

Participatory Design of Space (Course in Academic Year 2018/2019)

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Complexity of the 20th century society, along with strong professions' specialization, led to separation between all participants in the developing processes, especially in public spaces design. Lack of cohesion and consensus along with poor communication between professions, citizens, government and business sector, resulted in new participative and interdisciplinary trends emerging in the 21st century to bring sectors back together. Students' education must follow these trends, as their orientation in shaping the desirable futures.

Elective course 'Participatory design of space' (POP) is planned as a faculty-based fieldwork workshop that gives students the opportunity to become acquainted with participatory methods in space design. In this way, the user's opinion is included in the cognitive fund when drafting the conceptual solution of a small-scale task in the public space or in any area of interaction. Students learn to identify and critically evaluate participatory content, to generate the conceptual level of planning — intent, to discuss it with users, to translate it directly and recognizably into a viable solution, to present it successfully, and to participate in the realization.

IVAN GUNDULIC'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LOBBY

When we speak about participation we primarily refer to the process of sharing the decisions that affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives (R. Hart, 1992). In the academic year 2018/2019, the elective course POP focused on the participation of Ivan Gundulic's elementary school children, and the goal of the course was to architecturally redefine the school entrance space. Participation of pupils in problem-detecting, evaluation of suggested ideas and at the end the realization of selected solutions, achieved the partnership which is the sixth rung out of eight in the participatory ladder (S. Arnstein, 1969). For architecture students, this course gave an insight and tackle the importance of the involvement of end users in designing process.

The educational process started with introductory lectures followed by two focus group discussions: with school staff representatives (principal, janitor, cook, cleaning lady, teacher, professor) and with pupils (first to eighth grade representatives). On both focus groups the problems encountered daily regarding the usage of the school entrance space were identified and some ideas on how to solve these problems were mentioned.

The intensive on-site weekend group work followed, so the students could design solutions and present them to school staff and pupils' representatives next week. For comprehensively commenting the presented ideas, employees and pupils

were given leaflets with 3D images of each solution so they could write their thoughts and rank proposed solutions.

In deciding which ideas will be implemented and how they will be combined the mentors and the school principal brainstormed the comments on leaflets and discussed them regarding overall appearance and the available budget. The authors of the selected designs had two weeks to make detailed drawings and find the appropriate materials. On the day of school refurbishment (held each year in April), mentors and students, parents and pupils, with the assistance of a school janitor, worked to give the lobby a new, improved shape. The whole process took not more than a month.

CONCLUSION — THEMATIC RESPONSES

THE EDUCATOR. In POP, we — the teachers — act as mediators between the students on one side and the users on the other, while also encouraging our students to become mediators themselves. Educational process presents continuous encouragement to balance between own creativity and participative inputs. That includes the ability of being critical to both one's own ideas as well as users' opinion.

THE PLACE. POP strives to educate in the space that is the task area, or at least next to it. In that way, students have the opportunity to fully connect with users and the space in focus, which is crucial for this way of learning.

THE CONTENT. In the contrary to classical architectural education, approach where basic criteria come from the conceptual realm, POP draws inspiration from communication and collaborative processes. Choosing simple tasks enables focus shifting from the design problem to the process itself.

THE PROCESS presents a short and intensive journey starting with articulating the intention with users; designing the initial ideas; understanding the critical feedback given by mentors and users alike; redesigning ideas; elaborating and purchasing the needed materials within the budget framework; and finally, realisation of their design projects.

THE STUDENT. Student's perspective is, without a doubt, changed. They become more open to equal communication, with users and other professionals alike, thus more responsible and involved in the whole process. Dynamic teamwork makes them more agile and quicker in designing and thinking.

REFERENCES

Arnstein, Sherry P. 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216–224.

Hart, Roger A. 'Children's Participation — from tokenism to citizenship', Innocenti essays, No. 4, 1992, UNICEF International Child Development Centre Spedale degli Innocenti Florence, Italy



1: TASK — School's entrance hall before the refurbishment (photo by Rene Lisac)



2: BRAINSTORMING — Students and mentors discussing in the school's playground (photo by Rene Lisac)



3: PRESENTATION — Students elaborating their designs to evaluation body (pupils' and staff representatives) (photo by Mihaela Sladović)



4: REFURBISHMENT WORK — Annual school works (photo by Božidar Prezelj)



5: RESULTS — Storage and hanging (photo by Rene Lisac)



6: RESULTS — Pupils' and parents' lounge area (photo by Rene Lisac)