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# Multiple identities: the civic function of architectural education in Europe.

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# ***Multiple Identities: The civic function of architectural education in Europe***

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Architectural education asks students to look beyond the confines of the studio to embrace global cultures, politics, and social contexts critically. Through making, digital interventions, drawing and critical analysis, architectural practices reveal complex narratives of the contexts they emerge from, reflecting multiple identities of place, heritage, and culture.

This special edition of *Charrette* marks the 10th Biennial Congress of EURAU, (European Research in Architecture & Urbanism). EURAU is a network of schools and researchers in Architecture and Urbanism, which meets biannually in a conference to share their insights and concerns. EURAU's main objective is to establish these meetings as a place of debate and discussion of contemporary discourses in Architecture, City and Town Planning. This is a committed action organised by the Universities and contributes to the Europe 2020 Strategy towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive society. First initiated by the French Ministry of Culture in 2004, EURAU has convened regularly and continues to grow.

In September 2021, at the tail end of the global pandemic, over seventy academics met both in person and virtually to debate the multiple identities of the European City. Post Brexit, post-pandemic, there are still many questions about how these events will shape architectural and urban pedagogies, but what did emerge was the shared understanding of the University as a civic and cultural institution that is uniquely placed to examine these concerns. The overarching theme of the conference was to address how diverse architectural pedagogies coalesce through engagement with key contemporary and theoretical concerns of identity, difference, memory, and culture in the making of the civic in the city. Contributions presented in this special edition address these key conference themes but do so through a combination of thought-provoking urban studio projects, theoretical studies, and pedagogical proposals for pan-European collaboration.

#### **The imperative for the civic function of architectural education**

Schools of architecture play an essential role in the cities where they are located, and each city presents its own complexities. In particular, since the covid-19 pandemic, cities have seen a transformation in the way citizens have engaged with their public and retail spaces. Through studio briefs, architecture students are able to engage with and creatively explore these issues. Without the constraint of real budgets and, to some extent, regulatory confines, they are able to think and respond in an experimental and creative way. What is critical is to find spaces of convergence where the work developed in the schools can be shared with communities, organisations, professionals and policymakers to be discussed and disseminated. The contributions included in this special issue present different approaches to these convergences between schools of architecture and stakeholders in an international context.

*Twentieth-century contexts for civic spaces of experimentation in architectural education*

The imperative for a civic architecture seems as urgent now as at any time in the mid to late twentieth-century when Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood made their anarchic proposition that beneficial social conditions might be mediated through architectural interventions such as the Fun Palace. In a daring and brave moment, Cedric Price established models for civic engagement that still represent an exciting approach that could be adopted in architectural pedagogy. For example, at Staffordshire University, the annual Cedric Price Day, which was first established at the closing proceedings of the EURAU conference, continues to explore ideas such as the Fun Palace and Potteries Thinkbelt as models for a radical and activist approach to a civic architecture. Price published his proposal, *The Potteries Thinkbelt*, in issue 2 of June 1966 of *New Society*. Essentially, the Potteries Thinkbelt proposes an innovative civic university model linked to local industries. A railway line would support a mobile educational provision based on temporary structures, with the coaches becoming classrooms, with students being integrated within the urban areas contributing to the existing communities.

When the next round of university building starts, perhaps we should treat education less as a polite cathedral-town amenity. We print here an architectural project for a 20,000-student campus in north Staffordshire which is built around a road and rail network, emphasises temporary housing and ties students with the community.<sup>1</sup>

Price brings into debate questions such as regeneration and sustainability with this project. As early as the 1960s, Price proposed a circular economy model for this project, where the structures can be disassembled and reused, reducing waste and carbon footprint. He linked sustainability with the involvement of the Higher Education sector and local communities, which had, as an outcome, a plan for the regeneration of a post-industrial area that, sixty years later, in 2021, addresses similar regional and global issues.

Similarly, at Birmingham School of Architecture and Design, who were co-hosts of the EURAU conference, we see a long history of transdisciplinary collaboration through live projects, which exemplify similar values to those of Price & Littlewood's legacy in their inception. Collaborative Laboratory (Co\Lab) is a live project module running at BSoAD for over ten years, where academics, communities and students co-create and co-produce creative transdisciplinary projects across vertical studios. The projects themselves directly engage with the dynamic context of the city and use transdisciplinary design strategies to produce conceptual ideas and experimental design approaches for real-life clients, ranging from commercial and creative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to community charities and local authorities and in particular, function as a civic mediator between the city and University to drive forward the school's framework for sustainable and inclusive futures.

## Sustainable pedagogies

Following the UK government's declaration of the Climate Emergency in May 2019, sustainability and designing for net-zero have been put at the core of the architecture curriculums in schools of architecture in the UK. The 'State of the UK Climate 2020' report evidences that cities in the UK are becoming urban heat islands, and architects and designers can do much to mitigate this.<sup>2</sup> This also raises the need for transformation of our built environment through retrofit and green infrastructure to adapt it to different climate conditions. With the built environment contributing over 40% of the carbon emissions in the UK, architects, designers and construction professionals have a central role in tackling climate change, with schools of architecture recognising that through their training, graduates must develop the skills, attributes and knowledge to take on these challenges.

