

**Future
Architecture
Platform**

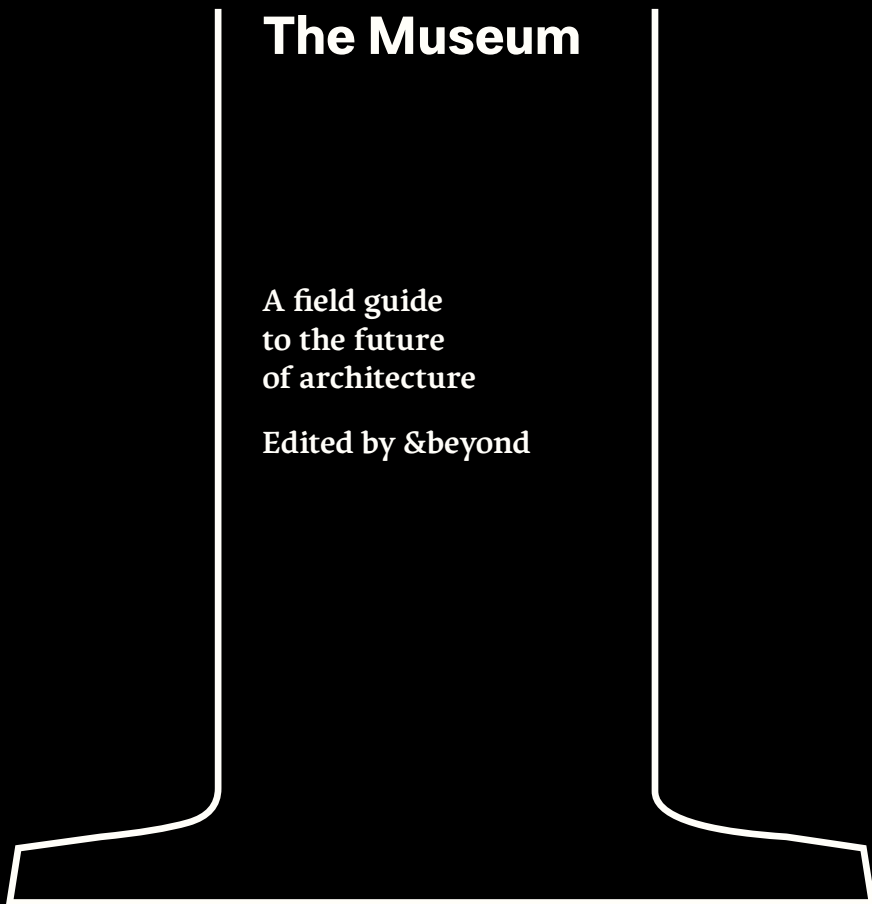


Archifutures

The Museum

**A field guide
to the future
of architecture**

Edited by &beyond



Those Who Can



Pedagogic vision meets interdisciplinary strategy and tactics

- **CANactions,
Kiev**

“In the case of urban development and the housing market, we see absolutely nothing, no innovation, no competition and no idea of what this could be, what other models could exist.”



CANactions

Urs Thomann is an urban planner, co-founder and curator of CANactions School for Urban Studies.

Vladyslav Tyminkyi is an architect, researcher, author and director of the education programme at the CANactions School for Urban Studies.

CANactions is an international platform for communication and cooperation between people and institutions with different professional backgrounds, focused on implementing positive change in Ukrainian cities. Since its establishment in 2008 in Kiev, CANactions has become one of the most important institutions in Ukraine sharing best practice in the fields of architecture and urbanism.

At CANactions School for Urban Studies in Kiev, Ukraine, the focus is on combining the disciplines, tactics and backgrounds that its students bring. Two of the schools initiators, Vladyslav Tyminskyi and Urs Thomann explain their all-in-one approach to Rob Wilson.



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process
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In what way do you see CANactions School for Urban Studies as providing a new or experimental model of education or academic institution?

Vladyslav Tyminskyi The first thing to say is that we're not providing an academic education. The initial idea was to develop a post-diploma course for people with a strong interest in urbanism and urban development, but coming from very different perspectives – we've got architects and urban designers,

but also engineers, sociologists, graphic designers and journalists on the course. They've all already taken specialist first degrees and built up skills in practice, but have a strong interest in exploring new tools and working in interdisciplinary teams. We aim to create an environment where the potential from such new collaborations can be realised: that's one of the purposes of the school. It is neither about research nor about design and planning: it is about combining them all in the frame of one programme.

VT It is through developing this network of people who share similar values focused on making positive changes – both tangible and intangible – in our cities. We're also helping people to acquire skills which they cannot get at university or in their jobs. Everything that we do is primarily based on teamwork and secondly, on a new approach to urban development which Urs can talk more about. Our initial statement of intent was to move from a general planning approach to a guiding planning approach: from static tools of developing cities to dynamic tools.

Urs Thomann The core of the experience is the practical studio-based teamwork which gives the participants new insights and experiences, helping them work differently in their future careers. In urban planning, in terms of both training and practice, Ukraine is still quite isolated, with approaches that originated in the twentieth century: i.e. Soviet-based planning or old hierarchical ways of

How do you see the experience that your school provides feeding back into and affecting the future of architecture, the city and society?

cooperation – across both private companies and in the public sector. Here at CANactions, as Vlad said, people sharing similar values are given the opportunity to work together: in the first phase a research project and in the second phase a project taking a strategic overview and plan for city development, but also focused on specific case study sites, like the ones we currently have in Ivano-Frankivsk in the Western Ukraine and Kramatorsk in the Eastern Ukraine.

