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Developing Design Strategies within Vernacular Context: A Social Responsibility-Based Approach to Architectural Education

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ABSTRACT

Although architecture is inherently shaped by social, cultural, and environmental factors, contemporary practices often limit architects' engagement with broader societal responsibilities. Integrating "social responsibility" concept into architectural education provides a framework to address this gap, emphasizing ethical responsibilities, sustainability, and community involvement. Architectural Design Studio 3 at Abdullah Gül University, conducted during the 2022 and 2023 academic years, explored this idea by focusing on culturally significant sites, Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/Istanbul, to study human-environment interactions and local habitat sustainability. Students conducted multidimensional design research to develop strategies at urban, neighborhood, and building levels. This study evaluates how well their design concepts reflect social responsibility principles. For this, a mixed-methods approach was used: first, a systematic literature review and thematic analysis were employed to define social responsibility principles in architecture; then, students' concept statements were analyzed through content and thematic analysis. The findings show that these principles effectively guided students in developing inclusive spatial strategies responsive to cultural and environmental contexts. This highlights the importance of incorporating social responsibility principles into architectural education to enhance students' ethical awareness, contextual understanding, and inclusive design thinking.

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1. Introduction

While architecture is increasingly losing its influence in addressing complex societal and environmental challenges, concepts such as "ethics" and "social responsibility" have re-emerged as vital frameworks to redefine the architect's role. This decline in architecture's societal impact has led to greater interest in design approaches that address social issues beyond just aesthetics or technical concerns. In this context, "social responsibility," which derives its broader principles from the "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)" concept, focuses on the ideal relationships between global corporations, governments, citizens, and stakeholders (Crowther & Aras, 2008). Based on CSR, social responsibility in architecture encompasses themes like sustainability, accountability, transparency, community engagement, and responsiveness, all

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supporting sustainable development by addressing environmental and societal issues alongside economic factors (Chapple & Moon, 2005; Crowther & Aras, 2008; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2001). Historically, a major turning point occurred when architecture became fully responsible for shaping the built environment, requiring architects to consider broader ethical and societal aspects of design (Tanju, 2003). In light of this shift, incorporating social responsibility into architectural education and discourse has become essential for training professionals capable of creating sustainable, ethical, and inclusive built environments.

In this context, architectural education plays a crucial role in developing socially responsible designers who can address current societal and environmental challenges. A key component of this educational process is the design studio, where students are expected to develop conceptual frameworks that demonstrate ethical and contextual understanding from the early stages of design. Kyropoulou (2024) argues that there is a significant gap between the concept of sustainability and architectural education, mainly due to the lack of clear methods and tools that help students effectively incorporate sustainable principles into their design processes. Supporting this view, Burton and Salama (2023) focus on integrating "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" knowledge into architectural education at both global and national accreditation levels. They emphasize the need for theoretical frameworks, validated strategies, and interdisciplinary teaching and learning experiments to embed SDGs into curricula and studio practices. In line with this concern, Qiu et al. (2023) developed a situational teaching framework for a third-year architectural design studio at Zhejiang University, incorporating investigations of historical background, economic and social structures, public services, and human needs to create an effective framework for improving students' ability to address social needs through design. Similarly, Calikusu et al. (2023) assessed how design studios influence students' knowledge, skills, and awareness of social, economic, and environmental sustainability through quantitative hypothesis testing and thematic qualitative analysis. Their findings show that both studio courses and theoretical lectures significantly enhance students' understanding of sustainability concepts. Complementing these perspectives, Mazalán et al. (2022) advocate for integrating social science methodologies such as sociology, anthropology, environmental studies, and behavioral psychology into architecture education curricula to promote participatory and user-centered design methods. These approaches help develop students' analytical, empathetic, and collaborative skills, enabling them to incorporate social dynamics into architectural practice. Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of equipping architecture students with the conceptual and methodological tools necessary to address sustainability and social responsibility throughout their architectural design education. Since the early stages of the design process are essential in shaping effective and responsible solutions to design problems, social responsibility can serve as a foundation for achieving creative, original, and high-quality results through structured frameworks.

On this basis, several scholars emphasize that enhancing students' ability to navigate complex design problems remains a key challenge in design education (Casakin & Goldschmidt, 1999). Structuring the problem is crucial for developing meaningful frameworks, while design concepts act as guiding ideas that shape spatial strategies and influence early design decisions (Eckert & Stacey, 2000; Mumcu & Düzenli, 2018). As Goldschmidt (1997) notes, these concepts are often uncertain at first and evolve through interaction with the problem space, where designers generate and refine partial ideas. Conceptual development is closely connected to sources of inspiration, personal interpretation, and shared cultural references, ultimately forming a unique design language (Eckert & Stacey, 2000). Despite the central role of the design studio in architectural education, a lack of structured understanding regarding how conceptual modeling helps develop students' creative and problem-solving skills remains a significant gap (Akalin & Sezal, 2009).

Building on this theoretical approach, this study argues that integrating social responsibility principles into the early design stages can provide a stronger pedagogical foundation for fostering critical thinking, contextual awareness, and value-based decision-making in architectural education. Therefore, to reflect this perspective, the Architectural Design Studio 3 at Abdullah Gül University (AGÜ), conducted during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years, was explicitly structured around social responsibility principles in architecture. The studio aimed to explore how social responsibility concept can be integrated

into architectural design education, with a particular focus on studio-based learning. As a result, this study examines a studio course centered on social responsibility principles to achieve this goal, analyzing how these principles influence students' approaches to design problems. By tracking how students developed their conceptual frameworks in response to a framed design brief focused on social responsibility, the research highlights the educational potential of embedding the social responsibility concept within architectural design. Architectural Design Studio 3 was selected for this purpose since third-year students had completed core compulsory courses in architectural design and theory, building and construction technologies, and urban design outlined in the architecture department's curriculum at AGÜ. Additionally, they had finished university-level elective courses focused on SDGs. As Bektaş (2001) indicates, vernacular structures within traditional settlements are authentic and direct reflections of life, representing a common ground between culture and architecture. Therefore, vernacular settlements were chosen as project sites to discuss cultural issues related to social responsibility, especially focusing on the sustainability of local habitats. For this purpose, two distinct areas, Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/İstanbul, were selected as project sites over the following years, since they offer traditional and geographically diverse environments. Students conducted multidimensional design research during on-site visits to these areas, including historical documentation, field observations, mapping, and stakeholder interviews to analyze socio-cultural, natural, and built-environmental contexts. Based on their findings, they developed design strategies through architectural concepts and usage scenarios at urban, neighborhood, and building scales. These proposed design concepts were then evaluated within this study using a mixed-methods research approach, including thematic and content analyses and a systematic literature review, to demonstrate how third-year architecture students integrated social responsibility principles into the design concepts of their project proposals.

