

# EXTRA-CURRICULAR, INTERCULTURAL LEARNING MODULES ON URBAN LAYERING AND THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF CITIES: THE CASE OF THE KUL-UOM SUMMER WORKSHOP ON VAUXHALL STREET, COLOMBO

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## Abstract

*Since 2013, the Department of Architecture of the University of Moratuwa (DA-UoM) and the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture (KUL-FAR) have jointly been exploring various types of extra- and co-curricular activities. Having successfully set up the International Urban Design Workshops in parallel with the International Conference "Cities, People and Places" (ICCPP), cooperation also covered in- and out-going mobility, guest-lecturing, joint research and student supervision. With the 2018 KUL-UoM summer workshop, the organizers launched yet another experiment introducing extracurricular intercultural learning to their respective students.*

*The workshop is situated against the backdrop accelerated urbanization of the past decade that has consolidated the position of the Colombo metropolitan region as Sri Lanka's international gateway and its top commercial and financial hub. Urban development strategies initially envisioned city beautification, urban regeneration and revitalization of landmark cultural heritage sites. Mega development projects through public-private partnerships and/or land concessions to local or overseas investors now are balanced with projects envisaging greater social equity and inclusiveness. The KUL-UOM workshop acted on this approach by examining the urban layering and social perception of the neighbourhoods along Vauxhall Street, since these are facing profound transformation due to the urban redevelopment plans proposed for Slave Island and the vicinity of Beira Lake.*

*This paper outlines the conceptual framework of this initiative and the format that was developed in view of the workshop objectives. It then reviews how this first joint summer workshop was initiated, prepared, and conducted. Next, it critically assesses the envisaged outcomes in terms of concept, method, logistics and learning process. Final reflections outline the lessons learnt and explore how experimental modules like this workshop can be developed as complementary contributions to the curricula offered at KUL and UoM.*

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## Introduction

Cities nowadays figure prominently “at the interface of heterogeneity within societies and heterogeneity between societies” (Hannerz, 1992). This ‘super-diversity’ involves flows of people, discourses and images that circulate in physical as well as digital spaces. Interaction with this multiplicity of ‘others’ unfolds in streets and public spaces, where it becomes mediated and digitized through billboards, large-sized screens, and online media. Streamlining these interactions into a balanced co-existence of quotidian activity (shopping, eating), organized events (sports, performances), creative incidences (taking photos, sharing content), and aesthetic practices (theatres, exhibitions) is becoming an increasingly complex task. To be best prepared for this responsibility, authorities, administrators and professionals need to adopt an attitude of “life-long” and “life-wide learning” (Jackson, 2011). This implies acquiring formal and informal experiences in different ‘learning spaces’ throughout their career. Therefore, students who will become involved in the planning, design and management of public spaces should not only focus on academic learning but also acquire skills, qualities and disposition through non-academic, extracurricular activities (ECAs) and experiences throughout their higher education<sup>25</sup>. Since 2013, the Department of Architecture of the University of Moratuwa (DA-UoM) and the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture (KUL-FAR) have jointly been exploring various types of extra- and co-curricular activities. Dr. Wijesundara (DA-UoM) and Dr. De Wandeler (KUL-FAR) began by jointly organizing International Urban Design Workshops in parallel with the International Conference “*Cities, People and Places*” (ICCP). They soon expanded the cooperation to include in- and out-going staff mobility, guest-lecturing, as well as joint research and design exercises. In 2015, the DA-UoM Master of Urban Design program for the first time hosted two KUL students who had been granted a VLIR-UOS short-term scholarship<sup>26</sup>. The KUL students participated in the UoM-MUD design studio project in Galle Fort. One year later, students in KUL-FAR’s *Atelier Sud* elective took the UoM-MUD study as starting point to examine linkages between the historical Fort peninsula and the contemporary city<sup>27</sup>.

The interaction between learning modules at UoM-MUD on the one hand and KUL-FAR on the other, inspired the idea of creating a joint module that would provide students with an opportunity for intercultural exposure and learning through on-site fieldwork and research-by-design. Dr. Wijesundara and Dr. De Wandeler began to outline the conceptual and logistic framework of the 2018 KUL-UoM Summer Workshop. The concept was that participants in this extra-curricular module would jointly address a specific bundle of dwelling-related issues in a well-delineated neighbourhood of central Colombo. This implied that the workshop would seek

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<sup>25</sup>Thompson et al. (2013) define ECAs as activities that students engage in, which are not part of their formal degree classification. This includes activities which are sometimes defined as co-curricular, as they closely relate to but are not part of academic study

<sup>26</sup>The Flemish Inter-university Council for University Development Cooperation (VLIR-UOS) supports partnerships between universities and colleges in Flanders and the Global South that seek innovative answers to global and local challenges. VLIR-UOS grants project funds to promote cooperation between professors, researchers and teachers. In addition, VLIR-UOS provides scholarships to promote short research stays and exchange between students and professionals in Flanders and in the Global South.

