

EAEA15_ Starting the Conversation.....engaging the unengaged

Introduction

When talking about equality, diversity and inclusivity within architectural education and the practice of architecture, how can we reframe the narrative in order to engage with the unengaged?

The lack of equality, diversity and inclusivity within architectural education and the profession has been well documented in the UK over the last 10 years. With the introduction of the Equalities Act in 2010, within the UK, it legally protected people from discrimination within the workplace and within wider society. There are 9 protected characteristics identified within the act which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. Although this act came into force 11 years ago, it has had limited impact on the way we teach or practice architecture or the way we look at built environment.

Christine Murray, founder of the Women in Architecture Survey and former Editor of both the Architects Journal and the Architectural Review noted that this increased awareness around issues of equality has rather than promoting change had the opposite effect with the UK Government's Creative Industries Report from 2019 suggesting that the number of women in Architecture has dropped by 10.3% ¹

With movements like Black Lives Matter and #Me Too gaining more coverage, there has been an increased awareness and availability to hear under represented voices within architecture. With the current pandemic affording further opportunities to hear a diversity of voices through many digital platforms, the question still remains...Who is listening?

This paper explores how we can change the narrative when talking about equality within architecture and asks if there is another way that we can promote inclusivity. It further evaluates one method of engagement through analysis of an organised event and associated survey 'The Equal Architect' symposium held on International Women's Day 2019.

¹ <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/03/08/women-in-architecture-worse-christine-murray-opinion/>

The findings demonstrate that there is a need to develop new narratives to increase engagement and suggests a variety of initiatives to support a more inclusive approach to equality across within education especially.

The existing narrative

Within the RIBA Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy ‘Creating Opportunity and Enabling Success’ Report from 2019, it states “Developing educational, practice and institutional structures and cultures which support diversity and inclusion is crucial to the future success of the UK architecture profession.”² It further recognises that currently the profession does not support many sectors of society and highlights the following areas of focus for the profession as:

- Social Mobility
- Gender Parity
- BAME Representation
- LGBTQ+ Communities
- Disability
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Religion and Belief³

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) goes further and has developed ‘Guides for Equitable Practice – guides for understanding and building equity in the architecture profession’ and usefully sets out moral, business, ethical, professional and societal cases for why equity in architecture is not only a positive development but essential for the future of the profession. By expanding on the reasons for the promotion of equity it becomes more than just ‘the right thing to do’ but proves that diversity can enhance innovation, economic growth and provide greater creativity within both the educational and professional sector.⁴

And yet architectural education is still struggling to harness these positive aspects and encourage more diverse voices to enter and stay within architecture. As Weisman reflects in her article ‘Diversity by Design: Feminist Reflections on the Future of Architectural Education and Practice’

² RIBA, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, Creating Opportunity and Enabling Success, April 2019

³ Ibid

⁴ AIA, Guides for Equitable Practice, page 12, 2018

How can an architectural education that continues to define professional expertise in relation to the history of white, heterosexual, Euro- American male consciousness prepare students to function as effective professional in pluralistic communities? How will students be sensitized to “difference” when they are encouraged to suppress their own gender, race and class identities in the process of becoming “professional”?⁵

Developing a New Narrative - Context

Missing in Architecture, MiA, of which the author is a founder, is a collective of architects and educators which was established with the ambition to challenge the status quo and give a platform to under-represented voices within both architectural education and the profession.

The collective launched on International Women’s Day in 2018 with an Event titled ‘Another Perspective’ which was a celebration of female architects and architecture students. It provided an opportunity for all genders to comment on their own feelings about the current conditions within both education and practice. A ‘Washing Line of Confessions’ was strung across the Ladies Lounge of a traditional City pub and guests were invited to respond to a series of provocations with their own confessions and hang them on the washing line.

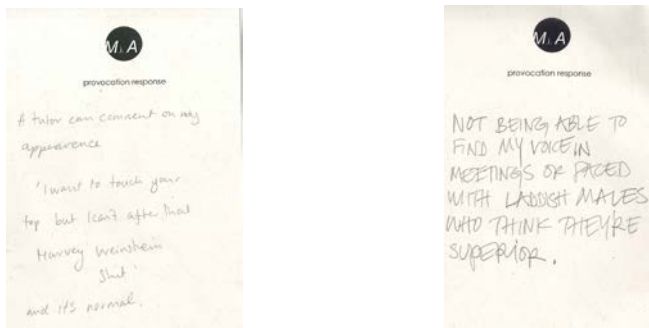


Fig. 01. Confessions Source: missing in architecture.

This event further prompted a series of student led events called ‘On The Margins’ and a subsequent lecture series run by MiA titled ‘Peripheral Visions’ which provoked and promoted the investigation of architecture through a wider lens.

