



European
Council of
Interior
Architects

Round Tables Report

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1 Introduction

The European Council of Interior Architects, ECIA, organised on 24 September 2022 in the framework of the yearly General Assembly which took place in Florence round table discussions about important questions for the profession. These were centered around the topics of adaptive re-use of buildings and the need for PhD programs for interior architects/designers. The round tables were part of the EU network project of ECIA – Building on Connections for a Stronger Profession, BCSP – co-funded under the EU Creative Europe programme.

2 Summary of round tables discussion

The round tables took place on 24 September 2022 in Florence after the ECIA General Assembly (GA). About 100 persons participated in the meeting. Participants were the attendees of the ECIA GA (delegates of the national organisations and guests like representatives of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE), of the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) and of higher education institutions in Europe) and Italian invitees, mainly professionals and representatives of regional professional organisations and higher education institutions. The meeting was recorded.

The event was divided into two parts around two discussion themes and questions relevant for the profession.

First Round table:

Adaptive re-use of existing buildings is now gathering increased interest from architects. How can we as practicing interior architects - Interior designers make our knowledge, experience and competence in this field more well known in our respective countries? Eco-sustainable design and the designer's task - correct practices, materials, systems, furnishings

In a lively and open discussion, it was underlined that the role of the interior architects and designers in adaptive re-use is vital. They play an essential role and can massively contribute to helping Europe to become greener, more sustainable and also beautiful. It should be a cooperating role stressing the aspect of multidisciplinary work to be executed together with other professions and clients. To this end, a constant dialogue would be needed including with users. Interaction and overcoming barriers should be the focus. The profession should not be regarded as inferior but complementary to other architectural work. In this regard, the political idea of a New European Bauhaus with many professions to cooperate to reach a better and sustainable environment could be an important driver. In the European Green Deal and Renovation Wave important goals are determined where the profession is asked to contribute to achieve them. It also has an important role in overcoming the energy crises. The participants underlined that knowledge and better education in relation to materials and furnishings as well as human beings and behaviour is needed. Single use of materials and houses is not possible and correct any more. The aspect of wellbeing should be included in a systematic way. Here the professions' competence is needed. To achieve this, it was highlighted in the discussion that it is also important to communicate in a clear and transparent way. Marketing, communication, and general education play a vital role in convincing clients and other professions to use "old" materials.

It was also stressed that legal and local conditions for the use of materials are an important aspect. Products can be different in different surroundings. Sometimes the national or local construction laws could be a barrier and hinder the re-use of materials.

Second Round table:

How could the third level of education (PhD level) benefit the profession of interior architect in your country?

Most of the participants were in favour of strengthening the third level of education to achieve better recognition. Some, however, stressed the liberty they have when practicing without regarding the degree of education. A majority was of the opinion, that more research, knowledge-based arguments, written values and facts as result of a higher education level are necessary for better recognition and acceptance of the profession including equal footing with other architectural professions. They underlined the need to evolve and to professionalise through a higher level of education towards society, clients and in the discussion with other professions. Professional qualifications that are recognised and respected worldwide help in the argumentation for a better acceptance and strengthening of the profession.

3 Conclusions

The discussion showed that the awareness and knowledge of different players concerning the re-use of materials should be developed. The role of interior architects and designers in this transformation was seen as vital. Interaction and dialogue should therefore be enforced. Communication and education should be increased. This should happen on local, regional and European level. Regional and national Building Laws should be more flexible in relation to re-use. A transformation in the way of thinking would be needed to reach the different goals. The BCSP project helps through the training carousels, stakeholder meetings and other events to further elaborate these ideas and to bring the discussion forward. The ideas collected should feed in policy papers which should reflect the position of the profession. It also helps to address these themes and to collaborate further with stakeholders as well as to strengthen the collaboration among ECIA members.

Concerning the level of education and enforcing the third level (PhD) the discussion revealed that a higher degree had not only individual but also societal benefits. It contributes to find better arguments for the value of the profession and what it can do to solve the current problems of the energy crises, climate change and other actual topics of our society and to develop them further.

The discussion will be continued in the next round tables in 2023 and in different work groups under the BCSP project. The results will be included in policy papers.