

DESIGNING AND BUILDING FOLLIES AS A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN EDUCATION

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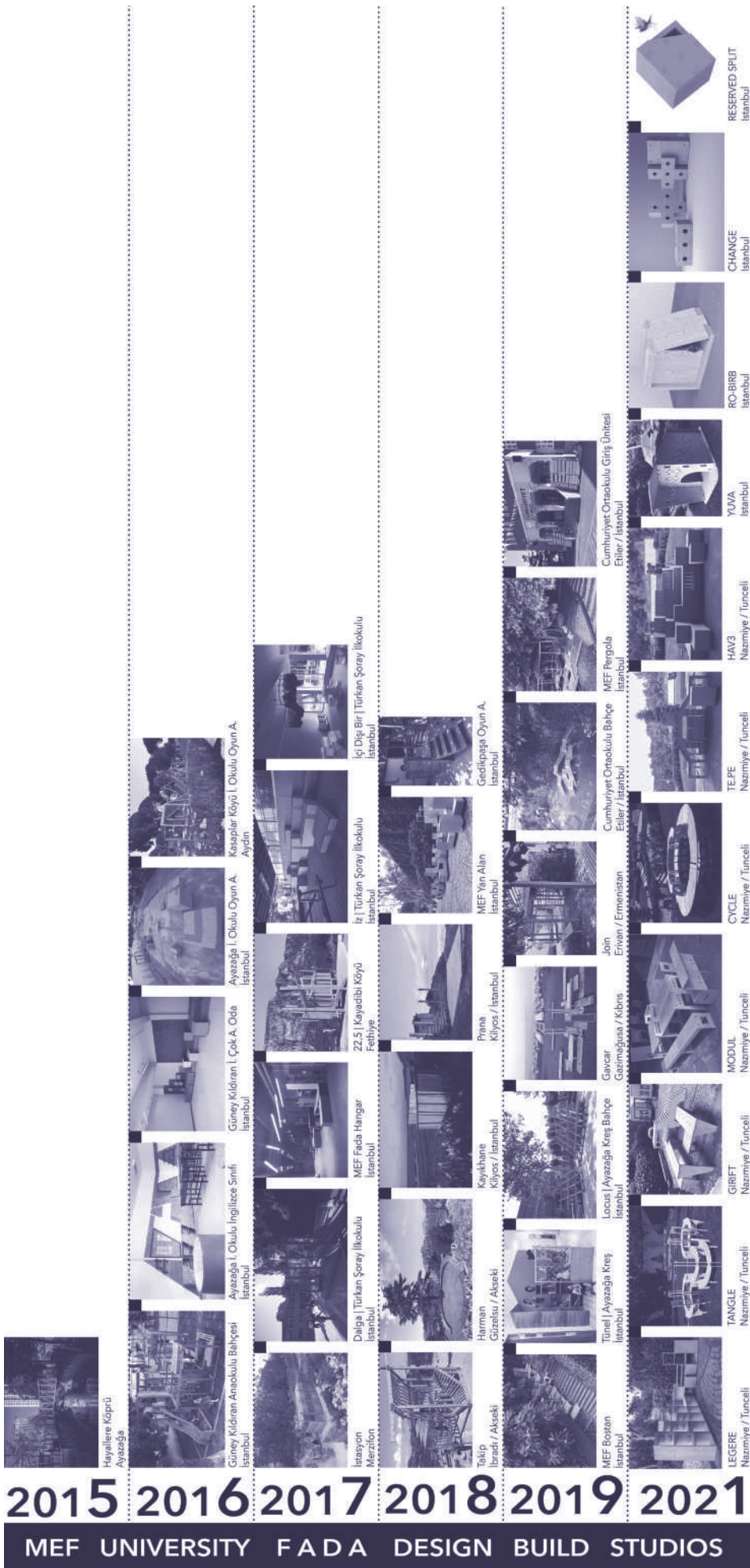
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Mimarlık eğitimi, rasyonel ve yaratıcı düşünme arasında gidip gelen kendine özgü bir karaktere sahiptir. Bu geniş perspektif içinde yaparak öğrenme, bu eğitimin farklı yönlerini kapsayabilmesi açısından önem kazanmaktadır. MEF Üniversitesi Sanat Tasarım ve Mimarlık Fakültesi'nde (FADA), üniversitelerdeki mimari tasarım stüdyolarının sınırlarının ötesine geçerek yaratmayı ve yapmayı zorlamak için Tasarla Yap (DBS) adında benzersiz bir program oluşturduk. Bu yazıda mimari tasarım eğitiminde pedagojik bir yaklaşım olarak 2015 yılından beri DBS programımızda tasarladığımız foliler üzerinde durmak istiyorum. Foliler çeşitli biçim ve işlevler doğurabilen gebe noktalardır. Açık yapıları, öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerin, kullanıcıların, yerel halkın, belediyelerin ve STK'ların katılımıyla kolektif bir tasarım sürecine izin verir. DBS projesi ile öğrencilerimiz gerçek bir mekanda gerçek insanlarla gerçek bir tasarım deneyimi yaşar, bu sürecin zorluklarını keşfeder, iletişim becerilerini geliştirir ve tasarımın herkesin hayatını iyileştirecek bir araç olarak kullanılabileceğinin gücünü kavrar. Sonuç olarak, foli benzeri yapılar tasarlanmasının ve yaratmanın mimari tasarım eğitiminde kritik olduğuna inanıyoruz.

