



Circularity for Educators

BLOCK III Circularity in Architecture and the Built Sciences

Practitioners Interview Series

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I'm Dorte, Dorte Kristensen. I'm an architect and director of this office Atelier PRO. We're in The Hague. We've been here as an office for more than 40 years, and it's our lovely garden.

What drew you to circularity?

Sustainability has always been a part of our office. It's deeply rooted in our DNA. Circularity is something that slowly started growing. And it started growing. It's like a snowball that eventually becomes so big you can't get around it. You need to face it.

We have so far to go. There are some projects, some architects in Holland, worldwide, who achieve to make these beautiful, bio-based, completely neutral, circular projects. But they are the stars. They are the few. They are the 5%. But the 95%, the average also needs to move and needs to have ambition, and needs to try as much as possible, because every little step is better.

Can you discuss one of your projects in terms of circularity?

One of our nice examples of the small steps towards circularity and towards a healthier way of building is a project we did for an office building. It's a refurbishment of an office building that we built in the 90s, which at that point was extremely

sustainable and got loads of prizes for it. But the stars were in a good constellation for this project because we had a client who thought this building has quality, but we need to enlarge the area of the building. And we need to make it Paris-proof and we need to make it more sustainable.

This building is being refurbished because it has quality. And sometimes you refurbish buildings by tearing down the facades and only using the concrete structure. But this one, the building itself, though it was a mid-90s building with a typical collage architecture, it still had some sort of quality of architecture that could last for longer than a decade or two decades. So it was worthwhile keeping the architecture as well. So we kept the elevations and simply bettered the elevations. And we heightened the building and we reused a lot of the old window frames and stuff from the interior.

Of course it's challenging because when you do this, you have to be aware that you're obliged to kill your darlings. I think you have to tell yourself, "Come on, grow up." And force yourself to really look at it and have the courage to say, "This is not good enough." Not all architects have that courage.

I'm grateful for our client that they asked us, because normally our office is an old office. So

we do have some of our old buildings which are being refurbished or redone by other architects. And it's very nice to be asked yourself to redo your own building, because it gives you the opportunity to send this building off to the next 50 years with a proper goodbye.

But it's always about a combination of your vision as an architect and the vision of the clients and how you influence each other, and how you get this symbiotic thing. And of course it's about money, but mostly it's about the wish and the will, will and ambition and inspiration. And that is something that you as an architect can give, and you have to give it an abundance because otherwise nothing is going to change.

How does the transition towards a circular built environment challenge the role of the architect?

I think this transition in sustainability and in circularity is a worldwide thing happening. And I think the awareness is worldwide that it is something that we have to do. It's not a question, it's a must. And that's the first thing. The second thing is that then you build your ambition and your knowledge around this necessity.

If everybody pushes and moves we get step for step for step we get there. And that's why I think it's extremely important that we realize it's not only about the star projects, it's about every project. Of course we still have to make the best possible, nicest architecture, but it's not the big 'A', it's the big picture.

It's leaving a better world.