Interplay of Cultures

25 Years of Education in Global Sustainability and Humanitarian Development at Aalto University
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"Ethnocentricism" and "naive realism" are notions in anthropology and philosophy, respectively, which denote a blind cultural self-centeredness and the uncritical acceptance of the perceived world as the unquestioned reality and truth. In both cases, we are usually ourselves blind to these prejudices. Failed education supports such restricted consciousness, whereas responsible education guides a student to see the relativity and situational nature of beliefs, behaviour and values.

The most important personal gain of my two years of teaching in Africa, 48 years ago, was the realization how strongly my views of the world and life at the time were secretly conditioned by my own culture, the reality of the Western industrial and then emerging consumerist culture. In Africa, at the age of 36, I began to see that "reality" is not something given and objective, as it is a cultural product and an individual mental construction. I also began to doubt the unquestioned benevolence of rationality, the blinding concept of progress, the undisputed benefits of technology, and the idea of universal human qualities and values.

Living and working in alien cultural, social, technological and economic conditions, is not only a matter of humanitarian interest, sense of responsibility or human solidarity. It is also an intense and irreplaceable education in the invisible deep structures, codes and meanings of culture, as well as an invitation to work on the constitution of one’s sense of self. Working in a culture that differs fundamentally from one’s own, calls for the re-shaping
of oneself, one’s ways of seeing, thinking and judgement, as well as one’s identity, values, beliefs and priorities. I can say frankly, that I returned back to my own country as a different person than I had left two years earlier. My African experience shook off my youthfully arrogant belief in the Western notion of progress and its superiority, as well as my assumption of the universality of the human mental world and thinking.

When teaching drawing at the Building College in Addis Abeba, I began to suspect that my students did not see the way I did. I first made experiments of my own in the class, and somewhat later, my assumptions were confirmed by the book *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception* by Melville Herskovits and his research team. Indeed, even our vision, which we consider as a shared and biologically determined sensory skill, is culturally conditioned and learned. Intense education in the arts and architecture is fundamentally teaching to see, to see the real essence of things. "Seeing is forgetting the name of the seen", as the American artist Robert Irwin argues. This cultural conditioning applies to all our senses as the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall showed in his pioneering books in the 1960s. In fact, anthropology has established that there are only two pan-human (applicable to all human cultures) characteristics. The first is that all human cultures use space purposefully, and the second that all humans have an unconscious capacity to manipulate surface and deep structures, which forms the unconscious ground of language. Facing the relativity of culture, made me shake off the foundations of the world I had constructed for myself. Due to my African experience, the acquired sense of relativity, relationality, and a fundamental doubt, instead of a blind faith in anything, has steered the second half of my life.

As Hennu Kjisik and Veikko Vasko in 1993 introduced to me (in my role, at the time, as the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology), their vision of a new course, aimed at the understanding of other cultures, especially the realities of the developing world, I immediately supported the initiative, based on my personal experiences and gratitude
for the decisive lessons that I myself had learned. I sensed that my colleagues were motivated by parallel personal experiences in their work in the developing world. The title of the course, *Interplay of Cultures*, wisely included the idea of cultural reciprocity and mutual gain.

I am saying all this as an introduction to the exhibition of the 25 years of the *Interplay of Cultures* program, because the students’s engagement in foreign cultures is often seen as mere youthful curiosity, adventure and reflection of innocent idealism. However, I wish to argue that architectural education nowadays, practically everywhere, tends to regard architecture as a given, objectified and rational discipline, and the issues of the student’s personal identity, cultural grounding, sense of self, and view of the world, are hardly consciously touched upon. Architecture is often taught as a preconceived discipline and formalised profession, disregarding the existential, mental, philosophical and ethical dimensions of building or the personal identity and values of the individual designer. It is evident, that in our consumerist world, buildings are in the danger of loosing their existential meanings and turning into mere utility, technology, profit making and visual fashion. Instead of supporting the art of architecture, today’s unlimited wealth and omnipotent technologies tend to distance architecture from its crucial human content. As a consequence, many of the leading architecture schools around the world have courses and studios that are engaged with the developing world or the less privileged in their own culture. Similarly, many of the most influential architectural journals around the world today, publicize projects from the developing world, as these buildings reflect real human needs, real ingenuity in the use of limited technologies and scarce resources, social participation and fresh aesthetic attitudes reflecting the veracity of the real. This architecture of the real also reveals the true ground of beauty. As Erich Fromm, the famous social psychologist and thinker, writes: "Beauty is not the opposite of the ugly but of the false".  

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1. I taught architecture in the position of Associate Professor at the Haile Sellassie I University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1972-74 as part of the Development Aid Program of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
5. I had previously spent a year as an AFS student in the United States in 1954-55, but that experience only solidified my view of the omnipotence of western industrial culture.
Introduction
Interplay of Cultures

In recent decades, many Western architectural schools have taken up the challenge to tackle global polarities and humanitarian crises. Educational programs raising awareness of the “south – north”, “developing – developed”, “poor – rich” dichotomies are all asking the same question: What is the role of architecture in the globalizing world?

Along with the transformation of development collaboration from top-down governmental actions to more grass-root community involvement, more possibilities for smaller actors to participate and become active have emerged in the field of global sustainability and humanitarian development. Whilst the international discourse on humanitarian architecture has evolved, some university programs have established a role as intermediators between different stakeholders in development work, emphasizing the importance of well-designed build environment as a human right.

Since 1993, the Department of Architecture at Aalto University (formerly HUT) has offered courses on development issues dealing with the reality of architecture, building design and urban planning outside Europe, with cultural understanding as the starting point.

The course, originally called Interplay of Cultures, was first developed and undertaken by architects Hennu Kjisik and Veikko Vasko, under Juhani Pallasmaa’s deanship. In 1992, Harris & Kjisik wrote: “The aim is to strengthen the reputation of and develop the faculty as a truly international centre of academic excellence, the best architectural school in the northern hemisphere.”1 To elaborate their thinking, Kjisik as a former UNESCO employee, they continued: “It is of utmost importance to stress that any design task

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in the third world is likely to include an extremely complicated set of interwoven problems which require a far more careful analysis than what we are used to dealing with in our normal work.”

The course was never about providing quick solutions, nor “about throwing up unrealistic ideas of our own”. From the beginning, it was about careful analysis and learning about local conditions, about communication with local stakeholders and communities, and listening to the needs and aspirations of the local people. It was not about romanticizing or dwelling in the exotic, rather than in the honest attempt to understand “the other”. It was more about pondering the values on which we base our profession, and the moralities we choose to follow in our practices – and what we can learn from ourselves, when venturing out to the unknown. It was, and still is, about mutual learning and respecting other ways of seeing the world.

Taking a few steps away from one’s own cultural realm has provided an important moment of reflection for all participants: In the world of constantly mingling motifs and influences, “acknowledging one’s own mental points of origin is invaluable.” During the years, the courses have exposed hundreds of architectural students to varied cultural experiences. Some of them have been mind-blowing, some life changing, almost all of them meaningful in the development of an architect’s identity. Adapting to cultural differences and unknown contexts have developed the students’ ability to work professionally in unfamiliar and unexpected situations.

The focal point – or *raison d’être* – of the course has always been more in the theoretical exercises, creating
understanding and providing tools for analysis. However, a few student projects have led to realization, due to persistence of the particular individuals to proceed to realization through a fundraising process without actual commission. Some of the examples have been architecturally notable and internationally recognized, some have also had a significant importance in re-introducing traditional building materials – like bamboo – that have clear benefits in construction when compared to industrially produced, more recent alternatives. All of them communicate passion for good architecture and a sense of global responsibility. Realizing projects was never the task of the University, but the examples show how profoundly significant the experience was to some, and how it shaped their professional and personal identities, attitudes and ways of working.

The course has operated under different names, professors and teachers at the Aalto University's Department of Architecture. In 2017, the course moved under the newly developed Aalto World in Transition Research LAB (Aalto Wit LAB⁵), and the name returned to its original form Interplay of Cultures. The focus has moved from strictly architectural towards more interdisciplinary approaches, embracing disciplines from other Schools of Aalto University. The Sustainable Global Technologies Programme (SGT), presented in this exhibition, is a strong example of innovative inter- and transdisciplinary thinking, that can lead into viable solutions in the world’s most pressing challenges, originating from grass root student inventions.

This exhibition celebrates the 25-year-history of education in global sustainability & humanitarian development at the Department of Architecture at Aalto University. It presents some of the highlights and realized projects stemming from the program, as well as the various cultural locations and contexts of the field trips that framed the students' experiences. It formulates some of the lessons learned from far-away cultures, and ponders on how they created an augmented understanding of the architect’s profession.

One of the simplest, yet key findings of the Interplay of Cultures course has been that the most challenging design tasks are the ones targeted to those who have nothing – whilst they are the ones needing them the most. Pallasmaa writes: “The purpose of architecture is not only to satisfy the practical needs of construction, as it must also add to the meaningfulness and dignity in our lives.”⁶ In many occasions, Interplay of Cultures has brought the participating students and teachers back to the basics in architectural alphabets. Working with underprivileged communities is a constant reminder of the essentials of our profession. In Kjisik’s words: “The simplest and “quietest” structures, the most modest grass-roots ideas and solutions can and should be good architecture”⁷.

2. Ibid.
A Finnish tale: Cultural Interplays Between Empathy and Respect

Empathy and Respect

Any pedagogical initiative is based on a set of assumptions. There are many values judgments that come in to play, loosely centred around some form of hope: that the course will allow both teachers and students to advance in their critical thinking skills and be able to contribute knowledge to society. This is a fairly deterministic summary, predicated on the causal relationship between course outline and students’ outputs. At the same time there is a huge degree of uncertainty that comes into play, when the variables are unknown. Such is the case when one takes the risk of locating the project site “elsewhere”, in unfamiliar territory. The binary reduction of discourse between “one’s self” and the “other” is a simplistic one, that invariably does not do justice to the complexity of the world.

When reflecting on the work that students and faculty at Aalto University have been producing over the last 25 years within the framework of the Global Sustainability & Humanitarian Development course, one is reminded of the notion of “epistemological abyss” Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nutall speak of when looking at the world from an African metropolis1. The challenge is to imagine what the feeling of looking at the world from Helsinki was in 1993, when the program started. The Berlin wall had fallen only a few years earlier, and Gorbachev’s Glasnost and Perestroika had led to the radical collapse of the USSR, Finland’s biggest neighbour. Under the leadership of Jacques Delors, the Maastricht treaty on the European Union had been signed in 1992, raising hopes that a better future was possible for advancing European integration, in a new global order of peace. Today we know that many of those hopes were short-lived, as too many wars and conflicts have since...
continued to erupt, and the renewed rise of right wing intolerant political parties in many parts of the world seems unstoppable.

This swift historical portrayal echoes the bitter-sweet perspective that the great Finnish film director Aki Kaurismäki instils in his movies. Possibly no other is more poignant for this piece than his 1989 _Leningrad Cowboys Go America_, where the fictional rock band that gives the title to the film is encouraged to move to America because people “will buy anything” there. Peter Zumthor once wrote that his aspiration was “to build houses like Kaurismäki makes films”, captured by the director’s “empathy and respect for his characters [which he] shows in a light that lets us sense their dignity and their secrets.”

I would like to use this reference as a key to locate the approach that in 1993 Hennu Kjísík and Veikko Vasko, under the deanship of Juhani Pallasmaa, chose to give to the core course in humanitarian development, _Interplay of Cultures_. I’m interested in tracing a particular “empathy and respect” in the pedagogical approach of the programme, that, to repeat Zumthor’s words, “lets us sense dignity and secrets” in the architectural manifestations of the students’ designs.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary’s definition of empathy points to “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another (...) without having the[m] (...) fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.”

In essence, the challenge is how to take [good] care of individuals and communities, through the act of design, and ensuring that this position is embedded within the ethos of place-making, the craft that architects claim to control so well.
Outside the Comfort Zone

As it happens, this is not a question that staff and student at Aalto University (formerly the Helsinki University of Technology) have been alone in asking themselves. Many institutions of higher education, mostly from the West, have been involved in programs abroad.

There are multiple reasons behind this. On the one hand a certain educational colonialism, or territorial scramble to expand areas of influence. The not so subtle quest to expand income sources, by increasing student numbers, outreach, and generally a move towards the commodification of higher education, have been driving a neoliberist agenda.

As part of the catalogue of the Afritecture: Building Social Change exhibition held in Munich in 2013 I had the opportunity of reflecting with a number of colleagues on the challenges of design-build projects as forms of knowledge transfer. The comments expressed then seem to me to be still valuable today, particularly when placed in the context of a growing debate on where and what is the “front” of architectural education. Part of the imbalance and impasse is based on not finding a solution to the question of “why our society sets knowledge transfer synonymous with technology and ultimately machinery handover”\(^\text{5}\), since it must be clear that the two are not the same.

Indeed, this asymmetry appears to be the tell-tale of a much wider phenomena, the manifestation of the global project of inequality. As evidenced by the seminal contribution of Thomas Piketty\(^\text{6}\), recent years have shown how labour income represents a 20th century exception to the rule of capital income. With the close of the “short century” we are therefore left wondering how to redress the situation. What the Interplay of Cultures project appears to have done is deliberately invite students and faculty to take some risks, outside their comfort zone. As many radical protesters have pointed out, in the liberation movements against white oppression you cannot hope to do good if you stay wrapped in a cloak of privilege.

The idea to introduce innovation, and difference, not simply for the sake of changing something, but as an act of dissent, is a frequent paradigm within universities. As Louis Althusser well-articulated\(^\text{7}\), an institution of education provides the site both for the reproduction and change of conditions of power.

Although it is clear that global education powerhouses such as MIT, which are consistently ranked at the top of world universities, both in terms of resources, and quality of education, have a hard time in mediating a social and ethical footprint of their endeavours abroad. In a vaccination clinic built near Lake Turkana, Kenya, that resulted from a studio led by Spanish architects Selgas Cano\(^\text{8}\) in 2014, for instance, the team “had to change the material because on site [they]realised that do to the masonry work was too complex for the people there, [who are] completely unskilled.”\(^\text{9}\)
What this anecdotal reference points to is the problematic correlation between technology and development, and even more so when the consideration of the issue is limited to a transfer of skills, devoid of the appreciation of the plurality of cultural and social implications of any form of physical manifestation. It is therefore refreshing to read how Hamid Dabashi, in his recent Can Non-Europeans Think?, polemically articulates how, “Europeans cannot read [even when we write in the language they understand] because they are assimilating what they read back into (...) what they already know - and are thus incapable of projecting it forward into something they may not know and yet might be able to learn.”

The linguistic indeterminacy, or should one call it misunderstanding? – is at the root of the ambiguity of both the approach and the outcomes different Western based programs have produced in the Global South.

Architecture and Development

In London, what is today the Bartlett’s Development Planning Unit had been introduced at the Architectural Association in 1954 as a postgraduate programme for tropical architecture, under the leadership of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew. Its mission to “conduct world-leading research and postgraduate teaching to build capacity working towards socially just and sustainable development in the Global South” is embedded in good rhetoric. In the words they used to celebrate their 50th anniversary in 2004, “the Department set out to influence the euro-centric [sic] architecture that was being exported to the tropics by introducing elements of medical research and building physics to appropriate climatic design. The functionalist ideals of the modern movement made it receptive to such innovation and the Department’s influence took root.”

In 1977 William Bechhoefer, then an assistant professor of architecture at the university of Maryland, after having worked as a peace corps volunteer in Tunisia, and later at the department of architecture in Kabul, warned how, “the role of an architect in a developing nation and the structuring of architectural education are problems closely related to the goals of that nation’s society. As a consequence, the inevitable participation of foreign technicians in these programs raises questions as to the nature of that participation and the extent to which it can be effective.”