The success of these events showed there was a desire to embrace a new narrative which supported and promoted diversity within architecture and a

⁵ Brown, Lori. A. 2016. *Feminist Practices: interdisciplinary approaches to women in architecture*. Oxon, New York: Routledge

widening of the discussion so that the focus was not centred solely on the traditional architects of the western world.

The Equal Architect Symposium

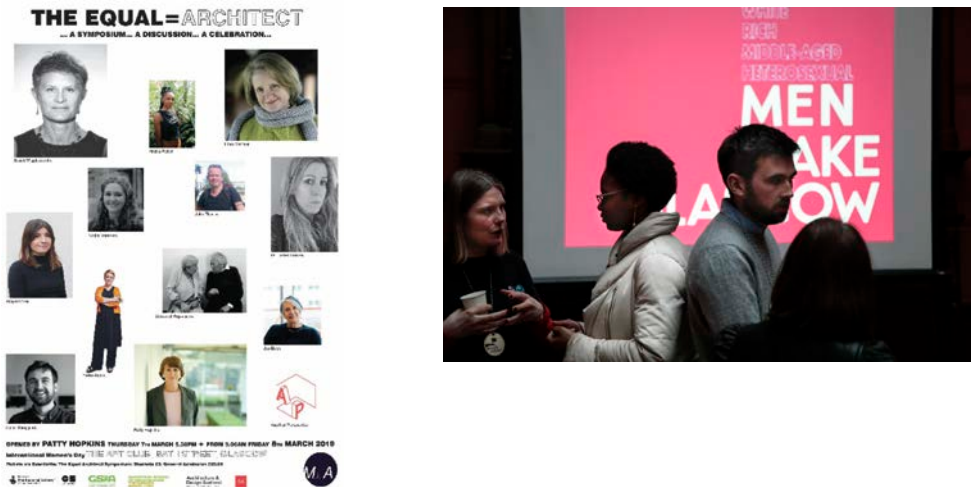


Fig. 02. The Equal Architect Symposium Poster and event Source: missing in architecture.

The Equal Architect symposium was held on Friday 8th March 2019, International Women’s Day and was designed as a celebration and discussion focusing on equality within architectural education and practice.

The aim of the symposium was to enhance awareness and understanding of the significance of female architects within the education system and the profession and to provoke discussions surrounding the creation of a more equal environment for all whilst celebrating the work of past, present and future generations of architects.

The day was structured in a way that it removed any ego from the proceedings and a selection of guests were invited to talk on a theme for 10 minutes before the panel discussed topics raised with the wider audience. The audience itself consisted of 50 students from Schools of Architecture in Scotland and 50 people from Practice and Academia. Ticket sales were discounted for students to £5.00 for the day and travel scholarships were made available. For members of the public the ticket price was £25.00. Both price brackets were designed to allow a diverse audience to attend at an affordable price as opposed to many academic conferences and architectural events where the cost of attendance often precludes many having the opportunity to be involved.

To support inclusive discussions an interactive ‘Padlet Page’ was launched and hosted throughout the day where questions and comments could be made in real time. The venue and the layout was aimed to support discussion and create a more relaxed atmosphere which afforded honest and open discussions on sensitive and passionate topics.

The themes discussed throughout the day were Equality and Diversity, Education and Inspiration, Identity and Practice and Future. The guests were experts in their field and talked about their work, research and experiences. There were specific talks delivered that focused on disability, sexism and racism within architecture. There were also talks from students and recent graduates that discussed queer spaces, feminist public realm strategies and the climate crisis.

Guests were invited to take part in an online survey which sought to investigate their experiences within both academia and the profession in relation to equality and diversity. All guests were also asked to complete a consent form to allow for their contributions to be shared. The on line questionnaire was completed by 40 guests and further quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken.

Questionnaire: Analysis and Findings

Teaching and awareness at university was extremely limited. It was seen as a choice to engage in the conversation, and I feel it is similar in practice. The onus is always placed on under-represented groups to speak up, instead of those with privilege using their position to share the platform.⁶

On the day of the symposium, it was evident that the audience was predominately female, through analysis of the data provided in the questionnaire it confirmed that 85% of the survey respondents identified as female, with 12.5% identified as male and 2.5% identified as gender variant.

It was also clear that equality and diversity was not a subject that was discussed within the education system with only 17.5% of survey respondents aware of the subject being tackled within their education.

Thematic Analysis was used to identify themes within the qualitative data gathered in the survey and the Braun & Clarke (2006) 6 phase guide methodology was used.⁷

The main themes were identified and drawn out into a thematic map. It was clear from the thematic map that many of the themes were interwoven and connected but centred around a lack of awareness, representation and flexibility within the current architectural system.

