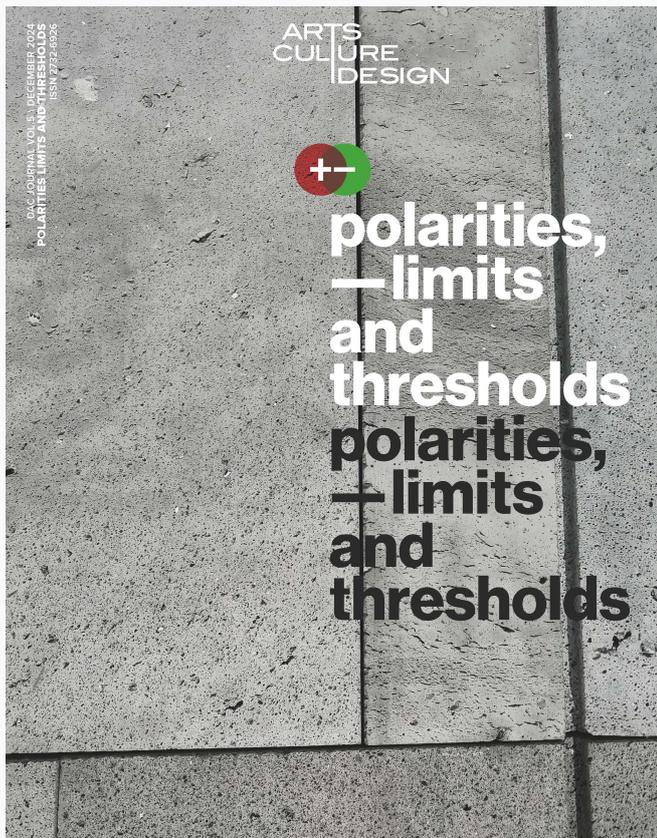


Design/Arts/Culture

Τόμ. 5, Αρ. 1 (2025)

POLARITIES LIMITS AND THRESHOLDS



The DISSOLVING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE IN THE DESIGN OF THE CITY

María Melgarejo Belenguer

doi: [10.12681/dac.39026](https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.39026)

Copyright © 2025, María Melgarejo Belenguer



Άδεια χρήσης [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Melgarejo Belenguer, M. (2025). The DISSOLVING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE IN THE DESIGN OF THE CITY. *Design/Arts/Culture*, 5(1), 84–95. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dac.39026>

DISSOLVING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE IN THE DESIGN OF THE CITY.

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of this research, we asked ourselves whether the interior design of spaces that have fallen out of use in the city could contribute to urban regeneration. Is it possible to reinvent the contemporary city from the inside out? This hypothesis led us to the concept of interior urbanism, an approach that seeks to integrate interior spaces with the urban fabric by dissolving the boundaries between inside and outside. This article aims to answer this question. It looks at authors whose projects have been clear examples of integrating interior design with urbanism to improve the quality of life and functionality of cities, transforming these indeterminate spaces into places that encourage social interaction and regenerate the urban environment. We have applied these premises in the projects we are developing and, in all of them, the dissolution of the boundaries between interior and exterior has opened up new possibilities for the design of the urban environment, as we show in the case study. How can cities be reinvented from the inside out? In the beginning, we formulated this question as a starting point and understood that the dissolution of the boundaries between interior and exterior space opened up a new possibility for the design of the contemporary city. The idea of interior space becoming the public space of the city, borrowing from the concept of Inner Urbanism, emerged strongly as a design option for the city. This article explores new actions in the design of the built environment, such as the building being permeable to the urban fabric, that can be traversed, that can be seen from the outside, that generates new routes, and new relationships, taking into account the user's behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary city often offers undefined, empty spaces with no specific use. They are spaces left in buildings or between buildings, empty, isolated, or in disuse outside of urban planning, which is summarized in the concept of "terrain vague", coined by Ignasi de Solà Morales, in an article entitled Present and Futures, published in 1996. The architecture of cities encompasses situations, territories, or buildings that participate in a double condition.

