IO3
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Manual of best practices for a blended flexible training activity in architecture for higher education institutions

FAM ArchéA
Architectural
European Medium-sized City
Arrangement

This volume returns the results of the Intellectual Output 03 of the research project "ArchéA. Architectural European Medium-sized City Arrangement", with the aim of analyzing and restating the state of the art achieved in the field of flexible mixed training in architecture, strongly encouraged by the emergency period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The result is a collection of good practices carried out internally and externally to the ArchéA partner network, in the context of higher education institutions, made possible by new virtual tools capable of mediating teaching and mixed and flexible learning around the disciplines related to the project.

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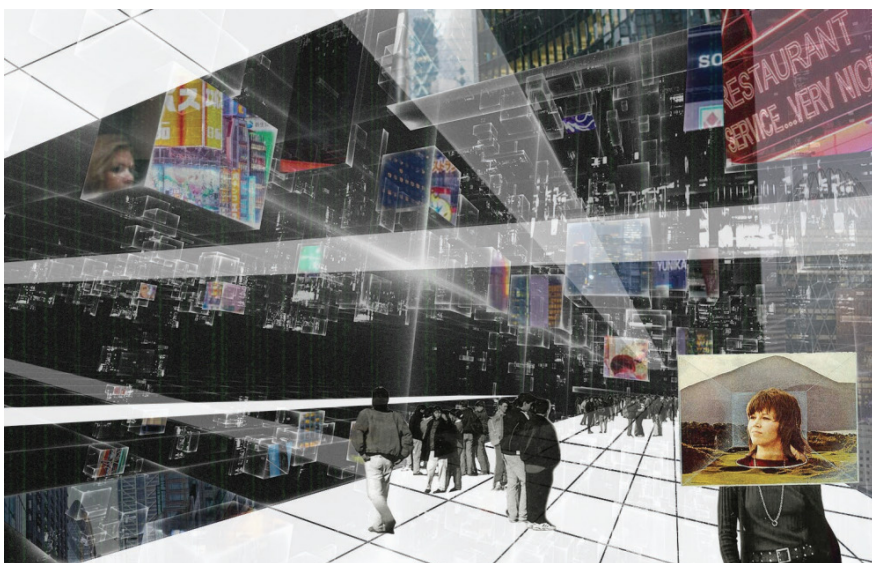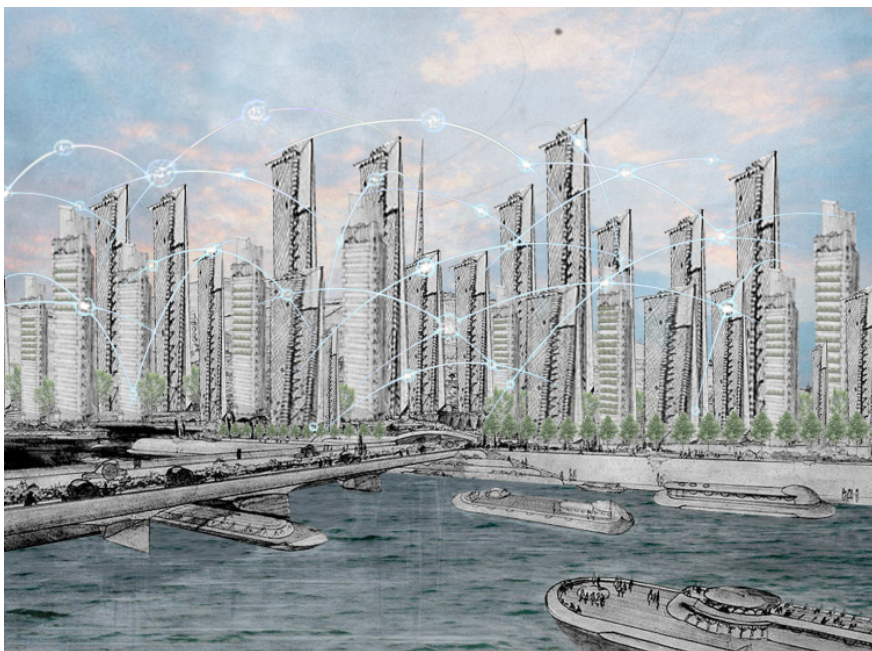# Manual of best practices for a blended flexible training activity in architecture for higher education institutions

