

Monitoring Architectural Design Education in European Schools of Architecture

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Monitoring Educational Structures

The present volume includes a series of texts that describe courses taught at schools of architecture in Europe and focused on the design of architectural space. The collection of these texts was realised and funded by Socrates Thematic Networks, in the framework of activities of the European Network of Heads of Schools of Architecture (ENHSA) Thematic Network.

The basis for the creation of the ENHSA Thematic Network was the need of Europe's schools of architecture to organise a supporting framework in order to integrate themselves into the European Higher Architectural Education Area. Three years ago, eighty schools of architecture undertook, through their Heads of School and Academic Program Coordinators and with the support of the European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE), to coordinate a series of academic activities allocated by the appropriate members of the academic community. These activities aimed at creating a working environment for dialogue and exchange of information, data and ideas, as well as for the comprehensive monitoring of architectural education structures in Europe.

As is widely known, the EU policies towards a cohesive European Higher Education Area, as expressed by the Sorbonne-Bologna-Prague-Berlin process, stimulated a vigorous mobility of ideas and views on the future of architectural education in Europe. The perspective of the creation of a European Higher Architectural Education Area is presented not only as a demand, or as an EU request, but principally as a great challenge: to re-form, creatively, architectural studies in Europe for a more coherent, more qualitative and more attractive European architectural education worldwide. This prospect has triggered the interest of the architectural education community. The central issue in the debates on architectural education today is the way (values, principles, objectives, priorities, methods, strategies and actions) that each school will manage its reform processes in order to be an active, valuable and influential part of this new European environment. Moreover, it is becoming more and more evident that cooperation and coordinated collective efforts are essential to the creation of such a new environment.

In an attempt to promote and enhance the academic physiognomy of European schools of architecture through cooperation and collaboration, ENHSA in the spring of 2003 invited the Deans, Vice-Deans, Heads of School and Academic Program Coordinators to call on their architectural design teachers to contribute to the creation of a working document that will be a record of the teaching practices, teaching strategies and pedagogic methods of the subject area of architectural design.

This record is incorporated in the present volume, entitled 'Architectural Design Education in European Schools of Architecture', which will be distributed to all Schools of Architecture, Partners of the ENHSA Thematic Network and members of the EAAE. All the material will also appear on the ENHSA Website (www.enhsa.net), to reach a greater number of architectural design teachers and serve as widely as possible as a useful tool. This volume is expected to constitute a starting point for the creation in the near future of a valuable and extended corpus into which all educators can delve for information on the state of the art in architectural design education around Europe.

Architectural Design Education in Europe

The initiative for the creation of this volume, is a part of a broader effort to shape a milieu for exchanges of views, ideas and teaching practices between teachers of architectural design in schools of architecture in Europe. Architectural Design is the fundamental subject in architectural education. It constitutes the core of architectural education and possesses the greatest part of the total of teaching that any school of architecture dedicates to educate an architect.

Despite the fact that architectural design has the greatest weight in the education of architects, it is interesting to follow the expression of this weight in figures. According to the results of a recent (May-August 2003) inquiry carried out in the framework of the activities of the ENHSA Thematic Network and aimed at recording the state of the art of architectural education in Europe, in a sample of sixty schools in the average total of teaching hours required for the diploma in architecture, Architectural Design accounted for 33%.

It is interesting to note that this percentage, as an expression of the weight given to the subject area, has the following characteristics. The mean, which is 33%, is close to the median, which is 32,33%; in most schools of architecture, in other words, the curricular share of architectural design teaching is close to the average. The extremes of teaching time in the schools of the sample are 19% (minimum) and 62% (maximum). With a standard deviation of 10,12% we can see that the majority of schools of the sample attribute to architectural design teaching time that fluctuates between 23% and 43% of the total teaching time.

The weight of the presence of architectural design in the curriculum of schools of architecture in Europe is not different in big schools (with more than 1000 students) compared to smaller ones (with fewer than 1000 students). Moreover, no differentiations are observed with regard to the geographical position of schools in the different parts of Europe. It is also interesting to observe that the more the teaching time dedicated to architectural design deviates from the average, the more the differentiation of the overall physiognomy of a school. It becomes evident, therefore, that these approximations to the maximum or minimum rates correspond to entirely different curricula. These curricula, in turn, correspond to different educational perceptions, teaching methods which lead to different learning outcomes and competences, and effectively to titles and degrees with different qualitative aspects. Thus, such an x-ray of school curricula is meaningful not in an effort to facilitate convergence of differences but, on the contrary, in an effort to support the creation of groups with similar approaches to architectural design that, through collaboration and exchange, would enable the development and advancement of the characteristics of their particular identity.

