

start. scholar architect

Ediție română-engleză/
Romanian-English edition

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TRADUCERE ÎN ENGLEZĂ DE/
ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
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Editura Universitară „Ion Mincu”
București, 2023

Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism „Ion Mincu”

Materialele publicate în paginile acestui volum (ediție bilingvă) reprezintă rezultatele cercetării desfășurate în cadrul proiectului **SCHOLAR ARCHITECT – Perfecționarea și creșterea calității științifice în învățământul de arhitectură (2020)**.

The materials published in this volume (bilingual edition) represent the results of the research developed within the framework of the project **SCHOLAR ARCHITECT – Improving the quality of research and teaching in architectural education (2020)**.

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DTP, COPERTĂ ȘI GRAFICĂ/DTP, COVER IMAGE AND DESIGN: Ruxandra BALCANU, Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

<https://doi.org/10.54508/9786066382991>

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

Start - Scholar architect / coord.: Anda-Ioana Sfinteș ; trad. în engleză de Florina Tufescu. - Ed. română-engleză = Romanian-English edition. - București : Editura Universitară “Ion Mincu”, 2023
ISBN 978-606-638-299-1

I. Sfinteș, Anda-Ioana (coord.)

II. Tufescu, Florina (trad.)

72

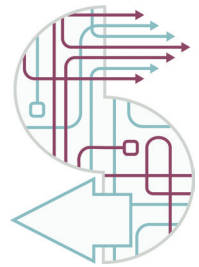
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Materialul în limba română a fost dezvoltat în cadrul proiectului

SCHOLAR ARCHITECT
Perfecționarea și creșterea calității științifice în învățământul de arhitectură
Proiect finanțat prin CNFIS-FDI-2020-0655

Traducerea materialului din limba română în limba engleză
a fost realizată în cadrul proiectului

SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2023
Promovarea raportării la tendințe, tehnologii și problematici
de actualitate în învățământul de arhitectură și urbanism
Proiect finanțat prin CNFIS-FDI-2023-F-0436

Fondul de Dezvoltare Instituțională, Domeniul 5:
Îmbunătățirea calității activității didactice, inclusiv a respectării deontologiei și eticii academice.

The Romanian edition was developed within the framework of the project

SCHOLAR ARCHITECT
Improving the quality of research and teaching in architectural education
Project financed by CNFIS-FDI-2020-0655

The English edition was translated from Romanian within the framework of the project

SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2023
Promoting linkage to topical trends, technologies and issues
in architectural and urban planning education
Project financed by CNFIS-FDI-2023-F-0436

The Institutional Development Fund, Domain 5:
Improving the quality of teaching, including the observance of professional and academic ethics.

<https://doi.org/10.54508/9786066382991.10>



anthropological approach

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INTRODUCTION

An architectural approach centred on anthropological aspects focuses on the users, attempting to respond to their needs through the architecture. Yet this kind of approach does not start merely from knowing the needs of users but especially from the in-depth understanding of the realities and problems confronting the stakeholders, the values and identities they assume, their way of life, the aspirations and relationships they develop or would like to develop with others, etc. Understanding (viewed as the distancing from the architect/future architect's own preconceptions and values) is a first step. This must be followed by identifying the real possibilities of intervention that can have a social impact – identifying the aspects on which it would be opportune to intervene and the types of relevant proposals, observing the architect's social responsibility in relation to what the concerned stakeholders are (not necessarily consciously) prepared to assume or appropriate, to what concepts like improvement of living and working conditions, progress, development (personal, social, economic, etc.), empowerment, etc. would mean to them. The ability of architecture to positively influence behaviour (from contributing to an increased awareness of social problems like inequality and changing attitudes towards discriminated social categories to increasing productivity in the workplace) translates, ultimately, into a value of the architectural object (Augustin & Coleman, 2012).

The built architectural programme will never be able to respond to the needs of all the stakeholder categories identified in the given context (users – as consumers of the space and/or functions, beneficiaries – as actors who will derive various kinds of gains from the implementation of the project, investors – as the stakeholder category that disposes of the material resources necessary for the construction, etc.). Even within the same category of stakeholders, the needs can be diverse, multiple and sometimes contradictory or even opposite. Thus, defining the aim and objectives of the architectural intervention will require ranking the needs and assuming responsibility for the (justified) decisions regarding the needs addressed by the project.

Stakeholders: all the categories of direct and indirect beneficiaries (users, investors, developers, etc.) on whom the proposed project has any kind of impact, to any extent.

The (future) architect must be aware of the fact that the architecture they propose can have major effects on the stakeholders and may not only resolve but also magnify existing problems or create new ones. For example, from an anthropological perspective, an architectural intervention can contribute, through its elements, to emphasizing social inequality, inequality in the use of urban space or, on the contrary, to creating an inclusive atmosphere. To understand the subtlety of the switch from inequality to inclusion, we can think about differences in how the access to a building is configured, about those architectural elements that can indicate to any passerby that: (1) what is beyond the door is accessible; (2) they must know beforehand what is beyond the door to determine if they can enter; (3) only certain categories of people can enter the building. The above differences must not be regarded as a given. To understand the impact of the design, we must think about what it means to passersby, at least on a psychological or social level, to perceive that they have or do not have the right of access.

Yet in the context sketched above, flexibility and spatial diversity can become essential architectural instruments in solving challenges of this type, instruments that in fact correspond to the anthropological concepts of flexibility and diversity, as we will see in the following pages. Not responding in a necessarily explicit manner to the needs can create the premises of negotiation and of place-making, place attachment, negotiation of boundaries and of space usage. Allowing the user to interact (directly or indirectly) with the space can lead to developing their creativity and to developing new relationships as well as new attributes of the architectural object through the prism of creative use.

[U]se can be a creative activity through which each user constructs a building anew. (Hill, 2003, p. 2)

The categories of stakeholders, the social problems, needs, relationships within and outside the categories as well as the types of intervention (pursuing a purpose with a social impact), uses, solutions, socio-anthropological and architectural concepts suited to the context, are all derived from solid research.

The reason why we research is so that we can create the best sorts of places for particular people, at particular times, doing particular things. (Augustin & Coleman, 2012, p. 45)

Research (conducted over the course of the entire design process) can influence design in different ways. Tracing the influences identified by Augustin & Coleman in *The Designer's Guide to Doing Research: Applying Knowledge to Inform Design* (2012, Ch. 1 - Design Research and Its Influence on the Practice of Design), research, from the point of view of social impact, can constitute:

_a means of relating needs to design strategies;

_a means of addressing social reform – a relevant example, in this context, is Teddy Cruz's vision and approach, who considers that the architect must assume the role of an activist, contributing, through the architecture, to reforms of political, economic and institutional

processes (Cruz, 2016), which subsequently translate into social impact; disadvantaged, marginalised groups, located in conflict areas are placed at the centre of his vision;

_a means of addressing sustainability by creating awareness of the effect of architecture on society as well as on the environment;

_a means of acknowledging and valorising cultural differences.

This is the task of design research today, designing the conditions for socio-economic and environmental justice from which a more experimental architecture can emerge. (Cruz, 2016, p. 216)

RELATION TO LEARNING AND TEACHING OBJECTIVES

The UAUIM general themes often refer, through the learning objectives set for each of them, to anthropological analyses or at least to elements of these. While mainly focusing on the learning objectives set by the Synthesis of Architectural Design Department, we will emphasize, in continuation, the directions that aim at a primarily anthropological approach.

Social impact. The characteristics of the architectural object (proposed or determined on the basis of research) – from its positioning in the urban context, on the site, to volumetric and spatial-functional conformation – can have a positive or negative impact on the different stakeholder categories. These effects need to be understood (by relating them to the realities facing the stakeholders, viewed in their complexity) and responsibility for them must be assumed by gaining awareness of the fact that the same solution can have different impacts on different stakeholder categories. The basic effects that may be considered include, for example, the possibility of appropriating the space and the function, the possibility of adapting the space over time and/or to diverse needs.