Architectural education has its own unique character in-between rational and creative thinking. Within this wide perspective, learning by doing becomes important so as to cover different aspects of this education. At MEF University Faculty of Arts Design and Architecture (FADA), we we've created a unique program called Design-Build Studio (DBS) in order to push creating and doing beyond the boundaries of architectural design studios at universities. In this essay I would like to focus on follies that we have been designing since 2015 in our DBS program as a pedagogical approach in architectural design education. Follies are pregnant points that can give birth to various forms and functions. Their open structure allows a collective design process with the participation of tutors, students, users, locals, municipalities, and NGOs. Through DBS project our students get a real design experience in a real place with real people, discover the difficulties of this process, improve their communication skills and comprehend the power of design to be used as a tool to improve the lives of everyone. As a result, we believe that designing and creating follie-like structures is critical in architectural design education.



Architecture is a discipline that has intertwined relations with various fields such as engineering, arts, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc. In addition to these complex relations, architectural epistemology has an intimate relationship with design and crafts. Within this wider perspective, architectural education gains its unique character. At MEF University Faculty of Arts Design and Architecture (FADA), we try to reflect these intertwined relations within our educational agenda. Besides learning through critical and relational thinking, we give importance to learning by doing.

Learning by doing operates at different scales in architectural education. Building models, mock-ups during architectural design studios are a part of it. Designing and building a project is another example of learning by doing which is not so common in schools of architecture. At MEF University FADA, our curricula are based on the central notion that design is about creation. In contrast to similar programs, studios in our curriculum offer a higher credit and hour per week value. We think that the studio, where our students learn by doing and experimenting, is at the heart of all design education, which is complemented by comprehensive academic courses. To that end, our studios are available to students 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Furthermore, we've created a unique program that pushes creating and doing beyond the boundaries of our studios. Our Design-Build Studio (DBS) is a summer program in which our students design and construct projects for diverse communities. Since 2015, our students have designed and built over thirty projects. Our design-build program provides our students with the opportunity to create, build and realize their ideas. They also get a sense of accomplishment from reaching out and assisting other people via design¹ (Fig.1).

Our Design-Build Studio is usually focuses on designing and building small-scale wooden structures - so to say FOLIES – in order to reach its goals in a restricted time with limited resources. Folies could be defined as small-scale units that may act like a ‘pregnant point’. This pregnant point can give birth to different forms and functions. Frederick

Fig. 1- MEF University FADA Design-Build Studios Timeline

Amrine describes Goethe's pregnant point concept as "a living idea rather than a dead hypothesis because it is generative, - plastic, multidimensional - a series of structured activities rather than a static structure".² Its ambiguous character converts it into an open work. The possibilities made available by the openness of the work always operate within a certain range of interactions. We may easily reject that there is a single predefined point of view in the "work in movement," just as we can in the Einsteinian universe. However, this does not imply that its internal ties are in full disarray. It does, however, suggest an organizational rule that regulates these relationships. To summarize, the "work in movement" allows for a wide range of human contributions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate involvement. The invitation provides the performer with the possibility for a directed insertion into something that always stays in the author's domain.³ In our Design-Build Studios, the follies are designed collectively with the participation of tutors, students, users, locals, municipalities, and NGOs, thus they become open works. These open works may also help to explore the possibilities of architecture beyond specific typologies.

