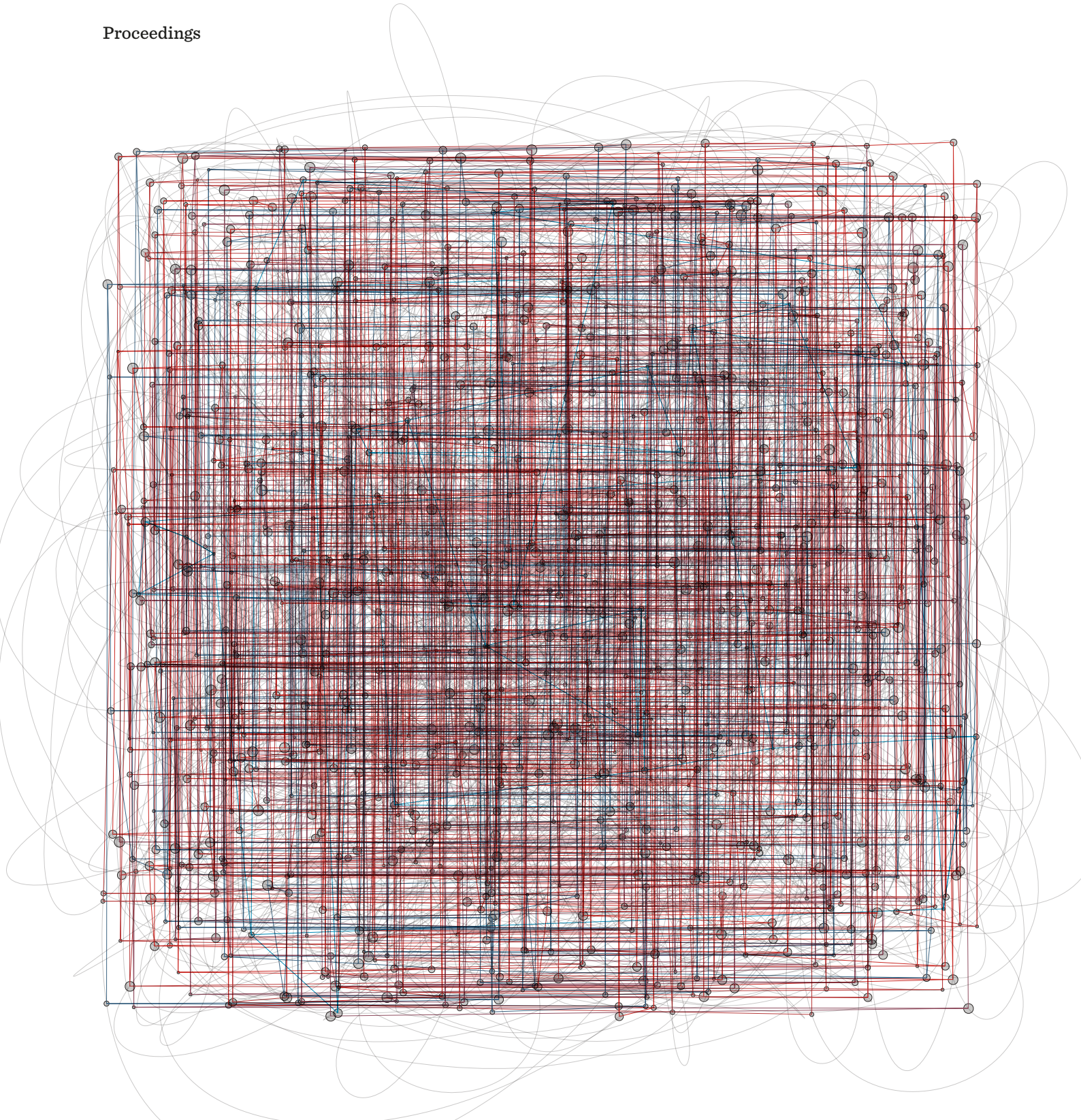
Architecture Connects

ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATORS

4th international peer reviewed conference

Oxford Brookes University, UK
6–9 September 2017

Proceedings



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Oxford Brookes University
Headington Campus
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Oxford
OX3 0BP

Tel: +44 (0)1865 741111
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INTRODUCTION

Architecture Connects.

