

# **scholar architect 2022**

English edition

COORDINATOR: Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

TRANSLATED BY Florina TUFESCU

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© COORDINATOR: Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

©AUTHORS: Magdalena STĂNCULESCU, Alexandru BRĂTESCU, Ana Daniela ANTON, Ionuț ANTON, Adrian MOLEAVIN, Sergiu Cătălin PETREA, Gheorghe CLITAN, Oana Anca ABĂLARU OBANCEA, Claudia-Gabriela PIPOȘ-LUPU, Andrei MITREA, Dana MILEA, Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ, Ruxandra PĂDURARU

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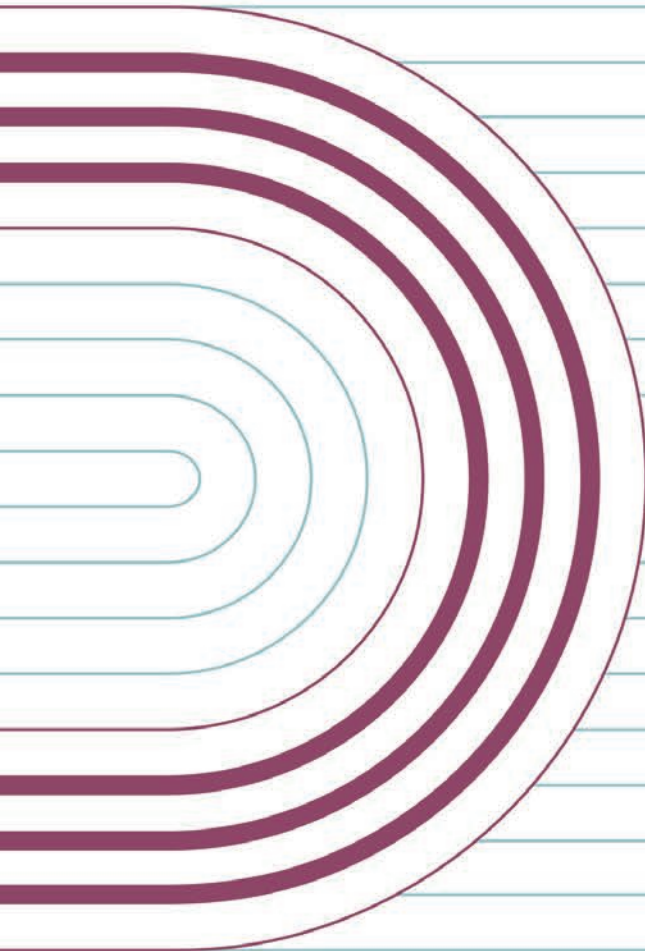
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Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ  
Ruxandra PĂDURARU



**Journal of  
architectural  
anthropology.  
Ten ideas**



The first *Scholar Architect* project (developed in 2020) aimed to familiarise students with research methods and concepts specific to some essential architectural approaches, albeit found at the intersection with other disciplines – the urban planning, anthropological, historical and sustainable approach were detailed in a guide. The anthropological approach, written by the authors of this journal, had as its point of departure the activity we conducted within the framework of *Research in Architectural Anthropology Studio (antropoarh)*, set up in 2016 at the Centre of Architectural and Urban Studies of the “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning – Bucharest. The aim of *antropoarh* is to encourage, conduct and guide, within the framework of diverse activities, the inter-, pluri- and transdisciplinary research of urban space in close connection with social realities. The research aims to then lead to the understanding and creative interpretation of these realities as a response given to genuine needs.

Through this journal, we return to *antropoarh* and the wish to generate dialogue and a close collaboration between the two disciplines within the framework of the *Scholar Architect 2022* project, which is directed at tightening the links between UAUIM architectural education and the national and international academic and professional environment.

The ideas developed in the following pages reflect the authors’ shared interests but also their slightly different perspectives – of an architect looking towards anthropology (Anda) and of an anthropologist looking towards architecture (Ruxandra). Beyond the ideas equally supported by both, the emphasizing of different aspects highlights, all the more strongly, that the two disciplines need to be thought of in conjunction, regardless of the project or the design brief.

The ten journal entries treat a variety of issues, some tangential, others of a completely different nature, thus demonstrating that the way in which architecture and social reality influence each other, both in the physical and in the virtual or technologically transformed environment, is an inexhaustible resource of subjects to be debated, understood and explored in research, in interventions of any kind in the built space, in design or implementation.

We consider it is essential to be aware of the effects that architectural gestures (most often assumed to be harmless by those who propose them) can have on communities, on people and their lives. Thus, the following ideas aim at drawing attention to the necessity of a broader perspective on aspects that can wrongly appear as insignificant, common or devoid of interest.

[antropoarh.ro](http://antropoarh.ro)  
[www.facebook.com/antropoarh](https://www.facebook.com/antropoarh)



# Architecture = Use + Design

## 01

Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

“[A]rchitecture is made by use and by design”, Jonathan Hill states in *Actions of architecture* (2003, p. 1) and this is a central idea in the approach of the *Research in Architectural Anthropology Studio*. In other words, an architectural object cannot be truly considered architecture in the absence of use or in the case of difficult use – in the case of an architecture which, for aesthetic, compositional or other reasons makes usage difficult. Under these circumstances, we may regard an architectural object as an art object, at most. Similarly, not every building, however usable, can be regarded as architecture. The architectural qualities of a building are of different types – from some fundamental ones, already mentioned, like the aesthetic or compositional, to profound ones, like the perceptions or the meanings it enables. It is these qualities which confer architectural status upon a building, removing it from the register of mere objects that provide shelter or some other, strictly functional, support for activities. ...In this context, vernacular architecture is architecture – through the careful balancing between the needs it addresses and environment and site conditions, but also through the profound meanings that come to accompany each of its composing elements.



This is not the place to start a terminological debate. Our intention is rather to highlight a few aspects we consider essential in understanding contemporary architecture. Both the “use” and “design” of the initial quotation mean so much more than could be grasped on a basic level and we will briefly explain these aspects in continuation.

Yet we begin with a small parenthesis connected to terminology because the use of the word *design* in Romanian is often criticised. *Design* does not replace, at all, words like architecture, architectural design, but the definition of the word, in *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (DEX), is not sufficiently comprehensive either. According to DEX (Academia Română, 2009):

DESIGN n. neut. 1. Multidisciplinary field concerned with the totality of factors (socio-economic, functional, technical, ergonomic, aesthetic, etc.) that contribute to the aspect and quality of mass products. 2. Appearance, how something looks (from the aesthetic point of view).

Yet design is not only connected to mass-produced objects while appearance, as we understand it, is not limited to aesthetics, but refers to appearance closely linked to all the factors listed in the first part of the definition – appearance as a result of socio-economic, functional, technical, economic, cultural, historical and other considerations. These factors – understanding them and the way in which they influence and define each other, translating them into an image, an object with a specific materiality, which responds to different types of needs – are actually key to understanding design. Other definitions, given by other dictionaries, are more comprehensive, but they lead towards a definition derived from the verb “to design”. In Herbert Simon’s view, to design means to “[devise] courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” (Friedman & Stolterman, as cited in Manzini, 2015, p. viii). Thus, *design* and (successfully) *designing* aim at improving a situation, at the positive transformation of some aspects, but this positive transformation can only occur as a consequence of the detailed knowledge of the factors that define the situation or object.

