

Utrecht

## Arhitectura contemporana

Mecanoo – Facultatea de Stiinte  
Economice/Universitatea Politehnica

1991/1995



A good illustration of their approach can be found in the plan of the faculty. One of the principal movements in Dutch architecture, as seen in the work of architects such as Aldo van Eyck (see pages 288–89) and Herman Hertzberger (born 1932), was to integrate anthropological studies of human behavior with architecture and planning, interlocking the relative notions of house/city, space/building in tightly organic units. Rather than imitating the style of their illustrious predecessors, Mecanoo reexamined some of the African sources that van Eyck and Hertzberger had studied and refashioned them for the faculty building.

Although the Economics department consists of 5,000 students and 400 faculty members, it actually breaks down into smaller units, each with its own identity. Shared facilities—the library, restaurant, computer facilities, and meeting rooms—form separate boxes unified behind a wall of glass along the northern side, while the tutorial rooms, elevated and punctuated by concrete piers, occupy a wing running through the middle of the site. The administrative offices line the perimeter along a canal, and the remaining wings grouped around courtyards accommodate the clusters of academics' rooms. Benches and areas for informal gatherings are scattered throughout the complex.

Mecanoo endowed each part of the scheme with a distinctive character. The ramps leading to the tutorial rooms are suspended from the ceiling as if they are weightless, while the rooms are robust boxes jutting out over the atrium, connected to the glass skin of the elevation by steel beams and vertical stays. Each courtyard expresses a different mood, one being dense with bamboo within steel-mesh-clad and plywood walls, while another is a Zen court, with boulders, gravel, and two small trees, framed by cedar latticework and okumen (an exotic wood) panels used in rhythmic patterns. And each façade is a distinct entity with a unique architectural personality; alternating bands of glass and steel panels adorn two wings overlooking the canal, which are adjacent to a Modernist glass façade pulled over a steel grid.

The Faculty of Economics is so specific to its site and program that it is difficult to imitate; other than in terms of the attention given to the overall scheme and to the detail and the high-quality construction, it is unlike any other building by Mecanoo. This uniqueness is the hallmark of their work and is what makes it so interesting; each commission is understood to present new problems that cannot be resolved with a tool kit of formulaic design elements.