Strategies for the co-production of architectural knowledge

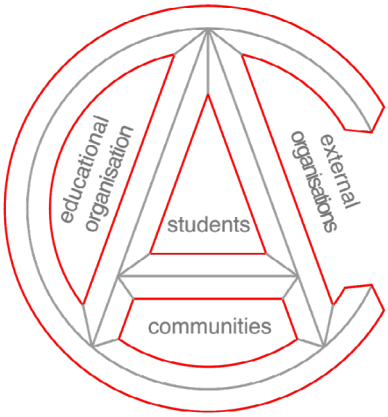
Architecture Connects is an international peer reviewed conference on 'strategies for the co-production of architectural knowledge'. It was hosted by Oxford Brookes School of Architecture, Oxford, UK in collaboration with the association of architectural educators from 6 to 9 September 2017.

The conference expanded the communities of practice in architectural education that were established by previous aae conferences by developing the lively discourse that took place around the themes of social engagement, live projects and design research. The conference was organised in collaboration with Live Projects Network, Designbuild Xchange, Center for Public Interest Design, SEED Network, and Design Corps– international networks who share these concerns. These connections expanded the aae community and promoted the quality, relevance and diversity present in this area of contemporary architectural education.

The overall theme "Architecture Connects" explored positive dialogue and collaboration between architectural educators, students, practitioners, researchers, educational bodies, local communities and other disciplines. By viewing architectural education as a linchpin between universities and society, the conference mission was to improve communication and contribute new knowledge that is of mutual benefit to all parties.

Conference Aims

- to stimulate dialogue between those operating design, pedagogical and research strategies beyond the educational institution, often requiring multi-disciplinary expertise.
- to disseminate best practice in the education of resilient and responsive architects and designers for changing society, culture and technology.
- to articulate multi-disciplinary methodologies for the creation of new knowledge and innovation through actions that engage external collaborators.
- to evaluate and disseminate the mutual benefits brought to society and universities by the creation of this new knowledge.



The conference highlighted architectural education and research that collaborates with people in real world contexts. This includes any external collaboration that engages academics and students in learning, practice or research in order to create new knowledge. These strategies are often inter-disciplinary, innovative, and subject to the change occurring in the world around them. This means that they are complex and closely connected to the society where they take place.

Examples include inter-disciplinary projects in external contexts; collaboration with external organisations, non-academic partners or local communities; live projects; design build education; public interest design; stakeholder engagement; field work; research-based education; practice-based learning; and participatory design practices.

The conference welcomed a diversity of contributions from established and early career researchers; teachers; students; practitioners; co-professionals; collaborators and experts from other fields. Work was presented in one of four formats to reflect the diversity of material being offered for dissemination. These were: paper presentations with question and answer sessions; an exhibition of case studies with informal discussion sessions; a film exhibition and screenings with discussion session; and interactive expertise-sharing workshops, one of which included a student live build taking place throughout the conference. A pop-up library featured delegates' publications and showcased their work.

Selected contributions to the conference will be published in a special "Architecture Connects" issue of Charrette, the aae Journal.

Conference Themes:

- Agility
- Activism
- Co-production
- Creativity
- Identity
- Inclusion
- Pedagogy
- Performance
- Resilience
- Responsibility

aae

The association of architectural educators

The aims of the association of architectural educators (aae) are:

- To develop, support and represent communities of practice and learning in architectural education in the U.K. and Ireland.
- To foster inclusive dialogues between the aae community, students and employers, and educational and professional bodies.
- To encourage research and scholarship of teaching and learning in architectural education through critical and reflective discourse.
- To promote the value, richness, quality, and diversity inherent in architectural education.

