



Constitutive conditions of transforming pedagogies in urban design: A critical reflection on METU MUD Studio (1996-2025)

Irmak Yavuz Özgür* 
Olgu Çalışkan** 

Abstract

This article investigates the constitutive conditions of urban design pedagogies through the case of the Middle East Technical University (METU) Master of Urban Design studios. Drawing on the distinction among pragmatic, normative, and exploratory pedagogies, the study moves beyond a typological classification to examine the contextual factors that shape these approaches in practice. Utilizing archival materials, course documents, interviews, and analyses of studio outputs, it constructs a periodization of pedagogical approaches and identifies the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that have informed their development. The findings highlight how urban design pedagogies are historically constituted through the dynamic interplay of these conditions, reflecting evolving contexts rather than fixed or static identities.

Keywords: urban design education, design studios, pedagogy, urban design thinking

1. Introduction

Urban design has long lacked a shared definition, unified theoretical foundation, or consensus on its scope and expectations. Positioned at the intersection of architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture, its intellectual grounding remains inherently hybrid with boundaries that are frequently contested and subject to appropriation by parent disciplines (Madanipour, 1997; Cuthbert, 2011; Gunder, 2011; Kamalipour & Peimani, 2019). The disciplinary position of urban design continues to shift among these related fields, whose trajectories have increasingly diverged. Over time, urban planning has anchored its legitimacy in the social sciences, often at the expense of its physical and spatial dimensions (Lang, 1983; Long, 2012). Architecture has reinforced its disciplinary authority through deeper engagement with the liberal arts, history, and critical theory (Dagenhart & Sawicki, 1992). Landscape architecture, meanwhile, has oscillated between its roots in agriculture and its design-oriented identity (Zeybek, 2025). Within this fragmented context, questions regarding the pedagogical foundations of urban design and what constitutes its distinctive hands-on educational practices remain unresolved.

Despite the steady rise in graduate programs worldwide, research on urban design studio education continues to lack a systematic understanding of its pedagogical characteristics. At the undergraduate level, urban design is often taught through pedagogies inherited from its parent disciplines of architecture and planning, drawing upon their established epistemologies. By contrast, graduate-level programs display a far greater variety and complexity in pedagogies. Each program tends to articulate a unique organizational framework shaped by contextual, institutional, curricular, and pedagogical settings, and design processes that vary according to scale, scope, theme, and method.

*(Corresponding author), Dr., TED University, Türkiye irmak.yavuz@tedu.edu.tr

**Prof. Dr., Middle East Technical University, Türkiye olgu@metu.edu.tr

Article history: Received 19 October 2025, Accepted 17 November 2025, Published 31 December 2025

Copyright: © The Author(s). Distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



Addressing this gap, our earlier research (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025) examined whether a coherent and unified notion of “urban design pedagogy” could be claimed. The study revealed that studio-based education, the core of urban design teaching, manifests multiple forms of structure and operation. Studios can be distinguished by their geographical focus, scalar range, thematic agenda, strategic orientation, and methodological approach, demonstrating that no single, universal pedagogy governs urban design education.

Within this diversity, three broad models can be distinguished in terms of their substantive and procedural frameworks. Pragmatic pedagogy emphasizes direct engagement with practice through real-life projects, service learning, and live design work. Normative pedagogy focuses on value-based design and research aimed at defining the qualities of the “good city” and desirable urban form. Exploratory pedagogy, by contrast, prioritizes speculative thinking and the imaginative exploration of alternative socio-spatial futures, often through representational experimentation.

Our earlier research examined these pedagogical types synchronically, examining them across different institutions at a single point in time. However, existing literature suggests that architectural and urban design education has been slow to adapt to broader transformations in design professions and societal contexts, if not actively resistant to them (Salama, 2015). This observation underscores the need for a diachronic perspective that investigates how pedagogical orientations evolve and what intrinsic or extrinsic factors drive such transformation.

In this light, the present study examines both the evolution of pedagogical approaches and the conditions shaping their transformation. (Figure 1)

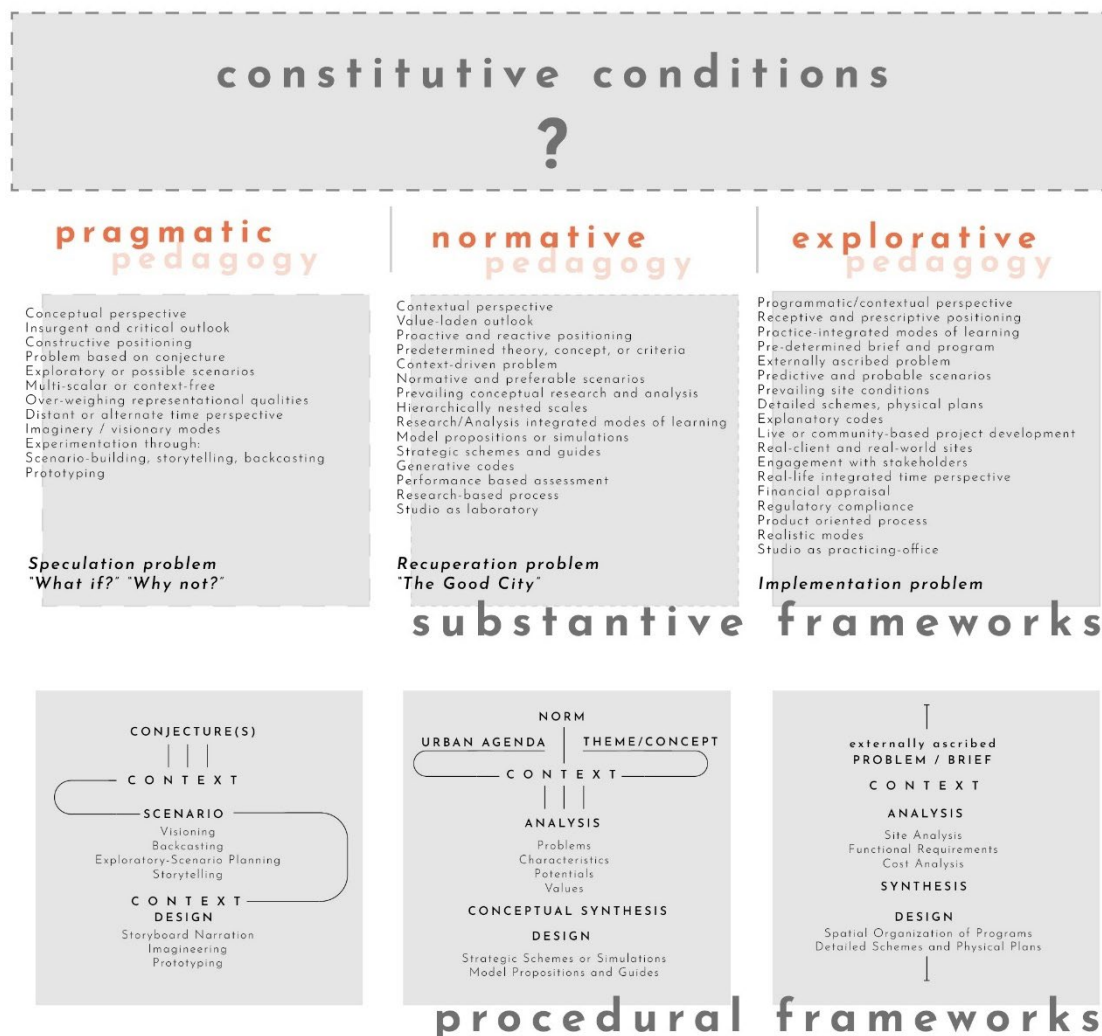


Figure 1 Substantive and procedural frameworks of urban design pedagogies and the search for their constitutive conditions

Adopting a case study methodology, it focuses on the Middle East Technical University (METU) Master of Urban Design (MUD) studios between 1996 and 2025. The program's thirty-year continuity, the availability of extensive archival and published materials, and its internal diversity make it a particularly suitable case for examining the evolution of urban design pedagogies. Drawing on archival records, course materials, and analyses of studio outputs, the study develops a periodization of pedagogical orientations and identifies the key factors that have influenced their transformation. In doing so, the study aims to reveal the dynamic formations characterizing urban design education as shaped by institutional, disciplinary, and contextual shifts. By situating these pedagogical transformations within their broader historical and institutional frameworks, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how urban design education evolves as a reflective and adaptive field of practice.

2. Theoretical Background: Urban Design Pedagogies

In the context of the emerging pedagogies of urban design in which each program develops its own pedagogical orientation (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025), three distinctive models can be identified, both in terms of the substantive and procedural frameworks they employ.

Among these models, **pragmatic pedagogy** is most closely aligned with professional practice and tends to be structured around externally defined problems or goals. Studios adopting this approach typically engage in service-learning projects or practice-led studies, collaborating with actual stakeholders during the studio process. The design process involves identifying programmatic and spatial requirements, producing detailed design schemes, and preparing guiding documents, such as feasibility studies or financial appraisals, to support implementation as real urban projects. Since the studio responds to concrete demands arising from professional or community collaboration and feedback, the proposed design frameworks are inherently problem- or program-driven, oriented toward practical implementation and realizable outcomes within relatively short timeframes. Owing to its strong applicability and reliance on analytical and creative capacities, pragmatic pedagogy remains among the most prevalent approaches in contemporary planning and design education.

Within this framework, **normative pedagogy** prioritizes a context-based or thematic/conceptual inquiry aimed at articulating the principles of good urban form and engages with systemic or emergent urban issues. Studios adopting this approach function as laboratories for analyzing geographically and contextually specific challenges—whether urban, historical, peri-urban, natural, rural, or coastal—and for developing planning and design strategies to address them. Their outputs often take the form of strategic frameworks, design proposals, or guidelines that can be extrapolated to other contexts. Although normative pedagogy has less immediate application than its pragmatic counterpart, given its focus on structural issues requiring longer-term engagement, it holds growing relevance in light of today's social and ecological urgencies, which demand proactive and strategic responses from design and planning disciplines.

The third model, **exploratory pedagogy**, is characterized by its emphasis on speculation, imagination, and the development of hypothetical scenarios with strong representational depth. Studios following this model often emerge from a desire to challenge established paradigms, introduce innovation, and experiment with new design tools and methods. Their design processes are less constrained by existing contexts and instead explore alternative socio-spatial futures, sometimes projected into distant temporal horizons. In this setting, the studio operates as a scenario simulator, where “what if?” and “why not?” questions generate novel solutions and modes of representation. This approach reflects broader theoretical shifts in design, from analysis-led problem-solving to reflective, discovery-oriented processes. Although less common than the pragmatic or normative models, exploratory pedagogy is gaining relevance in an era characterized

by uncertainty, where urban societies and decision-makers increasingly depend on speculative and forward-looking design perspectives.

3. Methodology

This research aims to scrutinize, first, the organizational aspects of studio pedagogies and secondly, the underlying factors that characterize the pedagogical models. A qualitative method is adopted in researching studio practices in the case of the METU Master of Urban Design (MUD) Program, Ankara, Türkiye. Founded in 1996 as the fourth urban design graduate program in Türkiye, METU MUD provides a rich experimental basis to follow the changing tracks of design pedagogies along with a relatively good record of works of the studios since then.

The paper, in this context, focuses on the following questions:

- In the specific context of METU MUD, what are the distinguishing **organizational frameworks and pedagogical models** in the historical trajectory of studio education?
- On a general basis, what are the **constitutive factors** that characterize these pedagogical models?

The data collection process is based on literature and archival research and interviews. The data was accessed from the program archive and from the secondary sources—i.e., Master of Urban Design Catalogue.01 (Çalışkan, 2016) and other studio publications (METU MUD, 2018; Akkar Ercan, 2019; Akkar Ercan 2020; Akkar Ercan, 2021; Çalışkan, 2018). Eventually, the trajectory of studio education has been discussed through examining through the assemblage of the course syllabi, assignment briefs, student works and coordinators' writings on studio experiences.

Based on the pairings within [tentative] criteria set extracted from international studio practices (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025) the organizational aspects of studio education have been specified and deciphered. (Table 1)

Table 1 Criteria Set to Identify the Organizational Frameworks

Context	Urban
	Peripheral
	Rural
	Historical
	Industrial
	Coastal
	Local
	National
Program	Global
	University campus design
	City Center Rehabilitation
	Housing development
	Industrial development
	Tourism development
Strategy	Post-recovery processes
	Conservationist
	Restructuralist
Aim	Developmentalist
	Problem-solving
	Problem-framing
	Research
	Setting a Model
Foothold	Exploration
	Realistic
	Innovative
Method	Imaginary
	Analysis-Synthesis-Design

	Conjecturing/ Scenario writing- Concept design
Frame of design interventions	Diversified Overlapping Complementary
Modes of thinking	Practical/pragmatist Descriptive Prescriptive Imaginative/speculative
Programming	Context and Scale-based Theme-based Strategy-based/Tactical Methodical
Object of design	Region Urban form and fabric Neighborhood Townscape Landscape Streetscape Public Space

After indexing the studio data in the form of a timeline, a periodic characterization of studio pedagogies and the constitutive factors changing pedagogical approaches was possible via a typological framework. (Figure 2)

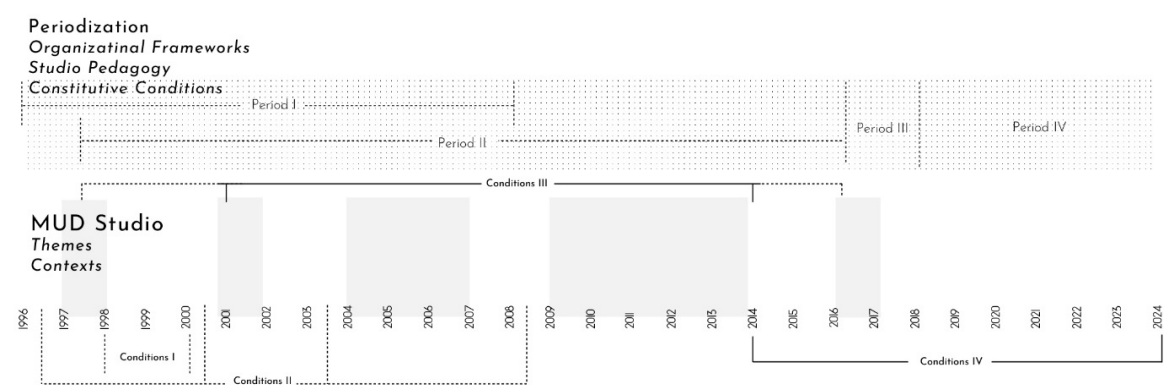


Figure 2 Diagram of the cross-reading of studio frameworks and the urban agenda

4. Findings: METU MUD Studio Education in the Last Thirty Years

The history of the education at of METU Urban Design Graduate Program presents two distinctive periods. The first period consists of the first two decades from the program’s foundation in 1996 until 2014. The pedagogical scope of the urban design studio in this period included *pragmatic* orientation through service-oriented live project experiences for METU Campuses, limited yet foundational *explorative* experimentations and *normative* orientations based on coastal urbanism, and Ankara as an urban lab. The second period of the program presents a dual structure in studio organization on a semester basis with major themes and design processes.

