

An aerial photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge, showing its iconic orange-red suspension cables and roadway. The bridge spans across a deep blue body of water, with a coastal town and green hills visible in the background under a clear blue sky. A white vertical banner is positioned on the right side of the image, containing text.

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Chapter 1	
BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: TEACHING WRITING IN THE DESIGN DISCIPLINE Sana Khan Hussaini	1
Chapter 2	
DESIGN BUILD STUDIO: AGENCY THROUGH LEARNING BY MAKING Camilo Cerro	13
Chapter 3	
PRODUCING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY THROUGH ART AND DESIGN Adelaida Del Puerto García	21
Chapter 4	
ALONG THE RIVERBANK: PLACE WRITING AND STUDENT TEACHERS' ENVIRONMENTAL AFFORDANCE-ABILITY Magne Drangeid	35
Chapter 5	
INQUIRING BY DISTANT READING: LEARNING AND UNLEARNING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIOGRAPHY Angela Gigliotti, Fabio Gigone	45
Chapter 6	
OPTIONAL THINKING (OT) DEVELOPMENT AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPE (NS) CHANGE BY BRANCHING-PLOT FILM WORKSHOPS FOR YOUNGSTERS Nitzan Ben Shaul	57
Chapter 7	
A MODERN TWIST ON AN OLD CLASSIC: INNOVATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR NEW TRAINEE TEACHERS Jenny Fogarty, Leanne Gray	66
Chapter 8	
FILM GROUP PROJECT AS AN EDUCATIVE ADVENTURE Hasmik Gasparyan	74
Chapter 9	
TEACHING WITH THE PLACE AND BODY Maria Freire, Aurora Carapinha	86
Chapter 10	
SOCIAL GREEN VS. ORNAMENTAL GREEN. FOR PEDAGOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN OUR CITIES Ainhoa Akutain, Imanol Esperesate, Xabier Laka	95
Chapter 11	
BRIDGING THE GAP AND INTEGRATING THE SPACE: WHEN INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS WORK TOGETHER Sumei Karen Tan	107

TEACHING WITH THE PLACE AND BODY

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of place is crucial in landscape architecture. It is more than just the space where design and planning occur. Understanding the physicality that encompasses the dynamics of transformation, as well as the eternity and spirituality of spaces and the embodied experience of those who inhabit them, is essential to creating landscape planning and design that are integrative, functional, and meaningful. Understanding spatial, temporal, and dynamic dimensions requires a device - our body. The methodological practice of experiencing the place is essential. Teaching landscape architecture involves working at the *locus* and with the *locus*.

This paper explores the idea that the connection between place and body is a fundamental tool in teaching landscape architecture, vital for reading, conceptualizing, and managing landscapes. Activities such as living, looking, moving, drawing, annotating, mapping, diagramming, discussing, reflecting on what we feel, and engaging with communities and stakeholders must be activated. It investigates the fundamentals of working with and at the *locus* and how these concepts can be integrated into teaching methodologies. The paper explores practices carried out at the University of Évora since 1980, mainly study trips, fieldwork, and addressing community issues.

Based on our experience, working at and with the *locus* must be seen as an ethical responsibility in teaching landscape architecture.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Landscape architecture is both an art and a science that collaborates with nature to meet human needs. It is a social art, serving human values. This definition, promoted by the first generations of landscape architects in Portugal in the mid-twentieth century, remains undeniably contemporary and forms the first founding principle.

With origins in the gardening profession, the landscape architect's intervention begins with an awareness of the biophysical place, its culture, and beauty. This manifests in a reflective action, integrating knowledge to respond to societal demands from a sustainability perspective. The intervention involves balancing economic interests, social and cultural purposes, ecological foundations, and aesthetic and ethical considerations. This is an activity that therefore requiring great maturity.

