

scholar architect 2022

English edition

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SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2022

Research and implementation of new trends, innovations and experiments in architecture and related fields of education

Project financed by CNFIS-FDI-2022-0075

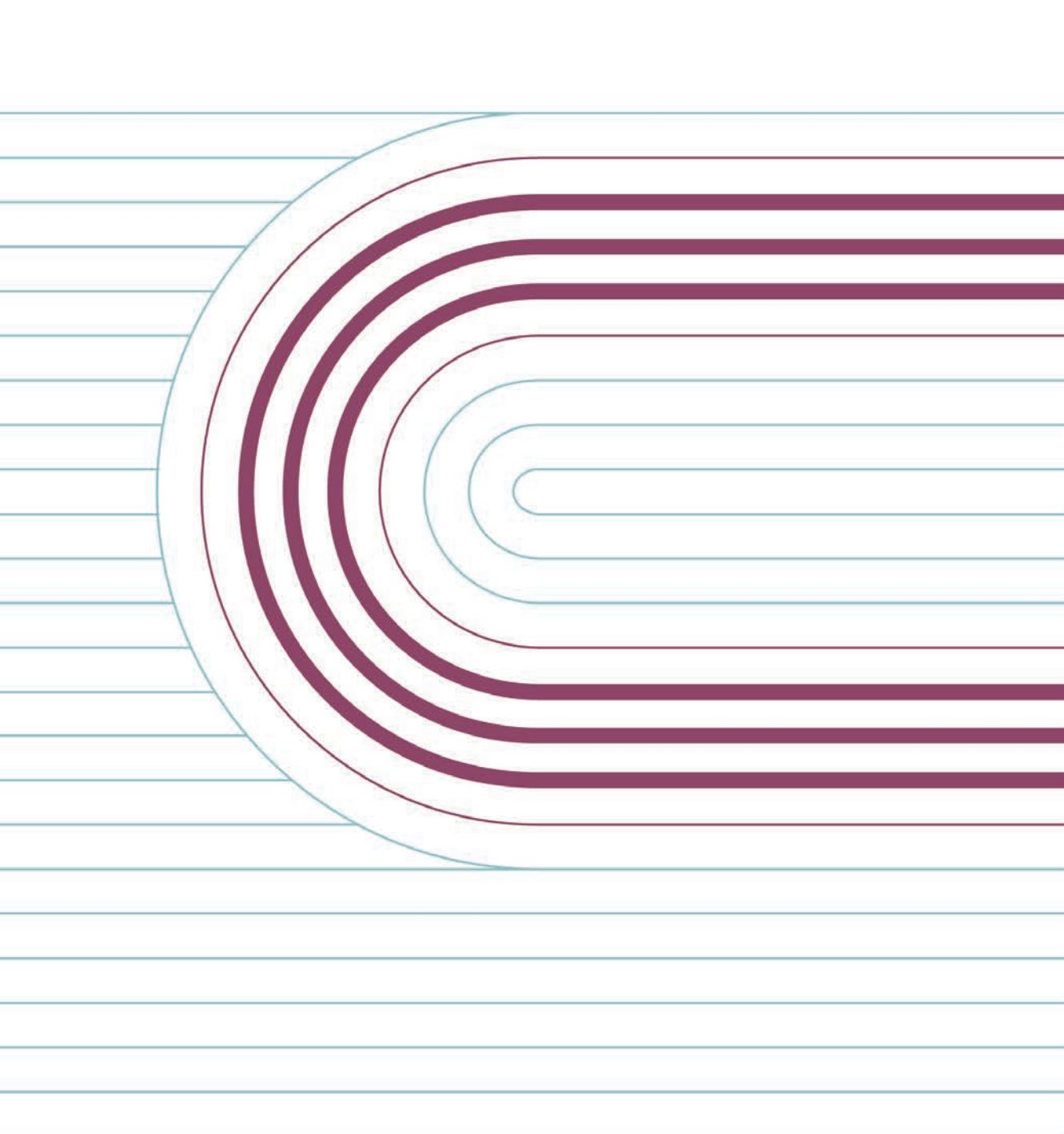
The English edition was translated from Romanian within the framework of the project

SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2023

Promoting linkage to topical trends, technologies and issues in architectural and urban planning education

Project financed by CNFIS-FDI-2023-F-0436

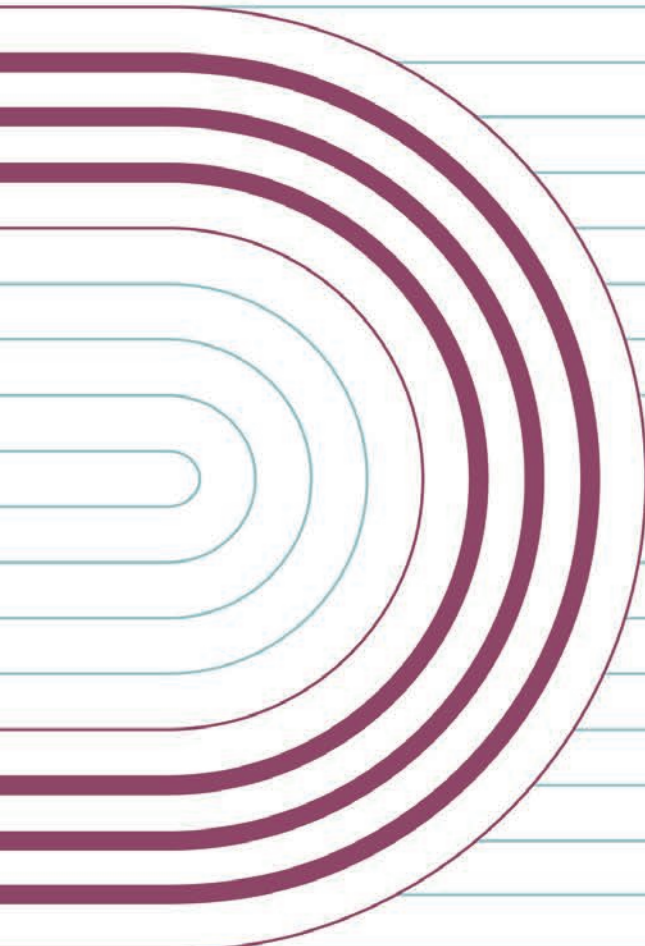
The Institutional Development Fund, Domain 5:
Improving the quality of teaching, including the observance of professional and academic ethics.

A decorative graphic at the top of the page consists of a series of horizontal lines. On the left side, a light blue semi-circle is partially visible. To its right, a series of concentric, rounded rectangular lines form a stylized 'C' shape. The innermost line is a dark maroon color, while the outer lines are light blue. The lines extend across the width of the page.

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Andrei MITREA

Dana MILEA



**Introduction to
urban planning:
the structure
of a modular
course**

The proposal below is the preliminary outline of a modular introductory course on urban planning, which is based on our teaching experience to date. The structure is a modular one and the modules can be combined depending on student needs and tutor preferences. In addition, each module can be expanded or explored in greater depth in the senior years of study, when project performance level increases.

Furthermore, each module will be supported by memo cards, meant to build a controlled vocabulary, useful for defences and debates.

Learning and teaching objectives

The course presents introductory information on the theory and practice of urban planning from a critical perspective. It is thus aimed at a public that is only slightly or not at all familiar with urban planning¹. For this reason, both the lectures and the learning materials must obey two conditions:

1. Present the essential information, clearly structured.
2. Use controlled, easy to understand vocabulary.

On completing the course, the students will be able to:

1. Understand the role played by urban planning and why it is necessary.
2. Understand the main challenges faced by an urban planner.
3. Formulate and assess urban planning problems.
4. Discuss urban planning themes with a specialised public as well as with a broad audience.

Course structure

The course is organised by starting from a few recurrent themes in urban planning theory and practice. Each theme is associated with a module. If necessary, the modules can be expanded and studied in greater depth as project performance increases.

