

# The importance of open-air drawing workshops in landscape architecture education

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the experiences from open-air drawing workshops in Hrubieszów, Poland (2022) and Kraków, Poland (2019-2022), organised for landscape architecture students from the Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT), Kraków, Poland. The objective is to emphasise that open-air drawing workshops are useful in developing drawing skills and individual artistic means of expression, as well as in developing observation skills and spatial imagination. The conducted research supports the view that open-air drawing workshops enhance the teaching process by preparing students for their future design work. It improves their competencies and provides them with an opportunity to learn new skills through intense experience, reflection, thinking and active experimentation. The majority of FA-CUT landscape architecture students who took part in the drawing professional practice in the period 2019-2022, confirmed in surveys that they found the experience important for the education of landscape architects and they expressed the opinion that the most important goals of the workshops had been achieved.

## INTRODUCTION

The process of *in-situ* drawing during open-air workshops is instrumental to the development of the professional skills required of future architects and the search for their individual means of artistic expression. The works created in these circumstances reflect students' immediate response to their own experience. The various modes of representation open them to a variety of ways of seeing. The development of a unique style, individual mode of expression through drawings and paintings, involves the growth of their authors' strong sense of identity [1].

Open-air workshops teach students how to become a penetrating observer of forms and space, while the reflection that accompanies this process may help them broaden their understanding of the world around them. Given the prevalence of information technologies that dominate the world today, it has become particularly important to students to explore complex local conditions, the topography of an area, to experience *in-situ* the scale of masses and interiors.

A personal experience of the actual space teaches students how to eliminate the excessive, irrelevant details from the complex reality and introduces much needed balance to the cognitive process. The discovery of the history of a place, the identity of its local community, allows the young people to analyse the current situation - a skill fundamental for their future professional work. It also gives them a chance to identify the potential of the space they observe, making it easier for them to imagine its future development over the course of the project. Workshops help students develop a better understanding of the complexity of design problems and provide an adequate response to users' needs in the future [2].

Such experiences broaden young people's horizons and foster creative, out-of-the-box thinking; they may also be useful in promoting integration between different subjects. A consistent approach to teaching in the Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT), Kraków, Poland fosters the co-existence and mutual reinforcement of the various elements in the educational process, producing better final outcomes. The students learn functional, spatial and aesthetic dependencies between architectural forms in practice. The new challenges related to the globalisation, environmental problems and the growing complexity of the design process call for an interdisciplinary, user-oriented approach to problem solving. This is why the workshop-based acquisition of competencies through observation, analysis and identification of actual problems cannot be overestimated. The workshops are useful in preparing future architects for participative design, integrating architects into their economic context. And, it is precisely the development of such interdisciplinary competencies that gives future architects a better chance to become even better experts [3].

Apart from acquiring theoretical knowledge and practicing drawing and design, it is important for students to develop the so-called soft, social skills [4]. These include the ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances, communication and collaboration skills, which are instrumental to future professional relationships in architects' work. Open-air drawing workshops provides them with an opportunity to meet and share experiences with people they already

know - teachers, peers, as well as strangers - observers and residents. Workshops take place in work conditions similar to those typical of architecture studios. They create an environment conducive to having an authentic conversation between a teacher and the students, which is less likely to take place in a traditional class. This teaching method, relying both on group work and open-air tasks, seems to be more absorbable and memorable; on top of this, it is more valued by students than *ex-cathedra* methods. The interaction between the workshop participants and the observation of other people's creative work make open-air sessions a great tool for developing flexible thinking.

Apart from teamwork, students also build their organisational skills. Once an open-air workshop is over, the author of this article always puts together an exhibition of the best works. This information is shared with students at the beginning of open-air workshops and motivates their engagement, which in turn brings students to produce better results. What is more, the preparation of an exhibition, encourages students to participate in the organisation of this event and inspires them to develop their own creative standing, also by taking part in competitions [5].

A broad range of obligatory workshops and internships offered to architecture students at the FA-CUT allows them to develop drawing and design skills, while promoting the implementation of the idea of interdisciplinary teaching. Students are further encouraged to take part in voluntary open-air workshops that prepare them to practice their future profession. One of such initiatives is an open-air workshop carried out within a research project focusing on Hrubieszów, Poland.