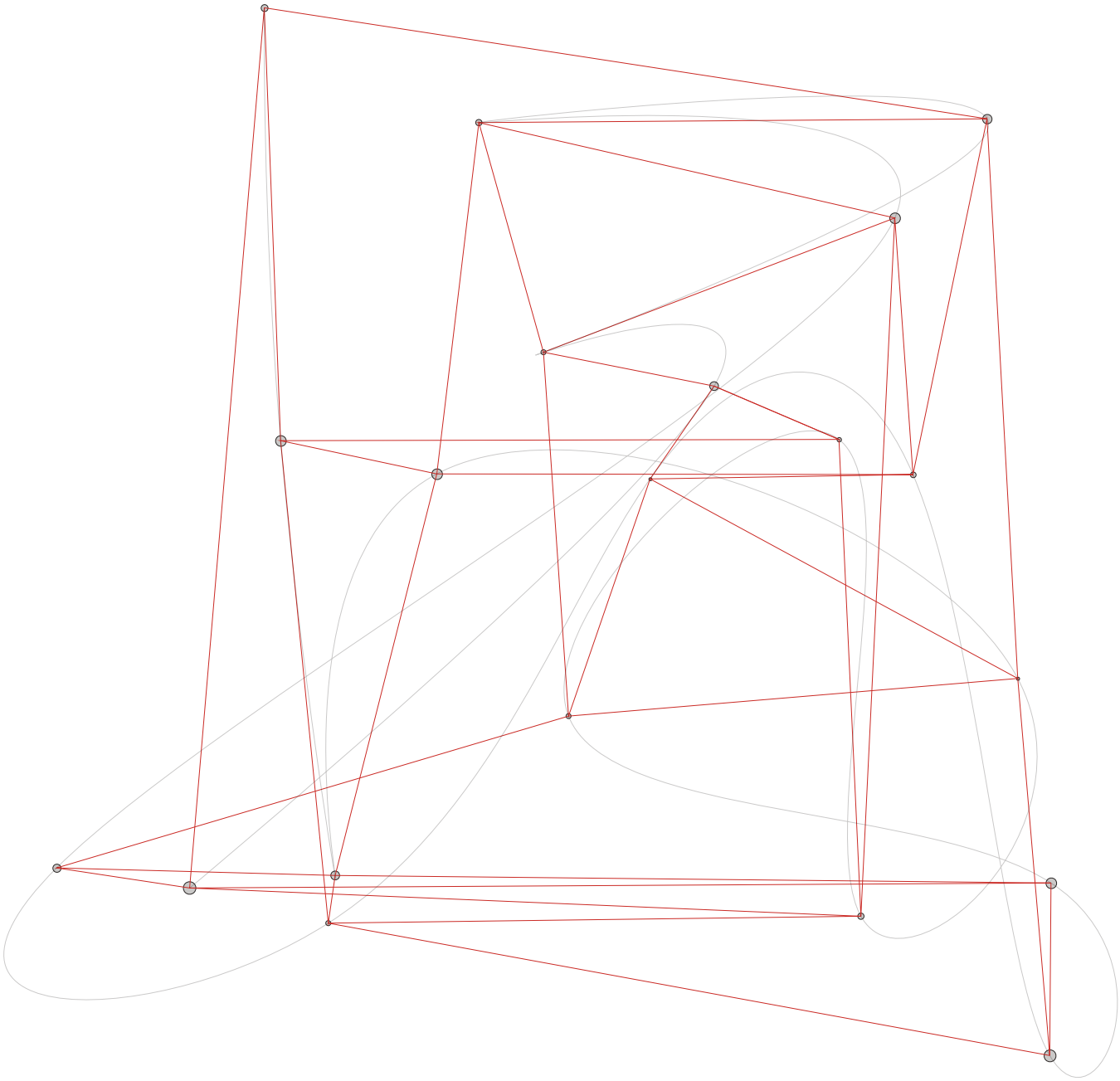
> *"I really welcome the formation of aae. Architectural education has lingered for too long as a set of received practices, and it is important to have bottom-up moments like aae which open the processes up to critical and constructive discourse."*
>
> – Professor Jeremy Till,
> Head of Central Saint Martins
> and Pro Vice-Chancellor of University of the Arts London.

The aae steering committee's members (2017-18) are as follows:

Co-Chair:	Hannah Vowles, Birmingham City University
Co-Chair:	Dan Jary, University of Sheffield
Co-Treasurer:	Victoria Farrow, Birmingham City University
Co-Treasurer:	Hannah Vowles, Birmingham City University
Conference & Forum Co-ordinator:	Victoria Farrow, Birmingham City University
Web co-ordinator:	Julian Williams, University of Westminster
Charrette editor:	James Benedict Brown, De Montfort University
Charrette assistant editor:	Amanda Hufford

TOUR OF OXFORD (JANE ANDERSON)

1.8 IDENTITY



Enhancing Local Identity through Fostering Research-based Education in Architecture.

