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Critical Urban Responsiveness in Architectural Education: The Situated Pedagogy of Atelier 1

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Abstract

Atelier 1 is a vertically structured architectural design studio. It is restructured in 2014, focusing on a theoretical inquiry, collective critique, and engagement with place and time shaped in a situated pedagogy of critical urban responsiveness. This paper reveals the site-specific concerns of Atelier 1 through an interpretive analysis of three documented studio themes, Open Architecture (2021–22), Architectural Dispositions (2022–23), and Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground (2023–24). The study examines how contextual conditions inform the formulation of design questions and their translation into theoretical, programmatic, spatial, and representational decisions. Particular attention is given to criticism-in-action as a generative process through which the public and ethical assumptions underlying architectural decisions are continuously questioned and reconsidered. The analysis identifies a situated pedagogical framework that connects critical inquiry, theory, program-making, representation, and peer dialogue within a shared vertical studio environment. Rather than measuring student learning outcomes, the paper proposes an interpretive framework for examining the relationships between contextual understanding, architectural propositions, and public responsibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Architectural design studio has often been organized around a conceptual theme and a spatial problem. A project theme is announced, a site is selected, a program is given, and students are expected to develop an architectural response within a defined pedagogical framework. This method is necessary to a certain extent because architectural education requires continuity, disciplinary knowledge, technical development, and representational clarity. Yet when the studio is reduced to fulfilling an assignment, the intellectual and critical capacity of design education is limited. The student may learn to organize a plan, produce a formal composition, or satisfy programmatic requirements, but may not learn to question why the project is beneficial, what kind of public life it proposes, and how it responds to the changing realities of place and time.

Atelier 1 provides a case for examining how architectural design education can move beyond assignment-driven studio models. Its pedagogical approach is not based on the passive reception of a predefined problem but on the critical construction of architectural questions. In this studio, the student is not merely expected to solve a given design problem. Rather, the student is encouraged to interrogate the theme, interpret the site, construct the program, and develop a design position through theoretical research and critical reasoning. The project emerges not as a solution to a stabilized problem but as a spatial argument developed through a critical encounter with the conditions of the present. The distinction lies not in the practice of problem framing itself, which is already well established in design theory, but in the sustained critical examination of the social, public, and ethical conditions that shape architectural questions [6–10].

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The term critical responsiveness is used in the paper to define this pedagogical position in dialogue with reflective design inquiry and debates on architecture's public responsibilities [6-10, 20]. Responsiveness is a basic concept in architectural discourse. Architects usually speak of climate-responsive design, socially responsive architecture, site-responsive strategies, adaptive environments, and responsive urbanism [15, 16, 20]. In these contexts, responsiveness implies architecture's capacity to answer, adapt to, or engage with external conditions. However, in the case of Atelier 1, responsiveness is not merely adaptive. It is critical. The studio does not ask students to respond to a site, a social need, or a contemporary crisis directly or functionally. The studio asks them to question the conditions to which they respond: for example, how pandemic restrictions redefine public encounter, how earthquakes interrupt urban memory and everyday life, or how the ecological and public uses of Atatürk Forest Farm have become contested. It encourages students to interpret the conditions they encounter and translate these interpretations into architectural propositions.

Critical responsiveness, therefore, refers to a double movement. On the one hand, Atelier 1 is sensitive to the specificities of place, time, society, and public life. On the other hand, it refuses to treat these specificities as fixed data. The site is not a neutral location; it is a field of relations [4, 15, 16]. The program is not a list of functions; it is a proposition about social life. The theme is not a slogan; it is a conceptual ground. The project is not an isolated object; it is a constructed response to a complex situation. In this sense, Atelier 1 invites students to respond by questioning and to question through designing.

The second key concept of this paper is situated pedagogy. The term “situated” underscores that design knowledge is produced within specific contexts, practices, relations, and conditions, including participation in a community of practice [14]. Architectural design is never placeless, timeless, or socially neutral. It is always embedded in a ground, a moment, a culture, a set of material and social relations, and a field of public expectations. A situated pedagogy of architectural design therefore does not present architecture as a universal formal language detached from context. Instead, it approaches architecture as a practice of making relations in response to specific spatial, social, environmental, and historical conditions.

In Atelier 1's vertical organization, students at different stages of architectural education engage with a shared theme, attend collective critiques, observe one another's design arguments, and learn to articulate distinct responses without being required to produce uniform solutions. The common inquiry enables comparison, while differences in experience and architectural resolution make the critical dialogue productive [14]. In this setting, theory informs the questions students pursue, interdisciplinary knowledge broadens the interpretation of the urban condition, and the site operates as a generator of architectural thought rather than a passive background. Verticality therefore supports, rather than simply accompanies, the atelier's theory-based, interdisciplinary, and site-responsive pedagogy.

Previous publications and exhibitions by Atelier 1 have documented several key themes developed in the studio, including the city as critical ground, architecture as an emancipating ground, open architecture, architectural dispositions, and Atatürk Forest Farm as a critical ground [1–5]. These studies provide the documentary basis for the present inquiry but primarily address particular themes or project contexts. The contribution here is a cross-theme interpretation of the recurring pedagogical operations that connect them. Table 1 sets out the conceptual dimensions through which these operations are examined, establishing a common interpretive framework for reading across otherwise distinct studio investigations. It clarifies the analytical focus of the inquiry and supports an understanding of how different thematic concerns contribute to a shared pedagogical approach. The dimensions are intended to be read relationally, allowing connections and overlaps to emerge across themes, rather than as discrete categories. Accordingly, the table neither proposes a chronological sequence nor serves as a one-to-one outline of the sections that follow.

