



# International course landscape architecture

A challenging experience with international students

**A new load of international students is walking in the Hucht. Every year students from all over the world come to Wageningen to participate in the International Course Landscape Architecture. What kind of course is this? What is the scope? Where do participating students come from? This article should give you an idea!**

## Introduction

Landscape Architecture in the Netherlands and particularly in Wageningen has always had an international scope. Many of the professors and lectures in the sixties and seventies of the last century have had their education and practical experience abroad. In the seventies the programme even contained a tropical and subtropical specialisation. In the same period the Dutch approach on landscape became famous amongst landscape architects and planners from all over the world. The main reason was the emphasis on the regional scale and the awareness that design on that scale was possible and even needed. In most countries landscape architecture focussed on gardens and small elements in urban context. The spatial problems on the regional scale were in the hands of regional planners. These two worlds hardly met. However, in our small and well-organised country planners and architects used to co-operate and sometimes with exciting results, particularly in the new polder areas. Wageningen became attractive which resulted in a growing number of international students. In 1992 our Wageningen Landscape Department decided to organise a fulltime English taught planning and design course; the International Course was born.

The course started in 1993, so this year it is taught for the 11<sup>th</sup> time. It lasts 12 weeks, from the first of May till the third week in July.

## Scope of the course and the teaching model

The core of the course is basically a planning and design studio. Parallel with the studio a series of lectures and field-trips is scheduled. All three are strongly related. The Dutch context is a starting point but we encourage all kinds of exchanges of ideas, approaches and philosophies. The mentioned diversity of input gives an interesting perspective on the future development of the profession. Teaching is done on an academic level. So students are not only supposed to learn how, but also why they do things the way they do them. We encourage individual development and focus on a high level of design work.

All design is creating order. This order implies a certain choice - however it may be deliberate - it is always a choice of a spatial solution in the given situation. Design teaching is building up a systematic approach to design problems in which individual designers take the lead in developing ideas and concepts. This requires an emphasis on personal development and not only the learning of a 'bunch of tricks'.

The lecture program consists of three types of lectures:

- Introductions into land, landscape and landscape architecture in The Netherlands;
- A series of lectures on contemporary theory by staff members;



Analysing the landscape by drawing.

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This year's design area.



Groupsdinner while being on excursion.

- A series of lectures on projects of Dutch landscape architects, mostly landscape architects that work at private offices and municipal departments. Although lectures, presentations and fieldtrips form an important part of the teaching approach the main emphasis is on individual coaching of the student in the studio. Getting to know how the student thinks and approaches the problem is the basis for studio teaching. The final goal is to make the student ready for individual and independent work in a practical situation.

### **The assignment for the studio and the study area**

Problems on a regional scale like this, form more and more the work of many landscape architects in The Netherlands and abroad. Although planning and design at a regional level has a long tradition in The Netherlands, the approach and methodology is still developing and constantly changing. The complexity of these problems is threefold:

- The need for integration of different scales;
  - The need to develop a strategy for future development instead of a blueprint for a final and static situation;
  - The need to relate planning and design in a social context. Communication of ideas and plans is of prime importance for all landscape architects.
- For this year the study area is located near Wageningen; that means within bicycling distance. The area around

Wageningen offers a wide variety of challenging related spatial problems like urban development, accessibility, water management, ecological zones, development of science landscape, conservation of historic values, etc. etc.

### **Fieldtrips**

Fieldtrips form an integral part of the course. We put much emphasis on visual research, drawing and analysis of the site. We also organise a series of fieldtrips to projects of landscape architects in The Netherlands to give students a start of a reference what is done in the field. For this year fieldtrips are scheduled to old and new cities and towns and to specific Dutch landscapes like the 'polders', the river area and the coastal landscapes.

### **Students population of the Course in former years**

The course is meant for students with an academic background of at least three years in landscape architecture, landscape planning, regional planning or urban design. Every year also a small number of Dutch students participate in the course as part of their regular programme. In the last ten years we have had over 220 students from more than 28 different countries, mainly from Europe, which resulted in an interesting and stimulating cultural diversity. Several participants continued their studies in one of the MSc-programmes. When I join international congresses I frequently meet former students from the course. Some of the positive points,

often mentioned in these contacts are the social context and academic atmosphere of Wageningen and the way students co-operate. In many cases the design approach developed in Wageningen has proved to be a base for awards in design competitions and for a promising professional or scientific career.

### **This year's student population**

The course will start May 1<sup>st</sup> with a group of 35 students originating from 13 different countries. The pre-requisites for the course imply also this year a wide scope in background, knowledge, approach and skill. Ranging from ecological based programmes of for instance Germany, planning based scientific approaches from Portugal and Sweden, design focussed schools in Scotland and Munich, craftsmanship and knowledge of plant materials from France, drawing techniques from Poland and so on.

However, it is hard to draw these general conclusions from the course results because individual qualities of the participants and particularly the susceptibility to new approaches and theories tend to dominate. Even students from the same school from the same year can show an immense variety in interest, knowledge and skills. We expect that after a couple of weeks the group process will result in a coherence and probably, like former years, the participants will keep contact for the rest of their professional careers.<<