



Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

**Departement Architektur
Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der
Architektur (gta)**

ETH Zürich
Prof. Dr. Laurent Stalder
Professor für Architekturtheorie
HIL E 64.1
Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5
8093 Zürich

Telefon +41 44 633 76 63
Telefax +41 44 633 18 82
laurent.stalder@gta.arch.ethz.ch
www.stalder.arch.ethz.ch

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External Review for the Kharkiv School of Architecture

It is with the outmost pleasure, that I write this review for the Kharkiv School of Architecture. I am writing in the position of the Professor for Architectural Theory at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (*Institut gta*), at the Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich. I am a full professor at this institution since 2018, having served as an assistant professor both at ETH and Université Laval in Québec before. From 2017 to 2021 I was head of the *Institut gta*, and from 2020 to 2022 in charge of the Departments Strategy and Curriculum Revision. In 2009 I was visiting scholar at the MIT School of Architecture and Planning and in 2019 visiting professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. In 2022 I headed an Evaluation Committee for Architectural Schools for the French Ministry of Culture. Thus, having been confronted with different contexts of research and teaching, I feel comfortable, to assess from a scientific, pedagogical and administrative point of view the Kharkiv School of Architecture.

I came to know the Kharkiv School of Architecture through a summer school initiated and coordinated by a guest researcher at our chair, the art historian Myroslava Liakhovych, which took place in summer 2023 both in Zürich and in Lviv in collaboration with Prof. Daria Ozhyhanova. The summer school aimed at training Ukrainian university students to survey Ukraine's modernist heritage with analogue and digital tools, with the goal of both recording and documenting the impressive modern heritage in Lviv and with the possibility to expand this research in the future to other cities. This first encounter with the Kharkiv School of Architecture, its faculty and its students proved to be an impressive introduction to its educational system. The nine, female students who attended the course had a deep knowledge of architecture and its history, an excellent training in the basic skills of the discipline, like surveying or drawing, but more over were exceptionally motivated and curious. In the summer school in Zurich the students gathered the fundamentals, which they then were able to apply on 5 different buildings in Lviv in the following weeks.

This individual quality, that we could observe during the summer school in Zurich, is the result of the educational path of the Kharkiv School, that convinces through its precise and well-crafted structure. Building up on a comprehensive understanding of architecture, the curriculum provides the students from the start and throughout their studies, on the one side a solid theoretical base, both in the humanities and technology, and on the other side a thorough practical education, where design and skills are taught in parallel. In a convincing way, the school is thus able to educate the students both technically and intellectually, while relying on design for their synthesis. In the best possible sense, the Kharkiv School of architecture, is both a technical school with an university education and a university with a practical education.

Particularly well shaped is the incremental path that runs throughout the studies from the first year up to the diploma. Thus all disciplines go from the first to the last year. This is particularly true for the studio. There every year the scale of the projects raises. The studio begins in the first year with the most intimate program, that is housing, followed by larger programs, like institutions and dwelling, ending in the last year with the largest architectural scale, that is the city. In this last year, particular care is also given to the burning societal question of re-use, showing the capacity of the school to react and adapt to the challenges facing our society in the 21st century. The commitment to the practice of architecture is similarly underlined in this last year, through the mandatory internship.

The commitment both to practice and theory is similarly reflected in the teaching staff, combining architects in practice and researcher. While in numerous international schools, it has become rare (as a consequence of a raising academisation of the profession), that practising architects teach (look at France, the UK, numerous Ivey League Schools in the US), the Kharkiv School of architecture is rightly keeping alive this tradition (as does our school, ETH in Zurich). This commitment to practice allows the teacher to transmit a knowledge gained outside the school, in direct contact with the vicissitudes of the profession.

For a reviewer, writing from a country like Switzerland, however, perhaps the most impressive, is how the school was able to relocate from Kharkiv to Lviv and to continue to give to their students a first rate education, supported by a rarely dedicated team. One cannot acknowledge enough such a commitment.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me

Sincerely



Prof. Dr Laurent Stalder