

## Teaching planning for the transition

# Collaborative International Workshops – A joint Brazilian-German Teaching Experience for Planning in Vulnerable Areas

## Collective Learning on Planning for Integration and Transition

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### **Abstract:**

*A joint teaching experience involving Brazilian and German students of Architecture, from Universidade Federal Fluminense (Niterói/Brazil) and Jade University of Applied Sciences (Oldenburg/Germany), promoted the development of urban planning proposals. Based on previous teaching experiences in planning for vulnerable urban areas in the participating faculties we developed a workshop series as a collaborative teaching project.*

*In 2017 we worked in Niterói on a project for a centric favela and fishermen village at the Guanabara Bay. In 2018 we elaborated a project for a centric neighbourhood gathering (social) housing, enterprises, abandoned plots and harbour uses in Bremerhaven. In 2019 we will be back in Rio de Janeiro.*

*The workshops were accompanied by local actors. Students learnt to understand social implications of planning in a new context, started a critical reflection of own experiences and developed a cooperative project that was dedicated to open the local discussion about the places further development. During the Workshops students acquired knowledge about local conditions of urban development such as in the case of Brazil the challenge to integrate informally grown neighbourhoods and the formal city or as in the case of Germany dealing with the consequences of economic and demographic changes like shrinking populations and drastic changes of uses. Parallel to the development of projects the students participated on lectures and excursions. The concepts aim to integrate the neighbourhoods into the city and to develop ideas for public spaces, community facilities, affordable housing, and local economy.*

*These teaching experiences are challenges to integrate compact workshop formats and the manifold new experiences for the student into professional approaches within complex working fields. At the same time the experience of an immediate communication to planning agents and local communities create an intense learning process and a critical reflection on given for granted planning knowledge.*

**Keywords:** collaborative teaching; vulnerable urban areas; urban planning; socio-spatial integration



## Introduction

This article reflects on a joint teaching experience involving Brazilian and German students, from Universidade Federal Fluminense (Niterói/Brazil) and Jade University of Applied Sciences (Oldenburg/Germany). We developed a series of workshops as a collaborative teaching project to promote the development of urban planning proposals for vulnerable areas.

The School of Architecture and Urbanism (EAU) and the Faculty of Architecture (FBA) developed a format of iterative workshops. The Workshops were organized and taught by the authors, integrated around 30 students for each workshop and were held in English. This workshop series was funded by the International Office of the Jade University and by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In 2017 we worked in a mixed students group on a project for a Favela in Niterói (Brazil). One year later we elaborated a project for a neighbourhood in Bremerhaven (Germany). In September of 2019 we will continue the programme at Rio das Pedras (Brazil). Throughout the implemented workshops students learnt to understand social contexts of planning in a new context, started a critical reflection of own experiences and developed a cooperative project that was dedicated to promote the local discussion about the places further development. Parallel to the development of projects the students participated in lectures and excursions.

While in the case of Brazil a key issue was to integrate informally grown neighbourhoods and the formal city in the case of Germany it was about to deal with the consequences of economic and demographic changes like shrinking populations and drastic changes of uses.

In Niterói students in mixed teams developed concepts for the local favela Vila dos Pescadores. The goal was to show development alternatives that facilitate the integration of the existent favela into the city without expelling the community of dwellers and fishermen. So there had to be found ideas for public spaces and community facilities within the neighbourhood, for affordable and flexible housing projects and last not least ideas for local economy to develop as a stable base for the community of dwellers. There were developed divergent proposals based on the central approach to reinforce local qualities and to open up opportunities for the local community to use and discuss these proposals as much for self-initiative activities as for negotiations with planning administration.

In Bremerhaven the objective was to develop a proposal for the requalification of a degraded area, near the local harbour, students and teachers involved had the possibility of building a dialogue with different agents - public and private -, in the area under study, seeking for solutions that could create an urban morphology capable to attend social demands for housing, community facilities and also promote the integration into the surrounding neighbourhoods. In addition to these relevant issues addressed in the project development, the focus was on stimulating business activities in the area under study in order to generate income and job opportunities. Another determining point in the development of the urban projects was the creation of different types of housing projects including social housing.

