

TEACHING

PRACTICES

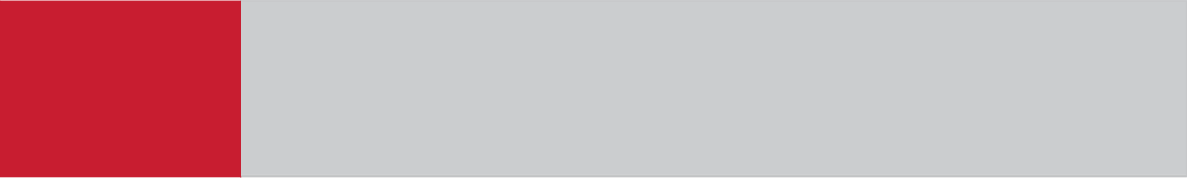
PRACTICING

ARCHI-

International Conference
Architecture Pop-up Lab
Exchange APLE

26 - 27 March 2026.
University of Sarajevo -
Faculty of Architecture
Sarajevo,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

-TECTURE



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26 - 27 March 2026.

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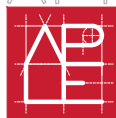
ARCHITECTURE

International Conference Architecture Pop-up Lab Exchange APLE
Conference proceedings

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PREFACE

Erdin Salihović, PhD, Professor, Dean
Faculty of Architecture
University of Sarajevo

It is my distinct honour, on behalf of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo — coordinating institution of the APLE (Architecture Pop-up Lab Exchange) project — to welcome you at the APLE Conference 2026. The conference, held under the theme Teaching Practices, Practicing Architecture, represents a significant milestone in our shared commitment to advancing architectural education in response to contemporary societal, technological, and environmental transitions.

The idea of the APLE project emerged from the “ArchiPraxis” initiative, a platform for the exchange of experiences, best practices, and critical reflections of experienced professionals within the architectural field, with the aim of familiarising students with the practical challenges they are likely to encounter in the near future. This bridge between education, professional practice, and the economic sector was further developed through a series of ambitious objectives within the APLE project, which can also be identified in the conference proceedings through the basic classification of authored papers into four thematic categories.

These Proceedings reflect the intellectual depth and diversity of contributions presented within the framework of the APLE consortium. Scholars, educators, and practitioners from partner universities and associated institutions engaged with pressing questions concerning innovative teaching methodologies, digital transformation and emerging competencies, architectural management and systemic thinking, as well as inclusive public engagement and collaborative partnerships. The resulting body of work demonstrates that architectural education must continuously evolve — not only to respond to change, but to actively shape it.

As coordinating institution, the Faculty of Architecture -University of Sarajevo is particularly proud to have facilitated this exchange of knowledge across borders. The APLE project, co-funded by the European Union, embodies the values of cooperation, mutual learning, and shared responsibility for the future of the architectural profession in Europe and beyond.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all authors, reviewers, partner institutions, and members of the consortium whose dedication and intellectual generosity made this publication possible. May these Proceedings serve not only as documentation of a conference, but as a foundation for continued dialogue, innovation, and collaboration in architectural education.





INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE POP-UP LAB EXCHANGE (APLE): REINFORCING PRACTICE-ORIENTED ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Senka Ibrišimbegović, PhD University Sarajevo – Faculty of Architecture
Architecture Pop-Up Lab Exchange (APLE) Project Coordinator
Head of Conference

The Architecture Pop-up Lab Exchange (APLE) project represents a strategic and collaborative initiative aimed at addressing one of the most persistent structural challenges within contemporary architectural education—the discontinuity between academic training and the professional competencies required at the threshold of employment. Conceived as a response to critical feedback from professional practice, the project establishes an innovative educational framework designed to strengthen the transfer of knowledge between higher education institutions, the professional sector, and public stakeholders.

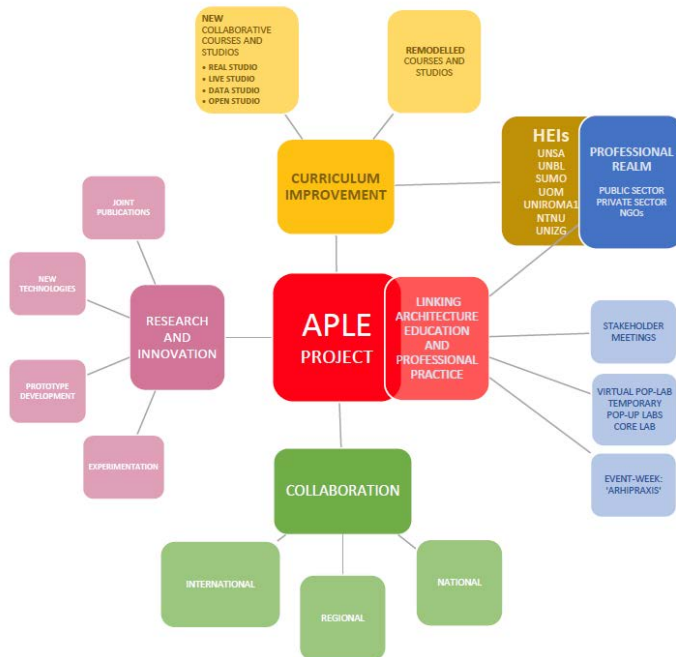


Diagram 1. APLE Project Concept (source APLE/UNSA AF)





The APLE project is **co-funded by the European Union** within the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education framework and implemented through a consortium of academic partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the European Union. The core consortium includes the University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Architecture (coordinating institution), University of Banja Luka – Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, University of Mostar – Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy, and the University of Montenegro – Faculty of Architecture. These institutions collaborate with European partner universities, including the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Architecture (Croatia), La Sapienza University of Rome, Faculty of Architecture (Italy), and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim (Norway), forming a transnational platform for pedagogical innovation, knowledge exchange, and institutional development.

Within this framework, the APLE 2026 Conference was launched by the APLE consortium as the culminating dissemination and reflection event, presenting the project's methodological advancements, educational outputs, and long-term strategic impact on architectural education. The conference represents not only the final stage of the project's implementation cycle, but also a platform for continued dialogue among academic institutions, professional organisations, and public stakeholders concerning future directions in architectural pedagogy and practice.

Architecture and spatial planning, as disciplines with profound societal implications, require educational models capable of addressing rapidly evolving environmental, social, technological, and economic conditions. The quality of the built environment directly influences public welfare, cultural identity, sustainability, and economic resilience. Consequently, contemporary architectural education must operate beyond the confines of traditional academic structures and actively engage with real-world contexts, interdisciplinary collaboration, and socially responsive design processes. The APLE project addresses this structural limitation by establishing a comprehensive and replicable model that embeds practice-oriented learning within the core of architectural education. The mission of APLE is grounded in improving educational outcomes, strengthening the development of relevant skills and competencies, and enhancing graduate employability. Through structured collaboration between students, academic staff, professional practitioners, public institutions, and industry stakeholders, the project fosters new modes of knowledge transfer that reflect the complexity of contemporary architectural practice. The expected impact extends beyond higher education institutions, contributing to broader socio-economic development through engagement with municipalities, planning bodies, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector.

The project is structured around three interrelated strategic objectives. The first objective focuses on innovation and development within the educational process, introducing experimental pedagogical models, collaborative design studios, and adaptive curricula that encourage critical thinking, interdisciplinary exchange, and problem-based learning. These initiatives aim to enhance the relevance and responsiveness of architectural education in relation to evolving societal and professional demands.

The second objective promotes a proactive institutional approach toward the professional realm. Through the development of structured partnerships with design studios, construction companies, material producers, and governmental and non-governmental organisations, APLE establishes opportunities for apprenticeship, proto-practice, and engagement with real assignments. This model benefits students through exposure to authentic professional environments while simultaneously enabling industry partners to access emerging talent, innovative design approaches, and collaborative research opportunities.

