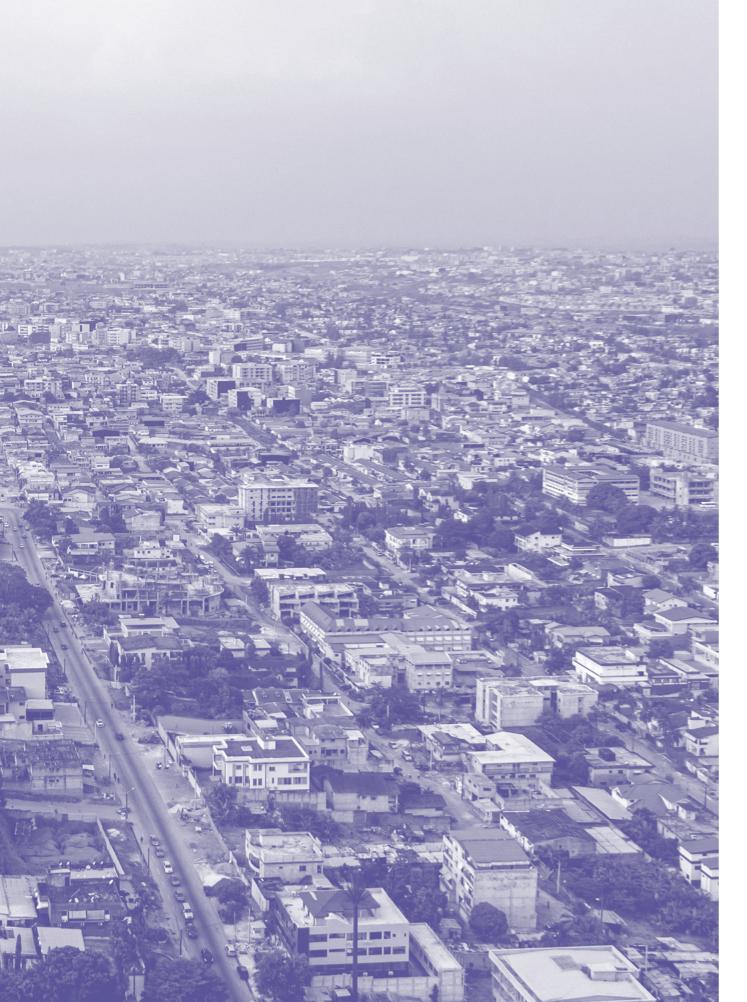


Anna Gasco

Towards ethical forms of urban practice



Thank you, esteemed guests and colleagues, for this opportunity to address you as the next Head of Urbanism at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture. It is a particular honour for me that my appointment coincides with the Academy's 115th anniversary, as it gives us all an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the Academy's tradition as an environment for encounters and exchanges; an institution that synthesises diverse frameworks of knowledge arising from the fields we teach, the insights shared by our students and faculty, as well as our diverse design, writing, production and research approaches. What is the best way to engage with a growing body of knowledge that comes from different disciplines, other modes of communication and creative activities?

The Academy has long provided a wide range of opportunities to synthesise ideas, challenge conventional boundaries and create novel solutions to complex urban challenges. Synthesising means placing separate elements together and combining them, often to make the new, the surprising and unique. And that is exactly where I believe the potential of our work as urbanists lies. The discipline of urbanism is unique in that it combines transdisciplinarity with vital imagination and speculation to try to give meaning to the Anthropocene. We synthesise knowledge from a range of otherwise often separate sectors to address the future spatial dynamics of a location and its people. In doing so, we develop frameworks that provide possibilities for new ways to inhabit the world around us. While this presents immense opportunities, it also comes with considerable responsibilities.

We are at a moment in human history, and also therefore in urban history, which urges us to develop alternative strategies to move towards a truly social and ecological future. Transition is a term that has infiltrated many spheres of human society. The ongoing critiques of traditional power structures (such as capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy) remind us how these have perpetuated inequality and discrimination on many levels (environment, race, gender). In recent years, a thorough reshaping of the Academy's curriculum has begun, with a focus on the climate and ecological crises, and encompassing a multidisciplinary approach: (R)evolution Planet. I am indeed fortunate to be able to join the conversation at this critical moment in time.

I would like to take this opportunity at the start of my term to lay out some of the priorities for urbanism. These priorities embrace the wide scope of the field and with it some of the challenges that will dominate the 21st century—from climate change to rising social inequality and the weakening of democratic institutions. My aspiration is for these priorities to be firmly established in the Academy of Architecture in the coming four years. To unpack these priorities, I'd like to walk you through my journey as a child born in the heart of Africa to the now 44-year-old woman living in one of the most developed cities in Europe. The principles of my evolving practice of urbanism are rooted in the wisdom I encountered during this journey.

Towards...