Along the workshop, the students had also the opportunity to establish a rich dialogue between them, discussing references and similar projects of requalification of degraded areas, in different countries of Latin America and Europe.



The final presentation of the studies developed by the student groups, allowed – in addition to the return of the urbanistic proposals to the several agents involved – a first experience (for most of them) of a contact with some of the real "clients" of their projects. Finally, it is expected that the projects elaborated during the workshop will contribute with ideas to the development of future urbanistic solutions for the area object of study.

In both faculties there are courses that focus on integrating teaching into real planning discourses and specific needs of local communities and vulnerable urban areas. They are part of the compulsory programme of either school: At the School of Architecture and Urbanism (EAU) in Niterói it is the course on popular housing project. At the faculty of Architecture (FBA) in Oldenburg it is the course of urban design project. The joint workshops take these teaching experiences as a starting point to explore new didactic approaches by creating an intense learning process and vivid studio atmosphere and by using the different backgrounds of the two student groups as a base for a critical reflection on given for granted planning knowledge. Especially the immediate communication to planning agents and local communities create manifold new experiences for the students and opens up their perception of a complex working fields for them as future professionals.

#### **The Social Housing Project Course at the Escola de Arquitetura e Urbanismo (EAU) at UFF**

The Social Housing Project course is taught over six months, in the penultimate period of the Architecture and Urbanism course. Comprising three modules, the discipline addresses each semester one of the three distinct fields of the social housing project in Brazil: the urbanization of consolidated informal settlements; the re-qualification of abandoned properties, aiming to adapt them to the use of housing; and the occupation of empty land in urban areas equipped with sanitation, transportation and services infrastructure, with the construction of multi-family buildings. In addition to the teacher responsible for the discipline, teachers from other areas (sanitation infrastructure, structural calculation, transportation, social work), linked to other units of the Federal Fluminense University, also participate in the orientation process.

Each semester, a community - in the case of urbanization projects of informal settlements - or an area - when it comes to the development of housing projects - is object of study, addressing one of the themes mentioned above, in different municipalities of the Metropolitan Region from Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the students developed several projects in communities located in Niterói, São Gonçalo, Nova Iguaçu, Itaboraí, Duque de Caxias and in the state capital, Rio de Janeiro.

Organized in groups of up to four members, the students act according to a project development methodology, which foresees the development of the following activities: socioeconomic surveys in the areas where the interventions will be carried out, in order to build the social profile of the project. population that will be served; collection of data in different public agencies, in order to subsidize the architectural and urbanistic proposals that will be developed; participation in assemblies with dwellers, to discuss existing problems and identify solutions; and, finally, the development of urban-architectural projects, which will be presented and discussed with community leaders and the local population.

In the development of projects, lectures are also held with the participation of architects and town planners, who work in the State Housing Company of the State of Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian states, with the objective of knowing different experiences and discussing them. Students are



encouraged to elaborate their work, almost exclusively, in the project studio, in order to share the different project approaches.

At the end of the course, copies of the material produced by the students are submitted, after approval by the dwellers, so that their representative entities can use the studies developed by the students, in their lawsuits and negotiations with the municipal and state governments. The level of resolution of the studies carried out by the students should allow the architectural and urban planning projects to be detailed later, without any significant changes in the proposals developed together with the community.

With regard to informal settlements, the studies developed by the students are focused on favela communities occupying sites with different characteristics. Some of the communities where the interventions were carried out had settled sloping areas with high risks of landslides. Others were located on land situated along riverbanks and lagoons, subject to floods. Finally, there were those that arose from the occupation of public areas, through actions implemented by the organized social movement, which sought to redefine patterns of land use and subsequent land regularization and the implementation of sanitary infrastructure and community equipment. The projects carried out by the student teams would thus contribute to negotiations with municipal and state agencies, aiming at the expropriation of the occupied area, thus giving it a social function - in the words of one of the leaders of this movement: the creation of a popular neighbourhood.

