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THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN PLANNING STUDIO AS A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH.

EXPERIENCES FROM GRENOBLE & SFAX (2012-20)

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Abstract

In 2012, an international planning studio was organized by the Urban Planning Institute of Grenoble (France) at Sfax (Tunisia). What could have been a one-off project evolved into a long-term cooperation between French and Tunisian partners. The international cooperation in urbanism studio is now the focus of the teaching approach in both years of the Urbanism and International Cooperation master's programme. This paper firstly considers the theoretical and practical contexts in which these studios developed. It then goes on to explore the planning concepts on which they are built. The main pedagogical characteristics are then drawn out. Finally, the lessons which can be learned from this experience and the potential for these to be applied elsewhere are evaluated.

Keywords

planning pedagogy, planning studio, studio abroad, Grenoble & Sfax, international cooperation

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1. Introduction

Together with professional experience, internships or apprenticeships, and the mastery of a multidisciplinary culture and the dissertation, the studio – or workshop – is a basic element of training in urban planning or urbanism (Heumann and Wetmore, 1984; Guttenberg and Wetmore, 1987; Wetmore and Heumann, 1988; Higgins et al, 2009; Grant Long, 2012; Bastin and Scherrer, 2018).

After pioneer experiences of “cross-cultural learning” design studio from the 1980s onwards (Banerjee, 1990), a new type of studio emerged in the early 2000s, seemingly at the same time in the Anglophone and French speaking worlds: the “international studio”, “travelling studio” or “studio abroad” (Abramson, 2005). This new form of studio has only been the subject of a limited number of scientific articles (Macedo, 2017; Bastin and Scherrer, 2018; Cremaschi, 2019; Jones, 2019). These international live experiences are seen as a good thing for two reasons: professionally, they can effectively prepare students for a professional world that is increasingly globalised. Second, they allow students, by opening up to other societies, cultures and ways of working, to reconstruct their relationship to the world around them, which, beyond professional knowledge, can have profound repercussions on how they perceive themselves (Abramson, 2005; Dandekar, 2009).

This paper focuses on a particular sub-type of international studio: the *international cooperation in urbanism studio*. The paper explores a number of questions. Being a sub-type of a sub-type of planning studio, how far is this type of studio like other examples of the international, or travelling, studio? What are the main characteristics of the Grenoble and Sfax case study in terms of teaching concepts and approach the type of learners? What are the difficulties in comparison with other studios? What are the effects of such experience on students? And finally, what lessons can be learned from it?

This paper draws predominantly on observations of a series of eight studio experiences, from 2012 to 2020, which contributed to a more complex collaborative relationship between two cities and their respective universities and municipalities¹. The experiences are evaluated from the point of view of the students from a complete series of deliverables: written final reports, public presentations of projects (slide shows in pdf/ppt and video formats), and public exhibitions. Some 25 students, from both countries, provided written feedback at the request of their professors, either at the end of the course (about one month after returning home) or several years after, for the purposes of this research. This feedback covers five out of eight of the studios, from 2015 until 2020. For each of the eight studios, the students have contributed their private archives. These documents provide access to their personal daily experiences through photos, recordings, videos of the fieldwork, drawing books, in situ testimonies, and even a master’s thesis in the form of a comic strip (Rajic, 2020).

The author played a number of roles in this international cooperation: co-director of seven studios, deputy-director then director of the Planning Institute, inviting professor for Tunisian colleagues and doctoral students in France, and co-author of an illustrated trilingual book on the two cities’ urban life (Roux et al, 2019). The relationship is continuing. At the time of the writing, a 10th studio is in preparation for 2022, after an experience of a distance-learning studio due to the COVID pandemic. A collective atlas about Sfax metropolis is in development, under the supervision of Tunisian colleagues (Bennasr and Ben Fguira, forthcoming). The studios observed in this article were organised in Sfax. In Grenoble, Tunisians have been involved, every year, in a variety of teaching and research activities as professors and PhD or master students, but with only two proper studios; that experience is not reported here.

1 Sfax is a port city in the east of the country, located about 270 kilometres from Tunis. It is the second largest Tunisian city, and a leading economic and university centre with a population of 272,801 in 2014 within an urban area of approximately 600,000 inhabitants. Grenoble is a university town in the Alps, specialising in high technology, located 550 kilometres from Paris. It is the second largest agglomeration in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, with 157,650 inhabitants in 2018 within an urban area of 451,096 inhabitants. The two municipalities have been cooperating since 1968 and the two universities signed a partnership agreement in 2016.

2. Characteristics of the International Cooperation in Planning Studio

The emergence and development of international planning studios can be seen in the more general context of the internationalisation of higher education which began in the early 21st. century (Pezzoli and Howe, 2001; Gacel-Ávila, 2005). Opening up to the international arena was identified as a strategic objective for higher education institutions. It is widely believed that the students of tomorrow must be prepared to work in an increasingly international, intercultural, and globalised world, and that the internationalisation of universities must be conducted in an intentional and inclusive manner:

In sum, the modern internationalised university: (a) serves a global community by welcoming and attracting talented, international students and scholars, (b) addresses local as well as global problems, which often cannot be investigated in isolation, through research and social engagement, (c) ensures inclusive, intercultural learning and competency development in and through the classroom and curricula, and (d) fosters a more peaceful world by increasing mutual understanding. (Frank, 2019, 8)

The paradox is that actors do not hear the same thing when they talk about internationalisation. For some, it is an essential lever for attractiveness and competitiveness, understood in a neo-liberal and quantifiable sense (the number of foreign students, exchange students, international agreements, and so on), while advocates of a form of internationalism hope that it will increase the intercultural skills of everyone. Even if universities opt for the latter, experience shows that the increase in the proportion of foreign students does not have an automatic effect on intercultural learning.