But this particular emphasis on the role of technology, and its potential beneficial effect on development has too often allowed for a unilateral technocratic approach, that did not include considerations of cultural sensibility. Too often innovation in appropriate technologies became a slogan, as the EPFL’s Centre for Development still candidly frames it today, for a mission “to alleviate poverty in the Global South”, where the key issues appear to be, among others, “obsolete regulations, curricula that do not match the jobskills
demand, concerns about the quality and relevance of the educational content, outdated pedagogical methods.”

The short version of this seems to point to a circular cycle, whereby “developing” countries suffer from not having learned lessons well enough during the colonial period, and now need technological help to remediate the gap accumulated since independence.

Conversely, reflecting today on 25 years of the Interplay of Cultures project, the one word which signals a welcome shift of perspective is the adjective “humanitarian”. Because it is a specific construction of society, that led to the emergence of a Scandinavian way to architecture across the 20th century, that is at the basis of this approach. Indeed, after 1960, the independence of many African countries coincides with the establishment of state development aid in the Nordic countries. This temporal coincidence goes in parallel with the emergence of the belief that the Scandinavian social democratic model could be exported, translated, and used for nation-building, modernization and welfare in the South.

If the first wave of “expert export”, that included financial and technical assistance in both small and large-scale projects, ranging from architecture to infrastructure planning, lasted only until the 1980s, with the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programs set in motion by the World Bank and the IMF the nature of aid work changed. It is possible to reflect on the establishment of the Interplay of Cultures programme at this juncture. Warning signs on what could be perceived as a neocolonialist approach to architecture had started to appear already in the mid-70’s, and the idea to bring to the fore the notion of “interplay” appears a refreshing humanistic counterpoint to the mainstream technocratic agenda.
Non-Alignements

It is worth remembering that in continental Europe and the US the 1980s are a period of celebration of the autonomy of architecture and the postmodern movement. Beside its ghastly formalist aesthetics, it’s the complete absence of engagement with social issues that strikes us today for its self-referential short sightedness. Hence, I find it intriguing to read architectural evolution in parallel with the stance that the Non-Aligned Movement took to support every member’s “struggle against imperialism (...) and all forms of foreign (...) occupation, domination, interference.”

This can be read also within the current call to decolonise educational approaches, as means to foster more just and equitable relations between countries.

As it is widely known, the legacy of 20th century Finnish architecture is one that looks at materials, sustainability, elegance of design. The interpretation of the modern movement through the lens of sensibility, care, attention to details, has had a widespread recognition, and effectively established its role within the history of architecture. Certainly, the inspiring role of Juhani Pallasmaa, both in his theoretical work, and in his capacity as an academic leader, must have contributed to set the tone for the specific approach of the programme, as well as have allowed multiple people to take ownership of it and reformulate the briefs over the years.

In the words of Norberg Schulz, Nordic education in, and practice of, architecture can be looked at as a “form of understanding...[an] explanation of the unity of life and place, in order that we understand where we are, how we are, what we are.” If the South lends itself to abstraction, the North is marked by variation, openness, and dynamism. Rather than offering a representation, Northern architecture engages one as a participant, and, looked at as a continuum, the *Interplay of Cultures* projects represent an iterative attempt at mediating the encounter with indeterminacy referenced earlier.

At the same time, a reflection on the program begs an answer to a further ontological query, whether architecture should be defined as a social practice, or a design object. Looking at the student and faculty work from Aalto University across the years the ambiguity comes to the fore as a productive armature.
Cultural Mediation Against Imperialism

Elsewhere in the volume the various projects are described with more detail. Over the years, the results are necessarily heterogeneous and present a considerable range of size and scope. Through fortuitous coincidences, tenacious students and staff some initial concepts later became built work. It is hard to express comparative evaluations, and potentially even useless. Beyond social, ecological, and aesthetic aspects, the effort of a pedagogical project that hopes to contribute to the advancement of knowledge whilst at the same time benefitting less privileged in society is obviously an idealistic one, that has to struggle with the material constraints. In a 2015 opinion piece Rainer de Graaf convincingly made the case of how architecture is a tool of capital, and hence there can be little doubt left around the intrinsic relationship between architecture and power. But the power of cultural mediation, the willingness to listen in order to overcome differences, and difficulties, is one that challenges the single narrative of imperialism.

When reflecting on the strong collection of work assembled and curated for this volume and accompanying exhibition, the feeling is that one is not only looking at process and good intentions. If too often the “value proposition of social impact architecture is the design process - one that is driven by inclusion and thinks about the long-term investment that a development or building can achieve”, here also the formal and material logics that emerge also deserve praise. The investigations bring poetry, symbolism, and at times, sculptural decontextualization to the fore. The tectonic precision, attention to production logics, experimental adaptations of vernacular traditions and logics take on new intensities.

What surface are serendipitous dialogues between the modern expression of materials, and new experiences, which change the view of things. Oscillating between abstract and enigmatic forms, the viewer can be left both fascinated and frustrated. The “interplay of cultures” becomes, quite literally, apparent. It is not a linguistic turn to reconnect language and architecture. It is rather the open endedness of the script that allows for some hope to be instilled in one’s mind. Not for the “vague do-good-feel-good-pursuit of ‘social justice’” that Patrik Schumacher can so blatantly accuse the Pritzker jury’s decision to award Alejandro Aravena the 2016 prize for. On the contrary to radically reimagine what the means of intersectionally co-producing architecture can be, and how they can be translated in experimental pedagogical frameworks. Thus, the patient and generous work that is presented here brings full circle the empathy and respect that Zumthor found in Kaurismäki’s movies. May there be more to follow.

Cape Town/Lausanne, June 2018
Notes
5. Ibidem, p. 212
9. mail by Selgas to the author, 11.2.2015
16. The architectural results of this have been displayed in N. Berre and N. F. Heyum (eds.), Forms of Freedom, African independence and Nordic Models, Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet, 2015
18. Fidel Castro speech to the UN in his position as chairman of the non-aligned countries movement, October 12, 1979. Archived at http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1979/19791012.html, accessed March 5, 2018
The rapid process of globalization has brought along an almost incomprehensible speed of communication and information transfer. On one hand, it serves to connect across the globe, whereas on the other, the feeling of connectedness is deceptive. Regardless of the ubiquitous flow of worldwide information, we as physical and psychological beings have remained the same; despite its huge pace, technological advancement has yet to overcome our physical and mental evolution. We still have basic needs as physical creatures, and rootedness in a place is still a valid issue to most of us. Cultural transformations are slow, thus the variety of cultural differences remain.

In cities and metropolises with high level of international presence, the architecture of global modernism, uniformity and loss of cultural identity may seem predominant. Yet, my assumption is that the underlying cultural characteristics, unique to every cultural context, remain largely intact. The way people use spaces, how their inherent culture shapes the way they see and perceive the world, is a fundamental human attribute. Architecture is a projection, or a built image of these cultural features. “Cultures are unique and inseparably rooted in their historical, geographical and economic realities and, consequently, cultural forms cannot be exported or imported”.¹

The fact that these qualities are largely hidden in an international megalopolis, does not mean they disappear as projections of cultural identity. Although they become less evident under the pressure of global industry and exchange, the fundamentals of a culture are deeply rooted.

Even in our era of globalization, it still makes sense to explore the variables and cultural differences that shape us as individuals, as communities and nations, and how these variables are projected in material form. If we look deeper into the vernacular traditions and their urban modifications, we can identify features in the built environment that communicate the intellectual and spiritual values of
a community. Architecture keeps bringing us back to who we are, and how we manifest our presence in the world. Every culture projects itself in a different manner, and it brings forward the importance of analysis and understanding of context in the in architectural design, when the geographical limits of the profession are expanding or vanishing. Architects should be the interpreters of the values and aspirations of a culture, and remain aware of the threat of cultural impoverishment amidst global influences.

**Humanitarian Architecture – What it Means and Why it Matters**

As the global flow of information is losing physical constraints, the more we have become aware of global poverty, forced migration and natural catastrophes. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “by the end of 2017, 68.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations... One in every 110 people globally is either an asylumseeker, internally displaced or a refugee.”

The conflicts and violence are often times consequences of climate change, of droughts, or other extreme weather conditions, that force people to leave their places of origin, and migrate to already overcrowded areas. In 2015, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NCR) reported that “every second, one person is displaced by disaster”. It is estimated that by 2050, the number of climate migrants might reach one billion people.

Due to natural disasters, conflicts result and more migration occurs. UN Environment Program reports: “Since the beginning of this century, the world has witnessed more than 2,500 disasters and 40 major conflicts.” Furthermore, disasters happen all around the world, in whichever cultural context. Even in emergencies, it should be kept in mind that cultural features play a crucial role in how people respond to crises, how the temporal shelters can best be organized and how people use the spaces build for their rescue.

Humanitarian crises call for action, and architecture is a crucial component in the process of helping the people in need. Can we then claim that there exist a phenomenon specifically called humanitarian architecture? As Michael Sorkin argues, “What architecture, after all, isn’t humanitarian, engaged with that most primal activity: the provision of shelter?” Perhaps a more accurate way of describing the phenomena would be architecture designed for humanitarian needs, rather than “humanitarian architecture” per se - and in parallel, to talk about the work of architects working in humanitarian sector, rather than humanitarian architects.

In humanitarian architecture and development, we can identify roughly three temporal modes that distinguish themselves in urgency, yet overlap in crucial ways. The immediate response to life-threatening conditions requires urgent actions: emergency shelters prevent further deaths and secure the survival of the victims. The transitional shelter offers standard solutions to housing needs, still not being an ideal solution. Reconstruction is
when the permanent habitat and infrastructure are set in place. Too often the transitional becomes permanent, and what was built without planning or design, remains in use even for decades.

A common denominator for all successful projects in the humanitarian sector is the engagement of communities in the design process and construction. They involve a socio-political perspective, where reconstruction or development is considered to go beyond the physical, including the social and economic aspects of a community. These projects cannot be designed off-site. They need careful analysis and personal involvement, interaction and interdisciplinary collaboration. The architect is a team player and serves the whole community in finding solutions that best empower the end users – the “owners” of the project.

Charlesworth discusses what she describes as the “design parachute”: how donors and designers “drop in” to execute a quick project with little interest in its long-term effect, local impact, community involvement and resiliency, cultural adaptation or local economy. At worst, these projects are designed to be photogenic and media-sexy, and may add to the negative perception of architects as self-seeking individualists, ignorant to cultural and local conditions, looking for an international boost to their careers.

Schneider and Till discuss the notion of agency in relation to the transformative potential of architecture where the lack of a predetermined future is seen as an opportunity and not a threat. The question comes down to the responsibility and power of the architect. In a humanitarian context, the architect can be considered as someone who “actively and knowingly gives up authority... who doesn’t work in the foreground, but takes a step back... who is part of the process, and sometimes but not always the initiator of the project.” In humanitarian projects, architects become responsible for their actions and the feasibility of the design to the end users, rather than donors, which reverses the notion of accountability. In a humanitarian architecture project, the architect seeks to render him/herself unnecessary, if not invisible in the end. It’s a game defined by respect and empathy, not by egos and self-interest.
Role of the Architect

It is inevitable that the current state of the world has implications on how we should think of the profession of architects. Andres Lepik questions the role of the architect in the 21st century: “Is it simply enough to be a service provider who works solely to fulfil commissions for clients who can afford such services?” There are too many people who are forced to live in inadequate conditions, left without either safety or sanitation in built environments that we can just stand by and do nothing. As a consequence, a growing number of architects have taken up social challenges - in many places, different tempos and in various ways. Working with communities that are not in the position to speak for themselves, many architects are now exploring ways of new spatial and social activism. For many, aesthetics is no longer enough as a primary motivation for architecture, rather than meaningfulness of the practice.

As Michael Sorkin points out, “it is also crucial that ‘humanitarian’ practice not be so uniformly associated with conditions of emergency”.

In the case of development projects where urgency is not defining the design choices (or lack thereof), there is more time to make proper analysis of the conditions and local culture, engage communities and search for locally sustainable building techniques and materials. In terms of design, the role of the architect then becomes closer to the customary, but in terms of clientele, it often remains undefined. However, architects have the potential to become key play-
ers in initiating and implementing successful development projects with underprivileged communities. In doing so, they also need to consider what are the cultural particularities of the place and community they have chosen to engage with. Hence, the need to critically evaluate regional and cultural features.

Aquilino has pointed out three of the many ways architectural know-how can be critical in post-crisis situations. The first of these is capacity: well-trained architects have the ability to erect secure and durable structures, and in addition to serve as capable construction and contract managers. Handling needs, resource and budgets throughout a project saves resources from other actions in humanitarian work.

The second area is representation: working with communities can help them act on their own behalf in areas that the community normally finds out of their reach, such as land tenure, access to water, sanitation, public space and improved ecology.

The third function Aquilino describes is vision: Imagining a better future despite the surrounding devastation. For desperate individuals it may be impossible to look ahead and see beyond destruction. “Architectural expertise can promote public health, encourage investing in new skills and environmental awareness, and advocate for mitigating risk, which together help ensure a sustainable and safe way of life,” rooted in local priorities.

There is a substantial amount of professional fields responding to growing humanitarian demands, but a remarkable absence of professionals capable of strategic spatial problem solving and design-led solutions for longer-term recovery. On average, architects contribute to only three percent of the world’s built environment. This means that in general, architecture is not considered a valid profession worth relying on when planning spatial arrangements. In some sense, we architects can blame ourselves: the long-lasting tradition of architects considering themselves as self-satisfied artists-creators, rather than useful professionals with capacities to empower communities, has alienated us from a vast number of other disciplines and agents. Yet, this is where architects should find themselves, offering a widespread capacity to process management in recovery and development.

In the Design, Disaster & Development Research Forum held in Barcelona in July 2018, Brett Moore from UNHCR stated that the UN Refugee Agency prefers to recruit other professionals rather than architects, due to their general lack of teamwork skills. Moore’s assertion, and clearly his personal experience, was that the usual client-commission based modus operandi of the architectural practice is useless in disaster management and development work. Indeed, the ability to work in multi-disciplinary teams is crucial in situations where there are no clearly defined clients and the role of the architect is not a lead position, rather than a coordinating and collaborative one.
Consequently, there is a striking lack of employment opportunities for young architects, who wish to work in humanitarian and development fields, in any of its time scales or temporal modes. As Aquilino states: “There is still no career path that prepares students to work as urgen-tistes – design professionals who intervene at a crucial moment in the recovery process to produce enduring solutions.”

However, although largely absent in the vast operations of disaster recovery, a growing number of architects have chosen to work pro bono, or funded by small donations, on humanitarian projects. Their interventions are small in the global scale, but they provide inspiration, insights and examples to many. Furthermore, we can safely say that at least a discourse has begun with the international community of professional agencies, on what are the crucial skills needed for such circumstances, where architecture puts itself primarily in the use of others, in an active, adaptive and collaborative way.
Education in Humanitarian Architecture – Interplay of Cultures

The notion of the UNHCR sends a critical message to contemporary architectural education. Whilst globalization is shaping the way we work and act in the world, architectural education has to embrace and learn from disciplines like cross-cultural psychology, anthropology and sociology, and invest in transferable skills. These include subjects such as teamwork, leadership, social skills (listening and empathy); problem definition and analysis; project design; basic financial management of projects; fieldwork and data collection; public speaking; writing/reading and research methods; political analysis; advocacy and creativity. Solid design skills will always be the basic prerequisite: understanding of scale, materiality, spatial arrangements and their cultural adaptations, human dignity manifested in architectural form - but in addition, a professional designer in humanitarian sector needs those transferable skills to promote participatory and collaborative design.

Whilst many international universities have taken up the challenge to offer courses and programs in global issues, development and risk management, this is still often marginalized and seen as an “alternative” way of thinking architectural education. A wide international discourse is needed, to reconsider the capacities of design professions, such as architecture, in responding to global crisis. Architects need to learn how to articulate the untapped potential their education is producing, to move away from the detrimental effects of starchitecture, and start talking to other disciplines and communities with respect and empathy, already during their education.

