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An examination of reflections of mainstream and architectural approaches in architectural design studios

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Abstract

This study concentrates on the experiences acquired in the architectural design studios which are a prominent part of the architectural education, and evaluates also the effects the space where the project is being put to life has on an architectural product. In this sense, this study includes mainstream design approaches, based on the idea that an inter-dependence is mandatory between space, context and the architectural outcome; and also contrarian ones which criticizes this interaction. This paper aims to weigh the potential that these two different approaches discover whilst interacting with space against the conceptualization and spatialisation methods through the design process. In order to do so, the study advances in two separate stages: The first stage develops a discussion of the mainstream design approaches, which are based on the *a priori* and urgent interaction of the architectural product with the space and context, and evaluates also the architectural discourses opposing these ideas. The second section has chosen to dissect two different architectural design studio experiences of Bomonti [B] and Seyrantepe [S], (Districts located both in Istanbul) based on the context set forth in the first section. Thus in this manner, six student studies with architectural products relating to different districts of Istanbul have been chosen from these design studios and they have been evaluated on the basis of interaction they have implemented with space. The conclusion of the study is that the architectural design process incorporates multiple potentials to the architectural understanding, and that the education given in the architectural design studios carries an important responsibility in the development of the design approaches. In this sense, as an independent platform, the architectural education is seen as a valuable laboratory, which has the ability to expose the embedded potentials of space and its design.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, the concept of space has been the subject of various discussions in different disciplines, being primarily philosophy. In fact, it is possible to state that the breaking points in this field overlap the critical breaking points in the history of thought. Thus, defining this concept by today's concepts is vital in order to comprehend the present-day design approaches. However, today's slippery ground leads to a much greater diversification of the discourses relating to space, and this paves the way for the emergence of very different approaches.

This study concentrates on the experiences acquired in the architectural design studios which are a prominent part of the architectural education, and evaluates the different design approaches towards the properties of the space where the project is being put to life. In this sense, in addition to the 'mainstream' design approaches, based on the idea that interdependence is mandatory between space, context and the architectural outcome; the 'contrarian' designs, which take a critical stance against this interaction are also included in the study.

This paper, which aims to weigh the potentials that these two different approaches discover whilst interacting with space and the conceptualization and spatialisation methods through the design process, advances in two separate stages. In the first stage, a discussion of the mainstream design approaches, which are based on the probable and urgent interaction of the architectural product with the space and context is developed; and also the architectural discourses opposing these ideas are mentioned. In the second stage, on the other hand, two architectural design studio experiences carried out at different times in two separate working areas in Istanbul – Bomonti and Seyrantepe – are tried to be dissected on the basis of the context set forth in the first stage.

2. Mainstream and Opposition¹ in Architecture

As many disciplines today, architecture has undergone a series of rapid transformations. Concepts such as 'place', 'context' and 'function' which shape the comprehension of space, survived until the last quarter of the 20th century, yet, these concepts are no longer sufficient in understanding today's architecture and space approaches. According to Harvey ((1997)2006), the changes taking place in the production technologies triggered the transformation of the space, and the serial production which emerged together with modernism created a crisis environment which led to radical changes in the perception of space. In this way, the fragmentation, insecurity and ephemerality of the space, which was begun to be seen as a capital by being localized in the center of capitalism, started to be questioned.

In this context, the study is based on the assent that the process of comprehending architecture and space can be read through two reciprocal channels as 'mainstream' vs. 'opposition'. Starting from the traditional narratives², the 'mainstream' architecture approaches (Moles, 1993),(Newton, 1846),(Malzkorn, 1998),(Howard, 2010) are defined through the concept of space which is in constant transformation. It is possible to evaluate the relation between the space and the context in this approach, through the relation between the 'time' phenomena and space. In traditional rhetoric, in which time and space are conceptualized separately from each other, the production is composed of the reiteration of the accepted and learned information in order to produce the 'same'. The uttered word had only one

¹Opposition means resistance or contrariety against a sentiment, thought, decision or action (Meydan Larousse, 1985). In democracies, on the other hand, opposition means the ones who are not in power (Meydan Larousse, 1985). This word, which is used in this study to describe architecture and space, in fact, includes both meanings.

