

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2022)

Heft: 41

Artikel: Where do we stand? : Learning from the strategy workshops

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1037213>

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Where Do We Stand? Learning from the Strategy Workshops

Momoyo Kaijima, Laurent Stalder

The idea that education at the ETH Zurich's Department of Architecture (D-ARCH) must change is not new. Since the founding of the polytechnic Bauschule in 1855, its curriculum has constantly evolved to meet contemporary challenges. This spirit propelled the school's growth over the last 167 years, including its transformation from a small outfit with one professor and nine students to a large organisation with forty-one professors and almost two thousand students. And while D-ARCH's character as a Swiss and public-funded institution has been unchanged since its establishment, the department's positioning vis-à-vis the world has changed (and will continue to do so). The current reforms must be considered against this background. In November 2020, the then dean, Christophe Girot, set up two task forces to advise the department's board on the reform of the school's faculty appointments and the curriculum, respectively. Girot's initiative aimed to address three challenges faced back then: the important rejuvenation of the professorial body, a growing demand by the students to take into account contemporary societal challenges, and a sense of alienation because of the Covid crisis.

Members of the second task force, the «Curriculum Group», included François Charbonnet, Sacha Menz and Laurent Stalder (all of whom had been working together on the issue for a few months already), plus Maarten Delbeke, Benjamin Dillenburger, Christophe Girot, Momoyo Kaijima, Silke Langenberg, Elli Mosayebi and Freek Persyn. The group's membership was set up to equally represent D-ARCH's five institutes and feature a balanced mix of senior and recently hired professors. In June 2021, after consultations with AAA (assistants of the D-ARCH) and achitektura, the Curriculum Group presented the first draft of its proposal to the Professors' Conference. This draft contained three main motions: a stronger focus on «design» as the conceptual pivot of architectural education in the school, a clearer distinction between undergraduate education (skill-based design) and postgraduate education (research-based design), and a deeper integration of research and design.

Following the presentation and in response to the department's pressing need to develop a strategic vision (as requested by the ETH Executive Board), in the fall of 2021, the D-ARCH entrusted the Curriculum Group in addition with the planning of the new department strategy. The decision was made at the Professors'

