

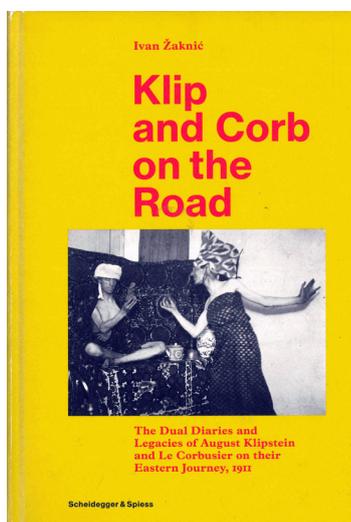
## Abstract

The *journey of initiation* has been and continues to be vital for architects. It is a process where an individual undergoes a period of intellectual growth and deeper understanding; it is not just about visiting buildings and understanding their contextual reasons, but also about experiencing them firsthand. In this way, they become part of a personal atlas of references and, consequently, project material, extending the influence of the journey beyond time.

This issue addresses several sub-themes, ranging from the cognitive processes associated with material interaction with the artefact, to the various ways in which it can be observed, from the journeys that have most influenced the trajectories of individual architects, to the analysis of some of their exemplary works. The last two contributions are based on interviews about the role of travel in architects' intellectual training.

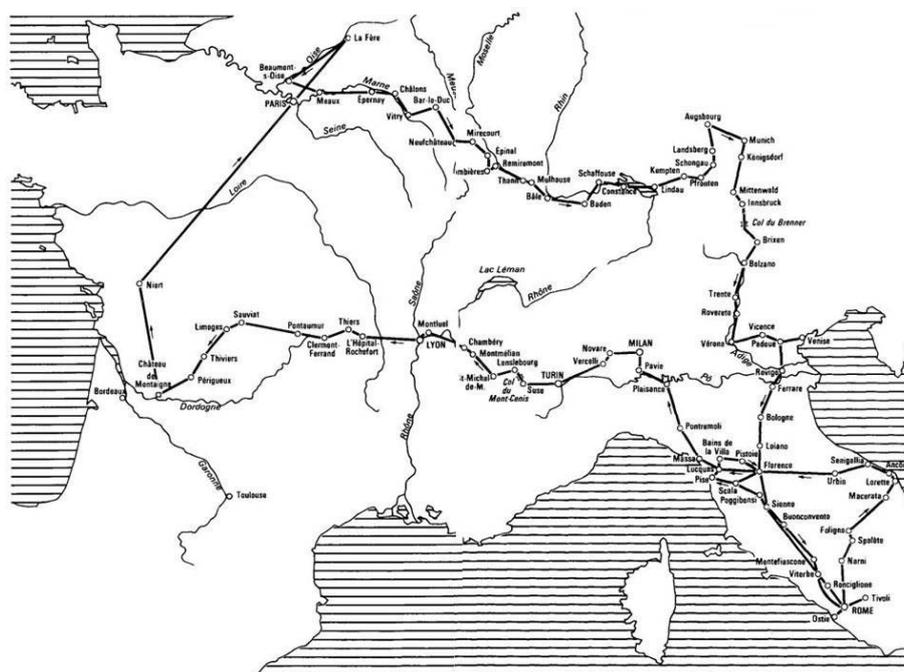
## Keywords

Grand Tour — Architectural training — Travelling architects

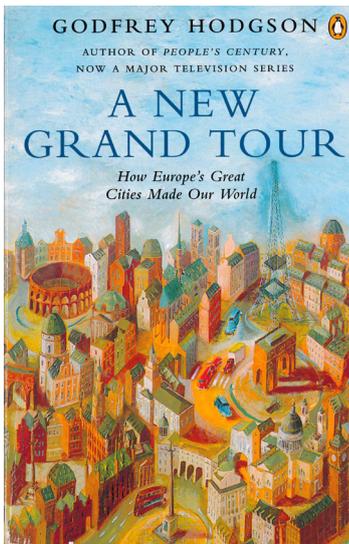


**Fig. 1**  
Book cover of *Klip and Corb on the Road* (Žaknić 2019).

**Fig. 2**  
Michel de Montaigne's journey through Italy in 1550-1551 (de Montaigne 1983).



[...] I deem travel to be a profitable exercise. The mind has therein continual exercise to mark things unknown and note new objects. And as I have often said, I know no better school, to shape a man's life, than unceasingly to propose to him the diversity of so many other men's lives, customs, humours, and fancies; and make him taste or apprehend the perpetual variety of our nature's shapes or forms (Montaigne 1580, 2012, book III, chapter IX) (TdA).



**Fig. 3**  
Book cover of *A New Grand Tour. How Europe's Great Cities Made Our World* (Hodgson 1995).



**Fig. 4**  
Cover of *The eye of the architect*, «Lotus International», n. 68 (1991).

On 22 June 1580, Michel de Montaigne embarked on a long journey to Italy with his brother and two friends. He needed spa treatment and was equally driven by his curiosity to learn about new things and cultures. In fact, he kept a diary describing places and the customs of the local inhabitants, adorned with personal reflections in French and Italian (Montaigne 1774, 2003).

