

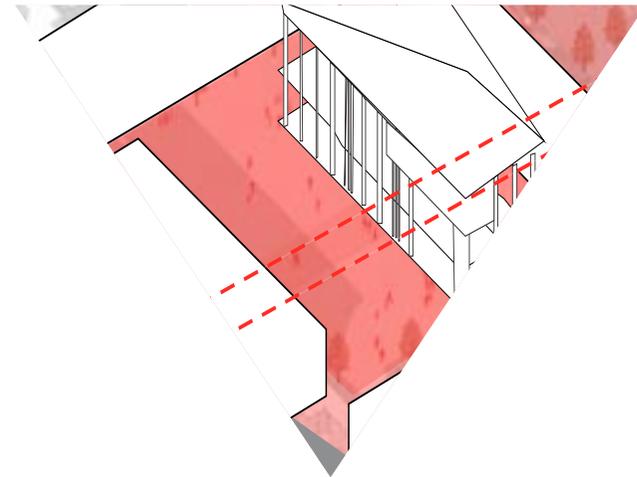


ISSN 2385-2291

## Syllabus 02

October 2021

### Architecture Research Agenda



02

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Syllabus  
is a Pedagogical Supplement of FUOCO AMICO  
Architectural Review  
ISSN 2385-2291

Syllabus presents experiences and research made inside formative courses at different levels: bachelor, master, doctorate.  
The goal is to offer these results, provisional and incomplete as they can be, to the scientific community, enhancing dialogues and exchanges.

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**Syllabus 02**

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*Which groundscapes can be considered successful from a point of view of multi-public appropriation? And what are the architectural qualities that contribute to this success? What is good for designers is as well good for ethnographers?*

*The research moves from a confrontation between the contemporary investigation in the fields of landscape design and of ethnography, looking for successful common cases in Europe, and identifying parameters and values on which the two different methods are based.*

*Through this interdisciplinary dialogue, the research questions which methodologies and elements can support the architectural process in re-designing multi-public groundscapes.*

**Francesca  
Gotti**

**Multi-public  
groundscapes**

When Aldo Aymonino and Valerio Paolo Mosco write their book about architecture 'zero volume' they aim at reclaiming the architectural value of public spaces beyond their characterisation as interstitial places. The 'zero volume' is defined as a consistent manifestation of architecture, but freed from "functional enslavement" and that manages to create 'the most engaging relationship with the public'. They look at a wide range of design elements, from "flooring systems, to arcades, canopies, belvedere, pedestrian bridges, noise barriers" as architectures (Aymonino, 2006). Drawing on this renewed concept of public space and moving forward to a more transversal spatial matter, we encounter GROUNDSCAPES. This term includes open and closed spaces and remark the potential of their intersection, the need to dissolve the duality inside/outside within urban-scapes, possibly opening new scenarios in formulating hybrids between architectures and infrastructures. The concept of groundscape in the context of architectural debate is investigated by Andreas and Ilka Ruby in a book that retraces the use and role of ground in contemporary architecture (Ruby, 2006). A similar operation, which connects historical and modern cases, is carried out by Dominique Perrault with an exhibition and a publication 10 years later (Perrault, 2016). The results of the two researches

don't overlap, but they instead show different interpretations and values that groundscapes can acquire.

Identifying these places also implies to define their spatial and temporal relation with the surrounding: we don't refer to isolated artefacts, but to entities deeply woven in the urban context.

They can be newly built objects or adaptations of existing structures, but they are in any case products of constant transformations happening within a specific fabric, at a micro and macro scale. And in a mutual exchange, they as well generate transformations - aesthetic, functional, social, environmental - on the fabric, characterised by permanencies, historical presences, rooted imaginaries.

More than any other state of being, being (on) the ground means to be crossed by daily re-configurations, formal and informal, planned and unplanned, short-term and long-term, strategical and tactical, especially when this refers to public spaces. Clarifying the definition of groundscapes, in regard to existing theories, will be the first step of the research, together with a selection of projects realised in Europe in the last 20 years.

#### Questions on construction and occupation

The 'zero volume' of Aymonino and Mosco evokes a central



Plaza Domingo Guascon, Teruel, by Mi5 Arquitectos + PKMN Architectures.

topic concerning publicness: the liberation from the function. The absence of a given program is a determining factor concerning the design of the space, as it affects the spatial organisation, infrastructuralisation, accessibility, and the implementation of specific devices. This also shifts the focus of the space to the experience users make of it, which lead to the definition of MULTI-PUBLIC model. Breaking out of the idea of a functional-characterisation of a place and exclusivity of the users, the multi-public implies the redefinition of the space itself as the public is redefined, as new groups are "incorporated into wider conceptions of who the public is" (Orum, 2009), including not only social groups, but also natural and animal entities.

As well as users, consequently, also informal activities and uses are progressively incorporated and come to inhabit the same place contributing to a diversification of site practices. Multi-public is challenged by the design of the space and is what challenges the collective management of conflicts. Deciphering the relationship between the physicality of design elements and the practical manifestations of public is the central structure of the investigation, and this is carried out through the critical analysis of few chosen projects. But to understand whether and how the public is shaped by design, it is as well necessary to identify the correspondance

between spatial elements and meanings, and how this has evolved through time.

