

Each studio at UAUIM has the freedom to pursue objectives of architectural education through diverse approaches and methods. Within a framework assignment and following deadlines that require the development of specific content up to the final submission of the project, each studio sets its own goals and, in doing so, may emphasize and frame certain steps or aspects in different ways.

With regard to decoding context, the premise was that reading, analysis, synthesis and interpretation of a particular context, irrespective of the studio or its philosophy, should be transposed into the project, contributing to its foundation. The results, visible in the final work, may differ greatly depending on the overall project – its context, the issues addressed, the student's personal understanding, the pursued scenario or vision and so on. However, the way different teachers approach context decoding in their studios is a subject worth exploring, and discussions on this topic can prove highly fruitful. Thus, as part of the Scholar Architect 2024 project, two round tables were organised to identify the fundamental aspects and strategies of context decoding employed by UAUIM teachers, regarded not only as a means of site analysis but, more importantly, as a way of understanding context (as defined in the first chapter of this volume).

The lively discussions at both round tables – transcribed and adapted for publication – underline that, beyond differing didactic approaches and methods, the final architectural project is expected to demonstrate the existence of a coherent logical, narrative and visual thread, linking context decoding (as part of the research process) to the design outcome.

[6] UAUIM INSIGHTS. Round Tables



[6.1] ROUND TABLE no. 1

08.10.2024 / Bibliohub / UAUIM

1. Bearing in mind context scales (from local to international) and the multitude of contextual dimensions (from the historical to the social and cultural but also the climatic, symbolic or virtual, alongside many others), what determines the selection of scale and of the relevant dimensions for studio/diploma projects?

Lorin Niculae

In the studio, I usually tell students that the scale at which we consider context has nothing to do with a metric scale, but rather with a human, 1:1 scale.

This is the scale at which the object interacts with a user through the details you can touch. Going further, the 1:10 scale is the scale at which architecture interacts with 10 users. At the 1:100 scale, we see how the building, the object interacts with 100 users. And we could follow this thread up to the geographic scale, the scale of national territory. So the link to context scale has to do with the number of users the architectural object is meant to serve through its concept and the programme we adopt. This link seems important to me because it moves the discussion away from figures, which can be opaque and elide the human factor, to the very idea of the people whom architecture helps in a given context.

Magda Stănculescu

We've started an experimental project this year, in which we try to determine this scale and the relevant dimensions together with the students. We take the first steps in decoding and, starting from several dimensions provided by us, we direct the students to brainstorm, to identify the relevance of each dimension, to determine the area for analysis relevant for each of these and to justify the conclusions they've reached. In order to determine the area to be analysed, for example, we ask them if on enlarging the scale they'd still obtain significant data.

What interests us is for them to find parameters that are suited to their inclinations but that also lead to conclusions in the analysis. This is a challenge until the diploma project because they often draw highly expressive analyses, but they don't reach any conclusions; not having reached conclusions, they can't provide a diagnosis; in the absence of a diagnosis, they don't know how to solve the situation at the site. Beyond the in-depth understanding of analysis parameters, from the measurable to the non-measurable ones, the conclusions are also very important: we can't move forward without them. We suggest to them that every analysis board should contain a minimum of conclusions, in keywords that capture the essence. Even this process is at first fairly complicated for the students: drawing partial conclusions from the analyses and then formulating interconnected ones. When this entire objective process is finished, the affective analyses will emerge, which very much depend on what each of them perceives, how much they empathise with the users, with the place. And these lead to different conclusions.

It's essential that they understand the whole process, but in order to obtain a very good project, they should rather begin from the end, I mean, from the affective analysis, which highlights what seemed special to them, those elements that

not everyone sees in the same way. This is when the project succeeds in also illustrating an interesting trajectory.

