



A Global Perspective On Architectural Education

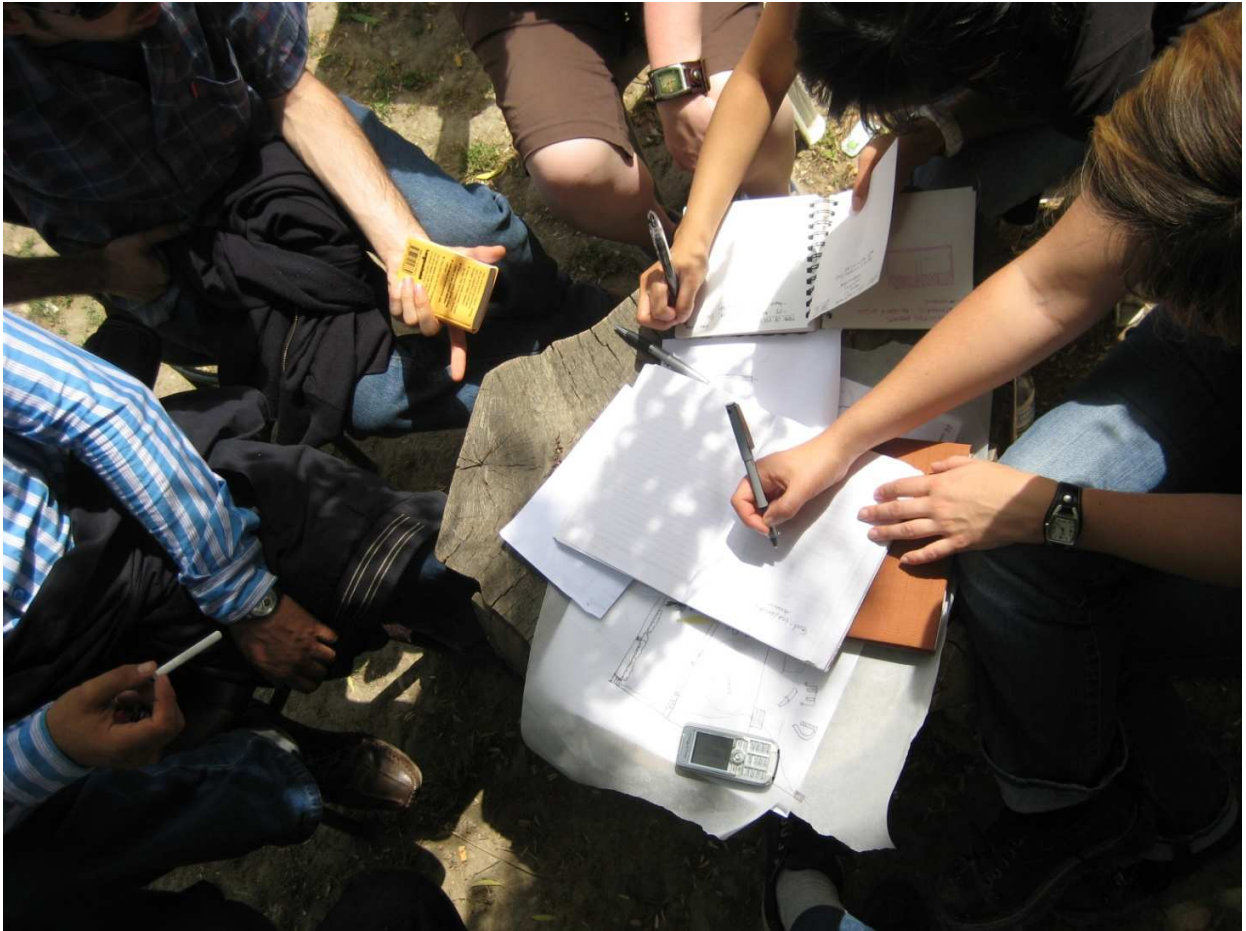
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ABSTRACT:

By reflecting on an international service learning course that was conducted in Turkey, this article will focus on the difference in objectives and strategy that an intercultural studio can offer a design educator. It also will discuss the potential advantages of intercultural coursework and illustrate a departure from more traditional studio experiences, first in terms of curricular objectives and later in terms of execution and outcome. Finally the article will offer recommendations for educators who are interested in increasing intercultural dimensions of architectural education.

