

Design Education During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Experiences

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To cite this article:

Kepsutlu, G. (2021). Design Education During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Experiences. SPACE International Journal of Conference Proceedings , 1(1), 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.51596/sijocp.v1i1.15>

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Design Education During the Coronavirus Pandemic: Experiences

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Article History:

Received May 17, 2021

Accepted June 10, 2021

Published Online July 22, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.51596/sijocp.v1i1.15>

Abstract

This presentation discusses the problems we faced as academics during the coronavirus pandemic, which made online education a part of our lives. Furthermore, this presentation explores the possible approaches in online education, specifically in design, by sharing our experiences during the pandemic.

Keywords: architectural education, online education, pandemic, COVID-19, coronavirus

1. Introduction

In Turkey, the news and the facts about the coronavirus pandemic began to talk on the 10th of January. The Ministry of Health announced the first COVID-19 case on the 10th of March in Turkey (1). The day after this, on the 11th of March, the government began taking measures and implementing the first restrictions nationwide. The next day, the Ministry of National Education announced that all schools in Turkey would be closed from the 16th of March 2020 to April, but later, they extended the closure until the end of the semester (2). On the 21st of March, a total curfew for those over the age of 65 or those with compromised immune systems was announced. From the 3rd of April, this curfew, which applied only to 65 and older, was extended to people twenty and younger. Long-period curfews continued only on weekends and holidays starting from the 10th of April, including measures prohibiting entry into and exit from Turkey's largest cities. Initially, the first restriction in higher education and academia was announced on the 9th of March for only scholars and employees over 60 (3).

Parallel with the announcement of the Ministry of National Education, formal face-to-face education was suspended, and from the 16th of March until April, Isik University moved to online education. Initially, the university administration announced that only theoretical courses would continue and that the design courses such as Architectural Design Studios, Basic Design, and Presentation Skills should be cancelled. Nearly all academicians believed such studies could not be possible through online communication. However, it was clear that there was no end to the pandemic in the foreseeable future. Therefore, design courses needed to begin despite many doubts and negative thoughts.

In formal design education, knowledge is transmitted to the students and tested directly in the studios in an atelier ambience. The primary purpose of studio education is to develop the creative potential, creative thinking and attitudes of designer candidates (Onur & Zorlu, 2017). The feature of design education is direct communication between the students and the instructor. Face-

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to-face criticism and one-on-one conversations carry out and shape the design process of a student. All students at the same studio participate in the critiques and share their opinions and ideas, learning from each other. Sketching, making hand drawings, and observing how to sketch and draw are all inputs of studio studies (Bozkurt,2017).

Developments in communication tools have led to the emergence of the concept of distance education in education (Pekdas & Kutsal, 2021). Studies and research on online design education in the architectural discipline have started to develop in parallel with the development of computer technologies and the widespread use of these technologies (Dincer, 2014). However, in Turkey, these studies did not go beyond the workshops, juries or conceptual developments in architecture conducted by some online group studies from different cities and countries (Isik and Mulayim. 2020). Until the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, it never became an ongoing education program for the entire semester. The quality of technologies and infrastructure for computer-aided education in universities in our country facilitated the transition to full-time online education during the pandemic.

At Isik University, computer-based and online education studies started before the pandemic, though they did not necessarily focus on design education. The Blackboard system was used for several years; however, it was only applied to some general curriculum courses, which all students from entire faculties were required to take. Because of this system, formal education was quickly and easily transformed into online education without much trouble, even for the intensive lessons at the pandemic's beginning of the pandemic. However, this situation, which was encountered for the first time, suddenly and unprepared, brought many negativities.

- Many students left home, assuming that schools and universities were closed for a short time. They did not have access to the necessary materials and equipment.
- Both students and scholars had no experience with long-term online education, especially in design courses.
- Students who thought this situation was temporary and short-lived in the first weeks did not attend the lessons at the desired level.
- There were some prejudices about online design education.

Soon, it was clear that the pandemic was more temporary than many scholars and students - initially thought. It turned out to be a much more complex situation, which required an adaptation to online education and online communication through the screens of computers.

2. Design Courses During the Coronavirus Pandemic

The leading online design courses conducted at Isik University are Basic Design, Design Studios 1, Design Studio 2, Design Studio 4 and two Graduation Projects in three semesters during the pandemic.

2.1. Graduation Project

The course with which we had the slightest difficulty was the Graduation Project.

- Students in the final year knew the design course requirements very well and had the experience of being in a studio many times.
- The graduation project course was carried out not through the critiques and directions they received face to face in the studio lessons but through the presentations of their designs in a total of 6 interviews in interim juries.
- Not only were they already working in a studio environment, but they were also well-informed in computer technologies and digital drawing programs.

We can easily say that they had less difficulty adapting to online education and were not affected so much by online education.

When the final projects produced during online education and formal education are analysed, it can be seen that there are not so many differences in terms of quality, content and presentation techniques between the two processes (Figure 1, 2 – Figure 3, 4).

