Means-oriented or goal-oriented architecture education?

Ahmed K. Ali

In a fading material culture, where societies have become far from making and only content with image approximations, architectural education, no exception, is suffering from the absence of visual, haptic, and tacit knowledge. When pairing the knowledge of materials with its related issues of resource depletion, climate change, and waste, a new seed for teaching architecture is ready to be planted.

This contribution will focus on a profound distinction between two opposing design methodologies: a conventional method and an unconventional one. In an interview, Taeke De Jong, a professor of ecology at the University of Technology in Delft, a leading authority on ecosystems, described the two design approaches as “means-oriented” and “goal-oriented.” Goal-oriented design is the conventional method in which the goal (or building design) is defined, and every decision is made in fulfilment of that goal. It is not until the design development phase that suitable materials are specified and procured. The means-oriented design methodology, on the other hand, is the complete opposite process, starting from the means (or materials in our case) available with a less strictly defined end goal. Under this approach, it is necessary to first source and acquire the materials before design starts. Otherwise, uncertainty and potential failure in both sourcing and detailing complicate the process.

Dr. Ali is the Harold Adams endowed professor of architecture at Texas A&M University. His research investigates the relationship between the architecture of waste, circular economy, and industrial symbiosis.

Img. A02