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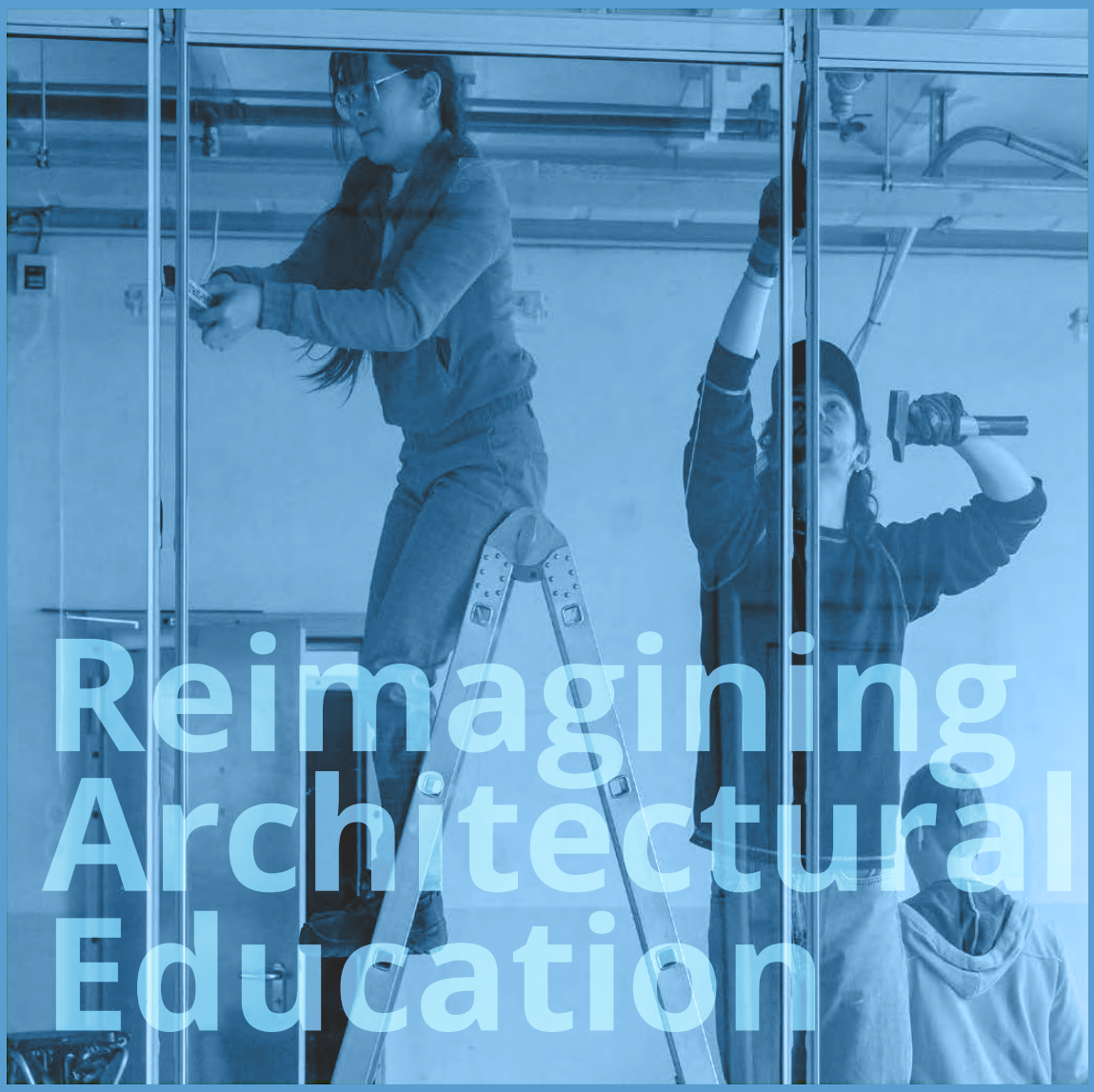
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Reimagining Architectural Education

Pedagogy Awards 2024

European Association for Architectural Education
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ace

