HOW SPIKE AND THE SLUMDWELLER FIND REALITY IN DESIGN STUDIO HANDOUTS: AN EXPLORATION OF REALITY IN THE DESIGN STUDIO

Beatriz C. Maturana

Abstract
This paper is part of my research exploring the architectural design studio (ADS) and its engagement with the real world. This engagement is partly investigated by identifying instances where the architectural design brief (reflecting the reality of practice) manifests in the ADS handouts. Specifically, I will examine here the occurrence of three of the nine criteria identified in the design brief within the ADS handouts: consultation, need, and client. Spike and the slumdwellers are two “clients” that reveal some of the complexities of the connection between ADS handouts and the real world. The data for the study consists of 145 handouts from three architectural faculties in Australia. It covers five years of architectural studies between 2003 and 2007.

Keywords
Architectural education, reality, experience, maturity, engagement.

Introduction
Assessing ADS against the reality of practice is not without contention. Some would argue against emulating the reality of practice in ADS, believing that practice diminishes the opportunity of creative freedom (1). Others consider that the aims of practice contradict the aims of education—practice focusing on financial gains and education on learning (2). Conversely, others posit that by not drawing from the real world, “contextual variables are neglected. (3)” In this paper, I argue that creative freedom requires experience, knowledge, reason, judgment, and maturity, and that in ADS these qualities can be attained by engaging with the real world (4). Without these, freedom becomes a shallow and misplaced delusion (5). I suggest that the criteria used in a design brief and permanently used in architectural practice (6) offer some readily available “tools” that can assist students (even if in a limited degree) in increasing the opportunities for interaction with the world outside the university environment (7). This is not to say that there are no other ways to go about improving ADS’ engagement with the real world, but for now, this is perhaps one of the most measurable and attainable.

Aspects that replicate the reality of architectural practice, or more specifically the criteria used in a typical design brief, can be and to a degree are perceived as built-in to speculative ADS exercises. Indeed, most ADS handouts contain at least some of these criteria—for example,
client, site, cost, or budget. Inquiring into the research data from the perspective of the processes typically undertaken by an “average” architectural practice provides an agreed-upon process of gathering information that assists to define a design brief. This information is generated by and within the “culture” of architectural practitioners. Thus, by exploring and evaluating how ADS handouts engage or dismiss aspects of the brief, this study highlights the benefits that this specific form of engagement with the real world of practice could offer to students.

Data, Methods, and Nomenclature

The study is based on 145 ADS documents contributed by three Australian architectural faculties from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), University of Tasmania (UTas) and The University of Melbourne (UoM), from the states of New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria, respectively. The three faculties are representative of what I have called traditional universities, meaning that these are public and are some of the oldest universities in their respective region (8). It is not the aim of this research to focus on evaluating the differences between these three universities. I have called “theme” the sum of most of the content included in the document or case, which encompasses the problem(s) selected and explored by the studio, and expectations and recommendations of the subject coordinator, tutor, or studio leader—all of whom will be referred to in this research as “tutor.” Other important elements, such as ADS pedagogy and ADS physical learning environments, are not explored here.

Some key terms have emerged from the bibliographic material and from the data analysed, particularly from those cases offering thick descriptions (9). One of these key terms involves attitudes, broadly grouped around the idea of “maturity.”

Experience, judgment, and “maturity”: I use these first two terms to refer to important aspects that assist us to understand reality and consequently facilitate the process of maturity (personal and societal)(10). For instance, awareness of reality through the development of objectivity, “the faculty to see the world, nature, other persons and oneself as they are, and not distorted by desires and fears,” was essential to Erich Fromm in the achievement of maturity—or sanity, as he would define it. Others, using terms such as experience, the practical side of life, “field of care,” engagement and judgement, have gone further to discuss notions of maturity in architectural education (12).

