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As we did last year after the meeting in Brussels, we as a student organization reflected upon the experiences and ideas that resulted from this year's workshop which took place in Versailles. This document will try and make clear - in writing - our position and thoughts about this year's main theme being 'e-learning'.

As the opinion of us eight ELASA representatives is not more than a tiny fraction of the actual number of landscape architecture students to which this subject concerns, we performed a survey as part of our preparation for the LE:NOTRE workshop in Versailles. This with the objective to broaden our insights into the topic and give an overview on what they think about e-learning at their universities: what are their experiences, positive and negative ones so this knowledge could be included in the discussion around e-learning. The specific details and results of that survey have resulted in a separate document (*Online survey May 2009 [ELASA-L]*). We feel that that document should be read in advance to this report, as it was conceived as a separate document to which nevertheless will be referred to in this report.

Besides the e-learning topic itself, this year's workshop in Versailles was again a great opportunity for ELASA students to come and give their opinion on the thematic network's future. We are thankful to be heard and are grateful for the feeling of appreciation and respect. A feeling which evidently goes both ways and strengthen us in the belief we can be of mutual interest to each other.

## [01] E-LEARNING

The internet is an extremely popular platform amongst students of our generations. Not only for entertainment purposes or keeping contacts, but also as a learning platform in ways previously unimaginable. If you think about it for a moment, wasn't the internet designed in the first place specifically for interconnecting universities, libraries and information altogether? after which it grew out to the multi-purpose tool it is today. It's first objective might have become somewhat overshadowed by other applications, but students definitely know how to find their way to usable and trustworthy online resources in means to further develop their knowledge.

What somehow did came to a surprise was that e-learning - in its current form - is being seen largely as something separate from the university since only 60% indicate that the university provided them with e-learning sources (see **Fig. 2.5 – 2.6** '*Origin of online tools and resources*', *Online survey May 2009 [ELASA-L]*). This while 95% of the respondents are attending a university connected with LE:NOTRE (see **Pg. 3** '*School attending*', *Online survey May 2009 [ELASA-L]*) and therefore theoretically already have access to the thematic website with continually growing profession orientated material and resources. Being unaware of the existence of the LE:NOTRE site might well be the reason for low students participation. This lack of involvement from students was something that was brought up last year as well, and was answered with the development of a common ELASA-LE:NOTRE poster as a physical media of the cooperation between those two organizations. This was realized in March 2009 with great support by LE:NOTRE. The poster offers all basic information for students on how they can be involved in the whole process, how they can contribute to the work of both ELASA and LE:NOTRE and the development of our emerging profession of landscape architecture. The idea is to distribute the poster to all LE:NOTRE members and beyond, and involve more people who want to be part of the great professional challenges in the 21. Century.

Students noted being interested in additional content for a broad range of purposes. This only stresses the importance of a thematic network (such as LE:NOTRE) which centralizes knowledge and resources that are easily accessible with the ultimate goal of delivering trained professionals. Continuity and further resource additions to the website should therefore be seen as essential, since this is the only way to answer the demand for very specific information, tailored to the individual needs and interests of a young landscape professional and their tutors.



## [02] WEBSITE

Since last year we developed some kind of internal working group within ELASA that is focusing on both the reorganization and maintenance of ELASA's website. With their support we came up with the following ideas, suggestions and questions for both our website (elasa.org) as well as that of LE:NOTRE (le-notre.org):

- Collaboration by providing web space for the ELASA site on the LE:NOTRE server since we are facing some difficulties with disk space and safety issues on our actual server.
- Having the possibility to embed certain database entries from the LE:NOTRE website into ours by opening certain databases to ours. Specifically we were thinking of applications such as the LE:NOTRE events calendar on the ELASA site for students to be up to date with latest happenings. If insisted upon, we could limit access to certain parts of our site using registration methods. We are especially interested in events where student attendances are desirable, or all events but ones with students should be marked.
- ELASA on its turn can start (and has started) to gather a local student organization database, which could then also be opened to LE:NOTRE.

Concerning the LE:NOTRE website itself we have following suggestions, some of which we know are already been given thought but seem extremely useful to us:

- Ability to upload more than one image at a time, perhaps also having the possibility to batch upload photos much in the same way as a lot of popular image sharing websites (Flickr, Picasa,...) are doing by allowing FTP uploads.
- Strongly connected to this function is the usage of EXIF/IPTC information embedded in image files (extremely handy in combination with photo organizers as Adobe Bridge, Adobe Lightroom, Picasa,...). If the website would be able to read these atomically, it would replace the tedious task of titling, describing, key wording (essential to the functioning of the site) and additionally even geopositioning (assuming a GPS tracker was used) the image before adding it to the database. This would drastically reduce the whole process to a simple drag and drop and definitely have an impact on the number of contributions.
- Image sets organization is weary unclear. How can image be added to the set? Looks like each user have to create its own image set which results in many set with same title just with different owners and just some images in them.
- Although efforts have been made, the website is still too complicated for a lot of people. Attention should be given to finish those parts that they have begun already before opening new and new sections. (e. g. in the glossary section even the term 'landscape design' is not defined)