Frank examines five types of innovative international planning collaboration initiatives: (a) comparative research network, (b) international doctoral college, (c) co-diplomation, (d) bilateral agreements and (e) the international planning studio, which she describes as a “collaborative international live project”:

While highly valuable for learning, ‘live’ projects are resource intensive (e.g., Forsyth et al, 2000; Kotval, 2003) and international live projects incur additional complexities in their delivery. Nevertheless, with planning schools under pressure to increase the level of international experiences for students while also having to offer practice-based curriculum elements, international live projects represent a promising pedagogical approach that can satisfy both needs by bringing students from different cultures together for one-two weeks of project work. (...) They are generally run once or twice but often cease once project funding runs out. (Frank, 2019, 14)

2.1. Definitions

An urban planning studio is an integral, intensive and live teaching course that allows students to put their theoretical knowledge, know-how, and interpersonal skills into practice. Under supervision of a group of teachers, students work together to provide a response through periods of study, observation, analysis and project development, with constant iterations. A report to the sponsor - most often in the form of an oral presentation and/or a written document - generally concludes the studio. Thus defined, the urban planning studio normally involves fieldwork, unless there are financial, geopolitical or health constraints. A studio can be carried out *pro bono* or be subject to a financial contribution by the client. It is supervised by a small teaching team which provides a complementarity of disciplines and professional status (teacher/researcher/practitioner). In contrast to studios in architecture or landscape, students are put in a position of working together on a collective response. This does not, however, prevent them from being organised into sub-groups during the study or project phases in order to test different hypotheses or scenarios. The larger the number of students, the more difficult it is to maintain such a system.

An international cooperation in urban planning studio is first and foremost a collaborative effort between students and teachers which contributes to the production of a “studio work”; there is a strong notion of peer learning. The studio takes place with one or more delegations of students from foreign partner universities.

This kind of studio may be referred to as a “studio abroad”, a term possibly coined by Abramson (2005, 89), and defined as:

A subtype of education abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution. Students generally enrol in academic coursework for a traditional classroom-based experience abroad. Depending on the selected program, academic credit will be earned via the host institution or via the home institution (Ogden, 2015).

This meaning, which has become standard among international educators in the U.S., excludes the pursuit of a full academic degree at a foreign institution. It can also be referred to as a “community-engaged form of learning” or as “community service-learning” which is defined as:

A course-based, credit-bearing education experience in which students (a) participate in organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995, 112; see also Levkoe et al., 2020; Roakes and Norris-Tirrell, 2000).

2.2. Genesis

Studios abroad in French urban planning have been strongly connected to the development of international cooperation between cities, regions, and states from the 1980s onwards and the subsequent development of international tracks in planning masters degrees. In Grenoble, the master’s degree has specialised in international cooperation since 1990 under different names (see Table 1).

Table 1: Successive international tracks in planning masters degrees

Academic year	Title of the master’s degree	Tracks
1990 - 1999	DESS Urbanisme & Aménagement <i>Urbanism & Planning</i>	Villes et Développement <i>Cities and Development</i>
1999 - 2004	DESS Urbanisme & Aménagement <i>Urbanism & Planning</i>	Villes et Développement & Coopération Internationale <i>Cities and Development & International Cooperation</i>
2004 - 2016	Master Sciences du Territoire <i>Territorial Sciences</i>	Urbanisme, Habitat & Coopération Internationale <i>Urbanism, Habitat & International Cooperation</i>
2016 - 2021	Master Urbanisme & Aménagement <i>Urbanism & Planning</i>	Urbanisme & Coopération Internationale <i>Urbanism & International Cooperation</i>
2021 onwards	Master Urbanisme & Aménagement <i>Urbanism & Planning</i>	Transformative Urban Studies ²

DESS: Diplôme d’Études Supérieures Spécialisées (Diploma of Higher Specialized Studies)

The first studio abroad, in the form of an “international urban project studio”, was not run until the 1999-2000 academic year. Until 2003, these studios were held in partnership with the local municipalities of El Jem, Monastir, and Sfax in Tunisia; and Taroudannt in Morocco within the international cooperation schemes of the Rhône-Alpes region and Romans-sur-Isère municipality. In 2003-04, a six-month long studio was organised in Mali with the Municipality of Timbuktu as part of its new development plan which was supported by the Rhône-Alpes region and Handicap International.

These studios insisted on horizontal relationships with the other country in order to carry out an *exchange of competences*. Students were invited to cooperate with their fellow students, university teachers, local elected officials, artists, and civil society. They also emphasised giving elected officials a real piece of work in urban planning – from urban study to urban design - including analysis and project. The studios relied on broad skills ranging from hand and computer aided drawing, communication, writing reports, to organising public exhibitions.

2 This new master’s programme was created in September 2021 through the merging of three international degrees: the one discussed in this paper, the English-speaking Planning track, and the International Development Studies masters in Geography. The new programme will be bilingual and named TRUST for “transformative urban studies”.

This early period was a kind of 'golden age' characterised by a great deal of organisational freedom, very small groups of students (maximum 12), and local authorities being ready to commit themselves politically and financially to decentralised cooperation via their respective universities. It did not last beyond 2004. The teachers then had to constantly find new sources of funding and partners. The quality of the studios suffered. The commission, money for travelling and accommodation, and reliable or understanding local partners were often missing. Sometimes the students themselves were absent when visa or logistical problems had not been sufficiently anticipated. The teachers became almost 'hunter-gatherers' who had to travel with their students, from town to town, relying on personal networks or flair to source some funding to support the work.