Teaching landscape architecture encompasses a wide range of scientific, technical, and artistic knowledge, which is crucial to the process of transforming landscapes. This education involves

acquiring and integrating knowledge from a humanist perspective, essential to human life, and preparing landscape architects to frame actions ethically and humanistically. This involves learning objective and subjective knowledge, understandings, and skills integrated into a complex, interactive process involving research, reflection, and synthesis.¹

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PLACE

Several authors from different scientific fields have a multifaceted perspective of how space and place influence and are influenced by human interaction. Space is an abstract, quantitative and impersonal entity, while place is concrete, qualitative, and personal. Space is often seen as a neutral context for activities, while place is a space that has been endowed with meaning through human experiences. Space is perceived through its physical dimensions and coordinates, while place is experienced through emotions, and cultural and social engagements. Space is associated with what can potentially occur, as well as movement, while place is associated with identity, attachment, and belonging.² Each author brings a distinctive viewpoint from their field.

For philosopher Merleau-Ponty, the body's interaction with space is the "genesis of all things," and "the human experience is explored in the articulation of the relationship between the visible and the invisible".³ The philosopher Rosario Assunto argues that pleasure comes from the multiplicity of physical sensations of being in the landscape, through space and time. The space we experience where we live relates to our way of experiencing, implying our being in it.⁴ For psychologist Jean Piaget, the first learning belongs to the individual's interaction/experience with the body in space, based on the subject's cognitive structures. This real experience of space is dominated by the senses - vision, touch, smell, hearing, and taste.⁵ For anthropologist Tim Ingold, knowledge derives from lived involvement.⁶ The sculptor Nuno Mendoça asserts that space presupposes a multisensory, corporeal relationship, known through the sensitive internalization of its multi-relationships.⁷ For landscape architect Michel Corajoud landscape is a relational place, connected to spatial characteristics, individual knowledge, and movement in space.⁸ Aurora Carapinha reinforces this perspective, stating that "landscape can no longer be understood merely as that which is meant to be contemplated, but as a product of the relationship between subject and space, rooted in diverse relationships, constant motion, and evolution, biotic and abiotic factors, and various functions and meanings inherent to the structural ecological unit (...)".⁹

The commonality across these perspectives is the emphasis on the active, sensory, and relational aspects of experiencing place. Space is not a static backdrop, but a dynamic entity created by human interaction. Thus, the *locus* is understood as a complex interplay of sensory experiences, cognitive processes, and emotional responses, all contributing to our understanding and engagement with our common ground and our lives.

WORKING AT THE LOCUS AND WORKING WITH THE LOCUS

The concept of *locus* derives from the Latin word for place. For Christian Norberg-Schulz, *locus* is not just a physical location but also a contextual framework that influences design decisions. The concept of "genius loci," or the spirit of the place, emphasizes the importance of understanding the intrinsic characteristics of a location to create harmonious and contextually appropriate designs.¹⁰ Anne Spirn describes the concept of *locus* as extending to the larger environmental and ecological contexts. It involves designing with the natural and built environment, considering factors such as topography, climate, vegetation, and cultural heritage. Understanding and integrating these elements into the design process is crucial for creating sustainable and meaningful spaces.¹¹ For architect David Leatherbarrow, teaching in the *locus* involves immersing students in real contexts. Site visits, field trips, and hands-on projects allow students to engage directly with the physical and cultural context.

This experiential learning fosters a deeper understanding of spatial relationships, materiality, and ecological impact.¹²

As expressed before, the perception and action of landscape architects are founded on the complementarity between ecological and cultural systems.¹³ “The concept of *locus* corresponds to construction, an existential place where one is, where one lives, where opportunities and possibilities for dwelling are created (...) a space for being, a space for existing, fusing with *topus* creating an ecological, cultural and aesthetic occasion that all constructed landscape should be”.¹⁴

Thus, *locus* is a dynamic interplay of physical, contextual, ecological, and cultural elements that must be understood and integrated to create designs that are sustainable, meaningful, and deeply connected to the landscape. As landscape architects we work with the *locus*. To understand the spatial and temporal dimensions linked to the landscape, we need our body. In this way, teaching methodologies in landscape architecture must work with the *locus* and at the *locus*. The value of immersive landscape learning is more expressive with the use of study trips and fieldwork, as well as interdisciplinary collaboration, involvement of communities, and hands-on projects.

