

# A new learning model for UOU

Letter from the director

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This article has received a grant from Programa REDES of University Teaching Research by the Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación of the University of Alicante (2022 call). Ref.: 5784 UOU4EUROPE.

Citation: Sanchez Merina, J. (2023). "A new learning model for UOU" UOU scientific journal #05, 6-15.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2023.5.01>

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The *UNIVERSITY of Universities* project now involves 46 universities, and a total of 65 teachers participating from diverse backgrounds and interests, from their own cultures and different ways of understanding architecture.

That is, at the end of the day, one of the treasures of this learning project: our differences. Indeed, one can detect with precision those differentiations in the methodologies that each of us use in our teaching and, even more, in the expected results by the students.

We have just finished the third year of UOU. A long enough period of an intense collaboration exchanging workshops to get to know each other and to identify the use of these personal methodologies. It is true that the UOU model offers a lot of freedom to the teachers, since we are just asked to organize the best possible workshop that we can. Still, at the same time the UOU model is quite rigid when framed in the 2 weeks' duration of each workshop. They start with a 30 minutes' Presentation, followed by a 4 hours Crit in the first week, and concluding with another 3,5 hours Final Crit in the last week. It is also then when the presentation of the next workshop starts.

We also must remember that since we have more teachers offering workshops than weeks we have in the semester, the students have the possibility of choosing, and that is a second treasure of UOU. Our students are active members in their education right from the first day of the course, defining with their selections what kind of architects they want to be.

Once the student has chosen a workshop by a specific teacher, all of us follow the Crit system, where the student explains the project to the rest of the class. In this way the project becomes a starting point for a conversation between teachers and students, that constitutes a reflection on the theme and the architectural response. As the Socratic method, the teacher goes beyond the mechanical transmission of knowledge, to provoking critical thought. Still, as we mentioned at the beginning, each teacher always manages to leave his/her mark in this so systematic course. That is precisely the third treasure: how each of us help to improve the learning process. This paper will focus precisely on this, on the personal strategies that have appeared in parallel to the routine of the classroom based on the Crit system.

## A GLASS ABOUT TO OVERFLOW

Everyday more and more of us realize how our dear schools of architecture, and our universities in general, are missing important opportunities for education. Without any doubt it is a consequence of the tedious process of self-validation, peer-validation and professional accreditations, where many teachers and institutions focus all their attention on the production of their own CVs forgetting its real nature, the origins that should embody them. Indeed, the pressure for accreditation is so high that it provokes multiple publications that feeds a structural endogamy and, as it is happening now for instance at Alicante University, the learning of the local language to a high C1 level responds just for the sake of getting extra points with a certificate that will assure a teaching position, missing in this way opportunities, for example, of finding critical cultural applications of the language in their teaching.

Another consequence of the individualism provoked by the accreditation stress is the disappearance of the director of the school of architecture as a the figure who ensures the relationship between taught modules for a real learning of architecture. On the contrary, we are arranged by compact academic calendars that do not keep space to have so many experiences, for instance, those field trips that have always been so essential in the education of the architect.

At this point, I would like to make use of my own experience when participating as a tutor in the PAT (*Plan Action Tutorial*) – a service for orientation to students at Alicante University. From my conversations with the students, I realize that they constantly ask for extracurricular activities. They, the students, are the ones who

intuitively demand for experiences that enrich their learning as future architects, as if they clearly realize that the modules offered by our schools of architecture do not cover their complete education. If it is true that on the one hand one feels proud of such students' concerns, on the other we should feel shame in calling those practices "extracurricular activities".

One of the very acclaimed activities by the students is to organize a series of **Jobsite Visits with Author**. These consist of learning directly from architects (usually young professionals who studied in our school of architecture) when visiting one of their works under construction. The students are organized in groups, and each of them is responsible to prepare a brochure of the project to be visited, including plans and sections, as well as other information about the authors. Usually it is a single house, and during the visit, the architects describe the process they followed to materialize a project that responded to the briefs and dreams of the clients. The explanation includes issues on economy, materials and building construction, law, aesthetics, sustainability and energy, structure, installations... as well as how to deal with the clients, who sometimes are even present in the visit. In that way our students have also a first contact with clients (Fig.1). The visit concludes inviting the architects for lunch, a very important moment since it is then when the students become more participative in a real dialogue with the architects. All issues explained before appear again but this time in a different way, more reflective, and not conceived as isolated facts but stablishing relationships between them (Fig.2). Without any doubt the students open our eyes on deficiencies in the architecture education that our schools are offering, helping us to imagine new extra curriculum practices to complete it.