The third objective introduces the Pop-up Laboratory as a flexible organisational and technological platform for collaboration. This concept integrates Core Labs as physical





spaces for experimentation, Virtual Labs as digital knowledge-exchange environments, and Temporary Labs as adaptable, context-specific working settings. The Pop-up Lab framework facilitates synchronisation between academic schedules, professional workflows, and project timelines, enabling transnational cooperation and continuous exchange of expertise.

The implementation of APLE has been characterised by a structured sequence of consortium meetings, workshops, pilot studios, and dissemination activities conducted between 2023 and 2026. Beginning with the online kick-off meeting in April 2023, partners established shared objectives and operational frameworks. Subsequent meetings in Sarajevo, Rome, Trondheim, Banja Luka, Podgorica, and Zagreb enabled the progressive refinement of the Practical Learning Model methodology, evaluation of pilot studio outcomes, and preparation of final dissemination activities. Student workshops held across EU partner institutions further reinforced international collaboration and knowledge exchange. The project has directly engaged approximately one hundred academic staff members and more than four hundred students, while indirectly benefiting a broader network of public and private stakeholders. Through equitable distribution of activities across Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, APLE has ensured geographical, cultural, and socio-economic inclusivity, while maintaining a strong commitment to diversity and participation.

In alignment with European higher education priorities and regulatory frameworks—including the Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications—the project contributes to strengthening the relationship between higher education and labour markets. By balancing theoretical knowledge with practical competencies, APLE supports the development of architectural graduates capable of addressing complex societal challenges while navigating professional environments effectively.

Beyond its immediate educational outcomes, APLE positions higher education institutions as active contributors to urban and socio-economic transformation. Through engagement with real-world spatial challenges and collaboration with local communities, the academic environment becomes an experimental platform for testing innovative solutions and generating public value. This approach reinforces the role of architecture schools as knowledge producers and agents of societal change. The APLE project has been implemented with high ethical standards, promoting inclusion, diversity, and social responsibility throughout all phases. Open access to activities, engagement with vulnerable groups, and sensitivity to community needs have been integral components of the project's methodology, ensuring that educational innovation is aligned with broader societal priorities.

As consortium coordinator on behalf of the University of Sarajevo Faculty of Architecture, one of the most significant achievements of the APLE initiative has been the establishment of a sustainable and scalable model for long-term collaboration between academia and practice. The Pop-up Lab methodology provides a flexible framework that can be adapted across institutional contexts and extended beyond the project lifecycle.

The outcomes presented within these conference proceedings document both the processes and the tangible results achieved through APLE, while also outlining future opportunities for continued cooperation. The knowledge generated through this initiative contributes to ongoing discussions on the transformation of architectural education in Europe and the Western Balkans, supporting the development of resilient, practice-oriented, and socially responsive educational systems.

Ultimately, the Architecture Pop-up Lab Exchange represents not only a project, but a strategic platform for innovation, internationalisation, and institutional transformation. Through sustained collaboration among participating universities and stakeholders, APLE established a foundation for future initiatives that will continue to enhance the relevance and societal impact of architectural education.





ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

TEACHING PRACTICES, PRACTICING ARCHITECTURE

Senka Ibrišimbegović, PhD University Sarajevo – Faculty of Architecture
Architecture Pop-Up Lab Exchange (APLE) Project Coordinator - Head of Conference

The conference theme “Teaching Practices, Practicing Architecture” emerged from the central ambition of the APLE initiative to critically examine and advance the relationship between architectural education and professional practice in a rapidly transforming socio-spatial and technological context. The topic was conceived through collaborative dialogue among consortium partners, reflecting both shared challenges across European architectural schools and the need to reposition architectural pedagogy as a dynamic, practice-oriented, and socially responsive field. Contemporary architectural education operates within a landscape shaped by accelerating technological change, complex urban transitions, and evolving professional expectations. Traditional pedagogical models, often rooted in studio-based design culture, are increasingly required to expand toward more interdisciplinary, experimental, and practice-embedded forms of learning. In response to these conditions, the APLE consortium identified the necessity of creating a platform where educators, practitioners, researchers, and institutional leaders could collectively reflect on how architectural knowledge is produced, transferred, and applied. The overarching theme therefore positions teaching and practice not as separate domains, but as mutually constitutive processes. “Teaching Practices” addresses the methods, tools, and institutional frameworks through which architectural education evolves, while “Practicing Architecture” highlights the professional realities that shape competencies, ethical responsibilities, and societal impact. By intentionally bridging these dimensions, the conference seeks to explore how educational environments can more effectively prepare future architects for increasingly complex roles within contemporary society. The development of the conference structure resulted from a series of internal workshops and discussions within the APLE consortium, during which partner institutions mapped current pedagogical innovations, identified emerging professional competencies, and shared experiences from pilot studios, experimental learning formats, and collaborative engagements with industry and communities. This collective reflection led to the articulation of four interconnected thematic subfields.

Innovating Pedagogy: Connecting Academia and Practice focuses on new educational models that integrate real-world conditions into architectural learning processes. It addresses studio formats that involve stakeholders, live projects, interdisciplinary collaboration, and practice-based research. The intention is to examine how architectural education can move beyond simulation toward active participation in societal and spatial transformation.

Digital Tools and Future Competencies responds to the increasing role of digital technologies in both design and knowledge production. This thematic area explores how digital platforms, data-driven approaches, extended reality environments, and emerging computational tools reshape architectural thinking, representation, and collaboration. Equally important is the question of how future curricula can equip students with competencies that extend beyond technical proficiency to include critical digital literacy and adaptive learning capacities.





Architectural Management and Systemic Thinking addresses the expanding scope of the architect's professional role within complex institutional, economic, and regulatory systems. Recognizing that contemporary architectural practice requires strategic decision-making, project coordination, and long-term spatial planning, this subtopic investigates how educational programs can incorporate managerial knowledge, systems thinking, and interdisciplinary negotiation skills as integral components of architectural training.

Inclusive Public Engagement and Collaborative Partnerships reflects the growing importance of participatory processes and socially engaged design. The APLE consortium identified that future architects must be capable of working with diverse communities, public institutions, and cultural stakeholders. This thematic area therefore examines methodologies that embed co-creation, public dialogue, and civic responsibility into both educational and professional frameworks.

By situating the conference at the intersection of education, professional practice, and institutional transformation, the diversity of papers confirms also how APLE project results with new models of learning that are adaptive, collaborative, and future-oriented. The topic itself reflects a shared commitment among partner institutions to strengthen the feedback loop between academia and practice, ensuring that architectural education continues to evolve in alignment with contemporary challenges and opportunities.



EDUTOPIA – NEW METHODS FOR THE DESIGN STUDIO

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ABSTRACT

Situating itself within the theoretical and methodological framework of the ongoing “EDUTOPIA – Utopia as Educational Practice in Architecture: New Methods for Envisioning Transformational Change” research project, the paper builds on the hypothesis that architectural and spatial education can and must move beyond technical and product-focused training towards the development of transversal and critical thinking, predominantly by employing speculative and utopian modes of thinking and methods of practice. Taking as a broader aim the need to equip future practitioners with the means to not only produce built space, but to also address and engage with urgent social and spatial challenges, the methods developed for the design studio within the scope of the project integrate insights and approaches from architecture and urbanism with those of the humanities fields. Developing a framework for experimental design studio assignments, the project brings together creative methods from utopia, fiction, and other speculative and narrative-based forms. The paper brings forth both the methodological structure of the project, some of the initial findings as well as some ongoing outputs from the design studio. Exploring the discursive and speculative potential of the architectural discipline and placing focus on its potential to actively engage with a larger array of both spatial and societal topics, the project treats the design studio as a space for critical inquiry and imaginative world-building – a place for problematizing, and not merely problem-solving. Focusing more on systems, processes, and interconnections, rather than finalized and embodied products the methods and approaches developed through the design studio assignments aim to challenge conventional pedagogies and expand the role of spatial education in preparing students for spatial practice as a form of societal and cultural engagement and transformation.

