Design

X

Commons

DesignXCommons

DesignXCommons is the learning trajectory and the design focus of the Master of Arts courses (DASL) offered by IED – Istituto Europeo di Design. IED's Master of Arts courses (DASL) allow students to **broaden the technical and cultural competences** acquired during the Bachelor's Degree courses, **deepen autonomous critical thinking** with respect to the urgent challenges of the present and **develop a design approach capable of contributing to significant changes**, recognising the interdependence between design decisions and the impact on people, society and the environment.

The world we live in is increasingly interconnected, resources are more and more limited and many places are the stage for eco-social injustices. In this scenario, IED sees **design as a transformative platform** contributing to a more equitable and resilient world, responding to the changing needs of society and the environment, adapting to – but also hacking – emerging technologies. The common goal is to **formulate new design questions** anticipating future challenges and to **identify emerging sectors**.

The IED Master of Arts courses are based on the concept of **DesignXCommons**, i.e. design applied to the ideation, the regeneration, the implementation, the integration and sharing of **common resources (Commons)**. The concept of commons is defined as the set of material and immaterial resources, with which several communities of people relate and which can therefore be considered the collective heritage of humanity. Examples of commons are land, water, forests and even the atmosphere, climate, biodiversity, but also knowledge, patents, local knowledge, the internet, the transport system, healthcare, food and social security. The very act of producing, managing, sharing and distributing these common resources is what is known as commoning, which is therefore **an act of design**, involving the development of active propositions between a common good (commons) and one or more commoners (communities).

Method

Assessing the ways in which the commons are sourced, processed, applied and distributed requires special attention, and in IED's DASL courses it becomes a design focus concerning, for example:

The design and application of sustainable **materials** and fibres in **fashion, product, and interior design**.

The use of **design and production technologies** to support **regenerative methods and circular practices**.

Interior design as an **ecology of living** – individual and collective – that generates physical and mental space using shared material and immaterial resources.

The **inclusion of communities** in the design of new spatial devices and **public places** in the broader project of **urban regeneration and mobility** conceived as an interdisciplinary interweaving of relationships with society, capable of shaping **social structures**.

The generation of **exchange platforms** that revitalise the artistic cultural heritage, understood as a system of commons.

The construction of **post-digital worlds** where the knowledge of nature is fully integrated with the knowledge of technology and where the human-machine relationship is understood as a form of **ethical-material alliance**.

Values

Placing the commons perspective at the core of the Master of Arts courses (DASL) means acknowledging how design has always had (and continues to have) a fundamental role as a social balancer in making a more equitable future accessible to all – be it related to issues of diversity, community or availability of resources and services. To enable this, the core values in the DesignXCommons are:

Equity   This means ensuring that all members of society, regardless of their background, identity, skills and social status, have equal access to and benefit from shared resources, all the while correcting inequalities resulting from history and systemic factors.

Inclusiveness   This means embracing diversity and actively involving members of marginalized or under-represented communities in shaping project contexts and decision-making processes to make sure that course framing is equitable and inclusive. This notion should be extended to overcoming physical and cognitive barriers, ensuring that products and environments are accessible to all people, and going beyond mere regulatory compliance, pushing project analysis to a deeper level of understanding and awareness, while also celebrating differences as a source of inspiration for creating experiences to reach out to a broade range of users.

Responsibility   This means holding all stakeholders, including governments, industry and communities, accountable for their actions when it comes to shared resources and the environmental impact of their decisions. Thus, what is important is to bring an ethical approach into the design process, looking at the social, economic an environmental impact of projects through all the different phases.

Sustainability   This means prioritizing long-term environmental and social well-being, working to preserve the commons and mitigate damage to the environment while meeting the needs of present and future generations, seeking solutions that have a positive impact on our planet and society.

Interconnection
This means recognising the intertwined relationships between social and environmental systems, emphasising how people and nature are interdependent in common challenges. With this in mind, it is crucial to encourage that ideas, methods and results are shared openly to contribute to a culture of continuous learning.

Solidarity   This means encouraging collective action, empathy and a sense of responsibility among students and lecturers through dedicated programmes, and more broadly among individuals and communities, as a way to address different challenges and work towards achieving social and environmental justice.