4.1. The 1st Phase: Multimodal Foundations (1996-2014)

Pragmatic Pedagogy: Service Learning Through the Commissioning of Live Projects

The first decade of the urban design studio reflects a service-learning approach through university campus development projects commissioned by the administrators to the studio coordinators and faculty members. As the founder of the program in 1996, Baykan Günay played an active role in taking on these tasks within the scope of studio education. The fact that Günay was a member of the Spatial Planning Committee at METU had an influence on this. One of the events that led to the architect-planner co-working and co-creation culture at METU was elaborated (Günay, personal communication, 2023):

Lodgings were to be built at METU. First, a project was prepared by someone else. We didn't feel comfortable with it. We said, "Give us three months and we'll do it." And in those three months, together with architects Erhan Acar and Gönül Evyapan.¹ That small group took on the job of designing the lodgings. And when that work was undertaken, it was a project in which architects and urbanists worked together. This is perhaps the first in the history of METU.

Although ODTÜ Kent (METU Town) lodgment project was not undertaken in terms of the studio work, it created an environment where the design studio is operated to conduct real-world service-oriented projects in a professional multi-disciplinary setting. (Figure 3)

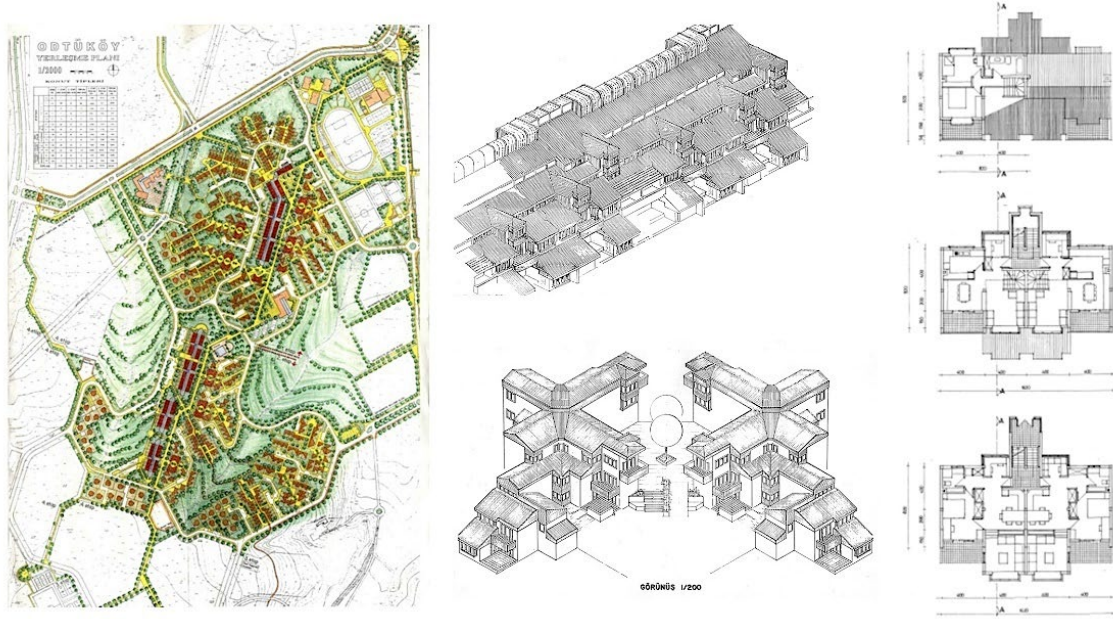


Figure 3 ODTÜ Kent (METU Town) lodgment plan layout, axonometric views of buildings and floor plans (Source: B. Günay, personal archive)

Then, METU Technopark Project (1996-97) and METU North Cyprus Campus (NCC) Planning and Design Project (2000-01) were conducted within the scope of the studio education in the following years based on this foundational basis. Taking on these tasks, the studio functioned as a practicing office in the realization of strategic projects of the university. Günay (Ibid) points out this as a kind of "practice, not theory, emerged from design studies."

The first year of the program's establishment in 1996 corresponds to the commissioning of METU Teknokent project by the program's founder, Baykan Günay implying the initial threshold for the program (B. Günay, personal communication, 2024). This project was integrated into the studio education, setting the first example of *service-oriented live project development experience* with the joint participation of architects and planners from inside and outside of METU. Architecture and urban planning students mixed in groups generated alternative design strategies and solutions based on structure, form and cost analysis and predictions of METU Technopark development. A typological design approach was adopted in the studio works in configuring plan-units for certain program requirements (Ünlü et. al, 2016). (Figure 4)

¹ The assisting design team included both architects and planners: Semih Halil Emür, Can Kubin, Tülin Özbiçer and Mustafa Dikeç as City Planners and Ayça Akçalı, Fatmagül Aslaner, Feruze Çetin, Erol Demirtaş, Didem Kılıçkiran and Yasemin Somuncu as Architects.

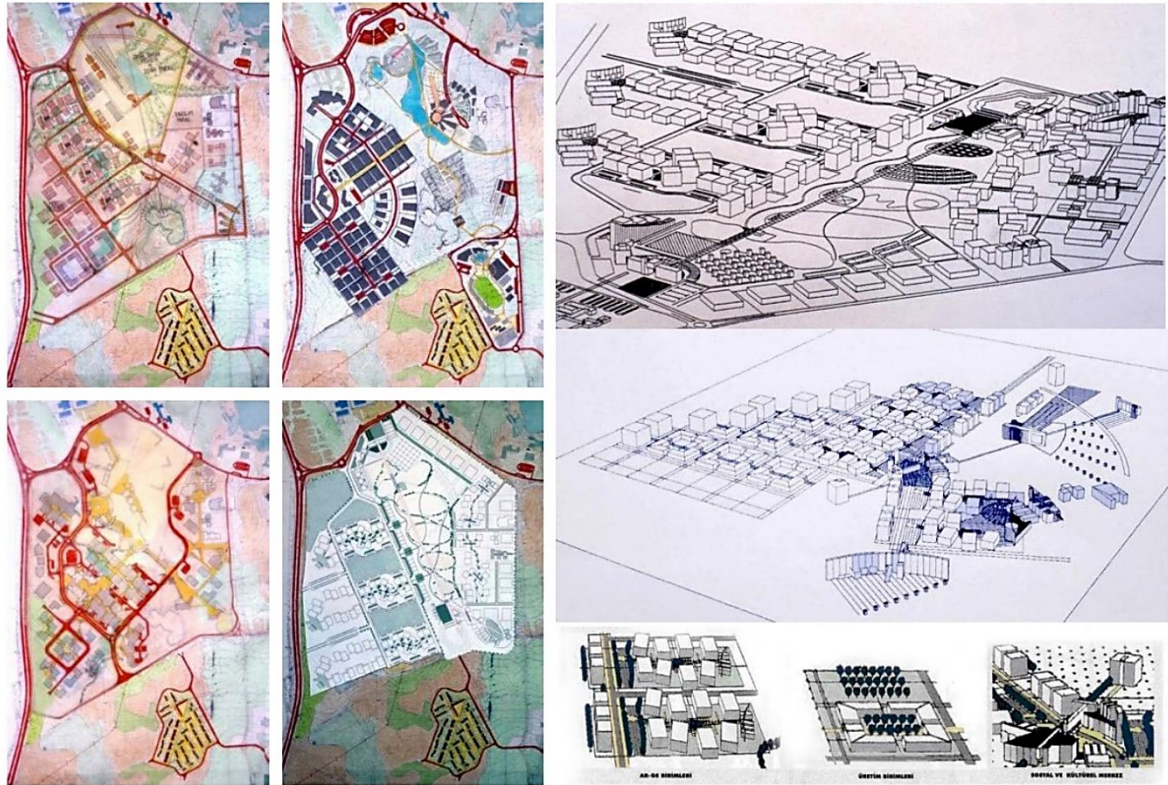


Figure 4 Alternative design strategies and solutions proposed by each student group for Teknokent development (above), typological design approach in configuring plan-units for certain program areas (below) (Source: Ünlü et. al, 2016)

The know-how on service-oriented and program-based studio education through development of university campus projects was reinforced with the commissioning of spatial planning and design of the METU Northern Cyprus Campus (METU NCC) to the faculty members who coordinated the urban design studio in 2000.² This opportunity was seized in the studio, which functioned as a design office whose major objective was to configure ‘spatial organization of the program-based education’ and utilization of ‘urban coding as a tool for flexible and multi-actor planning and design process’ (Baş et. al, 2016). To that end, different options were proposed as alternative plan layouts, and a unified master plan was developed as a synthesis of these alternatives. (Figure 5)

² These faculty members included Baykan Günay, Erhan Acar, Adnan Barlas, Özcan Esmer and Türel Saranlı.



Figure 5 METU Northern Cyprus Campus Planning and Design Project (2000-01) and the latest status of the implementation in the field within the framework of the plan as of 2024 (Source: B. Günay personal archive and Baş et. al, 2016)

A *typological approach* was adopted in *master planning* practice. In that regard, codes and guidelines on mass space relationships, architecture, landscaping, open space typologies based on topographic and climatic conditions, and program requirements were put forward.



Figure 6 Alternative design schemes (left and middle) and the final layout (right) of METU Kosovo Campus (Source: Acar, 2016)

The implementation of the METU NCC master plan produced within the studio setting marked a turning point for the program based on its 'practitioner' characteristics. This approach was further developed with the undertaking of the spatial planning and design project of METU Kosovo Campus in the studio framework. The major procedural studio strategy based on generating alternative development scenarios and model suggestions for the project at hand was reiterated. (Figure 6)

Normative Pedagogy: Emergency and Crises

Besides *practitioner mode* in the urban design studio, problem-oriented *care and remedy-oriented normative studio practices* were performed. This mode was activated for both developing solutions to long-standing problems and the cases of disaster. As one of the examples, the studio refocused on METU Campus in 1998, this time with a thematic framework on 'barrier-free urban design'. Reorganizing the campus pedestrian circulation based on universal and inclusive design principles and barrier-free comfort standards for all was the major objective of the studio. The student works included strategic plans identifying the overall design interventions on campus, and specific design solutions as detailed layouts for particular problematic outdoor spaces.

As another example of care and remedy practice, the studio concentrated on Gölyaka, a small historical settlement in the western Black Sea region which suffered heavily from the 1999 Gölcük Earthquake. The urban design task was required by the district governor. Generating ideas and proposals for post-earthquake urban redevelopment and recovery was the major objective of the design studio (Gürler, 2016). Developing earthquake-resistant architectural and urban morphological typologies as risk reduction strategies for the reconstruction of the settlement fabric and generating a regional strategy for the new urban character were aimed at (Figure 7). Design deliverables varied from an action plan, regional structure plan, master plan where strategic project areas are specified, as well as design codes and guidelines. An integrated urban planning approach and a holistic interdisciplinary perspective were adopted to develop *a model to be applied in similar contexts* in the search for earthquake resistance.



Figure 7 Alternative plan layouts and new typologies for Gölyaka urban fabric (Source: Gürler, 2016, and B. Günay, personal archive)

Interaction with the users, actors, stakeholders, or inhabitants have been one of the key avenues in gathering information for a systematic analysis. In the barrier-free campus design project, people

with disabilities were invited to the studio to learn the intrinsic features of their spatial perception from them and to address key problem areas. In the 'Gölyaka Studio', site visits, meetings with local government offices, and interviews with residents were conducted.

Explorative Pedagogy | The Need for Alternative Model Search

Alternative to the consolidated studio trajectory with program-based (campus) projects, *context-based* studio frameworks were launched, governed by the explorative mode of design thinking. As the program was established in 1997, Atatürk Forest Farm, a very significant natural and historical conservation site forming the green wedge of the city, was taken as a planning and design context. The decreasing coverage of the Farm, the incompatibility of new uses, and the underutilization of the existing areas and structures were addressed as major problems. Protecting the agricultural and cultural characteristics of the site, as well as generating a structural configuration for new programs, were the primary objectives of the studio. (Figure 8)

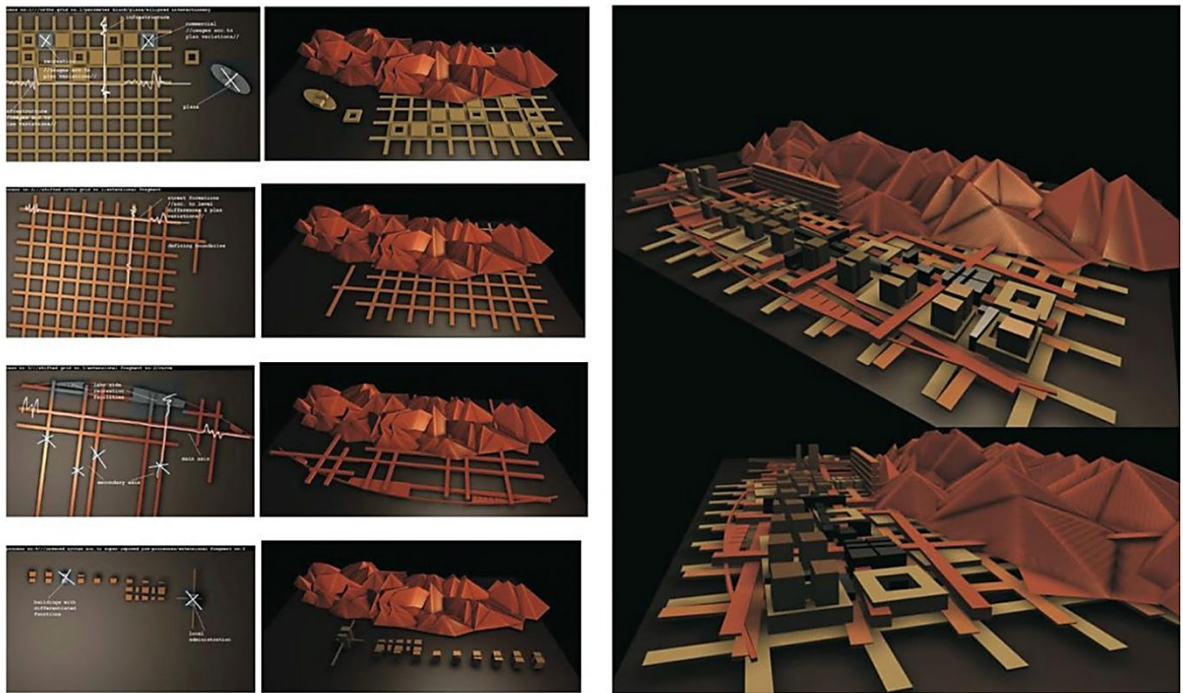


Figure 8 Structural formation of new compatible programs with the existing character of the design area (left), and the internal structure of the design proposal representing an avant-garde line of thought (right) (Source: [Burat & Aksel Gürün, 2016](#))

Alternative strategies were developed as a structural plan in which main character areas were designated, and key policies and management frameworks were formulated ([Burat & Aksel Gürün, 2016](#)). It is noteworthy that an 'avant-garde' line of thought was adopted in studio works ([Figure 6](#) below). Embarking on an experimental modality in the studio education after the Technopark design project with a realistic foothold signals an underlying flexibility in putting together an urban design studio framework in the following years.

