CURITORIAL REPORT ON THE ULAB+ WORKSHOP HOSTED BY CUBES: HELD FROM THE 19-23 NOVEMBER 2013
The Pond at John Moffat School of Architecture and Planning, University of the Witwatersrand
Introduction

This report constitutes a summary of the planning and content of the overall workshop and curation of the various inputs into the two day colloquium held during the workshop. The report will firstly outline the background to the ULab+ network as a context to the workshop, it will then cover the planning processes and the philosophy behind the workshop. The activities of the five day workshop will be described including a summary of the key aspects of the colloquium and its outcomes. Finally, the report will reflect upon the various outcomes of the workshop and its implications for the objectives of the Erasmus Mundus ULab+ network project, as well as on the way forward in relation to the Symposium 2.

Background

The Erasmus Mundus URBAN LAB+ project is an EU funded three year project involving an international network of urban laboratories whose purpose is to research the critical questions surrounding the status and future possibilities of built environment education. The URBAN LAB+ project’s target is to open a dialogue between these various Urban Laboratories involved in the higher education sphere. The partners are from Europe and the major regions of urban growth in South Africa, Asia, and Latin America (for a strong north-south dialogue).

The Main Objectives of the project are as follows:
• promoting and enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and research in European Higher Education Institutions (EHEI) and its international partners through cooperation of urban laboratories,
• “internationalizing” the work of the participating urban laboratories to improve their professional competences to facilitate Global Education and prepare the students for their future work in today’s rapidly globalising world.

Supplementary Objectives:
• strengthening of relationships between EHEI and partners in the “Global South”,
• production of studies of scientific merit as well as practical guidelines for curriculum design,
• joint development of research, educational ideas, and hands-on activities in a thematic area that is widely considered a key challenge for contemporary urban governance and development: the issue of urban inclusion and exclusion (www.urbanlabplus.eu)

Preparation for the Johannesburg Workshop

The Urban Lab+ network project was officially initiated at a symposium held at TU Berlin from the 21 – 23 March 2013 in Berlin. At this symposium the initial urban laboratories’ working group networks (Clusters) were established as well as the themes that each would pursue. The Centre for Urbanism & Built Environment Studies (CUBES) from Wits was teamed with the Urban Research and Design Laboratory, Technische Universität Berlin (TUB) and the UCL Urban Laboratory (University College London). It was agreed that Wits, represented by CUBES, would host the first five day workshop together with our partners on the theme of ‘Practice orientation’. On the last day of the symposium the teams met for about two hours to discuss what to do in the workshop in Johannesburg.
Furthermore, it has been discussed that an intensified South-South-dialogue would be of great value and that ideally another partner from the network of the global South can join. After an initial report-back meeting at CUBES, a series of meetings were held with those CUBES members interested in being involved and organising the ULab+ workshop. CUBES decided that the workshop could useful if it was structured around it.

Rosettenville residential area which lies south of downtown Johannesburg and is further removed from the city by the M2 freeway and the gold reef mining belt, which runs east-west.
Rosettenville Studio, a funded 2-year research and teaching project in the neighbourhood of Rosettenville, Johannesburg. The first issues faced were how to structure the five day workshop and secondly how to incorporate the Rosettenville Studio into the workshop, and more specifically how to somehow involve our ULab+ partners in the Rosettenville project prior to the workshop.

As a means of addressing this issue with our partners a ‘Guideline document for the ‘Practice oriented ULab+ cluster’ was prepared in May 2013, and distributed to our cluster partners for comments. This document basically reiterated the proposed outcomes of the overall project, and more particularly the areas of focus and objectives of the ‘Practice oriented’ Cluster. The areas of focus included:

1. the use of city studios (engagement between universities and communities, for teaching, research and service to communities) in education in the built environment studies
2. how we understand, narrate and theorise urban practices in their relation to urban change (how planners, officials, politicians and other agents affect change in the city).

Out of these focus areas the following objectives were agreed upon for the first workshop:

a) strengthen the academic working relationship between UCL, TUB and Wits’ urban labs;
b) explore the theme of ‘inclusive cities’ under the sub-topic of ‘practice orientation’ within a broader city studio project, within a suburb of the City of Johannesburg, in South Africa, for the purposes of joint academic research and curriculum development.
c) Develop a comparative debate based on various experiences of city studios from both a number of South African experts and our international partners, questioning the different form and nature of ‘city studios’ (engagement between universities and communities), their respective merits and challenges).

In order to achieve the above objectives a four and a half day workshop schedule was planned. Firstly, a one day introduction to the Rosettenville project (including a morning field trip to Rosettenville) was planned as a contextual exercise for our partners. Secondly, a two day colloquium of invited guests on the broad theme of ‘City Studios – Practice Orientation’ was planned. The colloquium was seen as an opportunity to share diverse forms of participatory urban teaching programmes and to build a long-term dialogue amongst the participants around the general question of “Practice-Orientation”. As such the focus of the colloquium event was about teaching and learning through engagement with target communities, and all the issues and challenges associated thereto. Inevitably, it also provoked questions in relation to urban theory and research practice and their relationship to teaching and learning about cities.