On the one hand, “vague” means vacant, empty, free of activity, unproductive, and, in many cases, obsolete. On the other hand, the term “vague” also means imprecise, indefinite, vague, without determined limits, without a future horizon. (SOLÁ-MORALES, Ignasi de., 1996). Faced with this situation, we wonder if these spaces can be transformed into useful and dynamic areas through interior design, integrated into urban planning, as a possible alternative.

This research focuses on how people colonize these unplanned spaces left in the urban fabric, on the boundary between inside and outside: passages, thresholds, etc., and how they appropriate these urban voids to make them their own. These spaces, which have been left on the border between the inside and the outside, appear as possible spaces that offer the opportunity to generate places where we want to be, stay, or meet, which can be a refuge for the loneliness of those of us who live in the city.

This need is reflected in our search for that place that welcomes us, in that idea of space that we find in the reflection of Lao Tse, collected in *The Book of Tea*, by Kakuzo Okakura, for whom “the reality of the building does not consist of the four walls and the roof, but in the space in which it is inhabited” (Okakura, 2005).

This joint work aims to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, encourage social interaction, and revitalize disused urban areas through the interior design of these spaces. Beyond streets and squares, the concept of interior urbanism arose, influenced

Figure 1.
The anonymous city dweller.
Sant Antoni -Joan Oliver Library.
RCR Arquitectes.
Photograph Eugeni Pons.



by American urbanism, to bring the city's design into the interior of the buildings and covered public spaces.

The following is a collection of experiences of authors who integrate the design of interior spaces in their projects and who have turned these spaces into new places for meeting and social interaction, to enrich the lives of citizens.

A new concept of public space appears That is the city, but it is also the interior and it is also the landscape, which leads us to reflect on the dissolution of the boundaries between interior and exterior, which is the focus of this research.

