

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION: INTERCULTURAL STUDY OF ARCHITECTURE (ICSA)

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Introduction

As international exchange programs lead to exchange of information, ideas, experiences and provide opportunity for students to develop an understanding of local, global values and cultural issues in different countries; a great number of exchange programs are highly promoted as part of architectural education [1], [2]. The aim of this paper is to discuss the contributions of international exchange programs to architecture students based on the experiences and the outcomes of the exchange program ICSA (Inter Cultural Study of Architecture) that is organized by Mukogawa Women's University, Japan (MWU) and Bahcesehir University, Turkey (BAU). The case of the study, ICSA, is a summer exchange program being held since 2009 in Japan for six weeks with the participation of Japanese and Turkish students and professors. The paper is organized in five chapters. After this Introduction, Chapter Two will discuss the place of exchange programs in architectural education by reviewing the existing literature. Chapter Three will introduce the ICSA program; its content, context, schedule and activities. Then, in Chapter Four, the results of the survey which is conducted to 26 students of ICSA will be presented. Finally, in Chapter Five, feedbacks of the participants will be assessed. For this, observations of the instructors and the answers of the students to survey questions are utilized. The contributions of the program will be discussed in various aspects and the issues that have the potential to improve the program will be outlined.

International Exchange Programs in Architectural Education

Education, especially higher education is becoming international with each passing day as a result of globalization [3], [4]. Based on UNESCO's statistical studies, the number of globally mobile students increased up to 3,4 million students in 2009, from 2,1 million students in 2002 [5]. The number may rise to 8 million by 2025 for international higher education students [6]. With this data, internationalization of the higher education seems to be an important issue to deal with.

As national economies become more interconnected and participation in education expands, higher education is considered as a means to expand students' horizons and help them to better understand the world's languages and business methods. The internationalization of markets and demand for highly skilled individuals encouraged people to gain international experience as part of their education [7]. Studies in recent years indicate that the majority of people attach importance to international education. In that education, world issues are

taught in universities to prepare students for global economy, foreign language is taken as a necessity and study abroad opportunities constitute significant part of the education [8].

Architectural education is one of the most distinctive branches of higher education which requires creative capabilities [9]. So improving students' creativity is an important issue. There are researches that prove the relationship between cultural factors and creativity [10]. "Diversity" at the cultural level challenges people to broaden their ideas about what is right and good [10]. Hence, increasing students' intercultural sensitivities by promoting appreciation of cultural differences appears to be an important issue in architectural education [11].

In this context, international exchange programs play an essential role in architectural education by contributing to inter-cultural understanding of students. Students develop their understandings about other cultures by learning different approaches to life, ways of thinking, traditions, values and beliefs. Since understanding others leads to a better knowledge of oneself, these also help to understand students' own cultures and identities [12].

Intercultural Study of Architecture (ICSA)

ICSA (Inter Cultural Study of Architecture) is an international exchange program for architectural students and faculty which is being held two times in a year, in Summer in Japan (ICSA in Japan), in October in Turkey (ICSA in Istanbul). It is an international organization under the collaboration of MWU and BAU. It was launched in 2009 and since then it has been held for 10 times. ICSA in Istanbul is out of the scope of the paper, so ICSA refers to ICSA in Japan.

ICSA is held in Japan for around six weeks during the summer period with the attendance of 8-10 students and 2 professors of BAU. The main objective of this program is to provide students the opportunity to experience an unfamiliar design process and to observe the role of "cultural interaction" in architectural education, especially in design studio.

All the students in the program are elected through interviews and get scholarships from JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization). The students given this opportunity are determined based upon several criteria like being responsible, hard-working, conformist, good at group studies, etc.

The program has two main stages: Preparation phase in BAU in Spring semester and 6 weeks in MWU in Summer. Preparation phase includes a departmental course named "ARC3916-Architectural Studio in Japan" and a Japanese training course. The purpose of this preparation in the home country is to enable students to be aware of this new and different culture and education system they are about to face and to motivate them to get most of the program. With the help of this preparation, it is aimed to prevent potential cultural shocks, adaptation problems with the new environment and unfamiliar conditions. The period in Japan comprises five main parts: Architectural Design Studio, Basic Design Studio, Lectures, Field Trips and Non-curricular Activities.

BAU students are assigned to 3rd and 4th grade architectural design studios. They are expected to complete an architectural design project in six weeks. Students are not assigned to a group or a tutor, so they are able to get critiques and comments of all instructors. The time (six weeks) given to the architectural project and the routine in the design studio are

different from it is conducted in BAU. There are also major differences in physical conditions of the studios. Each student has her workstation including a drafting desk, separating panels, a cabinet, a double-screen computer and all necessary drawing tools. For desk-crits, instructors visit students' individual units. Students participate in lectures and 1st grade students' Basic Design Studio. Lectures are directly related to design topics and always support architectural design studios while in Basic Design Studio, the topics are generally related with Japanese culture. Ikebana, woodwork and ceramic classes are given by their masters. In woodwork classes, students are asked to design a composition from wooden elements with traditional Japanese timber joint technique by using traditional hand tools.

