

The Podcast as an Innovative Urban Planning Teaching Tool: Soft and Hard Skills between Discipline and Professional Identity

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Abstract: The expression didactic innovation has recently assumed an implicit reference to Distance Learning. For scholars, however, it was above all the critical questioning on learning models. The article explores the use of the podcast as a stimulus for engineering students to achieve new soft skills: to learn multidisciplinary contents related to planning and to acquire professional competences in digital aspects and feedbacks attribution. Experience took place over two years: this gave the opportunity to compare the activity carried out totally in presence and totally remotely (through online lessons and reviews), to draw from them issues for discussion and future implementations.

Key words: Podcasting, planning teaching tool, learning process innovation, academic experimentation.

1. Introduction

The expression “didactic innovation” has recently assumed an implicit reference to the various technological applications now allowed and encouraged by Distance Learning. In fact, although this formulation is certainly related to digital and enabling technologies, it also indicates research, experimentation with new expressive practices, adoption of active and laboratory methodologies to face the current challenges in placing students in the best conditions to develop necessary skills [1, 2].

In this article, the authors analyze and draw conclusions regarding their path towards innovative teaching methods to be inserted into the Urban Planning Course for Building Engineer students. The main questions authors investigated focus on how to better glimpse the connection between academic activities, the daily activity of a planner, and everyday reality, up to understand the usefulness of the

discipline, among younger citizens.

The will was to make the students reflect on the knowledge and attitudes they have developed along the way up to that moment and rationalize the information learnt in classroom, being able to express them in a structured way.

In particular, in this article, authors experiment the potential of the podcast into the domains of teaching planning methods. The podcast technique, used for para-didactic and self-awareness purposes, helps the student not only to systematize his knowledge but also to become aware of the specific point of view they adopted (and acted, accordingly).

Quoting the work by Dallas Rogers [3, 4] can help in explaining the powerful value of podcast usage: “Podcasting has always been a synthesising media. Podcast is a portmanteau coined in 2004 by combining the words broadcast and iPod that is now synonymous with the audio content our devices pull from RSS feeds onto our mobile devices from around the web. In communications and media studies, podcasting is known as ‘convergent media’ or a

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‘converged medium’, drawing on the convergence culture where ‘old and new media collide’.”

This is a tool made for bridging the gap between two parts of modern reality which is what teachers try to do with students, putting in relations the two faces of their being: the professional one and the citizen/personal one.

From the point of view of the authors, the value of the podcast is even bigger when used in didactic contest. Entering the world of storytelling and the multi-channel and multimodal communication has many effects on the learning process: first of all it engages the students in finding the most appropriate sources of information; they need to give a structure to their knowledge, to look in depth through it and to reorganize it.

Secondly, during this process, part of the information starts being part of their knowledge baggage in a smooth unconscious way. Not only they need to express the topic in a clear and comprehensible way but they also have to make it appealing and interesting for someone else. In this way we are touching two different spheres of interest: the first one, the personal one, because they enrich their own knowledge, they land the basis for new one to come and, according to the principle of relevance [5, 6], they amplify the context of action of their active learning. The third is the social factor, in fact, during the process the students need to confront with their colleagues, discussing over notions and methods; they must organize their ideas synergistically to reach the higher goal which is to provide a useful and convincing product to an audience that can also be outside the sector. Here another essential element of the experience emerges: disclosure. The disclosure to the outside of the more or less technical knowledge of a sector is an essential element of the interdisciplinarity required by the contemporary period but not only, it is also a testing ground for future interactions. When students become professional figures in all respects, they will find themselves having to know how to

manage confrontation with often heterogeneous teams and having to present ideas and projects in the most effective way possible. And, therefore, soft skills complement hard skills and that dialectical, informative and argumentative processing skills make the difference [7].

The results of an update recognition show that it is increasing the number of academic podcasting, that research in general has been made on this topic and, finally, that some examples of teaching use of podcast in urban planning are already present. Some scholars concentrated their efforts on investigating audiences, impact and political concern of using such a medium. Anyway, all agree that the podcast format is a powerful medium for circulating information to a wide variety of audiences.

Reflecting on podcast didactic potentials, the essay is focused on central questions: can the podcast also serve as a method for producing sound planning knowledge? Can podcasting contribute to an enhancement of the discipline and stimulate reflections on the basis of correct information conveyed by validate sources?

Several scholars already answered to these series of interrogatives and the paper would like to discuss on them. These insights, regarding soft skills’ improvement using podcast as an educational experience, are before deepened within the current literature and then in the propositive discussion. Podcasting can be an opportunity for learners to achieve new skills to cope with the challenges of the job world? How important is it to speak the language of youngers in order to transfer to them professional principles and recreate an imagery of all the possibilities they have for the fact to be planners?

To answer these crucial questions, in order to innovate scholarship teaching methods, the paper is structured as follows: after a brief summary of existent knowledge about podcasting and their multiple educational usages in Section 2 (2.1 and 2.2), Section 3 is devoted to the podcast experimentation made at

the University of Genoa in the Urban Planning Course along two academic years. In Section 4 authors discuss about results and make comparisons between 2019 and 2020 that were taught respectively in presence and remotely. Conclusions and future perspectives are drawn up in the final section.

2. Literature Review on Podcast as a Communicational Tool and Related Teaching Experiences

2.1 Podcast as a Communicational Tool

A podcast is a specific type of webcast which, like “radio”, can mean either the content itself or the method by which it is syndicated; as known, the latter is also termed podcasting. Podcasts, or personal on demand broadcasts, are audio or digital video media files that can be downloaded via the internet to media players such as iPods or personal computers: video podcast is an enhancement of audio podcast with video.

They are typically viewed directly on a website or by syndicated download or web feeds.

There is no shortage of debates on podcasting and its benefits and risks, as well as applicability to teaching and delivery of course contents; in fact, many definitions of podcast are now current in different sectors of scholarship [8].

The podcast form is harnessed simultaneously as both a mode of participatory performance and a knowledge-producing research tool. For Paiva [9], making a podcast can be a way to weave together concepts, theories or mere thoughts about places, and the emotional experience of being in a place.

Kinkaid et al. [10] offer a systematic view of the “core” elements of the podcast, considering their integration also one of the successful points of the widespread podcast as a method. The communicational potentials of such a tool are basically three:

(1) Firstly, podcast can communicate visceral elements of discourse directly through the speakers’ voices;

(2) Secondly, the resulting product is composed by a “polyvocality”, difficultly reachable with other technique;

(3) Finally, authors argue that the strong power of podcast is related to its enlarged audience.

In terms of communication outcomes, potentialities are also underlined by Gallagher and Prior [11] and Durrani et al. [12], not only as a mean for conveying concepts, but for influencing how research can be led and built up, too: with the aim to improve engagement between research subjects and research audiences, audio formats also change methods of data analysis. They argued that listening, recording, playback, editing, distribution, and broadcast are research processes that require different interactions with data than writing does [13-15].

The podcast medium presents opportunities to engage data in ways that are limited in conventional means of scientific or divulgative communication today; as the podcasting brings into relief, journal is not considered anymore as the only way that data can generate meaning. Rogers and Herbert [4] deepened variously the theme and contributed to the interest towards podcast through noteful publications about. In 2020 they confirmed the potentials of academic podcast as a way of reporting (text and sound) and to interpret situations very distant one from another, permitting to lower the distance between academics and not, with making also possible the insertion of contributions not theoretically grounded. In their logic, it is important to underline that podcast can be considered a unorthodoxical way of research, but—anyway—podcasting, as a tool, “does not allow generalization but exploration” and traditional ways of scientific divulgation normally privilege recognition about policies and laws and not “voices”: in this, the main innovation lays. Starting from a general reflection on scholarship attitude towards podcasting, authors point out also the curatorial activity that has to be done in order to transform multiple voices in a worthwhile contribution to critical reflection. Relevant

for them is how the overall process of podcast production is a way to “shape” research, which implies also a branding technique and improve “critical thinking”. Fundamental, in fact, is reflecting on a podcast and not only doing it.

