

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	Inhabiting Borders - Abitare i confini Area: Project 1 in Eco-Social Design
Course code	96100
Scientific sector	ICAR/13 – Disegno industriale
Degree	Master in Eco-Social Design (LM-12)
Semester	I
Year	1st and 2nd
Credits	12
Modular	No
Lecturer Group A	Jacopo Ammendola e-mail jacopo.ammendola@unibz.it Webpage: https://www.unibz.it/it/home/research/competence-centre-economic-ecological-social-sustainability/team/person/49014-jacopo-ammendola
Lecturer Group B	Angelika Burtscher e-mail angelika.burtscher@unibz.it Webpage: https://www.unibz.it/de/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/48976-angelika-burtscher
Scientific sector of the lecturer	Prof. Ammendola: ICAR/13 Prof. Burtscher ICAR/13
Teaching language	English
Total lecturing hours	90 + 90
Total hours of self-study and/or other individual educational	about 210

activities	
Attendance	highly recommended
Prerequisites	Experience in self-motivated and -organized project work
Course page	https://www.unibz.it/it/faculties/design-art/master-eco-social-design

Course description

Project 1 is the core course of the first semester of the master's program and represents the students' first opportunity to engage with the core themes of the program, the city of Bolzano, and eco-social design, while developing their own projects under the supervision of the instructors.

Since many years during Project 1 students and teachers/researchers of the MA Eco-Social Design collaborate with OfficineVispa, a cooperative doing social work in Bolzano Don Bosco. Thanks to this collaboration, students will be introduced to further local stakeholders, and citizens, with the possibility to develop hands-on-projects and applied research that foster social-ecological transformations on a site-specific level.

The course will work in close and continuous collaboration with the Design Research course, as the two are intended to complement, enrich and support one another, also involving learnings and teachers from the courses of the area *Observe, Analyse & Apply*, hands-on experimentation and prototyping supported by tools and teachers of area *Make & Intervene*.

Topic 2024: *Inhabiting Borders*

The course will explore the master's annual theme, 'Hope,' by focusing on a specific concept: the border, which we consider highly relevant for understanding contemporary issues. The course will explore the concept of borders not as fixed lines but as dynamic zones of interaction, transformation, confrontation, and social change. Anchored in the unique context of Bolzano-Bozen, a city marked by its borderland identity, the course situates itself specifically in the Don Bosco district—an area that serves as a border within the border city, both in terms of its urban landscape and history and present time marked by immigration and transcultural coexistence.

Through the lens and practice of eco-social design, students will critically investigate how borders—whether physical, social, or ecological—serve as spaces where diverse elements converge, clash, and coexist. Borders are not only sites of connection but also of violence, impacting both human communities and natural ecosystems. This course will challenge students to confront these complexities, examining the concept of borders on multiple scales, from the super-local environment of Don Bosco to global contexts.

Additionally, the course will explore the border between city built and informal space, and nature, addressing the tensions and opportunities that arise when these realms intersect. Students will engage in hands-on projects, collaborative workshops, and critical analysis to explore and inhabit border spaces, fostering social and ecological sustainability. This course is ideal for those interested in reimagining borders as fertile grounds for creativity and change, aiming to cultivate a more sustainable and interconnected world while addressing the inherent challenges of these contested spaces.

Outcomes

At the end of the semester each projects' outcomes and key elements of the process will be presented in diverse forms:

- as a page on the portfolio website of the Faculty (designart.unibz.it)
- as an exhibition within the end-of-semester exhibition of the faculty (GOG > 24-25 Jan 2025)
- as a documentation booklet, based on a shared template, which serves also as a catalogue for the exhibition (to be handed over to partners and stakeholders)

Structure of the course

Kick-Off Week in Don Bosco During the first two weeks of the semester, we will introduce spaces, actors, and topics with teachers from the Master, local stakeholders and international guests. Students will also be invited to explore the district autonomously.

La Rotonda Sessions, Co-Working at OfficineVispa's community centre "La Rotonda" in Don Bosco all day during the Kick-Off week and on Tuesdays all day during the introductory phase. This includes common lunches.