The Department of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture at the FA-CUT boasts of a long tradition of obligatory drawing and painting workshops. Currently, workshops for the students of architecture are held following the completion of the first year of study in Kraków, Poland, and last five days (30 hours). In the past, they were organised in other venues located in the Kraków area. Likewise, students enrolled in the landscape architecture programme participate in a five-day workshop organised after the first year of study (30 hours). Currently, the workshop takes place in the urban landscape interiors in Kraków. During them, students stand a better chance of becoming engaged and focusing on their creative process, as they have no other university classes at that time.

During the first-cycle studies in landscape architecture at the FA-CUT, students have the total of 240 hours of workshops (the data from the academic year 2020/2021): drawing (30 hours), dendrology (30 hours), land surveying (30 hours), landscape architecture (30 hours) and an internship (120 hours). Their aim is to prepare the graduates to work on designing green areas adjacent to pieces of architecture. The future architects will also examine, implement and take care of landscape architecture facilities. This article aims at proving that drawing workshops are a very useful teaching method, preparing students for their future design work. It is an attempt at answering the question as to whether such workshops develop students' skills and improve their competencies.

The objective of this article is to:

- Emphasise that open-air drawing workshops are useful in developing drawing skills and individual artistic means of expression;
- Draw attention to the usefulness of drawing workshops in developing observation skills and spatial imagination, also through reflection and personal experience of a place, physical contact with space and the scale of forms;
- Emphasise that open-air workshops prepare students for their future professional work by developing their practical skills in terms of using drawing for spatial and chromatic analyses, and to convey information on architectural forms and the landscape.

## METHODS

The methods applied in this study are based on the latest scientific research and many years of teaching experience of this article's author.

The article compares the grades obtained by the students attending the course in drawing in the second semester of their first year and in the fourth semester at their second year of landscape architecture studies, as well as their grades from drawing workshops. The goal of this comparison was to verify whether students have made progress in terms of their grade average and identify factors that interfere with this process.

The study further included a survey among students of FA-CUT landscape architecture, who attended professional practice in the period 2019-2022. Questions in the survey focused on the relevance of the drawing practice for the education of future architects. In the article are also analysed the outcomes of anonymous students' surveys concerning the assessment of the drawing workshops in the years 2019-2022. On top of this, students provided their additional feedback on the attainment of the key practice objectives.

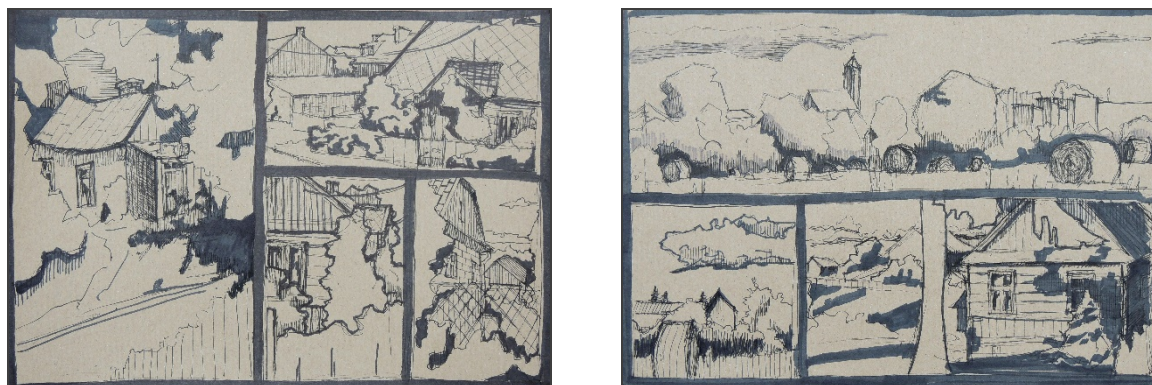
The article presents the experiences from the open-air workshop in Hrubieszów (2022). It further describes the experiences regarding the organisation of professional drawing and painting workshops for the first-year landscape architecture students held in Kraków (in the years 2019-2022). For many years, the author of this article has also been teaching, along with other colleagues, open-air workshops organised after the first year for students of architecture studies (in the years 1989-2020).

