

Master's Degree in
Architecture
Advanced Studies

Track I Contemporary Project

Track II Urbanism

ETSAB MBArch

Courses in English

2025-26



Credits:

International Relations Office, ETSABarcelona

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The purpose of this publication is purely academic, without profit expectations.

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Welcome to ETSAB!

The origins of the Barcelona School of Architecture ETSAB date back to the noble School of Arts and Trades La Llotja, founded in 1775. The institution formed Master Builders by means of an official degree since 1850, the most immediate precedent of the future school of architecture. In 1875 the Barcelona School of Architecture would assume definitively its present name and almost a hundred years later, in 1972, the ETSAB became a co-founder of the UPC Barcelona-TECH.

The Barcelona School of Architecture ETSAB is the **largest and oldest university in Catalonia**, with 3,000 students, 400 teachers and more than 50 administrative staff. The school offers training in all stages of university education and plays a **leading role in research and doctoral studies in the Spanish and Latin American contexts**, through departments and research groups. The school is also a leader in the teaching of Landscape Architecture in Spain, in constant collaboration with the most prestigious schools in Europe in this field of knowledge.

The Barcelona School of Architecture has a **continuous influence on the development and design of Barcelona**, a model of architecture and urbanism, and actively participates in the permanent dialogues generated by the city. The school is a world reference in planning, urban design and building. Attentive to debates on environmental culture, it also offers intense technical training, while promoting criticism and historical research through its important archive. As a result, the school is currently ranked among the top twenty schools in the world, according to the QS World University Rankings, and the second in Spain.

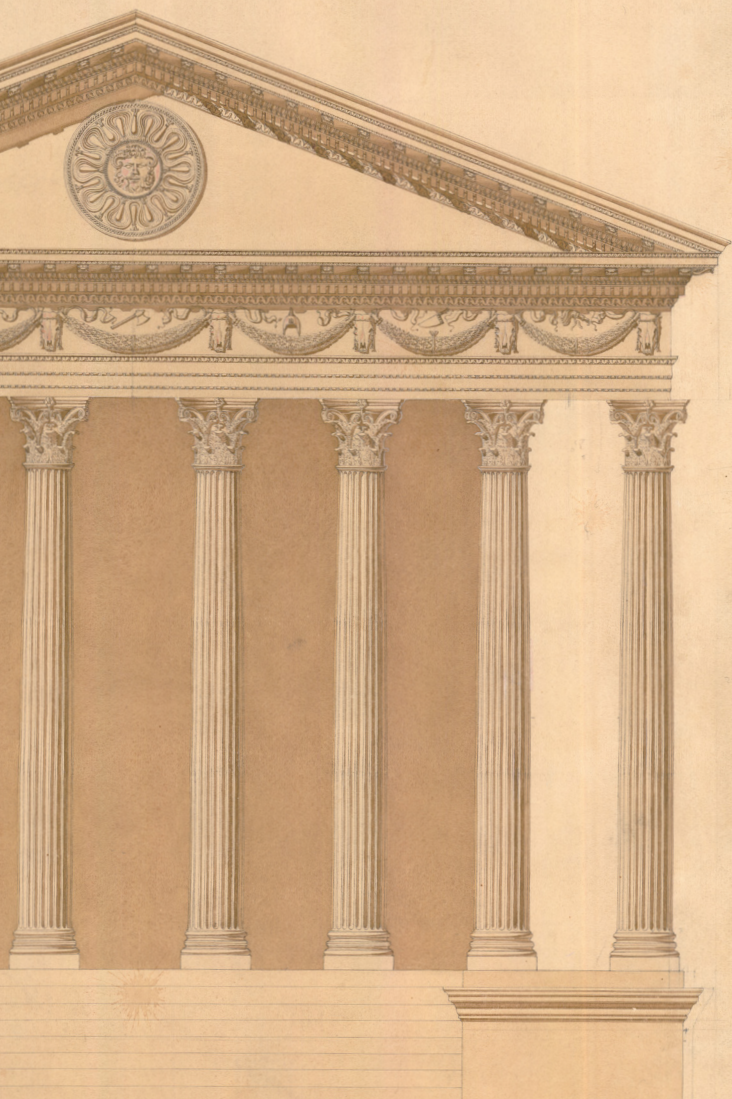
To celebrate the ETSAB's 150th anniversary in 2025, this guide reproduces fragments of images from the ETSAB-Càtedra Gaudí Archive at the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona – UPC. These images are featured in the exhibition and catalogue of the same name, ***Transhistorical Pedagogies. 150 years of the ETSAB*** held the Espai Picasso, COAC, Barcelona from 10 July to 21 September 2025.

How to Read this Guide?