Study Trips and Fieldwork

The aim is to place students in situations where they experience the landscape, allowing them to use their bodies to explore spatial relationships, emotions, and memories. “The mind realizes the awareness of the place, the perception of exteriority, and the interior deduction for visible facts”.¹⁵ Space is perceived in multiple dimensions: spatially in the construction of depth, in various directions,¹⁶ and in time and movement. Space thus presupposes a relationship through the senses, allowing the understanding of how things assert themselves as global or structuring signifiers.¹⁷

Study trips and fieldwork enrich the imagery repertoire (forms, patterns, materials) and enhance natural and cultural references (elements, uses, functioning, and management). They provide a real proximity to the landscape system and its dynamics, offering opportunities to embrace various domains present in its interpretation and transformation, enabling students to capture the essence of each landscape, essential in future interventions.

These methodologies are also fundamental for understanding and internalizing the sustainability and authenticity of the landscape. It is *in situ* that ancient knowledge, perfected and transmitted over generations, can be observed and debated.

Overall, such methodologies provide a compendium of intricate influences that build students' knowledge: “knowing how to see,” “knowing how to be,” “knowing how to do,” and “knowing how to become”.¹⁸ Knowing how to see involves the body in space and is decisive for other mentioned skills. Only with the apprehension of biophysical and cultural components (size, shape, matter, surfaces, and spaces) and sensorial components (light, colors, sounds, skin sensitivity, odors, movements, time/moments) is it possible to identify physicalities, eternities, spiritualities, or atmospheres. This skill is strongly related to individual knowledge, the act of motion (body movement, directions, speed) and spatial characteristics. This process culminates in the ability to identify the character and meaning of space. Only after acquiring direct knowledge of ambiances and spatiality can one enter the complex domain of associating abstract information with real equivalents. Knowing how to see then reflects on lived experiences, acquired knowledge, and the ability to relate knowledge to visual patterns. The learning achieved also forms an important repertoire of references for practice. The greater and more diverse this experience, the broader the knowledge and the richer the possible reflections, namely in the transformation of the characteristics of the space into visual information (sketches, maps, and diagrams), capturing the real dimensions of objects and spaces (size and proportions). This knowledge must be trained using multiple contexts and examples to allow generalizations and to build a hierarchy of values. This knowledge and experience go beyond

documenting the biophysical and cultural characteristics of the place. We must learn innocently, guided by feelings, seeking the unknown, discovering, losing, and finding ourselves - an intensely sensitive knowledge.¹⁹ Understanding the multiple dimensions present in space (physical, historical-cultural, aesthetic, and ecological) integrates the sensitive and rational domains, blending scientific, technical, and artistic knowledge.

Study trips and fieldwork must be supported by other pedagogical strategies such as: drawing as main expression; complementary tools such as graphic diaries, portfolios, posters, reports, videos, and documentaries; metacognitive scripts, provided in advance, well-structured and detailed, to support “diving” into and “emerging” from the *locus*; collaborative experiences, involving technician, stockholders and the communities; interdisciplinary collaboration; and discussion sessions.