Table 1. *Conceptual Dimensions of Atelier 1's Situated Pedagogical Approach*

Pedagogical dimension	Atelier 1 interpretation	Pedagogical operation	Educational value
Critical responsiveness	Response is not a passive adaptation, but a critical interpretation of place, time, society, and public need.	Transforms external conditions into architectural questions rather than treating them as fixed data.	Cultivates judgment, responsibility, and the ability to construct design problems.
Situated pedagogy	Design knowledge is embedded in specific grounds, moments, disciplines, and social relations.	Connects studio work to the needs and urgencies of the present.	Teaches students to think with context rather than apply universal formal solutions.
Theory-based design	Concepts operate as design media rather than background explanations.	Turns theoretical reading into spatial, programmatic, and representational decisions.	Strengthens conceptual clarity and architectural precision.
Vertical studio ecology	Students at different stages of architectural education share the same studio environment.	Allows multiple levels of experience to interpret the same theme differently.	Supports peer learning, dialogue, and design maturity.
Interdisciplinary inquiry	Architecture is open to philosophy, art, urban theory, ecology, sociology, and public life.	Prevents complex conditions from being reduced to narrow design problems.	Expands architectural imagination beyond typological and formal conventions.
Site- and time-specificity	The site and the present are treated as active generators of architectural thought.	Reads urban ground as the field of social and physical demands, conflicts, and potentials.	Develops projects that are situated without becoming merely contextual or topical.
Critical program-making	The program is developed through inquiry into needs, users, relations, and possible forms of public life.	Turns contextual and theoretical questions into justifiable architectural briefs and spatial propositions.	Develops responsibility for programmatic choices rather than relying only on assigned building types.

This inquiry addresses a pressing question in architectural education: how can a studio sustain disciplinary rigor while helping students respond critically to shifting public, ecological, and urban conditions? Its specific research question is how Atelier 1's vertically organized, theory-based, and site- and time-responsive pedagogy translates contextual concerns into architectural design questions, programmatic decisions, and spatial proposals. Rather than evaluating individual students or attributing effects to a single studio theme, the paper develops an interpretive model of this translation and distinguishes it from the theme-specific accounts already published by Atelier 1 [1-5].

1.1. RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study uses a qualitative, document-based comparative reading rather than a statistical evaluation of student performances. Three academic-year themes—Open Architecture (2021–22), Architectural Dispositions (2022–23), and Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground (2023–24)—were selected purposively because their documented responses concern different conditions: pandemic-era public life, post-earthquake recovery, and ecological and civic questions surrounding a historical public landscape. The three themes are the units of comparison; the cited program types are illustrative examples, not a counted sample of individual student projects.

The analysis proceeds through three interpretive steps. First, the recurring pedagogical concepts are identified across the cited accounts and articulated as the dimensions in Table 1. Second, the three themes are compared by asking how a present-day condition is interpreted, how the design question and program are formulated, and how theory, drawings, models, and collective criticism inform architectural decisions. Table 2 names the studio elements involved in these translations, whereas Table 3 records the contextual differences among the three thematic cases. Third, the recurrent operations are brought together as the evaluative questions in Table 4. This analysis supports an interpretive account of the atelier's pedagogical orientation; it does not provide a complete inventory of student projects or measured learning outcomes.

Consequently, the model and criteria are proposed here for further examination rather than presented as experimentally verified effects.

2. BEYOND PROBLEM SOLVING: CRITICISM-IN-ACTION

The architectural design studio has long been regarded as the core of architectural education. It is where students learn to synthesize knowledge across disciplines: structure, materials, representation, function, site, history, theory, technology, and social use. Schön's influential discussion of the reflective practitioner remains central to understanding studio pedagogy, as it shows that design knowledge is produced through reflection-in-action [6-8]. Students do not merely apply rules to a design problem; they learn through conversation with the developing project. They draw, observe, revise, test, and reflect.

Schön's "reflection-in-action" already includes the framing and reframing of problematic situations; it cannot be reduced to solving an externally given brief [6-8]. Atelier 1's proposal of "criticism-in-action" therefore does not claim to discover a capacity missing from reflective practice. It marks a particular emphasis within that practice: the explicit and sustained scrutiny of whose needs define a design question, which historical narratives and public interests inform the formulation of the architectural brief, and what social and ecological consequences may arise from a proposed architectural intervention. Such criticism is carried through theoretical reading, program-making, drawing, and collective reviews, rather than confined to a preliminary statement or a final jury. The distinction is thus one of critical orientation and studio organization, not a simple opposition between reflection and problem formulation.

This approach resonates with broader discussions in design theory. Rittel and Webber argue that many social and spatial problems are wicked problems, meaning they cannot be clearly defined, solved once and for all, or separated from the values and perspectives of those who formulate them [9]. Buchanan likewise positions design thinking as a way of acting within indeterminate situations [10]. From this perspective, the design problem is never simply given; it is constructed. Atelier 1 builds on these arguments by asking that the construction and successive reframing of a design problem remain accountable to situated public conditions, and that the resulting argument can be traced into the project's spatial and programmatic decisions.

