Territory as Interior

Post-Carbon Landscapes of the Eume River

MIT 4.154 Architecture Design Studio

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Studio 3-415

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Description

Territory as Interior is an architectural design studio that connects ecologies and economies. The studio focuses on the Eume River Basin, a geographical area of high ecological value in the province of A Coruña, Galicia (Spain). This hydrological region follows the River Eume from its origin in the hills of the Serra do Xistral to its mouth in the Atlantic Ocean, at the village of Pontedeume. In turn, the river's tributaries define a broader region that also encompasses the Ría and city of Ferrol—a strategic settlement of military origin with a long industrial history rooted in its shipyards.

The Eume River Basin is an energy landscape. Since the mid-twentieth century on, the region has been fundamentally oriented toward energy production. Initially, the damning of the Eumer River in the 1950ss allowed for hydro-electric production. In the 1970s, coalmining in As Pontes led to the construction of As Pontes power plant. Since the 2000s, hundreds of wind turbines generate electricity This energetic landscape constitutes he fundamental geographic and productive framework upon which we will base our design propositions.

The area is currently undergoing an energetic and social transition. It has left behind the fossil fuel–based economies that dominated its industries over the past seventy years and embraced renewable energies production — primarily wind and hydro power. In particular, the town of As Pontes was home to Spain's largest coal-fired power plant until its decommissioning in 2023. This industry has left a deep imprint on the town's spatial, social, and cultural fabric. It is now time to explore possible alternatives to the role this industry historically played and to rethink the spaces it occupied.

The studio's goal is to develop alternative economic and productive sectors in the current post-carbon context. To achieve this, the class will engage in a process of design research. The first step will involve analyzing and mapping the territory's material resources and economic sectors. This initial research phase will have a strong collective, collaborative nature and will help define two key aspects of each student's project:

1. **Program:** Students will define a productive activity that can contribute to reactivating the region's economy.
2. **Construction:** Students will use their understanding of the area's material resources to define the building's construction system.

The outcome of this research will be interventions that condense territorial relationships into a single artifact — buildings whose program and construction contribute to rearticulating and revitalizing the territory.

The title Territory as Interior reflects a dual intention: on one hand, to create architectures that mobilize the internal resources of a geographical region; and on the other, to understand geographic and environmental systems through the experience of a building's interior space.

The Eume River Basin. Territory and territorial transitions

The Eume River Basin is a landscape of high cultural and ecological value that has been inhabited for millennia. The basin begins in the Serra do Xistral—a delicate peatland ecosystem that must be carefully preserved—and follows the river's course until it reaches the Atlantic Ocean. Surrounding the river lies the Fragas do Eume Natural Park, home to the last remaining example of original Atlantic Forest in Europe. Its best-preserved areas still exhibit the biodiversity and native species that once characterized European forests thousands of years ago.

Yet this natural landscape has also been profoundly shaped by human activity. A central element of these transformations has been energy production. The windmills that historically lined the river were almost entirely abandoned after the construction of a major dam and hydroelectric plant in the 1950s, which significantly altered the river's flow. Shortly afterward, the exploitation of the region's coal mines led to the construction of an initial power plant, followed in the 1970s by the As Pontes Power Plant. This facility — the largest and most productive in Spain — turned As Pontes into one of the Iberian Peninsula's most critical energy hubs.

In recent decades, the ecological and energetic landscape of the region has undergone profound change. The Natural Park has experienced the spread of invasive species — notably *Eucalyptus globulus* —which threaten the area's biodiversity. Meanwhile, the decommissioning of the As Pontes Power Plant in 2023, in alignment with Spain's 2030 decarbonization goals, has been accompanied by the installation of countless wind turbines across the region. Largely owned by Spain's major energy corporations, these wind farms have transformed the area into a clean-energy hub powered by both wind and water. As a result, Galicia—historically dependent on imported energy—now produces 153% of its own energy needs.

The transition from coal to renewable energy represents a positive step toward Spain's decarbonization targets and the global effort to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. However, it has also generated significant social and ecological tensions. The closure of the coal plant has deeply affected the local job market,

triggering demographic decline. It has also left behind a vast spatial footprint: buildings, roads, chimneys, cooling towers, and a massive open-pit mine, now transformed into an artificial lake—all of which call for reimagination and reuse. At the same time, the installation of wind turbines has often occurred with little regard for ecological values and has brought minimal economic benefit to local communities. In response, ecological collectives across Galicia have mobilized under the slogan: *"Windmills, yes — but not like this."*

Amid these broad ecological, economic, and energetic transitions, the studio seeks interventions that reactivate the region's economy and social fabric by building upon its natural, material, and energetic resources. How might a more socially and economically just energy transition take shape here? How can the spaces of the fossil-fuel industry become the spaces of decarbonization? How can fossil landscapes be repaired and transformed?