RENATA JADRESIN MILIC.
Department of Architecture, Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland.
ANA NIKEZIC.
Department of Architecture, University of Belgrade.

ABSTRACT

This paper emerged from the strong belief in the importance of research-based education for enhancing local identity in modern architectural practice and education of young architects today. It proposes an alternative teaching approach, introduced at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, in the academic years 2014/15 and 2015/16. The main argument presented in the paper is: In order to strengthen the role of architectural history in education and in the profession, content-based teaching should be replaced with pedagogical experimentations, having an emphasis in converting from *teaching* to *learning*.

KEYWORDS local identity, research-based education, architecture, place-making, heritage, Belgrade Fortress

Introduction

A majority of schools of architecture teach architectural history. However, it seems that there is no general agreement on techniques used to make sense of historical events in order to show their importance either for community, or for the architectural practice today. One of the seductions of modern architectural education is that it often operates as a context-free activity. The knowledge students acquire in architectural schools is generally unrelated to place – it is universal expertise of no-place.[1] Architectural education repeatedly happens far away from the real problems and issues related to 'real places'. The question is how methodologies gained from an understanding of history and historical processes on one side, and place-based methodologies used in problem solving on the other,[2] can serve architectural design and can contribute to local identity. Apart from being motivated by desire to overcome the division between conceptual knowledge and 'real-life experience' within the course presented in this paper, we were seeking ways in which it is possible to become aware and responsible towards a place, and to be connected with it.[3]

The Faculty of Architecture at University in Belgrade was the first, and always the leading school in Serbia, old Yugoslavia, and the Balkans. The earliest steps in the history of teaching architecture in Serbia can be traced back to the first half of the 19th century. Since then, the school has undergone numerous internal changes and teaching reforms to date, and today it is one of the most reputable academic institutions for education in architecture and urbanism not only in this region, but in Europe as well. History

of architecture (at Bachelor level) and Theory of architecture (at Master level) had formerly been taught in the traditional way – by delivering in a lecture theatre mostly. With the Bologna Process, however, the school accepted necessary changes, and lecture time allocated to most of the core courses (general survey courses) was reduced radically. As a result, it was important to find new ways of presenting substantial historical knowledge to the students in a way that they could see immediate benefit for their future profession from it.

In response to these questions and problems, and with a consciously blended theoretically-based and place-based teaching approach applied to a site of significant historical and cultural importance, the elective course New Reading of Architecture was designed for third-year students.

Research – Based Education Process

The main objective of the course has been to prepare students to work in accordance with a research-based knowledge, with full respect for the active interaction between monuments, sites, and contemporary society, so as to develop the sense of an interdisciplinary approach and an awareness of its potential. Likewise, it has been important that students:

- found their design decisions on critical thinking and develop sound judgment and understanding of the community's needs;
- recognise history as a valid resource in studying architecture;
- use local environment as a starting point to learn concepts; *and*
- form a strategy of cultural heritage potentials.

The main goal was that students would come to recognise and hopefully later apply contemporary heritage preservation and presentation methods in accordance with the specificities of people and places.

The location chosen for the students' final design proposals was the Belgrade Fortress; a highly protected historical site which consists of the old citadel and spacious Kalemegdan Park, occupying the central part of Belgrade at the confluence of the River Sava and Danube.

At the beginning of the process, the students were provided with invaluable help by professionals from the Belgrade Fortress organisation,[4] who supplied significant information in photographs and texts, organised field research and provided an opportunity to collect data (whether from visitors or from the place itself), so as to become aware of possibilities for the activation and advancement of the place and its local identity. Carefully examining the heritage, sensing the authentic context, and contemporary needs for this location, and of visitors, students were asked to look for a new or re-established character of the place and possibilities for small-scale architectural and urban interventions; and to offer a variety of ideas for preservation, revitalisation, and presentation of cultural heritage.