It was precisely in that final part of the sixteenth century that the tradition of the Grand Tour began. For young aristocrats and gentry, it was the pinnacle of their education: they would set off, often accompanied by a tutor, to visit the cities, monuments, and artworks they had studied in books, with no clear distinction between the journey and leisure activities.

In 1615, Francis Bacon, in a short essay entitled *Of Travel*, listed the things to be seen and observed, recommending his readers to rely on a guide, learn the local language and, above all, keep a diary.

During the eighteenth century, the Grand Tour became an essential part of the education of the European elite, and Italy established itself as a key destination (Wilton and Bignamini 1996). No trip would be complete without a stay in Rome, where visitors could explore the remnants of classical antiquity and walk the cobblestones of the Appian Way in the footsteps of many illustrious predecessors (Brilli 1995, 2014, 2025, p. 14).

It was not merely a personal need for thought, which, when disconnected from diversity, descends into a diabolical narcissism, but an authentic social requirement for cultural development [...] It is not surprising that a culture seeking to define itself through diverse and multifaceted experiences identified with travel, especially travel to Italy, its most significant literary and social moments (Viola 1987, p. 7).



**Fig. 5**  
Posters of Grand Tour #1, #2 and #3 organised within the *UpGrant* project (graphic design by Marta Ramos).

**Fig. 6**  
Maps of GT#1 (12-15 January 2024), which began with an itinerary from Cesena to Urbino, alternating modern architecture and visits to historic centres, concluding with a “section” on the centre of Milan.

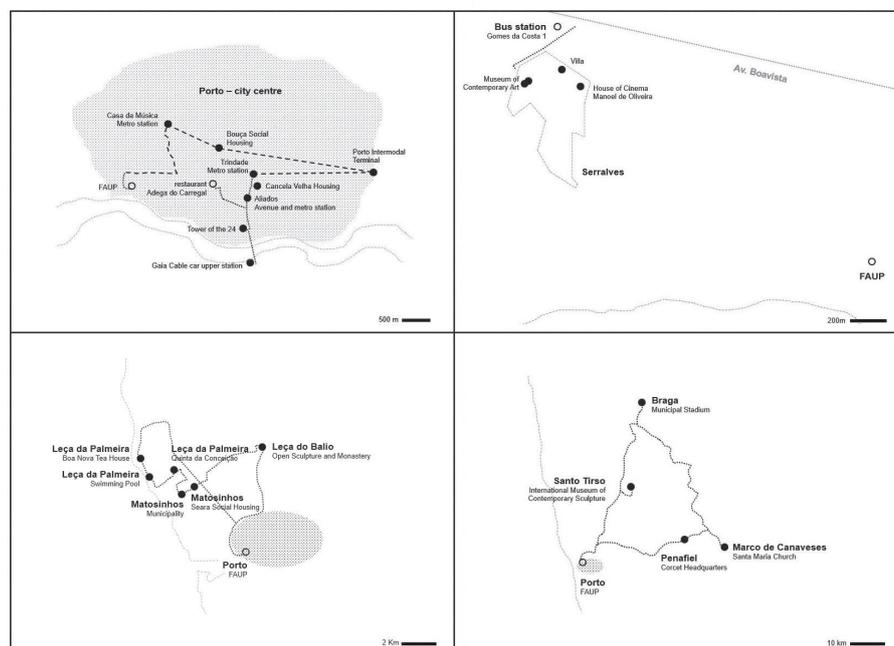


According to sociologist Luigi Zoja (2024, p. 144), these secular pilgrimages, a paradigm of itinerant education aimed at broadening horizons, were an invaluable gift, precisely because they fostered unprecedented cultural understanding. While modernity promoted nationalism, travellers exchanged knowledge, curiosity, and tolerance among various communities and countries, engaging with fellow travellers from different nationalities as well as with Italians (Bignamini 1996, p. 31). It was also thanks to their perspective, argued Cesare De Seta (1996, 2014, p. 35), that *Beautiful Italy* became aware of itself. Reflected in the mirror of paintings, stories, and travel diaries, it also helped weave the first threads of European identity.

Each city possessed its roster of *topoi* – viewpoints, famous monuments and favourite panoramas. Italy, no longer mythic or Arcadian, assumed its real shape in European consciousness, with strong lights and shadows, and sharp contradictions as well as splendours. [...] ‘Las Italias’, wonderfully described by Cervantes in the sixteenth century, had by the end of the eighteenth been glimpsed as a single Italy, one mind and spirit, born of the creative imagination of the entire Continent (De Seta 1996, p. 17).

**Fig. 7**

Map of GT#2 from Riga to Tallinn (8-12 June 2024), via a series of intermediate stops to visit buildings constructed during a period spanning from the interwar years to the post-independence era.

**Fig. 8**

Maps of the four GT#3 itineraries (June 5-14, 2025), in a counterclockwise direction: Porto and its urban centers, the Serralves Foundation area, the surrounding areas, and northern Portugal. GT#3 also involved students from partner institutions.

Studies on the historical and literary aspects of travel increasingly examine the traveller's personality, motivations, and methods of travel (Lucchesi 1995). Paradoxically, as the Tour became more institutionalised, its scope became narrower (Haskell 1996, p. 10). With the coming of the railway, the figure of the "tourist" appeared (D'Eramo 2017, 18). Unlike the traveller, the tourist generally hurried back home (Bowles 1949). Nowadays, this clear-cut distinction has given way to many intermediate figures, including the "city collector", attracted by historic towns off the beaten track (Langone 2006).