2.3. The Institutional Setting of the Grenoble-Sfax Cooperation

In Mid-September 2012, the studio scheduled for mid-November in Constantine (Algiers)³ was cancelled. A fall-back solution had to be found urgently. The technicians of the decentralised cooperation department of the City of Grenoble offered to contact a twinned city in Tunisia: Sfax. Contacts were made, upstream, with Tunisian representatives of the twinning steering committee and, on site, with municipal technicians and a development company. An ad hoc commission was drawn up. Although it was not known at the time, this was to be the first studio in a series of nine consecutive workshops. The 'hunter-gatherers' were to become more sedentary 'farmers'.

The studio took root in Sfax because of a favourable institutional context. It is based on decentralised cooperation between the two cities, which is one of the most effective and long-lasting such cooperation initiatives in France; being in place since 1968. The studios are financially and technically supported by the City of Grenoble's Office for European and International Action.

The studio, because it is a university-based project, has certain geopolitical qualities. During the first years of the democratic transition in Tunisia, from 2012 onwards, the government-appointed mayor of Sfax was challenged in court. The City of Grenoble used the studio to maintain an informal link with its counterpart and even theorise a new form of international cooperation between local government and civil society. The studio was also a medium for re-establishing political ties from the moment of the democratic election of the municipal government of Sfax in 2018. The Spring Studio (in Grenoble) and the Fall Studio (in Sfax) habitually start at the University with the presentation of the municipality's commission to the students, and conclude at City Hall for the submission of the work. The Consuls of France in Sfax and of Tunisia in Grenoble participate fully in the studios by welcoming students, providing logistical and consular assistance, and participating in the presentations.

2.4. Planning Concept and Learning Objectives of the Masters Programme

The masters programme is based upon some core planning concepts. Educated planners are as essential for developing countries as they are in developed countries. Countries everywhere are confronted to differing degrees with issues such as unemployment, social and economic crises, urban violence, segregation, and aging populations. Responses are also needed to general urban issues such as transportation, ecology, and social justice. Moreover, with the ever-growing importance of the global perspective, international cooperation skills have become more essential than ever. International cooperation practices must evolve accordingly. It is important to replace predominantly 'overhanging' views of expertise (notably where Western or Northern countries may consider Southern ones as being mere recipients of planning knowledge) with horizontal ones which favour the sharing of experience, practices, methodologies, and innovations. International cooperation between cities and/or universities must become truly multilateral.

International cooperation is an essential condition for urban transition towards solidarity and sustainability. More than 'merely' a professional specialty, it is an important human need. In the first instance, it is necessary to train students as urbanists or planners and offer the possibility for those who are interested to focus on

3 Ville de Grenoble, Maison de l'Internationale, archives of the file « Jumelage avec Sfax (Tunisie) », "Sfax 2012, Institut d'Urbanisme. Accueil d'un groupe de 30 étudiants + 2 encadrants, Atelier « réhabilitation du quartier Cimer »".

international cooperation. Grenoble's planning school offers a programme in Urbanism that can take up to five years, starting with a three-year undergraduate diploma (Licence Géographie et Aménagement, parcours Urbanisme; Bachelor in *Geography and Planning* with specialisation in Urbanism) followed by a two-year master's in *Urbanism*.

Eighty percent of the first year of the masters is comprised of courses and tutorials which are followed by all the students; they provide a basis of knowledge and know-how for urbanists. The students acquire a basic knowledge of urbanism (Planning theories and doctrines, History of Architecture, Planning legislation, Spatial planning, and so on). They learn to use the social sciences to consider critical issues such as mobility and transportation, sustainable cities, and new urban dynamics. They develop or complete their skills in hand drawing, computer aided drawing, and foreign languages. The remaining 20 percent is devoted to International Cooperation and takes the form of two courses ("International Urban Dynamics" and "Geopolitics of Cooperation") and two studios, one of which is the Spring Studio.

Orientated to specialisation, the second year is organised around courses related to international work-contexts: "Project Management", "Urban Networks and Services", "Real Estate and Housing Policies", "Ecologies", "Inclusive Cities", "Urban Risks and Crises", "European Programmes and Trans-Border Cooperation", "Participation and Shared Expertise". The knowledge dispensed by these courses is applied in up to four international studios (Sfax, Cracow, Lausanne, and a rotating location such as Madrid, Jezzine, or Cluj).

3. Grenoble and Sfax: A Case Study

The four studios are moments of learning by doing and experimentation. In each case the students are confronted with real cooperative urban projects, and they gain first-hand experience in professional practice by working in binational teams on genuine commissions. They learn how to structure a project and see it through in an intercultural and multilingual context. They acquire an urban project culture along with the technical tools required for heading-up complex international projects.

The students develop their capacity to see and work in space, following an approach that is both contextualised and pluri-disciplinary. They explore the physical and spatial dimensions of a given territory in order to determine how they can be reconfigured. In order to do so, they must learn to articulate economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions with one another. The studios abroad are of two kinds: those dedicated to students on an apprenticeship and run through a one-week session without any specific preparation, which are organised in Europe and/or Asia; and the international cooperation in urban planning studio between Grenoble and Sfax.

3.1. An Experience Over Two Years

Since 2012, the *international cooperation in urban planning studio* has been the central feature of the Urbanism and International Cooperation master's programme at the Planning & Alpine Geography Institute in Grenoble.