2. Materials and methods

This study employed mixed-methods research to examine how social responsibility principles are reflected in the design concepts developed by students. The study consisted of two steps: defining social responsibility principles in architecture and analyzing students' design concept proposals within the social responsibility perspective (Figure 1). First, a systematic literature review was conducted using the Web of Science database, and thematic analysis was used to identify social responsibility principles in architecture. Next, concept-statements created by students in two design studios, "Socially Responsible Architecture: Alternative Scenarios for Divriği" and "Social Gathering Space at Büyükada," were analyzed using thematic and content analysis methods to assess the extent to which these principles appeared in their design concepts. Therefore, a systematic literature review was used for data gathering, while thematic and content analyses were used for data analysis within the study's framework.

A systematic literature review refers to a research method used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing studies related to a specific research question, involving collecting and critically analyzing data drawn from those studies (Kitchenham, 2004; Liberati et al., 2009). This process follows a structured, transparent, and repeatable approach designed to reduce bias and ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature, resulting in trustworthy findings that support sound conclusions and informed decisions (Kitchenham, 2004; Moher et al., 2009). A systematic review seeks to find all empirical studies that meet predetermined inclusion criteria to address a particular research question or hypothesis (Moher et al., 2009). These reviews include clear objectives, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic search strategies applied across selected databases. As Petticrew and Roberts (2006) explained, systematic reviews differ from traditional literature reviews because they follow an explicit protocol, which improves reliability and allows for critical evaluation of the included studies. This method enables researchers to combine findings from multiple studies to generate evidence-based insights and identify knowledge gaps within a specific field.

