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Social Science Courses at a Life Science Faculty: How to adapt a Sociology Course to Landscape Architects

Lise Herslund

Forest and Landscape, University of Copenhagen

The course 'urban sociology – human, place and city' is a relatively new course. It is an optional course for landscape architects. Two years ago a colleague and I developed the course from scratch because many landscape architectural students called for a course dealing with the 'human dimension'. The goal of the course is to give the students different perspectives on peoples' lives and use of urban areas. My colleague and I both have backgrounds in social sciences and developed a course building on sociological and geographical theories and concepts to the understanding of urban areas.

The students attending the course counts landscape architectural students but also a growing number of students from outside. The course was initially built up very traditionally of lectures, text presentations, and then an essay in the end. Much like we knew it from our backgrounds. However, it was clear after the first year that it was the students coming from outside that were most satisfied with the course and generally succeeded better in the final essay. Our task was clear; we needed to adapt the course better to the intended target group – the landscape architects. This essay concerns the adaptation process. It analyses the course to pinpoint core problems and focus two main initiatives to improve the course; thematic restructuring and reflection papers. These initiatives are then discussed and evaluated. The analysis and evaluation is based on experiences and observations during the course, student evaluations, both oral and written and the KNUD pre-project that was based on a focus group interview with students from this course.

Pinpointing the problems

Different kinds of knowledge

The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the course are that the students should get an overview of and be able to account for the most important research traditions and domains within urban sociology, be able to relate them, and critically apply and evaluate their applicability in the analysis of different urban problems or concrete cases. The ILOs are inspired by the steps in the SOLO taxonomy displaying stages in the learning process (Biggs & Tang 2007). The quantitative stages of learning where students increase their knowledge take place first and then learning changes qualitatively as students start to see the big picture. The ILOs of the urban sociology course work through the levels from describing and accounting for to relation, evaluation and synthesising. Biggs & Tang (2007) similarly distinguish between deep learning and surface learning. Surface learning is the collection of facts and detail where deep learning is the grasping of the main points and messages. This course and the ILO's primarily focus the deep learning.

The course can be said to be aligned at the overall level. The ILOs are evaluated in an essay and 'learned' through the teaching and learning activities (TLAs) of lectures, text reading, group discussions and presentations. However, especially the skills higher in the SOLO taxonomy of relation and evaluation were not reached by many students the first year and it was clear that our TLAs of lecturing and text presentations were not sufficient for all students to obtain the ILOs. We could see from reading the essays that several students read their texts with a 'surface approach' stating some facts and details but not grasping some overall points and relating these to other points and arguments from other texts or course themes. So how could we promote deep learning better in our course?

Different kinds of students

According to Biggs & Tang (2007) the scene for university teaching is changing exemplified in the 'Robert and Susan problem' (Biggs & Tang 2007, p.8). The problem is that teaching mainly is designed for Susans – the academically committed students. But there are also Roberts in the universities today. They attend classes to obtain qualifications for a decent job. Roberts are in higher proportions in today's classes. This distinction in

students seems like a valuable distinction also in the course of urban sociology to explain the success of some students and the difficulties of others. Some students are very self-motivated, where others are more reluctant. The teaching and learning activities (TLAs) in this course of lectures, reading and presentations might be enough for the Susans that practically learn by themselves where the Roberts need some other elements to engage them in the subject matter and setting the stage for deep learning.

The students attending the course are made up of mainly landscape architects but also a substantial part from other institutes mainly geographers and students from social science educations at Roskilde University (RUC). It is clear that these students from outside are much more used to the course set-up of lectures, reading and presentation/discussion and a written essay. They do not question the format and in the end also succeed well. So are they all Susans? Probably not, but they are all used to courses like ours with the rather traditional course set-up of lectures and presentations. So the distinction between Susans and Roberts in this case, is also something to do with what the students are used to from their other courses and educations. It is notable that opposite the students from outside, the landscape architects are not feeling familiar with the format and TLAs, particularly the text reading and essay writing. The evaluations showed that they found the texts too difficult and abstract. The reading they had done before, had mainly been for facts or insights on a particular issue. They also stated that they were not used to writing and it was a major barrier for them.

In landscape architecture, as in other design domains, design is learned primarily by experience through the practice of designing. Heylighen et al. (2005) describes it as 'learning in action'. Students learn through the practice of designing without being aware of what is learned. It is more a kind of tacit knowledge learned through a master-apprentice relationship. Students design and the teacher gives feedback and critique and the students design again and so forth. This way of learning is very different from our course. In our course, it was through text analysis and plenary discussions that feedback was given.

