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Sociospatial devices as a strategy for situated learning of architecture

Los dispositivos socioespaciales como una estrategia para el aprendizaje situado de la arquitectura

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ABSTRACT In contrast to the demiurgic model dominating architectural schools, this article systematizes a teaching experience oriented toward a situated, critical, and interdependent formation. The Performative Architectures Workshop at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador operationalized the tension between the conceived and the lived city through exercises of critical analysis and design speculation on Quito. Applying the systematization of experiences method, the process was critically interpreted through the workshop's records and student interviews. The results show a verifiable pedagogical shift, from the analysis of urban problems to their re-signification through design, with the simultaneous development of critical, communicative, and ethical competencies that foster a graduate profile grounded in an ecosystemic perspective and a commitment to reality. The article concludes that the transferable contribution lies in the pedagogical translation, the sequence of exercises, and the use of graphic tools as dialogical devices for architectural mediation.

RESUMEN Frente a la formación demiúrgica dominante en las escuelas de arquitectura, este artículo sistematiza una experiencia docente orientada a una formación situada, crítica e interdependiente. El Taller de arquitecturas performativas de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador operacionalizó la tensión entre ciudad concebida y ciudad vivida mediante ejercicios de análisis crítico y especulación proyectual sobre Quito. Aplicando el método de la sistematización de experiencias, se interpretó críticamente el proceso a partir de los registros del Taller y entrevistas a estudiantes. Los resultados evidencian un desplazamiento pedagógico verificable, desde el análisis del problema urbano a la resignificación proyectual, con desarrollo simultáneo de competencias críticas, comunicativas y éticas que apuntan a un perfil de egreso ecosistémico y comprometido con la realidad. Se concluye que el aporte transferible radica en la traducción pedagógica, la secuencia de ejercicios y el uso de herramientas gráficas como dispositivos dialógicos de mediación arquitectónica.

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PALABRAS CLAVE arquitecturas performativas, formación en arquitectura, pedagogía crítica, responsabilidad socioambiental, sistematización de experiencias

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1. Introduction

In contrast to the traditional demiurgic training of architects who view themselves as "executors of a semi-divine mission to impose preestablished orders on nature, based on an idea of progress that considers growth to be unlimited by definition and views the use of urban space as inexhaustible" (Delgado, 2004, p. 1), this research explores a different approach to architectural education—one that is situated, critical, and interdependent. Based on a reasoned systematization of teaching experience, the study reflects on the development of specific skills that promote a new professional profile better suited to current realities in contexts such as Latin America.

The 7th–8th-level Performative Architecture Workshop at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE), adopting an experimental approach, embraced a critical and transdisciplinary pedagogy centered on the social production of the built environment, grounded in reciprocity, solidarity, and civic co-responsibility. Based on the tension between the planned city and the lived city, the workshop analyzed—drawing on Carisimo (2023)—how power dynamics and ideological disputes generate intrinsic dissonance within the territory. Consequently, the research focused on studying the interrelationship between static urban planning and the dynamic practices of everyday living.

This systematization aimed to analyze the Performative Architecture Workshop as a situated educational space, assessing its contribution to developing critical skills and shaping a professional profile more relevant to Latin American reality. The workshop contrasted urban theory and critical pedagogy with design experimentation, focusing on designing *socio-spatial devices* that transform the static city into a stage for civic political action. During the analysis, the development of the emerging professional profile was evaluated, revealing that the workshop's use of critical and post-productive operational techniques not only enhances students' perceptual abilities (Trachana and González Ortiz, 2022) but also serves as a transformative mechanism that strengthens their ethical commitment and socio-environmental responsibility.

This systematization was motivated by the following research question: How do situated design practice and the development of critical skills in the Performative Architecture Workshop contribute to the formation of a professional profile—one that is conscious, creative, and socio-environmentally responsible—committed to transforming its environment?

1.1. A critical look at architectural education

Traditional architectural education—which Colomina et al. (2017) describe as obsolete—has been anchored to the figure of *the demiurge architect* who prioritizes formal intent over socio-spatial reality, fostering a practice of segregation that conceives of space *for* the community, but never *with* the community. This pedagogical model replicates Freire's (1970) "banking" model of *education*, where the vertical hierarchy of teaching and submission to hegemonic tastes nullifies students' political agency, reducing them to technocrats of the global market.

In response to this crisis, the critical pedagogy of architecture proposes an epistemic reconfiguration: the transition toward a *dialogical education*, where the design process is understood as a *praxis of reflection-action* aimed at transforming structures of spatial oppression. From this perspective, architects assume the role of mediators. By shifting the architectural object away from its autonomy, the design studio becomes a space for co-production that integrates local knowledge and participatory methodologies, reclaiming the project as a field of contestation for spatial justice and the right to the city (González-Ortiz and Ríos-Mantilla, 2024).

1.2. The conceived city and the lived city

According to Stavridis (2002), the modern city is conceived as a "screen city": an urban landscape of static images, centralized perspectives, and monumental façades that symbolize the power of the groups promoting urban planning, thereby hindering inhabitants' democratic participation. It is a succession of disconnected scenes, much like tourist postcards, where aesthetic regulations take precedence over the spontaneous appropriation of public space.

Control mechanisms such as solid walls, railings, electrified fences, security cameras, bollards, etc., are installed, imposing a closed order and legibility that oppose the perceived, lived, and used space that characterizes urbanity as a way of life (Delgado, 2004). Rather than being neutral, these devices operate politically; they inscribe conventional programs into materials, spaces, and bodies to *re-fold* (silence, inhibit, distance) civic action (Domínguez Rubio and Fogué, 2015). The result is a city observed passively from the outside, impersonal, where form takes precedence over life and time freezes in a present without a past or future of its own, except for that dictated by the normalizing gaze of urban design (Trachana, 2021).