The analysis of the results achieved by the course of popular housing project, in the academic field, points to a positive balance. The students have access to a socioeconomic reality quite different from the one they experience in their daily lives, which undoubtedly contributes to the construction of another concept of citizenship, committed to democratic values and social justice, and, also, another perspective about what a city can be.

As far as their professional training is concerned, they have the possibility of developing architectural-urbanistic projects that question the standardized and poor quality solutions, which, with exceptions, characterize the official production of popular housing.

At the same time, the interaction with teachers from other areas, such as civil engineers and sanitarians, sociologists, social workers, geographers, in turn, makes it possible to anticipate the experience of a multidisciplinary dialogue, which will take place in professional practice of the students, in the future.

Finally, the architects who received this formation, in the bachelor course of the Fluminense Federal University - one of the few Brazilian architecture and urbanism faculties that has a course specifically built for the question of social housing – will have a special role in the labour market for their particular qualification in this field of planning.

However, with regard to the effective contribution of this academic production to the formulation of public policies, or even to meet the demands of the communities with which the projects were developed, the results are not that good, for several reasons.

Initially, it is important to highlight the resistance of a significant portion of government agencies, in their different spheres, to promote greater integration with the University, in the sense of building



partnerships. Whether for reasons of a political nature, or because there is a distrust of academic production, whose deadlines and products are supposed to be incompatible with the dynamics of public administration (some managers even affirm that the University is distanced from the real world) few projects served, in fact, as a reference for interventions in the areas under study. However, even though the projects presented were not implemented - most of the time - the solutions presented by the students contributed to the community leaderships having a study that materialized their aspirations, giving a base to their positions in the negotiations with the public power.

Considering the last 25 years of regular courses of Social Housing Project, at the School of Architecture and Urbanism of the Fluminense Federal University, we find that, despite adversities, we have sought to achieve our goals. One of these objectives is to contribute to the training of qualified architects for the practice, in a project field that has particular characteristics and that require another professional posture and a social conscience. Another is the commitment to contribute to the formulation of social housing solutions committed to popular participation in the planning process, the quality of the built environment and sustainable urban development - the University, joining forces in the construction of the right of Architecture for all.

#### **Joint Workshop at Vila Dos Pescadores in Niterói**

The partnership between the Federal University of Fluminense and the Jade University of Applied Sciences was originated by one of the Brazilian students who had studies there at the faculty of Architecture (FBA) due to his participation in the "Science without Borders Program" - an international exchange program promoted by the Brazilian federal government.

For 2017 we agreed on a first workshop in Niterói and in September 15 students from the Faculty of Architecture of Oldenburg came to Brazil to participate in a 2 weeks urban project workshop, involving students of the course popular housing project. The workshop was held by the authors and Ronaldo Brilhante.

The German students had participated in a preliminary seminar about urban development, housing policies and architectural approaches to social housing in Latin America at their home faculty. The Brazilian students prepared the workshop by own research activities that would give a base to the analysis of the site. In the beginning of the workshop several excursions within the Cities of Rio de Janeiro and Niterói were offered. Especially the visits of two Favelas, Rocinha and Parque Royale, allowed German students to acquire first on site experiences of informal city growth and urban interventions to integrate the favelas. After these first experiences the student groups visited and analysed the area that would be studied during the workshop.

The workshop was engaged to develop proposals for the community of Fishermen Village, in Niterói. This informal settlement, located on the shores of Guanabara Bay is home to about 80 families. Located in the central area of the city of Niterói, it was originally a colony of fishermen. Along the years, the community reduced their fishing activities, due to the pollution of the waters of the bay. According to information from local dwellers, some of the former fishermen are currently engaged in the promotion of boat trips for tourists. The place is still used for the anchoring of private boats, whose owners pay a small amount, to leave there their boats. The Fisherman Village presents recurrent problems in the Brazilian favela communities: lack of adequate infrastructure for basic



sanitation; need for improvement of the quality of housing conditions, the precariousness of the urban structure; absence of access to basic community facilities, such as day-care centers.