Vlad Eftenie

I've noticed two attitudes. First of all, the more we want to analyse the city at a larger scale, the more the ego's temptation increases to imagine that the respective project will be extremely important for as many people as possible. On the other hand, architectural experience shows that objects are also transformed through usage. We can't design how the respective building will be perceived after 5 years, 10 years, after 20 years. See the Guggenheim effect where a museum – a programme we often teach in the studio – has become a subject of global importance, actually, in architecture. So I think we should reconsider this selection of perimeters of analysis through zooming in and zooming out. Perhaps we should think of the city in the form of scenes or moments or sequences leading to this zooming in or zooming out. This kind of perspective should be kept in mind even after project completion because only from there can a very well-founded discussion begin. Perhaps we could even imagine the life of the respective edifice if it were built.

Alexandru Călin

I think there's a difference between a studio and a diploma project, first of all in terms of what is at stake, of its extent. The correct scale of the diploma project is given by the chosen approach and we have two main types: 1. Some projects start from a site and seek to solve a problem at the urban level, a situation in a particular place; function and usage become of secondary importance. In this case, a certain scale of analysis is selected at which the problem is solved. 2. Some students intend from the very beginning to develop a specific architectural programme and so they try to find a suitable site for it. In this case, the scale of analysis will be adjusted to the programme and the identified conditions, so the point of departure is somehow reversed.

In studio work, the stakes are different because things are preset to some extent. Usually, studio projects have a clear theme, they have a function that is fairly well-established through the brief so the scale of the area to be studied is then determined in relation to the complexity of the project.

In any case, the discussion is linked to what the project aims to achieve from the very beginning: if it aims to solve a situation or to contribute a new function. The two scales may in fact be different and I think the scale of the analysed context is determined in relation to this.

Vladimir Vinea

There are two terms here that mean different things: one is "dimension", which refers rather to a theme or issue being explored, and the other is "scale".

With diploma projects, we often notice that students don't set these scales correctly in relation to dimensions and the jury cannot tell, in fact, which are the fundamental characteristics of the context because the transition from the city scale to, let's say, the immediate neighbourhood of the site isn't explicit. Apart from the transition from one scale to another, with rules that can be learnt, one

must also learn to sense the city, to feel when there are greater or smaller breaks in the fabric, variations of urban density that determine, each time differently, the need to do these successive cuts... It's not actually an algorithm. The conclusion would be that they need to explore the city more, on their own, and that they should put together this exploration (which also exercises their intuition in reading the city) and what they learn in urban planning courses (the principles of defining area delineations across successive scales).

Magda Stănculescu

Defining the limits has consequences, actually, and this isn't well understood, not really. Often, they do a circular delineation because it looks great, but this cut doesn't establish clear boundaries, it's not correlated to the study and to where it stops. Or they make the cut in the middle of the street although it might have been relevant to capture both fronts. It depends on what you are studying, but you should be consistent.

Vladimir Vinea

Yes, they need to realise that, for example, if they put a human subject at the centre, the limit of the analysis should never be in the middle of the street because you, as the person standing in the middle of the street, perceive both fronts and so the limit would necessarily be somewhere at the back.

Anda Sfinteş

In the case of literature reviews, we say that when you stop finding new information, you can stop studying. I wonder if we could find a similar rule for delimiting context?

Cosmin Caciuc

I don't think it would be possible to stipulate a rule that can be applied from the beginning. When framing the brief or at least within the student group, especially in year II, we have the difficulty of providing a study area, which we select in a seemingly random manner. We generally start from a focus point or the experience of having walked through the area. This, somehow, makes the relationship to the space be limited by the body. The sense of setting limits is trained intermittently: even if we set them by following a rule (such as the rear property lines or the middle of the street), at some point it might cease to matter. We might have to extend the limit of the study area because we've discovered something in the course of our experience; or to shrink it because the initial cut is no longer relevant. We had this situation last year, with the year III students, when we were working in Bucharest's old city centre and we provided a perimeter of analysis. Then, for us, the limit of the old city centre really didn't matter. The area of interest was eventually determined after walking through, following some questions and the actual experience. So everything we had provided at the beginning became invalid.