Coming back to architecture, architectural design thus means the strong anchoring of the object in the realities that surround and define it in order to better respond to the functions it fulfils, even the aesthetic ones – for example, given the subjectivity of beauty, for an object to be considered beautiful by those for whom it was conceived, it needs to relate to their system of values, it needs to be decoded and appropriated by them ...and we add the observation that fulfilling a function is assessed depending on the user categories whose needs are addressed by the object.

Furthermore, use, in the sense we have given it, does not refer simply to the conformation and configuring of architecture that enables the smooth running of activities, but to an architecture that really

manages to optimise processes, to facilitate intersections and beneficial interactions, to add value, to lead to new uses and above all to the creation of profound aims and meanings for these uses. An already well-known example in this field is the transformation of intermediary spaces, from universities where different specialties are studied, from research centres or even from office buildings housing different departments, into spaces of encounter and interdisciplinary dialogue which become, through this very function, engines of innovation.

Finally, we specify that design and use, in order to lead to architecture, must not be regarded as separate elements, but together, as a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. A design detached from the reality of use (for example related mainly to the viewing public and not to direct, current users) does not really lead to architecture. A merely functional object is not necessarily architecture, either. Yet it is here that we consider the greatest challenge, but also the greatest satisfaction, of the architectural profession is to be found – in balancing the two aspects, beyond qualities and achieved functions, to encourage positive changes on multiple levels, to facilitate development, from the individual to the social and cultural level, to inform and support education regarding sustainable aspects and values (broadly understood as economic, environmental, social, political, cultural and other types of sustainability).

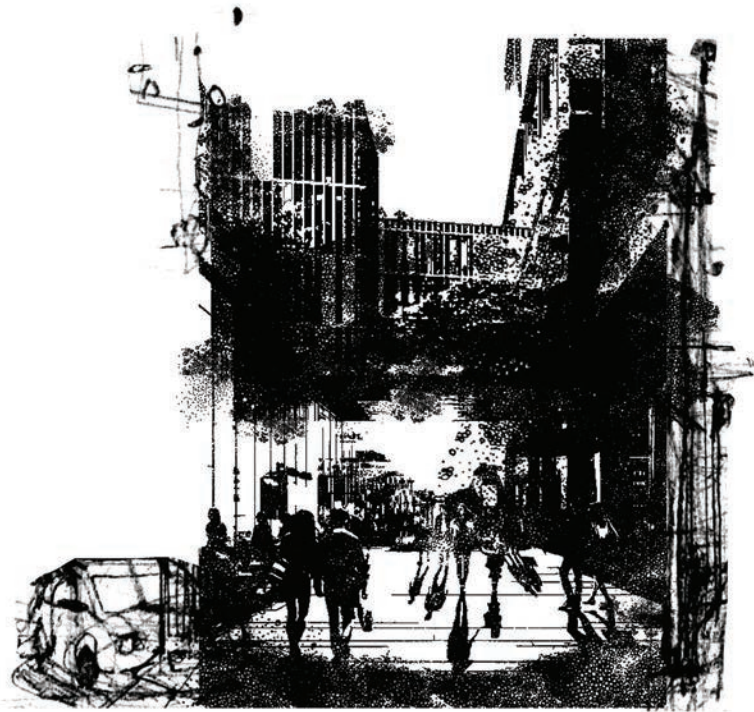


Fig. 1. The architecture-user relationship. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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## Categories of users of architecture

# 02

Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

An essential attribute of architecture is represented by its capacity to ensure it is as easy to use as possible, thus facilitating the conduct of the activities for which it has been designed. Yet what we understand by use and especially by users is open to a broader discussion.

Beyond the already well-established rules of placing certain rooms in relation to others, beyond the typologies of complex buildings meant to lead, on the basis of prior experiences, to optimal use, in the context of architectural anthropology we view the problem of use and users at a different level from the basic one. On the one hand, we discuss the diverse categories of actors that can be regarded as active or passive users; on the other hand, we bring into the discussion the value that the architecture centred on the needs of these users adds to the quality of their relationships, activities and even of their lives.

It is obvious that any architectural commission first of all considers its primary users – those who will mainly use the building. For example, in the case of a public institution, we speak about the employees and the public who require its services. In the simplest way, both the employees and the public can be regarded as part of a category of users,

only differentiated by the activities they conduct or by their primary needs of using the available space, on the two sides of “the counter” that separates them. Yet high-quality architecture looks beyond this and considers the subcategories of users, differentiated by age, gender, economic and social status, cultural profile, etc. All these aspects bring up other problems that can be solved innovatively, thus transforming the architecture into one that responds to different types of complex problems and is capable of determining changes in its users’ lives (from changes of perception to behaviour changes). We will give just a few examples to this effect:

\_architecture that facilitates the development of relationships between different generations or categories of users – as in the case of the Enabling Village from Singapore (*Enabling Village*, n.d.);

\_architecture that promotes cultural diversity – some Canadian museums have assumed the role of expressing the cultural diversity of the country through their image, apart from through their programme (Macdonald & Alford, 2007);

\_architecture that advocates tolerance – with museums becoming, in this case, promoters of the struggle against racism, for example (Szekeres, 2007);

\_architecture that mediates conflicts – here we can mention the activity of Teddy Cruz (2016) in border regions.

Some of the examples above started from a clear theme that highlighted solving these aspects as an essential element of the future architecture. Yet they can just as well become at least secondary aspects in any type of architecture and especially in public architecture, which must respond equally to all types of users – to the specific access needs of children, older people or people with disabilities, but also to the need for spaces that allow for dialogue and even negotiation between different categories of users.

To illustrate the capacity of architecture to change the nature of relationships, we refer to the example of a project which, albeit centred on a piece of furniture, demonstrates how its placement and design can greatly change the relationship between users. It is a counter placed in the hall of a municipality which, over the course of several years, has led each time it was redesigned to change in the relationship between clerks and citizens (Våland & Georg, 2015). The follow-up and understanding of transformations over time, in a dynamic of social relationships concurrent with the dynamic of social, economic, political and other realities, is very important in architectural as well as anthropological discourse.

Yet this kind of follow-up and constant readjustment is not always an option. In this context, it is worth mentioning some important contemporary research methods and directions, which at first glance



emphasize the quantitative aspect of the focus on users – space syntax and use simulation through parametric thinking. Space syntax (Hillier & Tzortzi, 2006) focuses, in a quantifiable manner, on the use of spaces by directly relating human behaviour to spatial characteristics like integration or connectivity. On the basis of these, it is possible to anticipate spatial models that would correspond to the intended type of usage. An additional step forward is taken by artificial intelligence and parametric thinking that can simulate uses and contribute to deciding upon optimal configurations on the basis of the set parameters (*Agent-Based Semiology*, n.d.; Schumacher, 2016). It must be borne in mind that, in this entire discussion that starts from the social component, it is vital to accurately establish the human-centred parameters. Without a socio-anthropological analysis which identifies the different user categories, their role in the context, their specific needs, the problems they face within their respective category but also in relation to the other categories, it is impossible to fulfil the architectural potential of changing a situation for the better.