Through refinement the major themes identified were Male Domination, Role Models, Barriers, Limited Awareness and Discussion and Unconscious

⁶ Questionnaire. 2019 'The Equal Architect' Anonymous On Line Questionnaire, March.

⁷ Doing Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step by Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. Maguire and Delahunt, 2017. Page 4

Bias through language and learned behaviour. The analysis of this questionnaire has allowed for a more considered response to how to develop a more equal curriculum and



Fig. 03. Thematic Analysis Mapping Source: author.

From my experience sexism is worse in education than in practice. I think a lot of architecture offices know they need to redress the gender balance whereas academia is still more of a boys' club. Who we learn from is still very much a male dominated education, Corbusier, Wright, Foster etc. Absolutely no P.O.C were mentioned during my education, nor people of a lower social class⁸

When asked what initiatives were in place to support the development of a more inclusive profession, survey respondents were aware of a variety of platforms namely Missing in Architecture, Part W, Black Female Architects and Voices of Experience and acknowledged that some practices are taking a more progressive approach to equality with support for paternal leave but it was clear that much is still needed to be done.

Since the time of the symposium, the number of initiatives to support the under-represented has increased and with the recent move to a more digital system due to the current pandemic it has afforded a platform for many more communities to talk about their experiences within architectural education and the wider profession.

In Education the pandemic has allowed for a step change in the delivery of lectures which has afforded students the opportunity to engage in more diverse ways with the curriculum. This has supported students with different learning

⁸ Questionnaire. 2019 'The Equal Architect' Anonymous On Line Questionnaire, March.

capabilities, financial and caring commitments especially and created a more flexible and independent mode of study for many. The peer supported studio culture however has been difficult to replicate online and the range of diverse voices and opinions that are on show within the studio environment is missing within the digital world which has impacted students in different ways leading for many to a lack of awareness and confidence in their own abilities. In practice the pandemic has led to a greater understanding for some within the profession on how to work flexibly and has allowed some practices to reconsider their views on working from home and flexible working models which it is hoped will support a more inclusive environment for all once entering the profession.

Still the reality is that during the pandemic, much of the increased workload and caring responsibilities have fallen on the shoulders of females with the Office for National Statistics showing that 67% of women were taking charge of their children's education at home.⁹ Although there are now more and more opportunities to share experiences of inequality, we still need to determine if the narrative has changed and if we are engaging with the unengaged?

What Next?

The issues should be addressed early on in architectural education, integrated into our design projects. Lectures on the subject with practical solutions could be integrated into studio lectures, or a short-term intensive workshop at the start of the year, as I found the equal architect symposium to be invaluable and will definitely influence my thinking and studio work moving forward. If this was taken up in architectural schools across the board the new generation of architects would carry the principles through in to their careers, and as such maybe RIBA could pay it more attention in its curriculum¹⁰

The RIBA have developed a more robust and inclusive Validation process which has identified a series of Themes and Values for Architectural Education (Part 1 and Part 2) which will be implemented from 2021-2022 cycle.

These themes are identified in the 2021 RIBA Procedures for Validation Document as:

- Health and Life Safety
- Ethical and Professional Practice
- Structures, Construction and Resources

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/feb/19/women-doing-more-home-schooling-during-covid-lockdown-than-men>

¹⁰ Questionnaire. 2019 'The Equal Architect' Anonymous On Line Questionnaire, March.

- Histories, Theories and Methodologies
- Design Pedagogies and Architectural Expression
- Business Skills¹¹

Within each theme Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plays a part. Whether this is the acknowledgement that the effectiveness or otherwise of health and life safety can directly relates to a person's socio-economic status as highlighted by Grenfell or how the current histories, theories and methodologies given more prominence within architectural curriculums are western and do not in many cases acknowledge the context that they are framed within. These six themes highlight the importance of an ethical response for the RIBA and although there is not any specific mention of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity within these themes, within the document it does state:

The RIBA is an inclusive organisation, celebrating multiple approaches and points of view about architecture and architectural education. We believe diversity drives innovation, and wish to build a culture where difference is valued. Validation takes a holistic approach, and we hope the schools of architecture we work with will reflect our values and encourage the broadest demographic of staff and students to participate in teaching and learning. This will give the freedom to address an expansive set of academic initiatives creatively interpreting the RIBA's Themes and Values for Architectural Education.¹²

It is therefore the responsibility of each School of Architecture to promote this within the educational framework that they are operating in.

EDITT:

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Think Tank, EDITT, was set up within the Mackintosh School of Architecture in 2020 as a response to questions from students and staff and an awareness of the issues within architectural education with regards to equality and diversity. EDITT is designed to explore ways to develop a more equitable curriculum and has allowed both students and staff to work together to gather information, experiences, proposals and propositions to develop a strategic plan to co-create an inclusive curriculum.

