

# STELLA PAPANICOLAOU'S OPEN TEXTBOOK JOURNEY

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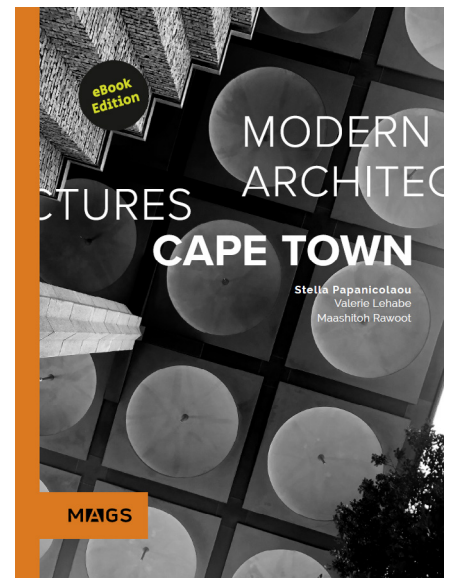
**Bianca Masuku, Michelle Willmers, Henry Trotter & Glenda Cox**

**Grantee:** Stella Papanicolaou  
**Position:** Senior Lecturer  
**Department:** School of Architecture Planning and Geomatics  
**Faculty:** Engineering and the Built Environment  
**Course:** History and Theory of Architecture III  
**Degree level:** Undergraduate  
**Title of Initiative:** Modern Architectures in the Global South  
**Title of open textbook:** *Modern Architectures: Cape Town*

### Introduction

Is it better to start a big project with an elaborate plan? Or should you just jump in, try some different approaches, and see what ultimately works? In our professional lives, we're typically encouraged to take the planning route, to establish goals, deadlines and deliverables while charting our progress. Any deviation from that plan is often treated with suspicion or anxiety. But in reality, our 'best laid plans' often overestimate what can be achieved, underestimate the timelines involved, and misjudge how to best approach a problem. This is because it is often hard to know what the best approach is until you've experimented and landed on the one that ultimately proves most suitable for your ambitions.

When Stella Papanicolaou, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture Planning and Geomatics in the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment at the University of Cape Town (UCT), decided that she wanted to create an open textbook for her students, she had a good sense of the kind of textbook that would be useful for her students.



The Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) project is a research, advocacy and implementation initiative based in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at the University of Cape Town (UCT). From March 2018 – March 2019, 11 open textbook initiatives received DOT4D grant funding at UCT. The Open Textbook Journeys series tells the stories of the people driving these initiatives, their teaching and publishing processes, and what inspires them to do this work. These case studies were developed in collaboration with and reviewed by the open textbook authors profiled.

Being a teacher of design in the postgraduate programmes of Architecture and Histories and Theories of Modern Movement Architecture in the Bachelor of Architecture Studies (BAS) programme, she developed a concrete plan to achieve this.

Stella, along with teaching assistants and candidate architects Valerie Lehabé and Maashitoh Rawoot, constituted themselves as the core trio of the Modern Architectures open textbook production team in the Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) grant period of March 2019 to February 2020. But despite Stella's extensive planning for a long-desired open textbook, her journey did not go as expected. This case study tells her story.

This case study draws on:

- Stella's grant proposal to the DOT4D project.
- Stella's grant report to the DOT4D project.
- Interviews (x2) with the DOT4D Researcher.
- Field notes of the DOT4D Publishing and Implementation Manager.

## What is the problem Stella is trying to address?

Modern buildings from the Global North dominate the publications referenced by architecture students and professionals in the precedent studies used to inform their design work. Stella and her collaborators in the Modern Architectures open textbook production process believe that the historical narratives and technological developments of modern buildings in the Global South should be made more visible and accessible to students in South Africa, as well as to scholars worldwide. The study of these buildings offers an opportunity to investigate the role of the Modern Movement in the Global South and the nature of its relationship to colonial and apartheid agendas.

