Benjamin George, assistant professor in Utah State University’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, was recently honored for his creation of a digital landscape architecture library.

The Digital Library of Landscape Architecture (DiLiLAH) consists of virtual tours of historical landscapes from around the globe. The tours contain immersive panoramas that showcase the unique beauty of gardens such as the Château de Villandry in France and the Villa Lante in Italy.

The project began with George looking for a tool for the students in his online class.

“Landscape architecture is such a visual field,” George said. “I thought that our students were going to struggle in an online course if all they do is read texts. They needed a different way to engage with the material.”

He started the project by spending a month camping across Europe in 2011. George visited over a dozen gardens in that time, spending long days taking photos that captured the details of the landscapes.

The students in the online class enjoyed using the tool so much that it was soon implemented into the face-to-face class. George said the library is expanding and can be used as an education and documentation tool, as well as a way to experience the gardens for those who haven’t had the opportunity to visit them.

“Dr. George has created one of the most unique and accessible tools for students, scholars and the public to access significant gardens and related designs,” said Sean Michael, the department head of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning. “DiLiLAH is an innovative mash-up of his research into virtual environments and his expertise in landscape architectural history. We have benefitted from this resource as students enrolled throughout Utah are given access to significant landscapes that otherwise would remain caught in static 2-dimensional images.”

George was recently honored with the Award of Excellence for his work on the DiLiLAH by the Utah chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. This award is the highest that the society gives out and is only presented when a project comes along that is significantly impactful and warrants special recognition.

“I was extremely honored to receive this award,” George said. “It’s nice to know that DiLiLAH is getting some much-deserved recognition. With the attention it’s receiving, I really think this project can grow and expand at a much faster rate.”

Eventually George wishes to incorporate virtual reality technology into the project, allowing for a more immersive experience. In the near future, tours from New Zealand and Turkey will be added to the library.

“Whenever I travel, if there’s a garden, landscape or anything noteworthy, I try to go make a virtual tour of it,” he said. “Now that it’s getting national attention, I’ll probably start taking trips specifically to make virtual tours, and really push this project forward.”

To explore the digital library, visit http://gardentaining.com/dililah/

For more information about USU’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, visit https://laep.usu.edu/

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