In contrast to this "screen city," Stavridis (2002) describes a transition toward the "stage city," where space is experienced as action, movement, and interaction. Residents cease to be spectators and become actors within a network of affections that produces the city (Latour, 2008). Citizens are seen and heard before an audience of equals, validating their identity through mutual recognition (Arendt, 2007), in a space of representation that guarantees the survival of the urban through the reproduction of everyday experience (Carisimo, 2023). Here, architecture ceases to be an isolated object and becomes an atmosphere of relationships. The very same devices that once re-fold now generate thresholds and interstices for neighborhood life, in what Domínguez Rubio and Fogué (2015) call *the* "unfolding of design"—not as its opposite, but as a process that makes new bodies, entities, and places possible and visible, thereby multiplying the world. Time, too, is transformed; it no longer stands still but intertwines subjects and objects in continuous, ephemeral, and ever-changing drifts and explorations, where the "other" emerges and paves the way for dialogue and collective action. The traditional façade fades; architectural skins emerge as communicative "packaging" independent of the building (Trachana, 2021, p. 177), and the capabilities of digital society drive ephemeral, performative structures that generate estrangement and surprise (Laredo Torres and Trachana, 2022).

The coexistence of *the* "screen city" and the "stage city" (as the projected city and the lived city) shapes a field of research on new ways of inhabiting that can no longer be sustained by the precepts of the Modern Movement, but rather demands an exploration of the playful experience, the web of events, and the participation of human and more-than-human[1] actors in the production of the city. This very coexistence, in turn, demands a critical stance—a pedagogical shift away from traditional architectural education (González Ortiz, 2024).

1.3. Architectural education profile grounded in socio-environmental responsibility

Contemporary reality faces a series of social and environmental crises that affect not only the local level but also the global scale. In this context, it is necessary to rethink disciplinary education through an approach that integrates socio-environmental responsibility and a commitment to transforming natural and cultural environments. International regulatory and policy frameworks already exist to promote these initiatives, such as the University Social Responsibility (USR) management model promoted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin America (AUSJAL). These proposals aim to raise awareness of the importance of establishing comprehensive systems of engagement with the environment and communities in the region (Vallaeys, 2008). Although the proposal is at the macro level, it is important to incorporate it into day-to-day activities—that is, into the educational and teaching-learning practices of the disciplines. This involves rethinking teaching methods and developing competencies that promote an ethical, sustainable, and responsible interaction with the planet's resources.

From an architectural perspective, the profession must adopt a critical and conscious stance on the socio-environmental impacts it generates, addressing both design strategies and construction methods. According to data from the United Nations Environment Program [UNEP] (2024), the construction industry accounts for approximately 37% of global CO_2 emissions, highlighting the scale of pollution and its contribution to the climate crisis. Furthermore, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2016), informal construction in

1 The term more-than-human, originally coined by David Abram (1996), is used in this context to challenge human exceptionalism and the nature/culture dichotomy. From a posthumanist perspective, the concept shifts the focus away from humans as the center of agency and morality, situating them within a network of interdependencies with biological, technological, and mineral entities (Braidotti, 2015). In line with Integral Ecology, this term acknowledges that human existence is inherently relational; we do not merely inhabit the Earth but are part of a biotic community in which agency is distributed across a multiplicity of beings and systems (Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2017). Thus, the more-than-human does not exclude the human but resituates it as a node within a broader and more complex web of life.

the region accounts for up to 50%, depending on the country, highlighting architecture's limited role in addressing these issues. In this context, a disciplinary rethinking oriented toward architectural practices that prioritize sustainability and socio-environmental justice is essential. This entails adopting approaches that promote relationships of solidarity between humans and non-human beings, as well as fostering research, mediation, and action within the local context (Ríos Mantilla, 2024). Architectural education committed to the socio-environmental dimension will foster a mindset that impacts the holistic well-being of nature at both the local and global levels, thereby consolidating a responsible professional practice in harmony with territories, entities, and bodies.

In line with these principles, this research aims to analyze a training experience in the Performative Architectures Workshop, considering as learning objectives the development of certain competencies that have traditionally been regarded as generic but are now redefined as specific by González-Ortiz and Ríos-Mantilla (2024) to establish a new graduate profile relevant to the region's socio-environmental challenges. This profile, which focuses on socio-environmental responsibility and is oriented toward professional practice in the service of social transformation, is illustrated in Table 1.

As shown in the table, the proposed competencies broaden the professional scope of architecture, since it is not limited to building construction but has broader implications in other areas. It enters, for example, the realm of criticism, reflection, and evaluation, recognizing that architectural proposals impact the territories and bodies of other beings. The goal is to move from anthropocentric architecture to one that engages with contexts from an ecosystemic and interdependent perspective.

This ethical role carries fundamental weight, as it transcends the neutrality of proposals and raises awareness of their socio-environmental impacts. The discipline is no longer isolated but enters a system of ecologies that positions human beings as part of a reality that extends beyond the human.

1.4. The performative architecture workshop

The Performative Architecture Workshop, integrated into the fourth year of the PUCE degree program, aligns with the university's mission to promote human dignity as an educational space that links urban and architectural planning with citizens' social, economic, political, and environmental practices. Its central purpose is to foster what Romano (2021) calls the *spatialization of existence* and the *existentialization of space*: to make space a means of life and life a way of inhabiting space. To this end, it has adopted active learning methodologies that take a critical stance toward the segregation and privatization of public space, aimed at fostering citizen participation and the appropriation of spaces in what Gehl (2009) calls the humanization of public space.

Among its design strategies, the workshop promotes the reuse of structures, the minimization of interventions, and the dismantling of existing structures, embracing renunciation and austerity as valid ways of practicing the profession (n'UNDO, 2017), alongside playful exploration, the conjecture of possible futures, and the use of digital tools, all aimed at developing creative critical thinking and a political stance in the face of the crisis in contemporary society. Students are encouraged to adopt a questioning attitude toward traditional practice, unlearning and relearning the profession

Graduate Profile for Architecture in Latin America		
	Competency	**Description**
1	Design Capability	Ability to lead a creative process of design, planning, and development of architectural and urban projects.
2	Theoretical Knowledge	Knowledge of the theory and history of architecture, art, aesthetics, and the humanities related to the creation of the built environment.
3	Understanding of the social function	Understanding of the social function of architecture and of the cultural and environmental aspects of society's demands and needs.
4	Research Skills	Research capabilities and a focus on social and technological innovation.
5	Technical knowledge	Knowledge of structural systems and construction techniques, new technologies, materials, and specific installations.
6	Management skills	Ability to manage projects, administration, financing, regulations, processes, and building oversight.
7	Social and Environmental Responsibility	Awareness of architecture's social and environmental responsibility, its impact on health, hygiene, safety, inclusion, and well-being; and knowledge of methods for sustainability and the preservation of environmental and cultural heritage.
8	Understanding of Professional Roles	Understanding of professional practice, work organization, and livelihood strategies.
9	Ability to work in a team	Ability to cooperate, demonstrate leadership, engage in interdisciplinary work, and value the knowledge of others.
10	Communication skills	Ability to communicate, mediate, express ideas, present information, and use ICT.
11	Critical thinking skills	Ability to think critically, mediate, and solve problems.
12	Ethical behavior	Ethical behavior and well-rounded education.

