THE MSC BUDD BUILDING AND URBAN DESIGN IN DEVELOPMENT

The MSc BUDD was created in 1993 in the Development Planning Unit to educate development practitioners to socially responsive practices to challenge urban poverties, informalities and inequalities. Benefitting from the visionary intellectual legacy of Otto Koenigsberger and scholars as John Turner, Cho Padamsee, Geoffrey Payne, Nabeel Hamdi, Pat Wakely and Babar Mumtaz, the course developed in its essential dimensions of participatory and strategic design.

Since its creation more than 500 practitioners were trained and now are working all over the world promoting a cultural shift in the production of habitat. In line with the historical legacy and the ethical mandate of an architecture of engagement the course experiments studio methodology and learning by doing, in a transdisciplinary setting. Acknowledging the limits of the traditional notion of urban design the course develop a new kind of designer to emerge, with a renewed social commitment and a more critical engagement in the Global South.

Design interventions are nurtured by critical theories and find a testing ground in the community-based experiences of the field trips developed in strict collaborations and in co-production of knowledge with partner organisations around the world (International Federation of Slum Dwellers, Asian Coalition of Housing Rights, Community Architect Network).

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THE CHALLENGE. A NEW KIND OF DESIGNER

For over twenty years, the MSc BUDD has embraced the task of developing and understanding urban design as an interdisciplinary, spatially complex and hybrid practice that engages with the political and social urban realities. To fulfill this type of engagement with the urban, the BUDD course engage with a recalibration process of how we imagine, plan and make cities. The BUDD course explore new possibilities of using professional capacities differently, taking on different design approaches and practices to respond effectively and responsibly in the context of rapid urbanisation, increase density, constrained resources and spatial injustices.

The MSc focus on resisting un-critical engagements with design practice, escaping a narrow and static solution-focused and profit-based vision of architectural and urban design, and dealing with precariously and informality as constituent parts of the urban reality where design is reconfigured as strategic intervention at the urban and the architectural scale.

The programme develop a political economy perspective of space, a comprehension of the unique needs, abilities, aspirations, and forms of resistance of urban dwellers, the ability to respond with strategically coordinated proposals to leverage local abilities to meet local needs and to critically engage with the practice of urban design, architecture and urbanism in developmental processes.

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2. FOSTER THE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ROLE OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROFESSIONALS BY STIMULATING SOCIAL MODES OF PRACTICE BEFORE SPECULATIVE ECONOMIC PROFITABILITY
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THE STUDIO ENVIRONMENT AND IN THE FIELD ACTION
RESEARCH: AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF COPRODUCTION
OF KNOWLEDGE.

The MSc BUDD is taking up the contemporary urban
challenges by embracing a different mode of design
research: active, relational, collective, embedded, reflexive
and transdisciplinary, which requires a different mode of
thinking, researching and practicing.

Active refers to a practice that is engaged with material
conditions and social and political complexities. Such
practices are also necessarily relational - recognising that
knowledge production and learning are defined within
relative positions, and in conversation with existing
discourses, material processes and the socially constructed
structures of actors, resources and meanings.

The works is then collective - whereby knowledge production
is understood as a common endeavour pursued by
networks of individuals, community organisations, NGOs,
and institutions that share the value of both aesthetics and
ethics alike.

Research and design research are also embedded – where
learning and knowledge production are seen as processes
integrated related to the practices and lived experiences of
people in specific settings and locations. The research also
has to be reflexive – acknowledging the contexts in which
it is produced and challenging hegemonic outcomes.

Finally, transdisciplinarity becomes fundamental – where
complexity is recognised and celebrated through the
promotion of critical engagement with multiple partial
perspectives of multiple voices and specific disciplinary
construct.

6. SHARE KNOWLEDGE, PROMOTE DISCUSSION,
REFLECTION AND AWARENESS, AND COLLABORATE IN
THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE ‘SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF
HABITAT”
A CONTINUOUS AND LONG TERM PARTNERSHIP: A WORLDWIDE PLATFORM

The innovative design thinking of the MSc BUDD is employed beyond the classroom environment thanks to the active engagement with urban practitioners, design networks and collectives globally as well as the contribution of the BUDD alumni. Partner organisations around the world play a fundamental role in shaping the pedagogical dimension of the course, contributing to frame a continuous collaborative platform with communities.

Such action calls for a deeper reorientation between politics and aesthetics, confronting three challenges. The first one is related to the need to play against the non-critical engagement with the urban environment. The second challenge is to get away from a certain narrow vision of urban design. The above leads to a third challenge related to dealing with informality as a constituent material of the everyday urban.

The course has recently introduced a summer Itinerant workshop called DpuSummerLab in Rome, Zurich, Medellin, Santiago, Beirut and London involving more than 200 participants. In 2012, the MSc BUDD took a leading role in launching a DPU/ACHR Junior Professionals Programme with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and the Community Architects Network (CAN), where several DPU Alumni were awarded paid internships to work in Southeast Asian countries experiencing in community-driven development.

7. PROMOTE THE FACILITATION OF TRANS-NATIONAL DIALOGUES AND LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS WITH AND WITHIN THE LESS AFFLUENT COUNTRIES