To explore these questions, the studio will conduct a careful analysis of the region's existing dynamics. We will examine the ecological shifts in the Natural Park, the large-scale deployment of wind infrastructure, and the spaces left behind by the power plant. We will also study the emergence of new economic sectors—such as the increasingly significant wood industry—and their potential to promote a more balanced and responsible use of natural resources.

The studio will engage in research in collaboration with local actors, designers, and decision-makers, as well as with our partners at Fundación RIA in Santiago de Compostela. Drawing on this collective knowledge, we will develop architectural propositions that aim to revitalize the Eume River Basin and contribute to a just and sustainable post-carbon future.

Territory and territorial design

A key goal of this studio is to explore how architecture acts as a tool for territorial articulation. Our objective is to see how specific buildings, with their associated programs and modes of construction, can help unfold new territorial logics aimed at producing an equilibrium between ecologies and economies.

This territorial project requires dealing with the different layers, or components, territory has. With that goal, we will approach territory through three main lenses, which have informed geographic and urban literature from the second half of the twentieth century on.

Strand 1. Territoriality. Shaping space through mobility and resource relations.

A first strand of literature approaches territory because of a previous process of *territoriality.* This is a position articulated in the late 1970s and 1980s by scholars such as Claude Raffestin, Robert Sacks or Edward Soja. The authors who developed the idea of territoriality understand that humans act as other animal species when they define and delimit the territories they occupy in relation to the resources that exist in them. In this sense, the organization of human territories is intrinsically linked first to the reproduction of life, and second to the structuring of economical systems.

In our case, this resource-based position can help us understand different forms of occupation of the region throughout its history, and the current transition from concentrated forms of resource extraction (coal) into a dispersed system of energy generation (wind mills)

Territoriality let us understand the relation between ecologies (as these inform which resources humans can use) and economies. Historically, this relation has been mediated by different modes of resource management which often had a collective nature. This communal form of resource management also informed the use of wood land. The *montes comunais* (common woods) were used for forestry and grazing and managed through shared decision-making processes.

Communal structures were reduced or eliminated during the Spanish dictatorship (1936 to 1975). They were substituted by a process of land and resource appropriation that continues nowadays. Some of the new land uses, from wind energy farms to monoculture forests do represent the current version of land appropriation, although in some cases they also establish positive agreements with owners and the *montes comunais*. In this sense, while the approach to territory through the lens of territoriality

seems to initially prioritize the economic prism, there's an inherently political question involving who owns the resources and how these are used and distributed. *Territory as Interior* invites you to explore how the territorial economies your building will reinforce can also promote collective systems of resource management and work outside of the logics of territorial and economic appropriation.

Strand 2. Territory as a cultural construct

A second strand of territorial literature develops the idea of territory as a cultural product or, in other words, as a transformation of the natural world into a human artifact. This position relies heavily on the learnings of human geography and anthropology. Its strongest representation in architecture were the variegated territorial discourses developed in Italy during the late 1960s and early 1970s by authors such as Saverio Muratori, Vittorio Gregotti, Aldo Rossi, Franco Purini, Claudio Borradori or Antonio Palermo. While there are notable differences between these authors, we can highlight here some shared aspects of their discourses.

- **Territory is an autonomous spatial category.**
  The notable urban growth European and North American cities experienced during the 1950s and 1960s, led Italian architects to develop the notion of *città-territorio,* (city-territory). This notion proposed that cities had become so big that they had to be considered as a territory—or rather, the territory had been converted into a city. In this sense, the category of territory was somehow equated to that of urbanization.

  The approach to territory developed by Muratori, Gregotti, or Rossi differed from this idea of *città-territorio*. They posited that architects had to consider "territory" in its own right, as an autonomous spatial category, different than city or urbanization. Territory hosted a diversity of elements. It contained cities together with other type of settlements. It included agricultural fields and a multitude of productive systems. It was not characterized only by buildings, but by natural elements and ecological systems. A territory was thus a specific cultural, spatial, and economic configuration or assemblage of all those aspects.