Many are the meaningful experiences which allow the wider public to approach podcasting as a research product (Wandercast, CityRoad, NoVoid, to cite most popular ones). Above all, applications were made in the geographical field, where the audio element was considered as “spatial” in itself. In particular, Kinkaid et al. [10] report how geographers are increasingly embracing it as a critical part of politically minded academic work, because the podcast-as-method could enable geographers to engage in academic and public debates in new ways, providing more accessible forms of geographic knowledge on pressing social and environmental issues. Duffy and Waitt [16] and Stevenson and Holloway [17] add how, so as to bridge the gap between text and meaning, soundscapes and sound diaries are built up in order to analyze and convey experiences of socio-spatial meaning-making. Geographers’ community in general underlines how the format is along the lines of their traditional attitude to build collaborative knowledge, given the need for genuine and productive dialogue on contested geographic problems, to find new modes of engaging differing perspectives. Among geographers, Paiva [9] starts from the consideration that traditionally, geography has been communicated through the written word, taking expression in books, journal articles and scientific reports, or through conference papers. Although these established forms of communication are essential for the diffusion of research theory and practice among the academic community, he sustains that now these forms leave out significant parts of the research process and the field experience. For these reasons, researchers operating especially through the perspective of non- or more-than-representational theories have been seeking ways to communicate which “aim to enliven rather

than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and re-imagine rather than to faithfully describe, to generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct representative ideal types” [18].

Other applications are current in the performative sphere, where podcasting is considered as an “intimate bridging medium” that provides intimate connectivity, and arguably blurs the boundaries, between artist and listener [19]. The work by Wilson [20] suggests that the podcast medium possesses versatility and creative potential similar to theatre/performance, the extent of which is only beginning to be explored. Here, the author affirms how, in addition to the dominant forms which might be called discursive podcasts (one or more people discussing one or more topics), there are narrative podcasts, too. Narrative podcasts have been various but they inevitably possess a dramatic structure. Such performances afford recognition of relations between humans and their environments (which, from an ecological perspective, are not strictly separable), forming the precursor necessary for potential re-equilibrium with interacting wildlife.

Furthermore, Xie and Lew [21] deepen podcasting as a potential for tourism. Their conclusions suggest that podcasting will become an important marketing tool for tourist destinations and encourage studies by tourism researchers and practitioners. Others sustain podcasting as a direct way to stimulate socio-cultural-political activism and a militant way to be engaged and engage others [22, 23].

Ultimately, a wide field of application—which somehow gathers the expressions mentioned before—is urbanism. There are different products to be considered: from the Audiowalks, which for Meyers possesses a particularly potent expressiveness and interanimates and shapes landscapes for the listener, to the key-experience of Structural Integrity (<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/structural-integrity/>), which shows how podcast recordings and

podcasting can include discussion of the technical skills of a discipline, such as technical urban planning ones.

Rogers and Herbert [22], in particular, argue that podcasting is a political and ethical process and that each stage of the process should be used politically and ethically to intervene in the socio-political world. For this reason, they started to investigate the radio as an earlier modality of communication related to urban planning. The key concept is that podcast production and dissemination offers urban planning academics a way to make their research more accessible, and the wide public dissemination of research findings is especially important for a discipline with a professional arm like urban planning.

2.2 Educational Aspects in Multiple Usage of Podcast

Another group of robust literature has been investigating since the beginning of the 20th century the educational aspects connected to the usage of podcasting [7, 24]. Alpay [8] reports how there has been a growing interest in studying and how podcasting can be used effectively as a learning tool. This is evidenced by the IMPALA (Informal Mobile Podcasting and Learning Adaptation) project, which is a UK-wide study on the impact of podcasting on student learning in higher education. Montgomery [25], in a thesis discussed at the University of Phoenix in 2015, reflects on an introspective view into 20 urban American educators' podcast integration experiences, in an effort to understand the multifaceted and complicated situations that hindered the successful implementation of podcasts. Briefly, the results of the study identify key issues that contributed to teacher frustrations with podcast implementation and provide a guideline to enhance podcast integration within urban schools.

All scholars identified podcast as a contribution to develop interpersonal and flexible soft skills during the technical course they carried on. These can summarize in three aspects:

(1) Morris [26] underlines the results of the podcast being implied in the educative process: students in his trial group who listened to podcasts of the lectures and completed mobile assessments performed significantly better in the formative assessment. Again Alpay [8] reveals that experience was conducted at the Imperial College of London, where podcast activity *covers a range of relevant engineering topics* such as sharing student views on global and scientific developments, raising issues for current matters important to students and disseminating information on unique educational opportunities; he refers also how attention was paid also to the effective interface between academic staff and the student podcasting team, and mechanisms for ensuring that the podcasts maintain *balanced educational outcomes*.

(2) For the engineering disciplines, that is the specific scope of this paper, relevant is the experience told by Kao [27], where podcast is told as a pedagogical tool for asynchronous teaching and learning which has recently been employed in the online engineering program in the SUNY (State University of New York) at Stony Brook. Liu et al. [28] report about their experience of a summer course designed as a combined program of experiments and seminars, driven by blended technologies. Technology in education is seen as a powerful educational instrument and its integration, as a significant force driving change. An increasing number of researches are linking technology-enriched learning environments to improved higher-order thinking skill and showing that, by using technology as an educational tool, students are better prepared for "*real work*" *skills and future success in this new technological society* [28]. In fact, recent experimentations around podcasting started from the assumption that the students and faculty today have many technologies that did not exist a decade ago. Such technologies can be great tools for the delivery of course contents to enhance students' learning experience. Basically, millennial students grow up

with exposure to technology and are quite adapted to live with technologies, including their products and benefits. On one hand, the millennial students are more ready to accept and embrace new technologies and adapt their lives around them; on the other hand, they are also pushing, and perhaps challenging, faculty to expand their technical horizons. Some argue that “lecture-cast” is a poor way of teaching, but there are many ways to enrich the learning experience of students by means of such a tool. The results confirmed that students of this generation, who are savvy in learning and using new technology, can be challenged and motivated to use the podcast technology in production of educational materials. Rogers and Herbert [3] provided also a useful checklist on how involvement of students and following steps can be organized. This interactive learning process, with peer learning and review, produces a very positive environment in which active learning and engagement in learning can naturally take place.

(3) The third element is referred to the multiplicity of voices and opinions. Listening and discussion are key actions in educational usage of podcast. In the study produced by Moryl [29], discussing on podcast in class is assessed as a second most helpful activity with students; moreover, in this case, the author provides a very interesting survey in which podcast is effectively evaluated (although it is not the aim of this paper), compared with course assignments. As France and Wheeler [30] told, as part of a year-three module, at the University of Chester *assignment feedback* was delivered by podcasting technology. Podcast and giving/receiving feedbacks are interconnected in various forms: as a discussion on audio-products and as a way to convey audio-feedbacks (instead of other traditional channels). Killingback et al. [31] affirmed that feedback is an integral part of teaching and learning, being one of the most widely used methods of providing student feedback. From the student perspective, written feedback has been seen as limited

in terms of its quality, instead of alternative feedback modes (including audio, video, podcasts, and screencast feedback), which promote a sense of belonging in relation to the program of study and in relation to teaching staff.

3. Materials and Method

The experiment made by the authors intends to align its results with the experiences already carried out and give an additional contribution to them. The paper allows readers to compare the use of podcast, as a teaching method in urban planning classes, in two significant academic years such as 2019 and 2020, when lessons were held in presence and remotely, respectively. The fundamental aims of the teaching innovation recently adopted in the Urban Planning Course of the University of Genoa about podcasting are:

- considering the good results already obtained from previous experiences, to use the podcast to encourage students’ engagement, with the idea of making them work on real issues that bring them closer to the topics of the discipline “on the field”;
- to propose the pupils another form of deepening the subject, which can go beyond the delivery of a simple text, being personally involved in the ideas they performed;
- to recreate within their mind, an imaginary that reflects the possible activities of a planner and what a planner deals with, using a technology that allows them to understand that urbanism can be a possible interesting job of/for the future;
- to contribute, by means of the podcasts produced over the years by the classes, to an external official release of academic research. This experiment joins what other authors have pointed out: one of the goals achieved by podcasting is precisely to help “get scholars out of the academy”.