The studio is based on the decentralised cooperation that exists between the two cities. The students work on urban planning commissions relating to mobility and accessibility, waste management, urban agriculture, air pollution, urban heritage (*medina* or historic city, *ville européenne* or colonial city, traditional orchards and housing), access to public space for disabled persons or children, and urban projects about sites like the port, the railway station, and the main stadium. Working in mixed project teams, they collaborate with the Tunisian partners (students, professors, elected representatives, and civil society).

The first-year master's Spring Studio is comprised of weekly sessions from February to May with an intensive week held in May. It constitutes a complete teaching unit corresponding to 6 ETCS and is conducted by two professors (representing 13% of a full annual teaching load). Through it, approximately 20 students develop their project practice abilities through work on a commission from the City of Grenoble, about Grenoble itself. When it is feasible, an intensive workshop phase, allows participation of their Tunisian counterparts in this work. At this moment, French students discover the importance of an international point of view; such as in

2019 on the issue of air pollution in Grenoble. Reflecting on their interaction with participants from Sfax, a student noted that:

The exchanges with them were interesting since Grenoble's situation was not unlike that of Sfax, in which phosphate chemical factories cause significant pollution. Independent of the pollution issue, the urban dynamics and architectural and urban forms of Tunisian cities have been sources of inspiration for us. For example, our group constructed its approach based on air circulation techniques used in North African architecture, in particular the *moucharabieh*. This idea arose from our discussion with the visitors, which we very much appreciated (Eva, Spring Studio 2019).

At the same time, they familiarise themselves with Sfax through previous years' reports. They are acculturated to the logic of international project and international cooperation with Tunisia through a series of courses, tutorials, meetings with professionals in such fields as orientalism, history of colonization and decolonization, Tunisian history, and the geopolitical context of the Tunisian revolution.⁴

About ten additional students join the class in the second year of the master's programme and participate alongside the others in the Fall Studio which runs from September to January. It is weighted at 9 to 18 ETCS according to the status of the student in question: first degree or continuing education. The studio belongs to a part of the second-year programme entitled "Project methods". It is offered by the two same professors (20% of an annual teaching load).

The *international cooperation in urbanism studios* require the involvement of both the teaching team and students on the one hand, and various partners of equal commitment on the other. The two teachers in charge are responsible for coordinating the whole process and ensuring that the professional commissions meet pedagogical requirements. Each year, the studio involves about three commissions from either the City of Grenoble or from the Tunisian partners: university, municipality, public-private consortiums, or civil society.

3.2. Strengths and Weaknesses of Mixing Learners

The students of the Fall Studio in Sfax fall into two groups. The first one is comprised of Grenoble students, in the second year of their Masters (approximately 30 students). A third of these come from the local bachelor's program, whilst the rest are from other urbanism institutes, or from programmes in related disciplines (Political Science, Architecture, Geography, Law, etc). Currently standing at 25 percent, the number of foreign students, mostly from North and Sub-Saharan Africa and South America, has been steadily growing. The second group is comprised of students from Sfax. Their number was very limited - below ten - for the first iterations of the studio. Initially there were only Geography students drawn from Masters or Doctoral programs. However, over time the studio has attracted more and more students, with up to 40 now participating; they come from Geography courses as well as Design and Logistics courses at the University of Sfax and from a private Architecture school. There is no School of Planning in Sfax, but more and more students from the planning schools in Tunis and Carthage are now involved at their request. French students, who comprised the vast majority of the cohort at the beginning, are now a minority in their "own classroom"; this is sometimes challenging.

If the professors from Architecture and Design can adapt the "French studio" to their own programme (studio and fieldwork), there is no official place dedicated to the experience in the curricula of Geography or Logistics. For all Tunisians students the studio is challenging. They have to join an experiment in their own city, run by foreign students, without any cultural or technical preparation. They have to do it alongside their other daily life activities; this can cause some difficulties:

I thought it was a pity that the Tunisian students could not be integrated into the project before we arrived in Tunisia. They had to join in, without necessarily agreeing, and didn't really have a

4 France was the colonial power in Tunisia between 1881 and 1956 (French Protectorate of Tunisia). The Tunisian revolution, sometimes called the "Jasmine Revolution" was a revolution which, through a series of demonstrations and sit-ins during four weeks between December 2010 and January 2011, led to the departure of the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali who had been in office since 1987.

say in it. They did help us and that was useful for our work, but I'm not sure that we were useful for them. All decisions about the project were made in the evening in a hotel room when we were debriefing our day, therefore without them (Marjorie, Fall Studio 2015-16).

About 20 of the second-year students are in initial training while the others are registered as employed students with an apprenticeship status (bringing a full waiver of registration fees and a one-year contract in a firm or local authority). The rhythm of their involvement in the programme differs. The first students follow the full course programme in the first term and go abroad for an internship in the second. Those with the status of employed students are in their professional contexts three weeks per month and follow a course in the remaining one. The two groups have a common calendar during key moments, notably the Fall Studio. This desynchronised rhythm brings certain issues:

The upstream phase of the studio was somewhat frustrating, as I would have liked to have been more involved in the project, but with the rhythm of the work placement, it was sometimes difficult to keep up with the daily work of our fellow students. Nevertheless, we managed to meet occasionally to discuss the progress of our group. We also had a meeting altogether before leaving for Sfax so that everyone could be 100 percent operational during our fieldwork (Alexis, Fall Studio 2015-16).

3.3. Posture and Methods of Teaching

The students are positioned as active agents of their own education. The programme seeks to develop their capacity for critical analysis of project methods and objectives. The students are also encouraged to evaluate group work as it is being carried out.

