



European
Council of
Interior
Architects

Round Tables Report September 2023

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1 Introduction

The organisation of stakeholder events and round tables falls under the tasks of subproject 6 – representing the network. The aim of this subproject is to represent the network by setting up policy work groups to brainstorm and to discuss about policy and regulatory questions, to organise stakeholder events and ECIA round tables (T2.5). The idea is to exchange ideas on the main European topics and the latest policy themes relevant to Interior architecture/design. The results should be incorporated into policy papers.

Linked to objectives:

- 1.3 Strengthen the ECIA network and increase collaboration among ECIA members
- 1.4 Strengthen the ECIA network and increase collaboration with other related pan-European organisations
- 2.3 Disseminate good practices and experiences of the profession across Europe.

The round tables are part of the yearly ECIA General Assembly (GA). The 2023 round tables took place as part of the GA in Stockholm on 9 September.

2 Summary of round tables discussion

The round tables took place on 9 September 2023 in Stockholm, 2:00-4:45pm.

About 60 persons participated in the meeting. Participants were the members of the ECIA GA and special guests like the representative of EIE (European Interior Educators), the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers IFI, as well as representatives of higher education institutions in Europe and of Swedish regional professional organizations.

The event was divided into four parts:

- Keynote Lecture of Louis Debersaques, Researcher, University of Antwerp about the key findings and results of the study about professionalization of interior architecture in Europe.
- Three Round Tables to discuss the three topics.
- Short presentation and discussion of the group-conclusions of the three roundtables.

The topics for the discussions were derived from the key-findings of the research from University of Antwerp with the objective to convey first insights in the acquired knowledge. The discussion of the topics should give insight in the situation in the different member countries and give a possibility to exchange multiple opinions, find common positions and even create ideas for individual and common actions. The three discussion groups were moderated and summarized by the board members (1) Dominic Haag-Walthert, (2) Martin Thörnblom and (3) Jeremy Williams.



Louis Debersaques presenting the findings of the "Study about professionalization of Interior Architecture in Europe"

Round Table Questions

1. By which terms is interior architecture defined in your country (Interior Architecture, Interior Design, Spatial Design, Furniture Design)? How can these terms be harmonized within supernational recognition of the discipline?
2. In many countries the profession of interior architecture is stigmatized as a female or amateur profession. How would you explain the continuous and erroneous perception and the substandard public recognition of the profession?
3. How could ECIA/the national organizations become a platform for professional lifelong learning directed to its members? And how can mandatory attendance to these learning moments be enforced and monitored?



Dominic Haag-Walther explaining the round tables.

Table 1

Question: *"By which terms is interior architecture defined in your country (Interior Architecture, Interior Design, Spatial Design, Furniture Design)? How can these terms be harmonized within supernational recognition of the discipline?"*



Round table nr. 1

Discussion and summary

The discussion started with the fundamental question if the designation of our profession even can be harmonized, regarding the different names and professional definitions have no clearly defined boundaries. Harmonizing names does not help for a better recognition. The variety in names and available educational titles (Interior Architecture, Interior Design, Interior and Furniture Design, Spatial Design, ...) also shows the cultural diversity of the profession throughout Europe which should not be eliminated.

Interior Architects/Designers should better focus on what the customers and the society at large are expecting from the discipline. Professionals should focus on the competences they offer and value they can add to the planning and building processes. ("Be good and talk about it!")

A key role was identified in education to harmonize and guarantee minimum standard and a defined set of competences for future professionals. This coincides with the efforts and objectives of Subproject 5 of the BCSP project (Promote the Charter of Interior Architectural training) and should be intensified.

Secondly the ECIA and the national member organizations can act as a gatekeeper for minimum standards of professionalism by defining the entry requirements on the level of education and qualification for members. This can also be additionally supported by defining requirements for continuing education for individual members of national organizations.

Table 2

Question: *"In many countries the profession of interior architecture is stigmatized as a female or amateur profession. How would you explain the continuous and erroneous perception and the substandard public recognition of the profession?"*



Round table nr. 2

Discussion and summary

In a lively and open discussion, it was underlined that the role of the interior architects and designers was seen since the beginning of the profession more as an artistic profession than a technical one. This might be a reason why it traditionally has lower salaries, a lower status in the general but also in the professional perception.