Fig. 1. Public spaces that are inaccessible to people with disabilities. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

Finally, we direct our attention to the passive users of the architectural object. We must not lose sight of the fact that people living in its proximity or passersby who do not intend to use the respective building are nevertheless influenced by its aspect, by the manner in which it is integrated into the context, into the site, by the manner in which it is

configured. A building that shadows its surroundings, a building that compels passersby to circulate on the other side (because they feel excluded, because the architecture is unfriendly through its groundfloor design or too crowded, etc.), a building that could determine nearby residents to relocate (Abushamaa et al., 2018) are all examples that do not take into account the impact of architecture on all its users, whether active or passive.

It is worth bearing in mind that even architecture with exceptional architectural qualities can have a negative impact on the social level and then the question becomes: what are we ready to assume in our role as architects? Do we agree with our architecture being a hostile one? Or do we assume the aim of socially sustainable architecture? What role do we in fact assume, beyond design itself?

We encourage you, via this brief article, to always view problems in a broader context, to be aware of the possible effects of the project and to knowingly decide on the architectural design.

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## Hostile architecture

# 03

Ruxandra PĂDURARU

The influence of the built environment on how people interact with space or with each other becomes obvious in the analysis of what experts call “hostile architecture” (Bader, 2020; Ruetas, n.d.). This concept refers to surrounding architectural elements that have a negative impact on conducting certain types of activities or that contribute to the exclusion of social groups deemed “undesirable” or incongruous with certain spaces. The theme is of equal interest to architects and anthropologists since it combines in a poignant and perceptible manner the mutual influence of space on human beings and of human beings on space.

The best example of hostile architecture is the “Camden bench” (Mansfield, 2016), whose main design is to discourage its use for undesirable purposes like sleeping or in various sports such as skateboarding.

There are, however, various embodiments of hostile architecture, including the spikes placed under bridges to prevent homeless people from withdrawing underneath them, uncomfortable or intentionally unshaded benches that prevent sitting for long, urban furniture that is “locked” at night to prevent vandalism, public spaces that require



payment for their usage, with the aim of reducing their use by certain groups of people.

We can thus note the public financing of spaces in which not all of us can interact, an infrastructure which strongly limits social inclusion, and measures that “deal” with effects rather than with causes, with architecture focused, in such situations, on the marginalisation and elimination of the elements deemed as “disturbing”. In this context, what needs to be discussed is not the kind of support that can be given to social groups in a precarious position, but rather the manner in which these undesirable people are pushed outside the visible spaces (Hu, 2019).

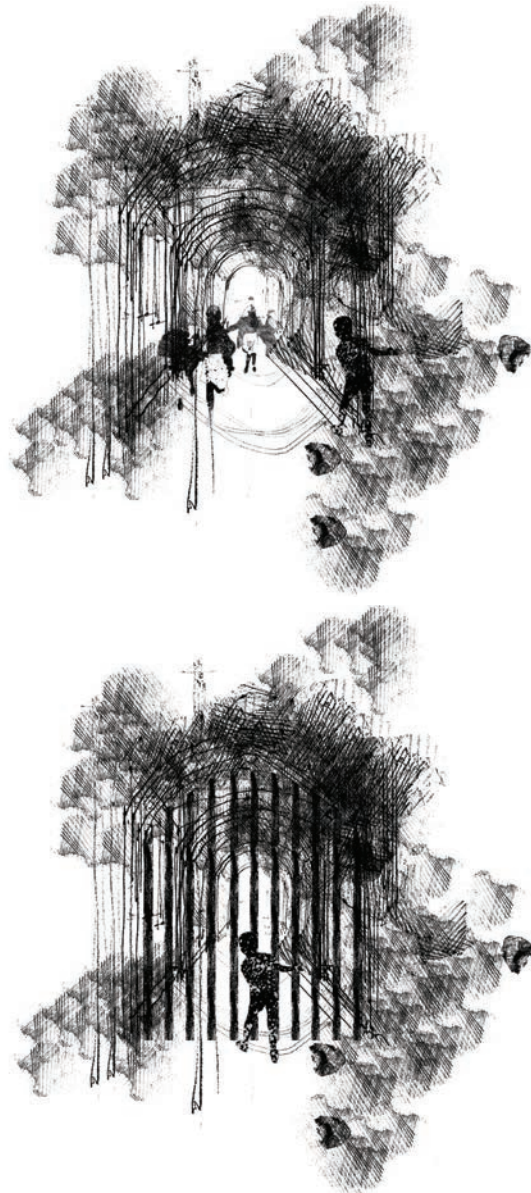


Fig. 1. The transformation of space into a hostile one. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

Apart from the attempt to remove the above-mentioned groups, sensory means are also used at times to limit the use of spaces by different age categories. An example is the setting up of small amplifiers in different places, which transmit sounds only perceptible to certain people. In some areas, where the presence of young people after a certain hour could create conflicts, these boxes emit sound waves only perceptible to the “young” ear, sounds which generate anxiety, discomfort, headaches, etc. Thus, without direct human intervention, materiality and sensoriality operate on their own to maintain “order”.

The next time we feel uncomfortable in a space, we can think about whether it might not be a mere design error but a way of communicating that we should not remain there for too long.

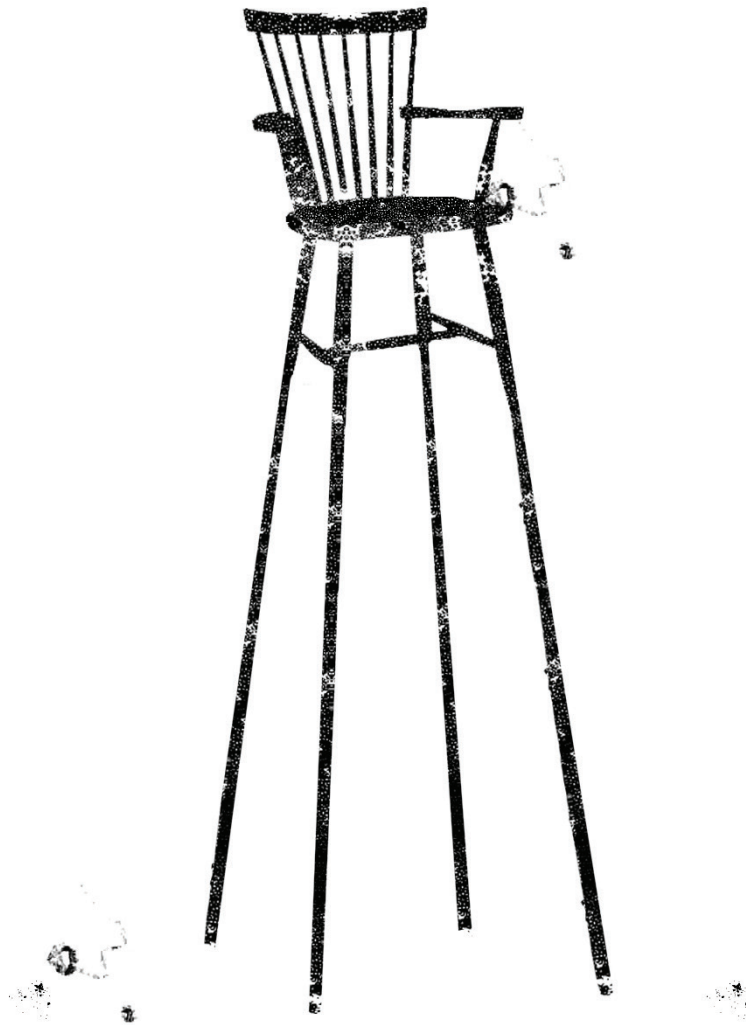


Fig. 2. Unusable piece of furniture. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

