

Relazioni Talks

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Making Architects Formare architetti

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Parole chiave: PRATICA DELL'ARCHITETTURA, CURRICULUM ACCADEMICO, ACCREDITAMENTO PROFESSIONALE, ITALIA, GRAN BRETAGNA, ARCHITECTS' COUNCIL OF EUROPE, INDUSTRIA DELLE COSTRUZIONI

Architecture has always existed, long before architects. Humans have always attributed cultural, social, religious and personal values to the interventions they made to their surroundings, as soon as they started to modify it to suit their needs and tastes. Yet, architecture as a practice is incredibly fragile, and in these fast-paced times of pseudo-science and fake news, when science itself is doubted, the practitioners of architecture run the risks, in some places more than others, to be cast aside. The major causes of this crisis are cultural, social and economic, so they operate at a scale well above the possibility of intervention by the profession itself or its ruling bodies and institutions. Yet, this situation still calls for a reassessment of the way we educate, regulate and manage our profession.

L'architettura è sempre esistita, molto prima degli architetti. Gli esseri umani hanno sempre attribuito valori culturali, sociali, religiosi e personali agli interventi che compiono nei confronti dell'ambiente circostante, non appena hanno iniziato a modificarli per adattarli ai loro bisogni e gusti. Eppure l'architettura come pratica è incredibilmente fragile, e in questi tempi rapidi di pseudo-scienza e finte notizie, quando la scienza stessa è messa in dubbio, i professionisti dell'architettura corrono i rischi, in alcuni posti più di altri, da accantonare. Le cause principali di questa crisi sono di natura culturale, sociale ed economica, esse operano perciò su una scala ben superiore alla possibilità di intervento della professione stessa o dei suoi organi e istituzioni dominanti. Eppure questa situazione richiede ancora una nuova valutazione del modo in cui educiamo, regoliamo e gestiamo la nostra professione.



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The bulk of my training was completed in the UK, where a strong studio culture permeates Architecture Schools and where the profession is practiced in a field bound by very well-defined roles, procedures and regulations. My professional experiences as a practice owner and director has been, on the contrary, gained in Italy, which in contrast has a very notion-based university system and a rather fluid set of rules and conventions influences the construction industry, where roles and competences are often spread and overlap on different professionals and regulations are even more often subject to interpretations. Hence the idea for this paper: to compare the two nations, their academia and their professional practices, to try and determine not so much which one works best but to understand the connections, if they can be rendered at all apparent, between the way we teach, the architects we produce and their role within the respective societies.

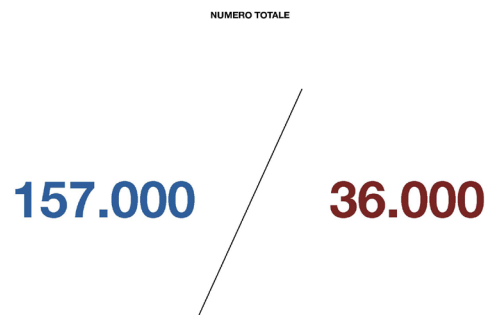
This is for me a central component of the greater issues facing the profession after the demise of modernism as a cultural entity shaping society, which had the architect as one of the central figures in the process of re-defining our built environment to match the requirements of the new world, and the onsetting crisis of ultra-capitalism that gave to the architect the role of an adder of cultural-economic value and a streamliner of production processes. Once these market-driven qualities disappear, once the sun finally sets of the figure of the archistar as an aspirational proposition both for architects and clients, the profession will have to reposition itself in its environment and most critically reorganize itself internally, country by country and globally.

A WORD ON THE METHODOLOGY

The research part pivots around the confrontations of the two situations (UK and Italy) on three main fields of analysis: analytical data on the profession and the construction industries; ¹ legal and deontological frameworks within which

the architects operate; ² the academic systems; This data will yield both quantifiable comparisons and more abstract data on possible approaches and motivations at the bases of the way the two systems were structured, as well as a possible insight on the perceived role of the profession and its perception in the two societies. So the results and their comparison will somewhat *rarefy* as the

might be actually closer within the two countries, but still widely different. So even by taking into account the higher of the two figures, the ratio remains disproportionate, especially when we take into consideration the economic data of the construction industry and the total value of the Architecture market. In the UK the construction industry moves around 300 billion euros vs. the 201 million of Italy, which at the worst end



research moves deeper into the subject.

COUNTING ARCHITECTS: A NUMERICAL COMPARISON

THE MARKET

The first striking difference comes from the numbers of registered Architects in two countries: 36.000 in the UK vs. the 157.000 of Italy ³. Given that the two countries are comparable in population, this brings the average number of Architects/1000 inhabitants to 0.6 vs. 2.6 (Fig. 1).

The numbers of professionals in Italy need to be adjusted to take into consideration that some architects are registered but are not actually practicing. This number varies greatly with no official figure, with estimates ranging from 30% to 50% ⁴ of the total being non-practitioners. Of these architects, around 70% in Italy and 80% in the UK declare themselves to be in full time employment, so the figure of practicing Architects

of the scale represents a difference in market value pro-capita of 59k euros for British architects vs. 11k for their Italian counterparts.

Given that around 45% of the total in both countries define themselves as sole practitioners or freelancers, this number has clear social implications and consequences on the sustainability of the profession which are beyond the scope of this paper (Fig. 2).

The British building industry is not only bigger by volume, but when one compares its larger size (33% bigger) to the difference in GOP between the two countries (where the UK has a 25% advantage) we realise that the industry plays a bigger part also within the country's economy.

The type of work undertaken by Architects in the two countries is roughly comparable, comprising of around 50% private houses undertaken for private clients. The UK has the edge for the new built with around double the percentage

Figure 1: Total number of architects registered in the relative national guilds

of Italy (39% vs. 21%). This data could be explained partly by a higher artistic value of the building stock in Italy, or by stricter conservation regulations, by smaller investments overall, the influence or lack thereof of State investments and so on. Architects in the UK devote most of their time to design work (77%) while the Italians are just above the middle mark (58%). This number frames the different role of the architect within the building process in the two countries, and the bureaucratic structure that revolves around it. The workforce is heavily atomised in both countries, with 55.000 (roughly 3 architects per practice) practices in Italy versus 7000 (5 architects per practice) in the UK. The Italian number must be judged carefully, as most architects who practice in the country have a fiscal position as a freelancer or a limited company, even when their work is done in its totality for a practice or a larger structure. Yet still, in both countries the majority of practices range on average between 2 and 4 employees.

As we will see later on when we analyse the legal frameworks, architects in Italy share the market with a number of other professional figures which share much of their prerogatives, both from a legal point of view (ability to sign planning permissions and other requests for authorization) and from a cultural point of view. This means that in the public's eye both Civil Engineers and *Geometri* (a figure comparable to a British QS, but whose qualification only entails a high-school level of education) are valid designers of buildings and interiors. The slimmer market in Italy, coupled with a more layered authorization system for construction, means that around 58% of Italian practices undertake what they define as purely bureaucratic work, not connected to their designs, while this percentage drops dramatically to 8% in the UK.

