

Teaching Circular Architecture On-site: The Land of a Thousand Dances

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Abstract:

The Land of a Thousand Dances is an interdisciplinary one-week workshop for architecture, civil engineering, and environmental sciences students at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). The course proposes to study design through maintenance, by following the evolution of a timber pavilion built by EPFL first year architecture students in Evian, close to the Grange au Lac concert hall realized by Patrick Bouchain, in 2019. During the first edition, in 2021, the pavilion was redesigned to be considered as a public garden. During the second edition, in 2022, the pavilion was dismantled and some parts have been reused on the EPFL campus while maintaining its original purpose as a sociable public space. For five intensive days, teachers and students will work together on-site to take care of the site and the structure. First, the site's current condition and needs will be identified and traced to establish the framework of the intervention. Participants will form a hypotheses formulated by observing site uses, time, climate, and gravity on the existing structure. Next, the participants will select parts of interest in the greater site and investigate potential reconfigurations and adjustments. Finally, parts of the structure identified as in need of maintenance and evolution will be carefully disassembled and reworked. A precise documentation of the interventions will be collected, in order to pass the knowledge and the memory of the place to the team who will succeed. The two previous editions of the workshop have highlighted a few key findings. First, working on-site allows several back-and-forths between observation, measurement, and re-action in a productive and inventive exchange. It empowers students, making them responsible to develop a project they can realize by themselves, adapted to the site, the users and their uses. Second, working with a multidisciplinary team of participants is a stimulator for integrating social and environmental considerations. It allows the development of interventions that do not rely solely on construction but also on actions, such as gardening or mobilizing users and decision-makers. Third, continuing yearly the same project anchors it in a long time frame. This creates the necessary setting for the participants to perceive the act of care and maintenance as an act of design.

Keywords:

Interdisciplinary teaching, circular construction, reuse, repurpose, materiality, on-site, care, maintenance