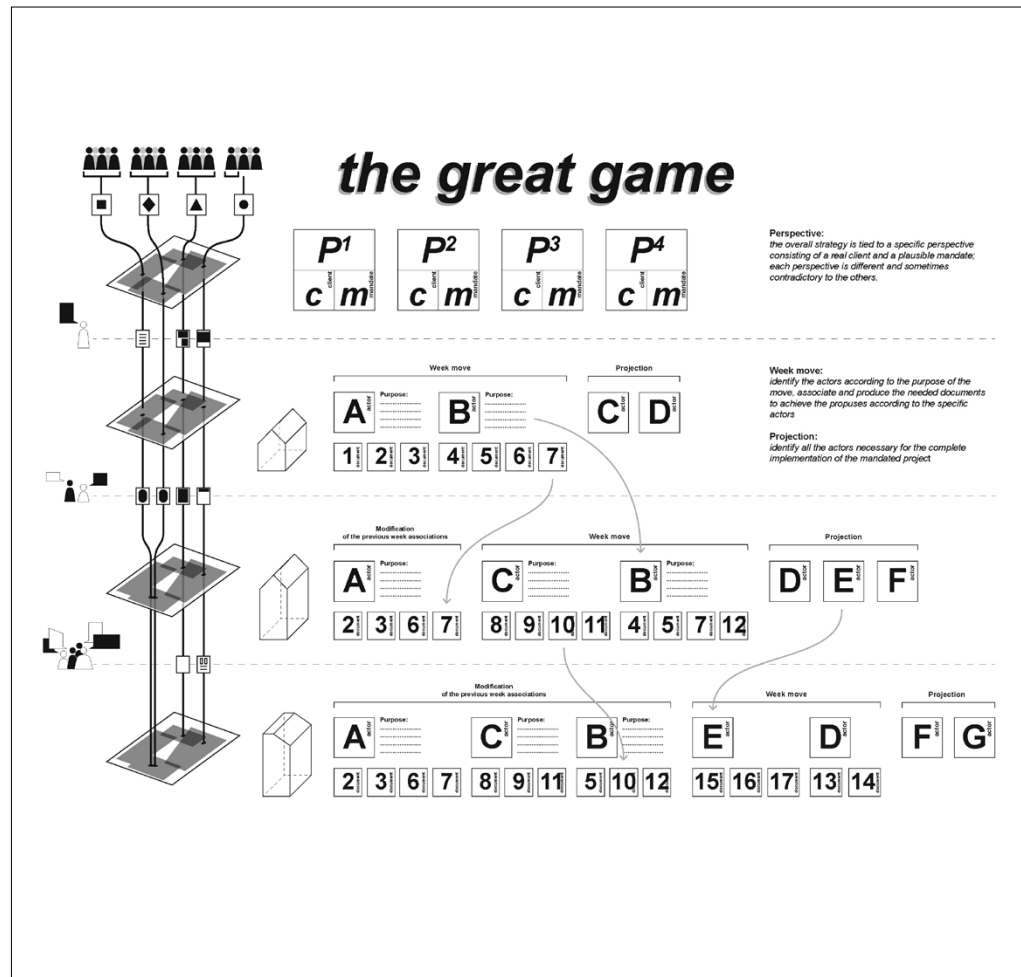


Politecnico di Torino. Department of Architecture and Design - IT

The Great Game

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The Great Game is a pedagogical experiment carried out in the Laboratory of Architectural Design Theory, taught in the third year of the Bachelor in Architecture at Politecnico di Torino. The primary objective is to prepare students to see architectural design as a social and political tool, and their competence as architects as an open field of practice, where gaining agency within complex socio-political exchanges is as important as coordinating technically sound designs.

These aims align with the EAAE teaching award objectives: framing students as active citizens aware of social complexity and able to find agency; treating teaching as a continuously innovated practice; and strengthening ties between architectural education and professional practice. Any plot of land—urban, periurban, village, rural—holds within it rental contracts, zoning laws, fiscal policies, informal agreements, environmental regulations, networks, traditions, structures, and power relations. Any design practice engaging its redevelopment must consider how to design both the conditions for transformation and the formal spatial arrangement.

Acknowledging this complexity, The Great Game shifts focus from individual creativity to collective endeavor. Students aim to define viable strategies and associate an effective set of actors to push them through, developing an understanding of design as collective practice and of the mechanisms that socialize ideas in the world of political exchanges. Each week, players make a ‘move,’ reflecting on their strategy by mapping the actors they engage and the documents they produce. Moves are framed within diagrams that trace evolving strategies, both retrospectively and projectively.

The Game rests on three principles:

- Projects are objects—not ideas—composed of drawings, texts, maps, videos, etc.
- As objects, projects can be exchanged, modified, and reworked by actors with differing perspectives.

- Though connected, the time of design unfolds differently from the time of building

The simulation constructs a complex, situated environment where diverse actors—human and non-human—pursue varying aims, form shifting alliances, and use distinct tools. From the outset, players face a world in motion, with memory and existing dynamics, where every action can have an effect.

Each edition of The Great Game has focused on sites where physical form and socio-political dynamics visibly intersect: two neighborhoods in Detroit shaped by demographic shrinkage; a town in the Apuan Alps dependent on marble extraction; and a town in Northern Sweden being relocated due to intensive mining activity..

Though the course does not require prior knowledge, it works best as a reaction to conventional design studios that emphasize compositional practice. The Game seeks to counterbalance the primacy of form, relying on a theoretical apparatus that draws on Actor Network Theory and Science and Technology Studies. Practical outcomes include:

- students experiment with circulating design documents via newspapers, flyers, websites;
- groups interact strategically, sharing contracts, formal emails, proposals;
- students distinguish between clients’ perspectives and their own, as professionals do;
- students learn to distinguish between absolute values and contingent conditions of action
- The future of The Great Game should be seen in relation to the evolving role of the design studio in architectural education.



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