This guide must be understood as a set of pieces that do not fit together perfectly: the images presented do not correspond to the same academic year than the detailed syllabi, which in turn might be different this year, as courses are reformulated annually. Taken together, however, these materials provide an accurate picture of the topics on which the school's courses taught in English focus.

The guide complements the information you will find detailed on the school's website (<https://etsab.upc.edu/en/studies/garqetsab/syllabus>). In these pages you will see the syllabus and the results of previous years of the courses that ETSAB offers in English (you can consult extensively this information here: https://www.instagram.com/open_etsab). We recommend that, in order to get the most out of your time at the ETSAB, you also look at the courses taught in Spanish and Catalan, which you will also find detailed and illustrated here: <https://etsab.upc.edu/ca/escola/cultura/publicacions/handbook-etsab/handbook-etsab-2018-2020> and here: <https://etsab.upc.edu/ca/estudis/garqetsab/guia-docent/guia-docent-grafica>.

For each course in these pages, you will find symbols that indicate whether the course corresponds to Contemporary Project or Urbanism track (CP or U); and whether it is from the first or second semester (1 or 2).



Fall Semester

	1	2	CP	U
Contemporary Architectural Topics	●	○	●	○
Public Space: Experiences, Projects and Policies	●	○	○	●

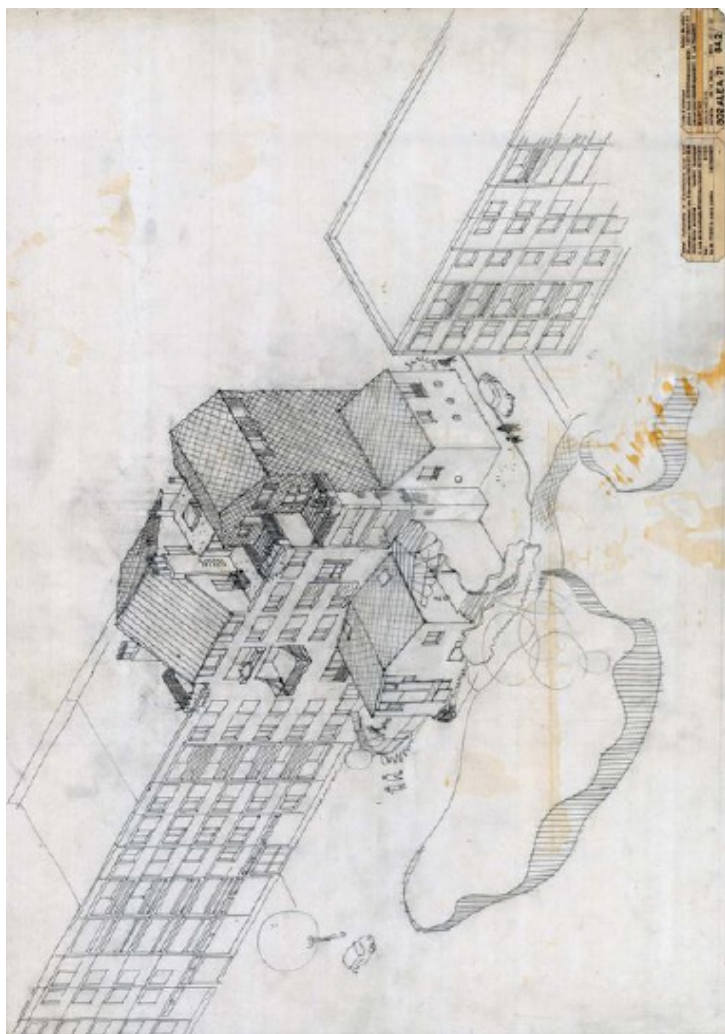
Spring Semester

Design and Thought	○	●	●	○
Design and Materiality*	○	●	●	○
Urban design: Ideas and Praxis*	○	●	●	○
Cultural Landscapes, Heritage and Territorial Project	○	●	○	●
Contemporary Residential Urban Project	○	●	○	●
Key Aspects of Urban Projects	○	●	○	●

* both subjects require joint enrolment

Contemporary Architectural Topics

Temes d'Arquitectura Contemporània



Intentions:

The ideas of architectural modernism, which have conventionally been interpreted as an adaptation and update of the positivist, universalist and technocratic approaches of the Enlightenment project, have had unquestionable influence on our cities, our understanding of buildings in relation to technology and the human being, and on urban culture of developed societies during the 20th century.

