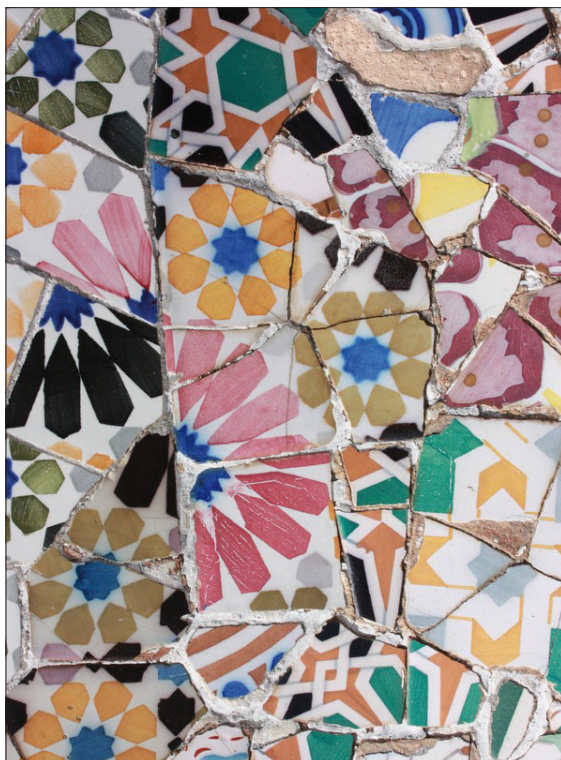


CONTRIB SCI 12(2): 141-144 (2016)  
doi:10.2436/20.7010.01.254

## Barcelona Dialogue: A Collaborative Project between Northeastern University, Boston and the AE-BKH

Xavier Costa-Guix

Professor of Architecture and Design, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.  
Member of the Council of the Academia Europaea



Trencadís ("broken tiles") by Antoni Gaudí

**Summary.** The Collaborative Project "Barcelona Dialogue: Creativity, Innovation and Design" established between Northeastern University and the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the Academia Europaea (AE-BKH) has offered students of 15 different disciplines, and of 11 different nationalities an introduction to contemporary achievements in design, the creative fields and the creativity economy in the Barcelona context. The first edition of the "Barcelona Dialogue" has taken place during the Summer of 2016 (July 4–July 24) in different locations of Barcelona, with lectures held in the site of the AE-BKH, at the impressive mid-17th century building of the Institute for Catalan Studies. [Contrib Sci 12(2):141-144 (2016)]

**Keywords:** Northeastern University · Barcelona Knowledge Hub · Dialogue cooperative project · Creativity, Innovation and Design · Architecture university teaching

**Correspondence:** Xavier Costa-Guix  
E-mail: X.Costa@northeastern.edu

A first edition of the Collaborative Project "Barcelona Dialogue: Creativity, Innovation and Design" has taken place during the Summer of 2016 (July 4–July 24) in different locations of Barcelona and in the unique spaces of the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the Academia Europaea (AE-BKH) at the former Casa de Convalescència (Convalescence

House) of the former Hospital of the Saint Cross (presently, the Library of Catalonia), which is the site of the Institute for Catalan Studies (Fig. 1). This Barcelona Dialogue has offered students of 15 different disciplines, and of 11 different nationalities an introduction to contemporary achievements in design, the creative fields and the creativity economy in



©M. Berlanga

Fig. 1. Convalescence House (*Casa de Convalescència*) of the Hospital of the Saint Cross.

the Barcelona context. Additionally, the program benefitted from partnerships with the Mies van der Rohe Foundation and the Enric Miralles Foundation, both located in Barcelona (Fig. 2).

Northeastern University is an institution founded in 1898 in Boston, Massachusetts. In a city distinguished by its many and respected universities, Northeastern has differentiated itself from its very beginnings by its focus on experiential learning. This philosophy of higher education is based on the pedagogical premise that a complete education requires a diversity of experiences, some strictly academic within the boundaries of the traditional campus, together with other experiences of a diverse nature, ranging from professional practice, to community service, and institutional collaboration, all at a global scale. Experiential learning draws from the latent synergies between social progress, innovation and scholarly research. The “Barcelona Dialogue” has been conceived within this pedagogical framework.

Barcelona is a city that has strongly believed in the transformative power of design. As a 19th-century industrial center, Barcelona’s entrepreneurial class fostered a dramatic expansion of the existing city through Ildefons Cerdà’s (1815–1876) new *Eixample* (Expansion) section of the city, where a disruptive architecture emerged in the work of Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), Lluís Domènech (1850–1923) i Muntaner (1850–1923) and Josep Puig i Cadafalch (1867–1953), to only mention some of the most recognized architects and designers. The city and its industrialist elite also supported an unprecedented and diverse creativity in many fields, ranging from graphic design to literature, from the visual arts to technology. Our students were introduced to these

many faces of the city in its recent history, and also to the role that creativity plays today, an essential force behind this Mediterranean city’s culture, economy, and international projection. Creativity is also one of the essential forces driving forward modern societies.

