

Open air City Squares - space for art and communication

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Abstract— Over the last few years, the theme of transforming the squares of Sofia into interactive art spaces has turned into a rather lively discussion between the social, the cultural circles, and the institutions, as well. Thus, the prime subject matter of the present study is the development of a creative project enabling the interaction between art and architecture, which has been assigned to students majoring in Architecture at University of Structural Engineering and Architecture "Lyuben Karavelov" (Visshe Stroitelno Uchilishte), Sofia. Within a year, the art-professors worked with the students on projects exploring a temporary interactive intervention with a specific function, on Slaveykov Square in Sofia. The practical module of the research project contains the following tasks: Investigating the real situation, collecting information about the historical past; Generating new ideas and approaches to innovative artistic solutions for the purpose of an interactive intervention in outdoor square spaces; Developing a general town-planning model (mockup) and authors projects' models for a temporary intervention in an urban square space; Selecting the technology for model-making; Analysis of the final results achieved.

Index Terms— architecture, art, education, city squares.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the theme of transforming the squares of Sofia into interactive art spaces has turned into a rather lively discussion between the social, the cultural circles, and the institutions, as well. Thus, the prime subject matter of the present study is the development of a creative project enabling the interaction between art and architecture on Slaveykov Square, which has been assigned to students majoring in Architecture at University of Structural Engineering and Architecture "Lyuben Karavelov" (Visshe Stroitelno Uchilishte), Sofia.

The research was performed under the research project theme SPACE - ENVIRONMENT - ARCHITECTURE - ART - CONSERVATION lead by the art critic, Assoc. Prof. DSc. Blagovesta Ivanova. Within a year, the art-professors worked with the students on projects exploring a temporary interactive intervention with a specific function, on Slaveykov Square in Sofia. The practical module of the research project contains the following tasks:

- Investigating the real situation, collecting information about the historical past of Slaveykov Square;
- Generating new ideas and approaches to innovative artistic solutions for the purpose of an interactive intervention in outdoor square spaces;
- Developing a general town-planning model (mockup) and authors projects' models for a temporary intervention in an urban square space;
- Selecting the technology, the right tools and proper materials for model-making;
- Analysis of the final results achieved.

The study discusses assignments fundamental not only for architectural modelling, but also presenting a significant part of the subject matter of architectural design, interior design and city planning.

Following such aims, primarily, the knowledge and skills of our future architects attained in good faith, as well as the attempts to develop multimodal assignments are a prerequisite for growing a

lasting interest, broader competence and culture, thence developing a professional position regarding the nature and standards of the urban environment, as well as the quality of life in it.

II. THE CHOICE OF LOCATION

Slaveykov Square is one of the most strolled about and well-known squares in Sofia, hence the team focused their work on it. Such an intervention in a famous social area and a favorite public space, the work itself, and not least, the expected results appeared to be a good challenge for the whole team.

Over the last 30 years, the walkable zone of the square has developed as an open-air book market, which means that the task of modeling is related to the formation of an intellectual environment - a place where visitors may not only easily flip through the pages of books, but may also get what they like. The central building of the Sofia City Library brings certain metaphorical and conceptual emphasis to the area.

The project may be also seen in terms of creating a counterpoint - a different place for books, a place where people can buy them, as opposed to the place to read them, i.e., the library. In such a particular case, the change of seasons and the weather conditions are to be considered, for not only the visitors are to be taken care of, but also the making of the outdoor stalls shall be adequately addressed.

In terms of urban planning, the square is a closed type. It is rectangular in plan and its space is developed along a main road artery, i.e., a tramway track in this case. The absence of car traffic introduces a feeling of a chambered space. The pedestrian zone follows a layout of a plan, as it is spatially separated, and yet it blends with the tram railway and neighboring shops (Fig.1).



Figure 1

The book market place could also be viewed as a bridge between different epochs. The commercial area meant for the sale of books is in concord with the present function of the retail shops in the adjacent buildings. At the same time, it refers back to the past when Slaveykov Square was a center for education and information.