KEYWORDS:

Spatial education; Utopia as critical method; Utopian pedagogy; Speculative design; Design studio.

1. INTRODUCTION – ARCHITECTURE AS A CRITICAL AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

Within the contemporary context, architecture as a spatial discipline which focuses predominantly on the production and innovation of built forms, is being increasingly recognized as a field which exerts a significant effect on our overall environment. And while the engagement of architecture as a discipline in the efforts to mitigate the effects of climate crisis and to address some of the most relevant socio-spatial issues of today is steadily increasing, the focus is often geared only towards engaging architecture's technical side by developing more sustainable building practices. This is done either through the reuse of existing building stock and materials, by designing carbon neutral or even carbon negative structures, or through designing smart buildings and cities which develop and integrate innovative technologies aimed at optimizing various aspects of utilities consumption, infrastructure, and mobility. And while these goals and attempts are by all means noteworthy, through focusing on and employing predominantly the engineering aspect of architecture, they often neglect the potential of the discipline's social, political, cultural, and economic role, as well as its discursive, artistic and transdisciplinary side. They therefore fail to employ architecture's potential to act as a discipline for spatial and societal visioning through imagining and proposing new futures and ways of living for our (built) environment and its inhabitants – human or other.

Focusing precisely on this experimental and speculative – utopian – side of the architectural discipline the ongoing research project “EDUTOPIA – Utopia as Educational Practice in Architecture: New Methods for Envisioning Transformational Change” aims to develop and test novel ways of re-establishing the critical and discursive role of architecture in imagining the futures for our (built) environment(s). Situating the research within architectural and spatial education, the project builds on the hypothesis that education can and must move beyond technical and product-focused training towards the development of transversal and critical thinking, predominantly by employing speculative and utopian modes of thinking and methods of practice. Taking as a broader aim the need to equip future practitioners with the means to not only produce built space, but to also address and engage with urgent social and spatial challenges, the methods developed for the design studio within the scope of the project integrate insights and approaches from architecture and urbanism with those of the humanities fields. Developing a framework for experimental design studio assignments, the project aims to bring together creative methods from utopia, fiction, and other speculative and narrative-based forms. Exploring the discursive and speculative potential of the architectural discipline and placing focus on its potential to actively engage with a larger array of both spatial and societal topics, EDUTOPIA treats the design studio as a space for critical inquiry and imaginative world-building – a place for problematizing, and not merely problem-solving. Focusing more on systems, processes, and interconnections, rather than finalized and embodied products the methods and approaches developed through the design studio assignments aim to challenge conventional pedagogies and expand the role of spatial education in preparing students for spatial practice as a form of societal and cultural engagement and transformation.

While the EDUTOPIA project is now only in its initial stages, the aim of this paper is to establish some of its benchmarks and starting points. The paper builds on the concept of utopia, which in the framework of this research is not seen as an individual fancy, but as a critical method for reflecting on our own past and present with the aim of envisioning a better or different future. After creating a framework for defining utopia as a critical method, the paper examines it within the context of (architectural) pedagogy. Observing utopian pedagogy as an approach

¹ EDUTOPIA – Utopia as Educational Practice in Architecture: New Methods for Envisioning Transformational Change is a post-doctoral research project led by dr.sc. Jana Čulek at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, Croatia. The research project is funded through the DIGIT Seal of Excellence under the Synergies Program of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Youth and the World Bank (DIGIT.2.2.01.001.)

which often appears outside of architectural education and situates itself more commonly within the humanities and social sciences fields, the paper speculates on potential ways in which some of these approaches and methods could be translated into spatial education, and through which means – structuring through the reflection some of the main approaches and methods developed for the EDUTOPIA project. Lastly, the paper lays out the initial and ongoing design studio assignment within the scope of the project – Utopian Laboratory Ilica – reflecting on the structure and aims of the course, as well as some of the early outcomes of the students.

2. DEVELOPING UTOPIAN PEDAGOGY

2.1. DEFINING UTOPIA AS A CRITICAL METHOD

Approaching the topic of architectural and spatial education through the framework of utopia as a critical method, requires a short reflection on how utopia as a concept is understood within the framework of the EDUTOPIA research and this paper. When examining the utopian impulse to envision a society and space which is some way better than the one we find ourselves in, we see that it can be dated as far back as Plato's *Republic* (Mumford, 1922; Manuel, Manuel, 1997). The name of this impulse, however, at least in the scope that we recognize it in today, was first established only through the 1516. literary work of Thomas More which describes the imaginary island Utopia (Manuel, Manuel, 1997). As a creative, critical, and speculative form it has developed predominantly within literature through the spoken and written word but has also come to appear in other creative disciplines such as architecture, art, and more recently – film and the graphic novel. The name – utopia – deriving from the ancient Greek words *topos*, meaning “place”, and the prefix *ouk* meaning “not”, automatically defines it in spatial terms as “a place which is a non-place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of affirmation and denial” (Viera, 2010,4). In addition to utopia as concept describing a more perfect place outside of our own, several other concepts have appeared in the last couple of centuries such as that of dystopias, anti-utopias, critical utopias (James, 2003; Vieira, 2010), and heterotopias (Foucault, 1967). And while the depictions of these other ‘topias’ and the alternative worlds they envision differ from the ideal utopian image, the majority of them is based on the same intention – to pose a critical reflection on a specific historical and spatial context, its social and spatial forms² (Čulek, 2022), with the aim of depicting an alternative futurescape.

Throughout centuries, utopias have offered some of the most innovative, thought-provoking and critical solutions which, albeit mostly not indented for immediate realization, created a much-needed trigger and inspiration for long term transformational change. However, proposing a fixed and encompassing definition for utopia as a form presents itself as difficult, given that what constitutes a utopia often varies according to the creative field within which it is creative, but also the historical period in which it emerges. Within the recent decades there have been various attempts that managed to frame it within the architectural field (Coleman, 2005; Choay, 1997), critical theory (Jameson, 2005; Marin, 1984) and within literature (Claeys, 2020; Vieira, 2010; Levitas, 1990, 2013; Suvin, 1979).

Building on these insights, within the context of the EDUTOPIA project, utopia is defined not as a finished product or an idealized image of a perfect world, but as a critical method

² The concepts of social and spatial forms build upon both the concepts of form from architecture as well as those from comparative literature – specifically those of Caroline Levine (2015) who proposes to “broaden our definition of form to include social arrangements”. They therefore include all manners, configurations, organization principles, and repetitive patterns of the behavior of humans or other living things, and as such do not generally have a tangible spatial manifestation. They also include cyclical and other rhythms, societal and other hierarchies, political, educational, health and other systems and groups, as well as theoretical concepts which describe or refer to human behavior such as industrialization, alienation, mass production, religion, and others. Conversely, spatial forms include all types, scales, and manners of forms which have a physical manifestation in space such as buildings, cities, infrastructure, structural systems, geography, planets, objects, etc. (Čulek, 2020, 2022, 2023)

which simultaneously reflects on and opens up the context within which it is situated, while proposing an alternative for it. Through the topics it addresses and the social and spatial forms it develops, utopia becomes bound to the socio-spatial and historical context from which it emerges. Actively addressing this context utopia becomes a tool for rethinking our (built) environment and societies with the aim of creating a critical reflection on their past and present and offering a speculative alternative for their future. Avoiding focusing only isolated aspects and processes of the built environment, utopias employ their capacity to encompass a much wider array of spatial and societal implications and forms which they often address through the combined use of textual and visual narratives – making them a valuable tool in addressing today’s context of complex poly-crises. Acknowledging the complexity, multifacetedness, and diversity ingrained in today’s society, as well as all the negative repercussions and connotations tied to the production of totalizing narratives, I argue that novel ways of employing utopia as a critical method within spatial practice still can and need to be researched, developed, and evaluated.