The Interplay of Cultures program at Aalto University initially shaped itself around the notion of understanding “the other”, of cultural analysis and interaction. “Interplay” refers to reciprocity, which in turn is about mutual dependence, action or influence. Its core aim is fundamental to relevant architectural education: how can we learn to avoid ethnocentrism, gain scientific, sensory and embodied knowledge despite geographical boundaries and learn to respect other views and ways of manifesting human existence in built form. At Aalto, the Interplay of Cultures program has...
proven its resilience, despite admin-
istrative sway and obscurity, due
to a small but resistant number of
faculty members determined to keep
it alive. The Aalto WiTLAB (World
in Transition Research LAB), estab-
lished in 2014, has now adopted it
to build a more rigorous and solid
academic base for the program,
also to strengthen its interdisciplin-
ary approach, vitally important to
any humanitarian or development
project.

Finnish architectural education
has traditionally relied strongly on
the concept of practice. Already on
the bachelor level, soon after the
basic introductions and exercises
in form, light and materials – the
architectural alphabets – the design
tasks take up a form of “reality sim-
ulation”. The design process includes
understanding of the context and
surroundings, sometimes even the
concept of “accountability” to a cli-
ent. The inbuilt premise is that the
design choices have to be justified
and sustainable, and rooted into
the surrounding conditions, context,
users’ needs and available materials.
In a sense, one can argue that this
tradition provides a fruitful basis for
working in foreign contexts, where
understanding local conditions is the
primary precondition for any suc-
cessful project.

Finland’s strong architectural
tradition has also manifested itself
in the bilateral relationships and
development collaboration with
the newly independent nations in
post-colonial Africa. In terms of edu-
cation, the Finnish Foreign ministry
included support for the training of
architects, town planners and build-
ing engineers in the Finnish devel-
opment cooperation programmes.
A long lasting programme with
Ethiopia was established as early as
1970, which included contribution in
teaching staff, provision of books and
other teaching materials. In the
1980s, the Faculty of Architecture at
the Helsinki University of Technol-
ogy (HUT) offered a Master’s Pro-
gramme in Architecture and Urban
Design, funded by the Finnish
International Development Agency,
FINNIDA. Architect graduates
from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sri Lanka,
Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia took
part in the two-year program, most
returning to their home countries
after finishing their degrees.

In a way, the above-mentioned
programs paved the way for Inter-
play of Cultures. Juhani Pallasmaa,
an Associate Professor at the Haile
Selassie I University in 1972-74,
wrote in 2006: “Cross-cultural
interaction has to be approached
with respect for the uniqueness and
autonomy of the cultures in ques-
tion.” His vision played a crucial
role in initiating the Interplay of
Cultures course at HUT in 1993, to
offer architectural students a wider
perspective of the cultural varie-
ties in our world. Never has this
approach been more topical than
now.

The 25-year-history of the Inter-
play of Cultures program sparked
the idea of this exhibition to be held
at the Museum of Finnish Architec-
ture. It is an excellent opportunity
to reflect on the values and mean-
ings of architectural education in
the globalizing world, as well as the
definitions and relevance of the term
“humanitarian” in architectural
practice.
Alumni Survey – What Did We Learn?

In late 2017 and early 2018, when preparing for this exhibition, a web survey was conducted among the alumni of the Interplay of Cultures program (or courses that run under other names, such as World Architecture and Planning, City in Crisis and Cities in Transition). Out of some 200 alumni whose email addresses we were able to track down, we received 40 responses. Thirty-nine of them allowed their answers to be anonymously quoted.

The survey revealed that this course was a valid reason for some to come to Finland as an exchange student in the first place. The course certainly had a reputation among the foreign students. Many pointed out the importance of teamwork, of learning about different cultures. Shared human condition was a frequently referred issue: “How different the challenges may be elsewhere - so different but still the same.” Some wrote about growing professional identities, multicultural experiences and committed teaching. Some referred to coping with difficult situations, stepping out of their comfort-zones and developing problem-solving skills.

Some pointed out the “importance of context, use of appropriate materials and resourcefulness”, and how “I realized that good solutions are often simple solutions.” One notion was “the importance of participatory planning”, and how “it’s important to ask, not to presume.” “It opened my eyes for how small changes can make a big difference,” and most aptly: “The impact of a building goes beyond beauty.”

For some, the course was a life-changing experience, dictating the direction of their future career entirely. Not everyone was happy, though. One alumnum responded, when asked about the most important thing learned during the course: “Human race sucks. I developed a very pessimistic view of the World.” A literature review had revealed that the problems we face now are the same or worse than 30 years ago. “However, I could learn that big policies made by big men, in big buildings, with big money, are mostly non-effective. I also learned that the little hope we have, is to apply the "think global, act local" slogan.”

The replies showed that out of 39 alumni, 14 were working professionally in projects related to global sustainability and humanitarian development, and 11 were volunteering. For some, at least, the course provided a basis for their future careers and professional interest, with some of those transferable skills mentioned earlier.
The Code of Conduct

An integral part of the Interplay of Cultures program—obviously—is interaction and communication with communities and individuals in the developing world, with people representing cultural realms sometimes very different from the western context. The program includes prerequisite courses where students face questions of globalization and development small and large, and prepare for the field trip experience by expanding their knowledge base. For communication and encountering people, we provide simple guidelines, which have proven to be appropriate in almost any project involving underprivileged communities. Set your ego aside, respect people with empathy. Do not criticize openly. Think of positive sides and learn to articulate them. Do not engage in something you cannot fulfil. Be clear about your objectives—do not raise false expectations. Appreciate people’s time, and thank them appropriately. If invited to their homes, observe their habits and imitate. Always be respectful and consider the elderly.

Most of these guidelines are basic courtesy, but the imbalance between the reality of a low resource community and a group of white students can easily create situations, where managing expectations may be challenging—for officials and communities alike. Often the presence of local students is helpful, or simply sitting down and explaining carefully what they have come to learn. Sometimes “icebreakers” are needed: a simple football game between students and village kids, like the one our students entered into in Kigabiro, Rwanda, or an improvised art exhibition in Zanzibar, where we presented our 30 min hand drawings of a square to the locals hanging out there.

I do not recall, nor have I heard of one single incident, when a student from Interplay of Cultures would have violated these guidelines. On the contrary, in a field trip context the students have always paid particular attention to their behaviour, which signals commitment and sense of responsibility. However, despite the respectful conduct of the group, things can still go wrong.
The Quileute Adventure
In March 2015, a group of Aalto students travelled to the shores of the Pacific Ocean in Washington State to meet and work with the indigenous Quileute Tribe in their project, Move to Higher Ground. The tribe’s land is located on a tsunami risk coastal zone and moving the village to a higher area allocated to the tribe is of vital importance and urgency.

Aalto University was connected to the project through a few private individuals, one of them being the then executive director of the tribe. The course assignment was to consider the feedback and reflections of the tribe on the initial relocation plan, and to propose alternative solutions for the relocation master planning. The course was part of the Architecture master program in urban planning. The preparations went on with the belief that relations to the tribal council were in order, assuming that we had the permission to visit their land.

Somewhat exotic for foreigners was the fact that some years ago the Quileute had received a widespread international attention due to the famous Twilight saga, which drew people to their land from all over the world. The tribe had built a high-quality resort for visitors, which made it possible for the Aalto group to appear in their village just as any tourist would, and wander around without attracting too much attention. The tribe tolerated the presence of visitors, since eventually it did bring in money and promoted cultural awareness.

During the field trip, the group worked mainly with the executive director (who was not a member of the tribe himself) and a few elders and past members of the tribal council. At that time, a new tribal council was being formed - hence, we never met with the actual council.

The field trip was successful, and the group received appreciation due to respectful behaviour. The students continued with their design projects in Finland, aiming to provide fresh ideas and potential concepts for the tribe’s ambitious initiative. The course projects were finished according to plan, and eventually sent to the tribe for review.

Not long after the one week intensive field trip a media intervention occurred. A story appeared on the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE website, covering the unusual and exceptional commission from a North American Indian tribe to the Finnish Aalto University. The copy communicated clearly that the tribe had commissioned the design from the University, that the tribe had acquired money from the state and the government, and the students were hired to do the job. None of this was true.
The exotic story spread like wildfire: soon it was covered by the Finnish tabloid magazines and in no time it found its way over the ocean and spread among the indigenous tribal communities. A day before the “storm” hit the Quileute tribe, the new tribal council had learned that a group of Aalto University students had visited their lands in the first place.

The “storm” included hundreds of furious inquiries from other North American indigenous tribal councils, about the alleged funding for the Move to Higher Ground project. The Quileute Tribal Council had to respond to a series of erroneous allegations, which had totally confused their whole tribe.

Two weeks later YLE corrected the story, but the damage was already done. The tribal council announced that they would simply cut all relations to Aalto University, to allow the tribe to recover from what they saw as yet another outside intervention. At that moment, the tribe did not give much value to the Aalto students’ input – their first and foremost responsibility was to protect the tribe.

The indigenous communities in North America have witnessed a violent history of oppression and abuse. In Finland, however, the American Indians have always appeared as exotic and mysterious: when a Finnish university got involved with a real North American Indian tribe, the journalists seemingly got too hasty to check their facts – and who knows if the interviewee was a bit too careless as well. What seemed like an innocent, harmless and exciting story on this side of the globe, turned out to be seriously harmful for the Quileute tribe itself. The council’s reaction was understandable – as was the confusion and disappointment of the Aalto students.
Media Exploitation

In the humanitarian sector, when working with underprivileged communities, designers and architects are dealing with people’s lives: real human beings who live in dire conditions. The projects are often designed and executed pro bono; what remains with the designer is a story to tell. There is an element of extremity in these sometimes undeniably beautiful architectural works that may appear particularly seductive to the media: photogenic exoticism, admiration or even glorification of people’s resourcefulness amidst hardships, heroism over everyday challenges. Dan Hancox writes about “desperation dressed up as architectural invention”, denouncing the stories exploiting low resource communities as “slum porn”.

The temptation of adding a twist or two in one’s story, a photograph deliberately leaving out the crucial mistake or revealing only the favourable sides of the design, is a pitfall we should be mindful about. Providing a false image of a project easily turns against the good purpose. This appeared to be partly the case when the famous Makoko Floating School in Lagos, Nigeria, collapsed in 2016, after a few years of service to the community. Designed by the NLÉ architecture studio, the Makoko Floating School had received such intense media attention, that the collapse of the structure shook the press.

The collapse of the floating school prototype in Lagos took place on June 8, 2016, while the MFS II, an improved version of the structure was being celebrated at the Venice Architecture Biennale. The prototype itself was built quickly, and required constant maintenance. NLÉ had intentionally communicated an image of a functioning project: albeit a pilot structure meant to be temporary. It was presented as a continuous success story, which had clearly helped to establish the international reputation of NLÉ. Their initial press release on June 8, 2016 understated the collapse and explained that “the structure had been out of use in anticipation of reconstruction”.

Six months later the studio published a comprehensive report on the case, which was dated Nov 28, 2016. At that point, however, the report seemed more like a response to repeated inquiries than a self-directed attempt to openly reflect the causalities of the collapse.

One should not underestimate NLÉ’s contribution in maintaining and repairing the MFS I structure until the ownership and responsibility was transferred to the community. However, if the architect continues to benefit and seek international recognition on the basis of a particular project, part of the responsibility remains: at the very least, it includes honesty and openness towards all parties. Tomà Berlanda wrote shortly after the incident: “The collapse of the structure of the Makoko Floating School faces us with a fundamental question of how to articulate judgement and inform an opinion on the role architecture has.”

The media coverage of the Makoko Floating School had been immense. In fact, it was so powerful, that the government reconsidered the relocation of the community, and allowed the floating school to remain despite its previously unknown typology. This is no minor achievement for a piece of architecture. Had the collapse and reasons behind it been more openly and swiftly communicated, the studio could have avoided the adverse publicity, caused by their dismissive attitude. Building a career and seeking fame doesn’t blend well with humanitarian work. There is nothing more harmful for a community project than the arrogance of the architect.
Sharing the Failures

A very different attitude was communicated by architect Rahul Mehrotra, in his keynote at the UIA conference in Durban, South Africa in 2014. For an audience of about 4000 people, he spoke about a community toilet project that his studio RMA had designed and built with SPARC (The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers), a Mumbai based NGO – and what went wrong with it. In his keynote he not only presented the ambitious project itself, but also openly shared the mistakes and failures that took place during the design and execution of the project.

SPARC had been commissioned by the government to build over 300 toilets in the slums of Mumbai. Funded by the World Bank, the requirements included a concrete structure, which encouraged RMA to develop a prototype with a higher structure and include useful features to the complex: a residential accommodation for a caretaker in the upper floor as well as a community space, to serve as a study area for children at night. Solar panels would provide electricity for lighting, for the security of women and children. The facades were to be wrapped with flowers and creepers, to allow for a more welcoming atmosphere.

RMA did a lot of research in the areas the toilets were to be built to secure the appropriateness of their design to the local conditions. Nonetheless, every time they reached the plinth level, the government would stop the construction. The government representatives saw the structure as something too iconic and permanent, whereas the slums were only a temporary condition in their minds. The carefully designed aesthetics did not do good either: it only helped to give the toilet an image of a permanent structure, which would allow for the community to get organized and eventually legitimize the entire slum area – something the government was not ready to accept.

One toilet complex, however, was eventually built. This was in a remote area, where the government officials rarely visited. At first, the toilet project was a success: children were using it, the community centre was appreciated and the solar panels kept the spaces active and safe during the night. Six months later, however, the government had installed one of their normal public toilet blocks beside it. The door of the SPARC/RMA toilet complex was locked and the community centre had been occupied by the group of slum residents who were involved in building the toilet.

Mehrotra sees two clear reasons for the repeated failures of their toilet project. One of them is the
government’s conception of “temporality” of the informal settlements, and the fact that the prominent and well-designed architecture would serve as a means to legitimize a temporal condition. This was further emphasized by the use of materials: a solid concrete structure served the same purpose of consolidating the project on the slum ground – all working against the idea of temporality, which the government wanted to preserve.

The second, and from the community perspective even more notable reason for failure, was the lack of ownership. The NGO did not have a solid enough community base on the ground, and this paved the way for vested interest. The one toilet that eventually got built was soon taken over by a small group, who unfoundedly claimed ownership of the facility over the rest of the community.

**Rooting a Project**

Mehrotra’s analysis of the causalities of their failure is precise. It carries wisdom and valuable lessons for all stakeholders who take part in projects aiming at improving
the living conditions in informal settlements. Good intentions, even profound research and fine-tuned, dignified design cannot alone assure the success of a project. A sense of ownership has to grow from the grassroots, for a project to take root in a community.

In the very same UIA Durban conference, I recall Jennifer van den Bussche, founder and director of the South African NGO Sticky Situations, talking about the importance of local representation in community projects. Her advice was that if you cannot engage with a community for seven years yourself, work with someone who can. Participation, engagement and commitment are absolute prerequisites for any community project to take root and become sustainable.

We can rarely predict the political and socio-economical changes that take place in the communities we work with. Often times these are side effects or consequences of larger political realities, choices and actions, to which the informal settlements or underprivileged communities are most exposed. One example of such is the Sra Pou Vocational School, also presented in this exhibition. Designed and built by architects Hilla Rudanko and Anssi Kankkunen - both Interplay of Cultures alumni - the project was intended for a relocated community in Cambodia, evicted from areas that the government wanted to develop. The Vocational School was executed in collaboration with a small NGO, which eventually did not have the capacity to maintain it, nor sufficient local engagement to keep it active.

In a forcibly relocated community, which lacks cohesion and sense of place in the first place, this is sad but not surprising. The current state of the school reflects the challenges of relocated communities, as they are evicted from their original locations.