In Atelier 1, the project begins with inquiry. What is the condition to be addressed? What kind of site is being studied? What are its visible and invisible conflicts? What social practices are present or absent? What has been damaged, forgotten, interrupted, or made inaccessible? What new relations can architecture make possible? These questions shift the studio away from "problem solving as a technical procedure" and toward "design as a critical and interpretive act".

This does not mean that Atelier 1 rejects architectural competence. On the contrary, its critical approach demands a high level of architectural responsibility. When students are encouraged to formulate their own programs or design approaches, they must also justify them more clearly. Freedom in this studio is not arbitrary. It is a disciplined form of agency. The student is free to interpret, but interpretation must be supported by research. The student is free to construct a program, but the program must respond to the site and the theme. The student is free to develop a concept, but the concept must become spatially operative.

The studio thus becomes an educational environment where critical thinking and architectural making are inseparable. The design process is neither pure speculation nor mere technical production. It is a process of constructing relations among ideas and spaces, among public needs and architectural programs, and among theoretical concepts and material forms. This is one of the defining qualities of Atelier 1's critical responsiveness.

3. CRITICISM AS A GENERATIVE TOOL IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

One of the most important aspects of Atelier 1 is its use of criticism as a design tool. In many studio cultures, criticism is understood primarily as judgment. A tutor or jury criticizes —or judges— the

project, identifies its weaknesses, and suggests improvements. Although this form of critique is necessary, it can remain external to the design process because it arrives after the project has already taken shape. In Atelier 1, criticism is not only evaluative; it is generative. It helps produce the project. This generative role of criticism is central to the atelier's educational approach. Students are asked to develop critical positions toward the theme, the site, and the program. These three elements are not accepted as stable givens. The theme must be interpreted, the site questioned, and the program constructed. Through this process, criticism becomes a method of design formation. It shapes both the discourse and the design process of student projects.

This is particularly significant because architectural education often separates conceptual discourse from the architectural design process. Students may write a critical statement yet produce a project that does not embody it, or they may produce a spatially interesting project without a clear critical position. Atelier 1 seeks to overcome this separation. The project must speak through its spatial decisions. If a student criticizes fragmentation, the architectural proposal must show how fragmentation is interpreted, transformed, intensified, recovered, or made visible. If a student criticizes the loss of publicness, the project must create spatial conditions for encounter, accessibility, and shared use. If a student discusses openness, the project must demonstrate whether openness is social, spatial, environmental, functional, or experiential. This understanding makes criticism architectural. It is not only verbal, textual, or theoretical. It becomes visible in the plan, section, model, circulation, structure, and relationships with the site, landscape, and program. Theory supplies concepts through which such choices can be examined, while representation—drawings, diagrams, models, and renders—makes their assumptions visible, testable, and open to collective critique. The critical argument must be translated into architectural operations. This translation is among the most demanding and educationally valuable aspects of the atelier (Table 2).

Table 2. *Reframing Studio Elements: Critical Design Approaches in Atelier 1*

Studio element	Conventional risk	Atelier 1 reinterpretation	Design consequence
Theme	A topic or slogan that frames the semester superficially.	A conceptual ground to be researched, questioned, and spatialized.	Students construct positions rather than simply follow a given subject.
Site	A physical plot documented through descriptive analysis.	A relational field shaped by social, cultural, spatial, ecological, and historical conditions.	The project emerges from a critical reading of ground.
Program	A fixed list of functions to be organized efficiently.	A critical proposition about public life, relations, events, and possible uses.	Program-making becomes an intellectual and ethical phase of design.
Criticism	A retrospective evaluation of weaknesses and corrections.	A generative tool that shapes discourse, method, and making.	The critical argument becomes visible in plan, section, model, render, and program.
Theory	A reference added after design decisions have been made.	An operative medium that helps define concepts, methods, and spatial consequences.	The design process produces knowledge through architectural inquiry.
Representation	A final presentation technique used to display outcomes.	A shared instrument for exploring concepts, externalizing uncertainties, and making projects discussable.	Projects become collective objects of interpretation within the studio commons.

Using criticism as a design tool also changes the nature of studio dialogue. The tutor does not simply criticize or correct the student's project. Instead, the tutor helps the student sharpen the project's critical position. The critique asks: What is the project responding to? What is its conceptual —or critical— ground? What does it reveal about the site? What kind of public life does it propose? How does the program emerge from the student's argument? How do spatial decisions support or weaken that argument? Through these questions, critique becomes a shared inquiry rather than a one-directional judgment. This approach is closely related to critical pedagogy. Freire argues that education should not be based on the passive transmission of knowledge but on the learner's active capacity to read and transform the world [11]. Hooks similarly understands teaching as a practice that can open spaces for participation and intellectual freedom [12]. Atelier 1 translates these pedagogical principles into architectural design

education. Students are not positioned as passive recipients of a design assignment. They are encouraged to become critical authors of their own design processes.