This way urban design studio presented an explorative pedagogical orientation starting from its second year when the practicing mode was swiftly changed to an experimental modality taking Atatürk Forest Farm (AOÇ) the spatial context. AOÇ has been one of the most contested cases in Ankara that comes to the urban agenda frequently. The discursive theme of '*the disintegration of historical, cultural and natural land*' in the context of AOÇ unfolded in the News Bulletins starting from 2004 until present. In that sense, urban design studio preceded the public discussions in problematizing the decreasing coverage of the Farm, the incompatibility of new uses, and the underutilization of the existing areas and structures.

Between 1996 and 2001 the construction of urban design studio education had manifold premises. Starting with service-oriented and live project experiences in the beginning, the urban design studio later harbored problem-driven design processes and alternative representation modes. The studio frameworks shuffled between realistic and avant-garde footholds as well as programmatic, contextual or thematic orientations.

4.2. The 2nd Phase: The Dominance of Normative Pedagogy (2001-2014)

Influence of National Agenda: Coastal Design Studios: Peninsula Urbanism

The thematic focus of the studio education between 2001 and 2010 was coastal development in the context of small settlements located at the Aegean coast. Disintegration in coastal, urban-rural transect, uncontrolled developments, and the disruption of the unique spatial characteristics of the settlements were identified as the common problem areas in the context of Türkiye. Bozburun, Alaçatı, Eceabat Bodrum, and Ayvalık were some of the contexts that were integrated within this scope. Coastal design studios were not limited to Türkiye. *Overseas studios* were conducted on Pogradec, Doha, and Kyrenia as coastal towns, besides intrinsic contextual characteristics and problems. These overseas studios reflect an *internationalization* in studio education.

Through these coastal design studios, the relationship between the settlement and the sea, semi-rural characteristics, and the intrinsic features of urban fabric were scrutinized in the context of Türkiye. Conservation and consolidation of the existing urban fabric and establishing a planning and design framework for new development areas and waterfront development were adopted as major strategies. In Bozburun Studio (2001-2002), the conflict between spontaneous development and planning legislations was at the forefront. Design principles to guide the future development in consideration of the contextual characteristics of the town were proposed. Alternative planning and design schemes were produced by different groups accordingly.

Similarly, in Eceabat (2004-2005), transforming the Gallipoli Peninsula into a place of commemoration was identified as a context-driven theme. Integration of urban and rural areas, expansion of the existing settlement, and ecological sensitivity were aimed at besides waterfront development. The following year (2005-2006), Alaçatı located at Çeşme Peninsula was studied within the scope of the studio, taking integration of the center and the coastal area, consolidation of the urban identity, and cohesion between the different user groups were discussed by design.

Form exploration and new typological solutions derived from the existing building codes of the settlement were at the core of the design processes. Decoding urban identity and encoding spatial components into a new system of relations were the major design tactics. (Figure 9)

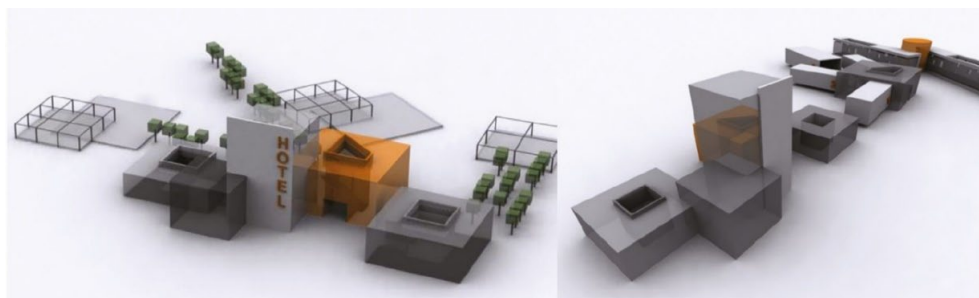


Figure 9 Form exploration based on decoding of existing form relations and encoding as new spatial configuration
(Source: Şentürk, 2016)

Next year, in 2006, the major strategy of coastal development shifted towards *development control* in the context of Bodrum Peninsula. Natural and historical characteristics of Bodrum were delineated in developing a harmonious settlement pattern against the sprawled secondary housing development. Speculative mode of the design studio was reactivated, generating alternative thematic projects from either utopian or dystopian perspectives. (Figure 10)



Figure 10 Selected works on structuralist approach (left) and mega structural approach (middle and right) as alternative development patterns produced with speculative design mode (Source: Kesim & Celep, 2016)

The northern Aegean region was later (2013-2014) taken as a design context as a continuation of the previous experiences on coastal urbanism. The overarching theme of the studio was identified as ‘urban interface’ as a state of transition in space. (Kesim Aktaş & Güldal, 2016). To that end, designing interfaces between the old organic traditional fabric and the new with modern high-rise buildings, between the derelict post-industrial sites and the surrounding urban fabric, and between various uses in the city were major objectives of the studio. A typological approach to urban form and design was reiterated as a design method in restructuring disconnected coastal fabric towards an integrated seaport district. (Figure 11)

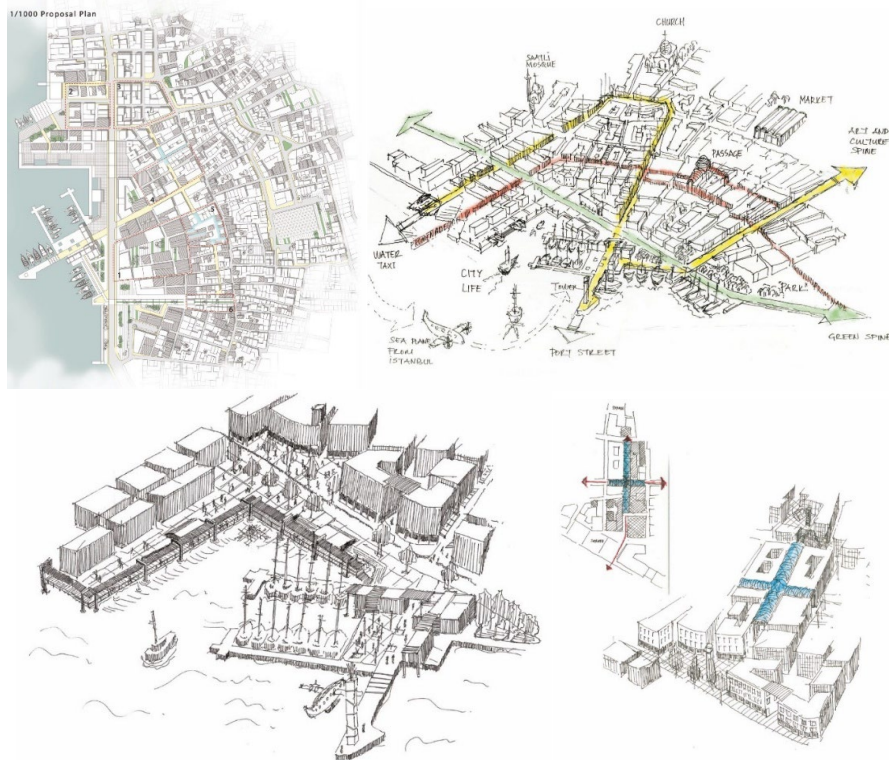


Figure 11 Integration of disconnected core urban fabric through the design of interfaces (above) and utilizing a typological approach in the physical configuration of urban interfaces (below) (Source: Kesim Aktaş & Güldal, 2016)

The same thematic focus was also pursued through overseas urban design studios in international contexts. Among them, the Pogradec Studio (2002-2003) reconsidered the post-socialist urban landscape and the problems emerging from this transition in the cities of Albania

(Alpan, 2016). Land privatization, uncontrolled development, migration, insufficient infrastructure, and unsatisfactory living standards were considered major design problems. Re-organization of the property structure, conservation of the historical core, and redevelopment of a new town center and a new residential district, and transformation of the fragmented urban block pattern to create an integrity via a series of codes and guidelines were studied by design. (Figure 12)

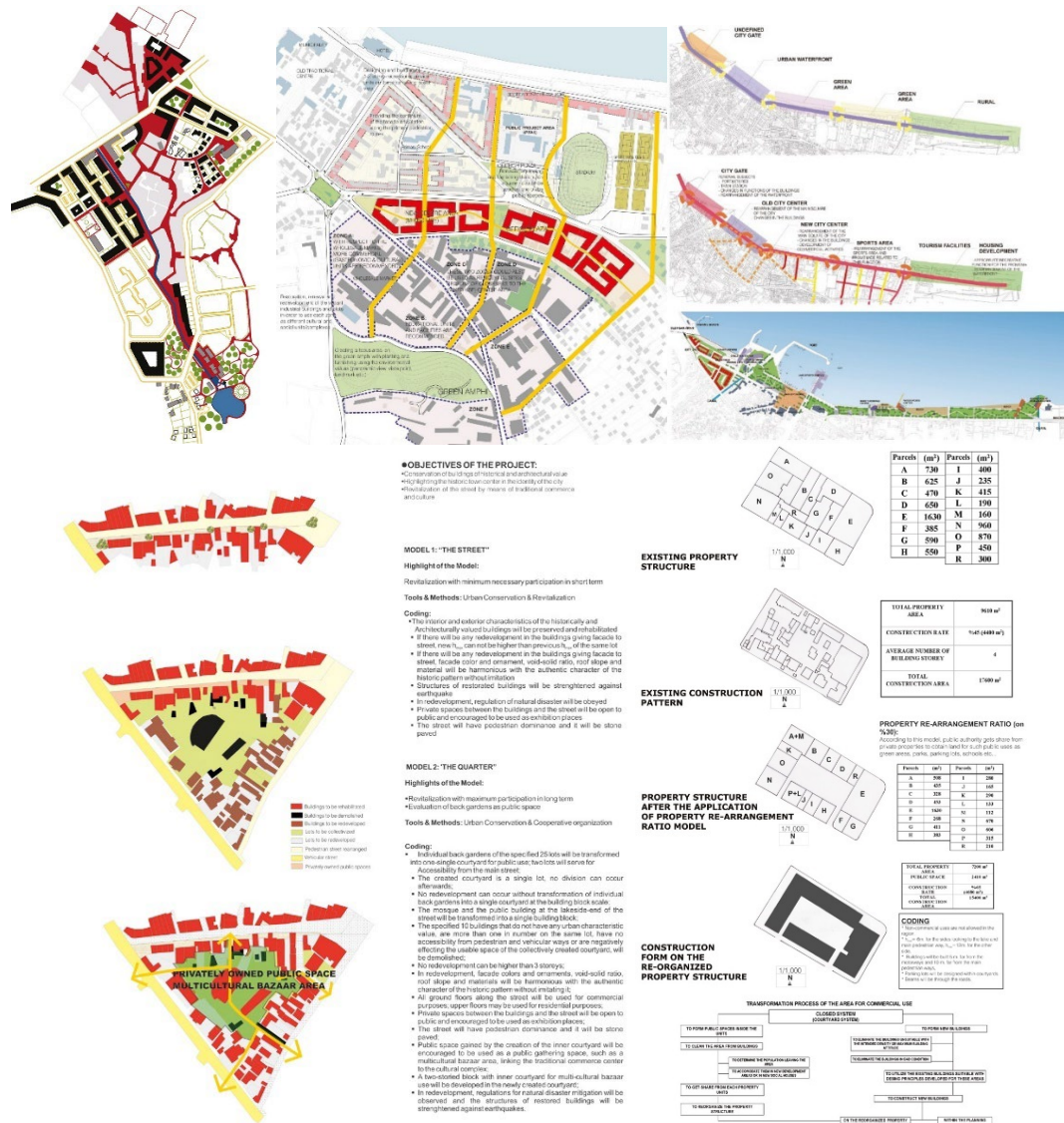


Figure 12 Design proposals for character areas such as the historical core, the new city center, and the lakefront strip (above), and design codes and guidelines for the transformation of the historical core and fragmented urban block formation in an integrated manner (below) (Source: Alpan, 2016)

The following year (2003-2004), another overseas coastal design studio was conducted in the context of Doha, Qatar. The selection of this city was due to the generation of design inventory and brief by the studio coordinators for the international competition organized by the Government of Qatar to transform Doha Corniche into an international center of arts and culture in the Gulf region (Severcan, 2016). Design of a pedestrian strip through the redevelopment and regeneration of the waterfront, enhancing the quality of urban life, and creating a cultural and visual identity were the major design tasks of the project.

