



Moderator Morten Lund address the panel during ASAE04

ASAE04

Annual Symposium for Architecture and Education 2004

The second Annual Symposium for Architecture and Education opened in the Department of Design Sciences building at Lund Institute of Technology, LTH, on August 28, 2004, just at the beginning of the new academic year. Organized by the Board of Education of the School of Architecture through its Chairman, Prof. Abelardo Gonzales, it gathered a number of prominent guests who together addressed a series of questions concerned with the overall topic "Architectural investigation – a shared platform between education and the profession".

Background

The symposium was closely integrated with the International Workshop on Urban Development, works of third-year students presented at the workshop being discussed. The two-day programme of the symposium was initiated by lectures and a panel-discussion followed the next day by a critical discussion based on results of the workshop. The symposium dealt primarily, however, not with the work of the teachers

and students from Lund, but with the relation between architectural education and the architectural profession generally, the participants also including a broad audience of practicing architects, both from Sweden and abroad.

Three lectures at the start of the symposium, 45 minutes in length each, set the stage for the panel discussion. The lectures, by Nat Chard of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, Odile Decq from Benoit Cornette Architectes Urbanistes in Paris, and Prof. Bijan Youssefzadeh of Metropolis Architects in Texas, concerning the views of each of them regarding the education of architects, provided a highly international perspective.

Initial talks

In opening the talks and the panel discussion which was to follow, Prof. Abelardo Gonzales welcomed the national as well as international guests, addressing the issue of the common grounds for education and for practice. The panel was asked to comment on and discuss the following:

1. How different architectural programs prepare the student for becoming an architect.
2. How students can best be trained to use new as well as traditional solutions and materials in architecture.
3. How students should be taught to relate to the use of modern IT: whether they should simply use it as it is at the moment or be trained to ask critical questions aimed at the development of new solutions.
4. Whether the approach and the tools employed in architectural investigation can function as a common basis for connecting architectural education and practice, such that both sides benefit from the processes and methods involved?

The moderator, Morten Lund, pursued these lines of thought somewhat further, agreeing on the importance of understanding the role of analysing and investigating both architecture that was planned and that which was already built, and of experimenting in the use of new materials and

of those employed conventionally. He pointed out that the result of an investigation could itself become a finished architectural work and asked that each of the panel members endeavour to provide an example of how experimentation to educational ends could lead to architectural works of professional character.

Nat Chard took up the importance of giving any creative process that was underway time to develop, arguing that interaction between architects working on a project can be effectively promoted by first allowing each to develop his or her ideas in solitude. He examined in this connection the case of Daniel Liebeskind, who worked and experimented alone until his ideas could be presented, discussed and developed further. A key phrase Nat Chard employed was "dwelling on things".

Odile Decq emphasized the importance of using models in the early stages of developing an idea, and of the models being highly conceptual ones that could lead to the thorough analysis of a problem, rather than one's aiming immediately at working out a project in detail. She indicated that even that which had already been built could be useful to analyse through the creation of an analytical, abstract model able to provide new interpretations of the work. The creation of such a model she regarded as representing an investigation, not as an interpretation in itself. She gave an example of an idea used earlier being developed in a new context and being adapted to the specific location and the cultural setting involved. A word she emphasized in her talk was "resistance" in the sense of one's being faithful to an idea.

Bijan Youssefzadeh raised the question of what experimentation in architecture represents, asking whether it was necessary to come up with revolutionary ideas or whether simply challenging existing ones was sufficient for experimentation to be involved. He asked whether "experiment" means the same in architecture as in other sciences. If a project was labeled before being built, he considered it to not be experimental. Morten Lund responded to this by suggesting, in the attempt to characterise architectural methods of investigation and the will to experiment, that it then represents simply a kind of doctrine.

The audience discussed the extent to which architectural education should use experiments as tools for teaching. It was pointed out that in order to challenge ideas properly

one had to have close knowledge of them. In addition, it was remarked that education and the acquisition of knowledge become more fruitful if one investigates and analyses existing theories and works before starting to experiment and conduct investigations on one's own.

Chris Thurboune of the Aarhus School of Architecture argued that architecture has very much to do with communication, the architect's needing, in order to arrive at an adequate solution to a problem, to first communicate with everyone involved, professionals within highly diverse fields as well as the public. He described architects as having to be very humble in this respect, their not being experts on their own but needing instead to take account in all that they do of everything that is relevant. According to him, having a network of people with differing expertise is necessary before one can start to experiment since otherwise one is unable to validate the ideas one examines. He advised too that one think out one's basic ideas as quickly as possible and then spend sufficient time in evaluating the consequences the ideas would have.

Carola Wingren from the Department of Landscape Planning of the Agricultural University in Alnarp emphasized the importance of cooperation for obtaining the mutual benefits it can provide. She also argued that since at a practical level communicating effectively requires thorough insight into what the architect does, an educational program needs to reflect the professional reality of architects. In addition, she stressed the value of expressing one's ideas quickly yet clearly so as to facilitate communication with experts, teachers, students and the public generally.

