

Unlearning to learn: contextualising architectural thinking into practice. Paraa's approach to critical design thinking & making. A case study of the Bamboo Design Build Workshop

This paper sets to argue that rethinking the architectural design process, especially when it concerns local materials and vulnerable user groups is crucial to crafting an education system that responds accordingly to its local culture and needs - through a case study of the Bamboo playground in Bosilla, Dhaka. The paper further argues for a new language and methods for design education, especially the issues of participation, that is embedded in local cultures and local needs, and stronger engagements with users and fundamentally, the need of practitioners to unlearn.

#### Further context

The 'Bamboo Design Build Workshop' project was developed to engage with the architectural potential of bamboo. Another key aspect of the workshop was to engage and work with a group of vulnerable children and to design specifically for their needs.

Paraa, in collaboration with LEEDO, a children's organisation based in Bangladesh, has been engaged directly with vulnerable urban children since 2013. Throughout the collaboration, there has been an investment in engagement and communicating directly with the children, in developing various ideas. Paraa has worked with children to map, communicate and explore how they are using small pockets of the city to play, work or rest. A change of methods for the architect was required; Paraa explored multiple aspects- through film, drawing, participatory action research, co-design, making, and play, focus groups, intimate conversations, and other creative projects ensued, the most recent of which, includes the 'Play - Garden' and the Bamboo playground.

The paper argues for unlearning a lot of the processes involved in crafting and making architecture, especially when working with vulnerable communities - and seeks for new methods and technologies to assist this. Paraa's approach, embedded within the local culture, expanding on critical pedagogy that questions the role of the architect. Especially the potential limitations of existing architectural education models that seem isolated from local culture and material technology. The theme of the workshop: Making Thinking – Crafting Education fits clearly with Paraa's ethos to push knowledge exchange methods and to develop new ways of interacting between users and designers. It further adds a dimension of localised practice - and to interrogate tools used within the domain of 'international development', such as Participatory Action Research to further appropriate and create a new language, and also to create a language of architectural design that fits better not just the context of Bangladesh, but a language devised to address the needs of a vulnerable community, namely, in this project, children of different abilities and life experiences. This critically begins to create a new way of doing architecture at the local level, whilst exploring the potential of design participation as a method at global level.

The presentation will contain a short talk (15 mins) explaining the process and context that led to the project, with a photo-diary of the design and construction process, a video clip (1 min) showing the build up of the structure, and a video presentation (3 mins) of reflections on the project by the participants and users.