The Hrubieszów open-air workshop was combined with an inventory practice and took place in July 2022. It was carried out within a research project entitled *Local development of Hrubieszów - from participation to implementation* financed within the Local Development Programme as part of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism. The workshop was attended by seven students from landscape architecture, who volunteered to participate (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Open-air workshop in Hrubieszów, Poland - CUT students at work, 2022.

The project is being carried out by the Institute of Landscape Architecture at the CUT [6]. The students wanted to capture in their drawings and paintings the beauty and the unique atmosphere of the Hrubieszów landscape, as well as the typical architectural elements and the plants found in gardens surrounding traditional houses (Figure 2). Their works are of documental importance, and testify to the value and potential of the cultural and architectural heritage of the historic buildings for the future development of the town. Once the disappearing wooden architecture is immortalised in drawings and paintings, its *loss* becomes less acute [7]. The results of the workshops were presented at the exhibitions in Kraków (2022) and Hrubieszów (2023).



a)

b)

Figure 2: Sketches of houses in Hrubieszów - drawings by the CUT student Weronika Zielińska, 2022.



Figure 3: Open-air workshop in Kraków, Poland - CUT students at work, 2022.



The workshops following the first year of the landscape architecture programme, over the period 2019-2022, were held in Kraków (Figure 3) and were typically carried out by two teachers (in 2019 and 2020 with the graphic artist - Ryszard Grazda in 2022, together with the architect and designer - Barbara Bajor).

Open-air workshops ended with an overall grade - a mean average from five painting assignments and five sketches. In 2022, as a novelty, a topic integrating drawing and sculpture was introduced. The students first selected the right place, then took several photographs illustrating the various compositions incorporating apples in the selected space, and then, following an in-depth analysis and an investigation of the nature of the space, made three sketches representing their artistic installation with apples (Figure 4).

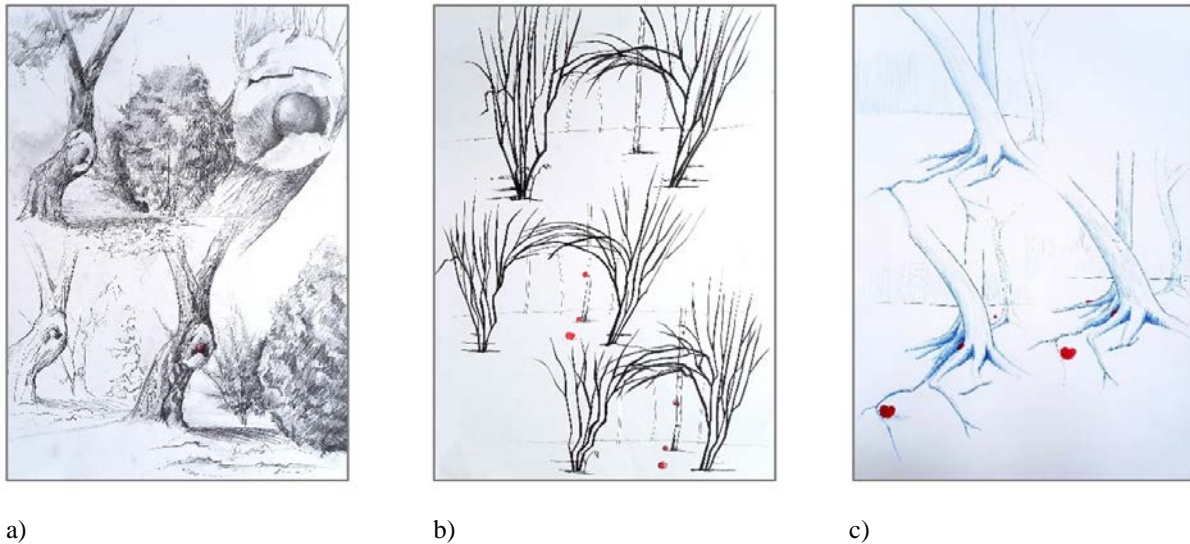


Figure 4: Subject of the drawings: sketches of the landscape interior with students' intervention - drawings by CUT students: a) Joanna Okulska, b) Anna Mazera, c) Liliana Pluta, Kraków, 2022.