Course evaluations and the focus group interview showed that our course could not 'compete' against these other kinds of courses with continuous deadlines and feedback. It was too easy to skip the course and first put efforts in at the end for the essay. This was a reason given why some students did not participate in our course on a regular basis. This is a vicious circle for the students because when they do not attend, they do not get to 'practice' text analysis and miss out on the big picture presented in lectures

and discussions making relation and evaluation difficult when writing the essay.

Different ways of improving

The landscape architects can be separated into those who attend an urban design line and some more traditional landscape architects with a stronger focus on design and plants. It is clear that the urban designers are much more used to both reading and writing than the more traditional landscape architects. But for all the landscape architectural students, the main problem stated in the evaluation the first year was that the course was too abstract and not easy to relate to their everyday life and subject matter. So building better on what they already knew both in format, way of learning and subject matter was the challenge we had to address. And as Biggs & Tang (2007) so rightly says promoting deep learning is all to do with encouraging an active response from students and developing teaching building on what the students already know.

We had expected the students to be self-motivated throughout the course without direct continuous feedback and without them being as active as they were used to in their other courses. Being active meant something different in our course and so did feedback. Activities were to read, discuss and present and the feedback was the discussions and comments after presentations. More student activity and also feedback or deadlines had to have a more prominent part in the course.

We had expected them to know how to read in depth already and analyse a text and we also expected them to be used to formulating themselves in writing. Therefore obtaining such more generic skills in text analysis and writing skills had to become part of our intended learning outcomes as well as activities.

After the first year we felt like skipping the course altogether but we still believed that the designs and plans of the landscape architectural students could really benefit from a wider set of perspectives and understandings of societal changes and peoples' everyday life. And the evaluation and the essays still showed that even writing and texts were difficult and frustrations with these overshadowed the positive for some landscape architectural students. The students had been challenged by the new perspectives and found them interesting.

The changes

Structure and themes

The changes we made after the first year was to strengthen the connection to the field of landscape architecture. We focused the course around some key themes like 'place and sense of place', 'public places', 'everyday life and mobility', 'communities' (see appendix A, the course plan and figure 9.1). These themes could both relate to the more physical design and planning activities that the landscape architects were used to but also to themes in sociology and geography. Within these fields we then added on with different insights from sociology and geography to widen their understanding and perspectives. The intention was to make it easier for them to see the connection and the value of the sociological approach and insights by looking at familiar themes in a new light. This way we could build on what they already knew while giving them new tools and perspectives to go deeper into the theme.

Each theme had a similar set-up running over three course days. The first year we used two course days a week (of three hours) for confrontation and the last day were left free for reading etc. (at LIFE this is called module B). The second year we decided to spend all three days a week the first six weeks to have room for different new activities, making more free room in the end of the course for essay writing.

Each theme were made up of three different kinds of lectures; one giving the overview and the overall perspectives of the theme. Another, a 'kick-in', was a short lecture focusing on a thinker, a study or a particular perspective, and then the last one was a guest lecture bringing in the real world with a person using sociological insights in planning, design or decision making. Around these lectures the students read 1-2 general texts and student texts they had to discuss in groups and present. The text discussions were guided by text introductions from us and questions guiding the text analysis. The course then ended up in a week where students worked with formulating essay subjects in collaboration with us. This process was more formalised than the year before and the essay writing were followed up by supervision to address the difficulties in writing.

The evaluations and also the quality of the essays were markedly improved after the first year. Not just for landscape architectural students but for everybody. The group of students not attending regularly had also become relatively smaller but it was still a feature in the course. Especially

CONTENT
INTRO TO (URBAN) SOCIOLOGY
SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE CITY
MOBILITY, EVERYDAY LIFE AND PRAXIS
PLACE AND SENSE OF PLACE
PUBLIC SPACE
COMMUNITY AND SEGREGATION
OUTRO – AND ESSAY FORMULATION
WRITING AND SUPERVISION

Fig. 9.1. Overall course themes

the days when we had text discussions were not that well attended, even if it was the text discussions that were brought forward in the evaluations as positive and interesting. So there were still room for improvements. The barrier of writing was still mentioned in the evaluation and also some essays were still of such bad quality showing that the students had not gone into depth with the texts and the course themes.

Reflection papers and peer feedback

This year we have introduced a new feature in the text discussions: the reflection paper. It is an individual written paper of 1-2 pages analysing a student text and discussing it in relation to planning/urban life. Similar to the year before we have prepared some questions to guide the text analysis and suggest points to discuss in relation to planning and design. The students are divided into six groups of 4-6 students. Each text is then read by two groups. One group discusses and presents the text in plenary as before and the other group writes reflection papers on the text. This adds up so each student has to be involved in three text presentations and make three reflection papers (see appendix A course plan). The handing in of the three

reflection papers is a precondition for going to the exam (writing the final essay).

Introducing written assignments in the course without putting more workload on us for commenting and giving feedback was a concern. We have a limited amount of hours for a course and these are already spend on confrontation and essay reading. Here the experiences from elsewhere with peer assessment encouraged us. Peer assessment can, based on several examples (Morrow 2006, Cho & MacArthur 2011), be introduced without necessarily increasing the workload. It is important to stress that we use peer feedback and not assessment as such, where students have to give grades or report back to the teacher. The benefits of peer feedback are that the student and also the 'assessor' get deeper into the subject matter and also obtain a better understanding of what is a good text. Peer feedback is also an important alternative to instructor evaluation and feedback because when peers communicate their comments, they use the same 'language' without using professional jargon and student writers may understand peer comments more easily than expert comments because peers also share problems and knowledge (Cho & MacArthur 2010).

The obligatory reflection papers are introduced to make it 'worthwhile' to come to the text discussion days, start the writing process earlier in the course and use peer feedback to enhance text comprehension and also on what is a good text. The students that write reflection papers get the opportunity to get peer feedback on a written piece by other students that have also read the text, discuss the written piece and the text and then get to hear the texts presented by another group and act as opponent on the text presentation. All this giving them a good basis for the final text analysis and individual writing of the reflection paper.

Introducing this new element into the text discussions has definitely worked on the attendance of text discussions. This gives a larger critical mass for discussions and hereby again making it worthwhile and also interesting to come. The actual peer feedback has not worked out exactly as intended. The frame given for the feedback sessions was that students write a draft text at home and bring it on the day of text discussions in order to get feedback on the draft written piece. However, students read the texts at home and take some notes also in written form. Mostly they do not write these notes into a coherent text they can interchange and get feedback on. They use the notes as a basis for group discussion and say that these notes are not in a form where actual feedback on the written format would make sense. Therefore the peer feedback stays on the level of a group discussion

on the text messages and not on the actual writing. However, many students say that the process of discussion and hearing the plenary presentation give them a very good basis for writing their reflection paper and they will use the group later in the writing process for feedback.

Discussion

In the evaluation of the course, students rated the reflection papers positively. It was helpful to write as it gave room for reflection and pushed students to express themselves in writing not just at the end of the course, but throughout. However, students found it too "structured" that we wanted them to write for every session. We see the point made by the students who ask why spend much time on writing before they have discussed and heard the presentations. The feedback on writing is more worthwhile later. So we will work on facilitating text feedback later in the process because students are already asking us whether we will give them feedback on their reflection papers when they have them ready. – And this was not the intention. We targeted the reflection papers to the situation of the landscape architects so they could get a forum for writing and receiving feedback from students from outside who had tried it before. But it is clear that the students from outside are used to less formalised ways of teaching, leaving more room for themselves to do as they find suitable. Therefore they first start writing after text discussions in class.

Another interesting point has come up during the last month of the new course. Are we putting too much into the course now leaving no time for the student preparation? This year we have kept the structure of using three days a week for lectures, discussions and texts, but at the same time seized some of the free essay writing time in the end of the course also for discussions etc. Here at the faculty of LIFE sciences we have many hours in a module; nine hours a week. We have filled them up with activities and discussions to have room for students being active, with interesting lectures and discussions. 'Great' say some students but some students find it too much. It is especially students from outside that that are used to much less confrontation hours from their respective studies. They say they do not have time for all these activities. Also in the light of university restructuring, running courses with many confrontation hours might very well be something of the past; a way of teaching done at LIFE but not feasible within a new faculty made up of both LIFE and Natural Sciences.

We have now developed a structure for the course that brings into play themes from landscape architecture and urban design that we can add new perspectives to. We can most probably sort in the perspectives, streamline and find the most important ones, and hereby cut some time from lecturing while still keeping the discussions and activity of students high. We have an inhomogeneous group made up of landscape architects, urban designers and a growing number from outside. As it was important to adapt the course to include more student activity and generic competences for the landscape architects it is also important to keep up the number of students from outside. We will have to find a middle way.