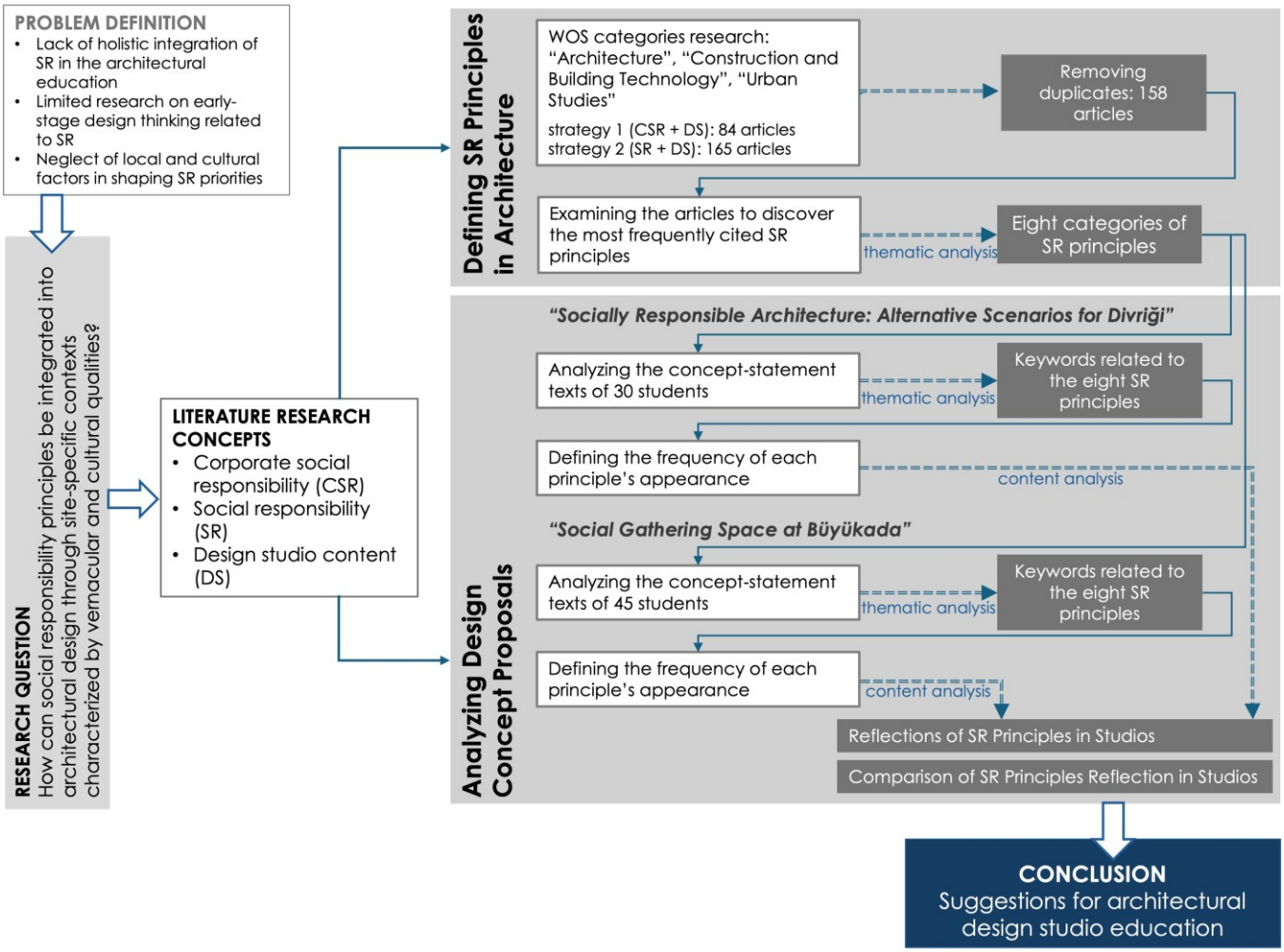

Figure 1. Research design of the study

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method and independent analytical approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns called themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2014). It can be used either inductively or deductively, depending on the researcher's theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as an approach rather than a strict method, highlighting its flexibility across different research designs and epistemological perspectives. This approach helps researchers organize and describe detailed datasets while also interpreting their deeper meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Its flexibility enables researchers to explore viewpoints among participant groups, identify similarities and differences, and uncover unexpected insights from extensive or unstructured datasets (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The coding process is essential in thematic analysis because it simplifies complexity by identifying key features within the data. Researchers assign labels to significant data segments that represent specific topics or themes, creating a clear framework of interconnected concepts (King, 2004). Thematic analysis is particularly useful for understanding socially constructed meanings and narratives in their context, making it highly relevant in fields like education, psychology, cultural studies, and architectural heritage. It also improves methodological rigor through transparent coding processes, theme development, and reflexive interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017). In the end, thematic analysis helps researchers to summarize and generate theories from data, resulting in conceptually rich and methodologically sound findings.

Content analysis, on the other hand, refers to quantifying different types of documents, which involves classifying written, visual, or spoken material into distinct categories and analyzing how often these categories appear (Simon & Burstein, 1985). This process measures frequencies quantitatively while also aiming to understand the texts' structural characteristics and their underlying conceptual frameworks. This approach is convenient for exploring how specific topics, concepts, or ideologies are represented and highlighted across various media. Content analysis enables the identification, summarization, structuring, comparison with other datasets, and analytical interpretation of existing data (Smith, 1975). Through identifying recurring themes or symbolic expressions, this method goes beyond surface content to reveal deeper values and intentions in the material. Researchers like Ericsson and Simon (1985), Kassarjian (1977), and Neuendorf (2002) emphasize that content analysis involves not just the message of the texts but also the reasons and methods behind their particular structures. The approach is widely used across many fields, serving as a fundamental tool in discourse analysis in areas such as sociology, education, communication, architecture, and cultural heritage. The analytical process usually begins by selecting a set of texts or documents. Next, a systematic coding scheme is developed to record the presence and frequency of specific concepts or themes. Within this framework, key terms or themes are quantified, and the findings are often represented visually with tables or charts for interpretation (Neuman, 2009). Thus, content analysis functions as both a qualitative and quantitative method, offering objectivity and replicability. As noted by Mayring (2010) and Erdoğan and Semerci (2021), content analysis emphasizes not only individual concepts but also the larger structures and contexts in which they exist, leading to richer and more detailed insights. Therefore, content analysis goes beyond simple counting; it assesses how concepts function within their context and how they relate to each other. Specifically, qualitative content analysis enables a deeper exploration by examining similarities and differences encountered during classification.

3. A social responsibility-based architectural design studio experience

Architectural design education at AGÜ aims to foster the ability to critically question and reinterpret the connections between architecture and disciplines such as culture, art, science, society, environment, and technology. Students are expected to develop essential skills in design, inquiry, abstraction, critical evaluation, and decision-making based on multiple criteria during their first and second years. Additionally, AGÜ emphasizes sustainability by requiring students to complete five elective courses on global issues from various departments, focusing on the SDGs. The curriculum promotes a balanced and sustainable approach to both built and natural environments, including an emphasis on heritage and ecology. It also aims to raise awareness of urban design and landscape architecture in relation to local and global values, planning strategies, and cultural, economic, and political factors. By the third year, students should incorporate the technical knowledge gained from courses on structural systems, building materials, and architectural detail design into their projects. Consequently, Architectural Design Studio 3 is organized around students' accumulated knowledge, with a focus on the urban-rural interface, construction systems, and vernacular architecture. Having previously completed architectural design projects on individual housing units and repetitive building clusters, third-year students are expected to design a public space at the intersection of urban and rural environments. In this context, discussions about sustainability, nature, human interactions, and geographical conditions are integrated into the studio, creating a platform for active exploration of these themes.

Based on this framework, two design studios were conducted during the fall semesters of 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 academic years, named "Socially Responsible Architecture: Alternative Scenarios for Divriği" in Divriği/Sivas and "Social Gathering Space at Büyükada" in Büyükada/İstanbul, both focusing on social responsibility in architecture. The studio brief encouraged students to develop new visions for gathering spaces within the urban cores of the selected project sites, emphasizing inclusive design and the use of natural building materials and techniques. Students developed programmatic solutions that included, but were not limited to, workspaces, meeting rooms, multi-functional spaces based on specific user scenarios, collective production areas, recreational zones, accommodation units, administrative offices, storage, stationery, and service areas. The studio also involved designing open and semi-open spaces, as well as landscape elements that respond to the existing landscape character and production systems. To support this studio design, three faculty members with expertise in building and construction

technology, urban and environmental design, and cultural heritage, along with research assistants from related fields, co-instructed the studios. Their interdisciplinary collaboration enhanced the teaching approach and helped integrate building details and landscape design into the projects.

The social responsibility-focused architectural design studio was structured to include discussions, site visits, and analysis studies, leading to concept development based on the synthesis of these analysis studies. This was followed by a design development phase, concluding with the final product (Figure 2). Throughout each semester, social responsibility principles were clarified through lectures, readings, and follow-up discussions to provide students with a structured foundation. Additionally, students conducted comprehensive literature reviews before the site visits, analyzing conceptual frameworks, documents, and maps in detail. During the site visits, students worked in groups based on assigned analysis topics from an interdisciplinary perspective. In these visits, interviews with municipalities and non-governmental organizations were conducted, providing students with insights into the spatial and socio-cultural contexts of the area. Similar projects were examined on-site during the visits, with analyses discussed interactively among student groups.

