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#### CONTENTS

Preface

# I Phenomenology of Architecture

REVISIONIST PHILOSOPHY OF ARCHITECTURE

New Phenomenology, Theory of Spectacle and Biopolitics through Architecture

Miško Šuvaković

THE ESSENCE OF ARCHITECTURE – shift through time Vladimir Lojanica

VIBRANT ARCHITECTURE Rachel Armstrong

CHALLENGES AND LIMITS OF THE URBAN REGENERATION - NEW FUNCTIONS IN OLD STRUCTURES Álvaro Gómez-Ferrer Bayo

PAPER BOAT: COLLAGE TRIALOGUE Zoran Lazović

ANTIMANIFEST/ ANTI-IDEOLOGY Borislav Petrović, Ivan Rašković

WHY IS PHENOMENOLOGY OF ARCHITECTURE INCONSISTENT WITH PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF PHENOMENOLOGY?
Vladimir Stevanović

THE METAPHYSICS OF THE HOUSE – THE VISIBILITY AND ARCHITECTURALITY OF THE PRIMORDIAL ELEMENTS OF EARTH, AIR AND HEAVEN Fehim Hadžimuhamedović

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS MENTAL LABORATORY
METHODOLOGY AND PHILOSPHY OF SCHAPING THE ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT
Mustafa Musić

BETWEEN THE DOOR AND THE WINDOW – THE NOTION OF "HOME" IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS Edna Langenthal

SPACE, PROGRAM AND SOCIAL CONTEXT – THE MARGINS OF MODERNISM AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE Dragana Konstantinović

MINIMALISM IN ARCHITECTURE: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE IDEA OF MINIMUM Dragana Vasilski

THE FUNCTION OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE PARADIGM OF FUNCTIONALISM Milan Maksimović

HOMEBODY: DISSOLUTION OF THE INTERIOR Milena Kordić, Andrej Dolinka TOWN AND TEMPLE Aleksandra Mokranjac

HIDDEN VALUES AND DISPUTED COLLECTIVISM OF BROWNFIELDS IN THE CITY OF BANJALUKA
Dijana Simonović

REGIONALISM IN ARCHITECTURE Kosana Rošuli

QUALITY OF LIFE CHANGES THE QUALITY OF SPACE: KEY STUDY TIRANA, ALBANIA Ivana Barandovski, Olgica Nelkovska, Etleva Dobjani

ROLE OF OPEN PUBLIC SPACES IN MAINTAINING URBAN MEMORY IN THE CITY OF NOVI SAD Dijana Apostolović, Aleksandra Milinković, Dr Milena Krklješ

ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTUALISM OF NON-RESIDENTIAL USES IN THE OLDEST HOUSING SUPERBLOK IN NEW BELGRADE (with the emphasis on the example of building of the Institute for Medical Care of Mother and Child of Serbia)
Ranka Gajić

INFLUENCES OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND POWER ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN NEW BELGRADE – CASE STUDY: SAVA CENTER Predrag Marković

#### II Architecture and Art

ARCHITECTURE AND(OR) ART Dijana Milašinović Marić

NON-ALLUSION MARKINGS MODELS Borislav Petrović, Ivan Rašković

DESIGN BY RESEARCH – RESEARCH BY DESIGN: THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITY Aleksandar Kostić

CODING ARCHITECTURE: DIGITAL URBANITIES IN NEW MEDIA ART Jelena Guga

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING AS BASIS OF UTOPIAN VISIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS OF THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Vladimir Kovač, Ivana Lukić, Dorđe Nenadović

THE SYMBOLIC CHARACTER OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN SOCIETY Dorde Mandrapa

THE CATEGORY OF BEAUTY IN CONTEMPORARY ART AND ARCHITECTURE A phenomenological concept of art and architecture Fehim Hadžimuhamedović, Amra Hadžimuhamedović

RECORD ON ARCHITECTURE DRAWINGS Aleksandar Radojević, Jovana Miholčić, Milan Radojević ARCHITECTURE AS A SYMBOLIC FORM. THE SEMIOTICS OF THE TOWER Dragana Stanačev Puača

COLOUR AS DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COLOUR AND THE ROLE OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND Zoran Marković, Slobodanka Radanović