2.2. UTOPIAN PEDAGOGY

Acknowledging utopia’s capacity for addressing complex socio-spatial issues and its value as a tool and method in various creative practices, it is also relevant to address its potential as an educational model. When examining today’s approaches in architectural education, we can detect two main avenues which are predominantly present based on the focus of the institution itself: the first, in which employs a [1]“problem solving (application)” approach that relies more precisely on methods which provide solutions for specific predefined problems and are more akin to “hard science disciplines” , and the [2]“problem framing (development)” approach which focuses more on investigating abstract problems which rely more on a “hunch” instead of relating “to an existing or established field of knowledge and methods”(Helmersen, 2021). The former is perhaps more akin to a client brief and prepares students for the more practical side of building-based architectural practice. By offering as an assignment a set of defined spatial requirements intended for a specific function at a predefined location, it teaches students practical design skills and the implementation of standards, norms, and defined technical solutions. Conversely, the latter is often based on abstract philosophical notions and – in some cases – does not even require a spatial solution from the students, but merely a theoretical and conceptual speculation or scenario. These types of assignments are often nominally aimed at the development of research skills, critical thinking, and creativity, but sometimes fail at providing students with methods of implementing these new skills and knowledge within the “real world”. And while both sets of skills are of utmost importance for the future spatial practitioner, it is actually the overlap and simultaneous use of these two approaches within the framework of the design studio which is often lacking. This merge of speculation and critical examination with the envisioning of concrete and possibly implementable solutions and strategies which could educate and equip future experts and practitioners to actively envision and create positive transformational change within the global environment.

2.2.1. UTOPIA AS PROCESS OR DESTINATION

When examining utopian pedagogy³ as a specific field, especially within the context of the last several decades, two distinct forms of utopian teaching appear – one which focuses on the methodological aspects of utopia and what it affords as a form, and the other focusing on the prescriptive outcomes it depicts. The two often have many names, depending on the author which discusses them, I will here focus on two perhaps most illustrative nomenclatures, namely “utopia as process” versus “utopia as system” (Webb, 2013 based on Levitas, 2007)

3 The term utopian pedagogy was coined by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Webb, 2013).

and “utopian archaeology” versus “utopian architecture”⁴ (Webb, 2017). Webb describes “utopia as process” as “open-ended”, “fluid and partial”, “exploratory”, “playful”, and “critical” with its main aim being that of “critical demystification – uncovering, unveiling, unmasking the operation of power so that new, open partial, fluid, spaces of possibility can emerge” (Webb, 2013, 282). Similarly, the concept of “utopian archaeology”, derived from the works of Frederic Jameson (2005) and Ruth Levitas (2013) also focuses on the process of uncovering and unearthing what is already there – making things and connections evident, to provide them a space of becoming. “Utopia as system” is conversely described as “representational”, “totalistic”, “normative”, “prescriptive”, and “instrumental” (Webb, 2013, 281) and often alluded to as problematic, due to its seemingly prescriptive nature and content which aims to propose actual alternatives to its contextual social and spatial forms, practicing thus the “indignity of speaking for others” (Webb, 2013, 283).

In today’s context, the “utopia as system” or “utopia as architecture” is most commonly addressed through pejorative terms, abandoned as a method or approach due to its seeming totalitarian, rigid, and prescriptive overtones. The utopian has, as Webb proposes in the terms of Jameson, “shifted away from the ‘utopian form’ and towards the ‘utopian wish’”, and is “no longer concerned with constructing systems and programs but seeks to uncover the diffuse, varied and ambiguous utopian impulse to be found in subjective human experience” (Webb, 2017, 553; Jameson, 2005). A path to uncovering potential reasons for this shift away from a more prescriptive form of utopian narratives, aside from the most common interpretation which links it to the disillusionment and failure of the modern movement and utopia following the atrocities of the Second World War is offered by Ford and Svensson (2024). Reflecting on a contemporary return to the topic of utopia “in scholarship across the political spectrum” (Ford, Svensson, 2024, 562), they link the gravitation towards the “utopia as archaeology” and “utopia as process” – or what they critically term as “good utopias” with the capitalist condition of the perpetual present and “the prison of the now” (Ford, Svensson, 2024, 574) in which the goal is one of constant reinvention and replication of the present. But similarly to Webb, who calls for a combination of both approaches if we are to see or envision any actual change, Ford and Svensson also state that “to reclaim the essence of utopia, education must combine imagination and action, and openness with direction, imagination, and struggle [...] sinking head-first into the dialectical tension between denouncing and announcing” (Ford, Svensson, 2024, 568).

Utopia as Process		Utopia as System
Utopia as Archaeology		Utopia as Architecture
“Good” Utopia		“Bad” Utopia
Open-ended		Representational
Fluid and Partial	vs	Totalistic
Exploratory		Normative
Playful		Prescriptive
Critical		Instrumental
Unveiling		Blueprint

Figure 1: Comparison of Utopian Concepts. Source: Jana Čulek, 2025.

⁴ It is important to note that the concept of “utopian architecture” which Webb refers to is not related to the field of production, but rather the process of its creation. When discussing “utopian architecture” Webb discusses a process of utopian pedagogy which focuses not on the process of uncovering and problematizing, but one which offers concrete solutions or “blueprints”.

2.2.2. APPROACHING ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Considering that the majority of scholarship on utopian pedagogies does not stem from the architectural field and is therefore more focused on developing approaches for teaching and for designing curricula, it is important, within the framework of this paper and the context of the EDUTOPIA research project, to re-situate this topic within the context of the architectural discipline. Given the specificity of the architectural teaching process – one which requires transferring to students a combination of critical and imaginative as well as practical skills, the question arises if it is really possible to address spatial and architectural education within the context of utopian pedagogy without employing the approaches of both “utopia as process” and “utopia as system”? The answer of course, which also aligns with what Webb, as well as Ford and Svensson call for, is – no. One of the main goals of “utopia as process” and “archaeology” is to untangle and open-up one’s context, allowing for new things to occur within it just through making them evident as a possibility. But how do these possibilities actually occur if one does not propose, at the very least, a type of framework or direction? As Webb also concludes, within the process of opening up and “creating space”, it often occurs that “one seems to be left with is the practice of creating spaces devoid of content (‘radically open’) and lacking direction (‘always in process’), urging us to pose the question: “what actually happens in these spaces?” (Webb, 2017, 559).

