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As an educational tool the importance of informal studies/studios in architectural design education; case of Walking Istanbul 1&2

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Abstract

Design education is the most important part of architectural education. Formal architectural education (training), followed by an architect in the candidate's training period, is a whole consisting of theoretical and practical courses. In spite of this programme package, in design education, student acquires to experience the design by his/her own and this is the only way to learn how to design. In this context, aside from formal architectural education informal studies such as workshops, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, competitions, excavation, etc. have an undeniable importance. In design education, "Informal Studies" have some outstanding results on developing design thinking skills, learning by doing, creating motivation, intuitive knowledge and self-confidence and at the same time these studies are a suitable tool for the LLP- lifelong learning programme. In this paper, as an informal study example two workshops will be discussed to evaluate the contributions of such informal studies on student's individual and collective learning styles, design thinking techniques and practices.

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1. Introduction

Yildiz Technical University (YTU), Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture with two of European Architecture Schools (Catalunya Polytechnic University, UPC and Zurich University of Applied Sciences, ZWAH) held the international workshops (design studios) of - "Walking Istanbul 1; Rhythm in Fener - Balat" and "Walking Istanbul 2; Texture & Material in Fener - Balat". The results of these studies assure a supportive environment for gaining, transforming and communicating knowledge in architectural design education.

2. The scope and content of architecture

Architects, committed themselves to the principles of profession, honesty and competence, design built environment using their knowledge and skills. Architectural education should contribute to the development of society in social, cultural and economics both in national and international levels.

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The UIA(Union of International Architects),together with UNESCO, created and promotes the UNESCO-UIA Charter on Architectural Education. This fundamental document sets directives on architectural education. Item no.5 describes that architectural education involves the acquisition of the following capabilities(www.uia-architects.org);

ITEM 5.A. DESIGN; •Ability to engage imagination, think creatively, innovate and provide design leadership. • Ability to gather information, define problems, apply analyses and critical judgment and formulate strategies for action. •Ability to think three-dimensionally in the exploration of design. •Ability to reconcile divergent factors, integrate knowledge and apply skills in the creation of a design solution.

ITEM 5.B. KNOWLEDGE; Understanding the role of architect in Cultural and Artistic Studies, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, Technical Studies.

ITEM 5.C. SKILL; •Ability to act and to communicate ideas through collaboration, speaking, numeracy, writing, drawing, modeling and evaluation. •Ability to utilize manual, electronic, graphic and model making capabilities to explore, develop, define and communicate a design proposal. • Understanding of systems of evaluation, that use manual and/or electronic means for performance assessments of built environments.

3. General characteristics of architectural design education

Design education is the most important part of architectural education. Formal architectural education (training), followed by an architect in the candidate's training period, is a whole consisting of theoretical and practical courses. In spite of this programme package, in design education, student acquires to experience the design by his/her own and this is the only way to learn how to design. In this respect, it is possible to talk about three stages in architectural education. First stage is gaining knowledge and skill for establishing fundamental; second stage is using the gained knowledge and skill and the third stage is focused on producing new knowledge from the gained ones. As shown in Table 1, YTU Department of Architecture determined its programme outputs (in the context of set criteria of National Architectural Accreditation Board (MIAK) according to these three stages.

Table 1. 35 Student performance criteria of MIAK derived from NAAB that YTU Architectural Department follows (Ünver, R., Polatoğlu, C., Vural, S.M., 2009).

