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THE FIRST PROJECT (STUDIO) EXPERIENCE IN THE URBAN PLANNING EDUCATION: THE TESTING OF A METHOD

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Outobiography:

Ahmet Melih Öksüz was born in 1961 in Trabzon, Turkey, and studied architecture at the Karadeniz Technical University (KTÜ), where he graduated in 1985. From 1985 he spend three years working as "designer" for architecture firm that was called NKY partnership in Trabzon. He began his career as a planning (urban and regional) in 1988. In 1997 He completed Ph D in Department of Architecture in KTÜ. He has been working since 1988 in the same university.

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ABSTRACT:

The studio experiences in the urban planning and the architecture education in tertiary level have shown us that students' grasping the urban project topics in terms of scope and content is difficult. A similar comparison to be made among the students of the urban planning, interior architecture and landscape architecture will give us the same conclusion. This situation may be because urban issues include a network of relations that can not be easily observed at first sight due to its wide-ranging scope in physical, social, economic, and cultural...etc dimensions. For the students, the problem in the studio is the planning of a design problem which they were unable to comprehend. For this reason, the main purpose of the design problem should be the step-by-step progress towards the concepts from the levels at which students can render good comprehension of the topic, to the one at which they are least familiar or unable to comprehend, and thus they are made to discover these levels. This is called as induction.

Project 102 is the first studio study that has ever been made by the students of Urban and Regional Planning Department at Karadeniz Technical University. For such students who came from different regions of the country and who have different cultural backgrounds and elements, an appropriate level which they can define and comprehend must be essential. For this reason, during the planning process of the Project 102, the "family" level must be initiated since it can be defined and comprehended easily by the students. This is due to the fact that Turkish people attach great importance to the concept of family as well as the family is the smallest unit of the social structure and the smallest planning unit in the urban planning

The family which the students imagined in a certain time and space will meet all its needs for the urban living in their environment. This environment follows a 3-step process that starts from the

vicinity of the house, and then is extended to a settlement area with a population of 15000.

In the first stage, a scale of 1/500 is used. At this scale, the functional and the spatial needs of the family in the vicinity of their houses are defined, and the students are asked to design this level in the studio atmosphere and this level falls into the neighbouring unit in urban planning

At the second step, a scale of 1/1000 is used and primary school unit is designed, where functional and spatial needs that have been determined by the daily needs of the defined family are met.

At the third step, the land use decisions of a small scale urban settlement for nearly 15000 people are designed on a scale of 1/5000. This settlement is the place where the defined family meets all its needs and where they live.

In all three levels that include inter-scaling transitions, the use of model techniques for studies on a scale of 1/500 and 1/1000 as well as the use of drawing techniques is required.

With the project under study, the adaptation process was observed to have been fairly easy and nearly all the students made a good start. In the studies with scales of 1/1000 and 1/5000 the general progress is as expected. When viewed in terms of the achievement in the progress level, every student made an achievement in different levels based on their own backgrounds, skills and perceptions.

Finally, building the design in terms of definition, comprehension, identification and control, and discovering the unknown spaces as the knowledge increases all seem to be a safer and more reliable way for the students who have only recently began their design and planning education.

Keywords: Planning Education, Planning Studio, First Project Experience, Inductive method

The discipline of Urban and Region Planning is relatively a newer profession or expertise than the architecture and the other disciplines. This new discipline has gradually broadened in terms of content and scope so as to include various dimensions in a long period of time from the early design-based physical planning forms to the modern social, economic, cultural dimensions etc. (Branch, 1981). Recently, radical criticisms have been directed to the scope and the content of the planning in terms of city, region, rural and space, and the participant and advocacy planning dimensions etc. have been discussed for a certain time.

The most important point where city and urban planning students or graduates differ from the architecture is that they are working on planning or design problems which are based on a broader scale (Frank, 2006).

On the other hand, the studio experiences that we gained in architecture and urban and regional planning departments showed that the understanding of planning studios, in particular by the students, is more difficult. When a similar comparison among other departments such as interior architecture and landscape architecture are made, it can be said that the same is the case. This is because planning topics are more comprehensive in terms of content, scope, and scale. Since the planning and design problems include a system of relations that can not be comprehended at first sight in the urban and regional planning education, its structure is not concrete enough to be comprehended at first sight in the early stages of the design. For this reason, the approach to be followed in the studio education must be strong enough to solve these problems. Moreover, such general benefits as developing various methods for solving the design and planning problems, and thus gaining experience are all expected. (Kulo•lu at al. 2001; Asaso•lu at al. 2002)

The Significance of the First Project in the Planning Education

While the construction of the studios that are vital for urban and regional planning is important in terms of planning education to be given, the construction of the first studio in particular is important since it represents the first stage of the planning education and profession. Through this first project experience it becomes possible to melt all the students who come from the various parts of the

country and who have different knowledge, skills, and cultures in the same pot, and thus enable them to take up this profession through a soft adaptation period. This is what makes the first experience different than others.

