

# Students' Approach to Participating in Informal Education: The Case of Betonart Architecture Summer School

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## KEYWORDS

architecture education, informal education, workshops  
in architecture, summer school, Betonart Architectural  
Summer School

The way of learning and performing practice, the tools and methods that are being used for it and the spaces that these processes take place are shifting with the change of information and technology. Under these circumstances architectural education has faced difficulties in being up to date in particular about curriculum, program and physical requirements. While instant solutions give instant results, it is inevitable that rooted solutions will be encountered to keep up with this rapid change. For this reason, countless “informal education” activities are being implemented, such as competitions, workshops, assemblies, forums, publications, etc. This paper focuses on BASS (Betonart Architectural Summer School) as a case to understand the motives of participating in such activities from the perspective of architectural students. It tries to demonstrate that students are aware of the importance of informal educational activities, furthermore they are increasingly demanding.



## INTRODUCTION

The place of formal and informal studies in architectural education has been discussed in various platforms for a long time. In particular, the effects of supporting formal education (planned vocational training in educational institutions affiliated with the Higher Education Council) with informal experiences (such as seminars, interviews, exhibitions, workshops, technical trips, which do not have a formal feedback such as course credits or internship) have been the subject of many scientific studies.

In Turkey, the architecture students' formal learning processes coincide with many informal education practices. Architecture students participate in many informal activities mentioned above, and even play an active, participatory, and responsible role in the organization of these activities. Students often contribute in these activities to where involvement is voluntary, and there are no concerns about grades. They even sometimes prefer such events to formal education activities.

The reasons why the student devotes the time remaining from formal education or the time required to spend in formal education for informal education practices (in other words, the motivation of the student to participate in informal education environments) gives an idea about the student's approach to formal and informal education. Within the scope of this study, which investigates the effects of the physical and social components of the educational environment on students' motivation, Betonart Architecture Summer School (BASS/BASS), which is a free and applied informal education activity that has been held since 2002, is examined as a case.

In the first part of the article, the current paradigms in contemporary architectural learning environment are revealed. In this perspective, informal and formal education concepts are specified, and their scope is concluded. The second part of the article examines the program, functioning, and unique characteristics of BASS, which is one of the longest-running study programs held by a non-profit association in Turkey. In the last part of the article, the case study is being analyzed comprehensively in terms of social and physical components of the educational environment. The theme of this article is elaborated extensively in the thesis titled "Investigation of Students' Motivation in Informal Architecture Studies: The Case of BASS" defended in Yildiz Technical University.

## CONTEMPORARY FORMAL AND INFORMAL ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION

Architecture is technological as the oldest occupation of mankind, theoretical as the sophisticated knowledge and ideology, commercial as the office practice, academic in terms of institutional education practices, perceptual and artistic in terms of its products and cultural qualities, economic in terms of its products' existence, social in terms of its functions, political in terms of priorities and choices, urban in terms of its use and context. It is a theoretical, cognitive and individual practice due to the characteristics of the design process (Teymur, 1995). The education of this multi-layered discipline exists as a wide ranging area of research and discussion in national and international areas, being discussed in academia, technology, economics, politics, theory, pedagogy, philosophy, sociology. History, content and scope of architectural education; the relationship between architectural education and architectural profession, effects of economic, technological, sociological changes in the profession on architectural education environment; globalization in architectural education and accreditation processes related to globalization; lifelong learning and out-of-school (formal, informal, etc.) learning environments are among the main topics discussed in architectural education. Many paradigms affect architectural practice and architectural education (Salama, 1995). In recent years, these have been presented around the world with their environmental, social, economic, political, and technological aspects world (Nicol, D.; Pilling, S., 2000). In Turkey and the world, alternative education methods and practices are explored in many schools of architecture. Architectural education, which is different from other disciplines, includes many non-traditional practices within its formal boundaries.

According to the table adapted by Rogers from "Lifelong Learning Comment 1 1985" (Table 1) traditional education programs, memorization and repetition, linear and concrete development, adherence to teacher-determined models, individual-competitive effort, static and rigid processes, rational content learning, as information provider teachers underline categorized learning, cultural unity, isolated learning spaces, separation from society while in alternative education; values such as the excitement of learning, holistic learning (ethics, intellectual, physical), respect for the individual, collective effort, creative and sociable (problem-centered) processes, teachers as contributors to learning, interdisciplinary learning, cultural differences and partnerships, life-circles, cooperation with society are emphasized (Rogers, 2004). Today, it

can be stated that alternative learning styles are frequently tested and applied in many countries of the world, especially in architecture schools.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS:	ALTERNATIVE LEARNING VALUES:
Programs	Excitement and love of learning
Memorization and repetition	Holistic learning (ethical, intellectual, physical)
Linear and concrete intellectual development	Diversity and personal esteem
Conformity to models set by teacher, individual/competitive efforts	Co-operative/collaborative efforts
Static and rigid processes, rationalist	Creativity and intuition process
Content learning	Learning, problem-centered
Teachers as an information provider	Teachers as learning facilitators
Compartmentalized learning	Interdisciplinary learning
Cultural uniformity	Cultural differences and commonalities
Isolated teaching environments	Life-based environments
Separation from community	Community partnerships

Table 1: Rogers's adaptation from *Lifelong Learning Comment 11985* (Rogers, 2004)

Terms related to education vary across disciplines and countries as well as across time (Werquin, 2008)(Rogers, 2004). Classifications related to education have also been made many times in different ways. Many pedagogues and thinkers have agreed on the classification created by Coombs and Ahmedin 1974 as 1. formal education (common-public education), 2. non-formal education, and 3. informal education. However, Michigan State University has divided education into four categories: 1. incidence (completely unplanned), 2. informal (partly planned and partly unplanned), 3. non-formal(out-of-school), and 4. formal (in-school). This classification was not accepted by those who thought that only planned learning could be called “education.” Those in this view expressed incidental learning through the concept of “informal learning” instead of informal education. Over time, these concepts have been used interchangeably in the literature (Rogers, 2004). Thinking that learning can take place in any condition and everywhere, education is a deliberate action, Rogers uses the term “informal learning” for the incidentwhile he uses “informal education” for “personalized, contextual learning programs” (Rogers, 2004).

According to Werquin, the concepts of formal, informal, and non-formal education should be defined concerning each other

in line with the main characteristics such as whether there are the learning objectives, whether it is intentional or not, and whether it leads to a qualification (Werquin, 2008). Ciravoğlu considered “informal education” as practices out of the formal curriculum (Ciravoğlu, 2001). Within the scope of this study, these informal environments 1) where “informal learning” took place, 2) which the student voluntarily participated and 3) did not seek any formal interest such as grade concerns (ECTS, extra credit), were evaluated as “informal education.”

Informal architecture activities diverge across programs (meeting, workshop, competition), the institution or people that organize (student/company of building materials/NGO/University), the field of activity (local/national), the actors involved in that activity (the roles, disciplines, and ages of the actors) and, the time, duration and the location (country-city) and space of the activity. There are many informal education activities for architecture students in Turkey. Many competitions are organized by or independent of the Chamber of Architects. Architecture journals and architecture publications appear periodically. Various events, such as seminars, exhibitions, and workshops, are held in cooperation with academia and industry. In schools, students hold multiple meetings, talks, and discussions and make publications as out-of-lecture activities with student clubs or more formal communities. There are also workshops held in Istanbul Design Biennale, which we might call as an informal learning environment in itself and Venice Architecture Biennale, Pavilion of Turkey for students of architecture in the context of international activities. In 16<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, the Pavilion of Turkey covered the informal research program “The Shift/Vardiya” which aimed to be a space for production, meeting and encountering for more than one hundred architecture students visiting the Biennale weekly through a shift, during 25 weeks, between May 26 and November 25, 2018 (Vardiya/Shift Curatorial Team).

It can be believed that the most common of all these informal practices is being short-term workshops. If looked at the workshops held in Turkey or frequently attended by students from Turkey, it's observed that these workshops are different from each other in terms of history of the activity (for how long is it being held?), actors (organization, participator, coordinator), activity area (city, space) time of the activity (During the semester, out of semester, weekday, weekend etc.), space (city, workshop space) and output (concrete output, intellectual output). In the workshops, applications and / or participation is usually free of charge. There are mobile workshops as well as those taking place in a particular city. Although most of

the workshops are carried out, out of the semester, especially the activities organized by the academy are planned according to the academic program. While the workshops held during the semester are shorter, those held between the semesters can last longer. These works can be annual, biennial, or monthly. Workshops may possibly be held in specific workshop space, as well as in different spaces, transforming those spaces into learning environments. Few of these workshops provide an opportunity for students into practice.

