Syllabus

Course description

The course belongs to the class “caratterizzante” (obbligatoria) in the MA in Eco-Social Design (LM-12). This course is a compulsory subject in the area “Projects”

| Course title                  | TPP – thesis preparation project  
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<th>Area: Project 3 – Design 3, incl. Design Research</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lecturer Group A</td>
<td>Uwe H. Martin</td>
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<td><a href="http://landrushproject.com/">http://landrushproject.com/</a></td>
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<td>Lecturer Group B</td>
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### Course description

Project 3 supports students in finding relevant and appropriate topics for their thesis project while helping them navigate and plan their research and development and enter an active, productive, and self-responsible working process. Students will be encouraged to develop new competencies, investigate new practices, and establish a culture of experimentation and exchange. This course will support students in finding and developing discourse, action, and self-directed approaches to learning that facilitate the development of ambitious and exciting projects grounded in concrete and reasonable propositions for their final thesis. The course will follow the annual theme "Staying with the Trouble" (Haraway, 2016) as a lens to deal with the complexity of ever-increasing crises deeply entangled with the thesis themes.

The course provides early sessions geared towards helping students initiate their thesis projects by exploring chosen themes through embedded and embodied practices as well as theoretically. In the next phase, students apply different mapping exercises to identify the possible human and non-human actors to establish a fertile network, possible leverage points of the research context, or identify the first meaningful action points for experimental design-led interventions. In the final phase, the course invites students to critique, reflect, synthesize and re-frame their project to assess its feasibility, theoretical coherence, and potential for societal change. Ultimately, Project 3 will help students funnel gained insights into a design brief, generating research and design-related questions and a thesis project plan, which should be easily accessible both textually and visually.
Project description group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin):

Students will be accompanied individually and in small groups to find the topic for their Master's final thesis work. Throughout the semester, students will conduct research work that involves meeting with experts and stakeholders. They will propose in-depth studies, experiments, fieldwork, exercises, and practical formats to encourage reflection on methods and approaches to their chosen theme, with a focus on eco-social design. Students will be encouraged to apply and implement the strategies and thematic research on practical, prototypical model experimentation. The whole process is accompanied by elaborating tangible models, probes, and tools corresponding to the respective purpose. The results of this process may turn out in different formats, such as videos, photos, interviews, performances, workshops, sketches, mappings, drawings, experimentations, prototypes, public interventions, participatory design activities, events, or written conclusions. Students will document and evaluate their process and results in an appropriate form.

Project description group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi):

Students will develop specific methodologies of research, advanced by a feminist, intersectional, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective. They will identify the situation from which their projects emerge; temporal, spatial, discursive, political, environmental and imagine unconventional collaborative partnerships and formats of exchange. An emphasis will be placed on the very process of design (be that space, relational objects or structures) and its collective nature over its finite form, as well as on the inclusion and recognition of the equally significant agency that all objects, people, and species have in the continuous co-creation, maintenance and reconfiguring of all material relations within the built environment. Some of the methods and strategies that the students will learn include collective actions and hands-on formats; performance, workshops, listening, mapping, walking...

By creating open and facilitated invitations for communities locally as well as nationally and internationally, students will cultivate a supportive working environment that goes beyond the institution's walls. Special importance is placed on the student's interests and inherent skills by encouraging them to develop them further in dialogue and conversation so that learning happens in a distributed way.

Within student design projects we will initiate processes of self-organization that create convivial, social spaces that can grow beyond the instigation by the designer.
Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos)

The Design Research module introduces students to an expanding research landscape regarding contemporary discourses and debates surrounding research ethics and their implications for eco-social transformation. Classes include lectures, reading circles, and discussion groups that help students explore case studies and research projects relevant to eco-social design. Topics include 'power, reciprocity and positionality', 'vulnerability, ethics & consent', 'humanizing research', 'reflexivity' and 'research, transformation & empowerment'. The module also opens space for creating new and inventive research approaches grounded in design as discourse and practice.

Educational objectives

Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin)

We start with two equally important questions: What is the problem? And: Why do I care?

We research the available science and theory, go out and talk to stakeholders, and spend nights at the bar and weeks in offices, living rooms, the factory, and on the river: What is the real problem for the community and the ecosystem? What element is true beyond the specific and connects to a universal idea? Who do we need to reach, and how? Through photography, film, languageless comics, podcasts, or mass media, spaces like the streets, exhibitions, or live events such as theater and educational settings? Are we only preaching to the quire? Where could we reach those people "on the other side"? Can intimacy and small gestures become potent tools? Can we moderate solutions between different stakeholders and experts? Can we do it ourselves, or do we need a trusted partner?

