

# Tabarca: A Planetary Indigestion

Reflections on the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP – ERASMUS+) 2024

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Fig.1 - Initial phase at Alicante University.

**This article examines "A Planetary Indigestion," a workshop developed during the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP – ERASMUS+) 2024 titled *Rural Areas Facing Climate Change*. Coordinated by the Department of Architectural Projects at the University of Alicante (Spain), this international collaboration brought together architecture schools from Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium), École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Montpellier / La Réunion (France), Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (Germany), and Oslo School of Architecture and Design (Norway) to explore climate-related challenges on Tabarca Island, Alicante.**

**The program, which involved 60 participants, faculty and students, combined seminars, workshops, and on-site activities from April 4th to April 11th, 2024, addressing sustainable strategies for remote rural areas in the context of climate change.**



## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) aimed to foster a multidisciplinary exchange of perspectives on the challenges facing remote territories in the context of climate change, new rurality, and sustainability. Responding to the urgency of protecting natural reserves from significant human impact, this program adopted a research-by-design methodology to examine the balance between safeguarding fragile ecosystems and addressing the needs of human settlements.

The issues addressed in the 2023 iteration of the program in the Mafate Circle, Réunion Island, were revisited and recontextualized for Tabarca Island in 2024. Comparative analyses of these two geographically and culturally distinct sites provided an opportunity to reflect on critical themes, including water management, food and



energy autonomy, and the interplay between ecology and economy, as well as the relationship between built and natural environments. This approach sought to uncover innovative strategies for rural development across diverse contexts.

## INITIAL PHASE: Seminars and Foundations

The program commenced at the Alicante University Museum (MUA) with a series of lectures delivered by local professors Miguel Mesa, Juan Carlos Castro, and Arturo Calero. These sessions presented architectural research by students from the University of Alicante, demonstrating creative approaches to mitigating global warming through innovative design (Fig.1).

## FIELDWORK: Tabarca Island

The subsequent phase of the program involved on-site activities on Tabarca Island (Fig.2). Participants were organized into four interdisciplinary working groups, each tasked with developing sustainable proposals for the island's future. While these groups integrated students from all participating institutions to promote international collaboration, each was led by faculty from a specific university to emphasize distinct academic approaches to shared challenges:

- German Team: Focused on reconstructing visual narratives of ecosystems that have ceased to exist, revealing subtle environmental transformations that have occurred over time.



Fig.2 - Fieldwork: Tabarca Island.

- Belgian and French Team: Utilized detailed drawing techniques to explore the boundaries between human and non-human environments, fostering new dialogues and envisioning future opportunities for coexistence.

- Norwegian Team: Employed illustrated narratives and animations to investigate the interplay between liquid and solid states, emphasizing dynamic ecological relationships.

- Alicante Team: Developed A Planetary Indigestion, an immersive audio guide that highlighted Tabarca's infrastructural systems, providing a novel perspective on the island's interdependencies and ecological challenges.

This collaborative framework allowed participants to address the multifaceted challenges of climate change through diverse methodologies, generating holistic and innovative solutions for sustainable development.

## A PLANETARY INDIGESTION

Directed by professors from the University of Alicante, Javier Sánchez Merina and Joaquín Alvado, this workshop was conceived as part of an interdisciplinary initiative to underscore the critical importance of water as a vital resource and to investigate innovative interactions with Tabarca Island's unique environment.

### Student Participants:

- Sunny Angelina Geschwender, KIT
- Cara Francine Stiller, KIT
- Élodie Lebon, ENSAM Réunion



Fig.3 - Explanation on the possibilities of water technology, by Vicente Castillo (*Rain Bird*).

- Ferdinand Widmer, AHO
- Håkon Grundt, AHO
- Jasmin Maichle, KIT
- Jesse Kauppinen, UCLouvain
- Julian Zimmermann, KIT
- Kawtar Guennouni, UCLouvain
- Morten Midtun, AHO
- Romance Al Sous, UCLouvain
- Tatar Marian-Georgian, UCLouvain

Additionally, participants benefited from the guidance *Visiting Professors*:

- Maria Luna Nobile, Umeå Univ.
- Maria Hadjisoteriou, Univ. Nicosia
- Maria José Marcos, Alicante Univ.
- Francisco Leyva, Alicante Univ.

The workshop was led by *La Cuarta Piel*, a renowned collective of architects and artists celebrated for their groundbreaking multimedia architectural projects, the experience began with a

custom-designed audio tour. This immersive journey around the island highlighted the central theme of water, establishing a foundational framework for creative exploration.

## DAY 1: Establishing Foundations

The workshop commenced with an emphasis on the theme of water, drawing inspiration from the intrinsic relationship between Tabarca Island and this precious element. With sponsorship from *Rain Bird*, a prominent manufacturer of irrigation systems, participants were provided with materials such as pipes and other supplies essential to their explorations (Fig.3).

The initial brainstorming and

creative experimentation unfolded in Plaza Carlfred, where the first concept emerged: to activate and transform the plaza using water-related elements and sound. This setting became the epicentre of collaborative experimentation and idea generation throughout the workshop.

Within the plaza, participants formed several groups to address diverse creative challenges. One group focused on crafting suspended water tanks between trees, producing visually striking installations that embodied the theme of water. Another group explored the sonic qualities of water, conducting experiments with liquid-generated sounds. Meanwhile, a third team designed an artificial cloud utilizing irrigation pipes, further diversifying the workshop's artistic interpretations of the central theme.

## DAY 2: Refining Ideas and Expanding Horizons

On the second day, participants divided into three specialized groups to develop their projects



further. One group concentrated on narrative development, refining the audio experience. Another team worked on sound recording and interviews to deepen their understanding of the island's complex relationship with water. The third group continued their work on the cloud installation.