²This concept most often passes as 'traditional rhetoric' in English literature. 'Traditional' means, "cultural remnants, habits, information, rules and attitudes, customs and traditions which have power of sanction and inherited from generation to generation, as they are respected and time-honored (Turkish Language Association – TDK). In this study, this concept of 'traditional' is used to indicate the time in the history of thought when religion prevailed instead of science; information, perception and representation processes were yet to be solved; human mind had not yet started to question the concept of space, along with many other concepts; and only a set of rules were accepted. According to Carpo (2001), the traditional narratives define a system in both the Classical and Medieval ages, which is consistent within itself, economic according to its own rules; and which is dependent on the memorization of the production methods. In this context, arts have become a field advancing under the guidance of verbal discourses determined to the memory.

meaning, and representation was founded on the conventions. All concepts adopted by societies were made transcendental by accepting their inalterability. Parallel to this, the space perception is two dimensional and cartesian, as well. According to this, ‘time’ was treated as a separate concept having effects on space only by movement and it was accepted that a once-produced space does not change and it is experienced by everyone in the same way (Tanju, 2008).

The critical breakage in the time-space perception expanded the borders of the space concept, increased the number of narratives about it, and thus, the relation between the space and time is no longer an obligation. This enrichment paved the way for an unavoidable contrarian stance, and as a matter of fact, these space discourses constitute the basis for the opponent architecture approaches. This attitude can be expressed by activism as a method of searching for solutions to modern problems, and this approach can be evaluated as trying to achieve harmony out of the polyphony in this field, and not as drawing its strength from the dominant economic order of capitalism, but from the society and concertedness (Bell, 2008).

Woods (1992) reminds us of the continuous struggle against authoritarian control mechanisms of architecture, accepting the fact that architectural practice is limited by technical, legal and cultural factors. He suggested new life methods and ‘Free-Zones’ in order to be able to fight against these cultural and social dogmas. According to this, it is possible to state that the functions in the free zones, which can be named after individual life laboratories, are determined by the users in loose-structured and constantly-changing societies, instead of architects. By this way, new spaces which necessitate new ways of life and thinking can emerge (Kanekar, 2010). Accordingly, the *heterarchical free zone* model starts with a small group of people. This group does not contain the institution, called as authority, within itself and everybody in the group has only their own authority of performance. The relations between this group, and the city and society develop depending on the type of communication this group has with the city and the society (Woods, 1992).

3. Examination of the Design Approaches in the Architectural Studio

In this section, two architectural design studio experiences carried out at different times in two separate working areas in Istanbul – Bomonti and Seyrantepe – are tried to be dissected in the context of the ‘mainstream’ and ‘oppositional’ approaches set forth above as design concepts. In this sense, the student studies that are chosen from the relevant design studios and present architectural products with different design approaches to Istanbul’s different regions which hold various potentials are evaluated within the context of time-space approaches and their relations with the space. 3 of these are the mainstream projects as regards to the design approach determined by the students as a result of their preliminary examinations; and the rest 3 are the projects that are going to be scrutinized within the oppositional design approach.

3.1. Discovering the Space, Potentials and Probable Problems and Developing a Design Language

The processes in the studio are carried out by choosing a study place as a result of the students’ analyses on the space, determining an architectural subject and program and doing relevant design experiments. It is expected from the students to present an architectural design by interpreting the potentials and problems they determine in the space.

