SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2021

English edition

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The interviews on the subsequent
pages bring up four keywords in
approaching a diploma project:
coherence, responsibility, complexity
and innovation. The answers, given
by teachers who are members of
the UAUIM leadership board and/or
presidents of diploma juries, highlight
the diversity of the ways in which
students could interpret and follow
these criteria after their own fashion.

The diploma in four keywords. Interviews

Univ. Assist. Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ PhD Arch.

Prof. **Marian MOICEANU** PhD Arch.

Rector of "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning

What does the diploma represent from the point of view of the student's entire academic trajectory?

It is essential that the teacher and the student should understand, first of all, that the diploma project is the crowning achievement of continuous effort over at least six years of study and that it is the result of the knowledge accumulated during the years at the university, in the interaction with the teachers and through individual study.

Students should acknowledge the fact that the diploma is also a competition against oneself, that is to say, a personal project in which you want to prove to yourself and to an international jury, since the panel includes foreign as well as Romanian teachers, that you are worthy of the architect diploma. If the desire to prove this is absent, an error has been committed from the start. This is because in the diploma project the student architect should aim to demonstrate that they understand and love architecture and they should convey some of their knowledge to others.

The diploma is also an important event for the teachers, an opportunity to note the level of the university and of the students' competence. Not all juries are the same, just as not all students are equally knowledgeable. There are juries in which the students' projects are not so well developed and juries in which the presented projects have great complexity. This has always been the case. This is why it is important to have the final discussions in which the members of the jury, both Romanian and foreign, meet and attempt to briefly describe the students' level of competence, the subjects/themes they have come across in their panels, the difficulties and the positive and less positive aspects, before concluding with praise, criticism and recommendations. The university, its teaching staff, take all this into account and they attempt to improve the curriculum, the approach, the themes, etc.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

Coherence is first of all found in the way of conceiving the curriculum. This is why I would answer with a comparison. Before 1989, the university curriculum relied on covering a number of architectural programmes over the six years of study. Our university was a very pragmatic and functionalist one in which competences were acquired through the coherence of a hierarchically arranged study of the different architectural programmes. After 1989 and following a period of searching (and of course, stronger international connections) there was a shift of paradigm, in the sense that it was considered that architecture could be taught, learnt and understood by starting from the aim of acquiring competences specific to the architect and urban planner profession. As Dean, I was the one who formulated, on the basis of the 11 competencies of the architectural profession stipulated at the European level, the six competencies that appear at present on the graduation diplomas. Continuing tradition, the leadership of the "Ion Mincu" School of Architecture unequivocally stated that they intended to prepare students in the course of the six academic years so that they could acquire these competences and be ready, on graduation, to work in architecture, design and urbanism studios or in related fields that require the mastery and practical application of these competences. This pragmatism has never been abandoned by the university. I believe that ensuring the continuity of the educational approach is the main reason for the influence and competitiveness of our university. The very high number of graduates who work in prestigious architectural bureaus and who are known precisely for this pragmatic approach to architectural issues testifies to this competitiveness. Coming back to the coherence of the curriculum, it is worth highlighting that the design studio is given most weight since the credits and the hours allotted to it make up more than 50% of the curriculum. I would also say that the coherence of the approach is given by those who conceive the directions of development of the university, its orientation and the main areas of interest. We are talking about deans, heads of department and to the level of the coordinators of each design studio or of each discipline.

On the other hand, coherence must also be understood by the student. The coherence of the curriculum, of the manner in which the themes are expressed and of the way in which the student is asked to respond to them in the course of the six years of study should be reflected in the approach and in the coherence of the student's work on the diploma project. Coherence must also be sought and programmed. It starts with the choice of theme, with the analysis of situations and the formulation of questions, with the argumentation and with the artistic, expressive presentation of possible answers. All of this ensures the coherence

of the theoretical approach and the coherence of the discourse, which are thus capable of sustaining the student's answer as developed in the diploma project. This is why I tell my students from the very beginning that the choice of theme for the diploma project must be theoretically grounded in the dissertation. I explain to them that our artistic gestures must be contained within the scientific analysis and within a theoretical, sometimes even philosophical, framework. At the beginning, one must "dig deep", study, analyse and then one must try to understand.

The student must feel the need for this coherence, but the teacher should also pay attention and ensure that this requirement is met. In the absence of this coherence, projects may easily become dull and lack clarity and vision as well as complexity.

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

Architecture solves problems by responding to various needs: the need for beauty, the need for integrating the new with the old, the need for continuity in the city, the need for functionality, expressivity, etc. The student must understand these things and this comes gradually, through an understanding of architecture.

As teachers, we lay emphasis on the study of architecture at university as well as on individual study. In the course of the six years, we tell students about integration, specificity, identity, expressivity, function etc. We make the case for these values to the best of our ability. But they can all remain mere words in someone's vocabulary unless they are understood and applied in the university assignments or in the diploma project. When this happens, it means that we have done our duty and that the student has understood the responsibilities of the architectural profession.

I think responsibility also comes from realising that the diploma project is the culmination of all the knowledge acquired so far. Responsibility is also proved by the student's attitude towards the act of teaching, towards what is being taught, but also by the manner in which they wish to persuade the jury through their project.

Responsibility today, more than before, derives from an understanding of the need for sustainability, the need to respond to contemporary problems, or from the necessity of an identity for any architectural gesture. It is good when these kinds of problems are solved through the diploma project. As teachers, we encourage this type of diploma project, a less spectacular one perhaps but which tackles a present-day issue in depth and suggests solutions that are feasible for the community.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

I would rather say where the errors are made. Sometimes students think that the site or the choice of theme, the function, the architectural programme have to be sizeable. And they choose concert halls, stadiums, museums. Yet complexity is not purely a question of size, most often it consists in the complexity of the approach, of the way in which you, as a student, come to analyse and to propose new concepts via the dissertation, the pre-diploma and the diploma. In reality, the project can be small-scale with regard to surfaces, heights, volumes as long as it is pursued to a high level of detail.

The teacher and the student must decide together upon the theme of the diploma project, on the programme and its dimensions, depending on the student's abilities and potential. Here the teacher plays an important role and has the responsibility of leading the student to an area where they can achieve maximum results and stretch their abilities.

The complexity of the approach should also be reflected in the final result. It is odd when one only encounters this complexity at the level of verbal expression and in the oral defence of the student's ideas, when it is not contained in the project itself, expressed and presented in the graphical manner specific to architecture, for example in plans, facades and sections. Yet sometimes a section can be more relevant than an architectural perspective and reveal a lot about a student architect's understanding and control of space...

Complexity consists of this entire process in which you analyse and understand before finally arriving at a personal architectural proposal that you present and defend in front of a specialist panel. And when a student has reached the stage of defending a project in which they truly believe, it means they have already started to understand and accept the purpose of their profession.

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

Innovation is a must, in architectural creation as in other fields. It is not enough to limit yourself to citing or adopting illustrious examples or to the answers given by others. The architect is a scientist, but also an artist and thus they create and innovate. This is why innovation is also a must in research papers: dissertation, diploma, or doctoral thesis. It is simply that innovation does not happen by itself, in the absence of

analysis, knowledge and understanding. To innovate, you should know what has happened in the field so far; this would mean knowing a great deal of things, refusing some and believing in others and then starting to interpret and to develop them in your own manner. Innovation presupposes the ability to judge the valuable things that have been achieved so far, the noteworthy experiences of the past, and it continues with a new, personal and unique contribution to the sum of time-tested achievements.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

The diploma gives the students an opportunity but also the enormous responsibility of proposing a coherent, personal and innovative architectural answer to all the discontent and criticism they express, sometimes forcefully, in relation to the approaches and results of others. The diploma project gives them a chance to prove to themselves and to the members of the jury that they can create better architecture than others. They have the chance to prove that they have earned their architect diploma.

It would be wonderful if in the future, after a long career in the architectural field, the graduates of today would discover on reviewing their personal evolution that they have managed to become the architects of their own lives.

This is what I wish for my students.

Prof. **Tiberiu FLORESCU** PhD Arch.

Vice-Rector for Academic Development, Institutional Image and Student Relations

The four keywords – coherence, responsibility, complexity and innovation – perfectly capture the key elements of the diploma and what the diploma represents, at the end of architectural studies. From my point of view, they refer to a double issue: the diploma project is in equal measure a reflection of the school of architecture and of the student – it is the expression of the ultimate study aims of all the graduates, of each of them individually and of all together. What I mean is that the responsibility for high-quality diplomas is shared by both parties. In my view, attaining the values encapsulated by the four keywords must be ensured first of all by the framework provided by the university for the development of this process called the diploma. I am not referring simply to the defence. The defence is the final stage, the moment of public debate and shall we say ...of public display ...of the student's qualities, of the future architect, in front of a jury that certifies the completion of their studies. Like the closing of a circle, this moment completes the student's trajectory.