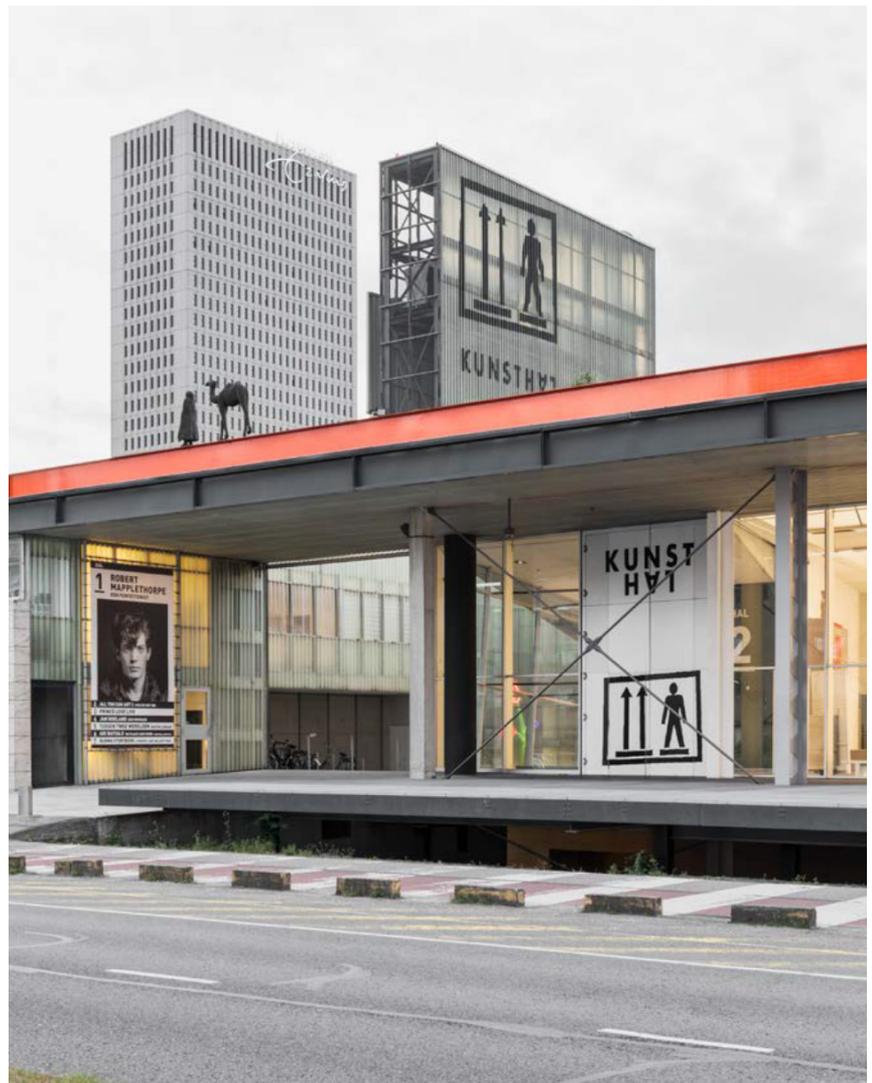
2. FROM ALBERTI TO KOOLHAAS

Leon Battista Alberti, already in 1452, in his treatise *De re Aedificatoria* (Alberti,1992), stated that 'The city is a large house, just as the house is a small city'. This statement by Alberti makes us think today that we can design the city on a small scale as if it were a house.

Alberti, a Renaissance humanist and architect, believed that both spaces - the city and the house - shared common principles of organization, harmony, and functionality. Humanism placed the human being as the origin and source of the values that regulate life. This reflection leads us to analyze the city project from the individual's point of view.

From this position, we conclude that both cities and houses must be designed

Figure 2.
OMA's Kunsthall in Rotterdam,
Rem Koolhaas and the New Europe



with the well-being of their inhabitants in mind. This approach to the design of the city from different scales, from the conception of a macro-scale (City) to a micro-scale (House = Interior Space) allows us to establish a dialogue with the existing city, with what has already been built, from the particular to the general and thus, attending to design criteria from how to access, to how to cross a square, can give us a new, more human perspective of an environment.

Kevin Lynch, in his book 'The Image of the City' (LYNCH,1998), argues that the city is a construction in space, but it is a construction on a vast scale. To understand this, we must not limit ourselves to considering the city as a thing in itself, but the city as it is perceived by its inhabitants.

This concept of Variable Scales was also raised by Rem Koolhaas in his book S,M,L,XL (KOOLHAAS,1995) and has been a constant in all his intervention projects in large cities, projects of the 1990s, such as Euralille in Lille, a complex project in terms of infrastructure but which maintained in its essence the idea of space as a generator of an environment, or the Kunsthal Museum in Rotterdam, a new concept of an articulating and transparent enveloping space.

Koolhaas proposes the dissolution of the limits between inside and outside and develops his projects as a whole, an enveloping spatial volume that expands in the place and generates an area of influence, which he claims as his own, in the territory.

Through various design strategies, such as making the building permeable to the urban fabric, allowing it to be crossed, to be seen from the outside, to generate routes, he manages to turn the interior space into a public space in the city.

Koolhaas states that we must consider not only individual buildings (S and M), but also entire cities (L and XL). He proposes a constant interaction between the building and the urban environment.

3. INNER URBANISM

This idea of interior space as public space in the city is related to the concept of interior urbanism. In a recent article published in Archdaily, 'Inner Urbanism: the implications of covered public space', Ankitha Gattupalli talks about the growing importance of inner urbanism in the design of the built environment and poses the following question: How can cities be reinvented from the inside out?

The author explains that public spaces, which are inside buildings, are essential elements for urban life, highlights the importance of these spaces to encourage public activity and community interaction, and takes as a reference Charles Rice, who in his book 'Interior Urbanism: Architecture, John Portman and Downtown America' (Rice 2016), highlights the influence of Portman's projects in the decade between 1960 and 1970 in the United States. From the analysis of Portman's model, atriums, galleries, and covered public spaces for the American city, we extract the idea that it is possible to design the city from the inside, that the interrelation between interior and exterior public space generates an intermediate sphere where urban life develops.

Redefining this concept of interior urbanism, for European cities as opposed to traditional urban landscapes, poses the dissolution of the boundaries between interior

and exterior, transforms the way we experience the city, influences the design and organization of the interior spaces of buildings, and establishes a new relationship with the urban environment that surrounds them.