  While the idea of *città-territorio* was fundamentally linked to urban growth, that of territory was above all connected to planetarization. For Muratori, for instance, the fact that humans had already occupied the entire surface of the earth through multiple settlements and infrastructural systems, meant that architects had to start designing at a geographical scale. Gregotti and the team he

articulated for the special issue “The Form of Territory” of *Edilizia Moderna* argued that planetarization was also causing huge geographical transformations—from the deployment of massive agricultural areas to the transformation of climates—which could only be addressed by territorial action.

This position is crucial for us. Importantly, it led to important explorations in architectural design. Also, it advocated for the need to go beyond the problems and scales associated to cities that had constituted (and still do) the core of architectural production and argued that to address the ecological, environmental, energetic, or productive challenges derived from planetarization requires thinking and acting upon territorial scales. In this sense, this group of authors argued for the relevance of designing territories, not cities.

- **Territory as artifact and technology**
  All these authors sustained that human modification of geographical space and environmental conditions led to the definition of different types of territorial systems. These territorial systems could be understood as expression of human cultures and techniques. The notion of territorial interpretation we took from Muratori is perhaps the clearest expression of this approach. Each mode of territorial organization constitutes, in this view, a conscious interpretation, or elaboration of geographical space. This interpretation is spatialized through human artifacts: from systems of land division to modes of cultivation and irrigation, to infrastructures, to landmarks. Territory is here an architectural and technical question. Human artifacts structure the way territory works and our experience of it. They create systems of reference, means to orient ourselves in geographical space. Artifacts make geography human. In this regard, the work of Rossi, Muratori, or Gregotti is like the reticulation of geography by technical means described by Gilbert Simondon in his *On The Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.* Architecture and technical systems are both instruments to organize geographical space

  The fact that territory is a human organization of geographic space into different spatial structures bring the question about how to represent those spatial systems. Mapping became a crucial tool for Italian thinkers about territory, who posited the need to develop systems of cartographic representation that could bring together different natural and land made elements. Cartographies could thus include rivers and water bodies; irrigation and productive systems;

infrastructures and geographical features, to understand the relation settlements had with all of them.

This work of cartographic production was aimed at the identification of different territorial systems. Cartography showed their different spatial features, as well as the opportunities these provided for further development. The contrast between architects as Gregotti, Rossi or Muratori was not methodological (they all emphasized the value of cartography) but projective. Whereas for Muratori, cartographies could help us understand the stable dimensions of territory and factor a project of preservation, for Gregotti or Rossi, they allowed to understand temporal evolution of a territory, and the possibilities it offered for further transformation.

This approach to territory will inform our work. *Territory as Interior* will begin with a mapping exercise, which will connect the geographical features of the Eume River to the different resources this territory provides. While the main object here is to map resources, we will also pay attention to the spatial structures and technologies that are at play in the region.

- **Territory is a space of transformation.**

  Cartographic registers help unveil the temporal dimension of spatial structuring. They allow us to understand the different configurations a territory has had over time, and what propelled the transition between successive territorial models. Historic cartographies may reveal territorial invariants (features that remain constant, geographical elements that maintain a structuring presence, or systems of land division that remain hidden under changing architectural or urban configurations). But cartographies also reveal those elements that drastically changed how a territory worked and even its extents and relations. The introduction of novel infrastructural, energetic, or technical systems drastically alters previous territorial organizations. Human artifacts thus act as triggers for potential transformations, creating new systems and new scales of spatial relations. For example, the recent implementation of wind farms responds to national energy demands and is linked to global needs of decarbonization, energy transition, and fight against anthropogenic climate change. In this sense, the wind energy system operates at a scale that exceeds the Eume. This fact raises questions about how to ground wind farms in the area's specific geography, and about how to make visible the new geographic scales of which the Eume now participates. Historically, buildings as fish

markets, lighthouses or churches, helped to define systems of territorial relations. *Territory as Interior* investigates how the spatialization of new economic sectors can help us comprehend the territorial relations of which they participate.

Strand 3. Territory as a political construct

The last theoretical understanding of territory is perhaps the less explicitly architectural. It consists in the understanding of territory as a politically configured space, where a certain type of power exerts its political sovereignty. This idea has been recently, and successfully, summarized by Stuart Elden's definition of territory as a "political technology," but it builds upon previous formulations by German political theorist Carl Schmitt, French geographer Jean Gottman, or philosopher Michel Foucault. All these thinkers focus on the relation between the control of the land and the construction of political orders.