The diploma, in the end, is an exam – let us not forget it. This means that everything you say, all the statements you make, the demonstration you give to the jury, illustrated by the project, is part of your exam performance, which is also a test of maturity. The diploma represents after all proof that the graduate has acquired the necessary knowledge and graphic expression abilities as well as the ability to persuade a jury. It demonstrates maturity by means of the work conceived and carried out by the student, which is presented as their personal vision in relation to a problem they have identified, constructed and solved by means of the diploma exercise, supported by the dissertation.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

The coherence of the approach represents the coherence of a trajectory, the continuity of approach or the continuity of interests (in the course of the pre-diploma foundational study, the pre-diploma, the dissertation and the diploma). During such a long process, which begins from the identification of a problem in a particular place and continues in directions linked to general issues of that specific place, of that particular context, or linked to the need for a particular programme

that arises from different considerations and so on, the coherence of the process or of the undertaking can be preserved by retaining the same objectives, which must be constantly pursued through the solutions that the student brings up for debate. Not necessarily through the result or through the actual solutions. The concept can change, but the perspective on the objectives should always be the same, with a focus on understanding the need to which the project must respond and on the accurate and complex diagnosis of the context where the intervention is made. The analysis of a site or a context is done by extracting the important elements we relate to, for which we seek solutions. The coherence of the approach is ensured by relating to these problems; it is not a question of formal coherence. It is important to steadily pursue the elements identified at the foundational study stage and which can be connected to certain functional, economic, social, cultural, contextual needs and so forth. The answers to all these needs … and even to the same need… can be formulated in different ways, through different projects, through different concepts. A study of different versions, as required in the pre-diploma not so many years ago, presupposed two alternative approaches, two solutions, which enabled students to formulate the problem differently and to grasp the fact that in architectural creation the first thought, the first concept is rarely the best and thus, you must have the stamina to examine the alternatives in relation to the same requirements.

It will never be said that your undertaking is not coherent just because you change the solution or you come up with an alternative solution or with a new concept that you trial and experiment with, not as long as this undertaking is the one that has led to the new alternative, which means that it relates to the same functional requirements, to the same theoretical elements, not as long as it responds to the same needs etc. So coherence is about the main features of the approach to the subject, not about the form of the answer. Coherence is given by the means used and by your way of thinking, by the perspectives from which you approach the subject.

I place a strong emphasis on the initial stages of the project, that is to say, on the foundational study on the theme, on the theoretical grounding (the dissertation) and on the pre-diploma. If these stages are well understood in themselves and if they are carefully and perhaps even enthusiastically covered, it is impossible that the resulting approach should not be coherent. It becomes incoherent from the moment when these first stages are not taken seriously and the essential elements to which the project must respond are not clearly identified. There is every risk then for the entire undertaking to become incoherent because crucial elements that the project should respond to are lost to view.

Not least, the coherence of the approach could be maintained through a certain personal touch that the student can impose from the start; if, from the very beginning, they aim to approach the problem differently and if they do this consistently, then this can indicate a certain coherence.

First, they must assume the responsibility that this project represents them and belongs to them. The diploma project should constitute the highest-quality answer they are capable of giving. If the student thinks that they would be able to do more or to say and demonstrate more, then it means that they do not show sufficient responsibility given the importance of this moment of their professional life. So they must give their all, but they must also assume responsibility for the fact that everything they show, the solutions they present belong to them and that the potentialities of the project reflect their thinking. I am referring to aspects connected to contextual framing, the relationship to the city, to urban issues, to the theory of architecture as well as to technical aspects, the maturity of the architectural language, etc. All of these together, in their project, make up the quintessence, and the responsibility is theirs with regard to the personal, original or innovative answer they give, which turns it into a unique, authorial project. The supervisor only has the role of directing and guiding them. They must identify and make the most of the student's best qualities in order to channel their efforts and to guide them, both in the choice of subject and in the process of solving it.

Subsequently, the relationship between the responsibility and complexity entailed by the project is an aspect that must be carefully considered by students because the responsibility is theirs with regard to the choice of subject. With less complex subjects, the results will also be less eloquent; with challenging subjects that reflect the real problems of the society we live in, the impact of our actions on building a better-quality existential framework will come up for discussion and the degree of complexity will also be different.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

A diploma project is complex when it offers answers related to a particular context and to specific constraints and not simply an answer related to a programme. A project is complex when it can answer a question one formulates from any of the perspectives taught in school, so it must touch upon: urban issues, architectural theory issues (discussions on space, volume, light, colour, materials and so forth), issues of architectural technique or technology, social issues (whether as a response to a society-wide problem or from the perspective of particular type of users, whether they are older, they have a physical illness or they

belong to a particular socio-professional category etc.). A diploma that does not refer to any problem and that does not touch on any issues connected to the environment, to sustainability, to urban design, to history, etc. is not sufficiently complex. A winery, a craft workshop, not even an airport is complex enough if it does not refer to these aspects. A dwelling can be a complex diploma project if it refers to these aspects and if it reaches the point where the coherence of the project and thus of the thinking moves from the object to the detail, from the context to the object, from the community to the context. And then it can indeed be a complex, coherent project which also brings a degree of innovation. But if one of these elements is absent, I do not think that complexity can truly be attained.

Let us not confuse a complicated or large-scale project with a complex one! Complexity is attained through issues that refer to all the architecture fundamentals. The importance of the programme, its surface, its degree of formalisation in the project are not a direct reflection of complexity. Sometimes complexity derives from a certain simplicity, too. An exceptional synthesis of a place, understood in a particular way, renders a diploma complex, but such an approach is far more intricate than the creation of a complex diploma by means of the multitude of issues it highlights and responds to.

> Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

I would define innovation in the diploma project firstly as a personal interpretation and a personal answer. Innovation refers to a very great extent to the personal contribution, the individual vision that must not necessarily be innovative in the sense of inventing something or of discovery but in the sense of a new look, a fresh look, anchored in the reality of our society or of the place where the intervention is made.

Innovation may consist in identifying a particular problem, in the specificity of a solution, in an answer, an intervention that can be made today in a manner that differs from the past, in the answer given in relation to different types of users, or in responding to contemporary trends, aiming at a modern way of using space, etc. There are many areas where innovation can occur. Innovation can refer to form, to exterior design, to urban composition, to the combination of materials based on the knowledge of their technological attributes, to the association of materials, to new facade solutions, etc.

Yet innovation can only be implemented on the basis of a previous thorough study. It can only appear as a result of highly detailed knowledge …And, at any rate, innovation cannot be really introduced for its own sake. I would not advise students to seek innovation at any cost. It

occurs when the answer they produce is focused on major components of the identified problems; it most often comes naturally, straight from the solution. It is not a purpose in itself. We state that diploma projects must have this component to ensure that students pay constant attention to the specificity of the answer. True innovation occurs when they understand the problem very well, as a result of in-depth study. Innovation is also a result of the coherence and complexity of the project.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

The advice I would give them is to take this diploma project most seriously because regardless of their academic trajectory (I am referring to their results, the marks), the diploma is a landmark project. It is the project that represents them at least until their first great architectural success – winning a competition, building their first projects. It is the most eloquent project that they will show everywhere and that they should be proud of. So, from this perspective, they should be highly invested in the diploma. The diploma is an important stage. It is an important stage because, in the understanding of most people, it reflects your level when you graduate from the university of architecture. This is what you start with.

I would advise them to choose their subject and their supervisor carefully so as to accomplish a project that truly represents them and not to be content with little, thinking that it does not matter. It matters a great deal! It matters a great deal what university you graduate from and it matters what projects you have completed. In life, there are two necessary (but not sufficient!) conditions for professional recognition: to have a degree from a good university and to have a portfolio of very good projects. Our university has an excellent reputation. It enjoys considerable international recognition and its students should be happy and proud that this is the case. This is connected to the quality of the teaching and of the teachers and students in general. So the first condition is met. The second depends on the qualities of each student and of each individual project. My recommendation is to treat this with utmost seriousness and dedication, especially in the diploma, so that they can truly consider that what they have there, in the proposals they make, the problems they discuss and which they solve and illustrate through the project, represents the highest degree of professionalism they are capable of.

Prof. **Simona MUNTEANU** PhD Arch.

Vice-Rector for Academic Operations Management

The diploma is the last academic project. So we enjoy the total freedom of not being constrained by a social commission and of demonstrating what we are capable of, with an inventiveness pushed to the utmost. ...Or it is the first project of responsibility in which I, as an individual, demonstrate what I have learnt and I attempt to integrate all the knowledge, abilities and competences acquired at university by putting them to work in this, shall we say, first mature project. I think the truth is somewhere between these extremes. Both approaches can be equally correct. I think a lot depends on each student's personality and that it is important that they define their position, the status they want to give to the diploma, especially in the interaction with the supervisor.

