
ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION FOR WORLD CITIZENSHIP

Massimo Santanicchia, Associate Professor, massimo@lhi.is
Iceland University of the Arts IUA, School of Architecture, Reykjavik, Iceland
Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Iceland in Culture Studies and Education & Diversity

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from fourteen qualitative interviews conducted with students of architecture from eleven schools of the Nordic Baltic Academy of Architecture (NBAA) and from numerous conversations conducted with students in architecture at my home institution, Iceland University of the Arts (IUA). The findings of these conversations reveal that students consider a meaningful architectural education one that helps them make ethical design choices. To do so, respondents indicated that schools should help students find their inner compass, develop their professional skills and ethical attitudes, think independently, and make a difference in society and beyond. Four narratives emerge that describe the multiple roles of an architect in our society: the dissident intellectual, the ethical professional, the storyteller, and the caregiver of the world. Based on these findings, and with the support of the work of Henry Giroux's "Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education" and Martha Nussbaum's "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," a framework referred to as Cosmopolitan Citizenship Architecture Education (CCAEE) was developed.

Keywords: Architectural Education, Citizenship, Cosmopolitan

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an edited and updated version of the original one: "Becoming Cosmopolitan Citizens Architects: A Reflection on Architectural Education Across the Nordic Baltic Academy of Architecture (NBAA): A Student's Perspective," published in *The Hidden School Papers: EAAE Annual Conference 2019 Proceedings, Zagreb*. The research project is the result of conversations conducted with fourteen architecture students across the Nordic Baltic Academy of Architecture (NBAA) and with students in architecture at my home institution, the Iceland University of the Arts (IUA), where I am an associate professor and program director in architecture. The NBAA network is composed of sixteen schools of architecture.

My intention with this paper is to report students' voices conversing and reflecting together about something that is essential to teachers and students: the education of an architect, and possibly to find valid answers to the question: What does a good architectural education look like? Based on these findings, Henry Giroux's "Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education" and Martha Nussbaum's "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" are then used to formulate a framework referred to as Cosmopolitan Citizenship Architecture Education (CCAEE).

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In 2016, an inspiring book edited by Elizabeth Resnick, titled *Developing Citizen Designers*, gave me the opportunity to reflect deeply on the value of citizenship in the education of an architect. Resnick opens the book referring to the words of the designer Milton Glaser: “Good design is good citizenship” (Resnick 2016, 12) and by stating that designers have the moral responsibility to use their skills to address the ongoing social and ecological crisis. *Developing Citizen Designers* not only encourages educators and students to embrace the notion of citizenship in design education but also provides numerous case studies that illustrate a design pedagogy capable of developing social awareness and prompt action. This reinforced my belief that architecture has a strong societal role that goes beyond forms experimentation, and consequently it is the duty of architectural educators to empower students to be world citizens who can act in the interest of the entire ecosystem to which they belong. My interest in citizenship led me to the work of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010) and the educator Henry Giroux (1980).

Martha Nussbaum defines a cosmopolitan citizen as “the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (2010, 154). A citizen of the world is a person with a unique identity, strong local bonds, and acute awareness of the state of the world: of its problems, injustices, and possibilities. Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan education promotes the understanding that we are all unique, precious, interdependent, and relational beings. As such, we need to learn to dialogue and collaborate to face the current crisis.

Henry Giroux defines citizenship education as transdisciplinary, relational, holistic, profoundly political, collaborative, and instigative of hope for a better world. The primary focus of citizenship education is to enhance civic courage by stimulating “students’ passions, imaginations, and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social, political, and economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives” (Giroux 1980, 357). Citizenship education is based on critical thinking, social awareness, and action competence. Critical thinking requires challenging the status quo and reexamining old practices and established beliefs. Social awareness is about developing empathic and social skills to understand the conditions of others. Social action means having the courage to pursue ideas beyond the classroom into the world and being inextricably related to everything within the web of life.

Cosmopolitan citizenship education requires an openness to guaranteeing that all learners have equal access to education (Wink 2000, 71). Cosmopolitanism and citizenship expand the language of architecture by encouraging educators and students to be much more than spatial explorers but to be world citizen architects who are interested in designing how all earthlings can live harmoniously together. Becoming cosmopolitan citizen architects means learning to make ethical design decisions that are grounded in their social and environmental context and are equally influenced by the understanding of their local and global implications—ultimately, we are all connected as citizens of the world. Architects have a social and ecological responsibility to design spaces for communities in harmony with nature and to pursue the spirit of social and environmental justice. With this serving as the theoretical context, the next step was to dialogue directly with the students.