Regarding fishing activity, the intention was to propose suitable solutions of mooring for the boats in order to support the existing fishing activities and to support to the growing demand for sightseeing activities in the bay - considered the tourism and leisure potential of this area. Nevertheless, this involves a more complex situation that transcends the interventions envisaged for the project. It is not enough to propose a physical structure to support this activity if fishing in the area has been increasingly compromised by agents who deposit material in the sector of the border where the fishing is carried out. In this sense, it is possible to foresee in the project the implementation of infrastructures like sheds with refrigeration structure, for fish storage, to meet the demands of the fishermen's' association. But it has to be stated that this will not change the loss of water quality.

In order to provide adequate treatment for the bay's edge, it would be necessary to promote the resettlement of families who built, in extremely precarious conditions, irregular housing in this area. So the resettlement of housing within the area of the community was proposed, suggesting the demolition of a part of the buildings (with fair compensation of its occupants) and offering new housing within the area. Along the shore of the bay it will be useful to define with physical landmarks a precise boundary of settlement.

All interventions considered the need for improvement of the conditions of living for the local dwellers as for example the implementation of sanitary infrastructures and pavement of the existing streets. To support a positive future development of the area the group planned also community-based equipment that would meet diverse dwellers demands: health, professional training, culture, etc.

The community is adjacent to a state-owned abandoned plot. This area was included to create new opportunities for social housing or for affordable self-help construction with corresponding public spaces and infrastructure.

Needed to say that all proposals developed should consider aspects related to costs, in order to make them feasible.

Regarding the relationship with the community of Fisherman Village, the crisis of community representation, expressed by the absence of an active and combative dwellers association, compromised the perspective of a more active participation of local dwellers. Nevertheless several dwellers were interviewed by the students, accompanied by the teachers involved in the project workshop.

In addition to the above mentioned problems of the favela dwellers there is a project presented by the City Hall of Niterói, which proposed the withdrawal of all families currently living in this area, with the aim of promoting a "gastronomic centre", focusing on the tourist potential of the area. Until now - above all for economic reasons – it was not carried out. For this reason the local community had on one hand formulated their main demands but on the other hand they hesitated to promote them actively.

Within this complex situation the students considered the site analysis and, the community's demands to develop goals for the future development of the area. These results would be handed to the dwellers

association and it would be left upon their decision to consider whether they would use them for further negotiation or not.

Considering all these questions, the teams formed by German and Brazilian students developed urbanistic proposals focusing on site analysis and on the points presented as local demands. The student teams worked together beginning with creating knowledge and understanding of the local needs and going up to develop specific projects. Students' discussions were very concerned about the possibilities to create flexible housing typologies that could be afforded by the local dwellers. By this motivation they discussed private and collective needs, the minimal equipment of a basic house and strategies to amplify the houses by self-construction. The groups also discussed alternative options to facilitate economic and educational activities within the neighbourhood, and the adequate urban spaces for the area that would allow an integration to the city but keep a certain privacy for the community in the fishermen village. So besides presenting relevant possibilities for the development of the favela the students lived an intense process of reflection about human needs on housing, education, work and collective life.

#### **Urban design projects at Faculty of Architecture (FBA) at Jade University**

The urban design project Faculty of Architecture (FBA) at Jade University is part of the Bachelor Degree Programme. In the third year the students develop their first urban design project. Students work on the project for the duration of one semester.

The aim is to introduce students to current issues of urban development and the complex links between social, economic, ecologic and morphologic aspects. Projects are developed on base of real planning needs in cities within the region as Bremen, Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven and last not least Oldenburg. Bremerhaven and Wilhelmshaven have suffered severe shrinking processes. All cities have planning needs for the redefinition of areas with former uses for industry, harbour, military, railways, etc. The choice for working areas takes into account to form part of a current local planning debate. So the areas chosen are zones that require a transition of use and represent current urban voids not in the sense of being brownfields but having been excluded, being in decay or comprising conflictive uses and morphology within the area. The aim is to develop mixed use areas that allow hybrid functions between housing, commerce, business, leisure activities and social infrastructure.

