The sight of people utilizing food kitchens in the United States especially in cities such as San Francisco and Portland is a welcome occurrence. In Europe and particularly Barcelona, a city focused on public services and city branding, the sight is unimaginable. The 22@ information activities district in Barcelona, despite meeting expectations to attract businesses since 2000, remains challenged to develop its own community identity amidst gentrification and competing with the traditional identity of the adjacent area of Poblenou. What development growth is so accelerated to override emergent culture or too slow to stagnate participation? Real estate values grew 20% annually for over a decade and have yet to see a significant correction. Unemployment has reached 25% and continues to climb. The likelihood of a Catalan referendum for national sovereignty grows with each day. All of these trends occur while the national government postpones an inevitable request for EU assistance and the austerity measures that will follow. What if the crisis has only begun?

The studio will design a food kitchen installation in the 22@ Barcelona in parallel with a site chosen in an EcoDistrict in Portland, Oregon. Ideas of Smart City technology will ‘attach’ to the living context of the information activities areas of both cities. The studio will investigate how media may empower participation and the communication of values within a district, neighborhood and urban room from the bottom up. Principles and digital media of bottom-up urban design will be explored at the scale of analytical tools and installation scale interventions using digital media. Interaction with a parallel studio at the Institute of Advanced Architecture of Catalunya (IaaC) may be possible to assist students with understandings of place and culture. The studio will utilize methods of parametric design, material experience and cultural events.

The studio effort will be part of a larger effort leading to a possible real-world installation in 22@ deployed in collaboration with IaaC, a local non-profit organization and the City of Barcelona. A visit to Barcelona immediately before the winter 2013 term may be occur via subsidized support from an Architecture Department Studio Enhancement Award. The studio will meet with City of Barcelona representatives, experience Catalan culture and urban life, visit the site and meet colleagues from IaaC. Students will engage the real-world challenges of public service and capital driven forces in the built environment of Barcelona.

“Context stinks,” as Koolhaas so famously said. But it stinks only because it stays in place too long and ends up rotting. Context would not stink so much if we could see that it, too, moves along and flows just as buildings do. What is a context in flight?  
Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva,  Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move