During the first stage of our reflections (in the preparation for the Berlin Symposium) we had identified three lenses through which to look at our “practice”: the pedagogy of Studios (teaching and learning practices), our own professional practice (shaping the city) and a critical inquiry into the world of urban ‘practitioners’ (researching the politics of practice) and these generated four themes for the colloquium. These themes were sent to cluster partners as a means of inviting specific contributions and structuring the programme. At the same time, it was emphasised that the themes were interrelated and entwined with one another and contributors were invited to make connections and contributions that extended across them.

1. Assessing pedagogical outcomes
   This first theme fosters a critical reflection on the pedagogical value of the teaching and learning practise utilised in our urban laboratories when undertaking City Studios, not only for the students’ learning processes and practices but also for the teacher-students relationship and the teachers’ personal practice. By asking HOW to evaluate the actual outcomes of ‘city studios’ in an academic curriculum, we invite the participants to critically address the difficulties and limits of this demanding form of teaching. It also asks questions of: How to avoid a certain fatigue from staff and students alike; and how to insure that the specific methods used in the Lab do not overcome the intellectual/scientific exigencies of the project.
2. Shaping the City: An ethical commitment?
Pushing further the critical reflection proposed in the first theme, this second strand proposes to interrogate the ethical dimension of ‘city studios’ beyond the University. Our experience in South Africa suggests that there is a demand for academics to actively take part in urban change, but questions how to draw the line between consultancy, advocacy and activism. Are ‘city studios’ an ethical duty for academics? What responsibilities and commitments are there to communities? What tools can be used to keep participants accountable to each other, to their institutions and to society at large? In regards to the students involved, what could be the role of ‘city studios’ practice in teaching ethics? What is the level of involvement and commitment of the institutions? How are expectations managed on both sides? What timeframes and levels of commitment can be offered?

3. Navigating local politics
For an academic, being part of urban development on the ground can require stepping beyond one’s comfort zone. We generally assume that the ‘city studio’ will provide a platform of engagement with “the community” but who are “the community”? Communities are often thought of as coherent entities with a clear identity and a commonality of purpose. The reality is, however, that “communities, more often than not, are made up of an agglomeration of factions and interest groups often locked in competitive relationships” which is why ‘city studios’, in practice, often mean entering complex political games. Participants can be asked to be neutral referees or on the contrary be summoned to take a position. They can also be played like a ball when conflicts erupt. How, then, should those teaching city studios deal with local politics, both personally and institutionally? Is it our role to foster the creation of a united “community”? Can we transfer methods used in one place to another place? Should we take sides? How should we allow our work to be used?

4. From practice to theory… and back
The last theme intends to explore the dialectics between practice and theory: how can we use our experiences on the ground to elaborate general models, and how in return can these models help us to assess our current practices and to plan for future ‘city studios’? Alternatively, do we want to develop generic models? For this discussion, participants are invited to contribute to a typology of ‘city studios’ using criteria as the objectives of a specific project (concrete planning interventions, civic empowerment, students’ awareness etc.), its timeframe (long-term partnership, short-lived contribution, etc.), the tools used (generic participatory methodology, quantitative and qualitative data, ethnographic immersion, etc.) or the public involved (individual residents, local organisations, administrators, politicians, experts, etc.)

In addition to the colloquium there was some debate in CUBES around the question of what broader benefits could such a network and associated workshop bring to our student body. Given the South African legacy of Apartheid there are still many students who have not and do not have the opportunity to travel internationally and therefore get limited exposure to other academic environments or activities overseas. A suggestion was therefore made that the visiting academics from other partner universities be asked to contribute something to the broader student body. After consultations with our partners it was decided to run an afternoon workshop during which each university would present a brief workshop on some methodological approach they were currently using for the benefit of local students. Additionally, Wits students played a key role in hosting conference partners, presenting the Rosentenville Studio and in some cases participating in the conference discussions. There were numerous opportunities in tea breaks and excursions for visitors to engage with students, which conference partners greatly valued.
Summary of the Workshop

The Johannesburg workshop began with a light lunch and welcome after which groups of students presented their projects on Rosettenville to the workshop participants (see Annexure A).
The following morning a field trip was undertaken, which involved a first stop at the top of the highest building in South Africa, The Carlton Centre, for a bird’s eye view of Johannesburg and Rosettenville. Wits staff and students used this opportunity to describe the historical development of the city to visiting groups. From there the participants walked some four kilometres into the centre of Rosettenville, through the old mine tailings, gaining a sense of how the city had been shaped through the discovery and mining of gold and resources, as well as the diversity of the city’s population, shaped by successive waves of inward migration. There was a chance to get a sense of the diversity of small shops, markets and shopping centre developments in the area, as well as a lunch at a local Portuguese restaurant.

That afternoon a series of methodology workshops were facilitated by TU Berlin, UCL Urban Laboratory and KR VIA for post-graduate students at Wits. According to our student organiser Muyiwa Adegun, who co-ordinated the workshop, it was (despite a number of technical hitches), highly successful, attended by some 32 undergraduate, post-graduate and staff members (see Annexure A). The key benefits which emanated from this workshop included that some of the participants utilised the opportunity to present and discuss their own research to the workshop in order to seek solutions to the methodological challenges they faced, in a conversational atmosphere. The other benefit participants found was from the networking opportunities the workshop provided. The faculty and students of the partner Urban Labs were also very positive about the workshops which provided a flexible structure for meaningful exchange with the hosts and the other institutions alike.
Having got a fairly good physical sense of the city and Rosettenville, the two day colloquium began on the second morning.
The Colloquium

The colloquium was opened by Professor Paul Jenkins, the head of the school of Architecture and Planning (see programme and list of attendees, Annexure C).

