

## A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE: THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION AT THE OSLO SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

This volume of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research opens for a discussion on the character of architectural research and on possible directions to advance it. It continues the debate which was commenced during the annual seminar of the Nordic Association of Architectural Research, held in Uppsala/Ultuna 19–21 April this year. In this discussion, which is first and foremost directed towards the future, some thoughts should, nevertheless, be given to the near past. While talking of architectural research one must also see it in a context of research education, which influences attitudes, knowledge and skills of research recruits and practitioners. In the following a brief report from a ten year history of doctoral education at the Oslo School of Architecture will be given. The dialogical relationship between the concept of this research education and its “companion”, the journal Research Magazine, has

influenced the 6 batches of doctoral students of the School, which is the reason why this little report seems to belong to the subject matter of this volume.

The Doctoral Programme at the Oslo School of Architecture was launched in September 1992. The most recent volume of its own Research Magazine, No 5, marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both the Doctoral Programme and its research journal.

The Oslo School of Architecture, henceforth referred to as OSA, was established in 1945 as an “emergency support” for the students of architecture whose studies were curtailed by the war. The course of studies lasted two years, following three years of studies at the long established State School of Arts and Crafts. In 1969 the institution was awarded the status of a School of Architecture with an external governing board appointed by the Ministry of Education. In 1983, it was elevated to the status of an autonomous university college with an internal Executive Board, appointed by the then Minis-

try of Education. In 1995, a new University Legislation reconfirmed the academic status of the School. The following year the School merged with the Institute of Industrial Design.

The School has traditionally emphasised the value of practice as the main source of professional and pedagogical competence. The status as an academic institution demanded that the OSA establish its own doctoral programme along the lines of similar institutions. Research at the School, with few exceptions, was a relatively new phenomenon in 1992. At an institution without a strong research tradition, it was a challenge to start an organised research education.

The OSA was given the right to confer a doctoral degree as early as in 1981, but doctoral studies were more or less non-existent until 1992. The newly established Doctoral Programme was based on the national Doctoral Code (Dunin-Woyseth, 1996:66).

The Programme was primarily targeted towards architects, but professionals from other so-called practical-aesthetic fields, like landscape architecture, object design and visual arts, i.e. "making" professions, were admitted for the first time in 1995. Since then, the Doctoral Programme has played an active role of a hub within the national research education system called Norway Network (Norgesnett). Its profile has been strongly formed by the fact that it recruited candidates mainly from the "making" professions, and that their research subjects have most often been derived from the PhD students' own practice-related experience.

The Research Magazine has been a companion to the development of the Doctoral Programme throughout this entire period of 10 years. It has documented the debate on architectural and design research in its own institutional, Scandinavian and international context, and it has discussed the principles of the content and structure of the doctoral curriculum.

The first volume of the Research Magazine, published in June 1992, summarised the preparation process for the start of the Doctoral Programme. It reported extensively from a series of seminars, called Research Forum, which were held at the School in the academic year 1991/1992. Its objectives were to stimulate a debate on architectural research, reflective practice and

on new, innovative architectural works, as well as on the relation between them, for developing a relevant academic discourse. The staff presented and discussed their own work as a base for mapping out the internal scholarly competence as well as their intentions to acquire or expand it. The long-term objective was to motivate some of the faculty to join the doctoral studies in order to increase the School's internal capacity for doctoral supervision.<sup>1</sup>

In the years 1991–1992 an intensive debate was held in order to define a doctoral curriculum for the class of PhD students who were expected to start their doctoral studies in the autumn of 1992. At the national level this debate included the two Norwegian schools of architecture, the Oslo School and the Faculty of Architecture at the Norwegian Technical University in Trondheim. At the same time a more general debate was started among the Scandinavian schools of architecture, which has since continued and resulted in many common doctoral courses and a common research education programme, the so-called Millennium Programme (Dunin-Woyseth, 2002). This continuous debate was aimed at defining the contents and structure of the obligatory research education for PhD students recruited mainly from the design professions. On the one hand, it should have close relevance to the core subjects of the professions, and, on the other hand, it should provide the appropriate training for good scholarship.

The second volume of the Research Magazine appeared in 1995, and it described and discussed the first curriculum, which was carried out throughout three semesters in 1992 – 1993. It was heavily based on the knowledge aspect of architecture, concentrating on the theory of architecture. Volume 2 consisted of three parts, each representing a specific part of the curriculum. It described and discussed the introductory course to the theory of science and the humanities; the Nordic Symposium on architectural theory, and the three courses on specific subjects of common theoretical interest to the first class of the OSA doctoral students. From a time perspective of 10 years it has become clear that the curriculum expressed the intention of the research milieu at the School to legitimise the

profession's theory as the main source of its intellectual identity, as in other academic disciplines, where theory constitutes the main core of the doctoral curricula.

