ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:

Hands-on online: challenges and learnings from teaching landscape materials and fabrication from the kitchen table

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• Abstract (300 words):

The learning of practical skills, enabled through making and experimenting, is indispensable in design education. In landscape architectural education at the University of Hong Kong, learning on materials and their ecological impacts was previously often investigated primarily theoretically. Over the past years, a range of courses – amongst the here discussed Landscape Media Seminar – have stressed the importance to create opportunities for experiencing, testing, and evaluating materials hands-on.

The learning benefits previously demonstrated in the seminar were the decisive factor to carry out material testing without access to university facilities after the transition to online teaching in January 2020 only one week into the semester. Students were encouraged to set up a ‘home fablab’ with minimal means to manifest and facilitate learning through the immediate approach of crafting. The course brief restricted material sourcing to supermarkets and neighborhood hardware shops asking to compose materials suitable to fabricate previously designed objects. Students assessed their design decisions based on adapting conditions and speculated on how to reintroduce these mostly atypical
materials to landscape projects. The exploration of material qualities was used as a tool to understand wider concepts of sustainability, urban resources, as well as fabrication and analysis technologies.

Even though platforms like zoom and conceptboard could be smoothly incorporated, reflections and evaluations of physical objects were slower as compared to face-to-face teaching. Yet, the very local availability of resources increased the variety of materials explored with students suddenly located all over Asia. In an informal student survey, the potentials but also the shortcomings of ‘hands-on online’ learning were assessed.

The paper discusses the outcomes and assessment of the course and evaluates how new teaching approaches (online and face-to-face) reveal a great potential for the revitalization of local material use in the 21st century, moving away not only from the acceptance of predefined industry standards and specifications but also from an outdated understanding of locality.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Susanne Trumpf is a Senior Lecturer at the Division of Landscape Architecture at the University of Hong Kong, where she teaches design studios, landscape media and research seminars on material sustainability. She has previously taught at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the AA Visiting School (Hong Kong) and Hong Kong Design Institute. Susanne has practiced as architect in Berlin and Hong Kong and is founder of indialogue, a collaborative design and research platform. She graduated from TU Berlin, Germany (BArch) and TU Delft, Netherlands (MArch) in Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences.