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Social responsibility in architectural education: exploring experiential design studies in Mardin

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Abstract:
The action research study examines the long-term socio-spatial impacts, pedagogical outcomes and potential and limitations of the design studies conducted by Istanbul Technical University (ITU) in Mardin. These studies were embodied in a holistic working process that included integrated studios and interdisciplinary urban design studios. Primary data were collected through reflective interviews with all stakeholders, including former students, academic staff, local community members, and institutional representatives, and examined through content analysis. The findings demonstrate that engaging with real-world social issues through integrated studio processes generates pedagogical outcomes and fosters a long-term sense of social responsibility among students' professional careers, as well as socio-spatial benefits for the local community. By providing a long-term reflection on the *ITU Mardint* approach within the discourse on socially responsible architectural education, this study offers empirical data to support the development of future experiential learning cycles.

Keywords:
architectural education, built heritage, experiential learning, heritage conservation, social responsibility, socio-spatial impact, university-community engagement

1. Introduction

The field of architectural pedagogy necessitates a deeper understanding of the long-term socio-spatial impacts of socially responsible and experiential learning models. Existing literature frequently focuses on immediate project outcomes or student reflections during studio sessions, yet lacks a comprehensive, retrospective, multi-stakeholder evaluation of sustained initiatives. This study addresses this gap by exploring social responsibility through the case of the ITU Mardint design studies (*or ITU Mardint*) – an initiative/centre encompassing these design studies – thereby enabling an evaluation of their longer-term socio-spatial impacts.

Mardin is located in the Southeastern Anatolia region of Türkiye, known as "Upper Mesopotamia". Having hosted various civilisations throughout history, the city possesses a unique historical fabric, shaped by its natural landscape, cultural diversity, and spatial characteristics. Given its diverse spatial needs, the city provides a suitable environment for addressing issues such as social responsibility, fostering local values, and approaching architectural and urban studies holistically. Figure 1 shows Mardin's historical fabric.

Fig. 1. A view of Mardin from the year 2011 (left) and 2025 (right) (Source: Authors)

Within this broader context, the ITU Mardint studies addressed multiple sites and spatial scales, including Mardin city centre, Savur, Cumhuriyet Square, Hükümet Konağı Square, and the Mardin Artuklu University campus. These sites brought together themes such as heritage conservation, public space improvement, accommodation, research facilities, and institutional development within a shared pedagogical framework. This diversity of spatial contexts makes the case particularly suitable for examining the long-term socio-spatial implications of socially responsible architectural education.

In line with the research aim, the case of Mardin enables a retrospective evaluation of how experiential design studios interact with real socio-spatial conditions and multiple stakeholders in the field. The city's complex urban morphology, characterised by traditional stone architecture and terraced housing, further provides meaningful context for architectural education to engage directly with tangible social and spatial challenges. By immersing students in this multi-layered environment, the studies facilitate a deeper exploration of the architect's social role and the potential for collective benefit.

The concept of social responsibility (SR) in architectural education highlights the potential of socially responsible actions to improve the quality of life in communities. From a psychological perspective, SR can be linked to the concept of "sense of community" (*gemeinschaftsgefühl*) [1]. This concept describes the meaningful sustenance of social existence through enhanced societal relations and the addressing of societal needs. Social responsibility refers to the obligation of individuals, as constituents of society, to act for the common good, guided by ethical values. Consequently, perspectives that argue individuals cannot be considered in isolation advocate an ideal of interconnectedness based on shared goals [3,21,33].

Universities, which primarily served elites until the 19th century and had limited engagement with the broader public, began to reshape their relationships with society as the social dynamics of the Industrial Revolution unfolded. In the late 19th century, this growing involvement in social issues was exemplified by the University Settlement Movement, which originated in England and rapidly spread to the United States, Canada, Australia, and beyond. This initiative emerged as a social reform effort in which students resided in and directly engaged with local communities in impoverished districts. In architectural education, a pioneering experimental project involved road building near Oxford, conducted by John Ruskin with undergraduate students for the benefit of the community [13,5,4]. In subsequent periods, the Bauhaus (1919-1933) also exemplified initiatives reflecting a concern for the common good. These included mass housing projects, such as the low-cost Törten settlement, designed to address the housing shortage and carried out by students and faculty members, including Hannes Meyer and Walter Gropius. Furthermore, in the Bauhaus manifesto "Bauhaus and Society" (*Bauhaus und Gesellschaft*), [24] emphasised that design is a social process and that their work serves society. Following the Bauhaus's period of modernist ideals, Black Mountain College (1933-1957), grounded in John Dewey's experiential learning approach, emerged as one of the 20th century's alternative learning environments. The school supported interdisciplinary, collective, and socially responsible studies, positioning it as a pioneering experimental endeavour in the field. Before this period, individual initiatives and emerging social issues were the primary catalysts for these practices. From the 1960s onward, universities such as Harvard, Yale, and MIT increasingly engaged in socially responsible initiatives (e.g., the Joint Centre for Housing Studies and the Building Project). These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the university's role in addressing societal challenges and fostering community engagement. In parallel with these institutional developments, Giancarlo De Carlo, a core member of Team 10, incorporated collectivist principles into architectural pedagogy. The International Laboratory of Architecture and Urbanism (ILAUD) initiatives he launched in 1976 represent significant early examples of action-based studio methods in architectural education. This initiative brought together students and academics from various countries, providing an international environment for interaction and supporting an on-site, experience-based approach.

Today, diverse initiatives worldwide, such as the Centre for Public Interest Design at Portland State University, the Basic Initiative at the University of Texas, Rural Studio at Auburn University, and the Detroit Collaborative Design Centre at Detroit Mercy University, represent significant examples of socially oriented architectural education. In Türkiye, several universities have undertaken notable initiatives, including METU's Summer Construction Practices (1958-2006) and the METU Urgent Design Studio, established following the February 6, 2023, earthquake, to address the needs of disaster-affected regions. Similarly, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University's field-based studies in rural areas reflect a comparable commitment to social responsibility and direct engagement with the local communities.

The ITU Mardint studios, conducted between 2005 and 2010, represent an early local-scale example in Türkiye. Their distinctive contribution to the discourse lies in an integrated, interdisciplinary studio framework that combines design, restoration, landscape, and construction courses, together with a long-term retrospective perspective spanning more than 15 years, enabling the assessment of sustained socio-spatial contributions and professional impacts on participants. This study positions the ITU Mardint approach, which engaged real actors and addressed real-world issues, within the context of existing community-based studio models.

In this context, the study addresses the main question: "What are the long-term socio-spatial impacts of ITU Mardint studies, as evaluated retrospectively by diverse stakeholders, in terms of social responsibility, and considering the key themes of experience, communication & collaboration, reflection, and social benefit?" It is supported by a set of sub-questions that further define the research scope (Table 1). In this research, social responsibility is examined primarily through the dimension of architectural heritage preservation, reflecting Mardin's specific historical and contextual conditions.