| 1st MODULE / 1st and 2nd years | 2nd MODULE / 2nd and 3rd years | 3rd MODULE / 4th years |
|---|--|--|
| Gaining knowledge and skill | Using the gained knowledge and skill | Producing new knowledge and skill from the gained ones |
| [1] Communication Skills | [6] Design Skills | [29] Comprehensive Design |
| [2] Critical Thinking Skills | [7] Teamwork Skills | [30] Architectural Practice & Project Management |
| [3] Graphical Presentation Skills | [8] History Of Western Architecture | [31] Practice Management |
| [4] Research Skills | [9] History Of Entire World (Excluding Western Architecture) | [32] Professional Development |
| [5] Formal Composition Systems | [11] Preservation Of Historical Environment And Restoration | [33] Leadership |
| [6] Design Skills | [14] Cultural Diversities | [34] Legal Responsibilities |
| [7] Teamwork Skills | [16] Sustainable Design | [35] Ethics And Professional Judgment |
| [12] Use Of Precedents | [17] Ability To Prepare A Comprehensive Program | |
| [13] Human Behaviors | [19] Structural Systems | |
| [14] Cultural Diversities | [20] Environmental Systems | |
| [15] Accessibility | [21] Safety | |
| [16] Sustainable Design | [22] Building Envelope Systems | |
| [17] Ability To Prepare A Comprehensive Program | [23] Building Service Systems | |
| [18] Site Conditions | [24] Building Systems Integration | |
| [28] The Role Of Client (User) In Architecture | [26] Control Of Building Costs | |
| | [27] Technical Documentation | |
| | [28] The Role Of Client In Architecture | |
| | [29] Comprehensive Design | |
| | [30] Architectural Practice & Project Management | |
| | [31] Practice Management | |

These criteria are also determine the knowledge and skills in design; Critical Thinking Skills, Graphical Presentation Skills, Research Skills, Formal Composition Systems, Design Skills, Teamwork Skills, Use of Precedents, Human Behaviors, Cultural Diversities, Accessibility, Sustainable Design, Ability to Prepare a

Comprehensive Program, Site Conditions, Building Systems Integration, The Role of Client (User) in Architecture, and Comprehensive Design. The studio in design education is the place where all above criteria come together. From this point of view studio can be defined as;

- a place where all the knowledge is integrated,
- a discussion platform where various relations are developed,
- a communicative organization between receiver and sender.

In this context, aside from formal architectural education informal studies such as workshops, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, competitions, excavation, etc. have an undeniable importance such as;

- Developing design thinking skills,
- Learning by doing,
- Creating motivation, intuitive knowledge and self-confidence and at the same time these studies are a suitable tool for the LLP- lifelong learning programme.

In general the scope and objectives of the informal workshops can be summarized as;

- to solve a design problem in a short-time period,
- to promote group work,
- to bring together different cultural and architectural environments,
- to give wider point of views,
- to improve oral and written communication techniques,
- to highlight different approaches on design.

In this paper, as an informal study example two international workshops is discussed to evaluate the contributions of such informal studies on student's individual and collective learning styles, design thinking techniques and practices.

4. Walking_Istanbul; an informal design studio

YTU Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture with two of European Architectural Schools held the international workshops “Walking Istanbul 1 & 2” in order to point out the effects of informal environment in design education for gaining, transforming and communicating knowledge.

4.1. Scope of the studio

The goals of the studio are set according to the UIA charter and items 5A-5B-5C capabilities in design and representation skills. Understanding different city structures; working on a historical urban context via design elements; rhythm, color, material and texture, proportion, module, symmetry, space is the main theme of the studio series. In this context at Walking Istanbul 1, Rhythm and in Walking Istanbul 2, Texture & Material were studied. The second aim is to encourage sketching with freehand drawings so beside verbal presentations especially the observations also wanted to be accompanied by sketch drawings. According to Pallasmaa (2009), “sketching and drawing are spatial and haptic exercises that fuse the external reality of space and matter ... In our time computer has broken sensual and tactile connection between imagination and the object of design”. The freehand drawing is the reflection of perception, expression, observation and all these realized in different steps depending on the stimuli in same time. Two neighborhoods, facing Golden Horn, Fener and Balat from historical peninsula of Istanbul are chosen as study area to emphasize different urban context. The workshop studies held in 2010-2011 academic year, one in spring (29 April-4 May 2010) and the second one in fall (9-12 November 2010) semester. Both studies lasted for four days including the weekends. There was no set prerequisite for both workshops and the participation numbers of workshops in total were 9 faculty members and 60 students(10 from UPC, 21 from ZHAW and 29 from YTU).