Let me start from the beginning. I grew up alternating between one of the world's fastest growing megacities—Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where we lived—and, in stark contrast, a small bucolic village in the Italian Alps, Fino del Monte, where we spent the summers. This rather dichotomous situation probably steered my fascination with urban environments, how

they are produced and by whom, and their potential to positively impact our lives. From a young age, motivated by the desire to help those suffering around me in Kinshasa, I wanted to become a doctor. However, as time passed, I realised that it wasn't just the people that displayed evident distress in the DRC, but also the environment surrounding me.

My father grew up in Lubumbashi, the main city of Katanga: Congo's mining region located along the south-eastern border with Zambia. His last job was managing an Italian company that cut precious and valuable trees from the rainforest along the Congo River, transported the large logs by barge to the company's downstream processing facilities in Kinshasa, and transformed timber of the Afromosia, Mahogany and Wenge species into parquet, before exporting these resources from the western port of Matadi to retailers and construction projects all over the world. Unlike many other foreign companies, this small Italian one did not have the financial means to bring in its own workers to the Congo, nor to build its own infrastructure to fast-track processes, which are very common practices in the resource-heavy industries of Africa. The population of the Kinshasa urban agglomeration grew from around 1 million inhabitants when I was born there in 1979 to nearly 16 million in 2023.1 While the city's central position in the African continent makes it a strategic hub, it's primarily the wealth of Congo's natural resources that has contributed to the city's significant growth.² Partly due to doubtful governance, the exploitation of these resources poses formidable issues, including severe environmental problems and social inequalities in the cities, the country and well beyond its borders.

When considering 'Geographies of Extraction', Saskia Sassen claims that we have shifted from a 'global imperialism mode to a global extracting mode, with today's leading multinational corporations focusing on the retrieval of commodities with minimal concern for the local context.⁴ These global geographies of extraction, and the industries that support them, have devastating multi-scalar impacts. As the cities in such locations formally develop, they do so—Sassen highlights—to accommodate these extraction processes, with related developments on the ground being accessible only to the wealthy few: the employees of the corporate businesses, law firms and financial institutions that enable these trades. And as the productive sites get exploited to sustain our global supply chains, their surroundings undergo deforestation, water pollution, biodiversity, topography and ecosystem destruction, causing further displacement of local communities, conflicts over land rights, and violations of labour and human rights.

When I was living in Singapore, I saw very short building lifecycles, such as 25 years for an apartment building, all in the name of constant modernisation, technological advancement and even sustainable efficiency.5 Yet, as Peter Marcuse argued already 25 years ago, the promotion of 'sustainability' may simply encourage the preservation of an unjust status quo as it 'masks very real conflicts of interest. For example, the bauxite extracted in Congo is used for the construction of 'green towers' all over the world. Charlotte Malterre Barthes similarly claims that the integrity of the sustainability narrative is disproved by today's neo-colonial modes of extraction capitalism, with the construction industry's greenwashing strategies devised to cover up ongoing devastation. More radically even, she calls for 'a global moratorium on new construction' and a shift from building anew to repurposing only existing stock until the materials and methods we use in our spatial professions are adapted.

Brussels The historical center with the complex of buildings of the European Parliament BILLIEB-BIRBI INSTE



In his latest publication, Kiel Moe questions what is involved ecologically in extracting building materials from mines, forests, and factories. He stresses that the enhancement of a particular built environment 'should be inextricable from the enhancement of its world-system and construction ecology'. He discusses how unequal ecological exchanges inherent in the building of our cities concentrate resources in certain, specific places at the cost of others, leading to processes of underdevelopment through design: robbing specific places of their natural wealth, these struggle to overcome that deficit.

As urbanists, we are responsible for the fact that cities are major contributors to global carbon emissions. As the world's urban population is likely to continue to grow, the decarbonisation of cities is therefore amongst the greatest challenges of the coming decades. Where there are challenges, there are also opportunities. We should place our hopes on the view that climate stress can be a generator, or a catalyst of a collective unanimity. We can find new ways of working together to bridge the ecologies of cities with ecologies of nature. As Bruno Latour suggests, we must find a new approach that brings us back 'down to earth'. For this, as urbanists, we must design not with nature, but for nature as the most important stakeholder of our times.

Urbanism is about environmental justice. A beautiful urban environment produced through unequal exchanges and processes of underdevelopment is no longer an acceptable reality. How can we move beyond sustainability and the status quo? How do we move away from urban design strategies that accentuate the consequence of models of continuous growth and linear ideals of temporality and progress? How do we move towards postmining? How do we embrace circularity, resilient lifecycle and degrowth as the new economy of our spatial produtions?

Having to flee Congo due to military rampages in the early 1990s left me questioning the role of power, and its impacts on the environment and populations. I ended up finishing secondary school and studying architecture in Brussels in the mid-1990s, during the last glory days of post-modernist architecture. My high school was located on the periphery of an immense construction site—a tabula rasa really—for the European Parliament.

