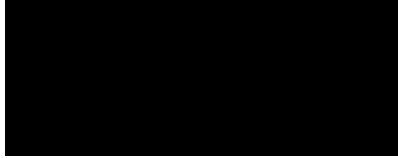


Laia Gemma García Fernández, PhD



LANGUAGES

Spanish - Mother Tongue
English - Advanced (C2)
Italian - Advanced (C2)
Catalan - Fluent (C1)
Swahili - Beginner (A2)

COMPUTER SKILLS

Nvivo (average)
Google Workshspace (advanced)
Autocad (advanced)
Adobe Package (advanced)
Microsoft Office Package (advanced)
Slack (advanced)

EDUCATION

Oct 2019-April 2024 **PhD (Cum Laude) IDAUP-International PhD Programme in Architecture & Urban Planning, XXXIV Cycle, Università degli Studi di Ferrara (IT)**

Doctoral thesis entitled 'Contextual Building Materials: Unfolding Meaning-making Dynamics and Communities' Identities Towards the Production of an Ecologically Responsible Built Environment'. Research Curriculum: ICAR-12 Architecture: Design Theories, Methods and Sustainable Construction.

September 2019-2020 **MSc (Distinction) 'Building and Urban Design in Development', The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London**

With a dissertation entitled 'Analysing Vernacular building traditions, Socio-Cultural Barriers and Sustainable Resources in Sedentary Maasai Communities'.

September 2015-2018 **MArch in Architecture and Urban Planning at Università Degli Studi di Ferrara**

Final Design thesis entitled 'Old Habits, New Ideas: Co-Design, Construction and Management of a Health Centre in Rural Tanzania'. Thesis final mark: 8/8.

September 2011-2014 **Degree in Architecture and Urban Planning from the School of Architecture at Granada University.**

Enrolled in Architecture degree in Universidad de Granada (Span) for three years before transferring the academic expedient to Ferrara University.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

April 2025-Ongoing **Expert in Resilience and Climate Adaptation at ICLEI European Secretariat**

Lead expert supporting European cities and regions in advancing climate adaptation and resilience through Horizon Europe projects. I am currently the Scientific Coordinator of the EU-Horizon Fair Future project which focuses on the co-design of adaptation measures looking at vulnerable communities. Besides that, I design and apply methodological frameworks to evaluate adaptation effectiveness, manage multi-stakeholder work packages, and strengthen governance processes with a focus on socio-environmental justice. My work bridges research, practice and policymaking by engaging local authorities, civil society, and EU institutions in co-creating strategies for climate-resilient urban development. I also contribute to ICLEI's policy advocacy on adaptation and nature-based solutions, and to securing new projects through proposal development and acquisition.

June 2021-May 2025 **Graduate Research Assistant at the 'Building and Urban Design in Development' MSc, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit University College London**

Supported teaching and research through the development of course materials, studio tutorials, and dissertation supervision, while also playing a central role in student mentorship and pastoral care. Coordinated conference series, public events, and academic workshops, as well as walking tours and design studios, fostering dialogue between academia, practice, and communities. This role sharpened my expertise in research dissemination, knowledge exchange, and participatory pedagogies within urban and development studies.

November 2024 **International Elections Observer for National Elections in Somaliland, UCL Consultancy**

Monitoring the voting and counting processes to ensure transparency, fairness, and adherence to democratic standards. The role included reporting on any irregularities and verifying that election procedures are conducted according to Somaliland's electoral laws and international guidelines. A post-elections report was written by the team, showcasing the analytical results of the elections' process.

2019-Ongoing **Co-Founder of '[Un Refugio Colectivo](#)'**

Interdisciplinary collective that fosters spatial interventions by using an action-research methodology. The main goal is to promote urban design projects that trigger social and environmental change using locally-sourced building materials and by employing local workforces. Projects and initiatives have included: The design and collaborative construction of improved and ecologically-suitable pit latrines in rural Tanzania, a playground using recycling materials in a primary school in the same area and the participatory design and construction of a community women centre and shelter house for *Fundación Anabella* in Bafatá, Guiné Bissau.

2018-2020 **Architect and Project Manager at C-re-aid NGO. Moshi, Tanzania**

Managed the participatory design and construction of rural public infrastructures by using innovative and locally-sourced building materials. Combined project management, citizen involvement, and an approach to contextual strategies to advance equitable access to healthcare and socio-environmental justice.

ACADEMIC & TEACHING EXPERIENCE

September 2023 -June 2024 **Lecturer in Participatory Processes in Urban Design, Building and Urban Design in Development MSc, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL**

The module aims to locate contemporary urban design practice in the evolving dynamic of urbanization, capitalism and democracy. Teaching of a semester module focuses on the intersection between Spatial Justice and Urban Participatory Design. Cohort size: 25 students.