Many books have been written on the theme of defining a region and its relevance. Urban geographers say that, however small and narrow-focused a place may be, it is linked to a global context at a given moment. A pandemic may reach that place and then you become preoccupied by issues on a planetary scale ...or you refer to other scales for historical, environmental or cultural reasons, bearing in

mind the migration phenomenon or anything that happens outside and has an impact on the place. Then, these limits become debatable and are born, in fact, from the very process of design. This is very difficult for students to understand, they think it's something vague and they'd like us to deliver a methodology ...but I, who've worked a lot with methodologies, start doubting them after a year or two.

Lorin Niculae

What you're saying is true! In general, if your research is genuine and truthful, the investigation methods you start from undergo modification and you have to adapt to the situation. For example, you can define the area by its streets, by the rear property lines; this way, it may be more relevant to view that area as the sum of acts of appropriation and ownership claims. You can move on to anthropology and bring anthropology into the realm of architecture, which can be very fruitful and can change the perspective. It's important that everyone should define their own tools and these should be coherent within the totality of the thinking proposed. I think that we, as a studio, should not, as you say, close down students' thinking, we shouldn't give them methodology with capital M which, once mastered, they can apply for the rest of their lives and thus solve the problem of context. On the contrary, we should teach them how to discover their own sensitivity and their own tools attuned to it so they can put themselves in the work they'll do; only then will their humanity be transposed into architecture. Otherwise, everything becomes mechanistic, it becomes a craft that we teach, and architecture is not a crafts school.

Melania Dulămea

It's very important for students to understand that there is no recipe for analysis and that analysis is, in fact, part of their thinking process and that it shows an individual way of relating to a theme that they define.

The aim of analysis is to help you establish the hierarchy of priorities linked to the intervention. I think that analysis must be seen from two points of view: of examining how the proposal affects the city and then of defining the area that imposes some constraints on the site where one intervenes. There is permanent fluctuation between the two: there is a need to extract data, then to test them and see how they'll be changed through the intervention.

I'd add something else connected to the process because I think that studio projects relate differently from diploma projects to context analysis. Over the years, in the studio, I've tested many ways of working with the students at the analysis stage because I see it not only as a step in building the argumentation of the proposal, but also as an opportunity for student interaction, for getting them to know one another by pursuing research on a common theme. I tested working with the students by dividing them into teams, on the basis of study criteria, and then putting all the information together and creating a kind of collective, group analysis; we also worked with the set-up where each of them did individual analyses. The advantage of studio projects is that you can show them, in fact, how analysis is carried out, going much further than could be accomplished by a single person, and in this way, they test several ways of conceiving such an analysis, which they can begin to personalise in the course of time. In the

diploma projects, context analysis seems less in-depth, perhaps because in the studio projects they have a very well-established framework and rhythm and interaction is much more intense, whereas there are breaks in their work on the diploma projects.

2. Decoding the context is a process that implies various steps (from a first reading of the site to understanding the context), but also different complexity levels depending on the year of study. For a correct differentiation across the study cycle, we should ask, first: what expectations do we have from a student at the diploma level when they present the context and how they have decoded it?

Letiția Barbuică

In the diploma project, before getting to decoding, students must choose a site. This choice is a very difficult step for them to take, especially since the chosen site and the issues raised must be sufficiently stimulating and spur them towards the analysis of different dimensions. I agree with Vlad, one must zoom in and zoom out and the more questions you ask that create the need for analysis at a larger, intermediary, smaller, detailed scale, the richer and more complex the project becomes.

Alexandru Călin

The diploma project should probably lead to a much more complex research area than the mere resolution of an architectural programme. You get to solve it, of course! In the list of submissions, we see many projects that adopt from the start a purely functional solution – three-star seaside hotel, Crevedia winery – while other projects address an urban situation with a complex theme, where the ultimate object is not defined, but you see an understanding of the situation, an understanding of urban dynamics that leads you to the conclusion: Yes, given this entire situation, it's worth designing a sports hall! ...which eventually also requires a solution in terms of function. This is actually how you solve a situation and you demonstrate that you understand several dimensions: of decoding a physical context, a historical context, a social context, a larger built context, of decoding theoretical issues... and you have a well-argued answer. So the expectations, in the foundational study – pre-diploma – diploma sequence, consist in understanding a theme that you present in a much more nuanced and sophisticated manner than the mere functional insertion of an object, whatever its characteristics.