Moreover, the experience can be interesting because, as Rogers and Herbert [3] said, the podcast is useful also because it can represent a “snapshot of a

moment of time” and, considering they were done in the COVID pandemic era, they reproduced a singular testimony of what it was a learning process in urbanism in this particular moment.

The authors will report in this section the methodology used and all the aspects in common for both the first and the second experience, reserving the analysis of any difference for the paragraph dedicated to the discussion of the results.

The first challenge was finding the right way to introduce the issue to the class. After a brief survey, what emerged was that the majority of the students were not accustomed to listening to Podcast but the few who did, were quite expert about it.

The authors, in quality of teacher and tutor, decided to adopt an empiric way to approach the matter, given the practical soul of the activity, and started the experience with the definition of podcast given by famous podcasters in their works. Following, many different podcast channels have been suggested in order to stimulate students to develop their own sensibility over the subject and to bridge the gap for those not updated. We did not want to give them a pre-set vision on the tool; we strongly desired to let them experience it by their own.

In the following step a constructive dialogue has been initiated with the aim to discuss the choice of using a podcast as expressive method and why it should be a winning one. Some of the emerging points of the discussion were the following:

- it is portable;
- one can reach his audience anywhere, without need for further visual support;
- it is a “reachable” tool, there is no need for professional instruments in order to produce a podcast of acceptable quality;
- last but not least it is personal, the voice can convey a lot of different emotions and contents and the intonation, sometimes, can express more than words.

From this, a broader discussion about the changes in the communication field and the evolution of the

job markets has started, showing the sensitivity of the future generation of professionals over the theme.

After this successful phase, a frontal, but still interactive lesson, was used to explain more in depth the use of Podcast as tool. The students were given the theme on which the task was focused. In the first year the theme was the city. They could choose which aspect of living in the city they wanted to discuss; only mandatory request, apart from the time limit of 15 min, was that the chosen theme had to be strongly related to the city as territory and to its peculiar tissue (being Genoa a city enclosed between the sea and the mountains, with the biggest historical center of Europe, now UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) heritage). In the second year the theme was centered on the city parks, also in this case we did not give them much indication on the topics to face, they were free to approach the subject as they thought to be the most suitable for their liking. They just had to remember their learning path as students and the professional figure they were going to evolve in, in order to look at the subject with a specific frame of mind.

The authors tried to communicate the potentialities of the instruments making an overview of ways to use it.

Particular attention was paid to the prospective issue. It was necessary to clear that, being the podcast an expressive and informative tool, the audience was a crucial part of the equation. Being appealing for the target audience was one of the requests and therefore, part of their hard knowledge needed to be blended with the soft expressive one in order to fulfil the task assigned.

The authors underlined that effective knowledge can be conveyed by different expressive choices such as the telling of a story, with or without plot, the using of interviews, the adoption of a documentative or investigation style. The importance of the sources was discussed. Finding the right information and documents, was the other relevant step in the path

toward the knowledge maturity. According the educational deductive method, leaving the student the task to find the sources, the instrument and the pieces of knowledge suitable for their task is a part of the task itself (obviously always monitored by the teachers).

Teachers and students, then, discussed together the flow of actions to follow.

The first step was to create a powerful idea, teachers, as facilitators, suggested the brainstorming meeting as helpful method to put together suggestions in order to structure the core idea.

Second step was the writing of the script. It was not an intuitive step for everyone but, as strange it could sound to the students, writing the script to act and record was a crucial point. Expressing the ideas in a fluent, argumentative, and interesting way, all together, was the real challenge for them. As any other storytelling activity, it needs to have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. Once having found the main joints, they need to sustain each part with a rich ensemble of information handled in a conversational but professional way, and it all must be made intriguing using the appropriate rhythm and musical/audio support. We underlined that to achieve a good communicative degree sometimes it is useful to work by contraposition: the most boring information can become a first page content if organized and expressed in a successful way.

Crucial passage has been represented by the definition of the evaluation criteria. They have been

chosen through a bottom up dynamic. The students, all together, reflected on the subject, sharing personal opinions and thoughts on what really makes a podcast “good” and what was meant by the word “good” compared to a podcast. Tracing the perimeter of the instrument was not easy but led to a fertile process, which resulted in the choice of criteria.

Four adjectives each, for style and content, have been chosen and a clear definition of them has been given. That was fundamental for the creative process of podcast because in this way student a-priori knew the criteria to respect to produce a good quality product and they felt stimulated in respecting them because they were the ones to suggest them in first place.

To give this step of the experience the attention it needs, we decided to give the students, in both years divided into four groups from a minimum of two to a maximum of four, three weeks of time with a revision per week.

The pupils decided in autonomy to have the first revision all together in order to be alienated and to start with a basic shared knowledge, and then we continued with revisions group by group.

They experienced the difficulty of finding the right balance between information and public-oriented feature, they had to learn that not always their research could be presented in the podcast, the hard lesson to learn was that sometimes hours of research could produce just one single good paragraph.

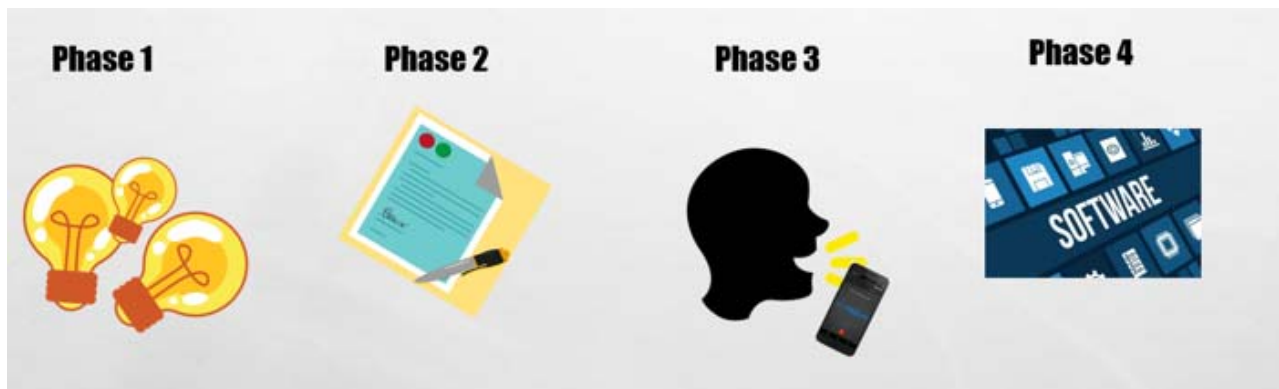


























Fig. 1 Phases of the students' assignment.

Table 1 Extract of the table of criteria for the peer evaluation.

	CONTENT				STYLE			
	Original	Rich	Focused	Coherent	Moving	Well-structured	Fluent	Adequate
GROUP 1								
GROUP 2								
GROUP 3								
GROUP 4								

After the writing phase, the class moved to the next one, the recording phase.

We decided to introduce them an open source software for editing audio: Audacity. We opted for this specific tool for different reasons: it is free and available for Mac, Windows and Linus; it is easy to use; it has a vast community of users, able to give online support through blog and tutorials.

The teachers gave them instructions on how to use Audacity through a dedicated lesson and a simulation but what tutors really wanted to achieve was their learning of a new digital instrument on the way. Audacity, like many other editors, allows the user to handle the track in a creative way, not only he can cut and edit the track at his liking but he can also deploy a vast set of audio effects, useful to animate the podcast and make it suitable for a general audience.