The “Rural Studio” offered at Auburn University’s School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture in the United States is another exemplary case of teaching with and in the *locus*.²⁰ Located in rural Alabama, this design and construction program immerses students in the local community, addressing real-world challenges through hands-on projects. It emphasizes the social and environmental responsibilities of architects and the impact of design.²¹

The future of landscape, understood as a significant cultural and ecological practice, depends on the capabilities and skills we provide to students, enabling them to look, imagine and perceive the world and each landscape in a responsible and creative way. All the pedagogical strategies must contribute to generating and influencing holistic and innovative design and planning solutions.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AT UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA, PORTUGAL: TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Study Trips

Study trips have been conducted since the 1980s.²² The plan mainly includes our country and, very occasionally, trips abroad. The itineraries cover different regions, landscapes, and gardens. These trips can be annual or biannual and can be mandatory or optional. They involve students from all three educational levels (Bachelard, Master, and PhD) or specific courses. The study trip program can range from short trips (a full day) to longer trips (a few days or a week). Costs are partially supported by schools and students. Study trips are designed according to the landscape architecture core (three-dimensional space, landscape complexity and landscape architect activity) or are given a study theme for each course. They begin as an intuitive spatial experience and gradually transform into a cognitive experience. In any case, they address many objectives, including knowledge, skills, and experiences. They are usually organized in conjunction with other educational strategies.

Long study trip: Drawing along a River

The goal of the first study trip in the 1980 was to spend a week in a rural landscape marked by subsistence agriculture. Teachers and students undertook this week-long journey, following riversides and villages, on foot with backpacks, carrying tents, food, and work materials. It was a deeply immersive experience. More than just seeing the landscape, students lived there and created a trip diary with drawing and writing materials, as illustrated in Figure 1. They explored various dimensions associated with these landscapes through a sensitive understanding of their characteristics, dynamics and transformations, values, and problems.²³

