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WORKSHOP 3

Landscape Education for Democracy – Advancing the goals of the European Landscape Convention through the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union

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The adoption by the Council of Europe of the European Landscape Convention in 2000 has further solidified the notion that landscapes are critical infrastructures in support of the lives of residents and communities. It has defined landscape as the result of the actions and interactions of people and community, and has entrusted them with their collective future management. The European Landscape Convention also reminds us that expertise in matters of the landscape should be grounded in the knowledge and perceptions of all those who inhabit it.¹ The epistemological shift required by the convention's landscape definition requires re-thinking of how landscape planning and design laws, regulations and processes have been performed in the past. Top-down decision-making processes need to make room for bottom-up participatory efforts involving all residents in deciding goals and strategies that may ensure their long-term livelihood.

The compounding of the effects of the policies and processes set into motion over the past few decades call for the redefinition of landscape planners and environmental designers' professional competences. Democratic landscape transformation requires design and planning practitioners to partner with communities to activate and build upon local knowledge and wisdom, recognise

1. Déjeant-Pons, M. (2004). European Landscape Convention Entered into Force. Environmental Policy and Law 34(2), p. 79

landscape injustices, engage diverse stakeholders, collaborate with related disciplines, and contribute to landscapes that will become resilient signs of a community's deep sense of ownership and stewardship. Although 18 years have passed since the convention's implementation, little has changed in academic programmes, where designers continue to be trained according to beaux-arts inspired curricula and pedagogies. Discussions of democracy, social justice, and participation rarely make their way into landscape architecture and planning education.

In 2015, scholars from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Nürtingen-Geislingen and Kassel University in Germany; Szent István in Hungary; the University of Bologna in Italy; and the LE:NOTRE Institute in the Netherlands began to envision a new course that would focus on landscape democracy. They sought funding from the Erasmus Plus programme of the European Union, which aimed “to support the development, transfer, and implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting co-operation, peer learning and exchanges of experience at European level”.² The Landscape Education for Democracy (LED) programme adopted a Participant Action Research framework, whereby the course would be emergent from the interactions and active participation of the project partners and students enrolled. The goal was to inspire a transformation of landscape planning education, both at the European level and within the partner universities, engender a new culture of engagement and social responsibility, and prepare students to serve as catalysts of democratic landscape change across cultures and geographical contexts.

In 2016, 2017 and 2018, the Landscape Education for Democracy (LED) programme attracted approximately 180 students from the five academic partners and an equal number and auditors from other world universities. The course introduced an interdisciplinary student body from Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture to knowledge and skills required for them to be successful in engaging the public in democratic landscape design and planning processes and co-design strategies and goals for the future of communities. The programme embraced a ‘blended learning’ pedagogical model, consisting of an online seminar for both individual and group-based learning activities and on-site intensive summer programmes to be organised by some of the partners. The online seminar used Adobe Connect, an online platform for the delivery of the learning activities – lectures, group and individual presentations, and student-run discussion sessions.

The Spring 2016 online seminar enrolled 45 participants from Europe, Asia, Central and North America, to collaborate on a strategic vision for resolving a landscape democracy challenge within their communities. Twenty of those students later participated in a ten-day intensive summer workshop where they could test their newly-acquired skills and knowledge to design for and with the residents of the immigrant community of Zingonia, in Italy, addressing challenges related to livability, food security, and environmental justice. The city served as a case study for on-the-ground testing of the theories and methods covered in the online course. The second LED workshop took place in July 2017 focusing on the multicultural community of the Nordstadt, a workers district in the German city of Kassel. In June 2018, the LED Team will travel to Törökbalint, a small town in the metropolitan area of Budapest, Hungary challenged in its social identity by the growing pressures of new residents seeking a more affordable and livable place to call home.

2. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus>

Seven Learning Goals for Landscape Democracy

The learning objectives for the online seminar and the Intensive Study Programme (ISP) were set during the grant application phase of the project and then specified during the first consortium meeting in Norway in November 2015. At that time, partners envisioned subject-specific, personal and methodological competences which the course would seek to foster in the participants through a structuralist approach.

The following seven goals embrace the subject-specific framework of how we have understood landscape education for democracy. Next to these seven goals, the LED team has identified a set of personal and methodical skills, which are not necessarily specific for the LED context but are required for putting LED competences into action.

Goal 1: Democracy as a practiced skill

Through the seminar we wanted the students to explore the concept of democracy not only from a theoretical perspective, but also from a dialectical perspective, as a result of their work within their transdisciplinary, cross-cultural working group work and through their interactions in the online seminar. In the end, we wanted students to know how public participation and democracy are related, and raise their awareness of the contemporary challenges to landscape democracy and to the ‘right to landscape’ in the context of urban and landscape change processes.