<sup>27</sup>The *Atelier Sud* elective is an English language elective for all Master students of the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. This English spoken international elective has the aim to introduce students to different architectural and urban issues of the Global South. It gives students an opportunity to examine in a seminar-cum-studio setting explore tentative design strategies that address real cases in Asia, Africa or Latin America (KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, 2018).

to examine current urban development in Colombo against the backdrop of current government policies that seek to realize participatory, community-led urban development<sup>28</sup>.

In the summer of 2017, two VLIR-UOS grantees took a first step in that direction by participating in the UoM-MUD design studio in North Pettah. Participants in KUL-FAR's 2017-18 *Atelier Sud* elective subsequently took up that research and focused on scenarios for the densification of Newnham Square. This exercise was intended to lead to a next step, in which KUL and UoM students in a joint summer workshop would examine whether the lessons learnt from the *Atelier Sud* study of Newnham Square could be applied to another community in Slave Island (De Wandeler, 2018). The actual workshop (25 August – 2 September 2018) did not pursue this line of thinking but instead focused on more complex issues related to relocation and redevelopment rather than on preservation and densification of an existing neighbourhood.

This paper reviews how this initiative took shape. The first section outlines how the conceptual framework of this summer workshop was brought in line with KUL-FAR guidelines for summer schools and wrought into a format that fit the UoM-MUD curriculum. The next section reviews the steps that were taken to initiate, prepare and conduct this new collaboration. Next, the paper critically assesses the envisaged outcomes in terms of concept, method, logistics and learning process. Final reflections outline the lessons learnt and explore how experimental modules like this workshop can be developed as complementary contributions to the curricula offered at KUL and UoM.

## 1. The concept and its operational framework

The rapid expansion of fast and mobile ICT applications into all aspects of daily life profoundly affects job opportunities worldwide. Ever larger sections of the active population need to engage in 'life-long' and 'life-wide' learning to keep a competitive edge. Since ever more students end up pursuing careers outside of the area of their academic degree, they need to acquire generic attributes and skills that can help them respond to an uncertain future. Whilst some ECAs can negatively affect academic study, they are widely believed to help graduates' employability as they help students develop – besides the specific skills of their education – the capacity to reflect and thus, enhance their ability to work as part of a team, to assess their own work and to identify their own training and development needs.

This is precisely what the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture envisages with various ECAs throughout the academic year as well as during the 2,5 months of summer break customary in European universities. These "summer school" ECAs are intensive workshops or seminars that arise from initiators' personal or professional concerns and have a clear link to on-going research projects, scheduled coursework and design studios, or the Faculty's Architectural Design Office (ADO) activities. The Faculty grants each of the approved summer schools a modest subsidy. Moreover, students can gain recognition for engaging in this ECA as the Faculty offers several electives linked to preparation or reporting of the summer school. In anticipation of the summer school, students can either help prepare the event by choosing the elective "Summer Schools: Intensive Foreign Programs" or the elective "Atelier Sud" if the summer school is organized in the Global South. In the latter case, selected students can also apply for a VLIR-UOS travel grant.

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<sup>28</sup>With its "Vision 2025: A Country Enriched" the Sri Lankan government set out on a course of reforms to make the country more competitive and lift the standards of living for all Sri Lankans. In terms of urban development, the reforms seek to (a) engage people in decision-making, actions and responsibilities, (b) pursue integrated and inclusive urban housing development and (c) ensure that housing development is sustainable.

After completion of the summer school, participants can reflect and report on their experience by choosing the elective “Participation in an International Project”.

Given the institutional embeddedness of the summer school ECA, participants are carefully selected: priority is given to master students of the Faculty, but participation may also be open for other KUL students as well as for students and young professionals from other universities or organisations in Belgium or abroad<sup>29</sup>. Some summer schools strive for a truly international mix of participants, others focus on an equal number of participants from KUL and the host country, and still others narrow down this equal participation to students from the partner universities that organize the event.