**Fig. 9**

GT#1, Pesaro: Carlo Aymonino, High School Campus, 1970-1988. Photo UNIBO Team, 12 January 2024.

**Fig. 10**

GT#1, Urbino: visiting Palazzo Ducale. Photo L. Jākobsonsone (LMA), 12 January 2024.

In his recent *Survey on the age of tourism*, Marco D’Eramo (2017) examined the dichotomy between the increasingly frantic pursuit of authenticity and the growing alienation of many places transformed into tourist settings. In parallel, the phenomenon of “overtourism” is gaining increasing media and scholarly attention (Zezza 2023, De Majo 2025, De Mauro 2025, Masneri 2025). As Fernanda De Maio and Christian Toson (2022) point out, the peculiarity of the architect’s journey, understood as a fundamental aspect of their ongoing training process, is a well-established and long-standing theme.

**Fig. 11**

GT#1, Modena: Aldo Rossi, San Cataldo Cemetery, 1971-1985. Photo L. Jākobsonsone (LMA), 13 January 2024.

Yet, one wonders why, today, with the tools that enable us to access large amounts of images and information about the places and buildings we are interested in, travelling is still regarded as so important. In our modern world, indeed, travelling appears to have lost much of its adventurous element, of discovering otherness, of exploring the unknown (De Maio et alii 2022) (TdA).

**Fig. 12**

GT#1, Milan: The Arch of Peace with the Sforza Castle and the Filarete Tower in the background. Photo EKA Team, 14 January 2024.

One wonders how we can rediscover the “poetic-constructive” dimension of travel, understood as the ability to foster personal growth and new perspectives, especially for architects-in-the-making. This is the main question raised by *UpGrant* project, which considers the Grand Tour as a European cultural heritage.

Not only did it expose architects to diversity, but it also made them aware of the co-identity inherent in many European townscapes, itself a legacy of the plurality of forerunners who have been able to transpose the lessons of travel into their work. Furthermore, a greater “literacy” in architecture

**Fig. 13**

GT#2, Riga: Latvian Riflemen Square. From left to right: the monument of the same name (1971), the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (G. Birkerts, 1993) and the Memorial to the Victims of Soviet Occupation (K. Gelzis e I. Mikelsone, 2021). Photo Porto Team, 8 June 2024.

**Fig. 14**

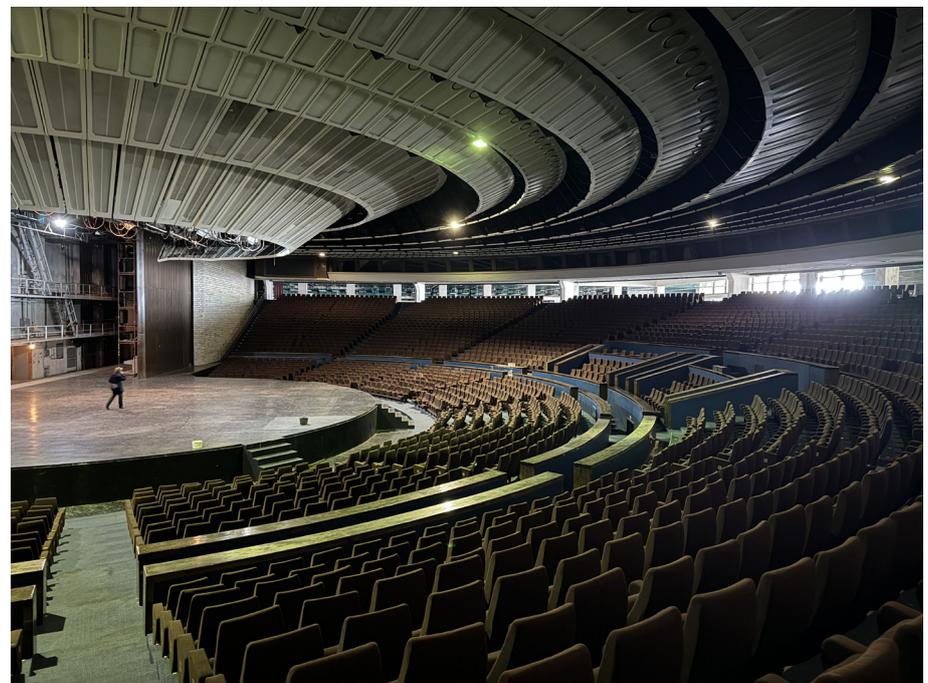
GT#2, Pärnu: Vilen Künnapu, extension of “Tervis” Sanatorium, 1976. Photo C. Pallini (Polimi) 10 June 2024.

– especially modern architecture in its diverse contextual forms – could have a significant influence extending beyond the discipline’s boundaries, impacting not only those who travel in Europe for study, work, or leisure, but also ordinary people who interact with the built environment daily. The ability to “decode” the affinities between buildings, places, and urban contexts could promote self-driven learning, which has always complemented academic education, particularly in the field of architecture.

