

WORKCAMP IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN URBANISM: EXPERIENCE FROM DANURB+ BUILDING CAMP FOR STUDENTS IN GOLUBAC, SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

Urban design belongs to the professional fields where public welfare is of great concern. This means that common practice in urban design involves the various forms of the active participation of different actors and stakeholders, positioning it as a significant segment in the professional ethos of urban designers. Hence, public participation is also one of the integral parts of higher education in contemporary urban design.

Urban design curriculum usually has a few courses dedicated for participation as the core topic, while other courses indirectly touch it. Their practical side is often in the form of public audits, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, which students conduct as an on-site or online training with citizens, experts and/or stakeholders. The form of a workcamp, where students-volunteers work and live together with local community on a short-term basis and for a not-for-profit cause, is rarer simply because it is more demanding to be included into formal higher education. However, such workcamps have many advantages related to learning about the participation process, such as democratic awareness, mutual understanding, increased independence, and self-reliance.

This paper presents one building camp for students, organised within DANURB+ INTERREG Project in Golubac, Serbia, in June 2022. The aim of the camp was to realise, materialise a small scale 'design and build' urban project which connects with the revealed underused local heritage or cultural potential, as a tangible implementation of an intangible potential. The paper intends to show how this process involved both students and the local community to jointly develop, design and build a small-scale public square in the Danube Riverfront of Golubac Town.

KEYWORDS _ *Open public space, participation, student camp, urban design*

INTRODUCTION: WORKCAMPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN URBANISM

Urban design is a design process in the environment with a focal point to physically shape human settlements and their integral parts. As such, this discipline has a collaborative and multidisciplinary nature, making a profound impact on the economical, social, ecological and cultural aspects of human settlements. It is said that urban design makes places for people (EP, 2000). This is due to the essential human dimension of urban design; one of the basic ideas in urbanism is to make human settlements more lively, safe, sustainable and healthy (Gehl, 2013). Therefore, urban design belongs to the professional fields where public welfare is of great concern (Djukić, 2021).

Many famous urban designers underline the importance of the active participation of citizens in urban design process. This is connected with a humane ultimate aspiration to improve their surroundings (Moughtin, 2003). This means that common practice in urban design involves the various forms of participation of different actors and stakeholders, positioning it as a significant segment in the professional ethos of urban designers (Münster et al, 2017). Hence, public participation is also one of the integral parts of higher education in contemporary urban design. In this consideration, cooperation between citizens and students during the urban design process is an especially important experience (Oh and Seo, 2022). Students in urban design thereby develop “the capacity to engage with the complexity and temporal fluidity of urban citizenship” (Combrinck and Venter, 2020, p. 1). A typical situation is that urban design curriculum consists of a few courses dedicated for public participation as the core topic, while other courses indirectly touch it. Their practical side is often in the form of public audits, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, which students conduct as an on-site or online training with citizens, experts and/or stakeholders.

The form of active workcamps for students is much rarer. Workcamp represents an active volunteering where volunteers (i.e., students) work and live together with local community on a short-term basis and for a not-for-profit cause (Sherrard Sherraden et al, 2006). The history of modern workcamps began in the 1920s in Western Europe, while they became more common after the World War II. The focus group of workcamp participants was younger adults. The aims behind a workcamp are usually multiple. The main gains are particularly for participants-volunteers and they are related to the process of their participation, such as mutual understanding, the raise of democratic awareness, increased independence and self-reliance (Burghardt, 2015).

Although international workcamps are a relatively widespread type of volunteering and they can be found across the world, there are no many of them directly incorporated within formal higher education. They are also rare in urban studies despite workcamps often having tasks related to space, such as an archaeology, the restoration of monuments, environmental protection (EYP, n.d.). This is simply because a workcamp is more demanding to be included in formal higher education than other, aforementioned forms of participation.

