PUBLIC DESIGN SUPPORT ST. PAULI
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4TH ISTANBUL DESIGN BIENNIAL, A SCHOOL OF SCHOOLS
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A new, socially and politically engaged design practice can only be built from the clients' perspective – and only if we look for alternative clients who represent the local community and its needs.

Since 2011, the Studio Experimental Design at the HFBK Hamburg offers support to people in the neighborhood of St. Pauli and elsewhere in the city who, for economic or socio-cultural reasons, do not have access or are prevented from wielding the agency of design. For the past ten years, we have hosted open Public Design Support sessions every Wednesdays from 6–7 pm in a storefront space of GWA St. Pauli, a social association that has been doing community work there for decades. In these weekly consultation hours, students pick up requests from local residents and work together with them to address the everyday problems they bring. Public Design Support has worked for a pub in trouble, solved a single mother's storage space problem, co-developed a semi-public dye garden, dramatized a demonstration by refugees, redesigned a drug counseling center, erected a memorial for relatives of concentration camp prisoners, supported rent protests, designed a cozy tutoring room, installed a loft bed with a cat tree, helped move a non-profit counseling center for refugees, renovated a broken trailer, stretched a tent across an apple meadow, laid bricks for a group barbecue, transformed an undemocratic classroom, and more.

In recent years, St. Pauli has undergone unpreceded change, from which its local population has been largely excluded or negatively affected. At the beginning of the 2000s, St. Pauli was the poorest neighborhood in West Germany and characterized by a culture of solidarity between former harbor workers, immigrants, and diverse subcultures from the Hafenstrasse squatting struggles to the Reeperbahn red light district. Recently, however, St. Pauli has become the most expensive district in Hamburg for new rentals and an unmistakable displacement has and continues to take place. Public Design Support intends to intervene within the context of these urban processes and to counteract the powerlessness and dependence people often experience within exclusionary urban development policies. Yet most residents of working-class neighborhoods and others affected by gentrification would typically be unable to afford design, not to mention even think of laying claim to its agency. As a clearly partisan practice, we work with those who are not only excluded from urban development but also from design itself. Public Design Support advocates for the "Right to Design," which regards design as a fundamental human act and undisciplinary practice by which people can improve their material conditions and social well-being, and represent their claims as citizens.

JESKO FEZER works as a designer. In various collaborations, he engages practically and theoretically with the social and political relevance of design. In cooperation with ifau he realizes architecture projects, he is co-founder of the bookstore Pro qm in Berlin and part of the exhibition design studio Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik. He is co-editor of the Bauwelt Fundamente series and Studienhefte für problemorientiertes Design. Jesko Fezer is professor for experimental design at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts and has been running the student-led Public Design Support programm since 2011. Latest publication: Jesko Fezer: Umstrittene Methoden. Architekturdiskurse der Verwissenschaftlichung, Politisierung und Mitbestimmung in den 1960er Jahren, Adocs Hamburg 2022.

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4TH ISTANBUL DESIGN BIENNIAL, A SCHOOL OF SCHOOLS – A WEB OF PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIMENTS WHERE EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHERE IS SCHOOL

Vera Sacchetti

Taking place over three months in the course of 2018, the 4th Istanbul Design Biennial, A School of Schools, started from the observation that while the design discipline has deeply transformed in the last century, design education has mostly remained the same, stuck to models that date back to the Bauhaus' curriculum. The biennial thus aimed to go beyond the traditional spaces and framework of design education, with a curatorial strategy combining an attitude of critical reflection towards the past and present of design education, while appreciating the singular contexts and spaces in which it happens. We sought to transcend the traditional spaces of design education and explored design practices that have learning at their core.

"The biennial began as an open call for new projects; some 120 are included. The themes that emerged became topics that its six venues circulate around. The global refugee crisis, disaster relief and climate change are dealt with in the 'Earth School'; postlabour, posthuman design practices and future material cultures in the 'Unmaking School'; information networks, spheres and connection in the 'Currents School'; the fluctuating concept of a global standard in the 'Scales School'; the distractions of late capitalism in the 'Time School'; and colonial relics of food production and the politics of distribution in the 'Digestion School'. A simple but clever exhibition design – oily metal, uncoated MDF, hundreds of prefabricated bolts – creates a flat value system for all the objects. The selection (...) slants heavily towards the eastern and southern Mediterranean region. Also, over 70 percent of participants are female." – Art Review, December 2018.

The profound act of questioning at the core of A School of Schools led the curatorial team, composed of Jan Boelen, Nadine Botha and myself, to question the idea of a biennial itself, creating a multiplicity of formats and outputs that gravitated around a six-venue exhibition spread through the Beyoglu neighborhood. In this sense, the public program was an active and intense part of the biennial, testing a variety of formats and experimenting with elements of duration, complexity and materialization. More than 90 events took place across six venues during the six weeks of the biennial.

The public program was also a way to involve a large local audience and bring several international practitioners to Istanbul, including some international schools who became temporary residents of the exhibition spaces, adding to the exhibitions and their spaces, and creating new work while there. What emerged is that everything and everywhere is school, and every single interaction we have with a design is pedagogical. The biennial became an educational web that, wrote Croatian-Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich in his classic 1970 pedagogical critique, Deschooling Society, can 'heighten the opportunity for each one to transform each moment of his living into one of learning, sharing, and caring'.

VERA SACCHETTI (Lisbon, 1983) is a Basel-based design critic and curator. She specializes in contemporary design and architecture and serves in a variety of curatorial, research and editorial roles. She is currently program coordinator of the multidisciplinary research initiative Driving the Human: Seven Prototypes for Eco-social Renewal (2020–2023), which supports transdisciplinary research on sustainable futures; and co-initiator of the Design and Democracy platform (2020–), which maps the intersections and overlaps between design and democratic systems and practices. Sacchetti teaches at HEAD Geneva, and in 2020 joined the Federal Design Commission of Switzerland.