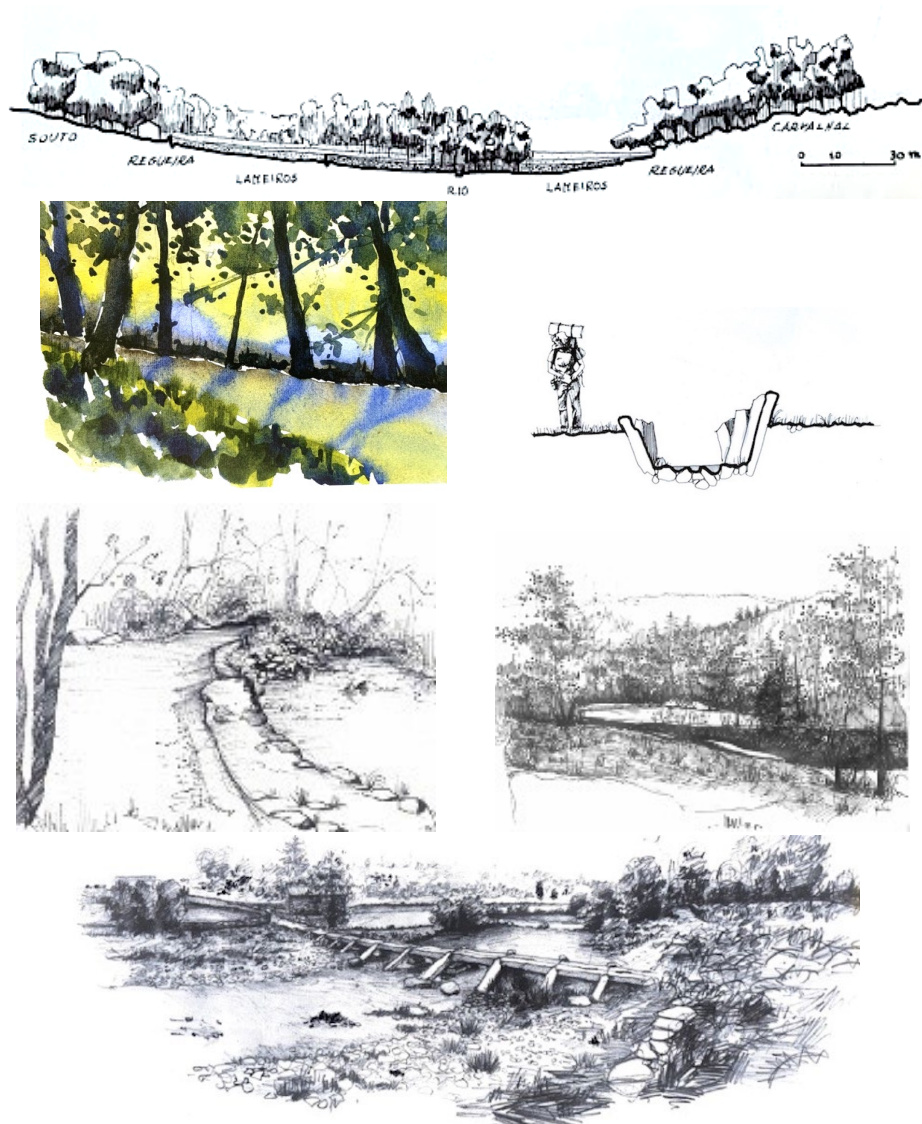


Figure 1. Study trips: student's drawings.²⁴

Short Study Trip: Introduction to Landscape Themes

Since the beginning, we have organized various types of study trips, visiting different regions and landscapes. These short trips now involve traveling by bus and often include short walks on foot, by boat, or by train. Professors from different scientific fields, such as landscape architects, botanists, biophysical engineer and geographers, accompany the trips. We establish contact with the local communities, as well as with designers and other technicians who work locally. These experts share and reflect with students and teachers on the values, problems, and challenges associated with each landscape, as illustrated in Figure 2.

For the past decade, we have started the academic year with a study trip like this, involving students from all three levels of landscape architecture education, as well as from other related fields offered by the university of Évora. The aim is to introduce students to the landscape, revealing the multiplicity and complexity of processes and actors, stimulating curiosity, and highlighting different scales and perspectives.



Figure 2. Study trips: examples from diverse contexts and landscapes.

Fieldwork in Landscape Planning or Design

Fieldwork can be linked with planning or design, and it can be an exploratory thematic activity or practical work addressing a given problem, often involving community participation. Students should spend a significant amount of time on-site, experiencing, drawing, and working during the main phases of the process: analysis, strategy discussion, scenario development, proposals, on-site experiments, work model, and community involvement, as illustrated in Figure 3. Being on-site makes it easier to understand scale, temporality, dynamics and atmospheres, combining the emotional dimension (our five senses) with the scientific dimension.



Figure 3. Students participating in fieldwork and students on-site experimenting design solutions using a working model.

CONCLUSION

Among the pedagogical strategies for teaching landscape architecture with and in the *locus*, we can consider study trips, fieldwork, and community involvement as the central tools. This approach has been maintained and refined for almost forty-five years at the University of Évora.

Students are encouraged to see and understand the landscape while learning to represent it. Furthermore, they must remain in the landscape to understand how it works, express the sensations it evokes, and grasp the problems and values present in each landscape. It is important that opportunities occur in meaningful landscapes, prompting students to experience and reflect on them with their teachers, other professionals, stakeholders, and through community engagement.

As we have seen, the evaluation of scale, temporality, and atmosphere results from combining the emotional dimension with the scientific dimension. The sensitive landscape approach is particularly slow and includes exploring different dimensions of a place. In this process, we explore the emotional, ecological, and cultural dimensions.

Living, researching, knowing, working, interacting with communities, leading to critical reflection, is the approach we convey through our methodologies. Any intervention must use the most innovative technology, but it must always integrate human scale and temporality, resonating through the senses and the act of sensory registration and apprehension. This is a very gestural act, where the whole body moves to record, draw, and reflect. The subsequent development of work with technology allows a more realistic and vigorous approach to consolidating the research process, synthesis and construction of sensitive and innovative strategies and proposals, which can then be transmitted in a clear, appealing and creative way.