THE BUSINESS

This striking difference in numbers reflects directly onto professional revenue, even before we consider the difference in fees on single projects. The average revenue per practice goes from a 1:2 ratio (IT:UK) for single practitioners exponentially to 1/4.5 ratio for a medium sized office of 6 to 10. Note that all these figures are calculated on adjusted earnings, meaning they already take

into consideration differences in the cost of living and taxation, based on the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) system (Fig. 3, Fig. 4, Fig. 7).

Average hour charge also differs greatly, from 40 euros in Italy to 73 euros in the UK on average,⁵ also adjusted to PPP.

This means, basically, that a sole practitioner in Italy, with the same amount of work, earns half of what his or her British counterpart pockets even when adjusted to the different cost of life

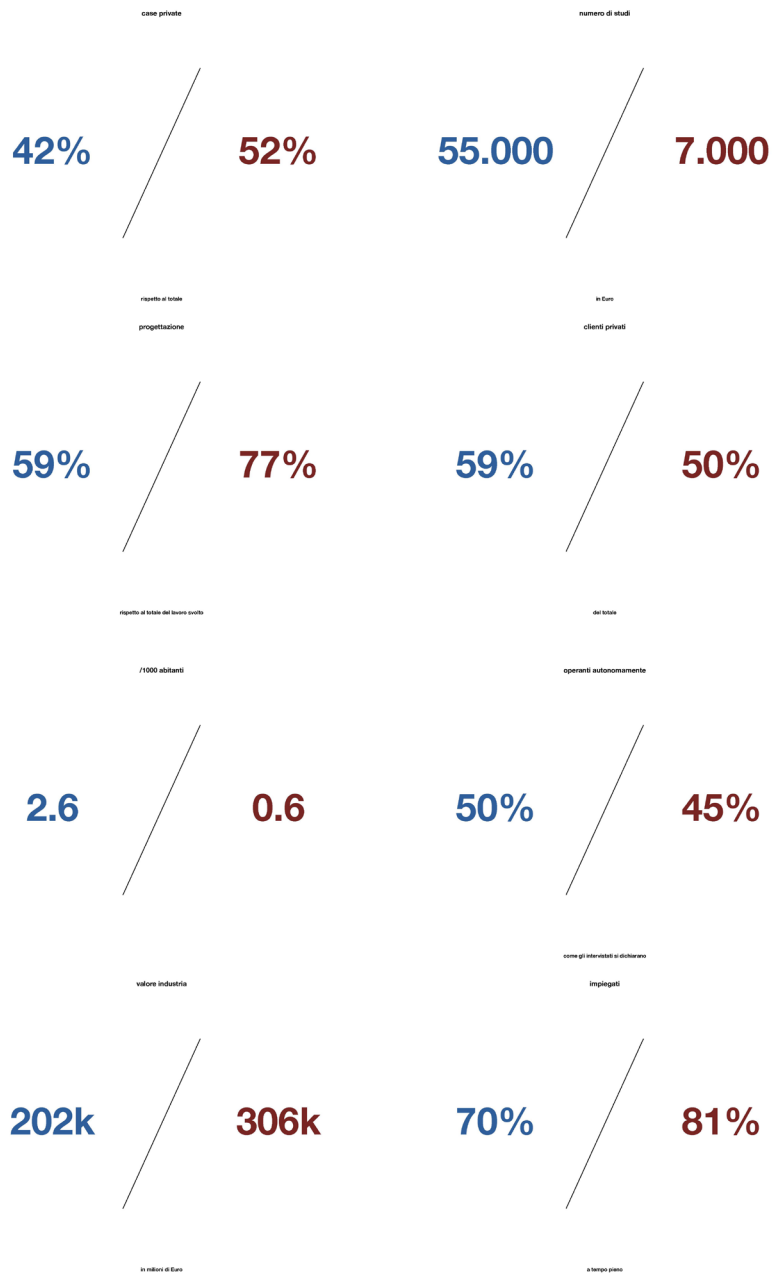


Figure 2: Clockwise from left: the percentage of private houses designed related to total business volume, the number of registered offices including sole practitioners, the percentage of time spent designing related to total working hours, the percentage of private clients
 Figure 3: Clockwise from left: number of architects per 1000 inhabitants, percentage of sole practitioners on total, total value of the construction industry, in euro, adjusted to PPP, percentage of fulltime employed architects

in the two Countries. This is not only a damaging figure per se, but also has the medium and long term consequences of hampering all sorts of investment business-side, and can greatly hamper practice expansion. Bigger commissions require more man-hours, which have to be paid upfront by the architect-employers the business of architecture usually works on payments based on stages' completion. so just like in any other business, expansion must rely on revenue generation or of venture capital, both of which are historically scarce in Italy.

MAKING ARCHITECTS: EDUCATING

The standard graduate course in Architecture in Italy has a duration of 3+2 years and gives direct access to the professional examination. Recently an option for a two year long professional experience allowing entry in the professional registry without a formal examination was introduced but it struggles to become a viable path for students, who are faced with a strong unpaid internship culture (which is not only relative to architecture but affects most professions within the creative industries and often beyond) (Fig. 10).

In the UK, the education process relies too on a 3+2 structure, but this does not automatically grant access to the professional examination. A minimum of 24 months of professional experience is required, along with a series of seminars and interviews within a tutoring structure provided by an Architecture faculty. Most students decide to spend 12 of these 24 months in practice during a break between the two legs of the academic process, but the remaining 12 have to be completed at the end of the course. It has to be noticed that in both countries the numbers of people completing the first 3 years and then *dropping out* are relatively low, with Italy having the edge with a single digit percentage (Figg. 5-6). Architectural education is generally composed of three factors: technical knowledge, design training and humanistic subjects. This mix reflects the varied nature of the

profession that hangs in an ever-shifting balance between engineering, arts and philosophy.

In the UK, the accreditation of faculties and their curricula is delegated to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which is something of a hybrid between a professional body, a public institution and a guild. As such, it has a mandate of protection of the public

interest but also of promotion of the profession and its members. This, in theory, makes the development of the curricular requirements something of an internal mechanism, autopoietic within the profession itself. Universities undergo a review every 5 years, and they might lose their capacity to provide certified qualifications if the requirements set out by the RIBA are not met. This can happen

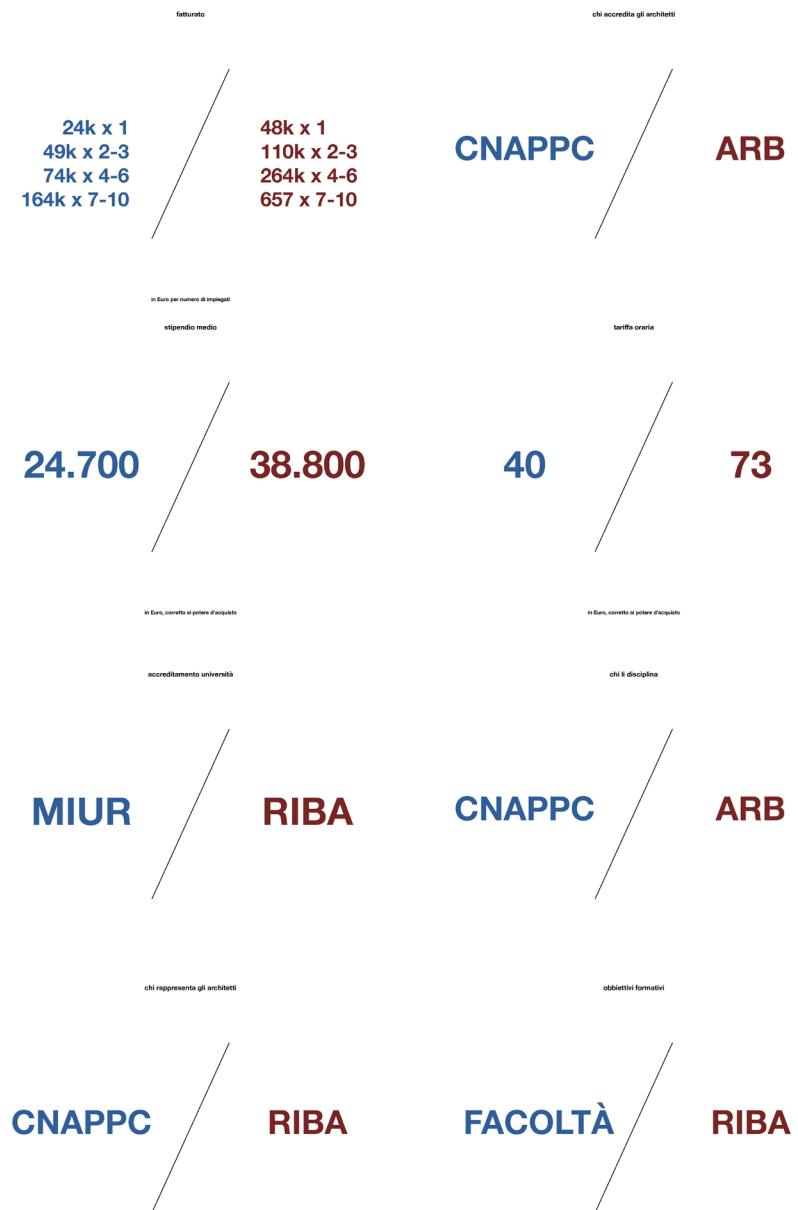


Figure 4: Clockwise from left: yearly practice revenue per number of employees, body responsible for the accreditation of architects, yearly average salary, average hourly rate

Figure 5: Clockwise from left: body responsible for accreditation of architecture faculties, body responsible for disciplinary actions against professional misconduct, body responsible for fostering the interests of architects, body responsible for setting out university curricula

quite often. Faculties can also go *under observation* and will then undergo mid-term reviews in order to keep their status. In Italy, faculties are accredited by the Ministry of Education and Research, which is obviously a public institution, and has no direct relationship with the architectural profession. The same 5 years rule apply, but in recent history there have been almost no cases of certifications being removed and

towards professions can be attributed to a different cultural approach in setting out bureaucracy: the tendency in Italy is towards centralization despite competences, as a means of control. In the UK there is a larger emphasis on individual freedom and initiative, both with regards to single citizens and abstract entities such as companies and governing bodies.

In both countries, institutions charged

The Italian document by the Ministry of Education casts a much wider net in terms of defining necessary credits and required hours of teaching for the different subjects, and this results in larger didactic guidelines documents for each faculty: in other words, the curriculum and the approach behind it varies greatly from institution to institution, defining a wide range of educational offers.¹³

The RIBA document on the contrary is very clearly detailed, credits are weighted to the hour of teaching thus making teaching structures rather consistent across the country (which obviously does not mean all faculties are the same or teach in the exact same way).¹⁴

In this situation, Italian faculties have developed their teaching systems in several different manners. Some keep design studio work completely separated from the taught courses; some others have developed integrated design studios. With this second approach, subjects like construction technology will be partly assessed through the development of the technical side of a design project, or restoration studies will be coupled with history of architecture. This approach introduces some of the complexities of the profession into the education process: architecture as a practice hangs in imperfect balance between technical, humanistic and artistic knowledge. Students are, theoretically, pushed to layer their design thinking in order to address the different sides of a project. The current and former students I have spoken with who attend faculties with

ORGANIZZAZIONE CNAPPC

Il Consiglio Nazionale Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori è un ente pubblico non economico istituito presso il Ministero della Giustizia con la Legge n. 1395/23; la sua attuale denominazione è stata definita ai sensi delle modifiche apportate dal DPR 328/01. Il CNAPPC coordina e sovrintende il sistema ordinistico italiano, costituito da 105 Ordini provinciali, preposto alla tenuta dell'Albo professionale, alla vigilanza sullo svolgimento della professione e all'esercizio delle relative funzioni di magistratura. Il Consiglio Nazionale interloquisce con Governo e ministeri competenti riguardo alle politiche riguardanti la professione, fedeltà e il territorio con l'obiettivo di tutelare la collettività e promuovere la cultura architettonica. Il CNAPPC sviluppa attività politiche, culturali e formative

rivolve agli oltre 155mila iscritti e alla società civile al fine di valorizzare la qualità progettuale in coerenza con il patrimonio culturale e la qualità della vita dei cittadini italiani. L'attività di approfondimento delle tematiche professionali è perseguita attraverso il lavoro svolto dai Dipartimenti e nel dialogo con le strutture territoriali attraverso la Conferenza Nazionale degli Ordini. Il Consiglio Nazionale assume delle determinazioni al fine di fornire il proprio parere e la propria interpretazione in merito a provvedimenti e leggi concernenti l'esercizio della professione. Le circolari inviate agli Ordini provinciali, forniscono un costante aggiornamento dei principali provvedimenti di natura legislativa connessi al mondo professionale.



Mr Ross Etherington
Deputy Director
The Registry
100a St John's Square
London
W1S 1JF

By email only

Dear Mr Etherington,

Use of the title "architect".

Our organisation, the Architects Registration Board, was established under the Architects Act 1997 to regulate the architectural profession in the UK. Section 20 of the Act prohibits anyone from using the title "architect" in business or practice unless they are registered with ARB. Please find attached further guidance for your information.

It has been brought to the Board's attention that the article 'St Martin Church by John Pawson' on your website, www.stmartinchurch.com, refers to John Pawson as an 'architect' (please see information attached). However, John Pawson is not a registered architect and therefore should not be described as such.

