

## Study tours in teaching architecture and urbanism: improving the itinerary

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**ABSTRACT:** Study tours are an experience-based form of architectural education that is not often used. Summarised in this article are the results of a study conducted between 2017 and 2019 on study tours run as part of a curriculum for overseas students at a technical university in Poland. In treating architectural sightseeing as an experience - as understood under Kolb's experiential learning theory - the author traced which of the sites visited during the study tours were selected by students for in-depth case studies, and whether there existed a link between these choices and the time spent at a given site. Findings of the study were that students select sites for in-depth case studies where they spend a longer time visiting, and that students rarely engage in in-depth case studies of large urban projects, despite the significant time spent exploring them. There are other factors that affect student choices. The results of this study can aid the planning and enhancing of study tour itineraries. Further research will allow a fuller understanding of the effect of visit time and other factors on the educational outcomes of study tours.

### INTRODUCTION

In many countries and in different educational systems, a portion of the curriculum can (and in some cases should) be taught off-campus. For tertiary education, off-campus study, typically at co-operating universities, is *studying abroad*, and typically lasts for one or two semesters. Immersion in a new environment for a period of several months of studying abroad can be a formative experience for a student. Some universities offer off-campus studies without the student having to leave the country, e.g. in co-operation with non-governmental organisations. Among the less popular forms of off-campus study that are not full-semester studies abroad are various short-term forms: student workshops, charrettes, mini-terms, study tours and others.

One form of studying abroad that combines studying with travelling is the study tour. It can be an independent educational form (e.g. a mini term) or form a part of a larger whole, for instance as one of the components of a study abroad programme that lasts a semester or longer. To inquisitive architecture students, the opportunity to personally experience architectural forms, urban spaces, people and customs is a lesson in architecture in its inseparable context of nature and culture [1].

The study tour is an alternative teaching method to traditional, classroom-based learning. The ability to directly experience places, works, persons and phenomena that accompany them in a broad context is its unique quality, which, according to Pennings et al, makes it particularly suitable for teaching creative disciplines [2]. Experiential learning theory formulated by Kolb assumes that learning is a four-phase, cyclical process comprised of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting [3]. Experiencing is critical, as it affects the feelings, thoughts and actions that follow. This was expressed in Kolb's definition of learning as a process in which knowledge is formed by transforming experience [4].

Scholars point to both the benefits and challenges of study tours. The most obvious are educational benefits: enhancing knowledge and skills; increasing interest in the subject [5]; participation in classes that are unavailable at the home university; and experiencing varied teaching methods [2]. The second group of benefits is multi-level personal development. Studies have found increased self-confidence, enhancement in the ability to deal with difficult situations [5], improved language skills, greater motivation and self-development [6], participation in unique extra-academic events [2], as well as the development of personal contact networks. Many scholars point to benefits associated with global engagement, arising from interacting with persons from other cultures and different nationalities [2][6][7], which contributes to a better understanding of the world and its cultures, the acceptance of other points of view and appreciation of the home country [5].

Findings are inconclusive concerning the professional benefits of study tours. In one study on the long-term effects of studying abroad performed over the past 50 years on a large sample of more than 6,000 persons, the study tour was

mentioned by graduates as one of the most significant experiences from their university time and one that had had an impact on their lives. More than three-quarters of respondents declared that participating in a study tour had a positive impact on their careers, including its internationalisation. It also led to increased global engagement [8]. Participation in a study tour contributed to stronger motivation and greater engagement in professional life over the long term [5]. However, other studies showed no correlation between study tours and higher earnings [9]. In a study performed by Pennings et al on students of creative disciplines, it was found that respondents rated the direct experiencing of key buildings and sites and coming into contact with global industry practices as the most significant aspect of study tours. It came first - ahead of networking and personal development [2].

Among the positive aspects of study tours listed by creative discipline students was a considerable enhancement of knowledge that went significantly beyond their own expectations. Study tours and studying abroad in general also bring with them a set of challenges. These include potentially less rigorous academic requirements, challenging travel adjustments and a tendency to sightsee rather than study [9]. The immersive learning context also can prove to be a challenge to some students and lead to disorientation and feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, overcoming these problems can have a positive impact on personal development. One more challenge that study tour participants can face are the practical aspects of travel, such as transport, lodging and the itinerary of the tour [2].

## GRAND TOUR

The educational advantages of travel found their expression in the concept of the Grand Tour in the 18th and 19th Centuries. The Grand Tour was a trek by young European aristocrats and intellectuals, the cultural and social elite, to enhance their education, sophistication and increase their knowledge of the world [10]. Rome and later Florence, Naples and Venice were the primary sights of this tour; later, also other cities of Western Europe [11]. During the trek, which took several months or even years, the travellers would familiarise themselves with classical architecture and art, southern etiquette, traditions and canons [12].

The Grand Tour, popular in many countries throughout the modern period, also served to build a network of social contacts across Europe. The Grand Tour significantly contributed to the development of architecture and the teaching of architects. As Ceserani et al stated in their study of British Grand Tourists: *...not everyone who went on a Grand Tour became a successful architect, but almost every successful British architect of the eighteenth century had been on the Grand Tour. It was a crucial educational experience - almost an accreditation* [11].

Although the European Grand Tour ended with the French Revolution (or, according to others, with the appearance of the first travel agencies that offered tourist trips in the 1840s) [13], trips to Italy continued to play an important role in the education of architects, up to the 20th Century. Many outstanding architects, including Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Erik Gunnar Asplund, Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn documented their Grand Tour experiences through sketching. Michael Graves, a proponent of sketching and architectural drawing, in his essay entitled *The Necessity for Drawing: Tangible Speculation*, introduced three primary categories of drawing: the referential sketch, the preparatory study and the definitive drawing. *Referential sketch* is the architect's diary or record of discovery. It is a shorthand reference that is generally fragmentary. It is not likely to represent *reality*, but rather to capture an idea [14].

Ambroziak, the author of a book on Michael Graves' two-year Grand Tour, observed that even when photography became the primary form of imaging, architects still preferred drawing, so that they could record reality in their memoirs. Graves' sketches are thus something more than merely travel postcards. Ambroziak stated they are an *...imprint upon the architect's mind a central idea about culture and history to remember and assimilate* [12]. A travel sketchbook also plays an important role in architectural design. It is a form of recording and enhancing images from which new works can be created. As Sir Joshua Reynolds put it: *...nothing can come of nothing; he who has laid up no materials can produce no combination* [15].

## BACKGROUND

The Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT) in Kraków, Poland, has been co-operating with the College of Architecture and Design of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville (UTK) in the United States since 1993. As part of this co-operation, between 1993 and 2020, about 300 CUT students had the opportunity to study abroad at UTK for one semester, and a similar number of UTK students studied at the CUT. Since 2017, students from Guangzhou and Tianjin in China, and Seoul in South Korea also have participated in the programme. The curriculum of the full-semester study programme for the incoming students in Kraków includes a module on urban design, which forms the core of the programme and is conducted as a design studio, and a theory and history module comprising a series of lectures and three study tours to European cities.

The module is introduced via a series of lectures with the factors that contribute to the emergence and development of cities. The students also identify, date and characterise urban layouts from various periods. The lectures include Kevin Lynch's imageability theory, as well as an introduction to architectural design in a historic context. The second component of the theory and history module are three study tours: a nine-day tour of the capitals of Central Europe and Venice; a nine-day tour of Polish cities and localities; and a four-day tour of Berlin and Dresden. During the tours,

the students explore the urban form of the cities, both independently and with the aid of instructors from the FA-CUT. They also familiarise themselves with selected contemporary works of architecture by direct contact. For selected works of architecture, the students are provided with instructions from a local expert or an audio guide. The subject of this study are study tours, which are an experience-based and uncommonly used form of teaching architecture and urban design.