SYMBIOSIS – A RESPONSE ON CONTEMPORARY ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE Ksenija Bulatović Ksenija Bunjak

ARCHITECTURE AS METAPHOR IN THE CASE OF TWO MOVIES BY PEDRO ALMODOVAR Vladimir Bojković

CREATION OF HABITATION INNER SPACE WHICH BECOMES THE PLACE OF CLUBBING AND SKATEBOARDING EVENTS
Olivera Erić

WORDS AND ARCHITECTURAL THINGS Gordana Vuković-Nikolić

ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITION AS A FIELD OF AUTONOMY? Grozdana Šišović

LEARNING BY DOING AS AN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION TEACHING METHOD: PETNICA SUMMER SCHOOL CASE STUDY
Ana Nikezić and Dragan Marković

ON PERFORMATIVE POTENTIALS OF THE EXHIBITION SPACES: OCTOBER SALON Jasmina Čubrilo

# **III Technology and Architecture**

ARCHITECTURE AFTER GLOBALIZATION: LOST IN TRANSLATION? Aleksandra Stupar

NEW AESTHETICS OF BIOCLIMATIC ARCHITECTURE Igor Marić, Božidar Manić, Tanja Bajić

THE INFLUENCE OF BALKAN TRADITION AT THE YUGOSLAV ARCHITECTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY – theoretical and historical treatise through review of selected chronological-spatial examples
Nebojša Antešević

CREATIVITY AND URBAN REGENERATION Tatjana Mrđenović

REPROGRAMMING THE ARCHITECTURE OF ABANDONED PLACES IN BELGRADE Predrag Marković, Milica Pajkić, Ksenija Stevanović

**BUILT BY HAND:** 

A LOW-TECH APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE AND AFFORDABLE DWELLINGS Jelena Pejković

SYNESTHETIC ARCHITECTURE FOR WELLBEING - CONCEPT AND CONTRADICTIONS Ružica Bozović Stamenović

POROSITY IN THE HIGH-DENSITY SPACES OF LOW-COST MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING Zorica Medjo

BLOG ON TRIAL: EXPOSED FIELD IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION Dragana Vasiljević-Tomić, Ana Nikezić, Nataša Janković, Dragana Ćirić

INTEGRATED INFORMATION SYSTEM OF THE CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE BELGRADE Goran Petrović

COMPUTATIONAL MORPHOGENESIS: PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CONCPT Jelena Milošević, Miodrag Nestorović, Zoran Šobić

SUSTAINABLE SHAPING OF BUILDINGS ACCORDING TO WIND IMPACT Zoran Šobić

ON THE IMPACT OF PERVASIVE INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY ON URBAN ENVIRONMENT Lea Škrinjar, Miloš Mandić

POSITION OF RURAL AREAS ON THE TERRITORY OF SERBIA IN THE TIME OF GLOBALIZATION Ksenija Bunjak, Mladen Pešić

QUESTIONING THE CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE Ljubica Slavković

General Thesis About Space At The Example Of The Army Officers' Cooperative Building In Belgrade

Nataša Z. Krstić, Vladimir Kulašević

The Genesis Of The Square Of Sava Kovacecvic In City Of Niksic Vladimir Bojković

Artistic Vision or Solution to the Problem; Freedom Square in Osijek Denis Ambruš, Vlatko Dusparić

OPEN SOURCE TYPE BUILDING Vladimir Kulašević, Nataša Z. Krstić

# **BLOG ON TRIAL: EXPOSED FIELD IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the potential resources in the educational process and research methodology in the field of architectural and urban design, by positioning of the *Blog* as a formal framework of content and representation of contemporary architecture and as a tool that can contribute to the growing complexity of the knowledge base in the field of architecture.

In this context, this paper examines two theses. The first one suggests that, used properly, a *Blog* can become a useful tool in the form and content of the research. This is based on the assumption that reflection of the architectural design process may have a significant influence on the development of architectural education, particularly in the area of information exchange and raising of the critical awareness about the problems of the specific topics in spatial, contextual and formal sense. The second theses encourages the development of blogs as a tool that may extend the interpretive potential of the representation in the field of architectural and urban design, by displacing it from the real to the virtual space and by giving it a value of the driver and initiator of possible changes.