I can advise the Architects Act 1997 specifically protects the title 'architect' and derivatives such as 'architectural' and 'architectural' are not protected under the Act and therefore can be used as an alternative.

Could you please confirm in writing, within the next fourteen days the steps you will be taking to update this article accordingly.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Loukes
Professional Standards Administrator



Date: 1 August 2013
Ref: 10/13/14

Architects Registration Board
100a St John's Square
London W1S 1JF
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Fax: 020 7625 2201
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the process has more to do with the accreditation of newly born faculties. As we will see later when we analyse the legal context, this different attitude

with allowing Universities to teach architecture produce documents that serve as guidelines for faculties to follow in order to develop their curricula.

Figure 6: Left: Italian national registry of Architects statutory description. Right: letter sent by the ARB to the design and architecture portal Dezeen highlighting the misuse of the title when referring to John Pawson, who is not registered

this approach (a small, statistically non-relevant sample) have all complained about the same issue: coordination is scarce and the integrated design studio logistics are prone to failure. The main cause seems to lie with the way different teachers of different subjects are required to coordinate their efforts and schedules and this seldom happens smoothly, so students are stuck in a two-speed system. As for the academic staff (again, small sample), the most frequent complaint seems to be that this approach might be only suitable for 4th and 5th year students, who already should have some grasp of the complexities of the design process. For younger students this teaching method is often too burdensome and risks hindering the development of the freethinking process that since the modernist era (starting with the Bauhaus) is widely considered as a basis for the development of a productive creative process.

In both cases, the average Italian architecture faculty devotes around 30% of the total credits to design/studio work, while the rest is assessed and gained through written and oral exams on technical and theoretical subjects, with the former taking the credits edge as the student progresses towards the degree.¹⁵ The UK system, as we said, has a uniform structure. Design work, in the form of a very strong studio culture, takes up in excess of half the necessary credits. The rest is split between technical and humanistic subjects, with elective courses such as cinema, psychology and art studies being offered in different forms by the almost totality of Universities. There is no real integration between design studio and technological studies, aside from certain faculties which require students to investigate the structural and environmental sides of their thesis projects, and assess these as part of the relative technical units. Design work has a large place in the students' schedule, and these focuses are often introduced by the students themselves possibly as a way of compensating the separation imposed by the curriculum. They often do so even if they are not

directly assessed and scored as part of their technical studies.

In terms of sheer hours of frontal teaching, Italy takes the edge in terms of technical knowledge passing, which might also be an indicator of a different attitude towards the role and function of the profession in the industry. Teaching staff in both countries present heterogeneous profiles: from career academics to young professionals teaching on a contract basis, there is a wide assortment of professional and academic experiences.¹⁶

MAKING ARCHITECTS: CERTIFYING

The differences between the two systems become even more apparent when we look at the way architects are certified and the institutions that regulate the profession (Fig. 8).

The Examination process in Italy is a straightforward affair, if not somewhat obsolete in its practice: After their degree students sit a written exam based on a brief to which they must respond by hand-drawing and hand-rendering a design, developed to a level comparable to a planning application stage. The project must contain some elements of architectural composition while at the same time respecting design rules and

regulations. This happens on a single day, over the course of several hours. Together with this, the students must write texts in which they justify their design choices, provide an economic evaluation, and then on a separate session discuss themes connected with the cultural aspects of architecture.

A commission made up of academics and members of the local *Ordine* then examines the projects, and those who pass are the examined orally on a range of subjects, including planning laws, construction technology and the exam project itself. Passing this oral exam allows them to enrol in an *Ordine* of their choice, as they operate on a provincial level.

The process in the UK is much longer and entails very little assessment of the actual design skills of the architect-to-be. The afore-mentioned 24 months of practice are accounted for by the keeping of a diary, in which all work made is reported, underlining the project stages and typology, the functions performed etc. In the final 12 months, those that must be completed after the final two years of study, the students enter the "part III" stage, during which they are accompanied by a University (that might or might not be their alma mater) offering them support and seminars



Figure 7: Clockwise from left: potential per-capita value for each architect (market value/total number of practitioners), percentage of the GDP represented by the construction industry, new built vs. refurbishments as percentage of total work, country's GDP

concentrating on professional and legal issues. The final exam has much in common with a lawyer's bar exam: the student is presented with a series of questions and with a fictional scenario to which he has to react by assessing the contractual and legal obligations involved and by producing the relevant documents and communications, describing the actions he/she would undertake in said scenario. This then leads to an oral exam, during which both the practice diary, the professional experience and the exam answers are discussed.

This process is organized and handled by the RIBA. This means that the profession is responsible for its own professional assessment, with very little external influence, whereas in Italy the Ministry of education is again responsible for the examination process, albeit in collaboration with the local *Ordini*.

This profound difference in the examination process allowed the UK to withdraw from the Bologna agreements on the specific subject of Architecture.¹⁷ Whereas architects can freely move, practice and register with the different national Boards across Europe, the UK will not allow a foreign architect to register without a specific integration process. British regulations do allow for direct access to the part III exam, but this can only really be passed after an in-depth study of the local legal system.

Another striking difference between the two countries lies in the governing bodies that regulate the profession. In Italy the profession is regulated by a single body, the national council of Architects (CNAPP) which also operates for landscape architects and urban planners. This entity holds the national registry (through the *Ordini*), provides certification for CPD credits and administers disciplinary actions against its members. It is also responsible for taking legal action against fraudulent use of the title and has within its mandate the promotion of quality in architecture and the promotion, on the public scene, of the social relevance of the profession. It should also act, on a political level, as a pressure group to foster the interests

CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE
DEGLI ARCHITETTI
PIANIFICATORI
PAESAGGISTI
E CONSERVATORI

Art. 3

(Obblighi nei confronti del pubblico interesse)

1. Il Professionista ha l'obbligo di salvaguardare e sviluppare il sistema dei valori e il patrimonio culturale e naturalistico della comunità all'interno della quale opera.
2. Il Professionista nell'esercizio della professione deve vigilare con diligenza sull'impatto che le opere da lui realizzate andranno a provocare sulla società e sull'ambiente.
3. Il Professionista, per l'attività urbanistico-edilizia svolta nell'esercizio della propria attività professionale, deve rispettarne la rispondenza alle norme di legge e di regolamento, alle prescrizioni degli strumenti urbanistici ed alle modalità esecutive fissate nei titoli abilitativi.

Art. 4

(Obblighi nei confronti della professione)

1. L'iscrizione all'albo costituisce presupposto per l'esercizio dell'attività professionale e per l'utilizzo del relativo titolo.
2. Costituisce illecito disciplinare, anche ai sensi del successivo art. 5, l'attività esercitata senza titolo professionale o in periodo di sospensione, l'uso di un titolo professionale non conseguito e l'uso improprio di titoli.
3. Costituisce altresì grave illecito disciplinare il comportamento del Professionista che agevoli, o in qualsiasi altro modo diretto o indiretto, renda possibile a soggetti non abilitati o sospesi l'esercizio abusivo della professione o consenta che tali soggetti ne possano ricavare benefici economici.