2.1.1. The graduation projects - before the coronavirus pandemic

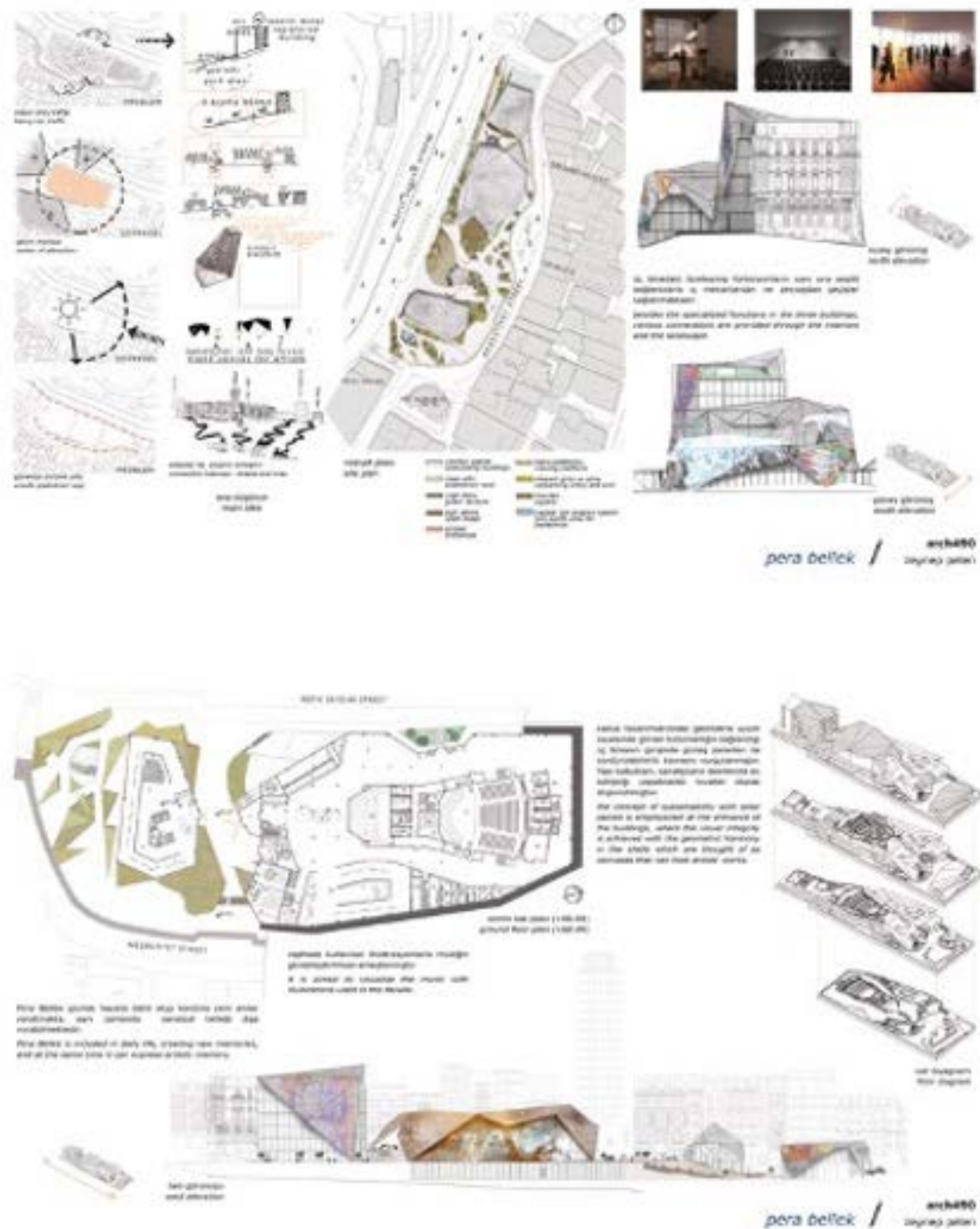


Figure 1. Culture and Art Centre - A multipurpose complex in Pera – Historical Centre of Istanbul, Student: Zeynep Pelen

