Course PM, ARK641, Master´s thesis preparation course 3p
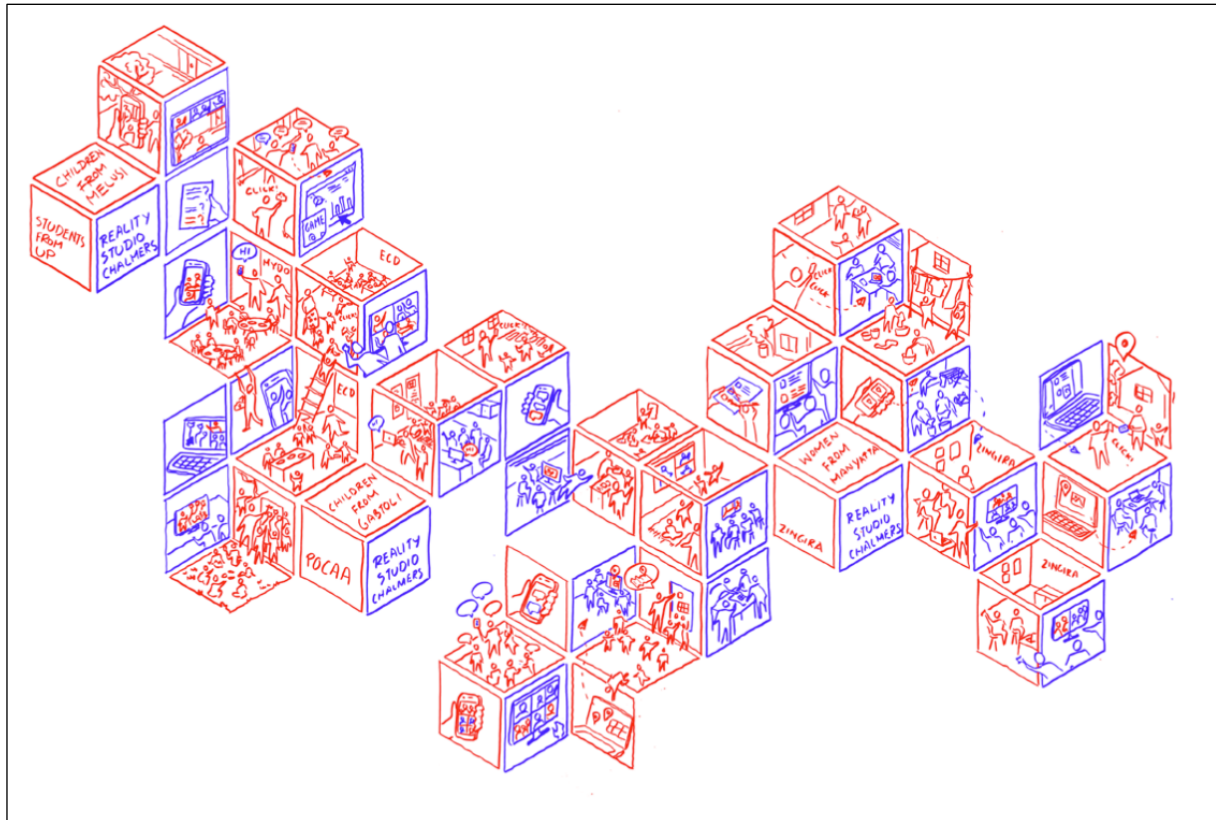# Autumn semester, 2021
Design Activism Beyond Borders

Rifat, Mumtaheena & Eskilsson, Robin (2021). LOCAL-NON-LOCAL. Re-appropriating Design Methods for Remote Collaboration in Community Development Projects

Description and aim

The purpose of the course is to support the students in the development and finalization of **their master's thesis project plan,** allowing the direction team and examiners to assess the potential and feasibility of the project within the thesis direction **Design Activism Beyond Borders**.