During open-air workshops, the free choice of what to focus on, select one's preferred format and technique (pencil, ink, charcoal, acrylic, oil, watercolour), ensures that students enjoy the much-needed creative freedom. Their intrinsic and attentive observation fosters the memorisation of images, an in-depth reflection and endowing the reality with one's own meaning. *In situ* work activates and deepens levels of perception, rather than only purely visual observation. This experience often involves positive emotions arising from work in a small group of people, and in exceptional sites. Friendly atmosphere and tasks with clearly defined objectives broaden students' interests, positively influencing the process of learning and remembering experiences. The combination of this form of teaching with individual interests and preferences as regards the artistic measures boosts students' motivation and improves the effectiveness of the learning process [8]. Creating the space of freedom where the young people may take control and responsibility for their own development may significantly improve their skill of learning based on their own experience, while fostering their independence.

The drawing and painting workshops held in Hrubieszów and Kraków discussed in this article relied on teaching methods based on experience and intrinsic observation. They were carried out in compliance with the so-called Kolb's cycle [9], where effective learning takes place across four different stages: concrete experience (active participation, feeling), reflective observation (observation assuming a broader perspective), theorising (thinking, abstract conceptualisation) and active experimentation (action, drawing, painting, design). Going through all the stages of the Kolb's cycle allows one to launch a new *circuit* and acquire more advanced competencies. The analysis of architectural landscape forms and the selection of relevant elements in complex structures are the key skills to be achieved in the process of training landscape architects. More in-depth learning involving practical experiences contributes to developing students' more mindful reflection on the task at hand.

## RESULTS

In this part are summarised the results of research carried out during drawing workshops held as part of the FA-CUT landscape architecture study curriculum. Treating workshops as an educational form based on the Kolb's cycle, the author of the article analysed their impact on students' development, including the development of technical skills, the perception of reality and spatial imagination. This has been measured through the grades awarded for drawing and painting before and after the workshop. The research period spans 2019-2022, when the author was in charge of the workshop.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the grades for drawing obtained by the students in their first year in semester 2 and in the second year of study in semester 4, as well as the grade for the drawing workshop (after first year). Given the variable number of students, mean grades divided by the number of students attending classes in a given year were

compared (grade scale from 3.0 to 5.0). The comparison pertains to the same student cohorts (the same graduation years) e.g. the data from the first year semester 2 in the academic year 2018/2019 are compared in Table 1 with the data from the second year semester 4 in the academic year 2019/2020.

Table 1: Comparison of students' average grades in three subjects in the years 2019-2022 (grade scale from 3.0 to 5.0).

No	Average grades Freehand drawing 1st year semester 2 Leader: B. Makowska	Average grades Open-air drawing workshop 1st year semester 2 Leader: B. Makowska	Average grades Freehand drawing 2nd year semester 4 Leader: M. Barański
1	4.42 (30 students) 2018/2019	4.53 (31 students) July 2019	4.70 (28 students) 2019/2020
2	4.36 (29 students) 2019/2020	4.68 (30 students) July 2020	4.62 (26 students) 2020/2021 on-line
3	4.79 (21 students) 2020/2021 on-line	4.66 (22 students) July 2021	4.86 (18 students) 2021/2022
4	4.52 (24 students) 2021/2022	4.93 (23 students) July 2022	average grade will be available in September 2023
Average grades 1-4	4.52	4.7	4.73 Average without no 4

On top of this, the article contains an analysis of a voluntary survey carried out in January 2023 among students of landscape architecture at the FA-CUT, who participated in professional practice over the period 2019-2022. Out of the total number of 95 students (the number of students continues to vary as a result of students not being promoted and the attrition rate), 21 students responded (22.1%). The students' responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: CUT students answers to survey questions 1-3.