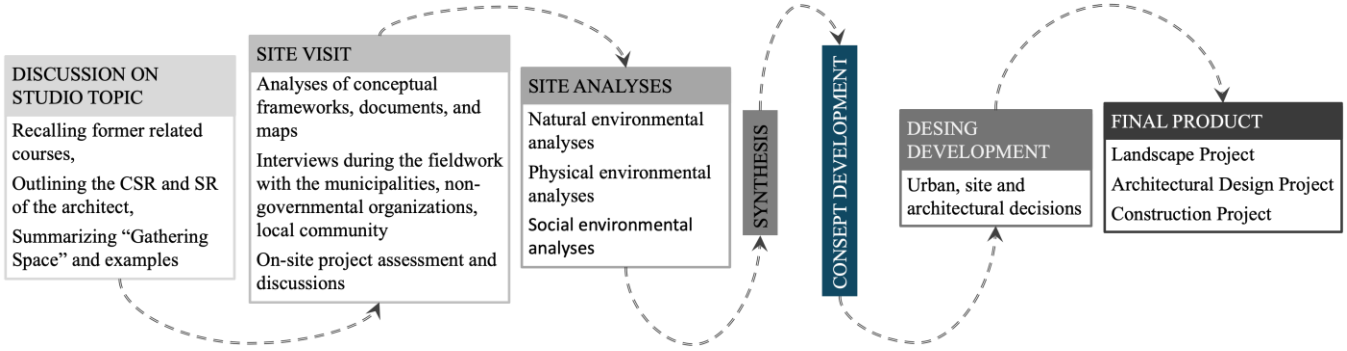

Figure 2. Phases of the social responsibility-based architectural design studio

In both the Divriği and Büyükada studios, site analyses were conducted across natural, physical, and social environment categories to understand the multi-layered character of the site. The natural environment category includes the area's physical and ecological features, from topography to environmental characteristics. The physical environment category describes the site's spatial layout and structural elements, such as street patterns, neighborhood units, building facades, architectural details, construction techniques, material use, and artisan culture. The social environment category considers historical development along with socio-economic structures, demographic distribution, cultural traditions, ethnic groups, production practices, and daily activities. These analyses were then integrated into comprehensive syntheses of the natural, physical, and social environments, serving as the basis for the concept design and guiding design decisions. Synthesis studies, which included field analysis and context assessment, were conducted using written descriptions, diagrams, visuals, collages, and models to explore the relationships uncovered through site analysis and synthesis. The spatial, social, and cultural connections that the design aims to establish with the site are communicated through a multi-layered approach that uses these visual and written narratives. Finally, students developed their concept proposals based on the synthesis findings (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Throughout this process, students received guidance to develop their conceptual frameworks grounded in principles of social responsibility and related values, which subsequently informed their design choices.

As a result, in both studios, students developed inclusive design visions rooted in local traditions of social life and architecture. They collaborated with local experts to explore vernacular techniques, which shaped their socially responsible design strategies. This process improved their understanding of traditional architecture as a means to achieve contextual and ethical design, encouraging innovative methods that combine historical knowledge with contemporary requirements. Ultimately, the studios provided a platform for students to examine the architect's role in developing resilient, site-specific environments using local and natural materials.

Figure 3. Examples of concept development from the Divriği/Sivas Studio

Figure 4. Examples of concept development from the Büyükada/İstanbul Studio.

4. Results and discussion

To examine how third-year architecture students reflected social responsibility principles in their project proposals' design concepts in two design studios, "Socially Responsible Architecture: Alternative Scenarios for Divriği" and "Social Gathering Space at Büyükada," social responsibility principles in architecture were first defined, followed by an analysis of the concept-statement texts developed by the students for their design proposals.

4.1. Defining social responsibility principles in architecture

As the first step of the study, the principles of social responsibility (SR) in architecture were identified. Although lectures were given and readings assigned in the studio to provide students with a general overview of social responsibility principles, it was necessary to systematically identify these principles to understand how much they were reflected in the design concepts. Therefore, a comprehensive literature review was conducted using the Web of Science database. For this review, a search strategy was developed to cover the "social responsibility" principles addressed in the studio, as well as the broader concept of "corporate social responsibility" and related themes from various scales and scopes that align with the studio's theme. To achieve this, keywords related to "corporate social responsibility," "social responsibility," and "design studio content" were established (Table 1).

Table 1. Keywords for the literature search.

Concepts	Keywords
Corporate social responsibility	Corporate social responsibility, Corporate social responsibility strategy, Corporate social responsibility principle, Corporate social responsibility principles, Principles of corporate social responsibility, Strategies of corporate social responsibility
Social responsibility	Social responsibility, Social responsibility strategy, Social responsibility principle, Social responsibility principles, Principles of social responsibility, Strategies of social responsibility, Social responsiveness
Design studio content	Architect, Architecture, Design, Building, Construction, Urban, Urban design, Built environment, Heritage, Cultural heritage, Sustainable, Sustainable built environment, Sustainable design, Sustainable architecture, Sustainable urban design, Sustainability, Sustainable development

The literature search was conducted in two stages to expand the range of sources collected. In the first stage, articles that included at least one "corporate social responsibility" keyword and one "design studio content" keyword were collected. Then, in the second stage, articles containing at least one "social responsibility" keyword and one "design studio content" keyword were gathered. To keep the search focused, only original research articles in the categories of "Architecture," "Construction and Building Technology," and "Urban Studies" were included, and the keywords had to appear in the title, abstract, and keywords. During the first stage, 84 articles were identified, with one excluded due to missing an abstract. In the second stage, 165 articles were identified, and six were excluded for the same reason. After removing duplicates from both stages, 158 articles remained. These articles were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the "social responsibility in architecture principles." The initial analysis, supported by OpenAI, was validated through manual review. As a result, eight categories of social responsibility principles were identified, as defined below.

