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GIDE Network – Good Practice

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Van Geetsom, N. & Papadimitriou, O.

nansi.vangeetsom@lessius.eu

o.papad@yahoo.com

Abstract

GIDE – Group for International Design Education – is an international consortium of higher education design schools¹, which work together in order to enrich the experience of students in the areas of 3D, architecture and interior design. GIDE exists to promote inter-cultural collaboration and exchange across education bringing ethical design issues into applied working practices, transforming curricula and promoting multidisciplinary experiences across the European Union and beyond.

To achieve this aim GIDE organises annual workshops, symposia, exhibitions and, crucially, research publications that describe diverse responses to shared project themes. GIDE, partially funded through the LLP/Erasmus programme, offers an alternative model to traditional Erasmus student exchange programmes. It argues that international collaboration at this level allows us to gain new perspectives for ‘local problems’ and to maintain solidarity through such collaboration.

We speculate on the sustainability of GIDE in the face of severe cuts and academic restructuring and argue that without such international, educator-led initiatives, design education will become vulnerable and unsustainable.

Through shared project themes over a ten year period, we focus on successful examples of cultural exchange as a vehicle for the on-going sustainable development of design. GIDE operates a rolling annual programme that revolves around a global design theme, allowing flexibility of interpretation from seven nations.

Keywords: GIDE, sustainability, internationalization, collaboration, internationalization@home

¹ Members include: Politecnico di Milano – School of Design (Italy); Leeds College of Art (UK) member of IE group; Lessius Mechelen University College (KHM), Mechelen (Belgium); Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal Institut für Industrial Design (Germany); SUPSI Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana Dipartimento Ambiente Costruzioni e Design, Lugano (Switzerland); Academy of Design, Ljubljana (Slovenia); Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Design, Dundee (Scotland), also a member of the IE group.

Good Practice Description

After some years of traditional Erasmus student and staff exchanges and almost six months before the EU Ministers of Education signed the Bologna declaration in September 1998, three design schools (Lessius Mechelen University College – Belgium, Leeds College of Art – UK, and Ecole Boulle Paris – France) decided to develop a common project (“Day Nurseries”) – which depended on cultural exchange. From 1998 until 2012 the GIDE partner – schools follow almost the same procedure.

Every academic year, a similar collaboration cycle (Figure 1.) is followed. The whole experience is divided into three parts: the “Event”, the “Launch” and the “Project”. The “Event” (4 days) takes place each year in February and is hosted by a partner school. During the “Event” the results of the researched design theme of the seven schools are exhibited. The partner also chooses a new theme for exploration. The “Event” includes an international workshop to explore this new theme. International multidisciplinary groups of about 12 students, supervised by multidisciplinary staff (2 or 3) from different countries, work together towards common aims. On the final day the groups of students produce a presentation of their work. But it is the dynamics of social interaction between the participants which is the major objective and learning outcome.

The “Launch” is the second stage. At a GIDE meeting in October, members present their theoretical and contextual approach to the shared project theme, already considered in their own institutions. Central to the GIDE partnership is the annual documentation in the form of a book that includes theoretical papers expanding on the pedagogic processes and key social and contextual themes that influence each institution’s approach.

The third phase in the GIDE experience is the ‘International Project’. **Each school works individually with the freedom to adopt their own project schedule, intellectual approach and course organization.** Usually students of the 3rd year BA are involved in the design project at this stage. Students work in (multidisciplinary) teams. The results of the projects form the basis for the selection of the final works for the exhibition – timed to coincide with the following year’s ‘Event’ in February.