Professor Jenkins gave a brief input on the nature of Knowledge, opening up some of the issues at the heart of the colloquium that we would return to again and again. The rest of this document outlines the content of the one and a half day colloquium. In this colloquium the core ULab+ cluster was joined by approximately 22 invited participants (see Annexure B).

According to Professor Jenkins the city can never be known in its totality, but rather we can only imagine the city, therefore we need to think about knowledges related to the city. What is really producing cities of the south are the imaginaries of households and therefore need to understand this imaginary. As such knowledge through academia is only one type of knowledge, which is abstracted from forms of reality, and has limitations. There is a need to find new ways to look at knowledge that bridges academic knowledge with other forms of knowledge. From this there are three thought provoking concepts to consider:

- Trans-disciplinary knowledge,
- A need for more critically empirically based research in cities of the South, which leads us inductively to new ways of thinking and analysing,
- Knowledge exchange being a valid activity as important as teaching in a university environment.
This presentation generated lively discussion of which the essence was whether Tanja would do anything different in the future. Her reply to this was that she would set parameters around which her and her student’s involvement / participation would be defined. Furthermore she made an important point as follows;

“What I now do, which I never did before, so much of the literature tells us that if we’re going to do this work, then the community must benefit. If they don’t then there is no point in doing this work. I now start every project and discussion that while I respect community development, I am first and foremost an educator, and my first priority is towards the educational wellbeing and social responsibility towards students. Then the NGO, intermediary would say that their priority is community development, then we discuss how we’re going to get to that. It’s the only way that I feel I’m being honest” (Winkler, 2013).
Finally, the question of power relations between the community and the university participants were raised. Tanja’s response to this was that “power like empowerment needs to be taken…and that students empower themselves by taking knowledge” (Winker, 2013). A further point was made from the audience that power relationships needs to be dealt with more rigorously in our architecture and built environment curricular to better equip our students for work with communities.

The first session began with the theme of “Assessing pedagogical outcomes”. The first presentation was on the Yeoville City Studio and was presented by Kirsten Doermann.

This was followed by Ariane Janse van Rensburg assessing the value of the Rosettenville studio. The following points came out of these sessions:

- Yeoville Studio was a studio engagement partnership between community based organisations and Wits University run from January 2010 to December 2011,
- The idea was to use the format of the urban laboratory to access, understand and (possibly) transform spaces and processes from within rather than only from the outside,
- Students spent time understanding how people lived before they started design projects, which is something that is difficult to teach,
- Numerous outputs were produced, including map restaurant guides, tenants/landlords rights booklets, exhibitions, stories of people, a book, and more,
- The outcomes of City Studios are far more than just pedagogical.
- Purpose of assessment of Rosettenville Studio is to evaluate subject learning, benefits to students and staff, and community,
- Study is in process, but will probably only be complete after completion of the Studio,
- Context of this community is very different to previous Yeoville Studio, with community structures not as established, so in–community collaborations are not so easy,
• Student assignments are gathering rich information and piecing together a great deal of contextual information, which is shared with each new class, 
• Many questions need to be answered, including what are the benefits to students, staff, and the community.

Thereafter Alexander Opper, presented the University of Johannesburg’s (UJ) Architecture Masters’ program, designed by the speaker, launched in 2011. The key points of his program included the importance of combining practice and theory in education. The program is also very collaborative, between the university, students, guest practitioners, relevant Municipal bodies, and community, and tries to ensure all parties benefit. According to Alexander, it is crucial to understand the damage that can be done when and if things go wrong, and to try to minimise that damage when engaging with communities. He sees collaborative nature of their programme as a beginnings of a research process into Studios, from students’ perspective, inspired by their own experiences. However, it raises the following questions:

• Are students sufficiently prepared for studio engagements?
• What commitments are given by all parties before the project begins?
• How are the end products of Studios used by all parties?

There was some concern from the audience that these utopian student projects seemed very naïve, and that why can’t the educators start educating students with real time projects from the start? Would that prepare students for the real world? It was questioned whether as universities they are being too ambitious in the projects they take on and the briefs they write. The UJ course has 16 weeks for the course work, of which at least three months of pre-engagement, so the question raised on the two projects was whether the project was too complex from the start?

Another respondent in the audience indicated that there is not such a thing as knowledge but knowledges, plural and that the examples poses by Alexander also supports the notion of the existence of different types of knowledge that needs to be engaged with. Another response was that the training of students in this work was maybe about restricting the field sometimes. How teachers can guide students in the right way, and how they can pick the right questions concerning the community and the neighbourhoods they are working in. According to Professor Uwe-Jens Walther, a representative of the UrbanLab+’s advisory board who participated in the meeting, academics and students have knowledge, and it is their responsibility to share it and to bring in the right role players.