The main data used for this research comprise subject outlines and design studio handouts or SD (used to describe the specific design studio offered by the studio coordinator and/or tutor). Handouts offer a significant opportunity to succinctly explain ADS projects to students—including intentions and recommended approaches. In a manner that selects what is considered essential by each ADS, these documents offer a snap-shot of an important phase in ADS, one that establishes what is to be done for the rest of the semester. It is understood that while studio handouts and descriptions are essential documents in ADS, these do not constitute all the written information offered to the students throughout the semester. Nevertheless, these are chosen because they set the scope for the semester’s work, which in many cases form the basis for the students’ selection of a particular ADS (13). While the length of
each case varies substantially, within and across faculties, most cases manage to present the ADS project (from the perspective of what matter in this research) in one or two pages. The remaining pages comprise information that has not been weighed up by this study, such as bibliographic lists, images, maps, timetables, university regulations and students’ services.

The data are framed within the period between 2003 and 2007, inclusive, and it is chosen because there has been continuity in the general program or curricula of each faculty of architecture during this time.

The following table shows the information and meaning provided by each case name. The use of a nomenclature to identify case type, year level, semester level (when known) and faculty code, provides a short form of immediate access to basic information about each case, while keeping the source (architectural faculty) anonymous.

Case names are accompanied by data specific to each case offering information regarding two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studio Handouts:</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Semester (if known)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Project No. when more than one case</th>
<th>Faculties of architecture (code used to identify each faculty is known only to the researcher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O.L. (subject outline x 44)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A. (first)</td>
<td>03.</td>
<td>-1.</td>
<td>Fa, Fb, Fc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD. (studio description x 87)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B. (second)</td>
<td>04.</td>
<td>-2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX. (exercise x 1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C. (third)</td>
<td>05.</td>
<td>-3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS. (workshop x 4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>06.</td>
<td>-4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF. (reference x 3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>07.</td>
<td>-...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: because of the type of information contained in “RF” documents, these have not been used in all analyses.

** To maintain the anonymity of the participating faculties, names of places and/or organisations in selected quotes have been replaced with a “XXX”.

Table 1: Cases are identified by using the following nomenclature. (Source: Author).
forms of engagement with reality. For example SD.4A.05-1.Fb (7/5), where 7 (max. score is 10), refers to the “reality of architectural practice,” which favors a more clearly defined and larger social engagement. The number 5 refers to “content thickness” (max. score is 10), which is achieved by a quantitative calculation of nodes expressing pieces of information included in each case. Example of the scoring system used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reality of practice</th>
<th>Thick or thin case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD.4A.05-1.Fb</td>
<td>7 / 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Design Brief as a Criteria

In order to establish ADS’ engagement with the real world of practice, cases were evaluated to ascertain their content in relation to nine points, reflecting important design brief criteria. The AIA defines the design brief as:

...a written statement which details the client’s expectations and the functions of a proposed building. It should describe the facilities to be provided and the activities to be performed and also clearly identify the broad policies within which these are to be achieved in respect of time, cost and quality of the facility (14).

The criteria used in this research comprise simplified versions of the headings included in standard architectural design briefs in Australia and includes the following performance criteria: consultation, site, needs, societal reach, client, spatial details, construction, budget, and planning control or regulations (15). Social reach conveys the recommendation described by the AACA and the AIA as the “Human, social, environmental, and contextual issues are researched and addressed. (16)” The answers are recorded simply as “not mentioned” or “mentioned.”

While some parallels can be drawn between the reality of architectural practice and ADS, it is also necessary to appreciate that in an educational environment some flexibility is required in the manner and depth with which none, some or all of the nine criteria are noted. Most ADS handouts provided evidence of at least one criteria of the design brief. The parameters for the evaluation of the presence and weighting of this criteria in the ADS handouts is based on the extreme case samples—those that addressed most of these questions and those that address virtually none. A moderate approach that mediates between those two extremes was taken.

By and large, early results unambiguously suggested that cases addressing the criteria were far fewer than those not addressing it. These results prompted me to verify the evidence using different methods, including the consideration of a more flexible approach that included a wider range of terms that could indirectly convey the notions sought. The steps taken confirmed and increased the confidence in the findings. Nonetheless, each category has also presented its own particularities, which when significant will be discussed separately.