Survey questions 1-3	Yes	Difficult to say	No
1. Are the open-air drawing workshops useful in developing technical skills and individual artistic means of expression?	20 95.2%	-	1 4.8%
2. Do the open-air drawing workshops develop the ability to perceive the reality and spatial imagination?	21 100%	-	-
3. Do the open-air drawing workshops prepare students for their future professional work by developing their practical skills to use drawing for spatial and chromatic analysis, and to convey information on architectural forms and the landscape?	18 85.7%	3 14.3%	-
Average percentage 1-3	93.6%	4.8%	1.6%

What is more, the author further analyses the results of anonymous student surveys carried out annually at the FA-CUT. The mean assessment of the teacher in charge of the drawing workshop (the author of the article) for the period in question (2019-2022) is 4.97 (grade scale from 3.0 to 5.0).

In the year 2018/2019, 10 out of 31 students responded in the survey, which accounts for 32.3% of the student body (the average grade was 5.0), while in 2019/2022 only two of 33 students responded, accounting for 6.1% (the average grade was 4.88).

In 2020/2021, the surveys were submitted by eight out of 26 students (response rate of 30.8%, the average grade was 5.0), while in 2021/2022 only by three people out of 27, accounting for 11.1% (the average grade was 5.0). The mean response rate in the period 2019-2022 was 20.1%.

In the survey, the students assessed their teachers in several categories: preparation for the class, the manner of teaching the class, giving feedback and attitude to students. Additionally, they could leave their personal comments.

Students who left positive comments about their teacher paid attention to:

- very interesting, inspiring topics, which develop imagination;
- an interesting manner of teaching the class, with individual feedback for every person;
- huge engagement of the teacher and highly specific feedback;
- friendly and open attitude to students; individual approach to every person;
- accurate, clear and helpful feedback and comments;
- good atmosphere during the class.

Conclusions drawn on the basis of the survey's analysis:

- A comparison of the mean grades obtained by the students after the second semester of the first year and the professional practice (after the second semester of the first year) reflects the higher level of engagement and better results obtained from open-air workshops; what becomes evident is also the progress in terms of drawing and painting skills in the second-year students, as confirmed by the higher mean grade from drawing obtained by the majority of students (it was only in the fourth semester, second year of the programme in 2020/2021 that the mean grade was slightly lower, reflecting on-line rather than on-site teaching);
- Classes that were held exclusively on-line (caused by Covid-19) to the first-year students in the second semester in 2020/2021 significantly impacted the mean grade obtained from the workshop - this was the only case when, following a year of on-line learning, students obtained lower grades from drawing workshops than from the subject taught in the second semester during the first year of their studies (the students met their teachers for the first time only during the professional practice in July 2021). That year, the open-air workshop was taught by only one teacher, which had also an impact on the quantity of feedback and the quality of the works;
- The best students, whose works from open-air workshops were displayed on exhibitions and who obtained the highest grades from drawing, are more committed to developing their own creative identity by participating in extracurricular competitions and projects - this group includes the participants of the Hrubieszów open-air workshop, who volunteered to take part in this project inspired by their own passion;
- The majority of FA-CUT landscape architecture students who took part in the drawing professional workshops in the period 2019-2022, confirmed in the surveys that they found the experience important for the education of landscape architects (average of students' answers to the three survey questions were: 93.6% - yes, 4.8% - difficult to say, and 1.6% - no);
- The attainment of the key objectives of open-air drawing workshops in the period 2019-2022 was confirmed by CUT students in anonymous surveys; this is reflected in the mean assessment given to the teacher in charge of the drawing workshop (4.97) and in additional opinions expressed by students.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research supports the view that open-air drawing workshops enhance the teaching process by preparing students for their future design work. It improves their competencies and provides them with an opportunity to learn new skills through intense experience, reflection, thinking and active experimentation (so-called Kolb's cycle). What is important in the process is not the transfer of knowledge alone, but also creating the right framework to enable the students to express what they have learnt so far and to verify it in practice. The workshop has a positive influence on the exploration and understanding of a number of issues instrumental to the education of architects.

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