In this sense, the students are primarily oriented towards doing preliminary researches to analyze the qualifications of the space in this process [d i s c o v e r y]. By this way, while the relations of the region with the totality of the city and its historical structure are being examined, the current situation and the necessities of the region are determined, as well [a n a l y s i s]. Following that, the students are expected to make civic decisions on the basis of the data they have acquired in the process of reading about the space. This phase encompasses the studies in which they determine a subjective approach by synthesizing the data they have acquired with their own personal experiences [i n t e r p r e t a t i o n]. Finally, an architectural design as a solution offer to the problem which is determined on the basis of the student’s preference against the qualifications of the space presented at the very beginning of the process is put forth [a r c h i t e c t u r a l p r o d u c t]. In this process, the success of the design is

evaluated in association with the solution it brings to the problem defined within the framework of the determined design approach and the analysis of the space potentials, and the originality in the interpretation of the design offer.

3.2. Mainstream Design Approach

3.2.1. Project 1; Project Name: Automotive Research and Training Center [S] - Student Name: Ahmet Çilingir ©

The study area is Seyrantepe auto industry district. In the analyses that were carried out, it was determined that there are small-scale workshops in the south of the district, and an area where housings were localized intensively in the west. The identified problem is the fact that the existent industrial area needs qualified interventions. In this context, the aim of the project was to accept the existence of the auto industry area within the integrity of the whole area, and making a substantive contribution to the function here. The project area was determined as an empty parcel in a city block where auto mechanics located; the design proposal became an automotive research and training center envisaged to contribute to the function in this area. *What was done in this project was the repetition of the accepted knowledge.*

3.2.2. Project 2; Textile Recycling Project [B] - Uğur İmamoğlu ©

This project is based on the providence that the textile function from the area's memory can be kept alive by a recycling project, as a solution proposal to the social gap which is assumed to emerge with the urban transformation in the study area of Bomonti. Thus, it was thought that the two separate income groups that were going to come to the focus by urban transformation could go on living in the same space. In this context, the design was realized at a point where textile and housing functions overlapped. The project was interpreted as predicting and accepting the probable negative effects of the urban transformation, and providing solutions for them. *Here, there is a search for a consensus with the dominating architecture.*

3.2.3. Project 3; Bomonti District History Museum - Tuğçe Seda Mut©

The analyses that were conducted have shown that the history of Bomonti which has important breaking points is not reflected sufficiently to the district and there is not a qualified public space within the intensive texture of the area. Depending on this fact, a proposal was made to construct a district museum in order to raise the awareness of the people living in the district about the history of the area, and provide the urbanites with the information on this part of the district. Within this context, the main axes in historical texture guided the project, and the project was considered together with a space design. *Thus, this project is a parallel intervention to the development line of the historical development at today's point.*