Keywords:

internationalization of architectural education, international service learning, design-build



1. INTRODUCTION

In a global economy our communities, and therefore practice, is directly influenced by integrated economies, new technology, increased mobility, and multi-cultural demographics. This article will explore international service learning as a method for preparing students to work in a global economy. Information has been drawn from literature on international curriculum, service learning, a case study, and student evaluations. The article will begin with an overview of a global perspective and international service learning, followed by the case study - *The Deydinler Project: Building a Teahouse*. Finally the article will offer recommendations for design educators interested in offering courses in international service learning.



2. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In the past decade there has been a growing awareness in the education community of the need for students to gain skills and knowledge that will prepare them to work in the global economy. Globalization - or the broadening of social, political, and economic interactions at a global scale (Auffrey & Romanos, 2001) – has heightened the need for graduates to learn to interact more effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and social realities. Many scholars in education, city planning, interior design, and architecture have identified intercultural understanding as a fundamental attribute of education in the 21st Century (Goldstein et al., 2006; Joubert & Whitford, 2006; Stone, 2005; Wallis & Steptoe, 2006; Smith-Pariola & Goke-Pariola, 2006). In an increasingly integrated world we can no longer ignore shared responsibilities, opportunities, and implications of our work.

Today's graduates will enter a complex and dynamic job market. According to Williams (2005), postsecondary graduates can expect to change careers - not jobs – six times in their lifetime, and will likely retire from jobs that do not presently exist. They will inevitably work with people from different cultures, be exposed to professional practice in other countries, make decisions with

cross-cultural and international implications, or work overseas. To cope with demanding job market, students require strong academic training combined with international knowledge and competency (Wallis & Steptoe, 2006).

Internationalization of architectural education, as described in this article, is not specifically focused on preparing students for international work per se. It can enhance domestic practice by introducing new perspectives, encouraging critical work, and expanding professional networks (Goldstein et al., 2006). Participation in international projects encourages designers to reconsider every aspect of the design process from the planning of spatial configurations to the use of building materials and technologies. Furthermore involvement in integrated experiences with people from other cultures or social realities can promote improved job performance in multicultural societies (Weber, 2005).



3. ARCHITECTURAL LEARNING FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Design is fundamentally informed by the complex and systemic relationships of our communities. This notion of design in its broader sense, simultaneously reactionary and visionary, is often unattainable in traditional problem-based studio learning. While acknowledging the merit of carefully crafted design briefs, the outcomes are often well-developed solutions that are disconnected from context, people and places (Vlahos, 2001). Christopher Jarrett (2000) calls this disconnection in studio work the 'blind spots' referring to the humane, political, and practical aspects that are difficult to address in studio pedagogy. The very specific, and at times isolated and discipline-centric studio experience, often fails to promote interest and understanding of new perspectives, social realities, collaborative methods, or global conditions. International service learning, or working with communities abroad, provides a venue for educators to enhance design education through intercultural experience based learning.

Architectural learning for the global community combines the primary concern of producing three-dimensional space to accommodate related human activities with learning how to understand culture, place, and experience in a rapidly changing world. In addition to regular studio objectives an international service learning course aspires to teach international knowledge and competency. 'Knowledge' within the context of studio education refers to the content, skills and method of the course. It can also be described as the 'what' of the course. 'Competencies' inform 'how' we approach a given problem. Effective architectural practice in the global community involves architectural and international knowledge combined with intercultural competencies leading to informed decisions about the built environment.