The problem, however, is related to who has the power to decide who has access and where – in fact, the unequal power dynamic perpetuates inequalities and increases social cleavages. Architects can introduce, deliberately or not, from their own wish or at the request of the public administration or of private actors, elements of hostile architecture into their projects. Yet the cold mechanism behind this “unwelcoming” design makes the problems invisible and unsolved in the long term (Savic & Savicic, 2014). Often, only the consequences are dealt with (for example, the lack of shelter) and not the reasons behind them (such as career interruption, domestic violence, substance abuse, etc.). Hostile architecture is a means of “sweeping under the carpet” any social divisions, in the short term. We can of course avoid the creation of inclusive spaces, but the reality will not change and the discrepancies will only deepen. Whether or not it is a moral duty to prevent these things is a question that remains for each of us to answer.

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## Architecture in support of social education

# 04

Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

Architecture, through its elements, can contribute to informing a broad public or can even support educational processes regarding architecture as such and the sheltered function, even expanding to social, civic, ecological, political and other meanings and roles. All of these can be conveyed through the material characteristics of architecture, through planimetric and spatial configurations (especially through the housed functions and the relations proposed between these), through the mode of solving the interior-exterior communication or through what the architecture actually does. The possibilities of informing via architecture are countless and, beyond the specifications of any design brief, they are closely connected to the role assumed by the architect on the social level, which we also discuss in the “Categories of users of architecture” and “What architecture can do” subchapters.

The discussion initiated here remains an open one, with only a few of the modalities through which architecture manages to support education exemplified in the following pages, with an emphasis on social and socio-cultural education.

A first modality for architecture to convey information or support educational processes is via its image. The image of the architectural object can become an element of identity, assuming the role of conveying, more or less explicitly, messages linked to the values of the community or communities in the midst of which it is placed, which it represents or caters to. In the first case, we can speak of architecture connected to the social context, even though it does not assume this role through its function, if it comes to be accepted and appropriated, as an image, by the community. Thus, it actually comes to mediate the relationship between users and their surroundings, informing users on the immediate social context and becoming a potential catalyst of dialogue and innovative collaboration. In the second case, we can think of architecture meant to represent and this time explicitly express certain communities, their values, challenges, elements of identity, etc. (we have in mind, for example, ethnic museums). In this case, users of the architecture want from the very beginning to know and understand the community, with architecture being, among other things, an element that supports or even completes the function. The architecture that serves a community, unlike the previous cases, can become a contributing factor to the perpetuation of community values across generations. Viewing these aspects from a socio-cultural perspective, we understand architecture as having an important role in raising awareness of elements of identity, thus supporting social and cultural education.

Similar to the role it can assume through its image, architecture can contribute, through the manner of resorting to certain materials, combinations of materials and to their laying, to social education centred on the understanding, acceptance and, ideally, involvement in solving the problems faced by disadvantaged social groups. We refer, for instance, to the architecture that by engaging the senses becomes architecture for all and can also be easily used by people with hearing or sight difficulties.

Also through the manner of using materials, this time in direct relation to the configuration of the boundaries of the building – i.e., through managing the interior-exterior relationship – the interior of the proposed building can open towards public space and thus attract the public to activities they would not normally be inclined to pursue. Here, we find numerous examples of museums or auditoriums that “go out into the street” (Sfinteş, 2013).

The resolution of the interior-exterior relationship as well as the spatial and volumetric configurations can facilitate direct or even purely visual interaction, with both having an important role in exposing users to other systems of values, identities and activities. This exposure is essential to prompting or encouraging communication, collaboration,

sometimes even between social groups that do not know, recognise or understand one another. Maciocco & Tagliagambe (2009) emphasize the significance of the existence of a space of encounter/clash wherein “misunderstanding becomes a stimulus and occasion for translation of languages, a sort of compromise aimed at achieving understanding” (p. 138). The functions housed in the interior, their placement and interrelations, can also contribute to the above-mentioned aspects.

Viewing the architectural object in an urban context, we note that the discussion carried out so far remains valid, and is perhaps even more significant, at the scale of the city, highlighting the need for the architectural object to be thought of in relation to the other architectural objects that shape this context (Tonkiss, 2013). This emphasizes the observation with which we wish to conclude these lines, namely that setting an objective of informing and supporting social and socio-cultural education from the very beginning is very important because such objectives cannot be reached through isolated elements, but only through a complex and coherent approach that makes use of several means to this end. Otherwise, architecture can be confined to a purely informative role, without contributing further to education, to positive changes on the individual or social level. Numerous professionals consider this capacity of architecture to be essential and view the architect’s responsibility in relation to these problems as an ethical responsibility that must be assumed already during university studies (Jones & Hyde, 2019).



Fig. 1. Social education facilitated by spaces that bring people together. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor



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## The synaesthetic understanding of cities<sup>1</sup>

# 05

Ruxandra PĂDURARU

The previous century has been marked by the hypertrophy of the visual. Yet the environment is perceived through the synesthesia of the senses. Is it possible to speak of an experience of the city that is not only for the spectator?

If we distance ourselves from the hegemony of sight, we can indeed decode the environment also with the help of the other senses. Cities can be studied in a multisensory context – the entire sensory kaleidoscope of lived experiences can be analysed, with research spanning from the social character of the senses in urban contexts to the sensory consumption of cities.

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<sup>1</sup> The article reworks ideas from the author's MA thesis – “Mirosul urban. Accente olfactive ale Bucureștiului” (Urban smell. Olfactory accents of Bucharest) – defended in 2021 at the University of Bucharest, the School of Sociology and Social Work, the master's programme in Anthropology and Regional and Community Development.



The attention given to the other senses as well provides information not only on city configurations but also on the residents' unmediated experiences. The manner in which visual aspects combine with olfactory, auditive and tactile perceptions influences residential quality. It is important to note that the sources of sounds, smells and tactile impressions are not decontextualised; they do not exist outside the multiple mechanisms that create and constantly modify them. For example, street noise can be amplified by the placement or materiality of nearby buildings. Smells can be diluted or emphasized by the different flows and corridors formed by the existing architecture. The tactile appreciation of pieces of urban furniture is always influenced by other factors as well.

Thus, an architectural choice must take into account not only visual considerations but also the impact it can have on the other senses. The list below contains some recommendations of sensory analyses of cities that can provide a good starting point for understanding this phenomenon.