Table 1: Proposed graduate profile for architecture programs in Latin America. (2024)

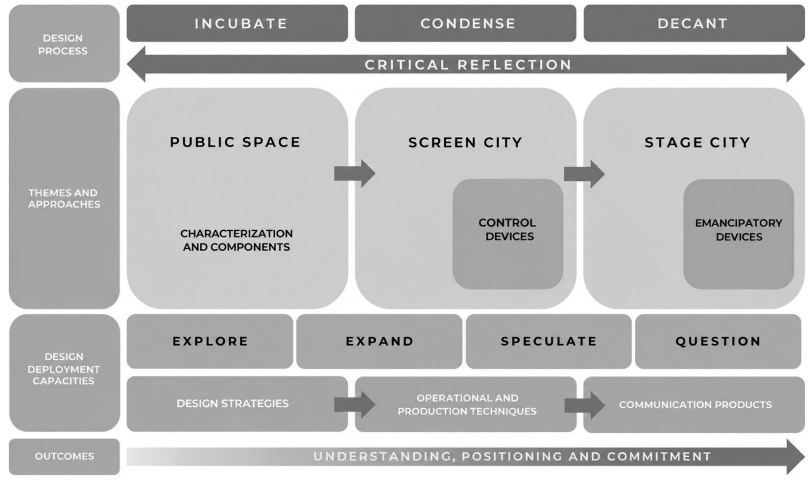


Figure 1: Methodological Design. (2024)

through this alternative approach to architecture—one that values otherness and social knowledge, reclaims the narrative of urban experiences, and activates the city's performativity. Communicating these practices has required going beyond conventional drawing and exploring operational techniques of production and post-production—such as *collage*, photomontage, *stop-motion*, and 3D modeling—that are capable of shaping the imagination and configuring the project (Seguí, 1996), transforming representation into an active system of mediation between architects, citizens, and urban space (Alonso Pedrero et al., 2025). The workshop's ultimate goal is to raise awareness of the impact of architectural practice on socio-environmental imbalances and to foster students' ethical and socially responsible commitment to transforming the built environment.

1.4.1. Workshop methodology

The workshop adopts methodologies characteristic of critical pedagogies that challenge power structures and socio-spatial inequalities to empower students to engage in conscious, transformative professional practice. The architectural project has been conceived here as a tool for developing an argument and maintaining a critical stance; following Argan (cited in Seguí 2018, p. 60), "one never designs for, but rather against" (against exploitation, prejudice, violence, and resignation in the face of the unpredictable), so that the pressure of the past becomes a driving force rather than a burden. Methodology and design technique thus carry an ideological weight that must be incubated, condensed, and refined—not as a chain of arguments but as a complex process of constructing what is imagined (de Molina, 2022).

Operationally, the Workshop articulates three approaches that Domínguez Rubio and Fogué (2015) propose to unfold design's political capacities. *Expansion* seeks to identify mechanisms of control in order to reverse submission to the established order and foster autonomous and responsible behaviors. *Speculation* explores open and flexible actions (such as participatory urban planning) to reimagine preexisting spaces through ephemeral configurations that promote participation and exchange. *Questioning* employs design not to provide answers but to raise questions about ways of inhabiting, exploring utopian possibilities that challenge established imaginaries; to this end, it uses the method of generating catastrophes for reconstructive criticism developed by Bretón Belloso (2014). The aim is to fracture reality in order to reevaluate it through ironic transgressions such as alternate histories, transgressive fictions, and X-rays of hidden urban fissures, which reveal prevailing models of citizenship and build bridges of communication between architecture and society (Figure 1).

Category	Criterion	Description
A. Urban morphology	1. Static physical infrastructure	Homogeneous and conventional buildings.
	2. Monumental dimensions	Large scale.
	3. Long distances	Wide field of view.
	4. Fixed facades	Heavy, static, and rigid facades.
	5. No transition zones	Absence of intermediate spaces; presence of specific boundaries and edges.
	6. Segmented space	Segmentation of space and discontinuity.
	7. Impermeability	Impermeability of public space; disconnected layers.
B. Perception	8. Plastic effect	Public space based on formal aesthetics, purely visual, appearing to be what it is not.
	9. Still image	The facade as a still image, with a central perspective and monotonous composition.
	10. Elitist space	A space for the few, not at all welcoming.
	11. Limited time	A perception of accelerated time, a rapid pace, and little opportunity to linger.
C. Sense of belonging	12. Segregating space	A space that segregates, repels, and excludes.
	13. Transit space	High-speed transit space.
	14. A space not meant for lingering	A space for lingering with passive consumption.
	15. Non-appropriation	A foreign or alien space, unsuitable for appropriation.
	16. Social distance	Barriers to proximity.
	17. No interaction	A contemplative space that doesn't encourage much participation.
	18. No inhabitants	A desolate space, devoid of inhabitants (neither human nor non-human).
D. Social structure	19. Authoritarian space	A controlled and inaccessible space.
	20. Lack of communication	A space where interaction is inhibited, with no possibility of communication.
E. Spatial devices	21. Obstacle objects	Objects designed to inhibit contact and lingering.
	22. Multi-level	Discontinuity and breaks in the level, limited accessibility.

Table 2: List of evaluation criteria for the "screen city". Performative architecture workshop (2024)

These three approaches take the form of two complementary operational techniques. The *multiperspective approach* brings together perspectives from multiple viewpoints on a single panel—similar to Cubism—integrating temporality and movement to convey the multidimensional complexity of urban reality in its current, past, and imagined states (Villarreal Colunga et al., 2024). The *diorama*, on the other hand, constructs a three-dimensional representation of an urban scene from a forced perspective, with overlapping fragments of the projected spaces, which places the viewer close to the scene's protagonists and acts as a mediating tool between the project and people (Esquinas Dessy and Zaragoza de Pedro, 2016). Both techniques are, rather than vehicles of expression, both techniques are dialogical devices that articulate the relationship between architects, citizens, and urban space.

