

The Future Role of Travel in the Traditional Travel Studio: Lessons from the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: How would the travel studio experience differ if it were no longer based on physical immersion?

Travel remains at the core of architectural education for many undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Pedagogy that mimics the cultural enrichment that results from immersion is needed to serve future generations of architectural students impacted by environmental shifts and unforeseen epidemics that limit mobility. However, not much has been publicly presented regarding the outputs and experiences teaching travel studios remotely. As an alternative to traditional travel studios that often result in limited participation and are not suitable for times of uncertainty, border restrictions, and financial insecurity, the objective of this work is to assess the effectiveness of remote teaching methods in imparting cultural enrichment comparable to traditional immersive travel studios. The methodology involves the collection and analysis of student design projects from two undergraduate and graduate travel studios impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions in 2020-2023.

The goal is to reimagine the travel studio as one that aims to rediscover local communities from marginalized perspectives. Students devised strategies and innovative design solutions reflecting an understanding of culture and contributing to a retelling of notable heritage sites with conflicted histories. Outcomes highlight opportunities for 1) the use of cultural mediators from marginalized communities to substitute ethnographic research ensuring accurate representation, 2) embodied experiences through games to enhance cultural understanding, 3) entry points for immersive technology and 4) improved strategies to utilize cultural precedents. The design research shown here is a work in progress, aiming to develop a curricular model that substitutes in-person experiences without compromising quality. The showcased work demonstrates how design studios can participate in historical retelling as a value substitute for immersive travel.

1368 — ZHEJIANG PROVINCE

GOU PU CENTER — JAMES BRETT

WENZHOU PAPER MILL
It is then placed into a vat of water and the pulp is pressed onto a screen and left to dry in sheets of paper.

1892 — ELLIS ISLAND 1

ELLIS ISLAND IMMIGRANT HOSPITAL

1900

1906 — ELLIS ISLAND 3

1954

THE ROSE — KACPER WILCZYNSKI

2023

TRAVEL STUDIO LEARNING OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED THROUGH HISTORY, HERITAGE, NARRATIVE, AND CULTURE

DIGITAL ARCHIVES
Newspapers from the early 1910s describing the massive waves of immigration, the largest the US has ever seen

NATIONAL MUSEUM EXHIBITION
Guided site visit exploring artifacts and collection of passenger records in former processing station

INTERDISCIPLINARY PEER REVIEW
One-on-one peer reviews from the fields of environmental science and anthropology

IMMERSIVE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT
Incorporation of campus-based virtual tools, critiques, and collaborative spaces

CULTURAL + ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN STRATEGIES

"The cultural moments surrounding water are responsible, in part, to Wenzhou's status as a successful, prosperous coastal city. Inspired by traditional cultural attractions infused with the many cultures of water, YushuiLand is a contained ecology that utilizes passive building strategies to provide space for the local community."
Andrew Engelhardt, Kean-Wenzhou Campus, 2020

"Every facility on the island contains the memories and stories of past inhabitants who have traveled to Ellis Island seeking out a new beginning. Both radiant and somber, these memories include denial of citizenship to the US, resulting in a prolonged stay on the island. The space being designed inside the walls of the abandoned hospital aspires to display these stories in a way that places you in them."
Ryan Barbour, Kean-Union Campus, 2023

Andrew Engelhardt, Kean-Wenzhou Campus, 2020

Ryan Barbour, Kean-Union Campus, 2023