As the last example of an overseas coastal urban design studio, Girne, a historic port city in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, was taken under scrutiny in 2009-2010. A comprehensive design study was conducted, including alternative regional structure plans displaying various visions, and a strategic plan on which strategic design project areas were designated. (Figure 11, above) Re-utilization of traditional building typology and infill development in restructuring urban

fabric, as well as configuration of new linear development pattern, were the major planning and design strategies. Detailed design layouts of these designated project areas as well as design codes and guidelines, were provided by the studio. (Figure 13)

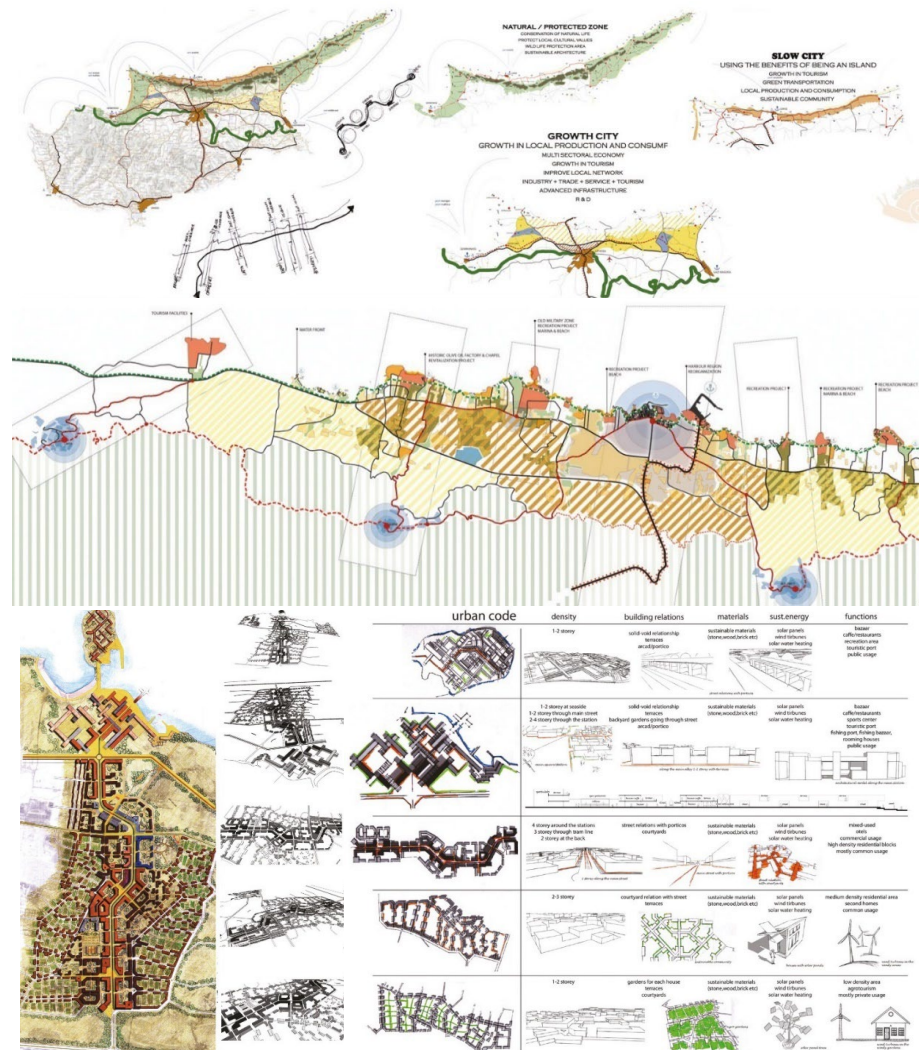


Figure 13 Regional structure plans demonstrating alternative spatial scenarios and strategic plan of Girne on which strategic design project areas were framed (above), and a detailed plan layout of one of the strategic project areas (bottom left) and urban guidelines and codes for developing specific character areas (bottom right) (Source: Memlük et al, 2016)

In conclusion, an accumulated design knowledge on coastal design and ‘peninsular urbanism’ was methodically created between 2001 and 2010 through explorations into thematic coastal contexts by developing planning and design frameworks in various scales, through utilizing various methods, instruments, and representation modes. This essentially could be considered as a response to the actual urban agenda in Türkiye, where intensive tourism developments have taken place through changing rules and regulations as well as incompatible practices, creating disintegration of the rural and urban contexts, leading to rupture in ecological, archaeological, and cultural conservation since the 1970s.

Influence of the Emerging Urban Agenda: Ankara as an Urban Lab

The focus of the studio shifted towards Ankara from the coastal settlements between 2010 and 2013. The commercial center of the city (Kızılay), the planned new town (Batıkent), and Ankara’s railway strip were the focus as design contexts. Among the studios that take Ankara as an ‘urban lab’, the reactive reflex was the most explicit in Kızılay Studio. Between 2000 and 2005 Kızılay and its close vicinity were located at the center of the public discussions in terms of its changing

functional and spatial qualities. Under the discursive theme of 'urban decay', the processes through which the city center lost its identity and characteristics of a central business district were problematized in the urban agenda. At this juncture, Kızılay was analogized to a 'heart' which needs to recover in the urban design studio (Cihanger, 2016). The ways to reproduce Kızılay as a CBD and art district through refunctioning and redevelopment were sought within that context.

The concept of 'heart' took up space in the agenda of the urban design studio for a while between 2010 and 2012 through the morphological study of sub-center development at Batıkent, one of the planned peripheral neighborhoods of Ankara. The studio set its thematic framework as 'urban morphology' based on the intrinsic and diverse spatial characteristics of the planned new town (Kerti & Özınanır, 2016). In this framework, first, a design framework was generated in a broader scope on which the whole studio agreed, then, alternative design proposals were generated via corresponding guidelines for new architectural forms and spatial typologies within each character area in the site. (Figure 14).

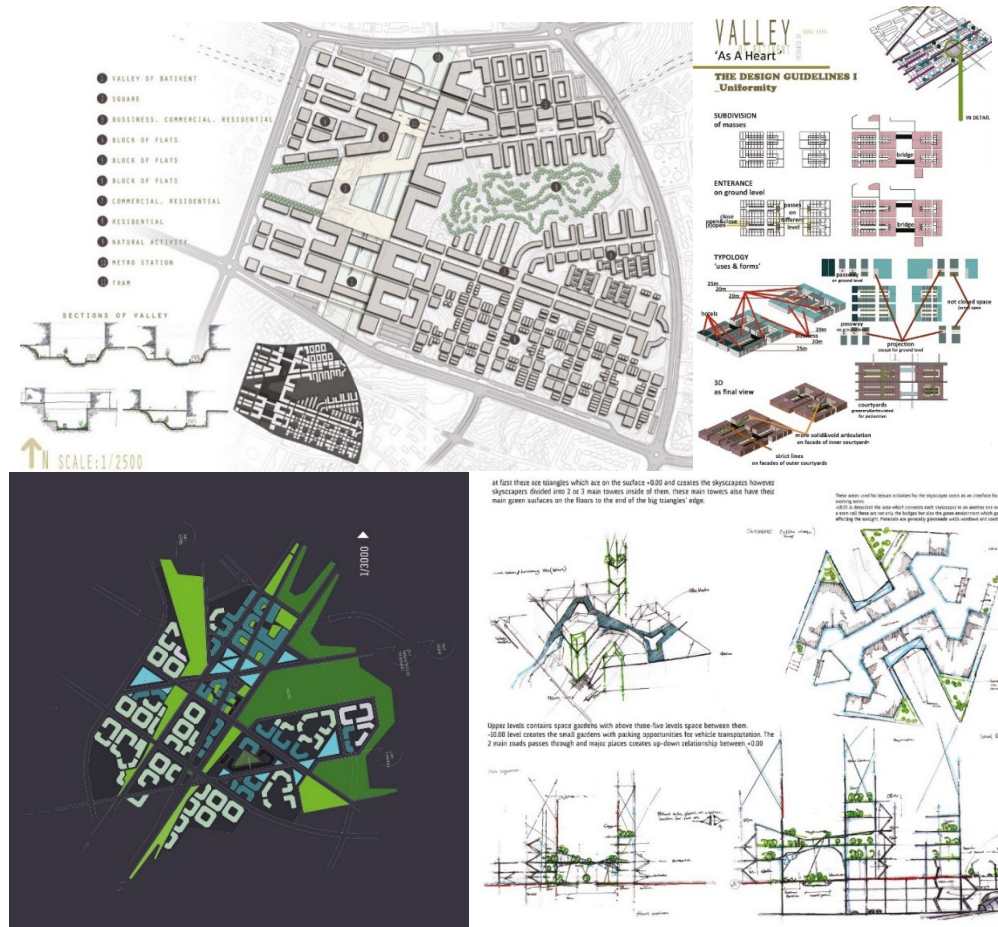


Figure 14 Detailed design proposals for the selected project area (upper left), urban codes for guiding the development (upper right) and conceptual design explorations through architectural forms and spatial typologies (below) (Source: Kerti & Özınanır, 2016)

In 2012-2013 Academic Year, the spatial context of the design studio was identified as the axis of Ankara Railway remained within the settled urban zones of Ankara. Though not explicitly mentioned in the projects, the selection of the theme as a design concept could be considered as a response to the problem of *destruction of industrial heritage* started in the 2000s. In this context, following research on different types of transformation within industrial sites in relation to railway infrastructure, a structure plan for the areas located around the railway line was provided to guide a series of focused design proposals for the designated sites corresponding to certain programs (Şanlı et al., 2016). (Figure 15).

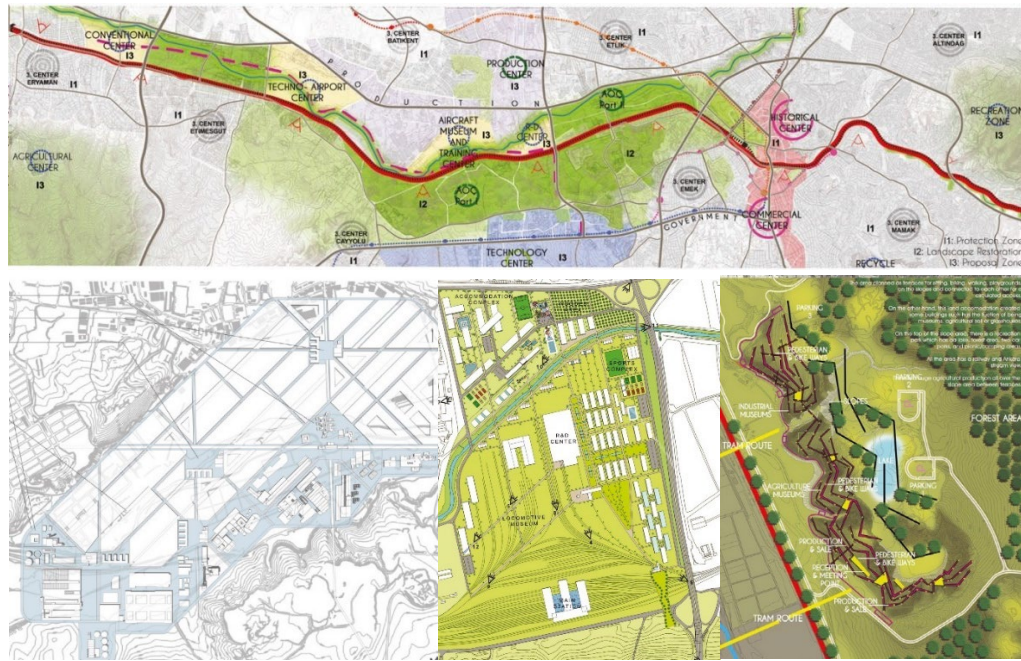


Figure 15 Structure plan including the areas of influence orbiting around the railway (above) and urban design project proposals for the designated program and character areas (below) (Source: Şanlı et al., 2016)

The focus on different parts of Ankara as the spatial context of the design studio indicates an *urban laboratory approach*, which could be traced back to the time when Atatürk Forest Farm was studied in the program's initial years. Finding solutions to 'real world' problems in Türkiye based on the reality of a specific context through situated and experiential knowledge has been a major endeavor in this period (Akkar Ercan & Barlas, 2016). It is noteworthy that in each design studio within this period, a certain reaction is developed to certain actual urban problems and practices. The studios functioned to generate conceptualizations and explore different scenarios and possibilities through fundamental planning and design implications instead of producing reparatory solutions. The major modus operandi of the studio was not roleplaying a practicing office but engaging in new explorations and conceptualizations. This approach paved the way for some radical shifts in the following decade of studio education.

4.3. The 3rd Phase: Explorative Pedagogy Revisited: Meta-Themes (2014-2018)

Via new participations in the studio staff, a certain shift in the organizational aspects of urban design studio education has occurred starting from 2014. The change in the organization of studio education presented both continuities and ruptures. In this regard, the basic approach of studio education and research tradition institutionalized in the first period was harnessed. This included the perpetuation of various tried and tested modes, including speculative design, generation of a knowledge basis on urban form, and formation through design exploration as the major task of the studio. On the other hand, significant changes were introduced in terms of thematic organization and methodological avenues adopted in the studio pedagogy. Within this context, 'design research' as the basic mode of studio education has transcended into 'research by design' within this period.

In this context, Parametric Urbanism Studio' (2014-2015) was the first attempt at setting up a studio framework with highly experimental content and methodology. The studio took the generation of urban form and explored underlying complex yet measurable relations in its morphology. To that end, while *decoding* was utilized to understand the morphology, *coding*, which had already been experimented with during the previous period, was implemented to control the design of urban form (Akman et al., 2016). Following this, form indicators were identified, such as visual and physical accessibility, compositional variety, passive heating, comfort and safety, and functional diversity, to assess diverse relations on a performative basis. One of the novelties

introduced in this period was that the research by design was not conducted based on a specific context or a project site. The abstract language of (de)coding had a very generic character, independent of a certain spatial context. (Figure 16)

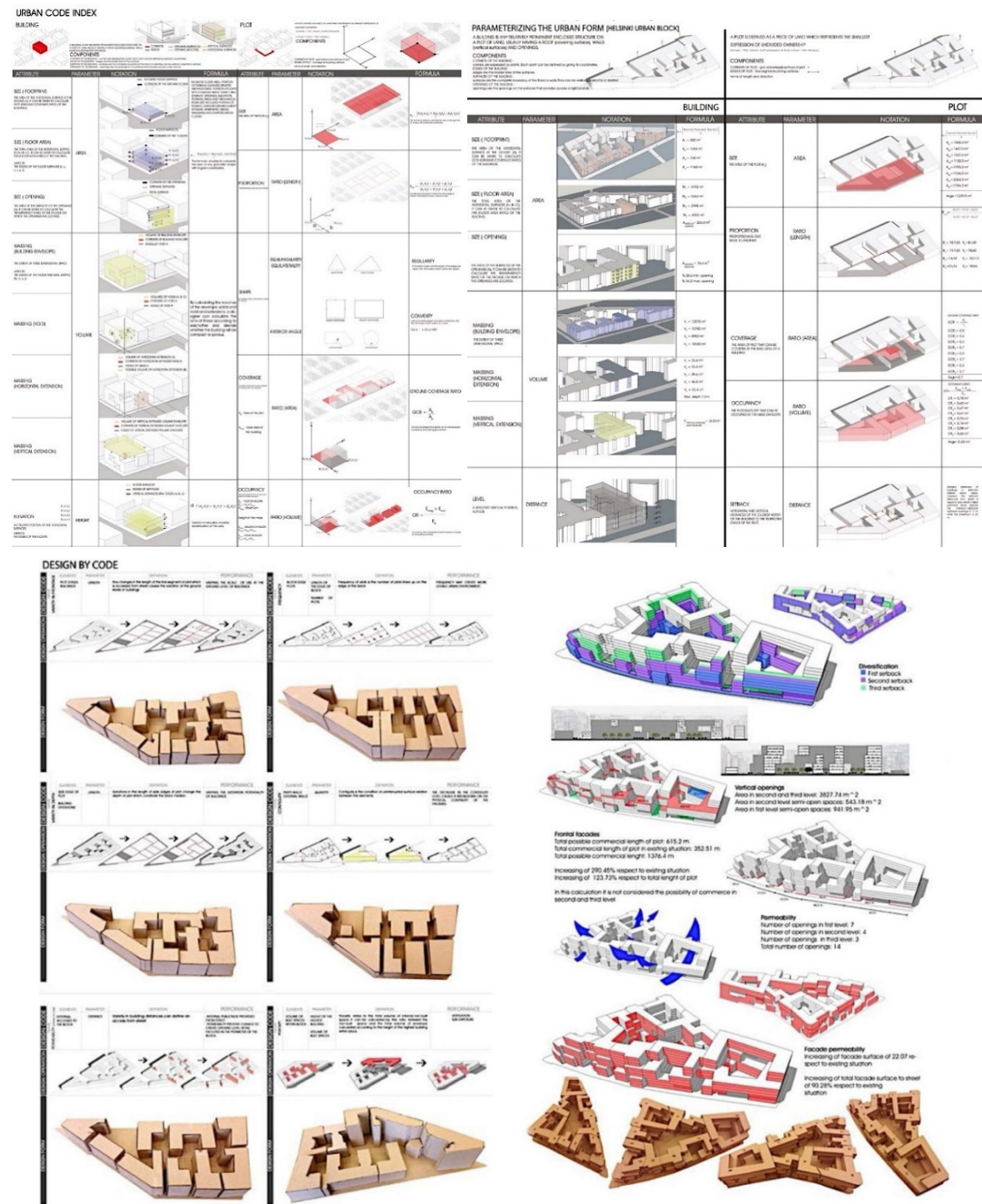


Figure 16 The 'code index' constituting the parametric components of the urban block, plot and the building (above) and some design explorations through parametric operations and form indicators defined in the previous semester (below) (Source: Akman et al., 2016)

In the second semester, certain urban block formations on multiple property patterns in İstanbul were selected to test the developed codes. (Figure 17) In this case, the design context (urban ensemble) was considered just an experimental framework without delving into its socio-cultural or environmental characteristics. The major aim, in this scope, was not to develop site-specific design proposals on programmatic, problematic, or thematic bases, but to test the generative

capacity of the code through ‘form exploration. This implies a non-structured (open and flexible) and *methodology-based* urban design studio pedagogy, integrating design into research.