By collecting direct, firsthand feedback from stakeholders, this research evaluates the multifaceted nature of the experience from multiple perspectives, including its potential and limitations. Moving beyond mere outcome analysis, it assesses the long-term socio-spatial contributions of the process and aims for action-oriented improvement. Researching prior studies aims to facilitate future progress by identifying their potential and limitations based on their findings. As Schön [31] states, "It is our capacity to see unfamiliar situations as familiar ones, and to do in the former as we have done in the latter, that enables us to bring our past experience to bear on the distinct case". In this context, as a retrospective inquiry, this research on ITU Mardint seeks to explore the unforeseen and sustained social impacts of the studies, while learning from past shortcomings to avoid their repetition. Schön [31] further argues that past experiences can serve as exemplars for future action and, through extension or restructuring within the present context, contribute to the development of organisational knowledge.

Table 1. Theories, concepts, and sub-questions of the research

Theories	Concepts	Questions
> experience in education (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2015) v **experiential learning**	**experience** concrete experience; comprehending local contextual data such as authentic traditional urban texture, multiculturalism, urban identity, daily life, etc.	How do community-oriented studio experiences foster architecture students' awareness of social responsibility, and how is this awareness reflected in their professional practice?
> communication & consensus (Dewey, 2001) >> communication, collaboration (Kolb, 2015) v **communicative & collaborative learning**	**communication & collaboration** interdisciplinarity, multi-stakeholder collaboration, local stories, interaction with actors.	What was the role of communication and collaboration during the experience?
> reflective thought (Dewey, 1971), > reflection-in-action, reflective practicum (Schön, 2016), > reflective observation (Kolb, 2015). v **reflective learning**	**reflection** uncovering tacit knowledge, imagination, reflecting context data, learning from society/with society, problem-oriented decisions, architectural representations.	What understanding or competencies did students develop about design and process, and how did these experiences shape their approach during and after the process?
> real life problems/real world problems/situations (Dewey, 1938; 2001; Schön, 2016; Kolb, 2015) v **reality-based learning, problem-oriented learning/problem-based learning**	**social benefit** active experimentation; transformation of learning from concrete experience to practical knowledge, seeking solutions to social problems.	What were the socio-spatial contributions of the studies to society?

In addition, the data collection and analysis processes of this research, carried out between 2024 and 2025, are primarily based on design studies conducted by Istanbul Technical University in Mardin, Türkiye, between 2005 and 2010. This study is timely and offers an opportunity to assess the enduring contributions of earlier educational practices.

Recent discussions argue that universities in the 21st century should extend beyond research and teaching to embrace SR and develop strategies to address their growing social impact [18,23]. Given the numerous global crises, including socio-economic, cultural, and environmental challenges, there is a growing consensus that universities must reassess their roles and functions within society [26,20,25]. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) within universities involves integrating their operations and activities with societal needs through an ethical and transparent approach, ensuring alignment through active engagement [14]. The growing importance of SR underscores the need for universities to integrate it into education and practice, particularly in architecture, where the social dimension is intrinsic.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined socially engaged and community-oriented pedagogies in architectural education. Experiential and practice-based studio models, including design-build studios, place-based learning, and community-engaged approaches, are frequently discussed as pedagogical frameworks that connect academic knowledge with real-world contexts [36,39,40]. These approaches also emphasise participatory and collaborative learning environments that involve interactions among academia, practice, and society [37,38]. These studio formats enable direct interaction with stakeholders and communities and encourage participatory design processes that respond to socio-spatial challenges [41,42]. However, a critical review of the literature indicates the need to move beyond merely advocating experiential learning and to analytically evaluate its long-term mechanisms and socio-spatial impacts.

In Türkiye, [34] and [35] delineate three core functions of higher education institutions: education, research, and social benefit. A comprehensive approach to social responsibility in architectural education necessitates consideration of all three dimensions. In this regard, architectural design studios provide a particularly relevant pedagogical setting in which these dimensions intersect through experiential learning and community engagement.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Architectural education has undergone a significant transformation driven by the growing influence of constructivist learning theories, which challenge traditional teacher-centred, hierarchical pedagogical models. This epistemological shift transforms knowledge from a fixed, definitive form into a dynamic structure shaped by individual experience and social factors. Furthermore, this transformation facilitates addressing social issues through a learning approach centred on SR.

As traditional education, which prioritises students production of hypothetical design studies, can lead to the neglect of contextual variables, there is a growing emphasis on students learning from actual local environments and engaging with diverse variables related to real-life experiences through direct experience rather than relying on generalised knowledge of the context [28,29]. Dewey [10] stated that it is a tragic shortcoming of the current school system to attempt to raise future members of society in an environment detached from social conditions and lacking a sense of community. To address this, society can serve as a source for identifying realistic learning goals and real-life problems [32]. Within this framework, the experiential learning paradigm is grounded in a philosophy in which learners actively engage with real-world problems, rather than simply reading, speaking, or writing about them, and learn directly from life experiences [16,19]. While Kolb's model provides a general framework, the ITU Mardint approach, informed by our field data and retrospective analysis, necessitated an analytical restructuring of the learning cycle. In addition, experiential learning paradigms emphasise that knowledge is gained through active experimentation within a context. Meaningful learning depends on alignment between the learning process and the environment, and it develops through active participation. In this regard, approaches centred on subjective experience require reflection, involving the internal evaluation of experience to deepen understanding and transform it into insights that renew the cycle. This study refines a framework around four key thematic components – experience, communication & collaboration, reflection, and social benefit – which serve as critical analytical lenses for evaluating the socio-spatial dimension of the learning process over time.

3. Materials and methods

The action-based studio practices conducted between 2005 and 2010 serve as the empirical basis for this research. Building on this earlier process, the present study provides a retrospective evaluation and reinterpretation of that specific process. By adopting a "learning history" approach [27], the research links past action cycles with a contemporary critical reflection phase conducted between 2024 and 2025. This research design is crucial for uncovering and transforming the enduring, unforeseen impacts of the studies into actionable knowledge for future pedagogical development. The term "action research" in the methodology refers to the retrospective analysis of the embedded action cycles within the ITU Mardint studies (2005-2010), rather than an active action research cycle conducted during the 2024-2025 data collection.

Accordingly, this study employs a retrospective mixed-methods evaluation. Triangulation utilising multiple data sources (reflective interviews and various documents) was employed. Engagement with multiple stakeholder groups – (former) students (S), academic staff (AS), the people of Mardin (PM), and institution representatives (IR) – was essential to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings.

Figure 2 illustrates the primary research methods, data collection techniques, and analytical approaches employed in this field. It presents a taxonomy of research methods relevant to social sciences, education, educational psychology, and architectural education research.