I can say: I want this to be my last academic project! I am not bound, I have neither financial nor thematic constraints ...So I have this total freedom of choosing the subject, the theme, the site, the approach and so on.

Or the more practice-focused, more responsible, more mature students can view this stage of their professional life as their actual debut in the professional world and in this case the diploma project is a kind of visiting card which attempts to integrate what they can do. It may be the most interesting element of a professional portfolio.

...But it is not about the purpose. It is about the degree of freedom and the methodology chosen together, in the supervisor-student team. This is because we, as a university, have defined specific objectives for the diploma project and thus each supervisor, each teacher develops their own didactic activities in relation to redefined themes, connected to their work – in the disciplines they teach or in their professional experience.

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The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

I think this answer has three parts. The first concerns attitude: the extent to which the student constantly relates to the diploma. As a jury member, I often encounter final-year students at three stages – the foundational study, the pre-diploma and the diploma – and every time I see students whose consistent approach resulted in a coherent perspective because this consistency, in one way or another, drove them to learn, to study the topics in greater depth and to revise. Of course, we have the other extreme as well where students work in stages, that is to say, they treat the subject as if it consisted of three unrelated deliveries.

The second part is the way in which they select the theme. The question that arises is: what determines students to take up a particular theme? Are they interested in a particular field, do they want to study an architectural programme in greater depth? Are they interested in a particular place, a site that has perhaps obsessed them throughout their studies …or perhaps a place that is representative of their personal experience? …Or a combination of the two. I would relate this again to coherence: attachment to the theme or to the motivations that led to its selection for the diploma prove or give a certain coherence to the approach because it presupposes investigation, and investigation, in one way or another, presupposes a methodology that generates a coherent approach to finding the solution.

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

I always try to bring students to the practical level in the Urban Law course I teach in year 5 and so we arrive at discussions related to responsibility. These discussions have made me realise that responsibility is generally viewed by our young students as a millstone around their very frail necks. I do not think that the students have a very clear sense of their responsibilities, yet making them aware of these at the diploma stage would render the process very difficult because they do not understand them. I think that students should rather be helped to realise that precisely everything they propose, the results of their work, of their study represent an attitude, an opinion that they must argue for. In the event that this attitude leads to particular results they need to understand them and to derive lessons from this experience.

The students are at a psychological stage of evolution where they view any kind of limitations as constraints and not at all as reference points

that can lead them to assume certain attitudes and so they would need, in fact, clearer ethical guidelines. The methodology I mentioned earlier could apply here as it involves some responsibilities from the start – the fact that they must carry out a particular task prompts a reaction and an action, which means they assume that stage.

There is another aspect that should fall under the notion of responsibility: understanding competition. We live in a very competitive university and this is positive, but I think no clear distinction is drawn between competitiveness and competition. The student competes with their colleagues; they do not set professional reference points that they wish to attain; they do not have ethical, moral or professional goals that they aspire to; they do not have a career plan that they intend to follow. I think this is a major problem and perhaps their assuming responsibility would mean creating this career plan. I think an interesting exercise for the students in year 6 would be to come up with a career plan until the age of 35; they should think about what they want and this would provide a form of guidance whose starting point is the diploma. They should tell themselves: My career starts now! The diploma is the first page of my professional portfolio and this is my career plan! I start with the diploma and I assume this responsibility towards myself. If we generated this transformation, then the diploma project might be seen in a far more favourable light by the students.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

Students often choose the theme, the site, the approach without having any arguments, without being sufficiently aware of the need, in particular of the public need for the project. All these choices should be based on the very clear understanding of the fact that an authorial project (and the diploma is the first authorial project of these budding architects) represents an answer to a social commission and thus they should ask themselves: what might this commission be? Who is my beneficiary? Who would be interested in such a project? If the site is very close to my heart, then who could be the sponsor who would generate a commission for this project that I want to complete? The students usually bring up feelings to justify what they do, but you cannot feel what can be done on a site or how, what a good approach would look like, if you have not practiced a little in advance. So I think the diploma should be approached, from the very beginning, from the perspective of having to illustrate, in one way or another, a potential social commission, a potential beneficiary. In addition to this, the project, beyond the process and the option it offers, does not simply represent a vision. It does not simply represent rendering abilities. It actually represents a concept of life, a business concept, a community concept, that is to say,

each diploma project has users, a context that is generated and produces effects; it has an impact on the social, material, economic, personal and cultural levels. This impact should be defined and, at a given point, it might determine the choice of a specific degree of complexity. All the above are reference points which the student should constantly consider. I think that good architecture responds to a need and to a specific place. It does not even need to be aggressive, it should not shout: Look at me! I'm the biggest, I'm the mightiest, I'm the finest! I think that withdrawing to a neutral position, as required by the need to integrate within a context, to fulfil needs and to adapt to particular stages, would make students pay far more attention to details, in the attempt of discovering the significance of all the information they can receive at a given moment when they approach the site.

> Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

Innovation goes hand in hand with science and technology. And here we begin with a deficiency. Europe cannot compete with the US in this respect because technology is a top priority in the US. You cannot finance research to a very substantial degree if you do not finance technology and if the latest technological approaches are not within your reach. If you do not experiment a little with technology, you cannot understand the freedom it can give and the approaches, sometimes outside the field, that you could take. Our students are innovative at the level of form and they may be innovative on the cultural level, but they are in a closed environment – akin to a septic environment where the same answer is infinitely replicated. To bring something new, the diplomas of the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning should somehow leave this septic environment. They need to be integrated into a multidisciplinary and highly technologised approach because architecture can never advance unless it joins hands with technology. The level of information and knowledge, the access to technology and to this technological expertise would, I think, give them far greater freedoms in approaching the form and concept of architecture.

At the same time, I think that when the diploma development process is a rich, complex one, with a sound basis and methodology, there is a kernel of innovation. It is obvious that the works examined by the student either at the time of preparing the dissertation or at the time of all the searches of the diploma stage lead them to explore further. Perhaps this is where this kernel of innovation, of added value, the need for transdisciplinarity, originates in the student's mind.

I always see this innovation – complexity relationship as a very direct one. If the diploma is treated like a box-ticking exercise, it is obvious that innovation cannot occur; there is no possibility of a new vision,

a new concept, a different approach. And then the searches and the interest for seeing further are absent and the degree of complexity of the answer, of the project, is obviously far, far lower. And this is visible despite the exceptional images produced by the students. A lot of these are fantastic posters, but they are only images. It is scenography, not an architectural project, not a diploma project with a concept and an answer to a question, to a social need, a project that can be clearly associated with a beneficiary. Once these aspects enter the equation, things obviously start to change.

I think students are, in most cases, so keen to find out things, they are like sponges that absorb a great deal. So they relate to the context in which they find themselves. If we as teachers give them alternatives, if we give them options and if we are diverse, then each of us can deliver a very different experience and a different approach. At this point, I think they would start to think about the discovery of a professional self to a far greater extent than they do at present. And I think the diploma will then mean something else to them, or a lot more than it perhaps represents for many of the students at present.

I think they should create a career plan before they begin the diploma and this is what I would recommend. Perhaps if they tried to design all aspects of their lives, not only the strictly professional but also the personal ones, and if they identified all kinds of needs and curiosities that they might have by the age of 35, they would view the diploma differently, not as the last university assignment. Perhaps they would think of it as I said at the beginning, as the most important and the first element of their professional portfolio, which they can show anywhere in the world to obtain a job or with which they can begin a trajectory, they can begin to construct a professional identity that they will fight for during the remainder of their lives.

Prof. **Georgică MITRACHE** PhD Arch.
Vice-Rector for Education and International Relations

What does the diploma represent from the
point of view of the student's entire academic
trajectory?

The diploma is a means of verifying the coherent and competent completion of the formative process. In other words, we can refer to the diploma project as the final exercise in the academic environment, which confirms that the student is an independent thinker, capable of bringing together the theoretical and practical components of the architectural profession. At a different level, we view this exercise as a transition towards professional activity.

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the process, from the initial stages of research
to the final presentation in front of a jury?

The coherence of the diploma work is a result of the process involving two important factors: holistic thinking and a consistent attitude. In mentioning holistic thinking and consistency I am referring to the student's ability of viewing the theme as a whole, of restarting the study at the different levels at which the theme is understood and of materialising ideas in relation to the conclusions of the research.

Obviously, our desideratum as supervisors and that of the student as the main subject of the entire undertaking is for the stated idea to be carried out in unitary fashion, in the spirit of novelty and creativity. Depending on our perspective, this finality is a matter of teaching but also of professional self-development, which must be consistently pursued.

