

ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS AND DIVERSITY IN PLANNING EDUCATION

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DIVERSIFYING URBAN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE PROGRAMS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Lessons From Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

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Diversity in urban-planning education has become a theme of interest among scholars in the past two decades. A thorough review of two main planning journals, the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, by Sweet and Etienne (2011), indicates that the issue of diversity has been addressed in four main areas: (1) race and gender, (2) master narrative vs. counter narrative, (3) pedagogy and curriculum, and (4) structural barriers to diversity. Over the past two decades, planning education has adopted internationalization and transcultural learning strategies as an avenue to promote diversity. Along with this, the need to internationalize planning education has been recognized by several associations in Europe, North America, and Australasia (Frank, 2006). Urban-planning and architecture schools' efforts and challenges to incorporate diversity into education and the faculty include increasing the number of underrepresented minority academic staff and students (Anthony, 2008; Sweet & Etienne, 2011); incorporating diversity into the planning curriculum and course content (Looye & Sesay, 1998; Kwitko & Thompson, 2002; Jackson et al., 2018; Shilon & Eizenberg, 2020); enhancing awareness of children, youth, and the greater public about urban planning education (Palazzo et al., 2021); promoting an institutional climate for diversity within the university campus (Greenlee et al., 2018); and engagement with transcultural learning experiences via international initiatives (Yigitcanlar, 2013; Jones, 2019).

While there is a growing volume of research on the desirability of promoting diversity in architecture and urban-planning education, there is less discussion about what the term “diversity” means in different locations, as the perception of diversity differs from one context to another. The majority of publications in this area are coming from North America where the issues of race and gender shape the aspirations for bringing and sustaining diversity into architecture and urban-planning education. However, research indicates that diversity is not necessarily solely categorized by race and gender issues. Importantly, as indicated by Sandercock and Forsyth (1992), the increase in the number of female students or students of color in architecture and urban-planning departments does not necessarily lead to the diversification of urban planning in practice.¹

It is also necessary to mention the efforts at diversifying architecture and urban-planning curricula to include ongoing urban complexities and challenges, especially in the global South. Particularly, with an increase in the number of international students, high mobility of students and academic staff through exchange programs, and shared global visions like the New Urban Agenda, there is a need to focus on major global-planning and sustainable-development issues in the pedagogy (Jones, 2019). For example, in order to develop a global mindset in urban-planning students, Ali and Doan (2006) explore and compare various methodologies in US planning schools to teach global planning issues and diversity of urban development processes to undergraduate students. Similarly, the surveys of Yigitcanlar (2013) and Jones (2019) on planning education in Australia indicate an increase in international learning experiences in which students acquire new knowledge and skills from the Asia-Pacific region through field trips and international planning studios. Today, many architecture and planning schools address this through different plans, programs, and policies that consider their local context and constraints. There appears to be a role for architecture and planning schools to share experiences and good practices in this area.

This chapter focuses on internationalization as a way to promote diversity within the architecture and urban-planning programs at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in Iran, where diversity is seen as *integration of intercultural/international dimensions into urban planning and architecture pedagogy*. Local Iranian students are included in initiatives not only to benefit from the workshop, but also to benefit from international students' experiences and insights. The aim is to increase students' capacity to become more resilient and innovative in an era of complexity and uncertainty in socio-political and economic conditions. To achieve this, we present here the experience of international students in two intensive workshops organized by the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

The Faculty: Diversity Gaps in the Mainstream Curriculum

Hosting over ten nationalities, the vision of the faculty² is to increase its international status in the field of architecture and urban-planning education in the Middle East and central Asia. This is to be achieved by increasing the enrollment of international students from the region as well as internationalizing education by addressing shared concerns regarding architecture and urbanism in the Middle East region. Several challenges and issues in regard to the built environment—including informal settlements, the aspiration for globalization through large-scale redevelopments, and heritage conservation vs. renovation—are shared between Iran and other neighboring countries, in particular cities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The official curriculum of architecture and urban-planning programs in Iran is approved by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) and is a required component for all higher-education institutions in the country. Reviewing the aims adopted for the two distinct official programs, it becomes clear that the mainstream curriculum does not reflect the *de facto* diversity that is slowly emerging in architecture and urban-planning programs, such as the increasing number of enrolled female students and the increasing demand for internationalization of the two programs. Considering these gaps, the approach to internationalize architecture and urban-planning programs at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad is guided by the following goals:

- To reflect the influence of international intensive workshops on the experience of international students, particularly on how they see themselves integrating these experiences into their own value systems in home countries.
- To recommend programs and policies to the faculty to internationalize the existing curriculum.
- To suggest strategies that create a departmental climate and learning context receptive to international learning experiences.

