Student Mentoring Programme as a new Tempo in Architecture Education

plan de acción tutorial
tempo en formación
co-tutela
visitas de obra
innovación docente

student mentoring programme
tempo in education
co-tutorship
jobsite visits
teaching innovation

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Durante los últimos cursos, el profesorado que participa en el Plan de Acción Tutorial de la Universidad de Alicante (en adelante escrito con el acrónimo PAT) lleva tiempo preguntándose el porqué de la poca participación e implicación de su estudiantado. Tras una serie de reuniones de trabajo se ha llegado a la conclusión de la necesidad de involucrar a los estudiantes para que, a partir de ahora, uno de los propósitos fundamentales sea el de transformarlo en un foro que sirva de voz a sus inquietudes. La intención tras la iniciativa consiste en dar la máxima importancia a las experiencias extracurriculares en la formación del arquitecto. Ha significado también incluir un tempo diferente en la velocidad de su formación, con profesores y estudiantes incitando conversaciones, mejorando la integración de la enseñanza académica universitaria y la realidad de su inminente y futura vida profesional. La metodología de trabajo que propone el profesorado implicado se fundamenta en un análisis previo del conjunto de metas y tareas propias de la acción tutorial y una recopilación de datos en la que se sintetice la elección, pertinencia, orientación y planificación de cada una de las experiencias extracurriculares que se articularán en las futuras reuniones de trabajo. Así, a través del diseño de micro proyectos interactivos se dota al estudiantado de la dimensión formativa y de aplicación práctica real para formar parte de su currículo oculto, considerándose interdisciplinar y poniendo en valor de forma implícita toda la actividad educativa recibida hasta este momento. Como paso previo a debates y análisis más profundos, se propone, elaborar un marco de referencia en el que el trabajo de investigación permita desgranar no sólo el método exportable que pauta la estrategia en los tres estadios de trabajo, a saber, preparación (por ejemplo, a la visita de una obra en construcción), acción (durante la visita a la obra) y reflexión (tras la visita) sino que, además, permita elaborar una rúbrica (también exportable) para la autoevaluación del trabajo y el aprendizaje desarrollado.

During the last few years, architecture academics who participate in the Student Mentoring Programme of the University of Alicante (from now on written as PAT, the Spanish acronym for Plan Acción Tutorial) have been wondering for some time what might cause low participation and involvement of students. After a series of working meetings, agreement was reached on the need to involve students more, so that from now on one of the fundamental purposes is to transform it into a forum that serves as a voice for the concerns of the students. The intention behind this initiative is to give maximum importance to non-curriculum experiences in the education of the architect. It also suggests introducing a different tempo to the speed of their education, with teachers and students instigating conversations, improving the integration of academic (university) teaching and the reality of their forthcoming professional life. The method proposed by the academics involved is based on a prior analysis of the goals and tasks of teaching and a collection of data that summarises the choice, relevance, orientation and planning of each of the non-curriculum experiences that will be articulated in future working meetings. Thus, through the design of micro interactive projects the students are provided with a training dimension and a real practical application of it to form part of their 'hidden' curriculum. It can be considered as interdisciplinary and implicitly valuing all the education received by them up to this point. As a contribution to wider debates and knowledge, it is proposed to develop a framework of reference in which the research work allows us to reveal not only the exportable method that guides the strategy in the three stages of work, namely, preparation (for example, to the visit of a site), action (during the visit to the site) and reflection (after the visit), but also allows the creation of a rubric (also exportable) for self-assessment of the work and learning carried out.

INTRODUCTION

The issue that this paper addresses was initially detected (during the last run of courses) by the tutors of the Student Mentoring Programme at the University of Alicante (hereinafter PAT) of the degree in architecture. In general terms, there is very little active student participation in this programme. The PAT is a voluntary programme on which students and academics enrol to complement the academic training of students from a professional, personal and human point of view. Students and teachers have the opportunity to organize the programme and guide it towards meeting the needs they envisage for it. After a series of working meetings, the conclusion has been reached that students now need to be more involved, so that, from now on, one of the fundamental purposes is to transform PAT into a medium that serves as a voice for the concerns of the students.

Consequently, there is a need to try to carry out activity that allows for the optimization of the PAT in our degree, with the aim of continuously improving the operation of the programme and making it more versatile and

successful. Furthermore, this is based on the current guidelines at Alicante University (Spairani 2021, 12) focusing on:

"Activities aimed at making visible and informing students about work, carried out in the educational programme (PAT), in order to improve their perception of the practical meaning of the PAT, and considering the difficulties and problems that may arise, then looking for possible solutions for continuous improvement."

