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Estonian Academy of Arts
Faculty of Architecture

UpGranT Best Practices
14/2026

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Fig. 1. The IPL poster, graphic designer Marta Ramos, 2025. Courtesy of the UpGranT Archive.



Fig. 2. The IPL flyer (back), graphic designer Marta Ramos, 2025. Courtesy of the UpGranT Archive.

Abstract

The Intensive Programme for Learners (IPL) is a six-day in-person international workshop in the field of Architecture, focused on the Architectural Design Process, with English as the primary language.

It is organised by the Faculty of Architecture – University of Porto (FAUP), the host institution dedicated to higher education in architecture and urban studies, in collaboration with the Politecnico di Milano, Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, Art Academy of Latvia, School of Architecture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Estonian Academy of Arts, and has the support of the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art and the Casa da Arquitetura – Portuguese Centre for Architecture.

The workshop gathered at FAUP 36 students and 15 professors/researchers from 6 different universities participating in the UpGranT Consortium, revisiting the idea of the Grand Tour as a privileged practice for the training of students and architects. The main aim of the IPL is to test and implement an *in situ* pedagogical model of learning by travelling through the FAUP ensemble, and to test it with students from different cultural and academic backgrounds, stimulating their autonomy through self-directed exploration and individual itineraries.

The IPL integrates two complementary phases: a pilot phase and a reloaded phase.

Objectives

- To highlight the potential of travelling in architectural education by demonstrating that experiencing architecture in a non-mediated way remains a unique opportunity for a genuine personal discovery and learning about architecture and architects.
- To engage students in active, open, and sensorial readings that go beyond available published information or archive

representations, enabling learners to understand the buildings and spaces as integrated wholes and in all their complexity (scale, nature, context, atmosphere, etc.), while responding to each student’s individual interests.

- To promote, within a laboratory setting, the development of authorial and creative knowledge about a building or space, through critical thinking and attentive observation, which can be retained and later re-emerge, transformed, in subsequent design processes.

Additionally, the IPL aims, through its programme and case study, to improve the portrayal of Portuguese and Porto’s architecture, namely associated with “Porto School” architects.

Method

The IPL focuses on combining laboratory-based learning with fieldwork and project-based learning approaches. It provides students with the opportunity to learn from first-hand experience, through attentive observation of architecture, and to construct authorial and creative, hands-on interpretations through teamwork.

In pursuit of the most immersive experience for learners, the workshop is grounded in a single travel destination that serves simultaneously as the workshop venue and the case study, which may already be familiar to the participants, and to which participants have full open access. As further selection criteria the case study must be thematically dense and capable of being explored through diverse, universal and, at the same time, authorial themes at different design levels by addressing: (1) a broad context comprehension and insertion; (2) a vast number and variety of design problems and corresponding design solutions; and (3) the author’s extensive body of work and architectural

references. Complementarily, the case study design process should comprise an extensive archive of sketches, rigorous drawings, and photographs that disclose the design's inception and reveal the different hypotheses developed to address the same design problems, extending from the urban reading and siting of the ensemble to the sequences of significant spaces and the meaning of the architectural elements, which can inform and enhance new readings when mirrored with the *in situ* experience.

To enable a more fruitful exchange and transfer of practices, the students are grouped into international teams of six, comprising one student from each of the six participating educational institutions. Each group is assigned a significant space that can be identified within the case study design process. The boundaries of these spaces can be expanded and even overlap.

The IPL comprises an opening session framing the workshop, thematic work sessions, guest talks, and a closing session with the presentation of the workshop results and a conference on the travels of a selected practising architect. There are also parallel itineraries in Porto (both pre-organised and self-discovery routes).

The IPL work sessions are structured into three phases, according to the main actions undertaken: (1) *Recognise* (8 hours), which includes a collective guided visit to the case study and autonomous group visits to the assigned significant spaces; (2) *Propose* (4 hours), which corresponds to the conception of personal *in situ* readings based on intense group debate; (3) *Build* (16 hours), which corresponds to the construction of physical objects that could be taken home as mementoes of the experienced architecture.

These objects consist of a “postcard series” (visual interpretation), a “kinetic narrative” (architectural narrative), and a “totem” (model), all organised in a “souvenir box”.

The conception and elaboration of each of these components are monitored by a team of two professors from different institutions, thereby enhancing cross-institutional collaboration and fostering mutual didactic and cultural exchange between professors and student groups.

Tools

The Intensive Programme for Learners pursues an active, student-centred, experiential approach, with travelling as its main learning tool, triggering architecture within a heightened cultural understanding and stimulating educational crossover.

