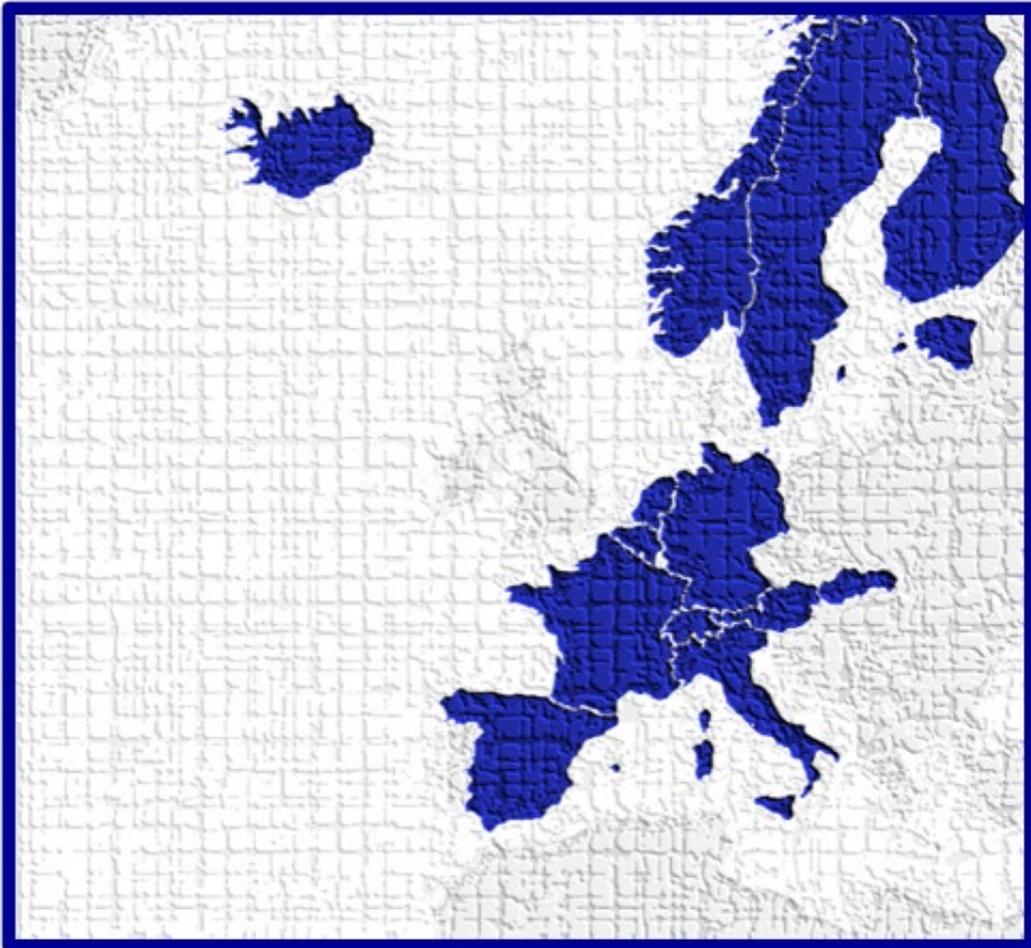


A STATE OF THE ART OF THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF  
**INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE**  
**IN EUROPE**

A binary Spider Model Approach



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European Council of Interior Architects/European Union/University of Antwerp – 2024



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## RESEARCH TEAM

**Louis Debersaques** is a historian, an academic researcher at the University of Antwerp (Faculty of Design Sciences) and a member of the Henry Van de Velde research group. In 2022, he graduated from the University of Ghent in History. Since September 2022, he has been principal researcher of this BSCP sub-project, responsible for both the general and specific data analyses as well as the communication with the ECIA affiliated experts and organizations, the distribution of the expert inquiries (questionnaires), the moderation of the focus group interviews, and the successful completion of this report.

**Professor Els De Vos** is chair of the interior architecture program at the University of Antwerp (Faculty of Design Sciences) and teaches in the field of theory and history. Her PhD in Architectural History on the architectural, social and gender-differentiated mediation of dwelling in 1960s–1970s Belgian Flanders is published by Leuven University Press. She has co-edited several books in the field of architecture, including *Van academie tot universiteit* (From Academy to University: 350 years of Architecture in Antwerp), *Theory by Design. Architectural Research Made Explicit in the Design Studio* (both published in 2013 by Antwerp University Press), and *Re-Use of Modernist Buildings. A Case Study Handbook*, (University of Antwerp, 2019). As workgroup leader of the COSTAction CA18137 on European Middle Class Mass Housing, she co-edited a lexicon on middle class mass housing (MCMH). She leads together with prof. Fredie Floré the research project “*The Emergence of Interior Architecture in Belgium, 1945-1999. Assessing the Impact of Education on the Identity Formation of the Design Discipline*”, which builds knowledge about the multi-faceted history of interior architecture education in Belgium. It will result in two PhDs (Vandevoort 2025, Vanhee 2025). In the spring of 2025 a *Sourcebook Interior Design Belgium, 1915-2000* will be published in collaboration with the Flemish Architectural Institute.

# INTRODUCTION



In the West, the professionalization of the interior architecture discipline and profession began with the emergence of interior decoration in the middle of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> Not long after it became a full-time occupation, educational institutions started establishing formal training and courses. During the second half of the 20th century, full-time programs in interior architecture were set up in various countries. Since the end of the 20th century (no doubt influenced by the 1999 Bologna Declaration), interior education evolved in many (but not all) countries from a purely vocational study towards a more academic one.<sup>2</sup> Research in the field of interior architecture was initiated. National and international professional associations and organizations were founded (mainly in the 1940s/1950s onwards)<sup>3</sup> to represent and defend the interests of interior professional practitioners and their clients. To further professionalize the practice, successive name changes followed: from “interior decoration” to “interior design” to “interior architecture”. According to scholars, including Wilensky, title change is a typical step in the professionalization process.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, this sequence of terminology should not be mistaken for a hierarchical sequence. As will become clear later on in this report, some countries do not even use the term “interior architecture”.

The aforementioned professional organizations set up codes of conduct for their practitioners, and organizations/institutions were founded to accredit and control the level and quality of the interior education programs. The popularity of the interior discipline received a boost in the 1980s, thanks to a myriad of TV shows and lifestyle magazines on interiors, resulting in a significant increase in educational programs and the number of practitioners. The field of interior architecture grew out of many different disciplines but in particular the decorative arts, home economics, product design and architecture. **This resulted in a wide variety of terminology, definitions, educational programs, and regulation related to the discipline.** The last two decades have therefore been characterized by a lively discourse on all aspects of the identity of the interior discipline, among professionals as well as academics, and by a common desire to reach a consensus on the issue. It is within this context that we must situate ECIA’s research on the regulation of the discipline.<sup>5</sup>

Interior architecture is still growing and developing as a discipline and profession. Most scholars agree that in order to “legitimize and professionalize”, **education is key, as it** defines the profession by forming and thereby separating the “the trained and qualified from untrained ‘amateurs’”.<sup>6</sup> Further in this report, it will become clear that the lack of scholarship within the interior discipline is an impediment to future professionalization. The effective absence or underrepresentation of an interiors body of knowledge has an influence on further research possibilities (and therefore further delineation/specialization): “For the future of the profession, it is critical for interior design education to find motivation for development beyond what has been described as interior designers’... near-paranoiac **need to define**

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<sup>1</sup> This research was funded the European Commission (grant no. Project 101054089 — ECIA – BCSP).

<sup>2</sup> Vanhee, S., Vandevort, B., Floré, F., De Vos, E. (2021), “Beyond Distinction-Based Narratives: Interior Design's Educational History as a Knowledge Base,” *Journal of Interior Design*, 46, no. 4, 13-25.

<sup>3</sup> Joke van Hengstum, “Interior Architecture - a Recognized Profession in Europe?” in *SISU\_Line* (Estonian magazine by the ESL) - based on 2014 Symposium of Interior Architecture 2017, 59-67.

<sup>4</sup> H. F. Wilensky, “The Professionalization of Everyone?” *American Journal of Sociology*, 70 (1964): 137-158.

<sup>5</sup> This part is largely extracted from the ECIA preliminary study 2021: Inge Somers, Marjan Michels and Ilse Lindenbergh, “Mapping the Diversity in Regulation of the Interior Discipline in Europe,” (ECIA research/University of Antwerp, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Cys, “Developing a Discipline: Interior Design Education and Research,” *Designing Interior Architecture: Concept Typology Material Construction*, ed. Sylvia Leydecker (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2013), 62-65.

‘this is what we do’.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, “Schools reproduce a certain version of professionalism, and serve as micro communities for the socialization of students into a profession” and we should see “school environments as places where disciplinary foundations are being challenged and reformed.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet there are those who believe that interior architecture should **embrace and acknowledge its marginalized position**, to “provide a starting place for change, innovation and the successful establishment of an autonomous and distinct identity for it”.<sup>9</sup> They believe that the discipline would benefit greatly from an expanded area of study and research. Ellen Klingenberg claims that interior architecture can (or should) be seen as an entire field of study “rather than as discreet entities of academia and practice”.<sup>10</sup> She also claims that, as interior architecture is quite “**undocumented, unwritten and unpublished**,”<sup>11</sup> there should be a call for the development and dissemination of a kind of theory for the discipline, applicable to academia and practice alike.<sup>12</sup> As postulated by Klingenberg, and elaborated by Inge Somers, the interior discipline can be conceptualized (since it is difficult to define) as a four-dimensional discipline:

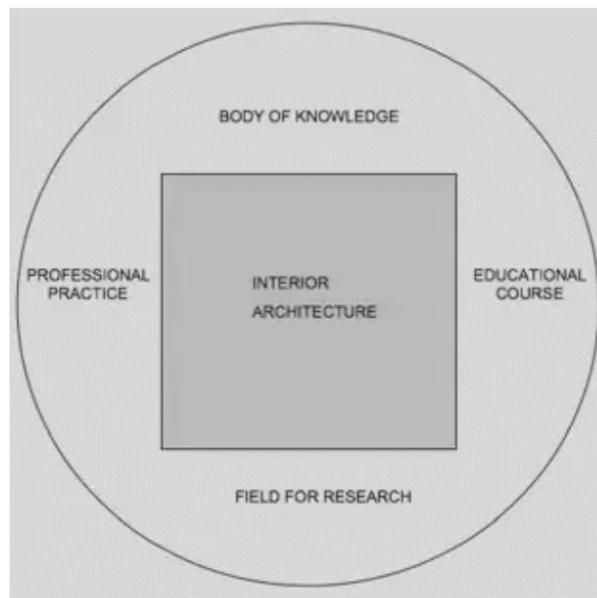


Figure 1: Ellen Klingenberg, p. 2, *Four dimensions of Interior Architecture* (2008)

Moreover, “**Education and practice need each other**. Courses cannot exist without the market and the market cannot operate without education. If in the global world of design the

<sup>7</sup> Cys, “Developing a Discipline,” *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Information retrieved from the ongoing PhD project by Benoit Vandevoot within the FWO project *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999. An evaluatieon of the impact of education on the identity formation of the design discipline*, 13; referring to Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture School. Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2012), 32.

<sup>9</sup> Cys, “Developing a Discipline.”

<sup>10</sup> Cys, “Developing a Discipline,” referring to Elke Klingenberg.

<sup>11</sup> Cys, “Developing a Discipline.”

<sup>12</sup> Inge Somers, *Advancing Interiors: Interiorist Voices on Identity Issues*, doctoral dissertation, University of Antwerp, 2017, 26; Ellen Klingenberg, “4 Dimensions of Interior Architecture,” *Interior Tools, Interior Tactics* 2008.



profession is to be distinguished, it needs a strong profile. A place between the architectural disciplines.”<sup>13</sup>

Professionalization has become a popular topic – especially since the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Also, scholars such as Inge Somers,<sup>15</sup> Ellen Klingenberg,<sup>16</sup> Ann Massey, Mark Taylor and Natalie Haskell,<sup>17</sup> among others<sup>18</sup> have highlighted the problematic state of interior architecture as regards professionalization practices. In this report, we will approach the state of the art of the interior discipline and profession through the concept of professionalization, which, as defined by **Grace Lees-Maffei**,<sup>19</sup> is characterized by a variety of variables. In short, professionalization can be defined as the process of developing an activity into a general **recognized** profession through the setting up of:

1. Educational institutions
2. Professional organizations
3. Articulation of codes of conduct (plus enforceability, cf. sanctions)
4. Educational rules of assessment
5. Networking and gatekeeping

Lees-Maffei is also keenly aware of the public perception of the interior profession as “a quintessential folk concept, defined popularly rather than academically, which is why **the popular perception of interior design matters**”.<sup>20</sup> We will discuss this further when dealing with public recognition and overall stigmatization.

To encompass and apply Lees-Maffei’s theory of professionalization within the interior architecture discipline, we must chart its progress towards institutional embeddedness and recognition: “Generally, professions are occupations based on advanced, complex or discrete knowledge. Although they render services that are usually preoccupied with aspects of everyday life — health care, schooling, planning, conflicts —they enjoy a privileged position in society because of their distinctive ethics, and because of the particular bodies of knowledge they hold, provided this knowledge differs substantially from the social, everyday knowledge held by the general (read: unprofessional) public. An occupation’s process toward professionalization, then, is understood as the progressive development of an amateur activity into recognized and paid work, and rests on the post-industrial division of labour and expertise. However as argued by sociologist Eliot Freidson, the foundational, professional knowledge, in itself, does not suffice in the establishment of professions, as it needs to be institutionalized (...).”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Van Hengstum, “Interior architecture – a recognized profession in Europe?” *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> See bibliography “literature concerning professionalization.”

<sup>15</sup> Inge Somers, “Advancing Interiors” (PhD).

<sup>16</sup> Ellen Klingenberg, “4 Dimensions of Interior Architecture,” *Interior Tools, Interior Tactics* 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Taylor and Natalie Haskell, “The Professionalization of Interior Design (Chapter 19)” in *A Companion to Contemporary Design Since 1945*, ed. Anne Massey (Hoboken (NJ): John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 393-411.

<sup>18</sup> See bibliography “Literature concerning professionalization: specific to interior architecture”.

<sup>19</sup> Grace Lees-Maffei, “Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History,” *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 1 (2008): 1-18.

<sup>20</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 7.



## Research assignment<sup>22</sup>

In 2020 the **European Council of Interior Architects (ECIA)** launched a research call to establish a collaboration with an academic partner for a study on the regulation of the interior discipline in Europe. The call built on a previous study conducted by ECIA, namely **“the spider model” study**, realized in 2017 in the context of the 25th anniversary of the professional organization. The research resulted in “the spider models overview”, a visualization showing the status of six regulating aspects per country. Each ECIA member country was asked to examine the regulation of the discipline according to these six aspects, or “axes” within the spider models: (1) regulation of the profession by law, (2) title protection, (3) building permission, (4) liability protection, (5) standardization by national organization, and (6) education. A representative of each participating country provided data on which the spider model was based. However, closer examination of the data collected in this initial research revealed that the data collection had **not been carried out in a consistent and systematic way**. This was the main reason that ECIA wanted to redo the investigation, in collaboration with an academic partner and based on a systematic research method.

According to the ECIA research call, the aim of this research was “to make the diversity in the EU visible for our members and give them an instrument to show the regulating bodies in their countries the possibility of positioning our profession” (ECIA research call, p. 2). This research ambition fits in with a more general ECIA objective, namely: **“to achieve general recognition** of the profession by public and legislative bodies at local, national and EU level” (ECIA research call, p. 2). Upon deeper reflection by the ECIA board regarding the specific objectives of the study, a twofold ambition emerged:

1. to map the diversity in regulation: namely, to gather and visualize data on the diversity in regulation of the interior discipline in Europe
2. to create a tool/instrument: namely, to use the information on regulation to negotiate with local authorities and at EU level in order to streamline regulation

ECIA formulated some underlying hypotheses, namely that a uniform and clear European regulating system:

1. is beneficial for free mobility of professionals and students
2. will help the discipline to gain recognition and status
3. will help the discipline to gain better access to the market

The interior discipline has been working to gain recognition and improve its status (within academia as well as the professional world) since it emerged as a discipline, but academic initiatives and publications of the last two decades show that these issues are still a focus of concern within the international interior community. **ECIA hopes that this research will help the interior discipline to gain recognition and improve its status by providing up-to-date, accurate information on the regulation of the discipline in each European member country**. This data is considered the prerequisite for comparing the national situations, formulating recommendations and discussing said recommendations with **local and European authorities**. In the preliminary study, the following countries were investigated: France, Norway and Germany (Somers, Lindenbergh, Michels, 2021).

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<sup>22</sup> This section is largely based on the preliminary research report.

## A revised spider model research

Unlike the preliminary study, this research included **all ECIA affiliated countries in 2023**: Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland,<sup>23</sup> Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The situation of the countries in the preliminary study (France, Norway and Germany) was reassessed to obtain a new and updated version that could be correctly compared with the situation in other European countries. The original categories/framework of the pre-study – as variables of the process of professionalization – were redefined and made particular through **three axes** instead of six.

Furthermore, the research team also assessed the situation in six other European countries



Figure 2: revised plan as stated in the preliminary study (2021)

that were not ECIA affiliated (Turkey, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Ireland and Poland). Here, analyses were made on the presence or absence of educational institutions and the legal embeddedness of the interior discipline. However, these assessments were made only in order to spark further debate within the countries and encourage them to create and further structure a national association for interior architecture.<sup>24</sup> In other words, only ECIA affiliated countries were assessed in this report through the binary models (cf. infra) on the state of the art of interior architecture.

## Research goals

Like the preliminary study, this report had multiple goals (besides instigating overall recognition). However, four main objectives can be distinguished:

1. Mapping and **making visible** the diversity in the regulation of the interior architecture discipline/profession in Europe.
2. **Mapping the diversity** in order to compare and determine the degree of professionalization of the interior discipline in each country and, by extension, Europe.
3. Conducting analyses, based on the following assumptions/hypotheses:
  - the profession and its professionals/practitioners are best served by a highly regulated framework

<sup>23</sup> The information on Iceland was prepared based on the material found on the website of the FHI organization, the very brief e-mail traffic with its representatives, and other available literature. It should not be considered as up-to-date (anno 2023) as that of other countries included in this study.

<sup>24</sup> This was done to collaborate with ECIA's sub-project 2 (cf. BSCP) "Growing the network". Data was shared with Marianne Daepf.



- a highly regulated framework will lead to general recognition of the profession by the public (status)
  - a highly regulated framework will lead to a higher level of professionalization
4. Using the mapping and evaluation as a tool to enable member countries **to put pressure on local authorities to advance** the professionalization of the interior discipline in their countries.<sup>25</sup>

These goals converge in the main research question: ***What kind of knowledge do our professional organizations need to professionalize the discipline?*** This question needs to be nuanced insofar as this knowledge can be discussed and communicated by the national organizations. In the end, it will become clear which countries should be addressed in order to “learn” more about certain segments concerning interior architecture.

This process of professionalization will thus be analysed and presented as a measuring instrument which countries can use to investigate the degree of professionalization in the national situation. Additionally, it will be made clear how this report (and more specifically, the binary models, cf. infra) can serve as an instrument that can be **continuously updated and adapted** in order to re-evaluate the national or even supranational progress made in the professionalization of interior architecture. This study helps to identify the differences in the degree of professionalization across countries. The main question is answered by analysing the progress in professionalization through aforementioned multi-axial study; i.e. by investigating how the discipline/profession is regulated by 1) education, 2) organization/professional practice,<sup>26</sup> and 3) legislation.

Importantly, throughout this study we use gender-disaggregated data and specific questions to explore the importance and influence of **gender** in the process of professionalization. Gender inequality and the stigmatization related thereto are clearly present in the interior architecture profession. The interior architecture discipline is often perceived as female gendered compared to architecture, which is considered male gendered. The profession seems to be historically constructed as hierarchically inferior to architecture.<sup>27</sup> In line with this stigmatization process, this report also includes a section on the importance and influence of cultural **diversity**. However, this is something we kept in mind and address throughout the report.

The **general hypothesis** is: *higher professionalization leads to higher acceptance and recognition of interior architecture; there is no consensus on the concept of professionals, professionalism or professionalization processes.*

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<sup>25</sup> In turn, these goals have their own sub-goals: 1. Incentivize EU member states to establish their first National Interior Architecture Association, 2. Mobilize an increased number of ECIA Members, 3. Strengthen the ECIA network and increase collaboration among ECIA members, 4. Disseminate good practices and experiences of professionalization across Europe. We focus on professionalization instead of the practices.

<sup>26</sup> In this report, organization and professional practice are considered together. Education and legislation also imply the dynamics of the professional practice (respectively, through the process of graduation/training and the process of establishing a legal framework to regulate the professional practice). However, national ECIA affiliated organizations are considered to be the bastions of professionals within a state.

<sup>27</sup> Helena Belis, Fátima Pombo and Hilde Heynen, “Interior Architecture in Flanders: Gendered Perceptions and Professional Realities,” *Architectoni.ca/Online* 4, 13-20 (2014).

## Grounded Theory (GT)

It is important to note that the collection and verification of data was done through grounded theory (GT).<sup>28</sup> This research method uses analytical induction, where concepts and theories are constructed through a cyclical empirical approach.<sup>29</sup> Grounded theory involves a constant “link-back” to previously acquired knowledge. In this way, previous, and foundational, knowledge is constantly updated. During this process, we were able to further define categories or frameworks that had already been delineated in the preliminary research.

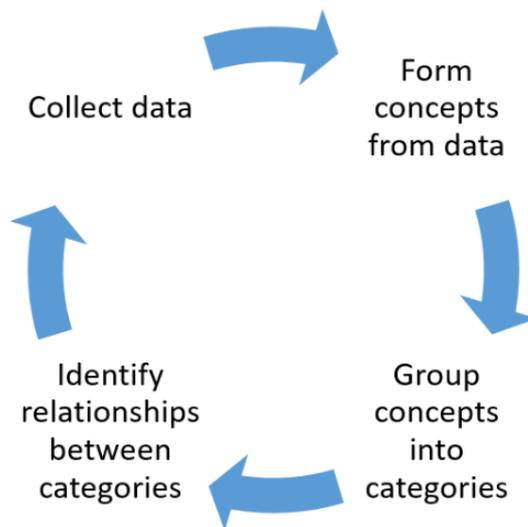


Figure 3: grounded theory model via <https://deakin.libguides.com/qualitative-study-designs/grounded-theory>

This constant comparison method relies on the sequence of different types of coding. In particular, a distinction is made between (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding:

- **Open coding** ensures that data is labelled – which allows us to construe and visualize basic topical dimensions. In other words, textual data is divided into discrete parts. Open coding gives a clear, initial overview of all data.<sup>30</sup> This method is described as the phase of breaking down the rough data material “into discrete parts, that can be closely examined and compared for similarities and differences”.<sup>31</sup> The aim is, on the one hand, to structure the amount of data, and on the other, to make an initial selection of data.<sup>32</sup> These categories are then named and labelled with the name or label suggested by the context in which the data were collected.

<sup>28</sup> First conceptualized by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *Awareness of Dying* (Routledge, 1965).

<sup>29</sup> Dimitri Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden* (Leuven: Acco, 2013), 399; Clive Seal, *The Quality of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1999), 87.

<sup>30</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 403.

<sup>31</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. 1998), 102; ECIA preliminary study 2021: Inge Somers, Marjan Michels and Ilse Lindenbergh, “Mapping the Diversity in Regulation of the Interior Discipline in Europe,” (ECIA research/University of Antwerp, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Mortelmans, 2011. Preliminary study.

- **Axial coding** nuances open coding by detecting duplicate data. It also allows the researcher to establish relations between different topics (as identified by open coding).<sup>33</sup> In axial coding, you draw connections between the segments, as defined by the open coding segment. In this study, it focuses on the intertopical or interaxial dynamics of the three axes (cf. supra). Finally, selective coding seeks to construe greater frameworks.
- **Selective coding** can be done by selecting a central category that connects the other codes. In other words, grounded theory codes data into categories via property definition. The continuous cyclical and comparative method is “ripe” for theory writing when the researcher notices theoretical saturation.<sup>34</sup> Within the framework of this research, the main focus will be on open and axial coding (as in the preliminary study). The reason for this is that the interaxial dynamics (varying between the educational, professional and legislative axes) is central to this research. A general main theory can be applied afterwards.

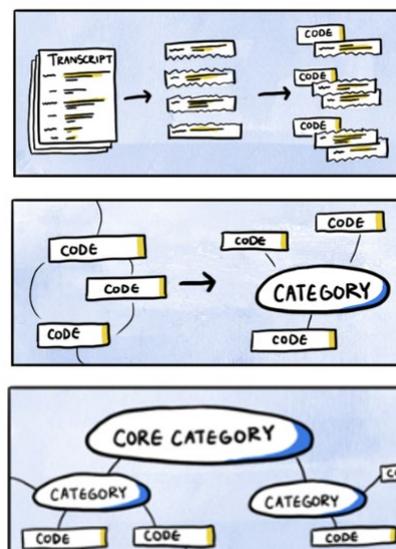


Figure 4. Delve & A. Limpaecher, (2022c, February 8). How To Do Open, Axial, & Selective Coding in Grounded Theory. Practical Guide to Grounded Theory. <https://delvetool.com/blog/openaxialselective>.

GT is especially applicable in qualitative research, whereas quantitative research mostly and primarily approaches data through deduction, to verify pre-prepared theories and concepts. Furthermore, GT is limited in that it gives information about a specific reality within a temporal frame. In other words, it is a snapshot. However, a systematic approach allows further research to be linked back to original data in true “grounded theory fashion”.<sup>35</sup> GT also offers researchers the convenience of its “open character” and enables the detection of the “multiple and conjunctural character of causation”.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 403.

<sup>34</sup> Seal, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, 87.; Open, axial and selective coding. Source: Delve & Limpaecher, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Seal, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Ian Dey, “Grounded Theory,” in *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds. Clive Seal, Gobo Gampietro, et al. (London: Sage, 2005): 80; “Your Complete Guide to Grounded Theory Research,” Qualtrics website, visited 07.11.2022, <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/grounded-theory-research/>.



## Methodology

### Revisiting the preliminary study

The way this research was conducted was heavily inspired by the methodology of the preliminary study. In September, the ECIA Spider Models 2022 project was launched at the University of Antwerp. During that first month, the primary objectives were to revisit the preliminary study (Somers, Lindenbergh, Michels 2021) and analyse its accomplishments. The shortcomings of the preliminary study were also explicitly identified, in order to learn from them.<sup>37</sup> As stated in the work packages, this first phase of the research was also characterized by an examination and overview of the state of the discipline of interior architecture in several non-ECIA members. In particular, the situation was assessed in (1) Ireland, (2) the United Kingdom, (3) Portugal, (4) Bulgaria, (5) Turkey, and (6) Poland. This first phase of the research was also a time for gathering information – per ECIA-member country – on the state of the discipline. This desk research provided well-founded documentation to allow an initial pre-questionnaire overview of the European situation. Importantly, to get a grip on the vast amount of data, all notes and collected literature were stored and annotated in the cloud storage of MS SharePoint. By storing and collecting information there, the gathered material was two-way (double key) encrypted, so that the research data was carefully preserved and protected.

ECIA's 30th anniversary conference was held in **Florence** (Italy) between 23 and 25 September 2023. At this conference, the research team was given the opportunity to present its planned research during the General Assembly convention. Afterwards, the questions, suggestions and comments were processed by the researchers. Contact information was also exchanged. This turned out to be a very efficient way of canvassing for experts that would be contacted regarding the planned questionnaire. In October, an alpha and beta version of this questionnaire was created, based on previous ECIA research. The final questionnaire was mostly inspired by the preliminary study (Somers, Lindenbergh, Michels 2020), Spider Models 1 (Kaiser 2017) and Crossing Borders (Spanjers 2003). Before distributing the questionnaire, it was important to draw up the research methodology for the future project. This was done in mid-November and coincided with the appointment of a contact person for each country, to help the research team establish the relevant contacts and obtain the necessary information.

### Questionnaire

Relying on the intense **literature review** already conducted, the research process - after a further examination of the actual issues - began with the **redrafting of the preliminary questionnaire**. This redrafting process went hand in hand with a further "getting-to-know" process in which experts from all ECIA affiliated countries were identified and approached. This was conducted both online and in person. As previously mentioned, the 30th General Assembly of ECIA in Florence provided an ideal environment for exchanging contact information and making the intended project clear to members through a presentation. Furthermore, after obtaining contact information, digital media provided a useful environment where documents (on education, practice and legislation) could easily be exchanged by email, or communicated via MS Teams. The redrafting of the questionnaire was helpful and necessary for a handful of reasons. First, the research team sat together with the team of the preliminary study. In these meetings, several suggestions and comments were made on how

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<sup>37</sup> It stressed the need for more focus talks, the limited period of time and limited amount of questions.



to make the questionnaire more efficient, bearing in mind that the new study would now focus on fifteen, and not three, countries. Ultimately, unlike in the preliminary study, the questionnaire would be divided into two parts: one on education and the other on national organizations and professional practice. The questionnaire was constantly revised until an optimal version was obtained.

It is important to note the difference between a survey and a questionnaire. Surveys are predominantly used in quantitative and large-scale research that adopts a deductive approach (testing/confirming theories by analysing numerical data). They require a lot of respondents in order to be methodologically correct and substantiated. The use of surveys is, to a certain extent, also applicable and appropriate in qualitative research. However, in this research, survey questions were used as a preparatory phase requiring further verification (cf. focus groups, *infra*). So, you could see the survey as a questionnaire or an expert inquiry.<sup>38</sup> In a survey, there is always a sample and a population. In the case of the expert questionnaire, the choice of the sample is not random, but specifically determined. In our case, the sample was made up of experts, chosen on the basis of position, expertise and experience. In a questionnaire it is not necessary to use the sample to measure a population; in the expert inquiry, the researcher can aim to visualize and analyse an “extent” or “degree” (in our case: the degree of professionalization).<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, questionnaires are tools for data collection, which is divided into peripheral and central questions, the latter being elaborated on via “scaling”.<sup>40</sup> According to Oppenheim, the researcher must be aware of five essential components.<sup>41</sup> First, there is the method of data collection. In this study, it was clear that data would be collected via desk research, networking, expert inquiries (the questionnaire itself) and the verification by focus groups. Second, the research should have a deliberate purpose. In this study, the purpose is well defined within professional ECIA and academic perimeters. Third, the ordering of questions should not be random. This was also done in a correct and collaborative manner (beta-questionnaire feedback, etc.). Fourth, funnelling questions are a great way to look for interaxial relations. Finally, the researcher should make use of open and/or closed questions. These come with their own advantages and disadvantages:<sup>42</sup>

#### Open questions:

- Advantages
  - “Response freedom”
  - Spontaneity
  - Probe opportunities (funnelling)
  - Hypothesis testing: detecting awareness, perceptions, ideas
- Disadvantages
  - Time consuming (respondent and research analysis)
  - Unreliability expertise

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<sup>38</sup> Joop van der Pligt and Matthijs Blankers, *Survey-onderzoek: de meting van attitudes en gedrag* (Den Haag: Boom Lemma, 2013), 28-31.

<sup>39</sup> Van der Pligt and Blankers, *Survey-onderzoek*, 122.

<sup>40</sup> Carrying forward the question: *ECIA\_Info\_questionnaire\_contact-document*.

<sup>41</sup> A. N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement* (London: Continuum, 2001): 100-1.

<sup>42</sup> Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design*, 115.



### Closed questions:

- Advantages
  - Quick
  - Easy to process
  - Easy to group / topic comparison
- Disadvantages
  - Loss of spontaneity
  - Question/interviewer bias

However, the “*Unreliability expertise* (open question disadvantage)” is neutralized by the use of an expert target audience and the possibility to nuance, verify or alter responses in later focus group discussions. Likewise, the “*question/interviewer bias* (closed question disadvantage)” is neutralized by the use of an “*other*” option and/or space for answer-elaboration through the provided optional text blocks. This also prevents the unavoidable “loss of information” to a certain extent (such prevention being bolstered by the verifying focus groups). Furthermore, open questions allow the researcher to notice certain “contextual” or “residual” information, which can be used to form relations between the three axes (axial coding grounded theory).

In addition, it is important to be aware of “leading questions” and “loaded words”. Leading questions encourage the respondent to answer in natural accordance to the intention of the interviewer/researcher; e.g. “*There are a lot of women that practice professionally in your country, aren’t there?*”. These kinds of questions can be seen as an impediment to correct qualitative research in that answers to such questions are synthetic. However, they should not be confused with open questions that aim to analyse perceptions, attitudes and awareness. These may seem – and are, in fact – subjective, but they are nonetheless important to grounded theory coding (seeking social/professional relations); e.g. “*Would you say that the discipline of interior architecture is stigmatized in your country?*”. For most scholars, attitudes are a “*state of readiness, a tendency to respond in a certain manner when confronted (...)*”.<sup>43</sup>

The researcher should also be wary of loaded words. Certain words are associated with feelings, attitudes or social categories; e.g. “ambition” is seen as a word that has a male-oriented connotation. In other words, certain words are “*emotionally coloured*”.<sup>44</sup> It serves to note that questions on awareness and attitudes are asked via open questions, as closed questions eliminate the “scaling” effect. For example, if you ask someone if there is sufficient attention to inclusive design, a closed question (with a “yes/no” or pre-generated response such as “yes but not entirely”) leads to an increased amount of information loss.

The questionnaire was conducted over the Internet. This has The following advantages and disadvantages.<sup>45</sup>

- Advantages of Internet-distributed questionnaire:
  - Quick distribution
  - Low cost

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<sup>43</sup> Oppenheim, 174, or: Van der Pligt and Blankers, 173.

<sup>44</sup> Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design*, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Van der Pligt and Blankers, *Survey-onderzoek*, 67.



- Funnelling questions (question branches, “carrying the question”) <sup>46</sup>
- Accessibility
- (Audio-)Visual illustration possibilities
- Disadvantages of Internet-distributed questionnaire:
  - Low response
  - Low quality
  - Exclusion of those without Internet access

In accordance to what was previously stated, the disadvantages of Internet use are offset by working with experts in the field (neutralizing low quality and Internet exclusion) in the context of ECIA research (which should eliminate low response).

Finally, as a method for outlining the context/background of the research aim, Internet questionnaires have a relative low cost of data processing, in contrast to pre-questionnaire interviews. However, online inquiries often have to contend with a low response rate and misunderstanding through lack of expertise. But these shortcomings are, again, offset by the selected expert target audience and the professional setting offered by ECIA. Nonetheless, interviews were highly important in the phase following the questionnaire data analysis. Questionnaire interviews offered the added advantage that during a moment of debate and elaboration, answers and/or questions from the expert inquiry could be nuanced, verified and “corrected” (if at first the intent of the question was not understood, for example).<sup>47</sup>

The expert inquiries were distributed via the **Qualtrics XM program**. This is a departure from the preliminary study. This innovative software tool made it possible to keep track of questionnaire submissions (per respondent) as well as visualize answers. Furthermore, Qualtrics allows the researcher to create questionnaires, while being sensitive of qualitative and textual data. The program makes it possible to ask questions where they are necessary. For example, if the question is “Does your organization have a code of conduct?” it would be irrelevant to ask whether it is available in English if the answer is no. Via the program it is possible to set conditions so that respondents are not bothered with questions that do not apply to them.

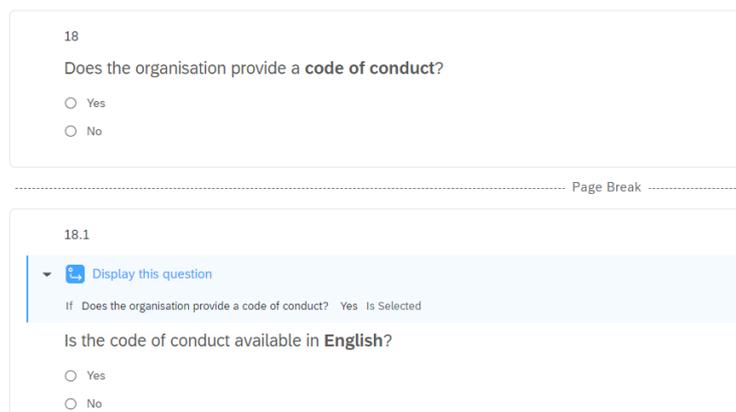


Figure 5: display dynamics in Qualtrics XM.

<sup>46</sup> For more information regarding the questionnaire technicalities (“dragging the question”, “skip logic”, etc.), see the document *ECIA\_Info\_questionnaire\_contact* through SharePoint > SPIDER MODELS 2022 > QUESTIONNAIRE.

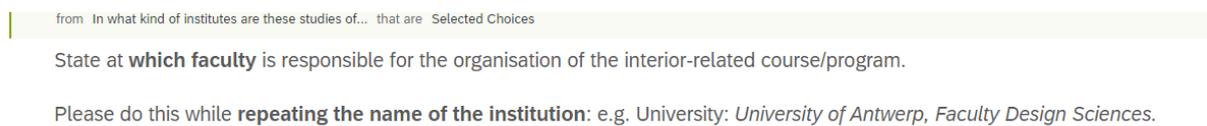
<sup>47</sup> Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design*, 65.



Qualtrics offers the user the mechanism of “carrying the question forward”: if the first question, “In your country, what institutions offer a program in interior architecture/design” does not fall under the respondent’s expertise, it is irrelevant to ask what faculties are responsible for them. Moreover, by carrying over the previous question, it is possible for the respondent to answer for each institution accordingly. For example, if two universities and one academy of arts offer an interior program, the next question will only ask about the faculties of the institutions that were marked (two universities and one academy of arts) in the previous question (since it is irrelevant to know the faculty of an interiors program in a technical college if this type of institution does not exist in that country).

Eventually, the questionnaire, as an expert inquiry, was sent out via an anonymous link by e-mail. The first wave was digitally distributed on 24 November 2022. This final version was

Figure 6: dragging mechanics in Qualtrics XM.



divided into two separate questionnaires: the first questionnaire, on education, was sent to several experts (mostly professors/lecturers) in all of the fifteen ECIA members (including the observer-member Slovakia). The second questionnaire, on organization/practice and legislation, was sent to members (mostly presidents) of ECIA member organizations.

During the first week of December 2022, the first submissions (Malta and Sweden) were collected and analysed. These submissions allowed us to draw up the first preparatory documents for the focus-group discussions later that year. In order to prepare and organize those focus-group discussions, a national assessment of the current situation (of the interior architecture discipline) was obtained in the form of individual information sheets. Thus, for each country, an individual document was drawn up in order to ensure the focus-group discussions were, geared as closely as possible to the national context of each country. Furthermore, contact persons were called upon to plan (depending on the availability of the participants) the future digital focus-groups. Lastly, during the entire process, the research team was aware of the gender and diversity dimensions that are inherently linked to these study matters.

The questionnaire was sent out to many experts. In the end, the questionnaire on education was submitted in full by 20 expert contact persons, while that on practice/organization and legislation was submitted by 18 experts. Thus, sometimes one of the two questionnaires was filled in by more than one expert (e.g. Finland – questionnaire on organization/practice; France – questionnaire on organization/practice; the Netherlands – questionnaire on education; and Spain – questionnaire on education).

### Focus group discussions

As previously mentioned, in a qualitative research approach (i.e. GT), the questionnaire represents the preliminary phase which provides the data that will be added to the background information already collected via desk research and contact networking. To briefly expand on this: this research also used the “**snowball effect**” method, which refers to the way in which respondents or interviewees can mention other experts or institutions, documents, suggested research perspectives/angles, etc. This snowball method had a general presence and application in the desk research (referrals via contact persons and websites) and in the questionnaire (e.g. the education questionnaire, the respondent could fill



in the contact information of a person that could offer us data regarding school enrolment – which is quantitative data that not only contextualizes information but also offers the possibility to return to previously acquired data, in grounded theory fashion).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, experts such as David Morgan argue that focus groups can also be used in a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches (sometimes used as a preliminary study, sometimes as data verification – in the a GT approach both of these perspectives are communicating vessels).<sup>49</sup>

Focus groups (or small round-table discussions) should not be confused with brainstorming sessions or classic interviews. Like questionnaires, a focus group session aims to collect data in a planned and organized fashion. Normally, a focus group is assembled by bringing together different people that feel at ease in a “homogenous” group and who provide added value to the overall aim of the discussion (which is collecting data).<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that, in this study, homogenous implies the same level of expertise (e.g. an expert in interior education is fit to argue with an expert in the professional interior practice, whereas a student would find it difficult to converse with a CEO on business matters). Homogenous groups lead to discussions with fewer conversational obstacles or “noise”. According to Mortelmans, it is up to the researcher to determine the criteria, while looking for people that fit such criteria. In our case, “experience” and “professional” criteria were of the utmost importance.

Mortelmans argues that by having a small number of participants, the researcher/moderator can lead the group more easily, while keeping in mind the aim of the research phase. If the number of participants is  $n$ , there should be around  $n+2$  main questions.<sup>51</sup> It is argued that around six people are ideal for an expert inquiry.<sup>52</sup> Just like questionnaires, data from focus groups allows the researcher to link back (GT, cf. supra) to previously collected data by adding to central and background information.<sup>53</sup> Focus group sessions give researchers the possibility to ask questions that remained unclear or could not be asked in the preliminary questionnaire. Mostly, this refers to the way in which focus groups generate creative thinking in terms of axial coding: when placing an expert on education across an expert on professional practice, common ground or disagreements (regarding a specific topic) will become clear when verifying questionnaire questions.<sup>54</sup>

A distinction must be made between the analysis and the interpretation of a focus group.<sup>55</sup> The analysis deals with marking and categorizing certain passages from the transcript. It can be divided into a section that tells us “**what**” is being said, and a section that tells us “**how**” it is being said. The interpretation focuses on the atmosphere and the reception of the questions, e.g. “Were there questions that everyone found difficult to answer?”; “Did certain questions generate a feeling of unease?”; and so on. Here, the moderator must empathize,

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<sup>48</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 232; 342; Van der Pligt and Blankers, *Survey-onderzoek*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Mortelmans, 140; David Morgan, “Focus Groups,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 22, no. 129-152.

<sup>50</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 170.

<sup>51</sup> This formula was taken from examples given by Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 172.

<sup>52</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 342.

<sup>54</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 347.

<sup>55</sup> Phil Macnaghten and Greg Myers, “Focus Groups,” in *Qualitative Research Practice*, eds. Clive Seal, Gobo Gampietro, et al. (London: Sage, 2005): 74-5.



psychologize and manage different emotions and perspectives, while keeping an eye on the time and the collection of valuable information.<sup>56</sup>

Members of the focus groups (within a national context/at least one focus group session for each country) were preferably:

- People who filled in the questionnaire (education) / ECIA contact person
- People who filled in the questionnaire (professional practice/legal matters) / ECIA contact person
- A specialist in legal regulations<sup>57</sup>
- A representative from interior education
- A professional practitioner

The questions during these sessions focused on the relationship between the three axes (cf. grounded theory open/axial coding, supra). The following questions were asked during the preliminary study (2021):

- Are the findings on the three regulating frameworks correct, complete, plus possible nuances?
- What is the national context in which these frameworks operate?
- Are there specific interrelationships between the results of the three regulatory frameworks?
- Which characteristics/features are (more) important with regard to the professionalization process? Which three have the highest priority?
- Which features are the most important / influence the “recognition” of the discipline? Which three have the highest priority?

The last two questions were to some extent already incorporated in the questionnaire (final questions) to make it easier for experts to answer these questions during the round table discussion. Regarding attitude questions (gender and diversity) the group interview aimed to explore the origins of the complexities, “in order to decide more precisely what it is we wish to measure (conceptualization)”.<sup>58</sup>

Almost all focus group discussions were organized and conducted between 5 April and 5 June 2023.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, 344.

<sup>57</sup> This was usually the same person as the representative of the national ECIA affiliated organization.

<sup>58</sup> Oppenheim, 178.

<sup>59</sup> Iceland did not participate, and Belgium did not participate until 18 August 2023.



