Course Title: Barcelona, the Rise of a Design City
Language of Instruction: English
Professor: Dr. Sasa Markus, Dr. Viviana Narotzky.

Prerequisites: There are no pre-requisites for the course.

Keywords: Barcelona, design, city branding, urban space and regeneration, Catalan cultural identity, modernity, material culture, architecture

Course description
’Barcelona, the Rise of a Design City’ looks at one of the most exciting periods of the city’s recent history: what is known as the ‘Barcelona design boom’, a cultural phenomenon that helped define the Spanish transition to democracy in the 1980s and the city’s Olympic dream in the 1990s. For a few years and in sharp contrast to the preceding decades, design became one of the main cultural frameworks of Barcelona’s identity, both locally and abroad. Paired with architecture in a seemingly unavoidable partnership, it provided the seeds from which ultimately emerged the narrative of the city as it is seen today: that of a sophisticated European metropolis, miraculously emerging from the ashes of a decaying post-industrial provincial capital.
Initially addressing local design practice and design retail, and later embracing architecture as well, this course follows the way in which these disciplines turned ideas about local identity, modernity, social and cultural value into everyday material artefacts and environments. Design and architecture were placed at the heart of the city’s popular culture, and of its international success to this day.

Learning goals
The aim of this course is to familiarize the students with the recent history of Catalan design, and its role in shaping the built environment and the global image of the city of Barcelona.

By the end of the course, students should be able to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify the main characteristics of Catalan design
- Locate Catalan design within its broader social and historical contexts
- Critically assess the impact of design and architecture on the character of the city of Barcelona
- Analyze the “Barcelona Brand” as a design-led city in a contemporary global context

**Syllabus**

1. **The Culture of Design: A European Approach**
   In the beginning of the course we will explore a particular configuration of the design profession, a European approach that arose in Italy during the second half of the 20C. It was underpinned by modernist utopian ideals and concepts of ‘good taste’ and ‘good design’. We will look at the emergence of the profession in Spain during the 1960s, and the ways in which the industrial context, the retail infrastructure and the social dynamics defined what these professionals did, how they did it and how the resulting objects inserted themselves within the existing material culture.

2. **The Arrival of Design**
   We will study the emergence of the prevailing practices and cultural meanings associated with design in Barcelona, deriving from the fields of discourse, manufacturing and retailing. We will look at their historical grounding and charts the positioning of design with relation to crucial elements such as modernity, regional identity, local politics, high culture and social class. In doing so, we will analyze the characteristics of design’s system of provision as it was configured until the early 1980s.

3. **Nation and Design**
   We will look at the role of the local politics of regional identity that framed Barcelona’s design renaissance in the 1980s. We will first explore the broader issue of design and national identity, to provide a background for the analysis of the Catalan case. We will then study the relationship between design and regional identity in Catalonia, particularly in relation to design practice and to the institutional instrumentalization of design.

4. **Vinçon: Selling Design**
   This part of the course centers on the retailing of design-led goods. It is developed mainly through the study of Vinçon, a shop that integrated into its commercial practices crucial aspects of Barcelona’s existing approaches to design, while at the same time fundamentally altering both popular perceptions of design and its social reach.

5. **Barcelona and Place Construction**
   This part of the course introduces the city as a privileged site of popular interaction with architecture and design, looking first at the broader urban framework before concentrating on the development of a new generation of urban furnishings. In Barcelona during the 1990s, the actual production of place through architectural interventions provided its citizens with an opportunity to participate in the construction of a sense of locality, one strongly linked to architecture and high-design.
6. The Designer City
By looking at the 1980s Barcelonese phenomenon of the 'designer bars', this part of the course will illustrate an aspect of popular interaction with high-design linked to the emergence of design-orientated urban lifestyles. These new youth-oriented lifestyles engaged with institutional discourses that capitalized on the symbolic power of urban transformation to successfully establish an imagined community of place. This cultural discourse of regeneration offered Barcelona’s citizens a purified urban experience that sought to leave behind the memory of a fascist past, and international capital an attractively packaged tourist product.

7. Advertising the Design City
We will review the advertising practices developed in Barcelona during its 'design boom', analyzing the public campaigns centered on the promotion of design in a local context as well as the strategies used to change the international perception of the city. We will pay particular attention to the development of private local marketing companies, exploring the links between the 'design boom' and the development of the Catalan audiovisual sector, particularly in the area of advertisement production.

8. Barcelona: global perspectives
The final session of the course will explore the status of Barcelona in a contemporary global context. We will focus on the cultural and commercial discourses that have been developed about the city and its visual identity, placing the 'Barcelona brand' in the context of other world-wide known metropolises and attractive touristic destinations.

Bibliography


Method of Assessment
The students will undergo a Midterm and Term exam related to the course contents; they will also be asked to choose one specific subject related to Barcelona design culture and compose a paper about it. Participation in class discussions will be evaluated.

Midterm exam: 30%
Final exam: 35%
Class paper: 20%
Class participation 15%

Methodology
Each theoretical session will be structured around a combination of course contents followed by a seminar discussion, encouraging the students to situate their own experience of Barcelona design culture within the wider frame of knowledge.

The course will also include a number of field study trips, as well as on-site classes at locations in Barcelona relevant to the syllabus.