



Akpakpa-Dodomey



Cotonou

Studio Statement

In May 2015 the United Nations released a report suggesting that 10 million more people are added to the urban population of Sub-Saharan Africa each year, over two-thirds (7 million) live in informal cities, and only 2 million can ever expect to move out from them.

The cities along coastal West Africa from Senegal to Cameroon have seen extraordinary growth since independence in the early 1960's. The Atlantic cities of Bénin are no exception, an example; the city of Cotonou gains one new inhabitant every two minutes by either birth or migration.

This hyper-growth in population has created tensions between the formal city and informal city, which have only recently been acknowledged. The informal city is now being accepted as a part of the urban landscape of West Africa. Informal urbanism is being recognized by the dynamism of its inhabitants to resolve their problems through informal methods. In the case of Bénin the diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious make-up of the people and their capacities to live together in peace magnify the dynamism.

The foci's of the Benin Studio will be the tale of two cities, the formal and the informal, we will listen and respond to historic and contemporary stories of two very different cities separated by less than a kilometers. Our energies will focus on the informal settlement of Akpakpa-Dodomey a neighborhood formed by contemporary economic refugees and migrants from Benin, Togo, Ghana, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and the City of Cotonou.

While in Benin, the studio will work directly with community members and the students of L'Atelier Des Griots and be supported by a number of West African design professionals in an effort to develop a meaningful architectural intervention. Project theses, strategies and narrative design methods, in support of the design of a much needed clinic made during our 10-day in Benin, will be focus of our semester-long effort.

Travel

We will be spending 10 days in southern Benin, taking up residence at Djibson Hotel Cotonou, Benin for the entire journey. From this base we will venture by bus north to the historic city of Porto Novo, west to the Route d'Esclaves at Ouidah, and by boat over Lake Nokoue to the lacustrine city of Ganvié, and on foot through the cities of Contonou. We will spend considerable time investigating informal urbanism and it's cultures, especially in the Akpakpa-Dodomey quarter of Cotonou, the focus of the semester's studio.

Prof. Ellis has been conducting research in Benin for five years, and lived there during the 2016-17 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar. In 2017, Prof. Ellis and Beninese Architect and WIT Alum Habib Meme co-founded L'Atelier Des Griots, a non-profit international studio and educational workshop devoted to teaching and implementing low-tech ecological urban architectural projects. L'Atelier is dedicated to the West African tradition of the griot - telling the many stories of the community through the mediums of art, architecture and urbanism. Prof. Ellis has been involved in international student travel at Wentworth since 1990 and has traveled and led more than 15 student groups in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Program Costs

The airfare cost is \$1,321, payable directly on-line to Student Universe travel agency. The estimated program cost is \$1,179, payable to the Department of Architecture. The total is \$2,500, and includes accommodations, local transportation, and entry fees. It does not include visa fees, transit to and from Logan airport, most meals, entertainment, shopping, or personal expenses. Students will be responsible for applying for the necessary visa for travel to Benin. A visa and yellow fever card are required for all.