

Study Abroad Programs in Turkey: Variations on a Theme

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Through travel we come to know more about ourselves, our own histories and cultural pasts and presents. We hone our interests, respond to immediate needs, imagine many things and inspect our desires. We test our abilities to maintain ourselves during sometimes adverse or strenuous activities that differ from our normal routines. In this sense, we withstand and understand, relate and translate. And, we pique our intellectual and emotional curiosities. Our eyes are strengthened and nourished as we become awakened and then filled with anticipation ready to attempt things we have not before. I believe studying architecture depends on the need for tasting the foreign and unfamiliar. So traveling and studying abroad intensifies the development of personal and collective philosophies; and, because of this, we produce and gain more.

Many who teach architecture can trace their interests and eventual scholarship to a combination of inspiring coursework and travel. Mine was spurred by a mixture of these along with professional architectural practice. As an undergraduate I studied abroad in Europe, yet perhaps my real catalyst was participating in an informal program to Turkey in 1986 while attending graduate school at Columbia University. I did not know for many years that I was destined to return to this country forever planted in Europe and Asia, but I have returned again and again. The impact of my first trip to Turkey turned into a way of living, prompting me to continue to study and process the concepts of social and cultural change that is evidenced in the architecture found there, though these concepts could also apply to the US as well. As I once again discovered, while teaching in Ankara at Orta Dogu Teknik Universitesi (Middle East Technical University) last Fall, one's research and teaching pedagogy involves integrating ideas and information that stem from a meeting of various viewpoints concerning cultural exchange.

The flow of information from west to east and vice versa supplies a constant back-and-forth of thought and theory that appears to particularly coalesce in Turkey.

Professors William Bechhoefer, of the University of Maryland, Richard Plunz, of Columbia University and Natalija Subotincic with Mark West, of University of Manitoba have all been, it seems, equally motivated to work in Turkey and to develop truly unique and inspired architecture programs. Each exhibit goals of enmeshing their students in a conversation concerned with the meanings behind architectural study and with special regard for people and the built landscape. Topics range from past to living history, to concepts of regionalism, to natural and induced physical change, and to exploring culture within the context of particular sites that include extreme urbanism and just the opposite.

In "Experiencing Regionalism: Turkish Paradigms," Professor William Bechhoefer provides a pedagogy dependent on Turkey's central location between Europe and the modern Middle East. He and his colleagues, since 1987, have used Turkey as living laboratory giving credence to a strong regionalist theoretical perspective. For the student, his or her three to six week course of cultural study is based on the

ability to 'read' and analyze vernacular and urban landscapes and building typologies, as a way to discover the reasons for the entrenched traditions as well as contemporary developments. The student is also asked to engage in literally 'tasting' the culture surrounding the architecture through first-hand experience and by reading on topics such as the psychology of spatial perception, economic systems and explanations of the east/west dichotomy amongst others. A record of the life of the work is kept in an annotated sketchbook that is used for recording as well as critiquing. Students are asked to adapt a *regionalist* response—not one that categorizes but one that recognizes the "vitality inherent in indigenous conditions and values and to enlist universal architectural ideas and personal vision in the search for regional expression."

"A Cover Version - Approaching design through the living topography of Turkey," tells of a program that Professors Natalija Subotincic and Mark West ran at their previous teaching position at Carleton University in Ottawa Canada. Their extensive 13-week course of study was conducted for four years beginning in 1993. This program amplifies Turkish history, contemporary culture and the *motion* of it all. 'Cover Version' studios looked to *improvise* as much as document. After a week of travel they immersed the newly arrived student in the tremendous natural and history-laden landscape of Cappadocia and then in the intense opposite of Istanbul. Each time the student independently designated his or her own place of study within the parameters of the given project. The goals appeared to be directed towards involving oneself in the minutia of native livelihood—that is, in the architecture of transformed spaces cut into cave dwellings or churches, in the intricacy of economics that comprise the system of work and commerce found in the urban *han* and, in the fluidity that brings different parts of the city together through a ferry terminals. Students first investigated, drew, depicted and then designed their versions that paid sensitive attention to the total environment.

In "Turgutreis 1974-1997. Anatomy of a Future Unlived," Professor Richard Plunz explains that he has been conducting a program, over more than a generation, of successive documentations that focus on the rapid transformation of a southwest region of the Turkish coast. He and Turkish colleagues selected their region of focus by looking for areas that exhibited 'timelessness' amidst the political and economic disorders of the 1970's in Turkey. What emerged is a story of a culture immensely transformed by municipal planned tourism. In the first season of 1974, American students were paired with Turkish students to do months of drawing and anthropological interviewing of 15 designated families within three villages. The trips following began again in 1986 and continued through 1997 to work with the same families and the municipality. Fieldwork strategies included measuring and drawing the homes with attention to new additions or subtractions over time all over the region. Back at school, attention was paid to the translating of the visual documentation in a way that would retain and represent the

'life' of the place. Throughout the process, student research and involvement provided the basis for analyzing the ongoing lives of the 'futures un-lived.'

All of these approaches, as varied as they are, present extremely potent ways for engaging students of various backgrounds into the past, present and future of Turkey. Each provocative course of study stimulates

and then, it seems, produces another challenge and a series of goals. It appears unavoidable that these intense *foreign* experiences would accomplish so much for the student and the professor.