This development is composed of two buildings linked by a bridge, which together cover the equivalent size of about nine blocks of the older urban fabric of Brussels (including some railway tracks). Inaugurated in 1993, the most famous of the two buildings is nicknamed *le Caprice des Dieux* (the Caprice of the Gods) because of its oval shape, which resembles the famous cheese box of the same name, but most of all due to the circumstances surrounding the development.

Due to weak city planning regulations, the private real estate sector has always played an unabated role in the transformation of Brussels.¹² Large sections of the city's historic fabric have been demolished to make space for high-rise commercial developments of dubious spatial quality.¹³ For historical reasons, the European institutions were not allowed to finance and own their buildings in Brussels until 1992. However, the development of the Parliament began in the mid-1980s. The solution was to involve a group of investors, led by two Belgian banks, and to use a false name: instead of building for the European Parliament, the developers and their architects branded it an 'International Conference Centre'. In 1987, the consortium obtained the planning permit and started construction. When completed, the EU rented the building and paradoxically renamed it after Altiero Spinelli, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, whose idea of European integration had had very little to do with the planning and implementation process of its Parliament in Brussels.15

A large part of the existing neighbourhood was expropriated when the Parliament was built. Many residents were evicted and those that remained were not included in the design process. The development privatised and turned a large area of the city inwards, with long opaque facades, inactive ground floors and barely any street porosity. The rich local cultural life typical of Brussels' inner-city quarters was lost right before my teenage eyes to make space for this huge postmodern complex. Costing 80% over the initially planned budget, the *Caprice des Dieux* became obsolete less than 25 years after its completion and will need to undergo a 500-million-euro renovation in the years to come. For a development that is supposed to embody the democratic functioning of the EU institutions, the disconnection of the city planners and architects from any political responsibility or discourse has left a lasting negative legacy in Brussels.

The European Parliament in Brussels is what we call an 'urban megaproject'. These have existed throughout all ages. They have been starting points for new urban settlements, a demonstration of power and strategic means of city 'rebranding'. We cannot ignore them. In 2015, I co-led a 5-year comparative research project at the ETH-Singapore Future Cities Laboratory to study the making and impact of such projects in Asia and Europe, focusing on large-scale masterplans. In our research, we called them *Grands Projets*, to accentuate the gesture of power these developments hold, a gesture inherent in the French *Grands Projets* of President Mitterrand. The aim of our research was not only to better understand the capacity of *Grands Projets* to transform, but also to improve the urban condition, adapt to change and be inclusive vis-à-vis different communities.

We found that urban megaprojects are extremely complex because, in many cases, they are the direct translation of a city's political and/or economic objectives in an urban layout. They frequently create a new image for their cities and a link to global networks tied to





the ground within their sites, which absorb large capital. But, as Christian Salewski summarised in his foreword to our research, if we consider the urban megaproject from its smallest scale—that of the users and pedestrians—it is not the plan nor the iconic large buildings that stand out, but rather the urban space itself that can embody the grand ambitions driving the project. It is with robust open space networks, careful design and programming of ground floors, and a policy of truly accessible open spaces (even if not really public) that the grand ambitions of a few can contribute to a city of the many.¹⁷

As urbanists, we must ensure the just city in which—in Susan Fainstein's terms—equity, democracy and diversity are crucial considerations. In a world that is becoming more polarised every day, such an urbanism moves to ensure a fair distribution of resources to curb social inequalities and promote access to basic services for all. It is an urbanism that embraces differences and diversity to foster social cohesion among its inhabitants, an urbanism in and through which individuals from different backgrounds and cultures can coexist harmoniously. It is an urbanism that embraces environmental justice at its core to minimize our ecological footprint and to preserve natural resources.

Urbanism is political. How can we use our political agency as urban designers to influence the production of space? How do we build a politically-engaged voice in a time of social and climate emergencies?

In 2001, I was fortunate that my architecture studies brought me to Venice for a year. Living in different locations, from a tiny island within the Venetian marshy lagoon, to the lido protecting it from the Adriatic Sea, and finally within different historical sestieri (quarters) of Venice itself, enabled me to understand that it was not so much the beautiful palazzi that interested me, but the whole system itself: how this highly planned urban environment had been developed in response to a specific context and the people who shaped it. While it was in Venice that I decided to become an urbanist, it was also there that it became clear to me that highly planned cities do not respond well to change.

After working as an architect for a few years in Brussels, I moved to London to study urbanism. Following the developer-led, laissez-faire approach to urban regeneration under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s—often fuelled by public subsidies—the 1990s initiated a restructuring of the UK policy framework towards more locally sensitive strategies that aimed to include community groups and multiple voices in urban planning and design. In London, I experienced and learned urban design as a political process and our agency within it as designers.

