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Estonian Academy of Arts
Faculty of Architecture

UpGranT Best Practices
14/2026

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High School Programme

Travel LAB: Learning by Travelling

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Faculty of Architecture – University of Porto

Context

Porto, 2025

Field of Study

Architecture

Degree Level

High school (Summer course)

ECTS Credits

5 days / 30 hours (ECTS credits not applicable)

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Abstract

Travel-LAB (T-LAB) is a five-day, in-person summer course in the field of architecture.

T-LAB is hosted by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP), which is dedicated to higher education in architecture and urban studies. It is set within the Junior University – University of Porto framework, a singular national programme that aims to introduce high school students to the university's academic life, facilities, and courses.

The summer course at FAUP brings together two professors (architects), two

monitors (architecture students) and up to 16 high school students aged 14/15 to 17/18 from across Portugal with diverse academic interests. The course encourages participants to revisit the idea of the Grand Tour as an important cultural and social moment in the education of cultured citizens. In an era of travel trivialisation and declining critical inquiry amid an environmental crisis, the main aim of T-LAB is to underline responsible travel as an opportunity for broad-spectrum learning, centred on the learner, their self-motivation, and autonomy. T-LAB also aims to raise awareness about the value of contemporary architectural heritage, the importance of architecture, and the social relevance of the architect's profession.

The T-LAB 2025 edition is supported by the Abade Pedrosa Municipal Museum, the International Museum of Contemporary Sculpture (MIEC), and the Art Centre and Archive Alberto Carneiro (CAAC) in Santo Tirso.

Objectives

T-LAB aims to go beyond being a leisure-time activity, promoting knowledge in architecture in an enjoyable and, at the same time, rigorous way, through travelling, a theme particularly dear to architects. Travelling is understood here as movement from one place to another, whether near or far, for a certain period of time, involving an integrated set of experiences.

The main objectives of T-LAB are:

- Reassess travel as a learning and pedagogical tool in architecture.
- Improve awareness of artistic practices from northern Portugal and those associated with the Porto School.
- Enhance the learning experience through travel and visits to architects and artists and their built works.
- Stimulate attentive observation, critical thinking, and autonomous discovery

through sensorial and sensitive readings.

- Promote active engagement with travel readings through personal creative assessments and (re)applications.
- Raise awareness of architectural and artistic practices and their social relevance and responsibility.
- Promote responsible travel – conscious, critical and sustainable.

Method

T-LAB focuses on combining laboratory-based learning with fieldwork and project-based learning methodologies. It is the opportunity for students to learn from firsthand experience, outside the classroom, through attentive observation of architecture and artworks, as well as through creative, hands-on authorial interpretations.

To create a five-day Grand Tour experience, the summer course is grounded in a one-day tour to a destination in the Porto metropolitan area, bringing together works of contemporary architecture and sculpture that are open and accessible to all. These works share a thematic density, the ability to be broken into diverse design problems and solutions (both universal and authorial), and the potential to represent their authors' extensive body of work and travel references.

Within the spirit of the Grand Tour, this travel implies a preparatory phase, focused on documenting and studying the works and authors to be visited through available bibliography (which includes archive materials among other sources) as well as a post-visit reflection.

More specifically, T-LAB integrates the following activities to be carried out either by a full group of 16 students or in small groups of 4 students (organised according to their personal affinities):

- An “elective affinities map of previous travels” based on the presentation of the notion of the Grand Tour, accompanied

by a set of unique journeys undertaken by architects and artists (6 hours, 16 students).

- A “travel board” based on a selected bibliography and a previously presented travel plan and itinerary, accompanied by brief introductions to the authors and the works to be visited (6 hours, 4 groups of 4 students).
- A “group travel experience” consisting of a one-day tour to visit works of architecture and sculpture. The tour is guided and includes time for autonomous observation and discovery (6 hours, 16 students).
- A “souvenir” developed as a new authorial narrative (written and/or drawn, through two-dimensional or three-dimensional objects) that recalls the group travel experience and can be taken home as a remembrance. Its construction follows an introduction to the concept of the souvenir, illustrated with examples in a short presentation (6 hours, 4 groups of 4 students).
- An “atlas for future travels” triggered by the recent travel experience (6 hours, 16 students).

Throughout these activities, students may explore drawing and writing as creative media, using exclusively analogue techniques.

In the 2025 edition, T-LAB travelled to Santo Tirso to visit an ensemble co-authored by Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, as well as the Art Centre, featuring sculptures and installations by Alberto Carneiro.

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Urtasun A. (2008) *Guía para educadores – Museo Oteiza*. Fundacion Museo Jorge Oteiza, Alzuza

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horizonte. Museu Chillida Leku, Hernani. Dipartimento Educativo di Pirelli HangarBicocca (2024–2025) *Kids Guide*. Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milano.