Bernard Tschumi explains his understanding of typology in the context of architecture and says that: "Typology relies on reduction: subtle differences are ignored in order to reinforce overt similarities. I would advise all of you to be on guard against this tendency. For in those differences that typology erases, those subtle contingencies of materiality and light, of movement and space, we might uncover entirely new possibilities for architecture—possibilities that refuse to conform to established typologies".⁴ We may see the reflection of this thought on the follies in his Parc de La Villette project in Paris. Follies' open structure helps us to design various kinds of public spaces and adapt our designs into different contexts. This ambiguous character also fits well with the nature of the collective process of designing and making. One of the main goals of the MEF FADA Design-Build Project is to have a qualified spatial and social impact of our productions in

various environments by partnering with local governments, non-governmental organizations, and industry. This cooperation creates a common ground for design. Follies open themselves for such participation and can be transformed easily according to the different needs of the participants. Exploring this collective production process and the power of building in architectural education is another goal of our DBS program. Feeling the power of co-production, discovering limits, learning collective decision-making processes, are the triggers to observing and understanding each other and the process of making.

In the scope of the summer program in our curriculum, we experience the power of collective production by designing and building for public schools and communities. With the Design-Build studio, we make a project designed by students a part of physical and social life. We can say that our Design-Build studios have two intertwined goals:⁵

1. To provide our students with a real design experience that encompasses all aspects of design: communicating with a group of people to understand their needs; developing a design proposal and get that group to accept it; designing as a team; communicating with experts, engineers, builders to improve the design; encountering situations that require revision of the design itself during the implementation phase and changing the design; learning to live with praise and criticism.

2. To show students how design can be used as a tool to improve the lives of everyone – especially those who cannot afford design services: we work in underprivileged neighbourhoods and villages, in public schools that do not have the structures or tools to transform an environment such that it will stimulate creativity in students, also we cooperate with local governments and non-governmental organizations that are willing to make experiments with us.

The subject of the first DBS project, realized in the summer of 2015, was a bridge that crosses the canal that divides the garden of Ayazaga Primary School

into two. 22 students designed and built a wooden bridge reaching a height of 2.5 meters with a span of 8.5 meters. The bridge built in Ayazaga Primary School doubled the open area of the school and created a design product in this socially and economically disadvantaged region.

In the summer of 2016, with the support of local governments and institutions supporting local development, a total of five projects, four in Sariyer district, where MEF University is located, and another in the Kasaplar village of Aydin, aimed to create a variety of spaces for primary school students. The four projects in the Sariyer district are a foreign language study room and a playground in the school garden at Ayazağa Primary School and, a playground and multi-purpose room at Rumeli Kavagi Guney Kildiran Primary School.

In 2017, 1st-year students of the FADA at MEF University completed a total of 6 projects in the Design-Build project. The projects were designed and built to fulfill different functions in line with the demands and support of non-governmental organizations, schools and local governments. These 6 projects are: 1. Merzifon, Hirka Village, a hiking trail starting point station, 2. Seydikemer, Kayadibi Village, a children's playground, 3. MEF University FADA, studio equipment, 3,4,5. Istanbul, Turkan Soray Primary School, a foreign language classroom, dining area and outdoor playground and 6. A structural installation for Antalya International Architecture Biennale.

In 2018, our students designed and built a total of 6 projects in 5 locations as part of their Design-Build summer internship: 1. Akseki, Güzelsu Village, a threshing floor reuse, 2. Antalya, İbradı, a city center observation deck, 3. Istanbul, Bogazici University Kilyos Campus, a boathouse structure, 4. Istanbul, Bogazici University Kilyos Campus, a viewing terrace, 5. Istanbul, Fatih Gedikpaşa, a children's playground and 6. Istanbul, MEF University, a gathering area.

In 2019, 1. a shading structure at a public beach in Famagusta, Cyprus, 2,3. a vertical garden and a seating unit in Etiler,



Fig. 2 - Istasyon / Station, Merzifon, 2017



Fig. 3 - Construction of the folie, Merzifon, 2017



Fig. 4 - Designing and building process of Istasyon / Station, Merzifon, 2017

Istanbul, 4,5. a playground for children and an interior playing corner in Ayazaga, 6,7. a community garden and a shaded seating area at MEF University campus and 8. a playground at Yerevan, Armenia were designed and built by our students.

During the pandemic, we organized an online OPEN DBS for 2020 and 2021 and designed various furniture for a kindergarten and secondary school at Tunceli and some shelters for the animals in animal sanctuaries. The design drawings and manuals are uploaded on our website as an open source for others who are in need of them.⁶

Within these DBS projects, I would like to give more details about two of them that were tutored by Kursad Ozdemir and I in 2017 and 2018. The first one is the Station project realized in Merzifon in 2017 (Fig.2).