The course prepares the students for their master's thesis under **the guidance of assigned examiner(s) and supervisor(s).** It explores **specific theories** and/or design methods associated with a particular niche of architecture and urban design.

It trains the students' **ability to use and explore** design processes and methodologies dealing with the concept of Spatial Agency, which involves a reflection on the professional role of the architect in practice. Spatial Agency develops through other, non-normative, radical, collaborative, interventive – ways of thinking and doing architecture. The concept and method of Spatial Agency is supported by the following principles:

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- architectural design knowledge in a sustainability framework is set beyond the technical and the aesthetic tasks of building design.

- architectural practices have the duty and responsibility to engage with socio-political and ethical aspects of the development of society in relation to the development of the built environment.

- architects are understood as only one of the agents of change and therefore this framework rejects the idea of an autonomous creator in favor of a design activist approach that works across disciplinary borders and empowers local communities.

Method & Process

The methods and processes to be explored in this thesis preparation course in order to construct (and eventually deconstruct) the project plan for this thesis direction will include among others:

- Process based on group and seminar discussions on all theses' ideas, including workshops or group tutorials to explore the dynamics of the group of theses within the same direction

- Situate the thesis within design activism, spatial agency, co-design and/or co-creation as insurgent (sometimes radical) practices

- Develop first drafts of manifestos (clear graphical and written discourse/project statements)

- Identify the collaborations to be developed in the thesis project, involving real-case partnerships and pedagogies internationally or locally

- Define and motivate the context or main case study for the thesis (explain already existing knowledge about the background) and how it will be explored in the thesis

- Use of diverse non-technical graphical production adequately supporting the project plan (compulsory first drafts of: thesis roadmap, delimitation diagrams, stakeholders' mapping, conceptual collages and norm-critical illustrations)

- Propose the development of new methods and tools for design activism to be applied in the thesis (plan for the development/application of games and other workshop methods for co-design, etc.)

- Define and motivate the expected thesis outputs (design proposals, production of manuals or handbooks for direct application in different contexts, prototyping and testing design concepts within real or simulated scenarios, etc.)

- First exploration of outcomes (propose the reflexive and reflective processes to be explored in the thesis)

Other methods that can be explored: graphical essays, dynamic annotations throughout the material, thesis journey notebooks, etc.

Graphical material*:* all material in this thesis direction (including the necessary theoretical framing) is to be explored and explained predominantly through graphical forms and formats, not necessarily technical drawings, but still involving the main tools and skills of the profession.

Learning outcomes *(after completion of the course the student should be able to)*

Knowledge and understanding

- Define and propose a particular trajectory of design and research within a Design Activism and Spatial Agency scope, to be explored in their thesis.
- Define the selection of design media (i.e. specific types of graphics, drawings, models, diagrams, tools, methods, etc.) and a writing style associated with the particular trajectory of design and research proposed for their master's thesis.
- Discuss their work with teachers and colleagues in relation to the particular trajectory of design and research defined for the master's thesis.

Abilities and skills

- Plan and structure the work to be done during the course of the thesis.
- Develop a critically and methodologically informed master's thesis project plan that fulfils academic standards according to guidance from the supervisors.
- Formulate a design problem and research query based on design studies, specific methodologies and tools, context studies, and theoretical texts and explorations.
- Demonstrate their ability to distinguish and move between the personal discourse of a design process and a more formal discourse appropriate for a master's thesis.

Ability of assessment and attitude

- Understand and promote the importance of drawing from the work of others in order to innovate, and always using references properly.

Content and structure

The final deliverable in the course is a project plan. The course will prepare the students to attain this.

At the introductory meeting and based on the course plan, the team of teachers (examiners/supervisors) will present the specific course description for the direction and the set of specific deliverables for the thesis preparation course (ARK641). At this meeting, the students will present shortly their thesis ideas and receive a first round of feedback from colleagues and teachers. Students will work individually or in pairs, depending on how they are planning on pursuing their thesis.