The figure below shows a comparative distribution representing the nine-point design brief criteria. It aims to illustrate the level of relative importance that these criteria have within ADS.
How Spike and the Slumdweller Find Reality in Design Studio Handouts: An Exploration of Reality in the Design Studio

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Figure 1: Average distribution of the criteria representing the “reality of architectural practice” within the yes answers. (Source: Author).

ADS Handouts: What Do They Say?

This exploration looks at three of nine criteria identified in the design brief used in architectural practice—consultation, need, and client—and their presence in the ADS handouts.

Consultation

With whom is the architect going to consult, for example, engineers, planners, neighbors?

In the real world of practice, even the simplest project requires some form of consultation. The most fundamental and more regular consultation takes place with the client. Meetings with specific council departments—for example, building and planning permits (or at least recommendations)—are often sought for most housing projects. Experts from other disciplines fill the gaps in architectural knowledge or in areas in which architects are not authorised to sign-off, for example structural engineering. Dealing with consultants is also deemed an important part of the learning process in practice.

The following chart shows the overall reference to any type of consultation taking place in ADS by each of the three faculties. Of the total sample, 77% do not mention consultation and 23% cite some form of consultation.

Figure 2: Mention of consultation or similar notion. (Source: Author).

While consultation in the real world of practice is a necessity, the above results (see Figure 2) would suggest that ADS does not rate consultation as an intrinsic part of the design process.

Although this research takes into account any mention or inference of consultation, including fictitious consultation, a “yes” result does not mean that “actual” consultation is being requested or will take place. However, a mention
would indicate a degree of acknowledgment. For example, the following two cases have been coded as self-referential consultation and placed under the “self or fictitious” category. These cases express an indirect allusion to self-consulting, both of which are based on the assumption of past experience. These documents do not cite any other forms of external source of knowledge, checks, or balances. Low engagement with practice and “weak” content is articulated in their scores both (2/3).

I assume that students will use their personal experience of studying architecture and their knowledge of its current state as a discipline to inform their design work, and I also assume that students... Case: SD.5B.06.Fc (2/3).

Critically review his/her own past work in order to articulate a personal agenda for a design project; Case: SD.4.07-1.Fb (2/3).

An opposite situation is presented in the following examples, in which, according to the document, consultation covers a wide and well-defined range of opportunities. These cases not only prompt consultation, but note how the second example also reinforces its value by highlighting the benefits that consultation brings to the studio as a whole (a studio community) and not only to individual students:

Pencil and sketching, walking, seating, observing, asking questions, and expressing the findings graphically. Case: SD.4B.06-1.Fc (3/5).

We also welcome design tutors, colleagues from other disciplines, professional architects, consultants and guests from practice, statutory authorities, government and the wider community who will be sharing their expertise with our Studio community. Case: OL.2B.05.Fb (4/4).

“Devaluing” of the connection between ADS and practice is evident in some ADS cases. In the following example, note how design and practice (professional services) are conceived as two disconnected or “different” activities and consequently “direct comparisons” are actively discouraged.

...learning about design is a quite different activity from undertaking design as a professional service. While the design studio superficially resembles the work of an architectural office, students are by no means encouraged to play-act half-baked architects, and you are discouraged from making direct comparison to ‘the way things are done in an office’. Case OL.3A.05.Fb (3/3).

While consultation will take place in practice, it may be regarded as a “necessary evil” rather than an opportunity for further learning through collaborative engagement with other professionals and the community. This situation might indeed have further implications for
interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary working models that, while stated as aims in educational curricula and by professional bodies, are at best difficult to achieve (17).

...you will be asked to engage with the real debates, conflicts of value and forces for change without dumbing down your urban and architectural responses. Case SD.4B.05-7.Fc (3/7).

As with each of the three criteria, I have taken a flexible approach to include a wide range of terms that could indirectly convey the notion, in this case, of consultation. In the above example, consultation is not explicit but I have taken engagement with real debate as a form of consultation. It is not clear why the engagement with “real debates, conflicts and values” would automatically result in the “dumbing down” of the urban or architectural response.

