

Abigail Johnson (Architecture) – Florence, December 2014

My trip to Florence was a trip organised by the studio tutors within the department to provide an opportunity to study the city in relation to my design studio project. My design portfolio is worth 60% of the year's marks, and consists of a year-long project focused on the design of a housing development in central London. The housing project is developed through city massing as well as the design of individual housing units and components.

Our trip to Florence was focused on studying three main aspects of the city- the piazza, the palazzo and the street. We visited the palazzi (large family town houses) that were built from the medieval period onwards, studying and sketching spaces, dimensions, sequences and the relationship with the rest of the city. The Medici family structured the city through construction, and particularly on the importance of the famous Duomo and the Medici Palazzo. Each family Loggia was an important mediation between the private home and the realm of the public city, opening up the ground floor for animals, selling goods, exchanges and events. They formed the public level, and were even sometimes extracted from the main building to create a small piazza (square) that belonged to both the family and the city.

The sequence of piazze were of particular importance to religion, education, or other institutions such as Ospedale degli Innocenti (the first orphanage in the world). Formation of these spaces informs the streets and structure of the city. An important street both in modern times and historically is Via Tornabuoni- a street of many palazzi- and a precedent that I had been studying for weeks prior to my visit. I have been studying both London and European precedents of streets as part of my studio work, creating drawings and models of the formation of the street in order to inform my own design work.

The trip was a very useful opportunity to study a European city in comparison to London precedents, in order to inform my design decisions through historical context and existing precedents.