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SCHOLAR ARCHITECT 2022

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

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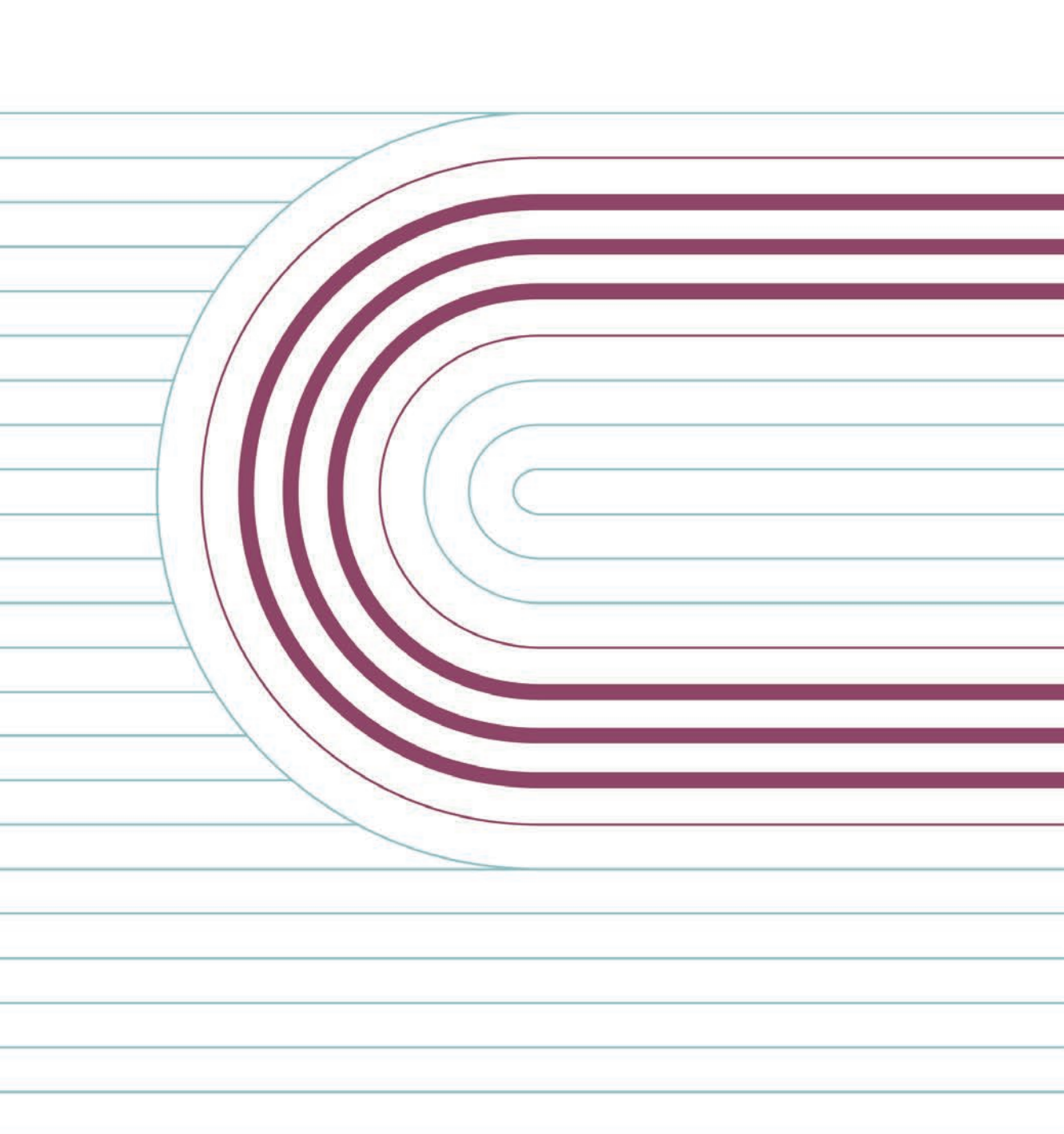
The English edition was translated from Romanian within the framework of the project