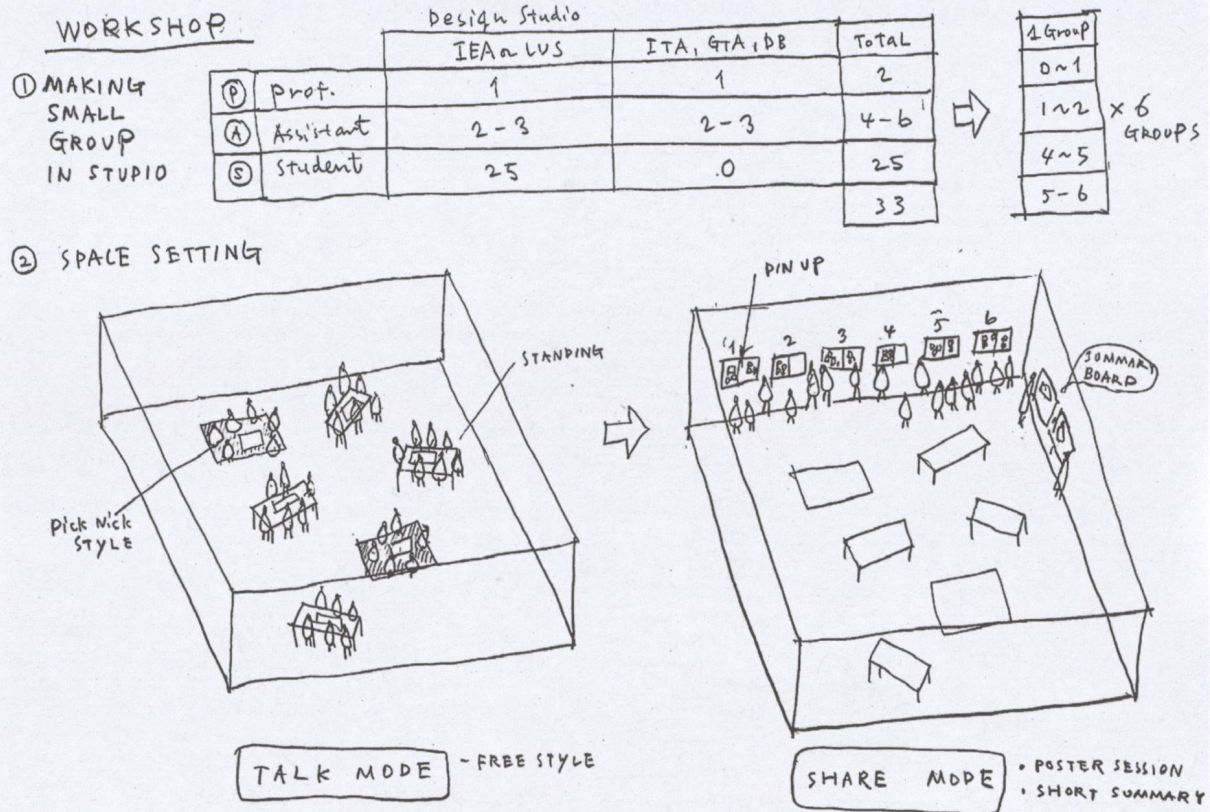
Conference upon the suggestion of the new dean, Tom Emerson. To include a broader range of voices and thereby better fulfil its mission, the current Strategy and Curriculum Group extended its membership to representatives of the school's Mittelbau and student bodies, namely, Cara Rachele from AAA and Eva Schnewwly from achitektura. At the same time, Milica Topalovic replaced Freek Persyn. Then, in mid-2022, Vera Kaps, the educational developer of the department, and Matthias Kohler, the current dean-elect joined the group (as external members).

The establishment of the Strategy and Curriculum Group marks a historic change in how the department develops its strategy. Until then, developing it had always been the purview of the dean, who would then submit (or not) the proposal for approval to the department committee. Instead, by bringing in a variety of voices from within the department the Strategy and Curriculum Group framed this task as a collective effort. On top of that, the group actively sought and acted upon advice from both internal and external consultants, weaving in its proposal recommendations from the «Engage D-ARCH» report, the Mental Health Group report, the «Matters of Culture and Matters of Rules» report, and the «Gender Action Plan». Perhaps more radically, though, the Strategy and Curriculum Group directly involved the students and staff in the strategy-making process.

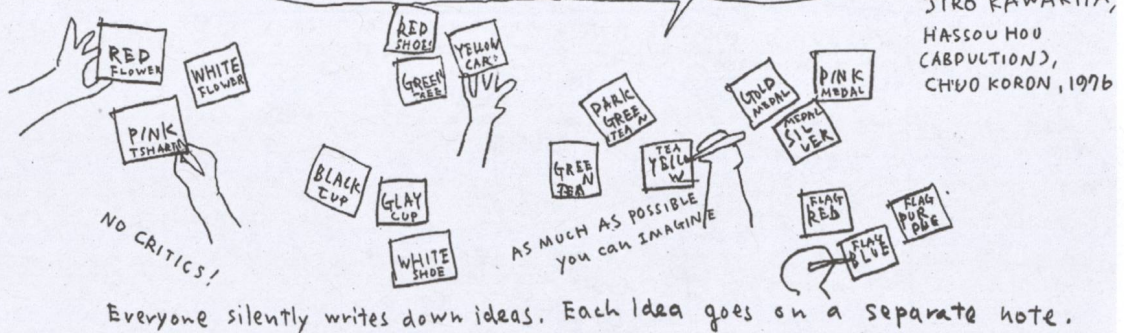
This was done through a series of workshops designed by Momoyo Kaijima and led by Momoyo Kaijima and Laurent Stalder. Participants of these meetings included D-ARCH students of all levels, assistants, professors and administrative staff. These workshops aimed to collectively identify specific needs, views and aspirations within the department concerning architectural education and the discipline's responsibility towards society. Thirty-one workshops took place between March and May 2022, all in the design studios, of which one only with the doctoral students and one only with the professors.

