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European Schools of Architecture – some thoughts on the way ahead

The EAAE is the forum where European Architecture Schools exchange information and experiences on architectural education and research. As such it has to deal with a considerable variety of member institutions in a time characterized by constant and unpredictable changes. Our cities and regions are confronted by a wide variety of spatial-social issues, such as increase of urban population, climate adaptation or making the existing stock of real estate sustainable. The consequences of these issues need to be better investigated and understood at different scale levels and throughout various viewpoints. In addition, future-proof solutions also have to be devised.

The above mentioned conditions must be considered and reflected in the academic environment. Here the aim should be finding a workable balance between long-term perspectives and attention to what is currently taking place in society, in practice and at the university. The EAAE member schools are leading institutions in the built environment area of knowledge and expertise and in this framework their task is very important: to take care of current and next generation of built environment professionals, providing a sound academic, integrated and interdisciplinary training in which spatial and technological innovations can be kept in balance with the understanding of places and surroundings, of identity and culture.

Moreover, in the 21st-century students and alumni will continue to learn throughout their lives. Life long learning is therefore an additional challenge that our institutions need to put and keep on the map. In order to do so we have to acquire more knowledge about how students study, how teachers teach and about how strengthening participation, engagement and mutual exchanges also after the regular course of study. Forms of blended learning, combining online and campus-based teaching, will increasingly be shaping the basis of the future learning environments. All this has to take place while internationalisation will continue to influence many of the involved institutions, along with their student and teaching populations. In terms of strategy as well as content, education and research are therefore both challenged more than ever to navigate between the international academic environment and the connections to local culture and context.

Some relevant and down on earth questions may help us moving forward, also in relation to the challenges pointed out before. Here in a row: how do we see the future of our degree programmes in 10-15 year time? Where do we see new opportunities? Are we taking sufficient account of the academic and professional ambitions of the future? Is this also the case in the light of our international ambitions? Do we consider the offer of courses in our schools still to be up-to-date? Is there a need for new MSc programmes? Is the relation with practice still sound? And how do such ideas relate to the organisation structure and the financial position of the particular schools? There may be indeed other issues that could be added to this list. In any case, in order to find answers to these questions, discussions are pivotal and the EAAE is certainly the appropriate place to exchange experiences and best practices.

Personal statement

Next to education and research, I've always had a particular interest in development and coordination tasks with special attention to the relationship between academia and practice. In the course of the years I've been involved in organizing and leading many events, conferences, symposia and workshops. Many of these activities were the base for publications and for further developments in research and education. My opinion is that both the results of design and research must be used as a breeding ground for discussions about the future of our discipline with various parties, so that opportunities for cooperation can also arise outside academia.

I've started my academic career as teacher from practice and I've been engaging with all types of duties within the university, getting to know from several angles the way such an academic institution is functioning. For years I've combined the work in practice with the university teaching and researching; although not easy in terms of time, I've learned a lot from this mutual exchange, enabling me to transfer knowledge to students and vice versa. Furthermore, I've had the opportunity to be the responsible coordinator for the Architecture study program for some years, taking care a.o. of renewal actions and their strategic communication but also of accreditation processes and exit qualifications.

Since 2014 I work as Vice Dean of Education at the Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment at the TU Delft. In this position I've had the opportunity to lead several strategic activities within the TU Delft, engaging with colleagues from other disciplines and representing my institution in various education and research events in national and international venues. Next to it, I'm also an active member of ARENA (Architectural Research European Network Association) where I'm part of the editorial board of the journal AJAR and co-editor of the symposium series DR_SoM (Design Research Series on Methods).

Considering my multi-faceted experience, I think I can be an added value for the EAAE council, especially regarding the organization of the association's activities and for the determination of its strategic objectives.