

## **Are study trips a leisure time for students and teachers?**

Landscape architecture, educational strategy, study trips, landscape experience, curricular programmes

### **Abstract**

Few curricular programmes recognize officially the study trips and only occasionally some schools make efforts to realize some particular ones. Even so, they aren't considered as a basic educational strategy, fundamental to seduce students about the landscape architecture and to explore the power of the landscape.

The study trips can no more be seen as leisure time for students and teachers. As real opportunity of experiment the space - the object of work of the landscape architect - they are a basilar educational strategy in landscape architecture.

The study trips are fundamental for students become familiar with the landscape, comprehend it, reflect about and be critical (as students and as future professionals). More than that, they are the opportunity to include and make in evidence a wide range of specific issues concerning landscape (humanistic, artistic and scientific principles, together with a comprehensive and inclusive view), at the same time, they introduce the students in the diversity and the complexity of processes, domains and actors involved in the landscape transformation.

For all reasons it is fundamental 'to put students in the landscape'. So, study trips should be created in all curricular programmes, establishing the connection between academic, curricular and disciplinary issues. This educational strategy has to be accompanied with others (group reflection, graphic diaries, meta-cognitive scripts, portfolios, documentaries, and reports, between others). Only this way we can expect students to learn 'how to see', 'how to do' and 'how to be' - ideas conceptually engaged in the process of landscape architecture.

### **Introduction**

Landscape architecture education is characterized by a strong inter-dependence and articulation of knowledge and practices - an intricate educational process, explained by landscape complexity and by landscape architect role. These conditions determine different teaching strategies, translated into multiple activities, opportunities and situations to confront the student (Freire, 2011). As supported by Peter Rowe (2002) the construction of this complex knowledge and learning are not limited to the traditional studio. On the contrary, several strategies play a central role in the teaching of landscape architecture - study trips, internships, multiplicity of researches and practices, group discussion. This is possible to confirm in the most part of curricula and teaching strategies applied in several landscape architecture schools of Europe and America. All those strategies are fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge, experience and critical reflection - which enrich the visual, cultural, theoretical and practical repertoire of students - a result of inclusive and humanistic dimension, intrinsic to landscape architecture (Freire, 2011).

In the universe of the most notice European and North American schools of landscape architecture, its possible to confirm the mentioned complexity of teaching and learning, which includes various classes with field studies and also tours, named as study trips. The first ones are short visits, fundamental to support some practical exercises or particular issues. Not so often, it's possible to observe some integrated

'study trips' along the course of studies (degree or master), although they are not always concept as an important educational strategy. Our research is center in study trips in European landscape architecture schools<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of our research is to support the meaning, importance and significance of study trips as a key teaching practice in the education of landscape architecture. It is sustained in:

- First, the study trips are the real opportunity of experiment the space - the object of work of the landscape architect. An idea confirmed by the philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1999) when he defended the corporal experience as the source of all things. Only in the landscape students can be aware of how various domains intricate in the landscape architecture view;
- Second, the study trips as a true landscape experience, are a remarkable occasion for the drawing development and observation skills - explicitly how to see and record, through training in observation, drawing, select and doing things;
- Third, the study trips are the occasion for students to become familiar with some particular landscapes (in an unlimited context of them), carefully selected in the perspective of the students group, sequence of curricula and most salient subjects of the moment. Simultaneously it can be the moment to introduce students in some special domains (urban, rural, natural, industrial, garden art, ore others) or particular themes;
- Fourth, the study trips involve an authentic occasion to see the sights of the complexity of landscape, to read and comprehend its natural and cultural influences, to reflect and to be critical. They are an opportunity to declare the multi-disciplinary domains associated with the landscape transformation and also an occasion to show the essential integration of all actors in this process (inhabitants, professionals, academics, and politics);
- And fifth, the study trips when realized abroad are an important help to establishment the international perspective on landscape architecture and garden art. They represent an opportunity to enrich the individual references, with consequences in future design projects.

As such, study trips are fundamental to seduce the students for the landscape architecture, to explore skills, to integrate knowledge, to discover the power of the landscape and to experiment the experiential learning. They are the special moment for support and make evident a wide range of specific knowledge concerning landscape - humanistic, artistic and scientific principles, together with a comprehensive and inclusive view, with the chance to introduce the students in the diversity and the complexity of processes, domains and actors, involved in the landscape transformation.