The square was planned during the time of the first major urban interventions undertaken to change the character of the new capital of the Principality of Bulgaria. Since 1879, the urban planning of Sofia has been radically changed from Oriental to a European one, as the purpose of a road artery is to connect radially the central point of the city with its south-eastern part. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, residential buildings of intellectuals, a printing house, a cinema, a teacher's institution, a public telephone booth, an Alliance Française, a children's nursery, a pharmacy, and some cafes were built on this place [1]–[2].

After the Second World War, the entire appearance of the square was transformed. The buildings that remained during the Anglo-American bombing have been restored, whereas new ones were built in place of the destroyed ones. All in all, each of the existing buildings has its own appearance. Their style varies from art deco, through neo-classicism, to constructivism and eclecticism.

The temporary facilities for the outdoor book market are also altering their appearance, which was of the many motives to assign to the students such a case study which holds the creative task for an

intervention in the spatial environment of the square, being so essential for the social and public life of the capital.

III. SITUATION CASE STUDY

Architectural Modelling and Scale Modelling is taught at the University of Structural Engineering and Architecture "Lyuben Karavelov" for two years to Architecture students. Simple and complex form making is taught during the first year, while during the second one, students create models and scale models related to a particular interference with a real urban environment or interior.

Task description

1. Modeling of Slaveykov Square and the adjacent buildings in a teamwork, as the situation is defined beforehand; breaking down the stages of the project realization.

2. Presenting single solutions for a temporary prefabricated construction that has both an open-air Book Market and exhibiting-works-of-art function.

The entire mockup is supposed to be made of one-type material in all parts of the layout to achieve a uniform and complete outlook. Model scale: 1/250. Recommended material for scale-model – white cardboard. Choosing other materials can be utilized only when preparing individual solutions for a temporary intervention in an outdoor square space.

The task outlined had not only the objective to train the students in the techniques of architectural modeling, but also to encourage them to professionally analyze the situation, and also to focus their attention on the preservation of the immovable heritage of Sofia. The issues they had to tackle and find solutions to enriched their awareness of the competences and responsibilities they had to acquire as architects and helped them grow as creative and mindful individuals.

As students were provided with the cadastral plan of the situation, they were guided to explore the outdoor square area and the buildings around. This included a broad analysis of the monuments of architectural and cultural heritage, the dimensions of the buildings, their facades, as well as their interaction with the environment. Students were advised to study the historical past of Slaveykov Square. They were recommended to thoroughly survey the square, i.e., to draw preliminary sketches, to take photos of important objects and observe the details in order to optimally implement and display them on the scale model.

Due to the small size of the buildings at a scale of 1: 250, the preliminary study had to consider reproducing a unified and stylized appearance of the buildings. At this point, it was necessary to specify carefully the essential architectural elements that represent the style of the building, so that it shall retain its overall appearance and character.

IV. ORGANIZING THE WORK PROCESS

Students came to the general conclusion that a well-organized teamwork process may facilitate the development of the model by forming small groups of 3-4 people to prepare the single stages of developing and assembling the entire terrain. Other groups undertook the work of modeling the buildings and dealt with other environmental details. In such a way, not only harmonious execution of the task was ensured, but also good workload distribution in the teamwork.

Unlike the teamwork approach, hereat, the students were encouraged to come up with individual solutions for temporary interventions in a square space not only by unleashing their creative potential, but also to look for non-traditional approaches to organizing and visualizing objects with the function of a Book Market cum exhibition-area-for-art [3].

V. PROJECT RESULTS ANALYSIS

Related to the present study, four different individual projects of second-year students majoring in Architecture will be discussed herein in terms of focus and vision.

As it can be seen in the photo-images presented below (Fig.2-5), the general model is made by the

assigned group of students, following the task conditions. The scale-model has its aesthetic qualities, stylization, and carries maximum informativeness.

