

Assist. Prof. Dr. Hakan SAĞLAM
Gazi University Faculty of Engineering and Architecture
Department of Architecture
Maltepe – Ankara / TURKEY

Tel . 0 (312) 231 74 00 / 27 02

gsm : 0 (532) 382 56 30

Email : hnsn@mynet.com
hsaglam@gazi.edu.tr

FIRST YEAR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STUDIO

Abstract

Especially towards the end of the 20th century, discussions on ‘medium’ were on the agenda with the discourse: ‘medium is the message’. Taking this concept into consideration, first year architectural design studio seems to be an appropriate medium to be experienced as a stage for a simulation game where students and teachers become the actors of the architectural process. Since the early 1950’s, social scientists have been using the techniques that combine mathematical models and human behavior techniques called ‘operational gaming’. In operational gaming, mathematical models and players are combined in a game simulation to examine physical and social consequences of human decisions. On the other hand, operational games are attempts by theorists to construct operating models of complex social and physical systems.

Could not the studio be brought one notch closer to reality by a simulation game in which the various actors of a concrete situation are embodied and their respective decisions, authority and power regulated by rules? Would not a student has a better chance to learn what in the given situation would be the appropriate decisions, strategies and acceptable solutions? What would such a game of design look like? Having these questions in mind we adapted the program of the first year architectural studio into a simulation game. In this game students and the teaching staff have their specific roles to execute the design process as if practicing architects face in reality. The problems and necessities of a design process in reality structure the arguments of the game. This program also enhances the ability of students to work in a design team and submit their proposals within the format of a real project

Since 1991 simulation game is used as an educational tool in the first year design studios, at Gazi University, Department of Architecture. Benefits of this exercise can be a significant contribution to design pedagogy at schools of architecture. The aim of this paper is to share this experience of education carried out by means of a simulation game as a teaching tool in architectural education.

Key words: Game, simulation game, design, design studio

FIRST YEAR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STUDIOⁱ

Although in every school of architecture, design courses are the foundations of the curriculum, the methods used therein are the most discussed. However, there are some few traditional methods which seem to be used in consensus, generally in most of the schools of architecture; Beaux art and Bauhaus methods are two of them. At Gazi University, the method used in the architectural design courses depends on the existence of design studios. Design studio creates a medium where theoretical knowledge meets with the practical knowledge. Studio working creates an interactive method between the students and tutors conducted within the *media* of architecture. Table critics start with the discussions on the subject. Comments and critics developed in the studio enhance the development of new visions, new programs and new spatialities. As Broadbent says "Architectural design is not simply a matter of solving problems. It is a question first of all, of finding what the problems actually are."ⁱⁱ So, design process starts by asking questions in the studio. Understanding the problem and finally developing solutions follow this process. At Gazi University architectural students have been given their design tasks at the beginning of the semester and have to participate in the studio twice a week, to have a critic from their instructors or professors. At the beginning of the semester these critics are mainly on theoretical concepts and conceptual studies about the design task. In the time being critics concentrate on formal problems, and general design concepts. However, on the following weeks the critics start to focus on the problems of the individual projects and may lose the initial conceptual background. In that case, comments start to develop around result *based* critics and functional problems. These critics in general define a frustrating and boring procedure, both for the professors and students.

If the design process is carried on such result based critics, the task has always been perceived as to design as "a good project", as instead of the learning process, the product is the most important outcome. In this respect, the design process covering the learning and experiencing process of design technologies, materials, and social and spatial inputs, etc, are seen as unnecessary details which can be neglected easily. Additionally it is very normal within this procedure that the social input like rules, regulations etc, are to be victimized for the sake of the form. The important question is what to do to enhance an innovative, critical, productive, rich and creative studio medium?

In pedagogy gamesⁱⁱⁱ are expected as tools of learning.^{iv} As Huizinga stated already in 1938 human being is a "Homo Ludens" which means 'playing person'. Focusing on the element of play in human culture, Huizinga examined the role of play in law, war, science, poetry, philosophy, and art. He saw the instinct for play as the central element in human culture - all human activities are playing: "Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play."^v

Beginning with this fact we may say that learning is a significant process which can be realized by means of games. So, by introducing games in a design studio, a student centered learning process can be initiated. Since 1990, such student centered learning process has been launched at Gazi University in the 2nd semester of the first year design studio.

Games provide us amusing time and social relations. As Friederich Schiller stated, a person is only than a human being to the extent they are able to play.^{vi} Games are mostly universal and they are not age limited. Games have certain rules, strategies, temporal and spatial limitations. Additionally if there are not very strict rules, the result may be more creative. Some games

may develop and change within it. This is a potential to be transferred into creativeness. That means the participants of the game have the freedom to interpret the rules and to create new strategies. Moreover, a game as a leisure time activity is the best way to learn. Just because games in themselves inherit to imitate, to recommend, order, fantasy, improvisation, imperatives, rules necessities and strategies.

Not every game but most of the games are amusing. Some games are like competitions, and in such games there are always winners and losers. Games do not always have common characteristics and strategies but may have some similarities. To express this situation Wittgenstein uses the term “family resemblance” The term “game” is like a family category and may compose several similar games inside.^{vii} In his studies Wittgenstein tries to find the relationship between concepts and practices in the daily life of the people. So, a game may give the freedom of practicing the realities of life in a simulation and by the way provides the opportunity of learning and experiencing the knowledge as if it is in reality.