APRIL 24	25 	26	27	28 	29	30
MAY 1	2	3	4 	5	6	7
8	9	10 	11	12 	13	14
15 	16	17	18 	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 	31 	JUNE 1 	2	3	4
5 	...					
AUGUST 14	15	26	17	18 	19	20

While waiting for the questionnaires (which did not always come in quickly), two actions were implemented. First, the data already collected from the questionnaire was further analysed and visualized; national situations were examined and separate excel spreadsheets were prepared. Second, the time was also used to carry out a further literature review. Since the conceptual and theoretical approach to professionalization in general was already addressed in the preliminary study, we decided to now focus on diversity, inclusion and gender in the discipline and profession of interior architecture in Europe.



The focus groups (moderator excluded) consisted of at least **three to seven people** considered experts in interior architecture education and/or practice. The questions asked in the focus group discussions were always different, depending on the national and historical context. Certain questions (for example, about the origins and development of title protection) proved less constructive in countries where there was no title protection. Nevertheless, there were some common questions that encouraged panellists to talk about an intended problem or goal. Terminology issues were thus raised in all countries. The focus groups also consistently polled on how PhD research was structured and, if absent, how it might contribute to the further professionalization of the discipline. Similarly, the degree of stigmatization of the discipline and the profession was continuously probed. The questions posed in one focus conversation were not always raised in the other focus groups. Moreover, it is important to mention that during the course of the focus discussions, certain topics were raised which in retrospect turned out to be very relevant to the countries already covered. In such cases, the experts of said countries were contacted again – in GT fashion (June/July 2023) – with additional questions. These questions were mainly about maternity leave (whether or not women were absent from the profession), internship opportunities and the organizations responsible for the certification and/or registration of building permits.

### Data mapping

According to the preliminary study, there are twelve actions that should be executed or established in order for the discipline to professionalize on a national level. Each of these actions falls under one of three axes (cf. supra):

#### **Education:**

- Institution of clear educational routes
- Development of educational standards based on the Body of Knowledge required by the discipline
- Control of educational standards
- Offering continuing education

#### **Professional organization/practice:**

- Establishing a professional association
- Controlled membership on the basis of education level
- Establishing a code of ethics / code of conduct and monitoring compliance
- Offering a training program – lifelong learning
- Union work <sup>60</sup>

#### **Legislation:**

- Establishing title protection and protection of practice
- Establishing mandatory membership
- Control of the practice - organization of internships

In the starting phase of this research it became clear that these actions would be difficult to identify and define within the framework of this study. Therefore, they were translated as variables or parameters which countries could use to evaluate and re-evaluate the progress

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<sup>60</sup> Here, union work refers to the way in which the national organization communicates and collaborates with other educational/professional institutions at macro level (organization x organization; organization x institution; organization x government).



of interior architecture in their country through the presence or absence of these variables, which include:

**Education:**

- Variety of educational routes
- Autonomous interior program availability
- Educational levels (bachelor, master, etc.)
- PhD possibilities
- Structure and accreditation
- Lifelong learning possibilities
- Internship options

**Professional organization/practice:**

- Mandatory membership requirements for professional practice
- Organization membership criteria
- Codes, services and control of compliance as offered/enforced by the organization
- Professional career possibilities for foreigners
- Organization convention rate
- Union work cooperations: presence/absence of intense communication with sister organizations

**Legislation:**

- Legal title protection
- Legal practice regulation
- Legal profession definition
- The need for architects / civil engineers for building permits
- Legal restrictions concerning structural or technical intervention
- Competitions/tenders
- Copyright regulations
- Business registration regulations
- Liability insurance regulations

The presence or absence of these variables can be illustrated and detected through their position in binary data schemes. This is the main way in which the data was “data mapped”. The data was then processed, as had been done in the preliminary study. The measuring tool applied was binary in nature; concepts were translated into ones and zeroes:

*“First, translating the concepts into present or absent deprives them of any nuance and presents the sometimes complex matter of regulation as black-and-white. Second, although assigning values to the concepts is necessary when one wants to compare the degree of regulation between different countries, it is clear that this is a delicate matter which asks for debate and consensus among specialists in the field, (1) on which concepts must be taken into account in this sum or in other words which concepts contribute to a certain degree of regulation and (2) on what is the possible variation in value between different concepts.”<sup>61</sup>*

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<sup>61</sup> Somers, Lindenbergh, Michels, “Mapping” (preliminary study), 26.

The loss of nuance could be neutralized, not only in the focus group sessions, but also through continuous communication with contact persons. It was also important to decide what could be seen as a “full 1” or a “full 0”.<sup>62</sup> In other words, by assigning a point to the “presence” of an element of professionalization, you could harmonize the substantive components across all countries (see figure from the preliminary study below):

DEU	NOR	FRA	
1	1	1	Variation in educational programs / existence of autonomous interior programs
1	1	1	Variation in educational programs / educational levels / less than 3 years (interior design)
1	1	1	Variation in educational programs / educational levels / 3-year bachelor
1	0	0	Variation in educational programs / educational levels / 4-year bachelor
1	0	0	Variation in educational programs / educational levels / 1-year master
1	1	1	Variation in educational programs / educational levels / 2-year master
6	4	4	Total Variation in educational programs

Figure 7: Mapped data overview - education (preliminary study, 2021), 22.

*“Let us look for example at the concept of education. In the excel sheet we have integrated the different durations of educational programs: less than three year, 3-year bachelor, 4-year bachelor, 1-year master and 2-year master. All these variations are included in the excel. If these programs are organized, this is indicated with a one. In the current excel overview we have given all present concepts a maximum score of one and we have taken all one’s and zero’s into account. This gives a distorted view, because one might ask what certain concepts contribute to the degree of regulation and if so, do they all contribute equally.”*

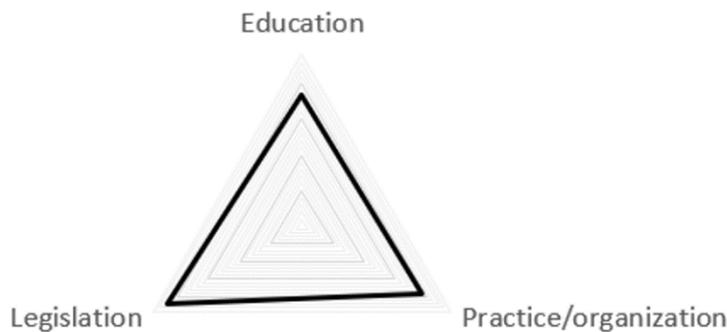


Figure 8: spider model example

In short, the actions were translated into the presence/absence of certain elements that lead to further professionalization. A “0” implies the absence of something, a “0.5” implies a substantial lack – though not full absence – of something, and a “1” stands for the presence of a certain element. To calibrate the values of the axes (education, practice/organization/legislation), the total scores of case attendance were converted into

<sup>62</sup> The questionnaire and the focus groups also paid attention to the content, organization and “consumption” of degrees in their own national and institutional context (e.g. a master’s degree from the university/country X could have another qualitative substantiality in university/country Y).



percentages.<sup>63</sup> In this way, spider model graphs were created. A full triangle would imply 100% professionalization, according to the variables used.

## Overview of this report

In **Chapter I** we first discuss how the interior profession and education has not yet reached full professional and public recognition. In particular, before addressing the spider models, we take a look at the poor definition of interior architecture and, more specifically, how the following aspects lead to incomplete recognition:

1. Terminology
2. “In-betweenness”
3. General recognition impediments

This chapter discusses the main topics that surfaced in the questionnaire submissions and focus group discussions, preparing the reader for the next chapter, where all the data is gathered and visualized. In short, chapter I explains the overarching impediments to professional recognition, while chapter II elaborates on what is already known but not yet explicitly visible.

**Chapter II** takes a closer look at the spider model study (based on the binary models) and explains each axis (education, practice/organization and legislation). This chapter shows which instruments and institutions are present or absent in the European countries studied. In a way, it shows what knowledge is or should be available to the professional and general public but hasn't reached them yet (cf. chapter 1).

**Chapter III** highlights further variables that hinder general recognition of the discipline and profession. In particular, stigmatization and gender are discussed, as they cannot be simply implemented in binary models given that this information mainly deals with “degrees of awareness” rather than the factual presence or absence of certain elements or situations. Finally, this chapter sheds further light on specific gender or stigma-related issues that were raised in the focus group discussions.

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<sup>63</sup> In these binary models, figures are rounded off: 0.5=1; 0.4=0.

## CHAPTER 0: DISCLAIMERS



Before addressing and elaborating on the international context concerning the professionalization of interior architecture in Europe, it is important to provide a few disclaimers. To begin with, it should be noted that the title refers to the “state of the art of the professionalization process” of the interior profession and education. With this, we mean that this report will show the state of the art / current situation of the professionalization process in several European countries. Besides this disclaimer about the title, there are four other disclaimers that can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, as already mentioned in the **methodology**, this report is based on previous ECIA research. Its structure and methodology in particular was influenced by the preliminary study. All of the hard data (i.e. information within the binary models and consequently the spider models) comes from a variety of sources including general literature studies, e-mail communication with respective experts, questionnaires and/or focus group discussions.

These elements of qualitative research are **snapshots** of the current situation in Europe. The questionnaires and focus groups were respectively filled in and attended by experts. These experts could have different opinions and did not always endorse the same views. However, the dynamics and interactions generated a healthy and efficient environment in which further discussion and sharing of views was encouraged. As explained in the methodology, the focus groups, and the questionnaires in particular, were respectively attended or submitted by only a handful people – although it should be said that they were regarded as true experts in the field.

This report is in no way a full statistical research project. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that the view/evaluation of a country is highly dependent on the group that represents it. Furthermore, this research was structured in such a way that it could be updated quickly and easily. It was highly advised to update the binary models if there was progress in professionalization in education and/or organization and/or legislation. In this way, spider models could be constantly updated in order to re-evaluate the national context and the overall European situation. The spider models became – in a way – sustainable thanks to their adaptability via updates. Needless to say, this report does not include every nuance or piece of information regarding interior architecture.

Many regional and local regulations were not elaborated on due to their unique nature which prevents plain comparisons. Time constraints and report size put further limits on the analysis of highly specific matters such as regional legislation in different cantons or provinces within the same country. The main goal was **to obtain a general overview** of the European situation **through individual/national spider models**; a cross-country analysis. More details on the specific national context is given – and considered highly important – in certain cases, but not every country is discussed separately by way of a list or catalogue. For more information, the submitted questionnaires and other additional documents can be found in the annex of this report.

Secondly, **terminology** will be discussed at the beginning of this report. In particular, it will be argued how terminology plays a central role in the professionalization process of interior architecture in Europe. For now, suffice to say that the term "interior architecture" will be used when discussing the discipline and profession that is represented by the national organizations which assemble under ECIA. This aligns with the way in which this terminological problem was approached in the preliminary study. This term also includes interior design. Of course, there are many ontological and qualitative differences that will be



pointed out, but for the sake of clarity and uniformity, **interior architecture** will be used as **the standard term** for the job in this report.

However, when discussing countries that use interior design instead of interior architecture, the former term will be used. This contributes to the clarity of the research and its correspondence with reality. For example, when discussing the situation in Malta, interior design will be used instead of interior architecture, and when discussing the situation in Sweden, interior architecture will be used. However, when referring to the entire European situation, again, the term interior architecture will be used.

Another nuance to this particular disclaimer is **the way in which “Europe”** is used. When speaking about “Europe” as such, it should be stressed that we are referring to the situation of interior architecture in the ECIA affiliated countries. This report gives an overview of the **fifteen ECIA members**, not the entire European continent. In addition, it should be mentioned that Iceland is included in this research, but only to a certain extent. During the final year, it proved incredibly difficult to contact various experts from Iceland. As a result, no questionnaires were submitted and no focus interviews were conducted. Thus, the analyses (and the figures contained therein) must be viewed with caution. This disclaimer is repeated several times in the graphical visualizations of this report.

Thirdly, when the report speaks in general terms (for example: “*n interior architecture studies, the majority of students tend to be female*”), this refers to the overall situation in Europe. In other words, these findings apply in all ECIA affiliated countries. If some situations are specific and characteristic or unique to certain countries, this will be indicated. A similar disclaimer should be made concerning gender. In this report, we only refer to the male and female gender.

Fourthly, a distinction should be made between **the profession** and **the discipline** of interior architecture. Many researchers have already addressed the epistemological difference between the two, but here a simple definition will suffice: *profession* refers to the practical reality and space where professionals work in the public and private markets, whereas *discipline* refers to the situation in educational frameworks (interior programs and the respective body of knowledge in academia and other institutions).

**CHAPTER I. ON GENERAL RECOGNITION DIFFICULTIES**  
**OR: DISCIPLINARY DELINEATIONS HINDERING PROFESSIONALIZATION**



## 1. Professionalization through terminology

Commonly known as the old continent, Europe is characterized by its rich and diverse history, practices and culture. Consequently, the multiplicity of languages often leads to obscure communication in which different terms can refer to the same thing, or vice versa. This is the case when Europeans discuss the discipline and profession of interior architecture. Interestingly, just about everywhere in Europe, the use of a term often coincides with the way in which the profession is defined as an academic discipline: terminology is “quite directly connected to education.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, professional vocabulary is often derived from the terms used in various universities, academia and technical schools. A first important observation is that educational structure and content is subject to historical trends. In several countries the interior discipline grew out of architecture; in others, it originated in art and decoration. Even within one country, different interior design programmes can have a different origin. Moreover, historically, the interior design discipline often co-existed with other disciplines, such as furniture design. This is particularly the case in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden.<sup>65</sup>

### 1.1. Interior architecture

The term “Interior *architecture*” is the term often used in the Central and Northern European countries of Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria,<sup>66</sup> Estonia, Germany, France, Sweden, Iceland and Finland. This does not mean that terms such as interior design or interior decoration are completely absent from educational institutions.<sup>67</sup> Often, for example in Belgium and Switzerland, interior design refers to a shorter and more practical-oriented educational track that is less focused on a building’s structure.<sup>68</sup> Sometimes this difference in training years leads to the stigmatization of interior design as the “lesser” program (since it has less to do with the actual structure and technicalities of a building) in relation to the architecture discipline. This begs the question “Why do people feel the need to describe good interior architecture as ‘architecture’ and expect us to consider it a compliment?”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Lars Rähä in focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023, 14:00-15:30 (BRUSSELS TIME). MS Teams.

<sup>65</sup> Slovakia can be seen as an exception where the program is called interior design and “housing” - which implies furniture design.

<sup>66</sup> In Austrian HTLs interior architecture is often referred to as “surface design”, according to Vesna Vučinić, in focus group AUSTRIA, 31 May 2023, 16:30-18:00. MS Teams.

<sup>67</sup> As explained previously, educational programs of interior architecture/ design often co-exist with furniture design. This is mostly the case in Northern and Eastern Europe.

<sup>68</sup> For Belgium, see: De Vos, Somers, Eeckhout, “Three Profiles of Interior Professionals in Postwar Belgium,” *Journal of Interior Design*, 40, no. 2 (2015) 15, 37-57; Vandervoort, Vanhee, Floré, De Vos, Poot (eds.), *Bronnengids Interieurontwerp België, 1945-2000* (Antwerp, Brussels: Vai/UPL, 2025).

<sup>69</sup> Stefanie Everaert, “Seven Questions,” in *Seven Questions. ETH Studio Jan De Vylder. Universum Carrousel Journey*, ed. Jan De Vylder and Annamaria Prandi (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2022), 178.



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*“(…) Interior design doesn't exist.”- Jokingly/provocatively  
Thierry Conquet (France)*

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*“In Germany we have interior architecture, and then we have interior decoration, which is a professional training (...) and in the middle we don't have interior design.”*

*-Carola EBERT (Germany)*

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As indicated earlier, **interior architecture** is usually seen as a **programme** in which students focus on the **architectonic elements of a structure** such as load-bearing walls. In addition to this substantive difference from interior *design*, interior *architecture* is used by graduates to differentiate themselves from the often less-educated interior *designer*. However, as the Finnish focus group explicitly mentioned, this does not mean that interior *architects* see themselves as more knowledgeable in general or more experienced than interior designers. Nevertheless, using the title of interior *architect* allows professionals (with specific training in interior architecture) to distinguish themselves from other designers by highlighting their additional knowledge about the structure of a building. This seems especially important in countries where the title of interior architect is not legally protected, as is the case in the vast majority of European countries.

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*For me interior architecture has not to deal with structure and this [is] how we teach it at school. Yes, we don't touch the structure and [their] formation [points to the way in which] they have no knowledge about how to deal with the structure (...) Of course, sometimes we have to change walls (...) I agree, but we shouldn't do it too often. (...) if I'm pronouncing it right, “Interior architecture, room design and object design.” So it means you're dealing on one side with the space and on one side dealing with the object”.*

*Christoph SCHMIDT-GINZKEY (Austria)*

*We think that interior architecture is (...) more than just furnishing and things like that. It's really [about the] architecture of buildings, so going deep in this topic; but there are also in my area carpenters or other persons, they also call themselves interior architects and this is not right [and in legislation it supposes/implies] different things.”*

*Christian ARMSTARK (Austria)*

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<sup>70</sup> All quotes are from the 2023 focus group discussions unless otherwise mentioned. In many cases, rectangular brackets will be used to correct the sentence grammar and improve readability.



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*So I've started a few years ago to say that I'm an "architect: interior architect", just to pronounce what education I have and that they don't put me into some time kind of decorator"*

*Susanna VON EYBEN (Sweden)*

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Many national organizations, such as the French<sup>71</sup> CFAI<sup>72</sup>, advocate that the title of interior architect be retained to indicate the latter's intense educational training and specific expertise

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<sup>71</sup> Arine Ollivier, *Carine Ollivier*, "Division of Labour and Competition on the Interior Design Market: Approaches to an Analysis of Professional Group Forms" (PhD, article version in *Revue française de sociologie*, 53-2, 2012, 147-179; "The title 'architectes d'intérieur' has no direct equivalent in English but the choice of terms is important. In fact French practitioners are not attempting to find an equivalent of the term "interior design" as currently used in the USA or Britain (and where the title "interior architect" is little used). This difference can be explained of course by the subtleties of the two languages, but these do however reflect a basic cultural difference; whilst the desire of interior designers in Anglo-Saxon societies to differentiate what they do from interior decoration is a real one, it is however less meaningful than in France where the aim is to **imitate the architectural model**, considered both more modern and prestigious, by marking out clear differences between that and the outmoded image of the 'décorateur à la française'. (...)The 'architecte d'intérieur' is someone who can conceive, give structure to and sometimes decorate public and private spaces (apartments, houses, offices, hotels, shops) working on his or her own behalf or as an employee. He may also be required if necessary to diversify his business towards stage design, or museum and trade exhibition design. He may even be the person who conceives and designs the facade of a building and thus comes close to being an architect, much as he could be the creator of the furniture that he will place in his interior layout, and thus wears the cap of the designer. Finally he may be the owner of a shop selling furniture and decorative objects at the same time as selling his services for planning and site management. It is thus difficult to precisely categorize interior design" (...)However, two 'architectes d'intérieur' are not just in competition for a job, they can also compete to offer their services to a client who wants to redo his interior—and they are in competition with an architect and a decorator who is trying to convince the same client to use their services. Hence the form taken by the professional group also depends on the competition between individuals at work in the services market, something too often overlooked in the literature on occupational groups."

<sup>72</sup> According to Alexis Markovics, "De l'immeuble à la petite cuillère. L'architecture, le décor, l'objet" Ecole Camondo Recherches & Documentation (Online) 2021, via « [De l'immeuble à la petite cuillère. L'architecture, le décor, l'objet](#) » - Camondo Recherche ([ecolecamondo.fr](http://ecolecamondo.fr)); "the CFAI tries in vain to protect the name of interior architects (under the name of space design). This concept encompasses the interior as well as the exterior and in this, differs from the interior designer who focuses on the interior space. For example, a space designer can work on a restaurant that would be open to the outside. He develops the layout of the place so that it corresponds to the desires of the owner while the interior designer draws up the layout plans such as the creation of partitions open to the outside," in Marie Talaucher, "Une brève histoire de l'architecture d'intérieur," <https://blog.institutartline.com/une-br%C3%A8ve-histoire-de-larchitecture-dint%C3%A9rieur>. Markovics observes that the field of interior architecture has always come under that of architecture. He states that this should be seen as logical, as "[transl.] The two professions will encounter the same obstacles and will ask themselves the same questions. It therefore seems obvious to us: the interior architecture springs from the architecture," 22 <https://recherche.ecolecamondo.fr/les->

in architectural principles - which surpasses the expertise (about structural matters) of interior designers.

Sometimes, as in Germany, the rather close relationship between interior architecture and architecture leads to more academic research because the design and decoration disciplines

Prestations	Architecte DPLG ou DE-HMONP	Architecte d'intérieur	Décorateur d'intérieur
Intervention sur la structure du bâtiment	Oui	Non	Non
Ouverture de murs porteurs	Oui	Non	Non
Réagencement des pièces	Oui	Oui	Non
Dossier de demande de permis de construire	Oui	Oui (uniquement pour les surfaces inférieures à 150 m²)	Non
Assurance décennale	Oui	Oui (s'il est diplômé)	Non
Habilitation à la maîtrise d'oeuvre	Oui	Oui (s'il est diplômé)	Non
Choix des revêtements de sols et murs	Oui	Oui	Oui
Choix et disposition des meubles, accessoires et textiles	Oui et non (certains le proposent, même si cela ne fait pas partie des missions habituelles)	Oui	Oui
Diplôme requis pour exercer ce métier	Oui (obligatoire)	Oui et non (pas obligatoire)	Non

Figure 9: interior architect's competence via <https://www.hemea.com/fr/architecture/architecte-archi-interieur-decorateur>.

are seen as vocational, leading to a professional degree rather than an academic one.<sup>73</sup> In other words, the competences of the interior architect *overlap* with those of the architect - the much more recognized profession. This is interesting in the British situation, where the term interior *designer* is used. However, here too, the interior designer is set against the architect (both professionally and conceptually).<sup>74</sup>

[colloques/colloque-de-limmeuble-a-la-petite-cuillere-larchitecture-le-decor-lobjet/de-limmeuble-a-la-petite-cuillere-larchitecture-le-decor-lobjet/](https://www.hemea.com/fr/architecture/architecte-archi-interieur-decorateur).

<sup>73</sup> The questionnaires from Germany showed that there is sufficient literature on the subject (however, sufficient is never enough). One may argue that in Germany this literature has a particular focus due to the regulation of the profession of interior architecture, for example, and its close proximity to architecture. In addition, the clear separation of interior decoration as a vocational/professional training in "Berufsschulen" with lower school-leaving certificate requirements, via trade schools/shops instead of offices, etc. creates a separate sphere for interior decoration, than would otherwise be the case.

<sup>74</sup> This graph was suggested by Antonio de Antonis in focus group ITALY, 18.05.2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

## 1.2. Interior design – and interior decoration

As aforementioned, one of the variables of the terminological definition is geographical location. Unlike the countries mentioned in the previous paragraph, Southern European countries usually use interior *design* when referring to the discipline and profession related to creating and adapting interior spaces with humans at the centre.

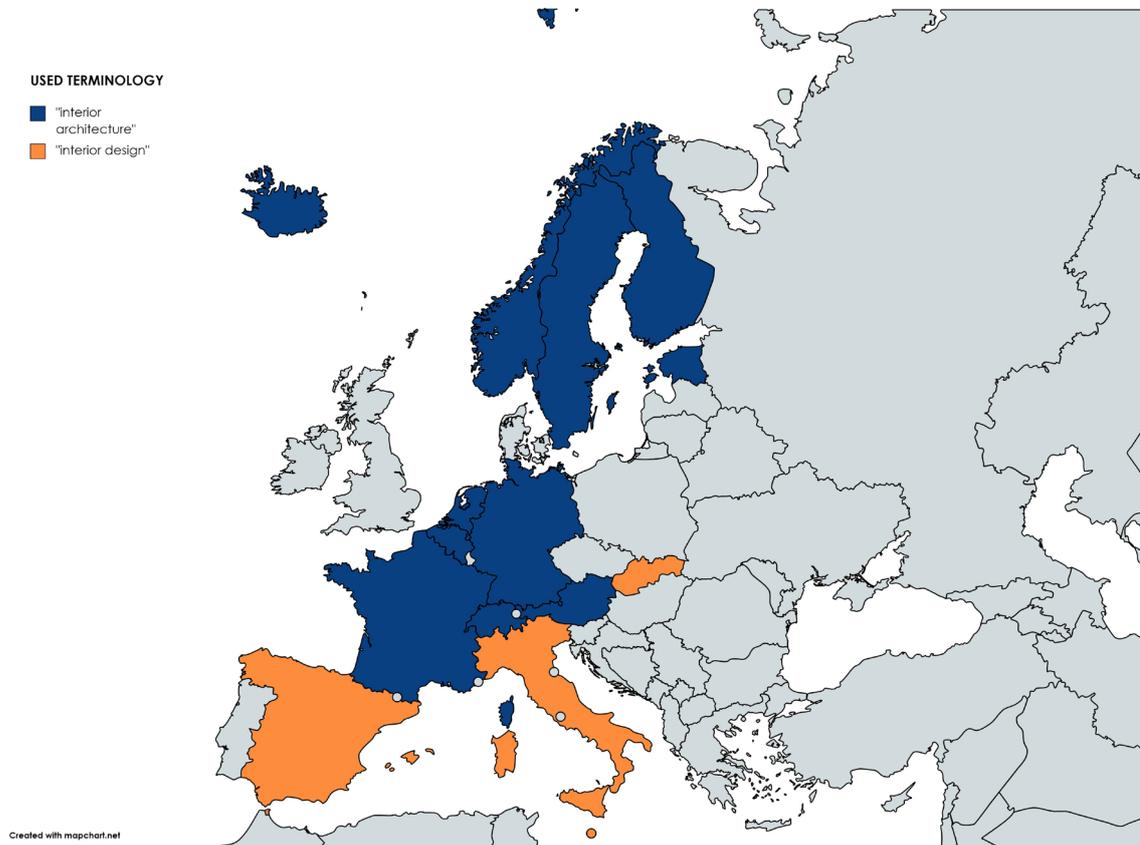


Figure 9: terminology used in Europe (via MapChart)

Most Southern/Mediterranean European countries offer degrees or courses in interior *design* or *spatial design* rather than interior *architecture*. These countries include Malta, Spain and Italy. Here, as in the countries where interior *architect* is used, the term interior *designer* designates a profession with its own competencies and abilities, in contrast to the more vocational profession of interior decorator.

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*“The difference between spatial or interior design and the interior decorator, because the interior decorator usually refers to the person who's actually just basically designing the interiors using already existing, already designed furnishings, that's it. Where it is spatial design, spatial architecture, interior design; there is actually the designing of products within the space.”*

*Nadia HABER (Malta)*

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However, some claim that, in using interior design, the discipline and profession seem closely related to interior decoration, yet neither interior *architects* nor interior *designers*



identify with the latter. Moreover, for example in Italy, the profession of the interior *architect* simply does not exist. There used to be a PhD in interior architecture<sup>75</sup> and there are still many courses on it, but the profession itself is called interior design.

Besides the interior *architect* and the interior *designer*, there is a third option in Spain where, much to the chagrin of the National Association of Interior Designers, the profession is regulated by law through the term *decorador* or [interior] *decorator*.<sup>76</sup>

### 1.3. Terminological interchangeability International context

Some countries, such as Slovakia, tend to use interior *architecture* and interior *design* interchangeably – much like the general public in Europe. In this case, interior *architecture* often alludes to the more technical (and structural) aspects of interior space, whereas interior *design* focuses on the design and production of furniture.<sup>77</sup> This distinction is also recognized (as shown in the respective focus group discussions) by experts from Austria, Spain, Sweden and France, where design is seen as the umbrella name for the use of interior space, encompassing furniture and decorative design. However, interior *design* is more frequently used in international discourse in English, since international publications and discussions often use Anglo-Saxon terminology.

Elaborating on the interchangeable use of the terms: in Finland, the use of interior *architecture* and interior *design* reflects not only a difference in education but also the distinction between – respectively – the public sector and private sector.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, the use of terms is also attributed to the scale and focus of the market. Indeed, all national interior associations divide their members into different categories.<sup>79</sup> In some cases, an organization has both the interior *architect* and interior *designer* categories. This is the case in Slovakia (SAID) and Belgium (AinB).<sup>80</sup> This division is, as explained previously, a way of distinguishing between people with different educational backgrounds (interior design vs. interior architecture) and/or fields of expertise. Other countries, such as Norway (NIL) and France (CFAI/POLE ACTION) explicitly use and only accept the term interior *architect*. In France specifically, “whilst the desire of interior designers in Anglo-Saxon societies to differentiate what they do from interior decoration is a real one, it is however less meaningful than in France where the aim is to imitate the architectural model, considered both more modern and prestigious, by marking out clear differences between that and the outmoded image of the ‘décorateur à la française’”.<sup>81</sup>

In true EU tradition, Europe offers a space in which students, teachers and professionals can communicate about the interior discipline and profession using multiple terms. However, it is clear that obscure terminology and vague definitions lead to miscommunication and overall ambiguity – especially in international and transnational communication. Most of the ECIA associations try to get around this through the selective and optional use of English in their

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<sup>75</sup> Francesco Scullica in focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>76</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: legal axis (Spain).

<sup>77</sup> Focus group: SLOVAKIA, 15 May 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>78</sup> Focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>79</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis practice/organization.

<sup>80</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis practice/organization.

<sup>81</sup> Ollivier, “Division of Labour,” 148.

codes of conduct and on their websites. However, this often just leads back to the interchangeable use of interior architecture and interior design.

### Double terminology

In some countries, like Belgium, interior architecture and interior design are separate programs. In countries with a similar scheme, interior design is always defined as the lesser program in terms of years and theoretical/conceptual focus. To expand on the Belgian Flemish case: since the reorganization of higher education in 1995, the term “interior design” (*interieurvormgeving*) has been used to refer to a professional bachelor’s degree of three years, which prepares students to implement concrete interiors. By contrast, the label of “interior architecture” (*interieurarchitectuur*) is applied to a four-year academic master’s program, in which the remodelling of existing buildings forms the core of the design studio, alongside academic research and reflection.<sup>82</sup> Although, in Flanders, these labels have been used since 1995, the debate on the position of interior architecture in education and the profession continues unabated. In Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium, the situation is completely different. Interior architecture can be studied at academies of arts in a three- plus two-year (MA) program. Interior architecture is often seen as the more “serious” program because it is usually concerned with structure and the concept of space.

### An interior matrix

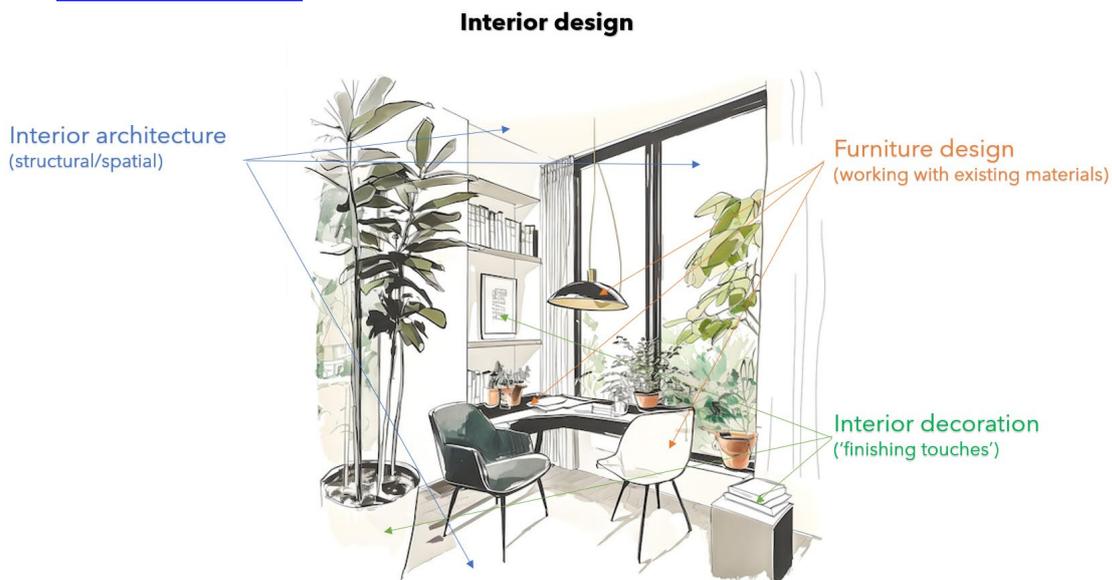


Figure 10: one of many visions on the focus points of interior architecture's sister disciplines.

As explained above, terminology within the interiors world is an obstacle to further progress on a definition. It is generally believed that interior design can refer to the design of the entire interior, so it is often used as a container term, while interior architecture explicitly deals with the structure of a space and not just its furnishing. Furniture design, in turn, refers to the study of objects inside a space. Finally, interior decoration often refers to the final finishing touches, considered ephemeral. However, it should be noted that there is certainly no

<sup>82</sup> De Vos, Somers, Eeckhout, “Three Profiles of Interior Professionals in Postwar Belgium,” *Journal of Interior Design*, 40, no. 2 (2015) 15, 37-57, 52.



consensus on this. Things are seen differently all over Europe, in part because they are also named and defined differently.

## 2. Professionalization through “in-betweenness”

Throughout Europe, interior architecture is seen as a so-called in-between profession, situated and defined within many other disciplines – most notably, architecture, furniture design and decoration. As a result, interior architecture is often influenced by regulations and adaptations of adjacent disciplines. For example, legal recognition of the title of interior decorator in Spain leads to tense and ambiguous situations in which an interior designer is limited when it comes to signing building permissions and structural interventions: the legal regulation of sister disciplines impedes unregulated interior practices and functions as a “wall”<sup>83</sup> which interior designers are unable to penetrate. Furthermore, as in Norway, fundamental changes in the national building law (e.g. legal requests for building permissions changing from local to central/state authorization) can lead to difficult situations, not just for the interior architect, but for all actors involved in the building industry. In a way, the “in-betweenness” of interior architecture is both a blessing and a curse:<sup>84</sup> a blessing because it has a unique way of working with the human in the centre of an interior environment; a curse because, due to its *in-betweenness*, interior architecture is an easy target for educational/professional/legislative change and has a hard time distinguishing itself from its neighbouring disciplines (most notably, architecture). This tension is most apparent in legislative matters and education.

As mentioned earlier, the interior architecture discipline and profession – especially in the case of the interior *architecture* denomination – tends to compare itself to the architecture discipline and profession, which is considered altogether more professionalized. This **imitation strategy** is mainly due to the fact that architecture has a longer academic and professional history than the interior profession – although some would argue that “we have buildings because we need interiors”.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, the “older” profession of architects – and their successful professionalization process – serves as an example for interior architects: “**Since the proliferation of professions, especially in the last century, the formal traits of professional occupations have been imitated by younger ones (...) As professionalism is something that is aspired, so is the nature of professional knowledge. Sociologist Nathan Glazer has coined the term of the ‘minor professions’ to designate those professions that have (unsuccessfully) aimed to assimilate their training programs in emulation of the ‘major’ or ‘learned’ professions.**”<sup>86</sup> It will be argued that this forced imitation and rather seamless mirroring of the architecture discipline is an impediment to the professionalization process, particularly given the in-between nature of interior architecture. It is also important to note that this forced comparison (in the educational framework) is mainly made in university settings. It is here that interior programs are nearly always placed within the Architecture faculty. Academies of arts, as explained by

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<sup>83</sup> Focus group: SPAIN, 10 May 2023, 13:00-14:30. MS Teams.

<sup>84</sup> Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

<sup>85</sup> This was also emphasized by Kees Spanjers at the 30th ECIA assembly (September 2022) in Florence.

<sup>86</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 13.



Pierre Lhoas,<sup>87</sup> focus on the human condition and in this sense have more “freedom” to work and study, without having architecture “breathing down their neck”.

To nuance, it is important to point out that this professional reflection/mirroring with architects is tangible even when the architect is not the central player in the building industry:

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*“(…) after the Second World War it moved very much towards engineering and then the focus in the building industry was put on the builders. So here in a building project, **it's not the architect that is the spider in the web, it's actually the builder.** So (...) you can say, we architects, in general we have a weaker position in the building process. If you compare to UK, Germany or France, Italy, Spain where the architect the building architect is very strong.”*

*Torsten HILD (Sweden)*

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## **2.1. In-betweenness through legal matters**

The legal matters will be discussed later in this report. For now, it is important to touch on the legal implications associated with the in-betweenness of the interior architecture profession. These legal implications can be explained through the phenomenon of legal title regulation on the one hand, and scattered building regulations on the other.

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<sup>87</sup> In focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

### 2.1.1. Legal title regulation<sup>88</sup>

In some European countries, the title of interior architect / interior designer is protected.<sup>89</sup> However, this constitutes the absolute minority. To date (2023) and according to European directive 2005/36/EC, there are seven countries<sup>90</sup> in which national<sup>91</sup> legal title regulation is in force. Most of these countries are ECIA affiliated.

Name of Regulated Profession	Country	Region	Recognition Under Directive 2005/36/EC
Architecte d'intérieur	Luxembourg	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Architecte d'intérieur	Switzerland	Genève	General system of recognition - primary application
Belsőépítészeti tervezési szakterület / Építészeti-műszaki tervezési tevékenység	Hungary	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Decorador	Spain	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Décorateur d'intérieur	Luxembourg	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Innanhússhönnudur	Iceland	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Innenarchitekt	Germany	All Regions	General system of recognition - secondary application
Interieurarchitect	Netherlands	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application
Raumplaner	Liechtenstein	All Regions	General system of recognition - primary application

Figure 11: regulated professions under EU Directive 2005/36/EC (via <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof/professions/profession/6490>)

In Europe, the most notable examples of legal title protection concerning the profession of interior architect are located in Germany and the Netherlands. In both countries the title may only be used by a certified and trained professional who is registered in the qualified chamber/order/association of registration.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, in both Germany and the Netherlands the title of architect is also protected– within the same legislative framework as the legal title regulation of other architectonic disciplines such as landscape architects and urban planners. Interestingly however, in countries like Belgium this appropriation was not self-evident because of the legal title protection of Belgian architects through their registration in the respective Order of Architects. However, inspired by the French, German and Dutch examples where the suffix of -architect was used in the recognition of *architecte d'intérieur*,

<sup>88</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis legislation.

<sup>89</sup> As explained previously, the Spanish case is special in that the title of technical decorator (*decorador*) is protected, and not the overarching interior designer.

<sup>90</sup> Note the variety of protected terms. Mostly, they refer to interior architects rather than “designers”. Source: Regulated.

<sup>91</sup> The exception to this is the protection of the interior architect in Geneva (and not in Switzerland as a whole).

<sup>92</sup> In the Netherlands: BA; in Germany: BAK (plus Chamber of Architects).



*Innenarchitektur* or *Interieurarchitectuur*, architect Jul De Roover, founder of the interior architecture programme in Antwerp, joined forces with the Professional Association of Interior Designers of Antwerp (the predecessor of the AiNB), and launched a legal appeal against the Belgian Association of Architects. As a result of his efforts, from the 1964 onwards, Belgian interior architects could refer to themselves as *interieurarchitecten*.<sup>93</sup> Importantly, in France, the title of interior architect is not legally protected – neither is this the case in Belgium. However, the use of the title was important for the mere recognition of the profession itself. Similarly, although much later, interior architects in Iceland had to sue the architect organization to obtain legal title protection.<sup>94</sup>

In a way, the quasi-monopolistic (or protectionist) appropriation of the architect title by architects in the past created an environment in which practitioners of interior architecture could not designate themselves as such. This tendency still persists in some countries, although nowadays this title appropriation is seen in a different light. In Malta for example, architects are planning to take protectionist measures regarding the use of the word “-architecture” (for example, in interior *architecture*, *innenarchitektur*, *interieurarchitectuur*). However, according to various Maltese interior designers, they themselves are not directly affected by this since they use “interior designer” as their professional designation. Moreover, measures such as those of the Maltese architects even incentivize interior designers to step even further away from the designation of interior architecture – which is often (and sometimes exclusively) used in many other European countries. However, notice how in Europe, legal title protection is only issued for the use of interior *architect* – and never interior *designer*: this could be yet another reason why interior architects tend to look at the architect profession as an example, a “big brother” leading by example. Again, terminology seems to be a key obstacle in supranational legal regulation concerning interior architecture’s recognition.

### **2.1.2. Discordant building regulation**

In many European countries, most notably Germany, Switzerland and Austria, building practice (and as good as all other professional arrangements) are affected by the state structure which is made up of – respectively – federal states (*Bundesländer*), cantons and provinces. Geographical divisions like these contribute to a vast and extremely diverse array of building practices concerning the practical and legal regulation of building permissions, office rules and even titular disposition.<sup>95</sup> The interior architect’s ability to sign a particular building permission in one canton may differ from his ability – or even permission – to do the same in a neighbouring canton or even city.

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*“It is a very diverse profession, but it is also very much **made by the limitations**. I think the restrictions that there are in terms of regulations, I’m not talking about the architect title, but especially in the field of building regulations, but also all kinds of other things such as the furnishing of*

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<sup>93</sup> Jul De Roover was an important figure in this process. See: De Vos, Somers, Eeckhout, “Three Profiles of Interior Professionals in Postwar Belgium,” *Journal of Interior Design*, 40, no. 2 (2015) 15, 41. This was further discussed in focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams.

<sup>94</sup> This information was communicated to the research team by Rosa Dögg during the 30th ECIA GA in Florence.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. the interior architect’s protection in Geneva, cf. supra.



*catering establishments or the furnishing of hospitals , or healthcare buildings. That kind of regulation is different in every country and sets great requirements that interior architects simply cannot meet.*

*Kees SPANJERS (The Netherlands)*

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Such fragmented building regulations greatly hinder the national - let alone international/transnational - recognition of the interior architect in Europe. This phenomenon contributes not only to the vagueness of the profession of interior architecture, but also to its unclear relationship with neighbouring disciplines such as architecture and, in the case of Austria, carpentry.

## **2.2. In-betweenness through education: interior education as an interdisciplinary nexus**

Besides the legal implications of interior architecture's in-betweenness, educational reality is another obstacle the profession has had to face. First, it is important to briefly paint a picture of the situation of interior architecture / interior design teachers. In Europe, most teachers of interior architecture courses seem to have a background in architecture. This relates back to the problem of numbers and professional size (cf. infra). In just about every country studied, the number of interior architecture / interior design graduates is extremely low, for multiple reasons.<sup>96</sup> Concerning further research, the situation is particularly alarming when one looks at the number of master graduates – where a master course in interior architecture is an option in the first place. This in turn contributes to the scant organization and creation of PhD possibilities.<sup>97</sup> Later in this report, we will come back to the structure and possibilities of PhDs. However, it is important to briefly touch upon this matter here.

These PhDs are not only important for further developing the disciplinary body of knowledge of interior architecture, but also – in many institutions – a key requirement for becoming a teacher or professor in the discipline. The almost microscopic number of interior PhDs ensures that a lot of professors/teachers/lecturers of interior architecture courses have a PhD in other (often neighbouring) disciplines such as architecture and civil engineering, which have a longer history as an academic discipline. This in turn leads to “zillions of applications”<sup>98</sup> of architects to teach in interior courses. In general this is the case across Europe, but was mentioned specifically in the communication with Germany and Spain.

Second, elaborating on these PhDs and interior education in general; where there are PhD possibilities regarding interior architecture / interior design, the overall diploma is often located in an overarching doctoral degree in design or architecture. In many cases, however, it is possible to specialize in interiors within a doctoral program<sup>99</sup> such as design, but a

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<sup>96</sup> For example, in some countries, like Norway, the government decides the number of study places within an institution.

<sup>97</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis education.