NOTES

- ¹ Maria Freire, “Towards a Different Approach in Teaching Landscape Design” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 2011), <https://rdpc.uevora.pt/handle/10174/11089>.
- ² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Fernando Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço* (Porto: FAUP, 2006).
- ³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia da Percepção* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1999).
- ⁴ Rosario Assunto, *Il Paesaggio e L'estetica* (Palermo: Edizioni Novecento, 1994).
- ⁵ Maria Freire, “Towards a Different Approach in Teaching Landscape Design” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 2011), <https://rdpc.uevora.pt/handle/10174/11089>
- ⁶ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 189-208.
- ⁷ Nuno Mendça, “Para uma Poética da Paisagem” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 1989), <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/11889>
- ⁸ Michel Corajourd, “Le paysage c’est l’ endroit où le ciel et la terre se touchent,” *Mort du Paysage? in Philosophie et Esthétique du Paysage*, ed. Françoise Dagognet (Seysse: Éditions du Cham Vallon, 1982), 36-53; Michel Corajourd, “Les neuf conduites nécessaires d’une propédeutique pour un apprentissage du projet sur le paysage,” in *Jardins Insurgés, Architecture du Paysage en Europe* (Barcelone, Espagne: Biennale Européenne du Paysage, 2001), 119-132.
- ⁹ Aurora Carapinha, “Of the *Topus* and the *Locus*.” *Arquitetura Paisagista* 11, (October 2015): 15, <https://apap.pt/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/AP-11-Out-2015.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980).
- ¹¹ Anne Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).
- ¹² David Leatherbarrow, *Architecture Oriented Otherwise* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).
- ¹³ The concept of cultural systems corresponds to constructions, so that with the relationships that human societies establish with nature.
- ¹⁴ The concept of *topus* is the expression of the “inter-relationship of natural systems” and it is also “the very poesis of Landscape”. It is “the operating system that leads to construction and transformation of a particular kind and that denies our relationship with the material world and the corporeality of the Landscape”. Aurora Carapinha, “Of the *Topus* and the *Locus*” *Making Landscape* 11 (2015):13.
- ¹⁵ Nuno Mendça, “Para uma Poética da Paisagem” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 1989), 2, <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/11889>
- ¹⁶ Cristopher Girot, “Four trace concepts in landscape architecture,” in *Recovering Landscape. Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, ed. by James Corner (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).
- ¹⁷ Nuno Mendça, “Para uma Poética da Paisagem” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 1989), <https://dspace.uevora.pt/rdpc/handle/10174/11889>; Maria Freire, “Towards a Different Approach in Teaching Landscape Design” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 2011), <https://rdpc.uevora.pt/handle/10174/11089>
- ¹⁸ Maria Freire, “Towards a Different Approach in Teaching Landscape Design” (PhD diss., University of Évora, 2011), 100, <https://rdpc.uevora.pt/handle/10174/11089>
- ¹⁹ Cristopher Girot, “Four trace concepts in landscape architecture,” *Recovering Landscape. Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, ed. by James Corner (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).
- ²⁰ “School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. Rural Studio,” Auburn University, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://cadc.auburn.edu/architecture/architecture-degrees-programs/program-of-architecture/rural-studio/>.
- ²¹ Andrea Dean and Timothy Hursley, *Proceed and Be Bold: Rural Studio After Samuel Mockbee* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).
- ²² Maria Freire, “Are study trips a leisure time for students and teachers?” in *The Power of Landscape: ECLAS Annual Conference 2012*, ed. Izabela Dymitryszyn et al. (Warsaw, Poland: University of Life Sciences, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/10174/7599>.
- ²³ Maria Freire, “Landscape design - theory in landscape architecture. Teaching experiments in the University of Évora,” in *Landscape and Ruins. Planning and Design for the Regeneration of Derelict Places: ECLAS Annual Conference 2009*, ed. Adriana Ghersi et al. (Genoa, Italy: Alinea Firenze, 2009), 152-155.
- ²⁴ Nuno Mendça, *Rio Côa. A Arte da Água e da Pedra* (Évora: Casa do Sul Editora and CHA-UE, 2006).

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