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# Are we educating traditional heroes or team players for the future?

## Reflections on landscape architecture education in Finland

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**Keywords:** Collaboration and negotiation skills, education, teamwork

### Introduction

Education in landscape architecture strives for individual excellence even though successful landscape architectural practice relies on collaboration and teamwork. According to surveys of Finnish landscape architects, collaboration and negotiation skills are assessed as the most relevant competence areas. However, the surveys revealed that education corresponds poorly to these demands. This finding is the starting point of our paper where we reflect on the role of teamwork in our education. The paper is based on two work-life skills surveys for landscape architectural professionals (2010, 2012), five interviews with landscape and architectural professionals (2014), focusing on the competition processes in their practice and finally, the analysis (2018) of the current learning outcomes and their implementation in the curriculum.

Aalto University is the only landscape architecture school in Finland. The degree program, established in 1989, is situated in the department of architecture which is part of Finland's largest multidisciplinary university, combining engineering, arts and business. A close link with architecture is one of the cornerstones in the education of landscape architecture, which is also reflected in its pedagogical principles. The teaching of architecture substantially leans on studio teaching with an emphasis on individualised expression (e.g. Schön 1985; Attoe & Mugerauer 1991). In this paper, we explore this tradition from the point of view of work-related challenges and reflect on the implementation of teamwork in our education.

### Collaboration skills in landscape architecture

Jan Kattein (2015) defines the three roles of the architect: inventor, activist and arbitrator. The inventor emphasises individual expression and challenges conventions while the activist concentrates on the process and the realisation. Finally, the arbitrator emphasises collaboration and engages the multiple stakeholders relevant for the project. The roles of the inventor and activist are based on the traditional architectural education and their skills are covered well in the curriculum. However, the collaboration and negotiation skills of the arbitrator are marginalised in the curriculum. In the recent analysis of the bachelor curriculum (Mannerla-Magnusson 2018), the skills outcomes for collaboration and teamwork scored lowest. Instead, the capacity for individual expression scored highest. This leads to severe self-reflection, are we educating traditional heroes or team players for the future? Is our education too much tied to its traditions and is its understanding of the professional field too narrow?

According to a questionnaire for architects, the work embodies continuous negotiation on the contents, costs, zoning, and the interpretation of the law and

various regulations as well as political decisions. Additionally, conflict management is often required due to stakeholders with contradictory interests (Kangasoja 2014). Alongside negotiations, professional practice also involves building knowledge through interaction. From the point of view of investigative learning, expertise is understood as a social role or as a skill on the part of a community, operational system, or network of players. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), it is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that members learn from each other and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally. The interviews with professionals confirm this argument. In the collaboration process of architectural competitions, the professionals emphasized the role of a constructive atmosphere and the equity and contribution of all the members. However, even if the collaboration was regarded as the key element in the process, also the individual expression and quiet time for working was valued as the first step of the design process, prior to the collaboration phase. (Weckman 2015).

### Implications for education

A creative process primarily involves working in a group and adopting the skills to take part in this collective process is essential. ECLAS Tuning Project recognizes teamwork as one of the key competences. In addition, ability to work in an interdisciplinary team and ability to communicate with experts in other fields are listed as relevant interpersonal competences (Bruns et al. 2010, 15). According to the Tuning project, 40-60% of the education should be studio learning, focusing on spatial design, planning and management skills. Studio is defined as a mixed-method learning environment where students work either individually or in small groups on planning and design proposals. (Bruns et al. 2010, 31, 37) However, even if teamwork is listed as a core competence, it is addressed mainly as a method, not a substance itself.

Teamwork is usually regarded as a resource-efficient method that is often a result from diminishing individual tutoring time. Tucker and Rollo (2005) argue that changes in funding mean that we cannot continue to teach as we have historically been taught. In addition to the financial advantages, teamwork has also other benefits. It emphasises student-centred learning, instead of teacher-centred master/apprentice model that has been criticised of the differentiated roles of the teacher and the student - the former telling and demonstrating and the latter listening and imitating (Yanar 1999, 173). According to Tucker and Reynolds (2006, 53), students perform better in group design projects than individuals tasks: 'The introduction of a more participatory student-centred design forum where learning takes place collaboratively with peers, rather than in an individualistic or competitive manner, appears to empower students to develop in



tandem with their creative skills, the interpersonal, professional, and cognitive skills'. Moreover, teamwork supports the capacity to listen as professionals to their real clients and users.

A successful and resource-efficient strategy, a key competence according to ECLAS and the questionnaires for professionals - how could we foster neglected teamwork as part of our education? To begin with, we have identified three key aspects: pedagogy, phasing and methods. The traditional studio pedagogy, inspired by Donald Schön lies deep in the education, and it is necessary to critically examine the master/apprentice model and its pedagogical aims. Moreover, teaching teamwork calls for special training specifically for design classes. Second, we need to consider the phasing - when and how to integrate collaboration skills in the curriculum and how to balance teamwork and individual performance in each stage. The integration of teamwork in education requires an implementation plan for the whole curriculum. According to our experiences, operating in a group requires strong personal skills as well as confidence in one's own abilities. Therefore, individual design and planning skills need to be the core of the first years' curriculum. The third aspect pertains to methods. Although multiple courses include group work assignments, the methods supporting them are not always elaborated, nor are their learning outcomes specified. However, there are interesting office simulation and role-play methods worth testing in design studios. In addition, the challenges of the teamwork need to be addressed, such as fair assessment and equal workload contribution (Tucker & Abbassi 2016, 9).

Finally, both collaboration and individual excellence are required in landscape architectural practice and education. The optimal equilibrium of these skills and the successful pedagogical strategy remain a key question in teaching landscape architects.

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