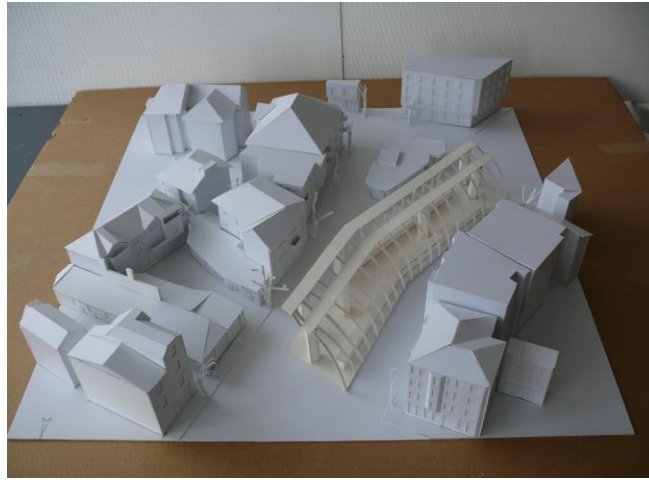


Figure 2

The individual projects for a temporary construction on an outdoor public square are made of different materials, following the preferences and concepts of their authors. Each of the four ways having dealt with the assignment carries a whole vision and style, functional distinctiveness, as it expresses the individual approach to completing the task.

Layout of models differ in terms of different levels of relationship with the environment, as in certain solutions a contrasting approach has been sought, whereas in others a more traditional type of intervention has been intended, subjected to the characteristic architecture of the contextual urban environment.

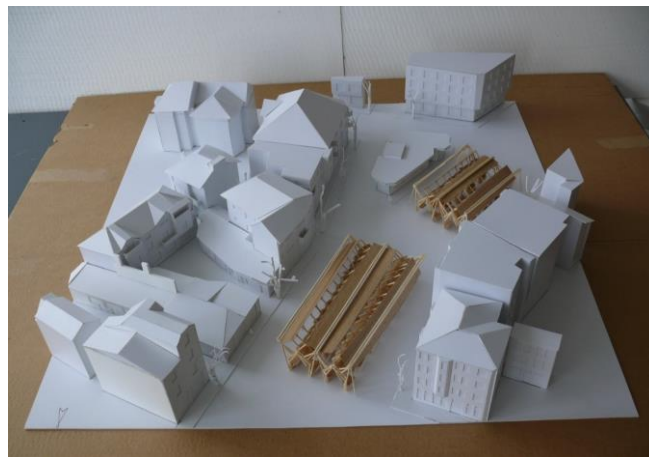


Figure 3

Another fundamental difference that can be traced is the quantity of structural volumes articulated, also their separation into parts, or their presentation as one whole volume, i.e., a gallery type. What impresses is the different approach of the students to the task-condition on an adequate installation/dismantling of the temporary outdoor-space intervention.

On the whole, some great understanding for designing lightweight and easy-to-assemble modular structures is seen, while on the other hand, the task condition has been developed at a varying degree in the individual projects. The Temporary interventions for an open-air Book Market cum exhibiting-works-of-art project solutions are furnished with a sheltering cover against adverse weather conditions. However, such protection has been developed of varying structure-weight in the individual decisions.

The overall conclusion from the analysis of the attained results is that the task has been performed in a creative manner by the students, and in compliance with the requirements stipulated, although some visual accents are at the expense of the functional qualities of the temporary interventions.