- **(SR1) Community Development** emphasizes the support and improvement of local communities through corporate social responsibility initiatives, aiming to foster social cohesion and sustainable community growth (Xie et al., 2020).
- **(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction** highlights corporate efforts to boost economic prosperity and reduce poverty within society (Othman, 2009; Winkler, 2012; Yáñez, 2015).
- **(SR3) Education and Capacity Building** focuses on promoting education, skill development, and capacity-building programs to empower individuals and communities (Chakrabarty, 1998; Manav, 2016; Othman, 2009; Pentireddi et al., 2024; Yáñez, 2015).
- **(SR4) Environmental Responsibility** involves corporate commitments to environmental protection, sustainable resource management, and mitigation of climate change impacts (Ajibike et al., 2023; Akotia & Sackey, 2018; Chang et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2018; Pentireddi et al., 2024; Somachandra et al., 2023; Tunji-Olayeni et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).
- **(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency** stresses the importance of ethical behavior, transparency, and accountability in corporate governance practices (Brunetta, 2016; Collinge, 2020; Kar & Jha, 2021; Ng et al., 2018; Pentireddi et al., 2024; Somachandra et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2020).
- **(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice** advocates for the protection of human rights, promotion of social equity, and advancement of social justice within corporate practices (Chakrabarty, 1998, 2001; Kaatz et al., 2005; Karaca et al., 2024; Winkler, 2012).
- **(SR7) Public Health and Well-being** targets the enhancement of public health, safety, and overall well-being through corporate initiatives and programs (Ernest et al., 2022; Kaatz et al., 2005; Kar & Jha, 2021; Ng et al., 2018; Tunji-Olayeni et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2020).
- **(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement** involves active engagement and participation of stakeholders in corporate decision-making processes to ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness (Collinge, 2020; Kaatz et al., 2005).

4.2. Analyzing design concept-statements

After defining the social responsibility principles in architecture, students' concept-statement texts from two design studios, "Socially Responsible Architecture: Alternative Scenarios for Divriği" (Divriği/Sivas) and "Social Gathering Space at Büyükada" (Büyükada/İstanbul), were analyzed to identify keywords they used to reflect social responsibility principles in their projects. For the Divriği/Sivas studio, one project lacked a concept statement and was excluded, resulting in an analysis of 30 projects; for the Büyükada/İstanbul studio, one project without a concept statement was similarly excluded, resulting in 45 projects for analysis. The selected concept statements were then subjected to thematic analysis to extract all keywords related to the predefined principles (Table 2 and Table 3). Throughout this process, manual coding was complemented by OpenAI-assisted validation to improve the accuracy and depth of the findings.

In the Divriği/Sivas studio, students' concept statements covered a range of keywords, most of which related to "(SR1) Community Development," followed in descending order by "(SR4) Environmental Responsibility," "(SR3) Education and Capacity Building," "(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction," "(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice," and "(SR7) Public Health and Well-being" principles. On the other hand, the keywords associated with "(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement" and "(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency" were more limited. When the concepts developed for the Divriği/Sivas studio were further analyzed, it was evident that elements such as urban memory, production culture, and social interaction were central, and the designs were organized around five main themes. The first theme emphasizes reviving craft and handicraft culture, revitalizing traditional forms of production like carpet making, motif processing, and woodworking through modern reinterpretations. The second theme, rural gastronomy and natural health, highlights community-based kitchens and therapeutic spaces utilizing local herbs, traditional recipes, and alternative treatment methods. The third theme focuses on preserving cultural heritage, including minstrelsy, square dances, and the representation of local musical traditions in public spaces. The fourth theme promotes social meetings and sharing spaces that support rural socialization through public markets, squares, and interaction areas. Lastly, a climate-sensitive and culture-bound architectural approach has emerged by reinterpreting local materials, such as adobe, stone, wood, and rammed earth, using modern building techniques. Therefore, the thematic analysis highlights Divriği's rural characteristics, where priorities focus on fostering community cohesion through economic and educational initiatives, respecting local building traditions, and preserving cultural identity, resulting in a strong emphasis on community and environment-related principles.

In the Büyükada/İstanbul studio, students' concept statements mainly focus on keywords aligned with "(SR1) Community Development" and "(SR4) Environmental Responsibility," followed by "(SR3) Education and Capacity Building" principles. Then, this was followed by "(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice," "(SR7) Public Health and Well-being," and "(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction" principles. On the other hand, none of the students included keywords related to "(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement." Further analysis of the concepts reveals four main themes that holistically address the island's natural, cultural, and social fabric. First, the idea of living in harmony with nature is emphasized through elements such as local flora, olive groves, flowers, forest textures, and aromatic plants, supported by sustainable building techniques and the use of natural materials. Second, social participation and inclusiveness are expressed through spaces dedicated to collective production, gastronomy, art, and learning areas that prioritize multicultural island identity and social justice. The third theme focuses on revitalizing cultural heritage by creating new narratives through elements like island memory, literature, music history, and craft traditions. Lastly, sensory and experiential spatial designs aim to deepen individuals' connection to space through festivals, interactive experiences, and designs that engage all five senses. Overall, the pattern gathered from the thematic analysis highlights Büyükada's rich natural and architectural heritage, encouraging projects that foster community cohesion, environmental responsibility, and learning through built interventions. Additionally, its well-established economic base, governance structures, and social-health frameworks may have led students to assume that stakeholder collaboration and ethical transparency mechanisms are already in place and thus require less attention.

Table 2. Keywords gathered from the Divriği/Sivas studio design concepts.