The final presentation was by Julia Pelzl and Malin Praktiknjo from the Technische Universität Berlin. In it, they reflected on their experience as student participants in studio courses and introduced a survey to gather information about the studio experiences of instructors involved in UrbanLab+ they began to conduct after the symposium. In the following discussion one of the participants Anne Graupner, commented that it doesn’t matter how much time is provided, it is very complex. Was the example from UJ too big for something like a student studio? Maybe such projects require a few cohorts of students to engage in the same project over an ongoing period. According to another respondent these are big problems which are good and our students are brilliant and can cope with them. Furthermore the scale of the government’s intentions for upgrading informal settlements in South Africa is so ambitious that we HAVE to educate students and expose them to this field, there’s no choice.
The bottom line of each of these projects is that each informal settlement represents a unique condition, so the comparative teaching model is relatively useless. Despite this some of the methods and approaches that might be used in conversation and agreement pre-project, is a clear agreement of the process, the methods and the deliverables. However, because of the nature of the project of informal settlement upgrading, not being known at the beginning, and the complexities that emerge (geographical, archaeological, historical, narrative, etc.) no one can know the outcome before-hand. So here is where the university is not flexible enough as a partner, and not interested in being part of the pre and post project issues and difficulties.

The second session dealt with the theme of “Shaping the City: An Ethical commitment”. The first presentation in this session was from Dr Paola Alfaro d’Alençon and Dr Daniela Konrad, from the Urban Research and Design Laboratory, Technische Universität Berlin, and they reflected on a case study of Berlin waterfront renewal development, a studio engagement between numerous conflicting stakeholders to create dialogue. Main findings concerned the understanding of the limits of participation, and the importance for all stakeholders to understand other people’s point of view, and to really feel they are being listened to. However, power structures in politics and economics limit the scope of participation possibilities and qualities of results. As a result, they felt that it was important to reflect on and rethink planning practice and process, and to think outside of traditional planning structures. As the case of the Urban Research and Design Laboratory has shown, the university and city studios explicitly can contribute to provide adequate ground for successful cooperation formats.

The second presentation was by Ben Campkin and the UCL Urban Laboratory around re-imaginining regeneration, housing and economy in cities through practice-oriented research. They indicated that urban regeneration was a big debate at present in London and that possibly inappropriate terms were being utilised in the discourse with certain imagineries and terminologies used by professionals alienating communities. The presenters proposed that we need to attend to re-imagine cities in various ways. Ben Campkin argued that the history of these contested areas, and their earlier urbanization, need to be more deeply considered to better understand context of place and communities.
David Roberts, a UCL doctoral candidate, called for a reimagining of policy terms, a need to re-habit utopian histories and reuse modes of representation in a productive manner based on his long-term collaborative research with the residents of the Haggerston Estate in East London. Myfanwy Taylor, also a doctoral research student, reflected on the diversity of London’s economies and explored how rethinking urban economies as diverse could provide a starting point for more inclusive urban development strategies. Her work highlighted the importance of collaborative research with local communities for both ethical and analytical reasons.

The third presentation was by Chloe Buire, from CUBES, who gave a presentation about the ethical challenges of practise oriented research in a non-democratic society. Here presentation was based on a 24 hour student design competition in Luanda during which the students had little to no interaction with the space, the people, or the lecturers, so the context was almost non-existent in design outputs. This competition was undertaken within Angola which has a very censored political climate, so architectural education is different to most places. However, the positive aspects of the event were that it is the only forum in Angola where different universities can meet, exposing students and lecturers to opportunities to learn outside their usual contexts. Given the circumstances of planning education in Angola, she reflected whether we need an urban lab to have an ethical duty towards the city that we live in? According to her “If we don’t understand the real impacts on the people we are working with, then we need to find someone who does to work with, and then be prepared to deal with whatever can of worms opens up, not just stick to educational courses and subjects. Ultimately she argues that academics need to be committed, even though they are not necessarily activists, but all people have a responsibility to people.

The final presentation in this session was given by Jennifer van den Bussche, an independent consultant, who presented on ‘Should we be educating students ‘in’ communities?’ Jennifer’s main points (based on a four year community infrastructure maintenance project entitled WASSUP) were, that if we don’t understand the real impacts on the people we are working with, then we should find someone who does to work with. Secondly, we should be prepared to deal with whatever can of worms opens up, not just stick to educational courses and subjects. Thirdly, we should be committed as academics are not necessarily activists, but all people have a responsibility to people.

In response to questions in this session, Jennifer van den Bussche indicated that many mistakes were made in the first seven years of the WASSUP project and that she was upfront with people in Diepsloot from the start. She indicated to the community that she had very little experience, and worked collaboratively with them on what to do, how to do it, and it ended up being a joint learning process.

Paula D’Alencon raised the issue of shared sensitive data and the need to prepare students for it, for example how to behave. Also she raised the issue of raised expectations, because when you work with different stakeholders they also believe that you can help to overcome complicated situations or shortcomings from the administration, and shortcomings of their own situation. She indicated that it was important to agree with the people you are working with, that we don’t know more than them, and we will learn from each other. It’s very important that there’s not this belief that they have a problem and we have a solution, and that it’s a process that we learn from each other.

