Since the global financial crisis of 2007-08, calls for social and environmental justice have been on the rise, providing impetus to a growing number of mass mobilizations and protest movements around the world, particularly against the doctrine of neoliberalism.

So what is neoliberalism? Encompassing both politics and economics, neoliberalism is an ideology that has been adopted around the world since the 1970s, sometimes voluntarily; other times through coercive pressures. [1] It is widely associated with policies of economic liberalization, including globalization, privatization, deregulation, free markets, free trade, and austerity measures. Supporters of the neoliberal project argue that such policies have the capacity to liberate the potential of capitalism to create an unparalleled era of social well-being. [2] On the other hand, critics of the project argue that such policies only benefit the dominant classes of both developed and developing countries, which have established worldwide class alliances responsible for promoting the same policies. [2] Critics also argue that the adoption of such policies has come at high human and environmental costs, evident in the persistence of poverty; unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities in most countries; and growing inequalities between the global north and the global south. In the global south, it has had a profound impact in terms of increasing levels of poverty and new forms of accumulation by dispossession, [3] as well as contamination and loss of natural habitats and ecosystems. Knowingly or not, spatial practices have been complicit in these processes due to their ties to dominant power structures and entrenched economic interests, for which reason it is time to ask:

As designers and problem-solvers, how can architects, interior architects and landscape architects proactively contribute to meaningful social and environmental change, especially in geographies characterized by high levels of poverty and environmental degradation?

Centered on notions of activism, agency, empowerment, inclusivity and co-creation, this seminar brings into focus a set of contemporary spatial practices operating in the global south, the ones that keep people before power, place before profit, and cooperation before competition in pursuit of solutions (not just spatial) that foster social equity and environmental protection.

Each of our first nine meetings will begin with media presentations on relevant case studies by the tutor, followed by discussions and deliberations on the content shared. Here, weekly assigned readings from various disciplines will help us broaden our perspectives and deepen our understanding. Midway through the term, students will team up in groups to select and study a specific community and environmental development project, before presenting its story from pre-initiation to initiation and implementation to post-implementation stages in the final meeting. Students will also submit up to four brief reading responses during the course of the term.
