

6	PAS DE TROIS .....	Prof. Dr. Marc Angélli
8	SMALL CITY URBANISM .....	Katrina Stoll
10	TO THE READER .....	MAS UD Students

**[12] ETHIOPIA**

22	IN SIGHT OF A DEMOCRATIC URBANISM .....	Roman Loretan
24	CHOOSING URBAN PROBES .....	Yusuf Nazerali
28	SMALL CITY NETWORKS .....	Interview with Prof.em. Franz Oswald
32	THE GENESIS OF DIRE DAWA .....	Gabriele Mersch
34	URBAN PROBES .....	MAS UD Students

**[42] ADAMA**

50	TERTIARY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA .....	Interview with Dr. Karl Herweg
54	THE PUBLIC LINK .....	Birgit Kann   Lenita Rivera
66	EDUCATION COOPERATIVES .....	Birgit Kann   Lenita Rivera
74	HOUSING COOPERATIVES IN ADDIS ABABA .....	Dr. Elias Yetbarek
76	THE LINEAR INTERFACE .....	Irene Asara   Jeongseok Moon
88	AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES .....	Irene Asara   Jeongseok Moon

**[94] BAHIR DAR**

102	NETWORKING PRODUCTION .....	Burak Haznedar
114	PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES .....	Burak Haznedar
118	OPERATE, COOPERATE, COOPERATIVES .....	Bisrat Kilfe
120	INTEGRATED PRODUCTION .....	Purisa Nimmanahaeminda
132	PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES .....	Purisa Nimmanahaeminda
138	SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE WEFT .....	Gabriela Kappeler   Isabella Mori
150	SOCIAL COOPERATIVES .....	Gabriela Kappeler   Isabella Mori

**[156] MOJO**

164	MOBILITY ISSUES IN ETHIOPIA .....	Alemayehu Gessesse
166	RAIL SCAPE .....	Mistere Hailemariam   Hyunjung Seo
178	MOBILITY COOPERATIVES .....	Mistere Hailemariam   Hyunjung Seo
184	URBAN CATALYST .....	Diana Celi Andrade   Oscar Raya Fernández
196	COMMERCE COOPERATIVES .....	Diana Celi Andrade   Oscar Raya Fernández

**[202] APPENDIX**

210	PARTICIPANTS .....	MAS UD Students
212	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	MAS UD Students

# PAS DE TROIS

Ethiopia, Cooperatives, and Urban Design

Prof. Dr. Marc Angéilil

Imagine a *pas de trois* – and less a *ménage à trois* – between protagonists framing a laboratory experiment and unfolding at the intersection of three themes: Ethiopia, cooperatives, and urban design. The stage—on which potential choreographies are played out—is a research project undertaken in the context of the Master of Advanced Studies Program in Urban Design at the Department of Architecture of ETH Zurich.

The first dancer is a nation. Ethiopia, also known as the “Roof of Africa,” is population-wise one of the fastest growing countries on the globe, with an expected doubling of its current 80 million inhabitants within the next few decades. This development will not only occur in cities, but will promote nationwide urbanization processes, embedding rural regions within urban networks and partially transforming the countryside into an urban system. Additionally, Ethiopia is one of the poorest nations worldwide with a gross domestic product per capita of less than US\$ 1'000. Here the second dancer—in the guise of a specific form of political economy—enters the stage. Cooperatives are viewed as an alternative model to be deployed within a country that—withstanding wide-ranging poverty—is currently experiencing a high economic growth rate, with an average of more than 10% over the last few years.

Attempting to overcome the constraints of subsistence economy, which for generations marked the country's effort to survive, Ethiopia currently faces a peculiar amalgamation of conflicting financial models, whether influenced by global economy, neo-liberal values, or investments of sovereign wealth funds. Within this amalgamation of systems, outlines of a particularly promising form of market economy are surfacing. Based on communal solidarity and self-empowerment, principles of what is generally known as a ‘complementary currency system’ are being implemented, fostering the formation of micro and small enterprises, craftsmen associations, trade unions, and the like—partially supported by state-sponsored public works projects, vocational training and micro-financing programs. The nascent attempts to enable other financial models and to pursue an integration of shared resources from within communities take root in the priority given to local forms of organization. But, as might be expected, such initial steps are frail.

Such economic developments further strengthen urbanization processes, while having a direct effect on territorial transformation. Here, urban design enters the scenes as the third dancer joining the previous two. At this juncture, a special role is given to urban design, establishing a bridge between social and physical space or what could be termed socio-territorial relations. Urban design evolves into a project that can be collectively carried. Concurring with Bruno Latour's thesis that objects take on the role of participants in courses of action, planning instruments can be considered actors able to transport agreed upon objectives. Means of design representation—projects, plans, scenarios, models, images, etc.—are herein considered tools invested as agents in mediation to raise awareness of specific problems and devise strategies of how to proceed—taking into account that the various parties involved in such endeavors do not share the same agenda. Urban design takes on the role of a mediating platform aiming to settle controversies, while attempting to find appropriate physical forms for social formations.

The results of these experiments, which proceeded through a series of movements over the course of a year, are summarized in this publication—the objective being to offer tactics of how to potentially merge territory, economy, and design within frameworks that are complex, if not complicated, and in part contradictory—*ménage à trois* after all.

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Marc Angéil

Marc Angéil is Professor at the Department of Architecture of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich and was recently appointed Dean of the Department. His research at the Institute of Urban Design of the competence center Network City and Landscape (NSL) addresses recent developments at the periphery of large metropolitan regions. Emphasis is placed on strategies to support sustainable urban processes - with attention given to the forces involved in the formation and transformation of cities. He is author of several books including *Inchoate*, on methods of teaching, *Indizien*, on the political economy of contemporary urban territories, and *Cities of Change*, on transformation strategies for urban territories. He is a board member of the Holcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction and practices architecture with his partners Sarah Graham, Reto Pfenniger, Manuel Scholl, and Hanspeter Oester – agps.architecture, an architectural cooperative with offices in Los Angeles and Zurich.