2.1.2. The graduation projects - during the coronavirus pandemic

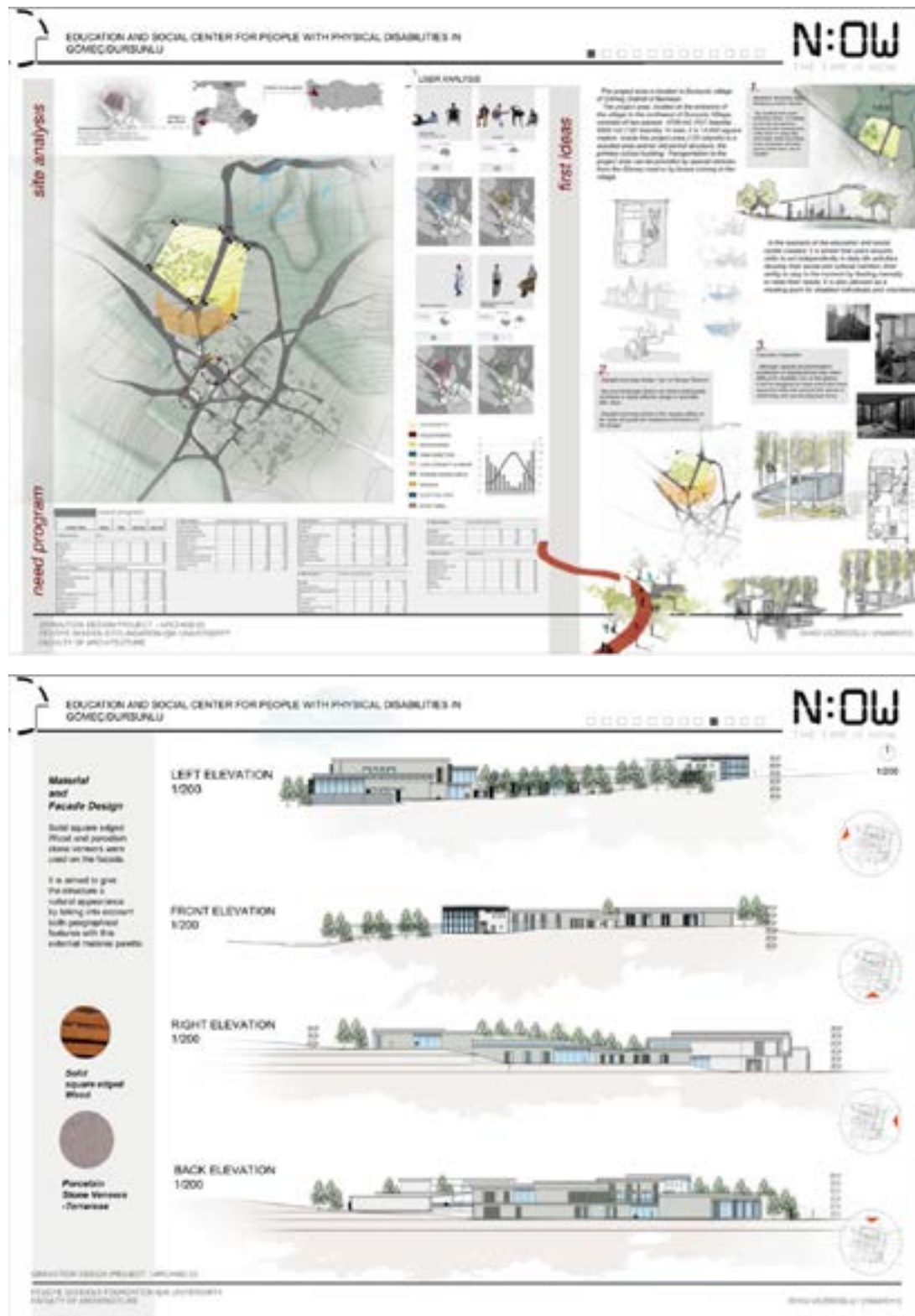


Figure 3. Social Centre for People with Physical Disabilities – Education, Sport and Accommodation Complex, Balikesir / Gomec, Student: Oyku Veziroglu

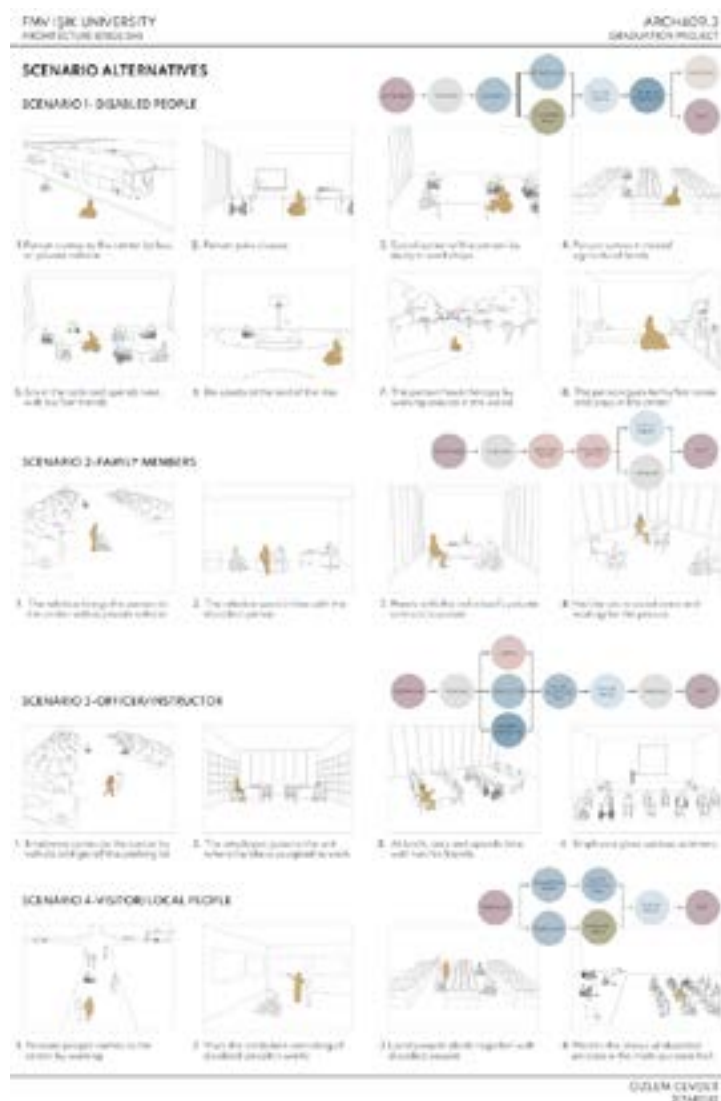
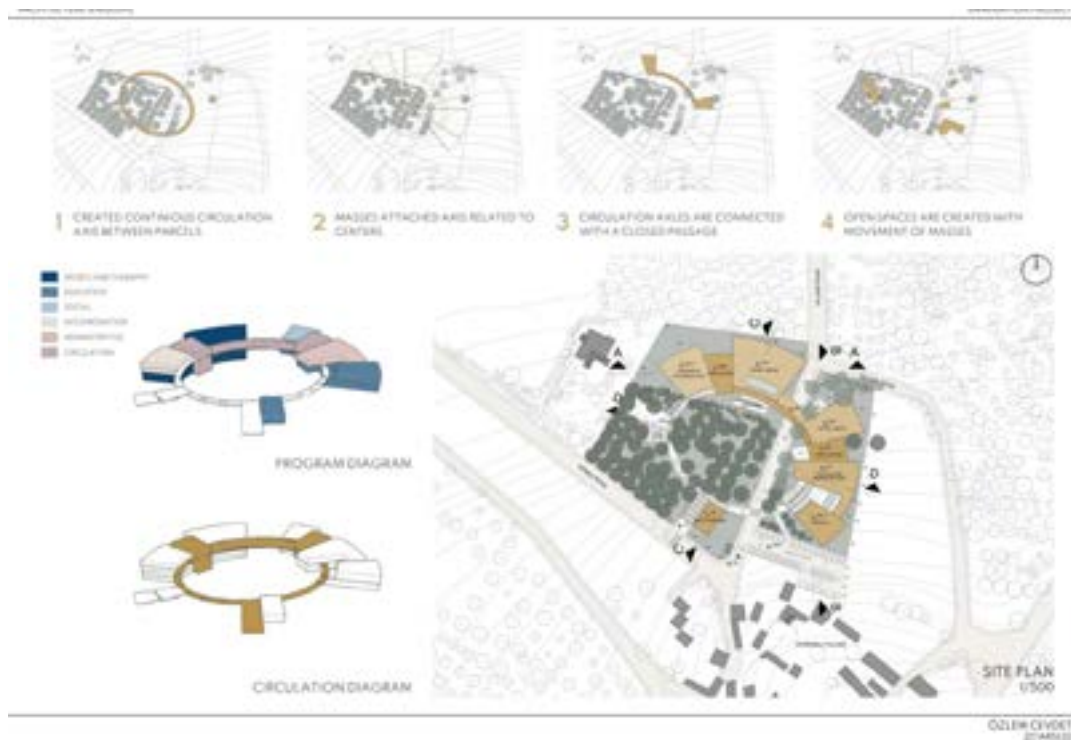


Figure 4. Social Centre for People with Physical Disabilities – Education, Sport and Accommodation Complex, Balikesir / Gomec, Student: Ozlem Cevdet

2.2. Design Studio 4

Students participating in Design Studio 4 had little trouble during online education. The month after the pandemic announcement, most students had already completed the analysis and research of the design process and even made their first sketches. Therefore, managing the work that had already started and was in progress was relatively easy. However, the students faced difficulties developing their designs in the following semesters.