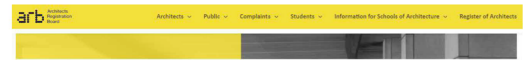
of Architects. It seems rather peculiar then, that with such wide range of responsibility and such large numbers of members, this entity has struggled in recent years not only to successfully promote the profession's interest on the national platform, but also to create any real leverage at a political level. During the last 10 years the profession in Italy has lost most of its political battles, from failing to defend professional prerogatives to the unsuccessful campaign to stop the government for cancelling of the minimum tariffs that were once established by law.

The UK, on the other hand, has split all these prerogatives between two bodies: the ARB and the RIBA. The Architects' Registration Board is the regulator of the profession. It exists *outside* the profession. Its principal aim is to regulate architects in order to protect the public interest. It acts as a registry, it sets the standards for conduct and practice and it administers disciplinary actions, it ensures that no one uses the term *Architect* without the proper qualifications, but it does so with the principal aim of protecting the public from fraudulent practitioners who might not meet the basic standard to which architects have to adhere. The Board itself is made up of 15 members, of which

7 are architects elected by the profession and the other 8 are lay members. This balance alone speaks clearly about the mission and the main prerogatives of this institution are.

The Royal Institute of British Architects, on the other hand, is a Guild of sorts. It promotes architecture and architects. Its services are firstly devoted to the interest of Architects: it does so by forwarding an agenda that has the professional, social, environmental and economical relevance of the architect in society at its centre. It is also vested with the power to determine the necessary curriculum for architects' education and accreditation.

Because this distinction between the two systems depends on a generally different approach to bureaucracy between the two countries, different legal systems and institutions, furthering this type of analysis would probably lead this research away from its intended purpose. But what is striking even at first glance is the amount of freedom allowed to the profession in the UK, compared to Italy, as far as self-regulation is concerned. In Great Britain, architecture ruling bodies can set universities' curricula, preside over their adherence to the guidelines and administer professional exams. In Italy, these functions are either shared or completely under the control of other



ARB was established by Parliament in 1997 to regulate the architects' profession in the UK. We are an independent, public interest body and our work in regulating architects ensures that good standards within the profession are consistently maintained for the benefit of the public and architects alike.

Our duties are contained by the 2007 Architects Act, and cover six main areas:

- Issuing and "re-issuing" – the qualifications needed to become an architect
- Keeping the ARB Register of Architects
- Ensuring that architects meet our standards for conduct and practice
- Investigating complaints about an architect's conduct or competence
- Making sure that only people on our Register offer their services as an architect.
- Acting as the UK's Competent Authority for architects

Our work is overseen by a Board of 15 members. Seven members are architects who are elected by the profession, and the remaining eight are members of the public (lay members) who are appointed by the Privy Council.

The Architects Code:
Standards of Professional
Conduct and Practice

As an architect you are expected to:

1. Be honest and act with integrity
2. Be competent
3. Promote your service honestly and responsibly
4. Manage your business competently
5. Consider the wider impact of your work
6. Carry out your work faithfully and conscientiously
7. Be trustworthy and look after your clients' money properly
8. Have appropriate insurance arrangements
9. Maintain the reputation of architects
10. Deal with disputes or complaints appropriately
11. Co-operate with regulatory requirements and investigations
12. Have respect for others

Figure 8: Left: Italian national registry of Architects statute. Right, top: ARB "about" page. Right, bottom: Code of practice, ARB

institutions, which in most cases are void of architects in their governing boards. One last anecdotal evidence of this profound difference is rather personal. During my first introductory lecture at the Faculty of Architecture in Portsmouth, the vice-dean went on for a while about the risks of giving free architectural advice to friends, family and prospective clients without being paid for it or having a contractual obligation. It sounded like scaremongering to a young student on his first day, but it was actually pretty sound advice: in the UK a qualified professional is always responsible for his words, so even free advice could make you liable if it led someone to break the law or it put people's lives and property in danger. Within this system, society is entitled to expect complete competence and professionalism from a publicly

recognized figure.

REGULATING ARCHITECTS: THE LAW AND THE PROFESSION.

As briefly mentioned in the data analysis, the Italian system does protect the title, but it is mostly concerned with the functions of the architect, even though these functions are largely shared by other professions (all of which have other governing bodies and require different levels of accreditation as a guarantee of standards and codes of practice). The law, aside from punishing the abuses of title, states that only regularly registered architects can sign planning applications and specifically limits the possibility of designing and managing intervention on historical and listed buildings to architects only. It must be remembered that not only Italy has within its confines

possibly the largest number of historical buildings in the world, which permeate practically every urbanized area of the country. Add to that the fact that by law all elements of the built environment older than 50 years are considered listed by default. So the main functions that can exclusively be performed by architects are mostly within the realm of a bureaucracy that deals mostly with restoration projects where the freedom of architectural intervention is severely limited. A system of planning cross-applications addressed to different public agencies so complex that, in recent years, Italian governments have tried to slim it down by making heavy use of a process called "self certification": a technician signs off declarations certifying that a certain project is compliant to norms and regulations, and by doing so accepts the



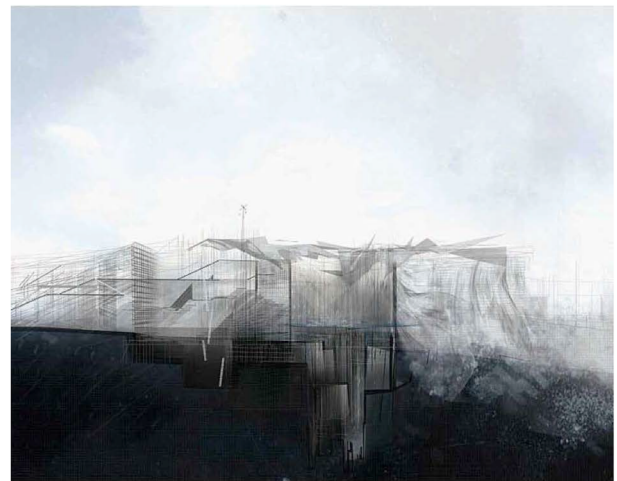
Robots of Brixton is an architectural film project that explores the relationship between architecture, class and race. Using Brixton, (or an augmented Brixton) as backdrop, the project uses robots as metaphors for a future intake of migrants to the UK. It acts as a commentary on the cyclical nature of the working class in areas with diverse populations such as Brixton

The projects shows Brixton as a degenerated and disregarded area inhabited by London's new robot workforce. The robots are built and designed to carry out all of the tasks which humans are no longer inclined to do. The mechanical population of Brixton has rocketed, resulting in unplanned, cheap and quick additions to the skyline.