Ben Campkin of UCL referred to a protocol drawing out lessons on how to make university-community research collaborations work, produced by the London-wide network of community groups, Just Space. This document suggests how students should prepare before they approach community members, how they should engage, how they should follow up afterwards, and develop longer term relationships (available to download on the Just Space website at http://justspace.org.uk/links/universities/ as well as http://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/research/urban-pamphleteer).
Chloe Buire raised the issue of peoples’ expectations that academics have the solutions to their problems. So while agreeing on the ‘no we don’t have a solution’, approach she supports the notion of being careful about how one behaves, and the ethics of one’s own position as an academic researcher, educator, activist. Therefore she thinks that we should use the word educator and not teacher because we don’t want to limit education to the university. However, Jennifer responded by saying that raising expectations is always an issue, but people are also not silly. What is important is being more open and honest about what you are doing, what are your goals, and what you are trying to achieve and what YOU want from someone else. People are not silly, they understand.

Daniela Konrad responded by saying that in Berlin they understand their role as mediators as well as lecturers, for example when they start working with a community, everyone needs to be aware that they all need to have a notion of responsibility, otherwise working together is not possible. Myfanwy Taylor further responded that Nkosilenihe Mavuso’s question about who takes ultimate responsibility from the university’s side was a really good starting point because we are asking students to do really difficult things. It was important to acknowledge this explicitly with students - the problems are difficult, the solutions are not there and urban theory does not presently provide us with much help in terms of how to do this sort of work. To pick up this question of ethics, we try to explore how we’re relating to people and issues, and what is your role in relation to others.

This raised another question, is it the function of the university to find solutions, or is it their function to enable students to find solutions? There is a big difference. Also what is the responsibility of the university? Ben Campkin commented that one of the interesting things coming out of this colloquium is around the lines of activism and research, and where individual institutions draw their boundaries. The third theme of the colloquium covered, “Navigating local politics”. The first presenter under this theme was Mpho Matsipa from CUBES, who spoke about a studio that engaged with Bree Street in the inner City Johannesburg. The studio looked at crucial linkages between formal and informal trade, zooming in on individuals, then zooming out to look at linkages. From that studio she argued that the active city is a very complex geography, and people, including students, who engage it need to come to terms with their own position within that geography.

The second speaker was Thiresh Govender, an architectural consultant, and he describes Johannesburg as beautiful, chaotic, and harsh; full of innovation and survivalism, and describes his readings of it, and consequences for creative practitioners. In doing so he described spaces such as shebeens as innovative and adaptable spaces, and that the informal structure and spatial arrangements of such things are sources for inspiration. As a practitioner navigating between clients and users one had to be observant of how people use space. His manifesto: “observe critically, provoke and imagine, act on what you see, and become creative brokers of space”.

The third presenter was Professor Aneerudha Paul from KR VIA, who spoke about the ideas of slum eradication and glamorous development visions in Mumbai from government and media that produce cynicism and ambivalence in citizens. He provided examples of student projects and public engagements in Mumbai, that were used to question approaches taken by the local government and private developers to various developments. Finally, he maintained that students need a more sensory approach to architectural and urban education, which requires methods used from first year,

The fourth presenter in this theme was Monica Albonica, an urban practitioner, whose engagements with the people using the inner City of Johannesburg has been a long term process, with gradual positive change becoming visible. She described recent events in the inner city of Johannesburg where The City of Johannesburg destroyed 20 years of engagement and development, to evict thousands of traders within a handful of weeks. She maintained that it has become evident that the City lacks the resources and an ability to get different departments to engage with each other.
Three key questions arose from the presentation:

• How do we reinstall simple rules and real purpose into urban planning?
• How do we move from rigid determinism to truly responsive environments?
• How do we change our civic and professional mind-sets from 'command and control' to that of enabling leadership?

The final presentation within this theme was from Andrew Harris, Laura Hirst and Myfanwy Taylor. They provided accounts of some of the practical and intellectual learning experiences, as well as difficulties and dilemmas, raised by practice-led teaching on Masters courses run at UCL across the Urban Laboratory, Development Planning Unit (DPU), Department of Geography and the Bartlett School of Planning that in different ways were practice-oriented. Laura presented on the action learning platform that comprises part of the MSc Social Development at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit at UCL. The course takes a critical approach to ‘people-centered’ development, addressing the challenges for promoting wellbeing and equitable citizenship in the context of social diversity and globalisation. The course attempts to promote student fieldwork (in London and Kenya) as a micro-development project with a strategic purpose, to contest exclusionary relations and decision making processes in relation to the production of the built environment.

Space is facilitated where students can learn from local communities to address the learning objectives of the module as well as generating knowledge through collaborative relationships with the community which can be used by organisations to enhance their bargaining power. Andrew Harris spoke about a module called ‘Urban Practices’ for the MSc Urban Studies that explores and experiments with multiple ways in which urban issues, problems and experiences are identified and addressed in practice. While Myfanwy Taylor detailed some of the innovative teaching models used in ‘Community Participation in City Strategies’ that develop participatory and community-based research through analyzing the London Plan process. Myfanwy introduced an MSc option, ‘Community Participation in City Strategies’, available to planning, geography and urban studies students at UCL, highlighting the values and outcomes of its collaborative approach. The course builds on existing relationships between UCL staff and students in supporting the Just Space network’s efforts to increase community participation in planning, particularly at the city-wide level. Myfanwy described some of the ways in which the course aimed to value communities knowledge and experience; to produce work which has value to both communities and students; and to teach students some of the skills of collaborative research and practice.

