

Master 1
Visit. Prof. Anuschka Kutz
Campus Brussels
Engagement Urban Cultures
Academic year 2021-2022

The studio will run in a hybrid mode
operating 50/50 on campus / remotely,
alternating between both modes.
Depending on the trajectory of the pandemic
this may have to shift to more remote delivery.

Studio Urban Field Lab

(Post) Pandemic CityLand

Extended Brief



“Parks have been a lifeline during the pandemic... The royal family hates Buckingham Palace. The Queen is rarely there. Let's make Buckingham Palace a public space.”

Simon Jenkins, The Guardian, 25th of February 2021.

The pandemic is a trauma that we experience collectively throughout the globe, albeit not with the same force nor consequences. There is certainly an otherness in the ‘togetherness’. The pandemic has amplified many existing fragilities and inequalities, whilst adding new ones. It has impacted our lives and transformed our cities and villages in ways we are yet to fully comprehend. Some transformations are welcome, others are strongly contested. Some are brought about by governments others emerge through ad-hoc tactics initiated by the people. Many of these transformations are yet to be identified, examined and worked with. Space has a big stake in these developments. The studio sees its mission to contribute to this emerging knowledge field.

“The pandemic has highlighted a host of shortcomings ... that have raised fundamental questions about the justice, security and wellbeing of cities in developed and developing countries alike.”

Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future, UN Habitat, May 2021.



Migrant workers in Singapore, outside their dormitories.

“Spatial inequalities do not just manifest themselves in physical segregation, but also in the form of uneven distribution and access to basic services and infrastructure.”

Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future, UN Habitat, May 2021.

The pandemic has brought the precariousness of our health and care systems to our collective conscience and has shone a light on the institutionalised ways in which care now happens in many parts of the worlds. New divisions have emerged between those who can work from home and those who cannot; further divided by those who can comfortably work from home and the many who cannot. The need for accessible public places – indoor and outdoor - have

become plain obvious all over the world and the scarcity of these spaces have been painfully felt. Canyons have opened up between those with gardens and outdoor spaces and those confined to the stale air of yesterday's lunch. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown, one in five households in London (21%), for example, had no access to a private or shared garden (office for National Statistics, 14 May 2020). According to Natural England, Black people in England are nearly four times as likely as White people to have no access to outdoor space at home, whether it be a private or shared garden, a patio or a balcony (37% compared with 10%). Places where even the most basic facilities are counted a luxury have experienced even more hardship. Those with precarious incomes and low-paid jobs who cannot make ends meet, have seen musicians, events managers, travel agents, café and pub owners join their queue at the food banks. Density and overcrowding have made it impossible for many to live, work, play and educate in homes barely sufficient for sleeping. Shared homes have turned into kitchen rotas and booking systems to use the dining table for work. Some have discovered with dismay that their home will remain their place of work for good, others are welcoming the decoupling from their former ties to offices, suits, air conditioning and meeting rooms, saying goodbye to their long commutes, or even the city as such. What the comfort of home is to some, is terror to others. Domestic abuse, loneliness and mental health issues have dramatically increased, others on the other hand have welcomed spending more time together. Travel has completely transformed or stopped altogether, and we have all gotten to know our local streets a whole lot better. A new geography has turned the logic of our cities inside-out. Inner-city centres reserved for work, leisure and consumption have turned into empty shells of their former selves, taking a sway of support-industries with them. Residential areas which are often a little further out, on the other hand, seem to brim with life. The countryside has seen an influx of urbanites escaping the city, begrudged by many for inflating rents and house prices, but welcomed by others who see it as an opportunity to rejuvenate over-ageing and shrinking rural areas or revitalize abandoned sites. City-tired urbanites have orientated themselves towards the countryside for some time, now a new sway of people who can work remotely have joined them, creating a new wave. Those who cannot work remotely, obviously do not enjoy this level of freedom or mobility.

And yet, besides the hardships, there are new opportunities. Roads have been turned into restaurants and office canteens have provided lunches for those less fortunate. High streets are trying to reinvent themselves. Citizens had campaigned for years to open up the streets for public use, but it took a pandemic to turn the minds of local and national governments. Suddenly, things that were hard to achieve before the pandemic, are happening. Erie entrance zones, porchways and driveways were occupied by children's blow-up swimming pools, repair workshops, chairs and tables for neighbourhood gatherings. What has been common practice in many parts of the world had now suddenly shored up in other parts of the world. Education has diversified and air travel has reduced, etc.

The pandemic has provided us with a unique opportunity to reconsider many so-called certainties and commonplaces, giving rise to a renewed interest in asking fundamental questions that attempt to redress certain balances we may have lost. How do we want to live? What are our values? What do we want and need in and from our cities, villages, offices, schools, hospitals, homes, streets, neighbourhoods, public spaces?

“As COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc on cities and communities, the world is learning new ways to meet the challenges at hand and mitigate the potential effects of pandemics in

the future. Now is the time to re-examine how regions, cities, neighbourhoods and buildings are planned, designed, built and maintained.”

Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future, UN Habitat, May 2021, p. 24)

Stance

You are invited to set your own project focus and context within the framework of Post-pandemic CitiesLand. The Master studio with its global studentship offers a unique – but often underutilised – opportunity to collectively build capacities that outstrip our individual knowledge base, perspective and experience. By inviting you to set your own project context and focus within the set framework, we integrate your diverse backgrounds, lived experience and embodied expertise into the studio context, whether you are a local student or from far afield. This will deepen our collective understanding of the issues that unfold in a global context, and it will illuminate opportunities that arise through the pandemic. Within the studio, this will permit us to explore differences and similarities across diverse projects.

