I’m a relationship builder. When you think of a relationship builder, don’t you just automatically think “architect?” Probably not. That’s because most people think architects design buildings and cities, but what we really design are relationships, because cities are about people. They’re places where people come together for all kinds of exchange. And besides, skylines are highly specific urban habitats with their own insects, plants and animals, and even their own weather. But today, urban habitats are out of balance. Climate change, together with political and economic troubles, are having an impact they’re adding up and stressing out cities and us, the people who live in them. For me, the field of ecology has provided important insight, because ecologists don’t just look at individual species on their own, they look at the relationships between living things and their environment. They look at how all the diverse parts of the ecosystem are interconnected, and it’s actually this balance, this web of life, that sustains life. My team and I have been applying insights from ecology to architecture to see how physical space can help build stronger relationships. The projects I’m going to show you today use the idea of building relationships as the key driver for design. Here’s an example of what I mean. Recently, we were asked to design a center for social justice leadership called the Arcus Center. They asked us for a building that could break down traditional barriers between different groups and in doing so, create possibilities for meaningful conversations around social justice. The students wanted a place for cultural exchange. They thought a place for preparing food together could do that. And they wanted to be welcoming to the outside community. They thought a fireplace could draw people in and help start conversations. And everybody wanted the work of social justice to be visible to the outside world. There really wasn’t a precedent for this kind of space, so we looked around the globe and found examples of community meeting houses. Community meeting houses are places where there’s very specific relationships between people, like this one in Mali, where the elders gather. The low roof keeps everybody seated and at equal eye level. It’s very egalitarian. I mean, you can’t stand up and take over the meeting. You’d actually bump your head. In meeting houses, there’s always a central space where you can sit around a circle and see each other. So, we designed a space just like that right in the middle of the Arcus Center, and we anchored it with a fireplace and a kitchen. It’s pretty hard to get a kitchen and a fireplace in a building like this with the building codes, but it was so important to the concept, we got it done. And now the central space works for big social gatherings and a place to meet one-on-one for the very first time. It’s almost like this three-way intersection that encourages bumping into people and starting a conversation. Now you can always pass the kitchen and see something going on. You can sit by the fireplace and share stories. You can study together in big groups or in small ones, because the architecture sets up these opportunities. Even the construction is about building relationships. It’s made of cordwood masonry, which is using logs the way you would use bricks. It’s super low-tech and easy to do and anyone can do it -- and that’s the entire point. The act of making is a social activity. And it’s good for the planet, too: the trees absorbed carbon when they were growing up, and they gave off oxygen, and now that carbon is trapped inside the walls and it’s not being released into the atmosphere. So, making the walls is equivalent to taking cars right off the road. We chose the building method because it connects people to each other and to the environment. But is it working? Is it creating relationships and nurturing them? How can we know? Well, more and more people are coming here, for one, and as a result of the fireside chats and a full calendar of programming, people are applying for the Arcus Fellowships. In fact, applications have increased tenfold for the Arcus Fellowship since the building opened. It’s working. It’s bringing people together. So, I’ve shown how architecture can connect people on this kind of horizontal campus scale. But we wondered if social relationships could be scaled up -- or rather, upward in tall buildings. Tall buildings don’t necessarily lend themselves to being social buildings. They can seem isolating and inward. You might only see people in those awkward elevator rides. But in several major cities, I’ve been designing tall buildings that are based on creating relationships between people. This is Aqua. It’s a residential high-rise in Chicago aimed at young urban professionals and empty nesters, many of them new to the city. With over 700 apartments, we wanted to see if we could use architecture to help people get to know their neighbors, even when their homes are organized in the vertical dimension. So, we invented a way to use balconies as the new social connectors. The shapes of the floor slabs vary slightly and they transition as you go up the tower. The result of this is that you can actually see people from your balcony. The balconies are misregistered. You can lean over your balcony and say, «Hey! » just like you would across the backyard. To make the balconies more comfortable for a longer period of time during the year, we studied the wind with digital simulations, so the effect of the balcony shapes breaks up the wind and confuses the wind and makes the balconies more comfortable and less windy. Now, just by being able to go outside on your balcony or on the third-floor roof terrace, you can be connected to the outdoors, even when your way above the ground plane. So, the building acts to create community within the building and the city at the same time. It’s working. And people are starting to meet each other on the building surface and we’ve heard --they’ve even starting getting together as couples. But besides romantic relationships, the building has a positive social effect on the community, as evidenced by people starting groups together and starting big projects together, like this organic community garden on the building’s roof terrace. So, I’ve shown how tall buildings can be social connectors, but what about public architecture? How can we create better social cohesion in public buildings and civic spaces, and why is it important? Public architecture is just not as successful if it comes from the top down. About 15 years ago in Chicago, they started to replace old police stations, and they built this identical model all over the city. And even though they had good intentions of treating all neighborhoods equally, the communities didn’t feel invested in the process or feel a sense of ownership of these buildings. It was equality in the sense that everybody gets the same police station, but it wasn’t equity in the sense of responding to each community’s individual needs. And equity is the key issue here. You know, in my field, there’s a debate about whether architecture can even do anything to improve social relationships. But I believe that we need architecture and every tool in our tool kit to improve these relationships. In the US, policy reforms have been recommended in order to rebuild trust. But my team and I wondered if design and a more inclusive design process could help add something positive to this policy conversation.