From an anthropological perspective, the building-users interaction is a primary concern already from the stage of research and of the conceptual approach. Estimating the degree and type of flexibility of a building by relating it to the users can lead to determining certain types of boundaries and relationships between spaces, between functions, between potential users. The creativity (the creative capacity) of users in interacting with the space can be converted, in this case, into a resource (Hill, 2003).

User categories. The analysis of all user categories and the understanding of their specific problems and needs must be based on well-designed research studies. Distancing from suppositions and preconceived notions, avoiding conclusions derived from insufficient data, excluding value judgements, avoiding the choice of models that do not correspond to the local context are all compulsory elements of a correct approach from the anthropological point of view. An architectural attitude should only be assumed after the realities and the major problems faced by the stakeholders have been fully understood. The assumed attitude can even rely on the understanding of the mediating role of architecture in social transformations. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that decisions that are assumed and integrated into the design become means of classifying and ranking the beneficiaries' needs, which means that the architect has a social responsibility in relation to the brief and to the groups of people affected by the proposal.

The public-private relationship. Managing the public-private relationship (not only by means of the boundaries of the proposed construction or through entrance configuration, but also by means of the facilitated relationships, the joining of functions, etc.) is decisive in dealing with socio-anthropological concepts such as: identity/identities, equal opportunity, the fight against discrimination, values, freedom of expression, empowerment, inclusion, etc. Architectural conformation can encourage or inhibit certain behaviours, with effects perceived on different urban scales: depending on the programme and the proposal, the same building can produce effects not only on the local scale but also on the scale of the entire city.

Realities. The social phenomenon must be related to historical, cultural, psychological, political, economic, technological aspects, inter alia, so as to achieve an in-depth understanding of the problems and needs and to identify valid solutions. The search for possible solutions to current social problems must be related to the history of their emergence and transformation, to the psychological effects of both the problem and the solution (with an understanding of the fact that the proposed solution must be capable of being appropriated by the stakeholders on whom it is imposed), to the political reality and power games that can influence implementation, etc. The analysis of the real possibilities of use and/or appropriation of the building must be connected to its intended users, but also to the other categories of stakeholders on whom the presence of the proposed object has an impact (whether positive or negative). The architectural object can have effects on culture, the economy, on physical and mental health, on human relationships and power relationships within the communities where it is inserted and so on. From the anthropological point of view, designing architecture that is well-suited to the context relies on understanding the relationships between stakeholder – function – architectural image – architectural elements.



Fig 11. Inner-City Arts Campus, Los Angeles, US - Michael Maltzan Architecture
(c) Iwan Baan <https://iwan.com/portfolio/michael-maltzan-inner-city-arts-los-angeles>

Effects over time. The impact of the proposal on the stakeholders, at different scales, must be borne in mind, for the short, medium and long term. Some of the transformations of needs over time can be predicted, with the design allowing opportunities of adapting the architecture to ever changing society, to rapid technological changes or even to the need of managing risk situations – drought, earthquakes, climate change, pandemics, etc. The architectural object must be understood as an element that has an impact – as an architectural presence and as a function – over time and at different scales. Within this context, it becomes very important to correctly assess the scale of effects – from the community scale to the scale of the locality or even the national/international scale.

RESEARCH – CRITERIA AND CONCEPTS

Identities. The concept of identity/identities is fundamental in anthropology since it refers to the way in which individuals or communities identify with or, on the contrary, differentiate themselves from others. Identity represents the individual's "sense of self" within a given social structure. It is expressed by behaviour, lifestyles, decisions, preferences, etc. Identities are assumed and communicated to others by elements connected to the means of expression listed above but also attributed to the individual or the community by others (Jaffe & de Koning, 2016b). Identities are thus socially constructed, dependent not only on the context in which they develop but also on the dynamic relationship between how the individuals want to be and how they are seen by others. Identity is fluid and depends on external factors; the structure that is external to the individual guarantees their identity, which is thus contingent on the relationship to others. This relationship also determines the positioning of the individual or of the community within the urban context and has an impact on how space is used and experimented with. Not every space, including public ones, is accessible to everyone. Different kinds of barriers, the feeling of being welcome or not in a space, elements of a political, economic, administrative or other nature are reasons why certain identities are expressed or not within particular contexts. Through its elements, architecture can support, emphasize, but also negate the individuals' and the communities' rights to build, express and negotiate their own identities within a space.

Urban lifestyles and leisure activities – from fashion, music and shopping preferences to how and where people choose to relax and socialize – are not only about economic processes or class distinction. They are also very much ways of expressing and negotiating cultural identities and political viewpoints, but, importantly, they are also ways of just having fun or even seeking an escape from everyday concerns of economy and politics. (Jaffe & de Koning, 2016a, p. 95)

Social equality/inequality. Any right that can be breached as well as any access to material or immaterial resources that can be controlled leads to equality or inequality (if managed in a discriminatory manner). Economic, educational, occupational, gender or age inequality are often amplified through the very elements of urban design and/or architecture such as: the proliferation of gated communities, infrastructure that cuts off the direct access of certain communities to services, inaccessible architectural image, planimetric solution that does not facilitate wayfinding, spaces that

are not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, etc. Urban and architectural configurations can therefore exacerbate social inequality, yet solving these in an inclusive fashion cannot fight discrimination by itself. The struggle against discrimination via urbanistic and architectural means must be supported by social processes of raising awareness and fighting stigma ...and the other way round (Jaffe & de Koning, 2016c). From the right to consume or not to consume a product in a particular space to the right to “consume” or not to consume a space, structural inequalities lead to urban inequalities and vice versa.

Inequalities – of income, consumption, opportunities for mobility, degrees of security or overall life chances – are rendered especially durable in their spatial expression as patterns of segregation, inequities in physical access, disparate urban environments, differential patterns of mobility and fixity. (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 20)

Speaking of social sustainability, Fermín Rodríguez Gutiérrez (2013) has identified a series of urban rights which, in our context, can be interpreted and regarded as sources of equality/inequality:

- _the right of access, the right to acceptance and integration in diversified, multifunctional and complex urban contexts;
- _the right of access to services and infrastructures (especially the right to unrestricted mobility);
- _the right of access to high-quality public spaces that foster interpersonal relationships, the building of communities (and identities);
- _the right to build and express collective identities, to take ownership of or to build spaces wherein these identities can be expressed;
- _the users’ right to participate in decision-making processes regarding urban spaces.

An issue like equality/inequality cannot be solved only through architectural approaches but by keeping an overall perspective of the relationships within the territory and between the stakeholders involved as well as of the social, economic, political, historical, cultural and other relationships.

Diversity and inclusion. The manifestation of the users’ diverse identities within the same space can be difficult in light of the different conditions that the space must respond to and of the different elements it must contain in order to create the premises of place attachment. Within this context, spatial and functional diversity and flexibility can support social diversity. Yet the artificial construction of an inclusive space does not necessarily lead to the creation of an inclusive environment (Mendes et al., 2017) if this is not supported, for example, by the necessary legal, administrative, social and cultural framework – which can, as a matter of fact, be created in parallel. A space which encourages social diversity enables dialogue, negotiation and thus finding a balance between the individuals and the communities who intersect in that particular place.

It is obvious that power games can always occur and may upend the inclusive character of a space. This is why many elements should be considered in designing a space of diversity and flexibility that guides behaviour, contributes to the gradual education of users towards tolerance, mutual acceptance and subsequently dialogue or even collaboration – towards

an inclusive environment. Continuous use of public spaces, for example, facilitated by design which takes into consideration the timeframes and the activities that users need to be involved in or the services they need to access, becomes sustainable use that ensures encounters between people/communities and social interaction (see Stickells, 2008; Tonkiss, 2013). Such intersections and interactions can provide the basis for creative uses that dynamically transform both the users' relationship to the space and the relationships between users.

A mix of functions supports more 'vital' urban spaces that are better used by a range of users, and open up opportunities for social encounter and interaction. (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 165)

Mobility. The right to move – freely and anywhere across the city, towards any kind of space, services, facilities, using any means of transport – and especially the right to choose the means of movement play a major role in the context of inequality, as discussed above (Kuoppa, 2013). Yet providing the right to move and the right of access is not sufficient to ensure mobility, which also takes into account the degree of safety, the degree of comfort, the ease of using certain routes or means of transport. Beyond externally imposed or self-imposed restrictions, mobility – as a need, but also the preferences that generate urban rhythms (Mareggi, 2013) – is closely linked to social status, financial possibilities (Colleoni, 2013) and not least to identity.

Social groups move through the city in different ways: individually or collectively, effortlessly or with difficulty, on foot, by car and by public transport. Mobilities shape and are shaped by identities. (Jaffe & de Koning, 2016c, p. 43)

Mobility is an essential element in the construction of identity and relationships with others, relationships with space, with the city, not only through the (manner of) movement itself, but also through all that occurs in the course of movement. The time dedicated to movement is charged with meanings and contributes to determining the individual's positioning within the urban social context (Miciukiewicz & Vigar, 2013). At the same time, mobility, as described above, can be at the basis of important social processes like emancipation, empowerment, inclusion, etc.

Different performances of movement, such as walking, cycling or bus riding, are increasingly considered emancipatory practices through which individuals gain power to renegotiate meanings of self and the city. (Miciukiewicz & Vigar, 2013, p. 176)

Informal character. Beyond the institutional, official, legal frameworks, a series of informal processes take place that make up for deficiencies and satisfy different types of needs and demands. For example, the informal economy refers to any type of activity that entails material gain, at the limit of, or outside legality, and thus unmonitored and unprotected by the state. This kind of economy can nevertheless ensure the survival of disadvantaged groups, just like in the case of informal housing that provides living conditions (albeit often improper) to people who do not have, or cannot afford, access to legal forms of residence. In addition to informal types of commerce and housing, we can speak about informal education, access to informal health services, informal urban planning (Tonkiss, 2013),

etc. An analysis of the informal sector offers, in fact, an image of what the legal framework cannot cover or satisfy and brings to light deep social and economic problems, negotiations of space and of power. It can emphasize how individuals, communities and societies negotiate and resolve various crises. Understanding the mechanisms that led to the development of the informal sector can contribute to the finding of specific, innovative solutions. Within this context, the architect can assume the activist role (through the architecture), mediating the relationship between the formal and the informal framework, between the imposed policies and the organic solutions that emerge in the midst of the communities confronted with the respective problems (Cruz, 2016).

Some societies have already included elements of an informal nature into their legal framework, thus becoming more flexible and permissive. Urban planners and architects (in the midst of interdisciplinary teams) design by relying on elements identified in informal contexts or even to highlight the advantages of informal use.

I see informal urbanisation as the site of a new interpretation of community, citizenship and praxis, where emergent urban configurations produced out of social emergency suggest the performative role of individuals constructing their own spaces. (Cruz, 2016, p. 215)

IMPACT

Architectural projects can aim directly at social impact (converting it into a purpose) or indirectly (through approaches of a different type, yet which do not ignore the possible effects on users).