3. METHODS

Dialogues are the essence of education: “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire 1993, 66). During the fall of 2018, I visited eleven schools of architecture that are part of the NBAA network and conversed with fourteen students, five men and nine women, between twenty-two and thirty-two years old, in their fourth and the fifth years of study. All interviews were semistructured, initiated by the following three research questions:

- Q1 What skills should students have after studying architecture?
- Q2 How should these skills be taught?
- Q3 How can the education of an architect be of special importance to our society?

The questions were designed to be sufficiently “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (Charmaz 2014, 85). Question number three is a “sensitizing concept” to encourage the interlocutors to reflect on the societal role and responsibility of an architect (Charmaz 2014, 30). All interviews were recorded and transcribed for a total of 8 hours and 43 minutes. All participants received the transcripts and were invited to make comments or amendments if necessary.

On my return to the IUA in January 2019 I continued asking the same questions to my current and future students in formats of group interviews, singular interviews, and workshops. So, the same three questions were asked to a total of thirty-two current students at the IUA and sixty-four prospective students, specifically:

- 34 prospective students in architecture (interviewed May 6 and 7, 2019);
- 30 prospective students in architecture (interviewed May 27 and 28, 2020);
- 21 second-year students in architecture at the IUA;
- 11 international students studying at the IUA during the academic year 2019–20.

All the interviews were analyzed using the abbreviated Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, which helped me examine the data (transcribed interviews) before framing a specific hypothesis (Charmaz 2014). By listening closely to the students’ voices and their narratives, strong connections emerged between them and the understanding of Cosmopolitan Citizenship Architectural Education. The intention of this paper is therefore to show the genesis of this concept by using both literature reviews and students’ dialogues.

4. FINDINGS: FOUR NARRATIVES

All students interviewed began their answers by recognizing the overwhelming scope of architectural education and questioning whether it is doing enough to prepare them to respond to the ecological and social crisis felt to be of paramount importance for the continuation of life on our planet. These fundamental concerns shape students’ vision of architectural education to be intended as a social platform for personal growth and critical thinking, for social awareness, and collaboration with other people for a better world. Four fundamental narratives consequently emerge. They describe the architect as a “dissident intellectual,” an “ethical professional,” a “storyteller,” and a “caregiver of the world.” These four narratives were consistently present in all the answers to the three questions and

constitute the foundation to build the conception of Cosmopolitan Citizenship Architecture Education CCAE.

4.1 First Narrative: The Architect as a Dissident Intellectual

This narrative is based on understanding the role of architects as people who are critical of the current reality and who use their knowledge and voice for ecological and social amelioration. This resonates tremendously with how the educator bell hooks defines dissident intellectuals as people who “are critical of the status quo and . . . dare to make their voices heard on behalf of justice” (2003, 187). Respondents understand that even though architecture has a vivid image, it is not just a picture to be published in a magazine: “Architecture education should not just be about designing beautiful houses; it should make us critical” (student in architecture at Chalmers, Gothenburg, November 14, 2018). This element of criticality or awareness is considered foundational for their education. Students know architectural education is a lengthy and complex process; nevertheless, they show a surprising optimism in firmly believing in the importance of architecture.

Respondents believe that “you can use that kind of process (architectural thinking) in many ways” (students in architecture at AAalto, Helsinki, December 11, 2018), since architecture is about making sense of the world, dealing with its complexity, and finding solutions. But to be effective, architectural education needs to act as a social platform capable of exposing students to different sources of knowledge, learning conditions, experiences, and diverse points of views. Specifically, one student states:

Teachers must be different so that they can support the students to find their own voice, their own path, and in that way, they may be [able to] find their voice and then can contribute to the society in some ways or have an opinion and so on. (Aalto, Helsinki, December 11, 2018)

Exposing students to a diversity of thoughts is key for helping students find their inner compass, their mastery, and for developing the empathy and confidence that is needed to then position themselves as outspoken, critical, socially aware architects—that is, to acquire the role of dissident intellectual, of a person who uses architectural thinking for the greater good. One student states: “We are not the same persons, and the school should not produce the same architecture students” (NTNU, Trondheim, December 20, 2018). When students feel confident about their skills and optimistic about their future, they also feel liberated and empowered to imagine their many possible roles in society. And they embrace the diverse possibilities with enthusiasm, as one student states: “This is not the time to be in one cage to decide whether you are a professor or a practitioner; this is the time to be all over the place!!” (RTU, Riga, November 29, 2018). There is therefore no singular dominant vision of what an architect should do. Architecture is plural and diverse, and architects will bring their working method and critical collaborative capacities into every task they are working on.

