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Strengthening the Sense of Place in Architectural Education through Historical Architectural Typologies: A Context-Focused Design Studio Approach

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Abstract

Contemporary architecture education faces a growing disconnect between design practice and cultural, historical, and spatial context. This situation weakens students' perception of locality and their capacity to comprehend site-specific spatial qualities, often leading to design approaches that disregard human-scale spatial qualities and site-specific sensitivities. This study proposes a context-focused design studio approach based on the premise that incorporating historical architectural typologies into the design education process as an analytical tool strengthens students' place-based awareness. The study is based on the application of this approach in undergraduate architectural design studios over a four-year period. Within the proposed studio framework, students examine historical architectural typologies related to the project theme, focusing not only on their formal characteristics but also on their positioning within the urban context. The relationships between public and private spaces and the spatial experiences produced at human scale form the fundamental components of this examination. Through measured drawings, spatial analyses and contextual readings, students decipher the local spatial principles and cultural continuities embedded in these typologies. This approach reinterprets typological knowledge as a conceptual design input that nourishes the perception of locality within the contemporary architectural design process. Within this framework, design decisions prioritise human-scale spatial strategies such as horizontal spatial organisation, courtyard systems, and semi-open spaces. Thus, students are guided toward alternative design solutions to vertical and context-independent architectural models. The research is based on a qualitative evaluation of student projects developed in context-focused design studios at undergraduate level, through observations of the studio process and project outputs. Evaluations based on studio outputs demonstrate that this design approach, supported by historical



typologies, strengthens students' contextual awareness and perception of locality, enabling them to produce new and original design models. Furthermore, a marked improvement has been observed in students' ability to establish a relationship between architectural form and place. The study demonstrates that historical typological knowledge in architectural education can be considered a powerful pedagogical and theoretical tool in studio-based architectural education that contributes to the development of the sense of place.

Keywords: Architectural education, Historical typologies, Perception of locality, context-oriented design, Human-scale architecture, Design studio