The following year, through the setting of ‘Futuristic Urbanism Studio’ (2015-2016) the experimental organization of urban design studio was pursued with a twist. In this case, the organization of the studio was *theme-based*. On the 500th anniversary of Thomas More’s Utopia (1516), the utopian tradition in urbanism was reexamined through the lens of urban design. The overall process in the studio was conducted as a form of researching the possible conceptions of future human settlements by futuristic design. In this framework, ‘futuristic thinking’ in design was organized in two phases. In the first semester, students were invited to experiment with the imagination of utopian settlements through fictitious designs situated in an indefinite space and time, approached in a highly flexible manner. In the second semester, however, they were asked to develop speculative design scenarios for the Ankara city-region in 2055. In this case, the specific temporal framework guided the designers toward more tangible spatial forms, which, in turn, could be systematically presented from a morphological perspective. (Figure 18)

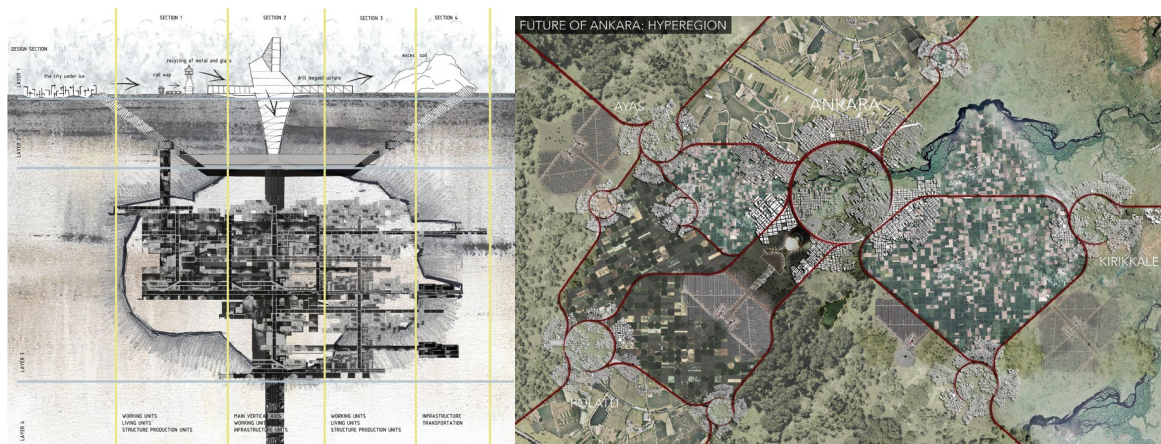


Figure 17 As an example of imaginary design, an underground settlement responding to the future scenario of catastrophic climate change on Earth (above), and the proposed future form of Ankara in 2050, decentralized by the new transportation system of ‘hyperloop’ at the regional scale (below) (Source: Tümtürk, 2016)



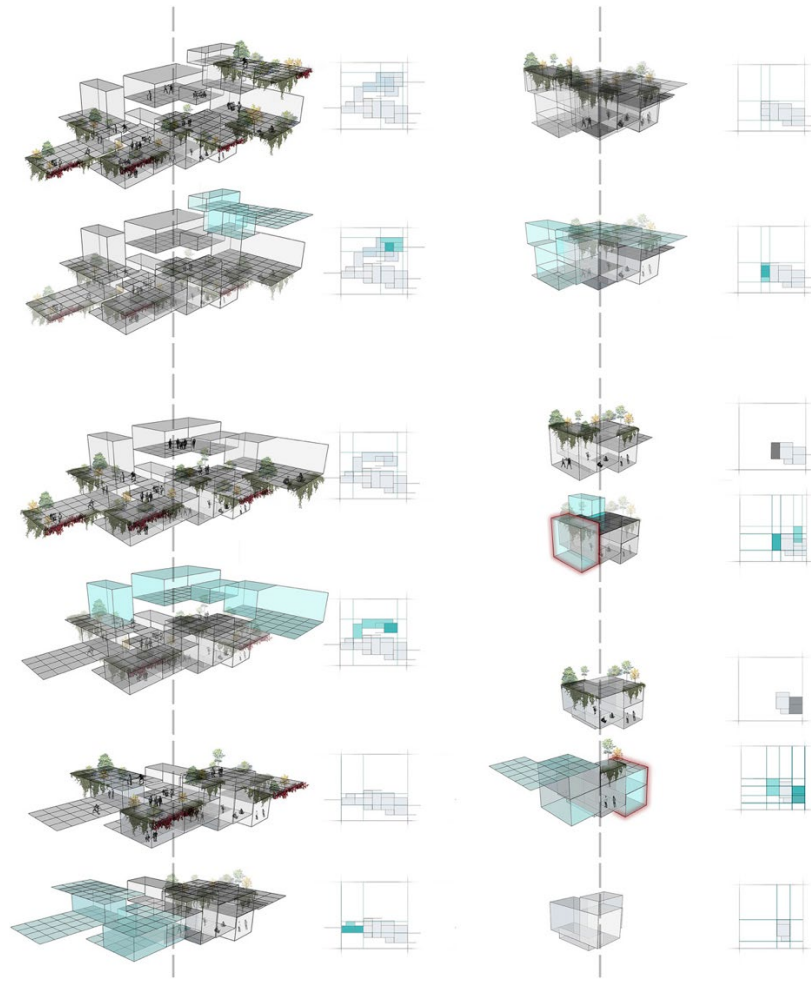


Figure 18 The visual collage, as a conceptual image of an envisioned scenario for Ankara, provided by the designer at the very beginning of the design process (above), and the modular growth of the settlement fabric simulated in progressive phases from the end to the first stage of the formation process (Source: I. Yavuz Özgür's personal archive, 2016)

The alternative mode of thinking, which was not a common convention in contemporary urban design education, has been realized by an alternative procedure based on the 'backcasting' technique. Accordingly, having recognized the difficulty of coming up with a concrete idea of a future form of the city in the far future, the students were asked to generate a visual collage, first, as the conceptual image of the envisioned scenario for Ankara in 2050. (Figure 18 above) Then, the imagination of alternative compositions of the future settlement cognitively would be more practical. In this way, the imaginary form of the city could be re-presented through all the morphological components involved. (Figure 18 below) This method, in turn, has been conceptualized as *imagineering*, a model approach for futuristic design thinking in urbanism (Çalışkan et al., 2020).

The conceptual design skills that the studio experienced during this period were presented to the general public through the Future Ankara | Zukunft Ankara Exhibition, held in the city center in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Ankara³. (Figure 19)

³ Curated by Duygu Cihanger Riberio and Olgu Çalışkan, with advisors M. Adnan Barlas, Z. Müge Ercan Akkar, Cansu Canaran, and Serdar Özbay, the exhibition's participating designers were Y. Baver Barut, Süleyman Demirel, Eren Efeoğlu, Ecesu Eşmen, Astera Galali, Berçem Kaya, Duygu Kalkanlı, Ali Emre Karabacak, Merve Özen, Begüm Sakar, Ebru Şevik, Hatice Taş, Onur Tümtürk, Irmak Yavuz, and Mert Can Yılmaz.



Figure 19 Future Ankara | Zukunft Ankara Exhibition, prepared by METU Urban Design Graduate Program and opened on January 14, 2017

In the ‘Recovery Urbanism Studio’ (2016-2017), the theoretical and conceptual problem framework of the studio had to be replaced with real and acute urban problems. Following the destructive military conflicts taken place within some city centers in the southeastern region of Türkiye during 2015, the subject matter of the design exploration and research was identified as the recovery of the torn living fabrics during the post-conflict processes. In this context, Suriçi, the historical core of Diyarbakır, harshly destroyed after the intensive conflict and systemic ‘clearance’ of the site, constituted the context of the research by design. The major concern of the studio was “regeneration of the dynamism of the everyday life within the intrinsic complexity of the traditional urban fabric, and development of the responsive approaches on physical design and programming in the way of generating proper spatial solutions to enable the productive and creative capacity of the local community” (Çalışkan, 2018). To that aim, conceptual research on conflict and urban warfare was conducted at the outset of the study. Later on, strategic transformation and regeneration models were developed. (Figure 20)



Figure 20 A conceptual model for the recovery of the torn fabric from a contextualist perspective (Source: Çalışkan, 2018)

The semesterly organization of the studio education was unique in terms of developing a conceptual model approach first, then improving this model by delving into the corresponding socio-economic and morphological structure of the peculiar traditional context. Based on everyday life and spatial practices, not only *form* but also *formation* processes as constituents of the urban space were considered as design inquiries.

At the end of the academic term of the 'Recovery Urbanism' Studio took an opportunity to discuss such a politically sensitive issue publicly from an urbanist perspective via a panel titled, 'Destruction, Planning and Design' at METU Faculty of Architecture on 12 May 2017 (Çalışkan, 2018).

The following year, the theme of the 'Peripheral Urbanism' Studio (2017-2018) did not imply an urgent urban agenda, but an actual problematique of sprawl within many rapidly developing cities in Turkey. Among them, Döşemealtı, the emerging peripheral development of Antalya, in this context, was specified as the case study of the studio. Development control on the hybrid settlement forms emerging at the urban and rural interface and defining alternative urban-rural transects to achieve spatial coherency in an ecological setting were the major objectives. Utilization of the property pattern on the cadastral land formed a concrete basis guiding planning and design decisions (METU MUD, 2018). (Figure 21)

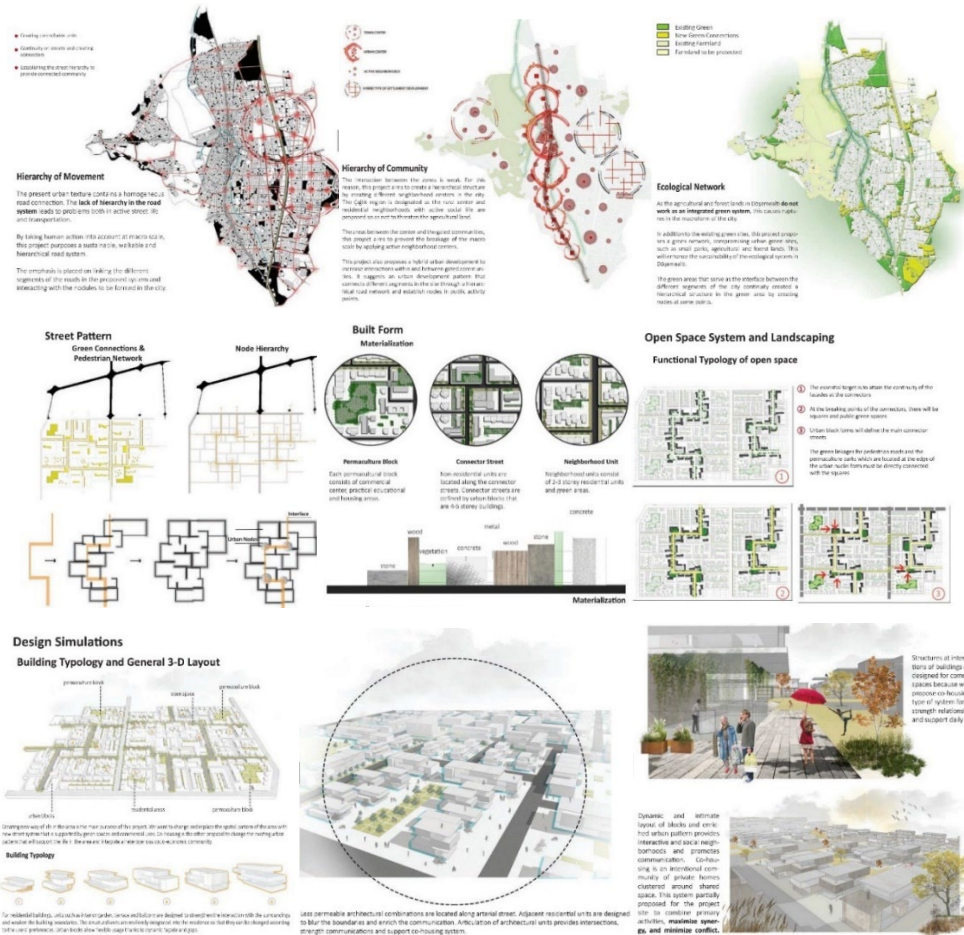


Figure 21 A strategic spatial framework for the urban-rural fringe and selected design principles guiding the alternative development patterns in the periphery (Source: METU MUD, 2018)

In that sense, the studio framework had a realistic standing that could be regarded as a *context-based* urban design pedagogy. Although the intrinsic characteristics of the context led the design conjecture, the predominant design task was form exploration rather than proposing ultimate solutions to the given context. Therefore, the major outcome of the studio was specified as a guideline for the peripheral formation of Antalya's northern metropolitan fringe (METU MUD, 2018). Within this framework, each urban project ultimately defined the design guideline, comprised of a strategic perspective, design codes, and design simulation demonstrating the proposed quality to be achieved by the codes and guidelines.