*Design Thinking*, the central concept of this program, is a term coined by British designer Tim Brown in relation to his work at the consultancy IDEO, and also to his academic collaboration with Stanford University in California. At Stanford, Brown proposed that all undergraduate students take an introductory course on design methodology and strategy, an initiative that has been fully implemented. *Design Thinking* proposes a method of problem solving based on experimentation, interdisciplinary collaboration, iterative process, prototype-based exploration, and experience design.

Contemporary design has been rapidly changing the world we live in. From the spaces we inhabit to the clothes we wear, from sustainable environments to data visualization, design is reshaping the way we think, the processes of making, and the cultures of interacting with products and systems.

The seminar looked at the evolution of design and design thinking during the last few decades, with a focus on the present and immediate future of disruptive creativity. We studied how design methodologies translate into business models, into new forms of communication and problem solving with high emotional and intellectual impact. We have examined the work of designers that have successfully doubled as entrepreneurs in different fields, such as visual communication, fashion, product design, architectural



©X. Costa

**Fig. 2.** The program benefitted from partnerships with the Mies van der Rohe Foundation and the Enric Miralles Foundation, both located in Barcelona .

innovation, gastronomy, or applied technology.

Topics of the seminar included the writings of Walter Benjamin on mechanical reproductivity; Nikolaus Pevsner on the pioneers of modern design and architecture; Sigfried Giedion's research on the impact of industry and mechanization on designers, and Reyner Banham's concept of design within a "second machine age." Among recent contributions, we worked with the writings of Tim Brown on "design change"; Manuel Castells on the network society; William McDonough on sustainable design; Rem Koolhaas on "generic cities", and Richard Florida on the rise of the creative class.

Dr. Suzanne Strum offered a seminar on Design Innovation that referred to several case studies, based on design-based companies, Dr. Kathrin Golda-Pongratz, a member of *Academia Europaea* and professor at the Frankfurt University of Technology, lectured on recent transformations of public

spaces in the city of Barcelona, and Dr. Xavier Costa-Guix offered an introduction to the urban development and transformation of the city.

Students also worked on a creative project using photography and visual documentation. This studio was led by artist and photographer Diego Ferrari, a professor at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and a collaborator at Elisava School of Design and Engineering, a school which is ascribed to University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. This photographic project was based on the German Pavilion designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for the Barcelona International Exhibition of 1929, and reconstructed in 1986. Students were able to develop preparatory work and final presentations in the spaces of the Enric Miralles Foundation, within the Miralles-Tagliabue (EMBT) architecture studio, in the historic center of the city.

The students also enjoyed different ludic and cultural



© Jordi Pereto

**Fig. 3.** Night concert of classic music at the cloister of the Convalescence House (*Casa de Convalescència*), the site of the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC). On the upper right, students and professors of the program with the president of the IEC, Prof. Joandomènec Ros (center). The rain, that that summer night exceptionally felt also on the Barcelona plain, could not prevent the brave students to attend the concert, after, indeed, taking shelter in the cloister arcades.

activities, one of the most remembered among them was the night concert of classic music at the cloisters of the Convalescence House (*Casa de Convalescència*), the site of the Institute for Catalan Studies, a Baroque palace built in mid-17th-century (Fig. 3).

Both academic and cultural activities of the Barcelona Dialogue Project of Northeastern University perfectly harmonized with the main interests of the AE-BKH that aims to the promotion of activities of interest for the

scientific community of the region, with special emphasis on multidisciplinary scientific activities that include the perspective of the natural and social sciences and the humanities. The AE-BKH's goal is to contribute to the consolidation of a genuine European area of innovation, research, and education, especially in the Mediterranean and southern Europe. ■

**Competing interests.** None declared.

**About the images on the first page of the articles in this issue.** Articles of this thematic issue of CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE, devoted to the activities of the Barcelona Knowledge Hub of the Academia Europaea (AE-BKH), show in their first page a reproduction of a *trencadis*, a type of mosaic used in Catalan Modernism, made from broken pieces of ceramics, like tiles and dinnerware. Those nine “broken tiles,” designed by the architect from Reus Antoni Gaudí, show multiple angles and views, reflecting the ever-changing reality around us. The AE-BKH believes that those images, created more than a century ago, represent appropriately the multiple aspects of the present academic world, both in science and humanities, which constitute one of the main objectives of the activities of the Barcelona hub. See also the article “Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926): The Manuscript of Reus,” by R. Gomis and K. Katte, on pages 145-149 of this issue. This issue can be downloaded in ISSUU format and individual articles can be found at the journals’ repository of the Institute for Catalan Studies [[www.cat-science.cat](http://www.cat-science.cat); <http://revistes.iec.cat/contributions>].