



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty for the
Built Environment

B.Sc.(Hons) in Built Environment Studies
(BEN2103 Occ B) – Design Workshop
ADAPTIVE VOIDS

Unit Co-Ordinator:

Perit Janice Fiorentino

Tutors:

Perit Janice Fiorentino

Perit Mark Muscat

Consulting: Arch. Alexandra Abela

Specific Instructions:

Review Date: Friday 29th May

Credits Assigned: 3 ECTS

Method of Assessment: Project

Description of Assignment

Introduction

The Maltese urban fabric is dense, layered and deeply historical. Yet, within this compact landscape lie these overlooked voids – residual spaces between buildings, leftover corners, edges of infrastructure, and fragments of land that exist without purpose. They are not empty space. They are opportunities.

The design project asks you to reimagine these small urban pockets as places for teenagers. Teenagers occupy a unique position in the city: no longer children, not yet fully integrated into adult space. They are often displaced—asked to move along, to not linger, to not claim space. And yet, they need space perhaps more than anyone else: to gather, to withdraw, to express, to observe, to be seen, or to disappear.

This design workshop is not to simply “design a space,” but to **ask the right questions**:

- What does it mean for a teenager to feel ownership over a space?
- How can architecture support both solitude and social interaction?
- What makes a place inviting without being prescriptive?

Consider carefully:

- **Flows**
Who passes through? Who lingers? Who avoids the space—and why?
Is your project a destination, a threshold, or something in between?
- **Access**
Is the space open, hidden, layered, or gradual in its reveal?
How do different users approach and enter it?
- **Shading & Climate**
Malta is intense, its shadows sharp.
How does your design work with sun, wind, and time of day?
Where does one seek refuge, and where does one remain exposed?
- **Edges & Boundaries**
Where does your project begin and end?
Can boundaries be soft, negotiable, or inhabited?
- **Material & Atmosphere**
What does the space feel like—cool, rough, quiet, vibrant?
How do materials age, and how might teenagers appropriate them?
- **Use vs. Possibility**
Can the space be used in ways you did not anticipate?

The design proposal should emerge from observation and questioning. The final form is not the starting point; it is the consequence of this exercise.

Ultimately,

Can this small space in the city become a place where someone chooses to stay?

Adaptive Voids Project (100% weight of final grade)

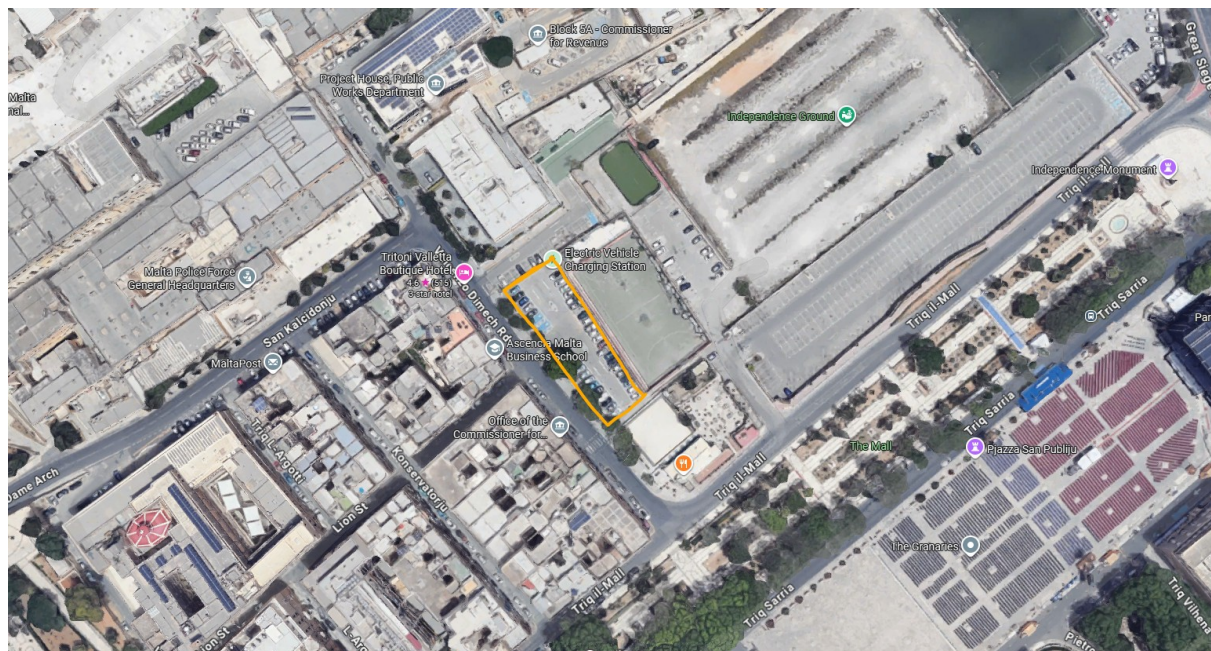
The aim of this design workshop is for each student to design this urban pocket that thoughtfully responds mainly to teenagers, considers the residents, the immediate community, and the surrounding context, as well as other factors, by applying the fundamental tools of architectural design.