But as it is also known, their ideological basis, social ideas, political views and their derived design methodologies have been increasingly contested since the end of the Second World War. As the presence of modernist practice has become common and mainstream in globalised cities, the problems, limitations and inconsistencies of such positions have also become increasingly evident. Just as 19th century cities had to deal with problems such as urban hygiene, urban functionality or rights of the working classes when adopting industrialisation, the current metropolis, partly built on modernist ideals, now faces its own challenges, a significant part of them emerging from the problems laid out by the modernist dream of systemised mass production and mechanisation. Consequently, some of the trending topics in architectural and urban planning discussions nowadays may be how our cities should react to political and social imbalance, cultural complexity, heterogeneous globalisation processes, ecological challenges, pollution and planetary warming, pre-existing built heritage, acceleration in social changes, lack of dwelling facilities and public services, appearance of new functional needs, the effects of digitalisation, growing or shrinking population, or even gender issues, among others. Definitely, the CIAM years seem to have fallen far behind our present, and their visions and theories to be mainly unfit to solve our current worries.

Furthermore, the second half of the 20th century gave birth to an epistemological revolution in globalised societies: So, the postmodern philosophical and ideological contributions of trends like new aesthetics, structuralism, post structuralism, deconstructionism, phenomenology, existentialism, situationism, formalism, semiotics, etc. have been seen as an attempt to update, confront or correct modernist mistakes. How did all this influence dwelling culture and the practice and conceiving of architectures as a tool for shaping habitats in the last fifty years in Europe? When discussing residential contemporary architecture, can we even use the same concepts, categories and words as we did with modernist buildings? The course aims to explore these last questions by taking advantage of the wide catalogue of the Mies van der Rohe Foundation (1988-2022). By focusing on the analysis of relevant real residential buildings, it intends to let students become familiar with the current problems, discussions and dilemmas around housing nowadays, while providing them with intellectual tools and methodologies which they can apply in their own master thesis, but also in their future professional careers, when facing and trying to understand and interpret ...contemporary architectural issues.

Faculty:

Rubén Navarro González.

Public Space: Experiences, Projects and Policies

Espai Públic: Vivències, Projectes i Política



Abstract:

The city of Barcelona is an on-going urban laboratory. What role does public space play in the (re)shaping of this metropolitan city? This course aims to answer that question through a combination of lectures and on-site visits centered around the analysis and discussions of urban places and their landscapes. The course aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of how Barcelona's geographical location, historical influences, and cultural heritage have influenced its urban design, spatial organization, and overall development. From its ancient Roman origins to its latest urban transformations, participants will gain valuable insights into the city's urbanism and its development over time. Additionally, contemporary urban challenges, such as sustainable development, mobility, and preserving cultural heritage, will be analyzed, providing students with a comprehensive perspective on the city's ongoing evolution.

Structure:

1. Introduction to Barcelona · The foundation of the city · Ciutat Vella
2. Walking tour to Ciutat Vella
3. The extensive plain · Project and reality · Eixample
4. Walking tour to Eixample
5. The city made of squares · Gràcia + Barceloneta
6. Walking tour to Turó de la Rovira and Gràcia
7. The hidden delta · Updating the grid · Eixample 22@
8. Inhabiting the periphery · From informal to mass housing
9. Final presentation + Concluding lecture

Assessment:

Students are requested to elaborate drawings and notes on A5 horizontal blank paper.

The field trips are part of the theoretical background of the module and try to provide a close-up view of the city of Barcelona. During the visit, students are invited to take photographs of the places we visit.

The final assignment consists of the paper + digital presentation of a neat A5 horizontal booklet of all the drawings and the final version of all the photographs made during the tours. The booklet will be preceded by a short introductory text. The evaluation will take into consideration this booklet (70%) and the participation in in-class assignments (30%).

Faculty:

Miquel Martí Casanovas
Alejandro Giménez Imirizaldu

Design and Thought

Projecte i Pensament



Theoretical Framework:

Every action of architecture is an action on materiality. We might face a decaying terrain vague, a strongly defined historic environment, a beautiful natural scenario, a smart and modern urban area or a wasted suburban slam: we will always act on materiality and we will do it in a material way, regardless of the level of abstraction of our start.

Such observation could make us think that architectural space could be intended as incapsulated within the boundaries of a materiality which determines the width of possibilities for design. What we propose in the course is to look at the apparently irreconcilable struggle between ideas and matter with a vision which combines complexity, unorthodoxy, disciplinary secularism and ludic awareness.

During the course, technical and material considerations are, therefore, integrated with others of social, urban and ecological nature, within the framework of a more sustainable vision of the reality of our cities and landscape. History never reaches a defined ending and each new project does nothing but add another layer and, maybe, move one further step. Therefore, we will also play with the concept of “heritage” as a structural component of any materiality and we will try to investigate through all the complexities intertwined within such a concept.

The subject proposes a theoretical journey through the most recent evolution of the debate, with specific approaches on concrete architecture and public space projects.

Syllabus:

The course is structured through lectures, discussions, visits and the individual assignment. The idea of architectural heritage will not be studied in a conventional way, since we want to develop the participant's skills in terms of architectural intelligence, rather than provide some specific technical knowledge on the topic.

