

THE ARCHITECTURE STUDENT CULTURE

AN ARCHEOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE DESIGN STUDIO

Lubomir Popov

Bowling Green State University

Publications in Architecture and Urban Planning
Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

September, 2003

THE ARCHITECTURE STUDENT CULTURE

AN ARCHEOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE DESIGN STUDIO

Lubomir Popov

ABSTRACT

This text is created in pursuit of several major goals, both diverse in their nature and focused by common purpose. The study follows the interpretative principles of Symbolic Interactionism and utilizes the Grounded Theory methodology. The first goal is to better understand the culture of architecture students and particularly the fascinating everyday life in the design studio. The second goal is to better understand architecture students as users of school buildings. The third goal is to explore the opportunities offered by Grounded Theory for the study of user culture and needs in regard to facility programming.

The narrative highlights a number of important traits of the architecture student culture and focuses mostly on the daily routines beyond the formal class time, the processes of professional socialization "after hours," and the special air that surrounds architecture students. An important part of the study is the interpretation of the studio life and student personalities in order to construe the major forces that shape the architecture student culture.

PUBLICATIONS IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING

Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research

School of Architecture and Urban Planning

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

P.O. BOX 413

Milwaukee, WI 53201

Report R01-5

ISBN 1-886437-17-3

For additional copies of this report write to the address above.

Copyright © 2001 Lubomir Popov

PREFACE

This publication presents a study with several major goals, both diverse in their nature and focused by common purpose. The first goal is to better understand the culture of architecture students and particularly the fascinating everyday life in the design studio. The second goal is to better understand architecture students both as a specific subculture and as a group of users of school buildings. This aspect of the study is directly related to the field of facility programming. In this regard, the text illustrates the contributions of cultural studies to the area of user needs research and programming in general. The third goal is to explore the opportunities offered by the Grounded Theory for the study of user culture and needs in regard to facility programming. This side of the methodological aspect is not explicated, but it had an important motivational role in devising the study. These three goals and functions of the

ishing that an environment so familiar to architectural designers is treated with almost distant indifference in regard to student needs and behavior patterns.

Facility programs and the design requirements and guidelines that constitute them are, or at least they should be, a codification of user needs, patterns of behavior, and space utilization. Knowledge about building users is essential for reconstructing the use of space and formulating design objectives. The professionals who develop design requirements employ different methods, ranging from prototype studies to mass surveys and standardized interviews to observation and in-depth interviews. The most common methods are chosen with consideration of quick results, staffing, and economic feasibility. Programmers and designers often resort to surveys and interviews with standardized questionnaires and shy away from time-consuming in-depth interviews and observations. While this approach can work in situations where the users are well known and have been researched for previous projects, the results may prove superficial when studying the users of non-traditional or lesser-known settings. "Cookie-cutter" approaches that aim for quick data collection can be misleading even in fairly common and familiar situations. In such cases the development of user-needs programs and design considerations is served best by methodologies that facilitate the understanding of users and their social world.

An important function of this study is to explore the

study are presented in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

The text depicts the culture of architecture students based on analysis of studio life. The study highlights a number of important traits of this culture and focuses mostly on the daily routines, the processes of professional socialization, and the special air that surrounds architecture students. An important part of the study is the interpretation of studio life and student personalities in order to reconstruct the major forces that shape the architecture student culture.

In respect to facility programming, the object of study selected for this inquiry – the architectural studio – is very interesting methodologically because, on the one hand, it is familiar to architectural designers and on the other hand, it is often taken for granted and overlooked. This situation provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate how a particular programming information collection strategy and research approach will work and produce information that in conventional and unsystematic studies is either overlooked or not reflected upon sufficiently. The architectural school is often designed in a way that doesn't differ much from a school of education or a traditional academic facility. The studio spaces are just big classrooms, and the school spatial structure is designed to accommodate the circulation of large groups of people rather than to meet the unique needs of architecture students. It is aston-

advantages and the limitations of the Grounded Theory approach to researching social reality and the sociospatial relations in regard to facility programming (Glaser, 1994, 1995, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glassner & Hertz, 1999; Lofland & Lofland, 2003; Strauss, 1984, 1985, 1987a, 1987b, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998; Young, 2002). The approach can be particularly useful in the study of activity settings and building types that are not well known to the architects. The more unusual and unfamiliar the building type, the more esoteric behavior patterns and sociospatial needs will be unveiled, and the greater benefits this method will bring. The Grounded Theory approach can be used for the study of non-traditional settings such as hospices (Corless, Germino, & Pittman, 1994; Dickenson & Johnson, 1993; Glaser and Strauss, 1965, 1968; Golubow, 2002), home-like birthing centers (Lerman, 1991; Turkel, 1995), facilities for the elderly (Corbin & Strauss, 1988; Hyman & Corbin, 2001; Rubin, 1999), correctional facilities of any type (Flanagan, Marquart & Adams, 1998), hospitals (Fagerhaugh & Strauss, 1977), and schools for children with special needs (Ricaurte, 1998; Speece & Keogh, 1996). Its contributions will be even greater to architects working for the first time in a specific building type or those who have had little exposure to the users, and little time and few resources to engage in such detailed and profound explorations.

This text can be of interest to several diverse

groups: scholars (and students) in cultural studies, facility programmers (consultants who intend to enter the programming business, active programmers, educators, and students), and methodologists (both in academic research and facility programming).

For scholars in cultural studies we hope this will be an interesting publication on a particular understudied sub-population. We believe that the world of architecture students can be as interesting as hip-hop, teenyboppers, and gothic bodies.

Facility programmers might be interested to see how an extensive cultural studies component can be incorporated into the programming process. They can see the informational potential of such intervention and the benefits of using social science approaches in programming research.

Professionals and students in architecture and in facility programming can see the application of one methodology, which, although not new to the research community, is rarely utilized in architectural research or in programming in particular. A review of a number of course syllabi indicates that although architectural research courses inform about some qualitative approaches, the major focus is still on traditional positivist quantitative methods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people and organizations that made this publication possible. My warmest thanks are extended to the unnamed students and faculty who allowed me to spend many dozens of hours in their studio, who invited me to parties and happy hours in their favorite pub, and who were kind enough to sit for interviews and share their own experience in a frank and candid manner. I regret I cannot mention their names because of a pledge for privacy.

I would like to thank Dr. Dale Jaffe, Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, for his encouragement, inspirations, and insightful suggestions.

And last, but not least, I want to thank the staff of the Center for Architectural and Urban Planning Research, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the staff of the UWM publishing house for assisting with the publication of this text.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

3

THE STUDIO WORLD: SHOP, HOME, AND TURF

15

FORCES THAT SHAPE STUDIO CULTURE

71

CONCLUSIONS

89

REFERENCES

101