

HUMAN PLUS 2004

**“The Role of the Humanistic Arts and Sciences in European Society,
Education and Research**

First Conference of the European Archipelago of Humanistic Thematic Networks

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“Defining and promoting cooperation in the archipelago for meaningful collaboration in research”.

Educational institutes where research is given a priority often describe their activity as contribution to the knowledge economy. The paper, *Communication from the Commission: The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge* (COM(2003) final) refers to the creation of a “ Europe of knowledge” and describes it as one of the challenges facing universities as they operate in a global environment. It identifies four interdependent elements of the knowledge economy and society: “the production of knowledge, mainly through scientific research; its transmission through education and training; its dissemination through the information and communication technologies; its use in technological innovation”. This meeting would add to the list – the role of knowledge in developing European society and culture, and the production of such knowledge through research in the humanistic arts and sciences.

Key phrases in our mission statement include: “defining and promoting cooperation” and “meaningful collaboration in research”. One expects – not knowing my fellow participants – that our research undertakings and experiences are many and varied.

We are present because of conviction/belief that research in the humanistic arts and sciences makes a special contribution to the life and culture of Europe. Some questions occur to me about the next two days and what can be achieved.

How will we work – there are overlaps between the five strands - do we need to spend time articulating the contribution we make - do we believe that it is obvious – or that the task of doing that is not for this meeting – or that it will emerge from our discussions?

Can we map/record the disciplines represented here, or is that information already available to us?

Since we are asking ourselves how research collaboration can be encouraged and supported among the kinds of discipline represented here – we can ask in what ways can we map the experience and therefore begin to sketch the potential?

Collaboration between disciplines is an ability driven by the need to find solutions to complex problems – problems that stretch the paradigms and methods of individual fields of enquiry.

What do we hope for: collaborations between individual researchers?

creation of “enabling” structures that will define a function of the archipelago with regard to research?

We need to map the questions that each of us is bringing to the meeting

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As an addendum.....

In my own discipline, architecture, the debate on its contribution to the knowledge economy has gathered pace. The role of schools or academies of architecture in this regard is complex, and reflects the diverse character of established schools. In Europe, architecture schools are found in Universities both public and private, in Technical Institutes or Polytechnics, in Art Schools and they sometimes exist as independent institutions. To a degree, this diversity reflects the historic development of the discipline, and the imperatives

that generated the institutionalisation of architectural education and training at various times.

Architecture is a discipline rooted in the culture of societies, and this characteristic has been given official recognition in some countries, through the formulation of government policies on architecture. Ireland first established its policy in 2000, and the policy statement puts the matter thus:

The architecture of a people is an expression of its culture, and an integral part of its identity, as well as being a response to the requirement for shelter. At its highest level it takes its place among the arts as an expression of the human spirit.

In addition to its cultural agenda, architecture has a role within what Foucault called the “techne” the organisation of society, with all the requirements for specialised knowledge and practical experience that such a role demands. That role is defined by engagement in forming the human habitat, and that involves responsibilities towards clients, the public and the building industry. Both of these characteristics of my discipline help shape its ethos – they result in a high value being placed on conceptualising futures in terms of constructed environments.

Most institutions, in considering their contribution to the knowledge economy have focussed on the development of research as the greatest challenge to be faced in the immediate future. Some schools of architecture have succeeded in establishing a culture of research, and have well established programmes. The research could be said to fall into two broad categories: research that has a scientific and numerate emphasis and research that draws on methodologies rooted in the humanities. Many schools are finding the effort to establish a research profile to be difficult. The metrics of research performance developed for other disciplines often appear to conflict with the design culture which has formed the core ethos of both the profession and schools. Many see the need to develop more refined parameters that can reflect the centrality of design within the discipline.

The most significant development here is the move to develop design-based postgraduate studies at doctoral level. The issue of the “design doctorate” has been a live one for some time now, and some institutions, in the US and in Europe, have established them already. The development suggests that design itself can be considered a form of research, and be validated as such at the highest academic level.

In summary:

Schools of Architecture across Europe face major challenges in meeting the changing requirements of an educational environment that is being required to expand its contribution to the knowledge economy. Most schools of Architecture are focussed on design, and reputation as a leading design centre is most highly prized at present. While many engage in and value research, there are as yet no commonly accepted research paradigms and, compared to more established academic disciplines, few internationally recognised journals devoted to research in architecture. In contrast, there are several international journals devoted to design theory, critical practice and architectural criticism that have wide currency at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate education. Their value is not transparent outside the discipline. The increased salience of research is forcing many Schools to re-align themselves to this changing context.

Apart from the question of peer review, there is the question of the value of research in the field of architecture, as indicated by the resources that societies are willing to devote to its support. The construction industry is one of the largest industries in Europe, and yet has a very poor record of investment in research compared to that of other industries.

Some key issues from the research in the discipline of architecture:

The question of peer review mechanisms - an issue not necessarily shared with other disciplines within the humanistic arts and sciences;

The availability of research funding – an issues issue shared with some disciplines and less so with others

Perception of value of the research contribution – an issue probably shared with many other disciplines

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