TEACHING-LEARNING-RESEARCH: DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTS

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Architectural Design Service-learning as Critical Spatial Practice, unpacking the case of the Solidary Mobile Housing Project

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• Abstract:
This paper aims to rethink Architectural Design Service-learning (AD-SL) as Critical Spatial Practice. Critical Spatial Practice in Markus Miessen’s terms involves crossbenchencing across disciplines and positions, and critically addressing the established codes of conduct, and in this way, reframing the role of the architect.

The focus of this study will be on how AD-SL can bring together socio-spatial modes of practice, academia and society via a transformative combination of 1) Participatory Design, 2) Reflective Practice and 3) Living Labs. This question will be discussed through an in-depth case of the Solidary Mobile Housing Project (SMH); an ongoing practice-based research project at the KU Leuven Faculty of architecture. In the framework of this case, several partners from academia, society and practice have been collaborating together in a transdisciplinary way to develop, test and refine a model for increasing urban resilience, through the co-creation and co-management of mobile houses for houseless on urban Waiting Spaces in the Brussels-Capital Region. From 2017, until today
several students have also been involved in the SMH-project via research driven, community-engaged Architectural Design Service-learning (AD-SL).

The study will start with a theoretical background discussion on mode 2 knowledge production, Participatory Design, Reflective Practice and Living Labs and construct a conceptual framework for analysis. Using this analytical framework, the SMH-project will be scrutinized including critical reflection on methods and tools used for enabling transdisciplinary collaboration and AD-SL. The paper will conclude with an elaboration on the transformational approach of this case - including Infrastructuring Design, Cross-benching and Live Project - fostered Critical Spatial Practice. Particularly, the challenges encountered in this venture and potential future directions for bring together socio-spatial modes of practice, academia and society in a sustainable and perpetual manner will be highlighted.

• Author(s) Biography:
  Aurelie De Smet (Gent, 1980) graduated in Architecture at the Hogeschool voor W&K, Sint-Lucas Gent and in Spatial Planning at the University of Ghent. After working as an independent architect for three years, Aurelie was offered a grant by the Brussels-Capital Region (Innoviris) to research ‘The Role of Temporary Use of Waiting Spaces’. This research (promoted by Prof. Kees Doevendans and Prof. Bruno De Meulder) lead to a series of publications, workshops and consultancy assignments on ‘temporary use’, ‘bottom-up urbanism’ and ‘tactical urban planning’. Currently Aurelie is working as researcher for the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture on the Solidary Mobile Housing Project and combining this with a PhD on ‘Increasing urban resilience through solidary appropriation of urban Waiting Spaces for housing in Brussels’ (promoted by Prof. Burak Pak and Prof. Yves
Schoonjans). In general, Aurelie is fascinated by the influence people have on their environment and vice versa. The interaction between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ is a common thread in her work, as she finds it essential to relate her findings to the real, everyday world.

Burak Pak (Ankara, 1977) is Professor of Architectural Collaborative Design, Collective Spaces and Digital Media at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. He holds a PhD from ITU Faculty of Architecture. After working at Carnegie Mellon University School of Architecture and Texas A&M University VIZLab as a Visiting Scholar, he worked as a post-doctoral research fellow at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture on ‘Alternative Urban Projects for the Brussels Capital Region’. He is the co-founder of the Altering Practices (Alt_Shift) Research Group. Burak is currently teaching design studio courses and running several international and national research projects. Burak’s research covers an interdisciplinary area between architecture and urban design, participation and digital spatial media. The two main and complementary focus points are exploring and enabling bottom-up participation (in) and (through) reflexive research and design practices. His research focuses on enabling inclusion in and through design. Co-creation and co-design play a central role in the research projects he participates in through which he aims to integrate social design practices, education and research. Examples of the research projects he is involved in are: “Networked Practices for Placemaking” (EC Co-create), “Solidary Mobile Housing” (INNOVIRIS Co-create) and “Incubators of Public Spaces” (JPI-Urban Europe).

