

Preface

Shaping Architectural Curricula for the European Higher Education Area

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1. What we have already done

The prospect of the creation of the European Area for Higher Education within the context of the Sorbonne-Bologna-Prague-Berlin process has constituted the central theme of all the past Hania Meetings of Heads of European Schools of Architecture. This prospect has triggered off our interest in getting to know better other schools of architecture and the persons involved in the decision-making for their future, and from this acquaintance to gain a deeper insight into our own schools and into our position in the European context of architectural education. What should we do about our schools in this new and increasingly changing social and financial context? What aims and objectives should we set and what strategies should we adopt to ensure their fulfilment? These are the fundamental questions for the answers of which our meetings pursue to create a constructive milieu.

For the creation of this milieu, our work went through various phases. In the debates that took place we critically followed the developments in the political context. We listened carefully to the positive as well as the negative considerations of the changes in the European context for architectural education. We managed to come to a unanimous agreement on the content of our own declaration: the Chania Statement. This crucial document set the framework for the principles of our debates, and at the same time it represented the views of one hundred schools of architecture, and conveyed them to all relevant national and European bodies. Moreover, from the debates we concluded that the nature of architectural education in the future is defined to a larger or lesser extent by the way in which these schools will deal with the four fundamental issues: firstly, the structure and content of architectural studies; secondly, the evaluation of the quality of school curricula; thirdly, the redefinition of the multifaceted professional profile of the architect of our days; and fourthly, the student and staff mobility, and the system of credits (ECTS).

For two consecutive meetings we focused our interest on these issues and we attempted to follow the various ways in which schools of architecture deal with them. We carefully mapped the points of convergence as well as divergence, the tendencies and dynamics, the particularities and differentiations. Through a thorough inquiry at schools of architecture, valid qualitative results yielded which could describe the nature and qualities characterizing a great number of schools of architecture in Europe. We continue to map the educational approaches and teaching methods in order to be able to draw a picture of the particularities of the European profile of education, but primarily to learn from the

others and to understand ourselves through this knowledge. Our efforts are gathered in the two volumes of proceedings generated from the last two meetings as well as in all volumes produced concerning the pedagogy of specific subject areas such as the two volumes of construction teaching, and the forthcoming volumes relating to the teaching of architectural design, urban design and conservation.

2. What we will do

In times of such fundamental changes, the importance of our meetings became apparent as they aim to integrate, develop and preserve a lively and dynamic milieu for communication, exchange and collectivity, and to cultivate creatively, with dialogue and collaboration, the future of architectural education in Europe. For such a milieu to be kept alive, it must not limit itself to the level of exchange of views and information but should be in a position to proceed in more constructive and creative syntheses. This is exactly the point on which the 7th Meeting of Heads focused this year. Its main objective was to schedule procedures for the development of tools and mechanisms which will more decisively support schools of architecture in their effort to be integrated in the European Higher Education Area.

More specifically, the 7th Meeting focused on the curriculum and in particular on its structure and the content of studies as these two parameters encapsulate answers to the question of quality, professional identity, and the dynamics of mobility. Whilst the system of studies in most schools of architecture in Europe comes from governmental bodies, educational structures and the content of studies are primarily issues dealt with by higher education academic institutions. The need for compatibility, comparability and competitiveness of higher education in Europe, as this is suggested in this new political context, requires reliable and objective information about educational structures and the content of studies, that is to say about the educational programmes we offer. We therefore urgently need new tools and approaches in order to be able to describe our curricula as well as to recompose them in the prospect of the reforms suggested by this new political context of the European Commission.

To better grasp the school curricula and to create the conditions for their comparability, the 7th Meeting focused on the learning outcomes and competences to be ensured by school curricula. By learning outcomes we mean the set of competences including knowledge, understanding and skills that a learner is expected to know/understand/demonstrate after completion of a process of learning – short or long. They can be identified and related to integral programmes of study and for individual units of study (modules). Competences are normally obtained in different course units and can therefore not be linked to one unit. It is, however, very important to identify which units teach the various competences in order to ensure that these are actually assessed, and that quality standards are met.

Competences can be divided into two types: generic competences which in principle concern the broader academic education of an architect and are to a great extent subject-independent and subject-specific competences. The approach to subject-specific competences is proposed to run in two parallel and complementary axes: The first axis concerns the competences related to the graduate skills to practice the various forms of the architectural profession as these are achieved by schools of architecture today. The second axis concerns the graduate competences related to research in architecture.

It goes without saying that competences and learning outcomes should correspond to the final qualifications of a learning programme. Competences are described as points of reference for curriculum design and evaluation, and not as straitjackets. They can allow flexibility and autonomy in the construction of curricula. At the same time, they provide a common language for describing what curricula are aiming at.

Learning outcomes and competences are the most relevant elements in the design, construction and assessment of qualifications ensured by schools of architecture, as they constitute the reference points to be met. It is of vital importance to discuss and agree on a rank order of learning outcomes and competences which will enable schools to structure their curricula. This way each school will be able to articulate their educational objectives as well as their reference points for quality assessment. In our effort, according to the principles adopted in the Hania Statement, we must not seek to develop any sort of unified, prescriptive, or definitive European curriculum, nor try to create any rigid set of subject specifications to restrict or direct educational content and/or to damage the rich diversity of European higher architectural education. Furthermore, we must not restrict the independence of academics and subject specialists or damage local and national autonomy.

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