### **Study trips features, offerings and objectives**

Named as *study trips*, *field studies*, *tours* or even *excursions*, this educational strategy is only explored in few landscape architecture undergraduate courses or master.

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<sup>1</sup> North America Kansas State University, Cornell University and Ohio State University are some examples of universities where study trips are part of course studies.

The study trips plan includes mostly the own country - some regions, course relevant landscapes, sites or gardens – and, very occasionally, abroad.

In the most significant cases, the incidence of study trips along the curricula can express one, two or three study trips each semester.

The study trips time programme can varied between a short tour (typically a half-day or a daylong) and a longer tour (some few days or a week, and very exceptionally two-weeks).

The costs can be subsidized by schools or support by students, conditions that establish the categories compulsory study trips or optional study trips and personal study trips.

The study trips are usually programmed as single educational strategy, nevertheless they could be organized with others educational strategies, for instances, it may be complemented by guest lectures (from politics, profession and academia).

Thinking as an experiential learning the study trips are conceptual programmed related with the core course content – the tri-dimensional space and the complexity and power of landscape. Thus, they respond to many objectives, namely knowledge, skills and experiences. For sure, all together form a powerful combination and exploration of academic and cultural domains and experiences. In this context, they include unquestionably the positive socializing and fun between students and teachers, more often emphasized by academy in general.

Along the several decades of higher education in landscape architecture, the study trips occurrence, programmes and objectives have changed; for the most part it was a consequence of the school dynamic and didactic. In the present the study trips offerings are linked with various objectives:

- To introduce the students to the thematic of the landscape in the perspective of landscape architecture;
- To reflect on contents taught in lectures, mostly on landscape architecture;
- To integrate knowledge's and skills;
- To learn how to read the landscape historical, cultural, ecologic and aesthetic influences;
- To focus on a singular theme;
- To see some particular case studies;
- To gain insight in objectives and realization of landscape architecture projects and/or landscape planning projects;
- To develop observation and drawing skills;
- To establish an international perspective on landscape architecture and garden design.

As we will see, schools emphasized the opportunity for the first experience of landscape, the whole occasion to come close to some particular real landscapes and the opportunity to address a theme.

In addition to the mentioned educational, pedagogic and cultural components there are the social ones. The study trips are always an important occasion to help everyone to get to know each other. It is a consequence of students and teachers living during some days together – an intensive time of not only working but also of

leisure. The study trips are also the opportunity to mix students from different levels of course, teachers, experts, practitioners of landscape architecture, local agents or others stakeholders.

Unfortunately great part of the schools doesn't have the resources to support the expenses associated with the study trips. It is common that students themselves cover the costs of study trips (partial or total), which include travel, food and accommodation. Consequently great part of them are not compulsory but schools implicated recommend students to take part (in this sense they are seen as an essential part of courses).

### **Some case studies**

The information available in *web site* of European universities (the universe of our research) is very limited and unequal (curricula, annual programs, teaching strategies)<sup>2</sup>. A limitation in our research, so that we didn't made the qualitative approach. Looking at some of those undergraduate courses or master, it is possible to give an idea about the present situation:

- In United Kingdom, the study trips in Leeds Metropolitan University are considered an essential part the courses – they support understandings of the context for design projects and help stimulate the designer's inspiration. Most project work involves daylong field visits to sites in the region, often with their designers and experts. Each level of the undergraduate courses has a residential field trip<sup>3</sup>;
- In France, the Ecole National Supérieur du Paysage (Versailles) is also supported by study trips. The first academic year start with 'inaugural trip' (7-10 days), considered an opening in the field of landscape. It is the opportunity to reveal the multiplicity and complexity of processes and actors who transform or build the landscapes and a way to develop the curiosity and look at various landscapes scales and integrate different perspectives<sup>4</sup>. In the second year they realize a 'pluri-disciplinary trip' in Europe, to explore some thematic (depend on the country selected and disciplines involved). In the third year another particular study trip focused in the site specificities. The location and itineraries carefully select, involve teachers from various disciplinary areas as well as actors of those landscapes. Students are asked to research, describe and understand the singularity of some places;
- In Norway, the School of Architecture and Design (Oslo), in the master programme has also the tradition to arrange an study trip each semester with the average duration of 1-2 weeks;
- In Denmark, the Danish Institute for Study Abroad (Copenhagen) articulates some study trips categories: study tours as compulsory visits to course relevant sites; field studies connecting the course with organizations, sites, and/or

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<sup>2</sup> Our research was based in the information available considering the universe of European landscape architecture schools already recognized or awaiting recognition by EFLA [http://europe.iflaonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=73&Itemid=85](http://europe.iflaonline.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73&Itemid=85) [March 2012].

