

EXTENDED SUMMARY

CREATIVE PROCESS AND EXPERIENTIAL PLACES: ACCOUNT OF A DESIGN EXERCISE IN CHAMIZAL PARK AT CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MÉXICO

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects on the importance of understanding the environment prior to intervening in it, particularly within the fields of design and architecture. Numerous studies emphasize the value of identifying the conditions shaping a situation before proposing solutions. This perspective supports the use of fieldwork as a methodological tool comparable to laboratory experiments, where the boundaries between interior and exterior, micro and macro, are dissolved to incorporate social, political, and economic dimensions into the investigative process. In this view, the environment becomes part of the experimental framework, allowing researchers to refine or redefine their assumptions through interaction with diverse actors and disciplines (Latour, 1983). Similarly, the environment provides meaningful feedback that can reshape the learner's trajectory (Papanek, 1972), encouraging active engagement with one's surroundings to stimulate cognitive and creative processes.

Despite its value, direct engagement with the field is not always feasible due to constraints such as lack of access, security concerns, or events like the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper thus explores the educational potential of out-of-classroom experiences, where students engage as active agents capable of observing, describing, discussing, and acting within a specific context. These situated learning experiences complement formal education and contribute significantly to the students' academic and professional development.

2 DEVELOPMENT

This work explores the connection between creativity, intelligence, and environment within the teaching-learning process of design, focusing on an intervention exercise carried out by students from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. It begins with a theoretical review of creativity as a complex capacity complementary to intelligence, developed through multiple theoretical approaches since the mid-twentieth century. The argument is made that creativity should not be understood as an isolated skill, but rather as a faculty requiring judgment, integration

of diverse modes of thinking, persistence, openness to multiple solutions, and contextual sensitivity.

The development of creativity in design students demands an education oriented not only toward techniques and methodologies of the project but also toward a critical understanding of the physical, social, and political environment in which the object of design is situated. Based on this premise, an intervention exercise was designed in Chamizal Park, in Ciudad Juárez, as a situated learning experience. The goal was to foster direct engagement with the space, encourage sensory perception, stimulate critical analysis, and promote interdisciplinary collaboration between undergraduate architecture students and master's students in creative studies.

The exercise involved students observing, walking through, and recording the park environment through a sensory and reflective immersion, with the objective of designing and installing temporary interventions. These interventions were expected to respond to the site in a critical and creative manner, using available materials and engaging in dialogue with existing elements. The activity was also framed as a space for bodily, sensory, and social experimentation, aimed at triggering both convergent and divergent thinking.

Mixed teams were formed with students from different academic levels and disciplines, allowing for a dialogue between bodies of knowledge, experiences, and approaches to the design process. Each team interpreted the site from a unique perspective: one focused on collective memory through sensory stations; another explored the duality of the space (natural-artificial); a third addressed its political dimension, considering the park as a place of transit and refuge for migrants; and another team created a minimal cartography of the park, highlighting its furniture, shade, and gathering points, with a focus on sustainability and non-invasive intervention.

The process involved both empirical appropriation of the space and the generation of personal and collective narratives about it. These experiences were translated into visual, textual, and spatial forms of representation. Subsequent reflection revealed not only the different ways of interpreting and acting upon the environment but also the role of collaboration, leadership, dialogue, and negotiation in the development of design proposals. Furthermore, the integration of rational

(structured, functional) and intuitive (flexible, exploratory) thinking was emphasized as essential to creative formation.

Finally, closing products were created—written or graphic reports in which the design process, conceptual and material justification, and learning outcomes were documented. This exercise demonstrated that direct experience with space activates memory, generates emotional connections, stimulates creativity, and encourages a rethinking of the designer's role as observer, actor, and mediator between people and places. Interdisciplinary work, shared spatial experience, and bodily engagement are fundamental to strengthening creative processes and critical thinking in professional education contexts.

3 CONCLUSION

The pedagogical value of spatial interventions is emphasized as formative exercises that promote observation, environmental awareness, and decision-making in real-world contexts. These practices allow students to apply various modes of thinking—analytical, intuitive, reproductive, or productive—and to test their skills in complex situations. Through site immersion, students generated ideas based on direct experience, which were then discussed, negotiated, and materialized into collective proposals. The diversity of methodological approaches and educational levels did not hinder collaboration; rather, it enriched it by fostering the exchange of perspectives and the development of shared strategies.

Peer feedback and the preparation of individual reports enabled each participant to reflect on the process, identify meaningful learning outcomes, and recognize the value of collective work. Moreover, the direct engagement with reality challenged preconceived notions and activated creative processes essential to academic formation. Finally, the study highlights the importance of fostering in students habits of critical thinking, observational and logical skills, and an active disposition toward addressing real-world problems—encouraging the development of collaboratively and contextually grounded design proposals.

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