The workshops are unique activities that are difficult to classify under specific categories that appeared in the search for/as alternative education. They can be organized by different individuals and/or institutions for various purposes, for different groups of either local or national students. These are activities that have the potential to strengthen cooperation between industry and academia, which can be sustained through financial models such as sponsorship or donations, which are usually free of application fees. They may consist of one or more workshops, be single or continuous. The workshops are not limited to a specific topic, time, or space, where different actors are involved, where inter-actor roles are flexible, and a comprehensive, multivariate, and flexible program is realized in a short time. In the workshops, theory and practice often come together, achieving not an outcome but a process-oriented work. They are considered as rapidly changing, which can follow up to date, critical and experimental environments where collective activity and production take place (İmamoğlu, 2019).

Informal education environments differ in many ways from formal education, which occurs at a given time, following a specific curriculum, and ultimately aiming to achieve an absolute gain. Reading informal education through the parameters that shape formal education brings in many problems. This study does not intend to classify informal education environments, but only to understand the effects of some components of formal education on their equivalents in informal education:

- A. Organization
- B. Content
- C. Output and evaluation
- D. Learning environment

*A. Organization:* Organizers and sponsors in informal education take the position of the institution(s) in formal education. Different actors play a role in this part, which can also be called the organization team of the activity. They organize these activities for different purposes. As in the case of EASA, some practices may be organized by students to discuss the problems of architectural education, co-create and build, or they may be organized

or supported by industrial institutions, organizations/associations to create a synergy between industry and academia. These kinds of activities take place in schools as well, in addition to the curriculum. These activities, which are organized to increase the prestige of the school, contributing to the researches and enhancing the social interaction among the students, are considered in the informal category even if they take place in-school and are not obligatory, and the students do not have the grade concerns. Professional chambers and NGOs also organize and host such activities in line with their mission and vision.

*B. Content:* The curriculum in formal education is partially included in informal education. In most informal education programs, the path that instructors will follow in their environment is planned, though not step by step. As in formal education, this plan is not based on the goals and observations set by an institution, but rather on a content determined by the executives and occasionally even by the participants. What informal education is about and, more specifically, its conceptual framework is fundamental here.

*C. Output and Evaluation:* In formal education, it is important to achieve the target outcomes by following the curriculum. In informal though, the motivations of the participant, such as obtaining a specific loan and having a certificate, are not important concerns.

*D. Learning environment:* Informal education environments are mostly process-oriented environments. At this point, in this study, the characteristics of the learning environment affecting the process in educational contexts are examined in detail.

## EXAMINATION OF APPLICATION FORMS

Exploring the reasons of students to participate in informal education environments, BASS, which is a continuous, practice-oriented workshop and has various and fixed features in which the effect of variables such as city and theme in participation can be observed, has been chosen as an example. The fact that BASS is free of charge and does not stipulate the success paving the way for more students applying for, has played an effective role by selection.

Within the scope of the research, the application forms of approximately 1000 students who applied to BASS between 2012 and 2017 were analyzed. Diversity was considered when



Applications of BASS 2012-2017

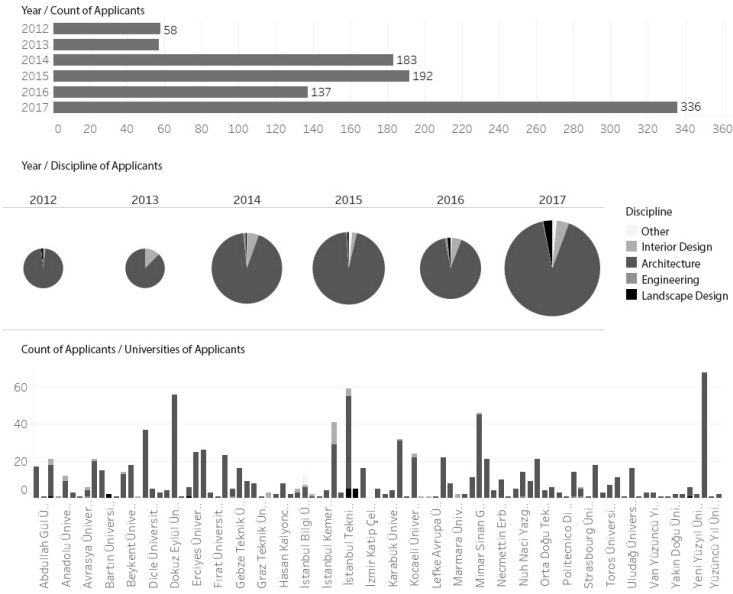


Fig. 1: 2012-2017 count of applicants-universities-disciplines

Components of Informal Practices

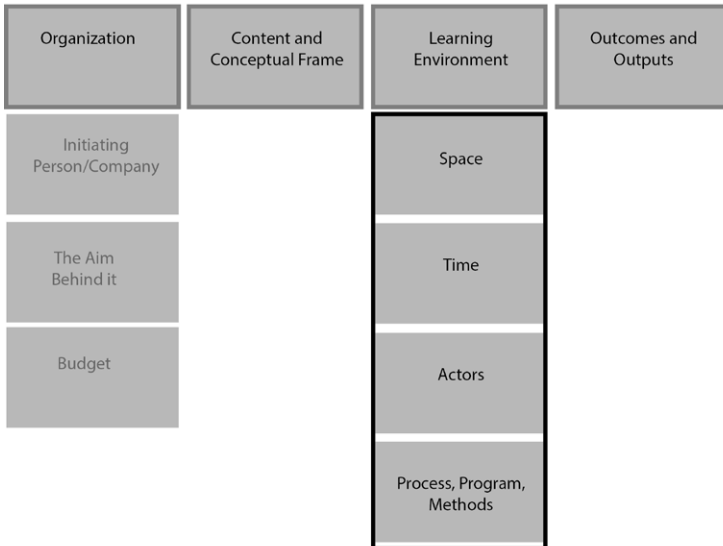


Fig. 2: scheme that shows components of informal education practices

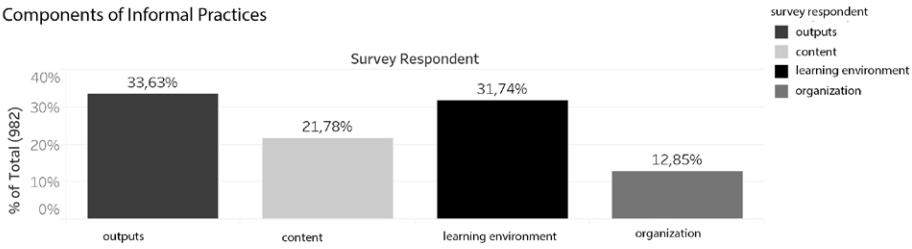
selecting the research group. Curator diversity (single curator or curatorial group), the scale of the activity (object scale or urban scale), the region (Black Sea, Marmara, Central Anatolia...) have been considered.

When the number of applications is analyzed by years, there is a continuous increase except for the decrease observed in 2016. Although the reasons such as the networks used to announce BASS in that year, the number of people reached, the curator of the theme of that year are effective in the number of applications, the current socio-economic and political conjuncture of the country cannot be considered independent from the participation of the students in such activities. Considering the increase in the number of applications between 2012 and 2017, it can be stated that 2016 is related to the situation of the country rather than the lack of student interest.

It is noticed that the diversity of disciplines of the students who applied by years increased as well. Although BASS is only open to the participation of architecture field, students from different disciplines have been applying to take part in the process in recent years, although they did not meet the application requirements. Nine hundred sixty-three applications were received from 96 different schools for six years. While a similar number of applications are accepted each year from state schools, the numbers of applications of private schools vary. Regardless of the city in which the Summer School will take place, a large number of applications are taken from the major schools, while the number of applications from relatively new universities in Anatolia are made according to the city where the event will take place. While the effect of the variables such as city, curator, and theme of BASS on participation motivation differs according to the year, features such as working with concrete, making applications, and working with participants from different schools are mentioned as the motive for each year. The reasons for this motivation were explored through the educational environment components.

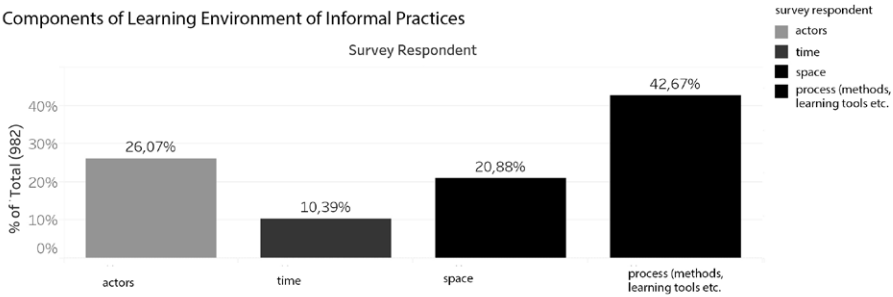
An average of 20 students attends summer school each year. The students are selected after evaluating of the open-ended question in the application form, which measure motivation for participation in the workshop. Criteria such as gender, class (grade), and whether the student has participated in similar activity before are also effective as selection criteria. The answers of the students were investigated through keywords and concepts. Each answer was examined and coded for the respective component. Among the responses of the students, it was discovered that educational output was effective for

### Components of Informal Practices



Color shows details about Survey (BASS Application Forms (BASS Application Forms 2012-2017) Respondent. The marks are labeled by % of Total Applicants (982).

### Components of Learning Environment of Informal Practices



Color shows details about Survey (BASS Application Forms 2012-2017) Respondent. The marks are labeled by % of Total Applicants (982).

Fig. 3: scheme that shows percentage of components of informal practices and components of learning environment in informal practices. Source: bass application forms. 2012-2017

33.63%, the education content and theme for 21.78%, the institution organizing the education for 18.85%, and 31.74% for characteristics of the process.

## BETONART ARCHITECTURE SUMMER SCHOOL

If BASS is classified and analyzed according to components:

### A. Organization

APME Pan European Survey, which was conducted in 2001-2002 with the participation of Sweden, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, France and Germany to measure the perception of cement and concrete in the public, showed that the attitudes towards the cement industry and cement and use of concrete as a material was negative (Survey, 2001-2002). After this survey, studies were carried out, aiming at changing the negative perception in Turkey and Europe regarding the qualified use of concrete (Becan, 2019). In Turkey, Turkish Cement Manufacturers' Association (TCMA) planned a summer

school for architecture students suggesting that education is important in this regard. Betonart Architecture Summer School BASS was organized for the first time in 2002 to break down the negative perception of concrete, contributing to architectural education, and combining theory and practice in architectural education. While planning of BASS, Blitz Concrete Research organized by Netherlands Institute of Cement (ENCI) in 1999 was taken as a model, while shared opinions in the meeting with the head of the department of architecture in Turkey was benefited.

Being organized regularly in a different city each year since 2002, with the participation of architecture students from Turkey, BASS is called “summer school” because it has a comprehensive program and that it is different from summer schools organized by the schools out of the semesters. This workshop aims to teach the students applying concrete material. BASS is a free workshop. There is no fee for the participation of the students. Besides the food, drinking, and accommodation fees of the students, all materials, tools, etc. are covered by the event organization. With these features, the workshop is accessible to all students.

BASS is organized every year in a different city with a specific theme. Thus, within the activity, there is the possibility to discuss current issues and to have the opportunity to draw the attention of students in different areas of interest, as well as to support the participation of students from every region of Turkey.

When the students know the organizer institution, they can choose the program because they are aware of the previous activities. Within the scope of the organization, the person/institution that organizes, coordinates, supports in terms of moral and material can be considered. In the case of BASS, these are fixed components, namely Turkish Cement Manufacturers' Association (TCMA) as the organizer of the event and teams, sponsors, and supporters (TCMA member cement companies, cement factories, municipalities, schools, publications) that organize the event organization as variable components.

### *B. Content*

BASS mainly focuses on the use of concrete material. Consequently, concrete is the main subject of the activity. Moreover, BASS works with a different curator every year and examines concrete within the framework of the theme decided by that curator.