In this way the activities determine what it has to be, that is, the students are considered as an "active part of the teaching-learning process" (Juan 2012, 38) and, at the same time, they will have the tools to "blur the boundaries between the professional world and the academic world" (Juan 2023, 307). From the conviction that the PAT is indivisible from our teaching work (that is, for the university they are seen as going hand-in-hand) and that this teaching work, as far as this group is concerned, necessarily involves architecture, we can agree with Ramón Araujo that: "the only way to approach *what architecture is* to do so from the understanding of the process of designing it" (Araujo 2019, 17).

Therefore, the objectives of the activities understood as 'research' and 'experiment' are to do with empowering each and every student of the PAT programme within the Architecture degree to allow her/himself to participate in an (inter)active way in their own learning and self-directed study. To that end, the aim is related to finding and identifying extra-curricular interests (beyond the formal study plans) that will have a broader outlook by adding the students' points of view. Finally, the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired by the students (and also the critical reflection of the academics) will be evaluated and self-assessed so as to understand the limits that we currently face within the PAT of Alicante University.

The starting hypothesis could be stated more or less as follows: Having an understanding of the work of the PAT as an inseparable part of the teaching-learning process directs the gaze of the actors towards a field of action.

1. METHOD

1.1. Description of the context and the participants involved

The participants in the experience started with the three academics who engage with this research work, (Pablo Juan Gutiérrez, Javier Sánchez Merina and Silvia Spairani Berrio) and, potentially, the entire student body of the degree in architecture at the University of Alicante. It is not considered a closed research project, but one that is always open, since it allows for its updating and for including any interesting proposal. Any good idea is considered as potentially feasible and its content reviewed as appropriate for the continuous improvement of the participants (always within the architectural context).

We must make a small aside at this point to differentiate between the possible participants (the students to whom the innovation experience has been advertised in real time through the different communication channels of the University of Alicante) and the final participants (those students who have ended up actively involved in it). While the former exceeds 300, the latter have been oscillating between 20 and 30, that is, barely 10% (Fig. 1).

However, although it may seem like a low participation rate, we must note that this is not

necessarily the way to read it since 25 students is a more than sufficient group, capable of generating synergies, critical mass and, at the same time, it is considered the around the preferred number to carry out this activity. A larger group would pose problems around logistics necessary to implement the proposed activity.

1.2. Instruments and techniques

Due to the aforementioned change of roles, which positions the students as protagonists and conscious creators of the activities, the instruments and techniques used for the development of the research are also determined by them based on their personal perceptions (refreshingly free of prejudice due to their as yet incomplete academic and professional training). It is notable that these instruments and techniques coincide, in most cases, with the students daily and contemporary communication and interaction channels / media.

Thus, the chat group (Fig. 2) is a hub in which all participating students and academics have a voice, vote and the same permissions by default. A fact that,

without a doubt, has allowed us to demonstrate and determine that they have been excellent working tools for two fundamental reasons. First and foremost, because it has allowed us to draw up and carry out the designed and proposed experiment in real time, collectively, democratically and transparently. Second, because it has also become a repository where, not only the trace of our actions, but also all our work documents, have been stored and organised chronologically for later consultation and/or checking back for future replications of this activity.

1.3. Procedure

The work method, proposed by the students themselves, is based on a prior analysis and a collection of data for each of the excursions that will form the basis of future meetings and critical reflection. These excursions are part of a series of "working visits with author" that constitute the raw material on which all the research and the experience of innovative teaching explained here pivots. It starts with choosing the work project and continues with its study, followed by the planning of the day of work and research on site accompanied by the architects and authors. The text

Fig. 1 – Left: image of the PAT WhatsApp group. Right: Rafael García Pedraza and Susana Alapont Durá explaining the experience during the VIII PAT UA Conference (titled "Tutorial action as a key factor in the comprehensive development of students" and held on the 4th of April 2023 in the auditorium of the Germán Bernácer Building from the University of Alicante: https://web.ua.es/es/ice/tutorial/viii-jornadas-pat.html).

Fig. 2 - Left: screenshot of the WhatsApp group created by the students active in the experience and where the sequential organisation of the site visit programme can be seen. Right: screenshot of the work meeting implicit to the working sessions, part of the experience

el PAT

(Narrativas y ficciones PATiculares)

Visitas a obra 2023

Departamento de Expresión Gráfica, Composición y Proyectos
Universidad de Alicante

P. Juan Gutiérrez; J. Sanchez Merina; S. Spairani Berrió; Ainara Quiles Díaz; Óscar Martínez Gómez; Paula Morales Roche; Rafael García Pedraza; J. Rodrigo Solís Ibáñez; Jorge Ruiz Campoy; Marina Sánchez Ferrández; Susana Alapont Durá; C. Ginebra Abadía González

Fig. 3 - Luis Navarro (architect of La Errería) taking a photograph of the PAT work group.