- The students used to see the project site with the instructors and friends and discussed the analyses together in the studios. However, they had to do these works independently through online education.
- Even though they could understand their instructor's critics and digital drawings by mouses – not of the same quality as the pencil- through screens better than the lower classes.
- The students said that their problem mainly was being alone in a small room during long study hours, sitting just in front of a computer.

However, when the final products of Design Studio 4 were examined during formal education and the designs during online education, it can be easily seen that there are no significant differences between them (Figure 5, 6 – Figure 7, 8).

2.2.1. Design Studio 4 – Before the coronavirus pandemic

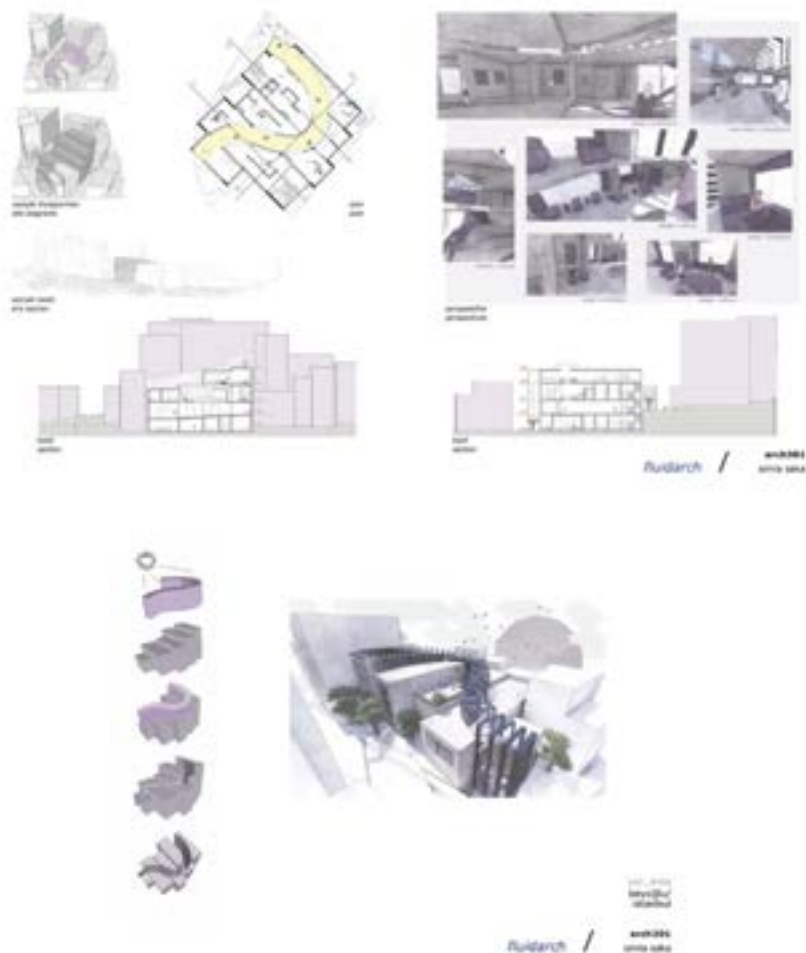


Figure 5. Multi-Functional Buildings – Shops, Restaurants, Offices, multi-functional Hall in Kadikoy – Istanbul (central area), Student: Simla Saka

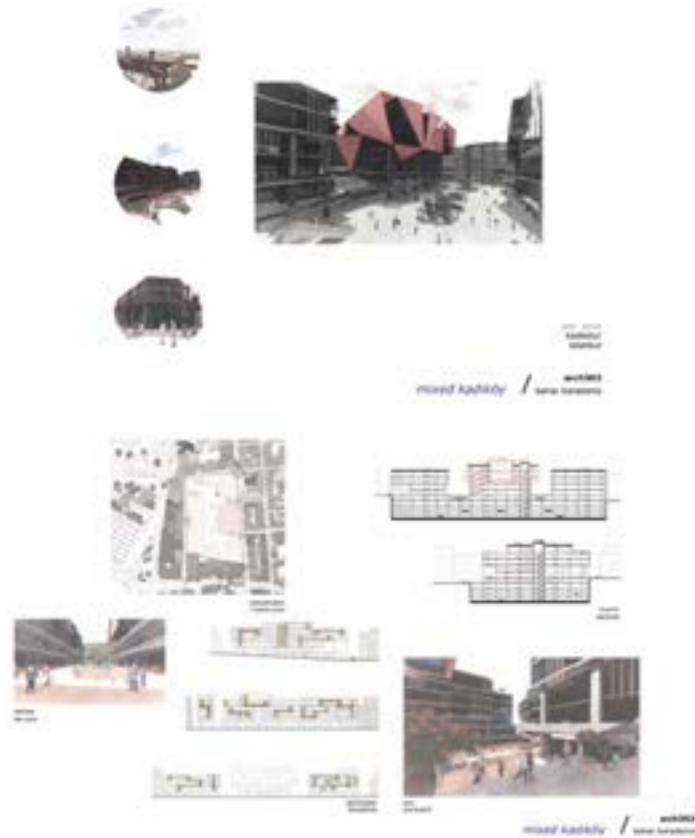


Figure 6. Multi-Functional Buildings – Shops, Restaurants, Offices, multi-functional Hall in Kadikoy – Istanbul (central area), Student: Bahar Karadeniz