Being a workshop in architecture, the IPL calls for the use of tools accessible to all, commonly used in architectural practices or architecture schools and challenges students to share their cultural intakes through the tools and methods used in their educational institutions.

Taking into consideration the specific condition of a current traveller – limited in means and resources – the IPL prioritises the use of personal, small-format, lightweight tools to document, interpret, and reconstruct the object of travel or case study in brief notes that allow for easier recall. This includes the use of analogue instruments and digital tools for sketching, designing, and modelling, alongside basic design and image editing software accessible through personal devices.

During the IPL, tools for collaborative and visual brainstorming include both paper-based methods and whiteboards, as well as the Miro app. Tools used for content creation, editing, or design include writing and drawing by hand, model making, and software such as Canva and Adobe, as well as AutoCAD or ArchiCAD.

For final or intermediate presentations, the IPL uses the PechaKucha format, with a short hands-on performance featuring the physical objects – the “postcard series”,

“kinetic narrative”, and “totem” – set in the “souvenir box”.

Course materials

- A booklet introducing the IPL, with information on its objectives, case study, and expected outcomes, together with guidance on time management and student organisation.
- A selection of original archive materials relating to the case study and recent digital redrawings.
- A selection of support texts on Portuguese architecture, particularly that of Porto, and free access to the FAUP library, specialised in architecture.

Additionally, the IPL students are provided with information on itineraries previously tested by the UpGranT Consortium, as well as additional maps and brochures designed to frame and stimulate self-discovery itineraries.

The IPL students are also invited to tour Casa da Arquitectura – Portuguese Centre for Architecture, namely its archive and main exhibition on Portuguese architecture.

Selected readings

- Cortés J. (2013) “Master lessons. Eleven Architectural issues on the work of Alvaro Siza”. *El croquis*, 168/169, pp. 6–58.
- Curtis W. (1998) “A Conversation [with Alvaro Siza]”. *El croquis*, 68/69+95, pp. 6–21.
- Domingues A., Nonell A., Tavares R. (1994) “Oporto”. In: *Atlas histórico de ciudades europeas: Península Ibérica*. Salvat, Barcelona.
- Frampton K. (1991) “Sketching. Álvaro Siza’s Notes”. In: *The Eye of the Architect – Lotus 68*. Electa, Milano.
- Frampton K. (1986) “Poesis and transformation: the architecture of Alvaro Siza”. In: *Álvaro Siza: poetic profession*. Electa, Milano.
- Huet B (1986) “Critical anthology”. In *Álvaro*

Siza: poetic profession. Electa, Milano.

Morales J. (2014) “Una conversación con Eduardo Souto de Moura”. *El croquis*, 176, pp. 5–27.

Portas N. (1986) “The search for a language”. In *Álvaro Siza: poetic profession*. Electa, Milano.

Rojo De Castro L. (2005) “La naturalidad de las cosas [una conversación con Eduardo Souto de Moura]”. *El croquis*, 124, pp. 6–18.

Rojo De Castro L. (2005) “The Invention of Problems”. *El croquis*, 124, pp. 19–26.

Santos J. (2007) “The meaning of things, a conversation with Alvaro Siza”. *El croquis*, 140, pp. 7–59.

Távora F. (2020) “On space organization / «Da Organização do Espaço», Fernando Távora, 1962”. In: B. Bogoni, J. Mendes Ribeiro. *In class with Távora. Teaching and learning (living) today*. AMAG Publisher, Porto.

Zaera A. (2000) “Getting through turbulence: Interview with Álvaro Siza”. *El croquis*, 68/69+95, pp. 6–45.

Siza A. (1986) “Foreword”. In: *Álvaro Siza: Poetic Profession*. Electa, Milano.

Maps

- “Fernando Távora, Architectural Map-Guide, North Region”
- “Álvaro Siza, Architectural Map-Guide, Porto Region”
- “Eduardo Souto de Moura, Architectural Map-Guide, Porto Region”
- “José Marques da Silva, Architectural Map-Guide, North Region”
- “Agostinho Ricca, Architectural Map-Guide, North Region”
- “Arménio Losa / Cassiano Barbosa, Architectural Map-Guide, North Region”
- “João Álvaro Rocha, Architectural Map, Maia North and South”
- “Matosinhos architecture map”

Brochures – *Sebentas d’Obra*
 “#03, Teleférico de Gaia”, *Vila Nova de Gaia*
 “#24, Terminal Intermodal de Campanhã”
 “#29, i3S da Universidade do Porto”
 “#32, Extensão do Museu de Serralves”
 “#36, Estação de São Bento / Ala Sul | Time Out Market”
 “#39, Monasterium, requalificação do mosteiro de Leça do Balio”

Prerequisites

IPL participants are students enrolled in the bachelor’s, master’s and PhD programmes at the universities of the UpGrAnT Consortium, preferably near the completion of the first cycle of studies (bachelor’s degree), with a minimum of 120 ECTS credits. This requirement ensures that all participants have an advanced and consistent academic background in architectural design, are familiar with distinct of design themes, narratives, and references, and are prepared to deepen complex knowledge through the implementation of a design process with a high level of autonomy.