Cosmin Caciuc

I think it's essential for the process to be fuelled by a cultural issue. Even when speaking of an architectural programme like the hotel, you can start from that without putting it in a test tube. Because hotels are places that are lived-in – you've seen and experienced them and you can ask some questions about them. For example: *How can you be a tourist nowadays?* What does tourism actually mean? How many types of hotel are there and what kind of experience

do they offer? Do these hotels ruin places or don't they? Are there other types of accommodation? All these questions should be addressed in the presentation because otherwise the jury will ask them. The jury's first questions aim to establish if your approach is valid and what your process has been like, first of all culturally, because referring to culture means that you definitely understand the place in a particular manner. And so, no matter how we play it, we get to places and experiences and to the founding cultural dimensions. Everything else comes after.

Many theory books revolve around visual, cultural, social and anthropological dimensions that, albeit different, are often intertwined, and it's impossible to justify why something belongs in one category and not another. I think that place can always naturally generate its categories. With a minimum of culture, you can set some modest dimensions in relation to which to orient the entire project and this seems more natural than something imposed from the outside. Going back to tourism, we can create a linkage to places by delimiting an area that interests us intellectually. For example, we can think about a Greek island that rejects tourism or about a different area of Europe that no longer tolerates tourists – I'd make this the issue. So I wouldn't formulate the problem of the hotel, I wouldn't wonder what it will look like, but how I confront this extraordinary situation: Why does a community reject tourism? Why is a saturation point reached although tourism has brought prosperity... or What is the harmful aspect of a consumer society? What does harmful mean? What is consumer society? I've not heard a student present this kind of approach. They just solve the programme...

Alexandru Călin

As projects grow in scale and intricacy from early to later years of study, the problem of decoding context, context scale and the complexity of dimensions for analysing and understanding context should also reach a higher degree of sophistication. In year VI, we assume they have sufficient professional maturity to choose by themselves the important dimensions of analysis for the site they want to work on.

Whether they want to solve a function – of course, it's desirable there should be more to the project than this – or whether they want to solve a problem of the site, limits can in fact differ depending on the contextual dimension being analysed. If we talk about functional elements: What functional references are there for the programme they eventually solve? What urban features could influence the site and the programme? At the same time, the proposal becomes an element that influences the context and, depending on the scale at which it has an impact, how far or how close should the analysis go? Sometimes, certain dimensions cannot have a limit or the dimensions have different limits. This isn't functional analysis, but an analysis of built fabric. How far do we take the limits depending on site, programme and place in order to create reference points and achieve integration in that place, that district, that neighbourhood, that city? It depends. Then, there are the immaterial dimensions that we couldn't work without because architecture is and must of course remain a cultural act. I'm referring to the social, cultural, historical dimensions.

In year VI, you expect them to come prepared to discuss things at a different level both from the point of view of content and of working methods.

Justin Baroncea

In the end, we wonder why we do all these things? Because when we chose this profession we thought that the field we selected would help us express ourselves. This is why I start to analyse, why I start to search for the place, the context. The context is a pretext, and so is the programme, and the client. It's a pretext! Architecture is my instrument of self-expression, through which I express what is in my mind and try to lay on the table what's circulating through my synapses. If it weren't the case, a brilliant engineer, together with a sociologist, together with an anthropologist and with a historian would be capable of putting together a better project than the architect. And I'm not at all convinced they could because they have no expressive process to sustain them. Solving the challenges of a site, however well you may analyse the context, is not sufficient. It's far too little. We must succeed in persuading students to find out what are the appropriate tools for their self-expression.

Lorin Niculae

I don't agree. I don't think the context can ever be a pretext. For me, context is something very important, which must be present in your project, a project that, of course, needs to be expressive as well. You express yourself and you are a creator, but the context is no mere pretext.

For example, a hospital you have to design represents a need. The beneficiary may be the City Hall together with the Ministry of Health, who have allotted money for a community that lacks a hospital. Of course, you need to integrate it into the urban fabric, relate it to a context. Yes, the context is a pretext because you, eventually, want to obtain expressivity out of that building as well, but apart from that, there are the people you must consider.