We encouraged students to work in exploratory and experimental ways, developing rough mockups, material experimentations, models, sketches, visualizations, and prototypes to make ideas visible, tangible, and experienceable.

Equally important is that students feel safe and understand who they are, why they care, and how they can make a difference. We strive to facilitate a solid student community and explore what moves us and why not.

We use case studies, scenario challenges, focus work, interview and coaching techniques, regularly change between individual, partner, and group sessions, and encourage project teams to coach each other. After every session, we reflect on each student's most crucial takeaway, learning, or insight.

Students will be able to:
• Conceive and develop projects in eco-social design from problem finding to prototyping
• Research on the projects theme, including field research, collecting information, narratives, interviewing and reading
• Develop an iterative design cycle that informs each process constantly seeking answers to the questions of “what,” “how,” “why,” “where,” and “for whom” with the same degree of attention
• Analyze the context of the project, map stakeholders, approach external experts, find for synergies across all areas and collaborate with partners
• Think, communicate and act across diverse areas and disciplines. Make complex issues tangible by design, visualization and storytelling
• Plan, organize and manage the project defining objectives and deadlines
• Be aware of hidden meanings and bring critical reflections by looking at them from different perspectives
• Take decisions and imagine their possible impacts
• Create hands-on prototyping, implementing and testing their hypothesis. Consider it in a long term period through a speculative approach. Evaluate its sustainability and possible market placement.

**Knowledge will be acquired in the following field:**
Ecology
Water-Food-Energy Climate Nexus
Planetary Boundaries
Overshot
Systems thinking
Storytelling, Narration, Interview, Communication
Moderation, Mediation

**Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi)**

“Learning to think differently is both a political and a pedagogical project since both pedagogy and politics involve processes of change and transformation. Indeed, change and transformation are critical in the area of environmental education and environmental politics, both of which [...] presume and reinstate a separation between what constitutes ‘us’ and the ‘environment’.” - Petra Hroch, “Deleuze, Guattari, and Environmental Pedagogy and Politics: Ritournelles for a Planet-Yet-to-Come”.

“The raison d’être of any art project in public space is to create a contrast, unfold a conflict and even add more conflict to make it visible.” – Fulya Erdemci, director of SKOR

Instead of pre-set hierarchies, a small gesture stands for a plurality of means of expression, a plurality of competing life worlds, but at the same time it emphasizes that both of these are only possible if there is enough room for something called reasonable disagreement and loving conflict. In one significant way, I
want to deny the often-used excuse that claims there are no alternatives. Instead, it is and it always will be about how we can both articulate and push those alternatives forwards – and back again.
- Mika Hannula, The Politics of the Small Gesture

...The job of the contemporary designer is too large for any single individual, they reasoned. The labor entailed—theorizing, writing, planning, funding, executing the work, travel—could be competently handled only by a team. So the five original members of Critical Art Ensemble—though membership is no secret, they prefer anonymity—organized into one entity. - Critical Art Ensemble, The Interventionists, Nato Thompson

Experimental ethnographic approaches will be explored including the use of “relational objects” whereby non-verbal exchange can open new modes of engagement. Students will shape active situations of engagement as a means to collect data and build relations with stakeholders. These actions will be performative and include the use of material elements which are theoretically grounded and not afraid of provoking clashes, collisions and uncertainty.

**Students will be able to:**
- Create modes of engagement with stakeholders that are thoughtful, challenging and mutually beneficial.
- Match praxis with theoretical rigour.
- Research infectiously.
- Produce appropriate forms of communication.
- Forecast scenarios related to their work; temporal, spatial, social...