Analyses of cities as sensory entities have been performed by Corbin (1986), Cockayne (2007), Reinarz (2013), Low (2009), and recent modalities of recording urban smells from the perspective of the residents have been proposed by Barbara & Perliss (2006), Lucas & Romice (2008) and Diaconu (2011). In addition, smellmaps or sensory maps have been created, via a participatory *modus operandi* (McLean, n.d.).

Recording perceptions can also be based on mixed research methods, such as walks where the participants are blindfolded and must concentrate on the heard sounds, or gathering of olfactory data derived from the explicit formulations made by participants while taking a pre-planned route through the natural and built environment (*smellwalks*). The aims of the *smellwalks* are:

- \_to explore the smells detected by individuals and find out what they think about them;
- \_to explore how the perception of smells changes from one place to another;
- \_to investigate how the shape and composing elements of the built environment influence the experience of urban smells;
- \_to investigate the meanings of smells and the relationship between the urban smellscape and the experience and perception of urban space, as well as
- \_to analyse the spatial and time patterns prompted by smell and how olfactory memory alters the perception of space and time in the city.

The *smellwalk* is thus a guided tour of environmental (usually unintentional) smells, during which informal discussions and interviews take place, aimed at capturing the direct, constant and immediate immersion into the urban *smellscape* (El Helou, 2018).

This kind of analysis generates a series of questions that can guide the decisions we take in urban design: How can we diminish not only olfactory but also noise pollution? What impact does the placement of an area of the food court type have on the residents of that district? Does the material chosen for the urban furniture aimed at relaxation influence the groups of intended users? How can we improve air flows through the chosen architecture? Do we create unintentional discrimination through the sensory effects we produce? Is architectural asepsis a desideratum or should sensory particularities specific to each area be encouraged? The list could of course be expanded.

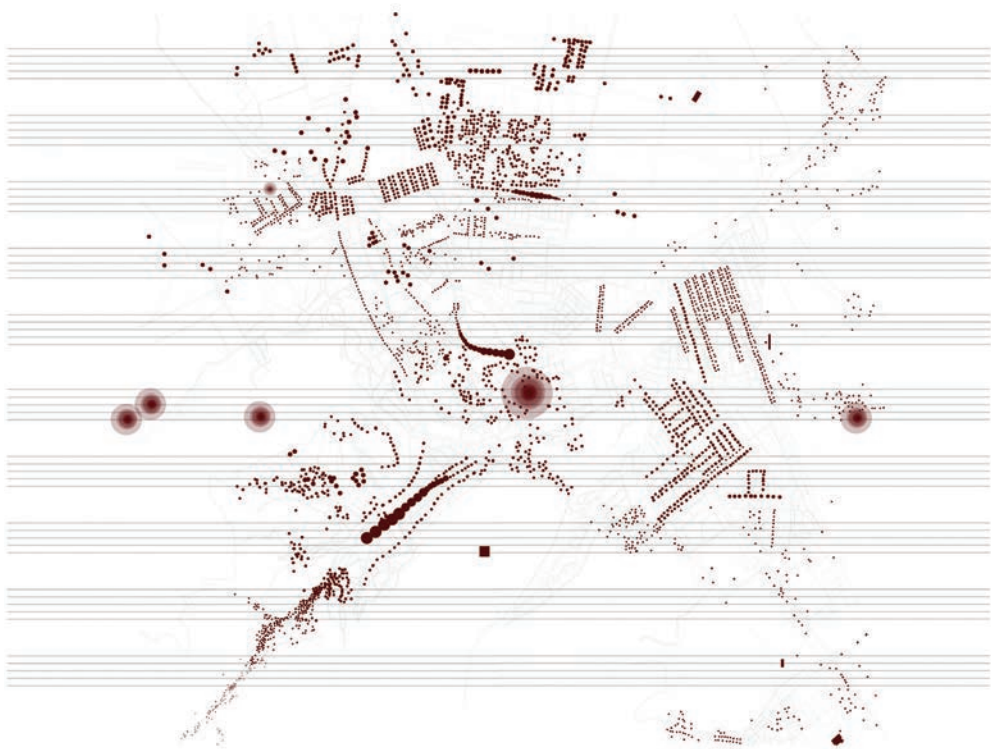


Fig. 1. Imaginary sensory map. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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## Gentrification – a universal concept with local particularities<sup>1</sup>

# 06

Ruxandra PĂDURARU

The theoretical grounding of architectural projects presupposes, among other things, researching studies on topics similar and related to the theme explored by the project. Yet importing concepts or theories can sometimes lead to a discrepancy of contextualisation and adaptation to local particularities, which is also noticeable in the analysis of gentrification processes. The criticism made of gentrification studies refers to the adoption of Western characteristics and their undifferentiated application to countries where the process is not exactly similar.

The traditional concept of gentrification entails a transformational process of the old residential districts whose working class and poor residents are replaced by an influx of gentrifiers, a new class consisting of well-educated, well-off people (Glass, 1964). Kovács, Wiessner & Zischner (2013) claim that gentrification in the countries of the former socialist bloc such as East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Estonia only affects small areas within the cities (not entire districts, like in the

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<sup>1</sup> The article uses ideas from the PhD thesis “Dimensiunea de clasă a mirosului” (The class dimension of smell), in progress at the Doctoral School of Sociology at the University of Bucharest.

Western examples). The “regeneration” projects that entail physical renewal and social modernisation of old and abandoned districts are carried out in segments, thus composing a “mosaic” (Popescu, 2020). This is why “Western concepts have serious limitations in post-socialist urban studies”, as Kubeš & Kovács (2020, p. 2597) claim.

To a certain extent, the above-named countries are representative of the gentrification that also took place in Romania. Sociologists and anthropologists from Central and Eastern Europe, including some Romanian ones, propose, for the local context, a reconceptualisation of gentrification in demographical and economic terms rather than cultural ones – a model that is a better match for the reality of post-socialist Romania (Chelcea et al., 2015).

In Romania, gentrification does not emerge against a homogenous background since the former inhabitants were extremely heterogenous and the newcomers do not represent a “compact” social group, so we cannot speak of the complete replacement of a social class by another. Sykora (2005) states that, in post-communist cities, gentrification also occurred in spaces that decayed during communism but were subsequently restored to their former glory, with the social categories who inhabited them during communism being replaced.

The dismantling of the socialist welfare regime led to different types of gentrification. Initially, the perception of the central districts was very negative due to their long-term neglect, the inadequate living conditions they offered and the concentration of marginalised groups (Kubeš & Kovács, 2020). With reference to the perception of marginalised groups, Ruopilla (2004) introduces the term of *gypsyfication* – the social phenomenon whereby, due to the fact that they were not allocated dwellings during the socialist period, the Roma people became gradually and increasingly more visible in central areas, which they took over precisely because of the above-mentioned negative perception (a phenomenon also observed in Bucharest). Left homeless, the Roma are forced to sleep in deteriorated blocks or buildings; once the area regains the interest of real estate investors, they are evacuated and moved to a different area.

