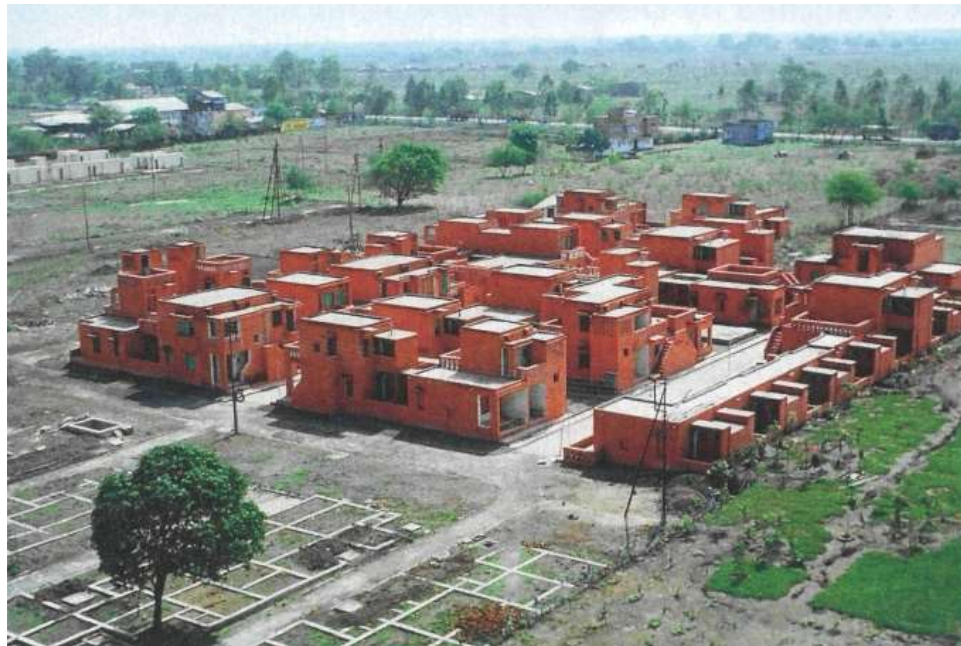


# CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

## OASE #123 Incompleteness

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Balkrishna Doshi/Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, Aranya show homes and surrounding sites-and-services project, Indore, c. 1989. / AgwA srl civile en Architecten Jan de Vylder Inge Winck, Chapex, Charleroi, 2022.

## Incompleteness

In architecture, it is common to work – implicitly or explicitly, intentionally or unintentionally – with an idea of ‘completion’. On completion, a project is considered ‘complete’: at that moment, the built reality conforms to the architect’s design, and the next stages of use and appropriation can begin. The documentation and photographs of this moment often become the references on which both professional journals and later oeuvre catalogues and history books rely to understand the project before the passage of time has had a chance to alter its essence.

However, both history and contemporary architectural practice also offer numerous examples, not only of seeing architecture as an incomplete process, but also of intentionally pursuing an architecture of incompleteness, where some notion of ‘incompletion’ is intentionally incorporated into the design process as a qualitative aspect of the project. You could say that these projects are approached from a contemporary urban design perspective. In urban design, the process – from design and planning to implementation – typically unfolds over an extended period of time, making ‘incompletion’ an inherent condition of the work – one that often shapes the design approach itself. In this issue of OASE, we want to explore the dimension of intentional incompleteness in architecture in its various forms.

The best-known and most compelling example is Elemental’s 2003 design for Iquique, Chile, where the office intentionally created ‘half-completed houses’ in the expectation that the occupants would complete the other halves themselves. This project builds on a long tradition of both successful and less successful attempts to intentionally construct ‘incomplete’ architecture in challenging contexts with tight budgets, speculating on its eventual completion by users or other stakeholders. Particularly with the challenges of the so-called Global South in mind, architects and policymakers have introduced various paradigms: ‘aided self-help’, ‘incremental housing’, ‘core housing’, ‘sites-and-services’ and so on. From a design perspective, they have intentionally lowered the *Existenzminimum* threshold, using architectural incompleteness as a means of harnessing the creativity of residents and a wide range of other actors.