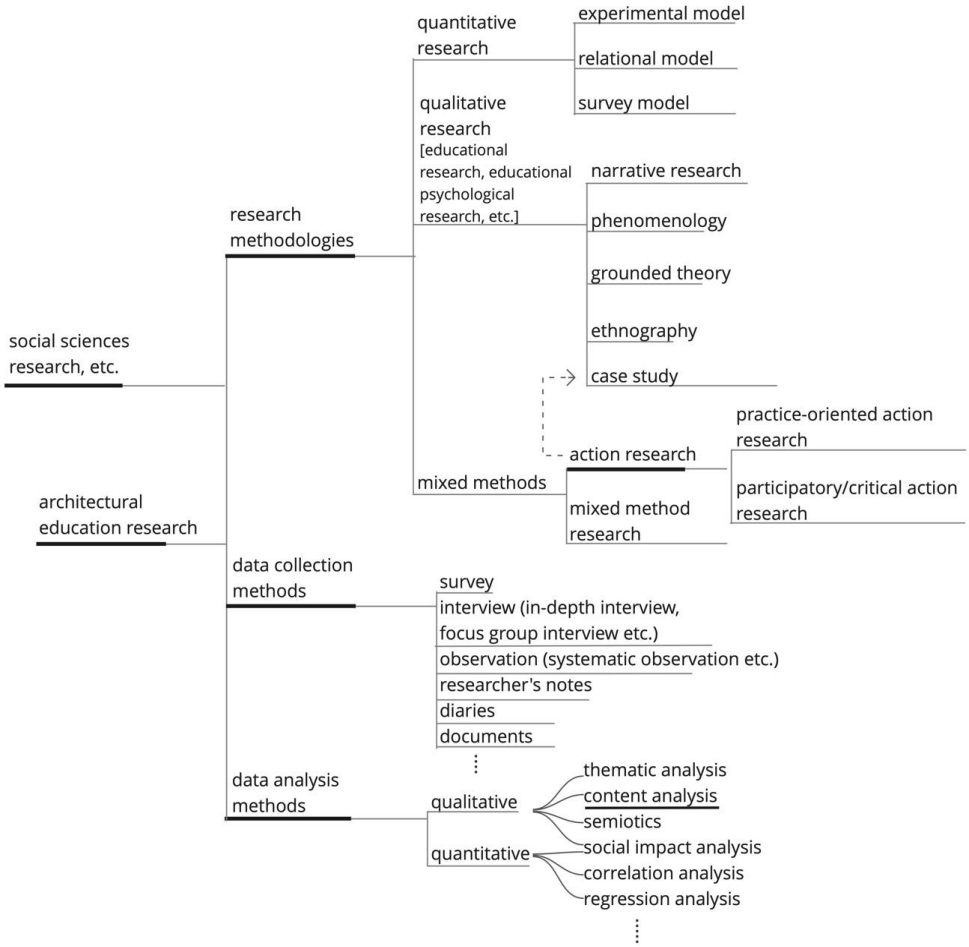

Fig. 2. Taxonomy of research methods related to the topic

In accordance with this framework, qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data (e.g. [30]). The interviews were developed based on the themes of the action research cycle (Fig. 3). The participants' perspectives were analysed to determine whether they aligned with these themes [15], and they did. All authors were involved in coding the data. The coding process followed [30] an in vivo, decoding and encoding approach. In the first stage, in vivo coding was used to extract verbatim expressions directly from participants, yielding numerous initial codes. Subsequently, as described by Saldana [30], the process involved decoding to reveal the essence of meaning and encoding to label relevant segments with appropriate codes. At the end of the content analysis, all participants validated the themes that emerged. Table 2 presents the coding framework used in the analysis, featuring the themes, their corresponding codes, and detailed descriptions that define the nature of the content included in each code. Following this, a mixed-methods analysis (e.g. cross-tabulations in SPSS 29.0 for demographic factors) was applied to the coded qualitative data to test relationships and enhance quantitative rigour.

Table 2. The coding framework

Theme/Concept	Code	Explanation
Experience	▪ Satisfaction with the process ▪ Dissatisfaction with the process ▪ Emphasis on process ▪ Change in perspective ▪ Multidimensional perspective ▪ Motivation ▪ Learning local values ▪ Social awareness	Expressions reflecting participants' emotional and cognitive experiences, satisfaction with the process, reflections on social awareness; views on the architect's social role, environmental awareness, sensitivity to context, etc.
Communication and collaboration	▪ Being aware of the process ▪ Communication with other stakeholders ▪ Developing collaboration, collective work, partnership ▪ Interdisciplinarity, holistic approach ▪ Communication breakdown, lack of information	Positive and negative assessments of the process's dialogical structure; communication effectiveness among participants, evaluations of coming together with common goals
Reflection	▪ Contextual data shaping concrete thought ▪ Aspects/suggestions to be improved ▪ Ensuring the sustainability of the studies	Reflecting context data; transformation of local data into practical knowledge, integration into design, evaluations regarding development and continuity, various suggestions
Social benefit	▪ Non-hypothetical, proactive and reactive approach, real actor/problem/ space-focused thinking ▪ Transformations in socio-spatial context	Approach shaped by real actors, context and current and future problems, emphasis on aspects distinct from conventional architectural education, organization of the process, direct and indirect socio-spatial contributions to society

Except for demographic information, all topics were investigated using semi-structured, open-ended questions. Alongside archival records and course instructors, participants involved in or who witnessed the design studies were reached through snowball sampling, in which participants recommended others. All interviewees were volunteers; those who declined participation or could not recall the relevant process were excluded from the analysis. This study had several limitations. Given that the data were derived from retrospective reflections on studio experiences, the reliability of participants' memories may be constrained. To mitigate these issues, participants' statements were cross-checked with other data, and clearly inaccurate information was excluded.

Within the theoretical and conceptual framework, as stated Table 1, the literature review revealed that experience in education [9,19], communication & consensus [12], collaboration [19], reflective thought [11], reflection-in-action, reflective practicum [31], reflective observation [19] and real life problems/real world problems/situations [9,12,31,19] are the emphasized approaches/concepts within the experiential learning approaches. Furthermore, conceptualising the action research cycle, many theorists [22,17,19] propose cyclical models for action research and experience-based learning that rest on similar epistemological foundations. For instance, Kemmis et al. [17] describe the "action research cycle" as a spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and then re-planning, while Kolb [19] defines the "experiential learning cycle" through the modes of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. In this study, the action research diagram (Fig. 3) was developed through a holistic approach that draws on both experiential learning theory and the theory of the action research methodology. It was also confirmed that these modes/themes became apparent in the participants' perspectives. This framework (Fig. 3) is distinctive because of its explicit integration of the "social benefit" dimension as a core element, redefining the action mode within the established experience-based cyclical process. Thus, the study suggests a social benefit-oriented approach by intertwining the cycles of experiential learning theory and action research methodology within a holistic framework. The "experience" theme holds that learning occurs through the learner's distinct experience and the

reconstruction of knowledge; "communication & collaboration" theme denotes the bonds and connections established within a learning environment where social relationships develop around a common purpose; "reflection" involves the individual's mental processing of the experience, including thinking, transforming, structuring, and expressing; and "social benefit" advocates for the common good of society. Because learning is continuously open to development, once a process is completed, new problems are formulated based on the knowledge acquired through critical reflection, allowing the cycle to continue its development uninterrupted (Fig. 3).