The problems arise when, for various reasons (linked to the interpretation of the research results, to the fact that the results of the study are not persuasive etc.), there are leaps or major shifts in thinking. Of course, the presence of these leaps does not mean that the approach cannot be coherent. From the teachers' point of view, we can admit smaller leaps, displacements, deviations from unity, provided there is a clear basis for each decision. On the other hand, "coherence" pursued as a goal in itself and merely for the sake of unity and continuity is simply the expression of a personal or borrowed mannerism.

Architectural discourse becomes coherent when it benefits from all the results of the research and when the student is aware of the need to use them.

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate
a certain level of maturity and an awareness
of diverse professional responsibilities. What
responsibilities should the student assume
within the framework of the diploma project?

The first responsibility, from my point of view, is to assume authorship of the project. The student is the author of this project, from the documentation and research stages to its defence in front of a jury and beyond.

Consequently, they are responsible for everything it contains. They need to assume the fact that they are the one to process and work on all the data and situations, to ask questions and to provide architectural answers. The others – teaching staff or experts from various fields – are supporting actors, with whom they interact while working on the project.

From the point of view of professional standards, it is important that the student should be aware of and assume one by one and to an increasingly greater extent the responsibilities that they will have in the future. The university provides a framework for becoming acquainted with them, but the student is the one who must prove that they have been understood. I will only name the following:

_The fact that the product of their work is intended for a numerous group of people and that it affects their quality of life. It thus becomes essential to assume responsibility for the entire scale of values used, the entire practical and theoretical content of the architectural answer.

_Technical responsibilities, namely understanding the fact that design is a complex activity and that even though each specialist's responsible and assumed contribution is fundamental, the architect must possess general knowledge of each field to be able to propose viable answers.

_Socio-cultural responsibilities; the student/architect must prove that they are aware of the socio-cultural space in which they act, seen from a historical and socio-economic perspective.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

This problem can be viewed from two perspectives – that of the student and that of the evaluator.

From the evaluator's point of view and starting from the hypothesis that completing one's studies is only the beginning of a new process, the exercise must be complex enough to fit into the framework of current demands of professional life. In other words, the student must demonstrate that they possess the abilities and competencies required for professional performance.

Turning to the student's point of view, they need to be aware of the level of competencies and abilities they possess in relation to their possible positioning in the professional sphere.

While I answered the previous question by pointing out that the student needs to freely assume authorship, in the case of defining complexity the student is not on their own. On the one hand, the student needs to be aware of the minimal level of complexity that should be attained; on the other, the supervisor should impose a minimum level of complexity. Thus, the complexity of the project will increase gradually by expanding the scope and depth of the research.

Complexity entails bringing together architectural challenges and issues which will provide the project with adequate theoretical and practical

content, thus demonstrating its ability to connect to the professional and socio-cultural sphere through all its components.

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

Architecture students should practice innovation at every stage since this is the only way they can begin to rely to an ever greater extent on their capacity to bring in the new.

Within the diploma project framework, innovation would consist in the courage and readiness to materialise an idea and to challenge others to a debate on it. I think readiness is a more comprehensive term here, but I would like to emphasise the content it carries, on the one hand the ability to allow yourself to be challenged on an intellectual and theoretical level by a certain subject and, on the other, the ability to challenge your interlocutors (the examination board and/or the professional milieu etc.) to a debate on a theme that has been developed in a specific and personal way.

Ultimately, any step in organising and shaping space can be considered an innovation insofar as it relates to a context that has been studied and understood in its full depth and complexity. Originality derives from processing/interpreting the specific traits of each contextual element and its characteristic nuances, by means of a personal architectural answer.
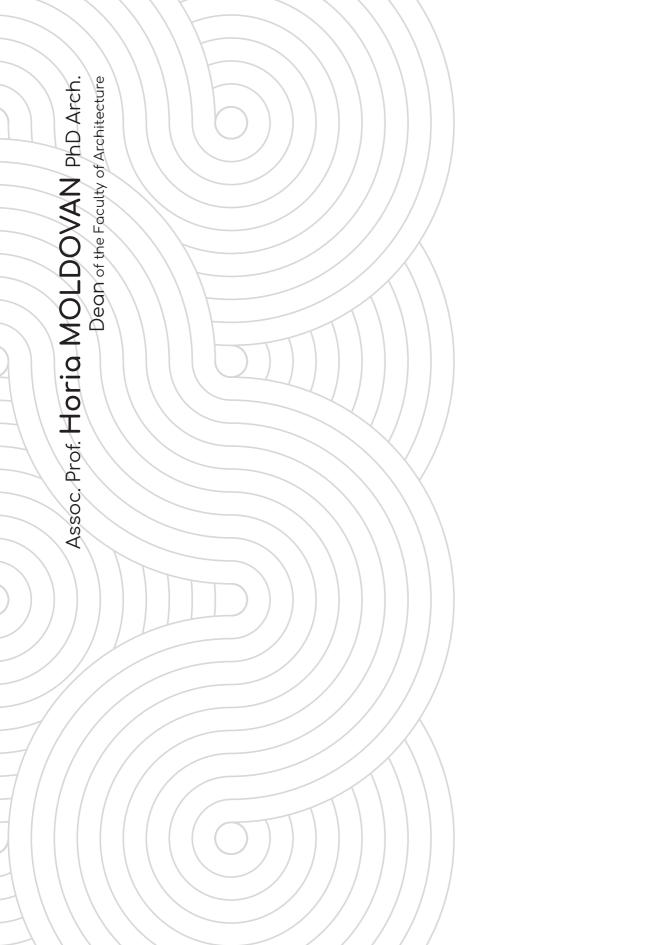
The students should start from the seemingly modest things, from the principles and achieve excellence with their help. I would use the word extraordinary, but in comparison with ordinary. In other words, they begin with ordinary things and arrive at extra-ordinary results, they surpass the ordinary. So they bring novelty, they innovate something in a specific field or direction or on a particular theme.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

The diploma project starts already in the second year… which is why I would convey the results of these interviews to early-year students as well. They will not achieve a complete diploma project if the four criteria discussed in this interview – coherence, complexity, responsibilities and innovation – have not been reflected in their practice.

You will note that two decisive factors for the student's path, regardless of the stage they are at, underpin everything we have discussed: awareness and commitment. Every step taken at university should be an opportunity for exploration and speculation and not merely a formality.

The diploma is not the last "manifesto of freedom" but the transition towards a new cycle of learning and development that will be managed solely by the professional, without the involvement of institutional structures.

Assoc. Prof. **Horia MOLDOVAN** PhD Arch.

Dean of the Faculty of Architecture

What does the diploma represent from the
point of view of the student's entire academic
trajectory?

The diploma project, the assessment at the end of an educational stage,
serves a double purpose. On the one hand it reflects the student's matu-
rity level in the choice and structuring of a theme and in the ability of
formulating a coherent answer by means of the project; on the other, it
is a measure of the student's open-mindedness and professional poten-
tial on the completion of their studies. The diploma project itself – as
well as the preceding stages, the dissertation/theoretical grounding and
the pre-diploma – represents a qualitative (not a quantitative) account of
the extent to which the assimilated knowledge has been assumed and
integrated in the construction, detailing and graphic illustration of an
architectural concept within a given or imagined context.

The development of the diploma project is in
fact a process during which the research issues
are explored in progressively greater depth.
How can coherence be maintained throughout
the process, from the initial stages of research
to the final presentation in front of a jury?

Defining the project theme as well as the directions of search and
research of its theoretical framework determines the degree of coher-
ence of the entire undertaking. The maturity shown in the decisions
that must be taken at the beginning of this multi-stage process, which
consists in the structuring and the actual formulation of the diploma
project, is vital for the manner in which the potential of an idea can
be exploited, nuanced upon and gradually detailed during the different
stages of the project. The theoretical component (the dissertation) is
frequently treated in a superficial manner, with a focus on secondary
aspects pretentiously explained, so as to simulate a committed attitude;
yet it plays an essential role in justifying and supporting the coherence
of the project's development. The more profound, coherent and sub-
stantial the theoretical and documentary basis of the project, the more
natural will the development of the research and of the issues it touches
upon appear to be.

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate
a certain level of maturity and an awareness
of diverse professional responsibilities. What
responsibilities should the student assume
within the framework of the diploma project?