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Fig.01 Photomontage LEMIEUX Perrine, ENSA de Normandie, 2020
Source : A drawing of the "Broadacre City" as envisioned by Frank Lloyd Wright. (Wright, Frank Lloyd (1867–1959) © ARS, NY; Living City. Presentation Drawing (River View). Location: The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Scottsdale, Arizona, USA.
Fig.02 Photomontage LAURENCE Léo, ENSA de Normandie, 2020
Source : Superstudio, Il Monumento Continuo, 1969-1970 (FRAC Centre); Haus-Rucker-Co, O2 Reservat, 1970.

Milena Guest, Antonella Di Trani, Roula Maya
Reinventing the pedagogy: about architectural and urban utopias. The experience of teaching the humanities and social sciences in a school of architecture during a pandemic.

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Metropolitan futures and revisited utopias

The frenzy of the metropolises calmed down completely during the pandemic, when the economy seemed to come to a standstill, thus raising the question of their sustainability. Perceived space is often dislocated by "flat" screens which are interposed between our bodies and their immediate surroundings, while the space we live in is reduced to the "15-minute city". The continued teaching of architecture is responsible for the future and training of architects-to-be; the renovation of existing buildings to design built forms is becoming more and more significant, and the health crisis is shaking up our relationship to space in an unprecedented way.

The idea of critically re-reading "past" architectural and urban utopias was reinforced by this particular context. It not only reveals long-standing socio-economic and political contradictions and paradoxes but it is also a vector of the recent upheavals that inevitably accompany the birth of other modes of living and production. We consider two main characteristics of these utopias in relation to the respective contexts in which they emerged. The first is their tendency to create a "placeless" structure of the territory, based on the extension in space of an archetypal plan; the second is their unity from a formal point of view, arising as a criticism of the realities experienced by societies and as a justification of the conditions for another social and spatial "order". In this sense, the meanings and functions of these utopias, as modalities of social imagination in the field of architecture and town planning, shed new light on how contemporary spatialities are produced. On the one hand, they refer to a proposition for an alternative society, whose organisation is reflected in the representation of the built environment, a living environment where built forms suggest a kind of "synthesis" of social connections. On the other hand, they represent the questioning of power through the redefinition of the very principles of how spaces are ordered. How can we then take into account the potential for transformation that some of these "past" utopias conceal and how can we make this into a material to be analysed, allowing us to better understand metropolitan futures? What will future generations of architects retain, assuming the heuristic value and the creative potential of such an approach?

The study of documents and the tutorials *(travaux dirigés)* presented in this paper have been chosen in connection with the course "From cities to metropolises", whilst still remaining relatively independent in terms of content. The objective of this course is to get students to think about the foundation and extent of interpretation of different approaches to understand the metropolitan phenomena. The main question thus being the continuing relevance of certain concepts, notions, models and tools that have been developed, particularly throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day, with the aim of understanding the relationships between spaces and contemporary societies.

The question of architectural and urban utopias introduced at the time of the health crisis by two specific classes made it possible to define a theoretical framework, allowing for a consideration of the major changes occurring in theories on the city at different periods and questioning certain changes in approaches to urban planning. With the development of town planning, the 20th century in particular has seen singular connections between utopias and realities that have shaped the contemporary Western world. While some authors

agree that globalisation for a long time contributed to the utopian impetus before becoming one of the main reasons why utopian thinking then ran out of steam, or at least why it was no longer a subject of research (Wallerstein, 1998; Picon, 2000 ; Paquot, 2018), others have managed to show that, on the contrary, utopia in general "concerns us more than ever today, in particular because of the role it gives to space and because of its underlying logic"(Choay, 2005).