SR Principles	Reflected Keywords
(SR1) Community Development	active open area, activity square, amphitheater, areas for families, children, young people, bring people together, celebrate, chatting, come together, cultures brought together, exhibition areas, games offered by local people, gardening, gathering area, gathering space, green areas, introduce bees and products, keep culture alive, market, meeting, meeting areas, musical cafes, network to producers, open spaces, people gather around folk music, people of all ages, people produce together, place for wood hobby, playgrounds, preservation of memory, public forums, public space, resting, seed swaps, semi-open bazaar, sense of community, share, shared place for everyone, social events, socialization, socialize, spend time together, square, walking, weaving
(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction	Divkoop market, herbal markets selling plants, herbalist-cafe selling plants, bazaar, cafe, restaurant, commercial return, community-based tourism, earn money, efficient operations, exhibit and sell, exhibition area, exported to surrounding provinces, increase income sources, market, exhibition section, market produced works, marketing and promotion building, marketing by regular events, online sales, organic cafe, sales unit, sell own products, semi-outdoor seating, shop building
(SR3) Education and Capacity Building	adobe workshops, apitherapy applications, classes, creativity training, decor workshops, design workshop, dyeing workshop, education meetings, hydrotherapy, instructive area for formation process, interactive education, learning by cooking, master-apprentice training, meditation/yoga halls, museum-promotion-education, musical workshops, musicotherapy, organic production workshop, phytotherapy, specialized workshops, spinning, studios, technology workshop, therapy studios, trainings, weaving workshop, wood workshop, workshops
(SR4) Environmental Responsibility	adobe, adobe and wood facade, adobe blocks, andesite stone masonry, breathable walls, climatic conditions, cordwood technique, wood structure, laminated wood system, laminated wooden beams, landscape elements, materials specific to natural region, natural materials, natural stone, natural stone masonry, rammed earth, rammed earth walls, stone masonry, sustainability, traditional construction techniques, wood, wood columns and flooring, wood construction techniques, wood structural system, wooden facade, wooden floors, wooden structure
(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency	less bureaucracy
(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice	accessibility, accessibility of all people, appeal to all ages, disabled access, elderly knowledge transfer, inclusive design, inclusive design idea, inclusive design principle, inclusive design principles, inclusive user definition, inclusive user profile, people from all groups, people of all ages, genders and genres, same level access, wide target audience
(SR7) Public Health and Well-being	apitherapy, aroma therapy, care applications, collective meditation, hydrotherapy, massage, massage parlor, music relaxes people, psychological and spiritual health, relax with alternative activity, spa, stress relief
(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement	games offered by local people, invited to event, socially responsible architects

Then, the content analysis method was employed to determine how frequently students' concept statements referenced each principle of social responsibility in architecture. This was based on the ratio of students in the studio referencing each concept, using keywords gathered from the thematic analysis. The reflections of social responsibility principles in the design concepts of Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/İstanbul studios are interpreted according to the site contexts as follows (Figure 5):

Table 3. Keywords gathered from the Büyükada/İstanbul studio design concepts.

SR Principles	Reflected Keywords
(SR1) Community Development	activities, activities and awareness, activity areas, botanical mock-up area, bring people together of all age groups, bring people together through art, bring societies together, city tours, closed spaces, collaborative discussions, come together, common gathering area, communal learning, communal spaces, community center, community connection, community engagement, community kitchen, cultural exchange, cultural protection, ease of gathering, events, olive harvest, exchange ideas, festival, festival area, flowers, cultural play, forest-specific activities, garden gatherings, gather and express thoughts and ideas, gather people, gather people of all ages, genders, cultures, gathering center, gathering space, gatherings, gathers people with music, inclusive space, interaction with people, interactive setting, involve local community, maintain heritage, make, share and eat foods, memorial forest, modernize weaving culture, open air market, open spaces, open-air concert area, participant activities, platform for artistic expressions, popular area by people, private gardens, produce together, provide occupation, relax, rest, restaurant, semi-open spaces, sense of pride and continuity, share experiences, share observations, social gathering area, social interaction, square, strengthens community ties, tea parties, unite community, vibrant atmosphere, workshops
(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction	employment environment, jam, production, and sale of pet food, products from resin, recycling, syrup, sell here
(SR3) Education and Capacity Building	activity areas, archive library, aromatherapy, art and cooking workshop, art therapy, atelier, botanical cosmetics workshops, collaborative visual arts-based activities, collective kitchen, community kitchen, cooking workshops, culinary workshops, design, education on health benefits, drama therapy, educational component, educational programs, exhibition areas, exhibitions, greenhouse, interactive, interactive cooking sessions, interactive reading experiences, literary-related activities, live performances, market, meeting hall, multi-purpose hall, music sessions therapy, painting therapy, participatory production atelier, participatory workshops, production, production studios, published magazines, selling block, seminar, therapy, tissue culture lab, training, training and application areas, virtual events, weaving workshops, workshop areas, workshops, workshops crafting essences
(SR4) Environmental Responsibility	oak wood, active green area, biodiversity, building techniques, cordwood, glass brick, green energy, green texture for open and semi-open events, harmony with planet, hemp, hybrid construction, masonry stone, hybrid structure, irrigation canals, masonry, masonry stone, masonry walls, natural building techniques, natural landscapes, natural materials, natural stone and wood, rain gardens, rain harvesting, rammed earth, recyclable materials, recycling, renewable energy, roof extensions, rubble stone walls, slip straw walls, solar and wind analyses, stacked stone, stone, stone and wood, stone and wood carriers, stone masonry, sustainability, sustainable agriculture, sustainable living, sustainable rammed earth, sustainable wooden construction methods, timber, timber frame, traditional construction techniques, traditional facade cladding, traditional wood, traditional wood and masonry, traditional wood methods, traditional wooden frame, traditional wooden methods, traditional wooden structure with openings, traditional wooden walls, upcycle, wood, wood and stone, wood and stone masonry, wooden construction, wooden structure
(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency	cultural cooperative, collaborative discussion
(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice	accessibility, accessibility and convenience for all people, accessibility for diverse communities, accessibility of all people, accessible to all, accessible to everyone, barrier-free area appealing to all, catering to all age groups and abilities, disabled, inclusive, inclusive design, inclusive structure, inclusivity
(SR7) Public Health and Well-being	emotional well-being, felinotherapy, mental and physical well-being, psychological health, relaxing feature, therapeutic activities, therapies
(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement	-

