

Review Kharkiv School of Architecture

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Intro

I am related to the Kharkiv School of architecture (KhSA) since 2015, first only in informal talks with founders and teachers, later as guest lecturer, special program tutor and finally as tutor of the urban design studio (MA5).

In this review I will describe three elements: general reflection, educational program, my personal experience. I end with conclusions and recommendations.

GENERAL REFLECTION

I will describe my general reflection around 5 themes that are symbolic for KhSA.

Brave and caring

KhSA is brave, in all its genes. Brave to start in Kharkiv, not the most easy city in Ukraine when it comes to internationally qualified architecture. Caring for the level of architecture in Ukraine, even during Covid times and all its restrictions. Brave to work without financial support from the national government. Caring to support teachers as much as possible. Brave to relocate the school to Lviv, without stopping the education program. Caring for students and staff to try to find safe places to live and study.

Quality teachers and students

The quality of education at KhSA matches international standards. The quality of the teachers is high for Ukrainian standards. Looking at the level of young architects and urban planners I meet from other universities in Ukraine, I see a huge difference. This is not measured, but insight from years of experience working in Ukraine.

The teaching staff is a mix of young professionals and experienced professionals from Ukraine, supplemented with international experienced experts.

Innovation and basics

KhSA works with a strong base of understanding building technology and materials. In my opinion, it is clear for all staff and students on top of this all bigger questions and topics can be developed. From art and sociology to urban concepts or philosophy. KhSA teaches to ask the question why you want to build; it gives meaning to programs and architecture.

Vulnerable and powerful

KhSA is vulnerable, having starting just a few years before covid gave a lot of restrictions. All around the world, universities struggled with remaking their programs into online formats and resetting their daily routine. KhSA managed to do that, but it took some effort, especially for the design studio projects. KhSA was powerful enough to develop this, just like the power it had when the war started and Kharkiv was unsafe to stay. The continuous work with those extremely challenges circumstances deserves a huge compliment. To keep running, to move, to lose donors, students and teachers to the war. It is astonishing to see how the school survived during all these emotional and practical issues.

EDUCATION

The educational program has a good combination of lectures and literature search and creative and studio tasks. The program consists of internationally up to date educational methodologies and approaches.

The different teaching experiences of all tutors bring a variety of methods, which is interesting for the students.

The education facilities to develop a good architecture program are more than good, like a model workshop at a really high level, and enough space for students activities and studies. The individual development of students, and the support and understanding of the staff is positively related to the positive relationship between students and teachers and management.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Teaching in KhSA is always a pleaser. More than in other universities, I experience a relatively big highly interested group of students who want to learn and develop themselves. They do not study because they have to but because they want to. You can feel the dream of architecture inside KhSA.

For guest lectures, KhSA reaches all generations of students and interested professionals in the city. I have met many active people during those yearly lectures.

In the special Lab studio about Cherkasy zoo (1 week special group project) the energy and interactive way of working was a great opportunity for many participants. Collaborating with students and (young) professionals, the project was inspiring and intense. The results of the groups were on a high level, which led to a real building project afterwards.

During last years urban design studio (case study Severodonetsk) I experienced the level of the third year students in research, conceptual thinking, attitude, design quality and presentation skills. The semester after that I was co-tutor at the 1st year program, but this was interrupted dramatically by the Russian full scale invasion. My role become more distant due to that.

The level of student work in both projects was similar to European standards, I coul say. The main challenge can be found the (low) amount of good examples in their own country. The main plus was the student's conceptual thinking and attitude.

Conclusion and recommendation

Since I am involved in a lot of international and Ukrainian high level expert discussions about the reconstruction of Ukraine during and after the war, I can highly recommend KhSA. Some of the just graduated MA-students joined Ro3kvit, urban coalition of Ukraine, of which I am co-founder. Their work is of a really high level, and these young professionals are indispensible in the work we are doing now, and all the work that is ahead of us. Ukraine needs these bright minds, now and in the future. Kharkiv School of Architecture certainly is a way to provide the country these minds.

Fulco Treffers, Amsterdam 25.09.2022