Fig.1 – Jobsite visit with LA ERRERÍA office / single house in Novelda (January 2023).



Fig.2 – Conversation with ABEZ design in Orihuela (February 2023).

The series *Jobsite Visits with Author* is a good example of a methodology that relates and puts together all the modules taught in the school of architecture.

## IDENTIFICATION OF METHODOLOGIES

With this perspective in mind, we have been detecting different the methodologies derived from the UOU workshops, and all of them can be considered as extracurricular activities as well:

### • The Exhibition in the City

The workshop *EPHEMERAL ARCHITECTURE: URBAN FOLLIES*, organized by Sofia Aleixo and João Santa Rita (Évora University, Portugal) last semester, consisted of the interpretation of the Public Place and Local Heritage, designing small ephemeral architectural structure for the European Capital of Culture 2027.

After the 2-week online workshop, all the students organized in international groups continued working for an exhibition of their projects



Fig.3 – Exhibition in the Church of Antigo Convento do Salvador (April 2023).

in the centre of Évora (Fig.3). The experience was so exciting that even one of the students of Alicante went to stay there and learn from the experience of mounting an exhibition in a historical building, as well as explaining their work to society.

Similarly, the workshop *NEW VISION OF PERFECT PLACE TO GIVE A BIRTH*, directed by Marcin Kolakowski and Franka Jagielak (University of Lincoln, UK & Pedagogical University Cracow, Poland), was presented with the possibility to participate in the **Exhibition and Research Seminar** which will be organised at the University of Lincoln.

It was really fascinating in their methodology to learn how they introduced an exercise for the students to interview their mothers, asking for the moment of giving birth to them. Without any doubt a stimulant conversation with one's mother to generate an "idealistic vision of place which do not exist".

In the same way, last semester finished with the workshop *ARCHITECTURE, CREATIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE DAWN OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE*, proposed by Sinan Mihelčič, from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). Based on the belief that as the near future of architecture and urbanism will be greatly influenced by AI we first need to know what kind of tools will be available and how

to use them. This thought is very attractive to our students, eager to learn new ways of production. And it shows a real contrast with other teachers of architecture design who keep serious doubts and fears of the intelligence demonstrated by machines, even forbidding its use in class since it questions the role of the architect. The results obtained of Sinan's workshop will also be part of an **Exhibition on AI**.



Fig.4 – How to eat a Marinera, an edible lecture on Skeleton in Architecture (Murcia, November 2022).

### • The field trip

Our partners from Umeå University (Sweden), Maria Luna Nobile and Richard Conway, visited Alicante University with their students last semester. In this way, the visit was more than a conventional field trip where the students are visitors. They also shared our classes and lectures, transforming the classroom in a multicultural context. Actually, the lectures changed their format, and when being asked to prepare a talk on the "Skeleton in Architecture", we organized it at lunch time, with local food that requires the knowledge of some principles of structure and construction to be able to be prepared and eaten.

Basically, it was a fun way of enjoying tasting a *marinera*, *salchicha seca*, *pastel de carne* and *paparajote* while learning about 'skeletons' directly from their hands (Fig.4).



Fig.5 – Capuchin Convent. Suspending time... by vmsa architects, UOU Reflections Series, Issue #01, Alicante University, (December 2022).

• The UOU Reflection series

We all remember special moments in our education, those that have transformed our way of thinking, coming to change our lives. I want to share a very special one: when I finished my architecture degree in Valencia, I went to study in London. There I lived with doctoral students from all over the world, in a collaborative environment, sharing ideas from different disciplines and cultures. Thus, I participated in the series of PORT TALKS - conferences that encouraged us to contrast our theses with the rest of the community, while the audience had a glass of Port wine. That small gesture opened new windows of opportunity, establishing dialogues with different knowledge.

Thirty years later, at UNIVERSITY of Universities we are applying that same collaborative attitude and intercultural education, in which all - professors and students - learn from differences. In fact, we borrowed the title from PORT TALKS for our Thursday night online lecture series during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Being online, these only lasted a maximum of 15 minutes, just long enough for the audience to enjoy

their drinks. Obviously, under these conditions, the topic to be discussed had to be very precise: a reflection originating from a project.