4.2 Second Narrative: The Architect as an Ethical Professional

“I look forward to participating in the creation of a more sustainable future.” (Prospective student in architecture, IUA, Reykjavik, May 27, 2020)

Students are aware of the basic competencies that are necessary to operate as architects; these range from having a good spatial understanding to the ability to visualize and test their ideas by using the appropriate software. One student says: “What I think of first of all is critical thinking, problem solving, spatial thinking, and basic skills to express your ideas like drawings. One very important thing is to have an opinion and not be afraid of expressing it” (VDA, Vilnius, November 22, 2018). Nevertheless, these competences alone are not enough to educate good architects. Another student says:

I think that architects should not only have knowledge about using computer skills but also have the understanding of how to make architecture more social and think about other problems, which are, I think, something of what we have to consider when we work tomorrow.

(VGTU, Vilnius, November 27, 2018)

Architects design buildings and processes, and the act of design is about making choices, the impacts of which reverberate in society and beyond. Architects should therefore be aware of their role and responsibility in society and sensitive to the fact that for every design choice there is a corresponding social and ecological impact that needs to be understood and evaluated, not just in terms of costs and space but also in terms of its social and ecological value. Designing the right thing is therefore more important than designing the thing right. The latter is focused on the accuracy of the product, while the former is based on critical thinking and reflects its context in the bigger picture. What are the potential social and environmental effects on this act of designing? What power relations are shifted? What other options are there? What could be the long-term consequences? Who makes the decision? Who builds your architecture? In other words: “What is the story behind a beautiful building?” (Chalmers, Gothenburg, November 14, 2018).

Students do not want to be part of a system of ecological and social exploitation; they want to operate as a positive, restorative force in their society and, most importantly, they need to believe that what they are doing is the right thing. One student puts it in these terms: “I just want to do something that interests me and have a positive impact for our environment and society” (Aalto, Helsinki, December 11, 2018). Students show empathy, sensibility, and courage to operate ethically for the greater good of the society.

4.3 Third Narrative: The Architect as a Storyteller

“It does not have to end with an architecture project.” (AHO, Oslo, November 16, 2018)

This narrative is based on the importance of storytelling. Architects are people who ultimately do not build but rather coordinate the social and design processes that lead to building. Communication is fundamental in this collaborative process, and architects need to learn how to engage and converse with the world. One student says: “I think the responsibility of the school is to give the students a way of interacting with life with their field of work” (RTU, Riga, November 29, 2018).

Consilience, or the ability to link together principles and people from different disciplines, is valued as an important quality that an architect should have. As one student explains it: “I think that the most important skill is cooperation and collaboration” (BAS, Bergen, November 19, 2018). This quality is fundamental for solving the ongoing social and ecological crisis. Consilience requires social and collaborative skills to operate as an activist

and protector of the common good. It is not just about problem solving but also about revealing important and cogent issues of our times and creating sufficient consent and support to be able to tackle them collectively. One student illustrates it this way: “to be critical and to be able to work with others, and what I mean with this is the capacity to put your feet in somebody else’s shoes, so this is also in terms of empathy” (Chalmers, Gothenburg, November 14, 2018).

Storytelling in this sense then refers to the ability of the architect to understand cogent issues and to reveal them using architectural thinking and tools (models, diagrams, narration, photography, installations, publications, writings) as vehicles for communication. To help students develop these skills, schools have to become platforms for socialization, allowing different knowledge and experiences to work together, as one student says: “I think everything should be connected” (KADK, Copenhagen, December 22, 2018).