**A Way Forward**

The Interplay of Cultures exhibition, for which this catalogue is produced, is an opportunity to discuss the failures, challenges and difficulties we face when working in the humanitarian sector, as well as the value base, roles and responsibilities of our professions in society as a whole. It highlights the importance of architectural education to embrace multi- and interdisciplinary approaches. But above all, my hope is that it will bring the readers and visitors closer to the riches and realities of cultures far and wide.

The world is in transition, amidst changes with unprecedented magnitude. The bravest thing we can do is to openly share both our mistakes and successes, to allow for discussion and learning, and educate new generations to appreciate and preserve our ecosystems better than we have. Let us be the advocates of dignified human lives, celebrate the diversity of cultures, and speak and act for an architecture that can make this world a more equal, safer and harmonious place for all. “Hopefully we are professionals who believe that human dignity begins with an appreciation and inclusion of wonder and art, and take creative steps towards making things better because, however small to however vast, we can do so.”
Notes
2. Ibid.
6. UN Environment website.
12. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
19. The Design, Disaster & Development Research Forum in Barcelona on July 6, 2018, organized by RMIT EUROPE, invited academics and professionals in the disaster, design and development fields. The focus of the event was on the question: “How do we deal with the pedagogic, spatial and research challenges of global mobility, migration and social inequality?”
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26. Ibid.
29. YLE news, 8.4.2015.
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34. Ibid:21.
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References
PART 1:

Context & Pedagogic Approach
Architects in the wealthy parts of the world have traditionally had a tendency of being primarily interested in what their successful counterparts in other wealthy parts of the world are busy with. The professional magazines in Europe, North America and the rich parts of Asia have responded to this by concentrating on the “wow-factor” and its various manifestations. It has, until very recently, been far less common that these publications have dealt with the everyday problems of the majority of the world’s population.

It was partly because of this that the Faculty of Architecture at Helsinki University of Technology (today Aalto University) decided in 1993 to start giving courses on development issues. Juhani Pallasmaa had just become Dean of the Faculty and he basically gave us a free hand to create this new pedagogical entity. The approach of the first programme named *Interplay of Cultures* was to give an introduction to the general development problems of the majority of the world’s people and communities. Its aim was to strengthen the global awareness and social conscience of the students, as well as helping to understand the realities of life and conditions of professional work in developing countries of the South. These fundamental principles have remained in the forefront ever since. They are, however, notoriously difficult to teach in lec-

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ture halls and drawing studios of northern universities, and consequently the annual field work period has, ever since the beginning, been an essential part of the teaching process.

In the beginning, in 1994–1997, field work was carried out in Senegal to acquaint students specifically with an African context. There our base was Centre Arc in Rufisque, a cultural centre created by Finnish sociologist Anne Rosenlew-Cremieux. Most projects were hypothetic exercises, as has always been the general idea of the course, but some of them did lead to realisations, most prominently the “Red House”, the women’s centre in Rufisque by Saija Hollmén, Jenni Reuter, and Helena Sandman. This building has been published in many of the world’s foremost architectural magazines and presented e.g. at the Architecture Biennale in Venice in 2002 and 2016.

It should be emphasized from the start that our project was never about saving people in distress, nor about coming up with unrealistic ideas of our own. It was about avoiding the prevalent mistakes caused by using “First World” solutions, totally alien to the local needs and priorities at the receiving end.

The basic aims of the field work were from the start defined as follows:

- Acquainting the students with unknown contexts and cultures and developing their skills in adapting to working professionally in a totally new situation.
- Developing the understanding of symptoms and causes that have led to a specific situation as a pre-requisite to any physical intervention.
- Developing the students’ value systems and sense of global responsibility as a designer.
- To show that architecture as we tend to define it, is not in conflict with the most modest grass-root ideas and solutions which can be of as high a quality as any of the manifestations we are used to seeing in our publications.
In Senegal all the basic ingredients of urban chaos were there, enough to cause a sufficiently powerful culture shock. Nevertheless, there was a basic functioning social organization with no one dying on the streets. Rufisque was not so large, some impact could actually be made. Apart from the “Red House group” that worked closely with the local women’s organizations, other themes in Senegal included urban renewal as well as facilities for education and health. The small rural health center in Thiadiaye received an addition to its existing maternity ward building, this being another realized new building where the impact of our students has been instrumental. Another important activity was, of course, the restoration of the premises for the new cultural center, the buildings of Centre Arc itself.

A slightly modified version of the studio course, now called World Architecture and Planning, started in the autumn of 2000 and adopted the theme of City in Crisis. The objective was to create an understanding of the dynamics of urbanization and of global issues in urban policies through lectures, seminars and exercises. For the first six years of the new studio a two-week field work period in Benin for a group of 10–15 students of different disciplines and nationalities was organized. The base during the field work was the Finnish cultural centre Villa Karo at Grand Popo.

The first field mission in 2001 documented and analyzed the town of Grand Popo and its built environment whereas, the following year, the fishing harbour and the working and living conditions of the fishermen and their families, was chosen as the main subject for study. Later field trips were devoted to the revitalization and urban renewal of the Old Gbecon, the dilapidated colonial commercial centre of Grand-Popo, as well as on the creation of a new civic centre or “heart” to serve the daily life of the inhabitants of Grand Popo, in search for identity and new sense of place. The field work during 2004–2006 covered housing problems, various urban design issues as well as alternatives for a centre for local women’s associations. One group of students studied tourism, one of the key sectors of development in Grand Popo, and students also studied the conditions of Togolese refugees in Benin at Agamé and produced general improvement ideas for refugee camps in cooperation with the field staff of UNCHR and the International Red Cross.

The projects of the previous year were always presented to the representatives of the local community during the following visit. The presentations were usually followed by lively discussions, and the reports were handed over to the municipality for their free use.

It is important to emphasize that a university is primarily involved in teaching, not the implementation of development projects. However, if viable projects are identified, financing can be sought on the basis of proposals prepared through student
work. The Mayor of Grand Popo, one of our most fervent collaborators, Mr Eugène Kpade saw this clearly. In his view our primary interests were: (i) enculturation of our students, (ii) the academic work of a university, and (iii) identification of projects. He pointed out that ideas presented in the student’s projects should be seen as an output which could be used and further developed by the local community; “We need dreams”, he concluded.

After six years in Grand Popo and Benin, it was, however, felt that a change was called for. A total of ten years of going to Africa made us now look east. The Helsinki University of Technology Water Laboratory, had had connections with projects in the Mekong Delta for some years. We also found out that one of our alumni, Ms Sara Hultén, a participant in the very first field trip to Senegal, now ran a busy architectural practice in Phnom Penh. The historical treasures of Cambodia undeniably also played a part in the decision to consider Phnom Penh as the new venue for the studio and thus the first group of students travelled to Cambodia in the beginning of 2008.

In Phnom Penh we cooperated closely with the School of Architecture at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA). For our first visit they organised a workshop under the theme “Designing with people” together with two very active local non-governmental organisations that were involved primarily in defending the rights of people evicted from the informal settlements in the central parts of the city. Thus, after the first few days of their stay, the students were already well versed also with issues such as marginalized communities, land sharing, serviced-site schemes, relocations and upgrading. The work continued efficiently also during the following years largely because of the continuing involvement and help of the staff of the two NGOs, the annual workshops organized by RUFA, and because of the relentless work of our many other collaborators, including designers in charge of some of the major private sector development projects.

A particularly relevant project touching on housing rights was “Save the Lake” which provided us with food for thought practically all through our Phnom Penh period. This project based on filling in Boeung Kak Lake in the centre of Phnom Penh had become a symbol for many large speculative ventures financed by investors from abroad. The conflict between continuous economic growth and increased competitiveness on the one hand, and the basic needs of the less privileged on the other, touched upon some of the most fundamental questions faced by humanity today and were in the very centre of the raison d’être of what we were trying to learn about.

In spite of us having been lucky in finding such excellent collaborators and having been so well received on all levels, we cannot pretend to have had more than a
fleeting glimpse of everything that was going on in Rufisque, Grand Popo or Phnom Penh. That is why the ideas and sentiments expressed in this exhibition should be seen as what they are; learning exercises by western students who, for the first time in their lives, visit places that are totally new to them and touch upon issues that affect the lives of millions of people around the globe.

Cities and urban settlements with their uncontrolled growth, congestion, traffic and environmental problems constitute a major challenge to governments and local authorities everywhere. Yet, most economic activity also takes place in the cities. Aid to developing countries has for decades largely concentrated on rural areas to stop the rural exodus. This has not worked, something that was visible already in the early 90s when we started with this activity. The urban situation seen remains an enormous challenge. Architects and planners from the industrialized world have increasingly have to get involved, there is no choice.

Luckily these activities continue at Aalto University. Excellent representatives of a younger generation of multi-talented young architects (many of them Interplay of Cultures alumni) have since taken over from us, and are carrying on with this important work with as much gusto and enthusiasm as ever before.

The three venues that we covered, Senegal, Benin, and Cambodia, have in recent years been joined by the Philippines, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zanzibar (Tz).

Two out of three of the latest Pritzker-prize winners could be classified as being involved in “humanitarian architecture”. We are, of course, referring to the marvellous Alejandro Aravena and Balkrishna Doshi. Even the third one, RCR, even if not perhaps “humanitarian” as such, represents ”quiet” architecture, completely in harmony with both the cultural and the natural environments surrounding it, as opposed to the work of most established “starchitects” which only seems to shout and scream. Is this really a sign of a trend? Let’s hope so.

The rise of architecture with a strong sense of social responsibility can be seen also in the Venice Biennales. Aravena himself curated the 2016 version under the heading Reporting from the Front. The trend can be seen to have started already in 2000 when Maximiliano Fuxsas called for “Less Aesthetic, More Ethics”. “Humanitarian” architecture has in recent years also found more space in the journals. Work by architects such as Fabrizio Carola in Mauritania, Anna Heringer in Bangladesh, Francis Keré in Burkina Faso, Patama Roonrakwit in Thailand and Hollmén, Reuter, Sandman in Senegal have all had their fair share of attention. Many of these people were also present at the 2009 Alvar Aalto Symposium in Jyväskylä, curated by Sami Rintala. This was certainly the first major presentation in this country of architecture from countries outside the “usual ones”.

Our course has become known around Europe because not many architecture schools elsewhere offer this type of activity where working out in the field constitutes the backbone. We do not want to claim that our Interplay of Cultures course up here in the freezing north has been instrumental in starting this major global tendency. However, we would like to believe that the 175 young architects from 19 different countries that have now received they first initiation to “humanitarian architecture” through us and thus learnt to inject a portion of social responsibility and international solidarity into everything they do, have had a small part to play in the strengthening of these trends.
Meeting the Complexity of the Real World
Tanzania 2013–2014

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When we as students took the master studio course Interplay of Cultures in 1995 we were asked to tackle a problem we encountered in the Senegalese society through architectural means. When we, seventeen years later, as teachers were asked to open up the same course for other disciplines than architecture, it felt like a very natural transition: The problems communities and citizens in low-income settings face are often very complex and can rarely be solved with architectural means alone. We will here elaborate on the transition phase in 2012–2013, when the course moved from Cambodia to Tanzania and became interdisciplinary.

The studio course was offered in the master program of Creative Sustainability as a part of the Sustainable Global Technologies minor program. This enabled students with different background knowledge to join. Sara Lindeman, from the school of business with a specialization in inclusive business, joined the teaching team. The first interdisciplinary year, 2012, was done in collaboration with the same NGO Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT) as the previous years in Cambodia. The political situation in Cambodia, made it very difficult to imagine that any of the ideas that the students developed in collaboration with the local communities would be realized. We found this increasingly frustrating.

For this reason, the following year, 2013 we decided that there was a need for a new destination. Helena Sandman was, together with her team Hollmén Reuter Sandman Architects working on a shelter home project in Tanzania and Sara Lindeman had done fieldwork for her doctoral thesis in Tanzania in collaboration with the Dar es Salaam based NGO Center for Community Initiatives (CCI). CCI works to empower local communities to form savings groups and supports these groups to identify and realize their own development initiatives. The community groups are organ-
ized into the Tanzanian Federation of Urban Poor, TFUP. This type of organization seemed to be the perfect partner for student work, as the organized, empowered and supported community groups could actually follow up on ideas developed together with the students.

In 2013 the interdisciplinarity was further increased, and now included students from business, engineering, design, architecture, landscape architecture and real estate studies.

We prepared for the course by traveling to Tanzania and discussing with CCI and TFUP community groups. Our philosophy was that the initiative and problem definition needed to come from the community – a notion that resonated perfectly with how CCI and TFUP work. CCI and TFUP already had several inspiring and innovative projects under work. Together, we identified where the expertise of the students could be most useful to enhance ongoing initiatives or establish new ones. Gradually, several joint project areas were identified and the “host” community groups were identified. We visited the groups and discussed further until everyone was clear on what lay ahead.

The challenge themes included: waste management, crafts and entrepreneurship, sanitation, community planning and affordable housing, and flooding. Based on a brief project description, Aalto students wrote motivation letters to apply for different themes. The teachers created teams around the challenges so that relevant competences were represented in the groups.

When conducting an interdisciplinary course, it is ideal to have a team of teachers with different disciplines, that can provide necessary expertise and coaching. To be able to have several teachers the number of students cannot be very small and, travelling with a big group is not always easy. In 2013, we had a team of four teachers and a large group of
30 master students from Aalto University. In addition, we collaborated with the school of journalism at the University of Dar es Salaam. When combining students, teachers and NGO representatives, the number of involved people was around 70. We solved the challenge of operating with so many people by dividing the groups into rather independent teams.

The studio course consisted of several combined methods of teaching. Prior to departure, we prepared the students both in terms of providing wide perspective knowledge regarding sustainability and big challenges on a global level as well as in terms of necessary detailed discipline specific knowledge. In addition to knowledge, we also strived to prepare them in a cultural, social and emotional way. We held workshops to discuss Tanzanian culture with Tanzanians living in Finland. We also discussed the need to be humble and respect different kinds of knowledge, such as the community’s knowledge, while at the same time recognizing the value of the professional knowledge that the students have themselves. We held workshops on teamwork, and different roles and dynamics that may appear.

The fieldwork lasted an intensive two weeks this year. Due to other competing obligations, the students typically cannot stay for a very long time, although a minimum of three to four weeks would be ideal. In this case the field time had to be used as efficiently as possible. On the first day, we organized a joint initial event for all participants. The community groups provided a hearth-warming welcome with music and dance. All projects were
introduced, and all participants introduced themselves. The event was held in a neutral, nice place, and included a lot of food, which is the tradition in Tanzania. The exercise contributed to building an equal ground for collaboration. The role and importance of all stakeholders became clear and was confirmed by the fact that all were given equal time and space for presentation and introduction. The groups – combining community groups, Aalto and UDSM students as well as a CCI support person – met each other and were able to bond. In addition, everyone knew what the other groups were going to work on during the next two weeks.

The work was then conducted rather independently within the groups. The groups were spread out across several informal settlements in Dar es Salaam. We provided transportation for each group, but the more detailed programs were set up by each team internally. The type of work conducted varied across the groups, depending on the nature of the project. It could include ethnographic style interviews and observation, various user-centered design workshops organized by the students, sketching sessions, interviews with local authorities and experts (facilitated through CCI, as they have excellent connections to all relevant stakeholders in Dar es Salaam).

During the work, we introduced a method that proved to be very supportive when working in a new environment with an overflow of input and inspiration in a team with members with different experience and background. We called it the “sun set round of sharing”. Both students and teachers
share their experience of the day in a personal manner while everybody else listens attentively without giving any comments. We have noticed that this is a powerful way of building the sense of connection and care for each other that reflects strongly on the team work in general. In this way everybody gets the opportunity to share their view, regardless of being talkative or shy. This was done only among Aalto students and teachers, as we lived in the same place. It was a method that worked well as a joint exercise, despite the fact that the students were working on very different projects.