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The Modern Architectures team also believe that buildings studied in students' countries of origin contribute to an understanding of their own identities. The dominance of European and North American examples in the literature means that South African students are often led to believe that buildings located elsewhere, and theorised by scholars from the Global North, have more relevance than buildings closer to home or in similar Global South contexts.

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These objectives were all in line with Stella's teaching ambitions relating to her Modern Architectures in the Global South initiative that emerged out of eight years of teaching in the History and Theory of Architecture III (HATA3) course to second-year architecture students. The course initially focussed on the Global North narrative of the Modern Movement of architecture with reference to its impact on the South African built environment, but steadily shifted towards the multiple narratives of architectures across the world, with a central focus on the Global South.

Stella's open textbook development process therefore aimed to:

1. Include more examples from the Global South.
2. Treat students as collaborators in the production of the textbook, which would be an empowering experience for them.
3. Involve students from three different courses in the BAS programme – History and Theory, Technology, and Representation – so as to highlight the relevance of studying the same subject matter through a variety of lenses, thus emphasising the multimodal nature of architecture and design knowledge.

## Textbook conventions in the discipline

Stella indicated that the use of prescribed textbooks within the department and the discipline is not common practice. Instead, students are encouraged to seek out texts that are relevant to the specific projects in which they are engaged. She stated: 'As a principle, most of us don't believe in [traditional] textbooks. I was never taught with a textbook. It's a bit of an anathema. It sort of sets us apart from the engineers. The engineers work with a manual. They follow the formulas of the manual. And what we try to do is get the students to be creative, to be responsive to the information that comes in.'

## Stella's open textbook journey

### Original plan

When Stella first developed her proposal for a DOT4D grant, she envisioned that her open textbook project would develop multiple outputs in several formats. The primary output would be a 'proof-of-concept' open textbook(let) working with a sample of buildings from Cape Town drawn from the work produced by the HATA3 students in 2019.

Stella conceived of this work as an 'open textbook(let)' in that it was to be a guide or booklet which would be developed into a longer-term open textbook representing modern architectures in the Global South and an online platform for 20th century architecture in the Global South.

It was envisioned that the most innovative aspects of the content development process would be:

1. The offering of a list of good buildings located in the Global South for students to study, including a summary explaining their scholarship value and references for further investigation.
2. The formation of a digital archive where a collection of documentation, and links to texts, on such buildings could grow and be sourced by scholars worldwide.
3. Introducing undergraduate students to concepts of authorship, copyright, open access and the publishing process of architectural research.
4. Building a network of scholars and practitioners interested in architecture in the Global South. This network would be beneficial for future research and collaboration in the construction of architectural knowledge.

Time and logistical constraints meant that Stella and the Modern Architectures team were only able to focus on the development of the proof-of-concept open textbook(let) in the DOT4D grant period. Once Stella realised the amount of time involved in brokering collaborations and undertaking the various aspects of the content development process, she realised she would have to treat the other activities as ongoing works in progress.

The course invited students into the authorship process and provided them with the agency to propose relevant material to be used in the textbook

### Authorship approach

Stella adopted the 'lead author as editor-in-chief with student co-authors' approach and worked collaboratively with second-year HATA3 students who co-created the content for the open textbook(let). As part of this process, students explored notable buildings in Cape Town and produced the content for the textbook(let) as part of their coursework. Thus, the course invited students into the authorship process and provided them with the agency to propose relevant material to be used in the textbook.

In order to process, format and curate content for the open textbook development process, Stella worked with two assistants who played a critical role in the content creation process – candidate architects Valerie Lehabe and Maashitoh Rawoot.

### The content development process and student involvement

In 2019, second-year HATA3 students were divided into groups and allocated three buildings per group to research, analyse and present to their peers as part of their coursework in the first semester – one from Cape Town, one from anywhere in the Global South, and one highly published example from the Global North. Stella initially intended for the second-semester, first-year students to produce construction models of each of the Cape Town buildings covered. In another course, students were to photograph and produce digital models of the buildings. These were to be featured in the open textbook. However, this aspect was not completed by the relevant teaching staff, as it was difficult to coordinate the project to satisfy teaching objectives in all three courses with three different course convenors.