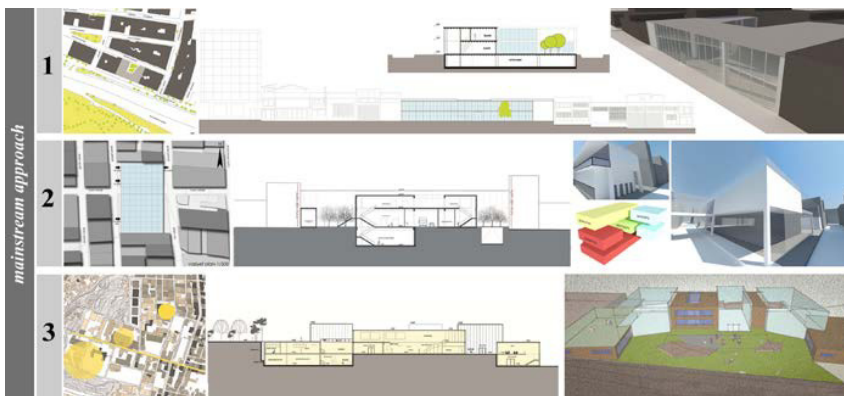


Fig. 1. Student projects (1,2,3) of mainstream approach

3.3. Intervention As an Approach Method

3.3.1. Project 4; District Kitchen [S] - Dilan Kenez ©

On the process of the project, an unused empty space in the housing space intertwined with the Seyrantepe auto industry area was taken under review. As a result of the analyses, it was determined that the area let in immigrants from Anatolia extensively in 1950's; structuring increased in an uncontrolled way depending on the emergent housing needs; and the people living in this district faced problems such as "alienation with the environment", "breakaway from the nature" and "lack of establishing dialogues" in the 1980 as, as Büyükdere axis started to develop. This situation was read as a potential rather than a problem, and elements such as "difference", "cultural wealth", and "being together by sharing food" were interpreted as the potentials of the region. Under these circumstances, the offered project was to construct a district kitchen workshop which was envisaged to combine the potentials and give the opportunity to the sense of sharing. The project is a space design, having emerged as a result of the potentials in the region and providing an opportunity to look from a perspective that was never thought of and offered before. *It is a trial for developing a new alternative for the society.*

3.3.2. Project 5; Urban Transformation Museum [B] - Mina Öner ©

As a result of the analyses, it was determined that there had been a transformation in Bomonti starting from the end of the 19th century, and in the last period of this transformation, after the 1999 earthquake, the damaged buildings were demolished and the process of constructing new ones started. On the basis of this fact, the construction of new buildings that were addressing to another social part over a settled culture and the emergence of concepts such as "being in between", "disappearance", "cliff" which came to the surface together with the new type of housing users attracted attention. In this context, the existence/conflict of different cultures and the rupture between them in this study space gained information and the project area was determined as one of the breaking points in the transformation that the area had gone through. The approach and aim of the project was to construct an interactive museum structure which processes and reveals the cultural potential of Bomonti among the housing structures which constitute the new context of the area and were constructed for income concerns under today's conditions. Accordingly, even if the dominant view of today was in favor of transformation, witnessing the previous situation from the transformation and 'that' exact moment of transformation are vital for the alternation itself. *This approach tries to reach harmony from polyphony by drawing its strength from the society and concertedness.*



Fig. 2. Student projects (4,5,6) of oppositional approach

3.3.3. Project 6; Bomonti Social Center for Workers [B] - Belin Kenger ©

The project areas, together with the other production premises, the Bomonti Beer Factory which has lost its function and an empty parcel located in the intersection of the housing units designed for the people with high income levels, who are advancing rapidly as a part of the urban transformation. In the analyses, the existence of workers who were coming to the clothing workshops at dawn for working and leaving the workshops at dusk were determined. The identified problem was the fact that the construction of buildings addressing to the people with high income levels and the rapid change in the social texture resulted in the restriction of laborers' area of movement. Thus, a social center for workers with a green yard was designed, being at the reverse direction from the income-oriented transformation of the district. The yard of the building was considered to be hollow, on the contrary to the high buildings around, and *the overwhelming heights were interpreted with such as irony.*

4. Conclusion

The process of architectural design is composed of three fundamental stages, which are **discovery, analysis and interpretation**. As a result of this process, which includes overlaps and reverses, the **architectural product** is set forth. In the design of a space, the variety of the problems and potentials, which are set forth/discovered in the very beginning of the process, is one of the factors that shape the approach in the creation of an architectural product. In the process of interpretation, the fact that the designer intersects his/her previous experiences with the data he/she acquires, carries a value as regards to reaching original results and plays a vital role in determining the approach. In this context, the approach that draws its strength from the common/dominant/more accepted view is closer to the **mainstream**; while the approach that draws its strength from society and concernedness, the willingness to try new things and aim to develop new alternatives for the society (Jones, 2013) is closer to **opposition**. Although different or even contrasting approaches were mentioned here, there is not a single truth in the field of design. The emphasis of the study was the fact that determining the approach in the design phase is important as regards to being able to move within the framework of that approach.

In the architectural education, in which the foundations of architectural design are laid, the design studios function as a laboratory where the students learn the steps of the architectural design in the accompaniment of practice. In this process, the fact that students learn how the process the data they acquire, and build ideas on how to determine their approaches accordingly is important in the sense that the process carries a creative quality.

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