

Global Summer Program in Berkeley; Report of Participation

1. The summary of the program

The course I took part in is one held in University of California, Berkeley named 'Media and Society: Middle East in the Global Context'. Middle East studies and media studies are the biggest two components of this course. Because there is ongoing Arab Spring in the Middle East, our discussion is focused on this issue, especially from the usage of social media like Facebook.

For our final project, 3 people composed a group and built up a website about a country in the Middle East. We have 13 students in our class and so there were 4 groups working on Bahrain, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia (My group worked on Tunisia). For the final of our class each group made a presentation about their sites and juries evaluated them.

2. What I learned through the participation

GSP, Global Summer Program is, as its name shows, intended to enrich students' understanding of global issues. To this extent, my program was a bit extraordinary I think. I participated in a program in University of California, Berkeley about 'Middle Eastern Issues'. What I would like to say here is that Middle Eastern Issues don't share a basic feature of quasi-global issues. The biggest feature of global issue from subprime loan to global warming is that every actor on the globe is a stakeholder to the issue. It is not the case in Middle Eastern Issue.

Almost all problems about the Middle East are strongly bound to its historical local context. For example, the Israeli-Palestine problem is not a big issue in Japan. Neither China nor Singapore is a stakeholder of this issue. Perhaps western pro-human rights activists can claim that violation of human rights is a problem regardless of one's interest. However, when you say 'Middle Eastern Issue', it contains something more than just political crime or deprived minorities. As the United Kingdom has nothing to do with the historical problem between Japan and Korea, Japan doesn't have anything to do with the Middle Eastern Issue other than oil.

To this extent, it might be totally different from other programs such as ones conducted in Yale or Oxford (though it is very dangerous to make any assertion because I didn't participate in other programs). The location itself is a problem here and the place we gathered, Berkeley, a calm town in north California, is by no means close to the place in question, the Middle East.

One good thing for our class is that there are many students from the Middle East. There

are students from Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Egypt and Iran. The Iranian student was from the University of Tokyo. Others are not GSP students but students participated in Berkley's Summer Session. A girl from Egypt is a student of AUC (American University of Cairo) and majors in sociology there. There were also several local students of Berkley. I have to admit their contribution to our class. However, my problem is that it is too hard for me to contribute to the class.

For example, the girl from Egypt took part in the demonstrations on Tahir Square last January therefore what she said is regarded as evidence itself. Anything I or other students point out is rejected by her remark 'It is not the case'.

If the place where we were was Cairo, there might be something we can do. However the place we are embedded was Berkeley, almost halfway round the globe from Cairo. That is what I mean by 'asymmetric relationship'.

I and also other some 'who hadn't seen' were suffering from both the uncertainty of one's own knowledge and difficulty to fix one's stance or 'disposition' for the Middle East.

About latter one, to be honest, I haven't found my answer yet. Now waiting for the transfer flight in Los Angeles International Air Port, I am still wondering about this point. It is certain that the situations of students from Europe or United States are better than Japanese or Chinese. Though they were not in the exact place, they are stakeholders of this problem. Middle Eastern Issues are actually, West-Mid-East issues as Edward W. Said pointed out.

I was certain about only one point that to make 'witness' is always indispensable with exaggeration or overstatement. This is an important discovery of sociology and I learned it from my fellow students and professors in the University of Tokyo.

The problem about this position is that this is nothing but skepticism and not so productive. Daniel Zoughbie, one of the lecturers of us said 'Critiques are just critical'. When you think about some particular topic, especially one like Middle East, some kind of productivity or real actions are needed like Edward W. Said himself did stand by the Palestine's people. Daniel himself told me he participates in some NGO's activity in the Middle East while he conducts on his theoretical study of the Middle East.

Thus I was confused when I started my work for the final project. I have to build up a website for people who don't know much about Tunisian Revolution. I always criticized mainstream media like New York Times or Al Jazeera but now I have to be on the side of criticized. Now I have to say 'the Middle East is this', 'Tunisia is this' and 'Revolution is this'. Sociologists are usually reluctant to make any assertion and I am not an exception though I am just a sociologist in the making.

After I grappled with this issue for 3days, I constructed some contents of my website. If

you are interested in this, please just visit [here](#). I tried to be neutral as much as I can, depending on statistic data. Even though, my statement cannot be 'neutral' and by no means free from bias. But in other words, it means that I formed some 'disposition' for this issue of Middle East, some opinion and claim, through my research itself.

I said the topic of this program is extraordinary in regard to the purpose of GSP to enrich students' understanding on global issues. However, most of the problem we face is not like 'Global Issues'. It is much more local and embedded to a certain context. In the era of globalization, we face this kind of problems inevitably because globalization contains deepening of interdependence and interaction among different localities. Usually, we are not ready to face this kind of problem when we encounter it and have to build up some disposition with which we confront the problem.

In this regard I think what I learned from this program is one of most fundamental experiences in the era of globalization.