Diploma projects undoubtedly actualise not only the guidelines set for
architectural education at our university but also the echoes of the stu-
dents' inmost experiences in the course of their personal progress and
the wagers assumed for their future career. Although it represents the
conclusion of the academic trajectory, the diploma project remains a
learning exercise, an architectural experiment formulated either as a

concrete answer to a specific situation (even if it is an imaginary one) or – less frequently, it is true – as a speculative discourse with reference to a widely relevant issue, viewed from a particular angle. Regardless of the situation, seriousness and the depth of commitment to the process represent the most important responsibilities, naturally accompanied by competence and accuracy in selecting and integrating specialist knowledge into the project. Thus, at the end of the years of academic study and before the years of apprenticeship (the stage of professional preparation), what should be pursued via the diploma project is perhaps not so much the undertaking of particular professional responsibilities but rather the consistency of the message and of the content and the ability to use specialist knowledge in a reasoned and well-argued fashion.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

Viewpoints differ... The complexity of a diploma project is not confined to the complexity of the architectural theme, to the size or extension of the proposed object or ensemble or to the number and complexity of the constraints imposed by a particular urban scenario. Complexity is above all a qualitative attribute and not a quantitative one, as many are prone to believe. Complexity derives from the manner in which the project is initiated and from the way in which the process is structured/imagined, from the way in which its ultimate goals are envisaged. This may sound banal, yet we all know that in the majority of cases the theme and subsequently the diploma project itself are inextricably linked to aspects related to its extent in square meters, to the singularity of an architectural or urban context, to the number and appeal of 3D simulations and ever more infrequently to the consistency and creativity demonstrated in exploring the potential of a new idea or of new ideas.
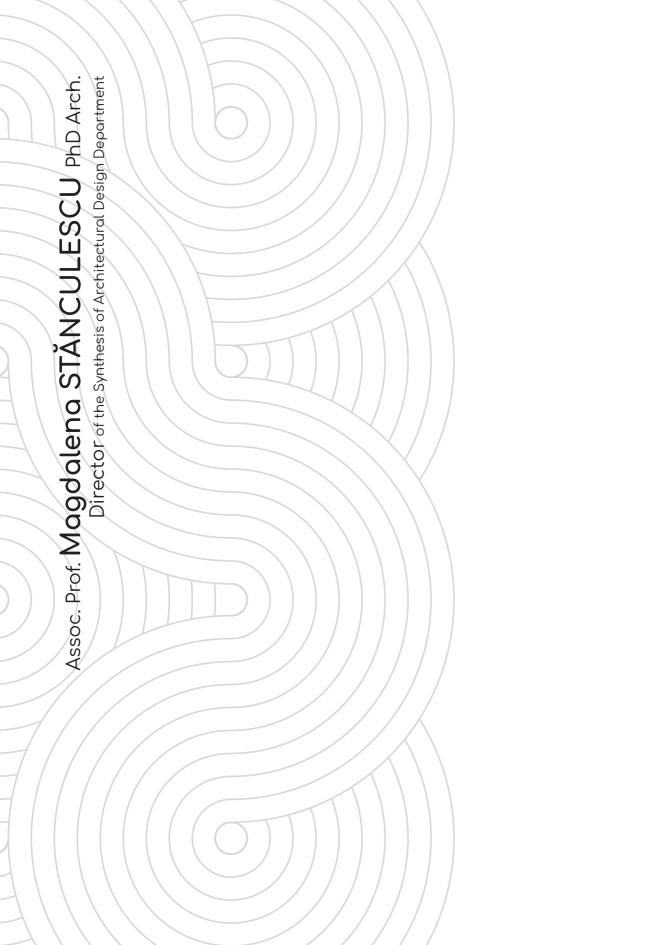
Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

The impulse to be original, innovative, to create something that no one has achieved before, is an intrinsic part of the profile and perspectives of any artist... I say artist because the type of innovation we are discussing refers mainly to expressive, aesthetic aspects, the ways in which one can provide an answer by means of form, material, etc. The technical aspect undoubtedly plays a very important role. Yet we must admit that the architects' technical competence has been diluted over the last few decades while specialists from other fields have made a

crucial contribution to finalising and materialising the architects' ideas and projects. The broader the student architect's horizon of knowledge and the greater their ability to draw in a synthetic and creative manner on information from different fields, whether acquired at university or through individual study, the greater the innovative potential, which also includes technical solutions (referring to materials, construction techniques, sustainable, energy-efficient solutions, etc.) that are harmoniously and organically integrated into the formal proposals.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

There is a natural inclination to follow a pattern, a recipe that will allow us to provide a solid, correct and therefore valued answer. Yet it is equally natural for each of us, at a given moment, to attempt to surpass limits, to leave our comfort zone and to broaden our exploration beyond the familiar, the convenient and the available. After many years of training, the diploma project is one of these moments! Beyond the banality and the (sometimes difficult to grasp) precision of the requirements set forth in the university and exam regulations, beyond what the student believes or knows about the expectations of the diploma jury, the project represents first and foremost a free creative undertaking in which everyone displays not only their current level of expertise but also their aspirations.

Assoc. Prof. **Magdalena STĂNCULESCU** PhD Arch.

Director of the Synthesis of Architectural Design Department

The diploma represents the crowning achievement of the six years of study – it is a very long trajectory compared to other faculties where the studies are completed in 3 to 5 years. This is the moment when the student must become aware that they need to stake absolutely everything they have learnt, all the knowledge accumulated and acquired up to that point. It is an important moment because it actually represents the first project in this trajectory where they have total freedom. Unlike the projects developed until the end of year 5 whose themes were set to a greater or lesser extent by the teaching team (an aspect I will return to), the diploma project is initiated by the student, most often on the basis of reasoned personal wishes, and the student is also the one who has to direct the entire process. Everyone finds a theme that reflects their personal inclinations. I usually tell students to strive to create a diploma project where they feel they showcase their abilities and the knowledge accumulated over the five previous years. Now is the time to spread their wings and fly. Although the completion of their studies will be followed by two more years of having someone who steers and monitors them until they truly take off, the diploma represents an important threshold from the point of view of acquiring autonomy.

Coming back to what I said earlier, about the themes over the course of the 5 years, it should be said that for the later years, i.e. years 4 to 6, we start to adopt a slightly different attitude compared to the way in which themes were introduced and taught before. We start to set themes that are intentionally left open, "unfinished", in order to develop the students' capacity of differentiating them through the manner in which they research a project and the context in which it will be integrated. In other words, already during the later years, a basis for autonomy is built through taking responsibility for the completion of the theme and implicitly through orienting the study towards particular areas of interest and providing justification for these choices.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

Maintaining coherence in the course of the diploma work can sometimes be difficult, yet its diligent pursuit must not be abandoned. Here, the diploma supervisor or supervisors play an important role as they support the student during this process with their own experience of design and research.

In this respect, the experience of the results obtained over the years have led to the conclusion that it would be beneficial to introduce an additional step in the diploma process – the foundational study. This is a year 6 project which lays the ground for the complex study consisting of the pre-diploma, the dissertation and the diploma. In addition, we can say that the final project of year 5 is also a form of training with a view to becoming familiar with this process since it tests the abilities and knowledge required for initiating the diploma. The diploma project has three different stages, three steps: as in any research process, there can be progress and setbacks, retakes, new ideas that require redoing all that has been studied so far. Coherence should result from the way in which the project is approached from the very first step. The foundational study is a very important stage as it ensures there is a clear idea from the outset. Good ideas often come intuitively, as a result of the experience accumulated over the years of study and these incipient ideas should not be forgotten but explored more deeply and re-evaluated after each stage of the study. The creation of the diploma is an active process and this is normal. This is why I think it is very important for the supervisor to reconnect you to the initial concept or idea (or the one set at a particular stage) in order to maintain coherence. This project is a research process in which the committed mentor understands that the protagonist must be placed in the right light. The supervisor is like a coach: their role is to bring the student back into the appropriate area of study.

The first major responsibility would be to choose a point of departure, whether it is a plot of land, a context, an idea, an architectural programme that they have studied at university or that they have not studied but are inclined to examine. This initial choice is a major responsibility in itself. Then, in my view, major responsibility passes to the sphere of spatiality – it is very important how the student solves the concrete situation in the chosen site while understanding that the gesture they make now on paper or screen could actually be built and thus mark that place for a significant number of years. It is very important for the students to understand that it will generate a dynamic in the area and a complex life, through the inserted building, which will dominate the respective area for a very long time. In the course of time, the zone will pass through modifications and changes, which is why another architectural responsibility is to foresee these changes or at least to be sufficiently modest so as to leave room for development over time, adaptation and modification over time of the proposed space and architecture.