This second period of METU MUD Studio displayed divergent characteristics. The design context shifted between the real and the hypothetical; the design mode shuffled between the imaginary-utopian and pragmatic design; the geographical framework varied from the historical core to the urban fringe; the design scale diverged from the urban block to the region; the representation mode differed between the artistic expressions and technical drawings; and the studio organization differentiated between *method-*, *theme-*, *strategy-* and *context-based* processes. This period, in this regard, could be characterized by the utilization of the meta-themes along with a series of organizational, procedural, and representational experimentations.

4.4. The 4th Phase: Pedagogies Diversified (2018-2025)

In the following years of the studio, the separation of the general framework of studio courses and the multiplicity of the studio course coordinators on a semesterly basis have led to a formulation of a dual structure. Every semester, the studio focused on a different theme and context with the application of a different methodology. This short-term studio experience could be conceptualized as an "intensive studio" (Çalışkan & Yavuz Özgür, 2023). Despite the divergence

in style, certain continuities and similarities are possible to address based on the thematic organization in the two semesters. As the common characteristics, the use of meta-themes as the overarching studio framework was adopted in both semesters. While the Fall semester⁴ predominantly scrutinizes morphological and temporal characteristics of urban design regarding both form and formation, the Spring semester⁵ has elaborated on the notion of *regenerative urbanism* and sustainability within different contexts during the current period.

Intensive Fall Studio: Explorative Pedagogy | Academy-Stakeholder Partnerships

The Intensive Fall Studio displays some similarities and differences with its counterpart in terms of the thematic construction of studio education. Similar to the Intensive Spring Studio, the studio organization was governed by a meta-theme that mostly focused on problematic urban contexts such as industrial zones, cities after the earthquake, or derelict post-industrial brownfields. One of the differences is that this thematic framework entailed a *programmatic weight* in the formulation of the design framework. Rather than suggesting a comprehensive planning and design perspective to the specified context, the Fall MUD Studio aims to develop alternative programs from a morphological perspective. In this regard, the context is not considered as a subject matter to work on, but a relevant ground responding to the specified problematic content (i.e., productivity, creativity, ephemerality, or adaptive capacity of the city). Such a perspective categorically rejects the idea of a pre-defined scalar framework and determines the scale levels (frame and grain) according to the specified problematique and program in the urban context. Therefore, the works of the Spring Studio are called 'design research' rather than 'design project' since the studio aims to generate generic design ideas that would work as 'design toolkits' to other similar contexts, rather than producing optimal *solutions* to the given specific context.

Organizing the studio collaboratively with other graduate programs and research institutions has been a characteristic factor of urban design education within the MUD Spring Studio. Starting from 2019, three studios were run as a *joint studio* that was established with the institutional partnership of METU MUD (UD501) and METU March (Architectural Design Research) Studio (ARCH505). Additionally, Policy Analytics Lab (PAL), a consultancy and think-tank based in Ankara, established a multi-disciplinary collaboration to inform urban design with social and economic policies and participated in studio discussions. In this way, an interdisciplinary setting required for urban design education was aimed to be provided (Çalışkan & Yavuz Özgür, 2023).

From this perspective, between 2019 and 2021, three different organized industrial zones (OIZs) were taken as the focus area of the studio. As the first design experiment, two industrial districts located in Ankara (OSTİM and Başkent OIZs) were taken as a context to discuss the next generation of techno-industrial districts by design in Fall 2019. While one of them represented the industrial development integrated into the city fabric, the other was problematized as the segregated type of industry generating new urban developments in the periphery. The same thematic perspective was further elaborated for Manisa OSB, which is one of the oldest and largest OIZs in Türkiye, located adjacent to the city. (Figure 22)

⁴ Coordinated by Prof. Dr. Olgu Çalışkan.

⁵ Coordinated by Prof. Dr. Müge Akkar Ercan.

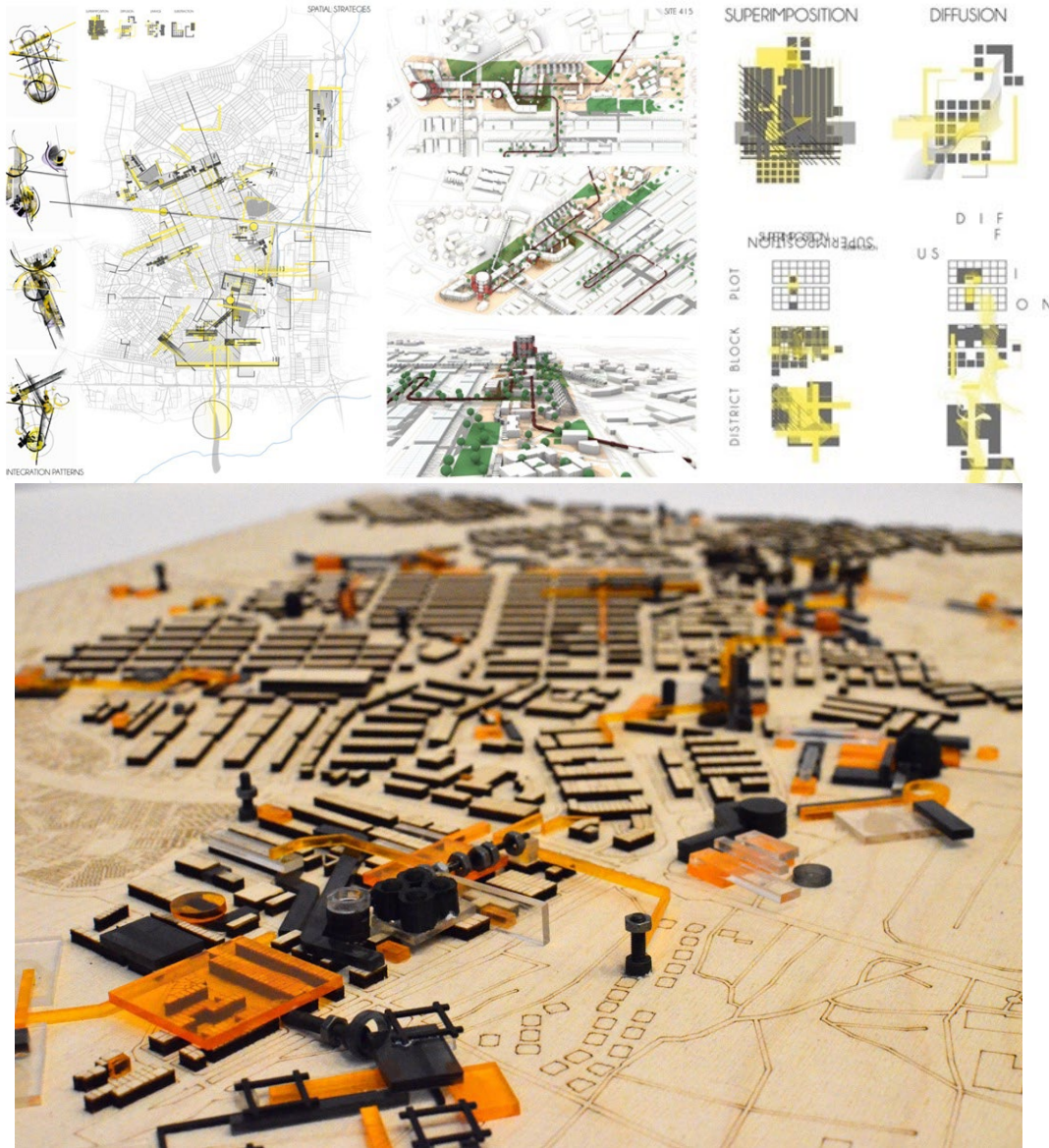


Figure 22 A selected project from the MUD Fall ‘Industrial Urbanism’ Studios: Morphological design tactics to generate hybrid (mixed-use of manufacturing, office, and living space) form-complexes to blur the boundaries between the organized industrial zone (OIZ) and the surrounding residential fabric (Source: Çalışkan & Çağlar, 2023, p. 183-188)

Within the Industrial Urbanism Studios, some responsive program approaches were formulated on how the productive capacity of the industry could be evaluated in a way that would also regenerate the city under the title of ‘productive urban space’. In response to the complex nature of manufacturing within OIZs, characterized by multi-property patterns and dynamic modal transformations, the design research aimed to develop alternative models of intervention based on controlled incremental changes and hybrid spatial-programmatic configurations. The task of generating design frameworks was combined with developing policy perspectives in the multi-disciplinary setting of urban design studio to not only ensure higher economic productivity but also create new life-patterns (re)incorporating the urbane and the industrial in the same context (Çalışkan & Çağlar, 2023, p. 175-269).

The overall discussion on the issue studied during two semesters within the studio was extended into the public domain with the *International Symposium on Industry, Spatial Planning and Design for Productive Cities*, held online in collaboration with AURA Istanbul on November 20, 2021 (AURA Istanbul, 2021).

In Fall 2022, a similar theme, Post-Industrial Urbanism, was adopted in the context of Alsancak, İzmir. Taking old post-industrial heritage sites located in the back sites of Alsancak Harbor as a design context, the studio mainly searched for a new programmatic structure to generate a productive cultural district for creative industries in İzmir. Then again, the studio mainly focused on designing alternative programmatic frameworks fitting to the peculiarities of the context, rather than designing a spatial fabric as the main 'design outcome'. In this regard, the proposed collective fabric was not considered the starting point for the design process, but a result of the search for responsive programs of the creative industry. (Figure 23)

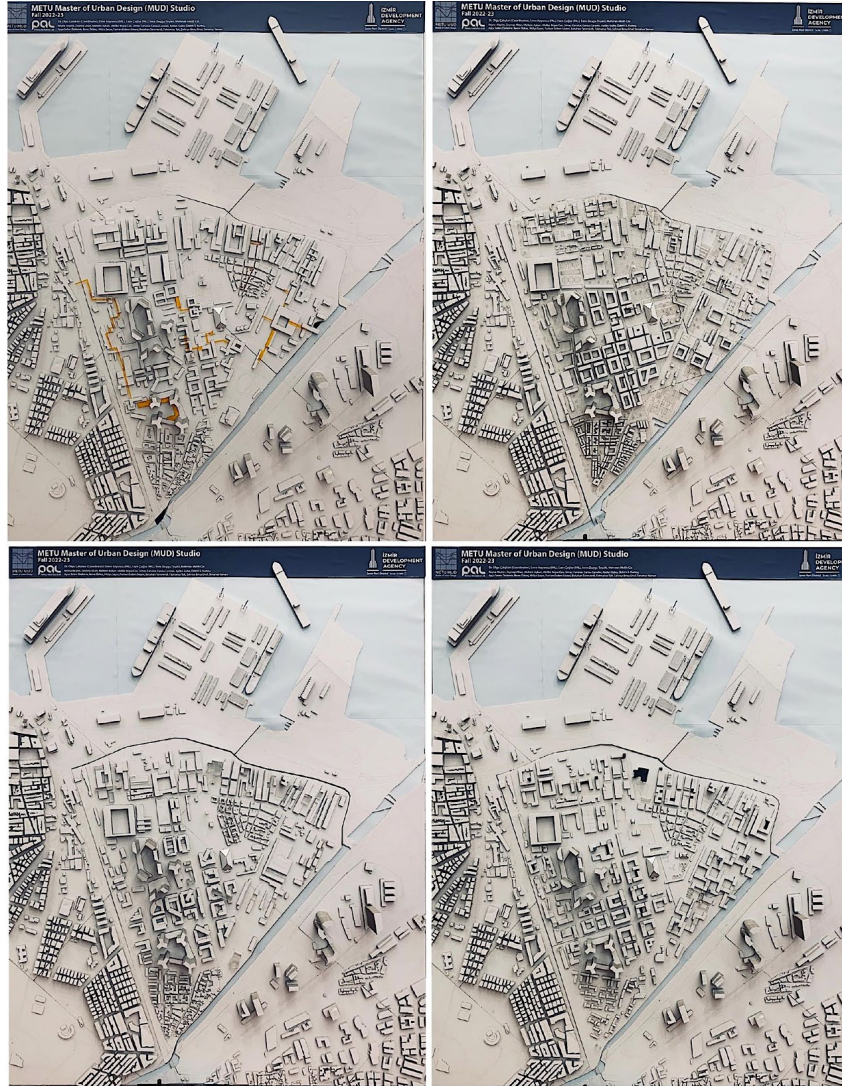


Figure 23 'Post-Industrial Urbanism Studio' (Fall 2022-23): The solid models of four alternative development scenarios suggested after programmatic urban coding studies (Source: O. Çalışkan's personal archive, 2023)

Intensive Fall Studio: Normative Pedagogy | Emergency and Crises (Re-activated)

Despite a series of crises and emergency conditions during the last few years, requiring urgent and focused interventions rather than holistic perspectives, the determination of a meta-theme for each semester's design research has always been the case for METU MUD Studio. During the Fall 2020 Semester, in this sense, 'Transient Urbanism' Studio tackled the issue of temporality of the urban programs and space in the search for economic and social resilience in the very context of very high uncertainties due to COVID-19. Pandemic, therefore, provided an opportunity for exploration of the concepts of ephemerality and spontaneity from an urbanistic viewpoint.

The second crisis was a natural disaster. Following the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes, which affected 11 cities destructively in the region, 'Recovery Urbanism' was reintroduced by the studio

in Fall 2023, in continuity with its counterpart experimented in the context of Suriçi, Diyarbakır in 2026-17 Academic Year. In the first design research for the post-disaster recovery, the modern center of Antakya that had been severely damaged after the earthquake was taken as the case study area in coordination with METU Master of City Planning Studio in the 2023-2024 Academic Year. Inheriting a long urban history dating back to the Roman period, the city faced a stark dichotomy between preserving its urban tradition and meeting the urgent need for rapid reconstruction following the destruction of its core.