The workshops followed the «KJ method», developed by the Japanese ethnographer Jiro Kawakita in 1967 and since then widely used in Japan for urban planning workshops featuring several stakeholders. The KJ method is structured around four phases: 1) formulating questions; 2) exploration; 3) observation; 4) conceptualisation. The organisers' choice fell on this method

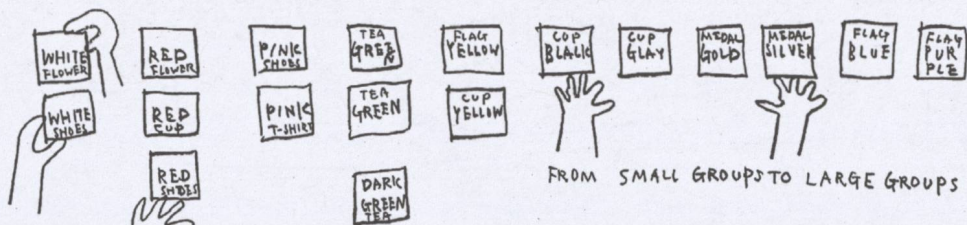
A



3-1) PRE EXERCISE 1: WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE COLOR THINGS? (2min)
Individual brainstorming
PLEASE WRITE 3-5 ANSWERS USING ONE ANSWER IN ONE NOTE.



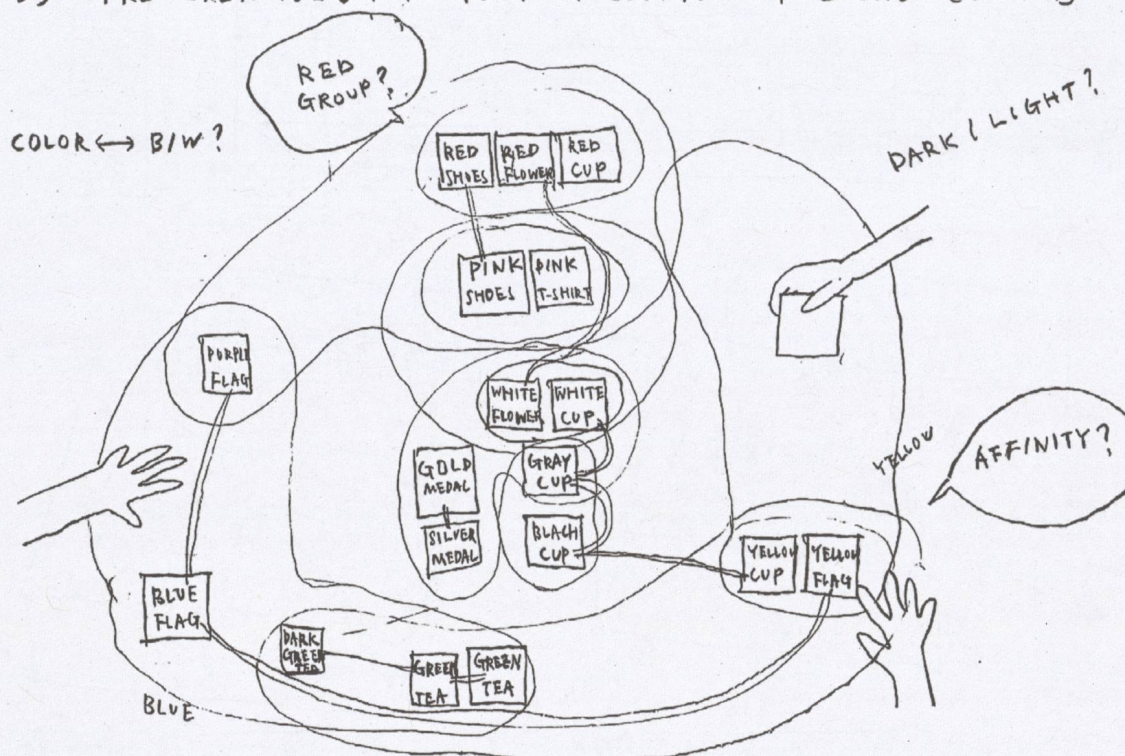
3-2) PRE EXERCISE 2: SHARING IDEAS (2min)



People take turns sharing the idea they have written and posting them to the group space.