In this light, the structuring of a territory is enabled by the convergence of politico-legal and spatial mechanisms. This approach to territory seeks producing clear spatial delimitations and divisions, so that political power can be exercised "monopolistically" on a certain area, and on those communities living in it. Territory appears here as the spatial expression of power, which is then distributed at different scales. Administrative subdivisions from state, to region, to municipality corresponds to this political understanding of territory.

This last angle opens a question about the role architecture plays in helping articulate alternative scales of political organization. The traditional structure of settlement in Galicia was divided in *bisbarras* (Parishes). Currently, there is a municipal subdivision in small towns that is oblivious to the continuity of settlement, infrastructures, and productive uses. This municipal subdivision is ill-suited for managing the urban process, and for addressing the new energetic and productive needs derived from global demands of decarbonization or materials. By reassociating buildings and systems of production, *Territory as Interior* seeks to investigate which what themes and scales should be politically articulated in the Eume River Basin. Can the Basin constitute a new political unit?

Internalities: Architectures for Territorial Equilibrium. Agenda of the Spanish Pavilion at the 19th Venice Architecture Biennale

This studio is linked to the agenda of the Territorial Design Lab and of *Internalities*, the Spanish Pavilion at the 19th Venice Architecture Biennale. *Internalities* explores how architects can (and should) limit the negative, environmental "externalities" often associated to the construction process. This requires articulating robust territorial ecosystems of production, capable of balancing the relationships between ecologies and economies. We call these territorial ecosystems internalities. Their emergence requires acting upon five key questions: 1)materials, 2)energy, 3)labor, 4)residues, and 5)emissions.

Internalizing Materials urges us to see how decarbonization involves re-evaluating and utilizing locally sourced, regenerative materials with a low ecological footprint, often derived from nearby regional production ecosystems. This is the aspect where the resource and mobility mapping of the Eume intervenes more directly.

Considering Energies requires addressing the various scales of the energy transition—from the building as a site of both production and consumption, to the territory as a key operational landscape in reducing historical energy dependence. The Eume is now immersed on a strong process of decarbonization, which should be reinforced at the architectural scale.

The internalization of Labor consists in taking advantage of the work cultures that use resources from the surrounding territory. By addressing the labor question, we can consider how to use or recuperate the resources of a given territory, but also how the use of those resources can lead towards alternative modes of labor organization.

The goal of working with Residues is to challenge the usual levels of waste production and by recovering, recirculating, and reusing discarded materials to extend their life cycle. In the context of the studio, this axis opens a question about the use of the existing building and the small infrastructures associated to it.

Finally, Emissions urges us to consider the entire CO2 cycle—from operational emissions associated with the daily operation of a building to emissions generated during extraction, manufacturing, construction, and demolition processes.

Fundacion RIA

Territory as Interior is the second iteration of a collaboration with Fundacion RIA, an initiative by architect David Chipperfield aimed at developing a sustainable territorial culture in Galicia. Fundación RIA also approaches the convergence between economies and ecologies this studio explores. Their aim is "to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute towards quality of life beyond conventional economic assessments such as GDP, " thus exploring how Galicia "can set a European benchmark for sustainable development." In this sense, the Fundacion is interested in an alternative approach to economics.

The studio will benefit from this collaboration throughout the entire term. The project is a joint initiative with RIA, which will conduct research in parallel to the studio. The work will be a collective effort based on the interchange of the knowledge each of us generates.

Deliverables. *Adjustments to scales may be done during the term.

Our intention is to develop the argument of Territory as Interior through a series of design documents.

Site model. Scale 1/500. This is a collective model, which will allow us to test each student's proposal at an urban scale and present the projects as an integrated proposal for the area.

Site plan. Scale 1/500. This is a collective document which will allow us presenting the projects as an integrated proposal for the area.

Resource and programmatic mapping /diagramming of the Eume River Basin. Scale TBD. This is an individual document that will reflect the materials and systems you are engaging with. It will be the base for your building's program and building technologies.,

Building plans, sections, elevations. Scale 1/200. These are individual documents about your building.

Construction and Interior models. Scale 1/50. These are individual documents explaining the materials and construction systems you are using in the project, and thus the resources you are internalizing. The models should reflect the building interior and capture the most significant areas of the building.

Model photographs. They will allow you to depict the interior's environmental conditions.