4. THEORY AS AN OPERATIVE MEDIUM

As discussed throughout the paper, Atelier 1 is a theory-based design studio. This does not mean that theory is treated as an abstract discourse separated from architectural production. On the contrary, Atelier 1 positions theory at the core of architectural design. Here, theory serves as an operative medium within the design process. It helps students define concepts, construct methods, interpret sites, develop programs, and evaluate spatial decisions. Theory is not something added to a project after it is designed; it is one of the forces that shape the project. This is an important distinction. In many studio settings, theory appears as a reference attached to the final presentation. It is used to lend legitimacy to a formal decision already made intuitively. In Atelier 1, theory is expected to enter the design process earlier and more deeply. Students are encouraged to read, discuss, and reinterpret concepts in relation to the themes and sites. A concept is not considered successful simply because it sounds intellectually rich. It must become architectural. It must produce spatial consequences. Frayling's distinction between research into art and design, research for art and design, and research through art and design is useful here [13]. Atelier 1 can be understood as an environment that encourages research through design. The student does not only study a concept relevant to the design project. Rather, the student discovers the concept through drawings, models, diagrams, spatial scenarios, and structural compositions. The design process becomes a way of discovering and producing knowledge.

This approach resists the image-driven tendencies of contemporary architectural culture. Digital platforms, social media, online archives, and competition culture have made architectural images widely accessible. While this visual abundance can broaden students' references, it can also encourage imitation. Students may reproduce visual languages without understanding the social, theoretical, structural, or environmental conditions that underlie them. Atelier 1 counters this tendency by asking students to ground their designs in critical concepts and site-specific arguments. Form is expected to emerge from inquiry, not from image consumption.

Theory also deepens students' understanding of the architectural program. If the program is treated merely as a list of functions, the design process may remain organizational. But when theory enters the process, the program becomes a conceptual and social proposition. A library may be rethought as a public learning landscape. A market may become a space of ecological awareness and local production. A cultural center may become a platform for memory and collective encounter. A research institute may become a spatial interface among the city, agriculture, and public health. Theory allows the program to move beyond typology.

This theory-based pedagogy strengthens architectural judgment. Students learn that a project cannot be evaluated solely by its formal qualities. The depth of its conceptual framework must also be assessed, along with the clarity of its critical argument, the relevance of its program, and the consistency between its stated intentions and spatial decisions. In this sense, theory does not make the studio abstract. It makes design more valuable and meaningful.

Theory-based pedagogy makes another important contribution by developing students' academic and theoretical literacy. Through continuous engagement with architectural theory and related interdisciplinary literature throughout the design process, students become familiar with discipline-specific concepts, debates, and terminology, while also developing their ability to read, interpret, and critically evaluate theoretical texts. Rather than adopting established concepts from the literature as abstract terms or reproducing them without question, students learn to understand their intellectual contexts, interrogate their meanings, and reinterpret and reconstruct them in relation to architectural problems. In this respect, the studio not only strengthens students' capacity to design through theory, but also enables them to develop a more informed command of the architectural literature and to participate in architectural discourse with greater conceptual sensitivity.

5. VERTICAL STUDIO AND SHARED LEARNING ECOLOGY

Atelier 1's vertical studio structure is another defining element of its pedagogical identity. Students at different stages of architectural education share the same studio environment, creating a learning ecology where varying levels of experience, knowledge, and design maturity interact. In this sense, verticality is a pedagogical strategy that enriches architectural learning through observation, dialogue, and peer exchange (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Students' Digital Presentations and Panel Critiques in the Vertical Design Studio*

In a vertical studio, students learn not only from tutors but also from one another. Younger students observe how more experienced students formulate design arguments, develop complex programs, work at larger scales, and use advanced representational techniques. Older students, in turn, become more aware of their own design reasoning because they must articulate their ideas in a mixed studio environment. The presence of students at different stages of architectural education fosters a dynamic culture of mutual learning.

Lave and Wenger's concept of situated learning is relevant to this structure. They argue that learning occurs through participation in a community of practice [14]. In Atelier 1, the studio functions as such a community. Students are not isolated individuals working independently on separate assignments. Instead, they participate in a collective environment where concepts, references, critiques, models, drawings, and doubts circulate. The studio becomes a site of shared inquiry.

Verticality also supports the atelier's commitment to difference. Because students work at different levels, the studio does not impose a uniform set of expectations. A second-year student may explore a theme through basic spatial relations and conceptual operations, while a fourth-year student may address the same theme through urban strategy, structural complexity, or programmatic hybridity. This difference keeps the theme open and productive and prevents the studio from becoming a system of standardized outputs.

The vertical structure also strengthens peer learning. Students see that architectural design unfolds in stages, each with its own challenges. They observe how ideas evolve, how projects fail and recover, how concepts are revised, and how representational tools clarify thought. This process helps students understand that design is not a linear path from concept to final product. It is iterative, uncertain, and dialogical.

Atelier 1's vertical structure is especially effective because it complements its theory-based and site-responsive approach. The shared theme provides a common conceptual ground, while the vertical structure allows diverse interpretations of that ground. A collective question connects students, yet each develops a distinct response. This balance between commonality and difference is one of the atelier's strengths.

6. INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND THE EXPANSION OF ARCHITECTURAL IMAGINATION

Architecture is inherently interdisciplinary. It is shaped by art, technology, social life, environmental systems, history, economy, politics, material practice, and cultural meaning. Yet interdisciplinary education does not automatically arise simply because architecture touches many fields. It must be intentionally constructed. Atelier 1's interdisciplinary approach does not treat other disciplines as decorative references. It uses them to expand the scope of architectural imagination.