A script is always necessary for initiating a game. It is like an agreement which shows the way that the game develops, and also it is a guide to design the options, the actions, the possibilities and activities by the whole participants. The game itself becomes an object to be designed. As we can observe, the ongoing process of the game, it is just same as the design process, altering due to time and place. The one and only thing in playing and designing we learn is the fact that the procedure is never the same. In each game/design you have to design it each time again and again.

The learning process via games in the design studio is a significant experience in terms of architectural education. Each game has its own equipments just like the architectural design process having its own equipments like; pencils, papers, drawing equipments, cardboards, wood, steel, glass, brick, concrete etc. In terms of design process it has some other sophisticated design elements like columns, beams, walls, water surfaces, steps, etc., On the other hand, the medium of architecture is mostly abstract. Accordingly it is needed to fill the gap between idea and form. For that reason the tool of critic must refer both to the idea and to the form.

In the meantime in the design process poetical expressions is a must and always be appreciated. To find a design work which touches our hearts is the most expected result. Nevertheless, architecture and construction are the two basic goals that must not be separated during the design process. The knowledge of structure is of utmost important for architecture. Therefore, towers and bridge like structures are good tools for games and design processes. Otherwise natural structures like human body or a tree structure can be used as examples to learn the possibilities of load bearing. Another media to be used as a tool in the playing process is the history of architecture to discuss the formal and conceptual facts in architectural examples.

The students as playing actors have to work in three dimensions. To enrich the dimensions always enhances the students. Models are very good examples for this issue. Remodeling in the studio can open a brand new perspective for the students and allows him to observe the very changing face of architecture

Urban and architectural problems which are on the agenda of the city are carried directly into the studio. These problems are transferred into design/game themes. Accordingly the subject is usually chosen from the city where we live. Consequently the students are trained to look

and to see the city gradually with a professional eye. This is achieved by mini excursions in the city, which held quite often.

In this screenplay students are given altering roles in playing/designing the subject. These roles varying from being a simple citizen to the role of a major, including all layers of the society, are taken from the daily life.

Just about a year the whole class is turned into an architectural office where teaching staff are architects / senior architects and students are technical drawers or designers. Additionally this architectural office functions like an overseas bureau in which several teams are competing with each other.

Within each design task there are projects which are eliminated and there are some which will be realized and this atmosphere could be comparable with real life. There should be some rules to realize this game just like in every case. But these rules may alter due to the time and place and the task. In this procedure awards are taken as quality improving factors.

The main aim of this game is to provide an accelerating motivation to the design process, moreover to place love for architecture. As Huizinga stated, to transfer the game into cultural function, tasks or home works should be taken into consideration. Consequently a cautious volunteering performance is needed to continue.^{viii} One of the main results that surfaces when a student is expected to move on from a multi choice thinking process to a multi dimensional one, is the confusion that overcomes them when the one and only authority is replaced by polytonality.^{ix} The performance is far beyond a theatrical one. In this performance we discover our own talents. At this very point formatting the profession as a game enhances an out most creative environment. It is very clear that even a very passive and incommunicative student is ready to involve in the process just because the process is tend to be entertaining as a role player; as an actor. The first architectural project should be as memorable just like the first love...

CONCLUSION

Architecture is one of the most significant discipline in which creativity is the backbone of the learning process. As Huizinga states game is a challenge and a way of representation.^x In architectural design studio, it has a power to teach the methods of design by experiences and by participation of all the students. Within this conceptual framework the relation of creativity and the process of learning design via games is a specific experience. So, this paper mainly focuses on introducing this pedagogical strategy and to share the experience of the design studio at Gazi University.

ⁱ This course (M 102 architectural project II) has been part of the curriculum of Gazi University, Department of Architecture. Instructed by Hakan Sağlam, Nurçin Çelik, İlhan Kesmez, Aktan Acar and Ece Kumkale since 2005.

ⁱⁱ Broadbent, G., “Architectural Education” in **Educating Architects**, Pearce, M. and Toy, M., (eds.), 1995. pp.10-23.

ⁱⁱⁱ Generally we choose a **simulation game**, or sim game, wherein the use of skill and strategy, as well as chance plays an important role in the simulation of an aspect of reality, such as current urban problems in Ankara. To increase the popularity, we arrange some similarities with some computer simulation games such as Sim City and Civilization or etc. Generally these simulation games are intended to simulate the real world. For more information see. Onur. Z and Saglam, H, Role of Simulation Games in Architectural Education.

^{iv} Especially in psychology a useful documents about ‘Play Therapy’; Such a knowledge helps us how therapy can be implemented in play contacts and how the play can vivid performers and aids in growth. See for more information ‘Play Therapy’ by Virginia M. Axline

^v see. <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/huizin.htm>. 20 .04.2007 hrs.14.00

^{vi} Schiller, Friedrich. (1984) werke in drei Bandern, *Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft*, Darmstad .p.837

^{vii} Wittgenstein, L. Yan Değiniler, (1999) tras. O. Aruoba. Altıkırkbeş yayın İstanbul.

^{viii} Huizinga J. Homo ludens, oyunun toplumsal işlevi üzerine bir deneme. Trans. M.a. kılıçbay. Ayrıntı yayınları. İstanbul 1995

^{ix} Dural Tuğyan Aytaç, Oyun Oyunun gücü, Oynama İçgüdüsü ve Mimarlık Eğitimi, (2001) Gösterge Bilim Tartışmaları, Multilingual. İatanbul.p 210-218.

^x Huizinga, . Homo ludens 1995