Additionally, IPL participants must be proficient in English, from the perspective of an independent user.

Assessment

IPL promotes the shift from passive lecturing to active participation, where students, together with their professors, engage in a cycle of action and reflection, collaborating to identify problems, share knowledge, and co-design solutions.

The assessment of the IPL objectives spans both the workshop and the period thereafter, measuring its immediate and mid-term impact on participants.

During the IPL, to keep the students focused, the work is structured into three main actions that correspond to intermediate deadlines. Each of these actions involves timed work sessions as well as presentation and critique sessions, as previously set out

in the workshop schedule included in the dedicated booklet. There is also a scheduled final project presentation by the students.

The presentation and feedback sessions take place without exception at the end of each working day and involve all student groups and professors. These sessions provide opportunities to directly observe skill acquisition and document progress towards the final outcomes.

Additionally, short, informal, and frequent moments of exchange between teachers and students occur at the worktable during work sessions, allowing for immediate feedback, course corrections, the encouragement of divergent thinking, and the promotion of emerging themes.

After the workshop, each partner in the UpGrAnT Consortium will implement the reloaded phase of the IPL through specific activities used to evaluate its educational effectiveness.

Evaluation

Evaluation through a final numerical grade or a simple “pass/fail” assessment is not applicable to the IPL.

Instead, IPL prioritises a narrative-driven assessment, with an evaluation method based on descriptive and qualitative standards that assess the merit, value, or significance of the students’ participation. This approach enables a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the students’ performance, which is particularly relevant when assessing the impact of IPL’s applied methodology: were the students able to showcase personal interpretations of the case study through their *in situ* study?

Evaluation within the IPL is continuous, encompassing the workshop’s entire duration and all planned activities, from the working sessions and presentation/critique sessions to the parallel activities – talks, the conference, and itineraries. It monitors the students’ performance, valuing both the students’ learning process and the

group’s final outputs. The evaluation has three distinct, yet complementary, components: (1) continuous assessment, resulting from individual feedback on the group work; (2) focused assessment, based on comparative feedback on the key aspects of the work’s development; (3) specific evaluation of the work performed by the group. Therefore, the IPL requires the students’ presence and active participation throughout all the proposed activities.

All the students who complete the IPL with at least 90% attendance receive a participation certificate, validated by the six partners of the Consortium.

Deliverables

The main output of the IPL is inspired by André Malraux’s *Le musée imaginaire* (1952) and by Mansilla + Tuñón Architects’ *Playgrounds* (2008/2014) concept, and takes the form of a “souvenir box” created by each student group.

Each box contains a collection of physical objects that aim to communicate an original, authorial, and creative perspective on the group’s assigned significant FAUP space, based on an active, open, and sensorial *in situ* reading, that goes beyond previously collected information and reports, and directly addresses the students’ personal interests.

This personal point of view is expressed through a set of visual interpretations (a “post-card series”), a visual/textual report of a process or situation that evolves through space/time displacement (a “kinetic narrative”), and an object that functions as a symbol of the selected space (a “totem”).

These elements must not only fit within but also organise the interior space of a pre-purchased 27 × 33 × 11 cm cardboard box. This box, when completed, must be able to travel.

Student feedback

The evaluation of the IPL impact includes: (1) informal follow-up evaluations; and (2)

an individual post-event questionnaire.

The short survey, designed to collect immediate feedback on the workshop experience and suggestions for improvement, may address planning and communication, activities, and outcomes. These three themes may require students to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). They may be followed by a series of open-ended questions that encourage students to reflect on their learning by travelling experience.

The questionnaire must be kept concise to minimise respondent fatigue.

It is to be presented in English, the IPL’s official language.

Agree/Disagree questions Planning and communication

The questions in this section concern activities related to the implementation of the subject.