3.1 INTERNATIONAL STUDIO KNOWLEDGE

International knowledge includes awareness of cultural values, communication styles, development of relationships, group interactions, conflict management and adaptation processes of specific nations (Weber, 2005). With that said, what is international studio knowledge? The definition of 'studio knowledge' has been a topic of debate in architectural education for the past decade. Traditionally, architectural education has been concerned with imparting knowledge, facts, and 'good design sense' from teacher to students (Feigenberg, 1991). In his paper, *The Hidden Curriculum and the Design Studio: Toward a Critical Studio Pedagogy*, Thomas Dutton (1991) draws our attention to the ideological considerations of the educator that are central to the act of imparting knowledge. He argues that hierarchical relationships sanction 'acceptable knowledge'

that is often disconnected to the needs of communities. Dutton's concern for the teacher-centered, and often aesthetically based, learning experiences in design studios continues in architectural and planning discourse today (Vlahos, 2001; Jarrett, 2000; Feldman, 2004; Salama, 2005). Furthermore, Ashraf Salama (2005) expresses a concern for the credibility of an architectural education satisfied with the manipulation of formal configurations at the expense of understanding human realities. Allan Feigenburg (1991) builds on similar ideas, promoting a need for studio education with an emphasis on teaching students to 'learn how to learn' through community engagement. Studio knowledge, within the context of learning for the global community, builds on the arguments of Dutton, Salama, and Feigenburg.

Educators concerned with globalization concur with the need for integrated experiences to provide relevant curriculum. Effective internationalized programs implement interplay between knowledge acquisition, acculturation processes, and development of a common understanding and meaning (Weber 2005). Through integrated experiences students 'learn to learn' by working 'with' communities. Immersion in nonlocal culture, geography, or social reality provides opportunities for comparative analysis rich in exposure to new perspectives and methods informing the built environment. Students learn about the common needs and goals of societies, in addition to the complex relationships leading to disparities. Service learning participants - domestic and international – reflect on existing practice through discussions on identity, goals, and priorities.

3.2 INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people from other cultures to optimize the probability of mutually successful outcomes (Stone, 2006). This definition implies that 'concern for others' is a fundamental attribute of intercultural competency training. Demonstrated through communication and understanding, intercultural competency impacts 'how' we approach given situations. Attributes of intercultural competency include adaptability, openness to change, cultural empathy, autonomy, non-judgmental perceptiveness, and intercultural communication skills. Educators concerned with teaching intercultural competence may want to provide opportunities which promote reciprocal learning between all participants (Joubert & Whitford, 2006; Williams, 2005), development of effective strategies for addressing challenges in appropriate, respectful, and constructive ways (Joubert & Whitford, 2006; Smith-Pariola & Goke-Pariola, 2006), and opportunities to practice critical comparative analyses between local and global conditions (Goldstein et al., 2006; Salama, 2005; Stone, 2005).

3.3 THE BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

There are many benefits of service learning, chief among them are the partnerships cultivated between universities, professionals, and the public. This aspect employs the unique position of architecture and design to contribute to community development projects. In addition to promoting the professions in the public realm, international service learning provides an effective method for imparting international knowledge and competency as described in the previous sections.

Service learning can provide opportunities for effective pairings connecting those in need of design with people who can provide the service. Domestic service learning programs, such as the Rural Studio, Auburn University, and KU Studio 804, University of Kansas, demonstrate commitment to designing for the vast proportion of the population who cannot afford the services of architects or designers. Programs concerned with community development such as the NEURUS Program (Goldstein et al., 2006), and Service Learning for the Global Community, University of Manitoba, further illustrate how service learning can provide mutually beneficial outcomes for all participants in cross-cultural settings. Moreover, domestic and international service learning programs educate both the students and the public about the contributions architects and designers can make to improve the built environment.

