

Temporality in the work of Shigeru Ban



Shigeru Ban on the way to Lviv the 29th of June 2023 reading the Issue # 3 of the UOU Journal REPRESENTATION

Shigeru Ban is the world renowned architect whose work has been recognised for its form, functionality, use of unconventional materials and, above all, for its function in supporting people in emergency situations. After the Russian invasion on Ukraine, thanks to his efforts, with the support of Hubert Trammer from New European Bauhaus Round Table and volunteers, the Paper Partition System (PPS) was set up in Poland within days. PPS is a system consisting of paper tubes and fabrics with which large spaces where refugees or victims of natural disasters gather can be partitioned off into small rooms that provide a sense of privacy. The next step in the aid activities for Ukraine was

the realisation of the Styrofoam Housing System (SHS) prototype unit, which was built in June 2023 in Lviv. SHS was intended as a day-care centre for IDPs' children. Next to the support for Ukraine, Shigeru Ban is constantly involved in relief architecture in different parts of the World. In March 2023, Shigeru Ban initiated the implementation of the PPS for the victims of the earthquake in Hatay Province Turkey, and in May, the construction of the Paper Log House a temporary building that serves as a classroom. This interview was held on the way to Lviv, where on 30th of June 2023 the SHS prototype was presented as one of the possible ways to support victims of the war in Ukraine.

Jerzy Łatka (JŁ) and Mauricio Morales-Beltran (MMB): In 2004 you have created the Paper Temporary Studio on the terraces of the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Please, tell us how this work was conceived to be integrated with the ideas Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers had for this building.

Shigeru Ban (SB): After I won the competition for the Centre Pompidou in Metz, I decided to establish an office in Paris. Because renting an office in Paris is very expensive, I asked the president of the Centre Pompidou if I could use the terrace rooftop to make a temporary office. He agreed under the condition that I would show the inside of my office to some VIP guests of the Centre Pompidou, and they could see what was happening with the new Pompidou Centre design, like in an art gallery. So they agreed to lend me the terrace. He also asked me to get permission from Renzo Piano. Therefore I visited him to get his permission. Renzo Piano was very pleased, because when they won the competition for the Centre Pompidou in Paris, they first

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Citation: Łatka, J.; Morales Beltran, M. (2023). "Temporality in the work of Shigeru Ban" UOU scientific journal #06, 24-27.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2023.6.04>
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Paper Partition System in Chelm Poland, March 2022.

made a temporary office on a boat on the River Seine. He said it was the same legacy to start with the temporary office. A building added on top of an existing building had to be very lightweight. That was the reason why a paper tube structure was chosen. It was also appropriate to make the Studio without connecting it with the existing building, as we were not allowed to do that. I created a lightweight structure, just sitting on the terrace without any connections. I built the Studio together with my students from Japan and French students. Moreover, after the experience with the Japan Pavilion for Hanover Expo, I was already familiar with European permission to use the paper tube for the structures, the temporary structure. Therefore, I used the same diameter of tube because it had already been tested in an official German laboratory. That's why it was easy to get permission. But the design had nothing to do with the design of the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

JŁ & MMB: And was the design approved by Renzo Piano?

SB: Yes, we got the permission.

JŁ & MMB: You have mentioned that you were inspired by the Emilio Ambasz in the way he presents his designs to clients, which always have two functions. Has this functional duality, has any influence on your work?

SB: Yes, he never pushed the design, but his design is always about problem solving. He always convinces clients by telling them how to solve some existing problem with his design. So I learned this process of designing and also of convincing the client.

JŁ & MMB: Another question concerns the Paper House and Paper Log House. You designed them in 1995 and the Paper House was designed to be permanent, while the Paper Log House was not...

SB: Paper House is my own house which was designed to get government permission as a first permanent paper tube structure.

JŁ & MMB: On the other hand, Paper Log House was built as temporary residence. However, they were both made from the same material. What makes a house temporary and what make it permanent?

SB: I never designed a house as a temporary. A house can always be used permanently. The Paper Log Houses I built in India in 2001, are still there. They are not used as houses anymore, but as a local clinic, hospital. So, as long as people take care of them, they can be permanent. It is also possible because we designed it as a solid and safe structures in cooperation with the engineers.