At the same time, students must understand that they have a great responsibility with regard to the social and cultural impact of their architectural proposal. Through defending their ideas and through the project, today's architect has the capacity of educating several categories of people, towards a better, more sensible future. And I am referring here in particular to clients but also to the users of the buildings.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

I would like to answer this question by exemplifying with two extreme cases of what can constitute a complex diploma project. One case is that of a theme on a relatively small scale. Such a project could be guided towards a careful study that would deepen the research layers one by one and reach a very high level of detail. I am reminded now of the houses of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, which showed the pleasure of studying to detail level, for example in the carpentry work or the balustrades and even in the proposals for stained glass or custom-made (unique) light fittings. The other extreme would be the diplomas that propose very ample sites. These require from the beginning an effort of understanding at a larger scale, an approach that directs and articulates some general intentions, significant research on urban planning. In this case the diploma project will often only manage to

detail a far from large part of this study. Here, complexity derives from this global, innovative vision of a site. It is important to understand that the diploma can develop in any fashion between these two extremes, from tackling a very ample site to the architectural object as a single piece. In fact, the degree of development also depends on the scale and complexity of the initial approach because a site that is not necessarily large can frequently require deeper analysis in a broader context that encompasses more remote neighbourhoods. Using multiple criteria to research the context can lead to redefining the scale of approach of the entire study.

Complexity can also stem from the manner of approaching the project, for example relating to the viewpoints of different users and not merely to that of the client who initiates it. The project can also be influenced by the special requirements of the community or by sustainability ideas of e.g. retaining the existing buildings even if they are not heritage.

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

"Innovative" in the diploma project can even refer to how you choose to treat a subject, how you describe the theme. For example, if a student chooses an office building as the diploma theme, it is clear that in the present context they must investigate all that has happened over the last two years as a result of the pandemic, what is happening with the existing buildings, how they are used or not etc. The way in which the student manages to integrate the understanding of the topic seen from many points of view, of several urban actors, with the personal and customised solution that they will bring, can also be innovative. The built environment should be explored and the conditions it imposes on the project must be understood in order to obtain innovative solutions and answers, suitable for several user categories. Innovation can also consist in the way in which the diploma project has been documented, the way in which the programme has been investigated or in which several programmes can be joined under the umbrella of a final project that will, perhaps, represent an innovative mix. In addition, the way in which the structure of the project is imagined or the way in which certain materials are used in the aesthetic of the facade can also be innovative. Architecture redefines itself as it discovers new materials, new technologies. These can spur creativity.

Innovation is sought in the diploma project, wherever it may find a place, in any of the above-mentioned aspects. ...Or in other areas that I do not foresee at the moment, but which some students undoubtedly will. ...This is what makes being a teacher so wonderful.

My advice is that they should never give up their dreams in the diploma project. Personally, I would recommend that they make their boldest attempt as yet. Now is the time to do something that matters to them as a reference point in the career that is about to start, something they will remember with pleasure each time. Yet at the same time, architecture is a field anchored in reality and it has to remain connected to reason without, however, cutting off the wings of a bold project. The diploma does not need to be a project that is ready to deliver to city hall for building permission, but it must persuade that the young graduates and future professionals on the global architectural market will rise up to future challenges.

Best of luck!

Assoc. Prof. Melania DULĂMEA PhD Arch.

Director of the Basics of Architectural Design Department

What does the diploma represent from the point of view of the student's entire academic trajectory?

Firstly, it is an exam of maturity in which the students must demonstrate the assimilation of certain topics and their capacity to integrate this knowledge into a final project. It is a project through which the future architects must prove that they understand the challenges of the profession, a project which tests their ability to exercise their profession as such, more precisely their ability to understand and respond adequately to the problems they propose and identify in the diploma project. In addition, they must demonstrate maturity in their approach to the research theme. Ideally, their interests and personal choices throughout their time at university should lead to this project and open the path to an area of competence. For some students, the diploma happens to be the moment of crystallisation of certain interests, whether theoretical or professional. So it can open new perspectives for their professional development – for example, in some cases the dissertation or the diploma project can lead to doctoral research or to postgraduate specialisations and so on.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

Maintaining coherence is a key goal of any project, not only of the diploma. And this ability must be constantly honed during the six years of study. Whether it is a university project or an external project, the first step is to understand the selected field of research, to understand correctly the premises of the project or its starting points. The values of the context must be understood and its relationship to the project must be accurately established. Once the context has been understood, the author's positioning and the research questions need to be specified and the topics of research and theoretical study need to be defined. The research questions will subsequently lead to intervention opportunities, which need to be weighed against one another – to see what field of intervention is opened up by each opportunity.

It is very important that the students should ask themselves from the very beginning what they aim to solve by means of the diploma project. It is necessary to connect the project to the place in order to see how it helps, what it enhances, whether it adds a new layer or improves upon the initial situation. We often note that the diploma project leads one to spoil rather than solve something. And thus, the initial stakes are the most important because if they are mistaken, the result will not

be as expected, regardless of the project process. Many diplomas have this problem of not asking the questions correctly from the beginning. Coherence is about keeping these research questions in mind from the beginning until the very end. In the course of the project, you need to return to those questions and see if what you are doing in the project corresponds to your aims.

Last but not least, the role of the supervisor and of the juries (of the pre-diploma foundational study, dissertation and pre-diploma) should be that of steering and guiding the students and of checking whether coherence is maintained throughout the project.

> The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

First, we can talk about responsibilities connected to the context in which the students place themselves through their projects. They need to understand the context correctly, the stakes of the project, the private vs the public interests, their responsibility towards the city and towards the environment, towards heritage, etc.

With regard to the architect's tasks and the responsibilities of any practicing architect, the aim of the diploma project is not to mimic reality; it does not need to be a rehearsal before a real project, but rather to demonstrate the student's ability to respond correctly to research data and to take correct decisions on several levels – economic, social, urban, etc. The architect's role of coordinating and integrating all the different specialities into the project is also important.

> An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

For a long time, the complexity of a project has been wrongly identified with its scope and I do not think that this is the point. We are not referring here only to the complexity of the programme or to functional complexity. Rather, complexity emerges from the contextual data and the difficulties arising from a specific situation, from the mature understanding of what is at stake in the project. An architectural gesture that is not particularly large-scale can still be complex. A project can also be complex by virtue of the issues it raises. In the good diploma projects I have seen, the positive result often derived from this gradually accumulated complexity, from the link to the context and from the answer given to very difficult, not obvious, problems that were discovered through careful study.

Let us start from what is not innovation – the thoughtless use of technology, for example, or its undifferentiated use. At the same time, innovation should not be purely formal. Innovation comes from finding new answers or creative answers to known problems while maintaining an attentive and respectful connection to the project's point of departure. That is to say, you need to understand what is valuable about the chosen place and context, what should be kept and then you need to conceive an answer in relation to previous ones by thinking about your positioning today, about what your role should be in relation to contemporary society, to the community you intervene upon. Asking a research question that has not been asked before or formulating the problem in an unprecedented way can also be innovative.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

Most important in my view is that, as they begin, they should think about their interests in as mature and personal a way as possible and they should aim for the diploma project to represent them. Not to think about what a diploma project should be like or what boxes they should tick for a successful project. From my experience as a supervisor, success belonged to those who took a personal approach to this process, those who were more concerned with adding a stage to their individual trajectory. To do this, they should take a retrospective look at all the years of study and think about what they enjoyed and were captivated by, what interested and preoccupied them in previous projects and what those interests could point towards. They could revisit a question they confronted or that they asked themselves in the course of their studies and which they wish to explore in greater depth. They should view the diploma project not as a conclusion, but as a stage that can open up new possibilities. Here, we come back to what I said at the beginning – the diploma can open the path to a particular specialisation or to an area of professional interest.

Prof. **Anca MITRACHE** PhD Arch.
President of diploma juries

What does the diploma represent from the
point of view of the student's entire academic
trajectory?

The diploma should be a "mirror" of the knowledge acquired over the entire period of their studies and it should exploit it in an advanced, innovative and inspired manner. The diploma project demonstrates, in a confident and imaginative key, the mastery of competencies tested over time, with the aim of proving the future professional's capacity for an applied and inspired technical solution. In other words, the student should demonstrate, on the occasion of the diploma project, that they have reached maturity in their approach to the chosen subject with regard to: the attitude to the site; the conceptual approach in relation to the anthropological, sociological and relational data, or to the identity explored in connection with the site; the form and use of the proposed space and the elements of sustainability and technology, but also with regard to modalities of representation that are clear and interesting, in line with current demands. Next to the gradually structured approach, the study accompanying the final project should be linked to the documentation activity on the theme, approached from a local and international perspective – defining particularities, proposed site(s) and architectural typologies – local and international, documentation on the sites considered in the study and the specific attributes conferred on the subject of study in each case and, most importantly, the additional quality brought to it by each particular situation.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

The diploma project should stand for a higher degree of complexity from all points of view. The completion of projects whose theme was described by the learning exercises associated with the assignments set for each academic year is followed, in the case of the diploma, by a stage of higher complexity. The diploma project explores a programme and theme of personal significance to the author, which should be studied in depth in order to prove the student's capacity to bring the research to a high, competitive level or, on the contrary, the inability to demonstrate minimal project qualities or a new architectural and urban quality. The diploma project proposes a higher degree of complexity than the general themes of each year. Its themes most often use existing architectural objects, which are associated to extensions or related programmes.