A Course plan

DATO	INDHOLD	PENSUM	
	INTRO TIL (BY)SOCIOLOGIENS KERNEEMNER	Generelt	Til diskussion
MAN 21.NOV 9-12	*Temaformål: Bysociologiens start, dets kerneemner og –metoder, dets udvikling via Chicagosociologerne samt fagområdets senere forgreninger.* Introduktion til kurset: formål, opbygning, aktiviteter og produkter (LIHE). Bysociologi og byudvikling. Sociologiens grundlæggere og deres interesse for samfundsstudier via det urbane (TAC)	Giddens (1998a)	
TIRS 22.NOV 13-16	De klassiske studier af Chicagoskolen og overblik over tiden efter Chicagoskolen og bysociologiens forgreninger (TAC) Introduktion til nyere begreber som globalisering, refleksivitet, individualisering og udlejring (LIHE) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer (LIHE)	Alexander & Thompson (2008a) Rasmussen (1995)	
	SOCIAL DIFFERENTIERING		
FRE 25.NOV 9-12	*Temaformål: Man kan begribe sociale forskelle via et klassemæssigt og økonomisk/ressource-perspektiv. Inklusion af kulturelle forskelle kan bidrage til en mere nutidig måde at forstå forskelle på.* Social differentiering er et kernefelt for sociologiske analyser af samfundets hierarkier. Klasseanalyser med inspiration fra marxismen har været det dominerende (TAC). Inspiration fra antropologien har rettet fokus mod kulturelle værdifællesskaber, livsformer og livsstile. forskellige gruppers brug af byrum, inkl. Burgess' og Gehl's differentieringer (TAC)	Giddens (1998b) Faber (2009)	
MAN 28. NOV 9-12	Diskussion grupper/plenum: fællesskaber, individ og urbanitet (LIHE) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer om social differentiering (LIHE)		Tönnies (2007) [1887] gruppe 1 p + 2 r Simmel (2007) [1903] gruppe 3 p + 4 r Wirth (2007) [1938] gruppe 5 p + 6 r
TIRS 29. NOV 13-16	Gæsteforelæsning (13-14): Gertrud Ølgaard, NIRAS – om livsformer, livsstile og sociale differentieringer. Bourdieu – et eksempel på en måde at differentiere på (LIHE)		

FRE 2. DEC 9-12	Diskussion grupper/plenum: Social differentiering (LIHE)		Dahl & Øllgaard (2004) gruppe 4 p + 1 r Pløger (2002) gruppe 2 p + 5 r Holm & Jæger (2008) gruppe 6 p + 3 r
	MOBILITET, HVERDAGSLIV OG PRAKSIS		
MAN 5. DEC 9-12	*Temaformål: Hverdagslivet i byerne er forandret over tid. Analyser ud fra kapitalistisk verdensorden viser visse træk (Giddens), analyser efter den teknologiske revolution viser andre vilkår for socialitet (Urry). Hvad betyder disse udviklinger for hverdagsliv, daglig socialitet, menneskelig handling og fællesskab?* Menneskelige handlinger mellem rutiner og strategier. Hverdagslivsbegrebet introduceres via (TAC) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer om mobilitet, hverdagsliv og praksis (LIHE)	Jacobsen & Kristensen (2005)	
TIR 6.DEC 13-16	Mobilitetens sociologi – Mobilitet, som nyt grundvilkår (LIHE) Lefebvres tanker om hverdagsliv og kapitalisme - cyklisk tidslighed og rutiniserede praksisser overfor lineær tidslighed (TAC)	Jensen (2011)	
FRE 9.DEC 9-12	Diskussion grupper/plenum: Mobilitet, hverdagsliv og social praksis (LIHE/TAC) Gæsteforelæser (11-12): Malene Freuendal-Pedersen (RUC) om studier om mobilitet i hverdagslivet.		Beck-Jørgensen (2002) gruppe 5 p + 4 r Goffmann (1959) gruppe 3 p + 2 r Freudendal-Pedersen & Hartmann-Petersen (2006) gruppe 1 p + 6 r
	STEDER OG STEDSTILKNYTNING		
MAN 12. DEC 9-12	*Temaformål: Sted var tidligere kun et begreb i geografien, men bruges i dag også af sociologer o.a. Den stigende mobilitet i det moderne tid har medvirket til at det fysiske sted har mistet sin betydning. Flere mener dog at sted og stedstilknytning er blevet vigtigere for det moderne menneske.* Hvad er sted og stedstilknytning? Kan man skabe et sted og hvad betyder globaliseringen for stedstilknytning og findes der lokale og globale steder? (LIHE) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer om steder og stedstilknytning (TAC)	Cresswell (2009) Jensen (2009)	
TIR 13. DEC 13-16	Gæsteforelæsning: Svava Riesto. Om perspektiver på stedet, stedets produktion og kompleksitet – med Carlsberg-grunden som case. Indspark: Folk i Wilmslow - Et studie i Nordengland af stedstilknytning, mobilitet og social differentiering sammen (LIHE)		

