

## VIDEOCLIP MARATHONS – A PROVEN EDUCATIONAL APPROACH IN TEACHING "THEORY OF COMPOSITION" AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY

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### ABSTRACT

The study examines young designers' results in a specific task involving production of themed short "video clips". It follows works of third-year students, majoring in the field of "Engineering design" in the Faculty of Forest Industry. The clip demonstration (on an internally organized marathon) has been held annually for more than a decade in the Sofia University of Forestry.

The aim of the study is to reveal the benefit of the event as a learning tool and to trace the evolution of the clips, such as storylines and graphic tools applied by the students.

The used research methods include selection of key examples, comparative analysis and classification. The expected results are in the field of design and art theory, contemporary design and architecture.

**Key words:** "Engineering design" students, composition, training, video clip, short movie, Department Interior and furniture design.

### INTRODUCTION

"By excluding what is outside the frame of the shot, photography further reduces or gives another meaning to the real relations of the subject with the other surrounding objects," writes Tsocho Boyadzhiev (2020:50), one of the leading Bulgarian humanities scholars, in his treaty "Philosophy of photography". In this perspective, it is important to evaluate the significance of the work with photo and video techniques and also the principles in the design creation and presentation in the field of interior and product design as well in architectural studies. The choice of visual frames and their content, the placement of accents and visual anchors, and the composition of objects relations, are now (and have always been) key elements of the design creation.

The task of creation product or design oriented videoclips as an educational tool has been applied in the University of Forestry for student majoring Engineering design for first time in 2013. Still, the educational benefits for students in design and architectural majors to create photos and videos, had been traced by many researchers in the last decades. Some of them, like Tok, Kaplan, and Taneli (2010) traced the focus on social or aesthetic values in such productions, while others were experimenting with the sense of space or material, or even the therapeutic values of video filming (Balci 2024). A Filmmaking school for architects is even available online on Autodesk University since 2019. Theatre, as an educational tool in architecture and design, is also used and analysed in many studies. Some of them follow the body perception (Topaloglu 2014) and others investigate the forms of movement and using the space and the furniture elements (Read 2025). Even more, some scientists conclude that "the mixture of interdisciplinary subjects of drama, digital technologies, and sustainability in education allows students to combine live improvisation and role-playing theatrical performances and actions with digital tools and applications to cultivate sustainable consciousness." (Zakopoulos, V., et al. 2023). Thus, using Videoclip Marathon for the developing of thinking towards sustainability is very important. The Bulgarian designers of studio DiFOLD also stated "Good design optimizes spaces, changes

people’s behavior with its comfort...” (Nikolova, T., et al 2023). And the variations of the space perception and people’s behavior is very well felt through the camera lens.

The task “Videoclip” is part of the course “Theory of composition” which has been taught in the winter semester of third student year. The course introduces methods for shaping the final version of furniture and interior products and traces how design of form and space influence human perception. It is an interdisciplinary field connected to cultural and art studies, aesthetics, semiotics, sociology, psychology, ergonomics, and more. The lectures analyse contemporary and historical applications of composition and style, and key principles of structuring planes, shapes, and spaces are presented. Classes include presentations and exercises that use varied, playful, and competitive approaches. As a single discipline “Theory of composition” was introduced by professor Penka Dimitrova. Current course’s textbook was developed by the architects Dobrina Zheleva-Martins and Stela Tasheva (2015).

The specific use of video clips as an educational tool aims to boost as whole students understanding of viewers perspective, perception, the effects of used light, colour, frame composition, and also the storytelling as a design and marketing approach. The participants are encouraged to experiment, both in terms of script and visual approach.

The video pieces were limited as length (2 to 5 minutes), and were composed as promotional forms – following a product, phenomena or space and the linked important features, use or implementations. It was equally appreciated to make a documentary, analytical piece as well as a kind of a short story scenario. All of the clips, created by students were to be presented in public on a chosen date at the end of the semester. They were evaluated by a jury of guests and lecturers. The usual evaluation criteria for the jury was following the clip originality, the presented thesis or concept and also the high visual qualities of the video. Posters of the event were provided (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Videoclip Marathon posters 2013-2024.

The study is focused on the evolution of clip production as genre and team self-organisation, same as the benefits for the students.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Twelve years (the period 2013–2024) of conducting Videoclip marathons are investigated in the study (Table 1). Thus, 439 students were engaged and 235 clips created. The event concept was developed by Dobrina Zheleva-Martins and Stela Tasheva and the presented here data was gathered by me. It was possible for each one participant to present either a solo, individually prepared video, or to team with couple other students.

**Table 1: Themes and participation in the marathon.**

Date	Theme of the event	Number of participants	Number of teams	Proportion of participant versus teams
13.12.2013	Composition and style	45	39	1.153846154
5.12.2014	Composition and emotions	46	37	1.243243243
4.12.2015	The design message	34	29	1.172413793
6.12.2016	Technology and composition	36	35	1.028571429
5.12.2017	Signs and composition in design creation	31	21	1.476190476
30.11.2018	Composition. Bulgarian design	42	31	1.35483871
2.12.2019	Nowadays trends in composition and design	27	18	1.5
10.12.2020	Design and composition in cultural heritage	37	20	1.85
16.12.2021	Future design	31	15	2.066666667
5.12.2022	Me and the University of Forestry	28	13	2.153846154
6.12.2023	Movement & Interior design	41	19	2.157894737
13.12.2024	Culture of habitation & Interior	37	18	2.055555556

The rules of the event changed in some details (parameters of team and theme choices for example, number of the jury members and so on). Follow-up questionnaires have been also conducted after all the events, showing a quite high level of appreciation and understanding. The tradition of the Videoclip Marathons continued during the years of COVID quarantine, when the final demonstrations were delivered only online.

As of the rapid development of small (and mostly amateur) video production globally, and because the high popularity of social media products, there were no special requirements on the used video devices – cameras, drawing tablets or smartphones. Following the educational nature of the event, it was also allowed to use self-created footage (videotaped or with drawings) and/or free media elements (sound or pictures). The video editing software included: Windows Movie Maker, Power Point, Canva, HitFilm Express, Movavi, Veed, DaVinci Resolve, iMovie, Adobe Premiere Rush, and many others. Of course, all the used tools sources and references had to be shown in the end of the clip.

Beside the special composition training, the Videoclip marathons have been directed into achieving a palette of educational goals that included:

- Equipping the students with basic knowledge and techniques on the use of photography, video, and animation drawing in interior and engineering design.
- Provoking the students on their knowledge in some themes and their ability to convey this knowledge as a research, story or other type of video presentation.
- Engaging the students in self-organized productive teams, with possibilities of taking various roles and responsibilities.
- Boosting the creativity of the students, and their sense of experimenting beyond the borders of the third-year academic lecturing.

Examining the presented video content and the prevailing features of the clips, the students could be conditionally divided in four groups.

The first one was the group of teams that produced an *animated study presentation* for the chosen theme. Their works contained a lot of product images and theme analysis provided by subtitles, or voice explanation. This approach to the task was often chosen either as best for data presentation, or as an acceptable way to cope with the video media mode. Works of this genre were presented in all the analyzed years. The winning final results in this group were usually demonstrating a convincing balance of visuals and research presented. At the same time students were also working with the artistic touch of visual consistency and thoroughly prepared slides and resources, etc.

The second group of students often preferred to draw, animate and edit frames and to create a clip resembling a *video graphic essay*. Their frame preparation was often more time consuming but allowed demonstration of graphic excellence and individual artistic presence. A small number of this kind of clips were also created during all the period. The key element of their final success was usually the logical consistency and the elegant visual composition. Frame examples of some awarded entries in these two clip genres is provided on Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Left: Clip by Carmella Lombardi, 2016. Folding and unfolding models in the interior composition.**

**An animated study presentation**

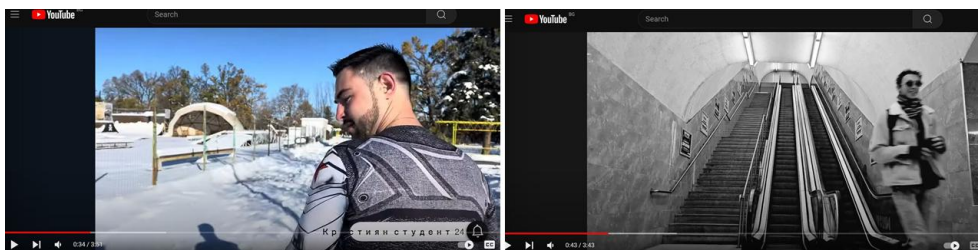
**Right: Clip by Stefani Nedkova, Elitsa Ivanova and Elena Koleva, 2023. Trends and innovations in urban mobility. A video graphic essay**

The third and the fourth group of students wished to shoot clip footage themselves. Most of them recreated small video teams – actors, a cameraman and a director, but solo participants – working individually, also existed. The third group productions were styled as documentary or *experimental vlogs*. The students were visiting chosen locations, commenting, performing

activities and/or taking interviews. These types of clips were created from the very first Marathon in 2013, but they first won the jury’s hearts in 2018. As a complicated, popular genre, the winning entries usually had to be close to the known existing vlog dynamics as content and plot, and also to adopt an elegant visual composition – as frame setting and graphic effects.

The fourth group of students was attracted by artistic storytelling, following the theme of the event. They often presented simple plots and jokes played by the team, thus analyzing positives and negatives of products and trends. Some personal jolly elements were visible as clip elements all the time, but a full *joke story* appeared in 2018, yet not a winning one. Later on, they become more and more popular among the students.

