

Projet d'architecture 3.11 : UN – Urban Nature

Lecturers

Mar Nadia CASABELLA ALVAREZ (Coordinator) and Axel FISHER

Course mnemonic

PROJ-P3311

ECTS credits

20 credits

Language(s) of instruction

English and French

Course period

First and second terms

Campuses

Solbosch and Flagey

Course content

The **UN – Urban Nature** teaching unit is a "vertical" architectural design studio open to Bachelor "continuation" students (see dedicated syllabus: **3.11**), **Master 1** (see dedicated syllabus: **4.11**) and **Master 2** (see dedicated syllabus: **5.11**).

UN – Urban Nature is based on a reconfiguration between urbanization and nature, between humans and non-humans in the way we inhabit the Earth.

Modernity, founded on a "great divide" between humans and the animated earth, has established a distance between human habitat and nature, evident in the organization of cities as much as the countryside, and which may today have lost its *raison d'être*.

More than the application of familiar tools and solutions, **UN – Urban Nature** is intended as a space for an "imperfect, holistic exploration of a holistic problem that is beyond us", in order to learn how to imagine an approach to architecture and urban planning that might incorporate a paradigm shift.

The majority of the world's population now lives in cities. Cities are rightly regarded as a constructed, artificial environment, often seemingly cut off from nature. Yet few cities escape the extreme conditions that nature imposes on them, whether it's dust storms in Dubai, snow in New York or floods in Paris. Nature intrudes on cities and adapts to them, taking advantage of the opportunities they offer and seeking new opportunities to reproduce. In turn, cities modify the natural systems and biogeochemistry of their environment. The scale of this modification of nature has accelerated over the last fifty years. Whereas cities originally depended on their immediate environment for food and supplies, they now depend on increasingly extensive territories and networks to satisfy their metabolic needs. Today, 60% of the world's urban population relies on rural hinterlands for 80-90% of its material and energy needs.

So, the "city" is not so much opposed to nature as interwoven with it.

What then of the age-old opposition that defined cities as the artificial environment par excellence, from which nature (its hazards, its dangers, etc.) is excluded?

What is to be made of the city/countryside dichotomy now that the survival of cities depends on territories that are increasingly vast and remote, linked by complex supply chains and proliferating *ad infinitum*: can these territories still be described as "rural", in the traditional sense of a subordinate territory, lagging behind in terms of progress and fundamentally under-valued by architects?

Does the notion of "rural" still have any validity when it comes to apprehending the reality of these outlying territories, haunted by their past and shaken by the contemporary dynamics of global interconnection?

UN – Urban Nature takes part in the **NeRu project** (newruralities.eu [<https://newruralities.eu>]), an Erasmus+ cooperative partnership (2022-25) between 6 teams of teachers and their students from as many European universities: *ULB*, *Politecnico di Torino* (Italy), *Universidade da Coruña* (Spain), *Universidade do Minho* (Portugal), *Universitet Po Arhitektura Stroitelstvo I Geodezija of Sofia* (Bulgaria), and *ETH Zürich* (Switzerland).

NeRu aims to reconceptualize rural territories beyond the city-country opposition, identified as one of the causes of the current climate crisis, in order to enrich training programs for architects and urban planners.

This 2023–24 academic year, the **UN – Urban Nature** studio's work starts from the hypothesis that these territories are traversed by a pre-modern, pre-industrial layer that persists in the form of GHOSTS: the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present. As humans reshape the landscape, we forget what was there before: our newly shaped and ruined landscapes becoming the new reality. If we want to see more clearly, we need to learn to identify and locate those GHOSTS pointing to the past, signaling our forgetting, and providing a substrate from where to actualize our present.

Our place of exploration is the coastal plain between Zeebrugge (B) and Breskens (NL), reaching inland to Bruges (B), Damme (B), Oostburg (NL), and Schoondijke (NL). About three thousand years ago, this area was governed by natural, geological processes, like storm surges and the ebb and flow of a turbulent sea. The present-day coastal plain is the result of a combination of anthropic interventions starting over 1,000 years ago, and long-term sea tidal movements carrying sediments, eroding, and altering the sea level. Hence a landscape of forever negotiation that, as late as the sixteenth century, still saw parts of it disappeared under the sea. And today a place traversed by a dense network of infrastructures aimed at controlling all possible hazards, which will be compared to other coastal locations in the context of the **NeRu project** (newruralities.eu [<https://newruralities.eu>]).

Dedicated page on the website of the Faculty of architecture La Cambre Horta: <https://archi.ulb.be/un-urban-nature>

Objectives (and/or specific learning outcomes)

UN – Urban Nature contributes to perfecting the specific learning outcomes expected of Architectural Project courses, as set out in the "BA3 jury" assessment grid (see downloadable file below):

- > Spatial dimensioning
- > Architectural composition
- > Uses
- > Scales
- > Subject
- > Oral
- > Representation

In addition, BA3 students will be invited to focus their work on the themes of the "Vernacular landscape" and "Third Landscape".