4.2. Procedure and development

Introduction meeting, seminar on theme, neighborhood and Istanbul, site trip and final exhibition are the main steps of the study. Rather than giving a topic to the students for them to research on, lecturers were with the students all through the workshop visiting the neighborhood. The aim was first letting the students see and experience life in the area and internalize than reading the physical properties of the area. The roadmap needs to be clarified delicately in such an open-ended study. Lecturers remained in the background and acted as a member of the group. And through all of these studies, the weight of informal environment kept its continuity at each stage. The formal environment, school, has been used only for the preparation and evaluation phases of final exhibition. Meetings, communication with locals, lunches and study took place all at the site so that students are conducted in the area to experience a longer period of time, to monitor the behaviors of local people, to perceive the use of space. One of the most important aims of these workshops was to gather students together from different cultures. For example in the first workshop Spanish students were hosted at Turkish student homes. Rituals of daily life such as lunch at the cost of Golden Horn, in the second workshop meeting-group discussion at a renovated old house used as a coffee house, sitting on the sidewalk of a street and sketching, or in the afternoon sitting on stools and watching Topkapı Palace while eating fish & bread were the examples of converging cultures. Students learned not only from the lecturers but also from their peers and shared their experiences. In the context of the chosen themes, students were asked to use free-hand drawings for their examinations but they were free in presentation. In the introduction meeting, rather than a comprehensive course, a short lecture about the theme and the area was given to the students. The goal of this short introduction was to reach the image created by their own research and observations in their minds. For reaching and explaining of this image, it was told that reading through the chosen themes must be done and if needed additional concepts could be used. Just as in the first workshop, along with the theme rhythm, movement and color elements were given in the presentations.

4.3. Evaluation

Two exhibitions were the end products of both workshops. However it should be noted here that preparation of the exhibition was not just hanging things on display surfaces in the classical sense but weaving a mental map of the chosen theme and the work area. Preparation of the exhibition was an all day long procedure. Evaluation of the workshop conducted jointly by both lecturers and students. Each student gave his/her approach by telling the best described thing (the physical part of a building or a moment of the local life) interesting for them in the context of the theme. After this joint evaluation, the students were asked to answer a self-assessment questionnaire about the workshop. (Table 2)

Table 2. Evaluation of the knowledge, skill and experiences during the workshops.

| Acquisition | Less | Medium | More |
|--|------|--------|------|
| Culture (Common knowledge) | | 10 | 8 |
| Cultural development | | 4 | 14 |
| Social development | | 4 | 14 |
| Design development | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Creative thinking | | 3 | 12 |
| Problem solving skill | 2 | 3 | 10 |
| Presentation – representation techniques | 2 | 3 | 11 |
| Development of communication skills (verbal) | | 5 | 12 |
| Development of analyzing techniques | 1 | 3 | 13 |
| Development of synthesis | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| Development of design evaluation techniques | 2 | 6 | 7 |
| Professional development | 1 | 5 | 11 |

Additional comments taken directly from the questionnaire:

- Gained new point of views by following the work of people specialized in different disciplines
- Spending a joint production process with architects and architectural students from abroad will help in myself improvement
- Contributed to improving social life and myself
- I found the workshop very useful and I learned different methods of architecture, had friends from different cultures. It was an experience where I had fun and learned as the same time. As a result I cannot stop myself talking about the workshop all the time. I am grateful to the lectures that organize such kind of events.

5. Conclusion

“Informal studies” are supportive activities in terms of improving students’ individual and collective learning techniques and also achieving the design thinking techniques and practices. All students participating in two workshops highlighted the importance of cultural and social development and stated the self-development through all stages of design. From this point of view integrated studios in architectural design education will provide a multi-dimensional and dynamic construction by creating a participatory and interactive study environment with the help of increasing the communication between the candidate, lecturer, other actors of profession and other disciplines.

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