We may well ask whether “updating” the Grand Tour means, first and foremost, coming to terms with new geographies. In 1992, three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, reporter Godfrey Hodgson was commissioned to write a series of travel articles on the great capitals: Rome, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Prague, and Berlin. It was a portrait of both old and new Europe, with all its contradictions. In the chapter dedicated to Rome, his first stop, Hodgson juxtaposed ancient glories with recent tragedies, witnessed by a new, grim monument: the anonymous spot in Via Caetani where the body of Aldo Moro was found (1995, 18-19). Hodgson suggested Paris, the richest and largest city of the nineteenth century, as well as the natural capital of modernism, as the starting point for a new Grand Tour (1995, 67).

**Fig. 15**

GT#2, Pärnu: Toomas Rein, “Kuldne Kodu” (Golden Home) residential complex, 1972-1987. Photo A. Vougia (AUTH), 10 June 2024.

**Fig. 16**

GT#2, Tallinn: Raine Karp, Riina Altmä, Linnahall (former “Lenin” Palace of Culture and Sports), 1975-1980. Photo LMA Team, 11 June 2014.

He described London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Prague through a retrospective fresco, while entitling the chapter dedicated to Berlin *Memories of the Future*. Truly, during those years, Potsdamer Platz symbolised the challenging process of reconciliation with the past.

For a start, you literally can't see that there ever was a square there at all. When you climb out of the U-Bahn today, you are in a sea of mud. Scraps of the infamous wall are still standing. Refugees are crammed into a ramshackle caravan park. A tatty anti-war exhibition offers a Cruise missile scrawled with tawdry hip-hop graffiti. A crassly commercial museum commemorates the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, and Russian deserters, the former conquerors, hawk fur hats and Soviet cap badges to German tourists for a few marks. The crowd will come back to the Potsdamer Platz. Daimler-Benz, Sony and other world corporations are committed to investing billions of D-marks in office and shopping projects. The Wall is down. [...] Berlin is again the capital of a unified Germany. [...] What is now called Berlin bears no resemblance to the old imperial city (Hodgson 1995, pp. 228-229).

**Fig. 17**

GT#3, Penafiel: Nuno Melo Sousa, Corcet Company Headquarters, 2021-2024. Photo EKA Team, 6 June 2025.

**Fig. 18**

GT#3, Braga: Eduardo Souto de Moura, Municipal Stadium, 2000-2003. Photo EKA Team, 6 June 2025.

For architects, “updating” the Grand Tour involves, among other things, questioning history and compelling it to disclose the secrets of practice, craft, and form (Gresleri 1991, 10-11). *Itinera architectonica* is the title chosen by Giuliano Gresleri to introduce his monograph on Le Corbusier’s *Journey into the Orient* (1984). Even before becoming a “global architect” (Colomina 2011), Le Corbusier can be considered a traveller, for whom travel was the main opportunity for learning. His trip to Italy in the autumn of 1907 was part of a pedagogical tradition established by L’Eplattenier: Florence, Siena, Ravenna and Venice (Tentori 1979; Gresleri 1988, pp. 537-540). The Orient, on the other hand, crowned a period of travel to Munich, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and Berlin, where the young



**Fig. 19**

GT#3, Porto: Álvaro Siza, Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, 1986-1996. Photo C. Pallini (Polimi), 5 June 2025.

Janneret visited the applied arts institutes on behalf of the School of La Chaux-de-Fonds. In Dresden, he embarked on a journey to Prague and Vienna in the company of August Klipstein, an art historian and collector whom he recognised as a valuable guide (Gresleri 1991, pp. 10-11). The two intended to continue to the Balkans, Turkey, and southern Italy, and travelled together to Athens following a meticulously planned itinerary designed to accommodate their respective interests (Gresleri 1987, p. 539).

The East was still immersed in the pre-industrial age, coinciding with Janneret's exploration of the entire world of antiquity, according to a tradition typical of France and the *École*<sup>1</sup>. But within this world [...] Janneret's curiosity seemed to favour minority cultures: in addition to the exoticism of the mosque, which fascinated him like nothing else in the world, his attention was drawn, despite the context of the early industrial age, which was entirely devoted to "modernist fervour", to the anonymous world of peasant civilisation (in the Balkans, Turkey and Greece) or to the "forgotten" world of the Romanesque period (in Italy) (Gresleri 1984, p. 10) (TdA).

The publication of *Voyage d'Orient* in 1965, a few months after the master's death, revealed previously unknown aspects of his personal and intellectual journey, prompting experts to reevaluate his formative years. Adolf Max Vogt did just that, arguing that a school trip to the then recently discovered pile dwellings on Lake Geneva was as decisive as the journey into the Orient in shaping Charles-Edouard Janneret's aesthetic sensibility (Vogt 1998). In the Orient, however, his more mature age allowed him to experience and note down a series of solutions to concrete problems, that is, to "question history" (Gresleri 1991, pp. 10-11).

Confirmation of the direct relationship between those persistent observations and Le Corbusier's original design vocabulary seems to come from the sketches grouped by geographical areas, opening the first volume of his complete works. A more recent publication (Żakniç 2019) retraces the journey into the Orient by comparing the parallel diaries of "Klip & Corb", who enjoyed a temporary creative symbiosis. Le Corbusier also entrusted his reflections to letters addressed to William Ritter, an artist, writer and art critic he met in Munich in 1910 (Dumont 2015).

