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„Freehand Drawing in the Architectural and Urban Design Process”

SUMMARY

The discussion on the use of freehand drawing in the architectural and urban design practice today – in the context of the digital development – is still ongoing. Numerous publications on this topic are based mainly on theoretical expertise, interviews or experiments. Nevertheless, there is a lack of investigation describing the actual use of freehand drawing in a real project.

Because of this research gap the author decided to undertake an empirical study using participant observation. The investigation was possible mainly because of the design method (charrette workshop) used by an architectural and urban design office which agreed to have the work on the project in Chicago recorded. The charrette method, pioneered by this office, gathers all parties involved on the site of the project in order to facilitate the discussion, find a satisfactory solution for all parties and intensify the conceptual phase of the design.

The aim of the dissertation is to examine those features of freehand drawing which determine its current importance in architectural and urban design.

Charrette is a specific design method but in comparison to the conventional conceptual phase of designing taking place in an office the ongoing thinking and communication processes are similar. The drawings generated in Chicago were analyzed and categorized. The categories show their different features: 1) enabling a quick record of information in the pre-phase (“sketchnote”), 2) transformation of an idea into form (“initial sketch”), 3) discussing ideas (“communicating sketch”) in order to evolve first thoughts into advanced concepts (“conceptual sketch”), finding mistakes and correcting them (“corrective sketch”) and, in the end, presenting “final conceptual drawings” to stakeholders and a wider audience.

The findings generally support the notion that, despite digital development, freehand drawing has valuable features, which are particularly visible in the education of architectural and urban design students, conceptual phase of the project and during design workshops. What is more, the dissertation demonstrated that while the use of drawing is being limited in certain aspects of design, it is being increased in others. The study helped establish the most important attribute of freehand drawing that determines the extent of its present use, namely its ambiguity, which stems from nothing other than the freehand nature of this tool.

Keywords: drawing, design tools, charrette, design process

