

Course guide

210338 - NAAEV - Nature and Artifice: Atlas of Green Spaces in the World's Major Cities

Last modified: 26/05/2025

Unit in charge: Barcelona School of Architecture
Teaching unit: 740 - DUTP - Department of Urbanism, Territory and Landscape.
Degree: DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE STUDIES (Syllabus 2014). (Optional subject).
Academic year: 2025 **ECTS Credits:** 3.0 **Languages:** Catalan

LECTURER

Coordinating lecturer:

Others: Primer quadrimestre:
JOAN FLORIT FEMENIAS - 1SM

PRIOR SKILLS

Those expected of a fourth-year architecture student.

REQUIREMENTS

Successful completion of Urban Design Studio I, II, III, and IV.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The course will combine a "teaching/learning" approach. Over the 10 sessions of the course, various formats will be integrated: more or less participatory theoretical lectures delivered by the instructor (5+5 hours), seminar-debates with student presentations (10 hours), and continuous supervision of the research work to be carried out throughout the course (10 hours).

Regarding the cooperative learning seminar-debate:

Each student will be required to read one of the selected texts (book chapters or short articles by various authors exploring the issue of urban green open spaces and the dialectical relationship between nature and artificiality from different perspectives) and give an explanatory presentation in class, followed by a discussion session.

Regarding case study research:

Working in teams, students will conduct structured cooperative research projects (phased throughout the course), with each group focusing on a different city and analyzing a range of green open spaces of varying scales and conditions. The progress of the research will be regularly discussed and shared with the rest of the class.

Reading and preparing presentations, along with conducting case study research, will require no more than 45 hours of individual work outside the classroom (3 ECTS = 75 total hours = 30 in-class hours + 45 hours of independent work).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THE SUBJECT

This course is intended to complement the core urban planning curriculum of the school by delving into specific aspects of the composition of today's metropolises, particularly those related to green open spaces—their planning, design, and the environmental externalities they generate.

At the same time, the course has a degree of autonomy in terms of the competencies it addresses, which differ from those developed in urban design studios, as it places greater emphasis on theoretical, historical, and analytical approaches to understanding cities.

In this elective, reading, communicating, debating, and writing are combined with research and drawing as means to understand and express ideas.

General Objectives:

GO1. To understand the basic cultural foundations necessary to critically assess and design urban public space, drawing on historical knowledge, influential exemplary projects, and/or current debates.

GO2. To grasp the basic techniques of green open space design, so they can be applied coherently in diverse types of projects.

Operational Objectives:

OO1. To use a diverse range of exemplary projects as references to build a personal critical perspective or to support the development of one's own project.

OO2. To understand the environmental challenges currently facing cities and the types of responses reflected in the most engaged public space projects.

OO3. To identify, in an analyzed project, the set of factors involved in the designer's decision-making process, and how these are formally expressed in the proposed solution—affecting its physical/material, functional, and compositional configuration.

OO4. To effectively communicate the results of a study using the diverse tools architects must master, combining technical graphic documents with other visual resources, and accompanying them with clear and concise oral explanations.

STUDY LOAD

Type	Hours	Percentage
Self study	45,0	60.00
Hours large group	30,0	40.00

Total learning time: 75 h

CONTENTS

0. General description

Description:

The course is dedicated to studying the phenomenon of the world's major cities and their green open spaces. It addresses the theory of the historical conflict between nature and artifice within the ongoing process of urbanization, as well as the landscape and urban traditions that have emerged from this tension. The course aims to make sense of a set of ideas and discourses which, in the contemporary context, often appear blended into well-intentioned claims advocating for fairer, more sustainable, and resilient metropolises in the face of the global climate emergency.

Cities, particularly the most populous ones, are among the most complex artifacts ever created by humanity. In most cases, what we inhabit today is the result of centuries, even millennia, of urbanization processes that have steadily transformed the territory. Thus, it is evident that large cities are in continuous conflict with what we would define as "natural."

Nonetheless, throughout their history, cities have often reserved spaces intended to evoke the natural landscape, or created environments made largely of living natural materials in which vegetation takes center stage—promenades, gardens, parks of various sizes. Each city exhibits a unique relationship between densely built urban fabric and the green open spaces it has preserved, shaped by its geography, climate, urban culture, and the historical influence of planners and political leadership. Yet some phenomena appear to be common or transversal across very different metropolitan contexts.

The course seeks to explore these issues and develop a collective understanding through the creation of an atlas of major cities and their parks and gardens. Theoretical foundations will be introduced via lectures and selected readings and discussions. These theoretical discussions will be tested and expanded through cooperative practical work: an introduction to urban research focused on the green and open within the most extensive and densely inhabited urban artifices in the world.

In these projects, each city will be "interrogated" and expected to answer questions such as:

How has its urbanization evolved over time?

What green or geographically derived open spaces has it incorporated?

To what extent have non-built-up areas been reserved for parks and gardens?

What is the origin of these spaces?

What episodes of future city prefiguration or urban reform have shaped today's provision of green open spaces?

What are these spaces like in terms of size, internal composition, or intended function?