Justin Baroncea

I'm only saying that we always stop at the first part and we never get to the second part – self-expression. It's like we were afraid. In the second part, we are all very different and coming to an agreement seems almost impossible. Not one of us, if we were given the same project brief, with all the restrictions in the world, would do a similar project to someone else.

We tell students: "You must analyse the context!". They reply: "But why must we?" to which we answer: "Don't you want to obtain an architectural project? Do you want to stop merely at solving problems?" Do we want to obtain something beyond solving problems, solving plans? Where is architecture in all this?

[6.2] ROUND TABLE no. 2

28.11.2024 / Bibliohub / UAUIM



1. From a first reading of the site and context to data interpretation, decoding can be approached in different ways that relate both to studio strategies and to individual visions. Still, could we indicate, by way of recommendation, a few points of departure for this process?

Andra Panait

It seems crucial to me that students should learn how to look at a place and how to ask the right questions in connection to it. This seems to me to be the difficulty in approaching a context, but these things contribute in determining the extent to which the future intervention can lead to positive changes in that place, to a positive impact. So students should always ask themselves how they can create value while keeping certain features of the urban fabric and how they can enhance the context at the same time.

Anda Sfinteş

Could we clarify what this “looking at” entails?

Andra Panait

The act of looking is a very subjective experience and so it's quite difficult to clarify. Of course, we can guide them and give them a series of points to keep in mind, but it's spectacular when the students notice something different from what you, as a teacher, have observed. When you give them a set of rules, or a set of conditions, you may end up losing precisely this unexpected part, the surprise element.

Emil Ivănescu

We find this looking to be so natural that the first things we say about it are fairly generic. In fact, every element of public space is a sign, it signifies something, and it's sometimes helpful if things are explained in different terms and taken to a more abstract level. For example, we see the street, the pavement, we see the fence; if we can make the students see the fence as a kind of boundary, they'll already start to read the site differently.

Dan Dinoiu

We've been doing an experiment in the studio for some time where, before getting to analyse the site rationally, we ask the students to decipher it intuitively (to discover “a secret”), to take a subjective attitude towards it (each through the prism of their own personality, their experiences, the music they listen to, their social habits and so on). Then, when you start conducting the rational analysis of the site, your intuition will already prompt you towards a particular approach. But it's very difficult to achieve a subjective attitude that is powerful enough to lead to an architectural project. In the end, this attitude should also mean something to the others, not just to you, and the project should be an illustration of the secret discovered at the site. Through this experiment, we noticed that students

place themselves, from the beginning, somehow above the programme: they aren't constrained by it and the conclusions reached by rational means, which they find much more difficult to overcome afterwards. Yet in the end, if your initial intuition was that the site should be a space of tranquillity or of freedom and you didn't obtain this in your project, it means you've made a mistake somewhere, even if the programme was well solved from the formal point of view. Perhaps this could be a way of getting to ask yourself some questions.

Melania Dulămea

You need to teach them to look and at the same time not to constrain them to look only in a particular way. It's important, especially during the first years, not to show them a way of looking that they can learn and apply mechanically. Instead, you need to try to stimulate their individual ways of looking so they can develop their autonomy.

Ana Machedon

Indeed! I've often noticed that students take the same kind of look at the context (through analyses made on circular or square delineations or whatever fits on the sheet of paper) and they even tell us: How can we reach different conclusions if this is what reality looks like? But even setting the limit of the analysed context is a project in itself since some things deserve to be analysed at one scale and others at a completely different scale. For example, the same parameter analysed from one side to the other of an entire boulevard looks different from its analysis on a shorter section; the respective parameter must be analysed up to the limit or scale where it becomes inconclusive.

Mihaela Pelteacu

I think the term "analysis" generates confusion because it's used slightly differently in the studio versus other courses or applications. Urban analysis as a tool of reading context differs from analysis as a creative act that we pursue in the studio. In light of this, in the latest project we first asked the students for a vision of the site and, only after the aim was set, to search in the context for elements that validated or contradicted this vision.