Working as an urban designer in London was not about the megaform, it was about listening, debating, convincing, and integrating different agendas and desires, including those of the clients, developers, city authorities, ministries and multiple consultants. But while our masterplans acted as tools in this political process, the expertise of our core discipline to project space and imagine better futures placed us—the urbanists—as one of the key stakeholders in this negotiating game. We acted as the chefs d'orchestre, guiding the different voices towards a common vision for a specific site.

My work as an urban designer in London allowed me to work on the team that developed the masterplan for the repurposing of the Olympic Park: The Legacy Masterplan Framework. Besides the complex political collaboration it involved, this project was the first of this kind that I had worked on from a spatial point of view: a large-scale urban project that would take years to be implemented. Rather than approaching the massive programme for the Legacy as a series of well-defined projects, we developed a flexible spatial framework, with a qualitative and robust open space frame, supplemented by a series of spatial strategies and layers, instead of a rigid blueprint. Many of the urban projects that have since kept me busy in practice involve spatialising something that we cannot and should not exactly predict: from rising sea levels in, for example, largely coastal countries like Vietnam, to machinelearning and its impact on urban manufacturing in high-density cities like Singapore, or questions of circularity and degrowth in low, densely-populated countries like Iceland. Each brief comes with its set of volatile parameters—including climate, technological and societal considerations.

As urbanists, we must include a high level of flexibility in our plans, so that they can adapt to change in response to environmental concerns, population growth, and changing social and economic requirements. Urban developments have long development timeframes and face evolving needs that will impact the spatial and programmatic implementation of the plans. If their spatial framework cannot integrate changes, developments will become superseded well before their implementation period is over.

The urban designer develops a set of rules and a regulatory framework to guide the long-term development of a place. This means developing complementary levels of designs that can be pursued simultaneously. On the one hand, there is the spatial framework (structural plans, masterplans) for the overarching elements of the plan. And on the other, there are the instruments like toolboxes and guidelines for specific areas. Urbanism is about

London
The Lower Lea Valley in East London with the Olympic Park





spatialising possible future scenarios within that regulatory framework.

Urbanism is about control and laissez-faire. It is about constant change, yet agency within it. Which urban design approaches endow spatial developments with greater adaptability for the future? And while this flexibility is paramount, how do you still safeguard and fix projects' essential spatial elements, qualities and identities over time?

After eight years in London, I was ready for new knowledge. In 2011, I moved to Singapore—a small city-state located on the equator in Southeast Asia, where planning processes could not be more different than in London.

With its limited size—around 728 square kilometres in 2020 including land reclamation works—Singapore is faced with many national priorities competing for land. Planning processes are therefore highly regulated, with the government consistently exerting a centralised control over the island's development and supported in this by a primarily state-owned land factor. Singapore's contemporary environment also bears the legacy of its foundation; the large spatial transformations formulated in 1971 materialised the modernist approach to urbanism common at that time: a technical engineering and one-dimensional planning of the entire island around infrastructure, segregated uses and programme zoning. Since the late 1990s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the Singapore planning authority, has been busy dealing with the shortcomings of such an approach by actively involving other dimensions in the planning of their city.

Despite these centralised and technocratic approaches to planning, upon seeing a city the size, density and reputation of Singapore, and knowing it had only developed over the last four decades, I was reminded that things are done very differently outside of Europe and that we have much to learn from them. Carrying on my work as usual was an elusive endeavour. I decided to reflect on my practice by joining the research centre of the ETH Zürich in Singapore: The Future Cities Laboratory (FCL).²¹ FCL is a transdisciplinary research centre that combines research in architecture, planning and urban design, mobility and transportation planning, sociology and psychology, landscape and ecosystems, energy systems, materials and engineering, and information technology. All groups worked on their discipline-specific research projects, but also together on transdisciplinary scenarios that linked research findings to specific places.

Together we tried to leave our disciplinary silos and work collectively. It was not easy to think in a cross-sectoral way as it meant negotiation between disciplines and across different scales. My team of urban designers was often tasked with guiding the groups in conciliating, converging and integrating their different disciplinary objectives into spatially-anchored actions for the research scenarios. Much like the political processes of the Legacy Masterplan in London, the urban projects that have since kept me busy in practice involve complex consultant teams including economists,

environment engineers, landscape architects, logistics and transport advisers. Likewise, through guest lectures, I ensure that these voices are also integrated in the design studios I have taught over the years.

