

towards a Charter on Architectural Education

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION: a position paper of the EAAE Education Academy

Who is this for?

This position paper is intended as a reference document for use by educators, students and University administrators, research institutions and researchers, funding agencies, professional bodies and architectural practices that are committed to education in architecture and in related disciplines. It seeks to identify the shared fundamentals of architectural education, describes the variety of valid practices and formulates a collective position for the international community and the EAAE member institutions. It declares the principles for the development of vibrant, internationally recognized, qualitatively outstanding and well-grounded architectural education and research and consequently a well-informed professional practice. As such, it is a source of inspiration, dialogue and exchange concerning the future curriculum and pedagogy of architectural education

Through its propositional principles, this position paper consolidates a variety of ideas towards contemporary architectural education put forward by members of the EAAE Education Academy within a series of workshops held from 2016 till now. Its formulation sublimates discussions on the socio-economic conditions in which architectural education takes place today across the range of contrasting European regions. Instead, this position paper responds to the ongoing changes within architectural education and the architectural profession. It maintains that architecture and architectural education is at the service of the societies it is embedded within and it recognizes the value of heritage, tradition and the contemporary culture. It highlights the importance of the environments in which architectural education takes place and explicates the its central pedagogy of teaching through design. Practice in architectural education has multiple forms and meanings, all of which are addressed in various forms: the practice of design, the practice of teaching through design, professional practice, and the practice of architectural research, including research by design, all of which are addressed in this statement.

This position paper aims to lead to a Charter on Architectural Education, that claims the space that architectural education needs and that explains why such space has to be negotiated. In a time of transforming professional practices and shifting fields of employment, EAAE opens up this document for feedback from all its members. This will lead to revision every three years, thus articulating the values for which the EAAE actually stands for.

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WHAT CAN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION DO AND FOR WHOM?

Architectural education can create professionals capable of responding to emergent need.

The architecture graduate is a new citizen, able to detect, formulate and articulate spatial problems and know when an intervention could be beneficial to society. (S)he is an advocate of community-led but can act as his/her own spatial generator.

Architectural education aims to produce graduates able to transpose complexity into a spatial concept. Architecture students are schooled in the ability to pose questions not just answers, thereby embracing complexity and uncertainty, rather than resisting it. Students learn to respond to complex conditions by developing concepts of articulated space. Creating space becomes an intrinsic skill, embodying a solution or staging the human condition.

Architectural education can provide students with a lens through which to critically reflect upon local, regional and global value systems of spatial production. Architectural education aims to operate as a 'field condition' – striking a balance between local identities, regional proclivities and global systems. In doing so it seeks to graduate empathic, citizen-architects who are enablers, cultivators, motivators, inventors and constructive-critics.

Architectural education is designed to graduate students who are able to manage the whole.

Within a world dependent on forms of expertise that can translate across disciplines, sectors and diverse agendas, architecture students are encouraged to take a holistic view of situations before taking action. Architecture students need to work within and sometimes beyond rules, contexts and conditions, to ensure solutions and strategies are fit for purpose.

Architectural education prepares students for an unbounded field of practice. The future of architectural practice is uncertain. Students are encouraged to remain sensitive to nascent trends, pay attention to data, manage ambiguity, take creative risks. It requires that students draw from a wide range of sources, reflect and take positions, embrace complex, uncertain, open, dynamic conditions and create presence in place and culture.

Architectural education strives to achieve and eschew equality. it seeks to ensure its white, male, western traditions are no longer allowed to dominate, that knowledge base is decolonised in order to allow architectures of from the east and global south to be considered equal to those of the west, and to ensure women, diverse ethnic groups, and students from poorer background have equal access to both education and practice.

UNDER WHICH CONDITIONS DOES ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION FLOURISH?

Architectural education emanates from a unique dialogue between the academic world and architectural practice. The best practitioners of architecture traditionally teach at the schools of architecture, while architectural researchers publish their research worldwide in journals and books that are read by the whole profession and a large part of the surrounding society.

The design studio is the energy field around which all pedagogy and curricula orbit. It is discussion-centered and responsive and can thrive both within and beyond the campus. It elicits free debate and constructive collaboration within a safe, inclusive and diverse climate whilst encouraging the experimental, irrational and speculative, constituting a platform for advanced free thought and experiment. Design studio teaching entails multiple pedagogical formats and transforms itself into a variety of spatial settings: lecture hall, laboratory, workshop, exhibition space.

Failure is the rocket fuel of innovation and expanded fields of enquiry. Architecture students are required to envision, experiment, edit and start again if necessary. Failure is not the end of a design project but the beginning of a better solution. Students are then encouraged to value the process and not just the result. The studio environment is safe and inclusive, allowing students time for self-directed learning, enabling authentic innovation and invention.

The opportunity to continuously inhabit a studio space is essential to architectural education productivity. A design studio is a black box, an unregulated context, negotiating its own complexities and contradictions. Its value lies in the platform it provides for debate, ideas exposure, making and testing spatial or theoretical concepts.