As significant as service learning can be to the community and to our professions, the benefits to our students are even more impressive. A 'live' project with a community group typically enhances interest in architectural training by providing opportunities to apply concepts and theories of design, communication, theory, and building technology reinforcing the relevance the curricula offered in professional programs. As suggested in the previous section, working with an international community or non-profit organization can effectively support the learning objectives of internationalized curriculum. In the project called A Template for Eye Clinics in South India, University of Manitoba (Beaverford, 2007), students were clearly motivated by contributing their skills in support of a non-profit organization concerned with a global issue. This type of a commitment assists teaching effective and respectful problem-solving techniques that rely on critical thinking and responsible research. Additionally, international service learning promotes awareness of relationships between culture, climate, economics, and the built environment.



4. THE DEYDINLER PROJECT: BUILDING A TEAHOUSE

The following section will further explore the ideas presented in this article through a discussion of The Deydinler Project: Building a Teahouse. Recommendations, in light of the literature review, student and instructor observations from the course will follow this section.

4.1 COURSE DESCRIPTION

Service Learning in the Global Community was offered by the University of Manitoba for the second time in May 2007. In a month long course, the students were asked to design and build a teahouse and garden while living and working with a rural community in Turkey. The intention of the course was to provide a learning environment which begins to address the pressures of globalization on architectural and design education as identified in the first part of this article. The learning objectives combine traditional and internationalized studio pedagogy. The outcomes are many, some which are easily measured, and others which will take more time and greater study to truly understand.

The author developed the course with the assistance of Professor Leland Hill, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar and Professor Karl Burkheimer, Oregon College of Art and Craft. Collectively, the instructional team has experience in sculpture, graphic design, furniture design, interior design and architecture. In addition to interdisciplinary training. All three professors have experience with cross-cultural collaborations, working overseas, and design-build projects.

With over 40 applicants, eight undergraduate and seven graduate students from Architecture, Interior Design, Landscape Architecture, City Planning, Environmental Design, and Graphic Design were accepted into the program. Selections were based on a letter of interest, references, and perceived ability to contribute to an interdisciplinary team. A deliberate effort was made to select students with a variety of pre-departure experiences. The instructors felt that a diverse group of students would be better prepared to meet the challenges of international service learning including the typical studio 'blind spots' (Jarrett, 2000) and the practical aspects of working and living with a community. The demanding project allowed students to practice many professional skills in addition to talents not generally considered part of architectural or design such as storytelling, acting, singing, dancing, and cooking. In addition to working in and beyond their own disciplines, students were encouraged to participate in all aspects of the project from design to building construction. Through collaboration and experience the students learned from community members, trades people, local professionals, host-families, professors, and classmates.



4.2 COURSE FRAMEWORK AND MANAGEMENT

A detailed framework was developed to establish the learning objectives, methods and management of the course. This document served as the course outline and letter of memorandum between the students, instructor and partners (Vlahos, 2001). The following learning objectives were identified based on the discussion on international 'knowledge' and 'intercultural competency' described above.

The 'knowledge' based objectives were to:

1. learn about people, materials, and making through experience;
2. provide challenges through which students can see beyond their own space, time, and culture;
3. integrate existing and new theories, methodologies, technical skills, and practices into the process of making decisions in the studio;
4. encourage the development of design solutions intended to enhance and support diverse human activities, realities and cultures; and

5. promote understanding of the complex interdependence of global economic, political, and cultural forces affecting the built environment.

The 'intercultural competency' based objectives were to:

6. respond to needs identified by the community;
7. promote reciprocal learning between all participants through engagement;
8. develop effective strategies for addressing challenges in appropriate, respectful, and constructive ways;
9. practice critical comparative analyses between local and global conditions; and
10. challenge perspectives on social problems and of others who are in different social or cultural groups.

The method and management of the course combined traditional studio, international service learning and travel study pedagogy. The greatest emphasis was placed on providing integrated experiences as recommended by advocates of international service learning (Weber 2005). One of the unique aspects of this course was that all participants shared the responsibilities of management. Key members of the team, in addition to the students and instructors, were the community members who prepared the site and continued to volunteer once the construction began and the family home-stay participants who made an indelible contribution to the learning experience. The local partner, the Experiment in International Living (EIL), also provided tremendous in-country support assisting with the planning and logistics of the program.