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

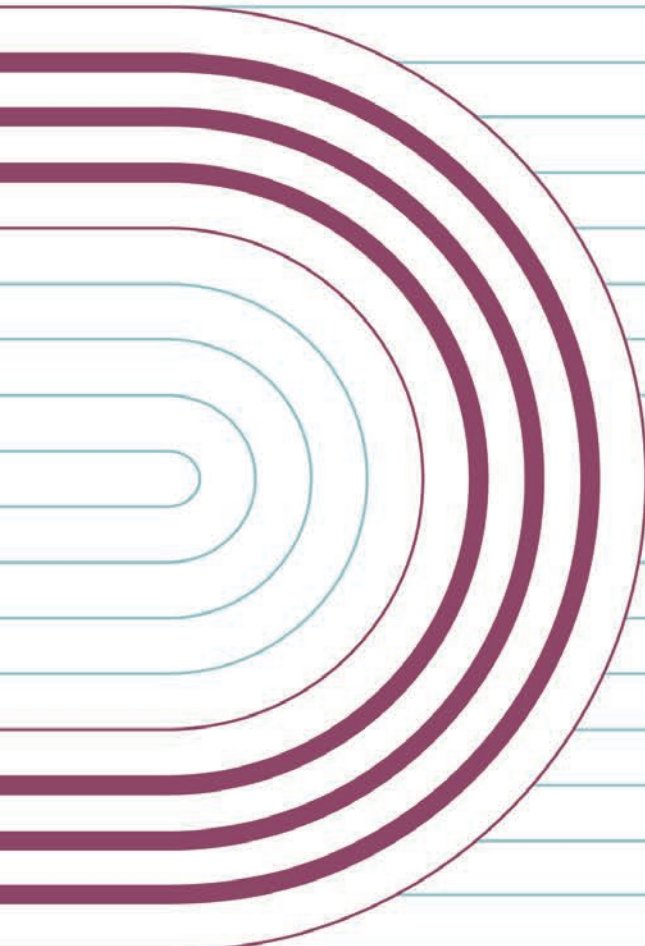
The Institutional Development Fund, Domain 5:
Improving the quality of teaching, including the observance of professional and academic ethics.

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 in a dark maroon color form a stylized 'C' shape. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page.

<https://doi.org/10.54508/9786066383004.07>

Andrei MITREA

Dana MILEA



**Key
concepts
in
urban
planning**



The problem

01

1. Working definition

The problem is a deficiency of a group of people, an activity or a place.

In urban planning design, the anatomy of a problem is given by the following equation¹:

$$P = A[-] \rightarrow M? \rightarrow B[+]$$

where:

¹A[-] represents the initial unsatisfactory situation²:

By definition, a deficient state exists if somebody suffers from something. If[,] for a given problem, the objective is to filter out a precise A[-], i.e. to recognise what the matter at hand actually is, it is recommended to ask the following question: “WHO IS SUFFERING?” (Schönwandt et al., 2013, p. 25)

¹ Some of the following paragraphs were previously published in Mitrea and Milea, 2020.

² The problem is the main product of the diagnosis.

_B[+] represents the final satisfying solution. In urban planning, B[+] is called an objective³ :

By defining a goal[,] we devise and determine the course of action. So far, so good. At the same time, however, we tend to completely mask out other, potentially promising search vectors [,] which may lead to improved solutions. (Schönwandt et al., 2013, p. 27)

_M? represents the measures that must be taken to improve the initial situation. The question mark indicates the fact that these are not known when the problem is being formulated. Otherwise, the formulated problem could be solved by following a predetermined procedure.