The expected impact is closely linked to the context and cannot be specified in the absence of the in-depth knowledge of the latter. Nevertheless, we will mention a few aims that the (future) architect can pursue, aims that can be attained through architecture – through the proposed programme, the functions, the relationships between functions as well as between the interior and the exterior, through spatial and volumetric configuration, through materials and implemented systems, etc.:

_facilitating interaction between stakeholders belonging to different social categories who are active in the given context, with the aim of developing social sustainability – for example, good management of the development of a local network providing access to goods and services can contribute to valuing everyone's work and fighting against the stigma sometimes generated by occupational differences;

_adapting the built space to the particular needs of certain social categories – for example, addressing the problems posed by working from home to families with young children in the context of the pandemic, addressing the problems and needs of pensioners, etc.

_improving living conditions and self-development opportunities – which can only be achieved by knowing the current status of the relevant stakeholders and relating it to what adequate progress, achievable with the help of architectural elements, would mean to them;

_revitalising/reactivating the built space by converting it into an inclusive space, indiscriminately dedicated to the stakeholders who are active in the given context – which entails freedom of expression, of taking ownership, the feeling of safety in using the space;

_rediscovering/reconstructing a place identity related to the identities of the stakeholders.

From an anthropological perspective, an architectural intervention within a given context must take into account diversity in its complexity, avoid contributing to discrimination, be intermeshed with the stakeholders' lives and at the same time act as a catalyst for positive processes of social, economic, political and other transformation, facilitate the negotiation of spaces and of uses as a means of finding a site-specific balance, encourage sustainable development, etc.

EXAMPLES

Inner-City Arts Campus – Michael Maltzan Architecture, 2008, Los Angeles, US (Pearson, 2009)

Given the specific circumstances of the site, the project does not simply respond to the brief, but also to social and political problems facing the community of Skid Row, Los Angeles. Through art and performance programmes, Inner-City Arts caters to a large number of children and young people at risk (from families who are poor or even homeless) by providing not only a place where they learn through art but also a place where they are safe, where they construct their identity, communicate and learn the meaning of social responsibility towards the community – “a place of hope, a clean slate for troubled kids” (Pearson, 2009).

R/GA Headquarters – Foster+Partners, 2017, New York, US (Hustwit, 2016; R/GA | Foster + Partners, 2017)

Foster+Partners renews, through this project, the concept of the office space that is closely tied to the beneficiary's field of activity – R/GA offers consultancy services to companies with a view to adapting to new technologies and making changes in consumption habits. The project develops around the idea of the intersection of the physical with the digital space, by emphasizing the needs of employees and clients (even considering possibilities of adaptation over time), intersections and communication (deliberate or fortuitous). It seeks to support creativity and innovation, to improve performance by increasing space quality.

Médecins du Monde, Anderlecht, Belgium (Bruno et al., 2018)

The project, developed by Metrolab Brussels, the applied research and urban criticism lab, aims to facilitate the building of a community in Cureghem, Anderlecht by starting from the social changes and urban developments that generate or are expected to generate tensions. Beginning from the need to increase the financial capacity of the Cureghem population – in order to enable the subsequent development of social infrastructure – and from the problems in accessing the health system, the team sketched a proposal around the scenario of expanding the right to health services to cover an otherwise informal context – that of homeless people, refugees, undocumented migrants, etc.

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The book addresses topical anthropological themes, closely linked to the urban space in which they manifest themselves, and explains the mechanisms of their emergence, highlighting the complexity of the associated social phenomena. Themes: urban places; urban mobilities; social life in the public space; urban economies; consumption, leisure and lifestyles; cities and globalisation; urban planning; cities, citizenship and policies; violence, security and social control.

Henckel, D., Thomaier, S., Könecke, B., Zedda, R., & Stabilini, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Space–Time Design of the Public City* (Vol. 15). Springer.

The book develops a series of spatial-temporal perspectives of the city, centred on residents and use. Themes: urban rhythms and diversity (uses of the city related to time, recovering the night in an urban context); mobility and access (the urban space in movement, social justice); urban policies related to time (the right to the city).

Hill, J. (2003). *Actions of architecture: Architects and creative users*. Routledge.

The author views architecture as being (re)created through use and believes that the user and their creativity in using space should be taken into consideration by the architect in the design process.

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