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Supporting architectural design competences via theoretical courses

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Abstract

Today Architectural education is one of the most questioned area with respect to its content and form. The debate frame is mostly concentrating on teaching methods, processes of education, credit systems, competencies, and how those competencies are to be tested. The problem is the cohesiveness of architectural competencies of the graduates into global conditions. In this context, the design studios as the backbone of the architectural education have started to involve in their agenda all kinds of new methods and theories concerning contemporary architecture. Loaded with these concerns the teaching staffs of M 102 Design studio in Gazi University have initiated a course “The development of architectural space idea” which found its place in curriculum. The aim of this paper is discuss our elective course, offered for the 3rd year students of architecture, “The Development of Architectural Space Idea”. It is a reaction to the degradation effect of that popular culture. The impact of that culture as a “contemporary approach” is getting stronger not only on architecture in practice but also the education. Under those circumstances, it was a necessity to manifest our perspective on Architecture, space and identity of the Architect. Briefly, our goal is to initiate awareness in students about the ruling – innate ideas and content behind styles, movements, and forms. It is our utmost concern to motivate them to consider the real but unseen, and sometimes ignored, content and components of architecture in their personal - professional – aesthetic judgments. By this way, it would be possible to construct an intellectual-individual competency base on which the professional – technical qualifications could be built upon.

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Architecture is one of the most questioned professions with respect to the models, processes, and context of the education. The frame / body of that inquisition cover

- what and how we teach,
- pedagogical and methodological approaches,
- duration,
- course contents,
- credits
- the professional competency of graduates
- and measuring and assessment.

The scope of that inquisition cannot be limited with the assessment of each school of architecture individually. Political, economic, social and cultural borders and relations have introduced new dimensions about the identity and qualifications of the architect not only locally but also in global scale. Thus, the comparison and evaluation of locally educated architects for the global market have become the primary issue of the profession and its education.

The topic of comparison comes with an important issue, developing common criteria in/for training and educating architects all over the world. Then, new questions can be raised such as relevancy of universal criteria, conversion – translation the criteria according to the unique contexts and conditions of different countries, the adaptation/ reaction process of local institutions to the global impacts.*

In this context, architectural education has become an almost independent / autonomous research area next to the issues of profession itself. Every single topic and media of architecture culture has being introduced to architectural education as new fields of practice, theory, methodology, and research within the scope of theory courses and design studios particularly.

Considering that widening agenda of the profession and education, and the local criteria bonded to the international processes, the comparison the qualifications of the architect is of ultimate significance. It is a fact that, there are numerous national and international documents describing the qualifications of an eligible architect.† Although their contexts and scope are different, the competencies, skills and level of expectations they put forward are almost the same. In this respect, it possible to ask what makes an architect more qualified than the others. Why are some architects more successful and unique among the others despite the same agenda, goals and, mostly, methods of education?

It is a fact that, the technical aspects and professional competencies can be acquired by means of training. The individual competencies, however, are the unique composition of intuition, creativity, and ambitions. It is almost impossible to measure, compare, or even detect them quantitatively.

The intricate point in that situation is the assumption asserting that there are different competency areas. Because, the technical – professional competencies are accepted as quantitative, common and subjected to institutionalized education, and the individual competencies are qualitative, unique and intellectual. It is clear that technical proficiency is a tool for intellectual – artistic creativity and realisation. Then, the distinguishing competencies of an architect should be looked for in his/her individual – intellectual development.

Following that idea, the goal of the architectural education can be put as to help the students develop individual competencies, and make them acquire technical proficiency as a tool in realising those competencies.

The professional qualifications of the architect have been already defined, coded, categorized, translated into educational skills, goals and outcomes, and secured by laws and regulations internationally. These kinds of standardisations, however, conflicts with the flexibility and diversity of creative thinking. On the other hand, the individual competencies are, because of their qualitative nature, still mythological topics of psychology, phenomenology and philosophy.

Indeed, it would be better to define the frame of the competence areas for a qualified architect as an intellectual instead of translating those competencies, which are in a continuous expansion and specialisation, into classroom skills. It is possible to mention those competency areas under 4 different categories.‡

1. Generic competences on the level of intellectual capacities philosophical reasoning and behavioural attitudes
2. Personal competences related to the individual his physical psychological and emotional condition
3. Disciplinary based competences covering a wide range of sometimes contradictory character they relate to design competence esthetical tastes technical knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge communicational and managerial skills and a research attitude

* The Bologna Process cannot be interpreted as a matter of accreditation only. See <http://www.ehea.info/>

† http://www.uia-architectes.org/image/PDF/Systeme_eng.pdf, http://www.naab.org/accreditation/2004_Conditions_2.aspx

‡ For details see. Foque, Richard, mimarlık eğitiminde yetkinliklere dayalı müfredat programı tasarımı için bir strateji. TBMMOB Mimarlar Odası anka şb. Dosya no.15.p.11-14

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