In Atelier 1, philosophy helps students question concepts and assumptions. Art offers methods of abstraction, experimentation, representation, and perception. Urban theory helps students understand the production of space and the complexity of public life. Sociology and cultural studies help them interpret everyday practices, social differences, and collective identities. Ecology raises questions about sustainability, food, water, air, climate, and environmental care. Digital culture opens new possibilities for representation, communication, and spatial organization (Figure 2). These fields do not replace architecture. They help architecture become more responsive and critical.



Figure 2. *Panel Critiques of the Digital Presentations in the Vertical Design Studio*

Rendell's notion of critical spatial practice is useful for understanding this interdisciplinary orientation. Critical spatial practice emerges when spatial production engages cultural, social, and political questions while remaining attentive to the specificity of spatial experience [15, 16]. Atelier 1 operates pedagogically in a similar way, encouraging students to produce architecture as a form of critical spatial practice. Students are not asked to design projects that merely look innovative; they are asked to design projects that question, reveal, connect, recover, or transform spatial relations.

Artistic methods play a specific role in the atelier. Abstraction, fragmentation, layering, folding, cutting, mapping, installation, collage, and model-making enable students to think beyond conventional typological solutions. However, the atelier does not treat artistic experimentation as an end in itself. Abstract operations must become architectural. A fragmented model must be linked to a critical reading of fragmentation on the site. A porous structure must support real social and spatial permeability. A layered drawing must reveal relations that matter to the project's argument.

Its interdisciplinary approach protects the atelier from formalism. In the atelier, formal innovation is not rejected, but it must be justified by conceptual, contextual, and social reasoning. Hays describes critical architecture as situated between cultural engagement and formal autonomy [17]. Atelier 1 translates this tension into pedagogy. It asks students to develop projects that maintain architectural coherence while remaining responsive to place, time, and society.

Interdisciplinarity also helps students understand contemporary issues in their complexity. For example, a pandemic is not only a medical event; it reshapes public space, domestic life, work, education, bodily proximity, and the meaning of openness. An earthquake is not only a structural disaster; it disrupts

memory, social routines, urban continuity, and collective trust. A site such as Atatürk Forest Farm is not only a landscape; it is a historical, ecological, political, agricultural, and public ground. Atelier 1's interdisciplinary pedagogy enables students to approach such conditions without reducing them to narrow design problems.

7. SITE AS A RELATIONAL FIELD: FROM ANALYSIS TO CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

Atelier 1's site-responsive design approach is among its most important qualities. However, site-responsiveness should not be taken here as a superficial adaptation to context. It is not merely a matter of using local materials, respecting building heights, or aligning with existing urban forms. Atelier 1 understands the site as a field of relations. It includes physical conditions, as well as social practices, historical processes, ecological systems, political decisions, public memories, infrastructural ruptures, and latent possibilities. This understanding transforms site analysis. In many design studios, site analysis is treated as a preliminary phase. Students document circulation, sun, wind, topography, access, functions, density, and surrounding buildings. These analyses are necessary but not sufficient. Atelier 1 asks students to move from analysis to interpretation. The site must be questioned. What does this place reveal about the city? What has been damaged or hidden? What social or ecological relations have been interrupted? What public needs are not being met? What potentials are waiting to be activated?

The reinterpretation of the city as a critical ground is significant because it frames ground not merely as a physical surface but as a relational field shaped by social, cultural, spatial, and historical conditions [4]. In Atelier 1, ground is therefore understood as the condition from which the architectural question emerges, rather than simply as the location where the project is placed. It actively informs the program, concept, spatial organization, and public meaning of the project (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *Exploring Possible Relationships Between Design Projects and the Urban Ground through Panel Critiques*

The theme of Atatürk Forest Farm (AFF) as a Critical Ground (2023-24) offers a clear example of site-responsive pedagogy. The AFF theme was developed in relation to the 10th year of Atelier 1 (2014-24) and the 100th year of the Republic (1923-2023), yet its pedagogical value was not merely commemorative. Students read AFF through its historical transformations and contemporary problems. They discussed the area using concepts such as fragmentation, introversion, dispersion, deterioration, rupture, transformation, and invasion. They proposed programs such as an agricultural campus, an agriculture and ecology research institute, a center for new agricultural technologies, and a botanical and

herbarium center to reactivate AFF's potential for Ankara, urban agriculture, recreation, and public health [1]. This example shows how site-responsive design in Atelier 1 is both critical and projective. It reads the site to imagine its possible futures.

Site-responsiveness in Atelier 1 is therefore not descriptive. It does not merely record what exists. It interprets what exists to construct what might become possible. This is a crucial distinction. A descriptive approach may produce accurate maps and diagrams yet fail to generate a critical architectural position. By contrast, a projective, site-responsive approach reads the ground as a field of demands and potentials. It asks how architecture can reveal, transform, reconnect, or intensify those potentials (Figure 4, 5).



Figure 4. Individual Consultations after Panel Critiques: Developing Site-Responsive Design Proposals I



Figure 5. Individual Consultations after Panel Critiques: Developing Site-Responsive Design Proposals II

This approach is especially valuable in architectural education because it teaches students to resist generic design. A generic project can be placed almost anywhere, whereas a site-responsive project belongs to a specific place. It responds to the particularity of that place and also produces broader architectural meaning. Atelier 1's pedagogy helps students develop this balance between specificity and generality.