Thus, the course operates with two types of modules: core and complementary². The core modules consolidate fundamental knowledge

¹ The course is mainly directed at first-year students of urban planning, i.e. recent high school graduates. The majority of these have graduated from a high school with an academic profile and have not completed any specialised training for admission to the Faculty of Urban Planning. In Romania, there are as yet no high schools with an urban planning specialisation, while in the high schools with an architectural vocational option urban planning is only studied in passing.

The course is also useful to students of architecture. Their interest in urban planning grows in the later years of study with the help of the urban planning project and of the diploma project. They usually have some knowledge of urban planning, but it is incomplete, insufficiently structured and difficult to exploit in projects.

² It is worth noting that the modules can be adapted for senior years of study so as to transform student projects from simple answers to a design brief into small research projects.

and are subsequently used in the complementary modules as a basis for the development of a professional culture.

Certainly, the structuring of content into modules has some advantages:

1. Modules hide the complexity of a situation. Modularity helps students deconstruct a complicated situation into components they understand and can work with.
2. The modules of the same type are independent. Understanding the information in a core module does not require for the student to have previously covered another core module. This is also true of the complementary modules. In addition, the tutor can adapt the order of introducing modular information to student needs.
3. Modular information can be (re)assembled in different fashions. By creating new connections between known elements, modularity encourages students to think in a structured and creative manner.

The number and breadth of the complementary modules can vary depending on available resources, on curriculum or programme requirements and on the students' ability to assimilate knowledge. Table 2 shows a few examples of complementary modules that can be used to develop the students' knowledge of urban planning theory and practice.



Fig. 1. Map overlay (c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor.

Table 1. Core modules of the course

Core modules	Research questions	Comments
1. Critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does an urban planner think? • How do we build an argument? • What is an urban planning problem? • How do we build the solution to a problem? • How do we assess the solution to a problem? 	
2. People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we interested in people when we discuss urban planning? • What do we need to know about people when working on urban planning problems? • How do we study people? 	
3. Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we interested in activities when we discuss urban planning? • What do we need to know about activities when we work on urban planning problems? • How do we study activities? 	
4. Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are we interested in places when we discuss urban planning? • What do we need to know about places when we work on urban planning problems? • How do we study places? 	
5. Glossary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the terms we need to understand professional literature? • What about the terms needed to communicate? 	<p>The glossary features only as supporting material, in the form of memo cards. Thus each card includes a working definition for a concept, some concise explanations, as well as a series of relevant definitions from other fields. It ends with an open thematic bibliography.</p>

Table 2. Examples of complementary modules

Complementary modules	Research questions	Comments
1. Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do we need rules in urban planning? • How are relationships between people, activities and places turned into rules? • Who imposes the rules and who has to follow them? 	
2. Instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What instruments does the urban planner have at their disposal? • How do we choose the appropriate instruments? • How do we create working instruments? 	
3. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we talk to a partner? • How do we negotiate with a beneficiary? • How do we present the results of a project? 	<p>This module is important because it familiarises students with teamwork methods and with project presentation techniques.</p>

The modular structure is reflected both in the lectures and in the learning material.

In the learning material, each module deals with a theme, supported by a series of cards. Each card brings up for discussion a topic related to the module theme. The topics can be of very different types. For example, a card can represent a state, a process, a problem, a way of solving a problem, a working instrument, etc. The discussion is structured by starting from a research question to which an answer is sought. In most situations, the structure of the cards is the following:

1. Research question.
2. Summary answer to the research question.
3. A series of arguments, which underpin the summary answer.
4. A series of examples which illustrate the argument.
5. References to other cards, which can add to the understanding of the subject.
6. An open bibliography.

Regarding the memo cards, the structure is slightly different since the role of this module is to define the working terms used by an urban planner. Thus, the discussion no longer starts from a research question to which an answer is sought, but from the working definition of a term. The cards will therefore have the following components:

1. Working definition.
2. Explanations dedicated to the usage of the term.
3. Definitions used in other professional fields.
4. An open bibliography.

All the cards are written in simple language that can be easily understood by anyone, regardless of whether or not they have any knowledge of urban planning. In addition, the structure of the cards clarifies the meaning and usage of key terms from urban planning practice. Thus, the cards can be read in any order.