Pre-requisites and co-requisites

Course having this one as pre-requisit

PROJ-P4312 | 4.12 : HUB – Hypothèses Urbaines Bruxelloises | 20 crédits

Required knowledge and skills

Required courses

[[span]]

Teaching method and learning activities

The UN – Urban Nature unit adopts the "design studio" pedagogical device, made of bi-weekly classes alternately devoted to structured presentations by teachers, contributions by external guests, site or exhibition visits, short, well-defined exercises (reading seminar, "lodge" for production of a well-defined product, ...), group discussions, individual and/or group work sessions, "correction" sessions for students' work, and participation in cultural events outside the class timetable (conferences, etc.).

More specific "formative" assessment assignments are also proposed; their purpose, modalities and deadlines are communicated by the teachers in class.

The presentation of these works to teachers and other students is subject to constructive assessments.

Ultimately, all these activities contribute to the production of a spatial transformation proposal.

Contribution to the teaching profile

The UN – Urban Nature unit contributes to the "Bachelor of Architecture" teaching profile [<https://sam-docs.ulb.ac.be/referentiels/202021/P/B-ARCH.pdf>] (in French) insofar as it focuses on the production of one or more concrete architectural projects.

The projects produced as part of the UN – Urban Nature unit will provide an opportunity to test the ability of Bachelors of Architecture to synthesize the following skills:

[[span]]

Among the skills targeted by the "Bachelor of Architecture" teaching profile [<https://sam-docs.ulb.ac.be/referentiels/202021/P/B-ARCH.pdf>] (in French), the UN – Urban Nature unit also contributes to the development of **student-actors capable of making committed choices**:

- > demonstrating a reflective, open-minded attitude and initiative,
- > assuming civic responsibility,
- > developing the autonomy of thought and action essential to confrontation and collaboration,
- > integrating ethical responsibility.

References, bibliography and recommended reading

[[span]]

Other information

Place(s) of teaching

Flagey and Solbosch

Contact(s)

- > Term 1 (September-December 2023): Write an email to Nadia Casabella AND François Vliebergh
- > Term 2 (February-May 2024): Write an email to Nadia Casabella AND Axel Fisher

Evaluation method(s)

Project

Evaluation method(s) (additional information)

Two types of assessment are used:

- 1 **A continuous "formative" assessment** of the work carried out by the student (with intermediate submissions, on agreed dates, of the progress of work, and group and individual projects) and his/her active and committed participation during workshop sessions. These formative assessments will be communicated to students throughout the year, at key moments, with a summary at the end of the first term. These notes will enable students to "situate" themselves over the course of each term and the year. Teachers reserve the right to over- or under-rate formative grades for pedagogical reasons, mainly to motivate students.
- 2 **"Certifying" assessments** at the end of each term.

For some of these evaluation sessions, teachers will set up a "(design studio) jury", made up of invited personalities (other teachers in the program, figures from the professional world, representatives of public administrations, decision-makers, etc.). Students present their work to this jury, which evaluates it. This jury is distinct from the **deliberation jury**, which is made up solely of faculty members, and is instead responsible for assessing the student's entire year and cycle. The purpose of the "(design

studio) jury" is to confront the students to the evaluation of his or her future peers and clients, and to objectivize the acquisition of the learning skills and their professional and societal relevance.

The work of B.Arch-3 and M.Arch-2 students (diploma years) must also meet the evaluation criteria common to the Faculty's architectural design studios.

[[table]]

Determination of the mark (including the weighting of partial marks)

"Formative" assessments do not contribute to the construction of the final grade. Under no circumstances can they be considered an indisputable indicator of the foreseen final grade.

The course's final grade is based exclusively on the "certificative" assessments, which will take into account students' progress and ability to synthesize their learning achievements.

Certificative assessments are weighted as follows:

[[span]]

The course's final note results of the weighed arithmetic average of these certificative assessments.

The **cognitive skills assessed** are those listed in the "**Bachelor of Architecture**" Teaching Profile [<https://sam-docs.ulb.ac.be/referentiels/202021/P/B-ARCH.pdf>] (In French) under the headings:

> A. Investigating an architectural question;

- > B. Developing a situated spatial response;
- > C. Interacting with all concerned stakeholders.

The Behavioral skills assessed—in addition to regularity, participation, progress, compliance to deadlines and instructions, tidiness, constructive and respectful attitude towards the group—are those targeted by the "**Bachelor of Architecture**" Teaching Profile [<https://sam-docs.ulb.ac.be/referentiels/202021/P/B-ARCH.pdf>] (In French), in terms of developing **student-actors capable of making committed choices**.

Main language(s) of evaluation

English

Other language(s) of evaluation, if applicable

French, Spanish, Italian and Galician

Programmes

Programmes proposing this course at the faculty of Architecture La Cambre Horta

BA-ARCH | Bachelor in Architecture | unit 3