UN-Habitat has described the current pandemic as “city-centric”. In this regard, cities and our future urbanistic responses are critical. At the same time, rural areas have of course been equally affected by the pandemic and we should strive to discuss urban issues alongside rural and peri-urban issues. You can select a case and context located in your own cultural and spatial background, or work in a Brussels or Belgium-based context. A project context in London, UK is also possible. You can work on an urban, peri-urban or rural context or develop a project that is invested in the relationship between these. You can also start out working on particular themes or conditions paradigmatically and then frame these by working on particular test sites. Your projects can tackle a diversity of themes and can be situated in varying scales, from projects that deal with housing or care, to projects that deal with connectivity, food and distribution systems, environmental systems, tourism, urban-rural relationships, global trade links, urban ‘weak spots’, suburbia, public space, repurposing, ... All projects will work with the framework of the (Post) Pandemic CityLand. We will work with a collective methodology and the phasing will be the same for each student.

Students are invited to arrive in the studio with their proposed case. You will briefly present your selected case in week 1. We will then discuss your proposal and ensure that it is well framed.

Links

The studio is situated in the Engagement Urban Cultures. We will also establish links to the Conference on the Post-Pandemic City initiated by the Urban Cultures engagement. The studio is thematically and methodologically connected to the *Fragilities* Master Thesis studio that runs in parallel. The Master 1 studio will run independently, but we will seek out crossovers. The independence with which you will be able to set your own project focus will prepare you for more self-directed and independent work required in your future Master Thesis at the end of your studies. You will, however, receive more guidance on the deliverables at each stage in Master 1.

Phases

The semester will be structured into 3 parts that build up on one-another.

Phase 1 (week 1 – 4) – Investigation - 'case book'

Students arrive in the studio *with* their proposed focus and selected context. With this starting point in place right at the beginning, you will use the first 4 weeks to establish a robust project case portrait, create multi-scalar survey drawings, undertake robust investigative research, using a variety of techniques, from analysis, critical mapping, films, testimonies, ethnographic and environmental readings, literature reviews, etc. You will also produce a position piece in which you synthesize your findings and outline your approach. The first phase will be articulated through a 'case book'.

Phase 2 (week 5 – 6) – Strategy

In week 5 and 6 you will work on a strategy. Through a process of rigorous testing, you will articulate your spatial and strategic approach. This will be expressed through a strategy drawing, underpinned by a field of smaller process-driven tests that communicate the investigation. Your project will need to consider current and / or potential future scenarios and it will need to pertain to uncertainties.

Week 7 – Interim Review

Phase 3 (week 8 -13) – Intervention

In the last phase you develop your strategic approach to a resolved proposal / intervention. You will articulate this in 3 distinctly different scales, macro, intermediate and close-up. The exact scales will depend on your particular project stance but can reach from a global or national scale to a magnified scale (2:1, rather than 1:1). Your proposal does not necessarily need to consist of a building or buildings, but you will need to develop a project that is centred on spatial issues. You will articulate this through drawings and models in the three scales, plus one composite operational drawing that outlines how your project works, how it mitigates or harnesses opportunities and how it puts your position piece in practice. With that it also outlines how the project will be broad about or how it could potentially be implemented and what would be needed for this implementation.

Week 14 – Final Review and Submission

Deliverables

The deliverables are outlined above. You are however encouraged to work beyond 'final outputs', committing to an in-depth, rigorous and critical ongoing research-driven process throughout. Stradling into other disciplines is actively encouraged.

Studio Culture

The studio will unfold in interaction with your projects. The studio will act as a supportive debate platform and workshop. Collective activities and peer debates will be as important

as more tailored project discussions with your studio tutor. You should work on your project in a self-directed manner, supported by studio discussions.

The studio will be of a *hybrid nature, operating 50/50 in-situ in Brussels / remotely, alternating between both modes*. We will meet on a weekly basis using on-site as well as remote facilities. This dual mode will permit us to integrate diverse online tools, such as Miro which we will use to generate an on-going digital archive of your developing work. At the same time, we will use on-site sessions to engage in person and to produce hands-on work in situ. Invited guests will infuse our work. Please note that the intended 50/50 mode may have to shift to more remote delivery, depending on the trajectory of the pandemic. The studio language is English.

Studio Ethos

Studio Urban Field Lab deals with real-world societal, political, economic and cultural transformations for which alternative spatial responses are sought. The studio sees itself as an advocate of our obligations towards the environment, the lifeworld, humanity and society. We need to develop creative ways beyond technical solution to redistribute, to harness dormant opportunities, to tackle spatial surpluses, to edit, alter and shift, without conceding quality. We need to reconsider and widen our role and practice field as architects, engage in interdisciplinary work modes to tackle isolationist disciplinary responses, whilst at the same time showing the immense capabilities that our disciplinary field brings to the table. Your projects will need to integrate a clear stance and commitment by acting with conscience and care. We investigate and develop through critical practice and in-depth enquiry. This will lead us to coherent, comprehensive and ambitious strategic and spatial responses.

Methodology

We will work in an investigative and multi-scaler manner, relating diverse scales from the remote to the close-up, the global, national, regional, city-wide, localized, inhabited, but also the personal, intimate, close-up scale, linking everyday life experiences of people and their environments, to wider urban systems. Ethnographic tools will help us to engage with lived space, supported by data and other forms of. You will need to challenge known ways of working and embrace diverse and unfamiliar methodologies and knowledge fields across disciplines, such as, ethnography, economy, politics, urban geography, health, environmental studies, sociology and art. The studio is research driven *throughout*, including the design process.



Interactive Conversations between Master Students and members of the 'Make A Difference' Afro-Caribbean Elder Group, London, 2016/17.

Any questions, please email: [Anuschka Kutz](mailto:Anuschka.Kutz)

See previous work here <https://www.blog-archkuleuven.be/urban-field-lab/>