Vlad Eftenie

We, too – Magda, Dragoş and I – try to get our students in the studio to put more emphasis on this subjective, affective, observational side, on the emotional connection to the site. It's an extremely important source for what will become the conceptual process, the way in which you defend and justify a project. The student architect must unquestionably establish a relationship and a dialogue with the site and the context in order to be able to encode/decode/re-encode. But to decode, you need to know the code ...which we can offer, as a pretext for looking, just like at the Music Academy students are taught harmony, the musical notes and staff. After that, it's up to everyone how they use it all and what they compose. At the end of that look there are astonishments, wonderings and fabulous things which can inspire you. At the studio, we gave them about 25 parameters from which they chose for analysis what suited them, what they

liked, what gave them joy. We steered them, gently, in the good direction, and I think it worked.

Magda Stănculescu

Indeed, for the first project we explained the multitude, the variety of the types of analyses they could do and they worked in teams, searching for the essence within the context to justify a function. But in the second project, they were given a function and then the analysis had to be completed depending on individual vision and what each of them was after. Yet suddenly they reverted to recipes and to what was “on trend”; they didn’t understand that analysis is something that must be generated, it isn’t set in stone, but needs to be expanded to serve a purpose, to support a scenario you believe in or a valid vision; it’s a living material.

Dan Dinoiu

We’ve also done the following exercise: over the last two years, we’ve asked them, in long-term projects, to work at first with 10 different spatial typologies on the site. With this set-up, where you work with typologies, you have the opportunity to develop your critical spirit, but the main advantage is that you get to analyse what happens to the site in different scenarios. And after you discover what you’re actually looking for at the site, you start to analyse the built fabric, knowing that you need to obtain something specific, that you must emphasize certain perspectives, now that you’ve realised what matters. So the analyses, however classic, become much more nuanced. The scenario Magda was talking about will almost dictate the in-depth analysis of the site.

Anda Sfinteş

Through my inclination towards anthropology I sometimes tend to put people and their needs perhaps slightly above the architecture, but at the same time I encourage students to look at the context from their own perspective and through the lens of their own interests, hobbies, etc. This is why I wonder how we could balance these two different approaches. When students look at things subjectively and decode or understand the respective site from this individual perspective, how should they relate further, also to those they are building for? Sometimes, intuition may be enough and the built object may be integrated very well, it may function in the context. But it isn’t always the case and so I return to the scenarios mentioned by Magda and Dan. I think that through scenarios, students might put themselves in the shoes of those they’d build for or who’d use the proposed building in one way or another. This way, they’d more easily understand that whatever they do and however personal their perspective, the respective object still has an impact on everyone, from passersby to active users of the building. Once they’ve understood this, I think they’d more easily fulfil the desideratum that Andra spoke about at the beginning, that of always producing positive change in the context.

2. If by decoding we understand not merely the reading and analysis of context but also processing information and formulating conclusions with an impact on the solutions, what role does such decoding play within a project? How might we expect it to develop in the course of a project?

Dan Dinoiu

After some first analyses of the site, at some point you start to develop a concept and then you get to reduce some of the analyses, to search and process further, you realise that you are still missing certain data... It seems to me that the elements you end up with at this stage are the most important; they are part of the explanation for the solution. These pieces of analysis done to justify the solution are the most relevant ones.

Andra Panait

Yes, after a set of basic analyses that we probably all do at the beginning, different ones take shape during the second stage of the project.

Dan Dinoiu

...and they give us answers that are much more grounded in the project context.

Ana Machedon

When might this second stage occur in the timeframe of the project?

Andra Panait

Actually, a project is a cyclical process where you keep testing hypotheses. When you reach a certain point, something may force you to take a step back and choose a different path, which may entail a different type of analysis, a different type of reading. So it could be at any time.

Ana Machedon

It could be until the end. It's actually the "nth" phase.

Andra Panait

In the end, it's about controlling the narrative. The discourse mustn't have logical breaks and it needs to be supported by images. So at the "nth" phase, you may notice you are missing a piece that justifies a certain part of the argumentation. This is why things can't be divided into an analytical and conceptual stage. They must be connected.