The focus of critical reflection in the first year is on the notion of international cooperation itself. It is structured around *Forum Theatre* or *Theatre of the Oppressed* exercises and fundamental critical theory texts such as Franz Fanon, *Peau noires, masques blancs*, (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952); Paulo Freire, *Pédagogie des opprimés*, (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970) or Edward Saïd, *L'orientalisme (Orientalism)*, (1978). At the same time, they organise, alongside their professors, the Spring Studio (logistics and budgeting) which involves up to twelve Tunisian students:

The programme familiarises its students with the full diversity of urban contexts in the world; from Inland China, to the Brazilian coastline, to the area around the large rivers of Western Africa. We were given means to understand these distant urban contexts and in doing so, to deconstruct our Eurocentric viewpoint. This international perspective starts with the group of master's students itself, which is made up of people of diverse origins and native languages. Throughout the year, our student association City Trotters contributed significantly to the financing, communication on, and events organisation for, the studio. Our first mission was to welcome the delegation of students from Sfax in Grenoble (Théo, Spring and Fall Studios 2018-19).

Students in the second year participate extensively in the co-construction of the studio work. It is up to them to make a critical analysis of the commission they are to work on and, if necessary, to reformulate the problems that have been addressed to them. Before starting the field research, their understanding of, and thoughts about the commission are reviewed by the various partners involved in the studio. They work with their professors to develop a methodology for the field work. Where possible, they also integrate into their approaches the work done by students in previous years on themes close to those that they are studying. Finally, through the student association, they participate in the co-financing of their studio via a municipal subsidy and fundraising (cf. fig 1).

Tombola atelier Sfax 2013/2014

Master 2 Urbanisme, Habitat et Coopération Internationale

Institut d'Urbanisme de Grenoble/Ville de Grenoble/AURG

Cet atelier a pour objectif de travailler sur le Grand Sfax et ses enjeux de développement et d'aménagement, dans la perspective de la création d'une Agence urbaine à l'échelle de son agglomération. Il se déroulera sur 10 jours durant le mois de novembre 2013. L'atelier réunira 30 étudiants de l'Institut d'Urbanisme de Grenoble et 10 étudiants du département de Géographie de l'Université de Sfax.

En parallèle, et pour profiter d'une synergie équivalente de part et d'autre de nos territoires, la même équipe reproduira à Grenoble, en mars-avril de l'année 2014, un atelier sur les problématiques de développement et d'aménagement à l'échelle de la communauté d'agglomération de Grenoble.

Ainsi cette tombola vise à financer une partie de cet atelier.

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20



Figure 1: Student's lottery for Sfax

From the outset, the students are familiarised by their professors with the know-how and behaviour that international projects demand. On arriving in Tunisia, this acclimatisation is reinforced by a visit to the French Consulate.

Once the fieldwork begins, the students are divided into multiple sub-groups to meet the different objectives of the assignment. The teachers then move from group to group and make collective progress reports each evening. They give the students a great deal of autonomy and never try to direct the final proposals. Instead, they simply ensure that the ideas and projects are well constructed. The approach adopted has been variously evaluated by the students as: too much autonomy, a lack of method and leadership, a disorienting but very formative method, an effective immersion technique, and as a chance to organise the studios they wanted. Some even end up considering the teacher to be just another partner in their project with one student remarking in feedback to the two professors involved that:

I now have much more compassion for all the forgotten and invisible people without whom the projects, the events would not happen. All those people who take responsibility without ever asking for a thank you. So, I have a deep respect for you, for all that has been done for a long time for this studio to exist, without you having any particular recognition because nobody realises it (Alexia, Fall Studio 2016).

3.4. Assessments and Management of Difficulties

The studios are evaluated at different moments and using different methods: at the end of the Sfax fieldwork, during a meeting with the decentralised cooperation service of Grenoble, the twinning steering committee, and the French Consulate; during a debriefing with the students immediately upon returning to Grenoble and at the end of the term; and, by an annual mission report addressed to all partners and supporting organizations.

Feedback from experience with students and our partners led the studio to be developed over eight years, incrementally, by setting up the studio over the two years of the master's programme; dealing with different themes over several years (1 - exploration, 2 - problematising, 3 - networking of actors, 4 - project implementation and handover to Tunisian society); mobilising students in the project process, and involving Tunisian colleagues and students.

Table 2: Annual studios' activities

Period	Activities
February - May	Spring Studio: reading previous reports, acculturation to international cooperation, Tunisia and Sfax. Hosting in Grenoble an event with Tunisian students.
June - July	Co-elaboration of the new commissions for Fall Studio
September - November	Fall Studio: team building, drafting of a technical note (reformulation of planning problems, methodological positioning, logical frameworks), preparing fieldwork, provisional budgets and trip logistics
November	Fall Studio: ten days of survey and fieldwork in Sfax
December	Fall Studio: data analysis, final report writing, preparation of the public exhibition.
January	Fall Studio: public exhibition and final presentation in Grenoble in the presence of Spring Studio's students
February	Assessment of the studio by teachers and the various sponsors and partners who decide on how the work is to be extended

The studios are now planned one year in advance through a permanent co-construction process that involves all stakeholders. Table 2 shows the way in which both studios are planned by professors while the 'goose chase' (Figure 2) describes, through the students' lenses, the Fall studio. The studio starts with preparation from Grenoble. It continues with the fieldwork and its phases of transcription, astonishment, luck, and changeover from diagnosis to project. The game insists on the many moments of doubt and panic, the delays, and the share of luck and misfortune that are both inherent in the realisation of a studio. It concludes with a report and exhibition.

