Representation and Context Based Studio Design Process: Articulating a City (Istanbul)

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Abstract: In architectural education, imparting of stationary knowledge, which establishes space only as physically, is insufficient to achieve the skill that will enable the architect to find solutions to problems encountered in the future. In this case, to perceive space both tangibly and intangibly, a transdisciplinary milieu is required to acquire derivable knowledge and create a setting of debate and criticism over that acquired knowledge. What might be methods and approaches that can stimulate and re-shape thought, encourage curiosity to acquire creative and critical knowledge in the architectural design studio? How can new experiences and perceptions of the city be reflected in architectural milieu? How are the experiences and outputs produced by different types of representations in the studio? To what extent can a contextual reading trigger the architectural scenario and program? In the light of the above-mentioned questions, this study focuses on the relations of the design studio with the city, the people, the place and everyday life, and, it unveils everyday life by the setting up of contextual readings and representations. It discusses the role of the design studio in understanding the place, the people as a social phenomenon and the reciprocal relationship of space with everyday life through the milieu of the Architectural Design Studios 3-4-5-6 at Istanbul Technical University, Department of Architecture. It is expected that the student's own journey and experience, rather than the de facto assumptions, are highlighted by grasping the information of place/city at different scales and disassembling (de-composition and re-composition) of existing knowledge. In this respect, different scales and approaches set the design strategy of the studio and direct the design. The study gives a brief theoretical background focusing on the relations of architecture with the city. Secondly, it discusses architectural studio as a platform of representations and narratives for the city and the people. Thirdly, and finally, it gives concluding remarks. Although the results are provisional, this study may give a broader understanding of the relations of the city, the people and the design studio.

Keywords: architectural design studio; context; experience; everyday life; architectural education
In Istanbul in the last decades, a population increase has been associated with unprecedented increases in per capita income; unprecedented investments in urban infrastructures (speed train to Ankara, speedway to Izmir, connection to southern Marmara via bridge over Izmit bay, Marmarail third bridge, airport two) emergence of a new city region and of a spatial frame for the stable electoral and social geographies, new consumption patterns, new life styles, new localities, new activity bundles, non-place realm. In this context, the new infrastructural system is going to form new spatial interaction patterns for the mega-metropolis – causing the generation of a new geography for the 21st Century Istanbul – as depicted by Murat Güvenç (Güvenç, 2017). As a result, the city has been re-shaped and is going to be shaped by the emergence of social and economic segregation, tensions stemming from the contact with contrast interpenetration of lifestyles consumption patterns, a new city region with a new urban society, a new built environment social and electoral geography, and new local Identities. In this framework, sustainability and social cohesion are put at stake. What we are witnessing in Istanbul is a rapid and chaotic capitalist urbanization - very reminiscent of Manfredo Tafuri’s depiction on the one in American cities in terms of the restless, wild, harmful, pitiless commodification and consumption process accompanied with the loss of ethical values – as depicted by David Harvey (1990).

In this ambiguous situation, it is difficult for experts to predetermine the future. Researchers in the humanities deal with the formation and the process of identity and new approaches in humanities question common notions and approaches to the city/architecture - design - human being - nature in a holistic system. These studies approached the city, on the one hand, as the space of power and, on the other hand, as the space of multitudes, negotiation and appropriation. These works put emphasis on the gap between official representations of spaces, and their multiple, conflicting conceptions, remembrances, and imageries. Those works focused on issues related to cultural identity and memory; and discussed how subordinate people negotiated their cultural values and identities through spaces. They saw architecture as a medium where ‘ordinary’ people represented their self-images or reconciled their cultural values with interacting cultural systems. And there is an urgent call for new approaches in the systematization of design/architecture/urban studies. Henri Lefebvre’s theories encouraged researchers and designers from various disciplines to conceive spatial formations as part of the socio-cultural fabric. After several other social thinkers who theorized space as either the background or product of social relations, Lefebvre was the first to see space as both; as at once the ‘medium and outcome’ of social life (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, for Lefebvre, “space was produced socially as social reality was heavily influenced by spatial relations” as depicted by Hilde Heynen (2013). In Lefebvre’s formulation (1991), “the production of space” did not simply point at a physical production; but included a multiplicity of physical and non-physical layers including everyday practices and lived experiences. The built environment was far from being an end product. It was continuously re-produced in everyday life; through each particular use, experience or remembrance. Thus, according to Lefebvre, spatial production included images, dreams, memories, mentalities and ideologies. Space, therefore, needs a broader understanding, and a new positioning in theory, research and design approaches. Studies in humanities do not provide a unitary method or have not agreed on terms and issues. However, we can detect a common interest: the making of space as a social product. Space is understood as a social entity with particular, localised meanings. Inter-/trans-disciplinary and theoretical intersections continue to use spatial metaphors; studies still require some form of critical remapping – spatial representation. As referred in The Unknown City (Borden et al., 2002), Benjamin treated architecture “not as a series of isolated things to be viewed objectively; but rather as an integral part of the urban fabric experienced subjectively”. Instead of describing buildings in terms of aesthetics or function or categorizing them in terms of their style or means of production, Benjamin approached buildings as aspects of culture. Accordingly, he produced a profound social critique of early 20th century Europe by analysing how the built environment was produced, used and perceived (Benjamin, 1999). Parallel approaches to architecture and the built environment are echoed in numerous recent studies. “Places in the city are not merely architectural metaphors” says Svetlana Boym (2002): “they are also screen memories for urban dwellers, projections of contested remembrances. Of interest here is not only architectural projects but lived environments, everyday ways of inhabiting the city by following and deviating from the rules, tales of urban identity and stories of urban life.” In The Future of Nostalgia (2002) Boym also emphasized the gap between master images and multiple experiences of spaces. She claimed that “the ideal city existed only in architectural models and in the new total restorations”, whereas the city always consisted of infinite fragments (Boym, 2002). Spaces might be produced according to (physical and symbolic) master images of regulative bodies; but they are made up of infinite fragments and are infinitely reproduced through use and imagination: through “multitudes” (Hardt & Negri, 2005) that infinitely re-imagine and transform them.