Ironically, some studios that engage with real situations that are close, both in proximity and social context, limit the experience of the real world by capitulating to the practical constraints of establishing relationships with “clients.” In the following example the tutor’s attempt to shield the would-be clients from unsolicited consultation is supplemented by the promise to provide “all” information required by the students. By default, this real-life studio reduces the experience to one that could be anywhere and is nowhere at the same time.

Please do not make individual contact with or request information from officers of XXX City Council or occupiers of the existing building or surrounding buildings. All information that you may require will be provided in the studio context. As this is a hypothetical project, it is in the best interests of all concerned that false expectations or concerns are not aroused. Case: SD.3.05-2.Fb (7/6).

That there are such few cases where consultation is mentioned in the ADS handouts indicates that consultation is either not valued or cannot be accommodated within ADS. This suggests that the concept of consultation as a source of knowledge to inform the architectural response is not relevant or a priority within architectural education. Without an appreciation and skill in consultation it might be difficult for students to locate the needs of the client.

Need
This refers to the needs that any project will have as an objective to satisfy. The mention of the notion of need is occasionally found expressed in the documents or asserted through and as part of the exercise. Below are examples of how the notion of need is explicitly expressed in the ADS handout:

What are their needs? What facilities exist? What are their functions? Case: SD.1B.03.Fa (5/2).

... by acknowledging that they bring prior knowledge, experience and capabilities to a real world design project that seeks design solutions for needs identified by a community group. Case: SD.4B.07-6.Fb (7/4).

Housing needs, objectives and strategies will be explored through readings and design exercises. Case: OL.5A.07-2.Fb (1/3).

The following chart shows the overall reference to any type of need by each of the three faculties. Of the total sample, 73% do not mention need and 27% cite some type of need.
Clearly defined clients or real clients bring with them clearly defined needs. This is also true in ADS, in which narrative, clients, and needs tend to merge. For this reason, some of the examples cited here are mentioned under the “client” heading, although with a different emphasis.

Sometimes need—as distinct from what we tend to translate as some type of social urgency—is an abstract necessity that we create or accept. For instance, the need to comply with some project deadlines or “immediate attention” as expressed in the following cases.


The need for consolidation and improvement of ferry terminal facilities in the region has been requiring immediate attention since the introduction of the two new XXX vessels in September. Case: SD.3B.03.Fa (9/8).

The above cases offer some of the few examples in which time is part of the proposal—not only as deadline for students’ submissions, but as an intrinsic factor in most of what we do in the real world. Deadlines are charged with all sorts of pressures that could assist to ground any project. Often needs are inferred in the narrative as in the following example that tells of an almost palpable sense of need and urgency:

The slumdwellers are furious that part of their community is to be evicted for a land use that they will not even be able to afford to use. Case: SD.4B.06.Fa (10/10).

Also, observe how the following case offers some background information that not only informs about the history of the place, but also actively implies the need to adapt and create new conditions. Notice the use of terms such as change, inevitable, conflicts, and competing interests, all bringing about a sense of immediacy, reality, and specific need:

The major industries that gave rise to the town, fishing, forestry, and agriculture are all in decline. New industries and new people are changing the region and the town. With change are the almost inevitable community conflicts between the new and the old and the competing interest[s] of the multitude of individuals and private and public organizations. Case: SD.4A.07-9.Fb (5/5).
Similarly, the following case speaks of needs that are intrinsically connected to a design response and which are not to be imaginary, but embedded in the experience of actual users.

The need to which your design responds must be established by research, because they cannot be drawn from your own limited experience. (...) Before all other considerations, dwellings must ‘work’, and they must do so for some identifiable range of users other than yourself. Case SD.3.05-2. Fb. (7/6).

In similar proportion to the criteria of consultation, the overwhelming majority of cases do not mention “need.” This suggest that the need, often responsible for defining the architectural problem, is either not a priority or is actively devalued through its absence in ADS. However, as some of these cases here exemplify, there is much to be learned from those cases that have mentioned need. The manner in which they express need and the rich connection that they manage to establish between ADS and the real world are worth further study.

