

Education initiatives of the Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects

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ABSTRACT: The Lesser Poland (regional) Chamber of Architects has launched several interesting and purposeful education initiatives. This organisation was founded with the purpose of granting to architects state-sanctioned unlimited architectural design licences. It provides professional courses for new architects and is involved in initiatives regarding the education of children and young people. These latter initiatives aim to raise awareness among future generations about how to care for the public and private environment, and how to ensure quality and aesthetics in these areas. Responsibility and the role of local authorities are also considered. This article describes examples of good practice in which members of the community of architects acting *pro publico bono* promoted the social and public educational role and mission of the architectural profession.

INTRODUCTION

The architectural profession in the European Union is one of the few whose members should not only be appropriately educated, but should continue with self-education throughout their professional lives. It means not only being up-to-date with new legal regulations, but also studying sophisticated technology, so as to be able to solve complex design problems, which are often a part of the building process. The range of required education is very broad, and there is no university curriculum comprehensive enough to educate students to meet all real-life challenges.

The best way to gain this knowledge is through practice, but this is never enough. How is it possible not to be overwhelmed by the real world? Learning by doing is not always the best alternative. Young architects often need to speak with someone who is more experienced or from another branch of engineering to find the best solutions for design problems.

In Poland, there is a way to become a lead designer by law, i.e. by becoming a state-sanctioned, licensed architect. After a five-year programme of study and documented professional experience as an architect, a person can take an examination and become a member of the Chamber of Architects responsible for designs. Nobody needs to feel like an *alpha* or *omega* architect, i.e. at the top or the bottom of the profession, because the education of architects is never-ending and is supported by a professional organisation.

EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS

In the past few years the Lesser Poland (regional) Chamber of Architects has launched several directed education initiatives. The first was dedicated to all architects. Sometimes workshops and lectures are held covering legal changes, where young architects can learn good practice in specialist fields of design, such as fire protection and occupational health and safety.

Lectures usually take place at the headquarters building of a regional branch of the Chamber of Architects [1]. Amendments to construction law or building ordinances regarding the design or placement of buildings are potential training opportunities to explain the legal complexities and their interpretation. Though not obligatory, such courses are often fully booked.

The organisation, therefore, decided to educate its members through lectures delivered via the Internet. The most important goal of the lectures is to raise the level of design knowledge and skills, as well as the use of regulations. This is intended to raise the standard of services being provided to the clients.

The Role Conferences Play

Another way to increase the level of specialist knowledge among the members of the organisation are through two-day conferences [2]. These take place at a mountain resort, where architects can meet and take part in lectures or open discussions, the aim of which is the elaboration of new solutions to design problems. These solutions may be presented to higher authorities, such as the Ministry in charge of building regulations or to other organisations with which architects interact.

These conferences (see, for example Figure 1a and 1b) provide an opportunity to explain state or regional-level politics, or future economic plans. Such discussions can have a significant influence on the Ministry's policies. Specialists are able to express views on a proposed policy, which may expose weaknesses and, perhaps, identify a better alternative. Hence, the testing phase of new and proposed legal regulations could involve a debate between architects and politicians from the Ministry.

Also, conference topics can be aimed at leaders of design teams [3]. Lectures that feature well-known architects discussing their experience during the design and construction process are important for young members of the Chamber. It enables them to learn about the complexity of every stage of a construction up to when a building is completed. There also has been debate about competitions, i.e. how to win and not go bankrupt. It is important to illustrate how hard it is to construct good architecture in Poland. Winning competitions cannot guarantee that the best design will be built [4].

Negotiations, often between the winning architect and client, provide guarantees of task completion and quality. Learning from bad examples provides a powerful lesson and preparation for problems in business. Every conference is a milestone for establishing dialogue and respect for new ideas.



a)

b)

Figure 1: Attendants at the conference, *Home for the Family* held between 21 and 22 October 2016; a) a panel discussion during the conference, in which the author took part (Photograph by Małgorzata Serafin-Kozyra); b) discussion with Mr Tomasz Żuchowski, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Construction, Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, who is responsible for the construction sector. The author also took part in the discussion (Photograph by Małgorzata Serafin-Kozyra).