June 2023-September 2025 **MSc Dissertation Supervision at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL**

Number of final dissertations supervised: 10. The research focus of MSc dissertations has ranged from housing justice, feminist Citizenship, socio-ecological implications of the built environment in climate change and decolonial design practices. I have also acted as second marker for over 15 dissertations.

September 2021-2023 **Fellow Lecturer at the Design Studio “Spatial Design Practice” Led by Prof. Catalina Ortíz, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL, London**

The module teaches contemporary urban challenges, investigated and tackling them through a new radical mode of design research, putting the emphasis on the collective, active and trans-disciplinary character of producing knowledge and space in contested contexts. I have been involved in the studio pedagogical structure, teaching and providing tutorials for studio-based projects.

Feb-July 2019 **Module tutor at the Laboratory of Technology II, 4th year at the School of Architecture, Università Degli Studi di Ferrara (IT)**

Student’s project involved the planning and design of a dismissed industrial area of Ferrara, proposing its urban regeneration through ecological building strategies and the construction of a cultural centre by using sustainable building materials.

April 2018-2019 **Coordinator of the ‘[I & II Earth Architecture Workshop](#)’. Granada School of Architecture, UGR (SP)**

Theoretical Workshop + hands-on experience in Tanzania to develop the design and construction of a public toilet using traditional building materials. The workshop aimed to raise awareness about the key role of built projects in promoting equitable access to public infrastructures, fostering circular economy and environmental sustainability.

RESEARCH PROJECTS & FIELDWORK

Jan 2024-June 2025 **Collaborator for the Research Project ‘[Urban Struggle in São Paulo: Occupations as Radical Spaces of Possibilities](#)’**

Investigating notions on citizenship and the right to housing with MSTC (Movimento Sem-teto do Centro) as part of the BUDD’s MSc Overseas Practice Engagement. The research project engages with local grassroots organisations and community leaders under the principle of Partnerships with Equivalence. Fieldwork was carried out in April-May 2024 in São Paulo (Brazil).

February 2023-Ongoing **Research Fellowship in collaboration with Red Sea Foundation (Somaliland), Berbera Planning Authorities and The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (UCL)**

Development of a Policy Brief with the aim of fostering financially viable and resilient building strategies able to cope with the effects of the climate crisis in the Horn of Africa. The case of

Berbera (Somaliland). The research has involved a two months' fieldwork in Berbera between February 2023 and April 2024.

Sept 2019-June 2023 Collaborator for the Research [Project 'Weaving Gendered \(Hi\)stories of Territorial Reclamation in Moravia'](#), Medellín (Colombia)

Developed under a learning alliance framework, the research project aimed at highlighting processes of self-construction led by the women in the community, highlighting everyday life practices as living heritage. Fieldwork was carried out in Medellín between the months of April and May 2023, where I supervised a group of students and community members working under the cluster of Ecological Reparations.

Oct 2020-June 2022 Research Report on Sustainable Building Strategies through Women's Participation in Bafatá (Guinea Bissau)

The research was conducted through fieldwork observation and workshops for Fundación Anabella. The aim was to propose a social, economic and environmentally sustainable design and management for the project: ['Construction of a Women shelter House in Guinea Bissau'](#). Working within a multidisciplinary team involving collaboration with Arup Spain, the Centre for International Cooperation of Andalucía Region (SP) and local grassroots organisations.

Feb-May 2021 Ethnographic Fieldwork Research following the premises of Grounded Theory as part of the Doctoral Research

Collection of quantitative and qualitative data in two different Maasai settlements in Northern Tanzania, developing a comparative case study to systematically assess the use of natural resources and the loss of vernacular knowledge for construction in the Savannah rural context.

Feb-Sept 2020 Research Fellow at the [DeCID Project](#): Co-designing built interventions with children affected by displacement

Under the topic 'What are the impacts of choosing local material in design-build development projects?' as part of the DPU Dissertation Fellowship Programme. Dissertation developed in collaboration with Catalytic Action NGO.

June 2018- Sept 2019 Participatory Action Research & Community Engagement in Maasai Settlement (Tanzania)

The 'engagement' phase of the PhD research involved living with a local family for over a year in a remote Maasai village, learning from their relation to home and their building materials, while working on the construction of a pilot project using alternative sustainable materials.

March-May 2017 Earthen Bricks Production- Fieldwork Research in partnership with C-re-a.i.d. NGO, Moshi (Tanzania)

Analysis of appropriateness and soil testing study for the production of Compressed Stabilised Earth Blocks (CSEB) to be used in the development of construction projects with Indigenous Maasai Communities.