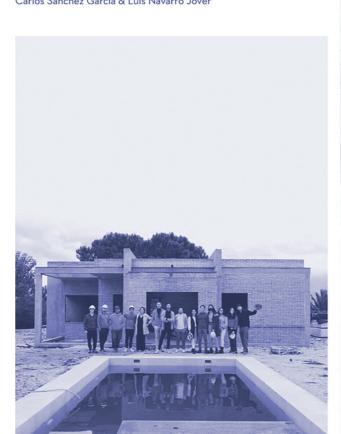**LA ERRERÍA architecture office** - Novelda, Enero 2023
Carlos Sánchez García & Luis Navarro Jover

Fig. 4 - Different snapshots of the construction visit made to three buildings in La Errería (https://erreria.com/).

with which the students contacted the different architecture practices is shown below:

Good afternoon! Dear architecture studio

We are PAT, a group of architecture students from the University of Alicante. The purpose of the group is to suggest and organise activities that complete our training as architects, beyond the university curriculum. This year we are carrying out a series of site visits in the province of Alicante.

Normally we divide the activity into two parts, first we visit the site and then we take advantage of the lunch hour to have a discerning and meaningful conversation between the parties involved in the building project, in the form of a colloquium, in which we review what we have learned and talk about the state of things. Beyond the visit to the project, these conversations (always informal) are a great learning experience.

We are working on documenting all the information from the visits for

publication at the end of the course where all the study visits are collected together.

We have known about and admired your work for a long time and we wanted to ask you if you would be willing to participate in the programme with one of your projects.

If you would like to participate in this experience or have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us to discuss the activity in more detail.

Atte. PAT (farewell)

The intellectual work continues and remains ongoing during the experience which can be understood as an open-air laboratory where samples are taken, ideas are tested and the most relevant lines of research and questioning are considered and contrasted. In this way, photographs, videos and audios, as well as notes and drawings are part of the media stored that are considered essential for future replication.

Finally, once back at the University of Alicante and in the context of the working meetings that articulate and guide the process, connections are established between the different elements of the project, but also between elements of one architect / author and/or another. All this is framed in an explicitly active and reflective participatory manner.

2. PRACTICAL RESULTS: ACTIONS

The following section addresses two fundamental issues: the specific activities that the methodological proposal has ended up making possible on the one hand, and the results (conceptual and exportable) that the activity allows, on the other.

After a brainstorming exercise that was as informal and intuitive as (and this is perhaps the key) it was realistic, the students ended up proposing a list of architectural practices that suggests, as a 'wish list', an outline of what could be

included. Thus, the list of candidates for the site visit looks like this:

- La Errería 🟡🟣
- Abez 🔵
- Grupo Aranea 🌱
- Jaime Sepulcre 🟠
- ARN 🦯
- Noname.29 👽
- CristalZoo 🐘
- Rocamora 🏛
- WOHA 🎋
- Sub Arquitectura 🟢
- Play studio ▶️
- Silvia Alonso 🟠
- Maribel Requena 🔴
- Escalar XYZ ⚙️

In which, and as previously mentioned, the desires of the student body are drawn into a realistic and possible scenario. Interestingly many of the architects on the list successfully completed their studies at the University of Alicante. At the time of writing we would like to comment that two

visits have been developed that coincide with the first positions described above: La Errería and Abez. During the visits (Fig. 3, 4 and 5), the architects described the processes they followed to realise a project that responded to the clients' instructions and dreams.

The explanation includes topics of economics, materials and construction, law, aesthetics, sustainability and energy, structure, facilities, etc. as well as dealing with clients, who are sometimes even present during the visit with the students. In this way our students also have a first contact with clients.

The visit concludes by inviting the architects to lunch as can be seen in Fig. 6, a very important moment since it is then when the students become more participatory in a real dialogue with the architects. All the issues explained above appear again, but this time in a different, more reflective and critical way, and they are not conceived as isolated facts but as establishing relationships between them.

3. THEORETICAL RESULTS: PATICULAR NARRATIVES AND FICTIONS

Without a doubt, the students opened our eyes to the shortcomings they perceive in architecture education that our universities are offering, helping us to imagine new extra-curricular practices to complete, complement and improve it (Sánchez Merina 2023).