On the day of the handover, teachers and students, with some hosts from other courses, listened together to the final results and commented. With the support of two valuable psychologists, responsible for the programs of didactic innovation, we formalized the criteria in an evaluation sheet to give the students to actuate a process of peer evaluation. According to this didactic method, the students would have used this instrument to evaluate respectively their own job and the one of their colleagues, giving an evaluation according to the criteria decided, giving suggestions to improve the products if and where though to be poor

and highlighting the good ideas and inspirations of the various groups. Being both, producer and target of the podcast had a powerful meaning, The students, like in a role play, had the possibility to look at the same item from different perspectives, understanding the perception of the target audience and the motivation of the producer, and in our opinion, it gave them a glimpse of the relativity of different fields that they will have to face in their future careers.

The actual discussion was the following lesson. In that moment, starting from the evaluation sheets and with the help of teachers as moderators, a constructive exchange of feedbacks started. Each group gave and received compliments, critics and suggestions, they all were fully into the discussion and it was a moment of actual didactic on contents, methods and knowledge of the subject.

Final phase of the experience would have been the upload of the podcasts on a university archive and on a public platform. The aim was for them to advertise themselves and their ability and for the university to have a public repository of the didactic projects.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the first year, in presence, and the second year, in distance learning, are noteworthy from a stylistic and content point of view with some differences that we tried to list below.

The works of the *first year* followed three different approaches: one more of a documentary-reporting type, one of a personal type with comparative experience and one more related to the atmosphere of the place. All groups used interviews and sound aids for transitions or as a background. The contents were rich, and one group in particular caught our attention because, in researching material for the podcast, it carried out an in-depth research on the history of some neighborhoods in Genoa, going back to cadastral documentation and the use of the Urban Regulatory Masterplan to exemplify the prerequisite of the deductive method or learn by doing.

The second-year podcasts were generally more set up than the first-year ones as we will discuss later. In this case we had products that were particularly well-finished technically and of quality content, with high-profile interviews and an impeccable sound cleansing, we listened to some vox populi with a light but informative tone with a masterful use of sound effects and editing, as well as small, recited parts and personal interpretations of the subject aimed at providing an internal point of view but always supported by data. The theme, in this case was narrower, being focused on the Genoese parks, yet the various groups have identified their niche of action and have developed the topic. The COVID in this case has forcefully entered the content, in part because unlike the first year, the interactions for the interviews were managed over the phone, in part because, mindful of the lockdown just passed; the pupils highlighted the importance and fruition of parks in an emergency climate.

In both cases, the part of the discussion was certainly the most enriching for us all.

Thanks to a fruitful debate in classroom (virtual and real), some considerations emerged from teachers and from students, that can be considered an early assessment of the didactic outcomes in respect of the 3 issues pinpointed in Section 2. In fact, three are the key issues we took into account in the evaluation of

the entire project: they are all connected with the improvement of the soft skills and they also sum up the points which are considered as crucial both in the literature review and in the discussion of results: (1) soundness of disciplinary and multidisciplinary grounds, (2) professional competences and digital aspects, (3) ability of giving/receiving feedbacks.

First of all, the realization of what a complex process stands behind a product like the podcast, gives them a more open minded framework to evaluate and handle materials in a different field of study; second they understood the importance of disciplinary basis and multidisciplinary; a podcast needs a lot of elements to work in an effective way and they learned it step by step. We propose a small and simple but representative example of this: a student noted that he had referred to a hilly settlement in Genoa (one of the popular neighbourhoods that make up the city), calling it “little village”. Discussing it with a friend, he realized that, in the composition of the work, he had already used, implicitly, the notions and concepts that he had previously acquired and that had made him look at that neighbourhood more aware of its history and its location. They were able to look at the context as citizens, to search and give solutions and opinions as professionals and to give back their conclusions as professionals who know what it means to be a citizen, linked to the territory, able to identify areas of interest but in need for a professional to actively intervene. This is crucial because transversality of knowledge in soft skills is a competitive point.

Our scope was successfully fulfilled in the moment in which we managed to *bridge the gap between university and real professional life*, between hard and soft skills, between submitting a report or telling a professional story, between creating self-referential professional and synergic components of a work body. Something else emerged, some students underlined both in their evaluation sheet and talked directly with us, the importance of learning to use concretely a tool (Audacity) not directly linked to their future activity

but that enables them to enrich their bundle of competencies for a world more and more competitive, multimodal and digital. The *digital aspect* is another feature to consider. Especially in the period of COVID-19, smart working, personal and digital branding and digital recruiting are changing the job market dynamics. Many companies are evolving in the flood of codes and numbers without identity or faces they are starting to prefer who knows how to emerge above the others, and, therefore, digital portfolios, video CV and deferred interviews are spreading. Being able to master a transversal competence such as the makeup of a podcast as method of alternative expression on the knowledge, values, project and ability of a candidate is a powerful tool to achieve a result. An exemplary aspect of no small importance of this change is constituted by the podcasts made by the second year, in full pandemic. They gave the digital instrument a dignity of a completely different caliber compared to the students who had the experience in the presence and who considered it something additional and accessory. In the COVID period, unfortunately, people have learned that the digital world is fundamental and has the same weight, if not more, than the physical one. A podcast, in this difficult period, is a tool to say something important, not a scholastic experiment for its own sake and, if the market trends are correct, we will carry this awareness even in the post-pandemic world. In the same vein we noticed that the latter year paid much more attention to audio quality than the previous year. We also assume this is the result of the historical period: when you listen to a podcast all together in the classroom, looking at each other's face, the audio is bound to another dimension, when you listen to a podcast on a digital classroom of a platform, the attention is 100% on it, it is the protagonist and must be of good quality because otherwise it becomes a nuisance and an element of negative evaluation. The negative ratings given by the first year students were all inherent to the podcast content, the second year students, on the other

hand, gave much more importance to the audio as a whole, whether there was transitional sounds, background music or simply the quality of the recorded voice.

Taking into account Rogers and Herbert [4] who said that it is more important to reflect on podcast than to do it, an interesting fact noted in the second-year review was the difficulty in accepting the otherness of the product of the colleagues. If the first year, also thanks to the broad topic, all the products had the characteristics of a podcast, even if interpreted in a different way, in the second year this value was lacking. We found ourselves faced with much more static positions and, examining the subject with the help of the moderators, we came to the conclusion that the very definition of podcast and the possibility of interpreting and folding its characteristics were being questioned. Was this due to the self-isolation of the distance learning? Maybe. Precisely following this event it was decided to undertake, first of all as teachers, and then broaden the contents to students in the most suitable way, a path on the *correct way of giving and receiving constructive and non-self-referential feedback*. The skill of being able to compare one's opinion with others is crucial in the working environment and the schools and university should contribute to building and strengthening it, by all means. From the point of view of didactic improvement, it represented a change for future approach in organizing such a kind of activity with the class.

5. Conclusions

The article starts from the goal set by the authors regarding how to better connect academic lessons and everyday reality, up to understand the "ordinary" usefulness of the urban planning discipline in the general organization of the society.

