

Participatory methods in the education of architects.

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To understand the context, from the physical through the sociological to the economic, the architect must conduct field research. For a long time, that primarily meant a tour of the location, but recently, the importance of collecting the opinions of all actors of spatial development is becoming highly recognized. Roughly speaking, these are four groups: the local government members; various expert groups representatives; representatives of companies interested in investment and development; and specific or future potential users. Moderating the conversation of all these groups representatives is a demanding yet rewarding task.

Since the architect already takes into account and tries to reconcile the views of various professions in his daily work, he could be a good moderator. Therefore practical teaching of this nature is advisable to be included in architectural education. The theoretical foundations need to be supplemented by active work on a specific task. The elective course “Participatory design of space” at the Faculty of architecture, University of Zagreb, introduces students to the importance and modes of applying the participation of all relevant stakeholders in creating a cognitive fund for solving a design or planning task. The topic of each years’ task is formed based on the needs of a community and its readiness for participatory activities that range from information through surveys and interviews to involvement in implementation.

The classes held so far provide interesting insights into specific situations and point out the importance of introducing students to the possibilities of comprehensive fieldwork and research in order to solve real problems of today. The challenges identified in that process are: understanding the broader context of inclusive planning and one’s own design role; maintaining a balance between one’s own professional creativity and the participatory information gathered; objective information filtering; approaching the interlocutor.

