ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:

Fieldwork in my backyard: Digital experiential learning experience based on distributed fieldworks in project-based courses

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• Abstract:

This research article aims to assess the achievement of learning outcomes through digital mediums within master’s level courses on practice-based participatory planning methods. The courses are part of the Urban Ecological Planning (UEP) master’s program at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). In this article, students’ learning will be assessed through an analysis of students’ written reflections and interviews with students. The analysis will be theoretically grounded in Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle.

UEP is a practice-based program aimed at equipping students with knowledge to tackle complex urban issues in dynamic socio, cultural, political, and environmental contexts. Since the beginning of the program in 1999, student-cohorts from UEP have been on obligatory fieldworks in countries like Nepal, Uganda, and India, to facilitate practice-based learning. With the onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020, this obligatory group-fieldwork was changed to individual fieldwork by students in their respective home-countries, with remote collaboration between students. As a result, the methods for participatory planning that students in previous years learned and implemented together
as a cohort, were implemented individually in their home countries but not necessarily learned individually. The teaching staff strived to replicate previous years’ group experiences through meetings, supervisions, and presentations in groups, albeit digitally. The teaching staff saw the change in learning trajectories through students’ written reflections that were submitted as obligatory deliverables of their fieldwork. This method of student reflection on content and learning has been adopted since the beginning of the program and was implemented in 2020 as well.

The learning outcomes of UEP in previous years have been assessed in various articles by former teaching staff (Skotte, 2013; Archipovaite et al., 2016; Sliwa et al., 2018; Vrebos et al., 2019), when learning occurred through non-digital interactions. This article preserves this practice by assessing the achievement of learning outcomes in circumstances where students were forced to adapt to digital learning because of restricted international mobility.

• Author(s) Biography

Riny Sharma is Research Associate for the UEP program at NTNU. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Urban Planning from School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal (2009-2013 and was also a student of UEP (2013-15). She has carried out intensive fieldwork in Ladakh, India, where she applied the learnings from UEP in the field of sustainability in education and learning and how it relates with sustainable livelihoods in a community, in the local context. She has worked closely with displaced rural communities in Central India, low-income urban communities in Uganda has also worked in the field of citizen participation and urban governance with a non-profit organization in Bangalore, India.

Cinthia Freire Stecchini is Research Associate for the UEP program at NTNU. She holds a bachelor’s degree both in Psychology (University of São Paulo, Brazil) and in Architecture and Urbanism (Centro Universitário Moura Lacerda, Brazil), and a master’s degree in UEP (NTNU, Norway). Her main interest for research and practice is housing, in its multiple dimensions, and the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. She has experience working with informal settlements (favelas) in Brazil through engaging with non-governmental and civil society organizations.

Rolee Aranya is a Professor at the Department of Architecture and Planning. Her research interests include relational studies of poverty and informality, globalization and urban restructuring and governance as a form for organization in planning and urban development. She is the current the Program Leader for MSc Urban Ecological Planning and the current vice dean of education at the Faculty of Architecture and Design.

Marcin Sliwa is a PhD Candidate and lecturer at the University of Oslo. He has background in urban planning and is particularly interested in urban informality and low-income housing in Latin America. In his doctoral research, he studies the provision and access to affordable housing in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the context of economic
uncertainty. Marcin is a UEP alumni himself and has worked as a research assistant and lecturer at NTNU.

Hans Skotte is Professor Emeritus at the Faculty of Architecture and Design, Department of Architecture and Planning, NTNU, Norway. He re-entered academia in the late 90s after 20 years as a practicing architect-planner, out of which he spent a couple of years as Head of Health Division at the Chief Architect’s office in Botswana, Africa. His academic research focused on reconstruction and recovery after war and disaster following his PhD where he investigated how internationally funded housing reconstruction after the war in Bosnia affected the overall recovery processes. This subsequently led him to assist in the recovery processes after the tsunami in Sri Lanka. For a number of years, he was Head of NTNU’s International Master’s Program in Urban Ecological Planning including the period of this study, autumn 2020. Semester-long fieldwork periods were conducted in Kampala, Uganda in collaboration with Slum Dwellers International and Makerere University, in part funded by UN-Habitat. 2008-2014 he represented Europe in the Steering Committee of the UN-Habitat University Partnership Network. In the closing years of his tenure Skotte focused on architectural education and was included in the group given the NOKUT Award for Norway’s Best University Program in 2015.