

out of studios // on to sites: temporalities of (design research) living labs in the wild

NORDEN Nordic
Design
Research
Summer School 2026

18-21 August 2026

IT University of
Copenhagen

Applications Open

10 Feb to 20 Apr 2026
Notification 4 May 2026

Teacher // Facilitators

Thomas Binder,
IT University of Copenhagen

Karey Helms
Umeå Institute of Design

Tom Jenkins,
IT University of Copenhagen

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University of Lapland

Anna-Mamusu Wehlitz
IT University of Copenhagen

The Nordes summer school in 2026 invites design researchers to embed their work in a specific site and imagine how that site might change their work and the work might change the site's future. Site matters: Its particulars inform our research interests and aims, and our being there impacts particulars seen and unseen. This includes potential participants invited and not invited to engage, places remade to scaffold encounters, and outcomes framed to scope concerns among other things. In this way, perhaps starting with a site is not about what it might provide for design research, and instead about what doing design research does, regardless of what it intends to do.

We take a neighborhood in Copenhagen—Sønderbro—as both a living lab and proving ground for emerging design imaginaries. Sønderbro offers a site for local fabulation, developing alternative imaginaries for how we might want to live and a way to investigate new forms of participation in design—as a thing, as an arrangement, and as an investigation. This summer school imagines a design process as always being a matter of public concern, and positions design as a form of invitation to approach a question in novel as well as local ways, exploring the mundane adjacencies of research topics. Bringing design research out of the studio comes with a particular ethos and corresponding methodological and theoretical commitments that we will explore with co-organizers and invited lectures.

While the inquiry focuses on the advantages of leaving the studio, the summer school also has a production component. Exhibition is foregrounded throughout the process, as we learn about each other's projects, filter them through a sited research-through-design process, and develop new materials that curate different modes of experiencing ongoing research.

Through the exhibition format, we draw out the temporality of design research within, upon, and without site. Within: the process; upon: the more standard exhibition—a “frozen” moment; and without: its traveling afterward, how it “ferments” and develops through interventions and experiments. This also specifically relates to us both being there as well as afterwards presenting, exhibiting, and discussing what was done, acknowledging the ongoingness of it.

We expect participants to gain a new perspective on their own research as inflected by the site, as well as a combination of public, expert, and collegial feedback on projects that can help propel the work forward. As a result of this summer school, we hope to build a network of practitioners that can push the boundaries of design research and help to construct the practice in the future.

Programme //

The PhD summer school will combine learning activities such as lectures, site visits, seminars, making, and exhibition. An online pre-activity will take place to orient us to each other and the site, and a common goal after the summer school will be to submit an exhibition to the arts track at Nordes 2027.

Participation //

We are looking for students with research projects in design and adjoining fields who are interested in exploring their research from a new perspective. We welcome students who are both already well acquainted with the summer school's focus as well as especially encourage those who are curious, but who are not necessarily familiar with doing work in this style.

Application //

To apply, we ask that students submit a proposal including a summary of your research project or practice that relates how the project relates (or might relate) to site and place. Proposals should be maximum one A4 page long. Send application via email to:

>> nordes2026@gmail.com