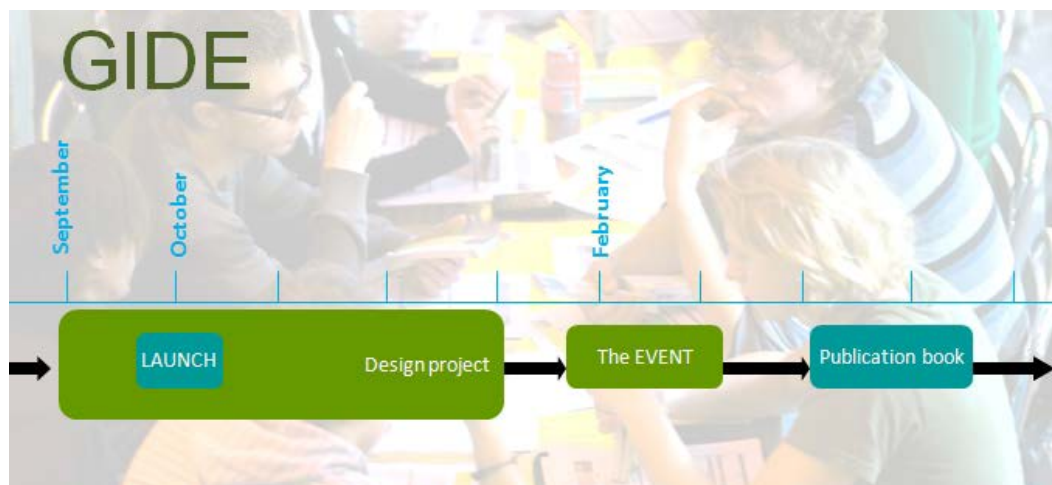


Figure 1. GIDE Collaboration cycle

During the GIDE project, also the Erasmus exchange occurs (LLP-funding). The institutions don't only receive GIDE Erasmus students but also from other international (Erasmus) partners. Because the interdisciplinary composition of the GIDE-group (bachelors in interior design, interior architecture, product design, furniture design,...) the student teams are not only international but also interdisciplinary. Crucially, as the project is running at the same time in each of the partner schools, individual students can opt to work on it at any one of the partner institutions, utilizing Erasmus funding.

The exhibition during the event is a key element because it provides an opportunity for a truly international experience where staff and students can view and discuss their achievements. A further advantage of the exhibition is for peer learning to occur through comparison, discussion and engagement for a common exhibition format. What emerges here is a distinct 'design challenge' for some student teams in fitting their design responses into a uniform format. Each school chooses six student projects for the exhibition and a panel of local professionals is invited to select the best one from each school and award a certificate on the opening night. The work, sometimes with models, prototypes or videos, is primarily in banner format, helping to harmonise the exhibition, but still allowing for diverse interpretations to emerge.

Good Practice – Favourable and demonstrable effect on the quality of education

Central to the GIDE partnership is the annual documentation of a selection of student work from each partner institution in the form of a book. This book includes theoretical papers expanding on the pedagogic processes and key social and contextual themes influencing each institution's approach.

One could say that this investigation of social/cultural dimensions of design reflects a school of thought that takes the design role in society seriously, but few approach this through an international format, as operated by GIDE. The multidisciplinary- multicultural teams of students create further added value.

The interdisciplinary nature of the mixed teams helps to ensure a more holistic experience, forcing the interior designer to work with 3D design, product design, furniture design or interdisciplinary students, for example, from other GIDE partners, affording a more 'inclusive' vision of the project. Clearly, there are different competences and skills related to different design professions brought together. But also the different cultural and traditional background (also educational tradition) of the international students provokes individuals to take into account other viewpoints and offers better potential for innovative ideas.

The international factor reflects the internationally orientated world we are living in. Students in the home institution who can't go or don't want to go on an exchange or participate in the Event, do have an international experience due to the GIDE project. The approach of international teamwork within their own college or university creates "internationalization@home", a form of internationalization without mobility in the strict sense of the word. Students experience international cooperation without

leaving the school building. Students' intercultural and interdisciplinary cooperative skills are developed and their creative skills are positively influenced².

In 2010, GIDE created a website (<http://gidegroup.wordpress.com/>). The aim is to evolve towards a digital international learning platform to exchange and share ideas, research results, theoretical background information and design results between teachers and students.