In the apparent intrinsic contradiction between the terms Urbanism and Interior lies the strength of the concept. Interior urbanism proposes a new way of making the city, new areas appear that are interior and exterior at the same time, and there is a fluid connection between interior and exterior spaces, promoting spatial and visual continuity.

Interior courtyards, semi-public - semi-private intermediate spaces, such as lobbies and gardens, appear in the buildings, as places to stop, and the most recent digital detox spaces, in the journey through a space, as an opportunity to generate new spaces of interrelation.

The re-naturalization of these spaces, introducing or prolonging green spaces in the interior, is another of the project strategies, which will also contribute to sustainable urban design, which also involves the use of ecological materials and natural ventilation.

These interior spaces that are generated must be functional and flexible to respond to the changing and plural needs of the users, from the design of flexible furniture and multifunctional spaces.

Transparency, natural light, the use of color, and materials must be carefully considered to contribute to the well-being of the users and enhance their experience.

Interior urbanism, also contemplates the participation of the community in the design process, ensuring that spaces respond to the needs and desires of their users.

Ezio Manzini in his book 'Habitar la proximidad', (Manzini, 2023) comments that there cannot be a resilient and sustainable city in physical and social terms without high-quality neighborhoods, introducing the concept of a city that cares, a city built from the lives of citizens, an idea of liveable proximity.

A city in which functional proximity is accompanied by relational proximity. A city in which people have more opportunities to get to know and support each other means creating places where these encounters are possible.

In short, a city built on the concrete life of its inhabitants.

Urban regeneration involves paying attention to the users who enjoy it, by proposing new uses that meet current needs.

4. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE INTERIOR-EXTERIOR LIMITS

Based on the concepts outlined above, situations, places, and views on points of the city, which for various reasons required special attention in the urban project and were worked on from Interior Design, are presented here.

Some contemporary examples of the design of interior spaces allow us to better understand these concepts, on how to generate these dynamics of the relationship between interior and exterior, access spaces, transit spaces, and intermediate spaces, which become spaces that make the city, to promote social interaction in the urban environment, where the conventional notions of public spaces or private spaces are also transcended.

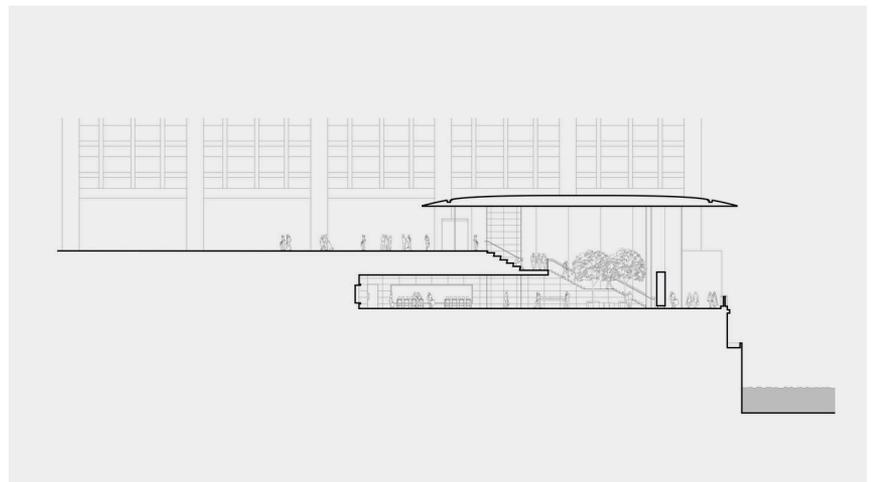
Norman Foster's 1993 design for the Carré d'Art, Museum of Contemporary Art in Nîmes, was conceived on the premise that the urban space should be an integral part of the project. The space in front of the building was extended to create a pedestrian area: a new social approach and an appropriate environment for the Maison Carrée. This example shows how an architectural project can revitalize the social and physical fabric of a city.

Figure 3.
Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art
Contemporain.
Foster + Partners.
Photograph Nigel Young.