The film follows the trials and tribulations of young robots surviving at the sharp end of inner city life, living the predictable existence of a populous hemmed in by poverty, disillusionment and mass unemployment. When the Police invade the one space which the robots can call their own, the fierce and strained relationship between the two sides explodes into an outbreak of violence echoing that of 1981.

Architecturally Robots of Brixton has three main design strands.

1. Urbanism and Masterplanning. Do design the film I first had to readapt an interoperate the architecture of Brixton. Social housing, Markets, Public buildings and spaces were all researched and redesigned at urban scale.
2. Film Design. The film in itself was a complex design project, all the environments, set design, transitions between films scenes all had to fit together harmoniously.
3. Robot Design, using 2D and 3D techniques each robot was designed in detail. Robots of Brixton is a projects that bridges Architecture, and politics using the medium of film as an open and accessible way in. The England riots of 2011 amplify the subject matter as both potent and relevant.



An Architecture of Lumetric Causality investigates the potential of aesthetically generated realities in architecture. Through iterative deployment of generative film, physical modelling, digital scripting and analogue drawing, these methodologies reveal a series of uncanny tangible worlds to explore. Through the programmatic design of a Lost and Found upon Willow Island, in Munich, Germany, these variable translations of narrative, programme and context tease out a series of spatial complexities.

Figure 9: Images and abstracts from dissertations submitted to the President's Medal student prize

legal responsibilities of making a false statements (should the project come under scrutiny by the authorities).

In the UK, on the contrary, there is no professional requirement for the presentation of a planning application (there is in fact a much more limited number of application procedure typologies related to the built environment, but this is a whole different subject). Any citizen can submit a P.A. for a new building or the extension of an existing one, because all planning applications undergo the same scrutiny and as such are denied or approved without making any reliance on who is presenting it.

In this system, the British architect has no special power whatsoever. What the law does protect, and does so to at times ridicule extents, is the title itself. It does that to the point that there have been several instances of the ARB denouncing the use of the title by world-famous foreign architects who were not registered in the UK and were practicing in Britain (Fig. 8).

This again underlines both a very different attitude in the use of bureaucracy and possibly a different position and relevance of the profession in the eye of the public. By protecting the name, and not the prerogatives, the emphasis is on the competences of the architects and not on what he/she can sign or certify.

Within the construction industry architects in both countries enjoy more or less the same position: within large developments, the construction companies hold most of the decisional power (as it always happens, within a liberal capitalistic system, the owner of the means of production dictates the rules). In a sense, the freedom to present planning applications in the UK means that the architect is even less indispensable to the process. On the contrary in Italy, especially when intervening in town centres or in areas of historical or artistic interest, the role of the architect becomes indispensable, if not in the design process, at least in obtaining the relevant permits.

But all in all, in both countries architects'

work impact only around 5% of the buildings being constructed, meaning that there is still a lot of work to be done both in promoting the value of professional design in the public eye and in the lobbying for stricter regulations on the permit processes. Which does not necessarily mean a legal fight to make architects the only professional figures allowed to design buildings. A strategy could be to put a greater emphasis the competences specific to the role of architects and how they can bring qualitative added values to the built environment.

To conclude this swift legal and bureaucratic comparison of the two countries we can analyse the contractual frame of reference within which the architects operate and how these regulate their relationship with clients and builders.

Italy has a very varied panorama, with a legal system that allows for contracts to be drafted freely between parties and to be legally binding as long as they do not stipulate anything illegal. On the lower part of the budget spectrum, most sole practitioners work with no written contracts beyond a letter stating the agreed fee and the scope of work, and even this document is not often used. It was also made object of a campaign by the *Ordini* promoting the importance of setting out scope of work, compensation and intellectual property ownership as a base for a stable architect-client relationship. Nowadays most *Ordini* have, as part of their compulsory CPD courses, lectures and tutorials teaching architects how to set up these vital documents.

In larger developments, contracts are obviously employed but the side holding the larger contractual weight is the developer, who can often rely on internal legal offices and consultants. As is widespread custom, fee payments in Italy too are based on the progress of site-works for both designers and construction companies. In any case, a lack of fixed fee structure or contractual frame of reference allows for different settlements to be agreed between clients and designers, a situation which can

obviously work both ways. The majority of the transactions, which as we saw are mainly residential renovations carried out by single practitioners for private clients, are agreed via email or orally.

The UK on the contrary relies heavily on an institution called the Joint Contract Tribunal. This council, founded by the RIBA itself and made up of several members coming from institutions involved in the construction trade, has been drafting contracts for use in the industry for over 80 years. Members include envoys from the British Property Federation, the National Federation of Builders, the UK Contractors Group, the Local Government Association, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and several others. This means that contractors, designers and local authorities all have an input in the drafting of these contracts, which are specifically written for the type of procurements and jobs they need to regulate: minor alterations, residential works, design and build, etc. While these contracts are not mandatory to use, they are part of a well-established culture of contractual practice and are certainly the centre of a very extensive literature. The RIBA itself publishes numerous volumes on contractual law, contract choice, litigation and management, together with manuals on the setting up of practices, their management and structuring, project managing, billing and so forth. These contracts are not without flaws and are at times object of criticism from different sides, but they are amended every few years (and new ones are created as the need arises) but since they are part of the professional education and development of architects in the country, they have become part and basis of architectural practice.

MAKING ARCHITECTS: CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this comparative analysis was not to determine which system (educational, professional or legal) is the best one even if, to be completely honest, by looking at the last 20 years and

compare the two scenes in economic returns, academic impact and world-renown architects produced, however much these comparative methods might be judged shallow or irrelevant, there is only one clear winner between the two. Regardless, since I am a practicing architect with an office based in Italy, it is only natural to try and determine which aspects of the UK framework could benefit our profession in Italy. Changing the way architects are educated or the way they contractually define their relationship with clients is not going to change the fundamental differences in the way the two economies operate and grow, or even the way architects are perceived by society (in the short term, at least).

Bureaucratically, the two countries are profoundly different: Italy is still a very divided country, with a rather diffused mistrust between institutions and the people. The legal system is thus developed to become an instrument of control or damage limitation, and certainly often becomes a hollow power structure which lacks in enforcing powers, unable to control those most at risk of breaking the rules. This is certainly (and is a constant refrain of international analyses by rating agencies) a pulled hand brake on the country's economic, cultural and social development.

The UK on the other hand has a tradition for developing clearer procedures and streamline bureaucracy. If this relatively small country has become first the largest empire the world has ever known and subsequently the bank and insurance centre of the world is in part thanks to its management culture, law abiding citizens and organizational skills. This well-structured system has suffered several blows in recent years, much like in most of the western world, under market pressures for privatizations and dismantling of state infrastructure, but the advantage one country has over the other is still large. A clear example is the redesign, in recent years, of the whole .gov.uk government websites which is now heralded as a successful example of public sector digital interface.