Tools

T-LAB pursues an active, student-centred, experiential approach, with travel as its main learning tool. Specifically, while travelling, T-LAB encourages students to activate the five senses and to engage thought and intelligence in the construction of clear and unprejudiced readings grounded in attentive observation, silent listening, and critical thinking. These processes may involve mediating tools, such as drawing, photographing, or writing, as a way of looking more attentively.

A principle that runs throughout T-LAB, a course dedicated to deepening architectural culture, is the call to use and apply tools embedded in the architectural practice, which are adapted for and academically relevant to high school students. T-LAB prefers analogue writing and drawing tools, such as whiteboards and notebooks of different sizes, to boost memory retention, focus, and creativity, rather than digital tools, thereby minimising digital distractions and screen-induced mental fatigue. With this objective in mind, at the start of the course, T-LAB provides students with a toolkit that includes notebooks, paper of different colours and thicknesses, pens, charcoal and colouring pencils, cutting devices, and glue, all readily available, to enable students to quickly map out ideas individually or brainstorm collaboratively. Students also have access to a print/copy machine during T-LAB. According to the recommendations of Junior University – University of Porto, the use of a personal device or camera is only permitted during the group travel experience.

For final or intermediate presentations, T-LAB promotes short, hands-on performances featuring printed images or physical objects conceived as souvenirs.

Course Materials

During the course, T-LAB provides students with the following materials:

- A selection of archive documents on the selected architects' and artists' travels, organised into short presentation sessions.
- The one-day travel plan draft and a collection of printed materials on the city, buildings, and artworks to be visited. This includes a map for each student to take home, which can be used as a basis for future family visits (Museu Internacional de Escultura Contemporânea. Mapa de esculturas na cidade 1990–2020. Santo Tirso. Câmara Municipal).
- A selection of books from the FAUP library on the architects' and artists' works featured in the group travel experience.

The one-day travel plan draft includes:

- Travel from Porto to Santo Tirso by rented bus.
- Visits to the Abade Pedrosa Municipal Museum and the International Museum of Contemporary Sculpture (MIEC), an architectural work co-designed by Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, including a guided tour led by a staff member.
- A lunchtime visit to the museum's outdoor sculpture collection (including works of Alberto Carneiro and other national and international contemporary sculptors, such as Pedro Cabrita Reis, Rui Sanches, Carlos Nogueira, Reinhard Klessinger, Jorge du Bon, etc.).
- Travel between the MIEC and the Art Centre and Archive Alberto Carneiro (CAAC).
- A visit to the CAAC and its permanent exhibition of the sculptor's work, including a guided tour led by a staff member.
- Return trip from Santo Tirso to Porto by rented bus.

The book selection includes:

- (2022) "Museu internacional de Escultura Contemporânea [MIEC] en Santo Tirso". El croquis, 215/216, pp. 52–65.
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Prerequisites

Within the framework of Junior University – University of Porto, T-LAB is aimed at prospective pre-university students who have completed elementary school and are currently enrolled in a Portuguese high school. It is open to students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th years (generally ages 14/15 to 17/18) from all scientific-humanistic courses (Sciences and Technologies, Socioeconomic Sciences, Languages and Humanities, and Visual Arts),

whether geared towards higher education/university or technical courses, with or without prior training in arts or architecture.

The opportunity for high school students to dive into the field of architecture at FAUP through T-LAB extends beyond mere exposure to a potential career path. It aims to stimulate among students a cultured perspective on art, architecture, and travel, providing them with tools to explore and better understand the built and cultural environment, strengthen their relationship with their surroundings, and foster their critical thinking and creativity.

Assessment

T-LAB promotes in-person learning, emphasising active participation by students, monitors, and professors in a process of action and reflection, as well as collaboration to identify problems, share knowledge, and co-design solutions.

The assessment of the T-LAB objectives is integrated, continuous, and formative throughout the course, focusing on monitoring students' progress and immediate learning outcomes through active daily participation. The main assessment methods are observation and discussion.

The T-LAB activities are structured on a daily basis, with each day corresponding to a specific activity. Typically, each day begins with a concise presentation of the activity by the teaching staff, followed by short work sessions involving student groups, monitors, and professors around the same worktable in a single workspace (with both interior and exterior environments), movement breaks between work sessions and end-of-day informal presentations. These are trigger moments for participants to share their discoveries and innovative creations, followed by a period of synthesis and reflection in which all participants can have a voice in discussing what they have learned and what they were most enthusiastic about. They also provide

opportunities to directly observe skill acquisition and document progress towards the mapped objectives and outcomes, complementing the worktable moments of frequent exchange and rapid feedback, which allow students to confront and review misconceptions in real time.

The course is structured around varied, interactive, and clearly framed activities, short presentations, small-group work sessions with movement breaks, and hands-on tasks developed both in the full group and in small teams. This structure, connected to the real-world scenario of travelling, aims to focus students' attention and maintain their engagement and enthusiasm.