- To extend the diversity values to other issues: the focus on internationalization as an avenue for promoting diversity in architecture and urban-planning education can be extended to topics such as gender diversity.

To achieve these goals, the experiences of hosting two international workshops at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad are described, in which a group of international students were involved in two different field-work settings. The first workshop concerns exploring a quasi-forgotten vernacular heritage located in a rural setting, where international students experienced three days of living and working in a village camp near Mashhad. The second workshop was held in an urban setting where an abandoned industrial site in Mashhad became a major concern for documentary work. The statements and expressions from international students at the end of each workshop are important for incorporating diversity into the curricula of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning.

The Experience of Organizing International Workshops

The undergraduate programs in architecture and urban planning were launched by the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in 2005. More than 1,000 students (71.36% female), including 33 international students, have completed their studies through the summer of 2021. The international students are mainly from Middle Eastern and neighboring countries: a considerable majority is from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and others are mainly from Lebanon, Bahrain, Tajikistan, and India.

A large proportion of enrolled international students in the programs (72.72%) are female.³ This might represent the case of structural barriers to diversity, as female international students are coming from countries where women are typically underrepresented. The faculty has adopted various initiatives addressed to international students in order to guarantee cultural diversity and establish an environment where students of many backgrounds work together. Two examples of these initiatives—documentation-intensive workshops—are discussed here.

Vernacular Documentation Intensive Workshop

VERNADOC, a method for documenting vernacular architecture, is a simple, authentic surveying method originating from Finland, later known in various countries thanks to the Survey of Architectural Heritage camps. These workshops rely on on-site measurements and the creation of exquisite, ink-based drawings. In VERNADOC-intensive workshops, scaled drawings with shadow and texture are the sole features fulfilling the documentation (instead of text and specifications) and are followed by an exhibition of the drawings at that community immediately after the workshop. These projects aim to highlight the value of local building tradition (morphology, construction method, and use value), to establish an international network of professionals to cover various disciplines relevant to surveying criteria, and to promote cross-cultural learning in the area of vernacular architecture and urbanism. In September 2019, the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad organized a ten-day intensive VERNADOC workshop in collaboration with the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts and the Iranian VERNADOC association.

Kang historical stepped village is located in northeastern Iran in the center of the greater Khorasan region. The village is estimated to have a 3,000-year history of civilization due to archaeological findings and textual evidence from the holy book of Zoroastrianism. The vernacular architecture of Kang is characterized by the use of only local materials such as wood and stone and an indigenous style commonly created without professional architects and planners. The architecture of Kang is typically practical and simple, without decoration or unnecessary ornaments. Its vicinity to Mashhad (about 40 kilometers or 25 miles), indigenous rural fabric, and continuity of village life made Kang



Figure 6.1 Vernacular Documentation Workshop
Students' activities during the vernacular documentation intensive workshop in Kang historical village and the final exhibition of drawings.

an ideal site for a vernacular documentation intensive workshop chiefly organized to include international students from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, India, Lebanon, and Bahrain, as well as Iran. Professional VERNADOC instructors from Finland, Iran, and Thailand joined the crew to document three rustic, original, and vernacularly built houses without considerable restorative interventions. The language barrier in this workshop was not a main concern since all international students study in Farsi, and they have a fair level of proficiency to communicate with local people.

The workshop was divided into two sections. The first took place in the village for five intensive days in which students became involved in surveying and sketching the selected buildings. Students became familiar with local construction techniques, vernacular construction materials, and the local functioning of everyday life in a small-scale rural setting. Instructors also taught various documenting tools and techniques. Through on-site experience, both Iranian and international students got to know different issues from the mainstream curriculum designated for indoor studio work. Indeed, the workshop was an opportunity for students to get familiar with vernacular contexts, cultures, needs, and expectations that can affect their critical and systems-thinking values. Here is a dialogue between an old lady resident in the village questioning one of the Afghan students.

“What are you searching for by drawing my house?” [the old rural lady asked].

“Because your houses are stunning; they are beautiful and to us they have importance; good for you Madame” [the student responded].

“Are we important? Is my house beautiful? This is the first time I am hearing such a thing” [replied the old lady].

The Afghan student witnessed how the atmosphere created by the workshop affected the confidence of the local people and their appreciation of their living environment. Later, she explained to the workshop instructors that Afghanistan and Afghan cultural heritage is suffering from not being appreciated; if people receive appreciation from outsiders about their tangible and intangible belongings, they are less likely to reconstruct or leave their vernacular homes.