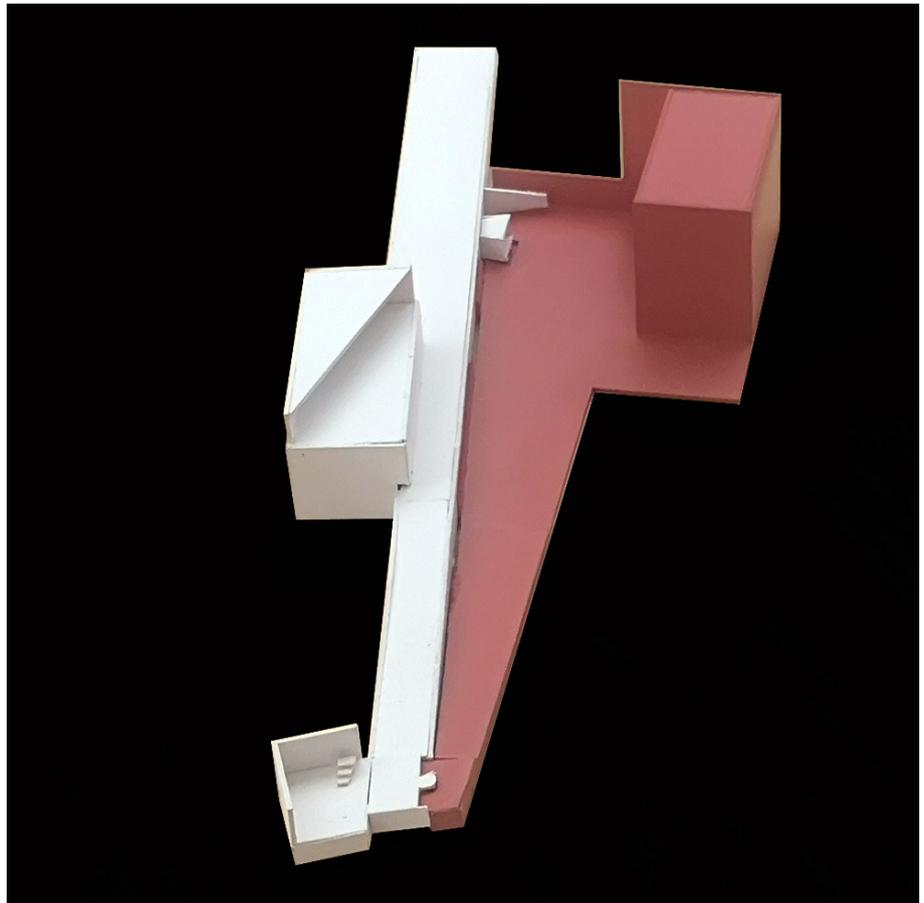


**Fig. 20**

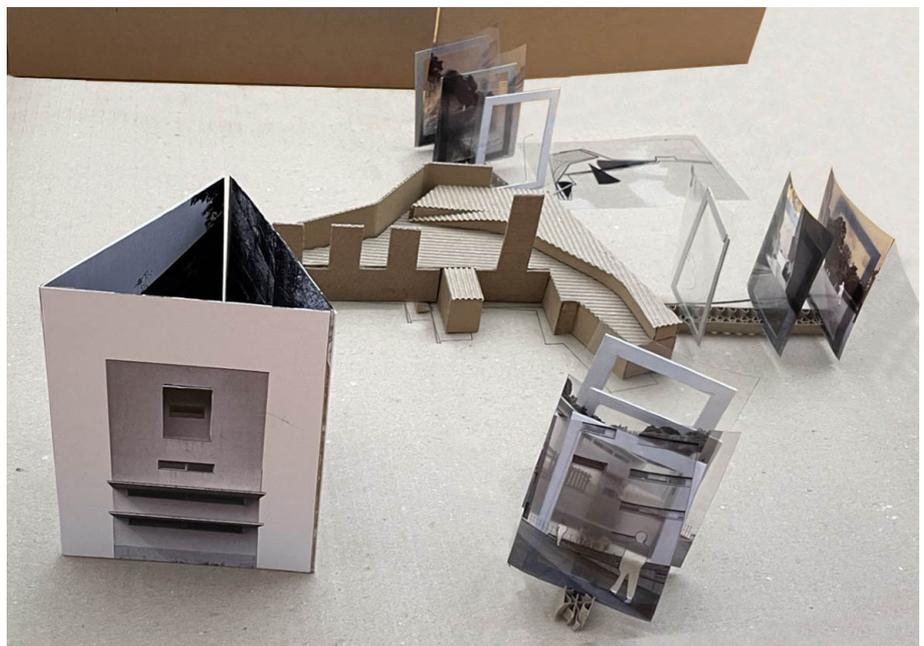
GT#3, Porto: Discussion with students during the IPL held in the semicircular space of the Museum. Photo E. Margione (Polimi).