The KUL-UOM summer workshop was organised with that last type of participation in mind. In contrast to other summer schools organized till 2018, it specifically targeted last year Bachelor students in line with efforts to bridge the gap between Dutch-language Bachelor curricula and both the Dutch- and the English-language master curriculum. The choice to open the summer workshop for Bachelor students was also intended to attract UoM Bachelor students in the workshop. In practice, this intention proved hardly feasible because the UoM Bachelor curriculum consists of a very dense programme that leaves hardly any time for ECAs. Even for UoM master students the introduction of an extended ECA proved quite cumbersome as most of them are fully engaged in architectural/ planning practice or a career in public service. UoM Bachelor and Master students have actively participated in the yearly two-day International ICCPP-UDW workshops since 2013, but that two-day time-slot seems like the closest approximation of an ECA that UoM Bachelor curriculum in its present format could realize. It is also the maximum leave from their daily activities that most UoM-MUD students could take. Despite these institutional constraints, the organizers of the summer workshop ECA outlined a clear stratagem:

- The joint initiative would seek to provide valuable inputs to government urbanization policies that seek to realize greater social equity and inclusiveness as added values of urban (re)development. It would do so by focusing on a community in Slave Island that was due to be upgraded on site. This choice of this community would be determined in consultation with the National Housing Development Authority depending on the progress of its negotiations with the neighbourhoods considered for redevelopment.
- The overall objective of the workshop was described as an attempt “to explore participatory design strategies that could help local inhabitants and stakeholders to handle urban development pressures in a way that ensures inclusiveness, social cohesion and a sustainable quality of life” (De Wandeler, 2018).
- The proposed methodology involved that students from KU Leuven and UoM would prepare all background materials and logistic arrangements for the selected project site in the weeks preceding the workshop. During the workshop, participants, in a process of mutual, intercultural learning, would get to know different dwelling typologies, explore different gradients of collectiveness as well as spatial assets and flaws of the identified neighbourhoods. Ideally, local community workers would coach participants’ interaction with inhabitants and local stakeholders and help to jointly elaborate proposals exploring micro-interventions / ways to improve living and working conditions in the neighbourhood

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<sup>29</sup>Whilst KUL students participate for free, other participants will usually be charged a registration fee. Throughout the duration of the event, participants bear their own travel, accommodation and living expenses, unless funding has been secured to cover (part of) these costs.

and inciting residents and users to enhance their involvement in the revitalization of the district.

- The expected output would be a joint publication and/or an exhibition that will be displayed at 6th International Conference “*Cities People and Places*” scheduled 5-7 October 2018 as well as at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture at a later date.

## **2. Launch, preparations and conduct of the summer workshop**

The workshop initially was scheduled in the second week of September 2018. Dr. Wijesundara would consult the NHDA on the selection of a project site; if that failed, the workshop would fall back on Newnham Square and surrounding communities. Two students from each of the partner universities would start gathering background materials and conduct basic surveys one month ahead. For the workshop itself, each of the universities would select ten participants and appoint one workshop coordinator. As the academic year progressed and the summer workshop drew nearer, the initial idea ran into unforeseen logistic complications both at the KU Leuven and the UoM side.

### *Launch and selection of participants*

Based on the preliminary outline prepared by Dr. De Wandeler, KUL-FAR launched the call for the preparatory phase by mid-February 2018 and the call for participants in the workshop one month later. Applicants had to submit their CV, study results and a motivation letter. By the end of April, each of them had been interviewed and assessed. Only two qualified master students applied for the preparatory works. For the workshop itself, there were ten Bachelor students who were about to commence their Masters’ degree, while five others would start their final Masters’ year in AY 2018-19. Given this enthusiastic response, KUL-FAR faced the choice to stick to the initial set-up with one coordinator and ten participants or to allow a larger group of participants with two coordinators from each university. The UoM counterpart did not object to host a larger group. With the prospect that they all would be allowed to participate, KUL, applicants decided to organize a series of activities to raise funds and cover the additional costs. Once the budgetary aspect was covered, slight adjustment in the timing of the workshop was made to guarantee the availability of both KUL-FAR coordinators. By the first week of May, the KUL-FAR participants met for a first briefing, well ahead of the final submission of studio assignment and the examination period.

At about the same time, logistic arrangements at the UoM side were underway. It had become clear that participation by UoM Bachelor students in the preparatory phase and the workshop was unlikely. Therefore, the summer workshop was linked to the UoM-MUD first year’s design studio. This offered the best possible assurance that preparations for the workshop could be conducted in an accurate and timely manner and that local participants would be able to provide KUL participants with sound advice and the insights gained from their professional experience. The exact number of participants remained uncertain until interviews and registration for the 2018 UoM-MUD batch had been finalised. Fortunately, this process was completed by mid-July so that the first session of the MUD-UoM studio could coincide with the arrival of the two KUL master students and the start of the preparatory phase, exactly one month ahead of the start of the actual workshop.

