

Chapter 10

Blended and Transnational Higher Education in Architecture Schools: Examples and Considerations From Two International Joint-Design Studios Between Australia and Japan

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ABSTRACT

In this book chapter, authors will reflect on the challenges, advantages, and pitfalls of the blended teaching in 2 architectural design studios jointly organized by an Australian and a Japanese university, highlighting key considerations ranging from the variety of learning and teaching on campus and virtual practices, to the design of assessments and related feedback, and the use of various on-line communication and graphic platforms implemented for teaching and learning (Teams, Zoom, Miro, Concept-board). They will also give an account of the experience and direct involvement of both students and faculty during the lock-down, and how flexibility and adaptability to the use of new technologies on their parts has resulted in a valuable experience at least for what concerns international design studios cooperation. As is common practice in architectural schools, the 2 joint design studios focused on different scale of representation and design, exploring issues and characteristics from the territorial to local scales.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic which hit and transformed the world in the last 2 years has been a fundamental reason behind an extended and far-reaching revolution in the methods and practice on teaching in higher education globally. Extended lockdowns and the consequent transition from face-to-face interaction towards the rapidly worldwide implementation of remote learning and teaching has completely reshaped the education methods and techniques in the academic world.

Among the main consequence of this revolution has the development of a so-called “hybrid” and “blended” teaching practice which blends in-class on campus practices with on-line activities. This has resulted in challenges for both students and teaching staff/faculty given the rapidity of the change and the lack of experience related to this new condition.

Based on first-hand experience of the authors, this book chapter discusses and critically outlines the activities planned and executed during 2 joint design studios organized by the School of Built Environment at the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney) and the Department of Architecture at Waseda University in Tokyo in the period 2020-2021. It intends to give a qualitative and reflective account of this experience (within its limits) and to assess and evaluate the efficacy of blended delivery (on-line and offline learning) while sharing some examples of good practice on the hybrid teaching and remote learning approaches which have been implemented during 2 international joint-design studios which involved students and faculty of the architecture program of these 2 universities in Australia and Japan.

As is common practice in architectural schools, the 2 joint design studios focused on different scale of representation and design, exploring issues and characteristics from the territorial to local scales.

The final work resulted in strategic architectural and urban design projects built on the knowledge and data collected, analysed, and elaborated during the various phases of studios and through a combination of seminars, virtual fieldwork, on-line tutorials and design charrette and interim and final reviews with faculty and student groups of the two institutions.

In both cases, through a series of blended teaching and learning methods, Australian and Japanese students were invited to develop urban design proposals and architectural responses through mapping, the review and analysis of relevant information, leading to conclusive detailed projects relaying on shared materials and coordinated (remote) joint activities.

METHODOLOGY

The content of the present chapter is grounded on the personal experience of the authors and other direct empirical observations which have been integrated with substantial literature review and ad hoc internal/external feedbacks from both students and invited staff during the interim and final reviews of the students’ works. The reflections presented are mainly based on and matured through several years of teaching design studios in local context (namely Australia and Japan) which also offered several opportunities of conducting joint activities with foreign partners during the pre-covid years.

The collaboration for the joint design studios illustrated in this chapter were the follow up of personal contacts among the co-authors, who after initial discussion eventually decided to experiment with a communal teaching project at the beginning of the covid pandemic in 2020.

While both studios in Australia and Japan worked on the same site and the same theme and had mostly the same kind of deliverables and assessments, still there was flexibility in deciding the focus of

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