Schedule

PART I: DESIGN RESEARCH

	Week 1. Introduction.
Th February 5	Introduction to the studio. Questions. Beginning of research phase and resource and program mapping.
	Week 2. Design Research. Territorial internalities.
Tu February 10	Begins collective site model and plan. Individual development of resource and program mapping.
Fr February 13	Discuss approaches to the site (collective) and first programmatic and material ideas and design (individual)
	Week 3. Design Research. Territorial internalities.
Tu February 17	Finish site plan and model.
Fr February 20	Discuss approaches to the site (collective) and first programmatic and material ideas and design (individual). Begin quantification
	Week 4 Design Research. Territorial internalities.
Tu February 24	Conclude resource and program mapping.
Fr February 27	Site strategies concluded (1/500). Preliminary building plans scale 1/200. First approach to construction systems.

PART II: SITE & BUILDING

	Week 5. Site & Building. Preliminary design
Tu March 3	Building design development scale 1/200.
Fr March 6	**External review 1.** Present building design development.
	Week 6. Site & Building. Preliminary design
Tu March 10	Building design development scale 1/200. Model explorations 1/500.
Fr March 13	Building design development scale 1/200. Model explorations 1/500.

Week 7. Site & Building. Preliminary design conclusion

Tu March 17	Building design development scale 1/200. Model explorations 1/500.
Fr March 20	Internal mid-term review. Building plans & sections 1/200. Model & site 1/500.

Week 8. March 21 to March 28. Studio trip to Galicia.

PART III: BUILDING SYSTEMS

Week 9. Building Systems Design

Tu March 31	Design re-evaluation after visit.
Fr April 3	Development of construction system. 1/100 to 1/50 studies.

Week 10. Building Systems Design

Tu April 7	Development of construction system. 1/100 to 1/50 studies.
Fr April 10	Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.

PART IV: TERRITORY AS INTERIOR

Week 11. Design plans and construction

Tu April 14	Interior. Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.
Fr April 17	Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.

Week 12. Design plans and construction

Tu April 21	Interior. Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.
Fr April 24	Review. Plans scale 1/200. Updated site model 1/500. Interior models 1/50.

Week 13. Design plans and construction

Tu April 28	Interior. Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.
Fr May 1	Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.

	Review with David Chipperfield
	Week 14. Design plans and construction
Tu May 5	Interior. Updated site plan, plan, section, construction model
Fr May 8	Interior. Revise plans and sections considering construction systems.
	Week 15. Final review
Mo May 11	Final review

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The lands which MIT occupies are the traditional unceded territories of the Wampanoag Nation and the Massachusett Peoples. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, as well as the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated. Beyond the stolen territory which we physically occupy, MIT has long profited from the sale of federal lands granted by the Morrill Act, territories stolen from 82 Tribes including the Greater and Little Osage, Chippewa, and Omaha Peoples. As we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous people connected to this land from time immemorial, we seek to Indigenize our institution and the field of planning, offer Space, and leave Indigenous peoples in more empowered positions.

Inclusive Class and Classroom

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.

Special Accommodations

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. If you have a disability and are not planning to use accommodations, it is still recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with their services and resources. Please visit the DAS website for contact information. If you have already been approved for accommodations, class staff are ready to assist with implementation. Please inform Professor Ryan at bdr@mit.edu who will oversee accommodation implementation for this course.

Grading definition

A. Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B. Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C. Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F. Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

NE. No record will appear on the external transcript.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently. Plagiarism is a major academic offense. Read: http://integrity.mit.edu.

Writing and Communication Resources

The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. All are all are published scholars and writers. The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing classroom presentations & conference talks as well as designing slides). No matter what department or discipline you are in, the WCC helps you think your way more deeply into your topic, helps you see new implications in your data, research, and ideas. The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from To register with our online scheduler and to make appointments, go to https://mit.mywconline.com/. To access the WCC's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/. Check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours and available appointments.

Student Performance Criteria. NAAB

Realm A: Critical Thinking and Representation

• A1. Communication Skills: Ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively• A2. Design Thinking Skills: Ability to raise clear and precise questions, use abstract ideas to interpret information, consider diverse points of view, reach well-reasoned conclusions, and test alternative outcomes against relevant criteria and standards.• A3. Visual Communication Skills: Ability to use appropriate representational media, such as traditional graphic and digital technology skills, to convey essential formal elements at each stage of the programming and design process.• A5. Investigative Skills: Ability to gather, assess, record, apply, and comparatively evaluate relevant information within architectural coursework and design processes.

Communication with the instructor

I will reply to your emails promptly, usually within 24-48 hours, excluding weekends. Office hours are by email appointment.

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Galicia and Eume River

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Fundacion Ria. Home - Fundación RIA