This initial idea was taken up by Foster's team in 2017 for Apple Michigan Avenue in Chicago. A new, wide public staircase is created to lead down from the plaza to the river, a sequence of levels between the exterior and the interior that creates dynamic spaces where people can sit around the forum, the center of Today at Apple (creative activities organized every day at Apple) and a living source of creativity, training, and entertainment between the city and the river.

Figure 4.
Apple Michigan Avenue Chicago.
Foster + Partners.
Photograph Nigel Young



Light streams through the walls of the glass building, dematerializing the building's enclosure and connecting to the lively center of the shop, protected by an incredibly thin carbon fiber roof supported by a minimal stainless steel structure.

Jonathan Ive, Apple's chief design officer, said that Apple Michigan Avenue is about removing the boundaries between inside and out and reinvigorating important urban connections within the city.

An example of small-scale design would be the design of the Prada shop in Soho NY, designed by Rem Koolhaas and his firm OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture).

Opened in 2001, with an innovative concept, it meant much more than a retail space, it became a cultural and relational space. A significant element of the design was the staggered wave of wood, the stands as a hybrid space between exterior and interior, articulating the circulations, acting as a meeting agora and at the same time as an exhibition space. The shop represented a paradigm shift in the design of commercial spaces in the city center.

Figure 5.
Prada Store Soho NY,
Rem Koolhaas – OMA



In this respect, the design by RCR Arquitectes in Barcelona in 2007 for the Sant Antoni-Joan Oliver Library is noteworthy, in which the authors recognize that they have managed to create a socially dynamic, urban complex, as they explain, 'The library, as a gateway and chill-out reading space, the retirement home, as a public space façade, and the interior of the block as a playground for children, with a wealth of space and relationships for a socially dynamic urban complex'.

Figure 6.
Sant Antoni -Joan Oliver Library.
RCR Arquitectes.
Photograph Eugeni Pons



The library could be considered as a new, mixed-use, to dynamize urban complex, which recovers the interior space of a block of buildings constructed in the Eixample district of Barcelona, which in turn acts as an element of social cohesion by strengthening the relationship between the users of the library and those of the interior courtyard.

5. CASE STUDY: SAN PEDRO NOLASCO MARKET

These premises are the starting point for many of the projects we develop in the Interior Design Department of the EASD Valencia. At the beginning of each academic year, urban environments are proposed to us to work on and buildings appear that become protagonists without them having sought to do so. This is the case of the San Pedro Nolasco Market, located in the Morvedre neighborhood, in the La Zaidia district of Valencia.

We received a proposal from Valencia City Council for the refurbishment of the market. Almost as the only point of the briefing, it was suggested to us that: ‘The action should revitalize the neighborhood, turning it into a meeting point that would dynamize the whole area’.

A market currently in danger of disappearing, which was located in a strategic point of the neighborhood that had fallen into disuse, and only the resistance of a vendor kept it open. It was not just a question of rehabilitating a given space, but the action should revitalize a neighborhood that is currently very run-down, with a large number of plots of land and dwellings in ruins and/or occupied.

Figure 7.
Photographs of the current state
of the San Pedro Nolasco Market.
TFG final degree project EASDValencia
by Araceli Landete



We put the above strategies into practice, taking into account the needs of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, as well as the current purpose of the building. Based on this analysis, several uses were proposed.

One of the options was to transform the traditional market model into a gastronomic multi-space, as a way of updating its traditional use to the new trends and consumer behaviors, as it is believed that it would attract people in different time slots, which would generate a new flow of circulation of users through the neighborhood and, in turn, keep alive the memory of what the building was.

Another option proposed by the neighbors was to convert the space into a cultural space that would accommodate neighborhood associations with a social objective.

The following is an example of Araceli Landete’s final degree project, a proposal

for a gastronomic multi-space. At the start of the project, the following questions were asked: Where is the square located, what would the square be like without the market, what sensations would we have in it, and what would an open-air market be like?

The intervention consisted of creating a covered plaza and connecting the interior and exterior in such a way that the street would enter into the interior space.

Two resources were used for this: the first, to create a glazed perimeter interior street through a visual connection with the street; and the second, to open up the box to create a covered plaza through a light plane. The market stalls, which were directly connected to the street, as they were in the past, would generate perimeter exterior circulations.