A reasonable number of students chose a profession with no adequate knowledge about it whatsoever quite often as was the case for many other students in their university education. On the other hand, they lack adequate knowledge to be able to express themselves in written and orally in their profession. For this reason, the first project in urban and regional planning teaches the students, on the one hand, the boundaries of the profession as was the case in architecture, and on the other hand, it teaches them all the necessary basic presentation techniques for their profession and, thus giving them opportunities for practice.

The students are offered Basic Design course and Communication and Presentation Techniques in the Planning course until they complete the first term during which time they carry out their projects.

The Construction of the First Project in Planning

Project 102 is the first project study that was done by the department of Urban and Regional Planning students. The main purpose of the project is the develop students' ability to start from a level in which they can identify, comprehend, and control the process, and this level will well fit into the students ability to cope, and then progress through more difficult levels step by step, thus developing the ability to cope with more complex problems. This is an inductive reasoning method, just opposite to the opening the Russian matruska each time and only to come up with a new and smaller matruska. This overlaps with the hierarchical staging in the planning from a single central (focus) house to the entire city.

The main purpose of the construction of the project in the first place is the family. The reason for this is that Turkish people attach great importance to the family and the students, similarly, have great interest on the family concept and values. Moreover, family is the core of the social structure and the house, as the spatial reflection of this concept, is the smallest physical spatial planning unit.

First of all, all students were asked to define the family. The concept of family to be defined is the one that each student constructed individually and that lives for a certain time in a certain place. The number of the members in the family, life style and environment, relations in and out, economic situation, culture, belief etc. are the dimensions to be defined by the students. This family concept may be utopia, idealized or an ordinary one. The students are to define the family as detailed as possible and do this in written form. The project is developed step by step from the close environment of the house to a small city within the framework of the neighbourhood, and primary school design or planning.

The Studio process is an ever increasing three-step process and accounts for the use of the term (15 weeks) in three steps as well as for the three steps in terms of scope, content, and the scale. (Figure 1)

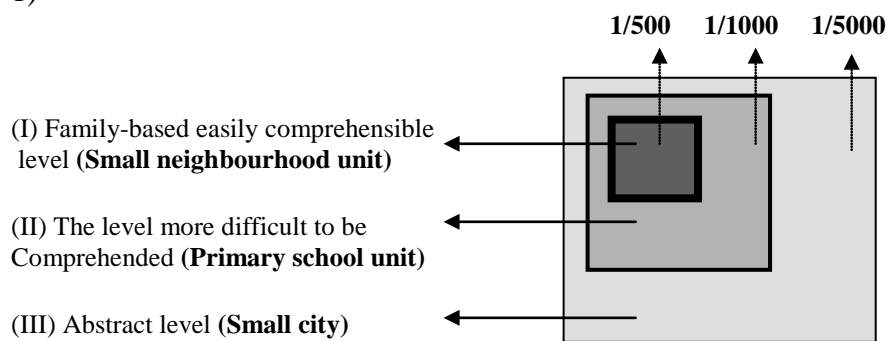


Figure 1. Three-Step Representation of the Project in Terms of Scope, Content and Scale

The family that was constructed by the student will meet its needs for urban life from the closest environment to the entire environment of the city. The environment where the needs are met are composed of small neighbourhood units, primary school units and urban settlement units of 1500 people and predetermined planning units, and these students are made to discover these scales through the needs of the families of their own construct. (Figure 2)

	SCOPE	POPULATION	THE NUMBER OF HOUSE UNIT	AREA (Ha)	SCALE
I. STEP	Small Neighbourhood Unit	300-600	Max. 150	~ 0.40	1/500
II. STEP	Primary school unit	3500-5000	300-400	~ 30	1/1000
III. STEP	Small city with a population of 1500	15000	2000-3000	~ 600	1/5000