In the light of this framework, our studio architecture is understood as cultural landscape - a physical and discursive product, continually reproduced through culture, politics and everyday life. The term architecture does not refer solely
to the practice of architects. The *built environment* does not refer to an accumulation of physical objects. The studio as a design research milieu leans on the idea that architecture and the built environment are embedded in cultural and social tissues, and are continuously produced and reproduced by multitudes of actors - discursively, as well as physically. Our studio in the last five years has been designed as a trans-disciplinary research milieu combining a variety of thought systems, most of which derive from critical theory. Our approach to architecture and urbanization as a design research platform is in parallel with Jean-François Lyotard’s towards grand-narratives. It aims to track power and institutional mentalities that still dominate architectural and urban memorialization. It looks critically at the cultural relations, and dominant and recessive patterns, attempting to show how they exclude a multiplicity of embedded meanings. Criticizing institutional and ideological forms of knowledge, Lyotard cherished the multiplicity of human perspectives.

The basic question of what are the contexts and themes in the global context bringing new questions on the format and content, as well as the meaning, and providing students the recognition of the infinite multiplicity of points of view. In the crucial new context, what can be the role of an architect vis-à-vis the built environment? To what extent can we make a difference as architects and as citizens of this city? How to develop a new language to deal with ambiguity? How to set up a dialogue with the foreigner and the other? To what extent can an architectural design studio be a milieu to unveil these chaotic issues and make young candidates of architecture aware of the context? To what extent can an architect be the architect of the 99 percent instead of 1 percent? Whose side can the architect take? How to touch the everyday life of the other?

With the above-mentioned questions, our study unveils the main approaches of our studio in the last five years aiming for the formation of an intellectual. For the setting of a new language in the systematization of architectural studies, our studio questions the common notions and approaches to history/architecture/theory/design. It problematizes yesterday via cultural layers for designing today. The basic question is how to design an integrated/trans-disciplinary design approach based on ecology, cultural economy for the making of a human city/settlement/architecture? How can research in design studio can be combined with urban studies? How can cities be best conceptualized as sites of social and political identity, as ambiguous territories of conflict, and as incubators of innovation and creativity? To what extent does grasping the everyday life and experiencing the place pave the way for critical design thinking?

A critical experiencing of the city, research process and alternatives representations of the contextual narrative from the process provides a multi-layered picture about the place, the people, the theme of the semester.

### 2 Representing the City/Place/People in the Design Studio

The core theoretical framework which determined the general approach of this studio as design research is based upon a wide range of insights from humanities. Besides a core knowledge on the theory and history of architecture and urbanism, it also leans on cultural and social theories, critical theory, poststructuralist theory and others. This framework centres upon keywords such as identity, memory, history, culture, power, architecture, globalization, cosmopolitanism; dwelling on a number of sub-intersecting issues and leading architectural students to face the presence of multi-issues surrounding the reproduction of space in Istanbul.