¹¹ RIBA Procedure for Validation (for UK and international courses in architecture) 2020

¹² Ibid

The goals of EDITT are to develop short, medium and long term strategies to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the architectural curriculum. Through the workshops held the following has been proposed:

Short Term Strategy: The aim is to increase awareness and understanding of how the curriculum supports all, through signposting students to information already available, including the diversification of the reading lists and the decolonisation of resource material. To date, this information has all been captured within a Padlet Page which recognises each protected characteristic as identified within the Equalities Act of 2010 plus 'class' in recognition of the social economic barriers often found within architecture.

Medium Term Strategy: The intention is to produce a document to show the school's commitment to change.

Long Term Strategy: It is the ambition that the School integrates strategies into the teaching and curriculum.

The hope is that by embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into the curriculum within architecture schools it stops becoming an afterthought and becomes as integral to the process of learning and designing as history, theory and construction.

Is It Working?

Through the establishment of Missing in Architecture, it became clear that it was necessary to provide a space for discussion to take place and for shared knowledge and understanding to be disseminated. Through the Equal Architect Symposium, it was evident that many wanted to engage in the conversation about the future of the profession and furthermore how to make it more inclusive, equal and diverse. However, it was also clear that there needs to be a desire for change and that this can only be done through a willingness to learn and develop or through a framework that requires all to participate.

I believe that through a heightened awareness of the issues, there is a change in the attitudes of current architecture students and that through the increased discussions and awareness of the subject, it has supported the emergence of a new narrative centred on a greater understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.

For example, in 2018, one of the RIBA Silver medal entries chose to inhabit their design proposal with an image of Kim Kardashian, semi naked taking a selfie. The choice of how to inhabit the architecture did little to promote equality, diversity and inclusion within the profession and it could be argued showed an attitude which is supported by the statistics discussed previously.

At the time, only 3 years ago, this image was not questioned or discussed in relation to its objectification of women in general and their representation within architecture although it could be argued the image was appropriate in the context of the thesis proposition. In comparison, the work that is being developed by students in 2021 shows a greater awareness of diversity, inclusivity and equality.

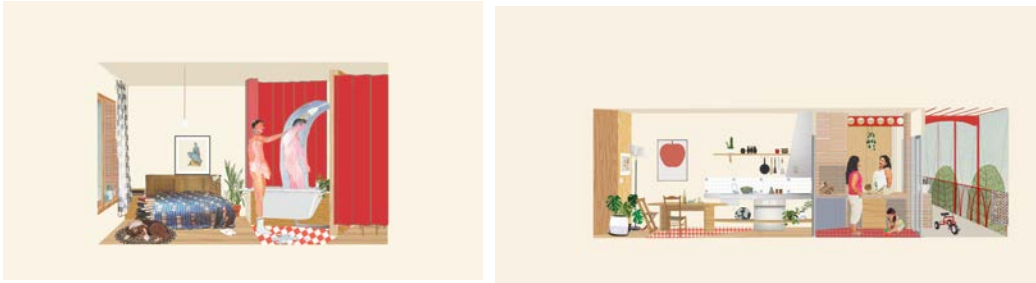


Fig. 04. Part 2 student submission Inclusive Housing Proposal Source: Carl Jonsson

This is apparent in the thesis topics being chosen, the diversification of the inhabitants represented within the student submissions and also in the emphasis placed on a broader and more inclusive set of references and precedents being discussed. Where there is an increased awareness and emphasis on equality, the themes being discussed especially within studio projects are now far more inclusive with a greater emphasis on the diversity of the user and an understanding of community.

I believe that by embedding equality, diversity and inclusivity within the curriculum at every level then there is the opportunity for both education and the future profession to become more inclusive in its outlook and representation.

Conclusion?

The existing context that architecture is operating in highlights the need for development in order to create a more inclusive platform for future generations of architects. There is clear evidence to support the need for this, whether it be on a moral, ethical or economic basis and by increasing equality and diversity it is recognised that all aspects of architecture and architectural education will benefit. If we wish to stay relevant and current as a profession it is incumbent on Schools of Architecture to change the narrative and educate the next generation of architects in a way that not only promotes equality but embeds it into every aspect of the curriculum.

This paper shows that through increased awareness and discussion through events like the Equal Architects Symposium it can help to bring the conversation to the forefront but in order to make real change and to increase engagement across the board, it requires the educational framework and the curriculum within Schools of Architecture to embrace equality in the way that we educate and through what we educate.

The next generation of architects should be challenged at every stage to design inclusively and it is our responsibility to provide them with the tools to achieve this.

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