### *Selection of the project site and identification of key issues*

The linkage with the design studio also sparked a decision on the project site. After consultation with the NHDA, Dr. Wijesundara decided to examine the urban community district/ precinct identified as the Vauxhall Street redevelopment area by the NHDA. Since the site qualified as an imminent redevelopment scheme and the NHDA was prepared to have it examined as part of an academic exercise, it became the project site on which both the KUL-UoM summer workshop and the UoM-MUD design studio would focus.



**Fig. 1: Vauxhall Street Redevelopment**  
Source: Google Maps

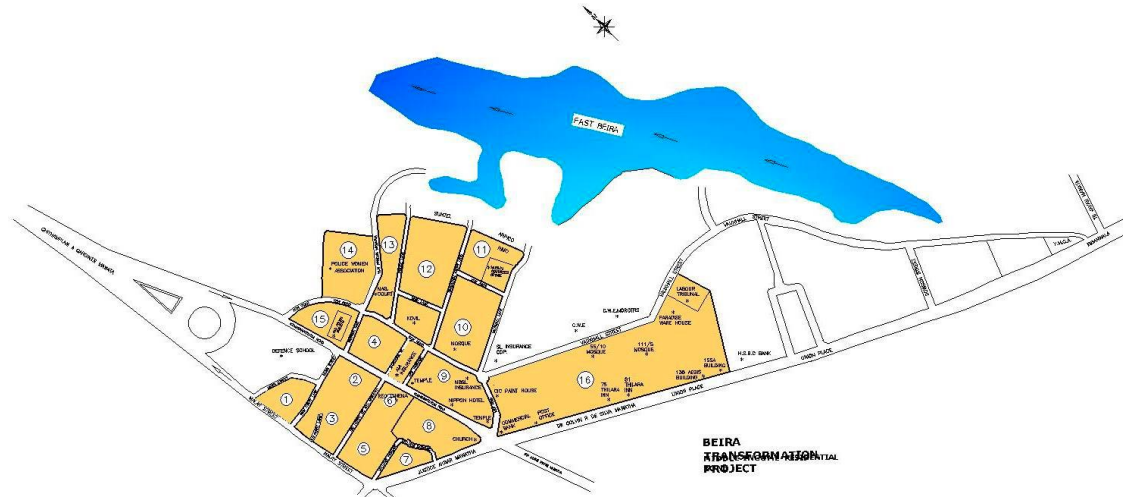
The brief of the design studio instructs students “to discover the architectural, planning and urban design features that support urban community life” (Wijesundara, 2018). By making students understand the various patterns unique to the community, the studio explores ways to interpret / integrate these into remedial actions for urban rectifications and urban design proposals that contribute to the overall redevelopment proposal. The studio assignment thus comprises two consecutive tasks:

- **Task 1 – Exploration and Mapping:** comprising site analysis and background studies, community mapping, rhythm analysis of urban activities, etc.
- **Task 2 – Design Engagement, Interventions, Proposals:** urban design visioning, concept formulation, and urban designing and presentation.

These tasks add up to an exercise in formulating urban design responses to the redevelopment of the area and the relocation of the communities, as proposed by the NHDA. The scope and time-frame of this exercise well exceeds the outcomes that can be expected from a workshop module of nine days in which half of the participants have yet to be familiarized the context and setting of the project site. To underscore the workshop’s modest part in this overall exercise, the coordinators agreed not to address urban planning / urban design features more than strictly necessary. They proposed instead to prioritize the architectural features of the area and of its constituent communities and to examine the way in which these features contribute to



typical patterns that can be re-interpreted in the light of redevelopment. The workshop's added value for UoM-MUD participants was that it offered an incubation period during which they can make the transition from site observation and analysis to the urban design decisions and design project that they will have to elaborate after the workshop and submit by the end of the studio.