## [03] ELASA PARTICIPATION IN WORKING GROUPS

This year, us students participated in various working groups connected to the topic of 'e-learning'. As the number of participating ELASA students amounted up to eight we were able to participate in a broader number of working groups and add our students perspectives to all of these discussions. The working groups which we covered were:

- 'Urban Landscapes: Public Space, Civic Identity and Place attachment'
- 'Consultation, Participation and Social Inclusion in Landscape and Open Space Planning'
- 'History and Conservation'
- 'Spatial planning and rural development'
- 'Rural landscapes and Landscape planning'
- 'Residential Environments'
- 'Biotopes in urban areas'



For us this was a valuable opportunity, amongst others, to communicate experiences related to teaching as teaching assistant. As the 2009 Spring Workshop was concentrating on innovative ways of teaching, precisely e-learning, we found ourselves (part of the so called Millennial Generation<sup>1</sup>) well placed to add our opinion to the discussion about this medium in relation to the diverse working groups topics. One of the outputs of the Versailles Workshop was the development of e-learning courses on different topics. We have the strong impression that although there is interest in the subject of e-learning from the position of the professors, the engagement of putting energy and time in the further development of the content is lacking somehow. The professors that were present are busy enough as it is already, so they tend to think about the whole e-learning subject in a way that they don't really have to do anything special. This resulted in the idea of having students participate greatly to the process of information gathering and course creation. This seems plausible at first sight, but is it something students are willing to invest their time into without any kind of return or 'rewarding'? There was some speaking about getting credit points for each well completed e-course. We think this might be a good solution, also to keep these students completing their courses and not stopping somewhere in the middle because of other 'more important' work. We know that all students are also not that self-initiative. The fact, unfortunately. Not only was our students' opinion very valuable for the teachers, in some of the working groups we specifically engaged ourselves to voluntarily contribute to the content of such a course by i.e. collecting and explaining interesting case studies dealing with very specific working group topics (i.e. participatory design and planning) to be shared with the working groups and the LE:NOTRE website. Hopefully these kind of initiatives also become exemplary for other students to start upload material to the LE:NOTRE website.

Overall we found the cooperation between the teachers and as well between teachers and ourselves as quit productive, as in some cases this resulted in several more or less elaborated course proposals. The crucial thing is now to keep up the development of these course units.

What we noticed in the different workings groups was that everybody has good intentions, and was willing to continue meeting on-line and working after Spring Workshop in Versailles. In the different working group that we collaborated on, there was agreed on some deadlines for the works, which made us feel optimistic about progress making in the whole thing. Meanwhile we heard back from some of the working groups, and can only note little has happened since then. We felt the bigger problem was more how to do it and what is expected. We got guidelines to prepare an e-course and how to work in a group, but we couldn't imagine how it should look like at the end. So we spent most of the time of first day in Versailles discussing about key words and the meaning of our group. The same happened last year in Brussels with another group. Instead of proceeding with the work, we tried to make up other subjects (totally unimportant for this year theme) and we lost the guidance. What we need are better instructions about what to do and how our output should be like. Perhaps that an example, a frame of proposal or just key points (index) what the e-learning course should contain would help a great deal. We have absolutely no doubt that the professors who participated at LE:NOTRE are among the best at their field and they know all too well how to prepare lectures which would achieve the best possible knowledge to their students. But to prepare a lecture which would suit to larger number of international students and their interests, is of course a bigger and more responsible act.

This year's setting might have contributed to the overall productive atmosphere. Compared to the Brussels '08 spring workshop, working groups and plenary sessions in Versailles took place on a truly magnificent (inspiring) place. This place attachment supposedly helped people to be able to focus more on the subject of LE:NOTRE development(tuning) rather than on changing venues. In that sense place attachment is a crucial factor for the success of workshops.

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, N; Strauss, W. and Matson, RJ (2000) Millennials Rising. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.



## **[04] LE:NOTRE & ELASA**

After attending the last two LE:NOTRE Spring Workshops, at the Erasmus University in Brussels in 2008 and the Versailles National School of Landscape Architecture in 2009, it was clear that the presence of ELASA student, made possible by LE:NOTRE, was very valuable experience. ELASA students had the chance to participate in the work of different LE:NOTRE working groups, meet project participants from all over the world, exchange knowledge, gain more experience and report it back to ELASA, colleagues in their countries and beyond.

We, as ELASA students hope to develop our association further and work side by side with our colleagues and supporters from LE:NOTRE in the future. We hope that will continue also in 2010 and beyond with help of possible LE:NOTRE 2+ and LE:NOTRE 3. Now is the time to take more responsibility for the planet, connect different disciplines in each project, offer green and sustainable solutions. This is what landscape architecture is about and we would be happy to continue our contribution.

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