<sup>98</sup> Carola Ebert in focus group: GERMANY, 4 May, 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>99</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis education.



specific designative and national<sup>100</sup> doctoral degree remains absent throughout Europe, with the exception of Belgium. However, this does not mean that any one regulation is better than another. In Italy, for example, there used to be a PhD in interior architecture.<sup>101</sup> Today, only a PhD in interior design is possible via a doctoral program in design or architecture. This deductive way of looking at the PhD structure confirms the way in which design is often defined in Europe. In the focus groups of France and Spain for example, it was argued that design can be seen as the overarching topic that deals with pretty much everything in and around created space. This leads to more obscurity regarding the content and general structure of the profession as a design discipline that does not “genuinely hold discrete knowledge, but rather value virtually all knowledge under the guise of interdisciplinarity”.<sup>102</sup>

Apart from the firm footing of design and architecture in interior PhD programs, it is also important to note the way in which structural and technical doctoral topics are prioritized. In the Estonian focus group for example, it was established that PhDs in architecture almost exclusively deal with subjects that are characterized as being “urgent” concerning current problems in the building industry. These topics deal with matters related to safety, health and welfare – subjects that are generally less ascribed to the field of expertise of interior architects.<sup>103</sup> By prioritizing “purely architectural” doctoral topics, interior architecture graduates are less likely to expand and strengthen interior architecture’s body of knowledge through further, extensive research.

These educational tensions between architecture, design and interior architecture contribute to the way in which the latter discipline is often seen as the one that “lags behind”.<sup>104</sup> In the Netherlands, the feeling of falling or lagging behind is underlined in the narrative of being one of the protected professions in architecture. Other architectonic professions here have successful PhD programs, whereas a PhD in interior architecture seems to be impossible, due to the great diversity in academic content and structure<sup>105</sup> and the way in which hardcore engineering or architecture institutions do not allow the interior discipline to gnaw away at the traditional educational infrastructure.<sup>106</sup>

The status quo that seems to be accepted by many of interior architecture’s neighbouring disciplines represents an eyesore for interior designers in Estonia, for example, where the Bologna system seems to prevent them from reaching a similar kind of recognition of their education program as architects. Like many other disciplines, interior design in Estonia is structured as a three-year bachelor and a two-year master’s programme, whereas architecture is continuous five-year study. Among other consequences, professional interior

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<sup>100</sup> In Germany, a PhD in interior architecture is also possible (in collaboration with a university), but not in every state. Therefore, to date, Belgium is the only country that offers a national and specific PhD program (so, not within or “under” the architecture or design discipline) in interior architecture (in both Flanders and Wallonia).

<sup>101</sup> As discussed in focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>102</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Many scholars have already conducted research on this matter (e.g. Inge Somers’s PhD). For more information, see Chapter II: axis legislation.

<sup>104</sup> Jaap Molenaar (transl.) in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

<sup>105</sup> Frans Bevers, “Waarom zijn er in Nederland nog geen PhD programma’s voor interieurarchitectuur?” De Architect website, consulted 2.10.2022, <https://www.dearchitect.nl/276360/waarom-zijn-er-in-nederland-nog-geen-phd-programmas-voor-interieurarchitectuur>

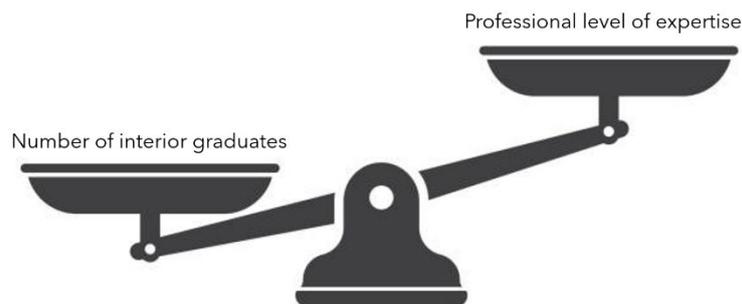
<sup>106</sup> Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

designers often graduate after the three-year bachelor, which is not associated with the full five-year education – much to the disdain of many master’s degree holders in Europe - and this hinders the general recognition of the discipline. Note how here a seamless comparison with architects is made again.

Many professional interior architects / interior designers are calling for equivalence with the architect study concerning the educational framework, in order to no longer be seen as *that one architectural discipline that seems to lag behind*. It is also the ambition of national interior associations to raise the educational criteria for admittance to the organization – which is currently predominantly hindered by the low number of graduates and certified professionals.<sup>107</sup>

The Estonian concern with the Bologna model contrasts with the Norwegian mentality which stresses that bachelor graduates should already possess enough expertise to start working in the field.<sup>108</sup> Note how the correlation between number of graduates and level of expertise seems to be cut by the same cloth (see *infra*; recognition through numbers).

The figure above, however, becomes irrelevant when each graduate, or even better, each professional interior architect, receives very high-level training focusing on both



concept/theory and practical application. Nonetheless, the scale-graph above shows how the

Figure 12: connection between program elaboration and graduation size

lack of interior architecture master’s graduates may lead to overall incompetence in the professional field.

### 2.3. In-betweenness through adaptive reusability and the supposed influx of architects

Now that it is clear that architecture studies and legislation are always connected through the in-between nature of the interior architecture discipline, it is essential to elaborate on the *in situ* tension between the two professions. Roughly 10 to 20 years ago, the general view in many (but not all) European countries was as follows: “whatever an interior architect can do, an architect can as well.”<sup>109</sup> Fortunately, for the most part this has changed. However, some

<sup>107</sup> For more information, see next section on recognition and Chapter II: axis practice/organization.

<sup>108</sup> Jeremy Williams, focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>109</sup> Jeremy Williams, focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.



say that the relatively recent focus on adaptive reusability<sup>110</sup> has turned the attention of architects to the space within the walls – far more than in the past.<sup>111</sup>

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*“I sat in the canteen and there were young architects and one of them said **‘there’s not a single job than interior architect can do that an architect can’t do’** (...) But that’s really changed in the time that I’ve worked.”*

*Jeremy WILLIAMS (Norway)*

*“I used to say that the architects that have been this engineering and so they start with the city and they go towards the building and we start within our hearts and go outwards from our body and out towards the building. And then **we meet somewhere in the walls** or something, because there is a very big difference of how we see things: we are so much closer to the user of the building, so much closer to who is really going to be here and what are they really going to do?”*

*Susanna VON EYBEN (Sweden)*

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According to many experts<sup>112</sup> this leads to tense situations in which architects and interior architects **no longer work with each other but against each other**. Previously we mentioned interior architecture’s “neighbouring” disciplines which are often defined as the sister disciplines. Emphasizing and elaborating on this personification, architecture is seen as interior architecture’s big brother. Some have underlined that, even though this big brother has a rich educational and institutional history, he isn’t always interior architecture’s most supportive family member. Various extremely powerful architecture chambers in Europe (particularly in Slovakia, Austria and Sweden<sup>113</sup>) prevent interior architecture’s professionalization by monopolizing legal titles and/or claiming professional working activities through protectionist policies.

By working far more often in interior spaces, architects seem to have set foot in the arena of interior architects / interior designers. *A small step for architecture, but a big leap backward for interior architecture?* In any case, this tension in the practice is often romanticized in research and fired up in debates. In the practice it is clear that architects, interior architects, civil engineers, etc. are highly aware of each other’s expertise and the tense relationship is predominantly located in past stigmatization. Nonetheless, it is clear that, driven by the increased attention to interior spaces post COVID and the heightened focus on sustainable practices, interior architecture / interior design is hardly absent from current debate surrounding adaptive reuse. However, the way in which architects and interior architects

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<sup>110</sup> Explicitly mentioned in the Norwegian focus group.

<sup>111</sup> Explicitly mentioned in the Maltese focus group.

<sup>112</sup> Thierry Conquet in focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams; and mentioned in focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023: 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>113</sup> For more information on the struggle of interior architects in Sweden, see Chapter II: axis practice/organization.



seem to be playing on the same field raises questions such as “Can we still speak of interior architects or architects if they deal with the same problems?”<sup>114</sup> Of course, this question is only valid and compelling if you exclude the permission to plan and construct whole new buildings and if we solely look at the interior space. One thing is irrefutable: the small number of interior graduates – to some extent– leads to the professional conviction of architects that they are the key figures in the interior spaces *as well*.

#### 2.4. In-betweenness through the nature of the chain of professionals in the building industry

In Europe, the building industry is characterized as being a team effort. And even though practically everyone knows their own expertise and that of their colleagues, sometimes the project/task delineation remains unclear. According to experts, this needs to be addressed and cleared up in the early stages of the interior programs in academies and university.<sup>115</sup> Here, people’s expectations of the profession are different from the reality. This coincides with the stigmatization of the architect as the “male/genius” professional and of the interior architect as the “female/superficial” amateur.<sup>116</sup> This perceived “superiority complex”<sup>117</sup> is still with us today, even though some claim that it became extinct 20 years ago.<sup>118</sup>

In countries such as Austria and Finland, interior architects are often allowed to sign building permissions under several conditions and based on geographical factors.<sup>119</sup> Inadvertently, this creates an environment where architects and interior architects compete rather than collaborate/cooperate. In former Soviet countries such as Estonia it is clear that the interior designer and architect used to collaborate in a very fruitful and large-scale manner.<sup>120</sup>

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*“In the Soviet times, there was a really great collaboration between interior architects and architects, and there wasn’t this so much of this “me as a great central author”- culture. And then, because there were these bigger teams (...) and this kind of gave way to this tradition we have now that architects and the interior architects are working together.”*

*Villa LAUSMÄE (Estonia)*

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<sup>114</sup> Paraphrased from Sophie Green in focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>115</sup> At Aalto University (Finland) in particular, they debate these topics with students and teachers alike; via Antti Pirinen: focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>116</sup> For more information see Chapter III; Hilde Heynen, “Genius, Gender and Architecture: The Star System as Exemplified in the Pritzker Prize,” *Architectural Theory Review* 17(2-3):331-345 (2012).

<sup>117</sup> Pierre Lhoas in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>118</sup> Focus group: BELGIUM. 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams; NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>119</sup> In Finland, professionals make use of layered building permits: to a certain degree (regarding safety), the interior architect may or may not sign building permits. This is especially the case in densely populated areas.

<sup>120</sup> Focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.



In a way, the building represented a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but professional duties were distributed between the architect and the interior specialist. Nowadays interior architects and architects work together on many projects all across the continent. In many instances the interior architect acts as a key adviser to the engineer: they are not only proficient in the layout of the interior space, but also extremely well-versed in the structural aspects of the building.<sup>121</sup> In this way, the interior architect plays the same metaphorical notes as the architect, albeit for the interior space. However, many European experts call for greater focus on the added value of the interior architect as someone who is exceptionally skilled in understanding human needs in the centre of the space (focusing on mental, social, sociological, anthropological and psychological elements).<sup>122</sup> In some construction-related instances, regarding ornamentation for example (or other less technical/logical aspects),<sup>123</sup> it is clear that the interior architect remains the true expert as opposed to the architect. However, it is difficult for interior architects to embrace the uniqueness of their profession and at the same time aspire to define themselves in the same way that architects have done in their professionalization process. In some countries, they even claim that the interior architect is actually a part-time architect.<sup>124</sup> This will be elaborated on later.

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*“It’s interesting to see how interior architecture is always in between.”*  
*Els DE VOS (Belgium) / co-moderator*

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Furthermore, the interior architect is not only an advisor but also a valuable and important link in the chain of professionals (i.e. architects, civil engineers, etc.) which is mobilized for building projects. In particular, Christoph Schmidt-Ginzkey agrees that architectonic practices are a team effort and, moreover, that the in-betweenness of interior architecture specifically is attributable to its being embedded in life itself.<sup>125</sup>

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*“But it’s normal. It’s a part of life. Therefore, it’s in between”*  
*Christoph SCHMIDT-GINZKEY (Austria)*

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It is also clear that the professionals who work in the building industry truly understand their own competences and abilities and also recognize the capabilities of other professionals in the chain. The interior architect, as part of that chain, is always seen as the professional that adds something after “the main” thing (construction, electrics, etc.): “Unlike those other disciplines, that expertise is seldomly required when commissioning a project, and is often assumed as something that can either be taken care of by other professionals, or that can easily be integrated afterwards, into an unfinished project.”<sup>126</sup> This leads to their absence in

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<sup>121</sup> Focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams. An example was given of how the interior architect in a particular project advised the architects and engineers and informed them about the general structure of the building and the way they could proceed safely.

<sup>122</sup> Focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>123</sup> Wim Van der Vurst in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30.

<sup>124</sup> Focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>125</sup> Focus group: AUSTRIA, 31 May 2023, 16:30-18:00. MS Teams.

<sup>126</sup> Vandevooort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 3.



legally regulated rights/duties and in competitions<sup>127</sup> and general documentation regarding construction regulation:

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*“I can give one example that that's been discussed in several different kinds of circumstances, and that's sort of the official guidance, because if you are starting a building project, you're expected to have an architect (or unusually the architect also the main designer) then you're expected to have somebody planning the electricals you're expected to have somebody planning the plumbing and the ventilation you're expected to have somebody planning the construction. And then you might even be expected to have somebody planning the landscape, but **no official documentation requires anybody to use an interior architect for the interiors.**”*

*Lars RÄIHÄ (Finland)*

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### 3. Professionalization through recognition

The previous section dealt with how the interior discipline and profession is hard to define terminologically due to its intermediateness. Moreover, it was argued that recognition plays a central role in the professionalization process. For example, it is clear that the small number of master's graduates and PhD possibilities has hindered the professional and disciplinary development of the profession. We established how the architectural discipline and the architectural profession are seen as examples and possible mirrors for the professionalization process of the interior architect. Elaborating on this, it is also clear that architecture is touted as a “true” academic discipline, while interior architecture is often considered a non-academic discipline or even a vocational education practice. Furthermore, it was briefly mentioned how *safety, health and welfare* issues are considered the domain of architects who are responsible for ensuring that the structure and concept of the whole building does not endanger its users (through the collapse of its structure, for example). As a result, more PhD research focuses on architectural problems. In a sense, the interior architect seems to be concerned with redundant software, while the architect is concerned with the essential hardware:

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*“The Chamber of Architects, we call it the round stamp with a sign of state means that they do the business which is related for some very sensitive information or dangerous information you can kill the people [through the lack of security and safety of the building's structure] with the walls and so on but the interior are just only the space with the with the really soft power inside. So from this point of view, there is a reason why maybe the Chamber is protecting own (...) in a circle, because it is really related to*

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<sup>127</sup> From focus group: SWITZERLAND, 12 May 2023, 14:30-16:00. MS Teams; SIA (Swiss chamber of architects and engineers) excluded interior architect codes in their competition policy.



*hardware of the buildings and we are somehow soft software of these space.”*

*René BAĐURA (Slovakia)*

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Lastly, the interior architect is often, as aforementioned, mobilized as an adviser and a “helper/assistant” in the “chain of professionals” of a construction project. However, the interior architect is never or rarely seen as a fully-fledged expert.

*“We're never like quoted as experts, you know, we're (not) asked to be on the news to be an expert in interior. And that's because we don't promote ourselves in any way. **We don't have that voice. We don't have that authority.**”*

*Jeremy Williams (Norway)*

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These misconceptions are caused by a failed recognition program of the discipline and profession. According to both the experts and the collected data, this recognition can be categorized on different levels: recognition through size (geographical factors) and recognition through numbers (on a public, interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary level). To understand this, we will first discuss the notions of health, safety and welfare within the framework of interior architecture's professionalization process.

**“Health, Safety and Welfare” (HSW) as a catalyst**

The general public and ill-informed professionals assume that interior architects/designers do not “really” contribute to the health, safety and welfare (HSW) of a building's user(s) as opposed to civil engineers and architects.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, many scholars and professionals<sup>129</sup> call for more awareness about the important role played by the interior architect / interior designer regarding the user's HSW - not only in relation to the literal structural and technical implications of the risks that a building or construction may pose, but also the mental and psychological factors that determine HSW issues.

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<sup>128</sup> Architects often enjoy legal title and profession protection through their responsibility concerning the health, safety and welfare of the building's user. However, in Sweden, the architect is not liable for any damage whatsoever. Even though this could instigate and enhance artistic freedom, it meddles with the general aura of the architect - who is not protected by title in Sweden. Therefore, it is responsibility which plays a central role in professional recognition, not just a specific skill set or competencies.

<sup>129</sup> Denise A. Guerin and Caren S. Martin, “The Interior Design Profession's Body of Knowledge and Its Relationship to People's Health, Safety, and Welfare” (College of Design. University of Minnesota, September 2010); Fred Bernstein, “Architects and Interior Designers Battle Over Turf: Interior Designers Press to Get Right to Stamp Drawings, Eliciting Pushback from Architects,” *Architectural Record*, 2021, via <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/15405-architects-and-interior-designers-battle-over-turf>; Denise Guerin, “Issues Facing Interior Design Education in the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Interior Design* 17, no. 2, 9-16; van Hengstum, “Interior Architecture - a Recognized Profession in Europe?”.



This last point was also underlined in Shashi Caan's speech during the 30th ECIA General Assembly in September 2022. Like many others, including the Italian experts in the respective focus group, she urged that the interiors profession be considered on its own merits, with its own peculiar strengths and perspectives, in particular regarding mental, social, and psychological HSW. She emphasized the importance of design education which "must not only strengthen fine arts and compositional skills but must also expand to include the factors that affect cognition and improve the welfare of people. Rethinking it in this way will lead to a new understanding of the discipline and its importance in human evolution."<sup>130</sup> However, underlining these qualities of the profession is harder than it seems since artistic and other "creative" values are underappreciated in the professional field.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, Caan argues that an acknowledgment of the complex nature of interior design, the development of experiential knowledge, the establishment of phenomenological research and the identification of qualitative design factors will lead to the further expansion of interior design's body of knowledge.<sup>132</sup>

The focus on HSW is not only important for the legal title protection of the profession<sup>133</sup> and – as explained above – for educational recognition for the discipline, but also relates back to the overall recognition of the profession by the public. In her doctoral dissertation, Inge Somers, referring to Caroline Hill and Carl Matthews, argues that the interior design profession is more often than not seen as a "fun job"<sup>134</sup> (see more in "public recognition", infra). Since it is perceived as a *fun job* which poses no risk to the safety or overall danger of the user, it is only logical to think that no further legal rules are needed regarding liability and responsibility if there are only decorating variables at play.<sup>135</sup> However, it is stressed that,

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<sup>130</sup> For more information, see Shashi Caan, *Rethinking Design and Interiors: Human Beings in the Built Environment* (London: Laurence King publishing, 2011), 127.

<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, throughout the Western world, there seems to be a tendency to discourage creativity in schools. According to Barbara Kerr et al., "Creativity and Innovation in Iceland: Individual, Environmental, and Cultural Variables", *Gifted and Talented International*, 2017: 8; "These include convergent teaching methods emphasizing teacher talk; suppression of creative expression; accountability mandates; assessment practices; and negative attitudes toward and misunderstanding of creativity. Icelandic education, however, is quite different from that in most Westernized and Asian countries. Stemming from Icelandic craft and design, innovation education (IE), the dominant model of Icelandic education, promotes the broadening of one's ability to apply creativity to everyday life in the pursuit of solving problems within one's current context or environment." 17 Barbara Kerr et al., "Creativity and Innovation in Iceland: Individual, Environmental, and Cultural Variables," *Gifted and Talented International*, 2017: 8. in other words: Icelandic education seems to differentiate itself by being more open and permitting creativity. "By the 1960s, the international avant-garde movement spread throughout Iceland. Since then, Iceland has created for itself a strong international reputation for fine art. The country has also become a popular location for artists around the world to showcase their work. Iceland hosts DesignMarch, an annual design festival covering all fields of design including architecture, graphic design, fashion, furniture, and product design." (Kerr, "Creativity and innovation," 11).

<sup>132</sup> Caan, *Rethinking Design and Interiors*, 135-57.

<sup>133</sup> For more information see, Cindy Coleman, *Interior Design Handbook of Professional Practice* (New York: McGraw Hill 2001), 10.

<sup>134</sup> Somers, "Advancing Interiors" (PhD).

<sup>135</sup> In particular, and for more information see: Kees Spanjers, "Regulations and Conventions: Interior Design Practice and Education," in *The Handbook of Interior Architecture and Design*, (eds.) Graeme Brooker and Lois Weinthal (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 79-92; in particular, Spanjers succeeds in underlining the importance of responsibility and liability (thus including HSW) within the legal framework of interior architecture's professionalization process: "The perception of



instead of embracing this peculiar perspective of interiors (i.e. creating aesthetically pleasing, functional spaces that have experiential values), current interior design education focuses on the “rational, pragmatic, economic obligations of the profession.”<sup>136</sup> This harmonizes with Caan’s plea to embrace the peculiar nature of interior design – which is possible among other things through the professional variables of HSW. Furthermore, Somers argues that even though advocacy such as this could be very beneficial to the overall professionalization of the profession, it should not degenerate into a narrative of “professional legitimation and protectionism”.<sup>137</sup> In any case, it is both a practice-oriented and conceptual matter that should be taught to students.<sup>138</sup>

In the different focus groups in particular, it became clear that HSW is key in the path toward general recognition (both public and inter/intradisciplinary). According to Norwegian experts, for example, the profession should be made compatible with taking on more responsibilities. In other words, the appropriation of more legal responsibilities (e.g. mandatory liability insurance, possibilities to sign appropriate building permits, etc.) could lead to a more complete view of the profession, or as our Maltese experts put it: “the more responsibility we take, the more respectable the profession becomes”.<sup>139</sup> In other words: “The interior designer who is unable to fulfil legal requirements and take full responsibility for the design ultimately sees his or her role diminished to decoration and styling.”<sup>140</sup> Note that this reaffirms the importance of acknowledging HSW in interior practice; building permissions (and other regulations concerning the building’s structure) are highly dependent on risk factors that contribute to the efficiency and use of HSW policies.

### Recognition through national size and geographical peculiarity

Some countries have a harder time than others putting the profession in the spotlight, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, sometimes the impediments are simply due to the geographical size or location of a state. Of course, one should look at the numbers *per capita*. However, it is obvious that due to their smaller size, countries such as Slovakia and Malta find it difficult to make an impact on the international scene. Nevertheless, these countries seem to have established a national interior architecture association in a quick, concise and quite well-organized fashion.

Secondly, apart from the actual size of a country, there is also the size of “historical baggage”. Countries such as Italy have a very rich cultural history. This includes a wide and diverse history of architecture, interior design, furniture design, and so on. Italian experts truly understand this and feel a sense of responsibility to take it on. Massive schools like the Politecnico di Milano (Polimi, School of Design) have a huge influx of international students, teachers, conferences, etc. Additionally, the specific traditions and customs of a country

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interior design is proportional to the practitioner’s ability to design, coordinate, and deliver a project, inclusive of obtaining the necessary permits. The interior designer who is unable to fulfill legal requirements and take full responsibility for the design ultimately sees his or her role diminished to decoration and styling. Interior design legislation does not automatically imply a license to be eligible to acquire permits. But we do see that in those jurisdictions where interior design legislation is in place it is usually easier for designers to become qualified.”

<sup>136</sup> Somers, “Advancing Interiors” (PhD), 145.

<sup>137</sup> Somers, “Advancing Interiors” (PhD), 171.

<sup>138</sup> Travis Hick and Rebekah Ison Radtke, “Reshaping the Boundaries of Community Engagements in Design Education: Global and Local Explorations,” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 19, no. 2 (2015), 157-73.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Farrugia in focus group: MALTA, 28 April 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>140</sup> Spanjers, “Regulations,” (conclusion).



highly influence the nature of the profession: “Interior architecture as its own professional field developed (in the German-speaking part of Switzerland) throughout the twentieth century (pragmatic approach to design) - grown from a strong tradition of the vocational building trades and applied art.”<sup>141</sup>

Thirdly, in countries such as Austria and Finland, legal regulations depend on the geographical region. In particular, this is reflected in the distinction between the urban fabric of the city centre and the more traditional way of life in the countryside. For example, Austrian society – especially away from big cities like Vienna – is quite traditional. Moreover, it is remarkable how carpenters play a central role in day-to-day renovations and alterations of the interior space. In addition, it is important to note that, across the entire continent, the recognition of students and professionals with a migrant background is far less advanced in these rural locations. Furthermore, when applying for a building permit, your legal abilities depend on the geographical region. In Finland, for example, interior architects can sign their own building permissions when altering or designing a shed in the northeastern parts of the country, simply because of the remote setting. Note that this last point recalls the risks involved in construction and the HSW complexity. Lastly, in Austria, most of the recent applications (for BÖIA) are from people who are based in Vienna and other big cities.

### Recognition through numbers or “visibility”

As briefly mentioned previously, the number of students and practitioners is implicitly and inherently linked to the recognition of the discipline and profession. In other words, numbers hold quantitative power. These numbers mostly originate in the educational framework since statistical market research was not within the scope of this research. For example, in the past 20 or so years, architects and architecture students tended to be male. However, in the last decade, increasingly more female students have found their way to architecture studies, which in turn translates to more female architects.<sup>142</sup>

The same logic can be applied to the interior architecture discipline. In the last 10 to 20 years, most students enrolled in interior architecture / interior design studies were female.<sup>143</sup> This statement applies to Europe as a whole. In a later section, this gender aspect will be discussed in more detail. For now, it is important to note that interior architecture graduates still represent a small group, and many within this group do not become interior architects. In a way, the ambition to become an interior architect is not self-evident when studying interior architecture (or any other study). Furthermore, after talking with many experts, such as those of Norway and Finland, it became clear that offering more study possibilities requires an increase in financial investment – which is not always a given or a possibility. The number of places is often capped, especially in private institutions (of which there are many in the interior discipline). On top of this, many of these study places are filled by foreign students. Of course, international relations and transnational knowledge exchange is continuously encouraged in Europe. However, it becomes problematic when most of these foreign students decide not to work in the country of study, which leads to a professional and knowledge drain due to the insufficient number of study places.

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<sup>141</sup> Dominic Haag-Walther and Ralph Stoian, “Presentation Paper: The Future of Interior Architecture Is Interdisciplinary,” 2018 Conference *Interior - Inferior - In Theory?*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> For more information, see Chapter III.

<sup>143</sup> For more information, see Chapter III.



Apart from the actual number of study places, professional recognition of interior architecture should be analysed on three dependent levels: the interdisciplinary level, the intradisciplinary level and the public level.

#### *Inter- and intradisciplinary recognition*

Previously, it was argued that the interior discipline could be briefly characterized as an in-between discipline. This implies that there are other, established professions and disciplines that can be seen as the sister disciplines of interior architecture.

Elaborating on this interdisciplinarity, it is striking that further research possibilities (especially PhDs) remain absent, while these are extremely important and successful in, for example, architecture and urban planning programs. Countries such as Norway argued that the launch and organization of a PhD program would greatly benefit the overall body of knowledge of the discipline; echoing the argument of Dutch experts that by educating more doctoral students the conceptual and theoretical debate about the discipline would finally move on to the next level concerning educational professionalization. In any case, it is striking that, compared to other professions, interior architecture and/or interior design remains a discipline without its own separate PhD program; where a program is available at all, it is almost exclusively available within architecture or design as a specialization option.

To distinguish themselves from architects and designers alike, many interior architects in Europe, in Germany and Slovakia specifically,<sup>144</sup> are calling for the creation of a separate Chamber of Design. In this way, professional interior architects / interior designers can distinguish themselves professionally from orders/chambers of architects on the one hand (which are often old institutions and omnipresent in Europe) and newly established chambers of design on the other. However, it serves to keep in mind that the further break-up of professional associations could lead to confusing situations that only enhance the existing obscurity surrounding public recognition of the profession. Besides, different institutions, such as chambers of architecture and engineering or even Ministries of Economics or Commerce, would define interior architects in a different way, as is the case in Austria.<sup>145</sup> This would create even more uncertainty.

Furthermore, disciplines like architecture and urban planning not only have a solid foundation for further doctoral research, but are often legally regulated concerning practice. However, by including the technical decorator in building law (with its own legal title protection), Spanish interior designers feel overrun by a specialty that could be defined as a peculiar aspect of interior design itself.<sup>146</sup> In other words, even though interior design could (in several cases) be seen as the overarching profession, it has to make way for the “underlying” practice of interior decoration. Needless to say, absence from legal descriptions does not help to enhance the profession’s recognition.

Apart from these interdisciplinary obstacles, there is also confusion about the intradisciplinary impediments (within the discipline/profession of interior architecture). As discussed above, some experts see benefits in the creation of a separate chamber of design. In Estonia for example, the Designers Guild<sup>147</sup> acts as a kind of chamber of design. However, when

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<sup>144</sup> Focus group: SLOVAKIA, 15 May 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams; focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>145</sup> Focus group: AUSTRIA, 31 May 2023, 16:30-18:00. MS Teams.

<sup>146</sup> Focus group: SPAIN, 10 May 2023, 13:00-14:30. MS Teams.

<sup>147</sup> Focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams; here “Designers Guild” was roughly translated within the focus group since there is no official translation of the organization.



discussing the organization and activities of the Guild in the Estonian focus group, many panel members did not even know of its existence. This shows that public recognition is a very ambitious objective since the profession itself is not aware of all its institutional components. By extension, following the same logic, it is hard to impose public recognition concerning terminology when there is such a wide variety of terms. Being invisible obviously does not help to gain public recognition. Indeed, it just enables other professions to appropriate interior architecture's expert competencies. This invisibility often coexists with stigmatization. This will be dealt with in chapter III.

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*"If you are within the program or in the projects, it's not the problem for everyone to understand what we can do. But if we don't exist, other people will think they do the same."*

*Susanna VON EYBEN (Sweden)*

*"It [the profession's recognition program] is not so developed. It's still very much on what you can measure and the technical aspects of it, but half of our competence is actually about very subjective and also very experience based qualities. And these are very hard to (...) make society value in a very concrete way."*

*Torsten HILD (Sweden)*

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### **Public recognition**

"Public" in this sense refers to people "outside" the professional realm of interior architects. This is the perception of the general public. It is widely accepted that the body of knowledge of interior design is lacking in many different ways and this influences the public's recognition of the profession: "If you ask the man in the street if he knows the profession of interior architecture/design, the answer will be 'they choose and advise curtains, wallpapering, painting colours'".<sup>148</sup>

According to many ECIA member associations, the very youngest among this audience - children - should be informed above all. More specifically, the German bdia has plans to increase public awareness of the profession by issuing and distributing various brochures or leaflets to children. These are intended to inform the public by breaking through existing stereotypes<sup>149</sup> and misinformation about the profession. In addition to children, young adults and adults often consider interior architecture the little brother of the "true academic" profession of architecture. The architect is a full-time professional, while the interior architect is an extra actor, who does not always have an "adult"<sup>150</sup> preoccupation. Additionally, as mentioned in the Swiss focus group, many people have a romantic view of the profession of interior architecture, which is all about decorating and redecorating with curtains, wallpaper and so on. This is often, as in Austria, due to the way in which interior architecture is

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<sup>148</sup> Joke van Hengstum, "Interior Architecture - A Recognized Profession in Europe?" in *SISU\_Line* (Estonian magazine by the ESL) - based on 2014 Symposium of Interior Architecture 2017, 61.

<sup>149</sup> For more information, see Chapter III.

<sup>150</sup> Ville Lausmäe in focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.



omnipresent on social media. Many interior and graphic designer influencers, such as Laura Karasinski,<sup>151</sup> have large numbers of followers. Yet the information communicated does not always correspond to the reality of the profession and the competencies of the interior architect. Moreover, in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland, television programs play a major role in the recognition of the profession. In the Netherlands, next to women's fashion programs, it is the most watched genre.<sup>152</sup> Needless to say, COVID-19 and the lockdowns shed a new light on the importance of interior spaces, through social media channels and TV broadcasts, something that is not necessarily an obstacle to further professionalization.

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*“After women's fashion, interior [-architecture/design] is, I think, the most described and shown subject on television, so we are also on everyone's tongue and **you have to take advantage of that. You shouldn't see that as a threat.**”*

*Kees SPANJERS (The Netherlands)*

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Not just in the digital sphere, but also in the professional field, the public is confused about organizational structure and terminology. In the Netherlands, for example, the public is not always aware of the difference between the Architectenregister (national register for architects, interior architects, landscape architects and urban designers) and the BNI (the national association for interior architects).<sup>154</sup> Moreover, as in the case of France, the public does not always know what terms to use to refer to the interior architect.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Neil Harkess in focus group: AUSTRIA, 31 May, 16:30-18:00. MS Teams.

<sup>152</sup> Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

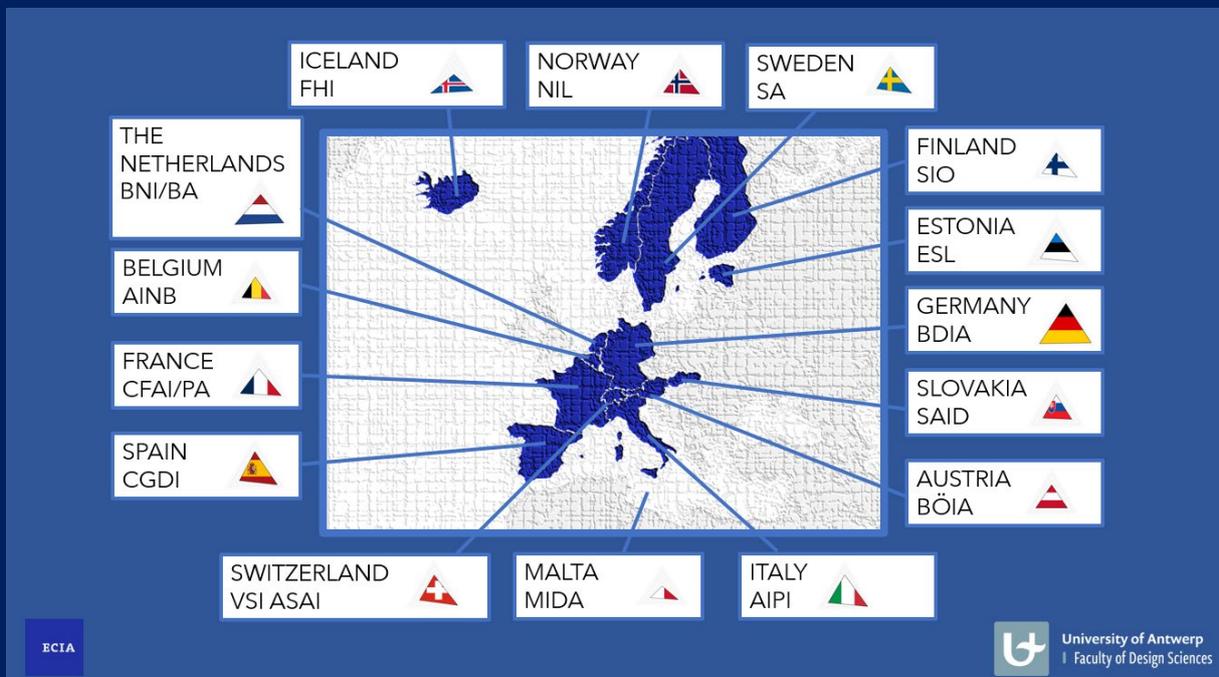
<sup>153</sup> Translated from Dutch.

<sup>154</sup> Jaap Molenaar in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

<sup>155</sup> Focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams.

# CHAPTER II. ON BINARY SPIDER MODEL ANALYSES

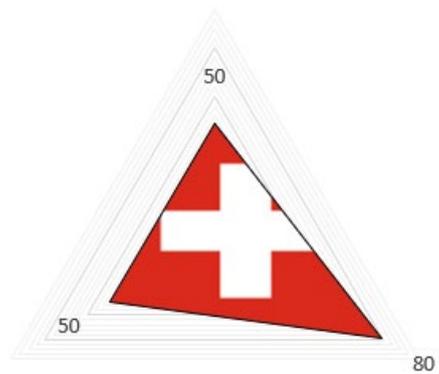
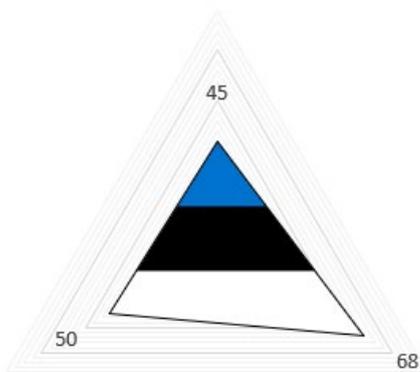
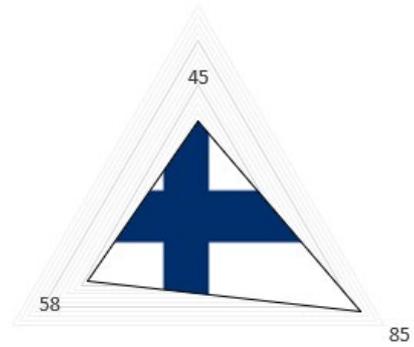
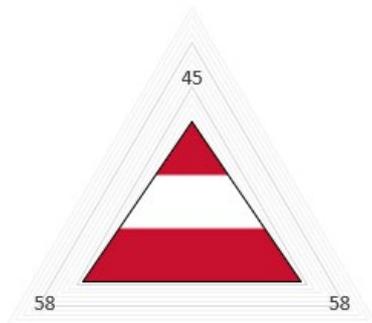
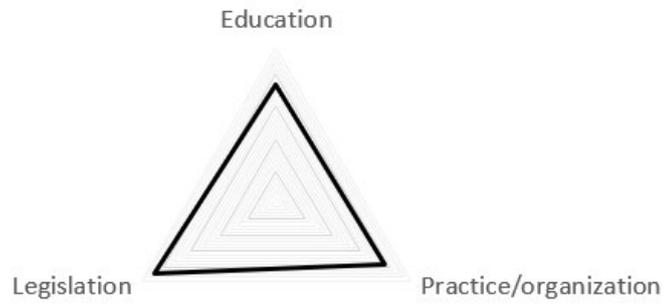
## OR: THE PROFESSIONALIZATION PROCESS THROUGH EDUCATION, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION AND LEGISLATION

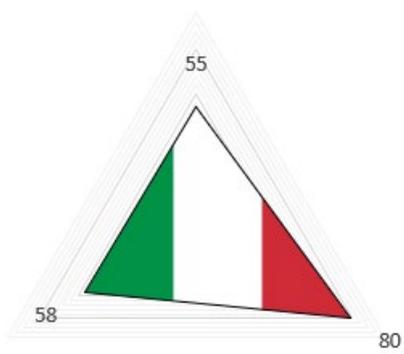
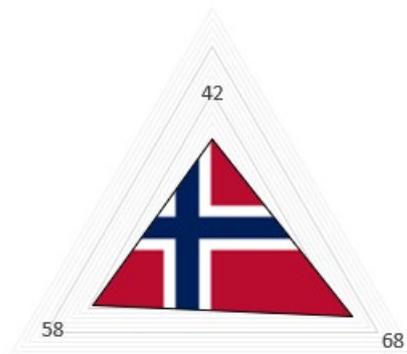
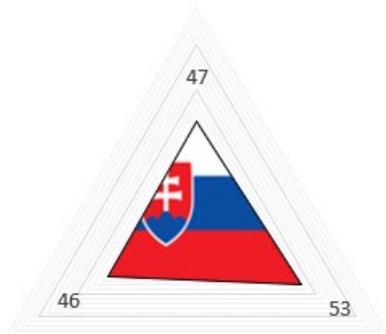
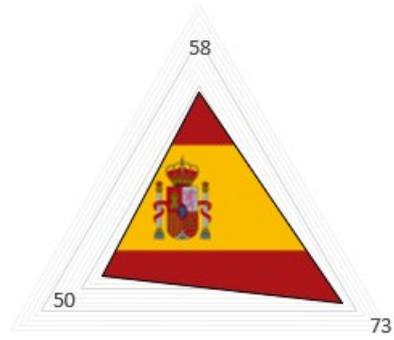


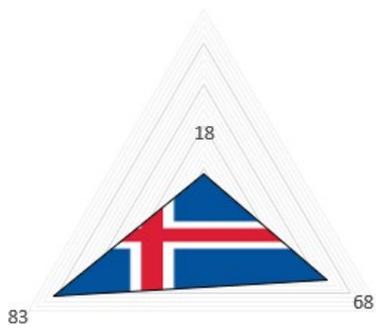
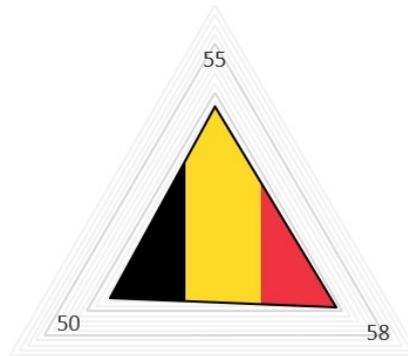
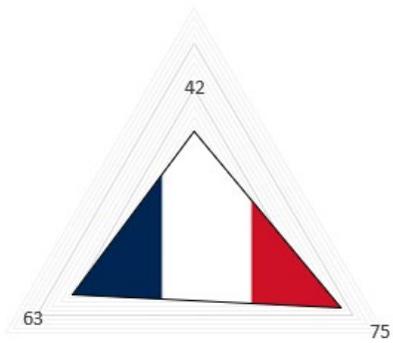
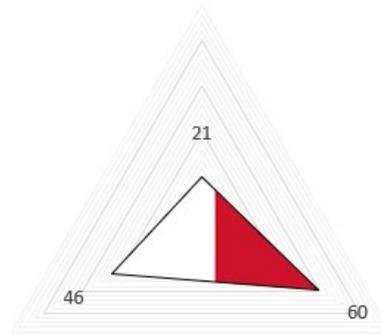
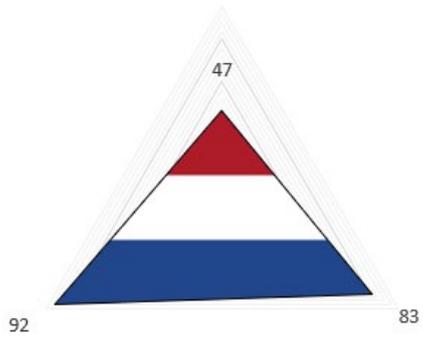


## 4. Spider Model overview (%)

### Spider models







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## Professionalization (%) on a map