Drawing a parallel between “utopia as system” – sometimes also “blueprint utopia”, Webb addresses one of the perhaps most common misconceptions about these types of utopias – namely that they are created as set instructions which impose the will of an individual onto the many. Noting that “architectural blueprints [...] do not arrive as an authoritarian imposition from above” but that they are rather “the outcome of a long iterative process of consultation and collaboration”, he proposes that – within this framework – the “role of the utopian pedagogue is guiding and directing this iterative process” (Webb, 2017, 560). As a method of doing this, he proposes the process of “convoking⁵ the radical imagination, animating, enlivening, drawing together, and building on the inchoate utopian imaginings” (Webb, 2017, 561). And as a method for this process, he proposes the construction of narratives and storytelling stating that “the issue is not simply to exhume what has been buried – it is how to take dreams, desires, hopes and fears and tie them together to construct a narrative that resonates, motivates and guides”(Webb, 2017, 562). Combining both the process of questioning, uncovering, “denouncing and announcing”, projecting, and visioning, he proposes to:

“...call this vivid image a blueprint and let us say that the role of utopian pedagogy is to guide and direct a collective and collaborative process of memory- and story-making, pulling together – through a process of convocation and extrapolation – disparate inchoate dreams and yearnings in order to produce something new; a substantive utopian vision.” (Webb, 2017, 562)

Reintroducing storytelling and narrative as both a practical and creative method into the process of architectural education and the design studio, therefore, also allows us to more productively access utopia as a critical and creative tool and method. But aside from its utopian potentials, storytelling as a method employed within architectural and spatial education has great potential. It is multifaceted and makes use of “creativity” through the development of “content”, “communication” through the “expression” of the story itself (verbally, visually, or textually), and “reflection” which occurs through the “interaction with others” (Lee et.al, 2023, 3). And while storytelling has been increasingly used in recent years as a method within architectural and urban design studios, it is still most commonly employed as a way of representing the student’s work which was developed in response to a set brief, as a way of summarizing the research and analysis process preceding the design, or as a method of

⁵ Webb defines ‘convoking’ through the work of Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) as a process of “call[ing] something which is not yet fully present into being”. (Webb, 2017, 561)

justifying one's design decisions. But, as evident from its potential within utopian pedagogy, storytelling and narrative as a design methods also have numerous benefits for the students, including the improvement of their "creativity and communication skills", allowing them to "develop unique design approaches and methods in a coherent manner", enabling them to "emphasize spatial sequence and spatial experience rather than form-oriented architecture", and also improves their "decision-making and problem-solving abilities" (Lee et.al., 2023, 2). As the EDUTOPIA project will demonstrate, storytelling and narratives – especially when conceived through the critical utopian format - in the context of architectural and spatial education also enable students to imagine and construct more complex systems of ideas, introduces topics and methods from other disciplines, and allows them to develop overall more responsive and critically positioned proposals.

3. UTOPIAN LABORATORY ILICA

Building on the concept of utopia as a critical method, but with the consideration that criticality and the process of "opening up", questioning, and making evident should not be considered the final results of any utopian pedagogical exercise, and that these should in fact require some format of visioning and a proposition of a better future, I want to reflect on the initial design studio assignment which is taking place within the framework of the EDUTOPIA project. The design studio titled "Utopian Laboratory Ilica" is held together with prof. dr.sc. Mia Roth Čerina at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, with the students of the third semester of the Master program and within the format of the "Istraživanje, seminari, projekti: Arhitektura" [Research, Seminars, Projects: Architecture] course. The overall course which the Utopian Laboratory Ilica" is part of is conceived as a collection of design and research studios which vary in topic and scope, each developed individually by a member of the teaching staff, with students freely choosing a group based on their own interests and available topics. With its relatively open format, this course presented itself as an ideal initial testing ground in which some of the starting hypothesis of the EDUTOPIA project could be tested within the standard format of architectural education, but without the need to conform to already predetermined programmatic assignments. It is important to note, however, that at the time of writing this paper, the course is still ongoing, and it is therefore impossible to reflect on or evaluate its results and its successfulness in conveying utopia as critical method or as a pedagogical approach in architectural and spatial education.

The locus of the first iteration of this design studio is the Ilica street in Zagreb which is chosen for several reasons, namely, as one of the longest streets in the city of Zagreb, it is given as a location due to its size, relevance, and heterogeneity. Spreading from the city center – its main square – all the way to its western periphery, it encompasses an array of scales and typologies varying from historical inner-city blocks, through large public spaces, parks, more contemporary housing, various public buildings and institution, to functioning or abandoned industrial sites, single-family dwellings, unbuilt areas, and large infrastructural surfaces. Additionally, it forms perhaps the clearest border between the lower and flat part of the city and its hilly and mountainous area, together with its parks, forests, and green recreational zones. In other words, the street is rich enough in content to provide the students with an array of possible avenues for research and design without offering any obvious or predetermined paths. While it provides students with a concrete location from which they can begin their inquiry, it also becomes merely a location which is heterogenous enough to bring onto itself any type of topic and explore an array of utopian avenues which could theoretically also be transposed to other parts and other cities.

3.1. DEFINING UTOPIAN TOPICS

Within the framework of the course, the students are divided into four self-formed groups, each focusing on one of four predetermined overarching topics. The topics – namely Habitat, Process, System, and Care – are defined as a continuation of a set of findings from my doctoral dissertation which examined a set of 20th century architectural and literary utopias. They are derived from the topics of housing, production, technology, and governance ⁶, which were identified through the research as four overarching topics of the majority of utopian narratives (Čulek, 2023). But given that in today's context we are much more aware of our connection and interdependence with all manners of living beings, as well as non-living systems, within the context of the course and the EDUTOPIA research project these four themes are conceptually expanded to include today's broader and more complex understanding of our world. Housing therefore expands to the concept of [1] Habitat, including within its scope not just the space of human habitation, but that which is inhabited by other living beings, considering also that different species and lifeforms require each a specific set conditions in order to sustain themselves. These conditions – unlike the often spatially focused ones developed through housing – provide not only the physical possibilities of life and inhabitation, but also societal and institutional ones.

Production becomes [2] Process, which widens the concept of work and production from those exclusively creating productive, useful, and consumable results, to also include their byproducts. Through the scope of Process, surplus, and waste, as well as including other – perhaps non-physical – byproducts of work and production such as speculation, or debt are investigated and speculated upon, considering both their effect and potential within the (built) environment.

Technology, which is widened to the concept of infrastructural [3] systems, stems from the contemporary change in the notion the scale and use of different aspects of technological innovation. Developing as a broadening of the concept of technology – seen here as a basic building block of every infrastructural system - it takes into consideration not just individual objects or products of innovation and innovative technologies, but how they work together – observing technology as something which is often developed precisely in service of and for the need of supporting or creating larger infrastructural systems. In other words, innovation today is no longer geared towards individual objects or technologies, but rather occurs in the scale of systems, through which it is also implemented.

And lastly governance is expanded to the concept of [4] Care which, starting from an entirely different power-relation from that of governance, seeks to give agency to and include within a collective system those commonly overlooked, marginalized, or underrepresented.]

Although by the end of the semester, each group of the students will develop a final project based on their own themes which will be closely related to the spatial and social context of the space and time from which the projects will arise, these themes will be elucidated from the four assigned overarching topics. In this way, the framework of the topics develops as a methodological approach which could potentially be reused in other formats and design studios, and generate a different set of results, depending on the investigated site, as well as the proclivities and interests of the involved students.

⁶ These initial four topics have already been used as a framework for two separate iterations of short design-based workshops with interdisciplinary students from the Urban Studies postmaster specialist program of the Deltalab Center of the University of Rijeka. The results of one of the workshops have been published in the special issue of the *Sociology and Space* journal (Čulek, 2025).



Figure 2: Diagram of the Utopian Topics. Source: Jana Čulek, 2025.

3.2. COURSE STRUCTURE

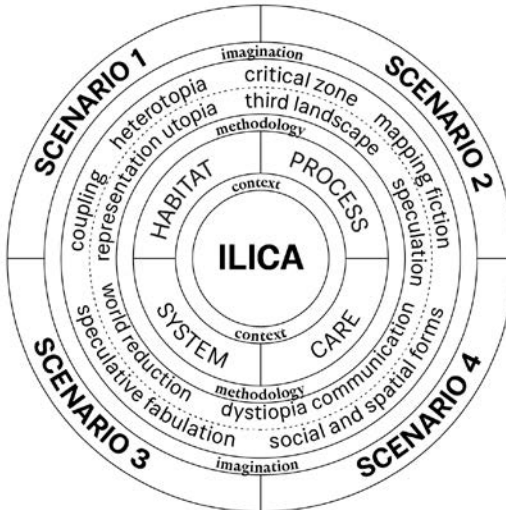


Figure 3: Diagram of the Course Structure. Source: Jana Čulek, 2025.