The paper also examines the ways in which the blog can establish, enhance, deepen or direct the already known and reliable methodological and conceptual basis of architectural education on the one side and representation of architectural and urban design, on the other side.

# [BRIEF BIOGRAPHY]

[text, maximum 150 words]

#### Dragana Vasiljević Tomić, PhD

Ms. Vasiljević Tomić has combined a career of an architect with teaching, research, and writing. She is Associate Professor at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture where she works at the Department of Architecture, teaching Architectural and Urban Design. She has lectured and published in Serbia, and has numerous award-winning competitions, projects, and exhibitions. She is the author of the books *Kultura boje u gradu: identitet i transformacija*. (Beograd: Arhitektonski fakultet u Beogradu 2007), and *Natkriveni javni prostori grada* (Beograd: Zadužbina Andrejević, 2003).

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Ana is an Assistant Professor at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, where she works at the Department of Architecture. She earned her PhD at the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade in 2007 with the theme of transformation of contemporary urban house in terms of city centre regeneration. Since then, she leads Master design studio and various elective courses whose topics promote different strategies of urban regeneration. She is an active researcher engaged in scientific research projects funded by the ministries of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia. Ana publishes professional and scientific papers in national and international conference proceedings, monographs and journals.

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# **BLOG ON TRIAL: EXPOSED FIELD IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION**

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#### 1. BACKGROUND: ON BLOGING

David Sifry noted in 2007 that "the state of the Blogosphere is strong, and is maturing as an influential and important part of the web" and reported Technorati's estimations that there are 70 million blogs in existence with 1.4 new blogs every second. Blogging is not only used to communicate individuals' manifestos, but has also been formalised by organisations supporting professional practice (Sifry, 2007).

In 2007, the *Higher Education Research Institute* found that 94 percent of first-year college students spent time on social networking sites in a typical week. Considering that such a high percentage of students are spending time on social networking sites, college faculty and administrators may benefit from integrating social media into their curriculum to serve as a useful tool to enhance student learning (Abe and Jordan, 2013). Andreas Shroeder, Shailey Minocha, and Christoph Schneider share in the *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* that "integrating these applications [social media software] into learning and teaching practices has the potential to trigger significant educational innovations as they enable new forms of interactive and collaborative learning" (Shroeder *et al.*, 2010, p. 169). Social media provides educators with the exciting new opportunity to connect with students in a manner that continues to provoke thought and discussion outside of the classroom setting. The use of social media encourages students to interact with one another and may increase engagement and interest in the course content. As Ronald Berk shares in *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, the role of social media has expanded from recreational use to supplementing learning in the classroom environment (Berk, 2009).

Approximately 10 years since the Internet has been engaged broadly to add the powerful notion of interconnectivity to the learning experience design palette (thus enabling all sorts of revolutionary social networks and distribution opportunities). Yet we do not think that universities have contributed very much to the exploration of new media learning opportunities during these years, most certainly not in ways that go beyond local geographies, times, and individuals in the spirit of the printing press. University publishers mostly remain focused on research publications, not teaching materials, and these typically remain print- and paper-centric (Woolsey, 2008). Yet, few universities have developed sustained programs to investigate new media opportunities systematically, to identify where they are effective and where they are not. Nor have faculty broadly embraced new media opportunities in extending new learning opportunities for their students. There are few university groups that address the interdisciplinary field of new media learning, and no emergent "new media rhetoric" departments to investigate opportunities in this arena (Woolsey, 2008).

As educators, we need to further our knowledge in the use of technologies in learning and teaching by actively building on these experiments. In most cases, the experiments and use of technology have paid off and students at least appreciated, if not wholeheartedly enjoyed, the changes in pedagogy.

# **OBSTACLES TO NEW LEARNING**

While some examples merely have transferred traditional practices (albeit successfully) into a digital realm (Crow, 2006; Ellis *et al.*, 2005), others ambitiously sought to prompt student reflection of the impact of media and technology on building environment working practices (Grierson, 2004; Dunne, 2006; Barrett, 2009 and Brown, 2010). Time and resources as well as a certain amount of risk-taking are essential to further the effective exploitation of communication technology and IT and to stimulate "new" teaching and learning (Woolsey, 2008).

