

What it means to be an architect today. A better life for all

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Being an architect in Europe today means being part of a bigger picture. As newly elected president, our point of reference is the Architect's Council of Europe (ACE), an organisation that hosts 47 member organisations representing the profession at national level from 32 countries - 28 EU members, plus Switzerland, Norway, Turkey and recently as observer nation, Serbia. We know that in Europe we have 550,000 architects. But of course we are not alone in the construction market, not even in its design element, but only the tip of the iceberg that comprises the design team, the builders, the suppliers, investors and the clients, all involved in the process of creating and maintaining our Built Environment.

Consequently, not only our numbers but also our role loads us with a heavy responsibility.

These two terms, 'Architect' and 'Responsible' should be natural synonyms and must express the way we work and above all, the way we design. The term 'Architect' is now commonly used in many fields, technical, scientific and even political, both as a noun and a verb. So I believe that it is in this fuller sense that we must now become the architects of our future and if we do this responsibly, it will mean that we will have guaranteed a better future for all. If we were to be slightly more pessimistic, just guaranteeing a future would already be a small success, but of course we need to aim much higher.

On a global level, Europe can now be considered a clear leader in the field of awareness and commitment to the need for energy saving, reduction of carbon emissions and research and reliance on renewable

energies. This commitment is not only a pre-occupation at a technical level, but also a priority at a political level, with the ambitious EU programs like Horizon 2020 that are setting standards and examples for the world. We are certainly leading the way, even if not everyone is following at the same pace, but this must not deter us from our progress. Our buildings are reaching standards of performance in terms of energy consumption that were unthinkable only a decade ago. But what is even more important, this is being achieved with an equivalent increase in the quality of our buildings that is equally remarkable.

Technology has made giant steps in releasing this potential; global access to information, together with the creativity that this has unleashed, has done the rest. This is especially true for glass. Back in the seventies when I was



a student in the UK, float glass invented by Pilkington in the fifties, was somewhat hi-tech. Double glazing was an aspiration and a status symbol. Now triple glazing is normal, low emission glass, curved glass, argon filled cavities or vacuum glazing, are all being used and their use constantly experimented and evolving. Together with this research, is an equally impactful innovation in frame technology. It is becoming quite commonplace to see window and door frames entirely covered by glass, so that is all one sees from the outside. Glass is important not only for openings, but also claddings, with a whole range of uses, both technical and aesthetic. This is of great value when intervening on existing buildings, often protected by Heritage Conservation restrictions.

As a profession and as a society we have recently come to recognise the value and need to re-use and recuperate our city centres. These centres have millions of square metres of empty

properties, a lot of them in desirable areas. It is quite clear that in most of Europe especially, it is becoming wasteful and damaging to go on building new buildings when there is this wealth of properties waiting to be rehabilitated - which of course does not mean only renovation, but can also contemplate re-building, where necessary. The advantages in terms of saving are multiple, of course in economic terms, but mostly importantly environmental. By re-populating our city centres, we are able to save in transport costs and keep our green areas intact, with all the positive consequences this entails.

Technological advances are driving costs down and standards up. We are happy and fortunate to have all these possibilities at our disposal when we are planning or designing. As a profession we are becoming increasingly reliant on our partners and consultants to provide us the technical information that is

constantly evolving. The links to industry that enable us to keep informed are essential. The various Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs present in virtually all European countries, whether compulsory or not, to keep our profession up to date, rely to a great extent on this input.

As architects, we are invariably called upon to coordinate the team that makes up the building process and as such we value all the technical support we get in this role. We confidently rely upon the continued cooperation of the glass industry in this case, and all of our partners on a wider scale, since our ultimate goal cannot but be the same - a better life for all.

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