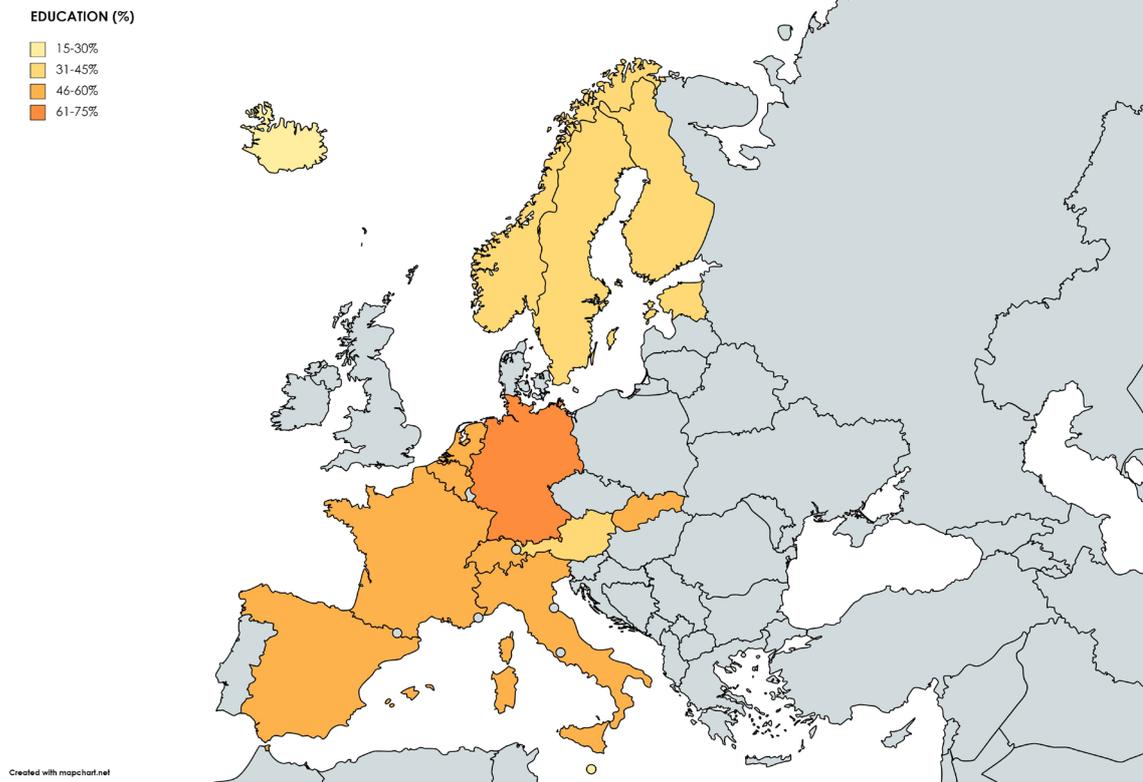


Figure 13: educational professionalization (%) on a European map

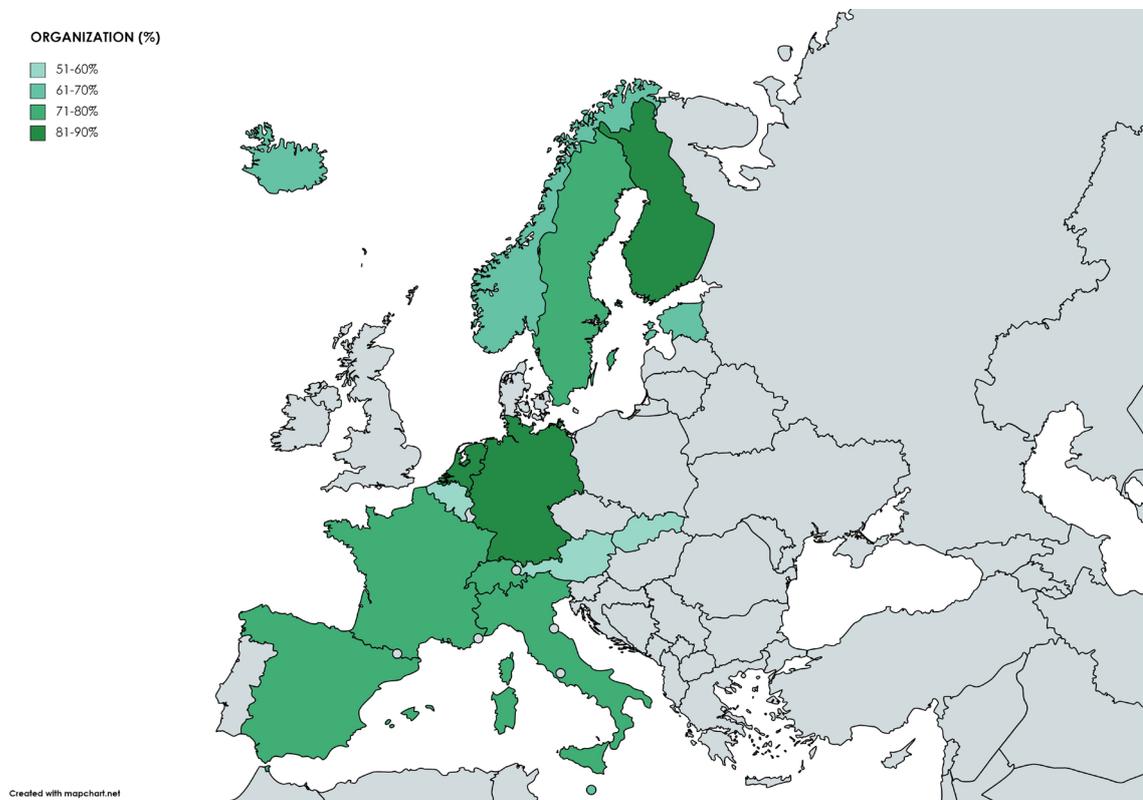


Figure 14: practice/organizational professionalization (%) on a European map



LEGISLATION (%)

- 41-50%
- 51-60%
- 61-70%
- 71 < %

Created with mapchart.net

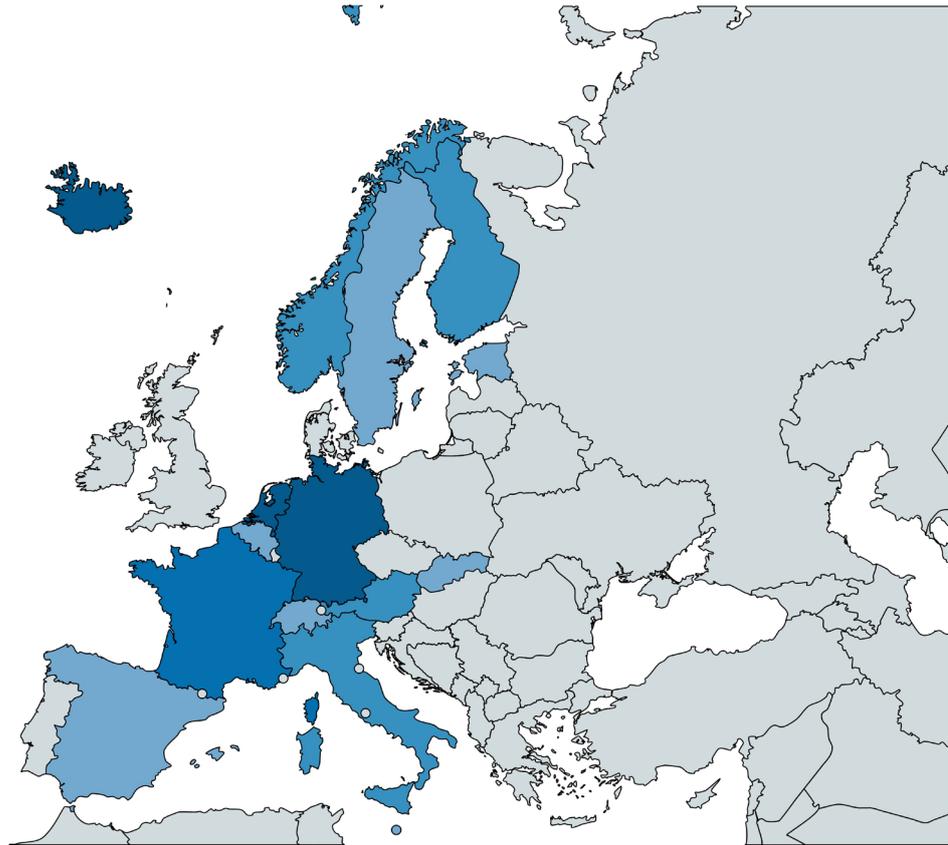


Figure 15: legislative professionalization (%) on a European map



## 5. Education

	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Norway	Poland	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland
<b>AXIS EDUCATION</b>															
Educational routes / Institutional context / University	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes/ Institutional context/ Technical University or Polytechnic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes /Institutional context / Technical College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes /Institutional context / University of Applied Sciences	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes / Institutional context / Academy of Fine Arts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes /Institutional context / Academy of Applied Arts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes/ Institutional context / University College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes / Institutional context / Vocational secondary education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational routes / Institutional context / Other (e.g. Design Institute)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Checkpoint 1: variety institution</b>	2	2	4	2	2	2	1	3	1	4	3	2	1	3	3
Educational routes / autonomous interior program available (specific diploma)	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Checkpoint 2: program autonomy</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Educational routes/ educational levels/ 3-year bachelor	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Educational routes/ educational levels/ 4-year bachelor	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Educational routes/ educational levels/ 1-year master	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Educational routes/ educational levels/ 2-year master	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Checkpoint 3: educational levels 1</b>	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	4	2	2	3	3	2
PHD	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	1	1	1	0
<b>Checkpoint 4: educational levels 2</b>	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	1	1	1	0
<b>Total educational routes</b>	3	5	7	5	5	5	2	6.5	2	6.5	6	6	6	6	6
Control of educational standards / Accreditation of educational programs	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Control of educational standards / Structure of educational programs	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total control of educational standards</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Lifelong learning possibilities	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total lifelong learning</b>	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Internship options	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1
<b>Total internship</b>	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL EDUCATION (n=19)</b>	10	9	11	9	8	9	4	11	4	14	9	8	9	11	9
<b>TOTAL EDUCATION (100%)</b>	50	45	58	47	42	47	21	55	18	71	47	42	45	55	45

Figure 16:  
EDUCATION  
BINARY MODEL



As mentioned in the introduction, education is at the heart of the professionalization process. This is not only the case for the interior discipline. Some claim, however, that you can gain professional/disciplinary recognition through skills, not a degree.<sup>156</sup> This implies that the key to innovation and to escaping the marginalized position of the discipline can be found outside academia. This argument does not really cover the way in which skills are taught, rather than acquired through some kind of natural talent, and it does not offer a real alternative to the epistemological value of a well-structured body of knowledge which instigates the transfer of knowledge and practical skills.

Before delving deeper into the educational framework, we should bear in mind that the numbers do not distinguish between private and public institutions. In other words, the type of the institution – in the binary model – is not a variable that influences the allocation of points. Nevertheless, it should be noted that many institutions are private in nature and impede the professionalization process through economic and social barriers. This will be elaborated on shortly.

Furthermore, even though secondary and vocational institutions have been included,<sup>157</sup> the main focus of this chapter on education will be on the tertiary education possibilities that provide access to a specific program in interior architecture.

### Institution variety

#### *University absence: interior architecture's invisibility in education*

Across Europe, there are many different types of educational institutions. The names / typological nature of these is highly dependent on the national or regional context. Moreover, people – even within the same country – do not always know how to translate or communicate the nature of their institution in English: some may call a Technical College a University College, whereas others might refer to a Visual Arts School as an Academy of Fine Arts. Sometimes, the type of institution is not really “translatable” in English; for example, the Swiss *Höhere Fachschule* and *Fachhochschule* or the Norwegian *Høyskolen*.<sup>158</sup> To avoid getting caught in a terminological and typological quagmire, we placed the institutions in one of nine categories (see binary model). In particular, we will discuss the variable “variety of institutions”, which does not necessarily correlate with a higher number of institutions within a specific category.

This variable refers to the institutional variety of schools where one can follow specific training in interior architecture in Europe. Note how this does not refer to the effective presence or the quantity of institutions, but rather to the variety of institutions. This nuance was chosen to eliminate false comparisons between small and large countries, and to give an overview of the rootedness of the discipline in academies, universities, and other institutions.

The focus group discussions and questionnaires revealed how interior architecture training is often absent – or at least underrepresented – in universities. The binary models, however, clearly show that this is the most common type of educational institution. Yet, this is a distorted observation since it is purely about the presence or absence of something rather than the quantitative distribution of a type. In other words, in many countries there is a

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<sup>156</sup> As discussed during the round table discussions in Florence (30th GA ECIA, September 2022).

<sup>157</sup> This report will also underline the importance and influence of Austrian HTL schools which offer vocational and secondary education. However, it should be emphasized that the report, including the binary models, will mainly deal with tertiary education institutions in Europe.

<sup>158</sup> As elaborated in the preliminary study (2021).



university where one can take interior design courses,<sup>159</sup> but only in a few exceptions is there just one university (Finland: Aalto University; Switzerland: HEAD Geneva; Austria: New Design University). This means that universities are the most prevalent institution only in a relative sense; quantitatively, there are more universities of applied science/university colleges and academies of arts teaching the discipline of interior architecture. So, it is striking how interior design courses are mostly absent from university institutions - even though they are relatively speaking the most “present” institution at which one can take interior design courses.

This university “absence” points to different, sometimes deep-rooted, problems. The most reported<sup>160</sup> problem concerns the way in which the limited master’s and especially PhD<sup>161</sup> opportunities thwart the development of a body of knowledge (including specifically trained professors) in the discipline of interior architecture. Even though PhDs have their own segment in this model, it is important to first indicate their presence or absence through the institutional configuration and overall variety in a country. In most of the European countries, a PhD is not possible for a specific interior architecture degree. However, some countries offer PhDs in design and architecture, where the doctoral candidate can specialize within interior architecture. However, as mentioned above, most PhDs in these fields – especially architecture – tend to be prioritized toward more “urgent” (cf. HSW) topics within the discipline. As a consequence, few people hold a doctoral degree in interior architecture. Subsequently, most of the university professors in Europe have a background in architecture, furniture design, urban planning or other neighbouring disciplines (cf. supra). Aside from the fact that most professors do not have interiors training, it is important to note that they can teach with a focus on architecture, design, etc. depending on their background.

Aside from this obstacle, the institutional nature of a place of education can also halt further steps toward doctoral research. In Germany and Switzerland, for example, you can only follow a PhD in collaboration with a university. Moreover, universities of applied sciences often focus on practice-oriented problems and knowledge, so there is less room for deeper theoretical research, adding to the lack of doctoral-driven research. This recalls the way in which interior architecture tends to “lag behind”. The “institutional nature”<sup>162</sup> of a place of education can also block specific interior doctoral research through its deep-rooted affiliation with neighbouring disciplines – maintaining a protectionist policy. For example, in the Netherlands, the Technical University of Delft is known for being a typical school of engineers. There have been many attempts<sup>163</sup> to introduce an interior architecture PhD, but due to the school’s traditional focus on engineering and architecture, the directors have not found it necessary to introduce a specific interior architecture program.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> In Spain there are for example 5 Universities with an interior design programme: University of Vic - Elisava, CEU San Pablo, UDIT (University of Design, Innovation and Technology), University of Nebrija, and the European University of Madrid.

<sup>160</sup> As mentioned in questionnaires and focus group meetings.

<sup>161</sup> For more information on PhD installation, see 5.4. PhD possibilities.

<sup>162</sup> By “nature” we do not mean “type” (i.e. private or public); “nature” refers to the institutional background and structure of the school, e.g. a university, an academy of arts, a technical university, and so on.

<sup>163</sup> As explained by Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

<sup>164</sup> This also has legal consequences; for more information, see Chapter II: axis legislation.



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*“We have been trying to convince different schools and collaborations to have them set up new bachelor interior architecture educations because [there are] too few in Sweden and **there needs also to be more of a bigger academic field** where you can have it change between different schools as it is now (...) like two education [institutions] and only Konstfack has this this clear direction towards the interior architecture and furniture design; so **it’s a bit lonely**, I would say we need more. So we have been talking to different schools like there is a private college here: Beckmans [College of Design, Stockholm] if they would be interesting because they have some students that do spatial design work and interior architecture work at some sometimes.”*

*Tor LINDSTRAND (Sweden)*

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This all circles back to the recognition problem, and more specifically the small size/numbers within the discipline: by not letting people graduate as a doctor in interiors, many schools and students lack professors with a particular skills set and specific know-how concerning interior architecture. Therefore, the body of knowledge on the interior discipline cannot grow fully – if at all.

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*“**We don’t have a PhD** and it’s a little bit difficult because we need to get teachers from the university who have this [PhD] (...) so in the field of interior architecture, there is nobody [with a doctoral degree in interior architecture], **so we can get an architect or historians or sociology people** who have this graduation but it’s difficult to start this in France. It was the same situation in architecture maybe 30 years ago: they had no “doctor” and so they used the people who were graduated from universities to be allowed to teach these kind of PhD. Nowadays, they have architects who are doctor, so it’s easier [for them].”*

*Pascal BERTRAND (France)*

*“**The cat bites itself into the tail** (...) How can you have a research strong program when you don’t have any time to do the research within the institution and you have very few people who could do that because they’re the professors that teach all the time? (...) which again causes structural problems to the introduction of PhD programs. **It’s almost like the institutional type prevents it**”.*

*-Carola EBERT (Germany)*

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This metaphor of the cat biting its tail is obviously most relevant in a university setting. Above we have discussed how in architecture faculties, interior architecture is often called upon to compare itself with the architecture discipline (which is less of an issue in academies of arts).



Even though one cannot deny its similarity to the architecture discipline, many experts and professionals strive to define interior architecture in its own terms, without architectural specificity. This, and being taught by interior architects, would enable interior graduates to truly grasp and embrace the uniqueness of the discipline:

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*I think there's a lot of good architecture (within Belgium), but a lot of bad interior within those architectures.*

*Wim Van der Vurst (Belgium)*

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To conclude this section, it is important to mention that although the institutional nature and the content of places of study can determine further doctoral research, the institutional type of such places of study can block the delivery of fresh interior graduates.

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*“Very important also for the academic part (...) is that in the Netherlands [the interior architecture program] is not connected to universities, so it is a bit difficult to really secure the academic part anyway; so the theoretical framework, which makes **interior architecture more than just an aesthetic layer.**”*

*Anja DIRKS (The Netherlands)*

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For example, in Austria, there is only one university where you can follow a bachelor's and a master's in interior architecture. However, this New Design University<sup>166</sup> is a private institution, thereby excluding many potential students through different variables such as economic or financial performance. Elaborating on the Austrian case: it is striking that this university is the only option for pursuing interior architecture at tertiary level, since the other, more technical/practice-oriented institutions (HTLs)<sup>167</sup> teach students in a vocational setting.

### **Lack of cultural diversity**

Due to the current social dynamics in society, this report also wishes to address the diversity issue. There are several ongoing questions concerning this, one of which has to do with the representation of students with a migrant background in interior education programs. In most cases (for example, in Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Malta), the lion's share of students are native born. However, it should be underlined that in those cases, Erasmus students are warmly received. In some cases, however, as in Norway, there seems to be a good mix of students from different backgrounds. Note how this perception is heavily influenced by transnational student exchange programs. “In Norway, up until now education was free of charge – paid for by the government [in public higher education institutions such

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<sup>165</sup> Translated from Dutch.

<sup>166</sup> There are plenty of universities in which one can specialize in interior architecture in the later phases of an architecture program in Austria (<https://www.innenarchitekten.at/ausbildung/>).

<sup>167</sup> There are seven vocational HTL schools (technical colleges) that offer an interior architecture/design program (<https://www.innenarchitekten.at/ausbildung/>).



as the Oslo Academy of Arts and the University of Bergen]. This is going to change and students from outside the EU / EØS area will have to pay.”<sup>168</sup>

In other cases, there is a high proportion of students from immigrant backgrounds. This is the case in the Netherlands and Germany. These cases actually bring another dimension of the diversity issue to light; namely the fact that diversity among teachers (not so much in terms of gender, but ethnicity) is still lacking. Foreign student influx may also be attributed to international collaboration and exchange programs (e.g. Erasmus). This is especially the case in many renowned French academies of art and German universities, such as the Berlin International University of Applied Sciences. Perhaps the most famous example is the Italian Polytecnico di Milano which has 8,258 foreign students (March 2023).<sup>169</sup> Needless to say, this international exchange fluidity (which is especially visible in private school systems)<sup>1</sup> involves social and cultural diversity in interior education.

Sometimes, current social and political movements and events in the world influence the influx of migrant students. The most obvious and visible example is the Russia-Ukraine war. This is especially palpable in neighbouring states such as Slovakia where “the number of students from Ukraine has increased, but in general, the number of external students is in the tens.”<sup>170</sup>

The lack of diversity is not only visible in the student population, but also in the curricular content. A thorough literature study (November 2022-February 2023)<sup>171</sup> concluded that there is an “illusion of inclusion”<sup>172</sup> and that most courses within the interior architecture / interior design programs deal with Eurocentric topics and Western culture.<sup>173</sup>

### Specific interior program

#### Graduating in “interior architecture” / “interior design”

In just about every country studied, it is possible to study interior architecture in a tertiary educational institution. It is also noteworthy that in almost all cases this involves a specific interior architecture course that is often given at the faculty/department of architecture, design or arts in general. In Malta alone, there is no specific interior course. Note: this observation only makes sense based on terminology. Indeed, at MCAST it is possible to study spatial design, which, according to experts, amounts to training in interior design. Nevertheless, it is striking that this does not lead to a specific degree in interior design.

Very often, interior architecture or interior design is taught as a program together with furniture design. This is particularly (but not exclusively) the case in Scandinavian

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<sup>168</sup> Mona Lise Lien, Email of July 2023.

<sup>169</sup> “Enrolled foreign students,” (<https://www.polimi.it/en/the-politecnico/about-polimi/politecnico-di-milano-figures>). These include all students (also those who major in different fields such as architecture or engineering).

<sup>170</sup> Focus group: SLOVAKIA, 15 May 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>171</sup> See methodology for more information.

<sup>172</sup> Jack Travis, “Perspective. An interior of inclusion or the illusion of inclusion,” *Journal of Interior Design* 43, no 4, (2018): 3-7.

<sup>173</sup> See bibliography “Literature concerning diversity issues within interior architecture education”.

countries.<sup>174</sup> Aside from this *orthodox* terminology, some countries also use spatial design. In the binary graphs, only countries which offer a program that is called interior architecture or interior design received a full “1” in their binary evaluation record. Moreover, some countries, such as Switzerland and Belgium, offer training in both interior design and interior architecture. These often differ in the number of study years and focus (where *design* is more oriented towards furnishing and decoration than structural problems). To further complicate things, in some instances the bachelor’s and the master’s degrees in interior architecture differ in name. For example, at the Konstfack University in Sweden, the bachelor’s is called “Interior Architecture and Furniture Design”, whereas the master’s is in “Spatial Design”. In other countries, like Finland, this specialization is more implicit: in Aalto University,<sup>175</sup> students can study Interior Architecture and Furniture Design and choose to specialize in one of these in the master’s programme.<sup>176</sup> It is important to stress that these specific programs are offered in a wide range of faculties. As already made clear, these programs usually fall under the general design or architecture faculty.

Additionally, many interior courses are very young. For example, in Malta, Switzerland and Spain, a specific interior design / interior architecture (bachelor’s) training has only been offered since 2009.

NATURE DIPLOMA	Arts (BA/MA)	Science (BSc/MSc)
Austria		
Belgium		
Estonia		
Finland		
France		
Germany		
Iceland		
Italy		
Malta		
The Netherlands		
Norway		
Slovakia		
Spain		
Sweden		
Switzerland		

Figure 17: nature of diploma in each ECIA affiliated country

### Entrance exam<sup>177</sup>

Before prospective student begin a course in interior architecture, they may be required to take an entrance exam. This form of evaluation ensures that the candidate is evaluated based on their experience and/or qualities. In theory, this seems an ideal way of working, but

<sup>174</sup> For example, in Slovakia (Zvolen University), there is also a joint program for interior and furniture design.

<sup>175</sup> Aalto University, which to this day is the only educational establishment in Finland offering higher university level education in the field of interior architecture. For more information, see; Sisko Anttalainen, “Interior Architecture NOW,” University Aalto, 2020 [English abstract].

<sup>176</sup> In the case of Finland, most students opt for a specialization in furniture design rather than interior architecture due to the excellent facilities (for furniture design) available in Aalto.

<sup>177</sup> This was further investigated because it came up in different focus group discussions.



as highlighted above, it is accompanied by financial stressors (in the form of pre-university schools) regarding the preparation of portfolios.

An entrance exam not only establishes a form of evaluation, but also creates a competitive environment. In countries like Norway, where vacant student places are scarce (University of Bergen and Oslo Academy of Arts), there is “fierce competition” among students.<sup>178</sup> In TU Bratislava (Slovakia), the candidate is also expected to prove their abilities in the field as this is “the only way to be accepted”.<sup>179</sup> Sometimes, however, this entrance exam is only organized for the bachelor’s or the master’s program, sometimes for both. In Estonia, at the national Academy of Arts, there are entrance exams for both the bachelor’s and master’s programs,<sup>180</sup> whereas at the TH OWL (Germany), there is only an entry test for the master’s programs.<sup>181</sup>

Entrance exams are also determined by the type of institution (private or public). For example, at the private New Design University (Austria), students have to present a portfolio during the entrance exam. Being the only tertiary education institution where one can follow a master’s in interior architecture, it is only comparable with foreign institutions such as those in France. There, most schools offer an interview to explain the application process. However, private institutions tend to organize “face-to-face tests” – more so than public schools.<sup>182</sup> Apart from the institution type (private or public), the organization of entrance exams is also determined by the nature of the institution. For example, in Spain, institutions of “higher artistic education” organize an entrance exam, while the “university framework” – and official private schools<sup>183</sup> – organize a more general exam, which one needs to pass in order to gain access to university tout court.<sup>184</sup>

It should be noted that the enforcement of an entrance exam “doesn’t mean there is a real selection process. If there is a selection process it can be also carried out during the course of study.”<sup>185</sup> In other words, the value of an entrance exam can be spread out across the years of training. By doing this, however, you run the risk that too many students enrol in the program (which exacerbates the problem of a lack of teachers and facilities)<sup>186</sup> and that those who enrol do so out of a false perception and recognition of the discipline (cf. supra).

### Educational levels (bachelor + master)

In most countries, the interior architecture program – where a master’s course is available – is subdivided into a three or four-year bachelor’s and a one or two-year master’s. However, curricular variety is great; in some countries, you can graduate as an interior architect in three years, in others in six years. This begs the question why small countries like Slovakia offer a six-year interior program, given that a higher education threshold also naturally leads to even fewer graduates. In most tertiary education models, interior architecture is possible in a bachelor’s program. In some cases, this can then also be continued in a master’s program. Elaborating on the undergraduate years, it is interesting to note that 84% of these are three-

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<sup>178</sup> Mona Lise Lien, email of July 2023.

<sup>179</sup> Dušan Kočlík, email of July 2023.

<sup>180</sup> Tüüne-Kristin Vaikla, email of July 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Carsten Wiewiorra, email of July 2023.

<sup>182</sup> Thierry Conquet, email of July 2023.

<sup>183</sup> Teresa Casas, email of July 2023.

<sup>184</sup> Carme Ortiz, email of July 2023.

<sup>185</sup> Pascal Bertrand, email of July 2023.

<sup>186</sup> Antti Pirinen in focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.



year bachelor's programs. However, in a few countries (20% of those surveyed), it is possible to pursue both a three-year and a four-year bachelor's degree. Interestingly, when a master's program can be taken, it is a one-year master's program in 20% of cases, and a two-year master's program in as many as 77% of cases. Again, these figures should be viewed with nuance since a master's program is the exception in all cases.

As mentioned above, according to some experts, this Bologna-regulated categorization is problematic (especially in Estonia – see quote below) since it enables students to quit after the bachelor's. In many focus groups, most explicitly in the Norwegian and Italian ones, it was pointed out that the bachelor's programs were usually focused on practice-based experience. In the first years of tertiary education, the student is expected to learn the basic concepts of design and architecture. In the master's programs however, the student is expected to learn more abstract theories and concepts of interior space. In other cases, when students are allowed to graduate after three or four years, they do so without much conceptual or theoretical knowledge, which can lead to awkward or even problematic situations in practice.

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*“[Interior architect’s education program length] should be the same as for architects (...) five years is mandatory (...) I work in an architectural office and it’s a really important when we design the building as a whole. Starting from the city planning landscape and to the final details. So **everyone was must be equal member of the team** and this is something that is problematic when people finish their degree in three years and come to work in an office. First of all, they have certain expectations because they have a diploma and they get a certain rights with it. But in [the] actual [building] process [they cannot be] full members of the team. **They always need supervision. They need their works to be checked.**”*

*Liis LINDVERE (Estonia)*

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However, this matter is more complex than it seems. Since there are few options (if any) for master's studies, few interior architects graduate with a master's degree. Furthermore, by allowing the entire program to be broken up into a bachelor's and a master's, students are able to graduate after a bachelor's training with a solid educational background that allows them to join the labour market. Because this too depends on the “numbers” (cf. recognition through size). Not all students who study interior architecture become interior architects. Additionally, graduating after a bachelor's is often incentivized through internships (which are hardly ever mandatory in tertiary European education).

Furthermore, many schools put a lot demands on new students. In Sweden, for example, it is regarded as normal to have already completed one or two pre-studies before even applying for interior architecture training. This has to do with the way in which educational institutions such as Konstfack University admit students – that is, on the basis of a portfolio, the content and structure of which is taught and prepared during the pre-study years. Obviously, this educational structure is dependent on financial standards that are not always met by students – or their parents:



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*“So if you don’t come from a privileged family which has that kind of [financially secure] background, it’s a very, very **steep hill**”.*

*Tor LINDSTRAND (Sweden)*

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Furthermore, to complete the picture, the overall internal structure of the program also depends on the institution itself. In the Swiss vocational high-school institution or *Fachhochschule*, students are expected to work during 80% of their training. This obviously has a strong impact on the rest of the curriculum. Yet another way to structure the courses is through modular division, as in Norway’s Kristiania College. Here, courses exist in the form of modules where students see all the subject matter at once, and are then tested on it. This contrasts with the more common model in which classes are taught in tandem and students take an exam at the end of a semester. This modular type of pedagogy is also used in other disciplines, for example in nursing programs and other practice-oriented vocations all over Europe.

### **PhD possibilities**<sup>188</sup>

Further research in the form of a doctorate fails in almost all cases – at least where the doctoral student would graduate in a specific interior design program. Only in Belgium is it currently possible (and effectively implemented and structured nationally) to pursue a doctorate in interior architecture specifically. In Italy such a doctorate used to exist but not anymore.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, a doctoral degree in interior architecture is still possible to some extent through two alternatives.<sup>190</sup> Firstly, it is possible in just about every country studied to specialize in interiors with a doctorate in design or in architecture. Secondly, some countries, including Estonia, provide an opportunity for doctoral study in a particular doctoral school that is also an overarching field: for example, one can do a doctorate with interior specialization in the doctoral school “Arts and Design Cultural Heritage and Conservation Architecture and Urban Planning Art History and Visual Culture” (Estonian Academy of Arts). PhD programs can only be offered by institutions that are certified to do so.<sup>191</sup> In most instances, this privilege is exclusively exercised by universities.

At the beginning of this chapter on education it was pointed out that PhD possibilities are heavily underrepresented in the discipline of interior architecture. However, this does not imply that no efforts are being made in this area. In Norway for example, Kristiania College is expecting to launch a master’s course in 2024. The next step would be the launch of a doctoral program. Also in 2024, in neighbouring Sweden, Konstfack University is planning to launch a PhD program in interior architecture. In Sweden in particular, as mentioned previously, one can already see that most of the “new” teachers have a background in research, whereas seven years ago and earlier, most of them came from a vocational background.<sup>192</sup> In a sense, there is a tendency toward more research-oriented teachers. The

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<sup>187</sup> Tor Lindstrand in focus group: SWEDEN, 5 June 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>188</sup> To obtain a full overview of the intricacies that are connected with a PhD program, one should include the information explained in Chapter I.

<sup>189</sup> Francesco Scullica in focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>190</sup> See attachments (annex binary models).

<sup>191</sup> An example is the Ecole Camondo, which has a “visa” by which the institution can offer and fill in PhD positions.

<sup>192</sup> Focus group: SWEDEN, 5 June 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.



year 2024 is also institutionally important for a third reason: in Austria, the only university where you can follow interior architecture (the private New Design University) is also planning to launch a doctoral program in that year.

In some countries where master's programs are already available, like in Germany, it is remarkable that the first and second tertiary cycles are organized in a very professionalized way, while the PhD programs remain problematic.<sup>193</sup> In other words, the existence of master's possibilities does not necessarily correlate with a favourable environment for PhD endeavours. In a way, it seems that the steps have been taken, but the leap towards further research remains to be.

From the findings of both the questionnaires and the focus groups we can conclude that PhDs play a key role in the professionalization process of the discipline. According to Kees Spanjers, PhD possibilities lead to three useful vectors of interior architecture's professionalization.<sup>194</sup> First, further research in interior architecture would also benefit neighbouring disciplines (cf. supra; interior as in-between). Second, doctoral research would challenge the overall educational framework itself to push further. Third, PhDs would contribute to the general recognition of the discipline. This suggests that the typical university doctorates are not easily accessible to interior architecture students or other graduates who wish to engage in further research. As an alternative, both the Spanish and the Dutch experts suggested practice-oriented PhDs.

### Control of educational standards and accreditation

"Ideally, the intellectual foundation that is both produced and 'safeguarded' at scholarly institutes, also serves as the legal basis for its jurisdiction. Through a system of accreditation, schools have a central position in the gatekeeping of professional knowledge."<sup>195</sup> Even though expertise and knowledge gatekeeping may seem totally beneficial to a discipline, it is worth bearing in mind that gatekeeping can also suffocate experimental/innovative tendencies that could lead to further professionalization. This relates back to the institutional type.<sup>196</sup>

Across Europe there is to some extent an arrangement of accreditation and curriculum structure. The latter is mainly regulated by the school boards themselves. In some cases, the government is involved. This is also the case with accreditation. The binary models and other source material can be consulted for more information. Here, we can briefly point to some specific situations.

Sometimes, as in Malta (MCAST) and Norway (Kristiania College), educational institutions are certified to self-accredit their courses. In other countries, such as Spain, the process is more complex. There, accreditation (which is similar to but not the same as in Germany) is regionally regulated. Moreover, in Spain all accredited university programs are bundled in a catalogue. This sidelines many of the academies of art or other non-university tertiary education institutions. However, a process was recently initiated to include other Spanish non-university programs in the catalogue. In Slovakia, accredited programs are only accessible via an admission exam / entrance test. This not only ensures a more appropriate

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<sup>193</sup> Focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>194</sup> Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

<sup>195</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999*, 13.

<sup>196</sup> This relates back to the aforementioned problems at TU Delft.



body of students, but also addresses the problem of educational diversity (cf. infra). It is also interesting to note that Flemish and Dutch schools are accredited by the transnational NVOA.

### Lifelong learning possibilities

Lifelong learning, or continuous professional development (CPD), was also a central topic in the Florence round-table discussions. Many different perspectives and opinions were given. The main dichotomy was between a kind of spiral of ongoing work (once in practice, people forget education: always working, routine work, etc.) and the need to reinvent oneself and update one's knowledge in order to snap out of routine work which can "destroy creativity". In this way, lifelong learning naturally assumes extra importance. However, according to some experts, professional practice provides a continuous lifelong learning process as every client and every project is different and new solutions must be sought every time. Yet this is overshadowed by the view shared by practically all experts that education is "at the beginning" of the professionalization process of the interior design discipline.

Among the many things that were discussed by the expert respondents, the topic of lifelong learning sparked a lot of debate and reflection. In all countries it was argued that continued learning possibilities should play an important role in the life of professionals – and maybe even made mandatory. If you go and see a doctor, you probably prefer one who is aware of and up-to-date on the latest knowledge and technology. Note how this implies HSW issues, just like with architecture, but not (according to the classic HSW defining variables) interior architecture. In this report, lifelong learning is situated within the education framework but there is obviously a strong link between education and the professional scene. It is placed there since it is considered part of the overall education of the student, graduate and professional. In a sense, lifelong learning could also fall under the practice/organization axis. Yet it was placed in the education axis since it is seen primarily as a model that contributes to the body of knowledge of the discipline. Thus, education in this respect does not end with graduation.

CPD programs for interior architects remain largely absent in Europe. Derived from the binary model, it is immediately clear that lifelong learning is absent in concrete terms. Although many countries are taking concrete steps to introduce lifelong learning platforms (like the Norwegian NIL and the Swiss VSI.ASAI ) or make it mandatory themselves (AIPi), it is currently mandatory only in countries where the title is legally protected. For example, in the Netherlands, although the control of this mandatory duty does not function optimally, there is an incentive for professionals to follow CPD workshops - namely, the fact that insurance companies will not immediately intervene in case of damages or other problems. It is important to note that mandatory or officially organized CPD programs are set up through legal obligation. In the Netherlands for example, interior architects are expected to follow these additional learning workshop since they are obliged to do so by the registry of Architects, where any interior architect who wants to use the legally protected title of interior architect must be registered.

An additional nuance should be made here: lifelong learning is mandatory mainly in countries with legal title protection since it is imposed by the institution that guarantees that protection. This is the case in Germany and the Netherlands. It is also important to note that this lifelong learning is imposed from within the architectural discipline. Indeed, in most countries, architects are required to devote a certain number of hours per year to workshops and additional classes - even in countries where the title of interior architect is not protected, such as France. Related to this, when interior architects are required to be lifelong learners, this is always in the context of title protection given that, to hold the title of interior architect, they



must claim the suffix of -architect, which is protected. So it's no surprise that title protection is only present in countries where there is talk of interior architecture and not interior design. Here again, it is striking that terminology is central to the professionalization process.

Remarkably, in many European countries such as Switzerland, Estonia, Austria and France, CPD programs for architects are organized and mandatory. Moreover, some experts argue that there is an intradisciplinary cultural difference between architecture students, who are more eager to go to extracurricular lectures, and interior architecture students.<sup>197</sup> Of course, this should be nuanced given the lack of interior architecture lectures as opposed to architecture ones. These are often imposed by the Chamber of Architects, Chamber of Economics (as in Austria for architects and engineers) or an authorized ministry. One could then argue that the creation of supposed Chambers of Interior Architects, or just the national ECIA affiliated organizations, could offer CPD to their members. Lastly, in connection with this, it serves to recall (cf. supra) the way in which a medical doctor should always be aware of technological breakthroughs and other things that might benefit his practice. It is interesting that architects have a lifelong learning platform. This is mainly because they are continuously updated on safety and health issues and regulations. Again, note how this circles back to the HSW issue where architects are seen as dealing with health and safety, whereas interior architects are not really recognized in this regard. Moreover, some experts claim that you cannot simply force people to educate themselves if this is not mandatory by law (and thus required for health and safety).<sup>198</sup>

### Internship possibilities

Regarding internships, it was difficult to determine whether they were present or not, and, equally important, whether they were optional or mandatory. In the binary models, the "1"s represent the presence of a mandatory internship in at least one of the educational institutions where one can study interior design. When an internship is available in a European institution, it usually spans one and a half to three months within one semester.

Most university institutions state that they mainly focus (especially in master's courses) on theory and concept.<sup>199</sup> In vocational institutions (or institutions that focus on a purely technical and practice-oriented program) – whether secondary or tertiary – internships in a sense dilute into practical experience. In these cases, students are expected to spend up to 80% of their time on practice. This is especially the case in Swiss HF schools and Austrian HTLs.

According to many experts (as seen in questionnaire and focus group sources) the lack of hands-on experience is a big problem in the professional field.

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<sup>197</sup> Els De Vos in focus group: BELGIUM. 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>198</sup> Focus group BELGIUM. 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>199</sup> For example, in Austria (Neil Harkess, email of July 2023); "The NDU is the only tertiary education institute in Austria for the Interior Discipline (Bachelor and Master). As a (Private) University in Austria we must always be careful not to say we are 'Praxisorientiert', so practice-oriented in English, because this is the study concept of the FHs (Fachhochschulen/Universities of Applied Sciences) and most courses (in other fields) in the FHs have internships. As the NDU has 'University Status' and is not an FH, we are 'Anwendungsorientiert', application-orientated in English and must never imply the course is practice-oriented. Very Austrian!"



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*“The biggest difficulties for the integration and the passage from school to the professional life [through internships] for interior architects.”*

*Mauro Brigham (Belgium)*

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Only in a few cases is the student required to do an internship. Moreover, even when this mandatory internship is included, it often takes “only” one and a half, two or three months. Many experts argue that this is far too little (this was explicitly mentioned in the Belgian focus group). It should also be noted that interior education is not only about delivering interior architects that work in studios and architecture firms. While practical experience is important, some say schools should consider everything but the professional market.<sup>200</sup> Interior graduates often end up in very diverse fields, from scenography and museums to architectural firms and many other jobs. Universities and academies should not strive to prepare students to become professional interior designers or interior architects. They should offer them a wide range of tools that they can use thanks to the unique social and psychological qualities inherent to the discipline.

Finally, it is interesting to note that an internship can also be followed in a less practical way. For example, at Polimi, students can do an internship in the Research Department.<sup>201</sup> This offers students a truly unique opportunity to prepare for (or get a taste of) doctoral studies.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Pierre Lhoas in focus group: BELGIUM. 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams. For more information, see Emanuele Coccia, “L’école de demain doit rompre tout lien avec le travail,” *Libération* (29-30 April (weekend edition) 2023), 17.

<sup>201</sup> Focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>202</sup> AIPI organizes competitions via “POLI.design” (founded in 1999 together with ADI (Industrial Designers) and AIAP (Visual Communication Design)). POLI.design is a consortium company that is led by the Politecnico di Milano (website + fg ita), OLI.design welcomes international students from 88 different countries. All graduates receive an invitation to join the AlumniPolimi: a community platform for graduates of the Design departments in Politecnico di Milano.



## 6. Practice/organization

Inclusion of architects  
within organization

Both interior designers  
and interior architects  
within organization

Only interior architects  
within organization

	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Norway	Poland	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland
<b>AXIS PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION</b>																
Establishment of professional organization / existence of professional organization	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Establishment of professional organization / more disciplines (does not count)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Establishment of professional organization / membership required to practice (legal title protection-automatic 1)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total: establishment of professional organization</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Controlled membership: educational level / educational level	1	0,5	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Controlled membership: professional level (work experience needed)	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Controlled membership: entry exam	1	0,5	0	0	0,5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Controlled membership: jury check	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Controlled membership: portfolio check	1	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Controlled membership: educational level / educational level membership / master needed (in case of title protection automatically yes)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0,5	0	0	0	0
<b>Total action 6: controlled membership</b>	6	4	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	4,5	3	2	3
Codes, services and control of compliance / code of conduct/ethics	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Codes, services and control of compliance / code of conduct / in English	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Checkpoint 1: code of conduct/ethics</b>	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / legal advice	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / technical training (e.g. workshops)	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / "cultural training" (e.g. inspirational exhibitions, lectures, ...)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / magazine subscriptions	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / educational guidelines (in addition to ECIA-charter)	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Codes, services and control of compliance / services / networking (in addition to ECIA conventions)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Checkpoint 2: services by organisation</b>	6	6	6	2	5	6	2	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	3
Codes, services and control of compliance / foreigners admission (with education criteria) / EU	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Codes, services and control of compliance / foreigners admission (with education criteria) / non-EU	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Checkpoint 3: foreigners admission</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Codes, services and control of compliance / formal conventions (1-3/= 0,5; 3/= ... = 1)	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
<b>Checkpoint 4: organization conventions</b>	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
<b>Total: codes, services and control of compliance</b>	10	9,5	9,5	9,5	9,5	11	7	10	7	9,5	10	11	9,5	9,5	9,5	9,5
Union work/lobbying: collaboration/communication other professions and associations (umbrella= automatically 1)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total: union work (macro-level networking)</b>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION (n=20)</b>	16	16	15	11	14	17	12	16	13	17	15	17	14	12	12	12
<b>TOTAL PRACTICE (100%)</b>	16	16	15	11	14	17	12	16	13	17	15	17	14	12	12	12

MODEL



This section deals with the professional realm of the interior architect. National organizations are also included within this framework. This report mainly focuses on the dynamic between the professional and these organizations and how the latter offer a healthy and constructive platform for interior architects. However, it should be noted that by placing the emphasis on this dynamic, the report deals less with the difference in private and public assignments, the different market structures and the number of professional studios. This is mainly due to the scope of the general research question and goals, but also due to a lack of numeric or statistical information. However, for some countries, such as Estonia, figures are available. In 2015, there were 538 architecture companies in Estonia. Among those, 84 studios were specifically devoted to interior architecture (and 34 landscape companies). Reio Raudsepp (president of ESL) estimates that around 1,042 people work in the field as a whole. Additionally, in Sweden, for example, “there is a strict line between public and domestic interiors... Interior architects hardly do any domestic interiors. Perhaps this is because IKEA that taught us how to plan our own homes and afford to do it in an aesthetic pleasing way. Interior designers work more with domestic projects. Interior architects in Sweden take on both new production of buildings as well as renovation,” says Torsten Hild (SA).<sup>203</sup> A recommendation for further research would be to conduct statistical and overall numeric research on the state of the art of market structure regarding interior architecture – similar to the research conducted by Kees Spanjers regarding the Netherlands.<sup>204</sup>

### Established professional organization

All investigated countries are ECIA affiliated and thus have a national organization for interior architects / interior designers:<sup>205</sup>

1. **Austria:** Bund Österreichischer Innenarchitekten (BÖIA)
2. **Belgium:** Associatie van Interieurarchitecten van België – Association des Architectes d’Intérieur de Belgique (AinB)
3. **Germany:** bund deutscher innenarchitekten (bdia) + Bundesarchitektenkammer (BAK)<sup>206</sup>
4. **Estonia:** Eesti Sisearhitektide Liit (ESL)
5. **Finland:** Sisustusarkkitehdit Inredningsarkitekterna (SIO)
6. **France:** Pôle Action (PA)
7. **Iceland:** Félag húsgagna-og Innanhússarkitekta (FHI)
8. **Italy:** Associazione Italiana Professionisti interior designers (AIPi)
9. **Malta:** Malta Interior Design Association (MIDA)
10. **The Netherlands:** Beroepsvereniging Nederlandse Interieurarchitecten (BNI)
11. **Norway:** Norske interiorarkitekters og møbeldesigneres landsforening (NIL)
12. **Slovakia** [observer member]: Slovenská asociácia interiérových dizajnérov (SAID)

<sup>203</sup> This excerpt was taken from the submitted questionnaires from Sweden.