2. Methodology

The analysis of the Performative Architectures Workshop used the method of systematizing experiences, as formulated by Jara (2018). Systematization is understood as the critical interpretation of an experience that, through its organization and reconstruction, identifies and reveals the logic of the lived process, the factors that intervened in it, and how they related to one another. The choice of this method is not merely operational but also epistemological. The systematization of experiences—rooted in the Latin American tradition of popular education and in Freirean methodological rigor—holds that knowledge can and must be produced from practice and through its participants, rather than by applying external theoretical categories to experiences that are foreign to them. This premise aligns with the workshop's performative nature, grounded in situated and collective action, and with a vision of a critical and interdependent architecture that demands equally relational, participatory forms of knowledge production and is committed to transforming teaching practice.

Methodologically, the process followed the five stages proposed by Jara: living the experience, systematization plan, process reconstruction, critical reflection, and communication of learnings. The starting point was direct participation in the "Performative Architectures" workshop, recognizing it as a proposal for educational innovation and compiling the records produced during the process—namely, the course syllabus, exercise prompts, documentary, photographic, and audiovisual records, student projects and reflections, and assessment rubrics.


MORFOLOGÍA
PERCEPCIÓN
ESTRUCTURA FÍSICA
Construcciones convencionales, homogéneas, estáticas, obsoletas.
DIMENSIONES
Gran escala, monumentalidad.
DISTANCIAS
Grandes distancias, amplio campo visual.
FACHADA
Pesada, estática, permanente.
ZONAS DE TRANSICIÓN
No existen espacios intermedios, no hay conexión visual, hay límites y muros ciegos.
ESPACIO SEGMENTADO
Discontinuo, inconexo.
PERMEABILIDAD
Capas.
EFECTO PLÁSTICO
Importa más la forma que el contenido, superficial, aparente.
IMAGEN FUJA
Perspectiva central, monótona.
ESPACIO ELITISTA
No es acogedor, ni receptivo.
TIEMPO REDUCIDO
Rapidez, no se puede ver lo que pasa, ni se puede experimentar a profundidad una actividad, pera capacidad de percepción y de memoria.
LUIS CABRERA Y MONTEVIDEO (CACI)
AV. 10 DE AGOSTO ENTRE CHECA Y SANTA PRISCA
AV. GRANADOS ENTRE 6 DE DICIEMBRE Y ELOY ALFARO
AV. 10 DE AGOSTO ENTRE ROCINOS DE LA VY EL LABRADOR
AV. AMÉRICA ENTRE MARCHENA Y COLÓN
AV. PATRIA Y 10 DE AGOSTO + 06 DICIEMBRE
AV. SAN LUIS ENTRE GENERAL RUMIÑAHUI- BOULEVARD
CALLE MAJIPA ENTRE AV. GENERAL ENRIQUE Y ALFREDO DÁVILA
AV. QUITUMBE ÑAN ENTRE AMARU ÑAN Y HUAYNAPATA
AV. CORUÑA ENTRE MADRID Y 10 DE OCTUBRE
AV. INTEROCEÁNICA ENTRE DE LOS CONQUISTADORES Y DIEGO DE ROBLES
AV. ELOY ALFARO ENTRE AVE DICIEMBRE Y PORTUGAL
AV. AMAZONAS ENTRE NIñAU Y GASPAR DE VILLARROEL
AV. MALDONADO ENTRE CASTILLO Y CERRO HERMOSO
AV. EQUINOCCIAL ENTRE SIMÓN BOLÍVAR Y 9 DE JUNIO
CALLE CUENCA ENTRE CHILE Y RAMÓN BARAHONA
AV. 12 DE OCTUBRE ENTRE TARQUI Y PADILLA
AV. ELOY ALFARO ENTRE AMAZONAS Y 10 DE
AV. 24 DE MAYO ENTRE IMBABURA Y GUAYAQUIL
JERÓNIMO CARRIÓN ENTRE 10 DE AGOSTO Y 6 DE DICIEMBRE

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Figure 2: Complete map and details of three evaluated areas. Performative architecture workshop (2024)

The systematization plan defined as its subject the workshop experience carried out during the 2024-01 academic period in the seventh and eighth years of the architecture program at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, and established as the central theme of the systematization the relationship between the workshop's performative strategies and the development of a professional profile for architects capable of responsible and transformative practice. On this basis, the process was reconstructed chronologically. The workshop information was organized around this central theme, paving the way for the method's substantive phase: in-depth reflections, guided by the question of why what happened did happen, in which the experience was critically examined in dialogue with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the article. Semi-structured interviews with five workshop participants enriched the reflection process by helping me understand their experiences and lessons learned.

Furthermore, the graphic corpus analyzed and illustrated in this article (maps, postcards, dioramas, and journals) corresponds to the design work produced by the thirteen students in the workshop, who authorized its academic use as evidence of the educational process under investigation. This critical interpretation and the lessons for future practice constitute the results presented below. The analysis is grounded in Jara's idea that conclusions are not universal truths, but rather practical guidelines drawn from a specific experience, open to debate in other pedagogical contexts.

3. Results

The workshop, held over sixteen weeks with thirteen seventh- and eighth-year architecture students, explored the city of Quito through the concepts of *the* "screen city" and the "stage city" via readings, critical analysis, and fieldwork. Following an initial theoretical phase to define these terms, the group observed that the city is not uniform but fluctuates between spaces of control and freedom depending on everyday dynamics. The first phase of the workshop (weeks 1 through 8) focused on *expanding* and *questioning* the methodological proposal, while the second phase (weeks 9 through 16) focused on *speculation*.

To ground the analysis, in the first exercise, the students mapped twenty urban axes from the perspective of the "screen city." Additionally, as a group, they defined a rubric of 22 criteria divided into 5 categories to evaluate and select areas for intervention (Table 2).

The visual evaluation of the twenty axes, using a scale from one to five, allowed for the classification of each zone. Higher scores indicate a more pronounced "screen city" character; lower scores indicate a greater presence of *the* "stage city." According to the resulting map (Figure 2), 15 of the 20 axes scored over 60 points. This suggests that, in Quito, the "screen city" configuration predominates—understood as a transit space designed to be viewed from a car, which discourages pedestrians from lingering. Because this is an exploratory method with an inevitable degree of subjectivity, interpret the reliability of this assessment exclusively within the workshop's pedagogical framework. Thus, the results lead students to adopt a critical stance, guiding the subsequent phases toward designing interventions that would transform the city into a more participatory and democratic space.

