SOCIALISATION: A PERILOUS TRANSITION FROM NOVICE TO ARCHITECT

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CONTEXT

Architectural education includes both formal and informal learning components, instrumental in the transformation of novices into architects. The informal component incorporates tacit aspects of education that can't be readily quantified, and thus are often taken for granted (Stevens, 1998). These aspects include: clothing worn, language used, and criteria employed in assessment and judgement of quality, geared to preparing individuals for a particular profession (Coleman, 2010; Strickfaden and Heylighen, 2010). This transformation is otherwise known as socialisation, defined by Bragg, 1976: 6) as "… that process by which individuals acquire the values, attitudes, norms, knowledge, and skills needed to perform their roles acceptably in the group or groups in which they are, or seek to be, members." Socialisation incorporates aspects of the curriculum that cannot be conveyed or garnered through books or lectures, but garnered through experience and immersion in aspects of professional education, that are 'caught' rather than 'taught'. For Stevens (1998: 196), socialisation is "… an integral part of architectural education," where the cultural aspects of the profession are "… slowly absorbed from those who are already cultivated." This provides a historic link to the origins of the profession, and a "… sense of kinship with centuries of traditions, thoughts, and personalities […] the true tie that binds those who practice architecture with those who teach it and study it." (Boyer and Mitgang, 1996: 4) Here, architectural Education is thus intimately tied to place, and society, with the resultant socialisation, influential on the way architecture students learn to think and act.

STRATEGY

This study investigates the nature of socialisation within the context of architectural education in East Africa, taking in five schools of architecture across the region. A mixed methods approach, incorporating Focus Groups and Participant Observation was adopted, to gather information from diverse points of view. Focus Groups were an economical, fast, and efficient method to obtain data from multiple participants, carried out in a socially oriented environment, creating opportunities for spontaneous and at times unexpected responses. Participant observations, scrutinised activities of faculty and students in a 'naturalistic setting', and used to further investigate elements of socialisation. The multiple locations incorporated a form of triangulation, to ensure validity of the findings.

RESULTS

The relations between students and faculty, emerged as significant in educational socialisation, albeit somewhat strained, or as one student put it, a 'master-slave' relationship. This suggests a power relationship; with instructors in a position of authority, inculcating their ideals and values on students, who risked failure should they not heed the espoused ideas.

One student expressing his frustration: "It has been trying for us, students trying to defend their ideas. But at the end of it all, you want the marks [Laughter] and it's the tutor who has the marks" (FG2-2). Similar sentiments were presented in other Focus Groups: "[…] we had a lecturer, ok an ex soldier, or something […] sincerely this is a guy […] it was like you were competing with him […] of course, you don't know, he knows, he is the instructor. And they're pumping their own ideas into your head […]" (FG4_3). Such occurrences were witnessed during the observations, particularly as part of crits and final jury sessions, where in some instances, conformity was actively advocated. The effect of this approach to architectural education is particularly overt with relation to engagement with contemporary issues. A low integration of contemporary issues or technologies in student projects was noted. With regard to the use of computers, for example, it was found in some cases, there use was actively discouraged; reflecting a prevalent attitude to the use of computers by faculty, who had generally not been exposed to computers as part of their own education, and thus were unable to offer required instruction to students: "CAD is taboo, despite CAD being taught as a course unit for the first three years, using it for an assignment or anything is taboo" (FG3_2); "[…] there was a person who did use CAD and they were disqualified as well. If one way or anther the school caught up, it opened its eyes to what is happening out there, maybe, maybe it could be considered a change [...]" (FG2-4)

DISCUSSION

Negating contemporary issues solely because they were not a part of the instructors own education, showcased how architectural education could be misappropriated; socialising students into 'tried and tested' approaches, while failing to acknowledge changes to society and the architecture profession itself. With academic faculty perceived as custodians of architectural culture capital and able to impose their 'particular brand' of architecture on students, architectural education is effectively reduced to 'studying about' rather than 'participating in' the profession. This suggests that negative elements of socialisation may stifle a key reason why students come into architectural education in the first place; a belief that their creativity was to be valued and fostered.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper presented a synopsis of the wider study, providing an insight into aspects of socialisation in architectural education in East Africa. With socialisation a significant factor in architectural education than is often acknowledged, this could have a bearing on how architecture programmes are evaluated, to place more emphasis on the tacit aspects of the curriculum, which are not neutral factors in the educational process. These findings support a key observation by Dutton (1987), who suggested that socialisation, which reinforces and entrenches the status quo, could be corrosive to faculty-student relations, and affect the growth of architecture discourse.

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