**Knowledge will be acquired in the following field:**
- Position projects within broader frameworks of the social, political and environmental landscapes.
- Critical approach to innovation and production of new materials and products, i.e. life-cycle, socio-political conditions under which the products are made, where the material originates and how it is produced, environmental impact of materials.
- Care and Generosity and Reciprocity in communicating with stakeholders
- Team Work/ Collaboration- presentation skills, scheduling and distribution of tasks/defining roles.
- Scale models - How to iterate through small scale models and rapid prototyping

**Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):**
**Students will be able to:**
• Generate research and design questions from the project initiation and contextual inquiry phases.
• Identify and frame contextual insights, map and frame the problem(s) and challenges.
• Generate a design brief from the project initiation and contextual inquiry phases.
• Choose relevant approaches, strategies and methodologies to undertake research actions. Then, devise experiments and gather data followed by subsequent analysis, synthesis and critique to understand the results.
• Drive processes of ideation, concept generation, prototyping, testing, and iterating in order to frame potential solutions to problems identified in a design brief. Monitor and evaluate the impacts of their experimentation and prototyping in order to critique and reflect upon the outcomes.
• Reflect on the ethical implications of the proposed research project.

Knowledge will be acquired in the following field:
• The relationship between design research and practice and their application to real-life contexts and managed projects.
• The complementary relationships between design research and ethical considerations in qualitative research and how to best integrate these into contemporary eco-social design practices.

List of topics covered

Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin):
• Storytelling for Eco-Social Impact
• Media, Spaces, Live - audience reach
• Linear, interactive & fragmented narratives
• Audio-Visual Anthropology
• Observing nature, narrating nature
• Thinking through making / observing
• Practice-based design research
• Complexity and Design

Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi):
- Archival Research - Historical Precedent
- Situated Practice, Critical Spatial Practice, Ethics of Care
- Rapid-Prototyping – Thinking through making
- Experimental, Relational Objects, non-verbal exchange
- Communication Strategies/ Platforms
- Durational Approach, Small gestures
- Unconventional Partnerships
- Value in local stakeholders

**Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):**
- Ethical implications of design research for eco-social transformation.
- Developing reflexive research skills as a design practitioner and researcher.
- Developing an ethical and responsible approach to eco-social design (reflecting the role of an eco-social designer with other humans and species; understanding systemic malpositions and their consequences for society and earth).

**Teaching format**
Assembly where students and teachers meet to discuss ongoing issues, schedule etc.
Excursions
Lectures
Reading Circles
Critical-Counter Mapping
Discussion Groups
Colloquium
Working Groups
Newsletter (about monthly, one page, printed and posted in public)
Cohabitation Exercises
Design, Build, Test, Reflect
Rapid prototyping
Interviews
Peer to peer learning

**Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin) and Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi):**
All teaching formats are governed by the latest laws and regulations from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, the province of Alto Adige/South Tyrol and the Italian government in relation to the COVID-19 situation. Check the latest updates here, [https://www.unibz.it/en/home/covid-19/](https://www.unibz.it/en/home/covid-19/). Please refer to the detailed programming updated weekly. The aim is to provide a blended learning environment of some face-to-face teaching with online teaching.
Project days are: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

**Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):**
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**Learning outcomes**

**Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin) and Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi)**

**Knowledge and understanding**
- understand the potential and restrictions of given settings, the connected issues and actors / stakeholders, considering available capacities, resources, instruments and technologies
- understand the requirements of a project, including all the above mentioned

**Applying knowledge and understanding**
- be able to co-create original ideas for effective projects, aiming at desirable and viable Eco-Social transitions
- be able to develop effective projects in given situations (see above) with the above-mentioned aims
- setup and organize a project according to its requirements
- be able to design and build mockups, functional models and/or other artifacts, which make the project tangible and testable

**Making judgments**
- be able to critically assess potentials and restrictions of given situations and settings (see above), and estimate strength, challenges, risks and prospects
- be able to review projects critically, to understand what is working, what could be improved (and how)

**Communication skills**
- be able to present and discuss the own project successfully (in diverse setting, using divers media and modes)
- be able to communicate and collaborate with partners, stakeholders and potential users or audiences

**Learning skills**
- be able to quickly learn the knowledge and skills necessary for the own project
- understand own capacities and limitations, and understand, where, when and how to involve other experts / partners, for certain competences, roles and tasks
**Knowledge and understanding**

- understand basic methods and tactics of media communication, of brand design and of visual communication
- understand layered relations between diverse actors in complex systems: human, more than human, material, energy, etc.

**Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):**

**Learning outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate the following:

**Knowledge and Understanding**

- How and why they integrate design research into their thesis project proposal.
- The application of different design-led research approaches, methods and tools to gather preliminary results that inform their thesis project proposal.

**Making judgments**

- The ability to assess the relevance and value of different design research approaches, methods, and tools to develop their thesis project proposal.
- The capability to reflect on the ethical implications of the different design-led research approaches, methods and tools used to gather preliminary results.

