

Introducing sustainability into an architectural curriculum in East Africa

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper aims to reflect on the transition of a school of architecture to incorporate sustainability principles as a core part of its undergraduate (Part I) programme. The paper offers a brief overview of the processes undertaken and outcomes of this to an integrated problem-based learning approach and with sustainability at its core changing both knowledge content and pedagogical approaches.

Design/methodology/approach

Reflecting on the transition to a sustainability-based curriculum, this paper makes use of a mixed methods approach incorporating a review of literature on sustainability in architectural education, pedagogical approaches and epistemology, as well as educational issues in sub-Saharan Africa. The main study made use of an ethnographic approach, including document analysis, interviews, observations and one-on-one informal interactions with students, faculty and alumni.

Findings

While the transition to a sustainability-based curriculum was achieved, with integrated studio courses at second- and third-year levels, this did not come without challenges. Divided opinions of formal education, linked to preconceived ideas of what constituted architectural education led to some resistance from students and professionals. Nevertheless, the programme serves as testament to what is achievable and provides some lessons to schools seeking to transition programmes in the future.

Practical implications

The paper contributes to discourses on sustainability in architectural education, examining the transition taken by an architectural programme to incorporate sustainability as a core part of its curriculum. The outcomes of this process provide advice that could be useful to schools of architecture seeking to integrate sustainability into their programmes.

Originality/value

As the first architecture programme in East Africa to integrate sustainability principles into its programme, this study provides an insight into the processes, experiences and outcomes of this transition. This reflective engagement highlights value of an enabling environment in any transitional process.