## This inclusive approach was intended to offer all students in the class a sense of accomplishment in terms of being part of the process

The students from HATA3 were all aware that the group tutorial fed into an open textbook publication process and that the work they were gathering and collating could be included in the textbook. The students' names were all mentioned in the publication, whether the buildings they worked on were included or not. This inclusive approach was intended to offer all students in the class a sense of accomplishment in terms of being part of the process.

In 2020, HATA3 students were given access to examples produced by the 2019 student cohort via Instagram<sup>1</sup> in order to give them an idea of what they were working towards and provide a platform for discourse around the examples selected. The short descriptions of buildings in the open textbook(let) served as models for the descriptions they were asked to produce as part of their research. In this sense, it was envisioned that the content would be developed over years of student work, which would form the basis for ongoing open textbook development informed by student topic selection and collaborative input.

### Publishing process

Stella adopted the 'initiative as self-publisher' approach, in which she drove the publishing process in her capacity as editor-in-chief on behalf of the Modern Architectures initiative.

The publishing process involved working with the DOT4D Publishing and Implementation Manager (PIM), who was instrumental in assisting with the editing process, providing publishing advice and playing the role of proofreader for each section of content as it was produced.

Stella also worked with an external graphic designer who designed the cover and produced a template for the book layout. Project assistants did the layout in Adobe InDesign in order to produce a professionally typeset product. The designer supervised this layout process and became an important partner in the publishing process. She embraced the key principles of the initiative and provided enthusiasm and support, with a keen eye on the audience and underlying intentions of the publication.

When the full publishing process was complete, a PDF of the textbook(let) was deposited in the OpenUCT repository<sup>2</sup> under a Creative Commons licence, while Stella's students primarily accessed the content via UCT's learning management system.

### Content development and publishing tools

Stella and her team used Google Docs to develop and edit a final manuscript, and Adobe InDesign to produce the typeset pages.

### Copyright and licensing

It was anticipated that the issue of copyright and licensing would constitute an interesting challenge to the project, and that it may be difficult to obtain permissions for photographs of buildings sourced through social media channels. Principles of copyright and licensing were explored and investigated throughout the content creation and publishing process. However, many authors of photographs were happy to allow free use of their images as long as they were appropriately credited.

The final published *Modern Architectures: Cape Town* open textbook(let) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. Copyright is held by Stella as the primary author.

### Quality assurance and sustainability

In order to address quality and cohesion in the final product, one of Stella's tutors provided formatting guidelines, a matrix and a checklist for students to follow in the documentation of the buildings to be utilised in the textbook. If the work produced by the students was of a good standard, it would be used in the draft of the final comprehensive open textbook in the future.

While many images found by the students were appropriate for publication, the quality of their written descriptions was relatively poor and had to be rewritten by Stella. Few second-year students managed to adhere to imposed formats and to deliver work of adequate quality for publication purposes, meaning that the assistants had to reformat all the material using the template provided. Collaboration between teaching staff was intended to ensure the work produced was of an appropriate quality through a process of reviewing each other's course outcomes. This did, however, not materialise, as the two staff members of the first-year courses withdrew from the publication process.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_zDbJIHRQj/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_zDbJIHRQj/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/33338>



In terms of sustainability, Stella had planned the publication of the first *Modern Architectures* open textbook(let) would take place at the end of 2019, and an associated exhibition would be used to showcase the project and entice future funding from various potential sources including large architectural firms, institutes and suppliers of materials in the construction industry. This exhibition never materialised because the textbook production process took longer than anticipated and a final PDF was only released in 2020, but the idea has not been abandoned.

## Status at grant closure

At the closure of the DOT4D grant period in February 2020, the *Modern Architectures: Cape Town* textbook(let) was in the final stages of production. Once produced, Stella wanted the textbook(let) to be made available electronically to the 2021 cohort of students.

Stella also hoped to source funding in order to print hard copies which could be made available to collaborators and scholarly networks in order to explain the project, future ambitions and how others could contribute. In this sense, the printed version would be used as a marketing sample to solicit future collaboration and, potentially, the funding required to continue production of further volumes.