Evaluation

T-LAB is a week-long (5 days) learning-by-doing travel experience designed to enrich high school students' broader understanding of the arts and to highlight the social relevance and cultural role of architecture through complex thought filtered by sensorial and sensitive ways of reading and understanding, with no intermediate or final evaluations and no minimum attendance requirements. According to Junior University – University of Porto, students come together in a safe environment, open to self-discovery and autonomous thinking, which inspires them to go beyond established social premises and their given socio-economic framework.

Deliverables

Considering T-LAB's objectives and activities, the course's main outputs are a collection of deliverables, which include an "elective affinities map of previous travels", a "travel board", a "group travel experience", a "souvenir", and an "atlas for future travels". An additional output may be an "individual travel journal", drawn and/or written, that records and interprets the daily activities.

Specifically, the "souvenir" corresponds to a reinterpretation of the travel experience

through the conception of an authorial narrative, based on active, open, and sensorial *in situ* readings, that goes beyond previously collected information and directly addresses the students’ personal interests.

This new point of view may be communicated and further developed through the use of a variety of analogue techniques, including writing, drawing, collaging, or modelling.

Due to the course’s premises, digital productions are not considered, and camera use is limited.

Student Feedback

The evaluation of T-LAB’s impact includes a follow-up informal evaluation and a post-event individual questionnaire.

During the T-LAB week, informal observations of students’ behaviour, interactions, and performance, together with conversations with the monitors, students, and the Junior University – University of Porto staff provide real-time insights and feedback, allowing for immediate adjustments to the T-LAB approach.

An anonymous survey to collect honest feedback on the course experience and further within 24 hours should be concise (limited to 5 to 10 minutes), using a mix of five-point scale ratings (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) and open-ended questions to provide actionable feedback on planning and communication, activities, and outputs.

Key questions include overall satisfaction, favourite moments, perceived value, and suggestions for improvement.

Quantitative Metrics (Scale of 1 to 5)

Planning and Communication

- 1 In the application phase, the T-LAB’s brief was concise, clear, and appealing.
- 2 At the T-LAB launch, the teaching staff introduced the course and clearly explained the overall programme (objectives, activities, outputs, and

supporting materials).

- 3 During T-LAB, the teaching staff and monitors were welcoming and approachable, encouraging socialisation and participation.
- 4 Throughout T-LAB, the teaching staff presented and clearly explained all the daily activities and the provided materials in an enthusiastic manner.

Activities

- 1 The T-LAB space was agreeable and suitable for the planned activities.
- 2 The T-LAB workload was adequate for a summer course.
- 3 The group travel experience was fundamental to T-LAB.
- 4 The travel preparation phase and the souvenir phase of reflection and discussion were fundamental to a better understanding of the group travel experience.

Outputs

- 1 T-LAB contributed to the improvement of my skills in observation, critical thinking, autonomous discovery, and communication.
- 2 T-LAB contributed to the improvement of my knowledge of artists, architects, artistic and architectural practices in North Portugal.
- 3 Through T-LAB, I developed a more critical and reflective attitude towards the social relevance of art and architecture.
- 4 Through T-LAB, I developed a more critical and reflective attitude towards the educational value of travelling.

Qualitative Metrics (Open-Text Answers)

- 1 Did you enjoy the overall T-LAB experience?
- 2 What was the most important thing you learned about arts, architecture, and travelling?
- 3 Would you like to participate in the next

T-LAB edition, and would you recommend it to a friend?

- 4 What suggestion would you give for next year’s T-LAB edition?

Course Review

During T-LAB, the daily observation of the students’ behaviour, interactions and performance, paired with direct feedback from the monitors, allowed for refinements to the devised methodology by:

- Introducing a preliminary rehearsal of the “group travel experience” through a group visit to the Faculty of Architecture, where the summer course took place. Through a guided tour, this provided an opportunity to test different strategies for experiencing architecture *in situ*, using the main senses (vision, hearing, smell, and touch), and to interpret initial atmospheric impressions into design themes and narratives, in order to discover the building’s objective, meaning, and purpose. This was also a special moment for high school students to become familiar with FAUP’s environment and facilities.
- Replacing the prior supply of didactic material on the studied authors and buildings with an afternoon in the FAUP library, where students identified the library sections, selected books, and engaged with them to build their own personal collection of information.
- Adding an unexpected surprise visit to the “group travel experience” itinerary. At the end of the one-day tour, on the way back from Santo Tirso, the visit to the Alberto Carneiro Sculpture Garden provided a unique occasion to regain the students’ attention and keep them focused on the space interpretation. The garden, comprising 435 granite posts on the outskirts of the city of Trofa, enhanced *in situ* reflection on the affinities between

architecture and sculpture in moulding spaces and creating atmospheres.



Figs. 1-2. The T-LAB "group travel experience", preliminary rehearsal, 2025



Fig. 3. The T-LAB "travel board", 2025



Figs. 4-6. The T-LAB "group travel experience", 2025



Figs. 7–10. The T-LAB “souvenirs”, 2025



Fig. 11. The T-LAB “atlas for future travels”, 2025
All photographs (1–11) by UpGranT FAUP Team. Courtesy of the authors.

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