Built within the remaining walls of a watermill ruin in Merzifon, Turkey, the timber structure, sized 890 x 235 + 265 x 135 cm, is the outcome of collaborative work by 16 participants from MEF University, FADA: 14 first-year students and 2 professors worked for an intensive period of 3 weeks of observing, talking, designing and swiftly constructing the

“station” in midsummer. The station marks the beginning of a hiking trail that dives into the valley of the town, situated on the northern edge of the central Anatolian plateau, home to ancient civilizations. The structure is a rational composition of simple 5/10 cm timber sections and boards, providing exhibition surfaces. The void between the existing mill walls and the station serves as a peripheral space, a linear path of communication between the old and the new. All is saluted by the dancing streaks of Anatolian sun, filtered through the articulated skin of the station (Fig.3 and 4).

The second project is called Harman in Guzelsu village in Akseki which was designed and built in 2018. Overlooking the Mediterranean from the Taurus

mountains, an unused threshing floor of the village Guzelsu served as the stage of our DBS. A total of 15 students and 2 professors designed and built a timber viewing platform in 3 weeks with assistance from the village community. The old threshing floors of Guzelsu are positioned on the steep and windy rocky outcrops within the village, forming clusters of human-made rational forms in the beautiful mountainous landscape. The process started with the marking of the circular path on the platform, reflecting the track of oxens at work. This circular track, shadowed by a few-centuries-old cedar, has then been extruded to a timber ring structure, deliberately indicating the motion in the memory of this rural facility (Fig. 5 and 6).



Figure 5: Harman, Guzelsu - Akseki, 2018



Fig. 6 - Harman, Guzelsu - Akseki, 2018

On the adjacent rocky threshold, once serving as a storage floor for the fresh hay, a timber wall was erected, pointing at the crests of Taurus mountains, dotted with massive cedar trees.

The structural system of this elegant screen possesses a resemblance to the local traditional dry wall compositions that have timber reinforcement frames. Through the louvres and the openings of this wall, comes the delicate rays of the evening sun, while lines of sight are projected to the village entrance and the surrounding fields. The main timber frame is supported with metal joints on a set of interlocked stone blocks, collected from

the nearby slopes (Fig.7).

The collection and precise placement of the foundation stones were made under the supervision of a local mason, presenting a hands-on course of local building know-how. Each element of the architectural system is treated with a tailor's careful approach regarding its positioning and attachment. The utmost care and precision in details of the composition of rational and natural components in this project provide a fidelity in user experience as well as a projection of collective labour memory of the village over the periods of time left behind. Now a gathering ground for the

people of Guzelsu for different occasions, the poetic simplicity of Harman is showered by the blonde reflections of the Mediterranean sun over the wheat fields in the distance (Fig.8).

The Design-Build Studio is academically and socially original and innovative. It provides direct and rapid benefit by providing both architectural design and application services to social groups who cannot access design, creates added value with the result, allows students to come into contact with the community and provide services as part of their education, and sets an exemplary cooperation model between university, NGO and local governments.

The Design and Build Studio is an exemplary study with the academic and social benefits it provides.

The reasons can be summarized as carrying out academic work in contact with society and in a way that will directly benefit, and radically raise the quality of architectural education through practice, and conducting the study with a traceable process and small sponsorships.

Therefore, we - as MEF FADA - think that designing and building folie-like structures have significant importance in architectural design education.



Fig. 7 - Details of Harman, Guzelsu - Akseki, 2018



Fig. 8 - Designing and building process of Harman, Guzelsu - Akseki, 2018

NOTES

1. This is how our dean explains our vision at MEF University FADA. You may check our website for further information about our school, atmosphere, projects, student works and more... <https://www.fada.mef.edu.tr/>

2. Frederick Amrine, "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist" in *Goethe's Way of Science: Phenomenology of Nature*, edited by David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc, State University of New York Press, 1998, p.39

3. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, translated by Anna Cancogni, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989, p.19.

4. Bernard Tschumi_Zenith de Rouen, *Source Books in Architecture 3*, edited by Todd Gannon and Laurie A. Gunzelman, Princeton Architectural Press (2003), p.17.

5. Inceoğlu, A., Sezgin, A., 2018. "Design-Build Studio (DBS)" in *FADA HANGAR 1 - Mef University Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture 2014- 2018*, edited by Burcu Serdar Köknar, Eda Yeyman, MEF University, Istanbul, pp.11-13

6. You may see all the projects of our OPEN DBS here: <https://www.fada.mef.edu.tr/publications>

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