3.2.1. CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL READING

The course itself is structured in three thematic parts – Context, Methodology, and Imagination – each lasting roughly a third of the semester. All three parts are observed and developed through one of the four overarching topics, where each topic is investigated by one group of students. In the first part of the course – titled Context – the students are introduced both to the physical context they will be working in, as well as the theoretical and conceptual global context through which they will frame their speculative interventions. They are introduced to utopia as a critical method and to a theoretical framework of today's complex socio-political, ecological, and spatial context through a given set of readings which they are asked to reflect upon through both text and diagrammatic drawings. Through the readings they are introduced to concepts such as “subnature” (Gissen, 2009), “third landscape” (Clement, 2004), “chthulucene” (Harway, 2016), “critical zone” (Latour, 2020), “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014), “infrastructure space” (Easterling, 2014) – which aid them in understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of today's local and global context. Within this format, the students adopt contemporary theoretical and spatial concepts that will help them observe, map, and analyze the given location (in this instance the Ilica street), its occurring social and spatial forms, stories, living, non-living, human, and non-human inhabitants and protagonists, its present, past, and unrealized futures. It is important to note that within this analytical process, the students are encouraged to switch their primary focus from a typical architectural form-based analysis of the assigned location, and focus rather on phenomena, conditions, and patterns which are commonly overlooked in architectural research, but are made more evident through the application of the learned theoretical concepts on their analytical process. While within their smaller groups the students were assigned to deal with segments of the location, which they choose themselves based on their overarching themes and the theoretical concepts they adopted through the reading, on the level of the group they needed to create a collective analytical drawing of the investigated space based on their research and observations which will be used as a base for the development of their speculative scenarios.

3.2.2. DEVELOPING UTOPIAN METHODOLOGY

The second part of the design studio – titled Methodology – will build on the knowledge and concepts from the first block with the aim of setting up the main conceptual and methodological framework for the students' speculative scenarios. Structured similarly as the first block and consisting of both a set of reading assignments paired with practical and design-based group-work, this part of the semester is aimed at creating the initial speculative scenario design proposal, together with a preliminary methodological approach which takes into consideration the already acquired knowledge from the first part of the course. Within this block, the students will work in the space of Ilica by employing various utopian, narrative-based, and speculative research-based design approaches stemming not only from the architectural field, but also from literature and other creative disciplines. From their assigned readings they will learn about methods such as “world reduction” (Jameson, 2005), “coupling” (Lateral Office, 2011), “medium design” (Easterling, 2018), “speculative fabulation” (Haraway, 2016), “critical design” (Dunne, Raby, 2013), and “speculative mapping” (Ait-Youati et al., 2022). Seen as the intermezzo moment of the design studio, this part is intended to bridge the acquired theoretical knowledge and spatial and conceptual analysis with the students' design ambitions and intentions through devising the most appropriate and productive approach for both developing and representing their speculative scenarios. After finalizing their critical reading of Ilica and identifying the topics and phenomena of interest, they will go through a process of “diagnosing” and “reconstructing” (Shor, 1977) and of “denouncing and announcing” (Webb, 2017, 568) both found and new social and spatial forms. By offering them an array of utopian creative approaches, many of which also deal with similar theoretical concepts that they have already been investigating, it aims to create

productive pairs of “concept-and-method” which will aid them in the development of the projects.

3.2.3. IMAGINING SPECULATIVE SCENARIOS

Which leads us to the third and final segment of the course – titled Imagination – which will deal with the actual development and refinement of the four theme-based speculative utopian design scenarios. Employing the learned and developed utopian and narrative-based design approaches, the students will create four speculative scenarios, each of which will be situated within one of the four predetermined utopian topics – Habitat, Process, System, and Care. The developed scenarios will aim to consider their own potential social and spatial impacts, both on the given context, its wider environment, and its current and future inhabitants, visitors, and users. Developed as a continuation of their collective analytical drawing, the students will depict the potential spatial implications of their speculative scenarios on the collective drawing, considering also the potential interrelationships of their proposals, their potential overlaps, connections, or collaborations. Arising from the four assigned utopian topics, and based on the observed and analyzed elements of the socio-spatial context and forms of Ilica, the students will create an alternative utopian narrative of its potential future through visual and textual storytelling – employing thus throughout the process both the aspects of “utopia as process” and “utopia as system”. By creating this parallel future, the students will observe the space of Ilica through different scales, through the perspectives of different protagonists and users, and will speculate about the development of the proposed interventions and scenarios over time. Their end results – the speculative utopian scenarios – although based within a physical location – do not need to be designed exclusively in the format of a (new) building or built space but can also consider a new way of using existing spaces, propose a new type of spatial, social, or infrastructural system, or it can merely propose a novel interrelationship of already existing social and spatial forms. This continuous correlation of both social and spatial forms therefore becomes necessary in speculating upon possible futures, as it will allow students to continuously remain aware of the correlations and potentials of architecture with the social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological context in which it is situated.

4. PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES – EMPLOYING UTOPIA AS A METHOD FOR CRITICAL READING

While the course is still ongoing at the time of writing this paper, the students have already finalized the first segment of the studio which focused on the critical reading of Ilica street through the lens of their chosen utopian topics, and have begun to develop the concepts and methodological approaches for their speculative scenarios. Therefore, in the following section of the paper I will provide a short reflection on some of the topics the students engaged with within the scope of their groups, based on the provided readings and the on-site analysis, as well as how they employed this new knowledge and insight in developing their speculative design scenarios. The four groups, working under the utopian topics of Habitat, Process, System, and Care, consisted out of three or four students respectively, with all the course deliverables being assigned on the level of the groups. This way, collective work and conversation between students was encouraged from the very beginning, which assisted them in navigating both the assigned readings as well as the analytical and design work. Additionally, the collective analytical drawing [fig.x.] of the chosen sites served as an additional layer of negotiation on the level of the entire student group, urging them to discuss both spatial and conceptual overlaps, interferences, and complementarities of their work.

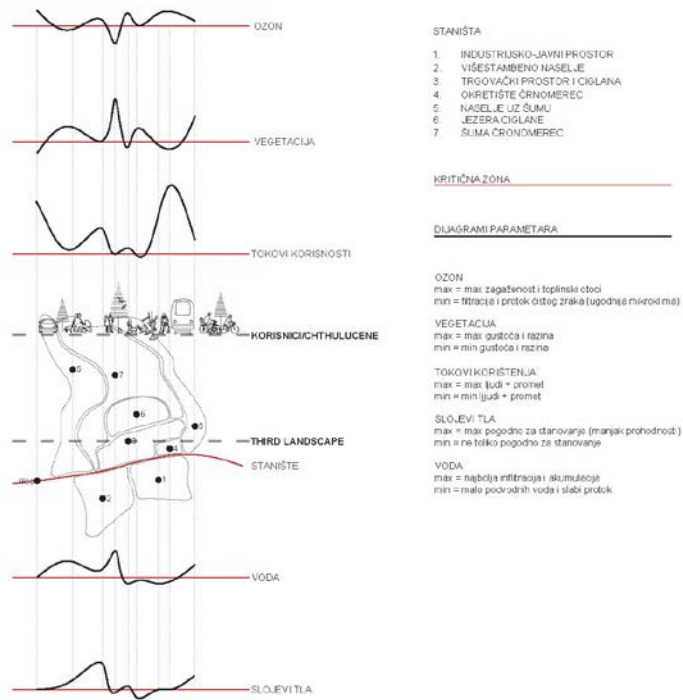


Figure 4: Diagram of the Critical Zone of Črnomerec. Source: group Habitat.