4.3 PROJECT OUTCOMES / EVALUATION

The primary outcome of the course was the design and construction of a teahouse and garden. Each student was evaluated on their leadership role in at least one area of the project (millwork, landscape, concrete...) as well as their overall contribution to the group efforts. Students were also evaluated on their participation in seminar discussions and a submission of a reflective journal. Although somewhat less measurable, an additional and profound outcome was the high level of collaboration between disciplines, community members, students and faculty.

5 Reflections and Recommendations

The development of an international service learning course requires more time, preparation, and risk than traditional studio projects. A growing body of literature on the pressures of globalization supports that international service learning projects are worth the effort for our students, communities and universities (Smith-Pariola & Goke-Pariola, 2006). The following recommendations are based on observations made by students, partners, and instructors.

5.1 WORK WITH EXPERIENCED LOCAL PARTNERS

One of the greatest challenges of international service learning is finding a meaningful project that will benefit all participants. This demands an excellent working relationship with a local partner who understands the needs of the students, faculty, and the community. The local partner was instrumental in the selection of an appropriate project and implementation of contextually aware problem solving techniques and solutions. Furthermore, EIL's contribution to the program was significant as it allowed the instructors to focus on course delivery as opposed to the everyday operations such as accommodations, meals, locating a translator, and transportation.

5.2 CLEARLY IDENTIFY PROCESS AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

It is important to clearly define the expected outcomes of the project. The international partner may underestimate the skills, work ethic, and maturity of the students. Moreover, if the partner does not have previous experience working with designers they may not be aware of the scope of work and level of commitment required to complete a design-build project.

5.3 PREPARE THE PARTNERS FOR DESIGN

An illustrated design workbook for the non-design participants in the community would provide an opportunity to increase participation and interest in the initial stages of the project. The workbook could inform the partners about the design process as well as begin to gather useful information about intercultural use of space, materials and colors. The participants of The Deydinler Project: Building a Teahouse attempted a book as a community consultation tool with marginal success due to lack of bi-lingual participants and visual explanation.

5.4 IDENTIFY THE ROLES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

It is crucial that all of the roles are clearly established in order to make the management of the course secondary to the learning experiences. A letter of memorandum should be circulated prior to departure to identify the responsibilities and of the community, non-profit organization, university, students, and faculty to see the project through to completion (Vlahos, 2001).

5.5 BE PREPARED FOR THE BUILD

When working with non-profit organizations for the first time the need for tools, professional expertise, and building materials must be clearly defined and communicated. Some of the 'local experts' may not have the language or technical skills to provide proper guidance to the students. Asking the students to bring their own tools mitigated some of the work place safety hazards experienced the first time the course was offered. Finally, the faculty should have construction experience and first aid training for design-build projects.

5.6 OFFER PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING

Pre-departure training should include the benefits and challenges of international service learning, design expectations, the role of the integrated process, course expectations, assignments, and management. When possible, the training should also include project specific information such as local demographics, building materials, technologies, climate, and the impact of culture on the regional built form. Since many of the students will be on a construction site for the first time it is imperative that safety training is done before leaving home and repeated once in-country. The students will also require travel information such as flights, security, accommodations, culture shock, what to bring, immunizations, visas, and expenses.

5.7 PREPARE THE STUDENTS FOR LEARNING OUT OF THE STUDIO

It is important that students understand the learning objectives and scope of the project. The reality of real clients, a low budget and mostly unskilled workforce (students and volunteers) presents culture shock to students familiar with traditional studio training. The students must be prepared to consider how design solutions respond to the realities of the project. Many of the skills required to handle 'studio culture shock' are similar to those mentioned in the section of this article on intercultural competence. Allan Feigenburg's (1991) concept of 'learning how to learn' can be expanded in this context to 'learning how to learn through openness to change'. The results may address Vlahos' (2001) concern regarding the disconnection of many traditional studio solutions from context, people and places.