The recipe for success is: think further, beyond the first idea that comes along and beyond the limits of your own professional field... (Schönwandt et al., 2013, p. 28)

2. Explanation

The problems that are relevant for urban design must meet three conditions (Maurer, 1973):

_the knowledge, even imperfect, of the relations between community well-being and the built environment;

_the existence of some mechanisms for influencing the built environment, which can be used to benefit community well-being;

_the chosen problem must not be possible to solve through direct interventions in a single area (social, economic, legal, etc.);

A clear problem obeys two conditions:

_it is well-defined;

_its formulation includes the conditions that must be met by the solution.

This raises three verification questions:

_have we clearly formulated the problem that must be solved?
Or, in other words, how do we recognise the problem when we encounter it?

_can we discover a more important problem than the one we have just formulated?

_what conditions must the proposed solution fulfil in order to solve the formulated problem?

³ The objectives must be clear and possible. In other words, their fulfilment must be easy to verify.

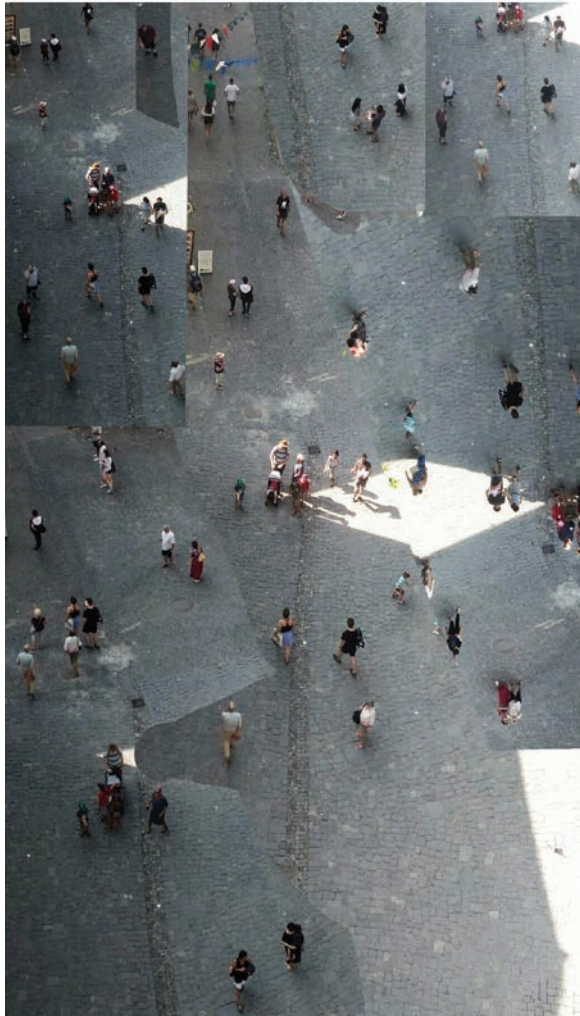


Fig. 1. People in public space - collage.
(c) Ioana Boghian-Nistor

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The analysis

02

1. Working definition

Analysis deconstructs the study area into people, activities and places, which it describes, classifies and summarises in diagrams. Each analysis explicitly deals with a problem¹.

It is worth bearing in mind that the study area is derived from the overlap of the minimal surfaces that need to be analysed to formulate the problem to be addressed by the project.

In its turn, the intervention area is the specific plot of land on which the solution to the problem discovered in the study area is built.

¹ See the memo card dedicated to the “problem”.

2. Explanation

The analysis answers the following research questions (see Pólya, 2004):

- _ what is the problem?
- _ what do we know about it?
- _ what do we not know about it?²
- _ what data do we work with?

By means of activities, the analyses connect people to places while at the same time creating a hierarchy of the encountered problems. Each analysis thus ranks the problems encountered by people in their activities, from the most to the least serious.

Here we work with three verification questions:

- _ what are the analyses we can perform and what data do we need for these?
- _ can we derive from each analysis at least one viable argument in support of our project?
- _ how many analyses do we need to perform? Can we reduce their number by reordering them?

² But we need to find out.