**Fig.2:** Vauxhall Street Housing Area – 16 Clusters  
Source: Wijesundara, 2018

*Preparatory phase: site analysis and data mining*

One month ahead of the summer workshop, the two KUL-FAR International Master students to join UoM-MUD students for the preparation of the workshop. These preparations largely coincided with the first task set in the UoM-MUD design studio. They aimed to pinpoint and understand the local dynamics and rhythms of the area and to establish both the urban and

architectural features of its distinct residential, commercial and industrial components. To streamline this complex task, the UoM-MUD students teamed up in four groups. Each group focused on one distinct aspect as follows:

**Table 1: UOM-MUDS 2018/19 Urban Design Studio: groups and focus areas of study**

<p><b>Group 1</b></p> <p><b>Physical context Layers</b></p> <p>(a) Elevation studies                      (b) Built form studies                      (c) Character identification                      (d) Urban elements                      (e) Space studies                      (f) Services and infrastructure</p>	<p><b>Group 3</b></p> <p><b>Proposed and ongoing urban development and possible development requirements</b></p> <p>(a) Existing developments                      (b) Proposed developments                      (c) Urban economic perspectives                      (d) Land values and demands                      (e) Stake Holder inputs</p>
<p><b>Group 2</b></p> <p><b>Social and Cultural context Layers</b></p> <p>(a) Activity Programs – Necessary, Optional, Social                      (b) Historic studies                      (c) People's/ user patterns                      (d) Cultural significance                      (e) Behavior patterns                      (f) urban symbols and unique user and activity patterns vs. city's identity</p>	<p><b>Group 4</b></p> <p><b>Regulatory aspects and micro development policies</b></p> <p>(a) Building and Planning regulations                      (b) Zoning and development control                      (c) Land use and activity patterns within the area                      (d) Area in micro context                      (e) Environmental and sustainability</p>

Since the two KUL students could only part take in the first month of the UoM-MUD studio and not in the elaboration of the urban redevelopment proposals, they mainly joined in the site exploration and mapping efforts conducted by groups 1 and 2. In this way, they contributed their share to the UoM-MUD studio while also deriving from that collaboration the base-line material, practical information and local contacts required to familiarize KUL participants with Sri Lankan life-style, dwelling traditions and architecture, and introduce them to Colombo's past, present and future urban development.

At the start of the workshop, KUL and UoM Master students thus could introduce the project site to the other participants in two distinct ways: on the one hand, the exploration and mapping efforts by the four groups were presented in four sets of power-point slides. On the other hand, broader background materials were compiled in a workshop reader that reviewed historical background of Colombo and Slave Island in particular, the socio-cultural significance of Slave Island in the Sri Lankan context as well as the socio-economic context of current urban development trends and policies, including a summary of the intended redevelopment scheme.

*Concept, scope of work and phasing of the summer workshop*

The Workshop was designed to engage students in a research-by-design fieldwork that responds to Sri Lanka's recent policy shift towards participatory, community-led urban development. With the identification of the Vauxhall Street redevelopment area as project site, the overall objective of the workshop became more focused and was to discover and understand qualities, limitations and inadequacies of current and proposed 'urban living' conditions. 'Urban Living' conditions, in this context, are understood as a complex of social, cultural, religious, economic features that are intimately linked to the spatial characteristics of the built environment and its impact on physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being



To realize this objective, Belgian and Sri Lankan workshop participants in a process of mutual, intercultural learning needed to get acquainted with different dwelling typologies (pros and cons) and their distinctive qualities, explore different gradients of privacy and collectiveness and examine the spatial assets and flaws of the identified neighbourhoods. The workshop thus came to revolve around two main phases:

- **Phase 1: Reconnaissance, observation & documentation of the current 'urban living' conditions.** This was achieved by observing, measuring, drawing and documenting the built environment, daily rhythms and activities along two sections that extended from Beira Lake southeastwards beyond Union Place.



**Fig. 3:** Reconnaissance survey and documentation through 1:50 scale section  
Author: Dhanesh Chathuranga

- **Phase 2: Extrapolation of the current towards the future 'urban living' conditions.**  
This was achieved through detailed studies of portions of these extended sections through the neighbourhood. These studies were aimed to produce creative re-interpretation & proposals:
  - > to effectuate the transition of current to future 'urban living' conditions, AND/ OR
  - > to integrate qualities of current 'urban living' conditions into the planning and design of future 'urban living' conditions



**Fig. 4:** Detailed studies extrapolating current towards future 'urban living' conditions  
Author: Dhanesh Chathuranga

### **3. Critical assessment of the workshop realisations and outcomes**

Any assessment of a project that required such lengthy preparations and such intensity in its implementation is likely to be biased and incomplete in more than one way. To balance these shortfalls, the author draws on experiences gained from other, similar ECAs that were conducted over the past two years in Cambodia and Thailand.

#### *Workshop Concept and Focus of Interest*

As described in the first section of this paper, the concept of “summer schools / workshops” is well-known and fully recognized in the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture and less so in the Department of Architecture of UoM. This discrepancy in institutional set-up did not prevent the initiative from being organized because UoM already adopted other, shorter ECA initiatives as part of its international cooperation.