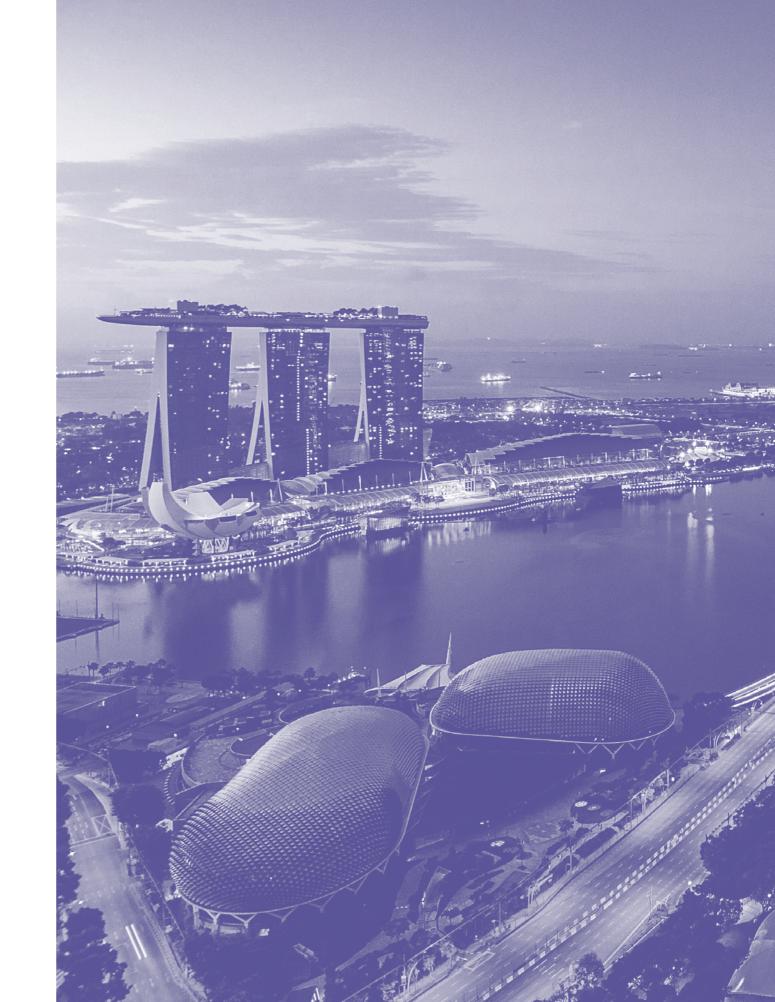
The core and strength of an urbanist's work is not only to synthesise, but also to project different disciplinary expertise into a unified urban framework. To address the complexity of urban environments, urbanism requires active integration of different bodies of knowledge in order to transcend boundaries and to imagine a better world for tomorrow.

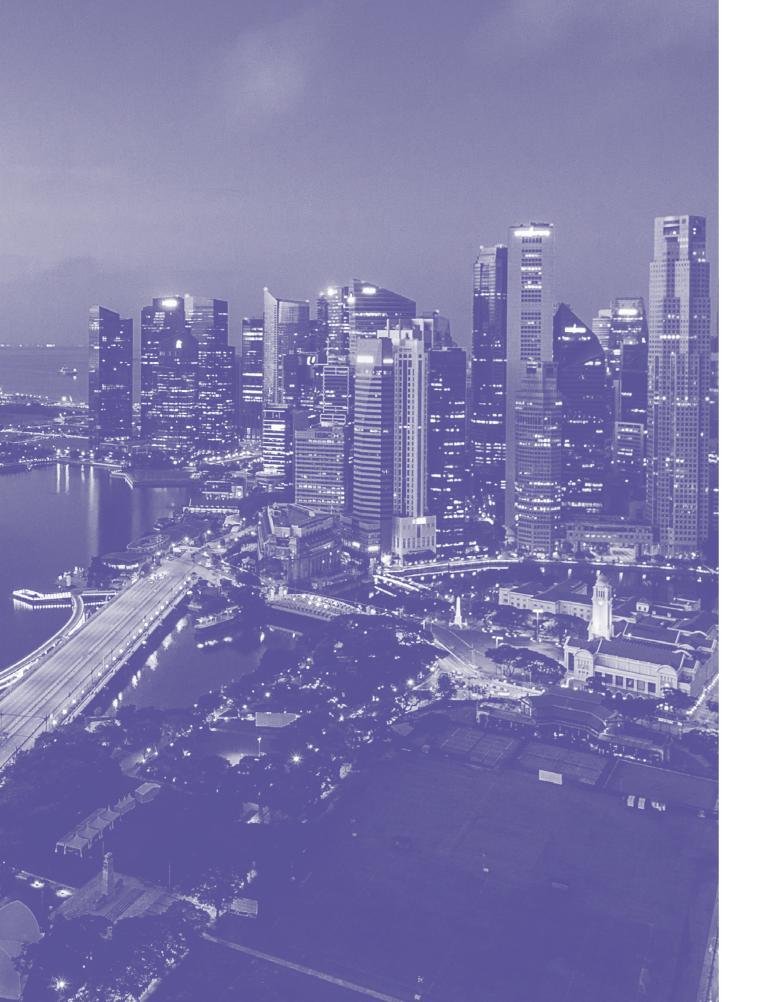
Urbanism is inherently transdisciplinary. How do we harness the core of our discipline, yet make sure we understand all layers that constitute the complex nature of urban environments? How do we determine which layers are relevant for a project? How do we develop our synthesising skills together with our best speculations to project urban spaces? How do we select team partners and ensure they trust us? How do we make these collaborations the subject of public debates as well?