PUBLICATIONS

Research Articles

December 2025 **AI for Spatial Mapping and Analysis: GeoAI Toolkit for Urban Planners**. *UN-Habitat Report* (co-author). Published: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/12/ai_for_spatial_mapping_and_analysis.pdf

July 2025 **Dwelling in Context: Unfolding Meaning-Making Dynamics and Socio-Ecological Tensions in Homing Practices.** 5th ISA Forum of Sociology, RC43: Revisiting the Housing Question as a Social-Ecological Question. Submitted

December 2025 **Occupations as Spaces of Radical Possibilities. Making Hope Matter.** Authors: Giovanna Astolfo, Laia García, Giorgio Talocci and Dina Mneimneh. UAA 2025, International Conference on Urban Affairs. Vancouver, Canada. Accepted Abstract

August 2023 **Framing a counter-city: The story of Sheffield Otherwise.** Authors: Catalina Ortiz, Natalia Villamizar, Laia Garcia and Giorgio Talocci. *Elsevier Journal. Cities* 142 (2023). Access to the paper: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104533>

October 2022 **Toward the Production of Contextual Built Environments: Unfolding Building Materials' Sociocultural Meanings in a Maasai Community.** *Journal of Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism*, (3), 361-374. Access to the paper: <https://doi.org/10.51303/jtbau.vi3.610>

September 2021 **Socio-Cultural Barriers and Sustainable Building Materials in Sedentary Maasai Communities.** Access to the paper: <https://decid.co.uk/output/decid-paper-3/>. DeCID Paper n.3

September 2020 **'The potential of urban ecotones as a tool to build better cities: The case study of Moshi (Tanzania)'. IV Congreso ISUF-H Barcelona 2020.** Access to the paper: <https://doi.org/10.51303/jtbau.vi3.610>

Book Chapters

March 2026 (in the process of publishing) **'Building Contexts, Shaping Behaviours: How Community-Driven Public Infrastructures Transform Everyday Practices of City Making'.** For the edited volume 'All Bits Count: The Value of Incremental Change in Advancing Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Cities'. Springer Nature.

December 2025 (Forthcoming) **'Old habits, New Ideas: A dispensary for Maji Moto'** ENVIRONMENTALize Book: 21 Cities in hot climate in the Global South. 24 Design projects, 7 Essays.

October 2019 **Book chapter 'Actions for sustainable development: A strategy for rural growth in Dropull municipality through the promotion of local resources for building and construction'** Polis University Press. Tirana (AL). DOI: 10.37199/o41006118, Polis Press. Access to the chapter: <https://press.universitepolis.edu.al/book/>

Website Articles

December 2020 **"How small changes can make a big impact in achieving sustainable sanitation"** Written for the IIED Blog. Access to the article: <https://www.iied.org/how-small-changes-can-make-big-impact-achieving-sustainable-sanitation>

November 2020 **'Maasai: The long journey from nomadism to sedentary lifestyle'** Paralelo 70 Foundation Magazine. Access to the article: https://issuu.com/kissthemountain/docs/p70_magazine_1/112

September 2017 Article publication 'Center for Women in Maasai Village' Design Project. Archdaily and Plataforma Arquitectura (ENG & SPA). Access to the article: https://www.archdaily.com/869092/center-for-women-in-masai-c-re-aid?ad_medium=gallery

PARTICIPATION IN LECTURES, CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

Guest Lectures

February 2026 Guest Lecture on Environmental Justice at the Engage Design Course - Development Planning Unit, UCL.

Presentation of the Fair Future EU-funded project including a perspective into Justice dimensions, specially Environmental justice and its link to recognition, procedural and distributional Justice.

November 2025 Guest Lecture on Participatory Urban Greening in Cities – Development Planning Unit, UCL

Delivered a session for 47 students on Financialisation of Adaptation in the context of Europe and presented the case study of the EU Funded Project Commit2Green

September 2025 Webinar presentation for [PilotGreen Project](#)- LAB University of Applied Science

PilotGreen explores how innovative green infrastructure pilots are shaping the future of sustainable urban development. The Commit2Green Research Project was presented for the webinar, with an introduction on ICLEI's Vision and Action Framework.

March 2024 Faculty Conference at College of Architecture, Design and Construction, Auburn University, Alabama, US.

Delivered a presentation for faculty members under the umbrella of events organised by Rural Studio, Auburn University. The lecture showcased my work in the past 5 years working with underrepresented communities to deliver ecological and financially viable housing solutions.