We asked ourselves simply: Can design help rebuild trust? So, we reached out to community members and police officers in North Lawndale; it’s a neighborhood in Chicago where the police station is perceived as a scary fortress surrounded by a parking lot. In North Lawndale, people are afraid of police and of going anywhere near the police station, even to report a crime. So, we organized this brainstorming session with both groups participating, and we came up with this whole new idea for the police station. It’s called «Polis Station. » «Polis» is a Greek word that means a place with a sense of community. It’s based on the idea that if you can increase opportunities for positive social interactions between police and community members, you can rebuild that relationship and activate the neighborhood at the same time. Instead of the police station as a scary fortress, you get highly active spaces on the public side of the station -- places that spark conversation, like a barbershop, a coffee shop or sports courts as well. Both cops and kids said they love sports. These insights came directly from the community members and the police officers themselves, and as designers, our role was just to connect the dots and suggest the first step. So, with the help of the city and the parks, we were able to raise funds and design and build a half-court, right on the police station parking lot. It’s a start. But is it rebuilding trust? The people in North Lawndale say the kids are using the courts every day and they even organize tournaments like this one shown here, and once in a while an officer joins in. But now, they even have basketballs inside the station that kids can borrow. And recently they’ve asked us to expand the courts and build a park on the site. And parents report something astonishing. Before, there was fear of going anywhere the station, and now they say there’s a sense that the court is safer than other courts nearby, and they prefer their kids to play here. So maybe in the future, on the public side of the station, you might be able to drop in for a haircut at the barbershop or reserve the community room for a birthday party or renew your driver’s license or get money out of an ATM. It can be a place for neighbors to meet each other and to get to know the officers, and vice versa. This is not a utopian fantasy. It’s about how do you design to rebuild trust, trusting relationships? You know, every city has parks, libraries, schools and other public buildings that have the potential to be reimagined as social connectors. But reimagining the buildings for the future is going to require engaging the people who live there. Engaging the public can be intimidating, and I’ve felt that, too. But maybe that’s because in architecture school, we don’t really learn how to engage the public in the act of design. We’re taught to defend our design against criticism. But I think that can change, too. So, if we can focus the design mind on creating positive, reinforcing relationships in architecture and through architecture, I believe we can do much more than create individual buildings. We can reduce the stress and the polarization in our urban habitats. We can create relationships. We can help steady this planet we all share.

See?

Architects really are relationship builders.

Thank you very much.

1. urban habitats – городская среда
2. their own insects – их собственные насекомые
3. individual species – отдельные виды
4. diverse parts – разнообразные части
5. interconnected – взаимосвязано
6. this web of life – эта паутина жизни
7. that sustains life – это поддерживает жизнь
8. applying insights – применяя идеи
9. social justice leadership – руководство социальной справедливости
10. meaningful conversations – содержательные разговоры
11. outside community – вне сообщества
12. a fireplace could draw people – камин может привлечь людей
13. elders gather – старейшины собираются
14. egalitarian – уравнительный
15. we anchored it – мы закрепили это
16. building codes – строительные нормы
17. bumping into – натыкаясь
18. intersection – пересечение
19. cordwood masonry – кирпичная кладка
20. nurturing them – заботиться о них
21. fireside chats – беседы у камина
22. people are applying – люди обращаются
23. have increased tenfold – увеличились в десять раз
24. horizontal campus scale – горизонтальный масштаб кампуса
25. rather – скорее
26. lend themselves – одалживать себя
27. inward – внутрь
28. awkward elevator rides – неловкие поездки на лифте
29. empty nesters – пустые гнезда
30. vertical dimension – вертикальный размер
31. vary slightly – немного отличаться
32. misregistered – неправильно зарегистрированный
33. confuses the wind – смущает ветер
34. ground plane – земная плоскость
35. social cohesion – социальная сплочённость
36. equity – равноправие
37. policy conversation – политический диалог
38. reached out – протянул руку
39. perceived – воспринимается
40. participating – участвующий
41. sense of community – чувство общности
42. spark conversation – откровенный разговор
43. able to raise funds – в состоянии собрать средства
44. organize tournaments – организация турниров
45. kids can borrow – дети могут одолжить
46. something astonishing – нечто удивительное
47. be able to drop in – заглянуть в дом
48. vice versa – наоборот
49. require engaging the people – требуют привлечения людей
50. intimidating – пугающий
51. taught to defend – учат защищать
52. reduce the stress – снизить стресс