This paper presents a case of a building camp for students, organized within DANURB+ INTERREG Project (2020-2022) in Golubac Town in Eastern Serbia in June 2022. The aim of the camp was to materialize a small-scale ‘design and build’ urban project which connects with the revealed underused local heritage or cultural potential, as a tangible implementation of an intangible potential. The paper intends to show how this process involved both students and the local community to jointly develop, design and build a small-scale public square in the Danube Riverfront in the center of Golubac Town.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is organised as a single-case study, where the case is the DANURB+ student building camp in Golubac, held on June 21-24, 2022. Relevant methodology involves a more precise research organisation, where theoretical fundamentals are first settled. In this paper, the explanation of the essence of a workcamp is already explained in the introductory section. Then, the case of the

building camp is presented through its character, preparations, and development, with a spotlight on undertaken on-site student activities. Golubac Town in Eastern Serbia was intentionally chosen as a design polygon, as the town has had a rapid development last years due to the restoration of the famous Golubac Fortress and the related boom of cultural tourism. However, this has not been adequately reflected into socio-economic benefits for local population due to limited local capacities (Antonić et al, 2021). Finally, the main findings from the case study are highlighted and linked with the theoretical core to form concluding recommendations.

CASE STUDY: DANURB+ BUILDING CAMP FOR STUDENTS IN GOLUBAC, SERBIA

The preconditions for the building camp

The building camps for students were among the most important activities in the DANURB+ INTERREG Project (2020-2022). They are organized within the working package WP.T4 “Actions – putting the heritage of the Danube into action: local, regional and international projects”. The activities related to preparation and organisation of the building camps are labeled as the thematic deliverable 4.4.1., under the title “Building camps for students to materialise valorisation processes together with local communities”. This deliverable was specially formed for six universities, which are the project partners, to carry a part of their education activities *in situ*, in a small city or town that has the status of a strategic associate partner in the project. By the project application, “a building camp is a final stage of a participatory process with the help of professionals (universities and NGO-s) among local stakeholders. The aim of each camp is to realise, materialise a small-scale ‘design and build’ project which connects with the revealed underused heritage or cultural potential, as a tangible implementation of an intangible potential. During these activities, partners shall include local craftsmen and materials as well. Therefore, the building camps will also function as easily adaptable small-scale interventions, which strengthens the local community and contributes to further improvement of such local activities. A total of 6 building camps will be organised with the involvement of international and local (regional) students between the age of 16 to 25 by the leading of the universities, 2 in each section.”

Figure 1 (left): Students visited the site for the camp in Golubac on March 9, 2022 (Author: N. Mitrović);
Figure 2 (right): small-scale 3D models were a critical element for students to simplify the initial



projects so to be implementable (Author: J. Marić).

The afore mentioned deliverable had a student camp as the final event, while related preparations lasted almost one year before it. Several meetings between local representatives and the project researchers were organized during the late 2021-early 2022. During these studies, basic *in situ* research of several possible sites in the town was done to choose the most appropriate one. Finally, a joint decision was made about a small concrete plateau – an old cinematic concrete stage for performances – surrounded with urban greenery and next to “Golubac” Hotel and close (30-40 m) to both the Danube and the main square. Despite this excellent location, the site was in a poor state before the building camp. The last such meeting in February 2022 also included the technical

measurement and photo-documentation of the site. The work with student to prepare all conditions for the building camp lasted one semester, from late February to Early June 2022. It was realised within a faculty course – “STUDIO 06 URBANISM – SEMINAR”. First, students visited, explored and documented the site for the camp in Golubac with teaching staff (researchers) on March 9, 2022 (Fig. 1). In addition, they spoke with local experts and citizens relating to their opinion and experience with this site and its surroundings.

During the next three months, students developed their projects. Initially, most of them proposed quite radical and resource-demanding design. The teaching staff and they worked together to customise these initial visions to the level to be implementable. Students preliminarily targeted several objectives: suitable urban furniture, optimal micro location, communication paths, and opportunities for urban renewal. Then, the project development encompassed many elements, including urban furniture design, space analysis, material sourcing, and construction, as well as the customization of limitations (budget, timeframe, space-related issues, available/recycled materials). Their preliminary project 2D drawings were submitted as colloquium in April 2022. The next step for the students was to develop these drawings into small-scale 3D models (Fig. 2), which influenced all of them to further simplify the overall design. In late May, the teaching staff and students chose the most adequate projects for the camp. During early June, all material and tools were bought for the camp, as a final preparation step. The realisation of the building camp

The DANUrB+ student building camp was finally organized in Golubac during four days – June 21-24, 2022. The students actively participated in all stages of the construction process, gaining valuable hands-on experience on a regular construction site. The main idea was to involve every student in construction stages, which were organised daily (Fig. 3-6):

1. Day: dirt and sand excavation,
2. Day: armature reinforcement and concrete work,
3. Day: finalizing finish and
4. Day: paint work and final arrangement.