The second section of the workshop took place in the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning where students were asked to ink and finalize their scaled final sketches. In this section, students learned various methods of drawing, texturing, and inking to present what they documented during the first on-site section.

The VERNADOC workshop adopted very basic, simple techniques and tools for documentation. However, the intercultural experiences during the workshop and over the exhibition of the final works highlighted the vernacular values⁴ that are shared by participants' place of origin. Considering that the tangible and intangible heritage of a local community can be appreciated through simple and accessible methods, the VERNADOC camp inspired international students coming from countries with deep traditional roots to look differently at the question of heritage conservation. The organization of similar workshops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria were suggested right after the final exhibition by authorities and academic institutions in these countries.

Modern Documentation Intensive Workshop

The Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning organized a second international documentation workshop, this one documenting modern architectural heritage, with the collaboration of DOCOMOMO (International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) Iran, Petroleum Museums and Documents Center of Iran, and CIPA (International Scientific Committee for Documentation of Cultural Heritage). The intensive workshop aimed at conducting measurement sciences into the technological heritage

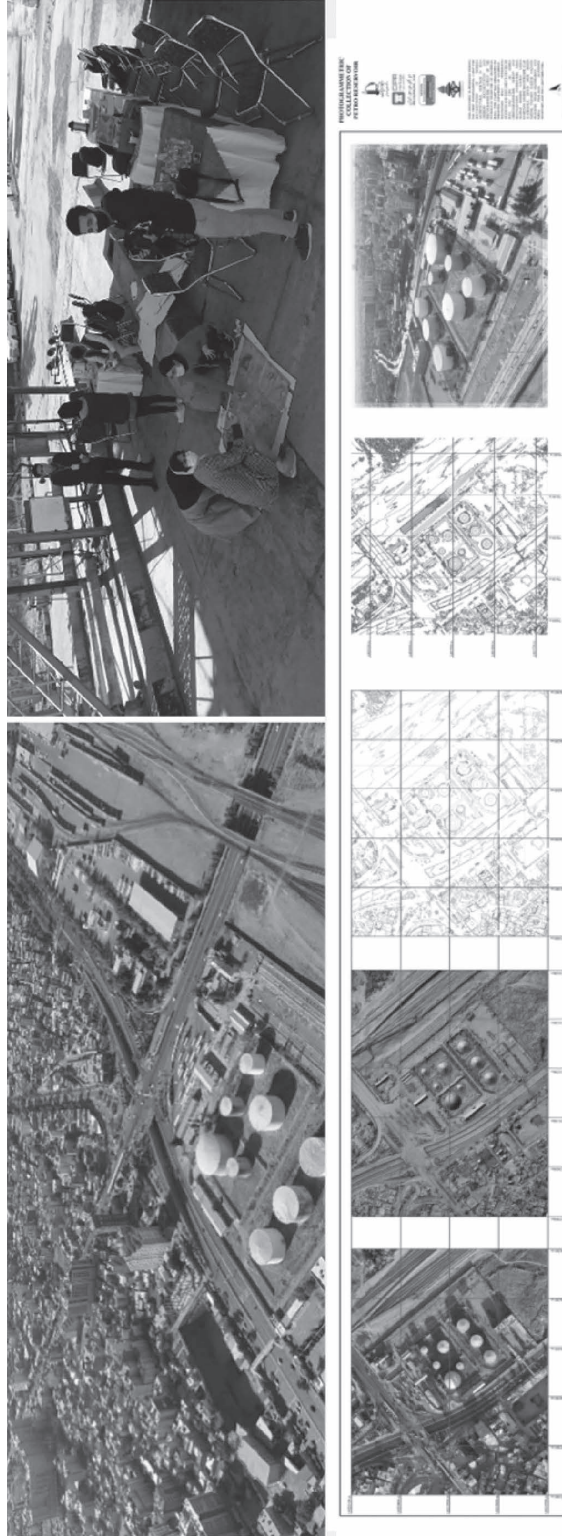


Figure 6.2 Modern Documentation Workshop
Students' activities during the modern documentation intensive workshop by means of drones and documented orthophotos created by the students.

documentation. The selected site for documentation was the oldest petroleum depository in both Mashhad and Iran, constructed in 1925 and abandoned in 2001.

