



“Galata” as an Architectural Design Studio Experience

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This case study has been brought about due to the projects carried out in our country in recent years under the name of “transformation”. The projects in question are directed towards developing various designs by dealing with an area of a city but at the same time by partly or completely neglecting it. In fact in this context our country has become a “trend” in the architectural sphere. Concepts such as urban transformation, urban change, urban renewal and urban environment are the concepts which form the basis of these schemes and which are among the most commonly found therein. We believe it is both valuable and necessary that these transformation projects, which involve individuals who take part in the academic process and who are concerned with studio education, should also be dealt with in the architectural education process. Formed out of this idea, the “architectural design studio” was conceived with the aim of enabling students to “rethink” the above concepts and, by creating various projects in this context, of increasing their “internalization” and “awareness” of the subject.

Accordingly, in Architectural Design Studios 4-5, which we are implementing in the 2009-2010 autumn semester at Uludağ University Department of Architecture, the “Galata Area” has been selected as the field of study. This area, with the architectural and experiential features it displays both for Istanbul and in terms of our other cities, offers a laboratory environment to designers. The existence of architectural and socio-cultural strata, laid down and developed during the course of history, has set the area before our eyes as a distinctive tissue. In the recent past, the overseas connections, arising from their trade dealings, of the “non-Muslim-Levantine” group, the users of the Galata Area, gave rise to the appearance of various neo-classic structures imitating the Europe of the time. In this way, the singular and distinctive architectural tissue of Istanbul, which was quite different from that of the other regions and which arose from its own dynamics and vibrancy, has come down to us today.

This unique architecture of Galata and the fact that it has to a large extent retained its architectural character were the determining factors in choosing it as the field of study of Architectural Design Studios 4-5. With the aim of enabling students to perceive and comprehend this field better, support has also been obtained from different disciplines. For this purpose, academic staff of the Archaeology Department of the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts has described Galata and its environs on location to our students by evaluating its development over the course of history. During the narration and excursion, relevant questions related to “socio-cultural structure”, “urban strata” and “physical formation” were asked by the students. In this context, the intention was for the students to internalize the region and project area by increasing their perceptions even further. After this investigation and research had been carried out in the field, the “project area”, “problems and potential of the area” and “socio-cultural structure” were evaluated by discussion in the studio. Later, by making use of the synergy created by the group study, a model of the area and a model generated in a virtual environment were prepared collectively.

The basic of the methods we apply in the architectural design studio rely on the concepts of creativity and the freedom of the individual. With this aim in mind, during the study period, it has been our intention to enable the students to come up with various proposals and to transform them into projects, and, during this process, to consider such concepts as change and transformation. During the course of this case study, however, the approach employed for the students relies completely on processes such as problem-finding, exploring the subject, and developing suggestions towards finding solutions. Within this framework the students were left entirely free without any kind of guidance program in their hands.

In this case study, concepts such as urban transformation, urban change and urban environment, which are the “artificial” and, unfortunately, “sterile” concepts mentioned above, are discussed with the “Galata experience” on the basis of the students’ designs.

KEY WORDS: Architectural education, design studio, urban transformation, case study, Galata.