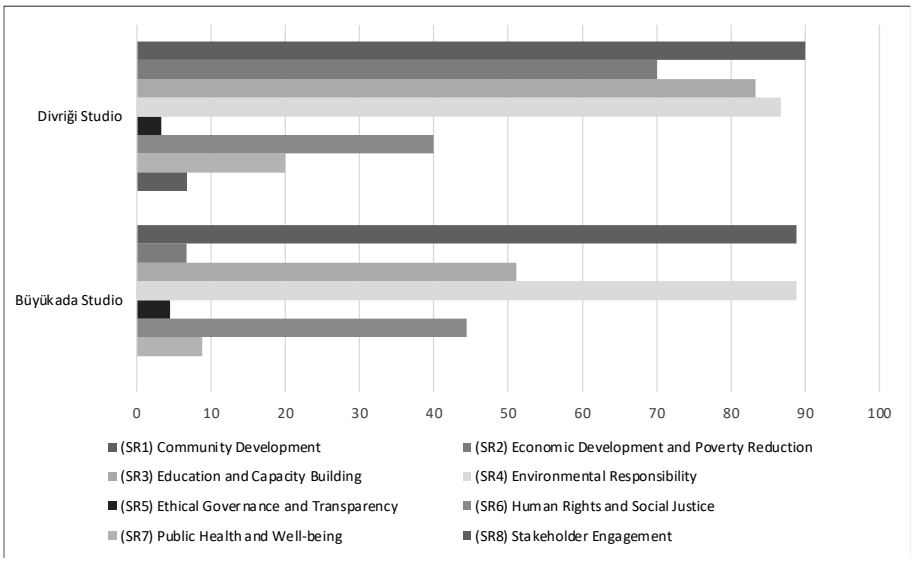

Figure 5. Reflections of social responsibility principles in the Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/İstanbul studios.

In the Divriği/Sivas studio, students primarily focused on "(SR1) Community Development" (90%) principle, followed by "(SR4) Environmental Responsibility" (87%), "(SR3) Education and Capacity Building" (83%), and "(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction" (70%) principles with higher rates. On the other hand, while 40% of students addressed "(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice," only 20% dealt with "(SR7) Public Health and Well-being." "(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement" (7%) and "(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency" (4%) received the least interest. Since Divriği has a rural context enriched by its cultural characteristics, nature, local traditions, building practices, as well as its demographic conditions, the interpretations of the design concepts related to the social responsibility principles in architecture make sense. Although elements of community participation were integrated into other principles, they were rarely addressed as a standalone focus in the design concepts. Similarly, issues related to ethics, governance, and transparency were not highlighted as separate themes.

In the Büyükada/İstanbul studio, students placed equal emphasis on "(SR1) Community Development" and "(SR4) Environmental Responsibility," with each reflected by 89% of the students. The students also paid moderate attention to "(SR3) Education and Capacity Building (51%)" and "(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice (44%)." In contrast, "(SR7) Public Health and Well-being (9%)," "(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction (7%)," and "(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency (4%)" received less focus. None of the students addressed "(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement." This pattern reflects Büyükada's strong traditions of community participation, communal living, and daily cultural practices, along with its educated population, which most clearly influence approaches to social justice and capacity building. Conversely, the island's vibrant tourism-driven economy, proximity to the urban periphery, and well-established public health and governance practices seem to lessen the focus on other principles.

When the students' approaches to their design concepts were interpreted in both studios, it can be argued that regional characteristics and their initial analyses directly influenced the outcomes. Students drew inspiration not only from analyses of the natural, physical, and social environments, where they examined the existing urban fabric, but also from historical studies of the project areas. These studies supported their understanding of social responsibility principles and enabled the development of context-sensitive solutions within this perspective.

Then, the reflections of social responsibility principles in design concepts for Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/İstanbul studios were compared and interpreted for each principle as follows (Figure 6):

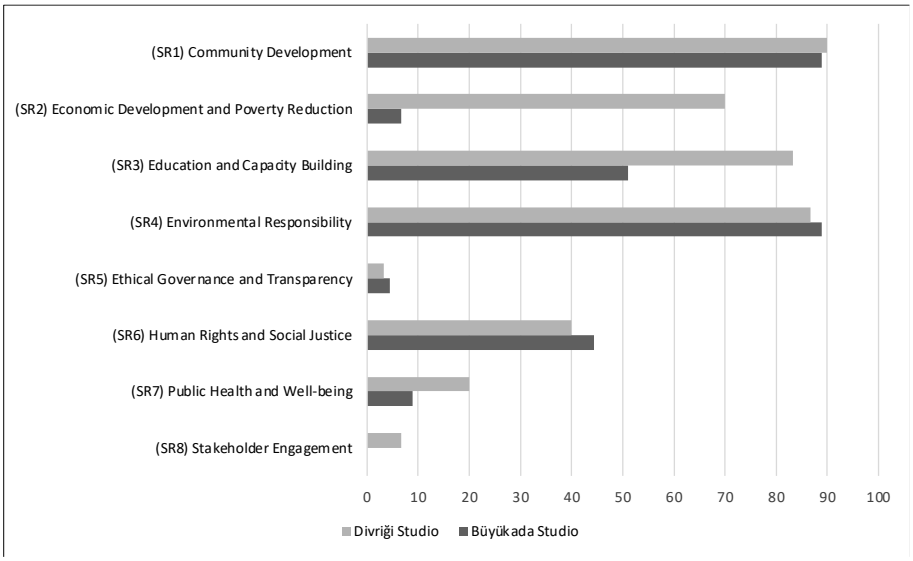

Figure 6. Comparison of social responsibility principles in the Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/Istanbul studios.

The "(SR1) Community Development" principle was incorporated into the design concepts by 90% of students in the Divriği/Sivas studio and 89% in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio. These high and nearly identical rates suggest that the studio's core theme of "gathering space" significantly influences the focus on developing and sustaining the local community. In both studios, students employed similar concepts (see Table 2 and Table 2) to highlight gathering opportunities at various scales and within different functional frameworks.