Figure 2. The Proposed Scope and Scale for Every Step

The study topics were previously prepared as the parts of a whole and given to the students at the beginning of every step. There are some similar points in every step that is followed. (Figure 3) First of all students, in their level (small neighbourhood, primary or small city) try to determine what kinds of spatial needs of the families they can meet on the basis of the families they constructed. Later, they search for this information from the literature and then the responsible instructors complete these processes by giving a general lecture on the topics. Here, daily, weekly, monthly, or seasonal needs and the spatial needs are discussed with the guidance of the responsible instructors. The functions to serve for the designed level are all evaluated in terms of their sizes, standards, the functionalities, the distance, availability etc. and ideal solutions are found within the planning and design activities in the studio. All the naturally and physically limiting factors such as elevation of the land, valley, flora, and season are all considered as much as possible in the discussions and thus students' awareness towards them are increased.

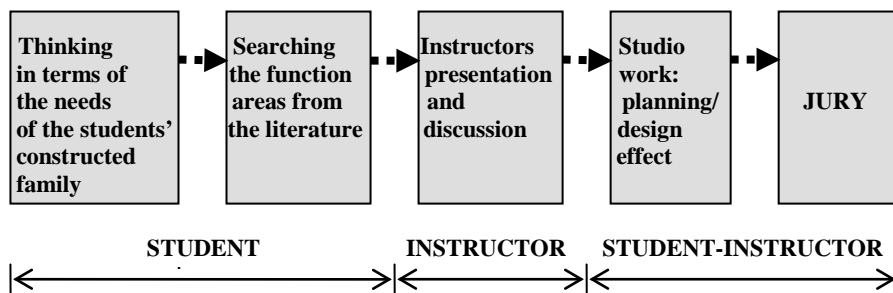


Figure 3. Proposed Functional Construction for Each Step

In the project three study teams made up of nine people each were prepared on the basis of department facilities and the number of students and every study group was given an instructor with a PhD degree and a research assistant. These instructors changed their groups in every step of the research and in this way they were given the opportunity to meet all the students and in this way, a classroom auto control mechanism was created. Another regulation that made this mechanism possible and that paved the way for the sharing of information is the establishment of juries that were attended by all the teachers and students alike.

Juries are places where learning takes place more than usual and when the students are questioned as to what and how much they learned (Webster, 2007). This period can be considered as an opportunity for the students to get rid of their shortcomings and to step up. At the same time, they have the opportunity to reflect all their knowledge and skills.

I. Step

In this step, the students think of the expectations of the defined families from their close environment and design it on the basis of family needs. The study is carried out in studio with drawings with a scale of 1/500 and with a model. Here, the students seize the opportunity to learn how to use spatial properties in the close environment of the houses, the design principles of the recreational areas, their standards, spatial organization of the street and urban spaces, pedestrian crossings and car park arrangements, and the texture of the houses. They also develop their ability to arrange and design. Moreover, they are given visual presentation techniques through the drawings and models. Below are some of the examples about the project. (Figure 4)

II. Step

In this step, the students see that their house group design is the part of a larger group. Discussing the needs of the family again at this level, they redesign the spatial arrangement in primary school level on the basis of the information obtained in the discussions. This stage is the one during which 1/1000 scale is used and it is carried out both by drawings and by models. Daily uses are questioned and

the spatial organizations of the primary school, trade, health, and social, sport and park areas are done and car parks are arranged. (Figure 5)


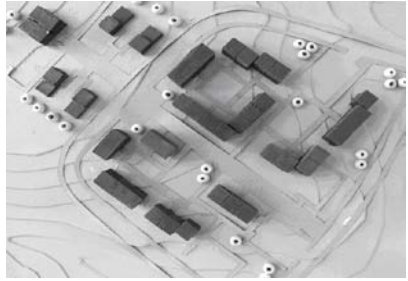
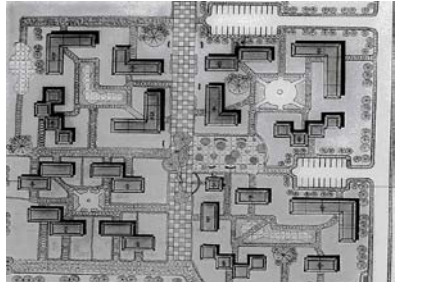
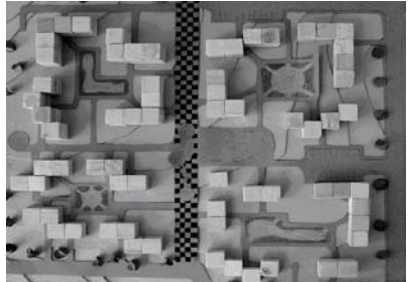
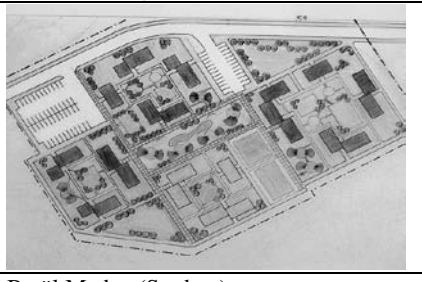

