'Without mistakes it can't be right'

Architect ir. Martin Smit (1957) developed a dynamic design system. With it an architect can learn from its mistakes, just as an aerospace engineer does. Smit hopes to graduate next week in Delft.

Jos Wassink

In your PhD thesis you compare aerospace engineering with architecture. As you have studied both, what is the most important difference ?
" In architecture a building is supposed to be designed by one person, while in reality it is the result of a team of people. In aerospace one is always part of a team. That is the main difference."

Your design method is called 'Cyclical Iterative Design', can I translate that as 'learning from you mistakes'.
"Yes."

In your thesis you use logical diagrams. What is the reason for that?
"For me it is a way to understand the complexity. The main disadvantage of schemes is that they will limit you if you consider them tot be definitive. My schemes are dynamic. The scheme I make at the beginning changes constantly as the project evolves. I don't want people to work in a certain way. I try to make visible the way we work together and can improve our working methods. And that is with schemes."

Just to be clear, what are the basis elements of you scheme ?
"To put it simple: think about what you are going to make. Next I make it and then I use it or let other people use it. The fourth phase is to compare the use with the specifications in the beginning."

Can the specifications change during this process?
"I it possible that the specifications were not right, or that the were right, but that the the way we used the specification was not right."

How does that work in reality?
"During the design of a large number of branches for the ABN-AMRO we had every week a design meeting with the client. The specifications were translated in a design. Everybody could react on the design and gave his or her critical comment. That was incorporated in the design and within a week we had an considerably better design. It was allowed to make mistakes: if you don't maker mistakes it can't be right".

You approach reminds me of the philosopher Karl Popper who said: ' There is no truth, just advancement". Cynically speaking you method can be seen as a recipe for retail chains.
We use it also for retailers. And for schools. For a large college we build the first school as a prototype. Every school gets better than the previous one."

What does you approach mean for the role of the architect?
"Architect often say that the user in the center of there attention. I agree with that, but I want to be sure. The acceptance of the building is for most architects the end of their involvement. For me it is just the beginning."