The course was conducted in three phases. The first dealt with the history and theory of architecture through close and critical reading of theoretical treatises on architecture (Vitruvius, Alberti, Serlio, Palladio, Ruskin, etc.). The pedagogical approach in this phase avoided simply communicating basic descriptive facts, but was rather based on the interpretation of theoretical knowledge (architectural treatises) through students' active learning and individual examination, analysis, and presentations of how old (past) architects had approached design when dealing with the existing historical context. Final presentations provoked numerous lively discussions between students, questioning universal messages of architecture and possibilities of their use in modern architectural practice.

The second phase involved researching the local identity of the place through a variety of questionnaires and an individual 'sensate' impression of the place. In this phase, the audio tourist guide, provided by the Belgrade Fortress organisation, was used as a source of knowledge about the Fortress. The students explored the Belgrade Fortress from the tourist's perspective. In the next step, students mapped the Fortress users: their paths, and major concentration areas. According to the findings, the students divided users into two focus groups: tourists and inhabitants, and the inhabitants group into three subgroups: older citizens, small children attended by parents, grandparents or kindergarten teachers and teenagers. The students interviewed users, asking the following questions: How and why do you use the space of the Fortress? What do you know about the Fortress? How long and how frequently do you stay there and on which occasions? What would you like to change?

From experiences gained, and through peer discussions and open dialogue with the Belgrade Fortress organisation in a form of a workshop, students came to the following conclusions:

a. The audio guide, although very detailed and informative about every cultural monument, did not really give an overview of the Belgrade Fortress as a whole, and did not explain comprehensively the historical context of its development;
b. Citizens and visitors could not obtain adequate knowledge about connections between monuments, spaces and different historical periods in which different parts of the Fortress were built;
c. Citizens and visitors needed more interactive ways to understand historical events and built layers, in order to make a personal connection with it.
d. The local community sees the Fortress as a predominantly tourist destination, thus avoiding peak hours; visiting the Fortress in mornings and evenings, using it as an Urban park.

As a result, the following design decisions for future interventions were proposed:

1. To locate each monument in its particular historical frame;
2. To avoid aimless wandering through the site and focus the attention of visitors on making a diversity of different paths (time-related, structure-related, hidden ambient-related, panorama-related);
3. To emphasise particular spaces providing adequate time to relax, pause, reflect;
4. To explain the continuity of the Fortress structures and their development;
5. To achieve a higher level of communicability and interactivity with the place;
6. To underline values of the cultural landscape that includes Belgrade's everyday lifestyle so as to revive the way that the local community interacts with it;
7. To enhance the local community's engagement and promote good behaviour towards the environment.

The third phase explored individual approaches in affirming historical perspective through the design process. This phase of the process had already been tested separately, within different courses organised by the school. One group of approaches focussed on the investigation of possibilities and models of protection, presentation, renewal, and activation of historic sites, natural and cultural heritage.[5] A second group considered possible ways of affirming devastated urban areas and neglected sites through small design interventions.[6]

However, within the course New Reading of Architecture, the main idea was to conduct the research in collaboration with an external organisation, in this project the Tourist Organisation of Belgrade and Belgrade Fortress, in order to explore how teaching history as design and design as history and in collaboration with local community needs can challenge traditional academic procedures in an established school of architecture and actually invigorate new paths to students' creativity and responsibility.

Complexity of Students' Design Proposals

After analysis and establishment of the site conditions, and assessment of potential interaction between the projects, the local organisation in charge of the Fortress, the environment, and the community, students prepared their final proposals. Outcomes have revealed students' ability to think about heritage in a holistic way and to address key issues in the process of redefining historic and cultural layers on the one hand, and spatial framework of the landscape on the other. Students have learned not only to recognise the potential of the built heritage, and to use it without a strict prescription or universal rules, but also to transform its potential to abstract forms and patterns, and to translate them into new architecture with a human scale.

None of the designs should be evaluated only according to the appearance of the outcome, but for the sound research process, and spectrum of various events it offers. Each design decision has relation to the inherited structures, considering a degree of animation of natural scenery and the importance of establishing dialogue between both groups of users (tourists and inhabitants) with the environment. The main direction throughout all phases of the students' research was to determine the extent to which new design proposals could be imposed upon a protected landscape, to create both a pleasurable environment and a vibrant space of diverse social activities.