<sup>204</sup> Kees Spanjers, “Flitsenquete interieurarchitectuur 2015,” commissioned by BA and BNI, 2016.

<sup>205</sup> Alphabetically ordered.

<sup>206</sup> BAK is a national professional organization that acts as the governing body of the 16 Federal State Chambers of Architects in Germany. BAK collects information concerning the regulation of the professional practice of all architects, including interior architects. This is an important task because the 16 regions in Germany have different laws and regulations. On their website you can find an overview of the “Bauordnungen” for each region (via preliminary study 2021).



13. **Spain:** Consejo General de los Colegios Oficiales de Decoradores/Diseñadores de Interior (CGDI)
14. **Sweden:** Sveriges Arkitekter (SA)
15. **Switzerland:** Vereinigung Schweizer Innenarchitekten/architektinnen/Association Suisse des Architectes d'Intérieur Associazione Svizzera degli Architetti d'Interni (VSI ASAI)



Figure 19: ECIA member states (via <https://ecia.net/members/national-organisations>)

For completeness: some countries are doubly represented through the addition of institutional members, notably:

1. France: Conseil Français des Architectes d'Intérieur (CFAI)<sup>207</sup>
2. The Netherlands: Bureau Architectenregister (BA)

The obstacles, missions and overall objectives of these organizations are obviously specifically aimed at and tailored to situational and regional imperatives. However the general thread that is very visible in all of these is their enthusiasm, preparedness and willingness to both fight existing stigmatization of the profession and promote the professional competencies of the interior architect to a professional audience and the general public. Almost all collaborators within these organizations work on a voluntary basis.

The national organizations differ regarding many variables. For starters, there are many organizations with a long and rich history and there are organizations, such as MIDA (2011) and SAID (2015), that are quite young. However, by pioneering the organization of the

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<sup>207</sup> The CFAI (est. 2001) is a non-union, independent organization. Originally, the CFAI stems from the Office professionnel de qualification des architectes d'intérieur (OPQAI). This organization was established four years after the law on architecture was passed in 1977 - which disregarded a legal framework for interior architects, more specifically: architects wanted to undermine the legal status of interior architects, in order to protect the autonomy of their own profession.



profession of interior architects, smaller organizations like MIDA have a key role to play in the setting up of equivalent organizations in other countries.<sup>208</sup>

Apart from age and size, the organizations also differ in terms of structure. More specifically, we can distinguish autonomous organizations and associations that are a branch of an umbrella organization. For example, SA is an umbrella organization that is home to four different professions (architects, urban planners, interior architects and landscape architects). However, within this umbrella organization, interior architects have their own “academy” or sub-branch. Additionally, it is worth noting that, like Germany’s Chamber of Architects (7%),<sup>209</sup> they represent the absolute minority of members. Moreover, SA is a union organization where both architects and lawyers share offices in Stockholm.<sup>210</sup> The other “umbrella situation” is found in Finland, where SIO holds the biggest share in the design association Ornamo. Note that SIO is the national organization that is ECIA affiliated, and not the overarching Ornamo – unlike in the Swedish situation. By representing national architects alone (and not other sister disciplines) some experts claim that they can truly grasp the ambitions and problems that are specific to the interior architecture profession:

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***“NIL as an organization for ourselves [as interior architects] is that we are the tip of the arrow for the profession.”***

*Mona Lise LIEN (Norway)*

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This situation contrasts greatly with the way in which interior architects are represented in the Swedish SA:

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***“So the Union [of interior architects] sort of joined the professional organizations and they were all compounded into one massive organization called Swedish Architects (...) and now everyone is trying to sort of still kind of grappling with this shift, (...) it’s an ongoing [problem] because (...) the building architects they are [present] more than many more of them (...) and **historically they have been very strong.** So that means that for the landscape architects, the urban planners and the interior architects, **they have to fight for their existence now** (...) Not really, but they have to fight to get attention, like within this massive organization and that has been a struggle over the years.”***

*Tor LINDSTRAND (Sweden)*

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However, as already discussed, umbrella formation does not necessarily lead to a situation in which interior architecture has to “fight for its existence” as the situation of SIO proves.

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<sup>208</sup> Davina Preca in focus group: MALTA, 28 April 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>209</sup> Focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams; BAK; Reiß & Hommerich, “Ergebnisse der Befragung selbständig tätiger Innenarchitekten und Architekten,” 2022.

<sup>210</sup> The office was visited during the 2023 ECIA GA in Stockholm.

In one case, the organization (according to the questionnaires) is home only to interior architects (Estonia: ESL). In other cases, architects and/or product designers are often present - at least if they are concerned with interior space. However, there are also countries that have both interior designers and interior architects as members (i.e. Belgium and Slovakia). Interior designers and interior architects are distinguished respectively on the basis of training and certification/expertise in structural aspects. But there are also countries that accept interior architects / interior designers, technical decorators (in the case of Spain) and furniture designers. This is mainly in Scandinavian/Nordic countries - not by coincidence, countries where interior architecture training is often accompanied by furniture design, such as Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland.<sup>211</sup>

MEMBERSHIP VARIETY	Architects/product designers et al. working with interior space	Neighboring disciplines: furniture design, technical decoration or combination interior architecture and interior design	Solely interior architects		EDUCATION AXIS (%)	PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION AXIS (%)	LEGISLATION AXIS (%)	AVG.
Austria					45	58	58	53,66667
Belgium					55	58	50	54,33333
Estonia					45	68	50	54,33333
Finland					42	85	58	61,66667
France					47	75	63	61,66667
Germany					71	83	88	80,66667
Iceland					18	68	83	56,33333
Italy					55	80	58	64,33333
Malta					21	60	46	42,33333
The Netherlands					47	83	92	74
Norway					42	68	58	56
Slovakia					47	53	46	48,66667
Spain					58	73	50	60,33333
Sweden					45	78	50	57,66667
Switzerland					50	80	50	60
				AVG.	45,86667	71,33333	60	

Figure 20: member configuration and professionalization rate (%)

It must also be said that the presence/absence of professionals from a discipline other than interior design did not count towards the total degree of professionalization because it cannot currently be ascertained whether the disciplinary variation contributes to a more robust

<sup>211</sup> In Iceland there is no specific interior architecture program. However, the country is included here since the national organization FHI is an organization for both interior architecture and furniture design.



framework of the profession. It is noteworthy that national organizations that also accept architects seem to be the “most professionalized”, according to the variables used.

### European dissemination

ECIA provides a European platform on which national organizations can convene, discuss and share knowledge. International interaction is key in the further professionalization process of the profession and the discipline. Countries with a relatively high degree of professionalization in interior architecture, most notably Germany, play a leading role.<sup>212</sup> These leadership positions can also be historical in nature. For example, Italy – inspired by its rich history and heritage (and in particular, the Polytecnico di Milano) plays a pivotal role in international research and education. The United Kingdom and Italy are famous for hosting foreign students. This is also the case for students from countries that have a small interior scene, like Iceland<sup>213</sup> and Malta. And yet, countries like Malta that have a young organization and a smaller educational scene are vital in both the acquisition of new ECIA members and in the founding of national interior associations. As explained previously, organizations like MIDA have first-hand and very recent experience in setting up platforms for professionals, whereas older organizations have less direct experience in founding organizations and setting up new platforms.

In addition to the leadership and advisory roles these organizations can play, it is important to keep in mind that countries can also inspire each other. For example, in 1955 Belgian interior architects legally enforced the professional title of interior designer, following the French and German examples.<sup>214</sup> Note that these spheres of influence are also determined by geography. Similar customs regarding language and culture strengthen the level of influence. This is acknowledged by various associations. For example, the Nordic group within ECIA regularly convene to discuss matters. Another example is Switzerland, where the German, French and Italian speaking parts respectively look to and communicate with Germany, France and Italy. These European dissemination practices should be kept in mind.

The terminological interchangeability and the use of English was discussed in chapter I. In an international context, the English language is an unavoidable instrument of communication – a *lingua franca*. Without detracting from local cultures and languages, it is obvious that the supranational and congruent use of English would lead to a clearer platform in the European context. By communicating in the same language, situational and contextual problems can be seen as precedents. Countries with similar problems can look at how other countries solved them or are still struggling with them.<sup>215</sup> This takes us back to the problem of terminology.

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<sup>212</sup> In particular, Sophie Green plays an important role in knowledge and expertise dissemination through her role on the ECIA board.

<sup>213</sup> For example (based on a personal conversation at the 2022 Florence GA), Rósa Dögg Þorsteinsdóttir obtained her master’s degree in Milan, just like the famous interior architects Hafsteinn Júlíusson (SPD Scuola Politecnica di Design) and Karitas Sveinsdóttir (IED Milan) from HAF Studio (<https://www.hafstudio.is/about>). However, it is possible to obtain a degree from the *Icelandic College of Art and Crafts*. After that, a foreign education seems the most obvious choice.

<sup>214</sup> Note that, in Belgium, the title is not protected in a legal framework, but nowadays, interior architects (and actually, all people) may call themselves interior architects, which was not allowed before 1955.

<sup>215</sup> In the Spanish focus group for example, panel members asked for a specific document regarding title regulation in the Netherlands. However, because it was not translated into English, and no efforts for such translation were made, the matter was not further explored.



## Controlled membership: size vs. expertise

### Educational criteria

One of the central criteria for candidate members to join the national organization of interior architects is educational background. In many cases, at least a bachelor's degree (whether from a design or architecture program or not) is required. In addition, according to ECIA guidelines, national organizations can admit candidates without an educational background provided that they have one and a half years of professional experience, compensating for each "lost" year of education.<sup>216</sup> Thus, a three-year bachelor's degree corresponds to four and a half years of practical experience. This regulation is in effect, for example, in the Austrian BÖIA.<sup>217</sup> This can be expanded to include a jury defence and portfolio submission. Organizations that explicitly stated that a particular educational background was not necessary were assigned a "0" in the binary model. The general aim being to determine the candidate's current competencies.<sup>218</sup>

In some cases, educational background is mandatory. For example, in Malta, the minimum entry level to join MIDA is a two-year diploma and seven and a half years of work.<sup>219</sup> Note that this relates to the application to become an associate full member. In Spain, one cannot join the professional organization "without the official degree that accredits it".<sup>220</sup>

Interestingly, the German bdia would like to accept members with a five-year education (today, a four-year architectural training meets the educational criteria in the Chamber). In this way, interior architects can have the same number of education years as architects. This was alluded to earlier (cf. supra) regarding the way in which Estonian experts see the Bologna system as an obstacle to the further professionalization of interior architects as opposed to architects. Against this argument that the interior architect should have the same master's-level skills as an architect, Norwegian experts believe that interior architects should be encouraged to graduate after a bachelor's degree, in which the student would have acquired several different skills. Additionally, this would increase the general number of professionals and thus help to improve recognition of the profession through numbers. However, to be clear, NIL asks its candidate members to look for "master-level competencies".<sup>221</sup>

The problem of the variety of school years also has legal implications. For example, in Spain, the technical decorator is legally protected and has a three-year education, whereas the interior designer has a four-year education. Moreover, it is argued that interior design is the overarching professional activity, of which technical decoration is only a specialization.<sup>222</sup> Consequently, candidate members to the CGDI have a satisfactory educational background after their three-year study. This obviously helps to grow the total number of members, but it undermines and weakens the educational basis for interior designers, who can only obtain an academic title after four years. At first glance, less educational experience implies a larger number of professionals (cf. balancing scales graph supra), whereas higher educational

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<sup>216</sup> ECIA guidelines (via <https://ecia.net/members/national-organisations>).

<sup>217</sup> Martin Thörnblom, email of July 2023.

<sup>218</sup> Dominic Haag-Walthert; Susanne Bachmann, email of July 2023; focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>219</sup> Davina Preca, email of July 2023.

<sup>220</sup> Teresa Casas, email of July 2023.

<sup>221</sup> Focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>222</sup> Focus group: SPAIN, 10 May 2023, 13:00-14:30. MS Teams.



criteria for entry into the organization implies a smaller number. The question is therefore, which is needed for professionalization - scale or academic expertise?

In countries where the legal title of interior architect is protected, candidate members (only if they wish to or are authorized to bear the title) must comply with the criteria of the chambers/registries that oversee this protection. In Europe, we have the example of the Dutch Bureau Architectenregister and the German Chamber of Architects. Just like with the criterion of professional practice (see *infra*), candidates must comply with educational criteria. To reiterate, this is only the case if the candidate of the national ECIA affiliated organization wishes to bear the title, since no national organization really requires them to be registered or to necessarily bear the legally protected title. It is for the latter that there is an additional criterion in the binary model: namely, the need to have a master's degree. It is interesting to note that this is only the case in countries where the title is protected and where the prospective member wants to use that title. In this respect, legal protection of the title creates a higher threshold in terms of educational background and expertise.

Lastly, it is also customary for national organizations to highlight (via their websites) their recognition by various accredited schools.<sup>223</sup>

SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED	N°
Austria	9
Belgium	14
Estonia	1
Finland	6
France	17
Germany	16
Iceland	
Italy	9
Malta	
The Netherlands	8
Norway	3
Slovakia	7
Spain	41
Sweden	2
Switzerland	9

Figure 21: schools officially recognized by ECIA affiliated institutions (regarding interior architecture/interior design)

### Professional practice criteria

One criterion that is almost<sup>224</sup> always applied is that of professional practice. The general rule is that one needs less professional experience if one has more education. Very often, the admission criteria concerning education and professional practice work in tandem. For example, a candidate can join the BÖIA with a master's in interior architecture or architecture and with proof of one year of professional practice (including the portfolio submission). At the

<sup>223</sup> The table above excludes vocational/secondary education institutions (tertiary framework only).

<sup>224</sup> In the Finnish Aalto University, master's graduates in interior architecture and furniture design can automatically apply for a full membership within SIO.



same time, another candidate can apply with a bachelor's in interior architecture or architecture, but must also have at least three years of proven professional practice. Furthermore, a candidate can apply with a vocational (non-tertiary) Austrian HTL (Höhere Technische Lehranstalt) diploma. In this case, an additional examination is required; proof of at least six years of professional practice has to be provided (including portfolio submission) and the candidate must hold the engineer title – requested from and granted by the Ministry of Economics.<sup>225</sup> In this way, educational “shortcomings” are compensated with professional practice.

In most cases, the prospective member is expected to have experience in the professional field. In some cases (e.g. university graduates from Belgium and Finland), this is not required. However, when professional experience is sought, this can also exist in the context of - again - legal title protection. Indeed, as in Germany and the Netherlands, a prospective member, if they wish to use the legal title of interior architect, must meet the conditions to join the organization that guarantees that title protection: the chamber/register of architects. In a sense, therefore, professional experience is especially important if the candidate wishes to use the title, since by no means all members (whether in the German<sup>226</sup> or Dutch case)<sup>227</sup> of the ECIA affiliated organizations are registered in the chamber/register of architects, and can therefore, officially, call themselves interior architects. For the sake of completeness, it is also important to include the Spanish case: even though the title of interior designer is not legally protected, a professional who wants to work as an interior designer must register with the national organization CGDI.

To briefly elaborate on the portfolio presentation: within the dimension of education and research, interior architecture has been struggling with distorted expectations (cf. failed recognition) among students and their parents: “This creates frustration with students entering the programs, as well as with (recent) graduates who don't see their newly acquired - and often highly idealized - conception of interior design reflected on the job market”.<sup>228</sup> For example, in the past, students of the IAEV (Venice, Italy) thought that the discipline was

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<sup>225</sup> Christian Armstark in focus group: AUSTRIA, 31 May 2023, 16:00-18:30. MS Teams; more information via <https://www.innenarchitekten.at/mitglied-werden/>;

<sup>226</sup> Focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams; for more information see questionnaires submitted for Germany.

<sup>227</sup> Only after obtaining the master's degree and completing the mandatory professional experience period/*beroepservaringsperiode* (two years) is it possible to registry as an interior architect (and use the title). In 2007, 13.8% of registered practitioners were interior architects (1,674) (via <https://www.architectenwerk.nl/architectenpraktijk02/architectendata>); for more information on the mandatory professional experience period see <https://bni.nl/voor-interieurarchitecten/mentoren-2/>. After four years of a bachelor's, one can follow master's courses (for two additional years). In these master's courses, there is a predominant focus on societal innovation and renewal. When the graduate receives their diploma, there is a mandatory professional practice experience period of two years after which it is possible to register. However, as of now, there is no dedicated PhD program for interior architecture in the Netherlands, which is, among other things, due to the extreme variation in the master's programs, where complementary research is limited and the individual development of students is hard to translate into a more cohesive educational block. The BEP is offered by the Registry of Architects. Programs are offered in Dutch or English. Besides the BEP, there is the Professional Experience Program (PEP) which costs 5,000 euro (excl. VAT) for 20 modules in two years; <https://bni.nl/voor-interieurarchitecten/mentoren-2/>.

<sup>228</sup> Vandevort, *The emergence of interior architecture in België, 1945-1999. An evaluatieon of the impact of education on the identity formation of the design discipline*, 4.



mostly about planning, designing, decorating rooms and rearranging furniture.<sup>229</sup> For parents on the other hand, the interior program was not desirable for many reasons. As previously argued, post-graduation options remain vague and the profession is not always seen as strictly academic or even for “adults” but rather as something that is “fun” to do on the side. There is also the economic variable, especially in countries where universities or academies have entrance exams. In some countries, like Sweden, these entrance exams are accompanied by the presentation of a portfolio, which students have already prepared by attending various pre-university schools. Of course, this costs money, especially if the institutions are of a private type – which is very common in the interior discipline in Europe. Another point can be made regarding the portfolios. In the interior architecture discipline, many of the variables on which scores are given are of an artistic – and some might say subjective – nature. This makes it difficult for teachers to assess a candidate's full competencies.<sup>230</sup> It can therefore be assumed that if those within the discipline itself are struggling to define its competencies, then it is hardly surprising that the general public finds it difficult to recognize the discipline, and subsequently the profession.

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*“I think it's [relevant] especially in interior architecture and the Fine Arts schools; you apply with the portfolio and there are special schools that give education that helps students to make a portfolio to get into that education, which they want so they can go for one or 2 extra years (...) it's a financial commitment so already there. There is an incentive that goes towards schools and then we have a real problem or challenge (...) when you apply to school: (...) they take criteria to get in [by means of entrance exam], one criteria is **artistic level you know? How do you how do you measure that?**”*

*Tor LINDSTRAND (Sweden)*

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### **Membership**

Most of the time, the members represent “full members”, i.e. members who fulfil all of the educational and professional criteria and who can vote on organizational matters. However, organizations have many membership categories. These include full members, student members, honorary members and association/company members. Apart from the general admission criteria, there are also special cases in which a member can be admitted - just think of the honorary membership in many organizations, where the prospective honorary member is chosen mainly on the basis of outstanding contribution to the field through tremendous success or great distinction in the arts.

However, the situation is more complex in countries where the title of interior architect is legally protected. When interior architecture becomes a registered profession, the

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<sup>229</sup> As explained by Emanuela Bonini-Lessing in focus group: ITALY, 18 May 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>230</sup> Focus group: SWEDEN, 5 June 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

prospective member cannot join as an interior architect member if not registered - which often implies completion of training.<sup>231</sup> It is important to note that in those countries (e.g. the Netherlands and Germany) not all members are registered interior architects. Some members are students and some are referred to as designers.

MEMBERS	Total professionals 2017	Total organization members 2017	Total professionals 2022	Total organization members 2022
Austria		50	500-2000	77
Belgium	3000	259	1000	325
Estonia	350	192	250	238
Finland	500		1500	767
France (CFAI)	1500	950	2500	900 CFAI (220: PA)
Germany	5889		6700	2000
Iceland		75		
Italy		200	30/40.000	312
Malta		12	<10	25
Netherlands		252	1650	300
Norway		593		639
Slovakia			2500	28
Spain	3000-10000	1146	6000	1410
Sweden	760	600	1000	885
Switzerland	900	346		420

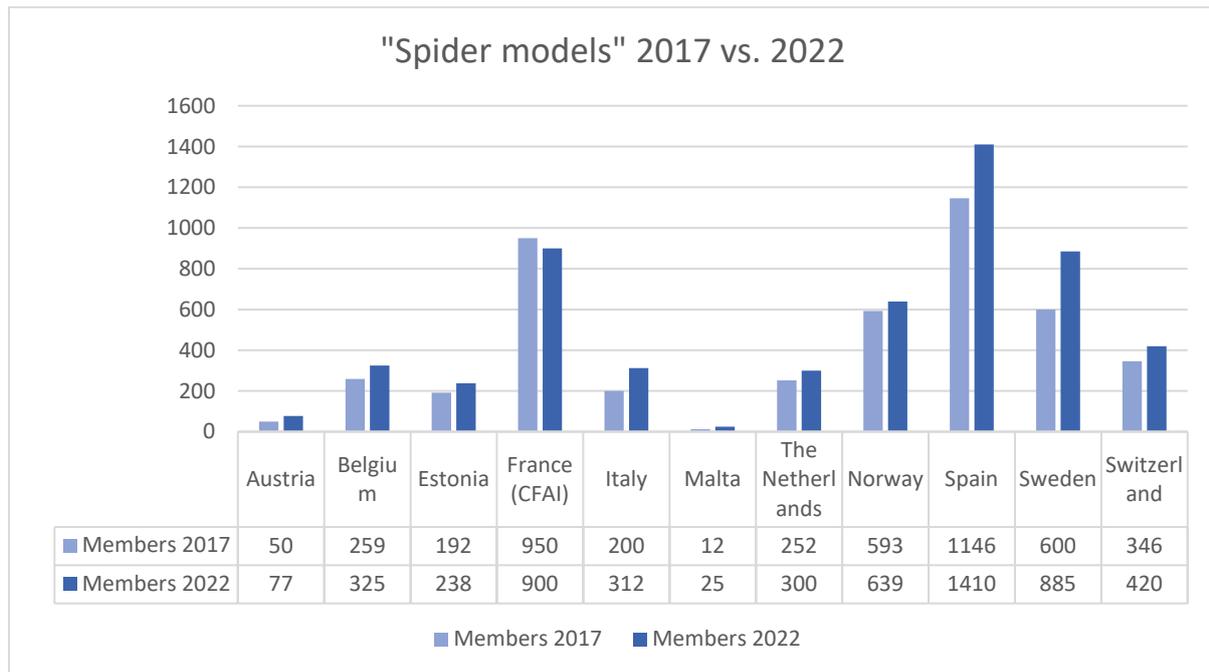
Figure 22:  
membership  
numbers from 2017  
and 2022/2023

To give a brief overview, the table above<sup>232</sup> shows how, in almost all cases, the size of the organization has grown since the first spider model research. If we place these numbers in a graph (below)<sup>233</sup> it becomes clear how, throughout the years, organizations have been successful in acquiring new members.

<sup>231</sup> Evaline Kruyssen; Anja Dirks, email of July 2023.

<sup>232</sup> In the table above, member size excludes company/institutional members. In the case of Sweden, numbers refer to the specific number of interior architects, not the whole (14,200) SA. For France, the CFAI was used as an ECIA affiliated member instead of PA to make historical comparison possible, since PA was only accepted into ECIA in September 2022.

<sup>233</sup> In this table, only some countries were included. These countries were chosen based on the presence of data and availability of the sources through the spider model analysis from 2017. For some countries, no data was at hand.



### Codes, services and control of compliance: a quality label

Members of the organizations have their own rights and duties. These are laid down in the organization's code of conduct and/or statutes. In return for their membership, they benefit from several services of the organization such as legal advice, cultural<sup>234</sup> and technical training, discounts on magazine subscriptions, newsletters,<sup>235</sup> educational guidelines and networking possibilities. Many of the organizations today focus on the pervasive problem of adaptive reusability and sustainability. Needless to say, the size and structure of an organization also influences the number of services offered.<sup>236</sup>

In some cases, members can encounter unique opportunities. In Switzerland, for example, the national organization VSI.ASAI is organizing and managing an archive on interior architecture. This provides both an opportunity for further historical research (possibly involving oral history methodology) and the collection and preservation of professional and commercial data: “[transl.]: *This has set itself the goal of archiving the work of selected Swiss interior designers of the 20th and 21st centuries so that it can be preserved, researched and communicated. Because to this day there is no institution that documents the work of this*

<sup>234</sup> By “cultural” training we mean lectures on different theories and concepts, but also excursions and other activities that might add to the cultural and professional baggage of the interior architect.

<sup>235</sup> For example, NOOK Magazine is a transnational magazine that is offered by both the AinB and the BNI (four times a year).

<sup>236</sup> That is, services can be cross-disciplinary, especially in umbrella-structured associations such as Ornamo. The larger the association, the broader the distribution of services. Furthermore, in Switzerland for example (VSI ASAI), members can appeal to the legal department of the Swiss engineer and architects association SIA (via <https://vsi-asai.ch/fr/>; <https://www.sia.ch/de/dienstleistungen/recht/>); this is also the case in Sweden where SA has a special business service (FöretagarService) for self-employed architects (with their own firms). On top of this, SA offers “services in matters of contracts, tenders, fees, public procurement, liability insurance, copyright, et cetera” (via <https://www.arkitekt.se/in-english/private-practice/>; <https://www.arkitekt.se/medlem/foretagare/anslut-dig-till-foretagarservice/om-foretagarservice/>).

*profession. The archive is an initiative of the Association of Swiss Interior Designers VSI.ASAI. as well as various people from research, teaching and mediation. The AIS should be accessible to all interested parties.”<sup>237</sup>*

Furthermore, in many instances, national organizations organize different competitions where members can compete for prizes and overall recognition.<sup>238</sup>

Evidently, the code of conduct is an important tool, not only for ensuring the professional and ethical quality of members, but also for improving the image and recognition of the profession. In fact, membership to these national organizations is seen by clients as a label of quality (both in countries where the title is legally protected and those where it is not).

Sometimes, membership to these organizations also coincides with the right to bear the association’s title (for example, in Germany: “innenarchitekt bdia”).<sup>239</sup> Many organizations offer this option, whereby the professional is credited for their competencies and the client is informed of this by means of a quality label.

### Codes

Partly because of their membership, all ECIA organizations have a code of conduct in one form or another, which they impose on members. In most cases, this amounts to a very transparent code of conduct/ethics. In other cases, it is indirectly named and defined in the statutes of the organization, as in Austria. The code of conduct ensures that both the organization and its members have obligations and rights. It is also the case that an organization can exclude or expel a professional by revoking their membership in case of a violation of professional rules and/or ethical codes, as well as failure to pay the membership fee.

It is striking that in only 20% of cases, the code of conduct is also drawn up in English. Incidentally, one of these three countries is Malta, where the code of conduct is drawn up in English since it is the official national language alongside Maltese. The absence of English is also visible on websites. Fortunately, several browser extensions offer the possibility to quickly translate a website in a preferred language, but only a few countries have a specific English tab on their website. In the focus group conversations (especially in Spanish) English turned out to be an important medium for communicating on certain issues, for getting

ENGLISH TAB ON WEBSITE	YES	NO
Austria		
Belgium		
Estonia		
Finland		
France CFAI		
France PA		
Germany		
Iceland		
Italy		
Malta		
Netherlands		
Norway		
Slovakia		
Spain		
Sweden		
Switzerland		

Figure 23:

*ECIA affiliated organization that offer a specific English tab/version on their website*

<sup>237</sup> For more information, see <https://www.ai-s.ch/>.

<sup>238</sup> In particular, one should mention the Slovakian SAID here. They are also responsible for the third BSCP sub-project: ECIA interior award (via <https://ecia.net/eu-funded-projects/ecia-interior-award>).

<sup>239</sup> For more information, see Chapter II: axis legislation.



inspired, and for tackling similar problems through collaboration and advice based on experience.

### Services

The services offered by the organizations were mainly checked through the survey in the questionnaire and through independent research of the websites. However, some reservations must be made in this regard. As can be expected, in some cases, the respondent mainly wanted to paint a “good picture” of the national situation and the organization. Some experts painted a rosier picture of certain situations - and the reality in general - than others. These nuances must be highlighted, since the questionnaire on practice/organization was often completed by only one or two people per country. It is also clear that the services provided by the organization count for many points in the general point system for professionalization in the practice/organization axis. However, the flexibility of the binary models makes up for this problem, since certain things can be omitted or assigned fewer points in further comparative analyses in order to obtain a more targeted comparison with a more transparent and objective representation of the services. Furthermore, "cultural training" and networking were among the most popular and frequently offered services, while legal advice and educational guidelines were among the least offered.

Interestingly, organizations increasingly choose to communicate the content of the profession via LinkedIn. By doing this, they reach both the professional community and the general public. This form of communication also constitutes a service that is offered by the organization. For example, the bdia (Germany) recently created an “Atlas”: a digital tool that can be accessed by anyone.<sup>240</sup> This Atlas consists of a digital map on which the user can see multiple flags and dots that correspond with projects by bdia’s members. By clicking on them, the user can learn more about the project and the overall capabilities of the German interior architect.

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<sup>240</sup> Data retrievable via <https://bdia.de/atlas-stichwortsuche-projekte/>.

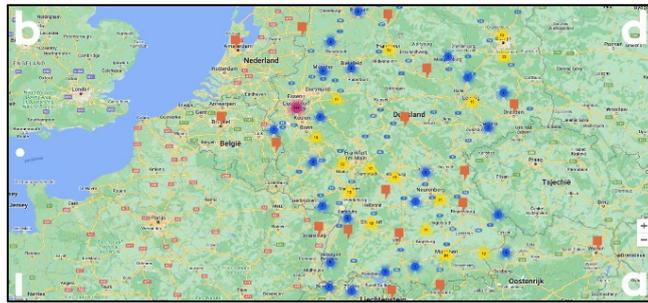


Figure 25: bdia's interior atlas.

Moreover, it clearly shows the versatility of the profession. Another example can be found on CFAI's LinkedIn page, where they have posted a slideshow in which multiple general questions are answered, such as "In what sectors is the interior architect active?"<sup>241</sup>



Figure 24: CFAI's presentation of the interior architect's working domains.

### **Foreigners/people with a migration background**

People with a different background (born, living or educated abroad) – here referred to as “foreigners” – are welcome to work within the interior architecture field in all countries (both EU and non-EU). In practice, however, as in all things, the reality is more complex. In certain countries, such as Estonia, it is mandatory to master the language. For many, this is both an obstacle and an incentive to focus on a career abroad. In all cases, foreigners must meet the same criteria as “native” members. If they stay in the country for an extended period, they have to arrange additional matters such as visas and social security contributions.

### **Conventions**

The organizations were asked to indicate how often they met; both on an informal and a formal basis. In the binary models, only formal meetings were counted. In 87% of cases, the organization met (e.g. as a general assembly) once to three times a year. Meetings provided ideal moments and environments for sharing certain knowledge and making suggestions and comments. The frequency of these meetings therefore plays a major role in the further professionalization of the organizations and the practical side of the profession in general.

<sup>241</sup> Data retrievable via <https://www.linkedin.com/company/conseil-fran%C3%A7ais-des-architectes-d-interieur-cfai/posts/?feedView=all>.



### Union work: advising and collaborating

All ECIA affiliated organizations work together with other organizations (for example, the bdia and the BAK<sup>242</sup>, or CFAI and France Compétence)<sup>243</sup> and educational institutions (for example, ESL and the Estonian Academy of Arts,<sup>244</sup> whereas AIPi officially sits in a professional consortium within the Polytechnico di Milano). At first, this may seem obvious, since the organizations are often established in order to give members a stronger voice as a collective. However, it is worth noting that all organizations strive for collaboration at the regional, national and supranational level.

Mostly, these collaborations imply professional work. In many countries, such as Austria,<sup>245</sup> Belgium, Estonia and Slovakia,<sup>246</sup> the professional interior architect needs additional certificates or qualifications to sign building permits and/or intervene structurally in the interior space. This implies further collaboration and communication between the ECIA-affiliated organization and the bodies of registration/certification.

Note how this “union work” variable differs from the national organization’s “networking” service:

#### **Practice/organization variables**

#### **Codes, services and control of compliance**

#### **Union work**

##### Networking (micro level)

- Organization x members
- Members x members

##### Networking (macro level)

- Organization x organization
- Organization x institution
- Organization x government

<sup>242</sup> “Each German region (constitutional, Germany exists out of 16 ‘Bundesländer’ or regions) has its own ‘Bauordnung’, which regulates construction activities within that region. The umbrella organisation BAK (Bundarchitektenkammer or in English the Federal Chamber of Architects) is a national professional organisation that acts as the governing body of the sixteen Federal State Chambers of Architects in Germany. BAK collects information concerning the regulation of the professional practice of all architects, including interior architects. This is an important task because each of the sixteen regions in Germany has different laws and regulations. On their website you can find an overview of all ‘Bauordnungen’ of every region.” (via preliminary study 2021).

<sup>243</sup> Focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams; in France, Christophe Sarlandie in particular works on this collaboration between the CFAI and France Compétence.

<sup>244</sup> They also convene to discuss the curriculum which is, as explained previously, perceived as problematic (the three plus two Bologna structure vs. the undivided five-year architecture structure).

<sup>245</sup> In Austria in particular there is a lot of regulation regarding certification. This mainly deals with the title of Engineer or the denomination of studios to an Engineering Office (for more information see focus group: AUSTRIA transcript and/or Chapter II: axis legislation).

<sup>246</sup> SAID in particular collaborates closely with many bodies and chambers (especially architecture and engineering bodies).



## 7. Legislation

Switzerland	Sweden	Spain	Slovakia	Norway	Netherlands	Malta	Italy	Iceland	Germany	France	Finland	Estonia	Belgium	Austria	
<b>AXIS LEGISLATION</b>															
0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	Establishing protection / title / interior architect
															Establishing protection / title / architect (does not count to total)
1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	Establishing protection / practice / interior architect
															Establishing protection / practice / architect (does not count to total)
1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	Establishing protection / practice / title by organization
2	1	1	1	1	3	0	1	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	<b>Total: legal regulation (title and practice)</b>
1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	Control of the practice / legal restriction regarding practice (building permission) / signature architect/civil engineer or other NOT needed
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	Control of the practice / legal restriction regarding practice (building permission) / permission drawing structural interventions
1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	Control of the practice / legal restriction regarding practice (building permission) / permission drawing technical interventions
2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	<b>Checkpoint 1: building permits/general regulation</b>
1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	Control of the practice / concerning competitions / specific interior architecture
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Control of the practice / concerning competitions / general design (interior architects invited)
1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	<b>Checkpoint 2: competitions</b>
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Copyright regulations
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<b>Checkpoint 3: copyright</b>
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Control of the practice / license to establish a business (ministry/taxes/business registry)
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<b>Checkpoint 4: licensing</b>
1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0,5	1	0	1	1	0	Control of the practice / mandatory liability insurance to practice
0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Control of the practice / mandatory liability insurance to join organization
1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0,5	2	0	1	1	0	<b>Checkpoint 5: liability insurance</b>
5	5	6	5	6	8	6	6	7	7,5	8	0	6	6	6	<b>Total: control of the practice</b>
6	6	6	6	7	11	6	7	10	11	8	7	6	6	7	<b>Total: legislation (n=12)</b>
50	50	50	46	58	92	46	58	83	88	63	58	50	50	58	<b>Total: legislation (100%)</b>

Figure 26:  
LEGISLATION  
BINARY MODEL



## 7.0. Territoriality and a wall of laws

Before addressing the sub-elements in the binary model for legislation, a few nuances are in order. Within this legislation chapter, the discussion on the binary variable is quite short since it speaks for itself. However, this small introductory sub-chapter will summarize the main ambitions and impediments.

During the course of this research, many comments and suggestions were made, alluding to many different local problems. It would be impossible, within the limits of this kind of research, to address all of those problems individually. However, the main thread can be summarized in the concept of **territoriality**, which underlines the way in which legal advancements can also be impediments to further professionalization. Territoriality has two aspects: regulation and competencies.

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*“At the moment it’s a **big wall in the administration** [which] is not possible to trespass. It’s a very incredible situation.”*

*Teresa CASAS (Spain)*

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### Physical territoriality

Regarding regulations, Europe is famous for its wide variety of customs and rules, and simultaneously for its universal and supranational regulatory framework (through the EU). However, by zooming in on nations, one often finds that there are different rules for different regions. As already discussed in the section on discordant building regulations (cf. supra), this may even exist in an enhanced form, especially in federal states like Germany (*Bundesländer*), Switzerland (cantons) and Austria.

This notion of “territory” also has a deeper meaning within the regional regulatory framework. In legislation, specificities regarding the space of operation for the interior architect are continuously absent from legal texts. For example, in Slovakia, interior designers can work in spaces up to 300m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>247</sup> However, there is no elaboration on how they can use their competencies. Building laws, as in most of Europa, are centered on the role of the “spiders in the web:”<sup>248</sup> the architect, the civil engineer, or in the case of Sweden, the constructor. Lastly, in many countries, such as Austria<sup>249</sup> and Estonia,<sup>250</sup> no building permit is needed for interventions in spaces that are smaller than 15m<sup>2</sup> or 20m<sup>2</sup> respectively. In most cases, building permits are not required for smaller interventions that do not deal with structures but focus solely on decoration and furnishing (cf. supra/terminology), as in Austria, France,<sup>251</sup> the

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<sup>247</sup> Focus group: SLOVAKIA, 15 May 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>248</sup> Focus group: SWEDEN, 5 June 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>249</sup> For more information, see questionnaire practice/organization (Austria): “everyone has its own regulations. But in common buildings starting from 15m<sup>2</sup> has to be permitted and also changes on existing buildings if you change structure, facade, public or commercial usage. Plans has to be signed by architect, civil engineer or interior architect or building-company; IA are just allowed for their field - so mostly for internal changes and smaller adaptations on the building. But in doubtful contexts it depends on the authority if they accept IA as planners or not. ”

<sup>250</sup> For more information, see questionnaire practice/organization Slovakia.

<sup>251</sup> Pascal Bertrand, email of July 2023; “In most cases a building permit must be signed by an architect. In some cases (small surfaces, interior renovation, etc.) an architect’s signature is not



Netherlands and Finland.<sup>252</sup> In these countries, the clients themselves can sign building permit documents.

Sometimes, however, building permits have nothing to do with size, but rather with the nature of the changes that are made. For example, in Norway, building permits are issued for changes in construction, in the use of a building (e.g. residential to commercial), etc. Lastly, in all of these cases, one needs the signature of any professional within the building industry **except** the interior architect.<sup>253</sup>

### Competence territoriality

Regarding competencies, it is clear that, in Europe, there are many different rules for signing locally-determined building regulations. For example, in Estonia, Finland and Austria, interior architects can sign building permits but only in special cases.<sup>254</sup> In Estonia and Austria, they can only do this if the interior architect has the necessary certifications from bodies such as the Ministry of Economics or the Chamber of Engineers/Architects.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, in some cases, for example in the German speaking parts of Switzerland, people can sign building permits from the age of 18. Of course, one should keep in mind that these permits do not concern extensive structural work or the foundation/building of new structures altogether. This relates back to the idea of safety, which plays a pivotal role in building regulations (cf. supra HSW). One could argue that this is most explicit in Estonia, where building permits, and general regulations regarding the building industry, are hierarchized and categorized in terms of safety. Again, as mentioned above, if there is no apparent risk of harm or to life, permits are not issued. It is important to note that these issues of safety only concern physical harm and do not address mental or psychological health – which is central in the anthropocentric profession that is interior architecture. Furthermore, it is important to point out that, in Estonia, one can practice as an interior architect perfectly well, without ever having to sign a building permit: “a lot of work for non-qualified or like legislatively: non-qualified people and you can really possibly I think have a very flourishing professional career for your whole life without ever needing this qualified title. It really depends on the work you do and this again it depends on the idea of is safety concerned or not.”<sup>256</sup> Significantly, the interior architect, in Estonia, is sometimes seen as a part-time architect. This again points to the in-betweenness of interior architecture and its pragmatic tensions with the architect. Furthermore, as mentioned above, changes in building regulations that

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required. So the client himself can sign the documents. The signature of an interior architect is not an obligation. The Direction de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Ministry of Culture, 4 rue de Valois 75001 Paris.”

<sup>252</sup> Kees Spanjers, “Crossing Borders Report,” ECIA Research 2003; “building permit required for interior alterations and exterior alterations, but not for alterations without structural work and interior furnishings.”

<sup>253</sup> Mona Lise Lien, email of July 2023.

<sup>254</sup> Lars Rähä, email August 2023; “Interiors architects in Finland can apply for building permits. Depending on the project and the location of the project, regulations may vary. With the degree, it is possible to apply for a permit regarding renovations and small, insignificant buildings. For new builds and larger projects an architect is usually required. There is a possibility for interior architects to attend a separate course that when successfully performed, results in the right to apply for any building permits.”

<sup>255</sup> For more information on the denomination of Engineer Interior Architect Bureaus, see [https://wien.arching.at/ziviltechnikerinnen/berufsfelder/berufsfeld\\_architektinnen.html](https://wien.arching.at/ziviltechnikerinnen/berufsfelder/berufsfeld_architektinnen.html). For more information on “free drawing offices” (non-engineering interior architecture/carpentry), see <https://www.wko.at/branchen/gewerbe-handwerk/gewerbliche-dienstleister/zeichenbueros1.html>.

<sup>256</sup> Ville Lausmäe in focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.



affect architects or constructors also affect the interior architect - again, due to its in-between nature. In Norway, for example, building permits used to be issued by local approval. However, in 2016, this right was transposed to central approval.<sup>257</sup> According to experts, this is detrimental to both the architect and the interior architect. Despite this apparent decline in legal comfort, some progress has been made concerning the chain of professionals in the building industry (cf. supra). In Malta, for example, arrangements are being made to license the contractors, in line with the licensed architects and engineers. Through this development, interior designers have the prospect of working within a regulated field – keeping pace with other professions, instead of “lagging behind” (cf. supra).

### Legal impediments

Legal regulations can thus be a positive catalyst in the professionalization process of interior architecture. However, they can also constitute professional impediments. For example, in the Netherlands this is visible in two ways. First, launching a PhD is impeded by many things, including the legal title protection of the interior architect. At TU Delft, efforts were made to launch a PhD in interior architecture. Given that TU Delft is a typical architectural engineering institution, the doctoral graduates would hold both the title of interior architect and of architect. In other words, there was a conflict between the power of the architect bodies and the practice. Furthermore, chambers of architects often cultivate an environment in which interior architects cannot fully develop, or create a stalemate in which interior architects try not to antagonize architects at the risk of losing their acquired rights.<sup>258</sup> According to the authority on these matters - the Bureau Architectenregister (Architect Registry) - this could not work in practice. Second, in every single ECIA affiliated country, there is a constant tension and lack of clarity surrounding the benefits of entering the national interior association. This is especially the case in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, where special bodies oversee the legal use of the protected interior architect title, because, after all, what is the added value for interior architects of becoming members of the national organization (a paid service) if it does not control the use of the legally protected title? Of course, there are many sides to this provocative question. However, it is clear that legal validation and authorization are not in the hands of the national organization, but of the bodies for architects and/or engineers.