Over the past five years the International Urban Design Workshops organised in parallel with the International Conference "Cities, People and Places" (ICPP) have opened a way forward towards creating exposure to 'other' horizons, perspectives and intercultural learning amidst

the otherwise quite strict and regimented learning experience of UoM students. Every year, students at UoM and abroad have enthusiastically participated in these two-day ICCPP-UDW events. If they are given the opportunity and are encouraged to do so, they may well go for longer initiatives as well. They could take an example from the enthusiasm of KUL students who organized fund-raising events so that they all would be able to participate in a 9-day event with students they had never met in a country where they had never been.

The focus of interest of the workshop – resilient urban development against the backdrop of large-scale transitions – is in line with one of the major research areas pursued in several other regular as well as ECA modules offered at KUL-FAR. It also coincides with the themes of the successive ICCPP conferences. The concern for a humane and inclusive revitalization and redevelopment of urban neighbourhoods in contemporary Colombo clearly matches the interest in people-centered streets and places (ICCPP 2018), in urbanization futures (ICCPP 2017), in place-making (ICCPP 2016) and urban coherence (ICCPP 2015), etc. This underscores that the issues addressed in this workshop are well embedded in the academic interests and the body of knowledge that ICCPP stimulates year after year among students and lecturers at UoM and throughout Sri Lanka.

#### *Workshop Preparation and Methodology*

The workshop idea started back in 2016 when Dr. Wijesundara first introduced his Belgian colleagues to the Newnham Square neighbourhood. The workshop concept was elaborated with this urban neighbourhood in mind and several preparatory steps were taken towards the realization of a workshop in this neighbourhood. Logistic matters (number of participants, size and ease of access of the project site) and conceptual concerns (contributing to real-life urban development projects) rather than methodological considerations inspired the last-minute shift to the project site along Vauxhall Street. Unfortunately, this shift considerably affected the workshop methodology.

Much of the preparatory material relating to North Pettah and Newnham Square became redundant. UoM-MUD students and the two KUL students had only just been briefed on the MUD Urban Design Studio and were hardly introduced to one another when they need to start collecting background materials and data-mining for the new project site. While they struggled to wrap up the first task of the studio assignment and present it in time for the beginning of the workshop, KUL participants remained in the dark on the progress of the data being gathered. Newly arrived, and often still jet-lagged, they had to absorb and process this huge amount of information while coping with first impressions after the exploratory visit to the neighbourhood. The hurried preparations also affected the possibilities to identify stakeholders in the redevelopment process and/ or create a wide and reliable network of respondents / informants within the neighbourhood. The initial idea had been to rely on stakeholders and/or residents and users when observing existing 'urban living' conditions and extrapolating the current to future urban living conditions in a considerate and well-informed way.

Given the constraints in preparation and identifying local contacts, the hands-on, two-phased workshop method proposed by colleague Annemiedemulemeester helped students to regain focus and concentration. During the first three days of the workshop, students conducted participatory fieldwork observations along two sections throughout the neighbourhood. Subdividing and documenting the different parts of these sections on a 1:50 scale required them to discuss and expediate allocated tasks, while the mere fact of drawing and composition allowed for team work and reflection. The next three days were reserved for creative elaboration and design of detailed studies on one or more portions of the section they had been

drawing. At this point, participants began to experience how deeply they differed from one another because of divergent ways of analyzing situations, of imagining future scenarios and of communicating these ideas during the subsequent instances of consultation and presentation held in the final days of the workshop.

These feedback moments also exposed that the workshop coordinators, in their haste to adopt the Vauxhall Street project site, had overlooked to establish a unified stance on criteria and expectations regarding the outcomes of the workshop. Whilst this may have created some confusion amongst the participants, it did not spoil the overall atmosphere of satisfaction at the end of the workshop.

### *Workshop Logistics*

Three factors conditioned the logistic set-up of the workshop: the KUL-UoM partnership, the divergent levels of students' engagement and the situation of the lodgings of KUL participants nearby the workshop site.

Since summer ECAs are well established within KUL-FAR, the KUL-UoM partnership in this workshop initiative was quite lop-sided as opposed to the fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities achieved in the ICCPP-UDW workshops. The internationalization process at KUL-FAR has resulted in seasoned procedures and funding channels for international students' and staff mobility of all sorts, including ECAs. Students and staff at UoM cannot (yet) rely on such infrastructure. Moreover, the KUL summer ECAs are organized during the summer break, when most students can take time off from student jobs or family obligations. This timing does not necessarily coincide with free time for students elsewhere.