Research shows that informal use of social media is not readily transferred to formal applications as in communication tools for work or university studies (Beuschel and Draheim, 2011). This means educators need to be selective and discernable in how and what technologies they use for what purpose. What is needed in respect to many leisure and commercial applications such as wikis, blogs and Wikipedia is a critical discourse on the impact of this technology on privacy, ownership, copyright laws, democracy and governance to raise awareness of the potential negative (personal) consequences that a careless engagement with these tools may entail.

The lack of this approach is critical thought in one direction, more precisely students are invited to have critical attitude toward the task, in order to have open and innovative answer to the given problem, but they are deprived of the possibility of communication and feedback from all those who are even a casual "visitors" of the blog. This communication is possible, but only at the final stage, and the comments are sddressed to the already "finished products" and rarely as a component or as a step in the workflow. From this we can conclude that the opening of architectural education to the general public and the ability to access the results of this process to the public requests openness for the cooperation and reaction of the general public to the results of the educational process.

# REFLECTIVE THINKING IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The value of reflective thinking as a way to transcend and enhance formal teaching is well-established in pedagogical wisdom (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984). Goward (2009) has identified its value in entrenching a deeper learning in an academic context and Roberts (2008) also notes its benefits in relation to architectural studies.

However, reflective learning cannot be taught as a skill merely by lecturing students on its content and validity. Instead, reflective thinking should be introduced to students prior to their transition from an institutional to a professional environment as a skill which they will continue to use as they develop in practice. It is not the skill that is taught but the development of "a capacity to process information during action" (Moon, 1999, p. 46). Looking at the development and transformation of the city as a continuous process, students, as future professionals, should develop the ability to react in relation to the set, but also to the changing situation, acting more by using tactics and by adapting to the specific situations, rather than having pre-established and objective method. Virtual archive and blog as a place of storage and display of information, can serve as a basis for socially responsible learning and action in the fields of architecture, especially when it comes to problems rooted into the real space and time. A virtual learning environment and learning is being increasingly selected as a vehicle for facilitating reflective thinking and practices (Barrett, 2010).

All this said it would be unwise to change the style of learning to only "new learning"; rather, traditional and new styles should co-exist and complement each other in higher and further education offering the best preparation and education possible for future graduates and the workforce (Frank, 2011; Woolsey, 2008).

## 2. BLOGGING IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Architectural practice has changed dramatically, therefore corresponding changes in education are needed. There are continuous attempts to displace architectural curricula, to reconfigure the structure of educational process, to test new ideas and to probe future visions. Learning courses are no longer one-way, from teachers to students, but are multidimensional and dynamic in both place and time.

Perhaps not by accident, in a world saturated with vast production of commercial architecture, it seems that the theoretical and experimental activities in architecture has no long been so active and so present as is the case in the last ten years. Architectural theory, criticism and fiction, digital presentations today are just as relevant ways of dealing with architecture as the design and building, and it is clear that the road to the quality of architecture practice lead through critical alternatives, debates, research and theoretical consideration, that is, through a diverse and non-manipulative discourse at all levels of the architectural activity. Educational and research process in this discourse are key elements of extension fields for the activity in the area of architecture.

Despite the time commitment and difficulties social media may present to faculty, the survey conducted by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane revealed that "faculty see considerable value in many social media sites for use in class" (Moran *et al.*, 2011, p. 16), particularly online video found on YouTube or other sites. Seventy percent of faculty who took the survey agreed with the statement "Video, podcasts, blogs, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching" (Moran *et al.*, 2011, p. 16). Social media can be integrated into the curriculum in a manner that is intuitive and informative, such as showing a video that serves to illustrate a point relevant to the lecture content. In relation to this topic the question which arises is the importance of new technologies, not only in operational terms in order to display what is intended and designed, as a tool for spatial representation, but also as part of the process of thinking and working, and telling the expanded or a different way of what was the concept / idea which led to the spatial intervention.

*Blog* in this way becomes an open field in which it is possible to further express intentions, dilemmas, goals of all those involved in space. In this way, reviewed not only the usual methods in the educational process, but also the subject of work or task in which the common educational practice gives the answer, and here it is possible to re-examine and even challenging. In order to demonstrate this approach to the work content of the blog, therefore, included the results of those researches and education, which are made in the higher education of architecture at the University of Belgrade, in which included method of the research by project and made some progress towards experiments and theory.