This theme was thus chosen and newly included in the pedagogical program, replacing a trip to a European metropolis and an intensive course for analysing and understanding major references in architecture and urbanism. The critical study of architectural and urban utopias, proposed as a substitute during the pandemic period, involved looking at how different territories are structured, with an emphasis on the formal aspects and on relationships between the different elements. The aim was to question the "legacies" of these utopias and to explore not only the way in which they influenced the architectural and urban design at the time, but also the way in which they have contributed to the contemporary transformation of territories, even if it is only through their ideology.

The idea of rupture that they carry also helps us to understand a certain renewal of imagination and of urban planning activities which can sometimes be stuck in anticipated certainties (when compared, for example, to models of urbanisation or town-planning representations which are seen as virtuous). Making it possible to glimpse or grasp evolutions of social representations regarding a collective destiny, or a shared project of "living together".

Pedagogical practices with regard to active teaching methods: towards an exploratory approach of research

The context of the pandemic forced the teaching staff to find new places for shared reflection and learning, to redefine the fields of research, to adjust teaching methods by questioning the conditions for the production of new knowledge in architecture. The course entitled "From Cities to Metropolises" was taught via the Moodle platform. Students could access a detailed outline and written summary for each lesson, uploaded to the Cloud, and which were then discussed. Conversely, the work submitted to the Cloud by the students, relating the major stages in the progress of their research and questions, was the subject of written feedback from the professors;

all of the written work produced by the students, relating to different texts and graphics, was annotated.

Faced with the lack of reciprocity in communication, after a short period it was decided to create a change of pace, diversifying ways of communicating using different media (videos, recordings or transcription of interviews, virtual site tours etc.). A large majority of the students benefiting from this teaching approach (nearly 100 out of 120) preferred the use of these active methods. They expressed a preference for "*in visu*" discussion, via the electronic platform, rather than only written follow-up. Analysis of the documents and their interpretation through freehand drawings allowed the architecture students to become aware of ideas through physical movement as well as expressing words and concepts orally.

This dual way of "sharing" content – both immediately and at a later time – had an impact on the way tutorials were organised. Each student was involved in two different kinds of teaching approaches.

The first approach consisted in creating a corpus of documents regarding the architectural and urban utopias developed since the second half of the 19th century and during the 20th century, as well as contextualized critical analysis. This was based on the progress of individual student research with the aim of creating a kind of fertile ground for thinking differently about how metropolises are made.

The second approach involved teamwork: groups of students were formed according to shared questions and the choice of references that they were working on. At the heart of the course was the objective of creating a link between the theoretical and practical knowledge the students acquired on the subject of future metropolises, between utopia and reality. The students' final piece of work, in the form of an essay and a photo-collage, had to take into account this experimental research and the new working methods, to show the students' evolving opinions, both individually and collectively.

This modus operandi thus opened up a unique temporality, specific to teaching done in the context of the pandemic. It included different stages of both collective and individual work, creating links between the chosen theme and the identified sources of information. However, the empirical approach and the way it could be implemented were altered, because the places where investigation could be carried out were no longer accessible. This gave rise to new investigative practices and thereby the

creation of a new object for research, simply due to the impact of the unprecedented context in which the work was done. As the use of active teaching methods becomes more widespread, it is also doubly impacted by the learning environment and the appropriation of sources of information.

During a pandemic, the learning process of architecture students undergoes a forced decontextualisation, moving from an exclusively institutional environment to a domestic environment connected to the private status (or private use) of space and the intimacy of people's homes. Moving learning practices from a public context, and a space which is exclusively dedicated to them, into a private space, where learning is not necessarily a priority. This interrupts the initial unity of place, spatially defined and structured by its pedagogical function. This function can therefore no longer be considered without the additional uses of space as a place of daily life and interaction. This transposition or re-contextualization thus forces the student (especially in a situation of strict lock down) not only to develop a certain cognitive skill, but also to rethink the limits between public and private spaces, and to reconsider the workspace with regard to the place of residence.

