

EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION IN ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING

Advances in final projects and thesis

Carlos Rosa Jiménez & Alberto E. García Moreno [Coords.]

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CONTENTS

- 9 **Introduction**
Carlos Rosa Jiménez, Alberto E. García Moreno
- 12 **Celebrating architecture, enjoying education: a multi-format project
(by land, air and sea... And networked)**
Manuel Gausa Navarro
- 32 **A critical architecture**
Francisco González de Canales
- TRANSGRESSION**
- 50 **Final degree projects in innovative architecture schools**
Carlos Rosa Jiménez
- 60 **The right to the city as a fundamental approach for urban planning
education: the case for final degree projects**
Eva Álvarez de Andrés
- 66 **The audio-visual document as a complementary element of graduation
projects in schools of architecture**
Javier Boned-Purkiss, Alberto E. García-Moreno, M^a José Márquez-Ballesteros
- 74 **Game versus project: An approximation to the approach, the place and
the process of projects at the beginning and the end of an architect's education**
Diego Jiménez López, Jorge Yeregui Tejedor, Luis José García Pulido
- 82 **Towards a radical pedagogy in architecture**
Enrique España Naveira
- 88 **OPEN ETSAB. Experimenting from altered teaching**
Celia López Bravo
- 94 **Research-action on the heritage object. Methodologies for approximation
and teaching experiences at the final degree project course in the school
of architecture of Seville**
María Teresa Pérez Cano, José Manuel Aladro Prieto, Blanca del Espino Hidalgo,
Daniel Navas Carrillo
- 100 **A Sleepless Night**
Antonio Álvarez Gil, Fernando Pérez del Pulgar Mancebo

TRANSVERSALITY

- 110 **What happened with bologna and technical studies?**
Montserrat Palma Muñoz
- 118 **Timeline as analytic tool for investigating tourism evolution and development**
Cynthia C. Perez, Enrico Porfido, Josep M. Vilanova Claret, Ricard Pié
- 124 **Editing of educational videos in manufacturing engineering with Open Source Software**
S. Martín-Béjar, M.J. Martín, F. Martín, M.J. Cano, F.J. Trujillo, M. Lozano, J. Solano, L. Sevilla
- 128 **JAMSESSIONS: A flexible methodology to generate synergies between theory and practice in design courses**
Juana Sánchez Gómez, Nuria Nebot Gómez de Salazar, María Jesús García Granja
- 134 **The definition of the indicators of Malaga's strategic plan as an excuse for learning with the curatorial model**
Antonio Vargas Yáñez, M^a del Carmen García Peña
- 142 **Experimental autonomous learning exercise in interior design. Dialogue between ideas from the academic realm and the real needs of the everyday environment**
Raúl Fernández Contreras
- 148 **Collaborative methodology for the promotion of graphic expression as a professional tool**
Víctor Miguel González Vera
- 154 **I Conference on mobility, public space and gender. Educating the outlook at the university level**
Isabel Jiménez López

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

- 162 **Exploring the Avant-garde: analysis of constructivist heritage in Moscow through a BIM model**
Fernando Agrasar Quiroga, Eloy R. Domínguez Díez, Luz Paz Agras, Zaida García Requejo
- 168 **Creative and experimental workshops in the discipline of architecture. Transfers between university, secondary education and training cycles**
Nuria Nebot Gómez de Salazar, Antonio Álvarez Gil
- 174 **Case study: Monitorization of higrothermic comfort in a house after its sustainable refurbishment**
Kusha Ghoreishi, Luis Parras, Alberto Fernandez Gutierrez
- 180 **The unhurried architect**
María José Andrade Marqués
- 184 **Integration of bim methodology into the transversal teaching of architecture**
Mercedes Aldeanueva Fernández, Alberto García Marín, M^a Jesús García Granja, Jorge Barrios Corpa
- 190 **Teaching and research projects. Labpatio 2.12: a prototype modular home for applied experimentation**
Alberto García Marín, Jorge Barrios Corpa, Juan Antonio Marín Malavé, Mercedes Aldeanueva Fernández
- 196 **Interdisciplinary experimental learning exercise between graphic and interior design. How to build and experience, approximations to the visual realm and the physical space**
Raúl Fernández Contreras, Luis Alhama Maestre
- 202 **Innovative teaching methodology for landscape integration designs. Fissures in the city**
Luis Machuca Casares

OPEN ETSAB.

Experimenting from altered teaching

Celia López Bravo



Figure 1: Student community of the ETSAB (2013) Intervention on the facade of the Barcelona Architecture School. Available at: <http://etsabennluita.blogspot.com.es/p/fotos.html>

What happened at the School of Architecture of Barcelona during the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013 had its origin in a grassroots movement that produced, among other proposed projects, a type of teaching methodology which is still evolving.

It is worth using a few lines to place in a context the moment at which this process took place. During the previous year, 2012, there had been several meetings in which students and teachers had joined in protest seeking to guarantee the quality of the public university. Among the main reasons for the protest were the meagerness of the teachers' salaries (Ibáñez, 2012), the rise in registration fees and the tense situation created by the implementation of the Bologna Process (Badia, 2013). That was how the *ETSAB enlluita* was born (*ETSAB enlluita*, 2013a).

The meetings and demands of students and teachers brought forth the so-called “*week of reflection*” in April 2013 (*ETSAB enlluita*, 2013b), during which the School Board decided to substitute the previously programmed teaching activity in order to promote, instead, activities aimed at starting a process of transparency, debate and dialogue in which every group in the School's organization was to participate. The goal was to elaborate a new Syllabus that came to challenge traditional models in the teaching of architecture.

