



Bridging Institutional and National Boundaries with Virtual Classrooms

Since 2008 a group of LE:NOTRE member schools has been exploring the potentials of virtual classrooms and collaborative writing for landscape architecture education. The motivation for organising and analysing these teaching events has been primarily based on three assumptions: Firstly, international student groups can develop multicultural perspectives on the respective educational topics while working together synchronously and asynchronously, thereby developing intercultural and communication competence. Secondly, developing, documenting and archiving both educational contents and student's artefacts with the help of WIKIs improve the overall educational performance. And thirdly, collaborative teaching activities across institutional and national boundaries create fruitful synergy effects in addition to mutual stimulation of the teaching staff. Special attention was paid on providing possibilities for intensive cooperation of international students in small groups in order to foster their intercultural skills.

In addition, this e-learning based learning mode enables cooperation of different actors from education, professional practise and public administration without producing additional travel costs and travel time. This potential is still unexplored for the continuous professional development of landscape architects in Europe.

The organisation was done by Ellen Fetzer from Nürtingen-Geislingen University in the context of the IMLA Master programme and Diedrich Bruns and Heike Kaiser from Kassel University, partly with financial support from the LE:NORTRE Mundus project. Altogether, the seminars were attended by over one hundred students and lecturers from about 40 different countries. A continuation is planned to start in October 2011. You may contact Ellen Fetzer (ellen.fetzer@hfwu.de) if you wish to learn more or get involved. A full documentation of all seminars including lecture recordings and evaluations is available under this link: <http://draco.hfwu.de/~wikienfk5/index.php>. ■

Image: Cooperation in the virtual classroom: students select themes from a topic map and small groups are developed on this basis

The screenshot displays a virtual classroom environment. At the top, there is a toolbar with icons for 'Application sharing', 'Favorites', 'Slides', 'Agenda', 'Deal cards', 'Send document', and 'Webcam'. Below the toolbar, a central window titled 'Urban Landscapes Topic Map' is visible. This map is a complex network of interconnected nodes representing different urban landscape topics. Key nodes include 'Sustainability', 'Urban Ecology', 'Water management', 'Green structure planning', 'Urban design', 'Participation', 'Public Space and Quality of Life', 'History and conservation', 'Urban Agriculture', and 'City region'. Each node is connected to other nodes by lines, indicating relationships between the topics. The interface also shows a grid of participant avatars around the perimeter, some with speech bubbles. At the bottom, a status bar indicates 'LE NOTRE members room - main room' and the time '19:16'.