However, it was only upon returning to Greece for the IV CIAM in 1933 that he formalised his conception of landscape as a determining factor in all human intervention (Simeoforidis 1997, 58). Two years later, in 1935, during his first visit to New York, he personally verified the profound discrepancy between reality and the knowledge he had previously acquired (Bacon 2001). Taking its cue from the *UpGranT* project, this issue focuses on architects who travelled, with reference to their different ways of taking notes, aimed at imprinting experiences in their memory and making them available for new spatial and formal ideas. A common denominator, in fact, is their aptitude for producing original materials: notes, sketches, surveys, photographs.

Thus far, *UpGranT* examined well-known and lesser-known figures active in the countries of the consortium: Italy and Greece, traditional destinations of the Grand Tour, Portugal, Europe's western frontier, and the Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia, a crucial but forgotten part of Europe where some of the leading figures of twentieth-century world culture were born (Brokken 2014, 2024). Each Partner Organisation (PO) selected ten Grand Tourists, documenting their main travel experiences in relation to their work and the evolution of their thinking.

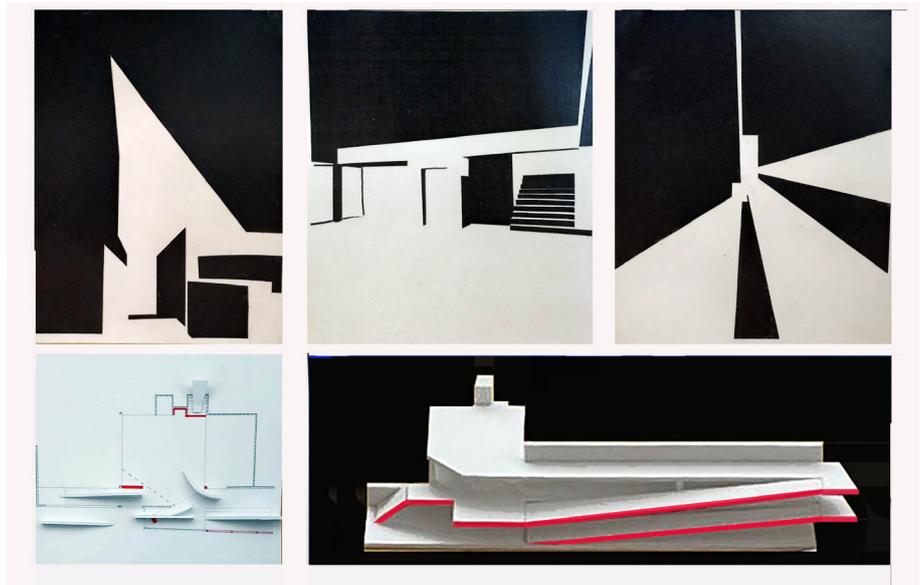
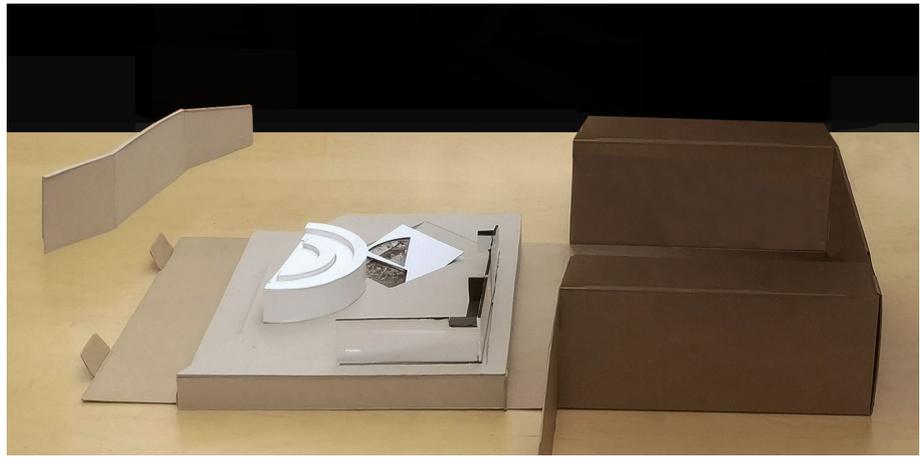
**Fig. 21**

GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale of the entrance area and cafeteria, FAUP (Group 1: Areti Dafnia, Tomás Martins, Davide Renzulli, Davide Santoro, Ulvi Tilt).

**Fig. 22**

GT#3 Porto, IPL: model to scale and framed views of the courtyard, FAUP (Group 2: Parisa Etemadi, Rebeka Kollo, Christina Maria Konstantinidou, Gina Celestini Radaelli, Erdal Giacomo Ripamonti, Kristine Zane Čible).