**Client**

The AACA (Architects Accreditation Council of Australia) defines the client as the building owner, proprietor, architect’s employer, or the principal. The client may be “an individual, a corporation, a partnership, an incorporated association, a statutory corporation or a government department.”

The client is a crucial factor in a study that explores engagement with the real world. The client is the reason for much of the formal procedures as they ground the project in a locality and financial and spatial terms. A client has a legal voice and often it has a human voice that expresses needs, affections, preferences, and dislikes. I will therefore expand the definition of the client to provide a glimpse of its many possibilities.

Often the client is the person, business, or corporate entity who requests the project. From a single client to a government department or land developer, the typology of the client can vary extensively. It is still a matter of contention whether “the wider public,” users or passersby, will be regarded as clients, but they certainly are stakeholders. Although the wider public may have vested interests, their relation to the project is indirect as compared to that of the “client.” Nevertheless, the following case provides an example of how a local government is presented as facilitating engagement with other government agencies and the stakeholders, through a defined document containing a set of goals:

**XXX Terminal Proposal:** The ferry terminal will be owned by the Port of XXX Corporation, and the State Government, with the opportunity for some private sector investment. Discussions with stakeholders and research into similar facilities indicate a new ferry terminal facility is likely to contain the following basic activity areas:

**Client:** XXX City Council, and the Port of XXX Authority.

**Client Goals and Objectives, XXX CITY COUNCIL**

Case: SD.3B.03.Fa (9/8).

The client is the generator, the assessor, and often the source of essential information regarding the project. From this point of view, we could consider the client as a source of knowledge, whether formal or informal. The client defines the basic functions that the project is required to satisfy and is normally the person(s) to whom the architect is answerable. With some exceptions, clients or
their agents are often financially responsible for the project (21). Given this, it is important to note that because architects are only associated with a small percentage of all buildings produced in Australia (somewhere between 8 to 15%) we can assume that architectural practices deal with some types of clients but not all of them. For example, clients in the form of community groups and not-for-profit organizations requiring building services rarely can afford the cost of engaging architectural services. Another type of client, seldom accessible to a “typical” practice, is the pro bono client (22).

The typology of the client also defines the closeness or separation between the architect and the ultimate user. For example, a developer as a client tries to interpret the needs of the potential user from his or her own perspective and interests. Similarly, a government lead development could also exhibit some distance from the user.

Different degrees of speculation within ADS projects also affect the “realism” of the client, its influence and actual presence. The existence of a client in ADS is not always designated as such. Yet, some can still assert their presence by other means, even when speculations may not generate the degree of definition needed in formal agreements typically used in architectural firms. Their presence, as in the following case, can be as informal as is the client’s housing situation. These clients have no names but they are present through their needs, which are most apparent and provide a powerful impression of determination and urgency. Notice how their presence is introduced with active realism—they are going to be evicted, they are furious.

The slumdwellers are furious that part of their community is to be evicted for a land use that they will not even be able to afford to use. Case: SD.4B.06.Fa (10/10).

Among cases acknowledging clients or users, the following quote exemplifies how the existence of a client allows other aspects to take on a more substantial form. Note how liaison with the users prompts the students, in advance, to become receptive to the users’ aspirations and needs:

Working in association with LLL. There our LLX studio enterprise will liaison with the rural community service group XXX Enterprises based in XXX to meet their aspirations for a residential and community based facility in the township of XXX. Case SD.4B.07-6.Fb (7/4).

The following chart shows the overall reference to client or user by each of the three faculties. Of the total sample, 62% do not mention clients and 38% cite (explicitly or implicitly) a user or client.

![Figure 4: Mention of client, user or similar notion. (Source: Author).](chart.png)
While in the real world of practice the existence of a client is almost mandatory, the above information suggests that most ADS do not rate the client as an intrinsic part of the creative process.

Although this research takes into account any mention of client, user, or similar notion, including inferred references, this does not mean that actual engagement with a client is being requested. However, a mention of any type would indicate some acknowledgment of the role of the client. Likewise, the absence of such a notion denotes failure to recognise such a key aspect in the instigation of most projects—a trigger in the creative process of establishing the “problem” to be solved.