Scope	Criterion	Associated competencies
A. Conceptualization and theory	1. Understanding of concepts, exploration, and awareness.	Theoretical knowledge
	2. Theoretical reasoning and reference sources.	Research skills
B. Synthesis and design process	3. Creative proposal for synthesis.	Research skills Social and environmental responsibility
	4. Design strategies.	Design skills Technical knowledge Ethical conduct
C. Critical thinking	5. Ability to conduct contextual analysis.	Understanding of social function Social and environmental responsibility Understanding of professional roles
	6. Ability to think critically.	Critical thinking skills Ethical behavior
D. Communication	7. Application of operational and post-production techniques.	Communication skills Technical knowledge
	8. Oral, written, and graphic expression.	
E. Management	9. Work organization (individual or group), responsibility, and agency.	Management skills Teamwork skills Ethical behavior
	10. Professionalism in submission and quality of work products.	

Table 3: Assessment Criteria for Workshop Learning. Performative architecture workshop (2024)

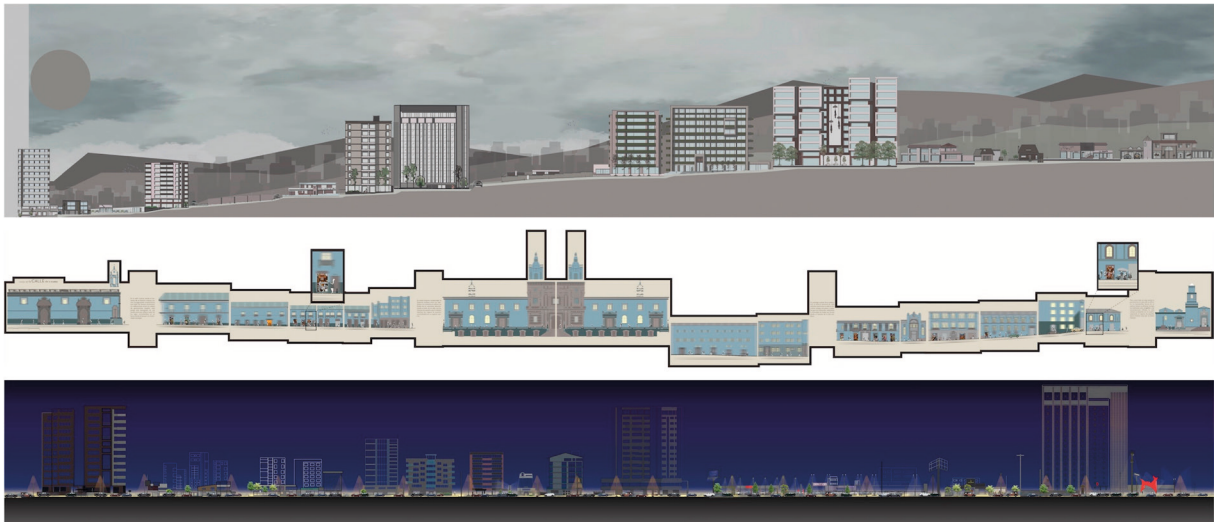


Figure 3: **"Postcards from the *Screen City*" Exercise.** Performative architecture workshop (2024)

The second exercise, *Postcards of the* "Screen City" (Figure 3), addressed the representation of façades along the urban axes that received the highest ratings in the previous mapping exercise. The objective was to use the postcard format to highlight the disconnect between the planned image and the authentic, real-time urban experience. For Ortiz Echagüe (2026), postcards are a hybrid medium for representing everyday life. In this exercise, the postcards served as an analytical tool to expose the structural tensions of modern cities through the articulation of image and text.

The methodology consisted of a planimetric survey of the selected axes, composing the façades from fragmented snapshots taken from a frontal, fixed perspective, and unified through image processing. The resulting representation offers a dual interpretation: a panoramic view that reproduces the accelerated perception experienced from a car; and a detailed view that documents how control mechanisms segregate community life and reduce the city to a functional transit space.

From an educational perspective, the exercise strengthened critical thinking and understanding of architecture's social function, prioritizing communicative skills through graphic languages. The students translated their urban analysis using analog and digital techniques, revealing—during the feedback process—the need to deepen their mastery of digital tools, as well as principles of composition, color theory, and graphic language.

The first phase concluded with the "Bestiary" exercise, which aimed to make the control mechanisms in the "screen city" visible. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2008), the physical environment was analyzed not as a backdrop, but as a set of human and non-human actants that shape sensory and emotional experiences. Elements such as furniture, materials, colors, textures, and spatial arrangements were analyzed not as neutral elements but as agents that shape behavior and act as punitive mechanisms that stifle spontaneity, reducing residents to passive spectators or automatons.

In addition to observing the actants, the methodological process involved the technical and political deconstruction of these devices (Figure 4). The foldable artifact (Figure 5) served as a metaphor for political *withdrawal*, where *unfolding* the object allows an understanding of the imposed structure of control. Likewise, using postdigital *collage* (Figure 6) as an alternative to photorealistic image production enabled a critical narrative based on assemblage and recombination (Carrasco-Hidalgo, 2025). By visualizing the environment through a visual essay in the form of *a catastrophe*,