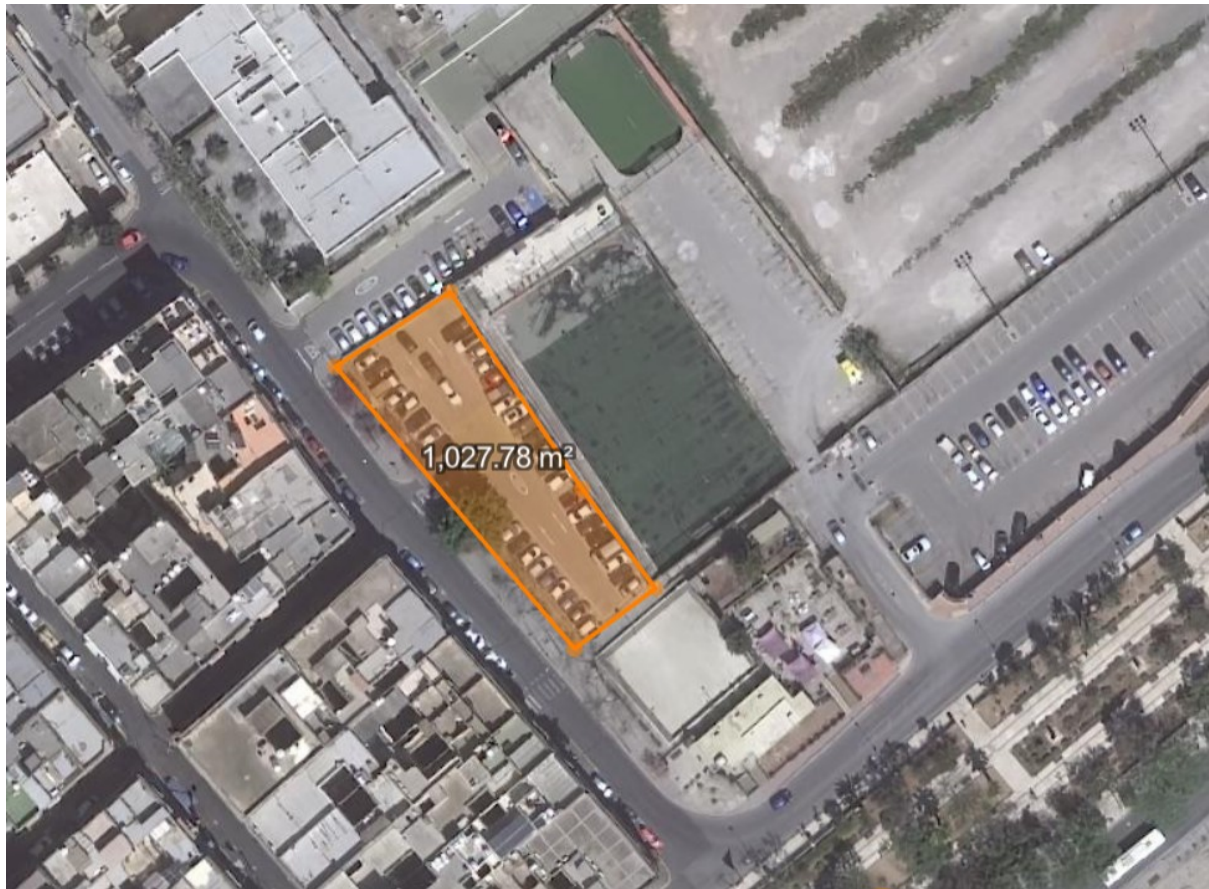
To support the process - from initial concept to final proposal - a set of guiding parameters are integral in informing the design.

These parameters include:

1. Site
2. End user
3. Spatial Elements

Site in context:





Specific site

The chosen pocket is small [1000sqm marked in yellow]. It is embedded. It already has flows, tensions, and histories. The intervention must negotiate with these existing parameters.

The site and its immediate context are key drivers of the design process. Students are expected to visit the site at different times of day to observe and understand its tangible characteristics, such as site topography, form and typology of neighbouring buildings, the surrounding urban fabric, and the variety of uses in the area. Beyond the physical, students should also consider behavioural and social patterns, including how people in the community interact (or perhaps do not) within the context.