The specific planning requirements are defined in collaboration with local planning administration, borough council, local citizens' groups or neighbourhood associations. While preparing the course contacts to the involved local actors are made and the main issues are defined in a cooperative way. At the beginning of the course students meet up with some of the actors on site. During the course of the semester the local actors are invited to on the mid-term presentations. The students elaborate their projects in groups of two. So, at the end of the course around twelve alternative project proposals are presented.

The developed project show divergent concepts to structure the areas, to develop a layout for buildings, to insert new uses, to create public spaces and infrastructure that integrates the areas into the surrounding neighbourhoods.



Project are presented in public on site or handed over to the involved local actors. In most of the cases the students' projects serve as a base of debate for local actors in order to define next steps for possible future development. The students explore by their project for the area alternative approaches and planning criteria. By this the developed projects have contributed to develop criteria for future professional processes.

### **Joint Workshop at Rudloffstraße in Bremerhaven**

In September 2018, 15 students from the Escola de Arquitetura e Urbanismo (EAU) came to Germany for 14 days to work together with the students of the Oldenburg Department of Architecture to develop urban planning concepts for the further development of the Bremerhaven district. The workshop was held by the authors.

The topic of the workshop "Abandoned Industrial Areas" and the aim of developing hybrid urban spaces are based on the main questions of the previous workshop. Issues such as the participation of local actors in the development of goals for urban development projects were explored during the project work in the workshop.

The project area is located in Bremerhaven in a former port area close to the city centre. The properties located directly on Rudloffstraße are currently used mainly for commercial purposes or are abandoned. In the west of the area, the Wilhelminian Quarter "Alte Bürger", which in recent years has turned into a lively district with a wide range of cultural attractions. At the north-east there are neighbouring two major historic social housing projects.

The students had prepared themselves in preliminary seminars with overarching topics such as shrinking processes in cities, neighbourhood development and social housing.

At the beginning of the workshop several excursions took place. First of all, it was about introducing the group to current issues of urban development, housing policy and knowing existing settlements of social housing and the recent interventions to adapt them for future needs in Bremen and Bremerhaven.

Besides that in Bremerhaven students visited the neighbouring Goethequartier which is the neighbourhood most affected by relative poverty within Germany. Students learned about problems and social projects. During one afternoon the students played, designed and talked with children and pedagogical staff at a local child care project.

With this background, the students now explored and examined the project area more in detail. All discussions concerning the project area were accompanied by actors from Bremerhaven dealing with the area as the representative of the neighbourhoods' development agency, local planning department and the Bremerhaven Company for investment and urban development.

The local planning administration had initiated a public workshop with dwellers and initiatives in 2017. Citizen developed initial ideas and identified spots of special interest. Of particular importance within the project area are the large warehouses in the north (Marcushallen) and a former municipal construction yard. The still existing allotment gardens and the memory of former allotments in the area inspired to develop new community gardens and to foster urban gardening.



The main challenges for the areas is the contradictory situation in the current uses: The area is stretching parallel to the waterline but blocked from it by a shipyard for cruise liners. That give a fascinating scenery but also a high level of pollution. The area has a mostly commercial use but there are also a lot of abandoned plots. Towards the east side of the plot the predominant use is housing. The challenge is to integrate existing uses in a future mixed-used area, to foster more housing and to stimulate the use of public spaces, and to provide attractive social and cultural infrastructure for neighbours and new inhabitants. For the economic situation of the city there is a low investment rate and the possibilities for public investment are limited. Thus, all proposals have to be stimulating for investment on one hand and ensuring social inclusion on the other hand. Only a minor part of the plot are state owned. These plots have to be used to initiate a change. So besides finding a spatial solution students had to find a strategical approach for the development of the area.

In their urban planning concepts, the students sought solutions for the appropriate mix and zoning of living and working, the possibilities of social mix, the design of public spaces and the development of further ideas for the new use within the new neighbourhood to be developed.