Architectural education can only serve the needs of a diverse society, if it is as diverse as the society it seeks to serve. Diversity is encouraged in the broadest sense – a diverse student and teacher body, diverse environments and diverse educational and evaluation forms contribute to meaningful outcomes.

ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND DESIGN PRACTICE: Teaching-through-design

Teaching for the future requires a pedagogy of playful anticipatory imagination. Architectural education is not only a matter of learning-by-doing, but also of teaching-through-design. It is intended to develop the particular “habitus” of an architect.

The transformation of architectural practice is dependent upon pioneering pedagogies. Pedagogies regularly require rethinking, rebooting and even reimagining without which progress in professional practice cannot be achieved.

Teaching through design fosters criticality, creativity and curiosity. By challenging the student to intertwine the diverse and often conflicting demands of ethics and aesthetics, economy and culture within their design proposals the student is taught to take a stance.

Architectural education develops resilience by continuous exchange of ideas and criticism. Students acquire resilience within the educational environment as much as outside of it. This skill enables them to offer rapid responses to fast-changing circumstances.

Teaching architecture is a practice in itself. Teaching design requires insight in both architectural as well as pedagogical practice. Moreover, the transformation of architectural practice and the responsive and explorative nature of teaching through design, inescapably leads to pioneering pedagogies.

ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: mutual learning

Professional life takes on various forms of practice. Architecture education prepares graduates for facing contemporary challenges that redefine the interaction between environment, technology, culture, politics and economics and therefore the boundaries of the architectural practice. The educational environment reflects the diversity of practices.

Architecture students are encouraged to explore the variety of roles they can assume in practice, in- and outside the discipline. Their skill set developed by design education invites them to explore the various paths linking their individual strengths to existing or emerging fields. In its turn, the educational environment therefore reflects the diversity of practices and professional pathways available, preparing students to deal with the open-ended, complex, dynamic and fluid, as well as interconnected challenges.

The reciprocity between practice and academia is vital. Academia, and architectural education in particular, needs to be connected not only with scientific research within universities, but also with the knowledge production occurring within professional practice. Professional practice stands in the forefront of actual societal challenges and demands and provides a unique source for capturing knowledge mediating the concerns of others.

Practitioner educators provide a means through which architectural education retains its relevance to professional practice. A balance of educators who maintain a professional practice and those devoted to academia is important to maintain. The teaching practitioner is not just mimicking professional practice: being a reporter from the front, (s)he directs the attention to what ought to be done. The teaching practitioner is a good architect, an empathic teacher, and a critical and inspirational meta-reflective thinker.

Professional merit equals academic qualification to enrich the educational environment as a whole. Securing the unique dialogue between theory and practice requires a balanced cooperation and synergy between both. A recognized expertise in design as well as designerly driven research to generate knowledge and critical insights are a substantial part of education. The qualification criteria for teaching practitioners needs to be clear, incorporated in an accreditation system and equal scientific research.

ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PRACTICE: resonating fields

Architectural Education requires a research climate. Conceiving architecture entails three modes of knowing: knowing based upon systematic knowledge of theory and technology, upon practical knowledge of cultural performance and upon procedural knowledge that leads to artistic creation. Architectural education thrives in a biotope in which these three fields resonate.

Academic design education is inquiry-based learning in which both the student and the teachers are engaged in a common quest. Inquiry-based teaching through design is edifying. The purpose of closely connecting architectural research and teaching is not only a matter of improving the design outcome of the students work, but also to induce an edifying process of developing the inquisitive mind of the student as well. For the inquisitive teacher, the design studio is a privileged site in which experiments can be done that practice does not allow.

In such conditions, architectural education and particularly the architectural design studio, becomes a place of research in itself. In architectural education, the application of theory and technical knowledge is the base for creative speculation. The studio provides an environment in which teachers and students push or even remove the borders of the discipline, generate and share new insights. Designing architecture is a way of exploring the world; through the process of conceiving architecture, the design studio creates a third medium of architectural discourse, next to theory and science.

Educational outcomes of inquisitive design studio work are validated as part of the large field of research output, and properly evaluated on its own terms. The contributions are not limited to the researchers, academics, teachers and practitioners. It is vital to the development of university level research and education that the students are given an equal role as contributor to the common.

Architectural education delivers inquisitive practitioners. The design studio is an educational environment that encourages curiosity driven research. It is a place of free thought, independent from economic and political pressure and market-driven needs,, whose lasting legacy fosters lifelong research in practice. The architecture graduate continues to develop a disposition that is not limiting professional practice to serving clients demands only, but also critically evaluates them and explores alternatives when appropriate.

Design education and didactics are a research field. Research on teaching methods and questions is an important and specific field of research. Since architectural education is a place of research in itself, and hence not only delivering proficient graduates, but impacting the discipline, academia and society as well, it is crucial to continuously wonder what we teach, how we teach, and why we teach as we do.