

Dérive – Using the psychogeographical concept of drift to develop students understanding of the city

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Synopsis

This radical and playful process is undertaken by 3rd year Planning and Architecture undergraduates and Masters level Urban Design students. The project challenges the participants to move through different parts of the city, and in different ways than they would otherwise. This facilitates a very personal, emotional and physical understanding which acts as a critique of the distancing that designing and masterplanning, through the use of maps and plans alone, can cause.

Students are sent out into the city in pairs. One person undertakes the dérive, the second person acts as a record keeper of the actions and impacts of the first person. The dérive is undertaken with predefined rules of action which create the route. These rules might be to follow the colour red, to walk a line (as closely as possible) drawn on a map, or to follow instructions allocated by the throwing of a dice (students can use existing methods or they can invent their own). The length of time is undefined as it is fundamental that the person undertaking the derive goes with the flow, is fully focussed, not on the method of the journey, but on the experience of being in the place.

Through this project, the students learn to 'read' the city. It allows them to seek out the everyday and the unseen - celebrating the Lefebvrian idea of waste in the city by exploring spaces which are un-prescribed and perhaps un-functional. Students find the process fun, challenging and sometimes deeply moving. The approach challenges their previous experiences and acts as a source of creative inspiration. They never see the city in the same way again.