The students elaborated five alternative proposals and presented them at the end of the workshop. The local actors were invited to the presentation after the intensive project work and were able to convince themselves of the developed urban planning concepts and give the students a feedback. For the local actors the workshop result were a relevant impulse to initiate and specify further planning steps.

As a follow up the workshop results were used a base for a further urban design project at the faculty of Architecture. The projects of both courses were shown in an exposition on site where citizens were invited to discuss the results. Meanwhile a planning office was found to develop a plan for the areas. They took part in the exposition and by this planning administration and professional planners can integrate the results of public debate. The students' projects visualized different planning approaches so they gave a visible base to define the criteria for future planning.

For the students of the workshop in particular the specific feedback of local actors reflecting issues discussed during the workshop in the context of the actual development process in Bremerhaven had a big impact. It enabled the students to gain new perspectives on possible positive impacts and constraints of their planning proposals.

## **Conclusions**

The experience of working together allowed, as well for students as for teachers, a rich exchange of project approaches, work methodologies, and contact with distinct socio-economic and cultural realities. The joint project elaboration along the workshop and the experiences gained represent a significant enrichment of students' education for the members of both groups. The students discovered similarities and differences in planning processes and tasks of urban development. The opportunity for the students to get in touch with relevant urban issues of both countries, such as urban interventions in informal settlements (in the Brazilian case) and the rehabilitation of degraded urban areas (in the German case) is a very valuable outcome of this cooperative project. Likewise, the contact with public and private agents involved in the urban structuring processes of the two study areas of the workshops allowed an understanding of the practices of these agents in contexts of countries with very different stages of economic and social development. In the informal city in Brazil the local communities were represented mainly by dwellers associations, especially in the current



situation with an absence of state driven programmes for the integration of favelas into the city. In change in Germany the initiative to local development is far more formalized. Local planning department and an agency for economic development were in charge of the project, and even the neighbourhood representative was employed (by external funding) to gather and advocate the interests of the surrounding neighbourhoods. The experience of this different field of actors and the formal and economic conditions for urban development was an enriching experience for both groups.

For the German students, the experience of working in an informal settlement was something absolutely new and represented a challenge for the formulation of proposals appropriate to the particular characteristics of the area under study. Especially facing the pressure of informal construction on open spaces was a new experience for them. This made the projects for the needed public spaces becoming a challenging task. The Brazilian students were of course more familiar with the challenges of planning within informal settlements. Nevertheless the cooperation gave them the possibility to know another perspective, which allowed them to reflect on aspects of urban informality that, due to the proximity to their daily life, were unnoticed. The students developed due to this active process of mutual learning and reflection a high commitment to find appropriate solutions for the area.

On the experiences in Bremerhaven the ideas of Brazilian students about the visibility of social needs and poverty were questioned. When working on the Bremerhaven project the Brazilian students were confronted with shrinking processes and the consequently low pressure on spatial development and had to think about the stimulation of uses for public spaces, infrastructure and investments (public and private). So they found a completely new situation of involved actors and needed collaborative approaches with these actors. The German students could rely on previous experiences referring to the given situation but learnt a lot in the exchange about the more community oriented approaches of the Brazilian students.

For the teachers involved, it was an opportunity to discuss the methodologies of project teaching practiced in the courses of the two educational institutions, and also of the curricular structures of each course, what allowed a valuable exchange of teaching experiences. Besides this the joint workshop also promoted discussions with others faculty members involved in this partnership.

The cooperation in the joint workshop has been a relevant contribution to promote experimental and intercultural learning within the faculties. Both faculties are interested in continuing the workshop series and to keep on working on the possibilities of its didactic format. Nevertheless, this will depend on the possibilities to access future funding. In the Brazilian case, the desirable continuity of this partnership - with regard to the groups of students and teachers going to Germany - is difficult due to the economic crisis experienced by the country and, above all, by the cuts made in the current federal administration, in the budget of the Public University. But this complex economic and political restrictions also show the divergent embeddedness of learning for future architects and this is another essential part of the learning process for the cooperating students groups. So we remain with the commitment of all the teachers and students involved in this academic partnership program to pursue this valuable international interaction.