To shape better urban futures, it is essential not just to consider multiple dimensions and to distil insights, but also to appreciate that everything is interconnected. An aspect of this mutual reliance is apparent in Singapore with cross-border networks. After it became an independent city state in 1965, its geographical limitations led the government to create a transborder urban region by encouraging the relocation of land and labour-intensive activities to the southern Malaysian state of Johor, located just across the northern border of Singapore, and to the Indonesian islands of the Riau Archipelago, just south of the Singapore Strait. Together, they form the trinational Singapore-Johor-Riau (SIJORI) cross-border urban region. Singapore is known as the Switzerland of Asia and is oftentimes depicted as a 'red dot' in isolation from its developing territorial neighbours. But in reality, the city state is heavily dependent on resources from Johor and the Riau (workers and 60% of daily water consumption, food, materials, space for production and tourism).

My doctoral dissertation, conducted at FCL, looked at the SIJORI cross-border region under the lenses of different aviation flows: studying cargo and tourism terrestrial networks articulated by Singapore's Changi Airport across this large territorial context, including rural, industrial and leisure areas, the provinces and the hinterlands: in other words, the 'backyards' of Singapore's shiny metropolis.²² To be honest, I was less interested in airports than in finding ways to explore how various forces and mechanisms shape our territories and how everything is interconnected. Paola Viganò, amongst others, employs the term 'territory-subject'²³ to consider

Singapore
The reclaimed Marina Bay and the Central Business District





the territory almost like an individual with its own logic and characteristics specific to a place: the history, soil, ecosystem, climate and people. The Territory is a sum of interrelated components. In a time of climate instability on a global scale, territorial specificity is key. Aglaée Degros extends this concept to the territorial transition, which she defines as a holistic understanding of space which can grant a sense of the close connections between our everyday built environment and its living systems. Given that one of the key challenges we face today is the transition from a fossil-fuel economy to a post-carbon society, she calls for fundamental changes towards large-scale decarbonising and ecological turnaround.²⁴

Currently, a hot topic in this domain—and another aspect of inter-connectivity—is the energy transition. However, much like the one-dimensional planning approach of the modernist movement, the tendency and danger are that the energy transition remains a technological question in the hands of specialists. The problem, therefore, is that the relationships between energy and ecology, and between energy and human society, tend to be obscured. But as Sven Stremke puts it, technology is only the enabler.²⁵ As is now commonly voiced, the energy transition should be as much about changing environments and mindsets, as about replacing fossil fuels with renewable forms of energy. The transition should be envisioned by integrating various (eco)systems, layers (generation, distribution, consumption, as well as governance) and scales.²⁶

As urbanists, one of our duties is to uncover territorial dependencies and their effects on the ground. This to enable coherent policies and developments surpassing localised strategies. Cities are intricate ecosystems with numerous interconnected components.

Urbanism is systemic. It is about the understanding of multiple layers, but also how these interrelate to shape a specific place. To address our contemporary urban environments, we must consider the interdependency of design across different dimensions and scales. From this holistic perspective, we might revisit familiar questions, but across a broader, even global spectrum. How will decisions made in one area impact the overall functionality and quality of life in others? How do we find the right tools to translate the systemic change into our everyday spaces?

Joining (R)evolution Planet

How will these principles influence the teaching of urbanism during my time at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture and within our (R)evolution Planet curriculum? The Academy already boasts a

strongly integrated Architecture, Urbanism and Landscape Architecture curriculum. Joining this approach, my aim is to focus on four priorities: transdisciplinarity, relevance and core, expanded awareness and international collaborations.

I would like to build on the multidisciplinary approach of the Academy by continuing to engage with multiple voices in the curriculum of urbanism, through lectures, in research exercises and in design studios. This is already done by including different professions and backgrounds. I would like to ensure that these voices are synthesised in the design studios, by allowing more fluidity through design by research. This can be done by pairing timely research exercises and case studies analysis with studio topics. Finally, I would like our students to develop the necessary negotiating skills, fundamental to any synthesis, by further pushing teamwork amongst our students of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urbanism. In this way we can transition some of our design studios from being multidisciplinary to being transdisciplinary.²⁷

As urbanists, our ability to understand all parties and synthesise their agendas in urban space is our strength. At the same time, for our students to be able to do so, I want to ensure the core and relevance of our urbanism curriculum, namely its bodies of knowledge and analytical and design methodologies. Only by mastering the core of our discipline can we stimulate dialogues that drive the necessary synthesis and changes. Therefore, I want our curriculum to follow and engage with the latest trends and topics relating to the environment, innovation and technologies. We must closely monitor new social themes as they surface around the world.