By turns, it is a question of reinvesting a space "for oneself" according to new constraints. Through playing with the different possibilities of shaking up the order of the domestic space, in a controlled way, the students applied different "tactics" to explore inhabited places. These "tactics" (Michel de Certeau, 1980) can result in playing with and bypassing the initial function of spaces, in order to accommodate new situations for learning. However, the interactions that take place "at a distance" are different to the so-called "classic" interactions which would normally take place there. These interactions, according to Erving Goffman, can be seen either as a kind of avoidance (by preserving other people's territory in some way), or as a ritualised or regulated form of contact, with very strict social rules. In this learning process, how the different sequences of communication and discussion were organised was therefore very important, because this governs the "joint presence" (Goffman, 1974) of students and professors through their use of the digital tool. This organisation involves imagining, synthesising and formalising a protocol, participating in the organisation and appropriation of knowledge, and in the (re)definition of different roles, in order to ensure the proper coordination and management of "shared" time. Apart from these considerations, it

is also the responsibility of professors to ensure the feasibility of any research requested of the students, including in terms of setting up sufficient material resources in line with the expectations of the course (student access to digital tools and databases remaining unequal and unstable, depending on each person's resources and level of comfort).

The evolution of the students' questions about the futures of metropolises was stimulated by the presentation of and discussions around each person's research and analysis results, using multimedia digital supports. The linearity of the sessions was broken up to a certain extent through alternating different phases of work with, on the one hand, theoretical and methodological input, and, on the other, phases of critical analysis and creative research. These changes in dynamic were positive and were intended to allow the students to better formulate and express their thoughts. This helped them to give importance to a critical idea using suitable descriptive tools, to draw parallels between architectural and urban utopias and to become aware of how these structure urban spaces. As such, the creation of photomontages by the students allowed them to test different assemblies of materials - collected during their research and produced by themselves - in order to make their presentations more intelligible. All these required elements thus question the role and posture of the professor, who, "at a distance", must develop the students' intellectual curiosity and their ability to associate together ideas and texts that they have read, to formalise and develop them, and then to enjoy sharing them with other students and professors.

Apart from these elements, the rules and procedures for teaching, as well as the students' learning conditions, were affected by various changes, dissonant effects and limits due to the communication via interposed screens. Thus, sometimes everyday happenings, "the banal", the everyday, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the usual" (Pérec, 1989), can interrupt a teaching session but suddenly seem to have another meaning, or take on another dimension. During a virtual exchange on-line, there is also a tension that occurs through not wanting to lose face or due to the illusion of being able to control one's image and speech. This can be for example not wanting others to glimpse the untidier aspects of our own personal universe. This feeling of embarrassment and off-centre communication is not so much caused by the repetitive barking of a dog or the loud conversations

of other people who share the same accommodation, and who sometimes burst into the virtual space both visually and through sound. The tension in fact arises from the attempts of the person experiencing the interruption to deal with it, as they try to quickly re-establish effective communication, according to previously established shared rules specific to the context of "remote" conversation.

Insights into the work of architecture students, feedback on different ways and methods of learning

The major concerns of the architecture students in the context of the tutorials presented here focused on the conditions for disseminating certain ideas, visions and architectural models and on how certain urban planning approaches resist when confronted with changing lifestyles. Rereading the students' work reveals their interest in understanding the role of utopian thought and the role of ideology in the development of contemporary metropolitan spaces. The students were particularly interested in the rhetoric of urban projects although the images that contribute to it were rarely the subject of critical analysis. We can also underline the role of the lessons as references, the semantic fields which were mobilized, the skills in argumentation and formulation that they developed, showing how easily the students were able to associate together the problems linked to the need for nature with those of urban development and deterioration.

In order to carry out a more detailed reading of the students' work, we created an analysis table to be used as a tool enabling us to describe the results presented at the different stages of the course. Mobilising theories and methodologies from discourse analysis, we tried to answer the following questions: how did the students apprehend the taught content? How did they perceive and experience the situations where interaction was proposed?

