An “Architecture Orientation Training” Experience

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Abstract

This study presents a preliminary architectural training program that aims to prevent disadvantages of the Turkish examination system and accustom the students to their further higher education. It is a well-known fact that comprehensive and sophisticated education systems including architectural education need a preliminary preparation period for students. Therefore a series of orientation activities presenting different aspects of architecture was organized. The orientation program, which took place during the foreign language prep-school year, was divided into six steps that followed a particular development process. It is expected that by generalizing qualified orientation activities in universities, architecture students will improve their performance especially in the freshman year at the School of Architecture.

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1. Introduction

Students who take the sufficient score from Higher Education Examination-Undergraduate Placement Examination (Turkish YGS-LYS) applied by OSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center) are entitled to enroll in the Department of Architecture of Universities after high school education in Turkey. The current examination system, constructed on measuring the quantitative capabilities, meanwhile vocational qualifications are ignored. Adequate level of vocational awareness is not developed in such an educational environment where art or design education is not provided sufficiently in secondary education curriculums and also; the only criteria of success is...
deemed to get a higher score from the exam. For this reason, a significant number of students select their future profession without considering the qualifications of the profession and their own characteristics.

The conception of examination based secondary education causes young people distancing from a critical view, an ability to evaluate and analyze social, sociological, economic facts and events. Therefore, radical changes are needed in young people’s point of view on life, life styles, environmental issues and the city especially during the freshman year of architectural education. It can be assumed that the freshman year is the most compelling part along the whole education period in the School of Architecture. In order to simplify the orientation period, it would be helpful for students to get used to make researches from printed materials such as: books, magazines and web-sources, attend architecture studios, follow architectural project criticizing juries, observe models and projects in their spare time after prep school classes. In this case, overcoming adaptation period with minimum severity is related to students’ personal efforts. Having this transition period effectively to the utmost will increase student’s self-confidence and raise his/her interest in learning. It is generally observed that the students who have difficulty in getting adapted to the educational system, tend to discontinue or withdraw architectural education. These problems arising from not having the level of overall success confront us with ‘virtual’ students who could not get involved in education until the last year and extend the period of education.

2. Architecture Orientation Training

The qualifications and context of present secondary education in Turkey is not sufficient enough to prepare students for higher education. It is observed that complex educational systems including architectural education require a preparation process. Atkinson [1] specifies that, “A Level” education, which is a two-year program for students between the ages of 16-19 in UK, is useful, as it prepares students for this transition period. The purpose of the “architecture” course, which is classified under the department of art within the scope of this training program, is to provide an accurate conception of architecture. It aims to clarify that architecture is not only a complement of abstract concepts produced by architects but also a process that arise from the contribution of everyone, everything and most importantly themselves. This training also improves the skills that an architecture student will be in need of during his/her education. Within the context of the interviews with the Deans of Architecture Schools in UK, Atkinson’s article argues that they also support this pre-undergraduate education. Thus, architecture orientation training might be accepted as a medium, which provides a base for students to learn basic concepts of art and architecture and prevents loss of time at higher education.

According to Senturer [2], architectural formation needs to be re-evaluated; because although architectural discourse is gradually expanding, architectural practice is still being comprehended as only designing / building a structure in temporary professional field. Thus, architectural education should be qualified to form a base for various approaches. Yurekli [3] stated that; an architect should have or improve some qualifications such as design ability, creativity, emotional intelligence and intellectuality. Architectural education ought to be organized in order to train students to gain these qualifications. Inter-disciplinary nature of the profession of architecture requires both architects and students to be sophisticated. Students who are used to the unilateral educational system might be confused with more complicated, specific and diverse educational system of architecture. As a result, foreign language prep-class should be enriched with orientation activities for architecture students who will be involved with the formal vocational education in the following year.

3. Architectural Orientation Training Activities in Bursa Orhangazi University

Architecture Orientation Training was organized for architecture students attending to prep-class in the School of Foreign Languages at Bursa Orhangazi University. The orientation activities were divided into six steps, all of which focuses on different aspects of architecture. It is aimed to present various concepts about architecture and different acquisitions (thinking, designing, practicing…) in a wide range. Program of the orientation activities was edited according to a certain process of development. These activities are predicted to raise an interest on architecture without asking for an extra work from students in prep-class. In this context, the orientation program organized by Department of Architecture of Bursa Orhangazi University in 2012-2013 academic years is presented in this article.
3.1. Lecture: ‘‘What is Architecture?’’

The first step of the orientation activities was a lecture about fundamentals of architecture. The lecture enabled architecture students and faculty members meet each other. The main purpose of the lecture was to get students familiar with the basic concepts of architecture that they will encounter throughout their higher education. In this context, the article with the title of “Başlangıçtan Günümüze Mimarının Gelişimine Genel Bir Bakış” (A General Look to the Development of Architecture from the Beginning to Present) from the book "Yorumlar" (Commentaries) written by Bülent Özer [4] was distributed to the students. The lecture was executed by Chair of the Department of Architecture, Asst. Prof. Dr. Yasemin Erbil, in the faculty's auditorium on October 12, 2012 and lasted for about 40 minutes. During the cocktail organized after the seminar, various books, magazines, catalogs and materials about architecture were also distributed to the students.