As work progressed, a novel idea emerged: integrating the artificial cloud into a large fig tree located in another plaza.

This conceptual shift involved merging fiction with reality, transforming the installation into an artistic illusion where the tree itself appeared to produce rain. The resulting display fused natural and artificial elements, creating a captivating spectacle that blurred the boundaries between art and ecology.

## DAY 3: Consolidating Components and Presenting Themes

By the third day, all project components—including the "raining tree"—were integrated into a cohesive audio guide designed to provide an immersive experience

of the workshop's water-related explorations (Fig.4).

A significant addition was a new installation at the endpoint of the wastewater pipe that channels treated water away from the island.

This installation symbolized the culmination of the participants' observations, encapsulating the island's sustainable water management practices.

Students meticulously tested and arranged elements of the audio guide to ensure a seamless and impactful presentation.

This phase represented a convergence of creativity, technical skill, and ecological awareness, culminating in a compelling exploration of Tabarca Island's intricate relationship with water.

## DAY 4: Guided Tour and Public Engagement

On the fourth day, a guided tour of the island was conducted for all workshop participants and residents (Fig.5 and 6). The audio experience diverged from conventional



Fig.4 - The Raining Tree.



Fig.5 - Invitation to a pass of A Planetary Indigestion.



Fig.6 - Frames from the video A Planetary Indigestion, recorded during the audio-guided tour of Tabarca Island.



tourist guides by illuminating the island's hidden infrastructures: the port where daily waste is transported, the supply chain for goods, the freshwater reservoir, the wastewater treatment plant, and the quarry access point. These stops offered an alternative perspective on the island's operational realities.

According to *La Cuarta Piel*, "while Tabarca has aspired to self-sufficiency at various points in its history, it now heavily depends on external services for waste management, resource supply, and tourism. Making this reality visible is critical to fostering collective awareness and addressing ecological challenges collaboratively." This interdependence, common to urban contexts but particularly acute in Tabarca, is managed through technologies such as wastewater treatment plants, irrigation systems, and maritime transport.

These often-overlooked

infrastructures demand societal reflection and active participation. "Highlighting the significance of these systems and understanding their implications is essential to collectively confront the ecological challenges we face today."

Finally, the project invited participants to reflect on water's perspective, metaphorically giving voice to the element itself to articulate its role and feelings about the collaborative exploration:

*In silence deep, beneath the azure gleam,  
I, water, weave through Tabarca's dream.  
A whispered current, unseen and untamed,  
Bound by pipes, my essence reclaimed.*

*From earth's embrace, I rise to the day,  
An island's heartbeat, life's gentle ballet.  
Enveloped by the sea's embrace,  
I am the unseen thread, the island's grace.*

*Yet through the hands of curious minds,  
I am awakened, in new forms entwined.*

*A workshop's touch, a daring quest,  
To reveal my secrets, to manifest.*

*In Plaza Carlfred's ancient domain,  
They gathered, souls ripe with refrain,  
To conjure sounds, to conjure sights,  
From hidden conduits, my ancient rites.  
A cloud of pipes, a dance of spray,  
A moment born from the workshop's sway.  
Their hands, like whispers on my skin,  
Unveiled the melody I hold within.*

*Then a voice arose, a spectral guide,  
A journey scripted, a lyrical tide,  
That spoke of me, my ebb and flow,  
In harmonies that only water knows.*

*And deeper still, a rainbow's arc,  
Projected through me, a radiant spark,  
Beneath the sun's benevolent gaze,  
A spectacle woven in the workshop's maze.*

*So water speaks, through pipes and song,  
Invisible currents, ancient and strong.  
Though used, transformed, I remain  
serene,*

*A witness to the artist's hopeful sheen.*

## DAY 5: A Closing Tribute

Following *La Cuarta Piel's* departure on the fifth day, the participants expressed their gratitude through a symbolic gesture. Utilizing the workshop's central material—pipes—they crafted a portable cloud installation. Carried collectively, the installation emitted water when positioned against sunlight, creating a radiant rainbow (Fig.7). This final act encapsulated the workshop's essence, celebrating collaboration, creativity, and ecological consciousness while leaving an indelible mark on the collective experience at Tabarca Island.

## CONCLUSION

The immersive teaching methodology employed in this program, which involved living and working within an unfamiliar

context, successfully stimulated students' curiosity and motivated them to explore and discover independently. Tabarca Island, often perceived as an idyllic natural environment, exemplifies a utopian vision that is, in fact, artificially sustained by three essential conduits from the mainland: a freshwater pipeline, a sewage pipeline, and an electricity cable. Without these infrastructural links, the iconic image of Tabarca as a pristine haven would not be feasible.

As a tangible outcome of the workshop, Tabarca now features an audio guide centered on its ecological interdependencies, aiming to foster a sense of attachment and care for the environments we inhabit (Fig.8). The guide highlights several pressing issues: the significant quantities of food waste and garbage that must be transported daily to the mainland, the loss of species that

once thrived on the island, and changes to the island's porosity due to recent constructions. These elements collectively illustrate the evolving relationships between human and non-human agents.

By rendering visible the otherwise invisible processes and transformations that have shaped Tabarca over the years, the students have posed an important question: should the challenge now be to reimagine the island as self-sufficient? Historically, Tabarca was designed for self-reliance, with its preserved agricultural land and numerous wells for water storage as key features of its sustainability. The students' final project, a traveling rainbow installation, serves as a powerful demonstration of technique and imagination. It symbolizes the potential for alternative realities, where creativity and innovation can address contemporary ecological challenges while fostering a deeper connection with the natural world.



Fig.7 - Constructing Rainbows.



Fig.8 - Qr codes of Tabarca Video and Audio Guide *A Planetary Indigestion*.