- 1 The workshop’s programme (activities and schedule) was clearly and correctly explained by the teaching staff before my application.
- 2 The workshop’s selected bibliography was studied in advance.
- 3 The workshop’s programme was explained in detail and clearly framed in its opening session.
- 4 The archive materials available during the workshop together with the information available in the booklet – course schedule, case study and outcome, selected bibliography, maps and brochures, and redrawings on the case study – were used and useful.
- 5 The workshop identification elements received (pin and bag) were used during the workshop, both inside and outside FAUP.
- 6 The workshop space was relevant for experiencing FAUP’s atmosphere and was suitable for the different activities.

Activities

The questions in this section concern the learning activities during the IPL.

- 1 I had knowledge of the FAUP architectural ensemble and of Álvaro Siza's work prior to the workshop.
- 2 The guided experience of the FAUP's ensemble contributed to the construction of new and personal interpretations.
- 3 The construction of the "souvenir box" contributed to consolidating the new readings of the ensemble in an organised manner.
- 4 The feedback received during the workshop supported the development of my work.
- 5 The parallel activities organised within the workshop (talks, the conference, and itineraries) were relevant in sustaining my interest in learning by travelling.
- 6 The time allocated for the workshop was sufficient to complete the proposed outputs.

Outputs

The questions in this section concern the students' opinions about the IPL outcomes.

- 1 The workshop experience was relevant to my academic and professional development.
- 2 The workshop helped me to develop a more critical and reflective attitude towards architectural observation, representation, and communication.
- 3 The interdisciplinary and international dimension of the workshop (its teachers and students) enriched the learning experience.
- 4 I would recommend the IPL's teaching approach, which incorporates experiencing architecture *in situ* as a learning tool, to my colleagues.

Open questions (free-text responses)

- 1 Which methods/tools did you use to record the spaces visited during the workshop?

- 2 Which methods/tools did you use to construct your memory of the architecture themes explored during the workshop?
- 3 Did the experience challenge your previous understanding of architecture or your approach to learning by travelling?
- 4 Is there anything you would improve regarding teaching, organisation, or logistics?

Course review

Enhancing the methodology applied may involve:

- Presenting the workshop programme in a virtual joint session open to all the professors and students interested in participating from the different academic institutions. This short collaborative session will ensure a clearer, shared perspective on the workshop programme, thereby helping to shape expectations more accurately. It could be followed by a common email summarising the workshop programme and additional resources. A teaser document (the IPL flyer) might also be shared in advance.
- Encouraging architectural readings on Portuguese and Porto architecture. Although the students were provided with selected readings in advance to support the IPL, few of these texts were read before the workshop. Having students discover the selected bibliography *in situ*, either by creating a reading corner in the workshop space or through the FAUP library, might be a more effective way to encourage independent and self-directed learning.
- Encouraging the self-discovery itineraries by inviting students to engage in intentional and immersive walks through FAUP's surroundings and Porto city centre and its neighbourhoods, fostering a direct, unfiltered connection with new environments,

creative reflection, and a personal perspective on Porto's architectural and cultural identity. Key strategies for experiencing spaces and monitoring these interpretations might include keeping a dedicated travel journal and/or a sketchbook to document observations and interpretations.

- Synthesising the workshop results over the following days into a final open showcase moment, during which the readings of the collection of significant spaces would be reassembled (and read as a continuous whole) to offer a new perspective on FAUP's architectural environment, built through the contribution of the various IPL participants.

Some of these improvements would benefit from, or would only be possible with, an increase in the number of days dedicated to the IPL. The duration of the workshop is a pivotal factor in the success of the applied methodology and its adequate assimilation by students. It is of utmost importance that the schedule identifies and appropriately paces the different activities, taking into account their nature and the time required for students' self-discovery.

Outcomes



Fig. 3. The IPL opening session.
Fig. 4. A guided tour of FAUP.
Fig. 5. Themed work session: *Recognise*.

Fig. 6. Open talk by Maria Conceição Melo and family, entitled *Travelling with João Álvaro Rocha*.
Figs. 7-8. A guided tour to Casa da Arquitetura – Portuguese Centre for Architecture.
Figs. 9. Themed work session: *Propose*.



Fig. 10. Open talk by Luisa Moura, entitled *Travelling with Eduardo Souto de Moura*.
Figs. 11–12. Themed work session: *Build*.

Figs. 13–18. Presentation of the final projects.



Fig. 19. Open conference by Nuno Melo Sousa, entitled *Travelling*.
Fig. 20. The IPL closing session – Part 1: Certificate presentation.
All photographs (3–20) by UpGranT FAUP Team. Courtesy of the authors.

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