On-line Portal in Response to Needs

The Architect's Workshop is an initiative born out of the needs of Krakow's architects [5]. The idea behind the on-line portal was to create for young architects a compendium of information available in one place. What they cannot find out from more experienced colleagues, they can find on the Internet portal. An expanded version is available to members of the Chamber.

The portal consists of several sections. In the Law section a search engine can be used to find links to legal regulations related to practising architecture. Legal acts are made available through the Internet System of Legal Acts of the Chancellery of the Sejm (lower house of parliament) of the Republic of Poland, which includes interpretation of provisions. Continuous training is one of the main priorities for the Architect's Workshop, which features on-line training courses and appropriate digital materials.

The Architect's Vademecum, or handbook, is to become a *mini-encyclopaedia* for the Chamber's members, leading them through all stages of design, from commission to completion; it includes administrative procedures, official documents and model contracts. The portal presents information that, for example, allows the search for an active architect or to read about a programme for secondary schools. Information is available about future development projects; useful advice on how to set up a business; or information about how architects work in other

countries of the European Union. In addition, the section on information covers news in printed or digital media that may be of interest to architects. The portal is an interesting and unique offering for young architects in the country, and can be very helpful at the beginning of a challenging career.

EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG GENERATIONS

The organisation is involved in initiatives to educate not only adults, but also children and young people. The aim of this activity is to raise awareness among future generations regarding how to care for the public environment, as well as our own, and to enhance the aesthetics in the areas where people live.

To ensure an aesthetically pleasing and beautiful environment, it is necessary to know who is responsible for its current state and what to expect from local authorities. The public education programme that is obligatory in public schools has nothing to say about the beauty of our environment or about aesthetics. Who better than an architect to go to a school and talk to children about the need for beauty in our surroundings? Every year architects go to selected primary schools *pro publico bono* (for no charge) and take part in a programme under the patronage of the Ministry. An example of a lecture in a primary school is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Lecture at a primary school during the Days of Architectural Education session, in 2017 (Photograph by Katarzyna Stolarczyk).

Architectural Education for the Young

The Architectural Education programme has been run 11 times, and aims to familiarise children, youth and adults with shaping the form of buildings in harmonious relation to function and structure. As well, modelling surrounding space and urban planning are covered [6]. The programme is conducted through lectures, competitions, exhibitions, conferences and media coverage. The programme is aimed at targeting children from an early age in order to arouse their interest and to sensitise them to beauty.

At the start, schools are asked if they are interested in taking part in the programme. The architects who applied for the education days programme are asked to appear at schools and give a short lecture about a competition and programme ideas. They also tell the children about the basics, scope and results of an architects' work to build a better world. Students are engaged by drawing on a blackboard and by participating in a discussion. At the end of the lesson, children receive books from the Chamber of Architects. The architect then explains the rules for participating in a drawing competition called *The House and Garden of Your Dreams* [7].

Afterwards, hand-drawn works are sent to the Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects, where they are jointly evaluated and assigned awards (see Figure 3). There are many awards and so many entries receive approbation. The competition is popular in Kraków, Poland, and the prize-winning students receive artistic prizes depicting well-known works of architecture.



Figure 3: Drawing jointly prepared by students at a primary school, pictured during the Days of Architectural Education, in 2017 (Photograph by Katarzyna Stolarczyk).

Architectural Education for High-school Students

Shaping Space is a programme designed for high school students [8]. The Irish original was created for students of the so-called transition year. This is the fourth year of secondary school, during which young people chart their further education and work. The programme focuses on the urban spatial environment of a home and the flat, public spaces in the immediate vicinity. Selected elements of the history of architecture are also covered. The work of students is based on conclusions drawn from observation, which can be a starting point for further analyses and the development of concepts concerning a range of social and environmental issues.

Technical and aesthetic aspects related to architecture, the maintaining and shaping of spatial order are also important. Students look at and analyse various types of buildings and places, and try to solve a number of planning and design problems. This applies to Poland and other countries, in contemporary times, in past historical eras and also for the future. The Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland has obtained permission from The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI), the creator of the *Shaping Space* programme, for its translation and adaptation.