4.1. ENGAGING WITH UTOPIAN TOPICS

4.1.1. SIX HABITATS OF ČRNOMEREC

Choosing to engage with the area of Ilica street which unfolds around the Črnomerec tram roundabout, the group⁷ developed their analytical narrative around six identified coexisting habitats, ranging from forest and artificial lakes, through industrial and infrastructural areas, to housing. Reading the space through the combination of three theoretical concepts, namely that of “critical zones” (Latour, Wiebel, 2020), “third landscape” (Clement, 2004), and the “chthulucene” (Haraway, 2016), the group engaged in mapping the different socio-spatial, as well as temporal layers of the identified habitats [fig.4.]. Including the temporal aspect – or rather the layers of site-specific socio-spatial history, such as shifts in use and ownership, major construction works, earthquakes and other – they employed an innovative way of interpreting the concept of the “critical zone” which included elements which are perhaps not longer evident, but have had a major influence of the current condition of the site.

Acknowledging this multiplicity of coexisting and neighboring habitats as a positive hallmark of the space, and as a relatively unique condition in the wider city area, the group continued to develop the concept and methodology for their speculative scenario. Their intent is to find ways of fostering this diversity and perhaps allowing them to occur in other areas of the city, which are at the moment much more homogenous regarding the diversity of their socio-spatial conditions and inhabitants.

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The Habitat group consisted of students: Marija Mazotan, Ema Šibila, Leon Antun Slivar, and Sara Bukvić

4.1.2. MAPPING INVISIBLE BYPRODUCTS

Examining one of the more centrally located parts of Ilica street, the Process group⁸ relied in their critical reading on the concepts of “subnature” (Gissen, 2009) and “hyperobject” (Morton, 2013) – both of which steered them into examining the more intangible and often overseen aspects of space – namely the olfactory and auditory byproducts of our daily lives and cycles of production. The group developed a highly detailed identification and categorization system for the numerous sounds and smells occurring in the area around the British square. They visually mapped within the collective drawing and provided further categorization for numerous aspects: the sources of the sounds and smells, the areas of their influence, the nature of their occurrence as either anthropogenic or biogenic, and even assigned values of pleasantness or discomfort which they cause. Through the process of mapping these byproducts on-site, they managed to produce an intricate depiction of the space and identify areas with different ranges of interest and comfort [fig.x].

As they explained in their text, “reading the space through the concepts of Gissen and Morton implies the abandonment the concept of the image of the city as an aesthetic object, and the acceptance of its invisible, uncomfortable, and non-human layers”, further defining that while “subnatures teach us that architecture and urbanism must acknowledge the value of that which is suppressed and foul [and that] hyperobjects reveal to us that the Ilica street is just one part of the enormous network of material and temporal relations which go beyond the human scale” (Process group, 2025) – offering thus through their analysis a potentially replicable analytical method for observing the non-spatial aspects of urban environments and how they emerge from temporal cycles of use.

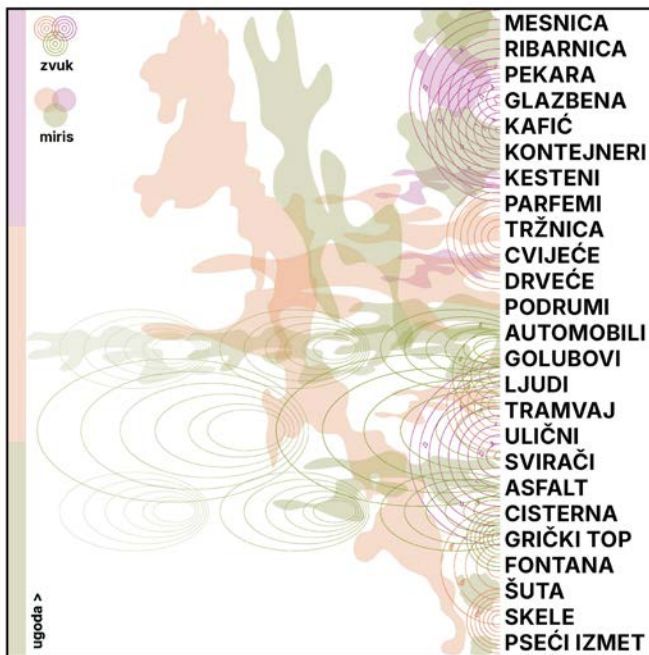


Figure 5: Diagram of Byproducts. Source: group Process.

4.1.3. TRACING INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The Systems group⁹ chose to investigate the intricate system of information flows within public spaces. Focusing predominantly on Keller Easterling's concepts of "spatial software" and "active forms" (Easterling, 2014), they identified these flows as important political and social actors, hypothesizing the connection of how information is transmitted with both the configuration and programming of a specific public space. Identifying the Ilica street as both an "infrastructural spine" as well as an "urban element which connects some of the city's most relevant public spaces" (Systems group, 2025), they observed the spread and delivery methods of various types of information within the urban fabric and how vary across different forms of public space. As examples of two radically different yet similarly concentrated information zones they chose two squares which connect to the Ilica street – the Ban Jelačić square and the Franjo Tuđman square. In the first, the individual was identified as having the role of an information receptor – solely receiving a curated set of information, while in the second, the individual takes on the role of the transmitter of information through participating more actively in various activities in the space itself.

Through their critical reading, public space becomes a type of information hub in which collective perception is shaped through a combination of media, advertising and sensory stimuli. In it, the Ilica street begins to act as an infrastructural information channel connecting the different public spaces and creating a network of invisible interactions. As they explain, the "facades become advertisements of simplified binary code, its recognizable spatial accents become the image of foreign rhetoric and its ground becomes a network of a complex infrastructural system which, over time, generates spatial changes in which people play the role of both recipients and transmitters of carefully controlled information" (Systems group, 2025).

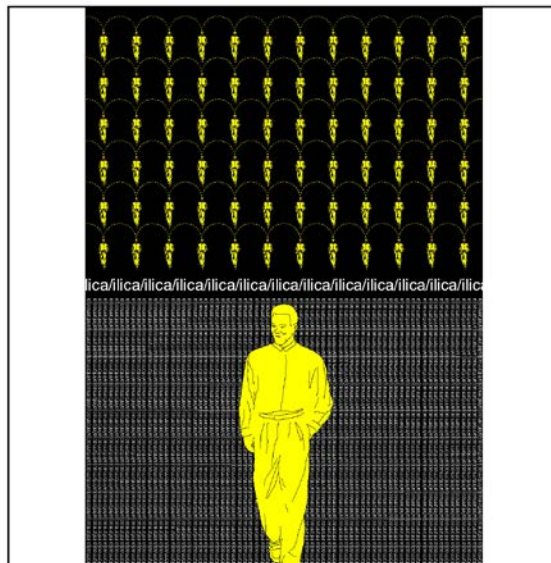


Figure 6: Diagram of Information Transmission. Source: group Systems.

⁹ The Systems group consisted of students: Patrik Štefiček, Zino Marković-Juričak, Mia Mezić, and Laura Grancarić

4.1.4. LOOKING FOR CARE

Lastly, the group which engaged with the topic of Care¹⁰ within the context of Ilica street focused their critical reading and continued to develop their speculative scenarios around the notion of collective responsibility for our (built) environment. By performing one part of their critical reading of the space through a process of walking the Ilica street, they observed multiple instances of the street's inhospitable – and sometimes even dangerous – pedestrian character: with numerous signs warning the passerby of varying dangers, a majority of vacant or abandoned street-level shops and businesses, torn-down facades, and open communal areas mostly filled to the brim with cars. They observed in detail some of the most problematic zones of the street and the socio-spatial decay which continues to spread on the ground level.