The appearance of new buildings is the most frequent form of gentrification in Central and Eastern European countries. Kubeš & Kovács (2020) classify gentrification, on the one hand, from the perspective of the scale at which it takes place. Thus, they distinguish gentrification in its incipient stage (led by artists, university students, young city dwellers), classical gentrification (led by *yuppies* and well-off – often foreign – gentrifiers) and supergentrification (wherein even wealthier gentrifiers replace the previous gentrifiers). On the other hand, they identify specific forms of gentrification: marginal gentrification (which refers to an initial gentrification process – e.g. Bucharest), controlled, “soft” gentrification (where we still encounter the original, low-income residents), gentrification controlled through policies of social mixing, organised gentrification (which leads to the relocation of low-income residents) and tele-urbanisation (wherein the gentrifiers are owners

who reside in a different country for most of the year – also called *Schengtrification*).

The specific post-socialist circumstances have led, however, to hybrid spatialities and “patchy” gentrifications. The authors emphasize the need for research into these contexts in order to answer questions like: what is the impact of gentrification on contemporary segregation? What are the displacements like and what is their effect? What is the role of political activism?



Fig. 1. The effects of gentrification on the built space. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor



Chelcea, Popescu & Cristea (2015) have analysed the gentrification process in Bucharest. They note that, after 2005, the main real estate investments were made in office buildings, malls, commercial centres and gated communities. Their research also highlights the rising number of young residents in the city centre, aged between 20 and 44 and with a university education. In fact, a reason invoked by Kovács, Wiessner & Zischner (2013), and reiterated by Popescu (2020), for the start of the gentrification process is the orientation of middle class preferences and lifestyles towards the core of the city. The cultural ingredients of gentrification identified by the three authors are: “new foodscapes, slow-time spaces, commercial outlets for bohemian consumers, hand-made boutiques and the commercialisation of residential space” (Chelcea et al., 2015, p. 123). There is thus a tension between the bohemian and economic interests of the middle class, and the centre becomes the realm of contrasts of the capital, equally characterised by selective and partial gentrification, with an impact on the symbolic value of the centre (especially through its social and cultural appeal – through the emergence of cafes, tea rooms, pubs, restaurants), and by “aesthetic gentrification” due to the remarkable expansion of leisure alternatives (Popescu, 2020).

To conclude, as in the case of gentrification, the macro concepts that describe processes on a large scale must be constantly related to local characteristics and to the cultural, social, economic, political and historical aspects which convey contextual specificity. Increased attention to the premises underlying and upholding these concepts is therefore recommended.

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## The role of public spaces

# 07

Ruxandra PĂDURARU

A high-quality urban space presupposes, among other things, creating conditions that foster socialisation and the community spirit, that take local factors into consideration and that are in permanent contact with city life while also ensuring a good interaction between the different city actors.

The importance of observing people's behaviour in public spaces in order to construct a functional city has been emphasized by numerous architects, anthropologists and urban planners. When it comes to urban vitality, safety and the encouraging of cohabitation, the design of public spaces requires special attention.

According to Gehl (2010, 2011), when public spaces are of low quality, only the strictly necessary activities will take place therein. He divides outdoor activities into three categories: necessary, optional and social (which depend on the presence of others in the public spaces and give the possibility of seeing, hearing and meeting others). If only the first category applies, the public space merely fulfils the utilitarian function of facilitating movement.



In addition, high-quality public spaces also require adequate urban furniture. Whyte (1980, 1988) defines squares depending on sitting places, not by size or shape. He states that there are usually too few benches, that these are positioned too low or are too narrow, that they are isolated from the other benches and do not have a good view towards other places, the boulevard or the people. He also claims that people are drawn to people and that they sit down if given the opportunity.

Highly frequented public spaces contribute to resident safety. Jacobs (1961) correlates the density of pedestrian activities to the safety of the area. A space that provides different opportunities for conducting activities at night as well as in daytime, a well-lit space or one to which visual access is unrestricted will improve user safety.

Obviously, the design of a public space must conform to the particular characteristics of the area where it is located, yet there are some generally applicable principles that can be integrated regardless of context. We recall a few of these below:

- \_public spaces must allow diverse uses, both commercial and non-commercial, both during the day and at night;

- \_they must be accessible from anywhere and to anyone; they must also be accessible regardless of the means of transport – by foot, by public transport, by bicycle;

- \_paying attention to lighting is crucial – the space must benefit from natural lighting as well as from high-quality artificial lighting;

- \_the local economy must be stimulated by supporting local businesses;

- \_it is recommended that the streets and public spaces should be shared by pedestrians, cyclists and, if appropriate, drivers, yet without creating dangerous situations – these user categories should not pose a risk to each other;

- \_green spaces must be created so as to encourage outdoor activities and relaxation in a healthy environment;

- \_active citizen participation in the design, planning and administration of public spaces must be encouraged – public spaces are part of a constant dynamic, with the community being the one who refines the space;

- \_it is recommended that the spaces should allow multiple uses, either through the creation of distinct areas or through hybridisation, so that places for relaxation, sports, reading, working or eating can coexist;

- \_the urban furniture must be placed both in sunny spaces and in those spaces less exposed to the sun, wind or rain; in addition, the urban furniture must encourage conversation;

- \_sounds and smells must not be excessive;

\_the existence of public toilets is necessary;

\_the proposal of elements of interactive design, both for children and adult users, is recommended;

\_it is essential that pedestrians should represent the starting point in the design of any public space;

\_the space must be inclusive so as to encourage its use by persons with different sociodemographic characteristics; at the same time, it must appeal to both individuals and groups;

\_for increased safety, it is recommended that there should be buildings around it with sufficient visibility and interaction with the public space.



Fig. 1. Public space – the place of interactions. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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## Sustainability and social responsibility

# 08

Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

Bringing up for discussion problems connected to social sustainability has become one of the architect's ethical responsibilities, as previously mentioned in the subchapter "Architecture in support of social education". This responsibility can be exercised in different ways and in the context of the most diverse approaches, whose aims range from inspiring social changes via the architecture to finding solutions to social problems.

Social sustainability refers to supporting and training people and communities to be sustainable, to providing tools and to increasing their understanding and capacity of further independent development, in a sustainable manner. Following various interventions in the midst of communities that required support and the failure of these interventions after external aid was withdrawn, the idea of social sustainability emerged as the necessity of ensuring long-term impact and the opportunities of sustaining an increased quality of life. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that positive impact on certain social categories can often mean a negative impact on others, as underlined in the subchapter "Categories of users of architecture". In relation to this, Forbes & Harjo

(2016) speak of the need to focus on impact and possible effects, which in architecture leads even to the need for conceptualising or developing, as part of the design, the processes and social infrastructure so that all the stakeholders of the respective built space have something to gain (not necessarily in financial terms). The difficulty lies in finding the mechanisms to encourage and motivate those in power to become involved, to contribute and share the resources in the long term.

Following Fran Tonkiss' look (2013) at social life in the urban space or the parallel drawn by Fermín Rodríguez Gutiérrez (2013) between social sustainability and the right to the city, we can identify a series of characteristics of architecture and of architectural spaces – integrated in the urban context – which hint, to a certain extent and certainly not without difficulty, at collaboration possibilities between diverse actors. Socially sustainable architecture must therefore:

- \_respond to the needs and problems of diverse social categories;
- \_ensure universal access and facilitate mobility within the building and at the urban level;
- \_give everyone a feeling of safety and acceptance;
- \_be capable of being appropriated by social groups in expressing their own identity while also promoting diversity, equality and social inclusion;
- \_promote identity and identities of any type (physical, historical, cultural, etc.);
- \_encourage individuals and social groups to interact and participate in joint activities, in civic activities, while also making available suitable spaces to this end;
- \_be adaptable and flexible, with the capacity to develop alongside society and its needs.