During question time Mpho raised the potential problem of publishing research which might be utilised in the wrong manner by authorities against people been researched. Ideally, what academics can offer, especially in the context of the informal traders, is information, knowledge, and another pair of eyes and hands to explore opportunities of what the City can offer. She further argued that a lot of the urban literature that she looked at when first starting was about making the invisible visible, but she now thinks to a certain degree there’s a naivety in that. For her it’s important to recognise the necessity of opacity in conditions where street traders are incredibly vulnerable and their ability to function in the city is very much dependant on people not knowing exactly what they’re doing. This was a key point that came up again later in the discussions.

Another question raised by Daniela is what is it we can actually achieve with city studios within this whole discussion about power, for example that knowledge provides power and that, that power can be used detrimentally in some contexts. According to Monica Albonica trust can get built because of long periods of engagement, however, it takes different forms at different stages, and you have to be very sensitive in how you position yourself, and introduce a new group of students or academics or whoever, into that kind of dynamics.
From the context of Mumbai, the importance of the city studio is to create clear alternatives to dominant imaginations of development, which have already embedded so strongly. In Mumbai, the judiciary and local government all believe that this kind of development is good, they will say that we are just opposing their project. But the fact that there are different alternatives that are beneficial for the community and other stakeholders, who are marginalised, seems not to come into the conversation. So for us it is to present alternatives.

The fourth and final theme addressed was, “From practise to theory…and back”. The first speaker in this session was Professor Natasha Erlank, a historian, who presented on a project based in Sophiatown, Johannesburg, a site of forced removals in 1955 under the apartheid state. According to her the initial project aims were forgotten through the process of engagement, which ended up being beneficial for outcomes, which became more and more about what residents were interested in. This project tried to challenge the gaps between academic practice and the daily lives of people. However, it was difficult to work in one neighbourhood, borders are often blurred. The project tried to have some sort of longer term impact, and some elements were successful. The challenges were retaining participation, how to engage people's imagination, and how to make a project insert itself into the neighbourhood.

The speaker concluded that this sort of project requires building up relationships, and that she would be hesitant to involve undergraduate, or even postgraduate students in these sorts of projects. The second speaker, Anne Graupner, presented from an architect practitioner’s point of view. According to her housing is in short supply in South Africa, with a government rolling out inappropriate one size fits all. When doing projects that address problems like these, it's important to find methods to share the knowledge learnt. Projects with students in communities need to be careful about the damage that can be caused, and to manage expectations. Once students have left the project, it's often that the organiser and teachers carry on their engagements. There is never enough time in such projects to pre-engage and grasp the complexity, or to post-engage.
The third presenter Hannah LeRoux, maintained that Kwathema, a mining and industrial township, has been a focus of the speaker for many years, due to its modernist beginnings. A number of different research and student projects has been based in Kwathema, working closely with local people and organisations, some organisations were formed out of projects. Considering the previous spatial expression, there is huge potential for radical reconfiguration of urban environment, and construction of new assertive open spaces, particularly in the old buffer zones, can create a sense of place and new neighbourhoods.

The fourth speaker was Monty Narsoo, a representative from NUSP, the National informal settlement Upgrading Support Programme. He maintained that increasing informal settlements, service delivery protests, and a giant housing backlog has put South Africa into a crisis. NUSP provides assistance for the implementation of new participatory upgrading programmes, to Municipalities, Councillors, Community members, and professionals. An issue they experience is that Professionals winning tenders tend to be engineers, and the social component is often a crude add on. South Africa has very little experience with socio-technical issues, and there is a need to build up experience and frameworks. There is resistance from government sectors to work with community outside the government structures. Going to scale is an issue, good participation takes time, yet sometimes it’s necessary to speed up implementation. Who chooses the project, the leader or the community?

In the follow-up discussions, Ben Campkin raised the question of how different modes of engagement work across these different constituencies, and methodologies work across or transform between student groups, community groups, practitioner groups. The terms that were used shift in different contexts. A key idea that struck him was the need for clarity of position; but with self-reflexivity to allow the researcher or person developing the methodology in all of these contexts to combine strength and clarity of position with humility and flexibility. He maintained that there was a need to constantly challenge the professional inculturation that happens in universities and is reinforced in practice. He noted that ‘time’ had been a central theme in many of the talks. For example there had been a call for slow practice, as well as the need for longitudinal investment in engaging deeply over a very long period of time.
He also found interesting the relationship between teaching and activism, the different speeds at which activism and research and teaching might work, and how those might conflict or synchronise at different moments. There was the theme of story-telling too, and the narrative sequence, with built environment teachers and practitioners being responsible for drawing out thoughtful narratives. He also highlighted the pressured time of the neo-liberal educational context and the pressured time of practice within rapid urbanisation.

According to Professor Uwe-Jens Walther, the first big issue is to bring society back into universities and creating a dynamic, the second issue is bringing society back into the political sphere, which is a challenge of governance and what they should/ could/ must be in planning and architecture. Mpho Matsipa raised a pertinent point about the way that urban labs work. Firstly, with regard to the emphasis on community engagement and the disarticulation of that work with where the decisions are being made, and secondly, how to think about building strategic relationships and modes of engagement with a state that has agency, a lot of power and capacity.