The Teaching of Architectural Design

Though the investigation of the quantitative aspects of architectural design teaching in Europe give us a series of clues on the identity of this teaching, this does not mean that they could substitute its qualitative investigation, which is itself a special research pursuit. In what way could we study a teaching practice in the subject area of architectural design? How can we record the qualitative aspects of the contemporary complexity, pluralism and polyphony of architectural education in Europe? Even though this question is not new, there is very little we can testify as valuable and broadly accepted responses.

As the debate on architectural education advances and as the details for the content and articulation of architectural studies become central to this debate, the breadth of polyphony in architectural education in Europe becomes evident. Every attempt to investigate and record ends up with a broad spectrum of approaches and views on how schools appreciate the subject area of architecture. This fact is directly translated into a broad spectrum of teaching strategies, practices and methods which, in turn, are reflected in the various skills and competences ensured by the various diplomas awarded to graduates. Our sense that awareness of the existing

differentiations constitutes a particularly fertile experience was the departure point for the development of initiatives aiming at the creation of a network of teachers of architectural design that will explore these differentiations and arrive at constructive conclusions. The initiative started with the consensus that it is necessary for a genuine material to offer particular information about different teaching paradigms around Europe. That this information would facilitate the exchange of ideas and research in architectural education, so useful to all eager educators. It is expected that this monitoring would provide a raw material for further investigation and research, will enhance the dialogue among them and will enrich their experience in the teaching of architectural design. The creation of this volume is the first step in that direction.

Monitoring Architectural Design Education

The research on architectural design pedagogy that is to say the investigation of ways in which the subject area of architectural design becomes a teaching subject, presupposes the definition of some fundamental issues, the analysis of which could reveal views, positions, theses, logics, approaches, principles and values as well as strategies, actions, operations and design processes. Our investigation was oriented towards two broader categories of issues. The first one concerns issues relating to the content of teaching, and the second one to pedagogic strategies and teaching methods. In other words, the first one concerns what is taught in an architectural design course and the second one, how this content is taught. The invitation to architectural design teachers to contribute to the creation of the present volume was structured on the basis of these questions.

The invitation was open to all those who felt that their contribution could help the reader comprehend the pedagogy of the subject area, the educational objectives and the techniques, methods and means that ensure the fulfilment of these objectives. Contributors were invited to describe, within certain guidelines, the course they teach, and to explain the overall philosophy of their teaching of the subject area. The number of contributors per school was limited to two, and their task was to describe at most two different key courses for the subject area that could be considered innovative and/or experimental.

The suggested guidelines did not only deal with practical issues of presentation but also prescribed a possible structure to allow for comparability and, if possible, for homogeneity. The descriptions are therefore structured around four key issues, which form the common ground of the presentations.

The first of the issues the contributors were asked to deal was the philosophy of the course, with emphasis on the perception of Architectural Design and Architecture in general, the educational objectives, the knowledge expected to be acquired and the skills and competences expected to be developed, the priorities and values on which the teaching of Architectural Design focuses. These issues may be expressed in the following questions:

What do I teach in the Architectural Design course I run? Why do I teach what I teach in the Architectural Design course I am describing?

The second issue includes a description of the chosen Architectural Design course, the pedagogy and educational method adopted. It was considered useful to discuss the pedagogic techniques and strategies for the development of the course (stages and phases, vehicles, activities, lectures, debates, presentations, visits, bibliography, precedent study, etc.) the issues dealt with at each stage of the course and the reason(s) behind this choice, and the general organization and structure of the course. All the points mentioned aimed at allowing for an explicit and effective description of the philosophy and the educational objectives of the course. These issues may be expressed in the following questions:

How do I teach in the Architectural Design course for which I am responsible? Why do I choose to teach in this way the Architectural Design course I am describing?