In order to do so, we will explore some fundamental antinomies particularly important for the general theory of architecture and beyond: past-future; destruction-construction; urban-rural; intimate-collective. Each concept will be examined both from a theoretical point of view and under its practical applications. We will observe the existing architecture in urban and rural territory and we will discuss its possible development playing with the abovementioned concepts. Like in many aspects of human life, the balance between these antonymies is crucial in order to acknowledge and, maybe, understand the dynamics of reality around us. In other words, our philosophical journey through architecture will be successful not because of a certain destination we will reach, but because of how we will be able to properly set and enjoy the journey.

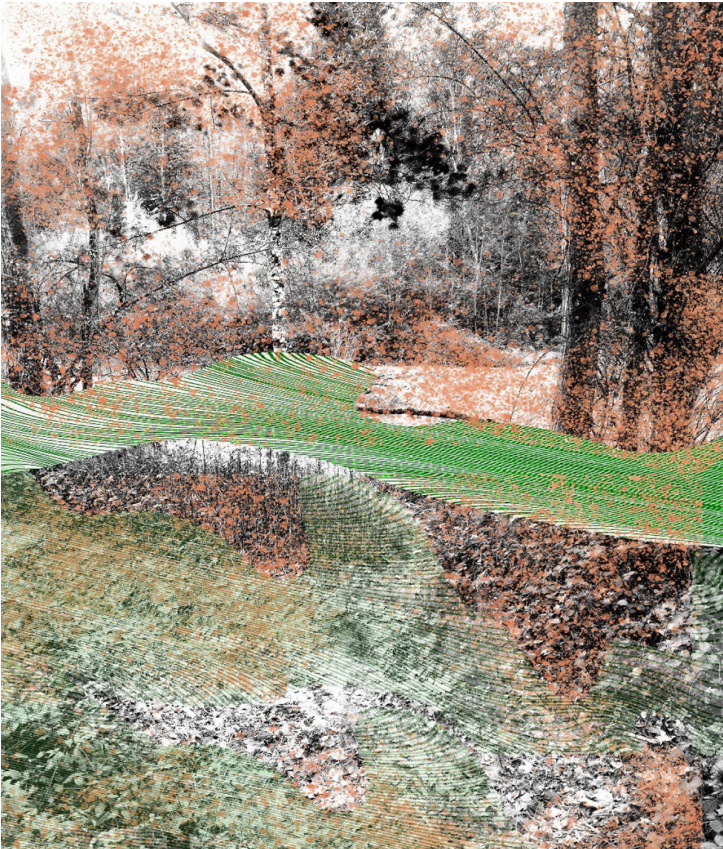
Therefore, we will also encourage watching movies that forecast some kind of light onto our concepts and we will discuss them in class. We will also examine and visit some significant places in the area of Barcelona. The texts we will suggest to read won't be taken as a learning tool in the classical way, since they shall be considered as a source of theoretical inputs.

Faculty:

Alessandro Scarnato

Design and Materiality

Projecte i Materialitat



The course Materiality and Project studies and analyzes architectural topics influenced by technique and materiality. The following contents will be developed:

- /“Low Hard–High Soft”: The concept of low technology understood through the sustainability of materials and new systems of design and production.
- /Materials and technologies in contemporary architecture.
- /The relationship between the “form” of architecture and the way it is built.
- /New trends in industrialized construction: the new generation of “craftsmen,” new tools such as the NCS, 3D prefabrication and its on-site assembly.
- /The skins of architecture, their performance, and their ability to convey architectural concepts.
- /The structure of the building as an organizer of architectural spaces.

The course is organized through lectures, case studies, and public discussions with guest speakers. One or two site visits to buildings in Barcelona will be scheduled.

Specific Objectives

This course explores the relationship between building technology and the design process, by selecting and analyzing contemporary architectural topics strongly influenced by technical aspects.

It aims to deepen the use of technology as a design tool, as well as its generative, structuring, and expressive capacities.

By the end of the course, students will be able to interrelate technology and design, thus improving their design skills. They will also have acquired basic skills for research projects in the field of technology and materials.

Assessment:

- /SE02 Oral presentations: 25%
- /SE03 Assignments and reports: 50%
- /SE05 Continuous assessment: 25%

The course, organized as a seminar and workshop, requires a minimum attendance of 80% of the classes.

Students will develop a design and research project related to the course topic, which they will present in a public exhibition.

Faculty:

Marta Badia Torrents
Maria Del Pilar Giraldo Forero

Urban Project: Ideas and Praxis

Projecte Urbà: Idees i Pràctica



During the first month of the Spring Semester, *Urban Project: Ideas and Praxis* together with *Materiality and Project* are an intensive workshop that provides a framework for the critical examination of architectural practices that engage with the notion of *collective living*. The course is structured as a research-oriented exploration that combines theoretical inquiry, fieldwork, and analytical exercises, with the aim of equipping students with methodological tools to address contemporary questions relevant to their Master's thesis research.