Can you explain the importance of both the strategic vision and the more tactical side of things exemplified by these case studies?

UT One of our aims is to combine these two things: it's important but it is also quite difficult – so it is still evolving!

Our ambition is to stick

everything together: top down and bottom up; strategic and tactical; public sector and activists; large and small scale. In German there is a good phrase for this all-angles-covered approach: *“eierlegende Wollmilchsau”* – an-egg-laying-wool-milk-sow, one that of course provides meat as well!

VT In Ukraine now it's very important to develop both directions. Firstly to establish principles for strategic thinking, planning and design and, at the same time, to develop the first steps leading to these strategies. You can work with a good strategic plan for a city, but it's not always understandable for people, unless you convince them through a specific tactical, tangible project. So from the beginning we were challenging ourselves with the task of combining these two different approaches: that's the magic of it.

VT CANactions actually grew out of the Architecture Festival. This had the ambition nine years ago to initiate new thinking and new approaches in contemporary architecture and urbanism by inviting people and experts – many from abroad – to talk about the latest concepts from around the world. Then it was quickly realised that it's not enough to have this for one week annually during the Festival, so the year-round public programme was developed as well, with open lectures and workshops for everyone interested in architecture and urbanism.

Then, one year ago, we started the School for Urban Studies project. For me and Urs this was our first experience of working at CANactions. We'd like to synchronise all the strands of activity as much as possible, to build a common framework for the institution, educating and inspiring people in line with our mission.

UT It's important to mention here the ambitions of Viktor Zotov, the founder of CANactions. He's an architect and for him it has always been important to put Ukrainian architecture in a global context.

UT Yes exactly. And it's also important for him that the public – everyone else who are not architects, from different kinds of professions and different kinds of life situations – is involved.

Apart from the School for Urban Studies, the other strands of CANactions activity include the International Architecture Festival and a public programme. How do these complement each other?

I read a quote from him about the School in which he said that: "we have to leave our 'closed circle' and 'zoom out' our world-view as much as we can".





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User-generated Kyiv



I think this is very important if Ukraine wants to achieve change. Take for example the issues around housing here. Whereas everybody knows which are the best cars in the world – and there’s competition between car brands: in the case of urban development and the housing market, we see absolutely nothing, no innovation, no competition, and no idea of what this could be, what other models could exist. A normal person living in a flat in Kiev only knows one type of flat.

VT Our intention is to change the emphasis from purely architectural issues to urban planning issues and more socially orientated ones. It’s parallel to the overall shift happening around the world: witness the 15th Architecture Biennale in Venice: *Reporting From the Front*. There’s a global move away from aesthetic and formal issues towards paying more attention to the final user, involving them in the process. This is one of the values that unites us, the social orientation of our work and how to spread this through public programmes, educational programmes, publishing and festivals.

UT What we’re seeing already is that our most effective tools are our graduates. They’re travelling to different cities all over the country for workshops and other activities and participatory projects. It’s been a nice surprise that they’re not just doing this in their home cities but are forming mobile teams together, going to totally different cities to do projects. Usually every city in Ukraine has its own boss and is like a little kingdom with a top-down approach. But suddenly there are people coming from other cities taking part in projects, helping to break down old hierarchies.

“Our most effective tools are our graduates”

VT We're also travelling a lot ourselves: going to cities like Lviv, Kharkiv, Poltava and Dnipro and presenting our ideas or the upcoming programme. As a result there are a lot of people from these regions now coming to the School and who then go back to their native cities to do things at a higher level of quality. At least we hope so! It's important that we're not trying to concentrate everything in Kiev, that the people we get are from over all the country.



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UT Well our focus and main mission is urban change in Ukraine with most participants being students who'll work in the country. However, for the quality of the programme, for opening up its dynamics, for sharing experiences, we'd like to have up to 25 per cent of participants from around the world if possible.

So up to now, are the students mainly Ukrainian in origin?

VT We do an international open call and anyone from all over the world can apply for the programme. But yes from our side the most important aspect is creating positive change within the country.

“This should be done now, not tomorrow, and not in a year, but now”

Given the specific situation of Ukraine at the moment – which has of course been very much in the news over the last two years – and the “volatility, complexity and ambiguity” that you have spoken of – do you see this as a particular moment of change and opportunity, the chance to break down old hierarchies, and rebuild new processes of urban development?

VT Yes, the momentum in the last couple of years has been unique. This should be done now, not tomorrow, and not in a year, but now. I would say that a lot of the changes we are observing now in Ukraine will not continue forever: for us and for the programme there is a time horizon of three to five years maximum after which the country should be in a position to deal with a lot of these issues itself. Energy is also an important issue. It’s impossible to be constantly in a state of change – the energy of people who’d like to do something, also has limits. We should be aware that this is a unique moment in which to change the things you believe in and make better conditions.

UT The challenge is to bring in a new understanding. Whilst there might be a progressive

team in the government now,

in three years with an election, there may be another

team. It is senseless for the dynamic of a city to be

dependent on a single mayor's will or patronage. The

dynamic must go much deeper down and draw on the

active participation of the citizens. That's the big challenge:

to start this dynamic and try to get to a position of no

return, no matter whom we have in power. ■

So it is the process side of things that is more important to you; the process not the form?