The third issue concerns the Architectural Design exercise(s) the students work on. It would be useful to describe the general and special characteristics of the design theme(s) and the exercise(s) of the Course, the criteria upon which this design theme is chosen, the way it is introduced to the students, the questions the exercise poses, the method whereby the teacher monitors the development of the exercise, the focal points of the exercise, the submission requirements, the evaluation of the exercise. The above descriptions were to be supported by references to the way and the extent to which the choice of the exercise(s) ensures the fulfillment of the educational objectives of the course and allows for the best grasp of its overall philosophy by the students. These issues may be expressed in the following questions:

What exercise(s) and design themes I run? Why do I suggest these exercises for the teaching of Architectural Design?

The fourth issue is suggested to cover questions related to the difficulties encountered by the teacher in running the course. More specifically, the teacher was asked to offer an overview and a critical appreciation of the course with regard to its effectiveness and contribution to the overall school curriculum, with suggestions as to how its quality might be improved. These issues may be expressed in the following questions:

How satisfied am I with the course of Architectural Design I teach? How could I improve my course?

The Structure of the Volume

Forty one responses from architectural design teachers from Schools of Architecture around Europe were received in this first step, and are presented in this volume. Their contributions are organised in three parts. The division was not based on similarities relating to perceptions of architectural design or to the teaching practices applied: attempts to follow such a taxonomy led to a great number of sections and of cases difficult to compare, to blurred distinctions between them and to a new realization of the complexity and variety of approaches to architectural design teaching. Rather, since the main objective of this volume was to record teaching practices in the subject area, it was organized on the basis of criteria related to the teaching process. More specifically, the criteria governing the organization of the volume were the characteristics of the course, as these derive from its position in the school curriculum (year of studies the course is taught, teaching hours dedicated to the course), and the characteristics of the recipient, that is, the class to which the course is addressed (number of students, number of teaching staff, student/staff ratio). The reader can find for each presented course, information about the number of students of each course, the number of staff teaching this course, the student /staff ratio, the duration of the course in terms of number of weeks and in terms of teaching hours. The interest is thus focused on the teaching itself, inviting the reader to investigate, through the strategies and methods described, the attestations, views and positions of teachers on the subject they teach.

The first part, entitled "initiations", includes contributions on elementary courses, that is, introductory courses to architectural design run in the third year of studies at the latest. This enables the reader to investigate the pedagogic strategies applied to give students their first acquaintance with the theoretical and practical issues of the act of designing. The logic of this classification is that these courses are addressed to students whose basic architectural education is just starting and their main objective is to initiate them to the design activity and the design thinking. The texts in this section were, in principle, classified according to the number of teaching hours a school dedicates to this architectural design course. We can distinguish two types of courses in this part according to this criterion: Courses with less than 200 teaching hours and courses with more than 200 teaching hours.

The second part, entitled "articulations", includes case studies of courses that are addressed to

students who are at the second or third year of studies, that is to say in their first steps towards the articulation of a way of thinking and designing architecture. The courses have, therefore, again an introductory character but they more profound and try to delve into a more integrated teaching of architectural design. The texts in this section are classified along the same lines as those in the first part: that is the number of teaching hours allocated to it. In this part we can make a subdivision in four types of presented course. The one concerns short courses with less than 100 teaching hours, the other concerns course with teaching hours between 100 and 200 teaching hours, the third type concerns long length courses with more than 200 teaching hours. There is a fourth type which collects vertical studios, that is to say studios addressed to students belonging to different years of studies.

The third part, entitled "advancements", includes texts that describe how architectural design is taught to students who have already acquired a relatively well-elaborated knowledge and conscience of spatial issues as well as an adequate design experience which permits them to go steps ahead and to investigate more advanced design issues. The texts in this section are classified along the same lines as those in the previous parts, that is the number of teaching hours allocated to it. We can distinguish here again three types of courses: the short length courses with less than 100 teaching hours, the courses with teaching hours between 100 and 200 teaching hours and finally the great length studios with more than 200 teaching hours.

The present volume is a first attempt to elaborate the raw material that tackled issues related to architectural design education. The ENHSA Thematic Network, and the Architectural Design Sub-network in particular, are committed to the further development and the critical and constructive processing of this material and of new material to come from new initiatives, in order to provide a useful and functional tool for the advancement of architectural design teaching in schools of architecture in Europe.