We did an exercise in the first project weeks – we asked the students to already write an argumentative text and this helped them put some ideas in order, to clarify the solution much better by choosing the appropriate words in the text.

Anda Sfinteş

I use a similar strategy in supervising diploma projects and dissertations: that of asking students to formulate an overall idea from the beginning, however vaguely sketched. It seems to me very important that the students understand what they want to do and why, that they determine the points they should reach to achieve that result. This way, they get to discard lots of irrelevant things and to concentrate on what matters, without fumbling in the dark in too many directions. Although it generally takes quite a long time before they settle on the aim, things evolve much more quickly after that; with clear objectives, you know what analyses you should move towards, where to take your research, what types of case studies to pursue, what to focus on and so on. In any case, from here, things still evolve in “nth” phases, but perhaps better directed ones.

3. What types of results, visible in the project, do we expect at the end of a context decoding process? More precisely: how could this decoding be reflected in a project, at the moment of defending it?

Vlad Eftenie

I think we expect to see mastery of the project theme and of the individual solution proposed. This gain of certainty about the solution can also demonstrate a good knowledge of the site issues. And why not, we also expect a self-critique of the presence of the project on the site because it may not bring Heaven on Earth, as the student would have initially wanted, it may even create new problems. Some issues might be resolved, while others might just start to appear. We rarely get to this point, but I'd consider it a gain for the students. In the end, what does the student gain on a personal and professional level from the assimilation and usage of certain codes?

Letiția Barbuică

Following some live presentations we organised under the title *Making of... Best Diploma*, we discovered that the presentation is very important. It somehow accounts for this narrative thread which, when it's appropriate and conclusive, is like a good story on the reading of which you'd exclaim: aha! It's not something you struggle to understand, to see what you're left with.

Andra Panait

If the question is asked in terms of deliverables and refers to what they must produce as such, then perhaps there should be a set of diagrams that explain the project, a strategy of development should be visible, or a vision for developing the site on which the intervention is made, in addition to a coherent narrative thread.

Letiția Barbuică

I expect that narrative thread to be able to transform into a story.

Emil Ivănescu

...but more than storytelling, the project should also speak by itself, without the story behind it. So it should contain those conclusive pieces which visually explain the solution.

Letiția Barbuică

Yes, it's true. The layout of the panels should create a storyboard.

Dan Dinoiu

The presentation should become a process leading to a kind of conclusion. The boards should be structured so as to convey a message about the project key: What is the specific context in which you have situated your work? What scenario are you introducing us into? What is the ambience like? And so on. And in the course of this argumentation you show plans, sections, facades, you don't fragment the presentation to fit them.

Anda Sfinteș

I, too, feel that there's most often a connecting piece missing, something to make the transition from what they analysed in the first stage, what they extracted from the site or any type of background research they've undertaken, to the solution. For example, when we get to the plan, is the fact that access is located in a particular place due to any specific cause?

Andra Panait

They need to show more clearly the relevance of the pieces and the diagrams they've studied and drawn in relation to the project. Each piece of research/analysis must be directly relevant for the decisions they've made in the design.

Dan Dinoiu

They need to do some syntheses.

Andra Panait

Which is the piece that best describes the project? This also needs to come from them. It can't be imposed through the brief.

Ana Machedon

My opinion is that a good decoding of the context should lead to a distinct project. In response to the question we started from, I expect, in a jury session, to see projects that differ from one another and that are particularised.

Dan Dinoiu

I'd say that one of the problems, somehow connected to context, is that each student must set the level of ambition to be reached by the respective project.

If you design a philharmonic hall in Bucharest you must understand the level of ambition of this kind of building, in a European capital. You can't set about designing a concert hall now and look at Sala Radio, which was built in 1960; you need to take a look at what is happening in Vienna, in Budapest, in Istanbul at least, if not in Paris. Of course we can't compare ourselves to that, but at least the level of ambition should be around that mark. And then you have a little understanding of the context where you situate your project, not just in that place, but also in a broader cultural context.