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*“It is a very diverse profession, but it is also very much made by the limitations. I think the restrictions that there are in terms of regulations, I'm not talking about the architect title, but especially in the field of building regulations, but also all kinds of other things such as the furnishing of catering establishments or the furnishing of hospitals, or healthcare buildings. That kind of regulation is different in every country and sets great requirements that interior architects simply cannot meet.”*

*Kees SPANJERS (The Netherlands)*

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<sup>257</sup> See preliminary study 2021 and focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>258</sup> This stalemate is strongly felt in Austria where the very influential chambers of architecture, economics and engineering limit interior architecture's institutionalization and professionalization through protectionist measures (focus group Austria).



In addition to the legal-administrative impediments, the abundance of regulation also hinders further professionalization. This is seen in the way that discordant building regulations interact with the need for certification and licensing through many different bodies (as in Austria). A regulatory framework is also present in Estonia. However, one should note that:

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*“[There] is a lot of work for (...) non-qualified people and you can really possibly I think have a very **flourishing professional career for your whole life without ever needing this qualified title.**”*

*Ville LAUSMÄE (Estonia)*

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These impediments to further professionalization in legal terms was addressed by different experts and through various channels. In Spain, they speak figuratively of a legal “wall” which they cannot penetrate or climb over.<sup>259</sup> As mentioned previously, the title of technical decorator (*decorador*) is legally protected, as opposed to the academic title of the interior designer. By not being defined in legal terms, interior designers have a hard time acquiring professional and public recognition, and exercising the competencies and responsibilities that go with it. This is an example of how legislation remains absent where educational and organizational progress is prevented by this legal wall which blocks the path toward further professionalization. The question is: should laws be established before or after a problem arises? The answer to this age-old question falls outside the scope of this report, but further discussion about these matters is highly encouraged within the field of interior architecture.

The EU is often described as a zone in which people, goods and services circulate freely. However, this does not always imply or lead to universal recognition. It is precisely this nuance which remains absent – a possible instrument for breaking the “wall”: supranational recognition of the profession could, not only counter terminological obscurity, but also help to define the competencies of interior architects in terms of regulatory (cf. discordant regional building regulations) and competence-oriented (architect vs. interior architect) territoriality.

Even though deregulation has been high on the European agenda, it seems that additional regulatory frameworks are needed for the professionalization of interior architecture. Significantly, these regulations should, in the first place, be aimed at recognition and not competence delineation, otherwise, situations may arise in which *a baker would not be able to bake bread because of certain clauses in certain laws.*<sup>260</sup>

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*“For small country, there's a lot of rules and regulations.”*

*Alistair Neil HARKESS (Austria)*

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<sup>259</sup> Focus group: SPAIN, 10 May 2023, 13:00-14:30. MS Teams.

<sup>260</sup> Paraphrased excerpt from focus group: Austria.



*“A baker could not make a cake.”*

*Martin THÖRNBLÖM (Austria)*

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### Legal title regulation

We have already indicated which countries have specific legal title regulation for the interior architect / interior designer (or even the decorator) and which countries do not. Legal title protection creates a professional environment in which the user can hire professionals they know have a competent skill set.<sup>261</sup> Subsequently, this also means that the title holder can make certain interventions that may not be done by everyone. In most European countries, however, the title is not protected. This means that anyone can call themselves an interior architect.

It is interesting how educational titles contribute to the appointment and recognition of professional interior designers. This occurs in two ways. On the one hand, there is the academic title that can be held to inform both professionals and the public that one has received academic training. In Spain, this has an additional dimension since the academic title of interior designer is an instrument to be used against the legally protected title of technical decorator (who has less training). Furthermore, the academic title can be used to indicate that one has followed academic or very extensive training, as in the use of the designation architect - interior architect. On the other hand, an educational title can also be used by way of institution designations. This is especially the case in Switzerland where graduates can use the title corresponding to the type of educational institution from which they graduated - indicating at what level and with what focus they graduated. In a way, these are weak alternatives to enforcing public recognition - which could be cashed in if universal and legal recognition were granted.

Title protection can have a legal, academic or institutional dimension. However, some organizations provide a fourth way in which the title of interior architect can be used as a quality label (this was mentioned briefly earlier). It is not always clear in which cases the members of an organization use the title of the organization. In some cases, it is very clear (as in the Norwegian NIL organization). In about 54% of cases, a member can add the organizational title to their professional title of interior architect. It is also striking how countries with legal title protection have an organizational title for their members in 100% of the cases. Again, a distinction should be made between the national ECIA affiliated organization for interior architects and the chamber/register where one must be registered as a professional to use the legally protected title (as in Germany and the Netherlands).

In the binary models, we focus on legal and organizational title protection. Title protection was only noted if it concerned national protection (excluding the very specific Geneva model, cf. supra). Spain was awarded “0.5” points because, according to the European Directive, it does have protection with regard to interior design. However, on closer inspection and in consultation with experts, this was found to be a protection of the technical decorator (cf. supra). It is also clear in the binary model of legislation that the legal title situation of architects is taken into account. It should be stressed that this in no way counts in the total

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<sup>261</sup> In many instances (including in the USA), HSW issues are central in legal title protection regulations. Moreover, HSW is often only defined in its physical nature, downplaying the influence of the interior architect on these matters.



degree of professionalization of the interior architecture situation. Still, it is interesting to show the presence/absence of title and professional protection for architects. In 67% of cases, the architect is protected by law by both title and practice. What is more, in countries where the title of interior architect is protected (which, as mentioned, is only in countries where one speaks of interior architecture and not interior design), the title of architect is also protected in 100% of cases. This has to do with the way in which the title of interior architect often owes its protection to having architect in its title, which is protected. In Iceland, the interior architect is protected by title in the same law as the protection of many sister disciplines such as architecture, landscape architecture, graphic design and about seven other professions.<sup>262</sup>

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*"Now it was the case that in Europe there was a call to make less regulation, (...) legislation-wide and our prime minister, who sat at the table and said that we are going to work with that and that is. It then started energetically to see what the various professions could do for us in the Netherlands. And he then thought that **[title protection] for taxidermists and interior architects was a bit nonsensical.**"<sup>263</sup>*

*Kees SPANJERS (The Netherlands)*

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### Control of practice (building permissions)

In most instances, the interior architect needs a signature from a certified architect or civil engineer in order to put their plans into practice. This is especially the case for structural interventions. As explained above, these regulations exist in a variety of forms across Europe. In almost all cases, interior architects, like many unauthorized persons, are able to draw plans for both structural and technical interventions. However, interior architects are usually not involved in the execution and elaboration of those plans. Although they do have the necessary competences - and other professionals in the construction industry know this (cf. supra recognition/chain building professionals) - they are only able to sign building permits in a few cases. In the Netherlands, for example, and in some parts of Switzerland, anyone over the age of 18 can sign a building permit. Sometimes, a specific license or diploma is required. Of course, this must be nuanced: it is never possible to build a completely new construction just like that. In some cases, as already indicated above, building permits are "layered" and the interior architect can sign building permits in some cases but not in others - often based on the safety risk involved in the building practice.

In most cases, interior architects are not authorized to sign building permits.<sup>264</sup> The help of architects or civil engineers is often sought for this purpose. In some cases, however, they

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<sup>262</sup> In Iceland, interior architects are protected by title through Act No 8/1996 on the Authorization of Several Professional Titles of Specialists in Technical and Design Faculties: Chartered Engineers (*verkfræðingar*), Engineers (*tækknifræðingar*), Architects (*arkitektar*), Constructing Architects (*byggingafræðingar*), Furniture and Interior Architects (Furniture and Interior Designers), or part of this title, (*húsgagna- og innanhússarkitektar (húsgagna- og innanhússhönnuðir*), Technicians (*iðnfræðingar*), Landscape Architects (Landscape Designers) (*landslagsarkitektar (landslagshönnuðuðir*), Planners (*skipulagsfræðingar*), Electrical Specialists (*raffræðingar*), Computer Scientists (*tölvunarfræðingar*), Graphic Designers (*grafískir hönnuðir*).

<sup>263</sup> Translated from Dutch.

<sup>264</sup> In Norway, interior architects are not permitted to sign building permissions. These matters are organized by the Direktoratet for byggkvalitet /DiBK (The Directorate for Building Quality).



are recognized as competent enough. In one situation, anybody over the age of 18 can apply for a building permit (this is the case in the Netherlands and in most Swiss cantons except for Tessin and Vaud).<sup>265</sup> In instances where interior architects are permitted to sign or stamp building permits they often have to undergo additional certification.

As already explained in the introduction to this section, building permits are only issued in certain cases. Suffice to say that the interior architect is hardly ever allowed to sign building permits when they deal with structure. In countries such as Slovakia<sup>266</sup> and Austria,<sup>267</sup> one needs additional certification and the title of “engineer [architect]” in order to sign some permits. However, it should be noted that in these countries, as well as in Estonia, people can work as interior architects without being able to sign building permits – and still earn a living from it.

### Competitions

In just about every country, it is possible to participate in competitions. Today, with the increased focus on adaptive reuse, there is more attention to interior design. The latter is therefore included in general architecture competitions. However, this does not mean that it is equally beneficial to participate as an interior architect everywhere. If we look at European tenders, for example, small interior studios often cannot afford to compete on their own.<sup>268</sup> This has to do with larger firms having more resources to compete with. Since, in most cases, standalone interior studios are quite small, the interior architect is excluded from competing. On the other hand, the interior designer is in some ways also excluded by protectionist measures.

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*The [architects/engineers organization] is not always to be seen as a friendly big brother.”*

*Silke EBNER (Switzerland)*

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<sup>265</sup> Dominic Haag-Walthert (for more information, see also focus group: Switzerland): “In most Cantons every citizen can sign building permissions, legally (except Canton Tessin and Canton Vaud). In Tessin they have their own accreditation organization (OTIA) as well in Vaud (register at the regional administration). There are negotiations at the moment to harmonize it nationally, on the basis of the definitions of the professional chamber (Schweizer Register der Fachleute in den Bereichen Ingenieurwesen, Architektur und Umwelt)”, via <https://reg.ch/de/>; Kees Spanjers, email of July 2023 (for more information, see also focus group: the Netherlands).

<sup>266</sup> Dušan Kočlík, email of July 2023: “title ‘Ing. Arch.’ It is exclusive in our country and can only be obtained by a graduate of an Architectural or Civil Engineering school. This person has the right and competence to sign construction documentation. Degree Ing.arch. it is protected similarly to the title of doctor of medicine.”

<sup>267</sup> Neil Harkess, email of July 2023: “only registered Architects and Consulting Engineers who are registered at <https://www.arching.at/home.html> and Building Companies <https://www.deinbaumeister.at/#kompetenzen> can sign building permits ‘Carte blanche’. There is also the possibility to form an Ingenieur Büro for Innenarchitektur in Austria. The is part of the Wirtschaftskammer structure.”

<sup>268</sup> This was especially elaborated on (cf. European tenders) in the Dutch focus group.

In Switzerland, for example, the Chamber of Architects (SIA: *schweizerischer ingenieur- und architektenverein*) has ensured that the interior designer is not included in the predetermined codes that stipulate which professionals have access to competitions. A similar situation was mentioned in a Belgian case:

*If we look at, for example, competitions, which they're enrolling very much, they always ask for, for example, structural engineer, landscape architecture, but they seldomly asked for an interior architect. (...) So within architecture, interior architecture isn't perceived as additional quality within the team, but predominantly seen as some something that they can do themselves.*

*Wim Van der Vurst (Belgium)*

There are often competitions for design and architecture, but the binary models do not indicate whether they have a specific segment for interior architecture. In many cases this is completely absent or undefined. Especially in public assignments, small design studios are often unable to compete with larger companies.

### Copyright<sup>269</sup>

Copyright regulations vary greatly across the continent. It is also worth noting that true copyright regulations are usually reserved for highly artistic or unique value. Even though

Copyright	Sketches and drawings	Complete work	Depiction complete work	Alteration complete work	Other
Austria					
Belgium					
Estonia					
Finland					
France					
Germany					
Iceland					
Italy					
Malta					
Netherlands					
Norway					
Slovakia					
Spain					
Sweden					
Switzerland					

Figure 27: often empty boxes 'in the colom of 'othe' in the questionnaire

most countries have a copyright regulatory system, in practice, it is seldom applied. These matters are also often settled within a contract.<sup>270</sup>

Furthermore, some countries have a specific set of rules by which they regulate copyright matters. In Malta, for example: "When it comes to copyright protection in the sphere of

<sup>269</sup> This variable was especially chosen on the basis of (and inspired by) Spanjers's "Crossing Borders Report" (2003).

<sup>270</sup> For more information, see Norwegian (practice/organization) questionnaire.



architectural work, the author shall have the right to authorise or otherwise prevent the erection of any building reproducing the whole or a substantial part of the original work. Interestingly, however, copyright does not afford protection with respect to the reconstruction, in the same style as the original, of a building to which that copyright relate.”<sup>271</sup> Another unique example can be found in Spain, where copyright protection “can be contracted by each professional, but it is not usually found in interior design. In Product Design if it is necessary to have this protection In interior design, architecture, engineering what is established is the ‘Project Visa’, which is obtained in the Professional Organization after passing through the control of a commission. The ‘Visa’ contemplates the registration of the order, registration of plans, budget of the work and certification of completion of work. This gives authenticity to the project both for the administration and for the clients.”<sup>272</sup>

*“There is some kind of copyright regulation, but it's really weak; even for the architect. You have to be a very famous architect.”*

*Martin THÖRNBLÖM (Austria)*

### Business licensing and registration

This specific variable concerns business licensing and registration. Of course, one could argue that the additional licensing practices to establish additional rights regarding building permits (like in Slovakia and Austria) can also be seen as “licensing”. However, here we predominantly mean the way in which firms and studios have to register in order to legally work in the professional realm and market. In all cases, licensing acts as additional rights and responsibilities and is never the sole certification needed to practice as a professional.

### Liability insurance (and the gateway to responsibility)

Liability insurance is concerned with both the safety and the responsibility involved in the realization of projects. In Chapter I we saw that building regulations often have to do with

Country	IA legally liable for damage?	Planning & Design	Execution	Other	Regulation regarding liability insurance	Liability insurance obligatory to practice	Liability insurance obligatory to join org?
Austria							
Belgium							
Estonia							
Finland							
France							
Germany							
Iceland							
Italy							
Malta							
Netherlands							
Norway							
Slovakia							
Spain							
Sweden							
Switzerland							

Figure 28: liability regulation in ECIA affiliated countries

<sup>271</sup> For more information, see Maltese (practice/organization) questionnaire.

<sup>272</sup> For more information, see Spanish (practice/organization) questionnaire.



safety and the associated responsibility. In that respect, it is striking how rarely liability insurance is required to enter the practice as an interior architect. In some rare cases (13%),<sup>273</sup> the member of a national organization is required to take out liability insurance, but in most cases this is not required. Of course, liability can also be regulated in individual contracts, where organizations often vouch to provide further legal advice (for more information, see practice/organization: services).

As aforementioned, interior architecture is not always recognized as a discipline or profession that deals with HSW issues. Consequently, it is often assumed that the interior architecture profession does not involve many responsibilities. Of course, this pseudo correlation does not correspond with reality. It is also argued that additional responsibility can lead to a higher degree of respect, recognition and overall professionalization. In a few rare cases, liability insurance is required to practice as an interior architect. Within this logic, obligatory liability insurance is hardly ever a prerequisite for joining the national organization. However, most interior architecture organizations recognize the value and importance of liability insurance. Usually, insurance matters are included in individual contracts.

## 8. Axial analysis

Throughout this chapter, it has become increasingly clear that both the discipline and the profession of interior architecture suffer from incomplete recognition. In this sub-chapter, the three research axes will be calibrated against each other in an axial coding (cf. introduction) analysis.

Before assessing the situation, it should be stressed that these axes should be seen separately. In this section, they are analysed together, however, in percentage terms they cannot simply be compared since the variables in one axis (such as education) can be much more numerous than in another. When there are more variables, there are also more possibilities to detect absences ("0" in the binary model) and to integrate them into the percentage of professionalization.

### Education x organization/practice

Needless to say, education and the professional field stand together like a tandem. Yet, not every graduate goes through life as an interior architect. Those who do roll into it, often do so after studying interior architecture, architecture, design or another course. In many cases, a professional works on the strength of their own professional experience, without any education. National organizations, according to ECIA guidelines, can therefore admit members based on practical experience, where one and a half years of practical experience compensates for one year of education. It should also be noted that education does not end at graduation. As mentioned before, lifelong learning is an essential part of the professionalization process. For those with an educational background in architectural studies, lifelong learning is in a sense a call back to school, while for others (including those with an educational background) it can be a moment of reflection and further training.

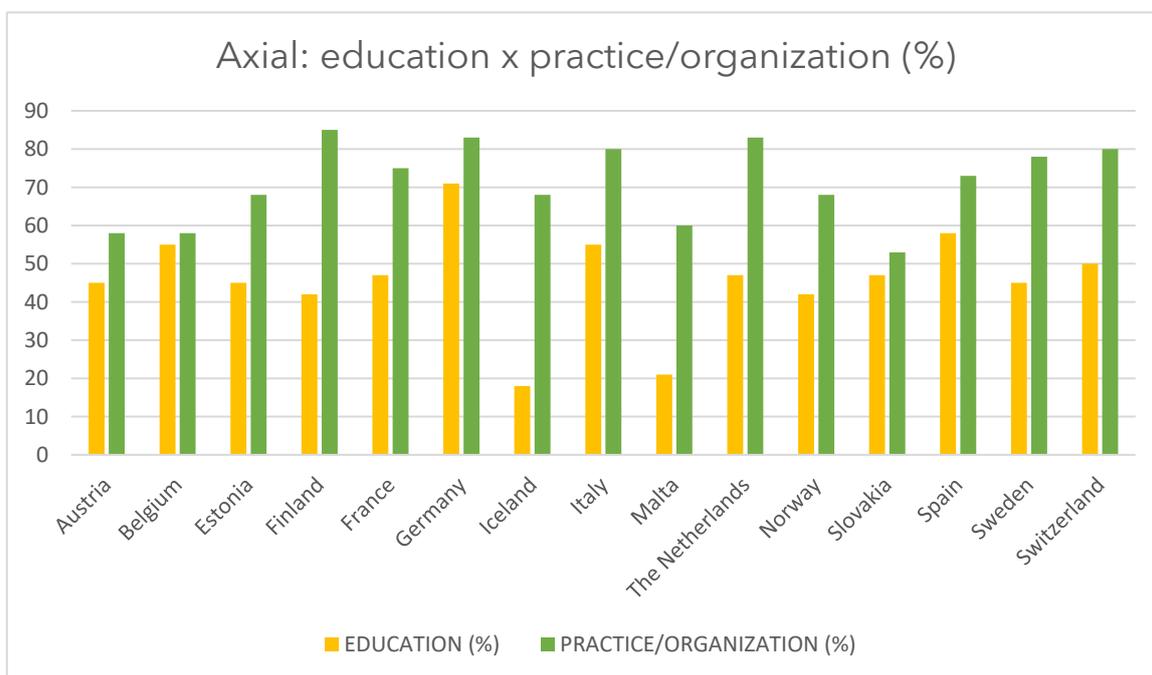
The ambiguity associated with how to increase the number of graduates and the degree of expertise has already been discussed in previous sections. The axial connection between education and practice clearly show that both an increase in both can lead to more intense professionalization. First, regarding the increase in graduates: by also allowing less-experienced bachelor's graduates on the market, more professionals would be recognized by

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<sup>273</sup> This percentage comes from the questionnaire data.

the public. The job would perhaps no longer be seen as something that is done on the side or which can be done by “anyone”, even your “female neighbour” (cf. supra). Second, regarding the increase in expertise and the further construction of an interior architecture body of knowledge (including PhD possibilities): forming highly trained experts would not only lead to further specialization of the interior discipline, but, due to its in-between nature, would also ensure that other disciplines could benefit from research breakthroughs and further competency definitions, since the interior discipline is somewhat of an interdisciplinary nexus. A third thing to keep in mind is the visibility of the organizations through educational institutions. In Belgium, for example, the AinB mainly hosts Flemish interior architects since the French-speaking (Wallonian) interior architects are difficult to reach. Many hypotheses can be made about this, such as the fact that Wallonia does not offer a university program in interior architecture. In this way, the type of institution might also contribute to the way in which the national organization is mentioned, perceived or simply known.

These logical hypotheses contrast with the present situation of incomplete or failed recognition of both the discipline and the profession. This, as alluded to throughout this report, is not due to the failed self-definition of interior architects or the ambiguity that clouds their area of expertise. Even other professionals in the building industry often recognize the interior architect’s competences – especially if they work together on a regular basis.<sup>274</sup> In other words, it is public recognition that remains far too low.



As illustrated above, higher educational variety does not necessarily lead to a higher organizational degree of professionalization. From the table, we can see that Finland, Germany and the Netherlands have the highest degree of organization professionalization. The Finnish case is self-explanatory: SIO (the interior architect organization) is the biggest branch of the umbrella design organization Ornamo. They can make use of many different services and a huge platform due to that variety of disciplines and professionals that fall

<sup>274</sup> Focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.



under the umbrella. But then there is Germany (bdia + BAK) and the Netherlands (BNI + BA). It is no coincidence that these are also countries that offer legal title protection, overseen by the Chamber or Register of Architects. Interestingly, Germany also scores the highest on education. This is mainly due to the variety of institutions where you can follow interior architecture in Germany and the variety of educational levels (bachelor's: three or four years; master's: one or two years). The next in line are Italy and Spain, countries where the term interior *design* is used. Not only do these countries have a large number (quantitative) of schools where you can follow interior design, but they are also popular destinations in Erasmus programs.

It is worth noting that Iceland and Malta score the lowest on education. This is mainly due to their geographic size and isolation (being islands). Nevertheless, Malta has a relatively similar score on the axial relation between education and organization; Iceland stands out due to the high degree of organization. Again, like Germany and Netherlands, Iceland is a country where the title is protected within the law that protects the title of architects. However, it serves to note that the presence ("1" in the binary model) of certain variables in Iceland are only an approximation as they are largely absent from the qualitative process (questionnaire and focus group) of this research.

The connection between education and practice/organization may seem obvious at first. People can be trained as interior architects in various institutions all across Europe. However, the questionnaires and focus group discussions clearly show that having trained in interior architecture does not necessarily mean that one becomes a professional. This is also due to the way in which the profession is misrepresented: students often go into the training with false expectations, and when they become professionals it is unclear how far they can or may use their expertise. In short, a higher degree of practice/organization professionalization does not imply a high educational professionalization rate (or vice versa). What is clear, however, is that there is far more fluctuation in the educational part than in the organizational one.

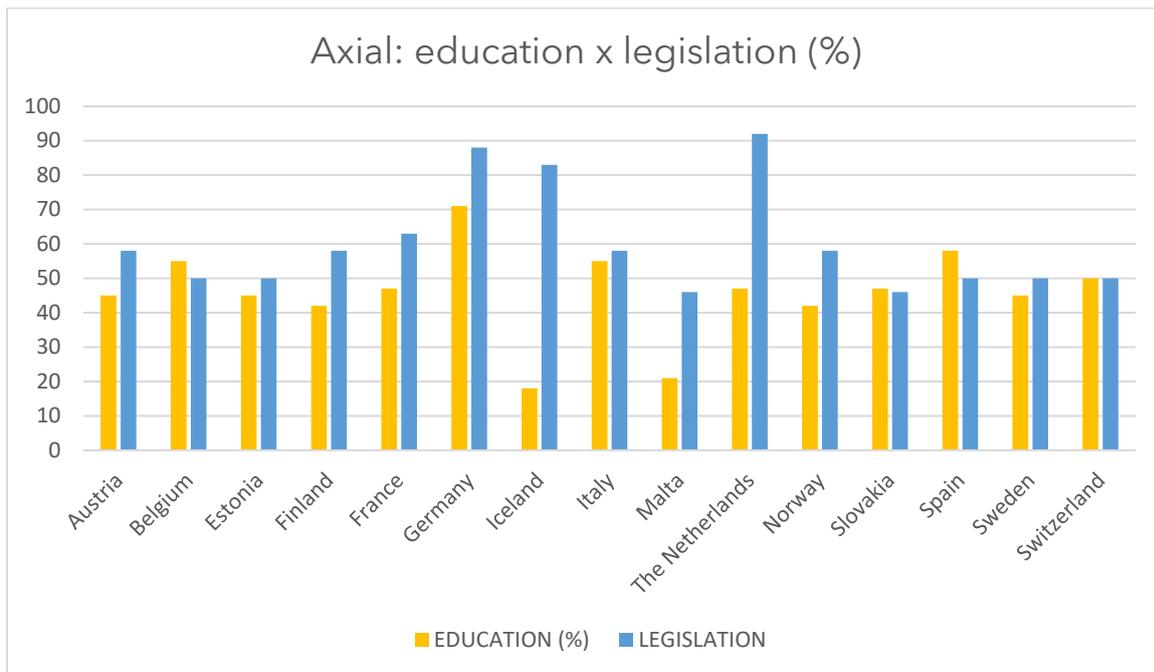
### Education x legislation

Obviously, legislation and education are inherently linked (also on a supranational level: e.g. Bologna agreements). In addition to official governmental arrangements such as academic accreditation, the connection between education and legislation is also found in the way the latter allows the former to, in a sense, innovate or at least grow. For example, in just about all countries, only universities are allowed by law to issue doctoral positions. In this way, the body of knowledge and further research opportunities within the institutional fabric are hampered by the authorization that is enforced by law. In France, incidentally, this is done through so-called visas granted to educational institutions. Furthermore, government regulations can also have a direct impact on the number of students and consequently graduates. In Norway, for example, the government allocates a certain number of places to educational institutions, thus limiting them in that respect.

In addition to governmental influence on the educational framework, it was found that title protection influences the educational criteria for joining the professional field. To bear the title of interior architect in the Netherlands and Germany, the candidate must comply with several criteria of the body that oversees the title protection. Even though these bodies are also affiliated with ECIA, it should be stressed that the national organizations for interior architects do not offer the service of protecting the legal title. Above, it was argued that legal title protection leads to higher educational standards.



It is possible that through legislation, or even case law, competencies could be handed out to respective professionals. An antecedent can be found in Austria, where a case was filed deciding whether a professional architect was capable of laying a roof. Upon further analysis of the subjects taken and the general curriculum followed by the professional, it was eventually decided that he was indeed allowed to lay the roof because he had acquired the relevant technical skills at school. Without constantly taking cases to court, it would be interesting to establish the competencies from the beginning in a legal framework. Again, with a view to greater public and professional recognition.



The table above clearly shows that in almost all countries studied (80%), the degree of legislation is higher than that of education. Of course, this must be seen in its context and according to its variable nature. In the legislation framework, far fewer variables are implemented in the binary models. Furthermore, this axial coding does not necessarily analyse the interconnectedness between the frameworks, but rather relative to other situations. For example, it is clear that in countries where legal title protection is active, the degree of legislation is a lot higher in relation to the educational framework.

In short, most countries have an equal legislation-professionalization rate (ca. 50% - based on the binary model). However, there are clear precursors: precisely those countries in which the title is legally protected (within the same legal framework as the title protection of architects). Lastly, note how this leading legal position does not imply a leading educational position.

Only Belgium and Spain have a higher degree of educational professionalization as opposed to the legal equivalent. In the Belgian case, this is mostly attributable due to the presence of national PhD possibilities and the wide variety of institutions where one can follow interior programs.

Lastly, we can link back to lifelong learning. As mentioned previously, it is mainly architects who enjoy CPD programs. Note that these are also usually obligatory due to the fact that architects need to be constantly informed of new safety and health policies. In a sense, because of their legal embeddedness and correlation with HSW issues, architects are more



instructed and obliged to follow CPD programs. One could argue that, with recognition of the HSW focus within interior architecture, and thus legal definition, interior architects can also be seen as obliged to engage in lifelong learning practices.

### Organization/practice x legislation

Given that education and legislation are linked, the professional sphere is also characterized by an environment based on a legislative framework. However, as already shown - and now underlined - the profession of interior architect is often not given a specific or explicit interpretation in legal texts (cf. “wall of laws”, supra). Of course, this is not the case in countries where the title is legally protected. Similarly, it is clear that countries such as Germany and the Netherlands score very high on the legislative framework - legal title is therefore a variable that counts in the overall point distribution in this axis since it demonstrates a further entrenchment of the profession in official terms. However, it should be emphasized that legal anchoring does not directly correlate with a more favourable or accessible path towards further professionalization. We have already seen several examples of this, such as the PhD issue at TU Delft in the Netherlands. Concretely, legal title regulations benefit overall recognition but are not necessarily the main driver of further professionalization. Moreover, some claim<sup>275</sup> that by not having specific “chambers for interior architecture”, the profession can develop more broadly and separately. However, it should be noted that this supposed “freedom” is overshadowed by failed recognition, both professionally and publicly. Besides setting aside exclusive rights and obligations for those who bear it, title protection also amounts to a quality label. This form of competence recognition can also be achieved by holding the academic title<sup>276</sup> or the title given by the national organization for interior architects.<sup>277</sup> Regarding the latter, in some cases, the national organization is even licensed by the government to issue such certificates (for example, AIPi since January 2023).<sup>278</sup>

This axial connection in particular remains underdeveloped in the professional sphere. Even though all the national organizations lobby for further recognition (even where the title is legally protected), an overarching acknowledgment program is lacking. National ECIA affiliated organizations, being the representative bodies for professionals, students and academics, could become the “tip of the arrow”<sup>279</sup> of both the discipline and the profession by instigating a supranational recognition program.

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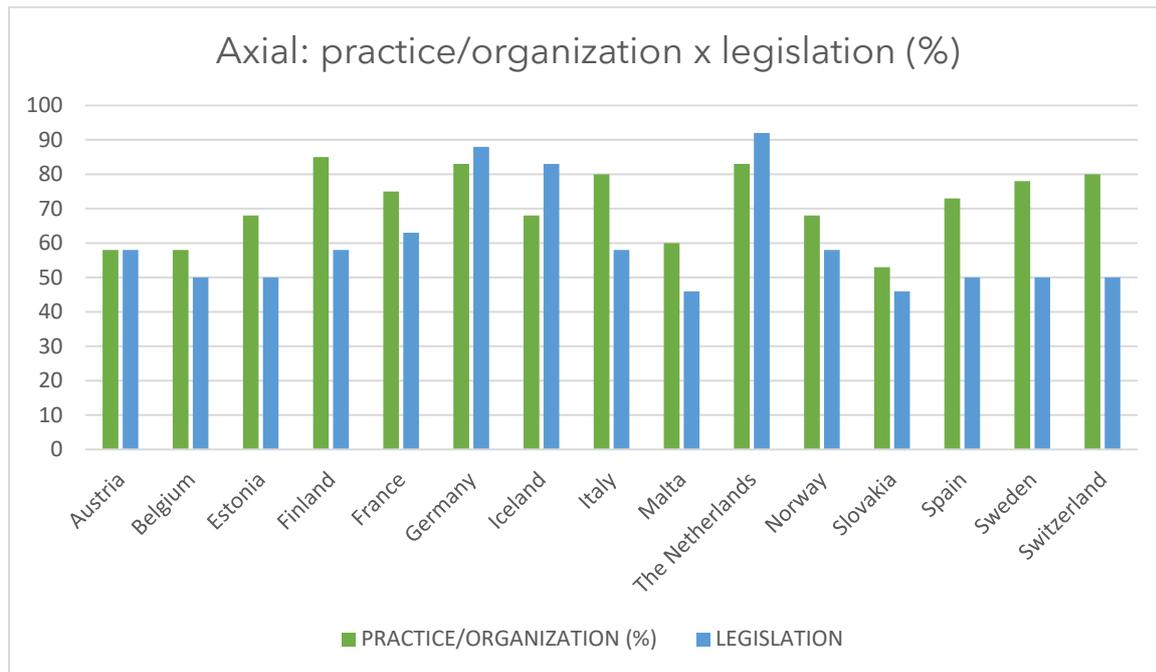
<sup>275</sup> Wim Van der Vurst in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>276</sup> For example, in Spain, interior designers can only use their academic title since only the title of technical decorator is protected by law.

<sup>277</sup> For example, by the VSI-ASAI, bdia and NIL.

<sup>278</sup> By being recognized, AIPi is obliged to work according to EQF guidelines, which include the organization and provision of lifelong learning possibilities.

<sup>279</sup> Mona Lise Lien in focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.



Unlike the axial coding between education and legislation, the degree of practice/organization was usually equal to (i.e. 80%) or higher than the degree of legislation. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that here, there is a mirror effect, as opposed to the educational x legislation framework; countries with legal title protection have a negative practice/organizational balance against the legislative framework. This can be for multiple reasons, such as the fact that the legal framework is heavily regulated and the national organization is not as advanced as the chamber/registry of architects that oversees the title.

### Summary/proposal: axial recognition matrix

The study shows that the three axes interact with each other on multiple levels. It is also clear that further debate and research regarding supranational recognition legislation is needed. The figure below shows that the legal axis does not work reciprocally with the other frameworks, unlike the other axes.

Where education and practice/organization bivalently interact with each other, legislation offers regulative frameworks but, as explained throughout this report, is not always susceptible to change or adaptation. The most explicit example of this is comes from Spain, where the legal title protection of the technical decorator impedes legal penetration of the interior architect / interior designer. Through intradisciplinary recognition (taught and communicated via education and made visible in the professional realm of the market) and public recognition (generated by the former), both education and practice/organization can push for legislative definition. This would lead to interdisciplinary recognition by attributing competence specificity to interior architecture – as opposed to its sister disciplines.

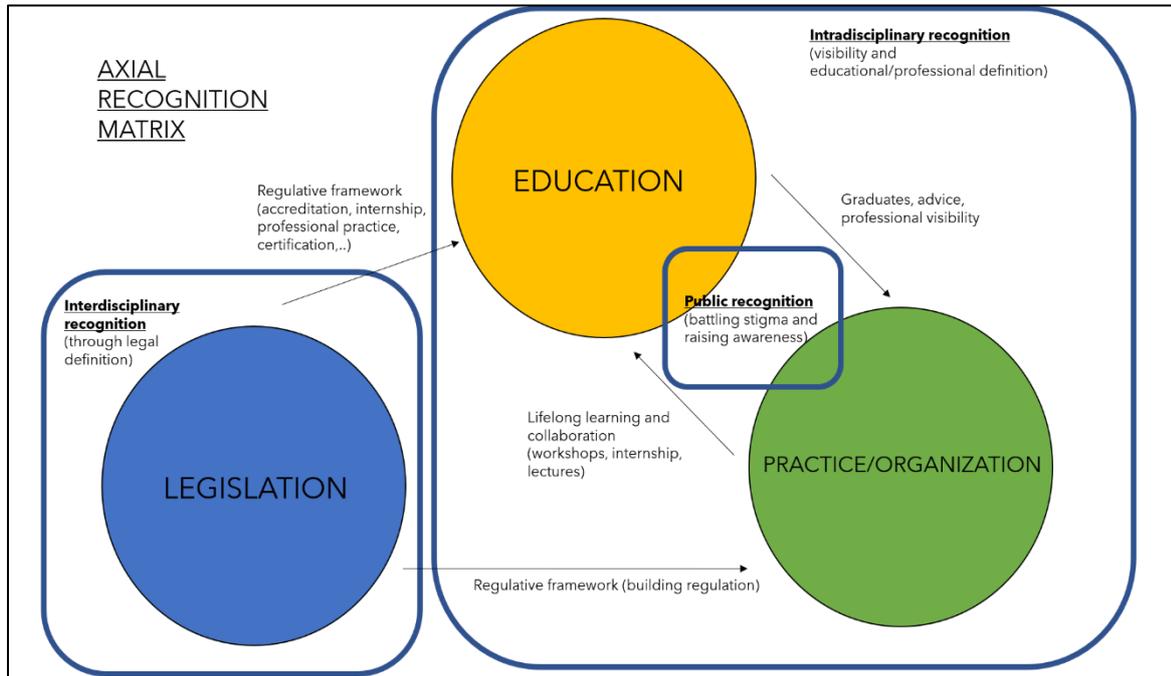


Figure 29: axial recognition matrix

# **CHAPTER III. ON AWARENESS**

**OR: THE ENVISIONED FUTURE OF A STIGMATIZED PROFESSION**



As mentioned in the introduction on the methodology, in focus groups, the moderator has the important task of empathizing, psychologizing and managing different emotions and perspectives. During the different phases of the research, it became clear that the misunderstanding of the discipline and profession had an overarching dimension on a socio-cultural level. In particular, it was found (especially in the focus interviews) that the stigmatization of the profession sparked a lot of discussion. Often the stigmatization or stereotyping of the profession was dismissed as being "out of date." Nevertheless, upon deeper probing, it emerged that there are very real and far-reaching perspectives associated with the imagined profession. This chapter will deal with the rate of perception and awareness. Note how this does not imply purely statistical research or exact numeric data.

## 9. Undeniable femininity

### 9.1. Female presence, male dominance

Within popular perception, interior design has always been associated with femininity. The number of women graduating from interior design courses in Europe have been outgrowing the male graduate population since the late 1970s (the vast majority of students tend now to be female (90:10)), yet the professional field of interior design is dominated by male practitioners (For Belgium, see Belis, a.o., 2014; De Vos, 2024).

WOMEN IN IA	Students	Teachers	Executives
Austria	Green	Pink	Pink
Belgium	Green	Pink	Pink
Estonia	Green	Pink	Pink
Finland	Green	Pink	Pink
France	Green	Green	Green
Germany	Green	Pink	Green
Iceland	Hatched	Hatched	Hatched
Italy	Green	Pink	Pink
Malta	Green	Pink	Pink
The Netherlands	Green	Pink	Pink
Norway	Green	Pink	Green
Slovakia	Green	Pink	Pink
Spain	Green	Pink	Green
Sweden	Green	Pink	Pink
Switzerland	Green	Pink	Pink

In almost every school, females represent the vast majority of students. In some cases, however, as in Finland, there was an estimated 50:50 ratio for interior design studies. As regards professors and teachers in interior design in Europe, females represent an estimated 50%, while program directors or department heads within an educational institution tend to be male.

In the professional field, it seems that most executive positions are also filled by men. Aside from this, there is the way in which the profession, like the discipline, is misunderstood by students, candidates and parents. Many expect to perform a job that can only be done at a desk or perhaps a drawing board, but the interior architect's profession is characterized by



hard physical labour and long hours. The fact that this can lead to excessive stress and even burnout remains, to a certain extent, unacknowledged. It was only in the Swedish focus group that this was recognized, along with the fact that it mainly affects women in the interior architecture profession:

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*“In Sweden, veterinarians and female architects or interior architects are the worst [concerning burnout]”*

*Tove SJÖBERG (Sweden)*

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Physical labour is mainly in evidence on construction sites. According to some experts, it is precisely there that women still suffer from excessive stigmatization and, to some extent, have to prove themselves more than men. Other experts claim that this is not the case and that women function in all segments at the highest level.<sup>280</sup> Yet the latter group also admits that there is a glass ceiling.<sup>281</sup>

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*“Man needs to be protected in zoo somewhere (...) because we see ‘too many’ women’s are going in our field.” - Jokingly*

*René BAĎURA (Slovakia)*

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This uneven distribution is visible all across Europe. However this was not always the case. In many countries, like Slovakia, students tend to be male. This could explain the dominant presence of men in the professional working space. Consequently, experts estimate that, in the future, many of these executive positions will be transferred to women, since they now represent the majority of students. In a way, there is a “hopeful” vision for the future, which is preached and promoted by many experts, both male and female. This is also visible in organizations. For example, it is estimated that in AIPi, around 60% of members are male while new candidate members are often female.

However, it should be observed that women, who have already “made it” in life, tend to play down the hard conditions in which a female professional has to build a career. Moreover, all the panel members of the focus groups were chosen on the basis of their expertise and knowledge, and not on the basis of their gender. A “hopeful” future can be endorsed by some, but in practice, this often coincides with the illusion of emancipation, in which a hopeful future is constantly projected into the future – and never reached. According to this view, female interior architects cannot be not fully liberated from the glass ceiling metaphor (cf. infra).

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<sup>280</sup> Thierry Conquet in focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams.

<sup>281</sup> Roseline Lepercq in focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams.

The fact that most students of interior architecture tend to be women does not mean that women (or men) know what to expect in the program. Again, this has to do with the public recognition of the profession. In many countries, building sites, which are still male-

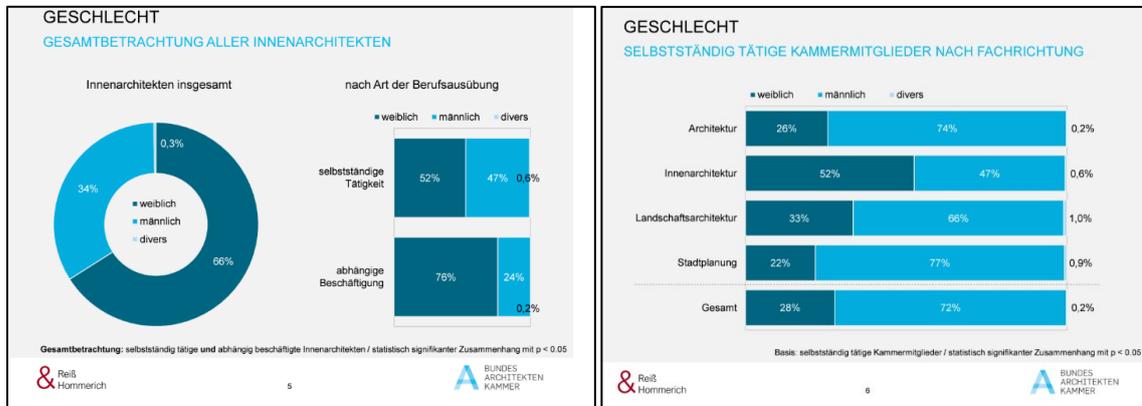


Figure 30: numbers from BAK commissioned research via Pia Döll.

dominated, are considered a rough environment for women. The graphs (fig. 33) illustrate the German situation and how interior architecture is the only architectonic (and protected) discipline that has a majority of female practitioners in the field.

The way in which the profession is often defined as a job that is done by designing and styling at a desk, sidelines the practice-based competencies and tasks that need to be done. In a way, women need to work harder and prove their competence “twice as much”<sup>282</sup> to play on the same field as men.

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*“If you go to the [construction] site and you have a building meeting (...) I'm convinced [that] for a woman; **they must prove themselves twice as much** as professionals than men to be accepted.”*

*Martin THÖRNBLUM (Austria)*

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Furthermore, there seems to be disagreement regarding the position of *women in power*. To give an example: in the French focus group,<sup>283</sup> it was argued by one expert that, in practice, women are often excluded from high-level projects, while another expert disagreed with this. However, there seemed to be agreement regarding the overall *glass ceiling* metaphor.

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*“So we have lots of women, but when you go up (...) you [don't have] lots of women who do high level [work/projects]. But is the same for other professions. It's not only [the] interior architect (...). We call that in France **plafond de verre (glass ceiling)**”.*

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<sup>282</sup> Martin Thörnblom in focus group: AUSTRIA, 31 May 2023, 16:30-18:00. MS Teams.

<sup>283</sup> Thierry Conquet vs. Roseline Lepercq in focus group: FRANCE, 1 June 2023, 10:30-12:00. MS Teams.



*Roseline LEPERCQ (France)*

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Even though most countries believe that this “gender” issue/disparity is rather outdated, many believe that more women in higher positions would lead to increased humility,<sup>284</sup> empathy<sup>285</sup> and a non-toxic culture.<sup>286</sup> This would also mark the culmination of years in which women have stood on the “barricades” to further develop the interior architecture discipline.<sup>287</sup> Furthermore, according to some scholars, exploiting and supporting female presence and virtues in the interior architecture discipline could prove a better alternative than the current position of “inferiority” (both professionally and gender wise) imposed by the “patriarchy”.<sup>288</sup>

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*“As soon as we have the building project leader on the building site, if it's a female engineer, it [would become] much better actually, that's my experience (...) because the traditional, **masculine ways do always define the hierarchy** all the time. ‘Who is above who? Who has the most power?’ and it gets a bit ... **You waste a lot of time** when you should be doing things instead of playing with this social structures.”*

*Torsten HILD (Sweden)*

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Interestingly, though, these virtues are often juxtaposed to “male-perceived” virtues like financial and technical competence. Related to this is the way that other disciplines are seen as masculine. In particular, architecture and other engineering disciplines are often seen as typically male disciplines and professions where, for example, the male architect is often defined as a kind of “genius”<sup>289</sup> with a superiority complex<sup>290</sup> with regard to other disciplines such as interior architecture. This relates back to the rather outdated view that *an architect can do everything an interior architect can do*.