The studio aims to develop a critical thinking of the built environment for the experimental re-discovery and creative analysis of place/city in different scales. Spatial experience emerges within experience/perception and critical thinking. Perceptions during experiences can be the constituent facts of understanding, grasping the built environment. This unveils how the reflexivity such as awareness, suspicion, care, intentionality, curiosity, remembering and forgetting can be transformed into understanding for the design process.

In Architectural Design Studio 3, 4, and 5, conducted between 2014-2018 at Istanbul Technical University, Department of Architecture, an urban milieu affects the student’s relationship with the city/place, the local and his / her own body and production of a space in the studio with the information gathered from that discovery. The setting up of a critical trans-disciplinary milieu in the design studio provides gathering social and spatial, tangible and intangible information about the place, experience it individually, and transfer this experience into representation(s), and then, to transfer it for the re-production of space.

In the trans-disciplinary design milieu, a critical discovery process is triggered by shared experiences and workshops - initiated instead of training students who just understand what teacher teaches (Rancière, 2014). In the design studio, all works are approached as cultural products (parks-buildings- networks-infrastructures) - the patchwork of the human existence, and thus, all cultural products are also a topic of design research and design. The
The duty/task/responsibility of a young researcher/designer is to work as a detective to question the urban layers and to unveil the mega-narratives. The design research process begins with theoretical readings, mappings and musings, leading to questions interrelating identity, memory, culture, socio-economic structure, power and architecture. The architectural design studio in 2014, titled Pier’s Navigation, the aim was to explore the possibilities of structure, space, scale, conflict and relations between city and physical experience. For this reason, the importance of both the analytical and intuitive was emphasized in the process and both were used to comprehend the project area. Urban layers were collected through maps, photographs, written sources and observations for grasping and experiencing of place. Grasp is based on solving and reassembling/ recompose. For this purpose, experts from different disciplines supported our studio milieu.

A cartoon workshop on the use of public spaces was realized with the artist Nalan Yırtmaç. Through this workshop, the students shared their observations and experiences in Karaköy via fictional characters. The representation is composed of these cartoons and collages also trigger the production of knowledge and awareness through experience and observations. In Figure 1, it is observed that Özlem Yazgan’s observation, encounter and experience in Karaköy are transformed into visual information with cartoons.

![Figure 1. Cartoon Workshop by Nalan Yırtmaç, ADS 2017 Spring, Özlem Yazgan.](image)

The actress Ayşe Draz organized a drama workshop which stimulate re-thinking of everyday life in Karaköy and on the waterfront with creative theatre techniques. Through this drama work, it was aimed to discover the potential of the body in the formation of space. Body with the dance and drama studies were asked to consider the potentials of the body that is standing and moving. Thus, the positioning of the body in the space and the possibilities of the designed space became questionable. In the studio conducted between 2014-2018, it was observed that space-body and space-user relations were established more strongly during production of space where body workshops were organized (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Body, Movement and Space Workshop, TAL Dance, Taşkışla.](image)
One of the targets in the studio is developing awareness to interpret what you see and the ability to re-discover, grasp and re-experience the built environment, unveiling both ordinary and hidden dimensions. Representations and mappings of the knowledge of place/space is gathered from experiential and creative processes, in different forms have been triggered to continue the re-production of spatial information. Focusing on the everyday life (banal, temporary, simple, standard, conventional, even boring) removes the sacred veil over urban and architectural issues - as proposed by Michel de Certeau (2009) in the 1960s as a tactic to deal with mega-narratives and mega-rules. In this regard, it has been possible to face contradictions, conflicts, dilemmas as well as dynamics and potentials - which have been put under investigations by young architectural students as detectives. In this investigation, setting up a Barthian symbiotic relation with the built environment is a must: a dialogue with place, citizen, and to listen to the voice of the city/citizen, smell it and be a flaneur/flaneuse grasping the built environment. With these holistic approaches, it is possible for students to think of the city with its surroundings, as well as with the local and the human scale (Figure 3).

In the architectural design studio 2017 titled “Re-Experiencing the Golden Horn”, the aim was to reinterpret the place through grasping, experiencing and re-representing the built environment with Roland Barthes’ work (Barthes, 1994). For the all-round consideration, comprehension and interpretation of the place/city, various seminars, workshops and excursions were organized with architects and experts from different disciplines. Re-reading and mapping the urban traces as an archaeologist was the process of the studio. Architects have to integrate local values with global issues, using technology and knowledge on behalf of innovation. They have to bring social awareness, environmental sensibility and ethic responsibility to their work. Referring to the urban experience, we seek ways for re-reading the city through its incomplete experience, cultural codes and historic values – with a flexible approach and critical thinking to grasp its multiple layers of meaning. We experience the paradox of the old city and global place which requires both continuity and change.