FRE 16. DEC 9-12	Diskussion grupper/plenum: Steder og stedstilknytning (LIHE/TAC) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer om offentlige byrum(TAC)		Sommer (1997) gruppe 2 p + 1 r Massey (1994) gruppe 4 p + 3 r Mazanti & Pløger (1999) gruppe 6 p + 5 r
	DET OFFENTLIGE BYRUM		
MAN 19. DEC 9-12	*Temaformål: Byen er forandret, sociale relationer og hverdagslivet er forandret, tid økonomiseres og sociale kontakter segregeres, internettet har revolutioneret. Er der stadig behov for offentlige byrum? Konsekvenser for planlægningen?* Offentlige rum gennem tiden og temaer i dag (TAC) Gæsteforelæsning (11-12): Lasse Liebst, Sociologisk Insititut - om urbanitetstolerance-hypotesen	Valentine (2001b) Hajer & Reijndorp (2001)	
TIRS 20. DEC 13-16	Diskussion grupper/plenum: det offentlige byrum (LIHE/TAC) Gæsteforelæsning (15-15.30): Yoko Harada – on urban space and local communities in Japan		Jacobs (2007) [1961] gruppe 1 p + 4 r Holston (1999) gruppe 5 p + 2 r Sennett (1992) gruppe 3 p + 6 r
	JULEFERIE		
	FÆLLESSKAB, LOKALSAMFUND OG SEGREGATION		
MAN 2. JAN 9-12	*Temaformål: om hvordan fællesskabstanken er blevet forvaltet i planlægningen via lokalsamfundstanker. Lokalsamfund, ghetto og segregering, og om hvordan moderne fællesskaber stiller sig mellem det globale og det lokale.* Lokalsamfundstanken i planlægningen (TAC) Introduktion til tekster og spørgsmål til studenterdiskussion og refleksionspapirer om fællesskab, lokalsamfund og segregation (LIHE)	Valentine (2001a)	
TIRS 3. JAN 13-16	Om moderne fællesskaber mellem det globale og lokale (LIHE) Gæsteforelæsning: Marie Louise Hartvig Widding, Gribskov kommune - om social kapital i boligområder	Jørgensen (2008)	
FRE 6. JAN 9-12	Diskussion grupper/plenum: Fællesskaber og lokalsamfund (TAC/LIHE) Om at skrive opgave: formål og formalia – brug weekenden til at tænke over emner og problemer		Mumford (1954) gruppe 4 p + 5 r Widding (2007) gruppe 2 p + 3 r Bauman (2002) gruppe 6 p + 1 r
	OUTRO – SKRIFTLIG OPGAVE		

MAN 9. JAN 9-12	Fremlæggelse af essayemner i mindre grupper: Emne, problemformulering, litteratur og indhold		
TIR 10. JAN 13-16	Opsamling af kursets hovedpunkter og problematikker (LIHE) Mulighed for individuel vejledning omkring essayemner og endelig fastsættelse af problemformulering		
FRE 13. JAN 9-12	Individuel vejledning og endelig fastsættelse af problemformulering (deadline for at uploade de tre refleksionspapirer)		
	SKRIVNING OG VEJLEDNING		
MAN 16. JAN 9-12	Selvstændigt arbejde – mulighed for vejledning		
TIR 17. JAN 9-12	Selvstændigt arbejde – mulighed for vejledning		
FRE 20. JAN 9-12	Selvstændigt arbejde – mulighed for vejledning		
	AFLEVERING AF SKRIFTLIG OPGAVE		
MAN 23. JAN KL 23.55	Deadline for aflevering af skriftlige eksamensopgaver (Oploades på Absalon)		

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