Thanks to the experience conducted in these two years regarding the use of the podcast and the lessons learnt on which it was critically reflected (and

reported in the discussion) it is also possible to identify some points of perspective for a further experimentation in the future:

- considering that teaching tools are increasingly evolving in a digital sense, the activities already traditionally included in the course can be interpreted and reviewed also in view of digital applications. In particular, the “classic” activities can be accompanied by other tools that put teaching work—but also learning at the same time—in a broader perspective of use of technologies (e.g. use of wikis webpages for individual in-depth topics required to the students). This could be useful, together with other activities, to specify even more (also for students) the importance of acquiring digital skills and their declination within planning practices;

- another direction in which the tested didactic innovation could evolve is the more intensive use of the podcast tool. This both from the point of view of the activities carried out by the students, and as regards the use of the product itself, which could also be used by the Degree Course as a dissemination of the subjects that are deepened along the academic years; they can be useful for understanding what is the neo-graduated profile that is “produced” by the Course. As far as the more frequent use of the podcast within the Urban Planning Technique course is concerned, it can also be used as the last step of the design laboratory, where students have to design a district. At the end of the project activity, the authors are evaluating the hypothesis of using the podcast, as an alternative to the oral presentation, to accompany the final delivery;

- it is also considered essential to continue and encourage the disciplinary debate around these experiences so that they spread and can become a starting point for innovating teaching in other teachings. Furthermore, the literature references indicate a great possibility of further advances in the use of podcast as a research tool; in this sense, the research can later develop taking into account both

needs and therefore have aspects of connection and use more directly by students and teachers.

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The Podcast as an Innovative Urban Planning Teaching Tool: Soft and Hard Skills between Discipline and Professional Identity

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Abstract: The expression didactic innovation has recently assumed an implicit reference to Distance Learning. For scholars, however, it was above all the critical questioning on learning models. The article explores the use of the podcast as a stimulus for engineering students to achieve new soft skills: to learn multidisciplinary contents related to planning and to acquire professional competences in digital aspects and feedbacks attribution. Experience took place over two years: this gave the opportunity to compare the activity carried out totally in presence and totally remotely (through online lessons and reviews), to draw from them issues for discussion and future implementations.

Key words: Podcasting, planning teaching tool, learning process innovation, academic experimentation.

1. Introduction

The expression “didactic innovation” has recently assumed an implicit reference to the various technological applications now allowed and encouraged by Distance Learning. In fact, although this formulation is certainly related to digital and enabling technologies, it also indicates research, experimentation with new expressive practices, adoption of active and laboratory methodologies to face the current challenges in placing students in the best conditions to develop necessary skills [1, 2].

In this article, the authors analyze and draw conclusions regarding their path towards innovative teaching methods to be inserted into the Urban Planning Course for Building Engineer students. The main questions authors investigated focus on how to better glimpse the connection between academic activities, the daily activity of a planner, and everyday reality, up to understand the usefulness of the

discipline, among younger citizens.

The will was to make the students reflect on the knowledge and attitudes they have developed along the way up to that moment and rationalize the information learnt in classroom, being able to express them in a structured way.

In particular, in this article, authors experiment the potential of the podcast into the domains of teaching planning methods. The podcast technique, used for para-didactic and self-awareness purposes, helps the student not only to systematize his knowledge but also to become aware of the specific point of view they adopted (and acted, accordingly).

Quoting the work by Dallas Rogers [3, 4] can help in explaining the powerful value of podcast usage: “Podcasting has always been a synthesising media. Podcast is a portmanteau coined in 2004 by combining the words broadcast and iPod that is now synonymous with the audio content our devices pull from RSS feeds onto our mobile devices from around the web. In communications and media studies, podcasting is known as ‘convergent media’ or a

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‘converged medium’, drawing on the convergence culture where ‘old and new media collide’.”

This is a tool made for bridging the gap between two parts of modern reality which is what teachers try to do with students, putting in relations the two faces of their being: the professional one and the citizen/personal one.

From the point of view of the authors, the value of the podcast is even bigger when used in didactic context. Entering the world of storytelling and the multi-channel and multimodal communication has many effects on the learning process: first of all it engages the students in finding the most appropriate sources of information; they need to give a structure to their knowledge, to look in depth through it and to reorganize it.

Secondly, during this process, part of the information starts being part of their knowledge baggage in a smooth unconscious way. Not only they need to express the topic in a clear and comprehensible way but they also have to make it appealing and interesting for someone else. In this way we are touching two different spheres of interest: the first one, the personal one, because they enrich their own knowledge, they land the basis for new one to come and, according to the principle of relevance [5, 6], they amplify the context of action of their active learning. The third is the social factor, in fact, during the process the students need to confront with their colleagues, discussing over notions and methods; they must organize their ideas synergistically to reach the higher goal which is to provide a useful and convincing product to an audience that can also be outside the sector. Here another essential element of the experience emerges: disclosure. The disclosure to the outside of the more or less technical knowledge of a sector is an essential element of the interdisciplinarity required by the contemporary period but not only, it is also a testing ground for future interactions. When students become professional figures in all respects, they will find themselves having to know how to

manage confrontation with often heterogeneous teams and having to present ideas and projects in the most effective way possible. And, therefore, soft skills complement hard skills and that dialectical, informative and argumentative processing skills make the difference [7].

The results of an update recognition show that it is increasing the number of academic podcasting, that research in general has been made on this topic and, finally, that some examples of teaching use of podcast in urban planning are already present. Some scholars concentrated their efforts on investigating audiences, impact and political concern of using such a medium. Anyway, all agree that the podcast format is a powerful medium for circulating information to a wide variety of audiences.

Reflecting on podcast didactic potentials, the essay is focused on central questions: can the podcast also serve as a method for producing sound planning knowledge? Can podcasting contribute to an enhancement of the discipline and stimulate reflections on the basis of correct information conveyed by validate sources?

Several scholars already answered to these series of interrogatives and the paper would like to discuss on them. These insights, regarding soft skills’ improvement using podcast as an educational experience, are before deepened within the current literature and then in the propositive discussion. Podcasting can be an opportunity for learners to achieve new skills to cope with the challenges of the job world? How important is it to speak the language of youngers in order to transfer to them professional principles and recreate an imagery of all the possibilities they have for the fact to be planners?

To answer these crucial questions, in order to innovate scholarship teaching methods, the paper is structured as follows: after a brief summary of existent knowledge about podcasting and their multiple educational usages in Section 2 (2.1 and 2.2), Section 3 is devoted to the podcast experimentation made at

the University of Genoa in the Urban Planning Course along two academic years. In Section 4 authors discuss about results and make comparisons between 2019 and 2020 that were taught respectively in presence and remotely. Conclusions and future perspectives are drawn up in the final section.

2. Literature Review on Podcast as a Communicational Tool and Related Teaching Experiences

2.1 Podcast as a Communicational Tool

A podcast is a specific type of webcast which, like “radio”, can mean either the content itself or the method by which it is syndicated; as known, the latter is also termed podcasting. Podcasts, or personal on demand broadcasts, are audio or digital video media files that can be downloaded via the internet to media players such as iPods or personal computers: video podcast is an enhancement of audio podcast with video.

They are typically viewed directly on a website or by syndicated download or web feeds.

There is no shortage of debates on podcasting and its benefits and risks, as well as applicability to teaching and delivery of course contents; in fact, many definitions of podcast are now current in different sectors of scholarship [8].

The podcast form is harnessed simultaneously as both a mode of participatory performance and a knowledge-producing research tool. For Paiva [9], making a podcast can be a way to weave together concepts, theories or mere thoughts about places, and the emotional experience of being in a place.

Kinkaid et al. [10] offer a systematic view of the “core” elements of the podcast, considering their integration also one of the successful points of the widespread podcast as a method. The communicational potentials of such a tool are basically three:

(1) Firstly, podcast can communicate visceral elements of discourse directly through the speakers’ voices;

(2) Secondly, the resulting product is composed by a “polyvocality”, difficultly reachable with other technique;

(3) Finally, authors argue that the strong power of podcast is related to its enlarged audience.

In terms of communication outcomes, potentialities are also underlined by Gallagher and Prior [11] and Durrani et al. [12], not only as a mean for conveying concepts, but for influencing how research can be led and built up, too: with the aim to improve engagement between research subjects and research audiences, audio formats also change methods of data analysis. They argued that listening, recording, playback, editing, distribution, and broadcast are research processes that require different interactions with data than writing does [13-15].

