



THE EXTRA-CURRICULAR AS AN INSTITUTIONAL THIRD SPACE.

Architecture and design education
in the post Covid 19 age.

February, 2021



Take your average university day in early spring this year. Yes, it was completely different from today's. Then, university life consisted of curricular and extracurricular activities, which took place in different venues within the campus: studios, lecture halls, the library... as well as the in-between spaces such as the canteen, benches, and the many other public places we use to relax and recharge our batteries with other people. What's more, research shows that active learning occurs outside the classroom settings, in informal, ad hoc, spaces (Journal of Facilities Management, 2012).

However, with the advent of Covid 19, many of the assumed dynamics which had taken place until then, had to change and be adapted without stopping for one single day.

At IE School of Architecture and Design the adaptation was fast, and worked mostly due to the involvement of the School community: members: students, faculty, staff and alumni.

—Cristina Mateo





When speaking about design and architectural education, one often talks about **campus life**, or **studio life**, or about the unique nature of the architecture & design programs, rich discursive, collaborative, and interdisciplinary. This has been largely built upon a spatial strategy and a unique mode of interaction, based on the 24 hour culture around the **design studio**, and the design critique. A physical and at the same time, symbolic place, where students and peers spent time developing their projects, discussing with each other, in an ongoing iteration, which involved analysis, testing, refining, innovation and retesting. Indeed the design studio was open for students 24 hours a day.

In IE School of Architecture and Design, this was also complemented by the existence of the fab lab, a digital fabrication space, with a compatible timetable to undergraduate students, to allow them to experiment with ideas and prototypes, explore the possibilities of new and traditional materials, and develop a culture of **making**. If one was to talk about architectural and design education at IE University, both, the **design studio** and the **studio life**, plus the **fab lab**, were quintessential.

In addition, students enjoyed “regular” academic activities with a focus on real-world experiences. At master level, we held **lectures, workshops, seminars and discussions groups**, and of course, there were **site visits** to see real estate projects, office visits to know the backstage of projects in design and architecture, attendance to festivals and conferences (Smart Cities World Congress), which were all part of the curricular context.

Moreover, there were also, the extracurricular activities, in which both undergraduate and master students, participated. We are talking about **study trips** to Milan coinciding with il Salone del Mobile, **site visits, exhibitions, lecture series, internships...** which extended the value of the curricular, by allowing students to rub shoulders, and share their fears and anxieties with internationally recognized references, such as Kazuyo Sejima, Winy Maas, Ben Van Berkel, Jeanne Gang or Kai Uwe Bergman. Leading international professionals who regularly came to IE School of Architecture and Design, and their unique university settings, such as the IE Paper Pavilion, the only building in Spain by Pritzker winner, Shigeru Ban.

HOW WAS ALL THIS ALTERED BY COVID 19?

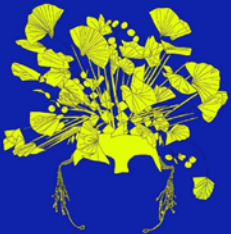
Indeed, before Covid 19, IE University students of Architecture and Design, had plenty of opportunities to collaborate, network and learn from each other and from the outside community, as the institution had a very hands on approach and the campus was heaving with curricular and extra curricular activities. However, with the advent of Covid 19, many of the assumed dynamics which had taken place until then, had to change and be adapted without stopping for one single day.

**THE ADAPTATION WAS FAST, AND WORKED MOSTLY
DUE TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
MEMBERS: STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF AND ALUMNI.**

By mid March 2020, School programs had adapted 100% to remote online access. We did this in the middle of the pandemia, confined at home, disperse and no without technological challenges. We moved most sessions from Adobe Connect to Zoom, whilst all the IE support team, faculty and students, trained and learned from each other. We had never learnt to use so many software applications to share and discuss work. In the meantime, we also identified the potential for more flexible teaching modes, in an unprecedented exercise of adaptation in times of uncertainty.

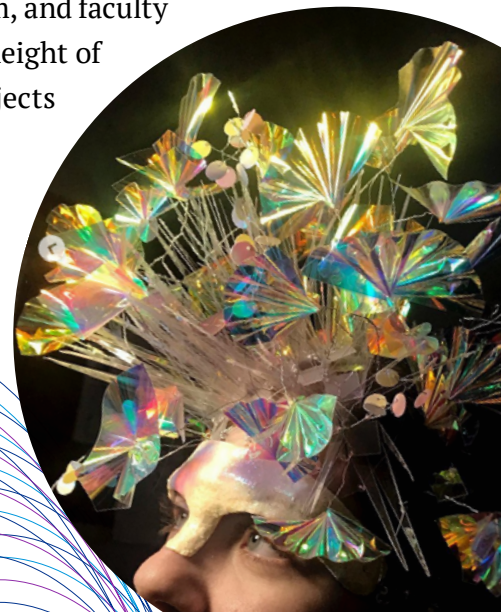
In other words, between March and July 2020 lots happened. We mixed individual and group work, to respond quickly and safely to changes, and adapted the richness and complexity of architecture and design pedagogy to the challenges of this new environment. Much of the adaptation was thanks to the input and leadership of students.