We had four teachers from Aalto, with different disciplinary backgrounds. In addition to the authors of this text, Matleena Muhonen and Johanna Laaksonen, from the SGT program were part of the teaching team. We did not divide ourselves to work on specific projects. Instead, all teachers provided support to all teams. In the afternoons, the students often worked on the projects in our hostel. The teachers then provided coaching to teams, moving from one team to the other. In this way, we were able to ensure that different disciplinary perspectives were taken into account in a balanced way in each team.

We also deliberately took a break for two days in the middle of the fieldwork period. During this time, the students typically go to Zanzibar to just relax and do touristic things. We have learned that the experience of working in the communities is so overwhelming, that the students need a break to assimilate what they have experienced. After the break, they usually have subconsciously processed the work, and are able to take big steps forward during the remaining time.

The collaboration with the local school of journalism was important for the success of the fieldwork. The local students had a course where they produce writings and TV-clips.
about the projects as well as acting as translators. Importantly, the journalist students had a genuine interest in the work initiated by the communities, held a respectful attitude towards the community members and were at the same time skilled in interviewing and translating between English and Swahili. They contributed to creating a sense of respect and equality in the teams. Often, we have encountered problems when engaging local master students from the same discipline to collaborate on an equal level with the students from Aalto, as their background education on sustainability often does not reach the level of the Aalto students. Sometimes we have also encountered a negative attitude towards low-income communities among local students. However, as the local students had different, but equally important tasks as the students from Aalto, we did not encounter any of these problems and we all found the collaboration mutually beneficial.

A nice outcome of the collaboration was also that the work gained media attention locally.

At the end of the fieldtrip all teams came together as in the beginning to present their work to each other. During the spring term, when the students developed their work back in Finland, they had Skype sessions with CCI and the Tanzanian community participants to get feedback for their progress. In the end of the studio course all material produced by the Aalto students was shared with CCI and through the NGO brought to the communities.

Reflecting on the challenges we encountered, we discovered that finding equal roles for team members, as the projects often tend to lean more towards one discipline, to be a challenge. We placed considerable efforts on identifying good projects together with our local partners and selected well the students working on each project. This in-depth
Preparatory work was of paramount importance in order to overcome several challenges. The projects need to be tangible enough for both the students and the community members to relatively quickly arrive at a concrete aim or solution, around which they can co-create. Taking the project to a concrete level soon also enlightens the role of each member of the team and everybody knows what their respective responsibilities are.

On the other hand, from a pedagogical perspective, the challenge also needs to be complex to allow for the interdisciplinary approach. Exposing students to a complex real-world challenge and give them an opportunity to find ways to address that challenge hands-on, is the aim of the course. All problem definitions were therefore selected so that they sprung from a complex socio-economic challenge. Finally, the problems also needed to be within our scope of expertise and network.

The adventure of traveling to a new place and new culture can be a strong experience. We were mindful of the pitfall, that if the students quickly manage to enter into the society and merge into the culture that mere experience might feel like such a big thing, that there can be a false belief that the work is already done. At first, solutions may seem obvious and easy. Despite the short time in the field, we made efforts to expose the students to conflicting information and have them test their ideas quickly so that the complexity of the local realities would become visible to them. Digging deeper into the issues is important in order to familiarize oneself with complexity. However, the chaos of complex realities can be frustrating for the students. They would prefer to stick with their first ideas, and with comfort remain in the illusion of clarity and ease that it brings. The Sun-set rounds of sharing were important in order to process these kinds of often demanding emotions related to dealing with complex challenges.

It is rewarding to teach through challenges in real environments, as it is much closer to professional life than traditional courses in university. The constellations and dynamics in the interdisciplinary teams are complex and demanding, nevertheless rich and inspiring. Often courses in university, within one discipline, tends to put the students in a competing position to each other, as every student tackles the same or a similar imaginative problem. In this case, where each challenge is different and the students within the
teams have their unique roles, this unnecessary competition is absent. The learning experience is not only on the level of specialized knowledge and skills, but on a more personal and emotional level. The experience is different for each student, but for all it tends to be an intensive, often even life-changing experience to be so close to a different culture and experience first-hand the reality of unprivileged communities.

One of the reasons for taking the course to Tanzania, was to have a window of opportunity for projects to actually be realized and not merely remain as great student project ideas. One of the projects from 2013 provides an inspirational example of how that can be possible. The sanitation group has continued their work on dry toilets together with TFUP and CCI. The student team found new partners in a dry toilet association in Finland, and with them gained a three-year funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland to build toilets in Dar es Salaam. The student team has evolved into an association, with ambition to become a social enterprise. Several Aalto student projects have been conducted since 2013 in support of this initiative.

Moreover, the work conducted in 2013 also inspired us teachers to do even more regarding local innovation for sustainable development. The collaboration around the student work, proved to us that solutions can be developed in a co-creative way. Encouraged by this realization and experience, we sought support from the National Innovation Fund of Finland. Against all odds, we gained a 4.2 million euro grant for five years to do research on how local low-cost innovations could form part of future sustainability business.
A three-year period working in the city of Tagbilaran and Bohol Island in the Philippines taught us about the benefits of multidisciplinary teams and of the power of change the studio can have.

We often find ourselves having to justify the need for running a university course about cities in the global south and having to explain the necessity of arranging a far-flung field trip, which causes students to miss other lectures while they are away. Having taught the Cities in Transition course for several years, we are convinced of the enormous impact that the course has had on students both at Aalto University and the host universities we have partnered with over the years. Showing a better version of the future can inspire great changes!

We have found that many developing countries are in dire need of urban design expertise. In the Philippines, as in several other countries, numerous universities offer architecture degrees at a Bachelor’s or Master’s level. However, extremely few universities have a planning school at all, and those that do focus solely on large-scale general planning, teaching students to produce vast maps of color-coded zones. Urban design tools and the in-between scale are not taught at either architecture or planning schools. This is manifested in a lack of understanding of the importance and qualities of urban spaces, yet many aspects of people’s everyday lives and their general quality of life could be significantly improved by small changes in the way open public space is shaped.

The course and particularly the field trip are often transformative for Aalto university students. Being taken outside their comfort zone to a completely different reality pushes students to open their senses and notice things they take for granted at home. Being confronted with totally different or perhaps even nonexistent solutions to issues such as waste management, sanitation, clean drinking water and adequate housing, teaches students to critically assess things from different perspectives and question conventional ways of doing things.

The course helps students understand and utilize the problem-solving skills they have learnt during their years at university, but working in exceptional circumstances and a foreign context also highlights the importance of non-academic abilities. Thinking on their feet while out in the field teaches students the importance of being approachable, good at building team spirit and resolving conflicts. Being confronted with new challenges and questions forces students to discover new sides of themselves.
Tagbilaran – City in Transition
The Cities in Transition course spent three years working in Tagbilaran, the Philippines, together with local Bohol Island State University (BISU) and Nagoya Institute of Technology (NIT). At BISU the College of Engineering and Architecture provides civil engineering and architecture education on a Bachelor’s level. Their syllabus includes only one urban planning course, a theoretical lecture course without any design tasks.

During the three years of collaboration we have noticed the impact the course has had on local students and faculty. They have started seeing their own city in a new light. Joined by Aalto students and driven by their curiosity, locals have visited parts of town they had never set foot in before and which their prejudices would have prevented them from entering. They have learned to approach and interact with residents of all social strata and understood, that local people are often the best experts on their own neighborhoods and needs. Together with Aalto students, local students visited the city bureaucrats’ offices in search of knowledge, boosting their confidence and professionalism. The need for an urban design programme at BISU has now been acknowledged among teachers and students alike.
Year 2015: Documenting and Learning about the Island and the Philippines
During our first field trip to Bohol, the focus was on getting to know the island and gaining some understanding of the local way of life. Project sites were identified across the island: in Tagbilaran, the island’s capital, in the port town of Tubigon and in the heritage town of Loay. The multidisciplinary student group had very different approaches to the problems they uncovered, with each student drawing from their own strengths and skills.

Year 2016: Human Scale and Participatory Approach
Returning to Bohol with a different group of students in 2016, data collection and analysis were again conducted during an intense two-week field trip hosted by Bohol Island State University in January, after which students continued their design work back in Finland until May. Based on our experiences from the previous year, we decided to focus our attention on studying public life and urban qualities in the city of Tagbilaran while assessing traffic and walkability. As foreigners, we don’t know how the city works, how people live, work and move about. How do public life and public space interact? We wanted to learn from Tagbilaran.

During the two-week field trip, students got to experience local conditions and design context to reflect on the right issues. They outlined their design projects and gathered material. Students could meet different stakeholders from informal settlers and street vendors to city and provincial government officials.

The course projects were collected into a book CIT 2016 which was received with great enthusiasm the following year, even from the mayor of Tagbilaran.

2017 Real Life Testbed – Small Interventions in the Public Space
Based on our experiences in previous years, we chose during the third field trip to focus on studying the everyday life of local people, concentrating particularly on the needs of marginalized groups such as children, the elderly, poor fishermen and women. The local students once again played a crucial role to the success of the process. They were active and enthusiastic about the collaboration and deserve merit for the outcomes of the field trip. Student teams made up of BISU, NIT and Aalto students conducted interviews asking locals sometimes rather personal questions. This kind of sensitive interaction could not have been possible without translation and valuable background information provided by BISU students. They also contributed to designing and implementing urban interventions during the field trip.

During this third year in Tagbilaran, students could utilize the material produced as part of the course in the earlier years. Special focus was on using the creativity and design skills of the Aalto Students in advancing the conditions of the urban poor. We also had the opportunity to highlight the rich cultural history of the old built environment. The wealth of background information and the fearless attitude of the students made it possible to stage small-scale interventions around the city already during the field trip. Despite the very limited time frame, students bravely took on the challenge, including closing a street from traffic, building a small playground for children and using a beautiful light installation as a tool in making a public space safer. The attitude of locals and their participation gave the students instant feedback about their ideas, which is incredibly valuable and is often impossible to achieve during a course, where most of the design work is done at home after returning from the field trip.
As a landscape architecture master’s student, I took part in the World Architecture and Planning course (now Interplay of Cultures) in Benin in 2004–2005, taught by architecture professor Hennu Kjisik and architect Veikko Vasko. This studio course gave me a chance to explore and understand the world more; it made my dream, as simple as it was then, to go to Africa come true, it gave me a chance to learn about the rhythms, colors and ways of life – and most of all, it gave me chance to learn about and from local people. Furthermore, it had a huge influence on my professional career.

In early spring 2007, I started as a coordinator in the new multidisciplinary educational programme called Sustainable Global Technologies (SGT) at the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK), later Aalto University. Since then, I have been inclined to develop the programme, its teaching methods and create opportunities for collaboration in many levels.

SGT focuses on sustainable technologies, urbanization, development, environmental, cultural and societal impacts in developing and transition countries, mostly with communities in social exclusion or in humanitarian crisis. Lecturers, teachers, facilitators and project partners come from different Aalto departments, other academic institutions and governmental and civil society organizations. Great emphasis is put on teaching methods and pedagogical approaches at each SGT course to enhance communication and interaction between the student, lecturers and project partners. The SGT Programme collaborates closely with the Interplay of Cultures course in teaching and pedagogical development, providing background for any student travelling afield.

As one may foresee, the challenge is that everyone, from teachers to students, from project partners to community members, come with different backgrounds, professional and cultural, and with their individual skills, hopes, fears and ambitions. To achieve a common goal, we aim to bring forward and embrace these as a resource.
Foundation
In 2003, a group of enthusiastic engineering students proposed that TKK should organize courses that are focusing on sustainable technologies in developing countries. Ulla Heinonen, a doctoral student at TKK at the time, was appointed to make a preplan. Various stakeholders in TKK departments, including Department of Architecture and Interplay of Cultures course, Ministries and UN Organizations were called for planning meetings to structure the new courses to be in line not only with the university curricula but also with the global agenda that is today known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time TKK became one of the first UN-Habitat partner universities alongside with other Nordic universities: Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden and Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norway.

SGT Programme was established in 2006 at the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering with support from former TKK Rector, professor emeritus Matti Pursula, who saw the potential and supported the programme start. Professor Olli Varis from Water Engineering was appointed as an academic leader for the programme. The aim was to provide university level teaching that seeks to give holistic view to the state of the world and development, emphasizing the role of sustainability and technology in development, and provide practical experiences from international projects. The methods and ways of working were aiming to imitate more consultancy rather than traditional research. The aim was also to increase collaboration with the university departments and with other universities in development sector, both in Finland and in developing countries.

Initially four new master’s level courses were founded, three of them remaining. Courses were, as they still are today, open for master’s level students from any field of study. This was one of the rare courses taught in English at the time, therefore it attracted lot of international degree students as well as exchange students. Roughly speaking, half of the students were originally from outside Finland. This created a foundation to develop pedagogies not only for multi- and interdisciplinary learning but also for multicultural teams – and yet aiming to work with another cultures. Today, this foundation also fits well in the Aalto University’s mission to “build competitive edge by combining knowledge from different disciplines to identify and solve complex challenges, and to educate future visionaries and experts”.

For me, looking back a bit over ten years, it has been a great journey in exploration of working methods and pedagogies to such courses. It is a challenge, year after year, to be able to touch the current or rising issues and respond to the current global challenges. The general understanding of sustainability has changed over time. Also students have changed, their knowledge about world and its state has increased enormously, but so has their concerns about the world and its future. Many are eager to do something about it, but may feel powerless and overwhelmed, some even depressed. They might come to SGT courses with ambitious thoughts about saving the world and in the end noticing how little they can do right now.

SGT courses are designed to fit all. The aim is that the teaching methods and tasks follow one another linearly to support different learners. The aim has been to build a well-thought out combination of courses and use methods that will challenge students to think for themselves. The students have the freedom to be creative and the right to be critical. Students are also encouraged to express their own feelings in their diaries and face-to-face sessions. One key element is to recognize one’s own skills and expertise as part of a multidisciplinary team. In project work, it is also essential to be able to integrate the diversity of knowledge for example from engineering, sciences, business and architecture. The learning outcomes, many of them transferable skills, include teamwork, project management from a project plan and budgeting to prototyping and reporting, communication and community interaction. Design thinking and human-centered approach have become the core methods and ways of thinking in recent years.
El 20 de Noviembre, Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico, photo Jan Ahlstedt
Fieldwork

The SGT Studio course, like Interplay of Cultures, organizes student projects in developing and transition countries. Over these 12 years, SGT has had 55 student projects with 28 field trips to 11 different countries with over 200 students from at least 10 different study disciplines. In addition, nearly 100 student per academic year pass the background courses of which, through application process, around 30 students join SGT studio projects and fieldwork and 20 join Interplay of Cultures.

The fieldwork became essential part of the SGT Studio course gradually. The first field trip was made to Taipei in 2011 with project mentor, architect Marco Casagrande. The following year another student team travelled to Lebanon to start a three-year collaboration with Al-Amal Institute for Disabled with their mentor, designer Aino El-Solh. Then, from 2013 onward, all the teams have travelled and the fieldwork has become central component of SGT Studio course. The real turning point was the joint fieldwork in Tanzania in 2013 and 2014 with two other Aalto courses: Cities in Transition (architecture) and How to Change the World (business). This allowed us to re-think the fieldwork methods together, share our experiences from the past courses and test some new methods. It also brought together a bigger variety of disciplines.