Project	Breaking the street	A discontinuous prison	Who is walking whom?	A discontinuous route
Actant	 Tightrope walkers and circus performers at traffic lights	 The lottery ticket vendor	 The dog walker	 The urban cyclist
Apparatus	The traffic light, with its constant green–red cycle, determines when acrobats and street vendors can act. The improvised tightrope is set up during the red light, opening up opportunities for interaction.	The railing in the underpass where independent vendors are "legally" stationed to sell their products. The winning ticket becomes a possible escape from routine.	The dog's leash constrains and directs both actants' wandering. The dog, as a subject, enables a way of being and expressing oneself in the city.	The discontinuous bike lane is encroached upon by vehicles making deliveries or waiting, thereby endangering the cyclist.
Project	**Strict admission rights**	**Private church forecourt**	**Withholding public space**	**An elegant urinal**
Actant	 The private university student	 The candle vendor	 The Saint: a statue of Mariana de Jesús in public space	 The pisser
Apparatus	The entrance turnstile at the university gate and the mobile app serving as a key to the segregated space of the university campus.	The security fence closes off and encloses the church forecourt, privatizing public space and excluding independent vendors from the Historic Center.	The benches surrounding the saint's statue are not available to every passerby; their use is restricted to customers of the bank, which privatizes the site and controls it through its security guards.	The triumphal arch monument serves as a tourist attraction in the mornings, a meeting place for students and young people in the afternoons, and a shelter, drinking spot, urinal, and hideout for criminals at night.
Project	**A turnstile of no return**	**A fake threshold**	**Controlling the herd**	**[In]dependence**
Actant	 The trolleybus passenger	 The citizen	 An anonymous passerby	 The woman in the Nissan Kicks
Apparatus	The turnstile at trolleybus stops channels movement in a single direction and prevents passengers from taking alternative routes.	The bank's security guard controls who enters, how they enter, and for what purpose. He reserves the right to refuse admission, unaware that, in another situation, he too could be excluded from space intended for public use.	The security barriers protecting government buildings against possible crowd disturbances during public demonstrations prevent citizens from moving freely and using public space.	The car shapes a woman's mobility, isolating her and providing safety as she travels through the city streets. It is a false apparatus of emancipation because it seeks to convince her that she is independent while cutting her off from contact with fellow citizens.

Figure 4: Bestiary of the screen city, agents, and devices. Performative architecture workshop (2024)



Figure 5: Bestiary, foldable artifacts. Performative architecture workshop (2024)

the work exposed the consequences of uncontrolled activation of these devices.

This exercise not only highlighted the tensions between the restrictions imposed by the environment and its inhabitants but also positioned itself as an exercise in pedagogical resistance. By practicing the deployment of these mechanisms, the sphere of the political was expanded, challenging architecture's capacity to normalize segregation and passivity in contemporary urban space.

The second phase of the workshop unfolded through two exercises that moved from critical analysis to design *speculation*, articulating the conceptual transition from the "screen city" to the "stage city." The pedagogical objective was to progress from developing research and interpretation skills to cultivating design capabilities while applying criteria of socio-environmental responsibility and ethical conduct. Drawing on Gehl's (2009) concept of the humanization of public space and Chinchilla's (2020) "urbanism of care," students explored everyday dynamics to propose strategies to slow the pace of life and reconnect with nature.

The methodology focused on creating spatial sequences and devices of emancipation that challenge the rigidity of the current environment. Through *multiperspective* exercises (Figure 7), images and sequence shots were integrated to broaden spatial perception, replacing the hurried gaze with one that seeks to spark meaningful interactions. In this sense, performativity catalyzes neighborhood life; under this approach, *the city-as-scene* is reconfigured not only as a physical design but also as a democratic mechanism based on reciprocity, correspondence, and the right to permanence.

The final exercise served as a critical synthesis, reconfiguring the previously identified control mechanisms and transforming them into catalysts for urban emancipation. Under this approach, strategies of humanization and care were not limited to technical improvements in safety or traffic flow but were deployed as a political tactic to rehabilitate public space. By redefining the roles of the actors, the aim was to transform them from subordinate subjects into agents with political agency, allowing their actions to imbue with meaning the "space of appearance" posited by Arendt (2007).

In particular, the "Umbrales" exercise, developed using the *diorama* technique (Figure 8), demonstrated that interstices and intermediate spaces constitute the latent infrastructure for civic appropriation. By integrating *multiple perspectives* and detailed views, the students explored the phenomenology of place to transform nodes of exclusion into gathering points. By the end of the workshop, the students came to understand that architecture is not a neutral container, but a mediator of relationships that can enable or undermine the democratic exercise of citizenship. Through experimentation with *dioramas* and *multiperspectives*, they integrated the rigor of graphic representation with an advanced understanding of human scale and urban phenomenology. As a result, they developed an analytical perspective capable of identifying the potential for transformation in the residual, moving away from conventional solutions and proposing or appropriating strategies more sensitive to social reality.

Learning assessment followed a multidimensional, weighted model, designed to go beyond summative grading and foster a culture of shared responsibility. The system integrated three complementary modalities: self-assessment, focused on reflective practice regarding the personal process; peer assessment, which facilitated horizontal dialogue and peer critique; and external assessment, centered on the quality of design outcomes and the fulfillment of academic objectives. This framework was articulated through



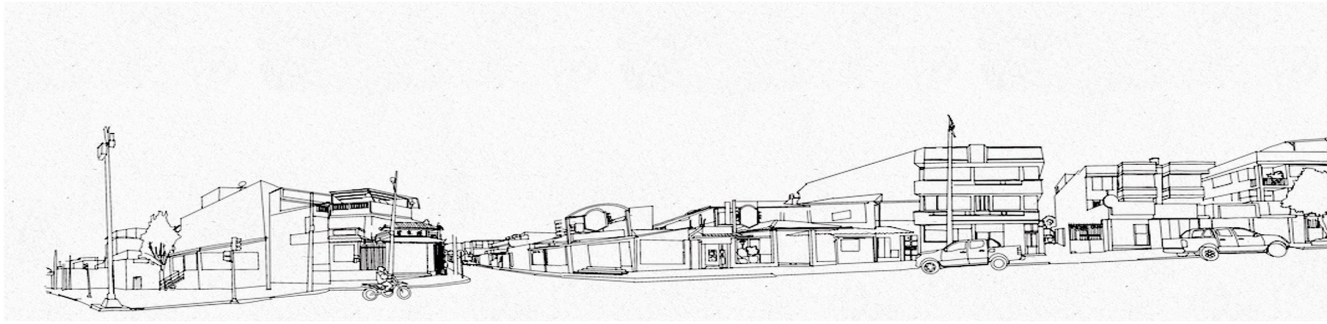
Figure 6: Bestiaries, Alternate Histories, and Transgressive Fictions. Performative architecture workshop (2024)

a consensus-based rubric consisting of ten criteria (Table 3), directly aligned with the competencies outlined in the workshop's graduate profile.