## **VIRTUAL RESEARCH LAB**

Case study: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, Seminar Course: Landscape, Structure and Infrastructure

This paper raises the question of inserting *Blog* as a viable tool in the field of architectural education. In that respect, we will show results and discuss the insertion of the Blog as an educational tool within the course *Landscape, Structure, Infrastructure* (second year of Master studies in Architecture) at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture (http://landscapestruktura.blogspot.com/) which is designed as a broad platform of the current issues of urban space in a complex and multi-layered way interpreted through small students' research projects, on the specific area polygon of the Savamala. This methodological approach in a certain manner moves the field of architecture and urban planning from technical and technological and design-dominant in the social and philosophical nature of a field dominated by research. The way in which a wide area is reflected and explored encourages a more comprehensive way of understanding of the space and architecture in general. In fact, the field of architecture is not seen as just a common practice of building, but as a wide area of possible ways of social, cultural, artistic and other forms of action, including experimental effects of temporary practice.

In this context, the use of the *Blog* is viewed as an appropriate tool that will help make the exchange of a wide range of information about the area in which the intervention is expected, and the exchange of information between participants in the classroom and in the transfer of knowledge and ideas beyond the school into the wider cultural and social framework of the city. Boden (1994; 2001) too,

has developed significant thinking in relation to creativity and its social-cultural dimensions. In particular, she emphasises the role that "interpersonal and cultural influences" play in addition to personal attributes such as self-confidence and motivation (Boden, 2001, p. 95).

Craft offers a critical perspective on this framework and argues instead for a value framework that nurtures "wisdom" with the job of nurturing creativity' (Craft, 2006, p. 341) in learning environments. Through a case-study approach, explored whether blogs can be virtual communities, and concluded that this may be possible although they could face particular challenges related to sustainability and critical mass. The aim of this *Blog* which has presented results of the work within a study program, is exactly the awareness of the general public about the real problems of the existing environment, their understanding and the principles of potential tactics of acting in real space.

It is important to use a social approach to foster creativity with a sense of community, environmental and ethical awareness, a value framework that is in opposition to the market-driven notion of liberal individualism (Budge, 2012). One of the aims of educational process going beyond institutional framework and the usual method was precisely the awareness of the problems and potentials of the real spaces and the possibilities of their usage. In this way it is possible to get acquainted with the analysis and performances of the space that you have never even visited, and also to see the possibilities of the future performances of certain areas before they actually even exist. This method provides tracking continuity and discontinuity of development or transformation of the city, through the introduction of what a specific area once was and what it could be. In this way the educational process does not end with just the students, and the creators of the blog, but it goes on, for everyone who with a specific aim or accidentally visits this blog.

The process of working itself on the subject was designed in the manner that it is possible to observe each phase separately, through a sub-task, as well as all phases together, through the review of a final proposal. The work within the seminar *Landscape, structure, infrastructure*, was carried out in five phases. Some of the key concepts, which could be related to these phases are: mapping, narrative, response, proposal, expansion.

The first phase was the mapping, respectively the analysis of the selected location. Spatial polygon of work was Savamala, starting from individual buildings to the larger areas and spatial coverage, including thus the sites that often have great cultural-historical and socio-economic importance, to those who are empty and sunk into oblivion, offering space entirely cleared of previous significance as a platform for work.