No one is sent to the field with empty hands. “One needs to understand geographical, cultural and historical factors of the location”, as Claudia Garduño in her doctoral thesis, Design as Freedom (2017), notes and continues: “The students are instructed to avoid making any decisions before visiting the place and talking with people who live there. However they are encouraged based on the background information, to benchmark sustainable projects that have taken place in other places in the world, and that might bear similarities (climate, history, threats) to the given location”. Garduño also acknowledges the ambitious task of “making the world a better” place as was originally set for Aalto LAB Mexico, a SGT student project since 2015, working with marginalized Mayan communities in rural Mexico. The original task, as Garduño states, “might make the students anxious and it might also place them under a lot of pressure. This process might become rather confusing and even frustrating, but it is important to experience it to acquire the right attitude before visiting the community. Nonetheless, there is the risk that the labbers (students) might develop the wrong attitude. Students might feel like their task is to save the world, or at least the people in the community they will work with, from oppression”. Similarly, the project partners, whether it being an industry, civil society or community directly, might have high expectations. Yet again, we have to bear in mind, that as a university course we come with certain learning targets, and cannot take the role of a consultancy company. We can, in best case, deliver an idea, scenario, prototype, technical report or similar. In addition, we can, by the way we work and communicate with the communities, give them tools to get involved in improving their lives and enhance communication within their immediate surroundings. In the same way that we prepare the student teams, we have to prepare our partners for not setting expectations that cannot be achieved. However, a long-term collaboration can lead to project partnerships or product implementation.

Then again, it is a learning process. Fieldwork is considered as the most fruitful, but also heaviest part of the course based on student feedback. It raises a lot of feelings before, during and after. It makes the teams focus 100 % on their project without having other priorities. Field trips teach the student teams group dynamics and also lot about themselves as individuals. It also gives some of them a spark to explore more.
El 20 de Noviembre, Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico, photos Jan Ahlstedt
Keywords
We use lot of keywords during the fieldwork, aiming to capture each day’s feeling or essential learnings. These are my keywords reflecting SGT Programme today:

EMPATHY
To be able to understand the local conditions and try to understand people’s lives in the given project site, we need to jump in their shoes. To do our best, we need to empathize. Empathizing with the people we are designing for is the best route to truly grasping the context and complexities of their lives. With empathy, it is easier to imagine new futures for the community we work with. It is highly important to make the students realize that people are experts on their own lives and that many times specific cultural values and practices cannot truly be comprehended by outsiders.

SPACE
Right team composition enables the right kind of a space for interdisciplinarity. The space is where everything happens. I, as facilitator, see the space as creating such conditions that the student teams have a chance to interact, work together, listen to each other, learn from each other and from each other’s skills. That space should allow them to co-create and brainstorm freely. It should be a space where magic happens. Through experience, we have learnt that with more mixed disciplines the teams have, the better space they find. When the team starts their exploration of the project, they also start exploring their team, themselves as part of the team, team power relations and limits in the space they define.

INTUITION
Without intuition, this programme would not exist as it does today. Intuition has given us freedom to do as we think is best at the time. We are not tied to any strict framework or guidelines other than time. Many decisions along the way have been based on intuition and in coincidences. Often intuition is also the leading force in the field.

EXPERIENCE
As many students have said, this was the best experience of their life! This way, it is possible to experience the world from a different angle and be part of it – and be part of its future. Through experience, we, as educators, are also able to develop the study programmes through trial and error to create better places to learn, and to experience.

MOTIVATION
Without the motivation of mentors, teachers, guest lecturers, communities, partners – and especially students, this could not be done like it’s done today. Everyone involved gives more time and puts more effort than is ever asked for. Many students say that it is the given responsibility, which gives them the incentive to perform at their best.

PASSION
The intense, driving, or overmastering feeling that keeps us exploring more.
El 20 de Noviembre, Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico, photos Jan Ahlstedt
PART 2:

People
Places
Projects
The city of Rufisque in Senegal was the first location chosen for the *Interplay of Cultures* field trip. As a former UNESCO employee in Dakar, Hennu Kjisik knew Senegal as safe environment, which had a network of many trusted colleagues. Rufisque was facing all the problems and challenges a city in a developing county can imagine: poor sanitation, rapidly growing population, high level of unemployment, and a declining colonial city centre, to mention a few. Anne Rosenlew, a Finnish sociologist living in Senegal, had acquired La Maison Roche, which became the base for the course for four years. The first field trip students measured the old colonial era house in the city centre, and it was later renovated into a cultural centre according to the students’ design.

Four main themes were developed to structure the field trip projects. The Urban Group studied how the rural immigrants were adapting to urban conditions: where they came from, and how they managed their new environment. A basic notion was that the spatial patterns were transformed from rural to urban conditions unchanged. A clear division between public and private space was notable.

The School Group studied three different schools through interviews and documentation. Participatory methods were used, which resulted in enthusiastic community involvement. A model school design for a narrow urban plot was developed. The Restoration Group measured La Maison Roche and designed the house renovation. The Public Health Group visited local health care facilities, both western and traditional, and designed a health care centre renovation. Lecturers from local experts, as well as the excursions and visits around the country were common to all.

From the very first year on, the students were given desk studies prior to the field trip, to prepare them to the upcoming projects in a different cultural context. Quite often, however, they ended up changing their topic during the field trip, which was part of the learning.

In Senegal, the French language was a challenge to many: the course operated with interprets, which is quite often the reality in development work. Translations from local languages Sereer or Wolof to French, then English, was time-consuming and the essential message had to be condensed. Many ended up expanding their language repertoire after finding out that English is not the only universal language.
During the course of 1997, the project group visited a women’s hospital in Tiadiaye. The hospital was built and run by FELM, an agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELF, Suomen Lähetysseura) for its international work. They expressed a need for an extension to the existing hospital in order to host more patients. The extension should include rooms for patients, sanitary spaces as well as cooking facilities for the extended families accompanying the patients during their stay at the hospital.

The project group started working on the extension immediately by studying and measuring the existing hospital area. We acquired a firsthand knowledge of hospital operations since Olli, one our group members, accidentally hit his head on a rusty windowsill. His head had to be stitched, which was done by the Finnish nurse, Kaisa Härkönen, who worked in the hospital.

The extension plans were finished later in Finland, and the hospital extension was built under the supervision of FELM.
The Women’s Centre project was started in 1996 and finally completed in 2001, with financial support from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Centre ARC, Finnish Cultural Foundation, other foundations and private donations. The idea for the centre originated from cooperation with local women’s groups. The purpose of the project was to improve women’s living conditions and enhance their social status, education, health and freedom of action, and to promote environmental awareness and sustainable building design. The Rufisque city authority contributed the land and local parties supported the project with material donations.

The design follows West African traditions, as the building is grouped around an internal courtyard. The building’s red colour gives the house its own identity amidst the grey tone of the city block structure. Recycled materials are favoured, and ventilation of the spaces and roof structure is especially considered. Appropriate structural designs and strength calculations were made, which we hoped would have an educational effect on local construction methods and our builders.

Today the centre is in active use. It even suffers from overuse, due to lack of similar spaces, which tells of an urgent need for such buildings, carried out with cultural sensitivity.
After La Maison Roche had closed its functions in Senegal, the course needed a new base and location. Juha Vakkuri, a Finnish writer and journalist, had established the artists’ residence Villa Karo in Grand Popo, Benin. This turned out to be a timely and natural continuation for the course, this time called *World Architecture and Planning*. Villa Karo provided logistic support and grants, and the small coastal village turned out to be a fruitful place to study in a comfortable environment, despite its relatively small scale.

Collaboration with local authorities and politicians was extremely fruitful and easy, especially in the early years. The Mayors Alain Bogler and Eugène Kpadé especially engaged with the course. Artists and other scholars from Finland staying in Villa Karo participated in discussions and common knowledge creation. Local teachers, village elders, shopkeepers and restaurateurs were important stakeholders.

The main themes studied were ecotourism, women’s centres, city centre activation, education, sports and recreation, old colonial city centre Gbecon revival, and a refugee camp following the 2005 Togolese exodus. The desk studies, such as climatic studies...
and book reviews prior to the field trip, played an important role in preparation for the studies in Benin. A continuum was created the following years, as the students presented the previous years’ projects to the local stakeholders.

In six years the interest of the villagers slowly waned, Mayer Eugène Kpadé had died, and his successor was not interested in continuing the collaboration. However, the course’s impact on the development of Grand Popo was crucial, where over 80 students lived for at least two weeks every year. Villa Karo was equally important; many new local livelihoods, like restaurants and workshops were established around the visiting scholars.

The ancient Gbecon city centre was thoroughly measured and documented during the field trips, and the study informed its development plans. The most concrete achievement was the renovation of Villa Karo’s new Lissa Gbassa, a centre for arts, concerts and performance, where the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra performed Beethoven’s 5th, the Destiny Symphony, in the presence of the whole village to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Villa Karo.
The concept was envisioned in January 2006 during fieldwork in Benin by Henrik Drufva, Rebekka Gröhn and Mika Savela. During spring semester the project was developed further in a team, resulting in a pamphlet on sustainable tourism, which Rebecca illustrated by hand. Hossam Hewidy drafted the technical details and principles for ventilation in hot climates. Richard Sirén provided additional photos and materials.

The core idea was to think of a project that could tap into local tourism potential in a sustainable manner, and provide means for the local people to acquire gradual control of tourism as a spatial resource and source of income. Thus, the hotel school would instruct students and local residents in running the main hotel, as well as operating as a service hub for self-built bed & breakfast rooms dispersed throughout the village.

The aesthetics and the design draw inspiration from West African royal palaces, their courtyards, climate-sensitive practical solutions as well as local vernacular typologies. The hotel rooms are designed with the aim of producing a quiet sense of luxury through simplicity aimed at well-informed travellers.
My first visit to Villa Karo was in March 2001 as part of a group of architecture students. Later that spring I took part in a student competition aimed at producing a design for an extension that would include gathering, work and exhibition spaces.

I received the commission, developed the final plans during 2002 and construction work started in 2003. I visited Grand Popo several times during the process and spent a great deal of time gathering ideas and insights from local architecture, environment, techniques and culture. The result of the construction was an amalgam of my design, local interpretations and input from Finnish professionals visiting Villa Karo.

One of the main concerns of the design work was to maximise the natural ventilation through extensive use of openings and pierced concrete tiles in order to cool the building and take care of excess moisture. This led to a design with two inner courtyards facing the sea with a longer main volume that could be opened up completely by the use of wide sliding doors.

In 2018, the building is fully functioning with concerts, dance lessons, seminars, parties, exhibitions and outside movie performances happening on regular bases. Lissa Gbassa has found its place as a centre of cultural life for the whole village of Grand Popo.
Cambodia

Phnom Penh
2007–2012

5 trips
79 students

Teachers & tutors:
Hennu Kjisik, Veikko Vasko,
Humphrey Kalanje, Auli Puhakka,
Matleena Muhonen, Ilona Mansikka,
Inari Virkkala, Helena Sandman,
Saija Hollmén, Trevor Harris,
Jenni Reuter, Taru Niskanen

Visiting critics & lecturers:
Kong Kosal, Sara Hultén,
Nora Lindström, Hallam Goad,
Din Somethearith, Mann Chhoeurn,
Lormaneenopparat Saranya,
Stefanie Irmer, Yam Sokly,
Tom von Weissenberg,
Damien Evans, Marko Keskinen,
Ulla Heinonen, Mira Käkönen,
Matti Kummu

After the years in Africa, it was time to explore other continents. City in Crisis studio travelled to Cambodia, Phnom Penh in 2008-12. The HUT’s Water & Environmental Engineering research group had studied the Mekong area water resources and social dynamics for years, which provided the initial contacts. Veikko Vasko got to know Kong Kosal, architect and lecturer in RUFA (Royal University of Fine Arts of Cambodia), who participated in the HUT’s Dipoli Sustainable Communities Professionals’ Education Program. Vasko travelled to Phnom Penh, where architect Sara Hultén, a former Interplay of Cultures alumna, was running an architectural office. Her contacts and consultation in local conditions were vital for the course. In the end, many people and organizations, including the local UN-Habitat office, contributed to the network of stakeholders that helped frame the vast challenges of the rapidly growing city.

In Phnom Penh area, the poor urban communities were living in constant fear of eviction. The local government was keen on transforming the central areas into profitable land areas for real estate development, and this meant that the long-established low resource communities were being evicted and relocated in remote areas, and left with little infrastructure or means of livelihood. Many local NGO’s were fighting time and the authorities to stop this policy, by lobbying and providing alternative development plans for the city centre. A major issue was the Bonk Kak Lake, which the government wanted to fill and turn into building land. The lake and the implications of the infill became a continuous theme for the course; the projects presented new ways to turn the neighbourhoods allocated for displaced communities into more humane, ecological and sustainable living areas.

An important aspect of the course was the collaboration with RUFA: the local university students were part of the group when visiting the slum areas, and
they attended the common seminars and project evaluations. For them, this opened new realities in their own back yards, and was likely to be highly influential for some.

Some building design projects were also developed, which focused on sustainable, local materials, and studied the social impacts of public buildings in low resource communities. The further development of the two realized projects featured in this exhibition, reflect the contemporary societal and cultural context of Cambodia. The Sra Pou Vocational School was designed and built on a relocation site, where the community had not grown roots, and the local organization was not able to keep the functions ongoing. In Kouk Khleang Youth Center, on the other hand, the local NGO took strong ownership of the project and the location has grown into a lively city – hence the building is in active use.
Boeung Kak Lake in the centre of Phnom Penh was the site of extremely controversial development plans at the time of our field trip in 2008. Once a public recreational park, the area was squatted on after the Khmer Rouge period. In 2007, the city leased the land to a company that would fill the lake for building.

The planned development was highly problematic. Squatters, who should have earned land titles by law, would be evicted. The reclaimed land would be sold to developers, the city having little control of the planning. The draining was expected to exacerbate flooding in the city.

Our project envisioned alternatives for the exclusive development: strategies that safeguarded the lake, but re-integrated it into the urban fabric of Phnom Penh. We drafted an affordable building typology with ecological sanitation based on a study of the informal communities by the lake. The goal was an incremental change of the area that would lift the communities out of poverty.

Sadly, Boeung Kak Lake has been filled and real-estate development is taking place on a once public property, despite national and international protests.
Alternatives to exclusive development: how to integrate the Boeung Kak lake to the centre of Phnom Penh?

- Develop a circular route around the lake so that the waterside can be accessed easily.
- Continue the existing green corridors around the lake. Revive the lake as a park.
- Move the railway station further and remove the barrier of the railways.
- Integrate the lake better to the street network in the east.
- Improve the access to important places around the lake.

Tilted roof with rain gutter to collect water

![Diagram of a house with a tilted roof and rain gutter](image)
SRA POU VOCATIONAL SCHOOL
Udong, Cambodia, 2010–2012

Hilla Rudanko
Anssi Kankkunen

Sra Pou Vocational School was designed to be a training centre and community building in Sra Pou village, Cambodia. The school was to be operated by Blue Tent NGO and the Sra Pou community. The purpose of the centre was to encourage and teach poor families to earn their own living in the Sra Pou community, which is one of the communities evicted from their homes in the city to the surrounding countryside. The vocational school aimed to provide professional training and to help the people to start sustainable businesses together. It was also meant to be a place for public gatherings for the whole community.

A local workforce constructed the school building with domestic materials. The aim was to encourage the community to make the most out of the materials that are easily available. The building budget was extremely low and the materials scarce, so the beautiful red soil was utilized as the main construction material in the form of sundried soil blocks.

During a follow-up trip by architects Rudanko and Kankkunen in 2012, necessary improvements were made to the building and its surroundings, mainly the replacement of the lightweight doors with solid ones, which were colourfully painted in a workshop by a local artist and the community’s residents.

For some months after its completion, the school served its purpose and was used by the community. Currently it remains a primarily unused space.
KOUK KHLEANG YOUTH CENTER
Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2010–2014

Komitu Architects:
Noora Aaltonen
Sisko Hovila
Tuuli Kassi
Maiju Suomi
Elina Koivisto
Inari Virkkala

Kouk Khleang Youth Center is located at the outskirts of the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh. The project began in the spring of 2010 in the Cambodia design studio. Komitu Architects was founded the following summer by six friends, all students at that time, with the aim of realizing the project.

The centre is operated by two Cambodian NGOs: Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS) and Khmer Kampuchea Krom Human Rights and Development Organisation (KKKHRDA). They work with the youth from Phnom Penh’s poor communities offering them possibilities for education, employment and societal participation. The youth centre includes educational spaces as well as spaces for meetings, recreational activities and accommodation for poor students. The main materials of the building are bamboo, compressed earth bricks and recycled plastic bottles. Rainwater is harvested on site and the ground floor is raised against flooding.