8. TIME-SPECIFIC DESIGN: CRITICAL RESPONSIVENESS TO CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS

Atelier 1 situates architectural inquiry within both the specific context of place and the historical moment in which design takes shape. Its themes and projects engage the present as an active condition that generates architectural questions and challenges established assumptions. Pandemics, disasters, ecological crises, debates over public memory, technological transformations, and changing social practices enter the studio's critical field, informing students how to interpret sites, formulate programs, and develop spatial propositions.

Atelier 1's understanding of time-specificity requires transforming contemporary conditions into conceptual and spatial questions through deep architectural inquiry. Its aim is not to follow current events or architectural trends but to understand how such developments shape new social and spatial demands in architecture. Within the design process, a shared thematic question is reopened through readings of the site, theoretical discussion, proposed programs, representational experiments, and successive individual and panel critiques. A theme becomes pedagogically productive when students can explain not only why it matters now but also why a particular spatial response, user relationship, or program follows from that interpretation. Thus, time-specificity is tested and revised through criticism-in-action rather than secured simply by selecting a topical subject.

The theme of Open Architecture (2021-22) during the pandemic is a relevant example. The pandemic brought questions of openness, distance, ventilation, public space, and collective life to the center of architectural debate. Yet Atelier 1 did not treat openness merely as a physical property of space. It framed open architecture as a social, spatial, environmental, functional, and experiential quality [2]. In this way, the pandemic became a pedagogical opportunity to rethink publicness, flexibility, adaptability, and the relationship between architecture and health (Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Poster for the design theme Open Architecture*

The theme of Architectural Dispositions (2022-23), following the Hatay earthquake disasters, exemplifies another form of time-specific responsiveness. The earthquakes caused severe physical destruction and disrupted daily routines, social relations, memory, and the continuity of urban life. Atelier 1's dispositional approach addressed both structural and non-structural forms of disruption [3]. The studio did not reduce the disaster to the technical problem of earthquake-resistant design, even though structural safety remains essential. Instead, it asked how architecture might contribute to social rehabilitation, collective memory, public gathering, and the reorganization of damaged urban relations (Figure 7).

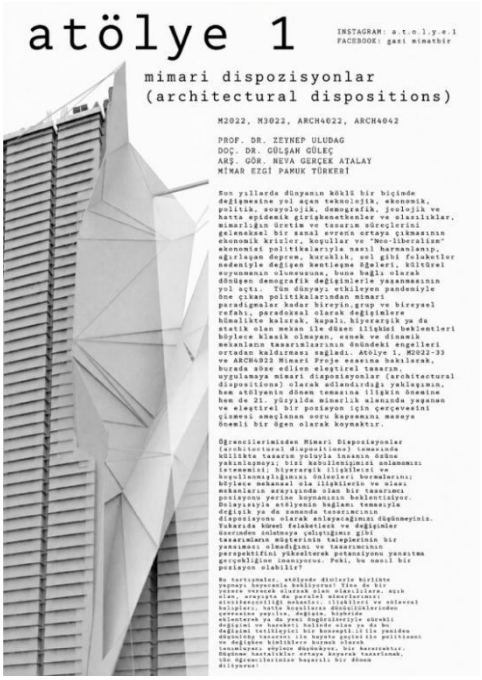

Figure 7. *Poster for the design theme Architectural Dispositions*

The theme of Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground (2023-24) reveals time-specificity in a different way. It emerged in relation to an anniversary context, but it did not remain at the level of commemoration. It used the moment as an opportunity to critically reinterpret a public landscape in relation to contemporary concerns such as urban agriculture, ecological sustainability, healthy food, clean air and water, recreation, and the relationship between the city and the countryside [1]. This theme shows that time-specific design can involve not only an urban crisis but also memory and institutional reflection (Figure 8).

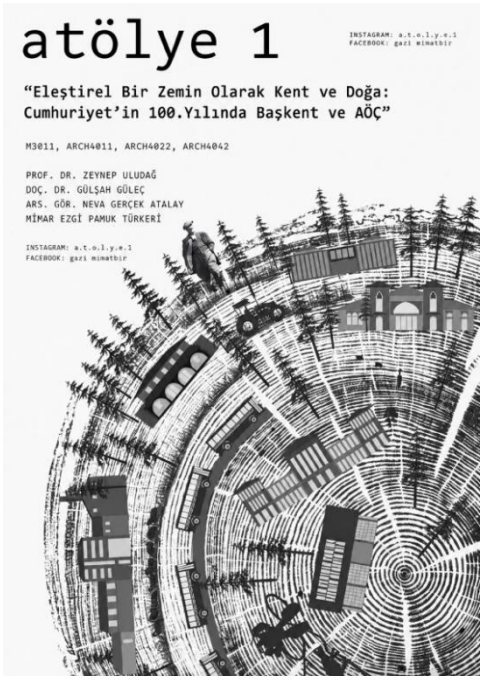

Figure 8. *Poster for the design theme Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground*
Source note for Figures 6–8: For the atelier's theme posters and student projects, see Instagram, @a.t.o.l.y.e.1. A digital exhibition of the Atatürk Forest Farm theme is also documented in Arkitera [1].

