



SHORT TERM WORKSHOP: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN EDUCATION

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Keywords: Architecture, design education, short term workshops

1. Introduction

The primary intention of this study is to focus on potentials of short-term workshops within architectural curriculum. It also aims to discuss the potentials of a unique urban context and their integration to the architectural education [Abel 1995]. The objective of the study can be summarized as how to trigger perceptive and creative skills of the students through off-campus experiments within the urban context. Key concepts for the experiment could be summarized as to proposing implementation of short-term workshop as an alternative educational strategy, integration of unique local potentials to a global curriculum, exposing students to real life situations for highlighting looking versus seeing and emphasizing analysis in accordance with creative synthesis.

The complexity of the architect's role that today's society defines may be addressed with a view of knowledge, in which the desire for information that would simply aim at providing the right answers and 'correct' architecture, is replaced by a position where architecture adopts a critical role. This requires a redefinition for architectural knowledge [Wingham 1997]. On one hand there is the act of acquiring the necessary skills and on the other the understanding the discipline. Through the course of architectural education, students face with a variety of problematic situations that present themselves as unique cases. Because the unique falls outside the categories of existing theory and technique, the practitioner/student cannot treat it as an instrumental problem to be solved by applying one of the rules in his/her store of professional knowledge. In other words, this case is not "in the book". If one is to deal with it competently, then she/he must do so by kind of improvisation, inventing and testing in the situation strategies of his/her devising. From this point of view, short-term studies or workshops present unique potentials to deal with unique problematic cases [Schön 1987]. This phenomenon requires the formal architectural education to be structured around compulsory theoretical and studio courses and informal short term studies where the aim is to focus on unique problematic situations. Thus, integration of such activities to the formal curriculum will provide more creative and fruitful atmospheres for the students.

Classical architectural education is dominated by "hands on" experiments where the goal is to provide a medium for the *master/instructor* to channel his/her knowledge and professional identity to the *apprentice/student*. This not only suppresses the creativity of the student but also transforms her/him to a reflective media. In today's global culture, however, there is the phenomenon of attaining global values through the *net* and its *virtual medium*, which also has negative impacts on the students' creativity. Short-term studies aiming to highlight local characteristics provide potentials to integrate *local* to the globally accredited formal education while enabling students to explicit their personal creative capacities.

2. The Study

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Through this study it is aimed to highlight a trajectory from the interpretation of texts to the identification of relevant images within the built environment. A reader consisting of literary texts where the main subject or the setting is Istanbul was compiled. The students participated in the experiment were given these texts -poems, essays, scripts, etc.- of prominent literary characters who conveyed their ideas of this unique place through words and were asked to search for their visual matches. The main question to be answered was “*what could have these poets, authors, writers have seen or experienced in this unique setting to choose these specific words or phrases to describe its physicality?*”. Hence, the study is intended as an exploration of the relationships that exist between the intangible concept and meaning of a place and its physical attributes.

It is believed that the unique architectures of places made it possible to think about them with some ingenuity and to connect particular ideas and events with specific forms and shapes and their relationships. Places could bring emotions, recollections, people and ideas to mind and their qualities are part of a culture’s intellectual equipment. Thus these attributes of places are reflected on various literary works through the course of time. This phenomenon marked the starting point of the experiment.

2.2 Goals and Objectives

The primary intention of the study is:

- to explore the potentials of optional short term studies within formal education,
- to aid the development of interpersonal skills required for team work,
- to emphasize the value of contribution and participation rather than individual evaluation,
- to provide an optimum period of study for maximum concentration,
- to assist in the understanding of place,
- to guide students to looking rather than seeing by introducing them to real life situations rather than abstract representations,
- to provide media for collective expression,
- to provide media for relating words with spatial images,
- to discuss the relations of social, cultural and intellectual media with architectural semantics and spatial perception.

2.3 Background Information on Students

The curriculum of the Department of Architecture at Istanbul Technical University is a four year program consisting of seven semesters during which all students are obliged to take an architectural design studio in addition to a variety of other theoretical and studio courses, and the eighth semester is dedicated to Diploma Project, upon completion of which a professional Bachelor of Architecture degree is conferred. The aim of the architectural design studio (the core studio) is to explore design principles common to architecture and interrelated disciplines during the fourteen-week period a semester lasts. According to the semester, students are required to work on architectural design problems of varying nature and complexity. Majority of the students that participated in the workshop were 2nd year students.