The conference given by Sofia Aleixo together with Víctor Mestre (vmsa arquitectos) is included in a book, the first of the UOU Reflections series: *CAPUCHINS CONVENT. SUSPENDING TIME...* Near Lisbon, in Alferrara, one finds the ruins of the Capuchin Convent, founded in the 16th century. When the architects were commissioned to restore it, they questioned how to incorporate the passage of time into the restoration. Or, put another way, how not to lose it. For this they came to consider preventing their work from being finalised. It was essential to them that their contribution became part of the process of time, perhaps waiting for future generations to find the necessary certainties to finish it.

The resulting project consists of wonderful falsework and wooden trusses that, in addition to providing security to the construction, generate a landscape in which the concept of time is always present. This careful and small publication, with 79 colour pages, DIN A5 format and soft cover, with a foreword by Joaquín Alvado Bañón (Alicante University), leaves us thinking: How is it possible that architects with so much experience and prestige still manage to maintain those doubts of youth? Those are the doubts that allow us to continue learning (Fig.5).

• BIP

We have also discovered during the last semester that the innovative *Blended Intensive Programme* of Erasmus+ is a perfect short mobility programme combining hybrid and classroom learning.

Along with our colleagues Jane Coulon, Christine Fontaine and Arturo Romero Carnicero,

from Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture La Réunion (France), Université Catholique de Louvain / UC Louvain (Belgium) and Karlsruher Institut für Technologie / KIT (Germany) respectively, we organized the BIP under the title "Rural Areas facing climate change".

A total of 43 students and 8 teachers met in the Cirque de Mafate Caldera in La Réunion island last Easter, with the aims to exchange views about the tropical and continental territories facing the challenges of climate changes and realities of new rurality. It was a unique opportunity to reflect on the problems of water management in all its forms, as well as on food and energy autonomy, not only by experiencing it by ourselves for a week but also realizing the differences with the other schools of architecture when facing the project. That for sure depends on the different roles for architects in every European country.

ARCHITECTURE MAFATE

We believe that there is no architecture in Mafate, but there are important people who 'validate' the constructions present there.

For example, the building for the chapel could have any other function, even to be a construction for keeping animals. What makes it to be a chapel is the presence of the priest and the religious elements. In the same way of thinking we could say that the postman of Mafate embodies the Post Office. These are our "Super Heroes" who embody architectural powers, helping to create a community:

- The Priest
- The Teacher
- The Postman
- The Nurse
- The Gravedigger
- The Helicopter Pilot

The challenge of our students was to give an architectural present to each of them:

- To the Priest: A portable chapel, to be able to take it with him when visiting old parishioner who cannot walk to the chapel anymore.

- To the Teacher: A map of Roche Plate done by her students, with more important information for them than the one given by an "orthodox" map.

- To the Postman: A post-box for him, placed in La Brèche, to receive there all the notes by visitors who want to communicate with him.

- The Nurse: In the absence of a pharmacy, what about to mark those plants with medical properties? There are so many in Mafate, that we have started the job. The nurse is nature itself.

- The Gravedigger: We planted for him two trees by the altar of the cemetery. In just few years, he will enjoy there a fresh shadow and shade.

- The Helicopter Pilot: Instead of marking the small heliports with loose stones painted in white colour, what about with we organize them creating a stone bench? So exciting to wait for the needed helicopter!

Now it would be fantastic to receive feedback from these Superheroes to be able to help our students to advance with our reflections.

QUESTIONNAIRE

- Name and job: .....
- What do admire the most of Mafate?
- If you could commission us a job as architects to improve your work, what would you like?
- What do you think about our present? Do you consider it to be Architecture?
- Last, we would like to continue collaborating with you. Do you have any suggestion?



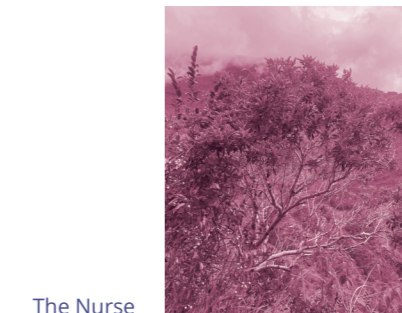
The Priest



The Teacher



The Postman



The Nurse



The Gravedigger



The Helicopter Pilot



• **Summer course ProtoLAB**

One still remembers with emotion the online class with Mauricio Morales Beltrán and Jerzy Łątka last year, when the latter showed us life, with the camera of a mobile 'phone, the works in progress to receive the Ukrainian war refugees in Wroclaw. Done by his students, and following the instructions of Shigeru Ban, there were cardboard structures with textiles that dignify with privacy the huge space of a railway station ready to accommodate desperate families. These two colleagues, from Yaşar Üniversitesi (Türkiye) and Wrocław University of Science and Technology (Poland) respectively, are fascinated giving the students the opportunity to design and build directly by themselves. *ProtoLAB* is the name of the annual workshop that they

organize: it takes 2 weeks, divided into an online design week and onsite manufacturing process organized in Wroclaw.