2.2.2. Design Studio 4 – During the coronavirus pandemic

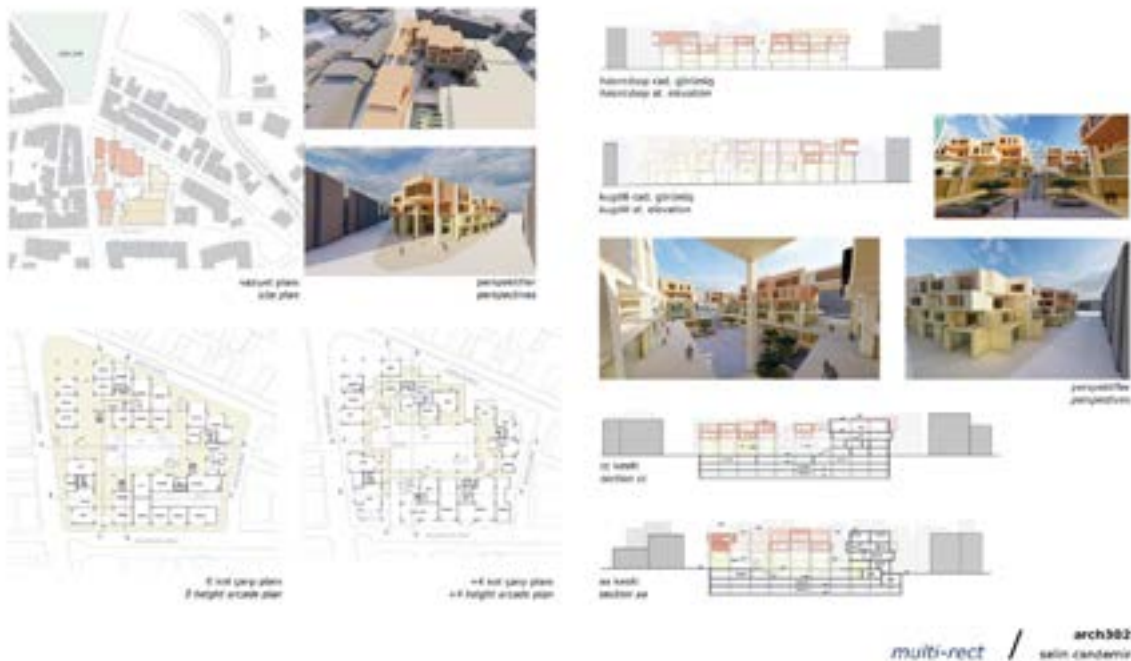


Figure 7. Alternative Education Center – School, Library, Exhibition Hall, Multi-functional Hall in Kadikoy – Istanbul (central area), Student: Selin Candemir

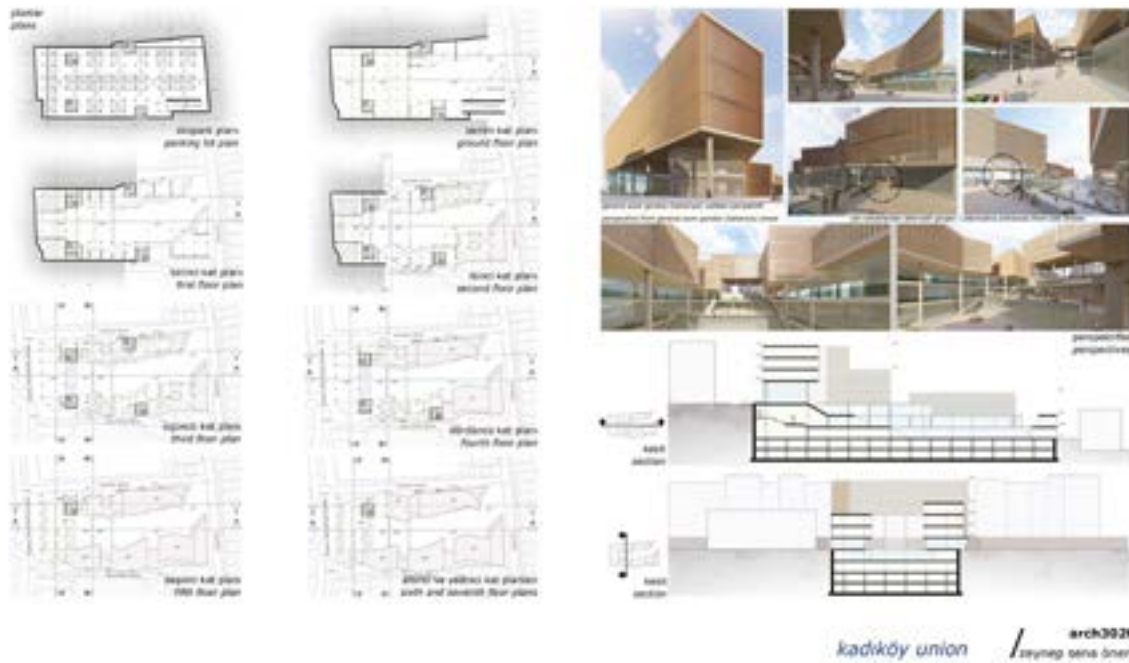


Figure 8. Alternative Education Center – School, Library, Exhibition Hall, Multi-functional Hall in Kadikoy – Istanbul (central area), Student: Zeynep Sena Onen

2.3. Design Studio 1 and Design Studio 2

Students participating in Design Studio 1 and Design Studio 2 had trouble during online education. Students in lower grades who had minimal studio experience before had difficulties managing the design process.

- The students were not used to being in a design studio or had never been there.
- They never visited the project site with the instructors and friends.
- They could not discuss the analyses together in the studios.
- They could not make sketches by the directions of their instructors.
- They did not produce accurate models and checked the alternative solutions in interaction with the other participators of the studio.
- They could not work together or learn from each other.

They had to do all these works on their own by online education.

Even though it can be easily seen that during the pandemic, students did their best with the help of their instructors and that their projects were not of very different quality from the projects produced before the pandemic (Studio 2; Figure 9, 10 – Figure 11, 12), (Studio 1; Figure 13,14 – Figure 15,16,17,18).

