

Aleksei Lashkov, Meri Pepanyan **Can It Be Tried in Yerevan?**

Abstract

The title is a nod to Ettore Sottsass's 1973 article "Can It Be Tried Somewhere?", published in the same issue of *Casabella* that introduced Global Tools¹. That question, posed at a time of radical pedagogical experimentation, still resonates today. *Can It Be Tried in Yerevan?* explores the possibilities of architectural transmission beyond formal education through the case of the Library for Architecture (LFA) in Yerevan. Informed by the radical pedagogical spirit of Global Tools and Ivan Illich's deschooling theory, the library embraces self-learning, collaboration, and spatial experimentation. This text reflects on LFA not as a model, but as a lens to question how knowledge circulates, and what it means to learn architecture otherwise.

Keywords

Library for Architecture (LFA) — Architectural Education — Experimental Pedagogy — Self-Learning — Radical Pedagogy — Armenia

The title is a nod to Ettore Sottsass's 1973 article "Can It Be Tried Somewhere?", published in the same issue of *Casabella* that introduced Global Tools¹. That question, posed at a time of radical pedagogical experimentation, still resonates today. This text extends it into a different geography and urgency, asking what such experimentation might look like in Yerevan. One of the ways we've tried to respond to this question is through the Library for Architecture (LFA)². This text reflects on LFA not as a model, but as a lens to question how knowledge circulates, and what it means to learn architecture otherwise.

LFA was founded as a reaction to a desire for more open, collaborative, and process-driven ways of engaging with architecture. Instead of mimicking the form of a traditional school, it seeks to project its social core, its people, its networks, into a physical and virtual environment. It desires to operate as a hybrid educational machine: a physical and virtual space shaped by people, conversations, and self-learning. We want to activate it as a space that Leonardo Savioli and Adolfo Natalini describe as a «space of involvement, a continuous happening», a place where both presence and process, form and theory, cooperate. The important component for us is a network of people. The space itself is a projection of this network where books, conversations and workshops give a form to cultural processes. It is an interface of local and collective realities, shaped by a small but complex community. We saw the platform as a space of non-hierarchical transmission of knowledge, it is not a school in a conventional sense.

Library for Architecture (LFA) is situated in a yard in the centre of Yerevan, in the former house of the architects Freidun and Armen Aghalyan. The ground floor is open to the public: there is a library room with over



Fig. 1
Mutual Interview, 12 month program, LFA, photo by Mitya Lya-lin.



Fig. 2
Garage Modeling Workshop, photo by Anna Prilutskaya.

460 books, where various types of gatherings and discussions take place (fig. 1) and a kitchen space with all the basic facilities. On the same level is the garage modelling workshop (fig. 2), open to students and professionals who want to build models and learn about model making through the bi-weekly inductions held there. The garden also hosts various activities, from workshops with students to outdoor discussions when the weather allows it. (fig. 3, fig. 4)

The neighbourhood itself is lively, surrounded by cultural institutions. In the 1930–1970s it was almost entirely inhabited by architects, painters and cultural figures. Freidun Aghalyan was involved in the land division of the area, which at the time was considered the periphery of Yerevan. Today it is the centre, and this is where LFA lives.

LFA has 12 co-founders, architectural studios currently active in Armenia³. In its first year, 2023, the idea was to make the library a centre for the architectural community. This led to the concept of a 12-month public program (fig. 5), where each month was curated by one co-founder. It became a key way to introduce the public to LFA.

This year, the objectives shifted. Students and professionals already know



Fig. 3
Public talk "Method", photo by Mitya Lyalin.

Fig. 4
1:1 workshop, LFA, photo by Mitya Lyalin



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12 Months

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

LFA was founded by 12 co-founders. “12 Months” is LFA project where our 12 co-founders will become curators of the LFA program for a month and will embody their professional interests together with library guests, in such formats as lectures, workshops, interviews, presentations and excursions. By covering topics and issues chosen by the co-founders, LFA will become a true platform that unites the professional community.

Tumanyan street 2nd lane,
5th building, 0002, Yerevan city,
Republic of Armenia
lfa.