The podcast medium presents opportunities to engage data in ways that are limited in conventional means of scientific or divulgative communication today; as the podcasting brings into relief, journal is not considered anymore as the only way that data can generate meaning. Rogers and Herbert [4] deepened variously the theme and contributed to the interest towards podcast through noteful publications about. In 2020 they confirmed the potentials of academic podcast as a way of reporting (text and sound) and to interpret situations very distant one from another, permitting to lower the distance between academics and not, with making also possible the insertion of contributions not theoretically grounded. In their logic, it is important to underline that podcast can be considered a unorthodoxical way of research, but—anyway—podcasting, as a tool, “does not allow generalization but exploration” and traditional ways of scientific divulgation normally privilege recognition about policies and laws and not “voices”: in this, the main innovation lays. Starting from a general reflection on scholarship attitude towards podcasting, authors point out also the curatorial activity that has to be done in order to transform multiple voices in a worthwhile contribution to critical reflection. Relevant

for them is how the overall process of podcast production is a way to “shape” research, which implies also a branding technique and improve “critical thinking”. Fundamental, in fact, is reflecting on a podcast and not only doing it.

Many are the meaningful experiences which allow the wider public to approach podcasting as a research product (Wandercast, CityRoad, NoVoid, to cite most popular ones). Above all, applications were made in the geographical field, where the audio element was considered as “spatial” in itself. In particular, Kinkaid et al. [10] report how geographers are increasingly embracing it as a critical part of politically minded academic work, because the podcast-as-method could enable geographers to engage in academic and public debates in new ways, providing more accessible forms of geographic knowledge on pressing social and environmental issues. Duffy and Waitt [16] and Stevenson and Holloway [17] add how, so as to bridge the gap between text and meaning, soundscapes and sound diaries are built up in order to analyze and convey experiences of socio-spatial meaning-making. Geographers’ community in general underlines how the format is along the lines of their traditional attitude to build collaborative knowledge, given the need for genuine and productive dialogue on contested geographic problems, to find new modes of engaging differing perspectives. Among geographers, Paiva [9] starts from the consideration that traditionally, geography has been communicated through the written word, taking expression in books, journal articles and scientific reports, or through conference papers. Although these established forms of communication are essential for the diffusion of research theory and practice among the academic community, he sustains that now these forms leave out significant parts of the research process and the field experience. For these reasons, researchers operating especially through the perspective of non- or more-than-representational theories have been seeking ways to communicate which “aim to enliven rather

than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and re-imagine rather than to faithfully describe, to generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct representative ideal types” [18].

Other applications are current in the performative sphere, where podcasting is considered as an “intimate bridging medium” that provides intimate connectivity, and arguably blurs the boundaries, between artist and listener [19]. The work by Wilson [20] suggests that the podcast medium possesses versatility and creative potential similar to theatre/performance, the extent of which is only beginning to be explored. Here, the author affirms how, in addition to the dominant forms which might be called discursive podcasts (one or more people discussing one or more topics), there are narrative podcasts, too. Narrative podcasts have been various but they inevitably possess a dramatic structure. Such performances afford recognition of relations between humans and their environments (which, from an ecological perspective, are not strictly separable), forming the precursor necessary for potential re-equilibrium with interacting wildlife.

Furthermore, Xie and Lew [21] deepen podcasting as a potential for tourism. Their conclusions suggest that podcasting will become an important marketing tool for tourist destinations and encourage studies by tourism researchers and practitioners. Others sustain podcasting as a direct way to stimulate socio-cultural-political activism and a militant way to be engaged and engage others [22, 23].

Ultimately, a wide field of application—which somehow gathers the expressions mentioned before—is urbanism. There are different products to be considered: from the Audiowalks, which for Meyers possesses a particularly potent expressiveness and interanimates and shapes landscapes for the listener, to the key-experience of Structural Integrity (<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/structural-integrity/>), which shows how podcast recordings and

podcasting can include discussion of the technical skills of a discipline, such as technical urban planning ones.

Rogers and Herbert [22], in particular, argue that podcasting is a political and ethical process and that each stage of the process should be used politically and ethically to intervene in the socio-political world. For this reason, they started to investigate the radio as an earlier modality of communication related to urban planning. The key concept is that podcast production and dissemination offers urban planning academics a way to make their research more accessible, and the wide public dissemination of research findings is especially important for a discipline with a professional arm like urban planning.

2.2 Educational Aspects in Multiple Usage of Podcast

Another group of robust literature has been investigating since the beginning of the 20th century the educational aspects connected to the usage of podcasting [7, 24]. Alpay [8] reports how there has been a growing interest in studying and how podcasting can be used effectively as a learning tool. This is evidenced by the IMPALA (Informal Mobile Podcasting and Learning Adaptation) project, which is a UK-wide study on the impact of podcasting on student learning in higher education. Montgomery [25], in a thesis discussed at the University of Phoenix in 2015, reflects on an introspective view into 20 urban American educators' podcast integration experiences, in an effort to understand the multifaceted and complicated situations that hindered the successful implementation of podcasts. Briefly, the results of the study identify key issues that contributed to teacher frustrations with podcast implementation and provide a guideline to enhance podcast integration within urban schools.

All scholars identified podcast as a contribution to develop interpersonal and flexible soft skills during the technical course they carried on. These can summarize in three aspects:

(1) Morris [26] underlines the results of the podcast being implied in the educative process: students in his trial group who listened to podcasts of the lectures and completed mobile assessments performed significantly better in the formative assessment. Again Alpay [8] reveals that experience was conducted at the Imperial College of London, where podcast activity *covers a range of relevant engineering topics* such as sharing student views on global and scientific developments, raising issues for current matters important to students and disseminating information on unique educational opportunities; he refers also how attention was paid also to the effective interface between academic staff and the student podcasting team, and mechanisms for ensuring that the podcasts maintain *balanced educational outcomes*.

(2) For the engineering disciplines, that is the specific scope of this paper, relevant is the experience told by Kao [27], where podcast is told as a pedagogical tool for asynchronous teaching and learning which has recently been employed in the online engineering program in the SUNY (State University of New York) at Stony Brook. Liu et al. [28] report about their experience of a summer course designed as a combined program of experiments and seminars, driven by blended technologies. Technology in education is seen as a powerful educational instrument and its integration, as a significant force driving change. An increasing number of researches are linking technology-enriched learning environments to improved higher-order thinking skill and showing that, by using technology as an educational tool, students are better prepared for "*real work*" *skills and future success in this new technological society* [28]. In fact, recent experimentations around podcasting started from the assumption that the students and faculty today have many technologies that did not exist a decade ago. Such technologies can be great tools for the delivery of course contents to enhance students' learning experience. Basically, millennial students grow up

with exposure to technology and are quite adapted to live with technologies, including their products and benefits. On one hand, the millennial students are more ready to accept and embrace new technologies and adapt their lives around them; on the other hand, they are also pushing, and perhaps challenging, faculty to expand their technical horizons. Some argue that “lecture-cast” is a poor way of teaching, but there are many ways to enrich the learning experience of students by means of such a tool. The results confirmed that students of this generation, who are savvy in learning and using new technology, can be challenged and motivated to use the podcast technology in production of educational materials. Rogers and Herbert [3] provided also a useful checklist on how involvement of students and following steps can be organized. This interactive learning process, with peer learning and review, produces a very positive environment in which active learning and engagement in learning can naturally take place.

(3) The third element is referred to the multiplicity of voices and opinions. Listening and discussion are key actions in educational usage of podcast. In the study produced by Moryl [29], discussing on podcast in class is assessed as a second most helpful activity with students; moreover, in this case, the author provides a very interesting survey in which podcast is effectively evaluated (although it is not the aim of this paper), compared with course assignments. As France and Wheeler [30] told, as part of a year-three module, at the University of Chester *assignment feedback* was delivered by podcasting technology. Podcast and giving/receiving feedbacks are interconnected in various forms: as a discussion on audio-products and as a way to convey audio-feedbacks (instead of other traditional channels). Killingback et al. [31] affirmed that feedback is an integral part of teaching and learning, being one of the most widely used methods of providing student feedback. From the student perspective, written feedback has been seen as limited

in terms of its quality, instead of alternative feedback modes (including audio, video, podcasts, and screencast feedback), which promote a sense of belonging in relation to the program of study and in relation to teaching staff.