Note in the following example how the presence of the client enriches the context of the proposed project by bringing to the discussion issues affecting a large number of people who are not traditionally architectural clients.

Relocated Slum dwellers: It is proposed that a total of 15.48 ha of the reclaimed land be used for relocation and rehabilitation of those people living in slums along the river who are affected by the project. The land is allocated in three pieces at separate locations. This ensures that none of the project affected persons will have to move too far from their present location. Case SD.4B.07.Fa (7/9)

The presence of clients brings with them their own preoccupations with which students can develop some empathy. In the real world of practice, design decisions carry consequences. In the world of ADS, students’ decisions also carry consequences, even if for now only for the students. Although the result of these decisions will not be worn by the clients (slum dwellers in this case), students can be reminded and made aware of the possible consequences that their design options could have in the real world. Design decisions can be richer by considering the issue at hand in all its complexity—creativity springs from a problem with tight constraints. The text offers enough visual clues to prompt questions that can confidently be asked by the students—because we all know what a river is and can imagine how living close to a river can present some challenging conditions. Students may also have heard that people prefer to remain close to their community—in fact, this is what many students do.

The text invites questions and the responses can further enrich and ground the learning and project response: what is the line that determines beyond which the users will not need to move “too far”? What are the climate and topographic conditions?
conditions along such a river?

As indicated by the score for this case (7/9), this ADS handout has engaged with the reality of practice and it is thick in content, therefore, we can assume that many of these questions are addressed in other sections of the document. Nevertheless, the point I am making is that a client, with defined needs and social conditions, enriches the case and may assist students to make sense of the wider realities that they may have never experienced.

Nonetheless, in ADS it is not always possible to have “real” clients with such strong presences. In such cases, this is how two cases deal with hypothetical projects:

This project is hypothetical, but you are encouraged to consider current use patterns and the needs of the local community when designing your proposals for the site. Case WS.2A.07-1.Fb (4/4).

Whilst the project is a fictitious, speculative one, the problem stems from an actual need to improve facilities at the XXX School in XXX. The site is home to a support school, providing educational facilities for intellectually handicapped children, and also general learning support for other primary schools in XXX, as well as adult literacy classes. Case: SD.5A.07.Fa (6/4).

The above two cases demonstrate how the key role of the client is not diminished by the admission that the project is hypothetical. On the contrary, even in these hypothetical cases, the needs of the clients (the community and the school) are to find their way into the proposal. This statement opens the doors for students to work out how they are to investigate these needs. Hypothetical, speculative or not, these cases draw from strongly definable clients and needs. The opportunity to extend the “field of care” into areas such as that of intellectually handicapped children is made available to students (23). The acknowledgment that “the problem stems from an actual need” speaks of a tutor that values real experiences and brings them into the ADS.

Nonetheless, not all clients are based on real situations. Consider, for example, the following description of a client, in which the direction of the investigation is inward looking and in which exposure to new experiences is explicitly reduced. Furthermore, note how these clients are shaped from the student’s imagination in order to serve the student’s “own design”:

The clients are an imaginary pair. It is up to you to give them attributes that are relevant to the questions you are exploring in your design. The only requirement is that the pair must somehow challenge conservative norms regarding the idea of a couple. Case: SD.2B.03-1.Fa (2/4).

In addition, as real clients “vanish,” fictitious characters come to replace them. Take for instance the following description,