As the first initiative to document the works of the modern movement in Iran, the workshop aimed to increase awareness of modern architectural heritage, incorporate modern technologies in surveying the built environment, and foster the development of ideas for adaptive re-use. In the course of five days of intensive on-site and campus work, the participants learned and practiced computerizing photogrammetric surveys of an industrial heritage site and practiced façade mapping by drone photogrammetry. In this workshop, the abandoned site of the Petroleum Reservoir of Mashhad (an area of approximately 5.5 hectares), including several mazut⁵ tanks and industrial sheds, was documented by means of drone images. Through photogrammetric documentation, 3D models and a dataset for production of Building Information Model (BIM) models were created. These data-enriched samples could be used on a digital model for monitoring and operational purposes, with various potential applications for cultural-heritage conservation and restoration. This documentation system could be adopted by architects and urban planners for technical surveys and measurement of archeological sites, land plots, street façades, and topography. It could be seen as an alternative to traditional surveying tools (such as theodolite and level), which is a part of the current curriculum of architecture and urban planning programs in Iran.

The Iraqi and Afghan participants found drone documentation and photography interesting methods for surveying architectural and archeological ruins in unsafe and war-torn regions and proposed a similar method be applied in some zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. The speed, accuracy, and versatility of the data-enriched model creation (especially compared to vernacular documentation methods) had a substantial effect on the critical thinking of the students. The Iraqi and Afghan students claimed that the pedagogy in their home countries manifests a separation of education and technology. They highlighted that the surveying techniques they learned in their home countries, and later in the programs, were almost disconnected from high-tech facilities that could ease documentation, modelling, and design. They found such initiatives useful to fill the existing gap; however, a new combination of pedagogy and high-tech survey tools and advanced technologies is what they desired for their future fellows.

Lessons and Recommendations for Diversifying Programs via Internationalization

The international students participating in the two documentation intensive workshops were chiefly from countries with many endangered built heritage sites (vernacular and modern) due to uneasy political conditions or internal conflicts. The cultural landscape of many Middle Eastern countries (particularly Iraq and Afghanistan) has remained mostly unseen and unknown to the rest of the world due to security issues and lack of study and documentation. Organization of such workshops could highlight the importance of documentation of the built environment in conflict-prone regions as an initiative to safeguard endangered heritage.

Furthermore, the participants in the workshops were mostly from post-colonial Middle Eastern countries where the “developmentalism” rhetoric of the state is often reflected in large-scale renewal plans and infrastructure projects. This was also reflected by Iraqi and Afghan students when they spoke about architecture and urban-planning programs’ curricula in their countries, where the main focus is on technical and structural issues (technical drawing, structural issues, infrastructure, land development, mapping, etc.). The two-decade presence of international (Western) military forces, consultants, volunteers, donors, and foundations in Iraq and Afghanistan has accelerated the developmentalism rhetoric—reflected in economic growth and competitiveness. Therefore, appreciation of indigenous fabrics and construction techniques as well as preservation of vernacular and modern

heritage sites is often neglected. During the workshops, students were given time to think about their concerns and ideas for increasing vernacular and modern heritage awareness in their countries of origin. The final discussion highlighted the need to invest attention and capital in vernacular and modern heritage sites to attract sustainable income through tourism.

Both camps offered an atmosphere totally different from the mainstream studio work indicated by the official curriculum in Iran. While the typical design or planning studio is pre-planned with sets of instructions and assignments, working in the international workshops enhanced competencies and skills in different domains. Students learned to think out of the box, to see things differently, and to experience real issues and challenges. They also learned to be good observers and good listeners, abilities that they do not fully encounter in their campus studios. Importantly, international students could compare the values demonstrated during the field experiences to the value systems operating in their home countries, therefore drawing comparison lessons on how modern and vernacular heritage sites are recognized and treated in different contexts. Since the majority of international students in Iran return to their home countries after graduation, it is important for them to relate their knowledge to their place of origin through comparative learning. This is also in line with the findings of Yigitcanlar (2013) and Jones (2019) that international field trips and overseas learning experiences provide a valuable learning environment where students' cognitive learning is improved.

Organizing workshops and scientific camps for international students could contain various challenges in Iran. The challenges include securing sponsors to keep the workshops affordable to students; inviting guest instructors; establishing connections with professionals overseas, which, due to the international sanctions on Iran, have become an obstacle in recent years; and obtaining permissions from various state-controlled organizations. Despite these challenges, these two international intensive workshops could be a steppingstone to diversifying the architecture and urban planning curriculum at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and to enhance the importance of cross-cultural learning in both disciplines. On the basis of the experiences available, the following recommendations are provided for the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in order to diversify the pedagogy with the focus on internationalization within the curriculum.