Figure 3-6: The building camp was organised into four days: Day 1 – dirt and sand excavation; Day 2 – armature reinforcement and concrete work; Day 3 – finalising finish; and Day 4 – paint work and final arrangement (Author: M. Obradović).

This section highlights the educational benefits of involving students in real-world construction scenarios, enabling them to acquire practical skills and insights into fundamental construction techniques. After making the urban furniture, the concrete pedestal was the most important for the

main wooden installation in the very centre of a new space – a Portal to the Danube, which is the widest on its flow exactly in Golubac (6-7 km). It has the purpose of having a reference point, a central figure, and an artistic form.

There students had a chance to get familiar with rebars and making concrete with hands – just cement, sand and water. Having in mind that those students will be architects in a few years, it would be very useful for them to learn-by-practice how to mold concrete and to understand the row technology of making it, which was an important work to form a 'pedestal' for the portal. Other forms of public furniture were wooden chairs, wooden staircases to connect with the former stage and a higher elevation, small public shelf for books which represents an open public library, and the seating and lying 'waves' made from wooden cylinders.

Ultimately, the transformed Golubac square became a vibrant gathering place, as urban acupuncture, attracting locals and providing a safe and engaging environment for various activities (Fig. 7-8).



Figure 7-8: The complete project during day (left) and night (right) (Author: M. Obradović).

Community Engagement and Participation

The success the building camp and the project can not be attributed only to the students' innovative design solutions and the integration of recycled materials, but also their efforts in community engagement. This section explores its positive impact as it fosters a greater sense of belonging and responsibility among residents. Basically, central to the success of the building camp and the final on site project was the active involvement and engagement of the local community. The students organised a lot of small tasks that ordinary citizens could involve themselves in, allowing citizens to contribute to the project's transformation, such as painting and help in material transfer. Even old ladies joined to these activities by making food for all camp participants.



Figure 9: The bright colours of the finished project in Golubac in order to create more identity and slightly more propelling space for younger generations (Author: M. Obradović).

At the end, furniture was polished and painted in different colours in order to create more identity and slightly more propelling space for younger generations, considering that the municipality of Golubac has depopulation and 'brain drain' (Fig. 9). In order to involve other citizens in the project as a good participation practice, students chose four possible names and made a post on Facebook for everybody in Golubac to participate and give their suggestions for a name of new public space. After some time, every citizen could feel that he belongs to the project. That gave the sense of belonging, which eventually made locals spend time with their kids to watch and protect their new place. The most important goal was for an activity to address another activity by participating from locals. This online action resulted with a very 'local' name for it – the DANUBIAN PAVILION (Serb. *Дунавски павиљон*)

CONCLUSIONS – THE RESULTS AND IMPACT OF THE BUILDING CAMP

The Danubian Pavilion Project breathed new life into a neglected public square in Golubac through a workcamp by employing the expertise and creativity of architecture students. This case study provides an in-depth exploration of the project objectives and chronology, emphasizing the crucial role of community engagement and sustainable design principles.

Despite many limitations, the students ingeniously employed recycled materials and existing infrastructure to revitalize the Golubac square. This case study underscores the significance of incorporating historical identities, repurposing spaces, and engaging the community to foster sustainable design practices and create a sense of belonging while equipping students with valuable architectural and building skills.

The gains for the projects could be seen while researchers as the organisers of the building camp regarding to the management of duties and assignments and the establishment of roles. The most important action was to organize the common activity and work in larger groups, which an important task during a workcamp. All of the researchers spoke about organizing tasks, distributing them among team members, and ensuring that everyone has a specific role to contribute effectively to the project or task at hand.

Last but not the least, the Danubian Pavilion has made a sizable impact on Golubac community. The project serves as an example of how local identities, spaces, and symbols can be repurposed to foster architectural innovation and sustainable design. By embracing creative problem-solving, resourcefulness, and inclusive design practices, the project revitalized a neglected public space while instilling a sense of pride and ownership within the community. This case study underscores the importance of community participation and their vision on the integration of sustainable design principles in transforming their environment.

The final conclusion is based on how we can use old identities, spaces, community ideas, and local symbols, after which we can recycle them and use them in the most rational way to embrace the project. The most important aspect of this project was the creation of the idea of how to involve everybody, students, locals, and the public sector to participate, where everybody has a chance to share knowledge and dedication with the common goal of connection and having a place where to connect.

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