At the core of the program is the development of analytical methodologies that enable students to initiate and structure research projects related to *The Architectures of Collective Living*. These methodologies are not limited to descriptive analysis but emphasize the formulation of research questions and the construction of interpretative frameworks. Students are encouraged to investigate the relationship between spatial morphology, patterns of inhabitation, and the forms of social appropriation that emerge from them.

A fundamental component of the course is the selection of three case studies, which serve as focal points for the development of individual research projects. These cases are approached from a dual perspective: on the one hand, their architectural and urban qualities are examined in detail; on the other, the lived experiences and practices that unfold within these spaces.

Based on these investigations, students will prepare a graphic document of critical analysis, structured across different scales: urban, architectural, and technical. This document is conceived not as a purely representational exercise but as a research instrument capable of synthesizing spatial observations and social dynamics. The integration of diagrams, and analytical drawings is intended to foster the ability to translate complex realities into rigorous visual arguments. Producing this document represents a key step in articulating research findings in a precise and analytically consistent manner.

The semester culminates in a final critical presentation, in which each student presents the outcomes of their research and situates the selected cases within contemporary architectural and urban debates. This concluding exercise aims to consolidate the analytical work developed throughout the course while also fostering a collective discussion on the relevance of the studied cases. The final review thus serves both as an academic assessment and as a platform for intellectual exchange, underlining the shared dimension of architectural research.

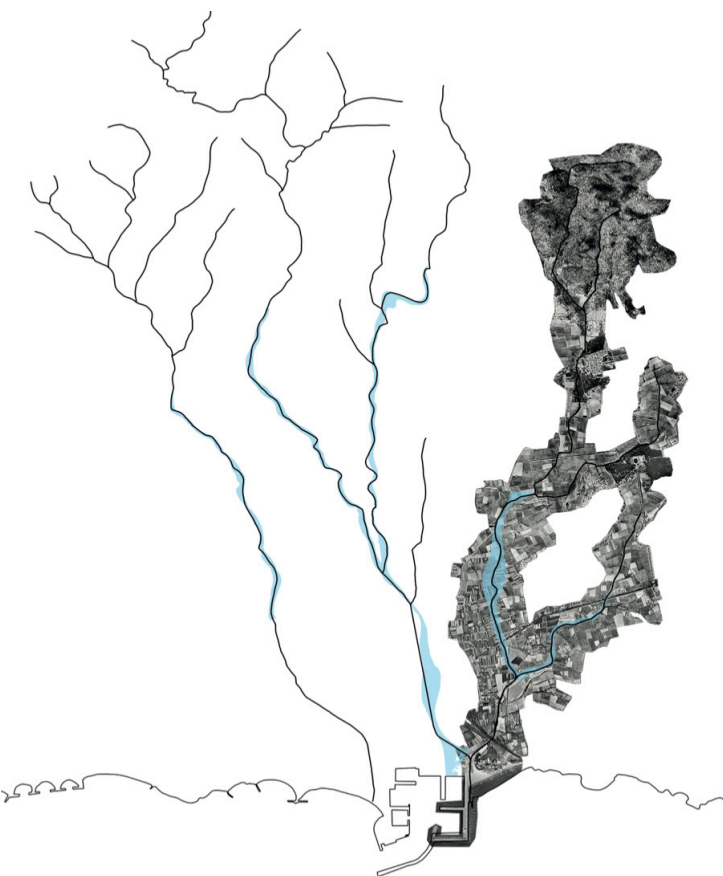
In summary, the workshop is conceived as a research-based academic experience that situates architecture within the broader field of collective practices. Through methodological training, case study analysis, graphic interpretation, and critical presentation, the course provides students with the tools to critically examine the role of architecture in shaping the spaces of contemporary collective living.

Faculty:

Marta Domènech Rodríguez
Maria Pia Fontana
Joan Casals Pañela

Cultural Landscapes, Heritage and Territorial Project

Paisatges Culturals, Patrimoni i
Projecte Territorial



Abstract:

This course focuses on the research and project of the processes and forms of urbanization on the contemporary territory. For this, we will study the landscape, the heritage, and the shape of the territory as planning criteria based on local resources and on the identity of the place. Throughout the course, we will explore the concepts of landscape, “cultural landscape”, heritage, and the operationalization of the territory in the current context through the study of theoretical references and case studies. Likewise, we will develop a methodology for analyzing the territory using the drawings as the main tool for the analysis and development of interpretive hypotheses. This opens up a broad field of reflection on the diversity of territorial patterns and intervention strategies and projects on the contemporary territory.