3.2. City Tour: Koza Han

The second orientation activity included an excursion to the “Hanlar” Region, which stands out with its historical identity in Bursa and held on October 19, 2012. Prior to the trip, documents about Grand Bazaar and “Hanlar” Region and also a tour map were shared with the students. Students were requested to read the section about Bursa from Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar’s book: “Beş Şehir” (Five Cities) [5]. Students were asked to investigate the places with an architectural point of view. This might be summarized as perceiving the architecture as a profession based on not only building a structure but also creating an environmental atmosphere. Historical and architectural characteristics of the region were discussed while mentioning on the formation of the "genius loci" and the role of 4th dimension (time) in transformation of the spirit of place. Structural elements forming these historical buildings and the design principles were also discussed. Students were encouraged to comment on these issues. Basic techniques of sketching were shown to the students during the trip. Students were required to sketch the places and take some pictures in the free time. By this way, it is aimed to improve students’ hand-skills, which are essential in architectural education and profession. After the group tour, students revisited “Hanlar” Region individually in order to make sketches and take photos.

3.3. Installation

The third orientation activity that focused on improving hand skill and abstract thinking was organized on December 21, 2012. Architecture students created the new surfaces by arranging different forms of the identical material in the main gallery of the campus building. Students designed an exhibition surface that is seen in Fig. 1 for the sketches and photos that they worked on in the previous orientation, which became an installation itself. This can be accepted as their first spatial design experience as the university freshmen.

The work was intended for students to discover structural features of a material and its possibilities, then to form a space by using the possibilities of the material at their best. The orientation was inspired from Noodle Workshop in Salt Galata realized by “Herkes İçin Mimarlık” (Architecture for Everybody) Association [6]. Cylindrical flexible polyurethane tubes were used as the construction material to form a three-dimensional exhibition space by creating new layers on existing surfaces in the gallery. Thus, the aim was to imply the fact that an architectural space is not created only to fulfill a specific function but also to reveal its own visual features.
3.4. Exhibition: Raising Awareness on Natural Disasters and Earthquake

The fourth orientation activity included an exhibition which was organized in collaboration with Anadolu University on March 1-3, 2013. Students were informed about the content of the exhibition in a seminar which was executed by Prof. Dr. Yucel Guney before the exhibition day. The exhibition had been performed in Eskisehir previously. Within the cooperation of two Universities, the same exhibition which is called as: “Raising Awareness on Natural Disasters and Earthquake” was repeated as an orientation activity during the Earthquake Week in a shopping mall in Bursa. The aim of the exhibition was to raise awareness on natural disasters and earthquake in the society.

The exhibition included a video presentation and poster images about occurrence of earthquake, the behavior of the structure during an earthquake, soil liquefaction and soft ground. Architecture students of Bursa Orhangazi University took place in the exhibition as volunteers, and had an opportunity to learn basics of a structure, examples of applications and the architect's responsibility in professional scope. The exhibition also enabled the students to realize the importance of collaboration with other technical members and possible results of wrong architectural practice and poor communication. "Learning by Teaching" method has an important place in education. Thus, students consolidated their knowledge by sharing it with visitors and answering their questions.

3.5. Movie Screening: Blade Runner

The movie: “Blade Runner”, directed by Ridley Scott in 1982 was screened in the context of the fifth orientation activity on April 24, 2013. Movies, particularly science-fiction movies, have a deep interaction with architecture. Architecture is inspired by cinematography as many as other branches of art; while motion-pictures benefit from architecture profession and architectural theory for spatial organization. As a result, movies have an important role as a starting point for an architecture student. Architects such as Tschumi, Koolhaas, Nouvel accept cinematography as an important reference to form their architectural language [7]. A cinematographer constructs the experienced space and, visualizes it with its utopian and dystopian place suggestions. A medium is formed in movies to legitimize the creative thinking that architectural education endeavors to improve; but cannot be applied in professional architectural practice most of the time. Ozakin [8] defines Blade Runner as "the intensified metaphor of the intellectual thinking in today's world." Concepts such as post-industrial world's yields, cities dragged to chaotic language by revivalist styles, alienation, consumption culture, and individualism are the main critical elements of dystopian cinematography. The movie, Blade Runner, gives an opportunity to get involved in “architectural concept” that will be questioned through architectural education. The article with the title of "Bugünün Dünyasını Geleceğe yansıtmak" (Reflecting Today's World to the Future) by Ozgur Ozakin was distributed to students as a reading to help them evaluate the movie in architectural context.

3.6. Workshop: Constructing a Geodesic Dome with Waste Materials

The last orientation activity, which is seen in Fig. 2, was about constructing a structure by using basic materials such as used newspapers, colored scotch tape on 15 May, 2013. Geodesic dome, which is frequently used in contemporary architecture, was practiced in order to evaluate the opportunities of a basic architectural form. Within
In this workshop, practicing to create a temporary architectural structure with basic materials and forms, students experienced how this basic form gained a spatial quality. It can be concluded that the students get used to the design dynamics that they will encounter all through their education.

In addition to the activities mentioned, a web blog and a social-media group were operated as digital mediums for sharing information with students. Through these channels the dynamics of the professional life such as: the activities of Chamber of Architects, interviews, announcements about fairs such as: Bursa International Building and Life Fair and Congress, Bursa Book Fair and Istanbul Design Biennale, various building examples, architectural competitions, web addresses of some architectural offices were shared all along the academic year.

4. Findings and Results

Students were asked to complete a survey prepared in 5 Likert-type scales in order to measure the improvements achieved by the orientation program about their understanding of the profession. 33 students attended to the survey. The evaluation revealed that most of the students thought the orientation activities helped them to understand architectural education. On the other hand, it can be mentioned that most of the students had a difficulty in relating visual arts such as cinematography to architecture depending on the results.

It is expected that, generalizing qualified orientation activities in higher education would benefit the architecture students to improve their performance especially in the freshman year. It might also open a different research area for academicians to compare overall success between the students who attended to the orientation activities and the ones who did not.

References