3. Materials and Method

The experiment made by the authors intends to align its results with the experiences already carried out and give an additional contribution to them. The paper allows readers to compare the use of podcast, as a teaching method in urban planning classes, in two significant academic years such as 2019 and 2020, when lessons were held in presence and remotely, respectively. The fundamental aims of the teaching innovation recently adopted in the Urban Planning Course of the University of Genoa about podcasting are:

- considering the good results already obtained from previous experiences, to use the podcast to encourage students’ engagement, with the idea of making them work on real issues that bring them closer to the topics of the discipline “on the field”;
- to propose the pupils another form of deepening the subject, which can go beyond the delivery of a simple text, being personally involved in the ideas they performed;
- to recreate within their mind, an imaginary that reflects the possible activities of a planner and what a planner deals with, using a technology that allows them to understand that urbanism can be a possible interesting job of/for the future;
- to contribute, by means of the podcasts produced over the years by the classes, to an external official release of academic research. This experiment joins what other authors have pointed out: one of the goals achieved by podcasting is precisely to help “get scholars out of the academy”.

Moreover, the experience can be interesting because, as Rogers and Herbert [3] said, the podcast is useful also because it can represent a “snapshot of a

moment of time” and, considering they were done in the COVID pandemic era, they reproduced a singular testimony of what it was a learning process in urbanism in this particular moment.

The authors will report in this section the methodology used and all the aspects in common for both the first and the second experience, reserving the analysis of any difference for the paragraph dedicated to the discussion of the results.

The first challenge was finding the right way to introduce the issue to the class. After a brief survey, what emerged was that the majority of the students were not accustomed to listening to Podcast but the few who did, were quite expert about it.

The authors, in quality of teacher and tutor, decided to adopt an empiric way to approach the matter, given the practical soul of the activity, and started the experience with the definition of podcast given by famous podcasters in their works. Following, many different podcast channels have been suggested in order to stimulate students to develop their own sensibility over the subject and to bridge the gap for those not updated. We did not want to give them a pre-set vision on the tool; we strongly desired to let them experience it by their own.

In the following step a constructive dialogue has been initiated with the aim to discuss the choice of using a podcast as expressive method and why it should be a winning one. Some of the emerging points of the discussion were the following:

- it is portable;
- one can reach his audience anywhere, without need for further visual support;
- it is a “reachable” tool, there is no need for professional instruments in order to produce a podcast of acceptable quality;
- last but not least it is personal, the voice can convey a lot of different emotions and contents and the intonation, sometimes, can express more than words.

From this, a broader discussion about the changes in the communication field and the evolution of the

job markets has started, showing the sensitivity of the future generation of professionals over the theme.

After this successful phase, a frontal, but still interactive lesson, was used to explain more in depth the use of Podcast as tool. The students were given the theme on which the task was focused. In the first year the theme was the city. They could choose which aspect of living in the city they wanted to discuss; only mandatory request, apart from the time limit of 15 min, was that the chosen theme had to be strongly related to the city as territory and to its peculiar tissue (being Genoa a city enclosed between the sea and the mountains, with the biggest historical center of Europe, now UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) heritage). In the second year the theme was centered on the city parks, also in this case we did not give them much indication on the topics to face, they were free to approach the subject as they thought to be the most suitable for their liking. They just had to remember their learning path as students and the professional figure they were going to evolve in, in order to look at the subject with a specific frame of mind.

The authors tried to communicate the potentialities of the instruments making an overview of ways to use it.

Particular attention was paid to the prospective issue. It was necessary to clear that, being the podcast an expressive and informative tool, the audience was a crucial part of the equation. Being appealing for the target audience was one of the requests and therefore, part of their hard knowledge needed to be blended with the soft expressive one in order to fulfil the task assigned.

The authors underlined that effective knowledge can be conveyed by different expressive choices such as the telling of a story, with or without plot, the using of interviews, the adoption of a documentative or investigation style. The importance of the sources was discussed. Finding the right information and documents, was the other relevant step in the path

toward the knowledge maturity. According the educational deductive method, leaving the student the task to find the sources, the instrument and the pieces of knowledge suitable for their task is a part of the task itself (obviously always monitored by the teachers).

Teachers and students, then, discussed together the flow of actions to follow.

The first step was to create a powerful idea, teachers, as facilitators, suggested the brainstorming meeting as helpful method to put together suggestions in order to structure the core idea.

Second step was the writing of the script. It was not an intuitive step for everyone but, as strange it could sound to the students, writing the script to act and record was a crucial point. Expressing the ideas in a fluent, argumentative, and interesting way, all together, was the real challenge for them. As any other storytelling activity, it needs to have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. Once having found the main joints, they need to sustain each part with a rich ensemble of information handled in a conversational but professional way, and it all must be made intriguing using the appropriate rhythm and musical/audio support. We underlined that to achieve a good communicative degree sometimes it is useful to work by contraposition: the most boring information can become a first page content if organized and expressed in a successful way.

Crucial passage has been represented by the definition of the evaluation criteria. They have been

chosen through a bottom up dynamic. The students, all together, reflected on the subject, sharing personal opinions and thoughts on what really makes a podcast “good” and what was meant by the word “good” compared to a podcast. Tracing the perimeter of the instrument was not easy but led to a fertile process, which resulted in the choice of criteria.

Four adjectives each, for style and content, have been chosen and a clear definition of them has been given. That was fundamental for the creative process of podcast because in this way student a-priori knew the criteria to respect to produce a good quality product and they felt stimulated in respecting them because they were the ones to suggest them in first place.

To give this step of the experience the attention it needs, we decided to give the students, in both years divided into four groups from a minimum of two to a maximum of four, three weeks of time with a revision per week.

























The pupils decided in autonomy to have the first revision all together in order to be alienated and to start with a basic shared knowledge, and then we continued with revisions group by group.

They experienced the difficulty of finding the right balance between information and public-oriented feature, they had to learn that not always their research could be presented in the podcast, the hard lesson to learn was that sometimes hours of research could produce just one single good paragraph.



Fig. 1 Phases of the students' assignment.

Table 1 Extract of the table of criteria for the peer evaluation.

	CONTENT				STYLE			
	Original	Rich	Focused	Coherent	Moving	Well-structured	Fluent	Adequate
GROUP 1								
GROUP 2								
GROUP 3								
GROUP 4								

After the writing phase, the class moved to the next one, the recording phase.

We decided to introduce them an open source software for editing audio: Audacity. We opted for this specific tool for different reasons: it is free and available for Mac, Windows and Linus; it is easy to use; it has a vast community of users, able to give online support through blog and tutorials.

The teachers gave them instructions on how to use Audacity through a dedicated lesson and a simulation but what tutors really wanted to achieve was their learning of a new digital instrument on the way. Audacity, like many other editors, allows the user to handle the track in a creative way, not only he can cut and edit the track at his liking but he can also deploy a vast set of audio effects, useful to animate the podcast and make it suitable for a general audience.

On the day of the handover, teachers and students, with some hosts from other courses, listened together to the final results and commented. With the support of two valuable psychologists, responsible for the programs of didactic innovation, we formalized the criteria in an evaluation sheet to give the students to actuate a process of peer evaluation. According to this didactic method, the students would have used this instrument to evaluate respectively their own job and the one of their colleagues, giving an evaluation according to the criteria decided, giving suggestions to improve the products if and where though to be poor

and highlighting the good ideas and inspirations of the various groups. Being both, producer and target of the podcast had a powerful meaning, The students, like in a role play, had the possibility to look at the same item from different perspectives, understanding the perception of the target audience and the motivation of the producer, and in our opinion, it gave them a glimpse of the relativity of different fields that they will have to face in their future careers.

