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“From paper to house: small experimental architectures”

Abstract

Paper, wood, plastic and metal: those are the materials with which students build their first architecture. 

One Man Living is a research and teaching project that started as an experiment in 2007 with a group of 40 freshmen students as part of the Laboratory of Interior Architecture of the School of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. Currently, the work involves a large team of professors, PhD candidates and reaches much more students.

The One Man Living project's goal is to allow young fellows to approach architecture, not only through books or drawings, but also by building self-designed small livable environments. The project is inspired by similar European teaching experiences born in other schools of architecture as well as by practical examples both from the past, such as emergency prototypes from the '60s, and from the present. Students are therefore called to think on issues of minimum spaces and interior scale, dry masonry solutions and low cost materials.

First year students explore the subject by studying and designing small living spaces for one person such as: emergency units, first housing for immigrants or homeless, units for singles, artists' studios, shelters or "think tanks".

There are not many opportunities for architecture students, especially in Italian universities, to be able to build their own projects or to see them built. Often, such experiences are obtained by attending workshops or international seminars, but hardly during the curricular activities. That’s why we have drawn a line of research, One Man Living, which intends to test the potential of a concrete experience inserted in the institutional university-activities of training of future architects.

The basic requirements consist of using green materials, low cost manufacturing, and rational assembly principles.

Each project is developed from design to executive details; the students are required to project and realize a small living space for one person. Eventually a panel of experts will be called, as in a real architectural competition, to selects the "winner".

One man living's goal is to make the students aware of the problems and of the tools of an architectural project, from the initial idea and the first drawings to its realization: from Paper to House, indeed.

Nine selected prototypes have been built by the students in in 1:1 scale so far.