The designated plot is located in Floriana. Although Floriana already offers a number of open public spaces, these are rarely designed with teenagers in mind. This project shifts the focus toward their specific needs—spaces that allow for both gathering and retreat, visibility and privacy—encouraging them to remain within a safe, welcoming environment rather than being pushed to the margins. Situated within a highly accessible area, well connected to Malta's public transport network, the intervention has the potential to become a natural meeting point, supporting everyday use while fostering a sense of belonging and ownership among young people

Measurements may be obtained using the Planning Authority Map Server or Google Maps tools.

End User:

Teenagers will be the primary users of this space—individuals navigating a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, where identity, independence, and social connection are constantly evolving. They seek spaces that offer freedom without control, places where they can gather, observe, express themselves, or simply exist without expectation. Often overlooked in the design of public environments, their needs are subtle yet complex: a balance between openness and shelter, visibility and retreat, structure and ambiguity. Designing for them means creating conditions that invite appropriation, adaptability, and a genuine sense of belonging.

Possible Spatial Elements:

There are several spatial elements that one can consider:

- **Shading Structures**
 - Shading from the environmental elements though not necessarily definitive
 - Deep overhangs or framed shadow-casting elements
 - Layered shading to create gradients of light and shadow
- **Seating & Gathering**
 - Fixed benches (linear, stepped, or circular)
 - Informal (seating) edges, plinths, and low walls
 - Tiered platforms for sitting, gathering, or small performances
 - Moveable or adaptable seating elements
- **Ground & Surfaces**
 - Changes in level to define zones (steps, ramps, terraces)
 - Varied textures (stone, concrete, finishes)
 - Durable, skate-friendly or multi-use surfaces
- **Landscaping**
 - Native, low-maintenance planting
 - Trees for natural shade and cooling
 - Soft edges with shrubs or ground cover
 - Green pockets that create micro-climates

- **Spatial Definition**
 - Partial enclosures (screens, mesh, walls)
 - Layered thresholds—spaces that reveal themselves gradually
 - Framed views toward the surrounding city
- **Activity & Use**
 - Open space for flexible use (hanging out, games, performances)
 - Subtle provisions for play or movement (edges, rails, platforms)
 - Quiet corners for retreat or solitude
- **Lighting**
 - Soft, indirect lighting for evening use
 - Integrated lighting within seating or ground planes
 - Safe but non-institutional atmosphere at night
- **Access & Movement**
 - Clear but non-prescriptive circulation paths
 - Multiple entry points to encourage permeability
 - Integration with surrounding pedestrian flows
- **Identity & Expression**
 - Surfaces that allow for appropriation (art, graffiti)
 - Elements that can change over time
 - Subtle cues that make the space feel “owned” by its users
- **Convenience**
 - Is there the need or space for a public convenience?
 - How would one integrate this with the architecture?
 - How would one not make it an obvious mass but flows smoothly possibly as part of the design?

Outcomes Envisaged / Assessment Criteria:

Group Work_Site Study and Case Studies [24th April]

The first weekly objective is for students to analyse and study their assigned site and this will be a group effort and presented digitally in graphical form for the next studio session. This site study exercise will also include a site massing model of 1:200 of the immediate context. This model needs to be simple in material choice and highlight important contextual factors such as topography, building form, immediate masses, pavements and any specific landmarks or detail if visible at specified scale. This will accompany the site analysis content to be presented in digital format in studio.

Accompanying the site study and site model deliverables, students are also requested to research a series of relevant architectural examples of open spaces in relatable scale, climate and context. These can be a mixture of local or foreign and the research approach should be a thorough study. A minimum of good 10 case studies are expected to be analysed as a group work addressing some of the parameters abovementioned. Case studies are an analytical tool to inform strategy, not visual references.

As of the 24th April, the students are encouraged to look for further and more specific case studies relating to their envisaged concept, whilst starting concept development.

Milestones:

14th April – Launch

17th April – Site Visit

24th April – Presentation of Site Analysis and Strategic Case Studies (Group work)

1st May – Public Holiday (Rescheduled Date TBC)

– Tutorial - formulation of spatial strategy based on Analysis (Working in Pairs)

8th May - Pin up presentation of the Design Strategy for the space, and for the Architectural pieces within it.

15th May – Tutorial – Architectural Detailing

22nd May – Tutorial - Presentation Planning

29th May – VLE Submission

The Programme

The studio sessions will be conducted every week for the duration of the semester (depending on the number of students you might hold the tutorials in the pit or the ground

floor studio, TBC) the Faculty for the Built Environment and all studio sessions are mandatory for all students. Each student will be assigned a group and follow the official schedule that will rotate according to the assigned tutor to meet and discuss as a group/individually at respective tutor's availability.

Attendance

As already mentioned, all studio sessions, meetings, discussion groups, presentations, lectures and any related activity to this design workshop are mandatory for all students. It is in the best interest of the student to attend the design workshop to receive weekly constructive critique and guidance from various perspectives of the tutors. It is also important to show constant progress and design development in order for tutors to react and provide the necessary feedback. Fulfilling this commitment will also allow the tutors to keep track of the various phases of design development from initial conceptualisation to final proposal preparation.