2.3.1. Design Studio 2 – Before the coronavirus pandemic



Figure 9. House for an Artist in a rural area, Student: Melike Ala



Figure 10. House for an Artist in a rural area, Student: Ayberk Cetinkaya

2.3.2. Design Studio 2 – During the coronavirus pandemic



Figure 11. Institute for Self-Sufficient Living – Working places (shops, ateliers, coffee shops, laboratory...) and housing. The aim of the institute be chosen by the students, Istanbul, Sile. Student: Dila Ergin

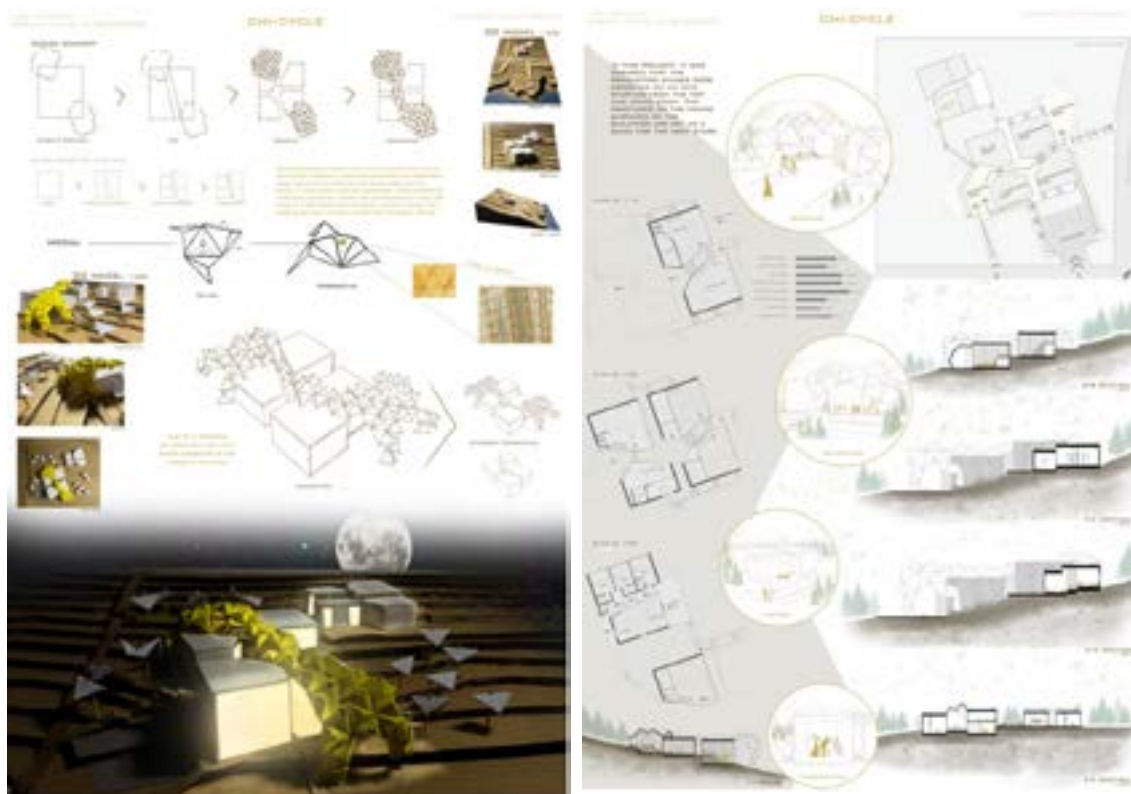


Figure 12. Institute for Self-Sufficient Living – Working places (shops, ateliers, coffee shops, laboratory...) and housing. The aim of the institute be chosen by the students, Istanbul, Sile. Student: Begum Tutus

2.3.3. Design Studio 1 – Before the coronavirus pandemic

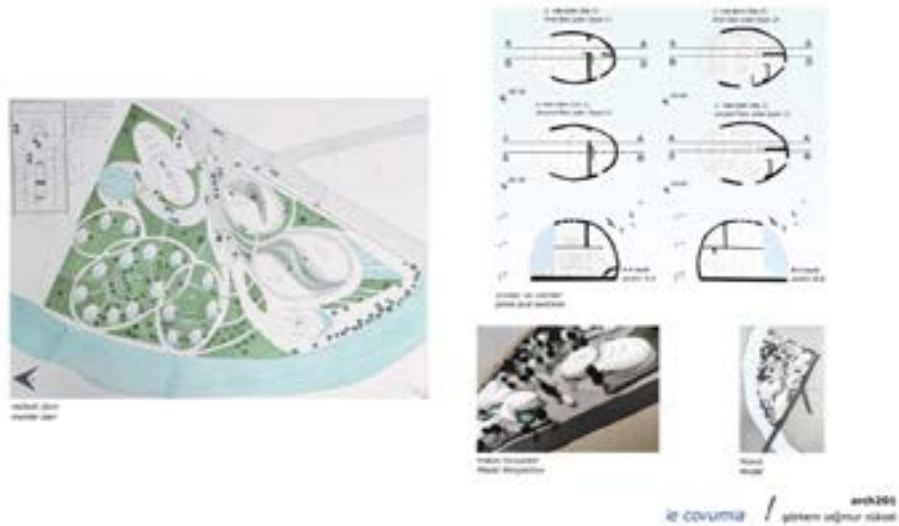


Figure 13. Camping Area for Students, Istanbul /Sile. Student: Gorkem Yagmur Yuksel



Figure 14. Camping Area for Students, Istanbul /Sile. Student: Ceren Sekeroglu.