During the period in Japan, in addition to the studies at the university, there are field trips every Saturday that can be to project sites, modern/traditional buildings, to laboratories, research centers or factories. Besides, extra trips and social activities are organized since it is aimed for students to better recognize and comprehend this culture. Important buildings of Japanese traditional architecture are visited and worldwide known Japanese architects' contemporary designs are seen in their contexts. Within ICSA, students participate in traditional tea ceremonies for understanding the ritual and its spaces and also visit important festivals in order to experience the culture with a large number of Japanese people.

Feedbacks of ICSA participants

In order to discuss the contributions of international exchange programs to architectural students, a survey is conducted for 26 students of ICSA. The survey is structured in four sections: Preparation Phase, During ICSA in Japan, After ICSA and Comments/ Suggestions. In this context, students are subjected to several multiple-choice, yes-no and free questions. This Chapter presents the students' opinions about the program through their answers to the questions. Some of the survey results are shown in Fig. 1, 2 (numbers indicate the number of the students).

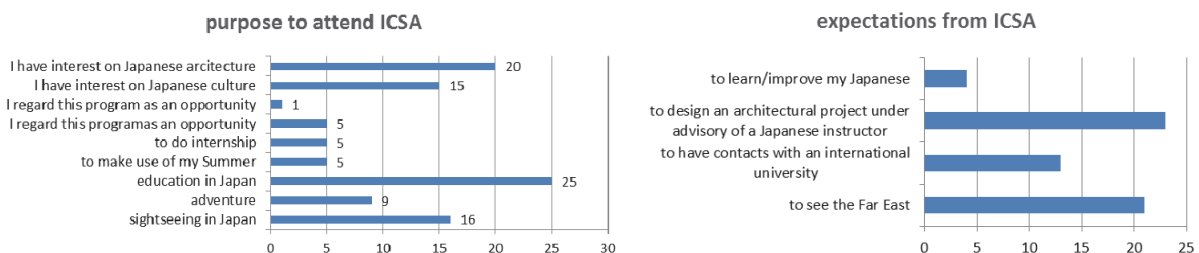


Fig. 1: Purpose to attend ICSA / Expectations from ICSA

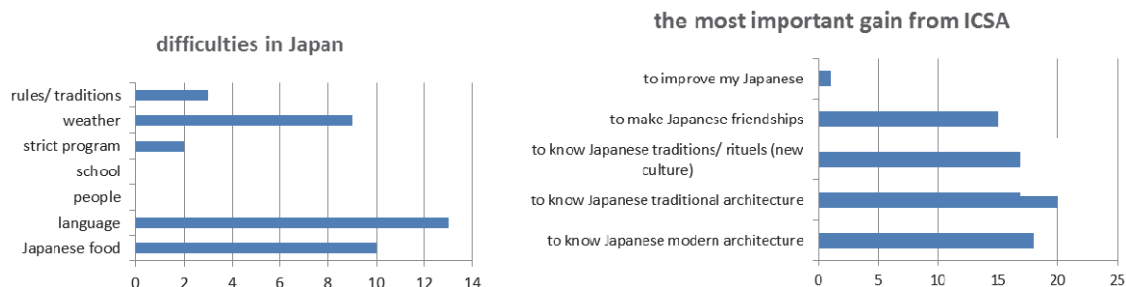


Fig. 2: Difficulties in Japan / The most important gain from ICSA

Discussions and Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate that the biggest motivation of the students for being part of this kind of a program is for academic purposes rather than cultural purposes. The questions regarding the pre and post period of the program show that the structure and the content of the program meet the expectations of the participants. As expected, students found opportunity to observe different ways of studying, design processes and to meet different point of views. For instance, design process through architectural model making was new for ICSA students and they experienced the contributions of studying with a model to the design process thanks to the program.

The inclusion of the cultural issues in the courses was stimulating for the students. Beside the curriculum, extra activities were beneficial to recognize this new culture, their art and architecture. By this means, students gain a great awareness of cultural differences/similarities and their reflections on design issues. They also become aware of different approaches to global issues like recycling, sustainability and accessibility.

As the instructor of the ICSA, based on the personal observations, it can be easily said, a preparation period is a must for international exchange programs like ICSA. Because cultural and regional differences may cause the students lose some time and decrease their academic performance there. Also, if students are informed well in advance what they will encounter, they will enjoy the program much and will get more benefit.

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