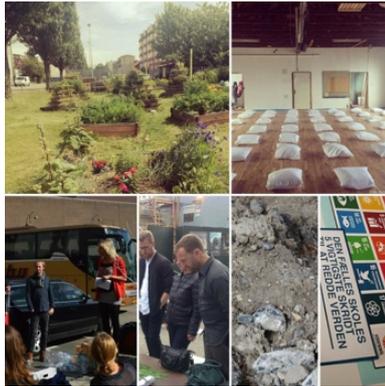


THE ACTION UNIVERSITY AT TEATERØEN Copenhagen

AN ECOLOGY OF ARTBASED LABS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIFE

WE ARE ALL ARTISTIC ACTIVISTS!

**Research as Creation,
Collaboration
and Participation:
We are all artists, activists
and researchers!**



**Sustainable Action:
A collective engagement in
qualitatively better Life**

The Action University: Teaterøen as a campus for experiential and felt thoughts in the act (*dwelling, fabulating, doing, creating, making...*)

Sustainable Action: A collective engagement in Life

“What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to Life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our Life?”

(Michel Foucault)

The SDG-Action University at Teaterøen grows from the idea that sustainability entails *rethinking* central areas of our society such as performativity, rationality, organisation, knowledge, learning, nature and leadership.

Although sustainability is a fuzzy concept with many different attempts to translate it, a growing number of studies tap into *the affective turn*, aiming at understanding sustainability as a transformative potential for our organisations and society. The starting point of these studies is that we cannot solve our problems with the same forms of knowledge that have created the problems in the first place.

Therefore, these studies aim to go beyond this *problem maze* (Li & Lin, 2011), which our industrial society has created, by advocating for sustainability as a new kind of aesthetic, sensitive and sensuous rationality. This rationality is about creating knowledge on an experiential and felt level. Because, when we are affecting our bodies and are affecting other bodies too, we can also put our thoughts into movements and action. Hence, activating these *affective co-motions* also makes it possible to see and to feel how every human and non-human

is related in ongoing, 'flat' and horizontal networks. One movement affects another movement and we can no longer (if ever) manage and control these movements from a meta-governance perspective. What we can do is to ask: How can we be aware of more Life and how can we activate and multiply it together?

The Action University is informed by these kinds of studies and shares the ambition about boosting a sensitive and sensuous rationality, because it wants to explore how to transgress our habitual way of thinking and acting in order to create new pathways. The idea is not *first* to change the individual – and thereby society. The ambition is rather to be aware of and to activate all the subtle, vague - and often understood as useless micro-worlds - between us. This kind of knowledge is an important source for change and for Life. Albeit, also often overseen in our institutionalised and performance-oriented systems.

Artbased labs

The Action University invites managers, urban planners, researchers, artists, citizens and others to come with a central question, a problem or a challenge and to work with this through all sorts of aesthetic performance techniques and practices such as *dwelling, sensing, playing, pausing, creating, reading and walking*. Thereby the Action University wants to create a public space to grow potential new pathways other than the institutionalized and predicted outcome.

This could be challenges such as:

- How to transform strategy as a question of control and management to strategy as dwelling, hosting or creating?
- How to grow new pathways together across formal roles and silos?
- How to invite citizens in ways in which they want to be engaged in collaborative practices?
- How to activate politicians as facilitators of collaborative processes?
- How to work with 'mental health' as a shared topic?
- How to work with 'public value' as a verb, something we are doing and creating together?

Addressing these kinds of questions from sensible and sensuous practices creates a futuristic process between "what already is" (the actual) and "what is not yet articulated" (the potential).

Because if something is radical new it is something we can sense, but also something we have not yet been articulating. The Action University aims to grow new forms of life, value and learning from 'within' these kinds of futuristic processes, where we experience knowledge on an experiential and felt level and thereby move between the actual and the potential and not yet possible.

Ecologies of thoughts in the act

Often, we are aware of our identity such as students, members, parents or friends. The Canadian philosopher Brian Massumi defines this form of becoming as *mirror-seeing*, because the norms and expectations are summoning us into a pre-giving role. When we are *affected* and are *affecting* others and other things it is about *movement-seeing*. Movement-seeing is about all the small and subtle micro-movements affecting us to think and act with a felt difference.