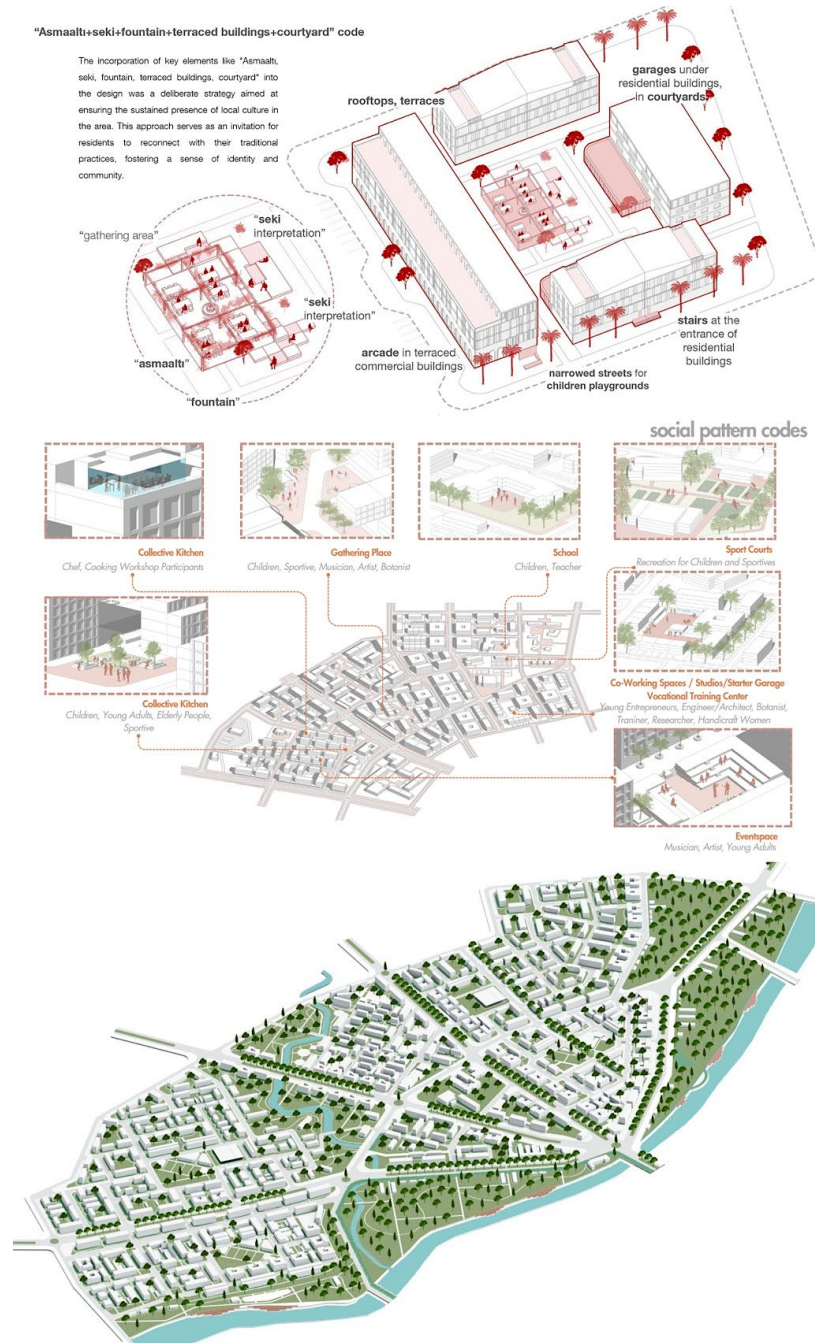


Figure 24 Code-based experiments on how the urban block can form a ground for social gathering, reproduction, and sharing through the post-earthquake recovery process (above) and the corresponding collective form simulated based on the palette of the predetermined typologies for a resilient urban fabric (Source: Çalışkan, 2024, p. 63-64)

To respond to this problematic condition, the MUD Fall Studio aimed to generate a dense and both morphologically and functionally diverse fabric of the city center of Antakya. To that end, a typomorphological approach was adopted to generate a coherently varied urban fabric, in contrast

to the uniform mass housing schemes implemented in post-earthquake cities. The proposed design of the quarters was guided by codes derived from established behavioral patterns once embedded in the traditional fabric. (Figure 24)



Figure 25 A new morphology for Kahramanmaraş City Center, in the search for diversity within unity through standard modularity of the ‘mass-production’ / total design approach (middle), and a bottom-up perspective based on a series of local building codes (below), simulated by design as a critique of the current state of the art in Kahramanmaraş (top) (Source: O. Çalışkan’s personal archive, 2025)

Systemic exploration of the built fabric alternative to the mainstream production of urban land during the post-earthquake period in Türkiye continued following a critical reflection of the first post-earthquake ‘Recovery Urbanism’ Studio. In 2024-2025 Academic Year, the studio re-iterated the same question in the context of Kahramanmaraş City Center, where its fabric was seriously torn down after the earthquake. To transcend the standardized character of the new fabric, the studio suggested two strategic perspectives for alternative modes of production and explored their possibilities within the context. Accordingly, 1) *total design Approach* by the corporate production of a mega-structural fabric, and 2) pluralistic approach: collective production of the ‘multiple fabric’ through plot-based design control. (Figure 25) Both alternatives were articulated in the research on the programmatic codes of the central services in the downtown area. The alternative models have

been utilized as a critique of the actual plan implementations within the site in Kahramanmaraş (METU MUD, 2025a, b, c).

Intensive Spring Studio: Normative Pedagogy Under the Influence of Global Agenda

The intensive Spring studio had a multiple contextual focus while introducing certain thematic and methodological frameworks. Between 2018 and 2023, Cappadocia was identified as the main spatial context of the design studio. In the earlier study (Spring 2019), an *agent-based* planning and design approach was adopted in the context of this natural heritage setting under the theme of 'Regenerative Urbanism'. One methodological difference in this study was focusing on the needs, assets, resources, and values instead of problems of space as a starting point in the design process (Akkar Ercan, 2019, p. xi). Within this framework, the research and design process sequentially entailed (I) the selection of human or non-human generic regenerative agent applicable to any context; (II) making a research on the regenerative theme or agent; (III) identification of the ways to accommodate the agent in a given locality; (IV) identification of the local values and needs; (V) developing design vision and strategies based on a scenario; (VI) developing design proposals; (VII) generating design rules. (Figure 26)

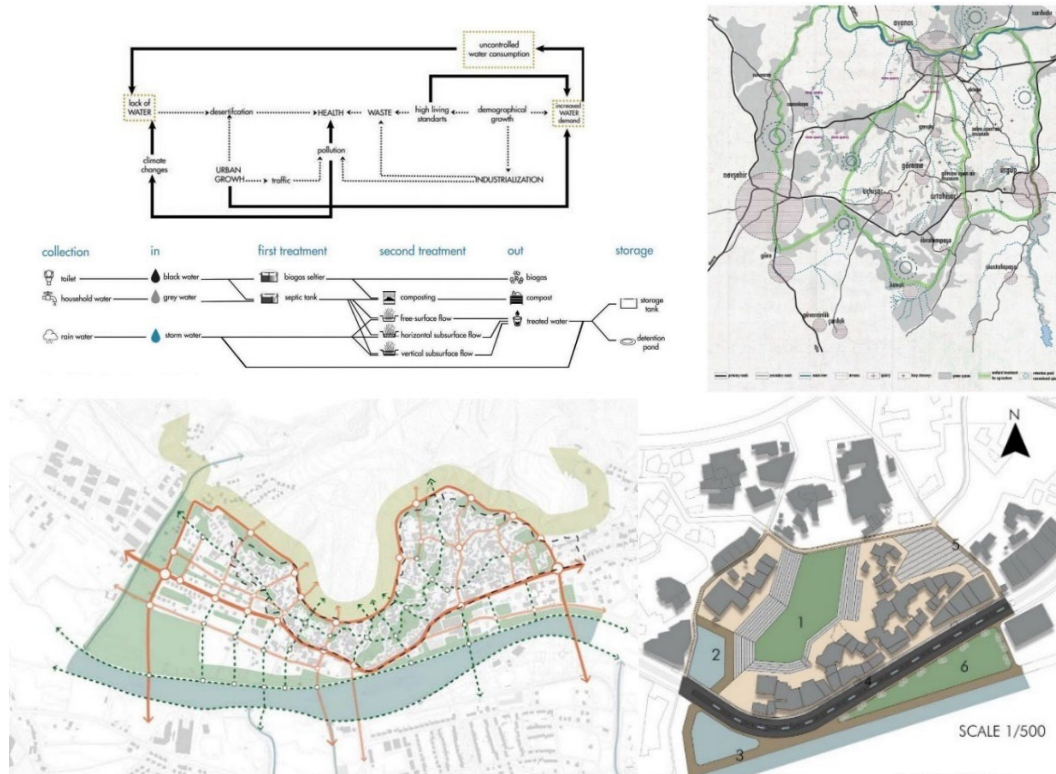


Figure 26 The thematic and contextual research on the generative agent (above) and strategic design proposals (below) (Source: Akkar Ercan, 2019)

The selection of a generic regenerative agent at the outset of the design process reflects a *theme-based* organization. Therefore, design scales and outputs of the design process for each study were based on the specified 'generative agent'. Therefore, each study created its own perspective within the established thematic framework.

In the following years, the Intensive Spring Studio exclusively focused on the theme of 'Sustainable Urbanism', mainly in the context of the Cappadocia region. Nevertheless, the agent-based approach and the design methodology were maintained. Within this framework, it was aimed to think about new ways of living and developing sustainable urban and rural systems and practices. In detail, the major design tasks included researching sustainable living and working environments, designing public and private spaces drawing on sustainable tourism, and developing conservation and regeneration strategies (Akkar Ercan, 2020). (Figure 27)

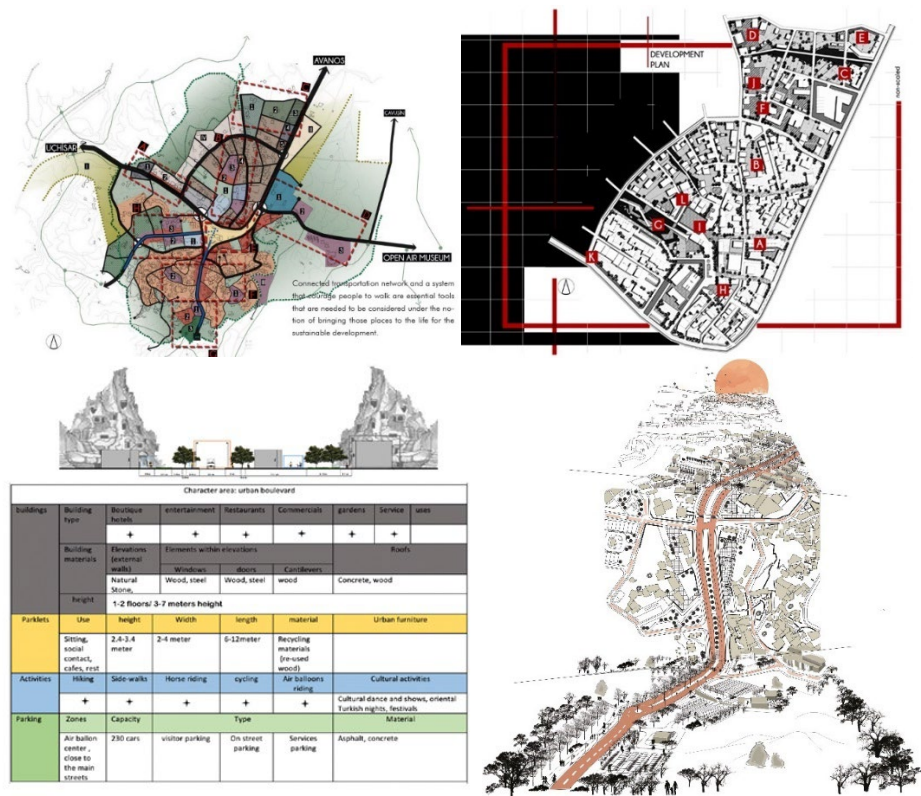


Figure 27 The methodological continuity as to specification of the generative agent and contextualization on the macro scale (above), the generation of a strategic design proposal along with design codes (below) (Source: Akkar Ercan, 2020)

Alternatively, the spatial framework was re-identified in the context of Ankara (Spring 2021) under the theme of ‘Sustainable Green Urbanism’ (SGU) and İzmir (Spring 2024) with a thematic focus of ‘Sustainable Resilient Urbanism’ (SRU). Although the design context changed, the emphasis on sustainability as the overarching globally relevant thematic framework was pursued in these studios with nuances.

The origin of the problem was attributed to global crises, including “growing population, consumption, production, migration, environmental degradation, global warming, biodiversity loss, sprawling land consumption patterns, and the COVID-19 pandemic” (Akkar Ercan, 2021, p. 19). Within that scope, Çayyolu, a peripheral neighborhood that grew rapidly with mass housing, commercial service facilities, and isolated large educational campuses through a fragmented pattern, was examined in the context of Ankara during Spring 2021. Based on the same conceptual framework, the student groups generated alternative spatial restructuring scenarios for the designated macro-scale plan frameworks. Later, detailed design proposals were developed for the strategic parts designated within the larger context. (Figure 28)



Figure 28 Spatial development scenario at the macro scale and the specification of strategic sub-design area (above), detailed design proposals, agent-based design codes and simulations (below) (Akkar Ercan, 2021)

Grounded on this problematic framework, Çiğli, a peripheral neighborhood on the northwestern part of the İzmir Bay, was specified as the design context of the studio in Spring 2024. In this regard, sustainability and resilience in the design of residential districts and public spaces were considered as integral components of the regeneration process. (Figure 29)

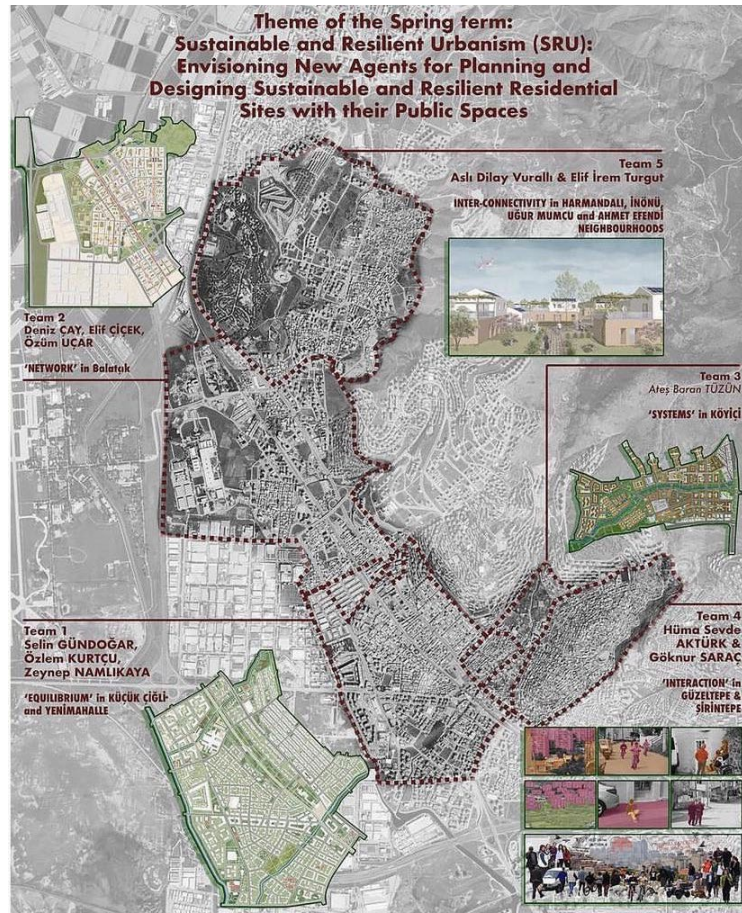


Figure 29 Designed residential districts as segments of the macro design context of Çiğli, İzmir, in SRU Studio⁶

The Intensive Spring Studio presents the execution of a settled thematic and methodological framework in various contexts, with a special focus on Cappadocia. While values, assets, and resources of this natural heritage region were considered as the basis for developing an agent-based sustainable design framework, the problems associated with the peripheral areas of the rapidly growing Turkish metropolis, such as Ankara and İzmir, constituted the ground for this approach. A top-down comprehensive perspective aiming to control the context holistically from large-scale to smaller, focused areas, and prioritizing the systemic analysis for design, in this sense, could be specified as the basic characteristics of the design pedagogy of the studio.