Goal 2: Learning how to deal with diversity

Through their work in the context of a cross-cultural learning environment, we hoped that students would experience and learn from their direct engagement with different interpretations and values that resulting from a pluralistic society. Students would need to become sensitive to the different attitudes towards the landscape and across ethnic, socioeconomic and expertise divides.

Goal 3: Critical landscape thinking

By engaging with relevant theories, learners are enabled to conduct an informed and dialectical discourse on the relationship of landscape and democracy. Students would then start to critically evaluate and identify concrete situations in which democratic processes are missing from landscape decision making processes, and propose possible solutions.

Goal 4: Rethinking the role of planning

Students are introduced to the evolution and common understanding of public participation, linked to major directions of contemporary planning theory. Through discussions and group reflection they develop a critical perspective and become aware of the potentials and limits of various models of participation.

Goal 5: Rethinking the role of the community

Students learn about the evolution and the contemporary understanding of the concepts of community and identity. They are encouraged to relate these concepts to planning practice. This is especially developed during LED intensive study programmes. Shifting mindsets towards empathy and the

appreciation of local knowledge includes a critical reflection on the role of the designer/planner as 'expert', which often leads to a discovery that knowledge about the landscape must be first and foremost grounded in people's perceptions, as the European Landscape Convention called for.

Goal 6: Landscape democracy into action

The LED programme is not designed for presenting a specific approach towards participatory planning. Instead, the idea is to make the learners select the most appropriate methods and tools to be applied in specific challenges requiring participatory processes. Students should be enabled to design a participatory process that is specific, adaptive, flexible and sensitive to the local context. This requires knowledge of common communication tools supporting participatory processes as well as different examples of participatory processes and how methods and tools are applied in practice.

Goal 7: Cultivating a landscape democracy discourse

Participants are knowledgeable and have the ability to discuss the interrelation of landscape and democracy using an agreed vocabulary employed by practitioners and researchers in landscape, democracy and public participation.

The seminar process framework

The seminar was organised into six thematic blocks, progressing from general to specific. Sessions would consist of lectures, interactive sessions, individual and panel presentations. A wiki page was used as a platform for documentation, knowledge gathering and sharing. Its process was structured over a period of 13 weeks starting in April and ending in June. The structure of the programme was graphically represented and posted to everyone on the course. Students met either once (in 2016 and 2018) or twice (in 2017) a week, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. The virtual classroom Adobe Connect was used in an open way to expand the reach of the online course to everyone who had a computer, rather than limiting the interactions to the partner universities and their students.

The first part of the course introduced the students to the state of the art discussion within landscape planning about the various interpretations we give to the landscape, and how these understandings are linked to democracy. Assignments were designed to reveal in the students their own positioning within the need for greater landscape democracy. We engaged images and drawings as a form of communication that would allow them to express their most intimate thoughts. The second and third phases introduced them to participation as an essential tool for landscape democratic actions. Lectures would seek to demonstrate how participation can benefit communities, above and beyond its ability to inform decision making. Theories and methods were discussed, concepts such as co-design and collective creativity as an approach that would allow designers to partner with communities at a deeper, more meaningful level. Case studies would illustrate the challenges in performing participation, and the implications on design and planning practice.

Phase D, which we called for simplicity 'design', asked the students to activate the knowledge and ideas that they had gathered in the first part of the course by taking on, as small groups, a landscape democracy challenge. Students would compete to select the challenge they found most meaningful in landscape democracy terms. In this activity, students were asked to outline, based on theories and examples they had learned about in the online course, how they might implement democratic

landscape change in these communities, laying out a theoretical transformative process as a set of strategic goals and moves. This would be diagrammed through a concept map, and presented at the end of the online seminar in small groups through the lectures.

The final phase of the seminar was dedicated to communication. It comprised lectures and case studies of participatory processes that had creatively addressed the need to communicate a new vision or story. We asked case study presenters to focus on their own approaches to storytelling and communication, while also reflecting on successes and failures along the way.

The annual Intensive Study Programme (ISP) constituted phase F of the educational programme. By travelling to a location many participants had never heard of, and partnering with local community groups and individuals, the ISP offered opportunities to combine old and new techniques of participatory landscape planning. In many cases, students acted as participatory action researchers, to uncover rich – and in many cases previously-unavailable data – that could help direct their actions during the 10 days they spent in each community.

Conclusion

The project aimed to be transformative of academics (i.e., students and scholars involved in the pedagogical experience) as well as civil society (the local communities it engaged, from civil society to professional organisations). While the LED project aimed to strengthen the presence of democracy and social justice within landscape planning, its adoption by the partner universities was mixed and diverse. While Bologna and Nürtingen-Geislingen University of Applied Science integrated the course into their curricula, other partners were only able to offer it as an elective, often in direct competition with sessions aimed at improving their professional skills, rather than critical-thinking abilities. The course will be offered again in Spring 2019.