The design process was highly participatory; local students and architecture and engineering professionals were engaged in the project through workshops, lectures and site visits. The project resulted in bamboo trainings for a network of community builders throughout Cambodia, conducted by a local NGO (UPDF).

In 2018, the centre is owned and actively used by the local NGOs and community.
The course returned to the African continent, through the contacts of Sara Lindeman, a researcher at Hanken School of Economics, later at Aalto University. Local Tanzanian NGO, the Centre for Community initiative (CCI), and its founder Dr. Tim Ndezi, played an important role in building the foundations for Tanzanian collaboration. Long term Finnish collaboration was also a reason to pursue Tanzania as a country for the course projects. The umbrella organization for CCI is Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a community-based organization of the urban poor in 33 countries that serves as an umbrella organization to support local initiatives and develop alternatives to evictions with global platform and network.

The courses worked with low resource communities and developed solid waste management innovations with Keko Mwanga community, where they tried to find solutions for handling different types of solid waste, and find new ways for recycling. The course also developed solutions to improve sanitation in slum areas, flooding and urban development, which often resulted in relocation of communities, small-scale entrepreneurship, and improvement plans for resettlements.

The Tanzanian years in Dar es Salaam were an important milestone for the development of course pedagogy: the challenges addressed by CCI and SDI required interdisciplinary approaches. Students from business, engineering, design, architecture, landscape architecture and real estate were engaged from Aalto Sustainable Global Technologies and Creative Sustainability programmes.

In 2018, the Interplay of Cultures Studio headed to Zanzibar, a semi-independent insular region of Tanzania, through the connections created by Helena Sandman and her research in New Global, which is
an interdisciplinary innovation and action research project at Aalto University. The studio projects studied Ng’amo, a neighbourhood next to the historical city center and UNESCO World Heritage Site Stone Town, which has been chosen to be developed into the new modern center of Zanzibar City.

The course addressed key issues established by the Department of Urban and Rural Planning of Zanzibar: flooding and resilience, green urban environments and sustainable densification of urban structure. Moving from global environmental future to individual private spaces, the projects created a deeply intertwined network of urban development proposals. Research and project development was conducted in collaboration with the Department of Urban and Rural Planning of Zanzibar and Zanzibar City authorities, as well as students from the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) and the local residents of Zanzibar.
COMMUNITY TOILETS
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2014–2016

Zita Floret

In Dar es Salaam, groups of slum dwellers called Phast Ujenzi (PU, from the Tanzanian Federation of the Urban Poor) have mapped their settlements in order to gather information about their living conditions and daily challenges. As a result, lack of proper sanitation was identified as one of their main problems.

In my project, I explored ways of doing architecture with active and engaged slum communities. The work expanded into a master’s thesis, and a project called Sanitation Improvement and Social Enterprise (SISE, a member of the Global Dry Toilet Association of Finland, Käymäläseura Huussi). The work spanned 1.5 years for my master’s thesis and three years for the SISE project (2014–2016).

The process involved observation, interviews, active performing and involvement as well as planning and building with the community. I used participatory methods profusely to engage with the community, to create trust and a collegial atmosphere that would later lead to the community ownership over the project.

Today PU can replicate the toilet construction process without external input. They are building up their capacity in business related topics, but are still active in promoting ecological sanitation, gardening and maintaining the toilets.

The first toilet, built for a youth centre, is still in use and provides the centre with urine and compost to grow bananas and other crops on their small plot.
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,
photo Zita Floret
The field trip to Zanzibar in January 2018 was organized in collaboration with the Department of Urban and Rural Planning of Zanzibar. The 13 Aalto students spent three weeks studying the area of Ng’amo, the densely populated area next to the historical city centre, Stone Town. As the capital city grows faster in population than ever before and becomes increasingly more urbanised, Ng’ambo will be developed into a new center for the city of Zanzibar.

The course themes were outlined with Director Muhammad Juma, whose insights guided the work. The assignments addressed flooding and resilience, housing and public buildings, green infrastructure and community engagement through built environment. The Aalto students worked with his team and some students from SUZA, to access local communities and gather information on site. The shared footwork served as a common basis, and all individual projects remained connected to the overall scheme. Collaboration with lecturer Omar Makame from the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA), and local organizations like Sustainable East Africa, served to provide valuable insights.

As a result of intense group-work and collaboration, the 13 students built a joint endeavour where all the projects interlink and intertwine, and collected their learnings and presentations in a course publication, The Other Side. The book presents suggestions to improve the urban conditions in the Ng’ambo area within Zanzibar City.
ZANZIBAR’S FUTURE
CITY CENTRE PROJECTS

ENVIRONMENT
1. Flood risk areas

PUBLIC SPACE
2. The Green Network
3. Community & Culture
4. Zanzibar Culture Center
5. Furniture of Culture

PRIVATE SPACE
6. Rules as Tools
7. The Footprint
8. Housing on Stilts
9. Green Community Housing
10. Gongoni Cluster

Ngambo, City of Zanzibar
2. **THE GREEN NETWORK**
by Andrea Esquivel Velásquez and Rosa Väisänen
An urban scheme reflecting Zanzibar’s ambition to achieve a more walkable and inclusive city.

![Diagram of urban scheme](image)

**THE GREEN NETWORK SCALES OF INTERACTION**

**URBAN SCALE**

- Connectivity into Ng’ambo
- Public spaces in the neighborhoods

**DETAIL SCALE**

- Nodes - places and activities
- Detail - greenery and furniture

3. **COMMUNITY OF CULTURE**
by Hannin Alnimri and Anna Niubò Bermejo
A chain of community centres introduced in the four quarters of Ng’ambo.
4. ZANZIBAR CULTURE CENTER
by Kristaps Kleinbergs
Enhancing cultural tradition and contemporary self-expression in Zanzibar City.

5. FURNITURE OF CULTURE
by Talisa Dwiyani
Street furniture and a sitting object adapted to the culture and identity of Zanzibar.
Rules as Tools

6. RULES AS TOOLS by Andreas Bergene
A set of guidelines that promote a secure and controlled densification of the housing areas in Ng'ambo.

Street hierarchy
The street hierarchy in Ng'ambo consists of four categories, from the largest connections to the finest tissue.

How high can you go
Four height categories for Ng'ambo based on the street hierarchy and local documentation.

Plot handling
Plot handling will be divided into five steps that allow developers to handle their groups correctly.

Crossing boundaries
Each plot inside a group is given a strict border. All object belonging to that plot, must be kept inside the border.

Roofing
Traditional Swahili shaped roofs with robust eaves should continue to characterize Ng'ambo. Other types of roofs can be approved by local government.

Openings
Houses within groups should have a two-directional approach, mainly opening up towards the access streets and open space inside the group.

Cross ventilation
All buildings should be provided with cross ventilation. If possible, a north-south direction is preferable because of local wind conditions.

Meeting places
A group should contain the same amount or area of Barazas as the houses it replaced along with additional street furniture.

7. THE FOOTPRINT by Tina Čerpnjak
A flood resilient house as a new typology, creating spatial possibilities for new public urban landscapes.
8. **HOUSING ON STILTS** by Francisco Soares
A housing concept that considers densification, development of urban areas, flooding and waste management.

9. **GREEN COMMUNITY HOUSING** by Keiti Lige
Community based housing system, with organic urban farming and economic development opportunities.

10. **GONGONI CLUSTER** by Fernando Navarrete Suárez
A model to develop and densify living areas, preserving and recovering elements from Swahili culture.
The Kigali Master Class was an advanced building design studio organized by the Chair of Public Buildings in Aalto University, Department of Architecture, with the support from the Asko Foundation, during the academic year 2013–2014. The course approach was partly based on the work of Ukumbi NGO, which offers architectural services for communities in need, and for which the founders also teach at the Aalto University. Peter Rich, architect and a former Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, was asked to become the Master of the class. Kigali was chosen to be the location for the field trip, due to Peter Rich’s professional relations and connections within the city.

Since the tragic genocide in 1994, Rwanda has witnessed unbelievable development and growth, the nation united and determined to overcome hatred and rancour. The city of Kigali is growing rapidly and new developments are taking place. The course took as a challenge to study public space and design public buildings for existing needs, using participatory planning processes and collaboration with local people and communities.

The concept of public space in Rwanda is different from that of a Northern Europe; there are few public buildings in Rwanda that would genuinely be open to the public. Schools and churches are strongly institutionalized; the most public spaces are the places for
trading and meeting: markets, street sides and market verandas. Aalto University’s Kigali Master Class aimed at studying how public space and buildings could serve as a catalyst for chance and development.

In Kigali the course collaborated closely with the city authorities, as well as architectural students from the Kigali Institute of technology (KIST). The presence and local knowledge of the KIST students enabled the class to achieve depth and understanding, as the Aalto students approached the people in communities in the villages of Nyarurenzi and Kigabiro, which were identified as sites for the course assignments. Collaboration and co-design with the Aalto Kigali Master Class provided an educational opportunity for the KIST students as well, to get an outside view of architectural approaches to the development of Rwanda, challenging them to think beyond their customary assumptions.
The Kinyarwandan word “Aga-kinjiro” means a local workshop providing income for craftsmen and women. These workshops are concentrated on technical skills usually in the fields of carpentry, construction, crafts and arts.

During our visit, agriculture was the main occupation for many Kigabiro villagers. The newly published city plan would leave less space for the fields and plantations. It felt natural to design a project that would increase off-farm employment and establish new career possibilities.

This project includes facilities for people to gain hands-on skills through apprenticeship at the workshops. In addition, building and crafts can be learned in classes organized on-site. Besides offering education, the workshop area provides commercial street front for trading artefacts and products.

The idea behind the design concept was to allow growth so that in the future the street front can extend and promote other services like restaurants and commercial banks. The whole community as well as the other public buildings nearby would benefit from the Craftsmanship Workshop, providing building materials and skilful workers to help with the construction.

The interviews with the local craftsmen gave important information about their wishes and visions for the future. They all shared similar ideas of working together and the opportunities that the co-operation would initiate.
One thing that immediately drew my attention while exploring the village of Nyarurenzi was the absence of groups of women in places of informal gathering. With the assistance of a KIST student who volunteered to help understand why, I found out that women prefer the comfort, safety and privacy of home when gathering together even in an informal manner.

I was later told that the need for privacy arises from discussions of sensitive subjects relating to "women's issues". This led me to read through multiple papers on the state of reproductive health and child well being in Rwanda, and helped me decide on a set of services that I could design for my project.

The project is inspired by the Finnish neuvola or maternity clinic system that provides a variety of services during the pre- and post-natal periods and during the early years of a child's life. In this project, these services are configured into a Rwandan context, and the building expanded to provide different levels of privacy for informal and formal gathering. It uses integration of pre-existing services such as a children's nutrition program to introduce the maternal healthcare services into the Rwandan everyday.
Plan 1:100

Workshop I
43.5m²

Cleaning & Gardening
6m²

WCs
24m²

Lavatories & Showers
15m²

Nutrition Centre Office
12m²

Teaching Kitchen
32m²

Indoor Dining Hall / Extended Teaching Kitchen
67m²

Outdoor Dining Hall
43m²

Handwash Hut
9m²

Gynecology & Operation
24m²

Examination Room III
17m²

Examination Room II
17m²

Examination Room I
17m²

Group Discussion & Therapy
30m²

Family Nurse
17m²

Medicine and Equipment Storage
12m²

Reception, Pharmacy and Indoor Waiting
20.5m²

Outdoor Waiting
77m²

Lavatories
14m²

Administrative Office
14.5m²

Doctors’ Work Quarters
18m²

Archive
6m²

Compound Employee Common Room
14.5m²

Below: Office
14.5m²

Below: Storage
10m²

Below: Workshop II
47m²

Laboratory
9m²

Sample WC
2.5m²

Storage
6m²

Hygiene Education Centre
Classroom
12m²

Outdoor Stage
The Cities in Transition course spent three years working in Tagbilaran, the Philippines, together with local Bohol Island State University (BISU) and Nagoya Institute of Technology (NIT). At BISU the College of Engineering and Architecture provides civil engineering and architecture education on a Bachelor’s level. Their syllabus includes only one urban planning course, a theoretical lecture course without any design tasks.

During our first field trip to Bohol, the focus was on getting to know the island and gaining some understanding of the local way of life. Attention was paid to disaster preparedness and resilience. The multidisciplinary student group had very different approaches to the problems they uncovered, with each student drawing from their own strengths and skills. The next year,
we decided to focus our attention on studying public life and urban qualities in the city of Tagbilaran while assessing traffic and walkability, mapping the city with methods introduced by Jan Gehl.

The third year the students studied the everyday life of local people, concentrating particularly on the needs of marginalized groups in informal settlements. A series of urban interventions such as closing a street from traffic, building a small playground for children and using a beautiful light installation as a tool in making a public space safer were made by the Aalto and local students, out of which grew a few final projects for the course.

During the three years of collaboration we noticed the impact the course had on local students and faculty. Joined by Aalto students and driven by their curiosity, locals visited parts of town they had never set foot in before and which their prejudices would have prevented them from entering. They learned to approach and interact with residents of all social strata and came to understand that local people are often the best experts on their own neighbourhoods and needs. Together with Aalto students, local students visited the city bureaucrats’ offices in search of knowledge, boosting their confidence and professionalism. The need for an urban design programme at BISU has now been acknowledged among teachers and students alike.

After three years the security situation in the Philippines had changed considerably, and the course had to search for another location.
In Tagbilaran, relocating informal settlers is part of the city’s current urban development plan. Inland relocation stands in contrast to the traditional fisherman settlements on the coastline and increases social segregation. Previous relocation attempts have often caused financial problems for the settlers, leading them to return. The coastline and the settlements are, however, vulnerable to annual natural hazards, climate change impacts and seawater contamination.

The project is based on interviews, mapping the site and studying different scenarios. The focus is on on-site development with socially sustainable and participatory planning methods. The coastal location has potential to combine adequate housing with livelihood and social matters, but this requires improving natural hazard resilience and environmental consciousness. The project shows that the joint development of the coastline and existing settlements can benefit each other and unnecessary evictions could be avoided.

The project was presented to the IAPS (International Association People-Environment Studies) symposium in 2017 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.
TAGLAB
Participatory Practice through Small Intervention in Tagbilaran City
Tagbilaran, The Philippines, 2017

Johanna Marttila
With students from Aalto University, Bohol Island State University and Nagoya Institute of Technology

TagLab comes from testing the idea of a Local Lab, an urban incubator for creating place-based design and planning solutions through participatory practices. During the fieldtrip, the students studied Tagbilaran city by interviewing inhabitants in different parts of the city and learning about their typical days, about their current needs and wishes for the future. Together with local communities, they created small interventions in public spaces and showcased the results for local planning authorities and practitioners.

The study indicated that the small interventions worked as a powerful inspiration for local actors to participate in or initiate participatory practices. Many of the participants, coming from public, civic and academic sectors, expressed their interest in taking over participatory methodology in their practices and in continuing cross-sector collaborations created during the fieldtrip. Interventions with more permanent results were taken over by the local communities who have maintained them until this day.

The planning and examination of the testing process in Tagbilaran is discussed in my master’s thesis “Towards Local Lab” where the focus is on understanding how short-term practices can become regenerative and create local continuity. My thesis proposes a toolkit for the facilitation of initiating and handing-over participatory practices with others. It includes a continuous design process of small interventions that are planned and documented through a gaming format.
The exhibition also presents examples from Aalto University’s SGT studio course, where students form multidisciplinary teams to carry out projects linked to global development challenges. Key learnings are to start recognizing one’s own skills and expertise as part of a multidisciplinary team and to be able to integrate the diversity of knowledge from disciplines such as engineering, business, design and architecture into a one solid result. The outlined learning outcomes include many transferable skills such as teamwork, project management, communication and community interaction.