Therefore, it is also important to elaborate on the way in which these studies (and academic disciplines in general) are attracting more and more females. This situation is replicated across Europe. However, it is important to keep track of the national context and possible nuances. For example, in Slovakia, there are increasing numbers of female students in the interior architecture programs, but many male students study interior architecture abroad (mainly in Prague). In a way, the “export” of Slovakian students should be taken into account when analysing the growing presence of females in academia and more specifically in the architectural disciplines. Some may argue that studying abroad is a more prestigious or courageous endeavour than staying at home. Following an internship or education program

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<sup>284</sup> Jeremy Williams in focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>285</sup> Pia Döll and Sophie Green in focus group: GERMANY, 4 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>286</sup> Torsten Hild in focus group: SWEDEN, 5 June 2023, 10:00-11:30. MS Teams.

<sup>287</sup> Mona Lise Lien in focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams..

<sup>288</sup> Wim Van der Vurst in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

<sup>289</sup> Hilde Heynen, “Genius, Gender and Architecture: The Star System as Exemplified in the Pritzker Prize August 2012,” *Architectural Theory Review* 17(2-3): 331-345

<sup>290</sup> Pierre Lhoas in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.



abroad (e.g. Erasmus) is often seen as good experience. Of course, it should also be noted that foreign education does not necessarily lead to better education possibilities.

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*“In relation to the architect’s education on the technical universities there’s a clear feminine profile where interior architecture is seen as architecture “light” for people, preferable women who wants to decorate things. But in the artistic faculty there is almost the opposite. Interior architecture is seen as commercial and shallow with a tendency towards economy.”*

*Torsten HILD (Sweden)<sup>291</sup>*

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### Full-time mother, part-time interior architect

One question that was not drafted beforehand, but nevertheless emerged in several focus group interviews, was how motherhood and caring responsibilities in general (including maternity leave) can affect a woman's presence in the professional sphere (especially in executive positions). This turned out to be a very crucial topic for female interior architects in the execution of their work.

As discussed above, the profession of interior architecture is not always seen as something you can do full-time as an adult, but rather as a kind of hobby that you do for fun. It has already been argued that there is a large discrepancy between the female presence in academic and professional life. The relatively higher absence of women from the professional sphere is due to many factors, including the regulation of maternity leave. Having a family is accompanied by a period of rest, during which professional pursuits are discontinued to focus on raising children and developing the family bond. The question is whether women return to the profession after maternity leave (as is the case in Switzerland, with an estimated 50%)<sup>292</sup> - especially given that interior designers work both at a desk and on construction sites where physical labour is central. Indeed, construction work cannot always be planned in advance, and unforeseen problems can crop up any time.

Across Europe, maternity leave is organized in a great variety of ways. Periods of leave differ not only in time - ranging from a couple of months (e.g. Switzerland (14 weeks);<sup>293</sup> Belgium

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<sup>291</sup> This citation does not come from the focus group meeting, but the Swedish questionnaire (education).

<sup>292</sup> Dominic Haag-Walthert, email of July 2023.

<sup>293</sup> Dominic Haag-Walthert, email of July 2023.



(minimum 15 weeks);<sup>294</sup> the Netherlands (16 weeks);<sup>295</sup> Spain (ca. 17.5 weeks);<sup>296</sup> Malta (18 weeks); France (ca. 17.5 weeks)<sup>297</sup> ...) to more than one and a half years (e.g. Slovakia (3 years)<sup>298</sup> - but also in structure. This structure can be subdivided into different options. In Norway, for example, parental leave (including fathers) is divided into three periods: "The mother has one-third, the other parent has one-third and the last third the parents themselves can decide who has leave to be with the child."<sup>299</sup> This also encourages fathers to take up parenthood.

In some countries, like Sweden, the mother is legally protected to ensure retention of pay and job security.<sup>300</sup> Given that the latter is not always guaranteed, it is possible to assume that, after giving birth, many women opt out of the profession. And even if they do rejoin the professional sphere, their renewed membership to the organization is often forgotten about<sup>301</sup> or becomes an unaffordable or undesirable expense. Outside the professional sphere, there are also child-care schemes for academics and even students in the interior discipline. For example, at the TH OWL (Germany), there is a kindergarten on campus: "Students bring children there [kindergarten] and can continue their studies."<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Maternity leave information via

[https://www.belgium.be/nl/werk/loopbaanbeheer/verlof\\_en\\_loopbaanonderbrekingen/moedersc\\_hapsverlof#:~:text=U%20hebt%20recht%20op%2015,dit%20is%20het%20prenataal%20verlof.](https://www.belgium.be/nl/werk/loopbaanbeheer/verlof_en_loopbaanonderbrekingen/moedersc_hapsverlof#:~:text=U%20hebt%20recht%20op%2015,dit%20is%20het%20prenataal%20verlof.)

<sup>295</sup> "A maternity leave is 16 weeks (4-6 weeks before and the rest after). Salary or income is paid by the Dutch government. I would say women would not directly quit, but it will raise some private questions about work-life balance and wishes of women themselves. Especially with multiple children. In general there is a high risk on losing professional active women in this period. Recently the publication 'vrouwen in architectuur' is publicized by NA010. It is in Dutch, but it refers to this question. I was discussion leader in the panels at the book launch and the phenomena 'the leaking pipeline' is named in the book. In the broad spectrum of architecture, the balance women and men is 50/50 in university, 70/ 30 in the professional life and dropping during the career process. Also named in the book is that the domain of interior design and interior architecture much more is accepted for women to work in than architecture itself. Which is (still) considered more as a man's work. Again, numbers are named in the perspective of architecture. But the book might provide you with the missing context and has an international scope."

(<https://www.nai010.com/nl/publicaties/vrouwen-in-architectuur-nederlands/246055>)

<sup>296</sup> Teresa Casas, email of July 2023; "Maternity leave in Spain is the same for all professions and jobs. Four months of maternity leave plus lactation periods."

<sup>297</sup> Thierry Conquet, email of July 2023: "This question must be placed in the general environment of the French Labour Act and the French Women's Employment Act. To make a long story short, if the woman is employed in an interior architecture agency, she is entitled to various maternity leaves, whether or not she is covered by the employer. If she is self-employed, her maternity leave is covered by national social security. A maternity leave normally lasts 4 months, but can be extended up to 6 months. As you certainly know, there is also a paternity leave in France! I certainly wouldn't say that maternity leave leads to the abandonment of a job and that the woman has to stop working. As in any occupation, each case is different, and this specific professional activity is not different from another."

<sup>298</sup> Dušan Kočlík, email of July 2023; "The general entitlement to maternity leave is 3 years. Women can choose not to use the full 3 years of maternity leave, or they can switch with their partner. We do not have official data, but subjectively from the information we have, female designers do not end their careers in interior design after maternity leave."

<sup>299</sup> Monica Heck, email of July 2023.

<sup>300</sup> Martin Thörnblom, email of July 2023; in Austria job security is legally regulated for at least a year during pregnancy leave.

<sup>301</sup> Focus group: FINLAND, 5 June 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>302</sup> Carsten Wiewiorra, email of July 2023.

In most known cases (communicated mainly by the Estonian, French and Norwegian experts),<sup>303</sup> women do come back to the professional realm of interior architecture after giving birth. Aside from this, it is also important to note that it is becoming increasingly common to practice part-time<sup>304</sup> or on reduced hours if the employer agrees,<sup>305</sup> even though the profession is, according to just about every individual expert respondent,<sup>306</sup> predominantly seen and practiced as a full-time occupation.

In some instances, however, research shows that interior architects do leave the profession after pregnancy leave. In the Netherlands, the Bureau Architectenregister<sup>307</sup> conducted research (2018) that showed how interior architects (as opposed to other architectural disciplines that are protected by legal regulation) are mostly self-employed (almost 60%).<sup>308</sup> However, if one looks at the data of professional practitioners that work on a part-time schedule, it is clear that women are overrepresented in the Netherlands.<sup>309</sup>

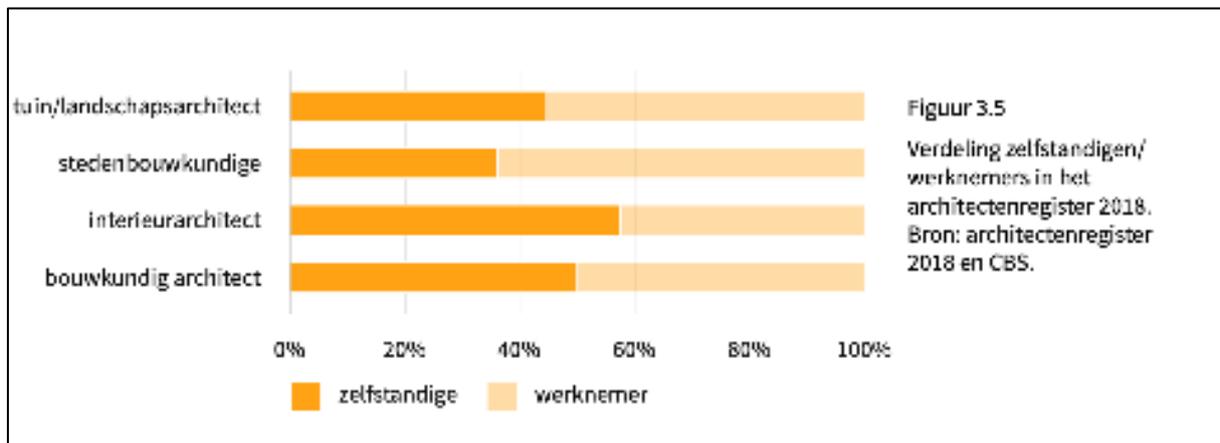


Figure 31: BA commissioned research. Communicated by Evaline Kruyssen (BNI, cf. infra ibid.).

*“The Figure 3.10 shows that garden/landscape architects worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week) relatively most often. They are closely followed by the interior architects, which may be related to the large number of female interior architects given also the fact that women in the Netherlands in general are strongly overrepresented in part-time work. (...) This may reflect both other preferences of this age group (e.g. care for children, combining with studying or more leisure time) and demand-side constraints where a full-time job is not*

<sup>303</sup> Mona Lise Lien, email of July 2023 (for more information see transcripts focus groups: Estonia and France).

<sup>304</sup> Kees Spanjers, email of July 2023 (more information via <https://business.gov.nl/regulation/leave-schemes/> and <https://business.gov.nl/regulation/prenatal-and-childbirth-allowance-self-employed-professionals/>: “I don’t think many women leave work altogether nowadays, but part-time work is quite common. Government plans to make child day-care free after 2025 to promote women (and man) to take part in the workforce.”

<sup>305</sup> Davina Preca, email of July 2023.

<sup>306</sup> See attached questionnaires for more information.

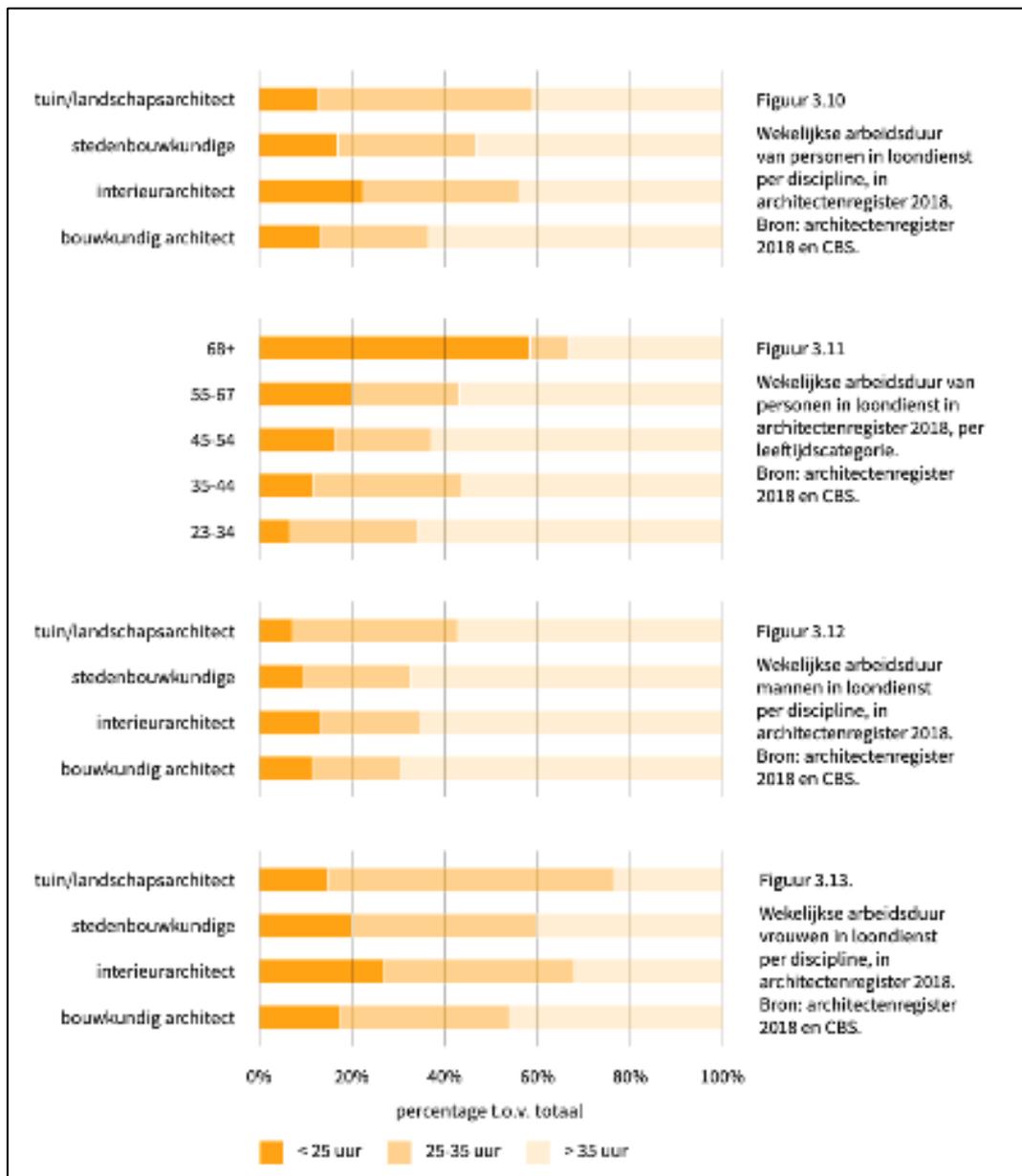
<sup>307</sup> It is interesting how, in this segment of awareness, the most legally advanced countries, Germany and the Netherlands, conducted statistical research in these matters (predominantly the architecture organizations/chambers/registration offices: BAK and BA).

<sup>308</sup> Evaline Kruyssen, email of July 2023; Architectenregister 2018 (and CBS).

<sup>309</sup> The following information in cursive was copied from Evaline Kruyssen, email of July 2023.

profitable or where companies employ part-time workers to save costs and achieve flexibility in responding to fluctuations.”

“Figure 3.12 concerns weekly working hours by discipline concerning men, where we see that in each discipline more than half of the total number of men worked full-time. This picture is substantially different in Figure 3.13 where the number of female spatial designers and part-time work is depicted: less than half of the total number of women by discipline appear to have worked full-time in 2018. The group of women who worked 25-35 hours appears to be largest among the Garden/Landscape Architects, while the group who worked less than 25 hours is most significant among the Interior Designers.”





## 10. Refutable amateurism

As argued above, the profession of interior architect is often stigmatized as an “immature”<sup>310</sup> job that is done *on the side*, as a “fun”<sup>311</sup> hobby. Sometimes, in education, interior architecture is even seen as the program to follow if one has insufficient expertise in or affinity with mathematics – unlike the program of architecture.<sup>312</sup> Furthermore, it has also been shown how, especially during the past 10 or 20 years, the profession was seen as something that an architect can do *as well*.<sup>313</sup> This has changed drastically in the past few years due to a variety of different variables, in particular, as argued by virtually everyone, the way in which interior architects, as part of the chain in building projects (cf. supra), work together with professionals from other, sister disciplines. By collaborating often and communicating constantly, the competencies of interior architects have become more visible and appreciated by, for example, architects.<sup>314</sup>

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*“Stereotypes are stiff and stick very well.” – on the depiction of interior architects in television programs*

*Lars RÄIHÄ (Finland)*

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However, professional recognition is not universal. Above, we saw how recognition is something that is layered (interdisciplinary, intradisciplinary and public). The hypothesis is that, if interior architects can define their discipline and profession, and if this is recognized by other disciplines, then the public can be informed in a concise and transparent way, in order to achieve overall recognition – even without the support of a sustainable legal foundation. Today, however, the public is not always correctly informed by TV programs and social media outlets. Yet, some welcome these forms of broadcasted communication as advertisement for the profession.<sup>315</sup>

Countries like Malta and the Netherlands explicitly stated that stigmatization of the discipline and the profession is not really about gender, but about the way it is seen as something for amateurs. The problem here is that interior architecture / interior design is confused with decoration or furnishing, or even reduced to an occupation where you just rearrange things. Consequently, the interior architect / interior designer has competition everywhere, since theirs is assumed to be an activity that anyone can do. Even though the aspect of gender is supposedly excluded from this argument, it is interesting to note that, when discussing examples related to ubiquitous amateur competitions, women are often alluded to. For example, the “female neighbour (housewife) who does styling” can be seen as a competitor. Note how amateurism is inherently, albeit erroneously, linked to femininity and historical

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<sup>310</sup> Ville Lausmäe in focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>311</sup> For more information, see e.g. Inge Somers, “Advancing Interiors: Interiorist Voices on Identity Issues,” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Interior architecture, University of Antwerp, 2017.

<sup>312</sup> See questionnaire education (BELGIUM – Els De Vos).

<sup>313</sup> Ville Lausmäe in focus group: ESTONIA, 30 May 2023, 14:00-15:30. MS Teams.

<sup>314</sup> Focus group: NORWAY, 25 April 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.

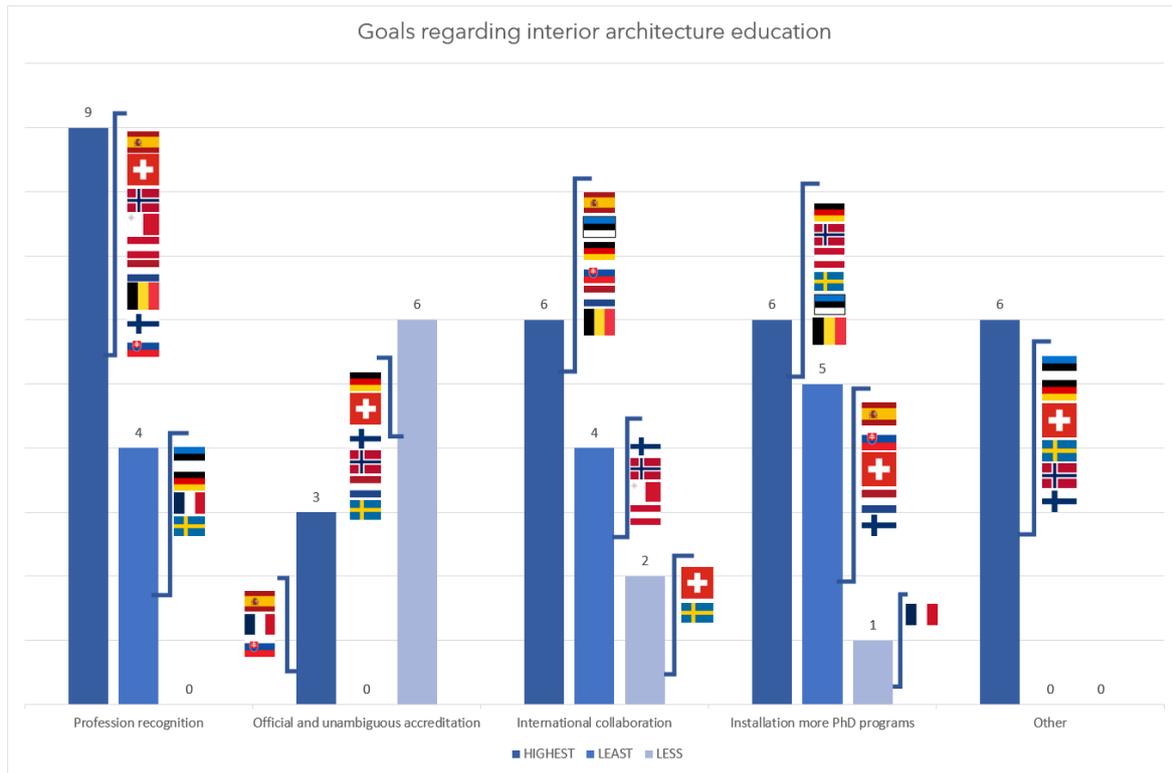
<sup>315</sup> Kees Spanjers in focus group: THE NETHERLANDS, 15 May 2023, 15:00-16:30. MS Teams.

domesticity (which is female connotated).<sup>316</sup> Of course this is not done intentionally by professionals, but it is interesting how the mental connection is made. We assume this is due to the underrepresentation of women in the practice and in leadership positions.

## 11. Goals and problems for the near future<sup>317</sup>

Finally, we present the goals and problems that experts, according to the questionnaire, see for the near future regarding the professionalization process of interior architecture.

### Education



Other goals (Education)	Most important
Estonia	Well balanced educational training students (both artistic and practical skills + critical thinking) + more professors trained in IA
Germany	Mid-career teaching opportunities
Switzerland	<b>Second MA program</b> + public image
Sweden	<b>More study places</b>
Norway	More attention for <b>sustainable practice</b> in the profession
Finland	Focus on <b>sustainability</b> and responsibility

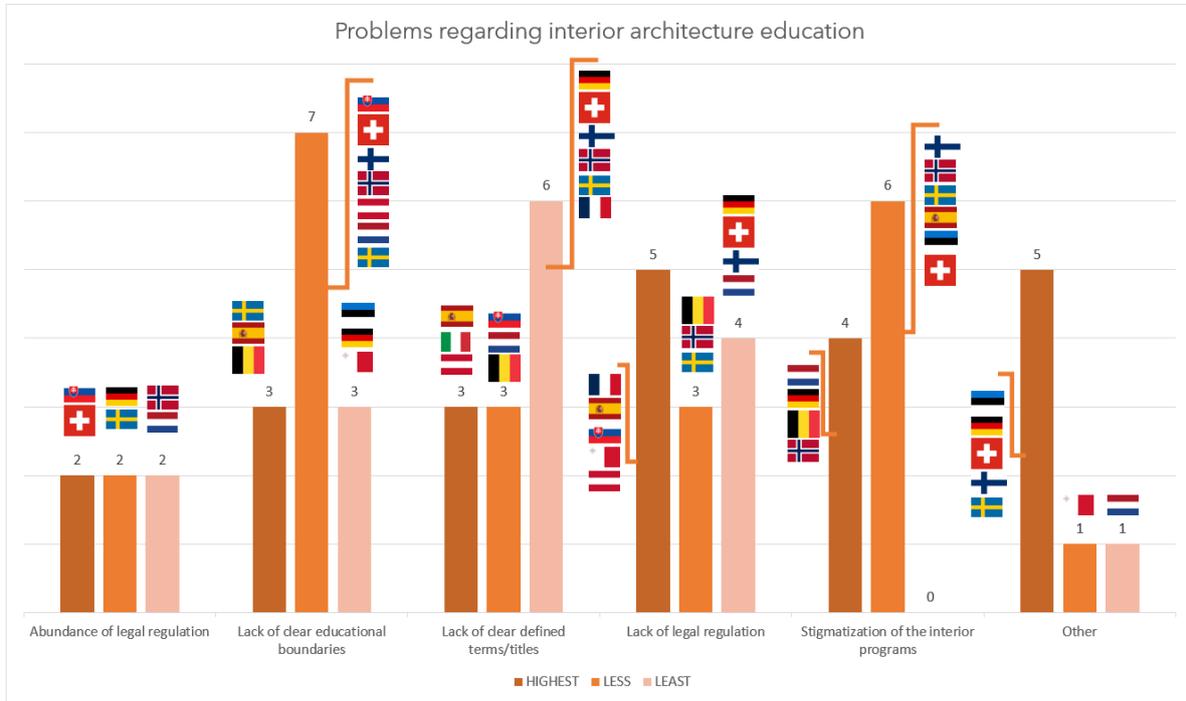
<sup>316</sup> One could also approach this matter by diving it into historical research concerning the domestic practices of middle-class women and the use of interior etiquette. See for example, Yves Schoonjans, "Au Bonheur des Dames: Vrouw, smaak en het burgerlijk interieur in de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies* no. 2, 1997: 1365-152.

<sup>317</sup> Important to note: the data gathered here is "only" harvested from a limited number of respondents (the questionnaire "submitters") and thus should not be regarded as collective beliefs within the nation state.



The above figure, confirmed by the arguments in this report, shows that professional recognition is given absolute priority in the professionalization process of interior architecture as a discipline and profession.

When the option "other" was filled in, respondents placed it at the top. This makes sense given that they were asked about future goals.

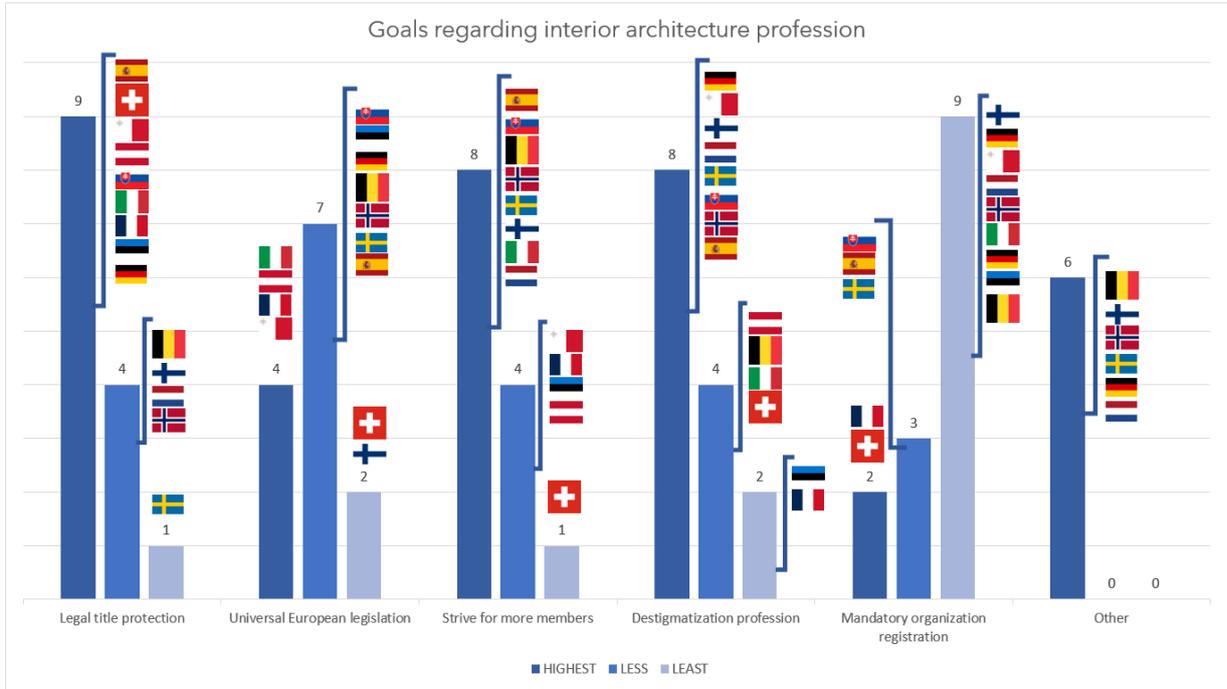


Other problems (education)	Least important	Less important	Most important
The Netherlands	The relevance of interior architects in multiple assignments, due to their knowledge on human behaviour		
Malta		Lack of distinction & awareness between practitioners who are fully qualified with recognized qualifications & those who have a basic non accredited qualification	
Estonia			A Bologna integrated BA is too short to train a good critically thinking young professional practitioner, so we prefer an integrated BA+MA interior programs
Germany			Not a proper university program but UAS/arts academy + under representation of IA in Chamber of Architects
Switzerland			Knowledge of the Competencies of Interior Architects by the general public and the administration
Finland			Need for profound curriculum renewal + diminish resources and growing number of students



Sweden		Too few study places
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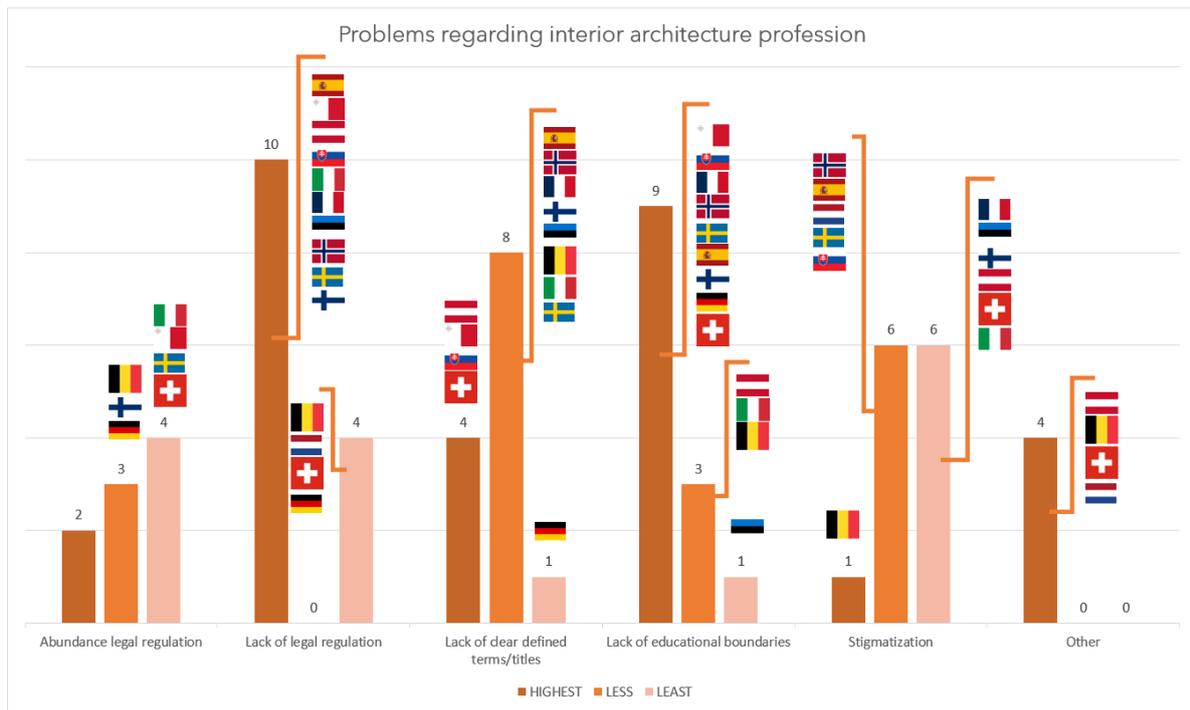
Practice/organization and legislation<sup>318</sup>



Other GOALS (Practice/organization)	Most important
Belgium	Awareness of profession + putting best practices in the spotlight
Finland	Enabling interior architects to have more important roles in projects
Norway	To influence politicians + continued education
Sweden	Collaboration between architect competences + procuration legislation + more education places
Germany	Appropriate compensation for work + abolition of restrictive regulations in the practice of the professions
The Netherlands	Inclusiveness

Note that, like the goals of the education framework, the “other” options are all marked as most important.

<sup>318</sup> These two axes are put together since that was also done in the questionnaire.



Other PROBLEMS (PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION)	Most important
Austria	Public study IA needed
Belgium	Equivalence with the profession of architect
Switzerland	Laws and regulations by different cantons <sup>319</sup>
The Netherlands	Numbers entry practical experience

<sup>319</sup> Here, paradoxically, there seems to be both an abundance of legislation and a lack of it. After careful consideration and verification through focus group interviews, it becomes clear that there are too many regulatory impediments obstructing interior architecture’s professionalization. An alternative would be to define interior architecture legally by acknowledging and recognizing the competencies and expertise of interior architects as opposed to other actors within the building industry.

## REFLECTIVE CONCLUDING REMARKS



## 12. Concluding remarks

The professionalization process of interior architecture is hampered by many different factors. In this concluding chapter, we will elaborate on this and refer to the data previously obtained through grounded theory.

We can summarize the **main obstacles** to stronger professionalization in the **ten points**:

Lack of Standardization: There is a lack of standardized education and accreditation criteria for interior architects across European countries. This makes it difficult to establish consistent professional standards and recognition.

Different Educational Pathways: Different countries have different educational routes to becoming an interior architect. Some had specific interior architecture programs, while others integrated it within broader architecture or design programs. This diversity made it harder to establish a unified professional framework, but at the same time it means an enriching diversity of programmes.

Recognition and Regulation: In many European countries, interior architecture is not a regulated profession, meaning that practitioners were not legally required to meet specific educational or licensing criteria. This lack of regulation led to issues of quality control and consumer protection.

Cross-Border Mobility: Professionals face challenges when working in different European countries due to differences in the recognition of qualifications. This hindered the mobility of interior architects within the EU.

Limited Awareness and Understanding: Interior architecture is sometimes misunderstood or not fully recognized as a distinct discipline, especially in comparison to architecture. This leads to undervaluation of the profession.

Competing Disciplines (instead of Collaborating Disciplines): Interior architecture often intersects with other design and architectural disciplines, such as architecture, industrial design, and graphic design. This leads to questions about jurisdiction and scope of practice.

Economic Factors: Economic conditions, such as the availability of jobs and demand for interior architecture services, also influence the professionalization process. Economic downturns make it harder for professionals to establish themselves.

Advocacy and Representation: The field of interior architecture apparently lacks a unified voice or advocacy groups to promote the interests of professionals and push for regulatory changes.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD): Many countries do not have established systems for ongoing professional development and accreditation. This hinders the maintenance of high professional standards over time.

Cultural Differences: Different cultural attitudes towards design and architecture affect how interior architecture is perceived and practiced in different European countries.

These points have been elaborated on throughout this report.



## Concluding remarks I: professionalization theory

This report clearly shows that a wide variety of rules and customs exist in Europe. These are determined by many variables, ranging from geographical size to sociocultural attitudes. Like the 2017 study, this report acknowledges such diversity.

To come full circle, it is necessary to link back to Grace Lees-Maffei's conceptualization of professionalization based on five variables. In this conclusion, “education” and “educational rules of assessment” will be discussed together:

- Education and educational rules of assessment

Regarding education, this report shows that there is a wide variety of educational institutions. It is noteworthy how the absence of a well-supported body of knowledge and further research opportunities (PhDs) prevents professionals from pursuing further professionalization and redefining the discipline relative to other, sister disciplines. A case of the “cat bites itself in the tail” on many levels. One could solve this issue by tracing the problem back to the “tail of the cat”, so to speak. A broader or more recognized educational system would lead to greater intra- and interdisciplinary recognition of the discipline, which would eventually lead to overall public recognition and prove beneficial in enforcing further legal regulation (including and concerning HSW matters).

In addition to institutional variety, there is also a wide discrepancy in the number of years of training required to become a professional. Usually, a three-year bachelor's is available. Often this is coupled with a two-year master's, which, remarkably, is more prevalent than a one-year master's.

Internships are usually optional. Moreover, even when available (and/or required) these periods are usually seen as far too short. However, more time for internship opportunities would lead to even fewer “ex cathedra” classes, which would in turn prevent the growth of a proper body of theory and knowledge in the field.

As explained, education does not stop at graduation. Moreover, some professional interior architects never even graduate (in interior architecture or anything else). This underscores the importance of lifelong learning opportunities, which are glaringly absent throughout the continent. Where lifelong learning is mandatory/regulated, this is always in the context of the architect's training because of the health and safety issues it raises. In countries where the title is legally protected, lifelong learning is enforced in the context of lifelong architectural learning, but not fully controlled.

It is important to note that educational curricula are always structured and regulated by accreditation practices. In a sense, the scene is set but the further implementation of the curriculum remains unfinished. This reaffirms the view that interior architecture seems to “lag behind” other architectural disciplines.

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*As long as we don't sit at the table as equal partners and that's something that we perceive also within configuration of our school at the moment, it's a very difficult position to be in.*



*Wim Van der Vurst (Belgium)*

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- Professional organization

This report also revealed that, in terms of organizations, there are many possibilities in Europe. Through ECIA's platform, 15 national organizations have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience on a transnational stage. It is also a way to help others in terms of practice/organization professionalization: the older/larger organizations can teach the others based on knowledge gained in the past, while the smaller organizations can help other small organizations to establish a platform where professionals can come together to shape the profession.

Despite the fact that national organizations can help professionals (and students) with all sorts of issues, it is striking how mandatory registration nearly always fails to materialize. Also, in the case of legal title protection, it is not the national interior organization that oversees this, but the chamber or register of architects. The profession therefore continues to be drawn and defined in architectural terms. Moreover, this fuels the urge to emulate the professionalization of the architectural education and practice – rather than embracing the unique (people-oriented) elements that shape interior architecture. We firmly believe that interior architects and interior designers should take control of their own destiny.

- Articulation of code of conduct

This variable has a lot in common with “professional organization”. Through ECIA and general professional guidelines, each national organization can establish a code of conduct (even if it is not always defined as such). In this way, registered professionals are held accountable concerning both professional and ethical standards. This ensures a professional work environment that is beneficial to both the professional and the client. Above all, membership to an organization offers the client the assurance that the competencies of the professional interior architect have been tested and found worthy. In other words, membership of an ECIA affiliated organization is synonymous with a label of proven quality and guaranteed professional and ethical abilities.

- Networking and gatekeeping

#### *Networking*

The section on networking is straightforward. Professional interior designers can network on a global level (IFI) and European level (ECIA), as well as on a national level. However, there are also regional networks. Within ECIA, there is a Nordic group in which consultations take place between the Northern European countries of Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia and Finland. In addition to this geographic variable, what matters is how the institutional embedding of the professional interior design group leads to further professionalization. Umbrella organizations such as Ornamo, where consultation across sister disciplines, can take place, is an example of this.

What is more, an umbrella configuration is not always necessary. Just look at the Norwegian NIL, for example, where interior architects represent their own organization as the “tip of the



arrow” of the profession, but share offices with, for example, landscape architects. This leads to interdisciplinary discussions. There is also the way in which different types of interior organizations can communicate with each other in a national context. In ECIA this can be seen in the way in which the CFAI (France) and the Bureau Architectenregister (the Netherlands) collaborate with PA and BNI respectively.

Apart from the professional scene, it serves to note how transnational flows of students (e.g. Erasmus program) lead to a platform in which both knowledge and cultural know-how can be shared. However, this is almost exclusively the case in countries where the educational framework for interior architects is well structured and a wide variety of Erasmus programmes are offered (for example, Germany, Spain, France and especially Italy).

### *Gatekeeping*

Here, we can comment on umbrella organizations such as Ornamo, where consultation across sister disciplines can take place. In this way, gatekeeping can be addressed in multiple ways. Firstly, it is clear that, even though interior architecture (both as a discipline and profession) imitates (or tries to imitate) the older and well-established architecture discipline/profession, respondents emphasized that architect organizations cannot always be considered friendly big brothers. Of course, this does not mean that architects are the main obstacle to professionalization of interior architecture, but it does suggest that certain architectural regulations and traditions hinder the recognition process of interior architecture and interior design.

Gatekeeping can also be seen in legal terms. We have discussed how, overall, legal regulations hinder the further definition of the professional interior architect, and that there seems to be a “wall” of regulations that is impeding both the interior architect and the architect - especially when it comes to discordant building regulations and the way in which title protection hinders further professionalization and research (e.g. a PhD at the TU Delft, cf. supra).

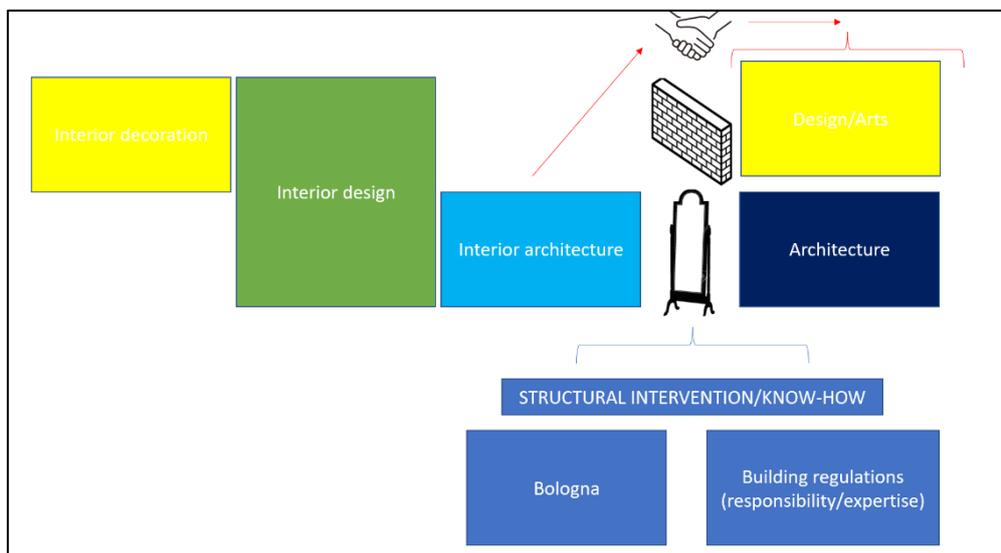
Additionally, gatekeeping is not something that is done solely by professional entities. In a way, the general recognition of interiors can be seen as “gatekept” by both professionals and the public. The lack of recognition affects the way in which interior architects both define themselves and are defined by others.

These forms of gatekeeping are of a rather passive nature: interior architecture has to undergo these phenomena and situations. But gatekeeping can also be approached in an active way, where interior architecture itself is regarded as a gatekeeper. However, due to the lack of professionalization and of an academic body of knowledge, it seems that, without legal definition and specifically tailored regulation, interior architecture will remain a passive actor in a regulated playing field, instead of an active gatekeeper for specific knowledge and practical skill.

## Concluding remarks II: embracing interior

It is clear that the recognition - and thus the overall professionalization process - of interior design is greatly inhibited by several deep-rooted factors. In Chapter I, we saw how obscure terminology, "in-betweenness", and general recognition thwart both professional (intra- and interdisciplinary) and public recognition. This creates a total lack of visibility. This blindness seems to be fuelled by the inherent ambiguity of the interior profession as being "in-between" many different disciplines and competencies. Conversely, this flexibility and versatility should be exploited rather than suppressed, in order to professionalize in line with architecture's professionalization. Interior architecture's uniqueness should give interior architects some tools to distinguish themselves from other actors in the "building chain" (building team). By being centrally embedded in this chain of professions, interior architects should be mature enough to recognize the competencies of others, while simultaneously standing up for their own specific expertise in order to innovate and share the spotlight.

To elaborate, the lack of recognition is also due to the fact interior design is often seen as a profession where safety is not compromised. This has its consequences in the lack of a legal definition of the profession and its associated responsibilities. However, many have suggested focusing on the anthropocentric and social/mental aspects of the profession, to better embrace the uniqueness of interior architecture as an artistic and design occupation, but also as a profession where knowledge of structure and technique is indispensable. Rather than focusing on the strategy of imitating the professionalization process of architects, we propose an alternative route in order to embrace the integral values and characteristics of interior design / architecture, since the discourse of architects cannot be seen as directly aligned with the "sensibilities within interior architecture".<sup>320</sup>



Many experts felt it important to highlight the "feminine" qualities of the profession, so that traits such as empathy, non-toxicity and humility could receive more attention and be further developed within the discipline.