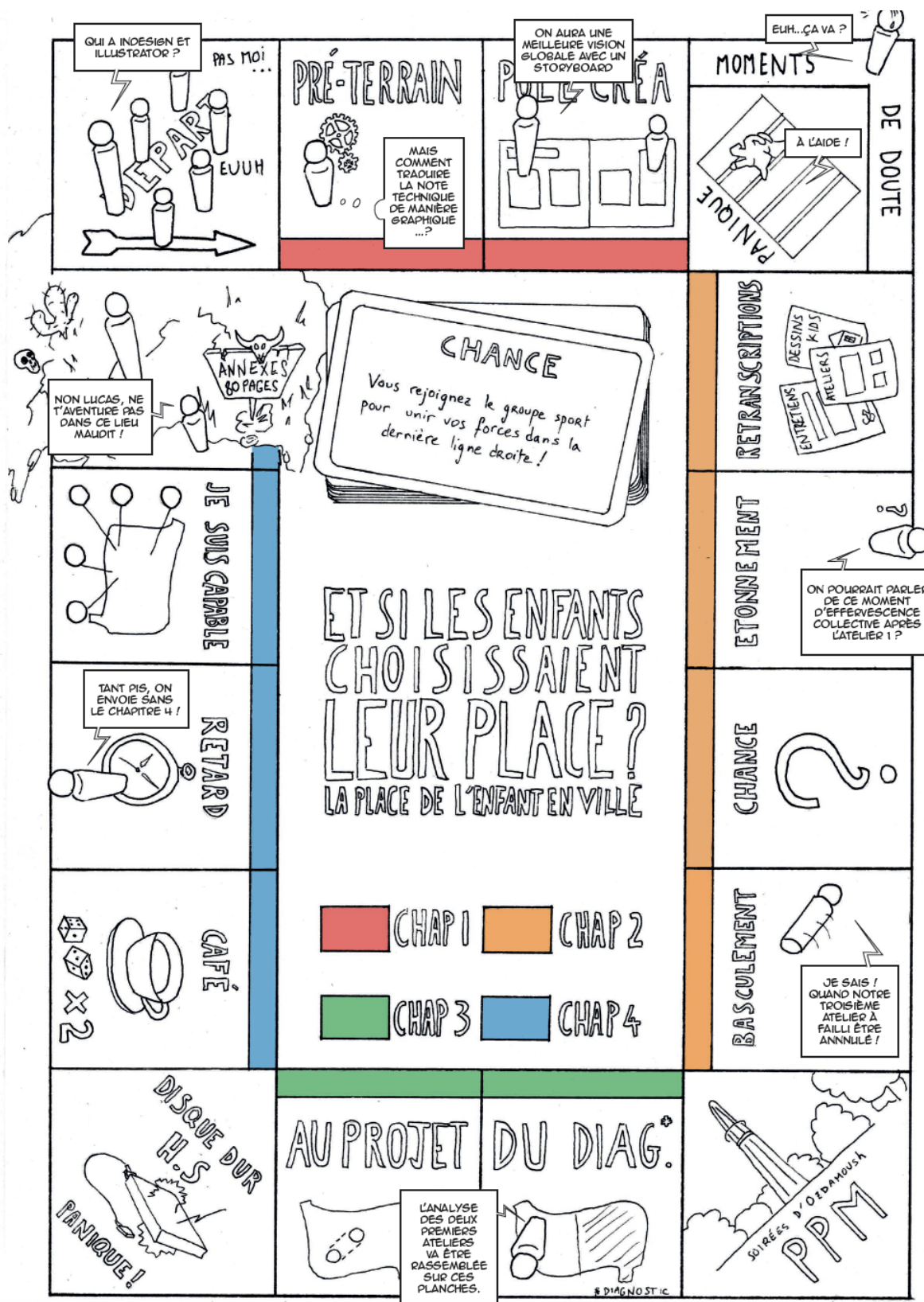


Figure 2: The goose chase. Lucas Rajic, Dernière année, master thesis, 2020

3.5. Managing Difficulties

A teaching approach of this kind is subject to numerous types of difficulties: financial, logistical, linguistic, and security-related.

The system of education in France is almost entirely free (fees of €243 per year at masters level, with a total fee waiver for students on an apprenticeship). Travel, visas, accommodation, and breakfast are entirely paid for all students engaged in the Spring and Fall studios. The total costs of the two studios is about €18 000 for approximately 40 students and 2 + 1 professors travelling for 10 days, both ways. The funds are provided by the City of Grenoble (€8 000 per year), and a para-public organization sponsoring apprenticeships (€3 000 per year). These financial contributions are renegotiated every year. The remaining budget is provided by the French student association and the Institute itself.

The students must participate actively in the organization of the studio work they are to engage in. This participation is organised through the involvement of a student association dedicated to the studio abroad: City Trotters. The association takes on travel and housing related logistics, as well as management issues. It is able to take on the organisation of the journey in a much more proactive way than a university administration. This experience is generally valued by those involved, though it can be a heavy burden on board members:

I appreciated the self-managed logistical organisation including the collection of funds to pay for the trip. In addition to fostering the sociability needed to work in the field, this City Trotter tool empowers students and teaches them how to find funding (Eleonora, Fall Studio 2015-16).

I must admit that the preparation beforehand was long and tedious. There were times when I felt like crying, I probably even did but I thank my brain's selective memory for forgetting those moments. I told myself many times "when we get there, we won't think about it" and this is exactly what happened. What trouble? What problem? I do not know any more. Sfax taught me skills, or perhaps I can even say new qualities, which are the ability to put things into perspective and self-control. I do not know if other students have mentioned this, but personally, it is thanks to them that I have been able to develop this (Alexia, Fall Studio 2015-16).

