

AR-405

Architectural anthropology

Baumgardt Laurin

Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture	MA2, MA4	Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	3
Withdrawal	Unauthorized
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	During the semester
Workload	90h
Weeks	12
Hours	2 weekly
Courses	2 weekly

Number of positions

Il n'est pas autorisé de se retirer de cette matière après le délai d'inscription.

Summary

This course introduces key anthropological debates and methodological approaches that are concerned with architectural productions, knowledge, and design practices.

Content

Architectural Anthropology explores how people imagine, create, and inhabit built environments. It introduces an emerging field that brings architecture into dialogue with anthropological inquiries. Anthropology's central tool of inquiry is "ethnography," a people-oriented qualitative research practice and sensibility that makes it possible to document and interpret how individuals and collectives understand, act, organize, and situate themselves in the world. Introducing ethnography as a creative and dynamic toolkit for architectural research, it can, for instance, help us make sense of how people imagine and make use of space, how built environments take shape through political, ecological, and socio-economic forces and conditions, and how design emerges from and engages with everyday life.

To not only discuss anthropological inquiries and tools but also work with them directly, this course offers small methodological exercises and creative explorations that can potentially expand architectural knowledge and practice. Designed as an "ethnographic studio," the course involves writing fieldnotes, producing ethnographic drawings and visualizations, documenting soundscapes and walking experiences, analyzing observations, and conducting a qualitative interview exercise. These and other ethnographic methods can offer new insights into how design practitioners and urban dwellers across the world are rethinking the critical potential of architectural knowledge and building practices amid social, ecological, and political crises and inequalities. The course thus combines an introduction to anthropology's key debates and methods with investigations into architectural production, habitation, and design practices.

Keywords

anthropology, ethnography, ethics, positionality, relationality, knowledge, material culture, justice, urbanism, qualitative interviews, creative writing and drawing, political economy

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- apply anthropological perspectives
- work with ethnographic methods
- familiarize themselves with ethnography as a distinct genre
- reflect on the culture of architectural productions
- engage in interdisciplinary discussions

Transversal skills

- Demonstrate the capacity for critical thinking
- Communicate effectively, being understood, including across different languages and cultures.
- Demonstrate a capacity for creativity.
- Access and evaluate appropriate sources of information.
- Communicate effectively with professionals from other disciplines.

Teaching methods

The course is run both as a discussion class and as a type of ethnographic studio with creative exercises and assignments in the form of writing experiments and ethnographic applications.

Assessment methods

Course assessments will involve creative exercises and assignments, such as writing fieldnotes, producing ethnographic drawings and photo series, documenting a sound- and walkscape, analyzing ethnographic observations, reading discussions, and conducting a qualitative interview exercise. There will be no final exam.

- Reading Discussions (15%)
- Craft a Fieldnote (15%)
- Record a Walkscape/Soundscape (20%)
- Make an Ethnographic Drawing/ Photo Series (20%)
- Write an Autoethnographic Essay/ Ethnographic Analysis (20%)
- Interview Exercise (10%)

Resources

Websites

- <https://www.epfl.ch/labs/thema/home/teaching/ar-405/>

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/AR-405>