The "(SR2) Economic Development and Poverty Reduction" principle was a focus for 70% of students in the Divriği/Sivas studio, while only 7% of students in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio addressed it. This difference is attributed to the different rural-urban dynamics and economic development levels in the two project sites. In their design concepts, Divriği/Sivas students proposed solutions focused on local production and the economic circulation of locally made goods. In contrast, Büyükada/Istanbul students concentrated on issues like the labor environment and recycling.

The "(SR3) Education and Capacity Building" principle was most emphasized in the Divriği/Sivas studio, with 83% of students focusing on it. In comparison, 51% of students emphasized this principle in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio. Although students used more detailed keywords in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio to reflect this principle than those in the Divriği/Sivas studio (see Table 2 and Table 3), rural-urban dynamics significantly influence this outcome. Students' focus on incorporating site-specific cultural richness and natural resources into their projects as a means of education and capacity building, rather than solely for economic purposes, explains this result.

The "(SR4) Environmental Responsibility" principle was addressed by 87% of students in the Divriği/Sivas studio and 89% of students in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio. The natural environmental conditions of both project areas and sustainable construction practices that focus on using local materials were prominently integrated into the design concepts as part of this principle.

The "(SR5) Ethical Governance and Transparency" principle was reflected by 3% of students in the Divriği/Sivas studio and 54 students in the Büyükada/Istanbul studio. Although they met with local officials and community members during fieldwork and received feedback, the design concept proposals did not reflect this principle.

The "(SR6) Human Rights and Social Justice" principle was similarly addressed by students, with 40% of those in the Divriği/Sivas studio and 44% in the Büyükada/İstanbul studio incorporating it into their design concepts. They achieved this by embedding accessible and inclusive design strategies, adopting a universal approach to accommodate all ages and ability levels.

The "(SR7) Public Health and Well-being" principle was primarily emphasized in the Divriği/Sivas studio by 20% of the students, while 9% focused on it in the Büyükada/İstanbul studio. Although Divriği's healing traditions and the historic buildings associated with them can serve as sources of inspiration for students, it can be said that, in Büyükada, the opportunities and potential offered by the natural environment were only reflected to a limited extent in the design concepts.

The "(SR8) Stakeholder Engagement" is addressed by only 7% of students in the Divriği/Sivas studio and by none of the students in the Büyükada/İstanbul studio. Regarding the design-concept approaches developed by students, it can be interpreted that this principle was related to other principles, mainly in "(SR1) Community Development," rather than being treated as a separate focus.

5. Conclusion

This study examines how social responsibility principles can be incorporated into architectural design studio education through site-specific contexts characterized by vernacular and cultural qualities. By analyzing students' concept statement texts from two geographically and contextually distinct studios, the research explores how design thinking evolves under different local dynamics. First, eight core social responsibility principles were identified through a systematic literature review and thematic analysis, creating a structured framework for evaluating students' design concepts. Applying this framework to the Divriği/Sivas and Büyükada/İstanbul studios revealed both overlapping and site-specific patterns within the social responsibility framework. In both contexts, "Community Development" and "Environmental Responsibility" emerged as the most frequently referenced principles, highlighting social cohesion and ecological awareness. However, significant differences appeared in "Economic Development" and "Public Health and Well-being," with Divriği's rural character encouraging deeper engagement with local production and healing traditions, while Büyükada's urban-touristic environment resulted in more modest attention. On the other hand, "Ethical Governance" and "Stakeholder Engagement" were the least addressed principles, indicating a need for greater emphasis on participatory and transparent processes within studio content.

The findings highlight the importance of incorporating social responsibility principles into architectural design education to enhance students' ethical awareness, contextual understanding, and inclusive design thinking. The studio provided a comprehensive framework that integrated context-specific, research-based, and interdisciplinary approaches for embedding social responsibility principles into architectural design education. Results also suggest that introducing social responsibility in the early stages of design process can shape students' conceptual thinking, affecting both creative ideas and critical assessments. Differences observed between studio outcomes further highlight the need to tailor social responsibility education to particular social, economic, and environmental contexts. Through engagement with diverse geographic and cultural settings, students gained a deeper understanding of architecture as a practice influenced by local traditions, environmental conditions, and social dynamics. This experience fostered critical thinking, collaborative exploration, and the capacity to translate complex analyses into meaningful design solutions. Ultimately, the studio served as a pedagogical model illustrating the architect's growing responsibility to address today's societal challenges through inclusive, sustainable, and culturally aware design strategies. Overall, these results support the main idea of the study: that embedding social responsibility principles into architectural education improves students' ability to approach complex design issues ethically, contextually, and inclusively. By providing a comparative view based on two distinct environments, the study shows how a structured social responsibility framework can influence both conceptual development and spatial strategies in student work. In this way, it enriches current architectural education literature by introducing a thematic and evaluative model that connects early design thinking with broader social, environmental, and ethical responsibilities.

Building on these insights, this study contributes to architectural education by proposing a thematic approach to assess how social responsibility principles can be integrated into design studio pedagogy. Through the integrated application of thematic and content analysis, it provides a replicable framework that educators can adapt to evaluate student outcomes. While the findings are based on a specific institutional and cultural context, the methodological framework and educational strategies developed

in the studio offer transferable insights for other architectural education settings, especially those focusing on vernacular heritage, sustainability, and ethical design. The comparative analysis of distinct geographic and cultural sites further illustrates how local conditions influence students' engagement with social responsibility, emphasizing the importance of context-responsive pedagogy. These findings aim to help educators and curriculum developers better embed ethical, cultural, and environmental themes into architectural design education, guiding future teaching strategies and studio practices. Future research should expand this approach to additional pedagogical settings, include tracking students' design-thinking development, and examine the effects of explicit instruction in underrepresented principles like governance and stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, systematically incorporating social responsibility into the architectural design education curriculum can help develop practitioners who are technically skilled, creatively driven, and highly conscious of their social and environmental responsibilities.

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