In terms of students' engagement, UoM Bachelor students have no or little opportunity or encouragement to engage in ECAs of longer than a day or two. Most UoM students at Master level have a full-time professional activity. Therefore, they are not likely to take or be granted leave for ECAs that do not offer a tangible benefit to their employability, competitiveness and/or efficiency. Even though the KUL-UoM summer workshop was a compulsory component of the MUD Urban design Studio, many students either lacked the time or the motivation to be available for the entire duration of the workshop. This stands in stark contrast with the level of engagement of the KUL students. They chose to apply, went through a selection process to participate, and could acquire 5 credits in their master curriculum. Whilst this ECA engagement may well help them in their university career, the fact that they raised funds to support operational costs shows that they considered it as far more than an exotic adventure.

Whilst KUL offers students administrative and logistic support in terms of registration of study leave and insurance coverage, students need to pay themselves for their travel, board and lodging. Upon advice of their coordinators, they booked the YWCA guest house on Union Place. This turned out to be a very fortunate choice as the guest house offers spacious accommodation as well as a large common room where Belgian and Sri Lankan students could work throughout the day and easily access the project site whenever they required additional data.

### *Learning Process*

Most participants in the KUL-UOM workshop were women – notably all KUL participants were women between 21 and 25 years, studying interior architecture or architecture. The composition of the Sri Lankan groups was more varied, in terms of gender, age as well as educational status and professional experience. Those who had prepared the workshop were

familiar with the context and setting of the project site, the others were not. These differential levels of knowledge and familiarity created the starting point for the learning curve that each of the participants could pursue over the 9 days of interaction.

The workshop offered participants both formal (presentations, feedback moments) and informal (field visit, discussions, shared meals) experiences in different “learning spaces”. The group of KUL students lodged at the YWCA probably enjoyed the largest variety of such spaces: they were together, in a country and a city they hardly knew, exploring a neighbourhood together with Sri Lankan participants who were far more familiar with this context and often had more professional experience.

Interpersonal, intercultural, and intergenerational exchanges between the participants were largely unobstructed by language barriers and generally overcame differences in opinion, age or experience. They took place in the field, over meals, and while discussing the successive phases of the project. These exchanges forced participants to face and deal with unpredictable and changing situations. Moreover, participants had to deal with the constant shifting of perspectives generated by fieldwork experiences, observations, and creative re-interpretations throughout the two phases of the workshop. Combined with the intermittent feedback moments and presentations, this spurred participants into learning and reflecting upon past experiences rather than merely relying on the possession of specific skills. This process of self-reflection is a typical by-product of intercultural ECAs that benefits all participants as well as the workshop coordinators.

#### **4. Final reflections**

In the wake of a globalized economy, skilled as well as less skilled people worldwide are more likely to face an unknown future. With this prospect in mind, education systems need to enhance students' capability to integrate knowledge, skills, personal qualities and new insights derived from reflecting upon past experiences. ECAs create opportunities to widen the range of such experiences beyond the specific, curricular skills. ECAs that involve intercultural exchange and dialogue are even more likely to boost the capability to learn from self-reflection.

The experiences gained in the preparation, conduct and follow-up of this workshop give reason to reflect and rethink following aspects:

- ECAs are well-established at KUL-FAR to the point that the curricular and extracurricular sometimes seem to overlap. Summer schools are becoming a sought-after ‘learning space’ for an increasing number of students, especially when they come with partial funding from public funding agencies or private donors. This year's overwhelming response to the KUL-UOM summer workshop shows beyond doubt that the time is ripe to open this opportunity to students who are about to start a masters' degree. This also means that instructors at Bachelors' and Masters' level will need to establish procedures to help students think strategically about the ECAs for which they apply. And to do so, also implies that summer schools/ workshops will need to work towards continuity i.e. either establishing a continuous relationship with local partners, building a longitudinal research and follow-up in one locality, or most likely, a combination of both.
- Summer schools / workshops may still need some time to gain ground at UoM. Given Sri Lanka's current economic growth and prosperity, however, short ECAs may soon become a necessary stratagem, particularly for UoM's Masters' curricula, to keep a competitive edge over private higher education institutes. For ECAs of a longer duration like the KUL-UOM



workshop, a one-to-one partnership may not be the most effective and feasible formula at present. An alternative may be to launch open, online calls to interested and motivated students at large, such as the one KUL-FAR has done in Cambodia over the past two years. More broadly speaking, the university should explore ways of promoting self-reflection and “life-wide” learning with larger numbers of students. The on-going process of internationalization is probably a good move in that direction.