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1. d'Arvestanots
2023 November

2. SP2
2023 December

3. tl bureau
2024 February

4. Tarberak
+NPATAK
2024 March

5. Storaket
2024 April

6. Karen Balyan
2024 May

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7. Electric Architects
2024 June

8. STOHA + NPATAK
2024 July

9. snkh.
2024 September

10. Meganom*
+ untitled architecture
2024 October

11. DAAP
2024 November

12. auditoria*
2024 December

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Fig. 5
LFA 12- month program poster
by Dana Smagina

the library; every day groups of them come to work, read, and make coffee in the kitchen. So the focus moved toward enlarging the network and strengthening the research component. We kept the “12 months” format, but now each co-founder invites a collaborator to curate the month, with two public events and a theme. These themes explore different kinds of “shape”, combining text and form, but above all reflect our interest in studying Armenian reality as it is now.

Through research, we wanted to take a screenshot of the present, what is happening, what is relevant, who is doing what. This intention shaped our projects and our wish to expand the community and understand who the Armenian architectural and urban community is.

The educational component of LFA is in the space itself, in the events and discussions. When students choose to learn and enter this environment of self-learning, they enter our carefully organized “trap” of emancipation, one that we continue to weave through topics, events and the network that grows around the library.

The simple question “what can we offer?” gave us a lot of food for thought

on architectural education in Armenia. It led into a deep and complex rabbit hole of various educational systems and theories. What began as an instinct gradually became an intention, as we started to study radical movements in pedagogy.

It is curious to study theories of the 1950s and 60s. A lot of historical shifts triggered those thoughts back then, and it is interesting how we keep coming back to them. The radical movement was a result of big transformations in the world. It was a period marked by shared resistance to institutional, bureaucratic and capitalist authority⁴. The main ideas circulating back then were the need for more open horizontal learning models, experimental approaches, and opposition to institutionalized systems. There were cases of alternative learning all around the world, some short lived, some longer. They are not nostalgic references, but rather reflect a growing urgency for experimental, open and non-hierarchical approaches to learning.

So we asked ourselves: why revisit those theories today, particularly in the Armenian context? Globally, these topics are again gaining relevance in the face of rapid technological transformations, especially in artificial intelligence, so the question «how can we proceed with education?» is part of the international discourse.

In Armenia, apart from technological shifts, there is a strong presence of geopolitical influences. Armenia was part of the Soviet Union for around seventy years. Architectural education was highly institutionalized and hierarchical, deeply patriarchal, with an individualistic approach to projects and a typological focus. After the collapse, the country seems caught in an inertia zone, where components of the Soviet system still remain, but without the system itself. Changes enter slowly. Institutions adapt slowly. And the geopolitical situation complicates everything further.

The architectural landscape mirrors these shifts. It is not unusual that various individuals and platforms raise the question of what can be different and how to proceed. We were curious to observe how learning scenes appear in other post-Soviet realities.

We see different manifestations of educational experimentation: Strelka, which suspended its activity due to the war; the Kharkiv School of Architecture, an independent school created in response to social and political shifts; the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, a free program based on self-learning with hubs all over Armenia. Yet in architectural education inside institutions, the system remains technical, limited, and lacking collaborative or interdisciplinary learning. Critical discourse is scarce.

Armenian architectural education is mostly centered around the National University of Architecture. Structurally not much has changed since Soviet times. The system is still hierarchical and top down. There are three departments Architecture, Urbanism and Restoration, but even though they sit on the same floor they work separately and remain isolated. Student projects are not studio based but department based, and there is no clear link between the departments, which would have been valuable and highly educational. Many positive things depend on individual professors, but they also work inside boundaries.

This structure keeps the hierarchy intact and leaves little space for experimentation. The briefs stay typology driven and disconnected from real situations. What is missing is a shift toward reality, a more open environment where students can move more freely and are not shaped so strongly by rigid limits. A place where many voices coexist. A steady network, a public program that is also educational, screenings and discussions, and



Fig. 6

LFA Collective reader process, Photo by Mitya Lyalin, taken during the BOOKUBORAN LitFest at Woods Center, 2025

a community that grows through this. Something that adds to the existing system and gives another way to learn.