The pedestrianization planned for the area was a factor that favored the idea of the project, as it enhances the fluidity between inside and outside and creates a large pedestrian transit area which, in the future, with the complete rehabilitation of the surroundings, will provide the neighborhood with an important meeting point.

Figure 8.
TFG final degree project
EASDValencia by Araceli Landete



We put the above strategies into practice, taking into account the needs of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, as well as the current purpose of the building. Based on this analysis, several uses were proposed.

One of the options was to transform the traditional market model into a gastronomic multi-space, as a way of updating its traditional use to the new trends and consumer behaviors, as it is believed that it would attract people in different time slots, which would generate a new flow of circulation of users through the neighborhood and, in turn, keep alive the memory of what the building was.

Another option proposed by the neighbors was to convert the space into a cultural space that would accommodate neighborhood associations with a social objective.

The following is an example of Araceli Landete's final degree project, a proposal for a gastronomic multi-space. At the start of the project, the following questions were asked: Where is the square located, what would the square be like without the market, what sensations would we have in it, and what would an open-air market be like?

The intervention consisted of creating a covered plaza and connecting the interior and exterior in such a way that the street would enter into the interior space.

Two resources were used for this: the first, to create a glazed perimeter interior street through a visual connection with the street; and the second, to open up the box to create a covered plaza by means of a light plane. The market stalls, which were directly connected to the street, as they were in the past, would generate perimeter exterior circulations.

The pedestrianization planned for the area was a factor that favored the idea of the project, as it enhances the fluidity between inside and outside and creates a large pedestrian transit area which, in the future, with the complete rehabilitation of the surroundings, will provide the neighborhood with an important meeting point.

The final solution proposes a light and open building. The original wooden exterior enclosure is recovered and brought inside. The central area will be the heart of the market, where there will be cooking and selling stalls, and where many colors, flavors, and smells can be appreciated. The stalls are conceived as heavy monolithic elements.

In this way, the project allows the market to become a permeable building that aims to be a city with a public character and thus to function as an activator of the city.

What is it intended to convey to the user?

The intervention must restore the value of the market to the place and the people, and bring the square back to life as a public space for meeting, exchange, and enjoyment. At the same time, the square is introduced into the interior space delimited by the light roof, which is both open and exterior at the same time.

From a pedagogical point of view, our methodological proposal focuses on: 'Learning through experience' and, to this end, we work in city neighborhoods that have a special significance, either because of their configuration, their history, or their current situation, with real cases, and we teach students to value the built heritage and its relationship with the city and to make a social commitment to its recovery.

6. CONCLUSION

The interior design of undefined, empty, and unused spaces left in the contemporary city plays a crucial role in urban regeneration. These spaces that act as transition zones between indoors and outdoors are presented as potential places that offer citizens the opportunity to create spaces where they feel like being, staying, or meeting.

Through the analysis of several authors and the proposed case study, the concepts presented here highlight the benefits of integrating interior design into urban planning. The aim is to set out some basic actions to carry out this action in urban environments. This includes the joint study of access, pedestrianization, lobbies, and transition areas that facilitate the circulation of people and allow the development of activities indoors and outdoors.

This work has explored how the design of these intermediate spaces visually and physically connects the interior with the exterior and how the design of these spaces allows for the revitalization of deteriorated urban areas by dissolving the boundaries between interior and exterior.

In turn, sustainable development is promoted through the reuse of these spaces, which reduces the need for new construction and encourages the rational use of existing buildings. Furthermore, interior design, through its strategies, such as the integration of natural materials that provide warmth, the study of color, light, and shapes, as well as the tendency to re-naturalize spaces through interior gardens, makes it possible to recover these degraded areas of the city, encouraging social interaction and making them accessible to everyone. In short, it contributes to the well-being of citizens.

In short, the adaptation of these spaces through interior design is essential to create a sense of connection with the urban environment. A welcoming design revitalizes an urban area by providing comfortable, safe, and stimulating places for social gathering and activity, inviting citizens to use and enjoy it, thus reclaiming their city.