Learning from their methodology of putting together design and production, we have extended it by creating *ProtoLAB UA*, and encouraging the rest of the UOU partners to do the same (Fig.6). In this way the online part will be organized by the different schools, although working together, and for the manufacturing process all of us will join at the old and incredible tram depot in Poland.

This "extracurricular activity" is considered so important by our students of Alicante that they have created with their own funding the *PAT scholarship* to travel to Wroclaw.

• **UOU Scientific Journal**

Without any doubt our journal is the result of another precious methodology derived from the UOU workshops. Each issue is edited by a different colleague and focuses on the personal research applied in the classroom. It is, therefore, also considered as an extracurricular activity that gives voice to students by encouraging them to write, show their work and have a first publication. This is the case, for example, of the present issue #5, *BORDERS*, edited by Mike Devereux (University of the West of England / UWE Bristol, UK), since it contains an article by our former student Verónica Amorós Botía (Alicante University) (Fig.7) as well as the ATLAS section of short presentations of student work, and this time includes a student essay by Matt Reed (University of Brighton).

**UA** CURSOS D'ESTIU CURSOS DE VERANO | **RAFAEL ALTAMIRA** Campus de Sant Vicent del Raspeig

**PROTOLAB UA**  
7 al 14 de julio de 2023

**Dirección:** Javier Sánchez Merina.  
**Créditos:** 24 horas / 2,4 créditos ECTS.  
**Precio:** estudiantes, PDI/PAS UA, alumniUA y personas desempleadas: 70 €. General: 105€.  
**Curso online.**

ProtoLAB UA se trata de un Curso de Verano online de la UA, donde nuestros estudiantes dan respuestas arquitectónicas sobre emergencias actuales. Tiene un marcado carácter internacional, al estar realizado en paralelo con otras escuelas de arquitectura. De hecho, al final del Curso de Verano ProtoLAB UA, nuestros estudiantes si lo desean, podrán inscribirse en otro curso de verano con el mismo nombre, aunque entonces será presencial, en Polonia, organizado por la Universidad de Wroclaw, donde construirán las propuestas proyectadas en ProtoLAB UA.

Más información en la web de ProtoLAB Wroclaw es: <http://protolab.archi>.

<https://web.ua.es/es/verano/>  
<https://web.ua.es/es/verano/2023/campus/protolab-ua.html>



Patrocina:

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Fig.6 - Poster of the Summer Course *ProtoLAB* (Alicante University, July 2023).

**AN EXPERIENTIAL PROPOSAL FOR THE NEXT COURSE, 2023-24**

In the last months, my colleague Joaquín Alvaro and I have been collaborating with other universities. We have travelled to different schools of architecture for teaching, workshops, lectures, and tutorials. All those experiences have been short in time but very intense. With those students, apart from having classes, we shared lunches, walks... time, where all of us spoke a lot on architecture and their education. When coming back to Alicante, our first comments about the education of the architect were always the same: how important it is to share moments of coexistence with our students! The point that sometimes we have managed to get to know students from other schools even better than ours is something that makes us reflect. It is essential to introduce adjustments for our future classes by asking how can