The role of architectural theory to architectural scholarship has been examined during the theory courses for subsequent classes of PhD students. The issue of disciplinary identity for design professions has been widely discussed in the European context (*Doctorates in Design and Architecture*, 1996). The OSA took the initiative to organise a similar debate on the matter with international participation, which resulted in the symposium "Architecture and Teaching. Epistemological Foundations", held in Ascona, Switzerland, in 1997. The invited contributors represented a smaller group of prominent scholars. The proceedings from the symposium, itself a co-operation among three parties, have been recorded as a joint publication of: the EAAE<sup>2</sup> Workshop Proceedings (Vol. 02), the Architecture & Behaviour series – 1998, and the OSA Research Magazine (Vol 3).

The contributions submitted to this publication represent a strong degree of unanimity about the issue that a knowledge base, understood as the intellectual identity of a field, in design professions is different from that of the academic disciplines. While the latter heavily relies on their theory which is also supposed to guide the production of new knowledge through qualified research, the role of theory in design professions is different both with regard to its professional and its research practice.

A pertinent, concise description of the character of architectural theories has recently been proposed by Mo:

In design professions and in social practice like business administration or social work, theory is more for inspiration, collections of tips and good advice, frameworks for thinking, or methods of analysis, without recommendation of particular solutions. Theory is meant as a contribution to professional judgement, and is to be constantly adjusted in application, as individual or project-based adaptation. It is not the intention that theory is to be tested scientifically. It is tested in a way in practice, but it

is not falsifiable. (Mo,2001:150)

She writes further on:

Architects also try to write theory at a higher level, a meta understanding that is meant to lead to better theories for practice. These are theories about the discipline itself, reflections over what it stands for, what direction it is going in, (...)

(Mo,2001:151)

The fourth volume of the Research Magazine, edited in 2001, without having the ambition to write a theory at a higher level, makes an attempt to discuss the principles for establishing a "making" discipline; to formulate some reflections over what it could stand for, what directions it could be going in and what criteria should decide its academic standards. It appeared under the title "Towards a Disciplinary Identity of the Making Professions". It argues that the knowledge base in design professions relies strongly on mutually related knowledge components: history, theory and criticism. It also maintains that the academic standards can only be established over time, through research practice and continuous scholarly criticism.

The most recent volume of the OSA Research Magazine is the fifth in the series. Its emphasis is on a more conscious process of establishing scholarly standards in the "making professions". The issue of "good handicraft" in this field has been internationally debated in recent years (Buchanan et al., 2000), (Durling and Friedman, 2000), (Frayling, 1993–94, 2001), (Frayling et al., 1998).

The Head of the Royal College of Art and Design, Sir Christopher Frayling, refers to the British experiences in the academic strengthening of art and design-related research. According to Sir Frayling, British PhD regulations require the following criteria to be fulfilled in order to submit doctoral theses:

They must make a recognisable and communicable contribution to knowledge and understanding in the field of study concerned; the PhD students must demonstrate a critical knowledge of the research methods appropriate to this field of studies. The latter requires that the candidate is acquainted with the range of

the relevant methods and knows when and at what level to apply them, even though the thesis may demonstrate mastery of only one method. It is consistent with this principle, that the contribution to knowledge and understanding could itself be focused on method as much as on content or product. The key words here are “critical knowledge of research methods”. The one thing that all the regulations have in common is that to be awarded a doctorate the candidate must show the awareness of the route map by which he or she reached the points described in the thesis. The technical phrase for this is research method.

(Frayling, 2001)

Volume 5, is markedly different from previous editions. It is made up as a group assignment of ten PhD students studying at the OSA. This assignment belongs to the category of obligatory submissions within the doctoral education system in Norway, called “Research Dissemination”. The title of the assignment was: “Route Mapping: On Relevant Methods, One’s Own Choice and Application”. The challenge in this assignment has been to answer the question posed and to do it in an intersubjectively communicable way. In their endeavours the PhD students were advised by his or her doctoral supervisor who accepted the final version of each contribution. It is hoped that this volume will not only add something valuable to the authors themselves, but also to the wider academic community of the “making” professions, by contributing in a positive manner to the process of professionalisation of research in the practical-aesthetic fields.

New challenges are underway, and it is to be expected that the second decennium will bring about new tasks for both the Doctoral Programme and its companion, the Research Magazine.

Halina Dunin-Woyseth. Professor Dr.  
Director of the Doctoral Programme, AHO  
Halina.Dunin-Woyseth@aho.no

## Notes

1. Some of the teachers who then joined the Doctoral Programme completed their studies and have since acted as supervisors for new groups of PhD students.

2. The EAAE (European Association of Architectural Education) is an international organisation which promotes the exchange of ideas and people within the field of architectural education and research, and encourages the development of the subject throughout Europe.

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