In addition, the new cohort of 2020 HATA3 students delivered further material for a second volume of a small selection of the open textbook(let). In response to the limitations of remote teaching under the COVID-19 lockdown and based on the recommendation of tutors, the work of the 2020 student cohort was exhibited on Instagram ([uctma.gs](https://www.instagram.com/uctma.gs))<sup>3</sup> rather than in traditional poster format. Students in the course followed the Instagram site where cases from the 2019 volume as well as cases produced by the 2020 cohort were shared as a live, ongoing exhibition. The ambition was to use this platform as a means of engaging students and bringing other contributors on board.

At the time of writing, Stella was still engaged in discourse and planning around the *Modern Architectures* in the Global South initiative and had engaged a number of colleagues in academic debate and practical planning around how to integrate a decolonised pedagogical approach with a new approach towards textbook creation.

The project made it possible for her to work collaboratively with her students and the project team, and to experiment with ideas towards decoloniality in concrete terms rather than purely in theory

## Challenges experienced and lessons learned

### Experimentation allows clarity to emerge organically

Reflecting on her process, Stella explained that she would have liked to start sooner with less material and, perhaps ironically, with less clarity, because it is in the process itself that real clarity emerges. The process requires several iterations before the idea settles. She believed that the lesson was to dive in and give it time and be flexible to make changes along the way that will improve the end product, but always to hold the original intention in focus.

### Some collaborators took on major roles

In terms of working with various types of collaborators, the graphic designer unexpectedly became more of a conceptual partner and team member, taking on ownership in the process, rather than merely being a service provider. This was also true of working with the DOT4D PIM, who served as an important publishing partner. The camaraderie amongst the partners who participated in the production process helped to fulfil Stella's vision as editor-in-chief and advance the team dynamic.

### The (partial) fulfillment of a long-time dream

At the end of the grant period, Stella described multiple benefits that she experienced. She explained that the idea for a series of booklets has been with her since she began teaching the HATA3 course in 2012. The production of a first edition had been very satisfying, but more importantly, it was essential as it was only in its actualisation that the true potential of the product could be understood and the gaps or shortfalls noticed.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/B\\_zDbJIHRQj/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B_zDbJIHRQj/)

The project had made it possible for her to work collaboratively with her students and the project team, and to experiment with ideas towards decoloniality in concrete terms rather than purely in theory. The realisation of a concrete deliverable in the publication of her first textbook(let) was exciting to Stella, as she could now approach potential collaborators and funders with conviction and with a product of which she was proud.

With an ambitious, multi-phase project such as this, collaborators were essential for the project's initiation

### Collaboration can be tricky

With an ambitious, multi-phase project such as this, collaborators were essential for the project's initiation. Stella needed others' input, wisdom, time and sweat. However, the expansive level of inclusivity increased the complexity of managing all the moving parts of the project and the varied personalities. As discussed above, some key collaborators pulled out, radically slowing the progress of the project. Students tried their best, but could not write building descriptions that were up to publication standard, thus Stella had to step in and do them herself. This was time consuming and not part of the original plan. Students struggled in other ways to stay within the template parameters, thereby creating extra work for the main coordinators. Thus, ironically, the delegation of activities sometimes ended up creating extra, unanticipated work for Stella. Despite these challenges, Stella expressed that she remained committed to ongoing work in this area.

### Budget

Overview of the original budget submitted to DOT4D as part of 2018 grant application, with actual expenditure.

#### Budget projected at proposal phase

Research assistant: R33,600  
Form design for Vula submission: R5,000  
Data wrangler: R8,000  
Graphic designer: R13,400  
Storage: R1,000  
Exhibition printing costs: R10,000

Total estimated budget: R71,000

**DOT4D grant amount: R56,000**

#### Project actual expenditure

Research assistants: R33,600  
Graphic designer: R22,400

#### Additional resourcing

Research assistant: R10,000 (DOT4D supplementary grant)

**Total expenditure: R66,000**

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