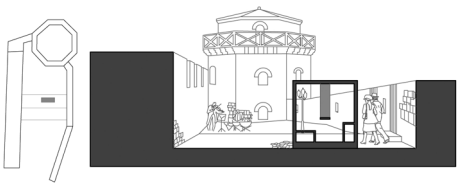


Figure 1. R1. The Bench.
Student, Milica Nikolic

Looking for places that will adorn Kalemegdan Park and point to the particular historical sites on one side, and to respond to the insufficient engagement of the local community on the other, the design superimposes the need for the place to relax and reflect with particular historically important views. The "bench" represents a focal point, framed view and a place to rest and spend time in harmony with the surrounding environment. Made of wood and carved to reflect the historical layers of the Fortress, the design model represents a contemporary interpretation of the bench—a traditional ingredient of an urban park.

Figure 2. R2. Water-city.
Student, Jovana Lukic

The Water-city design is a field of light strings inspired by the dynamism and bustle of the past. It explores the recreational potential of the place, but also with an idea to raise awareness of the upcoming climate change. It is launched by the movement of the strings against the wind, affirmed through a particular labyrinth of light and stressed with the overall appearance and chosen blue colour to engage reflexive thinking of the possible consequences of climate change (flooding).

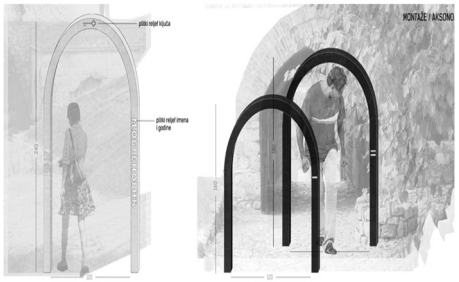


Figure 3. R3. TimeGate.
Student, Irena Nikolic

This design proposal engages with two distinguished problems: insufficient comprehensiveness of the historical context and poor interactivity of the place. It resulted from that part of the research conclusion that visualises a historical timeline for Belgrade Fortress. The design creates a playground of arches which in their shape, height, structure, material, as well as through hidden messages carved in it, communicate a multi-layered story of the Fortress in an un-obstructive and playful way.

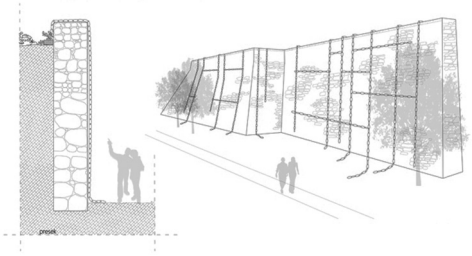


Figure 4. R4. Custom-made necklace. Student, Teodora Tasic

This design proposal focuses on the indistinct character of the Fortress defence walls and poor interactivity of the place. Defence walls are the most exposed feature of the Fortress, but also the most disregarded one. During the day they are unnoticed, and at night it is almost impossible to see the structure of the defence walls. The proposed design creates a "necklace" for it using a stone pattern for two reasons: not to jeopardize its day appearance and to highlight it at night. The materiality indirectly associates with iron protection shields that fighters carried during battles.

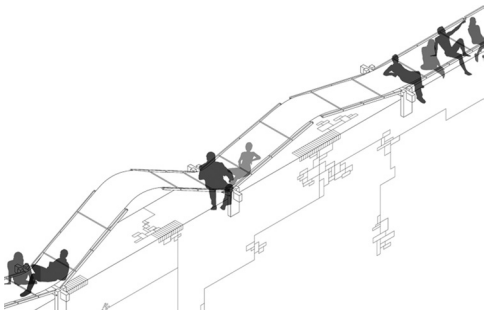


Figure 5. R5. Sitting at the top of the Fortress. Student, Tihomir Dicic

The most unusual feature of Belgrade Fortress today is the opportunity to walk along the walls unattended and to use it as a leisure resource. The proposed design, pointing to engagement, interactivity, and accessibility introduces a new mechanism for sitting on the walls and affirming particular spots and viewpoints. The most exquisite features are its flexibility and mobility reminding us of the idea of the defence wall cutting edge.