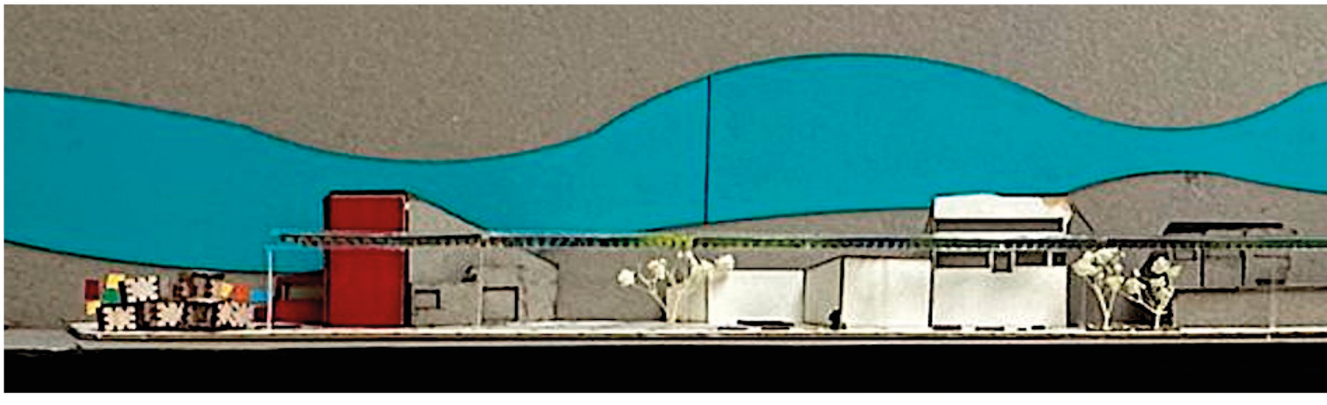
Continuous monitoring through four evaluation rounds made it possible to track the development of competencies among the thirteen participants. The increase in the overall average—which rose from 6.99/10 at the start to 7.93/10 at the end of the cycle—suggests an upward learning curve, reflecting a gradual mastery of the program's theoretical and conceptual complexity, as well as greater proficiency in the technical and communicational challenges inherent in project development. The pedagogical process was documented through reflective journals (Figure 9) and project portfolios, which were converted into audiovisual and interactive formats.

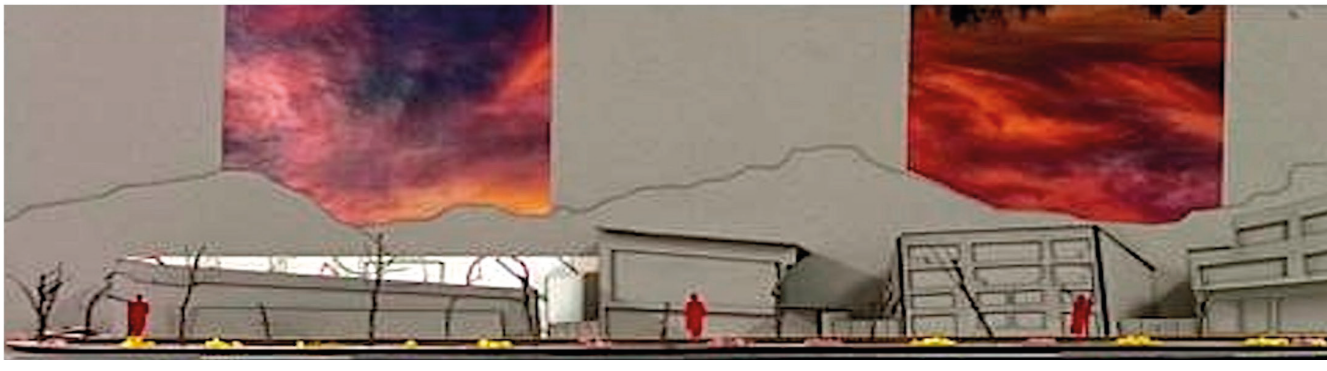
These records served not only as repositories of information but also as visual elements that articulated the process narratives and critical reflection on learning. To assess students' mastery of the content and the development of their competencies, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five students, using their workshop experience as an indicator of the educational

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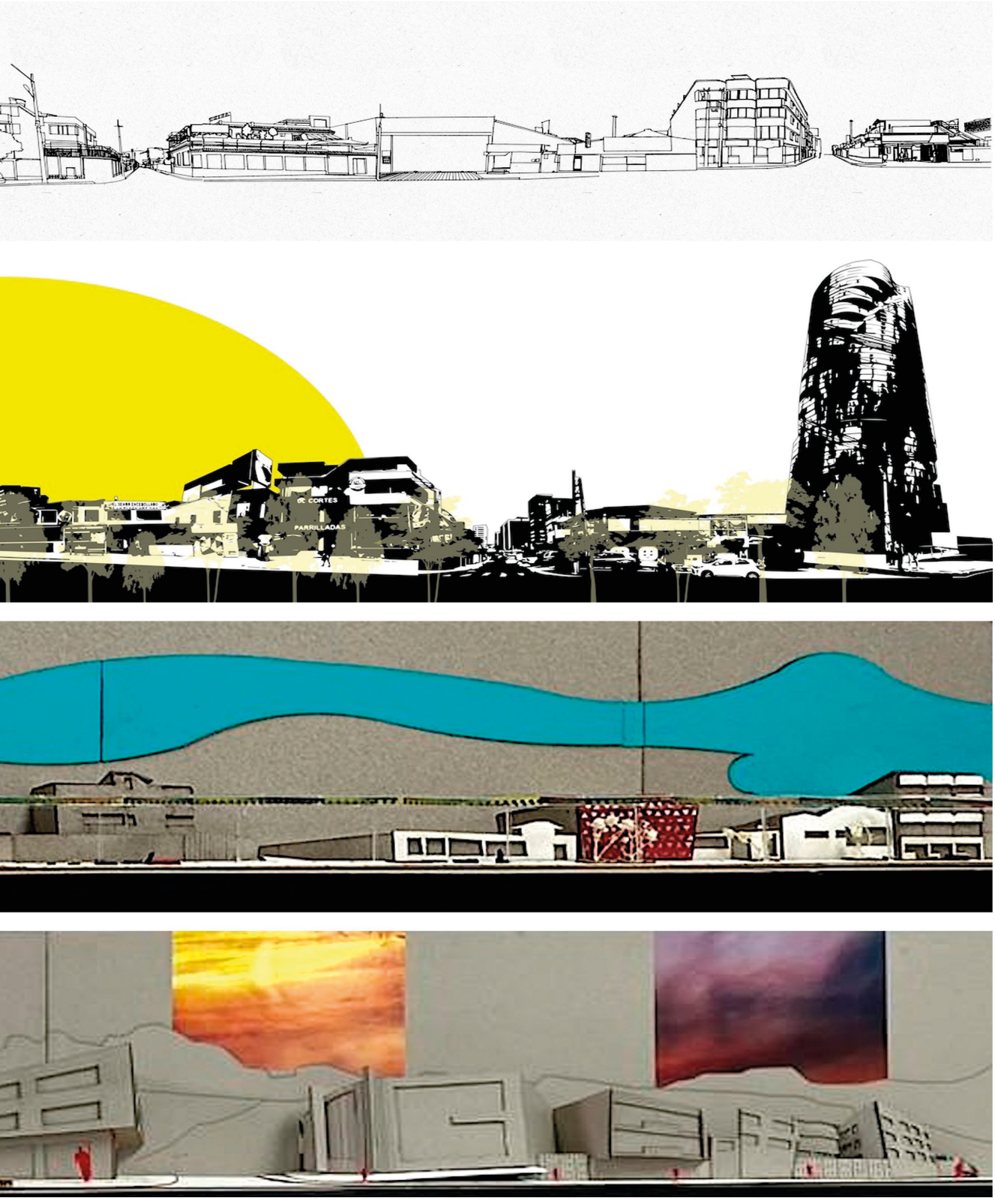