## AIM OF THE STUDY

Provided in this study is an analysis of the impact of visits to high-value works of architecture during a semester-long study programme in Poland by overseas (non-Polish) students of architecture and similar fields. To pass the theory and history module, the students performed in-depth case studies entitled *Contemporary Interventions in Historic Cities*. The object of this precedent study was between three and four contemporary architectural interventions in an historical context of the student's choice: either buildings or public spaces that the students had visited during their study tour and which were known to them from personal experience. The subject matter to be included in the precedent study included the cultural, historical and spatial context, the conditions and limitations of the site, the functional programme, the client's expectations and the architect's intentions.

In the precedent study the relationship of the contemporary architectural intervention with its surroundings was explained through the answering of questions such as *why? what for? or how?* The students were encouraged to make sketches during the study tours, which could be used as quick, referential aids with which to capture and record images, experiences, ideas and architectural details for later use. Their sketches could support arguments raised in the study. This study, based on the semester assignments by students, answered the following questions:

- What sites were chosen by students for the precedent study?
- Was there a link between the sites selected for the precedent study and the itinerary of the tour?

The results of the study can prove useful for understanding the impact of study tour itineraries on student choices, and in enhancing the student experience.

## METHODOLOGY

A mixed method was applied in the study, based on quantitative analysis of the content of semester assignments, a critical analysis of the itinerary of the study tours and qualitative analysis of a selected precedent study. This method made it possible to trace the choices made by students (instead of their declarations) concerning the study tour itinerary and programme, and incorporate elements of content analysis to illustrate educational outcomes.

To ensure the findings were representative, the study covered four semesters (autumn 2017, spring 2018, spring 2019 and autumn 2019) during which the study tours had similar itineraries and the students received similarly worded class assignments. Forty students took part in the study during this period; 20 were students of an American university (UTK); 12 were students of Chinese universities (Guangdong University of Technology (GDUT) and Tianjin Chengjian University (TCU)); one was a student from a South Korean university (Hanyang University (HU)); and seven were students of the home University (CUT). See Table 1 for number of participants by semester and home university.

Table 1: Sample composition by home university (Source: author).

Term and Year	No. of participants	Home universities
Autumn 2017	9	Guangdong University of Technology (GDUT), Guangzhou, China; Cracow University of Technology (CUT), Kraków, Poland
Spring 2018	7	University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville, TN, USA
Spring 2019	13	University of Tennessee (UTK), Knoxville, TN, USA
Autumn 2019	11	Cracow University of Technology (CUT), Kraków, Poland; Guangdong University of Technology (GDUT), Guangzhou, China; Hanyang University (HU), Seoul, South Korea; Tianjin Chengjian University (TCU), Tianjin, China
Total	40	

The research material was composed of semester assignments handed in by students by the end of the semester, after they had participated in three study tours. Forty assignments were analysed. The analyses were based on:

- contemporary architectural interventions located in an historical context visited during the study tour, which were presented in detail in the precedent study and the number of presentations;
- time spent at each site or building during the study tour.

With some exceptions, the time spent at each site or building was similar during the four semesters. The study did not account for any possible additional exploration of the sites by students during their own study time. Cumulative results

have been presented, showing the total number of presentations and, in minutes, the time spent during the four semesters, in chart form (see Figures 1 - 3, in which are listed the itinerary for each study tour). In Figure 4 are the samples of sketchbook drawings and precedent studies by students.