She asked whether there is any possibility of being effective in that space and finding modes of engagement so that our conversations are not conversations amongst ourselves, but actually have implications about somebody other than ourselves. Another point made by Nabeel Essa is that “one needs to be pragmatic with imagination. Being a designer is about multiple levels, you never do any one thing with one driving focus, and to be a good designer you need to be both pragmatic and imaginative. So you shouldn’t let either go”. According to Monty Narsoo he feels that urban laboratories or studios enable some people the space where they could think about things where people get inspired to think out of the box.
Professor Uwe-Jens Walther asking a question

Mr Nabeel Essa during his presentation
Overall Colloquium Conclusions

Dr Sophie Oldfield (University of Cape Town) undertook the summation of the two day colloquium and made many insightful points. Some of the main points are summarised as follows:

From her observations it was clear that this field is complex and “messy” and contains many different practices, trying to achieve a range of visions, for a variety of reasons. Furthermore she observed that although the colloquium was organised according to four topics, mentioned earlier in the report, aspects of each theme came through in all sessions / presentations because all are part of practice and the work that it entails.

Most of the reasons for the multiple practices entail a range of mechanisms to try and “disrupt or reshape policy”. In undertaking these tasks there is a need to develop a new language or vocabulary that embraces the sensibilities of the various dichotomies at play, the complexities, the murkiness as well as the many practises used when academics or professionals engage with communities. Another theme she identified through the colloquium is that of multiple knowledges and expertise in both the production and learning of the knowledge, where “nobody is the expert”.

One of the major consistent points made in the colloquium is the importance of context and its impacts on what we know or don’t know, or what we can or cannot translate or can or cannot experience or understand. Linked to this is the importance of history and how it may shape the way we think about the project of learning and this sort of work. Another inherent tension or integration, is politics, which is at the heart of this sort of work and negotiation. Thinking about it, researching it, and writing it, is a really productive way forward. Finally a significant point made by Sophie Oldfield was that there is a potential to turn many of the outcomes of the workshop into research questions in the future.
An interesting response from someone in the audience to Sophie Oldfield’s summation was Edward Soja’s idea of third space, that the negotiation between the university and the community might create the third space, that when these two entities come together, something new emerges rather than it having a kind of polarity between the two there is something new. They further suggested that there was now an opportunity for us to find these new entities or phenomena that emerge, because of the tension between these two phenomena.

Reflections on the Workshop

On the final day of the workshop Garth Klein presented ideas on what he thought were the significant outcomes of the colloquium for pedagogic purposes and Professor Uwe Jens Walther gave his reflections of the entire workshop with regards to the aims of the ULab+ project.

Garth’s reflections started with reflecting on some of the key themes he identified throughout the colloquium and these included the following: The use of different terminologies in trying to describe the community type engagements that urban laboratories do, which is not a problem, we just need to be aware of it. Secondly, the different approaches to our work in terms of horizontal or vertical based learning, differing time frames, university or community led; differing types of engagement with communities. He concludes by saying there appears to be no generic formulae rather Lindblom’s approach of “muddling through”. He then identified some key concepts discussed, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, participatory action research, collaborative methods and specific methods determined by role players and project contextual issues. Another key concept he identified was the range of knowledges including: experiential learning; engaged scholarship; protective knowledge; community knowledge; expertise; collective knowledge and conflicting knowledges.
Based on the above Garth then set out some implications for the various stakeholders, pedagogy. For academics he sees urban laboratories as opportunities for universities to be responsive to their context and to undertake “socially proactive knowledge exchange” which is more than mere outreach. For academics it is an opportunity to introduce students to ‘wicked problems’. In so doing academics should be reflective practitioners. For students he sees urban laboratories as opportunities to challenge stereotypes; engage with “real world issues”; get them experience of the real ethical issues faced by practitioners including power issues. For communities opportunities could include empowerment; sharing of knowledge; mutual learning; reciprocity and technical skills. With respect to the state/city administration, urban laboratories could assist them to shift policies, through reinterpretation of circumstances, through the production of new knowledge.

Garth concluded by suggesting we revisit and reassess ideas around: projects/studios; knowledge(s); communication; innovation; community and learning. In his reflection Dr Uwe-Jens Walther (see full contribution in Annexure D) narrowed down the terrain to 4-5 concepts that are key elements of academic work, namely:

1. Project/Studio
2. Knowledge(s)
3. Communication
4. Community
5. Project

“A project has a definite timeline (a beginning and an end), an agenda (it has an objective and means how to achieve it within a given timeframe), a well-chosen number of strategic actors will be involved. Also, conflicts are kept to a minimum so as not to torpedo the expected results. Given the above he then asks why revisit or even question such a well-worn format? He maintains that it is not in spite, but because it is so near to us that we forget about all sorts of ramifications and implications that are part and parcel of it. He then went on to explain his answer by using examples given during the colloquium of the project mode being in conflict with reality modes. Some of these examples included the lack of personal continuity in projects due to financial or term period constraints or when community's day to day projects (such as caring for a sick parent etc.) clash with project formats. Therefore possible incompatibilities need to be made clear from the start of any project.