The majority of the students' work (nearly 80%) combined two approaches for the analysis of architectural and urban utopias. The first was the identification and schematisation of the principles which govern the unity of different architectural forms and which give structure to the territories. The second was the characterisation of human activities and how these are included in the environment. Thus, after questioning the context and the conditions of emergence of some of these utopias, students tend to develop a critical approach of these utopias notably through the logics at work that shape urban worlds.

About a third of the students' work manages to highlight the strategic dilemmas facing the utopias of the twentieth century by inserting them into the urban planning debates of today. Four major concerns emerge: dealing with the density and living conditions of urban spaces; creating links between nature and architecture as an essential condition for urbanity; organising mobility and new ways of attaching people to their neighbourhood; how social and environmental inequalities are produced and become a factor in creating territorial discontinuities.

More than half of all the works focus on the first two elements of research. Therefore, we can ask ourselves what are the thought processes that the students go through in this case, and to what extent were they influenced by the situation of the pandemic? The referencing process which is initiated (choices, methods and types of reference) is of particular interest to us, because the process is developed freely by the students in connection with the teaching given. This process evokes "places of knowledge where reasoning is encoded, where ideas are formulated, where knowledge is fixed, where hypotheses are validated, where a thought is objectified" (Jacob, 2011).

Different paths of thought ("ideal-typical", according to Max Weber, [1917] 1965) can be identified. However, with regard to the purpose of this paper, we will limit ourselves to mentioning a few examples relating to the first two concerns, which were commonly mentioned in the students' work. The Garden City by Ebenezer Howard and Broadacre City by Frank Lloyd Wright were both among the references most often given. In both cases, the students highlighted the blurring of the distinction between town and country and the establishment of a new productive order based on shared ownership of the land. Social organization in communities is presented as being "concerned about resources and how to share them". However, this comparison includes significant nuances: while Ebenezer Howard advocates social equality through a cooperative model, Frank Lloyd Wright proposes a certain form of individualism through property rights. Whilst Broadacre City takes into account the physical context into which it fits and is designed in an "organic" way, it is quite the opposite for the Garden City. On the morphological level, two types of preferred urban design emerge: Ebenezer Howard proposes a hierarchical urban system organised in small cities, but which is on the whole homogeneous, while Frank Lloyd Wright imagined

a binary system which combines on the one side, the city territories, and on the other, a concentration of macrostructures, mainly made up of high-rise buildings.

These two utopias appealed to a large number of students mainly due to the city-nature connections that they illustrate and the way in which these connections were then translated into projects (Letchworth Garden City, in Hertfordshire, founded in 1903; Radburn, in New Jersey planned at the end of the 1920s; Tapiola, built from 1951 on the outskirts of Helsinki, etc.). During the debates around these creations, the students questioned both the initial urban planning principle and how it would be renewed.

The comparison of these two utopias with more contemporary urban designs, such as, for example, the Vegetal City by Luc Schuiten, shifts the analysis towards the very conception of the urban environment. If architecture is "an orchestration of form according to nature" according to Frank Lloyd Wright, for Luc Schuiten comes from the living beings "which throughout its development is part of a set of balances necessary for our survival" (Schuiten, 2018). The experiments that Luc Schuiten carries out through drawing or through different creations nourish the students' imaginations and lead them to formulate questions about biomorphic architecture, the use of biobased materials, and the search for means of self-sufficiency (food, energy, etc.) at different scales.

Echoing these urban creations, some students referred to recent architectural projects such as the Dano secondary school, in Burkina Faso, completed in 2007 by Francis Kere, or the METI primary school, in Dinajpur, Bangladesh, completed in the same year by Anna Heringer and Eike Rosvag. Others were interested in projects such as Stefano Boeri's "Bosco Verticale" in Milan, completed in 2014, and which offers both an "exemplary" living environment and a response to the challenges of urban densification.