Within this context, although the overall pedagogical organization of studio education is diversified between explorative and normative pedagogy, the underlying factors of normativity varied between *academy-stakeholder partnerships* (i.e., industrial and post-industrial urbanism), *global thematic influences* (i.e., recovery, regeneration), and *emergency and crises* (i.e., transient and recovery urbanism) at both the national and international contexts.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Our previous research (Yavuz Özgür & Çalışkan, 2025) identified three broad pedagogical orientations in urban design education—*pragmatic*, *normative*, and *exploratory*—which reflect the field's inherent diversity. Building on this foundation, the present study argues that pedagogical approaches are not fixed but evolve in response to changing contexts and institutional dynamics. Contrary to the assumption that design education is inherently slow or resistant to change, the findings from METU MUD reveal a relatively rapid and adaptive transition among different modes of studio teaching. Each pedagogical orientation is supported by distinct organizational frameworks shaped by the interplay between the prevailing urban agenda, the stakeholders involved, the

⁶ See: <https://crp.metu.edu.tr/en/announcement/mud-20232024-final-jury>, accessed in September 2024.

agency derived from the background, expertise, and orientation of the studio coordinators, as well as the design process itself.

At METU MUD, studio education has evolved through four distinct phases, each reflecting shifts in institutional priorities and pedagogical intent. In its formative years, the program was closely aligned with the practical demands emerging from within the university, particularly from administrative units and affiliated offices in which the coordinators themselves were actively involved. This alignment fostered a pragmatic pedagogy, characterized by live projects and direct engagement with real-world problems. Initiatives such as the Technopark and university campus development projects exemplified this mode, bridging academic inquiry and professional practice while equipping students with applied design skills.

Nevertheless, this pragmatic orientation did not characterize the program exclusively. In the subsequent period, pedagogical focus shifted toward *normative orientations*, shaped by broader urban challenges and the repercussions of crises such as natural disasters. In some instances, collaborations with local governments in post-disaster contexts led to the organization of design studios; in others, coordinators' critical engagement with pressing urban issues—such as coastal transformation or contested development processes in Türkiye—guided studio agenda and pedagogical direction.

Within these contexts, exploratory tendencies also emerged, particularly as studios shifted their focus from problem-solving to envisioning alternative urban futures. Studios operating in exploratory mode functioned as critical and reflective responses to real urban conditions, generating conceptual frameworks and speculative scenarios rather than immediate design solutions. Over time, the studio's principal modus shifted from emulating a professional office to cultivating a space for experimentation and conceptual development, paving the way for significant pedagogical shifts in the following decade.

The second phase of the program was marked by expanded experimentation in design context, scale, and method. Studio work alternated between real and hypothetical settings, blending pragmatic and utopian design approaches. Geographical foci ranged from historical cores to peripheral territories, and scales extended from the urban block to the regional level. Modes of representation diversified—from artistic expression to technical documentation—and the design process oscillated among method-, theme-, strategy-, and context-based frameworks. This period is therefore characterized by a strong emphasis on meta-themes and a willingness to explore new organizational, procedural, and representational forms.

In the third phase, studio education developed a more pluralistic and flexible structure. The separation of studio courses into distinct frameworks and the rotation of coordinators each semester resulted in a dual system. Each semester centered on a specific theme and context, employing varied methodologies within what could be described as intensive studio practices. Despite these variations, certain continuities persisted, most notably the consistent use of meta-themes as overarching frameworks. Typically, the Fall semester addressed the morphological and temporal dimensions of urban form and formation, while the Spring semester focused on the role of agency within regenerative urban processes across diverse contexts.

Within this structure, pedagogical orientations oscillated between exploratory and normative modes, depending on partnerships and contextual priorities. Collaborations extended across multiple scales and domains—from academy–industry and academy–local government partnerships to engagements with cultural institutions, think tanks, and other academic programs. These collaborations not only enhanced students' representational and analytical capacities but also opened studio work to broader public discourse through exhibitions and joint research, reinforcing the exploratory dimension of the pedagogy.

The findings suggest that neither external expectations nor real-world collaborations alone determine pedagogical orientation. Partnerships with public or private actors did not automatically yield pragmatic modes of education. Instead, the interplay of the mode of collaboration and the agency of the studio coordinators, their intentions, expectations, and pedagogical philosophies, played a decisive role in shaping the direction of the studio. For instance, collaborations with institutional bodies in the early period produced pragmatic, practice-oriented studios focused on deliverable outcomes, whereas similar partnerships in the later phase were reframed through an exploratory lens without immediate real-world implications. This demonstrates that pedagogical modes are contingent upon the interpretive and strategic choices of educators as much as on external conditions.

It should also be emphasized that these pedagogical modes are not entirely discrete or mutually exclusive. Elements of normative thinking may surface within pragmatic frameworks, just as exploratory thinking can emerge within normative approaches. Rather than fixed categories, these modes represent dominant orientations shaped by the overarching aims of the design process, its intended outcomes, and the evolving contexts in which they are situated.

Ultimately, the evolution of METU MUD's studio pedagogy demonstrates that urban design education operates as a dynamic system continually reshaped by changing urban agendas, institutional frameworks, and intellectual orientations. Its pedagogical shifts—from pragmatic to normative to exploratory—reflect the program's capacity to engage critically with practice, to reinterpret the role of design in addressing urban complexity, and to sustain an ongoing dialogue between experimentation and application.

Future research could extend this study by comparing pedagogical shifts across other urban design programs to test the generalizability of the patterns identified here. Further work might also examine the influence of student agency in shaping, negotiating, and reinterpreting pedagogical frameworks. Investigating how these interactions affect student learning outcomes would provide a more reciprocal understanding of design education. Moreover, future work could address how evolving institutional partnerships, community-based collaborations, and hybrid digital environments shape alternative pedagogies in urban design education.

References

- Acar, Y. (2016). METU Kosovo Campus design project In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 134-139). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Akkar Ercan, M., & Barlas, A. (2016). Urban Design Beyond the Borders. Olgu Çalışkan (eds). *Catalogue.01: METU MSC Urban Design Studio (1996-2016)*. METU Faculty of Architecture publication. Pelin Ofset: Ankara. pp.11-16.
- Akkar Ercan, M. (Ed.) (2019). *Regenerative urbanism*. İDEALKENT.
- Akkar Ercan, M. (Ed.) (2020). *Sustainable urbanism: Envisioning new agents for planning and designing sustainable space*. İDEALKENT.
- Akkar Ercan, M. (Ed.) (2021). *Sustainable green urbanism: Envisioning new agents for planning and designing sustainable green spaces in Ankara*. İDEALKENT.
- Akman, D., Uysal, B., Kurum, I., Uzunoğulları, E., & Başak, M. (2016). Ruling the city: Parametric urban design coding. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 176-183). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Alpan, A. (2016). Pogradec urban project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 90-97). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- AURA Istanbul. (2021). *AURA symposium: Industry | spatial planning | design for the productive spaces* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAcEM6ADCXQ&list=PL2BKzkLHqq-edEhBFzgD_nx-NhV7ZNw8F (Accessed in September 2025).
- Baş, Y., Kızıldaş, A. C., & Baş Bütüner, F. (2016). METU Northern Cyprus Campus planning and design project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 76-83). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Burat, S., & Aksel Gürün, B. (2016). Atatürk Forest Farm urban design project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 52-57). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.

- Cihanger, D. (2016). Kızılay urban design project: Reproduction of Kızılay as a central business and art district. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 148-155). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Cuthbert, A. (2011). Urban design and spatial political economy. In T. Banerjee & A. Loukaitou-Sideris (Eds.), *Companion to urban design* (pp. 84-96). Routledge.
- Çalışkan, O. (Ed.) (2016). *Catalogue 01. METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016*. METU Faculty of Architecture, Pelin Ofset: Ankara.
- Çalışkan, O. (2018). *Çatışma, planlama ve tasarım / Conflict, planning and design*. METU Faculty of Architecture.
- Çalışkan, O., Tümtürk, O., & Yavuz, I. (2020). Imagineering: A model approach for futuristic design thinking in urbanism. *Urban Design and Planning*, 173(1), 1–33.
- Çalışkan, O., & Yavuz Özgür, I. (2023, May 25). ODTÜ Kentsel Tasarım Yüksek Lisans Programı: Stüdyo eğitime yönelik retrospektif bakış [Conference presentation]. 31. *Kentsel Tasarım ve Uygulamalar Sempozyumu*, İstanbul, Türkiye. <https://msgsu.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Program-1.pdf>
- Çalışkan, O. (2024) Deprem sonrası şehirciliği için bir model arayışı [Searching for a model for post earthquake urbanism], *Arredamento Mimarlık*, 2024(03-04), 61-64.
- Çalışkan, O., & Çağlar, E. (2023). *Üretken kentler için endüstri, mekânsal planlama ve tasarım / Industry, spatial planning and design for productive cities*. İdealKent Yayınları.
- Dagenhart, R., & Sawicki, D. (1992). Architecture and planning: The divergence of two fields. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 12(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X9201200102>
- Gunder, M. (2011). Commentary: Is urban design still urban planning? An exploration and response. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31(2), 184-195.
- Gürler, E. (2016). Gölyaka post-earthquake urban design project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 64-71). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Kamalipour, H., & Peimani, N. (2019). Towards an informal turn in the built environment education: Informality and urban design pedagogy. *Sustainability*, 11(15), 4163.
- Kerti, E., & Özınanır, I. (2016). Urban morphology and design explorations in Batıkent. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 156-163). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Kesim, B., & Celep, S. (2016). Bodrum Peninsula urban project & Başakşehir urban design competition. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 120-127). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Kesim Aktaş, P., & Güldal, G. (2016). Urban interface & design explorations in Ayvalık. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 170-175). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Lang, J. (1983). Teaching planning to city planning students. An argument for the studio / workshop approach. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 2(2), 122_129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X8300200208>
- Long, J. G. (2012). State of the studio: Revisiting the potential of studio pedagogy in U.S.-based planning programs. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 32(4), 431_448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X12457685>
- Madanipour, A. (1997). Ambiguities of urban design. *Town Planning Review*, 68(3), 363.
- Memlük, N. O., Songülen, N., Kimyon, D., Arın, G., & Sarıkulak, S. (2016). Northern Cyprus coastal planning and design project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 140-147). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- METU MUD. (2018) *Döşemealtı design guideline: Envisioning new urbanities for the metropolitan fringe* (Unpublished report). https://issuu.com/metumud/docs/dosemealti_design_guideline_metumud (Accessed in June 2018).
- METU MUD. (2025a). *Bir uygulama eleştirisi: Kahramanmaraş kent merkezi projesi – An implementation critique: Kahramanmaraş city center project* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKyPb2H8R7A> (Accessed in September 2025).
- METU MUD. (2025b). *Kahramanmaraş kent merkezi için alternatif tarih anlatısı 01 – Alternative history narrative for Kahramanmaraş city center 01* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LQ7Grc4o4> (Accessed in September 2025)

- METU MUD. (2025c). *Kahramanmaraş kent merkezi için alternatif tarih anlatısı 02 – Alternative history narrative for Kahramanmaraş city center 02* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp7y4LVdKbc> (Accessed in September 2025)
- Şanlı, H., Demirel, Ş., & Sevim, E. (2016). Urban transformation and design explorations along Ankara Railway. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 164-169). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Şentürk, M. (2016). Alaçatı urban project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 114-119). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Tümtürk, O. (2016). Envisioning the city: Design explorations of the future urban forms and spaces. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 184-191). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Ünlü, T., Zorlu, F., & Levent, T. (2016). METU TEKNOPARK planning & design project. In O. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Catalogue.01: METU Master of Urban Design 1996-2016* (pp. 29-41). ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Yavuz Özgür, I., & Çalışkan, O. (2025) Urban design pedagogies: An international perspective. *Urban Design International*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41289-025-00271-w>
- Zeybek, O. (2025). History of landscape architecture education: Evolving curriculum through global perspectives. *Journal of Environmental and Natural Studies*, 7(1), 15_32. <https://doi.org/10.53472/jenas.1592769>

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Irmak Yavuz Özgür: Research Design, Methodology, Investigation, Data Analysis, Conceptualization, Visualization, Writing—original draft. Olgu Çalışkan: Research Design, Supervision, Conceptualization, Data Provision, Validation, Writing—review and editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee permission is not required.

Resume

Irmak Yavuz Özgür is currently a Dr. Lecturer at TED University Faculty of Architecture and Design. She received her BSc degree in City and Regional Planning (2015), MSc degree in Urban Design (2018) and PhD degree in City and Regional Planning (2025) at Middle East Technical University (METU). She worked as a research assistant at İzmir Institute of Technology in 2016 and at TED University between 2016 and 2023. Since 2023, she has been working as a Lecturer at TED University, Faculty of Architecture and Design. To date, she has participated in various seminars, symposia, workshops and exhibitions both as a contributor and organizer at METU and TED University. After the completion of her doctoral thesis titled "Urban Design Education: Institutional Models, Curricular Formations and Studio Pedagogies," she continues to expand her research on urban design pedagogy and thinking at an international scope.

Having completed his PhD in Urbanism at TU Delft in 2013, Olgu Çalışkan has since served as a professor of urban design and morphology in the Department of City and Regional Planning at METU. His publications include guest editorials for Built Environment (2011, 2022) and articles in leading journals such as the Journal of Urban Design (2010, 2022), Urban Design International (2012, 2020), Urban Morphology (2017), Habitat International (2023), and Cities (2024). His research focuses on physical planning and design, urban morphology, urban design theory and methods, parametric urban design, and industrial urbanism. As coordinator of METU's Master of Urban Design program, he leads the MUD Studio in the Fall semester and teaches courses such as Creative Thinking for Planners, Parametric Urban Design, and Collective Housing Planning and Design. Since returning to Turkey in 2014, he has served on numerous national and international design juries and contributed to award-winning projects, including the Konyaaltı Waterfront in Antalya (2015) and Taksim Square in Istanbul (2020).