Across three design themes, a time-specific concern is not yet a design question. The design process must interpret how conditions change in everyday life, identify the relations architecture might address, and test these propositions against site, program, and representation. Pandemic-era openness prompts questions of proximity and shared use; post-earthquake dispositions bring recovery and memory into the design argument; the Atatürk Forest Farm theme relates an anniversary to contested ecological and public futures. These are distinct responses, not interchangeable examples of topicality. Their comparison in Table 3 makes visible how *criticism-in-action* can keep the initial question open while demanding spatial, programmatic, and public consequences.

Table 3. *Three Thematic Framework: Contextual Analysis, Critical Inquiry, and Spatial Strategies*

Theme and period	Contextual awareness	Critical design question	Programmatic / spatial orientation
Open Architecture (2021-2022)	Pandemic conditions transformed the meaning of openness, publicness, health, proximity, and collective life.	How can architecture support openness not only as a physical condition, but also as a social, environmental, functional, and experiential quality?	Flexible, adaptive, permeable, and encounter-oriented programs and spatial relations.
Architectural Dispositions (2022-2023)	The Hatay earthquakes disrupted physical structures as well as daily routines, memory, social relations, and urban continuity.	How can architecture respond to disaster without reducing it to technical reconstruction or aestheticizing destruction?	Spaces and programs for rehabilitation, collective memory, gathering, social recovery, and the reactivation of damaged urban relations.
Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground (2023-2024)	The anniversary context opened a critical reading of AFF through fragmentation, deterioration, rupture, ecological urgency, and public memory.	How can a historically and politically charged ground be reconnected to Ankara through agriculture, ecology, recreation, and public health?	Agricultural campuses, ecology research institutes, new agricultural technology centers, botanical programs, and city-countryside interfaces.

9. THE ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAM AS A CRITICAL PROPOSITION

One of Atelier 1's most distinctive aspects is its treatment of architectural programs. In conventional studio models, the architectural program is often given to students as a fixed list of functions. This approach can be useful for teaching organization and technical planning, but it can also limit the critical potential of design. If the architectural program is fixed from the beginning, students may focus on arranging functions rather than questioning what kinds of social relations those functions should produce. Atelier 1 therefore treats the architectural program as a critical proposition. Students are encouraged to formulate architectural programs through their own readings of the theme, site, and contemporary condition. This does not mean the program becomes vague or arbitrary; instead, it becomes more meaningful because it must be justified. The student must explain why a particular program is needed, how it emerges from the site, and what kind of public life it supports. This approach changes the role of function in the design process. Function is not discarded but expanded. A program is not simply a list of rooms or activities. It is a spatial argument about how people may gather, learn, cultivate, heal, remember, produce, exchange, or participate. The architectural program becomes a medium through which the project constructs relations between architecture and society.

Tschumi's concept of event is relevant here because it challenges the reduction of architecture to form and function. It underscores that architecture also involves actions, movements, encounters, and unpredictable uses [18, 19]. Atelier 1's critical approach to the architectural program moves in a similar direction. Students are encouraged to design not only spaces for fixed functions but also conditions for events and relations. Spaces may overlap, transform, and support multiple forms of use. This is especially important in contemporary society, where the boundaries between work, education, leisure, care, production, and public life are increasingly fluid.

The AFF projects illustrate this programmatic approach. The agricultural campus, ecology research institute, new agricultural technology center, and botanical programs were not selected as conventional building types. They emerged from critical readings of AFF's history, fragmentation, public mission, and

contemporary relevance [1]. Similarly, the theme of open architecture generated programs that could support flexibility, public encounter, and open spatial relations, while the theme of architectural dispositions opened programmatic possibilities related to rehabilitation, memory, and the reactivation of social life. In each case, the architectural program was developed in response to a critical reading of place and time.

This programmatic freedom is pedagogically powerful because it gives students responsibility. They cannot hide behind the authority of a given brief. They must construct the brief themselves. This process involves reading the site critically, identifying the social and spatial relations that require transformation, defining the users and forms of encounter the project will address, and translating these concerns into an architectural program. In this sense, programming becomes an intellectual and ethical phase of design rather than a preliminary technical requirement. It teaches students that architectural design begins before form. It begins with the question of what needs to be made possible. By asking this question, students learn to understand the architectural program not as a fixed list of functions but as a critical framework through which new spatial, social, and public relations can be imagined.

10. ENVISIONING COLLECTIVE LIFE: PUBLIC IMAGINATION AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Atelier 1's critical responsiveness is ultimately connected to public imagination. Architecture not only addresses existing problems; it also imagines new forms of collective life. It can propose new relations among people and places, memory and the future, ecological systems and urban life, and public needs and spatial form. In this sense, architectural education can support students in imagining public possibilities as well as in developing buildings.

Public imagination is not fantasy. It is not detached from reality. It is grounded in interpreting actual conditions. It begins with the question of what is missing, damaged, suppressed, forgotten, or unrealized in each place. It then asks how architecture can make new relations possible. This is why “situated pedagogy” is essential. Imagination becomes meaningful when it is situated in the specificities of place and time.

Atelier 1’s public imagination is ethical. The studio does not encourage students to aestheticize crises, disasters, or social problems. This is an important issue in contemporary architectural culture. Ruins, fragmentation, displacement, and ecological crisis can easily become visual themes. Atelier 1’s “criticism-in-action” asks students to move beyond aestheticization. If a project responds to earthquake destruction, it must address social recovery, memory, and everyday continuity. If it responds to pandemic conditions, it must address public health, openness, and social encounter. If it responds to AFF, it must address the public and ecological meaning of that ground, not merely its visual or historical identity.