French is partially a common tongue, native, or second language in Tunisia, yet there is a considerable part of the population which is only Arabic-speaking. As English is not a *lingua franca* yet, professors in France tend to include some Arab speakers in the programme each year, and Tunisian professors select French-Speaking students:

The few Sfax students involved in the project also helped us a lot in making appointments. In addition, having Arabic speakers on the team often saved us a lot of time and allowed us to hold meetings that would have been impossible to do in French (Cécile, Fall Studio 2015-16).

For the French government, Sfax has the status of a "zone of reinforced vigilance". The studio must, therefore, pay particular attention to the security of the students. They are informed about potential dangers linked to behaviour in the country. Professors also remain in daily contact with the French Consulate and the Police force of the Sfax governorate:

There was one thing I didn't like: the omnipresence of the Police. We didn't really have the impression of being protected, but rather followed all the time, which was actually quite unpleasant... as we couldn't escape it, I ended up getting used to it (Cloé, Fall Studio 2015-16).

4. Effects of the Studio on Students

The international cooperation studios seem to be effective in preparing students for the labour market and reportedly have impacts upon them long after they leave the university.

4.1. Students' Preparation for Practice

The students make little mention of the links between theory and practice in the studio. Instead, they focus on the acquisition of communication skills, techniques for working in a group, with a client or the public, and learning how to manage a project. These skills are more related to communicational than rational urbanism. This could be referred to as a postmodern education for spatial planning, "including social and cultural awareness, adaptability, creativity, collaborative ways of working and becoming global citizens with a shift to learner choice and autonomy" (da Rosa Pires and Frank, 2021).

During the 2018 Fall Studio in Sfax, the students met with more than 400 inhabitants of the city within a ten day period including: elected officials, municipal technicians, civil society leaders and activists, children, teachers in primary and secondary schools, hospitals and clinics' staff and users, craftsmen, hotel owners, real estate agents, and so on.

The students developed a variety of tools: meeting with the elected representatives, site visits with technicians, exchanges of know-how with planners, commented walks and semi-directive or wide-open interviews with civil society, mental maps, questionnaires and 'serious' games with children in schools, field observations, short informal interviews with hospital patients and clients of clinics, etc. One group, working with architecture and design students on the *medina*, even implemented its own workshop.

In each year of the programme the students have needed to communicate their ideas and propositions to different people and, through different mediums: public presentations of field observations carried out in Sfax before approximately 100 people, and final project presentations in Grenoble before approximately 150 people; an exhibition at the *Plateforme*, an information centre on the urban projects of City of Grenoble (attracting 9,255 visitors over six years); and, a final written report.

4.2. Long Term Effects on Students

The students are unanimous in affirming that their view of planning is changed as a result of the experience of alterity that the studio offers them. They are affected by the encounters with the people and places they come into contact with through the work. At the same time, they gain confidence in their own abilities thanks to the experience of working through the complexities inherent in these projects. As a result, the prospect of entering the profession seems less formidable to them and their ideas become clearer with respect to what they want – or do not want – to do in the future. In the years following their involvement in the programme, certain alumni speak of the effects that the Sfax experience has had on them with regard to it making them - whether working in France or elsewhere - more open, more serene, and more combative as planners:

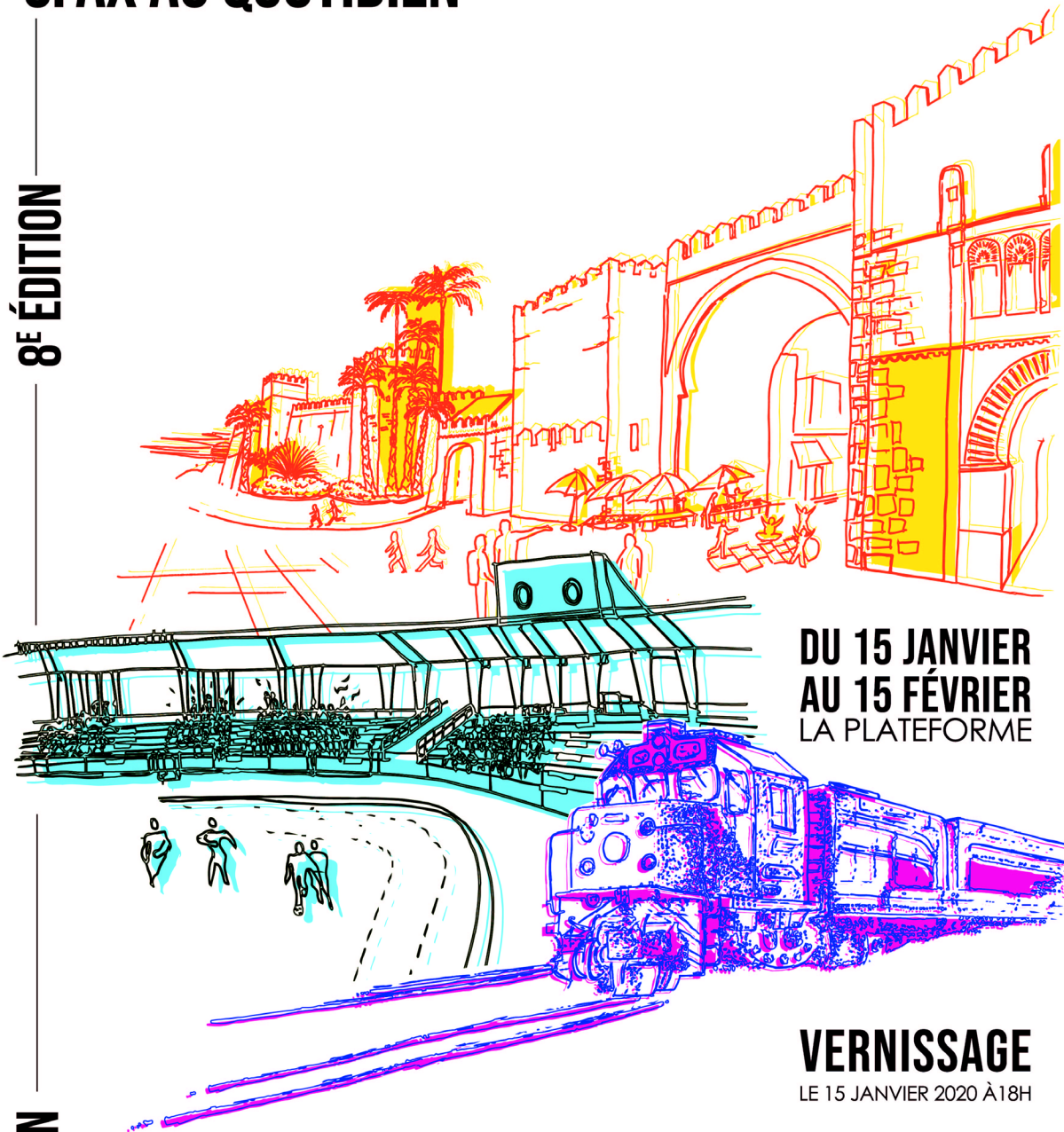
In short, this studio reinforced my desire to learn from the Other. The Other is Culture and an enriching difference that allows us to think in new ways. We have seen that reality, that culture, that territory - through the lens of our sensibility, our analyses and our capabilities. I became aware of the value of what we, urbanists and alumni, possess, thanks to our acquired criticality and capacity for analysis. Our capacity to adapt to different contexts and situations, identifying stakeholder dynamics and taking care to situate them within the physical context and culture of their country. (...) With the distance that has come from several years of working professionally, I am aware that the studio changed my way of envisaging public place and of apprehending a city. My capacity for project management and the coordination of a pluridisciplinary team grew as I learned to define shareable vocabularies (Laetitia, Fall Studio 2015-16).