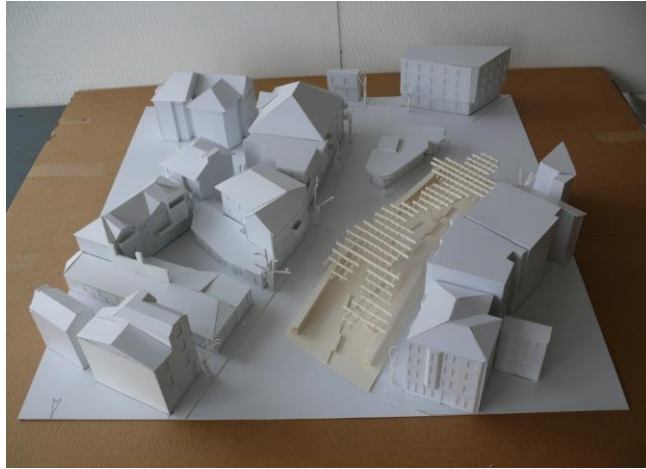


Figure 4

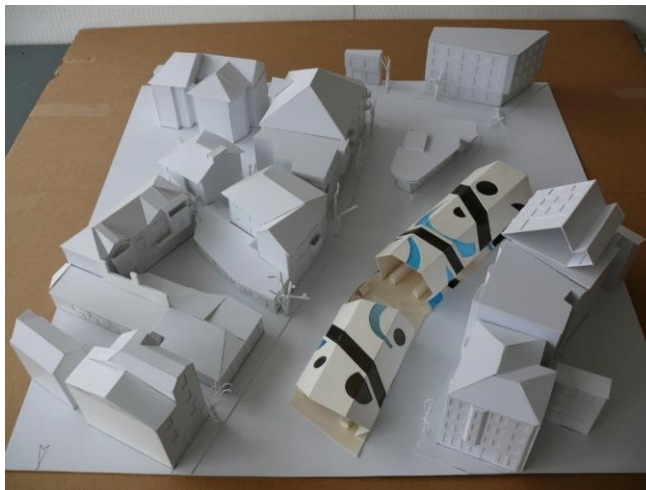


Figure 5

Of the very many interesting projects on individual temporary interventions completed by the students, there are particular ones characterized by truly non-standard ideas and optimal commitment to the spatial characteristics of Slaveykov Square.

An example of such an adequate and interactive approach is a unique concept discussed hereinbelow, and its generated model for movable-stands-on-wheels. Each stand has a mechanism to be attached to another stand, or to a tram passing through the square, so that it is movable and may be moved about when needed (Fig.6-7). The main idea of the project is to implement movability to all stands, and yet by using the tram as a vehicle, twice a day - morning and evening.

Such a student's idea can be distinguished as a non-traditional, yet at the same time optimally functional given the quick and easy freeing the outdoor-square-space from the temporary architectural intervention and regaining its original appearance if necessary. The stands themselves, in terms of obtaining suitable shape and form, and proper stylistics, correspond visually to the surrounding buildings and the historical monuments of the era, which undeniably adds value to this project.

