

THE HIDDEN SCHOOL

The hidden school is contained behind/within the visible school. // The hidden school is often personified by a charisma or identified with a specific space or atmosphere. // The hidden school can be embodied in topics that develop outstanding skills. // The activities that shape the most formative aspects of an educational path are often informal ones. // The hidden school can remain unstated in the regular curriculum, and therefore remains subjectively evaluated or overlooked in administrative quality assurance or accreditation.

What constitutes the invisible layers of an architecture school?

The EAAE Annual Conference of 2019 is titled ‘The Hidden School’, aiming to discuss an architecture school’s true character, the substance and the quality of architectural education in the broadest sense, and that which is beyond the stated curricula, yet — whether concretely manifested or subliminally perceived — embodies the culture of the school.

The Hidden School can be observed through a range of tacit aspects or conspicuous specificities which make the educational path a unique one. It is the content that can be embedded within the syllabus, learned informally, personified by educators, the attributes and activities of students, or the spaces it takes place in.

Bearing this in mind, reading between the curricular lines is crucial in evaluation, but is it possible to develop tools for the assessment of the ‘hidden’? If the hidden school exists in parallel or as a background process, a self-generated search for fundamental answers, and its interpretation, manifestation or legibility has a multitude of facets, how can these aspects be captured?

The conference, hosted in 2019 by the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb, focuses upon the subliminal quality of architectural education, that which is beyond the stated curricula and is hard to document through quality evaluation procedures. It can be observed through several indicative aspects, often contributing to the identification of what makes the ‘true’ spirit or substantial quality of the school and uniqueness or peculiarity of its educational path. It can also be the tacit meaning situated between the lines of the syllabus, or generated by the students that contribute to it and the educators that personify it, the various shapes of informal learning, or the spaces it takes place in.

In order to examine the less obvious but inherent qualities that constitute the specific process of architectural education, we proposed five aspects to be considered as triggers. The five thematic areas are presented below, each offering a series of provocations to which contributors were invited to respond, but we welcomed other thematic responses as well.

The Educator: Strong charismatic figures sometimes personify a school, leaving a lasting legacy forming its identity. Alternatively, they could be the less conspicuous educators just as able to generate meaningful educational experiences. They could be academy situated educators drawing upon a substantial body of research expertise, or they could be practicing architects teaching at architecture schools, informing the educational process with a vital connection to professional practice. Some are both. Is there a preference, or prevalence? What is the role of a teacher in the education of an architect? In what ways are they either a provocateur or a mediator? Which tools best encourage a student to conduct a creative research process? Should architecture teachers be taught to teach? Reciprocally, what forms of autodidactic expression begin to emerge?

The Content: What drives the content of design briefs placed before the student? What is the domain of teaching architecture and who is the architect that educators wish to produce? Is there a substantial frame within which an educator operates in order to achieve a required synthesis and how flexible is the path of achieving the mandatory set of learning outcomes? Where is the balance between abstract or universal and real-world subjects in developing a contemporary and timeless intellectual capable of a culturally and technically sustainable approach? What is the balance between local and universal, or do we aim to develop universal ability to adapt? How does the school communicate its set of values through the subject matter it puts forward?

The Place: What is the importance of the space in which education takes place? How does the space of a school influence the educational process and outcomes? Do the social or cultural contexts in which the school is placed make a difference in the inner and outer perception of a school, or the subject matter? What are the differences between schools that are isolated, remote islands, and schools directly embedded into the surroundings, even extrapolated and scattered into them? Can a particular quality emerging from the spatial character of the school be defined?

The Student: What distinguishes an architecture student from students in other disciplines? What are their common traits? The teaching process is greatly influenced by the exchange between the teacher and the student, and reciprocally determined by their mutual dedication. What motivates a student, and how do schools describe their prerequisites? Can resilience be taught? What are the aspects of horizontal learning? What role does peer-to-peer learning play in self-directed study and independent enquiry? The Bologna Agreement em-

phasizes the need for students to act as independent learners, but can for instance designing one's own trajectory produce a clash with regulated outcomes?

The Process: The educators and the educated, the program and the places are agents of the educational process. How do they interact, and how does this interaction induce learning? In what way does formal education organize and manufacture these interactions? What happens when students become teachers, or places become content? What are the tacit examples of informal learning? In what way do informal educational experiences foster expanded study and bring benefits back to school? What examples of informal learning are individual, collective, institutional or supra-institutional? What is the role of accessible media or open-source communication platforms in manifesting the hidden school?

Teachers, students and practitioners were invited to join this discussion by answering our call for contributions.

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