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OVADA Workshops: From Material Experiment to Building Knowledge through Nature-Based Construction

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ABSTRACT

OVADA Building Workshops demonstrate that nature-based construction requires more than simply using alternative materials; it involves the integrated consideration of materials, construction techniques, and practical knowledge. The OVADA Building Workshops began in 2018 in the Barbaros Polje in Urla, İzmir, through hands-on building workshops that brought together participants from different disciplines. The main aim of these workshops was to support theoretical knowledge of natural building materials and construction techniques through full-scale practical applications. This paper retrospectively examines four OVADA building workshops in terms of material experimentation, construction processes, design decisions, and the relationship established with the place.

In the first OVADA building workshop, a semi-open structure consisting of gabion walls and an eight-meter-diameter geodesic dome was constructed. During this workshop, the production, assembly, and construction processes of a predetermined structural system were experienced at full scale. In the second OVADA workshop, different natural building techniques, including adobe, rammed earth, gabion construction, and earth plaster applied over straw walls, were implemented within the same site. Thus, the focus of the workshops evolved from constructing a single structural system toward the comparative experience of different materials and construction techniques.

In the third OVADA was held online due to pandemics. The design proposals were evaluated according to criteria such as local use, originality, ease of construction, cost, durability, and future applicability. At this stage, construction knowledge was no longer limited to understanding how a particular material should be applied; the feasibility of design decisions and their relationship with local needs also became integral parts of the process. In the OVADA workshop 3.5, small-scale interventions were carried out on existing rural wells using available waste and reclaimed materials to create covers and upper structural elements. In this way, the focus of the workshops shifted from producing a new structure toward

engaging with the existing environment and developing site-specific interventions using available materials.

Taken together, these four workshops demonstrate a gradual progression from the construction of a structural system to the comparative exploration of material and construction techniques, the evaluation of design decisions, and interventions within the existing environment. The OVADA experience shows that full-scale, collective building workshops can function not only as environments for transmitting existing construction knowledge, but also as spaces for generating new knowledge through the relationships established among materials, craftsmanship, design, local needs, and place.

KEY WORDS:
Nature-based construction; Earth-based construction; Design-build workshops; Material experimentation; Building knowledge