Frame examples of some awarded entries in the genres of *experimental vlogs* and *joke story* is provided on Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Left: Clip by Kristian Neychev, Petya Nedeva, Michaela Simitchiiska, 2023. Trends and innovations in fitness centers. Right: Clip by Bozhidar Naydenov, Kristiyan Rusinov, Petya Ilkova, 2023. Transformation and movement in common spaces (staircases, lobbies and corridors).**

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A systematization of the winning entries is shown in table 2. Only the first 3, 4 or 5 teams are shown there, to assure the good quality of the final clips. As the jury was always using points to evaluate the clips, some years there were equal final numbers for the teams. The above-mentioned terms: Animated study presentation, Video graphic essay, Experimental vlog, Joke story are used in the table for the clip genres. The team’s constitution varies following the students’ needs and wishes. Therefore, solo participants and teams of 1, 2, 3 and 4 were allowed to participate, as long as they all work together and organise their process. In 2024, two teams decided to work together, creating a longer clip in 2 parts. All team “constellations” were present in all the Marathon years.

**Table 2: Winning entries: teams and clip types.**

Theme of the event	Type of the first winning team, genre of the winning clip.	Type of the second winning team, genre of the winning clip.	Type of the third winning team, genre of the winning clip.
2013. Composition and style  (there were 2 third places)	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>

Theme of the event	Type of the first winning team, genre of the winning clip.	Type of the second winning team, genre of the winning clip.	Type of the third winning team, genre of the winning clip.
2014. Composition and emotions  (there were 2 first places)	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>  Solo participant <i>Video graphic essay</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	
2015. The design message	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>
2016. Technology and composition	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>
2017. Signs and composition in design creation  (there were 3 second places)	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i> Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i> Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	
2018. Composition. Bulgarian design	Team of 3 <i>Experimental vlog</i>	Team of 2 <i>Experimental vlog</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>
2019. Current trends in composition and design	Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i>
2020. Design and composition in cultural heritage (there were 2 second places)	Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Solo participant <i>Animated study presentation</i> Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	
2021. Future design	Team of 2 <i>Animated study presentation</i>	Team of 3 <i>Joke story</i>	Team of 3 <i>Animated study presentation</i>
2022. Me and the University of Forestry (there were 2 second places)	Solo participant <i>Experimental vlog</i>	Solo participant <i>Video graphic essay</i>  Team of 3 <i>Experimental vlog</i>	
2023. Movement & Interior design  (there were 2 first and 3 second places)	Team of 2 <i>Joke story</i>  Team of 3 <i>Video graphic essay</i>	Team of 2 <i>Joke story</i> Team of 2 <i>Joke story</i> Team of 3 <i>Experimental vlog</i>	
2024. Culture of habitation & Interior. (the first winning entry is accepted for 2 clips, there were also 3 second places)	Team of 6 with a clip in two parts. <i>Joke story</i>	Solo participant <i>Experimental vlog</i> Team of 2 <i>Experimental vlog</i> Team of 2 <i>Experimental vlog</i>	

Although the numbers are too little to perform a full statistic evaluation, the last couple of years more students preferred the cooperative forms of video production. Thus, smaller number of clips were shown comparing to the participation (Table 1). The team type was not defining towards the quality of the final presentations – neither solo participants nor teams of 2 and 3 were prevailing in the winning (Table 2). There were two “statements” in some of the follow-up questionnaires towards the team -work:

- “I prefer not to work in a team unless we can choose our partners ourselves. It doesn't matter what technologies we use.”
- “Teamwork is always a better idea in my opinion, because we learn to work with people and help each other.”

It also could be noticed that last years the winning entries were of more complex genre and visual character, using more updated technology and braver setting, plots and team constellations. Students were more willing to experiment and to present various perspectives. On the other hand, videoclips themselves became clearer as message and content.

## CONCLUSIONS

Video visuals are now inevitable part of educational forms in various majors and discipline. Self-made clips were even part of the 2025 year opening ceremony on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. When connected with academic design education they provide insights both for the students and the public, and in University of Forestry these forms were appreciated by all the participants, where wishes “I liked the video marathon. If there were more tasks of this type, it would be more interesting,” although exaggerated, were often mentioned in the final questionnaires. A popular quote by Steve Jobs says that “Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.” The Videoclip Marathon gives the young designers the opportunity to use and explain exactly how things work, and students make good use of this.

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# **INNOVATION IN WOODWORKING INDUSTRY AND ENGINEERING DESIGN**

**2/2025**

INNO vol. XIV Sofia

ISSN 1314-6149  
e-ISSN 2367-6663

Indexed with and included in CABI

# INNOVATION IN WOODWORKING INDUSTRY AND ENGINEERING DESIGN

Science Journal  
Vol. 14/ p. 1–110  
Sofia 2/2025

**ISSN 1314-6149**  
**e-ISSN 2367-6663**

Edition of  
**FACULTY OF FOREST INDUSTRY – UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY – SOFIA**

**The Scientific Journal is indexed with and included in CABI.**

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**Cover Design:** Desislava Angelova

**Printed by:** INTEL ENTRANCE

**Publisher address:** UNIVERSITY OF FORESTRY – FACULTY OF FOREST INDUSTRY  
Kliment Ohridski Bul., 10, Sofia, 1797, BULGARIA

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