Approaches

According to the concept of commoning, the interdependence between design decisions and the impact on people, society and the environment is recognised in IEDs' Master of Arts courses as essential in the current context, where the urgency of addressing social, environmental and economic challenges is now shared by intergovernmental initiatives on a global scale. With this in mind, **design takes interdisciplinary forms** that include:

An ethical approach   It is necessary to ensure respect for cultural sensitivities, inclusiveness and protection of cultural rights. **Ethical design is based on embracing inclusive and collaborative processes**, with different kinds of stakeholders getting involved. Co-design, collaborative workshops and user – or community-focused design formats – combined with the collective efforts of designers, lecturers and students – allow creating solutions to immediate needs and contribute to a world centred on the shared well-being of people, other species and the environment. In terms of production, such an approach requires seeking and applying sustainable materials, using innovative technologies and promoting equitable economic models.

A systemic approach   It means looking at the broader ecological, social and economic systems where the focus of design research is placed. Applying systemic thinking means focusing on understanding and managing the interactions within these systems for the optimisation of all or some of their parts: from the supply and use of resources to the promotion of sustainable and circular development models. It is **a design that creates positive connections** and synergy between object and infrastructure, between material, energy and know-how flows – all of which are often perceived according to a dualistic logic.

A regenerative approach   It seeks not just to reduce negative impacts on the environment, but also to **restore and regenerate ecosystems and natural resources**. Regenerative design intervenes in the supply and disposal of resources in a circular economy perspective and implements metabolic systems that restore, renew or revitalise resources that have already been used. Such resilient and equitable actions are likely to successfully combine the needs of society with preserving the integrity of nature, thus making design a positive contributor to the ecological transition.

An educational approach   It includes design forms of **education and advocacy to raise awareness** and promote a new culture of collaboration and shared responsibility through the design of community workshops, campaigns and communication strategies. Setting up this approach is based on the integration of educational programmes that encourage active participation, experiential learning, and also understanding about the dynamics of shared resources within specific social and cultural contexts.

These approaches allow the formulation of multiple design questions that the students, together with mentors and all other stakeholders involved will develop from the design of new social and material contexts within which to situate their work, taking into account certain **guidelines**.

Guidelines

Ecological sensitivity   Minimising the environmental impact of design solutions in the perspective of ecological transition. Ecological sensitivity is an integral part of a **systemic approach** that may include the use and design of sustainable materials, the reduction of emissions as a project or as a consideration of production cycles, the implementation of zero-impact public mobility the adoption of transgenerational and transcultural methods and models best suited in an ecological approach that aims at the elimination of waste according to the principles of the circular economy and the optimisation of both tangible and intangible resources (online platforms and digital transitions), promoting the use of renewable and sustainable resources such as solar, wind and hydroelectric power, as well as using these fields as a direct project application.

Complexity and Interconnection   Promoting a balance between the needs of the environment and human, social and economic needs. Keeping in mind the larger ecosystem where a product or system would work means understanding how design solutions affect the surrounding natural, social and economic environment. Following a **regenerative approach**, the intention is to restore and improve ecosystems and natural resources that have been undermined by human activities. Design is based on the idea of "giving back more than you take".

Local participation   Adopting a "situated" design approach and operating in the most tangible contexts is of fundamental importance in order to have a real impact. Starting from the IED seats in the different cities, it will be possible to deepen a cultural knowledge of these places and **establish synergic connections with different realities present on the territory**, from municipalities to associations, from companies to small producers, from cultural institutions to schools. The involvement of local communities is an integral part of ethical and regenerative design. This will ensure that solutions are tailored to local needs and cultures, with communities taking an active role in the design process and in making use of new tools co-developed with our school. These will then be implemented in social and environmental conservation and regeneration of the chosen ecosystems.

Continuous learning and adaptation   A paradigm shift is needed for resilient enquiry. Designing within a process of continuous learning and adaptation of solutions based onthe results obtained and new information that emerges is necessary to develop projects that generate minimal ecological impact. The paradigm shift sees schools and designers looking for new partners to **formulate new design and professional demands**. At the same time, the review of design processes will be supported with a focus on documenting the positive impact that design proposals would bring to the environment and community well-being.

Integrating the design of new materials and bio-materials Contributing in conceptual and applied ways to the creation of new materials. Where possible, the study and design of new materials could be integrated into the programme, providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to **contribute towards sustainable and responsible system design**, while promoting experimental development and production practices that could inspire spatial, cultural, and ethnological design narratives.

This vision is translated in the IED Master of Arts courses into a **continuous and dynamic learning environment**, where students take an active part in **interdisciplinary projects** together with experts from different fields, experiment with **innovative methodologies**, **participatory governance models and sustainable practices**, essential for the success of transformative interventions and management of the commons.