

How To Guide:

Planning a Study Visit



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Context

Description:

In this context a study visit refers to an event with a research/ sustainable design practice emphasis [rather than a site visit which is an event focused on preparation for and integral to the working through of a design project]. This activity can be utilised as an introduction to a study course or as illustration of a built example of a sustainable design. In the former, the visit can be used to help set the agenda for the course and to promote interest in the subject. In the latter, it is useful to relate studio work to the three-dimensional realisation of drawings and strategies in built form. The intention is that these realised strategies might both feed-back into student's design work and assist in developing their critical faculties and values around sustainable architecture. Students are asked to make choices and participate to the decision-making process to promote meaningful student involvement.

[ARCH4change Teaching Toolkit Glossary Reference: Active Learning, Experiential Learning, Applied Learning](#)

Relevance of method to climate change design teaching integration:

Drawing on the context for the ARCH4CHANGE project in general, a well-chosen built example can be the foundation for an interactive site visit which supports climate change design and is linked with successful integration of climate change curriculum and sustainability integration. The informal learning and teaching experience is one of the assets of study visits, but the success of that experience depends on the engagement and involvement of the participants.

Practical Considerations

Class Size:

The size of group should be related to the size of building or capacity of the environment to be visited; a larger site being better able to accommodate a larger group. It is useful to subdivide the group in groups of 5-8 students related to a specific [ARCH4CHANGE theme](#) to be studied.

Learning Stage (Year Group):

Applicable to all learning stages. At Foundation level it is very helpful as an introduction to the built realities of sustainable design and to encourage engagement of novice learners. For Intermediate and Advanced Learners it is an opportunity to apply critical and reflective thinking on the translation of design proposals to realisation.

Educator Resourcing/skills

Educators will need to operate in a subject expert role to establish the context of the site visit and to assist in the delegation of tasks. Post study visit, the educator will have to act in a facilitator role for developing discussions and evaluations

Available teaching space & resources (tech etc)

Students and educators need access to an appropriate form of public transport for the site visit unless with walking range of the college; if not, arrangements must be put in place to make a group trip/visit most cost-effective. It should also be determined if there are any seasonal, cultural or institutional parameters which might affect when might be the ideal time of year to visit. An advance recce trip/visit by the Educator is recommended an invaluable way of consolidating aspects of the study visit as well as facilitating local contacts.

A well-chosen built example for the destination of the study visit is essential: exhibiting sufficient themes for different groups to engage with. Teaching is split between on-site active learning and internal seminar space which will require display facilities.

Teaching & Learning Considerations

Themes:

This approach can be used within any of the ARCH4CHANGE curriculum themes dependent on the range offered by the building but can also be used to provoke discussion on further themes.

Learning Outcomes/Objectives

The study visit is principally useful in terms of the self-directed learning it entails and in order that the visit actively engages the student it is important that there are both designated tasks and that the tour, in specific parts, is student led. In this regard student groups leading aspects of the tour must be well prepared in advance and those who are listening should be engaged in preparing drawn/photographic records of key design, technical and environmental considerations discussed.

The post visit evaluation is based on the demonstration of understanding of selected themes and a general project critique. A student-led presentation which can utilise digital presentations or pin-up to help illustrate key findings and provoke discussion.

Course Context (alignment with other subjects/modules)

The study visit can be used as both part of a taught module or as a case study within design studio.

Timeframe (length of learning activity):

The initial preparatory phase would typically last between 40 minutes to an hour; travel time to the building or site must be factored in and the size of the building or site and number of themes within will determine the length of the activity, however two hours should be sufficient. The post visit student-led discussion will depend on the number of themes addressed but allowing for 90 minutes should be adequate.

Methods

The site visit has essentially three aspects to it: a preparation phase where aims and objectives of the project are clarified and student tasks allocated; the visit itself which is proactively led by the students with specific activities; lastly, concluded with a reflective discussion on the merits, the downsides and the learning opportunities of the project.

Deliverables

From educator perspective: Resources to enable students to fully engage with the visit. These could include maps, site plans, building drawings, project histories and other resources.

From students perspective: Recorded summaries of key issues and their built realisation in both sketch form and photographic. Display of key findings as part of a student-led evaluation of the project and the themes presented.

Feedback

Feedback for study visits is best delivered through structured group discussion in which the educator facilitates the students individually or in groups to provide a critical review of the visit.

Assessment:

Engaging students in the assessment process encourages them to be more responsible and introduces them to the use of assessment criteria and judgement of quality and standard, increasing their sense of responsibility within the module. Specific assessment would include marking of the recorded summaries and the subsequent presentations.

Recommendations

The site visit is a useful teaching tool when placed within the semester (rather than at the beginning) as students are better able to lead the discussion through the themes and better equipped to understand the design strategies utilised. When used as an introductory course visit in first year, whilst having learning benefits, the students tend to be less prepared and as a result less engaged.

Smaller built examples may not have the luxury of space or thematic breadth and this may generate different parameters for the site visit or perhaps require multiple site visits with each visit focussing on specific technical or environmental issues.

Establishing a demonstrable relationship of the site/ building visit to design studio work is useful so that the site visit can be perceived as sustainable design tool.

Having said that, the site visit can exist as a didactic element in its own right, reinforcing taught course content.

Potential problems associated with study visits are primarily short term and logistical and related to co-ordination, administration, and changes in travel arrangements and itineraries. Adequate time should be given to advance planning including the preparation of appropriate Health & Safety Risk Assessments.

The cost of travelling for study trips for both students and educators should be considered. Whilst some institutions will cover these costs, many will not. Students should be given good notice of the likely cost of the trip so they can plan and budget accordingly.

References

- Ewing, S 2011, *The Value and place of site visits and field trips in Architectural education*. CEBE, Centre for Education in the Built Environment.
- Pattacini, L. 2018 "Experiential Learning: the field study trip, a student-centred curriculum," *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*, vol. 11, no. 2,



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