4.4 Fourth Narrative: The Architect as a Caregiver of the World

“I would like to participate in creating and changing the world.”
(Prospective student in architecture, IUA, Reykjavik, May 6, 2019)

An important aspect that needs to be underlined is that despite the fact that the interviews started with the specific question, “What skills should students have after studying architecture?,” students’ responses began by illustrating the context of their education in a time of global ecological and social crisis. Respondents position themselves primarily as people who care for the earth, for the common good: “Architecture has an impact on everybody’s lives” (KADK, Copenhagen, December 22, 2018). “You should really take the environment into consideration in your design” (AALTO, Helsinki, December 11, 2018). The idea of “care” is a lens through which students not only look at the world but also act to ameliorate the world as both professionals and citizens. Respondents show awareness in understanding that architecture can both act as a source for good and amelioration, but equally can further contribute to exploitation and ecological destruction. Respondents show skepticism toward big corporate firms, defined as entities that do not care enough, and seem much more inclined to work in their local context with people that they can trust and on projects that they feel passionate about. Working locally does not exclude them from being in contact with the world and using their established networks to collaborate on projects that cross geographical boundaries.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Respondents depicted the multiple roles of architects. For all students in architecture, their education is intended as a journey that helps them find their path and develop as autonomous individuals, and equally to become professionals capable of working collaboratively. To do so, architects need to learn to converse with the world. This is considered the best way to incite their sensitivity and prompt ethical design solutions. It would be important to understand whether these traits are specific to students in architecture or whether they are universally shared among students from different disciplines. To answer this question, more research is needed.

The findings of this research reveal four fundamental roles of an architect in our society: the dissident intellectual, the ethical professional, the storyteller, the caregiver of the world.

A good architectural education should therefore help students pursue their unique path in architecture while caring for the world.

Acting as a model from the world of education, one person has emerged as a leader and catalyst of change: Greta Thunberg. Greta simply says that education without a future has no meaning. She has become a leader who brings students and education to the front line in the quest for a solution to the climate crisis. September 20, 2019, will be remembered as the Global Climate Strike, which is said to have been the biggest climate protest in world history (Barclay and Resnick 2019). Students therefore feel that they are not just called to a cause, but they promote the cause itself. This is the context of this research, of its methods, of its dialogues and findings. The paper's intention was to provide an interpretative and explanatory framework with which to understand the students' voices, including their understanding of what it means to be a student in architecture in the current context. Students from the NBAA capture the essence of their education as a journey to develop critical thinking, to acquire social awareness, to instill social activism, and to grow.

CCAIE can help us answer the question of what does a good architectural education look like? Educators can teach the right thing when students are allowed to bring their experiential knowledge into the classroom, when educators create the conditions that make students critical and engaged, and when educators help students nurture their individual talents without forgetting that we are all connected and interdependent.

CCAIE is intended as a way to develop a more caring and intimate relationship between architects and their community, one that is based on social awareness and collaboration, driven by the desire to operate with care and social responsibility (Santanicchia 2019). Becoming cosmopolitan citizen architects means learning to understand the social and environmental impacts of design decisions and how those decisions can respond to the cogent issues of our society. This means becoming critical thinkers and outspoken intellectuals, carers of our planet and its earthlings, and stewards for promoting the necessary collaborative change that we need to protect life on this planet. Architectural education's scope therefore goes beyond building design; it is about how people can live and flourish together in an environment that is always both natural and human-made.

This requires education to be place-based and socially contextualized. It requires education to cross disciplinary boundaries. It requires education to be generous and to welcome people from all walks of life. It requires education to be about the common good and how we live together. And it requires students and teachers to work together, to use critical thinking to discover awareness and activism. It requires the confidence, competence, and art of consilience to be a public intellectual, an ethical professional, a storyteller, and a caregiver of the world. It requires care and courage.

REFERENCES

- Barclay, Eliza, and Brian Resnick. 2019. "How Big Was the Global Climate Strike? 4 Million People, Activists Estimate." Vox, September 22. <https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2019/9/20/20876143/climate-strike-2019-september-20-crowd-estimate>.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. London: Penguin Books.

- Giroux, Henry A. 1980. "Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education." In *Curriculum Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (Winter): 329–66.
- hooks, bell. 2003. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. London: Routledge.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2010. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In *The Cosmopolitanism Reader*, edited by Garrett W. Brown and David Held, 155–62. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Resnick, Elizabeth, ed. 2016. *Developing Citizen Designers*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Santanichchia, Massimo. 2019. "Becoming Citizen Architects: A Case Study of a Design Studio in Reykjavik." *Building Material*, no. 22: 117–36.
- Wink, Joan. 2000. *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.