Structure:

1. Introduction to the course. The Mediterranean coast: territory, landscape & heritage
2. Site visit
3. Drawing the territory
4. The Agrarian Park of Llobregat River
5. Workshop MBArch
6. 1st Presentation
7. The territory of Ibiza
8. The structure of territory as a tool for design
9. Cultural landscapes & Heritage
10. 2nd Presentation
11. Three Ideas for the Project of contemporary landscapes
12. Operational Landscapes
13. Final presentation

Assignments:

Exercise: proposals for Mataró from the structure of the empty spaces of the territory.

Assignment 1: Propositional analysis, selection of topic to address. Group presentations.

Assignment 2: Development of selected topic. Group presentations.

Assignment 3: Dossier A3, including analysis, project, references, plans and memory. Final group presentation.

Assessment:

- 1st intermediate assignment: 20%
- 2nd intermediate assignment: 20%
- Final assignment: 40%

Faculty:

Melisa Pesoa Marcilla
Stefano Cortellaro

Contemporary Residential Urban Project

Projecte Urbà Residencial
Contemporani



Site Visit / La Borda



Site Visit / Casa Bloc

The course is divided into two parts: one focused on the study of the contemporary residential urban project in new developments, and another oriented toward the study of contemporary interventions in existing residential fabrics. Both parts share a common reflection on residential urban fabrics/frameworks and the issues related to housing, spaces for everyday life, and urban habitability at the local scale.

One aim of the course is to introduce research on the Residential Urban Project as a specific subject of urban design, through the analysis of relevant case studies and the application of analytical methodologies that allow for the comparison and evaluation of projects and their implementation. The starting point is to improve design methods and tools by incorporating variables of sustainability and energy efficiency into the analyses. Based on the study of significant cases (residential projects or executed fragments) from recent years, the course seeks to identify different design strategies and the instruments employed in their development. The objective is to evaluate the outcomes and establish useful, generalizable, and systematizable taxonomies, while always acknowledging the individuality of proposals and their specific contextual situations. Particular interest is given to structural, compositional, and organizational aspects related to the formation of the residential urban fabric in contemporary urban transformation processes.

Another component of the course will promote reflection on the obsolescence and updating of the residential forms characteristic of twentieth-century urban construction (mass housing, suburban growth, marginal areas, traditional neighborhoods, and residential fabric in historic centers) through their analysis and projective study. Conservation, transformation, or substitution as basic intervention strategies—at different scales and through diverse (sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting) models of action—will be analyzed using cases that allow for the systematization of methods and tools. The study will be guided by a design-oriented approach, its methods and instruments, and the objective of evaluating urban efficiency and user satisfaction as key principles of quality.

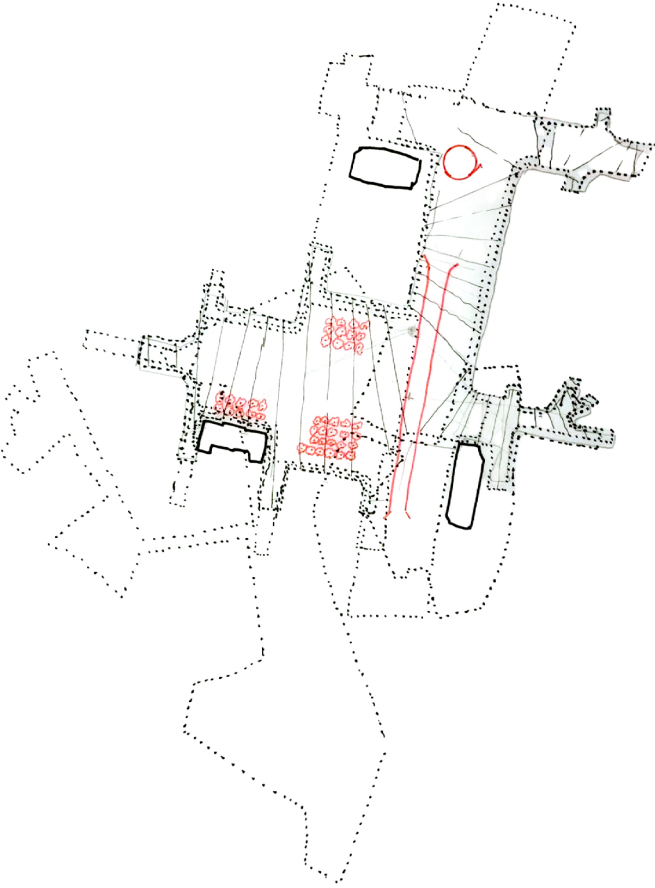
The main reference contexts will be Europe and Latin America within the broader Western culture, with particular attention to Barcelona and its metropolitan area, while also considering the global dimension of the housing problem, its implementation processes, mass programs, and contemporary challenges in developing countries.