The curator, which is determined for every year's workshop, develops a theme considering the city where the event will be held that year and invites the moderators in line with that theme.

Concrete is examined through the theme chosen that year. The approach to the material changes according to the theme and the scale of the activities performed. Until now, BASS, under the themes of Concrete as a Material and a Texture, Encounter, Forming the Concrete, Intersection and Connection has taken place in Ankara, Istanbul, Trabzon, Kayseri, Edirne, Kocaeli, Izmir, Mersin, Canakkale, Isparta, Balıkesir, Afyon, Ordu, Adana, and Bursa.

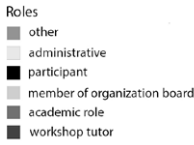
The program not only intends to teach concrete to students but also aims to teach them by applying concrete. Therefore, making the application by using concrete material builds up the core of this workshop. Although the studio process in the workshop and the workshop process in which concrete is used form the basis of this workshop, the position of these two in the program is not fixed. Sometimes the studio activity may come after the practice, and sometimes the two may walk in parallel throughout the whole process.

Even though the program is determined by the curators and moderators, some of the content of the program remains constant. Various cultural activities such as city tours, field researches, forums/seminars, video/movie activities, social activities such as juries, dining together, and entertainment are spread to the 2-week program.

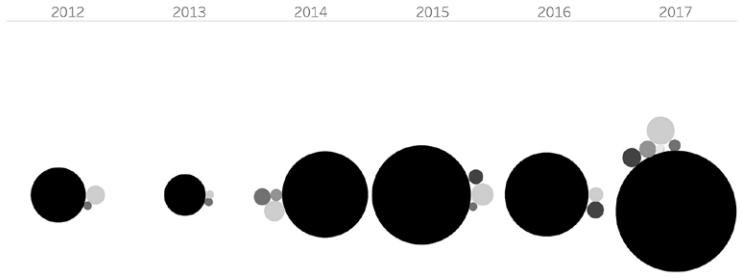
### *C. Output and evaluation*

Physical outputs of different scales have been achieved at BASS to date. Public space arrangement, urban furniture, concrete objects, and sculptures were produced. The program does not specify a final product, although various products have been obtained and exhibited at BASS. The program is process oriented.

The research covers only the motivation of the applicants to participate in BASS and does not include any final evaluation. But to have an idea about their views, the booklets (Collective, 2012) (Collective, 2013) (Collective, 2014) (Collective, 2017), prepared after the Summer School have been examined. The short answers and comments to the question “What did this challenging design and application process leave you with?” reflected that it has broadened their knowledge and changed their perceptions about the nature of concrete. They had the opportunity to use tools and construction materials they have not known before, and to carry out a design and application process from beginning to end. One of the 2013 participants highlighted that after he attended BASS which he evaluated as a 3-stage process (analysis, design and application), he faced a phase that he never took into account which was the experience of architect-employer relationship (Collective, 2013). One of the participants in 2014 stated that what



### Roles that Architecture Students Take in Workshops



Roles of Students in Informal Environments (color) and distinct count of BASS applicant no (size) broken down by Year. The data is filtered on Type of Practice (main categories), which keeps "workshops, assemblies and design weeks."

Fig. 4: roles that architecture students take in workshops. Source: bass application forms. 2012–2017

characterized this workshop environment was that they had the opportunity to experience three different roles in a time: master, practitioner architect and designer (Collective, 2014) Almost all students have underlined the pros of the social environment of BASS in these booklets. They referred to friendships developed in such a short time.

PAB Architecture founders, one of the first participants of BASS and later involved in BASS with roles such as curator and moderator, state that the most important outcome of BASS is its continuity, pluralism and serious knowledge accumulation with its history of nearly twenty years (PAB, 2019).

#### *D. Learning environment*

When the components of the learning environment are considered separately, it is noticed that the process is the component that affects student participation the most. Methods such as finding the possibility of one-to-one application, working with moderators, doing group activity; means such as working with concrete material and finding opportunities to use different analog and digital tools, and the process which is diversified with various cultural activities instead of only workshops are effective at the rate of 42.67%.