One of the most interesting observations in the Armenian context aligns with what Paulo Freire described as the «banking system»⁵. Students are seen as passive recipients. There is little space for questioning. A lot of students who feel this gap look for postgraduate education abroad. There are exceptions, of course, and they are growing, but the structural issue remains.

This is where LFA becomes a small operator of change. The educational experimentation appears through projects like the Live Archive or the Collective Reader. The Collective Reader first appeared as an event inside the BOOKUBORAN litfest at WoodsCenter. Participants chose a book from the library, selected a fragment, and began translating it into Armenian. (fig. 6) Around thirty-five people contributed, translating passages from twenty different books. (fig. 7) It was a small experiment, but it showed

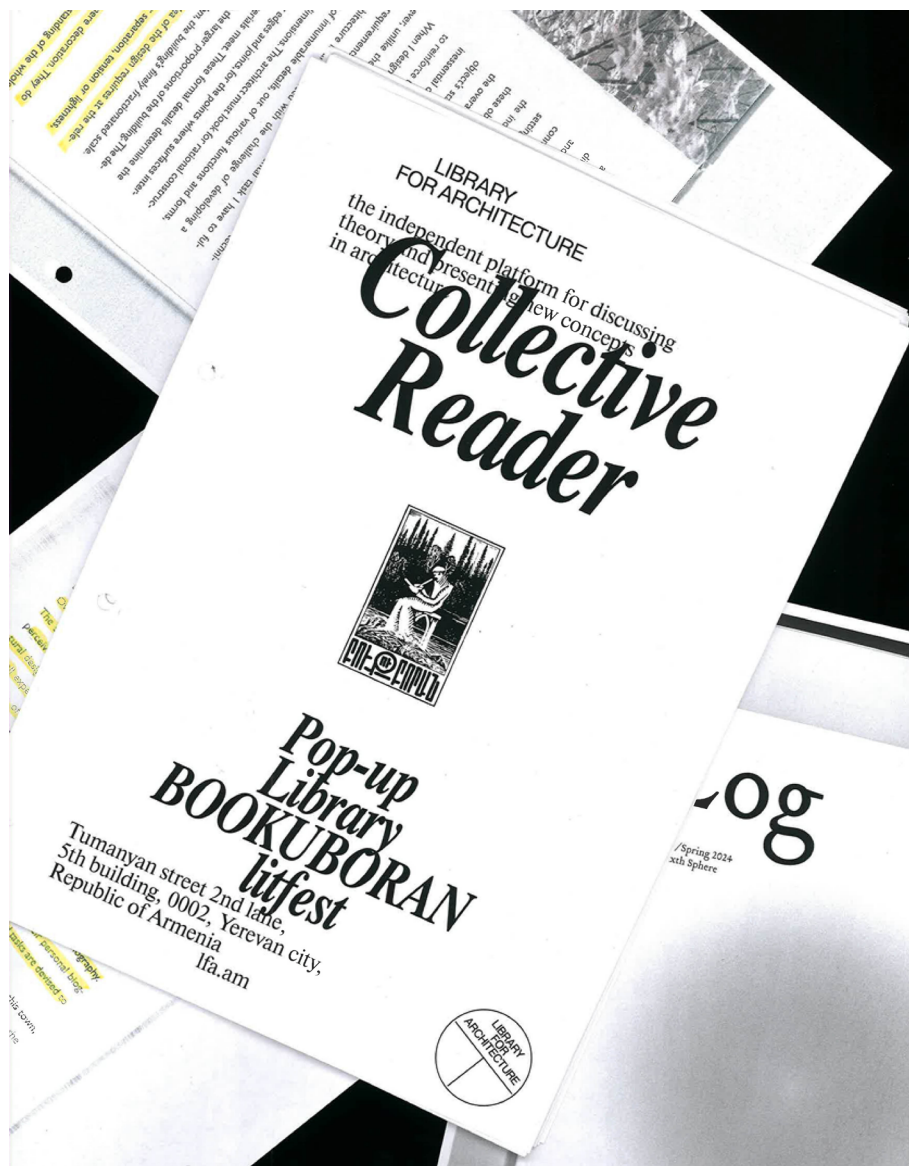


Fig. 7
LFA Collective reader, zine by
Dana Smagina 2025.

something important. When the circumstances are right, people are eager to take part, to contribute, to bring their own voice into a shared process. It confirmed for us that learning can happen collectively and quietly, without instruction, simply through the act of doing something together. These small experiments show how knowledge can circulate differently, through presence, through curiosity, through doing.