The architectural qualities of the newly proposed programme are related in a more or less successful and in a more or less coherent manner to the object chosen as reference point. On the one hand, this type of programme has the merit of sustainability, yet on the other, it can also indicate the lack of courage to take up an independent subject which would demonstrate architectural qualities through the assumed proposal.

The university supports the student through all the stages of the diploma project – the pre-diploma foundational study, the pre-diploma and finally

the diploma project itself. The evaluation and consultation moments throughout this process aim at the materialisation and the coherent development of the proposed project. During the first stage – that of the foundational study – the student should examine the broader context and propose a solution at the level of an initial study of a concrete site. Following this stage, there should be detailed exploration and in-depth study of the proposed programme – in the pre-diploma – where the project provides an answer from the point of view of local and overall organisation of the area by means of a solution study and illustration of the theme, with different options. Finally, the architectural object will be fully detailed in the diploma project.

The more thorough the study of the context and of the opportunities for intervention at each stage of the work and the more research directions it covers, the greater the likelihood of an answer that displays additional qualities.

> The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

I would say that the level of responsibility often depends on the maturity of each individual. The chosen approach is a reflection of responsibility as understood at that stage by the student. For some students, this responsibility grows as the research develops.

In any case, the first responsibility is knowing the site; this is also the first step forward, towards professional practice. Of equal importance is the investigation of the theme, of similar examples, with a focus on the adaptability of the approach to the particularities of the place in which it is applied. The site and the theme must be studied and known to detail level in order to discover what they can generate that is interesting and positive and that brings an additional quality to the new site. It needs to be shown how the proposed project (understood as the ensemble of site, function and proposal) works with the context in a "revealing" manner.

The quality of the proposed project is likely to improve in direct proportion to its increased level of complexity and to its ability to generate a vision or a stage of an evolving process or to suggest a potential direction of development in a new field of application. In other words, the project functions as an assumed, tangible witness of the diploma author's manner of understanding their chosen subject.

> An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

The diploma project is a mirror of the knowledge that has been acquired, assimilated and conveyed to the future graduate, under conditions of accessibility to a level of documentation and to a variety of means of

expression that are unprecedented in the history of the profession. Given these circumstances, the diploma project should constitute a "celebration" of complexities resolved in a revealing fashion. The facile resolution of a function would deprive the study author of a new experience. Complexity should encompass the cultural and technical aspects of the theme as well as a positioning with regard to the new quality proposed by the architecture of the project. Water, wind, stone and earth, proportion, dimension and scale, colour and light – actors in the memorable architectural drama. The complexity of the answer aims at positive attitudes, via gestures that find a natural resolution.

The way of approaching the diploma project and also its modality of providing answers, not necessarily final ones, point to a certain degree of complexity. Every student will relate differently to this complexity depending on their background. Yet it is worth mentioning that each assumed, tested and shared exercise should provide a benefit to the author and to the recipient of the message in question.

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?
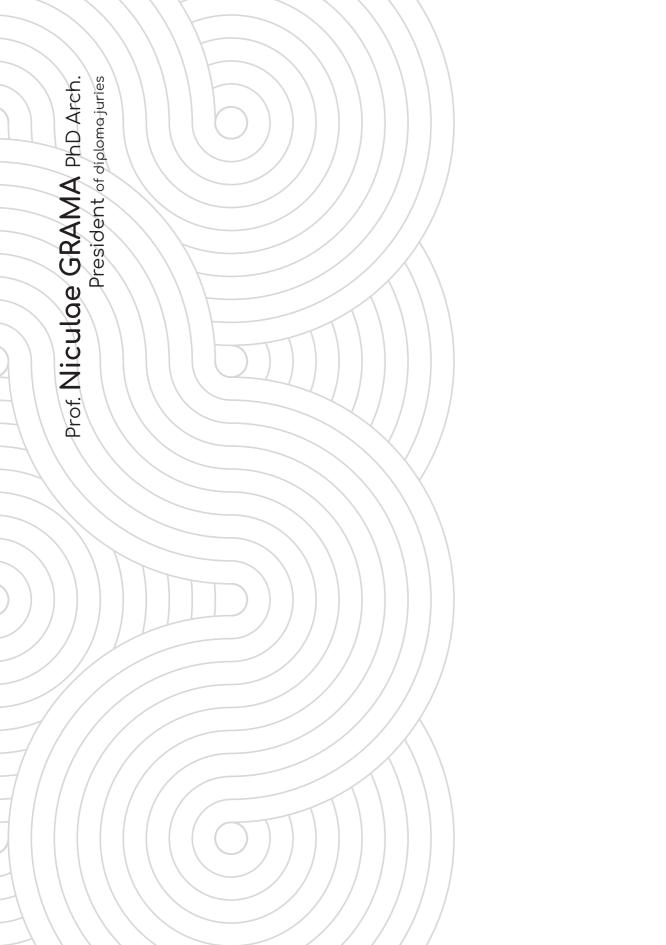
Many diploma projects touch upon the issue of innovation and provide an answer related to sustainability and durability as part of the overall solution or they touch upon social themes and provide a community-oriented answer. Other topics are invested in new technologies, included in the solutions of the project itself – they imagine new, repetitive, modular structures or they integrate materials with special properties. Financial issues could also be tackled responsibly and boldly in the projects.

Expanding the exploration of social issues within the project themes could provide an extended framework for cross-border or international topics.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

I wish them success, patience and tenacity! Perseverance at any rate – since the experience gained on this occasion will give them the chance of delivering a project they believe in and the happy opportunity of overcoming situations that are not always clear-cut. The act of defending an architectural attitude they believe in in relation to a site and of presenting a theme in front of a not always favourable jury will constitute a valuable experience for the future practitioner.

I would encourage them to keep an open mind when speaking to anyone, to colleagues, collaborators or associated researchers. Sometimes the solution may take time to emerge despite all the efforts and study. Yet talking to a friend or to an acquaintance may yield a new angle, new types of approach that are interesting and ingenious.

Prof. **Niculae GRAMA** PhD Arch.
President of diploma juries

What does the diploma represent from the
point of view of the student's entire academic
trajectory?

The diploma represents each student's conceptual, personal, unique and demonstrative answer to the chosen topic on the basis of the knowledge, capacities and abilities acquired or developed during the years of study, an answer that encompasses various aspects of the site and of the object and up to the details of the execution, with a result that reflects the entire process.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

In my opinion, the coherence of the approach is given by the use of an acquired system which encompasses: urban, contextual, stylistic analysis etc... followed by conclusions (possibly highlighting appropriate functions for the site), the creation of a concept in harmony with the theme (obviously with the functions it implies), the proposal of a context-related volume, correlated with interior spatial configurations and following the process of the well-established and useful stages implemented at our university, namely the foundational study, the pre-diploma and the diploma project. This process ensures continuity and coherence da capo al fine (not with its musical connotations). Of equal importance is the presentation/analysis of examples of national or foreign architecture in preparation for the defence.

Maintaining coherence throughout the entire process depends firstly on how the priorities are set at the very beginning, and secondly on the capacity or rather the ability to make concessions while keeping the order of priorities (essentially so as not to alter the concept).

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

I think the first responsibility derives from the analysis – the identification of the functions that are compatible with the site. If these are imposed by external factors, analysis leads to the comparison and weighing of positive and negative aspects. Suitable functions are established on the basis of the analysis and a point of view is formulated.

Another important aspect is the conceptual approach, which entails assuming responsibility for a reasoned and context-related proposal. (It is the architect who formulates the concept; no other complementary profession can do this.) This is how I believe responsibilities are assumed in the diploma project, compared to the old, functionalist style of the university until the 2000s. This shift is mostly due to the participation (starting more than 20 years ago) of numerous well-established foreign architects, both teachers and practitioners, in the diploma exams as well as to the participation of numerous teachers from our university, as grant-holders, in the research and teaching activities of various European faculties of architecture; the sum of these exchanges is today the characteristic of the (still perfectible) "conversion". Over the last 20 years, the university has been transformed, in my view, by moving from an intuitive to a systematic approach; together with the conceptual approach I mentioned before, this facilitates, over a six-year trajectory, the understanding and assumption of professional responsibilities and implicitly of those connected to the diploma.

The third responsibility is discipline applied to the presentation, which they should have acquired over the years of study. Our former teacher Zoltan Takacs used to pay considerable attention to the accuracy of the drawings, always saying that very neat drawing will also be reflected in the architecture.

The fourth responsibility is the dullest part of a project, but it is part of our profession – half of any project is about the details so it is very important to master the principles and to apply them responsibly.