In this context, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) published the 'Sustainable Outcomes Guide', which defines eight sustainable outcomes that are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Climate Change Challenge addressed to chartered practices laying out a series of targets to reduce operational energy, embodied carbon and potable water.<sup>3</sup>

With the new requirements from the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) for the accreditation of the architecture programmes in the UK, embedding sustainability within the curriculum is a core priority for the schools of architecture.<sup>4</sup> Educators have for some time been working on developing strategies for sustainable pedagogies; making students and communities aware of how to improve the environment and design according to sustainable standards is at the core of the architecture curriculum. However, as discussed in Advance HE's 2021 guidance 'Education for Sustainable Development', sustainable development in Higher Education must be considered to include inequalities in health and well-being and economic disparities alongside climate change and loss of biodiversity. These all require urgent attention in the curriculum, which brings us to the focus of this edition, the civic role of architectural education and universities, students and academics' roles in engagement in local, regional and global communities. Through this special issue, we argue that it is essential that architectural training dedicates time to build relationships between students and communities. The more the students engage with the city and the people who live in them, the more likely the proposals they design - not only as students but also later as young professionals - will understand and relate to the needs and values of their users. For interventions to last and be used, they need to be integrated within the city, and this highlights the importance of establishing dialogues between students, professionals, policymakers and citizens.

## Practices in environmental justice (engaging with the city)

Environmental justice, defined as the intertwining of environmental and social differences and the spatially distributed patterns of inequality that impact health, well-being, and quality of life, is manifest in almost every dimension of urban life.<sup>5</sup> As such, it becomes essential to address environmental justice (and injustices) in architectural education, ensuring that future architects and designers understand the impact of systemic challenges that the built environment brings to the well-being of communities. As witnessed in our own teaching, the pedagogy of the live brief, with a social and value-driven focus, brings much greater benefit than simply to the public alone. Often these projects become a threshold moment for students where they start to engage with the nature of wicked problem.<sup>6</sup> The process becomes a transformative pedagogy, where they develop the skills and knowledge to tackle the urgent challenges of the climate, biodiversity, and economic crises we currently face.

In the following contributions, we bring examples from Europe and beyond of studio projects and briefs that involve communities and large-scale interventions that take on these challenges. By levelling up the use of materials, installations and urban infrastructures of deprived areas, sustainability helps to address issues such as poverty and inequality. This is thoroughly explored by the human geographer Edward Soja, who defined Spatial Justice as 'the fair and equitable distribution in the space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them'.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, sustainable urban strategies are essential to tackle spatial and environmental justice.

This special issue presents a selection of texts presented at the EURAU2020 conference. These contributions have been divided into two thematic sections. The first four articles set up and discuss frameworks and strategies for civic engagement between schools of architecture, the cities and the wider context.

The first text, 'From Civic Responsibility to Socio-Spatial Civic Agency: Critiquing the Civic University Movement through live projects' by Matthew Jones and Alessandro Columbano explores the impact that live projects developed in collaboration can have in the city. It contextualises the pedagogical practices at Birmingham School of Architecture and Design within its ambition to become a Civic University. To complement Jones and Columbano's framework, Aleksandar Dundjerovic and Maria Sanchez discuss in 'Interdisciplinary Pedagogical Environments in Architectural Education' the creation of innovative teaching environments to construct creative dialogues in architecture, landscape and performance practice that can be applied to the creation of new intersectional knowledge in various fields.

Looking more closely at educational strategies, the contribution 'Common Aims: The UNIVERSITY of Universities experiment' by Maria Luna Nobile and Javier Sanchez Merina discusses the aim of University of Universities,

a research project on pedagogy in architecture. Designed by architecture educators, the UoU develops the basic idea of exchanging between our schools of architecture through digital platforms triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Another model of educational strategies is presented in the text 'Reflections on Extracurricular Activities (ECAs) as a Pedagogy in Architectural Education'. Islam Abohela reflects on how Extra Curricular Activities could play a key role in supporting the civic function of architectural education in Europe and the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) proposals for architecture education in the UK. The text discusses a series of case studies in Bahrain, Egypt, Turkey and the UK.

The last three contributions present case studies on how academic research can have an impact beyond the schools of architecture:

Angela D'Agostino, Giuseppe D'Ascoli and Giovangiuseppe Vanelli in 'Staging the City through the Architectures of Mobility: Napoli through step-by-step storytelling' present a postgraduate research project considering how the underground stations of Naples are capable of preserving the Mediterranean essence of the city within the architectural dimension. Looking into a bigger scale of intervention, the text 'Virtual Remakings of the City' by Anca Mitrache, Anda-Ioana Sfintes, and Oana Anca Abalaru Obancea brings into discussion architecture studio proposals as virtual explorations and virtual re-makings of urban contexts. The importance of the involvement of local architects in students' projects is highlighted in the contribution 'Crafted Space: A hybrid structure in Platres village', Yiorgos Hadjichristou, Markella Menikou and Angela Kyriacou Petrou present the summer school in Cyprus that was organised between the school of architecture and the Architects Association (CAA), a programme that has been taking place annually since 2009. During this workshop, the students worked collaboratively in the design and production of an installation - a series of timber follies - in the community of Platres in Cyprus.

These contributions present different international strategies for civic engagement of schools of architecture across Europe and aim to establish new models that can be used and adapted to teach to learn architecture. We hope this issue inspires architectural educators to develop civic strategies in their courses across the UK and internationally and to support the nurturing and development of a future generation of architects with social, ethical, and civic dimensions to their practice.

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