B

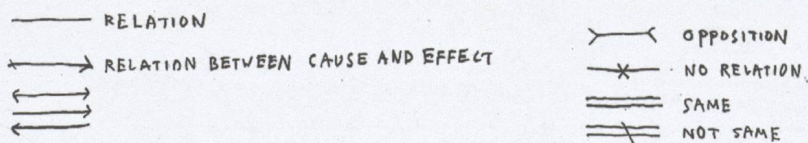
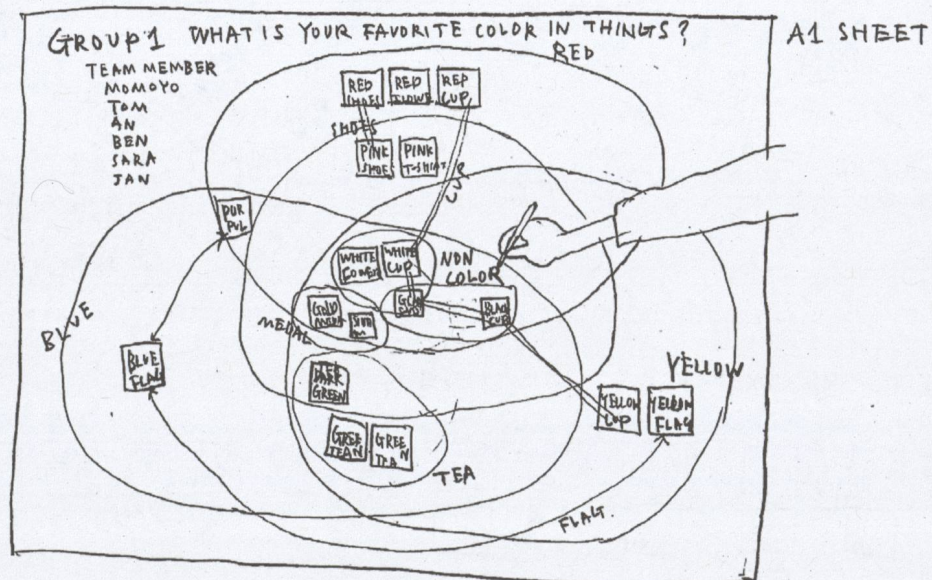
3-3) PRE EXERCISE 3 : GROUPING OR CLUSTERING IDEAS (2min.)



WORK TOGETHER, THE TEAM MAKES GROUPS OF SIMILAR IDEA OR CONCEPTS.
EACH GROUP GETS NAMED WITH SINGLE WORD OR SHORT PHASE, TEXT.

3-4) PRE EXERCISE 4 : LAY OUT OF IDEAS WITH KEY TEXT. (2min)

ON THE A1 PAPER.



C

Q1. Welches architektonische Wissen ist aus Ihrer Sicht grundlegend?
WHICH KIND OF ARCHITECTURAL KNOWLEDGE IS FUNDAMENTAL TO YOU?



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Was möchten Sie als ETH-Architektin / ETH-Architekt zur Gesellschaft beitragen?

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE, AS ETH-ARCHITECT, TO SOCIETY?