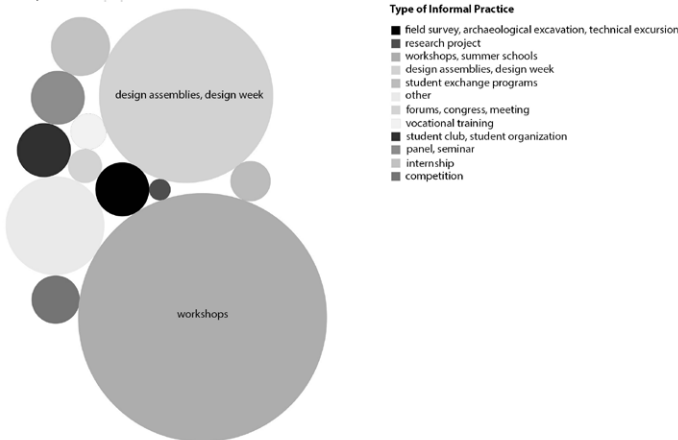
*Actors:* Actors in the learning environment have a second place with 26.07%. Informal education environments allow different actors to be encountered. Students can come together with students from different schools and cities. It also has the opportunity to work with instructors and professionals from

different disciplines, cities, and schools. Students can also come together with artisans and craftsmen from different disciplines (carpenter, blacksmith). R & D teams related to concrete and cement participate in the workshop throughout the organization. Architects and designers join the workshop as a jury member to evaluate students' presentations. At BASS, students can come together with architecture students from schools that provide different education from their school, along with a carpenter, blacksmith, and an engineer specialized in concrete. Students attach importance to meet with different actors.

*Time:* The fact that the activity takes place in summer and out of school is also effective. Many activities take place during this period. The students state that they want to spend their time efficiently by joining BASS. It can be seen as a productive summer vacation activity.

*Space:* Space is also effective in students' participation. The theme of that year and the institutions supporting the activity are also effective in determining the space. Betonart Architecture Summer School is hosted by schools in some years, in which case students generally produce on campus and stay in the dormitory of the school. In some years, the main sponsor and host is a cement factory. In the application forms, the students of architecture stated the importance of studying in different cities. They think that understanding the city will contribute to their professional and personal development. Although the effect of the city varies in the motivation of applicants in different years, it is 20.88% in general.

Diversity of Informal Practices in Architecture Education



Type of informal practice (color) and distinct count of BASS applicants (size).  
Source: BASS Application Forms 2012-2017.

Fig. 5: diversity of informal practices in architectural education. Source: bass application forms. 2012-2017

*Process (Methods and Materials):* Students do individual and group work. This group work takes place in a different fiction every year. Some years, students start working individually and then continue with group work through the selected project. Sometimes each group is led by a specific moderator, and in some years, all moderators are involved in all groups. Various pedagogical methods are dynamically adapted to the workshop process according to the context of the subject.

## RESULTS

The common idea of those who are engaged in architectural design education is that this education cannot be limited to studio and school. The observation area of the architecture student is the whole world; therefore, it is part of the learning environment (Yürekli, H., Yürekli, F., 2004). It was observed that the students who received architectural education were aware of this situation and applied to informal education activities with this awareness. The results indicate that students are aware that informal education will contribute not only to formal education but also to lifelong learning. In today's atmosphere, where the boundaries between formal and informal education become uncertain, students are involved in informal education to keep pace with the speed of change.

It is regarded that the students give importance to the process as much as the output of the education. Even though students who participate in informal environments are expected to produce outcomes, and ideas, to develop professionally and personally, the informal characteristics of the educational environment are as important as these outcomes. The student-sattach almost the same significance to social (actors, personal and professional development, etc.) and physical components (time, space, tools used). They agree that BASS, which takes place at different times, with different actors, in different places, with various tools and methods contribute to their personal and professional development. In the process where intensive, playful, and new techniques are used, the roles are more fluid than informal education, and the places where the workshop is held also allow students to relate to the context.

BASS, which is an excellent example of being a continuous summer school, providing an opportunity for knowledge about a specific material and usage of it and being free of charge, makes an essential contribution to architectural (and informal) education in Turkey. This study reveals that today, the importance given to informal education studies is increasing, and the students are aware of the contributions of these activities to their professional life.



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