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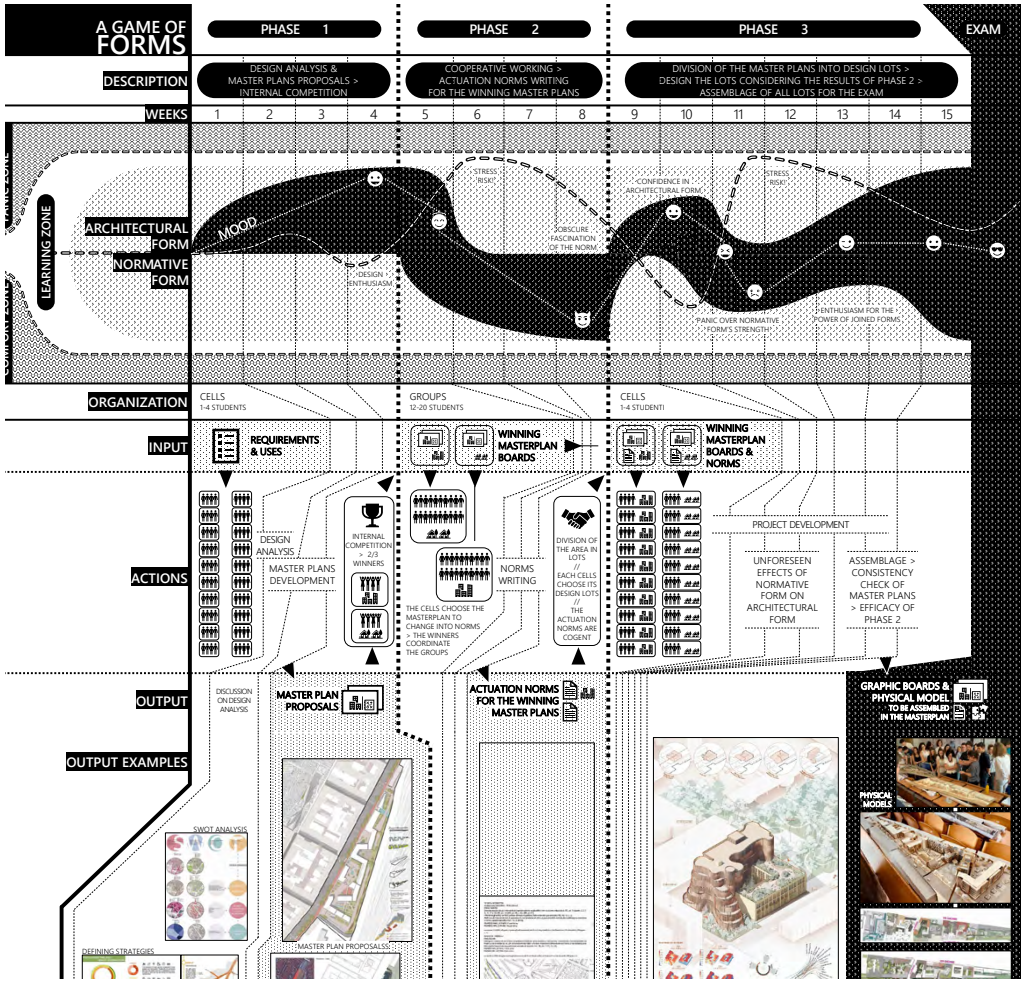
EAAE

Pedagogy Awards **2024**

Politecnico di Torino - IT

Game of Forms

Carlo Deregibus



"A Game of Forms" is a unique design studio format aimed at enhancing architectural design's impact on complex processes. It underscores the potential and utility of design in shaping the formal attributes of spaces and constructing the processes and conditions necessary for their viability. The goal is to push the formal and compositional skills of the students while balancing them with the ability to control the socio-technical and political dimensions of the project, influenced by external actors and factors.

In a transformative learning journey, students undertake various roles, following an approach that maximises the circularity and reflexivity of design action within the studio. Specifically, students are cyclically guided from what the Learning Zone Model calls the Comfort Zone towards the Panic Zone, exploring its boundaries to cultivate proximal learning. The learning outcomes are useful both for future designers and graduated architects who will work in technical studies offices or standards organisations.

The theoretical foundations of "A Game of Forms" are: a phenomenological approach to make the latent potentialities of place emerge; the use of design intentionality to blur the artificial separation between analysis and project; the exploitation of the systemic dimension of architectural design and the resulting tactical dimension of design actions.

The format is divided into three phases at different scales and types. Should the studio see contributions from other disciplines, Phases 1 and 2 will develop the ground knowledge and analysis to be integrated in Phase 3.

In Phase 1, students split into operational cells of 2–4 students. Starting from the same requirements frame and context, they develop a master plan. After a shift towards the Panic Zone, we remain within the central spectrum of the Learning Zone, mainly accelerating the use of skills already possessed and enhancing them proximally. At the end of Phase 1, cells produce alternative proposals, each described by a few key points. Through internal competition, students critique all master plans and select two or three: this peer discussion is crucial for growth.

In Phase 2, cells group based on thematic affinities, forming macro-groups (one per winning master plan). The aim is to transform the master plans into regulatory form by writing rules (e.g., zoning regulations, codes) similar to those in executive urban planning. Phase 2 sees oscillation within the Learning Zone. Students, buoyed by Phase 1's competitive phase, may underestimate difficulties but soon discover the challenges. Collaborative learning and teacher mediation help avoid the Panic Zone. At the end, they translate design intentions into textual and graphic prescriptions, then divide the area into lots for Phase 3.

In Phase 3, cells regain control of the project while respecting Phase 2 rules. This phase resembles a typical design studio aiming at a high-quality project. The design will likely clash with imposed rules, revealing how architectural form depends on other forms and vice versa. The teacher's role is critical in managing potential stress. This phase shows that rules can be circumvented or broken, but only by working on their systemic dimension or through design, leading to strong proximal learning. Outputs are graphic boards and models assembled into a macro-model for verifying the master plan's success and norms' efficacy.

"A Game of Forms" aims for convergence between architectural and normative forms, cultivating professionals who can respond to emergent needs and navigate complex systems. It fosters cyclical alternation of failures and successes, reinforcing students' ability to address challenges and anticipate conflicts. The format has been tested in various cases, always with other disciplines, across Bachelor's and Master's levels with minor adaptations.