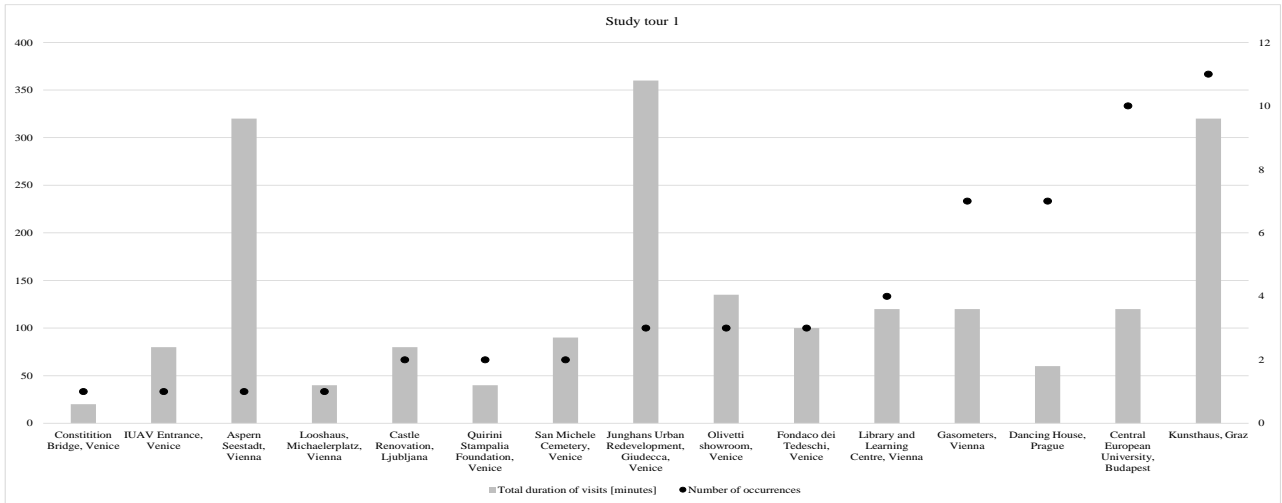


Figure 1: Number of site presentations in precedent studies (right scale) compared with the summary visit times (left scale) during study tour 1 - Central European cities (Source: author).

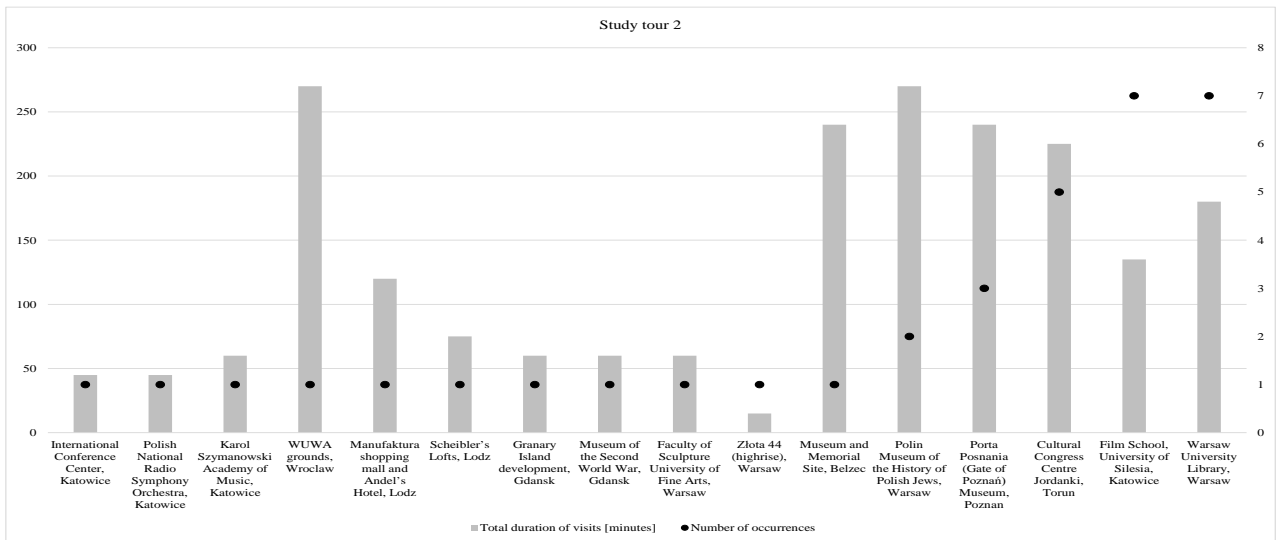


Figure 2: Number of site presentations in precedent studies (right scale) compared with the summary visit times (left scale) during study tour 2 - Polish cities (Source: author).