In countries, where the educations in interior architecture are at the same schools as the architect's programs, students can start with a BA in interior architecture and complete their studies with a master's degree in architecture, and vice versa (e. g.: Konstfack Sweden), which leads to a better knowledge and recognition of interior architecture by Architects. It was pointed out, that to increase the recognition a common, high educational standard throughout Europe would be key. It was also stressed, that the interdisciplinary work in study programs among architect, interior architects, landscape architects and engineers is very important to create a mutual understanding and acceptance of interior architects in planning teams.

The participants underlined that, the professionals and especially the educations of interior architects should focus more on technical knowledge.) in connection with the planning of interiors (HVAC, acoustics, lighting, ergonomics, sustainability etc.), not only design and materialization of inner surfaces. This may be a path to enhance the professional recognition.

With the Green New Deal of the European Union building renovations will be the most important assignments in the building industry in the future. This is where interior architects have traditionally their key competences and where we as professional must become more visible.

Table 3

Question: *"How could ECIA/the national organizations become a platform for professional lifelong learning directed to its members? And how can mandatory attendance to these learning moments be enforced and monitored?"*



Round table nr. 3

Discussion and summary

The group identifies a potential to promote and advertise already existing courses for life-long-learning within the given structure of the association. For example: Existing programs or lectures could be gathered on a national level (also from allied associations) and be promoted on ECIA website. It was highlighted, that the attendance of courses should not be enforced, then rather be as attractive, that everybody would want them. This is partially already the case on a national level in Norway and Sweden.

Continuing professional development (CPD) can have different formats. Courses can be structured (online lectures or seminars) or unstructured (acknowledgment of having read a certain amount of specialist literature), very easy to deliver as MOOCs (Massive open online courses). In general, it seems universities have the better competence and capacities than for the association(s) to provide and accredit courses.

Another aspect was added to the discussion, that in some countries (e.g.: France) the fee structure foresees a certain amount in the fees to contribute to CPD, provided by universities. To establish the outlines for CPD programs could as well be a matter of a next possible application for an EU fund.



Dominic Haag-Walther reporting the discussion at the table 1.



Martin Thörnblom presenting the summary of the discussion at the table 2.



Jeremy Williams concluding the discussion at the table 3.

3 Conclusions

All three topics of the table discussions were identified in the study "Professionalization of interior Architecture in Europe" by the University of Antwerp as key questions for the next steps in the professionalization of the field. Although they concern different aspects, the possible starting points for future development, which were individually formulated in the three groups, are similar: Education plays a central role in the future development of interior architecture/design.

With regard to the question of harmonizing the professional title or diploma designations (Table 1), the implementation of common high standards in education, as well as the enforcement of these standards by the associations, was felt to be more important than a (new) unified professional title.

At Table 2, reasons for the stigmatization and not fully adequate perception of the profession were identified, but here too possible solutions lie in the area of training. The participants underlined that, the professionals and especially the educations of interior architects should focus more on technical knowledge in connection with the planning of interiors (HVAC, acoustics, lighting, ergonomics, sustainability etc.), not only design and materialization of inner surfaces. This may be a path to enhance the professional recognition. It was also stressed, that the interdisciplinary work in study programs among architects, interior architects, landscape architects and engineers is very important to create a mutual understanding and acceptance of interior architects in planning teams.

The initial question of Table 3 already focused on training. Nevertheless, the group developed ideas on how and in what form professional development can contribute to the professionalization of individual members and thus to a more professional practice. However, it is not the task of ECIA itself to offer such courses, but only to set the framework and/or to promote and publicize such them.

The 2023 round tables were instrumental in advancing the objectives of the ECIA fostering collaboration and addressing key issues within the field of interior architecture. They served as a forum for insightful discussions, the exchange of ideas, and the formulation of strategies for the future of the profession. The outcomes from these discussions will undoubtedly influence the direction of interior architecture in Europe and contribute to its continued growth and recognition.