Models & Drawing

Physical model making & drawing (sketching) are considered fundamental tools that support students' design process development. All students are expected to utilise such tools during various phases of the design process during the semester and presented weekly in studio sessions.

Deliverables (final submission Friday 29th May at 8 am)

The workshop has a strong architectural basis and students are required to establish architectural thinking and develop a mature understanding of the design process.

The final submission as digital version is due on VLE by latest **Friday 29th May at 8 am**. The Review will be held (location TBC) of Faculty on May 29th and follow a student physical presentation method. A schedule will be issued closed to the date.

The final design proposal will be a mostly graphical submission in the form of drawings and images accompanied by a series of physical model [and any other working models].

The basic deliverables for the final submission include the following:

- Sheet size depending on the scale of the drawing/s [probably A1 fits best]

- All physical working models made during the semester to show massing and architectural development
- Site Plan / Context
- Site analysis [brief]
- Concept/brief in the form of mixed media such as concise text, sketches, physical working models
- Architectural plans at 1:100
- Other detailed architectural plans of any structures within the space
- Sections at 1:100 (scales can be discussed in tutorials)
- Other architectural details that focus on specific aspects of the proposal at different scales ranging from 1:50, 1:20 and even 1:10.
- Materiality mood board
- Sketches/collages of internal spaces that are specific to design
- All drawings to be scaled, labelled and annotated properly
- Any other material that is important to express the design project

The design project should be presented in a clear, concise and graphically engaging manner that highlight salient points of the design proposal.

Learning Outcomes & Assessment Criteria:

By the end of this project, students should be able to:

- **Critically analyse urban conditions**
Understand and interpret small-scale urban spaces within their social, cultural, and spatial context. Show critical thinking – relate general/national urban problems to small scale everyday spaces that users experience.
- **Design for a specific user group**
Develop proposals that respond thoughtfully to the behavioural, emotional, and spatial needs of teenagers.
- **Formulate and test design questions**
Use inquiry as a design tool—asking relevant questions that lead to informed architectural decisions rather than predetermined forms.
- **Develop spatial strategies at a micro scale**
Explore how small interventions can have meaningful impact through careful consideration of proportion, thresholds, and relationships.

- **Respond to environmental conditions**
Integrate climate-responsive design strategies, including shading, orientation, materiality, and microclimate creation.
- **Address movement and accessibility**
Consider flows, access points, and connectivity within the wider urban fabric.
- **Balance definition and ambiguity**
Design spaces that are open-ended, adaptable, and capable of supporting multiple interpretations and uses.
- **Communicate design intent effectively**
Represent ideas clearly through drawings, models, and diagrams that convey both concept and experience.
- **Reflect on architecture as a social act**
Recognise the role of architecture in shaping inclusion, belonging, and everyday life in the city.

As a result, the assessment criteria are as follows:

- **The extent to which site analysis, user understanding, and case study research inform the design process (20%)**

Link the general urban ‘problem’ in Malta to this user and to this site – i.e. think of the bigger picture. Focus on observing the Floriana site, flows, climate, and social patterns, alongside a clear understanding of teenagers as the primary users, and translate this into design decisions.
- **Clarity in identifying spatial problems and opportunities within the urban void (10%)**

Ability to frame relevant design questions emerging from site conditions, user needs, and the notion of “adaptive voids,” rather than starting from predefined solutions.
- **Formulation of a coherent design strategy and concept grounded in analysis (20%)**

Development of a spatial approach that addresses thresholds, access, climate, materiality, and use, demonstrating how the proposal negotiates existing conditions and supports teenage occupation.
- **Development of the spatial and architectural proposal demonstrating creativity, adaptability, and responsiveness (35%)**

Quality of the design in generating meaningful, flexible, and non-prescriptive spaces that support gathering, retreat, and appropriation, while responding to context and scale.
- **Clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of graphical and physical presentation (15%)**

Communication of design intent through appropriate drawings, models, and diagrams, conveying both concept and spatial experience concisely and legibly.

Participation Disclaimer

The brief is solely the basis for the Design Workshop, which is fully developed through the Design Studio sessions.

The Design Studio sessions systematically introduce the full scope of the brief and guide students toward learning outcomes through weekly milestones. The Design Studio sessions combine class discussions, student presentations (pinups), and feedback sessions. Students' participation in all components is essential to the design development process. Students must follow peer feedback throughout the session, recognising and taking on board aspects that apply to their design process. Students must complete each weekly task. Weekly Design Studio reviews are as valuable as the final one, as they offer an opportunity to present work and gain timely feedback. For this reason, attendance is mandatory throughout the Design Studio sessions. Poor attendance will affect students' progress, results, and their ability to deliver expected deliverables at the required level.