On knowledges Uwe reflected on three issues: plural, production and responsibility/selectivity. With regards to plural Uwe referred to interdisciplinarity, applying the appropriate disciplines to a task when required. Secondly, he suggested knowledge is mainly about producing it, through many actors and mediums. Finally he maintained that it is the responsibility of the academic to frame the theme, set the agenda for students. On the subject of communication Uwe maintained that “counter to intuitive and cherished belief” it is about misunderstanding each other, which is he sees as a positive as once all the misunderstandings have been worked through the communication is more robust.

Uwe addressed the issue of communities by reminding the audience that social science research attempts over the past 30 years “to tie down bonds to larger social groupings in a particular spatial area” has proved to be a futile exercise. Rather he maintained that most often communities depend on the “bridging and bonding capital” of a few individuals within the community, and should not be assumed beforehand.
Conclusion

This draft report constitutes the curatorial report, agreed upon in the last session of the Johannesburg workshop as one of the ways forward in capturing the proceedings and contents of the four day workshop. As a first draft it is now available for any amendments or additions by broader membership of the ‘Practice Oriented Cluster’ members.

It is envisaged that this report could be used by members of the ‘Practice Oriented Cluster’ as a basis for any further work on the aforementioned theme. This could include, academic research reports or papers, presentations to the other ULab+ clusters. To this end all the full transcripts of the contributions referred to in this report are available on the cluster drop-box.

ANNEXURE A

REPORT ON RESEARCH SKILLS WORKSHOP FORMING PART OF THE ULAB+ COLLOQUIUM/ JOHANNESBURG CLUSTER MEETING 2013

1.0 Introduction

As part of the Urban Lab+ Johannesburg Cluster meeting/Colloquium, the Centre for Urbanism & Built Environment Studies (CUBES) at Wits University’s School of Architecture and Planning hosted a research skills workshop. This was made open to interested staff/students from within and outside the university. The workshop sessions were handled by resource persons who are also Urban Lab+ partners and international participants of the week-long Johannesburg cluster meeting. The workshop was held in the afternoon (14:00) of Wednesday 20 November 2013 at the John Moffat Building, East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
2.0 Invitation Dissemination

Invitation to the workshop was disseminated through the postgraduate students' weekly lunchbox seminar mailing list, which contains over 350 contacts. Anisa Desai assisted in this regard and also sent out a reminder through the same list a few days to the workshop. Maria Badir of the School's administrative office also disseminated the invitation to all academic staff. The intention was that the staff members would encourage students who can benefit from the workshop to attend. Prospective participants were required to pre-register.

3.0 Booking/Attendance

In response to the disseminated invitation, 30 persons booked to attend the workshop. In all, 39 persons participated in the workshop. Of these 22 were Wits undergraduate/postgraduate students, staff (lecturers/researchers) and post-doctoral fellows. Six participants came from outside Wits, 4 were part of the ULab+ team (but not workshop facilitators) while 7 of the ULab+ team were facilitators. A breakdown of the attendance is shown in the appendix.

4.0 Programme

* The enormous support from Wits University ULab+ partners/CUBES members is acknowledged.
* The international partner urban labs were positive about the experience of running the workshops which were felt to provide a useful informal-yet-structured environment for exchange. The workshops helped to facilitate discussion and comparison around common questions being addressed in different cultural/geographical contexts.

Although starting late, after a relatively short plenary, the workshop broke into four themes/sections held in four venues within the John Moffat Building. Each theme was repeated in two sessions which lasted from 45-75 minutes each. The two sessions were interspersed by a short tea break. It implied that each participant had the opportunity to participate in two themes. The Table below shows the topics, venue and facilitator(s) for each theme.

**Topic, Venue, Facilitator(s)**

1. The Use of Open Source GIS to create public databases Room A5, Johan Moffat Basement Aneerudda Paul (KRVIA)

2. Ways of Seeing in Urban Practice and Research – A workshop on the critical and ethical uses of images Lecture Room A3, Johan Moffat Ground Floor Ben Campkin and David Roberts (UCL Urban Laboratory)


4. Case Studies: Comparative Framework and Research Design Lecture Room A2, John Moffat Ground Floor Andrew Harris (UCL)
5.0 Participants' Reflection

Attempt to interact with the participants and informally elicit feedback on the workshop was made. Only a few of the participants could be reached within the limited time available. From the few, it was realised that;
* The participants utilised the opportunity to present their research and seek solutions to the methodological challenges involved in a conversational atmosphere.
* Time available for some of the sessions was short.
* The participants utilised the opportunity for networking and welcomed future events like it

6.0 General Comments/Observations

* The workshop had no pre-planned programme. This evoked some anxiety in the organiser and disallowed the opportunity to communicate the programme’s details to the prospective participants.
* Since there was no specific programme, the venue and facility preparation turned out to be inadequate when the workshop started. Contingency arrangement saved the day.
* The workshop started behind schedule. The event preceding it within the week-long cluster meeting ended later than scheduled and spilled into the workshop time.
* The workshop/cluster meeting happened when the university was not in session. This most probably affected the attendance negatively as students were officially on holiday.
* The enormous support from Wits University ULab+ partners/CUBES members is acknowledged.
* The international partner urban labs were positive about the experience of running the workshops which were felt to provide a useful informal-yet-structured environment for exchange. The workshops helped to facilitate discussion and comparison around common questions being addressed in different cultural/geographical contexts.