In short, projects that fully embrace the most explicit dimension of incompleteness often challenge our conventional notions of what constitutes a plan, an author, a reference image, or even a project. Perhaps this is why they are rarely at the centre of the canon. However, incompleteness is also intentionally placed at the centre of design in less radical ways, often in response to economic or other constraints that force designers to rethink their approach to architecture. Questions about the place of incompleteness in architecture can therefore be asked in a more subtle way, indirectly touching on many contemporary debates.

This points, last but not least, to the role of the user in architecture. How can they be made productive participants in the architectural enterprise throughout the life of a project, from design to demolition? Incomplete architecture also automatically raises the question of the care and maintenance of our architecture. How can a design anticipate the future maintenance of the built environment? And how can an architectural practice adapt to an ongoing need for care, rather than a one-off need for a project?

In the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis, OASE explored the role of the unforeseen in architecture and how uncertainty can be used productively as early as 2011 (OASE 85). Many post-war architects, from Yona Friedman to John Habraken, attempted to incorporate degrees of freedom for users into their designs by using modular systems or by distinguishing between ‘support’ and ‘infill’. In 2016, under the theme of ‘social poetics’ (OASE 96), the focus shifted further towards the user, outlining a range of practices that challenge the conventional divide between design and use, redefining it as a dynamic field of tension. More recently, OASE 113 explored authorship in a context where collaboration and co-creation are increasingly central to the ethos of design practice.

Building on this, the issue presented here emphasises the role of incompleteness in architecture. **In which historical examples and contemporary practices is incompleteness intentionally and architecturally employed, cultivated and made productive?**

For this issue, we invite contributions that explore the many dimensions of ‘incompletion’. This goes beyond material incompleteness, where loadbearing structures are designed or even required to be built upon. It can also take the form of *typological incompleteness*, where a proposed typology intentionally

serves merely as a starting point for a longer lifespan, encouraging multiple potential evolutions. *Economic incompleteness* is another possibility, where an uncertain, incremental budget allocation is directly reflected in both the design and its possible futures. Similarly, *social incompleteness* occurs when a project actively engages with its social fabric and incorporates community building as an integral component. Forms of *political incompleteness* can also be embedded in the design process, where design choices become the subject of decision-making processes involving citizens, or where the 'commons' are actively made the focus of a project. In some cases, incompleteness manifests itself *aesthetically*, through an open aesthetic that invites users to contribute and build on the project. It is also possible to think of *ecological incompleteness*, where nature is given free rein and becomes an integral part of the project.

For this issue, we are looking for three types of contributions that explore how incompleteness – in these and other dimensions – is intentionally used as a design tool to create qualitative architecture.

1.

**Historical or theoretical essays** (approximately 2,500 to 3,000 words) that describe, from a clearly defined perspective, how architects engage with incompleteness or how notions of incompleteness challenge established ideas of architecture and authorship. Proposals must be submitted as abstracts of 300 to 500 words.

2. **Project descriptions** (approximately 800 to 1,000 words) that analyse notable historical or contemporary projects, exploring how some form of incompleteness is intentionally used as a design quality, or how questions about incompleteness arise – directly or indirectly – in contemporary architectural practice. Proposals must be submitted as abstracts of 200 to 300 words and include at least one image.

3. **Visual essays** (4 to 6 pages) attempting to outline the relationship to incompleteness through photographs or drawings, either documenting historical examples or presenting contemporary conceptualisations. Proposals must include sample images and brief descriptions of up to 300 words.

If you have a strong idea or compelling example, please submit your abstract or sample images to [info@oasejournal.nl](mailto:info@oasejournal.nl) by **7 March 2025**.