According to the students, the pandemic brought to light the limitations of several architectural and urban forms and typologies. Referring to their own experience of lockdown in the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, they point out the absence of a threshold between public and private spaces, between indoors and outdoors, and the impossibility of spontaneous interaction with the neighbourhood, etc., thus highlighting some of the paradoxes of living in a densely populated city. While some students continue to question the future

of metropolitan areas through the "trivialisation" of architectural designs resulting from an HQE approach (High Environmental Quality is a French certification system promoting sustainability in construction), others argue for the application of the same principles as for the Garden City with the idea of "bringing the countryside into the heart of the city, but also using techniques that conserve energy and guarantee the recycling of certain resources which have already been used". The lexical field used during the evocation of such projects shows that around 25% of the students' work repeatedly associates the future of the metropolises with the question of nature in the city, and with notions of "comfort" and individual and collective "well-being".

These debates thus anchor the students' questions in a broader semantic field, that of everyday utopias, leading them to express the need for other kinds of political action. Some discussions for example turned towards the generalisation of the creation of ecological districts. Some students put forward the hypothesis that urban fabrics would be densified by this type of new program and stress the importance of "good practices" contributing to their creation; others disagree, emphasising the technocentric design of such districts, "leaving little room for sensitive approaches which are sustainable in the long term". It may be asked if this means that the "sustainable city" for most of these students is seen as a new utopia or if they imagine urban futures that conform to it only from an ideological point of view?

Linking certain "past" and more recent architectural and urban utopias is a way of developing the research process and has shown promise in terms of helping to familiarise students with the cognitive approaches specific to research in their field. It leads them to initiate pathways of critical reflection concerning the relationship between utopian discourse and the rhetoric of the project (or sometimes the project itself), as well as to question the role of imagination in architectural and urban design. The students encountered several issues with the work that was carried out in the context of the pandemic, in particular the major difficulty of juggling with an understanding of utopian spatialities and at the same time the reinvention of their own daily living space.

Sometimes the correspondence between architectural and urban utopias is based on a formal and structural homology according to different socio-economic and cultural relationships. This led

to a growing abstraction in the analysis proposed by some of the students' work, as if the utopias in question were losing part of their substance and the links that were found between them suggested a kind of metalanguage, which was not without raising important epistemological problems. However, the debates on the future of metropolises which were initiated as a result allowed the contents taught in the course and daily life to meet, and the conversations thus benefited from the formative aspects of this experience.

Conclusion

In an unprecedented way, the context of the pandemic raised the question of how to renew educational practices in schools of architecture. The contents and objectives of the lessons which were re-developed and re-adjusted by the teaching staff resembled a challenge in which they had to resonate with the students in a virtual space and during a limited period, either of which might happen again. The conditions in which the lessons took place showed their limits insofar as the interactions in the learning process were of a very different nature, in the absence of any real physical presence, and involving different ways of sharing both verbally and non-verbally, compared to that which usually happens in the institutional places.

Workspaces were redesigned for uses which were restricted, alternating or deferred, both within schools of architecture and in domestic spaces. Infused with intimacy and undermined by the emergence of the digital tool and the imperatives of this reorganisation, homes thus became places of investigation into architectural forms and the practices that are played out in them. The dynamics of the mutual professor-student commitment to learning involved the construction of new benchmarks. Thus there was a tension between the need to reinvent new scientific methods, linked to themes which were appropriate to the context of a crisis, and the sometimes unequal possibilities that the students had to reappropriate them according to their different material and cognitive resources.

Entrusting architectural and urban utopias to students means both allowing them to change their outlook on the unfinished hypotheses of "past" and contemporary utopias and giving them the possibility of rethinking them from a critical distance. Such a posture seems necessary to us in order to renew architectural and urban forms for the future situations in which students will be required to work, in line with current concerns, at the intersection of the environmental crisis and that of the pandemic. The recurrence of the themes relating to city-nature connections which the students proposed, encourages us to teach them about the possibilities of reconciling an urban world in transformation with that of the living beings.

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