International Cooperation

International cooperation is to be achieved by establishing ties with counterpart academic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to develop mutual cooperation plans in teaching, research, exchange programs, and engagement activities of similar interests.

Diversifying Architecture and Urban-Planning Pedagogy

Understanding the depth and efficacy of architecture and urban-planning pedagogy at the faculty level should become a priority for diversifying the curriculum. To what extent have the program curricula and course contents in architecture and urban planning been adapted to fit the scope of internationalization by the faculty? Do the courses offered by the faculty meet the expectations and needs of the architecture and urban-planning job markets in Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq?⁶ What areas have been missed in the course curriculum that could have helped international students with their knowledge of the socio-political context of their country of origin? Future research should address these questions by critically revising the current curriculum.

The experience of the two workshops offered new perspectives on skills each architecture and planning student should be equipped with in order to relate knowledge to practice. This could be achieved by revising studio courses for both programs of architecture and urban planning at Ferdowsi

University of Mashhad. Currently, studios comprise the backbone of the architecture and urban-planning curricula with long hours of individual or team work on a subject ranging in scale from a building to a neighborhood to a city. The aim of the studio work is to enhance skills in presentation (visual, oral, written), design, planning, qualitative/quantitative analysis, and interpersonal communication. The experiences of the two workshops highlight the need to design strategies to incorporate critical-thinking skills into studio courses. This could be developed by assigning tasks and activities to include different methods of problem solving as alternatives to predefined standards (such as land use or building codes). Another strategy could be the integration of studio work with real challenges and issues in the city of Mashhad from architectural to a broad urban and regional scale. Off-campus field trips can enrich students' learning experiences, moving the learning out of campus studios into real spaces of the city where students can make connections to the way that the knowledge they are learning in the programs has real-world applications.

Since planning in Iran is largely a product of the state, much of the policy and practice that is taught by urban-planning departments is tailored to fit the professional planning context in Iran. However, the increase in the number of international students and their places of origin should be taken into consideration by the faculty. One strategy could be to include courses in the curriculum that have regional implications in order to expose students (both Iranian and international) to diverse contexts that enhance their learning, skills, and capabilities.

Establishing Ties With Public and Non-Governmental Institutions

Securing funds for organizing international workshops is one of the most important steps for managing this process. Establishing ties with municipalities, city councils, and other public institutions as well as NGOs could provide financial and administrative support for future international initiatives. Possible initiatives could include the organization of public exhibitions of student work or inviting public officials or NGO members to narrate their experience and expectations.

Intercultural Sharing Experiences

This can be achieved through organization of cultural events focusing on diversity and sharing intercultural experiences to integrate international students with their local peers. The point is to appreciate different local cultures, setting the stage for diversity and inclusiveness, possibly through such events as photography exhibitions, food-sharing, storytelling, and so forth.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on internationalization as a way to promote diversity within architecture and urban-planning pedagogy. The increase in enrollment of international students in the architecture and urban-planning programs at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad indicates a need to diversify the pedagogy through cross-cultural learning initiatives. The experience of the two workshops provides a platform for the programs to diversify the pedagogy in three ways:

- 1) Incorporate concrete issues and challenges of the city of Mashhad into studio courses in order to enhance students' problem-solving skills.
- 2) Incorporate field experiences into the curriculum to enhance international students' competencies in comparing those experiences to the value systems of their home countries.
- 3) Incorporate into the pedagogy courses and content that have regional implications and that enrich students' cognitive learning through transcultural learning experiences.

However, the focus on internationalization as a way to promote diversity in architecture and urban-planning education must also be extended to various topics such as gender diversity in the future.

Notes

- 1 In the last decade, the number of female graduates and faculty members in the fields of architecture and urban planning has increased significantly in Iran, but despite this, women still have much less power in policy and decision-making structures.
- 2 “Faculty” describes a group of university departments concerned with a major division of knowledge.
- 3 At the time of writing (summer 2021), the ascendancy of the Taliban in the Afghan civil war was sure to substantially increase emigration and send fresh waves of refugees flooding across the border between the two countries; hence, the number of female Afghan students is predicted to increase considerably in the following academic years.
- 4 These values include construction techniques, materials, and the everyday life of villagers.
- 5 Heavy, low-quality fuel oil used in power plants and similar applications.
- 6 Afghanistan and Iraq have the most considerable cultural exchanges with Iran. Afghanistan shares a common language and long land border (the *Afghanistan–Iran border* is 921 km), while Iraq has a majority of Shi’ite Muslims, which is the official state religion in Iran, as well as a long land border (the *Iran–Iraq border* runs for 1,599 km).

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