Plenum, Collaborative Work Session and Inputs Usually on Mondays, 14:00–18:00, in University, Atelier F4.01

Review & Support Sessions, for each student team; usually periodic time-slots on Tuesdays (after the introductory phase), in University, Atelier F4.01

Furthermore, there will be walks, lectures, discussions, workshops, creative and convivial activities, excursions. Overarching activities include *Reading & Designing Circles*, *Community Learning Sessions* and self-organised student activities.

Educational objectives

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola) and Project group B (Prof. Burtscher)

Students will be able to

- develop projects in eco-social design from define urgencies to prototyping
- collaborate with partners, experts and other designers to develop, prototype and test an integrated project;
- analyse the context of projects, conceptually frame them and explore potentials
- create and develop projects in an integrated way, with an interplay of diverse elements like social interactions, spaces, products, services, cross-media communication, etc.
- think, communicate and act across diverse areas and disciplines. Apply and integrate instruments and knowledge from Design Research and from the chosen courses in the areas *Observe, Analyse & Apply* and *Make & Intervene*. Find for synergies across all areas
- make complex issues tangible by design, visualization and storytelling
- prototype, and partially implement and test projects
- learn quickly and adapt to given situations and their contexts
- propose and develop projects which will contribute to local development while considering the global context, starting from a “glocal” vision, which “focuses on the global and planetary dimension and the local one at the same time” (from the Dizionario Treccani);
- integrate socio-economic aspects and sustainability requirements in project design
- adopt and invent project methods that comply with the requirements and with the needs of the project and its stakeholders
- work with interdisciplinary, international and multidisciplinary teams
- organize and manage creative processes
- organize, manage and motivate a team
- develop an individual way of thinking, leading to critical judgements and self-assessments. Apply critical thinking as it is taught in the area *Observe, Analyse & Apply*
- balance inspiration and systematic planning
- balance more intuitive ways of working with more analytical ones
- design by [taking into account](#)[considering](#) the needs and desires of a given territory, of a situation/set of circumstances, of a specific group of people, thanks to the ability of observing, listening, interacting and mediating amongst various stakeholders involved in the project. Apply methods learned in the area *Observe, Analyse & Apply*
- think and understand what it means to take responsibility in a design process / project
- think critically about a space – spatial critical practice – and reflect on what constitutes a space and its multiple interests and interdependencies
- negotiate a space between individual and common interests

List of topics covered

Shared part

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola) & Project group B (Prof. Burtscher):

Eco-Social Design for/with neighbourhood relations, public space, public life and public debate, participatory design and codesign, design for ecological and social sustainability, global and local interference, border theories, feminist theories and urbanism

Specific part (Object–Space–Services)

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola):

Design of spatial objects, spatial design, installation design, intervention design, service design, impact planning and assessment

Specific part (Communication–Interaction–Services)

Project group B (Prof. Burtscher):

Design strategies; design as expanded field; visual communication, tools and tactics for narrating eco-social transformations; storytelling for convivial grounds

Not all topics will be treated with the same depth for all students. Students can focus on specific topics and depending on the teachers will provide specific input in groups and individually. Students are encouraged to ask for this proactively.

Teaching format

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola) & Project group B (Prof. Burtscher)

Project-work with a balanced mix of field trips, lectures, exercises and experiments, workshops, presentations and reviews (individually and in groups), interventions by external experts

Learning outcomes

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola) & project group B (Prof. Burtscher)

Knowledge and understanding

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

Applying knowledge and understanding

- be able to conceptually frame projects, integrating competences and knowledges from Design Research and from courses of the area *Observe, Analyse & Apply*
- 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, across all phases: initial research, finding, project development, exploration and experimentation, prototyping, testing and publishing / exhibiting.
- be able to design and build mockups, functional models and/or other artifacts, which make the project tangible and testable, integrating methods and skills from courses of the area *Make & Intervene*
- Integrate approaches, knowledges, methods, competences, skills and technologies from multiple fields and (design) disciplines

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

- think, communicate and act across diverse areas and disciplines
- be able to present and discuss their own project successfully (in diverse settings, using appropriate media and modes)
- be able to communicate and collaborate in teams, with partners, stakeholders and potential users or audiences

Learning skills

- learn from context and adapt to given situations
- understand own capacities and limitations, and understand, where, when and how to involve other experts / partners, for certain competences, roles and tasks

The focus within this spectrum depends on the interest of each student and on the needs of their project, as if the main part of the teaching happens in individual consultancies of project teams and single students.