<sup>320</sup> Wim Van der Vurst in focus group: BELGIUM, 18 August 2023, 11:00-12:30. MS Teams.



The comparison with and imitation of architects seems to have grown naturally. Because they are both part of the chain of building professionals, interior architects and architects both have to deal with self-definition and competency delineation.

However, it seems that with the "interiors shift", more and more architects are playing in the field of the interior architect. This is not to imply that architects have bad intentions. It is really about how interior architects, and more precisely, their competencies, are not legally defined or publicly recognized.

Furthermore, part of the imitation strategy is due to the "problematic" Bologna structure, which deals with the overall educational foundation of the discipline. Some experts believe that interior architects should be trained like architects - via a full five-year program. For now, however, this seems too optimistic, or premature. Many European countries do not even have a master's program in interior architecture, and in those that do, usually only one or two schools offer such a program.

### Concluding remarks III: axial focus points

#### Education

In the education axis, it is important to highlight the absence of the discipline of interior architecture in many universities. This report focuses mainly on tertiary education and shows how the first and second cycles, where applicable, are quite well organized (in terms of structure, content and accreditation).<sup>321</sup> However, PhD possibilities are limited. This is due to many factors, including institutional type<sup>322</sup> and legal context.<sup>323</sup> It was suggested that this leads to a negative spiral in the educational realm, where only in a few rare cases the interior architect has followed an specific interior-architecture PhD program. In practically all European countries, one can specialize in interior architecture through a PhD in Design or Architecture or doctoral umbrella schools such as Visual Culture or Art History (as in Estonia).

We also discovered that doctoral positions, especially in architecture, were mainly given to more urgent topics. This leads back to the importance of defining HSW in terms of interior architecture. The negative spiral, however, the way the "cat bites itself in the tail" affects the creation of a body of knowledge. In many cases, teachers and professors have a background in architecture or other disciplines (including the social or human sciences). This is not necessarily a problem. However, in defining the disciplinary nature of interior architecture, it is important to undertake further theoretical and conceptual research into these matters in a PhD. The PhD can then function as a criteria to pursue an academic career and strengthen

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<sup>321</sup> Again, it must be underlined that accreditation often depends from regionality. In Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and many other countries; accreditation practices respectively vary from canton, community or federal state. Moreover, in Spain, it became clear that (almost exclusively) universities enjoy most accreditation certification.

<sup>322</sup> In many countries, like in Switzerland and Germany, the doctoral research program can only be started up in collaboration with a university (moreover; this is not a national affair through the discordant regulative matters in the federal states).

<sup>323</sup> For example, the manner in which a PhD in interior architecture became impossible in the Netherlands due to the double nomination of "architect" and "interior architect" which did not seem possible (cf. supra).

the academic body of professors and researchers. It is important to keep in mind that many of interior architecture's sister disciplines do in fact have PhD possibilities, which means interior architecture is "lagging behind" (cf. supra). Interestingly, in an attempt to embrace the uniqueness of the discipline (cf. supra), it was proposed<sup>324</sup> to develop more practice-based doctoral research within the realm of interior design/architecture.

The problematic nature of their academic absence is emphasized by the way in which many tertiary education institutions are private academies. Moreover, they all work with entrance exams. It was argued that this excludes low-income students (or families), and thus raises the threshold to study interior architecture in higher education. The higher threshold creates more impediments to public recognition, for obvious reasons.

Additionally, regarding education, and as a segway to practice/organization, it was established that lifelong learning implies the continued importance of education – even after graduating. It became clear that architects in particular enjoy (obligatory) lifelong learning programs. Of course, professionals may be tempted to think that imitating the professionalism of architecture is perhaps the only way forward. However, the situation becomes more complex when you look at how, with respect to the legal structure, the interior architect (if defined or titled at all) is always defined in (or appended to) architectural law. This takes us back to HSW issues and how physical security seems to prevail in the legal

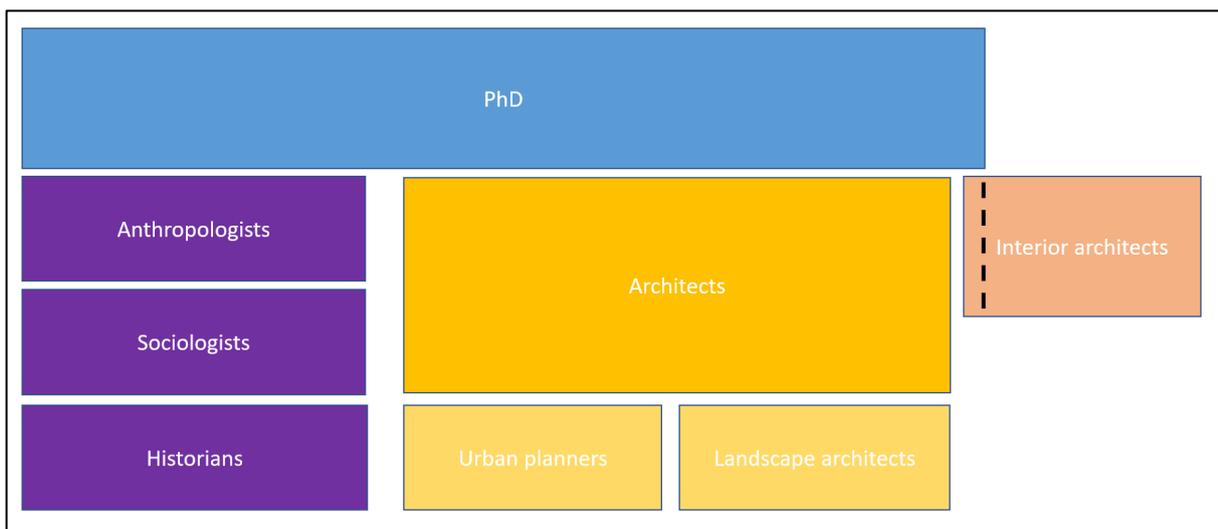


Figure 32: the lack of interior architecture PhD degrees as opposed to social and architectonic sciences (schematic)

definition. Again, the difficulty here lies in defining interior architecture in opposition to interior decoration.

Lastly, it can be concluded that the vast majority of interior architecture students are white native-born women. Moreover, in just about all the countries observed, it seems that more women in general are finding their way to university studies, including architecture.

<sup>324</sup> This was explicitly – and individually – mentioned by Kees Spanjers (focus group: the Netherlands) and Albert Fuster (focus group: Spain).



## Practice/organization

This report shows that many national organizations in Europe already provide a helpful, constructive and healthy environment for both knowledge exchange and mutual aid. National organizations facilitate various services that the professional can use. In addition, the professional is subject to a code of conduct under which they must uphold a set of professional and ethical rules. All this comes together as a platform where the professional's client can be offered a seal of quality. Also, membership is a mutual relationship because of the following: the professional enhances the organization, and the organization, in turn, highlights the professional interior architect (and his competencies).

In terms of educational background, the criteria are more demanding when the national organization is affiliated with the chamber or registry of architects that oversees the legally protected title of interior designer. In cases where the title is not protected (therefore, in most cases) the educational criteria are limited to a bachelor's degree. This diploma, by the way, does not have to correspond to a course leading to the academic title of interior architect. It should be noted, however, that typically, the more years of education a candidate has, the fewer years of professional experience that are required. Incidentally, the best example can be found in Finland, where graduates of Aalto University can directly become full members of SIO.

This report also reveals that the existence of so many different organizations can cause a lot of confusion, for both professionals and the public. In some cases, the professionals themselves are convinced (as in Slovakia) that additional organizations should be created, such as a chamber of design (as opposed to the chamber of architects) to oversee title protection or at least facilitate lifelong learning. The plethora of organizations can also cause a lot of confusion among the public. For example, in the Netherlands (and in almost every other country) there is great uncertainty regarding the difference between the national interior organization and the Chamber of Architects. It was also observed that title protection (if present, thus overseen by architects) can throw a spanner in the works by placing the legal and administrative aspects in the lap of the architects, with the interior organizations only providing additional services to members, such as legal and practical advice, magazine subscriptions or an organizational title.

## Legislation

Even though legal definition and titles can contribute to an increased degree of professionalization, there is clearly an abundance of legislation. **Supranational and uniform European recognition directives** could initiate interprofessional recognition, which in turn would lead to overall recognition. It is striking that, despite this legal abundance, a description of the specific competences of the interior architect is often lacking. In other words, there is too much untargeted legislation. Some experts believe that there is not enough legislation, but then they refer to specific interior-oriented legislation in which the legal definition would extend beyond a mere m<sup>2</sup> limitation. The abundance of legislation is particularly visible in federal states such as Germany and Switzerland, where each state or canton, respectively, has its own legislation. This is not just the case for the interior architect, but for the entire construction industry. Here, one can relate back to the "in-betweenness" of interior architecture, - through which it is constantly and systematically attacked. Nevertheless, we saw that in countries where title protection is in force, the axis of



organization and that of legislation were the strongest. This eventually resulted in the "most filled-out" spider models (particularly in the Dutch and German cases).

In general, one can conclude that although legislation is in place, the focus is lacking. Because the discipline of interior design is still quite young, it has to contend with a context in which legislation already exists. This creates a situation where the professional reality no longer corresponds to legal preference. In most countries interior architecture education is established to some extent (although academic absence remains a major problem) and the national organizations appear to be doing a very good job. Nevertheless, legislation represents a kind of "wall" that cannot be scaled or broken through, without losing the status quo and the rights already acquired (in relation to architects, the "big brother").

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*"I think that both education and professional manner are much more mature right now [in Spain] (...) we should be running after how our policies are going ahead. But now we are in the other way around completely."*

*Albert FUSTER MARTÍ (Spain)*

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Unfocused regulation leads to a situation in which the legal framework, even if professionalized to a very high degree, prevents further progress; for example, the difficulties to launch PhD programs in the (legally) most professionalized countries: Germany and the Netherlands. The presence of title regulation and the respective controlling architecture bodies are therefore not always the preferred situation. Instead of being blindsided into imitating architectural professionalization, it is recommended to embrace the unique virtues and competences that are inherent to the interior discipline.

At the moment, we have a situation where interior architecture as a discipline runs after its sister disciplines, and as a profession runs after regulations that focus on the wrong things. In a way, one could argue that it is time to revise certain regulations (touching on the other sister disciplines through "in-betweenness") in a strategy of creative destruction, in which superfluous legislation is slimmed down towards more targeted and competency-defined regulations.<sup>325</sup> Besides, in-betweenness should not always be seen as a problem; when one builds a better future for interior architects, one is also building one for its sister disciplines.

#### **Concluding remarks IV: models of inspiration**

During the different phases of this research, it became clear that many situations were similar in many countries. However, due to the lack of a broader international body of knowledge, the absence of professional communication and the general failure concerning professional and public recognition, it seems that all countries educate and work in isolation, as "islands".

During the focus group discussions, however, the research team created an enriched possibility for intradisciplinary recognition by assembling people from the same countries and getting them around the table. Not only did people meet (sometimes for the first time) for this

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<sup>325</sup> This can also be implemented for competition affairs since in many countries (e.g. Belgium and Switzerland), interior architects seem to be explicitly excluded from competitions.

specific research; very often, new information was shared and discussed during these meetings.

To further enhance this intradisciplinary communication, but on a European scale, we would suggest the use and instrumentalization of the following models of inspiration (MOI). In the table below, we have summarized some key practice-related accomplishments, and indicate which country or affiliated organization seems to be on top of its game regarding these accomplishments. Thanks to this overview, countries have the possibility to contact the countries/organizations that have experience in a certain topic within the professionalization process.

However, a caveat needs to be made regarding legislation. Clearly, when it comes to legislation, there is either an abundance of it or a lack of specific legislation regarding the legal definition and recognition of interior architecture. Furthermore, the legal framework is always a derivative of the state structure (e.g. Germany's Bundesländer and the abundance of regional legislation). Consequently, not every legal aspect can be implemented in every country. Therefore, this overview of MOI should be seen as a tool to stimulate further debate and action – and not as a copy-paste solution.

Framework/axis	Practice-related accomplishment	Country/organization
Education	Academic research and student internship possibilities (both practical and theoretical)	Polimi
	Lifelong learning possibilities (mandatory)	The Netherlands + Germany
	PhD set-up (national)	Belgium
	Near future PhD set-up plans (2024/2025)	France (Camondo) + Norway (Kristiania) + Austria (NDU) + Sweden (Konstfack)
	Secondary/vocational education possibilities	Austria (HTLs)
Organization	Research (instigated/instantiated by national organization)	Switzerland (VSI ASAI): founding AIS archive
	Set-up national organization for smaller/candidate countries	Malta (MIDA)
	Brainstorming about the creation of a chamber of design as a counterbalance to the chamber of interior architects	Slovakia (SAID)
	Successful interdisciplinary work (non-umbrella)	Norway (NIL)
	Successful interdisciplinary work (umbrella)	Finland (SIO - Ornamo)
	Mandatory registration (title protection)	The Netherlands (BA) + Germany (Chamber of Architects & BAK)
	Mandatory registration (no title protection)	Spain (CGDI)
Legislation	Legal title protection	The Netherlands + Germany + Iceland
	Recent legal definition/recognition (governmental)	Italy (AIPi)
	How to deal with the abundance of regulation	Germany (BAK)
	Specific IA competitions	Slovakia (SAID)
	"Layered" building permits	Finland (SIO) + Austria (BÖIA) + Estonia (ESL)
General	Awareness and influence of stigmatization	Sweden (SA) + Finland (SIO)
	Importance English communication	Estonia (SISU Line)

## Concluding remarks V: recommendations and further research

As mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this report is to collect information and obtain an overview of the professionalization level of interior architecture in Europe. This does not mean that the report offers specific solutions to specific problems. Nevertheless, some recommendations can be made, also with regard to further research.

### 12.3.1. Recommendations

Firstly, it has been demonstrated that recognition (or the lack thereof) is central in the professionalization process of interior architecture. In a sense, this has to do with the lack of **visibility**.

- One can recommend, especially to national organizations, to “grow the numbers”. Even though this may seem only natural and foreseen, it is important to underline that one has to grow the specific number of trained interior architects. In other words, if national organizations succeed in acquiring more trained interior architects (as opposed to architects and other sister professions), then membership to those organizations will naturally translate into a **label of quality for interior architecture**



**specifically.** In addition, it should be noted that not all organizations explicitly offer their members an organizational title, which could prove beneficial in overall recognition practices.

- Concerning visibility, it would be useful to foster European/supranational communication by offering an **English**-translated website and an English-translated code of conduct. Throughout this report it has been argued that national organizations still act as separate “islands”, while countries share many of the same problems. Working and communicating on the same level (through the use of English) would **enable further constructive debate**, especially concerning the axial recognition matrix (see last section of Chapter II).
- Lack of visibility can, in a sense, also be resolved through the use of **clear and unambiguous terminology**. Of course, this debate is larger than even the European story. However, some scholars have suggested other names or titles for the discipline and the profession, such as ‘interiorists’ or ‘Interiorizts’. (Fretton in Hay 2007; Attiwil 2013, Somers 2017). This, again, deserves further and deeper debate.

Secondly, this report underlined how HSW issues contribute to both the legal embeddedness and the lifelong learning practices of architects. Seemingly called upon to imitate the architecture discipline, interior architecture has adopted similar goals. However, instead of focusing on a similar professionalization process, **a debate** should be initiated to **redefine safety, health and welfare** for the interior architecture profession specifically. Not only would this contribute to the further development of its body of knowledge, but it would also highlight the need for continued education regarding psychological and mental HSW.

Thirdly, practically all experts pointed out that the interior profession is characterized by concept/theory and practice. Ideally, schools should offer a correct balance of those two deontological applications. However, the structure and organization of internships remains highly problematic: when an internship is offered (and it is rarely mandatory) it only consists of two or three months. Experts claim that this is too little. However, sacrificing more education hours to these internships further limits the possibility for teachers to elaborate on the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the discipline. This relates back to the educational structure of interior architecture and the question of whether a three, three-plus-one, or three-plus-two system is most effective. From this, we can conclude that schools should focus on **curricular reforms** to balance the two-sidedness of the discipline, and should be wary of “only delivering professional interior architects” (cf. supra).<sup>326</sup>

These three points emphasize the central importance of education as the true catalyst in the professionalization process of interior architecture. Some may claim that innovation and artistic freedom can come from outside the institutional bodies or schools, but this cannot counterbalance the benefits of institutionalized disciplines and standardized knowledge. One should not keep expecting “geniuses” to emerge, outside a well-founded body of knowledge, who will further professionalize and innovate the profession. Instead, educational standardization can enable both professional and public recognition, while also developing and redefining interior architecture concepts and theories through organized research practices.

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<sup>326</sup> Coccia, “L'école de demain.”



Moreover, standardized education can also serve to inform both students and practitioners (e.g. via lifelong learning) about the stigmatization of the profession and the obstacles it faces regarding diversity.

### 12.3.2. Further research possibilities

There are several lines of inquiry that future researchers could pursue.

- Of course, the numerous graphs and tables point to the analytical nature of this research, but large-scale surveys – especially regarding the rate of employment, financial situation and the ontological nature of the market, were not included in this report. Like Spanjers's report on the Dutch situation of interior architects,<sup>327</sup> national organizations could conduct market research to obtain an overview of the circulation of financial flows and professional deployment rates. This could also be done in collaboration with chambers of architects, which proved to be beneficial and workable in the above graphs that were communicated by BAK and BA. In other words, numeric or **statistical data** has not been sufficiently explored.
- The second recommendation for further research is connected with the previous point. Now that a macro-study has been conducted on the professionalization process of interior architecture, it is only natural to further examine this in a national context. Given that, through questionnaires and focus group interviews, some experts now know the importance and obstacles of professionalization, large-scale intranational follow-up studies could be conducted. Experts who were present during all the phases of this research could act as contact persons or as representatives/ambassadors of the discipline. In each country, each axis could be further explored with separate focus group interviews (e.g. one interview for educational matters, one for legislative matters, etc.). In this way, the present study could be **updated** (through its binary model) and **recalibrated** (by being translated into a national research document instead of a supranational one). Moreover, the influence of **gender, diversity and inclusion** could also be translated into variables. This way, the spider models could be transformed from a three- to a four-dimensional professionalization visualization.
- More specifically, and oriented toward the female presence in the profession, it would be interesting to conduct further research on **maternity leave** in Europe. At first glance, one might expect the “richer” countries to provide well-organized maternity leave (i.e. non-stop paid leave, exceeding one and a half years). However, if you look at countries like Slovakia, that hypothesis does not hold. Further research regarding this issue may also benefit the interior architecture profession as a whole by examining the extent to which women are prevented by pregnancy from entering or returning to the professional realm.

To conclude, just like HSW issues can be reframed to redefine the importance and competencies of interior architecture, it is important to focus on the profession and discipline as an interdisciplinary nexus between several other professions and disciplines. As mentioned previously, the in-between nature of interior architecture should not be seen as an inherent curse, but rather as an opportunity:

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<sup>327</sup> Spanjers, “Flitsenquete.”



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*“Building on the professionalization of interior architecture implies innovation in the entire construction and design industry. In the end it all comes down on recognition which is redeemable through target visibility, thus sidelining the abundance of peripheral and discordant building regulations and title protection measures. Recognition should be earned, but what happens if accomplished competences and expertise are not validated, let alone: seen? That is a question claimed by yesterday. Now, what happens if these shortcomings are mended? This is tomorrow’s aspiration which starts today.”*

*Louis Debersaques (Belgium)*

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### Internet links

- European professions database

Regulated Profession Database (europa.eu): <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof/professions/profession/6490>

- ECIA affiliated organizations

AinB (Belgium): <https://www.ainb.be/nl/> & <https://www.ainb.be/fr/>

BAK (Germany): <https://www.bak.de/>

Bdia (Germany): <https://bdia.de>

ESL (Estonia): [www.esl.ee](http://www.esl.ee)

SIO (Finland): [www.sio.fi](http://www.sio.fi)

PA (France): <https://www.poleaction.fr/>

FHI (Iceland): [www.fhi.is](http://www.fhi.is)

AIPI (Italy): [www.aipi.it](http://www.aipi.it)

MIDA (Malta): <https://mida.org.mt/>

BNI (the Netherlands): [www.bni.nl](http://www.bni.nl)

NIL (Norway): [www.nil.no](http://www.nil.no)

BÖIA (Austria): [www.innenarchitekten.at](http://www.innenarchitekten.at)

SAID (Slovakia): [www.said.sk](http://www.said.sk)

CDGI (Spain): <http://www.cgcoddi.org>

SA (Sweden): <http://www.arkitekt.se/>

VSI-ASAI (Switzerland) : [www.vsi-asai.ch](http://www.vsi-asai.ch)



- Additional links as referred to in-text

Austria: [https://wien.arching.at/ziviltechnikerinnen/berufsfelder/berufsfeld\\_architektinnen.html](https://wien.arching.at/ziviltechnikerinnen/berufsfelder/berufsfeld_architektinnen.html)

<https://www.wko.at/branchen/gewerbe-handwerk/gewerbliche-dienstleister/zeichenbueros1.html>.

Belgium:

[https://www.belgium.be/nl/werk/loopbaanbeheer/verlof\\_en\\_loopbaanonderbrekingen/moederschapsverlof#:~:text=U%20hebt%20recht%20op%2015,dit%20is%20het%20prenataal%20verlof.](https://www.belgium.be/nl/werk/loopbaanbeheer/verlof_en_loopbaanonderbrekingen/moederschapsverlof#:~:text=U%20hebt%20recht%20op%2015,dit%20is%20het%20prenataal%20verlof.)

Italy:

<https://www.polimi.it/en/the-politecnico/about-polimi/politecnico-di-milano-figures>

The Netherlands:

<https://business.gov.nl/regulation/leave-schemes/>

[https://business.gov.nl/regulation/prenatal-and-childbirth-allowance-self-employed-professionals/;](https://business.gov.nl/regulation/prenatal-and-childbirth-allowance-self-employed-professionals/)

<https://www.architectenwerk.nl/architectenpraktijk02/architectendata>

<https://www.nai010.com/nl/publicaties/vrouwen-in-architectuur-nederlands/246055>

Switzerland:

[https://www.ai-s.ch/.](https://www.ai-s.ch/)

## ATTACHMENTS<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> To view submitted questionnaires and focus group transcripts, please contact ECIA.



## Questionnaire respondents

### *Education*

EDUCATION		
ESTONIA	Tüüne-Kristin Vaikla	Head of Department of Interior Architecture 2019-2022 Head of BA & MA Program
SPAIN	Carme Ortiz Valeri	Director Escola Superior de Disseny i Arts Plàstiques de Catalunya
GERMANY	Carola Ebert	Professor of Interior Design, History and Theory of Architecture and Design at Berlin International University of Applied Sciences
SWITZERLAND	Dominic Haag-Walthert	Head of Institute and Head of BA Program at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts
BELGIUM	Els De Vos	Head of the interior architecture program and full professor at University of Antwerp
FINLAND	Antti Pirinen	Senior University Lecturer at Aalto University
ITALY	Francesco Scullica	Coordinator of the Study Course in Interior and Spatial Design Bachelor and Master levels at Politecnico di Milano
NORWAY	Jeremy Williams	Professor of interior architecture at Kristiania University College.
MALTA	Nadia Haber	Lecturer at MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts
AUSTRIA	Alistair Neil Harkess	Dean - Faculty of Design at New Design University St.Pölten Austria
FRANCE	Pascal Bertrand	Head of ESAIL Ecole Supérieure d'Architecture Intérieure de Lyon
SWEDEN	Torsten Hild	Professor in furniture design at HDK Valand Campus Steneby, Gothenburg University
THE NETHERLANDS	Ingrid van Zanten	Head of the master programme in Interior Architecture at ArtEZ University of the Arts
	Arlette Kerkhof	Head of Master Interior Architecture at HKU, Utrecht School of the Arts
SLOVAKIA	Dušan Kočík	Head of the Institute of Interior and Exhibitions at Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava
	Pavol Pílar	Co-head of the Architecture department at Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava

### *Practice/organization and legislation*

PRACTICE/ORGANIZATION & LEGISLATION		
AUSTRIA	Christian Armstark	Vice-President BÖIA
BELGIUM	Elke Stegen	General secretary AinB vzw
ESTONIA	Reio Raudsepp	Chairman of the Board at ESL
GERMANY	Pia Döll	President bdia
ITALY	Antonio de Antonis	President AIPi
MALTA	Davina Preca	President MIDA
THE NETHERLANDS	Taco Hylkema	Co-chairman BNI
NORWAY	Mona Lise Lien	CEO / Secretary General NIL
SLOVAKIA	Martina Uhrinova	President SAID
SPAIN	Teresa Casas	COIDIC Catalonia - President CGDODID former President
SWEDEN	Torsten Hild	Board member (former chair man) of the Academy of Interior Architecture within Sweden Architects
SWITZERLAND	Susanne Bachmann	CEO Board member Departement Profession + Education VSI ASAI
FINLAND	Lars Räihä	Chairman of the board SIO
	Minna Borg	Secretary General SIO
FRANCE	Thierry Conquet	Former CFAI President (elected 2006 - 2010) & CFAI delegate for European relations (2012 - present)
	Roseline Lepercq	President POLE ACTION

## Focus group participants



<b>NORWAY</b>
Mona Lise Lien
Jeremy Williams
Ragnheidur Björnsdóttir
<b>MALTA</b>
Davina Preca
Robert Farrugia
Martina Salomone
Nadia Haber
<b>GERMANY</b>
Sophie Green
Frithjof Jönsson
EBERT CAROLA
Pia A. Döll
Juliane Fender
<b>ITALY</b>
Antonio D. De Antonis AIPi
Emanuela Fanny Bonini Lessing
Anne Hubert Eugenie Schoonbrodt
Francesco Scullica
<b>SWITZERLAND</b>
Michela Pagani
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Haug-Walther Dominik HSLU T&A
Michela Pagani
Fernandez Contreras Javier
Susanne D. Bachmann
<b>SLOVAKIA</b>
Pallo STU
Zuzana Tončíková
René Badura
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Dusan Koclik
<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b>
Michel Geertse
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Anja Dirks
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Liis Lindvere
Reio Raudsepp
TyyneKristin
Ville Lausmäe VLS
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Christian Armstark
Vucinic Vesna
Christoph Schmidt-Ginzkey
Martin Thoernblom
<b>FRANCE</b>
Rosline Lepercq
BERTRAND Pascal
Thierry Conquet
Pepin de Banane
<b>SWEDEN</b>
Susanna von Eyben
Tor Lindstrand
Torsten Hild
Tove Sjöberg
<b>FINLAND</b>
Lars Riihä
Minna Borg
Pirinen Antti
<b>SPAIN</b>
Teresa Casas
Eduardo Castañe Lázaro
Fuster Martí, Albert
ANDONI DIAZ - CGC ODDI
Ortiz Valeri, Ma. Carme
<b>BELGIUM</b>
Sam Vanhee
Els De Vos
Bea Geboers
Jolien Cells
Pierre Lhoas
Wim Van der Vurst
Mauro Brigham



# Elaboration of binary models (nuance)

Country	Education	Autonomous program	Hours of study	PhD	Control educational standards	Lifelong learning	Internships
Belgium	The university course program is the only tertiary program for interior architecture in the entire country.	The university program is made out of 3 years bachelor and a 2 years master. However, to be absolutely complete, it should be noted that there is an additional curricular structure: the Career IFL program (non-tertiary).	At the moment there is no PhD program available specifically for interior architecture. However, plans are being made to provide these at the NDS.			Regarding lifelong learning, both the organization and the organization are looking for ways to keep professionals up-to-date and provide additional learning possibilities. However, nothing concrete has been established yet.	Concerning internships it is important to distinguish the tertiary NDS and the secondary IFL. At the university, an internship is not mandatory, however, at the vocational IFL school, students are expected to do a lot of hands-on experience, but not everywhere. Even if
Estonia				There is no separate PhD in interior architecture available. However, the doctoral candidate may specialize in interiors through a PhD in many different doctoral schools in the Estonian Academy of Arts, e.g. Arts and Design (through the Estonian Academy of Arts) for weekends.			From 2020 to 2022 internship was mandatory (min. 40 hours) after the second year.
Finland				Aalto University: Doctor of Arts degree is possible after Master in interior architecture. Not a specific programme but within the Doctoral Programme in Arts and Design.			Internship at Aalto University is optional, not mandatory.
France				At this moment there is no specific PhD possibility in interior architecture specifically. At Camondo however they are looking to install one (through the certification "VIA" with which they can write out an application for PhD/PhD candidates.			Internships are mostly seen as an integral part of the interior program in France. Moreover, the internship has been highly regulated through the "First French Education Charter (1996, Ministry of Culture), and it is again specified in the last Education Framework (Référentiel de Formation) (as have been working on with the Ministry of Culture three years ago". Thierry Comquet, mail July 2023)
Germany	The fact that interior architecture is only taught at Universities of Applied Sciences			"This is a "not quite" with regards to "specificity for interior architecture". There is the possibility to do a PhD in the field: Burg Giesenheim/Halle offers a PhD in Design, which includes Interior Architecture. PhD may be obtained in cooperation between a UAS and a University, e.g. between Leibniz Universität Hannover and HS Coburg" (Carola Ebert, questionnaire education 2022)	Both structure AND content of all interior architecture programs are generally defined by ASAP and the Chamber of Architects. Within these, the art academies follow more art-based practices and focus on art and design, whereas the UAS predominantly have a stronger link to professional practices". Carola Ebert, questionnaire education 2022)	Chamber of Architects are obliged to follow certain continued learning program/workshops. Verification and overall control remains difficult to enforce through similar situation in the Netherlands". Four registered interior architecture members in the chamber of architects, this is by no means obligatory. However, it depends on the registration in the	At the CWIL "in our 8 Semester program the 5th semester is mandatory abroad or an internship. Most students are doing an internship". Carola Ebert, mail July 2023) At our institution the internship is mandatory and part of the curriculum. This was asked for by the Berlin Senate as part of the accreditation procedure for a study program at a university of applied sciences". Carola Ebert, mail July 2023)
United Kingdom	Information on Ireland was prepared only through the material found through the website of the first organization, the very brief e-mail traffic, with its representatives, and other available literature. It should not be considered as up-to-date (since 2022) as the other countries included in this study.			Here, points are 0.5 since there is no autonomous interior program.			
Italy		There are other education types than the more typical ones. For example the IED studies (Institute of Design) - which also provides education in Spain and Brazil. For example, in Florence one can study interior design through IED.	At the Polytechnic di Milano (polimi), the official course name is interior and spatial design.	A PhD in interior architecture used to be available (Francesco Scaglia, focus group Italy 2022). Nevertheless, there is only a possibility to specialize through a PhD in Design or Architecture.		Because of the fact that AIR was recently recognized by the government and given an official legal status, progress is being made in making lifelong learning programs available and mandatory for professional members of the organization.	Internships are mandatory in most instances (especially in the master years). Sometimes like at the Università Iuav di Venezia, internships are obligatory in bachelor years. (Focus group Italy 2022)
Malta		Nevertheless the program is called "spatial design". It used to be interior design, but this terminology changed over the years. Furthermore there used to be a specific interior design course at the University of Malta. However, this seems to be discontinued - as communicated by the University itself via mail.		At the moment there is no PhD possibility. However, MCAI and the teachers are debating how they can implement this in their overall educational structure.			There are some options to do an internship. However these are in no case obligatory.
Netherlands					Members of the Bureau Architectenregister (Chamber of Architects) - among which are the interior architects (protected legal title) are obliged to follow lifelong learning program/workshops. However, law in Germany, verification and control remains quite absent. (Importantly though, insurance companies may decide to not intervene in case the professional did not follow enough CPD workshops. (Focus group the Netherlands 2022)		
Norway				There used to be Artistic Research projects that - according to some - may be equivalent to PhD's. However, an official doctoral program for interior architecture has not yet been installed.			In Oslo and Bergen, there is no internship available. In the graduate KHiO-institution it is optional.
Slovakia				PhD's are only possible through a doctoral program in Design or Architecture (specialization).		There are plans (especially via SAIO) to install a lifelong learning platform. However, this has not yet been concretely realized.	Internship is mandatory in the bachelor years (ST Bratislava)
Spain		Sometimes the program is only a specialization option in Design, in other cases it is nearly called "interior design".		PhD's are only possible through a doctoral program in Design or Architecture (specialization).	In Spain, the accreditation process is extremely complex, some institutions are more and some are less accredited. University courses in particular are accredited through the registration in the government's "catalogue". (Focus group Spain 2022)		Internships are compulsory practices for higher artistic education. In universities they can be compulsory, "depending on the curriculum that is approved". (Carole Ortiz mail July 2023)
Switzerland		There is a specific interior program. However, it is important to note that, at KTH/Stockholm University, the bachelor years are called interior and furniture design, while the master years are in "spatial design".		PhD's are only possible through a doctoral program in Design or Architecture (specialization).		For architects, like in many other countries, there are regulations regarding lifelong learning practices. In Sweden, also companies truly encourage their employees to attend CPD workshops. However, concerning interior architecture, the supply remains scarce and unstructured.	internships are optional.
Switzerland	In the case of Switzerland one should also be aware of the difference between the HF and the FH schools: <a href="https://www.fhn.ch/de/abom-hochschule/">https://www.fhn.ch/de/abom-hochschule/</a>			HF schools offer a 3.5-year program which exceeds a 3-year bachelor, but is not yet a full 4-year course. Further, there is only one school that offers a master interior architecture (Hochschule für Angewandte Technik (HAW))		At the moment there are no lifelong learning possibilities for interior architects in Switzerland. However, the creation of a specific archive for interior architects and designers through many different methods like oral history.	"At Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) it is mandatory to have at least one year of internship/experience in the professional field, or an apprenticeship with a professional/baccalaureate pursue further research in the professional field of "planning building and construction (duration 3 years)". (Dominic Hoag, mail July 2023)



	Establishment professional organization	Controlled membership	Codes, services and control of compliance	Union work/lobbying - eg hoort de bij de nevening enal, die miss (see evaluation) Weiss is bij adelen eigenli 1 dda
Austria	In BOIA there are also architects and product designers that work on interior projects.		BOIA claims to have regulations regarding ethical and professional guidelines, however an explicit code of conduct remains absent even though the statutes speak of certain behavior.	Cooperation with the architects remains tenuous - especially since interior architects do not want to lose the small amount of regulations they now get. In a way, there is some kind of stalemate.
Belgium	In AInB there are also interior designers.		Regarding the admission of foreign professionals: "For ECIA country's: if the school is mentioned on the page of the national organization of that country, or if the diploma was homologated by the government as equivalent" (Elise Bogen, questionnaire 2022)	On their site, AInB makes clear that they have a very close relationship with many organizations via "partners".
Estonia	In ESL there are also interior designers.		In Estonia, one is legally obliged to know how to speak the national language in order to work.	ESL has a close relationship with the Estonian Academy of Arts. There is also the magazine SISU-line...
Finland	SIO is part of the umbrella group of designers Oimamo - therefore many other professional disciplines are included.	Graduates (masters) from the Aalto University can directly apply for a full membership in SIO.		
France	An educational background is not obligatory - however, lack in education needs to be compensated with exceptional professional practice experience in the CFAL: "le processus de reconnaissance des compétences professionnelles" - Thierry Conquet, mail July 2023). To verify the letter, the candidate should appear before a jury in the form of an oral exam.		In the binary model, the services are divided between PA and the CFAL. So, in a way, both organizations make up for the entire scope of services. It is especially the legal advice and the educational guidelines that are products of the CFAL. Furthermore, talking about organization conventions; the attendance of PA was analysed.	The CFAL in particular communicates often with several ministries, firms and other relevant organizations. Recently, even a letter to president Macron was sent.
Germany		To bear the title one needs adequate education and registration in the chamber		BAK in particular collects data for the chamber across the entire country. This information can be communicated and presented across regional boundaries of the Bundesländer.
Iceland	Information on Iceland was prepared only through the material found through the website of the first organization, the very brief e-mail traffic with its representatives, and other available literature. It should not be considered as up-to-date (since 2023) as the other countries included in this study.			
Italy	In API there are also architects.			
Malta				MIDA works together with many different organizations through their membership in MFPA (Malta Federation of Professional Associations), MFHEA (Malta Further and Higher Education Authority), MCA (Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, etc.
The Netherlands		If one wants to hold the title of the interior architects, one (including foreign professionals) should be able to comply with the standards of the Bureau Architectenregisters, who guards the legally protected title. For this, the graduate should have at least 2 years of professional practice (BFP). Furthermore, a portfolio check seems to be always in order, however this was not marked in the questionnaire (2023). So, to bear the title one needs adequate education and registration in the Registrar.		
Norway		The presentation of the portfolio is seen as some kind of exam to verify if the candidate has certain (even master-level) competences.		Unlike in Sweden (SA) and Finland (SIO / Oimamo), Norwegian interior architects (NIL) are not part of an umbrella organization. However, they do share offices with sister disciplines like landscape architects. This boosts interaction and cooperation without the formal collaboration in the sense of an umbrella organization.
Slovakia	In SAIO also architects and interior designers (those without certain education/certification concerning permits and responsibility) focus group Slovakia 2023) can be members - next to the interior architect.			
Spain				
Sweden	(The score is given based on the position of the interior architects, not the overall organization itself (as an umbrella association). Since the interior architects are inherently part of the umbrella SA, also architects, landscape architects and urban planners are part of the organization.	With exceptional professional practice: those without any educational background can be considered to join the organization. In this case, one should come and present before a jury.		
Switzerland	VS: ASAI is part of SIA (architects organization), however they have an autonomous character. In a way, their membership is alike to their membership to ECIA.	If the candidate has an educational background that is not in interior architecture/architecture, he/she has to prove their competences and abilities through tests.		



Legislation		Control of the practice
Establishing legal protection		
Austria		Being able to sign a building permit depends on the registration/certification through many different bodies (e.g. Ministry of Economics, Chamber of Engineers/Architects, etc.). Building permission regulation, in a way, is layered. Sometimes the interior architect may sign, but only through additional certification (for example if he/she and his/her company is seen as an Engineer's Office. (Focus group Austria 2023). Furthermore, copyright regulation is enforced, but in practice this is only effectively used for/by very famous designers/architects.
Belgium	Elaboration on the law of architects in Belgium via Kees Spanjers' Crossing Borders report (2003): the law on Architects (1939) "protected monopoly of the architects to build and change the structure (stability) and main physiognomy of a building. For that you need a building permission from the local authority required and signed as his own responsibility by an architect". Furthermore, the profession itself is not regulated by law (however, the word is legally registered) (Spicer Model 2017, Elke Kaiser). The AANB also informs its members from the current and future legal changes regarding the practice of interior architecture (e.g. index building materials 2021; pension agreements and civil liability insurance)	If, in a project, the structure is being changed, adapted, removed or created, an architect and/or civil engineer need to be involved.
Estonia		Like in Austria, building permits in Estonia are kind of "layered". Depending on the intervention (structure, technicalities, ...) one needs an architect. However, it is possible for an interior architect to sign certain permits (more information, see report text and focus group Estonia 2023). Building permits are mainly issued around the topic of safety.
Finland		In Finland, building permits are also layered in a way insofar that the interior architect can sometimes sign, and sometimes he/she cannot. See report text or focus group Finland 2023 for more information. Furthermore, building permit permission has different variables depending on location: in far away places, acquiring a building permit for structural work may be easier due to its reduced risk for general safety and order.
France		In many projects it is "not not uncommon for an engineer's opinion to be necessary, in which case the responsibilities are shared" (Therme Couquet, questionnaire 2022). Furthermore, it seems that there is a serious lack of competitions, especially with a focus on the interior architects. In private competitions, they seem to be mostly included. Like in as good as every other country, copyright regulation exists, however it remains hard to efficiently and constructively enforce it.
Germany		In Germany, all of the regulations should be seen within the state structure of the Bundesländer. Laws can be different from region to region, especially regarding building regulations. Thankfully, the BAK organization works to get a grasp of the federal situation in every region. Furthermore, liability insurance is an obligation if one wants to join the chamber. However, not every member of the bda is registered (e.g. students). Therefore, these last cannot bear the title of interior architect.
Iceland	Information on Iceland was prepared only through the material found through the website of the FRI organization, the very brief e-mail traffic with its representatives, and other available literature. It should not be considered as up-to-date (anno 2023) as the other countries included in this study. Sometimes the numbers were assigned based on the given data (for example: the legal title protection may very well correlate with liability insurance regulations).	
Italy	For Italy there has been 1p attributed since the fact that they have been governmentally recognized which implies a further and secure regulation regarding licensing. This might further lead to official title protection. In any case, interior architect can be now legally defined.	
Malta		In Malta there are many regulations for construction practices. However, regulation regarding reconstruction remains underrepresented.
The Netherlands		In the Netherlands no specific certificate or license is required to apply for a building permit. People with the age of 18 or above can apply. Of course for intensive structure work and the creation of new structures, civil engineers and architects are needed. Interior architects planning is mostly verified by engineers before putting them to practice. Furthermore, the traditional competition culture is not really detectable in the Netherlands, although there are some impedimentary practices regarding EU tenders; see focus group the Netherlands 2023 for more information).
Norway		Regarding structural and technical intervention, the situation in Norway is somewhat complex: "Interior architects were permitted to do so [structural] until changes in the law January 2016. The laws regarding the building industry is under revision and has been for years. It's complicated to give new regulations for quality assurance of the construction industry." (Mona Lise Lien, questionnaire organization/practice 2022).
Spain	Information via SAID-document "Current definition of the profession interior designer", 2020. See Sharepoint. The interior designer is defined in legal terms via a decree of Statistics nr. 384/2015. This decree also defines the practice of those designers, clothing designers, architects, etc. The juxtaposition of architects in regard to interior designers in particular is striking. According to SAID, interior architect is more a field of study "that is a name for a profession". However, if you look back to the HESCO-classification, interior architecture is found under the umbrella of architecture as being a level 6 professional specialist, whereas interior designers are seen as level 4 professional experts.  Authorized architects: need 240-level university education and three-year mandatory professional experience (according to Act no. 138/1992 on Authorized architects as civil engineers (SAID). Authorized architects are seen as those who tackle problems and challenges in construction projects.  Authorized architects are differentiated from architects in the sense that the latter can also offer "designs and spatial solutions for interior" + furniture.  However the educational and professional requirements are the same of the authorized architects.  Interior designers: need secondary vocational education and one-year professional practice experience.  In other words, it is remarkable that they speak of architects (who can be seen as interior architects by these arguments) and interior designers as being separate. Moreover there doesn't seem to be a conventional usage of the term interior architect. According to SAID, interior architect is more a field of study "that is a name for a profession". However, if you look back to the HESCO-classification, interior architecture is found under the umbrella of architecture as being a level 6 professional specialist, whereas interior designers are seen as level 4 professional experts.  Architects are authorized via two institutions: SAA and SAA. However, SAID remains skeptical of these. Moreover, it is something that is not being done for interior architecture. So, professional architects who only deal with interiors, can't include themselves as interior architects but only as architects. In SAID's perspective, this does not seem a problem as "Authorized architects specializing in building interiors should remain architects specializing in Interior Design (not interior architecture)". Finally, SAID proposes to interior designers to agree and practice in respect of some of the laws by the National Council (the official legislative body) and government decrees by various ministries (eg. Health requirements for catering facilities, minimum standards for apartments, etc.). Just like in Italy, 1 point has been attributed due to their legal definition (not yet protection)	If the professional has also had additional technical and/or university training (and thereby able to get certified) interior architects can intervene in structural projects.
	In Spain the technical decorator is protected and the interior designer is not. There is the academic title for the interior	For actual structural and/or technical interventions there is no general regulation for the interior designer. Their professional practice is always met with reservations for other professionals (among which is the legally protected technical decorator). Furthermore, regarding liability insurance, the organization strongly recommends it to their members even though it is not