Economically, Italy has always been a manufacturing country with a long tradition of craftsmanship and a small-scale industrial infrastructure. Its economy has dwindled for years, and as it often happens the construction industry is the first to slow down and the last to pick up pace again. This has happened in the UK too after the global financial crisis, with many practices left exposed and in debt both domestically and internationally. But with time the UK industry picked up pace again and the sector has improved all its numbers and outlook (another test will surely come from Brexit, given the great connection between architecture in the UK and the rest of Europe, both in terms of projects and workforce). But, as most of the industry is made up of small practices doing local work in both countries, the fluctuations of the local real economies have the largest influence on business. This, again, is another aspect which cannot be easily impacted by changes within the profession.

It is hard to define exactly what the societal perception of architects in Italy or the UK is. Anyone practicing this profession in either country will probably tell you that most people around them have no clear idea of the actual function of an architect in the construction process is. The average Italian architect might be a little bit worse off because of the confusion between the different *designer* figures. I cannot remember all the times I have been called *Geometra* or *Ingegnere* on site.

What is certain is that UK architects have the advantage of an institution devoted to the promotion of the profession. The fact that in the British system the professional prerogatives of the architect are not defined or protected by law, but only the title is, could mean that architects are not employed by clients for what documents they allowed to sign off but because the general perception is that of an added value to the design and construction process.

To some extents the role of the architect in the UK is much more clearly defined than in Italy, first to architects themselves (and

to all the other professionals involved in the construction industry). The fact that, for example, standard contract forms define the functions of and relationship between the different parties means that the role of the designer is precisely described and clearly understood. This might have propagated to the general public during the last decades. The RIBA also produces leaflets, books and texts providing guidelines not only for architects but also for builders and clients. This is not to say that the RIBA or the profession saw no crisis in the UK.

The long-standing feud with Prince Charles, a fervid defender of the *traditional* against anything modernist or contemporary, has been tarnishing the reputation of the profession, and the RIBA has not been able to either completely win the argument nor to stop the Prince from interfering with design decisions on several important projects. But the RIBA has, over the years, established itself as a real guiding light for the building industry, and together with its status has managed to help define the role of architects in the UK: the professionals who design buildings. And while this might be an over-simplification of our profession, it certainly represents a good starting point for asserting higher social roles and more intellectually challenging positions.

Academically we find relatable differences: Italy has a much freer academic offering, changing much from University to University. This difference is not only qualitative, but also quantitative: different faculties will offer different credit balances, different emphases on certain units and different ways of teaching and managing studio work.

The teaching staff is usually made up largely of career academics, with practicing architects being generally only awarded part time contracts or temporary positions, often collaborating with design studios pro bono. Yet faculties are controlled and validated by an external entity which has nothing to do with architecture. The rather freer nature of Italian faculties, coupled with

their smaller numbers (34 vs. 53, which translates in generally larger numbers of students per faculty) results in a very varied academic experience, both from university to university and from student to student, as they have to wilfully engage with the institution and the teaching staff (much they will too have to very wilfully engage with local authorities and the profession once they are in practice).

The general sense is that of a student body left much to its own devices, with the studio culture taking a back seat unless the efforts of specific members of the academic staff, willing to go beyond their *call of duty*, compensate for this absence.

In the UK the system is much more

from boutique studios to larger offices (academic work is often an important lifeline for young practices in the UK). Within the defined credit structure, room is left for different subjects and elective units, most of which humanistic in nature, that students can choose to complete their curricula.

All of this is structured and validated by an architects-driven institution, so in a sense the world of architectural education becomes autopoeitic, in the original sense of the word, a system of entities (architects) that replicate themselves. And obviously, a very design-centred replication.

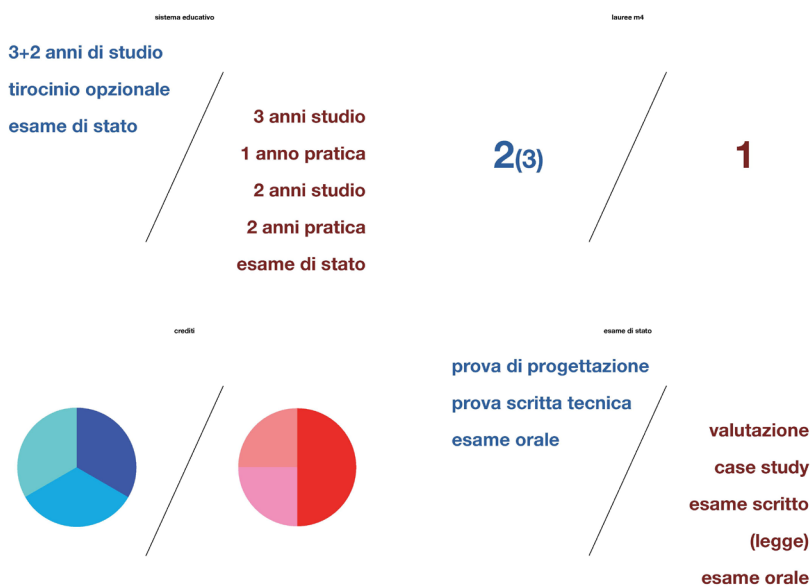
Design work in the studio usually happens with considerable amounts of freedom,

even some students producing films as their final opus. Contaminations and intellectual references are sought and fostered, while technical units are taught and assessed separately. The extent of these experimentations can be seen by looking at the projects submitted for the President's Medals,¹⁸ which claims to be the longest running architecture student prize in the world and is awarded yearly by the RIBA.

The downside of this studio culture, of this design attitude, is the diffusion of what is generally referred to as *all-nighter culture* within the faculty. The constant design review process pushes students to a continuous state of charette, with what are sometimes felt a 2 or 3 reviews per week on top of all the other academic work. In a recent study, the UK's architecture students were found to be the most susceptible to mental health issues, stress, fatigue and physical problems connected to sleep deprivation. This toxic culture spills easily out into the office environment, with all the imaginable consequences.

Again, not all of the UK's architecture students aspire or will become experimental or architects. The large majority will go on to become sole practitioners in the large renovation and extension industry, and many other will join the great number of medium sized practices that work on commercial projects and large housing developments, all of which are a far cry from the avant-garde of architecture. Studio culture is not a cure for mediocrity either.