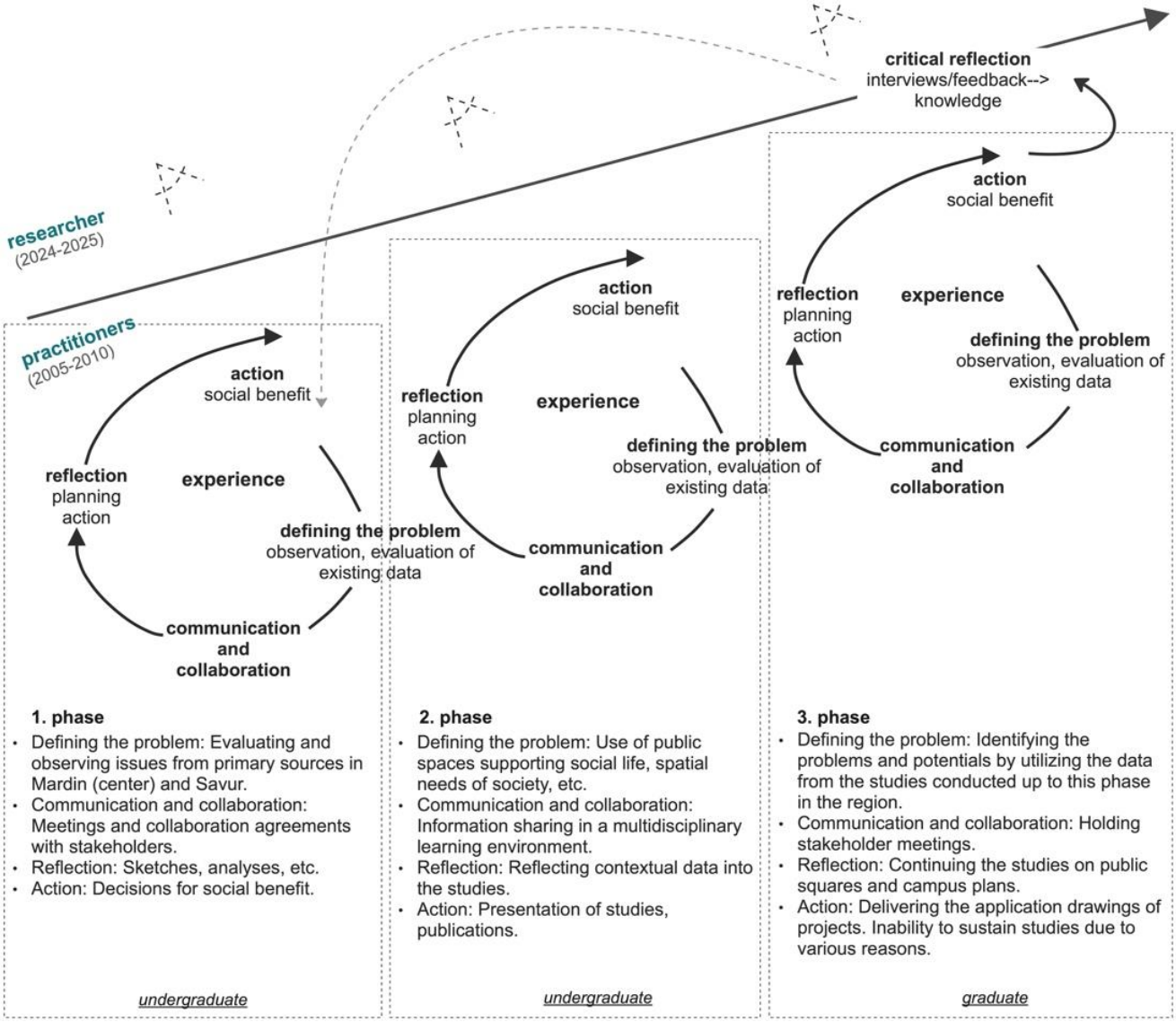

Fig. 3. Diagram of action research

The research adopts a mixed methods approach, combining content analysis of reflective interviews with descriptive quantitative analysis. The phases of the ITU Mardint design studies, critical reflection as a research stage, and the researcher's role are shown in Fig. 3. The primary researcher (corresponding author) outlined the cyclical framework and analytically addressed its organic structure. The researcher did not participate in these studios at the time and became involved as an external researcher between 2024 and 2025 (during the "critical reflection" phase). In addition, the second author of this article (one of the studio's practitioners and a direct observer between 2005 and 2010) contributed to structuring the process in phases. The three phases (2005-2010) represent the design studies process in Mardin. The first two phases consisted of integrated undergraduate studios (2005-2006 Fall Term and 2005-2006 Summer Term), while the third phase involved graduate interdisciplinary studios (2007-2008 Spring Term, 2008-2009 Fall Term, and 2009-2010 Fall Term). Accordingly, these studies spanned multiple academic terms.

3.1. Phases I-III: The Studio Practice Process

The missions of the ITU Mardint studies are the preservation of cultural heritage, the utilisation of local resources, and addressing social issues. Studio supervisors indicated that topic selection also considered local needs and the invitations of regional authorities in line with these requirements [7]. Based on this model conducted in Mardin, the studies aimed to enable similar settlements across Türkiye to benefit from this experience and promote similar initiatives [6,8].

In the first phase (2005-2006 integrated studios), students voluntarily selected these courses through studio calls, while academic staff and other stakeholders were invited. The problem

definition phase involved exploring the local contexts of the Mardin city centre and Savur. This exploration provided a foundation aligned with Kolb's [19] concept of "behaviorally complex learning environments". In this setting, students could apply their knowledge and skills directly to real-life problems they would encounter professionally, while also engaging with real stakeholders. This exploration process created environments that, as Salama [28] describes, enable students to investigate the challenges and potential of existing environments and analyse how they respond to people's needs, enriching and reinforcing their activities. The problem definition phase was largely conducted in partnership with academic staff, students, the Mardin Governorship, the Mardin Municipality, and the local community. This process relies on continuous communication and collaboration, including formal meetings and the establishment of agreements with stakeholders. Such interactions enable students to uncover and develop (societal) knowledge [19]. The reflection phase encouraged insights into the context, allowing individuals the freedom to express them through representations such as sketches and analyses, or through their own distinct perceptual processes. The action phase of the first cycle was completed with decisions aimed at social benefits, drawing on experiences that revealed tacit knowledge and an understanding of social problems. Given Mardin's significant historical fabric, documentation, conservation, and restoration were integral to the integrated studios. As the studio supervisor Ahunbay [2] noted, there has been a positive development in interest and participation in the field of conservation in Türkiye. This interest facilitated broader stakeholder engagement at that time, providing an environment in which participants could contribute according to their respective roles and competencies.

In the second phase, students evaluated specific issues to identify emergent spatial requirements (e.g., housing, research centres, and libraries). The objective was to address these needs while supporting social life and public space usage. Within a multidisciplinary environment, students continued to incorporate contextual needs and data into their thinking process. The action phase featured public exhibitions of all work produced up to that point.