JŁ & MMB: A similar situation happened with the Paper Church and Cardboard Cathedral. The Paper Church which was built in 1995 was conceived as temporary. However, it was dissembled after 10 years and re-assembled again in Taiwan in 2008 as a permanent object. Similar history happened in 2013, when you designed and built Paper Cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand. Again it was conceived as temporary but it became permanent...

SB: Yes, normally if we call the design temporary, a client can make a decision to vary things easily. For example, after the main cathedral in Christchurch was destroyed by the earthquake nothing was decided as to whether it would be rebuilt like original design or something new would be built. Actually there were three proposals, and rebuilding the original cathedral was the most expensive. Therefore, people were arguing between three options. And even now, after 10 years they can



Styrofoam Housing System next to the relief container.



Shigeru Ban on the way to Hatay Province with the editors Mauricio Morales-Beltran and Jerzy Łątko.

not make a decision. That is why they use this temporary structure almost as a permanent one. And, the building also met the local regulations.

JŁ & MMB: Do you think that religion has any influence on that? That people somehow, let's say spiritually, got attached to the structure and they want to keep it for the longer time.

SB: It's not the case, it's because they can't make a decision about how to rebuild the old cathedral. But even if the old cathedral could be rebuilt they may keep the Cardboard Cathedral permanently because it became a very famous symbol and it's a tourist destination. So, we don't know, it can become permanent...

JŁ & MMB: Is there any life-span predicted for this cathedral, was it designed for some specific timeframe?

SB: As a permanent structure.

JŁ & MMB: For the design of the Japan Pavilion for the Expo in Hannover in 2000, you worked with Frei Otto, Buro Happold, Sonoco Europe (paper tube producer ed.) and many other partners. What makes architects, engineers, contractors and stakeholders invest money, energy time and resources into a project that is only temporary? How can you convince

so many different partners to get involved in just a temporary structure?

SB: Expo originally was an opportunity to try innovative structural solutions as prototypes. In history there are many new structures that were proposed for Expo and became trendsetters. At the Expo in Osaka in 1970 for example, the American Pavilion was an air dome for the first time, and now there are many such solutions all over the world, another example is Buckminster Fuller's dome pavilion in Montreal in 1967. Traditionally Expo was kind of field for architects and engineers to try something new as an experiment for the future. This is why, even if it's temporary, it is really worth to making the difficult but innovative. However, now, not that many countries make innovative pavilions anymore.

JŁ & MMB: You are currently working on the new pavilion for the next Expo, which will take place in Osaka in 2025.

SB: And I am actually the only one who makes an innovative structure, using carbon fibre, paper and bamboo. Other pavilions are just a stylish things, nothing innovative.

JŁ & MMB: Those pavilions, they are three domes, will they be temporary, or is some future life predicted for them?

SB: We are looking for a place to move them afterwards.

JŁ & MMB: The Japan Pavilion from Hannover Expo was dismantled and recycled.

SB: Yes, the original idea was to recycle the pavilion after its demolition. We signed the contract with Sonoco, which said that they would collect the used tubes after demolition and recycle them.

JŁ & MMB: Do you think that Paper Partition System designed for emergency scenarios could become a permanent installation?

SB: No, because the privacy partition is only good for a certain period. It's never permanent but it's permanent to use, because it can be dismantled, stored and used again for another emergency situation. So as a lifespan it's permanent, but it is used temporarily for the particular period, when there is a need for evacuation facilities.

JŁ & MMB: As far as we know, it became an official solution in emergency situations for Japanese government.

SB: Yes, yes, after I spent 15 years convincing the government...

JŁ & MMB: After all these works you have done so far with paper, what makes paper an ephemeral material and what makes it permanent?

SB: As I always say during my lectures, if people love a structure, even paper can become permanent. On the other hand, many of the concrete buildings made by commercial developers in order to make money are often temporary, because another developer prefers to destroy the building to make a new one and more money. Whether something is temporary or permanent doesn't depend on what it is made of, it's rather people who love the building or not. That decides whether the building is temporary or permanent.

JŁ & MMB: Thank you for the conversation!

SB: Thank you!