For certain students, the studio has defined professional orientations or personal life choices. They have created their own businesses to work on social aspects of planning such as participation, or urban agriculture.

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Figure 3: Public Exhibition poster created by the students

My working group studied the place of urban agriculture in Sfax. Following the studio, the City of Grenoble offered me a six-month civic service appointment there. I met numerous stakeholders, organised meetings, recycling workshops, a network of small-scale farming stakeholders and, above all, came to know the city and its inhabitants. Upon returning to France I presented my final paper and began looking for work. After five months of searches and indecision, I took on the position I now occupy as Project Coordinator for the association Graine d'Espoir, in Sfax, of which I am a co-founder (Agnès, Fall Studio 2017).

Though the programme is clearly practice-oriented, several students have noted that studio experiences raised questions which led them to the idea of undertaking doctoral studies:

At the time, I thought the Sfax studio was to be my final experience at the Grenoble Planning Institute. I hadn't yet understood that it was in fact the starting point for doctoral studies. The studio was one of the main experiences through which I developed an interest in research and a desire to reflect upon certain broad questions about cities. The Sfax studio invited us to reflect upon the intrinsic nature of our knowledge of cities. In my case, it created the desire to go further, to observe, to reflect, to analyse planning practices and, more generally, to apprehend how cities are creating themselves before our eyes (Alexia, Fall Studio 2016).

The intense discussions, and the incredible productive capacity we discovered ourselves, gave us a new confidence. (...), I chose to return to Tunisia for a research-oriented internship, and to extend the work that I had previously done there. In turn, this experience led me to the idea of pursuing doctoral studies (Théo, Spring and Fall Studios 2018-19).

5. Conclusion

This paper suggests that there are some key features of this very specific kind of 'studio abroad'. The relevance of the studio can be explained by the choice to work hand in hand with the decentralised cooperation of a city from one's home country; the long-lasting partnership with a foreign twinned city in order to assess the local territories and to win the trust of local actors; the passing on from year to year of knowledge and findings; the involvement of students in their own training with a peer-to-peer learning environment; and knowledge transfers to and from the foreign partners. This goes far beyond the limits of a mere studio abroad. Maybe we should speak about this kind of experience as a global project of *education abroad* to more accurately reflect the range of types of outbound educational opportunities which include not only study abroad but also research abroad, intern abroad, teach abroad, and service-learning abroad (Ogden, 2015).

This paper also confirms that this kind of studio is resource intensive. Intercultural learning requires an adaptation of pedagogical postures and materials with adequate institutional support (Jones and Brown, 2007), and risks creating additional workloads for teachers; these can become a burden (Peel and Frank, 2008; Sykes et al, 2015). It can also very easily be stressful for those students who adapt poorly to logistical, linguistic, security, and intercultural issues. Is it only at this cost that the studio abroad can become a real transformative experience for the student? Perhaps we should leave the final word to one of the students who participated:

Sfax could have had more or less the same conclusion as my years at the institute. Sometimes you feel like crying, you wonder why you are here, what you are doing, the meaning of your life and your future, then you pull yourself together and look at it with a smile. You realise how much you have learned. You realise the professional distortions you already have when you go on holiday and comment on the urban qualities and faults of the city where you are. You smile and say to yourself, "holy shit, I'm really a planner, it's official". (Alexia, Fall Studio 2015-16)

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