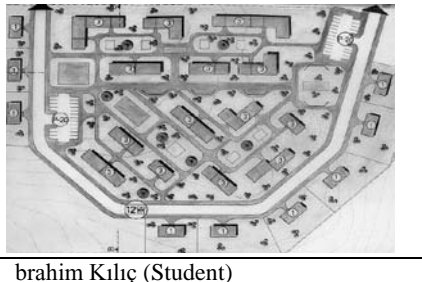
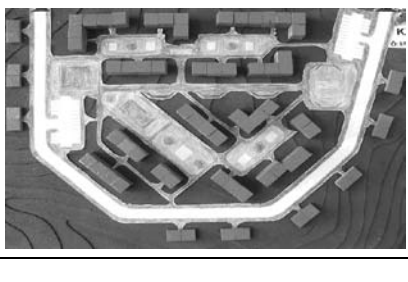
I. STEP DRAWINGS AND MODEL SAMPLES	
Plan 1/500	Model 1/500
	
Ferda Yazıcıo lu (Student)	
	
• ehriban Gökçe (Student)	
	
Betül Maden (Student)	
	
brahim Kılıç (Student)	

Figure 4. Neighbouring Unit and Model Samples from the First Step




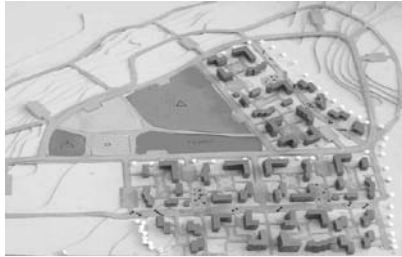




II. STEP DRAWINGS AND MODEL SAMPLES	
Plan 1/1000	Model 1/1000
	
Ferda Yazıcıo lu (Student)	
	
• ehriban Gökçe (Student)	
	
Betül Maden (Student)	
	
Merve Yava• (Student)	

Figure 5. Primary School Settlement Unit Planning Samples Prepared in the 2nd Step.

III. Step

The third step is the minor settlement level. Here, the student proposes the entire urban house accessories to be needed at this level, their properties, and sizes on the basis of needs and functions. While doing this, they are expected to use and reinterpret natural and artificial spatial data. At this scale, the general decisions such as central trade, education, health recreational areas for settlement and transportation systems are designed or planned detail. (Figure 6)

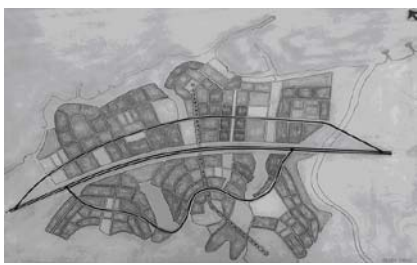

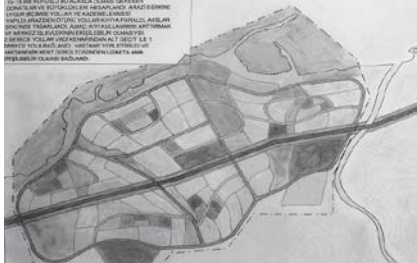
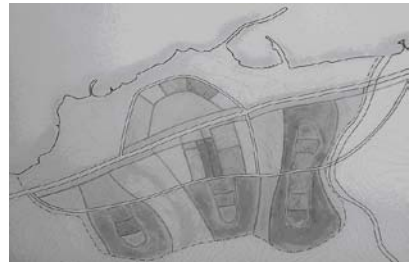
III. STEP DRAWINGS AND MODEL SAMPLES	
Plan 1/5000	
	
Ferda Yazıcıo lu (Student)	• ehriban Gökçe (Student)
	
Betül Maden (Student)	Merve Yava• (Student)