The second and third phases were intertwined and students had had themed lectures based on which they, on previously analyzed sites and with the help of the presented topics and possible approaches, gave some suggestions on spatial interventions through two small tasks. Some of the presentations dealt with topics such as: Public city spaces - the definition of public space, A covered public urban spaces, Culture of color in the city (Dragana Vasiljevic Tomic, Associate Professor), Abandoned public spaces and methods of their transformations (Ana Nikezić, Assistant Professor), Historical development of the Kosančićev Venac and Kalemegdan (Gordana Milosevic, Assistant Professor), also it was presented the competition winning solution for the Beton Hala - the first prize work (Redžić Branislav, architect), then it was discussed the art installations as a means of communication between the city and the man (Anna Nikezić, Assistant Professor), Reading of the space – Japan (Branko Pavic, professor), Water and landscape Architecture (Dragana Ćorović assistant, Vasiljevic Dragan Tomic, Associate Professor), Metro-study Belgrade (professor Spasoje Krunic), Master Class - Savamala (Milan Vujovic, a.profesor), Productive urban Landscapes (Natasa Jankovic, M.Arch, Ana Nikezić, Assistant Professor), Accessibility of public space (Dragan Ciric, assistant, Vasiljevic Dragan Tomic, Associate Professor), The anatomy of pixels, architectural practice of Bratislav Tošković (Finland). Based on the presented topics students had had the task to react in a particular area, or to adopt some of the presented approaches and methods in dealing with mapped locations.

The next phase of work involved the integral, holistic approach in solving selected problem or in dealing with a particular topic, based on experience from previous steps in the work. Review of different themes and locations was intended to give a critical review of thematic and spatial framework and establishing the proposed solution in an environment in which to potentially found. In

this way, this solution ceases to be a draft of only certain spatial interventions, but tends to become a certain place where the visitors or users could have a certain reaction. In order to spread awareness about the possibilities of the solution and aspirations towards its review, all material including the previous phases of work, not just the final proposal, in the next, final stage, was ready for display in the blog.

# **BLOG ON TRIAL**

After completion of these phasea of work, which aimed to produce proposals for intervention, further work process aimed at raising the awareness of residents and users of the space of possible interventions. The main factor in this was the Blog that not only presented the final draft stage of interventions, but also the phases of the work. 47 proposals were presented in the blog, on which 110 students worked, divided into n groups. In this way, visitors of the blog had the opportunity of framing the work process, and insight into the individual stages of work, which aimed to contribute to learning about the problem and the genesis of its solution.

*Blog* is a cross-section of research topics that were discussed in a segment of the educational process at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, on master class. It was selected twenty-nine conceptual, research and experimental projects and works of the students, that were presented as the main content in the digital media- blog. Physical framework of the blog, also has a starting point in the curriculum of the seminar.

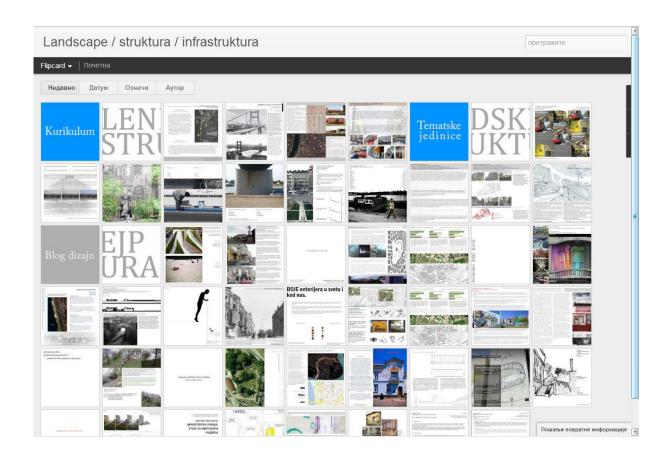


Photo 1. Blog

The criteria based on which were chosen representative works are set in relation to the contemporary processes of transformation of architectural and urban space Savamala on the one hand, and modern trends of architectural theory, on the other hand. Based on the different groups of criteria five thematic sections were set, as follows:

- 1. The specific qualitative research and analysis of types;
- 2. Investigation of the relationship between the practice of architectural and urban design and theory of modern architecture:
- 3. Identification of different forms of urbanization and detecting potential mutual correspondence and analysis of statistical and empirical data, mapping and other display of transformation of the city;
- 4. Defining a framework for the combined use of analytical methods in the social and humanistic sciences, and the procedures and methods of architectural and urban design.

With this approach, which is more phenomenological approximations, or a combination of essayistic analysis and design, thematic units were designed, and systematization of the exhibited works, the medium and sequence of their presentation (Photo 1).

## 3. CONCLUSION

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CREATIVE AWARENESS**

"Environmental awareness" was present in the content of almost a quarter of all blogs in this sample through discussion of environmental issues as part of a life approach or design/art/business approach and/or in terms of materials and methods used.