Thomas Hellquist of the Department of Architecture in Lund declared that in his experience as a teacher he found that seemingly less talented students not seldom become brilliant professionals, and that seemingly more talented ones may readily become mediocre professionals. He found there to be a lack of knowledge of why this occurs. In addition, he took up the gap he perceived between education in architecture and the architectural profession. He also presented diagrams depicting different theories of learning and suggested that the success of students lies to a considerable extent in their ability to profit from what they learn in their program of education or in the profession itself.



Bijan Youssefzadeh and Odile Decq

Discussion

The symposium continued with an integrated discussion between members of the panel and of the audience. There were three topics at which particular attention was directed:

1. The gap between education and the profession
2. The role of knowledge and confidence in connection with experimentation
3. Interdisciplinary investigation.

The gap between education and the profession.

Certain of the panel members failed to agree with models that suggested the learning process to be in the form of a linear progression. They maintained that more than one form of learning is involved and that the different models overlap and interact with each other to produce a nonlinear progression. Chris Thurboune argued, in line with what he had said previously, that in contrast to what the one diagram suggested it was best to think first and act later, and in the designing process to arrive at basic conceptual model rather



Students working with the exhibition in the foyer of the A-building



Detail: the workshop model built by the participating students

quickly, devoting adequate time thereafter to evaluating the consequences the model would have. Nat Chard, in turn, spoke against the notion of elements of genius being needed, saying that one simply can't wait for bright ideas to appear. He felt that good ideas are most likely to develop when investigations are carried out.

Odile Decq took up Thomas Hellquist's statement of the less prominent student becoming the more brilliant professional. She suggested that the determining factors here are individual strength of character, a desire for lifelong learning and realising that in a sense the more one learns the less one knows. She felt that success in the profession depends on one's character, motivation and manner of thinking, not on some linear model of learning. Bijan Youssefzadeh called attention to the admissions system that the School of Architecture in Lund employs, the majority of applicants being rejected already before attending any courses. He felt there was a discrepancy between an admissions system of

this sort and the fact that the less prominent student can readily become the more brilliant professional. He pointed out that in the School of Architecture in Arlington all applicants are welcome to take advantage of the program of training for a year, their being evaluated then in a competitive process, the best being selected for further studies. The panel considered the question of competition, agreeing that it is important quality-motivating factor both for students and for schools of architecture. They also considered it essential, for establishing a creative learning situation, that the student understand that a school demands achievement.

The role of knowledge and confidence in connection with experimentation.

The audience took part in the discussion in asserting the importance of defining the aim of an experiment, arguing that an experiment can reveal true relationships better than conventional methods of investigation can. The question of how originality relates to experiments was raised, as was that

of whether it is originality the student should investigate and whether this should be an aim in itself? Abelardo Gonzalez responded by saying that in the process of experimentation one should focus on the ideas involved, aiming at creating a process one considers enjoyable – one which, though it may result in originality, does not have to do so, originality not being a requirement.

Chris Thurboune claimed that one problem with the Scandinavian schools of architecture is that people feel that a new project calls for an entirely new conception of things, arguing that one should instead encourage students to develop their existing ideas further. The audience discussed students' often believing that their work has to be new and original to be worthwhile, whereas what is needed is confidence in one's work, not that it be original. Confidence was seen as giving the student the motivation to investigate even a common idea with the aim of transforming it into one's own. Thomas Hellquist declared that an experiment engenders



Detail: the workshop model built by the participating students

confidence in the search for knowledge, but that intuition is required to be able to recognise whether the knowledge obtained is genuine. Nat Chard emphasized the need of intuition in an experiment, stating that the difference between an experienced architect and a student is that the experienced architect has a much larger store of knowledge to draw upon and can thus place greater trust in his/her intuition.

Interdisciplinary investigation.

Odile Decq took up what she considered to be the apprehension found in schools of architecture throughout the world of architectural training dealing too much with simply architectural design. She recalled the investigations several decades ago based on the computer technology of the time which extended the possibilities for construction and design. She asked what kinds of investigations are being carried out today. The responsibility of the architect, she felt, is to create the future, something for which investigation is needed, including investigation in other fields of knowledge too, exploring how architecture can be affected by changes that occur there. She pointed out that the future is neither created nor adequately discussed in architectural schools today, students often being forced to search on their own in other disciplines regarding changes relevant to architecture one can be expected to occur.

Carola Wingren emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary methods in contemporary architectural research. Odile Decq remarked that since World War II the architectural profession has become more and more specialised, regarding this as a dangerous trend which at its extreme might result in an architect's designing only the outer wall of a building. She argued for architects maintaining an open mind and taking an interest in many fields, and for the enrichment of architecture this can bring about. Morten Lund reminded those present that each of the lecturers had provided examples of collaboration with engineers. He remarked that the role of the architect is in a continuing state of flux.



Discussions during the lunch break; Ingrid Järnefelt, Chris Thurbone, Nat Chard.

Conclusions

Morten Lund summed up the discussion by noting the wide range of possibilities for collaboration between students and professionals available. He emphasized the important role that experimentation has in advancing the aims of the architect and argued that schools of architecture should make every effort to promote it. He underlined the need of better teaching methods and observed that creating an inspiring learning environment requires that teachers, students and administrators work together closely. He stressed the need, finally, of developing the architectural profession's links with interdisciplinary discourse further.

Notes by Caroline Dahl, member of UNA and educational leader Mattias Hedberg