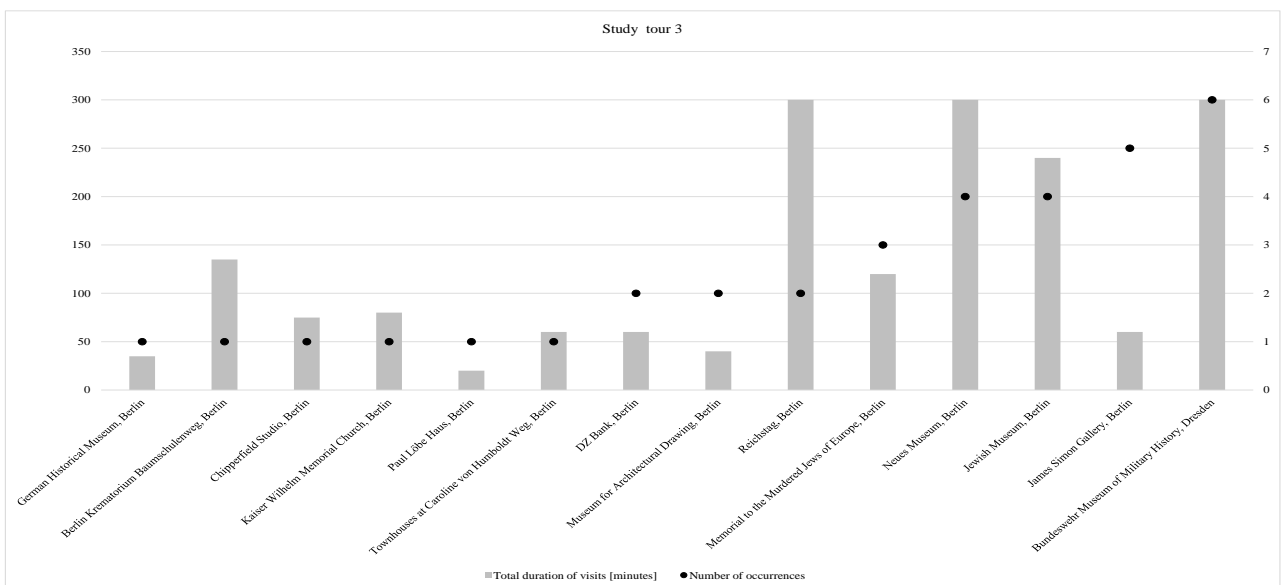


Figure 3: Number of site presentations in precedent studies (right scale) compared with the summary visit times (left scale) during study tour 3 - Berlin and Dresden (Source: author).