Through the defined topics presented by experts in various fields of theoretical and practical work (public building, roofing, abandoned urban spaces, parks, the phenomenon of colour, urban gardens, and availability), and interpretative potential of small research projects of students and how they disseminate the Blog, space Savamala became an essential part of a widespread community education to encourage the individual's attitude towards the world where a continuous flow of goods, people and information erodes any sense of permanence.

The methodological framework of seminar and spatial polygon were the starting point for both formal and content mode of work, and to set the blog. In addition, an important prerequisite for the work was the complexity and multiplicity of architectural activity. Throughout this process, there is multilevel of the work, from the set theoretical framework, research work, program settings and project. This concept has enabled the diversity of expression and profiles of students' teams, participants in the blog within a clearly defined thematic, structural and design focus.

# **SHARING OF CRITICAL THOUGHT**

According to C. Michael Elavsky, Cristina Mislan, and Steriani Elavsky, educators are paying attention to trends in social media, as demonstrated by incorporating blogs, wikis, podcasts, and social networking websites in the classroom curriculum. Many of these social media resources are used not only to facilitate discussion in the classroom, but also to serve as a reflection tool through instructing students to submit blog entries or hold discourse via Twitter to continue critical discussion of classroom topics.

When attempting to solve real physical problems it is significant to present course of thinking and working process, which on this subject began by mapping the territory and identifying the problem, then through the review of various methods and elements during the work different topics were selected for further elaboration at the rally. In this way the process is shown, conclusively selecting the most appropriate approach to solving problems, but are recorded other approaches as different possibilities. This indicates not only the diversity of approach and the finished product in addressing certain challenges, but also provides the possibility of their potential use in other similar locations or problems with minor adjustments.

Through presenting the process and results of work the aspiration to show the importance of leaving space within the institution in solving real problems rooted in space. Even the exhibitions, as a well-established practice, in this way are moved into a virtual reality. Blog unlike the exhibition is not timed nor condition related space, the concept is not firmly closed, it is possible to change or deepen the initial research topic or results arising during operation. Also, of great importance is leaving and forming a base for further research.

# SHARING OF CREATIVE PRACTICE

Our observations of these indicate that they are mostly used as online diaries to record the creative process. Some interaction between fellow students occurs, but usually this does not extend beyond the boundaries of a class or university, thus limiting the potential for developing different perspectives from a variety of contexts. While this is all very useful and positive, is there the potential to ask our students to extend the benefits of blogging and make their blogs go live beyond the university (virtual) walls to connect with the broader art and design blogging community, as a means of developing broader understandings of practice than may be possible from a small, localised community?

There is value in understanding and promoting social approaches to creativity because this enables the complexity of what stimulates and nurtures creativity to be explored and highlighted, thus allowing us to move beyond narrow, purely individualistic notions of this. Craft (2006) has argued, we need artists and designers who think about the impact of their ideas and work, not only on themselves as individuals.

The results show that Blog is an exposed filed in architectural education which is convenient for multiple information interchange, contributes to the formulation of a complete picture of the particular topic, and improves the communication among students and between teachers and students:

- 1. Exchange of information is fast and more efficient, for the next year, the theme, the better students' work (this is in category that the blog is tool of learning, where information goes beyond the relationship ex cathedra and becomes relative and valid by its own setting, and becomes the standard for discussion, give turn of knowledge), improves communication among students and between students and teachers;
- 2. Visibility of work at a much higher level, because of a lot of students and a lot of topics, and facilitated results (complete picture of the particular topic);
- 3. Dissemination of results is fast, more economic and efficient, something like a permanent exhibition (widens the vision in an endless web field) displacing architectural education.
- It is also important for widening the vision in an endless Internet field. In order to implement internet teaching methodology and content, it is concluded that the relocation of architectural education, in spatial, temporal and program aspect, is one of the key problems of educating future architects.

Indirectly, through the chosen spatial polygon of the Savamala, in condition of transition and globalization, and the potential for its multi-layered understanding and presentation within the wide topic *Landscape, structure, infrastructure*, blog seems like a possible ground for the relocation of the architectural education from the physical context of the school to the spatial framework and social context to which it belongs. In that way project is active system which has ability for the possible transformations together with changes of the environment.

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