The teachers will also prepare the students for planned learning activities such as seminars and tutorials in different groups. Seminars and tutorials aid students in collecting and analysing methods and tools, mapping and critically reading precedent works and source texts.

The students then will define and motivate the chosen context or case-study for their thesis where the iterative interplay between the chosen methodologies, design studies, exploration of methods and tools, context studies and the formulation of text is to be emphasised. With the aid of this process, and in dialogue with the examiner and supervisor, students develop a final draft of their project plan for the master's thesis.

Schedule

- **6th of October, 09.00-17.00, presentation and course introduction**
    - The teachers give a short presentation
    - The students present and get feedback
        - Ideas, background and relevance to direction and get feedback
- 13th of October, 09.00-16.00, Individual work
  (**optional seminar** on 13th of October: *Field Study Crash Course* for those planning thesis involving field studies)
- 20th of October, 09.00-16.00, Individual work
- 10th of November, deadline 09.00, **hand-in 1st draft for midterm on Canvas**
- **10th of November, midterm feedback seminar**
    - The students present their project plan and receive feedback based on the presentation
- 17th of November, 09.00-16.00, Individual work
- 17th of November, deadline 17.00, **hand-in 2nd draft project plan on Canvas**
- **24th of November 09.00-16.00, Final presentation and feedback**
    - The teachers have read the project plan and give feedback
- 8th of December, deadline 12.00, **final hand-in for the course on Canvas**
- 8th of December, deadline 12.00, **final hand-in for initiating the MT term**
    - Deliver final project plan and registration form
    - There will be a folder in the reception on the 3rd floor
- 12th of January, deadline 12.00, **hand-in final project plan for the exhibition**
    - Starting the master's thesis term
    - There will be a folder in the reception on the 3rd floor

Submission requirements

We use Canvas course page for all our deliverances. As the course only has one Canvas page, please make sure you are uploading to the right thesis direction.

Direction-specific requirements to be included in Project Plan

formal requirements for the project plan:
- on the cover: thesis title, date, name of student, course name, tutors
- max 10 pages A4 (excluding cover and appendices) – be concise!

content requirements for the project plan:
- **Thesis title**
- **Abstract**
- Purpose, thesis subject and **background**
- Only **one** thesis **question**
- **Relevance and alignment** of thesis topics within Design Activism and **framed** within the concept of Spatial Agency: specify how will the thesis approach, explore and deconstruct the thesis direction's main objectives
- critically position the thesis in relation to **sustainability** (relate to UNSDGs) or even moving **beyond sustainability** (e.g. social resilience, regenerative design etc…)
- Specify the thesis **delimitation** through a **diagram** focusing on:
    - The process of shortening the focus and scope of action of the thesis studies
    - What the thesis will **not do**/approach
    - the definition of the main topics of exploration of the thesis
- Specify a **context, case or framework** for the thesis

- Define and motivate the **methods and process (including design)** to be explored in the thesis work and adequate for the thesis direction's critical approach
- **Written manifesto** (direct and objective) explaining the thesis main statements and motivations such as situating the knowledge within the thesis direction
- **Graphical manifesto** (a diagram, a collage, a sketch...) supporting the thesis statements, approach, or critical challenges involved, within the thesis direction
- **Images** (diagrams, studies, collages, sketches) synthesizing the thesis problems, approaches, narratives, challenges, possible outputs, reflections, etc.
- **References** / Bibliography to be explored in the thesis (including eventual reference projects and previous thesis)
- **List of previous courses and studios (appendix)** and what was learned that can contribute for the thesis work
- **Portfolio samples (appendix)** with short reflections of the student's previous work most relevant for the thesis (only individual work, but if from group work then specify what was your individual contribution)

Note: It is strongly recommended that the students who want to apply for this thesis direction have attended at least one of the associated courses (Design and Planning for Social Inclusion; Reality Studio; Beyond Sustainability; Dare to Build, architects). A short portfolio of samples from previous work which are highly relevant for the thesis proposal should also complement the Project Plan. The relevance of such collected samples could eventually compensate for the case of not having attended any of the mentioned courses.