Beyond such an initial list, meant only to prompt a dialogue, there is still the need for careful research and for understanding the territorial context as an ecosystem which, in order to develop sustainably, must consolidate and maximise its resources – “places, activities, resident communities, and all the social, economic and cultural variety that this can lead to” (Manzini, 2015, p. 195).

Yet coming back to design and the need to develop a social infrastructure, we note that the professionals from this field currently also turn towards an integrated approach to the actual design, connecting from the very beginning “people, systems, business structures and practices into a process that collaboratively harnesses the talents and insights of all participants [...] through all phases of design, fabrication, and construction” (*Integrated Project Delivery: A guide*, as cited in Malecha, 2016, p. 212). Other examples, like the *Médecins du Monde* project developed in the Metrolab research lab in Brussels (Bruno et al., 2018), emphasize the need to activate a powerful social network in order to

ensure the functioning of a critical programme whose stakes are not only social but also humanitarian – the design of a medical centre dedicated to vulnerable people and to immigrants.

In fact, it is easy to understand that the need for socially sustainable approaches and socially responsible interventions by architects or urban planners is all the greater in conflict areas, in the suburbs or in contexts where people's basic needs are not met (Cruz, 2016).

Finally, we return to our initial statement, namely the fact that within and through the design process we can assume various social responsibilities, regardless of their scope; these are vital in a context where the failure to relate to the social milieu can easily result in the failure of the architectural object (as of any other service).



Fig. 1. Social infrastructure. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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## What architecture can 'do'

# 09

Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ

In contemporary professional discourses on architecture, there is very often an emphasis on what architecture itself “does”, beyond its basic functions (Jones & Hyde, 2019; Mendes et al., 2017; Kanaani & Kopec, 2016; Steane & Steemers, 2004). The architectural commission will remain, in the vast majority of cases, centred on a clear design brief, on a clear programme and functions, but the solution itself can add related spaces and functions as well as meanings; it can exploit the different characteristics of the architecture or of the context and it can refer to social, economic, political, historical realities, having its own role within their context.

In the “Contemporary approaches” chapter (Sfinteș et al., 2021), published in the volume containing the results of the project *Scholar Architect – Improving the quality of research and teaching in architectural education* (Sfinteș, 2021), we underlined a few approaches wherein architecture



acquires different attributes, grouped under several categories. At the initial stage, these approaches were differentiated by the manner in which architecture relates to users, nature, technology or to itself. Regarding users, the architect can assume the responsibility for their architecture to contribute, for example, to the greatest possible ease of use, to encourage dialogue or cooperation, even in conflicted environments, to address basic needs that certain communities are unable to fulfil or to contribute to increased quality of life. Regarding nature, we can speak of architecture that makes the best use of natural resources, that responds or adapts to environmental conditions, that protects under extreme weather conditions, that also contributes, albeit from a different perspective, to increasing the quality of life, etc. Technology can also be used in different manners, to facilitate or make the design or building processes more efficient in some respects (for example, by saving material), to anticipate or simulate modes of use so as to better fulfil the requirements, thus transforming the building into a living building, which reacts in real time to stimuli or needs, etc. All of these remain connected in one way or another to relating the architecture to what it means as an object – its ability of being appropriated, its capacity of becoming an element of identity or of becoming iconic, the mood it can convey, its spatial, formal or material qualities that come to mean something in particular in some context or other.

The categories within which these approaches may be included are in their turn different, as mentioned in the above-named chapter, thus highlighting their complexity as well as the countless possibilities of conceiving an architecture that also “does” something else, incorporating elements of different types, depending on the aim or objectives of the project in relation to the theme and the context (understood in the broadest sense). Thus, the approaches and the resulting architecture can also be grouped in relation to the type of research they are based on, the problems they undertake to solve, the manner of designing, the manner in which the building behaves or the behaviour it promotes, the relationship with the natural context or its performance over time, etc.

In this context, we emphasize the importance of understanding architecture in this manner already during university studies so that the research leading in such directions should be supported, as Morrow (2005) notes, not only by observation abilities but also by “the creative and intellectual rigour required to identify [many of the qualities of everyday life currently overlooked]” (2005, p. 40). These abilities lead, in fact, to identifying the potential of any context and the possibilities of sustainable development from the social, economic and environmental point of view. Morrow even calls this type of thinking sustainable thinking.

What architecture does beyond its basic functions can be considered added value when it is reflected in the quality of life, the impact on a life and society that are healthy, sustainable, inclusive, diverse and multicultural, in the positive impact also on those who were not

considered as beneficiaries or users of the architectural object as such. Even the image of the architectural object can have a positive impact at community level, encouraging civic behaviour and changing perceptions and concurrently the behaviour associated with an area. Yet for what is added to be considered a value, it must have this quality through relating to individuals and communities, to their value system. Often, especially when working in the midst of disadvantaged communities, understanding the value system of the local communities versus that of the researchers and designers can prove difficult and there is a delicate balancing act. The given answer may easily be ill-suited and lead to a negative impact. The subject must therefore be treated with great responsibility and seriousness.