An essential requirement in approaching the diploma project is the attainment of a certain level of complexity, a certain depth of research, yet students are often unclear about what this implies. So what could the attainment of complexity refer to in the diploma project?

At the risk of repeating myself, I think that, regardless of the chosen subject, the same approach should be used (by applying the so-called "system"), namely compliance with urban norms and regulations with possible modifications, analyses of the context followed by conclusions, the creation of a concept followed by the proposal of a context-related volume, functional solutions, the control of interior spaces and finally architectural details.
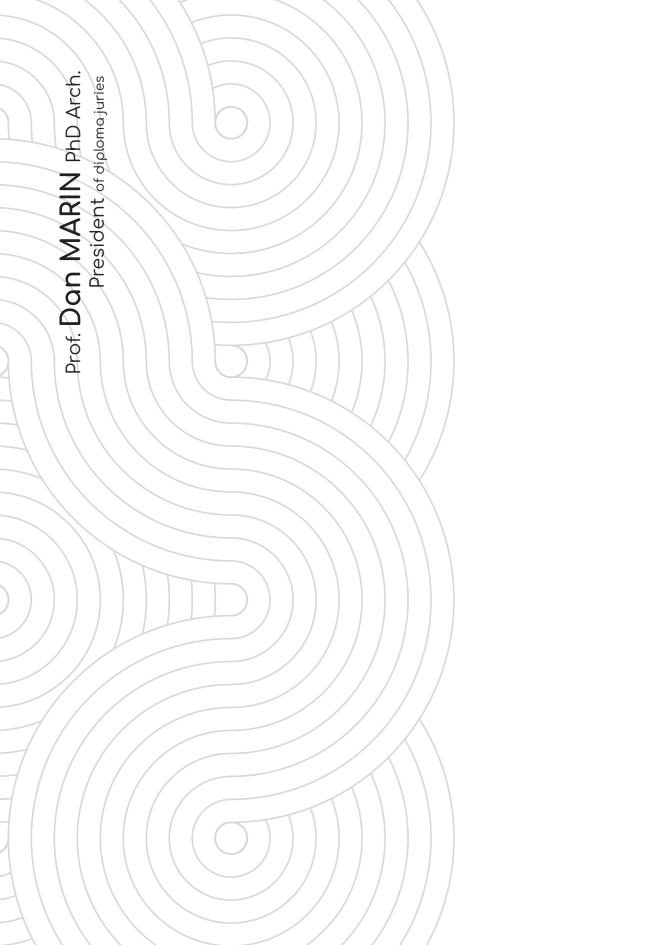
In a way, the problem of complexity does not fall entirely on the student. The diploma project has to be directed somehow and this is the supervisor's role, that of helping students avoid the extremes (the chosen topic should not be too vast or too narrow).

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

In the diploma, innovation can be found at the level of each separate element, both on the micro and on the macro level. At the micro level it can be found: on the conceptual level, in the elements of sustainability, in the relationship between functions, in the spatial configurations (including the interior ones), at the level of style, in the use of materials or even in the classification or application of certain principles. At the macro level we speak about the approach to the whole, which can also be revealed through comparison to various valuable architectural examples that can lead the student to an open path.

Finally, would you like to give any advice to students about to embark on their diploma projects, or would you like to add anything to the points already discussed?

My advice is that the diploma project should be preceded by self-assessment and by filling in any gaps in their knowledge of the curriculum. Only after this has been accomplished should they take the step towards the final, representative exercise.

Prof. **Dan MARIN** PhD Arch.
President of diploma juries

The diploma is the outcome of a cycle of professional training at the end of which the student must be able to demonstrate critical thinking that is based on specific knowledge and cultural openness. Yet at the same time, the diploma is only a stage in a preparation process that takes longer than the actual university programme. It is an important stage which shows that one has reached the required level of maturity to understand architecture in the complexity and individuality of its autonomy as an academic discipline, as something other than artistic subjectivity or technical accuracy. We encounter both extremes fairly frequently, yet in fact architecture is neither while obviously having something of each. And this reality must be understood in its correct dimensions.

The development of the diploma project is in fact a process during which the research issues are explored in progressively greater depth. How can coherence be maintained throughout the process, from the initial stages of research to the final presentation in front of a jury?

A brief answer would be – by implementing a hierarchy of project criteria, dependent on the way in which the problem is formulated and on the ideas that are subsequently expressed through the project. I think the key prerequisite is the comprehensive understanding of the issues tackled by the diploma and of all the aspects that need to be examined and permanently questioned so as to achieve a well-rounded result that leaves no room for dispute or counter-arguments from any point of view. To achieve this, we must "circle around" the subject and consider the issue from as many perspectives as possible, constantly questioning the different options. When we are left without any doubts, it means the result is coherent. Of course, all this is easier said than done, but the diploma presupposes a certain "obstinacy" in not being content with the already existing, with what you have achieved up to that point.

The concept of coherence is very important because architecture is not created in a single manner. We can approach a certain problem from many different perspectives, which are equally valid; what matters is that the fundamental option or options should be developed in a coherent fashion to the very end.

The diploma project requires one to demonstrate a certain level of maturity and an awareness of diverse professional responsibilities. What responsibilities should the student assume within the framework of the diploma project?

As a matter of principle, the student should assume the same responsibilities that an architect would in the case of a commissioned project.

Just like in the case of a real building, the proposed building does not belong exclusively to the author but also to those it is intended for, so the author has a professional as well as moral responsibility to society, which they must be aware of. Of course, in addition to this general principle, one should bear in mind all the aspects that derive from it, including the technical and economical ones that are often not considered or marginalised. Here we go back to what I mentioned before, to the fact that one needs to understand all these criteria which in the first instance define the diploma project and, subsequently, a project that can be materialised.

I do not object to a certain "detachment" of the diploma – in the experimental or poetical sense – but few can attain this level under the current conditions of massification of education. What seems truly important to me is to achieve a good quality of the average.

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There are four dimensions here which need to be kept in mind simultaneously and balanced in the diploma project. The first is the programmatic dimension: the one which refers to the subject, the purpose, the significance it has to society and the way in which we understand the usage of the building. Then there is the contextual dimension since no subject is self-standing and all are linked to a context. Of course, some diploma projects may be more theoretical or less connected to a particular place but in general diploma topics must attach great importance to this component. Then there is the formal, ineluctable dimension which is often either neglected or taken to an extreme. The fourth dimension is the technical – namely, what the project proposes must also be feasible.

At this point, we can start a broader debate on the relationship between the realistic and the reflective, philosophical or even utopian character of a diploma project: what should a diploma achieve? Should it simulate a real project, in concrete circumstances or should it on the contrary take a step forward towards a quasi-philosophical problematisation of architecture? The differences in perspective are in general related to the schools and their ideological orientations. And I think both must be combined although if we speak of the local context I think that in Romania's case "escapism" is not to be recommended. A global perspective and an open attitude are obviously necessary, but we should not forget the fact that the problems that a Romanian architect will face are quite distinct from those of an architect from a country at a different stage of development or from a different cultural zone. I think the way in which you do things is important, as well as your capacity to dream. The diploma must have an intellectual dimension, but it should not ignore the pragmatic component of architecture.

My advice would be to always select the subjects relevant at that particular moment, connected to the problems that we must face, first of all, here in Romania. If they can create good architecture in Romania, they can do it anywhere; in a word, realism.

Then there are aspects connected to the manner of working – this should be unceasing and systematic, based on intellectual curiosity, on the ability to always ask questions and to find answers beyond the immediately apparent.

Innovation is a keyword in today's society, regardless of activity sector. In fact, the issue of innovation is frequently brought up by the external members of the diploma juries. Within the framework of the diploma project, what could innovation consist of?

The word "innovation" is frequently associated with technology. Architectural forms are not determined by a single factor, tied to the author's imagination; they are also technologically and socially conditioned. We are unavoidably subject to gravity, bound by materials and our way of working with them, bound by a certain technology. The forms have emerged as a direct reflection of these factors although degrees of freedom exist. I think innovation in architecture refers mainly to the existence of constraints: constructive, material, technological; any new material or technology can ultimately lead to the discovery of new forms.

We can also understand innovation in a broader sense – as the capacity to see things differently, to formulate the problem differently, to interpret things in a new manner. I think an inward look and an intensive exploration of the issues and of the architectural form is far more important – playing within a given rule, so inside the framework, not outside it; finding variety within the limits of a fairly strict system of regulations and working with the freedom that rules actually give.

Constantly asking questions gives you the chance to find new answers or solutions, which is also a form of innovation, except that innovation must be regarded with a certain well-meaning suspicion. The social and contextual dimensions of architecture, its relationships to the city, the landscape, etc. require a certain restraint. Architecture should not be understood, as it is often regarded – not only from outside but even from inside the profession – as the pure unleashing of fantasy.