In conclusion the basic difference seems to be this: the rules in the UK are clearer, fewer in number and more thoroughly applied. This slenderer framework (in academia, in bureaucracy, in the definition of the profession and in the relationship between clients and architects) has a double advantage: it clearly guides those who wish to navigate within its confines, while providing a secure structure for those who wish to move into more progressive action. Personal and professional freedom remains a staple of the Anglo-Saxon world, and architecture is no different.



controlled, standardized and uniform. Which is not to say that all universities are as academically or culturally relevant as the AA or the Bartlett, but students across the country will be faced with similar structures, with design taking the largest part of their time, in a very controlled and *safe* environment. They will spend most of their time in university reviewing their own design work with tutors, who are often young practicing architects and whose work environment ranges

and students are often presented with surreal briefs or left free to develop their own. As they progress, students are encouraged to experiment more and this often culminates in dissertation projects which have very little to do with what the general public might consider architecture. During my research I have encountered several final projects that revolved around very abstract briefs, projects revolving around and flirting with sciences, technology, literature and

Figure 10: Clockwise from left: educational structure, type of architecture degree, credit distribution between design, technical subjects, humanistic subjects, components of the accreditation exam

In Italy on the other hand the rule-structure is much more layered in some instances, and completely absent in other. Sometimes, one condition leads to the other: rules are so complex that they can hardly be respects, or enforced. National, regional and local laws and procedures are almost geologically stratified. Institutions cross-control each other and overlaps of competence are frequent. Within this environment, personal freedom is often obtained only within the absence or the disregard of the rule itself.

Without getting too far from of the subject, the issue at hand might be this: the architecture industry in Italy must learn to define first and foremost what an architect does, and once it has done thiws, put all its efforts into spreading this knowledge both among students and the public. This has been the main staple of the RIBA for decades, and this has proved to be a vital lifeline for the profession. Recent talks and discussion about specialization and the creation of more specific post-graduation courses might look like a temporary solution to sort the job crisis in the sector, but their long-term consequences might be the opposite: a progressive dilution of the role of architect-as-designer, which in turn will only rarefy our relevance. A breaking up of architecture culture into an endless array of subcultures.

Students should be able to have more exchanges with practicing architects within the university, which would help them put all they learn into context and possibly favour a review of the curricula themselves: how much of what they are taught is still relevant?

At the same time, they should be allowed more time to study humanistic subjects, to gain the instruments necessary in building a cultural narrative. Why is this important? Because architecture occupies a border land between professions and the arts. Architecture without humanistic studies becomes a technical practice in direct competition with other professionals who have been occupying this position for much longer and are much better suited to it. What might otherwise happen is that by imbuing architectural academia with technical data and requirements

from the onset, we will end up lowering the intellectual requirements to a mere technical exercise of box ticking and compliance with regulations, which would end up creating a generation of designers who can only design what is already possible. Humanistic studies beyond architectural history and theory are the springboard from which students can develop an understanding of society and culture on which to (literary) build new readings and solutions, and the curricular freedom granted to Italian faculties allows them to foster these cultural aspects (Fig. 9).

During the Sixties, Italian universities were a hotspot of cultural activity at the forefront of both the artistic avant-garde and the cultural/political discussion shaking the country in that period. So, in that sense, freedom (some might call it anarchy) was exploited in a creative way. Nowadays, market pressures are shaping the industry and thus the profession, so we could greatly benefit by having clearer guidelines and reference structures such as the ones enjoyed by our British colleagues, in order to resist these pressure at least within academia, where we could let creativity flourish, students explore more radical issues and professionals concentrate on creating better, more engaging designs. A sandbox of sort. But the real question is: what could those structures practically be?

In academia, a more precise description of the curricula and a more defined credit structure, both developed in collaboration with the National Council of Architects and possibly with a greater focus on design than is today allowed to students. The contracts regulating the collaborations between practicing architects and universities could become simpler, less binding for both parties, and encourage these exchanges: universities around the world boast their professional teaching collaborations as a *selling point* while at the same time architects outside academia use them as a platform for research and visibility. There is no reason Italian universities should not do the same to the benefit of both themselves and Italian architects.

In the middle-ground between education and practice more relevance

could probably be given to the legal and contractual implications of the profession. Professional internships become a vital instrument to allow the student to relate what he/she has learnt to what he will practice. Again, working professionals within the academic institutions should provide tutoring and guidance. This could probably lead, in time, to an overhaul of the licensing exam, whose practical exam has lost most of connection it had to the real world.

These internships could also be state-funded, while closely controlled by mentors within the universities: this would provide workforce for smaller practices and much better working conditions for graduates, who in return would enter the profession and the job market with some relevant, certified working experience, making them more productive ad able to command higher wages from the onset of their career.

Finally, the profession should reassess how it sees itself. The National council should take a stand: Architects design. Architects should be architects. Not BIM managers, clerks of work, health and safety managers, quantity surveyors or planning application experts. Architectural institutions should be the first to assert this, both within and outside the profession. Especially in a country with such amazing natural and built treasures, the role of the architect as the designer of buildings that can integrate with their surroundings is vital and is too often forgotten (both by the public AND the architects themselves). We have a social responsibility for good design. And should certainly have a mission for great design. And with all that comes also a great power that we ourselves have often decided to relinquish.

All images by the author.

Note

Footnotes

- 1 Data sources include *The Architects Council of Europe Architecture Survey*, the RIBA Salary Survey, the CNAPP, ARB and RIBA official websites and documentation, the RIBA Library in London.
- 2 These framework are derived, for the UK, from the RIBA; ARB and JCT website and documentation. For Italy, the CNAPP and the relevant laws and decrees such as the Decree 223/2006.
- 3 *The Architectural Profession in Europe*, Survey by the Architects' Council of Europe, 2016.
- 4 These figures come both from provincial boards conducting survey and from cross referencing enrolment data with financial data from the Architects and Engineers' Pension Fund (Inarcassa).
- 5 *The Architectural Profession in Europe*, Survey by the Architects' Council of Europe, 2016. [non ripeterei ogni volta la nota, ma scriverei qualcosa come "tutti i dati qui riportati provengono da..."]
- 6 "Accreditamento lauree e lauree magistrali." <https://miur.gov.it/accreditamento-lauree-e-lauree-magistrali>, last accessed 16 September 2019.
- 7 "Validation Procedures and Criteria." <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/validation-procedures-and-criteria>, last accessed 16 September 2019.
- 8 This figure was calculated on the basis of the 5 year credits systems of the faculties in Milan, Venice, Florence, University of Roma 3 and Naples.
- 9 Some contract-teachers I have contacted in Italy lamented the fact that in order to obtain a full time position they have to renounce their professional careers, especially if they are sole practitioners or partners in a firm, and this double position would be in contrast with their contractual agreements with the University. Others confuted these statements, and I have not been able to secure copies of the contracts in question. Whatever the case might be, there is certainly an attitude issue at play here, which puts Italian academic institutions in contrast with other European schools: there is a mistrust or a lack of understanding between the profession and academic world when it comes to one employing the other. In the rest of Europe, this interaction is often encouraged and mutually beneficial.
- 10 The Bologna Agreement is the European Union's treaty regulating the mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications among the member states.
- 11 "President's Medals". <http://www.presidentsmedals.com/>, last accessed 16 September 2019.

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