I think my understanding of Middle East was enhanced and deepened through the program. However the most important thing is that it was an encounter with unknown thing. Before the participation to this program, I hadn't thought about this kind of encounter very seriously. Anything I learn in Japan is to some extent viewed from Japanese perspective and not so 'alien' to me even if it was about Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America.

I think I learned how to deal with a topic as itself (but also as my own problem) for the first time in this program. Therefore I think it was very interesting and fruitful experience.

3. Prospect for next application

Because it is just after the program, I haven't thought next to do so well.

However, if there is one thing certain, participation in GSP aggrandized my orientation toward the United States. Actually, I would like to go back to UC Berkeley. Libraries were tremendous. Main Stack was four times bigger than Komaba Library and there were 26 other libraries available for all students in Berkeley.

About people including both students and lecturers, I think there are more splendid scholars and fellows in the University of Tokyo. However, almost all students in Japan are Japanese. Diversity (ethnic, gender and other social) in campus is much more abundant in Berkeley.

In the previous section I said it is a basic experience in the era of globalization to meet something unfamiliar or unknown. However, I have to admit that if you stay only in one society, chances for this kind of encounter is far smaller.

It doesn't mean you can't meet such unfamiliar events or things inside of Japan. To be careful to this kind of encounter leads you to deeper understandings of your society. It is crucially important to be able to give some account of oneself. When you meet somebody unfamiliar with, the situation is same for the other party. Therefore, now I think it is not good to be obsessed with the idea of study abroad. Though it is necessary, I think it is not too late after I establish myself.

August 17, 2011

IARU Summer program

Report of participation at the University of California
Berkeley

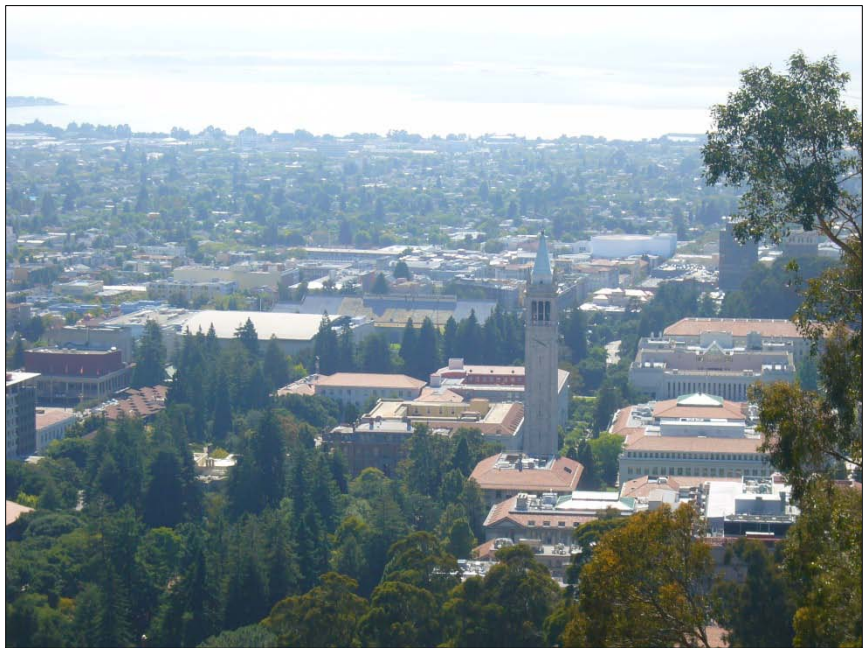
5 July – 12 August

THE GSP program at UC Berkeley, summer 2011

Outline

This summer I had the chance to attend the GSP course at the University of California Berkeley. The program was a 5-week course on the 'Middle East and the media'. The course mainly divided into two parts. The first was mostly on the backgrounds of theoretical and practical approaches to the Middle East and the second part was dedicated to media –Based coverage of it.

The participants were of two major groups of The IARU program students and the other of UC Berkeley students and some summer program participants from other universities. Altogether the formation of the 13 students mainly from different nationalities



and ethnicities (almost 10 different countries) created a unique atmosphere and learning environment.

The course was managed under the supervision of the center of Middle Eastern studies at the UC Berkeley that the faculties were from variety of interdisciplinary majors including environmental Design, sociology and media studies.

The coursework was mainly consisted of selected readings and website developing skills including creating an individual website and a collective one for

the final project presentation. As for the course assessment there was a midterm evaluation of the individual website and Blog and for the final the project was presented in front of Jury of the Center's Faculty in the form of the collective website.

My Experience

The course and its collective prospective

As someone already involved in comparative studies and being originally from the Middle East, the course was not only attractive but also academically effective. The theoretical discussions were mainly interactive give and take points and helped me to develop a more profound understanding of the known issues from different cultural, political and social standpoints. There were also several newly informed and inspired ideas and discourses that persuaded me to widen my fields of scientific inquiry.

The Middle East is indeed a complex topic to study and as an architect, I can realize now that it is insufficient to talk about its contemporary state of affairs merely from one perspective of either political or social or economic. Middle East with Its high Geopolitical importance for many developed, developing and underdeveloped countries is even hard to define just based on geography, history, religion or language.