2.4 The Setting

A unique district of Istanbul, namely Pera-Galata, where the school of Architecture is located was chosen as the site of the experiment. A route connecting the School of Architecture to Galata Bridge was chosen as the primary axis of concentration but the students were also encouraged to propose alternative routes or back streets within the vicinity. In the 19th, century when western cultures had influenced the Ottoman way of life, the area chosen for the study was the center for a variety of cultural and social activities. Thus, the area is dominated by edifices that possess characteristics reflecting the impacts of western architectural culture. During the course of time, Galata-Pera has

sustained its architectural identity to a great extent, thus the texts that the students were required to evaluate were written in a physical atmosphere that was almost as it is today.

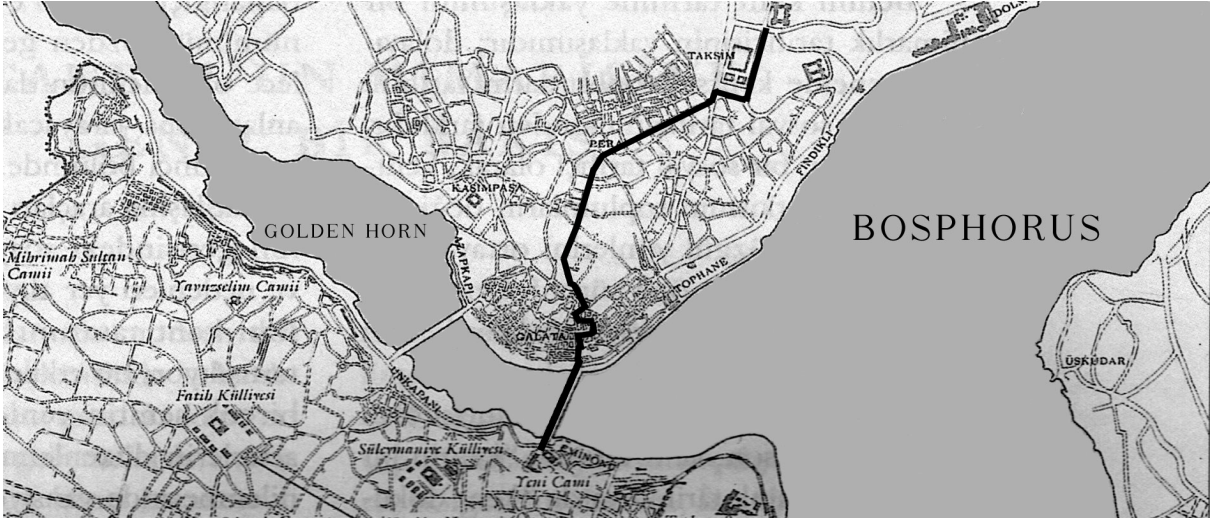


Figure 1. Map of the route



Figure 2. Scenes from today and the past

2.5 The Method

The workshop was announced at the school and the first applying 20 students were chosen to participate. The workshop continued for three consecutive days. Limiting the period of workshop to 72 hours was essential in avoiding possible outside interactions and impacts of formal educational activities. Either individually or as teams students spent a day within the area trying to match words and emotions with unique sights, instances or inhabitants. They were asked to experience different times within the day when either light or shadow dominate the place, and record not only sights but also sounds or smells that are unique to the place. Students documented the relevant images by taking photographs, drawing personal sketches or pictograms and recording sounds. They were also asked to determine the key words or concepts dominating the texts. Some of the students preferred to form teams whereas the others preferred an individual search.



Figure 3. Recorded visual images (Excerpts from Ercan [1994.]

At the end of the day all of the participants came together to discuss their adventures. And during the following two days they worked on a collage-exhibit to present the study to the whole student body.

3. Conclusion

All through the workshop students seemed to be highly motivated. Through different modes of working students experienced to share their ideas and co-operate, and also express their individualities. It is believed that the approach adopted for the study enabled the students to have a better insight to their surroundings. In a way, the precedent allowed the participants to perceive and see the existing environment from another critical perspective.

Since the study was optional, the participants were all very enthusiastic, and tried to contribute to the workshop as best as they could. As a consequence, a dynamic atmosphere was obtained which is rather difficult to sustain in a 14-week semester.

The quality of the exhibit was highly satisfactory and the workshop received encouraging remarks from the student body.

Acknowledgement

The students participated in the study are Elif Celik, Erdim Kumkumoglu, Mehmet Can Ambarlilar, Meric Onder, Esra Enhos, Rivka Geron, Elif Kilic, Evren Şerbetçi, Kerem Piker, Ozge Zoralioğlu, Rengin Toros, Volkan Lokumcu, Fulya Eliyatkin. Dr. H.L. Kahvecioğlu, Dr. N.P. Kahvecioğlu and Assoc.Prof.Dr. Arzu Erdem are currently on the academic staff of ITU, Department of Architecture.

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