During the third phase, spanning the 2007-2010 interdisciplinary urban design studios, various urban-scale studies were conducted, also utilising the work developed to that point. Throughout most of this process, the students continued to work collaboratively. The problem definition phase involved identifying challenges and the potential to develop a needs program for Cumhuriyet Square and the Mardin Artuklu University campus plan. Local administrators, NGOs, and the local community collaborated with ITU on the restoration of the historical fabric and the development of accommodation opportunities, facilitated by regular stakeholder meetings throughout the process. In the reflection phase, studies of public squares and campus plans continued, laying the foundation for subsequent publications, workshops, and seminars. Following an analysis of the existing situation, the students engaged in both individual and collaborative work. In the action phase, publications and off-centre presentations continued. Figure 4 shows the studies by students who opted to participate in the research with their projects. The projects by S14 and S15 were group works conducted by graduate students in interdisciplinary urban design studios, while the other projects are individual studies by undergraduate students in integrated studios. The studies followed a process of producing technical drawings of historical buildings, researching the region's built and natural environments, and subsequently developing new design interventions and adaptive reuse proposals. These studies address the needs of various areas of Mardin. For instance, S10 worked on an ecological village settlement, and S2 developed a research centre within the historical fabric. S14 and S15 focused on studies to enhance the public space usage of Cumhuriyet Square. S1 conducted urban design studies for an accommodation unit and improved use of the Hükümet Konağı Square, and S3 developed a dormitory proposal for the university campus. Many restoration and design projects remain unbuilt. Nevertheless, the studies continued until 2012 outside the formal curriculum, with students contributing voluntarily.

4. Results

This section presents a critical reflection on ITU Mardint's studio practice. Drawing on the researcher's involvement in the process, in-depth interviews and relevant data concerning the process were collected and analysed to provide a retrospective examination of the entire period. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, via telephone, online, or through written responses (Table 3).

Table 3. Data of the study

Participant Group	Data Collection Method	Forms of Data Collected	Number of Participants
Students	20 written interviews, 1 telephone conversation, online conversations	20 written interview drafts, 1 audio recording (transcribed), 3 student work files	21
Academic staff	7 written interviews, 3 face-to-face meetings, online conversations	7 written interview drafts, 3 audio recordings (transcribed), 1 book	10
The people of Mardin	4 in-depth interviews (via telephone), 1 written interview, online conversations	4 audio recordings (transcribed), 1 written interview draft	5
Institution representatives	4 written interviews, 1 face-to-face meeting, 1 telephone conversation, online conversations	4 written interview drafts, 2 audio recordings (transcribed), 1 PowerPoint presentation	6 Total: **42**

Note(s): Some written and visual data were used for background information only. All interviews were conducted one-on-one.

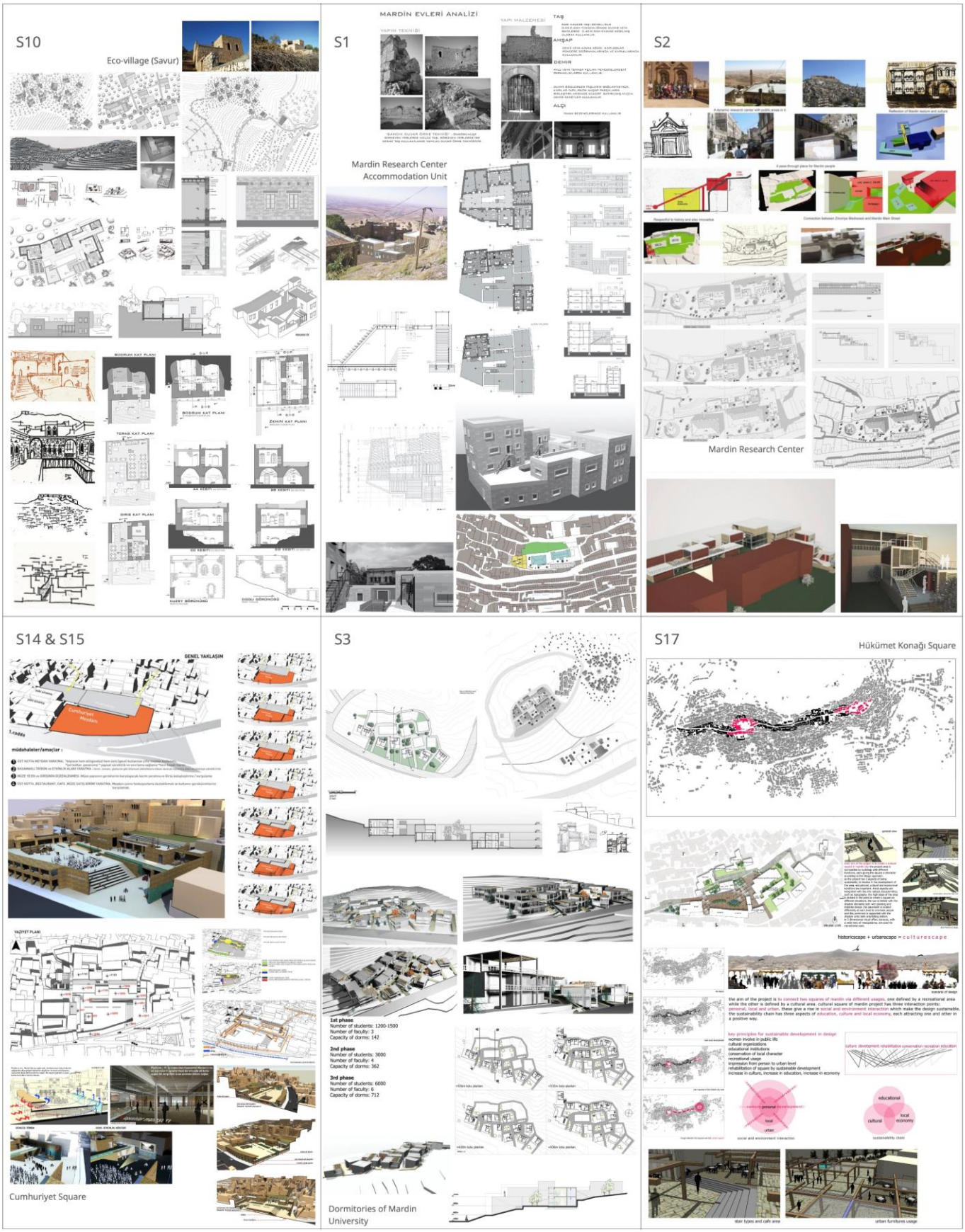

Fig. 4. An overview of student studies

Telephone and face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed with the participants' written responses. In addition, all interview responses were translated into English. Among the individuals involved in the ITU Mardint design studies, 42 out of 132, including 21 out of 36 students, 10 out of 26 academic staff, 5 out of 30 individuals from Mardin, and 6 out of 40 institution representatives, participated in the research. Figure 5 shows the demographic data of the research participants.

