



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty for the
Built Environment

B.Sc.(Hons) in Built Environment Studies

BEN3101 OCC. C – Design Workshop

Interpretation of the Absent

Design Tutors:

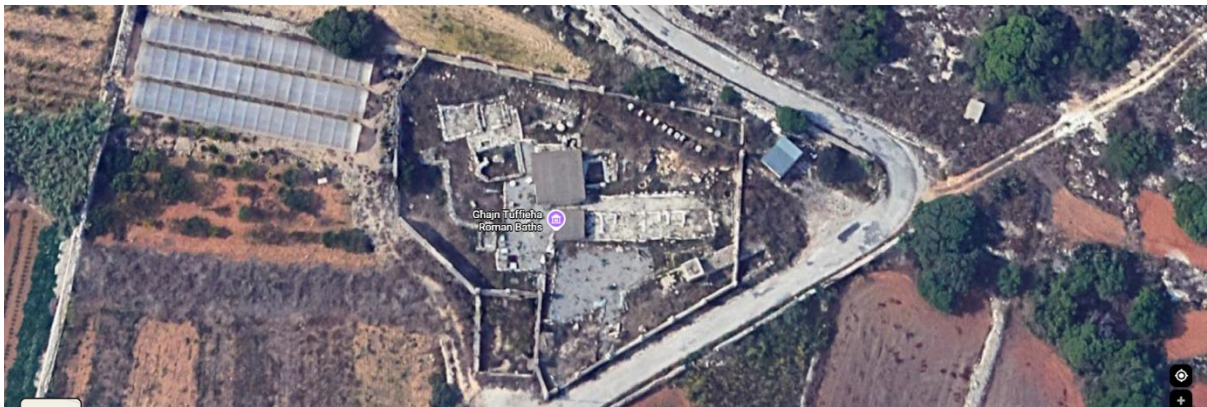
Dr Irina Miodragovic Vella (coordinator), Perit Simon Grech, Dr Hermann Bonnici, Dr Shiley Cefai, and Prof Bogusław Szmygin (Visiting Design Tutor)

In collaboration with Heritage Malta.

Theme: Interpretation

The workshop explores how architecture can interpret what is absent, invisible, or overlooked, whether through history, memory, ecology, or cultural narratives. Students will approach **the Roman Baths of Ghajn Tuffieħa and their wider setting** as a living landscape where traces of the past, present use, and future potential intersect.

Site:





Task

The task is to interpret the site through a proposal that:

- Uses the site's sensitivity and uniqueness as a **catalyst for creativity**.
- **Brings people**, locals and tourists, for education, leisure, research, and tourism in ways that protect and enhance its cultural, heritage, and ecological values.
- **Creates an experience** that reveals new layers of meaning, making the site engaging, memorable, and compelling enough to encourage repeat visits.

The proposal should address design across three interconnected scales:

- **Macro:** The masterplan and its integration with the wider context.
- **Meso:** The main architectural interventions and programme focus.
- **Micro:** Material palette, structural approach, integration of services, and a developed architectural detail.

Given the complexity and sensitivity of the site, students are required to undertake multiple site visits. Proposals should be developed primarily through physical models, sketches, and paste-ups, supported by digital models where appropriate. Realistic renderings are not required.

Assessment Criteria

Research and Contextual Analysis (20%)

- Critical use of research, readings and theoretical frameworks to support design thinking.
- Understanding of the site's layered significance (heritage, landscape, community)

Conceptual Approach (30%)

- Development of an architectural concept that interprets the site with sensitivity and creativity.
- Ability to reveal and reinterpret "the absent" through architectural strategies.
- Coherence of the concept across macro, meso, and micro scales.

Design Development (40%)

- Quality of proposals at macro (masterplan), meso (architectural interventions), and micro (detail, materials, services) scales.
- Iterative development of ideas through sketches, paste-ups, physical models, and digital tools.
- Evidence of reflection, adaptation, and incorporation of feedback.

Presentation (10%)

- Clarity, coherence, and creativity in presenting proposals.
- Effective use of drawings, diagrams, models, and verbal explanation.

Programme

The Design Workshop consists of an 8-week programme within a studio environment, commencing on Wednesday, 24th September 2025. The VLE submission will be by the end of the day on Tuesday, 11th November, followed by reviews on Wednesday, 12th November 2025.