Students may also require a briefing on the concept of collaboration as it will occur in the course. Several students of the The Deydinler Project: Building a Teahouse expressed resentment towards any form of leadership in the project stating that they believed that it contradicted the concept of collaboration. It is the author's view that this was used as a scapegoat for not

completing individual tasks and accepting responsibility in the project. Although having the entire group involved in all decisions is a lovely idea, it is not always possible when faced with complicated project and a short amount of time. Team building exercises exploring decision making and leadership might help the students adjust to a process void of the ultimate control of design decisions that they have learned in traditional studio courses.

5.8 EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Working with real people in a new culture has the potential to offer many surprises. In this case, the project changed from a library to a teahouse, and then grew from one small building to a two story building and park! This can be challenging for students accustomed to working in controlled studio environments. It is important for the instructors to demonstrate adaptable skills and to encourage the students to accept challenges as opportunities to respond to the actual, dynamic, and complex realities of providing service to communities. Problem-solving techniques, which rely on critical thinking and cross-cultural communication, should be promoted.

5.9 BE PREPARED FOR CHANGE

The role of the instructor changes from studio professors to co-investigators, co-learners, and facilitators due to the complexity, intensity and unpredictability of the project. Most students in the course responded by acting more independently bringing solutions to the discussions rather than problems. Design training was reinforced through hands-on experimentation with materials and through endless discussions between community members, trades people, students, and faculty rather than traditional design reviews. Digital photography was used throughout the course however the primary methods of communication were freehand drawing, sketch modeling, and rough construction.

5.10 ENCOURAGE INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Intercultural experiences were encouraged through partnerships with a local organization, community involvement, and family home-stays. Several students were reluctant to participate in home-stays prior to departure expressing concerns for privacy, security, and comfort levels. Upon completion of the course most students indicated that the home-stays were enjoyable and essential to the learning experience. Intercultural experiences were further encouraged through social outings, travel, and shared work experiences.

6 MEASURES OF SUCCESS AND ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

The completion of the project, student journals and feedback suggest that most of the learning objectives were met by the course. The majority of participants consistently demonstrated a high level of commitment and developed credible solutions. Many journal entries reflected motivation derived from working with a 'real' client on a project that they felt was important. Several students have indicated that they would like to continue to work in cross-cultural situations in Canada or abroad.

A significant outcome of the project was the willingness to collaborate with the client and contractor. That level of 'studio culture shock' was generally handled with respect and concern for creating a good solution for the community. Another potential cause for culture shock, the lack of computers in the design process, was easily accepted and even celebrated on several occasions. Most students welcomed hands-on construction as a break from their predominately computer based course work in Canada. Notable examples of successful design can be found in the design of the furniture, innovation of the landscape, and strong resolution of the teahouse building and interior.

Less successful examples of the course can be found in the lack of collaboration between students. The group of 15 quickly formed cliques that resisted sharing information, engaging in class discussions, and performing effective group work. As mentioned previously in this article, the instructors plan to investigate team building exercises to help students work together in challenging situations.

It would require more time and students to draw accurate conclusions on the capacity of projects such as The Deydinler Project: Building a Teahouse to teach international knowledge and intercultural competency. Further development of this course requires a greater effort to understand how it has impacted the students. An exit questionnaire given at the end of the course, three months and one year later may reveal a greater understanding of the success of the course. Although student journals offer some useful information many of them lack the focus on intercultural experience required to inform curriculum.

The potential to build on the student interest in international service learning suggests that further study of partnerships between educators and non-profit organizations could lead to mutually beneficial curriculum. Possible areas include but are not limited to sustainable community development and long-term reconstruction projects. Further academic contributions could involve

student internships, thesis level projects and research, documentation, and more design-build studios.



7 CONCLUSION

Within the context of globalization, professional education should transcend standard competencies to include increased collaboration, intercultural understanding and communication. By offering courses concerned with service-learning and internationalized curriculum, we can motivate studio learning and build on our understanding of domestic and international design practice. Furthermore, collaboration across cultures, disciplines and borders, can contribute to design education of global citizenship for the 21st Century.

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