“Is there a place for Spike?” is a sub text and question that would be explored in the studio. Spike is a character in “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and subject of many media and cultural studies. Spike epitomises a character that lies between fantasy and reality (and many shades of grey in between), a subterranean dweller that exists in the underbelly of any city. Is there a place for Spike in a genuinely diverse city? Case SD.4A.07-1.Fc (2/6).
This is an interesting case and not exceptional in regards to the use of fictional characters. Yet, most other fictional clients are somehow based on human beings, while this one transcends those boundaries. In spite of the fictitious nature of the client, the document expresses concern for social, political, and global issues affecting humanity and our cities. The document attests to it by centring the theme on questions and discussions posed by Richard Sennett and Leonie Sandercock—both authors grounded in social theory, politics, and social processes. Nevertheless, the document does not once mention terms such as clients, users, or consultation, although client is inferred in its mention of Spike (24). Thus, the “medium density housing” brief presented to the students is not supported with government reports, housing needs of the area in question, or any other form of empirical data, nor is there advice for students to search or support their investigations on quantifiable data. However, students are encouraged to consider certain urban conditions from the point of view of the suggested theoretical works. While these readings may encourage some students to further immerse themselves in theory, taken in isolation and without grounding them with experience, they may not do well in connecting these ideas to lived social and environmental conditions.

Richard Sennett identified one of the key principles of urban design as the creation of “live urban space,” space that acknowledges principles of diversity and focuses on the tensions in a society instead of isolating them from one another. Case SD.4A.07-1.Fc (2/6).

The score of (2/6) indicates that this case has a very low engagement with the reality of practice, however relatively thick in content. This is because much of its content is made of references to various theoretical works, and relevant history, with little grounding or emphasis on quantifiable, perceivable, or material conditions. Perhaps “Spike” as a client epitomises recurring cases revealing a ghostly void between good intentions and reality.

**Conclusion**

The three criteria studied above suggest that the reality of architectural practice does not play a significant role in ADS. What remains unanswered is how reality or which reality is represented in ADS.

As much as a mention of consultation, need, or client recognizes the value of their respective roles, the absence of these notions devalues their role. Their absence not only distances the inquirer from learning opportunities and from the opportunity to widen the understanding of an issue by approaching it from different perspectives, it also distances the student from a direct opportunity of engagement with its social context—from experiencing—considered by some intrinsic to the work of architecture (25).

This study begins to suggest that the notion that practice will take place after university education is already the dominant approach of the ADS. If a connection with the criteria of the design brief is not a tool used to engage with the real world of practice or reality in general, then it is unclear at this stage what other approach is providing such a connection. This poses a challenge to ADS in relation to delivering the stated intent of the universities to engage with the outside world.
Spike and the slumdwellers are two case studies that demonstrate the complexity of the connection between ADS handouts and the real world explored in my research. Here we have two cases that are both rich in content. The former, representing the overwhelming majority of case studies, meets little of the criteria I have used to ascertain the connection with the real world of architectural practice. On the other hand, a design brief for slumdwellers may appear to be an extreme example to explore the criteria of a design brief located within the world as we know it. Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that the real world is always somewhere else. There are ample case studies within this study that evidence high levels of engagement through mundane as well as extreme situations. Both the obtuse and overt case studies that demonstrate a connection with the outside world are assessed through the lens of the nine criteria of the design brief within the reality of architectural practice. Another question emerges in regard to why a disconnection takes place between the purported ambition of the universities to connect with the outside world and the intention outlined in the ADS handouts compared with actions, purposes, or measurable results of this intention.

Notes

1 A recent study on architectural education in Australia discusses how a focus on design has come at the expense of other areas of knowledge while misleading students in regards to wider societal concerns and the real world of practice. (Ostwald & Williams, 2008, p. 18). Moreover, according to Prof Louis Sauer, some practitioners see teaching in ADS as an opportunity to free themselves from the actual demands of the architectural practice while opting for play while avoiding references to real constrains. (Sauer, 25 February 2009).

2 (Teymur, 1992, p. 15).

3 (Salama, 2008, p. 104).

4 This paper is not concerned with the discussion of reality or the ‘real world’ from a philosophical perspective. It takes the stance that reality is not a relative notion, while its perception might be. The term ‘reality’ in this sense is referred to as the day-to-day, the quotidian, common place, ordinary, the real world, or simply reality.

5 See (Habraken, 2007, p. 17).

6 The Australian Institute of Architecture (AIA, former RAIA) calls these ‘performance criteria’, see (RAIA and AAC, January 2006, p. 10).