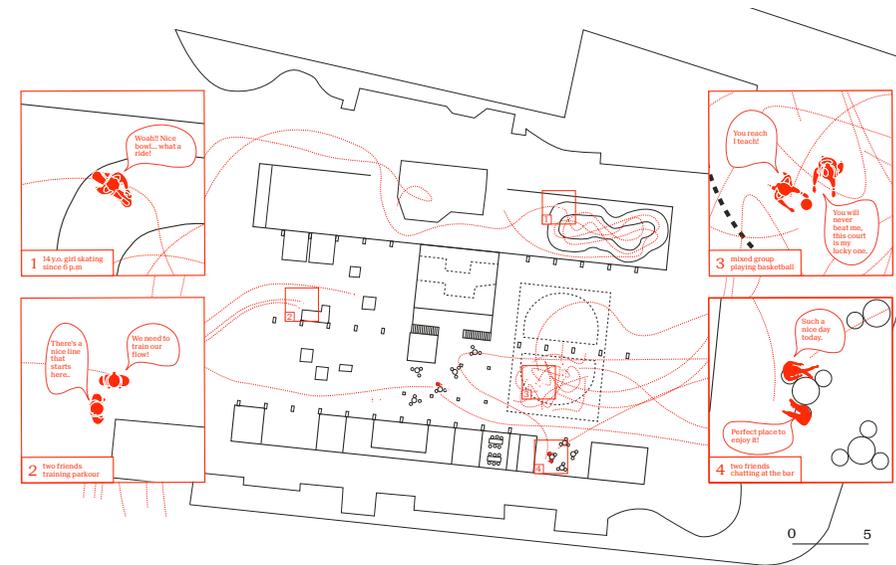
Not only uses but also meanings are in fact part of the negotiations happening in public spaces. Daily practices allow people and communities to express and join the multiplicity of identities composing the urban context. And it is through negotiations that a place is made inclusive or exclusive, conflictual or silent.

Spatial elements are used to practice negotiations (Mäntyselä, 2013), and designing and redesigning them within the same site implies a modification of the social dynamics, behaviours and of the typology of actors/users involved. Analysing this layer through a temporal perspective - looking backward to the former users and forward to the actual and potential future users - delineates the evolution of the audience in relation to the physical transformations.

It is, finally, a negotiation of multi-public through design. So a question emerges at this point: what is a good design that allows a successful appropriation? Can it be that a successful design is not a successful place for multi-public, or viceversa?

#### Transdisciplinary perspective

Looking for successful examples of multi-public groundscapes brings out a consistent question regarding parameters of



Streetmekka, Viborg, by EFFEKT Architects.

evaluation, it highlights a gap between what is considered good from a design point of view or from a usage perspective. Diving into this matter primarily requires a method able to create a dialogue with the actors of the place, by using multiple languages and by registering minor and major dynamics. Architecture “is itself defined and shaped by the accidents of the site and the participation of the people who inhabit it. [...] Working continuously across scales ranging from 1:1 to 1:1000, the architect moves fluidly between different dimensions, between part and whole, between the empirical and the abstract” (Kajima, 2018). And this is what defines the method of ARCHITECTURAL ETHNOGRAPHY. Borrowing from the ethnographic method means to relink architectural and non-architectural elements, to revamp the relationship between construction and occupation as “parts of spatial practice for the ecology of livelihood” (Sigler, 2017). Architectural Ethnography rebuilds the narrative of spaces through observations and drawings, emphasising the behaviours of users, spatial practices and appropriations, while strongly relating them to the architecture of the space, to its structure, to its material and atmospheric qualities. How can this method - in its collaborative declination - support the definition of proposals for contemporary groundscapes? How can it promote design interventions able

to mediate and remedy their conflictual negotiations?

### Supporting the process

The investigation of these projects crosses the entire life of each place, each fragment of their long-term design PROCESS.

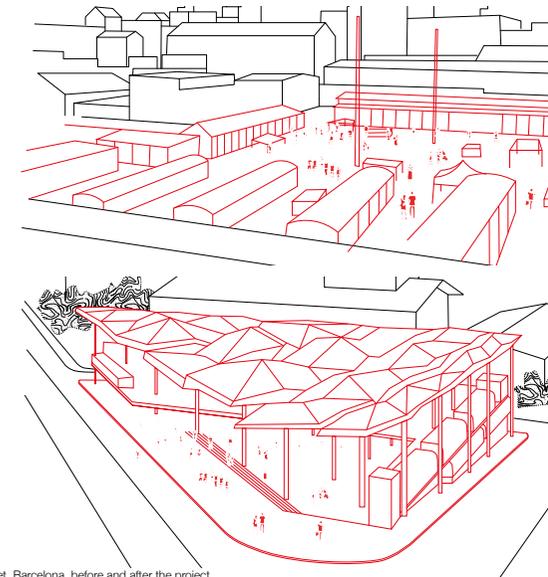
It is about the past of the place: what did the site look like prior to its current state? How was it perceived and inhabited, and by whom specifically? How did it come to be like it was, through which transformations?