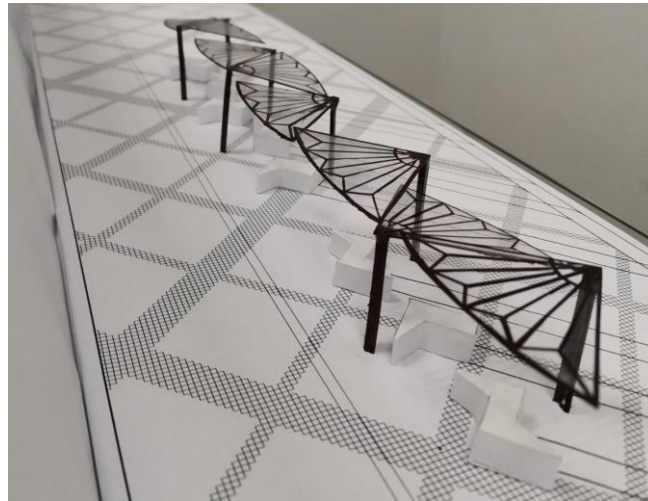


Figure 6

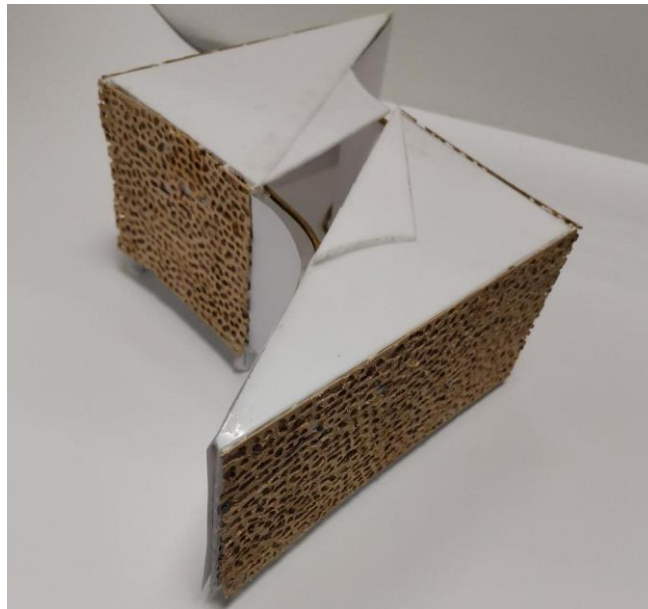


Figure 7

Concept of Iliana Romanova, 2nd year Architecture:

"The project presents a concept for a layout of Slaveykov Square as a book market and an exhibition place for works of art. The construction of stands should be easy to move about, i.e., mobile, as the square should remain free in the evening. The stands are compact when closed/shut, but still when opened they provide the necessary size for display and sale of books and artwork. There is repository space inside the stand. The external appearance of the stands fuses nicely with the decorative steel canopies placed, reminiscent of trees. Matching the fan-like spread of the canopy, the stands are enveloped with wooden mesh, as words are written underneath, words that signify the knowledge in books. Each stand is lockable and has a mechanism for attachment to another one or a tram. The main idea for removing all the stands from the square is to hinge them all at once to the passing tram – as in the morning, so in the evening, thus being taken to the depot and driven back to the book-market on the next day. Two options have been developed for the purpose. One is by laying additional rails which may run each stand to its allotted spot on the square backwards, so that no rail-way shifting shall be performed at the bend, nor is there a need of any other mechanism for hoisting the stand and lowering the tires onto which the stands may subsequently be moved to their lots.

Moving up and down the rails is a safe and economical way that does not interfere with the road traffic. It ensures a rapid organization of the market across the allotted place. The organization itself will not take much time, and it will give a new life to the tram depots."

CONCLUSION

The case discussed in this article is just a small share of the program of Visual Arts in The Urban Spatial Environment.

Setting a task for modeling of Slaveykov Square by working on a team, and presenting individual solutions for a temporary prefabricated structure of a Book Market cum exhibiting-work-of-art function is such an undertaking that can be considered as part of the process of training students in architecture. Allowing for freedom in research amongst students to find creative solutions shows some positive effect on the quality of their projects. The evident results are a confirmation of the relevancy of this approach, as they also open space for developing the creative and engineering potential of the students.

Authors may have to admit how much essential the real situation in/of the outdoor square, the compliance of the projects with their specific function, and coming up with optimal business-oriented solutions for temporary interventions in the urban environment are of a markedly contributing nature for the research. The research process is a prerequisite for developing both architectural and artistic-spatial thinking, when observing the contextual characteristics of the urban environment, its functions and priorities.

Art is an aspect of the way we reflect and make sense of our own history. Highly professional attitude to the cultural heritage means, also, a commitment to our future actions and decisions as to the overall urban environment. Understanding the causal link between past and present, as well as developing continuity will make our future more meaningful, more beautiful, and perhaps, a better place to raise and educate better people.

Future architects are responsible for creating the modern look of cities and turning them into a bridge between the past and the future. This very fact demands from all of us, being their teachers and masters, to manifest ever higher responsibility in planning the process of training and educating them, as we shall always make attempt to stimulate their creative potential, and to generate functionally and economically secure architectural projects.

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