What is their spatial distribution across the city?

Among other questions.

Full-or-part-time: 0h 01m

Theory classes: 0h 01m

1. Lesson Plan

Description:

S1) Three attitudes: The control of nature (techniques) + The desire for nature (motivations) + The appropriation and beautification of nature (the arts).

S2) Green in the city: Nature as public space + The introduction of added attributes + The value of scale.

S3) Additional thematic content: Urban collective leisure + Major events + Environmental balance.

S4) The origin of green spaces in large cities: Legacies and projects + Shared objectives + Ways in which land becomes public.

S5) Green open space as a DESIRE: A counterpoint of balance with ideological discourse.

S6) Green open space as an ARTIFICE (as well): Traces of technique + A refined artistic expression.

S7) Green open space as an ACTIVE landscape: Parks and sustainable development + Sensory experimentation.

S8) Discoveries in open spaces for the advancement of urban planning.

S9) Closing session: Qualities (of green space) and Opportunities (for the contemporary city): Geographic distribution for Order // Ecological values for Balance // Singularities for Identity // Diversity for Innovation.

Full-or-part-time: 14h 59m

Theory classes: 9h 59m

Self study : 5h

2. Reading of selected texts

Description:

A selection of texts will be distributed for individual reading by each student (a curated list of 30 texts is available, all sourced from books held in the ETSAB library).

These are excerpts from works by various authors that explore, from different perspectives, the issue of green open spaces in cities and the dialectical relationship between nature and artifice.

Each student will read and study one of the texts, and in-class presentations will be held to outline the most relevant arguments and initiate a group discussion.

Related activities:

Oral presentations in class and debate with the rest of the group.

Full-or-part-time: 20h

Guided activities: 10h

Self study : 10h

3. Case studies

Description:

Depending on the number of students enrolled in each edition of the course, working groups will be formed and assigned a city from a predefined list (around 7 cities will be studied per edition). The final objective is to create an atlas of green public spaces in cities, considering parks and/or gardens of different formats and characteristics, enabling a comparative discussion across different metropolises and landscape cultures.

Proposed cities:

EUROPE (11): Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Dublin, Stockholm, London, Madrid, Paris, Saint Petersburg, Valencia, Vienna.

AMERICA (9): Bogotá, Boston, Mexico City, Philadelphia, New York, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco, São Paulo, Vancouver.

Full-or-part-time: 40h

Guided activities: 10h

Self study : 30h

GRADING SYSTEM

Continuous assessment:

Learning of the content covered in the lecture sessions will be assessed through a written test with long-answer questions. This test may include questions related to other course activities, such as readings or research. The grade for this component will represent 25% of the continuous assessment.

The reading and discussion activity will be graded based on an average between the instructor's evaluation and peer-assessment forms (which will include qualitative comments, questions, etc.). This component will account for 25% of the continuous assessment.

The research project will represent 40% of the continuous assessment grade. This will be calculated by weighting the results obtained in at least three different phases of the project. Public presentations may include peer-assessment activities.

An additional 10% of the continuous assessment grade will be allocated to attendance and active participation in the course.

Final assessment:

The final assessment will consist of a written exam with long-answer questions and an in-class oral test involving commentary on a selected reading.

EXAMINATION RULES.

Continuous assessment tests will always be conducted in person and may be either oral or written. No supporting materials, such as notes or electronic devices, will be allowed. The same conditions will apply to the final assessment tests.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Basic:

- Czerniak, Julia. Large parks. Nova York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007. ISBN 1568986246.
- CHADWICK, G. F.. The Park and the town : public landscape in the 19th and 20th centuries. Londres: The Architectural Press, 1966.
- Cranz, Galen. The Politics of park design : a history of urban parks in America. Cambridge: The MIT Press, [1982]. ISBN 0262030861.
- Jones, Karen R. The Invention of the park : recreational landscapes from the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom. Cambridge [etc.]: Polity, 2005. ISBN 0745631398.
- Panzini, Franco. Per i piaceri del popolo : l'evoluzione del giardino pubblico in Europa dalle origini al XX secolo. Bologna: Zanichelli, cop. 1993. ISBN 880814240X.

Complementary:

- Wrede, Stuart; Adams, William Howard. Denatured visions : landscape and culture in the twentieth century. New York: Museum of Modern Art, cop. 1991. ISBN 0870704222.
- Ábalos, Iñaki. Naturaleza y artificio : el ideal pintoresco en la arquitectura y el paisajismo contemporáneos. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, cop. 2009. ISBN 9788425222764.
- Batlle, Enric. El Jardín de la metrópoli : del paisaje romántico al espacio libre para una sociedad sostenible. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2011. ISBN 9788425227004.
- Erickson, Donna L. MetroGreen : connecting open space in North American cities. Washington ; Covelo ; London: Island Press, cop. 2006. ISBN 9781556938913.
- Steenbergen, Clemens M; Reh, Wouter. Metropolitan landscape architecture : urban parks and landscapes. Bussum: Thoth, cop. 2011. ISBN 9789068685916.