2.3.4. Design Studio 1 – During the coronavirus pandemic

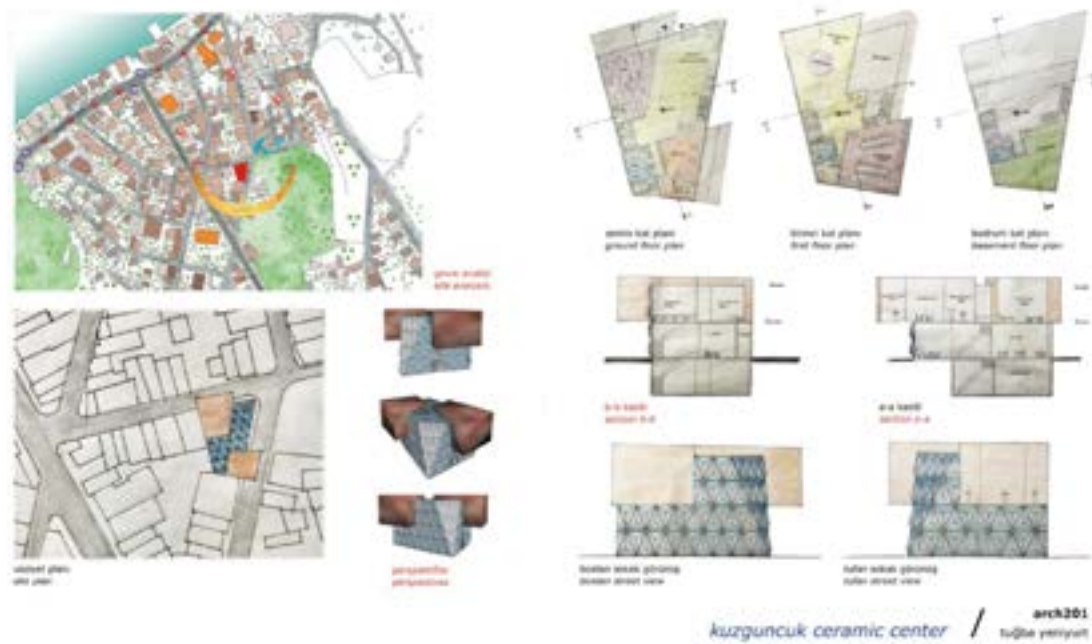


Figure 15. Cultural and Activity Center, Kuzguncuk/Istanbul. Student: Tugba Yesilyurt.

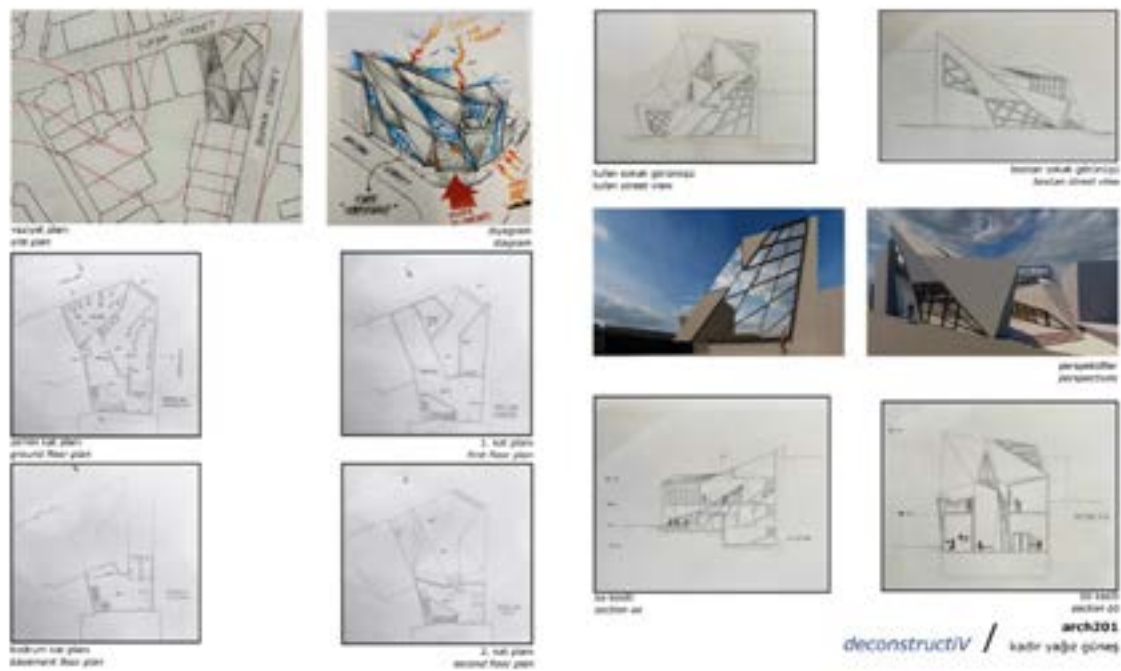


Figure 16. Cultural and Activity Center, Kuzguncuk/Istanbul. Student: Kadir Yagiz Gunes

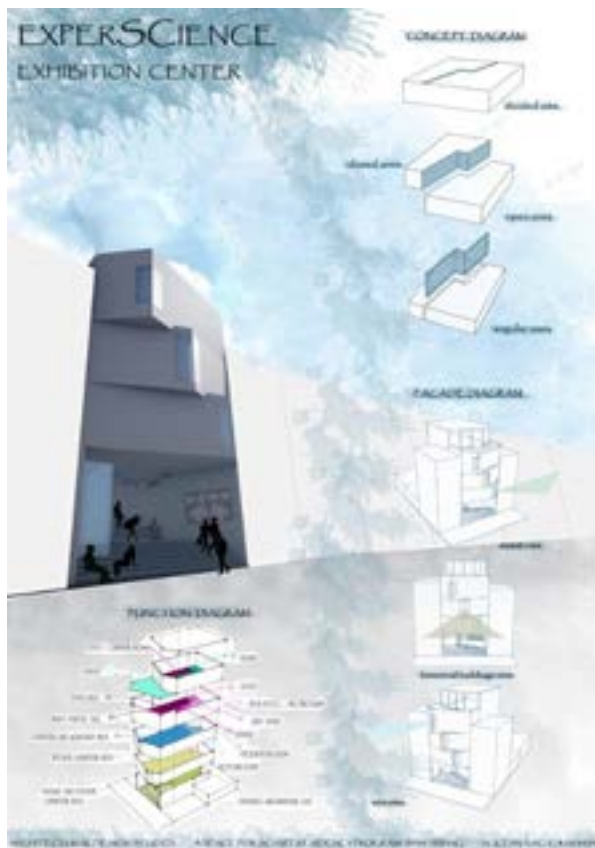


Figure 17. Science – Art Residency Building: An art gallery with workshop areas in Istanbul / Beyoglu – Historical area. Student: Sultan Sag.