Figure 7: **Multiperspective view of the city-as-stage.** Performative architecture workshop (2024)

program's impact. For Martina Endara, a student in the workshop who was interviewed, ongoing documentation of her experience in the blog facilitated the synthesis of the observed social dynamics, guiding the design process toward sensitive, regenerative interventions.

The workshop's pedagogical outcomes went beyond the traditional view of architecture as solely about buildability, shifting the focus toward creating spatial experiences and discourses. Experimentation with *multiple perspectives* and the creation of atmospheres allowed students to explore fields such as curation and narrative creation. In the words of Mateo Verdesoto, another student interviewed, this approach represented a break with the primacy of aesthetic composition, replacing it with a design logic based on empathy and systemic coherence. Ultimately, the workshop fostered a critical competence aimed at dismantling rigid boundaries, promoting an inclusive and democratic vision of the city grounded in civic engagement and the reclamation of urban interstices.

4. Discussion

Returning to the research question, the systematization allows us to argue that situated design practice and the development of critical skills contributed to the formation of the desired profile through a pedagogical shift verifiable in the exercises. The students moved from analyzing control mechanisms (cartography, postcards, bestiary) to their design-based reinterpretation (multiperspective, thresholds)—that is, from a critical reading of the "city as screen" to the design of conditions for the "city as stage." This transition occurred simultaneously on two levels: the disciplinary level, where the project ceased to be understood as the production of a work and came to be seen as an argument and a stance; and the ethical level, where design decisions were evaluated based on their consequences for territories, bodies, and human and non-human actors. In this sense, the Workshop aims to train what might be called



Figure 8: Thresholds of the *City-Scene.* Performative architecture workshop (2024)



Figure 9: Workshop log. Performative architecture workshop (2024)

"utopizers"—that is, professionals who question analytically, critically, and projectively, and who understand design as a political visualization of futures; as Eva Franch (Adriá, 2022, p. 128) points out, "current generations demand that architecture take a stand, that it have the capacity to understand how these imaginaries of the future can challenge present realities."

The specific contribution of this experience to the debate on situated architecture, critical pedagogy, participatory urbanism, and the social production of the built environment does not lie in its theoretical foundations—which are shared with other educational experiences involving critical workshops and field-based learning, such as the Service-Learning initiative "Sensibilizando la arquitectura" (Raising Awareness of *Architecture*), carried out in the Historic Center of Quito (González Ortiz et al., 2023), or the educational territories explored through action research on the outskirts of Brasilia (Aureliano Silva et al., 2023), but rather in its pedagogical translation, evident

in the methodological operationalization of the tension between the conceived city and the lived city through a concrete sequence of exercises, and the use of *multiple perspectives* and *dioramas*—not as techniques of expression but as dialogical devices for mediation between architects, citizens, and urban spaceThisis grammar of exercises and techniques, rather than the conceptual frameworkt is transferable to other educational contexts.

The systematization also brought to light tensions and contradictions within the experience. The assessment of *the* "screen city" retained a subjective bias that limits its reliability outside the pedagogical framework; insufficient mastery of digital tools and graphic language limited the communicative power of some results; and an unresolved contradiction persists between the goal of co-production with citizens and an exercise that, in this edition, took place primarily within the classroom, with citizen participation serving more as a conceptual goal than as an actual practice. Institutional conditions such as the semester-based structure, variations in the academic curriculum, traditional assessment systems, and teaching workload also shape the experience and limit the direct transfer of the methodology to contexts with different curricular conditions.

5. Conclusions

This study is based on a specific case: a pilot workshop, a cohort of thirteen students, and a single city of study; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to all of Latin American architectural education, but they do yield interesting results regarding the proposed critical reformulation of the graduate profile. Following Jara (2018), read the conclusions as guiding insights from a specific experience, open to dialogue with other practices.

With this caveat in mind, the experience suggests that project-based teaching can move beyond an object-centered and purely visual approach when organized around relational dynamics and the ethics of care; that thinking about the city from the perspective of interstices and intermediate spaces enables students to develop political and design capabilities where conventional architecture fails to perceive value. That representation—understood as mediation rather than illustration—constitutes an effective vehicle for the simultaneous development of critical, communicative, and ethical competencies.

The pedagogical challenge remains: to complement the graduate profile with these competencies through experimental and context-specific educational proposals. Several lines of research remain open to test the methodology with new cohorts and in new contexts, involve citizens effectively in the design process, and follow up with graduates to assess the persistence of this profile in their professional practice. Educating conscious citizens, creative students, and professionals committed to transforming their environment is not the result of a formula, but rather of a pedagogical practice that—like the "city as stage" it proposes—is built on interaction, reciprocity, interdependence, and the constant shifting of perspectives.

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