UNESCO Internship – Paris

For eight weeks of this past summer I lived in Paris, France and worked as an intern at the headquarters of the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO). Each of the three branches of UNESCO represents distinct departments within the structure of the organization. Based on my background in architectural design and graphic design, I was selected to work with a team in the cultural branch of the organization. I worked in the Cities Program, and within that program I worked with the team that represented the “Historic Urban Landscapes Recommendation (H.U.L.)”. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape is a normative instrument that operates within the context of many other UNESCO conventions and recommendations. The core argument of the H.U.L. states that World Heritage Sites should be looked at within the context of the urban fabric, and that that fabric is part of the site’s context and value. The H.U.L. was passed in 2011, and although the idea seems rather straightforward, the implementation soon became complicated.

My primary task at UNESCO was to help to create visual tools to help illustrate what the H.U.L. looks like on a city wide and regional scale. The first step in this process was to become deeply familiar with the language of the H.U.L., as well as with several other conventions and recommendations that frame the document in the larger goals of UNESCO. This phase of exploratory research and study took two weeks. After the two weeks I felt that my understandings of the texts and concepts were strong enough to take a stab at interpreting the ideas and making a visual map of them.

I decided that the best approach to explain the Historic Urban Landscape would be to create an interactive map, based on a composite of photography, graphic design (using adobe illustrator) and infographic style text samples. After six weeks of full-time production on the document, working closely with my boss (one of the heads of the H.U.L. Education Program) I finalized a product that the entire team was satisfied with. One invaluable aspect of my internship was learning how much give-and-take, discussion, differing opinion and collaboration goes into creating a product at an organization the size of UNESCO. The level of bureaucracy was staggering, but the level of intelligent thought and curiosity that my colleagues approached my project with was equally surprising and thoroughly impressive. The internship on the whole was a huge learning experience in terms of the logistics involved in creating a document of such depth (the likes of which I had never created before). The most unexpected learning experience was how much I learned simply by being involved in such a massive, influential organization: not hard-and-fast skills, but rather essential understandings of how to navigate a large pond as a small fish.
In Florence
Eiffel Tower
Pompidou
Sagrada Familia
Saint Chappelle

Villa Savoye
View from the UNESCO office