Figure 18. Science – Art Residency Building: An art gallery with workshop areas in Istanbul / Beyoglu – Historical area. Student: Janset Sezen

2.4. Basic Design Studios

The first-year students participating in Basic Design Studios had the most significant problems with online education.

- The students started university and design education without ever being in a studio environment.
- They started to participate in the lessons in virtual classes without meeting their instructors and friends.
- They had to learn drawing, sketching and painting without the direct guidance of their instructors.
- They had to learn to explore design possibilities and create alternatives to a design, create original forms, and work on three-dimensional models independently.
- They had to develop their skills in the design process in their own small, usually inadequate working spaces.
- They only did all the design study requirements by listening to the theoretical presentations and watching videos.

When the studies before and during the pandemic are examined, it is not difficult to put out the differences in terms of quality, content and techniques between the two processes (Figure 19 – Figure 20 – Figure). The period when the students cannot reach the materials when the shops are closed would be better and helpful for developing the students' design abilities and imaginations if they had some basis of design knowledge (Figure 22).

2.4.1. Basic Design Studios – Before the coronavirus pandemic

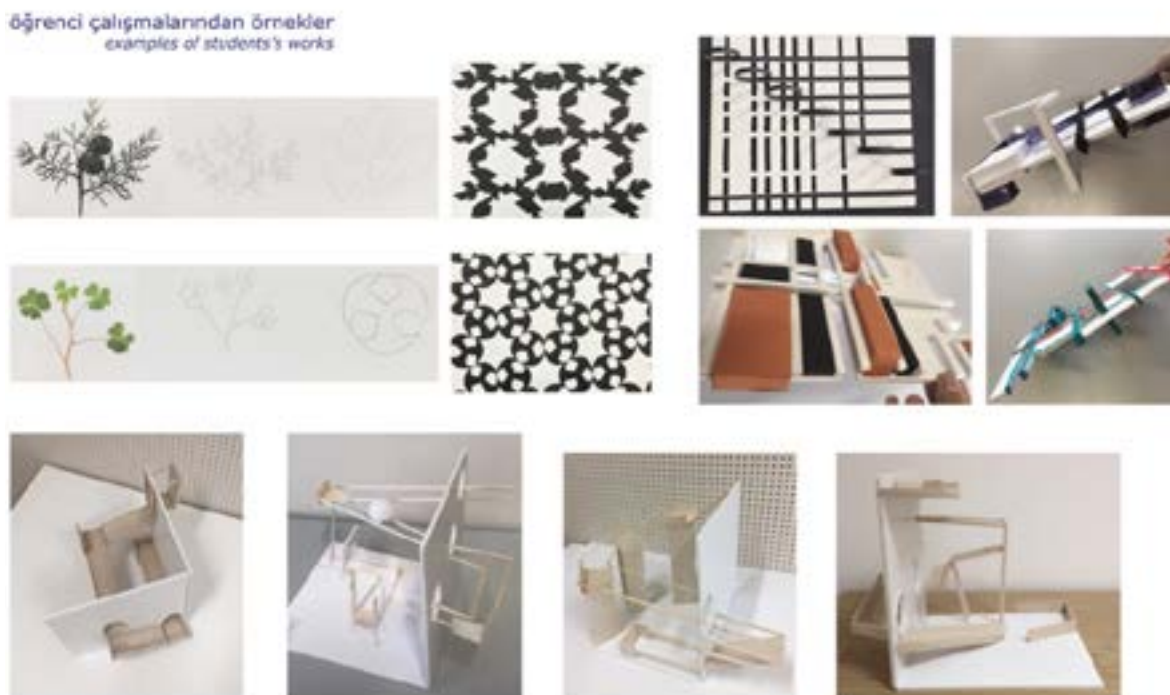


Figure 19. Various two and 3-dimensional works from Basic Design Studio (essential elements and principles)

mekan ve insan ilişkisi
space and human relations



Figure 20. Various two and 3-dimensional works from Basic Design Studio (human/space relations)

2.4.2. Basic Design Studios – During the coronavirus pandemic



Figure 21. Various two and 3-dimensional works from Basic Design Studio



Figure 22. Some three-dimensional works were done while the shops were closed.

3. Conclusion

It can be said that there are some negative aspects of online design education compared with formal education.

- Students may exchange ideas in the studio during formal education.
- They may listen to each other's critics, criticise each other, work together, learn from each other and support each other during long working hours.
- They also may continue their works by making sketches and models in interaction and under the direction of the instructors in studios.
- While the students were working with the instructors in the studio, they experienced sketching, producing alternatives, working with models in interaction,
- Moving away from the studio environment suddenly and staying at home has made them sit alone in front of the same screen in their small workspaces.

In addition, online education also has positive returns.

- Long working times instead of limited studio hours.
- Opportunities to reach the instructor by Internet whenever they want.
- Fast access to information sources, archiving and accessibility of the produced course materials.
- The opportunity to listen to the criticism repeatedly from the recorded videos that the students do not understand is a positive factor of online education.
- The ability to use digital programs and computer aid platforms has increased during the pandemic.

Online design education can be developed and sustainable through real-life experiences and by looking through the negatives. We know that many architectural offices work online already, using computer technologies. Some hybrid systems may be more beneficial for future design

education students. However, it should be remembered that online education may be adequate for upper-class students who have experiences in university life, studio work and the design process. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to say that online design education should not be preferred for lower classes - especially first-year students - unless there are mandatory conditions such as the pandemic we live in.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Endnotes

1. This paper has been presented at the SPACE International Conference 2021 on Architecture and Design Education.

2. For more information about the Student Projects given by the Figures and more Student Projects done at Isik University during the Pandemic, <https://www.isikun.edu.tr/mimarlik-bolumu/donem-isleri-katalogu>

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