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/as/ald/landscape-study-trips.htm> [March 2012]

<sup>4</sup> 'Programme pédagogique 2010-2011 - Formation Paysagiste DPLG Versailles' in [http://www.ecole-paysage.fr/ensp/media/ecole\\_fr/UPL626962580315962941\\_programme\\_p\\_dagogique2010\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ecole-paysage.fr/ensp/media/ecole_fr/UPL626962580315962941_programme_p_dagogique2010_2011.pdf) [March 2012].

persons relevant; study trips as optional visits, (subsidized by the university by an average of 25% of the cost); and personal travel, concept as free travel on weekends, organized as a rigorous academy program (complemented with previous research in library or at home, to complete or exploring the subject matter)<sup>5</sup>;

- In Portugal, the University of Évora (Évora) has also the tradition of study trips. Since begin (in the 70'), the course organize study trips as an opportunity to illustrate the interdisciplinary domains associated with landscape. In the last years field trips programmes (3-5 days of bus circuits) include itineraries in some reference landscape design projects, landscape unities and most significant regions of Portugal (Figure 1). In this way the enormous variety of Portuguese landscapes is explored, and also from time to time the school add visits or itineraries in Europe (Figure 2).



Figure 1 – Study trip in Gulbenkian garden (Lisbon). In the second image, Professor Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles (one of the authors Gulbenkian garden), describing the main ideas of original project and is recent requalification.



Figure 2 – Study trip in National Park Peneda-Gerês (region north of Portugal) and the second image another study trip, abroad, in Copenhagen (Denmark).

The contemporary study trips succeed the traditional annual week filed trips, by some riversides and villages, made during almost twenty years - a journey always on foot and with a backpack (with tent, food and work material). This was an experience more lived (therefore more experienced); more than to see the landscape, students were living in that landscape for many days, usually a week. While living there, the students had some tasks accomplish, such as drawing and writing, according to the requests of the trip diary. In a sensitive way, they could explore the several dimensions of the site (aesthetics, ecological and cultural) through the understanding of their specific characteristics (Freire, 2009).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dis.dk/faculty-advisors/academics/study-tours/> [March 2012]

At present, we are trying to strength the study trips with others educational strategies - daily graphics, portfolios, posters, reports and documentaries. All of them accomplish with some particular frameworks: meta-cognitive script, provided in advance, very structured and detailed (what do I see? What it feels like? What I read? What is the singularity of the site? How can I record the evidence and justify such selection? what did I learn? It serves for what? How was my performance? How affect it?...); discussion sessions between students and with teachers; and a planned observation from different perspectives (aesthetic, ecological and cultural) and their combination, using a variety of instruments (video, travel diaries, drawing and diagrammed sketch, photographs, between others).

## **Conclusions**

Despite such educational importance and some tradition linked with study trips courses of landscape architecture, few curricular programmes recognize officially the study trips and mostly occasionally some schools make efforts to realize some particular ones. In the most part of the European schools they aren't part of school dynamic neither considered as a basic education strategy.

In general 'to put students in the landscape' it is not considered a basic education strategy, crucial to seduce the students about the landscape architecture or as a mean to explore the power of the landscape. As we defend this opportunity is a vital part in the education of landscape architecture. Hence we must fight against the idea of mere leisure time (for students and teachers), often verbalized, and make the incorporation of the field trips and study trips in the curricular programmes as a way to strength it. They are the real experience of the landscape, as so an incomparable strategy able to make the connection between academic, curricular and disciplinary issues.

Although this educational strategy has to be accompanied with others: group reflection (between students and with teachers), graphic diaries, portfolios, documentaries, and reports, between others. Only that way we can expect that students learn 'how to see', 'how to do' and 'how to be' - ideas conceptually engaged in the process of landscape architecture.

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