The Live Archive is another ongoing initiative that launched publicly in December 2025 and shaped our understanding of learning. It collects research-based works on architecture and urban studies on Armenia, bringing together materials that are usually scattered across institutions, countries and languages. It became another way of creating a network, not through events but through the act of gathering. By placing these works side by side, we began to see connections, gaps and directions of thought. The archive showed us how much knowledge already exists, and how much can happen when it is made visible to a community.

Another experiment we carried out was linked to the idea of social architecture and took place in the context of the Triennale Milano. Within the theme of (ordinary) architecture, LFA initiated an open call for artists and architects, inviting them to represent an object that, in their view, reflects ordinary architecture in Yerevan today. The process opened many ques-



Fig. 8
The National Pavilion of Armenia at Triennale Milano, Curatorial team: LFA, Meganom, and untitled architecture. Photo by Giovanni Galanello, 2025.

tions and perspectives on the city's architectural reality, and generated an ongoing discourse around what is usually taken for granted or remains unseen. For us, this process itself became an educational moment, being part of a shared reflection on real, current topics, and contributing to a collective understanding of the city. (fig. 8)

Can it be tried in Yerevan?

We think it can, but with a clear understanding of what “it” means. For us the key is the community, and working with it in all its layers, the architectural community, the students and the public. We want to become a place where all three meet. Our programs and projects support this. LFA cannot substitute a school and does not want to. It tries to become a support mechanism, a self-learning space that facilitates discussions and community-driven research. Our definition of it will likely evolve. For now we do not seek to oppose institutions, but to introduce alternative approaches and broaden the conversation inside the community.

Notes

¹ See Borgonuovo V., Franceschini S. (2021) – “The Tools of a Possible School”. In *Global Tools 1973–1975: When Education Coincides with Life*, edited by Franceschini S. and Borgonuovo V., NERO Editions, Rome, pp. 15–35.

² Library for Architecture (LFA) is an Armenian non-profit organisation founded in 2023.

³ The twelve co-founders of the Library for Architecture are: d’Arvestanots, SP2, tl bureau, Tarberak, Storaket, Karen Balyan, Electric Architects, STOHA, snkh., Meganom*, DAAP, and auditoria.*

⁴ See Colomina B., González Galán I., Kotsioris E., Meister A.-M. (2018) – *Towards a Radical Pedagogy*, no. 02, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh.

⁵ Freire P. (1970) – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, Continuum, New York.

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COLOMINA B., GONZÁLEZ GALÁN I., KOTSIORIS E., MEISTER A.-M. (2018) – *Towards a Radical Pedagogy*, no. 02, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh.

FREIRE P. (1970) – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, Continuum, New York.

Aleksei Lashkov is a researcher, producer, and pedagogue in the field of architecture. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the Moscow Architectural Institute, with additional studies at Sapienza University of Rome. Since 2023, he has been the co-founder and program director of the Library for Architecture (LFA) in Yerevan. He also runs Auditoria's research and publishing programs. His experience includes work in the architectural studio Meganom, where he is a developing director of projects and research initiatives

Meri Pepanyan is an architect and a researcher with a Master's degree in Architecture and Urban Design from Politecnico di Milano (2023). Since September 2024, she has been a researcher at the Library for Architecture (LFA) in Yerevan, where she explores architectural and urban phenomena through research-based formats, including public programs and archival initiatives. Her experience includes participation in several international workshops and competitions, alongside work in architecture studios in Yerevan and Milan. In 2024, she assisted in citizen science workshops in rural Armenia within the TUMO Box network, which was initiated and organized by Hyphen4, an architectural and urban studio.