

## DESIGN STUDIO AND WORKSHOPS

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The Design Studio and Workshop approach in urban design promotes creativity through experiential learning and learning by doing, emphasizing that knowledge develops from reflection and involvement in real spatial challenges (Fikfak, 2012). Creativity is strongly linked to practical participation, where the process of searching for ideas, testing concepts, and reflecting on outcomes continuously enhances understanding for individuals and groups. This process-driven approach forms the core of spatial education and encourages students to connect theory with authentic design problems.

Experiential learning combines reflection and active engagement. According to Sewchuk (2005), reflective practice encourages students to critically evaluate what they learned, what worked well, what needs improvement, and how ideas can be applied in the future. Marentič-Požarnik (2002) emphasizes that spontaneous learning reinforces different types of knowledge through methods such as simulation, practice, group interaction, and role-playing. Such learning strategies are essential for strengthening critical thinking and system thinking (Zavodnik Lamovšek, 2012), enabling students to understand spatial problems in their complexity and interrelationships.

Within spatial workshops, theoretical and practical learning are combined in a structured experiential process that connects four main steps. The first step is concrete experience, where students face real or simulated spatial problems under the guidance of mentors. This is followed by reflection, in which ideas and perspectives are exchanged through dialogue. In the third step, meaning is given to experience by developing abstract concepts and design visions. The process concludes with experimentation, where students apply their knowledge in practice and return to reflection to test and refine their ideas. This cyclic model supports iterative learning and gradual development of design competence.

The Design Studio is a pedagogical environment central to architectural and urban design education. Here, students learn how to identify and define spatial problems, structure their approach, and create design solutions supported by both theoretical understanding and practical application (Fikfak, 2013). It helps them overcome uncertainty in the creative process, especially at the beginning of a project, and teaches them to navigate from concept to solution in a systematic way. Design studios also include collaboration with mentors, assistants, and invited professionals, providing valuable interdisciplinary feedback.

Spatial workshops complement design studio work by introducing real locations and involving local communities. Students are encouraged to recognize spatial characteristics, define key issues, and test design proposals through communication with stakeholders. Workshops begin with essential guiding questions, such as the purpose of the workshop, the expected usability of results, and the relevance of the chosen spatial challenge to the local context. They also address how theoretical knowledge can be applied to spatial development and how workshop findings can be included in planning documents.

Examples from workshops such as those in Ravne na Koroškem, Črnomelj, Nova Gorica, Domžale, and Zagorje ob Savi demonstrate how students tackled revitalization, adaptive reuse, and spatial transformation tasks. Through mapping, analysis, interviews, SWOT assessments, physical and digital models, and role-playing, students developed feasible concepts connected to local identity and sustainability goals. These workshops show how creativity is supported by methodological tools and teamwork.

Creative and experiential learning in design studios and workshops contributes to building knowledge, skills, and values through continuous interaction with space and community. These environments preserve a high level of conceptual freedom and visionary thinking, as they are not limited by commercial demands, allowing students to explore innovative and sustainable approaches to future spatial development (Fikfak & Grom, 2014; Gabrijelčič, 2012).