Working with concepts such as “broken world thinking” (Jackson, 2014) and “spatial agency” (Awan, Schneider, Till, 2011) they began to hypothesize that solution to some of today’s spatial issues of Ilica street such as vacancy, abandonment, and decay “lie within the space itself”, in the process of care and the development of a “greater sensibility for what a specific space is and what it [and its users] need” (Group Care, 2025). However, instead of addressing these issues through a more traditional approach which would involve both programmatic and spatial regeneration, they decided to accept the lessening needs of these street-level spaces and are intent in employing them as a new potential for widening the public sphere – both spatially and conceptually. Taking the built street level as an extension and widening of the public realm, they aim to both map and engage with possible new futures which will together – and not against – this change role of the “main street”.

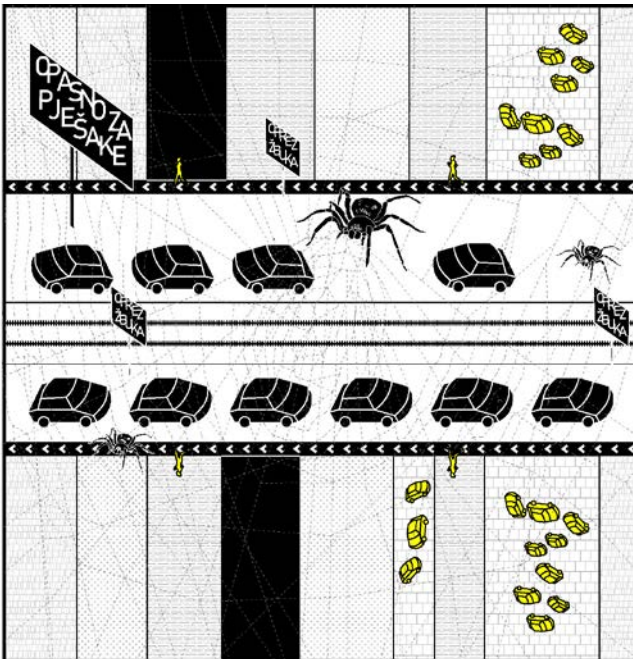


Figure 7: Diagram of Overlooked Spaces. Source: group Care.

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The Care group consisted of students: Paula Budija, Helena Čačić, and Antonio Drandić

4.2. A REFLECTION ON ONGOING OUTCOMES

As is evident from the initial outcomes, the students have clearly demonstrated that they have, although with some initial effort, moved forward from conventional methods of architectural and urban analyses towards a critical reading which took into consideration not only spatial forms and programs, but also various social forms and non-physical aspects of the observed space. Widening their focus from purely architectural aspects of Ilica street, they managed to include in their critical readings the various background dynamics, systems, byproducts, networks, and processes, which will aid them in developing their speculative scenarios. It is particularly interesting that the majority of student groups chose to investigate aspects of the Ilica street which are in fact not easily detectable or even visible, employing thus from the very beginning of the course a speculative, creative, and narrative aspect to their work. The process of uncovering unseen or previously undetected socio-spatial aspects of the site, as well as the process of creating previously unidentified connections – such as the olfactory or auditory connections with the overall spatial ambiance; or different modes of both transmitting and receiving information in regard to the spatial and programmatic configuration of a given public space – is also very much in line with the “utopia as process” or “utopia as archaeology” approach, situating their critical readings strongly within the intended outcomes of the course.

Although the majority of the speculative scenarios have not, as of yet, been developed, some of the initially discussed avenues – which build upon the critical readings and topics addressed in them – intend to engage with the Ilica street in innovative ways, and provide speculative future scenarios which consistently address the overarching topics of their respective groups.

5. CONCLUSION – UTOPIA FOR THE DESIGN STUDIO

These utopian-based approaches which will continuously be developed and adapted within the context of the EDUTOPIA research project, aim to innovatively and holistically address some of the identified complex issues of today. Putting into question the totalizing form of historical utopian narratives, but still retaining some prescriptive capacity, both the methods developed within the framework of the research and the student projects which will be developed as part of it will aim to establish that using storytelling-based, fictional, and utopian approaches in architecture is productive beyond just envisioning creative yet impossible solutions, and that these approaches can be seen as a legitimate and overall more successful way of understanding and addressing the numerous spatial and societal issues of our time.

Re-adopting utopia as a method, especially within the context of architectural education, aims to allow for a contemporary attempt in innovative, comprehensive, and large-scale and long-term visioning, through which we could potentially imagine and test out-of-the-box approaches for our complex global contexts. Using narrative-based visual and textual approaches which are developed with the tools stemming from the utopian genre, together with a precise methodological structure, architecture as a discipline could stand to engage more actively and productively in conversations regarding our wider spatial, climatic, cultural, political, economic, and societal milieu with the aim of fostering positive change which goes beyond simply modernizing the building industry.

Using interdisciplinary approaches (mostly from the fields of literature, film, sociology, architecture, philosophy, and urban planning) the developed methods aim to teach students and a new generation of spatial practitioners how to problematize and offer new insight into some of today's most pertinent issues related not only to the built environment, but also on the overall societal level. They will aim to foster a more comprehensive, holistic, and multi-disciplinary understanding of the (un)built environment which goes beyond the

process of building or planning, and which examines, predicts, and plans for possible long-term developments and effects that projects can trigger and engender not only on the spatial but also on the wider societal and cultural level. Testing and implementing new methods on an educational level is done to assure the widest perceived impact through the process of training and educating future generations of spatial practitioners.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Developed in response to the persistent gap between architectural education and professional practice, APLE offers a model in which higher education institutions do more than transmit knowledge: they actively mediate between learning, experimentation, and social application. In this respect, one of the project's most significant achievements lies in the establishment and consolidation of a regional and international network linking the Western Balkan partner institutions with European counterparts in Zagreb, Rome, and Trondheim. This network is relevant in a methodological sense, enabling the exchange of knowledge that supports the introduction of more practice-based and context-responsive learning into the education system.

A further major accomplishment of the APLE Project is the emergence of a new educational culture through pop-up laboratories, conceived simultaneously as pedagogical spaces, networking hubs, and platforms for innovation. The project's core, temporary, and virtual pop-up labs were designed to bring together students, academic staff, professionals, industry representatives, and the public sector within a shared environment of experimentation and applied learning. Their significance lies not only in their functional role within the project, but also in their long-term potential to remain active as collaborative and creative hubs beyond the project's formal duration. In this sense, APLE has succeeded in creating an infrastructural and conceptual legacy that extends well beyond the limits of a single funded intervention.

Equally important are the material outcomes for the Western Balkan universities, particularly the establishment and upgrading of core laboratories. These resources are central to the project's ambition to transform design studios from predominantly theoretical environments into places where students can test ideas against real technical, spatial, and professional conditions. The development of modelling workshops and the provision of equipment for prototypes and models represent one of the clearest expressions of APLE Project commitment to linking imagination with realisation, and education with employability.

The most encouraging dimension of APLE Project is that it has been shaped around continuation, not a finite product. The project highlights the evolutive and gradual improvement of remodeled and newly introduced courses, the sustainable functioning of the Core and Virtual pop-up labs, and the continuation of networking functions such as apprenticeships, project commissions, employment opportunities, and the Archipraxis/Pop up - type events. All Project Partners have supported the idea of drawing up a new joint application.

APLE Project leaves behind not only an important academic legacy, but also a deeply human one. We are sincerely grateful to all partners, teachers, students, professionals, and stakeholders whose contributions reached far beyond formal obligations. Their generosity, openness, and shared belief in the value of this work gave the project its true strength. It is this spirit that leaves us with genuine hope that the relationships, ideas, and shared sense of purpose nurtured through the project will continue to grow well into the future.





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