process designers". They represent a relatively new player in the (Danish) building sector. Although the title of process designer was actively used in the cases, it does not appear on the official websites of the organizations involved<sup>3</sup>, nor is it in other ways publicly recognized and explained in the general market for building design. But while end user participation establishes on this particular market, there are, nonetheless, a group of providers that aim to support this activity with a somehow blurred competence profile attached to it<sup>4</sup>.

As a basic product/method description, we might say that the process designer is responsible for organizing the user participation and also translating the results that these activities generate. In this way, she aims to secure the closer link between the client organization's (current and future) practice and the building that will accommodate this work. In projects where participation is integrated as a design

3 www.signal-arki.dk and www.arkitema.dk

4 As it seems, the process designer holds the significant challenge of a rather indistinct professional profile. Those representatives who openly confess to ethnography do, in fact, have a distinct methodological approach that is possible to explain and communicate. But because there are so many descriptions of what the process designer do, like ethnography; user innovation; user centered innovation or user driven innovation just to mention a few, it still seems unclear what the role stands for. Here, the problem is not that there are many concepts in the loop, but rather the lack of a shared understanding of what these different concept stands for (Stang Våland and Siggaard Jensen 2003).

condition, we might say that the process designer serves as a **mediator** between client and architect.

But what does this methodological approach more specifically consist of? The participation activities are basically made up of interactive exchanges like workshops and other exercises in which user representatives are the central contributors. The approach is usually based on ethnographic traditions where various aspects of an environment's culture are in focus; learn with and from the culture by engaging with it (e.g. Geertz 1973, Van Maanen 1988). But the input that gets produced in these exchanges are voluminous and ambiguous (for example compared to the requirements that often make up the traditional brief of requirements, with reference to diagram 1 above). When different people with many different perceptions discuss their work conditions, the outcome is indeed complex. It is this 'clutter' that forms the basis of the process designer's analysis. By *translating* the organizational input to a format that may potentially be possible for the architect to read, she aims to support the intersection between organizational practice and spatial framework.

The process designer's acknowledgement of *volume* as a means to bring forth design potential – an approach that might be said to derive from the anthropologist's interest in the broad complexity behind a culture – is here considered as good, as it may represent many different design opportunities. With reference to the professional architect's tradition for developing one main conceptual grip and then use architectural tools and models to negotiate these representations into a final construction, the process designer's approach seems significantly different. While the process designer focuses on *the magnitude of optional concepts*, the architect focuses on *one main concept*. As one process designer involved in Arkitema's project explains:

*"It is their [the architects'] way of getting their heads around everything, and then trying to organize everything based on that. [...] If we'd had various [design] possibilities... in fact, I think, the more different the better – then we'd have had some kind of latitude to it when we were challenged financially. And then we could have taken some of the elements and said, 'there are some good things in these concepts, how can we combine some of these elements in a third concept?' which would be something entirely new."*

In this quotation she attempts to describe a basic divergence between the two approaches. From the process designer's viewpoint, the material produced by users may represent important input to inform many different design solutions. It is in this magnitude that the *"entirely new"* may reside. Here, she openly challenges the classical architect's way of working (e.g. Cuff 1991, Cross 2007), not only by introducing the user as a new co-designer, but also by acknowledging the multitude of conceptual opportunities. A design process that involves users as active

contributors therefore represents a shift in reference to the architect's classical way of working and sense of identity. The architect's ability to reflect user needs has traditionally been acknowledged as an implicit part of the profession's body of knowledge (e.g. Cuff 1991). When end users become more actively involved in the design process, this authoritative position gets challenged. Here, magnitude represents a challenge in several ways. Not only are many people involved who actively engage in discussions about spatial organization, but the participation does not stop when the architectural design process begins, it continues throughout the project.

**THE CO-DESIGNING CLIENT REPRESENTS A MOVING TARGET TO THE ARCHITECT**  
I want to close the provisional introduction to this crossroad by pointing out a piece of data that illustrates that the ability to respond to and integrate the organizational input should not be ignored by contemporary architects.

In the town hall project that make up one of the cases upon which this paper is based, two representatives from the client organization were appointed members in the assessment committee that selected the winner of the architectural competition. One of these members was the municipality's managing director, who was highly engaged in the idea of a closer link between organizational practice and spatial framework, and actively involved in the participation activities. Below, he explains how the connection between the organizational input and the architectural design proposal was considered important in the selection:

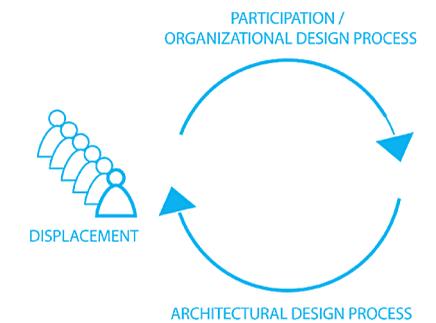
*"[...] the project we were choosing was the one most loyal towards the organization's own thoughts about what the house should accommodate. [...] We chose the proposal in which we could see ourselves."*

The quotation illustrates that the extended type of organizational input should be taken seriously by contemporary architects. If the ability to translate and integrate this input is now being established as an **assessment criterion** in the selection process in certain types of architectural competitions, these processes of engagement and translation certainly need attention. But the complexity does not stop there. As I pointed out above, the organizational design process that gets catalyzed by the participation activities is characterized by change and continuous adjustments and displacements (e.g. Weick 2001). As the client organization changes in the course of their participation, their perception of the spatial organization of the work is also likely to adjust accordingly. In this way, the participating client organization becomes a "moving target" to the architect in these types of projects (Stang Våland 2010a), cf. diagram 3 below.

The situation leaves the contemporary architect with a dilemma. Not only is it important that she responds to

the organizational input that is generated through the organized end user participation – as these activities now seem to be establishing as a precondition – but it is also important to keep continuous contact to the adjustments that materialize in the client organization as a result of its engagement in the architectural design process.

The aspects I have tentatively pointed out above represent but a few of the challenges that the notion of a double design process may induce for contemporary architectural practice. We might say that organized end user participation adjusts the architectural design process by vitalizing the organizational design process. In order to understand more about this intersection in which organizational practice and architectural configurations meet, we need further studies of what happens at the actual crossroad. Only practical projects can disclose how this conceptual link can turn into actual connections that may be equally beneficial for architects and managers alike. Here, it is important to remember that although the organizational input is produced through dynamic, parallel activities that make it possible to apply to both design processes, we cannot take for granted that these inputs can in fact come into use. By studying these processes and the link between them, we may be able to identify the conditions for such usage.



**DIAGRAM 3** illustrates that the increased end user participation can generate an input to inform the architect, who then attempts to use it in her design practice. But the diagram also indicates that the participation is likely to cause displacements in the organization. So when the architect returns with a new representation, the active client organization may have changed.

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