**Joints and
Articulations**



Indeed, there were many great initiatives. Design students decided to develop an entire exhibition gallery in Instagram as a way to present their projects. Instagram was natural to them, and faculty was happily surprised, as they realized that at the height of confinement, they were able to review students' projects from their own mobile phones:

www.instagram.com/jointsarticulations



Similarly, final year architecture students, presented their final projects digitally to online critics, free from the constraints of having to be physically face to face. Students did not use physical models either, since facilities such as the fab lab were closed, instead they used digital representations.

For graduate students, the link of academic content to real-world experiences was key, so they were offered virtual coffee sessions with industry experts during the month of June. Also, lectures turned into group work and tutorials, where students could benefit from a closer contact with faculty through virtual office hours. The field trips that before, had been used to illustrate real life work, were substituted by life video with professors' adding explanations and notes. In early July, we had final capstone projects, and campus was reopen with limitations, students and juries were offered to participate in whatever format they felt safer. This meant having both students and critics together in a mixed environment, some physically in the class, and others, virtually. This was the beginning of what IE called, Liquid learning.

THE EXTRACURRICULAR BECAME MUCH MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF THE CURRICULAR

During that time, we identified that the extracurricular was much more than an extension of the curricular. Thus, we used the opportunities of the **any time any** where approach to create a space for ourselves with the involvement of everyone who was part of our community, and contributed to solve the problems that were at stake with a sense of social responsibility. We felt that we needed to contribute and we did by helping with the immediate and most urgent: the coordinator of the fab lab, 3D printed mask holders in support of local hospitals in the UNESCO heritage city of Segovia, and one of the design professors developed a spatial protocol algorithm, for emergencies:

www.ie.edu/school-architecture-design/news-events/news/ie-university-professors-create-spatial-protocol-algorithm-emergency-situations/



At the same time, we contributed through a number of media articles and webinars to disseminate the crucial role of design and architecture in making our cities healthier and people less isolated and relevant. We were thinking short term and long term. Thus, we organised an international virtual conference about Actionable Science for Sustainability, another extracurricular activity of crucial importance:

ascus.metabolismofcities.org/

“I’M VERY GLAD TO BE MAKING GOOD USE OF THE SUMMER RECESS DESPITE THE DISRUPTIONS.”

Anurag Phalke,
Alumn of the
Bachelor in Design



Through the extracurricular, we started consciously building our community inwards and outwards.

Our undergraduate architecture and design students continued doing their internships in international firms (some did it in remote, others in situ), in prestigious studios and firms ranging from Miralles Tagliabue EMBT, to Vertic, or Modelical... whilst continuing their academic programs.

www.ie.edu/school-architecture-design/news-events/news/undergraduate-students-are-working-summer-2020/

We also involved thought leaders from the Media, the Industry and Academia, such as Iwan Baan, Elena Foster, Paul Priestman, Amanda Ferber... in discussions about the future of architectural education, every Friday with our Dean, through Instagram Live. People from all over the world with diverse age and professional experience, took part in the dialogues.

Besides, one of the academic directors developed a new way of continuing discussions beyond the “classroom” by delving into one design icon per week, such as the Serpentine Pavilion, or designer: Dieter Rams. Every Tuesday at 11.11’, he would do an Instagram Live for 10 to 15 min, that his students could follow if they wanted. It was not compulsory but it was relevant, it was extra curricular.

The series was called: **Spectacles.**

Ignacio Mejia



Maria Gonzalez



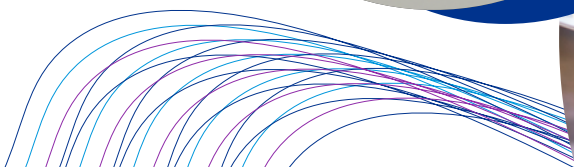
**“DEAR BERLIN,
I LOVE YOUR
CONSTANT
CONTRADICTIONS;
A DISCO IN A PHONE
BOX, A POOL IN A
RIVER OR KARAOKE
IN THE PARK,
YOU ARE UNLIKE
ANY CITY I HAVE
EVER COME TO
KNOW.”**

Danielle White,
Bachelor in
Architecture student,
and her letter to
the city of Berlin

Moreover, aware of the diverse nature of our community (we have alumni and students from 100 different nationalities), we tapped into the need for connection that the IE community felt during confinement, and asked them to write love letters about the cities they missed most whilst in isolation. The Instagram Live series, was called: **Love letters to cities**, and included read pieces, written by the their authors, students and alumni, about Buenos Aires, Berlín, Dubai, Alexandría, Bogotá and Beirut amongst others. Through the connections students and alumni felt closer to each other.