Future research should focus on long-term impacts and explore how this joint work in diverse urban contexts can further validate these results, to generate a more integrated and liveable urban experience.

IMAGES REFERENCES

Figure 1. *The anonymous city dweller. Sant Antoni-Joan Oliver Library, RCR Arquitectes.* Photograph by Eugeni Pons. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/624142/biblioteca-sant-antoni-joan-oliver-rcr-arquitectes>

Figure 2. *OMA's Kunsthall in Rotterdam, Rem Koolhaas.* Pataky, T. (2023). *OMA's Kunsthall in Rotterdam: Rem Koolhaas and the new Europe.* Park Books.

Figure 3. *Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain, Foster + Partners.* Photograph by Nigel Young. Retrieved from <https://www.metalocus.es/es/noticias/carre-dart-musee-dart-contemporain-por-foster-partners-cumple-30-anos>

Figure 4. *Apple Michigan Avenue, Chicago – Foster + Partners.* Photograph by Nigel Young. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/888559/tienda-apple-michigan-avenue-chicago-foster-plus-partners>

Figure 5. *Prada Store Soho NY, Rem Koolhaas - OMA.* Retrieved from <https://thewhitecave.wordpress.com/2014/04/22/prada-store-new-york-by-rem-koolhaas/>

Figure 6. *Sant Antoni-Joan Oliver Library, RCR Arquitectes.* Photograph by Eugeni Pons. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/624142/biblioteca-sant-antoni-joan-oliver-rcr-arquitectes>

Figure 7. Photographs of the current state of *San Pedro Nolasco Market*, located in the Morvedre neighborhood, Zaidia district, Valencia. *TFG final degree project: San Pedro Nolasco Market.* EASD Valencia. By Araceli Landete.

Figure 8. *TFG final degree project: San Pedro Nolasco Market.* EASD Valencia. By Araceli Landete.

REFERENCES

- Alberti, L. B. (1992). *De Re Aedificatoria*. Akal.
- Chinchilla, I. (2020). *La ciudad de los cuidados*. Catarata.
- García Pablos Ripoll, J. M. (2021). (De las) arquitecturas que hacen ciudad: Casos. Ediciones Asimétricas.
- Koolhaas, R. (1995). *S,M,L,XL* 010 Publishers
- Lynch, K. (1998). *La imagen de la ciudad*. Gustavo Gili.
- Manzini, E. (2023). *Habitar la proximidad*. Experimenta libros.
- Okakura, K. (2005). *El libro del té*. Kairós.
- Pataky, T. (2023). *OMA's Kunsthal in Rotterdam: Rem Koolhaas and the new Europe*. Park Books.
- Rice, C. (2016). *Interior urbanism: Architecture, John Portman and downtown America*. Continuum-3PL.

OTHERS REFERENCES

- Landete, A. (n.d.). *TFG final degree project: San Pedro Nolasco Market*. EASD Valencia.

WEBSITES REFERENCES

- ArchDaily. (n.d.). *Urbanismo interior: Las implicancias del espaciopúblico cubierto*. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/1011942/urbanismo-interior-las-implicancias-del-espacio-publico-cubierto>
- The White Cave. (2014, April 22). *Prada Store New York by Rem Koolhaas*. Retrieved from <https://thewhitecave.wordpress.com/2014/04/22/prada-store-new-york-by-rem-koolhaas/>
- ArchDaily. (n.d.). *Biblioteca Sant Antoni-Joan Oliver - RCR Arquitectes*. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/624142/biblioteca-sant-antoni-joan-oliver-rcr-arquitectes>
- Metalocus. (2023, October 15). *Carré d'Art – Musée d'Art Contemporain por Foster + Partners cumple 30 años*. Retrieved from <https://www.metalocus.es/es/noticias/carre-dart-musee-dart-contemporain-por-foster-partners-cumple-30-anos>
- ArchDaily. (n.d.). *Tienda Apple Michigan Avenue, Chicago - Foster + Partners*. Retrieved from <https://www.archdaily.cl/cl/888559/tienda-apple-michigan-avenue-chicago-foster-plus-partners>