

## RASL Minor *Re-imagining Tomorrow through Arts & Sciences*



A transdisciplinary minor for students from Erasmus University, Codarts University of the Arts and Willem de Kooning Academy



Students in one of their self-furnished spaces at Het Wijkpaleis during a Worldmaking workshop to explore transdisciplinary collaboration and envisioning other futures

The minor *Re-Imagining Tomorrow through Arts & Sciences* gives students the opportunity to engage in transdisciplinary, collaborative project-based research, in a small team of students and teachers from the fields of science, visual arts and performing arts, and together with societal partners from beyond the academy/university (e.g. government, NGO's and businesses, and civil society members). The minor is part of the innovative educational practices of the Rotterdam Arts and Sciences Lab (RASL), and brings together Erasmus University, Codarts University of the Arts and Willem de Kooning Academy. In this minor, students from various fields and backgrounds develop theoretical and practical competences in the field of transdisciplinary thinking and research. Together with teachers and societal partners, a setting is created where academic and artistic practices interact to identify and reframe a complex societal issue. While doing so, students develop creative, critical and other valuable skills and competencies necessary to deal with the challenges of an uncertain future.

The conviction that the three institutions start from is the following: contemporary societal issues that are prevalent today are of such a different size, complexity and scale, that dealing with them has to contend with methods, attitudes and expertise that transcend disciplinary confinements. Or in short, working together is urgent, and by extension, has to be rethought. Alternative futures have to be imagined and visualized, and only through the combination and validation of different knowledges (societal, artistic, academic) can this be achieved. Inclusion of the arts opens new avenues, as the nature of the arts is to create, to reimagine, and to decompose and recompose.

### SPACE

Where do you learn together in a transdisciplinary context with students and teachers from three institutions? The minor takes place in two spaces at Het Wijkpaleis in Rotterdam West – a community center that provides a space and platform for makers and community members to meet and learn from each other. Students have to make these spaces their own, consider the spatial conditions of doing collective research and find ways to relate to the communities that visit Het Wijkpaleis. A separate space enables the rethinking of the relations of learning together, while not being limited by institutional interior architecture. By giving students (temporary) ownership of the new space, they have to critically reflect on the importance of where teaching takes place. Transdisciplinarity as a core concept of 'transcending disciplines and hierarchical rankings' and for this reason the teacher team is interested in providing the students with a space that they can access, work in and take care of beyond the seminars and workshops with the teachers.



The minor is divided into two parts (15 EC + 15 EC). All students participate in the first part (10 weeks), and those students who are either required or willing to continue participate in the second part (another 10 weeks). The core concepts that will be addressed and thought through are ‘transdisciplinarity’ and ‘wicked problems’. The academic literature around these notions defines them in quite a specific manner; ‘transdisciplinarity’ is described to be a collaborative process that aims to transcend the notion of disciplinary borders, with the aim to adopt a holistic approach to research questions. The other core concept, ‘wicked problems’, is defined as problems that are so complex that they are very difficult, if not impossible to solve. The idea is not to abide by these specific academic definitions throughout the minor. But rather, through various different experimental approaches, to rethink what they mean for ourselves. Re-imagining Tomorrow through Arts & Sciences will focus quite heavily on collaboration, community-building and thinking beyond one’s discipline, with the aim to produce collective research projects that could contribute or respond to pressing societal issues.



## ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The relationship between students and teachers is inverted during the minor. This manifests in different ways. Firstly, we aim to conceptualize the classroom as a place where the students have full agency over the set-up of the space (e.g. they choose, source or make their chairs and tables, if they want chairs and tables). Secondly, the ‘fluid adaptability’ of the course content, to the students specific needs echoes this inverted relationship. The teachers do not dictate the content, rather, they bring in the necessary resources that could further the research projects of the students. This inversion aims to emphasize the importance of student-led initiatives, and foregrounds the students’ agency in their own learning trajectory. This heightened interpretation of student-led learning and study echoes the core characteristics of transdisciplinarity, namely those of community-building, transcending disciplines and the recognition of the need to re-invent learning and researching collaboratively.