Furthermore, this kind of teamwork simulates future working conditions of the designer. It reflects for students a daily working environment: designers can't but cooperate with engineers, cabinet makers, graphic designers, architects and other stakeholders. Many design offices employ co-operators trained in different disciplines.

By creating interiors and exterior, new products, communication, technology and systems, designers have the power to create interaction with the public. Young designers use their skills to address social, economic issues. A work-based learning environment sustains the growth to become a well-trained designer who reflects about his role to design for change. Students design with the aim to design for change.

Good Practice – Constraints or limitations and unique features

GIDE is considered as a dynamic and sustainable collaborative framework which enhances the sustainable development of interior/3D design education and future thinking. Gide operates a rolling annual programme that revolves around a shared global design theme, allowing flexibility of interpretation from seven nations in an event that brings teaching staff and students together in one of the partner schools. Moreover, we should mention that the competition between schools doesn't exist and the main objective of GIDE project is to learn from others.

Although there are many advantages to an international interdisciplinary cooperative, there is also a down side. Firstly, international projects and the organization of international week like the "Event" are expensive. Also further development of e.g. a more developed digital learning platform demands financial support. Besides the financial effects on a macro level, there are the economic consequences for the students. Student exchange or the participation in international events, always has a price. Erasmus grants or other allowances are often inadequate.

At last but not at least, The actual level of success has been achieved largely through the dedicated effort of a small, committed team who have nurtured its development and ardently postulated its educational value. However, the devotion and cooperation of a small team is also a weakness: when a GIDE partner loses their international coordinator by way of redundancy or retirement, a vacuum can

² Van Geetsom, N. (2011). The virtual class: an opportunity to create an innovative international student community. In Fassi, D. & Rebaglio, A. (red.). Innovative communities. Milan: Maggioli Editore

occur. If there is no-one to take responsibility for GIDE cooperation, collaboration can stagnate or totally disappear and the school will no longer be able to participate in the activities of the GIDE group³.

Exchange characteristics and opportunities

GIDE is an international consortium of higher education design schools, which work together in order to enrich the experience of students in the areas of 3D, architecture and interior design.

GIDE'S main objectives are to promote the exchange of design ideas and cultural experiences across the European Union and beyond. Internationalisation is not only an experience of some exchange students and staff, but should influence all the school's students and staff.

GIDE promotes the exchange of design education with an ethical sustainable dimension; exploring multidisciplinary and intercultural experiences; working practices and competences. Academics and students investigate a common theme, sharing experiences, cultures, design capabilities. The different approaches to project design and the different aspects of the discipline of the participating schools, will help to make this work an interesting opportunity to question the role that the design of spaces and 3D design have in the sustainable development of new reference scenarios of contemporary living.

Learning to deal with diversity and intercultural dialogue has become an increasing necessity across all sectors of education. Academic cooperation on the level of the programmes and student and staff mobility ameliorates professional competence and enhances students' employment prospects. The course curriculum is seen in a broader international and intercultural context which improves the competitiveness and attractiveness of partner schools' programmes.

The GIDE approach goes beyond traditional Erasmus student experiences. By establishing interconnected design research themes and projects, striving for 'world citizenship', sharing cultural identity, young people are helped to be prepared for professional practice in a global market. We encourage students to consider themselves as global citizens with an eye for universal issues and respect other cultures⁴.

GIDE invites young people to consider how to become better global citizens with intercultural experiences and with resilience and sensitivity – arguably, qualities that are required in a rapidly changing, complex global workforce.

³ GIDE: The sustainable future of a group for international design education. Milligan, A., Savage, G., & Van Geetsom, N. 2011. CUMULUS PARIS 2011 CONFERENCE.

⁴ GIDE: How can the group for International design education remain part of a sustainable future? Fassi, D., Rebaglio, A. D., Savage, G., Van Geetsom, N. & Milligan, A. 2011. INAUGURAL INTERIOR EDUCATORS CONFERENCE 2011. INTERIOR FUTURES 2011.