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Addressing environmental design in interior architecture education: Reflections on the interior design studio

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Abstract

Today, the fluid and multi-layered structure of the environment demands design professions acquire a broader perspective in conjunction with a more expanded, cross-boundary knowledge and skills. This paper mainly concentrates on the structure of interior architectural studies and the significance of environmental design. The study presents a descriptive reading through the experiences in the interior design studio, and in this sense evaluates the outcomes within the educational process. The aim is to discuss the relationship between the interior/exterior or environment/building through the ideas created in the interior design studio. The key points are elucidated through examples of student work from two different interior architecture departments in Istanbul. The reflections upon developing the knowledge of “environmental consciousness” and establishing the dialogue between different scales of environment on student work are examined and discussed in the scope of this paper

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1. Introduction

The fact that different spatial organizations gain currency today, in parallel with the technological advancements and the qualitative and quantitative developments in the structure of the modern society, particularly the dimensional expansion of public structures and the rapid changes in urban environment further complicated interior design and consequently the need for experts started to make its presence felt stronger. Along with the ever-changing and multi-layered structure of the environment and the diversifying needs, the framework of each of the areas of design is expanding, interdisciplinary transitions and cooperation become compulsory. This situation causes also educational approaches to be interpreted and discussed once again. Different educational approaches, in different areas of the world, became current issues in line with professional practice. Both in Turkey and all around the world, interior architecture education has always been discussed with different contexts in different educational institutions. Interior architecture programs are established as part of faculties of architecture, faculties of fine arts and sometimes faculties of design. Although at first glance it seems like inclusion of interior architecture in different professional disciplines within educational institutions will cause confusion, in fact it is a situation reflecting the various

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perceptions pertaining to the profession of interior architecture. Due to the differences among the various curriculums, formations of graduates become further diversified. Consequently, the availability of different comprehensions feeds platforms of discussion and brings in a multidimensional quality to the discipline. This paper mainly concentrates on the structure of interior architectural education and the significance of environmental design. A descriptive reading through the experiences in the interior design studio is presented and the outcomes within the educational process are evaluated.

2. Interior design education and environmental design

With the inclusion of interior architecture departments under different professional disciplines in universities, forms of interior architecture education usually represent the traditions of the faculty and even the university they are included in. FIDER defines interior architects at professional level as “the professional qualified from the relative education, experience and examinations, who improves and enriches the quality of indoors in order to promote life quality, efficiency, health, safety and happiness of humankind”. As it can be seen from this definition, the matter of importance is not the school in which the interior architect is educated, but his/her knowledge on this area. Accordingly, today interior architects are expected to understand and interpret architectural integrity and develop designs within spatial (interior-exterior) integrity (Erturk, 2007).

Interior architecture education in Turkey, which started in 1925 with the ‘Sanayi-i Nefise Mekteb-i Ali’ of Istanbul Fine Arts Academy (today’s Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts), currently continues to be given in 36 different universities (Garip and Adiguzel, 2011). While 23 of these universities have “Interior Architecture” departments, the departments in the remaining 13 are on “Interior Architecture and Environmental Design”. Examining the curriculums of these departments shows that there are compulsory and elective courses that deal particularly with the concept of “environment” such as “Environmental Design, Environmental Psychology, Human and Environment Relations, Human and Environmental Factors, Environment and Human, and Environment and Culture”. These courses examine the reflections of the topics of environmental perception and cognition on interior architectural design together with covering environment that affects human perception and behavior in physical, psychological and socio-cultural terms. In addition, some of the departments also include courses where environmental design projects of various scales are carried out. The way how these courses are included in the respective curriculums and their credit weighing are in direct proportion to the objectives of the interior architecture departments.

Until recent times, interior architecture education was given under faculties and schools on fine arts and design both in Turkey and all around the world. In Turkey, its first inclusion within the body of an Architecture-Engineering Faculty was realized in Karadeniz Technical University in the 1990s (Erturk and Sener, 2005). In this way the profession of Interior Architecture, which was interpreted until then as the “decoration of indoors” gained new dimensions. Along with these interactions that trigger each other, “environmental design” and “interdisciplinary studies” gradually grow in importance within interior architecture education. Within the scope of this article, this situation is discussed through two different models (schools) that carry both similarities and differences.

The curriculum of the first of the schools, “Istanbul Kultur University (IKU) Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design” is established in line with horizontal and vertical structure relations (Erturk, 2008). The department’s education structure by years and its objective through the years are set forth by means of the vertical structure. On the other hand, within the horizontal structure the objective of the department within a particular year and the interaction of the courses included in the curriculum in that year are defined. Within this setup “the development in communication technology” and “the importance attached to environment/culture and history” come forth as the two phenomena having continuity within the vertical structure. “Environmental consciousness” is aimed to be developed particularly during the third year within the curriculum and its continuity within the vertical structure is emphasized on (Erturk, 2008). The compulsory courses in the curriculum directly related with the “environment” are “Environment and Culture”, and “Environmental Design”. The elective courses of the curriculum consist of “Environmental Psychology” where the interaction of human and the environment is discussed in line

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