Free from the constrains of place and time, it was about sharing and exchanging ideas, and promoting a sense of belonging.

Thus, the site visits, the virtual exhibitions, the virtual coffee sessions, virtual office hours, offered by teachers, the internships and Instagram live connections, were all free from the constrains of place, and time (the extracurricular always happened before or after class). Instead, they became the pillar of our ongoing day to day, an institutional **third space** (borrowing from social theory), which conveyed the idea of safety, and at the same time, encouraged to stay in touch and exchange ideas, whilst promoting a sense of belonging to a community with whom people felt strong ties with, and felt proud of. One great example was our graduation ceremony this year, which was entirely virtual. Students listened to Inditex President, Pablo Isla and danced to Grammy nominated, Steve Aoki facilitating a much needed inter-degree and inter-campus cohesion, commonality, school spirit.



ACADEMIC YEAR 2020, NOW WHAT?

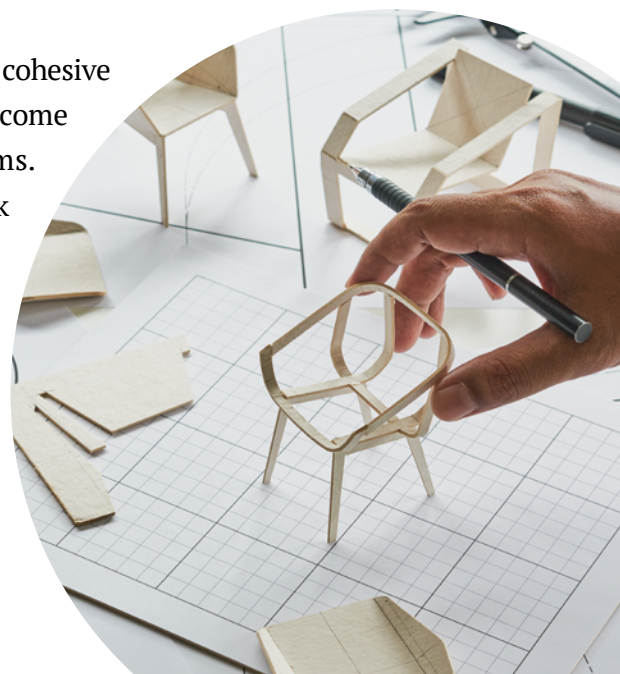
From now on what happens before, during or after the class, becomes all equally important, and starting in September 2020, there will be mix of students on-site and online. Design Studio classes will not be taking place just in the design studio, and we will use group projects to mix students on-site and online, allowing them to assume different roles, whilst being part of one project that receives feedback through different interfaces and/or different formats. The key will be to know that students need to acquire autonomy to be able to make informed decisions for their projects.

At the same time, projects will happen anytime, anywhere, and academic sessions will be comprised of synchronous on-site and remote sessions, and asynchronous learning experiences.

The learning-by-doing teaching strategy used before, will be further enhanced by the **Liquid Learning Model**. This means flexibility to build a highly personalised educational and professional journey, and above all, an ability to focus on building opportunities for people to trust and feel safe, and belong to a community.

Under this model, **visits or study trips**, will be performed virtually, having either a few students into the site, or having a collaborator within the site that can perform and record a site tour, pointing to the relevant aspects, for further student's review. This will be done with VR recording device as we will do in the Master in Real Estate Development, in the subject of Urban Development and Land Regeneration. Indeed, fostering the idea of collaboration.

Also, the **Studio Environment** can become a critical cohesive element beyond the bachelor programs, that can become a discursive opportunity for the graduate programs. Likewise, the **site visits and exhibitions**, will seek to expand academic content and create community links with outside partners, and expand academic, professional, stakeholder networks, (institutional and well as private). This will happen as well with our approach to the labs, in particular to the D Lab (the Design Lab), which has usually engaged with



City Councils and NGO's to develop projects of social interest for the local community, and also with the annual **Lecture Series**, and the more specific lectures, associated to a particular program.

All of them can benefit from the input of a network of leading professionals, not bound any longer to the place they reside. This not only will support an interdisciplinary discourse further, but will also build stronger academic, professional, and stakeholder networks. Indeed, making us build a stronger community. Indeed, this idea of a **third space** expands the role of university education, and it helps define the unique DNA of the School, through the recognition of our ability to build a resilient community, and guide us in the exchange of ideas between students, faculty, staff and alumni of the school; with those of other schools within IE; and above all, with the outside world, a diverse network / community of actors engaged in the domains of our interest, broadly speaking: design, the built environment, and the city.

IN THE POSTCOVID WORLD, OUR ROLE AS EDUCATORS WILL BE THAT OF A COMMUNITY ENABLER.