Semra Aydınli emphasized the concepts of tangible and intangible and triggered rethinking the possibilities of these concepts. Intangible and invisible channels of space hold within itself perceptual energies. They all refer to place-memory – as depicted by Semra Aydınli (2017). As she argues, enmeshed experience motivates us to grasp the multi-sensory qualities of the existing environment. It makes possible to be in constant dialogue and interaction with its narrative space. The tangible and intangible experience represented via mappings and transformed into knowledge about the built environment is not only considered as documentary evidence; rather, it speaks to the emerging cultural awareness of the traditional settlements studied and experienced in Istanbul. Grasping the intangibles of space via experiences as well as tangible data, and then transfer this body of experience into mappings / representations of place-space is the essential part of the design process.

Ali Vatansever talked about storytelling methods and made a story-writing workshop on the characters’ photographs taken by students during their trips to Eminönü. By way of the characters which have taken photographs by students in Eminönü, they conducted an analysis of the local with the method, is to be relatively part of the place through creating a fictional story with the local characters, based on their own observations and the knowledge of the place (Figure 4).
Students internalized their scenarios and transformed them into spatial information. Thus, it is possible to investigate the relationship between the user and the space. In Figure 5, the wishes of the children that Selin Sevim encountered in the project area are expressed and these wishes are tried to provide with designing transforming space (Figure 5).

Landscape architect Defne Akyol gave an overview of the approaches to the design of public space on the waterfront and gave examples. With that method, we supported the emergence of the unexpected and heterotopic with Benjamin’s word.
A holistic way of seeing, re-thinking and re-understanding the city/place with the local as a spatial and social structure can be associated with its narrative space during the design process. While investigating the social and demographic structure of the daily life of the local, not the majority, the plurality has been highlighted and an attempt to understand the voice of plurality. Focusing on plural voices of the everyday life in multi-faced and multi-linguistic imperial city is an essential part of the design process. Not only human beings, but natural elements, animals are also accepted as social actors of the built environment, and therefore part of the design research.

It has been observed that students often have difficulty in transforming the knowledge of the place/city into spatial knowledge, which is derived from the exploration of place/city supported by various architecture and trans-disciplinary seminars and workshops. Focusing on urban scale, place, people, body provide to face shifting balances; the multi-dimensional experience and reading create a dynamic effect in perception as well creativity of the student. Representations and mappings of the urban context, everyday life, peoples, body in the design process pave way critical and creative development of a story – scenario - program based on conceptual idea (an argument, an architectural word) for the design proposal – providing a broader meaning, critical contextual inter-relations of the design proposal.
In brief, the main argument and message of the studio to the young candidate of architecture is to provide insights into plurality instead of majority. In this context, it is necessary to prioritize humans and pluralism. Representations focused on experience, space, place and humans / living beings trigger the emergence of the unexpected and heterotrophic. With a broader investigation of the local, participatory design is allowed: in the last two semesters, students designed for chosen locals. Designing for an open and democratic city, the awareness of the city right, citizen right, nature right, water right, etc. were raised. The participatory design milieu has even become more trans-disciplinary and inter-active.

Change, dynamics, conflicts, oppositions, contradictions as well as dynamics and potentials, ambiguity, plurality, transparency, right to the city, water right, nature right can be guiding words for a new design language and an alternative architectural beginning starting from the studio. A tentative milieu exemplifies this.
Table 3. Works of Students | ADS 2014 Fall (Tayfun Saman, Ayşe Tuğçe Pinar, Cansel Özkan, F. Şeyma Erdal, Büşra Balaban, Sedanur Albayrak)

References

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İpek Akpınar is an associate professor at ITU, and conducting architectural design studio, lecturing graduate courses on the relations of architecture with urban, political and cultural context, and collective memory. Following her bachelor (1990) and Master of Science (1993) studies at ITU, she has received her doctoral degree from UCL Bartlett School (2003). Her collaborated international research project based on the personal archives of Henri Prost at Paris was exhibited and published. She is the author of Moonlight Monastery (2012) and 10th Year of the Sabancı Museum (2013).

Canan Ganiç graduated from Istanbul Kültür University, Faculty of Architecture with a first. In 2014, she completed her master's thesis titled with “Art Spaces' Relation with Urban Boundary: The Case of Karakoy” at ITU. Between 2014-2017, she participated in architectural design studios with Asst. Prof. Dr. İpek Akpınar at ITU. She took part in the architectural competitions individualistically and with different groups as students and professionals; she won various awards. For four years she worked at TEMPO and is working in Reyhan Ganiç Architecture since 2015. Currently she continues her PhD studies at ITU.