The POs shared three Grand Tours: in Milan and Bologna (January 2024), in Riga and Tallinn (June 2024), and in Porto and northern Portugal (June 2025). The last trip, longer than the others, involved students from all locations in an Intensive Programme for Learners (IPL) at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto<sup>2</sup>. This exemplary work, designed and built by Álvaro Siza between 1986 and 1996, was taken as a case study to compare different approaches to the “manipulation” of travel materials for design purposes. The two opening articles discuss theoretical aspects of the research, such as the relationship between architectures separated in

**Fig. 23**

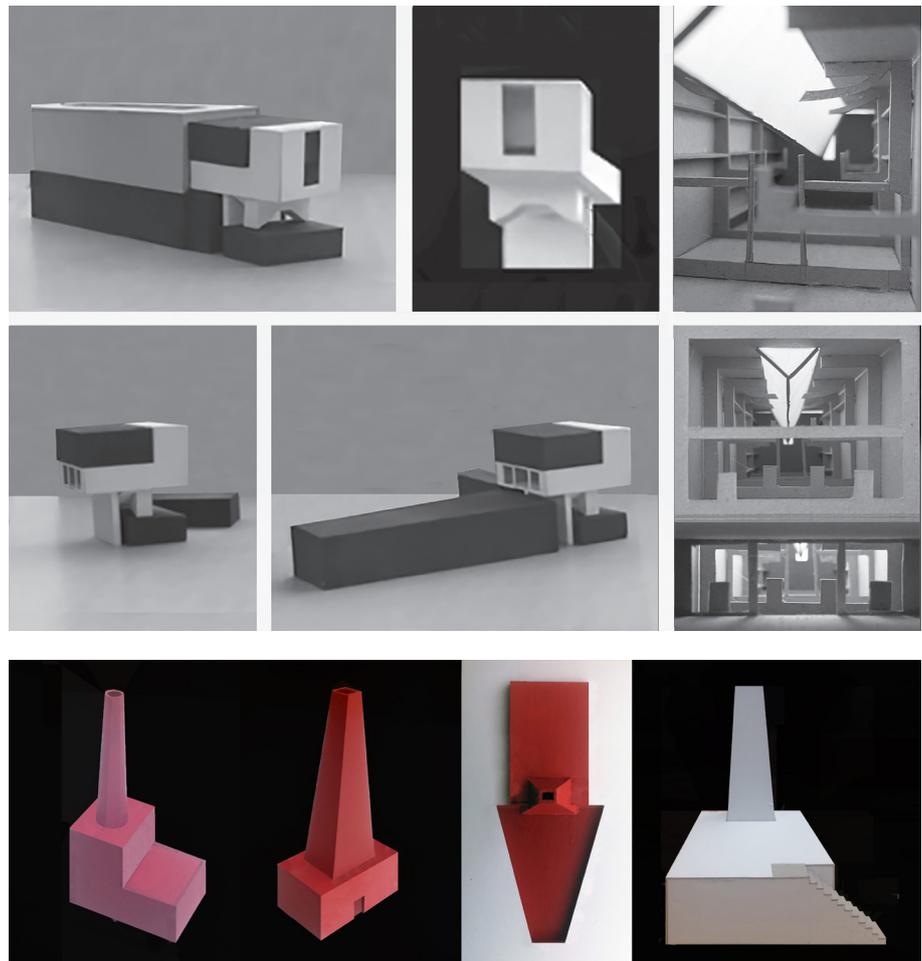
GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale of the semicircular space of the Museum, FAUP (Group 3: Luciana Aloisio, Eirini Antonakaki, Giulio Crispino, Joana Gastalho, Loukia Kotsifou).

**Fig. 24**

GT#3-Porto, IPL: models to scale and visual sequences of the entrance area with the bookshop, FAUP (Group 4: Despoina Athanasiou, Giuseppe Buttazzo, Maria Gião, Emīlija Anete Ozoliņa, Liina Pärn, Francesco Ramella).

time and space, and the elusiveness of the germination period involving travel, imagination, and the creation of new forms. Lamberto Amistadi and Ildebrando Clemente focus not so much on the journeys undertaken to visit architectural works, but rather on the processes of hybridisation that constitute their foundation. Referring to Aldo Rossi's *Scientific Autobiography*, they suggest a possible interpretation of the Grand Tour as a mapping of affinities between buildings that are geographically and temporally distant but can be connected through their evocative power, whether experienced directly or indirectly. Aleksa Korolija and Emanuela Margione question the nature of so-called *souvenirs*, the objects chosen and produced by architects as mementoes. In this sense, the figures of John Soane, Le Corbusier and Gae Aulenti, distinctly separated by historical period, geographical context and biography, are united by a propensity to preserve their travel impressions through *poetic objects* that can be rearranged and consulted over time to fuel new ideas.

The second part features four articles about trips – more or less institutionalised – undertaken by architects or groups of architects. Luisa Ferro and Maria Pompeiana Iarossi reflect upon the 1926 cruise to Naples and Pompeii undertaken by a group of students and recent graduates from Politecnico di Milano, who established their reputation in the post-war period. The visit to the excavations, discovering an archetypal Mediterranean classicism, represented for them a fundamental step, also in reconsidering the lessons of their teachers.

**Fig. 25**

GT#3-Porto, IPL: model to scale (in assembleable parts) of the library, FAUP (Group 5: Mattia Criscione, Eleni Madourou, Hugo Pereira, Jaan Repnikov, William Roat).

**Fig. 26**

GT#3-Porto, IPL: models to scale of the various solutions proposed by Álvaro Siza for the technical area, FAUP (Group 6: Gert Christjanson, Kristiina Teresa Kuusik, Anna Lopes, Quentin Pechinot, Ioannis Soufleris, Sofia Tagliatesta).