I also hope to expand our realm of influence. Urbanism operates in an expanded field, which means that we constantly move within and across different stakeholders' expertise and territories. For me, this means two things for our curriculum: broadening our awareness and, more literally, expanding our international collaborations.

The profession of urbanism deals with both nature and society and it's important that our concepts and designs reflect a proper understanding of the consequences of our work on the environment. To make our work less abstract, ²⁸ we must design and describe urbanism as processes and events that converge in a particular place but which take root and have consequences far beyond the specific locality we design. We must consider the environmental, political and social relations attached to urbanism. Otherwise, we will continue to operate outside the environmental and political dynamics of this century. Beyond the what, we must question the how and the why. This can be done by developing a strong ethic and honesty in the way we design, by mapping and communicating how our work manipulates and impacts our planet. This also means broadening our vocabulary to include terms from construction ecology, material geography and world-systems analysis.

Finally, expanding our realm of influence also means continuing to grow our international collaborations. Living in different places has taught me a great deal. Not only have I learned to observe diverse patterns of behaviour and cultures, to maintain an open mind, and be adaptable and resilient, but most importantly, it has taught me how everything is increasingly connected in our globalised world. Specificity matters of course, but we can learn much from approaches and solutions developed outside our zones of experience. I hope to bring the international network which I have developed over the years—from both academia and from industry—into our

Singapore-Johor-Riau (SIJORI) cross-border region Productive landscape in the State of Johor, Malaysia



education at the Academy. I would also like to guide the Academy in reaching out to the world through the pairing of our students and design studios with other academic institutions in different continents.

Towards ethical forms of urban practice

To end by answering the question some of you have asked me in these past few months—I do not think I have one vision for the future of urbanism and its education, because one singular vision would not do justice to the importance and breadth of our field, and its capacity to engage with what are not just some of the most urgent challenges of today, but which are some of the most complicated issues of our time.

If I had to make one statement, I would say that as urbanists, the pursuit of environmental and social justice should be our priority, now more than ever. And this will require addressing all of the relevant themes together: decarbonisation, decolonisation, climate change, societal change, demographic change, new forms of governance and explosive urbanity. I believe that we indeed can find solutions, but only collectively, that is, involving all of the different perspectives and wisdom from the diverse cultures of our increasingly interconnected world.

Under energy and material constraints, the cities of tomorrow will have to find ways to transform with utmost simplicity and minimalism. As urbanists, our mission is to guide the world towards a better future. To achieve this, we must develop a strong ethical judgment and a deep sense of empathy. Moreover, we must acknowledge our responsibility and shared contract as global citizens, towards each other and towards our delicate planet. To flourish, we must advance our field towards ethical forms of urban practice. I am honoured to be part of the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture's community. I look forward to exciting years of collective work ahead. Thank you.



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- 1 Expectations are that this number will double in the next 30 years. See: https://www.macrotrends.net. (2023).
- 2 The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is rich in natural resources including copper, cobalt, coltan [columbite-tantalum], tin, uranium, zinc, bauxite, gold and diamonds, timber and oil.
- 3 'Geographies of Extraction' are the consequence of economic and political dynamics, accentuated by design strategies. Acknowledging their impact on the Earth and populations is key to improving the current building system. See: https://urbannext.net/lexicon/geographies-of-extraction. (2023).
- 4 See: Sassen, Saskia. (2023). 'Geographies of Extraction: How Global Trade Has Impacted Urban Inequality', interview by Ibai Rigby of urbanNext. Film interview during the conference 'Decoding Asian Urbanism' held at the South Asian Institute, Harvard University. https://architizer.com/blog/inspiration/stories/saskia-sassen-geographies-of-extraction/
- 5 Singapore is often referred to as the 'Green City' or the 'City in a Garden' due to its extensive efforts to incorporate green spaces, parks and green initiatives within its urban landscape. Despite being a highly urbanized and densely populated city-state, Singapore strives to integrate greenery into its urban fabric. However, the dichotomy between these green initiatives and the growing ecological footprint of the small city-state is soaring.
- 6 See: Marcuse, Peter. (1998). 'Sustainability Is Not Enough'. Environment and Urbanization. 10(2), 103–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/095624789801000201
- 7 See: Malterre-Barthes, Charlotte. (2023). 'A Moratorium on New Construction? Beyond the Provocation: A Call for Systemic Change from Access to Housing to Construction Protocols'. Harvard University Graduate School of Design. https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2023/02/a-moratorium-on-new-construction-beyond-the-provocation-a-call-for-systemic-change-from-access-to-housing-to-construction-protocols/
- 8 See: Moe, Kiel. (2021). Unless: The Seagram Building Construction Ecology. Actar Publishers.
- 9 Moe stresses how it is not only about the resources themselves, but also about the 'Environment Load Displacement' present in construction industry such as the offshoring of the most toxic parts of our building processes in these other places and the concentration of the cleanest parts in our cities. Environmental load displacement is the process by which more developed nations outsource their undesirable industries and environmental harms to less-developed nations and further gain access to additional resources to meet their high levels of consumption.
- See: Latour, Bruno. (2018). Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime. Wiley.
 See: Emmerik, Joost. (2022). Taking Root. Amsterdam Academy of Architecture.
- 12 See: Papadopoulos, Alex G. (1996). Urban Regimes and Strategies Building Europe's Central Executive District in Brussels. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 13 The Bruxellisation is a term commonly used to indicate the demolition of large sections of the city's historic fabric to make space for the construction of often high-rise commercial developments of dubious spatial quality. See: Kapplinger, C. (1993). 'Façadisme et Bruxellisation'. Bauwelt. 84(40), 2166–2175.
- 4 See Papadopoulos op cit.
- 15 See: Fabbrini, Sebastiano. (2020). 'Whatever Happened to Supranational Architecture?'. Ardeth. (7), 85–105. https://doi.org/10.17454/ardeth07.06
- 16 See: Christiaanse, Kees, Anna Gasco, and Naomi C. Hanakata, eds. (2019). The Grand Projet: Understanding the Making and Impact of Urban Megaprojects. Nai010 Publishers.