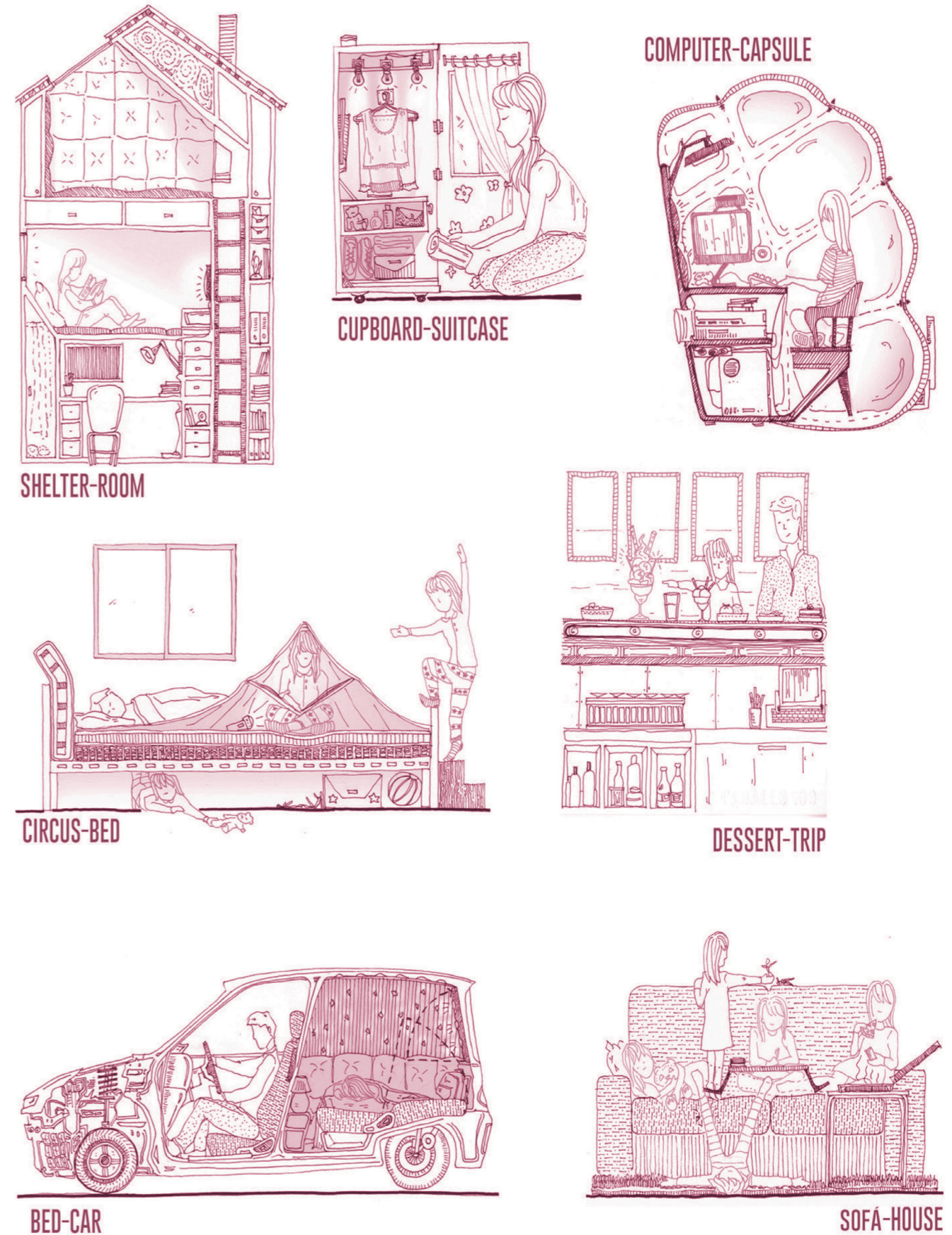


Fig.7 - Publication *UOU*s# 5 with an extract from the Final Project by Verónica Amorós Botía (Alicante University, July 2023).

Fig.3 - Carmen's experiences-series of drawings. Own elaboration.

we add extra-curriculum activities, and even more: We should question that name “extra”, and to make them part of the course. Our challenge is to incorporate the experiential character of the face to face into the possibilities of the online. Apart from continuing with all the methodologies listed above, this is our proposal for learning architecture design next academic year at Alicante UOU, and to be shared with the rest of our international colleagues at UOU, so:

At the end of every workshop there will be a week for public engagement in which students exhibit (in many possible ways) their outputs from the workshop just completed. In this way it breaks up the rhythm enforced by starting one workshop immediately after another and allows students to reflect on their work and make it exhibitable. It has the potential to make UOU ‘external’ (public) and ‘transferable’ (moving between cities). UOU was born out of covid; so, by necessity it was one hundred percent online. Without losing the benefit that online learning, of allowing us to be far-reaching, the ‘week of public engagement’ brings a welcome evolutionary step.

However, there are some logistical issues. Our many universities teach to different patterns: weekly and by semester and by pedagogical cultural. For instance, our colleague Mike Devereux comments that at UWE their students do approximately 5 modules at a time but they last all year (not just one semester). Their model means they are often having assessment during the year (not just at the end) that might well distract them from organising a public event. But they - Mike confirms - can be flexible, the important thing for them is to know in advance how they might operate UOU and integrate it to their pattern and they can then successfully mould / stitch the teaching together.