Figure 6. Small City Settlement Unit Planning Samples in the Third Step

Benefits

The aim of the first project experience in the department of Urban and Regional Planning is to create an atmosphere in which the students will easily adapt to the education and the profession successively, and while doing so, they will be equipped with all the necessary initial knowledge of the field. The benefits to be reaped in this context are as follows;

- * To inform about the settlement and the structure of the city.
- * Teaching the relative relations of the house and its close environment, primary school unit, and the settlements in cities with low scales and making them realize the hierarchical relation between them and the settlement systems.
- * Giving theoretical and practical information about functional areas in each proposed level, their properties, standards, and the arrangement principles, and thus improving the skills of using this information.
- * Bringing awareness for the natural and artificial data that can direct the design and the planning in each level, and enabling them to use these data in making design and planning decisions.
- * Teaching the drawing techniques that are used in different levels like 1/500, 1/1000 and 1/5000
- * Developing 1/500 and 1/1000 land and settlement model techniques
- * Gaining them skills towards the presentation and oral defence of the studies.
- * Learning the managing time and the project process

Discussion

The studio study carried out here has been planned as the part of a whole and it is in line with the basic principles (TUPOB, 2005) that are accepted by the Planning Departments all throughout the Turkey and which is in accordance with the teaching program of the Urban and Regional Planning of Karadeniz Technical University. The coordinators of the project completed their university in architecture department, and continued their PhD in Urban Planning. Many of them carry out works in studios both as architects and planners. For this reason, the method to be followed here may be close to the one in architecture. However, the number of educators who are in the Planning departments in Turkey but who had an Architectural education background can not be underestimated (Uzel 1989).

Although today the alienation of planning from architecture in terms of both application and education is discussed widely, in the emergence of urban planning and its further development, the contribution of Architecture can not be denied. Urban planning has a multidisciplinary area and has strong relations with other disciplines, the most important being the Architecture discipline

(Frank 2006). This brings variety and richness to the methods that are used by urban planning.

On the other hand, another topic under discussion is the concept of neighbourhood unit that is used in the planning of building areas and this concept is the subject of studio in the Architecture education (Soygeni• and Kırı , 2007). Since the first day this concept was proposed, it has been for several times reinterpreted despite the criticism directed to it and has been used as a valid planning argument (Biddulp 2007; American Planning Association, 2006; Hester 1975; Carmona at al. 2003; Wolfe 1987; Barton and Tsourou 2000).

The obtained results have been found to be satisfactory by the project coordinators. The project process is seen as a dynamic and uninterruptible period and the process is sensitive to the any possible interruption. Re-adaptation becomes harder each time when there is a break during the project process.

Although the project process seems at first a strict and inevitable program there may be some flexibility involved in the proposition of study areas particularly. Since the defined family will live in the future too, it becomes possible to include some utopian elements to the process. The preparations to be made by the students, the route and the methods to be followed have been formed so as to make the project process more flexible and rich. From this point of view, the process makes it possible to reconstruct itself on the basis of new developments in the world.

During the project process, such criticism as there are many subjects and they are all based on concrete data and this will limit the creativity of the students may be justified to a certain degree. But here the students are expected the get as much information as possible, believing that the degree of self development is infinite. For this reason, the knowledge of the students, their enthusiasm for learning, and the effort they put determined the scope and the width of the project process. Though there is a need for providing those students with minimum knowledge and skills, there is no a prerequisite for the maximum level of knowledge and this is determined entirely by the student population.

On the other hand, the planning area is different than architecture and other design areas in terms of the methods and materials it uses. This is why, in the project studies during the planning education, the use of concrete knowledge such as social, economic, and natural take place inevitably earlier than the other professional education areas. The shortness of the education period may be a factor behind this.

Conclusion

The results of the first project experience shows that the products and the performance put forward by the students for all the three steps were successful. Here, it can be said that starting the project with two familiar subjects, these being the family and house, eased the adaptation period. The end products that freshman Planning students produced in every step of the project in terms of comprehension, understanding, and developing a planning plan of the settlement were surprisingly successful. Here the true success will be understood only after the data obtained is used in the future. For this reason, there is a need for more time to understand the true benefits of the process to the students

Thorough the questions to be asked to the students on the issue, the evaluation of the project will be done, feedback, project time, and program will be revised.

The change in the project process and in the planning should not only be dependent on feedback from the students. The reflection of developments in the planning to the education becomes possible only through adapting them to the new developments as well as flexibility. The applied program for the first project study in the Urban and Regional Planning seems like to be adaptable to the new developments.

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