
TITLE

Learning from the Existing: Spa Settlements as a Pedagogical Framework for Environmentally Sensitive Spatial Futures

AUTHOR

Aleksandra Milovanović, Mladen Pešić, Jelena Ristić Trajković, Milica Milojević, Verica Krstić, Ana Nikezić, Vladan Đokić

ABSTRACT

This paper promotes a value shift in architectural education – from tabula rasa design toward reimagining inherited spaces as resources for future transformation. Spa settlements are framed as living pedagogical contexts for anti-extractive, regenerative approaches to the built environment. The study is situated within the SPATTERN project, which advocates an educational shift placing existing spa settlements at the core of integrating spatial history, environmental systems, and socio-cultural dynamics.

The paper reflects on five studio-based curricula at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, engaging spa settlements – often in fragile ecosystems – as bases for developing no-demolish pedagogies. These challenge extractive logics and promote care-based spatial futures. The curricula range from undergraduate studios on adaptive transformation of urban heritage through critical mapping and scenario design¹ to master-level studios exploring spa heritage reprogramming², hybrid naturalities, and multisensory well-being.

Students were encouraged to work with, not against, inherited spatial fabrics – treating heritage as dynamic and

AFFILIATION

Laboratory for Urban Morphology and Typology (Morpho-Lab), Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia

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shaped by environmental, social, and experiential forces. Through methods like site diagnostics, speculative programming, behavioral mapping, and environmental storytelling, these frameworks redefine the value of the already-built and propose new typologies rooted in care, circularity, and climate sensitivity.

Spa settlements, with layered materiality, health infrastructure, and entwined histories of landscape and architecture, offer fertile ground for pedagogical innovation. These studios promote a future-facing view of heritage aligned with education grounded in place, history, and speculative imagination.

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