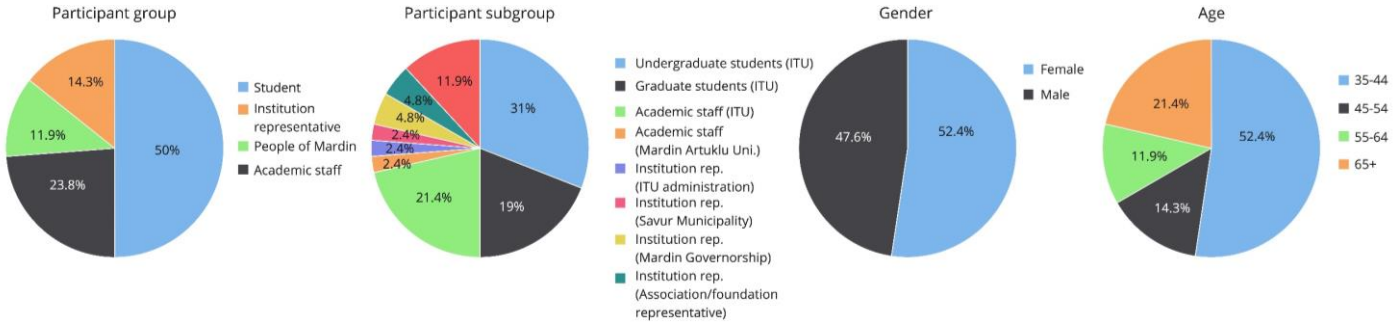

Fig. 5. Demographic data of the participants

Code system	PM	IR	AS	S	TOTAL
Experience					
Change in Perspective					45
Multi-dimensional perspective					21
Motivation					25
Learning local values					152
Social awareness					166
Satisfaction with the process					147
Dissatisfaction with the process					70
Emphasis on the process					24
Communication and collaboration					
Developing collaboration, collective work, partnership					161
Interdisciplinarity, holistic approach					58
Communication breakdown, lack of information					53
Being informed about the process					38
Communication with other stakeholders					210
Reflection					
Aspects to be developed/suggestions					118
Ensuring the sustainability of the works					66
The contextual data shaping concrete thinking					178
Social benefit					
Non-hypothetical, proactive and reactive approach					257
Transformations in the socio-spatial context					130
∑ TOTAL	198	265	533	923	1919

Fig. 6. Participant groups and coding frequencies

Participants individually responded to questions addressing each mode of the action research cycle, with interviews lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. The responses were analysed using MAXQDA 24 and SPSS 29.0 software. The qualitative analysis involved coding the data to identify summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative words or short phrases [30]. Recurring views in the responses were grouped into codes. To gain a deeper understanding, certain topics were compared across demographic groups.

Figure 6 presents the participant groups and the total frequency of each code across the data. Data frequencies provide insights into the most frequent and recurring ideas or concepts in the dataset. The code "non-hypothetical, proactive, and reactive approach," categorised under the "social benefit" theme, exhibited the highest frequency (f=257). This strong emphasis suggests that participants consider this aspect of the studies a primary medium for socio-spatial contributions.

4.1. Experience

The "experience" theme served as the framework for investigating the sub-question: "How do community-oriented studio experiences foster architecture students' awareness of social responsibility, and how is this awareness reflected in their professional practice?" The dataset reveals a concentration on the codes of "social awareness", "learning local values", and "satisfaction with the process" within this theme. Regarding the experience, responses from PM most commonly addressed "satisfaction with the process", while IR and S focused on "social awareness", and AS emphasised "learning local values" in response to questions. The participants stated the following:

"We examined the daily lives, places, and needs of people living in different regions. […] It was an experience that concretely taught how an architect, through their project, carried

out a social action, first with the users of that area and then with their contributions to the city" (S4, 2024).

"Architecture is a social science. And the learning environment of architecture cannot be separated from society" (S5, 2024).

Participants noted that the experience allowed them to engage with real contextual issues and gain insight into the region, including Mardin's distinct geography, lifestyle, and climate. Additionally, the vast majority of participants (92.86%, n=42) reported that their experience enhanced their social awareness. Expressions related to social awareness were emphasised by 20 of the 21 students (95.2%), indicating that the studio experience may have contributed to fostering their awareness.

Furthermore, based on all interview responses, social awareness emerged as the code with the highest frequency, followed by the "learning local values" code. Cross-analysis of the codes revealed that participants who mentioned learning local values also consistently expressed social awareness and satisfaction with the process within their statements. This consistent co-occurrence suggests that learning of local values contributes to social awareness, which directly influences satisfaction. Additionally, interview responses frequently revealed that the PM participants, through these studies, became aware of the city's distinct values and learned to view it from various perspectives.

When examining the relationship (Fig. 7) among students, no significant difference was found between undergraduate and graduate students in terms of references to the "learning local values" code (Fisher's Exact Test, p = .618), nor between genders (p = .255). Owing to the low expected counts in cells, Fisher's Exact Test was used instead of Pearson's chi-square test. Fisher's exact test indicated no statistically significant differences between the groups (p > .05). The absence of significant differences between the groups suggests that this code may reflect a shared aspect of the student experience.

education level * learning local values crosstabulation

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.297[a]	1	.586		
Continuity Correction[b]	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.291	1	.590		
Fisher's Exact Test				.618	.498
Linear-by-Linear Association	.283	1	.595		
N of Valid Cases	21				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.52.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

gender * learning local values crosstabulation

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.471[a]	1	.116		
Continuity Correction[b]	.965	1	.326		
Likelihood Ratio	3.699	1	.054		
Fisher's Exact Test				.255	.167
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.353	1	.125		
N of Valid Cases	21				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.33.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Fig. 7. Cross-tabulations of the "learning local values" coding by students' education level and gender

In students' expressions regarding the learning process, statements concerning the architect's social role and responsibilities were highlighted. For instance:

"As an architect […] it was a practice that demonstrated how important it is to impact the social, economic, and cultural life of a place through the spaces created. […] For me, it was an experience that not only broadened my architectural perspective, but also helped me develop different social, cultural, societal, and other types of awareness, and learn more from the process than from the outcome" (S1, 2024).

"My understanding of social responsibility, through this process, become more focused on local needs, listening to the voices of the local people, and providing social benefit" (S13, 2024).

Students were asked to reflect on these studies in the context of their future professional lives. A significant portion (71%, 15 out of 21) stated that the knowledge and perspectives gained were directly applied in their professional lives. They cited areas such as collective work, collaboration, idea exchange, prioritising societal concerns in their work, engaging in socially responsible projects, considering social and environmental factors in design, and applying the material and technical knowledge gained during the process. Among them, six students (28.6%, n=21) reported continued participation in socially responsible projects following the ITU Mardint experience. For example:

"After the ITU Mardint studies, I participated in a series of social responsibility projects supporting local communities" (S13, 2024).

"We are currently running a mobile playground project for areas that do not have access to play areas. We create temporary public space with mobile play (pop-up)" (S21, 2024).

"Later, I worked as an education volunteer for children at TEGV (Educational Volunteers Foundation of Türkiye)" (S1, 2024).

The process received critical feedback primarily due to factors that negatively affected the work and caused interruptions, including shifts in the roles and responsibilities of stakeholder managers (IR1, 2024; AS2, 2024), the lack of developed technology and technical personnel in Mardin (IR2, 2024), the absence of an assisting and guiding mentor (S3, 2024), and a call for more explicit task definitions and an organizational structure (S15, 2024). This theme highlighted aspects of the studio's reality-based, field-oriented characteristics, informed by both positive reflections and negative feedback.