It is about the present, the newly built form given to the place: what does the current design of the place look like? Which was the intention of the designer in doing so? Which material-conceptual-social process has produced it?

And it is about the imminent future, which is shaped by the daily practices, by actions and reactions generated by the place and by the people day-by-day.

It is about redrawing the entire process of production of each place, connecting the spatiality with the experience of thinking, designing and inhabiting it.

The desired result is to elaborate a qualitative record of spatial relations and to identify those design features, from the small to the big scale that (possibly) produce these relations. The participatory process, together with the ethnographic insights,



Els Encants Market, Barcelona, before and after the project.



would represent the testing aspect of the analytical research. This doesn't aim to create guidelines of design, but rather to detect methodologies to understand groundscapes within urban contexts: to support the process of spatial re-design based on the concept of multi-public, decentralising them from anthropocentric, ethnocentric or functional-centric approaches.

#### Guiding story

##### *Barcelona, 1928*

The City is chosen as the venue for the coming World's Fair and the Municipality implements a series of renewal actions to improve the quality of the urban center. The market Els Encants is considered one of the most degraded sites and is consequently moved to Plaça de les Glòries Catalanes, in the Eixample Neighbourhood, in a vacant lot of 15.000 sqm. Following five centuries of history and displacements around Barcelona, informality and transitoriness resist as fundamental principles. The market has already been object of controversy at the end of the 19th century, seen as "the most irrefutable testimony of the intolerable disorder of life on the streets" (Guardia, 2015), going against the will to improve the image of Barcelona through the "control over forms of urbanity and the moralisation of customs" (Guardia 2015).

Nevertheless, because of the level of employment it could provide (700 stallholders by the end of the 1880s) and being a reference for the marginalised working class and groups of immigrants, the market is not dismantled.

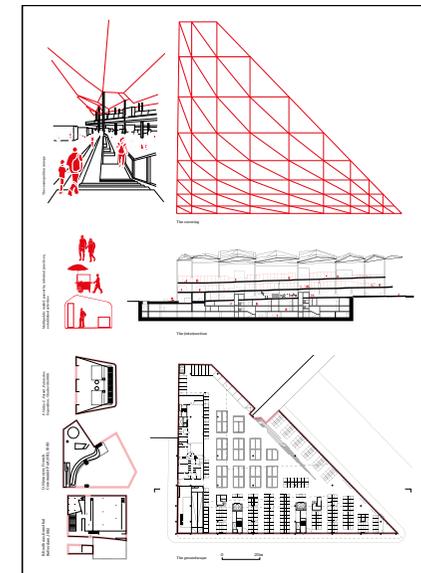
The situation of the area remained unchanged until the 1980s, when a new planning proposal was developed for the Plaça de les Glòries in anticipation of the Olympic Games. The area is set to become part of a system of "new centralities", "spaces in which it is considered opportune to favour a certain concentration of service sector uses and public facilities, in order to create new reference points in the geography of the central areas of the city" (Marshall, 2004). The crossroad is turned into an elevated infrastructural joint, but, despite the consistent changes taking place in the surroundings, the market is not interested in any kind of intervention. The Els Encants continues representing a marginal reality in a dilapidated site for other 20 years, a site of convergence for complex social dynamics, provoking "multi-layered conflict rather than cooperation between residents and outsiders (tourists, street-sellers, etc.) and between native and immigrant residents" (Pastore, 2016).

In 2008, the Barcelona City Council finally decides to intervene in the lot and finance the regeneration of the market, understanding the potentiality of the place as an "area

of encounter which directly influence inter-group relations" (Pastore, 2016).

The project is assigned to b720 Fermín Vázquez Arquitectos who completed it in 2013.

The Els Encants market can be seen as one of the Hearts of Barcelona, and the new project deals with the delicate issue of regenerating marginalised public spaces. The redesign of the borders of the market, the redefinition of the relation between the inside and the surrounding, of accessibility and permeability, constitute relevant challenges. And these challenges raise a high topic: that there "should be multiple, simultaneous conceptions of the public, [...] public space can be expanded and gained, therefore, as the public is redefined, and especially as formerly excluded groups are incorporated into wider conceptions of who the public is" (Orum, 2009). The project sets in the stream of "rediscovery of the ground in architecture: [...] the ground as archeological archive, [...] the concept of infrastructural ground, [...] the morphologic redefinition of the ground as building, [...] from natural singularity to artificial plurality" (Ruby, 2006). The building as a groundscape is what produces the main achievement of the project: the negotiation between formal and informal spatial practices, therefore the balance between accessibility and safety, the management of conflicts of spatial occupations.



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Confronting Groundscapes: Atocha Station (Rafael Moneo, 1992, Madrid), Porta Palazzo (XVIII-XIX centuries, Torino), Centro El Born (Enric Soria i Badia, 2013, Barcelona), Els Encants (B720 Firmin Vazquez Architects, 2013, Barcelona).