Selective bibliography

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The diagram

03

1. Working definition

The diagram encapsulates one or several analyses in a single image. In urban planning design, we work with two types of diagrams:

- _state diagrams (or structural diagrams);
- _process diagrams (or logical schemas).

State diagrams show the characteristics¹ of people, activities and places from the study area and from the intervention area.

Process diagrams show interactions between people, activities and places².

1 In other words, state (structural) diagrams include the characteristics of the different types of people (children, older people, maintenance staff, etc.) and their actions (playing, walking, maintenance, etc.), as well as the characteristics of the area or of the studied amenities (localisation, total area, accessibility, etc.).

2 Thus, they usually include activities (playing, sports, walking, etc.), decisions (if the weather is good, if there is an event, if there is free access, etc.) as well as the order in which they occur (indicated by arrows). In addition, they show the decisions people make: for example, if the weather is good, they walk down the alleys of the park; if not, they find shelter in the park pavilions.

It is worth bearing in mind that the study area is derived from the overlap of the minimal surfaces that need to be analysed to formulate the problem to be addressed by the project.

In its turn, the intervention area is the specific plot of land on which the solution to the problem discovered in the study area is built.

2. Explanation

Each state diagram must answer the following two research questions:

_what are the relevant traits³ of the people, activities and places in the study area?

_what are the relationships between people, activities and places?

In its turn, each process diagram must answer the question:

_how does interaction unfold between people and the places they use?

Two verification questions arise here as well, one for the state diagrams and the other for the process diagrams:

_how coherent (convincing) is the description of the people, activities and places in the study area and of the relationships between them?

_how complete is the picture of the interactions between people and places in the study area?

³ Or attributes.

Selective bibliography

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The synthesis

04

1. Working definition

The synthesis shows the functioning of the study area.

It is worth bearing in mind that the study area is derived from the overlap of the minimal surfaces that need to be analysed to formulate the problem to be addressed by the project.

In its turn, the intervention area is the specific plot of land on which the solution to the problem discovered in the study area is built.

2. Explanation

The synthesis answers the following research question:

_how does the study area function?

In other words, the synthesis represents the series of arguments (the argumentation) which show the functioning of the study area. Thus, the statements based on the conclusions of the analyses must be clear and linked together into a convincing argument. The synthesis therefore supports the solution proposed in the project.

Two verification questions arise here:

_is there a clear link between the conclusions of the analyses and the argumentation in the synthesis?

_is the argument built in the synthesis conclusive? Or, in other words, is the presented case convincing?

It is worth recalling that the synthesis ranks the problems of the study area according to their seriousness, showing why and to whom they matter. At the same time, it can also include a preliminary version of intervention priorities.

Selective bibliography

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Sommer, R., Tomoiogă, R., & Vaida, P. (coord.) (1969). *Mic dicționar filozofic*. București. Editura Politică.



The diagnosis

05

1. Working definition

The diagnosis explains the functioning of the study area.

It is worth bearing in mind that the study area is derived from the overlap of the minimal surfaces that need to be analysed to formulate the problem to be addressed by the project.

In its turn, the intervention area is the specific plot of land on which the solution to the problem discovered in the study area is built.

2. Explanation

The diagnosis answers the following research question:

_why does the study area function in this manner?

In other words, the diagnosis shows the causes and effects that produce the problem discovered in the study area, which the project will subsequently address. Thus, the diagnosis is a demonstration.

Two verification questions arise here as well:

_do we have a clear explanation (demonstration) for each argument in the synthesis?

_how many explanations do we need to offer? Can we support several arguments by a single explanation?

Selective bibliography

Popescu-Neveanu, P. (1978). *Dicționar de psihologie*. București: Editura Albatros.

Zamfir, C. & Vlăsceanu, L. (Coord.) (1993). *Dicționar de sociologie, urmat de indicatori demografici, economici, sociali și ecologici*. București: Editura Babel.