The Design Workshop blends individual and group tasks, held every Wednesday with activities guided by various tutors. In the third year, project development and design become more studio-focused, providing an opportunity for peer collaboration and creative growth. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the studio space and work there for most of the day.

Two full-day workshops by Prof Bogusław Szmygin, the visiting design tutor, are planned for Wednesday, 8th October and Saturday, 11th October.

The Design Workshop brief serves as the foundation for the entire workshop process, which is further developed and refined through the Design Studio sessions. The sessions systematically deliver the full scope of the brief, guiding students towards achieving the learning outcomes through structured weekly milestones. Additionally, they introduce the theoretical concepts and knowledge essential for the Design Workshop, which may not be covered in other study units.

Design Studio sessions are dynamic and interactive, combining lectures, class discussions, student presentations (pinups), and feedback sessions. Active participation in all aspects is crucial for developing students' design projects. Students need to engage with peer feedback throughout the sessions, recognising and integrating relevant insights into their design processes.

Students are expected to complete each weekly task diligently. Weekly presentations in the Design Studio are as crucial as the final presentation, providing a critical opportunity to showcase progress and receive constructive feedback. Therefore, attendance is mandatory throughout the Design Studio sessions. Poor attendance can significantly hinder a student's progress, negatively affecting their results and the quality of their final deliverables.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, students will be able to:

- Critically analyse a heritage site through historical, architectural, and contextual research.
- Develop an architectural concept that interprets, respects, and enhances the cultural significance of the site.
- Demonstrate how protected sites can serve as catalysts for creative design.
- Formulate spatial and experiential strategies that balance education, research, and tourism.
- Communicate design proposals effectively through drawings, models, and diagrams.

Tentative Design Workshop Timeline

Week 1

Monday 22nd September: Launch

- The brief is uploaded to the faculty website.
- 4:30 pm Online BEN3101 Design Workshops Launch and presentation of the four occurrences.

Task 1:

- Research the history of the site.
- Familiarise yourselves with the site and its main features like the Roman Baths.
- Readings

Wednesday 24th September: Introductory Design Tutorial

- Introducing design tutors, the brief, design tasks, and design workshop timeline.
- Presentation by Dr Cefai on the concept of ruins, significance, and heritage values of the site.
- Initial group discussions on readings, ruins, and workshop architectural principles.

Task 2:

- Site Visit (all students)
- Historical Research (group work).
- Context and Site Analysis (individual work).
- Identify readings and begin formulating a theoretical conservation approach.

Weeks 2 & 3: Development at Macro Scale

Wednesday 1st October

- Student presentations: Context Analysis and Historical Background Research.
- Group discussion on theoretical approaches.

Task 3:

- Continue Historical Research and Context and Site Analysis.
- Prepare presentations for Prof Szmygin's visit that communicated the development of the masterplan, concept, and strategy using diagrams, collages, and models

Wednesday 8th October: Charrette

The day-long workshop will focus on developing design strategies starting with a charrette on the site followed by a studio pinup.

By the end of the day, students will have initiated their design concepts and created a set of basic diagrams outlining the master plan and the distribution of activities on the site.

Thursday 9th October: Lecture by Dr Prof Bogusław Szmygin (8am)

Saturday 11th October: Charrette

- Pinup with Prof Szmygin.
- Presentations showing concept development since Wednesday to conclude:
 - o design strategies at the macro scale: masterplan, access, circulation, spatial organisation
 - o interpretation of cultural significance, and visitor experience.
 - o plan for the next stages of their development.

Week 4 & 5: Development at Meso Scale

Wednesday 15th October: Individual tutorials

- Refining key architectural interventions, main programme elements, and spatial strategies.

Wednesday 22nd October: Pinup

- Concluding design strategies at the meso scale: spatial organisation, material, and structural concepts.

Week 6 & 7: Development at Micro Scale**Wednesday 29th October: Individual tutorials**

- Focus on material palette, structural approach, services integration, and architectural detail.

Wednesday 5th November: Final Pinup

- Concluding design strategies at the micro scale and presentation content.

Week 8: Wednesday 12th November: Reviews