

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

Dear Fellow Architects

Welcome to India for 23rd Arcasia Forum.

When we speak about architectural education and professional practice, we often imagine a simple progression:

From Education with Graduation and then entering Practice.

The student learns in the institution, graduates, and then enters the profession.

But I would suggest that this model is no longer sufficient.

Architecture is a profession grounded equally in knowledge and action. The relationship between education and practice should therefore not be a one-way movement from the university into the profession. It should be a continuous and reciprocal exchange.

Practice must inform education. And education must transform practice.

Professional practice brings into the educational environment something that cannot be learnt entirely within the studio or classroom—the reality of making architecture.

Students need to understand not only design, but also construction, materials, costs, regulations, contracts, project management, consultants, clients, communities and the constraints of time and resources. They need to understand what happens to an architectural idea when it encounters the realities of a site, a budget, a building system or a client.

Practising architects have an important role here. Their experience can bring current professional knowledge and real-world problems into architectural education.

But the exchange must work in the opposite direction as well.

The university provides something that professional practice often finds difficult to provide: time to question, experiment and imagine alternatives.

Students and researchers can challenge established methods. They can investigate new materials and technologies, reconsider conventional models of housing and urbanisation, examine environmental questions and ask whether the way we currently practise architecture is actually adequate for the future.

Education should therefore not merely produce graduates who fit comfortably into existing professional structures.

It should produce architects capable of changing those structures when necessary.

This is particularly important in Asia.

Asia is not a single architectural context. It contains extraordinary diversity in climate, culture, economy, technology, density and patterns of settlement. Yet across the region, we also encounter common challenges: rapid urbanisation, environmental pressures, housing shortages, resource constraints, technological change and the need to retain cultural knowledge while accommodating new ways of living.

We cannot address these challenges simply by importing models of education or practice developed elsewhere.

Our architectural schools and our professional practices need to learn from the realities of our own contexts.

This is where the relationship between education and practice becomes particularly valuable.

Imagine a student working with a practising architect on a live project.

The student brings curiosity, research and new ways of thinking.

The architect brings experience, technical knowledge and an understanding of what is possible within real constraints.

The academic brings critical inquiry and the ability to reflect upon the process.

The community brings lived experience.

And the project itself becomes a place of learning.

This can happen through live projects, practitioner-led studios, internships, collaborative research, building documentation, post-occupancy studies, material experimentation, community projects and joint workshops.

But these should not become occasional additions to the curriculum.

They should become structural connections between the academy and the profession.

The Indian context illustrates this particularly clearly.

Architectural education remains strongly studio-centred, while professional practice has become increasingly complex and multidisciplinary. Graduates encounter a profession involving architects, engineers, developers, contractors, consultants, digital technologies, environmental specialists, statutory authorities and communities.

There is inevitably a gap between the controlled environment of the academic studio and the complexity of the professional world.

But the answer is not to make architectural education simply more vocational.

Architecture is not merely a technical service.

It is also a cultural, social, environmental and intellectual discipline.

The purpose of education is therefore not simply to teach students how to practise, but to teach them how to think about practice.

This distinction is important.

If practice only tells education what the profession currently requires, education risks becoming reactive.

If education remains completely detached from practice, it risks becoming irrelevant.

We need something between these two extremes.

We need a dialogue.

I would describe this relationship as a continuous cycle:

Going from Education to Practice which generates experience.

For Experience generates questions.

Questions generate research.

Research returns to education.

And education produces architects who enter practice with new knowledge and new questions.

The cycle then begins again.

This is particularly important at a time when architecture is facing challenges that cannot be solved by traditional professional boundaries alone.

Climate change, artificial intelligence, new construction technologies, changing patterns of work and living, housing inequality and the preservation of cultural knowledge require architects who can move between disciplines and between theory and action.

The architect of the future cannot be only a designer of buildings.

The architect must also be a researcher, collaborator, communicator, critical thinker and lifelong learner.

And this requires us to rethink the relationship between our schools and our profession.

So perhaps the question is not:

“How can architectural education prepare students for professional practice?”

Perhaps the more important question is:

“How can education and practice work together to prepare architecture itself for the future?”

That shift in question changes the relationship completely.

The university and the profession should not exist as parallel worlds.

They should become two parts of the same architectural ecosystem—each questioning, enriching and transforming the other.

For Asia, this is not simply an educational issue.

It is an opportunity.

If we can create stronger connections between our schools, practices, research institutions, communities and industries, we can develop an architectural profession that is more responsive to our realities, more capable of innovation, and more responsible towards the future.

The ultimate objective is therefore not to make education more like practice, or practice more like education.

It is to create a relationship in which practice brings reality into education, education brings imagination into practice, and research connects the two.

That, I believe, is the relationship we need to build for the next generation of architects in Asia.

Thank you,

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