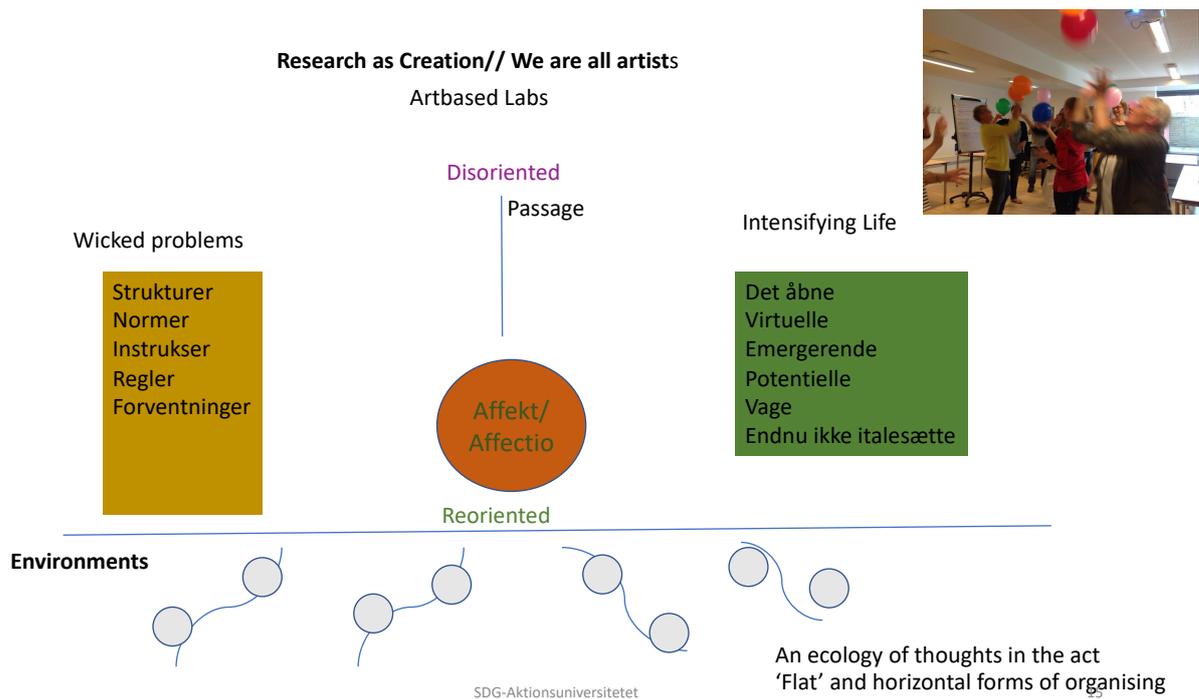
This approach is also redefining processes of knowledge and learning. Often, we understand knowledge as a container, which we can transfer and move from one place to another, and we understand it as objective and separate from *the body*.

Movement-seeing is about knowledge on an experiential and felt level. *Thoughts are created in the act* when we are being affected and when we are affecting other humans and non-humans. Aesthetic techniques and practices are able to intensify and multiply these experiential and *felt thoughts in the act* because they are designed to affect our bodies. This can create ecologies of *thought in the act*: affect affect affects which again affects. To do research in sustainable urban Life is to explore the passages to these ecologies.

So, what is *action*? From this approach all actions are about creation. When we walk from one place to another. When we talk or even listen. But paying attention to the ongoing everydayness of the singular and spontaneous creation makes it possible to create a difference in every movement and intensify it in qualitative better ways. At the Action University we use this awareness of what we often understand as useless acts to create new qualitative better movements.

We offer programs and design labs which are able to make the unconventional, the useless, the vague and the sensitive conventional to pave the way for the creation of new forms of organizing, value creation, learning and performance.

The action research can be understood as a process of taking risks, becoming disorientated and moving beyond the comfort zone. However, the Action University is all about creating and sharing collective techniques and about care. It aims to create an emerging ecology of practices and of belonging and co-existing lives. It creates a field of actions a ‘milieu’ but without a fixed horizon.



It is not only about a ‘positive’ and ‘active’ engagement in doing and creating qualitatively better micro-worlds and movements in relation to humans and non-humans. Rather the Action University welcomes engagement with all kinds of Life forms; active as in-active, positive as more primitive forms. It is a matter of creating a “safe space” for experiencing Life forms as ebb and flow. Some might say, that this is about

“Lifelong Education”, because this approach invites everybody to engage in and to do research in micro-worlds in-between us. We could also call it collective and shared research in sustainable Life.