After this, a great many teachers and students chose to continue with this teaching alteration and change it into assessed exercises that would entail passing the different subjects. Each group, teacher, subject or department would propose the exercises that they considered appropriate to show two main shortcomings: an academic one, consisting in the lack of contact of the School with reality and a professional one, which was due to the deep crisis that the architectural profession was undergoing at the time (Bohigas, 2016).

The group *OPEN ETSAB* (DEd'AB, 2013), which was later joined by the Escuela de Arquitectura del Vallès, thus becoming *OPEN ETSAB-ETSAV*, was in charge of publicizing the work that was carried out during the second session of the academic year. It was understood that the spreading and actual usefulness of such work were an essential part of it.

Made up by teachers and receiving the participation of municipal cultural institutions, the group organized the event that took place on June 15, 2013. During that day, the exercises that had been carried out were exhibited throughout the city. It was an open activity in which the city of Barcelona could partake of the results, recognizing itself as a work field for the students and appraising the usefulness of the exercises. The exhibit venues were the *Convent* and *Plaça dels Àngels* (site of the FAD at that moment), *Plaça Nova*, *Gran Via dels Corts Catalanes*, *Joan Oliver* Public Library and *Plaça Josep Maria Folch I Torres* (Arribas Pérez, 2013).

Publicized in social and university networks, the meeting *Post-Ocupación* was one of the outstanding activities of the day. It was a debate in which agents in charge of public facilities participated from the design phase to its put into use.



Figure 2: López Bravo, C. (2017) Location of the actions carried out on June 15 2013 under the name OPEN ETSAB-ETSAB

Josep Maria Montaner conducted this exercise applied to the *Joan Oliver* Public Library. The director of the institution, Neus Montserrat, the municipal architect, Santiago Romero, and one of the authors of the project, the architect Ramón Vilalta participated in the debate.

Perhaps the exercise that generated most debate was the critical examination that fifth-year design students elaborated under the supervision of professors Carles Muro, Carme Ribas and Ton Salvadó. It analyzed the university campus model at *Campus Sud* in Barcelona, where the ETSAB is located, and dealt with different issues, from the mere physicality of the campus to its political significance, including its change of uses during the day –from university campus to epicenter of the city’s transsexual prostitution at night.

Special mention, however, deserves the show *Arquitectes de Capçalera*. Designed and developed by professors Ibon Bilbao, Josep Bohigas, Marta Peris, Pere Joan Ravellat and Jordi Badia, this third-year design course focused on housing restoration and common spaces in residential buildings. The innovation consisted in understanding the role of the architect as that of a family doctor—a technician

connected to the life of a building who must know its inhabitants, history, social reality, needs, etc. first-hand.

In the words of Ibon Bilbao (2016), the method addresses housing from the perspective of “the user’s own inhabiting”, as a projection from inside out, and it claims that the role of the architect is that of an interlocutor. Students must have direct contact with residents, including outings during class periods to visit the residences and meet the neighbors, the recognition of problems through cartography applied to each individual resident and the understanding of the community’s global needs as well as their solutions (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2015a). In addition, the student must be in touch with the institutions already working in a specific environment, thus permitting the perception of the residential community as part of the neighborhood itself.

This has produced a kind of methodology that can adapt to each neighborhood and yields different formats. Thus, it can be an aspect of altered teaching, become a parallel *workshop* to design courses, or be a part of the *ETSAB-Summerschool* (EscuelaTécnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona, 2016). The ETSAB has collaborated with other universities, with institutions such as the Centro de Cultura Contemporánea de Barcelona CCCB, and with the Barcelona City Council in the creation of the first “Oficina de atención al ciudadano”[customer’s service office] (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2015b). In 2015 it was awarded the Premio Ciudad de Barcelona de Arquitectura y Urbanismo (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2015). New work has been undertaken in the Raval district (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2015c) and exercises have been carried out in Poble Nou (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2016) and Sant Adrià del Besós (Arquitectos de Cabecera, 2017).

To some extent, this reformulation of education gave back to students the hopeful feeling that they were needed and also provided them with new ways to approach the work to come, such as their final degree projects, by setting them in the direction of real needs (Bohigas, 2016). Therefore, it is a clear example of how the search for teaching techniques that are coherent with the actual social reality becomes a means to recover confidence in the profession as well as to create the realization that an academic project is part of the profession itself.

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Education is at the center of humanity's fundamental rights, it transforms our lives and it is the culmination of one of the basic aspects of our full exercise as such, contributing to the consolidation of peace, the eradication of poverty and the encouragement of sustainable development. As a fundamental right accessible to all, education must go hand in hand with quality and innovation. The role educators play is crucial in the way they generate innovative experiences that turn learning into a creative, dynamic, enriching and motivating process, producing tools which make possible a responsible and mature education that is committed to society.

In the branch of Architecture and Engineering innovation in higher education acquires even more relevance, since it has a significant impact on the improvement of the autonomy and motivation of students in a collaborative and knowledge transferring working environment.

This publication gathers methodologies, projects and experiences carried out in Architecture and Engineering Schools, showing the optimum results of innovative practices in learning practices. This material aspires to contribute both to the training of students and docents, while it also aims to generate debate and reflection regarding academic and professional practice and therefore introduce the necessary changes to guarantee a comprehensive and innovative education in accordance to the needs of the individual and our advanced society.



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