Results vary from inspired associations to creative dialogues, from designs that complement to those that contrast with the surroundings, from those intended for tourists to those engaging local community. Although the diverse concepts have produced a series of diametrically different solutions, they all are affirmative of the revitalisation of Belgrade Fortress and Kalemegdan Park. Solutions may vary in terms of dispositions, size, program, and scope; however, they are united in terms of complementing the materiality and sensuality of the place by relating the designed to the inherited structures.

Although without a proposed typology or strict brief the students realised that both program and space are primarily dependent on the character of the place. In an apprehensive, inventive and moreover communicative way, with use of lightweight, easy-manageable structures, as well as through an architecture that uses principles of designing with light, through palpable and sound sensibility, students' designs show that it is possible:

1. To draw attention to the context in which monuments and places were originally built (R3, R4);
2. To successfully revive the historical time-line of events, as well as a variety of cultural layers the Fortress treasures (R2, R3);
3. To point out a diversity of program and ambient related paths, as a mechanism of appreciation and understanding of the place (R1, R2, R3, R5);
4. To map and affirm places of particular character – gardens of reflexive relaxation (R1, R2, R5);
5. To underline community engagement through playing with the landscape (R1, R2, R3, R5,); *and last but not least,*
6. To add a somewhat liveable Belgrade-ian everyday spirit that favours hidden places away from the crowd and consumer-led society, engaging the local community in new, and yet to be explored ways with this unique landscape (R1, R2, R5).

Finally, it is important to underline that interactivity, connectivity, and accessibility were the leading forces standing behind design proposals. These were the perfect design tools and the main motives of the project - affirmation and illumination of the comprehensive nature of the Fortress historical layers and its logic of spatial organisation.

All students' proposals have demonstrated architectural history as relevant in teaching architecture and understanding the local identity of heritage. Learning from history by not trying simply to emulate it, and from the place by not simply trying to redraw it, but rather to use both in a way relevant to the students and their own design in accordance with community needs can and should be seen as a legitimate approach to teaching architecture today, and is an alternative teaching approach we propose and have tried to introduce through this elective course.

Challenges and Pedagogical Outcomes of the Course

It was a very complex endeavour to develop an innovative course that connects history of architecture, theory, sense of place and design, including at the same time the use of external collaborations. However, there were many challenges around the decision-making and the pedagogical approaches that informed it.

Firstly, a sequential and interrelated series of exercises that the course consists of, although each having a clear research and design limit from the beginning of the semester, still had an experimental approach that did not guarantee the refined project outcomes achieved at the end of the process. That experimental approach encouraged the students' curiosity and provided a strong foundation for the exploration of simple and complex forms, materiality

and possibilities for their expression. The importance placed on experimentation and risk-taking has turned out to be commendable, giving great conceptual richness and educational potential.

Secondly, the community engagement feature of the design offered a commendable integration of architectural history with community, and conservation of existing heritage with construction of "something new", showing creative and exploratory exuberance, and complexity in investigation and resolution. In the absence of an explicit theoretical framework or an architectural program or building type that dominates the brief in advance, the brief was actually defined by the students themselves. Such an approach helped students to create architectural designs through the exercise of knowledge, imagination, judgment and professional responsibility. They investigated through creative architectural propositions what the different perceptions viewers (visitors, inhabitants, architect) can bring to architectural space. They also recognised the need to sustain the natural and the built environment, and the needs and aspirations of building users and the community, in the formulation of design concepts. They managed to comply with the basic regulations controlling building design, procurement and the practice of architecture, communicating the design concepts clearly and persuasively.

When curriculum mirrors education in close contact with the surrounding environment, local communities and public facilities, the boundaries between schooling and life become more blurred and thus, more integrated. The methodology of this course contributed not only to solving problems concerning the affirmation of highly protected environments, but also participated in raising appropriate general awareness on the overall goal of architecture – to mutually bond places and people in a sensible and responsible way. Architectural design thus becomes a tool for reaching a higher quality of life and active involvement of people in deepening their engagement and awareness of the place.

Anyone who teaches architecture knows that educating students to become architects involves more than just inculcating the knowledge, skills, and abilities reified in the school curriculum. This paper highlights the necessity for introducing the concept of interlocking theory-based education with both place-based pedagogy, and community and public facility engagement, at the Bachelor level of academic education. It likewise identifies the necessity of implementing the goals of this teaching approach into all aspects of the architectural curriculum.

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(MATT BROWN)