February 2024 Guest Lecture at the Red Sea Foundation (Hargeysa, Somaliland)

Under the topic of 'Dwelling Berbera's Heritage', the guest lecture presented the findings of the Research fellowship I had been conducting in Berbera for the past few months, highlighting the research methodology and preliminary insights about housing climate strategies in the Horn of Africa.

January 2023 Guest Lecture at the International MSc in Urban Design at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)

Online lecture together with colleague Natalia Villamizar to present the Sheffield Otherwise Research Project and the BUDD perspective on Southern Urbanism.

December 2022 and 2023 Guest lecture at the Participatory Processes course within the Building and Urban Design in Development Programme, DPU

In-person lecture around ethical issues of fieldwork, with a specific focus on positionality and reflexivity related with my PhD action-oriented research.

July 2022 **Guest lecture at the Course: “Maps of Self-Construction in Perú” under the Bachelor degree of Architecture at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)**

Online lecture to present the PhD Research: Contextual Building Materials, with a focus on its theoretical framework and the use of qualitative methodologies.

April 2021 **Guest Speaker at the ICHAB Master Programme at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM)**

Entitled “Collective Learnings: Between Tradition and Innovation” with another URC member to expose our practice in the context of northern Tanzania.

January 2021 **Guest Speaker at the “Intercultural Design” MSc Course at the Offenbach Design University, Germany**

Online lecture given to course students showcasing the work of Un Refugio Colectivo in Tanzania.

Conferences and Workshops

August 2025 **Hargeysa International Book Fair - Panel Discussion and Presentation**

Within the panel “Built Heritage, Archaeological Evidence & Historical Developments” presented Dwelling Berbera’s Heritage: The potential of Berbera’s Housing Typologies to Inform Local Adaptative Climate Strategies

June 2024 **Belfast 22nd N-AERUS Conference: Thinking Urbanisation from the Ground: Innovations in Governance, Policy and Place-Making in the Global South - Panel Speaker**

Participatory-led built prototypes and their relevance to tackling ecological degradation through material innovation in rural Maasai settlements in northern Tanzania

November 2023 **Participation in the PhD Seminar: Critically Fit, as part of the Research Programme of RIOT, EPF Laussane.**

The aim of this course was to prompt and discuss how performative, critical, and contemporary research in architecture is articulated – its structure and methodology within dissertations.

November 2023 **Guest speaker at the Windsor Workshop, DPU (UCL)**

Presentation of the research project conducted in Berbera (Somaliland) as part of my ongoing Research Fellowship.

February 2021 **Organiser of the I Conference Series “Building For The Real World” at the Polytechnic University of Catalunya**

A conference series of three webinars with international speakers, on issues of participation and design, sustainable construction and the role of education in architecture. Part of the Un Refugio Colectivo initiatives and funded by the Cooperation Centre at UPC.

September 2020 **Panel Speaker at the IV International Congress ISUF-H Barcelona 2020**

Presenting the research paper “The potential of urban ecotones to build better cities” published in the same issue.

April 2019 **6th Forum LaFargeHolcim Foundation: Re-materializing construction**

Held in Cairo from the 6th to the 8th of April 2019, discussing the future of sustainable construction and planning.

March 2019 Workshop attendance 'Innovative doctoral training strategies for excellence in outcomes'. University of Ferrara (IT)

As part of the compulsory PhD workshops attended through my doctoral programme.

February 2019 Workshop attendance 'Rurban sequences. Inquiries on Dropull's states of liminality'. Polis University, Tirana, (AL)

From the 12th to the 20th of February as part of the compulsory workshops of the Doctoral Programme at the Polis University, Tirana.

AWARDS

March 2023 1st Award [INTBAU Architecture Challenge](#): Advancing Local Traditions for Sustainability.

Women's Shelter House Project in Bafatá, Guiné-Bissau. Un Refugio Colectivo.

October 2021 Fellow at the Norman Foster Foundation's First Sustainability Workshop, Madrid.

Awarded as a Norman Foster Foundation Fellow to attend the International Workshop during a week at the NFF Headquarters in Madrid.

VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMMES

Sept-Oct 2024 Volunteer at the 'Manifesta: European Nomadic Biennale of Architecture' in Barcelona.

Contributed for two weeks at the opening of historical venues such as Casa Gomís in El Prat de Llobregat, touring visitors around the artistic installations and architecture of the location.

June-Sept 2016 Groundwork Project at C-re-aid NGO, Arusha Chini (Tanzania)

Conducting preliminary research + leading the participatory design and building of a Women Centre, working and living in a remote Maasai Village in Northern Tanzania.