This ethical dimension closely aligns with Till’s argument that architecture depends on external forces. Architecture cannot claim autonomy from society, the economy, climate, or politics [20]. It is always entangled with conditions beyond itself. Atelier 1 teaches students to engage critically with this dependence. Rather than viewing external conditions as constraints that limit creativity, the atelier treats them as sources of architectural thought.

11. DISCUSSION: SITUATED PEDAGOGY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITICAL RESPONSIVENESS IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

The themes examined in the paper reveal a shared pedagogical structure that positions situated pedagogy as a framework for critical responsiveness without prescribing a fixed design method. Across different historical and spatial contexts, an initial thematic concern is interpreted through the specific conditions of a site, interrogated through theoretical inquiry and collective discussion, reformulated as a design question and program, and tested through architectural representation. Vertical exchange supports this process by allowing students to engage with a shared question while developing responses that differ in scope and solution. The resulting pedagogical model is relational rather than linear: critique can prompt

renewed site interpretation, while spatial experimentation can lead to programmatic revision. Critical responsiveness is thus sustained through iterative inquiry throughout the design process. Table 4, "Interpreting Atelier 1's Situated Pedagogy: Evaluative Criteria and Educational Possibilities," translates these observations into an interpretive framework organized around five criteria: critical inquiry, program-making, interdisciplinary translation, representation as inquiry, and public imagination. Each criterion emerges from recurring studio operations and identifies capacities that these operations may cultivate within architectural education. Together, the criteria offer a basis for examining the studio's pedagogical approach and considering its broader educational possibilities; they do not constitute evidence of measured student learning outcomes.

Table 4. *Interpreting Atelier 1's Situated Pedagogy: Evaluative Criteria and Educational Possibilities*

Analytical criterion	Capacity foregrounded	Operation visible in the studio account	Potential implication for design education
Critical inquiry	Judgment and interpretation	Students question the theme, site, and program before proposing form.	Prepares students for uncertain and complex design situations.
Program-making, or programming	Responsibility and public reasoning	Students construct briefs by identifying needs, users, relations, and possible encounters.	Moves education beyond typological assignments toward socially meaningful propositions.
Interdisciplinary translation	Conceptual and methodological flexibility	Knowledge from philosophy, art, ecology, urban theory, and social life is translated into architectural operations.	Equips students to address problems that exceed disciplinary boundaries.
Representation as inquiry	Communication and collective critique	Drawings, models, renders, diagrams, collages, and digital media make design arguments visible and discussable.	Turns studio work into shared architectural knowledge.
Public imagination	Ethical and responsive design thinking	Projects imagine new relations between place, society, memory, ecology, and future possibilities.	Positions architecture as a public practice rather than only object production.

The educational value of the situated pedagogical framework identified through Atelier 1 lies in the evaluative questions it offers for examining the relationship between critical inquiry and architectural design decisions: Does a proposal justify the condition it addresses? Can a theoretical claim be followed into the design brief and spatial choices? Do drawings and models expose an argument to dialogue rather than merely display its final appearance? How are public access, ecological care, and everyday use considered? These questions also reveal a limitation, as the documented materials show how the atelier frames and communicates its pedagogy, but they do not establish how consistently every student achieves these capacities. The framework should therefore be tested against a broader archive of briefs, student work at different stages, critique records, and student reflections. Its transferability depends less on adopting Atelier 1's particular themes than on creating a collective environment in which changing circumstances can be interpreted, disputed, and translated into accountable architectural decisions.

12. CONCLUSION

The comparison of three documented Atelier 1 themes—Open Architecture (2021–22), Architectural Dispositions (2022–23), and Atatürk Forest Farm as a Critical Ground (2023–24)—suggests that a situated studio pedagogy can be described through a recurring relationship rather than a common building type or a fixed sequence of design steps. A changing public condition becomes a discussable architectural question; theoretical and site-based interpretations shape the brief; programmatic and representational choices are revised through collective critique. In this account, *criticism-in-action* gives an explicit public and ethical orientation to practices of framing and reframing already recognized by Schön's reflective design theory [7, 8].

The paper's contribution is a cross-theme interpretive framework and a corresponding set of evaluative criteria for examining *situated pedagogy* in architectural design education. Identified through the analysis of Atelier 1, this framework connects critical responsiveness with the vertical studio's shared learning environment, integrating theory, program-making, representation, and public imagination into a continuous process of critical inquiry. It provides a basis for examining the coherence between a project's

interpretation of contextual conditions, its architectural decisions, and the potential social, ecological, and public implications of the proposed intervention.

Future studies could examine the applicability of these criteria through systematic samples of student projects, intermediate design documents, observations of studio critiques, and student accounts across different year levels. Such evidence would help establish how the proposed framework operates in practice, identify its limitations, and examine how exchange among students at different stages of architectural education shapes their design responses. Beyond its immediate institutional context, Atelier 1 offers a situated pedagogical proposition in which critical responsiveness develops through sustained inquiry of the assumptions underlying architectural questions. Its broader educational potential lies in connecting this inquiry to the formulation of architectural proposals, their representation, and their articulation within public debate.

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