The SGT Programme was developed in 2006 at the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, then Helsinki University of Technology (TKK), with support from former rector, professor emeritus Matti Pursula. From the beginning, professor Olli Varis from Water Engineering took the academic leadership of the programme. The aim was to provide university level teaching that seeks to give holistic view to the state of the world and development, emphasizing the role of sustainability and technology in development, and provide practical experiences from international projects.

The assignments are designed with partners from academia, industries, government and civil society organizations and communities. In best cases, the work of a student team leads to a follow-up student project, academic research or further to implementation by the local partners.
THE LIFT
Greece, Lesvos, 2016

Oona Anttila, Melanie Wolowiec,
Eve Zórawska. Mentor: Kristjana Adalgeirsdottir, architect

The Lift project is an initiative aiming to respond to the humanitarian and the environmental crisis on the Greek island of Lesvos that occurred due to the large influx of refugees into Europe in the last few years. The multidisciplinary group, consisting of 3 international students specializing in Sustainability in the fields of Architecture, Planning and Business, was given an open brief to tackle some of the many issues faced on the island at that time.

Lesvos, some 10 km away from the Turkish coast, has experienced a particularly unprecedented increase of refugee arrivals by boat between 2014 and 2016, with the majority coming from war-torn Syria and Afghanistan. After a critical analysis of the situation, the team decided to focus their efforts on the urgent environmental issue, which developed due to the large amount of life jackets and rubber dinghies left on the shores of the island. Conservative estimates claim there are as much as 500 000 life jackets on the island, in addition to countless wooden and rubber boats. Left unaddressed, this can lead to contamination of soil and water. According to the mayor’s office of Mytilene, the island’s capital, the situation is “an environmental ticking time bomb” due to the absence of suitable recycling facilities.

The Lift project thus strived to physically lift the waste from the beaches, develop ideas to lift found materials from their original use into upcycled designs, and most importantly lifting and humanizing the perception of refugees in Finland and Europe. In March 2016, the team traveled to the island and teamed up with locally based NGO Lighthouse relief, working on situation assessment, beach cleaning as well as volunteering in Moria camp, the main registration center for refugees on the island. Back in Finland, the team developed a design which upcycled the found material into much needed seating for the registration center users. Along the way, the team continuously strived to raise awareness through publications on social media, interviews and exhibiting of their work.
The Tanzanitation Project is a student initiative with a focus on developing sanitation in the slums of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In 2017 the project was led by a team consisting of 6 students specializing in sustainability in multiple disciplines including environmental science, water engineering, business and design.

Large proportions of Dar es Salaam’s 4 million inhabitants live under poverty. Commonly, working in the informal economy with small income and little or no education at all, these people live in the many slums of the city. These neighborhoods are densely populated and prone to multiple environmental and societal hazards, of which many are caused by a lack of adequate sanitation. Poorly constructed latrines contaminate the surrounding environment and spread numerous fatal diseases, yet, the provision of sanitation in the slums is of lowest priority in the politics. The Tanzanitation Project thus aimed at developing novel alternatives to sanitation by framing sanitation through the principles of circular economy. Together with a local partner, Center for Community Initiatives, the project developed a technology that collects urine and utilizes the nutrients as fertilizers in agricultural practices. This opens a prominent business opportunity for the community using the technology, hence fostering the overall sustainability of the community.

Such approaches are prone to prejudice, however, given the stigma and unawareness regarding utilizing human waste in commercial purposes. Thus, after arriving back in Finland, the team decided to develop material which would assist in raising awareness about alternative solutions to sanitation. In East African culture, the traditional cloth Kanga has an important role in daily communications and the cultural heritage. Similar to social media today, Kangas are used to express feelings or share thoughts via proverbs written in the cloth. Here, the idea of a Kanga was incorporated into educational cloths which serve as mediums for communicating and educating the key aspects of the technology in the community.
UHURA NA UMUJA
KUUNGANISHA SHUGHULI, KUWASHAWISHI WENGINE WANAJAMII TAASISI

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MKAKATI NA WADAU WA MAJARIBIO

Photo Venla Niva
Aalto LAB Mexico (ALM) aims to improve the quality of life in rural Mayan community of El20 de Noviembre (El 20) in Calakmul, Mexico. A wide range of disciplines collaborate with the aim of decreasing social injustice whilst raising awareness of cultural values and the environmental sustainability of the community. This is achieved by empowering the community through co-design and design thinking methods.

El 20 is a small Mayan community in the Yucatan peninsula, state of Campeche. The community’s exceptional forestry practices have revitalized the biodiversity of the surrounding jungle, resulting in beautiful settings for people, flora and fauna. Aside from sustainable forestry and agriculture, the major sources of income in El 20 are tourism and handicrafts.

These core ALM concepts have been identified and developed in joint workshops with the students, experts and community members over the years:
Water Project – Cuxta-Há
Securing safe drinking water and water saving sanitation system.
Groundwater in El 20 is extremely hard due to limestone bedrock. It is unsuitable for drinking, washing laundry or irrigation; instead, rainwater is gathered for these purposes – but this provides enough water for only 10 months of the year. The teams have introduced water quality testing on site to investigate the influence of toilets on the contamination of ground water and to give recommendations about sanitation systems, rain water collection and water purification. Also low-tech filter made from locally available materials has been tested together with the community members.

Artesania para el Bienestar – Artistry for Wellbeing
A concept for for people in El 20 to gain access to healthcare services in Mexico. Health Stamps were introduced in 2013. All the artisans can sell their products with the stamp; the stamp increases the price of the products, but that money is dedicated to a communal health fund. The stamps have been now tested and further developed with local artisans, SGT teams and Mexican labbers (students). The stamp design is digitalized by Theresa Berg (labber 2013) from sketches by local artisan Miriam Cahuich.

Economic Security
Economic security means the community’s ability to cover their basic needs, such as food, education and health care. The work with El 20 includes defining new income opportunities and advising on protection from income and expenditure risks arising from failure of crops due to adverse weather, or health emergencies. Microinsurance could offer affordable protection from these risks. The fieldwork has also produced information on new income opportunities related to tourism. These will be developed with Rutopia, a tourism company initiated by Mexican labbers.

Eco-hostel – La Casita – The Community House
An archetype of a sustainable house for El20 with traditional Mayan construction techniques becomes the first joint accomplishment of ALM and El 20. Building was finished in 2015 with solar panels installed. The construction of the building was funded through crowdfunding platform Transformadora Ciel.

The team of labbers for the Eco-hostel project were Juan Vértiz, Gabriel Calvillo, and Flynn Lewer, all Mexican labbers. Throughout the design process they were supervised by professional architects, designers and engineers. The actual implementation was skillfully made by a local construction expert Daniel and his team of local craftsmen.

ALM was initially a collaboration between Aalto University, Tecnológico de Monterrey Campus Ciudad de México and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The collaboration started as a student initiative in 2012 by Claudia Garduño García, a master’s student at Aalto at the time. In 2015 ALM became part of the Sustainable Global Technologies programme at Aalto University. Claudia Garduño’s doctoral thesis “Design as Freedom” (Aalto ARTS 2017) documents and discusses further ALM’s methodologies and philosophies behind the action.
El 20 de Noviembre, Calakmul, Campeche, Mexico, photo Jan Ahlstedt
TOMÀ BERLANDA

Tomà Berlanda is an architect and scholar with extensive international academic and professional experience. As of April 2015, he is Professor of Architecture and Director of the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at the University of Cape Town. In this capacity he pursues his research interests focusing on the implications that can be drawn from a non-stereotypical reading of the African city and the practice of architecture in non-Western urban settings and landscapes. This follows upon his position as co-founder of asa studio in Kigali (2012–2014), where he led socially engaged practice in an extensive design and build campaign to provide community based early childhood and health facilities across Rwanda. The award-winning work, recently recognised with the Curry Stone Social Design Impact Circle (2017), has been published widely, and included in the Afritecture: Building Social Change (2013) and the Africa: Architecture, Culture and identity (2015) exhibitions.

Prior to UCT, he has held teaching positions at various other institutions, including Syracuse University (2009–2010), Cornell University (2012) and the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (2011–2013). He holds a Diploma in architecture from the Accademia di architettura in Mendrisio, Switzerland (2002) and a Ph.D in Architecture and Building design from the Politecnico di Torino, Italy (2009). He is the author of a number of articles and chapters in international publications, of “Architectural Topographies” (Routledge, 2014), and, together with K. H. Smith, of the forthcoming “Interpreting Kigali, Rwanda. Architectural Inquiries and Prospects for a Developing African City” (University of Arkansas Press, 2018).

SAIJA HOLLMÉN

Saija Hollmén is the Vice Dean for Art and Creative Practices at Aalto School of Arts, Design and Architecture. She is a co-founder of the interdisciplinary Aalto WiTLAB (Aalto World in Transition Research LAB), which focuses on global sustainability and humanitarian development. She is responsible of the Interplay of Cultures program, based at the Department of Architecture, dealing with architectural design and planning in cultures outside Europe. Hollmén is a co-founder of Hollmén Reuter Sandman Architects and Ukumbi NGO, which aims at providing architectural services for communities in need. Ukumbi has projects in several African countries, seeking to improve the lives of the less privileged. Their work has been widely exhibited, e.g, in the Venice Biennale in 2002, 2004 and 2016. Ukumbi was also awarded the Finnish State Award for Art in 2009 for its work for culturally sensitive and respectful architecture.

HENNУ KJISIK

Hennu Kjisik, is an experienced architect, who has worked extensively in Finland and abroad. In addition to running his own practice together with Trevor Harris, he has consulted for the World Bank, and judged several architectural competitions. He is professor emeritus of urban design at Oulu University. Kjisik received his PhD in 2009 for his dissertation “The Power of Architecture: Towards Better Hospital Buildings”, which was awarded the Oskari Vilamo prize for best dissertation in the technical field.

Kjisik has also gained solid experience in development cooperation, including bilaterally and multilaterally funded health and education projects in Africa and Asia, through numerous short-term assignments with various international organisations.
Sara Lindeman (PhD Econ., MA Human Rights) is a researcher in the Aalto Sustainability in Business group, and the founder of Leapfrog Projects Ltd that supports systems change towards sustainability. Since 2014, Sara initiated and led the 5 year, interdisciplinary action research project New Global, that studies how to co-create sustainability innovations serving low income populations in emerging markets such as East Africa. Her research interests include inclusive business, sustainability innovations, well-being and business ethics, market creation processes and systems change, and Sara is a frequent lecturer on these topics. She has been teaching challenge-based learning in multidisciplinary teams since 2012.

Matleena Muhonen, M.Sc. (Landscape Arch.), is a Sustainable Global Technologies (SGT) Programme Coordinator at the School of Engineering in Aalto University. She also teaches basics of landscape architecture at the Department of Architecture. She has furthered her studies in university pedagogy focusing on teaching multicultural and multidisciplinary groups. Matleena has more than ten years of experience in planning and organizing training and education in the subject areas of sustainable development, human settlements and community engagement. She has organized and facilitated several master’s level interdisciplinary student field trips in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mexico, Nepal and Cambodia. She has been in charge of the continuing education training courses on Sustainable Communities in South East Asia and East Africa in collaboration with UN-HABITAT, UNEP and Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. She works in close contact with several Aalto University study and research programmes and networks such as Aalto Sustainability Hub, Aalto Global Impact and Aalto WiT (World in Transition) LAB.

Taru Niskanen has worked extensively in architecture from land use planning to building design. She has been successful in several architectural competitions as a member of various teams. Her Master’s thesis about Kenya and work in Ghana, Jordan, the Philippines and Zanzibar have deepened Niskanen’s interest in the challenges of rapid urbanization in the developing cities. In addition to working at Harris-Kjisik Architects, Niskanen teaches at Aalto University, School of Art, Architecture and Design. She is a PhD candidate at Aalto University and her research topic is: Battle over Public Space: Case Studies of Walkability and Public Life in Tagbilaran, Zanzibar, Kumasi, New York and Helsinki.
CHARLOTTE NYHOLM
Charlotte Nyholm is an architect and urban planner who never tires of advocating for high quality public spaces and the importance of place attachment. In addition to working at Harris-Kjisik Architects, Nyholm has taught at Aalto University since 2014, where she was also one of the teachers of Cities in Transition from 2015 to 2017. She has worked professionally in Cambodia, Ecuador, the Philippines and Finland since graduating in 2011.

JUHANI PALLASMAA

Pallasmaa has published 60 books and 400 essays, and his writings have been translated into 35 languages. His best known books include: The Eyes of the Skin (1995 and 2012), The Thinking Hand (2012), The Embodied Image (2015), The Architecture of Image: existential space in cinema (2001).

Honorary member of SAFA, AIA and RIBA, Academician of the International Academy of Architecture. Several Finnish and international awards for architecture and writing and five Honorary Doctorates in Finland, Estonia, Romania and USA.

HELENA SANDMAN
Architect M.Sc. Helena Sandman is founding member of Ukumbi NGO providing architecture as a means of development and a partner in Hollmén Reuter Sandman Architects Ltd. Helena has been teaching multidisciplinary student teams in project-based slum upgrading since 2009. She is also a member of the New Global research group at Aalto University. Her focus is on user-centred empathic design where she uses architecture as an empowering tool striving for social sustainability. Her fields of study are affordable housing and maternity ward design in low-resource settings.
Veikko Vasko is a retired architect living in Helsinki. He was teaching at IoC /WAP /CIC courses together with Hennu Kjisik for over 15 years participating in field trips in Senegal, Benin and Cambodia. Graduated at HUT in 1967, he has worked e.g. in Paris at Candilis-Josic-Woods, for UNDP in the Caribbean and UNECE in Geneva. His work in international consultancy and cooperation projects has taken him to over 50 countries in three continents e.g. more that 80 times to Africa. He now wants to paint.

Inari Virkkala is a Finnish architect with a strong focus on social & ecological sustainability. She has a versatile work experience from the different fields of the built environment working for example as the director of urban development of the City of Kerava, with various building and urban planning projects at B&M Architects and with a communicative and social impact focus as an entrepreneur at Virkkala de Vocht Architects and Uusi Kaupunki (Nordic Works) Architecture collective. Virkkala has been teaching in the Interplay of Cultures (Cities in Transition) -course in 2011 and 2017. She was part of the Komitu team behind the realisation of the Kouk Khlenag Youth Center in Cambodia in 2014. Virkkala also served in the board of Architecture Sans Frontières International during 2014–2018.
In recent decades, many Western architectural schools have taken up the challenge to tackle global polarities and humanitarian crises. Educational programs raising awareness of the “south – north”, “developing – developed”, “poor – rich” dichotomies are all asking the same question: What is the role of architecture in the globalizing world?

Since 1993, the Department of Architecture at Aalto University has offered courses on development issues dealing with the reality of architecture, building design and urban planning outside Europe, with cultural understanding as the starting point.

The course, originally called Interplay of Cultures, was first developed and undertaken by architects Hennu Kjisik and Veikko Vasko, under Juhani Pallasmaa’s deanship. From the beginning, it has been about careful analysis and learning about local conditions, about communication with local stakeholders and communities, and listening to the needs and aspirations of the local people. It has been more about pondering the values on which we base our profession, and the moralities we choose to follow in our practices – and what we can learn from ourselves, when venturing out to the unknown. It was, and still is, about mutual learning and respecting other ways of seeing the world.

In recent years the focus has moved from strictly architectural towards more interdisciplinary approaches, embracing disciplines from other Schools of Aalto University – namely from Aalto University’s Sustainable Global Technologies (SGT) Programme, where students in multidisciplinary teams carry out projects linked to global development challenges in collaboration with partners from academia, industries, government and civil society organizations and local communities.

The exhibition, first organized at the Museum of Finnish Architecture in 2018, and this catalogue discuss questioning and redefining the role of architecture in our societies and the globalizing world, where the challenges are too big to tackle with one disciplinary knowledge alone.