It is like introducing a different tempo into the speed of their education, where teachers and students open up conversations, improving fluidity between the present academic phase of education in university and the reality of their future professional life. Therefore, this programme completes the notion of Temporalty in education: to the architecture curriculum developed by our universities as a methodology that prepares students for professional

ABEZ design - Orihuela, Febrero 2023
Diego Abellán & Inma Jiménez

Fig. 5 - Different snapshots of the building site during a visit to a house by Abez (https://abez.design/).

Fig. 6. -PAT team working meetings.

careers, now our students have introduced their own reflexion about education, where a new tempo is required for desired transversal learnings.

The series of visits to site accompanied by the architect / author are a good example of a participatory method that relates and unifies all the modules taught in the architecture school. This participation leads us to be more linked between two worlds: on the one hand, the academic world itself and on the other, the professional work environment. This allows us to reduce the gap that is perceived to exist between these apparent two sides of the coin. It reduces the leap between the worlds and through this programme, we are encouraged to see the works in their most honest and humble states; that is, both in their birth and their youth, as well as with the narratives of their creators. As Adrian Forty reminds us:

Buildings cannot be experienced all at once – they have to be explored by moving through and around them in a sequence, and this sequential motion is much more easily represented by language than it is by drawings.

Forty 2000, 46

All of this will allow us to digress, generate and think about our future challenges and how to embrace them (both 'professionally', 'academically' and 'socially'). This programme is about a journey between these worlds.

We have not only outlined the exportable method that guides the strategy in its three stages; namely, preparation (for the work), action (during the work) and reflection (after the work), but we have also shown that the rubric (exportable) must be defined each time, for each activity as a result of the assessment of the work by locals and outsiders.

The findings are as simple as they are radical, as obvious as they are important. We are talking about the fertilization of student participation in their own teaching-learning process, undoubtedly favouring the development of specific

(professional) values in the students and bringing to life a reciprocity of coexistence and participation that allows students to improve their training in accordance with the PAT. They have to do with of the instigation of student participation in their own teaching-learning process following the results of similar research (for instance Yusoff et alt. 2019 or Ledon and Turner 2013). As Peter Cook reminds us, drawing and reflecting on the activity carried out has the capacity to make it better (to reach more context and impact more agents) than its own reality.

At this point we must face a nagging suspicion: that the drawing can possibly be better than the reality.

Cook 2014, 16

This is precisely as a result of the limitation of language itself:

Language is inadequate to formulate the exact meaning and the rich variations of the realm of sensory experiences.

Moholy-Nagy 1947, 63

CONCLUSIONS

What we see in each case is only the visible promontory that the latent rest of the world advances toward us.

Ortega 1929, 96

After the investigation, we can summarise our three main conclusions:

- The PAT is implicitly embedded in our daily teaching work, whether we are aware of this fact or not. A shared, reflective and mature guardianship of it has generated per se a fertile change of roles, as well as a series of desirable synergies for constructive criticism.

- Understanding the academic -learning process as a necessarily hybrid (academic, professional, personal and social) and complex experience (always depending on the situation where it is developed and implemented) allows us to propose activities aligned with the interests of the students and, therefore, more effective and innovative from the point of view of skills acquisition.

- The students open our eyes to the shortcomings in the teaching of architecture that our schools are offering, helping us to imagine new extra-curricular practices to complete it.

These conclusions build an ideal scenario to generate an important discussion in the architecture degree taught at the University of Alicante. Basically, it is about the opportunity to go further with the

PAT. While it is true that the first objective of this programme is to support and help our students, and this is the subject of the text of this article, now it is up to us to ask and reflect with a critical sentence: why not accept what our students claim from their intuitive understanding, that they could actually have an academic education better related to their future professional work than we are offering them?

Part of the success of the Site Visits with Architect / Author series is due to it being a good example of a methodology that relates and unifies all the modules taught in the degree.

From this starting point, we could even go so far as to question that the previous explanation of the apparent academic and professional duality is not actually a matter of substance, but is possibly a lack of vertical or horizontal coordination between the subjects of the degree.

It is therefore interesting and necessary to monitor this network during the coming year. Then we should not only carry out more specific questionnaires on the topic, but also discuss this uncomfortable reality among academics.

We should also understand the programme as a pedagogical project which follows 'Action Research' methods and, in this way, conducting annual evaluations would contribute to its ongoing enhancement.

The truth is that without constructive self-criticism we will not move towards a better degree that avoids calling activity as important as live learning of Architecture simply an 'extracurricular practice'.

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