Under such a positive attitude for international collaboration, this is the proposed programme:

**1st SEMESTER 2023-24**  
**Classes: Friday mornings**  
**9am-1pm / Total ws: 4**

Students will do 4 x fortnight-long online workshops during the first semester, organized in a series of:

- 2-week UOU workshop on Fridays.  
(Online, from location chosen by each student)
- Followed by an extra week, where the students will prepare an exhibition to share the work with society.  
(Face to face in the beach, the market, the castle, the museum)

*Calendar sheet UOU 1s 23/24 - Fig.8.*

**2nd SEMESTER 2023-24**  
**Classes: Tuesday + Friday**  
**mornings 9am-1pm / Total ws: 5**

Students will do 5 x fortnight-long online workshops during the second semester, organized in a series of:

- 2-week UOU workshops on Fridays.  
(Online, from location chosen by each student)
- Micro-field trip to a nearby destination.  
Every Tuesday for an active reflection to improve the ws.
- Followed by an extra week, where the students will prepare an Exhibition to share the work with society.  
(Face to face, the cultural centre, the esplanade, the train station, the island)

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

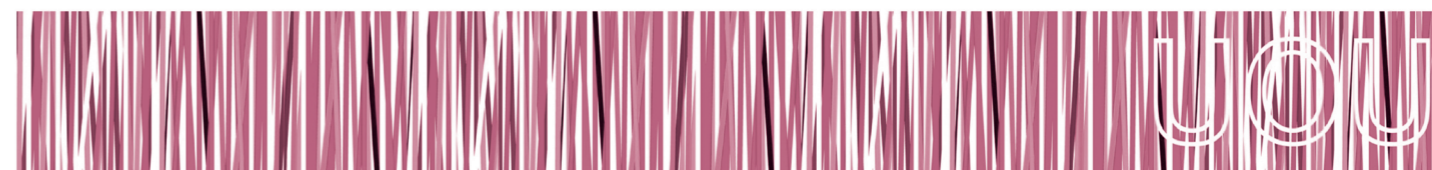
This adjustment brings these kinds of cases:

1. Each of the workshops can organize a parallel exhibition in your own city. The ‘public engagement week’ can be done in the home city or act as an opportunity to travel and display work in one of the UOU cities. Such a public display would disseminate the good work we all do with our students (and that the students do) and it would ensure the UOU has public impact.
2. One can propose a field trip with the students to Alicante during that extra week, to celebrate the exhibition of you own workshop.
3. Every UOU colleague could come to Alicante during that extra week as an ERASMUS teacher, for his/her exhibition.

Sofia already did it with her workshop in Évora, involving students from Alicante. And both Marcin, Franca and Sinan are already working in a similar way with their own workshops. Luna and Richard managed to integrate the field trip as part of a UOU experiential practice.

Their involvement is fundamental for all of us, something that makes us look forward to starting the new year. At last, a hybrid equilibrium between the best of the international online model and the experiential face-to-face one.

UOU is an excellent opportunity for students and staff, moving it to a next stage is exciting.



### UNIVERSITYofUniversities / workshops ARCH+ARTS 1s 2023/24

Week	WORKSHOPS	PROF / UNIV	AIMS	METHOD	TECHNIQUE	STRENGTHS	TEACHING DAY AND HOURS
1	15 Sep	INTRODUCTION	UOU professors				Friday 12:30-13:30 CET
2	18 Sep - 22 Sep	WS 1A / ARCH:					Fridays 09:30-13:30 CET
3	25 Sep - 29 Sep						
4	06 Oct						
5	09 Oct - 13 Oct	WS 2A / ARCH:					Fridays 09:30-13:30 CET
6	16 Oct - 20 Oct						
7	27 Oct						
8	30 Oct - 03 Nov	WS 3A / ARCH:					Fridays 09:30-13:30 CET
9	06 Nov - 10 Nov						
10	17 Nov						
11	20 Nov - 24 Nov	WS 4A / ARCH:					Fridays 09:30-13:30 CET
12	27 Nov - 01 Dic						
14	15 Dic						
15	22 Dic	PRESENTATIONS UOU					

Fig.8 – Ready to be filled with activity for 23/24 - Calendar sheet of workshops UOU 1s 2023/24. Students will choose their workshops from a catalogue made of all the offers.