

# Ways of Choosing: The Role of School Design Culture, Values and Philosophy in Irish Architectural Education

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Architectural education in Ireland — as elsewhere — is a somewhat unique educational environment in that it must provide for professional requirements within its system. It must produce graduates which have demonstrated standards of knowledge, skill and competence for practice as an architect and who possess particular professional attributes. Coupled with this framework, architectural education is also required to instil in students their civic responsibilities, in being bound by professional codes of ethics to act and to build in a way that has societal values at its heart; considering the interests of society as a whole (1) to shape a better world. As such, graduates are taught to question and direct design conditions from particular points of view (2) and to create 'good' architecture through the application of dependable professional education (3). The content and subject matter of architectural courses must therefore be both creative and technical, freeing and curtailing, locally responsive but universally applicable.

This apparent dichotomous system is very much apparent where the need to engender graduates who can achieve excellence in architectural design sits alongside the necessity for them also to be capable of achieving prowess in technical design; particularly with the need for built environment generally and buildings specifically to respond to the environmental, economic and social requirements of sustainability and have a technically sustainable approach. At the heart of the learning outcomes of architectural design education is thus a facilitation of emerging ideas amongst graduates about what constitutes architectural design excellence, and what shapes the framework in which these ideas sit.

Integral to this framework of ideas is the design culture, philosophy and values each school of architecture nurtures in its students, the ethical code it imparts and how it frames what the nature of architectural design excellence is; these less obvious but inherent qualities that comprise the specific process of architectural education. This paper aims to study the framework of this often unstated, hidden design culture; and the values and philosophy held by Irish schools of architecture by analysis of interviews with both heads of schools and programme leaders. These figures are selected as key figureheads who foster, maintain and promote the culture and philosophy of learning within each school (4) and are thus ideally placed to explore the nature of the design culture of each of the Irish schools. This paper explores how each schools' veiled culture emphasises particular decision-making processes that may be based on belief systems or systems of reason and logic, inductive reasoning or deductive logic, experience or reality (5). It evaluates: the extent to which the nature of choices and actions

designers within the school make are arbitrary; the degree to which they are instilled with meanings by the designer and 'part of a certain way to envision the world' (6) which is permeated through the design culture of each architectural school.

It studies how the design culture is defined and fostered, analyses how it varies across programmes and time and appraises how it is instilled in students. It questions how much a graduate is moulded motivated and controlled into their role (7) as an architect; the 'ways of choosing' (8) they are taught and to what extent students can or should exercise freedom within and from design culture frameworks, in order to act less subjectively and 'refuse other actors prescriptions' (9). It particularly questions if a preconceived notion of what a professional should be sets the priorities of the school's curriculum and how the balance is struck within school design culture between abstract and real-world subjects, both within the architectural school and in terms of the particular attributes instilled in graduates of the school; with a particular emphasis on how both architectural and sustainable design excellence are promoted.

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