Yves Schoonjans (1960) is a full professor in architectural history and theory at the University of Leuven (Department of Architecture), Belgium. He received a Master of Science in Architectural Engineering at the University Ghent (1984) and a PhD in 2001. His research is structured in two lines (1) Practices and discourses in a recent and contemporary context – relation between theory and practices; and (2) Everyday local identity, appropriation and urban development. In 2013 together with Kris Scheerlinck, he initiated the ‘Urban Projects, Collective Spaces & Local Identities’ research group. He was involved and lead-coordinator of different international programs (Erasmus, Mundus, ALFA) and participated in different projects, especially in Latin America. He was Head of the education-section ‘History and Theory’ (2002-2008), program director of the International Master of Architecture (2008-2010), member of the board and director of master-programs (2009-2013), Vice-Dean for International Affairs (2013-2017), Chair of the Research Department (2017-2020) and is now Department Chair of the Department of Architecture.

Sara Vantournout (Hasselt, 1983) graduated in Chinese Studies and Philosophy at the KU Leuven (Belgium) and in East Asian Studies at Princeton University (United States). While in Princeton, she also held a position as Graduate Administrative Fellow at Princeton
University’s Program for Community-Engaged Scholarship (ProCES), an academic program that fosters collaborative, change-oriented projects of an intellectual nature that benefit students, faculty members, and community partners. Currently, Sara is the coordinator of Service-learning KU Leuven, an academic program that facilitates university courses that incorporate community engagement and critical reflection in students’ learning experience and process. Together with her team, Sara co-developed and facilitates more than 25 service-learning courses that involve community-engaged teaching, learning, and/or research. As of 2020, Sara also coordinates KU Leuven Engage, a newly established platform for civic engagement that aims to mobilize the entire university to build on existing efforts toward mutually-beneficial campus-community partnerships in order to promote knowledge co-creation, civic awareness, and community transformation. Aside from her work in higher education, Sara has extensive experience in grassroots organizing for social justice, both in Belgium and in Brooklyn, NY. It is largely her own passion for volunteering and social change that propelled her to help create space within academia for community engagement and social mobilization.

Geraldine Bruyneel (Ukkel, 1975) graduated at the Vrije Universiteit of Brussels in Sociale en Culturele Agogiek and Culturele Studies. Geraldine works for Samenlevingsopbouw, an NGO in Brussels-Captial Region. The main focus of Samenlevingsopbouw is the empowering of vulnerable groups whilst working on fundamental rights, amongst others the right to decent housing. Geraldine has been working on projects in Brussels where the expertise of schools, universities, inhabitants, organizations were shared and deployed to improve different aspects of life of vulnerable groups. Currently Geraldine is taking up the role of project manager of the Solidary Mobile Housing project. Geraldine’s main interest is to help build innovative solutions to socially relevant problems by combining knowhow from different fields and to exchange and share the knowledge being built through these projects.

Tineke Van Heesvelde (Gent, 1966) graduated in Social sciences, communication at KU Leuven and works for the NPO Samenlevingsopbouw as a community worker. She is convinced of the participatory approach. Solutions worked out in cooperation with a disadvantaged group are often more sustainable. She started working with home- and houseless people from on 2002. The SMH project arose after many attempts to address, together with people in precarious housing situations, the great lack of affordable and decent housing in Brussels. Tineke is involved in the general development of the project and more specifically responsible for group facilitation and support, empowerment measurement and skill building.

Ken De Cooman is co-founder of BC Architects & Studies, and BC Materials. With these companies, BC starts from architecture, over research and expertise and experiment,
towards material production and contracting. As a hybrid office, BC is maneuvering the boundaries of all these disciplines in a doers manner. Ken De Cooman holds a master’s in Philosophy and Architecture, and a candidate in Psychology. He has published reflections in OASE, Domus and has (guest)taught at KULeuven (BE), ULB-LaCambre (BE), ETH Zurich (CH), EiABC (ET). Ken’s main research areas are bio-based circular materials, infrastructure as architecture, process-based design, transitional practice and start-up, local materials, contemporary vernacular architecture and de/re/post/colonialism.