4.2. Communication and collaboration

The sub-question "What was the role of communication and collaboration during the experience?", participant statements were analysed to reveal the dialogic structure of this process. This section also presents a perspective to understand how the interplay among stakeholders was sustained throughout and after the process. The findings indicate that the dataset frequently includes interactions with other stakeholders, the development of collaboration, collective work, and partnership codes. The following statements help improve the understanding of this theme among actors;

"We became a bridge for ITU Mardint to collaborate with other institutions. It is a small city anyway, so it is almost impossible not to be aware of what is happening. When they came to Mardin (ITU Mardint), I remember that people interested in these matters would also attend our meetings. They would express their opinions" (PM4, 2024).

"We built very friendly relationships. Students and architects from Istanbul interacted with children passing by on the street and with people living nearby" (AS2, 2024).

"During the Mardin trip, I had the opportunity to get to know the local people closely. Their friendliness and hospitality pleased me greatly" (S2, 2024).

Participants indicated that they gained knowledge through reciprocal interactions within this learning environment, specifically through their engagement with local people, which involved learning community needs, grasping the significance of the context, and participating in a mutually educational process (S13, 2024; S19, 2024). The responses highlight that these interdisciplinary and integrated studios strengthen collaboration and foster a holistic approach to design education. It was stated as follows:

"It can be said that I gained practical insights into the approach stages, from the macro to the micro scale, and how students from different disciplines think about the same topic. […] experiencing the ability to work both collectively and individually within the framework of the task division required when collaborating with people from different disciplines was an important gain for me" (S16, 2024).

"Afterwards, this experience allowed me to approach my work with a more holistic perspective" (S13, 2024).

Additionally, various negative statements related to this theme were identified. A significant number of participants (59.52%, n=42) expressed concerns, including a lack of communication and information during and after the process, and 6 participants reported being unable to interact with stakeholders during the process. The student participants' references to challenges within this code were examined in relation to demographic variables. In the full sample (n=42), no significant differences were found between the genders regarding references to this code (Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 1.437$, $p = .231$; Fisher's Exact Test, $p = .346$). Limiting the analysis to students only (n=21) produced consistent results with no significant gender differences (Pearson $\chi^2(1) = .875$, $p = .350$; Fisher's Exact Test, $p = .397$). Similarly, no significant difference was found between undergraduate and graduate students in references to this code within the student subgroup (Pearson $\chi^2(1) = .269$, $p = .604$; Fisher's Exact Test, $p = .673$). Due to some expected counts below five, Fisher's exact test results were emphasised. These findings suggest that neither gender nor student status (undergraduate vs. graduate) significantly influenced the frequency of mentions or the nature of the feedback regarding this code.

Additionally, the inability to implement studies and the difficulty in communicating them to decision-makers, thereby fostering diverse perspectives, were identified as barriers. The development of interaction areas and communication channels that facilitate learning can be achieved. Overall, these results emphasise the critical role of interaction through experience, while also identifying information-flow challenges as areas for improvement.

4.3. Reflection

To address the sub-question, "What understanding or competencies did students develop about design and process, and how did these experiences shape their approach during and after the process?", interview statements were analysed. Participants articulated their engagement with experiential knowledge in design processes, understanding of thoughts after the experience, and suggestions for improving and sustaining the process. As exemplified in the following statement regarding the process:

"Efforts to include the voices of society in the process have also contributed to field analyses that inform the design" (S17, 2024).

In all student responses (n=21), there were statements regarding the use of data from daily life and the local context to address a design problem, seek user-centred solutions, and reflect interactions with local people and other stakeholders in the studies. The faculty members' observations of the students also supported this topic. Studies on community issues, driven by interactions (meetings, informal encounters, etc.) with local people, support the evaluation of regional needs and the collection of contextual data. Additionally, the statements indicated a democratic shift in the student-tutor dynamic away from a hierarchical structure.

"We had a collective working environment, and there were no hierarchical distinctions between us and our course tutors; it was a very democratic setting" (S7, 2024).

"Due to spending 24 hours together, the relationship between the tutor and the student changes" (AS3, 2024).

Moreover, the participants' statements regarding the development of their social awareness and the integration of this understanding into their professional lives, as indicated within the experience theme, also address the reflection sub-research question.

4.4. Social benefit

The study analysed interview responses within the "social benefit" theme to address the question "What were the socio-spatial contributions of the studies to society?" Interviews with individuals from Mardin gained particular importance, as this theme provided insights into examining ITU Mardint's proactive and reactive approaches and deciphering the mode of social benefit within the presented research and learning cycle. The concept of social benefit is analysed within a broad socio-spatial and community-oriented framework.

Primarily, it has been revealed that the expressions focus on the studio approach, enabling social benefits. Notable statements highlight how and under what conditions the process is organised at ITU Mardint. For example, one participant from Mardin stated the following:

"We hosted the incoming students in our homes. That is, we gave them the keys to our vacant houses. They stayed in groups in these houses" (IR2, 2024).

In the responses of individuals from Mardin, expressions converged on the common topics of conserving the historical

urban fabric, contributions to tourism and the economy, the role of architectural design studies, and shifts in perspective. In this context, all five research participants from Mardin stated that socio-spatial contributions promoted the conservation of historic heritage and fostered changes in the perspective towards the city. They also emphasised that it provided guidance for the preservation of this heritage. For instance:

"The people here continued their subsequent studies by taking as a reference the work conducted under the supervision of ITU Mardint and the ÇEKÜL Foundation. These studies became a guide for the studies on the historical fabric of Mardin" (PM1, 2024).

Participant statements indicate that increased public recognition and conservation of the city's historical fabric as cultural heritage constitutes a key socio-spatial impact of the studies. Interview responses indicated that this awareness led to more careful intervention approaches. The meticulous efforts to conserve Mardin's historical fabric while adapting it to contemporary conditions have emerged as a significant issue emphasised by the participants. Participants also stated that efforts to safeguard and reveal the historical fabric enhanced the city's visibility, indirectly revitalised tourism, and consequently supported the local economy and improved quality of life. Moreover, although not fully implemented, the ITU Mardint design studies laid the groundwork for future projects, fostered the development of ideas initiated during the process, and contributed to the establishment of Mardin Artuklu University. To illustrate:

"ITU Mardint contributed to the establishment of Mardin Artuklu University. […] A project was carried out for Cumhuriyet Square, but unfortunately, it was not realized as planned" (PM3, 2024).

These findings set the stage for examining the participants' post-experience process evaluations. A synthetic overview of the main findings across the four thematic dimensions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Synthetic summary of the main findings across the four thematic dimensions.