Faculty:

Kathrin Golda-Pongratz
Rosina Vinyes

Key Aspects of Urban Projects

Claus dels Projectes Urbans



During the 1980s, Barcelona led the urban debate on the so-called 'urban project' as a design strategy focusing on proximity to architecture, public space and infrastructure. On one hand, with the outstanding theorization of Professor Manuel de Solà-Morales (UR-Revista), and on the other, with a number of successful mid-scale urban transformations that illustrated an internationally renowned practice. Since then, new approaches and new paradigms have appeared on scene, in Barcelona and abroad, composing all together an interesting design practice that is the core of this course.

Urban Project is an instrument of mediation between the city and architecture, and at the same time, constitutes a way of acting and doing research. A design tool that is different either from the conventional planning or the macro-architecture, and that is driven to conceiving projects for operative fragments of the city well-delimited in space and time. The urban project reformulates the architecture of elements and public space in order to generate a new and more efficient urbanity characterized by its greater clarity and emotion.

The course reviews the concepts and praxis of Urban Project through the analysis of some local and European projects and design-oriented assignments.

Programme:

The course is organized in a series of theoretical lessons, on-site visits and assignments focused on the analysis of complex urban projects and urban design strategies.

First part: The place before the project

Before the project is the place. Before the connection, the interstice. The first part of this course addresses a reading of urban fringe spaces from three different dimensions: space, time and activities.

Second part: Urban design strategies

This part addresses how designers can work complex projects in interstitial places, by comparing the multiple design strategies and mechanisms used in order to give form to those sites.

Visit. Guided visit to Manuel de Solà-Morales' Archive (COAC).

Third Part: Resonances: from the project to the city

Cities can be understood as a combination of multiple parts and projects. In this chapter we debate about the capacity of some urban projects to transform the whole city. The systemic vision of urban projects will be discussed and analysed.

Fourth Part: Urban projects in time: evolution and decay

Cities are not static, but the constant evolution in time. Urban projects are also dynamic and they are used by citizens in multiple ways. In this part of the course, we address the interaction between design and real use of the projects.

Assessment:

Each theoretical lesson will be preceded or followed by weekly assignments to be mainly developed and discussed during the class (40% of the total assessment). Assignments will be elaborated in groups of 2 students or individually. Finally, the course will be evaluated by two exams along the course.

Partial exam: 21 March 2024 (20%)

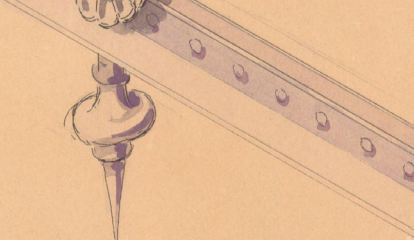
Final exam: 23 May 2024 (40%)

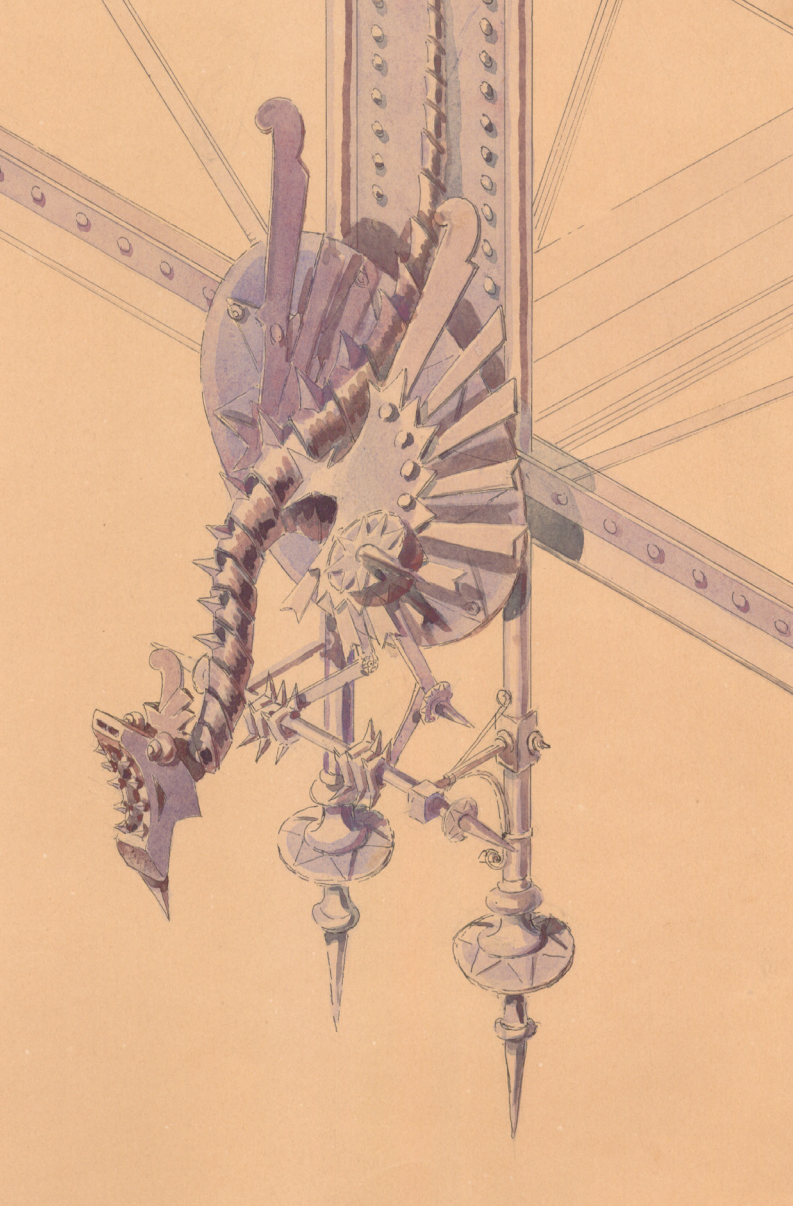
Faculty:

Álvaro Clúa

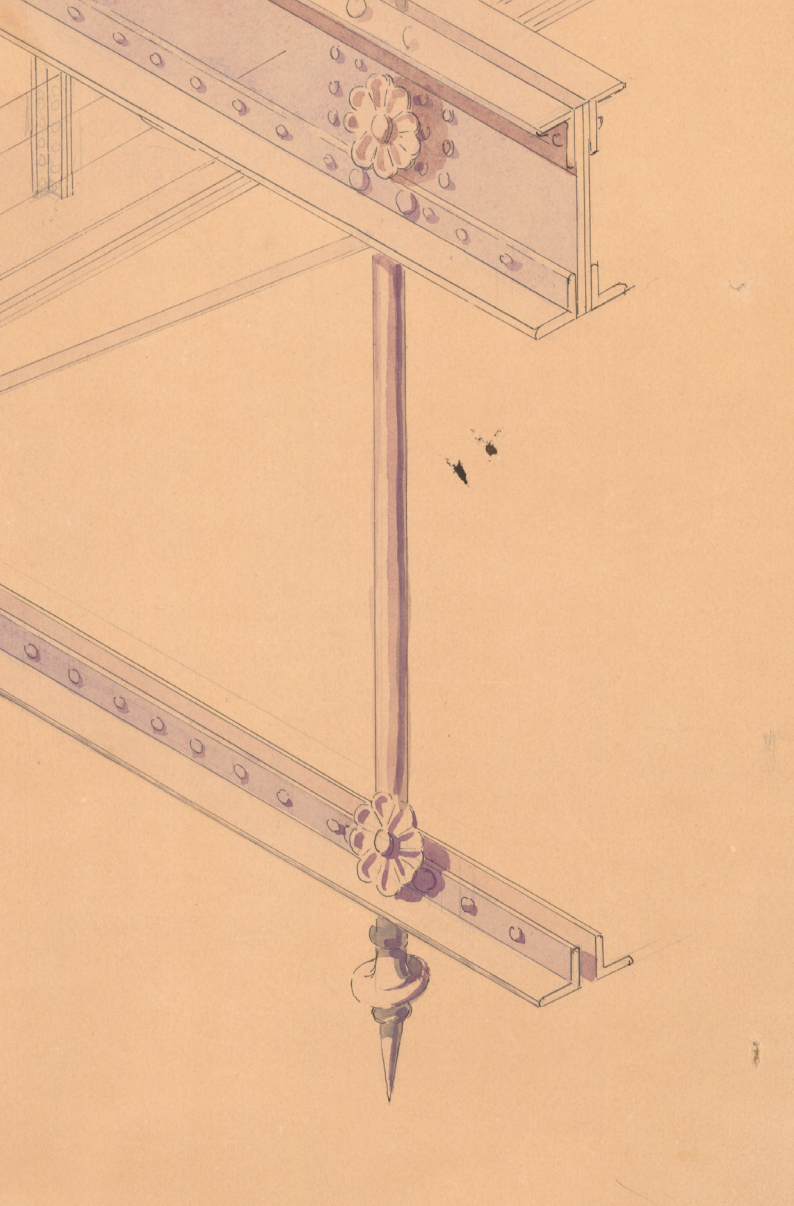


*Alte
L. J. J.
H. J.*





Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Monumental Bridge, longitudinal section, 1891; final exam Fragment.



Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Monumental Bridge, longitudinal section, 1891; final exam Fragment.