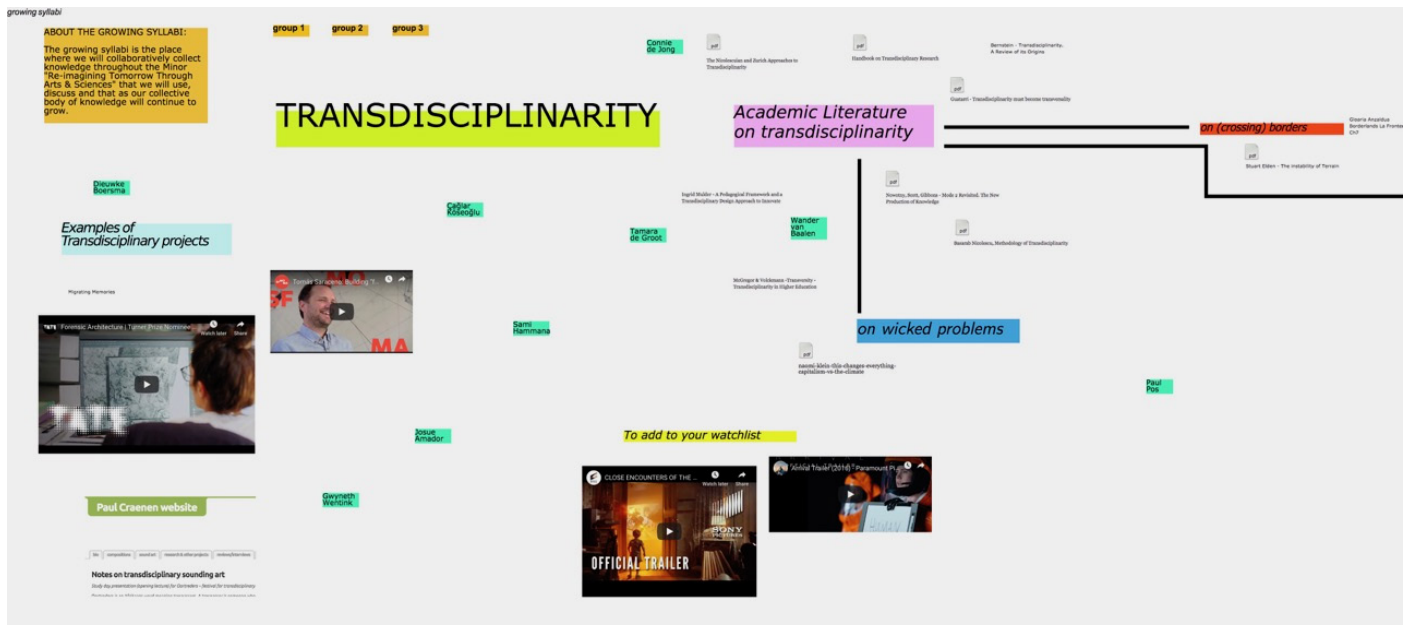
## VOUCHER SYSTEM

Students are given additional ownership of their own learning trajectory by means of the voucher system, through which provided with budget to self-organise their own education. In consultation with the teacher team, the student teams decide what knowledge, expertise and tools they need to make progress in their collective research projects.

## ASSESSMENT

Students develop their personal portfolio including the compulsory deliverables (Learning Goals document, 360° feedback document, critical self reflection and research archive). The students are assessed on the following elements: the research archive (55%), the presentation (25%), the reflection document (10%), and their observed and described professional behaviour (360 feedback) (10%).

An important aspect of the programmatic assessment is the use of the 4eyes+ principle. Assessment is done by at least two teachers and the student themselves. The active student participation and responsibility in (re-)formulating the learning goals according to personal objectives and assignments will also require a critical self reflection (and assessment) on the success criteria. During the first weeks students are invited to alter and add personal learning goals and success criteria in the final grading/assessment document.



The growing syllabi on hotglue.me

The minor was developed by a transdisciplinary team of educators from the three participating institutions, who were trained in the field of transdisciplinary education and research during the Teacher Training Programme (February-June 2019). During eight intensive sessions, the team discussed the conceptual and practical implications of working and teaching in a transdisciplinary manner, and collaboratively worked on the design of the minor.

### Minor development team

(participants of the Teacher Training Programme):

- Coordinator: Tamara de Groot (EUC + Codarts)
- Josué W. Amador (Codarts)
- Wander van Baalen (Codarts + EUC)
- Dieuwke Boersma (WdKA)
- Sami Hammana (WdKA)
- Connie de Jongh (Codarts)
- Çağlar Köseoğlu (EUC)
- Paul Pos (WdKA)
- Liesbeth Noordegraaf-Eelens (EUR + Codarts)
- Roger Teeuwen (WdKA)
- Mariska Versantvoort (WdKA)
- Boo van der Vlist (EUC + WdKA)
- Gwyneth Wentink (Codarts)

### Minor:

- Coordinator: Sami Hammana
- Core teachers: Josué W. Amador, Dieuwke Boersma & Çağlar Köseoğlu

### Researchers:

- Wander Van Baalen & Tamara de Groot

For more information on the minor, and regular updates on its progress, please visit: [publications.rasl.nu](http://publications.rasl.nu)

## GROWING SYLLABI

What role does a syllabus play when a course is not predetermined in its subjects and references, but rather, focuses on the transdisciplinary collaborative process itself?

To deal with this shift in focus, we have conceptualized the act of collecting references as a non-static, dynamic and growing process. Syllabi, as a plural notion, instead of the singular syllabus, is a way of insisting on this open-ended expansion.

The growing syllabi is the place where we will collect knowledge throughout the Minor 'Re-imagining Tomorrow Through Arts & Sciences', in a collaborative and open-ended manner. In line with a transdisciplinary spirit, the growing syllabi wants to collect different forms and sources of knowledge in a way that circumvents institutional, disciplinary or any other kinds of epistemological hierarchies. As a student engaging in a new mode of thinking, reading and making, the growing syllabi encourages transdisciplinary work – from archiving to collaborating, from finding relevant material to learning more about the teaching staff.

The growing syllabi grows on the HOTGLUE platform: a visual tool for creating websites directly in the web-browser.

Find it here: [growingsyllabi.hotglue.me](http://growingsyllabi.hotglue.me)

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