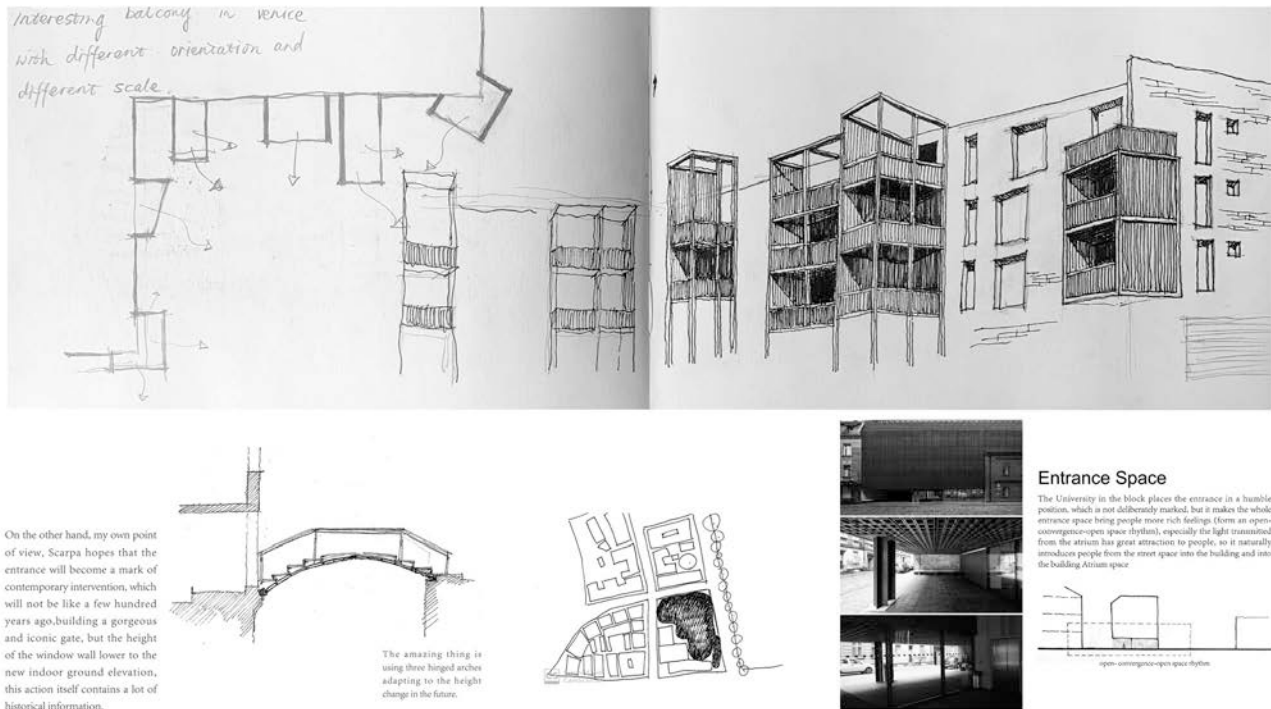


Figure 4: Choice of on-site sketchbook drawings (above) and precedent studies (below) from the study tours in autumn 2019, students: Zhong Jie, GDUT (above); Chen Ran, GDUT; Seo Hyunji, HU; Zhong Jie, GDUT (below, left to right).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was held to determine the choices of students of sites and buildings for the precedent study, and whether there was a correlation between the sites and buildings chosen and the itinerary of the tour. The findings of the study were that the sites and buildings most often studied by the students were: the Central European University in Budapest; the Kunsthaus in Graz; the Film Academy in Katowice; the Warsaw University Library; the James Simon Gallery in Berlin; and the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History in Dresden.

Longer building and site exploration times were observed to be correlated with the increased frequency of the presentation of cases in student precedent studies for the Kunsthaus in Graz, the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History in Dresden, the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Cultural and Congress Centre Jordanki in Toruń. The correlation of the longer visits and the higher frequency of the presentation of these cases could have been affected by the guided tours with a local expert or with an audio guide.

The long time spent at sites that were large urban projects (Aspern Seestadt in Vienna, the Junghans Urban Redevelopment in Venice and the WUWA exhibition in Wrocław) did not correlate with a higher frequency of presenting these cases in the precedent studies. This could have been caused by the difficulties the students had with perceiving contemporary large-scale projects that are much larger than a singular work of architecture, as well as the longer time needed to explore extensive sites.

Despite the short visit, the Dancing House in Prague, the Film School in Katowice and the James Simon Gallery in Berlin were all featured many times in student precedent studies. This indicates that factors other than visit time also play a part in the frequency of mentions in student precedent studies. These include information accessibility, fashion, students' interests, the influence of peers, and previous education. A fuller understanding of the influence of time and other factors on educational outcomes of study tours and determining the dependencies between these factors and student choices requires further study, with the application of multiple regression analysis.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study was based on student precedent studies that were prepared in a single semester of study abroad. The aim was to provide information as to which of the contemporary architectural interventions in an historic context that had been visited during study tours were selected by students for in-depth analysis and whether there was a link between these choices and the study tour itinerary plus the time spent at each site or building. The findings revealed:

- For many sites, a longer exploration time - over an hour - was correlated with a higher frequency of case presentations in the students' precedent studies.
- Long visits to extensive urban projects were not typically followed by a higher frequency of case presentations in the students' precedent studies.

- Other factors also affected the choices of students concerning cases for the precedent studies.

The findings can be useful in understanding the impact of study tour itineraries on students' choices and in enhancing itineraries to benefit student educational experience. These results are an argument in favour of limiting the number of places visited during study tours to longer, more in-depth studies of each site or building and the pursuit of an effective method of exploring large urban projects than can reconcile long visit times with educational benefits.

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