During the course I felt that even though the definition is made due to political preferences it is not very elucidating and efficient when it comes to more concrete domains of cultural identity, political realism, social integrity and religious coherence. I even felt a stronger critical stance toward the concept when I realized how it is biased through the exogenous orientalist approach of the foreign eyes.

In conclusion, for me a new level of appreciating identity in design, architecture and urbanism has emerged. Regarding my research in housing in Iran and Japan I consider my insights facilitated by the course as highly effective and illuminating.

Another notable contribution of the course was a brief but intensive study of media in its classical form and the emergent new Social media means. In the field it built environment raising awareness toward our living places and urban spaces requires an integral role of the media. By reviewing the strengths and weaknesses at the classical media and news networks and newspapers me bone able to better see the opportunities and Threats of the emerging influential social media.

This insight was far better realized by practicing an online Journalism –creating websites- during the course which gave me serious thoughts on revising my online publishing practices. It provided a deeper knowledge by doing as a workshop after the theoretical coverage¹.

Learning by being there

By being at another university like UC Berkeley and technically studying there, not only gave me a new experience of learning environment with different atmosphere but it also gave me a chance to look back and recognize new features of the place I was before (the University of Tokyo). The classes, instructors, Professors, facilities, materials, class management, research inquires and in general the learning culture at the UC Berkeley were in certain ways different from TODAI but as I said there are power points and weak points which this experience helped me understand better. My academic stay in Berkeley helped me to realize that some of the weak points I had in mind about my home university (TODAI) are indeed good opportunities and not that critical as I thought so.

The other good experience for me was attending in corresponding faculties and figuring out what is going on in similar courses of my Major. Here again strong motivations were made to pursue my research and studies back home. Meeting professors and students also triggered several ideas regarding continuing my education.

The length of the course was another differentiating factor. Being not too short nor too long the 5-week program is enough to make a decent connection with

¹ A list of the created individual websites could be found at <http://arabworldincontext.weebly.com/students.html>

your academic surroundings. I felt strongly to settle down every now and then in different spots and trying to contemplate. This is a feeling that I had less here because I always thought I am going to be here for such a long time that I will have time to explore my campus. Unfortunately there are many places in TODAI I have not yet explored.

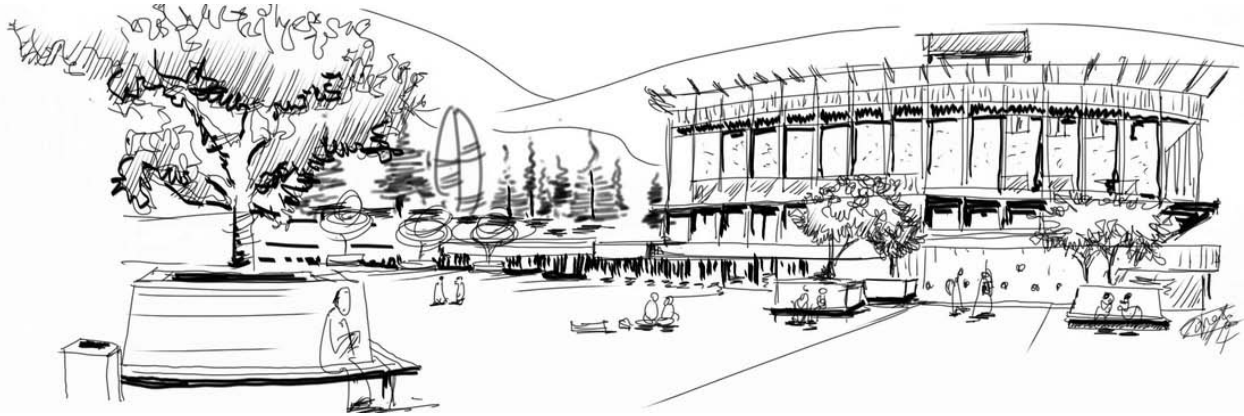


Figure 2 The lower Sproul plaza in UC Berkeley Campus. Sketch by Myself. Result of my contemplative pauses in campus.

A semi-Japanese

The last experience I had was the way I was treated as a representative of a Japanese institution. It sounds very normal for people of different nationalities to come from one school in Europe or US but others usually expect the students of Asian universities to be merely Asians. I together with another Japanese student were the only representatives of TODAI and even though I was already a foreign student like many others in UC Berkeley, still I felt there are some noticeable distinctions. I guess living and studying in Tokyo and the university un-self-consciously affected my attitudes.

Standing aside native Japanese from TODAI, I felt half Japanese facing with other international students and I was able to explain certain cultural issues more efficiently to other international students. I never realized this while being in Japan, in fact I felt more a Gaijin in Tokyo which oppositely there I felt more Japanese than others.

After all I am thankful to all IARU program coordinators for providing such an opportunity for me to elevate my awareness of the environmental influences in my academic life.

August, 2011