Evaluation criteria's

Grading: Approved / not approved.

Student are required to participate actively in a minimum of 80% of all scheduled activities. The project plan is reviewed and graded after submission at the end of the semester.

Specific preparation course criteria in *Design Activism Beyond Borders*

1. Well-motivated, contemporary and relevant thesis questions and research within the scope of the thesis direction (in relation to design activism).

2. Quality and clarity of the discourse and position of the thesis beyond sustainability (relate to UNSDGs) and in relation to design activism.

3. Level of coherence proposed for the process, and between the research, the (learning) outcome and the design output.

4. Proper use of (written and graphical) material to define discourse statements, design contextualization and application plan.

5. Quality and coherence of all visual and graphic material (including manifestos, diagrams, illustrations, etc.) in how it properly explains the complexity and coherence of the work in a concise and logical way.

6. Clear positioning of the thesis plan within a Spatial Agency approach.

7. Quality and depth of the reflective material regarding the role of the profession, the agency of the thesis, ethical aspects involved (including an intersectional reflection) and a decolonialized approach. This includes showing capacity to deal with failure in a constructive way.

Literature examples

- Architecture sans frontières International (2012). *Challenging Practice: Essentials for the Social Production of Habitat.* Retrieved from https://challengingpractice.wordpress.com/
- Awan, N., Schneider, T., & Till, J. (2013). *Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture.* Routledge.
- Chipchase, J. (2017). *The Field Study Handbook.* (Ed. 2)
- Frediani, AA; Fench, MA; Ferrera, IN; (2011). *Change by Design - Building Communities Through Participatory Design*. Urban Culture Press, New Zealand.
- Lepik, Andres (cur.) (2013). *Think Global Build Social*, ARCH+ nr. 211/212 – Journal for Architecture and Urbanism.
- Hamdi, Nabeel (2004). *Small Change. About the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities*. New York: Earthscan
- Hamdi, Nabeel (2010). *The placemaker's guide to building community.* London, CPI Antony Rowe.
- Kaminer, Tahl (2017). *The Efficacy of Architecture. Political Contestation and Agency.* Routledge, NY
- Martin, Bella; Hanington, Bruce (2012). *Universal Methods of Design.* Beverly, Rockport Publishers
- Petrescu, Doina; Trogal, Kim (2017). *The Social (Re)Production of Architecture*. London, Routledge
- Pitera, Dan & Wilkins, Craig L. (2014). *Activist Architecture: Philosophy and Practice of the Community Design Center*. Detroit Collaborative Design Center, USA
- Roussou E., Brandao E., Thuvander L., Adelfio M. (2019) *Social Inclusion When Community Outreach Becomes The Core Of Architectural Education.* Chalmers University of Technology Available here: https://research.chalmers.se/en/publication/511204
- Schneider, T. & Till, J. (2009). Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency. https://jeremytill.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/post/attachment/29/agency_footprint.pdf
- Sinclair, C., & Stohr, K. (2006). *Design like you give a damn. Architectural Response to Humanitarian Crisis.* London, Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- Till, Jeremy (2009). *Architecture Depends*. MIT Press
- TILT (2013). *Codesigning Space.* London, Artifice Books on Architecture
- United Nations (2015). *Transforming our world – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. (available on link: https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981)

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Course specific prerequisites (for the ARK641 prep. Course)

Minimum 30,0 credits from courses (in principal the first semester of the MPARC or MPDSD master's programme) with architectural design focus or corresponding qualifications. Masters thesis preparation course 1.

Please note limitations for combining Masters thesis preparation course 1 and Masters thesis preparation course 2 with other courses.