Thematic dimension	Related research question	Synthesized findings	Longer-term significance
Experience	How do community-oriented studio experiences foster students' awareness of social responsibility, and how is this reflected in their later professional lives?	The studio experience generated durable social awareness and sensitivity to local values. "Social awareness" and "learning local values" emerged as the most prominent codes. Sustained social awareness was reported by most participants (92.86%, n=42), and 71% of students stated that the knowledge gained later influenced their professional lives. The studies also contributed to increased awareness and shifted perceptions of Mardin's cultural heritage among the local community.	The findings suggest that reality-based studio experiences can shape professional dispositions beyond the semester and cultivate socially responsible practice as a lasting orientation rather than a temporary pedagogical effect.
Communication & collaboration	What were the roles of communication and collaboration during the experience?	Communication and collaboration structured the process, although 59.52% (n=42) of the participants reported communication problems. Participants described the process through interaction, collaboration, collective work, and partnership and reported learning through engagement with local people and interdisciplinary exchange.	The studies created a platform for dialogue and partnership among stakeholders; however, communication and information flow problems indicated the need for sustained communication channels.
Reflection	What understanding and competencies did students develop regarding design and process, and how did these shape their approach beyond the experience?	Reflection emerged through contextual learning rather than abstract critique. Students integrated everyday-life data and stakeholder interaction into user-centered design processes. Participants also described the studio environment as being more democratic and less hierarchical.	The findings show that reflective capacity in architectural education is strengthened when students engage with lived context and shared inquiry rather than purely hypothetical studio projects.
Social benefit	What were the socio-spatial contributions of these studies to society?	Participants from Mardin consistently linked the studies to the conservation of the historic fabric, new ways of seeing the city, and later initiatives that drew on the studio work. Comments also noted contributions to tourism, the economy, and the establishment of the university campus in the city.	Beyond their significant pedagogical contributions, the studies generated socio-spatial effects by increasing heritage awareness, changing perceptions of the city, and supporting the conservation of the historic fabric, with contributions to later urban and institutional development.
Overall	What are the long-term impacts of the ITU Mardint studies regarding social responsibility?	Despite challenges, including the lack of continued communication, administrative changes, and unimplemented projects, the studio model generated long-term impacts and socio-spatial benefits for the local community.	This research offers empirical support for understanding socially responsible studio education as a long-term civic-pedagogical formation, rather than as a short-lived teaching experiment.

5. Discussion and evaluation

Social responsibility is the duty to act for the benefit of society, with an awareness of being part of society. Further research is required to advance the development of both the literature and other pedagogical practices in these areas. Researching the long-term contributions of such practices is essential to strengthening pedagogical development. This study, drawing on multi-stakeholder insights, retrospectively examines the enduring impacts of the ITU Mardint experiences. Building upon the relevant literature and field data, this research proposes and supports a distinctive pedagogical model for socially responsible architectural education. While grounded in experiential learning, this model analytically restructures the learning cycle by redefining the "action" mode as "social benefit". By intertwining the cycles of experiential learning theory and action research methodology within a holistic framework, the study advocates a social-benefit-oriented approach in which the ultimate goal of the experiential process is to make tangible contributions to society. Consequently, the research process was carried out through this proposed action research cycle, focusing on the dimensions of experience, communication and collaboration, reflection, and social benefit.

The question "What are the socio-spatial impacts of ITU Mardint design studies in terms of social responsibility?" was explored through sub-questions related to these modes/themes. As detailed in the analysis of the findings, most students reported that the knowledge and insights gained from the experience were reflected in their professional lives. Some noted continued involvement in social responsibility projects in their professional lives after these studies. In total, across all interview responses, "social awareness" and "learning local values" were the most prominent codes related to the experience theme. When evaluated specifically for students, the lack of significant differences between genders and academic levels (undergraduate vs graduate) in the "learning local values" code suggests that experience prevailed over individual differences, creating a shared professional impact. Furthermore, the vast majority of participants reported enhanced social awareness. These views can be viewed as one of the long-term effects of the studies, particularly in terms of social responsibility.

In a non-hypothetical setting, students developed proactive and reactive solutions to generate social benefit. within the unique urban morphology and multi-layered cultural diversity of Mardin. In addition, these studies established a platform for stakeholder dialogue, fostering a positive perception of university-community relations. Furthermore, local participants expressed a willingness to engage in similar future collaborations.

However, the feedback highlighted that participants were unable to obtain information regarding the process after the studies. This highlights the pedagogical value of establishing feedback mechanisms that extend beyond the studio period and support continued interaction with the community at large. In addition, when participants were asked about ways to improve the process, the importance of minimising the impact of managerial changes on the studies, as well as more clearly defining project coordination, organisational structure, and the problem and project scope, was emphasised.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The role of universities today, especially in architectural education, is no longer limited to teaching and research; they are also expected to provide social benefits. Extending the learning environment from the school setting to regions with limited opportunities facilitates direct engagement with the community and a better understanding of local needs. Thus, it generates outcomes that enhance pedagogical development and students' awareness of the subjects. In this context, the development of field studies based on social responsibility and community engagement is becoming increasingly important.

Moreover, architectural education, which should be inherently intertwined with society and the built environment, does not produce merely unilateral benefits when structured around social responsibility. Rather, a reciprocal relationship exists that supports experiential learning from the context while contributing to society. Thus, it generates outcomes that enhance pedagogical development and students' awareness of the subject. Architectural education models require flexible, cyclical, and sustainable approaches that engage with societal contexts. In addition to socially responsible studio courses, the inclusion of integrated courses that incorporate theoretical subjects in the curriculum could facilitate a more holistic approach to the topic.

Based on the research findings, the following strategies and recommendations are proposed for future pedagogical practices:

- *Sustainability and Organisation*: It is essential to minimise the impact of managerial changes on the studies, as well as to more clearly define project coordination, organisational structure, and the problem and project scope.
- *Comprehensive Field Engagement*: Developing systems in which students complete the entire working process in the local area, rather than just a segment, is necessary to maximise their engagement with the local community.
- *Curriculum Restructuring*: Socially responsible architectural education should not be limited to extracurricular, optional, or experimental studies. Instead, architectural education should be restructured around this subject; social responsibility should not be an extracurricular adjunct but should form the core of the curriculum itself. In addition to this, the integration of theoretical courses on social responsibility with the practical applications of the studio could facilitate a more holistic approach.
- *Institutional Support*: Universities should transform into mechanisms through which communities can access support and benefit from the institutional expertise and resources.

Ultimately, this study highlights the role of translating academic knowledge into the field and incorporating experiential learning from the field to enhance social consciousness, specifically within Mardin's multi-layered historical urban fabric. The architectural culture embedded in the city's codes makes conducting a study in this area a distinctive opportunity and is considered a means of enhancing collective awareness. While the ITU Mardint model is inherently context-specific, conditioned by these unique historical and cultural codes, the strategies derived from the findings, such as integrating a social-benefit-oriented cycle into experiential learning, offer broader pedagogical applicability. The model's flexible and cyclical structure suggests its potential replicability in other schools of architecture, enabling academic knowledge to be translated into diverse field conditions. The research findings are presented in their original context. The strategies derived from these findings can inform the development of new action plans and learning cycles, enabling architectural education to be open to continuous improvement within cyclical continuity.

Future studies should integrate socially responsible pedagogical practices with research to enable universities to holistically achieve their objectives across the three fundamental dimensions. These studies could be expanded to different contexts and methods, such as longitudinal tracking of student engagement, comparative analyses across studies, and evaluations of hypothetical versus reality-based studio environments.

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