 17 See: Salewski, Christian. (2019). 'Forewords to The Grand Projet's Book Launch at ETH Zurich'. Zurich.
- 18 See: Fainstein, Susan S. (2010). The Just City. Cornell University Press.
- 19 See: Imrie, Rob. (2009). "An Exemplar for a Sustainable World City": Progressive Urban Change and the Redevelopment of King's Cross'. In Regenerating London: Governance, Sustainability and Community in a Global City, edited by Rob Imrie, Loretta Lees, and Mike Raco, 93–111. Abingdon: Routledge.
- In Singapore urban planning is overseen by the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) through a long-term, all-encompassing, and comprehensive planning approach, which is also very forward-looking.
- 21 Established in Singapore in 2010, the Future Cities Laboratory was a joint initiative between the ETH Zürich and the Singapore National Research Foundation. It is now named Future Cities Global and extends collaborations with local universities.
- 22 See: Gasco, Anna. (2024). The Airport as Urban Territory, The Spatial Effects of Singapore's Changi Airport. Singapore: NUS Press.
- 23 See: Viganò, Paola. (2022). 'The Territory as a Subject', in Designing Landscape Architectural Education. Routledge.
- 24 See: Armengaud, Matthias, and Aglaée Degros. (2023). Towards Territorial Transition: A Plea to Large Scale Decarbonizing. Park Books.
- 25 See: Stremke, Sven, Dirk Oudes, and Paolo Picchi. (2022). The Power of Landscape. Novel Narratives to Engage with the Energy Transition. Nai010 publishers.
- In my latest research project, I began with an urban design studio at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, looking at energy landscapes through which 'the Transition' is envisioned by integrating various (eco)systems dependent not only on multiple scales and layers of energy generation, distribution, consumption, but also governance. The aims are to question the broader politics of energy, and to approach it as a vital agent producing the territory, to give it agency to shape space in a non-technocratic way and to press our responsibility and role as urbanists in the Transition.
- The difference between multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches lies in the level of integration. Multidisciplinary approaches involve parallel (vertical) contributions from different disciplines, while transdisciplinary (horizontal) approaches aim to create a synthesis of knowledge from multiple disciplines.
- 28 See: Moe, Kiel. (2020). 'A Case for a More Literal Architecture'. Metropolis. https://metropolismag.com/viewpoints/literal-architecture-kiel-moe/



Biography

Anna Gasco is an architect and urban designer with over 20 years of international experience in practice, research and teaching. After working for firms in Brussels, London, Rotterdam and Zurich, she ioined the multidisciplinary ETH-Future Cities Laboratory research centre in Singapore, before founding her Studio of Urban Planning and Living Architecture (Studio UPLA) in 2018, Committed to cultivating synergies between professional and academic worlds, Studio UPLA is a practice dedicated to design, research and education. Anna's teaching experience includes a visiting position at Harvard GSD, an adjunct assistant professorship at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and teaching at the ETH Zurich. She has also lectured at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL and for Singapore governmental agencies. As practitioner, Anna is Associate of KCAP Architects & Planners, for which she manages urban projects at multiple scales for private and public clients internationally. She is one of the lead authors of the monograph The Grand Projet (nai010, 2019), The SIJORI Cross-Border Region (ISEAS, 2016) and the author of the forthcoming The Airport as Urban Territory (NUS Press, 2024). Her work has been exhibited at the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture in Hong Kong/Shenzhen, the Boston Society of Architects, Aedes Berlin and the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). Anna was trained as an architect in Brussels and Venice, received her Master's degree in urban design from The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL in London and her PhD from the ETH Zurich. Since August 2023, she has been Head of Urbanism at the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture.

Acknowledgements

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Colophon

Richard Glass and David Keuning

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