7 A commitment to external engagement in education is articulated by The University of Melbourne by: …its intention to make research, student learning and external engagement serve public ends. This includes taking up pressing societal problems in research, producing graduates prepared for responsibility, and promoting inquiry and open debate based on evidence and reason. (The University of Melbourne, 2005).

8 According to 2008 SHJT Academic Ranking of World universities, within Australia, The University of Melbourne ranks 2nd (note that the university ranking first does not offer architectural studies), the University of New South Wales ranks 6th (second in the State of New South Wales) and the University of Tasmania ranks 13th (first in its own State and the 4th oldest university in Australia).

9 Adopted from Gilbert Ryle, Geertz refers to thick description as those rich and contextualized narratives, the opposite he calls thin description (Geertz, 1973).

10 According to Fromm, “Mental health is achieved if man develops into full maturity according to the characteristics and laws of human nature. Mental illness consists in the failure of such development.”
(Fromm, 1955, p. 14).

11 (Fromm, 1955, p. 64).

12 See (Sennett, 2008), Mies Van der Rohe’s “1938: Inaugural address as Director of Architecture at Armour Institute of Technology” in (Johnson, 1979), (Tuan, 1974), (Teymur, 1992, p. 15) and (Habraken, 2007, p. 11).

13 Dr Greg Missingham raised the point that occasionally, a student’s preference for a particular ADS may be based on the studio leader’s reputation (it can work either to pursue or to avoid), in which case, any written material may have little effect in determining a student’s preference.


15 (RAIA and AACA, January 2006, p. 10).

16 (RAIA and AACA, January 2006, p. 10).

17 See (Morin, 1990); (Salama, 2005); (Boyer & Mitgang, 1996).

18 (AACA, September 2003).

19 A statutory definition of ‘client’ is also provided by government departments such as the Building Commission, the Architects Registration Board of Victoria (ARBV) and by professional bodies such as the RAIA. To the ARBV ‘client’ “means a person or body with whom an architect enters into an agreement to provide architectural services.” (Architects Registration Board of Victoria, 2004).

20 In the last decade, there has been some recognition that architects, unlike doctors or lawyers, do not extend their services to the wider community. Some large construction firms such as Arup and Grocon in Australia are trying to redress this situation by setting up a dedicated pro bono service within their practice. Also in Australia, Architects for Peace has established the first formal pro bono service for poorer communities and non-for-profit organisations. A similar social program, although not technically pro bono, was established earlier by Architects without Borders (Australia).

21 Exceptions such as charitable organisations or those receiving funding from other agencies, for example kindergartens or hospitals financially supported by government. With thanks to Dr Greg Missingham for pointing this out.

22 Other traditional professions such as medicine and legal services have formalized pro bono services and through this service, they engage with a wider spectrum of the community. In Victoria, Australia for example, The Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) offers professional services to that sector of the community that could not afford it otherwise.

23 (Tuan, 1974, pp. 56-57).

24 (Sandercock, 1998), no information is provided in this document about the source of Sennett’s ideas.

25 Garry Stevens comments on architects not supporting their decisions on hard-data, he claims that the ‘Anglo-American’ approach is not to test theories but, more like in a manner of a religious cult, “Architectural Truth is never obtained by achieving correspondence between the mundane and the theoretical, but by creating a great edifice. The architectural eye has ever been elevated to the transcendental.” (Stevens, 1998, p. 118).

References


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Beatriz C. Maturana
Beatriz’s research focuses on architecture’s engagement with the ‘real world’ in an urban context. She is currently investigating architectural design studio content in three faculties of architecture in Australia. Born in Chile, her architectural studies were completed at RMIT University followed by a Masters of Urban Design at the University of Melbourne where she is currently a PhD candidate. She tutors at both these universities. Beatriz has 15 years of architectural practice in the public and private sectors. She has worked in development including teaching and contributing to the architectural educational programme at the National University of Engineering in Nicaragua. Other work includes supporting the establishment of a planning framework in East Timor. In 2003, Beatriz founded Architects for Peace, a not for profit organisation providing a forum to discuss humanitarian issues concerning the built environment. She can be contacted at maturana at unimelb.edu.au