The actual discussion was the following lesson. In that moment, starting from the evaluation sheets and with the help of teachers as moderators, a constructive exchange of feedbacks started. Each group gave and received compliments, critics and suggestions, they all were fully into the discussion and it was a moment of actual didactic on contents, methods and knowledge of the subject.

Final phase of the experience would have been the upload of the podcasts on a university archive and on a public platform. The aim was for them to advertise themselves and their ability and for the university to have a public repository of the didactic projects.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the first year, in presence, and the second year, in distance learning, are noteworthy from a stylistic and content point of view with some differences that we tried to list below.

The works of the *first year* followed three different approaches: one more of a documentary-reporting type, one of a personal type with comparative experience and one more related to the atmosphere of the place. All groups used interviews and sound aids for transitions or as a background. The contents were rich, and one group in particular caught our attention because, in researching material for the podcast, it carried out an in-depth research on the history of some neighborhoods in Genoa, going back to cadastral documentation and the use of the Urban Regulatory Masterplan to exemplify the prerequisite of the deductive method or learn by doing.

The second-year podcasts were generally more set up than the first-year ones as we will discuss later. In this case we had products that were particularly well-finished technically and of quality content, with high-profile interviews and an impeccable sound cleansing, we listened to some vox populi with a light but informative tone with a masterful use of sound effects and editing, as well as small, recited parts and personal interpretations of the subject aimed at providing an internal point of view but always supported by data. The theme, in this case was narrower, being focused on the Genoese parks, yet the various groups have identified their niche of action and have developed the topic. The COVID in this case has forcefully entered the content, in part because unlike the first year, the interactions for the interviews were managed over the phone, in part because, mindful of the lockdown just passed; the pupils highlighted the importance and fruition of parks in an emergency climate.

In both cases, the part of the discussion was certainly the most enriching for us all.

Thanks to a fruitful debate in classroom (virtual and real), some considerations emerged from teachers and from students, that can be considered an early assessment of the didactic outcomes in respect of the 3 issues pinpointed in Section 2. In fact, three are the key issues we took into account in the evaluation of

the entire project: they are all connected with the improvement of the soft skills and they also sum up the points which are considered as crucial both in the literature review and in the discussion of results: (1) soundness of disciplinary and multidisciplinary grounds, (2) professional competences and digital aspects, (3) ability of giving/receiving feedbacks.

First of all, the realization of what a complex process stands behind a product like the podcast, gives them a more open minded framework to evaluate and handle materials in a different field of study; second they understood the importance of disciplinary basis and multidisciplinary; a podcast needs a lot of elements to work in an effective way and they learned it step by step. We propose a small and simple but representative example of this: a student noted that he had referred to a hilly settlement in Genoa (one of the popular neighbourhoods that make up the city), calling it “little village”. Discussing it with a friend, he realized that, in the composition of the work, he had already used, implicitly, the notions and concepts that he had previously acquired and that had made him look at that neighbourhood more aware of its history and its location. They were able to look at the context as citizens, to search and give solutions and opinions as professionals and to give back their conclusions as professionals who know what it means to be a citizen, linked to the territory, able to identify areas of interest but in need for a professional to actively intervene. This is crucial because transversality of knowledge in soft skills is a competitive point.

Our scope was successfully fulfilled in the moment in which we managed to *bridge the gap between university and real professional life*, between hard and soft skills, between submitting a report or telling a professional story, between creating self-referential professional and synergic components of a work body. Something else emerged, some students underlined both in their evaluation sheet and talked directly with us, the importance of learning to use concretely a tool (Audacity) not directly linked to their future activity

but that enables them to enrich their bundle of competencies for a world more and more competitive, multimodal and digital. The *digital aspect* is another feature to consider. Especially in the period of COVID-19, smart working, personal and digital branding and digital recruiting are changing the job market dynamics. Many companies are evolving in the flood of codes and numbers without identity or faces they are starting to prefer who knows how to emerge above the others, and, therefore, digital portfolios, video CV and deferred interviews are spreading. Being able to master a transversal competence such as the makeup of a podcast as method of alternative expression on the knowledge, values, project and ability of a candidate is a powerful tool to achieve a result. An exemplary aspect of no small importance of this change is constituted by the podcasts made by the second year, in full pandemic. They gave the digital instrument a dignity of a completely different caliber compared to the students who had the experience in the presence and who considered it something additional and accessory. In the COVID period, unfortunately, people have learned that the digital world is fundamental and has the same weight, if not more, than the physical one. A podcast, in this difficult period, is a tool to say something important, not a scholastic experiment for its own sake and, if the market trends are correct, we will carry this awareness even in the post-pandemic world. In the same vein we noticed that the latter year paid much more attention to audio quality than the previous year. We also assume this is the result of the historical period: when you listen to a podcast all together in the classroom, looking at each other's face, the audio is bound to another dimension, when you listen to a podcast on a digital classroom of a platform, the attention is 100% on it, it is the protagonist and must be of good quality because otherwise it becomes a nuisance and an element of negative evaluation. The negative ratings given by the first year students were all inherent to the podcast content, the second year students, on the other

hand, gave much more importance to the audio as a whole, whether there was transitional sounds, background music or simply the quality of the recorded voice.

Taking into account Rogers and Herbert [4] who said that it is more important to reflect on podcast than to do it, an interesting fact noted in the second-year review was the difficulty in accepting the otherness of the product of the colleagues. If the first year, also thanks to the broad topic, all the products had the characteristics of a podcast, even if interpreted in a different way, in the second year this value was lacking. We found ourselves faced with much more static positions and, examining the subject with the help of the moderators, we came to the conclusion that the very definition of podcast and the possibility of interpreting and folding its characteristics were being questioned. Was this due to the self-isolation of the distance learning? Maybe. Precisely following this event it was decided to undertake, first of all as teachers, and then broaden the contents to students in the most suitable way, a path on the *correct way of giving and receiving constructive and non-self-referential feedback*. The skill of being able to compare one's opinion with others is crucial in the working environment and the schools and university should contribute to building and strengthening it, by all means. From the point of view of didactic improvement, it represented a change for future approach in organizing such a kind of activity with the class.

5. Conclusions

The article starts from the goal set by the authors regarding how to better connect academic lessons and everyday reality, up to understand the "ordinary" usefulness of the urban planning discipline in the general organization of the society.

Thanks to the experience conducted in these two years regarding the use of the podcast and the lessons learnt on which it was critically reflected (and

reported in the discussion) it is also possible to identify some points of perspective for a further experimentation in the future:

- considering that teaching tools are increasingly evolving in a digital sense, the activities already traditionally included in the course can be interpreted and reviewed also in view of digital applications. In particular, the “classic” activities can be accompanied by other tools that put teaching work—but also learning at the same time—in a broader perspective of use of technologies (e.g. use of wikis webpages for individual in-depth topics required to the students). This could be useful, together with other activities, to specify even more (also for students) the importance of acquiring digital skills and their declination within planning practices;

- another direction in which the tested didactic innovation could evolve is the more intensive use of the podcast tool. This both from the point of view of the activities carried out by the students, and as regards the use of the product itself, which could also be used by the Degree Course as a dissemination of the subjects that are deepened along the academic years; they can be useful for understanding what is the neo-graduated profile that is “produced” by the Course. As far as the more frequent use of the podcast within the Urban Planning Technique course is concerned, it can also be used as the last step of the design laboratory, where students have to design a district. At the end of the project activity, the authors are evaluating the hypothesis of using the podcast, as an alternative to the oral presentation, to accompany the final delivery;

- it is also considered essential to continue and encourage the disciplinary debate around these experiences so that they spread and can become a starting point for innovating teaching in other teachings. Furthermore, the literature references indicate a great possibility of further advances in the use of podcast as a research tool; in this sense, the research can later develop taking into account both

needs and therefore have aspects of connection and use more directly by students and teachers.

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