The Council of the Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects developed its own experimental programme titled, *The District of my Dreams* [9]. The Programme was run in 2010 and 2012. The idea of the Programme was to work with young people, whose task was to assess the quality of their own living environment and attempt to create a proposal for its revitalisation.

Preparation for the programme consisted of initiating co-operation with junior high schools, as well as selecting the nearest school and a spatially interesting area. Surveying and planning materials (maps, excerpts from local plans) were obtained for this area. The selected group of young people (applications were voluntary) knew the area covered by the programme very well as they had grown up in it. Therefore, the reconnaissance, which they conducted under the supervision of an architect (the programme co-ordinator), was to give them an opportunity to critically look at their own surroundings.

Young people became acquainted with the concept of the valorisation of the quality of space, defining areas of a degraded landscape and finding valuable elements both in urban and landscape terms (e.g. finding visual axes). The students also conducted their own searches on historical topics concerning the analysed area, in local museums, archives and the local press. The material collected in this way was used to develop an extant state documentation - a record of space, for which maps of the area were used. The next stage of the work was establishing co-operation with an architectural university.

Young people became acquainted with the basics of design at the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts of the *Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Kraków Academy*. They also got to know a group of students who were to support them in

continuing the programme at subsequent stages. The methods of work were arbitrary - from freehand drawings, written texts (mainly for the presentation of the idea and the history of the site) - to the use of graphical programs, including computer games. The material that had been prepared was then presented to students who took over the task of further developing the project in accordance with the guidelines given to them.

They had to use a modern design workshop for this, adding their own design ideas. This stage consisted of meetings and discussions, which created a sociologically interesting situation regarding the ...*first customer of the architect - the first architect for the client* relationship and, as the young participants later admitted, it was a very intriguing experience in their lives. In this way, two studies of the same area were created: student and extended-student. The programme was supplemented with a presentation of the works - both by junior high school and university students. Presentations took place at the headquarters of the Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects, as well as in the cities that had participated in the programme. The prize for the programme participants was participation in an attractive trip.

PROMOTION THROUGH COMPETITIONS

Another interesting initiative meant to promote the architecture of Lesser Poland among the public is the *Architectural Salon* and *Showroom* competitions. The showroom competition consists of voting for the best works presented during the latter exhibitions on the organisation's Web site. The Architects of Lesser Poland 2011-2017 exhibitions, as well as the awarded works, are presented to a wider public audience, which can observe current tendencies and, above all, the architectural built projects themselves. This provides an indication of both aesthetics and beauty which, although still a small factor, is nevertheless growing in importance. The competition categories are as follows:

- M - small buildings (e.g. single-family houses);
- W - multi-family residential buildings, residential and service buildings;
- U - public buildings (e.g. office buildings, schools, kindergartens);
- P - industrial, production and storage facilities;
- Z - public space - urban planning;
- K - reconstruction, conservation and revalorisation.

The *Architectural Salon* is a plebiscite promoting the best architects from Lesser Poland and was founded in 2013. It is a prize given by architects that is of significant value to its laureates.

CONCLUSIONS

Because of the multi-faceted and statutory nature of their education, architects are involved in vocational and social education. The results of the architects' endeavours can be the production of a distinct architecture for living, built with the co-operation of local government and combining knowledge, science and technology. As the above examples show, architects are a professional group involved in education resulting from their professional obligations and their concern for society as a whole. Investing in the knowledge of children and youth is thought to return future beneficial results.

Expanded information in on-line portals can be a treasure trove of useful, immediately available knowledge and information. Many of the valuable initiatives described above originated in Kraków, which has taken a lead over other regional and national chambers and organisations. The Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects believes that all valuable initiatives should be appreciated and spread as wide as possible.

There is much talk about the future of cities. *Smart Cities* with smartness and intelligence are seen as part of a technological utopia. Architecture has a significant role to play in the development of future cities. Hence, it is important to educate the architects, so that the better cities can shape a new quality of life for their residents.

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