ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Landscape Architecture Design Studio in a Virtual Environment: Comparing Two Experiences

• Author(s) Name:
Stefania Staniscia

• University or Company Affiliation:
Landscape Architecture Program, West Virginia University

• Abstract (300 words):
On March 13th, 2020, after nine weeks of in-person teaching, West Virginia University decided to move the entire teaching activity online in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. After two weeks of preparation, on March 30, classes resumed remotely. By then, more than half of the semester had already passed. I was teaching a landscape architecture design studio for sophomores and, besides the first normal adjustments, everything went smoothly. In the Students Evaluation of Instruction (SEI), students showed their satisfaction with the way the course was organized and with the management of the remote activity. In a questionnaire I asked students to complete, they listed several skills they declared to have acquired. The list of skills is comparable with the ones I collected in previous years. Based on this experience, I felt confident and decided to teach remotely also in the Fall semester of 2020. I held a landscape architecture design studio for seniors. Although I was better prepared to teach remotely and students had more experience of the studio learning environment for they are seniors, things turned out differently from what I expected. For example, the level of student disengagement
was higher, the level of student satisfaction with remote learning was lower, and the final products’ quality lower than in previous years.

In my presentation, I will examine the tools and strategies I implemented to recreate the studio environment virtually, for example, the use of real-time discussion technologies and graphic design tablets. I will then compare and contrast the two experiences aiming at identifying the possible reasons for the different outcomes. It is important to say that at the time of writing this abstract I received neither the SEI for Fall 2020 nor the questionnaires I administered to senior students. Therefore, my current considerations for Fall 2020 are based only on the interaction with the students and the verbal feedback I received from them throughout the semester.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Stefania Staniscia is a registered architect and landscape architect. She holds an International Ph.D. in Architecture from the IUAV University of Venice, and has been Adjunct Professor and Research Fellow at the University of Trento, Italy, from 2011 to 2015. She is now Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture in the School of Design and Community Development at West Virginia University.

She teaches landscape architecture design mainly in the core studio environment at the sophomore and senior levels. Her teaching emphasis is on principles of design for sustainable, resilient, and users responsive open public spaces.

Her research focuses on landscape changes of anthropogenic origin, aiming to understand, from a diachronic perspective, the primary drivers of change and the main impacts on landscapes. Cultural landscapes are at the center of her investigations, and her reflections expand to include the geographic scale.