

CROSS-CULTURAL PARTICIPATORY DESIGN ASSESSMENT ACROSS DIFFERING INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXTS

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1 ABSTRACT

The study utilizes areas of scholarship in cross-cultural settings and participatory design to develop assessment criteria for international design studios across varying political contexts (Hou 2010, Nassar & Hewitt 2010). As part of the study, two cross-cultural design courses between American/Egyptian students and American/Iranian students were used to establish baseline relative cultural/political differences utilizing Inglehart–Welzel cultural assessments, “EIU Political Index” assessments, and “Conflict Barometer” assessments. The American/Egyptian student groups and the American/Iranian student groups were observed and surveyed to assess the extent of their community design participation, student learning, listening openness, student group common purpose, individual actions, relative cultural awareness, and their means of collaboration in the United States, Egypt, and Iranian. The study evaluated meaningful work by students in both classes as a comparative metric for educational outcomes. Meaningful work included shared regional and local research; research related to planning for development; collaborative fieldwork for site inventory and analysis; community resident interviews and analysis; collaborative site analysis and conceptual development; group presentations; and presentations to government officials about fieldwork findings including community survey information.

Findings suggest that: 1) the greater the cultural/political differences between the three student groups, the less meaningful work accomplished by the groups (largely as a result of perceived and imposed participation limitations); and 2) the more collaborative means of sharing knowledge, flexible ways of thinking, studying and learning, the greater the perceived influence of culture in stimulating creative thinking and mediating cultural/political differences.

1.1 Key Words

Multicultural, Participation, Design, Politics, Pedagogy