Whilst buildings represent the ultimate material synthesis of the forces that impinge on their production, their study is seldom carried out in such a way as to connect, intellectually, the various decisional domains or the specific interests and knowledge areas underlying them. We tend to analyse building artifacts and building results from particular vantage points that, depending on one’s disciplinary allegiances, may have to do with urban function, representational power, cultural significance, compositional strategies, technological choices, technical performance, procurement methods, cost, value in use, life cycles, etcetera.

But can a disciplinary debate about buildings be defined that feeds upon the integration of their social, technological, cultural and economic dimensions? Can we set up a “technical” discussion about the built environment that acquires sophistication by bringing these dimensions together rather than by separating them into strands of specialised expertise and scholarship? Importantly, if we did that, could the meaning of architecture be expanded so as to encompass the design or the management of the broad social structure eventually entrusted with the creation and care of the urban fabric?

The subject seeks a response to these questions by analysing, in detail, the multiple characteristics of a group of selected buildings conceived for and constructed in different contexts. Through such analysis, a conceptual framework will emerge to enable students to identify, represent, and eventually learn to intervene on, the possible forms of “value” generated by specific building experiences.