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Have a look at
the results here:



because of the latter's built-in capacity to offer a qualitative (more than quantitative) assessment of the participants' needs by fully taking into account the plurality of voices among them. In each meeting, the workshop participants were put in groups of five. In the exploration phase, each participant wrote five to ten ideas on post-it notes. Then, in the observation phase, each group clustered these post-it notes on an A0 paper sheet by affinity or meaning. Finally, in the conceptualisation phase, each group pinned this A0 paper sheet to the wall, as in a design crit, including a title elucidating the main motion of the group. A final, summarising discussion between all the workshop participants followed, led by one moderator.

All meetings evolved around two questions: «what kind of architectural knowledge is fundamental to you?» and «as an ETH architect, how would you like to contribute to society?». Before introducing it to the department, the KJ method was tested in Kaijima's second-year design studio, as doubts loomed over its suitability for large groups. This test evidenced that due to the very high number of envisioned meetings and participants it was crucial to find a way to synthesise the workshops' findings. In particular, it seemed all-important to devise an effective visual representation technique for the task. The actual workshops took place after this test run, and the workshop results were uploaded on a shared Miro board. Scheduled initially to last around ninety minutes, some of the workshops lasted up to three hours, ostensibly because the participants recognised them as a unique chance to critically reflect on their experience as students and their aspirations as future architects.

After completing all the workshops, the Strategy and Curriculum Group summarized the results in a single diagram using the same terms, concepts and graphic conventions proposed by the participants. Six themes emerged from this analysis: the future of the architectural profession; architecture's role in facilitating integration; the idea of «design» as the architect's core competence; the extra skills required for architectural design and thinking; the discipline's relation to other contemporary forms of knowledge; and architecture's constitutive suitability (called wisdom for better term) to the pursuit of beauty, technical advancement, and social and environmental justice.

In addressing these themes, the participants voiced a few important points about architecture and its place in the world today. To begin with, they see the architect's future role in society more than that of a mere designer. Second, to them, «integration» does not mean simply the pursuit of interdisciplinarity but, more broadly, the need to include considerations about social responsibility, representation and equity. Third, the acquisition of skills — technical, visual, social, and critical thinking — is a pressing issue. Further, while the participants acknowledge D-ARCH's broad course offering, they demand that new subjects are introduced (like ecology or politics) alongside traditional subjects that have disappeared from the curriculum (like descriptive geometry). Finally, they concur that the architect's core competence is design.

The workshops' results were made available on a Miro board in July 2022 (Please, have a look via the QR-code). The reason for openly sharing the provisional results of this process is — apart from transparency — to encourage feedback from the D-ARCH community. This move is in accord with the belief that developing the school's strategy and the transformation of its curriculum must be a collaborative effort. In July 2022, a first draft of the department strategy, building on the results of these workshops, was sent to the AAA, *architektura* and all the professors. The Strategy and Curriculum Group will rework this text based on the feedback and present it, alongside a first draft of the new curriculum, to the Department and Professors' Conference in October. This second round of consultations will lead to a final vote in December.

Momoyo Kaijima, born 1969 in Tokyo, earned her master's degree at the Tokyo Institute of Technology in 1994. She founded Atelier Bow-Wow with Yoshiharu Tsukamoto in 1992. In 2000 she completed her post-graduate program at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. She has been serving as an associate professor at the Art and Design School of the University of Tsukuba since 2009 and as a Professor of Architectural Behaviorology at ETH Zurich since 2017. While engaging in design projects for houses, public buildings and station plazas, she has conducted numerous investigations of the city through architecture such as *Made in Tokyo* and *Pet Architecture*.

Laurent Stalder, born 1970 in Lausanne, graduated in architecture from the ETH Zurich in 1996. From 1996 to 1997 he held a scholarship at the Swiss Institute for Archaeology and Building Research in Cairo, and from 1997 to 2001 he was an assistant at the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich, where he obtained his doctorate in 2002. In the same year he was appointed Assistant Professor of Architectural History at the Department of History of the Université Laval in Québec, Canada, and in 2006 Assistant Professor of Architectural Theory at the gta Institute of ETH. Since 2018 he has been a full professor at the Institut gta. He researches and publishes in the field of modernist architecture at the interface between the history of technology and architecture.