Assessment

Student performance in this course will be evaluated based on a combination of individual and group work, emphasizing both process and outcomes. The assessment criteria are as follows:

Project Work (50%) Students will develop one or more design projects that reflect their understanding of the course's central themes, particularly the concept of borders in relation to eco-social design. The project will be evaluated based on creativity, conceptual depth, and the ability to propose innovative solutions. Regular feedback sessions will track progress, and final submissions will be presented at the end of the course.

Research and Critical Analysis (20%) Students will be required to conduct research that critically engages with the theme of borders at multiple scales, from local to global, and reflects on how these borders influence social and ecological systems. This component will be assessed through written reports and presentations.

Participation and Collaboration (20%) Active participation in discussions, workshops, and collaborative activities with peers and the Design Research course is essential. Assessment will focus on the student's contribution to the collective learning process, including teamwork, constructive feedback, and engagement with different perspectives.

Reflection and Documentation (10%) Students are expected to maintain a reflective journal or portfolio documenting their design process, challenges encountered, and personal insights. This will be assessed for depth of reflection and engagement with course themes. A final documentation must be submitted (as portfolio web page and booklet) which should communicate the project starting from its development process.

Assessment language: English

Evaluation criteria and criteria for awarding marks

Project group A (Prof. Ammendola) & project group B (Prof. Burtscher)

The final evaluation will also take in account the following criteria:

1. **Eco-Social agency**
Impacts and potentials for positive eco-social change
2. **Qualities the of designed artefacts**
Aesthetic and technical qualities, and in how far these qualities foster the eco-social agency. How they build upon the state of the art in your chosen field and (design) disciplines. Boldness and vigour of experimentation and design exploration.
3. **Conceptual framing, reflection and future perspectives**
Understanding of the given situation, relevant actors and the potential for positive change. Critical analysis, synthesis, reflection and evaluation. Understanding of iterative development and future perspectives.
4. **Relations, processes and organization**
Understanding and managing relations and processes with the project team, collaborators, partners, stakeholders and other actors. Project management.
5. **Storytelling**
Effectiveness and potential in communicating the project to relevant publics. Quality and effectiveness of presentation techniques and narrative. How well the story attracts attention, convinces and touches audiences. Defense of your proposition and your response to critics.

All assignments and projects have to tackle all 5 qualities. Particular weight is given to the interplay between *eco-social agency* (1), the *qualities of the designed artefacts* (2) and *conceptual framing, reflection and future perspectives* (3).

Readings related to the annual topic:

(a list of reference about eco-social design will be shared during the course)

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*

Interboro (Ed.). (2017). *The arsenal of exclusion & inclusion*. Actar

Langer, A. (2005). *The importance of mediators, bridge builders, wall vaulters and frontier crossers. Una città* (Fondazione Alexander Langer)

Mezzadra, S. (2013). *Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor*. Duke University Press

Schimanski, J. (2020). *Grenzungen: Versuch zu einer Poetik der Grenze*. Turia + Kant Edition (in German)

Schimanski, J. (2017). *Glass borders*. *antiAtlas Journal*, Issue 2. Retrieved from <https://www.antiatlas-journal.net/anti-atlas/02-johann-schimanski-glass-borders/>

Staszowski, E., & Tassinari, V. (Eds.). (2021). *Designing in dark times*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Zanini, P. (2000). *Significati del confine: I limiti naturali, storici, mentali*. B. Mondadori (in Italian)