- Aside from institutional policies and frameworks, instructors and professionals who are passionate about their work usually remain the driving forces behind ECAs like the summer workshop discussed in this paper. The way in which they communicate their ideas, motives and limitations among themselves and towards their students is of the utmost importance for the success or failure of the initiatives in which they pour so much time and energy. True to the self-reflection and leaning processes they pursue, they need to sustain communication, feedback and fine-tuning throughout the entire process.

In parallel to this paper, KUL students have been finalizing the materials that they elaborated together with their Sri Lankan counterparts during the workshop. The author wishes to thank his fellow co-ordinators: his colleague Ms. Annemie DEMEULEMEESTER and former student Mr. Asiri DISSANAYAKE for their enthusiasm and support throughout the workshop, and last but not least, Dr. Janaka WIJESUNDARA for his patience and unrelenting encouragement in preparing the workshop. A special acknowledgement is due for all participants’ sustained efforts in making the exhibition of produced come true. The results that they will display in there are well worth showing and invite to be further elaborated in the coming years.

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**Appendix A: Detailed overview of workshop activities**

Date	Detailed overview of activities	Expected outputs
25/8	<p><b>General Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introductory session @ UoM</li> <li>- Field visits of project site &amp; surroundings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First proposal of section through the project site and immediate vicinity.</li> <li>- Formation of 8 groups (2 KUL + 2 Sri Lankan students)</li> <li>- Assignment of 4 groups / section</li> </ul>
26 – 28/8	<p><b>Participatory fieldwork observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reconnaissance survey &amp; adjustment of proposed sections</li> <li>b. Observation &amp; documentation of <u>current 'urban living' conditions</u>, its qualities limitations &amp; inadequacies</li> <li>c. Identification of stretches of the section that are interesting for a more detailed study</li> <li>d. Team-wise presentation of overall section among participants &amp; coordinators</li> <li>e. Group-wise identification &amp; justification of detailed studies among workshop participants &amp; coordinators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. First impressions; proposal &amp; justification for adjustments in section</li> <li>b. Section (Scale 1:50, metric), including partial perspectives, sketches, pictures, soundbites, short interviews &amp; conversations, etc.</li> <li>c. Justification of the proposal (each separately &amp; towards other proposed sites in the same section) &amp; summary outline of proposed project output</li> <li>d. Feedback &amp; exchange between 2 teams &amp; coordinators</li> <li>e. Feedback &amp; exchange between all groups; selection of priority projects &amp; adjustment /merging of groups, if necessary</li> </ul>
29 -31/8	<p><b>Creative elaboration &amp; design focused on detailed studies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recalibration of the section in function of the received feedback and the selected portions for detailed study</li> <li>b. Highlighting / detailing of <u>current 'urban living' conditions</u> in the portions selected for detailed studies.</li> <li>c. Creative re-interpretation &amp; proposals:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; to effectuate the <b>transition of current to future 'urban living' conditions</b>, AND/ OR</li> <li>&gt; to <b>integrate qualities</b> of current 'urban living' conditions <b>into the planning and design of future 'urban living' conditions</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>d. Team-wise presentation of overall section to workshop participants &amp; interested stakeholders / outsiders (31/8, evening)</li> <li>e. Group-wise presentation of detailed studies to workshop participants &amp; interested stakeholders / outsiders (31/8, evening)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Final draft of section &amp; documenting materials (scale 1:50, metric)</li> <li>b. Detailed sections &amp; full documentation materials for selected portions (scale 1:50, metric)</li> <li>c. Sketches, drawings and models of proposed transition process / integration strategies (scale in function of the study object)</li> <li>d. Feedback &amp; suggestions towards finalization</li> <li>e. Feedback &amp; suggestions towards finalization</li> </ul>
01 – 02/9	<p><b>Finalization of design &amp; exhibition materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Finalization of the produced section and detailed study materials</li> <li>b. Selection &amp; preparation of materials to be included in the exhibition</li> <li>c. Review &amp; evaluation among workshop participants, coordinators &amp; sympathizers (02/9 @UoM)</li> <li>d. Farewell dinner offered by KUL participants &amp; coordinators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Finalized section &amp; detailed study with all documentary materials</li> <li>b. Finalized materials ready for digital transfer and / or printing</li> <li>c. Lessons learnt &amp; suggestions for future development &amp; integration in KUL &amp; UoM curricula</li> <li>d. Happy ending</li> </ul>