Francesca Bonfante and Tommaso Brighenti examine some figures from the Milan School, for whom the trip marked a process of personal growth and maturation, significantly influencing their theoretical thinking. Following in the footsteps of protagonists from different generations, from Giuseppe de Finetti to Gae Aulenti, via Guido Canella and Aldo Rossi, the authors outline a journey through half a century of European history, contextualising not only the places and cities visited, but also the intellectual encounters.

While tourism became more widespread in Western Europe, only a small elite travelled freely beyond the Iron Curtain. In the Baltic republics, which were historically well integrated into European circuits, the Soviet occupation marked a turning point. Liene Jākobsonsone describes the experience of Latvian architects, whose creative freedom was limited both in their education and in their professional development. Faced with a scarcity of up-to-date sources, they developed autonomous training strategies, such as systematically redrawing images from Western magazines, which they kept as reference books for professional use. Gregor Taul examines the case of Estonia through the figure of Mart Port. An architect, urban planner and senior administrator, as well as a lecturer at the Department of Architecture of the Estonian State Art Institute, Port made more than thirty trips abroad. In 1966, he wrote a travel book about England, the only one published by an architect in Soviet Estonia.

The third part focuses on a selection of representative buildings, mainly spaces for university communities. Domenico Chizzoniti reports a journey into Finland in search of Alvar Aalto's works. Highlighting the difference between the reality of the built work and its visual and literary representa-

tions, he accurately describes the physical features of the spaces and their interrelationships, seeking to interpret and explain the reasons behind the formal choices and the meaning of the expressive codes.

Helder Casal Ribeiro and Silvia Ramos focus their attention on Álvaro Siza's design for the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto to demonstrate how a single building can encapsulate a Grand Tour if it incorporates many design themes. Through the study of archival materials, they identify the main alternatives for intervention in relation to the topographical and landscape conditions, highlighting some generative principles that remained constant until the final realisation.

Cesare Dallatomasina analyses Gianugo Polesello's design for the university campus in Tafira, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Recurring elements of Polesello's composition are blended here with references to the classical world and Mesoamerican culture, while also capturing the evocative qualities of the context, that of the archipelago, the last port before the "great crossing".

The fourth and final part is dedicated to interviews. Silvia Ramos and Helder Casal Ribeiro discuss the architects' Grand Tour in an imaginary dialogue between Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura (interviewed separately), whose experiences highlight relevant aspects for reflecting on the meaning of "learning by travelling".

Merilin Tee and Gregor Taul interview architect Siiri Vallner (1972). Trained during the transition phase of the 1990s, Vallner seized the opportunity to travel and experiment with different teaching models. In Copenhagen, she met Jan Gehl, known for his research on public space. In Washington, she studied with Jaan Holt, an Estonian architect who was a student of Louis Kahn. In 2008, thanks to the Young Architect Award, she embarked on a Grand Tour of Italy, Greece, the Middle East and India.

At the risk of generalising, it can be argued that for an architect, a formative journey is not only an opportunity to appreciate famous monuments and lesser-known architecture, but also to explore the geographical and cultural contexts in which these works were created (Bonfante 2014).

In 1991, to inaugurate a new series of the architectural journal *Lotus*, Pierluigi Nicolini chose to dedicate a monographic issue to architects' travel drawings, a sort of ideal point of (re)departure.

Reexamining and reflecting on the initial gestures of Le Corbusier, Kahn, Asplund, and Aalto is a good opportunity to observe different kinds of beginnings and see what kinds of things drew the eyes of the great architects.

We, too, would like to issue an invitation to make the same journey, with the awareness of a fresh start, and with the hope that, as for Le Corbusier, "the notes, the sketches made, the measures taken" are not an ends in themselves, not just part of the culture of travel, but cease to be a diary jottings and "become design" (Nicolini 1991).

**Editorial Note.** This issue is based on the project *UpGranT, Updating the Grand Tour. Memory and Invention of the European Built Environment* (2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000158377), running from September 2023 to July 2026. The consortium includes the Politecnico di Milano (Project Leader), the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, the Riga Academy of Fine Arts (Latvijas Makslas Akademija), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis) and the Tallinn Academy of Fine Arts (Eesti Kunstiakadeemia).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Architects trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, such as Henri Prost and Ernest Hébrard, travelled to the East to study the transitional architecture between the Roman and Byzantine eras. On winning the Prix de Rome, Ernest Hébrard devoted himself to the reconstruction of Diocletian's palace in Split. Henri Prost, on the other hand, focused on the hypothetical reconstruction of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Both their studies gave rise to a new approach to urban planning (Bordogna 1983).

<sup>2</sup> The IPL was divided into two distinct but interconnected phases. In the first event, part of GT#3, the partner institutions collectively tested the research materials and hypotheses for the first time with a sufficient number of students. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of different methods related to reinterpretation and redesign tools. The participants were divided into six groups, combining students from different universities. Each group concentrated on analysing a specific section of the FAUP. Promoting educational exchange and sharing experiences, the workshop followed a three-stage pedagogical approach: recognise, propose, built. The aim was to develop an interpretative reading articulated through three distinct modes: interpretative drawings, kinetic synopses and scale models that could then be contained in a box. The teachers were distributed across all the groups, forming three teams, each composed of representatives from two partner institutions responsible for interpretative drawings, kinetic synopses and models-to-scale, respectively.

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