**Communication skills**

- The capacity to engage actors, collaborators and/or stakeholders through their chosen research approach.
- The ability to choose appropriate communication strategies and approaches to convey their research/design/social actions as an eco-social design project.

**Assessment**

**Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin), Group B (Prof.Rosario Talevi ) and Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):**

You will be assessed on an integrated approach to **Project 3 combined with Design Research** over three **obligatory** phases. At each phase of assessment (one colloquium and the final exam), students are expected to make a 15-minute verbal presentation about their project. The presentation should be accompanied by edited documentation evidencing the student’s processes, *artifact generation and construction*, and *design research*. Students should explain how these were utilized to justify decisions about subsequent or future work.
The phases are as follows:

**Phase I** Initiation and Exploration (Encounter, Emergence) comprises initiating a design research project, contextual inquiry, framing contextual insights, mapping and framing problems or the problematic, and generating initial research questions and/or a design brief(s).

**Phase II Generation and Construction (Production)** comprises three interweaving lines of research inquiry. Line one is research actions, generating research questions, choosing theories, approaches, strategies and methodologies, devising and setting experiments and gathering data then analyzing and synthesizing from a critical perspective. Line two is design actions, generating a design brief, ideating and generating concepts, prototyping, iterating, framing solutions and monitoring and measuring impacts. Line three is social actions, implementing your design interventions or new processes/modes of eco- and social-production in your chosen social setting(s).

**Phase III Evaluation (Exchange)** comprises reflection on the key findings, recognition of the new knowledge created, how to make that public, its potential for positive societal change and how the ‘design qualities’ might contribute to that potential.

Assessment of Phases I, II and III is at the Masters Colloquium on **12.12.2022**.

**Phase IV Thesis project proposal** comprises a fully justified proposal for a Thesis project for Semester 4. This will include appropriate reference to how Phases I to III helped scope and develop the project, a well-defined issue with appropriate actors, stakeholders and audience, a well-defined problem or problematic, a visualization of how the project fits into a system view, a projection of how the project could impact to deliver positive potential for Eco-Social change, including the potential for contributing to alternative/heterodox/circular economies, an outline project plan and ethical considerations. Assessment of Phase I to IV is at the Final Exam on **29. or 30.01.2023**.

By the end of the semester, each student must deliver documentation, text summary and visuals, of the project as an integral part of the exam. Exact format to be specified two weeks before the exam. **At the end of the semester, all projects are exhibited during the GOG exhibition within the faculty. Besides, materials for web portfolio and press must be delivered.**

Assessment language: English

**Evaluation criteria and criteria for awarding marks**

Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin), Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi) and Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):
Student projects will be assessed under the following general criteria:

- design qualities (novelty, originality, form, function, state of the art in your chosen design sub-field or field)
- Engagement
- Demonstration of competencies
- Materialisation of design work (tangible, intangible, digital, analogue, aesthetic and technical qualities)
- Quality of the documentation
- Contribution to the class and fellow students projects

And under the following specific criteria:

1. **Eco-Social agency**
   You should show how your design processes, artifacts and communication of your project, combined with your research approach, helped generate impacts and potentials for positive eco-social change.

2. **Qualities of the designed artefacts**
   You should demonstrate how the aesthetic and technical qualities of your designed artifacts foster the eco-social agency. Show how they build up on the state of the art in your chosen (design) disciplines. Priority will be given to the boldness and vigour of experimentation and design exploration. You should also demonstrate the rational for developing artifacts for your research/design/social actions and their effectiveness to progress your research inquiry by answering questions, generating data, engaging actors and stakeholders and prototyping solutions.

3. **Conceptual framing, reflection and future perspectives**
   You should document: the ‘state of art’ and early contextual inquiry setting out the terrain of your project, your starting position and your framing of the context and its challenges. You should show your critical analysis, synthesis, reflection and evaluation of the artifacts and research process throughout your project. You should demonstrate the iterative development of your research within your project and how it generates new perceptions, present and future.

4. **Relations, processes and organization**
   You should demonstrate how processes with the project team, collaborators, partners, stakeholders and other actors affected the generation/construction of artifacts, and how it affected the research process, project management and development.