Copenhagen Action University – Teaterøen as a campus for experiential and felt thoughts in the act

Mostly, when people talk about knowledge, they are concerned with what philosophers call “propositional knowledge.” Propositional knowledge is knowledge of facts, and it can be clearly articulated in language. The primary aim of many universities is to build up that kind of knowledge through research projects, digital data, libraries, power points, buildings etc.

The knowledge that we acquired from listening to theatre plays, music and from participating in artistic collaborative processes is not propositional knowledge. These kinds of processes do not present us with any new facts, and the knowledge that it gives cannot be expressed in sentences. These kind of experiential and felt knowledge gives a new experience of the world around us. It gives us the ability to integrate with the urban nature, the city and the social relations and to grow new pathways in world in all it’s complexity. The experiential and felt knowledge cannot be ‘fixed’ or documented as articulated categorizations.

This also changes the idea of a campus. Instead of using a university campus as a place to transfer knowledge from experts to students, the campus becomes a ‘experiential and real felt thinking-space’ engaged in: How to create thousands of experiential and felt movements in-between humans and non-humans in ways to re-vitalize our existing systems and to navigate in new ways.

The Action University is hosted at the TEATERØEN, because this *Other Place* has the potential to enhance and to grow the sensitive and sensuously rationality as an ecology of experiential and felt thoughts in the act.

Teaterøen is as an ‘island’ – with multiple potential connections to the world - an open invitation to constantly to create new lines of Life in/and through the city of Copenhagen. Constantly inviting institutions, private companies and NGOs to experience knowledge on a felt level and thereby to do research in sustainable urban Life. This is not about imagining the futures (as in the 1980’ties.) The risk of this is, that it will create broken expectations, when the reality is not becoming like the imagination. Rather, it is about being aware that every time we lift our foot, we have the potential to put it down in a potential better way. To actually be aware of this potential for change in every movement, we need to actively participate in the creation of experiential and felt knowledge. Teaterøen offers this space.

The Action University at Teaterøen is situated *between* the City center and the peripheral of the city, the land and the water and between the rational and the aesthetic, performance management and performance studies. It is a place which have not undergone any modern re-design and construction since the 1950’ties. It has been a place for the military and for the navy. The last ten years it has hosted all kinds of theatres, plays and festivals. From being a place about protecting Life it has slowly become a place for creating Life.

Thereby Teaterøen can tell stories about another kinds of practices, times and spaces. This gives us – as humans - the opportunity to become someone else at the Teaterøen, than we might thought we could become. When we are going to school, college, the townhall, the library or the university the roles and manuscripts are pre-given. At Teaterøen we need to re-invent ourselves and our relations to others, to the place and to the City of Copenhagen. Every step and movement we make at this ‘Other Place’ silently affects our bodies to rethink on an experiential and felt level: Who am I and my relation to the others and to this public space? How – and to what extent – can I change these intra-actions in qualitatively better ways?

RESEARCH AS CREATION: WE ALL BECOME ARTISTIC ACTIVISTS.

To be able to transgress the problem labyrinth and the “wicked problems” that we are facing in our public organizations and urban spaces today, we need to go on the edge of our formal roles. The industrial era has created solutions but has simultaneously separated and isolated areas of knowledge. The back side of the industrial and instrumental way of addressing problems is creating new challenges, which it is unable to manage.

When knowledge is addressed as separate and often isolated areas, it is unable to observe and thereby to manage how one solution in one area can generate new challenges in another area. To think and act in more sustainable

ways, we need to understand that we are all connected, not separate from our planet and nature. We do not manage and control Earth but *intra-act* with it. To think and act in sustainable ways is to understand that what we do in one area can affect other areas. We need to engage and participate, instead of being at an isolated distance. We need to change focus from how can I (and this business) become an economically succes to how can I – and our business – contribute to create a better society!

The UN goals and the SDG's are an opportunity for this transformative agenda. The Action University wants to pave the way for this transformation. The aim is to transgress the idea that we are isolated and separated individuals and to explore how to create an *environ-mentality* aiming at intensifying qualitatively better actions.

The Action University works with actual problems and challenges in the City of Copenhagen, but it also invites other cities and citizens to explore and to re-create the Action University.

We run programs that help organizations, private companies and NGO's to create more like artists and to strategize more like activists being able to create social movements. We do rigorous research on sustainability and related fields such as public management, affective pedagogies, urban nature, transformative learning etc. The result is better informed theory and more effective practice. The result is transforming public value to art-based labs for better (urban) life.

The Action University Partnerships on an experiential and felt level