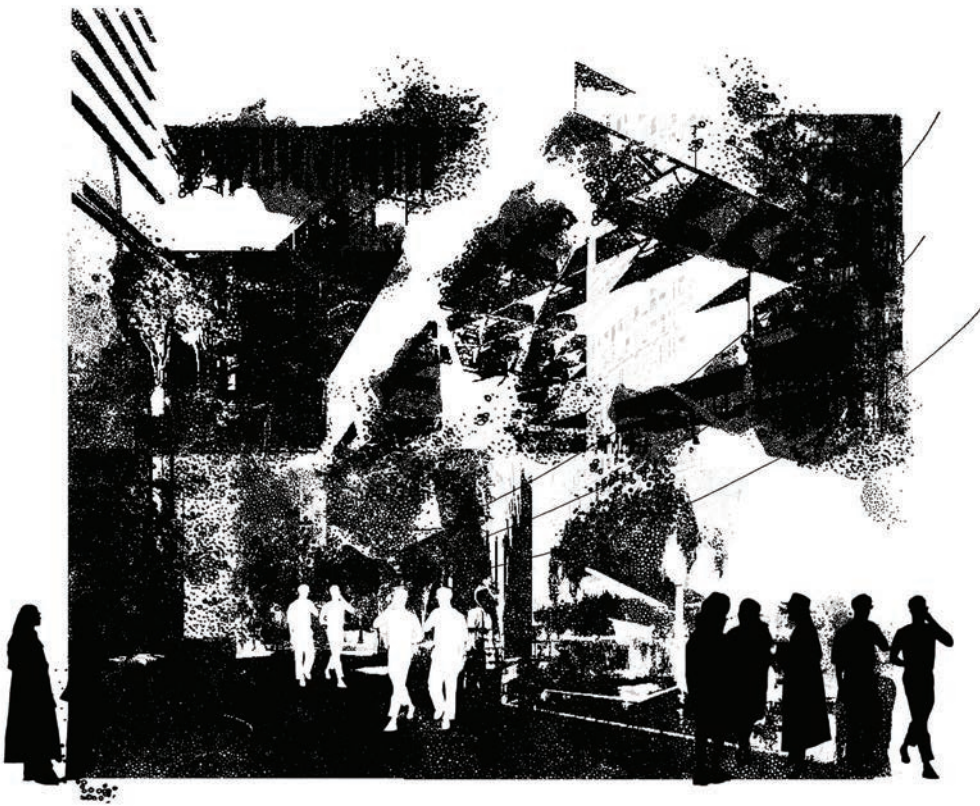
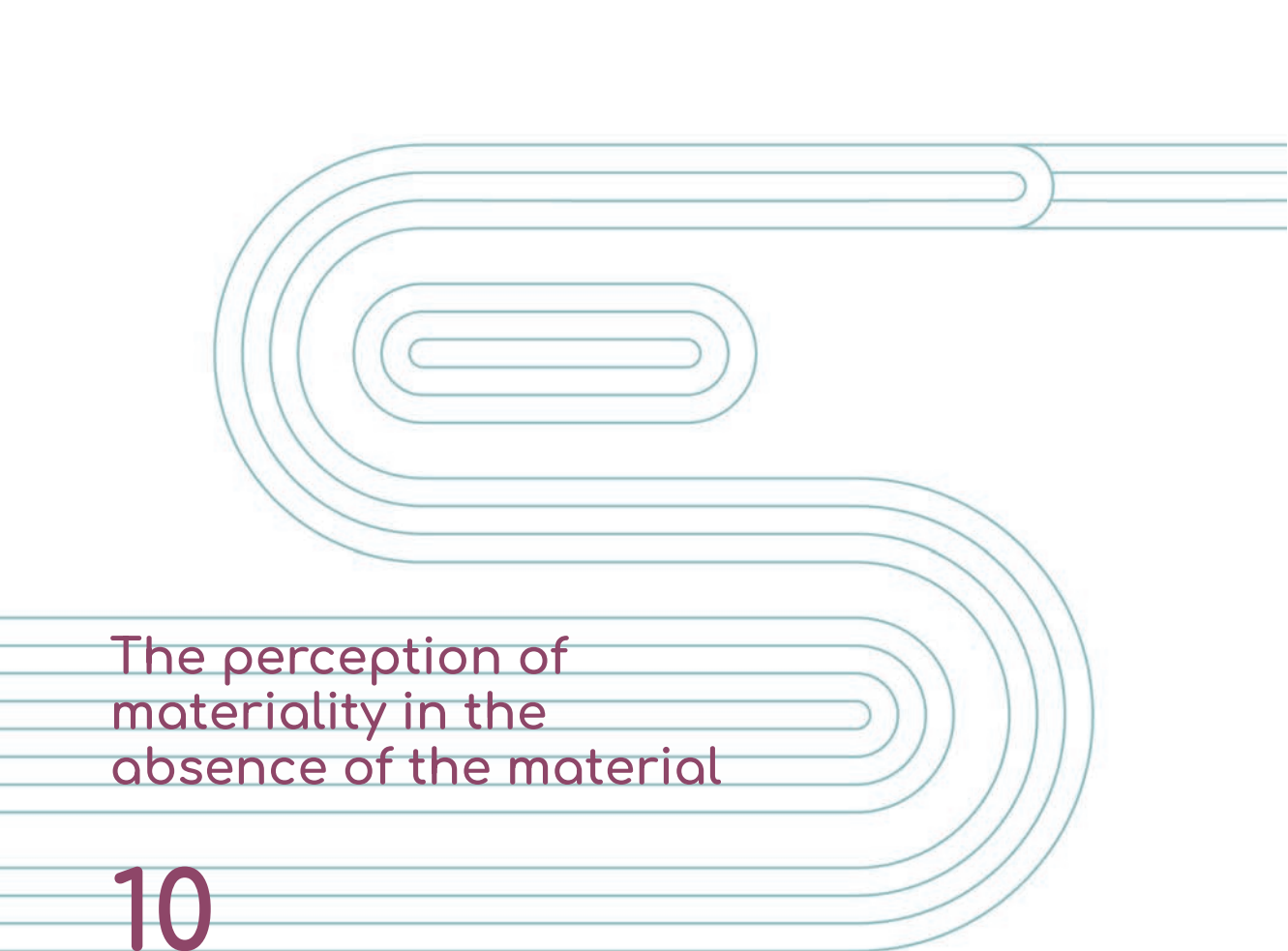


Fig. 1. Context that is favourable to social relationships. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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## The perception of materiality in the absence of the material

# 10

Ruxandra PĂDURARU

How do we perceive materiality in the absence of the material?

The design of a simple piece of urban furniture as well as the design of entire cities, albeit different in scope, scale and impact, presuppose increased attention to the manner of integrating them within the broader ecosystem of the elements with which they will interact – whether human or non-human ones (climate, materials, vegetation, etc).

The process of cohesive and holistic integration is supported by virtual reality (VR), which is gradually also finding its place in urban planning. Experts use technology for better visualisation of the proposed interventions and of their impact on the infrastructure and on the environment, always taking into account the specific local features (Axford et al., 2007). This digital immersion into the planned design favours making a value judgement on the quality of the presented content – VR constitutes the technological “prosthesis” required to understand, on a 1:1 scale, the employed materials, the impact on the surroundings, details like shadow fall, what the design looks like in the interior as well as on the outside, how human interaction with the proposal takes place etc.





Fig. 1. Virtual changes of materialities. (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

Thus, VR creates environments where immersion and the direct interaction with the interventions improve feedback quality and enable visualisation, communication and the evaluation of new developments (Gowling Wlg, 2019). In these cases, the proposals are not based merely on *ante factum* suppositions and *post factum* evaluations, but can be adapted “on the go” due to the digital framework that almost completely imitates the characteristic features of the space where the intervention is about to be made.

A major advantage of VR introduction consists in expanding its potential usefulness beyond specialist environments, especially in co-design and participatory urban planning. Instant 3D visualisation brings the ideas to life and nourishes creativity, both in the case of professional designers/architects and of participating citizens with no training in these fields, especially when the projects can be interactively modified in the joint design sessions. Thus, different options of design/management/construction can be directly tested and compared to choose the most viable proposal. These options do not merely offer a clearer image of the scale, order and proportion of the elements but also introduce aspects that could not be experienced simultaneously otherwise, such as the plot of land and the sky, the nearby buildings, the reference points, the vegetation and the landscape, the streetscape, the street furniture, even the pedestrian and traffic networks (Anke, 2019).

Such an understanding of design, which no longer appears decontextualised but integrated within the vast network of human and non-human elements that constitute the environment, has immense potential for more cohesive planning. Once the other sensory stimuli are introduced (auditive, olfactory and tactile) in addition to the visual, technology will be able to reproduce, almost entirely, what we currently understand by materiality. Yet, pending future steps, VR contributes positively to involving several stakeholders in decision processes and in the creation of pluridisciplinary teams that analyse, discuss and understand pluri...lateral space.

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