5. **Storytelling**
   You should demonstrate the effectiveness and potential of your artifacts and research process in communicating the project to relevant publics. Quality and effectiveness of presentation techniques and narrative are important, including how well the story attracts attention, convinces and touches audiences. You should demonstrate how your research informed the
development of your project narrative and how you chose to make it public. You will also be assessed on how well you defended your proposition and your response to critics.

The examination takes place at the end of Phase IV.
Project documentation has to be delivered three days before the exam at the latest.

The documentation should communicate the project together with design research, enriched by outcomes from all the courses students take in this semester. This essential documentation should be concise and attractive for interested audiences, such as: fellow designers and practitioners, partners and stakeholders of the project, potential collaborators, participants, users and/or consumers of the project, etc.). The format of the documentation will be defined and communicated 4 weeks before the exam.

Suggested readings

**Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin)**

- Donna Haraway: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, 2016
- David Montgomery: Dirt – The Erosion of Civilisations, 2012
- Jared Diamond: Collapse – How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed, 2004
- Michael E. Mann: The new Climate War, 2021
- Rachel Carson: Silent Spring, 1962
- Elizabeth Colbert: The Sixth Extinction, 2014
- Michael Pollan: The Omnivore’s Dilemma – A Natural History of Four Meals, 2006
- Kate Raworth: Doughnut Economy – Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist, 2017
- Rob Nixon: Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor, 2011
- Christoph Mauch: Slow Hope – Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear, 2019
- Dr. Anna Lembke: Dopamin Nation, 2021
- David Epstein: Range – Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World, 2019
- Eyal Weizman: Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability, 2017
- Susan Sontag: On Photography, 1977
- Susan Sontag: Regarding the Pain of others, 2003
- Anne Lamott: Bird by Bird – Some Instructions on Writing and Life, 2008

**Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi)**
- Sasha Constaza-Chock. Design Justice - Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need, MIT Press, 2020
- Braidotti, Rosi; Hlavajova, Maria. Posthuman Glossary. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Selected Terms:
  Anthropocene by Jussi Parikka
  Capitalocene and Chthulucene by Donna Haraway
  Commons by Lindsay Grace Weber
  Green/Environmental Humanities by Tobijn de Graauw and Elisa Fiore
  Multispecies by Eben Kirksey
  Naturecultures by Iris van der Tuin
  Planetary and Rewilding by Maya and Reuben Fowkes
- Clément, Gilles. Manifesto of the Third Landscape. Series of New Imaginaries. TEH, 2004
- Bader, Markus; Kafka George; Talevi, Rosario (eds) *Making Futures Book*. Berlin: Spector, 2022
Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):
The following books are focused on the approaches, strategies, tactics, tools and roles that design researchers can adopt:


The following international conferences demonstrate the extensive and dynamic landscape of contemporary Design Research in Europe and internationally:
- Design Research Society https://www.designresearchsociety.org
- European Academy of Design https://eadresearch.org/
- NORDES Nordic design research conferences http://nordes.org/
- Research Through Design (RTD) conferences https://www.researchthroughdesign.org/
Group A (Prof. Uwe H. Martin)

Podcasts:
The Great Simplification by Nate Hagens
Future Histories by Jan Groos
Long Now: Seminars About Long-Term Thinking
Multispecies Worldbuilding Lab

Group B (Prof. Rosario Talevi)

- Feral Atlas
- Rosi Braidotti (post-human feminist theorist) explains post-humanism in 1 hour and 23’
- A Feminist Organization’s Handbook
- Precarity Pilot

Design Research (Prof. Cabral Matos):
More on Design research theory, Design activism, Design for Social Innovation, Design for Sustainability
Design and Politics, Critical Design, Open Design, Service design, More-than-Human approaches,
Anthropocene, Community Economies, etc.:

London:Earthscan.
Gibson-Graham, J.K., D. B. Rose, and R. Fincher (Eds, 2015). Manifesto for the Living in the
Anthropocene. Brooklyn, NY
Helfrich, Silke and David Bollier (2019): Free, Fair, and Alive – The Insurgent Power of the Commons,
New Society Publishers
I.L.A. Kollektiv (2019): At the Expense of Others?, oekom, Munich
Massachusetts, MA: MIT Press.
and Hudson.
van Abel, Bas, Lucas Evers, Roel Klaassen & Peter Troxler. (2010.) Open Design Now. Why Design Cannot
Remain Exclusive. Rotterdam: BIS Publishers, Creative Commons Netherlands and Premsela.